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WE ARE A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION.
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WE DO THAT BY PRODUCING A 'ZINE & BY SUPPORTING URBAN BIKE CULTURE.



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FEATURES

DONALD MAHER MAY THE UPRISINGS CONTINUE!

I like people who speak out. It takes courage. For those who know me and for those who will get to know me, I am a person with a long and wide legacy of speaking out.

...

May the Stonewall uprising continue and may the UP rising of Reading, PA continue as well.

continued/full on page 2

RUBY MORA THE BADA** B.I.T.C.H. BOOK REVIEW

A regular book-review by and for bada** B.I.T.C.H.es (and everyone who loves to read) featuring books written by women of color. This Issue, Ruby reviews:

1. "All About Love: New Visions" by bell hooks*
2. "Peluda" by Melissa Lozada-Oliva
3. "Sabrina & Corina" by Kali Fajardo-Anstine*

*available at Reading Public Library

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WINNER OF OUR ISSUE 4 PHOTO CONTEST
RUBBLE // CARL KAUCHER

THREE POEMS: AS CHALLENGED BY NOAH AYALA

GLYPH AKA ANTHONY OROZCO

eliminate poem based on "Derailment clean up may continue into next week" Reading Eagle, 4/19/19. Goal: to write a poem as unrelated to the article as possible.

humid
sunset
draw

southern night
spilled alongside
the railroad

southern day
spilled outside
the city

southern train
hauling more
than property

southern evening
still common as
human errors.

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MAY THE UPRISINGS CONTINUE!

DONALD MAHER

PRESENTED AT RDG SOUL SPEAK, THURSDAY MAY 9, 2019

While I am born and raised in Brooklyn, NY, I have lived in Reading, PA for the past 16 years and I have become a very proud member of this community...I am most heartened by the talent, creativity, entrepreneurial spirit and dedication all of you give to the rising of Reading, PA.

I like people who speak out. It takes courage. For those who know me and for those who will get to know me, I am a person with a long and wide legacy of speaking out. I think there are many similarities of Reading, PA to Brooklyn, NY but I will leave that discussion for another time.

This past weekend I traveled to Brooklyn for a very special event in my life, the 50th anniversary of my 8th grade class who graduated from Our Lady of Angels Catholic grammar school back in 1969.

1969 was a most momentous year: Woodstock, the Moon landing and in baseball the perennial under dog, the NY Mets, unexpectedly won the World Series. It was also the year of the Stonewall Uprising, a six day riot in NY in which LGBT people at the Stonewall Inn held off the police and fought back for the first time against corruption, harassment, arrests and shake downs in which the police, District Attorney's office, lawyers, judges, media and organized crime were complicit in the oppression and destruction of LGBT people. The Stonewall Uprising is considered by many to be the single most important event leading to the liberation of LGBTQ people that continues to this day. This June, which is Lesbian and Gay Pride Month*, will mark the 50th anniversary of this event.

Brooklyn has many jewels. One of them is the Brooklyn Museum and after my grammar school reunion I proceeded to the Brooklyn museum to catch the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo de Rivera exhibit "Appearances Can Be Deceiving." While there I stumbled into a very special exhibit, "Nobody Promised You Tomorrow: Art 50 Years After Stonewall," which featured the works of artists all born after Stonewall. (As a local connection, this special Stonewall exhibit was partially funded by the Keith Haring Foundation. Keith Haring was born in Reading Hospital and raised in Kutztown.)

It was at this Stonewall exhibit that I discovered an excerpt of a poem by an artist. This excerpt of the poem was widely circulated after the 2016 Orlando nightclub shooting, in which 49 people were slaughtered and 53 others were wounded in a gay nightclub.

The poem was pasted to the wall as a repeated image going in many different directions. The poem was based on the beatitudes, which were part of Jesus of Nazareth's Sermon on the Mount, which was his very first public sermon. You may be familiar with the original source material that begins, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the merciful." I note that there are variations throughout the ages on these beatitudes and in other spiritual and religious texts and traditions including Buddhism, the Quran and Hindu/Yogic texts. There are also other contemporary versions of the beatitudes. I would encourage you to look up the tattooed Lutheran Pastor Nadia to hear her compelling version.

