THE ORIGINAL

Deseree Kuzel is at the forefront of Pittsburgh women's fashion. Acting as inspiration for the independent magazine and artist collective No Rules Pittsburgh, she has endured months of double shot espressos. Pursuing her graduate degree in Secondary English Education at the University of Pittsburgh, she retains her passion for modeling and the arts. Deseree only drinks bottled water.

Contact: desereemichelle@gmail.com

On The Cover

Eric Silverman, hails from Metuchen, N.J. An aspiring poet, he studies English Writing at Pitt, while dabbling in paint and photography. Formal education aside, Eric is a rising star in Pittsburgh's music scene. He formed the folk rock group Too Young which won the Battle of the Bands to open Bigelow Bash in 2012. After Too Young, Eric moved on to sing and play guitar in Nic Lawless (niclawless.bandcamp.com) with Matt Holden (of Legs Like Tree Trunks, featured in Original Issue 11) on bass, Mark Rodgers on drums, and Tim Crammond on guitar. Eric also performs bass, guitar, and backing vocals for Dean Cercone (deancercone.bandcamp.com) and spins at parties around Pittsburgh as DJ Nico with the #POSTLIFE crew. He's a member of the Monalloh Foundry Pittsburgh Arts Collective.

Photography by Emily O'Donnell

A Word From The Editor

An acquaintance recently told me about a church in Millvale whose walls tell the story of Croatian immigrants coming to Pittsburgh, the hardships they faced in the Old World, and different ones faced in the New World. You can read about the Maxo Vanka murals in "Around Town." Soon after I learned about it, by pure coincidence, I met someone who had written about the murals and recited his work in the church.

What's more, I recently discovered that Pittsburgh has a website with a map of all the murals in the city. It's pghmurals.com. It helped us figure out where to shoot the front and back cover photos.

At an *Original* pitch meeting, I learned that there's a professor who brings his students apples from a local farm every class. Sometimes he hands them out to strangers too. His name is David Walton. You can read about him in "On Campus."

Recently, I stumbled into a gallery on S. Highland where a friend works and met a man who, with the tiniest cuts, fashions paper into fantastical objects. His name is Ted and he's in "People We Like."

One day I checked the Original's email and there was a message from Julie Sokolow of Healthy Artists asking if *The Original* wanted to collaborate. I didn't know what Healthy Artists was. A couple of months later, we proudly helped them have an art exhibition. You can read about Healthy Artists in "In Focus."

I grew up in the South Side of Pittsburgh, our "Community Guide" for this issue. I spent most of my life there and I can give you a tour with my eyes closed. I can show you the spots where the sun breaks through the trees and dapples an entire span of abandoned pedestrian bridge, where you can watch the fireworks in July along the river and it's twice as good because you see them in the air and reflected in the water. I could show you what's new and what's old and what is and what isn't and what used to be. And I thought I knew everything about the South Side until I read Maggie Norbeck's article about the Brew House, and then I learned more.

Sometimes I think I know everything about this city, but if I've learned anything these past few years working on *The Original*, it's that I do not. What I have learned is that everything is at your fingertips here and you can learn something new if you just take a second to listen. So listen.

-Hadley Pratt
Editor in Chief

The Original Is

Editor in Chief: Hadley Pratt
Head Photo/Visual Editor/Managing Editor: Emily O'Donnell
Web Editor: John Lavanga
Assistant Editors: Rachel Cawley, John Lavanga, Max Schlosser
Business Manager: Harrison Kinzler

Contributing Writers: Laura Calhoun, Joe DeMarini, Rachael Grace, Andrew Gretchko, Phyllicia Leavitt, Paula Levin, Danielle Levsky, Sarah Mejia, Kate Miltenberger, Lauren McNeil, Vincent Mok, Jess Myers, Margaret Norbeck, Emily O'Donnell, Joshua M. Patton, Hadley Pratt, Ryan Pudlowski, Max Schlosser, Julie Sokolow, Joelle Smith, Karley Snyder, Taylor Wescott

Contributing Photographers: Jamie Bergey, Joseph Edgar, Kathleen Euler, Rachael Grace, John Herse, Vincent Mok, Emily O'Donnell, Hadley Pratt, Nishant Singh, Karley Snyder, Renee Stover, Robert Wallace

Contributing Editors: Kate Miltenberger, Karley Snyder, Robert Wallace

Contributing Illustrators: Jason Cicchini, Danielle Hu, Texas Carter Millican, Paula Pascual

Contributing Designers: Rachel Cawley, Chris Estes, Melanie Gross, Kelsey Kerr, Brian Mulligan, Vincent Mok, Emily O'Donnell, Hadley Pratt, Samantha Roffman

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For more information about The Original Magazine email us at **theoriginalmag@gmail.com** or check out our website www.originalmag.com.

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NEW & IMPROVED

TEXT Hadley Pratt & Emily O'Donnell
PHOTOGRAPHY Emily O'Donnell

THIS SPRING: *CONFLICT KITCHEN* IS SERVING UP SOME POLITICS IN A SCHENLEY PLAZA NEAR YOU!

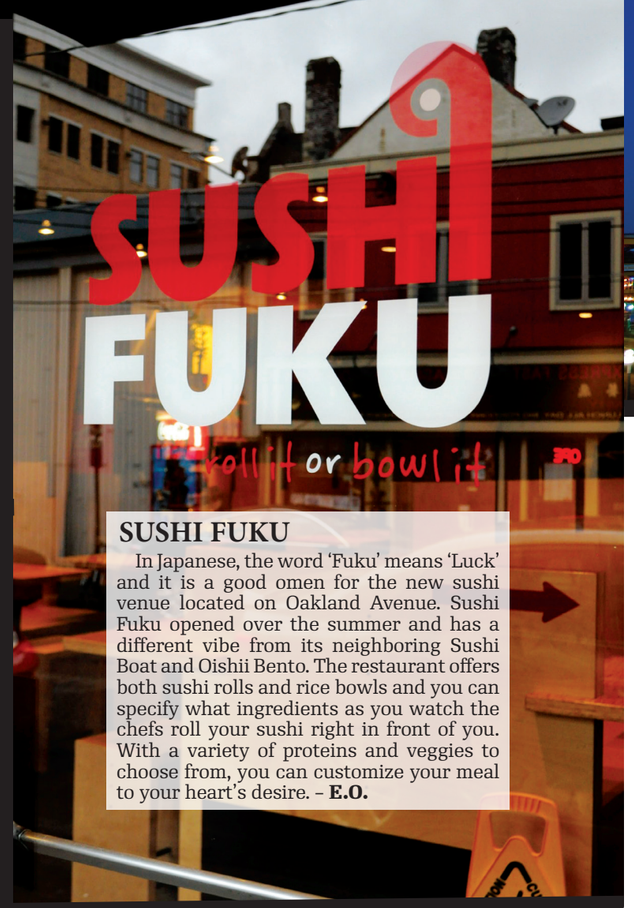
This March, Conflict Kitchen moved from its East Liberty location next door to the Shadow Lounge (now defunct, RIP) to Schenley Plaza.

Since CMU art professor Jon Rubin and Dawn Weleski began the quirky take-out kitchen in 2010, Conflict Kitchen has only served street food from countries with which the United States is in conflict. The menu (and the name) changes every six months and past dishes served include kubideh from Iran, bolani from Afghanistan, arepas from Venezuela, and lechon asado and yuca con mojo from Cuba.

In addition to serving food, Conflict Kitchen inspires dialogue between its customers and natives of the countries being served with events like Skype dinner parties, performances, discussions, and informative food wrappers that feature stories and interviews from the nation whose food is being served. Conflict Kitchen has received international media attention and NPR described it as "an experimental public art project — and the medium is the sandwich wrap."

The new Schenley Plaza Conflict Kitchen opens on April 1st, expanding its menu from one to two choices to ten to twelve. It'll be open from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. The Oakland location will offer its Iranian menu until the June Iranian elections. Future iterations are rumored to include North and South Korean and Israeli and Palestinian cuisines.

Check out **www.conflictkitchen.org** for recipes, job opportunities, and information about how to get involved in their community cultural events. – **H.P.**



SUSHI FUKU

In Japanese, the word 'Fuku' means 'Luck' and it is a good omen for the new sushi venue located on Oakland Avenue. Sushi Fuku opened over the summer and has a different vibe from its neighboring Sushi Boat and Oishii Bento. The restaurant offers both sushi rolls and rice bowls and you can specify what ingredients as you watch the chefs roll your sushi right in front of you. With a variety of proteins and veggies to choose from, you can customize your meal to your heart's desire. – **E.O.**

GOODBYE LEENA'S, HELLO KEBAB FACTORY

While we're sad to see Leena's go, there's a new Mediterranean restaurant on Oakland Avenue ready to take over the title of Best Falafel on Campus. We're digging the Kebab Factory's wide variety of Turkish options, low prices, and student-friendly hours. Check out their good gyros, awesome falafel, and, though we haven't tried it yet, we hear they make a mean potato salad. *The Original* just can't stay away.

The Kebab Factory is open every day from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. and offers free delivery for orders $10 and up. Call 412-904-4487 or 412-904-4458. – **H.P.**

THE RISE & FALL OF RAVENSTAHL: An Editorial

TEXT Hadley Pratt

When Mayor Bob O'Connor died suddenly from brain cancer in 2006, less than a year into his term, 26-year-old Luke Ravenstahl, next in line for the mayoral office as City Council President, became the youngest mayor in Pittsburgh's history. Since then he's been a divisive figure in Pittsburgh's leadership.

For some, he's a North Side native living the dream. For others, he's the Boy Mayor of Pittsburgh partying his way through the political scene, making talk show appearances and cutting ribbons while his staff calls the shots from behind the scenes. Whichever narrative you prefer, it's been a bumpy past seven years.

Some highs from Ravenstahl's office include the launch of the Pittsburgh Promise, a scholarship fund to make higher education accessible to Pittsburgh Public School students who meet a minimum attendance and GPA requirement, and servePGH, a city-wide service initiative to connect volunteers to opportunities to clean up neighborhoods and mentor children. Most recently, Ravenstahl has challenged UPMC's nonprofit, tax-exempt status.

Unfortunately, the lows of Ravenstahl's two terms as mayor seem to outweigh the highs. First there was that time UPMC footed the bill for a two-day golf outing he attended, then that time he drove a Homeland Security Vehicle to a Toby Keith concert. Then there was the G-20, a moment that put Pittsburgh on the international map at the expense of the student population who remember it for the out-of-town riot police forces' militaristic occupation of Oakland, unnecessary police antagonism, unlawful arrests of peaceful protestors and students, and Ravenstahl, on stage in full riot gear, telling the ACLU to "fuck off." Just like during Snowpocalypse, Ravenstahl spent G-20 safe and sound in a Seven Springs condo.

Most recently, controversy has culminated with the FBI's ongoing probe of the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police's finances and unauthorized account activity involving taxpayers' money. Ravenstahl denied knowledge that the accounts were attached to debit cards possessed by his bodyguards, despite one of his bodyguards claiming otherwise.

The FBI have not officially implicated Ravenstahl in the investigation, but the swirl of rumors surrounding it have contributed to the Mayor's decision not to run for reelection. The official word is that the FBI investigation and Ravenstahl's decision to call it quits are unrelated, but, well, I just find that a little too convenient.

PITTSBURGH'S 2013 MAYORAL ELECTION

TEXT Hadley Pratt

Pittsburgh is getting a new mayor this year. The big day, November 5th, is still a long ways away, but things are already getting exciting as we near the May 21st Democratic and Republican primaries.

As of March 12th, declared Democratic candidates include City Controller Michael Lamb, City Councilman Bill Peduto, School bus monitor A.J. Richardson, former Pennsylvania Auditor General Jack Wagner, and State Representative Jake Wheatley. Squirrel Hill resident Josh Wander is the only declared Republican candidate. March polling results place Bill Peduto in the lead with 30% of pledged votes. Jack Wagner follows in second with 20%.

Local and state politics are two aspects of the democratic process often overlooked in favor of the flash and hype so often associated with national-level politics. Staying informed and voting at the local level is a crucial way to have your voice be heard and make positive change. Local lawmakers influence state lawmakers who influence national lawmakers, so research the candidates, and vote!

Voter registration forms are due April 22, 2013. Applications for absentee ballots are due anytime between April 1st and May 14th, 2013. Absentee ballots are due May 17th, 2013.

LITERARY ARTS BOOM:

PHOTOS Courtesy of Literary Arts Boom

Call for Interns!

ABOUT LAB

Literary Arts Boom [The LAB] is an explosively fun creative writing laboratory in Garfield that offers free out-of-school programming to Pittsburgh youth. Students practice and improve their inquiry and writing skills in a safe and unique space by participating in project--based workshops that incorporate art, technology, and communication. The Mad Scientist theme encourages youth to explore, experiment, and invent. Mentorship and creativity inspire students to pursue their interests, find their voices, and tell their stories.

The LAB provides a space for collaboration, innovation and community engagement among youth, adults, and organizations focused on kids and creativity. Individuals, ranging from authors to zoologists, can share their talents, passion, and wisdom with local youth. Volunteers are essential to The LAB – offering the social capital, diverse skill sets, and critical engagement that transform organizations into community assets. The LAB targets students between the ages of 6-18 from in and around the Garfield neighborhood of Pittsburgh, though youth across the city are welcome to participate.

INTERNSHIP LOCATION

The LAB shares space with Assemble @ 5125 Penn Ave. in the Garfield neighborhood of Pittsburgh, PA.

GENERAL INFORMATION

- This is an unpaid internship, but we'll provide snacks and support as well as the opportunity to work on substantive projects. The Project Manager will work with you to develop goals and a work plan that satisfy the organization's needs and your interests. You'll meet a lot of great people, too!
- All positions have flexible schedules, ideally 10-20 hours per week, but we can arrange for more hours if you're available.
- Internships begin ASAP and run through the summer, pending your availability.
- Much of the work can be done remotely. Ideally, candidates will have their own computer to use.
- Weekly check-ins with Project Manager
- Exposure to the ins-and-outs of a start-up non--profit organization and social enterprise

HOW TO APPLY

EMAIL A CUSTOMIZED COVER LETTER AND YOUR RESUME (DOC or PDF) to the Lead Experimentalist (Project Manager) Paula Levin, at **literaryartsboom@gmail.com**.

In your cover letter, include the following:

* the position you are interested in
* the date range you're seeking to intern
* the number of hours per week you can intern
* why you're interested in interning for The LAB

Apply ASAP for consideration.

INTERNS ARE NEEDED TO FULFILL THE FOLLOWING DUTIES

Marketing
Community Outreach and Volunteer Coordination
Program Development
Fundraising
Business Development

For more information, contact Paula Levin at **literaryartsboom@gmail.com** or visit **www.literaryartsboom.org** to download the full internship application. ■

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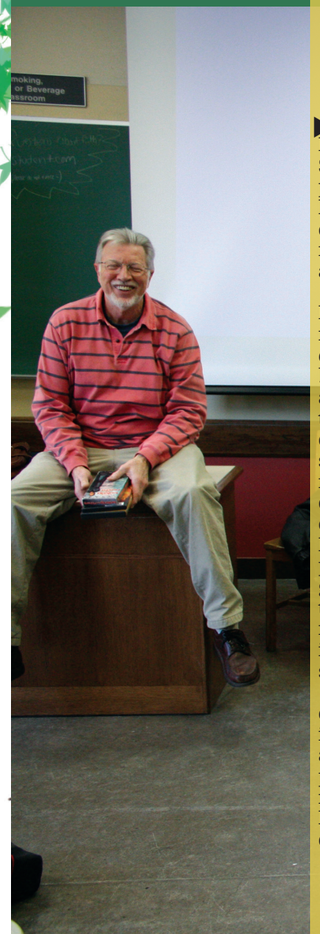
GOOD WILL & GOLDEN DELICIOUS APPLES

TEXT Lauren McNeil
PHOTOS John Herse

For Professor David Walton, conventionality is a dull concept. To his students, he has become a modern day Snow White – bringing apples to his students, instead of vice versa.

Background: Students in Prof. Walton's class enjoy intellectual stimulation... and apples.



I guess I expected a lot of things when I walked into Professor Walton's office. Perhaps an elaborate story about a trip to London to study the classics and visit Shakespeare's famous Globe Theatre, perhaps a lecture on the importance of literature, but I most certainly did not expect to leave with an anthology, a novel written by David Walton himself, and four beautiful apples.

Perhaps I did expect the apples. Professor Walton had given them out to my Introduction to Shakespeare class everyday last spring, and almost always brought his dog, Sonny, along for class as well. It was certainly unconventional to walk into a class and be fed and entertained within five minutes of sitting down, but it broke up my monotonous schedule (and certainly, the dreaded bomb threats) and forced me to eat at least one healthy thing that day. I thought it ended there—a simple treat, perhaps the root of a burgeoning apple grove in Professor Walton's backyard that couldn't quite be tamed. Again, my expectations were dashed almost immediately when I asked what the source of the apples was.

Professor David Walton started giving out apples when he taught Seminar in Composition at Pitt – he stopped by a local farmers' market to specifically pick up apples for his class. The farmers' market is the East Liberty Farmers' Market, a collective market where you can find anything from farmers to

craftspeople. Kistaco Farm is the specific farm from which Professor Walton buys his apples. Run by a local Pittsburgh family man who grows apples in Apollo, Pennsylvania, Kistaco Farm specializes in apples and apple cider, but also grows a wide variety of other healthy treats. Professor Walton made it entirely clear to me that I needed to give credit to the farm (and I've tried the apples, they're phenomenal – check out the text box at the end of the article for more information).

I suppose that to a college student running between classes, an apple is an apple – something to shove down your throat before holing yourself up in Hillman for the next twelve hours—but there was something behind the apple-giving that I hadn't known about while I was enrolled in Professor Walton's class.

> **"At a certain age, you're free from restrictions. You're allowed a certain degree of the eccentric, or whimsical, or the unconventional. And for a class in Shakespeare – who so much loved paradoxes – there's a kind of built-in pun: The teacher bringing an apple for the students."**

"The apples are a sign of good will," Walton told me; I thought back to the moment I walked into his classroom to interview him. He had been insisting that the last student to mosey out of his class take home the remaining apples and a smile lit up her face. I should have known that my brilliant English professor would use an apple as a metaphor.

Professor Walton confessed that the apples were not confined to the classroom. He offered them to people on the bus, in the dog park—anywhere, really, that he thought someone needed a boost.

"At a certain age, you're free from restrictions," Walton told me, smiling slightly. "You're allowed a certain degree of the eccentric, or whimsical, or the unconventional. And for a class in Shakespeare – who so much loved paradoxes – there's a kind of built-in pun: The teacher bringing an apple for the students." Certainly, many people had thought that he was crazy for offering apples to random strangers, but **he truly believes that they are a symbol of good will and trust among comrades – even when he gets asked if he is Snow White.**

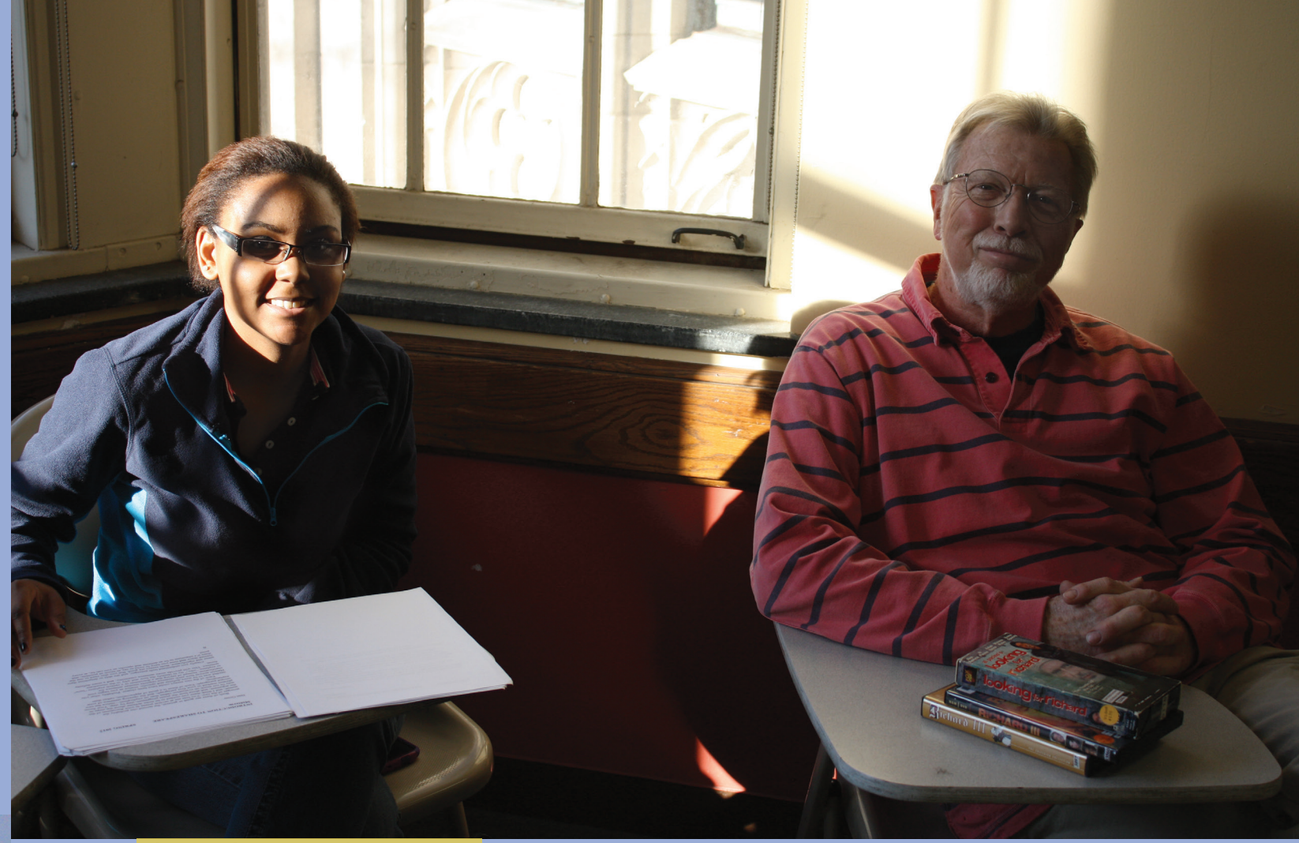
He isn't concerned about people's wary looks and sidelong glances, but those certainly weren't all that he received in return for the golden treats. "During the election, I called them Obama Apples: they're good, and good for you, they come with good will and good intentions. It's a symbol, but never underestimate the power of a symbol to do good, or the importance of small gestures, in a society that's so often tainted by ill will and mistrust."

Perhaps we are stuck in our own lives, drained each day by the agar that confines us in our little petri dishes. It's hard for us to reach out and touch, taste, and smell the humanity around us, but people like Professor Walton remind us that it's there for the taking, in more ways than one. His teaching career spans over 50 years, and yet his life has been enriched with so much more than a lectern and chalkboard. It's hard to comprehend anything but our career paths as college students – for the most part, we are corralled into certain paths and think it overwhelming to stray to some other interest. It was certainly eye opening to see how much Professor Walton experienced throughout his life while also pursing his desired career path.

Between teaching at Carnegie Mellon University and teaching at Pitt, Walton worked as a mobility trainer; he taught mentally challenged people how to ride the public buses.

"I used to say, this would provide great material for a novel someday. And it did. It turned out it was a learning experience, not only for the people I was teaching, but for me as well."

Walton's debut novel, *Ride*, drew inspiration from his experience as a mobility trainer. It was published by Carnegie Mellon University Press and reprinted by Penguin Books, and was later critically acclaimed. It was hard to imagine the man who could quote Shakespearean verse verbatim doing all of these worldly things; my perception of Professor Walton was limited to the classroom setting where he taught us about Hamlet.



Above: The Original finds Prof. Walton with a student after class. ▶▶

Everyday, Professor Walton would come into class and quietly make his rounds with a big bag of apples. He never made a big fuss about how an apple a day keeps the doctor away and how he was doing a huge social service to all of us; he simply handed them out with a smile and hoped that we would take it in stride and lift some of the stress from our self-important lives.

> **Perhaps we are stuck in our own lives, drained each day by the agar that confines us in our little petri dishes. It's hard for us to reach out and touch, taste, and smell the humanity around us, but people like Professor Walton remind us that it's there for the taking, in more ways than one.**

It's strange, because most college students see their professors as a separate entity from the real world, existing solely in the space of the classroom and occupying some sort of cosmic otherness outside of the classroom. Students never distinguish their professors from the act of teaching, which makes it harder to discover this cosmic otherness and develop a better understanding of the influential figures in their lives. With Professor Walton, I had always seen him as an extremely tough grader. I would rework drafts of papers for hours, but at times I still couldn't seem to crest a B+. It was wildly frustrating, but in the context of this otherness, this separate David Walton that I've now learned about, I suppose I can see his grading style much like the apples – a sign of good will and motivation to keep you moving. ■

To try Prof. Walton's favorite apples for yourself, check out Kistaco Farms at the Farmers' Market Cooperative at East Liberty, 344 N. Sheridan Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15206. For more information, call 724-661-4414.

The Farmers' Market Cooperative is open year round and accessible via Port Authority bus routes.

Old Traditions, New Additions

Exploring the new Swiss and Turkish Nationality Rooms that opened last year in the Cathedral of Learning.

TEXT Joelle Smith
PHOTOS Emily O'Donnell

In the spring of 2012, two multicultural masterpieces graced the diverse treasure trove, which is the Cathedral of Learning. The Swiss and Turkish Nationality Rooms assumed their place among the flourishing number of third floor exhibits. Like every international classroom under the cathedral's vaulted ceiling, the latest additions are sure to sweep your breath away and sights as far as the Bay of Biscay.

The design captures the traditional arrangement of a Turkish "democratic space."

On March 4, 2012 the Turkish Nationality Room became part of the Cathedral's grand legacy. The display features a short tiled entryway leading to a wooded enclosing like a richly hollowed out tree, lined in intricately carved benches on all four sides. The light and dark accents of wood establish a lavish dynamic. Designer/Co-architect Ömer Akin, Co-artchitect John Cleary, and a number of other skilled craftsmen worked to fashion the room after the Turkish House, Bas Oast, the likes of which can still be found in Ottoman cites. The design captures the traditional arrangement of a Turkish "democratic space." The rectangular seating arrangement, allows everyone to be seated in equal authority around the rectangular room. A sweeping mural, designed by local artist Ryan Woodring, scales the wall, a window depicting the city of Istanbul.

The history behind the regal room is equally fascinating. Based on information provided by the Turkish Nationality Room Website, the project went into the works in 2008. Substantial donations cut the price tag by 90% and brainstorming began. Designs are difficult considering a whole country needs to capture their culture in 30 by 40 square feet. An elite group of architects were invited to submit their proposed blueprints for the future room. After deliberation Ömer Akin's recipe of elegance and traditional Turkish architecture, emerged as the venerable victor. Four years later his concept had been whittled, painted, and polished into a reality. The Turkish room is located in classroom 339 of the Cathedral.

The Swiss classroom reached completion on April 22, 2012. The predominantly wooden design celebrates the late medieval architecture. Designer Justin Rüssli Architekten, Architect Stephen Altherr, Wood Artisan Richard Sink, and numerous others undoubtedly worked meticulously to recreate the Zürich room, a 14th century Swiss classroom which served as the Nationality Room's inspiration. Swiss innovator Johann Pestalozzi embodies the room's theme of universal learning. He revolutionized the education system in Switzerland, making schooling more accessible to young people of all ethnicities.

According to The Swiss American Society of Pittsburgh, the room underwent a similar process to it's Turkish predecessor. The beginnings of the project date back to 1998 when room 321 was reserved for Swiss design. Seven years later, artistic designer Justin Rüssli was hired. Fresh off renovating the Swiss Ambassador' s residence in Washington DC, Rüssli understood the multicultural mentality. An undoubtedly determined fundraising effort cannot be overlooked. Donations rolled in from worldwide magazines advertisements, picnics and various fundraisers, and donations bestowed by the Steel city's biggest names. In 2007, Pittsburgh Steeler Ben Roethlisberger donated an assortment of signed memorabilia for auction to benefit the outreach. After countless personal notations and promotional events construction began and in the spring of 2012 a class was scheduled in the freshly sanded success. The Swiss classroom is located in room 321 of the Cathedral.

