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Dear Quakers,

I want you to be confident. I want you to smile and laugh in the face of adversity. I want you to take on midterms and papers you once called formidable but now find hardly noteworthy. I want you to walk everywhere — walk to class, walk to your dorm, walk to unusual restaurants, walk into new experiences, walk into walls to test their durability, walk into day, and walk into night.

I want you to be brave, to fight the idiots, to fight the know-alls, to fight the temptation to take things too seriously, to fight the inclination to falter when someone pisses you off when that person is only going through his or her own “getting used to new people and new environments” phase.

I want you to be stupid with excellence.

Glass walls wait for you to lean on them and breathe on them. T-shirts await future staining. Pencils prepare for breaking. Pens prepare for drying out. Clocks are killing everything while processing the world through their meters, but no matter. You do not need to calculate your earnings based on tickings or clickings or spacings. You can figure it on the axis of your own deliberacy. Your own willing. The Whitman in you. The Franklin. The Schopenhauer and the Nietzsche.

Tear down streets and streetlights and street signs. Shake up buildings where the ancient voices of the old professors linger in the concrete. Kick down the hallways of the best woodwork you will ever need to know, adorned by the cleverest 8 1/2 by 11 attempts to lure you into -- wait for it -- involvement. Attack all opportunities to engage. Write down the silly musings of your daydreaming, and promise us it’s all good and creative and smart.

Smoke air. I want you to smoke air.

I want you to be willing to reside in the abstract. Nothing too serious. Nothing too psychedelic. Just your run-of-the-mill dead-poet self-expression message to seize the what?

That’s it. And when you do, you will find us there working like hell to give you a place to frighten away blankness. Your jump-starts will kiss the margins of our pages. Your conquests of literary genius can scrub away against the guidelines and the rulers of the doc.

I want you to be confident.

Cheers,

UNCLE CHUCK
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Growing up, I knew that college would be a magical world. It would be a place where I could try something new, step out of my comfort zone, and explore a different universe. But I never knew how magical college would actually be until I stepped onto Penn's campus as a freshman.

Immediately, I associated Penn with none other than Hogwarts, the famous, but fictional, wizardry school in JK Rowling's Harry Potter series. The resemblance between the two is more than superficial. The four houses in Hogwarts correspond eerily well to the schools at Penn.

If I were the Sorting Hat, here is how I would place my fellow students:

The Engineering students would go to Ravenclaw. Like Ravenclaws, engineering students are known for their intelligence and work-ethic. But there is more than just a similar diligence that makes engineering students ideal for Ravenclaw. Take passwords for instance. In Hogwarts, Ravenclaw students use the solution to a riddle as the password to enter their common room. The more obtuse wizards and witches residing in the other three houses just blabber some shared phrase to enter their sleeping quarters. An engineer would never share passwords as the other Hogwarts students do. The engineering students are more like Ravenclaws, using passwords that are more like riddles. Penngineers would be a perfect fit in Ravenclaw.

Hufflepuff would take all the nursing students. The caring nature of Nursing students is embedded in the Hufflepuff philosophy of dependability and loyalty. Just as a Hufflepuff would run to help others, a Nursing student would be quick to heal anyone's cuts and bruises. Interestingly, the head of Hufflepuff is the Herbology professor Pomona Sprout. What better choice to lead Hufflepuff than a teacher of magical medicine? It is no stretch of imagination to see Professor Sprout in charge of the Nursing school as well, considering many elements of the Nursing curriculum are basically magical medicine.

The Wharton students would go to the Slytherin house. Ambition and a competitive spirit are prevalent among the Slytherin and the business school students. The parallel between Slytherin and Wharton does not necessarily mean we need to determine which Wharton student is Draco Malfoy. Slytherin is not an inherently evil house. Commendable students such as Severus Snape emerged from the Slytherin house. Even our hero Harry Potter was almost a Slytherin. But Slytherin is a house where guile and opportunism, values also shared by Wharton, are prized.

This leaves us with Gryffindor and the College. Now, students from the other schools may be furious to learn that the College is most similar to Gryffindor. After all, Gryffindor is the school of the lightning-scarred Harry Potter and his coterie, Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley. But I can tell you that it is through no virtue of the College that its students were selected to be Gryffindors. It simply was the only choice left. And College students cannot claim the hard-working Hermione either; she is basically a Ravenclaw The Sorting Hat had a little hiccup in placing that girl.

Soon enough, I began to recognize the other fantastical elements of Penn. Strolling down Locust Walk in the dead of winter, I saw bright globes magically suspended near the tops of trees, floating without any support. Then there is the Fisher Fine Arts Library; some students swear the building’s blueprint comes straight from the pages of a fantasy novel. And no one would doubt me if I told them the University Museum comes alive at midnight.

Indeed, Hogwarts is no fictional school. It resides between Spruce and Market Streets in the heart of Philadelphia. Though we may not have flying broomsticks, in many ways, we are better than Hogwarts. No owl in the wizardry world could ever dream of delivering messages faster than AIM or Facebook. And any student here would tell you that Quaker football games are vastly superior to Quidditch matches.

