



Stylus

2006–2007

the literary annual of midlands technical college

Stylus

the literary annual of
midlands technical college

2006-2007

Stylus

2006–2007

Editors: Keith Higginbotham and Travis Gordon, English Department

Assistant Editors:

Douglas Capps, English Department
Alice Davis, English Department
Curtis Derrick, English Department
Amy Hausser, English Department

Design & Layout: Travis Gordon, English Department

Editorial Policy:

The *Stylus* editorial staff reads and judges all submissions anonymously (without authors' or artists' names), ensuring objectivity throughout the selection process. Each published work is chosen according to the creative and artistic merit of the individual piece. Only works received by the deadline were eligible for awards.

For their assistance, support, and advice, the Stylus staff wishes to thank

Marshall White, Jr., President; Ron Drayton, Vice President for Arts and Sciences
Diane Carr, Chair, English; Colin Dodd, Humanities; Dianne Luce, English; Cindy Rogers, English
Minnie Thompson, Administrative Specialist, English
Monica Boucher-Romano, Administrative Specialist, English and Humanities



Stylus is printed on recycled paper.

© 2008 Midlands Technical College
Columbia, South Carolina

All rights revert to authors and artists upon publication.

CONTENTS

NONFICTION

The Battle	JASON WILSON	5
Plastination in a Nutshell	MEGAN BROWN	11
Summertime in Harlem	LAPIERRE GILLIS II	16

POETRY

Hallucinations	MEGAN BROWN	19
Redneck Lullaby	MEGAN BROWN	20
Work Haiku	MEGAN BROWN	22
Stunted Person	MEGAN BROWN	23
Miasma	MEGAN BROWN	29
Untitled #1	MEGAN BROWN	30
Untitled #2	MEGAN BROWN	32
Premium	ALEX CORSI	34
High-Def	ALEX CORSI	35
01010010010010010101000	ALEX CORSI	36
Human's New Best Friend	JASON WILSON	37
Garage	SAMUEL THACKER	38

FICTION

Mother	LAPIERRE GILLIS II	39
Lost Planet	ALEX CORSI	44

ART

MARK S. ROWLAND	25–27
-----------------	-------

PHOTOGRAPHY

ROBERT CURRIDEN	28, 49
-----------------	--------

Stylus Awards 2006–2007

Nonfiction: Jason Wilson

Poetry: Megan Brown

Art: Mark S. Rowland

Web Design: Natasha Howle and Tracey Huff
<http://home.sc.rr.com/nmhportfolio/beans/home.htm>

The Battle

JASON WILSON

IF SOMEONE WERE TO ASK ME WHAT I DO FOR A LIVING, I would tell them I'm currently a student. The fact that I cook at one of the top restaurants in America doesn't cross my mind as "what I do for a living." To me, cooking is as easy as walking. I spend forty hours in front of a 450 degree grill every week, and I've done it for two years in the same place. When I was a child, I didn't want to grow up to be a cook—my mom was a cook, my dad was a cook. *Anyone* can cook. As it worked out, I chose certain paths that led me to the chair I am sitting in now, writing this essay about what I, in fact, grew up to be. Almost every Asian culture sees food as the most important thing in life, cooking as being the closest one can get to God. America sees food in a completely different light; the company I work for throws certain items away after they have reached a certain shelf life, even if the product is still edible and tasty. When I am standing in front of that grill, with dozens of voices shouting codes, numbers, and occasionally obscenities, I feel very far away from God. I've been cooking at restaurants for six years now, but nothing could prepare me for the sheer volume at this restaurant. To pull in close to \$40,000 dollars a *weekend*, well, that explains itself. From the time we open till the time we close, a nonstop blur of stress. Yes, stress. That

is the single word for any restaurant job, *especially* mine. Constant movement and communication, accompanied with heat, sweat, grease, butter, and raw chicken, are all factors in making me go bald.

Sometimes I ask God for help; it can get that crazy back there. Often, I feel as if I'm as close to hell as one can get. However, there is something there—something in the heat, in the movement and timed precision that it takes to produce quality food combined with quantity in a small amount of time. The guy who trained me on my station compared it to a race—not one that you were in to win, but one that you were in just to finish, like a forty-mile triathlon a sweat/yell/cook-athlon.

It's a Friday night, the busiest night in our industry. I show up a 3:15 like I do every day, but today seems special. I learn through word of mouth that the big corporate boss is coming to check up on the store—and he's coming around 8 o'clock, the busiest time of the night. Great. Not only do I have to keep everything looking good (which is almost impossible when you have to *make* time to use the restroom), but my boss is breathing down my neck every two minutes, asking questions and making sure everything has ice bags on it. Ice bags are used to keep the temperature of food down until it actually gets cooked. This is somehow supposed to make the food better (?), but I never use ice bags.

Before we continue, I must give you a mental image of my boss. Imagine Ned Flanders from *The Simpsons*—now, make him a living, breathing person, and you've got it. Now think of the Halloween episodes when Flanders is angry and crazy.

As I finish setting up my station, the fifteen servers start showing up. There is no rivalry between colors in this restaurant; if front of the house and back of the house don't work together, everything falls apart. So getting along with each other is what we do. The majority of servers, probably 95 percent of ours, are females. In the kitchen, there are no females. Only big, nasty, sweaty, frustrated, and often angry guys. So far, my account doesn't seem quite as hellish as you may have thought. This is because the most evil of evil words hasn't been spoken yet; the one word, above all others, that I will hate forever. The one word that when spoken, evokes my “fight or flight”

adrenaline—and for two years I've been fighting. As I finish whipping our famous lemon butter, I hear it, and it all begins..... “BOWL!!!”

The word “bowl” is spoken when a server puts a ticket into a black bowl, the same bowl our pastas go in. I don't know why it's a given that you *have* to say it when you are giving the kitchen the food ticket; we aren't blind. However, the servers relentlessly yell this one word, in various tones and colors, repeatedly. I hear it at least 200 times on a weeknight, 400 on a weekend. I'm sure you are thinking “oh, the horror!”...you have to understand... “BOWL!!!!”

“J-dub (my nickname at work), you've got two alices, two C and S's, and three ribs!”

“Two alices, two C and S, two ribs heard!”

“BOWL!!”

“Two more alices, 3 cyclone pastas!”

“two alice, two clone!”

All in all, I am pulling four eight-ounce chicken breasts, two five-ounce breasts, two five-count shrimp skewers, three ribs, and two cyclone sets out of my cooler. After seasoning the chicken and shrimp, it's a crab walk to my right two steps to throw them onto the open flame grill. Wait a minute, it's 4:40. Gotta pull the spuds out of the oven, load another tray. In ten-minute increments, I am pulling and loading spud trays, each with nine potatoes and four sweet potatoes. Damn, that oven is *hot*! Ok, gotta tend to the food on the grill, gotta start the frying pans up for my pastas...

