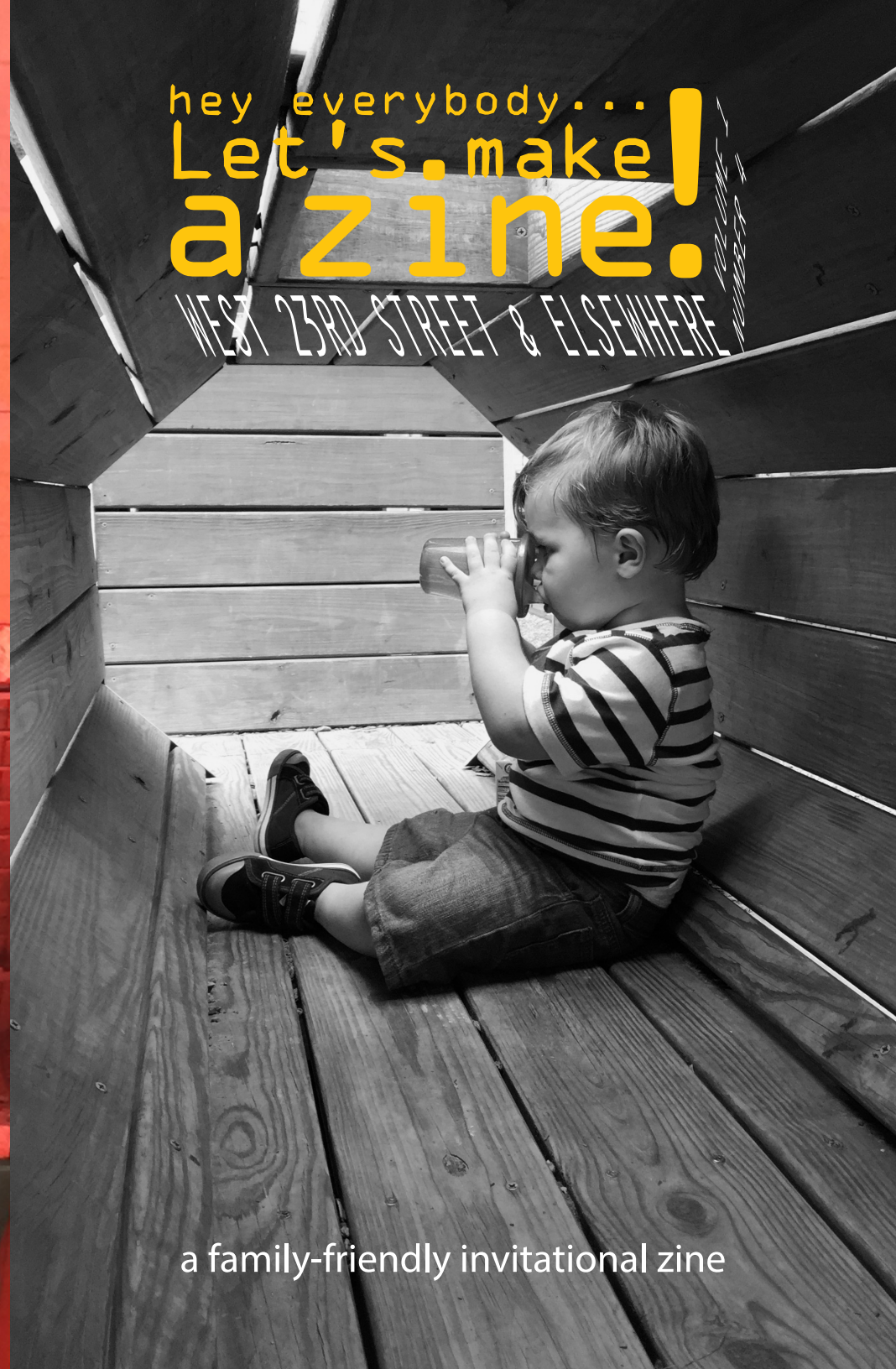




hey everybody...
Let's make!
a zine!
WEST 23RD STREET & ELSEWHERE



a family-friendly invitational zine



LAKE HOUSTON WILDERNESS PARK
by Carrie Decker and Gemma Lowe



ISSUE #4: "TIME AND ZINE WAIT FOR NO MAN"

Another year and another set of great contributions. My deepest thanks to all who submitted. And once again I have not had any time to write or draw anything myself — and only just enough time to get it compiled, laid out and printed. And I had no time to come up with a witty foreword, either. Sigh.

