OUT OF THE STACKS, INTO THE STREETS

One woman’s crusade to save Columbia’s old books

OUR NEW YORK NOSTALGIA

Today’s Columbia grads must choose professionalism to stay in the city

The Blue & White gets to know author Edwidge Danticat, gets lost in Flushing, and gets crunk
THE BLUE & WHITE

Vol. XVII FAMAM EXTENDIMUS FACTIS No. III

COLUMNS
4 BLUEBOOK
6 BLUE NOTES
8 CAMPUS CHARACTERS
12 VERILY VERITAS
13 DIGITALIA COLUMBIANA
34 MEASURE FOR MEASURE
36 CAMPUS Gossip

FEATURES

Adam Kuerbitz & Liz Naiden 10 AT TWO SWORDS’ LENGTH: DO YOU HAVE A MINUTE?
Our Monthly Prose and Cons.
Sarah Camiscoli 14 OUT OF THE STACKS, INTO THE STREETS
One woman’s crusade to save Columbia’s old books.
Carolyn Ruckun 16 STUDY BUDDIES
Butler’s librarians are your paper’s best friends.
Liz Naiden 18 OUR NEW YORK NOSTALGIA
Today’s grads must choose professionalism to stay in the city.
Michael Adame 21 BOOTLEGGING REVISITED
The sacred and profane afterlife of Four Loko.
Mark Hay 22 NEW WORLD ORDER
How Columbia quietly influences world politics.
Mariela Quintana 26 HER LIFE IN ART
A conversation with Edwidge Danticat.
Chris Brennan 31 TAKE THE 7 TO FLUSHING
The Blue & White visits Main Street, NYC.
Nina Pedrad 33 DOES ANYONE STILL USE MAIL?
A monthly series of found letters from home.

CRITICISM

Ian Scheffler 30 YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD ESCAPE ARTIST
A review of The Jewish Museum’s Harry Houdini exhibit.
Brian Donahoe 32 MAN ABOUT TOWN
Our culture editor plumbs the zeitgeist.

theblueandwhite.org ✈ COVER: “Jingle Books” by Cindy Pan
escrying that Mr. Hill failed to realize his months-held dream of spattering that deepest blue language upon the sacred, virgin-white pages of the magazine;

Remembering that Mr. Hill’s button-down Oxfords and black shoulder satchel are destined for corporate smugdom, Ms. Naiden did try her hardest to raise the alcohol content of his blue blood before the pressures of adulthood drive him to opiate addiction, and did so advise him against such profligate use of substances;

Concluding that a regime Change is in Order such that both Parties may relinquish or shoulder all Responsibility for their mutual Betterment;

Proclaiming triumphantly that Ms. Naiden, a heretofore hipstress nurtured into womanhood on the high-topped wings of Nike by the flourishing flannel scene of St. Mark’s, will assume the awesome Powers of the Editor-in-Chiefship!

(Provided that the following Terms and Conditions are met:)

1. That Ms. Naiden will incorporate the term “Gentrification” in conjunction with references to “the City”—capitalized always when eliding the name of the City of New York into base, four-letter slang—no less than once but no more than thrice into any given issue;

2. That Mr. Hill and Ms. Naiden continue via instantaneous, electronic communiqués their unabashed discussions of life, liberty, and their respective “pursuits” of happiness;

3. That Ms. Naiden will promptly end the reign of temperance that has gripped the Chapel grotto under Mr. Hill’s leadership and will consequently take full responsibility for the overindulging freshmen whose emetic emissions may slosh across the ceramic hallway floors (may the carpet be saved) like so many broken bottles of Jack Daniels.

And for the Support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honour.

Jon Hill
Editor-in-Chief
2010-2011

Liz Naiden
Editor-in-Chief
2011-2012

GOURMET DINING
COURTESY OF GOURMET DELI 109

It’s Saturday night and the drunchies have set in—it’s time for CrackDel. Upon arrival you realize your legendary sandwich artist has blown up on the food blogs and since moved on to spicier and specialer things. His subpar replacement simply will not do. You decide to improvise a different kind of CrackDel feast, using the following non-perishables that were all purchased at CrackDel.

Midnight Feast for Four

NB: CrackDel’s only bottle of olive oil, which is tiny, is not extra virgin, and you will therefore have to make do without. They do have a surprisingly vast quantity of similarly unusable white wine vinegar.

Cocktails & Nibbles!
• Cocktail peanuts
  1 can of cocktail peanuts

• Melange of potato frites
  Assorted Wise brand packages (many packages are open for tasting before purchase)

• Cosmopolitans
  Cranberry-Lime Bacardi Breezers

• Egg creams
  3 parts seltzer to 1 part condensed milk, with a dash of strawberry syrup (they do not sell chocolate syrup)

Appetizer:
• Piquant velouté of pickled serrano peppers
  4 cans pickled serrano peppers
  1 bottle Red Devil hot sauce
  Place peppers with juices and dash of hot sauce in Magic Bullet. Blend well.

Entrée:
• Caribbean Wien-ers
  1 package plantain chips
  4 cans of Vienna sausages
  Smash chips and blend with sausage gravy. Roll sausages in mix and place in toaster oven for 5 minutes.

Desert:
• Espresso semifreddo
  2 cans condensed milk
  1 can instant coffee
  Add 3 tablespoons instant coffee to ½ cup boiling water. Blend with condensed milk. Freeze for 40 minutes.

• Raisin creme pies
  Ready-made, $0.50 quality only. Garnish with powdered sugar.
EATING UP THE CORE

Here are six restaurants across the city where you can find your favorite works from CC and Lit Hum in bite-size form.

Homer’s World Famous Malt Shop

Symposium

Hector’s Place Restaurant

Caffe Dante

El Quijote

Virgil’s BBQ

POSTCARD FROM MORNINGSIDE

Compiled by B&W Staff
Postcard by Stephen Davan
Beyond the familiar corners of 107th Street, where O’Connell’s and Lime Leaf duel for undergraduate attention, lies a little-known oasis of quiet. The Nicholas Roerich Museum, tucked away in an unassuming townhouse between Broadway and Riverside, is home to hundreds of the Russian artist’s mystically-themed tempera paintings and host to frequent cultural events. “[The museum] is on the hidden gem side of the spectrum,” says Trenton Barnes, CC ’12, a former Roerich Museum intern. Although most Columbia students may not frequent the museum, it is far from empty.

On the second floor, a cellist tunes up for one of the Museum’s weekly free concerts. Held during the early evening every Sunday, the concerts are part of a larger cultural program that includes regular poetry readings, and soon, their holiday music festival. The beginnings of a Bach suite drift through the gallery as a Hunter College student examines one of the paintings up close—but she is here for a music class, oddly enough. Roerich, an artist and intellectual who contributed to the cultural landscape of his native Russia as well as those of Finland, England, the U.S., and India—where he travelled extensively—is also well-known in the musical world for collaborating with Stravinsky and Nijinsky on “The Rite of Spring.”

More than any particular paintings or musical works, the museum celebrates the larger cultural mission of Roerich, who pioneered the Roerich Pact, a treaty signed in 1935 by President Roosevelt and 21 other leaders to protect art and culture during times of war. The museum’s motto—pax cultura, or “peace through culture”—emphasizes its dual goal of promoting the arts and fostering peace. Aida Tulskaya, the museum’s assistant director, values the “peace and quiet” the museum offers for the arts within the busy city. “It’s a special place,” she says, sweeping her hands around the room to emphasize the paintings and books that line the wall. “It’s my life. I cannot separate myself from the museum.”

— Hannah Lepow

Illustration by Maddy Kloss
The Internet’s do-it-yourself ethos grants expertise (or a passable imitation) to anyone willing to Google it. As a result, it’s tough to find an officially ordained “master” of most things. In a world of eHow and self-taught amateurs, there is something quaint about the term ‘Master Printer.’ It is the name given to the artisan in charge of the printmaking shop at Columbia’s LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies, located in Dodge Hall. The spacious, well-lit facilities have all the trappings of a professional shop, from traditional relief and intaglio printing to digital imaging. It is both glitzy downtown gallery and musty seminar room, serving students, professors, and big-deal New York artists alike.

Chiefly, though, the Center is a space for artistic exploration. The four artists-in-residence annually given free reign over its resources do not usually have printing experience. “Typically the artists aren’t printmakers themselves so they tend not to have the knowledge and the tools to create prints,” explains Kari Higdem, CC’10, the current assistant to Tomas Vu-Daniel, the artistic director of the Center. Here the Master Printer steps in, advising, assisting, and in some cases producing the final print with the artist. Such an expert, who has experience with all types of machinery and all the different types of printing, “is very rare, especially one that wants to work in an academic institution,” notes Higdem. Former Master Printer Chris Creyts left the Neiman Center on good terms earlier this year, but he has been impossible to replace so far.

Although filling Creyts’ shoes will be difficult, filling the artist residencies at the shop never is. The opportunity for unlimited creative freedom is preferable to contracts with private printshops, which exert more control over the sales of work created than Columbia does. Access to Columbia’s other facilities, too, can be an unparalleled offer. During her time here, for example, American sculptor and printmaker Kiki Smith borrowed the astronomy department’s telescope to take pictures of the moon. Other artists simply relish the chance to work. The South African artist William Kentridge—the subject of a major retrospective at MoMA last year—became a resident in 2003. He was assigned a studio in Watson, the little-known hall on 115th Street that houses Columbia’s studio spaces, and worked side by side with undergraduate artists and MFA students for almost a year.

When it comes to the fruits of their labor, Columbia gives Neiman Center artists a deal that benefits both parties. The artists keep half the editions they produce in the shop, while Columbia keeps the other half for sale to galleries and private collectors. Higdem sees this equal deal as the key to the innovative projects that come out of the studio, “at other studios they’re helping them print but they also want them to sell... Because [the Neiman Center] is run by artists, we’re open to trying everything and new things, and we’re not as concerned with selling.” This creative license makes for adventurous and eclectic undertakings that demand attention in the world of art, humble though they may appear hanging small gallery across from the Dodge branch of Blue Java.

