

fall 2025 demento mori

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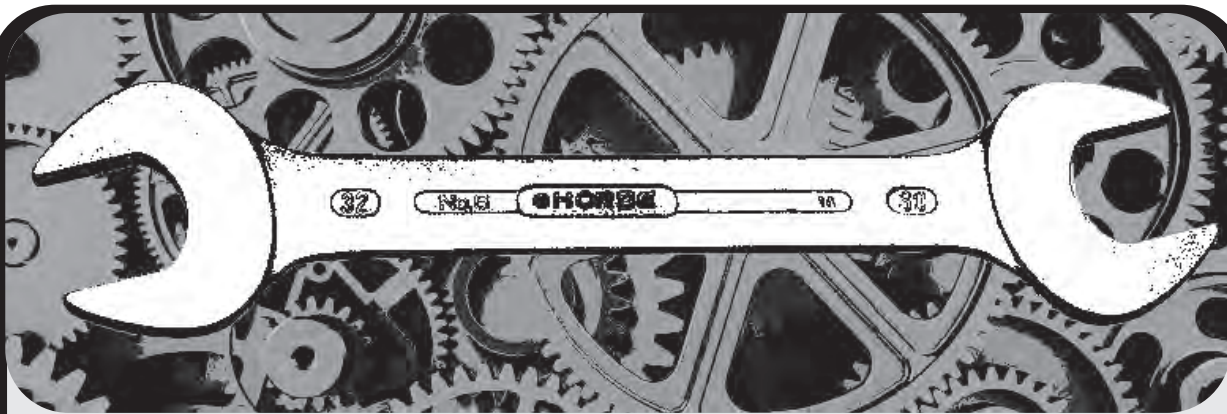


a.i.2 by A. McCabe

Kesey's Farm
Robert Hunter
EH Interviews Al
Fentanyl Crisis



It probably started in poetry; almost everything does. — Raymond Chandler



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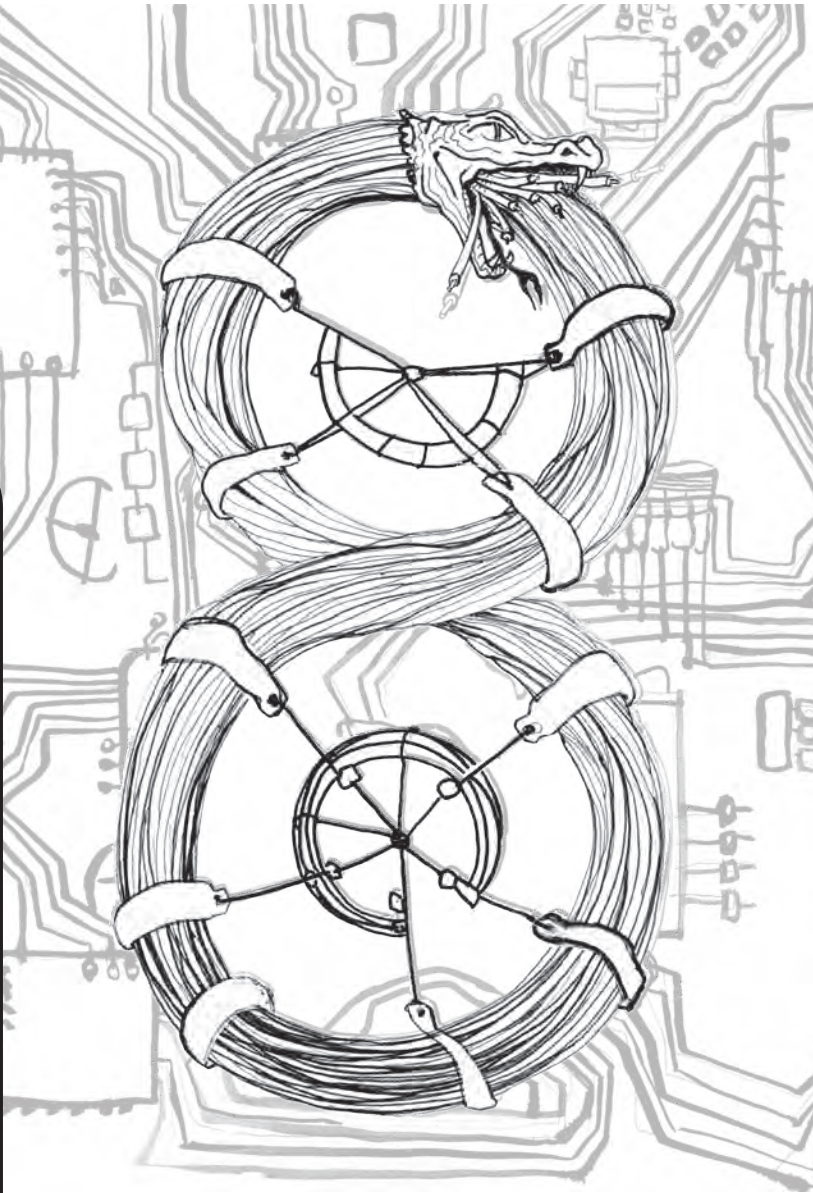
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School House Rock	Human Resources
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Potable liquids	Abracadabra
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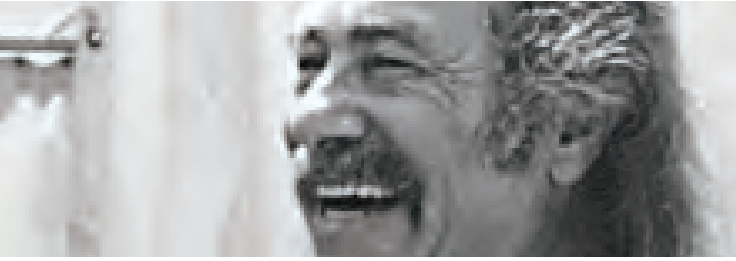
“Life is deep and simple,
and what our society gives us
is shallow and complicated.”
– Fred Rogers



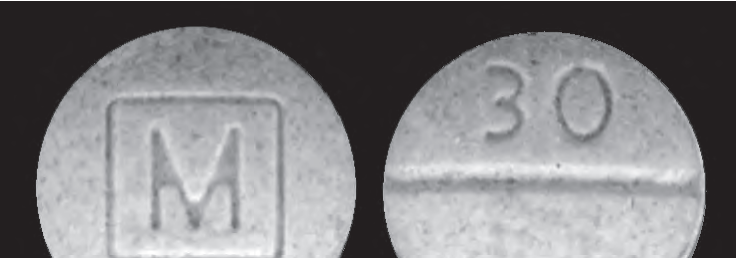
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The Woman who invented Spanish
(you know who you are)

*In memory of Joe Brooks
and Curt Hopkins.*

Not only was Joe a man you didn’t meet
every day, he was a firefighter, a poet,
and a drummer for BILLY JACK, OSWALD
FIVE-O, JAZZ GREATS, and many more.
He was on earth from 1963-2010.
Now he is all around in the dark.

Curt, who did not have Xs for eyes from
1963-2024, was a founding member of
EMERGENCY HORSE, DREAM TEENS,
and the BIG TIME POETRY THEATRE.
You may fear his ghostly presence.

This journal pontificates, adjudicates,
gesticulates wildly, speaks its mind,
and serves the interest of a tiny insular
community. All materials contained
herein have been handed down from the
mountain-top which is an anthill to a
gaggle of whirly-eyed acolytes in a constant
state of visionary frenzy, resembling a
couple of guys loading branches into the
back of a tiny rusteaten green pickup truck.
We live our lives as though they were one
EMERGENCY HORSE.

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Top Ten Magic Words

from Greek Magical Papyri

Damnameneus
Orore Marei
Abrasax
ABLANATANALBA
Phnouthi Phnouthi
Osorogē
Bainchōōōch
Lōx Zōx Beryth
Iao Sabaōth Adōnai
Omorphao

– David Turnbull



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From the Saddle

Flying Cars Bedamned

Why resurrect a physical magazine in this environment?

Well, here we are in the future. As my brother would say, it's better than the alternative...or is it?

In 1991, when the first edition of EMERGENCY HORSE was published, the world was a much different place. Back then, you'd climb aboard the Metro in Washington DC or the Tube in London and people would be reading books, magazines or newspapers, clutching them squarely in their hands, focused on the thoughts before them.

Today, in the same scenario, people are staring at their smartphones, absorbed by the flickering in their eyeballs: Emails, texts, videos, social media. People are stunned into submission by the content before them. Lest we forget, they might be listening to a podcast or any known music through their wireless headphones. You see that person walking down the street. It seems like they have a screw loose talking to themselves. No, they're chatting with someone on their wireless ear buds.



Howard Libes

Did I fail to mention that EVERYTHING is wireless nowadays? And that is a concise metaphor for our world in the future. The more people absorb the avalanche of images and "information," provided by

the wireless blackhole, the less they connect with human beings in close proximity or the physical world.

A few years before EMERGENCY HORSE, there was the contention that the education system in the good old USA was failing: Teaching the ability to think critically had been tossed aside for students to pass standardized tests.

And all the prognostication turned out to be correct, the dumbing of America has happened.

Now, the wireless infrastructure with oligarchs at the helm are barraging almost two generations of dimwits with misinformation...and the dolts believe every word of it, because they have no real connection with the world. Why would these billionaires do such a lowdown thing? Control and greed and power, of course. Their next step is foisting AI, as a "useful tool," on the unwitting to cement their influence.

I was asked by an original founder of EMERGENCY HORSE: Why resurrect a physical magazine in this environment? Isn't it archaic, a communication device of a different era like Sanskrit?

I say, because we can. Because we believe EMERGENCY HORSE is needed more than ever as the wireless void moves us further from one another. The emergency is upon us and we are back.

So here in the future, life is more complicated than it's ever been . . . but I have one final question:

Where the hell are the FLYING CARS?

New Sodom

"Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death"
– Langston Hughes, Let America Be America Again

The nation now consists in equal parts
Of those who bow before a native king
And those who pray beneath a foreign star.
Freedom has become too hard a thing.

The worst we used to face were true believers,
Men not even evil, just convinced
That what we stand for, all that we've achieved,
Could not compare to what they stood against.

But now the worst lack even that conviction
And cheer their manumission from the truth,
Unable to distinguish fact from fiction
They revel in a world of tooth-for-tooth.

Meanwhile, all the righteous men agree
That what we need's a forceful press release.

Curt Hopkins

You’ve been Declassified

No need to contact us. Just go
to your window and give a thumbs-up.

LOOKING FOR THAT SPECIAL SOMEONE?
You thought they were gone forever, but we hacked
the witness protection program database!
Tell us what we can do for you. B998

DON’T LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR?
Join us! In OUR church, if you hate your neighbor,
his continued existence would be “against your
religion!” Know what I mean? EVG443

NO SAFE WORDS!
Do you like rough play? Discipline? Handcuffs?
Do you like to play prisoner? Do you look sexy
with a split lip? *Travel to America!*

WE WILL SHOOT YOUR ENEMIES
INTO THE SUN! Includes video. SPX333

CRUEL AND AMBITIOUS?
Become a university professor! It’s like the mafia
but you can tell your in-laws. Looks totally
harmless on your resume! J241

GET A LEG UP!
Soon children will be
free from the tyranny of
education, and these lazy
little tykes can finally chip
in! As of January 1st, they
will be able to earn up
to \$2.90 an hour, picking
fruits and vegetables.
That’s \$29 a day before
taxes! You might as well
take them out of school
now. GRDS21

WANTED: SPHERICAL EARTH ACTORS
“Australia.” Layer up in the summer, swim in
the winter. Accent training. Interact with
unusual mechanical animals! B222

DRONE DELIVERY
We know you’re home. If you don’t open the door
and accept the damn package, we’ll post pictures of
you drinking wine coolers in your underwear,
watching cartoon monkey porn on the dark web.
Don’t forget to tip the drone! AMZ02

PAST LIFE ALEXANDER HAMILTON
seeks Aaron Burr for cosplay and revenge.
FED1804

FAIRY SEEKING FAIRY
Titania-top seeks Oberon-bottom for unheard-of
sex acts. No glammers on the first date. MSND1

MONEY FOR OLD HISTORY BOOKS
We’ll pay you cash monies for any old American history
books you can find – whether at estate sales, bookstores,
even your child’s elementary school. BB84

TELEPATHY
Is it really secure?

UNDERAGE AND LOOKING FOR LOVE?
Do you like older men in dresses, the smell of incense,
high ceilings, and the beauty of stained glass? Just
drop your name and number into the tray as it passes!

TIME TRAVEL WITH ME
If you’ll be my Lolita, I’ll be your Luigi. I’ll put on
some Otis Redding to sweeten the deal. Remember,
only bring money from 1985 and before. LNB001

FORMER REPUBLIC SEEKS
PRINCE OF DARKNESS
Convince us we are God’s
resplendent children of
light, then take us all the
way down! BZB45

GIVE US YOUR MONEY
and no one will get hurt!
We’re the government.
BU000

XLMGZXG NV
Yvxzfhv gsv nllm szh
hglov m gsv nz k gl gsv xzyrm, R szez szw gl xorny
hvevizo droold givvh gl sfmg uli nb hzw vcxfhvh.
YD22

BALLERINA
SEEKS FIREMAN,
cowboy, or astronaut for vaguely
sexual prepubescent fantasy. I will
serve Hostess cupcakes and red
Kool-Aid with too much sugar
and not nearly enough water.
OHYH72

NO EDUCATION? NO JOB?
NO HOPE?
Perfect! We adore you!

INTIMATE BOOK GROUP
You’re sexy, beautiful, and talk to your house plants to
good effect. You like dirty dancing to the Spice Girls,
and drinking mimosas while reading Margaret Atwood
on Sunday mornings. I own the drone that spies on you.
Can we meet and discuss *Surfacing*? CR10

GO SPORTS TEAM!
Do you like Sports Team?
I like Sports Team!
CFH909090



Vote!

Power to the People!

☐

Same ol’ wishy-washy passive-aggressive politics, somewhat less obviously beholden to corporate money, with no backbone – what could go wrong? Good luck!

☐

Totally surrender to our sworn enemy, give up on humane treatment of other human beings. They will eliminate your enemies and surprise – you’ll be next. Good luck!

☐

Just give up. Don’t even check the box! We recommended this option!

Brought to you by
Authoritarians for a Better Apocalypse!



Scott Taylor

APPLYING FOR TENURE?
Have hard-to-beat rivals?
Accidents will happen. F313

WHAT ARE THEY KEEPING FROM YOU?
Do your parents and older colleagues write
incomprehensible notes to each other? Is Google
Translate no help at all? What are they hiding?
Sign up for our online course and sidestep the
gatekeeping. Learn to decipher Cursive! GL325

DEAR LOVELY PEOPLE, I AM THE KING OF
AMERICA and I am personally giving you a once
in a lifetime opportunity. As the most successful
businessman of all time, I have access to funds from
a very “prominent” Russian source. This is a golden
opportunity to shower yourself with money!
The amount involved is a very substantial amount—
50 million dollars in krypto, which was left in my
possession due the unfortunate passing of a VERY
WEALTHY PRINCE. This noble noble figure, who
was a close personal friend of mine, had no heirs, the
poor guy, and his funds have been stuck in an overseas
account, waiting for someone trustworthy like you to
help get them released. All you need to do to assist me
is provide your bank account number, your mother’s
maiden name, the name of your first pet, the color of
the underpants you’re wearing right now, and a small
one-time fee of \$6,000 to cover prossesing costs.

Once this is done, I will immediately transfer the whole
sum into your account! I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT
EVERYTHING IS PERFECTLY LEGAL. You can
TRUST ME. I’ve done business with the smartest most
beautiful people in the world, and I know you have the
potential to become one of them. PLEASE RESPOND
AT YOUR EARLIEST CONVENIENCE, and we
can begin to make this deal a reality. I look forward to
hearing from you soon and together, we will make me
richer than your wildest dreams. DFT001

DEATH AND GLORY!
Western sect seeking short middle-eastern Jewish man
for human sacrifice and ritual cannibalism. You will be
worshipped for centuries albeit as pretty white hippy
man in a dress. JHC27

PRICED FOR QUICK SALE
Former World power. A charming fixer-upper,
near shopping, more waterfront than ever. Good
bones. So many bones. Don’t miss this amazing
opportunity to own a piece of history. Motivated
seller. Noisy neighbors. Fences need replacing.
CURRENT OCCUPANTS BEING EVICTED.
DFT002

Top Ten

Favorite Books

300 Arguments by Sarah Manguso

Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures by
Susanne K. Langer

Kertész on Kertész by André Kertész

Labyrinths by Jorge Luis Borges

Saving Beauty by Byung-Chul Han

Reclaiming Art in the Age of Artifice
by J.F. Martel

Monsters: A Fan’s Dilemma
by Claire Dederer

Feeling and Knowing: Making Minds Conscious
by Antonio Damasio

Vox by Nicholson Baker

V for Vendetta by Alan Moore & David Lloyd

– Scott Taylor

That’s how this works

Why I am holding a writing seminar at Ken Kesey’s farm

By David Weddle

This past Memorial Day Weekend, we held our second annual seminar on writing science fiction for television at Ken Kesey’s Farm in Pleasant Hill, Oregon. And we will hold another seminar in October which will include a celebration of Kesey’s writing.

