

The Weazel



Matthew Castellano.

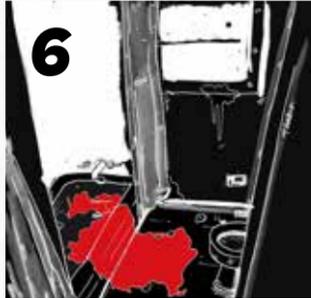
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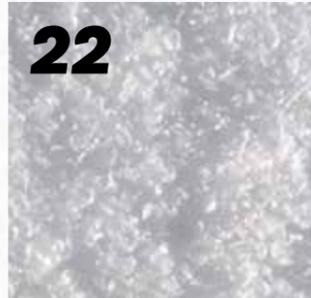
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February 14th



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Note From the Editor



In this issue we interview visual artist and curator Matthew Castellano, where he talks about growing up in South Florida and the influence skateboarding has on his art. Henry Edwards exposes the generational racism in the State Capitol involving former AR Senator, Jim Johnson, and his son, current State Senator, Mark Johnson. You'll also read some short stories, journal entries, and poetry about nostalgia, sexual encounters, poverty, desperation, and a kid with a weird face. Plus another fucked up comic by Everett Gee.



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"If it didn't happen, then you must have truly never wanted it."

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"Have courage and be kind."

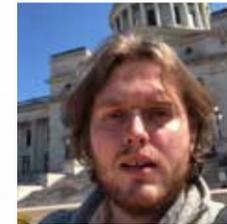
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"It's not art if you aren't losing money"

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Henry Edwards
Writer

"Always ask yourself, how will this affect other people's lives"

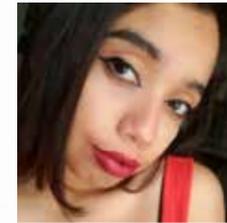
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5-12-15 Casual Encounter

I was standing outside the entrance of the Main Library. It was so fucking hot, and I had just gotten out of class, so I was still in my uniform. I had no idea what she looked like, just that she was 30-something, 5'2, and 185 pounds. I emailed her that I was here, but no response. A couple of minutes later, a short, fat, Latina woman walked out of the library. She stopped, looked at me, then asked if I was the guy. I told her I was, and we headed to my car.

We stopped at a small, white minivan. I had just gotten my license a few weeks prior, and didn't have a car yet, so I was driving the family van. It was old, probably older than me, and would overheat if you drove it down the highway. After the second try, I started the car, and pulled out. I suddenly realized that I had no idea where I was going. I asked her where to go, but she didn't know either. For some reason I thought she'd know a place. We drove around downtown looking for somewhere private, but she started to worry, saying she didn't feel comfortable going too far, so we settled on a gravel lot that was hidden by some bushes.

My parents took out the rear seats when they helped my brother move, so the back was empty. We sat on the floor of the van, looking at each other. My heart was beating so fast, and my hands were shaking. I had never kissed anyone, let alone fucked.

We shoved our tongues down each other's throats, as we pulled off our shirts. It wasn't passionate or sexy. More like two animals mating,



Illustration by: Cole McVay

both in heat. She leaned back onto the floor as I started pulling her pants down, but her pant leg got stuck on something. I pried them off and saw she had an ankle monitor. I looked at her, and she just shrugged.

I took off her panties, and saw a black bush of overgrown, tangled pubes. Her groin was covered in warts, and white puss oozed out of her vagina. It wreaked of wet garbage. I shoved my fingers back and forth, increasing my speed as she started to moan.

I always had a fascination with feet, so I took her socks off. Her feet were the worst type, short, bloated, and crusty. She had grime under her toenails, and long hairs on her big toe. I stuck her left foot in my mouth, sucking each toe and licking in between, as I continued to finger her-- just like they do in porn. I hate feet now, going

to the pool and seeing everyone's wet, disgusting feet. I hate how a woman with an amazing body and face could still somehow have crooked, revolting feet. I even hate my own. I'm never bare-foot unless I'm taking a shower, and even then I make sure not to look down.

She told me to go inside of her, but I didn't want to risk getting an std, at least not more than I already had, so thinking it was safer, I ate her out instead. I had no idea what to do, so I just moved my tongue around in different directions. I could taste the piss in her vagina. She moaned even louder, her legs moving around uncontrollably, as I started to gag. I wanted to vomit. I pulled my head up, but she then grabbed the back of my head and shoved my face back down. Barely able to breathe, I ate her out a bit more until her grip loosened, and she stopped. I looked up to see if she came. She was laying flat on her back, staring at the ceiling, panting.

She suddenly grabbed my belt buckle and unfastened my pants. She yanked my underwear off, grabbed my dick with her stubby hand, and started jerking me off hard, really hard. She spat

on my chest and pulled my face to hers, sucking on my neck. She continued yanking my dick as she fingered herself. I thought about if this was normal, if this was what it's supposed to feel like. All of a sudden everything slowed down, got quieter. I felt like I was in a video game, or some alternate dimension, where I was watching myself. I looked down at a brown stain on the carpet. I focused on it, really looking at it. It was so dark, either coffee or a soda or something. I noticed there were so many crumbs and hairs, untangled threads, and the way each one curl- and then I came. I came on her tits. I immediately regretted not cumming on her face.

