

SEPTEMBER 2010

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Anna Nair editorial assistant

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**For advertising inquiries:**

call 214.331.5208 or

e-mail [caroline@shelfmediagroup.com](mailto:caroline@shelfmediagroup.com).

**For editorial inquiries:**

e-mail [kathy@shelfmediagroup.com](mailto:kathy@shelfmediagroup.com)

or write to *Shelf Unbound*, P.O. Box 601695,  
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Cloris Leachman  
FOR **PETA**

A full-length photograph of Cloris Leachman standing against a dark background. She is wearing a long, form-fitting, purple dress with a ruffled texture. A long, vertical strip of green leafy vegetables, possibly kale or spinach, runs down the center of the dress, from her shoulders to the hem. The bottom half of the dress is heavily layered with these green vegetables, creating a thick, textured base. She is looking slightly to her right with a neutral expression.

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## THE END

It seems appropriate that with the launch of *Shelf Unbound* we are beginning at the end. At the end of summer. At the end of '70s skateboarding (page 8). At the end of baseball (page 34). At the end of Detroit (page 16). At the alleged end of magazines. Because that, in fact, is where it all began.

The whole thing was Margaret's idea. After progressively falling in love with her Nook and her iTouch and her iPad, the 25-year veteran of the magazine industry pulled me aside one day and, in her trademark deadpan way without a hint of drama, said, "Everything has changed." She said, "Publishing and reading will never be the same." She said, "This is so cool."

But there was a problem. With all of this incredible access and content, finding the really great stuff, the unexpected and unusual and self-published and indie stuff, was harder than ever. It took a lot of time and searching and slogging through unremarkable stuff. When at the end of the day, all either of us wanted was a really good magazine. About books. That was full of the really great stuff.

And, we thought, what if the magazine was digital, so that it was portable and green and responsive? And what if it was hotlinked so that you could order the books you wanted with a click? And what if it incorporated reviews and excerpts and author interviews, so that it would be the next best thing—or dare we say, even better—than spending an afternoon in our favorite indie bookstore? So we made it. And we really like it. And we hope you do, too. Because we're just getting started.

**Kathy Wise**  
editor in chief



# Logans only

photographs by  
**Hugh Holland**

edited by  
**Steve Crist**

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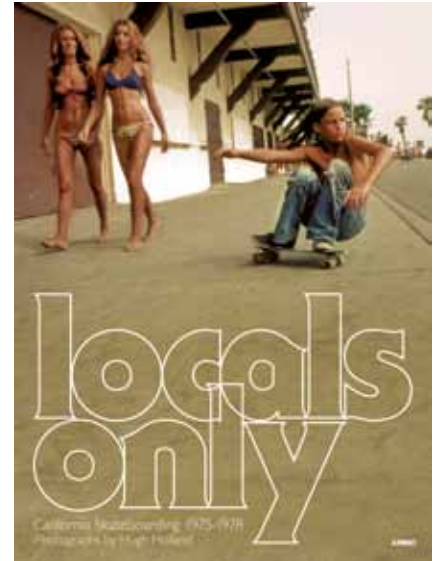
**California Skateboarding 1975-78**





**On a sunny L.A. day in 1975, a young photographer named Hugh Holland was driving up Laurel Canyon Boulevard when he saw something he, and most everyone else, had never witnessed before. Something that made him stop his car and grab his camera. Because, out of the corner of his eye, it looked like one after another golden-haired boys were rising up and floating above the pavement in a fluid, time-stopping arc before disappearing out of sight. In fact, in a drainage bowl below street level, tanned, tube-socked, and helmetless teenagers were launching themselves vertical with nothing more than a wooden deck and a set of urethane wheels. Holland, who had never been on a skateboard himself much less dropped in to an empty swimming pool, was hooked, quickly finding himself at the hub (and oftentimes at the wheel) of the burgeoning SoCal skateboarding scene.**

Over the next three years, he documented skateboarders on the streets of Los Angeles, the San Fernando Valley, Venice Beach, San Francisco, and Baja California, Mexico. His resulting photographs have recently been compiled in *Locals Only*, a large-format photography book from Ammo Books featuring 120 color images of legendary Dogtown and Z-Boys skateboarders along with nameless and shirtless others. *Locals Only* masterfully captures the daring athleticism of a knee-pad- and sunscreen-less generation in all its tanned and Vanned glory. The book also contains an interview with Holland by editor Steve Crist about the birth of extreme sports, the advantages of recycled movie film, and how a drought changed the face of skateboarding forever.



—Dean Hill

## EXCERPT

**Steve Crist:** *So, how did you get started photographing the skateboard work?*

**Hugh Holland:** I lived in Hollywood, and in that period I started noticing more and more young skateboarders on the streets and everywhere. I had started photographing them here and there, and I had even traveled down to a small contest in a mini-mall in Torrance that I had heard about. I got a few of my best pictures that

first day, actually, so that was a really good start.

The real start, though, was one afternoon in the summer of 1975. I was in my car, driving up Laurel Canyon toward Mulholland, when I noticed a group of kids skating in a drainage bowl off to the right side. They called it the “Mini Bowl.” It was small with very steep sides, and they were going up and down those banks. And out of the corner of my eye, while driving, I could have sworn



that they were actually flying. The bowl was mostly below street level, so I just saw the skaters bobbing up and then sinking back out of sight.

I parked the car on a side road and walked down to the bowl with my camera. That was the first time I saw vertical skating. As soon as the skaters saw the camera they perked up. I was immediately welcome. In those days, there were far fewer cameras around, so the camera was my “in.”

So I was welcomed right away, and the kids in Laurel Canyon were my first contacts. I didn’t really catch the

skate imaging bug until I went up and made friends with them, and for the next three years—although I traveled all over California—I always came back to the “Mini Bowl” and the other bowl up the street called “Skyline.”

**Crist:** *Did you continue to search out these kinds of informal photo opportunities?*

**Holland:** Usually on the weekends I would go up there to that place, and it wasn’t long before I was branching out to other drainage bowls around the area. The guys would always have a new hot spot to





check out. There are a lot of beautiful drainage bowls in the canyons in L.A., Beverly Hills, West L.A., and Santa Monica.

Benedict Canyon had a really big, nice one. Laurel Canyon had a couple, and that was my home base. Those two had the same groupings of “locals” usually, but the groups were fluid, and they kept changing and moving and going places. There was a huge bowl just above the Hollywood Reservoir. It was very big, but not many skaters knew about it, so the locals from the area claimed it all for themselves and called it “Vipers Bowl.”

I had a car, which was useful, and skaters would pile in and we’d go to whatever place was on their radar at the moment for getting vertical: bowls, ramps, and then, of course, the empty swimming pools all over the west side and into the Valley. Eventually I made it as far north as the Bay Area, and as far south as Ensenada, Mexico.

Skateboarders came to these spots from all over Southern California just because they heard about them; somehow they came, one way or another, and that was long before mobile phones and texting.









When I think back and recall those times, I think, how did they know where to go? It was amazing, but somehow they always knew. It was information passed quickly along solely by word of mouth from one skateboarder to another.

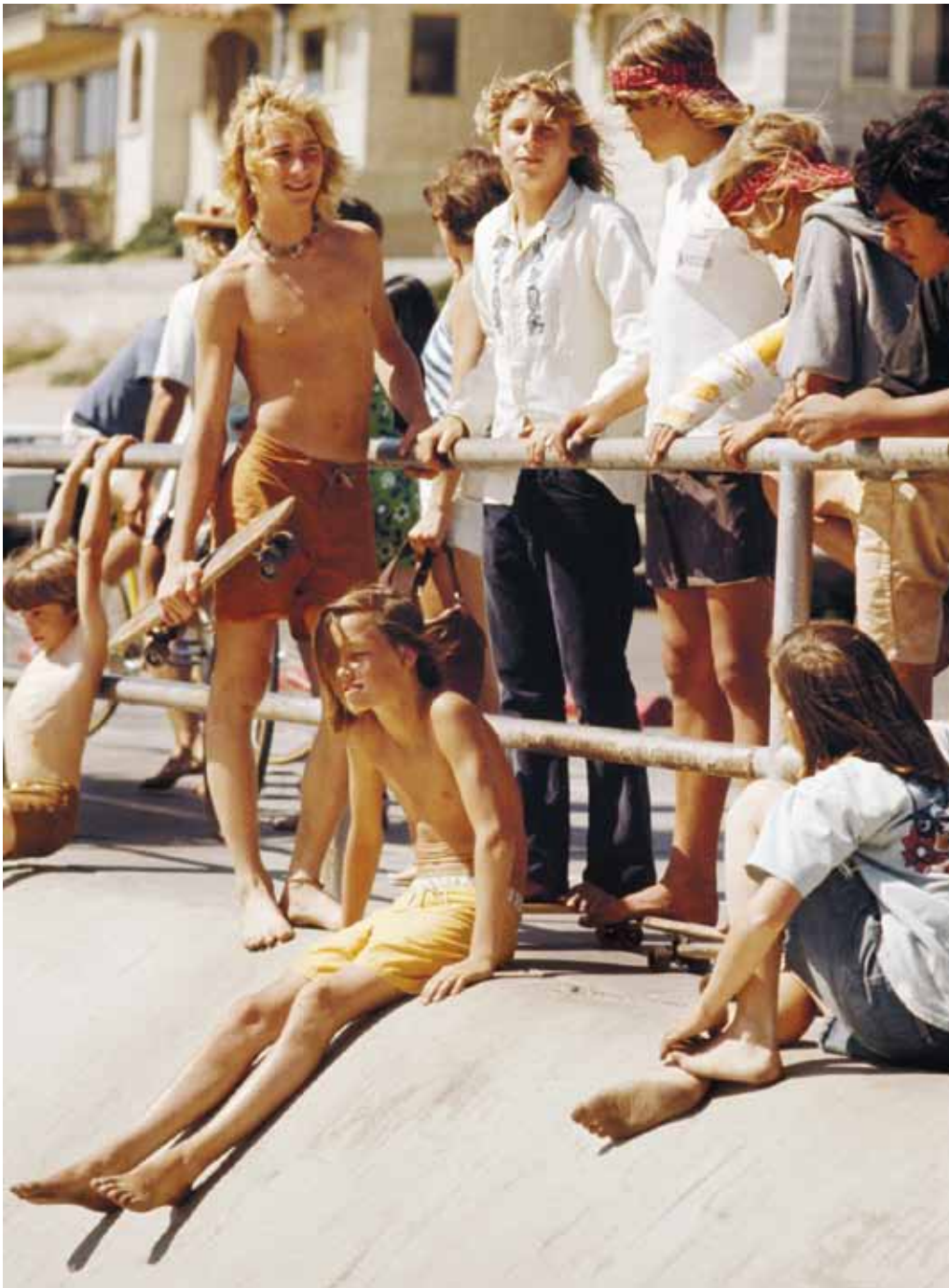
**Crist:** *How was skateboarding changing in those years from when you started photographing to the time you ended? What was going on?*

**Holland:** It was amazing. Everything changed very fast within those three years.

In '75 we were mostly in the canyon bowls and started getting out to the many different schoolyards like Kenter and Paul Revere. Schoolyards were great because they had these asphalt banks, which were perfect for skating, and large flat areas, too. By '76 the scene was moving to empty swimming pools, and then, after that, the skate parks started to appear, and there were bigger and bigger organized contests. In '77, commercialism started to come into the new sport.

When I look at the pictures that I took then, 35 years ago or so, I can right away tell which ones are from '75, from '76, and from '77, just by the way they're dressed and the surroundings and what kind of skating they're doing. There was a big shift in the three years, and a big part of the sport became commercial really fast. Manufacturers and skate parks and insurance companies moved in. The equipment came: helmets, knee pads, elbow pads, shoes, anything you can imagine that a person might wear or use when he's skateboarding—just like any other sport. When I started recording them, there were a lot who were barefoot and without helmets (not that that is a good thing for safety, but it looked good in pictures), but by the end of '77, those were rare, and most were all trussed up in gear.





Today, besides the sports professionals and “extreme athletes,” you can still see a lot of neighborhood kids out skateboarding, and you also see ordinary adults out skating on the streets just for transportation. Everybody’s skateboarding now, but back in the early days it was pretty much just the teenagers, mostly male, and they were out discovering brand new thrills.

I came onto the scene just after the introduction of the urethane wheel, which made it possible to go vertical, and that became a really, really exciting

thing—to, as they said, “get air,” or “go for coping” in the dry swimming pool.

There was a drought in ’76–’77 in California, so many swimming pools had to be emptied because there was not enough water. That provided tons of new places to get vertical, and so they were all out looking for empty swimming pools and climbing over back fences. I was there too, lying on my back on the bottom of a pool.

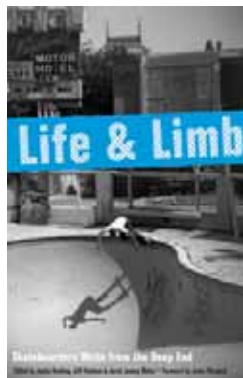
So those two things—the invention of the urethane wheel for traction and the drought providing empty





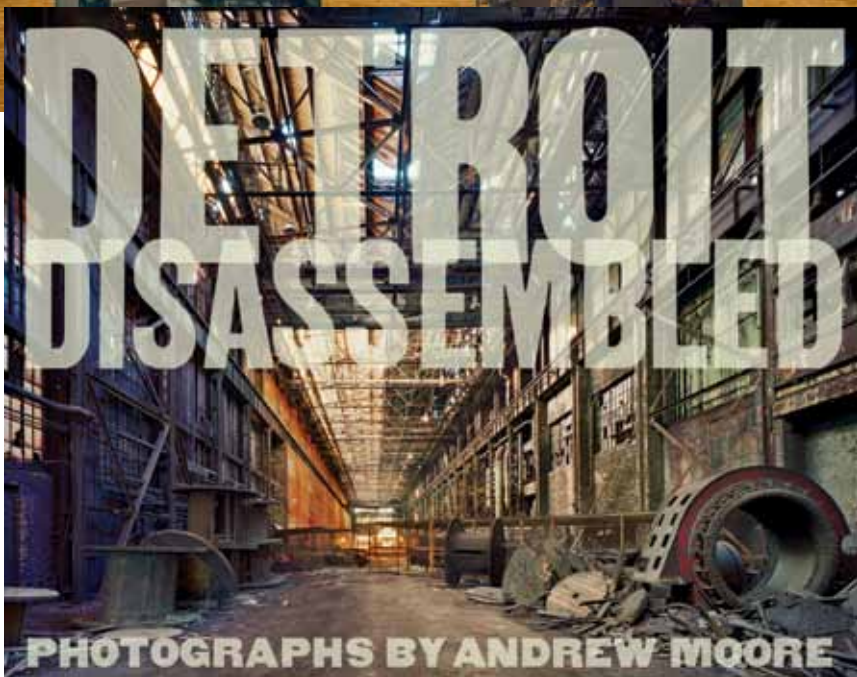
pools and basins—made those years perfect for the beginning of a radical and exciting sport and the visuals that it engendered, which is where I came in. —

*From “Interview with Hugh Holland” by Steve Crist, Locals Only: California Skateboarding 1975–1978, photographs by Hugh Holland, © 2010 Ammo Books, www.ammobooks.com. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.*



From Brooklyn’s own Soft Skull Press is *Life & Limb* (2004), a collection of writing about the gravity-defying, law-breaking, one-upping, double-dog-daring, raw-skin-meets-pavement counter culture that is skateboarding. Contributors include Mark Gonzalez, Ed Templeton, Michael Burnett, Scott Bourne, and Angela Boatwright. Introduction by Jocko Weyland, edited by Justin Hocking, Jared Maher, and Jeffrey Knutson. [www.softskull.com](http://www.softskull.com).





essay by Philip Levine

photographs by Andrew Moore

Damiani/Akron Art Museum  
[www.artbook.com](http://www.artbook.com)





**F**or many, the iconic images of post-automotive Michigan belong to director Michael Moore, who brought the desolation of Flint to the big screen in *Roger & Me*. But photographer Andrew Moore takes us beyond the individual toll of a failed economy to something more Pompeiiian in scope. To an empty city falling in upon itself, in unspeakable tragic beauty. Andrew writes in the book of his own excavations: of a grove of birch trees literally growing from rotting books, of a homeless man frozen head first at the bottom of a flooded elevator shaft, of pheasants with entire city blocks to themselves to roost and nest, of the surreal re-ruralization of what was once America's fourth largest city, now covered in ivy and moss. Moore's spectacular photographs take us to places where the outside has come in and where the inside, quiet and soaring as a cathedral, has become sacred in its desolation. As Moore points out, after the fire of 1805 Detroit adopted the motto *Speramus Meliora; Resurgit Cineribus*. "We hope for better things; it will arise from the ashes." Ironic, yes. But hopeful still. Again, there is ash and growth, albeit green. As Nature reclaims what was hers all along.

—Kathy Wise





## **Nobody's Detroit** by Philip Levine

EXCERPT

I left Detroit in 1954. I was twenty-six years old and had a B.A. in English. I left a job I liked, “driving truck”—as they said then—for a company that repaired electric motors of all sizes; the job got me out in the fresh air—if you can call the air in a manufacturing town fresh. And it took me to the little machine shops, the small parts makers, the tool and die outfits we serviced and on the worst days to the empire of arrogance and monumental ugliness, Ford River Rouge, then the largest industrial complex in the world. The year before that I’d worked for Railway Express delivering trunks and parcels to the four corners of the town, so I knew the geography and the neighborhoods of the place. It was my city and I hated leaving; it was home to my family and all my best friends, it was home to the little circle of poets I’d become a part of. Its tree-lined streets and its street life, its humble houses, its libraries, theaters, jazz clubs, its birds, beasts, and flowers, and especially its people had nourished me and would as the years passed not only enter my writing, at times they would command it. So why did I leave? Let’s just say it was for love, not money.







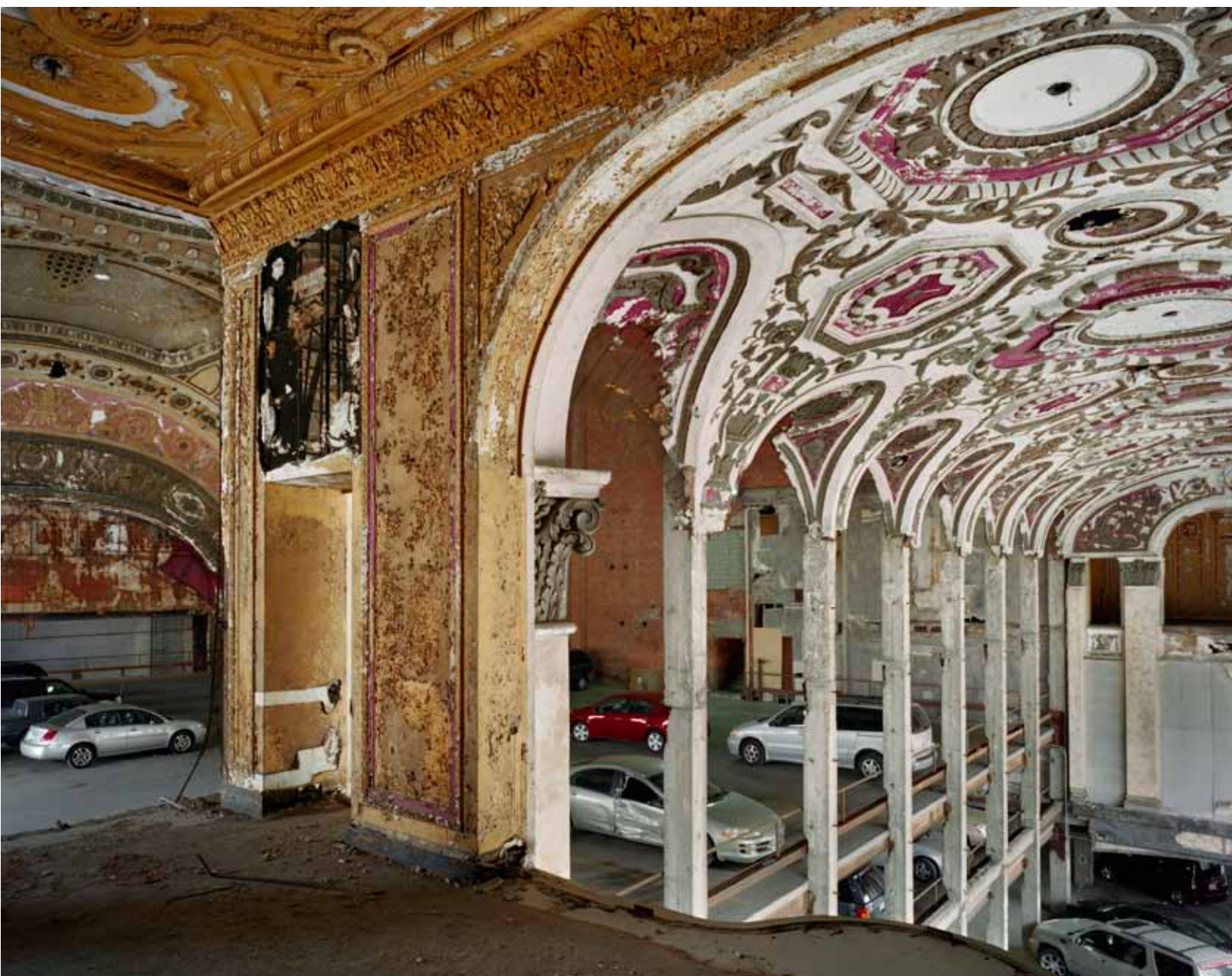


Twenty-eight years later I was invited back to read at the retirement party of one of my favorite English teachers at Wayne University (which in the meantime had become Wayne State). I was to be the surprise guest, a major player in the event. It was a short flight from Boston where I was then living, and when the plane landed I looked for my appointed driver. There was a young and attractive woman bearing a sign with my name on it. No, she was not taking me into town; she was from Delta Air Lines and had a sealed envelope for me. Inside was a note from the chair of the English Department and in the note instructions for getting into town by bus and also a badly drawn map showing me where to appear that afternoon for the planned *hommage*. It seemed I honored my old school more than it honored me. Since Jay, my teacher, had no idea I was coming, I decided I would skip the catered meal and show up at the last possible moment, give my talk, read a poem, embrace my old mentor, and then escape. Hopefully my absence

until the crucial moment would cost the chair as much anxiety as possible.

I had hours to kill. Coming in on the west side of town I got off the bus near the ball park. Alas, the season had ended and that year there was no post-season for the Tigers. Half a mile south of the stadium the plumbing parts factory where I'd worked for a year was gone, and nothing was in its place except a field of nettles and weeds and three abandoned cars, their wheels gone. I walked farther south, toward the river, and to my astonishment I found a large fenced-in garden—tomatoes, corn, squash, and rows of exquisite zinnias, all those things I'd tried unsuccessfully to grow in my Victory Garden during World War II. The gardener appeared from nowhere and asked me if I wanted a closer look. He opened the gate—which hadn't been locked—and took me down the rows, named the various crops while boasting only the least bit about the perfection of his tomatoes—"so good they remind you what tomatoes taste like"—and finally showed me the





area he'd reserved for his winter crop. No, he didn't have permission from the city; these days no one asked the city for anything. There'd once been a nice two-story house on this ground, but it was gone, just got up and left and then the land was empty, so why not use it. The fence was here to keep the dogs out; it was like the Great Depression years—which we both recalled—with packs of wild dogs cut loose by their owners and left to their own devices, foraging and wandering. “That’s what we all do to survive here,” he said. The day had grown unseasonably warm, and so we removed ourselves to the shade of his front porch across the street. How he guessed I was from Detroit, I don’t know, but he did and he was curious to know why I’d left and why I’d come back. When I told him I was here to celebrate the retirement of my old teacher, he rocked back and forth a moment and said, “That’s beautiful, that is biblical.” There are those rare times in my life when I know that what I’m living is in a poem I’ve still to write. As we sat in silence I took in as much of the scene as I could until my eyes were filled with so much seeing I finally had to close them.







*On this block seven houses  
are still here to be counted,  
and if you count the shacks  
housing illegal chickens,  
the pens for dogs, the tiny  
pig sty, that is half cave...  
and if you count them you can  
count the crows' nest  
in the high beech tree  
at the corner, and you can  
regard the beech tree itself  
bronzing in the mid-morning light  
as the mast of the great ship  
sailing us all back  
into the 16th century  
or into the present age's  
final discovery.*

My guide for the morning was named Tom; I gave him the surname of Jefferson and put him in the poem "A Walk with Tom Jefferson." I left out a remark he made that seemed to encapsulate his vision of our city. After he catalogued the disappearance of all but the seven houses that remained on the block, for want of something better to say, I remarked, "Nothing lasts forever." He turned his weathered face to me and amended my judgment: "Nothing lasts." If you grew up in Detroit when Tom and I grew up, that could easily become the mantra for your city and your life: Nothing lasts.