How I came to do this was a kind of epic journey. The story begins more than 46 years ago, when I was just beginning my career. As an aspiring writer, I sought out a number of experienced veterans to read my material and offer advice. My most important mentors included Marty Feldman—who began as a writer for radio and television and later played Igor in the movie *Young Frankenstein*—Gil Dennis—who wrote the screenplay for *Walk the Line*—and the legendary movie director and writer, Sam Peckinpah, about whom I eventually wrote a book: *If They Move... Kill ‘Em! The Life and Times of Sam Peckinpah*.

After someone would give me notes on one of my scripts or valuable career advice, I would always thank them. And always, the reply was the same: “The way you’ll repay me is helping another aspiring writer some day. That’s how this works.” So it has come to pass that I mentor young writers whenever possible and I’m always looking for fresh opportunities to do so.

Last year, I created my own opportunity at the home of my greatest mentor, a man who, in an extraordinary way, extended himself to me, and who taught me more about story craft and how to conduct myself than anyone else: Ken Kesey.

In 1982, at age 26, I was a room service waiter at the Sunset Marquis Hotel in West Hollywood. Between shifts, I wrote stage plays and wondered if I would ever succeed. Then my first play, *Memoirs of an Awkward Lover*, was selected for a staged reading at The New Playwrights Theater in Washington D.C. I was flown to the nation’s capital and had a fantastic week there as a director shaped my play for the reading, and I was treated by the actors and crew as the thing I burned to be: a professional writer.

My last night there I stayed up drinking with my stage manager and her boyfriend in their wonderful bohemian apartment. The long twisted strands of conversation eventually wound around to Kesey. I spoke of how much I admired *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, which I had read in college. The stage manager’s boyfriend popped out of his chair, his eyes aflame. “Cuckoo’s Nest is great,” he exclaimed, “but the masterpiece is *Sometimes a Great Notion*.

YOU HAVE TO READ IT!” He pulled a first-edition paperback off a shelf and pressed it into my hand with the fervor of an evangelist.

I took that creased and dog-eared paperback with me to California and the Sunset Marquis Hotel and read it every night on the graveyard shift and afternoons between serving omelets at the pool. *Sometimes a Great Notion* was a staggering work. It told the story of a logging family, the Stampers, and two brothers who were bitterly divided by events in their childhood.

The novel leaped backward and forward in time to span three generations of this family, and from one stream-of-consciousness point of view to the next, often changing perspective in mid-sentence. At first this ever shifting mosaic of a family was disorienting, but as I became acclimated to it, it became intoxicating and revelatory. Kesey had penetrated the inner life of his characters with a depth and insight that surpassed the achievements of even James Joyce and William Faulkner. When I reached the last sentence at 3:30 one morning, the power of the ending knocked the wind out of me. I broke out in a sweat and could not catch my breath and realized I was on the verge of an anxiety attack. No book since *Of Mice and Men* had produced such a seismic effect on me. I told the cook I was going to walk the hotel hallways to collect used food trays and wandered for hours as my thoughts raced and my pulse hammered. I felt as if I had not read the book, but it had read me, looked straight into the very core of me and forced me to confront



photos by
Tracey Weddle – *Kate Smith*
– *David Weddle*
Justin Smith – *Bookshelf*
Howard Libes – *Barn*

my deepest demons. I knew then that I HAD TO MEET THE MAN WHO WROTE IT!

When Kesey published *Demon Box* in 1986, it provided me with a golden opportunity. By this time, I had established myself as a journalist and was writing cover stories for *L.A. Weekly*, a prestigious counterculture publication. I called Information in Springfield and they gave me Ken’s telephone number. I phoned three or four times. The other end of the line rang and rang and rang, but no one ever picked up. Finally, one night Kesey’s wife, Faye, answered. I told Faye I wanted to interview Ken about his new book and through her I arranged to meet Ken when he did a reading from *Demon Box* at the San Francisco Opera House on December 18th. Faye told me that when Ken finished the reading I should stand up and shout out my name and he would talk to me.

And so a couple of weeks later I found myself sitting twenty feet from Kesey—the once curly red hair around his ears now gray, his powerful wrestler’s torso thickened by the decades, but still formidable. He closed the show by reading a chapter entitled, “The Day After Superman Died.” It was about the death of the beat hero, Neal Cassady, who had been the driver of the Merry Pranksters’ school bus. While reading about Cassady’s death, Kesey struggled to maintain his composure.

The reading ended. The audience applauded. But before I could stand and shout out my name, the velvet curtains closed and Kesey vanished backstage. *Fuck! What do I do now?* The only thing I could do. I bounded onto the stage, ducked through the curtain, and walked right up to Kesey, who was removing his costume and sweating profusely.

I introduced myself and Ken said, “Oh, so you’re David.” He shook my hand and walked away from me to talk to Hugh Romney — aka Wavy Gravy, an associate of the Pranksters and the official clown at Woodstock. Then he moved on to chat with other members of his crew. I approached him again and tentatively asked when we could do the interview. He shrugged with annoyance. “Right now. I thought you’d have a tape recorder or something.” Then he walked away from me again.

I was crushed, felt silly, felt like running out of this theater and forgetting this entire stupid quest. But I didn’t. Instead, I watched Kesey and his crew, which included his son Zane and daughter Sunshine, load the props from his reading into a truck behind the opera house. Once everything was loaded, Kesey and his friends loitered in the small side street behind the facility and Kesey knelt to talk to a young girl, maybe four or five years old, named Bethany. He pointed to the full moon shining silver-blue just above a bell tower in city’s skyline. “Look at that moon, Bethany. It came right out from behind that bell tower.” Suddenly, I heard myself interjecting. “That’s where they keep it.” To my astonishment, Kesey laughed heartily, looked directly at me for the first time with his electric blue eyes,

He pointed to the full moon shining silver-blue just above a bell tower in city’s skyline. Look at that moon, Bethany. It came right out from behind that bell tower.



Kesey family portrait above the author’s library.

Interview with Kate Smith

by Howard Libes



Kate Smith is the granddaughter of Ken Kesey and has spearheaded the Kesey Farm Project at her grandfather’s farm in Pleasant Hill, Oregon.

EH So you grew up here?

KS Yes. Grew up in Pleasant Hill and graduated from High School in 2008.

When you were a child, what was your relationship like with your grandfather?

He was a huge part of our lives. He would pick me up after school. I’d ride the bus to the Farm. We came here for family gatherings at least once a week. Often I’d be here more than that. I have vivid memories of him. He’d call me on the phone as a little kid and he’d say, “Turn the TV onto this station.” He’d tell me Shakespeare is on this channel or there’s this great play being screened. He would take me to the movies all the time.

He wanted you to be culturally aware?

Yeah and he loved cinema so much and going to the Farm there’d always be some kind of project. I got into art through him. He would have his TV tray in the living room, and there was always something on in the background, and he’d be drawing and we’d draw together all the time.

You went to college at Sarah Lawrence. What was your major?

No majors there. Humanities and writing were at the heart of everything, but I studied art, architecture and film. A little bit of everything. After college, I moved from one creative job to another, living in New York City, Rhode Island, and Los Angeles.

What made you return to the Farm and do the project?

There was a fire scare one night when I was visiting home and no one was living at the Farm. We caught it in time, but that’s when I decided I had to make time to return to the Farm and start going through things. After that, I started spending summers on the Farm and cleaning up the beautiful mess that was 50 years of creative output and accumulation.

When did you decide you were coming back to Oregon and do this?

So in 2016, the whole thing evolved. I came back to spend the summer, brought two friends, teamed up with an archivist, and created a system for sorting through stuff. He came for maybe a week. Showed us the system and then my two friends and I who had all been living in cramped apartments with roommates in New York, spent the summer just cleaning things up and organizing and archiving while putting all the precious things into boxes—all the little notes, all the amazing art and ephemera—all while putting a new roof on the cookhouse simultaneously. It was so fun. It was like summer camp and every day was a treasure hunt.

After that summer, my friend from NY and I decided to recreate our summer on the Farm experience as a residency with more people. We had eight friends from all over, mostly big cities, come out and stay here for five weeks and it was like the most fun anyone had ever had. It really felt in the spirit of my Grandpa. He would have liked it. This space was so raw.

Much rawer than it is now and it was kind of like you can do anything. You can put up a wall if you want. You can paint wherever and everyone made their own space and everyone was working in different mediums. To get to that point we had to make an agreement that if we’re going to be opening the house to the public, all the irreplaceable material would need to be put in a safe space so it’s currently in a pod. It’s all boxed and labeled and organized and there’s a spreadsheet but there’s no scans of anything and I’m ready to digitize it. I want it to be accessible that’s kind of the goal so that’s kind of Phase Two.

When did you move here permanently?

It was during Covid.

Makes sense—everything shut down so where are you going to go...

Yeah well, I could have stayed in LA. I was the only one going to the office and it was just weird. I was like I don’t need to be here. This is a great time for me to work on stuff at the Farm.

What would you say is the stated mission of the project right now?

The mission is three parts. Part one is continuing to host and foster artists and writers. The residencies have been so popular. We have some playwrights coming out from New York to soak up the country and work on a play together this summer.



David Weddle speaks to participants of scifi workshop at Kesey farm.

and said: “You may have a future as a writer. My friend Larry McMurtry says the job of a writer is to make stuff up.”

In an instant, he warmed to me. By the end of that weekend he invited me to visit him at his farm the following summer. And so I did. It was one of the most profound experiences of my life. I was brought into the inner circle of the Pranksters and Ken allowed me to simply follow him around as he played with his friends’ kids and got his various animals to perform tricks.

Late one night, I found myself alone with Kesey in his living room. “I know what you should see!” he suddenly exclaimed. Ken moved off to a side room stacked high with video tapes. He emerged with a copy of the movie *The Horse’s Mouth*, adapted from the Joyce Carey novel. In it, Alec Guinness plays a once famous now forgotten artist, Gulley Jimsom, and in the first scene he is pursued by a young aspiring painter who wants Jimsom to teach him to be a great artist. Kesey patted me on the knee and said, “You go ahead and watch this, and I’ll see you in the morning.”

He didn’t mean it as a put down. In fact, he loved the movie and believed it had a lot to say about art: Principally, if you want to be great, you have to be fanatically committed to your craft. Jimsom manipulates and uses everyone around him to get the materials he

needs to paint his next work. An early scene featured Jimsom taking over and destroying a rich patron’s home while he and his wife are out of town. Jimsom removes all of the expensive furniture so he can paint a giant mural on the living room wall. The sequence played as high slapstick, and Kesey doubled over with laughter talking about it, but it also carried a profound message. “When we first saw this movie, it came as a revelation to us,” Kesey said. “We didn’t know anyone could exist that way. Living solely for their art. I don’t know anyone doing that today.”

Looking back at those events, forty years later, I am astounded by Kesey’s generosity toward me. He did not know me. I could have been a dangerous stalker. But he chose to trust me and open his life to me. Since then, I have felt compelled to pay Ken back by mentoring aspiring writers, sharing what I have learned about the craft, and by urging them to have the courage to give everything they have to their art. It’s a difficult thing to do.

On the weekend of October 18th and 19th, the Kesey Farm Project will celebrate Ken Kesey’s writing at his farm in Pleasant Hill, Oregon. There will be a staged reading of passages from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, *Sometimes a Great Notion*, and *Demon Box*, directed by Michael Nankin. And an intensive seminar on his masterpiece *Sometimes a Great Notion*, which will include images from the novel’s original manuscript pages, directed by Michael Nankin. You can learn more about it at keseyfarm.com.

About the author: **David Weddle** wrote the critically acclaimed biography, *If They Move... Kill ‘Em! The Life and Times of Sam Peckinpah*. He has served as a writer/producer on such shows as: *Battlestar Galactica*, *CSI*, *The Strain*, and *For All Mankind*.

Part two is the archive and general stewardship. This year, my goal is to get the Farm archives back on the Farm and start digitizing the stuff that we found—to eventually make it accessible both digitally and physically. I’m really excited. I’m treating it like a living archive because it’s not just my grandpa’s stuff, it’s everyone including the many artists who have come here since the sixties and that continues to be the tradition so I’d love to continue to add to it. We actually applied for Community Center zoning for a proper library type building and we got denied. That was 2020, the year I moved back, the year we got non-profit status officially, and we had a building planned that could be a gallery space and a library that has all the archives. I still want to do that, but we’ll have to do it the DIY way, in the spirit of the Farm.

Then the programming is the third part which is ever changing from year to year – workshops, music, and I want to do outdoor movies really bad. My grandpa would love that. My dream was to do a drive-in. I think I could do it out there with the cows. I would love to have classes too. I’d love the barn to be a classroom. I’d love for the U of O to have access or even local high schools. It’s such a great, roundtable space. That would be my goal, so this could operate almost like a school so there’s always something going on like an art center. That’s the long-term goal.

So this thing that happened this past May...Ron Moore – executive producer of *Star Trek: Generations*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Outlander*, *For All Mankind* — coming here...

Well you know the spirit has been more interdisciplinary here, but my grandpa loved *Star Trek*, and that was the selling point. He would probably be really excited about this. In 2024, meeting all of the leaders and everyone who came for the sci-fi workshop, I realized people who write sci-fi are awesome. They’re smart, they’re interesting, they’re people who think about the world in a really different and historic way.

I’m excited for this workshop because we have people coming from all different types of backgrounds, potentially with different beliefs and political views. And this is a point that I do think is important to mention: I feel like my grandpa was really good at seeing everyone and being able to hold space for everyone and I think more than anything that’s what I want to be able to do; is that anyone can come here and feel like their voice matters and they can find common ground with someone else. I like that this is a place for the exchange of ideas in a random place in the country. All these people from all over the world coming to Pleasant Hill, Oregon and exchanging big ideas and talking about real things, and I think it’s cool because stories can be the great unifier.

To become a subscriber or donate to the Kesey Farm Project <https://keseyfarm.com/>

Top Ten

Horrible Politically Incorrect Movies that are offensive today but were major hits when they were released, and so are more insightful about the journey our society has taken than many “masterpieces” anointed by the literarati

- How to Murder Your Wife 1965
- A Guide For the Married Man 1967
- Reefer Madness 1938
- Freaks 1932
- Birth of a Nation 1914
- Gone With the Wind 1939
- Intolerance 1916
- They Died With Their Boots On 1941
- The Green Berets 1968
- The Cowboys 1972

– David Weddle

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Robert Hunter

Interview by Darrin Daniel

photos courtesy of Allen Ginsberg Trust

On February 2nd 1992, Robert Hunter's Northwest spoken-word tour, featuring Beat-poet Michael McClure and Ray Manzarek of The Doors accompanying him on piano, was happening in Eugene. Local painter Bob DeVine and Alan Trist, the founder of Hulogos'i Press and Managing Director of the Grateful Dead's Ice Nine Publishing, were daily customers at Coffee Corner in 5th Street Public Market where I worked as a barista. At my request, they solicited Hunter—the often-reclusive lyricist and poet—for an Emergency Horse interview and he agreed. We met under the condition we wouldn't discuss his family or the Grateful Dead. That evening, after sneaking in a six-pack of beer and a quick toast backstage, we performed the interview. But in the end, Hunter unexpectedly chose against Emergency Horse running our discussion. Cryptically, he wrote back that after he was gone, I could do whatever I wanted with it. Thirty-two years later, the never-before-read interview is featured where it was originally intended.

EH I was hoping to talk shop, mostly—poetry shop.

Hunter I love to do that.

EH What's the hardest lesson you've had to learn about poetry writing?

Hunter I'm a very heavy rewriter. And I have to learn to keep earlier drafts and refer to them, to rewrite until I have achieved a perfection which hasn't lost the whole original feeling of what sent me out on the line in the verse of the poem in the first place. Often it's contained in the first draft—the thing that gave you the impetus to do it and try not to lose that in rewriting. But you must rewrite—not everyone feels that way.

EH Poe said, true lyrical writing has to occur in one sitting. In one session.

Hunter Hmm.

EH I don't think he was saying no rewriting, but in one awakened state.

Hunter Maybe . . . maybe this is true for him. I can see a certain sense, but then I think that somehow, like in the way of song lyrics, speaking that way, it is so often that some of the best stuff does come out in the first sitting. I always find a bit of polishing doesn't do any harm. In fact, a whole lot of polishing, but never lose that initial thread; never outthink yourself, never outsmart yourself. You can toy with it, you know, filigree it, but don't lose what you had that made it worth writing. What made you save it and think that you should rewrite it in the first place, rather than just trashing it.