The sheer determination behind each room's ornate yet diverse scenery proves as prolific as the Cathedral itself: a beacon on Pittsburgh's skyline. The beauty of the building lies in the fact that everyone's vibrant plans and brilliant visions culminate here, the formula for a masterpiece. So take a trip up three flights and experience a piece of pure genius. ■

OLD SCHOOL OAKLAND: The Decade

Before G-Door was G-Door, it was the Decade – a legendary venue in Pittsburgh rock history where, instead of waiting until Karaoke Night, you could hear your favorite rock songs performed live nightly.

TEXT Andrew Gretchko
PHOTOS Emily O'Donnell

◀◀ *Background: Garage Door Saloon, affectionately referred to by many as G-Door used to be a lot more to Oakland than just a bar.*

Walking down Forbes Avenue, it seems like Oakland has virtually everything a college student needs. There are restaurants – both the type meant for visits from parents and intoxicated late night meals – book stores, a library, a museum, and a grocery store; everything but a place for those who thrive on guitar riffs and cymbal crashes.

> **Walking down Forbes Avenue, it seems like Oakland has virtually everything a college student needs... everything but a place for those who thrive on guitar riffs and cymbal crashes.**

Back when Pitt was winning national championships in football, Oakland was a hotbed for the national music scene. Venues dotted campus, giving fans a place to enjoy a show virtually any night of the week. Now, the stages have been replaced with apartments, bars, and other signs of corporate America, leaving mere traces of their former selves behind for us to marvel at. Yet, 17 years after the final note was played at the Decade, the legacy of the former venue is far from forgotten.

In 1973, Dominic DiSilvio, a Pitt grad who majored in English writing and theater, purchased a bar on the corner of Atwood Street and Sennott Street. The relatively small property was called Atwood Gardens (and before that the Oaklander Hotel), but Dom – as everyone calls him – quickly changed the name to the Decade. Comprised of two mid-sized rooms, the venue could hold roughly 400 people, but **during its heyday, DiSilvio's stage was packed shoulder to shoulder as crowds cheered on bands like U2, the Police, and Bruce Springsteen.**

"When I bought the Decade, it was half the size of what it is now," said Dom. His purchase of a small garage located behind the bar allowed him to knock down the wall that separated the two and merge the two buildings into one. This marked the start of something far bigger than your ordinary watering hole.

The Decade was Dom's second attempt at running a bar. His first attempt, Fat Daddy's on Baum Boulevard, ended just a year after it started in 1962, but was host to live music, just as his second bar would be.

"The reason we called it the Decade, was because my wife who I was married to when I bought the first bar; we really liked 50s music. That was our decade," said Dom, who originally planned to bring the music of the 1950s to his new bar. "It wasn't that out of line since it was only 11 or 12 years from then," he said.

The Decade soon played host to some of the remaining 50s bands in the area, allowing them to perform on the bar's small wooden stage on the weekends. One band, Gravel, which consisted of frontmen Bob Corbin and David Hanner, kept the bar packed; they would later go on to appear on U.S. top 100 charts for their country tunes throughout the 1980s and 90s.

By the mid-70s Dom was looking to expand his business.

"There weren't a lot of clubs that did music…there were big venues and auditoriums," said Dom, highlighting the gigantic Syria Mosque concert hall which was bought by UPMC in 1991 and converted into the parking lot that sits behind the Pittsburgh Athletic Association.

Taking a risk, Dom decided to avoid Pat DeCaeser and Rich Engler, a promoting duo that dominated the Pittsburgh scene, and side with Danny Kresky, an out-of-town promoter from Los Angeles. Kresky faced stiff competition in Pittsburgh, but had connections across the nation and overseas in England where he searched for many up-and-coming artists.

Soon, Dom would agree to let Kresky make the Decade his base. "People would call me all the time with this bullshit," said Dom, at first skeptical of the deal. For roughly $400, Dom would provide room and board for the band, along with the necessary preparations, such as lights and equipment, leaving the rest up to his promoter. Soon, his risk would pay off.

The first act Kresky tried to bring in was Maria Muldaur, whose song "Midnight at the Oasis" had peaked at number six on the Billboard charts in 1974. "Long story short, she didn't show, so now I'm real fuckin' pissed off," said Dom, who attempted to rescind his deal with Kresky but was persuaded to give the promoter one more chance. After bringing in Meat Loaf, Steve Forbert, the Ramones, and the Police consecutively, Kresky had Dom's trust.

◀◀ *Background: Instead of tables and bar stools, the main seating area of G-Door used to feature the amps and equipment of acts like The Police, Nirvana, U2, and Bruce Springsteen.*

After Kresky's initial success, word of the Decade quickly spread throughout Pittsburgh. Though Dom still allowed Kresky to book shows, he also allowed local acts – like the bar's main band, the Iron City House Rockers – to perform as well, eventually leaving more room for Kresky's artists.

From 1978 on, the Decade hosted big name acts almost weekly, becoming just as popular within Pittsburgh as it was with the bands that played there, many of which often returned to the small venue on their own. Even after Kresky left the Decade in 1980 to manage the Orange Bowl arena in Florida, the bar continued to bring in national acts on a consistent basis and build its reputation.

Maria Muldaur even reconsidered her earlier dismissal of the venue and made good on her word to perform, visiting the Decade three times over the course of her career. After her final show, one which saw Muldaur take the stage with her singer/songwriter daughter, Dom made sure to remind her of her past mistake. "Your daughter's better than you and I'm glad to say that," he told her.

As the Decade continued to gain notoriety, artists and celebrities who were in town would make their way to the popular bar. While the 1992 movie "Hoffa" was being filmed, actors Jack Nicholson, Danny DeVito, and Armand Assante stopped by to see Otis Clay perform. "DeVito was so small, you could hardly see him!" said Dom, who partied with all three of the Hollywood stars. Others, like Bruce Willis and Demi Moore, would also pay their respects to the Oakland bar.

Dom even encouraged undiscovered

artist Stevie Ray Vaughn to travel north and play at his venue in March of 1983 after meeting him at the New Orleans Jazz Festival. The next time Vaughn would travel to Pittsburgh he would play for a sold-out crowd of thousands at the Syria Mosque.

Then, in 1995, Dom decided to sell his property. "I was getting older. I had some broken fingers from the fights. I had two divorces," he said, citing his old age as the primary reason for moving on from the Decade. Dom is currently 73-years old.

"We were still bringing in national acts, even in the '90s," said promoter and bass player Tommy O'Shanick, a Pittsburgh native who went from playing at the Decade to helping bring in acts like Anti-Flag. "The sad thing is that when it closed, it was still kicking ass," he said.

Dom originally tried to keep the lucrative bar within his family, but none of his kids wanted to manage the rowdy establishment.

After Dom gave up control of the Decade, the bar changed hands multiple times, its reputation quickly dwindling. "The guy that bought it, he wanted to use the name Decade. I told him no. That was that," said Dom. What was once the Decade would eventually become Senor Frogs, the Next Decade, run by Dom's ex-manager, Tobacco Road House, and the Frog Pond before it would wind up as the Garage Door bar that occupies the property today.

When asked if he ever considers buying back his bar, Dom responded, "Only when I'm real fucked up." Though some around the city would love Dom to get back into the business, his kids would be less than pleased. "If I would go back into a place, my eight kids would kill me. I think they would actually kill me," he said.

Today, all that remains of the Decade is a plaque on the wall of Garage Door.

"Almost a Landmark.
The Decade"

"One this site from September 1973 until August 1995 once stood "The Decade": Home of Rock 'N' Roll. It was a haven for many of the finest local and nationally acclaimed musicians. For almost a quarter of a century, proprietor, Dominic DiSilvio, along with his family established The Decade as an enduring icon in Pittsburgh Music History."■

When asked if he ever considers buying back his bar, Dom responded, "Only when I'm real fucked up."

Pitt Progressive

Life as a DJ for 92.1 WPTS - The University of Pittsburgh's student-run radio station.

TEXT & PHOTOS Emily O'Donnell

I get to the radio station at 10:45pm on a Friday night, arriving early to scour the racks of CDs and vinyl to see if there is anything obscure I want to play. At 11pm, the guy who is currently on air signs off for the night and introduces my show. "This has been Music N'at, up next is the Odd Couple. Thanks for listening."

My boyfriend and I are the odd couple and we settle down in the MCR – the master control room – before a colorful board of dials and switches that control the levels of music that will be played from a variety of outlets. Two turntables sit to to my right, a three disc CD player looms above us and in front of us is a touchscreen computer that allows us to choose music and build playlists from whatever is already programmed into the computer. My boyfriend plugs in an opening song and then we count down the minutes to our first mic break.

"You are listening to 92.1 WPTS – Pittsburgh's progressive FM." We take turns intoning this into the microphone during each break, our everyday voices transform into the slow, deep voice of a radio DJ.

"I am DJ Faelai," I introduce myself. My boyfriend picks up after me, "And I am DJ Pseudonymous Bosch and together we are the Odd Couple."

On Friday nights from 11pm-1am, we rule the airwaves. Our show is an eclectic mix of post-rock and indie music with a good dash of punk and folk thrown in for good measure. Occasionally my boyfriend will pull out an obscure record from some band I've never heard of and fit it into our playlist. I thought I was knowledgeable about music before I became a DJ, but coming up with a new mix of music every week can be challenging. I typically rely on my go-to artists like Bjork, Arcade Fire, The Decemberists, Tori Amos, Bat For Lashes and Radiohead. I let my boyfriend bring the more obscure stuff to the mix, as a musician he is far more of a music snob than I, and this is the one time when that comes in handy.

One of the aims of WPTS is to act as a working classroom, exposing the students to the reality of live radio.

The Odd Couple is the second radio show that I have done on WPTS. My boyfriend and I were both doing separate shows for the radio station before we came together to form this one. With our hectic schedules, this is one time during the week that we know we have something we can do together.

The board lights up to indicate that we have a phone call and I answer it excitedly, I love taking requests from people. When I had my own show over the summer, my friends often listened in and we had long facebook threads full of requests that I would play for them. I like to have an interactive show, where others help build my playlists around a theme or an idea. I once had a show where I played exclusively redheaded female musicians for an hour. Recently, after a trip to Canada, my boyfriend played a special edition of our show called 'The Hoser Hour" where he played only Canadian musicians and ran the show in character as a Canadian DJ, complete with hockey updates.

The radio station we DJ for is the official radio station for the University of Pittsburgh, 92.1 WPTS. The station began in 1957 as an AM station and transferred over to an FM station in 1984. The founder of the station was a Vietnam vet named Adrian Cronauer, whose experiences in Vietnam were made into the movie Good Morning Vietnam, with the role of Adrian being played by Robin Williams. An illustrious beginning to the radio station, to say the least.

Although the music is the largest part of the station, WPTS also has blocks scheduled for sports and news. Within the past year, members of the station have also begun a column in The Pitt News, writing about current music topics. A recent highlight for the news people at the station is a mayoral debate that was broadcast live on WPTS on April 3, 2013.

One of the aims of WPTS is to act as a working classroom, exposing the students to the reality of live radio. All DJs go through a training process and then are paired up with a buddy DJ, sitting in on their buddy's show first to observe and then to play their own block of music during the end of their buddy's show. As DJs, we are trained to recognize what music is okay to play at certain times of day,

and what can never be said on the radio. Being a DJ requires a constant awareness of the music you are playing and the words you are saying, knowing that they are being broadcast over the air to many listeners.

WPTS follows a college-radio station format, with a steady rotation of music automatically playing when no DJs are on the air. The DJ shows make up the majority of the programming at the station and each show is unique. This semester we have shows dedicated to folk music, Irish music, electronica, and other shows built around a theme such as "The Two-Hour Beard Related Half-Hour Radio Program" or one of my personal favorites "The Love Zone with DJ Silky Smooth," which is amusingly followed by a show called "Happy to Be Down with DJ Forever Alone."

The format of the station is progressive music, meaning that you will rarely hear classic rock or pop hits or anything from the top 40 charts. WPTS prides itself on the good taste of the DJs and an experimental blend of music that you are unlikely to hear on any other radio station.

It is not hard to become a DJ, although it does require dedication to stay one. The station relies on its DJs to be involved in promoting shows and writing reviews for new CDs that come in. It is a community of people that really love music and it is an experience I highly recommend to anyone who is interested in live radio.

Graduate and undergraduate students at the University of Pittsburgh can apply to become a DJ anytime during the school year. During the summer, alumni and community members can also train as DJs at the radio station while the students are away. To learn more, e-mail training@wptsradio.org. ■

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5 MINUTES with ADRIANA HELBIG

Recent Pitt grad and former Carpathian Music Ensemble balalaikist Ryan Pudlowski goes one-on-one with the extraordinary ethnomusicologist, Dr. Adriana Helbig.

TEXT Ryan Pudlowski
PHOTO Provided by Dr. Helbig

▶ **Ryan Pudlowski:** So, real quick, just tell us a brief bit about who you are and what you're doing.

Dr. Helbig: I am an assistant professor of music here at the University of Pittsburgh. I've been here since 2008, and I teach undergraduate and graduate classes. Undergraduate classes – the most popular ones are Gypsy Music and Global Hip-Hop – and I also teach the large Intro to World Music with 200 students and the Carpathian Music Ensemble, which has been around now for 5 years. We specialize in gypsy music and music of the Balkans and we do a lot of community performances. We've been using the platform of performance to garner students' interest in the region and in theoretical issues like music and activism, music and politics, music and gender, so some of these are the BPhils and graduate-level research that's been happening among the undergrads.

So this is just kind of like that culmination year, that fifth year when you're up for tenure review and you're sort of assessing the past five years and it's really amazing. I almost can't believe that it's only been five years, that we created the ensemble, that we were able to do so much, and kind of get you guys where you are today. We've gotten a lot of people into grad school and also just with the graduate program here where we actually have people interested in that region on the graduate level, because it's not very common to get [the Balkans] to sound hip and cool.

But what actually happened was my research, my dissertation, is on Romani music, and at that time, in 2002, there was a lot of money being brought in from the West to create NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and so I kind of came in as an English-speaker grant-writer into a very remote region of Ukraine in the Carpathian mountains and helped write grants. We got a lot of money for it and I started seeing how corrupt that whole system is, and also I wasn't able to write my book on that at the time because there was a political upheaval in the country, and so, when I was there, I actually came across these pictures of students from Africa that were performing in Ukrainian and dressed in Ukrainian folk costumes and they were rapping and kind of creating their own versions of Ukrainian folk songs so I thought, "Well, great, you know what, let's go that way."

So it took me to another part of the country in eastern Ukraine and I started working in a town called Kharkov, and I started following around this network of African students. I'll show you the picture of it, and basically it's this whole – hold on a second, there we go – see? So this guy's from Uganda, and this is the traditional Ukrainian folk costume. So when I started to find this, I said let's try to unpack what's going on here, and basically at that time, because the revolution – the orange revolution in Ukraine was all about trying to break away into a sort of Ukrainian-oriented type of cultural sphere, trying to break away from Russia right at that moment, so these guys were tapping into that and creating Ukrainian folk songs. So what's happened since is it has kind of moved the opposite way, where the political sphere has moved kind of more towards Russia. But, with this network, I actually followed them into a network of hip-hop studios, and started doing a lot of research among Africans tapping into hip-hop. So not only do they tap into this type of thing, but because they're black and they speak English, they pass themselves off as African-American hip-hop musicians sometimes. So there's this cultural cache that they're tapping into, plus using hip-hop as a way to create a sense of social activism, and to create a network for themselves in a country where xenophobia is really on the rise because the borders are so porous going out of Russia into Ukraine. Ukraine is on the border of the EU, and a lot of people are trying to get into the EU, so they stop in Ukraine or they are pushed back into Ukraine once they're caught in the EU, and so there's a lot of xenophobia in Ukraine. So these guys are using music to really comment on racism and create a safe network for themselves.

So that's what the book became about, and then, as I spent more time with them, I decided I had to go and spend time with their families, so I went to Uganda. Their parents think they're in medical school, meanwhile, they've got these prolific careers in Ukraine as musicians. Yeah, it was really amazing, and so that also tapped me into a history of Soviet relations with Africa as well, with blackness and performance, so I started doing a lot of research going back to the 1920s, looking at African-American relationships with the Soviet Union as well as African, looking at it from the performance aspect, so that's what the book will be about. ■

I almost can't believe that it's only been five years, that we created the ensemble, that we were able to do so much, and kind of get you guys where you are today.

Dr. Helbig's book, *Hip-Hop Ukraine: Music, Race, and African Migration*, is coming soon from Indiana University Press.

People We Like

Genexodus... 25-27

DJ Salem... 32-33

Everything That's Neverending... 28-31

GENEXODUS

TEXT Jess Myers
PHOTOS Emily O'Donnell

Theodore Bolha's first solo paper cutting exhibit at The Gallery 4

The Gallery 4, a gallery on South Highland Avenue in Shady Side that works to bring in national and local talent to the Pittsburgh area, rang in the new year with an "incredible hand cut paper exhibit" called "Genexodus," which was the brainchild of Theodore (Ted) Bolha. This event defied the expectations of the Gallery 4 crew in terms of recognition, attendance and promotion. This was the most heavily publicized event the Gallery 4 has seen, which Ted remarked was "a great way to start 2013". The Gallery 4 works to bring in national and local talent to the Pittsburgh area.

The idea for this exhibition was conceived in late 2011; Ted worked diligently creating pieces and then choosing which would find a spot in his show. In the beginning, Ted planned to attempt 30 pieces for the exhibit. By the time opening night of the exhibition, he had created 35 miniature pieces and 26 floor pieces. Ted described his show as diverging from the gallery "norm" in that his show was less urban in style. Ted prefers to hear what people have to say about his work rather than explain the meaning of his art. During opening night, I was able to observe Ted talking with the patrons about his conceptual ideologies, as well as listening attentively to what they interpreted from the work.

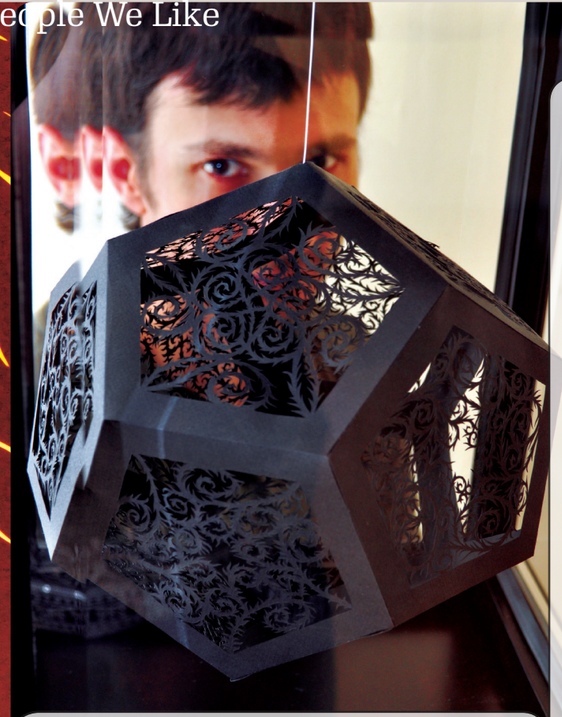
Ted first came to Pittsburgh from Westmoreland County, from the Latrobe area, in 1998 to obtain a degree in Graphic Design at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. Moving from a country life- where he spent most of his time alone on meandering hikes in the woods- to a more chaotic urban setting exposed him to art that he would not have discovered in his hometown.

Ted's interest in paper cutting began in 2007 when he stumbled upon the paper sculptures of Jen Stark in Miami. "I was pulled into the gallery by these captivating sculptures that I didn't know were made of paper at first. She happened to be there, and so she explained that they were made from paper she had bought at a dollar store, as she wanted to prove that great art can have an inexpensive start. I was more than intrigued and ideas began to flood my mind, but I didn't get around to actually doing anything about it until 2008."

Ted explained to me in detail the many ways in which paper cutters create their work. He doesn't use a single method; it varies from project to project, which makes his work even more fascinating. Despite his background in graphic design, Ted doesn't use a computer, instead he starts with a drawing; often the drawing is a reverse of how he wants the image to appear- he has done a few where the pencil sketch remains on the front of the final piece. He then cuts this drawing out, not always following what he originally drew- there's an element of improvisation to the cutting. He commented that only one of his pieces began with Photoshop.

I asked him what he did when he made mistakes while cutting, and he said he has one of three options: either he can adapt the "mistake" into the piece, abandon the project completely, or re-make the entire work regardless of how far along it is. "I approach [each cutting] as an expressionist would- it's more about the process for me, I'm not interested in anything too strict. Expression must be free."

We discussed where he does his work. Ted has moved multiple times in the past two years, and has continued to perfect his art despite the surroundings he finds himself in. From the farm, to the city, to a cabin in the mountains, he works wherever he is to craft these amazing creations.



Music is important to Ted's process. When he works, he puts his iTunes on shuffle. In this way he maintians spontaneity so that he won't be confined to a certain mood; though his playlists are dominated by the likes of Aphex Twin, Vangelis, Blind Melon and other eclectic artists. Ted believes that this also contributes to his method of "improvisational cutting".

Ted works with archival and museum quality papers. He jokes about how "they will be around long after I'm not!" At the gallery, the lights used to illuminate his pieces are LEDs, which can last more than 20 years. In his earlier works, he used construction paper, which was more brittle than the archival paper, causing it to fray sometimes when he was making intricate cuts. He believes the construction paper taught him to hone in on and develop his method when cutting very small pieces.

Religion plays a large part in Ted's work; he is a dedicated Pantheist. Ted enjoys discussing Pantheism, and how it has affected his works. He describes it as "revering nature as one would revere a god", and when he talks about it, you can hear the passion he feels for this ideology. He attributes part of his reverence for nature to his mother who is an avid orchid collector. Her influence has greatly impacted his relationship to the natural world.

We wrap our conversation talking about Ted's goals for 2013. After starting the year with such a huge undertaking and a successful show, what is next? "I'm learning how to be decisive about showing. There's been a lot of interest from other local galleries, and I'm also involved with the RAW artist's event in March." RAW is an organization geared towards "natural born artists and is an independent arts organization, for artists, by artists". RAW is a national organization that "welcomes all genres of art including independent film, fashion, music, visual art, performing art, hairstylists, makeup artists and more".

> Ted enjoys discussing Pantheism, and how it has affected his works. He describes it as "revering nature as one would revere a god."

Although Ted does not label himself as any "type" of artist, he makes sure to explain that he creates for himself, seeing it as a bonus when people like his work. His works are "personal and usually expressive or emotionally based, but sometimes my [graphic] design background is obvious."

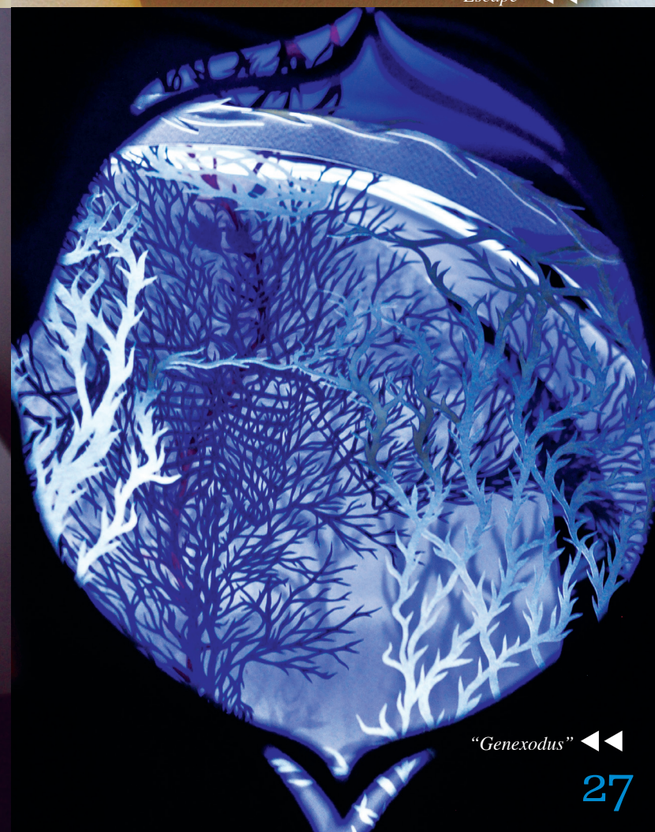
"I'm also talking about putting a few things on display in my hometown," he tells me. "I'm very interested in collaborations of all sorts. I've also recently started work on something big that might happen late this year or in early 2014." ■

To get in touch with Ted you can email him at ted_bolha@msn.com.

"Insatiable"

"Escape"

"Providing Shade for a Myth"



"Genexodus"

EVERYTHING & THAT'S NEVERENDING

Catching up with Endless Mike & The Beagle Club

TEXT & PHOTOS Emily O'Donnell

Every so often you come across an artist whose lyrics seem to speak directly to you, someone whose words are eerily similar to ones that you have spoken aloud in moments of intense emotion. When I was introduced to the music of Mike Miller in 2008, I had that experience and nearly four years later, the feeling has only grown stronger.

"Houses don't know that they're houses," sings Mike Miller on a track from his album "The Husky Tenor." The house tonight is packed with people, **"hipsters don't know that they're hipsters"** is the line that follows but at this point I've lost track of who here is a hipster, who is a punk and who doesn't fall into any category at all. It is a cold night in Bloomfield and tonight Mike Miller is performing solo. These house shows are a different vibe from the traditional venues where I have often seen Mike play with his band The Beagle Club. The show is stripped down, intimate and casual. Mike performs with an acoustic guitar. The crowd behind me pulses with drunken energy, many people here know the musicians personally and when Mike sings, we all sing along, sometimes louder than he can without a microphone. This is what the house shows are like, this is what Endless Mike and the Beagle Club are like, no matter where they are and no matter how many members of the band are present. It is always a big party, full of sound.

The official name of the band is Endless Mike and the Beagle Club. Formed in Johnstown almost a decade ago the band is a large ensemble that has retained over a dozen members at any given time with musicians constantly coming and going from the band over the years. Mike says "although the revolving door is still always open, right now it has mainly been me, Matt Miller [Mike's twin brother], Matt Davis, Cody Walat, Brandon Locher, Renee Saylor, Rod Fisher, Emmy Volkar, and John Thorell who have been playing/writing for the new record. "

It is hard to define the band and I suspect that the members of the Beagle Club are perfectly fine with their ambiguous status; they are a band that revels in their rough edges and broken boundaries. Although they may technically fall under the umbrella of the 'folk-punk' genre, Miller is an extraordinary singer-songwriter who often performs Beagle Club songs entirely by himself in concert. There is a lush quality to the music when the full band is attendance, replete with a cellist and a violinist who add orchestral quality to the sound.

The band also adheres to the DIY ethos of the punk genre and the mosh pits that have formed at their concerts certainly speak to their status as punk musicians. The social commentary that arises in Miller's lyrics speaks to the punk movement as well. Mike himself has said, "I like to think of us as a punk band, maybe not in sound, but certainly in content, ethics and feeling."

At the house show, Mike banters with the crowd; many of them long time friends and collaborators. Someone asks if he takes requests and he laughs, **"All I do is take requests. I'm here to entertain you, I'm like one of those monkeys with the cymbals, always clapping."**

"Play Mother!" Someone shouts and Mike laughs again but launches right into an acoustic version of the Danzig song. "Mother, tell your children not to walk my way!" He plays it straight through, an impressive imitation of a style that is very different from his own. Everyone cheers and sings along, shouting out more requests for his own songs that Mike obliges.

"Okay, okay. What song was I actually planning to play?" Mike asks us.

"I wrote this song a couple of years ago and I wanted to play it tonight because you know, four years ago Obama promised to close Guantanamo Bay and it still hasn't happened. It was a promise that we all fell for when we voted for him. I fell for it and you fell for it."

"I didn't!" A guy in the crowd named Robby, the organizer of tonight's event and one of the musicians who has known Mike for a while, shouts indignantly.

"Well, I did. " Mike concedes. He sets his guitar down and folds his hands together, bows his head as if in prayer.

"There are too many hands in too many pockets to lay all the blame on one," he sings. I am familiar with this song, called *Out of Respect*, although I have never seen him perform it live. Sung acapella, it is one of the best testaments to Mike's writing skills that I can think of. Powerful and chilling words, sung simply and alone.

"The other day, this guy I work with said goodbye to his son, says he joined the reserves to pay off his loans, and they're loaning him a gun. We don't know where he's heading first; we don't know when he'll be done. All we know is that he might have to kill or be killed by someone else's son."

It is this kind of social commentary that makes the music of Endless Mike and the Beagle Club so powerful. Mike started out "playing in loud rock and emo-ish bands" but had always wanted to "do a singer-songwriter kind of thing."