This closes out Volume 1 of this zine. Perhaps arbitrarily, but four issues seems about right. I hope everyone reading this will consider contributing to Volume 2.

Take care,

Patrick Brooks

Editor

hey everybody... Let's make a zine!

A West 23rd Street Production

11/12/2016 • Houston, Texas



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really going to go there?

<http://west23rdstreet.com>

NOCTURNE

by Oen Kennedy

Lightning snuck up on our house just past two
and cracked all the dreamers awake
drawing in a deluge loud as a train
punctuated again and again by Thunder's
rumbling crashing tail:
a huge drunken angry beast stumbling
after the light.

My heart flies out the window and seeks
Toumani — escaped in a flash from
the protective confines of his cage
only two days past - his little gray
birdbody probably clinging, drenched
and shivering, to a poorly chosen nightroost.

Toumani found nest cavities
in the living room's oddest places
hissing and dive-bombing passersby
in bursts of territorial tantruming,
every chromosome surging toward satiation
as if he had young ones to protect! And now
how I would protect and shelter him
from this beastly storm!

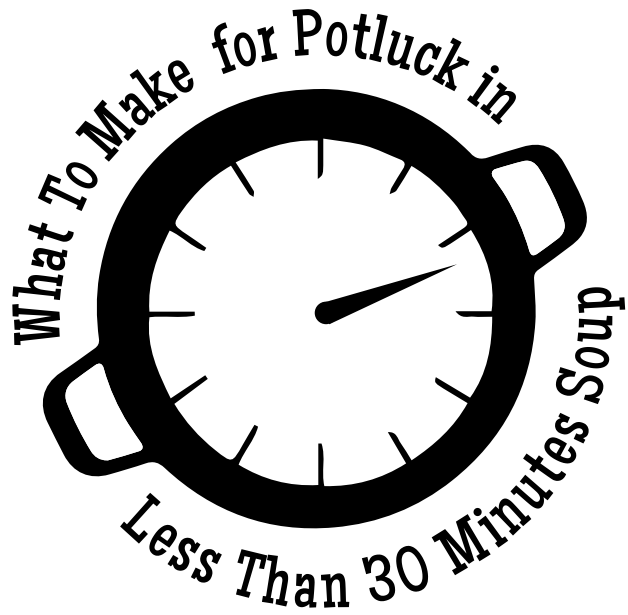
As the rain lets up and the crickets
turn over their little engines again
a storm of smell — a pungent knockout
blow to the senses, launched
by the neighborhood skunk -
comes pouring in the window.
I open up the doors, thinking to ventilate,
thinking for a moment I hear jingling
in the distance — a sorry dog vainly shaking the smell.

But two possums come hurrying up the garden path
the front one sneezing and hacking,
and as they pass by, the ungodly saturation
of skunk doubles and triples:
It's them! The trailing possum
is almost tripping over itself,
keeping as close as possible to its companion,
a small roving smelly furry piece of nocturnal heaven!

THE HAUNTED MANSION

by Marshall Dehart





Ingredients

2 cans pinto beans
2 cans black beans
2 cans kidney beans
1 large can hominy
1 large can tomatoes
1 package ranch dressing mix
1 package taco season mix
salt to taste

Preparation

Dump all ingredients in crock pot or pot.
Stir to mix and heat through.
Serve with rice.
Yum.

Passed on from my neighbor. The best kind of recipe.

— *Peggy McDonald*

A haiku poem

Slowly taking flight
Feather floating through the sky
Falling down to Earth

— Evelyn Dehart



feather illustration: Evelyn Dehart

CROSSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE: MY JOURNEY INTO SUMMONER'S RIFT

By Alice Savage & Kaveh Shafiei

If I'm looking for Kaveh these days, I can usually find him in the wild forest known as Summoner's Rift. Populated by magical warriors, Summoner's rift is the map for the computer game, League of Legends (LOL), and it holds a strange power over him. In order to understand it and perhaps rescue him from the game's allure, I have decided to venture in.