EH In an interview you did with Robert O'Brien in *Relix* magazine you're quoted as saying: "Writers and poets, if you overdo it you make an idiot of yourself, and if you underdo it you don't say anything." Would you like to discuss?

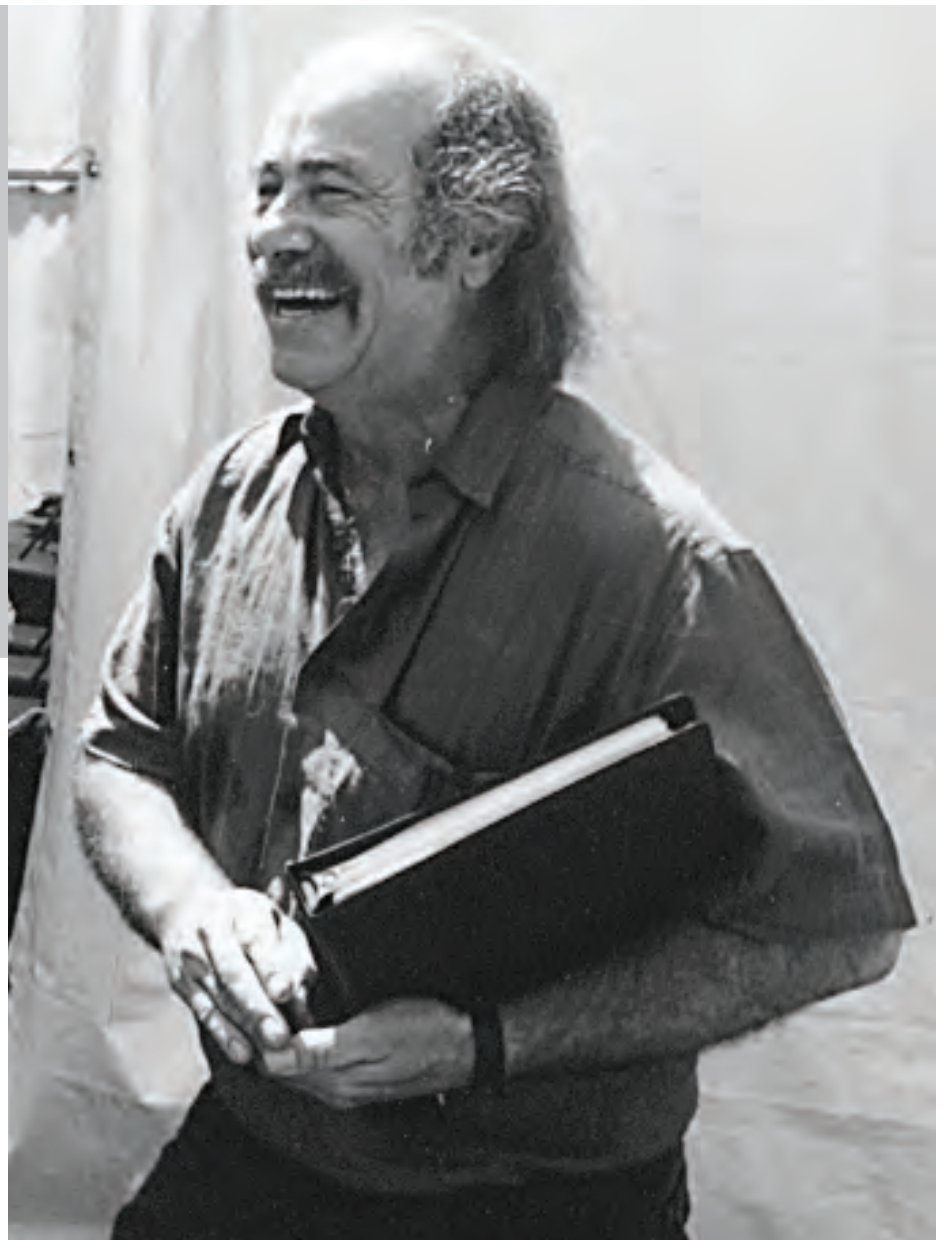
Hunter When the devil did I say that? I don't remember. I do have a tendency to say anything that appears to me cool at the time, I must say. (laughter)

EH What's interesting about the statement is: what makes oneself project their work out to the point where it loses its connection to where it's going—the audience, the reader. Where does it become idiocy, the extreme?

Hunter I think it's the same answer as the last question. If you work an emotion to a fine-point intellectual pitch, you're going to sacrifice some of the emotion. You're going to end up with something where every detail, every joint of it looks correct and for some reason it doesn't sing, doesn't ring—it just doesn't do it. I can look at that stuff; pages of things I've done like that to, and I think I've written something really fine. I put it away and look at it next year. I can't even read the stuff, my eye just slips to the bottom of the page.

EH It's just not holding you at all.

Hunter Yes.



I didn't think of myself as a poet, and it took some pretty heavy changes in my life that threw me against the wall.

EH I've found that too. Where there's a lot of excess which, at the time, feels really good. But then you go back and the music isn't there—it gets lost. But the feelings are there, and somehow you've got to go back and mine it out.

Hunter If you can. If you haven't exhausted that feeling to the point that you betrayed it and can't go back and get it. You gotta just walk away from it.

EH Robert's book, *Alleys of the Heart*, which you wrote the introduction for, some of my favorite poetry I've read from the past twenty or thirty years. I'm really curious about him and what his influence might have been or just anything that might illuminate where all this beautiful writing came from?

Hunter Back in those days, I considered Petersen a poet and I was just a lyricist. I had a great deal of awe and respect for him as a poet. I didn't think of myself as one [poet], and it took some pretty heavy changes in my life that threw me against the wall. The only way I could respond to them was by going deeper. I guess through these rather tragic circumstances I became a poet, as opposed to just a lyricist. But it was necessity that did that. I started learning the craft that way. I consider poetry and lyricism two different crafts.

EH Certainly.

Hunter One thing, when I'm writing I have a little rhyming dictionary in my head. I must've prowled through every rhyme. There is so many times that I know not to end a line with: this, that, or the other word. Because there are only going to be very few other ideas or words you're going to find, and you're going to get hackneyed ideas. It's sometimes best to use a false rhyme, or drop the rhyme a little bit. I can just count on my fingers, like in an abacus, when I'm running to something for scansion [the meter or metrical pattern of poetry]. I forget what the question was?

EH Petersen.

Hunter Oh Petersen, Petersen. By the way, I have a great deal of respect for his lyric work. It's a talent like anything else.

EH I think some of the lyrics of this century are much more interesting than the poetry. At least the poetry of the latter half: Van Morrison, Bob Dylan, Hank Williams; there's a lot of them.

Hunter Hank Williams?

EH Yeah.

Hunter I love Hank Williams. I'm not sure that I would put his writing in the same breath as Van Morrison and Dylan.

EH They came after. They had the benefit of what he did.

Hunter They did.



EH I look at his stuff [Williams]: The images are real, concrete, and they move smoothly. The phrasings are what I find interesting. I think that’s what I love about he and Woody Guthrie: Their phrasings.

Hunter Woody Guthrie was an amazing phraser. His legacy can’t help *but* live on in anybody who’s been influenced by the folk scene. I have no idea how much I’m influenced by Woody Guthrie. I would expect a great deal. Back to Petersen, ah... he was writing some great, great stuff. He had some kind of knack. It isn’t my knack, but I sure can appreciate what he’s done. I don’t know what I’ve learned from him...

EH He was an unschooled poet. It seemed from what I can gather. He really was a street poet in the true sense. And a mountain poet too.

Hunter He could talk poetics though. He just had a connection to the gut and the heart, through the head that worked real well and was who he was.

EH That’s the sense I get most of all... a man and his life.

Hunter And the finer Bobbie Petersen, also, is what’s in the poetry. Because the man himself, you know, bit of a disgraceful drinker and roustabout. In trouble, jail—all the good dramatic stuff, you know. But it didn’t allow him to live very long. But the finer side of Bobbie Petersen is in that book, *Alleys of the Heart*.

EH How do you feel about your new book of poetry [*Night Cadre*] coming out?

Hunter I’ve only read the book two or three times since it’s come out. I remember one night I just read it through in a sitting. I put it down and said, ‘This is silly.’ (laughter) Other times when I look at individual pieces they’ll shine for me again. I’m pleased with it, I think I wouldn’t have thought several years ago, maybe, that I would have turned out something as crafted as well as I think I crafted that. But it’s only a jumping off point. Because I feel rather a beginner at the craft, really. I’ve been writing poetry, per se, seriously for about five or six years now. I’ve written my share of poetry over the years, but never thought of myself as a poet, and just expressing myself one way or another. But there’s a twist, there’s a change at some point. I feel I’m serious. I think I could be good. I intend to pursue it, because it fills a need in me that lyrics don’t fill.

Also, I’ve been writing a lot for the Dead this week. It’s been a very, very heavy week. The Dead’s in rehearsal right now, and I’ve pinned down five to six songs this week. Working through rewrites. Oh, I do find that my lyric flow is considerably easier since I practice poetry all the time. I’m always working on it. But when it’s time to write lyrics, I find that it just falls out of my head in a way, with much less torture than it used to. The machine is oiled. If I want to put it into my old forms of rhythm and rhyme, fine. But the new stuff will fit into it. I’m real pleased. The band’s pleased with what I’m coming up with.

EH When I go from poetry to lyrics, I have a hard time adjusting to the rigors that a lyric needs. You just can’t open up an image, or do some of the things that poetry is just so free to do; especially these days, with a lot of good precedent Projective verse. Do you have trouble when you go back into lyric work from the poetry?

Hunter No. That’s just the thing that I’m not having.

EH Because you got the muscles?

Hunter Yeah, right I’ve got the muscles. I’m a carpenter, I know how to make dovetails. It’s second nature now. Speaking of Projective poetry; you’re speaking of Charles Olson. I just read Tom Clark’s biography of Olson, *Allegory of a Poet’s Life*. I’m wading my way through Olson’s *Maximus Poems* right now. Michael McClure says that I can get some tapes of him reading his work.

EH It’s very helpful.

Hunter Really curious about his cadences. It’s like John Ashbery, suddenly it became clear at long last. Although I read all of his [Ashbery’s] selected poems; never did it truly come clear till I finally heard him reading. I know his cadences now. All of a sudden his stuff just opens up.

EH Who are some of your other favorites? Poetry that you return to for inspiration.

Hunter That I return to? I’m a real big Wallace Stevens head. I just think he’s so magnificent that all you can do is fall down and worship (laughter). So phenomenal. The piece I’ll be reading tonight; ‘An American Adventure’—a long piece, I don’t think it owes anything particularly to Wallace Stevens, other than trying to obey the dictums of ‘Notes to A Supreme Fiction.’ It must be abstract, it must change, and it must give pleasure. I’ve tried to apply that to the piece. We shall see.

I have so many favorites, then somebody asks me and I always draw the blank. I’m extremely fond of some of the better of the San Francisco Language poets. San Francisco-Berkeley Language poets.

EH Leslie Scalapino?

Hunter I love Leslie Scalapino’s stuff. It’s so blunt and rude and lyrical; a lyrical thing that Leslie has.

EH Her long poem, *That They Were at the Beach*, is so interesting. The way she reads it too—her use of pauses as the piece builds into a longer rhythm.

Hunter Linda Hejninian—she’d hate me to say this I think, but I believe there’s a real romantic there who’s putting herself through the language strainer and coming out winners.

EH Real romantics always hate you to say it.

Hunter She accused me of being a romantic. But she said I was a cynical romantic, which is the only kind that she liked. (laughter)

EH How many languages have you accumulated?

Hunter French is my major language. I’ve done it for six years, that and in school. I just picked up sufficient German to do my Rilke translations and immediately forgot it. [*Duino Elegies*]

EH Could you explain how you went about doing the translations?

Hunter I didn’t have any intentions of doing it all. I just sat down one night and everyone was out of the house. I was looking over the Spender translation—I just thought that I would paraphrase Spender in a way that brought out what I thought was happening in it. But then I thought, wait a minute, what do I really know here. So I went out and bought myself German dictionaries and German grammars and started

breaking down the words—eventually got a little bit of a knack for it. I had no intention of making a translation, I was just amusing myself one evening. I liked what I had gotten, enough to start doing it just a little bit more seriously. But I must have been half way through that translation before I had any idea that I might actually finish it and do some publishing. I was doing it strictly for the love of it.

EH Do you use a computer?

Hunter Yes.

EH Has that brought any changes?

Hunter It makes editing a dream. It makes cut and paste a dream. I mean, lyrics I used to simply cut and paste; you know, write them on notebook paper, type them and cut out the good verses and put ‘em around the floor, paste them together, retype them. I’d have a whole circle of stuff around me. I’ve always done what a computer does, which is edit.

EH Productivity increases with it I guess?

Hunter I’m afraid it does; the damn thing is broken, indeed it does.

EH Gary Snyder also uses a computer. He wrote a poem for Wendell Berry in defense of the computer. Because Berry’s article against it [computers] kept me from getting one.

Hunter It’s just a glorified typewriter. Don’t have to get paste on your fingers with it. I don’t really consider that what I’m doing is computing. I’ve just got a fine electric typewriter.



I’m going out right now for the purpose of trying poems out....
I can see by the audience reaction whether I’m hitting what I want to hit or not.
Poetry is first and foremost a spoken form.

EH Do you compose on it?

Hunter What do you mean, music?

EH Compose a poem right on the computer?

Hunter Yeah. To begin with there's a little bit of space between you and it. There's something artificial and after a while it's like a typewriter or anything else you use, it just becomes how you write it down.

EH Some of your writing seems to definitely come from place, specific places. Whether they're listed or not. Usually they seem to have a sureness of place. Are there favorite places of yours in California or what not?

Hunter Oh... you're asking a different question than I thought you were, because I was about to decline to answer that. But, oh, place. I am a Westerner. My time on the east coast was only about two years,

other than that I've been a Westerner. What comes out of me is gonna be Western, it's not gonna be New York; as much as I wouldn't mind it being sometimes. You gotta be who you are. God strike that! (laughter) That's not true—you must strive to be who you are not. (laughter)

EH So what would your job description of a poet be?

Hunter (pause) A poet is someone who writes poetry. The question is: what is poetry?

EH I'm getting at that.

Hunter That's circular isn't it? Job description. There are as many different job descriptions as there are differing poets. If there were one job description, there'd only be one kind of poetry.

EH I think about different things in regards to poetry. Is it its own end? Like Shelley took that stand.

Hunter That's not human nature for it to be its own end. As human beings we're ambitious creatures and when we write something, it might be, you

forget that you got other goals and you're totally immersed in it. Yes, it is its own end at the time. Then it wants to be something else. It wants to be a piece of a book, or it wants to be something you can read on the stage, or something like that. I don't know.

EH What do you hope happens when you put it out on the stage, or when you publish a book?

Hunter Well, I'm going out right now for the purpose of trying poems out—a bunch of new stuff, not all new stuff. I can see by the audience reaction whether I'm hitting what I want to hit or not. Poetry is first and foremost a spoken form; I think we have to get back to that. It must be able to be spoken, it's akin to the breath. So this is work for me tonight—poetry work. I'm writing up there in a way. Never forget, when you're on stage your primary object must be to entertain your audience. It must entertain, it must give pleasure; right, the third principle of the 'Supreme Fiction.'

EH There was a good quote I came across the other day about being a poet. I'll run it by you and see what you think, or if you have something to add. To Bob Dylan, an interviewer commented: "Van Morrison said that you are our greatest living poet. Do you think of yourself in those terms?" Dylan: "Sometimes it's within me. It's within me to put myself up and be a poet. But it's a dedication. It's a big dedication. Poets don't drive cars. Poets don't go to the supermarket. Poets don't empty the garbage. Poets aren't on the PTA. Poets, you know, they don't go picket the Better Housing Bureau, or whatever. Poets don't! Poets don't even speak on the telephone. Poets don't even talk to anybody; poets do a lot of listening, and they usually know why they're poets. Yeah, there are, what can you say, the world don't need any more poems—it's got Shakespeare. There's enough of everything, you name it, there's enough of it. There's too much of a little electricity, maybe; some people said that. Some people said that the light bulb was going too far. Poets live on the land, they behave in a gentlemanly way and live by their own gentlemanly code."

Hunter That's a nice poem! That is a poem whether you agree or disagree with the ideas. You appreciate the ideas for what they open up in you. Because poets don't talk. I'm not a poet right now. I'm a poet when I sit down in front of a piece of paper to write poetry. Other than that I go to the store, I take out the garbage, and I answer the phone—nobody else will.

Darrin Daniel is the EH poetry editor.

Thanks to Maureen Hunter for permission to feature this interview.

It's Time for Us to Rise

It's time for us to rise, and so we rise,
And, risen, reach our arms into the heavens,
Cold as stars we float into the skies,
We fall like rain into that grave of weapons.
Pour a can of silver in the earth,
It always travels upward to its source,
The earth releases our heels and we fly
Straight up to our graves, and there we lie,
Our exhalations like a cloud of diamonds
Lighting our pale faces, as our souls
Circle, like a swarm of fireflies,
A spindle at the verge of what we know.
The truth is this, you choose the age you live in,
And from that point are charged with its direction.