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Before hearing the excerpt of the poem "Litanies To My Heavenly Brown Body," it is important to know something about the artist and writer. Mark C. Aguhar was born in Houston, Texas on May 16, 1987 – she was an activist, writer and multimedia fine artist known for her multidisciplinary work about gender, beauty and existing as a racial minority, while being body positive and transgender femme-identified. Aguhar was made famous by her Tumblr blog that questioned mainstream representation of the "glossy glorification of the gay white male body." In her own words, she tells us,

"My work is about visibility. My work is about the fact that I'm a genderqueer person of color fat femme fag feminist and I don't really know what to do with that identify in this world. It's that thing where you grew up learning to hate every aspect of yourself and unlearning all that misery is really hard to do. It's that thing where you kind of regret everything you've ever done because it's so complicit with white hegemony. It's that thing where you realize that your own attempts at passive aggressive manipulation and power don't stand a chance against the structural forms of domination against your body. It's that thing where the only way to cope with the reality of your situation is to pretend it doesn't exist; because flippancy is a privilege you don't own but you're going to pretend you do anyway."

According to her Wikipedia page, Aguhar was only a few months away from earning her MFA from University of Illinois at Chicago when she died by suicide in Chicago, Illinois, on March 12, 2012.

With deep respect to each of you and with deep respect to the life legacy and struggles of Mark C. Aguhar, I present to you...an excerpt from her poem:

EXCERPT

"LITANIES TO MY HEAVENLY BROWN BODY"

BY MARK C. AGUHAR

BLESSED ARE THE SISSIES

BLESSED ARE THE BOI DYKES

BLESSED ARE THE PEOPLE OF COLOR MY BELOVED

KITH AND KIN

BLESSED ARE THE TRANS

BLESSED ARE THE HIGH FEMMES

BLESSED ARE THE SEX WORKERS

BLESSED ARE THE AUTHENTIC

BLESSED ARE THE DIS-IDENTIFIERS

BLESSED ARE THE GENDER ILLUSIONISTS

BLESSED ARE THE NON-NORMATIVE

BLESSED ARE THE GENDERQUEERS

BLESSED ARE THE KINKSTERS

BLESSED ARE THE DISABLED

BLESSED ARE THE HOT FAT GIRLS

BLESSED ARE THE WEIRDO-QUEERS

BLESSED IS THE SPECTRUM

BLESSED IS CONSENT

BLESSED IS RESPECT

BLESSED ARE THE BELOVED WHO I DIDN'T

DESCRIBE, I COULDN'T DESCRIBE, WILL LEARN TO

DESCRIBE AND RESPECT AND LOVE

AMEN

May the Stonewall uprising continue and may the UP rising of Reading, PA continue as well. God bless you all.

Editor's Note: Some people identify with "LGBT" while others prefer "Queer" or other terminology. We respect the author's use here. The official government-recognized month is now called "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Pride Month" though, again, community members use varying names and we abide by the author's use.

THE NIGHT ANALYST: PART I

MICRO FICTION

MIKE SCHNITTER

Reggie's first day was going well, but he was miserable. The night before he and his fiancé Scarlet were fighting until 2 in the morning. Again. To take the edge off and get some sleep he finished the dregs of a generic bottom-shelf bottle of rum. The kind of garbage that has a name like 'Investor's Club' that you don't remember ever buying, but has always been wedged in the back of the freezer crammed against a half empty bag of frozen corn encrusted with years worth of freezer burn.

Reggie tried to focus his eyes on his computer screen as his head throbbed in sync with his pulse. This was the 5th training video he had to watch today. His eyes glazed over as the woman with a bright shiny voice repeated the company's slogan 'Growing stronger, together!' between filler sentences of various lengths. The video cut to an action shot of a tall blonde woman, the owner of the bright shiny voice, walking along a row of cubicles, their monitors facing the camera.

"At V.C. Incorporated you are our most valuable asset! We believe that effective collaboration, communication, and coordination between departments creates-"

A blue light flicked on atop one of the monitors. The rest of the screens were black, but the one with the blue light was clearly recording the woman as she walked by. But something seemed off.

Reggie paused and rewound the video and too see the blue light flick on, and also saw that the video was showing her from the front, even though it was clearly recording her from the back.

Something still seemed off, though.

He rewound to the same point again and pressed his nose against his monitor to get a better glimpse of the blue light and the monitor in the background. As he watched the audio began to sound slightly distorted, almost stretched. The face on the monitor in the background was the blonde woman's, but it was... wrong. The left side of her face seem to hang loosely, uselessly, off of her skull, like baggy clothing. He felt a guttural vibration through the headphones and began to feel dizzy. He felt a hand grip his shoulder and he jumped back in his chair with a yelp.

Reggie looked up to see a startled face he did not recognize from the orientation. A youngish man flirting with middle age. He had close-cropped reddish-brown hair, and a stubble beard that was graying around the edges.

Reggie removed his headset as the bright shiny voice hammered home the importance of each departments' value within the organization.

"Hey man, I'm Reggie," he said extending his hand.

"Nice to meet you, Reggie. I'm John."

John shook Reggie's hand smiling.

"That's weird, no one told me the new guy was starting today. Seems weird to start on a Thursday, doesn't it?" John asked.