—Claire Sabel
Chalk it up to convenience, comfort, or pride—whatever the reason, athletes at Columbia seem to spend an inordinate amount of time padding around campus in logo-tagged sweats. But when homecoming weekend rolls around, footballers and field hockey players alike can trade in their standard-issue sweats for more typical Ivy League garb: the letterman sweater.

The Columbia letterman sweater is the paradigm of classic collegiate apparel—white wool knit crew-necks emblazoned with a big Lion’s-blue “C” across the chest. It’s just the sort of thing a Columbia man of the 1920s might have worn, before squash and backgammon were replaced by protesting as default campus activities.

Though this preppy staple would be a surefire hit with current Columbia students—natty and historically-minded dressers, all—the letterman sweater is conspicuously absent from the Columbia bookstore. That’s because it’s a privilege reserved only for varsity athletes—and only for some athletes, at that!

Initially, the sweaters were given as an award for letter-winner, with criteria varying from sport to sport. In everyone-gets-a-trophy 1990s, the Athletic Department began awarding varsity letters (actual chenille Cs) to student-athletes who had participated in 25 percent of a given sport’s varsity contests, sweaters to all those who had played a sport for at least three years, and lion-engraved watches to four-year varsity athletes. The sweaters, though, were a long-standing tradition: “I have spoken to alumni from the ’40s and ’50s who still have their letterman sweaters,” Jackie Blackett, the Department’s Senior Associate Athletics Director, said in an e-mail.

The sweaters are largely funded by the NCAA, Blackett added, which allocates funds to schools across the country for what she called “student-athlete well-being issues”—insert your John Jay dining hall joke here—and teams distribute them at their respective end-of-season gatherings.

Though Natalia Christenson, CC ’11 and captain of the tennis team, has yet to wear her sweater, she said athletes are proud of what they signify, and even wear them beyond homecoming: “My best friend and teammate wears hers on a regular basis,” she said, “but it’s usually to her job in Dodge.”

These beauties sit locked up, lonely until the end of the year. While this correspondent overheard a few jealous homecoming attendees plotting to liberate a few sweaters, such action might not be necessary. Having endured enough pestering, Blackett is looking into designing a different version to be made available to the student body. The Blue & White knows what it wants for Christmas 2011—do you?

— Sam Schube
You might not know the following figures—but you should. In Campus Characters, The Blue & White introduces you to a handful of Columbians who are up to interesting and extraordinary things and whose stories beg to be shared. If you’d like to suggest a Campus Character, send us an email at editors@theblueandwhite.org.

**BRENDAN HANNON**

A sure-fire way to find Brendan Hannon, CC ’11, is to follow the sunshine. Specifically, to follow the sunshine to Low Steps, where more often than not, Hannon will be sitting in one of his favorite tie-dyed t-shirts, strumming a mandolin, and asking you to sit next to him. “I’d say the steps are my legacy,” says Hannon, who identifies his occupation as “A Man of Leisure,” on his blog, Diary of a Brendan. As a New York City native, it may be that Hannon is just used to the weather, but he does stay out on the steps much longer than others who flee inside to Butler. “I draw the line at 50 degrees,” he says.

Hannon’s fondness for the outdoors doesn’t stop at Columbia’s urban beach. His white-blond hair gives him away as a member of the Columbia Sailing Club, and he can often be found giving impromptu outdoor concerts with fellow members of Columbia’s bluegrass band, Lion in the Grass. “[Bluegrass] is a really joyful type of music,” says Hannon in all seriousness. “Everyone who plays it is having a great time, and it’s hopefully contagious for the audience.”

Hannon’s gusto certainly is contagious — in his third year as an RA, he boasts that his study breaks and events are the best on campus. Even the Res Life forms he’s required to write up are enthusiastic. “Paperwork and I don’t really get along, so I put ridiculous things in it,” he explains. These things include medieval spellings of words (“I threw a whole bunch of ‘e’s on the end”) and describing a weekly study break as involving a “magical war where people did battles against the demons of studying.” ResLife appreciates Hannon’s imagination — he was named last year’s RA of the year for the South Field block of dorms. And as RA of Carman 12 this year, he’ll graduate Columbia having only lived in freshman housing. “I’m a perpetual freshman,” Hannon says. “Minus the enthusiasm. I’m a jaded freshman.”

Some of his jadedness may stem from a run-in with the law last summer, a bizarre tale involving a potato gun, maple syrup, and the Canadian Mounties. Last year, Hannon was arrested for firing a potato gun at a tree in Riverside Park, as one does. Justice was swift: Hannon spent a few hours in jail and was sentenced to community service. Fast-forward to that fateful day this past summer, which Hannon describes matter-of-factly: “I was on a road trip with a few friends to Nova Scotia. We wanted to eat maple syrup, you know, the usual, but then I was stopped at the border.” When asked by a border patrol officer if he had ever appeared before a judge, Hannon did the stand-up thing, and replied yes. As a result, he’s banned from Canada for 10 years. “I’m too dangerous for the Canadian wilderness,” says Hannon. European officials have yet to comment on the threat Hannon poses to their continent.

While his brush with Johnny Law might suggest otherwise, Hannon is planning an auspicious future for himself. Right now he is looking into entry level positions as a geologist working in mineral exploration. “Eventually, I’d like to save the world, or at least contribute to its well-being.” Hannon wrote in an e-mail. For now though, he is affectionately known to three classes of freshman as the affable RA with the almost-white beard who always keeps the men’s room stocked with condoms.

—Helen Bao
I was about to print out my final paper for “Dinosaurs and the History of Life”—long name I know, but I just call it Dinos for short (and, I mean, it is a pretty legit class, ‘cause you know it fulfills the science req and all). I wanted to take that sustainable development class but it met like five times a week, and I was like, “Fuck that, I need my me time.”

So, wait, where was I? Oh, so yeah, I was all about to print this paper, when I get a text from my buddy being like “Sorry, man, can’t do Top Chef tonight. Last midterm tomorrow. I’m so stressed!” I was pretty bummed about that, ‘cause there was going to be this Quickfire Challenge about fancy ramen.

But you know what? It’s O.K. My role in our friend group is just to chill people out. All my friends back home told me how stressed out everyone on the East Coast would be, but I knew I’d never be like that. And it’s not like I’m not ambitious. I take five classes, and this semester I’ve been doing stuff with the Chillin’ and Grillin’ Society, and I’m even thinking about applying for this internship in Brooklyn or something. I just don’t let those things take over my life, and I have no qualms about pointing it out when other people do.

Take my roommate, for instance, who was—no joke—having hot flashes the other day because he was upset over a stupid cover letter. And I was like, “Hey, I’m only going to be 17 percent stressing about this cover letter I’ve got to write,” and then I told him to flip on the Lakers game. I may have to skip Christmas dinner with my family to finish writing that, but I’m just not going to deal with that right now.

Or like a couple weeks ago, one of those cute girls from Greenpeace stopped me on the street. She just looked so perky with that clipboard and T-shirt, so what’s the harm in talking to her for a while? I mean, I totally support gay marriage. We talked so long that I ended up being late for a class, but I just told the professor the subway came late. Plus, the canvassing girl and I are going out for coffee next week. Extra-shot soy lattes. See? Only good things can happen when you take a minute out of your day to talk to people, especially the cute ones.

Well, mostly good things. I admit I did miss some details about our seminar paper because I was late. I tried to talk to my friend Liz who’s in the class too—she always ignores my Gchats, so I tried to track her down in Butler—but she’s barricaded herself into a cubby behind a wall of books and empty Red Bull cans. Whatever, I’m not that worried about it. These things always get done somehow. She wouldn’t tell me anything about the paper, anyway, so I just told her to chill out.

Which she did not. I saw her after her Harvard Law interview the week after, and of course Liz dressed like Hillary Clinton complete with the lemon in her mouth and stick up her ass. It turns out her interviewer didn’t ask her to watch Monday Night Football and have beers with him. Guess that’s what happens when you don’t even have a minute to strike up a conversation.
No, I don’t have a minute, you useless post-collegiate fuck-up. Argh, he almost knocked over my extra-shot skim latte with that insipid GreenPeace clipboard. OK, deep breath Liz, calm down, charity organizations are important parts of our society.

I truly believe in tolerance. I truly believe in tolerance. (For this mantra, Harvard interviewer, I will never forget you!) I try, I really do, but it’s so fucking hard to be tolerant of someone who obviously is collecting signatures on the street because he got Bs in college, and who asks such a ridiculous question. Do you have a minute? Seriously? Do you see these headphones? This focused stare? Just below eye level of the people walking towards you, unwavering, accompanied by the clippiest power walk I can muster without breaking out into a run. I think that makes it pretty clear that I have somewhere to be.

I never, ever have a minute. Take today: I have to run a meeting of the Inter-Columbia Young High Achieving Mentors Society, then make it to my professor’s office hours, schedule an interview with an ambassador for the piece I’ve been asked to write for a very prestigious undergraduate publication, and only after I’ve worked out do I have any time scheduled to go to Butler! I thought about switching my Butler time and my gym time actually, but as I was poised to move them around in my Blackberry calendar I reconsidered (it was SO much easier on the old Palm Pilots... ah the days). If I get a cubby seat I might be able to do better than my 1.8-page-per-hour standard while writing this paper!

So here’s what I’ll do; I’ll first set my G-chat status to “SUPER BUSY, INTERRUPT IN EMERGENCY ONLY” (otherwise people don’t really respect the red icon, since it’s usually red) and I’ll set about planning my night. All caffeine, water, and snacks go on the shelf of the cubby desk, while books for my advanced graduate seminar paper are stacked at the upper left hand corner of the main surface.

My planner is laid out prominently by my right hand. I could not BELIEVE one of my friends the other day- Adam, that loser – just sidles up to me and says, “I knew you’d be here, Liz. You always are when you’re being all stressed out! You’re even more stressed out than usual right now, aren’t you? You know what you need to do? You need to cheeeeeelleeebrah.”