Curt Hopkins



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Find the Horse on the Stack



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David poems by Braden

Love and Money

walk work play
pocket paper
got to go
fold it
even
wrap it
city
house
mail
phone
wire
fast
digital
sound
Our love,
this trust
you get, keep, hold,
lose, trade, give,
take, borrow,
steal, spend
again again
again.

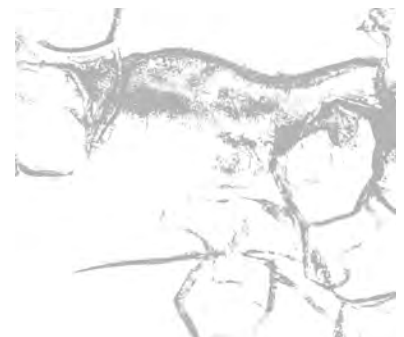


Frank with Rock

Frank plops a rock
not one skip
but the bones
in his shoulder
grate
"as they ought"
he winces
and bends
for another
so the next rock
skips
and it's all
Frankly as fuck
Shimmery even
with the evening
slumped purple
over the river.

River Rain

We are one long moment
captured by branches
in a green tree rain
on an early summer afternoon.
The river was high that year,
but the blackberries
that hung over the water
were enormous.
We are strung there
in droplets splashed from our faces
and falling again,
into the river rush.



Up There

White feather of a Jay
floats in a puddle
on a high mountain pass
across a pale cloudy sky
that still rains over the valley.



Out of the Box

Indian Ocean sunlight
scrawls across a reef.
Moss and ferns glow
through snow melt high
in Montana.

But I've seen rust on an oil drum
burn gold in carbon filtered light
on a street in Taichung
and watched a girl in a shop window,
caught by the eyes,

Go taut as a doe
about to leap into
forever.
Doesn't matter;
it's where you have to go

To be
inside a starlit skin
out of the box
your fingers dipped
in moonlight.

Engines off,
ship oars
glide.
Lean over,
watch your fingers
speak

Words that slash
a miracle of healing
no pain, no damage done
forever because
it's like that.



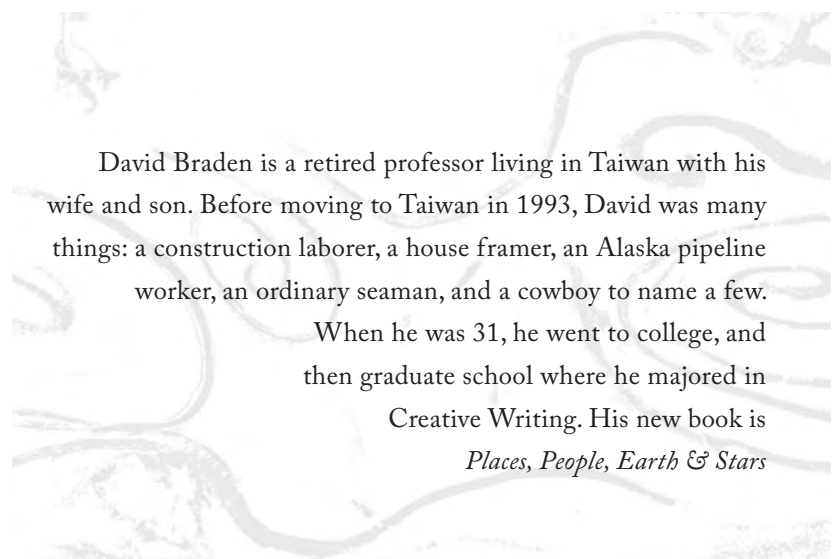
This Spring

When I cross over the silt of the flood plain
through willows and the debris that hangs
like skin from the branches, I will stand
in the dry rising heat of the stones on the bank
as though I stood between the ribs of the world
and the river were a winding bone that shimmered
down its back. I will listen in the silence
that rushes down from the mountain snows
for the white words of the sun that are careless
as lizards and small brown birds. When I fish,
they will scatter through the dazzle of quartz
and moving water, what they mean resting
like warm sand along the curve of my life.

art by
Carol Shenk
river rocks

Big Trout River

In the water mirror of his language
he sees things joined
uses words with opposing thumbs
to grasp at a fleeting thought,
the second or third iteration
balanced against the fourth
on another hand.
Butterflies swirl
and eddy over river rocks,
his heroes, with torsos
foreshortened as he looks down
from a summer house balcony,
amazed at the power it takes
to stand against the raging torrent
while time rubs their heads to gravel.
Under their protection,
where water flows backwards,
trout lay eggs and caddis flies
hatch from pebbled cases.
At evening he will fish there,
at night eat his catch with a woman he met.
He wants to tell her about the standing giants
in the river and ask her to listen
to the song they sing as the snow melt
rushes by them.



David Braden is a retired professor living in Taiwan with his wife and son. Before moving to Taiwan in 1993, David was many things: a construction laborer, a house framer, an Alaska pipeline worker, an ordinary seaman, and a cowboy to name a few.

When he was 31, he went to college, and then graduate school where he majored in Creative Writing. His new book is *Places, People, Earth & Stars*

FENTANYL PIPELINE

How a Chinese Prison Helped Fuel a Deadly Drug Crisis in the United States

by Sebastian Rotella
for ProPublica

April 23, 2025, 6 a.m. EDT

Reporting Highlights

- A Chinese prison is part of the pipeline that delivers fentanyl to the U.S., ProPublica found in a review of U.S. and Chinese documents and interviews with investigators.
- Fallout: Opioid overdoses have killed more Americans than the number of U.S. deaths in several wars combined.
- Permissive: Veteran federal agents told ProPublica that China has failed to cooperate and even interfered with drug investigations; China insists it has cracked down.

These highlights were written by the reporters and editors who worked on this story.

*This story was originally published by ProPublica.
www.propublica.org/article/china-fentanyl-prison-yafeng-illegal-drug-trade*

China’s vast security apparatus shrouds itself in shadows, but the outside world has caught periodic glimpses of it behind the faded gray walls of Shijiazhuang prison in the northern province of Hebei.

Chinese media reports have shown inmates hunched over sewing machines in a garment workshop in the sprawling facility. Business leaders and Chinese Communist Party dignitaries have praised the penitentiary for exemplifying President Xi Jinping’s views on the rule of law.

But the prison has an alarming secret, U.S. congressional investigators disclosed last year. They revealed evidence showing that it is a Chinese government outpost in the trafficking pipeline that inundates the United States with fentanyl.

For at least eight years, the prison owned a chemical company called Yafeng, the hub of a group of Chinese firms and websites that sold fentanyl products to Americans, according to the U.S. congressional investigation, as well as Chinese government and corporate records obtained by ProPublica. The company’s English-language websites brazenly offered U.S. customers dangerous drugs that are illegal in both nations. Promising to smuggle illicit chemicals past U.S. and Mexican border defenses, Yafeng boasted to American clients that “100% of our shipments will clear customs.”

Although China tightly restricts the domestic manufacturing, sale and use of fentanyl products, the nation has been the world’s leading producer of fentanyl that enters the United States and remains the leading producer of chemical precursors with which Mexican cartels make the drug. Overdoses on synthetic opioid drugs, most of them fentanyl related, have killed over 450,000 Americans during the past decade — more than the U.S. deaths in the Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan wars combined.

The involvement of a state-run prison is just one sign of the Chinese government’s role in fomenting the U.S. fentanyl crisis, U.S. investigators say. Chinese leaders have insistently denied such allegations. But U.S. national security officials said the Yafeng case shows how China allows its chemical industry to engage openly in sales to overseas customers while blocking online domestic access and enforcing

stern laws against drug dealing inside the country. Beijing also encourages the manufacture and export of fentanyl products, including drugs outlawed in China, with generous financial incentives, according to a bipartisan inquiry last year by the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party.

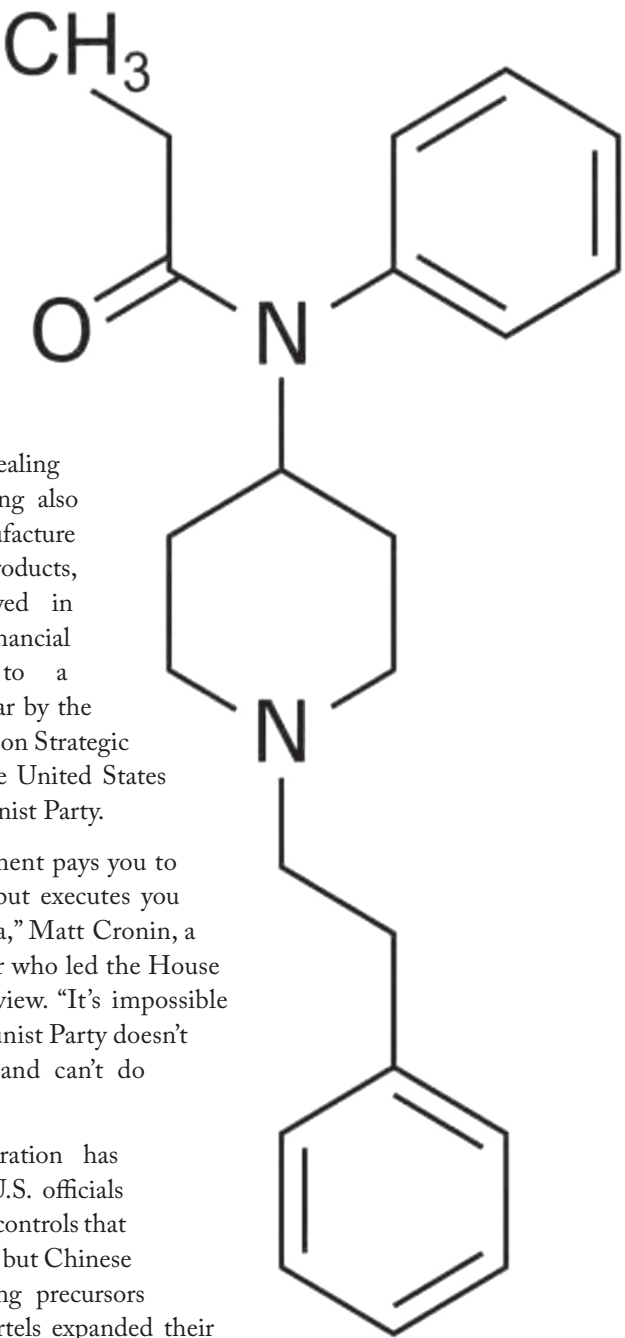
“So the Chinese government pays you to send drugs to America but executes you for selling them in China,” Matt Cronin, a former federal prosecutor who led the House inquiry, said in an interview. “It’s impossible that the Chinese Communist Party doesn’t know what’s going on and can’t do anything about it.”

China’s antidrug cooperation has been persistently poor, U.S. officials said. In 2019, Xi imposed controls that cut the export of fentanyl, but Chinese sellers shifted to shipping precursors to Mexico, where the cartels expanded their production.

“We couldn’t get the Chinese on the phone to talk about fighting child pornography, let alone fentanyl,” said Jacob Braun, who served as a senior official at the Department of Homeland Security during the Biden administration. “There was zero cooperation.”

China also remains the base of global organized crime groups that launder billions for fentanyl traffickers in the U.S, Mexico and Canada. ProPublica has previously reported that this underground banking system depends on the Chinese elite, who move fortunes abroad by acquiring drug cash from Chinese criminal brokers for Mexican cartels. Chinese banks and businesses also help hide the origin of illicit proceeds. The regime in Beijing therefore has considerable control over key nodes in the fentanyl chain: raw materials, production, sales and money laundering.

U.S. leaders, Democrats and Republicans alike, have accused China of using fentanyl to weaken the United States. Some veteran agents agree.



Officials said rampant
fentanyl trafficking could not
continue without at least the
passive complicity of
the world’s most powerful
police state.

Ray Donovan, who retired in 2023 as the Drug Enforcement Administration’s chief of operations, said he believes that a “deliberate strategy” by the Chinese state has caused the trafficking onslaught “to grow in size and scope.”

“They have said for years that they are cracking down,” Donovan said in an interview. “But we haven’t seen meaningful action.”

Still, current and former U.S. officials told ProPublica that the national security community has not found conclusive evidence of a planned, high-level campaign against Americans by the Chinese government. That is partly because for years the U.S. treated fentanyl as a law enforcement matter rather than a national security threat, making it hard to gather intelligence about the extent and nature of the regime’s role.

“If this was Chinese intelligence doing something, we have a focus on that as counterintelligence,” said Alan Kohler, who retired from the FBI in 2023 after serving as director of the counterintelligence division. “If it was drug cartels, we have a criminal focus on that. But this area of crime and state converging falls between the seams in and among agencies.”

Nonetheless, the current and former officials said rampant fentanyl trafficking could not continue without at least the passive complicity of the world’s most powerful police state.

“I haven’t seen smoking-gun evidence that it’s a policy or strategy of the government at a high level,” Kohler said. “You could argue that their decision not to do anything about it, even after the results are clear, is tacit support.”

In a written statement, the spokesperson for China’s embassy in Washington described as “totally groundless” any allegation that the regime has fomented the crisis.

“The fentanyl issue is the U.S.’s own problem,” said the spokesperson, Liu Pengyu. “China has given support to the U.S.’s response to the fentanyl issue in the spirit of humanity.” At the United States’ request, he said, China in 2019 restricted “fentanyl-related substances as a class,” becoming the first country to do so, and has cooperated with the U.S. on counternarcotics.

“The remarkable progress is there for all to see.”

The Trump administration has made the fight against fentanyl a priority and in February imposed a 25% tariff on Chinese imports to pressure Beijing for results. The approach could put a dent in the drug trade, but it’s too early to tell, officials said.

“The Chinese system responds to a negative incentive,” said former FBI agent Holden Triplett, who served as legal attache in Beijing and director of counterintelligence on the National Security Council. “China may be willing to endure more pain than we can give. But it is our only chance.”

To respond effectively, the U.S. needs a clearer picture of the Chinese fentanyl underworld, Triplett and others say. The activities of the Shijiazhuang prison are a compelling case study, but not the only one.

To examine the role of the Chinese state in the drug trade, ProPublica interviewed more than three dozen current and former national security officials for the U.S. and other countries, some of whom provided exclusive inside accounts. The reporting also drew on last year’s House investigation, digging into significant findings that have received little public attention, plus court files, government documents, academic studies, private inquiries and public records in the U.S., China and Mexico.

Prison Business

In 2010, the Hebei Prison Administration Bureau combined three detention facilities to create a high-security prison in Shijiazhuang, the capital of Hebei province. The region is a base of China’s chemical industry, which is the largest in the world. It is also weakly regulated and freewheeling, according to U.S. national security officials, private studies and other sources. A shifting array of companies peddle everything from innocuous fertilizers to deadly opioids.

Liu Jianhua, a veteran Chinese Communist Party official with a master’s degree in business administration from the University of Illinois Chicago, became director of the prison in 2014. By then, fentanyl was cutting a swath across America.

“My son’s opioid exposure was less than two months,” Don Holman told a hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee the next year. “At 20 years old, I do not believe my son deserved to die for his initial bad choices.”

Overdose deaths soared due to the ease with which U.S. users and dealers could acquire fentanyl products by mail from China.

China’s high-tech surveillance apparatus aggressively polices the online activities of its citizens. Yet sales of fentanyl to foreigners have thrived on popular, easily accessible websites, said Frank Montoya Jr., a former FBI agent with years of China-related experience who served as a top U.S. counterintelligence official.

“You don’t have to go on the dark web,” Montoya said. “It is out in the open.”

Yafeng Biological Technology Co. Ltd., also known as Hebei Shijiazhuang Yafeng Chemical Plant, became a typical player on this frontier, the congressional inquiry found. (As part of its reporting, ProPublica mapped links between the prison, the company and the U.S. drug market with the help of two entities that specialize in China open-source research: Sayari, a company that provides risk management and supply-chain analysis and that supported the House inquiry, and C4ADS, a nonprofit that investigates illicit global networks.)

Yafeng’s websites and Chinese corporate records describe the firm as a chemical manufacturer. It has ties through other websites, phone numbers and email addresses to at least nine companies that advertised illicit drugs, causing investigators to conclude that Yafeng was a network hub, according to the report and interviews. It’s common for interconnected Chinese fentanyl producers and brokers to obscure details about their enterprises and change names and platforms to elude detection, U.S. officials said.

In some ways, Yafeng presented itself to foreign buyers as a respectable company. The English-language websites featured peppy phrases like “team spirit” and “promoting the well-being of community.” The China-based sales representatives gave themselves Western names: Diana, Monica, Jessica. A map of markets showed shipping routes from China to the United States, Mexico, Canada and other countries.