My friends think I'm crazy. When I mention my intention to learn more about it, they are horrified. They warn of health problems, addictions, changes to the physical structure of the brain...violence. I nod my head. I have read that gaming diminishes empathy for other people and can be addictive. Yet what can I do? League of Legends is what he loves most in the world. Kaveh is 13-years-old. For how much longer will I be able to influence how he spends his time?

If I change my mindset just a little, perhaps I can imagine Summoner's rift as another product of Kaveh's rich imagination. As a League champion, he takes up a sword, joins a band, and goes on a dangerous mission where skill and teamwork will determine whether he meets with defeat or claims victory.

But once I decide to visit Summoner's Rift, I face my first problem. LOL is a total mystery. When I look over Kaveh's shoulder, I have a bird's eye view of what looks like chaos. The champions seen from above are colorful but indistinct shapes. They make whirling jerky circles emitting ripples of light and streaks of flame. It's more like fireworks than war, but I know at some level that this screen represents the myriad decisions of two five-person teams wielding weapons and applying strategy to defend, attack and regroup.

"It's too hard to explain," says Kaveh, not unkindly.

"Okay, then."

As a busy working mother, I have been content to be an auditory witness for several years. During that time, I mostly experienced LOL as a bit of chit chat that builds to groans of defeat, calls to attack, and shouts of victory. They erupt from Kaveh, but there are other voices too, Kaveh's school friends and a few he has met through the game.

Take Eric, for instance, I hear his voice almost daily and sometimes we inter-



act. When I bring Kaveh a bowl of mac and cheese, Eric will say, "I want some."

"Sure, I reply. "Do you mind if it has peas? That's the only way I can get a vegetable into Kaveh."

"Yeah, Kaveh," says Eric. "You need to eat your vegetables."

Thumbs up for Eric, I think.

Mostly Eric knows me as the voice that calls Kaveh to dinner, that impatiently says, "How much longer?" and then at a higher pitch, "You promised you'd be off in 30 minutes!"

Eric even goes on vacation with us. Once Kaveh and I were traveling in New Mexico, and I overhear my son say, "No, I'm not in a cave!"

"It looks like a cave." Eric teases.

"It's an Earthship!" Kaveh retorts.

"What the frick is an Earthship?" Eric demands, employing their favorite adjective.

"It's a house that's off-the-grid," Kaveh referring to our solar-powered, rainwater collecting, underground cooling Airbnb rental.

I can only wonder what Eric imagines.

What little else I know about Eric is that he is Korean, lives in Mexico, speaks perfect English and plays a little golf, but that's all I know since the boys are careful not to share personal information. When, they are together, they are not teenage boys. Rather they might be an exiled samurai, a pyrotechnic, evil-eyed little girl or a hairy monster with fangs.

Eventually, I do the math and realize that Kaveh and Eric spend up to 25 hours a week together in the summer. Maybe it really is time to find out more. I promise myself to learn how the game is played.

So, deep breath, I sit with Kaveh, and here's what I learn. When you are a league player, you put on a headset and rest your hand lightly on you mouse and wait for the formation of a team, the assignment of roles and the choosing of champions.

Each player on your five-person team is assigned a role, and your first tactical challenge is to choose a champion that suits your role. Because each role has a different charge--to defend, attack, maneuver or, for example, to protect a squishy (weak) champion that has great kill power--you must choose wisely. According to Kaveh, among the 80 possible champions, only 30 are viable for a competitive game, which makes it a little less complicated but also allows for great variation in the outcome.

Let's say you get the role of fighter. A good choice would be a blind monk named Lee Sin. As Lee Sin you'll use your fists and sonic abilities to take down enemies, but if you were to play a jungler, you would do better to choose Nidalee, a huntress who can transform into a cougar and move swiftly and quietly through the forest.

Riot Games takes great care with their champions, creating lore for each and frequently adjusting them to allow for balance of strength and weakness. The designers have realized that much of what accounts for a team's success is how well they work together. To win, they'll have to complement each other's strengths and compensate for each other's flaws—not always an easy task.

