MYTHIC TRADITION
When Barnard’s Greek Games Were Sincere

THE ELEGANT PHYSICIST
A conversation with Brian Greene

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So this is the end of the year—most daunting indeed. I will not hide my personal dread for summer: the scramble for many of us to put together an internship (much less the funds for one), the crunch as we try to fit in all the work that we shirked for the past three months, and the mournful separation from our peers. To those reading this who abhor the campus, who cannot wait to launch themselves up and away from 116th, at the time of the year, I envy you above all else.

To the rest of the campus, the staff of The Blue and White offers this: one last issue for the road. As must be obvious to our frequent readers, and as I will make most painfully clear for those reading for the first time, we are a magazine of the university. We delight in the nooks and crannies of it, in its sordid and splendid history, in the nit and the grit and in the people who occupy the place. We join together to revel in this campus (sometimes through adoration, and sometimes through deserved criticism that should make the institution into something which we can love all the more), and we present you with that orgy of love for all that is blue and white and good and perhaps has remained untouched or unknown for one reason or another.

Consider this issue your light-blue summer reading. Consider it a link throughout the summer to an institution to which you will soon return. (Or for those graduating, consider it one last memento, a token of Columbia to drag with you into your new lives.) As you lay upon the beach over the summer, I hope that you will pick up this little booklet from time to time to recall the absurdity and history of the Barnard Greek Games (page 14), or to learn more about the quiet pervasiveness of nudity on campus (page 19). I hope in doing so you will remember this place as fondly as I will when I leave in a few weeks.

Just know that we will be back—the students and the magazine—waiting for you when you return to campus. We look forward to seeing you.

This is a note full of nostalgia and perhaps tinged with a bit of dread about the future. That is accurate in that it is how I feel. But this magazine is not the attempt of myself or the other editors to dig in our nails and kick and scream about being forced to leave the university. Rather, while we are away or once we leave for good, this issue, as all of the others we have and will produced, is about feeling pride in, passion for, and fascination with Columbia—and taking that memory and the spirit of the inquiry behind it into all that we do from hereon out.

Mark Hay
Editor in Chief

WORD SEARCH

During one of the long nights spent crafting this issue, our writers got hungry and split up in search of food. Upon returning with sandwiches from three different delis, they realized that, for a Columbian, going to get a sandwich is not a straightforward quest. Surrounded as we are by a sea of sandwich shops, and the mystic, often manic, menu items offered at those eateries, much more is involved than simply deciding what sandwich—a personal hero, if you will. But, for those who have not completed the quest, the search for the perfect sandwich is long and daunting. To pay tribute to this great task, your friends at the Blue and White have compiled a word search featuring sandwiches from three Amsterdam eateries: P&W’s, Hamilton Deli (“HamDel”), and Subsconscious. Try to find your favorite! Then try to find the rest. Bonus points if you can name the restaurant they came from. Better yet, do it while intoxicated and it will be just like your typical Thursday night drunchies-driven stumble around campus.

WORD BOX

Acuna Matada  Hermadu  NuclearSub
Balboa  Lewinsky  OhBarbara
BigBird  Lifeguard  Pallone
Clinton  LionsDen  Sofutti
Double Trouble  Mizrak  TriplePlay
Final Exam  MonteCristo  Twister
Godfather  NotATaco  Xhilda
POSTCARD FROM MORNINGSIDE

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The PRINCESS BEATRICE

Answer Key:

Acuna Matada - HamDel    Hermadu - P&W's    Nuclear Sub - Subsconscious    Balboa - HamDel    Lewinsky - HamDel    Oh Barbara - HamDel    Big Bird - HamDel

Lifeguard - Subsconscious    Pallone - HamDel    Clinton - HamDel    Lion's Den - Subsconscious    Sofutti - P&W's    Double Trouble - Subsconscious    Mizrak - P&W's

Triple Play - Subsconscious     Final Exam - Subsconscious    Fraid Exams - Subsconscious    P90X - Subsconscious    Fitness - Subsconscious    Fitness - Subsconscious    Fitness - Subsconscious    Fitness - Subsconscious
The residents of Butler can be a quiet, ant-like bunch as they silently scurry around the library's corridors carrying over-sized bundles of schoolwork. Though Butler’s occupants aren’t always quiet—in the entrance lobby, Butler can get as loud as any other building on campus when conversations ricochet off the walls and domed ceiling to bounce around as disembodied voices thanks to the whispering gallery effect of the lobby’s design.

The phenomenon occurs mostly in structures with vaulted domed ceilings, such as Grand Central Station near the Oyster Bar restaurant and St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. Unlike St. Paul’s, where a person standing at a point diametrically opposed to another can hear the other side’s whisper, sounds in the Butler lobby reflect off the curved marble ceiling and can be heard distinctly and loudly between the bench in front of the Athena mural and the area right behind the security guard desk.

Perhaps the gallery is most entertaining for Butler’s security guards, who, if they position their chairs correctly, hear oscillations between daytime conversations—“all educational, nothing too bad,” according to one guard—to nighttime conversations of young women gossiping about love lives and surreptitiously admitting they do not even study in “Club Butler.” While most guards agreed that library voyeurism was not top on their agenda, one commented, “Two ladies will sit back there and not realize that everything they’re saying is going through the loudspeaker in my brain.”

This flourish in Butler’s architecture was probably not purposefully included to enhance the whispered communications of lovers separated by an insurmountable 50 feet, however. James Gamble Rogers, the architect of Butler, was known primarily as a pragmatist, and earned fame more for his Gothic work at Yale than Neo-Classically-styled buildings like Butler.

While Rogers may not have envisioned the whispering gallery when designing the library, the lobby regulars have learned to avoid discussing bosses or potential eavesdroppers. The next time you scurry into or out of Butler, it would be wise not to say anything you would not want your grandmother to hear, because you may have an audience.

—Chris Brennan

Most students who enter Butler are too preoccupied with snagging hot real estate to notice the attentive few, the reward is a massive, clever mural by Eugene Savage. An American artist, Savage painted Athena into each of the college murals he designed, always adorned in the featured school’s colors. Columbia’s Athena towers over the center of the mural as one enters the library. The goddess of wisdom fends off green demonic figures representing ignorance, while ushering in masses seeking enlightenment—representing the working class, as indicated by their garb and stance. Ironically, by the time most students see the mural as they exit Butler, many resemble the sickly demons of ignorance as opposed to the bright-eyed crowd eager to be guided up the steps to the arch of enlightenment.

The hammer and sickle in the workers’ hands are subdued by their inconspicuous placement in the
scene, but are symbolically vibrant. Indicative of American Communist movements in the 1930s (Savage painted the mural in 1933), they are shrewdly placed in the hands of different workers, adding spice to traditional symbolism.

Hovering above Columbia are three muse-like figures holding symbols of the four major phases of human effort: law, art, religion, and science. The first woman, holding a winged figure and a flaming lamp, wears a laurel wreath-like crown—perhaps a tribute to the large number of Columbia Nobel Laureates. The second figure holds a fasces—the symbol of authority—and a halo covers the head of the third figure, who holds the Ten Commandments, symbolizing religion. The mural also incorporates the University’s crown and motto. The New York skyline peeks through one side of Athena’s robe.

The mural, influenced by both Classical and Art Deco styles, reflects a portrayal of traditional values alongside contemporary, more radical, proclivities. This duality is reflected in Columbia itself: the University is esteemed for its core curriculum as it simultaneously encourages students to push boundaries.

Ancient and Medieval History Librarian Karen Green, a keen observer and fan of the mural, comments, “I still think [Columbia] looks like Cher.”