“BOWL!!”

“Dub, you got two bronze chooks!”

“Two bronze chooks heard!”

Damn that new menu item! Crab-step twice to the left to get to my cooler, pull out two five-ounces breasts, two corn cakes, and throw them on the grill. Policy at our restaurant is that entrée items *must* be sold in under twelve minutes. That's no problem, until it hits 7 o'clock and I've got eighteen pieces of chicken, all thrown onto the grill at different times, five ribs, five pastas cooking, two alices in the cheese melter, and one crazy little mustache man telling me to wipe the sides of the pasta bowls before I push them out of the window (*W'bat?!!!?!?!?*) If there was a way to visualize me during our busiest hour, think of the Tazmanian devil, spinning around in a fury and not really

knowing which end is up. Picture my six-foot-one goofy ass hopping around wildly after I grab onto a pan that is hot—I simply didn't have the time to think about it being hot. Picture my arms flailing left and right with tongs in grip, ambidextrously tailoring to the food that controls me...does it look good? Did I put enough seasoning on it? Is it *done*? I have gotten in the habit of making a noise when I grab my big metal spatula, like a sword coming out of a sheath. It seems to make what I'm doing a little more important, that sharp little "zzzzzziiinggg!" that rings out for a second or two, almost like I'm fighting in battle against the American Consumer...or am I fighting the food? Myself?

"BOOOOWWWLLLLL!!!!!"

"Dub, got a big one for ya....two alices, two drovers, four kid macs, mg shrimp, mg steak!"

"Two alice, two drover, mg shrimp, mg steak, and four kid macs!"

Mind you now, like I said earlier, I hear the word *bowl* many times a night...and everytime I hear that word, I usually have something to cook. The actual station I work, "Sauté," is said to be the toughest station on the line (even though I don't get paid like it's the toughest), simply because there are so many different components, different things to be doing all at once. God, it is so *hot* on this line! What's even better is now that winter's over, Flanders is making us wear our chef coats, black short-sleeve coats that add to frustration and overall angst. I think the stupid little kangaroo on the front only furthers my aggression, because kangaroos don't have to worry about...

"BOWAWAWAWALLLLLL!"

"Jesus Christ, girl, I'm standing right in front of you!"

"Sorry!"

I look at the ticket myself for once...you have to understand, the dialogue you see here is all real stuff. The man working the flat-top grill and cooking the steaks is the one that gets the ticket. He looks for his steaks, loads them on his flat-top, and then yells out the call. Luckily, this one ticket I pick up happens to be all steaks, so I get a second to catch my breath...

"They're here...Jason, they're here, make sure you got ice bags, clean up a bit, try and keep focused."

I nod and smile, but think to myself, "so you want me to do this all at

once, boss? Wait a second, let me sell these five alices that are in my melt, let me pull the spuds out, 8 o'clock, wash my hands, get back on line, damn I need to take a wiz...

"BOWL!!!!!"

DAMN that word! After getting the call and selling alices and pastas and loading ribs and shrimp and veggie skewers and burning the hell out of my arm, I look over to see the big boss standing amiably in the corner. Hmmm, he seems like a nice guy. Hell, if I had the millions of dollars he did, I'd be a pretty nice guy, too. I don't have time to introduce myself, but I smile and make eye contact—

"Hey, how's it going?"

He smiles and nods back, "Good!"

I like him right away. After tonight I will probably never see him again, but for this one instant, during all this commotion and organized calamity, his presence and sense of well being brings me up out of the sauté frenzy and actually makes me smile.

"Bowl!"

"Saute, you got a c and s, two mg chooks, and a fi-"

"Bowl!"

"-ve ounce chook... Dub, three eight ounces, two drovers, two ri-"

"Bowl!"

"-bs, and walking in you got four..."

My hands are moving so quickly from the cooler to the seasoning plate. Each hand grabbing something, left hand pastas and right hand raw chicken, left hand grabs a rib and right hand grab a shrimp skewer. I have found the rhythm. The calls keep coming and I keep yelling back exactly what I hear, sometimes getting light headed from all the yelling mixed with the heat. I carry on, cooking and sautéing and bar-b-que-ing and seasoning and hollering, all the while every ten minutes loading potatoes.

To describe the movement and rhythm of working the sauté open grill correctly, I would compare it to playing the drums. The left hand and right hand are working independently but together and both have a similar rhythm. Tonight I was playing a freaking symphony, with marimbas and every other weird instrument.

I guess it is like this every night.

For some reason I find myself enjoying this hellish little world that I live in forty hours a week. It's the times when the restaurant gets so full that eventually the word "bowl" ceases to be heard; these are the times I enjoy. No yelling, no memorizing, no...

"BOWWWWLLL!!"

I don't know if it is like this every night, but one thing's for sure. As the shift winds down and 11:30 rolls around, I'm always ready to get the hell outta dodge. I clean furiously, scraping off the blackest of carbon bar-b-que and pineapple glaze, chicken fat, and seasoning. I overhear Flanders telling servers that the boss was really happy with what he saw. I guess he'll be pretty "hydee-ho!" for the next couple of weeks. I speak little to my fellow cooking team on nights like this. They all work just as hard for not enough money. The funny thing is they all feel the same way, quietly cracking jokes but desperately attempting to get this night's race over with.

Plastination in a Nutshell

MEGAN BROWN

Science attempts to solve the riddle of life, of human beings, by means of abstract models and terms addressed to human intellect, striving to raise people's consciousness about themselves. Art, on the other hand, strives to fathom life with the aid of sensations, passions, emotions, using imagery in the form of living, sensory comprehension. — ALEXANDER VORONSKY

YEARS AGO ON THE DISCOVERY CHANNEL, I caught a glimpse of one of the most freakishly interesting sights I'd ever seen: a skinless man riding atop a skinless horse, surrounded by fetal skeletons, aptly titled *The Horseman of the Apocalypse*. My initial thought was, "that's a damn interesting sculpture." But lingering on that channel for a while longer, I learned that said sculpture was once two living, breathing entities. The "sculpture" was a primitive attempt at the preservation of formerly living bodies by use of wax in order to display to the viewer what lies beneath the skin. To no avail, I've tried several times to find this image online. In the process of my search, I came across a new medical phenomenon: plastination. Similar to

the wax-preserved horse and man, plastinated figures are bodies that have been preserved by means of an artificial source; no chance of decay, odor free, easily storable, and extremely durable. The fat and water contents of the bodies are replaced by synthetic materials ranging from silicone rubber, epoxy resin, or polyester. The creator of this “new” technique is German professor Gunther Von Hagens. He boasts that even through the replacement of the body’s fat and water, virtually all parts of the body, including skin, are in the identical condition they were prior to preservation—all the way down to the microscopic level. This process is a phenomenal discovery for those wishing to go into the field of anatomical studies, or simply a way to give the average person a glimpse inside their own species “in person,” without having to be a medical professional, mortician, or crazed killer.