More importantly, Penn students do not stick to four rigid stereotypes -- unlike the characters in Harry Potter. Each of us has qualities from all houses and schools. We do not have to hide ourselves from the rest of the Muggle world. Instead, we stand out in the middle of a colorful city with a legendary history of its own. This year, I hope you find Penn as magical as I do.

Madhav Nandipati is a sophomore in Engineering. You can write to him at madhav@seas.
DANCING ON ICE
SHIVANI SRIVASTAV

Bright headlights burn into my sight
dancing in my weary eyes,
I stumble forward and then see

Panic dancing in my mind
waltzing to her jeering rhymes
daring me to try and move.

Legs won't budge, and she just laughs
glimping slits of eyes turn harsh,
she traps me on road slick with ice.

The tattered ribbons of her dress
like streams of gold suffuse my view
blocking all the world I knew.

She pulls me close into her arms
I shudder, falter, start to
tall; she holds me upright, entranced.

Locked in Panic’s hard embrace
all my body froze in place
only her gleaming eyes exist.

Melting under her fiery kiss,
I am thrown into an abyss
and madly I turn to cling
the offered hands of Death.

Shivani Srivastav is a freshman in the College. You can write to her at shivanis@sas.
In 2000, Jimmy Wales pitched to Larry Sanger the idea of an open encyclopedia to which anyone could contribute. After a few stumbles, Wikipedia was born. The rest, as they say, was history.

Wales used Eric Raymond’s influential essay “The Cathedral and the Bazaar” to explain to Sanger why his open encyclopedia would be different. In the essay, Raymond outlines two basic models. (He is mainly concerned with software development and operating systems, but Wales applied these models to online encyclopedias.) The first, and the most common, is “the Cathedral” model: a model wherein a core group of developers (usually experts) releases versions of an encyclopedia protected under copyright laws that cannot be altered by the general public. A good example of a Cathedral model is the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

The other model is “the Bazaar” model, which became the basis of Wikipedia. Under this model, an encyclopedia is continually developed by any and all users.

The basic philosophy of Wikipedia is that any person can contribute to its freely available and vast wealth of knowledge. This is why Wikipedia sparked a passionate online debate when it announced on August 26th that it would change its editing rules.

The new rules are as follows. Any person can still contribute to Wikipedia. However, once a person submits a change to a page, it must be approved by one of the soon-to-be thousands of volunteer editors. Only after approval will it appear on the Wikipedia page to the general public (or, in internet lingo, “go live”).

Naturally, many are disturbed by the change. Technology blogs online (according to my cursory cyber-wanderings) are filled with philosophical diatribes, often capped off with statements such as “Mr. Wales, grow a pair!” Lead blog writer for ReadWriteWeb, Marshall Kirkpatrick, articulates a common point of view when he bemoans the “departure from the essential nature of Wikipedia.”

Others believe that without the new changes to the editing rules, discourse on Wikipedia would devolve into, as Flickr’s founder Caterina Fake phrases it, nothing more than “graffiti on bathroom walls.” Vandalism would run rampant, and there would be no way to know what was true, what was false, or what was part of an editing war.

At this point I had to take a very deep breath. Talk about communities up in rhetorical arms. Is Wikipedia violating the bazaar model to which it must attribute its success in the first place? Is it merely taking long-needed precautions so that false statements such as “Robbie Williams eats domestic pets in pubs for money,” and “Conan O’Brien assaults sea turtles while canoeing” cease to plague our favorite online source of knowledge?

The truth is actually closest to what the New York Times recently reported: the alterations will not cause a dramatic change in execution, but nonetheless cross “a psychological rubicon.” The fact that Wikipedia has divided the online population into editors and non-editors is more symbolically disturbing than anything. However, since these editors will probably be the core thousands of volunteers that are already dedicated to maintaining the accuracy and integrity of Wikipedia’s entries,
the only difference will be that these volunteers will now be tracking changes before they go live as opposed to afterwards.

It is important to take into account that Wikipedia’s credibility before this change was not exactly equivalent to the graffiti on a gas station bathroom wall. In fact, the most authoritative study done on its credibility (best quality according to The Atlantic and ReasonOnline) hired experts to analyze the accuracy of scientific articles from Wikipedia and Encyclopedia Britannica. Wikipedia averaged four errors per entry; Encyclopedia Britannica averaged three. The conclusion was that both were relatively credible sources with very low error rates. Considering Wikipedia offers over 3 million entries compared to Encyclopedia Britannica’s 100,000, that’s pretty good.

When errors do appear, the obvious ones take an average of a few minutes to be eliminated (and considering how obviously incorrect they are, I don’t see what the fuss is about personally. We all know George W. Bush isn’t a penis.) The less obvious errors take a few hours. Generally though, there are such strong social norms within the online community that this type of vandalism isn’t much of an issue. Problematic users are outcast, and, if necessary, banned. (For example, all IP addresses from the Scientology community were recently banned due to their amazing persistence in an editing war over the Scientology Wikipedia page.)