Yes, Adam, you know I’m stressed out, and so you come find me to distract me? That makes sense. No, you came over here to show off just how relaxed you are, despite the fact that finals are a less than a week away, and you must have some paper deadlines coming up too – we’re in that seminar together that you keep being late to. You just have to criticize those of us who really care about our work and our commitments, don’t you? •

Illustrations by Louise McCune
Ah, the winter months! What could be finer? The streets of the City surfeited with virgin snow, trees illuminated with white lights, thoughts of the chalet in Val-d’Isère dancing in one’s head. The season abounds with brandy, warm fires, and excuses to fête, and yet, your own Verily Veritas hazards to admit, one can also find it a tad isolating, even weary.

And so, eager to shake off an infernal melancholy, V. Veritas verily did set out to procure a dog, a “man’s best friend,” as is said. Now as a rule, of course, dogs typically come as gifts. Mummie has her Komondor from Aunt Vicky and Father his Staffordshire from Aga Khan. Grandfather Veritas breeds French Bulldogs but that is a different story entirely. So it was with great reluctance and even a touch of embarrassment that Verily verily ventured to procure his own dog.

Say what you will, you won’t be convincing old V. anytime soon with any of these ridiculous adopt-a-mongrel arguments. With a pedigree, one knows what one is getting. But before contacting a breeder, V.V. had to settle on a breed. Straight off, it was simple enough to eliminate a number of breeds from the running. Labradors—how pedestrian! Poodles—those vile chiens have been a bit overdone! And a hypoallergenic anything reeks of... well shall we say a dearth of taste?

Given the size of your own V.’s rooms (and, to be honest, a penchant for a certain aesthetic) V.V. decided on terriers, those little rakes! A Jack Russell, to be exact. They do go so well with argyle! A dear old friend put your own V.V. in touch with the very best breeder this side of the pond, and, well, waiting-lists are meant to be broken! Neutered, vaccinated, and perfectly coiffed, Wagner (pronounced with the German “W”, of course) was delivered on a rainy Sunday afternoon. A copy of the Times (sans the Sunday Styles) was left on the foyer floor, as is done, and the little devil had the temerity to ignore it, ruining V.V.’s sheepskin galoshes in the process. An excuse for a new pair, but nonetheless, a bit disconcerting.

The next day, after it must be said, a truly grueling Thoreau seminar (when exactly did discussion of gender in Walden become so horrendously obligatory?), a verily enthusiastic V.V. leashed his little rascal and, donning his ash greatcoat (London Fog, no less!), set out for Riverside Park to partake in its infamous dog-walking culture of flâneurs, retirees, and lonely women. The fresh snow made the park positively delightful, the sort of scene that calls for mulled cider, yet the one-upmanship of V.’s ambulatory cohorts soon filled the new-comer with disgust. There were dachshunds with knit sweaters, weimaraners with booties, and one particularly pretentious Afghan hound with Prada accoutrements. Poor little Wagner, with no jaunty accessory of his own, was made to feel substandard. After a close encounter with an especially well-trained whippet, V. and W. judged the affair a failure and made their way home.

One needn’t even mention the horrors of those little plastic bags and what one is meant to do with them. Needless to say, a dog-walker was soon hired—a charming Barnard girl, no less! Old V. and his mutt are now settling in nicely. An affectionate pat on the head and a respectful lick of the palm are all a man and his dog need. Although the scrapper is still micaturating in the galoshes, alas!
Title for a Hamlet paper: *One of These Danes is Not Like the Other* or: How I Learned to Start Worrying about Character and Love the Original


Meet my eighteen-year-old friend, Tim. Tim is your average basketball playing, rap loving teenager.

The easiest way to improve this grade is to reread GOOD works of literature that you are familiar with (don’t you dare say Twilight).

The healthy foods I picked, “Trader Joe’s: Crunchy Unsalted Peanut Butter” and “Progresso Chick Peas”, both fit the Nutrition Criteria. The “unhealthy” foods I used were “Trader Joe’s Dark Chocolate Covered Espresso Beans” and “Flamin Hot Crunchy Cheetos”, and as expected, both did not fit the Nutrition Criteria.

In return for access to the child, you will provide the teacher with a copy of your report.

Underneath all the make-up and expensive clothing she’s sad, she’s insecure, and her heart is aching. No one can break through the ice that shields her eyes and heart...and so she remains alone. The girl with a thousand numbers in her iPhone.

THE LIST

**Stuff**
- Ugg boots that have been hiding under your bed (both)
- Pretty equestrian riding boots. Please ask Courtney for assistance if you’re confused. Try to get them fixed first!
- Picnic blanket – specifically, the Allegheny Power or complete energy one that has the canvas side and the vinyl side
- Hookah (yaaaa)
- The red suitcase that’s been in the laundry room
- Laxatives
- Tylenol PM or something that will soothe my hurting face at night
- Army chair
- Waffle iron?
- ALL THE COOKING SHIT YOU CAN SPARE – whatever we have that’s extra, please bring it! At least one pot/pan too. And anything else really
- Ask Courtney for her Gap blazer – I just want to borrow it for the weekend. PLEASE!
- High socks
- Tights – lots of tights
Out of the Stacks, Into the Streets

One woman’s crusade to save Columbia’s old books

BY SARAH CAMISCOLI

“There used to be a joke when people answered the phone in the Geography Department,” says Lisa Cammett, BC ’78, “They said, ‘Rocks and maps!’” Outsiders might miss the irony of the greeting, but Cammett—a geography major herself—explains that the field is often misunderstood as dry talk of continental divides and topography when it actually is “about exploring the relationship between the earth’s resources, economics and human beings.”

For Cammett, this exploration has yet to end. After spending 27 years in the administration of the Columbia School of Social Work, she is taking action to mend what she believes to be a gaping chasm between the earth’s resources, human life, and social awareness. And how will she seal this rift? Well, Cammett rescues used books.

Sporting a tight, steely pony tail and rolled up sleeves, Cammett spends hours pounding the pavement of Morningside Heights. Her tools are modest—stacks of books, a plastic water jug-turned-donation jar, faded petitions addressed to President Lee Bollinger—but her ambition is not: she’s devoted herself to finding homes for used books trashed by Columbia professors and students.

The stacks of books that Cammett carries around with her, however, hardly make up a shelf out of the vast library of used books that fills her apartment on 122nd Street. She also has an offsite annex—a unit in Manhattan MiniStorage—for what doesn’t fit at home. But she doesn’t mind giving up the space in her living room. To her it’s a small sacrifice made on behalf of greater social justice, the “dying planet” and its “lower income” peoples. She sees rescuing used books from waste paper baskets and giveaway piles as a way to save trees and knowledge while keeping that revolutionary spirit alive.

It would be wrong, however, to assume that Cammett is driven by the same impetus that inspires today’s green movement. Her devotion to the lives of used books comes from a more personal place. “My father, who died a couple of years ago, was a historian and a bibliophile,” she explains. “My mother loves to tell that there were only two times I got a smack. One was when I ran into the street, and another was when I tore out a page from his book because I wanted attention.” Although she always respected her father’s love for books and was environmentally aware, these interests didn’t coalesce until she randomly stumbled upon a copy of her father’s book in the trash in 2004.

Cammett became incensed when she discovered that professors and administrators at the School of Social Work were being urged to “purge, purge, purge” before they moved offices from 113th Street to their current facility on Amsterdam. She knew she had to do something. “I put my job in jeopardy by going through the big plastic bags,” she explains. In her eyes, throwing out so many used books only helped to propagate the social and ecological damage that the University claims to be helping to prevent. “Perfectly good books,” she says, that could have been recycled or donated were dumped into the trash. When she personally tried to deliver the cache of books she rescued from the sidewalk to Butler and other university libraries, they could only take “a few hardcover classics.” The majority were left with nowhere to go.

After facing rejection from other local libraries, Cammett began setting up cartons outside of her office, visiting used bookstores, and offering her textual treasures to street vendors. When naysayers in her office would challenge her with “you’re supposed to be doing your secretarial work,” she says she would counter, “What does everyone else do when they’re done with work?”
In an attempt to connect with like-minded individuals on campus, Cammett joined Earth Co, the predecessor of today’s EcoReps. But she didn’t find the activists she was hoping for. “They did more potluck dinners than they did anything else,” she remembers. “They never missed an excuse to get some beer.” Nostalgic for the political fervor that rocked Columbia’s campus into the late 1970s, she became infuriated by what she sees as a lack of seriousness from her contemporary student counterparts. Proposals for politically correct forms of speaking out, like “corn husk cups for the frats” maddened her, so she pushed for a hunger strike and similarly radical forms of protest. She was rejected. “I felt like saying, ‘What are you smiling about so much?’” she says. “I simply didn’t understand why there wasn’t a sense of alarm. It seemed like they simply hadn’t seen enough of how much suffering and how much damage there is in this world to take what they were doing seriously.” She was asked to leave the student group after her harsh critiques of what she saw as wasting time to “play nicey nice.”

Not easily disheartened, by Labor Day 2004 Cammett had over 2,000 books—an amount which prevented her and her seven cats from moving about her living room. “I am going to give them away,” she decided then, “I’m going to pass out these leaflets with my rap song.” She planted herself on Low Steps, handing out used books to curious students, collecting several hundred signatures for her petition, and reading out her rhymes: “When knowledge is gone/it may be gone for good/and let’s not forget that paper’s made of wood/to throw away books kills trees and mind/and shows disrespect for all human kind.” Her beats won her an article in the Columbia Spectator and a meeting with the Office of Environmental Stewardship later that year.

Upon meeting with the Office, Cammett was informed that the “Give and Go Green” initiative was already in place to deal with used books. Discarded materials were stored and recycled in an area she calls “the anus of the university”—a disposal and storage garage on 118th and Amsterdam. Unsatisfied with this solution, she notified the Office, pointing out the bins inside of the “anus” were not effectively distributing books to those who had a need for them. In response, the Office granted her permission to sift through the piles and take what she could. And she did—so much so, in fact, that she decided to cough up $600 a year for storage and transportation in order to avoid throwing any of them away until she could distribute the books herself.