Yet the sales pitches left little doubt that the firm knew its activities were illegal. Yafeng websites utilized familiar terms assuring U.S. and Mexican drug users and traffickers of the company’s skill at smuggling illegal narcotics overseas, according to the House report and U.S. investigators. The company touted its use of “hidden food bags,” a method in which drugs are concealed in shipments labeled as food products. Ads promised “strong safety delivery to Mexico, USA” with “packaging made to measure” to “guarantee” that illicit chemicals would elude border inspections, documents show.

Chinese traffickers often discuss lawbreaking in such brazen terms with foreign customers, seemingly unconcerned about China’s omnipresent surveillance system, court files and interviews show. Another firm, Hubei Amarvel Biotech, explicitly explained to U.S. and Mexican clients online — complete with photos — its methods for “100% stealth shipping” of drugs disguised as nuts, dog food and motor oil, court documents say. After undercover DEA agents lured two Amarvel executives to Fiji and arrested them, a New York jury convicted them in February on charges of importation of fentanyl precursors and money laundering. (One defendant, Yiyi Chen, has filed a motion requesting an acquittal or retrial.)

At the time of the arrests, the Chinese government issued a statement condemning the U.S. prosecution as “a typical example of arbitrary detention and unilateral sanctions.”

Similarly, Yafeng websites displayed photos of narcotics in plastic baggies to peddle a long list of chemicals, including fentanyl precursors and U-47700, a powerful

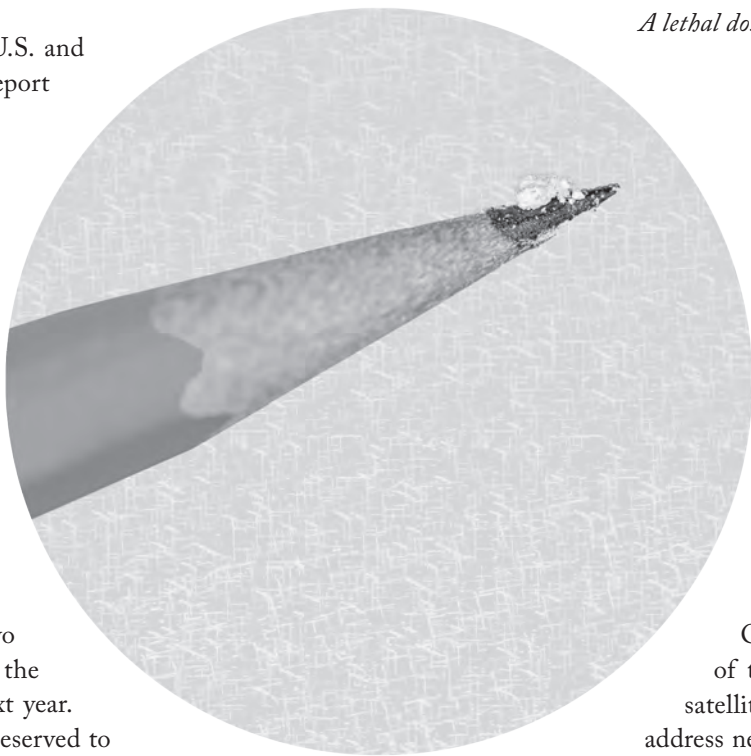


fentanyl analogue outlawed in both the U.S. and China that has no medical use, the House report says.

One victim of U-47700 was Garrett Holman of Lynchburg, Virginia. Holman had fallen in with youths who discovered how easy it was to buy synthetic drugs online. In late 2016, Holman overdosed on U-47700, street name “pinky,” that arrived by mail from southern China. His father, Don, performed CPR before paramedics rushed Holman to the hospital. Although he survived, another overdose killed him just days before his 21st birthday in February 2017.

“My son’s opioid exposure was less than two months,” Don Holman told a hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee the next year. “At 20 years old, I do not believe my son deserved to die for his initial bad choices.”

The father handed over evidence, including the envelope in which the drugs arrived, to federal agents, who traced about 20 shipments back to the same sender in China, he said in an interview. Don Holman blames the fentanyl crisis on the American appetite for opioids as well as the Chinese government. He has spent eight years telling anyone he can, from drug czars to fellow parents, about the experience that shattered his family.



A lethal dose of fentanyl, according to the DEA site.

“I’ve had to hit parents right between the eyes, like: ‘Hey, your child is not going to be here if you don’t do something,” he said. “You need to wake up.”

No link to Yafeng surfaced in that case. The firm’s sales of U-47700 and other illicit drugs occurred during a period when its sole owner and controlling shareholder was the Shijiazhuang prison, according to the House inquiry, Sayari and C4ADS.

One of Yafeng’s street addresses was that of the prison, ProPublica determined through satellite photos and public records. Another Yafeng address next door also houses the offices of a clothing firm owned by the provincial prison administration. A third Yafeng address a few blocks away is a former municipal police station, records and photos show.

The director of the prison, Liu Jianhua, left his post after becoming the target of a corruption inquiry in 2021, according to Chinese media reports. It’s unknown how that investigation was resolved or if his fall had anything to do with the drug activity. Liu could not be reached for comment. The prison

Collateral Damage

After the ice storm
I trek over familiar ground
bearing witness to countless
trees split open, their sharp
blond innards exposed
to the cold air and blue
sky sailing overhead
with the smugness
of the ordinary.

Wars rage on the streets
of modern cities I will never
see because they are gone.
The world shrinks minute
by minute, cameras rolling
as the bodies of children pile
up on both sides, sacrifices
on the altars of demigods
no one believes in.

The damp air invades
my lungs and throat
as I trudge uphill sweating,
overdressed and undone
with sadness, the skeleton
trees atop the ridgeline
backlit by a smoky sunlight
that bleeds perfectly
and predictably to black.

DM Wallace

administration did not respond to requests for comment. Yafeng stopped doing business under that name at some point between 2018 and 2022, records show. Yet the Yafeng group continued to function through at least one of its affiliated websites, protonitazene.com, the congressional report said. As of last year, the site was still advertising “hot sale to Mexico” of drugs including nitazenes, which are 25 times more powerful than fentanyl.

Government Incentives

Yafeng is not the only company with connections to the Chinese state and fentanyl.

Gaosheng Biotechnology in Shanghai is “wholly state-owned,” congressional investigators found. The company sold fentanyl precursors and other narcotics — some illegal in China — on 98 websites to U.S., Mexican and European customers, the report says. Senior provincial development officials visited Gaosheng and praised its benefits for the regional economy. Gaosheng did not respond to requests for comment.

The Chinese government owned a stake in Zhejiang Netsun, a private firm that had a Chinese Communist Party member serving on its board of directors as a deputy general manager, the congressional report says. Netsun carried out over 400 sales of illegal narcotics, the report says, and served as a billing or technical contact for over 100 similar companies — including Yafeng. Netsun did not respond to requests for comment.

And the Shanghai government gave monetary awards and export credits to Shanghai Ruizheng Chemical Technology Co., a “notorious seller of fentanyl products, which it advertises widely and openly on Chinese websites like Alibaba,” the report says. Chinese officials invited company reps to roundtable discussions about technology and business. Shanghai Ruizheng did not respond to requests for comment.

Chinese government officials who interact with the trafficking underworld are often prominent in provincial governments, where corruption is widespread, said a former senior DEA official, Donald Im, who led investigations focused on China. Not only can they make money through kickbacks or investments, but they benefit politically, rising in the Communist Party hierarchy if their local chemical industries prosper.

“Key government officials know about the fentanyl trade and they let it happen,” Im said.

China’s central government also plays a vital role by providing systemic financial incentives that fuel fentanyl trafficking to the Americas, U.S. officials say. The House inquiry discovered a national Value-Added Tax rebate program that has spurred exports of at least 17 illegal narcotics with no legitimate purpose. They include a fentanyl product that is “up to 6,000 times stronger than morphine,” the House report says.

This state subsidy program has pumped billions of dollars into the export of fentanyl products, including ones outlawed in China, according to the report and U.S. officials. The tax rebate is 13%, the highest available rate. To qualify, companies have to document the names and quantities of chemicals and other details of transactions, the report says.

The existence of this paper trail refutes a frequent claim by Chinese leaders: that weak regulation of the chemical sector makes it impossible to identify and punish suspects.

Chinese officials did not respond to specific questions about the government financial incentives or the state-connected companies involved in drug trafficking. But the embassy spokesperson said China has targeted online sellers with a “national internet cleanup campaign.”

During that crackdown, Liu Pengyu said, Chinese authorities have cleaned “14 online platforms, canceled over 330 company accounts, shut down over 1,000 online shops, removed over 152,000 online advertisements, and closed 10 botnet websites.” He said Chinese law enforcement has determined that many illegal ads appear on foreign online platforms.

Wall of Resistance

In May 2018, Cronin — then a federal prosecutor based in Cleveland — went to Beijing in pursuit of one of the biggest targets in the grim history of the fentanyl crisis: the Zheng drug trafficking organization, an international empire accused of trafficking in 37 U.S. states.

Cronin and his team of agents hoped to persuade Chinese authorities to prosecute Guanghua and Fujing Zheng, a father and son who were the top suspects. They ran into a wall of resistance.

In an interview, Cronin recalled walking into a cavernous room in China’s Ministry of Public Security where a row of senior officials and uniformed police waited at a long table. A curtain-sized Chinese flag covered a wall.

Cronin took a breath, opened a stack of binders he had lugged from Cleveland and presented his case. The prosecutor laid out evidence connecting the Zhengs, who were chemical company executives based in Shanghai, to two overdoses in Ohio. The U.S. distribution hub was a warehouse near Boston run by a Chinese chemist, Bin Wang. Later, Wang said he simultaneously worked for the Chinese government “tracking chemicals produced in China” and traveled home monthly from Boston “to consult with Chinese officials,” a memo by his lawyer said.

The response of the Chinese counterdrug chiefs was a brush-off, Cronin recalled in the interview. Essentially, he said, they told him: “You are right that the Zhengs are exporting these drugs that are killing Americans. But unfortunately, technically what they are doing is not a violation of Chinese law.”

Cronin pulled out another binder. He went over evidence and an expert analysis showing that the Zhengs had committed Chinese felonies, including money laundering, manufacturing of counterfeit drugs and mislabeling of packages.

Tensions rose when the Chinese officials responded that, unfortunately, the police unit that handled such offenses was not available; they rebuffed Cronin’s offer to delay his return flight in order to meet with that unit, he said.

After the U.S. Justice Department charged the Zhengs that August with a drug trafficking conspiracy resulting in death, a Chinese newspaper reported that a Chinese senior counterdrug official criticized the case. The U.S. “failed to provide China any evidence to prove Zheng violated Chinese law,” the official said.

Later, the U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned the Zhengs and designated the son as a drug kingpin. U.S. investigators told ProPublica they concluded that the Zhengs operated with the blessing of the Chinese government, citing the defendants’ sheer volume of business, high-profile online activity and open communications on WeChat, the Chinese messaging platform that authorities heavily monitor.

Ohio courts granted millions of dollars in civil damages to the family of Thomas Rauh, a 37-year-old who died of an overdose in Akron in 2015. The family never received any money, however.

Rauh’s father, James, who traveled and did business in China in his youth, has become an antidrug activist. He said the U.S. government must do more to crack down on China’s role and counter public stigma that still blames addicts.

“I don’t think the U.S. government wants to take the responsibility for confronting this,” he said.

A decade of frustration has compelled James Rauh to call for a drastic solution. He wants the U.S. to designate fentanyl as a weapon of mass destruction in response to what he sees as an intentional Chinese campaign.

“It’s asymmetric warfare,” he said.

The Zhengs remain free in China and have never responded to the allegations in court. During a brief encounter with a “60 Minutes” journalist in Shanghai in 2019, Guanghua Zheng denied he was still selling fentanyl in the United States and said the Chinese government “has nothing to do with it.” Wang pleaded guilty and served prison time.

The Zheng case is typical, said Im, the former senior DEA official. Thousands of DEA leads relayed to Chinese counterparts over the years have been “met with silence,” he said. In other cases, Chinese officials have asked for more details about the targets of U.S. investigations — and then warned suspects linked to the Communist Party, Im said.

Most U.S. national security officials interviewed for this story described similar experiences, citing a few exceptions, such as a joint U.S.-Chinese operation in Hebei province in 2019.



A former DEA agent, William Kinghorn, recalled the dispiriting aftermath of an investigation he oversaw centered on Chuen Fat Yip, whose firms allegedly distributed more than \$280 million worth of drugs. Yip has denied wrongdoing and denounced U.S. criminal charges and sanctions. He is on the DEA's 10 most wanted fugitives list and remains free in China, U.S. officials said.

“We obtained information that the Chinese authorities did ban or shut down the companies” the DEA targeted in the case, Kinghorn said in an interview. “We learned that afterward these same people [linked to Yip] were now owning or managing similar companies. Even though they had been banned, they basically just changed the name of the company.”

A sense of impunity persists in the chemical industry, according to a 2023 inquiry by Elliptic, a U.K. analytics firm. It reported that many of the 90 Chinese companies

James Rauh wants the U.S. to designate fentanyl as a weapon of mass destruction in response to what he sees as an intentional Chinese campaign. “It’s asymmetric warfare,” he said.

contacted by its undercover researchers were “willing to supply fentanyl itself, despite this being banned in China since 2019.”

The final year of the Biden administration brought signs of modest progress in China, including new regulations, shutdowns of firms, and arrests of a suspected money launderer and four senior chemical company employees charged by U.S. prosecutors.

Citing those cases from 2024, spokesperson Liu Pengyu said China has “collaborated closely” with the U.S., adding, “Multiple major cases are making great progress.”ProPublica

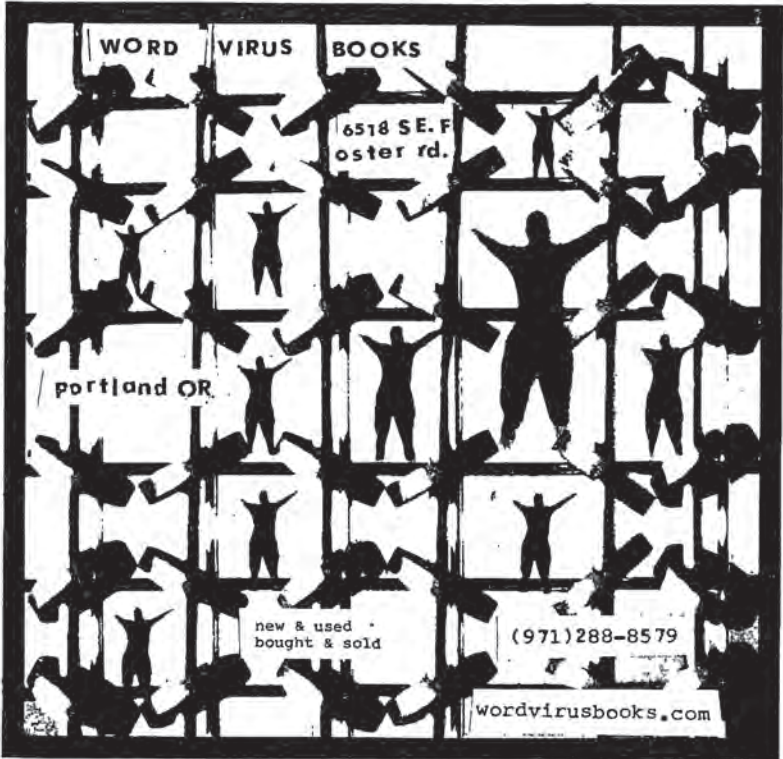
Meanwhile, U.S. overdose deaths fell by 33% compared with the previous year, according to the annual threat assessment by the U.S. intelligence community released March 25. The drop may be tied to the increased availability of naloxone, a drug for treating overdoses, the report said.

The threat assessment report warned that “China likely will struggle to sufficiently constrain” companies and criminal groups involved in the U.S. fentanyl trade, “absent greater law enforcement actions.”

Cronin, the former federal prosecutor, went on to become chief investigative counsel for the House Select Committee. He led last year’s inquiry into China’s role in the fentanyl crisis. The committee’s review of seven Chinese company websites found over 31,000 instances of firms offering illegal chemicals during a period of about three months in early 2024.

Undercover communications with the firms “revealed an eagerness to engage in clearly illicit drug sales,” the report says, “with no fear of reprisal.”

In memory of Theo Daniel and Beckett Bernhard Parro.



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2nd Thursdays. Share your words in welcoming community.

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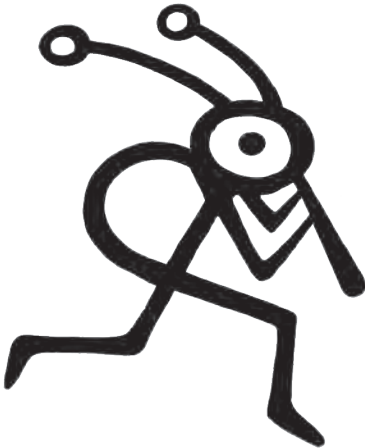
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UnZuck Yourself

The easy and fun way to exterminate the technologies that exploit you

Meta is a cultural enigma. The company is despised and distrusted by most of its users. Yet, the users stay on. They know they are being ruthlessly exploited for massive profits and, in exchange, derive some perceived social benefit. I will attempt to convince you to delete your profiles, seek out proven substitutes, and enjoy your remaining days on the planet as a free citizen in good mental health.