I hope I’ve debunked a few of the extreme positions regarding the credibility of Wikipedia entries. The entries are obviously not as accurate as those of a Cathedral model encyclopedia written by experts, but they are pretty close.

So, now it comes down to the real question: Are these changes for the better or the worse? I submit to you that they are for the better, but not for the reasons most major publications have been suggesting.

Wikipedia has done well ensuring that articles are factually correct. However, the fundamental commitment to NPOV—a neutral point of view—has been in jeopardy. Unfortunately, Wikipedia has had a problem with corporations editing their own Wikipedia pages.

While the editing war which culminated in a ban of Scientology IP addresses (as I mentioned earlier) is an extreme case, unfortunately, it is not a complete outlier. Corporations—that is to say corporate employees ranging in rank from Sea World’s owner to low-level employees on work computers—have a bad habit of editing the entries on their respective corporations on a regular basis. It is obviously not as accurate as those of Encyclopedia Britannica or the Bible, but it is certainly worthwhile. In return, the tradeoff between crossing the psychological Rubicon and protecting Wikipedia’s neutral point of view is certainly worth it.

So when all is said and done, bloggers do have a point. The reason why we all know and love Wikipedia is precisely because it endorses what other online periodicals and encyclopedias dismiss as the toilet seat model (toilet seat because you don’t know who used it/edited it before you). If Wikipedia truly decided to abandon this model, it would be more than a shame. Wikipedia as we know it would cease to exist. But that isn’t the case. The minor change in policy simply asks the same population of volunteers to check changes before as opposed to after they appear to the public, an alteration that is certainly worthwhile. In return, not only will there be stronger protection against obvious vandalism, but there will be a more trustworthy guarantee that the information we are reading is, in fact, neutral. Considering all the times I have used Wikipedia for a class paper, help on a research project, or even writing a First Call article, I for one will sleep better knowing that there is going to be an even smaller chance that my information was biased, botched, or just plain ridiculous.

Sydney Scott is a sophomore in the College. You can write to her at sydscott@sas.
The cover of Israeli three-piece Monotonix’s upcoming album, “Where Were You When It Happened?” features the band’s three hirsute showmen exploding from an unzipped fly. The image, like their growing, riffage-packed guitar sound and their bombastic live show, is none too subtle. They’ve created some significant internet buzz over the past two years by touring the states with an act that’s equally parts bar band and travelling bar fight.

“There was a period of time where we used to play in Israel and I think like 80% of our shows were stopped by the police or the venue owner, because of the way we perform, and the noise,” says lead singer Ami Shalev.

The Monotonix stage show is actually stageless; the band insists upon setting up on the floor for every show. Though Shalev claims that he tailors every performance to match the vibe of the crowd, it’s safe to say that, based on YouTube clips and breathless eyewitness accounts, the standard show goes something like this: The band sets up in the middle of the crowd, and to get a glimpse of them means fighting through a heavy mist of beer and sweat and a wall of flying elbows.

Lead singer Shalev screams his head off in what sounds like an unintelligible combination of English and Hebrew, which is barely noticeable in light of his bright red hot pants or rainbow-striped speedo or whatever the barely-there outrageous outfit du jour happens to be. Aside from his Ron Jeremy porn ‘stache, it provides scant coverage when he isn’t standing atop a bedraggled (but secretly honored) audience member’s shoulders and mooning the crowd. Like a sadistic Tarzan, Shalev heaves himself upon the crowd again and again, physically asserting that life is more fun when you miss the vine.

The drummer, known simply as Gever, is a glutton for punishment, banging away with unbelievable intensity while he is showered with stale beer, until he too insists on being hoisted (along with his entire drum set) above the crowd and performs almost the entire show perched on a variety of human stools.

All the while, guitarist Yonatan Gat lays down an endless stream of skuzzy garage blues riffs with remarkable precision given the six square inches of space on which he has to stand as the bewildered crowd presses in.

Even more remarkable than these performances is that Monotonix has maintained this manic intensity at a pace of over 200 shows a year for the last three years. “When I’m at home, I am biking 80% of the time. I don’t party. After the show I am going to sleep. We are not party guys, we save ourselves for the shows.”

The music itself, a sort of Deep Purple-meets-seminal, grunge-meets-Jack, White’s fuzzier garage-punk, is often lost in descriptions of the overall performance, but it is its no-frills, (often literally) balls-out sound that shapes the raucous nature of Monotonix shows.

While growing up in Israel has allowed Shalev and his crew to develop a style that is unique and confrontational, their lyrics and overall demeanor leave the politics of his tumultuous homeland behind. Shalev says that the band’s number one concern is safety (hard to believe coming from a guy who literally set the floor on fire at one Milwaukee show) and the band has crafted a performance spectacle that, although dangerous, is one of the most fun and audience-inclusive sets in rock n’ roll.