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"Yeah, I was originally supposed to start next Monday, but apparently there's some big project go-live tomorrow and Ted wanted me to sit in on it. Said it would be a good learning opportunity."

John rolled his eyes, "A great opportunity to see how this place barely works. The log consolidation helps but, damn, it's a drop in the bucket."

Reggie smiled politely and put his headset back on, '-as long as we remember to adhere to V.C. Inc.'s charter values we can be assured that we will all be-'

"Growing stronger together..." muttered Reggie as he began to nod off once more.

He waited for John to sit down, and start working before rewinding the video again. This time, though, no blue light turned on. All the monitors in the background were black.

Reggie reached into his bag and pulled out a bottle of generic migraine pills. He prided himself on knowing the active ingredients in most over the counter medications, and needlessly worked them into casual conversations. The bottle felt light, but when he shook it he felt something rattling. He opened the lid to find only the strange plastic cylinder that seemed to be in every pill bottle. He never figured out its purpose.

Cindy, the receptionist, told him within their first 5 minutes of meeting that there was a stash of painkillers, the good stuff, in the second floor break room in the cupboard above the water cooler. Reggie got up and moved through the rows of cubicles to the break room. As he passed the opening to the hall that led to the other wing of the second floor he thought he saw a blue light out of the corner of his eye coming from down the hall from an office with an open door.

He stopped, walked back and peeked around the corner. All he saw was a startled accountant who slammed her door shut when she saw him.

He shook his head and made for the watercooler. He opened the cupboard above and found a gigantic pill bottle. He looked at the active ingredients: acetaminophen, Aspirin, and caffeine. The good stuff.

Reggie pulled up to the apartment complex at 7:17pm, sweating. He pulled into his parking spot, number eight, and felt the loud 'thunk' that occurred whenever he turned right and stopped. He didn't know what the thunk was, but he figured it was expensive and hoped that if he ignored it long enough it would go away.

He gathered his bag, and the mountain of employee handbook materials he accumulated throughout the day, and meandered towards the door of he and Scarlet's one bedroom apartment. He felt tension in the air as he moved his hand towards the knob, the same kind of creeping anticipation you feel when you are gossiping about someone and can sense that they are close enough to hear. He opened the door and braced himself expecting round two to begin immediately (as round one ended without resolution).

Reggie looked inside and found the apartment empty.

He wandered through the living room, into the kitchen, passed the bathroom and looked in the bedroom. The bed was made. He opened the bathroom door and turned on the lights to see a note taped to the mirror.

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"Reg. I can't keep doing this. I love you. I don't think we work, though. I'm staying at Kathy's tonight. Please don't call me. I'll be back in the morning to get my things."

Reggie sat on the bathroom floor for what felt like hours, trying to get his mind around it. Scar and him had been together since freshman year of college. They'd been through way worse fights than last night. Usually it ended after a day or two with a few more spats, then depleting an entire tub of mint chocolate chip ice cream together.

He didn't even remember what they were fighting about last night. He tried so hard but just remembered her telling him he never listened. Reggie guessed she was right.

He made his way back to the kitchen, opened the freezer to see the emptied bottle of rum, and considered his bad investment.

He opened the refrigerator and saw the empty box of pizza, and bottle of Sriracha with the crusty nozzle.

He opened the cupboard and saw a few torn open bags of microwave popcorn that he meant to clean up last month, and nothing else. Reggie walked back to the refrigerator, opened it again, and to his surprise saw the same empty pizza box and Sriracha bottle.

Hungry, tired, alone, and worst of all sober, Reggie made his way to the couch and plopped down heavily. He reached for the remote and was able to snag it by his fingertips. He turned on Netflix and fell asleep before picking anything to watch.

He dreamed of papers and papers and smug looking cube mates, of hidden caches of pain killers and of a frighteningly tall blonde woman whose face appeared to be sloughing off on the left.



She gazed at him with a deadened expression as the left eye grew milky and dripped from the socket leaving nothing but a blinding blue light. It consumed the dream. Everything was drowned out by the LED glare of that aggressively blue light.

He opened his eyes and the light did not fade with the dream. The light atop the TV, by the webcam, was on.

When he looked at it, it blinked off.

To Be Continued...

WINNER OF OUR ISSUE 4 PHOTO CONTEST
PHONE // CARL KAUCHER

IS AT-WILL AN END RUN AROUND ADA?

BRIAN T. JOHNSON

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was put in place back in July of 1990 by President George H.W. Bush in an attempt to protect people with disabilities from employment discrimination. However, are employees who should have certain protection under laws such as the ADA still vulnerable from discrimination by employers?