"For years I had this idea of being a 'folk singer' – even though I didn't actually ever listen to folk music." Although it may seem like the folk genre and the punk genre are very different realms of music, there is at least one element that they have in common – a political message can often be found in both areas. Mike's strong suit is tying together the personal and the political with clever lyrics that are often brutally honest.

> It's about making a parallel between successful revolutions and failed ones – both political and personal, and trying to understand what's at the center of all of that."

Endless Mike and the Beagle Club have recorded four albums in their decade together. Their first EP was released in 2004 followed by the album "Pieces of String Too Small to Use." The band his their stride with the classic album "The Husky Tenor" in 2006. Their last album "We Are Still At War" was released in 2008 and afterwards, the band kind of disappeared for a while. In 2009, the band stopped playing together for almost three years, as various members were involved in side projects. Mike himself has been the lead for at least two other bands that have garnered their own following including Emmett & Mary and The Hit and Miss Engines. Mike's brother Matt has his own side project called The Higher Fives who has opened for the Beagle Club (of which Matt himself is a member) on at least one occasion.

In listening to the progression of these records, I find that I can hear not only the evolution of the band but also the maturation of Mike as he grows into adulthood. The first album has a song about a friend's 21st birthday and the rowdy party that accompanied it. The last track of "The Husky Tenor" is a song called *Mr. Miller's Opus* wherein he sings "I know people my age with children and I know people my age with husbands and wives, even more people my age with high paying jobs, even more people my age with miserable lives." Follow this sentiment into the last album "We Are Still At War" where Mike dedicates a song to his friend's unborn child.

This takes us up to the new project that Endless Mike and the Beagle Club are working on, an album called "St. Paul" that has been in the works since last March and will hopefully be released

in the fall of 2013. On the new album, there is a song called *Try to See Your Life as a Whole* in which Mike sings, **"I'm a husband and a brother and a father and a son. I'm a selfish freedom fighter, I'm an autobiography writer and I don't need to explain myself to anyone."**

When I asked Mike what has changed since he has become a father, he told me that "before you're a parent you hear all this talk about how your worldview is going to change forever and that the same things won't be important to you anymore. It hasn't really been like that for me – I still believe in the same things, some of them even more."

In reference to the extended hiatus of the band, and why they have now come back together to record a new album, Mike reflects. **"it's about stepping away from what you've come to define yourself by in an attempt to find out who you really are.** It's about making a parallel between successful revolutions and failed ones – both political and personal, and trying to understand what's at the center of all of that.""St. Paul" reflects a new dimension of the Beagle Club. Mike tells me, "we used to just all play at the same time, going for a big wall of sound. This time, we're playing as an orchestra would – trying not to step on each other. There are more melodies, better arrangements, but still a lot of energy, a lot of chaos and percussion… **At the end of the day, it still sounds like the same band – it sounds like a bunch of friends playing music together."**

The first time I saw the band play together was at the Brillobox in Bloomfield. The room was crowded and I had jostled my way up to the front with camera in hand, overly excited to see the band whose music had come to mean so much to me personally. There was at least a dozen members of the band there at the time, though I'm not sure I can remember everyone who played that show as several members have gone through the revolving door since then. I do remember that the band spilled off the stage and into the crowd, dancing and singing with the audience members like we were one of them, like we were all part of the band. Several audience members picked up shakers, maracas and tambourines and shook them, adding to the cacophony of sound. It was like a party and we were all part of the band, we all got to revolve through that door and be part of the club.

Back at the house show where I watch Mike perform his Beagle Club songs solo, a sing-along is in full swing. He chooses to end his set with *Mr. Miller's Opus*, although the house is far too small for his keyboard that he typically uses to play this song. Instead he turns to a small keyboard on a bookshelf, one that both looks and sounds like a toy. **"I guess I'm doing the Doogie Howser version of this song,"** he quips and although the synthlike sound of the keyboard is hilarious in conjunction with this serious song, Mike makes it work. The crowd sings along with him, all of us crowding around him in the small room. As he gets to the last verse of the song, Mike stops playing and begins to walk away, conducting the sing-a-long as he goes. **He vanishes from the room as we all sing the final line of the song: "As I'm waiting to just disappear."**

Endless Mike and the Beagle Club are far from disappearing however. Reunited after a long hiatus, their new album promises to be one of their best works yet. Although St. Paul will not be released until the fall of 2013, the band is currently re-releasing all of their albums on their website. These are deluxe re-issues that come with extra stuff like live shows and demos. You can also find a collection of 'free sides' – a digital album of b-sides and unreleased songs on their bandcamp page. And next time Endless Mike and the Beagle Club come to town, be sure to check them out. It is always a party. ■

Check out the re-released albums at endlessmikeandthebeagleclub.bandcamp.com

You can also find more information about Endless Mike & The Beagle Club at myideaoffun.org/endlessmike

5 Minutes with DJ Salem Hilal

Exploring the new world of modern DJs.

TEXT Kate Miltenberger
PHOTOS Provided by subject.

In early March, I sat down with Salem Hilal over cupcakes and coffee to talk about his experiences as a DJ, the finer points of his craft, the future of the music industry, and why Jay-Z seems like a really nice guy.

Salem Hilal is a sophomore at CMU. He is a Pittsburgh native, as well as a very dapper gentleman. He has been DJing for about four and half years, but he's been playing music almost since he was an infant. "I started piano when I was four, and cello when I was five and a half." I ask him if that was just like playing a violin turned on its side, and he laughs.

The first time I saw Salem perform as a DJ was at the Pitt Rock Wall's Bouldering Competition. It was a non-profit event, and he was doing us a favor because he's a friend of my roommate; they interned together last summer, out in San Francisco at a tech startup. I met him when I went with said roommate to pick him and his DJ gear up for the competition. I was disappointed, honestly, when I saw him carrying a small box of regular sized speakers and a messenger bag. I thought, he must not be bringing his best stuff, otherwise how could he need so little?

At the competition, however, Salem poured life into the speakers, adding an element of entertainment and suspense to the event. The coolest part about Salem's DJing, though, is how excited he is to teach others about it. About an hour into the competition, I stopped by to see how he was doing, and I became immediately enthralled in his setup. How, I asked, does this work? We've all seen DJs at concerts or bars or just our high school prom, but this was different. It was immediate and low-pressure. Here was a friendly face at a daytime event, and he literally had nothing better to do at that exact moment than to pour himself another coffee and explain how it all worked.

It works like this. The program Salem uses, called Traktor, displays four tracks on his laptop. Then on his mini-DJ board, which he later tells me is called a controller, he has corresponding buttons and knobs, allowing the novice user to adjust the high, mid and low parts of the sound. For the advanced user, there are other tricks, like the effects knob, and the loop buttons. My favorite part? The two small simulation-discs that you can use to rewind the track, just like with a real turntable.

Later, at his apartment for our "official" interview, Salem shows me his real turntables. We experiment with the vinyl of Jay-Z's "Empire State of Mind". First it's the real song, with Alicia and the beat and all that, then Salem moves the needle and it's just Jay rapping. "Jay-Z's fairly easy, because he likes to release his a capellas to the DJ community. I don't know if they're actually done officially, but the fact that they're out there and they're studio grade is kind of a testament to the fact that he appreciates when people sample his music." He pauses, then adds, "He seems like a genuinely good guy." He laughs, "I would kind of like to meet him."

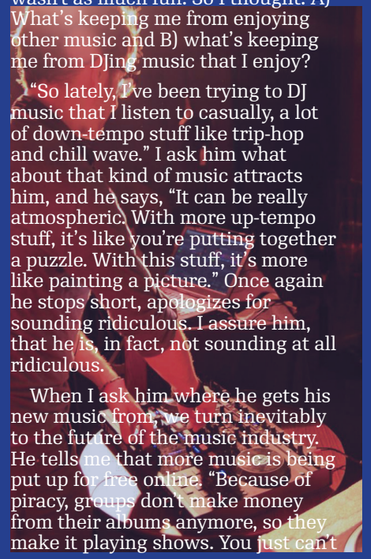
The problem with vinyl, Salem tells me, is that it's large and cumbersome. That's one of the beauties of modern DJing. "You can pack everything you need into a backpack," which I know to be true because that's how he arrived at our competition back in February. Yet the new technology is both a blessing and a curse.

He tells me that the new thing in DJ software right now is called "key matching". That means that not only will the computer analyze and match up songs with the same beats per minute (bpm), but it will also match songs in the same key. I ask him if it's like singers relying on auto-tune to fix their mistakes, but he says it's more like comparing manual and automatic cars. "DJing used to be way more difficult, because you had to use vinyl and learn how to match the beats and keys. There's this criticism of people who are relying on the computer too much." But the new technology isn't necessarily a crutch. Salem argues that DJing has not become 'easier'. "The technology just allows for more freedom to be creative with effects. We should do now what we couldn't do before."

Creativity in DJing is something that Salem has come to appreciate. "When I was in high school, I started DJing a bunch of Top 40 stuff at house parties. And then, after some time, I just kind of got over that." He tells me about how technology has made DJing cheaper and easier than ever to get into. "The DJ market is kind of saturated right now," he says. "I started to step away from the Top 40 thing because I wanted to make myself different, and I wanted to be doing something different. My goal is to find music that I'm comfortable with that's still unique enough to associate with me." He stops himself, suddenly worried. "That's not obnoxious, is it?" I laugh, reassuring him that it's not.

I ask him how he goes about finding new music. "I listen to music constantly. I have a show on CMU's radio, and I basically spend the whole hour each week exploring new music that I'm interested in from a personal perspective." This raises a question that's been nagging at me for a while: what do DJs listen to on their own time? Do they always listen to DJ music?

"For a while I stopped listening to music for fun, actually. I was only listening in the context of DJing. And it really started to bum me out. It just wasn't as much fun. So I thought: A) What's keeping me from enjoying other music and B) what's keeping me from DJing music that I enjoy?



"So lately, I've been trying to DJ music that I listen to casually, a lot of down-tempo stuff like trip-hop and chill wave." I ask him what about that kind of music attracts him, and he says, "It can be really atmospheric. With more up-tempo stuff, it's like you're putting together a puzzle. With this stuff, it's more like painting a picture." Once again he stops short, apologizes for sounding ridiculous. I assure him, that he is, in fact, not sounding at all ridiculous.

When I ask him where he gets his new music from, we turn inevitably to the future of the music industry. He tells me that more music is being put up for free online. "Because of piracy, groups don't make money from their albums anymore, so they make it playing shows. You just can't pirate the experience of being at a live event."

He also attributes the rise of EPs to the changing music industry. "Before really produced music came out, people would write an album and all the songs on the album would go together. Now there are a lot more EPs coming out, which are just collections of songs that were produced separately from each other. The only thing they have in common is that they were all made around the same time, roughly." He adds later, "I'm not saying that all EPs aren't well thought out. It's just a trend I've been noticing."

I ask him what he thinks about this change, and he gives me two replies. "First," he says, "the music industry is resilient. Second, I think giving music away for free is a good direction." We talk about the pay-what-you-want model most famously employed by Radiohead on their album In Rainbows. "You know," he says, "I recently discovered this new group that had pay-what-you-want pricing, so I downloaded their album for free and listened to it. And I realized I really liked it, so I went back and paid for it like it was a full-price album. And I think they deserve every last cent of that."

Our conversation turns to his own performances. And I use the word "performance" very seriously, because DJing really is just that. It's live and on the fly, and it's about reading the crowd and understanding what they want to hear but also giving them what they've never heard before. "Often people aren't there for the music that they know, they're there for the music that the DJs know," Salem says.

I ask him to tell me how he prepares for a show. "I like to make sure I have a solid amount of music in a wide variety, so that if I can tell the crowd isn't reacting well to one type of music, I can switch without feeling too uncomfortable. You really can tell, they either won't be dancing as much, or they just won't care." He pauses to think, "But when you drop a song and people just cheer a little bit, that's such a good feeling. That's how you know you're really clicking with them. Performing is a lot of fun."

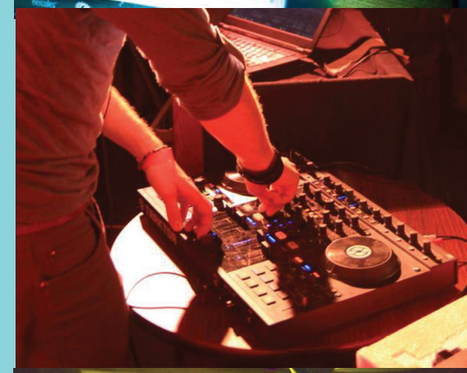
That being said, I ask, do you have a plan when you start? "I make sure I have some sort of plan going in, but really you just kind of play what you feel. It's not like, this song comes after this one. You react to the crowd. You essentially facilitate this interplay between the crowd and the DJ. There is some disconnect that comes from computers. They call it "Serato-face" when you get too into your laptop," he says, referring to Serato, a popular electronic DJing program. "Keeping your eyes off your laptop is a big deal. You have to be careful that you know your equipment well enough that you trust it, that you don't need to rely on your laptop."

I think back to when I saw Salem DJ for the first time, and I know this isn't an issue for him. Most of the time he's holding onto his headphones, dancing a little bit and watching the crowd. And when he twists an effects knob, he does it with a flourish. It's not hard to see he's having a good time.

"I DJ because I enjoy it, and people ask me to DJ because they know I will enjoy doing it for them. And it's fun, you know? It really is. It's a lot of fun."

You can find Salem Hilal floating on the airwaves of 88.3 WRCT and having a blast in people's basements at house parties throughout the area.■

> "Salem argues that DJing has not become 'easier'. "The technology just allows for more freedom to be creative with effects. We should do now what we couldn't do before."



In Focus

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No more starving artists! A local advocacy group fights against health care inequality with an award-winning online documentary series.

TEXT Hadley Pratt
PHOTOS Emily O'Donnell

HEALTHY ARTISTS

The screen fades from black into the glimpse of a face: a green eye scanning the landscape behind a pair of black frames, a tuft of brown hair. Melancholy chords from an acoustic guitar sound as a bike pedal appears with the words "An Appeal."

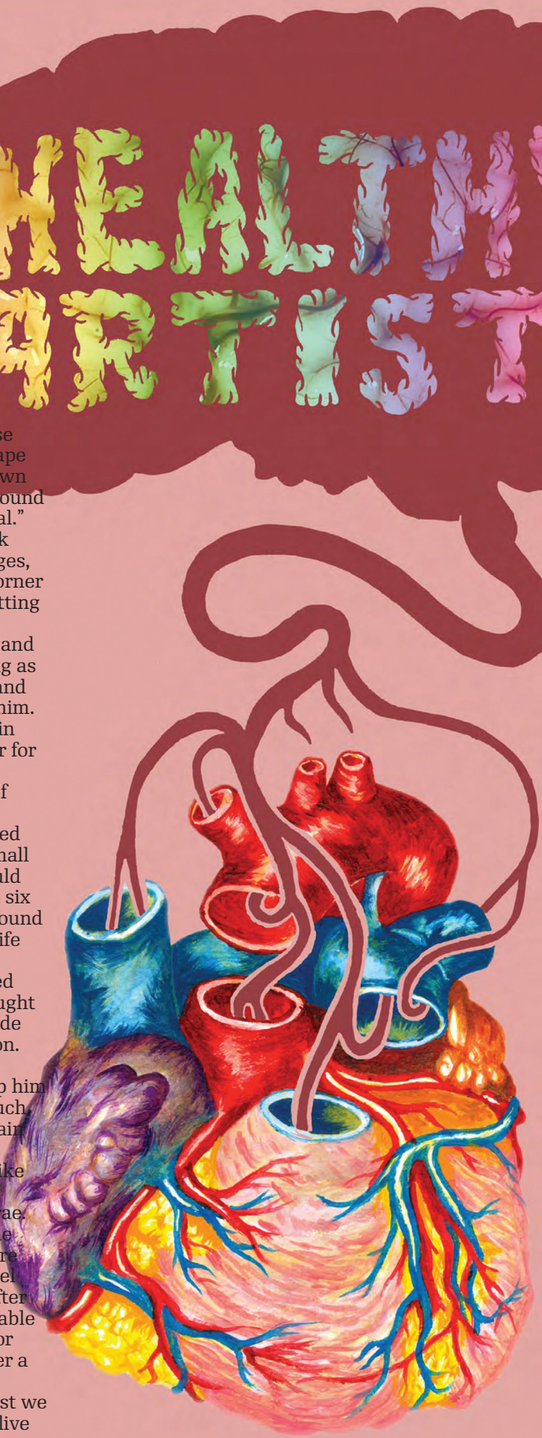
A girl in a cream sweater and lace-trimmed tank top replaces a medicine bottle belonging to "Menges, Daniel" on screen. The words in the lower right corner identify her as "Alison Tan, Daniel's girlfriend." Sitting outside in a plastic lawn chair, against a lush ivy backdrop Alison smiles as she describes how she and Daniel met at an art supply store. "He was working as a cashier there and I would go in, and just loiter, and buy single pencils, just to find a reason to talk to him. One day I decided to be courageous and I walked in there and just asked him out. We've been together for about half a year now."

Daniel Menges moved to Pittsburgh in the fall of 2011 after graduating from the School of Art and Design at Purchase College, SUNY where he studied photography and sculpture. He found a job at a small art supply store close enough to home that he could commute by bike, a habit he had kept for the past six years. He settled in and began to learn his way around the local arts community. Then, in one night, his life changed in an instant.

"The night of the accident was terrifying. I pulled up and at first I didn't know that it was him. I thought that someone had just thrown their bike on the side and then left a pile of clothes beside it," says Alison. "When I realized it was Daniel crumpled on the ground, I immediately ran to him and tried to prop him up against a tree...I had never seen him in that much pain before. I hadn't seen anybody in that much pain before."

Neither Alison nor Daniel knew then that the bike accident that left Daniel in a crumpled pile on the street had also resulted in three fractured vertebrae. Afraid of the cost of an ambulance and a trip to the emergency room, Alison took Dan to her bed where she put ice and a bag of hot rice on his back. Daniel didn't go to the hospital until the next morning, after he realized that the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (known also as the Affordable Care Act or Obamacare), provided him medical coverage under a parent's insurance plan until the age of 26.

"It was the debt we were thinking about, the cost we were thinking about it. And that's the society we live in. It's not what's best for our bodies, it's what we



◀◀ *Left: Andy Scott's design grabbed first place in the Healthy Artists Movie Poster exihibition, image courtesy of Healthy Artists.*

◀◀ *Left: Healthy Artists founder Julie Sokolow is caught in a rare moment in front of the camera and not behind it.*

◀◀ *Far Left: The Healthy Artists Movie Poster Exhibition flyer.*

◀◀ *Above: Dan Byers, Carnegie Museum of Art's Richard Armstrong Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, reads off the winners of the movie poster design contest.*

◀◀ *Left: Be Well! Pittsburgh founder Jude Vachon rallies the crowd before the winning poster designs are announced.*

can afford under this broken system," says Alison to the camera. Without the insurance made available to him by the Affordable Care Act, Daniel learned from a physician that the cost of his hospital visits, scans, and prescriptions would have totaled well over $10,000.

Daniel is just one of 3.6 million young Americans who rely on access to their parents' health insurance through the Affordable Care Act. Though medical coverage lessened the financial impact of Daniel's accident, it is not always enough. 60% of medical bankruptcies in the United States happen to people with health insurance, but those without insurance benefits feel the aftershock of a sudden illness, accident, or underlying condition the hardest.

"An Appeal," the short documentary about Daniel's accident, appeared online in June 2012, a week before the Affordable Care Act faced repeal. On June 28, 2012, the Supreme Court upheld it, permitting the continuation of the United States health care system's largest overhaul since the 1960s. The timely video caught the eye of Huffington Post's Wendell Potter, who shouted out via Twitter at its makers: a Pittsburgh-based health care advocacy group called Healthy Artists.

19 to 29 year olds make up 30% of uninsured America, the largest uninsured demographic in the country.

A nod from HuffPo isn't the only national attention that Healthy Artists has garnered. In April 2012, a Healthy Artists film won the Karen Peterson Audience Choice Award at the Progressive Visions Film Festival. In November 2012, the documentary "American Artist" featuring Sigh MeltingStar, a Pittsburgh multimedia artist living with Crohn's disease, took third place in the international Disposable Film Festival's Health Create-a-thon. In January 2013, Healthy Artists began guest-blogging for social activist/filmmaker Michael Moore's website.

Since January 2012, Healthy Artists has filmed and produced 30 short films and counting in which Pittsburgh artists and creatives talk about their lives, work, and struggles within the health care system. Founder and local documentary filmmaker Julie Sokolow jokingly describes Healthy Artists as "an indie Cribs for social justice" or "hipsters for health care," but Healthy Artists is more than a fad masquerading as social consciousness.

Julie Sokolow, a University of Pitt graduate, indie musician, and documentary filmmaker, started paying attention to the state of America's health care system after a friend and the copy of T.R. Reid's 2010 book The Healing of America: A Global Quest for Better, Cheaper, and Fairer Health Care convinced her that health care would be the definitive social justice issue of the 21st century. Julie also considers Michael Moore's 2007 documentary film SiCKO as an influence on her entry into the world of healthcare advocacy. Both works critically examine the United States' pre-Affordable Care Act, for-profit health care system and compare it to the universal systems favored in other industrialized nations like Canada, Cuba, the United Kingdom, and France.

Above: Curious eventgoers peruse the movie poster prints table, graciously attended by Original *staff.* ▶▶

Right: Glossy print versions of the Healthy Artists movie posters designed by local artists and Pitt students. ▶▶

She began volunteering for Health Care 4 All PA, a non-profit organization that educates people about single-payer healthcare in the midst of the Occupy Movement and the end of Arab Spring. During this period, Julie observed change, social reform, and activism growing out of youth movements and driven by new media.

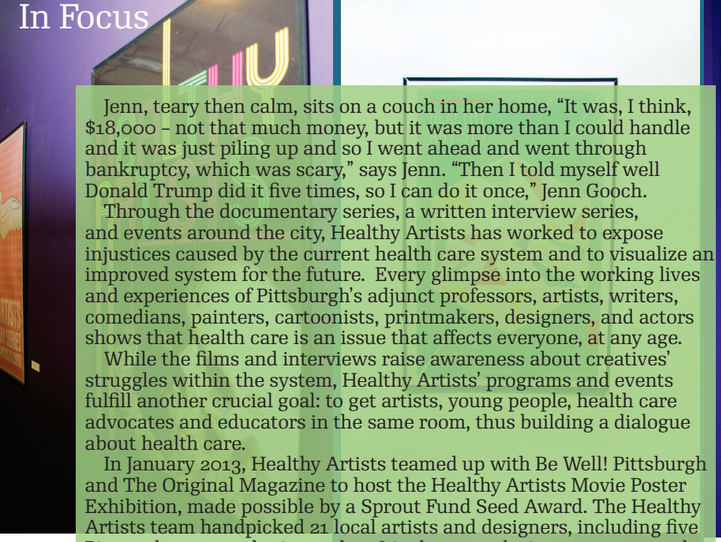
In 2008, Julie drew inspiration from the strong youth movement that buoyed Obama's first campaign to victory. In the 2008 election, art, specifically Shepard Fairey's iconic images of Obama with the slogans "Hope" and "Change", helped young people to engage with politics. She wondered why youths hadn't fully connected with the struggle for universal health care, an issue that directly affects 19 to 29 year olds who make up 30% of uninsured America, the largest uninsured demographic in the country.

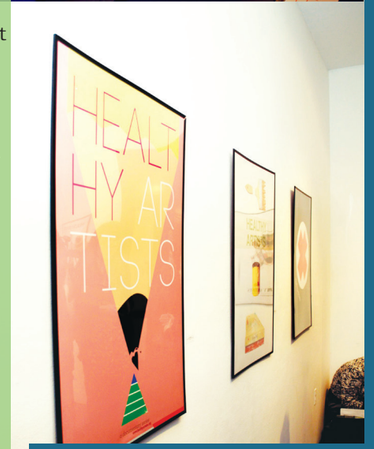
At the same time, Julie began to examine her own career as a documentary filmmaker and to reject the assumption that the lives of the creatively employed require a constant struggle for stability. Healthy Artists was born out of the desire to break the "starving artist" cliche, and grounded by the belief that all Americans have an equal right to health care, that they shouldn't have to struggle daily, and that no one should have to choose between paying rent or receiving health care. Julie centered the organization around youth and artists because both are greatly affected by health care and add vitality to the fight for change.

"When artists and young people bring their own personalities and quirky sensibilities to a movement, they rejuvenate it," says Julie.

Artists and creatives, who often work freelance, part-time, or nontraditional jobs that don't offer medical benefits, make up a large portion of uninsured America. In the most recent Healthy Artists documentary, Jenn Gooch, an artist and musician from Texas who relocated to Pittsburgh to pursue studies at Carnegie Mellon University, describes how medical bankruptcy due to a pre-existing condition has made it nearly impossible for her to advance her career and to open a small business.

"It was $18,000 – not that much money, but it was more than I could handle and it was just piling up, so I went through bankruptcy, which was scary… Then I told myself well Donald Trump did it five times, so I can do it once."





Left: An array of different styles and designs promoting Healthy Artists adorned Modern Formations' walls during the event. Beginning in April 2013, you can view some of the top movie posters at Commonplace Coffeehouse in Squirrel Hill. The Carnegie Library in Oakland will display all 21 in May and June.

Below: An event goer gets lost in a copy of The Original Issue 11.

Jenn, teary then calm, sits on a couch in her home, "It was, I think, $18,000 – not that much money, but it was more than I could handle and it was just piling up and so I went ahead and went through bankruptcy, which was scary," says Jenn. "Then I told myself well Donald Trump did it five times, so I can do it once," Jenn Gooch.

Through the documentary series, a written interview series, and events around the city, Healthy Artists has worked to expose injustices caused by the current health care system and to visualize an improved system for the future. Every glimpse into the working lives and experiences of Pittsburgh's adjunct professors, artists, writers, comedians, painters, cartoonists, printmakers, designers, and actors shows that health care is an issue that affects everyone, at any age.

While the films and interviews raise awareness about creatives' struggles within the system, Healthy Artists' programs and events fulfill another crucial goal: to get artists, young people, health care advocates and educators in the same room, thus building a dialogue about health care.

In January 2013, Healthy Artists teamed up with Be Well! Pittsburgh and The Original Magazine to host the Healthy Artists Movie Poster Exhibition, made possible by a Sprout Fund Seed Award. The Healthy Artists team handpicked 21 local artists and designers, including five Pitt students, to submit a 24 by 36 inch poster design to represent the documentary series. They also assembled an elite panel of national art stars from the Carnegie Museum of Art, Criterion Collection, MASS MoCA, Steeltown Film Factory, and the Warhol Museum to determine their top three favorite designs. Winning artists received cash prizes and the first place design is now the official Healthy Artists poster.

On Friday, January 4th, during the Unblurred Penn Avenue art crawl, the Movie Poster Exhibition packed ModernFormations' gallery with art enthusiasts, students, and health care advocates alike. Fun and informative activities planned by representatives from Planned Parenthood, Women of Color for Reproductive Justice, What If Post, The Thomas Merton Center, and Scott Tyson of Healthcare 4 All PA engaged attendees while educating them about health care options.

As a young person, navigating the confusing mess of health care can be daunting at best, especially as the U.S. transitions into a new system. While it's easy to put off worrying about medical coverage while you're still in college, ignorance can hurt you in the long run. Organizations like Healthy Artists can help educate you about the current system and help you to imagine an even better system for the future.

Although the Affordable Care Act expands coverage to more than 30 million people and eliminates the worst insurance company abuses for those already with coverage, it's not perfect. It's just one small step in the right direction toward regulating treatment, insurance, and prescription costs and providing universal health care. Millions of Americans still lack health insurance and the ability to pay for it.

"If you wake up one morning and need an ambulance, it will cost you about $1,000 for a ride down the street," says Julie.

Today, Healthy Artists, in collaboration with Health Care 4 All PA, focuses its efforts on attaining single-payer universal health care in Pennsylvania. A "single-payer" system is like Medicare made available to all Americans and not just those over 65 or with special conditions. In such a system, a consolidated government-run organization collects all fees and pays all costs associated with health care, for everyone. In the current system, thousands of organizations fulfill this function, adding to the confusion that surrounds insurance coverage and making health care harder to regulate.

"Arts and humanities graduates across America are being forced to ask: 'Should I work a traditional 9 to 5 for the stability or should I follow my passions and what I'm good at?'," says Julie. "Single-payer universal health care is about a true investment in the talented, intelligent, and hard-working people of this country."