Though I couldn’t find the wax-preserved figures I was so desperately searching for, I did come across Von Hagens’s plastinated version: a skullless, skinless man holding his own brain in one hand, and the brain of his valiant, skinless steed in the other.

Where do the plastinated figures come from? Von Hagens has been accused of stealing bodies from psychiatric hospitals in many European countries, amongst other odd places. He vehemently denies these accusations and states that all of the whole-body corpses are donated to him by a Chinese medical research factory, where bodies, sometimes unclaimed, were already donated to science. Other body parts and deformed fetuses were loaned from alternate medical collections. But Von Hagens no longer has to worry about a lack of bodies or issues surrounding where the bodies will come from. With his exhibits’ rising popularity across the globe, many viewers have already offered to donate their bodies so that they too may become immortalized, furthering the scientific exploration of the human body in a more tangible and accessible way for the public. Where did the horse come from? No clue. But there’s little controversy over the origin of the animals used in the exhibit, with the exception of a few animal rights groups.

Von Hagens invented plastination in 1977 and has been battling various governments and religious groups on the legalities and ethics of this process ever since. The Department of Health (Great Britain) insists that “the exhibition still needs a license under the Anatomy Act of 1984.” Although Von

Hagens has requested a license, he doesn’t believe the Act applies to him for his plastination technique because the act only covers the use of bodies and body parts for research and teaching (in medical schools). Upon further research, he noted that many other anatomy specimens are on display in Britain without license. If the Egyptian mummies in the British Museum were banned, this would undermine freedom of expression under article 10 of the Human Rights Convention.

Many religious groups believe that plastination is desecration of the human body, especially in Von Hagens’s exhibit, because the bodies are posed almost artistically and are more animated than average cadavers used in medical schools for dissection. They believe that the plastinates are being exploited, regardless of whether or not it is known if the former living person was a willing donor. On the flip-side, alternate views on plastination include those in the medical profession, basically stating that it would be more beneficial to unlock the secrecy around anatomy—that it’s unhealthy how people are so detached and isolated from the process of death. I personally find these exhibits to be far less offensive than much of the violence and pornography that currently plagues the media. They serve as an educational and sometimes spiritual experience. They put a great deal in perspective.

And what a breathtaking perspective it was. *Bodies: The Exhibition* was recently shown here in the south at the Atlanta Civic Center. Though it’s not affiliated with Von Hagens’s *BodyWorlds*—and what he calls one of the many “copy cats”—the exhibit still contained plastinated bodies that were on loan to the University of Michigan from a medical school in China. The exhibit was divided into the different systems of the body—skeletal, muscular, nervous, respiratory, and circulatory—followed by a fetus and infant exhibit (which visitors may bypass if they wish) and a room with gender differentiated organs. At the beginning were several glass cases containing cross sections of bone and a fully reconstructed skeleton. A little further in, I encountered another skeleton with a slight build up of muscle tissue followed by a skeleton and muscular system holding hands as if bracing one another from falling back. This display was meant to represent how one system simply cannot function without the other. Said skeleton belonged to the muscular system from which it had been separated. It was almost unimaginable how they were able to so

expertly extract the skeleton, reconstruct the muscular system, and have it still maintain its perfect form. The face still held an expression, complete with details, all the way down to the remaining eyebrows and eyelashes. Oddly enough, a few teeth were visible through the parted lips of the muscles — rather strange that all of the teeth did not remain with the skull.

Almost all of the full bodied plastinates were posed in athletic positions (sometimes with athletic equipment such as a baseball) to show the dynamics of the muscular system and to make the bodies more “relatable” to the viewers. Though no personal information was given about the bodies, there was a wealth of information about the anatomy our eyes were resting on. It reminded me of a twisted science fair, complete with projections of cellular structures that lit up the separating walls of the dark exhibit maze.

Next, after walking from the doorway of the nervous system into the darker circulatory system room, I was confronted by what appeared to be glowing red and blue roots floating in glass squares. Of course, they weren't roots; they were the arteries and veins of particular body parts — e.g., a glass containing an entire leg of nothing but arteries. The preservative was red, to emulate oxygenated blood, and the arteries continued to maintain the perfect shape of the limb. There were others like it — hands and internal organs like hearts and lungs made of nothing but spindly, delicate capillaries and vessels. The most amazing of all was the full body circulatory system. Despite the lack of skin, skeleton, and other organs, the arteries clearly delineated a face. And they marked where lips, nose, eyes, lungs, and even testicles once were.

Baffled by this display, I asked a docent how this was done. He explained that the preservative was injected into the arteries and blood vessels and allowed to harden. The body was soaked (sometimes for up to a year) in an alternate corrosive fluid that ate away everything but the injected circulatory system. “Circulatory man” recalled a childhood dream I had about a figure made of twisted red and blue wire or veins, without a face and invisible to everyone but me. It chased me into a parking garage and disappeared. The real red and blue man was encased in glass, so I had nothing to worry about.

At the end of the exhibit, a booth was set up for those who had questions or simply wanted to handle plastinated organs. A liver and brain felt like hard rubber, bendable and extremely strong. Two pairs of lungs were encased in

glass: one pair healthy and the other, not so healthy, formerly belonging to an average smoker. The difference in the size was astonishing. Though most people know it, but never see it, the contrast in color was enough to make anyone cringe. The smoker's lungs literally looked like they had been incinerated. Those who were disgusted and determined to quit smoking were invited to discard their cigarettes in a nearby container. It was half full when I walked by, but according to an attendant, it had to be emptied several times a day.

Every sight at *Bodies: The Exhibition* was amazing. It was like something out of a dream — nightmarish for some, surreal and beautiful for others. Gunther Von Hagens and others who are furthering the field of anatomy with plastination hope that people will enter this world with an open mind and exit with understanding of its positive intentions. They hope people will gain a greater knowledge and respect for their own bodies and be inspired to take better care of what is their most priceless possession.