Pennsylvania, for example is an At-Will employment state, meaning an employee can be dismissed from a job for any reason that would not be considered illegal. At-Will also allows an employer to change the terms of employment (without notice) such as: the alteration of wages, termination of benefits, and the reduction of paid time off. It is this type of employment status that could be considered to be a loophole in the ADA protection, take into consideration the case below.

I spoke with a 39-year-old disabled veteran, who did not wish to be identified (who we will call Bob), who feels like he has reason to believe that he has been a victim of this loophole in the At-Will employment law,

"I was working for a local company during which time I had some medical issues that are a result of my service-connected disabilities, a fact that I disclosed to my employer during my interview. I would have medical appointments that I needed to go up to the VA hospital in Lebanon for on occasion, think maybe four times in my initial 90 day probation period. This was something that I disclosed to the employer at time of interview and hire and they said they would accommodate. Three days short of my 90 day probationary period being up I was summoned to the HR department and was told that the position I was hired for was being consolidated and they could not keep me on staff..

This was also strangely enough right after a big yearly event they have in which they need more people to help out."

Bob continued, "I bumped into a former co-worker a few months later and was surprised to find out that not only was the position not consolidated but they had it filled within a month of my dismissal. The co-worker had told me that she felt that I had been given a raw deal when she overheard two supervisors talking about the reason they let me go was of my medical appointments. I had thought about a wrongful termination suit but looking into At-Will law and seeing that the burden of proof falls upon me to prove, made me feel like it would turn into a my word against theirs situation."

Bob would go on to talk to me about being "laid off " or have his hours cut to the point where he would have to find another job over the duration of 2018, and his encounter with his former co-worker made him really start to think about his issues with employment.

More importantly than that, is the fact that Bob is not the only person who has a legitimate claim to falling victim to this circumstance. What is worse is that of others I polled at the VA hospital, a staggering seventy-two percent felt like they have lost a job due to similar circumstances. Most of those I spoke with said that they were "off the record" and mentioned the amount of time they missed working due to medical appointments.

Over half were asked at some point by their employers to start bringing proof that they were in fact going to medical appointments.

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Some would go on to say that they feel that in order to expedite and strengthen their dismissal certain standards were more strictly enforced on them than others after providing proof of medical appointments. This in order to possibly be able write them up and create a "paper trail" of disciplinary action.

What seems worse is that others I spoke with said that that paper trail had been used to help deny them unemployment benefits after dismissal from employment.

A lot has been said about the veteran community and this potential issue. However, they are only a small minority of a bigger majority. Disabled veterans and other people who have disabilities are all at risk under the At-Will status. The big question that needs to be asked is simply this; if this is happening so often, why is there little to nothing being said or done about this issue?

After speaking to Bob and the other veterans at Lebanon a handful of employment attorneys were contacted, and not one of them who responded to inquiries were able to say if they knew of any precedent to investigate this issue, let alone try and solve the problem. All seemed to agree on the fact that the burden is on the individual to try and fight the issue. With this being the case how can anyone be expected to make any progress in a fight when experts such as attorneys have no way of solving the problem?

This begs the question of what is the point of having laws like ADA and other protective measures if an employer can just claim that an employee was dismissed for a different reason that is completely bogus and hard for a dismissed employee to prove?

This opens the door for all kinds of discriminatory dismissals in At-Will states, dismissals based on color, creed, religion, sexual orientation, and beyond. At what point should At-Will be revisited and adjusted to help keep discriminatory dismissals?

In Bob's case he is left with a fear of this possibly happening again, "I am so paranoid now, I am at the point where I feel like I need to push things of and risk conditions getting worse or risk losing another job because I chose to get care."

DEBTOR'S PRISON

BY GLYPH AKA ANTHONY OROZCO

eliminate poem based on "Reading airport authority as county to pay off debt" Reading Eagle, 4/19/19, as challenged by Noah Ayala

Reading the debt,
the grim assessment
outstanding disappointment.

Trouble stems
from a big mistake
to renovate
and fly to
anywhere in the world.

A big hit to the revenue stream
Continued operations no longer means to satisfy
the debt,
years of low interest has kept losing focus on
primary mission
of high quality and dependable business.

BADA** B.I.T.C.H. BOOK REVIEW

RUBY MORA

* "All About Love: New Visions" by bell hooks

Twitter: @bellhooks

I started reading works by author, teacher, scholar, and culture critic bell hooks at the beginning of this year and I'm still mad at myself for not reading her transcendent work sooner, especially after reading "All About Love: New Visions." hooks takes multiple avenues of deep dives into the question of "What is love?" while also discussing her experiences defining love for herself, how the younger generations have been cynical about love (guilty), honesty with oneself and others in regards to love, living by a love ethic in all aspects of life, self-love, and more, not just the romance aspect of love.