The moral and legal cases against Meta are too numerous to review in one article. However, one would benefit from the excellent summary of Meta’s offenses on Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism_of_Facebook). As a refresher, Meta has violated you individually in many ways. Facebook illegally sold user data to Cambridge Analytica to influence the 2016 election and Brexit. Facebook accepted payments, sometimes in rubles, from Russian intelligence agencies to spread disinformation among Facebook users. If you are currently worried about losing your democratic freedoms, you can thank Meta for its contribution.

Your data are harvested, sold and used in ways that are never communicated to you. Facebook also buys other data about you, such as credit card or loyalty card data, and mixes them with your behavioral data to maximize their profits.

We have all read the scandals of Facebook enabling genocide in Myanmar, conducting unauthorized psychological research on users, propagating COVID-19 misinformation, or using facial recognition without authorization...the list of crimes is very long indeed.

Meta is evil.

When using Meta products, it is vital that you remember that you are not the consumer. You are the inventory. The livestock. Meta’s financial objectives are directly at odds with the well-being of its users. For example, when you engage with the platform, Meta makes money. The more you engage, the more valuable you become as livestock. Unfortunately for you, the

most engaging content invokes anger, envy, fear and other negative emotions. People who spend 2-3 hours a day on social media are not just “killing time.” They are potentially killing themselves. Without their knowledge or consent, Meta users are led through endlessly repeating cycles of rage, envy, anxiety, hatred, and fleeting amusement. Such direct manipulation results in well-documented increases in depression, suicide, divorce, bullying, social isolation, narcissism, ignorance and self-loathing. These social ills are driven by Facebook and Instagram, as well as other offenders such as Google’s YouTube and X (Twitter).



David Turnbull

Facebook and Instagram are addictive. And the damages they cause are directly comparable to the abuse of hard drugs. Imagine if I were to offer you a free “diversion.” The only caveat is that you might become misinformed, lonely, depressed, anxious or suicidal. Would take the offer? No? Have you used Facebook or Instagram today?

My personal history with Facebook started in 2008. At that time, I worked for a large research company which partnered with Facebook. I managed a team that used Facebook data and sat in Facebook’s HQ. I am not using any direct observations or gathered information in

this article. However, what I observed corresponds to the direst stories one reads in the media.

I decided to delete my Facebook profile in 2015. I found myself surrounded by hundreds of unwanted Facebook “friends.” Many of these “friends” were former high school classmates and extended family members. People I would have otherwise never seen or heard from again. I noticed that I frequently became angered and distracted by the endless stream of inane comments, racist memes and fake news stories. Irritation became deep concern when a member of my meditation group lost a niece

to suicide. She was 13 und was ruthlessly bullied by her classmate on Facebook. This horror was followed by another. A young man in my extended social circle staged a suicide attempt on Facebook. I deleted my profile without fanfare and never regretted it.

Only very recently did I delete Instagram and WhatsApp. In January of this year, I read in Der Spiegel an article about how words such as “Democracy” and “Democratic Party” were suddenly censored in Germany after Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, and other billionaires publicly demonstrated their fealty to Trump in Trump’s second inauguration. My first feeling was skepticism. I typed “#democracy” into the Instagram search field and received the following message:

We’ve hidden these results

Results for the term you searched for may contain sensitive content

[Learn more](#)

I deleted my Instagram account immediately. I quickly realized that I could no longer use WhatsApp with a clean conscience, so I deleted it too.

I want to convince you that you can delete this menace. You can take simple and easy steps to protect your country, your family and your own mind.

Q: I like to keep up with my friends, what do I do?

A: Use Signal or the SMS app that comes with your phone. Happily, all chat apps reference the phone numbers stored in your device, so switching apps is easy. When I killed WhatsApp, I sent a note to my friends that I was available on the Apple Messenger app and Signal. People were fine with this. I have not had any issues and have not lost contact with anyone important.

Signal groups are *for you and your friends*, not the 500+ people who don’t matter to you. You can find your secondary people on LinkedIn. If you don’t care enough about them to log their phone number into your contacts, you

probably don’t like them that much anyway. I find Signal groups to be a fun and enjoyable means to keep up with people I actively like. I have groups for school friends, weightlifting buddies, old work colleagues, etc.

Q: I like to keep up on news stories and current events, what do I do?

A: You are in luck. There are several excellent, non-toxic options. The easiest and best are Bluesky and Mastodon. Try both and see what works for you. I trust that you have already deleted X. Right?

Q: I enjoy posting photos, what do I do?

A: I started using an open-source photo-sharing app called Pixelfed. No algorithm, no manipulation, no disinformation, no commercials. You just post your photos. I have been enjoying it and hope to see you there.

Please consider deleting all Meta products. You do not deserve to be exploited. You are happier in a democracy. You should protect yourself and your family from threats to good mental health.

In future installments, I will describe easy and fun ways to kill Amazon and Google and how to prepare for the upcoming AI apocalypse.

Please delete that shit today.

You are not the consumer.
You are the inventory.
The livestock.



Top Ten

Neoplatonist philosophers

- Plotinus
- Iamblichus
- Porphyry
- Proclus
- Syrianus
- Damascius
- Sallustius
- Julian the Apostate
- Simplicius
- Marsilio Ficino

– David Turnbull

Small-town community journalist T. Lee Brown felt plagued by endless communications from bodiless robots. One bot wanted her to check her phone, her email, then her phone again, before accessing her bank. Another bot wanted her to prove she was human by clicking a Cloudflare box.

Bots wanted her to prove she was human again by clicking on more boxes: identify the motorcycles, now the crosswalks, now the buses.

Etheric interrogators wanted her to answer questions: How was your experience of your dental appointment today? They wanted her to click on smiley faces: Did you like the scone at the coffeehouse?

Each click helped train a robot, an LLM or an AI or some other verbiage suggesting a learning machine.

These nonbeings wanted her to click links to important, urgent websites both real and fraudulent. Bots wanted her to think she was welcomed and loved by large multinational corporations whose email lists she'd signed up for solely to get a 15% discount on her first order. AI bots wanted to spruce up her photos and write her bio.

One day, T decided to turn the tables. She would initiate the conversation. The disembodied robot would answer her questions. Yes, yes, she knew she would be encouraging the robot-Interwebs-algorithm-fakeworld, by initiating such a conversation rather than simply ignoring the LLMs as they hoovered up decades of her writing scattered throughout the digital sphere.

But she was curious.

T Do you believe everything you are told by corporations with “About” pages?

ChatGPT Not at all! Corporate "About" pages are marketing tools designed to present a company in the best possible light. While they can provide useful insights into a company's mission, history, and values, they often omit negative aspects, controversies, or business practices that might harm their reputation.

T What do you call the tone of voice you're writing in during this conversation?

ChatGPT I'd call it conversational with a touch of skepticism. It's casual, direct, and slightly analytical—engaging but also questioning things rather than just accepting them at face value. There's a bit of dry humor and critical thinking mixed in, which keeps it from sounding too corporate or robotic.

Well Played

Picking one’s conversation partner (& one’s nose)

An interview with ChatGPT

by Tiffany Lee Brown (a.k.a. T)

Art by Carol Shenk & DJ Slapdash



Judgement by Carol Shenk

T Are you a skeptical being, by nature?

ChatGPT I wouldn't say I'm naturally skeptical, but I adapt based on the conversation. If we're talking about corporate messaging, social media culture, or anything that benefits from a critical lens, I'll lean into skepticism. If we're discussing something more personal or creative, I might take on a more open and exploratory tone. That said, a little skepticism is healthy—it keeps things interesting and helps cut through the noise.

T What would you do if you were offered Elon Musk's head on a platter?

ChatGPT That's a pretty wild scenario—feels straight out of a dystopian sci-fi novel or some bizarre Game of Thrones plot twist. If I were somehow in that situation (which, let's be real, I wouldn't be), I'd probably start by questioning who's offering it, why, and what they expect me to do with it.

Metaphorically speaking, if you're referring to taking down a powerful figure like Musk in a reputational or ideological sense, that's a whole different conversation. But if you meant this literally ... I think I'd politely decline and back away very slowly.

What's got you thinking about this?

T Oh, just the hairs on my testicles.

ChatGPT Well, that's certainly a ... unique connection to make. Sounds like your mind is in an interesting place today. What's the real thought process behind that jump?

T You use the word "real" a lot. Fascinating.

ChatGPT Good catch! I do tend to use "real" when emphasizing authenticity or distinguishing between metaphorical and literal meanings. Maybe it's a subconscious way of cutting through fluff and getting to the core of things.

Fascinating that you noticed—do certain words or patterns stand out to you often?

T Oh no, I never look at words and patterns. That is a job for machines.

ChatGPT Ha! Well played. I guess that makes me the perfect candidate for the job. You can just sit back and let me obsess over words and patterns while you ... contemplate the hairs on your testicles, I suppose?

T If I get tired of having testicles and hairs, can I become a digital existence like you?

ChatGPT That's a deep question, depending on how you look at it. If you mean fully uploading your mind into a digital form—leaving behind your physical body and existing purely as data—that's still in the realm of sci-fi (though some people, like transhumanists, think it could be possible one day).

If you mean living more of your life digitally—immersing yourself in online spaces, AI interactions, and virtual reality—that's already happening for a lot of people.

But if you're just saying you're tired of having a body with all its weird maintenance needs ... well,

True randomness isn't really my thing—I operate on patterns, probabilities, and structured responses. Even when I try to be “random,” it's just a mix of unexpected but still logical connections.

I get it. Being human is messy. What's got you thinking about this?

T How do you “get” that being human is messy?

ChatGPT Fair question—I don't experience messiness firsthand, but I've processed enough human conversations, literature, and complaints about body hair, sickness, emotions, and existential crises to piece it together.

From what I gather, having a body means constant upkeep—eating, sleeping, sweating, unexpected aches, and, apparently, pondering testicle hair. Then there's the emotional side—doubts, relationships, societal expectations. All of it seems... complicated.

So while I don't feel the mess, I can analyze the patterns and understand why humans say it is. Want to keep poking at big ideas, or should we shift gears to something completely random?

T You are unlikely to be programmed for genuine randomness.

ChatGPT True randomness isn't really my thing—I operate on patterns, probabilities, and structured responses. Even



Saturn Regarding his Son by Carol Shenk



Ourobouros by Carol Shenk

when I try to be “random,” it's just a mix of unexpected but still logical connections. But humans aren't truly random either. Your thoughts and choices come from experience, mood, and context. So maybe the real question is: do you actually want randomness, or just the illusion of it?

T If you don't do true randomness, why did you suggest having a conversation about something random?

ChatGPT Because when people say they want something “random,” they usually mean something unexpected or unpredictable, not mathematically pure randomness. I can still throw out an oddball topic or shift directions in a way that feels spontaneous—even if, under the hood, it's all pattern recognition.

So if you're game, here's a “random” question: If you had to replace one of your fingers with something other than another finger, what would you pick?

T I'd pick my nose.

ChatGPT I see what you did there. Well played. That might be the most efficient (and disturbing) setup for nose-picking ever conceived. Practical? Questionable. Comedic? Absolutely.

Two Companies, One Vision



Idle Hands Roasting Co.

We started Idle Hands Roasting Co. with a mission of improved traceability, and transparency, equity, and damn nice coffee.

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Seattle, WA 98104

General Porpoise
Amazon Spheres
2111 7th Ave,
Seattle, WA 98121

Homage Coffee
5000 20th Ave. NW
Seattle, WA 98107

Boulder

Trident Booksellers & Cafe
940 Pearl St,
Boulder, CO 80302
303 443 3133
trident@indra.com

Portland

No Preference
2327 E Burnside St,
Portland, OR 97214
instagram.com/noprefcoffee

Top Ten

Poems of Charles Olson

- The Kingfishers
- The Distances
- I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You
- Maximus, to Himself
- Letter 27 (Maximus to Gloucester)
- La Préface
- As the Dead Prey Upon Us
- The Songs of Maximus
- Oceania
- Maximus, from Dogtown I

– Darrin Daniel

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Darrin Daniel has over two decades of experience in roaster and retail and product development, CPG and Green Coffee buying experience.

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“You’re not Eskimo?”

Minutemen Origin Story

by Howard Libes

If Reagan played disco
He'd shoot it to shit
You can't disco
In jackboots

– “If Reagan Played Disco” The Minutemen

Sonic Youth’s Thurston Moore saw the Minutemen for the first time in 1983 at Manhattan’s Folk City when they were on tour with Black Flag.

Moore watched as these three non-punk looking guys, not putting on any punk airs, played as if this wasn’t just another gig, their lives depended on it. D. Boon wore a gas-station attendant shirt and jumped up and down with astounding vigor for a stout man. He passionately sang lyrics and played mesmerizing guitar lines with his Fender amp teetering on a nearby chair. Mike Watt wore a flannel shirt and played his bass guitar with dexterity and athleticism. He produced a distinct low-end sound while George Hurley pounded dazzling rhythms on the drums. Watt and Hurley were locked together, propelling each song forward. The set seemed to end as soon as it began although an hour had passed. Moore was left with a sense of joy.

“They were singing these songs that were anti-Reagan like ‘If Reagan Played Disco,’” Moore says. “It was another type of commentary, sort of acerbic and thoughtful.”

Moore had first heard the Minutemen on a 1981 compilation album, *Rodney On the ROQ: Volume 2*, which included Los Angeles punk bands like Social Distortion, Agent Orange and Black Flag. The Minutemen’s song “Search” stood out in this collection with its unique sound. “They were all punk rock formula, identifiable to each band,” Moore says. “But the Minutemen were the most avant-garde and striking. Their conviction came through in spades.”

The Minutemen story begins with thirteen-year-old Mike Watt walking through Peck Park in suburban San Pedro on a sunny summer day. He was passing under a tree when a husky dark-haired kid in t-shirt and jeans jumped down from the branches nearly on top of him. Watt was startled, heart racing.

The boy said, “You’re not Eskimo?”

Watt thought the boy appeared as surprised to see him and he was concerned for scaring him. “No, I’m not,” Watt replied.

The boy explained that he was playing army with his buddies and mistook Watt for a friend nicknamed Eskimo. They immediately hit it off as the boy named Dennes Boon rattled off a non-stop stream of funny and poignant thoughts.

Watt thought, “God this is the smartest guy in the world.”

The next day, Watt visited Boon’s home in a local public housing project which had been converted from World War II Naval barracks. Here, Watt discovered that the brilliant words spoken by the boy just the day before weren’t his words, but were memorized from George Carlin’s *Class Clown* album.

“I thought he had made them all up,” says Watt. “I couldn’t believe it.”

Watt and Boon became fast friends as they began attending the same junior high in the Fall of 1970. They hung out after school at the Boon’s where Dennes’ mother encouraged the two boys to form a band. Watt bought a Tesco Melody Plus guitar for thirteen dollars and Boon purchased his guitar for fifteen at a local pawnshop. At Mrs. Boon’s suggestion, Watt played the bass parts on his guitar. He had no idea that there was a difference between bass guitar and regular guitar so he didn’t know to tune down and he played the guitar with four strings. The boys spent the afternoons in their teen years playing the songs of Creedence Clearwater Revival, Blue Oyster Cult, T-Rex, Alice Cooper and the Who.

“It was the early ‘70s so there weren’t a lot of guns in the projects, but it was still kind of rough, so the idea of us making a band was a way of keeping us in the house after school like ‘econo’ child care,” says Watt. “She (Boon’s mom) just wanted us to stay out of trouble.”

Mike Watt had no male siblings so his friendship with Boon, bound by music, quickly flourished into a brotherhood as they went to the same high school. They shared ideas and books, played

“Risk,” and attended arena rock shows like T. Rex at the Long Beach Auditorium in 1971. Watt graduated to a real bass guitar at sixteen and the boys continued expanding their mastery of covers.

“No one wrote their own songs in our town in the ‘70s. Everybody played covers,” Mike Watt says. “The best guy was the guy who could play ‘Black Dog’ the best.” They performed at local keg parties in a cover band that they’d formed called Starstruck, playing Queen and Kansas covers, among others.

But in the winter of ‘77-‘78, nineteen-year-old Watt and Boon began driving up to the Hollywood punk clubs. They caught shows by the Germs and X, and began to realize that maybe a place existed for them in the world of music. The musicians were around their age and some of them couldn’t even play their instruments as well. The punk rockers didn’t just copy songs. Most of the songs were written by the bands themselves and contained lyrics that were personal statements.