In order to reach the goal of single-payer universal health care, Healthy Artists needs help. They're currently looking for ambitious college students to get involved and to possibly start related organizations on campus. Visit www.healthyartists.org for more information about how to get involved and check out their documentary series and written interviews to learn more about Pittsburgh's creative minds. ■

...so now what?

A message brought to you by:

Healthy Artists
healthyartists.org

Universal health care is an **ethical guarantee** in first world nations such as Canada, France, the UK, and Germany. It means that every single person in those countries receives the medical treatment they need, when they need it, and the government picks up close to 100% of the bill.

The US is a very different story. In the US, people die simply because they don't have health insurance. People go into debt and bankruptcy due to medical bills. After graduating college, people are often forced to base career decisions on the availability of health insurance.

Fortunately, President Obama established the Affordable Care Act (aka Obamacare), which allows individual states to create universal health care systems. For example, Vermont recently passed a type of universal health care called "single-payer", the best health care system according to President Obama.

We need your help to bring **single-payer** universal health care to Pennsylvania! College students were essential in Obama's 2008 election, and will be essential in bringing universal health care to this state and the country as a whole.

An Economic Impact Study is being released in 2013 showing how single-payer health care would benefit PA. There will be rallies and events and we'll need volunteers! There are leadership roles and internships available. No prior knowledge/political savvy is necessary. **College students** across all disciplines can help, and we'll tell you how.

Simply email **healthyartists@gmail.com** and put **"leadership info"** in the subject line. In the email, tell us your name and what you are studying. Feel free to include more about yourself or attach a resume. We'll get back to you ASAP with more info! ■

GET INVOLVED!

{Internships & More}

Why Care?

• Single-payer saves lives. It provides health care to everybody and encourages people to seek early treatment before health conditions become worse.

• Single-payer provides care. It provides comprehensive, fair care to all Americans including check-ups, prescriptions, ER visits, extended treatments, dental work, eye care, mental health services, and absolutely any other kind of medically necessary care.

• Single-payer creates jobs. Employers currently spend a lot of money providing employees with private health insurance. With single-payer, the government picks up the bill instead. This allows businesses to flourish and really helps small, independent businesses to blossom.

• Single-payer saves money. Currently, we have a for-profit system that allows high-up executives to profit a lot off of the sicknesses of American people. That's why the average ambulance ride will cost you $1,000. Single-payer reduces unfair and unnecessary administrative spending and saves 99% of people tremendous amounts of money.

• Single-payer = freedom. It means that no matter what kind of job you have, you will receive quality health care. When health insurance is not dependent on your job, you have the freedom to pick a job based on your dreams, rather than your fears.

"Single-payer" means that one government run organization would collect all health care fees and pay all health care costs. Currently, tens of thousands of organizations are at work, when only one is needed. The result is administrative waste that makes health care costs go up for ordinary Americans.

Single Dadditude

Sunt pueri pueri, puerilia tractant – Children are children and therefore do childish things, Latin proverb.

TEXT Joshua M. Patton
PHOTOS Provided by Author

Do you want to hand the baby to Mama now?"

"No."

The nurse looked at me with surprise, not expecting me to resist handing her the baby—my daughter Madison—born only moments before. Madison's mother was resting on the bed, her eyes closed. The two doctors and nurses were fussing around with the placenta, it born more recently. Yet, I couldn't imagine willingly giving the girl in my arms to anyone, even her mother. It was as if at that moment we became adversaries. Ironically, an hour before, I half-hoped that something went wrong, that somehow this would end without me being a father. Even though there would be tears and regrets, I felt that I was far more able to mourn a hypothetical child than raise an actual one. But what did I know? I was only 21.

Much has been written about what one's twenties are supposed to be. Most recently an author named Megan Jay was interviewed in USA Today urging people in their twenties to start walking the path to success immediately. Katy Waldman wrote in January for Slate.com quoting research that suggests we make our best memories during this time in our lives, so take the time to make some memories. Nathan Heller waxes lyrical in The New Yorker in an attempt to understand the appeal. During my twenties I became a father, served overseas twice, left my childhood home and returned. I traveled far and ended up right back where I started.

I never wanted children. I was raised without a father and I saw children as a burden. I had dreams of moving to New York or Los Angeles, telling stories, going to fancy parties, and hooking up with beautiful and powerful women right before their big break into fame and fortune. Nowhere in this fantasy was there room for Diaper Genies or bottle liners. Not that my aversion to parenthood was wholly shallow. I **had a real concern that I was not capable of bearing the responsibility of a father. I wasn't even that worried about all of the (literal and figurative) baby shit**—I knew that would pass with time—but instead feared more the expectations the child would have of me beyond those days and into their teenage years and adulthood. **Anyone can care for a baby, but who can handle the task of shaping someone into a moral and just person? Or at least not an asshole?**

The day of my daughter's birth could have gone a lot worse than it did. Madison broke her way through her mother's amniotic sac shortly after 7:30 A.M. on a Tuesday morning in September. The labor was remarkably quick and without incident. Well, there was one incident, but it wasn't threatening just weird. Madison's mother rested on the table, legs akimbo. A fresh-faced doctor, a stranger to both of us, came into the room and said he was there to check on her cervical dilation. He put his hand under the sheet and, presumably, into Madison's mother. He then made the same sort of face you would expect if he had put his ear up to it and heard the ocean. He walked out of the room and returned with two doctors and they all took their turn "checking out" whatever it was that was so interesting. Neither Madison's mother nor I ever got an explanation other than, "Oh no, everything's fine." But I digress.

When Madison emerged into the world, they handed the naked caterwauling thing, covered in blood and what looked like old silly string, to her mother for a second and then whisked her to the warming table to clean her up and examine her. I abandoned my post up by her mother's head and went to look at this little bundle of responsibility. Madison's mother forced me to talk to her belly a number of times. I felt silly doing it, but I would always comply because it made Madison's mother happy. Yet, after the nurses left the warming table and it was just me and the infant, I said to her, **"Nice to meet you, baby." Her light brown eyes were wide and scanning the room. I only spoke because I thought I saw fear in them.** Even though it seems scientifically impossible, her eyes locked on my face (or at least the direction from which my voice came) and I swear I saw familiarity. It was at that moment that I fell wholly and completely in love with my daughter, an emotion so powerful it forever changed my definition of the word.

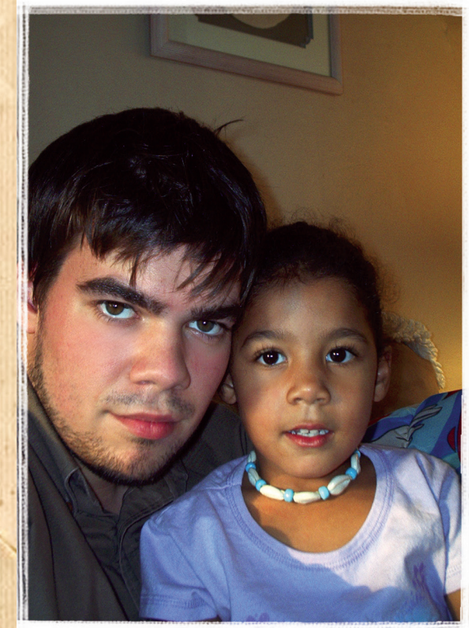
He then made the same sort of face you would expect if he had put his ear up to it and heard the ocean.

There is an idyllic quality—one that almost flies in the face of reality—to the idea of the two-parent home. That children "do better"—which can mean myriad things depending on the study—in two-parent homes has been known for years and backed up by research both anecdotal and empirical. Frankly, it makes sense. Even though my relationship with Madison's mother is contentious at best, Madison loves us both equally and would certainly enjoy having both of us around at all times. The problem is that would mean that Madison's mother and I would be around each other at all times. If the measure of a couple is taken by how they deal with stressful situations, we didn't just come up short; we weren't even on the scale. For me, parenting always seemed easier when Madison's mother and I were apart.

During the periods of separation from Madison's mother, but before that separation became wholly permanent, it was always better when it was just me and the child. Without her mother hovering over me and critiquing every little deviation from her mothering style, I was able to discovering my fathering style. When I would return Madison to her mother, I would feel an almost crippling sense of loss, but one I could overcome by indulging in varied recklessness.

For the reluctant father, single-parenthood is the best deal going. For some of the time, your every waking moment is absorbed by caring for your child. Infants and toddlers are exhausting, yet rather than relax when they finally go to sleep, you find yourself walking past their room and checking on them. As a single-parent, you can never fully let your guard down. However, when the other parent comes to relieve you of that responsibility, you have the (limited) freedom to do whatever it is that you want to do. When Madison would return to her mother, I would find my childless friends around my age (in the early-to-late twenties) who were inevitably doing something that seemed more exciting than restocking diaper bags and cutting up hot dogs into tiny, choke-proof bites.

Once Madison's mother and I permanently separated, my life continued this way. A few months after my 31st birthday, I attended the house-cooling party of some friends I had made while taking classes at the University of Pittsburgh. They were moving and that house served as a place to gather, especially for those of us who lived off-campus. And the weekend of the send-off happened to be a weekend I was free of Daddy-duty. There were at least two dozen people there and I was one of the oldest guests and certainly the only parent in attendance. As is typical with collegiate parties, there wasn't nearly enough seats for everyone. At about 2:45 A.M. I was sitting on the ratty carpet next to a woman seven years my junior, trying to figure out if I was hitting on her or not. My phone buzzed in my pocket. When I checked it, I saw a text message from an unknown number.



> My two lives—that of a responsible father and of a single man in the collegiate world—collided like never before.

It read, "HI! this is madison. i got a phone!!!!!!!" The text was then followed by a picture message of her cat lying outside sometime earlier that day. My two lives—that of a responsible father and of a single man in the collegiate world—collided like never before. Sure, there had been times when I was out, inebriated, or otherwise engaged in reckless behavior and my phone would ring and I would have to extricate myself from the "fun" and be a father. However, because Madison was now armed with a mobile communication device, I was never more than an instant away from having to interact with my daughter.

The irony did not escape me when I replied to my daughter's first text to me, arriving at a time of night when most other text communication was decidedly less wholesome, "That's great! Shouldn't you be sleeping?" The girl next to me was talking about travelling during her study abroad in Europe with her friends, I had tuned out of the conversation entirely. My phone buzzed again with my daughter's reply.

"not tired. its summer."

The internal dilemma at that moment was all encompassing. Before me was an entirely new way to connect with my daughter. The girl who didn't want to tell me about her day at school—other than it was "boring"—would send me text updates of all of the inner dramas of the fourth grade. Hell, anytime my daughter wanted to communicate with me, I jumped on the chance because as time goes on, those opportunities come less and less frequently. That night, I told her that she should go to bed once more and then responded to every message she sent. While my friends partied around me, my interest in participating waned because I waited for each new text from the person I love the most.

It's always hard leaving Madison when I take her to her mother's or, even worse, drop her off at school. I had been lying to myself by thinking that when I didn't have her was when I could have fun. The fun—going to house parties, clubs, or bars—was just a way to numb myself to the absence of my daughter. I had been lying to myself, I didn't have the best of both worlds, I just tried to make the best of the one without Madison.

When Madison was very young, our days together were often timed segments of varied activities. We didn't have a schedule taped to the refrigerator or anything, but I knew how long certain activities held her interest. Wake-up/breakfast/getting dressed was about 90 minutes, mostly because Madison has always been a very slow eater. After that, we would draw or color for about an hour, usually 40 minutes. After that, there would be another 90 minutes of doing "lessons," or some kind of overt learning activity. Then either an hour for lunch and then a 1-2 hour nap (that took at least a half-hour to get to her to sleep for) or vice-versa. After the nap, we'd go outside if it was nice or we would doing something active in the house like Hide-N-Seek or, when she got older, Lazer Tag. When that was over and with preparing dinner a concern (especially if she took a late nap), there would be 2-3 hours of playing with her toys. She had her stuffed animals—which she called "Soft Kids"—and the plastic action figures—which she called the "Hard Kids"—which could occupy her attention for hours. She would come up with little stories, but most of the time was invested in the set-up.

I would most often spend at least half of toys-time, laying on the floor with her as she arranged the creatures, often annoying her by making certain toys act of out of their typical characters or getting key plot points wrong. It was the best time of the day with her, followed closely by bedtime story-time. Madison would fight sleep, asking for me to read another book or chapter—once we'd moved into multi-chapter stories. When caught up with the schedule, that can seem tiring—which it is—and unpleasant—which it can be, but never is in hindsight. The timing of the resurgence of superheroes in pop-culture and the resurgence of 80's childhood icons like the Transformers also played a role. I played with toys longer than most of my peers. I, like my daughter, enjoyed creating stories about the characters. Once I was given a typewriter, the toys were put away for good.

For Madison, as she has gotten older, her interests have matured. She has an affinity for sculpture and she began to craft her own toys out of poly-clay. She created her own Facebook page, which I discovered when she sent me a friend request. I was against it, but I knew that if I made her delete the page, she'd just create another one. We no longer play with stuffed animals or action figures together, trading the toys for video games like Minecraft or Lego something-or-other. There are moments when I am nostalgic for my little girl's infancy or toddler years. Only those moments are fleeting, because she has grown into such a dynamic and intelligent young person that I find myself excited for the future—e.g. the teenage years—rather than dreading them.

One evening recently, I was having a conversation with the younger brother of a former classmate. I had a crush on his sister, and I use such juvenile terminology because our age difference—our experience difference—made such a relationship seem unrighteous. Still, they're good people. He even asked me about my daughter and I told him that I was now one of those parents whose child had an iPhone. He laughed, waited a beat, and then asked, "So, what's her number?" We laughed in the moment; the joke was just the right amount of crass for a crowded bar on a Friday. It was only later I realized that the age difference between his sister and I was the same as between him and my daughter. Time feels different here.

There is no small amount of regret that comes with watching children grow into adulthood. Regret for the loss of childish games and the unconditional affection that comes with wholly dependent youth. Regret for those first times you truly let them down. Regret for those moments when they just so desperately wanted your attention for something that was mostly unimportant but you couldn't tear yourself away from your own bullshit for even a minute. Regret for the bad advice. Regret for those moments when you see your own anger, your own insecurity, your own flaws reflected in the adult the child becomes. Regret that as time passes you will certainly become far more needy than needed. Yet, even with all that regret, they are still your greatest accomplishment and best hope for immortality. ■

BENEATH THE FRAME

The life of a transgender shop owner in East Liberty.

TEXT & Photos Joseph Edgar

I needed some glass cut to fit an old picture frame. My friend Casey pointed me in the direction of Miller Frame on Centre Avenue in East Liberty. "Reasonably priced and the owner is trans", she told me over the phone. "It's this guy Cooper I know from high school, it's his father's shop." "Wait, Trans? So, like, the owner used to be his mom?" I was corrected, "No, **Wendi is Cooper's dad and she used to be a man."**

This section of Centre, where the neighborhoods of Shadyside join with East Liberty has been strategically named by developers, The East End. Gentrification has set-in, where once stood veritable blight now is a trendy neighborhood of shops and ample parking. An apartment building that had been abandoned for more than a decade is now under renovation, a many leveled parking garage is going up next door. An intrepid new Target has opened at the end of the street. On the opposite end, Whole Foods has become a Mecca for the professional health conscious yuppie set. Centre Ave. and Penn Circle South have been rerouted in order to allow traffic to move more freely.

Upon entering Wendi's framing shop, a bell is triggered by the opening of the front door. In the window box facing the street is a dusty aloe plant and a large poster of President Obama designed by Shepard Fairy. Under the president's face is the word "Change," the winning slogan from the 2008 election. In the other window are some empty boxes and three sharp shooter trophies from a state-wide competition. The names on each of the trophies are Wendi Miller.

My arrival announced, Wendi emerged from the workroom in the back, all jovial hellos and how- can-I-help-yous. She slipped into easy banter, her voice all at once soft and masculine, gravely yet gentle. She put those sharp shooter trophies in the window to deter potential robbers. It's cheaper than an alarm and in all of her years in business her shop has never been robbed. "I got my gun license years back after witnessing a shooting. I was helpless; all I could do was get down and watch two men get shot in front of me. I still have a license to carry, but I rarely do these days."

She walks with an unsteady gate and a low center of gravity, her hips a bit tight from age, the weight of her chest pushing her torso forward. She steadied herself on the counter as she approached me, nestling into the space next to the cash register, and lifted herself up on a stool. Hexagonal glasses rest atop a slightly crooked nose. She wears a wig a shade between auburn and maroon, combed tightly around her face in a sort of bob. Her face is a bit freckled, pale. Age is apparent in the wrinkles around her mouth and eyes, the skin of her neck. However the triumphant blue eyes that are have been permanently outlined are young, un-dulled, and vibrant – much like the woman behind the counter.

Her voice is a little low, scratchy from years of smoking, of which she quit decades ago. There is kindness in her eyes, in her voice. She is quick to joke, to smirk at the idea of something absurd. In spite of her amiability she is not a push over, wizened by her years in the business, her encounter with every type. Leafing through a magazine her hands are neither masculine nor feminine, somehow existing between the two, like the hands of an adolescent boy enlarged to fit a grown woman's arms.

A woman around my parent's age in a white T-shirt, Wendi also wore blue jeans that sat high on her waist and orthopedic shoes with Velcro straps. Not mean in tone but superior, the posture of one who knows her craft. Her work is this. "Oh. My. God" she said quietly and almost to herself staring directly at me, eyes wide. We became peers then and perhaps that was her intention. She quickly jotted down some numbers on the back of a torn open envelope. I gathered that she was interested in me too - thought maybe I was quirky but not insufferable – my usual m.o..

"Come on back," Wendi invited me into the workroom of the shop after I had expressed some curiosity in its inner-workings. Or perhaps she felt bad for me for not being able to identify a sixteenth of an inch. The workroom is where all of the big equipment is housed - the computerized mat cutter and the table saws. The staple gun powered by air compression. This is where she and Carla, the shop's lone employee, spend their days and weeks churning out frames. They have developed a formula through a fourteen-year collaboration and can turn out frames, even large ones, in under ten minutes. In the event of a framing emergency, a person can wait, drive-thru style, as Wendi on matte cutting and Carla on carpentry, assemble a frame.

Carla is also a trans-woman. She met Wendi when she first moved to Pittsburgh and soon took a job in the shop, thinking she'd only stay-on briefly. Carla is a rock musician (guitar) and is from eastern-Ohio. Her look resembles June Carter Cash's with Dolly Parton's tits. She was listening to Rodriguez, of Searching for Sugarman fame, eyeing a matte board through asemetrical pig-tails. Feeling the music, she tells me of her daughter who has a high-security job in the government, initially hired under Bush II. "Way up there," she told me. And: "When the FBI wants to know about you they don't talk to you, they talk to your neighbors." Her daughter met a man from a conservative background. They got serious. She told him that he had to get completely okay with Carla or it wouldn't work out. "He was so nervous when it came time to meet me. He didn't want to say the wrong thing," Carla said with wide eyes, astounded by the complexity of her fellow man. Carla is now a grandparent.

As I got the tour, a woman entered the workshop from the alley entrance. This was Dorcas, Wendi's friend, former wife, and Cooper's mom. Wendi's chubby rotweiler, who had largely ignored me after an initial hello, bounded up to her in a familiar way. A photograph of the family from 1982, a Christmas card welcoming their new born son shows Dorcas dressed as the Virgin Mary and Cooper in swaddling clothes as the baby Jesus. Wendi is costumed as the proud father Joseph in full-antiquated garb; a shirt to her knees tied with a rope, hairy legs, sandals, head covered in the style of the ancients. The quintessential manger stands erect in the background, hay in its stalls. The backdrop shows the star of Bethlehem twinkling brightly in that holiest of night skies. Wendi is looking down at her family as Dorcas looks down at baby Cooper, who is looking at her breasts. Only his little round head and a sprinkling of blonde hair is visible. **In the photo, Wendi has a long black beard that reaches down to a pre-op barrel chest. This was about eight years before the change and her name then was Bill.**

As William Henry Miller III, Wendi had never felt comfortable. The male body for her was not right - her penis, annoying. The image she had of herself was that of a girl, of dresses and long hair. In her mind, her voice was feminine. Somehow she knew that this was inappropriate, that it was wrong. Who knows how Bill came to learn this? **The way that we mold little children, reprimanding the qualities in them that we find inappropriate. Girls pink, boys blue.** Something was working on the young mind of Bill and she was very unhappy. A good day was when she wasn't the last boy chosen in a pick-up game.

On the last day of school in the third grade, Bill's teacher had the children number a piece of paper from one to ten. She was going to ask the class some questions. This was in the days before ballpoint pens and each student had a small inkwell at their desk. The paper was of newspaper quality and was difficult to write on. One had to be sure not to take too much or too little ink onto the pen. An abundance of ink meant blotches, for the paper was of such a quality that it absorbed the ink like a sponge. A deficiency in ink and one was essentially scratching at the paper – the calamity of giving fresh ink to an eight-year-old child. The teacher came to the last question: **"If you are a girl would you rather be a little boy, or if you are a little boy would you rather be a little girl?" Young Bill was terrified. How could the teacher know her secret, her shame?** How was she able to read her mind? Bill lied, answered no to the question.

Bill moved forward in life in a male body, repressing a growing rage. He lied. Living in the lie made him introverted, constantly hiding an identity he was unable to express. Puberty hit and William became doubly confused. She felt that she was a girl but her body was mutating uncontrollably, further pushing her away from the true vision she had of herself. With the influx of testosterone, William's was becoming a man's body with erections and facial hair. Furthermore, she had the libido of a man and a sexual desire for women. Perhaps it would have been easier

if she were gay, if she could live her life as a gay man with effeminate tendencies. With the added burden of sexuality, William became mired down in her maleness.

William graduated from Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh with a degree in sculpture. Shortly afterward she and some friends opened a framing business in Oakland. When business improved, William bought out her friends and hired a full-time staff. William's introversion made it difficult to interact with customers. She needed someone at the counter who could wait on people. Enter Dorcas. A former art student too, and acquaintance of Bill's, she applied for the job and seemed to be a good fit - bubbly and friendly. Bill and Dorcas married.

Bill grew her beard long, hiding, building a defensive wall. Perpetually angry, frustrated, dissatisfied with himself, the marriage suffering, Bill sought professional help. In therapy Bill explored her gender identity. Connections between her unhappiness and her inability to be herself, her true full-blown lady self, to be this unequivocally, were being made. Each time, whenever Bill took a trip for business, Dorcas would accompany her. A trip to Philadelphia presented itself one weekend and Bill decided to go alone. **In the hotel she shaved off her beard, donned a wig and a dress and hit the bars.** She was both frightened and exhilarated. She had never felt so alive. When Bill returned to Pittsburgh, the jig was up. The beard was gone and Bill was happy for once. The truth won out. Bill admitted to being a woman. Dorcas fucking lost it.

Father and Son

Fast-forward ten years after the change: Cooper was sometimes referring to Wendi as "Dad" and sometimes as his aunt. In the 9th grade he had started to mix his stories and his friends were starting to pick up on it. "It's getting too hard to keep things straight," Cooper told Wendi. Wendi said, "Let's keep the cat in the bag for a little while longer if we can, once it's out there is no taking it back." Soon after that Wendi was contacted by a producer for the Ricky Lake show who had somehow found out about her.

"I told the producer, I know it's coming up on sweeps week and you want your ratings but I am just a normal person." Wendi pointed out that there was no sensation to how she lived her life. "In fact," she mentioned to the producer, "My son lives with me." The producer assured Wendi that they didn't want to make a spectacle out of Wendi's life and offered her a spot on an upcoming segment about Transgendered women. Wendi said she would need to discuss it with Cooper first. When Cooper got home from school, Wendi presented the opportunity to him and he responded with an enthusiastic YES! **This is how Wendi and Cooper decided to come out to the world.**

> "I knew that everything was fine because he had a huge smile on his face, was just beaming when he came in the door."

Wendi neglected to tell Dorcas of their plan. There had been a three-month period when Wendi was refused access to her son. The situation had resolved itself over time – they were then navigating that tricky space of ex-spouses raising a child and building a friendship. "She didn't find out until we were already in New York and when she found out, man, did she go through the roof!"

When Cooper and Wendi returned to Pittsburgh, Dorcas was still furious but Wendi managed to convince her to sign a release that would allow the show to air. When that Ricky Lake episode appeared a few weeks later Cooper attended school the next day. Wendi was worried when he left that morning, expecting a call from the school at some point. Cooper took the PAT bus to school. He was immediately recognized by a woman when he boarded. She asked him if he had been on Ricky Lake the previous day. Cooper said that he had. The woman's friend asked what the show was about. The first woman responded, "I'll tell you later." That day at school Cooper was congratulated and hi-fived constantly, even by kids he didn't know as word spread.

"When he got home I knew that everything was fine because he had a huge smile on his face, was just beaming when he came in the door." ■

STREET MUSIC

The Art of Busking in South Side

TEXT Max Schlosser
PHOTOS Emily O'Donnell
ILLUSTRATION Paula Pascual

What I Wear:
Thick long socks, boots, sweatpants cut off at the shin (serves two purposes, pulling full lengths down beneath jeans can be a bitch, and the parts you cut off make great face warmers), flannel shirt, Pitt sweatshirt #1, Pitt sweatshirt #2 (w/ hood usually up over hat), big fuzzy corduroy coat that makes me look Russian, aforementioned sweatpants-face-gator, stocking cap, fingerless gloves.

What I Bring:
Backpack stuffed with small sitting-blanket, extra t-shirt, cheap vodka and juice in large plastic bottle, extra gloves, antacids, water, cracked-screen ipod, cell, chargers, lyrics for a few newer songs. Guitar case with guitar (an Alvarez brand acoustic with a broken D-string tuning machine and large sugar skull fabric design—attained at concert in New Orleans two Halloweens ago and glued to the back for dramatic effect) extra strings, incense, leftover coins, slide, kazoo, egg shaker and capo. A capo is the little clamp-thing you'll sometimes see guitarists clasping on the neck of their instrument to change key. I should probably find a harmonica soon.

How Long I Play:
Usually about three or four hours.

What I See:
I see endless police, on foot and in flashing cruisers. They have better things to do than hassle me or other buskers. What we do is legal in Pittsburgh, but if they really wanted, they could always still shoo us away, saying we're obstructing or disturbing or selling or something else you're not supposed to combine with busking. At first I'm nervous about them, but after several packs of boys in blue stroll by and acknowledge me the same way one acknowledges a flattened piece of gum on the sidewalk, my fear subsides, and after they pass I twist around to sneak another stiff slurp of liquor out of my pack and onward, hi ho Silver, to play a new song.

I see a man with a thick streak of black ink or something down the middle of his forehead and the bridge of his nose like Scottish war paint, a man with serene but crazy eyes and shaggy locks, he smiles down at me.

"You're awesome!" he states matter-of-factly after I finish my bluegrass improvisation. He looks at me a moment longer. Why, thank you.

"Now I'm going to go back to not listening." And he walks off.

An average looking middle-aged, short haired, stocky man in a Penguins jersey drops fifteen dollars, three fives, into my case, he gives a smile and a thumbs up and walks away.

Later, walking down East Carson, wanting a break from my home base outside the Rex Theatre, I see a young couple kissing and laughing, leaning against each other on a nondescript brick wall near Fourteenth Street. I walk by them, then,

"Hey, will you play her a song? You will! Ha! Alright!"

Any requests?

"Hmm," the guy's gears turn, "She knows about guitars and music way more than me, she plays guitar…um, let me think, know any Disturbed?"

Nope, can't help you there. You like Bob Dylan?

"Well," the girl says, "I do, but I can't stand his voice. So really I just like Bob Dylan covers."

How about "Like a Rolling Stone?"

"Sure."

I play it for them.

That song seems to always reel in the dough. I used to love it, now I think it's kind of cheesy, sort of a romantic Jack Kerouac tramping off into the wild American sunset nostalgic overkill. It feels like when I'm busking and singing about how "now you find yourself out in the street and you're gonna have to get used to it," I'm trying too hard to come across as a rugged rambling man. But still I always sing my favorite line, "When you ain't got nothin', you've got nothin' to lose!" as strong as possible, because in the end, as lame and romantic as the line is, it is also true.