Shalev says that above all, they are honored to have the opportunity to play almost every day in Europe and America to enthusiastic audiences. And the love from their fans almost always comes back their way, in the same manner in which they dish it out: raw and real and unexpected.

Shalev relates a story of one of the band’s first American shows that captures the heart of the Monotonix experience. “There was this one brilliant moment that we played in our first U.S. tour in a small place in Boston,” he says. “And I just kind of dedicated one of the songs to an old fat lady that was there, she was around fifty. And after the show she came to me and said, ‘Well, it’s the first time that someone let me feel like a lady.’

“Behind all the moments that people get wild,” says Shalev, “this is the highlight of the Monotonix show: to get people feeling good and having a good time.”

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WHAT I’M THINKING WHILE YOU SLEEP
KATHERINE THACKRAY

It’s 2 AM and I am wide awake. 
I want to walk to Philly Diner, eat chocolate chip pancakes, 
and wear my pajama pants with your t-shirt. 
Mostly I want to do this because I’m 19 
and I can. 
You roll over. 

My favorite therapy is to dress myself up the way I did for our first real date, and go out with someone else. 
There are plenty of boys who don’t mind paying for my meal if I’m pretty enough to get the restaurant to look our way. 
I love the way it feels when they move in to kiss me. When I smile politely and remind them of you. 
I love to know I’m not the only one in this world feeling unsatisfied. 

It’s 2 AM and I want us to indulge in chocolate and spontaneity. 
You pull on a pair of pants and walk to the vending machine. 🌫️

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PHOTO SPOTLIGHT: COLETTE
AUDE BROOS

Aude Broos is a freshman in the College. You can write to her at aude_broos@hotmail.
July 12, 2006: She didn’t say a word the entire time. Her hands were leathery and old, with giant, deep blue veins stretching her ancient skin to the point where it looked like it might rip. Her finger still was adorned with a stunning, diamond encrusted engagement ring that she refused to take off when she was admitted to the hospital. Her hair, unsurprisingly, was a sad tone of grey, and was thin to the point at which her scalp shone through like sun through a tree canopy. Her face had developed the mysterious oversized light brown freckles that the skin of the elderly always seem to develop as they leave middle age. These features, and the wrinkles that lined her arms, hands, neck, and face were unsurprising in a woman so advanced in age, as was the turquoise hospital clothing and the dull, white blanket that covered her limp body. What would surprise any onlooker, however, is that nearly lifeless body were the salty tears that streamed past her face and down her neck, turning her hospital gown from a homogenous light, sea-turquoise color into a partially dark, damp, green mass. These tears were, besides her steady heart rate and the warmth radiating from her broken body, the only sign that she was alive. A picture of a kind-looking old man, adorned in his old military uniform, graced the small wooden table next to the hospital bed. A woman of about fifty sat adjacent to the elderly hospice patient, stroking the varicose veins that lined the old woman’s hands, and whispering, through quiet sobs of her own, “I’m sorry mom.”

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June 6, 1944: The beach exploded as soon as Soldier #1 landed in the water. He had sidled sideways off the boat as German bullets began to lodge themselves into the front of the landing craft, and he heard several screams from the craft as the Germans hit their mark. He sank to the bottom of the ocean floor, where he was met with the blood-stained bullets and used explosive material that were hidden among the smooth rocks and the beautiful sea shells. Soldier #1, however, didn’t notice any of this. His trajectory was now pointed upwards and forwards, ready to plunge out of the shallow ripples of the Atlantic as soon the bullets stopped ripping through the surface and then lackadaisically lifting and sinking to the rock bottom. Soldier #1’s heart was heavy, his lungs young and able to handle the stress of what seemed like hours under the surface. Behind him, several more soldiers clung to the water’s bottom, ready on a moment’s notice to burst through their liquid shield and on to the beaches of Europe. As soon as the bullets stopped coming (the gunman was reloading), the four soldiers who survived the ride from the battleship to the shore took their first steps on German-occupied land. Almost instantly, soldier #3 stepped on a landmine, and within seconds, a body that had remained faithful for 18 long years was ripped into hundreds and hundreds of bloody pieces that stained the wet sand. His helmet was rocketed from his body, and before Soldier #4 could react, he was struck in the face with a metal-plated, American-produced soldier’s helmet moving at about 130 mph. His nose sprouted into a messy fountain of blood and flesh like a geyser, and his head swung back with a whirr, making soldier #3’s head snap back mercilessly, and with it, his short life was ended.