Once your team is sorted, you assemble at your base, which is a tower in the red corner or the blue corner of the map. The map is like a chess or checker board but instead of squares you cross Summoner's Rift, a jungle with trees that wave in the breeze, lakes that harbor dragons, and rock formations that conceal assassins. Three lanes connect the two sides, and it is in these lanes that the game takes place.

Your team must defend your tower while moving up the lanes to attack your opponents' tower. At the start, you feed. This means you seek out and gobble up rows of marching minions in order to gain strength. These minions are then turned into gold that is used to enhance your champion. A well-fed champion is a superior fighter, so feeding off minions is a precursor to the actual clashes.

As the game progresses, you begin to encounter your enemy. You circle each other, clash, dodge and retreat in rainbow colored bursts of fire and noise. Above each champion sits a vertical health bar. It indicates how long you and the other players can survive hits without dying. It is important to pay attention to these health bars so you know who to protect, who is vulnerable to attack and when you need to back off to save yourself.

Now the fun begins. In these extended, fiery battles, the health bars stave off an early death, prolonging the bouts by allowing attacks and counter attacks before an actual kill. In a battle, your excitement mounts as you and your teammates teeter on the edge of victory for minutes at a time.

But sometimes you die. When your health bar is depleted, your champion is killed, and your world goes grey. You reappear alone in your base, waiting out a timer that determines the length of time that you must stay dead. In the early game, death is short, but towards the end, it can be agonizingly long and very lonely.

Eventually, you do return to the dazzling melee of the end game. Here the clashes become fiercer and more urgent. You must be aware of the map, your teammates' locations and health status. You make split second decisions about how to use your abilities. You might have the power to move a protected enemy to an unprotected location so your partner can move in for an easy kill. Or you might turn invisible and suddenly drop into the fray to tip the balance against an opponent. You might have balls of fire for hands, or if you are a powerful girl named Syndra, you throw deceptively dangerous fuzzy purple balls that destroy the health of even well-fed opponents.

It's often apparent who will win before the end of the game, but it is bad manners to quit before the end. You can't just turn your king on his side as in chess. Good sportsmanship dictates that you endure while your tower goes up in flames. Besides, who knows? You can always make a "comeback" and win.

I think I'm starting to get it.

When Kaveh was little, I took him to the wild places of the real world. On hikes in the Olympic mountains of Washington State, we distracted ourselves from fatigue by inventing creatures. They lived in hollowed out moss covered boulders, and each had specific physical features and magical powers. Now I realize that these forest denizens were eerily similar to the avatars that populate Summoner's rift. Maybe those imaginary worlds set him up to embrace LOL's fantasy forest. And if that's true,

maybe there's more to LOL than explosions.

Maybe Kaveh doesn't need to be rescued from gaming. A little more research informs me that gaming can foster creativity. It's certainly develops the social skills of collaboration, and who knows how his generation will organize their world and work life. Esports are emerging as a major global phenomenon, accessible to anyone with a computer and Internet.

I tell my friend Kim about my endeavor to understand League of Legends. We are at a 70's birthday party and I say that I have watched a couple of games from beginning to end. She laughs and listens while I recount my experience. She tells me that her son also disappears into his laptop for hours at a time, and she admits she doesn't know what he's doing there either.

At another gathering a few days later, Kim laughingly reports that she sat down with her son and asked him about his gaming life. The other mothers in the group are appalled. "I don't know how you can let them do that, says a middle-school teacher whom I greatly respect. Those games are so violent!"

I know where she's coming from. And I see the thorny issue of gaming come up with mothers everywhere. But...when I listen to my son talk about league, Kaveh changes. There a sparkle in his eye and a confidence in his gestures. After years of studying LOL, he's an expert and it's very clear that this is what he loves. How can I love him and despise what he cares most about?

"You'd like a gamer's life, wouldn't you?" I half joke, "...living in a dorm with a lot of other players, eating take out and playing League all day."

His face shines with happiness at the thought, and finally occurs to me to ask, "So how good are you, anyway?"