---

*From Detroit Disassembled, essay by Philip Levine, photographs by Andrew Moore, Damiani/Akron Art Museum 2010, [www.artbook.com](http://www.artbook.com). Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.*

*An exhibit of Andrew Moore's work from Detroit Disassembled will be on display at the Akron Art Museum through October 2010. [www.akronartmuseum.org](http://www.akronartmuseum.org).*



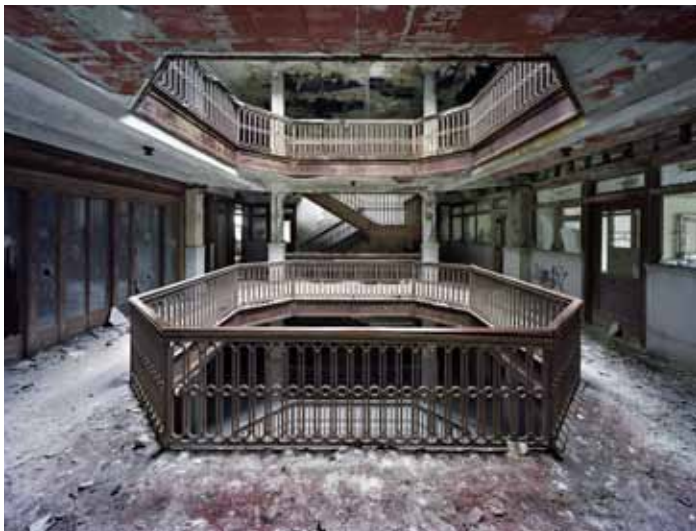




## The Ruins of Detroit

Steidl | [www.steidlville.com](http://www.steidlville.com) | photographs by Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre  
Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, two young photographers from Paris, originally introduced Andrew Moore to the photographic possibilities of Detroit. Over dinner in the City of Light, the three discovered a mutual interest in photographing old theaters, which led to an invitation by the Frenchmen for Moore to join them on a shoot that winter in Detroit. The Marchand and Meffre collection is a larger one than Moore's, with more than 200 pages of photographs covering a wider variety of sites, including a police station eerily abandoned with all of the furniture and supplies intact, down to blood samples and evidence files still labeled and laid out on desks. The two books make for a fascinating comparison of side-by-side shots, like the photograph in both of a Salvador Dali-esque clock melting on the wall of what was Cass Technical High School, the largest high school in the country when it was built in 1922, once attended by Diana Ross, Jack White, and Ellen Burstyn, now, like the rest, abandoned. Time frozen and inexplicably fluid. This is their first book.















# HOW TO WRECK A NICE BEACH

THE VOCODER FROM WORLD WAR II TO HIP-HOP

THE MACHINE SPEAKS



STOPSMILING books

DAVE TOMPKINS

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Invented by Bell Labs in 1928, the vocoder was originally designed to guard phones against codebreakers during World War II, but by the time the Vietnam War rolled around it had been repurposed as a voice-altering tool for musicians, later being used by artists from Neil Young to T-Pain. *How to Wreck a Nice Beach*—the title of the book comes from a mis-hearing of the vocoder-rendered phrase “how to recognize speech”—is a surprisingly riveting and linguistically intriguing exploration of the history of the decidedly boxy apparatus, from Nazi research labs to Stalin’s gulags, from artificial larynges to cell phones. Put your padded headphones on and prepare for the funk. —*Jim Beehler*

# In one word, militarism was funk. —H.G. Wells

## EXCERPT

### Axis of Eavesdroppers

I have been bugged all my life.  
—Vyacheslav “Iron Arse” Molotov,  
Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1955

Theoretical security was not absolute like the records.

—Ralph Miller, Bell Labs

We are clear.

It’s quiet inside the Black National Theater, just above 125th Street in Harlem. Afrika Bambaataa sits on a defeated couch, flipping through a brochure published by the National Security Agency. He wears black sweats and fluorescent green running shoes, and there’s a trainer’s towel around his neck. The Thunderdome spikes, leather cape, and Martian sun dimmers have been left at home. He seems to be giving his myth the day off, looking more like a gym coach with a head cold than the retired gang warlord who once borrowed his mom’s records, stuck a speaker in the window and blew out the neighborhood.

Our conversation arrived at the NSA through the normal discursive channels: an old record Bam made that doesn’t exist, an admiration for a British vampire soap opera, a childhood memory of sneaking to the front row to watch Sly Stone “make his instruments talk.” Yet when discussing the NSA, Bam drops into a cautious strep basso. If anything can modulate our voices, it’s the notion of some federal protuberance listening in.

The brochure in his hands is pink and its title is not for the sore of throat. *The Start of the Digital Revolution: SIGSALY Secure Digital Voice Communications in World*

*War II.* Bambaataa grunts and jots this down on a borrowed scrap of paper. On the cover is a dual turntable console photographed behind a nameless door in the basement of the Pentagon. Surrounding the turntables are banks of winking electronics, as if the walls are putting us on, spoofing a future that’s one set of pointy ears from campy. Taken in 1944, the photo, along with the future, would not be declassified until 1976. Bambaataa is curious, having spent 1976 DJing some of the better parties in New York. By 1981, he was making people dance to German records that spoke Japanese in voices programmed by Texas Instruments.

The Pentagon turntables are now sitting at the bottom of the Chesapeake Bay. These machines were designed by Bell Labs but created by funk, back when funk meant fear, German transmitters and codebreakers under headphones. The turntables played 16-inch records of thermal noise in reverse, a randomized shush, backwards masked inside out. Produced by the Muzak Corporation, the vinyl was deployed for the army’s “Secret Telephony” voice security system, a technology that was treated with the same crypto-fuss as the Manhattan Project. Installed across the globe from 1943 to 1946, these fifty-five ton phone scramblers would be used for D-Day, the Allied invasion of Germany, the bombing of Hiroshima, and the “dismemberment of the surrender instrument”—allowing Roosevelt, Truman, Churchill and Eisenhower to discuss the world’s fate with voices they barely recognized, voices not human but polite artificial replicas of speech rendered from digital pulses 20 milliseconds in length.

The wall of knobs assigned this task was the vocoder, a massive

walk-in closet of cryptology invented by Bell Labs in 1928. The vocoder divided the voice into its constituent frequencies, spread across ten channels, and transmitted them through band pass filters. At the receiving end, this information—stripped of intelligence and color—would be synthesized into an electronic impression of human speech: a machine’s idea of the voice as imagined by phonetic engineers. Not speech, they qualified, but a “spectral description of it.”

The vocoder was sensitive, high maintenance and seven feet tall, an overheated room full of capacitors, vacuum tubes and transformers. Some engineers dubbed this system “The Green Hornet.” Others called it “Special Customer.” Bell Labs referred to it as Project X-61753, or “X-Ray,” as if it was ordered from the back of a comic book with a pair of rubber Mad Doctor Hands. The U.S. Signal Corps called it SIGSALY, taken from children’s “nonsense syllables” and used for strategizing Allied bombing campaigns—the shelling. *The New York Times*, not knowing what to call it, went with “Machine that Tears Speech to Pieces,” and then later, like most everybody else, decided on “the robot.”

To a DJ like Bambaataa, the vocoder is “deep crazy supernatural bugged out funk stuff,” perhaps the only crypto-technology to serve both the Pentagon and the roller rink. What guarded Winston Churchill’s phone against Teutonic math nerds would one day become the perky teabot that chimed in on Michael Jackson’s “P.Y.T.” During World War II, the vocoder reduced the voice to something cold and tactical, tinny and dry like soup cans in a sandbox, dehumanizing the larynx, so to speak, for some of man-





kind's more dehumanizing events: Hiroshima, Cuban Missile Crisis, Soviet gulags, Vietnam. Churchill had it, FDR refused it, Hitler needed it. Kennedy was frustrated by the vocoder. Mamie Eisenhower used it to tell her husband to come home. Nixon channeled one into his limo. Reagan had on his plane. Stalin, on his disintegrating mind.

The Seventies would finally catch the vocoder in its double life: secret masking agent for the army and studio tool for the musician. The machine that subtracted the character from the voices of Army echelons would ultimately generate characters in itself—the one-man chorus of be all you can be. Never mind the robots: what's more human than wanting to be *something else, altogether?* Ever since the first bored kid threw his voice into an electric fan, toked on a birthday balloon or thanked his mother in a pronounced

burp, voice mutation has provided an infinite source of kicks. In 1971, that first kick was delivered to the ribs of anyone who saw Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*. In its big-screen debut, the vocoder sang Beethoven's Ninth to Dresden firebombings while rehabilitating a murderer who wore eyeballs for cufflinks. It was quite an association.

Soon the vocoder began showing up on records, reciting Edgar Allan Poe and making sheep bleats. If a string section could be replaced by the synthesizer, then why not the voice? The vocoder thanked you very much in Japanese. It allowed Bee Gees to be Beatles. It just called to say it loved you. It allowed people to give themselves names like Zeus B. Held, Gay Cat Park, and Ramsey 2C-3D. It could sound like an articulate bag of dead leaves. A croak, a last willed gasp. A sink clog trying to find the words. Or the InSinkErator

itself, with its wiggly, butterknife smile. In Neil Young's case, it was a father trying to empathize with his son who suffered from cerebral palsy. Or it could've been just a bad idea—as I've been told, *something that punished the atmosphere*.

Shadowing the World War II model, the vocoder would have its own Axis powers: Kraftwerk (Germany), Giorgio Moroder and Italo-Disco (Italy), and Bambaataa's Roland SVC-350 Vocoder (Made in Japan, where the Yellow Magic Orchestra did a vocoder version of "Tighten Up"). In 1976, when SIGSALY was sufficiently dated to be declassified and allowed in public, the vocoder was already well out in the open, nodding along in Kraftwerk's day-dream stretch of imagination called "Autobahn." Before the Age of Scratching Records with Basketballs, Bambaataa and his Zulu Nation DJs would use more gathered German intelligence (Kraftwerk's "Trans-Europe Express") for their own version of travel, making people dance, forget, buy synthesizers, steal ideas, make more records, and dress like the Count of Monte Cristo. Countless electro and disco 12-inch singles owe their dance floors to the Thing That Tore Speech to Pieces. In the early Eighties, a romance better remembered than relived, the vocoder was the main machine of electro hip-hop, the black voice removed from itself, displaced by Reaganomics, recession, and urban renewal and escaping to outer space where there was more room to do The Webbo, where the weight was taken but the odds of being heard were no less favorable.

As the vocoder disbanded and digitized conversations in Washington, commercially available models were all over the radio, rapping ills and blight while generating the cosmically Keytarded fantasies needed to cope with it all. The vocoder would be used in songs

about safety, Raisin Bran, taxes and black holes. Pods and poverty. A dance called “the Toilet Bowl.” Christmas in Miami and deep throats in Dallas. Nuclear war, biters in the city, and the Muslim soul. Saving the children and freaking the Freaks. The ups and downs of being a machine with feelings.

Though the military had originally wanted the vocoder to sound human, the Germans didn’t (calling it a “retro-transformer” as early as 1951) and somehow Afrika Bambaataa ended up with the keys to the robot. He calls the vocoder “that Joker.” “I couldn’t wait to get on that Joker,” he says. “We used to bring it to parties and funk ’em up with it. Stop the turntables and I talk on that Joker. People were hearing the robot voice from the records but the records weren’t playing. They didn’t know what was going on.”

A man who wanted to use the vocoder to destroy all Pac Man machines once said to me: “People gotta like what’s going on even if they don’t know what’s going on.” And they did and they didn’t.

Of the World War II cryptology experts I interviewed, none were aware of the vocoder’s activities in the clubs, rinks and parks of New York City. (“It was just analyzing breakdowns of speech energy,” said the Pentagon.) Of the hip-hop civilians I interviewed, none were aware of the vocoder’s service in any war, nor were they surprised.

And none were aware that vocoder technology now inhabits our cell phones as a microscopic speck of silicone, allowing our laryngeal clones to sound more human, condensing the signal for more bandwidth at the expense of intelligibility in a shrinking world. The vocoder was originally invented for speech compression, to reduce bandwidth costs on undersea phone cables—the ultimate long-distance package. Now compression is back. The voices from the tower are not our own, but digital simulacra, imperfect to be real. Conversations are minutes gobbled and songs are ringtones chirping a T-Pain hook. Auto-Tune, the pitch-correcting software popularized by the robotox of Cher and inflicted on the twenty-first century, is often misheard as a vocoder, giving the latter currency through a revival of misunderstanding. Not as a technology, but a meme. In other words, it was what it isn’t.

When I mentioned this to Bambaataa, he nodded and said, “Yeahhh.” If conspiracy is your baggage, this is not unlike the way he says “Yeahhh” at the beginning of “Planet Rock,” a song he recorded with the Soulsonic Force in 1982, the same year *Time* magazine replaced its Man of the Year with a computer. Stocking dance floors for the past twenty-eight years, “Planet Rock” is the first hip-hop song to say *shucks*, vacuuming the sibillance, universally recognized as the white noise of secrecy. Over

## VOCODER MIX

Covering ’70s disco to current hip-hop, *How to Wreck a Nice Beach* will open your ears to a whole new way of listening to music. Detailing the evolution of the vocoder from a secret WWII machine used to alter communication transmissions to a magical device that changed music forever, the book reveals the history behind the voice-bending machine whose ubiquitous synthesized sound we now take for granted. And if you’re anything like me, it’ll have you cruising iTunes researching songs containing the vocoder influence. Madonna, anyone?

—Debra Pandak

## our iTunes playlist

(click above to link to playlist)

**FAME** david bowie

**FUNKYTOWN (SINGLE VERSION)** lipps, inc.

**P.Y.T. (PRETTY YOUNG THING)** michael jackson

**I JUST CALLED TO SAY I LOVE YOU** stevie wonder

**LET’S GROOVE** earth, wind & fire

**MR. BLUE SKY** electric light orchestra

**ROCKIT** herbie hancock

**MR. ROBOTO** styx

**IN THE AIR TONIGHT** phil collins

**STARSHIP TROOPER: A. LIFE SEEKER, B. DISILLUSION, C. WURM** yes

**BIZARRE LOVE TRIANGLE** new order

**BLUE (DA DA DEE) [RADIO EDIT]** eiffel 65

**IMPRESSIVE INSTANT** madonna

**TOXIC** britney spears

**CALIFORNIA LOVE** 2pac, roger troutman & dr. dre

**EASY LOVE** mstrkrft

**HEARTLESS** kanye west



at Bell Labs, “shh” is called unvoiced fricatives, or “unvoiced hiss energy,” pulmonary turbulence modulated by tongue, teeth and lips.

“That’s bugged,” says Bam, who often speaks in terms of sound effects, as if waiting for the right word to show up. It may be a while, so *bugged* will do. Though much of Bam’s memory belongs to a record collection that defies mini-storage, you can always count on *bugged*, a hip-hop jargonaut that has survived for over two decades, its etymology based on the act of going out of one’s head through one’s eyes while attended by invisible (and apparently very busy) insects under one’s skin. When eyes “bug out” from their sockets, doctors call it globe luxation. Despite its provenance in pre-Industrial sanitariums, bugging out was the scourge of military argot during the Korean War, referring to US soldiers in a state of bullet-hastened egress. (Retreat was less a matter of going crazy than coming to one’s senses.) Yet losing one’s mind never goes out of style, and hip-hop, ever reinventing the tongue, would replace mad with *bugged*, converting the former into a quantitative adverb, as if rightfully assuming everyone is insane.

So crazy became bugged, the bugged picked up the vocoder, rappers went under surveillance, and we listened very carefully, under headphones.

**B**am continues chuckling through the NSA brochure, the towel, now over his head. He hits a circuit diagram and doubles back to the Pentagon, the glowing basement and the turntables. The room looks busy yet unoccupied. He wonders where they stuck that joker. Perhaps somewhere near the world’s most accurate clock. Or next to the Sumo air conditioner that kept the entire system from melting down. Or maybe behind the oven that stabilized the

crystals that kept the turntables in synch 10,000 miles apart.

Those capacitors have some explaining to do.

By 1943, there were two turntables and a vocoder in the Pentagon and a duplicate system in the basement of a department store in London. As the war machine kept turning, vocoders and turntables would be installed in Paris, Brisbane, Manila, Frankfurt, Berlin, Guam, Tokyo, Oakland.

*Oakland?*

Another one, on a barge that tailed General Douglas McArthur around the Philippines. And another, under a mountain in Hawaii. If a satellite zoomed in on the northern bump of the African Zulu medallion hanging from Bambaataa’s neck, one could see General Eisenhower checking out two turntables and a vocoder in a wine cellar in Algiers.

Fall of 1983, the Zulu Nation funk sign began appearing on my spiral notebooks, its index and pinkie horns shooting lasers at whatever subject crossed its path. “Shazulu” became the code for “Latin Vocabulary Homework” which I did for a seventh-grade classmate in exchange for vocoder record money. (He would whisper over his shoulder from the desk in front of me: “You got that shazulu?”) I would launder the cash through Shazada Music, four walls of 12-inch singles in downtown Charlotte, North Carolina.

The Pentagon vinyl was far more rare, guarded with life but destroyed by protocol once the needle lifted. Bambaataa wonders if any of it survived. This was a world where records were controlled by clocks, not people. Where privacy was distinct from secrecy and a digit was referred to as a “higit.” Where torpedoes were equipped with 500-watt speakers and records played thermal noise backwards behind nameless doors. Where speech must be “indestructible” and the voice wouldn’t

recognize itself from hello. So it’s not unreasonable to think that turntables and vocoders once kept the snoops out of Churchill’s whiskey diction.

Bam, often just headphones away from some version of deep space, is not surprised. (He once named an album *Warlocks and Witches, Computer Chips and Microchips and You*.) His old playlists could be a conspiracy theory themselves. To Bam, it’s William Burroughs, Gary Numan and Vincent Price who are the real vocoders. In a sense, everything is bugged.

He mutters something about “Leviathan” and scans through the NSA appendix. There’s a transcript of Bell Labs President O.E. Buckley speaking through a vocoder in Pentagon Room 3D-923, July 1943, when Special Customer was first activated. There is a promise of “far-reaching effects.”

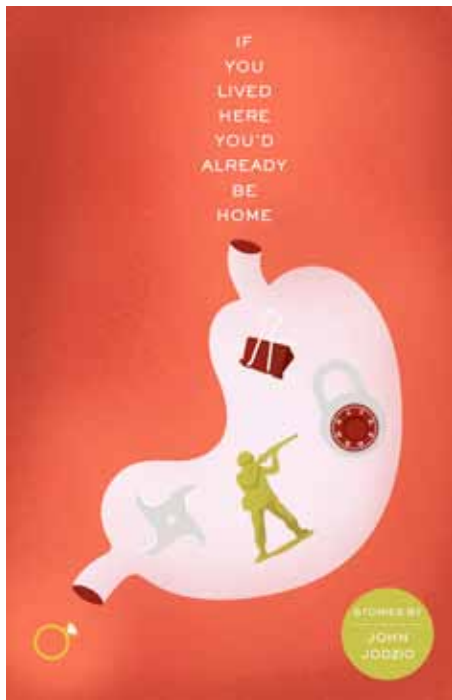
*We are assembled here today to open a new service—Secret Telephony.... Speech has been converted into low-frequency signals that are not speech but contain a description of it... Signals have been decoded and restored and then used to regenerate speech nearly enough like that which gave them birth... Speech transmitted in this matter sounds somewhat unnatural.* Bambaataa descrambles a frog in his throat, a matter of clearance in itself. *Somewhat.*

“We hope that it will be a help in the prosecution of the war,” said O.E., signing off.

And so we bug. —

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*Excerpted by permission of Melville House/Stop Smiling from How to Wreck a Nice Beach: The Vocoder from World War II to Hip Hop by Dave Tompkins, www.mhpbooks.com, © 2010 by Dave Tompkins. All rights reserved. No part of this excerpt may be reproduced or reprinted without permission in writing from the publisher.*



Replacement Press  
www.replacementpress.com

For all the odd characters—"I get paid eight dollars an hour to pretend I am Vincent. Mrs. Ramon's dead son," begins one story; "My brother's girlfriend came home with a barnacle stuck to her butt cheek," begins another—John Jodzio's writing is simply about the folly of being human. Every one of the stories in his debut collection is succinct, funny as hell, and spot-on smart. Case in point: the 478-word "Shoo, Shoo."

—Chico Valdez

## EXCERPT

### Shoo, Shoo

Shoo, shoo, my wife said, but those were not the words. Quite obviously those were not the words. We might as well have thrown a bottle of Jack and a dime bag of skunk weed down from our bedroom window and said, Hunker down fellas, stay awhile. These were jazz musicians and my wife had said shoo.

Earlier that day, we'd gotten the test results. It ended up being both of our faults. Her eggs were bad and my sperm was lazy. We sat in the parking lot of the clinic for about an hour after our appointment, in that car of ours that you started with a screwdriver and stopped by pulling up on the emergency brake. I paged through a glossy pamphlet that made adoption look cool and fun.

"I was ready to blame you and then pretend I wasn't blaming you," she said. "I was ready to blame myself and then not believe you when you said it wasn't my fault."

"Exactly," I told her.

"I really don't know what to do now," she told me.

"Totally," I said.

I'd already called the cops. I'd already held the phone out the window and let the police dispatcher listen to the racket below, the joshing and stumbling and bellowing and knee slapping and the occasional horn bleat and rim shot.

"In my neighborhood, noise like that would be welcome," the dispatcher told me. "I'd love to hear some noise like that sometime."

I hung up the phone and kneaded my wife's shoulders, pushing against the braids of her back muscle until I found a bone.

"Maybe we could have a miracle baby," I offered. "One of those against-all-odds babies that never should have happened. Everyone else has them," I said, "why not us?"

After I said this, my wife got up and put on her robe. I watched as she began to drag our dresser across the bedroom floor. It was huge, this dresser, claw-footed, an heirloom, passed down from her grandmother and her grandmother's grandmother before that.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

I watched as she lifted the dresser on the windowsill and then pushed it out the window. There was a loud crash, then a clattering of instruments, then voices yelling out below. My wife walked across the room and lifted up a bedside table and then tossed that out as well. The musicians had run off by then, gone to wherever it is jazz musicians go when people get tired of their shenanigans, but my wife kept on—the good silverware, the coffee pot, those super sharp knives I bought off TV.

I got up and went into the bathroom. I took wet toilet paper and stuffed it into my ears. I laid down on the linoleum floor. I closed my eyes and listened to my heart echo all around me.

*From If You Lived Here You'd Already Be Home by John Jodzio, Replacement Press 2010, www.replacementpress.com. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.*



# Rounding Third

Three pennant-worthy reads.

**Baseball fans like to read.** A lot. As Peter Schilling Jr. points out in his essay “Fathers Reading Books with Sons,” they read the sports pages, the stats, the rules, the history, even the backs of countless cardboard cards wrapped in wax paper or encased in plastic sleeves. So here’s an infield’s worth of books to get you to the World Series this October: First, Schilling’s novel *The End of Baseball* drafts the fantasy 1940s team that could have been had the color line not existed. Second, Arnold Hano describes Game One of the 1954 World Series in vivid detail in *A Day in the Bleachers*. And rounding third is Peter Morris’ essential baseball encyclopedia *A Game of Inches*. Love it or loathe it, you won’t look at the game the same way again.

—Jack Rubenstein

## The End of Baseball

by Peter Schilling Jr.  
Ivan R. Dee  
www.ivanrdee.com

**H**e may be best known for sending a midget to the plate, but “Sport Shirt” Bill Veeck, son of sports writer and Chicago Cubs president William Veeck Sr., grew up selling peanuts and tickets and tending the grounds at Wrigley Field. After his father’s death in 1933, he dropped out of college to work for the Cubs, eventually becoming club treasurer before leaving the Windy City in 1941 to seek his fortune, buying the financially troubled American Association Milwaukee Brewers minor league franchise and finding his calling as a promotional genius. He scheduled morning games for late-shift workers, gave away live animals and birds, scheduled weddings at home plate, and sold the team within four years for a sizeable profit, having turned its reputation around with three pennant wins.

Before Veeck sold his interest in the team, however, war intervened. He left his wife and club, joined the Marines, and shipped off to Guadalcanal. He served for three years, ultimately losing his foot, and later his leg, due to an accident. But he had secured backing to buy the Philadelphia

Phillies before heading off to war, and he came back with a revolutionary plan: to stock the club with Negro League stars. For every visionary there is a villain, and Veeck’s came in the form of a federal judge and the first commissioner of Major League Baseball, Kenesaw Mountain Landis, who effectively maintained the sport’s unwritten color line for more than two decades. Peter Schilling Jr.’s first novel, *The End of Baseball*, is the “woulda, coulda, shoulda” story of what might have been had Veeck recruited the team he dreamed of in the jungle, instead of being left to his long-remembered gimmicks. “All I ever said is that you can draw more people with a losing team, plus bread and circuses,” he once pointed out, “than with a losing team and a long, still silence.”

### EXCERPT

**T**he elder Veeck died when Bill Jr. was in college. After a few years working with the Cubs, from the ballpark to the front office, the son decided the time was right to run his own team. He rounded up a group of skeptical

investors—all prominent friends of his father—who felt obliged to usher the son onto the path to his first failure. After one of his squirrely pitch sessions, with Veeck gesticulating wildly and unable to sit still even for a moment, they wondered aloud how this nut could be William Veeck's son. It was as if a banana had sprouted from the branch of an apple tree. But they figured that since this was a certain fiasco, Veeck would get his needed kick in the pants and get drummed right out of the sport. So Veeck bought the Milwaukee Brewers, a sorry minor league team that hadn't operated in the black since before the depression. He cleaned up rickety Borchert Field, made a variety of shrewd trades, and in the course of two seasons took that wormy franchise from last place to a pennant winner. More than a million fans turned up, a better attendance than any team in America with the exception of the Yankees and the Cardinals—and his was a minor league club. His investors nearly had coronaries from the news, but the money made them happy.