Let’s be real: it was renovated in 1998.
— Sam Herzog

It’s material that genuinely earnest tour guides dream of: something to titillate the parents, impress the teens, and show off just how cosmopolitan—and lurid—Columbia can be. Yet somehow a particularly lecherous tidbit of campus lore has been left out of the tour guide’s standard narrative. Whilst strolling around our pleasantly right angle-ridden campus, the triumvirate McKim, Mead, and White trips off one’s tongue without knowing, or caring, much about the gentlemen themselves. If anything, students are vaguely aware of their status as relatively important Neoclassical architects. Allow us to enlighten you, because their story is really too salacious to leave by the wayside.

It just so happens that in 1906, six years after his firm’s completion of Columbia’s campus, Mr. Stanford White was shot in the head by Harry K. Thaw. Thaw was an infamous millionaire who was jealous of White’s raunchy relations with his young wife, showgirl Evelyn Nesbit. Their romantic trysts, Nesbit later testified, involved White pushing the young woman back and forth on his notorious velvet swing—in the nude. During a serendipitous performance of the number “I Could Love a Million Girls,” Harry K. Thaw assassinated the architect-playboy on the rooftop of Madison Square Garden. The building was then in its second incarnation and had been designed by White himself. Oh, the irony!

The story caused a sensation at the time due in part to the extraordinary circumstances of the crime, and the subsequent scandal of the trial; Thaw was eventually acquitted by plea of temporary insanity. It has remained a source of fascination for writers, inspiring titles such as The Architect of Desire: Beauty and Danger in the Stanford White Family and American Eve: The Birth of the “It” Girl and the Crime of the Century, which was featured in E.L. Doctorow’s novel Ragtime and exported to France. That White’s story should be so unfamiliar to those who charge will remember, not the myth of Columbia’s “Urban Beach.”

— Claire Sabel
Josh Faber

Josh Faber, GS’12, known by some as “the guy with the egg sandwich” or “the kid with the blue hair,” likes to get people talking. He earned his title when Fox’s O’Reilly Factor producer Jesse Watters interviewed Josh for one of the network’s Columbia-baiting segments. Faber was returning to campus after running out to get breakfast, and, he recalls, “As I was walking back, a well-dressed man with a microphone asked me for an interview. He asked if I could finish the sandwich or put it down.” Genuinely more interested in his breakfast purchase, Faber retorted “No,” and began to walk away. The cameraman relented, and told Faber he could keep the sandwich, but Faber had a few demands: “No matter what you do,” he told the reporters before the interview, “this sandwich will not make me look bad on TV.”

Faber succeeded in a way that George Costanza couldn’t. He weaved his way through provocative questions, including, “Is there a Muslim problem?” sandwich soundly in hand. After his 10-minute interview was cut down to a handful of soundbites, Bill O’Reilly admitted on-air, “that guy with the sandwich had a point.”

It’s no surprise the O’Reilly crew asked Faber for an interview—he certainly stands out in a crowd. His hair is a mix of brown and faded green. He wears ripped cut-offs regardless of the season. With his thick, curly wisps of beard, Faber most resembles a punk-rock faun.

Faber’s punk energy comes partially from a youth spent carousing with punks in Griggstown, New Jersey. He never finished high school, but after securing his GED, Faber spent a year studying video-game design in Arizona before transferring to a New Jersey community college. There, he worked diligently in hopes of transferring. His dedication showed: one day after class, Faber’s professor pulled him aside, telling him he was “wasting his life” and urging Faber to apply to Columbia.

In taking an atypical route to Columbia, Faber has picked up a strong, defining work ethic. His friend and fellow WBAR radio staff member Eli Wald CC ’12, remembers finding a distraught Faber toiling away in Butler late at night. Wald told Faber to catch up on his rest, but Faber only replied “No, I’ve spent too much of my life catching up to something.” Today, Faber is majoring in physics and enjoys translating Latin. As one of those types who wanted “to study math ever since [he] learned how to count,” he enjoys the equal patience translation requires.

And one of the upsides of stumbling through Horace is the chance to chat with Core and Classics stud Professor Gareth Williams. In a recent meeting with Williams, Faber asked the terse Classicist when the two could hang outside of the Ivory Tower. Faber mentioned a Phobia concert he had attended recently, but Williams’ tastes are perhaps a little too refined. “Phobia,” Williams jeered, “what do they sound like? They can’t be good.”

Faber’s looks are entrancing and may be the initial lure for those who see him, but the copper-rust locks are only his anglerfish trap. “People go up to him and think it would be funny to talk to him because they expect something,” explains Faber’s friend Cody De La Vara, CC ’13, “but then they realize he’s really nice.” Josh’s open-minded optimism is evident in the way he reflects upon his O’Reilly moment of fame. He believes, “It forced people to come to their own
conclusion” about the issue of Islamophobia and the “Muslim threat.” Chuckling, he adds, “plus, they cut me with Richard Pryor!”

—Matthew Schantz

**LEARNED FOOTE**

Learned Foote, CC ’11, seems like a bundle of paradoxes. Raised in a large Evangelical Christian family and home-schooled in rural Michigan, the President of the Columbia College Student Council has become one of the most visible people on campus. Though arriving at Columbia a confident liberal, he soon shifted across the political spectrum. Foote, an openly gay conservative and member of Columbia University College Republicans, campaigned to bring ROTC back to campus even before Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell was repealed, and participates actively in Columbia Queer Alliance.

Foote reconciles these apparent tensions through a dedication to dialogue. “You’ll always have gay kids born into families that are conservative or Evangelical,” he explains. “It is important to develop relationships and have conversations because even when people disagree, you’re going to be in a better place when you sit down face-to-face than when you just demonize each other.” He concedes that reconciliation is difficult, but believes it’s always “important to try that process.” He recalls the Safe Spaces forum with panelists from CUCR and CQA: “the initial sense of combativeness bled away as the conversation continued.”

Foote also stresses his belief in “working within the system,” an adherence that shows in his ROTC advocacy. Effectively addressing the military’s faults, he explains, can’t occur with ROTC removed from campus. “If you look at the military and disapprove of the way it operates, the way to fix it is not to isolate yourself from it, but work within it to change it.” Foote sees this as crucial to his own philosophy. “Conservatism is about giving people the freedom to live their lives as they see fit,” he explained. Even when Foote’s parents disagreed with his decisions, “they said ‘you’re an individual and we can’t force you to believe certain things’—a very libertarian, conservative idea.” Foote contends, “even if that takes me into directions they don’t agree with, it is still a positive process.”

“He’s very much an idealist, but with a practical bent,” praises, Lauren Salz, President of CUCR. Foote is even friends with one of the infamous students who “heckled” a veteran speaking during an ROTC town hall. Salz, BC ’11, credits these seemingly strained relationships to Foote’s uncanny ability to “separate the personal from political, and talk about ideas rather than personal experiences.”

This commitment to conversation is rooted in Foote’s genuine enthusiasm for testing his personal foundations. He has rigorously revised his beliefs enough to understand that “parts of them eventually have to be jettisoned—especially ‘cause we’re undergraduates and we don’t know anything.” College should make you “feel unsafe” intellectually, he stresses.

It’s truly staggering how much Foote has been a part of at Columbia: CCSC, CQA, CUCR, Let’s Get Ready, COÖP, URC, ROTC advocacy, Spectator, Sanctum, and The Current, among others. After meeting Foote during COÖP, fellow CCSC board member Andrea Folds, CC’12, realized she needed to be persistent to steal some of Foote’s time. “I had to interject myself into his life because I wanted to be his friend.” Still, Folds insists Foote isn’t all that serious. His enthusiasm for Sarah Palin is matched by a guilty love of Battlestar Galactica and “Like a Prayer”—the Glee version. “He’s always smiling even when he’s mad,” Folds marvels. “I call it the wolf-grin.”