I found an old shirt and gave it to her to clean up. After we got dressed, she pulled out a pack of gum and handed me a piece. She said it helps with post-sex breath. I keep a piece of gum in my wallet now, just in case. We didn't say much on the way back to the library. I dropped her off, said goodbye, and drove back home for dinner.

Even though I found her disgusting, and absolutely repulsive, I sit here masturbating as I write. Something about her lack of any care for herself, gravitates to me. I get hard at the thought of her horrid disease ridden vagina breathing in my face. Maybe I like it because I feel like she won't judge me. I feel superior around her. I get to feel so disgusted that it makes me angry. Maybe it's because I'm like her, with my own kind.

- LAWEEZ



Illustration by: Cole McVay

Noah Woods

The Desperation

When you keep weeping

head sunken into shaky hands. The water from the shower head collided against bare skin. Spine protruding down the back—you are a hundred and thirty pounds

bones present themselves often. Food an object of avoidance, replaced by various drugs to suppress the ants crawling in the stomach. Early twenties, spiraling into habits never foreseen in blissful youth.

The dim tungsten light of the bathroom only gives brief moments of movement, the ants scratching away the plastic covered tile walls. A candle flickers on the white marble counter, swarming the air in birchwood.

Now you hold a Gillette razor

in hand, dripping with the hot water from the showerhead. Your battered heart beating itself like a dropped bees nest, Oh Honey!

Water dances around your tight toes, knees tremble with the same tempo.

Eyes already stinging with pain.

The razor is pressed down on a bulging vein, tantalizing its compressed liquid. Move the blades in a horizontal motion, thrashing against virgin skin. Now forming a band of leaking crimson around. The pellets of water collide against the oozing crevasse, brushing away life, more and more. Let out a sorrowful gasp into the plastic curtain, muffling the cry. Slink into the pool of water and blood from the clogged drain, limbs drooping over.

Slowly turning the water deep red while the steam opens up the wounds, allowing the insides to breathe for the first time.

Think about when you were 13 and your dog died. And you started to hate yourself.



Illustration by: Matthew Castellano

When the trees started to turn grey in the middle of summer.
When your body cramped every night as you fell asleep because you refused to eat
when Abigail gently placed a frog in her hand then squeezed
when your uncle told you not to sit like that
when your mom yelled at you for being sad all the time
when the fluid in your body boiled like a poppy seed in soup
when you were 16 and weighed the odds of your life
when Daniel said he didn't want to kiss you
when the baby shallow dug itself into a rabbits hole
when you had your 20th birthday
when you put on your first dress
when your shaved legs finally felt the breeze
when Katie touched you
when you did not want Katie to touch you
when she decided for you what you wanted
when you felt like dying and
when you tried to stop it but were too drunk and high
when the drugs came over like a heat stroke and tranquilized your body
when you woke up in a bed you didn't remember getting into
when you woke up to the smell of burning marijuana and sex
when their eyes started cutting through your skin
when the prickling began
when you have to come up with an excuse to let the pain go
when you don't talk
when you don't know where your clothes are
when you get a goodbye kiss
when it seems like a tree grows in front of you for 19 years
when the warmth hits your frozen tears that scrape away your skin
when they glide out of your eyes
when the previous 12 hours rush into you like a dentist drilling into your tooth canal and
when you are suddenly driving down I-40 and have a moment
when the hands are no longer on the wheel but on your own throat reliving the moment
when you felt powerless and that it was supposed to just be a kink
when you have to play the quiet game
when you have to
when you have
when you
when

George's Dumb Face

By Tim Morrison

He couldn't help from laughing every time he saw George's dumb face. His friend's mother's doctor had put too much force behind the thumbs during delivery, while pulling George from the vaginal canal.

"Oops, I botched it," the doctor had said immediately after, on inspecting his work. He had pushed the eyes to either side of the face, crooked the nose, lodged in the ears. There was no discerning chin. The jaw was sharp on one half, round as a bowling ball on the other.

George's mother looked down from the bed, in a state of delirium, her gown bottom hiked up as part of the excavation. She had rolled herself over to one side to get a better look— perm curls in disarray, sweat dripping from the ends.

"What, you didn't do no good?" She asked.

The doctor tried to fix his mistakes hurriedly but saw that he was only making it worse. The face had not been settled, like a pizza with the toppings still able to be shuffled around. He now had to leave it to the uninterrupted oven of time.

"It's not my best work," he admitted, with sympathetic brows.

The mother looked up to call to God for guidance, but found the fluorescent light fixtures on the hospital ceiling so appalling that she decided either there must be no God. or that he had terrible taste to create those who would design these awful fixtures.

She stopped praying. "Well, hand him over," she said finally, with the same vexed expression of someone who must leave their vehicle to inspect damage.