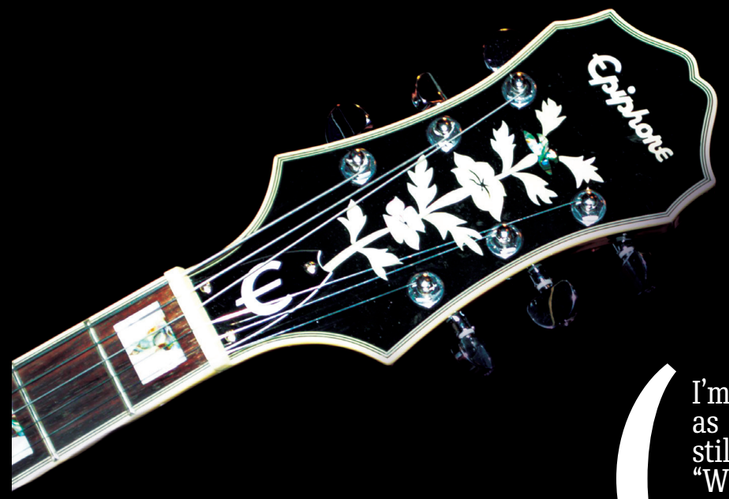
I know it's a beloved song, a moneymaker, but I won't play "Like a Rolling Stone" twice in one night, or any other. It would be boring and contrived the second time, unless done in a totally different style. What if someone walked by and saw the song the first time, then again later? I couldn't live with knowing that had happened.

The man behind the door at the convenience store waves through the glass. I usually busk sitting where his store and the Rex intersect in an enclave, a big poster of Bob Marley above me. A bouncer from the Rex tosses five dollars into my case, later washes away vomit with a bucket of water after someone pukes next to my spot and diverts away my, and possibly his, business.

I have hand warmers in my gloves, they flop, little bean bags under my palms when I play. The wind bites the patch of face starting at my upper eyelids and ending with my lower lip, along with my fingertips the only skin exposed. I don't pull in too much dough on these especially frigid evenings: taking hands out of pockets, even to appease an adorable dancing-monkey beggar like me, just too much of an extravagance for most, and understandably so.

Street music has earned me more money than I expected—it's about minimum wage under the table—as well as phone numbers, condoms, cans of beer, cigarettes, expired Monday through Friday passes to strip clubs, etc.

Busking in the extreme cold is an unnatural, rollercoaster physical state, frigid on the edges, prickly warm in the center. You're constantly refreshed, warmed up, slap-chilled, queasy-heated, then



I'm trying too hard to come across as a rugged rambling man. But still I always sing my favorite line, "When you ain't got nothin', you've got nothin' to lose!"

you take a big breath of cough-inducing wind and have a few flaps of the coats to bring air to the chest and you're back to medium.

I'm used to freezing weather, but not hanging out in it for hours. I tend to do things that distract from it, like shoveling a driveway, walking to class, or that heat me up from fun physical motion, like snowboarding or snowman-building.

It's different just sitting in it, playing guitar. On the sidewalk for hours with little movement other than strums and occasional leg stretching the cold makes me feel there, but not there.

"Hey," a guy leaning next to me confronts a cute blonde walking by, "if you could be any kind of candy, what kind would you be, and why?"

After her fleeting response I am asked the same question. I respond: Twix, because they're fucking delicious, and you always get a second chance.

In my cocoon of layers, hat pulled down past my eyes, only my fingertips and mouth exposed to produce the music, I often lose track of time and come back to reality four or five songs later, numb and spaced, left to wonder how exactly it was I got there, when it happened, what it's about. Oh yeah, the bus, the Rex hippie concerts, the story, the people I'm meeting.

The beautiful young brunette, lost-eyed from alcohol, who sings along to Gershwin's "Summertime."

The mohwawked and trenchcoated loudmouth who raps overtop my take on gentle Nick Drake, an amusing combination of elements.

"Dude," the trenchcoat Mohawk tells me, "I had a fucking rough night…me and my friends, we took some shit… and, and I just, you just don't know how much this means to me…" After which a female companion appears with a look of, "there you fucking are…" grabs his shoulder, pulls him down the sidewalk.

Then there is Layla, all curves and grace to match the cool name—she speaks with me for a few moments in a French accent and glows down from her lean-to of Rex Theatre brick until her boyfriend whisks her off, arm around her shoulder, myself left to frown, then shrug and resume the music.

There is the grunge-looking kid with his long straight locks and baggy flannel, jumping and grooving and singing along to "In My Time of Dyin'"

Meet me, Jesus, meet me

Meet me in the middle of the air

And if my wings should fail me, Lord

The kid chimes in loud, dancing, jubilant,

"Won't you greet me with another pair! Fuck yeah, man!"

My guitar was desperately rigged up for that song, and the little bits of improvisation that preceded and followed it. I broke my D string a few tunes in at the beginning of the night, right in the middle of "Venus in Furs," such an anticlimactic letdown. At first it seemed like my night was ruined, because not only was that tuning-machine malfunctioning-it still is, it won't twist, its only job-but I didn't have a replacement D, and stores were closed.

Still, eager to try to make the outing work, even half-assed, I borrowed a knife; used it and pliers to halfway repair. I strung an E string where the D should go. E strings are roughly three times thicker than D's, much lower pitched. I already had two G's in a row anyway below this, so my guitar, which should have been EADGBE, was EAEGGE, quite a different instrument.

All my carefully memorized finger-shapes had been rendered null and void; I was shooting in the dark. But it was an ultimately welcome turn of events—it upped the fear, spontaneity, and irreplaceable-memory factor in playing that song. Soon after, I managed to crank it back to a more or less standard tuning.

In the alien open-tuning I played slide using a Bic lighter, smacked the body on the down strokes and stomped my sturdy camouflage hunting boots for a beat, and the grunge boy and his girl danced in a circle in front of me like American Indians around a fire. Dozens of other people were around at the time, cooling off in between watching the acts inside, pacing around, smoking, I glimpsed leaning stretching passing legs here and there in between verses. I smiled at the snow dampened pavement and strummed the next chord, wanting nothing more than the exact place I had staked then in our world. And to think I at first thought, "Well, no extra D, broken D tuner, broken D string. Guess I'll go home and watch TV."

I'm not just talking about myself here, it's a product-of-setting kind of thing: you can hear music out on the street as soulful and professional as any you'll see on the monolith stage at the annual festival blowout you pay three hundred dollars to participate in. Street music is my new best friend. Vaya con Dios, we hope to see you out there. ■

Around Town

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HIGH TIME FOR HIGH TEA

TEXT Danielle Levsky
PHOTOS: Renee Stover

When in doubt, pinky out!

Though I started drinking tea at the tender age of six, never in my life did I get the opportunity to attend an English Tea Time. My parents immigrated to the United States just a year before I was born. We created our own teas at home, with many selections and traditional Russian style sandwiches and treats set up across the table: buttered bread with caviar, potato salad, egg salad, salami and meat slices, pâté, green onion, herring. Growing up with this kind of experience, I always figured that Afternoon/High Teas were for those who didn't "know" their tea and had to be taught.

In my household, tea has always been a staple in our diet. After arriving from a day of school, or, in my parents' case, work, each of us would settle down in the kitchen and boil ourselves a pot of hot water. While I would do my homework or study, a mug of steaming hot tea would rest by my books and papers. At night, just before bed, my mother and I would have to have a cup of tea or we couldn't fall asleep. Tea was not used as a method of caffeine in our home, but as a treat we couldn't live without. There is always a large selection of teas available at our house, ranging from Earl Grey to English Breakfast to Russian Black to White with Lavender to Green to Red to Herbal. We only have one rule: we never, ever drink Lipton.

Maybe it's a bit judgmental and hierarchical, but any other tea lover will tell you that a hierarchy does exist. Tea packets do not taste the same. Depending on what company they're from, what country they originate from, what the material of the tea bags is made out of (Paper? Linen? Silk?), or if the tea is loose-leaf (Is it in a tin can? Metal can? A plastic bag? A paper bag?), the texture and taste of the tea changes all together.

The Afternoon Tea ritual may have been started by the French. It first arrived in Paris in 1636 (22 years before it appeared in England) and became popular among the aristocracy.

The writings of Madame de Sévigné, a noble woman in 17th century France, gossiped in letters to her daughter about the going-ons of Paris and frequently mentioned tea. She wrote that the tradition of adding milk to tea was started by the Marquise de la Sablière, another French noble woman.

I was invited to attend an English High Tea Service with my boyfriend and his parents. I didn't know what to expect, so I felt that I overdressed for the occasion. Turns out the old adage is true: you can never be overdressed, just underdressed. As we walked into the Inn on Negley, a little bed-and-breakfast in Shadyside, we were greeted with exquisite antiques, paintings, and furnishings that brought us back to the Victorian period.

By 1700, tea was available in more than 500 coffee houses in London. Tea drinking became even more popular when Queen Anne (1665-1714) chose tea over ale as her regular breakfast drink.

> **"It's a comforting and culturally influenced ritual. We present everything in an elegant, yet relaxed way. You still feel the Pittsburgh charm."**

The Inn was originally a single family house, built in 1884 by the family Chaplin for well under $6,000. It was built on Negley, where the very first streetcars began to drive by. At the time, most of the populace and activity was along Forbes Ave. by the large, Victorian mansions on Mansion Row. This Italianate-Victorian style, moderate home began the expansion of public and commerce into the east side of Shadyside. The Hoffmann family, notable for laying gas lines throughout Pittsburgh, purchased the house and remained there, living as a family for more than 50 years. Throughout its ownership history, it remained a privately owned home. In 1997, Liz Sullivan purchased the establishment while it was a three-bedroom in. The expansion from a three-bedroom to the current eight-bedroom began in 1999. All the original infrastructures--the plaster work, the woodwork, Victorian fireplaces, floors, and shutters--are still well preserved and honored.

During the second half of the Victorian Period, also known as the Industrial Revolution, working husbands would return home exhausted from a long day's work. Their wife or maid would set the table with meats, bread, butter, pickles, cheese, and the drink of choice, tea. Because the meal was eaten at a high, dining table rather than the low, Aristocratic tea table, it was termed "High" tea.

By the time we were seated in the Fernwood Tea Room, with a round, cherry-wooden table, and surrounded with period paintings of children in elegant frocks and countryside scenes, I wanted to ask for my petticoat.

It is said that "Afternoon" tea was created by Anne, Duchess of Bedford. In the late 1830's, the English normally had two meals: breakfast in the morning and dinner late at night. Anne was said to have had a "sinking feeling" during the long gap between meals, and requested for her ladies-in-waiting to bring her light sandwiches and tea in the late afternoon. She began to invite others to join her during her Afternoon Tea and thus, started a tradition.

The most difficult part in choosing a tea from the menu was that the variety and selection was outstanding: the menu stemmed from very traditional black and green teas, to exquisitely flavored and aromatic loose teas. I became partial to the loose-leaf Chocolate Mint Black Tea, so I went with that one as my first choice.

While we were deciding what to order, the owner of the inn, Liz Sullivan, came to see our table. She was well acquainted and kept in touch with most of her frequent customers, including my boyfriend's parents. When I spoke to Liz Sullivan later about the High Tea Service and the inn and itself, she emphasized that their chef made the experience unique.

"Our chef is well trained and an expert baker. The food is paramount to a good tea, and the service must be equally as captivating," Liz said. "It's a comforting and culturally influenced ritual. We present everything in an elegant, yet relaxed way. You still feel the Pittsburgh charm."

Indeed, even the layout of the table was perfectly created. The silverware that was brought out was beautiful, decorated in gold and flowers. Now, I usually drink my tea without any add-ons, but the server recommended that I add a little milk and honey to my tea. It smelled like chocolate cake, and the add-ons truly brought out the flavor of the chocolate and the mint. I'm a very easily amused girl, so the fact that the sugar was given to us in sugar cubes and the honey in little plastic tubes sent me over the edge.

Since then, "High" and "Afternoon" Tea has evolved into what is served in many English Tea establishments throughout the United States. My experience at the Inn on Negley would have been traditionally notated as an "Afternoon" Tea. It was sometimes known as "Low" Tea because guests were seated in low armchairs with low side-tables on which to place their cups and saucers.

After I finished two (or maybe three) cups of my chocolate-y tea, the server encouraged all of us to sample more teas. I opted for a more traditional green tea, just as the server brought out marmalade and cherry jam in little, silver bowls. Then, a tiered cake stand of cucumber or egg and mustard cress sandwiches, scones with jam and cream, and a selection of pastries and small cakes followed. We each sampled the dishes, marveling at how such fresh, simple ingredients could taste so delicious. Perhaps it was the inclusion of the delicious food, or the wonderful company, or the piping hot and aromatic tea, or maybe the beautiful and historic atmosphere, but as our High Tea began to wind down, I felt that I had learned more about tea drinking in the past hour than I had in my lifetime.

All at once, I felt regal and perfectly content. ■

The Fernwood Tea Room is located at the Inn on Negley - 703 S Negley Ave.

Tea service served 12pm-4pm daily.

Reservations required. Please call 412-661-0631

Liz Sullivan
info@innonnegley.com

The Millvale Murals of Maxo Vanka

St. Nicholas Church in Millvale is home to a series of extraordinary murals that deal with themes of motherhood, homeland and social injustice.

Text & Photos Emily O'Donnell
Additional Photos Robert Wallace

Atop a steep cliff the church sits quietly looming over the constant construction and noise of cars that fill route 28. Located on the fringes of Millvale, it is easy to overlook when traveling to Mr. Small's or en route to the Waterworks in Fox Chapel. Although it holds few services, St. Nicholas Church is well known for the vivid murals that stretch over the walls and ceilings of the church. Many churches have beautiful artwork, but the murals at St. Nicholas are different and extraordinary in their themes and execution.

Mary Petrich has been a docent at the church for over a decade, and has been giving tours of the murals for as many years. She likely knows the murals better than anyone else currently living and her passion for the art comes through in her analysis and history of each work of art. **She says that sometimes she feels that she is 'guided by the spirit of Mr. Vanka' on her tours.**

Travel back to 1889 when the artist Maxo Vanka was born in Croatia. His story begins like a fairy tale. Petrich says that he was the illegitimate son of Habsburg nobility, although this fact is hard to prove. He was given up by his parents to live with peasants for the first eight years of his life. It was his noble grandfather who lifted the boy up from the life of a peasant, and brought him to the palace to live in luxury. Vanka's elevated position allowed him to study art at some of the finest schools in Europe, and he went on to work as a portraitist, painting with oil on canvas. The influence of his early years never left him, however. His empathy for the plight of the peasants and common people had deep roots in his early upbringing. These issues of poverty and injustice are demonstrated in his murals at St. Nicholas Church.

Petrich explains that **"inherent in the paintings are three predominant themes that were important to Vanka himself, and what he believed was important for religion to address."** The first is the theme of the strong mother, who often appears as the grieving mother. In a large mural that stretches above the church pulpit, an image of the Virgin Mary is painted with the child Christ. Petrich speaks of her namesake reverently, "Unlike other depictions, this is not a demure Mary. She is painted with strength and determination. This Mary is depicted as the Queen of Heaven, with a crown on her brow. Her body is stocky and thick, much like the peasant women that Vanka knew as a child. This particular depiction of Mary was likely based on Dora, the peasant woman who raised Vanka for the first eight years of his life. Her enduring strength and power is reflected in the figure of Mother Mary, the holiest of women in the Church."

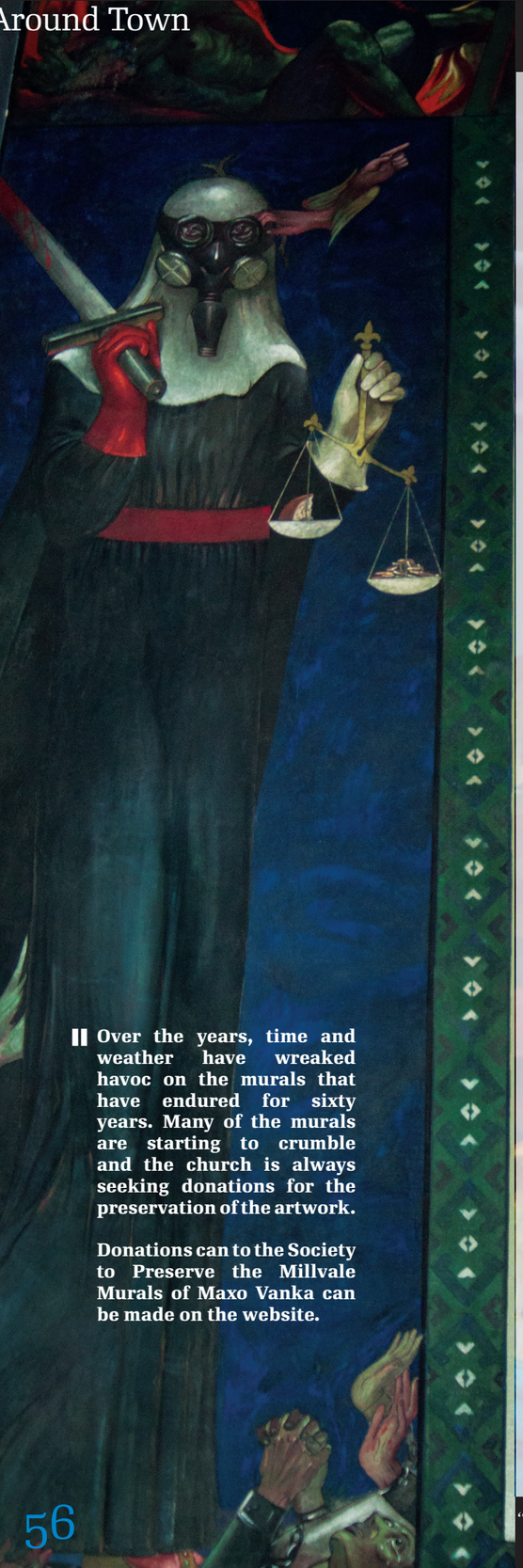
"Unlike other depictions, this is not a demure Mary. She is painted with strength and determination. This Mary is depicted as the Queen of Heaven"

▶▶ *"Mary, Queen of Heaven"*

▶▶ *"Croatian Mother Prepares Her Son For Industry"*

"How many young men come back from war now with empty sleeves, empty pant legs, empty hearts and empty heads?"

"Croatian Mother Raises Her Son For War" ◀◀



Over the years, time and weather have wreaked havoc on the murals that have endured for sixty years. Many of the murals are starting to crumble and the church is always seeking donations for the preservation of the artwork.

Donations can to the Society to Preserve the Millvale Murals of Maxo Vanka can be made on the website.

The second theme is the contrast between the old country and the new country. As an immigrant in America this theme was integral to Vanka's life. He came to the United States after marrying a Jewish-American woman; the decision was a difficult one for him as he loved his homeland of Croatia but detested the condition of life for many in his home country. Having lived as a peasant and nobility both, he empathized with the peasants but felt somehow powerless to help them. The situation in Europe at the time was tumultuous, as the nations were in limbo between two great wars. Vanka left the old country behind for the promise of a new life in America and his unease at doing so is evident in his work. In his murals he depicts the old country as pastoral, peasants in the field working and praying. The new country is America and is depicted with some cynicism. His America is full of the smoke of the industrial revolution. Mary states that the immigrants **"when they came to the United States, they were told the streets were made of gold. Of course they weren't."**

The third theme that permeates Vanka's work is that of social injustice. Maxo Vanka was a noted pacifist, and when World War I broke out in Europe, he served as a member of the Red Cross. He would not fight in battle; his job included clearing dead bodies from the field and this job left indelible scars on his emotional and psychological self. These dead bodies and broken figures recur in his work on the murals.

On corresponding walls of the church, there are two paintings that deal with this theme. The first is titled "Croatian Mother Raises Her Son For War." It depicts a soldier returning home from war in a casket. Grieving women, each wearing a white habit similar to a nun's, surround him. In reality these white dresses were traditional mourning clothes for Croatian mothers. Petrich says "the graveyard beyond the women and the body of the young man is filled with crosses, for those who have died in war. There is an empty expanse of space in the graveyard, awaiting the crosses of young men who will die in future wars." The dead body of the young man has an arm missing from one of the sleeves, indicating that he had already lost limbs before he lost his life. Mary Petrich speaks eloquently about the theme of this painting, **"What greater social injustice is there than war?"** She asks, "How many young men come back from war now with empty sleeves, empty pant legs, empty hearts and empty heads?"

The complementary painting is titled "Croatian Mother Prepares Her Son For Industry." Whereas the previous painting was set in the old country of Croatia, this painting is set in the new country – specifically in Johnstown – and tells a true story. A young man lies broken, grieving mothers surround him once more. In the distance, smoke rises from a coal mine on fire and the brothers of the young man are headed into the mine in attempt to save the lives of those trapped inside. None of them will come out alive. As the young men of the old country leave home to return from war, broken and dying so do the young men of the new country leave home to work underground and are buried there. As the coal miners worked all night to provide for their families, so Vanka worked day and night to record their stories on the church wall.

Vanka first began work on the murals in 1937. Petrich recalls watching him work as a child when she attended the St. Nicholas school next to the church. "I would come in at 8 am for class and he would be working, he would work until 2 am. Sometimes, he would enlist Father Zagar – the priest who commissioned Vanka to paint the murals – to mix paint for him… **Most of these murals were completed in only eight weeks**." There are twenty-two murals in St. Nicholas church and eleven of them were painted in the span of eight weeks in 1937. Maxo Vanka returned to the church in 1941 to paint the remaining eleven murals. In the years between his murals, Vanka was greatly affected by the start of World War 2 in 1939, and by his return to painting in 1941; the war had spread to his homeland of Croatia. There is a stark difference between the 1937 and the 1941 murals. Although all of the paintings deal with the three themes that Petrich spoke of, it is the final theme of social injustice that is most prevalent in Vanka's later work.

Two interlocking paintings show "Prudence" and "Justice" as matching angels. The figure of Prudence holds up one finger to its mouth. Petrich explains that the angel is warning the immigrants of the new country to keep quiet so they would not be discriminated against in America for their accent, at a time when suspicions of foreigners were at their height.

In a painting called "Mother 1941," there is another of Vanka's strong female figures hung with chains on a cross, her head bowed low. Mary Petrich describes this painting with a different title, "Mother Croatia on the Cross." This painting was Vanka's emotional tribute to his motherland, at that time caught up in the chains of facism. This painting hangs beside the most foreboding figure in the entire church; the figure of "Injustice." The painting features a large figure holding a bloody sword, wearing bloody gloves and most notably, wearing a gas mask.

> "These are not comforting murals, they are very disquieting. They are a challenge, are they not? So what am I challenged to do?"

"Who does it look like to you?" Mary Petrich asks. She laughs softly, despite the seriousness of the image. **"Children come in and tell me it looks just like Darth Vader."** In a way, the gas mask of Injustice does resemble the heavy helmet of Vader. But there is gravity to the image that no childlike comparisons can undo.

The final paintings that Vanka completed in 1941 are actually the first that visitors might notice when walking into the church. Stretching across the low ceiling at the entrance of the church are several murals that vividly depict the horrors of war. In one painting, two soldiers are in the midst of killing each other, one French and one German. In between them is the figure of Christ on the cross, being stabbed by the soldier's bayonet. Petrich says, "In killing someone unjustly, you are killing Christ."

The opposing painting once again features the strong figure of Mary that has been recurrent throughout so much of Vanka's work. This powerful figure of Mary stands in the midst of a battlefield, her large peasant hands gripping the weapons of the soldiers and attempting to turn them away from one another. The holy mother transforms into the grieving mother of Vanka's work as she struggles to keep her children from destroying one another in the horrors of war. Much like the corresponding paintings from the earlier era, as the mother raises her children for war and industry, so too she fights against the injustice that breaks them down.

These murals are unlike most religious paintings typically found in a church. It is notable that Maxo **Vanka himself was not a Catholic or a religious man. He was an agnostic with strong morals and deeply held beliefs of pacifism and justice.** These murals are not easy on the eyes or easy to accept. They challenge every viewer who walks in through the doors of the church, but it is a necessary challenge for many who have become too complacent in their religious beliefs, for those who find it too easy to turn a blind eye to the social injustice that Vanka sought to bring to light.

Mary Petrich concludes her tour with the following words: "I am 85 years old and I have known these murals for a long time. So what do they mean to me? These are not comforting murals, they are very disquieting. They are a challenge, are they not? So what am I challenged to do? In the words of Micah, from the Jewish scriptures, I am challenged to 'act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with my God.' Do I always do it? I don't think so. But in the words of G.K. Chesterton: 'Christianity hasn't failed, it hasn't been tried.' So we have to keep on trying." ■

St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church is located at 24 Maryland Ave., Pittsburgh PA

Mary Petrich leads tours on Saturdays at 12pm, 1pm and 2pm.

For more information visit www.vankamurals.org

"Injustice" ◀◀

▶▶ *"Mother Croatia on the Cross" / "Mother 1941"*

TEXT & PHOTOS John Herse

Knit One & Natural Stitches

Two locally owned knitting stores support the thriving DIY atmosphere in Pittsburgh.

I have always been a craft fanatic, but I never immersed myself in the world of knitting until finding a how-to-knit your own sweater book at Goodwill. It was the perfect solution for my excess of free time: knitting my very own and unique grandpa-chic sweaters. I thought I found the holy grail of crafting. However, I decided to begin a journey of which, at the time, I didn't realize its complexity. A never ending index of patterns and techniques, not to mention the amount of tools needed, to complete a perfect knit can seem overwhelming. Luckily the great city of Pittsburgh offers two very amazing (and locally owned) yarn extravaganzas that let us fellow knitters (and crocheters) have not only a variety of materials at our disposal, but communities within which we can share our passion for the craft.

Natural Stitches

Natural Stitches is located in East Liberty across the parking lot from Trader Joe's in a quaint store that one could easily overlook, but definitely should not. Passing by the store-front, the first thing anyone sees is their comically large ball of yarn in the window. I mean a massive three feet in diameter. Their logo adorns the entrance, a black cat playing with three interwoven golden rings. Walking into the store, the first thing you notice is the sheer volume of yarn. Rows and rows of yarn fill the store, almost a library of yarns. There are several shelves full of books for sale brimming with patterns, techniques and Martha Stewart-esque…everything. Knitting needles, crochet hooks, and all the other tools any knitter would need fill an entire wall behind the cash register. At first overwhelming, you can easily navigate the explosion of colors with the help of any of the employees. I had the pleasure to talk to Yvonne, the store manager.

Natural Stitches was founded in November of 2007. Yvonne explained to me her philosophy for the store, "Anytime the door is open, the couch is open if anyone wants to knit or crochet." Next to the rows of yarn and tools is an area of couches and chairs where anyone and everyone can sit down, knit, and most importantly meet and chat with fellow crafters in a welcoming environment that reeks of creativity and passion.

The official business philosophy is providing a "welcoming atmosphere to learn and go beyond your current skills." **Natural Stitches is a place to expand your horizons in the knitting and crocheting world.** They offer an array of classes dedicated to every skill set: kids, sweaters, hats, mittens, socks—you name it. They are expanding to even include classes on very specific styles such as Japanese crochet.

Boasting their collection of Cascade 220, a yarn that is 100% wool, they are one of four stores in the country to carry the whole line. They also keep it local. They have a few skeins (the yarn) sold uniquely in the store such as one called: Pittsburgh Pride donning the famous black and yellow clashing colors any yinzer mom would be proud to wear to a Stiller game.

The store has a great community connection hosting weekly and monthly get-togethers such as a Sci-fi Geek Night, a Men's night, and Finish It Friday. Anyone is welcome to come into the store and participate at any of these events. Included in the store is a donation bin where they collect old yarn and needles that people probably find in their grandmother's attic or a neglected craft bin.

Knit One

Knit One is located in Squirrel Hill on Murray Avenue. The store's window displays are full of gadgets, yarn, and finished pieces. The store is big, open, and full of light. Big fluffy couches greet you to your right and to the left swifts stare at you menacingly (the gadgets that wind your yarn into manageable spun balls). Finished pieces adorn mannequins around the store with random yarns here and there in buckets that lead you in an almost treasure hunt throughout the store. The back of the store houses a large table and a small library full of books. In the back corner of the store, shelves are filled with an array of yarns. The raised ceiling allows for a large llama and various mannequins to sport beautiful pieces—it's almost a museum of the craft.

Knit One was founded 8 years ago Stacey, the owner, told me. She decided to open the store after a realization that it was her dream to own a small business while still working full time as a psychologist. Her trademark is "Developing a close knit community." Her goal is to have people who enjoy working with yarn, and who enjoy creating things, come together and interact with other people to make a community out of the craft.

Left: A proud alpaca stands atop a mountain of its own wool at Knit One.

She wants customers to develop better self-esteem, creativity, to reach their potential, and to take risks. All the while recognizing the welcoming community they have at the store. She said, "Knitting is the new yoga, it is a therapy." I have to say I agree.