On his oddly dignified-sounding name, inspired by famed American judge Learned Hand, Foote jokes, “my dad has a really bad sense of humor.” He chuckles and flashes his characteristic toothy smile. “It’s really dorky.”

—Carolyn Ruvkun
I go to Butler to study, sometimes. Other times I go to sip Oren’s and do pleasure reading, just to piss people off. I go to Butler and I see wrecks of human beings. You’ve seen them: Red Bull-chugging, toe-tapping, pill-popping, shuddering little messes. I’m talking about the folks setting Facebook statuses to, “OMG in butler 8 hrs today... got nothing done,” or, “In suchh bad shape... this soash paper is making me fatti.”

Here’s an idea, my little masochist: Move. Get your ass to the gym. I swear I’ve seen you there before; weren’t you wearing jeans and using the Cybex curl machine?

Spending all this time studying or complaining about studying won’t get you anywhere. Think about the whole Core, friend. Though today’s swim test and physical education requirement are mostly sad, awkward artifacts of days long gone, they are here for a reason. Rumor has it the swim test was created so that Columbians would be able to flee across the Hudson in case of an Indian raid, so you are not meant to excel strictly scholastically—no, physical competence is part of your Columbia education, too.

Even Columbia’s favorite ancient scholars would tell you so. Juvenal wrote that we should strive for a mens sana in corpore sano. Instead of an hour on Hulu, take an hour to jog in Riverside Park. It will purge your bile and hysteria, and it will cure your procrastination, too. Try roughhousing on the lawns, racing to the end of college walk, or genuinely having fun. Ironic frisbee on the quad is just the beginning!

But, “No,” these scholars whine, “I lead a life of the mind.” I say, have a visceral experience! Breathe hard, feel a pain in your side, break a sweat. When you get back to your dorm, take a shower. You’ll be physically and even spiritually purified. And for the first time in God knows how long, you’ll have a deep and restful night of sleep. Put your body to work to avoid the feverish tossing that racked Raskolnikov.

And I cannot fail to mention Beach Season! It’s imminent. While maybe some people have “won the genetic lottery,” you probably did not; you need to work to tone up. With Beach Season coming in, the shirts will be coming off. When you’re sipping on a drink with someone desirable, they’re not going to be impressed by the “Comp Sci line. They’ll be impressed by your rippling abdomen.

Think of the ancient Greeks, who, oiled and young, would wrestle and toss the discus. They exercised and considered physical activity as valuable as intellectual activity. Just as they strove in the gymnasium, so they strove in the Academies to gain skill in philosophy rhetoric.

Even science wants you to move! As Humanity evolved, respiratory systems and muscles developed for a reason. Our species will not adapt to our new sedentary lifestyles and overabundant food supplies unless we loaf about for millions of years. For now, these habits have led to unnatural levels of insanity, obesity, and yellow bile.

As a last resort, think about your family. They don’t want you to go insane or lose your lean physique (assuming you ever had one). Michelle Obama, the flagship mother of the country, wants you to move, and suggests starting at an early age. You’re still young (really!), even if it is a Sunday and you’re sad and hungover. Walk outside, breathe in a deep lung-full of cold morning air, stretch your legs and run! Run and shout, “I am human! I am embodied!”
Let me give you an insider’s perspective. We all remember this January’s winter storms, when Columbia’s charmingly provincial stone walkways were under the siege of urban New York’s treacherous black ice, correct? While caught up in the Ivy League anxiety of sprinting to Butler with every spare second, I fell on the ice and found myself a broken woman. Laid up in bed later that day, I mused upon the eight weeks of limited mobility I had to look forward to. In those eight weeks of bedridden recovery, not only did I not move, but I realized that Red Bull-ing your way through Butler is not really moving either. As I regained strength, I also gained a stoic resolve that taught me the wonders of inertia.

Pondering the overratedness of moving (and of freaking out in Butler), I did not spend my inert hours on Hulu. I thought of Nietzsche’s attack on your ascetic ideals of physical “purity.” Nietzsche suggests the rest cure of Silas Wier Mitchell. When you’re feeling hysterical or looking pale and anemic (and Columbians, I’m looking at you), what should you do? You should hearken back to the good old nineteenth century and spend your days and nights recumbent in bed, like I did! Never mind that this cure drove Charlotte Perkins Gillman insane and afforded us her cheery story, ”The Yellow Wallpaper.” I, for one, will vouch: I too was once pale and anemic, and how am I now? Still a little pale, but chock-full of rosy blood cells and iron. And I feel better every day.

But when in less dire straits (the ice has long since thawed from the campus walkways, and not all of you can expect the excellent luck of breaking a bone anyway), you’re still likely to land yourself in an ultimately more fruitful state of affairs when sitting and discerning, say, the meaning of life, instead of squandering your time in the gym. Gym time might build muscle, but what kind of mental legwork will you get done there? Distraction, that’s all. Preoccupied with your fellow gym-goers’ rippling biceps and dauntingly surreal, machine-like finesse, you’ll probably just get yourself into a diffident mental rut. If you’re worried about attracting all the “babes,” you should migrate from the gym to a quiet room and put on a Bach sarabande for your potential special someone. Because triple meter is sexy. You may not hear a lot of sarabandes today, but they were sixteenth-century Spain’s routine mode of seduction. And of course, if your (stoic) inclination is to dance to that sarabande, then get up and swing your patootie. Just don’t overdo it, because nothing is less sexy than losing your cool.

It really just can’t be denied: stoicism is beautiful. Just look at the etymological root of stoic: Stoa. In Greek, that means porch. Don’t you like to sit on porches? And if you New Yorkers are too street-savvy for porches, don’t pretend you haven’t passed many a sweet hour on your summer stoop.

But come the rainy day that you have to get off your stoop and get to class, I promise you: there is no better feeling than that moment when you realize, caught in the rain and late for class, that you are not compelled to run. Walking slowly, showing your strength of character, looking around at your fellow pedestrians who, panicky on adrenaline and pumping their exaggeratedly muscular thighs to the shelter of their oppressively scheduled classes, you will undoubtedly feel like the better person. •

By Amalia Scott

Illustrations by Maddy Kloss
Oh, the woes of a spring romance gone wrong. Although she had style and grace, and even Verily’s purebred pup Wagner had proved not averse to this finely robed and adequately bred brunette, the romantic dreams of yours truly were upended by a most unanticipated sequence of events.

Your Verily’s first excursion with his spring blossom had been propitious. Her airs and graces on their date at the Oak Room had impressed Verily and suited his own tastes so much that he chose to whisk her away to a more secluded cave on the Upper East Side. As he regarded his lovely’s gaze upon that fabulously famous mural, much like Marilyn Monroe had once done, Verily conceived of grand visions for the title of his memoir: Veritas and the Bella: Head of Europe’s Vanguard. The recent days of Verily’s semester abroad in France had swum before his eyes. Yes, he would see her to all the ritziest corners of the earth. The western hemisphere’s intelligentsia would be theirs.

Upon her request, then, the weekend found Verily and his fabulous on the cobblestone rues of New Orleans. Over a rich dish of bouillabaisse at Galatoire’s, the grand dame of Cajun cuisine, Verily leaned into the mysteriously mesmerizing eyes of his lady. She gladly obliged: why, yes, his Belle told him, I do send off to France for my bath gels from Bourjois. He had known it! The fragrance was “Indian Cress.” Craning his neck tastefully so as to inhale her delightful odor, Verily caught sight of her leather bag. Truly Verily regrets what he saw, because he was further convinced that this lady was only fit for the grandest finess, for she proved too subtle for Prada. Her sleek Swiss brand choice was, in fact, Bally. Accessories maketh the maid.