A few months after Pearl Harbor, Veeck, bored with three seasons of first-place finishes and sellout crowds, joined the Marines and sold his share of the Brewers. He was shipped to Guadalcanal, where the recoil from a 50mm gun shattered his ankle. Infection set in. He spent fourteen of his eighteen months of service in military hospitals. Finally they took his leg off and discharged him. When he hit the shore, hobbling on his new crutches, he didn't wait a day to start looking to buy a team on the cheap, which meant a last-place club with few prospects.

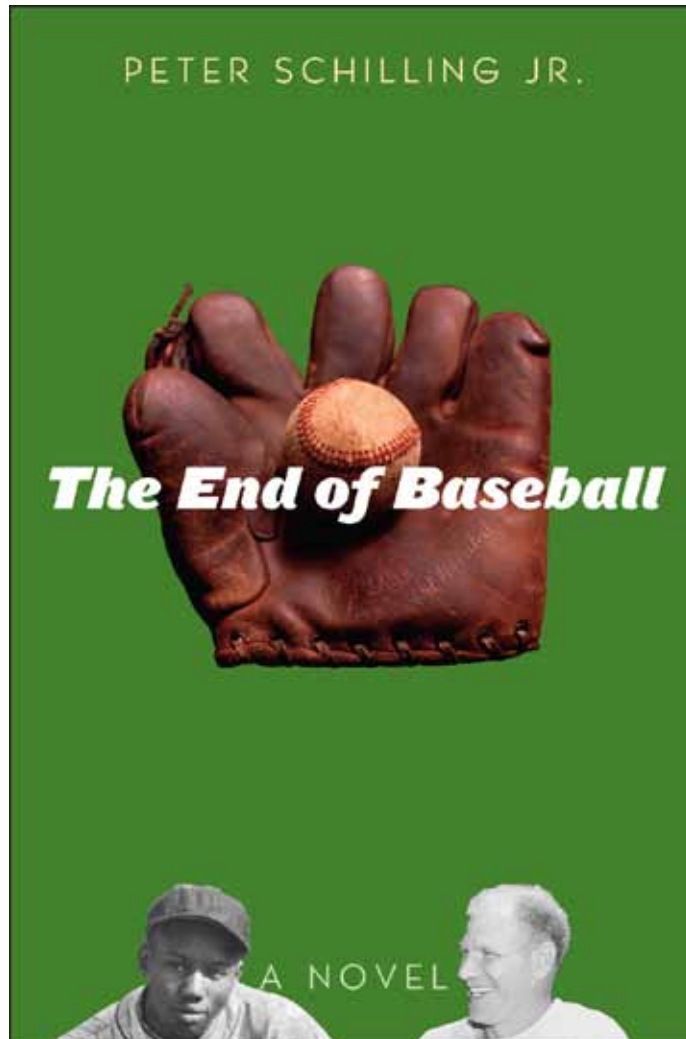
So it was that Bill Veeck and Sam Dailey found themselves in the middle of Whoknowswhere, Texas, on a scorching day in late 1941. They were in search of a prize, and this time the prize was a man: Josh Gibson. Veeck ached to see Gibson's artillery in the majors—the homers

rising out of Shibe Park, doubles and triples and just plain mashed baseballs. For the last two weeks Veeck had been regaling Sam with tales of Josh Gibson's fabulous exploits. Their scouts told him that Josh had just come off his finest season in 1943: 41 homers and a .449 batting average with the Negro League Homestead Grays, who had been playing in Washington, D.C., that year. One of the greatest catchers in any league. Why, Josh could throw out the fastest base runners, call the best pitches, hit for power and for average. Veeck couldn't stop shouting about the guy: Josh's

arms were like railroad ties! Great eyes, sees better than Ted Williams! Should have been in the majors years ago...that's the beauty of the thing! We'll unleash this guy and all the rest just when they aren't expecting it!

But his ballplayers were proving hard to find. With the arrival of winter, Negro Leaguers followed the heat, moving from Philadelphia to New Orleans, down to Monterrey, Mexico, back up to Oklahoma and rural Texas—wherever they could play for decent, or not so decent, wages. Veeck hired Oscar Charleston, possibly the greatest baseball player, black or white, in history, and Fay Young, the *Chicago Defender's* great black sportswriter, to hunt down ballplayers. Both men had an eye for talent. There were only two players you didn't need a scout to tell you were the cream: the first was Satchel Paige, the other was Josh Gibson.

Sam read the press clippings from the Negro papers and was as baffled by their yellow journalism as Bill's utter faith in their reportage. When he wasn't sufficiently terrorized by the thought of Negroes invading baseball in general, Sam's baseball mind took over, and he wondered just how good men like Gibson really were. Like most white baseball men of the time, he tried to imagine what kind of pitching Gibson faced. You could find bushel basketsful of minor league hit-men who clobbered dozens of homers in a week against farm boys without any movement to their





fastballs. Sam would admit that Gibson's legend was far-reaching—they'd been driving for days, following rumors from Birmingham to New Orleans and now the most lonely sections of Texas, burning through the combined gas-ration coupons of Veeck, Sam, and all their friends and families. But rumors were only rumors. And to make matters worse, some weren't good: one coach in Baton Rouge had fired Josh for reasons he wouldn't go into, and in fact wouldn't even open the door to answer the question. Then there was the teammate in Oatmeal, Nebraska, who, over a dinner that consisted mostly of beer and whiskey, reported that Josh had also spent part of the last year in a sanatorium, and was once found naked in an alley mumbling to himself, "Why won't you talk to me, DiMaggio?" A fellow ballplayer in Lubbock said he went crazy. In Mobile they'd even heard he was dead.

None of this bothered Veeck. He took a long pull on his cigarette and said, "Leo Rothberg's heading to Santo Domingo tomorrow to look for Satch. We'll have Fay in Newark and Pittsburgh to look for talent there. He's got some ideas. And Oscar's racing around the South. How about this for our press conference: *The greatest aggregate of talent in baseball history!*" From the corner of his eye he could see Sam's discomfort. He shook his head and chuckled. "Would you loosen your tie? And take off your jacket. You're making *me* feel sick."

Sam loosened his tie, which only made him appear more uncomfortable. Staring out the window at the few ramshackle homes they'd pass, he wondered how anyone could live in such utter desolation. They were going to find ballplayers here? When he met Oscar Charleston, the brute seemed inarticulate, maybe violent if provoked. Sam didn't trust instinct, but his was rankled. And it seemed strange all this hunting they had to do: you look for the white boys on the sandlots, in the minors, sometimes even in colleges. These Negroes were scattered about like gypsies, their talent nothing more than whispered legend. Sam didn't truly believe that Fay Young or Oscar Charleston, Negroes both, would be fair judges. He was tired of the chase and tired of hearing about Josh Gibson. He could

only blame himself for being in this predicament: he hated to rock the boat, yet always jumped in the dinghy with the crackpot at the oars. "Bill," he said at last, noticing now there weren't even shacks to break up the sunburned fields, "what if we took just *one*? Just Satchel. I mean, a whole team of Negroes, for God's sake! While you're at it, why not a whole team of Jews?"

Veeck took a swig of beer, and then said, "Which white players are worth keeping, Sam?" Sam scowled and folded his arms. Veeck chuckled. "Sam, I'm not looking to sign Negroes. I'm looking to sign the *best*. The best happen to all be Negroes. It's the same old troubles, Sam: had we not fielded a winner in Milwaukee, we'd have lost the team for lack of profit. That goes double for the A's. We're so deep in the red we might as well be on Mars. Don't forget: promotions only go so far. Field the best players and you make money. Lots of money. So what if they're white, Negro, Jewish, Arab, or Eskimo? And these men can play, Sam. They'll give us the pennant and keep us in the black. In a big way."

"We're black in a big way, all right." Sam huffed. "Josh Gibson. Drunk. Insane. Dead, maybe. What a prize."

"You take the churchgoers, I'll go with the lushes. That would leave me with Babe Ruth, Rogers Hornsby, Grover Cleveland Alexander. That would leave you with the... Lutheran Softball League." Veeck laughed and lit another cigarette off the one he was smoking. "Sam, these players, they're going to have their plaques in the Hall of Fame, nearly every one...and we'll get them for peanuts." The car hit another pothole, almost sending Sam into the dashboard. Veeck ignored Sam's groan, and continued: "It's like war: you sit in a trench with a Jew, an Italian, a Negro, and pretty soon you realize that, hey, this guy can do the job just like anyone else. That's what people'll say when they see the A's. When we're ten games up at the All Star break, no one's going to notice the color of their skin. And the turnstiles will be spinning."

"You forget: the army doesn't put Negroes in the trenches. I wasn't even there and I know that."

"Okay, so they don't," Veeck said, tired of talk of the war. "But we will." He nodded ahead. "Keep an eye out for the park. It has to be here somewhere."

**H**e may be best known for sending a midget to the plate, but "Sport Shirt" Bill Veeck grew up selling peanuts and tending the grounds at Wrigley Field.

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## FATHERS READING BOOKS WITH SONS

by Peter Schilling Jr.

After penning his own baseball novel, sports journalist Peter Schilling Jr. found that his father's shared love of books meant more than any backyard game of father-son catch.

**B**ooks matter. Baseball fans know that reading helps us to draw this crazy sport even closer to our hearts. We get to understand each season better by reading all the essays and numbers-crunching in an average copy of *The Hardball Times* or *Baseball Prospectus*. We get caught up in a pennant race whose outcome we know and which was played years ago, simply by reading. History unfolds before us every nine innings of a current game because baseball fans, more than any other sports enthusiasts, read, read, read. That's a wonderful thing, and we know it.

My Dad and I shared a passion for reading. We'd often talk over the phone, comparing titles we'd enjoyed, and favorite authors, from Kurt Vonnegut to Paul Theroux to Raymond Chandler to Jack Kerouac. I'd devour, say, Vonnegut's *Slapstick*, in this case simply because he'd enjoyed it, and I would see it with two sets of eyes: my own, and my father's. We'd discuss it later, often disagreeing, sometimes arguing. But what we came away with was a shared experience between ourselves, and between the reader and the author, and I loved these conversations. The books were so much more alive in this way.

My Dad passed away this summer, after a bout with lung cancer and a severe stroke. Unlike most baseball fans, I didn't have a baseball connection with my Pop. There is none of the proverbial "fathers playing catch with sons," though he made it to most of my Little League games and suffered through a Detroit Tigers contest in the late '70s. When the Tigers went to the World Series in '06, he wasn't someone I called frantically when they threw the damn thing, almost literally, away. I wish he'd loved baseball as I did, but he didn't and that's that.

However, before he died he and I shared two baseball books: the one I wrote and Arnold Hano's *A Day in the Bleachers*.

After plowing through *The End of Baseball* (which he loved, I'm proud to report), he had asked me to find another great baseball book for him to read. He wanted to understand just what it was I liked about the game. I suppose I could have handed over *Veck: As in Wreck*, which influenced my novel, but that one, as much as I love it, doesn't translate well to people who don't give a hoot about baseball. So I chose *A Day in the Bleachers* because it really is the one title I would recommend to anyone, male or female, love the game or hate it.

Well, Dad didn't love baseball but he loved Hano's book. *A Day in the Bleachers*, for those of you not in the know, captures one day, one game, with such loving detail you can almost smell the stale beer on the concrete floor of the Polo Grounds. Arnold Hano observed Game One of the 1954 World Series, between his beloved Giants and the Cleveland Indians, and he didn't leave anything out: the wonder of a well-played game, the thrill of shouting with thousands of other people, the often grubby and annoying manner in which crowds comport themselves, and the author's own, often curmudgeonly, opinions on everything. I swear that if I wanted to recruit nonbelievers, I'd hand out *A Day in the Bleachers* the way Christians hand out New Testaments.

After reading *A Day in the Bleachers*, Dad said that this was a "strange little book", and that he enjoyed its many oddities. Hano avoids most, if not all, of the usual clichés, and Dad and I both could relate to the author's closing summary of that afternoon—that it made him (Hano), "wonderfully, savagely happy." Who hasn't felt that way about something joyous?

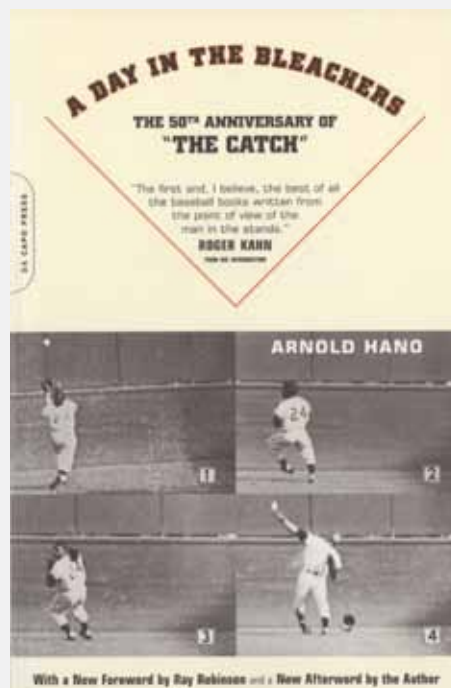
It's a small thing, reading a book with someone you love. Reading Hano's tiny masterpiece is one of many miniscule events in the 40-year relationship Dad and I shared, but like the bricks that make the Great Wall of China, it all adds up. You read a book, share it with someone, and it takes on new life. It enriches your relationship, and your understanding of said book. And later, when that person is gone, it becomes even more poignant. I now read *A Day*

*in the Bleachers* and think to myself that my father finally got what I loved about baseball, and that he was transported, as I was, to the Polo Grounds to see Willy Mays' famous catch. ("The way he wrote it," Dad said, "even I could tell that was some catch.")

The only point to this seemingly pointless essay, then, is this: Read. And read with someone you care about deeply. I guarantee that whatever book you choose will be a favorite for the rest of your life.

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Reprinted with permission from Peter Schilling Jr., [www.mudvillemagazine.com](http://www.mudvillemagazine.com). *A Day in the Bleachers* by Arnold Hano, Da Capo Press 2004, [www.perseusbooksgroup.com/dacapo/home.jsp](http://www.perseusbooksgroup.com/dacapo/home.jsp).





# A Game of Inches: The Story Behind the Innovations that Shaped Baseball

by Peter Morris

Ivan R. Dee

www.ivanrdee.com

**B**ut the exact year was not given, so it is impossible to say that [Charles] Bennett's contribution was a 'first,' a very dangerous word to employ in writing baseball history."

—Lee Allen, *Sporting News*, April 6, 1968

As Peter Morris points out in his introduction, a book of firsts could be endlessly long. And unreadable. But *A Game of Inches*—the only book to win both the Seymour Medal and the Casey Award for the best baseball book of the year—satisfies. Astonishingly well-researched and dense as a basswood bat, this newly revised and expanded edition (which combines the former 2-volume hardcover encyclopedia into a single paperback volume), is chock full of fascinating facts, little-known histories, and dry-roasted humor on everything from midget strike zones and ladies' softball skirt lengths to the unwritten color line and contract negotiations. And an eminently usable index makes the book the perfect armchair companion to quickly settle any game day dispute.

## EXCERPT

2.3.3 Crouches. The next logical step after batters began to deliberately strive to gain bases on balls was for them to start trying to help their chances by means of batting crouches. Charles "Duke" Farrell was one of the first, if not the actual originator. A reporter observed in 1889, "Charley Farrell gets many a base on balls by a clever trick that fools most umpires, and he worked it today on [umpire John] McQuaid as he has done before. In bracing himself to hit the ball he drops his shoulder a foot or possibly fifteen inches, and a ball which would be perfectly fair with the batsman standing erect is called 'ball'" (*Chicago Tribune*, May 25, 1889, 7).

This sportswriter clearly felt that McQuaid should not have modified the strike zone for a batter who crouched. It would be nice to know how other umpires interpreted this situation, but unfortunately this is the type of question that is difficult to resolve at this late date. What we can say is that many batters of the

era perceived the crouch as a means of drawing bases on balls, which strongly suggests that at least some umpires were reducing the strike zone of these batters. In 1903, *Sporting Life* noted, "The 'Eberfeld crouch' is the latest thing in Metropolitan base ball. The kid's position in trying to work the pitcher for a base on balls is what earned him the new name" (*Sporting Life*, August 8, 1903).

Acceptance of the crouch was slowed by the philosophy that "To be a good batsman it is necessary to stand erect" (quoted in *Pittsburgh Press*, April 28, 1890). But by the turn of the century, some batters were coming to see the crouch as an effective hitting posture. As noted by Skel Roach in "Keeping the Ball Down" (3.3.3), Willie Keeler made use of the crouch to chop and cut

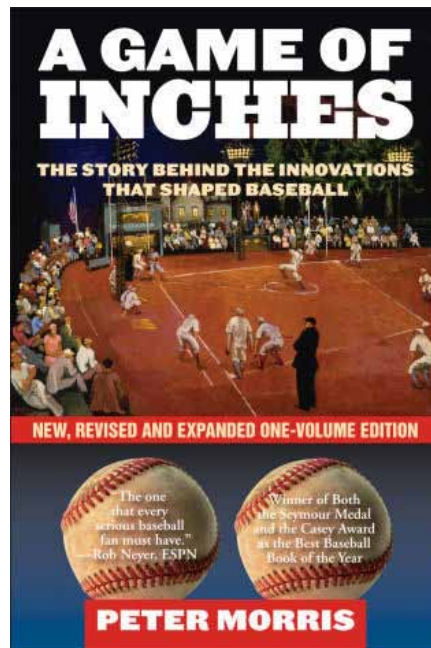
the ball. Another influential practitioner of the pronounced crouch was George Stone, whose peculiar stance prompted Billy Evans to observe, "[George Stone] uses a very heavy bat and assumes a crouching position at the plate, so much so that a spectator not knowing Stone would believe he was humpbacked. Stone stands close to the plate and in reality half of his body is extending over it when he crouches" (*Sporting News*, February 27, 1908). . . .

Of course, the ultimate example of using a crouch to increase the chances of drawing a free pass was Eddie Gaedel, the three-foot-seven midget hired by Bill Veeck. Gaedel pinch-hit for the St. Louis Browns in the second game of a double-header on August 19, 1951. He crouched so as to have virtually no strike zone and

drew a four-pitch walk. Since Gaedel had an official contract that had been submitted to the league, he was allowed to appear in that one game. But American League president Will Harridge refused to approve Gaedel's contract, ending his career.

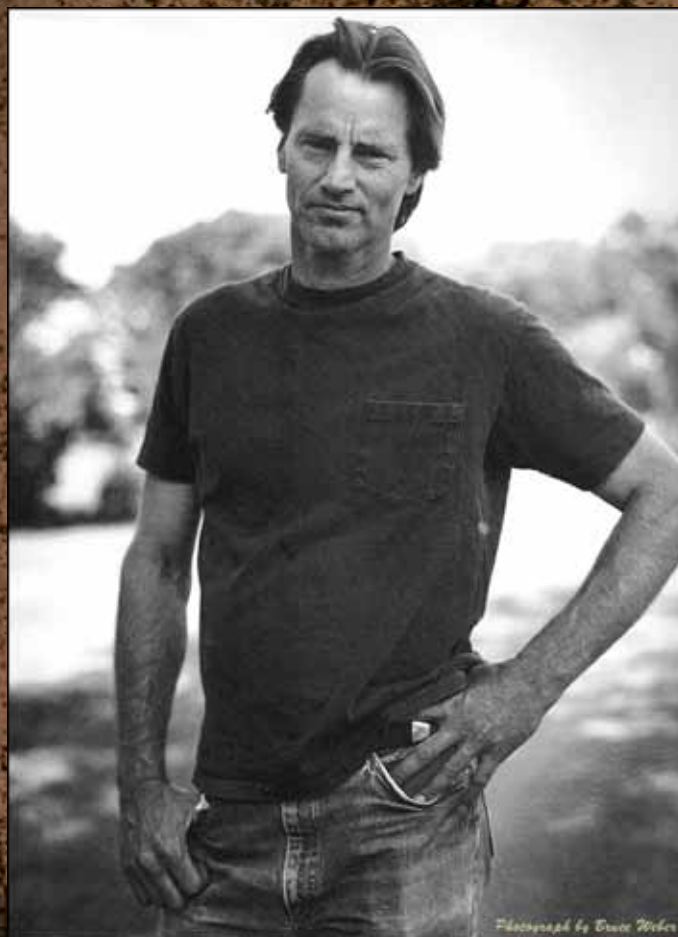
A James Thurber short story, "You Could Look It Up," features a midget who is used in a similar fashion, but Veeck claimed that the story had not been the source of his inspiration. Researcher Joe Overfield, however, discovered that Gaedel was not the first midget to appear in a professional game. In an inconsequential late-season 1905 Eastern League game at Baltimore, Buffalo manager George Stallings sent midget Jerry Sullivan up to pinch hit. The first pitch was far too high, but the second was in Sullivan's tiny strike zone and he singled over the third baseman's head. Sullivan ended up scoring and ended his professional career with a 1,000 batting average (Joe Overfield, "You Could Look It Up," *National Pastime* 10 [1990], 69-71). ■

*From A Game of Inches: The Story Behind the Innovations that Shaped Baseball by Peter Morris, Ivan R. Dee 2010, www.ivanrdee.com. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.*





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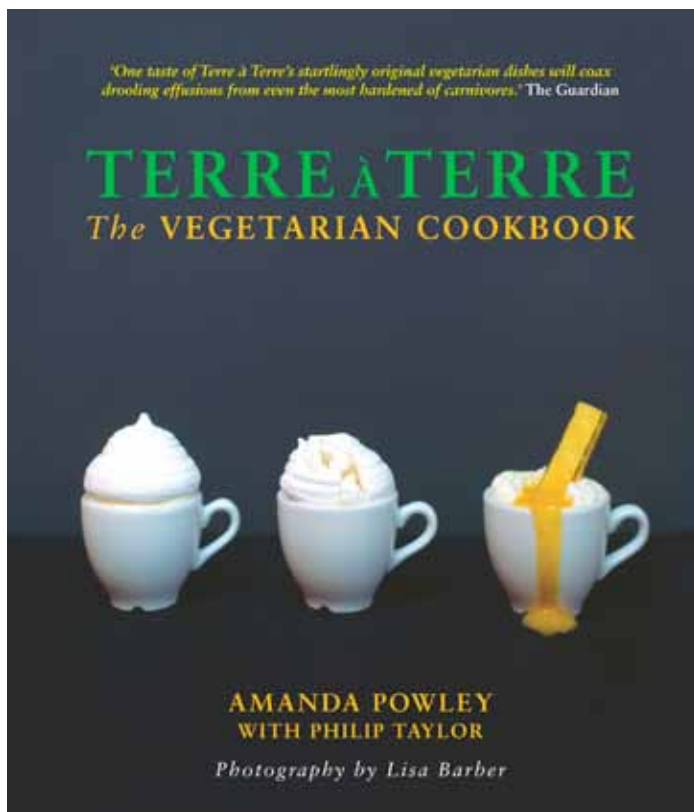
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# Eat Your Vegetables



## Terre à Terre The Vegetarian Cookbook

by Amanda Powley with Philip Taylor  
photography by Lisa Barber  
Absolute Press  
[www.absolutepress.co.uk](http://www.absolutepress.co.uk)

**A**manda Powley and Philip Taylor bonded in a subterranean British kitchen over their desire to create food without meat where less actually meant more, where vegetarian dining was about indulgence not abstinence. They borrowed from friends and family, bought a derelict Georgian property in the recession-hit Brighton of the early 1990s, and opened Terre à Terre, now considered by many to be the best vegetarian restaurant in all of Britain. Their first cookbook is a thing of beauty, filled with full-color photographs of artfully and impossibly presented food, and the recipes are not for the faint of heart. But despite the difficulty level, the ingredients are fresh and whole and the recipes completely doable when approached step-by-step. The staging, however, takes a steady hand.

**T**his is the Generation Next of vegan and vegetarian cookbooks, and it ain't your mother's *Moosewood*. From the glamorous, high-art composition of *Terre à Terre* to the local focus of *The Northwest Vegetarian Cookbook* and *Ripe from Around Here*, from the simplicity and velocity of *Easy Vegan* and *Speed Vegan* to the shared vegetarian/omnivore table of *Double Take*, there's something here for every veggie-lover and kitchen skill level, whether your priority is cooking whole ingredients from scratch or making something healthy quickly with a leg-up from pre-made ingredients. And there's even some surprising inspiration for those who want the lifestyle but dearly miss grandma's meatloaf. So pull up a chair, grab a fork, and start tasting.





Fried parmesan and **POLENTA PLUMPS** served with toy box tomatoes and olive cassoulet.



## Soba Salad (serves 4–6)

This dish has been on the menu in the restaurant almost since day one, so is virtually a tradition. It's a constant customer favourite, withstanding many a change in food trends and fulfilling the gluten free and vegan option with ease. Delicious lightly charred cubes of tamari coated smoked tofu, slippery with warm toasted sesame oil, secure crispy strings of vegetables, knitted together with soft soba noodles, all bathed in piquant miso, mirin, plum and ginger dressing. A scattering of wasabi spiced cashews and pomegranate seeds adds texture and sweetness to the savoury smoothness of the noodle tangle.

It might take a few goes to perfect the twist of the wrist to assemble the salad stacks with precision, but it's worth being patient because they look gorgeous and striking. And please don't let the more unfamiliar ingredients put you off trying this dish: it's surprisingly easy to put together. In Japanese cooking there are soba noodles, which are thin and made from buckwheat flour, and udon noodles, which are thick and made from wheat. Soba noodles are considered the noodle of choice in Tokyo and are ubiquitous—on street corners as fast food, in serious restaurants, and of course at home. Traditionally, good manners dictated much slurping and noisy consumption of the noodles, however these days it's not imperative!