Anyone who breathes should read this book. I really don't mean to sound cheesy, but hooks and her wise and influential words really transformed my outlook on life and its dark crevices that lack love. It is an absolute must-read.

"Peluda" by Melissa Lozada-Oliva

Twitter: @ellomelissa

Website:

<https://www.melissalozadaoliva.com/about>

Poetry isn't dead (but really: who said this?), and solid proof of this is in the work of poet Melissa Lozada-Oliva. "Peluda" is a collection of work that really encompasses Lozada-Oliva's experience as a Latina in a society where whiteness is the ideal. In a time where mainstream poetry can be seen as extremely centered on white narratives,

"Peluda" is an honest and unapologetic rumination on identity as a Latina, class, being a child of an immigrant and the privileges and trials that come with that, family, and legacy.

It's not common for me to see humor integrated into the poetry I read nowadays, but Lozada-Oliva adds it so seamlessly into her pieces, while also adding some deep, personal moments and thoughts. There's a reason why I try to read "The Women in My Family Are Bitches," my favorite poem in the collection, once every week as motivation.

* "Sabrina & Corina" by Kali Fajardo-Anstine

Twitter: @KaliMaFaja

Website: <https://www.kalifajardoanstine.com/>

This was a recent read that I anticipated for weeks and felt like my heart became more full after finishing it. "Sabrina & Corina" consists of multiple lives, tiny universes even, that are interwoven through having Denver, Colorado as their shared home. In her debut collection of short stories, Fajardo-Anstine manifested complex Latina characters that stray away from the stereotypes normally attached to them in various forms of media.

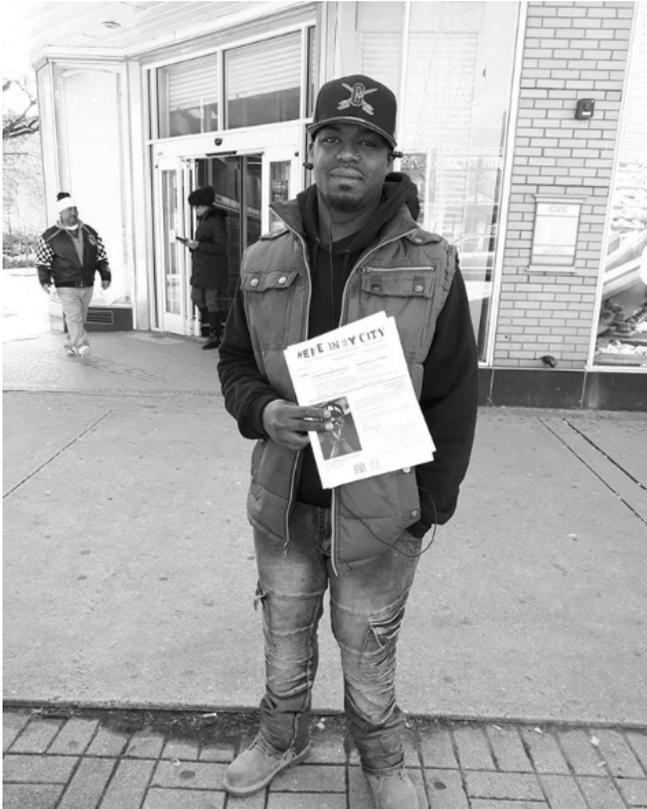
She also lays out issues that Latinx and other marginalized communities deal with, including gentrification, racism, trauma (inter-generational and otherwise), and classism. I felt such a deep sense of connection to the stories and characters in this book because of the commonality of cultures and terms of endearment. I only wish that I could have this feeling more often AKA publishing houses need to publish more work by Latinas about Latinas. This was the take-a-breath-between-stories type of book in the best possible way.

*available in the Reading Public Library system

A BRIEF PROFILE OF RAYMOND DIGGS

AND HOW THE WHITE-WASHED "OVERCOMING-ADVERSITY" STORY ARC CAN MAKE US FEEL NICE, BUT CAN MISS SOME IMPORTANT TRUTHS

DANI MOTZE



When I ran into Raymond outside the CVS downtown, I noticed right away that he seemed different. He wasn't the kid I remembered from back during our community bike rides from Cherry Street, the one wearing the same over-sized hoodie every day, on-and-off-again in drama, often just around "hanging out" all day, and who wouldn't quite look you in the eye.

He now simply held himself with a different air; looked like he had chosen his outfit with care; was proud to catch me up on what he'd been working on; and couldn't stay to chat too long because he had things to attend to. A young man trying to get his shit together.

You know, a tidy piece fleshed out with a heartbreaking backstory, framed by a character-development arch and wrapped up with the bow of a bright and hopeful future: the kid of color from the poor city & broken background overcomes the odds!