"I don't know," he replies, and so we look it up. He's platinum 2, which puts him in the top 4 percent in North America. Considering that he is only 13—which I recently discovered is the recommended age for him to start playing, that seems pretty high up, and I say so. He nods and explains that if he keeps improving at the same rate, he'll be an elite player by the time he finishes high school. Clearly he's thought about this.

I stop joking. "You are really that serious about League?"

"Yes,"

A few days later, while I'm researching colleges for his older brother, I happen across an article with the headline, 10 best colleges for gamers. I hold my breath, and then I forward Kaveh the link.

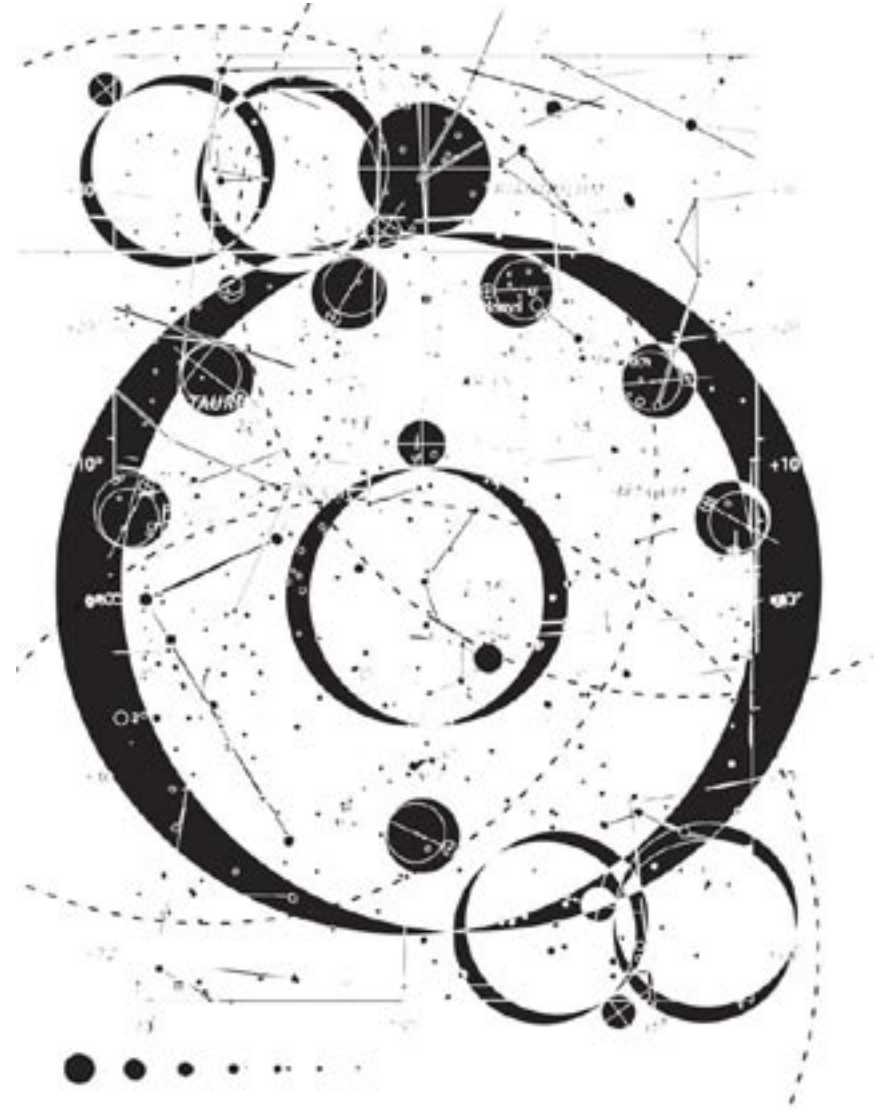
DINNERTIME EPIPHANY

by Davis Brooks

Tangy. Spicy. Savory.
These words come to me as I look down
upon my *Pollo Guisado* taco on flour.
It has made its way across a border to
find me here, at Tacos A Go-Go.
Here in Houston, Texas.
Here in America.
If a certain hombre gets his way, it will be forced
to climb a wall to reach me here next time.
As it enters its new home, the spice makes its mark.
My mouth becomes a furnace.
Tears form in my eyes.
Tears of joy.