He guiltily gave over the ugly thing wrapped in a mess of blankets, looking away while doing so. On receiving the boy, it took everything in

her not to burst into tears at his grotesque, alien features. I must love this thing she decided, after a brief, delirious period where she thought of throwing him at the doctor as he was leaving the room. Even though he is hideous I will still love him, she thought. The boy's cries bounced off the walls as he twisted uncomfortably in her hands. She smiled down at her child, rocking him lightly.

This continual love from his mother was the reason for George's relatively well-adjusted and contented temperament, despite his hampered appearance. One day he asked his mother why he looked the way he did, and she explained the bit about the doctor.

Ralph had known him for years, yet he was still prone to outburst on seeing the face. He would usually apologize, but they both found over the years that it was better to simply move on. They met in an art class in high school where George had been his model for a painting. Ralph had failed the assignment, yet on seeing George, the teacher later amended the grade. To improve his ability as an artist, he'd have George pose nude and paint him with clothes and have George put his clothes back on to paint him nude. Eventually, he didn't need him to pose at all but they kept with it because they each respected traditions.

Ralph was relatively sane, but had constant intrusive thoughts about cutting off his left hand and there was something in George's presence that seemed to quell those thoughts. Ralph hated to admit it to himself, but what he really loved about his friend was how he constantly reminded him that his own situation could be worse.

What George hated was when he told a joke and he couldn't tell if Ralph was laughing at the punchline or his garbled bone structure. The

laughs were uncontrolled responses coming from a part of himself Ralph didn't recognize as his own. The two would often go to the quarry and talk about the number of fingers rats had or why praying mantises prayed. They threw rocks at gray squirrels and let the red ones pass. It was an arbitrary rule, yet it was a rule nonetheless. They often came here at night, which meant there weren't many squirrels around.

"Hey, Ralph," George said.

"Yeah?" His friend turned.

"You wanna go skinny dipping in the water?"

The quarry was a giant crater, holding water in its round, cupped bottom; the concave void was left from the impact of a meteorite in the distant past. Ralph looked out at the black, languid water with the same color as dirty cast iron. He thought of it only as an area for throwing rocks and the occasional soda can, which he really did feel extremely guilty about. His whole face pulled down a shade of consternation at the thought of skinny dipping.

"Why, George, the water must only be a foot deep. I don't even know if it will go up to our ankles."

George had already stripped his shirt and shoes, he shuffled his jeans off, standing on one leg.

"What else is there to do?" George asked, finally getting his jeans over both feet.

Ralph thought about it. He stripped off his button-down, and the rest, and soon they were both standing naked on the edge of the quarry, looking down the 20 foot dirt wall. Ralph was taller and straighter in silhouette.

"We'll just have to work our way down," George said. He sat on the edge, and scooted up how kids do at the top of a playground slide. He started down the edge.

"My ass, my ass!" he yelled on the way down as his end scraped over rocks and hard tree roots. He reached the bottom, sore as hell, and felt up the damage. He rubbed at the welts on either side of his crack.

Ralph laughed. He turned himself over, belly side facing the ground, and started down the ridge in a plank position. He slid down and made it— except for mild cuts on his palms— without incident.

George stepped over the bank and its prickly cudweeds, then into the cool, midnight water. Going to the middle, he let out small wincing pains as each step lodged small rocks deeper into his soles.

Ralph was hesitant. He never went to the ocean of the coastal town he had grown up in because he couldn't be sure what was in there, and yet here was the same problem. Some new part of himself he didn't recognize had to take over and he stepped on the same rocks as his friend then he found a sharp, stabbing edge that made him yelp like a dog that had been shot.

He reached down under his foot and pulled out a faded, twisted soda can. He knew it had drawn blood without even checking, yet he also knew he had no right to complain.

The two young men were standing in the middle of the quarry, water halfway up to their calves. George with his hands laying limp by his side, Ralph's on his hip. They both looked around, not sure what to do next. The stars reflected in the water, dancing slightly with the small ripples the pair had left from their steps.

"This is stupid," Ralph said.

A gust of wind passed over him and he shivered.

"It's cold," George said, crossing his arms. He looked down at the wilted, circumcised thing below his belly.

Ralph looked down at his own. "Yeah, it is."

They kicked around at the surface of the water. Making rings of tepid waves each time. Ralph bent over and started splashing around with his hands, he wondered if there was anything alive down there. Doubted it.

"Hey, Ralph."

Ralph looked back up and faced his friend. George's profile was horrible in the moonlight. "I'm going to kill that doctor."

White Supremacy At the State Capitol: A Family Tradition

By Henry Edwards

Fire hoses blasting water on peaceful black protesters, Southern governors screaming white supremacist verses from segregationist pulpits, and a violent mob screaming at Elizabeth Eckford as she integrated Central High School. These are the images we conjure when we think of our country's civil rights history. A common refrain among social conservatives is that we as a society have moved beyond racism because we no longer see explicit images quite like these. While we do not see the same images our grandparents saw, racism still finds ways to implicitly seep into our society.