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July 12, 2006: Over the past few days, her condition had worsened considerably, the doctors said. Her face looked older than that of most eighty-year-old women, as if she should have already died. Tears littered her face, neck, and turquoise hospital gown, and no one was at her side even attempting to console her in her hysterical state. Instead, a man of the same age who looked several years younger walked unsteadily across the room, balancing himself as if he were on a boat in a rough sea. “These are for you,” the man said gruffly, tossing several letters in the woman’s direction. The woman let out a loud sob, a noticeable change from the quiet tears that fell along her hospital gown. The man turned back and said, in a voice that betrayed his elderly likeability, “You know, I know you’re upset about your illness, Marge, but I spent three goddamn weeks in a military hospital while doctors removed five pounds of fucking shrapnel from me, and I didn’t shed one tear.” And with that the man turned on his heel and left the hospital room as briskly as his old legs would take him, yelling back, “and I was nineteen years old!”

That man, who had suffered in a military hospital for three weeks through painful surgery and barked at his wife in a sterile, relatively sleepy hospital ward, was Soldier #2.

***

June 6, 1944: Soldier #1 and Soldier #2 crashed behind the seawall, not noticing that they had lost Soldiers #3 and #4 until they looked back and saw
the bloody mess that adorned the beach. They lay close to the seawall as the beach filled up with other soldiers from other boarding parties. Minutes later, several still rushed from the shore, lagging behind the other soldiers and becoming cannon fodder for the German gunners nested in the turrets overlooking the beach. One soldier was almost within reach of the seawall, and he looked like he might make it to safety if he didn’t already have two bullets lodged into his right thigh and one bobbing above his left kneecap. He cried out into the war-torn air, and Soldier #2, overcome with a compassion rarely seen in his later life, leapt magnificently toward the other soldier and grabbed his hand. A German sharpshooter thirty feet above took aim and fired, yet his shot was just a tad low, and as it was on its way to end Soldier #2’s life, it skimmed the sea wall, changed trajectory, and ended up lodged in Soldier #1’s nervous, rapidly contracting windpipe. His several final breaths unleashed a sea of hot red blood along the bullet-strewn sand. The blood spread through his uniform and down to his pants pocket, in which lay the stunning diamond-encrusted engagement ring he bought stateside only months earlier.

January 7, 1966: He lay there, hidden in the shadows of the half-darkness, arm around the woman who lay at his side on the unmade bed in a seedy motel. She never bothered taking off her fishnet stockings; he kind of liked them, but he had unceremoniously thrown her fur coat to the floor in a fit of passion.

“I told you not to throw it,” she said, rising from the bed and carefully draping the coat over the chair in the corner of the room.

“I’m sorry. Jesus.”
“Thank you because I’m a prostitute you can treat me like shit? Huh?”
“How do I treat you like shit, Rita?”
Rita walked across the room and began to get dressed, making sure her back was turned to the man the entire time.

“You told me you were going to marry me.”

“Rita, I’m married, I have a kid.”
“You said you would leave her.”
“I’m happy with her.”
“Then why do you come see me?”

The man was at a loss for words. He tried to rise from the bed, to put his arm around her, but she pushed him away.

“You know what I think of you? You’re just some fucking stupid rich white two-car garage suburbanite asshole who thinks the world belongs to him…”

“Rita.”
You probably promised three thousand fucking girls what you promised me, you probably married for money…”

“Rita, come on.”
And you probably drink too much red wine at dinner parties because you hate your life. Does that sound right Mr. fuckin’ Lawn Society…”

“RITA!”
He never yelled, not at his wife, not at his daughter, not at his mistress(es). He was calm, collected. He fixed every dispute with a peck on the cheek, a smile. The last time he raised his voice was during the war, when Rita Johnson was all of three months old. Naturally, she was surprised, a little taken aback, and it took her all of five seconds to resume the argument.

“What are you gonna do? What? You’re gonna hit me? When was the last time you were intimidating, when you stole some kid’s lunch money in the second grade? I’m sorry, but I don’t think the country club would approve of whore’s blood on your knuckles.”

“I fought in the war, Rita.”

“Oh big fuckin’ deal. My brother’s in Vietnam, cry me a motherfuckin’ river. You owe me $45 bucks.”

The man stuffed a wad of cash into the woman’s hand. She counted it rapidly, as if she were used to counting considerable, unceremoniously arranged amounts of money. As the door closed behind her she finished their final meeting with a “and I never want to see you again” and slammed the door behind her. The man walked to the bathroom sink and threw the dirty condom away that he had temporarilay left on the nightstand, clutching the linoleum counter like he clutched the sea wall in Normandy as his troop mates shed blood all over the exploding beach. He lightly touched the diamond-encrusted engagement ring still on his finger after more than twenty years. His wife would never suspect a thing.

September 30, 1945: It had been fourteen months, twenty-six days. All of the condolences had been made, flowers left on the doormat, somber phone calls pervaded by the strange awkwardness that comes with trying to understand another’s sadness. Several boys, mostly recently injured soldiers, had landed on her refrigerator as phone numbers given by parents and siblings. She never called. Periods of darkness followed. Time was spent inside for days, curled under the sheets or on the couch with a book to which she wasn’t paying attention. She called in sick to work five times in a month, until the foreman’s empathy could no longer restrain his need for labor. She strained to make rent, and she went to stay with her parents in their country home for two weeks. Other women, many, many other women, had lost fiancées, yet they seemed to get over it, to suck it up and to return to the workplace so the effort wouldn’t be too harmed by their personal loss. It was sacrifice. But she couldn’t eternalize it in that way, she couldn’t accept that this kind of loss came with the territory and the time. She was, quite literally, broken.