### {wasabi cashews}

300g whole unsalted cashew nuts  
2 tablespoons wasabi powder  
(Japanese horseradish)  
20g caster sugar  
30ml water  
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Bake the cashews on a roasting tray at 160 degrees C/Gas Mark 3 for 15–20 minutes until they are golden brown. Make up 1½ tablespoons of the wasabi powder into a paste, according to the packet instructions. Bring the sugar and the water to the boil in a small pan, remove from the heat and add the wasabi paste, mixing it in thoroughly. Add the cashews to this wasabi syrup and

coat them well, turning them over with a spoon. Then sprinkle in the remaining ½ tablespoon wasabi powder, add seasoning to taste, and stir again. Return the coated cashews to the roasting tray and bake at 110 degrees C/Gas Mark ¼ for about 45 minutes, until they are dry and crunchy. Allow the nuts to cool down, then store in an airtight container.

### {miso and mirin dressing}

50g white miso (soy paste)  
50ml mirin (sweet rice wine)  
25ml toasted sesame oil  
2 teaspoons umeboshi purée  
(pickled plum)  
125g best quality sushi ginger (pickled ginger)  
1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar  
2 tablespoons yuzu juice (Japanese citrus fruit)—or use lime juice  
75ml grapeseed oil  
about 20ml water

Put all the ingredients together in a blender and blitz on high until the mixture has a smooth coating consistency. (You need to add just enough water to thin the mixture.)

### {soba salad}

250g soba noodles  
1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil  
35g carrot, peeled  
35g daikon (Japanese white radish or mooli), peeled  
35g courgette  
35g mangetout  
100g pomegranate seeds  
35g mizuna (Japanese greens)  
35g beansprouts

Bring a large pan of water to the boil and submerge the noodles. Bring straight back to the boil, then reduce to a medium heat and cook for 5–6 minutes. Drain the noodles in a colander, then refresh under cold running water. When they are cold, drain thoroughly then toss them in a bowl with the sesame oil, making sure each strand is well coated, otherwise they will stick together. Now chill.

Slice the carrot, daikon and courgette through a Japanese mandolin (also known as a vegetable spaghetti machine), or hand slice them as finely as possible. Thinly slice the mangetout by hand. Set aside half the pomegranate seeds and a few of the mizuna leaves for garnishing, and gently mix all the other ingredients with the cold noodles.

The salad will be dressed just before you are ready to serve it.

### {smoked tofu}

250g smoked tofu  
1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil  
1 tablespoon tamari (gluten free soy sauce)

Cut the tofu into 16 cubes and fry in the oil for 2 minutes until the cubes are brown on all sides. Add the tamari, coating all of the tofu, and continue to fry for 2 minutes until the tofu is glazed. Remove the cubes from the pan and keep hot.

### {to assemble}

20g best quality sushi ginger (pickled ginger), finely shredded

Gently mix the bowl of salad and noodles with three quarters of the miso and mirin dressing. Twist up little piles of the dressed mix, and heap them on to big serving plates. Splash each plate with the remaining dressing. Thread the smoked tofu cubes on to wooden skewers with the shredded sushi ginger and reserved mizuna leaves. Top each noodle pile with a smoked tofu skewer and scatter the reserved pomegranate seeds, the wasabi cashews and any remaining sesame oil artistically around the plate.

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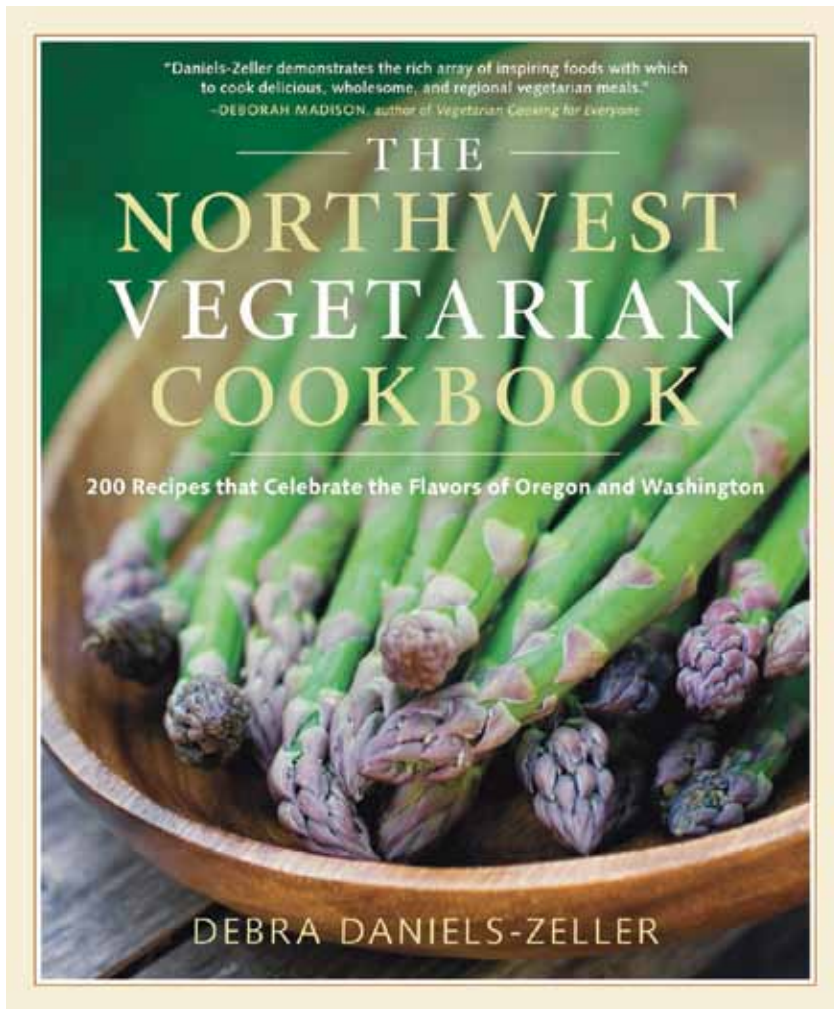
*From Terre à Terre: The Vegetarian Cookbook by Amanda Powley with Philip Taylor, photography by Lisa Barber, Absolute Press 2009, www.absolute-press.co.uk. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.*



**SOBA SALAD**

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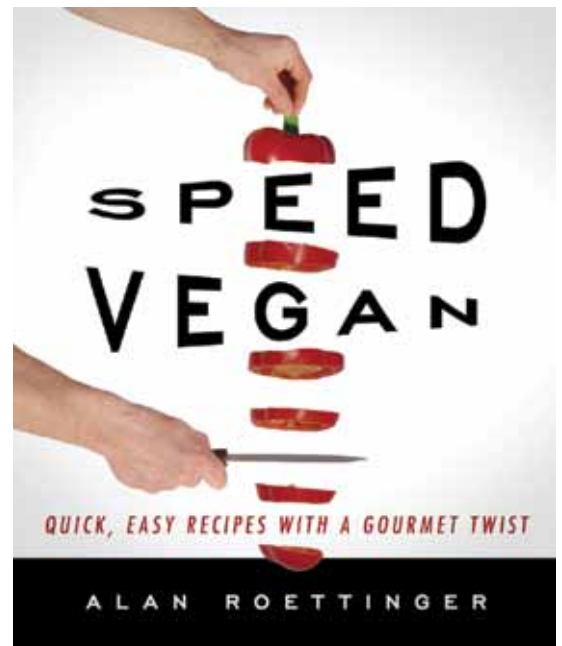




**The Northwest Vegetarian Cookbook**  
**200 Recipes that Celebrate the Flavors of Oregon and Washington**

by Debra Daniels-Zeller  
Timber Press  
[www.timberpress.com](http://www.timberpress.com)

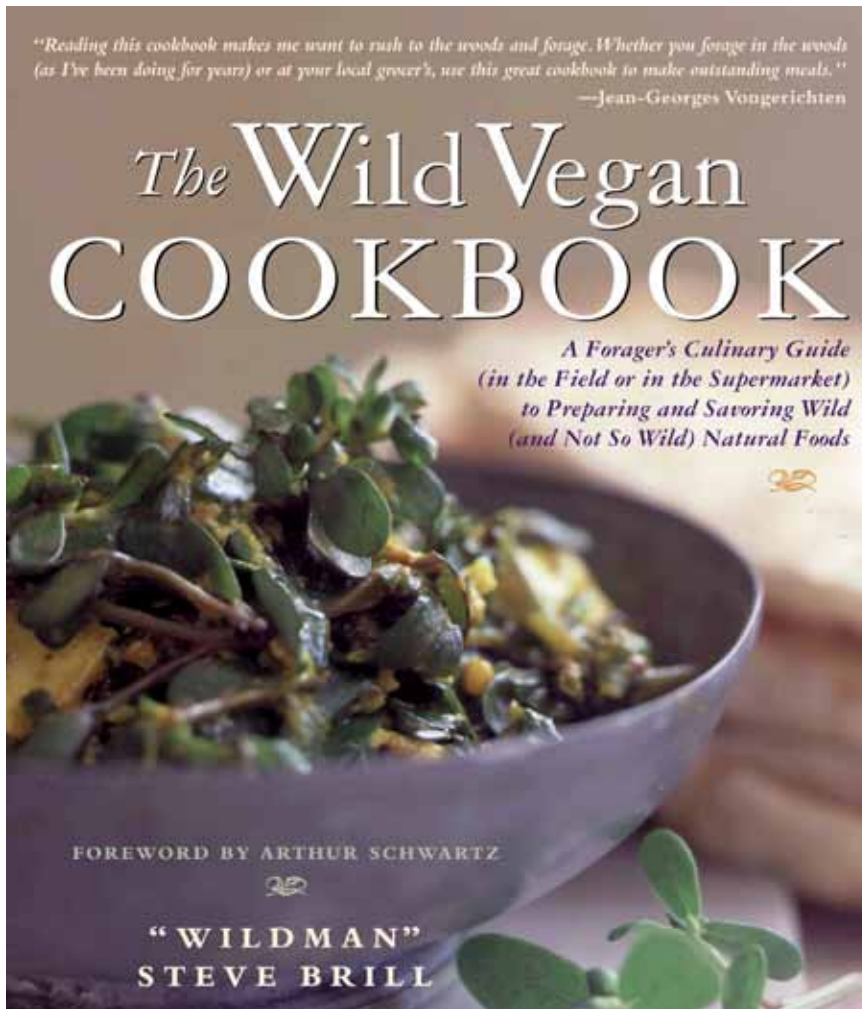
**D**ebra Daniels-Zeller makes the clear point that it is not hard to eat locally and well in the Pacific Northwest. She visits farms and farmers' markets across Oregon and Washington to source the best ingredients, taking advantage of pre-made condiments like salsa, pasta sauce, and jam. There's Pear Clafouti from Cliffside Orchards in Kettle Falls, Washington; Ginger-Peach Scones from Mair Farm-Taki near Yakima; Cranberry-Cilantro and Sun-dried Tomato-Balsamic vinaigrettes from Willie Green's Organic Farm in Monroe; and Eggplant and Red Pepper Lasagna made with locally grown eggplant and pasta sauce from Winter Green and Gathering Together farms in Oregon. Daniels-Zeller documents the seasons, from spring rhubarb and asparagus to summer berries and greens to apples, pears, persimmons, and cranberries through late fall. The best part? The orchard-ripe fruit recipes.



**Speed Vegan**  
**Quick, Easy Recipes with a Gourmet Twist**

by Alan Roettinger  
Book Publishing Company  
[www.bookpubco.com](http://www.bookpubco.com)

**A**lan Roettinger wasn't a vegan when he started his cookbook, but he was one by the time the book went to press. A private chef to the stars for close to 30 years, Roettinger knows how to cater to limited diets. And time. His book is all about foods that can be prepared in 30 minutes or less. "After only a few weeks, I can say unequivocally that my body is ecstatic with the change," he says. "I have more energy, less sleep, and in my athletic activities I feel invincible. I'd say that's a pretty good endorsement of the vegan lifestyle, wouldn't you agree?"



## The Wild Vegan Cookbook

**A Forager's Culinary Guide (in the Field or in the Supermarket) to Preparing and Savoring Wild (and Not so Wild) Natural Foods**

by Steve Brill

Harvard Common Press

[www.harvardcommonpress.com](http://www.harvardcommonpress.com)

**A**rrested in 1986 by undercover park rangers for plucking and eating a dandelion in Central Park, “Wildman” Steve Brill (named for his lifelong love of jazz, not the organic nature of his diet) has long foraged for the flora less traveled. His arrest led to national news coverage which led to a job in the New York City Parks Department, ironically leading the same wild food tours he was conducting when first handcuffed. But he left civil service in 1990, once again to march to the beat of his own drum, this time giving private tours, writing his first cookbook—*Identifying and Harvesting Edible and Medicinal Plants in Wild (and Not So Wild) Places*—and hosting TV shows. Now he’s back with a sizable softcover tome (with more than 400 pages of recipes) that focuses less on plant identification and more on how to cook your harvest.

And what, you might ask, makes wild foods worth foraging for? They have coped with herbivores, competing plants, and harsh climates over millenia to survive, evolving an extraordinary level of nutrients and flavor. (Did you know that the sour and pungent flavors human enjoy, like onions, garlic, winter-green, and licorice, were actually developed to discourage plant-eating insects and animals?) So if you need a recipe for chickweed, daylilly, pokeweed, or fiddlehead fern, here’s the cookbook for you. Even if you’re not not so sure about those mushrooms sprouting in your backyard after a good rain, Brill offers store-bought substitutes that make his book a unique and comprehensive addition to any health-conscious larder.

### Chicken in a Hurry

When you have pounds and pounds of this choice but perishable mushroom to prepare in a hurry, here’s a method that is as good as it is quick. If you use very fresh, young chicken mushrooms, you’ll make wild mushroom coverts of anyone who tries this side dish.

¼ cup olive oil  
 Juice of 1 lemon  
 6 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
 3 tablespoons tamari soy sauce  
 1 tablespoon chili paste or any hot sauce  
 1 tablespoon paprika  
 12 cups sliced chicken mushrooms

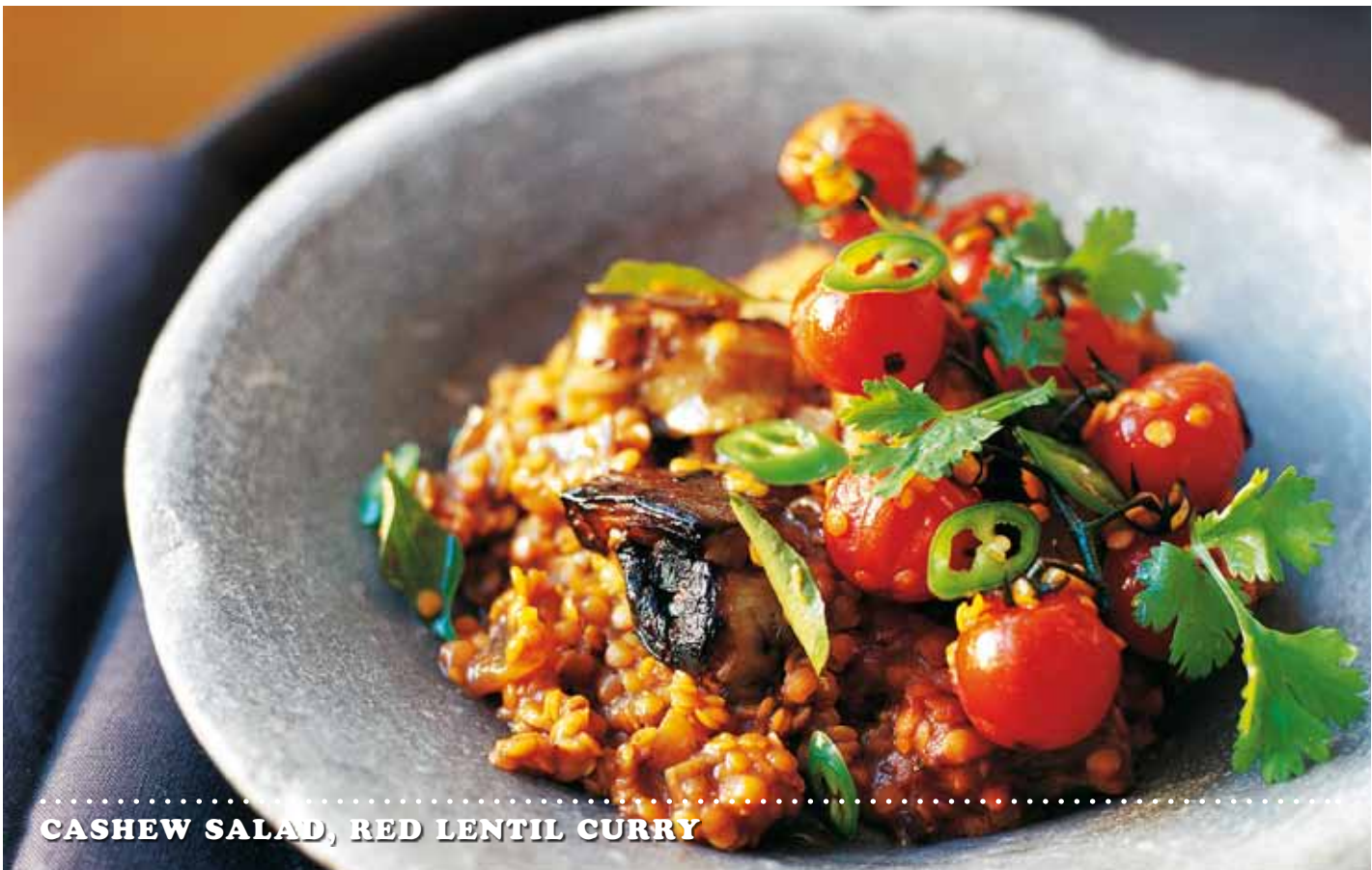
1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
2. In a small bowl, mix together the olive oil, lemon juice, garlic, tamari, chili paste, and paprika.
3. Place the chicken mushrooms in a 13 x 9 x 2-inch oiled baking dish, toss to coat well with the sauce, and bake, uncovered, until most of the liquid has cooked off, about 45 minutes. Serve hot.

**Note:** The chicken mushroom freezes well after you cook it.

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*From The Wild Vegan Cookbook by Steve Brill © 2010 and used by permission of the Harvard Common Press.*



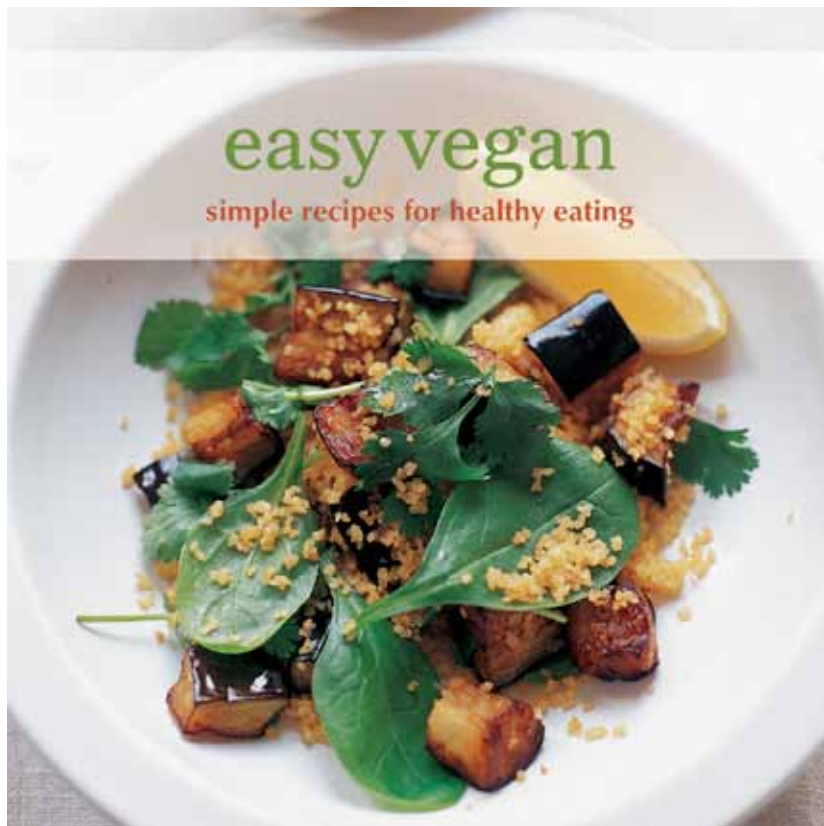


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**CASHEW SALAD, RED LENTIL CURRY**

## Easy Vegan Simple Recipes for Healthy Eating

Ryland Peters & Small  
[www.rylandpeters.com](http://www.rylandpeters.com)

A diminutive book chock full of photographs and recipes, *Easy Vegan* strikes a perfect balance between simplicity and sophistication, with flavorful whole-ingredient recipes for everything from soups and snacks to main dishes, drinks, and desserts. Recipes come from 19 international chefs, including Louise Pickford (*The Inspired Vegetarian*), Ross Dobson (*Wholesome Kitchen*), Linda Tubby (*Spanish Country Kitchen*), and Vatcharin Bhumichitr (*Thai Vegetarian Cooking*), adding to the diverse, yet cohesive, content.



### Artichoke Tarator

Tarator is a fabulous garlic and nut dip, and this version has artichokes to make it extra special. Perfect as a dip with vegetable crudité—it goes especially well with endive. In Turkey it is served as a spooning sauce so do try it with grilled vegetables too.

2 slices of day-old bread, crusts removed  
6 canned artichoke hearts, drained  
Freshly squeezed juice of 1 lemon  
3–4 garlic cloves, crushed  
½ teaspoon sea salt  
½ cup/70 g blanched almonds, finely chopped  
4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling  
Toasted slivered/flaked almonds, to garnish (optional)  
Vegetable crudité, to serve

### Makes about 2 cups/500 ml

Put the bread in a strainer/sieve and pour over boiling water. When cool enough to handle, squeeze out any excess water.

Chop the artichoke hearts and put them in a food processor or large pestle and mortar with the bread, lemon juice, garlic, salt, and almonds. Blend together, adding the oil slowly to combine.

To serve, drizzle with olive oil and scatter with the almonds, if using. Serve with a selection of vegetable crudité for dipping. The tarator will keep, covered, in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.

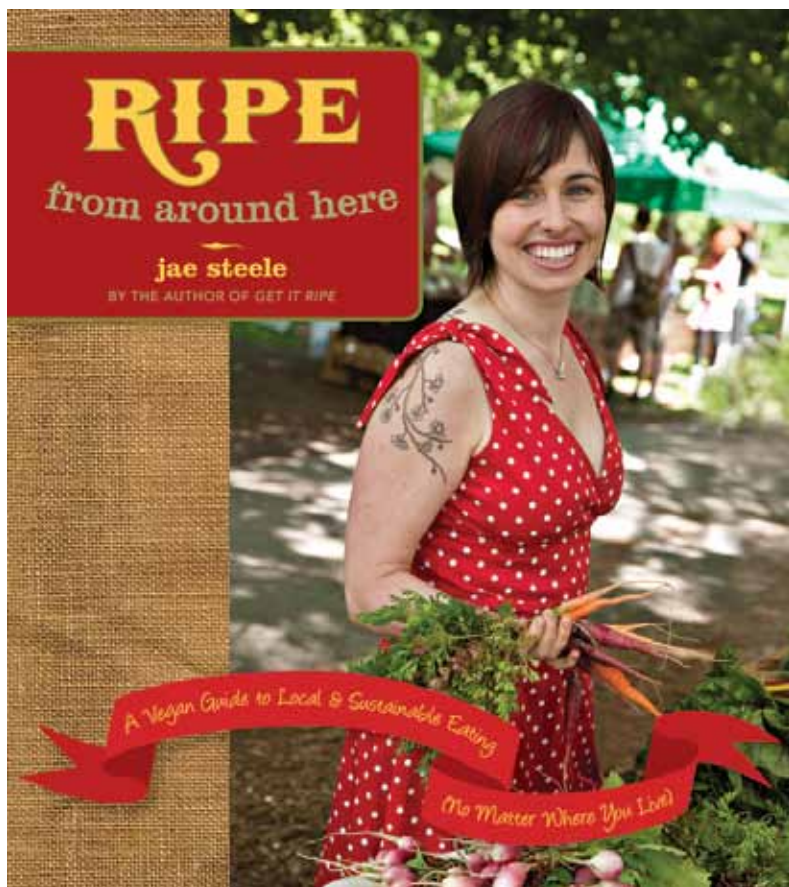
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**BLUEBERRY LAVENDER ICE CREAM**



## Ripe from Around Here A Vegan Guide to Local and Sustainable Eating (No Matter Where You Live)

by Jae Steele  
Arsenal Pulp Press  
[www.arsenalpulp.com](http://www.arsenalpulp.com)

**T**his is Toronto-based holistic nutritionist and vegan blogger Jae Steele's second cookbook, following close on the heels of the success of her debut effort *Get It Ripe*. But, despite the title, she wants you to know that this is no 100-mile diet—she believes in supporting local family-owned farms, sustainability, and non-altered produce, but she also recognizes the reality of a globalized food network that creates unique economic opportunities for distant farmers and sources healthy spices and oils that simply aren't available closer to home. Her bottom line? Eating mindfully with joy. Which is not hard to do when given her recipes for everything from blueberry peach pancakes to fried green tomatoes to roasted ratatouille to strawberry shortcake. Her detailed guides to home composting and pantry stocking are a welcome bonus.