After downing a Sazerac fit for New Orleans’ Kingfish, your very own VV made the mistake of smittenly following his new cause celebre out onto Bourbon Street, unable to shift his gaze from her heavenly haunches. Verily has never been so caught in the flux of living life as at that miserable moment. His elegant insouciance crumbled as his rosé floret swished down that French-style street, but very quickly your truly rueful VV was verily jolted into reality!

Verily suffered a sudden blow to the head and the next thing he knew a large Sicilian man, suspiciously dark-eyed like Verily’s own Bella, had slammed Verily against the inside of a mysterious oak door. Dazed by recollections of the arboreal atmosphere of their very first date, Verily’s head swam as he realized that his blushing beauty was a Marcello, a daughter of the oldest New Orleans Crime Family that had been godfathering strong and shadowy since the early 19th century. His lady had been bred by the richest—and the most nefarious—in the nation. Held in the clutches of her gangster papá, Verily realized he had been terribly lucky enough to drop his wallet at Galatoire’s after paying for this agent provocateur’s digestive. His ego, not to mention his entire body, badly bruised, Verily allowed Papá Marcello to disgustedly cast yours truly out into the thick night air. Forlorn, VV meandered back to the restaurant, recovered his wallet, and today he finds himself gratefully returned to the serenity of our very own campus quad, mourning the mobster pedigree of his former flame.
It's something you have to train for,” said Nick. His dark, hard eyes were fixed on me from under his hat. Beneath his chiseled chin was a uniform that seemed just a little too crisp. I nodded, puzzled by the seriousness—I was just there to ask him a few questions about supermarket security. It's not like I was asking about CIA secrets.

“Uh huh,” I replied, jotting down notes. “So... you have to train your employees? Is it a big problem?”

Nick’s eyes narrowed. “Shoplifting is a $30 billion a year business, and kids will take anything and everything. A girl once tried to walk out with $350 worth of cheese samples. Unbelievable. Westside is a family place,” he growled. This was turning from a Food Network special into a Sopranos episode. I ogled the bank of security camera monitors out of the corner of my eye. Cameras are a normal part of supermarkets, right?

“About this training process—what happens?” I stammered. “I heard about this kid—he got really drunk, and I heard he came here and used the same puffed rice cake to sample two cracker spreads. And, my point is, he got tackled and arrested 20 seconds later. That must take some serious training!”

Nick didn't flinch. “We're no different from any other store. We protect our merchandise. We watch it carefully, but that’s all. We’re a family place. Any more questions?”

“Err... no. Thanks so much!” I squealed. Nick turned and crossed his thick arms. I caught a glimpse of a tribal band tattoo around his biceps. Figuring the interview was over, I headed out the door. I was relieved to be outside—I had felt on edge the whole time I was with Nick. It was something I never noticed before, but I put my finger on it. Ambling past the fruit displays, I noticed the Milano kitty purring at my feet. “Hey kitty!” I reached down to pet her, but she slunk towards the open Westside basement hatch and leapt into it. Being a bit of a pussy chaser, I followed.

Before my eyes adjusted, I heard loud grunts and whacks. Hiding behind a crate of cookies, I peered into the room. I couldn’t believe my eyes—the center was cleared out and covered with large mats. Men were practicing hand-to-hand combat, and two people sparred with wooden staffs. At the edges, others squat-lifted kegs of beer and bench-pressed watermelons. Oldies music emanated from a boombox (I remembered hearing it faintly during my conversation with Nick). Suddenly, I noticed their uniforms; these were Westside employees. This was the training ground of the Westside elite defense force!

To my left, I noticed the Milano kitty pawing at an unreasonably large cockroach. “Eeeack!” I shrieked. The room briefly fell silent and then I heard the swift patter of feet racing towards me. Scooping up the Milano kitty, I booked it towards the stairs. As I saw the light filtering into the basement from above ground, I knew that I was running for my life. I felt the pack of employees closing in, but with two giant leaps I catapulted myself up the stairs and into the outside world.

Gasping for breath, I turned around and locked eyes with Nick, who had left his post to investigate. He made a slow cutting motion across his neck with his finger, and I knew that he knew that I knew. Since that fateful day, I’ve been getting my groceries at Morton Williams—it might be low quality for a high price, but at least I know I’ll leave the store with my skull intact. •
Mythic Tradition

When Barnard’s Greek Games Were Sincere

BY CLAIRE HEYISON

A group of women, barefoot and draped in cheesecloth togas, enters LeFrak Gymnasium wielding torches. Two priestesses, one first-year and one sophomore, light a fire atop an altar honoring the patron deity, and the sophomore priestess recites a Greek invocation, blessing and celebrating the day. Suddenly, one of the sophomores springs up, issuing a challenge of skills in Greek to the first-year class, who answer. The first-year and sophomore classes then compete in a series of athletic and artistic competitions, presided over by a high priestess from the senior class, a panel of judges, and thousands of spectators. The winning athletes and aesthetes are crowned with laurel wreaths as their classmates celebrate their victory with cries of “Nike! Nike!”

This elaborate ceremony used to take place at Barnard every spring. The Greek Games began in 1903, when the class of 1906 challenged the first-year class to feats of strength loosely based on ancient Greek competitions. The earlier games were informal, and the audience was restricted to students and faculty. Men were forbidden from watching, lending the Games a mysterious, Eleusinian intrigue and thereby instituting the grand Columbia tradition of sneaking into LeFrak to watch the proceedings from the balcony.

Slowly, the Games evolved. In 1908 the categories of song and dance were introduced, by 1909 the students began dedicating each Game to a specific patron deity, and in 1913 men and members of the outside community were invited to watch and judge. As the Games grew in popularity, they attracted guests ranging from Christopher Morley to W. H. Auden (who judged the lyric poetry competition in 1947), and even piqued the curiosity of the Columbia community. As the Spectator put it in 1959: “We came to mock; we stayed to cheer.”

The activities eventually shifted to include a greater focus on ancient Greece, abandoning archery and tug-of-war in favor of discus-hurling and chariot racing. This newfound classical emphasis yielded strange and dramatic results, including living statues of Dionysus, musicians playing authentic Greek instruments, and in 1932, a priestess theatrically plunging a dagger into her heart on an altar dedicated to Hera. Though not every class resorted to such extremes, sensationalism became as much a part of the Games as the athletic competitions. As early as 1914, the New York Times reported, “Four very tall girls dressed as shepherds sacrificed a lamb and poured the libation as the entire class knelt in a semicircle before the temple.” Whether the girls really sacrificed a lamb is left unclear, but these grandiose displays attest to the enthusiasm and school spirit that made the Games an integral part of the Barnard experience.

As the audience and the pageantry of the Greek Games expanded, the planning committees and training for the athletes grew with them. The rulebook from the 1926 Greek Games was a tome of 144 pages, the planning committee headed twelve subcommittees, and the participants trained for their events for an entire year. Barnard women were involved in every aspect of the Games from designing the costumes, chariots, and backdrops to handling business, publicity, and space concerns. Astonishingly, training, and spectating were initially motivated and financed by students—a feat made possible by keeping costs low and selling thousands of tickets.