Therefore, it may seem odd that only seven months after the nadir of her sorrow, she was married to one of her fiancée’s troop mates. He was from Brooklyn, he told her, tipping his hat as he entered the door, and he just returned from Japan, where he was transferred after the victory in Europe. He was in the neighborhood, he said, and he just came by to pay his condolences. She had been lying in bed, watching the shadows of the streetcars down below on the white-washed walls when she heard a knock on the door. Her eyes still had tears in them, and she looked bereft. She was more than a bit embarrassed.

There was a vicious white scratch on his cheek, where she said a bullet nearly hit him but just barely grazed him instead. He said he could have died. A grenade blew up over his foxhole in Japan, and he still had a little bit of shrapnel in his torso, although the doctors removed most of it. He told her all this so calmly, so passively; she was impressed by his serene liveliness. Yet what excited her most was what he told her about her dead fiancée.

He went into such great detail that he was there for hours. He told her about his habits, how when they were on the boat he would meticulously straighten out and clean his clothing, even his undershirts, before bed, how he was
never late to any drill or activity, how he was the only soldier on the boat who was never delegated to cleaning the toilets because of his good behavior. It was exactly how she remembered him.

So for two hours on September 30, 1945, Margaret Hayworth was in heaven. She reveled in his stories, mostly complimentary, some funny. She was always a nostalgic person, yet on that dreary fall morning, which promptly turned to fall afternoon, it was as if the past had never left her. They sat on the couch, talking until sitting turned to lying, until she was resting her head on his shoulder as tears ran down her face. He leaned over to grab a tissue and lightly dab at her cheeks, and by the time he turned back to her she was asleep, looking more serene, more happy, than she had in over a year. When she woke up, he was puttering around the apartment, scrubbing at the dishes that hadn’t been washed in a week. “If you need any help, Margaret, just ask me,” he said smiling amiably. “I’m only two subway stops away.” She asked if she could see him again soon, next week maybe, to talk about the man she was still, unfortunately, in love with. However, as weeks turned to months, as she began to see her soldier savior more and more frequently, and as she began to move from talking about her fiancée’s life to his life, she found that she wasn’t in love with the same man anymore. Much to her family’s joy, they were married in the early spring, and the 18-year-old she fell in love with years ago was pushed further and further to the back of her mind, until all that held him there was a wobbly, thin, and yet oddly unbreakable, thread.

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June 6, 1944: Soldiers #1 and #2 ran along the beach, dodging bullets while pattering lightly on the sand as if applying minimal pressure to the bloody beach would lessen the possibility that a landmine would explode and take both of their lives. They made an epic dive and landed, relatively safely and soundly, behind the protection of the seawall. They looked back at the perilous beach, and saw several soldiers attempting to make it to the seawall before being cut down by German gunners. One man, who was only a short distance away, was bleeding profusely out of three bullet holes. He was coughing uncontrollably, and tears began to form in the electric blue eyes that betrayed how young he really was. Soldier #2 poked his head out from the protection of the seawall and offered a hand to the injured soldier. The German gunner took aim and fired abruptly, before Soldier #2 could reel the dying man into safety. The bullet just missed the soldier, cutting some of the small hairs off the back of his neck and landing in the sand next to the seawall. All three soldiers who graced that small section of the beach breathed in a rare sigh of relief until Soldier #1 heard a beeping noise from a couple of inches under the sand, and…

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January 7, 1966: He didn’t sleep. He never did. His energy was constant, unfailing. He didn’t even get in bed anymore, he just sat up, every night, in the same living room chair with the same cracked white coffee mug. Office work was failing him; yesterday some-
istence, yet he never thought it would be anything like this, and neither did she, and when she walked down the stairs of their home (they bought a spacious one in Greenwich, Connecticut when they still thought they might have kids) she was not happy. He was always down here, she knew that, but seeing him curled up in a blanket, unshaven and with his eyes wide and bloodshot, was completely pathetic. She had just abruptly awoken from a dream in which she was happily married to the man she lost in the war, living in a nice house with three kids. It was perfect, for about six hours, when she woke to see the one picture she had planted on the bedroom wall of her and her husband. She was smiling; he had a blank expression. It was taken five years ago, when he started not even trying to sleep, when he started simply sitting in that same chair with the same mug. It was long after they stopped working to conceive, after they found out he was sterile. Now, on this cold winter day, she was angry, and when she saw him she couldn’t help but say, “What, are you sick or something?”

“You know what I am,” he said, missing any of the dark humor present in her comment.

“I don’t think I do anymore”

This made him angry.