"I hope my story will help everybody to change. That's my big headline: "Change. Success. Live through the struggles."

Now if that's not a pullout quote, I don't know what is.

Talking to Raymond made me think about the other side of the story arc, about how much someone can ever really recover from a youth of chronic trauma, about how much we expect of young people like Raymond, really -- and how much work it takes to meaningfully participate in a society that wants to punish you just for being you, anyway.

About how, when he succeeds, the non-profit social services that helped him will use him as marketing material in their newsletters, over-emphasizing their roles because that's how you get resources (I've done it) and that while Raymond will have benefited from their help, he'll also have succeeded despite living in a society where he was, from birth, set up in many ways to need their help.

And, can you ever fully sand down the sharp pieces that you've needed to wield your whole life to survive trauma? Or even get to the point where you want to, risk your protection, your edge? I made friends with a gentleman named Jim who I met at the library recently. We connected over an art book he was reading, and he was working on writing a Miles Davis album review for the 'zine.

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We cooked him dinner at our house a few times and listened to some music and the birds together. He's homeless and carries a pocket knife. He cannot enter into a shelter with the knife, which made total sense to me. Until he pointed out that, on the many night he can't get into the shelter because the line is too long, and is out by himself again, he no longer has his knife and is unprotected in more than one way. So, rather than risk losing his knife, he doesn't try to get into the shelters anymore.

But Back To Raymond

Raymond's biological mom died soon after giving birth to him, and his father died a year later. He grew up in the foster care system, "being abused in every way."

He spent much of his childhood protecting himself and his little sister who has an intellectual disability and is deaf, "I was her rock."

School was his safest place. One time, his mom didn't want him to go to school, fearing teachers would see the marks of her abuse, so Raymond jumped out of his bedroom window and caught the bus. He showed his teachers, and later the police saw. But still, nothing happened and he remained with that foster parent. "It's how the world works. Not a lot of people pay attention."

He remembers his first charge of breaking and entering. He had just moved into the type of suburban neighborhood where all the houses look exactly the same and he walked into the neighbor's front door by accident. The neighbors immediately called the cops on him. I asked him if he thought it'd be different if he had been white, "I don't know. Maybe."

He got out of incarceration for robbery over a year ago he didn't have a place to stay, which wasn't the first time he was homeless,

"I first started being homeless at the age of 18." He had run away from his foster home and stayed with his girlfriend, "I didn't know who to go to. You don't know the next time you can eat, use the bathroom, shower. I slept literally in the snow with a sleeping bag behind the shed." He got sick a lot, too, from living like that.

When in interviewed him, he was staying at a friend's house. He barter's his share of rent for helping her with her kids, taking them to school and picking them up afterwards.

Raymond's working on getting his high school diploma and wants to continue on to RACC or another school to study business. He can't study his first choice, criminal justice, he told me, because he can't pay for the process to get his record expunged. His record makes it hard for him to find a job, too. But he decided to go back to school and start to get his life together because he wants to be a good role model for his kids, "I just got tired of [living like how I was]. [I thought that] my kids are going to look at me like I'm worthless. I buckled down and got myself into school and did what I had to do.

I thought, "I'm getting too old for this. I'm turning 27. It's time to shape up or go back to jail and I'm not trying to go back to jail." I told myself that I need to start doing something or I'll be a failure to society."

But in addition to his record and minimal support for aging out of the system, overcoming a lifetime of neglect and abuse isn't so simple or easy,

"My anger grew more and more and I take it out on everyone. I try not to but the anger gets the best of me." He's working through his trauma but it's hard to find someone who can 'get it.' He's seen therapists, but none of them have actually been through anything remotely like what he's been through and it can be hard to connect with them, "I tell them to switch shoes with me, and then come tell me what you feel."

"I still have dreams to this day about my childhood...people ask me, 'Why do you act this way?' I tell them, it's a long story, and you wouldn't understand."

Raymond may move, partly to be closer to his kids and significant other, and partly because he thinks it might be a fresh start to get away from Reading for a while. But, he wants to come back to Reading to open a shelter, with integrated programs like sports teams, job search help, schooling, counseling and health care. He'd emphasize teaching life skills where clients would also learn how to cook, how to manage money, how to drive and how to survive. He experienced the 18-year cut-off and knows how hard it is,

"Once you hit 18, it's over. You have to fend for yourself. I basically had to learn everything on my own." So, his dream program would focus on helping people transition out of the current system for minors into young adulthood.

So, here we come to the ending and you can choose your own: the neat and tidy wrap-up bit, or the ambiguous and authentic bit:

Raymond sometimes struggles to leave behind the behaviors that kept him alive during all those tough years not that far removed, "I grew up fighting. I had to learn how to fend for myself, so I did. I'll still fight someone if I have to."