Black Arc: Number 05 by Nina Hays



RENEGADE ALIEN GUY IN BOXERS

BY SAM KUŽEL



SAMKUZEL.COM

DOES LIFE BEGIN? WHEN



by Robert Hughes

“**W**hen does life begin?” If there were a precise answer to this question, one would have a rational basis for formulating a policy on abortion, based on the notion that it is impermissible to kill a human being. That is, if we knew exactly what human beings were, we could easily by law proscribe their destruction by other human beings. However, it is obvious from the current acrimonious debate on the issue that there is not an unarguable answer to the question nor, indeed, even a consensus of opinion. The reason for this is that the question is meaningless. Human life, apart from the beginning of all life on the planet, has no beginning; it is continuous.

In order to show that life is continuous, it will be helpful to consider what we are. Each individual represents the survival of a collection of genes, half of which were donated by each parent. Since each parent makes many assortments of his or her genes to their germ cells, each child constitutes a unique collection of his

parents' genes. It is important to remember that not all genes of a given individual are transmitted to the next generation, even if that individual has many children. That is, some genes are lost (die) each generation. Each gene in an individual has a history that can be traced backward in time to one of his parents, then to one of his grandparents and so on. As one recedes further and further into the past, the gene itself will be observed to change and the organisms that bear it will become less recognizable as our ancestors. And if one traces the gene and its progenitors back far enough, one concludes its origins can be found in the primeval chemical ooze from which all life likely sprang.

Therefore, any extant individual can be thought of as the ends of a tangled skein of genetic threads stretching back through time. Furthermore, the interruption of any one of those threads at any point in its history would preclude the existence of that individual. That is, it is material to the existence of a given individual that if his father's particular sperm which would fuse with his mother's egg is destroyed or replaced with another, that individual cannot exist. (The father is used solely for example; similar arguments could be made for the mother, of course.) This argument applies to any of the ancestral bearers of the genes of the individual under consideration; if at any point any one of them failed to donate the gene of interest to the succeeding generation, the individual in question would fail to exist.

What, then, might be the meaning of a call for "the right to life"? One popular point of view is that human life begins with the zygote and should be protected from that point (or even before in some interpretations). But from the foregoing analysis, it is clear that such a position cannot be supported since much of life does not survive from generation to generation and only a fraction of life continues. It cannot be, then, that every egg and every sperm, indeed, every gene is entitled to live to perpetuate themselves for an indeterminate number of generations. Staggering numbers of persons would be necessary to preserve all human life. If such a strategy were possible, it would create so many individuals it would be disastrous for the species (and probably the rest of the world). Therefore, it is unwise, nay, irresponsible to argue for the preservation of all human life; a more prudent course would be to argue for the preservation of some human life.

How will we know when it is not wrong to destroy life? One test is that the life to be destroyed must be incapable of thought or of its recovery if it has been lost and it must be incapable of independent existence without unnatural assistance. Although this is a spare definition, it seems to be gaining acceptance, not only for immature fetuses but for insentient individuals without hope of recovery. Implicit in this definition concerning abortion is that its realization rests, in our species, solely on the opinion of the woman carrying the fetus, incapable of life without the consent of the life sustaining mother. It is important to realize that this right of choice makes women free, for the alternative is an imposition by law forcing delivery by those unwilling. Women would then be a subclass of humans, similar to

slaves, lacking the right to manage their own biology.

No matter how unpleasant the prospect, we, both by inadvertence and by design, destroy much human life but not enough to avert catastrophe. We see this clearly by our inability, by reason or by law, to regulate the number of humans on the planet. This inability has the earth racing to reach the population that is biologically horrifying, when the earth cannot supply the food and natural resources that can sustain the population. But, long before this limit is reached, we will be beset by wars to protect land against immigrants, starvation of large numbers of people and a general breakdown in civilization and orderly and humane behavior.

Finally, in light of continuing advances in biomedicine and biology in general, it is necessary that we continually review, by philosophers, scientists and experts from other branches of knowledge, the morality of the destruction of life as well as its forbiddance in order to preserve our humanity and our civilization.