“What’s that supposed to mean? Are you giving me shit for this?” He raised one, pulsating hand, effortlessly alive with a tremor he nursed for nearly twenty long years.

She didn’t have a response.

“Huh? Are you going to fucking answer me? Do you think its fun? Do you dream about war, Margaret?”

“No, I dream about a lot of other things though.” Her voice was cracking; she was on the verge of tears.

“I got fired from my job yesterday,” he said, baiting her, trying as hard as he possibly could to upset her, to shock her.

“What?” Tears were now rolling down her face, and her voice was both hysterical and incredulous.

“You heard me.”

He walked toward the door, not knowing where he would go or what he would do. He simply needed to get out. He didn’t bother putting his mug in the sink, even though he passed it on his way out of the house. He simply dropped it, and it shattered with a resounding noise that reminded the ex-soldier of something very painful from his past.

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January 7, 1966: Wait. That’s the only way to pass the days. Wake up late, 1 or 2 or 3. It makes it easier to do nothing. Lie in bed for at least an hour. At least. Get out of bed. Don’t bother brushing your teeth, you’re not going anywhere today. No need to shower. Light a cigarette. Don’t bother to open a window, you like the smell when the smokes hangs in the air, the 700 pound gorilla in the room when your mom or dad or sister comes over. Go to the fridge and take out a carton of orange juice. Take out the bottle of Smirnoff in the freezer. Mix accordingly. Have two. Three. That’s the spirit. Call your sister back. Sound cheerful. Lie and say you’ve been looking for a job. You will, once you get over your depression. The whole thing seems like two seconds ago anyways. No one can expect you to get over something that quickly. You’re fine, just a little afternoon blues. Now mix another drink. Looks like we’re out of orange juice. Gonna have to drink it straight. None of the cups are clean, but you can drink straight from the bottle. It’s not like anyone is here. Someone knocks on the door. Put the vodka down. It’s Linda with the groceries. Smile at her. Thank her. Slip her some bills through the door. Take the groceries inside. She bought more orange juice. Mix accordingly. Take out some old photo albums. Drink until you pass out. Drink until you forget.

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July 12, 2006: Margaret Hayworth isn’t a patient here. She doesn’t sleep easily in a hospital bed, tugged into the depths of her plastic mattress by wrinkles and IVs. She doesn’t cry because she lost her husband, she doesn’t regret her life choices every second of every day while her body deteriorates from cancer. The last time she was admitted to a hospital she was an inch of blood away from leaving the earth. Now she is six feet under it. Her end came quickly, her last will to live took so incredibly long to leave her that the end seemed like a relief if anything. When it finally came, the cold linoleum of the bathroom floor greeted her, and the serrated edge of the food-stained kitchen knife tore through her skin like the shrapnel that killed those three soldiers on the beach in Normandy. People wondered why she would stab herself in the heart, and some even suggested murder. But who murders a sad old woman who hadn’t left the house in three years? Who even knew of her existence? It was suicide, undoubtedly; painful, unforgiving suicide, the kind of suicide people could only commit when they are not only completely unafraid of death, but also when they are incapable of pain. She didn’t want the uncertainty of slitting the wrist, the easy comfortable numbness of swallowing sleeping pills, the spectacle of plummeting out of her apartment window. She never thought that death should be a spectacle; she thought it should be a stark, ripping finality.

When she was found (her altruistic neighbor had come by to drop off groc ries), bleeding profusely with a knife poking a minuscule hole through her heart (she didn’t have the physical strength to complete the deed), she was rushed to the nearest hospital and as soon as she was wheeled into the ER she bled the last blood she had to bleed, her white face displaying the most shocked expression it had in years. The doctor put down his surgical tools, and with a detached blank look declared, with all the finality Margaret Hayworth ever wanted, “She’s dead.”

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Somewhere, she’s underground right now, probably buried next to what ever family she has, rotting and being devoured by small organisms. Somewhere, her formerly graceful body has been reduced to a pungent little bastion for biology’s less refined side. To the very end, to the final cancerous death rattle or the last fresh blood stain she regretted every thing, she questioned everything, to the point where her life was an uncertainty, where her life was dominated by, what if? And why? And what would happen if…

Humanity is bound by the shackles of possibility, constricted by ruminations over what could have happened, what should have happened, when we all end up in tears, broken and inevitably alone anyway. We may be bleeding on a beach in France or dilapidating on a hospital bed in Brooklyn, it doesn’t matter. We start in diapers, we end in diapers. Who the bullet hits is just a trick of the light.

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FIRST CALL  
SEPTEMBER 21, 2009 | 13
Abraham Lincoln gazes ahead, toward the future and all that it holds, his bow tie the golden color of his beard, his nose. Passed through millions of hands, rubbed smooth by fingers more concerned with sales tax than the sixteenth president of the United States.

Slipping, spinning, tumbling down; escaping through a rip of fabric in a pair of faded designer jeans, landing without a sound in the cool, tall grass. Soil smudges the phrase E. PLURIBUS UNUM.