Despite the excitement that initially surrounded the Games, by the latter half of the century, their early energy and enthusiasm had begun to dwindle. While it had once attracted more than 2,000 spectators, by the 1960s, the Games only had 30 to 40 participants from each class, and spectators were mostly upperclass-
women. In April 1967, the Barnard Bulletin reported, “We saw the same people a bit too often as if the talent and enthusiasm had to be spread pretty thin in order to cover the ground. The usual student-composed music was conspicuously missing. The challenges were recited in English, and the audience seemed to find the literal translation of lyric Greek laughable.”

Everything changed after the 1968 Vietnam War protests, when political events beyond Morningside Heights transformed the Greek Games from a symbol of school spirit into an unnecessary and outdated elitist frivolity. Nevertheless, the 1968 Games were given the go-ahead to continue until an hour before they were scheduled to start, when the 40 participants voted them out of existence. The cancellation was intended as a display of solidarity for the protesters, but the Games had also become irrelevant to most Barnard students. More or less official Barnard lore holds that musicians scheduled to play for the Games were kidnapped and held against their will to prevent the festivities from moving forward. A less colorful account claims that the musicians simply declined to play, but given the character of the games beforehand the mythic version seems oddly plausible.

While most students seemed to agree that the time had come to cancel the Greek Games, they still mourned their passing. Barnard’s Vice President Dorothy Denburg, who was a first-year participant during the ’67 Games, recalls, “I do remember that people felt disappointed that they weren’t happening. I wouldn’t say we were terribly excited by then; we were beginning to be distracted by larger events.” However, Denburg also credits the abolition of the Games to an increasingly apparent lack of student interest. “There were people who cared, and a larger majority for whom it felt irrelevant, by then... it felt like it was the moment for [the Games] to die.”

Yet remnants of the Games can still be found at Barnard, despite the fact that they have been largely defunct for nearly half a century. The statue of the Spirit of the Games still stands outside of Barnard Hall, and even the Student Government Association’s Constitution retains the various planning duties of the Greek Games’ organizers. There have been a few attempts to reinstate the Games, as recently as 2000, when a small group of Barnard student-historians tried to reintroduce the tradition. Their revival introduced updated competitions such as Greek salad tossing, barbecuing, and bowling. None of the inventive revivals have managed to carry over for a second year.

This year’s effort was motivated by a desire to foster Barnard’s chimerical school spirit and, in part, to create a counterpart to Engineering Week and College Days. The Greek Games Committee, comprised of SGA, McIntosh Activities Council, and other volunteers, decided that the Games should combine traditional and contemporary challenges. The result was one day of chariot races, discus throwing, and hoop-rolling, and one day of tie-dying togas, Greek trivia, and pilates. A group of alumnae returned to campus for the occasion, offering assistance, advice, and hurdling tips. For some alumnae, the occasion marked their first and only Greek Games. Enthusiastic prospies also joined the festivities, prompting the addition of an honorary 2015 scoreboard. In the words of JungHee Hyun, BC ’13, co-chair of the Class Competitions Committee, “It was a lot of Barnard-loving.”

Though the presence of eager alums and prospective students is encouraging, the success of the revival can only be judged by its reception from Barnard students. As Denburg says, “you can’t graft a tradition onto a student culture.” It is difficult to imagine recreating the level of enthusiasm and over the top theatrics of the original Greek Games without some sense of irony; however, the 2011 Greek Games seem to have achieved the ideal compromise between making an anachronistic tradition relevant again and remaining consistent with Barnard’s history. It remains to be seen just how relevant this iteration of the Games will be, or whether their chariots will grace the campus again next year.
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Getting Comfortable With Nudity

BY ADAM KUERBITZ

“I’ve stopped booking this year. Booking... that makes me sound like a hustler or something,” laughs Nora Rodriguez, CC’11. Rodriguez is in charge of organizing models for the Artist Society’s Friday Night Sketch. The Sketch, which takes place every Friday evening at 6 pm, offers Columbians of all artistic abilities the chance to paint or draw for a couple hours and generally just chill out. Popular because of the free food and soft music (The Society plays Iron and Wine and Okkervil River), the Sketch is best known for the student models who strip down to nothing in the name of art, pushing both personal boundaries and reasonable expectations of campus employment (models receive $10 per hour to pose).

Rodriguez had been attending Friday Night Sketch for about a year before the former Model Coordinator, short on volunteers, asked her to pose sometime. “Really no matter who you are, getting up there, the first ten seconds is like, ‘Oh my god. I am naked in front of a lot people right now. This is crazy.’ And then after thirty seconds it’s like, ‘Okay, still naked. This is not that bad.’” After a few sessions, the Artist Society board turned over and Rodriguez became Vice President and Model Coordinator. Now that her term is over, Rodriguez recalls that the biggest part of her job was making models feel comfortable. “Nakedness is really awkward, you know?”

Many people know that nakedness is awkward, and sign up to model for exactly that reason. Another model, a female junior in CC who wished to remain anonymous, joined out of a desire to challenge herself and test her comfort zone. Each session begins with short gestural poses before moving on to longer poses, culminating in two 20-minute static stances. A few artists paint, but most just use the time to practice sketching with pencils, charcoal, and pastels.

Despite the mellow vibe of the Sketch, models are occasionally surprised when they see their exposed likenesses on paper (or plastered around the school as in recent weeks). Rodriguez described the surprise of some of her friends that she convinced to model for the Sketch: “They’ll take drawings home and be like: this is the fat me, this is the crazy-haired me, this is the me with pointy boobs. It’s funny.” Rodriguez has kept a few sketches of herself over the years. “It doesn’t really feel like yourself. It feels like this weird, fleshy blob.”

Some models sign up for the gig with the expectation that modeling will remain a compartmentalized section of their lives. The anonymous junior recalled fleeing from an artist she encountered at a party unaffiliated with The Artist Society. “The figure drawing room is its own world that feels very separate from the rest of school life. Nudity is art in there. Seeing that guy outside of the context of figure drawing made me very uncomfortable because at a party nudity is no longer art.”

Awkward brushes aside, the experience afforded by the Sketch has grown in popularity since it started in 2006. In the early years, coordinators had trouble finding and booking models, and would sometimes strip down themselves when no one could fill in. Now the program consistently has a full house of 30 people, and a Saturday morning session was added to catch some of the overflow from the crowded studio. Coordinators book models on a first-come, first-served basis and there’s a waiting list to pose for the group. While this could be a testament to Rodriguez’s managerial skills, we hazard the hope that the collective Columbia community is becoming more comfortable in its own skin.
Then I started to see that reading wasn’t that bad, it’s like I can go on an adventure every time I open a book. Now in fourth grade I read chapter books and I think it is pretty cool. I want to try reading all the Lemony Snicket books and then next I want to read the Harry Potter books. I know some of them are really long, and my brother said that the last one was 1,000 pages. I am up for the challenge though.

Buffy’s emphasis on the supernatural is not an anomaly; rather, the show’s demons serve as a metaphor for the inner demons that haunt us.

CCSC Campus Life Report 2010-2011

Welcome back BBQ

-We decided to do ice cream instead because I was a noob scared of Robert Taylor’s deep hatred of BBQ and BBQ pits so I figured this was easier logistically speaking.

-Jake Snider stopped by and took the opportunity to showcase himself, playing his guitar to no one.

Lessons:...do something a little odd that Bwog can be snarky about and they’ll give it more attention.