Raymond dreams of continuing his education and coming back to his home town to give back, "When I see a teenager who is homeless, I remember how me and my homeless friends went through it together. I want to give the people something to look forward to. I'm trying to do better by the community."

I believe in Raymond. And I don't think those endings are mutually exclusive. Maybe, both endings can be, and will be, true.

WEAVER

BY GLYPH AKA ANTHONY OROZCO

eliminate poem based on "Victims need resources"

Reading Eagle, 4/19/19, words collected from bottom up

relationship – toxic.
courage takes danger.
exit safety, custody,

connect with
victims
connect,
new levels.

Many types of cases dismissed
many cases.

Get out,
able to see blue.

Another history.

Another miraculous relationship.

THE STORY OF A SURVIVOR

CHRISTOPHER TROTTER

When I was young I was taught that family comes first. It wasn't until I got older that I truly understood what that would come to mean. I grew up as the 2nd youngest of a family of five...When I was young up until I was about seven, I had an average good childhood. It wasn't until then that I was mistreated.

When I was seven my dad got cancer and had to quit his business, but that is when it all started. Because of my dad not working my mom had to work harder and for longer so she was never home. My dad took advantage of that. Unfortunately growing up as his oldest son I got the brunt of it from everyone one. I was physically abused, mentally abused, emotionally abused, and sexually abused. It affected me so bad in the 2nd grade I was expelled. From that point on I was in counseling. It wasn't until my parents split that things started to get easier for me, but by that point, the damage was done.

When I was 16 I hit a low point in my life and started thinking about taking my life...again. It was at that critical moment in my life that something amazing happened. I met my girlfriend. She accepted who I was and loved me for it. The first time in my life I would feel like I mattered to someone.

It was her and her baby girl that gave me meaning for the first time. Her daughter was 1 ½ years old. When I turned 18 I joined the Army National Guard. It was two months before I would leave for basic that we found out that my girlfriend was pregnant with our son. The 2nd day at basic I got injured and was told that I would be discharged.

While I was away my girlfriend and her daughter were homeless. She would give birth to my son without me. When I came back my son was three months old. For the next year I would battle with things that happened to me in basic. When my son was one year old we had already moved three times. In the next two years I would start to get on my feet and start to make a home for myself.

It was when my son turned two that life decided to throw another punch. The house we had lived in had lead paint. My son had been being poisoned. When we told the landlord she fought me. For the next year we tried to get her to fix the issue. Finally we searched for legal advice. We were told to put money in a second account. Then they decided to turn us to court. Due to a bad lawyer who lost our paperwork we lost and were evicted. For the next few months we would spend all of our money on hotels and friends' couches.

About a month ago [at time of writing] I sucked up my pride and asked for help from my grandmother. She would agree to help, only for it to back fire on us. My kids, wife and myself would be used and abused by them. Finally just as I would have enough, life threw another punch. My car would be repossessed. So there I was stuck. Thankfully my mother in law would save us. From that point on we have lived at a homeless shelter. The point of me telling my story isn't for pity or for you to say, "Damn, that sucks."

Through all of this I didn't give up hope that things will get better. The point of this story is that no matter what happens, it can always get worse, or better. That is dependent on you.

BOOK SNIFFER, PEOPLE WATCHER: WHY I LOVE THE LIBRARY

BY DANI MOTZE

I returned to my table to gather my things and a woman had settled in the chair next to mine. As I leaned in, I first noticed her stubble and then her thickly penciled eyebrows, and then her giant, gaudy gold pin. I tried to get her attention. She tried to ignore me. So I went ahead, "I have a pin almost exactly like that, I almost wore today. And I really love your hat."

She smiled with relief, and the stranger told me that she had been keeping an eye on my things (and, that tomorrow was another day, another opportunity to feature my pin). I did.

Sometimes while I'm looking up a book in the online category, then searching for it on the 2nd floor, I pretend that I'm on a secret, important mission - always, for some reason, so sure it won't be there, elated when it is. And sometimes along the way I stumble across the exact book I didn't even know that I was looking for, but it found me anyway (or the reference librarian helped me out).

On the second floor, I sneak a glance to the right, to the left, and tip a book out from its place; I smell deeply, like a wine drinker: hints of vanilla with undertones of grass.

A few years ago I went to the branch on Perkiomen Ave. to lead a youth program, entered, and immediately remembered: that specific mix of stale air conditioning air, old rug, and old books. This is the branch me and my mom used to walk to when we lived first on Cotton Street, and then on Fairview Ave.

Its high ceilings and tall shelves sheltered us while I searched for and found the girls with whom I'd become who I am: The Babysitters Club and Nancy Drew.