Summertime in Harlem

LAPIERRE GILLIS II

IT IS THE LAST DAY OF SUMMER BREAK and my son Aaron will soon begin fourth grade. We both seem melancholy, but for different reasons. I am sure Aaron just wants more time to do the things he has come to enjoy over the summer. As for me, I don't want the summer to end, because I will miss the time I spend with him. Watching my son ride his bike around our yard, with the sun beaming on his brown shirtless back, I start to think about my childhood. As a parent you can't help but compare your life to your children's life. I find myself doing it constantly. When talking with my son, I often start my sentence off with "When I was your age..." I am sure I caught him rolling his eyes when he thought I wasn't looking, as he prepared to hear yet another tale about my youth. Instead of commenting, I choose to ignore his reluctance and indulge in my memory.

Growing up in the streets of Harlem was one of the most carefree times of my life. I lived in an apartment building that had six floors and no elevator. It was surrounded by buildings that looked just like it on both sides of the

street. I was glad that we lived on the second floor because I never had to run up many stairs when I ran in and out of the house.

I remember getting up early one summer morning and looking out my bedroom window. The sun was already out and sprinkling happiness all over the neighborhood. People dressed in suits carrying brief cases and purses were hurrying down the street towards the subway station to get to work. A white garbage truck was double parked in front of my building while men in green jumpsuits tossed shiny silver trash cans into the open mouth of the truck. After the trash cans were emptied you could hear the sounds of them hitting the concrete pavement as they landed on their side.

Across the street, the Spanish bodega with the yellow and red awning over the storefront boasting "Groceria" was open for business with sounds of Latin music. The neighborhood elder was already perched on his folding chair in front of the store sipping something from a brown paper bag. From the corner of my eye I saw the street cleaner slowly move its large circular brushes up the street, pushing cans and scattered trash out of its way. A pigeon flew onto my window ledge. That was my cue to close the window and wake up my sister. It was time to head outside!

The warm morning quickly turned into a hot afternoon. One of my friends asked his father to turn on the fire hydrant so that we could play in the water and cool off. There was a cap on the hydrant that allowed the water to spray six feet into the street. The spray resembled the arch of a rainbow when the sun hit it at the right angles. We didn't fear getting hit by a car driving by too fast as we ran towards the water. We started pushing and shoving each other until our clothes were completely soaked. The water was cold at first but got warmer as we kept running in and out of it. Streams of water ran down our faces and filled our sneakers until they made a "squish, squish" sound.

As the afternoon blended into the evening, I heard Mr. Frosty's jingle faintly a few blocks away. The bells got louder as it moved toward our neighborhood. I raced to my building and called to my mother from the sidewalk, "Mommy, Maaaa....The ice cream man is here." Soon she poked her head out of the window to see what I wanted.

I begged for a dollar so I could buy a vanilla ice cream cone with rainbow sprinkles. "Hold on," she yelled at me.

I waited for my mother to return and throw me down a dollar from the second floor window. I prayed the slight breeze did not carry it away. The balled up dollar bill landed right at my feet. I snatched it up and made it to the ice cream truck just in time.

I savored each lick as I crossed the street to join my friends and my sister. Sprinkles fell off the sides of my cone and landed on my wet t-shirt. Ice cream outlined my mouth and dripped down my right hand as it melted. I licked faster. In the frenzy, I pushed the rest of the ice cream off the cone and onto my wet sneaker. Noooo! I wasn't finished yet! I was sure someone wished my ice cream would fall since I was the only one who had any. Well, they got their wish. I wanted to cry, but I shrugged my bony shoulders and ran into the water.

Only traces of my vanilla cone remained on the street, as the water from the fire hydrant slowly washed it away. When the street lights came on, my sister and I headed home for the night. The nearer I got to our building, the sadder I got. To this day I don't know why sadness accompanied me home. I can only guess that I knew that days like this were to be treasured, because they wouldn't always be there. Just as my ice cream blended into the asphalt and became invisible, so would my youth blend into adulthood never to be seen again.

Watching Aaron ride his bike, an idea came to me. I ran to the side of the house to grab the garden hose. I quickly turned on the spigot and kinked the hose to keep the water from spraying. As I saw the wheel of my son's bike, I let the garden hose loose. Water gushed out and hit him in the face. He started to laugh and scream as he stopped his bike a few feet away. Before I know it, we are soaking wet. We play for what seems like hours. Walking into our house we continue to laugh and talk loudly about the fun we had.

So, you see, I guess I was wrong on that summer night years ago. Youth may blend into adulthood, but it can be seen again through your children and their experiences. Thanks to my son and a garden hose, my youth was reborn.

Hallucinations

Black gum swamp
Drunk on humidity
Kudzu bounds bark of maple
In death grip

Cypress roots paw into soil
Branches scuff one another
Sticky limbs stab at thick canopy
For breaths of sunlight

Dark sediments contrast leaves of yellow
Gaunt Cypress silhouettes
Shrouded in Spanish moss
Bend toward their knees
Giving up

MEGAN BROWN

Redneck Lullaby

Barefooted and marked by the sun
the pinguid man walked sluggishly
across the pollen stained pavement
and observed the cast iron frying pan
of fish and hillbilly caviar

Per the Datsun truck's radio
his driver was not in the lead
so he belted out a holler and
hacked up a wad of viscid saliva
that plopped down on a nearby insect bed
and destroyed the fragile architecture

A hound with glaucous eyes
moaned and
wailed
in hopes to obtain a measly scrap
of white bread or bone

Flies accumulated on the discarded Vermillion heads
Moths to the electric blue stick
and mosquitoes toward the sweat
beaded on the man's ruddy neck

The ashtray on the white plastic table
was filled to the brim with butts
The greasy man straddled a stump
and took a final swig of Old Milwaukee
then slipped into drunken slumber
with his toes buried deeper in the cool dirt

MEGAN BROWN

Work Haiku

Always jamming up
Note to self: Bring a steel bat
Fucking copier

MEGAN BROWN

Stunted Person

I don't know what comes out of me is ever true.
It's like digging fingers into mud
only to have grains cling under fingernails.

The sand gets stuck in your teeth when your thumb is
inserted into your mouth for comfort.

Brush your teeth until your gums bleed and
the tiny specks of black and grey,
peppering the enamel of your jaws — nothing works.

All the words pushed outside my skull
come out obscured and incomprehensible;
that can't be counted as truthful.