Cammett ultimately wants the university to establish an on-campus used book and donation center, and she’s collected several thousand signatures in support of such a facility, “where the precious intellectual knowledge that too many of us here take for granted could be shipped to libraries, schools, and cultural institutions in other parts of the United States or the world.” She wants President Bollinger’s approval and even would like her project considered for a small space in the forthcoming Manhattanville campus. In the hopes of securing a meeting with Bollinger, she has written a letter, hand-painted the margins with floral vines, and had it mounted in a gold frame: “Has word about my petition to you reached your ears?” the letter reads, in part. “What can we do with these books? Will the university take the responsibility for this? ... I pray that it will ... Can I have a meeting with you?” But its delivery will have to wait, as her unpleasant dealings with some lower-level administrators have made her unwilling to approach Bollinger without more support and awareness.

Still, she’s holding out hope. Flipping through reams of signatures collected over the past seven years, Cammett believes she’s helping to make a difference in the world. “I made a wonderful discovery,” she says. “All across the political spectrum... nobody believes it’s a good idea to throw out used books.”
We have a responsibility to posterity," declares Karen Green, Columbia Librarian for Medieval History and Graphic Novels. In their duty to capture history before it dissolves into the unrecorded past, Columbia's librarians are entrusted with a treasure trove of extraordinary resources—a centuries-old Buddhist sutra, John James Audubon’s “Elephant” folio edition of the Birds of America, and the Shoah Foundation’s visual history archive containing 50,000 hours of video interviews with Holocaust survivors, just to name a few.

And Columbia’s librarians are not so much the stereotyped, buttoned-up shushers as bubbly bibliophiles eager to share information with students spelunking in the stacks. Donna Reed may have played a pitiful librarian in It’s a Wonderful Life, but don’t forget, Batgirl worked as the head librarian at the Gotham City Library when she wasn’t fighting crime. Even the reckless romantic Casanova spent a decade working as a librarian for Count Waldstein.

Librarians in today’s digital age simply don’t fit the old stereotypes. They face an era exploding with new information in new formats, and they face this challenge by drawing on a rich tradition—Melvil Dewey, founder of the Dewey decimal system, used to be our chief librarian. The first academic reference department was founded here, and so was the first school of library service. Columbia is simply steeped in library history.

Columbia’s librarians are divided into three groups: access service librarians, technical service librarians, and public service librarians.

“The technical services guys you’ll never see,” jokes Green. Hidden underground on the elusive first floor of Butler, technical service librarians are responsible for processing, cataloging, and conservation. Most recently, these conservators repaired architect Joseph Urban’s three-dimensional set design models—known as maquettes—for an exhibit on his theatrical work.

You’ve seen the access service and librarians, though. They’re the ones who work at the circulation desk, dole out fines, kick out the campers, and tell you there’s no lid on your coffee cup. “Access services deal with all the anger, and public services receive so much gratitude,” Green says. Bob Scott, Electronic Text Service Coordinator, adds: “You can always show someone angry something really neat and it’s a wonderful feeling.”

And rightly so. The public services librarians, responsible for reference, instruction and collection development, seem to know every book that enters Butler’s doors. These more academic librarians are the gatekeepers of an information palace and are trained in helping students find precisely the books, journals, and other materials they need. Unlike many other offices around campus, Columbia has consistently increased the budget these librarians have to work with, which allows the librarians to secure new acquisitions and grow the collection. “We’re leaders among the Ivies,” Scott beams.

Cultivating the collection is a job that requires serious scholarly skill. All of the Columbia’s public service librarians have advanced scholarly degrees—masters’ degrees from library school and Ph.D.s in specific subject areas. “When Columbia opened the first academic reference department and the first school of library service, the thinking at the time was librarians...
working at universities need to be highly intelligent to help faculty with research,” explains Nancy Friedland, the librarian for Butler Media, Film Studies and Performing Arts who also teaches reference classes.

That school—named the Columbia University School of Library Service and founded only a year after the establishment of the New York Public Library in 1886—marked the beginning of the professionalization of librarians. Just as public libraries had become established landmarks, academic libraries were now becoming more actively involved in their university community.

Dwindling enrollment and the tremendous need for space in Butler ultimately forced the School of Library Service to close in 1992, but its legacy lives on in different terms. Some library schools have dropped the name “service” for a more quantitative “science,” while others have ditched the “library” label altogether in favor of the broader term, “information.” “They’re ashamed of the word!” Green laments. These schools of “information science” integrate the vast world of the web into their curricula.

Yet, even with the benefits of technological information and the paper-saving benefits of e-books, Columbia’s librarians still passionately defend books. “It’s the smell,” five librarians explain at once. “You can’t curl up with a Kindle,” Michelle Chesner, Columbia’s first librarian for Jewish Studies, adds. More practically, Friedland explains, “you can still read a print book in a thousand years. There’s just no guarantee that we’ll be able to read all of these digital formats in even 50 years.”

Whether in digital or paper format, there is a magical quality in preserving the half-forgotten, bringing the dead back to life. Most of the public services librarians delightfully recall how they “fell into” their jobs. Having been very “library immersed” as a graduate student, Green had an epiphany: “I realized everything I loved about academia was in the library, and everything I hated about academia—the unstructured hours and publish-or-perish—wasn’t.”

Chesner tells an inspiring “straight from undergrad story.” While working in a rare book library, Chesner was tasked with identifying Hebrew books from the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction Project for cataloguing. After World War II, the US army arrived in Germany to find warehouses of books taken from Jews—millions of Hebrew books without owners. The Jewish Cultural Reconstruction project aimed to return these books to their rightful owners and donate the rest to Jewish institutions, including the one where Chesner worked. She opened a recognizable title that would have been studied in a traditional eastern European yeshiva, and at the back of the book, she found the stamps of the particular institution the book had been in—the French Archives Nationale—and the Nazi eagle with a swastika, plus the manuscript notations of the original reader. “This is where you get to the past,” Chesner realized. “The book has the manuscript notes of the person who used it and the stamp of the person who grabbed it from his hands and threw it in a pile. You create a story and see how much books talk about and show that story of the people.”

Librarians, then, are the ambassadors of these personal narratives, inviting readers to stumble across these telling moments for themselves. Much of this guidance occurs in the reference interview, somewhat like a therapy session, when reference librarians steer patrons to the “a-ha!” moment. “The most exciting thing in the world about being a librarian is having somebody come up to you in tears because they can’t figure out what to do with whatever project and sending them away smiling,” says Green. “You can show someone how to find the information they need and that is just the most gratifying thing in the world.”

Surprisingly, Green’s favorite part of the library isn’t a book at all. It’s the mural in the Butler lobby that depicts the enlightened masses fighting off the...

Continued on page 20
In a voice completely devoid of irony, say the following sentence out loud: New York used to be different.

This is certainly true—the city has changed dramatically, especially over the last 20 years—but to put it in such earnest, simplistic terms is trite. I still remember the genuine laments of friends from far away, who arrived as freshmen in New York City only to discover it was not the city they had expected. By their first spring at Columbia, they had gotten tired of talking about their romanticized yearning for an older, less gentrified New York. They eventually realized that Columbia professors and students, scholars and journalists, young arrivals and seasoned New Yorkers alike have been mourning the loss of “old” New York for at least two decades. The gentrification of New York has become a subject reserved only for academic settings and those ironic, casual conversations at parties where everyone giggles, gives a knowing nod, and then looks away.

We may no longer sincerely admit it, but nostalgia for an older, grittier New York is something that a lot of the city’s young people share, on and off college campuses. It is one reason that so many of us are drawn to neighborhoods like the East Village, Williamsburg, Bushwick, and even Harlem—these places still allow us to imagine a past that was less shiny and commercial than most of New York is today. It is hard not to feel nostalgia when you walk through neighborhoods that have undergone intense “Disneyfication”—the creation of the sterile, over-advertised, consumer-oriented aura that now defines places like Times Square and most of Chelsea, Greenwich Village, and SoHo.

The word “gentrification” was first used in the 1960s to describe the physical rehabilitation of London’s working-class neighborhoods. The flurry of renovation and new construction completed in New York since the late 1980s was fueled by the recovery of the city’s economy from decades of deep depression. Since then, money from a new global economy—anchored on Wall Street—has paid for the changes we see on the street. We sense a vague absence as we walk in the city today, what CUNY sociologist and gentrification scholar Sharon Zukin calls a “loss of authenticity.” But our investment in this nostalgia distracts us from the more important changes gentrification has wrought. The same economic forces that have remade the built environment of New York have put pressure on young people like us to make money or leave. Of course it costs more to live in a city that is, by any metric, more comfortable. Nevertheless, this nostalgia blinds us to the fact that when we leave college, we will pay a much higher price to live in New York than people our age did 20 years ago.

Since the majority of Columbia students have been living in the city for fewer than five years, we aren’t even expressing nostalgia, per se, when we lament the gentrification of New York. It is better to call it nostalgia-by-proxy: a yearning for something we never knew. Despite being a native New Yorker, I am the guiltiest of all my friends. I remember New York 10 years ago, but not 20. Like many people, I’ve put together the details I remember and the small transformations I witnessed, with things I’ve read or heard, creating a nuanced vision of the past—a New York that was somehow thicker, more stimulating, and more real than the one I live in now. A lot of young people who hang out in the
East Village, where I grew up, have created their own mythology of that neighborhood and its history. Part of the mythology, though, may stem from the knowledge that living in the East Village is so expensive now. It is something to hope for and work hard for; something that drives your desire for a professional job with a decent salary.