Opening for Snoop

One for the drummer, two for the horn
Three for the girl with the beautiful song
Four for Cush, for giving me a group to belong
Five for yall, the minds where the future is born
I recall, four years of bachannal
Praying I could be on-stage as I watched em all
Then just the other day I was smoking on the stoop
When I got a call saying that I’m opening for snoop
Youre now rocking with the pride of the metropolis
A rapper hot as this its obvious that that’s preposterous
And hip hop is just making profits while the game is still prophetless
Until I stepped up to the mic and cleared my esophagus
Ahem—amen, sign of the apocalypse
Opposite of motonous how I’m dropping this
You better be an optimist to think of stopping this
Rookie out to save the game and live prosperous
Let me craft the portrait, my college life wasn’t just asher roth shit
It wasn’t playing beer pong all year long
With some brain dead, weedhead alcoholics
It was more like studying all night on my redbull, coffee, and aderol shit
Better be an A that I pass the course with
staying in shape on my basketball shit
nice in the paint or the three point line
not a hater in the world that could destroy mine
and my grade point average is a 3.9
I’m just mad that my Daddy can’t see his boy shine
When I’m rocking the scene
For the Barnard women and philosopher queens
Stay calm have faith in your strong potential
One love to my brother Stephan vincenzo •
Take the Staten Island Railroad to Tottenville

The Blue and White Heads Down South

BY ALLIE CURRY

It’s about 20 minutes from the Ferry and an hour and 20 minutes from Morningside Heights before the leather-jacketed, half-shaven guy sitting diagonally from you and sipping from an Au Bon Pain cup, takes a sudden interest in French existentialist feminist philosophy. A bored, compulsive consumer of MTA advertising yourself, you empathize with his desperation for distraction. The blue bucket seats are mostly empty and the landscape is indistinguishable from the view from New Jersey Transit. Industrial parks, McDonalds, and trees flow by. After suggesting you read Camus’s Exile and The Kingdom (you’ve lied, saying you hadn’t), what may be Staten Island’s only hipster exits at Great Kills.

Tottenville, on Staten Island’s South Shore, is the southernmost neighborhood in New York City and State. Just over 25 miles from the Columbia Sundial, its Google News headlines are high school girls’ softball wins and wedding announcements. When you step out and “WATCH THE GAP” between the car and the platform (the remains of a dock in the Arthur Kill waterway), a muscular fishy smell—memories of a once-thriving oyster industry—confront you. Victorian townhouses line Bentley Street to the south and Main Street to the east; it’s a Sunday afternoon and more residents lounge on porches or park benches than stroll along sidewalks.

The neighborhood is strikingly homogeneous: 2010 US Census confirms that while ZIP code 10307 is attracting scores of Hispanic immigrants (and holding one well-stocked Mexican grocery on Main Avenue), Tottenville has remained largely middle-class white for most of its history. Its high concentration of churches and temples tell a different story though. The Korean Church of Staten Island, the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church of Archangel Michael & St. Mena, Congregation Ahavath Israel, and St. Paul’s Methodust all disgorge young families within blocks.

Main Street undergoes a crisis of character at its intersection with Amboy Road. From a series of delis, dance studios, party planning offices, and conspicuous vacancies, Main resists a straight line. As it veers into residential property of the “housing boom” aesthetic and the late 19th century Victorians, sagging porches, and peeling paint jobs disappear. Along Bentley in the neighborhood’s west end, the development has effected a remarkable bipolarity; underneath the ultra-new siding, some properties struggle to remember that they’re turn of the century demi-landmarks. Eastward, along the Rariton Bay waterfront, recent Bloomberg initiatives have focused developers’ attention along the unusually wide Hylan Boulevard, wrested properties from aging residents, and inserted condos in their place. White signs visible in several lawns speak to the controversy when pedestrians won’t: “HOMETOWN PRIDE” they declare in a Gothic font; “Tottenville, Est. 1861 PRESERVE AND PROTECT.”

As you walk about, you realize what makes a neighborhood feel homey: trunks are propped open in empty driveways, one lawn could be a fiberglass still from Bambi, Tottenville’s newsmakers run laps around the high school. The S78 growls by. When you step off the path in the park surrounding the neighborhood landmark, Conference House, earth grips the soles of your shoes. You have stepped in mud for the first time in two years.

Heading back to Manhattan, you drag your shoes first along the sidewalk, then the floor of the train car, scraping off the place’s peculiar clingy-ness. Pondering your intellectualizing of the experience, you appropriately open to the chapter titled “Situation and Character,” and you settle in.
Centralia, Pennsylvania isn’t the center of anything, not even itself. The conjunction of Highways 42 and 61 is an open expanse of scruffy grass that almost manages to hide the cracked driveways and sidewalks leading nowhere. If you stop (though you wouldn’t think to if you didn’t know what to look for) you’ll see a lilac bush in the distance, incongruous as a Christmas ornament. People used to live here.

The town is surrounded by hills—there’s a Ukrainian church up on one, and fleet of wind turbines on another—so when your gaze shifts west and the hills go dark it takes a minute to realize that you’re looking at piles of coal. The necks of cranes rise up, lifting nothing.

Centralia used to be a mining town. It sits on top of a deposit of anthracite coal, the hardest, hottest-burning, and most expensive kind in the world. It’s sometimes called crow coal, or black diamond. It burns so well that in 1962, when a fire started in the town dump, a finger of coal near the surface caught, and let the flames burrow down into the mines.

For a while, nobody knew. We kept visiting the VFW, the dance hall, the ice cream parlor. Then the air got bad, the mines closed down, and people were out of work. Soon afterwards the government stepped in, worried about the health of those of us still living there. Most stayed; Centralia was home. In 1979 the owner of a gas station found that the underground fire had heated the fuel in his tanks near to boiling, and in 1981 12-year-old Todd Domboski’s back yard opened up underneath him, 150 feet deep.

Then people started accepting the buyouts, drifting away, leaving the mines to burn. The Pennsylvania government couldn’t stop the coal from burning, or didn’t care to, but ripped away the buildings at their foundations, skinny row houses tucked up shoulder-to-shoulder, then scattered the empty town with grass and wildflower seeds, so it’s hard to see what was there.

About five houses remain, with less than a dozen residents between them. There’s also a drab little box just up the hill from the crossroads, grandly labeled Municipal Building, Borough of Centralia, Columbia Co., Pennsylvania. It holds one police car, one fire truck, one ambulance. The original Highway 61 is blocked to traffic, split open and leaking smoke. It’s covered in spray-paint and scars.
The day we drove into Centralia was cloudy, and the trip had taken longer than we’d wanted; it was six o’clock. The streets – “streets” doesn’t express the emptiness of those tar strips cutting through Appalachia – should have been deserted. Instead they crawled with slow-moving beat-up cars full of teenagers looking for a story to tell back home.

The locals know it. They never come out of their houses, but a couple of signs in shaky block print are posted right by the mines. One reads: “THESE RESIDENT’S WANT NOTHING FROM OUR GOVERNMENT THEY WANT TO LIVE WHERE THEY CHOOSE! PLEASE CALL- AND DEMAND THEY BE LEFT to LIVE IN CENTRALia.” providing phone numbers for the governor, senator, and state representative. The other sign asks Governor Rendell to help “American Citizens” instead of illegal immigrants.

Even the nearest town, Ashland, is no happening place. It’s got a main street full of Victorian row houses painted like Barbie clothes, one bar, and about six pizza places. People hung out their windows to watch us drive by because there was nothing else to do. The weekend we were there, a sign announced an upcoming submarine sandwich-eating contest. Down the side streets the color seems to peel off the houses. Things need repairing.

Today the ground over the mines is full of holes, hot to the touch and spouting white smoke with a faint odor of rotten eggs. It’s a little like how you imagine hell when you’re six. People cook marshmallows over the steaming holes and try to coax the rubber soles of their shoes to melt a little so they have some kind of proof. They take pictures of the mines and leave. The smoke never shows up right on film.