### Blueberry Lavender Ice Cream

- 2¼ cups wild blueberries (fresh or frozen)
- 1½ cups cold filtered water or —for a richer dessert but with less of a color punch—1½ cups coconut milk
- ⅔ cup agave nectar or maple syrup
- 2–3 tablespoons fresh lavender flowers (or 2 tablespoons dried)
- 1½ cups or one 13.5-ounce (400-mL) can coconut milk (in addition to above, if using)
- 2 tablespoons liquid non-hydrogenated coconut oil

What you've got here is a gorgeous color and sophisticated taste!

1. Combine 1 cup of the blueberries, water, sweetener, and lavender in a blender or food processor, and process for 1 minute, until very smooth. While the machine is running, pour in the coconut milk and coconut oil in a steady stream.
2. Process as per your ice cream maker's directions (this will likely involve freezing the mixture for about 30 minutes before pouring it into the ice cream maker). Freeze until firm, about 3–6 hours.

Makes about 5½ cups.

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*From Ripe from Around Here: A Vegan Guide to Local and Sustainable Eating (No Matter Where You Live) by Jae Steele, Arsenal Pulp Press 2010, [www.arsenalpulp.com](http://www.arsenalpulp.com). Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.*







JEREMY HOLT

# double take

ONE FABULOUS RECIPE, TWO FINISHED DISHES  
Feeding Vegetarians and Omnivores Together



A.J. RATHBUN

## Double Take

One Fabulous Recipe, Two Finished Dishes

by A.J. Rathbun and Jeremy Holt  
Harvard Common Press  
[www.harvardcommonpress.com](http://www.harvardcommonpress.com)

There are a lot of mixed marriages out there with carnivores and vegetarians sitting at the same table for supper. Rathbun and Holt want you to know that nobody has to compromise—you can have your Bolognese and eat it, too. Paired recipes (one with meat, one without) range from bacon and cheese tartlets (with veggie bacon) to frisky fish sticks (with tofu) to meatloaf (with veggie crumbles) to Sunday roast (with seitan). This is comfort food that, cooked on parallel tracks, takes the leisurely time of slow-simmered sauces and braises, leaving everyone feeling satisfied.

### Tagliatelle Bolognese

Serves 3 to 4 vegetarians and 3 to 4 meat-eaters

4 ounces dried black beluga lentils (see Note)  
1 quart water  
4 tablespoons olive oil, plus more as needed  
1 medium-size carrot, chopped  
1 medium-size onion, chopped  
1 celery stalk, chopped  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
8 ounces ground pork  
8 ounces lean ground beef or veal  
2 ounces pancetta or unsmoked bacon, finely chopped  
1 pound mushrooms, stems included, chopped (we recommend portobello for their size and ease of use)  
One 14.5-ounce can crushed tomatoes  
1 cup white wine  
1 tablespoon vegetable *glace*, Marmite, or Vegemite  
½ cup whole milk  
½ cup heavy cream  
2 bay leaves  
1 recipe fresh pasta sheets, well floured, rolled up, then cut into long tagliatelle noodles, or  
1 pound dried tagliatelle or fettucine  
½ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese (2 ounces), for garnish

Jeremy's favorite memory associated with pasta Bolognese: It was my great-aunt and great-uncle's 50th wedding anniversary, and my cousins threw a huge party at a resort outside of Phoenix to celebrate. It was the first time that both sides of the family—one side being Kansan, the other Icelandic-Canadian—had been together since the wedding of the guests of honor. The night before the shindig, my cousin Mark, Mark's childhood friend Louise, and I made a ridiculous amount of pasta Bolognese to feed 40 or so family members and close friends. Always the lord of the manor, Mark dispatched Louise to do the grinding of the meat for the sauce, and I jumped in later to handle the browning of the meat. We fiddled with the sauce for the better part of the day, and it culminated in the best possible pasta in the best possible company. Although we had many great meals during that trip, this is the one that will remain indelibly imprinted on my mind.

1. Place the lentils and water in a medium-size saucepan. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to a simmer and cook until the lentils are just tender, 10 to 12 minutes.
2. Heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil in each of two heavy-bottomed saucepans over medium heat. Add half of the carrot, onion, celery, and garlic to each pan. Cook until the vegetables are soft, 10 to 15 minutes.
3. Increase the heat to medium-high and add the pork, beef, and pancetta to one pan; add the mushrooms and parboiled lentils to the other. Cook for another 10 to 15 minutes to brown the meat and mushrooms, stirring occasionally. The vegetarian sauce may be a little dry, so don't be afraid to toss in another tablespoon or two of olive oil if necessary.
4. Add half of the tomatoes and ½ cup of the wine to each pan. Scrape up any browned bits from the bottom of the pans, and stir them into the sauce with a wooden utensil. Add the vegetable *glace* to the vegetarian and cook for another 5 minutes or so to reduce the wine and tomatoes, stirring occasionally.

5. Reduce the heat to low and add ¼ cup of the milk and ¼ cup of the cream to each pan. (From here on, it is very important to prevent the sauce from bubbling too rapidly, as doing so will curdle the milk and cream rather unattractively. A little curdling is natural in this recipe, but you want to avoid a “cottage cheese” appearance.) Add 1 bay leaf to each pot and simmer the sauces for 45 to 60 minutes, stirring occasionally.

6. When the sauces are about done, cook the pasta in well-salted boiling water. If using fresh pasta, it will only need 2 to 3 minutes of cooking. If using dried pasta, cook according to the package instructions until al dente. Reserve a cup or so of the cooking water to loosen the sauce as needed.

7. Divide the cooked pasta between two large serving bowls. Ladle about 1 cup of the vegetarian sauce into one bowl and 1 cup of the meaty sauce into the other bowl and toss. The pasta should be lightly dressed, not buried under a mound of sauce. If the pasta and sauce mixture is too thick and difficult to toss, thin it out by adding some of the reserved pasta cooking water, 1 tablespoon at a time, until the desired consistency is achieved.

8. Garnish both bowls of pasta with Parmigiano-Reggiano, and serve.

**Note:** Look for dried black beluga lentils at Trader Joe's or in the bulk section of many natural food stores. Any dark green or brown dried lentil can be substituted.

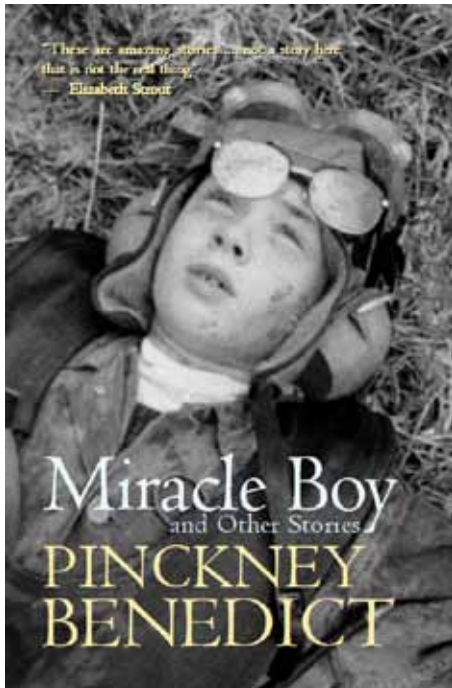
**Make it all vegetarian:** Omit the ground pork, ground beef, and pancetta, and use 2 pounds mushrooms, 8 ounces lentils, and 2 tablespoons vegetable *glace*.

**Make it all meat:** Omit the mushrooms, lentils, and vegetable *glace*, and use 1 pound each of the ground pork and ground beef and 4 ounces of pancetta. ■

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Press 53  
www.press53.com

The 14 stories in *Miracle Boy and Other Stories* have appeared separately in such publications as *Esquire* and the *Ontario Review*, but gathered together they form a mythic world of small tragedies and large isolation. We talked to Benedict about the ever-present fear of losing a limb, the power of narrative, and his particularly compelling title story, “Miracle Boy.”  
—Margaret Brown

### Shelf Unbound: What was the genesis of the story “Miracle Boy”?

**Pinckney Benedict:** “Miracle Boy” came about primarily as an evocation of a couple of terrors from my childhood. The first was riding on the fender of the various Allis-Chalmers tractors on my family’s dairy farm. We owned three Allis-Chalmers tractors, in various horsepowers and configurations, but I used the Case Agri-King for the story because I love that name: Agri-King! It’s kind of how I think of my dad, who still runs—with my older brother—the farm in the Greenbrier Valley: He’s the Agri-King!

The fenders on those tractors were slick and not really made for riding on, and the fields over which we rode—my father always driving of course—were rutted and rough, and falling off always seemed to me to be a distinct possibility. Falling off meant more than just a pretty good drop onto hard ground, though. We were always pulling some kind of implement, mower or hay-rake or haybine or, as in “Miracle Boy,” silage chopper, and a fall meant going into or under the thing.

It seems like every farming family we knew had members who were missing fingers, limbs, eyes, from agricultural accidents, and I had a morbid terror of losing a limb (or limbs) in this way. Oddly, I never worried much about dying; it was the idea of being maimed that haunted me. The accident that takes the hand of the father of Geronimo and Eskimo Pie—a hydraulic fencepost driver, a hand left carelessly on top of the post—actually happened on a nearby place when I was a boy, to a guy ever afterward known down at the barbershop as Lefty. I knew with perfect assurance that something like it was going to happen to me (for the record, it never did), but that wasn’t the kind of thing that you could tell your dad when he instructed you to climb up onto the tractor’s fender because you were going somewhere, to mow or rake a field or to chop some corn. And the lure of being with my father while he worked (at the side of the Agri-King!) was so exciting that I wouldn’t have stopped riding the fender even if I’d thought it might have been permissible to do so.

And I vividly recall when I started reading in the papers—I was old enough to be driving the tractors myself then, no longer riding on the fender—about people whose amputated limbs were being surgically reattached, and seeing the name “Miracle Boy” affixed to one of the stories—I think he got his arms lopped off and managed to call the paramedics by using a pencil held in his teeth—and thinking to myself, Holy cats! That’s amazing. Stoicism in action. One day I’ll write about that.

The other terror (which was also a thrill) was climbing up into a treehouse made by my older brother and his friends when they were in their teens, when I was eight or nine. It rested in the crotch of a tree that was nothing but trunk, straight up, for perhaps 25 feet, before it divided and branched out. The ladder they had devised consisted of a line of 60-penny nails driven straight into the trunk of the tree. I’m not particularly physically brave—as my all-consuming horror at the idea of falling off the tractor perhaps illustrates—and climbing up that series of nails to gain entrance to their hideout (with its cache of tattered porn magazines, so worth the climb!), was as painful and as exhausting as anything I’ve ever done, except for perhaps the descent

that followed. For the story, I combined that experience with many days of fence-building, pounding nail after nail into square locust posts (locust is as hard as iron! at least when you're driving nails by hand), to imagine how Lizard managed to make his way up the utility pole.

**Shelf: Which character came to you first?**

**Benedict:** Miracle Boy was initially at the center of the story. I wrote the small scene that happens just before he falls off of the tractor early on and thought that most of the story would be like that, written from his point of view.

Miracle Boy himself is based (as much as he's based on anyone specific) on a guy named Doug G\_\_\_\_\_, who lived in my hometown in southern West Virginia. He was a couple of years older than I was, and had been horribly burned a few years before I ever met him. He looked melted, truly. I was fascinated with him, as were all of the kids whom I know. I wish I could say that my interest in him was kindly or generous, but I really just wanted to look at him up close, to see what burns like that actually looked like. I knew that it was rude to stare, and so mostly I saw Doug in brief glimpses, when I thought I could look without being detected. There were lots of rumors about how he had suffered such terrible injuries. The one that was repeated most often is that, while his family home was burning down, Doug (quite young, maybe six or seven at the time) had grabbed his infant sibling (brother, sister, they seemed interchangeable in the various tellings of the tale) and hustled the baby outside. The house was engulfed in flame, and Doug, shielding the baby with his own body, had been grievously burned. A hero!

He seemed a nice enough guy, though I never got to know him well.

Quiet and aware that his appearance was gruesome and unnerving, but he never seemed to want to hide himself. I always (in that smug way that one feels such emotions) pitied him until one time, when I came home from college, I saw him briefly (he was easily recognizable, as you can imagine—an adult-size version of his candle-wax boyhood self) and he was driving a beautiful white '69 Chevy Z28, rocking that classic 302 V8 mill with twin Holley carbs (290 horsepower from the factory, my ass! more like 400). At that moment, I understood that—whatever his misfortunes had been—he owned a much more badass car than I ever would, and I had no cause to pity him any longer. (At the time I was driving an old Ford Mach 1, which is not nothing, but it's not a '69 Z28, and I'm a GM guy at heart anyway.) He probably, and rightly, pitied me.

**Shelf: You grew up on your family's dairy farm. This story of small town farm boys in some ways feels nostalgic but is actually brutal, un-idealized reality. Is this harsh nostalgia your personal perspective or one you took on as narrator?**

**Benedict:** I like the phrase “harsh nostalgia” to describe the primary mode of my storytelling and believe that I'll begin using it as though I had come up with it myself. It describes exactly how I feel about my boyhood: I miss many parts of it—the freedoms, the excitement of innocence (or naïveté), the delight in the everyday. And in a strange way I also miss the near-constant terrors: awful nightmares, and waking nightmares that were just as bad (my imagination has always been dramatic), and fistfights, the awful practical jokes played on me by my older siblings and their friends, the utter inability to communicate my thoughts and feelings, and the sense I had of ter-

rifying, paralyzing helplessness.

Life is considerably easier now, but it is also, I have to admit, a great deal less vivid. My stories are one of the ways that I have of returning to that earlier time, which I miss but which I would not live through again for any amount of money.

**Shelf: Miracle Boy says, “It's miracles around us every day.” Do you see miracles in this story?**

**Benedict:** I think it's a miracle that it was initially published in a commercial magazine! (It appeared in *Esquire*.) I think it's kind of a miracle that Lizard doesn't die, either by electrocution or by falling to his death, just as I think it's kind of a miracle that I didn't die during any of the million misadventures—with firearms, with liquor, with drugs, with tractors and animals and cars that were far too fast—of my own growing up. And I think it's a miracle that, at the end, Lizard realizes that someone besides him has real existence. That's the hardest and rarest thing: to understand that other people are real, that they are not just figments of the imagination, not just shadows or ghosts, and that they must be accorded the dignity (however much that might be) that's accorded to actual living beings. It's hard for me, anyway, and so it seems miraculous when it happens either in me or in someone I observe or even, as in the case of “Miracle Boy,” in someone I've created.

I also take pretty seriously the idea that things like limb reattachment surgery are miraculous, but that we have become so dulled to their miraculous nature we hardly even notice anymore. Why are there no more miracles, we ask, when we're surrounded by them all the time. Same goes for space flight, iPads, and Android phones. I'm still waiting on flying cars and X-ray glasses, but I imagine when they do finally come



along, I'll use them for a while, be amazed, and then say, "Ho hum, why are there no miracles in my life?"

**Shelf: Which character do you have the most sympathy for?**

**Benedict:** Lizard. If there's anyone in the story who is my stand-in, it's Lizard. At least, Lizard is the one I'd like to be. He's a representation of what I might have been like if during my boyhood I'd been capable of learning moral lessons from the things that happened around me (though I paid relatively little attention to anything that happened around me, because my head was always stuck in a book of some sort, or a comic book; it took a lot of pain to get my attention.)

I'm probably actually more like Eskimo Pie, who I always pictured as being called that because he loves Eskimo Pies, which I also do. He's a fellow of some girth, as am I, which is why he's the one who sits on Miracle Boy. Lots of contemporary problems could be solved, I think, just by having large people sit on smaller people. It's not as openly aggressive as punching, and it's actually more effective. A buddy of mine who works in a jail—also a fellow of girth—has told me some great stories about sitting on prisoners who were getting out of control. Works like a charm. So I like Eskimo Pie a lot.

Geronimo I don't have much of a read on. I do know that he went on to join the Navy, because he shows up as the backseater in the F14 Phantom that crashes in the story "The World, the Flesh, and the Devil."

**Shelf: I read the story and then went back to it after a few days and was stunned to see how short it actually was—just over 11 pages. You tell an incredibly full, vivid, memorable story in such a scarce space—did you write it longer in**

**your head or on paper and then pare it down?**

**Benedict:** What a nice compliment! Thank you. My stories tend to be quite long: the longest in the Miracle Boy collection is something like 14,000 words. So I'm very happy when I manage to do something in a compact space, as with "Miracle Boy." I always tell myself when I begin writing a new story that this time I'll write a story that's perfect and gem-like and only 3,000 words long, so that magazines will be able easily to find space for it. And generally I end up with something long and gangling, something in the 7,000- to 9,000-word range, with tangents and digressions and minor characters who go off and do oddball things. And I like the freedom I have in those sprawling stories—but my ideal, when I sit down to write, is something more along the lines of "Miracle Boy." I happily fail at my ideals, though.

**Shelf: Your first book of short stories, *Town Smokes*, was published in 1987. How have your writing and your writing style evolved since then?**

**Benedict:** It feels to me as though I'm taking more chances in my writing now: The stories are stranger and look much more like the world that I see in my head, that I have always seen in my head. I'm much less worried about a kind of theoretical literary perfection now (this was my idea, when I started out writing stories, to create some sort of small perfection, and I could drive myself mad pursuing that ever-receding goal) and much more interested in telling a story—getting a real narrative on the page—that will catch people up, that catches me up as much as anybody else, and that tells some morsel of truth about the world.

Chiefly, I think, I'm enjoying the act

of writing far more than I have in my past books. It feels like play to me, and I feel free to be mischievous, to make in-jokes and personal references that only a very small number of my readers (perhaps none of them) will ever get, to make plot and character moves that I know will baffle and frustrate folks (also intrigue, I hope), simply because that's the thing I see in my head. My stories are shaped much more like me these days.

**Shelf: As a reader, what do you value most in writing?**

**Benedict:** Powerful narrative. I see a lot of very "fine" writing—by which I mean writing in which the sentences are mellifluous, the paragraphs graceful, the diction intelligent and challenging—in which nothing much happens at all. I've taught for years in various MFA programs, and I believe that, while it's pretty easy to teach talented folks to write fluid, stylish prose, prose that looks like it belongs in a book, it's pretty damned hard to teach them that the prose needs to tell a story. Stuff needs to happen; occurrences of vital import (at least to the characters) need to take place. MFA programs seem to me to have made the lovely sentence a commonplace virtue; now what separates real writers from wannabes is the narrative impulse.

It's a kind of charisma that's hard to define, the storytelling gene (you either have it or you don't, I think), that informs my favorite writing.

**Shelf: What's a typical day of writing like for you?**

**Benedict:** I don't have a typical day, though I wish I did. I always read with envy and admiration about the habits of other writers, how intrepid they are, how they rise before dawn or write into the middle of the night, how they cannot rest until they've achieved a certain word count or

created a certain amount of splendor that day. (I suspect that many of these accounts of folks' working habits, though not all by any means, are wishful thinking from excellent fictioneers.) My wife is also a writer, and she's much better about actually putting in the hours required to create a meaningful body of work. She's one of those people who, when she talks about the discipline required to be a writer, I believe her.

Like most of us, I'm a family sort, and my family is a lot of fun. I have a teaching job, and I find it pretty tough to write a whole lot during the semester. I like my sleep, and I like to read, and I like to watch movies and TV: I like all of these at least as much as I like to write, and probably more, since writing is work (even if it's a very enjoyable sort of work) and these other things are leisure. And so I give them as much time as possible in my schedule. I'm ambitious for the quality of my work (but not manically so—I should be more exacting of myself) but not particularly ambitious

for its quantity. Certainly the world does not seem in a rush for me to produce piles of the stuff!

So my writing day contains exactly as much writing as I can fit in around the edges of the rest of my life. Mostly I spend time planning in my head what I will write next: stealing ideas from what I read, noting the quirks of the people around me and imagining how a character might enact them, making up grandiose plots that I know I will never actually enact on paper. Some stories are so much fun to make up and to revisit again and again that I never even bother to write them down. Those are actually my favorites, and so private and idiosyncratic and arcane that I keep them wholly to myself.

**Shelf: What have you read lately that you would recommend?**

**Benedict:** Oh gosh! So much great work by young writers: my grad students surprise me all the time with work that should be published and

ooohed and aahed over, which should make them famous and celebrated, though that likely will not happen. I tell them that their sole job in my classes is to freak me out, and many of them take up the challenge with some success.

Published work: *In the Devil's Territory* by my friend Kyle Minor [Dzanc Books, [www.dzanc-books.org](http://www.dzanc-books.org)]. *Give + Take* by Stona Fitch [Thomas Dunne Books, [us.macmillan.com/thomasdunne.aspx](http://us.macmillan.com/thomasdunne.aspx)]. I'm greatly enjoying *The Passage* by my old Iowa schoolmate Justin Cronin [Ballantine Books, [ballantine.atrandom.com](http://ballantine.atrandom.com)]. All highly narrative stuff, all beautifully written, all with that indefinable shamanistic quality.

And I keep returning to old favorites, in part because they're free to download to my Kindle: H.P. Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* and Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo*. I would happily kill or die to be able to tell stories at the level of either of those geniuses.

## MIRACLE BOY

Lizard and Geronimo and Eskimo Pie wanted to see the scars. Show us the scars, Miracle Boy, they said.

They cornered Miracle Boy after school one day, waited for him behind the shop-class shed, out beyond the baseball diamond, where the junior high's property bordered McClung's place. Miracle Boy always went home that way, over the fence stile and across the fields with his weird shuffling gait and the black-locust walking stick that his old man had made for him. His old man's place bordered McClung's on the other side.

Show us the scars. Lizard and Geronimo and Eskimo Pie knew all about the accident and Miracle Boy's reattached feet. The newspaper headline had named him Miracle Boy. MIRACLE BOY'S FEET REATTACHED IN EIGHT-HOUR SURGERY. Everybody in school knew, everybody in town. Theirs was not a big town. It had happened a number of years before, but an accident of that sort has a long memory.

Lizard and Geronimo and Eskimo Pie wanted to see where the feet had been sewn back on. They were interested to see what a miracle looked like. They knew about miracles from the Bible—the burning bush, Lazarus who walked again after death—and it got their curiosity up.

Miracle Boy didn't want to show them. He shook his head when they said to him, Show us the scars. He was a portly boy, soft and jiggly at his hips and belly from not being able to run around and play sports like other boys, like Lizard and Geronimo and Eskimo Pie. He was pigeon-toed and wearing heavy dark brogans that looked like they might have some therapeutic value. His black corduroy pants were too long for him and pooled around his ankles. He carried his locust walking stick in one hand.



Lizard and Geronimo and Eskimo Pie asked him one last time—they were being patient with him because he was a cripple—and then they knocked him down. Eskimo Pie sat on his head while the other two took off his pants and shoes and socks. They flung his socks and pants over the sagging woven-wire fence. One of the heavy white socks caught on the rusted single strand of bob-wire along the top of the fence. They tied the legs of his pants in a big knot before tossing them. They tied the laces of the heavy brogans together and pitched them high in the air, so that they caught and dangled from the electric line overhead. Miracle Boy said nothing while they were doing it. Eskimo Pie took his walking stick from him and threw it into the bushes.

They pinned Miracle Boy to the ground and examined his knotted ankles, the smooth lines of the scars, their pearly whiteness, the pink and red and purple of the swollen, painful-looking skin around them.

Don't look like any miracle to me, said Eskimo Pie. Miracle Boy wasn't fighting them. He was just lying there, looking in the other direction. McClung's Hereford steers had drifted over to the fence, excited by the goings-on, thinking maybe somebody was going to feed them. They were a good-looking bunch of whiteface cattle, smooth-hided and stocky, and they'd be going to market soon.

It just looks like a mess of old scars to me, Eskimo Pie said.

Eskimo Pie and Geronimo were brothers. Their old man had lost three quarters of his left hand to the downstroke of a hydraulic fence-post driver a while before, but that hadn't left anything much to reattach.

It's miracles around us every day, said Miracle Boy.

Lizard and Geronimo and Eskimo Pie stopped turning his feet this way and that like the intriguing feet of a dead man. Miracle Boy's voice was soft and piping, and they stopped to listen. What's that? Geronimo wanted to know. He nudged Miracle Boy with his toe.

Jesus, he made the lame man to walk, Miracle Boy said.

And Jesus, he made me to walk, too.

But you wasn't lame before, Geronimo said. Did Jesus take your feet off just so he could put them back on you?

Miracle Boy didn't say anything more. Lizard and Geronimo and Eskimo Pie noticed then that he was crying. His face was wet, shining with tears and mucus. They saw him bawling, without his shoes and socks and trousers, sprawled in his underpants on the ground, his walking stick caught in a pricker bush. They decided that this did not look good.

They were tempted to leave him, but instead they helped him up and retrieved his socks and unknotted his pants and assisted him into them. He was still crying as they did it. Eskimo Pie presented the walking stick to him with a flourish. They debated briefly whether to go after his shoes, dangling from the power line overhead. In the end, though, they decided that, having set him on his feet again, they had done enough.



**M**iracle Boy's old man was the one who cut Miracle Boy's feet off. He was chopping corn into silage. One of the front wheels of the Case 1370 Agri-King that he was driving broke through the crust of the cornfield into a snake's nest. Copperheads boiled

up out of the ground. The tractor nose-dived, heeled hard over to one side, and Miracle Boy slid off the fender where he'd been riding.

Miracle Boy's old man couldn't believe what he had done. He shut off the tractor's power-takeoff and scrambled down from the high seat. He was sobbing. He pulled his boy out of the jaws of the silage chopper and saw that the chopper had taken his feet.