Dirt begins to cover Abe’s features, smearing the well tailored suit, getting in his ears. And yet he remains static, trampled into the earth by children with their water balloons and guns, attempting to stay cool on a humid day.

Later, piles of amber and magenta leaves are tossed skyward and let fall to the ground, swaying in the wind and finally landing gently on his cheek.

A white sensation descends from the heavens and settles onto his hair, the first flakes melting, until eventually he is blanketed by sparkling crystals. Forts are built of snow, and tiny projectiles thrown through the air at the enemy, who huddle together, their marshmallow coats insulating them from the frigid air.

Abe watches silently, his vision returning as the whiteness dissolves around him, convinced he will lay here until the sun rains down upon the earth and his once noble copper melts, disfiguring his face.

The breeze warms, flowers blossom once again.

Small, active hands grasp his lucky nose, clearing away years of grime from the proud face. A gleeful squeal proclaims that this treasure has at last been found, and the proud mother pats her child on the head and walks away, her faded designer jeans swishing in the tall grass.

The daughter gazes down at the copper disk held dearly in her fingers and laughs as age old lips curl into a smile in the palm of her hand.

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Roosevelt Island, irrespective of how many times I acknowledge it in conversation, always seems to puzzle the residents of DC. Not one soul, to date, actually has any familiarity with either its location or its significance in the District of Columbia.

Theodore Roosevelt graciously served this country as the 26th president under the nickname of Teddy. He is legendary for his “trust busting” tactics against corrupt monopolies and his illustrious achievements in conservation. “Conservation means development as much as it does protection,” Roosevelt once stated, “I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use the natural resources of our land, but I do not recognize the right to waste them....”

On Roosevelt Island, I witnessed the full extent of what this man conceived as the meaning of conservation. The island is completely secluded and almost untouched by mankind. The rivers there continually and effortlessly pour through the territory carrying with them an ecosystem full of the known and unknown. The clean air blows through the area, amiably providing the life-force for so many while biased toward none.

In the center, there stands a grandiose statue of a grandiose man, a man who forged a movement to preserve the world so that we could indulge in today. What truly engulfs me, however, is not so much the island despite its uncontestable intrinsic and extrinsic value. No, what effortlessly creates an imprint is the fact that this man left such a resilient legacy that it exudes into the present. A man who served almost a century ago was able to leave such a strapping impression on a people that today we are able to model an architecture that accurately serves the purpose of his definition of conservation -- an island that develops as much as it protects.

My day off, without question, provided me with more than simply a touristy image of Washington DC; reinforced the idea after which I would like to fashion my life.

I want to leave a legacy that animates and stimulates an ambition for success. I, like Teddy Roosevelt, want people to know that falling and getting up is better than to have never fallen in the first place. Furthermore, that eventful day reintroduced the significance of an impression, a legacy, and the impact it has on a people.

For almost four weeks now I have been situated around the likes of you all at the University of Pennsylvania, and for that I am truly fortunate. I would anticipate that after all has been said and done, I have left a lasting impression on each and every one of you; as you all have left one on me. Whether, it is a charismatic smile that exists through thick or thin, or the relentless joy of meeting new people through tours, I hope I have left an imprint on you.

To live simply requires a heartbeat but to live a life worth living requires you to take a breath and jump.

If you would like to contact this writer, please e-mail fcpaper@gmail.
Robert Shepard, write me a song. It should vitamin B-gin

“when the snake eats its own tail…”

Eightths and eighths and eighths and eighths and eighths and eighths and eighths and eighths and eighths and eighths and eighths

She climbed the stairs, onward and upward, toward an uncertain fate. The steps creaked with pained sighs protesting the hot august heat, though she tried to tread lightly. Ahead stood a door, Octavia ascended with caution, though she was wary. When she had reached the highest step she outstretched her trembling hand and reached for the shiny brass doorknob. She grasped it tightly, slowly turning, giving a gentle push to unveil an infinite and celestial abyss. Suddenly, she felt an overwhelming tug of gravity. She fell downward, on and on until her plummet slowed to a float. Her feet touched a shiny wooden step of a colossal staircase. She glanced curiously upward, replete with an inexplicable desire to ascend. She climbed the stairs, onward and upward, toward

[a deceitful curve: the fallen loop, no end in sight.]

A squid at battle on a playing card, like a

Cartoonish tattoo ∞

wielding a viking axe. terror and destruction, the oxygenated blood of my enemies, send me down a tall frothy glass for a fatalistic toast, appearing to macbeth in a fierce multitude, pawns on the board. ride on, sleipnir.

I had a dazzling conversation with my machines this morning.

dead man’s Hand Mixer: structured cubes quavering at the force of temperature, the terrible plight of existence, a body at homeostasis. adaptation never tasted so sweet. life processes: somewhere and everywhere, a fantastical and grotesque carnival, a softly shimmering snowy palace. my spidey sense is tingling. eightths.