Part of my brain must be jumbled up and stunted, perhaps,

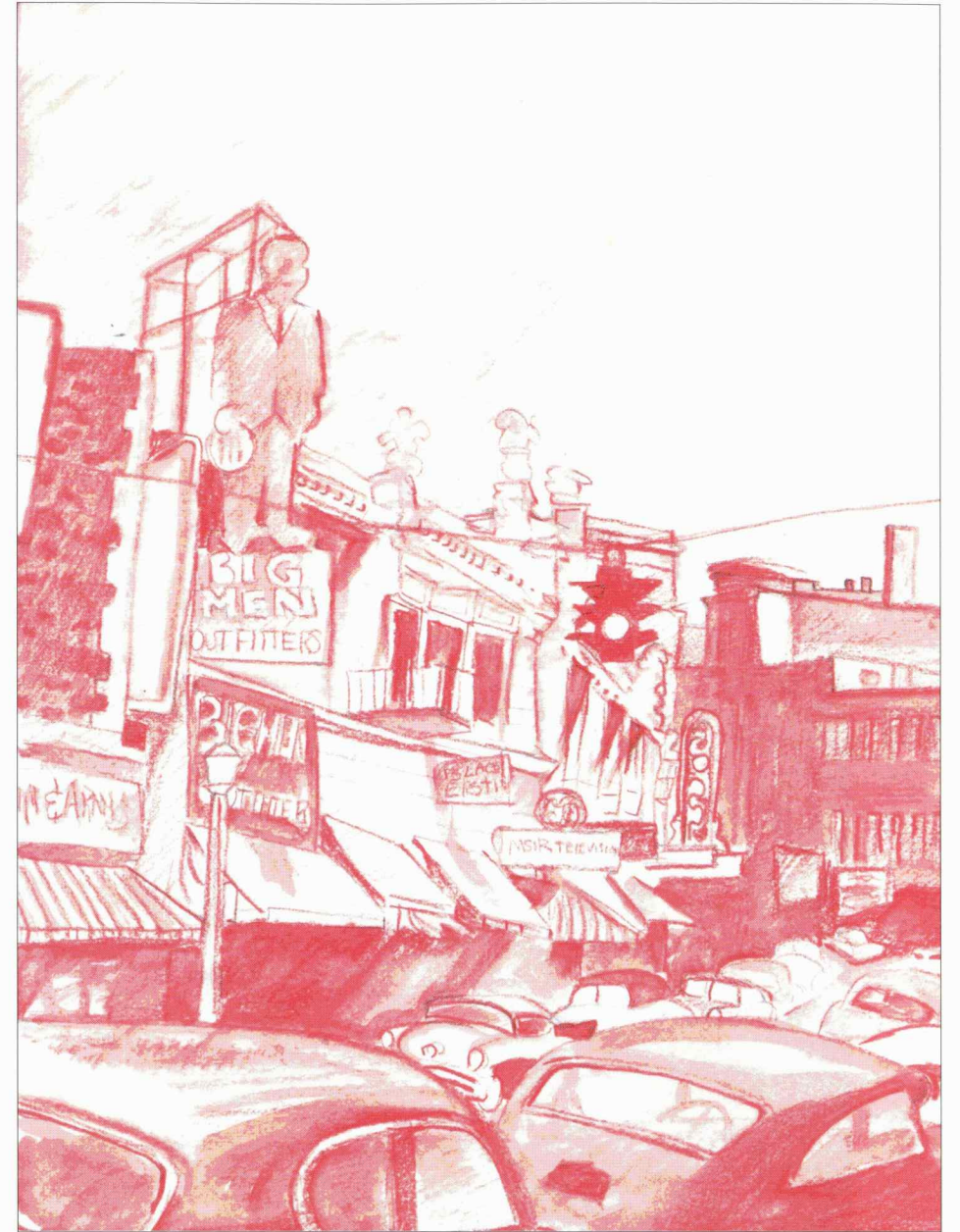
but then moral conscience arrives and
shouts ego to be pushed down into the belly—
drown it.

Guilt arises, perhaps,
let it flood your mind and punish you for
everything you've ever committed.

You are a traitor to your family, as your ears tell you
everyday as your body carries those words to
be eaten by both hemispheres.

Then remind yourself that you give yourself too much credit—
a person cannot be responsible for all the atrocities of the earth
sitting at home, dark hollows under eyes, plastic plugged into ears.
Stunted person with eyes going blind.

MEGAN BROWN



MARK S. ROWLAND



MARK S. ROWLAND



ROBERT CURRIDEN

Miasma

Cockshut takes the tin and wood shack
long since condemned

Final rays are filtered through the dusty panes
of the only window

A hateful shade of yolk
illuminates wild weeds that peek

through the gnarled wooden floors
rotting at the seams

The scent of decaying membrane rises
from lone animals

who found a quiet place
to lay their sleepy bones

MEGAN BROWN

Untitled #1

One time I stayed awake for sixteen days straight,
fueled by chemically-treated
orange concentrate, coffee, and thirty-seven cigarettes a day.
When I stood up from white lawn chairs,
I left a print of black ash in the smooth grooves of the plastic.
My hair was streaked with tar and carbon monoxide
and the wind blew fire and ash from my graying scalp.
My skin sweated coffee.
I couldn't wear white because I'd turn every square inch
of the fabric
brown and yellow in ten minutes flat.

My breath was condensed caffeine and every conversation
would leave my company red-eyed and trembling
with the second-hand chemicals flowing through their bloodstreams.
I reeked of foul unhealth.
My cells were turning into ash and one more week of
kinesis and sleeplessness
and I'd disintegrate into nothing

but dust and smoke to be carried into the wind,
and caught in the lungs and clothing fibers of the unsuspecting.
She rang up a red ambulance and I laid on a cot with my arms and
legs bound down
with shrapnel pushed into my skin.

I breathed smoke.
I could feel motor oil leaking out of all my pores.
I kept thinking that I was going to poison everyone around me
from the fumes,
rising from my body.
I was nothing but a cultivator of toxins and slow-killing diseases
that give birth to blood-drinking cancers.
Then peace spread from the warmth in my shoulders
and I felt like I was made of nothing more substantial
than threads of cotton.

MEGAN BROWN

Untitled #2

You know how childhood always seems so far away?
When you're a kid, the line between what's real
and what's imaginary
isn't even conceived of.
So when you're older
and you try to remember way back when you're five or six or so,
or even older,
you can't remember whether or not something really happened
or not.
Your mind isn't dependable when it comes to things like that.

I remember wearing a white cotton dress
wrapped with pink satin ribbon 'round the waist,
while large hands lifted me onto a spray painted motorized
horse that
bucked in place, ten stories above the ground,
outside of the local supermarket.
I remember tugging off black patent church shoes
and lacey pastel socks
and rubbing my bare feet into the patterns of my
grandparents' carpet.

I remember climbing a chestnut tree until the moisture of my hands
was soaked into the smooth sections of bark making it too slippery
to hang on,
and falling thirty feet into the pointy grass below.
I remember the rough bark that tore at the fragile skin
around my candy-boned palms,
and my hands bleeding out a rough stinging sensation
when I released the limbs.
And I continued to climb despite all the injuries.