In Arkansas, this transition from explicit to implicit has shown itself in the political relationship between a man, "Justice" Jim Johnson, and his son, current state senator Mark Johnson. When I'm at the Capitol, it seems as if this relationship is a dirty little secret. Hardly anyone mentions it in public, and when I hear about it it's always in a hushed tone. It's something that is not repeated nearly enough, and should be said every time his name is mentioned: one of the conservative legislators in Arkansas is the son of the most outspoken segregationist in Arkansas's history.

Jim Johnson wore that badge with pride, in fact, he first entered politics because of segre-

"...racism still finds ways to implicitly seep into our society."



gation. In 1948 he campaigned for presidential candidate Strom Thurmond, who led a third party called the Dixiecrats. This party was founded as an anti-civil rights party, and it gave many racists their political starts, including Jim Johnson.

From there, Johnson started his vibrant career in Arkansas politics. In the next election, 1950, he won a seat in the Arkansas Senate. With his newfound political power, he sought to prevent integration in every part of the state. In 1954, after the *Brown v. Board* decision, he brought the White Citizens Council to Arkansas, whose chief focus was to prevent the racial integration of public schools. In 1955, he led his first battle against integration, as he mounted a legal challenge against the integrated Hoxie School District. At the time, Governor Orval Faubus refused to step in and prevent Hoxie's integration, and his legal challenges failed.

The same year, Jim Johnson filed an "interposition amendment" to the state constitution, allowing the state government to prevent federal laws and rulings that it deemed unconstitutional to enforce. A number of southern states used this constitutional argument to keep school segregation in place. The people ratified the amendment in the 1956 election, but the U.S. Supreme Court rejected interposition in *Cooper v. Aaron* (1958).

We now remember Orval Faubus as the poster child of racism in Arkansas, but in 1956, Johnson challenged him in a primary because he was not anti-integration enough. After Johnson lost this primary, Faubus became known for fighting against the integration of Little Rock Central High in the 1957 school year. During the crisis, Johnson was a close adviser who counseled him on taking hard stances, including ordering the National Guard to deny entry to the Little Rock Nine.

After this period, Jim Johnson served a single eight year term on the Arkansas Supreme Court, where he earned the moniker "Justice" Jim. With his term ending, he won the Democratic

gubernatorial primary in 1966, but lost the general election to Winthrop Rockefeller, Arkansas's first Republican Governor since Reconstruction. Soon a relic of Arkansas's explicitly racist past, he lost several runs for the Arkansas Supreme Court. He spent the last part of his life mainly in private, authoring letters to the editor from the aptly named home called Whitehaven in Conway. Up until his suicide in 2010, he still maintained his racist attitudes, once telling a reporter

"Faubus became known for fighting against intergration of Little Rock Central High in the 1957 school year"



Illustration by: Sir Justice Truth BaFree



Illustration by: Sir Justice Truth BaFree

that I have to admit that I have not grown to the point where I am not uncomfortable when I see a mixed couple.

I'm no child psychologist, but I would imagine being raised in an environment with a person like that would take some sort of toll. Mark Johnson got his political start by interning for Democratic congressman Wilbur D. Mills, but later joined the cabinet of Republican Governor Frank White in 1980. It was this move that prompted his father's switch to the Republican Party. Mark did not enter the policy making arena until his election to the state senate in 2018. In the interim, he was a fundraising consultant to several Arkansas cities.

Upon his election, he did not adopt the fiery tone of his father. He did not publicly oppose racial integration. He did not shout from the pulpit

that black people were inferior to white people. His white supremacy has lurked in the shadows, and he has worked to subtly subvert any movement towards racial equality.

He had a relatively quiet first legislative session, but he still showed his colors. He introduced Senate Bill 515, which would prohibit the moving or altering of Confederate monuments, and would punish private actors who damaged a monument. The bill passed the Senate after a couple votes, although it failed in its House committee, and was not run through committee again. He co-sponsored and passed House Bill 1730, which made it easier to create more charter schools. Charters in Arkansas have operated to the detriment of public education and racial equality.

This session, however, he has come out of his

shell a little bit more. He co-sponsored a pair of bills which deal with the teaching of race history in school. House Bill 1218 would punish a school, college, or University for offering courses, events, and activities that promote the overthrow of the U.S. government; promote division between, resentment of or social justice for a particular group. Obviously, this paints a broad brush, as banning anything that promotes the social justice of a particular group would seemingly prohibit the teaching about figures such as MLK, Malcolm X, Cesar Chavez, and dozens of others. House Bill 1231 prohibits teaching of the 1619 Project: a collection of articles from the New York Times which presents a history of the United States as one primarily built upon slavery. These bills have failed and won't become law, but they show a profound lack of respect for the experiences of black people in this state and country.