They boast being the largest knitting store in Western Pennsylvania and **the community knitted a series of panels for the airport during the G20 summit**: each panel had one of the countries' names. The whole piece is about 6 by 12 feet. They are also proud of workshops they offer in which prominent knitters in the craft world come and give lessons.

The store offers a series of classes just like Natural Stitches in all sorts of disciplines, while also hosting events and open knitting times during regular store hours. The store sponsors several local charities such as making chemo-caps, blankets for hospitals, and offering free classes at Carnegie Mellon University.

Right: Natural Stiches is lined with braided yarn in every shade and hue that could be imagined.

I asked Stacey what she sells figuratively and she told me, "The opportunity to have a new experience, away from computers and cell phones. **Creating something that is all the knitter's that is very unique, it's their footprint, a unique creation.**" She argues, "The process of knitting is better than the end result."

Both stores offer a variety of experiences for the curious or experienced crafter. Both stores offer a vast array of beautiful yarns and fascinating tools to get any project started and finished. Most importantly, however, is that both places offer community. Never have I felt more relaxed than with a group of knitters. They are places of instant connection: a love of a craft, the struggle with a certain piece and the appreciation of your work that comes with experienced knitters.

Nowadays we do get lost in our technology and we don't recognize the work that goes into something so elaborate, beautiful and useful: a knitted piece. Knitting for me is the chance to not only get something done, but to prove I could do it. Knitting can

"Learning patience and relaxation is not only part of the knitting experience, but possibly its quintessential aspect."

be done anywhere at any time as long as it is a calm, still place. I've knitted everywhere from the beaches of Hawaii to the Andes mountains, never giving up the art of perfecting something so underrated and relegated to grandmas and cat ladies.

Anyone reading this piece and marveling over the overwhelming photos of mountains of yarn, confusing gadgets or intimidating final pieces, remember everyone starts a beginner. I cannot count how many times I've screamed in frustration at a piece gone wrong. But that's part of the therapy in a way. It's noticing that I do make mistakes and can fix them. There's always a solution in knitting and definitely outside the craft. Learning patience and relaxation is not only part of the knitting experience, but possibly its quintessential aspect. It is a therapy. When I finally finished this story I had just completed a pair of socks that took me nearly two months to make, but I didn't notice the minor mistakes in my piece right away. I noticed the countless productive and peaceful hours of labor. I had two beautiful socks that are uniquely mine and no one else can take that from me. So pick up those knitting needles head down to both stores and start something.■

Knit One is located at 2721 Murray Ave.
http://knitone.biz

Natural Stitches is located at 6401 Penn Ave.
http://naturalstitches.com

Right: A couple of happy customers knit on the couches at Knit One. The atmosphere is laced with fun colors that add to the easy going vibe.

BABY, WE NEED YOU

TEXT Phyllicia Leavitt

From morning 'til night, there's no rest for Michelle Rouse, owner of Simmie's Seafood Restaurant and Grill in Homewood.

Michelle Rouse wakes up one Saturday autumn morning no different from any other morning and slips on some khakis and a black hooded sweater. She loads her kids – her two terriers – into the car and stops to buy food at Restaurant Depot in the Strip, before heading up to work. On her way, she passes through East Liberty with its new super centers and grocery stores. Veering onto Frankstown Avenue, her path parallels the train tracks that fence off Point Breeze to the South with its big brick houses, stone walkways, and trimmed hedges.

If it were the 1950s, Michelle would have passed Joey's Poultry and Fish Market where they'd cut the heads of live chickens in front of customers. She might have seen Reverend J. A. Williams standing outside of the Baptist Temple Church or maybe students carrying violins into Marie Carter-Hayes' School of Music. If it were the 1950s, Michelle would have driven past a bustling Homewood Avenue with a G. C. Murphy's Five and Dime, Homewood Bank, Rand's drug store, and Belmar Theater. Today, however, Michelle drives past the vacant lots and boarded buildings that overshadow the remaining, yet deteriorating homes built with the same quality as those in Point Breeze. Michelle is in Homewood.

As Frankstown Avenue turns into Frankstown Road, Michelle starts to get away from the residential area, and that's where a tall sign greets her:

FRANKSTOWN FISH COMPANY
SIMMIE'S SEAFOOD
RESTAURANT AND GRILL
DRIVE THRU MENU
DRIVE THRU BEER
DELICIOUS BBQ RIBS

She parks in the lot by the stucco and stone building, the restaurant she has been running for years. She walks past the entrances for the bar and dining area, and unlocks the take-out door to a room lined with buffet tables and fridges of beer. She hangs her sweater on a turquoise chair in the dinning room, drops off her dogs in the back office, and then begins casually pacing between the kitchen, dining room, and bar, where she waits on customers all day.

Diamonds of light refract from chandeliers onto the warm purple walls of the dining room. Upbeat R&B oldies drown out the clatter from the kitchen. Turquoise benches bend around tables where families have gathered to eat for years. African-American religious paintings decorate the walls; one, called "Grace," shows a family holding hands around a diner table. Michelle bought another one, "Our Daily Bread," at an estate sale back when her dad opened the restaurant in 1992.

In the kitchen, Michelle bakes macaroni and cheese while talking with the cooks. From the dining room her laughter can be heard over loud music, "He was like, 'you're a hater!'" she cackles. Then the music changes pace to a steady tick-tock drum beat – "Time Has Come Today" by the Chamber Brothers is playing.

Tick-tock tick-tock tick

Sitting at a large table in the dining room, a man in a checkered suit yawns, flipping the menu over. Two women and their toddler eat by the foyer. A few young men talk in the far corner. Michelle sits down at a table and lays out utensils and napkins when one young man in a blue scarf yells, "Michelle! Excuse me baby! We need you."

Now time has come . . . Time!

"What happens when people know your name," Michelle sighs to herself. She jokes that she hates her name – when people know it they abuse it. Michelle hears, "Michelle! Michelle! Michelle!" and just thinks, "WHAT?!"

No place to run . . . Time!

Michelle puts down her utensils and strolls over to their table, sets down their check and starts walking back to the kitchen.

"Alright, I'll see you later 'chelle," the young man says, adjusting his scarf.

Michelle sits down at a table and lays out utensils and napkins when one young man in a blue scarf yells, "Michelle! Excuse me baby! We need you."

Tick-tock tick-tock Time!
"Take care."
"Alright."
"Thanks, 'Chelle"
"Have a good weekend."
"You too," the customer says, leaving through the foyer.
Tick-tock tick-tock Time!

There are good sides and bad sides of running a business, and Michelle knows about the bad sides. Running a business takes up a lot of time, and sometimes there doesn't seem to be a reward. Michelle's dad, Gene, opened Simmie's in 1992, adding on a restaurant and bar to what was already a fish market called Frankstown Fish Company since 1984. Back then, Simmie's picked up business fast. But now it's difficult to attract new customers, when large shopping centers like the Waterfront offer new dinning experiences. Michelle has tried advertising, but she finds that word of mouth works better with her type of small business. However, with Homewood's population declining steadily over the past half a century, word now has to travel farther to reach new faces. Right now, Michelle thinks that Simmie's is in a phase where business is slow. They'll have to depend on their regulars.

Michelle carries the young men's tab back to the register. She remembers a time when someone robbed less than 20 dollars from that register back in 2008. Other than that, though, she hasn't had any problems. As for other businesses in Homewood, it's a different story. The old KFC once used bulletproof glass to keep their employees from getting shot. That was before they shut down because of violence and lack of profit. Tommy's Sandwich shop was thriving before a shooting in 2002; they shut down soon after. A few years ago, Woodside Barbeque on Frankstown Avenue closed down after 35 years of serving their secret barbecue sauce. Loss of business is one of many negative outcomes of the crime in the community, but when you're talking about Simmie's, crime is not really a problem.

Michelle returns to her table in the dining room where she sanitizes utensils and then folds them into napkins. A tall, lanky man walks in to pick up a set of keys and head back to the kitchen to cook.

"Hey Ed," Michelle says glancing up from her utensils. She calls him Ed, since his name is Edward Scott Winton; his friends call him Scotty or Skull. Scotty grew up just around the corner from Simmie's. He used to walk to Frankstown Fish Company with his mom to buy French fries. Back then his neighbors were trusting, "they kept an eye on you, you kept an eye on them." When Scotty got out of high school he joined the U.S. Marine Corps, but after a while he started to miss home. So he came back to Homewood and started working at Simmie's; that was about 18 years ago. Today, Scotty lives on Kelly Street, where once endless row homes and town houses have been broken up, overgrown trees mask the roads, and sections of row homes are torn out. Scotty doesn't feel so close to his neighbors anymore. Now, people are nervous.

> **One older woman would always call Simmie's and say Michelle's got to make her food personally. She's got to humor them. She's got to say, "okay."**

Once Scotty is settled in the kitchen, Michelle walks over to the large table where the man in a checkered suit still looks at the menu. She asks him how he's doing.

"Everything in your case, good. In my case, eh, not so good," Michael says.

"My dad would say, 'you're still breathin'.'"

Michael picks up the menu and flips it over. "Well the front and back are the same so I'm not getting anywhere."

"I don't know why you try," Michelle laughs. Finally, Michael decides on fried chicken over fried fish.

One of the cooks, in a green shirt and black apron, strides over to the family by the foyer and leans towards the toddler.

"What's up little man!" he says. The toddler stops playing with his plastic toy and gazes at the cook. The family chats with him for a while before he returns to the kitchen.

Because Simmie's is a family business, Michelle and her employees build a rapport with the customers; people come and go, they gets to know families. An older customer who passed away recently came to Simmie's on his birthday a couple months ago. His son visiting from Boston and his daughter – Missy, who's an old friend of Michelle – also came. Missy told Michelle a few weeks ago, "Jim didn't wanna go nowhere but Simmie's. He'd say, 'I ain't goin' nowhere else, I'm goin' right down to Simmie's to chill.'" One older woman would always call Simmie's and say Michelle's got to make her food personally. She's got to humor them. She's got to say, "okay."

Running a family business, Michelle also has a personal relationship with her employees, some of whom have been working there for over 15 years. Dealing with her employees gets to be a little overwhelming sometimes. Michelle cringes when Lash walks into work. "Hey!" Lash would say excitedly, and then after a few moments of silence Michelle would say something. Michelle just thinks he's weird, and she doesn't want to hear all his stories about his wife… or his partner. He just talks a lot. Michelle's sister hired him a couple months ago. He dreamed last year that he was an employee at Simmie's, so when he saw a "Now Hiring" sign he called every day for two weeks until they hired him.

To all of the employees, Michelle is like family. Lash has been working at Simmie's for two months, and he feels like Simmie's is "cool as hell," and that they treat him like family there. Lash's family comes to visit him too – his wife and his cousin have come by a few times. John, another cook, knows that Michelle has his back when he's got to make his rent and needs his job back. And Scotty, he knows Michelle's a sweetheart even if she can "raise hell too." At Simmie's, Scotty can find the same sense of community that he felt growing up.

Like any family, Simmie's staff isn't without its problems. John is another employee who gives Michelle a hard time. John is sitting outside of the take-out room on a break. He takes a break every moment he gets, but this time an old man walks over cutting his break a little short.

"Oh shit! I got to make his catfish!" John whispers to himself.

"I'm back," the man says, approaching.

"Okay, I got you, I'm gonna drop 'em right now, they come out real hot for you. I'll make sure they good and hot for you, I got 'em right now."

"They ready?"

"Nah, I'll get 'em right now, I wanna make sure they hot. You don't wanna pre-cook catfish."

"I'll be out front."

"Okay, I'll bring 'em out for you," and John heads back to the fryer in the back hallway by the kitchen. Next to the fryer, a pot of pigs' feet boils and a skillet simmers, filled to the brim with homemade gravy with chicken wings sticking out. John comes out front with the hot catfish; he always serves fish fresh or else it gets tough, and well, he didn't remember about the old man's catfish this time.

Even though John is not the perfect employee, Michelle has learned not to let situations at work upset her so much. Just after her dad died in 2001, she and her sister closed Simmie's to mourn, but they reopened and started working the very next day. Michelle didn't take enough time to come to peace with herself; in the past, it would have been much easier for her get angry if something went wrong. Since then, gradually, Michelle has come to have a new perspective when she has problems with her employees: just be done with it, be "Zen."

After John runs out front with his hot catfish, Michael is joined in the dining room, by a group of people coming from work at Petra International Ministries just down the road from Simmie's. Michael works there as a law clerk. With them is Elder Milton Raiford, an attorney who happens to represent the restaurant; his wife, Darlene Raiford; Elder Jim Balthrop; and Minister Cathy Whitely who also works at the desk of the law office. The group came for a late lunch and to celebrate for a court case that Milton and Michael won earlier in the week.

"Did everybody get food?" Michael says.

"Yeah, you're ready to go now," Cathy jokes because Michael has long since finished his chicken.

"What are you putting on your fries? I don't want that on my fries."

Cathy lifts her tray and shows him the ketchup on the side.

"I'm so disappointed you didn't order shrimp," he says.

"This is my new thing now," Cathy looks at her plate of salmon, her usual.

"Well, that won't last forever."

"That didn't last forever, the shrimp didn't. Fried chicken and macaroni and cheese didn't last forever," Cathy says.

"Well my chicken and waffles is still strong." Simmie's always has a chicken and waffles special on Wednesdays and weekends, and Michael loves it.

The day goes slowly on as customers file in and out; filling orders for take-out and eat-in, Michelle paces back and forth. At night the bar fills with the same crowd as any other weekend, but at 8:00 p.m. they've got to go. It's dark and brisk out, and all of the cooks and clerks and customers have gone home, and Michelle is the last one in the building as she gets ready to lock up for the night. She takes her dogs, locks the doors and walks out to her car. Sometimes people tell Michelle she should do something different, that Simmie's is at a standstill and she should get out and start something new, but she won't. "That's life," she says.

Tired and ready for sleep, Michelle pulls out of the lot and back onto Frankstown Avenue. **For families and friends in Homewood, Simmie's offers a "third place," a space where members of the community can feel at ease outside of their home and work place.** In a neighborhood like Homewood, Simmie's is a sanctuary for the families and neighbors whose community has been afflicted by crime and violence. She might not think about what she's done for Homewood each night, but as she's driving away, Michelle has accomplished something priceless for the community. She has given hope. ■

Simmie's serves seafood and soul food and is located at 8500 Frankstown Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15235.

For more information, call 412-731-4689.

Hours: 11:30 a.m. – 10 p.m. Tuesdays – Fridays; 1 – 11 p.m. Saturdays; 1 – 8 p.m. Sundays; closed Mondays.

GET POINTS, DO ANYTHING

TEXT Kate Miltenberger
PHOTOS Jamie Bergey, Brian Mulligan

Slam is an interactive complex. It's more than poetry, and it's more than performance: it's competition.

Tonight the man on stage is fresh blood on the altar. He must go first, preceding the others as a sacrificial poet. It's the way every slam starts. He nods into the microphone, tentatively. Then the words start, tumbling out of his mouth, like he hasn't really prepared at all. He stutters once, twice. That's it. The poem is over, just like that, and the scoreboards go up into the air. The M.C. bounds onto the stage, and the sacrifice limps away to the soundboard, where he will nurse a drink and talk quietly with the regulars for the rest of the night. He has paid the price, and now the real slam can start. I turn my attention to the stage.

Slam Night

My first real-live experience with slam poetry was during a workshop taught by Alaina at a summer camp where I interned. The Alaina I had met that week was peaceful and mild, but today she strode into the room and burst out in a voice full of tears, nearly shouting the opening line of her poem.

"It smells like guilt in here."

Her performance electrified the room, rooted us to our seats, made the air crackle. The students, the interns, the other instructors, none of us could take our eyes off her. I had that experience of seeing double, where I was simultaneously in the classroom, watching her, and I was somewhere else, in a room with wilting flowers that reeked of the smell of guilt and disaster and sadness.

Flash forward six months: I'm tucked into a warm corner of the Shadow Lounge on a cold January night at 9:30 waiting for Pittsburgh's monthly sanctioned slam to begin. Since my experience with Alaina over the summer, slam has been floating around the back of my mind. When you've seen a performance that electrifying, it's hard not to want more. A small part of me hopes that she will be here tonight, but I'm not surprised when I don't pick her out of the fifteen or so people scattered around various tables and the bar. It's an eclectic mix. A couple of college-age guys in beanies and skater tees sit at one table, hunched over and talking quietly. A man in a brown and green argyle sweater with a neat, black beard tends the bar. A woman who is small and enthusiastic bounces from table to table, seemingly making the rounds with her big smile. Two young, bored girls sit by the door, checking IDs and stamping hands– the cover fee is a mere five dollars. Outside, the misty snow is turning to ice.

For my company, I have brought my extremely tolerant boyfriend. He has never heard of slam except from what I've told him. We sit relatively out of the way, as I want to be able to take notes inauspiciously, but it's not long before the overly enthusiastic lady bouncing around the room reaches our table, and suddenly we discover her motive. Her name is Lori Beth, she is the M.C. for tonight's gig. She asks us if we're planning to slam, we both say no. I tell her about the article, and she turns her attention to the tolerant boyfriend. She convinces him to act as a judge for the night, even though the closest he's ever gotten to performance poetry is 70's soul and funk. That he is suddenly a slam judge strikes me as incredibly democratic, and also, entirely unexpected.

Last Page: Left: Jake Frampton performs.

Right: Owner of the Shadow Lounge, Justin Strong

Before tonight, I had always imagined a poetry slam as this selective club. I had expected to feel out of place tonight, a newcomer to a clandestine ritual. But I got all that wrong, because as I said, it's a pretty random mix of earnest looking people just sitting around waiting for this thing to start, and now I know exactly how much forethought goes into the selection of judges: None. It is literally who ever can be convinced to do it.

I thought I knew what I was in for tonight, but now everything is up in the air.

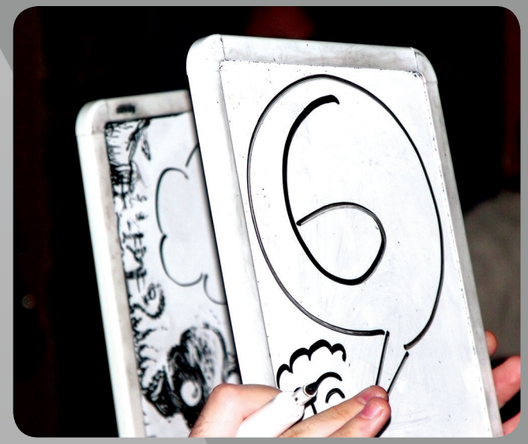
What is Slam?

Slam is the combination of poetry, performance and sport. Here's how it works: A poet gets up on stage and performs her poem. The audience voices their opinion through clapping and shouting. The judges give the performance a score on a scale of zero to ten. The M.C. then calculates the score for the poem, dropping the highest and the lowest judges' scores, resulting in a final score out of thirty for the poem. Sound complicated? Well, the math part is, but the rest is easy enough to grasp. It gets a little harder when you put it all into practice.

Just ask Alaina Dopico, Pittsburgh's 2011 Slam Champion and an all around nice person.

When I meet Alaina at Voluto on Penn across from the Glass Center, she is wearing every possible color and looks like she just woke up. After all, it's Sunday morning and last night was the Pittsburgh Battle of the Slams. Alaina has just seen off half of the D.C. slam team, whom she hosted at her apartment last night. They are friends of hers, from her college days at Howard, where she studied biblical and Afro-American studies. "But my entire life in D.C. was poetry," she concedes. Poetry was her "education outside of school".

The visit from D.C. has put Alaina in a reflective mood, so we start with her slam beginnings. Alaina Dopico, the Pittsburgh slam winner of 2011, began slamming just a few years ago. Her first slam was at the Nuyorican Poet's Café located in New York, an audacious beginning if there ever was one. The Nuyorican is famous for slam. The documentary SlamNation follows the 1996 Nuyorican Poetry Slam team to the national slam in Portland. To simply have your first go at slam be at the Nuyorican is like performing your first violin solo at Carnegie Hall. Yet that night at the Nuyorican, Alaina came in second place.



Even though she's only been slamming for about five years, Alaina's as much of an authority as anyone, because slam poetry is still young. Slam began in 1986, so the rules and standards are constantly evolving. "The slam you hear today

> "Slam is this really weird thing, it's turning poetry into sport, into competition.

is not the slam you would have heard ten years ago," she says, "Slam is changing, the only way it will stay alive is by changing."

Alaina has not slammed in a year, but last night's event has put her back into a slamming mindset. She tells me about how slam needs risk-takers to keep pushing the boundaries of what it can be. "Last night, I watched this girl who was really good, but she was also stagnant. I found myself being captivated and bored at the same time," she says with a rueful laugh. She recalls one performance by the poet Kelli Stevens Kane, where she did a piece about ballet and the whole time she was speaking, she was doing ballet movements on the stage. "She came to the slam and she basically didn't accept that what she was doing wasn't slammable."

"Slam is this really weird thing, it's turning poetry into sport, into competition. There are always critics in art, but it's blunt with slam. It's immediate, it's honest." In a slam competition, you're trying to get your audience to feel a certain emotion with you, and in theory, they will judge the poem based on how well you achieve that co-feeling. But, as I saw with my boyfriend-turned-judge (BFTJ), that's not always what happens. Sometimes people just can't hear so they give you a bad score. Or sometimes your piece doesn't quite resonate with their personal experience. Or sometimes, as I saw with the BFTJ, they warm-up as the night wears on, their scores getting higher over the course of the evening. "There's a dark side and a light side to slam," Alaina muses, "The light side is that anyone should be able to interact with poetry, but the dark side is that some people don't know what they're looking for."

There are nuances to slamming that I had never considered before talking to Alaina. She details how you have to pay attention to mood of the crowd. "It can be heartbreaking when you have a poem that you know is strong and you feel confident about your performance and then, it gets something like a 22." There's an addiction aspect to slam. Says Alaina, "It's a battle, fighting the high and low of slam."

It's hard to anticipate how your audience and judges are going to react. Part of the trick is finding work that translates. It's important to be able to connect your audience to the emotions of the poem, otherwise, it doesn't stand much of a chance. You have

no way of gauging in advance what will translate well. You have to feel out the audience. Says Alaina, "You can kind of read an audience. If they're giving out high scores for jokes, then you go up there and you make them laugh." Part of this strategy is "having deep pockets" or being ready to perform several different types of poems. Remember when I said slam was easy? I was lying.

"When I first started, I agreed with all the people who said, 'it's just about the poetry,' but I realize that it's not. It's a performance, it's a competition. They say not to write to get points. As a rule for any artist, your work shouldn't be influenced by the critiques of others," Alaina can't help smiling, waiting to drop the other end of her thought, "but there's nothing wrong with taking what you do and tailoring it to the competition."

Alaina's had one long year to put all her thoughts about slam in order. When I saw her over the summer, her experiences were still fresh, but now she's had some time to think about things. "You know," she muses, "There's dishonesty in saying, 'we don't care about the score.'" Alaina tells me how she wants to see slammers who aren't afraid to go after the points. As she begins to talk about points, her usual calm slides away into urgency. She is not angry, she is adamant, "Get creative, do things that will get you the points but do them in an exciting and classy way. Don't be cheap. That's what's baller. That's real. Saying, 'I want 30 points.' We need people who want points."

> Slam is not just about sharing poetry, that's what open mics are for. Slam is about winning through the best art.

That's what's real. Her statement resonates with me. It's completely alien to everything I've ever been taught about art, but at the same she's making a lot of sense. It's almost taboo, to seek popular success in any form of art. But Alaina's take is striking and honest, and truthfully, it's very slam. After all, slam is not just about sharing poetry, that's what open mics are for. Slam is about winning through the best art.

Back at the Shadow Lounge, things are heating up. We've had a couple of poets come through now, and the judges are finally starting to even out. There's a poem that's all auditory and for some reason, even though I think it's very clever, her presentation fails to impress.

After the auditory clacking poet, we are barraged by an almost forgettable slew of fledgling poets. It's obvious which of them have done this before. Some simply look unsure, their voices shaking, stumbling over certain words or rushing through the whole thing. It's also obvious which of them prepared in advance; you can tell by the practiced pauses, the intentionally dynamic volume. Yet over the whole event, there's a sort of desperate slapped togetherness. Maybe it's because it's January, or because is raining ice, or maybe just because it's Pittsburgh, but tonight's slam is intimate and soothing, but also scared and a little underwhelming. Lori Beth tries desperately to keep the crowd pumped.

Finally, the last poet takes the stage, an old man telling a story-poem about having bad luck. It is clever and full of word-play and clearly a half-joke. The end is delivered like a punch line and the boyfriend likes the joke so much he throws his scoreboard in the air with a ten.

Later, from Alaina, I find out this man represented Pittsburgh at the Battle of the Slams between Boston, New York and D.C. When she starts to describe him, I nod enthusiastically, I recognize this

man's polished schtick. But that's just it. The poem is good because it has been heavily rehearsed, heavily performed. Alaina is looking put out again, like when she first mentioned the girl who both enthralled and bored her. "I think the scene in Pittsburgh needs some new energy." She mentions the youth slam at the Union Project once a month. **"If new life for slam in Pittsburgh is going to come from somewhere, it'll be from the kids,"** she says and there's her optimism once more.

"People say all the time, it's just about the poetry, but it's not," says Alaina. "We made it a competition. It's a paradox to run away from that aspect, because we created it." And it's true, **slam is not an institution, it's a moment in flux, controlled by the people who are bold enough to grab it and shape it.**

Our coffee date is wrapping up when I catch Alaina's last thought, "I want to see people pushing boundaries. My dream is that slam can do anything."

I think back to the moment when I first heard Alaina's poem. When I think of slam, I don't remember awkward fledgling poets or an old man's punch line. My mind floats with images of a ballerina, and a room that smells like guilt, and a poem I once heard about a baby being held like a baseball mitt in his father's hand. These images stick in my mind, coming to me at random moments during my everyday, like snatches of dreams. At first, I think maybe she's crazy; how can poetry "do anything"? But then I remember the smell of guilt, and I think, maybe she's not so crazy. ■

> "I want to see people pushing boundaries. My dream is that slam can do anything."

The Shadow Lounge

Address:
5972 Baum Boulevard, Pittsburgh, PA 15206

The Shadow Lounge unfortunately closed for business this spring. It will be missed.

Community Guide

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The New Old-Fashioned Way

TEXT Joelle Smith
PHOTOS Emily O'Donnell & Robert Wallace

The first time life hands us a complicated situation, an unexpected combination, we learn quick, nothing is black and white. Despite tireless jokes about newspapers, shades of grey cast confusion over foggy situations that clog our judgment with indiscriminate puffs of white. This leaves concentration as fuzzy as the screen of a sputtering antenna television, snowing static in front of a black as night display, the signal just barely out of reach. After emerging from hazy phases such as these, the sun's appearance, brilliant and bright, causes us to squint in disbelief. After all, we've always been told nothing is black as night and as white as day.

Most every age-old phrase contains loopholes. In most cases they lie far and few between like a well-worn sweater, and among the rare exceptions falls the two-faced town of Pittsburgh's South Side. Running along the Monongahela River, the neighborhood facilitates a culture as compatible as crayons and markers, Zebras and Dalmatians. Sunlight illuminates Pittsburgh's past and those who wish to preserve a small-town lifestyle. However twilight casts an eerie glow on the horizon anticipating big changes in the steel city.

When the bus slid open it's doors, I was in an entirely different world. South Side by day. Based on the look of astonishment that crossed my face I half expected the bus driver to announce, "Honey, we're not in Oakland anymore." The sun winked at me from behind a transparent sky, slowly clearing itself of clouds. Wind licked at leaves on the chilled pavement sending them in corkscrew swirls to another street corner. As I strolled down East Carson Street, the serenity of the scene enchanted me. I'd entered a civilization switched into slow motion.

> Sunday strollers shared this city with another, more eccentric neighbor: nightlife.

The tranquility was shattered as I noticed an elderly woman grimace disgustedly as I dodged a dismembered slice of pizza, which looked as though it had been thrown from a third story window the night before. They tolerated them, the gadget wielding city slickers. An older generation sauntered the streets that would be theirs, until the sun sank behind South Side's scenic skyline. Inviting the young and restless, with bright neon signs which promised a wild night.