I do not know exactly how many Columbia students stay in New York for the first few years after graduation, but it must be a fair number. The East Village isn’t everyone’s goal, but by the time Columbia students begin to compete for jobs in the city, we’ve gotten a rough sense of how much it costs to live within 30 minutes of Manhattan—a lot. A recent New York Times article, titled “The Price 20-Somethings Pay to Live in the City,” went to the trouble of collecting stories about the money, space, and amenities young people are willing to sacrifice to be in New York. Most of us, General Studies students excepted, have never supported ourselves on our own for very long. Because of our eagerness to participate in the cultural, intellectual, and economic life of New York City, we must come to terms with the necessity of the entry-level professional job immediately after graduation. It’s that or grad school. We haven’t quite dealt with this reality consciously, though, because we’ve forgotten (if we ever knew) that it used to be much easier for young people to live cheaply in New York.

New York has always been expensive, but as gentrification has changed the city physically, the cost of living here has increased dramatically. Scholars of globalization, especially Columbia’s Saskia Sassen, have explained this trend in New York and other “global cities” as a result of the dominance of global corporations over the world economy since the 1980s. They need to be based New York, in no small part because of their reliance on the professional services—financial, legal, and consulting—that are also located here. As a result, the amount of money flowing through the city today is not 10 times more than in 1980, but 10 orders of magnitude more.

The implications of this vast increase in cash flow become clear if you consider the so-called “global professional class,” those who work for a multinational corporation or in an industry that serves those corporations’ needs. They have the money to buy an apartment in Manhattan, a more expensive silk button-down, and artisanal cups of coffee. Their million-dollar salaries support cultural institutions, stimulate luxury industries, and drive up the price of everything they buy, especially housing, to the disadvantage of younger people.

But a richer, cleaner, often safer city, like our post-Giuliani New York, by opening more shops and high-end services, also attracts a mostly white upper-middle class and middle class population, the majority of whom would have been found hiding in the suburbs for most of the late 20th century. People of color, rich and poor, have traditionally been concentrated in inner cities. However, the attraction of revamped, gentrified American cities like New York has recently brought white, well-off people back into the city in droves,
a phenomenon nicknamed “reverse white flight” by the Huffington Post. Over the past few decades, urban living has become not only safe and convenient, but also become culturally appealing—or, if you will, cool.

Before the return of demand for housing in American inner cities, young people could and did live in run-down neighborhoods cheaply. They weren’t pushed farther and farther from the center of town like young people—and all of those who can’t pay high rent—are today. It is now too expensive for many people to live or shop in Manhattan, or even near it. This pattern is typical of European cities: the rich live in the center of the city, near the culture and the action, while the poor are pushed toward the edges.

Why should this matter to you? Since when did young become synonymous with poor? If you’re an ambitious student graduating from Columbia, it certainly doesn’t have to be. Even if you claim you won’t make any money in your chosen profession, you’re likely to be entering a field with cultural or intellectual prestige, where you will interact in an upscale professional setting and social world despite your salary. Though perhaps no different from other high-caliber schools, the competitive job-seeking that Columbia undergrads engage in makes it seem like a professional lifestyle is not just one of many options—it is an imperative. Intellectual capacity and worldly ambition are not the only factors driving us toward this desire for professionalism. We fear irrelevance and poverty. The average Columbian is not well acquainted with either, but Columbia and New York City have also taught us to fear non-success and to equate it with failure. One of the reasons is that it is no longer easy in New York to live on the pay from a part-time service job, get a cheap place, and relax, think, and experiment after college. And so we are taught to have a plan and a trajectory, or else.

When I say “experiment,” I don’t mean with different careers. We’ll all have a dozen in our lives, says some over-quoted statistic. But New York used to be full of young people who weren’t sure if they wanted to be writers, or artists, or musicians, but who got a cheap place and messed around with their creative impulses for a few years after college. There is a place for those students who already know they want to go into music, or visual arts, or writing—those who are already competing for recognition in those fields, and who may begin to find pay for their work soon after leaving school. They will survive the difficulties of being twentysomethings in the city that the Times describes.

But those who just need a little money and some physical and mental space to play with paint, or a guitar, won’t find it in New York today. They will have to do their dabbling somewhere more hospitable to their youth and indecision. We may lose a few who would have made great contributions to New York’s culture and creativity. But what about those who never would have made it—the mediocrities? Don’t we lose something when they leave New York? And have we not lost something at Columbia when we worry constantly about competing for entry-level professional jobs, because we’re taught that if we want our own space outside of a parent’s house, that is the only option? Once we arrive at Columbia, privileged in our education if not in other ways, are we all effectively choosing pre-professionalism? You’d better hope so, because if you want a place in the society you see around you, you’ll have to work harder than anyone to get a job that will guarantee you a place in the new New York City.

But those who just need a little money and some physical and mental space to play with paint, or a guitar, won’t find it in New York today.
There’s not much more to be said about Four Loko; blogs and newspapers alike have breathlessly chronicled the overly social beverage’s quick march into oblivion. In the depths of this frigid winter, Four Loko has vanished, and we are from here on out frozen and alone.

And yet a dash of hope remains. Several enterprising freshmen (who, for fear of retaliation from authorities legal, academic, and familial, remain unnamed) recently organized a rescue expedition to a local distributor of the drink. Suitcases in tow, they bought “cases upon cases on the cheap” as a preventative measure ensuring future “shwasty fun,” as one hoarder crowed. The group espouses a particularly topical brand of libertarianism, decrying what they see as unacceptable overreaching of an unaccountable government. “It should not be up to the government to decide what is and is not good for us to put into our bodies,” a Four Loko-ite explained. “We should be able to make our own decisions based on personal responsibility and common sense. Four Loko is composed of FDA-approved substances. In a sense, if it is banned, it seems logical to ban other things that are not good for us in large doses—Big Macs, Sonic Blizzards, John Jay food, etc. Why is the government not banning these things?” She also added that to ban anything that is so “fizzy, fast and fruity” is exceedingly nefarious.

After the Four Loko ban went into effect, one fraternity hosted a party commemorating the drink’s reign on campus. These thrifty brothers also deployed wheeled suitcases and backpacks on a border-crossing Loko run, but refused to divulge the source of their secret stash. A spokesman for the party (CC ’13, name withheld as, “My mom reads Bwog!”) told this reporter, perhaps justifying the nature of the evening, “Four Loko deserves a place in everyone’s household. This is America. Banning it here, it will only increase binge drinking. Plus, it forces us to go to Connecticut or New Jersey. New Jersey!”

New Jersey aside, there’s something funny about the nature of these protests and the way they perfectly mimic what passes as America’s latest culture war. In a poetic twist, the Columbians up in arms aren’t quite the lefties of yore; instead, they more closely resemble the Tea Partiers, unhappy with airport security procedures and the authoritarian behavior of the Food and Drug Administration.

Perhaps this strict small-government logic would take hold on campus if the drink in question weren’t so, you know, disgusting. While one generation finds inspiration in their age-appropriate anti-authority rallies, more experienced members on campus view this hoarding and mourning as utterly boring. Rosario Quiroz, CC ’11, offers that despite her reputation as “the go-to person for Four Loko in my group of friends...in all honesty, it does not do much for me.” She does admit that since the announcement of the ban she has Lok’d up on the sweet nectar at least twice, taking advantage of an 8-for-$20 deal. As student desperation grew, driving up prices in neighborhood bodegas, Quiroz balked and stopped hoarding (although her roommate does maintain a closet for this exact purpose). “I refuse to pay more than $2.50 for the drink. [It] was disgusting but convenient. R.I.P. Four Loko...I’m ready to get back to vodka.”

And so perhaps this is how it all ends: radical disdence gives way to cold, hard capitalism, while the faithful stock up as if for the end of the world. The rest of us, meanwhile, return to a familiar alternative: the $12.99 handle of Nikolai from International.
New World Order

How Columbia quietly influences world politics

By Mark Hay

Standing at the podium in the Low Library Rotunda at the 2009 World Leaders Forum, then-Prime Minister of Nepal Madhav Kumar Nepal began his address with a declaration of thanks to SIPA Adjunct Professor Jenik Radon. Most seated in the audience that day paid no attention to Nepal’s acknowledgements, but his expression of gratitude should have come as a bit of a surprise—by the standards of celebrity, the leader of an entire nation had thanked an associate professor, a near-nobody.

It turns out Radon is far from a nobody in international circles. In fact, he helped craft the original Nepali Constitution in 1990, earning him the prime minister’s thanks that day in Low Library. He helped negotiate the construction of one of the world’s most important petrochemical pipelines, and he practically wrote Estonian corporate law. With such grand accomplishments, why, then, is Radon not more popularly known? Why is he not a Joseph Stiglitz or Brian Green?

“A large portion of the world’s people today are living directly or indirectly under some form of Columbian authority.”
This lack of professorial fanfare is par for the course at Columbia, at least where international achievements are concerned. The faculty directories of SIPA and the Law School and even the undergraduate schools are filled with D-list professors who have had A-list impacts on the world, so much so that a large portion of the world’s people today are living directly or indirectly under some form of Columbian authority because of professors like Radon and their students.

It’s perhaps not surprising that Columbia could influence the world in such a way—as a world-class institution, the University is well-equipped to produce movers and shakers—but it does so quietly. That may explain why most people will name Harvard and Yale when asked to name the universities with the most political influence. After all, Harvard and Yale dominate the Supreme Court, have played a part in educating every single major party presidential candidate since Reagan, and contribute a sizable portion of Congress’ membership—Harvard, for example, will send more alumni to the floors of Congress this year than Massachusetts will send congressmen.

This is not to say Columbia grads have no political influence domestically. We won’t soon forget that night in 2008 when President Obama won in a landslide, of course, sending the campus reeling from that strange beast known as school spirit. We can also lay claim to Central Intelligence Agency Director George Tenet, US Attorney General Eric Holder, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg. “Not a shabby record,” says SIPA Vice Dean for Academic Affairs Robert Lieberman.