Let's indulge ourselves in a little fantasy for a different perspective on things. Although we regard ourselves as quite important and our germ cells as relatively unimportant (when we think of them at all), it may be that they have the inverse view. Suppose that in a great sea, eggs and sperm swim and carry on a civilized life. They reproduce in a curious way; occasionally an egg and a sperm will unite to form a machine which clammers out on the bank and begins producing eggs or sperm which return to the sea. Now if the population of eggs and sperm becomes too great, all suffer. As a consequence, eggs and sperm regulate the production of the machines. First, they are careful about uniting but, if passion prevails and union occurs, destruction of the machine is permissible up until the time it begins to produce eggs or sperm. Destruction of the machine after this time is regarded as murder and is dealt with very harshly as is, of course, the murder of eggs or sperm by other eggs or sperm.

Although we have as little regard for our germ cells as they have for us in the little myth above, an outsider might see that all are parts of a great whole: that human life is a system of interdependent parts, all being essential for the preservation of the species.

ACCIDENTAL COURAGE

The Davis Brooks Story

A TALE OF REDEMPTION

by the author of *Dinnertime Epiphany*

It was summer vacation, and we rendezvoused in Washington State with my friend Kaveh (a regular contributor and topic of contribution of this very zine) and his Mom. Two days previously I had been dishonoured, by refusing to swim in Crater Lake, OR, a lake in a crater with temperatures of antarctic proportions (after bragging the whole way down that I would). I needed redemption.

Somebody decided that we would all hike down to this place called Goat Lake. The infamous Goat Lake goat proved elusive. My friend Kaveh decided to brave the calm, shallow waters. With his superhuman strength he held his own against the quote-”surges of cold”. He was obviously part of some government conspiracy to implant temperature resistance technology in the young to finally capture Antarctica after years of facing hypothermia, death and the common cold.

On the far right the water was much warmer. I tried not to think about why the water might be so warm as I slowly walked out to Kaveh’s current location, a log that was adrift. A couple more feet!

Suddenly the piece of debris that I thought was the bottom sank down into the cold, cold belly of the beast. I would like to say that I gave a dignified, manly scream, but what came out sounded more like a gargle. But Kaveh was there to save me.

I had reached the log. Kaveh had had enough, however. But for some reason I started to walk out on the log, entering the freezing areas. Probably the radioactive chemicals that made the water warm were affecting my mind. And if that wasn’t enough, I started boasting that I would swim back, like Kaveh did, **WITHOUT** his

robotic arms, legs and chest. And so I did. I mustered up the courage to swim back, got out of the water, and was interviewed by LIFE magazine for sexiest man alive.

THE END.

Actually, no. What happened was that I slipped off the log, did a sort of swimming never before seen by man, gargled for help, got out with a throbbing headache, and was only interviewed by Parade magazine.

And now the moral of the story: never go on a summer vacation.

THE END (for real this time).



COMPASSION

by Peggy McDonald

Some causes for ending life as we know it:

S *Global Warming.* The highest US temperature recorded was 134F in Furnace Creek Ranch, California. The Western Iranian city of Bandar Mahshahr reached 165F degrees. The “feels like” temperature of 178F was recorded in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. It is here.

Grid meltdown. Ted Koppel’s book “Lights Out” is a well researched description of the world’s vulnerability to a grid crash caused by a cyber-security breach or a solar flare or nuclear explosion or just an overload meltdown. In 2012 a solar flare blew across the orbit of the Earth about 3 days away. If it had hit the Earth, 1/4 of the US grid, at least, would have been incinerated. There is no to little defense for any scenario. Basically, in any such case the grid, transportation and electronics are toast. Imagine the consequences.

Decline of Pollinators. Colony collapse disorder is causing a die off of the bees. Although some scientists blame glyco-phosphates, there is no “proof” and the band plays on. If there are no pollinators, our food supply chain collapses.

Nuclear conflagration and proliferation. Surely no one would do that? North Korea? Pakistan and India? Israel and Iran? Iran and Saudi Arabia? Russia and anybody else? A nuclear conflagration between Pakistan and India does not bother you because it is “over there”? A much less dirty nuclear accident like Fukushima reached California across the Pacific. Multiply that. Sand from Africa reaches Florida in two days. We live on one planet.