We rolled out into the dark, all the way to Frackville, the big town nearby. The man at Motel Granny’s stumbled out of a back room, TV blaring, with a carpet of thick, straight, white chest hair filling the deep V of his t-shirt. We took whatever key he gave us and bolted before the situation could get any more b-movie. The room was cinderblock, painted bathroom-pink. We sat on the floor and ate cold baked beans from a can because we’d planned it. When we were done eating we couldn’t think of anything to do and went to bed.

— Diana Clarke
Measure for Measure

Morning, Salt Pepa

bathroom medicine parachute least serious sickness what object
doesn’t look like a filing cabinet today jeans been knifed up earrings

make sharp turns you’ll give it to him but you certainly won’t that’s right
uh huh foul picnic alone and morning bread traded bed hours you say

you shout we are all somebody’s steak relax and fun yourself feel sweet
porkchop dip it once it all stops tasting like spilled food this has been

a salt with a deadly pepa thanks just want to eat leaves with water
on them hey the girls dance in front of a beret-wearing leg machine

— Marshall Thomas
The Blue & White: You have done much in recent years with both science and media. Do you think of yourself as being equal parts public figure and researcher? How do those roles influence each other?

Brian Greene: It’s always a big struggle and challenge for me to find the right balance between the pure research side of things and the public side of bringing these ideas out to general audiences. There are periods when I’m doing very little general public-type stuff and the focus is almost purely on research. But then there are stretches where it flips the other way. So, you know lately I’ve been filming a four-part series for NOVA, working on the World Science Festival, I just finished that book (motions to a copy of The Hidden Reality: Parallel Universes and the Deep Laws of the Cosmos on a nearby bookshelf), so I was on a long book tour... so for the past month and a half it’s been hard to sit down and focus on physics.

But as all this stuff draws to a close I’m looking forward to very soon—like in a week or so—being able to spend much more time focusing on physics. So, as far as time goes, it’s really depending upon when... in terms of my own view, I don’t see them as different as they might appear—the two roles. Because I couldn’t feel comfortable talking to a general audience, bringing these ideas to the general public if I wasn’t engaged in the research, because I wouldn’t feel like I understood it or had my finger on the pulse well enough to be a good translator. And at the same time, when I’m out there talking to the general public it helps me figure out for my own self, what are the most vital ideas of what we’re working on; and what are the pieces that really need to be pushed forward? So there really is a kind of give and take that I find productive.

"I think that we’re all in one way or another searching for some kind of truth."

B&W: So do you think that the non-physicist has an important say in what is important in physics?

BG: An important say in terms of what we work on?

B&W: Yes.

BG: I would say that there are certain very basic questions that someone who is not trained in the field can recognize the value of pursuing. Things like, “How did the universe begin?” or, “What is time?” or, “Is space a real thing?” or, “Will the universe end?” or, “Does space go on forever?” or,
“Do any of these ideas suggest that there might be other universes?” or, “Might there be other copies of me out there?” All of these questions are so straightforward and so compelling that you don’t have to be a scientist to ﬁnd them interesting and exciting. So, from that perspective, I think the general public has the capacity to engage in the conversation, and ultimately that, to me, is what’s important.

I don’t like the idea of science taking place in a cut-off, isolated, silo-ed environment where the connection to the larger world is weak or non-existent. I mean, the reason we do what we do is to answer questions that matter to everyone, and for that reason as we make progress, everyone should be able to—at least at some level—participate in the joy of discovery, and that is what I try to help make happen.

B&W: What do you think is so valuable about the answers to these questions, other than how compelling they are?

BG: I think that we’re all in one way or another searching for some kind of truth. You know, if you’re doing literature, you’re trying to ﬁnd truth through the way the written word can communicate who we are and why we’re here. If you’re studying theology, you’re doing it from a different perspective. In music, you’re trying to ﬁnd the deep truths of what kind of sounds moves us. And if you’re a scientist, like me, you’re trying to do the same thing, but by analyzing the nature of reality and trying to pierce the veil, the hazy veil, that prevents us from seeing the truth, but which mathematics is a pretty good tool for getting through. And opening up a reality that you wouldn’t expect based on everyday experience. So, I think we’re all in it for the same reason, and these questions from the scientiﬁc perspective, that’s our contribution. That’s science’s contribution to the collective effort of the species to understand the nature of why we’re here.

B&W: Do you think that there can be a conﬂict of interest between the desire to ﬁnd truth from the results and the desire that people have to ﬁnd truth in their meaning? It seems too tantalizing to ﬁnd answers like string theory or multiple universes.

BG: I can imagine it looks like that from the outside. But the thing that really needs to be emphasized, and which I try to communicate as best I can, is that it’s very rare that we physicists are sitting in a room or at our desks and saying, “Here’s this spectacularly interesting possibility—maybe it’s strings!” And then say, “Okay, how can we take that idea and inject it into our understanding of the world?” It’s the reverse of that.

B&W: Right.

BG: We start with the very basic ideas that come to us from the historical discoveries—Newton, Maxwell, Einstein—and we say, “Okay, here’s where they have taken us, how can we take those ideas and advance them to explain the things that we actually can see?” And the remarkable thing is that when we
follow the math to the next step, sometimes these ideas emerge from the mathematics: the possibility of other universes or that the universe is made of strings. We don’t come up with these ideas and then put the math to it; we do the math and that’s where it takes us. We have no choice but to take these ideas seriously, because the ideas kind of jump off the page of mathematics and grab us by the lapels, and say, “Look, this is where the math is leading!” Even old ideas like the slowing of time in relativity or the contraction of space in relativity... you know you couldn’t come up with a more interesting idea if you were pressed to think of one. And yet this is the idea that the very simple algebraic math—you only need high school math and a strong brain like Einstein’s—to come to the conclusion.

“I mean, the reason we do what we do is to answer questions that matter to everyone, and for that reason as we make progress, everyone should be able to—at least at some level—participate in the joy of discovery, and that is what I try to help make happen.”

The other side of it, which I think is there all the time, is that I have a fundamental sense that we’re not separate from the physical universe. I think part of what’s happened, as technology has evolved in particular, is we have thought of ourselves as ever more separate from the environment. But when you think about the world in terms of physics and you recognize that the same particles that make up me are the same particles that are out in the flowers and trees, and those particles are merged in supernova explosions out in space, and those stars form because gaseous clouds that emerged from the big bang coalesced under the very same force of gravity that keeps my feet planted to the earth, there’s an interconnectedness with a wider reality that physics just forces upon you, and I think that is a way of looking at the world that is unique to physics, and one that I certainly feel all the time.

B&W: Has your experience in physics changed the way that you see the world?

BG: I would say yes and no. When I’m walking around with my kids in the park, when we go to the supermarket and buy stuff, I think my experience is more or less the same as everybody else’s. You know, buying milk is buying milk. And when I want to look at the world more deeply, when I want to look into a flower, and understand how it works, I can do that. When I walk down the street and want to really live the ideas that I’ve learned—for instance, to recognize that time for me is elapsing slower than time for somebody else because I might be on the ground floor of a building and they’re in the top floor, or I’m moving quickly and they’re not—I can do that, and I do do that at times, because there’s a certain kind of pleasure that I take in recognizing how poor a guide everyday experience is to the true nature of reality. I love to sometimes say to myself, “Okay, can I really experience—or at least try to experience—the things that science has revealed?” And I can do that and I do do that, and it’s not that I’m doing it all the time, but I’m doing it sometimes, and that capacity to experience the world on multiple levels, I think, is what science provides for me in particular.

B&W: Does your motivation to write books and appear on television shows stem from an urge to share this perspective with other people?