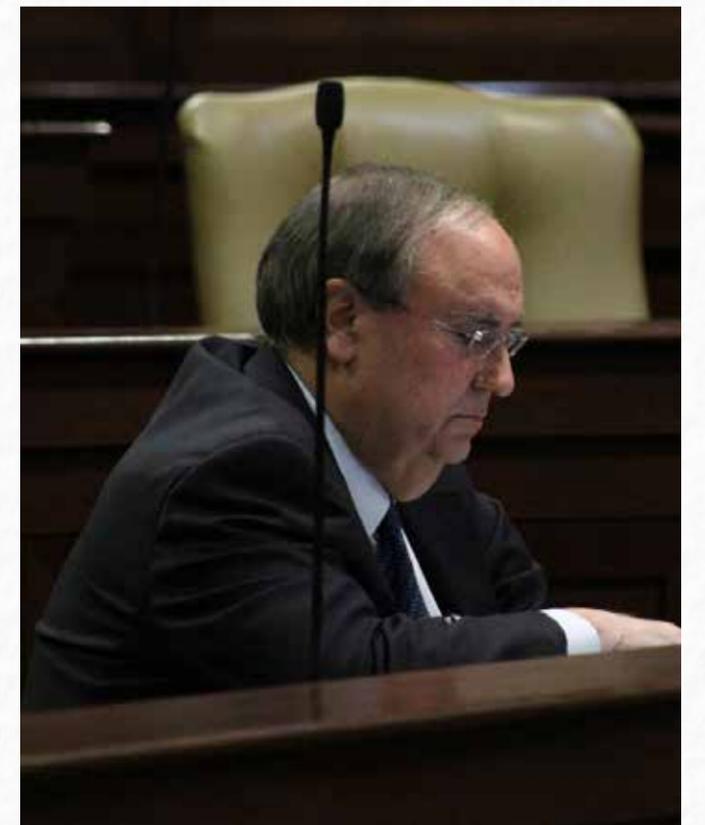
“These bills have failed... but they show a profound lack of respect for the experiences of black people in this state and country.”

These bills are egregious and dangerous, but practically, they pale in comparison to another bill he's introduced this session. It is a referred constitutional amendment that would remove the state's requirement to provide an “adequate and equitable” education to children across Arkansas, and would only require the state to provide a free education. This is in response to the series of Lake View cases, in which the courts forced the legislature to establish a much fairer and effective funding plan for schools. After they enacted the Lake View reforms, Arkansas's average ACT score shot up from 17 to 21. Even with these improvements, the student achievement

gap between white and black students remains wide, with literary achievements for white students around 55%, and black students 33%, according to Arkansas assessment data.

Clearly, more work needs to be done, but if this amendment passes, it would likely mean that many schools would lose a substantial amount of funding. The schools affected, given the political makeup of the legislature, would likely be the poorer, blacker, and more rural school districts. Additionally, this would open the door for more privately owned but publicly funded charter schools to play a larger role in education, which would leave even more schools inadequately funded.

Mark Johnson is not advocating that schools be explicitly segregated, like his father did for decades, but he is advocating for weakened public schools and strengthened charter schools, which would disproportionately and negatively affect poor, black children. While examples of racism in Arkansas may take different forms, in this case, they share the same last name.



Semillas y cáscaras: cuentos del norte

Por Jon Nevárez Arias

Miguelito estaba en el jardín junto a la maceta de tronadoras que les había dado su abuela cuando viajaron hasta Sinaloa para visitarla. Las tronadoras habían sido una parte del jardín de ella por mucho tiempo. Se hacían cuando las flores de este específico arbusto se secan y sus pedales se enroscan, encapsulando sus semillas. Durante la última primavera se extendieron demasiado y empezaron a causar problemas con las otras plantas en su jardín. Después, ella tuvo la idea de regalárselas a todos sus hijos para que las planten en sus propios jardines. Muchos vinieron de diferentes partes a recogerlas. Su tía Irene, que estaba estudiando literatura en el D.F., su tía Carmen que se casó con un hombre a los 17 y se fueron a vivir a Tamaulipas. Hasta su tío Paco, que había empezado su vida como instructor de baile folclórico en Nueva York, y por supuesto la familia de Miguelito, quienes eran sus vecinos en Chihuahua.

—¿Entonces qué chingados quieres que haga?— Miguelito oyó a su padre gritar desde su casa.

Siendo un día frío en los primeros días de la primavera, Miguelito notó la condensación que se había acumulado sobre la maceta. Con su dedo índice empezó a escribir los nombres de su familia mientras los decía en silencio. “David. Ivette. Martín con acento en la i. Dolores.” le dijo a la obscuridad del jardín.

La puerta principal de la casa se abrió.

—Miguelito, ya vente a cenar— Le gritó su hermano mayor, David, y cerró la puerta.

Antes de meterse, Miguelito agarró una vaina de la tronadora y se la metió al bolsillo de sus

pantalones. Cuando entró a su casa, su madre Dolores, que parecía haber estado llorando, lo vio y le reclamó en voz alta.

—¡Válgame Dios, niño! ¡Ya enlodaste los pantalones nuevos! ¿Y ahora qué te vas a poner pa' la misa?

En un pánico, Miguelito le respondió —No están enlodados.

Su mamá, cogiéndolo de la muñeca y dándole una gran nalgada le gritó —¡Ve a cambiarte para lavarlos antes de que se seque el lodo!