It's hard not to admire what he did next.

Thinking fast, he put his boy down, gently put his maimed boy down on the ground. He had to sweep panicked copperheads out of the way to do it. He made a tourniquet for one leg with his belt, made another with his blue bandanna that he kept in his back pocket. Then he went up the side of the silage wagon like a monkey. He began digging in the silage. He dug down into the wet heavy stuff with his bare hands.

From where he was lying on the ground, the boy could see the silage flying. He could tell that his feet were gone. He knew what his old man was looking for up there. He knew exactly.



Miracle Boy's old man called Lizard's mother on the telephone. He told Lizard's mother what Lizard and Geronimo and Eskimo Pie had done to Miracle Boy. He told her that they had taken Miracle Boy's shoes from him. That was the worst part of what they had done, he said, to steal a defenseless boy's shoes. The next day, Miracle Boy's old man came by Lizard's house. He brought Miracle Boy with him. Lizard thought that probably Miracle Boy's old man was going to whip the tar out of him for his part in what had been done to Miracle Boy. He figured Miracle Boy was there to watch the beating. Lizard's own old man was gone, and his mother never laid a hand on him, so he figured that, on this occasion, Miracle Boy's old man would likely fill in.

Instead, Lizard's mother made them sit in the front room together, Lizard and Miracle Boy. She brought them cold Coca-Colas and grilled cheese sandwiches. She let them watch TV. An old movie was on; it was called *Dinosaurus!*. Monsters tore at one another on the TV screen and chased tiny humans. Even though it was the kind of thing he would normally have liked, Lizard couldn't keep his mind on the movie. Miracle Boy sat in the crackling brown reclining chair that had belonged to Lizard's old man. The two of them ate from TV trays, and whenever Miracle Boy finished his glass of Coca-Cola, Lizard's mother brought him more. She brought Lizard more, too, and she looked at him with searching eyes, but Lizard could not read the message in her gaze.

By the third glassful of Coca-Cola, Lizard started to feel a little sick, but Miracle Boy went right on, drinking and watching *Dinosaurus!* with an enraptured expression on his face, occasionally belching quietly. Sometimes his lips moved, and Lizard thought he might be getting ready to say something, but he and Lizard never swapped a single word the whole time.

Miracle Boy's old man sat on the front porch of Lizard's house and looked out over the shrouded western slope of the Blue Ridge and swigged at the iced tea that Lizard's mother brought him, never moving from his seat until *Dinosaurus!* was over and it was time to take Miracle Boy away.



**G**eronimo and Eskimo Pie got a hiding from their old man. He used his two-inch-wide black bull-hide belt in his good hand, and he made them take their pants down for the beating, and he made them thank him for every stroke. They couldn't believe it when Lizard told them what his punishment had been. That, Geronimo told Lizard, is the difference between a house with a woman in charge and one with a man.



**L**izard saw Miracle Boy's shoes every day, hanging on the electric wire over by McClung's property line, slung by their laces. He kept hoping the laces would weather and rot and break and the shoes would come down by themselves, and that way he wouldn't have to see them anymore, but they never did. When he was outside the school, his eyes were drawn to them. He figured that everybody in the school saw those shoes. Everybody knew whose shoes they were. Lizard figured that Miracle Boy must see them every day on his way home.

He wondered what Miracle Boy thought about that, his shoes hung up in the wires, on display like some kind of a trophy, in good weather and in bad. Nestled together nose to tail up in the air like dogs huddled for warmth. He wondered if Miracle Boy ever worried about those shoes.

He took up watching Miracle Boy in school for signs of worry. Miracle Boy kept on just like before. He wore a different pair of shoes these days, a brand-new pair of coal-black Keds that looked too big for him. He shuffled from place to place, his walking stick tapping against the vinyl tiles of the hallway floors as he went.

I'm going to go get the shoes, Lizard announced one day to Geronimo and Eskimo Pie. It was spring by then, the weather alternating between warm and cold, dark days that were winter hanging on and spring days full of hard bright light. Baseball season, and the three of them were on the bench together. Geronimo and Eskimo Pie didn't seem to know what shoes Lizard was talking about. They were concentrating on the game.

Miracle Boy's shoes, Lizard said. Geronimo and Eskimo Pie looked up at them briefly. A breeze swung them first gently clockwise and just as gently counterclockwise. You don't want to fool with those, Eskimo Pie said.

Lectrocute yourself, Geronimo said.

Or fall to your doom, one, Eskimo Pie said.

Lizard didn't say anything more about it to them. He kept his eyes on the shoes as they moved through their slow oscillation, and he watched the small figure of Miracle Boy, dressed in black like a preacher, bent like a question mark as he moved beneath the shoes, as he bobbed over the fence stile and hobbled across the brittle dead grass of the field beyond.



**T**he trees are beginning to go gloriously to color in the windbreak up by the house. The weather is crisp, and the dry unchopped corn in the field around Miracle Boy and his old man chatters and rasps and seems to want to talk. Miracle Boy (though he is not Miracle Boy yet—that is minutes away) sits on the fender of the tractor, watching his old man.

Soon enough, Miracle Boy will be bird-dogging whitewings out of the stubble of this field. Soon enough, his old man will knock the fluttering doves out of the air with a blast of hot sing-

ing birdshot from his 12-gauge Remington side-by-side, and Miracle Boy will happily shag the busted birds for him. When the snow falls, Miracle Boy will go into the woods with his old man, after the corn-fat deer that are plentiful on the place. They will drop a salt lick in a clearing that he knows, by a quiet little stream, and they will wait together in the ice-rimed bracken, squatting patiently on their haunches, Miracle Boy and his old man, to kill the deer that come to the salt.



Lizard made a study of the subject of the shoes. They were hung up maybe a yard out from one of the utility poles, so clearly the pole was the way to go. He had seen linemen scramble up the poles with ease, using their broad climbing slings and their spiked boots, but he had no idea where he could come by such gear.

In the end, he put on the tool belt that his old man had left behind, cinched it tight, holstered his old man's Tiplady hammer, and filled the pouch of the belt with sixtypenny nails. He left the house in the middle of the night, slipping out the window of his bedroom and clambering down the twisted silver maple that grew there. He walked and trotted the four miles down the state highway to the junior high school. It was a cold night there in the highlands of the Seneca Valley, and he nearly froze. He hid in the ditches by the side of the road whenever a vehicle went by. He didn't care for anyone to stop and offer him a ride or ask him what it was he thought he was doing.

He passed a number of houses on the way to the school. The lights were on in some of the houses and off in others. One of the houses was Miracle Boy's, he knew, a few hundred yards off the road in a grove of walnut trees, its back set against a worn-down knob of a hill. In the dark, the houses were hard to tell one from another. Lizard thought he knew which house was Miracle Boy's, but he couldn't be sure.

His plan was this: to drive one of the sixtypenny nails into the utility pole about three feet off the ground. Then to stand one-footed on that nail and drive in another some distance above it. Then he would stand on the second nail and drive a third, and so on, ascending nail by nail until he reached the humming transformer at the top of the pole. Then, clinging to the transformer, he imagined, he would lean out from the pole and, one-handed, pluck the shoes from the wire, just like taking fruit off a tree.

The first nail went in well and held solid under his weight, and he hugged the pole tight, the wood rough and cool where it rubbed against the skin of his cheek. He fished in the pouch of nails, selected one, and drove it as well. He climbed onto it. His hands were beginning to tremble as he set and drove the third nail. He had to stand with his back bent at an awkward angle, his shoulder dug in hard against the pole, and already he could feel the strain grinding to life in his back and in the muscles of his forearm.

The next several nails were not hard to sink, and he soon found himself a dozen feet up, clinging to the pole. The moon had risen as he'd worked, and the landscape below was bright. He looked around him, at the baseball diamond, with its deep-worn base path and crumbling pitcher's mound and the soiled bags that served as bases. From his new vantage point, he noted with surprise the state of the roof of the shop shed, the tin scabby and blooming with rust, bowed and beginning



to buckle. He had never noticed before what hard shape the place was in.

He straightened his back and fought off a yawn. He was getting tired and wished he could quit the job he had started. He looked up. There was no breeze, and the shoes hung as still as though they were shoes in a painting. He fumbled another nail out of the pouch, ran it through his hair to grease the point, mashed his shoulder against the unyielding pole, set the nail with his left hand, and banged it home.

And another, and another. His clothes grew grimy with creosote, and his eyes stung and watered. Whenever he looked down, he was surprised at how far above the ground he had climbed. McClung's Herefords found him, and they stood in a shallow semicircle beneath the utility pole, cropping at the worthless grass that grew along the fence line. This was a different batch from the fall before. These were younger but similarly handsome animals, and Lizard welcomed their company. He felt lonesome up there on the pole. He thought momentarily of Miracle Boy, seated before the television, his gaze fixed on the set, his jaws moving, a half-eaten grilled cheese sandwich in his fingers.

The steers stood companionably close together, their solid barrel bodies touching lightly. Their smell came to him, concentrated and musty, like damp hot sawdust, and he considered how it would be to descend the pole and stand quietly among them. How warm. He imagined himself looping an arm over the neck of one of the steers, leaning his head against the hot skin of its densely muscled shoulder. A nail slithered from his numbing fingers, fell, and dinked musically off the forehead of the lead steer. The steer woofed, blinked, twitched its ears in annoyance. The Herefords wheeled and started off across the field, the moonlight silvering the curly hair along the ridgelines of their backs.

The nail on which Lizard was standing began to give dangerously beneath his weight, and he hurried to make his next foothold. He gripped the utility pole between his knees, clinging hard, trying to take the burden off the surrendering nail as it worked its way free of the wood. A rough splinter stung his thigh. He whacked at the wobbling nail that he held and caught the back of his hand instead, peeling skin from his knuckles. He sucked briefly at the bleeding scrapes and then went back to work, striking the nail with the side of the hammer's head. The heavy nail bent under the force of his blows, and he whimpered at the thought of falling. He struck it again, and the nail bit deep into the pine. Again, and it tested firm when he tugged on it.

He pulled himself up. Resting on the bent nail, he found himself at eye level with the transformer at the pole's top. Miracle Boy's shoes dangled a yard behind him. Lizard felt winded, and he took hold of the transformer. The cold metal cut into the flesh of his fingers. There was deadly current within the transformer, he knew, but still it felt like safety to him. He held fast, shifted his weight to his arms, tilted his head back to catch sight of the shoes. Overhead, the wires crossed the disk of the moon, and the moonlight shone on the wires, on the tarnished hardware that fixed them to the post, on the ceramic insulators. These wires run to every house in the valley, Lizard thought.

He craned his neck further and found the shoes. Still there. The shoes were badly weathered. To Lizard, they looked a million years old, like something that ought to be on display in a museum somewhere, with a little white card identifying them. SHOES OF THE MIRACLE BOY. The uppers were cracked and swollen, pulling loose from the lowers, and the tongues protruded obscenely. Lizard put a tentative hand out toward them. Close, but no cigar.

He loosened his grip, leaned away from the pole. The arm with which he clung to the transformer trembled with the effort. Lizard trusted to his own strength to keep him from falling. He struggled to make himself taller. The tips of his outstretched fingers grazed the sole of one of the shoes and set them both to swinging. The shoes swung away from him and then back. He missed his grip, and they swung again. This time, he got a purchase on the nearest shoe.

He jerked, and the shoes held fast. Jerked again and felt the raveling laces begin to give. A third time, a pull nearly strong enough to dislodge him from his perch, and the laces parted. He drew one shoe to him as the other fell to the ground below with a dry thump. He wondered if the sound the shoe made when it hit was similar to the sound he might make. The shoe he held in his hand was the left.

In the moonlight, Lizard could see almost as well as in the day. He could make out McClung's cattle on the far side of the field, their hind ends toward him, and the trees of the windbreak beyond that, and beyond that the lighted windows of a house. It was, he knew, Miracle Boy's house. Set here and there in the shallow bowl of the Seneca Valley were the scattered lights of other houses. A car or a pickup truck crawled along the state road toward him. The red warning beacons of a microwave relay tower blinked at regular intervals on a hogback to the north.

Lizard was mildly surprised to realize that the valley in which he lived was such a narrow one. He could easily traverse it on foot in a day. The ridges crowded in on the levels. Everything that he knew was within the sight of his eyes. It was as though he lived in the cupped palm of a hand, he thought.

He tucked Miracle Boy's left shoe beneath his arm and began his descent.



When Lizard was little, his old man made toys for him. He made them out of wood: spinning tops and tiny saddle horses, trucks and guns, a cannon and caisson just like the one that sat on the lawn of the county courthouse. He fashioned a bull-roarer that made a tremendous howling when he whirled it overhead but that Lizard was too small to use; and what he called a Limber Jack, a little wooden doll of a man that would dance flat-footed while his father sang: "Was an old man near Hell did dwell, / If he ain't dead yet he's living there still."

Lizard's favorite toy was a Jacob's Ladder, a cunning arrangement of wooden blocks and leather strips about three feet long. When you tilted the top block just so, the block beneath it flipped over with a slight clacking sound, and the next block after that, and so on, cascading down the line. When all the blocks had finished their tumbling, the Jacob's Ladder was just as it had been before, though to Lizard it seemed that it ought to have been longer, or shorter, or anyhow changed.

He could play with it for hours, keeping his eye sharp on the line of end-swapping blocks purling out from his own hand like an infinite stream of water. He wanted to see the secret of it.

I believe he's a simpleton, his old man told his mother.

You think my boy wants anything to do with you little bastards?

Lizard wanted to explain that he was alone in this. That Geronimo and Eskimo Pie



were at home asleep in their beds, that they knew nothing of what he was doing. Miracle Boy's old man stood behind the closed screen door of his house, his arms crossed over his chest, a cigarette snugged in the corner of his mouth. The hallway behind him was dark.

I don't necessarily want anything to do with him, Lizard said. I just brought him his shoes.

He held out the shoes, but Miracle Boy's old man didn't even look at them.

Your mommy may not know what you are, Miracle Boy's old man said, and his voice was tired and calm. But I do.

Lizard offered the shoes again.

You think he wants those things back? Miracle Boy's old man asked. He's got new shoes now. Different shoes.

Lizard said nothing. He stayed where he was.

Put them down there, Miracle Boy's old man said, nodding at a corner of the porch.

I'm sorry, Lizard said. He held on to the shoes. He felt like he was choking.

It's not me you need to be sorry to.

Miracle Boy appeared at the end of the dark hallway. Lizard could see him past the bulk of his old man's body. He was wearing canary-yellow pajamas. Lizard had never before seen him wear any color other than black.

Daddy? he said. The sleeves of the PJs were too long for his arms, they swallowed his hands, and the pajama legs lapped over his feet. He began to scuff his way down the hall toward the screen door. He moved deliberately. He did not have his walking stick with him, and he pressed one hand against the wall.

His old man kept his eyes fixed on Lizard. Go back to bed, Junior, he said in the same tired tone that he had used with Lizard before.

Daddy?

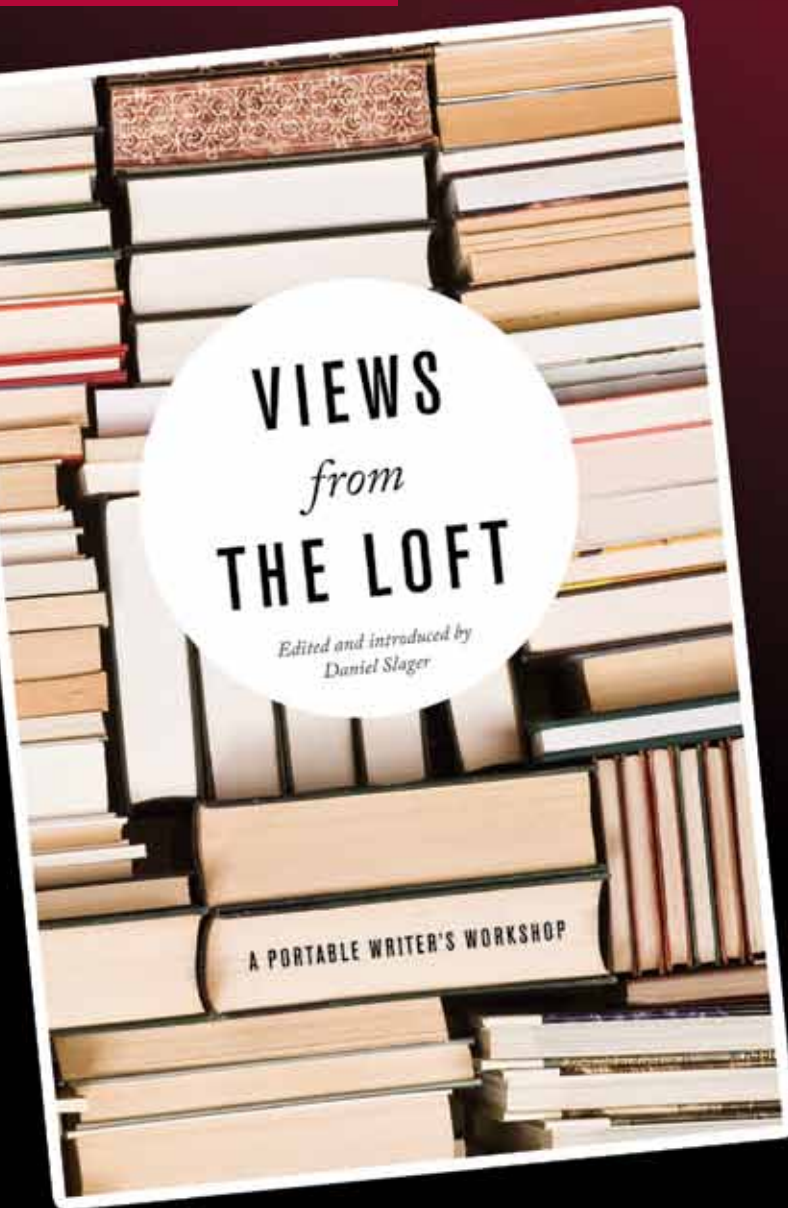
Miracle Boy brushed past his old man, who took a deferential step back. He came to the door and pressed his pudgy hands against the screen. He looked at Lizard with wide curious eyes. He was a bright yellow figure behind the mesh. He was like a bird or a butterfly. Lizard was surprised to see how small he was.

Miracle Boy pressed hard against the door. If it had not been latched, it would have opened and spilled him out onto the porch. He nodded eagerly at Lizard, shyly ducking his head. Lizard could not believe that Miracle Boy was happy to see him. Miracle Boy beckoned, crooking a finger at Lizard, and he was smiling, a strange small inward smile. Lizard did not move. In his head, he could hear his old man's voice, his long-gone old man, singing, accompanied by clattering percussion: the jiggling wooden feet of the Limber Jack. Miracle Boy beckoned again, and this time Lizard took a single stumbling step forward. He held Miracle Boy's ruined shoes in front of him. He held them out before him like a gift.

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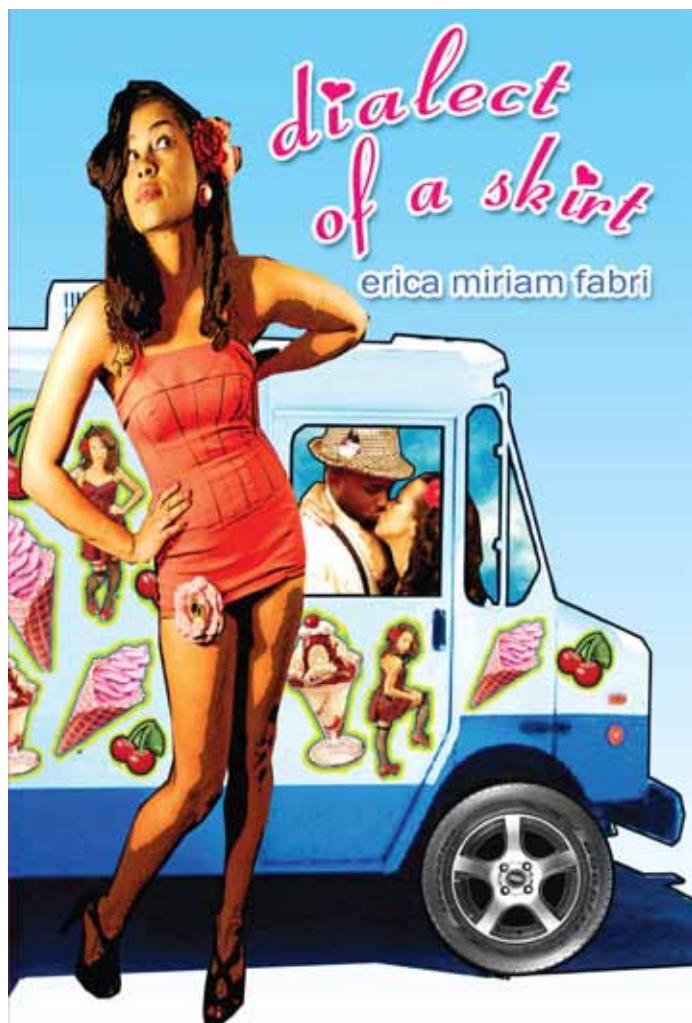
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## Love in an Ice Cream Truck by Erica Miriam Fabri

Yesterday, I took a walk downtown. It was winter everywhere, except for the inside of my mouth. I saw an ice cream truck parked on 3rd Avenue. The man inside drew me toward his window with a whistle that reminded me of the noise a peacock makes. He had good-looking lips, which always gets to me, so I gave him an attitude, "Who the hell's gonna buy ice cream on a day like today?" He didn't say a word, but instead, winked, opened the side door, kicked out a two-step ladder and whispered, "Come in."

Inside, everything was made of chrome. Rows of waffle cones hung from the ceiling like Chinese lanterns. He pulled a sheet of brown paper from a large roll and laid it on the floor. When I took off his shirt, he had a tattoo of a racecar on his torso. "Zoom, zoom," I said, and we started making love. He held my face in his hands as if it were a grapefruit he was testing for ripeness, and he barely breathed.

When we stopped, the only noise was the purr of a refrigerator. "There's a man you love, isn't there?" he asked me.

"There is."

"What does he do wrong, that made you end up in here with me?"

"He doesn't kiss me enough," I said.

"Why don't you leave him?"

"Because I like the way he sleeps.

And I like that he never prays."

The moon crept into the truck like a thief.

"I have to go."

He kissed me nine times from soda fountain to doorstep.

When I was almost a block away, he stuck his head out the ice cream window and yelled: "Have you ever seen a volcano?" I didn't even look back. As I

followed the sidewalk south I heard his voice three more times: "You are a volcano! You are a volcano! You are a volcano!"

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## Hair on Television

by Wesley McNair

On the soap opera the doctor  
explains to the young woman with cancer  
that each day is beautiful.

Hair lifts from their heads  
like clouds, like something to eat.

It is the hair of the married couple getting in touch  
with their real feelings for the first time  
on the talk show.

the hair of young people on the beach  
drinking cokes and falling in love.

And the man who took the laxative and waters his garden  
next day with the hose wears the hair

so dark and wavy even his grandchildren are amazed,  
and the woman who never dreamed tampons  
could be so convenient wears it.

For the hair is changing people's lives.  
It is growing like wheat above the faces

of game show contestants opening the doors  
of new convertibles, of prominent businessmen opening  
their hearts to Christ, and it is growing

straight back from the foreheads of vitamin experts,  
detergent and dog food experts  
helping ordinary housewives discover

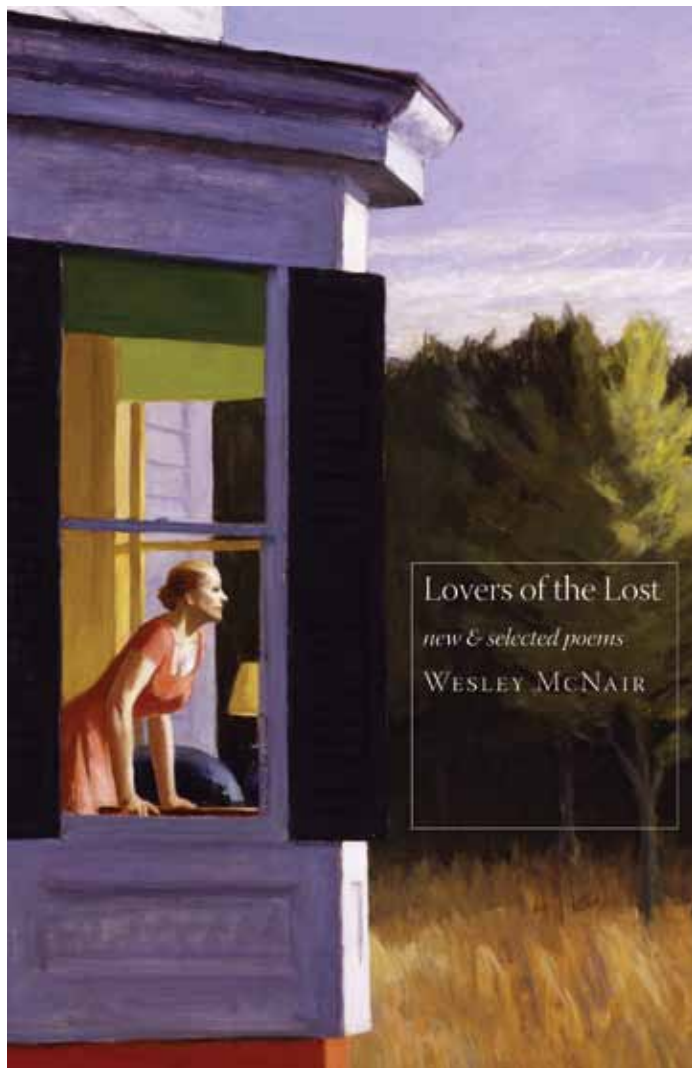
how to be healthier, get clothes cleaner,  
and serve dogs meals they love in the hair.