BG: It definitely does. One of the grand tragedies that I see in the modern world is the unfortunate fact that many people think that science is not something they want to know anything about. They feel that it is something that they may have been forced to take a class in, but once the class is over they’ve done their duty and now can move on to the real things of life. And to me, the real things in life are organically interwoven with science. And part of what I hope to do through the books and through some of the other ways that I’m sometimes out there
is to help science migrate from the outskirts of culture to the center of culture, where I think one day it will stand right beside the usual things: music, film, literature, art, theater. Because science is something that you can’t disregard. And moreover, life isn’t as full as it could be...

B&W: Someone’s at the door.

BG: Wow, physics!

[Chuckles, regains composure, has brief conversation about dinner with child]

B&W: It seems like, in some ways, that science is becoming more popularized, but I’m not sure whether the democratization and dissemination of science—everyone has iPhones and Wikipedia—doesn’t cause people to take it more and more for granted. There isn’t as much reverence for the everyday experience of science as there maybe could be.

BG: You know, that’s an interesting point. I think there are perhaps greater opportunities for grabbing snippets of science—if it’s a podcast, if it’s a blog, or you know, if it’s a snippet of some NOVA program that you wouldn’t have watched on television but you catch a piece of it on YouTube... and I think that that is all good. I think what we’ve failed so far to achieve is a broad public recognition that science is something that anybody can grasp. It’s not some subject that is beyond the average person; it’s not that—if it’s presented in a way that’s beyond the average person, then sure—by definition it will be something that’s pretty hard. But there are ways of communicating these ideas that are widely accessible and broadly interesting. And I think that is something which has begun and it’s great that the Obama administration talks about the value of science. I think that that is a very good step. But I think we’re still pretty far from science being viewed as an indispensable part of life, as opposed to something that we turn to when there’s a problem, or something that maybe makes our life better because of some gadget. Science is more than just that.

B&W: When did we lose that reverence? Or have we just never had it?

BG: I mean, I don’t really know. There was a time, certainly—I think it goes in waves—in the 1800s, when people like Sir Humphrey Davies—when he would give a public lecture, it would kind of be the talk of the town. It would be the hot ticket to go to, and I think as science progressed even further, it slowly became ever further from everyday life because we understood the physics of everyday life, so we went further. And as we went further, and the language became more specialized, people got left behind. I think that probably started to happen with quantum mechanics and relativity, and I think we’re now trying to repair some of the damage that was done by not paying enough attention to keeping these ideas a vibrant part of the public conversation.

B&W: Do you have any sense of what it would take to get us there? If we find the Higgs mechanism (theoretical explanation for why mass exists) at CERN (European Organization for Nuclear Research)?

BG: Well, I think that great discoveries have a galvanizing effect, but I don’t think they’re enough. We need a sustained, transformative approach to education, I think that’s the real issue. You know, when kids take a science course and it’s taught by
someone who doesn’t really understand science or maybe understands science but isn’t passionate about science, that has a tremendous impact. If that kid takes a course from someone who does understand science, is passionate about science, and really wants to communicate the ideas, then it’s a huge impact too. I think that’s the bottom line. I think that’s where it really needs to change. I mean, [the World Science Festival] is sort of an attempt to stand outside the educational system but yet provide an environment where, for five days, people can immerse themselves in the best kind of science programming—I hope—programming where [science] really integrates with life in a manner that feels real and makes you want to understand more about the science. And moreover, our online presence: you know we just started this World Science Festival TV, this online portal, and the traffic there is starting to build hugely, and that’s great.

B&W: But then you see some of the most highly educated, most brilliant physicists going into things like hedge funds.

BG: Yeah, my own students... Numbers of my students have not gone on in physics and have gone into the hedge fund world, the financial world, and that’s okay. I don’t think that everybody needs to be a scientist; I don’t think that everybody trained in science needs to be a scientist. In fact, I think it’s kind of a good thing that people trained in science go off and do other things, so that there’s a certain kind of solid, rational basis for things that are happening in other fields. So, I think that’s okay... the sad part is that when somebody who is good enough and should go on in science and wants to can’t get a job, and is forced to go into the financial world—that’s always a bit of a heartbreak. But that’s part of the reality of limited resources too: there simply will never be enough jobs for everybody to do exactly what they want to do.

B&W: Do you have any opinion on the recent news from the Fermilab collider? (Physicists think they may have found evidence of a new elementary particle which would contradict part of the Standard Model of particle physics.)

BG: Well, it’s still too early to take it very seriously... more data is required before it would be a convincing experimental signature, and if it were to hold up, that would be great. It’s the kind of thing that we live for. Something that doesn’t fit into existing theories and forces us to rethink and to come up with new ideas. So it would be thrilling if it’s true; at the moment I’d say caution needs to be respected, and to take it very slowly and say we’ll only believe it when there’s more data, but it would be great.

B&W: There were hundreds of signatures on that report. Do you think this kind of collaborative research is the future of experimental physics?

BG: Yes, for a certain kind of experimental undertaking there is simply no way to make progress without an enormous team. You need people who can build the machines, people who can analyze the data, people who can design the machines, people who can design the information flow in the machine to the people who can do the analysis. I think it is basically the only way to go forward. The question will be, if these machines don’t find anything new... that would actually be very interesting—it would force us to rethink a lot of theories. But will the funders recognize that as an interesting result and build the next machine? I hope it doesn’t come to that... maybe this [result] or other [experimental] signatures will really come through. But I do like to caution people that even finding nothing is interesting. •
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As PrezBo was running around the indoor track at Dodge Fitness Center on a particularly nasty day, he spotted a member of the Women’s Rowing Team bawling and clutching her dislocated shoulder. Concerned, he stopped and waved to her. As they made eye contact, he tried to give her a sympathetic smile, but she continued to cry. Baffled and somewhat annoyed that this rower had rebuffed his gesture of goodwill, Prezbo shrugged and continued plodding around the track.

FAST TIMES AT COLUMBIA U

In CC, a stoned student was observed giggling and talking about how, like, totally blazed he was, man. A few minutes later, he got up and left for an extended bathroom break. When he returned, he had a large box in his hand—turns out he had ordered a pizza. We’re guessing he wanted it “extra baked, hold the sticks and stems.”

ANGRY BIRDS

A student was strolling through Riverside Park when a bird shit on his head. Dismayed at his crappy condition, he panicked and began rolling around in the grass to get it off. Halfway through getting down and dirty—or in this case, clean—he realized in horror that he was allergic to grass. The student has since been avoiding the outside world entirely.

VOULEZ-VOUS COUCHER AVEC MOI, MONSIEUR MACKLOVITCH?

At Barnard, sex education doesn’t end in junior high. Students in Dave Macklovitch’s class (aka “The Chromeo Class”) were caught blushing when homework included a risque topic—cunnilingus. Ooh la la!

IT’S A TOUGH ECONOMY

Overheard in Butler Cafe: “There goes white privilege, out the door.”

PLAYING FOR BOTH TEAMS

Spotted in Broadway: Football player #1 waiting outside Football player #2’s door in a towel, toiletries in hand. Observers speculated that player #1 was patiently waiting for player #2 to meet him outside for one of their (frequent) tandem shower dates.

IRONY TALKS

April 15: An email reminder for a viewing of “Inside Job” included an invitation for the University Senators to attend a discussion with Charles Ferguson, the film’s director. In keeping with the film’s theme, the message included direct instructions: “This is an External Relations event, no press.” At least we know how the Senate takes care of its external relations.

TROPICAL STORM SHITFACED

A new margarita has been created at The Heights: “The Hurricane!” Guaranteed to wreck your proverbial ship, this tasty development in Morningside Heights’ debauchery is a much-welcome addition to the Heights already stellar collection of frozen fruity beverages.

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