I worked a traditional corporate 9-5 for a year in a smooth beige cubicle. I survived with daily walks around the downtown and adjacent neighborhoods, and regular trips to the library, where I could touch and smell and hear and see life and people living their lives, wondering what brought each of them there on that specific day.

I know that not everyone feels welcome inside a library, like I do, and that libraries around the country are working to change that, and to take the library outside, to the people, in addition to finding other ways to make them more inclusive. In today's day and age, with smart phones and e-readers, is the library building itself, the actual brick-and-mortar still relevant?

3rd Space & Social Infrastructure

Adam Gopnik writes about European café culture of past in his piece, published in *The New Yorker*, "One More Cup of Coffee" and we might copy and paste his description of why people went to cafés onto at least one answer of why the brick-and-mortar library is still so important, why I used to walk there on my lunch breaks.

"What matters is not the words of the person at the next table but the feeling of nearness - the sense of being able to carve out an identity among other identities, of being potentially private in a public space and casually public even while lost in private reveries."

continued on page 15

Cities often use hostile architecture to prevent certain unwanted people from loitering in "public spaces;" a common example is little metal spikes on a concrete ledge, or an intentional lack of benches (outside the Main branch you'll notice that the front entrance's concrete 'rail' along the stately steps is curved, perhaps, to prevent sitting or laying). But inside the library is filled with tables and chairs, inviting you, meant for you, to sit. And unlike at a cafe, you don't need to buy even a cup of coffee to do so.

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I watched two people at the table next to me. I couldn't quite figure out their relationship, maybe tutor and student, maybe client and social worker. Another person had left her bag on one of the chairs, and came back to retrieve it. The man apologized, he hadn't seen it when he sat down.

"You don't have to apologize," she said, "This is a library. And you can sit wherever you want."

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In 99% Invisible podcast episode, 346, "Palaces for the People," Eric Klineberg discusses his book by the same name and considers public libraries as "social infrastructure," the vital places in our community that not only provide specific services, but also keep us connected and whose presence has been proven to increase community health and wellness statistics (other examples of social infrastructure include the longstanding local grocery and community centers),

"Most of the time people go into libraries they realize that they are being respected and dignified and honored and...it brings out the best in us," said Klineberg. "If we want to support the kind of social life...that we all need to live well and be better connected with each other we're going to have to find a way to invest in it."

A few years ago I was at the Main branch browsing, and a little kid came in and set off the buzzers. He looked around bewildered and maybe frightened, and Jon, the well-known security guard, walked over and gently led him to the front desk. I ran into Jon that night at Schell's and got to tell him what I had seen, that it would have been easy to stay sitting behind his desk, and many of us would have. I often feel frustrated waiting for him to come open the bathroom for me, and hate that they feel like they must keep it locked, but Jon always remembers my name, and the names of most of the regular patrons; he once told me it was a gift given to him by God.

And, you don't need to tell a library staffer, libraries also meet other community needs, "Unfortunately, libraries have been these institutions of last resort for people who sort of slip through the cracks in our safety net," author Eric Klineberg said.

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The library is sheer abundance. That there are more books than I could read in my lifetime makes me feel safe and deeply held, the feeling I have when I swim in a lake. At the library, I always feel like there is enough for me. And when I come home from the library, I arrange my books on my kitchen counter, like I used to arrange them on my porch on Saturday mornings, running my fingers over them and considering which one I'll read first.

I once told an upper-middle-class acquaintance that I had spent the afternoon hanging out at the library, people-watching the weirdos. She was clearly uncomfortable that I would call poor people weirdos, even though she definitely did not spend her time at the public library with those weirdos, and not everyone who uses the library is poor, which was her assumption, and even though I was at the time. She asked me if maybe I was the one who was the weirdo, and I told her that obviously, yes, that was a given. Because I'm a book-sniffer, people-watcher, and I fucking love the library.



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WE SET UP POP-UP WRITING BOOTHS AND ASKED, "WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE YOU TODAY?"

HERE ARE A FEW ANSWERS.

I am glad to be alive, today, and every day, and every year. I wake up every year that goes by and I thank God for my health and my family. Every day that goes by I am thankful for having friends around, too.

Sincerely yours,
Sharon O.

I am a kind, energetic, intelligent, thoughtful and helpful person. I am a college graduate of Reading Area Community College and Penn State, Berks campus.
Keith R.

I am feeling today so good. God opened up my eyes today. I am happy at times and sad at times.

Q: What is making you feel happy?

A: Being loved by friends. Sitting with you. Being at the library. I went to Reading High School and I liked that. I like the warm weather and the sun.

Q: What is making you feel sad? I miss my mom. She passed away when I was 16.

-Joe K.

We believe that each of us has something important to say. We believe that listening to someone else's story is the most human thing we can do. We believe that telling our stories makes us whole.

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