The town's quaint, family-owned appearance left me wondering how chaos could ever crack its aged exterior. Grey haired churchgoers filed in and out of Bruegger's Bagels in leisurely throngs. Many, a little less than a century before, rolled down East Carson Street in strollers, and now they wheel their way through the bagel shop in walkers and wheelchairs. A heart-melting grandmotherly woman strolled by the snowflake sprinkled storefront, walking her equally endearing Shih Tzu. To my surprise, the doting pet owner bent down, looped her wagging pup's leash around a telephone pole and casually proceeded to enter the restaurant. Being a proud owner of two perfect pooches myself, I found the spectacle disconcerting, the poor thing paced the pavement, pathetic and alone. Although as I observed the woman order a chocolate chip bagel without a shadow of doubt cross her wise features, I realized that maybe this was not abandonment at all, but a truly defining act of sincere trust between the woman and her hometown. I sat at the booth, in awe, wondering how the fireside charm of South Side could possibly be transformed into the heat of a Friday night on the town. Nevertheless, the exorbitantly large array of bars, speckled across the streets, reminded me that the Sunday strollers shared this city with another, more eccentric neighbor: nightlife. ■

South Side By Day

TEXT Sarah Mejia
PHOTOS Emily O'Donnell

Caught in the South Side before the sun sets? Wondering what the South Side has to offer during the daylight hours? Never fear, there's always an adventure to be had on or around E. Carson St.

Southside may be famous for its bars, but there are plenty of restaurants and cafes in the area, too. The Beehive Coffeehouse & Dessertery has a fun mix of tea, music coffee and art. Crazy Mocha and Caribou Coffee compete for the caffeine-craved in South Side Works, which also houses bd's Mongolian Grill and the delicious Cheesecake Factory. Nearby, McCormick & Schmick's Seafood & Steaks is open for lunch and dinner, and there are even places in the neighborhood that offer ethnic cuisine such as Spanish, Thai, Greek, Middle Eastern and Asian foods. For a more laid-back meal, visit Qdoba and the Pita Pit near South Side Works. Be sure to pay attention to the pizza places scattered around the neighborhood as well, like Pizza Sola.

For an adventure only the South Side can provide, head over to The Cuckoo's Nest and explore the magic shop. Then make your way to Lucy's Handmade Clothing Shop to purchase something unique before you depart from the South Side, and around Halloween, be sure to visit Spotlight Costumes or Spirit Halloween. A cheaper alternative for both costume-hunting and regular, year-round shopping is the Goodwill thrift store on the corner of E Carson and 27th St. Across the street from the Goodwill is Aldi, a grocery store which just opened in the South Side in late 2012. (Bring a quarter so you can rent the shopping carts!)

At a loss for entertainment? South Side Works also has a movie theater. Trying to get in shape? There's BYS Yoga, LA Fitness and Amazing Yoga in the area, too. Looking for a life-long commitment? Go get a tattoo. There are eight tattoo shops on E Carson St, including In the Blood Tattoo, South Side Tattoo & Body Piercing and Jester's Court Tattoos & More. Are you looking to get a body mod, but you aren't sure if you're ready to commit to it for life? There are plenty of places to get new piercings around South Side as well. Make sure to follow any and all aftercare instructions carefully.

If alcohol just isn't your thing, Hookah Bookah opens every night at 5:00 pm. For other tobacco needs, Bloom Cigar Company and S&S Candy & Cigar Co are sure to help.

By the time all this is done, South Side's many bars should be open for business. It's no mystery what there is to do in South Side after dark, so go enjoy the nightlife ■

Legal Streetwalking

A South Side by Day Adventure.

TEXT Laura Calhoun
PHOTOS Emily O'Donnell

A single black suede pump lies broken on a metal grate at the base of a small tree on the 16th block of East Carson Street. There is no Cinderella to be found. If life were actually like a fairy tale, this little Cinderella would have a prince chase her down with a tube of super glue. But this is real life, and our Cinderella is probably waking up to find her prince next to her in bed. Regardless of which ending is true, the magic of the evening wore off and her shoe is still missing and broken.

That's the beauty of South Side. When the sun rises, all is forgotten except for a few traces of the prior night, and nobody is going to try to put them all together. We only catch glimpses of cigarette butts decorating the sidewalks and shards of busted beer bottles in the street glistening and popping as cars drive over them.

My friend and I walk through freshly salted sidewalks, avoiding the clumps of soiled snow that built up along the curbs and in between doorways to shops. People pass us in slow motion. It's as if the whole area between the Monongahela River and the base of the South Side Slopes is hung-over.

You could get confused walking through South Side in the daytime if you only visited at night. You might have become accustomed to the stop-and-go traffic and people screaming to direct their friend's car into a tight prime parking spot along the street. However, by day, cars seem to fit into parking spots easily and the air isn't quite so thick with heavy chatter and laughter. Without the bright neon signs and the distractions amongst the nightlife, we can see South Side in all of its natural beauty. You can't appreciate this beauty in the dark.

> Let the sidewalks lead you to your destination.

Romanesque and Italianate buildings line the sides of the streets. Mom and Pop corner stores offer welcoming greetings. People's faces aren't covered in shadows that distort their expressions. Elderly couples walk undisturbed, hand in hand. Families walk with their children and call after them when they get too close to the street or try crossing when the light is red.

Sometimes I wish I were a child again. Walking the streets in wonder, eager to let go of my mother's hand and venture into the world to find a journey and make my own mistakes. It's different once you have it. There isn't a hand to reach out to. Some find themselves trying to discover adventure in clubs or bars because they will have success stories to tell the next day after the effect of alcohol and recreational drugs wear off. Some argue that there is no adventure to be found in the daytime. I say they aren't trying to find one.

We turn down a random narrow street off of the main road and find a picturesque line of three-story townhouses. I can't resist the urge to snap a photo and upload it to Instagram, but I do it without a filter. The picture is rustic and fresh in its original form.

My friend gets a spurt of energy and runs ahead of me towards an abandoned building, pleading me to follow her in. Her curiosity is refreshing like the peppermint wind. She pushes against a door. It doesn't budge. She taps her boot against it, but nothing happens except the silent release of small clumps of snow that built up between the deep sole tread of her boots. A man with matted hair sticks his head out of the shattered window and asks, "What are yinz doin?"

I stand in shock, trying to decide if this is real life or if my imagination has been on a mental elliptical for too long. My friend runs into the street screaming in horror over the man's unexpected appearance and slips and falls onto the slushy street. The man notices her fall and he responds in deep, thunderous laughs. "You a'ight miss?"

Before I can help her, she jumps up and brushes her wet jeans and starts to laugh. What that man was doing in the building, we'll never know. But during that moment, we experienced an adrenaline rush, a natural high. And some say adventure doesn't exist here….

As we make our way back across the street to the Birmingham Bridge, I realize just how much an area can affect you. Stories are all around us in the spirit of the neighborhood, and South Side is no exception. For those of you who only visit at night, I urge you to go out and find a unique adventure. Let the sidewalks lead you to your destination. ■

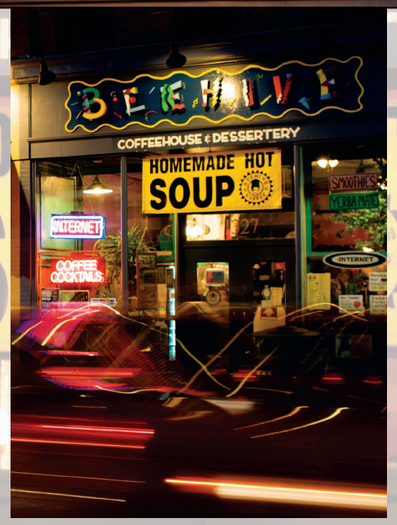
A Night at the Beehive

Viewing the South Side at night from a seat at the famous coffeeshop.

TEXT Joe DeMarini
PHOTOS Rachael Grace

Take a pause from Carson Street at the eccentric Beehive, hands too stiff from the cold to take a bill from a wallet for a beer. A fat black dog patrols the door with its Owner, wagging its long curved tail and nuzzling up to entering customers. The Owner wears a black leather bomber jacket, hands rammed in the pockets, and a striped black and gray beanie. The Owner chats to another man wearing a black ski jacket with sunglasses hanging from the back of his neck, the strap around his throat, and his cigarette smoke whirling around in the entry alcove, trying to escape into the night. The shop's quiet, few people around, but listen: there are girls giggling and that damn omnipresent "Shots" song by LMFAO bleeding through the walls from a club, almost drowning out the '80s rock and metal playing over the Beehive's PA.

It's a winter night in South Side. Everyone's at home staying warm or making moves to a bar—as the hours wear on, down come the necklines and up come the buttons on Carson. Today was temperate, thawing the area, and people are wandering the street, full from dinner at Cheesecake Factory or



Nakama, looking for just the right bar for their mood; maybe the dingy but welcoming Library suits their fancy, or perhaps Primanti's for some late eats after beers, or they could travel still further down Carson to Club Café for a show. A woman at the bar of the Pittsburgh Steak Co. buries her head in a menu—either ashamed or embarrassed.

The diligent workers inhabit the Beehive though, sipping coffee or beer or coffee cocktails. Undertaking tasks, or at least pretending to. Most stare at their work, its blankness unacceptable but unchangeable, too exhausted from the day to do anything else but watch the constant state of a blank page. The Barista-Bartender chats with a customer about the state of South Side and indie music in Pittsburgh, lamenting the decline of both. The B-B says "ahh" and "I see" at the proper moments, unengaged with the conversation and uninterested to the point where he asks people walking in the door what they want before they even sit down.

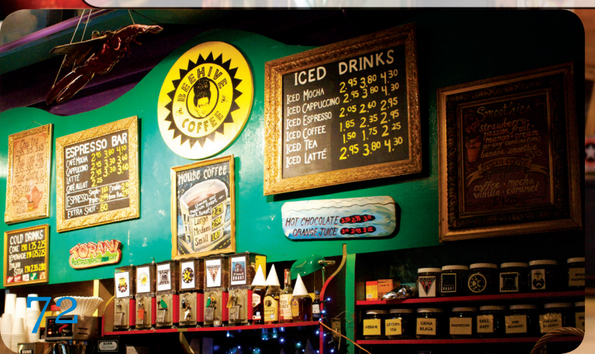
A woman across the aisle holds her pen in her left hand—a fellow lefty. No, wait, she's a righty, just holding it in her left. She glances at the B-B on her right. Turns to the door on her left and watches a man walk in, turns back to her cat-covered notebook as the entrant greets his friend at the table behind her. A man walks up, asks, "Can I sit here?" despite the numerous available tables. Clear intentions.

People complain about the cold and snow, but they should have tried crossing the Birmingham Bridge back to Oakland in the Snowmageddon of 2010 when buses stopped and cabs headed home. Now that was cold and snow, but what a beautiful trek. The lights glistened on the river and off the snow, cars passing—or perhaps, sliding—quiet atop the flakes. Looking over the railing, you saw the river churning away, ice floes the size of the missing PAT buses bumping and grinding in some twisted dance and breaking each other apart. No drivers took enough pity on your to give you a lift, despite your flimsy hoodie and nothing more. You didn't mind, though—the peace was beautiful, the solitude welcome. Pittsburgh became silence that night, a city in a void of white. It was the middle of freshmen year and you still weren't sure if Pittsburgh was the place for you, but after seeing it blanched you knew this city was the right decision. If the regality of downtown, with its towering UPMC building, could still be seen humming on through a haze of white, then this was a place worth living.

Now people complain of a little chill and two inches of snow. Weaklings.

Beer finished now, time to move on, back to Oakland on a 54. People doze, and a girl with piercings in her nose and eyebrow blasts Jack Johnson from her earbuds, glaring at those walking past her seat, the shreds of her exposed tattoos intimidating potential bench companions. Cross the Birmingham Bridge in shelter of a bus this time, the workers of the Beehive dispersing to their houses, bound to return tomorrow just to make an effort at their art, hoping to exchange pollen for honey. ■

> Cross the Birmingham Bridge in shelter of a bus this time, the workers of the Beehive dispersing to their houses, bound to return tomorrow



The Beehive is located at 1327 E. Carson St

(412)-488-4483

To contact for performance: promotions@beehivebuzz.com

How Did You Do That?

A magician reveals his tricks at the Cuckoo's Nest.

TEXT Taylor Wescott
PHOTOS Jamie Bergey & Brian Mulligan

"How did you do that?!" is what most people say after witnessing a magic trick. A magician never reveals his tricks, but if you wander into the Cuckoo's Nest and purchase one, a talented magician employed there will teach you how to do it right in the shop. I was honored when Adam Flemming, one of the employees at the Cuckoo's Nest, taught me the penny and dime trick I purchased. First he wowed us by making a penny and dime turn into one penny. Then he fooled us by placing both coins in my hand and, by magic, left the penny in my hand while the dime appeared in his! Of course I had to know how he did it. Since it was a pretty simple trick, I succumbed to my curiosity and bought it.

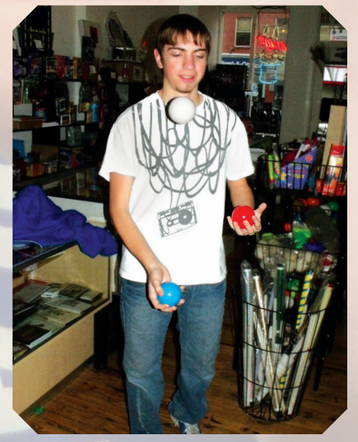
The "penny and dime illusion" is one of the few beginner tricks in the shop; the rest require some skill and practice which is why the shop's clientele consists of local magicians and, as I saw the day I stopped in, out-of-towners who travel all the way to Pittsburgh for their magical needs. The man before me in line to check out had three bags full of items. I asked him if he was a regular and he replied yes, he is from out of town so every time he manages to come out here he stocks up.

"You might have trouble plugging the address of 2304 1/2 East Carson Street into your GPS. No, you're not headed for Hogwarts!"

Despite the majority of out-of-towners, Pittsburgh is host to its very own magic scene. Adam used to do shows at restaurants before coming to work at the Cuckoo's Nest. Before then, a friend sparked his interest in magic by asking him to help build an illusion show. He described this illusion show as your typical magician's act involving disappearing items and sawed-in-half boxes. Local magicians also gather at local meetings where they can showcase new tricks to others. Organizations such as the Fellowship of Christian Magicians (FCM) or International Brotherhood of Magicians (IBM) hold their own formal meetings forming a lively community.

The patronage of loyal customers and Pittsburgh's local magicians has kept this shop around since 1976. Linda Peiritsh and her husband Tom, a local magician who performs under the name "Tom J.," own the shop. In 1986, they moved the shop to the South Side, where owner Linda Peiritsh says, "they felt like they fit." And a magic shop most certainly fits into South Side's eclectic and vibrant scene. Linda also said its central location helps out. Yet **you might have trouble plugging the address of 2404 ½ East Carson Street into your GPS. No, you're not headed for Hogwarts!**

Linda says the choice of address went along with the "magic" of the magic shop. The penny and dime illusion wasn't the only trick Adam showed us. He also demonstrated the wire gram, a more elaborate trick and one of his favorites. By placing a wire over the flame from a lighter, Adam was able to extract from my memory the face value of the card I had previously chosen from the pile. I watched in fascination as the wire curled and twisted into the shape of a J and a spade. My card was a Jack of Spades. How did he do it?! He wouldn't reveal his secrets this time, so your guess is as good as mine. ■



Cuckoo's Nest is located at
2304 1/2 E. Carson St.
Pittsburgh, PA 15203

Monday-Friday:
11:00a.m.- 4:30 p.m.
Saturday:10:30a.m.-4:30 p.m.

A TASTE OF THE MILK SHAKE FACTORY

TEXT Laura Calhoun
PHOTOS Nishant Singh

After reluctantly waiting almost an hour for the next 54C bus to arrive after I missed the first one, I debated whether the trip was worth it. What makes a milkshake good enough to risk moderate hypothermia and a definite cold? I silently cursed myself for not paying my landlord the $60 a month to keep my car safe behind my building and shield it from the violent Pittsburgh drivers. But of course my car was at home, over four hours away, leaving Port Authority to be my one and only savior.

But what's a knight in shining armor who abides by the city budget cuts and leaves its lady in distress out in the threatening winter weather? At that point, any citizen and their Oldsmobile could have qualified as long as I got to The Milk Shake Factory. I still couldn't think of devouring a milkshake amidst the below freezing temperature, but it wouldn't be a fair test run of the establishment if I didn't get a taste. The next bus going into South Side was the 75 so I hopped on knowing I'd have to walk five long blocks down to 17th Street and East Carson with the cold tightening my muscles and putting pressure on my spine.

I feared getting off the bus after being warmed up by the residual heat created by fifty freshman girls gabbing furiously about what they hoped to buy at the fashion shops in the Works. Once you're exposed to warmth, getting back out in the cold seems impossible. It's kind of like swimming in a pool and jumping in a hot tub and then running back into the pool. For the first few seconds as the ice water takes possession of your body and the pins and needles poke every birthmark on your skin, part of you wishes your life was over so you don't have to deal with the torture any longer.

Upon arriving, after trudging against the relentless wind, I barged through the door to be welcomed by a soft jingling of bells and the overpowering scent of melted chocolate. I forgot what cold was. Cold no longer existed. I was in a state of rapture as my eyes scanned mounds of chocolates. My pupils dilated over the impeccable display of espresso truffles, vanilla buttercreams, and large, luscious strawberries ready to be dipped in rich chocolate. I was in diabetic heaven. My hand traced the glass barrier that held the chocolate away from reach as I walked to the back corner where the ice cream was set up.

A girl behind the counter welcomed me with a smile and asked, "What can I get for you?"

The board of choices that boasted milkshakes, sundaes, egg creams, floats and spritzers, and ice cream sodas immediately overwhelmed me.

The girl acknowledged my demeanor and laughed. "You look intimidated."

"It's my first time here. Everything sounds delicious," I said.

"Do you like red velvet?" she asked. I didn't even have to reply. The girl kindly scooped the ice cream on a sampler spoon and handed it to me. "This one is popular. I always mix it with Piece of Cake. It's my personal favorite. You can mix any of the flavors together, though."

It came as no surprise that they have 55 milkshake flavors, each homemade on an old-fashioned Bastian-Blessing soda fountain. Knowing this gave me high hopes for a perfectly mixed milkshake, unlike the kinds you find at fast food restaurants where they throw in a glob of vanilla ice cream and a quick squeeze of an off-brand chocolate syrup that sticks to the side of the cup.

After scanning the list dozens of times and the worker graciously waiting, I ultimately decided on a Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough and Piece of Cake combination milkshake. I didn't mind paying the five dollars, which some may say is much too inflated. But this isn't just any milkshake. It's an upscale milkshake. It's a Milk Shake Factory milkshake! To the company, tradition and quality mean everything. They purchase only the freshest milk straight from Pennsylvania's renowned dairy farms, and all of their flavorings are homemade.

The Milk Shake Factory

After being in operations since 1914 (nearly a century!) paying any less than five dollars for the perfected recipes and customs would be robbery.

After getting my milkshake, I scooted past an intimate couple sitting at an elevated table with high silver chairs and sat down at a quaint two-person table with black aluminum chairs. The tables were decorated with festive centerpieces. Some tables had large hot chocolate mugs filled with individually wrapped peppermint and pretzel sticks dipped in chocolate and coated with sprinkles. Other tables boasted Edward Marc Chocolatier accordion pamphlets that described the types of chocolate The Milk Shake Factory sold. Pittsburgh's own Edward Marc Chocolatier creates all of the chocolate available from a special family recipe.

Looking down at my dark speckled milkshake, I knew it was time. I only had to suck my cheeks in hard on the first sip. It was just the right amount of thick and frothy. The chocolate chips that didn't get crushed by the mixer surged through my straw and flowed against my taste buds. There were just enough chunks to chew on the sweetness. At that moment, I knew that if Kelis lived in Pittsburgh and her song was actually about milkshakes, she'd be talking about these.

Originally looking at the generous portion of milkshake, I figured that it could easily be shared, but thankfully the plastic cups with lids were designed to allow one straw so the consumer doesn't have to feel gluttonous by keeping it all to his or herself.

Between sips and thanking God that I wasn't born lactose intolerant, I noticed the clean, retro soda fountain feel. The walls were covered in clear mosaic tile, as if it were a shiny brick wall from the middle of the wall down to the ground. The top half was covered in white Victorian wallpaper with a three dimensional texture. I longed to run my hand over its swirls to decode the secret recipes and ingredients as if the wallpaper was actually braille.

Along half of the back wall, light blue boxes of prepackaged chocolate with perfectly tied brown ribbons were being aligned by a worker. The other half of the wall displayed pink and red Valentine's Day goodies, even though the holiday was over a month away. It's never too early to share chocolate with your sweetheart.

It only seemed appropriate that an elderly couple appeared in the window holding a bag of pastries as Breakfast at Tiffany's played on the big screen television mounted on the wall behind the display of chocolates. The elderly man was holding on tightly to his dear wife's hand as he guided her into the shop. We exchanged smiles as they walked past my table, and the man tipped his plaid driver cap at me as his wife asked him if he wanted to share a sundae. I smiled at the love surrounding me in the shop. Couples, young and old, came here to spend quality time together, whether on a first date or a routine outing.

Minutes later, the woman shuffled by me with a vanilla cone in her hand. She headed to the two tables set up directly in front of the window and sat down at the table with only one chair. Her husband came over carrying a cup of ice cream and looked at his wife with confusion.

"Where the hell am I going to sit?" he asked. His voice was stern and he blew air out of his mouth in frustration.

She waved her hand as if she were swatting at a fly. "Oh hush, you," she said.

The man sat at the table behind his wife, and she slowly got up and moved to the seat across from him. His brow was furrowed until he dug his spoon into the mound of ice cream.

"How's your butter pecan?" the wife asked as if she already knew how he was going to respond.

They simply laughed together and continued to enjoy their treat alternating between stories of their past and sitting in comfortable silence.

It's amazing how delicious ice cream can change the mood and bring people together. If this trip taught me anything, it's that The Milk Shake Factory's Butter Pecan ice cream can solve any argument. For my remaining semesters in college, I plan on distributing cartons of butter pecan ice cream to all of my professors. There's nothing like premier homemade ice cream to turn that B into an A. New traditions start here. ■

The Milkshake Factory is located at 1705 E. Carson St.

Mon-Fri: 10am-10pm

AN HOUR AT ALDI

Aldi combines off-brand savings with grocery expediency for an unconventional shopping experience.

TEXT Vincent Mok
PHOTOS Robert Wallace & Vincent Mok

I've only ever been to Aldi when it's snowing, not so much by choice but by mere coincidence. It's always a welcome relief, feeling warmth wrapping gently around my cold face as I step through the automatic doors and out of Pittsburgh's surly weather. At Aldi, there's a touch of Costco in the design, with the cement floors and industrial stacks of groceries, still in boxes, that colorfully line the aisles. I see unabashed reds, yellows, oranges, blues, greens simply spanning the shelves in delightful bursts of saturation. There aren't many rows to navigate, and the walking space is roomy – almost excessively so. In fact, it almost feels sparse. But the building is warm and cheery even against the blizzards, and there's a taste of familiarity that such unpretentious displays and simple layout create.

I may be biased, though. I love grocery stores with an intensity bordering on obsession, much like my fixation on parks and libraries. I find them inspiring and clever, and they always have enough visual stimuli to keep me entertained. I treat them like I treat playgrounds: unchartered territory for rampant frolicking and rebelliously rolling around on the back axle of the shopping cart, drifting, drifting, drifting past vibrant cans, boxes, and packages. I'm told I don't act my age, but I'm okay with that. I blame my parents for not letting me run wild enough when I was younger, and I'm making up for the years of hyperactivity that I missed, I suppose.

> I don't know why, but people always seem to think that dancing in supermarkets is a symptom of mental instability.

I play games as I wander down the rows, and I imagine the life of the people I see. The young woman in yoga pants and a North Face just came from the gym. She'll be picking up a salad mix and some apples, but she'll sneak in a bag of chocolate at the bottom of her pile when no one's looking. It'll be a treat for tonight. There's a couple discussing whether or not carrots should go into the cart. He does eat them, he insists – remember that time when she made them with chicken? He loved them then. But his wife doesn't look convinced and reminds him of the last time. She had them for three meals because he didn't feel like eating them that week. But I know she'll give in today because their cart also has potatoes and onions, and she's going to make their son's favorite carrot casserole along with a turkey pâté loaf tonight. By the cash register is a restless employee who keeps checking the time. He's been working a long shift, and all he wants is to go home and get ready for the new episode of How I Met Your Mother. Soon. Soon, he'll be free. And then in the last aisle is the Asian rolling on his shopping cart without concern for the safety of those around him. One of these days, the employee is going to chase him down with a broom for endangering other people's welfare.

But no one's chasing my friend and me with a broom yet, which is surprising, considering how I'm dancing on the cart while my friend shakes two boxes of graham crackers like maracas. The other customers shoot us sharp looks under nervous eyebrows, but we mean no harm. I don't know why, but people always seem to think that dancing in supermarkets is a symptom of mental instability. Admittedly, questions about this condition have been thrown at me in half-joking tones, but I'm almost certain that I won't be propelling grocery-laden vehicles towards anyone within the next few years of my life. And rest assured, I'll be buying the graham crackers – steadily turning into crumbs as my friend jams to the sound of wafers crunching against the cellophane wrapper inside – to make a cheesecake crust. After all, I may ignore social convention when it comes to the prohibition of public dancing, but I'm not rude enough to make someone else buy the products that I am allowing my friend to crumble.

But really, I'm just enjoying my time at here. It's a place where I get to escape from the constant stresses of schoolwork and job searching, and Aldi's bright cartons remind me of the happy memories I had in playrooms full of toy bricks. Moreover, whenever I'm grocery shopping, the only thing I have to consider is what will line my kitchen shelf during the upcoming week. So even if there are difficult decisions, they're all about food, which essentially means that virtually all choices can lead to a delicious outcome anyways. Really, it's hard to go wrong in grocery stores. So it's not hard to understand why my friend and I have been having a personal dance party in the aisles for about an hour.

Still, there's no reason for the ordinary customer to be in Aldi for an hour. It's not a particularly big store, and the large, uncluttered aisles make getting lost a challenge even for small children. And despite its ranges of selection comprise the normal items – cereal, produce, canned goods, crackers, sweets, snacks – you normally only encounter one kind of each item. As a result, Aldi, unlike with other bulkier grocers, makes your decision considerably faster by eliminating the question of which brand you want. Instead, you have the option of purchasing what you see or returning home without it.

It's hard to make heads or tails of this. On one hand, shopping has just become a lot easier, but there's no assurance of quality as with a trusted brand name. Thankfully, Aldi seems discerning about the products it stocks. And to my knowledge, no one's tried to blame it for the death of a loved one, so I think we can be guaranteed our safety. But what happens if your product is not quite as good as what you wanted? Well, Aldi graciously has a "Double Guarantee" policy that ensures that the store will replace and refund any product that fails to meet customer satisfaction. Hard to go wrong with something like that.

Of course, Aldi's predominance of off-brand goods is south of conventional, as are some of the practices of the grocer's. You must pay for shopping bags if you don't bring any, and carts cost 25 cents to use. Of course, this seems backwards to some, but it's rather sensible in the long run by promoting the use of recyclable bags. And unlocking that carts' tethering mechanism may cost a quarter, but you can always get your money back when you push the cart back in its rightful place. For employees, it minimizes the hassle of fetching runaway carts, and it ensures that cart-related automobile accidents happen as rarely as possible. Ultimately, you figure out that customer consciousness is paramount when you shop at Aldi. Unfortunately, their inability to accept credit cards seems meritless for customers and may prove a drawback that might be too much for some shoppers, although they do accept Access cards.

When I first explained Aldi to a friend, she seemed traumatized by the idea of an off-brand store, but the concept makes sense to me. It's a jackpot for broke college kids like me, and a tour of the store is a benign experience regardless of any preconceptions. It sits on a corner in South Side, quiet on the outskirts of the Southside Works. It seems perfect where it is, perched diagonally across from LA Fitness and neighboring American Eagle and Goodwill. It's not flashy, but it's honest and simple, catering not only to those with disposable income but also those who want some grocery thrifting. And that's why, beyond the question of if it's suspect or not, it feels familiar. That's because it reminds me of Pittsburgh: open, hard-working, and interested in equal-opportunity prospects. It's a place that seems destined for this city. ■

Right: The colorful aisles of Aldi, top photos, display a collection of off-brand goods at an affordable rate. Their "Double Guarantee" policy, bottom, ensures that customers need not fear that these goods are off-brand but not low-quality.

Last Page: The lights of Aldi shine silently amidst the noisy streets of the Southside Works.