I remember coming home from Sunday school
and finding my father with a litter of two week old kittens,
a large pickle jar filled with water
and a shovel for diggin'.
A filthy hand shoving their tiny bodies to the bottom,
then dumping them in a muddy hole once the squirming
stopped.
I tried to punch him.
I tried to whack his knees with the shovel.
He said we had too many cats.
I remember not eating for two weeks straight.

I remember picking petunias out of flower pots
and trying to muster up the courage to sniff out their scent
because the thin petals would grab my nose
and not let go for an entire minute.

I remember being fifteen, wearing a red knit hat,
reluctantly following family members through a stark white
florescent nursing home.
The scent was yellow.
It reeked of urine, dental office, and old books.
The barely mobile corpses with paper bag skins were
flopping and folding their faces into crinkly smiles
as I made eye contact.

Sometimes, when enough time passes,
the actual event becomes so distorted
that you forget how it really was.
So, you're stuck with an ever-changing,
yet fixed lie in your head
for the rest of your life.

Premium

Thanks to our
process
steak you'd expect
a restaurant even better
Remember
15 minutes
taste
that long

ALEX CORSI

High-Def

The large wooden desk
supports electronics galore
the VCR blinking

12:00

12:00

over and over
entangled power cords
creating a spider web of wires
and atop the large screen
lay a case containing CDs
dusty from years of disuse
a bland white wall sets the background
for this technological rat's nest
scratched and scuffed
and showing heavy wear
yet when the lights subdue
all is set in black
and the imperfections gone
there is no mess...
there are no marks...
there is only...

the blinking

12:00

12:00

ALEX CORSI

010100100100100101010000

In the blink of an eye
it is turned from a homepage,
to a gravestone.

Dearly beloved,
we are gathered here today
to mourn the loss
of an old friend.
You will be dearly missed,
yet there will be another
to come along
right....

now.

And another...

now.

How easily and quickly
you are replaced.

ALEX CORSI

Human's New Best Friend

Somehow the ability to communicate is dying, as I
Sit alone writing, I sit alone fighting to find the words
To describe why the whole world hides behind the
New Best Friend, the one with all the answers.
It's all around us, spewing shouting what we want to hear.
But what about the laughter, the storytelling,
What about our dwindling creativity?
A blank stare is all I see, thousands, millions across
This magnificent Planet, one that's full of wonders undiscovered.
Blank stares, eyes tranquil, fixated on our new Friend.
A flashing, ever-changing constant brain numbing
Entertainment, keep you happy, don't move now,
It's been your best friend all along.
Imagery, beauty, you will not find in this friend, however;
I sit outside with pen and paper and realize
Beauty is nowhere but out here.
The sky above is a grey, the breeze feels like a kiss of heaven,
A hickory tree seems to have leaves
turning colors a bit early.
A dog in the distance barks and it sounds of hunger.
Peace is the only word for this, and if no one will join me in it
It is probably because it's
got them right where it wants them.
Sedated, placated, no thought necessary.
What happened to storytelling, I ask? Creativity seems to be
Dying.

JASON WILSON

had left for school unless she saw the white piece of paper tucked behind the perfume on her nightstand. Fifteen minutes left, so I rushed to the kitchen to make a bowl of Frosted Flakes. I turned on the television in the living room to *B.E.T.* There was nothing like starting your day off with a Destiny's Child video starring my future wife Beyonce.

Before I could get up from the table and rinse my bowl, my aunt yelled out my name, "Jeff!"

I tried to ignore her high pitched voice as I ran to get my backpack, but she caught me in the hallway in front of my room. "What, Auntie?" I yelled. Before she opened her mouth, I noticed that white piece of paper in her hand that seemed to say "you are so stupid."

"How many times do we have to go through this? I thought you were going to try and do better? Do you want to repeat the ninth grade again? You just turned sixteen three weeks ago, but I guess you aren't embarrassed to be the oldest person in your class! As a matter of fact, don't even think about going to the tryouts today after school. You are grounded until I am tired of looking at you! I am so disappointed in you right now that I can't even think straight!"

I moved past her and grabbed my backpack off my unmade bed. She must have noticed, because she started yelling at me about cleaning my room, making the bed, and taking out the trash every morning. Trying not to disrespect her I abruptly turned and headed to the front door wishing she would shut up. Knowing I would be late in about three minutes if I tried to answer any of those questions, I purposely remained silent.

For once, eager to go to school just to avoid hearing her voice, I slammed the door loudly as I ran out of the house, leaving the tied garbage bag and my aunt standing in the kitchen. I ran down the three flights of stairs because the elevator was too slow. All the while I thought about how sick I was of her rules and chores. I wished I could live somewhere else, with anyone else, but her. As I ran out of the building I saw a group of my friends standing at the bus stop. The bus was running late—good for me, I made it. I noticed this honey I liked, so I slowed my run down to a slow swagger to give her a good look at my black Polo shirt, blue jeans and fresh size-ten Jordans. Thank goodness the sun was out since I had left my jacket in my haste to leave.

Ignoring my aunt's decision about basketball tryouts, I went anyway. Running up and down the court sweating and looking for my big opportunity to score was where I was most comfortable. I played one of my best games. After tryouts I waited for my best friend Miguel to finish dressing so we could walk home together. By next week the coach would let us know who was on the team. I already knew I made it—how could I not after scoring most of the points to win the scrimmage? Miguel wasn't so sure, but I don't think he cared either way. Lately, he had been complaining about his home situation when we talked. Miguel hardly seemed happy anymore, although who was? We slapped pounds and greeted each other. I joked with Miguel that he was trying to be like me since we were dressed the same in our signature black t-shirt and jeans. The only difference, I was cocoa brown and he was the color of buttermilk.

On our walk back home we talked about the real reason I was so unhappy. My mother had been recently released from jail and she had yet to come for me. I thought she would get here as soon as she could, but it had been two months and I had not heard from her. I had been living with my aunt for four years with the understanding that it was a temporary solution. She did not have any children so she was the only one who could afford to take me this time. At first we got along great, but our relationship slowly started to change. She never seemed satisfied with what I did. She wanted me to be perfect, but didn't she know that I could only be me? I was an extension of an imperfect mother and a nonexistent father.

Talking about my feelings with Miguel gave me time to decide what I wanted to do. If my mother didn't care enough about me to come and get me, then I wouldn't care about her. Now, I just had to find a way to get out of Alexandria, Virginia. Miguel continued to let me talk about my dilemma, never having much to say anyway. As I reach our street, I paused to slow down my thoughts when I hear Miguel say, "let's just keep on going, we don't need to go home tonight, nobody will even miss us." He said it so quietly that at first I did not think I heard him correctly.