Miguelito corrió hacía su cuarto, mordiendo su labio inferior para contener sus lágrimas. Cuando se cambió el pantalón, esculcó sus bolsillos por la vaina que había ocultado. La colocó en el bolsillo de la pantalonera que se puso y salió a unirse con su familia en el comedor. La familia comió en silencio salvo el sonido de su padre rechinando sus dientes y el chasquido ocasional de los cubiertos.

Esa noche, cuando dormían sus hermanos, Miguelito salió de su cuarto y se dirigió hacia el baño. Él sacó su vina y con mucho cuidado y cariño la colocó sobre el mostrador. Después llenó un vaso con agua del lavabo, sumergió sus dedos en el vaso y los sacó goteando agua por el lavabo hasta que quedaron justo sobre su vaina. De gota a gota empezó a mojarla hasta que con la humedad la semilla reventó con un sonido estallido dispersando sus semillas sobre el mostrador. ¡Qué planta tan maravillosa!, pensó Miguelito. Unos pasos de pie pesado se acercaron al baño y la chapa empezó a traquetear.

—¿Qué están haciendo?— Dijo la voz de su

madre con el sueño aun en su garganta.

Escurriendo, Miguelito sacudió el mostrador con papel de baño, lo echó junto con la vina y sus semillas al escusado, y bajó al drenaje.

—Nada, Má— él respondió aprensivo.

—¡Miguelito, ábreme esta puerta este instante!— ella gritó a través de la puerta.

Miguelito se apuró a secar el lavabo con una toalla y abrió la puerta.

—¿Qué estabas haciendo?— lo regañó.

—Pos, meando.

—¿Andabas con esas vinas otra vez verdad? Ya vete a dormir.

Miguelito se fue a su cuarto y se acostó pensando en la tronadora afuera mientras se quedaba dormido.

La siguiente mañana se despertó por el sonido de muchos truenos afuera y un fuerte rugido de la lluvia que caía. Su hermano estaba empacando unas camisas en una mochila con su cara vestida con una expresión de piedra. Miguel se levantó y salió de su cuarto. En la sala, su madre y su padre hablaban en voz alta.

—¿No nos vamos a completar la renta entonces?— dijo su madre.

Su padre, que era un albañil, contestó —Pues no, no nos vamos a completar. Pero de donde chingados saco la lana si no puedo trabajar.

Su madre se quedó en silencio y se sentó en el sofá. En su mano sostenía un rosario y frotaba una perla entre su dedos índice y pulgar.

—Ya esta noche nos vamos con el coyote para ver si así sí.

Miguelito vio a su hermana llorando cerca del comedor.

Cuando su madre lo vio le dijo con una voz tierna, —Ve y acuéstate, mijo.

Aunque Miguelito no tenía sueño, se regresó a su cuarto y se metió debajo de sus cobijas mientras pensaba en su familia. ¿A cuál coyote va a ir mi papá que le va a ayudar? Después de un tiempo, sin querer, Miguelito se quedó dormido.

Se despertó al ser sacudido por su padre y su voz diciendo su nombre. La casa ya estaba ob-

scura. Se sentó y se le escapó un gemido de su garganta mientras se frotaba los ojos.

—Ya me voy a ir, mijo.— Le dijo su padre.

—¿A dónde?

—Tengo que ir al Chuco.

—Bueno— le contestó un poco mareado por el sueño. —¿Vas a regresar?

—Claro que sí.— le aseguró su padre y le dio un abrazo.

Miguelito se levantó y los dos salieron de su cuarto.

En la sala estaba esperando su hermano David con una mochila colgada a su espalda junto con su madre, quien se veía muy triste y su hermana que aun seguía llorando en voz baja. Su padre también recogió una mochila del piso y los cinco salieron afuera. Miguelito, aun entre estar despierto y dormido caminaba al lado de su hermano. Sin verlo, David le dijo en una voz quebrada, —Cuidas la casa eh, Miguelito.— Miguelito, asintió su cabeza para afirmar que lo había oído pero su hermano no tuvo el valor de voltear a su dirección para saber que lo hizo.

Se pararon cuando llegaron al barandal y su madre abrazó y les dio un beso de despedida a su padre y a su hermano y los dos empezaron a caminar por la banqueta. Dolores, Ivette y Miguelito se quedaron en el porche hasta que Martín y David desaparecieron en la línea horizontal. Miguelito volteó a ver a su madre que se quedaba en silencio y a su hermana que seguía sollozando en voz baja. Perplejo, volteó a ver a la maceta en el jardín y se fijó que los nombres que había escrito el día anterior habían sido borrados por la lluvia y las vainas de la tronadora estaban colgadas vacías.

Matthew Castellano

By Sophia Ordaz



What are your origins, and how did you end up in the Natural State?