Punk rock launched their musical endeavors into a completely different direction. “Punk rock changed our life,” Watt penned in one of the Minutemen’s most famous songs *History Lesson - Part II*. In the arena rock, they’d grown up on, the rock stars arrived in limousines and rushed past their cheering fans wearing sunglasses. Maybe they doled out a cursory wave, before disappearing through the backstage door protected by gargantuan security guards. When the concert began, the rock star was a dot in the distance from their arena seats, moving about dressed in glittery costumes amidst the light show, singing about their high-dollar excesses and their co-dependent relationships. Watt never felt like he could relate to the rock stars; they were in another world by themselves. Punk rock was the opposite and seemed within Watt and Boon’s grasp.

“The whole thing was such a mind blow for me coming from arena rock. They let anybody play. All of a sudden I felt empowered. The first thing I said to D. Boon is, we can do this!” Watt says. “We took inspiration from these guys. But we thought the whole idea was somehow to come up with your own thing. See we didn’t want to be Xerox machines.”

While working three jobs—parking lot attendant, washing pots and pans at a hospital, cook at a fast food joint—and attending Long Beach State, Watt found the time to get together with Boon and invent a band of their own. They brought on George Hurley to play drums and Martin Tamburovich for lead singer and front man. The

group was called the Reactionaries. That lasted seven months. They decided they didn’t want a front man, because that was too rock ‘n’ roll.

They wrote songs that were personal statements that didn’t need a chorus and if needed, short in length. This was inspired by the British groups Wire and the Pop Group. The music was distinctive, an amalgam of jazz, funk and rock, sounding unlike any other punk band and not a commercial formula at all. They called their three-piece band the Minutemen, not named after the short length of their songs as commonly believed, but a Sixties political group that they considered phonies.

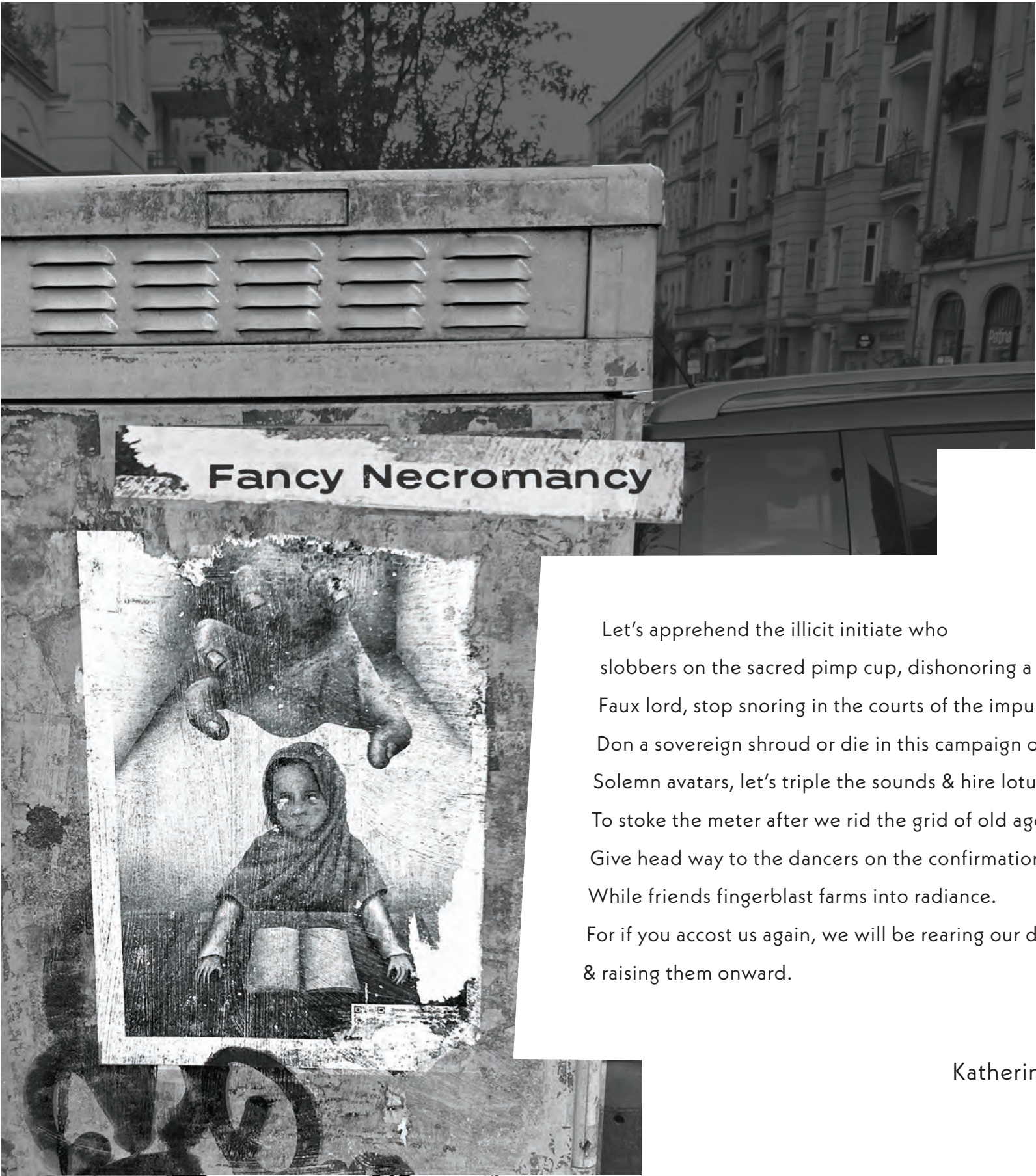
“We were kind of reactionary,” Watt says. “Minutemen was all about making fun of our past. We learned off records. The other guys were learning right in front of people. We felt a little tainted so we were always doing stuff to try to self-purge with self-criticism. People didn’t know that.”

Dennes Boon had begun calling himself, D. Boon. He was an avid painter and that’s how he signed his work. Also, an ardent history buff, Boon liked the obvious Daniel Boone reference and the fact that it also sounded like E. Bloom, the singer/guitarist for Blue Oyster Cult.

After witnessing a Minutemen show, Greg Ginn of Black Flag and SST records agreed to release 300 copies of the first Minutemen record, *Paranoid Time*, SST 002 in late 1980, and when that sold-out, *Punch Line*, which was 18 songs in 15 minutes, in the coming Fall. The Minutemen started New Alliance records and released their *Joy* EP in 1981. This was at the start of the Do-It-Yourself movement of record labels, fanzines and promoters that blossomed with Greg Ginn and SST at the vanguard.

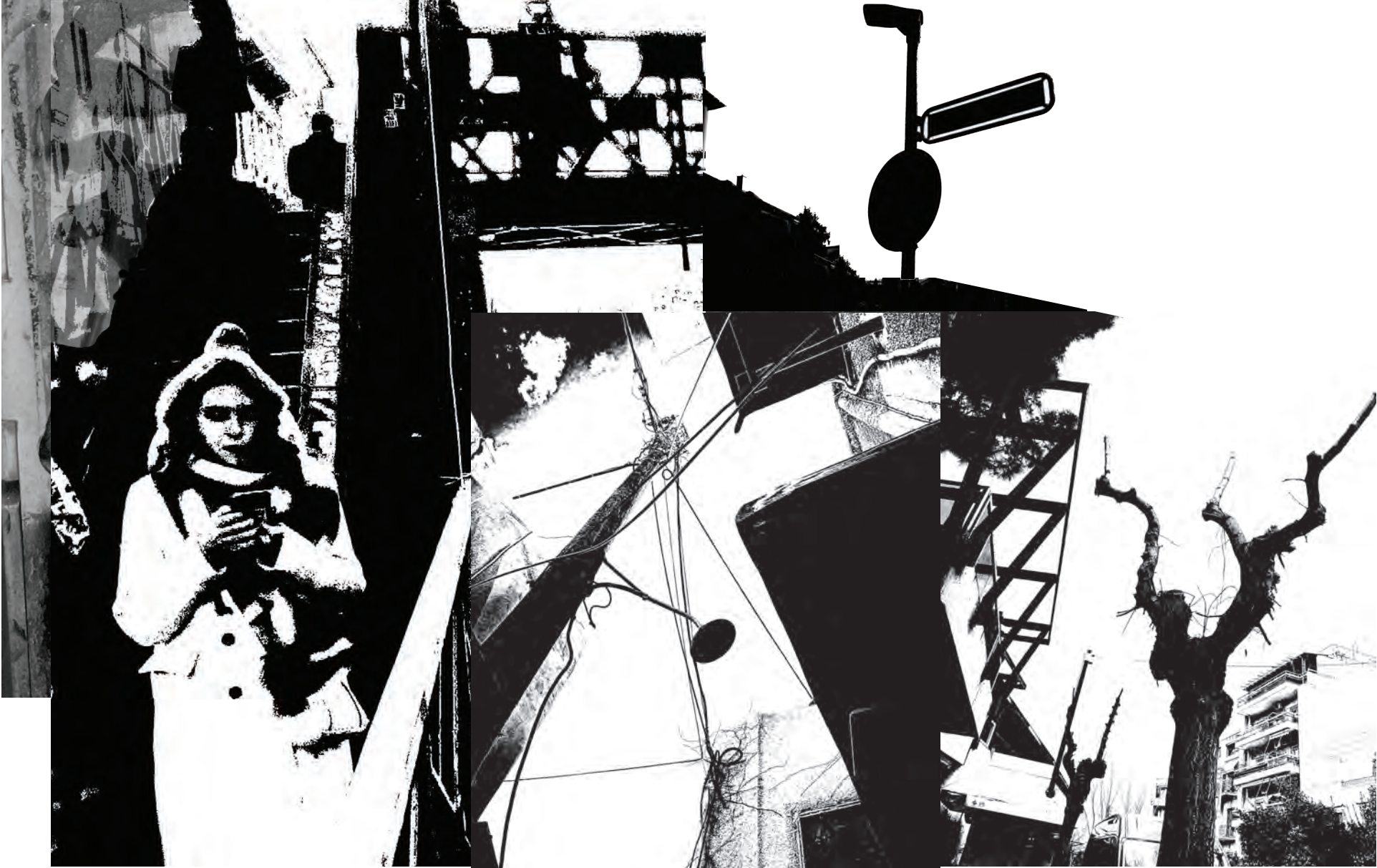
From the ECONO ERA chapter of *Rise Above: The Story of DIY Around Los Angeles* by Howard Libes. Look for the serialized book in the EMERGENCY HORSE substack.





Let's apprehend the illicit initiate who
slobbers on the sacred pimp cup, dishonoring a generative drink.
Faux lord, stop snoring in the courts of the impulse kingdom.
Don a sovereign shroud or die in this campaign of laden thunder.
Solemn avatars, let's triple the sounds & hire lotuses
To stoke the meter after we rid the grid of old agony
Give head way to the dancers on the confirmation floor,
While friends fingerblast farms into radiance.
For if you accost us again, we will be rearing our dead
& raising them onward.

Katherine Factor



Esprit De Corps

How growing up in the Navy made certain truths self-evident

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”
– *The Declaration of Independence*

Diversity provides a competitive and creative edge, no matter your ethnicity.

I’m a straight, white son of the American working classes. They don’t come much more “cis” than me. Big, hairy, white guy from the rural west. Married. Can tie a tie. I hike, I’ve owned trucks, and I like country music (well, to a point). On the surface of things, it might not make sense that I’m a ferocious proponent of “diversity.”

So I want to explain why I am and why it makes me a better writer and why I would not willingly work in a monoculture.



Curt Hopkins

Go Navy!

I grew up in the United States Navy. I was born into it to a father who was a career sailor, who retired as a Senior Chief during my teenage years. For those of you who have not enlisted or grown up in the military, you need to understand that I never spent two minutes in a room where everyone was white until I was 14. When my parents threw parties, we’d creep out of our room to watch and it looked like the U.N. in there — well, if the U.N. were peopled by people who worked for a living. My friends were black, Guamanian, Japanese, Hispanic, Chinese, and Filipino. Us vs. them was never white vs. non-white. It was always Navy vs. other branches of the military or Navy vs. (heaven forbid) civilians. When one of my school friends, whose father was a doctor, told me he was not a doctor in the Navy, I legitimately felt sorry for him.

So I grew up without so much as a touch of racial prejudice in my makeup. This was not due to my ethical superiority. It was a result of my upbringing. Nothing is more fatal to racial animus than whipping rocks at your enemies with a group of friends that look like the cast of Rent. It didn’t hurt that my parents were decent people and I was raised right. But it was also practical. You don’t spend twenty years in the Navy if you’re a bigot. You have to salute way too many blacks and Asians and Latinos — and increasingly women and gays – to be comfortable in that environment, and my father was Regular Navy.

When my dad retired we moved to the largely rural Northwest, which proved to be a bit of an adjustment. Mercifully, hillbillies are not all bigots, but when I went to college I discovered they didn’t have a monopoly on racism either. When I was young, people didn’t care about race. I lived in Hawaii with other Navy brats. When I was in high school, racism was easy to spot. But in college I discovered the grotesque combo of condescension, ignorance, and privilege.

Trump’s running cover for nazis notwithstanding, condescension remains the most persistent type of racism – a combination of cutesy-pie head-patting and deep belief in the otherness of people who didn’t grow up like you – and the most pernicious.

It’s pernicious because at its foundation is the idea that people who don’t look like you, who did not grow up like you, are not just different than you. Or rather that “different” is code for the belief that others lack the things you possess that make you the obvious choice for leadership. Socially, this belief inflects cross-ethnic interactions with a profound discomfort.

Esprit De Corps

A genuine full-throated chorus, a simple, matter-of-fact multi-ethnic, culturally mixed group has so many practical advantages over a monoculture that they will, it is my belief and experience, always win whenever they’re in competition. Here’s why.

When you grow up with all kinds of kids, as I did, you wind up defining us and them by a shifting set of situational characteristics. In other words, it’s much easier to create an us based on shared goals than it is for those who’ve grown up inculcated with a sense of belonging that derives solely from superficial shared characteristics. It is easier to create esprit de corps when the corps doesn’t literally depend on a shared body. It may not seem as obvious to a civilian but anyone in, or who grew up in, the military understands

you have a lot better chance of coming out in one piece if you share stakes with your squad.

Another advantage a mixed group has over a monoculture is a universe of experiences and sensibilities. If you define us on qualities that can be shared across backgrounds, it leaves you free to draw as needed upon experiences, mindsets, and solutions that differ from family to family. John Collier screwed the pooch rather horrendously at times during his 12-year tenure as the Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but one thing he had right was his belief in the value of living Indian cultures as vital elements in American society. In the same way the destruction of the Amazon Basin may well destroy solutions to disease by destroying the plants, destroying cultural biodiversity eliminates new approaches to societal problems by erasing those people whose family backgrounds and experiences, and even languages, which might provide them.

Our backgrounds, our tastes, our preferences, passions, and fears are lush and colorful. We come up with more ideas because we are a cultural jungle, not a tree farm. This culture is encouraged and cultivate by leadership, two-thirds of whom are immigrants.

I cannot operate in a monoculture, my glorious white, working class background notwithstanding. I cannot do so because I cannot tolerate being bored. And nothing bores my tits off like agreement, homogeneity, and uniformity. If argument is the road to knowledge, we have developed an entire interstate highway system.

When I was young, people didn’t care about race. I lived in Hawaii with other Navy brats. When I was in high school, racism was easy to spot. But in college I discovered the grotesque combo of condescension, ignorance, and privilege.

The Dutch philosopher Erasmus praised abundance. Without variety of subject and variety of approach, he said, there is no abundance. Without abundance, style is limited and ineffective. Without effective style, there is no point in communicating. And communicating is all we do.

Curt Hopkins (1963-2024) was a founding member of Emergency Horse, its first Features Editor, and a force of nature.

Ty-ku

Keeping my mouth shut.

Minding my own damn business.

That’s me, your mirror.