Entropy of toxic chemicals in landfills and the environment. Our water now contains antidepressants and hormones and heavy metals and is becoming increasingly acidic. The earth is a laboratory and humans and all other life on the planet, including microbes, are lab rats. We are betting our lives that these chemicals, alone or in combination, will not hurt us. The frogs are mutating and dying. Not a good sign for humans or other life. The Earth has gone through five great extinctions. We are deeply into the Sixth Extinction (Elizabeth Kolbert).

Meteor collisions with earth. Meteor monitoring is just getting underway. Defenses are just in the idea phase. The dinosaurs could offer some cautionary tales.

Microbes run amok. Either weaponized or spontaneous (like Ebola and SARS and MERS) microbes could kill without restraint. Some now in the wild have over 90% mortality. In 1918 an estimated over 50 million people were killed by a flu virus.

The world is a lot more crowded and mobile now. Friendly microbes necessary for life are under threat. No one knows what happens if their balance is disrupted. It is happening now. Humans have just been lucky so far.

Evil triumphs over good. With 11 Billion people on the planet, without compassion we are doomed.

Search on Amazon for “Prepper” in “Books” and there is all kind of advice on how to prepare for the end of life as we know it. Common advice in prepper books is that the key ingredient for survival after the end of life as we know it is being part of a community with compassion. In my view, only compassion can save us either way.

In the face of all this doom and gloom, one small light you can light is to get to know your neighbors.

Thomas Weiser is the parent of a young woman at UT-Austin campus whose life was cut short. He adopted the phrase “*Walk With Me*”. The phrase means to walk in spirit with all who are suffering but also to walk in, at least, pairs especially at night for safety and for making connections with community.

Mr. Weiser said “there have been so many shootings and bombings, acts of violence that threaten the very fabric of our collective humanity...this violence is deeply rooted in our culture, in our politics and even in our religious beliefs that perpetuate both gender inequality and violence...We believe we cannot counter the forces of violence with more violence, but with love and understanding.”

I urge you to *Walk With Me* in compassion for those who are suffering and to demonstrate the importance of reaching out to the world around us.

Untitled

The sky is bright and out my window I see,
An owl who seems to be watching me.

He blinks once then flies away,
Into the sunrise, the break of day.

The sun is rising above the hill,
And now the day birds begin to trill.

My spirit rises with the sun
And in my heart a voice whispers come,

“Come dancing in the meadow, come sing among the trees,
Let your joyful laughter float along the breeze!”

Tess Achtermann



Untitled by Zoli Mayrend

Acrylic on paper 2016



THREE POEMS

Wildflower

The fragile petals,
vulnerable, but strong,
reflect the ever enduring,
cycle of Faith.

Anna V Phillips, March 2016

The Growth of Belonging

Unfolding
Opening
Seeing
Hearing
Shining
Sharing
Planting
Growing
Simple
Being
Part -
Involved
Evolved
Loved.

Anna V Phillips, August 2016

Picture Window

There were eight, each one a square
neatly outlined with bright, white beading.

They sat, in a large rectangular,
broad white frame, four high, two wide.

Each pane was pristine clean
joining forces to present one window.

She sat, stock-still, silently watching
the big picture of a green space with butterfly garden.

Shrubs and leaves swayed in a warm, gentle breeze,
as butterflies flitted between colourful blooms.

She did not notice those bright white beads,
dividing the picture into eight segments.

Then, her eyes refocused and, with each slight shift,
she recognised the beauty of eight different pictures.

She drenched herself in the inspiration and joy
of seeing this 'eight in one' composition.

Her thoughts turned to creative contemplation
as she imagined how she might capture it all.

Within the blissful silence she knew this concept
was the start of a whole new creative journey.

Brush in hand, she approached her canvas
tenderly applying gentle layers of colour.

Time trickled by, slipping through her fingers
as her image gradually took form, came alive.

The day passed, from morning mist to evening sun
as the picture captured the essence of the scene.

Finally, she stepped back, inspecting her work,
the beauty of her vision, cocooned, perfectly.

Gently, she rested her brushes, picture complete.
Turning, she left - her art protecting, another piece of her soul.

Anna V Phillips, February 2016