I was born in Miami, but I was raised in a small town about 30 miles south of Miami, a place called Homestead. It's a farming community with a lot of money and big farms, so there were rich families... It was definitely a small-town upbringing with close-knit friends in the community, and skateboarding was what brought us all together... [My grandparents] were originally from Ohio, but moved to South Florida. My mom was a single mom, a teacher. They retired back into Arkansas and bought a house up outside of Harrison to be close to the Buffalo National River because my granddad... volunteered in the National Park Service.... lived up there in Northwest Arkansas for about a year and then moved to Little Rock. And that's where I've stayed. I've been here for about 10-11 years now, and I've really, really loved being here. It's been a wonderful experience, with all the people and all the artists that I've met. My art career really took root here.

How did skateboarding as a teen impact you creatively?

Going to downtown [Miami] skateboarding really introduced me to that grittiness: kids hanging out on the street, going to Burger King, figuring out where all the skate spots are, skirting the edge of the super unknown... It was like a playground. Experiencing all the festivals that happened, trying to skateboard around all that, getting kicked out, and running around everywhere was definitely the creativity that I needed growing up. It was the fuel. I still skateboard to this day and still get that rush. And I still get that inspiration, but not like that, not like a bunch of people feeling the buzz from the city, all the cars, the people going to the beach and drinking. How do you approach negotiating a price for your work? You have to figure out your moral compass



Illustration by: Matthew Castellano

or your guide when it comes to pricing. Because you can give yourself \$20 an hour, but are you really there all those hours or are you just doing busy work?... You gotta watch out for cheapening yourself and becoming a commodity instead of an artist. There were a couple times where I overpriced, and I lost the sale. And sometimes I've overpriced stuff thinking, 'Hey, why not?,' and it moves. And then there are some pieces I priced that were perfect, right on the money, and they're still in my living room, you know...Pricing is difficult, but it gets easier. It comes with time, but also the maturity level of being an artist for a decade....You do have to give and take, and you're going to lose more than you make. For sure. I mean, it's like with any kind of small business, you lose the first five years. So that's what you got to be into. And what curves that is figuring out your materials, and figuring out a way to obtain those with little to no cost."



How do you approach your style?

I like to go back to minimalism as much as I can, without going too easy on myself. Like I'm not gonna sit there and just draw a shape. I'm not that abstract. But simplistic minimalism is something I always return to, to remind myself where I came from and where it started because it's always a good centering point for me...

The symbol of the skull is so important in my art....I like to use a lot of symbolism, and there's even symbolism in the pricing sometimes, which is fun. For example, there's a couple of pieces I sold for \$187...I like giving a nod to people who look at things a little deeper....I try to include symbols in my art that are not always picked up on your first time looking at it. And that's my storytelling in a single image.

I try to almost figure and pose a multiple storyline in one single image. The only time I actually really achieved that without having an idea of the image beforehand is with *The Navigator*. It's a pretty heavy piece that I've done. I'm really wanting to expand on that style. That's what I'm going for with this piece, *Market030921*, I'm doing for *Weazel Lifestyle*. It's definitely encompassing all the nuance of the new things that I want to do.

Your zine *Tracker Kiosk* was recently released by Fluke Publishing. It depicts playfully-drawn characters with large coats and respirators. What was the inspiration behind your zine?

It's not too far from my original designs, but they're definitely a curated series that I definitely did just for [Fluke]. I only posted one or two of [the kiosks] during this process. It's amazing to be published by Matthew Thompson, because he was THE zine guy here in the '90s in Little Rock, and he lives in Arizona now, but I won't hold that against him. This is a huge dream come true....[The tracker kiosks] are a representation of the human spirit. When social distancing and COVID hit them, they had to be separated. So [with their respirators and masks], these indi-

viduals can be nomadic and move around, go to their job and be safe and comfortable and feel at home. They're very comfortable.

It was also super cool because I've always had to print zines myself...But now I'm sitting here with 200 of them, and it's so awesome that I didn't have to cut all those or fold all those. And also they're going out to the West Coast and in different shops. I'm stoked about it.

How has your relationship with discipline and artmaking fluctuated over time? I feel like that's always so tricky to navigate.

It is, and it differs from person to person. I really try not to force it. If I'm not feeling it, then it's a sign that I need to rest or I need to get through something. But there's always procrastination, and you've got to recognize it, especially with people that are creative. If you work all the time, you need that time to actually physically rest, so it's really hard to hold down a physical job and then come home and do a mental task that can also be physical in a sense. But that should never stop you. If you know that you're a creative per-



Illustration by: Matthew Castellano

son and you need to draw to feel normal or to feel like yourself, then it's important for you to make that decision to tell yourself: 'I need to take this time to draw.' It's like exercise; the more you do it, the better you get.

I'm still figuring out how to refine the creative process, and it's always changing, always ongoing, and never going to be consistent. You always gotta learn. That's where the discipline and consistency come in.

How were you affected when the pandemic first hit?