I turn to look at him and he said it again, this time loud and clear. I heard myself say, "Let's bounce." We crossed the street and headed away from our buildings with no destination in mind.

For most of the evening we wandered the streets, visiting with friends, alternately listening to Miguel's Walkman and eating McDonald's french fries. By midnight, we started to get tired and cold, so we talked about where to stay for the night. Neither of us had anywhere to go other than home. With only \$3 between us we knew that we couldn't go too far. Running out of options we decided to sneak into my building and hang out in the basement by the laundry room. The basement was quiet at that time of the night so we would be safe there. I settled onto the last step of the staircase, while Miguel sat above me. Smells of fried chicken permeated the musty air, remnants of someone's dinner I was sure. The stairwell was clean and dimly lit with pale peach walls. The usual quiet was periodically punctuated with a loud laugh, a baby's cry, and Miguel's snores.

I couldn't sleep. My mind wouldn't rest. I kept thinking about my life and how I wanted more. I wanted what some of my other friends had—a mother who loved them. I knew my aunt was doing her best, but it would never be good enough for me. I hate hurting her; I seemed to do it without even trying. I was so deep in my thoughts that I did not hear one of my neighbors coming down the stairs.

"What are you boys doing down here? It is six thirty in the morning. Jeff, does your aunt know where you are?"

I mumbled my response and reached up to awaken Miguel. He woke up disoriented and almost fell down the stairs. I helped him up and we began to climb the stairs with my neighbor to my apartment.

I slowly walked down the hallway to my front door. All of a sudden I was scared. I tentatively knocked on my door with the peeling gold knocker. The door was quickly pulled open. My aunt stood in the doorway in her nurse's uniform, hair hanging down around her shoulders, hazel eyes trimmed in red and feet bare. She moved to the side to allow us to come in while my neighbor explained where she found us. After my aunt thanked the woman, she told Miguel to go in the living room and call his mother, which left the two of us alone. For the first time since I had known my aunt, she did not yell or fire off twenty questions at once. She held open her arms and I hesitantly walked into them. We cried together, standing in our hallway. I never heard Miguel leave. I tried to apologize to Aunt Lisa. She told me to go to bed and we would

talk about it in the morning. It was morning, I remind her, but she had already gone into her room.

I knew that if my aunt let me live with her another day, I would have to make some changes. I didn't know what changes, but I knew I had better come up with something fast. Somewhere between the stairwell and my room I realized that I did have a mother. Her name was Aunt Lisa. I would never be perfect, but I was going to try, if not for me then for her. When I woke up later that morning, I would make my bed.

Lost Planet

ALEX CORSI

IT ALL HAPPENED SO FAST. The entire crew had been completely wiped out, except for us. We weren't prepared for it...how could we know?" It was a graveyard. Hundreds of immigration vessels had been launched into orbit around the moon of a large gas giant. It was a desolate wasteland, nothing but rock and sand as far as you could see. The heat was blazing due to the surrounding two suns.

"Stardate 5.072...no wait, what am I doing again?"

"Damn-it Ethan quit screwing around and get back to work!"

"Sorry Steph, I just thought we needed a little humor. I mean there isn't much else to find comfort in right now. We need anything we can get."

Ethan was a bright and enjoyable guy. He was about six-two and had short brown hair and green eyes. He didn't really know what to do in situations like this so all he could do was try and ignore what was happening.

"Nicholas, come over here quick! I think I may have found something useful in the wreckage!"

Nicholas wandered over from doing his soil and biological testing to where Steph was. Steph was a sweet and usually serious girl, about 23. She had short blonde hair that came down to her shoulders and bright green eyes.

Her entire body and clothes were now filthy due to her rummaging around in what remained of their vessel.

"This better be good, I'm in the middle of some important experiments. I mean, if we're going to survive here, we're gonna have to know what the environment is like."

"It's hot and miserable. Now shut up and come over here!"

In the wreckage Steph had managed to salvage a few canisters of medical foam and some food rations. The medical foam, in case of injury, would be injected into the wound causing the blood to clot and the wound to heal faster. It wasn't a pleasant feeling, but it would definitely be of some use.

"Good find, Steph! Now at least we will be able to feed ourselves until we find another supply of food elsewhere," Ethan said.

"Yes, yes...that's all well and good, but if you two don't quit trying a salvage every last scrap of junk from this wreckage, we won't get anywhere anytime soon. Ethan, why don't you come over here and help me do these soil tests?"

Nicholas was a somewhat arrogant middle-aged man. His tanned skin denoted his prolonged exposure to sunlight due to his extensive outside research. He has scruffy black hair that was beginning to grey. His glasses did give him a somewhat distinguished look, but that could not overcome his otherwise unkempt look.

"Why do you care so much about the stupid soil? It's just goddamned dirt and sand! It's pointless if we don't have any seeds to plant in the first place!"

"Damn-it, Ethan! Why don't you quit acting like such a naive little kid? Try and understand, I was our ships research assistant charged with the task of understanding whatever biological data we got from whatever planet we landed on." said Nicholas arrogantly. "This is an amazing specimen. It isn't mere rock and sand. The minerals in this land are amazing, some you don't even find on Earth!"

He was right on that point. This planet was indeed very different from Earth. It was a vast expanse of nothingness. As far as you could see there was sand, rock, and mountains. The particular minerals in the ground created a dirty red coloring as well as a noticeable sulfurous smell.

“Do you not get what happened only two hours ago, Nicholas?” asked Steph.

“We barely survived a fucking in-orbit correctional adjustment to our ship. If it wasn’t for Ethan, we would be rotting corpses just like the hundreds of others!”

It was true. Only miles away from the planet’s surface, quick thinking Ethan had managed to override the somewhat mysterious course that their pod, along with others, had taken. Why had the pods suddenly changed course like that? Everything was fine until...

“Alert, alert. Directional thrusters reversed. Planetary injection imminent. Please correct orbit immediately,” the computer had shouted.

“What the hell just happened? Why are we entering orbit?!?!” screamed Steph.

“I don’t know, I don’t know! We need to do something, someone bring up the control interface quick! Nicholas...Nicholas where the hell are you?” shouted Ethan.

....

“That’s all in the past; we’re alive now. Don’t try to linger on it. Think of the now...think of all the amazing discoveries we will make here on this planet!” Nicholas said.

“Discoveries! What discoveries?! If we don’t scramble together, we won’t even live past tomorrow on the forsaken rock. How can you think of stupid tests at a time like this? Who knows what kind of dangers there are, not to mention how cold it will get tonight...whenever tonight comes that is. We know nothing, not even the daily and hourly cycle of this planet. We might be in a year long day for all we know!” Steph said.