And over and over on television the housewives,  
and the news teams bringing all the news faster  
and faster, and the new breed of cops winning the fight

against crime are smiling, pleased to be at their best,  
proud to be among the literally millions of Americans

everywhere who have tried the hair, compared the hair,  
and will never go back to live before the active,  
the caring, the successful, the incredible hair.

poetry

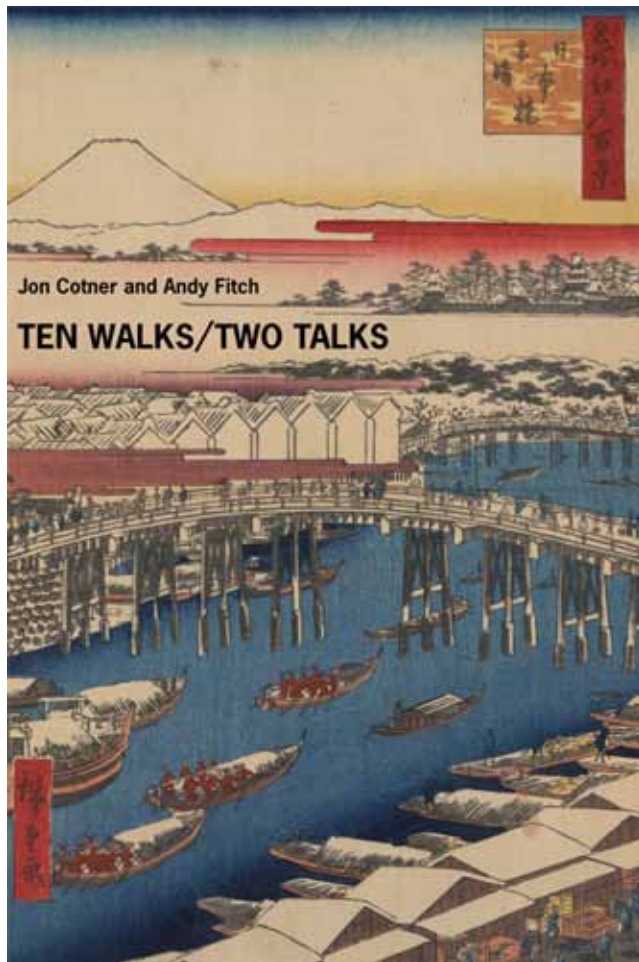


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**Ten Walks/Two Talks**

by Jon Cotner and Andy Fitch

Ugly Duckling Presse  
www.uglyducklingpresse.org

I've read *Ten Walks/Two Talks* three times now, once before something sudden and awful happened in my life and twice after. I don't know if I would have even thought about how I walk in my city if I hadn't, or if I would have tried to commit every conversation with a friend I have to memory even while I'm talking, afraid I'll lose it like I've lost most of my first 32 years of conversation.

This is a small book: 10 brief accounts of walks in New York City by Fitch and two transcribed conversations between Cotner and Fitch, the first in Central Park, the second in a grocery store. Things happen:

As always when I'm in a rush downtown I passed a sandwich shop that looked appealing. With a pulley-system someone dropped planks through an apartment window (no sound). With a tiny broom a custodian steered hissing water along the curb. Somebody else wrapped a deli display-case in blue plastic. Someone wiped the demonstration slicer he had whirring on the sidewalk. I wondered why everything in restaurant-supply stores looks dusty. A white truck double-turning (does that make sense?) stripped the fender off an old black woman's sedan. Pedestrians winced.

All of Fitch's walks are like this, filled with quotidian moments that become minor miracles as they happen. Fitch's prose is a minor miracle in itself, playful and unaffected and determinedly joyous; his unadorned observations give grace to, and come close to reclaiming, every small event that happens daily. It's easy to believe, reading his breath-

less and excited accounts, that you're walking with him, that he's some kind of manic tour guide of the everyday. Nothing bores him, it seems; his writing is contagious and angelic.

So too are the conversations between Cotner and Fitch. "What do you think of this New York lavender sky?" asks Cotner, and so the first one begins, and is almost immediately sidetracked. Cotner and Fitch distract each other, their sentences overlap, they follow every tangent. They discuss, among very many other things, architecture and philosophy and tea and goat meat and friendship. Like the accounts of Fitch's walks, the transcripts approach poetry, even—especially—at their most distracted and unguarded:

A: I'd guess we both learned to drive in expansive department store parking lots?

J: Yes.

A: Folks might consider that a luxury of space—not realizing it presumes a detachment from culture, and by culture

I mean near-accidents.

J: Right. I myself learned to drive in a public high-school's lot. I'd got trained on two stick-shifts, jolting...

A: I had my first oral-sex experience in a high-school parking lot, yet was not um the recipient. Um, this tea Jon, has started to develop a mace flavor? A bold spicy flavor? Will you often find that near the bottom of the cup?

J: It...

There are shades of Harry Mathews-style sly humor, of course, but nothing about it seems unreal, and nothing seems forced. And while Basho seems to be the inspiration for this project, I was reminded mostly of films like *Killer of Sheep* and *Old Joy*, where nothing much happens but every moment, every word, is significant and shining and somehow outside of oneself.

This is a simple book, though it's not, really. It's difficult to describe, even harder to explain, how Cotner and Fitch's reverence for the small miracles of life in a city is so remarkable, so comforting and revelatory and, in spite of the authors' humility, profound. I've noticed more since I read it. I've listened more. It's made me feel better. But all that is hard to explain, and I don't know if I even can or will be able to anytime soon, so I'll just say that this is a gift, a beautiful book, and nothing in it is forgettable. —Michael Schaub, [www.bookslut.com](http://www.bookslut.com).

## The Singer's Gun

by Emily St. John Mandel

Unbridled Books

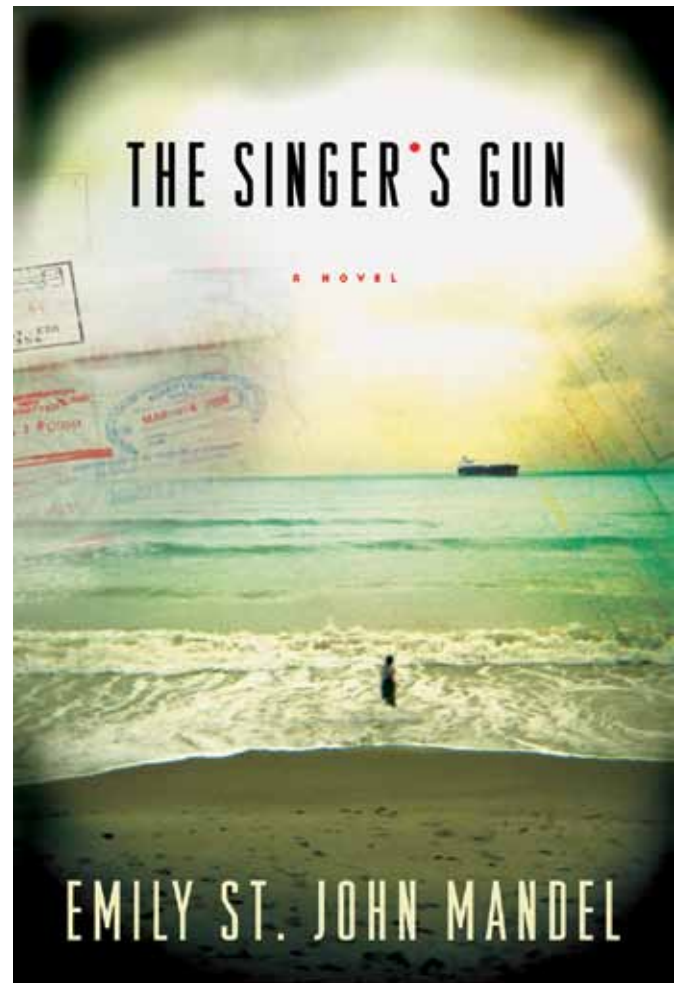
[www.unbridledbooks.com](http://www.unbridledbooks.com)

In a sea of predictability, *The Singer's Gun* is a refreshing tale that marries the search for connection to the darker side of criminal enterprise. Anton Waker hopes to shed the past for a more conventional attempt at corporate life and marriage to Sophie, a classical musician, leaving behind a partnership with his cousin selling forged passports and Social Security cards to illegal immigrants.

The child of a family that has long lived with the inherent complications of criminal enterprise, Anton has enjoyed his legitimate day job, but his optimistic foray into the corporate arena is threatened when the company decides to conduct thorough background checks of employees. Not only will Anton's Harvard degree be proven false, but his other activities will likely be exposed. While an unwitting Anton agrees to do one more job for his cousin, Aria, a State Department investigator has already begun pressuring Anton's former secretary and sometime lover, Elena, to tape their incriminating conversations.

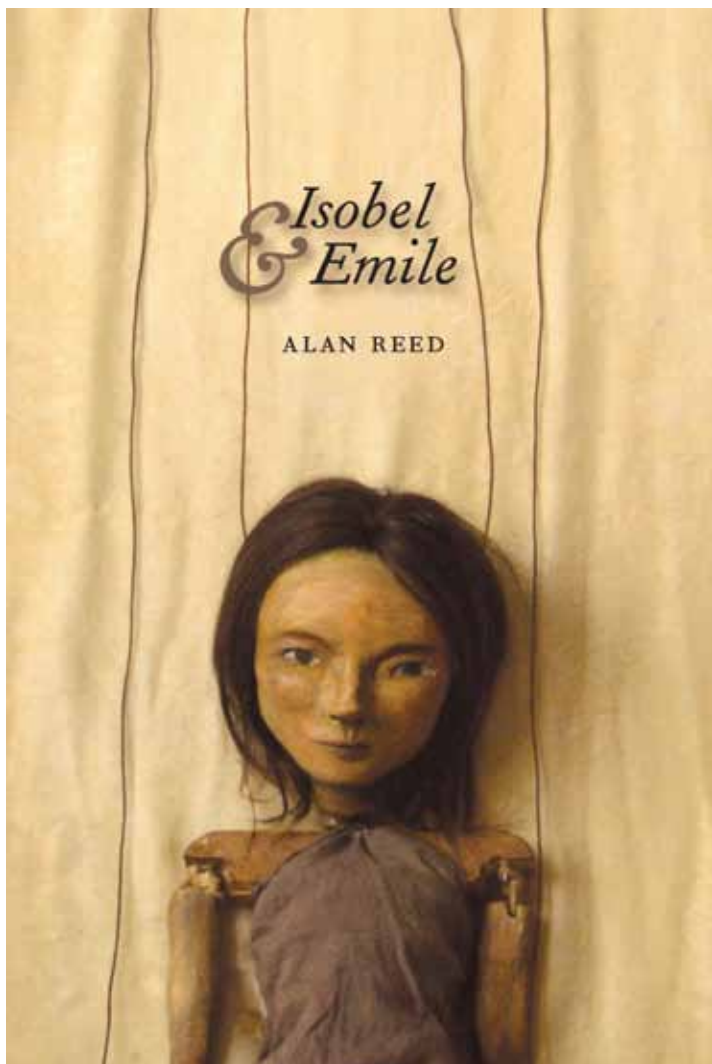
Despite two false starts at the altar, Anton's wedding to Sophie is finally accomplished and the couple heads to a Mediterranean island for their honeymoon. Here the final exchange is to take place, and Anton faces the shape of the future he has created. His best intentions have brought him to an impasse where his emotions are in direct conflict with his actions, where thoughts of his lover intrude into his marriage bed while the troubles that await in New York seem as distant as the infinite ocean that surrounds this island paradise. Yet menace shimmers on the horizon as the investigator hones in on her prey and Elena makes one last attempt to flee the consequences of her decisions.

Like a pied piper, the author leads her audience through the stories of those who seek a better life, for whom





desperate times call for desperate measures and Anton's illicit work with his cousin offers opportunity and at least a modicum of hope. But where crime thrives, and law enforcement pursues, there are always unintended consequences. As Anton considers his place in the grand scheme of things under the vivid Mediterranean sky, waiting for the meeting to occur, everything moves inexorably toward conclusion, to a reckoning and a bargain with fate. Mandel writes with such beauty and grace that we are lulled, like Anton, into complacency, while reality arrives with the tide, carrying both violence and gifts. —Luan Gaines, [www.curldup.com](http://www.curldup.com)



## Isobel & Emile

by Alan Reed

Coach House Books

[www.chbooks.com](http://www.chbooks.com)

The novel opens on the morning after the young lovers' final consummation: Emile boards a train bound for his home in the city; Isobel stays in the town where they conducted their brief affair. For each one, the pain of separation becomes an existential crisis. The prose is a study in restraint, with a jarring minimalist style that reflects Isobel and Emile's disorientation and confusion. The vocabulary and sentence structure are childlike, and few concrete details about the characters or the settings are given.

As in the works of Hemingway, Carver, and Barthelme, the style reflects the trauma that the characters suffer, the bleakness and repression of their lives. But as we watch them eat, drink, smoke, work, and battle insomnia in real time, we rarely hear their thoughts. The cinematic effect is a slowed-down reality that captures the tedium and excruciation of heartbreak. Within passages, the characters take one step forward and then two steps backward, a backstitch technique that mirrors their inability to transcend their pain. To be sure, dramatic moments are rare, but as time passes the coldness and lack of sentimentality ratchet up the pressure, bringing the ex-lovers to the brink of despair.

At times, friends and strangers try—and fail—to connect with Emile and Isobel, but neither one takes the bait. Their reticence reflects the disengagement typical of people who suffer from trauma; the implication is that some pain is too deep for words. In a scene that epitomizes the novel's pathos, Emile moves apples and oranges across a table until they fall to the ground:

He wants the sound of the fruit hitting the floor to be like the sound of the train. It is not the sound of a train. It is the sound of fruit hitting the floor. He sits at the table. He puts his hands on top of the table. He looks where the fruit was. It is what it is like to watch someone leave.

For her part, Isobel busies herself in the manual labor of a shop girl. Her concession to feeling is to write letters to Emile that she never mails, pouring out the desires and fears and emotions she cannot or will not say aloud.

*Isobel & Emile* seems designed to flood the reader with a sense of frustration and helplessness. Still, the novel ends with a glint of hope. Heartbreak may be part of the human condition, but with time and determination, we can find a way to love again. —Keith Meatto, [www.newpages.com](http://www.newpages.com)

## Do Something Do Something Do Something

by Joseph Riippi

Ampersand Books

[www.ampersandreview.com](http://www.ampersandreview.com)

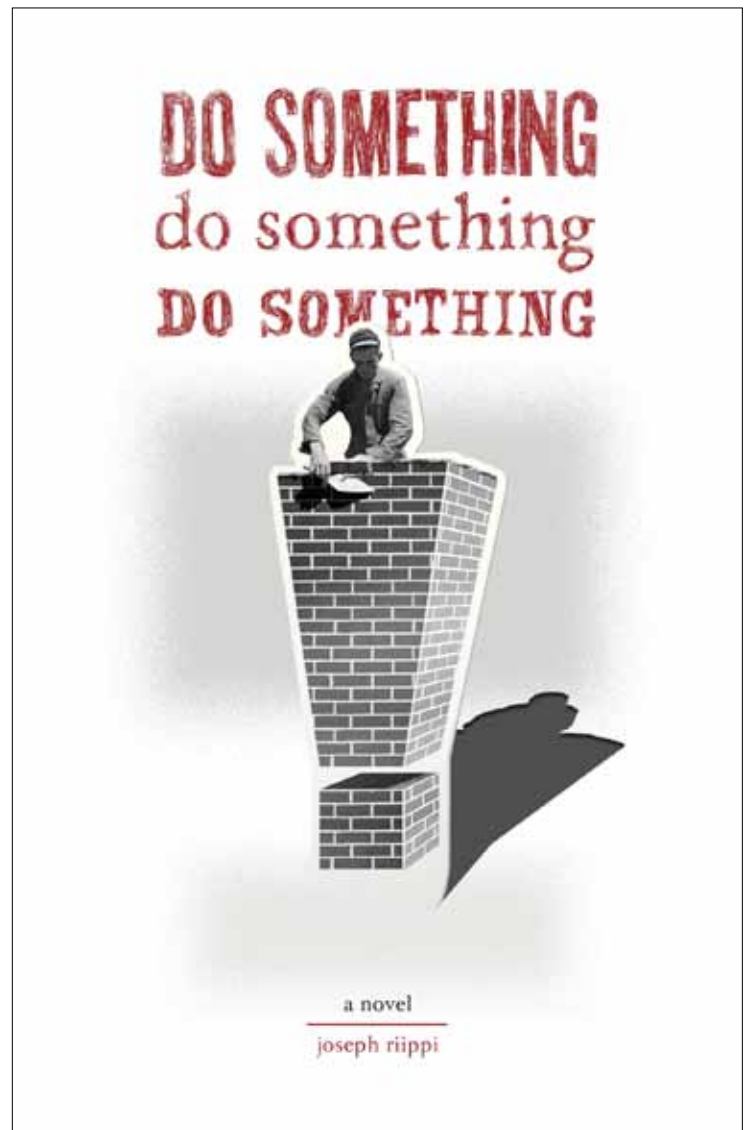
Reading Joseph Riippi's debut novel is a lot like what hearing Nirvana's *Bleach* on vinyl might have been like in 1989. We get a glimpse of a writer whose potential is yet to be fully realized (and, thus, whose best works are probably ahead of him), but whose raw talent, creativity, and energy are palpable on every manic page of the book. Yes, Riippi has a somewhat maddening fondness for stream-of-consciousness paragraphs that stretch for pages at a time, and, yes, he cheats a little by relating at least a third of the narrative through the eyes of a narrator who turns out to be completely unreliable, but such peccadilloes are ultimately forgivable, especially in light of the fact that he's only taking the kinds of risk that all great writers take when walking the high wire of great literature. (Faulkner, anyone?)

The novel focuses on three characters whose loosely connected lives suggest that none of us are alone in the struggle to make sense of the world. In one strand of the narrative, a woman with a starfish tattooed to her breast visits her brother in a mental institution and subsequently embarks on a journey into her own difficult past. In the second strand, a dramatist wrestles with the emotional impact of the dissolution of his marriage following the death of his infant daughter. In the third, an arts critic finds himself committed to a mental institution after attacking a stripper. Though only the first and third come together directly (the woman with the starfish tattoo is the sister of the committed arts critic), all three narratives complement each other in terms of both imagery and thematic content.

The title of the novel speaks to the existential angst of all three protagonists. As one character notes fairly late in the novel, "Hope is the only thing that makes us do anything, and doing something is the only way to happiness." The only problem for the characters, however, is that hope is in short supply and that "doing something" has the ironic potential to eliminate hope—a fact that becomes especially clear when a dark-skinned man boards an airplane and a panic-stricken racist starts screaming at her husband to "Do something! Do something! Do something!"

What is especially clear throughout the book is that Joseph Riippi is a student of the human heart and a keen observer of emotional complexity. His characters are all broken in some way, yet he has the patience to follow them on every step along their crooked paths to wholeness, even if said wholeness

is no more than an illusion. A strong debut novel in the tradition of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and, to a lesser extent, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Do Something Do Something Do Something* is, with any luck, a precursor to a body of work that will shine new light on the darkest recesses of the human heart for years to come. I'm fairly certain this Joseph Riippi guy and I would get along well. —Marc Schuster, [www.smallpressreviews.wordpress.com](http://www.smallpressreviews.wordpress.com) ■





what's on their shelf



**Columbine** by Dave Cullen, Twelve 2009, [www.twelve-books.com](http://www.twelve-books.com). For most of us who live outside of Colorado, the name of the state flower is more immediately associated with the name of the high school where two trenchcoat-attired boys massacred their fellow students on April 20, 1999. Journalist Cullen pieces together not only the what, where, and when, but the why of that tragic day.



**Father Said: Poems** by Hal Sirowitz, Soft Skull Press 2004, [www.softskull.com](http://www.softskull.com). Called the Poet Laureate of Queens and the “Bard of the deadpan delivery,” Sirowitz follows up his bestseller *Mother Said* with a tribute to the idiosyncratic, cautionary wisdom delivered by dear old dad.

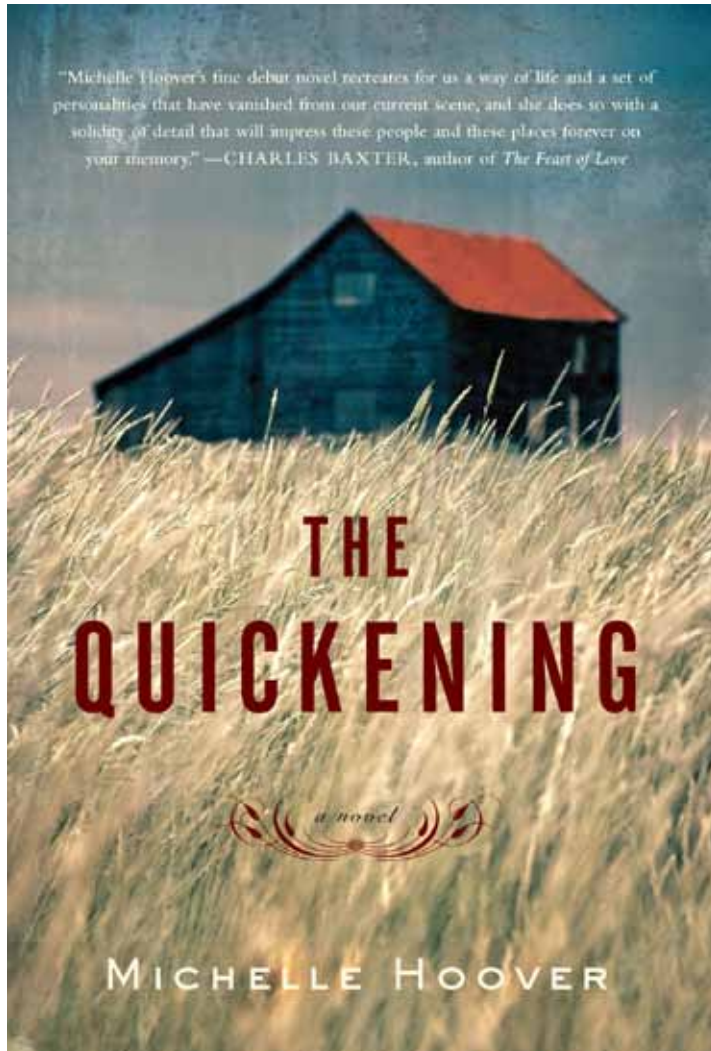


**Pride and Prejudice and Zombies: Dawn of the Dreadfuls** by Steve Hockensmith, Quirk Books, [www.quirkclassics.com](http://www.quirkclassics.com). Edgar finalist Hockensmith tries his hand at a prequel to Seth Grahame-Smith’s original surprise hit mash-up, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. The result is a terrifyingly hilarious fan favorite of alternate Austen aficionados.

# POOR RICHARD'S

Founded in Colorado Springs in 1975, Poor Richard's is more than just a used bookstore. This Tejon Street complex in the city's historic downtown includes three additional storefronts: Little Richard's Toy Store; The Restaurant, which offers hand-tossed New York-style pizza; and the latest addition, Rico's Coffee, Chocolate, & Wine Bar, with a selection of fresh-baked pastries and breads, 20-plus wines by the glass, and more Colorado micro-

brews than you can shake a carabiner at. And you'll need the snack break—in addition to housing a collection of thousands of discount books, they also have a large selection of rare, out-of-print, and collectible books, including vintage children's books, first editions, and autographed copies. So order a Chimay and a plate of cheese and prosciutto, and hunker down for a good read. 320–324 N. Tejon St. [www.poorrichards.biz](http://www.poorrichards.biz), 719.632.7721.



## The Quickening

by Michelle Hoover

Other Press

[www.otherpress.com](http://www.otherpress.com)

The first few pages of Michelle Hoover's *The Quickening* brought two of my favorite books to mind: Willa Cather's *My Antonia*, with which *The Quickening* shares the theme of Midwestern pioneer farm families struggling against the untamed land, and Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*, which similarly begins with an elderly Iowan's earnest musings about past hardships. But the story, of course, is Hoover's own, inspired by her family history.

"I was 22 when my mother lent me my great-grandmother's recollection—15 pages in all, poorly typed, with photographs taped in the margins and my great-grandmother's date of birth—1880—at the top," Hoover says. "Born and bred a farmwoman, [she] bore three children, mothered six grandchildren, and was a great-grandmother to 17. In the few

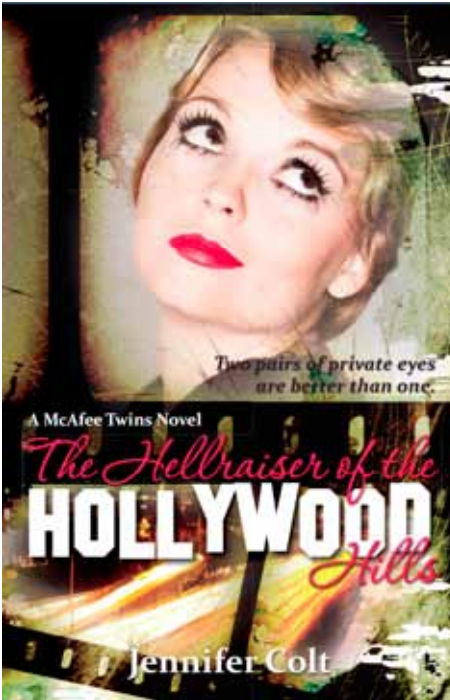
pages I have, she repeated the word work 18 times, God 22, love 11, and references to death, accidents, or sickness 29."