When it started, at the time, I had quit working at the art store to work at a restaurant because that was a change that I needed to make more time for art. And I was really trying to think, 'This is it, I'm gonna start dedicating more time to art, I'm gonna start making the shift into part-time work and then make the art thing happen.' And then the pandemic hit. I was at a restaurant doing to-go food, so it was a closed restaurant with only three other people. That's all I saw. Then when I got back to the art store and eventually started to see people again, it still kind of made me wary, seeing people in person, sanitizing after everyone and everything....It was so strange, because at the beginning [of the pandemic] people wanted to buy. And they wanted us to support artists, and they were very gung-ho and very generous. And it was very good. I got to work on more of my online orders and fine-tune shipping and creativity at home. I never stopped working... But man, 2020 was a blur because I was working six days a week and then doing art anytime in between. I began to wonder if maybe I should not work and just do art. But then my motivation would plummet. I needed to have a set schedule that's on somebody else's time. I needed that pressure. That's the soft pressure that motivates a weird procrastinating skateboarding kid to embrace his creativity. It's a delicate balance, but once you find it, you can create some beautiful discipline with that.

The idea of the starving artist has always been troublesome to me because I get the metaphor, but no artist is creating beautiful masterpieces when they're starving. If they're working really hard to not die of starvation, they're not going to be making beautiful art; it's going to be sad art. When artists create a comfortable situation for themselves, mentally and physically and emotionally, then that's when their peak creativity comes out and beautiful creations come out of their brains.

It seems like you develop your creativity from introspection, not necessarily from the structure of the teacher-to-student educational model. Did you ever think about going to art school? Why or why not?

I didn't like school. I was not a school person. I struggled until the end of high school and barely graduated. I just wanted to get out of there. I just wanted to live my life. I wasn't destined to be anything better, and I knew that right away. I was a dumb kid.

Now, looking back, I definitely want to go back to school. I definitely want to get a degree, eventually, I can be a non-degree seeking student and go take a bunch of printmaking classes just to have the camaraderie....I tried community college, but it didn't work out. I'm definitely someone that had to learn the hard way, and that's why I'm so passionate about making sure the knowledge I have to share is easy to obtain, so people don't have to work as hard as I did or wonder as much or agonize about what-ifs....it's definitely a struggle, that I don't have a bachelor's because I have that imposter syndrome. I'm a professional artist, but it took me a while to even say that. But I've proven that I am multiple times., I'm more comfortable with it now, and I feel like more people should be....That's what I'm loving about the community aspect of communicating with different artists, knowing about what they do and how they are because that's so important and that could be inspiring beyond belief.

February 14th,

I always really liked the snow, ever since I was a boy. It meant no school, in that generic sort of way. The way you learned after watching hours of cartoons, where the characters praised the day off, where they rode sleds and made snow angels, had snowball fights and built forts. Maybe it was learned behaviour, but the feeling was still there. Trying to emulate the fun they had, but I never knew any “neighborhood” kids. Never had any. But there I’d be, laying in the snow flapping my arms up and down, trying not to ruin the angel as I got up.

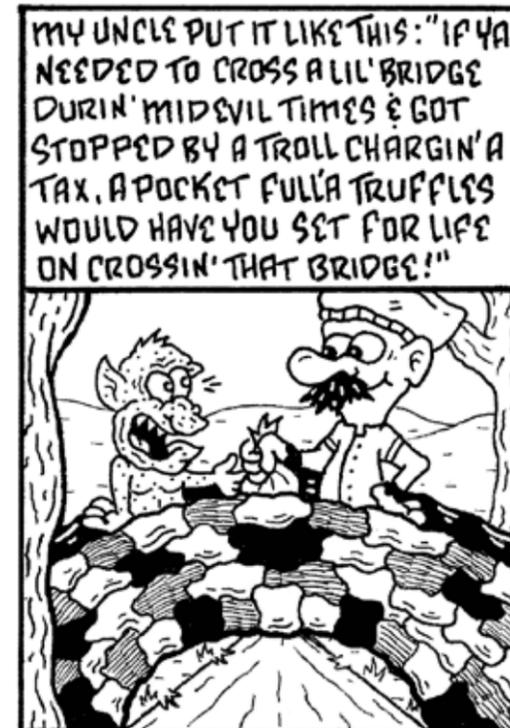
It’s been a while since I’d last seen the snow fall. Of course there were always flurries, and the air usually became this cold, but I can’t even remember the last time there was this much. Now, I stand on my porch looking up, draped in a new scarf and a worn jacket, keeping my hands warm in their pockets. Watching it come down, lightly drifting against gravity. The memories of snow start to come back, schools out forever, yet I’m glad I don’t have to go. I get to stay inside and do what I want, play video games all day and...

God, is this nostalgia? That thing that we all used to pretend we have about things we’ve never seen or places we’ve never been. I used to remember saying that I don’t feel nostalgia. I used to think I was above it. I didn’t need the past. Now, years later, standing in the cold and looking into the gray sky, I look at the snow fall and remember. Not a place, not a person, not even myself. It’s a feeling, I remember that vague feeling. Knowing that the future was coming but not caring, not just convincing myself that I don’t. I want to do all those things I saw in those cartoons, but now I can’t even imagine how I would. For the first time in my life, I feel old.

-Nick Wiench

Comics

VACATION ASHTRAY 002



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