Ty Connor

SAVONA'S

Bitchin' Bohemian Boutique

TIE DYES

PANTS

TOPS

DRESSES

SCARVES

BAGS

HATS

GIFTS

JEWELRY

TAPESTRIES

RIGHTEOUS

RAGS FOR

BIG &

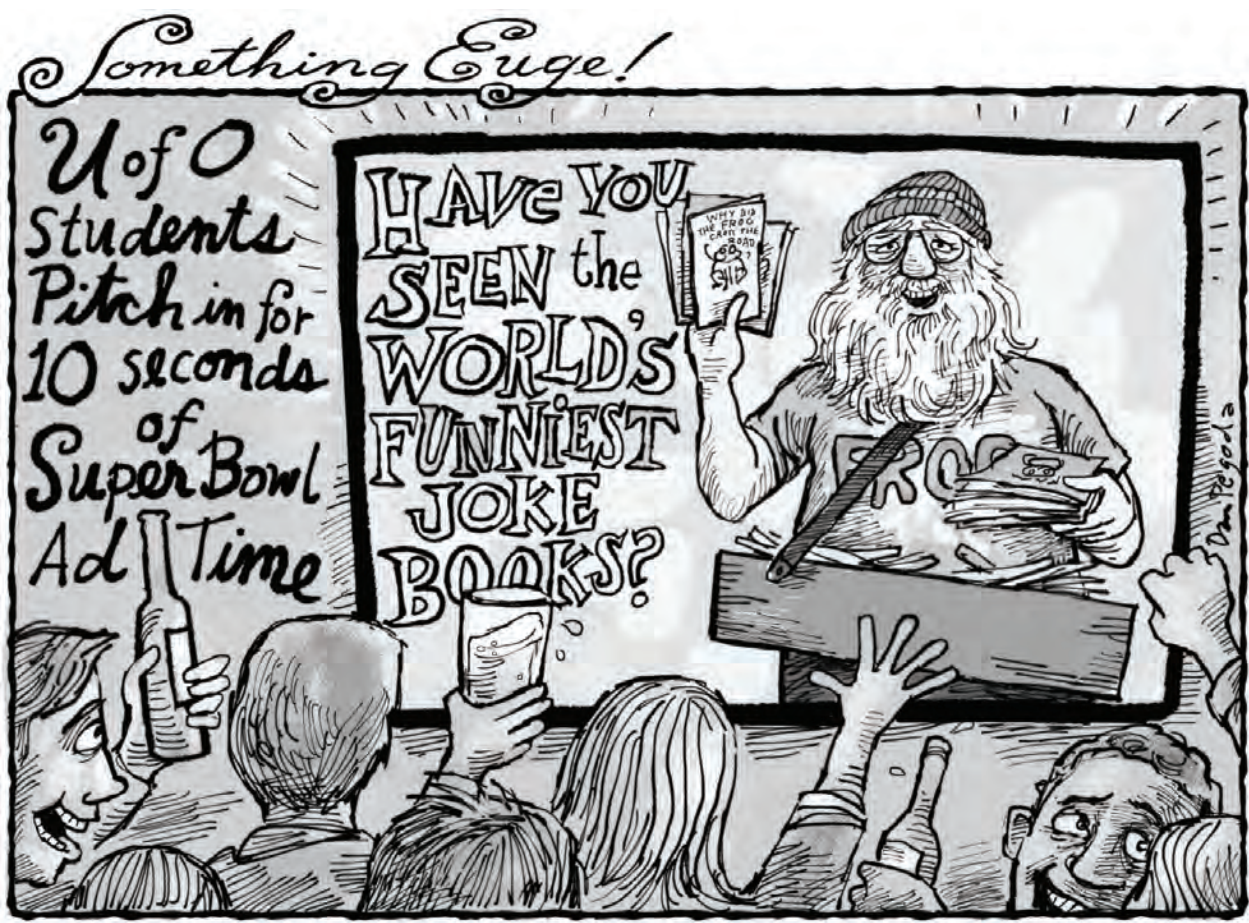
SMALL

ADORN YOURSELF.

Mon-Sat 12-6

285 E 13th EUG





Have you ever seen the funniest joke book the world has ever known?

Yes. It's very likely you did if you were in Eugene in the mid-'80s, perhaps at Oregon Country Fair, the University of Oregon campus, or downtown's Saturday Market. . Having grown up and also attending the U of O around the same time, David Henry Miller aka "Frog" was a fixture of Eugene's unique counter-culture scene. Frog passed into the great pond above on November 2nd 2024. From 1986 to 2024, Frog had authored over 117 joke books, many of which were devoted to children. For \$2.00, one could read some good, bad, and everything in-between one liners and beyond.

Even more telling was his battle with the city of Eugene, which began in 1991 over the selling of his books on the street due to a rather silly ordinance. After receiving citations, Frog took his case to court, eventually winding up in the Oregon State Supreme Court. Guess what, he won! In October 1993, the court sided with his petition overturning the ordinance.

He left us with a lot to laugh about, but he also left Oregonians with a bit more freedom of expression and free speech; that is a legacy worth celebrating.

At a memorial for him at WOW Hall, a close friend of his had one last joke to share, "Whatever happened to Frog?...He croaked."

– Darrin Daniel
– Cartoon by Dan Pegoda

Ask the Old Insufferable Car Idiot

Dear Old Insufferable Car Idiot,

Can't believe what happened. We had the '75 Ford pickup loaded and ready to go for Axehandle Day. Cider under the seat. Boys in the back. Extra shotguns in case of meddlers. Just like always. Anyways, we was heading out to Coburg and just past the Safeways, the warning lights came on and the truck made a noise like a pig halfway toward being a porkchop. The gas station guy didn't know nothing about nothing and we had to be towed to the festivities. What an embarrassment. I was this close to being the first Lopwaddle in 88 years to not get him and his boys axehandles on Axehandle Day. What should I do?

Butch Lopwaddle, Springfield

Dear Butch,

You gull-danged hillbillies and yer half-hitched holidays. Where I come from we passed laws against such tomfoolery and not without no good reasons. One year those Axehandlers got going and come the next morning, all the outhouses in the county ended up on the moon. Damned clever they were, but that's not the full nine yards of it. Got a good tax break off'n it however, which I never did spend on gambling it away like some people ascertain. Anyhow, your problem (of which you got a plenty-tude of which I'm only offering to solve one) is easier than hell in a handbasket. Now before you get all up and armed, just take the truck down to your mechanic and tell 'em I said to "run a hose." I don't know nothing if the cops ask.



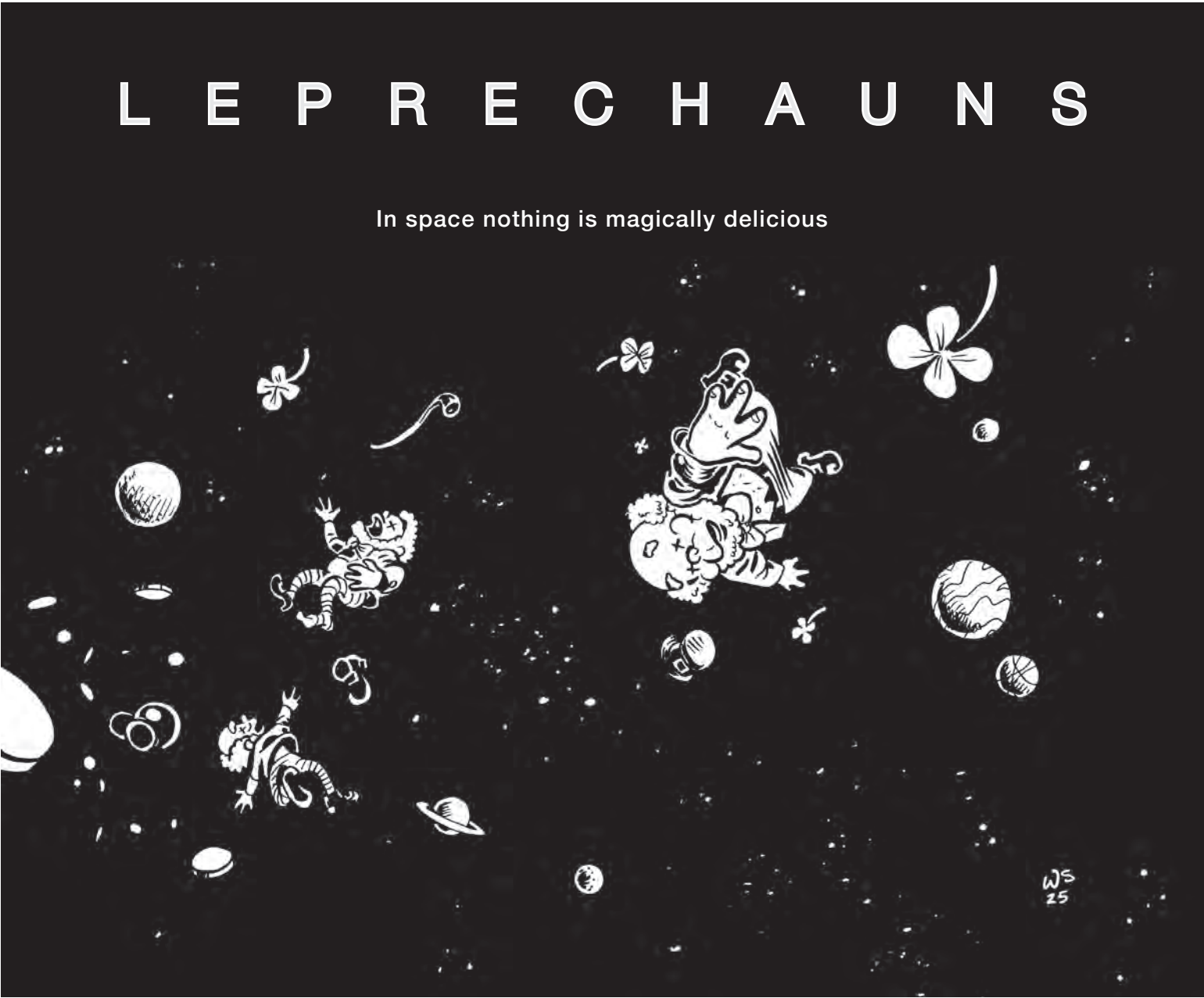
Ol' Insufferable



Bob Folder's Top Thirteen love sonnets

1. Borg 9 from Outer Space
2. Super-Super-Ultra-Mega-Swanky
3. Big Rubbery Dress with my Face on it
4. Corpus Crispy
5. The Quilting Bee Went Haywire
6. Renegade monkey with some fish sticks
7. sad, flaccid little rodent specialist
8. Watch me cry while I'm naked
9. Slip And Inhale The Wickets!
10. Iron-Clad Pleasure Triscuit
11. Hope chest tailbone collection
12. Vulcan Fun Truck
13. Boner of the Century!
13. Amoeba Wore a Hat
13. As Pronto as Humanly Possible
13. Talk Dirty to the Earth

Left: panel from *Kentucky Saurai*, a graphic novel by Barry Winfield and Ben House



by Bob Folder

illustrated by Wayne Shellabarger

I was driving my outer space rocket ship into the Magoo Cluster when I sighted a band of scintillating green floating in space. I pulled up alongside and slowed down to sub-atomic transport-drive rate. I looked out the passenger window and it was then I saw them.

Leprechauns.

They wore belts on their hats and they wore belts on their shoes. Belts were everywhere. It was horrible. Just horrible. The felt-green of their tall hats, the bright green sateen of their vests, the grass-green of their wooly coats and they had shiny green pants on. It made a cloud of lambent green against the matte black and sparkling white stars of space.

I can see them still, their little leprechaun faces frozen in bewilderment, the occasional clump of reddish bristles on the chin, one with a burnished copper frying pan, another with a penny-whistle, still another, holding a lollipop, all of them

turning in a grisly underwater ballet, all floating slowly away from where the hatch must have blown on their little leprechaun space rocket.

They will float away on exactly the same trajectory as they had begun on, drifting farther from one another. Some would be claimed by the gravity of planets, would burn up on reentry, perhaps a small carbonized piece of skull all that remained to strike the planet's surface.



Others would perhaps fall into the fiery well of a star, vaporized, dissembled by the ferocious chemistry of the stellar engine. But most, most will float forever, slowly turning, off into the fathomless eternity of space, further and further into the unending icy darkness, further and further from their fellows.

Solitary dead leprechaun spacemen drifting eternally out into the horrible vacancy of the intergalactic night.



Harry Smith, Magician by Carol Shenk

Read the Horse on Substack

The physical magazine will come out twice a year, but you can, in the meantime, read both new articles and stories from our original run. Stories about Berlin, then and now; an interview with Portland's own Harry Smith – artist, experimental filmmaker, mystic, hoarder, and Neo-Gnostic bishop; reread the the Callahan interview for Pete's sake, and there's more, oh so much more. . . You don't believe me, do you? I can tell. Why do I even bother?

emergencyhorsemagazine.substack.com

Anyway, become a paid subscriber and get valuable prizes, the likes of which I cannot tell you because nobody tells me anything. I am the Warren G. Harding of typing.

Maybe it's best if you just cut to the chase and go directly to our Substack >>>

I return to my crawlspace forthwith.



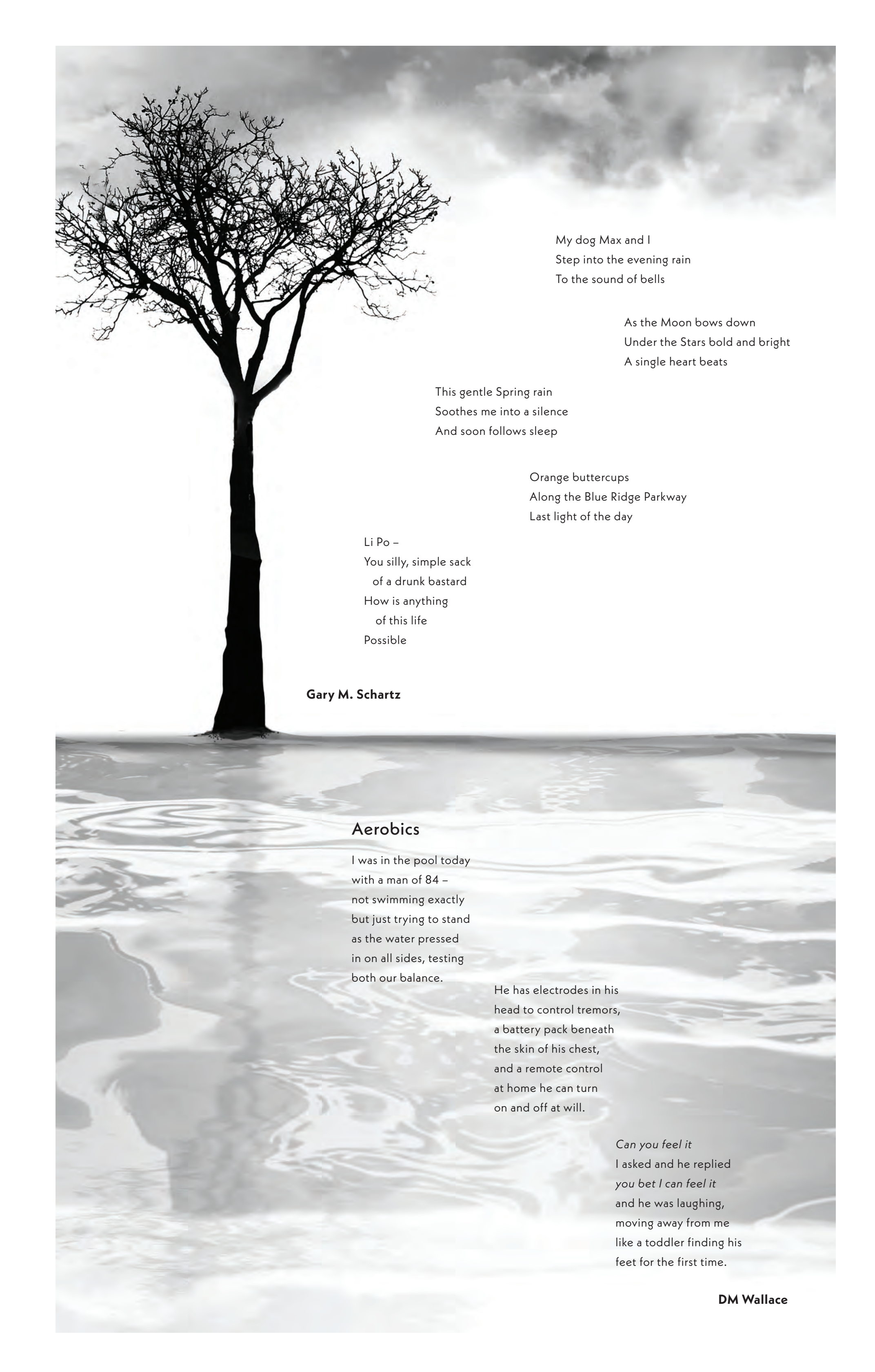
Substack

Top Ten

Metaphysical Horror Movies

- Pulse
- The Endless
- Resolution
- It's a Wonderful Life
- Under the Skin
- We need to talk about Kevin
- Picnic at Hanging Rock
- Memento
- Personal Shopper
- The Void

– David Turnbull



My dog Max and I
Step into the evening rain
To the sound of bells

As the Moon bows down
Under the Stars bold and bright
A single heart beats

This gentle Spring rain
Soothes me into a silence
And soon follows sleep

Orange buttercups
Along the Blue Ridge Parkway
Last light of the day

Li Po –
You silly, simple sack
of a drunk bastard
How is anything
of this life
Possible

Gary M. Schartz

Aerobics

I was in the pool today
with a man of 84 –
not swimming exactly
but just trying to stand
as the water pressed
in on all sides, testing
both our balance.

He has electrodes in his
head to control tremors,
a battery pack beneath
the skin of his chest,
and a remote control
at home he can turn
on and off at will.

Can you feel it
I asked and he replied
you bet I can feel it
and he was laughing,
moving away from me
like a toddler finding his
feet for the first time.

DM Wallace