“Both of you need to calm down now. Arguing won’t get us anywhere at all. We just need to take a second and assess what we have and what we need,” said Ethan.

“You’re right...I’m sorry” sighed Steph.

“You two don’t get it do you?” laughed Nicholas.

“What do you mean?” exclaimed Ethan and Steph in unison.

“I mean we will be fine. I have made sure that enough food and organic vessels survived the crash. We have everything we need...”

“How the hell would you know that...what do you mean you made sure?” Steph said.

“I mean I made sure everything would be ok...wait, don’t tell me you honestly think that twit Ethan saved you do you? He couldn’t correct orbital displacement to save his life... It was because of me that these selected ships survived...it was because of me those other fools died!” laughed Nicholas.

“...wha...what do you mean you let them die? It was you who put in the new coordinates to all the ships?” Steph cried.

“Those commoners could never understand the scientific significance of a planet like this! They wouldn’t even listen to me when I suggested landing here; they said that the purpose was to find a new home, not a laboratory for me to play in. That’s why I had to override the system... we had to land here...for the advancement of mankind!”

“Advancement of mankind!? You call killing thousands upon thousands of innocent human beings advancement? They had no chance...no chance to survive; they were all frozen helpless...just sleeping. And you killed them all!” shouted Ethan as he leapt at Nicholas with his fist in the air.

They both fell to the ground. Ethan’s fist had smashed into Nicholas’ face. Nicholas quickly crawled backwards trying to get out of Ethan’s reach. He moved his hand to his back pocket and took out a weapons grade personal sentry gun.

“How could you Nicholas!” murmured Steph through her tears.

“Steph, I thought you of all people would understand. You are a researcher just like me...and your little boyfriend there Ethan, I let him survive if nothing else because of your growing feelings for him. But now I see... I am the only one intelligent enough to finish this expedition...I can’t let either of you interfere.”

Ethan scrambled to his feet, running over towards Nicholas, leaping at him once again and reaching for the gun. Ethan’s quick reflexes paid off; he was able to grab the gun from Nicholas’s hand before Nicholas knew what happened.

“What! What! You dare turn this gun on me...You insignificant little bastard; how dare you!!!” yelled Nicholas at the top of his lungs.

Ethan pointed the gun at Nicholas’s chest with a steady aim.

....

“This...this wasn't the way it was supposed to happen...”coughed Nicholas as the breath left his body, spitting up blood.

“Ethan! You killed him,” Steph cried out.

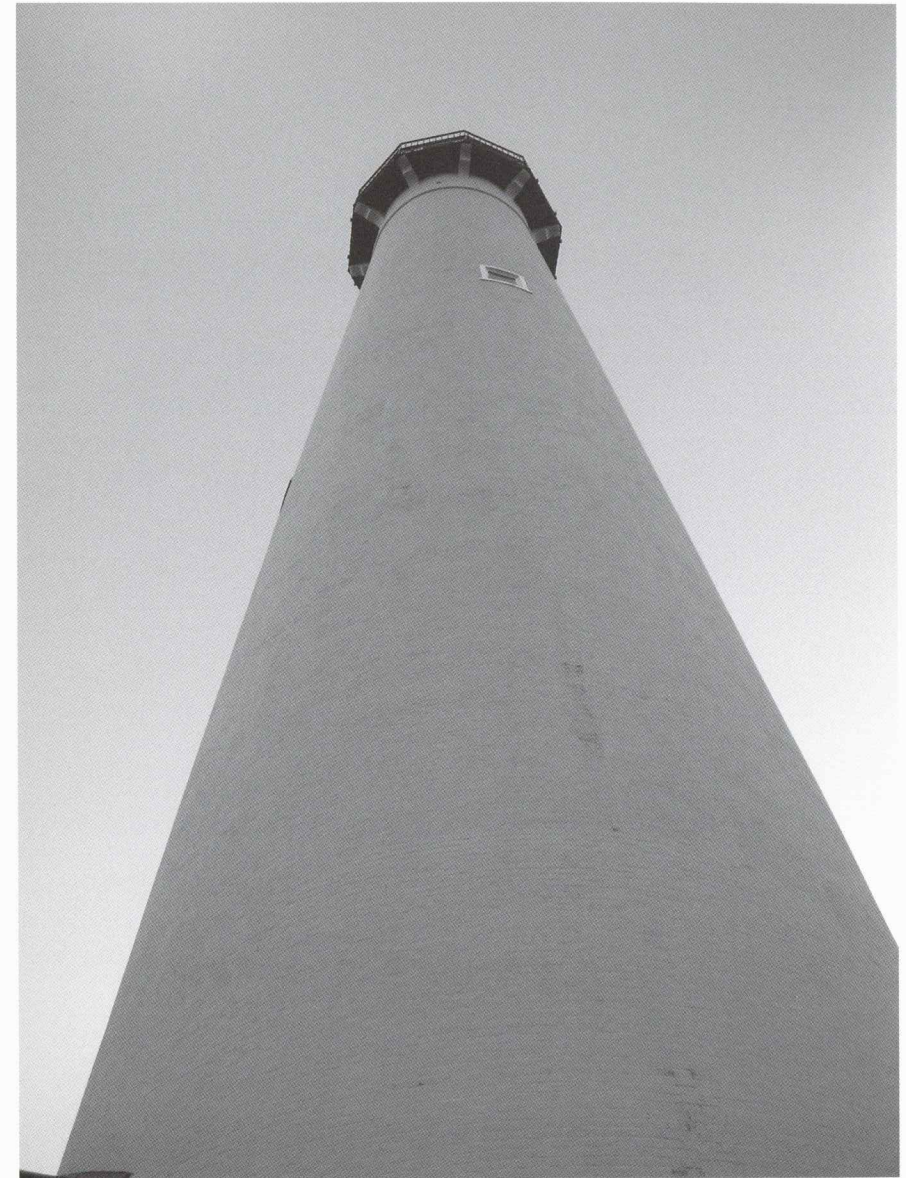
“I know, but it had to be done. He would have killed me Steph, and then he would have come after you. It had to be done.”

“I don't know what to think,” Steph said.

“It's okay, Steph. We will be ok. We'll look to see if anyone else survived and then make the best of what we have. Don't worry...”

Ethan took Steph into his embrace, holding her tightly in his arms. Looking up into the sky, he could only see a dim orange colored atmosphere with the large gas giant orbiting around them. Still in his head he was trying to convince himself of the things he had just said to Steph. Would everything be all right? Would they survive? It didn't matter anymore...they could only do what they could and that had to be enough. They gathered up their salvaged materials and moved on together.

“Let's go, Steph. There isn't anything left here for us.”



ROBERT CURRIDEN