But to focus on domestic politics is to underestimate the true scope of Columbia’s influence—since the mid-20th century, the legacy of global governance at Columbia has been richer and more expansive than those of Harvard, Yale, and the rest of the Ivy League. As detailed in David C. Engerman’s Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America’s Soviet Experts, Columbia’s location in a global city like New York and its exceptionally strong Russian studies program made it an epicenter for training a generation of intellectual and political innovators. Many of the massive federal funds funneled towards Columbia went toward influencing pedagogy and impacting policy in the world, such that over the years, as Engerman notes, Columbia wound up besting Harvard in metrics like the number of scholars produced and government positions held by alumni to become one of the primary forces for democracy in national academia and in the larger world.

With that top spot came plenty of responsibility, as Columbia had a hand in many of the major democratic experiments of the
post-World War II era. The now-defunct Republic of China, early Taiwan, portions of anti-Soviet Africa, pre-Soviet/Taliban Afghanistan, pre-Saddam Iraq—all of these nations hosted Columbia faculty and alumni in the highest levels of government, many of whom worked on constitutions and other policies that would far outlast their personal political power. Similarly, Columbia had ties to Soviet glasnost and perestroika through alumni in Mikhail Gorbachev’s administration, and the College, Business School, and Law School can be proud to have produced Li Lu, leader of the Tiananmen Square protests.

And those aren’t even the biggest impacts Columbia can claim to have had on the world. Different academic niches within the university have wrought their own changes on global politics, reflecting a singular institutional culture that has dominated Columbia for several decade. These changes all point toward a drive to export Western academic formulations of development and democratization, with its most profound influence felt on the structures that rise above presidencies and prime ministers—the creation of documents and the institutionalization of ideals that have ordered the modern world.

Here, the shining example is B. R. Ambedkar, Columbia alum and architect of the constitution of India, the document that has governed the operations and ideals of the world’s largest democracy for more than 60 years. Ambedkar’s constitution pays homage to its American counterpart with a strikingly federal structure and, at several points, nods to socialist forms of economic theory as well as debates over isolationism that were both raging in institutions like Columbia around the time Ambedkar was a student.

Or consider our dear economist and Professor Jeffrey Sachs, who, before his leadership in sustainable development and the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals, was known as “Doctor Shock” for advocating his “shock therapy” macroeconomic policies in post-communist nations worldwide. His strategies—though steeped in the Cold War preoccupation with exporting Western economic growth models to promote democracy—instantaneously liberalized markets in countries like Bolivia, Poland, and Russia, for better or for worse.

And this is to say nothing of Columbian soci-
ologists like Seymour Lipset, whose theory that economic growth and improvements in standards of living promote stable democracy, have changed the ways policymakers develop and implement economic initiatives, foreign policies, and development plans.

But these are just three people—the total scope of Columbia’s global governance is unfathomable. Every professor involved in SIPA, the Law School, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, and Columbia College contacted for this piece indicated that Columbia has had even more of a hand in world politics than meets the eye. Many were able to list this scholar or that who impacted this constitution or that theory or gave birth to this field or that norm. But no one was able to provide a comprehensive list, or even an abbreviated list within his or her field. In part, this is indicative of Columbia’s lack of pomp and revelry concerning its success in determining the current shape of the globe.

“CU [...] doesn’t make much of international connections,” said Associate Professor of International and Public Affairs Maria Victoria Murillo. Based on her experience as a Ph.D. student at Harvard and a former member of Yale’s faculty, Murillo believes that “the development offices and administration at Harvard and Yale are always making the connection. Everyone knows about [our alumni and their impacts] and it reinforces networks with funding that is specific and linking students and former alumni. I don’t see that here... even though SIPA at least should have tons of connections with policymakers.”

According to Robert Jervis, the Adlai E. Stevenson Professor of International Affairs, Columbians pepper influential mid-level posts in governments the world over, but “CU has never built up the apparatus needed to track its graduates—that’s one reason our fundraising has lagged.” Not that there haven’t been attempts to build such an apparatus, though. Huber recalls that former SIPA Dean Lisa Anderson “once tried to compile info about” Columbia’s global influence, but never managed to complete a full document before leaving the university to accept a position at the American University of Cairo.

It is admittedly difficult to calculate the global impact of an Ambedkar, or even a Radon. But it may be crucial to begin improving that tracking capacity if Columbia wishes to retain its seat at the head of the class when it comes to international influence. Harvard, for any shortcomings it may have on the global scale, still manages to pull in millions in alumni donations every year precisely because of such successful alumni networking.

Even conservatively estimating, the political, economic, and social work of Columbians holds sway over at least one-fourth of the world’s population today. Not a shabby record at all. Whether we ought to be proud of that legacy remains a separate question. Certainly the recent disorder of Nepal, or the hardships often brought on by Sachs’s shock therapy ought to give us pause, just as the tenure of so certain presidents and legislators ought to give pause to Harvard and Yale.

But for now, we may proudly say that the sun never sets on the empire of Columbian thought and influence—if only because we have no way of easily locating where the borders of that empire begin and end. ♦
Her Life in Art

Born in Haiti, Edwidge Danticat, BC ’90, moved to Brooklyn when she was a teenager, where she attended Clara Barton High School before Barnard. The success of her early semi-autobiographical novels and short stories has made her one of the most prominent writers to come out of Morningside Heights and an important figure in the Caribbean Diaspora. Receiving the National Book Circle Critic award in 2007 for her memoir, Brother, I Am Dying, and a MacArthur Fellowship in 2009, Danticat has in recent years been celebrated for her sincere mix of personal narrative and political commentary. Although Danticat has been busy on tour for her new collection of essays, Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work, she found a moment to speak with Blue & White Managing Editor Mariela Quintana about her work, her community, and her home.

The Blue & White: What is the art scene like in Haiti now? How has it changed since the January Earthquake?

Edwidge Danticat: After the earthquake there was a momentary pause because a lot people lost their family members and they had to worry about the business of survival.

But soon some of the writers were blogging about the earthquake and about what happened to them. Many are still actively blogging and writing today in a first person or journalistic way about what is happening now in Haiti with the cholera and the elections and all of the other challenges facing the country today.

And immediately artists were writing and painting. The week of the earthquake itself, on the cover of The New Yorker was a painting by Frantz Zephirin, a painter from Haiti. Even though this was an older painting, it was a fitting description of what artists are trying to do in Haiti today. The painting was called “Resurrection.”

For the writers, it was words. One of the things that was a lot more visible this time around was that the people who lived in Haiti were able to tell their stories to the rest of the world with the new social media, including the artists. The people who have always written have continued writing, but many people who have never written before have started writing some for personal relief; some for their children, you know, as a response therapy. So, yes, art is alive and well in Haiti.

I never let my mind settle because I think, and fear, it’s settling all the time.

B&W: As a Haitian-American writer how do you view yourself in relation to Haiti? In the USA, you are certainly one of the more prominently known artists coming from and writing about Haiti—do you identify yourself as the artistic voice of Haiti or is this a label you recoil from?

ED: My feeling is that I am one of the many voices from Haiti. I know the community and I am part of the community. I see myself as one of many others. I don’t see myself as the artistic voice. I try to when I can, as best as I can, bring attention to other voices.

B&W: When writing about the earthquake, who is your intended audience? Are you writing for the
people of Haiti, for the people here in the USA, for yourself?

ED: All writers write for themselves, or at least everyone says it and it’s probably true. So when I write, my primary audience is myself. I write because I’m interested in a subject, in trying to understand it better myself.

And I write to explain certain things to myself, really. That’s who I see as my audience. That being said, the writing, the words, the pages, the ideas are there for everyone. But I ultimately write as a way of understanding things better.

B&W: So was writing about the earthquake a means of recovery or mourning for you?

ED: Oh yes, it was a way of participating in the larger mourning. I lost family members in the earthquake, so it was a means of dealing with the need to mourn for them. That’s the only way I had. When I lost my father and I lost my uncle, I found that that was one way of healing. So when you’re part of a larger healing process with dozens or hundreds of people, you go back to your roots and begin to collectively tell a story.

B&W: One theme you touch on in Create Dangerously is the inability to actually leave Haiti or home though you have actually physically left. What accounts for this dislocation? Where do you consider home?

ED: Home is sort of wherever I am at this point. (Laughs.) I consider Haiti my home island. I have a lot of family there. I feel very connected to it. I’ve lived in the north where I also have family. I think one thing is that, when you’re young and you leave the place where you were born, it becomes clear in your mind that home is wherever you end
up. It’s not that I’m extremely passive about home, but at this point I do feel like I could make my home anywhere. I take it with me. What makes home are these attachments, these familial attachments, friendships and memories. If you have that, wherever you are you can make it home.

**B&W:** Is this something that you find unique to your own personal experience? Or something that is shared with other people or artists in transition?

**ED:** No, it’s not unique at all. Especially these days, where migration is such a part of people’s lives. And even people who never leave the country they are from, who don’t cross national borders, who just move from rural to urban or urban to rural. I think everyone has that feeling. But I’m not in anguish, I’m not agonizing over it because I have my work. Making my work is home and I create home in my work. I take whatever that is with me. Is it a particular piece of ground or a particular state of mind? I don’t think so because I’m not attached to anything in that way forever, except maybe my family, my loved ones, my children.

**B&W:** This notion of the diaspora gets thrown around a lot in academia—how does it translate to real life? How does it translate to art? Is it something you’re conscious of or try to avoid?

**ED:** The notion of the diaspora is real in the sense that when you’re physically away from the place you were born, then you immediately become part of a larger community of people outside the country you were born.

Haiti is interesting because it’s a mixed bag. Everyone who lives in Haiti has a family member who lives in the diaspora. There are lots of people who leave Haiti to support their family financially.

**B&W:** Your name often is associated with other literary celebrities of the Caribbean Diaspora—Junot Diaz and V.S. Naipaul to name two—does being a part of this group motivate you to speak for people of the Caribbean or the people of Haiti?

**ED:** There’s nothing telling me I need to speak for the people of Haiti. They can speak for themselves directly. I think it’s very dangerous to say or to feel you’re speaking for anyone. I’m not speaking for anyone, I’m expressing my own individual view of and it happens in some cases that you record the experiences of others.