Hoover's great-grandmother shaped the character of Enidina Current, whose relationship with neighboring farmwoman Mary Morrow is the center of the story. The two are more like dysfunctional sisters than friends, with plenty of churlishness, feuds, and grudges in the mix, bound together by need rather than commonality.

My least successful book club meeting was when we read Faulkner. "Brilliant." "Completely brilliant." "Absolutely." What more was there to say? My book club would have a field day, though, with *The Quickening*. Sure, it too is brilliant, but just imperfect enough for the structural nitpickers to get a word in. And obviously there's the Team Enidina vs. Team Mary discussion to be had. Three-quarters of the way through our nonfat lattes, though, we'd probably get to the heart of the matter: wonderment at the stoicism and forbearance of these women, and at Hoover's ability to so fully evoke them.

—Margaret Brown





### GUILTY PLEASURE

If a pair of bickering, wisecracking 25-year-old red-headed identical twin sister detectives coming to the rescue of a teenage pop star in distress appeals to your inner Nancy Drew, then *The Hellraiser of the Hollywood Hills* is for you. *Eat, Pray, Love*'s Elizabeth Gilbert calls it "a madcap crime spree—I got a big kick out of the story," she says. I'm calling it the book most likely to engender the perfect comeback role for Lindsay Lohan.

—Margaret Brown

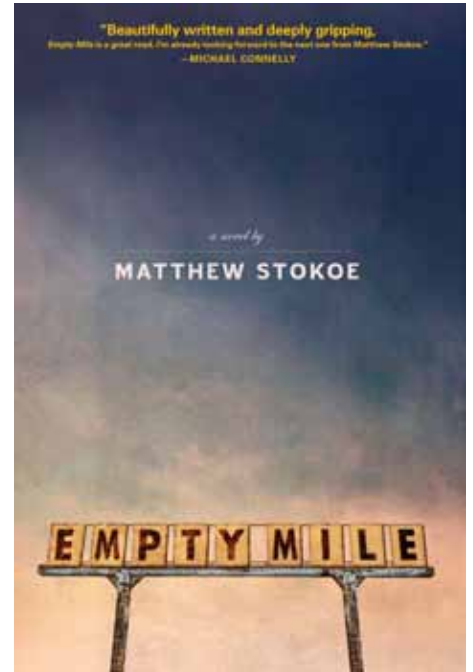
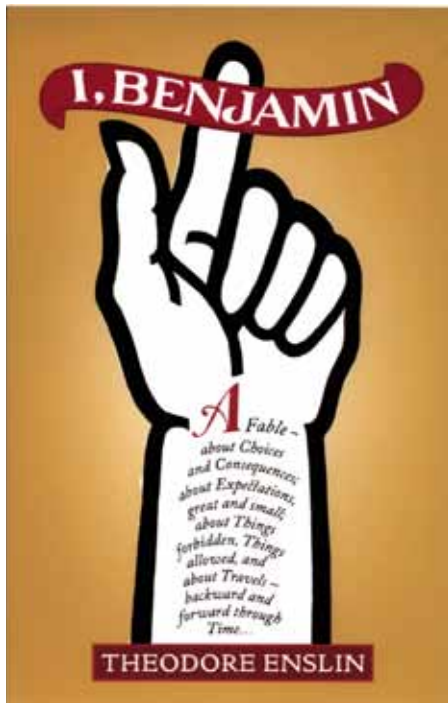
*The Hellraiser of Hollywood Hills: A McAfee Twins Novel* by Jennifer Colt, BookSurge Publishing 2010, [www.booksurge.com](http://www.booksurge.com).

### CHEW ON THIS

Life and death, love and loss, alienation, the meaning of existence, and the ephemerality of all of the above are covered in avant-garde poet Theodore Enslin's dreamlike fable *I, Benjamin*, the tale of a man's journey through a mysterious, mercurial world. The thin tome ventures into Siddhartha territory, but no need for Cliffs Notes. It's 61 pages of lyrical, thought-provoking writing.

—Ben Minton

*I, Benjamin: A Quasi-Autobiographical Novella* by Theodore Enslin, McPherson & Company 2010, [www.mcphersonco.com](http://www.mcphersonco.com).



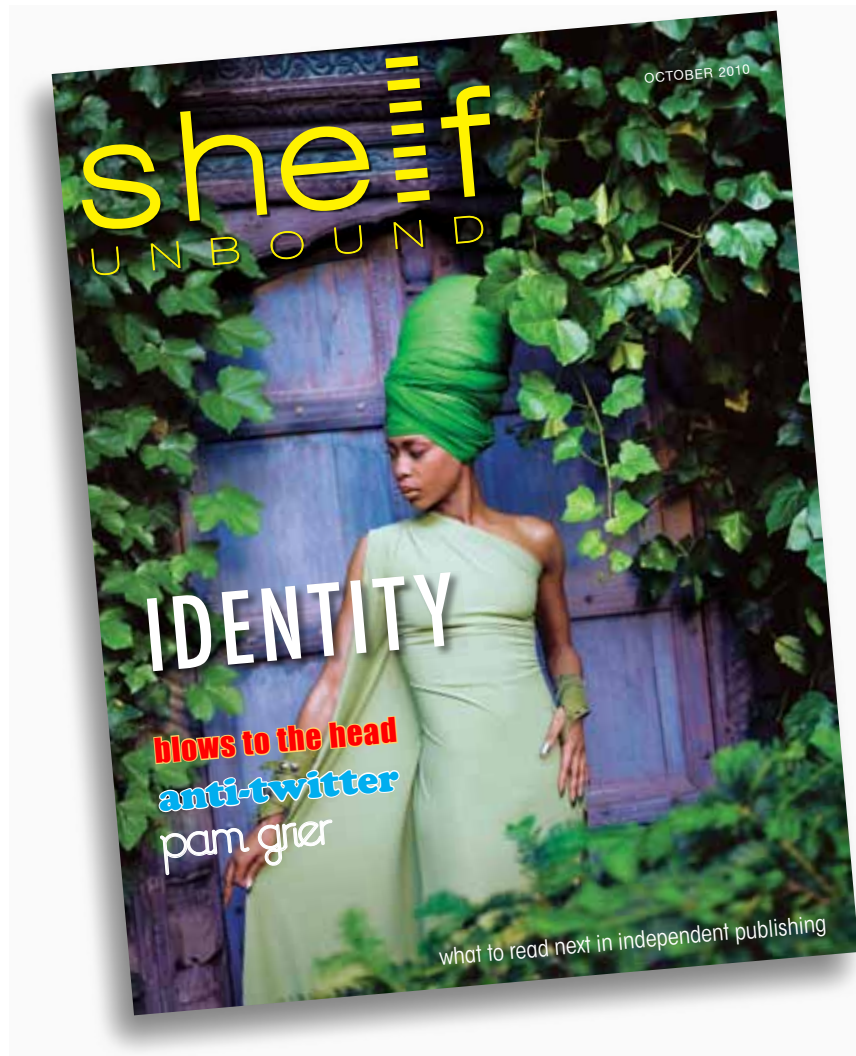
### DEEP NOIR

To say Matthew Stokoe's *Empty Mile* is dark is an understatement of Herculean proportions. But there are glimpses of light, moments of grace, and characters that, despite their bad acts and shortcomings, are honestly human and, consequently, understandable if not always relatable. A story of brotherhood, imperfection, and the huge toll that unresolved guilt and shame can take on our lives, the book made each evening's return to its shadowy pages a gift.

—Dean Hill

*Empty Mile* by Matthew Stokoe, Akashic Books 2010, [www.akashicbooks.com](http://www.akashicbooks.com).

COMING IN OCTOBER



Celebrity photography by Stewart Cohen and Tom Munro

Interview with Pulitzer Prize winner Paul Harding

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author

interview

with

# Samantha Bee



## I Know I Am, But What Are You?

by Samantha Bee

Simon & Schuster  
www.simonandschuster.com

**M**ost of us know comedian **Samantha Bee** from her work on Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart, where she appears as a veteran mock news reporter who skewers politicians and pundits who have gone off the rails. Classic bits include riffs on Elliot Spitzer's hooker-gate, Sarah Palin's resignation as Alaska's governor, the proposed secession of Long Island, and how some "douchey" Wall Street traders caused the economic meltdown. But in her first book, *I Know I Am But What Are You?*, Bee steps away from current events to share touching—sometimes even twisted—stories of her life growing up in Toronto as the car-thieving Jesus-loving daughter of a Wiccan. —*Melissa Romig*

**Shelf:** *You're a highly visible and successful comedy writer with a continuing gig on one of the smartest shows on television and, now, a brand new book. How did you decide to pursue your comedic genius?*

**Samantha Bee:** Well, originally I aspired to be a very "important" stage performer. When I utterly failed at that, I discovered that not only did I have no talent in that regard, but that the world, quite simply, refuses to take me seriously. And I just went with it. So the answer to your question is: by default.

**Shelf:** *In your book, you share some extraordinary details of your life: Your history as a car thief, an admitted "knack for penises," and some highly unusual relationships with both older men and animals (separately). Were you concerned about the reactions of friends and family to your book?*

**Bee:** Of course I was concerned about it, but I tried not to let that invade my consciousness as I was writing the book. In some ways I thought the book might vindicate me in the eyes of my family, since they continued to harbor a suspicion that I had been a drug addict as a teenager. As a tribute to them I should have called it *Not On Drugs, Just A Horrible Girl*.

**Shelf:** *Your husband has seen you in some decidedly unsexy situations, including mighty struggles with foundation garments and a rough trip to a dude ranch (complete with a fat lip and bad headgear). What's the secret to attracting, and keeping, a good man?*

**Bee:** A vagina made of solid gold. (Answer courtesy of my husband, who is sitting beside me.)



**Shelf:** *You also disclose that you and your husband like to watch the Olympics together with a big bowl of popcorn and pray for the figure skaters to fall on the ice. What other types of schadenfreude do you engage in?*

**Bee:** I cannot be more clear about this: we do not pray together for anything. Least of all, that peoples' ambitions will be cut short by our desire to watch a spectacular ass-related spin out on the ice. That said, should it "happen" while we "happen" to be watching with our big bowl of popcorn... well, we are only human. If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you fall on the ice in a spangly leotard after doing karate kicks to the song "King of Wishful Thinking," should we not titter uncontrollably?

**Shelf:** *You devote a portion of the book to describing your "old lady hands," I have always thought that my own hands—while age-appropriate—were too small for me. What's worse for a woman, old lady hands, tiny hands, or the classicly problematic "man hands"?*

**Bee:** Man hands are OK, unless you are also saddled with "man neck," which is really much worse, and perhaps even telling. The tiny thing isn't ideal, but it only really prevents you from giving satisfying massages, so it shouldn't be a hindrance to a happy life. I think the "old lady" problem is the worst of the "aesthetic hand challenges" because even though you may look young up top, people will cringe when they hold your hand, and children will feel compelled to say unflattering things about them.



**Shelf:** *Your grandmother gave you practical tips for life. Apparently, most things, ranging from molten bratwurst to using Yahoo, can kill you. But you'll be better prepared for life with "full-seated panties," a form of insurance against the vagaries of getting older. Did you ever ignore your grandmother's advice and slink into a thong?*

**Bee:** I did, once...on my wedding day. Not the best day to try something new and uncomfortable, perhaps. I spent much of the time trying to smile for pictures as I attempted (unsuccessfully) to subtly shimmy it out of my backside. On the plus side, it looked better than the girdle I was also wearing.

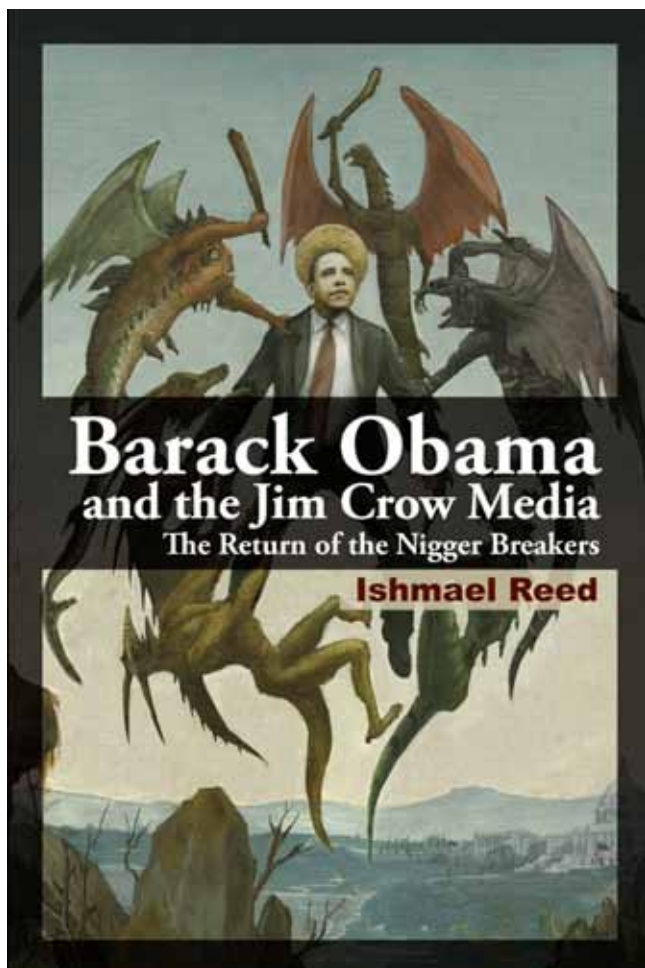
**Shelf:** *There's an old episode of This American Life called "Who's Canadian?" that inspired a post-Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon parlor game in the U.S. where Americans try to surprise other Americans with the secret Canadian*

*identity of celebrities, like William Shatner and Peter Jennings. Have you ever played?*

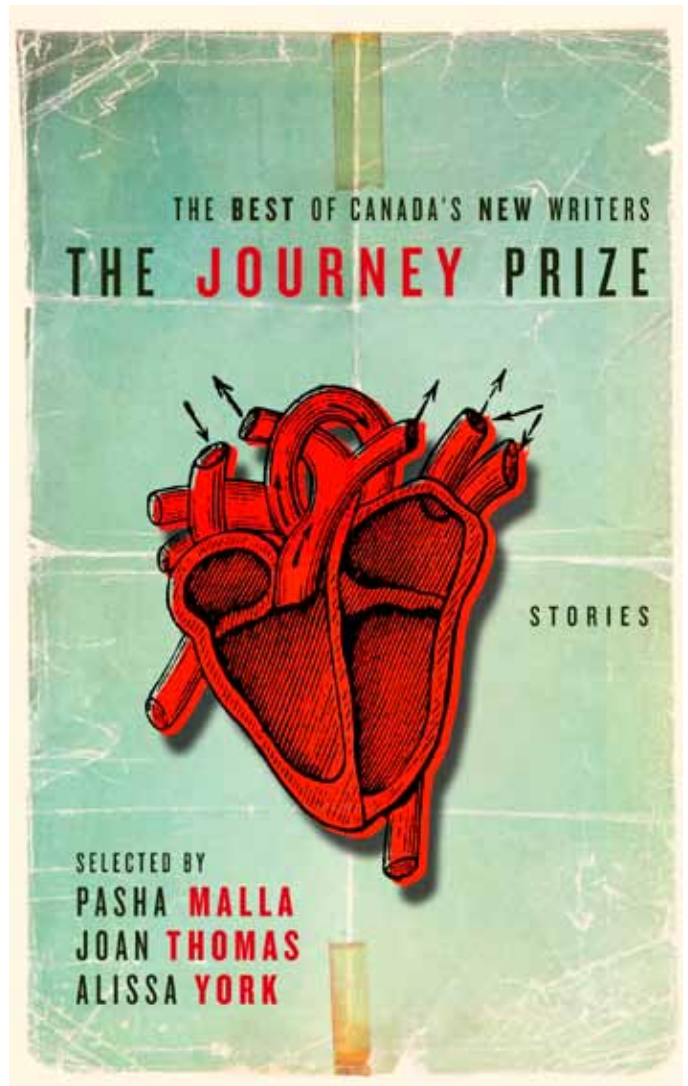
**Bee:** No, it's not necessary. As Canadians we are constantly subjected to cultural conversations about successful Canadians abroad. It's a national pastime. There are no surprises. We know all of them, we know where they live, we know their immigration status, and we know whether or not we are supposed to be disappointed by said immigration status. As in: Are they giving up their Canadian citizenship (not OK!) or retaining their Canadian citizenship (OK!).

**Shelf:** *You, as a successful and famous comedy writer, have a mainstream publisher. But do you have any favorite books by indie publishers on your shelf?*

**Bee:** I'm still getting over the fact that you just called me a successful and famous writer. Thanks, I am now officially impossible to work with. Come over to my house and peel some grapes for me. I don't plan to eat them, I just want them to be extra slimy for when I viciously whip them at you for no apparent reason. ■



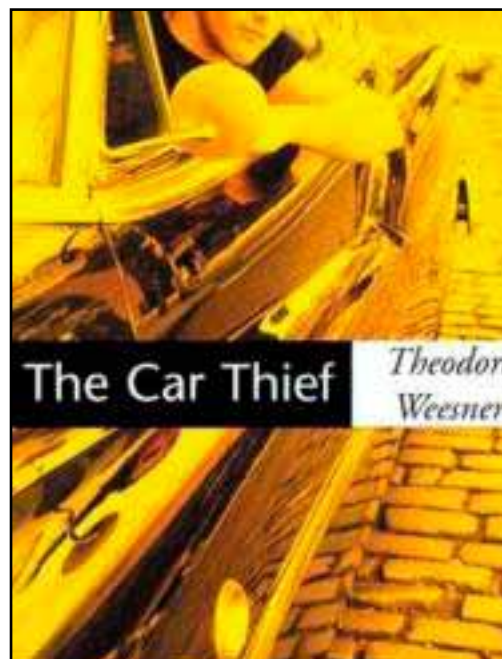
She may have dodged the question, but we have a few indie book suggestions of our own for Samantha Bee:



*The Car Thief* by Theodore Weesner, Grove/Atlantic 2001, [www.groveatlantic.com](http://www.groveatlantic.com). Like Bee, 16-year-old Alex Housman is well on his way to a life of crime after stealing his 14th car in his hometown of Flint, Michigan. The critically acclaimed novel explores the complex love between an alcoholic father and his troubled son.

*The Journey Prize Stories 22: The Best of Canada's New Writers*, McClelland & Stewart 2010, [www.mcclelland.com](http://www.mcclelland.com). The prize is actually funded by Pulitzer Prize-winning author James A. Michener's Canadian royalties from *Journey*, his 1989 book about a trek across Canada's Great White North, but the winners are the best Canadian writers you haven't heard of yet.

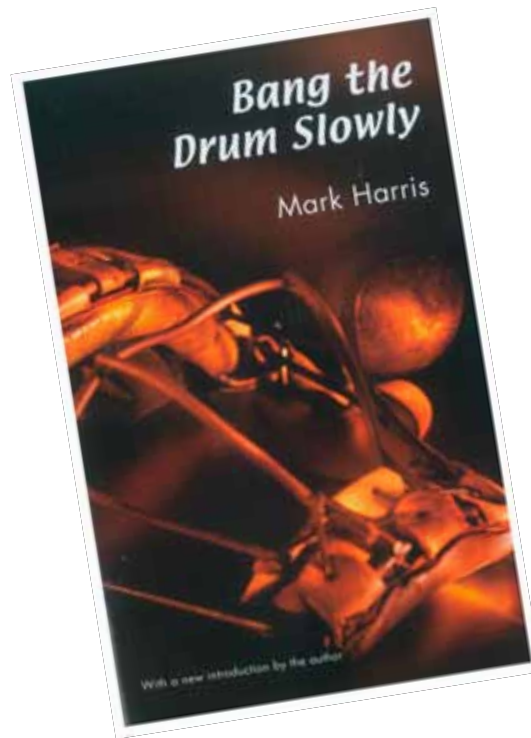
*Barack Obama and the Jim Crow Media: The Return of the Nigger Breakers* by Ishmael Reed, Baraka Books 2010, [www.barakabooks.com](http://www.barakabooks.com). Under slavery, "nigger breakers" had the job of destroying the spirits of tough black men by whatever means necessary. American essayist Ishmael Reed makes the case that President Obama is being similarly assailed in 21st-century fashion, by the media. From a Quebec-based publisher, no less.





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# LAST WORDS



**Bang the Drum Slowly**  
by Mark Harris  
University of Nebraska Press  
[www.bisonbooks.com](http://www.bisonbooks.com)

**i**n my Arcturus Calendar for October 7 it says, “De Soto visited Georgia, 1540.” This hands me a laugh. Bruce Pearson also visited Georgia. I was his pall-bear, me and a fellows from the crate and box plant and some town boys, and that was all. There were flowers from the club, but no *person* from the club. They could of sent somebody.

He was not a bad fellow, no worse than most and probably better than some, and not a bad ballplayer neither when they give him a chance, when they laid off him long enough. From here on in I rag nobody.

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**PINCKNEY BENEDICT** has published two previous collections of short fiction (*Town Smokes* and *The Wrecking Yard*) and a novel (*Dogs of God*). His stories have appeared in, among other magazines and anthologies, *Esquire*, *Zoetrope: All-Story*, *StoryQuarterly*, *Ontario Review*, the O. Henry Award series, the New Stories from the South series, the Pushcart Prize series, *The Oxford Book of American Short Stories*, and *The Ecco Anthology of Contemporary American Short Fiction*. He is a professor in the English Department at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois.

**ERICA MIRIAM FABRI** graduated from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and received her MFA in poetry from The New School. Her work has appeared in *The Texas Review*, *Hanging Loose*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, *The New York Quarterly* and *Good Foot Magazine*, among others. She has lectured and led seminars at Cooper Union School of Art, New York University, Columbia University, and Penn State University. She is also a teaching artist, spoken word mentor, and curriculum writer for Urban Word NYC; and she currently teaches creative writing and performance poetry at The School of Visual Arts, at Pace University, and for the City University of New York (CUNY) at Hunter College and Baruch College. *Dialect of a Skirt* is her first book.

**MICHELLE HOOVER** teaches writing at Boston University and Grub Street and has published fiction in *Confrontation*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Best New American Voices*. She has been a Bread Loaf Writer's Conference scholar, the Philip Roth Writer-in-Residence at Bucknell University, a Pushcart Prize nominee, and in 2005 was the winner of the PEN/New England Discovery Award for Fiction. She was born in Ames, Iowa, the granddaughter of four long-time farming families.

**JOHN JODZIO** is a winner of the Loft-McKnight Fellowship. His stories have appeared in *One Story*, *Opium*, *The Florida Review*, *Rake Magazine*, and a number of other places, both print and online. He's won a Minnesota Magazine fiction prize and both the Opium 500 Word Memoir competition and Opium Fiction Prize.

**PHILIP LEVINE** was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1928 and divides his time between New York and California. He is the author of 17 books of poetry, including the *The Simple Truth* (1994), which won the Pulitzer Prize; *What Work Is* (1991), which won the National Book Award; *New Selected Poems* (1991); *Ashes: Poems New and Old* (1979), which received the National Book Critics Circle Award and the National Book Award for Poetry; and *7 Years from Somewhere* (1979), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award.

**WESLEY MCNAIR** has published seven collections of poetry and two limited edition volumes, along with books of prose and anthologies of Maine writing. A recipient of Fulbright and Guggenheim fellowships and two NEA grants, he has twice been awarded Rockefeller fellowships for creative work at the Bellagio Center in Italy. In 2006 he was awarded a United States Artists Fellowship for poetry. He lives with his wife, Diane, in Mercer, Maine.

**ANDREW MOORE** is a New York-based photographer whose large format photography has been widely exhibited and is represented in numerous museum collections, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, Los Angeles County Museum, San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art, Canadian Centre for Architecture, and the Israel Museum. His film *How to Draw a Bunny* won a Special Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival. Moore's previous books include *Inside Havana* (2002), *Governors Island* (2005), and *Russia: Beyond Utopia* (2005).

**PETER MORRIS** has established himself as one of the foremost historians of early baseball in America. In addition to *A Game of Inches*, he has written *Catcher*, a study of how the man behind the plate became an American folk hero; *But Didn't We Have Fun?*, an informal history of baseball's pioneer era; *Level Playing Fields*, about the early days of groundskeeping, and *Baseball Fever*, the story of early baseball in Michigan.

**PETER SCHILLING JR.** has reported on the Minnesota Twins for the *Minneapolis City Pages*, served as the film critic for *The Rake Magazine*, and now covers film for the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*. A member of the Society for American Baseball Research, he has extensively studied the Negro Leagues and the home front during World War II for his work on two novels. *The End of Baseball*, excerpted in this issue, is his first. Next up? A movie musical, a novel about magicians, and a graphic novel.

**DAVE TOMPKINS**, a former columnist for *The Wire*, writes frequently about hip-hop and popular music. His work has appeared in *Vibe*, *The Village Voice*, *The Believer*, and *Wax Poetics*. As a child growing up in North Carolina, he wrote stories about Mud Men, shot football cards with his dad's .38, and was forced into speech therapy. His grandfather ate the microfilm, somewhere over Moscow.