I think that’s certainly what Naipaul is trying to do and Diaz too. It’s what everyone is trying to do. We tell our individual stories in the hopes that we can tell part of a larger story. A lot of people may tell different pieces of it, I know Junot and I know for a fact that he’s not trying to tell the story of another and Naipaul in his writing is certainly clear about that. But we’re not trying to speak for a group.

**B&W:** How do you feel about recovery? Where should we look for hope? In continuing aid, support from abroad, the involvement of celebrities like Wyclef Jean and Angelina Jolie?

**ED:** We should put our hope in the Haitian people. I was telling people if we want to support Haiti, then we invest in initiatives that empower Haitians. There’s no one in Haiti who thinks there’s a magi-
cal solution. But there is so much ingenuity and so much will and motivation. They work wonders with very little. So when we work with organizations that empower Haitians to help themselves, that’s when we have the most hope. That’s pretty much how the country’s been maintaining itself for the past two-hundred-plus years, simply by Haitian people supporting other Haitian people.

B&W: Do you see the trauma the earthquake caused as draining energy away from these empowerment efforts or reinvigorating them?

ED: In some quarters, it’s a motivating factor and motivating greater effort and awareness. In the diaspora, for example, outside of Haiti, you have more people wanting to get involved. More people are looking for ways they can contribute to the country which is great. Unfortunately, it also opens up new avenues of exploitation...

There are certainly plenty of people who see this as an opportunity to make money in Haiti. They see the potential of billions of dollars coming in without thinking about the welfare of the people.

B&W: Is this non-profit organizations or specific individuals or political figures?

ED: In a lot of cases it’s aid groups, in other cases it’s government. Haiti is primarily supported by NGOs. That’s something that’s been okay and we do have some invaluable NGOs. But if we had a more positive relationships between NGOs and progress, in the local sense, then we would have a different country.

B&W: In the context of development, how feasible is sustainability for Haiti?

ED: In the past, whenever the Haitians have tried to develop on their own, they get their legs cut out from under them.

Years ago, during President Clinton’s presidency, he flooded Haiti with cheap rice, and that destroyed the rice industry there. Thousands of Haitian pigs were massacred with the prompting from the Food and Drug Administration some years ago. Those pigs were like the saving banks of poor Haitians. It’s like every time Haitians try to succeed, they are undermined.

B&W: Are topics of sustainability, progress, and politics on people’s minds and in their conversations and something that works its way into your writing? Or is it reserved for political discourse among legislators and policy makers?

ED: It’s all connected. Much like it is here, politics, the everyday and writing, for me, is connected. You can write a novel about anything, no matter how political or technical, that affects a person’s life on daily basis. In Haiti, this is even more so simply because it’s a smaller country. And so political issues have a local resonance in everyday life.

B&W: When you sit down to write, where do you find inspiration? Current events? Your family life? Moments of introspection? Or does it change on a day to day basis?

ED: I definitely have an idea way before I sit down to write. Even though the sorts of things I write about deal with people and what they’re thinking about and how they relate to their environment, they can go beyond me and beyond my head. It can start from a moment of dialogue. Or it can start from something that occurred from something I’ve seen or something I’ve read. Writers are like sponges. Something you read about now can be something you end up writing about five months, ten months, ten years down the road.

B&W: Do you have ideas for a next project or are you taking a moment to let your mind settle?

ED: I never let my mind settle because I think, and fear, it’s settling all the time. I’ve been working on a book of fiction for about five years, so on January 1, on 1/1/11, I’ve told myself I’m going back to it.
A picture of Harry Houdini at The Jewish Museum’s new show, “Houdini: Art and Magic,” shows the magician on the stoop of a brownstone in Harlem with his family, smiling at the camera. From the aged tone of the photograph and the grins of those around him, it seems to describe a distant place, as vanished as the jovial figure at the top of the stairs.

Walk across Morningside Park to 278 W. 113th Street, however, and you will see the building still stands. The angular, terracotta brownstone next to an empty lot halfway down the block is the same house Houdini bought in 1904. As “Art and Magic” reveals, rather than passing from memory like so many performers of magic’s golden age, Houdini escaped the chains of history and continues to inspire artists and writers today.

As one would expect, the exhibit first chronicles Houdini’s early life. Grainy pictures show Erik Weisz and his brother Theodor in Hungary in 1877, one year before they immigrated with their family to Appleton, Wisconsin. After moving to New York with his father in 1889, Weisz took a job in a necktie factory, where he met Jacob Hyman, another aspiring magician. Taking the name “The Brothers Houdini” after French conjuror Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin, they performed card tricks at small venues around the city.

Of course, Houdini’s reputation wasn’t built on parlor tricks alone. The exhibit’s main gallery contains artifacts from the stunts that made him famous — handcuffs, straitjackets, wooden chests, and the water torture cell, a device of his own invention. Footage of his escapes is projected on the walls alongside the tools of his trade to communicate the power of his spectacles.

Houdini projected an intensely physical presence. Short and muscular, he slipped his bonds like an athlete sprinting a race, emerging with a tired smile and lines of fatigue etched on his face. The marvel of his escapes was so great, in fact, that they seemed to transcend physical possibility. As American sculptor Petah Coyne would later state, one can read his bonds metaphorically — in the note to “Untitled #618 (Trying to Fly, Houdini’s Chandelier),” a work on display dedicated to war prisoners, Coyne says, “If they could all disappear from [oppression], spin around, and leave their clothing the way he left his straitjacket, what an amazing thing.”

Despite his success as a performer, Houdini took on a second career, which the show documents in full. After his mother died in 1913, he undertook the debunking of spiritualists and mediums, traveling to psychic parlors in disguise to reveal the machinery behind their illusions. In posters and books, all of which are collected in the penultimate room, Houdini tries to convince the public that magic is a hoax, going so far as to reveal some of the techniques he used in his own escapes.

In spite of his efforts, all the public remembered for many years after Houdini’s death was the sensationalism of his act. In a 1954 biopic starring Tony Curtis, excerpts of which are on view, Houdini performs his escapes in a tuxedo, surrounded by showgirls. Only recently have artists like Coyne, Matthew Barney and Deborah Oropallo — whose works all appear in the exhibit — begun to explore other aspects of his performance, like the symbolic potential of his act.

Whether you read Houdini as a physical marvel or a beacon to the oppressed, never before has so much Houdiniana been exhibited at once, revealing a figure as alive and vibrant as the man on the stoop in Harlem.
The sensitivity of Bloomberg’s urban agenda was called into question late last summer when the city council approved the Flushing Commons development project. The massive $850 million initiative is set to include residential, office, and retail space in a lot surrounded by locally owned Chinese and Korean businesses, many of which have been there since the 1970s. Ultimately, developers hope the project will help revitalize the neighborhood with high-end commercial activity.

But with throngs of people pouring out of the Flushing 7 station onto the corner of Main and Roosevelt—after Times Square, the city’s second busiest intersection—you quickly realize that this neighborhood is already thriving. While merchants in Flushing are eager for space in the new building complex, many fear that the construction only add to the confusion and bustle of the neighborhood, severely limiting their business in the short term. There are further concerns about the strains the traffic will put upon public transportation. The 7 line, which terminates in Flushing—one of the city’s most densely populated neighborhoods—already operates at near capacity during peak hours.

Flushing known to Manhattanites as the more authentic Chinatown, Flushing is also a remarkable cultural amalgam and home to a host of other thriving communities. Flushing’s Chinatown, for example, began with the first wave of Asian immigrants in the 1970s and now rivals Manhattan’s. Wonton shops on Main Street are interspersed with churches inviting worshippers inside in a multitude of languages. European immigrants—Eastern European Jews, Greeks, Irish, and Italians—have of late been supplanted by Latinos, Afghans, and Indians, each building their own sites of worship which line the neighborhood’s main drag. Since the first Dutch immigrants settled in the area and named it after the Flushing in their native Netherlands, the neighborhood has been shared by many groups. A small, unassuming brick building on Flushing’s Northern Avenue is the first place Quakers were allowed to practice their religion freely in this country and today it is still referred to as the site of the founding of freedom of religion in America. The sounds of a kids’ basketball game on a residential street corner reverberate against a synagogue, Catholic church, Sikh temple, Baptist church, and mosque, all lined up like paintings in an art gallery.

Not all of Flushing is a picturesque vision of multiculturalism, though. Greater cultural rifts appear along its length, dividing it like an ethnic compass. To the south, Pakistani and Afghan groceries selling mango pulp and spicy poppadom line the streets near the Queens Botanical Gardens and Kissena Park. Chinese restaurants and Korean groceries dominate the neighborhood to the east. Even though these groups live in such close proximity to each other, they often associate separately, as witnessed most recently in the clashes over the new Flushing Commons development—Chinese and Korean business owners have staked out opposing sides over whether the project should go forward.

Despite these divisions, the mixing of cultures still gives Flushing a unique feel. Instead of hot dog stands and halal carts, there are vendors selling stalks of pure cane sugar. And Flushing’s neon signs continue to blink in different languages, illuminating the faces of passersby as they exit the last stop of the 7 line subway.

Illustration by Adela Yawitz
Man About Town

Our culture editor plumbs the zeitgeist

By Brian Donahoe

It has been joked about since, well, the Millennium, but after a solid decade, our society has finally decided that it is time to embrace the ’90s. Though it may be a desperate grasp at that familiar sense of irony that has characterized all the nostalgic trends of our epoch, it seems curiously genuine this time around.

The Blue & White’s Man About Town first came to this realization in September, after having received invitations to two unrelated “croptop”-themed parties in the same weekend. Then, recently, during a campus band’s performance of Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” he brought up this new trend in conversation. While friends argued—not entirely without reason—that this is nothing new, that ’90s nostalgia has been gradually percolating through popular culture for years, he maintained that what we are seeing now is happening on a wholly unprecedented scale. As the debate unfolded, the song concluded and the band began to lead the crowd in friendly banter about Pogs, those oh-so-’90s plastic discs that have not been seen or heard from since the Clinton administration, before breaking out in Weezer’s “Sweater Song.” And so the Man About Town’s point was made.

Then there was the trailer for the upcoming film Friends With Benefits, in which *NSYNC’s own Justin Timberlake and Mila Kunis (who, as a cast member of the now-defunct That ’70s Show, is no stranger to decade-specific nostalgia) play two twenty-somethings arguing over whether “Closing Time” was or wasn’t performed by Third Eye Blind (Third Eye Blind!) as the ballad rocks on in the background.

It’s by Semisonic, but this is hardly the point. The point is that, in 2010, we have undoubtedly entered a decidedly new phase of ’90s nostalgia. The argument that such a trend is merely the natural progression from a previous fetishization of the ’80s, as a younger generation gains ascendancy in “the culture,” might seem logical enough, but the Man About Town, always with his ear to the ground, suspects something else is at play.

In a YouTube video by the comedy group DrCoolSex that has recently been making the rounds and racking up a million hits, we are treated to a mock-trailer for Doug: The Movie, in which a college-aged Doug, from the eponymous Nickelodeon classic, returns to Bluffington to find the world of his childhood changed for the worse. Judy chain-smokes on breaks from her minimum wage job, Porkchop is dead, and Patti is dating Roger.

Today, faced with horrible job prospects and an overwhelming array of societal crises, financial or otherwise, the generation that grew up watching Doug before AYSO games yearns to return to the bygone era of Bluffington, with its booming economy and confident American culture, without the onus of too-tight lycra and too-big hair. Yet, they are also the generation that were adolescents in the Aughts, the decade that fully embraced ironic decade-specific nostalgia. As a result, they see themselves as too jaded to actually admit missing the ’90s, and instead funnel their energies into the brand of nostalgia that let us, sort of, relive the quirkier ’60s, ’70s, and ’80s—artificially faded Ramones T-shirts are an industry unto themselves. But when conversation turns to cartoons, pop music, and midriff-bearing garments, emotions are sincere. Our Man presumes to speak for a generation in saying: in a way that no one in 2007 ever felt about the drab ’80s, everyone under 30 wishes, in their heart of hearts, that it were still the ’90s.

Illustration by Stephen Davan
Ho ho h(ell)lo!

We hope this letter finds you well. Both Mom and Dad here, cheaper to send one letter (recession!) and this way, your father will actually get it done instead of watching Project Runway. Again.

We’ll keep our updates short. As you might remember from your mother’s last letter, I accidentally singed the Virgin Mary’s eyes in a freak garage fire. We put tiny glasses on her to hide the burn, but they broke. And since I was unable to track down another pair of tiny sunglasses, I’ve sewn a tiny eyegbandana for her! I know what you’re thinking, but it’s not an eye patch. And no, she doesn’t look like a blind maid.

What your father means to say is that he turned the Virgin Mary into a chola. In other news we’re having the family over at our house for Christmas Eve dinner because Uncle Nathan is still “involved” with his lawyer (also a he, not that we judge). Aunt Claire isn’t taking it well, as you can imagine, so we decided it’s best to keep her away from ovens—she keeps re-reading The Bell Jar. And I don’t know what we’re going to do about Jasper. Poppy’s so frail I doubt he can stand to be humped again.

Exciting changes aside, your mother and I wanted to talk to you about our famous annual Christmas letter. We thought it’d be sweet if your brother and you each did your own updates this year, so we’d like you to write your own. Here’s your brother’s for some inspiration and continuity:

“Hey. I’m still in high school. It’s whatever. My band’s performing at Las Rosas Mexicana if anyone (under 40) can come. We’ve got a couple other gigs coming up too, nothing crazy big, just like local stuff. We don’t want to sell out. That was the problem with Coldplay. So we’re keeping it simple (Applebee’s Happy Hour 12/23, Shipfield Outlet Mall Sing-along 1/17).

If anyone knows a flautist we’re looking to do a sick death metal-electronica cover of Brahms’ Symphony No. 4. Just kind of classic, simple. My parents asked me to talk about girls but I’m not going to because that’s not your business. H4ppy H01id4y$, you guys.”

We asked him not to talk about his band as extensively, so maybe you could follow up with something a little more varied. Here’s a sample we drafted (it was mostly your father) since we know you’re busy:

“Hello friends and famiglia! As many of you know, Columbia University in the City of New York has been treating me as well as an expensive Ivy League university could. Italian classes are paying off (buono!), and I’m hoping to study abroad in the fall (and taking donations so my mom and dad don’t shoulder the burden by themselves, poor things—recession!). As for boys, I’m very focused on my studies. To dispel rumors that my parents tell me are circulating, I’m not in fact “engaged” to my friend Lisa Stiebowitz, and in the future I will take how I present myself on the facebook more seriously. I’ve talked it over with my parents and I will reconsider adding biology as a major, though the stubborn side of me (from my mother!) still wants to remain an English major in spite of its thoroughly unmarketable nature. Hope everyone is doing well, and happy holidays to all!”

Some of that is vague, you can be more specific of course (I didn’t know how often you go to church, for instance). Anyway, please mail something to us, or fax it if you want to get it here faster. You still have your fax machine, right?

We miss you so much, sweetheart. Keep up the good work at school, and if you have any ideas for placating Jasper and his wily friend, please, let us know!

With love,

Mom and “Mr. Bandana!” ♦
DREAMTIME!

Vector! I say
to Finn waking
dogstretched limbs no pupils
and barking at sky.

It’s like rhombus
in here on Sundays.

I thought we found
Isosceles in our brain waves
when all those scatter plots
grew together
like sounds on the floor.

My trig was whack
blurry as being hungry
and puffed with smoke with
more inches than
Algorithm
to count.

Today we saw giants like
Woah that dude went right over
my last memory of the
Distributive Property.

Jake tried to explain, all
“We’re practically the same age.”

More like those giant freak things
never heard of the metric system
or they invented that jizz
plugging in numbers
I saved in my graphing calculator
with letters.

“You don’t know the half of it
unless you’ve taken
base x height.” Mmmmm
I always like to chew my formulas
before I forget and swallow them.

But woah man I forgot
about those things giant
freaking lines out all the way
across the sky
they always come back to the same
think it’s called something terminal
what’s a ray
Again?

One of those big guys
(not the biggest)
opens up his mouth
chewing metal all the way
“We’re like stuff dreams are made
of.”
Geometric! I could go
tout my mind down those
back again
hung up at the
ray’s terminal point
Bisector
like sword challenge time!

I’ve got him! Gah!
Pudding deficiency!
Dumb protractors always
breaking pencil tips.

Hero: “I have no fears except the ocean
and you’re not made out of water!”
MATH spitting power: Proof.

Yeah man, right on. You’ll beat
those guys as soon as you know
they end somewhere. They always leave
tracks behind.

Dudes look just like lines.

That metal corkscrew takes you
right through the sky almost
one convex neck and a sloshy stomach.

Looped again, dude almost looks fun
till it takes you back down
sloping radius.

The curve on its spine is whipping you
like you’re its equation, Finn,
but you know a helix is less like a circle
and more like a cylindrical pyramid.

Man, if it wasn’t for that lapbar
always covering you
you’d have fallen
Parabolic
flatter than it takes a line
to cut through space.

But dude, that almost square
is your wingman.
“My arms always stretch to save you.”
I don’t have angles.
“I have magic powers.”

All four of Jake’s legs arch over that
Whole sky. “I never said anything
about 180-degree angles.”
Post-angular.

Finn gets off that roller coaster
about to puke.
He pukes.
“Radical,” says Jake. “Mathematical.”

—Jordan Lord
CAMPUS GOSSIP

(TO PUT IT BLUNTLY...)  
Gal to guy: “...so how’d you get hepatitis?”

The Hungarian Pastry Shop, as per usual:
Girl 1: “Well they’re in an open relationship...and it’s not like she hasn’t had lovers.”
Girl 2: “So why doesn’t he tell her?”
Girl 3: “It’s complicated.”

In Lit Hum:
Student: “Ulysses just wants to have his cake and eat it too.”
Professor: “Oh, now Ulysses wants to have his cake, eat and do something else to it.”
Like warm apple ... cake.

A group of three thirty-somethings — alumni — walking near South Lawn:
Man 1 (pointing): “That’s Carman, there, that thing's the most solidly built building on campus.”
Man 2: “Yeah, it’s built like a brick shithouse.”
Woman: “Form follows function...”

Two little boys:
Boy 1: “If looks could kill then I’d be dead!”
Boy 2: “That doesn’t make sense.”

ENTREPRENEURSHIP... BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY
On college walk:
Bake sale girl to Asian tourist: “No, no, no, sir that picture will cost you a dollar, I mean, like, buy a cookie, I’m serious.”

HOLIDAY OBSERVANCES
A GS student: “If you don’t give a veteran a hand job on veteran’s day, you’re a communist ... That’s how I got into Columbia”

BOMB-ASS CHRONIC
A student was giving a presentation in a Contemporary Civilization class held in the Carman classroom across from Frat Row. Suddenly, the overwhelming stench of cannabis began to waft through the open windows filling the room. Students look around, making faces at each other. Some snicker and roll their eyes.
The instructor, interrupting the presenter: “I’m sorry, excuse me, but someone is smoking some major weed right now... We’re gonna try and not get stoned back here.”
Then turns to an AEPi brother in the class in: “if that’s your frat house, maybe you want to have a word with them or something...”

Near the steps, two men talk trends:
“But when rolling backpacks were cool, they were cool.”

A TRUE MANHATTANITE
Small child to his mother, looking down into the Riverside Park: “It’s like the end of the world...”

HEY, IT IS THE PERFECT FATS AND PROTEINS!
Each week, the swim team coach buys 150 bottles of Ronnydale Farm chocolate milk at the greenmarket to reward (and refresh!) his team after practice. Swimmers who wish for more chocolate milk may stop by the stand and thereupon receive four complementary bottles.

Wine...it’s preferable!