A WORLD OF MAYBE

A psychic is not someone who can predict the future; there is no crystal ball, there is no cape, and there is no Whoopi Goldberg (referencing the movie Ghost, of course). Instead, a psychic is merely a kind of therapist, someone to offer advice to those searching for suggestions. And human beings always have and always will continue to search for the answers.

TEXT & PHOTO Karley Snyder
PHOTOS Emily O'Donnell
Illustration Daniell Hu

The ring of wind chimes and the smell of sage suffocate as the white walls get a few feet closer with every footstep, transferring the human vessel into the room. The sign from outside East Carson Street reads "The Psychic Shop." The motion-censored door chimes louder than the metal instrument, but the candles instantly melt away the piercing sound. Figures and Pharaohs wrap around the walls, shelves, and center table. Sprinkled in with these symbols of Egyptology are angel statues and a painting of Jesus Christ hanging on one of the doors. This is a space to discover tranquility, whatever kind that may be.

Is this the place for answers? Or is this only to find suggestions, a certain starting place? Maybe—if you search long enough.

Tina is a psychic or "Personal Advisor," as stated on her business card. Her services include three different kinds of readings: palm, tarot, and psychic. Palm readings deal with the surroundings of an individual, not about life, just a personal expression of self. Tarot cards involve a process of picking out ten cards, which Tina will read aloud. Whatever the cards tell her, she will deliver to the client. "It's whatever you pick out. It's your energy," she explains. Tina also provides psychic readings, in which she will concentrate on energies, auras, and karmas, and then piece these factors together when discussing the results.

"This is kind of a gift," she coos, "It's a spiritual thing. This is not something I learned out of a book at school. This is a God thing. God gave me this knowledge, and God opened up his door. And there is a purpose for it. And that is what it has been used for." Tina is a practicing Catholic. Both religion and psychic abilities shaped her past and molded her future. Tina came from a religious, psychic family; her grandmother introduced the ability to her mother, who in turn opened the gift up to Tina and her sister. The ability to tap into one's psychic gift is passed from one family member to the next. She was given the psychic gift by god, but familial influence assisted the understanding of her innate ability.

> "It's a spiritual thing. This is not something I learned out of a book at school. This is a God thing. God gave me this knowledge."

Tina uses her gift as a form of therapy, psychiatry—what she believes to be her purpose in life directly from God. She manifests this gift by satisfying other people, giving them peace of mind. A client will come into her shop confused, lacking direction, and Tina has the opportunity to help them leave with a smiling face. She tries to provide some sort of guidance, offering hope and reassurance for the client. Part of helping someone is being able to precisely string together words and provide a source of verbal comfort. The other part is the ability to listen. Once these skills are mastered, an emotional balance can be achieved and comfort is possible for anyone in need.

However, Tina cannot help every client. At times, clients stump Tina and she cannot read anything for them; sometimes they are completely and totally blank for an unknown, puzzling reason. "Maybe they are not supposed to know whatever is supposed to happen to them. Maybe they cannot handle the situation. Maybe they just aren't supposed to know, just figure it out on their own. I don't know, I really don't have the answers." Some psychics can pick up on some of these energies, but it usually stops somewhere.

The small flame of the tea candle dances from on top a solid wood table. Tina enjoys burning candles, and she enjoys a variety of scents. "They are very relaxing, they are very soothing, and I feel like candles have a purpose for everybody because everybody gets different feelings from candles." The burning wick, a small citadel amongst the liquid wax offers a form of illumination hidden in the flame.

"Everyone has their gift in a different way, or a different feeling or different situation. Or at a different time in their life." Some psychics are able to connect with the dead, but Tina doesn't have that aspect in her personal gift. She simply can't pick up on the deceased. "It's not that I am not interested in it, I just don't have the knowledge for it. And I don't have the gift for it, so I don't want to bother anything that I don't quite understand." Every psychic is in-tune with this gift in a unique manner. Tina accepts her gift for what it is; she doesn't meddle with the unknown. "I try to leave everything alone because I feel like this is a gift from God and if he wants me to move on with it, he will show me. And he will give me, or open up a door for me."

Tina started practicing her gift when she was a teenager, and she has been in the psychic business for forty years now. She has her shop on East Carson Street but also in North Carolina and Florida. She travels often, commuting and touring across the United States. However, Tina believes the energy levels in Pittsburgh to be outstanding, mainly because everyone she encounters seems to understand each other and get along together. There are a lot of psychics in the Pittsburgh area. Not all of these psychics have shops though; some read privately in their homes. Instead of advertising their gift, they rely on word-of-mouth connections between friends. Either way, this area is full of psychic energy. The psychic industry is also evolving; there are more psychics now than there were ten years ago. "It's just that people are more open to it, where before they weren't. It was just kind of a scary thing. They didn't know anything about it, or couldn't understand it."

There will always be skeptics and disbelievers, but not in Tina's shop. "I haven't had any problems with anyone or had any disbelief or skeptics because they all seem to have an open mind.

Skeptics don't usually walk in. The only reason a skeptic would walk in is when these bars are open and they are drunk. There is no way to pick up on energies like that!" Tina encounters drunkards more often than she would prefer. Beer-drinking stragglers wander into her shop asking her to tell them their first name or year of birth, amongst other ridiculous requests. East Carson Street is swamped with bars and clubs, the heart of Pittsburgh's nightlife, so naturally Tina would encounter inebriated souls. The psychic shop closes at nine o'clock to prevent things from getting too ridiculous, allowing Tina to share her gift with those in need of her services. Tina believes helping people is her personal purpose from God.

"Everyone is here for a purpose. Whether you accept it, whether you don't, whether you believe it, or whether you don't. I think God gave everybody a purpose. It doesn't matter how big or how huge, it's all still there." Tina's purpose is providing someone with peace of mind of some sort. She strives to give them guidance, to open up a door so they can look forward to something instead of just wandering, lost. A small cloud of smoke trails off from the candle and into the still air. The smell floats through with the passing breeze, carrying more questions than answers. In reality, we are all searching for some kind of answer—a trend of thousands of years and one that will continue indefinitely. And yet, how can we ever find what we are searching for? ■

The Psychic Shop is located at 1933 E Carson St, Pittsburgh, PA 15203

"Everyone is here for a purpose. Whether you accept it, whether you don't, whether you believe it, or whether you don't. I think God gave everybody a purpose. It doesn't matter how big or how huge, it's all still there."

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PERMANENT POSSIBILITIES

Pittsburgh's East Carson Street is home to eight tattoo studios, stretching between thirteen blocks of bars, shops, and restaurants. Each shop has a unique style and atmosphere—their own space amongst the commotion of Carson Street. From Sailor Jerry inspired flash art to custom artworks, Southside provides tattoo collectors with a wide range of permanent possibilities.

TEXT (Karley Snyder & Sarah Mejia)
PHOTOS (KarleySnyder & Kathleen Euler)

▶▶ *Right: Artist Nick Herrington of Flying Monkey*

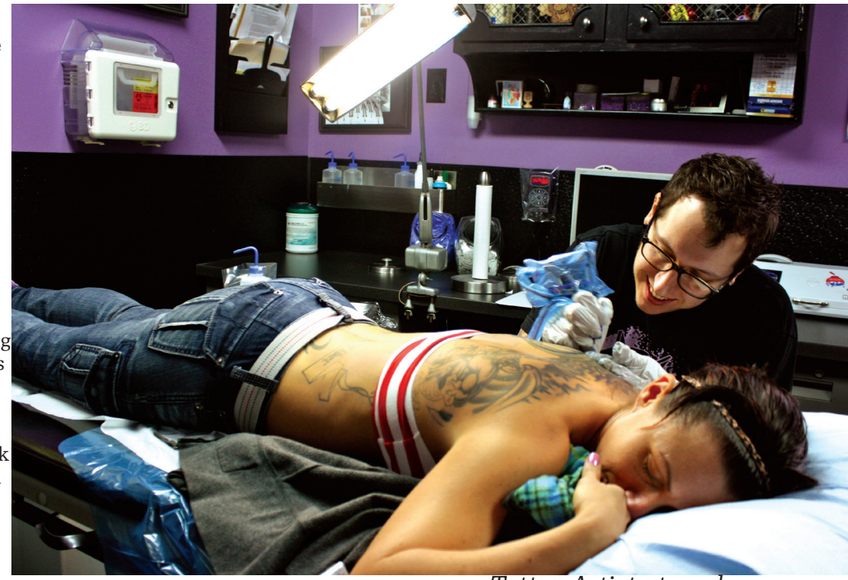
The artwork of Kyklops. ◀◀

Kyklops Tattoo has six tattoo artists and two piercers. The owner, Evan, grew up in Pittsburgh and attended CMU where he, as a student, had access to all the equipment and materials he needed. After working in another shop where the artists did not have reasonable access to the resources they needed, Evan set out to make his shop less like a home studio and more like a salon. The long-standing connection between the South Side and tattooing made E Carson Street an obvious location to establish the shop in 2006.

Kyklops Tattoo has nice, modern computers and scanners, and the shop is neat and organized so that the artists can focus on making art without worrying that the health or safety of their clients is at risk because of a sub-standard shop.

The artists at Kyklops Tattoo are a team, and Evan says that everyone's work just keeps improving. The artists work in a variety of different styles, but the shop mainly focuses on traditional American and Japanese tattoos.

Kyklops is located at 2130 E. Carson St.

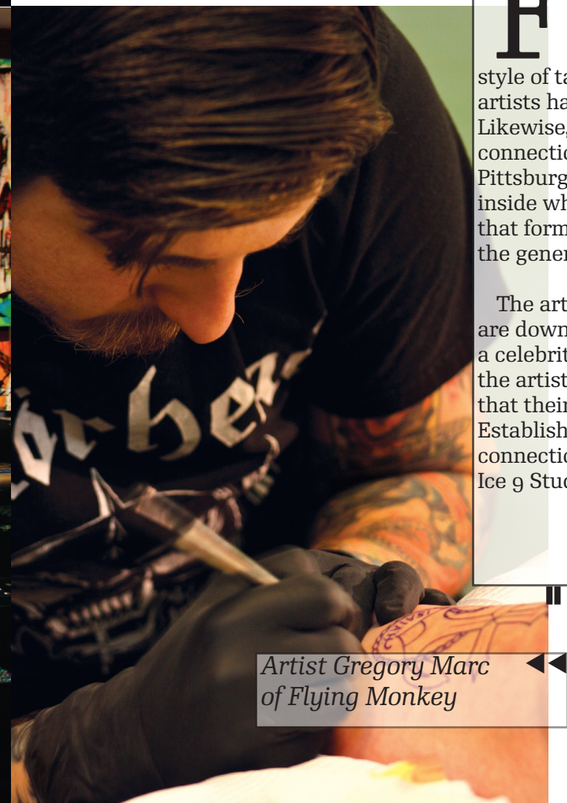


Tattoo Artist at work at Kyklops ◀◀

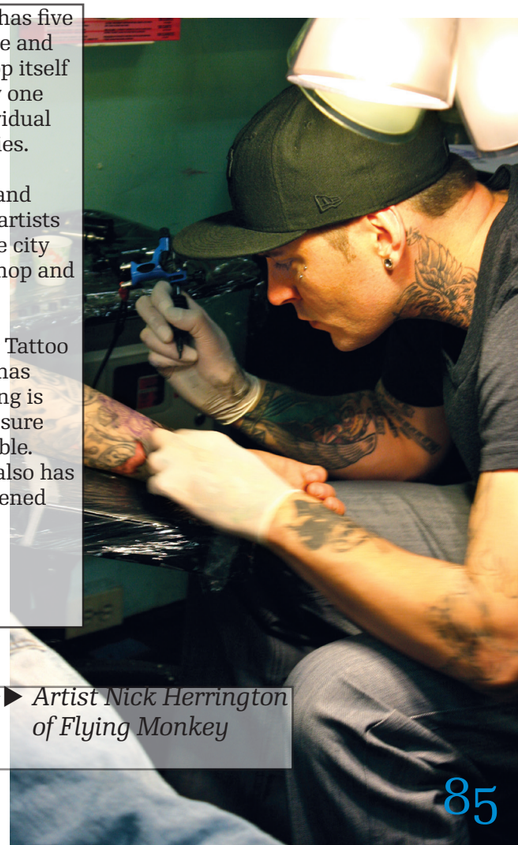
Flying Monkey Tattoo has five artists, one apprentice and two piercers. The shop itself does not focus on any one style of tattooing, but the individual artists have their own specialties. Likewise, there is no specific connection between the shop and Pittsburgh in general. It is the artists inside who live and work in the city that form a link between the shop and the general area.

The artists at Flying Monkey Tattoo are down-to-earth and no one has a celebrity personality. Tattooing is the artists' life, and they make sure that their clients feel comfortable. Established in 2008, the shop also has connections to the recently-opened Ice 9 Studio.

Flying Monkey is located at 1309 E. Carson St.



Artist Gregory Marc of Flying Monkey ◀◀



▶▶ *Artist Nick Herrington of Flying Monkey*

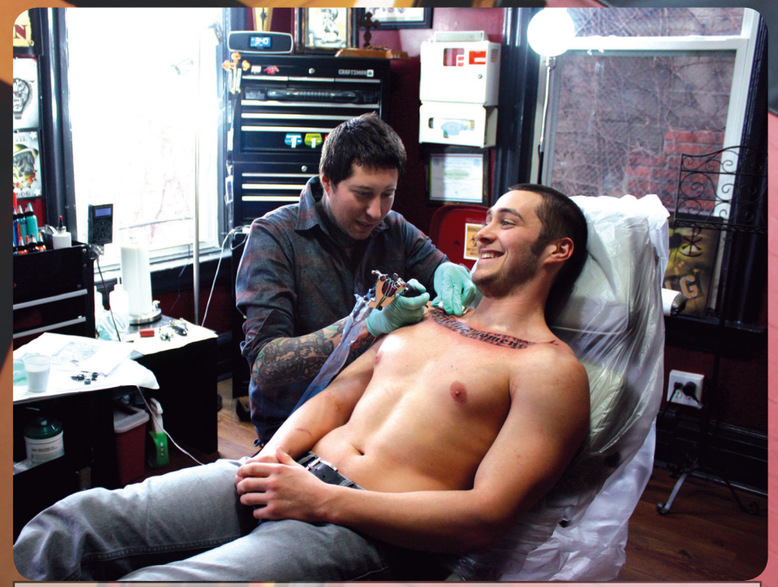
IN THE BLOOD

The walls of this antique, restored wooden building are decorated with hundreds of framed flash, encapsulating a traditional style of tattoos. In The Blood Tattoo, located on East Carson's 20th street, has a diverse style. "We're pretty well-rounded. We all like the traditional style, and it fits our building. So it kind of doesn't make sense to make it more modern looking. Myself, I'm pretty well-rounded. I like to do a number of different styles. I like doing a lot of color and black and gray styles," Justun, the owner of In The Blood, strives to provide his clients with a tattoo they can be satisfied with, regardless of the Sailor Jerry influence on shop décor.

In The Blood houses tattoo artists Justun Palencsar, Seth Mortiz, Mark Patrick, and Doug Brunner, as well as professional piercer Twitch. The shop was founded in 2003, and since then the shop has been voted Best Body Art in 2009, 2010, and 2011 by Reader's Choice in Pittsburgh City Paper. The staff strives to provide a friendly, professional environment while advancing in the ever-growing industry, open from 1:00-8:00 PM on Mondays, and 1:00-9:00 PM Tuesdays-Saturdays. They have certainly built their shop into something to be proud of.

Justun has always been fascinated with tattoos. As a little kid he saw bikers covered in ink and thought, "that is awesome!" From elementary school to high school, he took every art program possible. He really didn't think of tattooing as a career, but when he was sixteen, he became friends with an owner of a tattoo studio. "It wasn't really planned though. I just befriended this guy and his wife, hanging out in the shop. When it got busy I would do some drawings. I did that for a while, and I told him I was interested in tattooing but he just laughed at me." It's hard to start out in the tattoo industry; a lot of artists don't want to guarantee an apprenticeship or provide motivation because tattooing is a lot of hard work. After about five years of apprenticing without realizing it, Justun still didn't get any kind of guarantee. He was investing time into something uncertain, and he needed to find direction in his life.

"I just put my life in God's hands. It was crazy because, you know I didn't make any big announcements, I just kind of lived how I was living, but I was trying to better myself. Then Mike who I apprenticed under, was just like 'Hey man you have been here forever. It's time for you to pick up some machines.'" Faith gave Justun the ability to let life come to him, and everything fell into place.



Justun opened In The Blood in 2003, taking over a previous tattoo studio that was run into the ground. The shop had to be completely rebuilt, from inside and out. "You come in with a new name, no one knows who you are. You have to gain respect. And we have gained a lot of respect with a lot of people that are pretty recognized and been around different shops."

Justun has incorporated his faith into his shop, but in a very personal aspect. "Everyone that works here is not a Christian or anything like that. But we try to have that general standard. And even if someone does work for me and they are not [Christian], they can at least understand what the formation of the business is about; listening to people instead of telling them their idea is dumb." He uses faith to make his shop more family-oriented, more inviting. "You can't make everyone happy, but we try to break down barriers. We've been known as a Christian shop, but we have never labeled it as that. I'm thankful for that though." Justun has been able to create a shop with a positive staff, consistent clients, and a respectable community.

Justun's favorite part of tattooing comes from the constant interactions with people and the stories they have to tell. "I just like how personable tattooing can be with people. It's cool how you can put a marking on someone for the rest of their life and hear their stories. Sometimes I think it's ridiculous when I hear these stories and I have to ask 'Is your story even true? You're allowed to just get tattooed' But, sometimes you get these stories that are pretty heartfelt. The purpose for me is sometimes just to listen to people. Sometimes people need someone to listen."

In The Blood's success is partly based on how comfortable clients feel in the shop. There is no dumb idea, there are no judgments—there is just the art of tattooing. They are following their passion, faith, and creativity to provide the best tattoo experience possible. ■

Last page: Artist Greg D. with Tim Harmon

Right: The exterior of In The Blood.

In The Blood is located at 2005 E. Carson St.

Mon: 1pm-8pm
Tues - Sat: 1pm-9pm

http://inthebloodtattoo.com

EVOLVER

Who wouldn't want to get tattooed at the very entrance of a studio on an elevated platform— almost surrounded by windows, inviting the public to walk by and investigate? Well, maybe this almost communal viewing of such a permanent action isn't exactly relaxing for some. Not to fear, this is just one of the tattoo stations at Evolver Tattoo Arts—a diverse space for creativity of any kind.

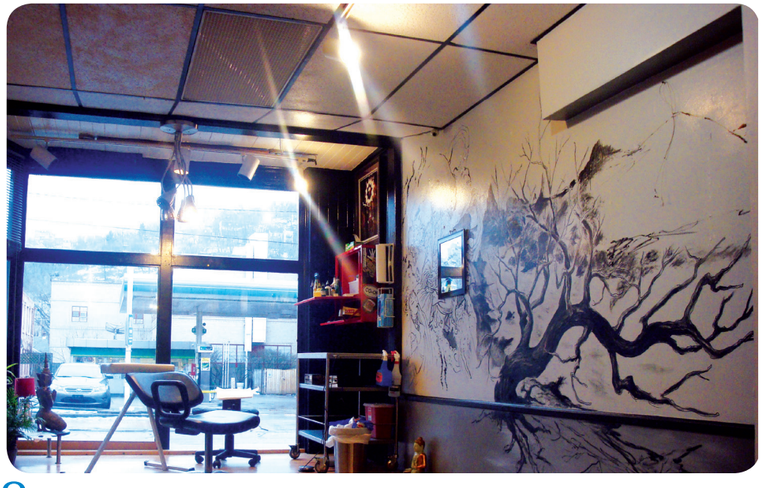
Evolver is covered in precisely stenciled line drawings, mixed with freehand, organic murals on top of slate-gray walls. This shop immediately oozes creativity to the passersby. With murals depicting unruly trees, mandalas, eastern deities, and scantily-clad women, the fine art emphasis of Evolver is hard to miss. Oh, and we can't forget the display case full of action figures and small-scale paintings. Needless to say, the shop hosts eclectic tastes.

Founded on October 30, 2011, Evolver is a fairly new addition to 10th street, but the shop has already established a well-known presence. Evolver Tattoo's talented and friendly staff includes Brandon Cantu, Eric Rumfelt, Dave Frentzel, and Laura Lee Burkhard, and they are available from 1:00-10:00 PM Monday through Saturday. The shop's tattoo style is diverse—a little bit of everything. Evolver is emphasizing the need for creativity, from inside their shop and expanding across East Carson.

> A body is the perfect canvas for self-expression.

Immediately after entering Evolver's door, Dave pokes his head up from focusing on his client's tattoo—the word "Family" written in script, filling the space across the client's chest. A body is the perfect canvas for self-expression. I am welcomed into the space, where we all start sharing tattoo pictures and stories. **This is a kind of community—composed of members that create, collect, or appreciate.**

Dave has been tattooing for seven years now and favors the



American traditional tattoo style; bold lines and bright colors are a consistent trend in his work.

He's new to Pittsburgh though, starting at the shop in August of 2012. While he may be the newest addition to Evolver, Dave has certainly made both Pittsburgh and Evolver both his home.

Dave Frentzel believes Evolver's artists use the past traditional-style of tattooing as inspiration for their designs, blending this original style with personal artistic styles to create a more modernized, individual tattoo. **The artists at Evolver focus on both the art of tattooing and the idea of fine art.** "The Renaissance artists were trying to recreate some of the master's artwork. It's like that for tattoos—we are looking for the traditional, but doing it better. Not to say Sailor Jerry was a hack, but we have the technology to do it a lot better," Dave explains amidst the buzzing of the tattoo machines.

Tattooing is the perfect way to combine an individual's artistic expression and standard of living, and this is something with which Dave also agrees: "I just like to create artwork on a daily basis and get paid for it. My personal paintings don't pay the bills." However, Evolver isn't just about the ink and tattoo machines. The shop also provides professional piercing, allowing clients to decorate their body in whatever medium they prefer.

> With a focus on creativity, Evolver stands out from the other shops.

With a focus on creativity, Evolver stands out from the other shops on East Carson. "We have absolutely no flash on the wall. I definitely like the traditional style, but I feel like it encourages more of a custom tattoo." The artists at Evolver have a variety of strengths, such as Kantu's realism and Eric's use of color. But no matter what artist, each brings their own style and background to produce a completely unique tattoo.

Inspiration can spark from anywhere, and Evolver is embracing the possibilities of expression. **The shop hosts a free monthly art show, inviting public to stop in and see what the shop is all about. These shows open** Evolver's doors to host artists and musicians alike, an attempt at fusing together forms of creativity. From acoustic night with coffee and cool people, to art gallery openings, the studio is promoting inspiration across East Carson. These shows typically are from nine o'clock to midnight, and the artists offer tattoos in one of their many rooms. Evolver's staff encourages the community to come in and get inspired, in whatever method they prefer.

Dave finishes his client's script and cleans off the superfluous ink stationed on the skin. "That shit fuckin' hurt," the client mutters as Dave wraps up his tattoo to protect the new composition. It might hurt, but the pain is only temporary—scratching the surface. A variety of after-care products will mend the open, wound and within a week or two it will be healed, leaving a permanent token. Dave's client walks out the shop door with a new, unique, and personable piece of art, and Dave has gained another satisfied customer by doing a job he loves. And the best part about this situation is that it occurs daily. Someone will walk into the shop with an idea, and leave with a permanent possibility. Whether the ink is offered from a brush or a tattoo machine, people are constantly creating. ■

Evolver is located at 1009 E. Carson St. in the South Side.

Mon-Sat: 1pm-10pm

FINDING MY ZENITH

TEXT: Danielle Levisky
PHOTOS Kathleen Euler

Attending a vegetarian Sunday brunch at an antique shop... repeat that three times fast

When I tell my relatives across the country about Pittsburgh, I compare it to a spilled treasure chest. Through every part of the city, gems and riches have been scattered and hidden for newcomers and locals to stumble upon, experience, and pass onto their friends. This is where my metaphor gets lost. A communal treasure chest? Impossible. Yet Pittsburgh finds a way to bring the hole-in-the-wall restaurants, shops, bars, and community centers more accessible to each Yinzer every day.

In the fall of 2012, I was searching for another gem among the hills of the city, but with little time and even less money, I found no new treasures for myself until the last week of my semester. One of my good friends invited me to a Sunday vegetarian brunch at a place in South Side called Zenith. He also mentioned it being an antique store, so I immediately thought of a restaurant-meets-gift-shop establishment.

We walked along 26th street to the definition of a hole-in-the-wall restaurant. Had I come by Zenith alone or with a group of friends, I would have never thought it was a restaurant. The nondescript entrance is bursting with antiques from floor to ceiling, including chairs hanging from the ceiling. My friend directed us to the back to get seated for a table. We were asked to wait 15-20 minutes; my grumbling stomach persisted. So we waited, but it flew by amongst the racks of vintage clothing, tapestries, jewelry, old paintings, housewares, and funky items.

When our time came, the two of us were seated immediately at a larger table with a few others. I surveyed the eclectic dining room we sat in. **From the carpet to the ceiling, contemporary works of art were ornately framed. I felt like I was attending an art show...** just before the smell of cakes and salads began to waft our way. I eyed the buffet hungrily, deciding right then that I was going to opt for the brunch buffet. As we got our menu, my friend gave me a few opinions on what he thought would be good as an entree. Everything was indeed vegetarian, with a number of vegan and gluten-free options. Just as I was reconsidering my decision on the buffet, I read at the top of the menu that **the entire meal was $10: the buffet, an entree, and iced or hot coffee/tea included.** I was amazed and extremely happy with the amount of delicious food I was about to receive. For my entree, I settled on a seitan meatloaf with mashed potatoes and hot tea. After we placed our orders, we went to the star of our brunch: the buffet. It included a salad section featuring peanut noodles, macaroni salad, hummus, potato salad, lentil salad, vegetable salad, Israeli couscous, pasta salad, and too many more to mention. The cake buffet included a variety of bundt cakes: Banana Chocolate, Raspberry Almond, Chocolate Coconut, and too many more to mention.

Our table was tightly packed but cozy. We talked to our neighbors and noticed how just about every part of the table came

> "zenith" is defined as a) the highest point reached by a celestial or other object, and b) the point in the sky or celestial sphere directly above an observer.

from a different set. Forks were mismatched with plates and cups; we were even seated at different chairs around the table. **The waitress mentioned to us that everything we saw before us was for sale. My friend actually ended up buying the antique cup he was drinking out of for $3.**

All the food was absolutely delicious and filled each of us to the brim: from the tasty and flavorful salads, to the sweet and scrumptious desserts, to the main course itself. As a meat substitute, seitan tastes wonderfully compared to normal meatloaf and doesn't leave you feeling too heavy after the meal.

At the end of our meal, we sat pleasantly plumped and looked around at the different pieces of art, discussing some and looking puzzled at others. I observed a few younger children at the restaurant that were captivated by all the artistic stimulation around them; the decor and gallery was a surefire way to keep the kids from crying.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, "zenith" is defined as a) the highest point reached by a celestial or other object, and b) the point in the sky or celestial sphere directly above an observer. The abundant amount of collectibles, trinkets, and delicious food within this antiquerie-meets-restaurant made it a metaphorical zenith, and a true high point in my treasure hunt through Pittsburg ■

Zenith is located at 86 S. 26th St. in the South Side.

Thursday to Saturday
11:30am til 8:30pm

Sunday (brunch) 11am til 2:30pm

Closed Monday thru Wednesday

ACACIA

The sequel to Embury - this prohibition era bar is not to be missed.

TEXT & PHOTOS
Emily O'Donnell

For years, cocktail lovers of Pittsburgh flocked to a small establishment in the Strip District for their drinks of choice. The bar was called Embury and served up prohibition era cocktails in an intimate setting, replete with low hanging chandeliers and a bathroom door disguised as a bookcase. When Embury closed in August of 2011, cocktail lovers of Pittsburgh despaired. Where could they go for unique cocktails at a flat rate of $10 a piece? While many bars and restaurants in the area offer delicious cocktails, none of them can quite match the quality that Embury maintained.

Well, cocktail lovers despair no more! Spencer Warren, who owned Embury, has opened a new bar in the South Side. Acacia is not quite the resurrection of the closed speakeasy, it is more like a sequel to the bestselling bar. Acacia also boasts an intimate setting but the furnishings are simpler and it holds true to its prohibition era feeling, with boards on the windows and old timey music playing inside. It is easy to walk right past Acacia as the boarded up windows and newspaper taped to the glass door make it appear to be closed, but the new bar is open and appears to be thriving well in the shadow of Embury.

At Acacia, you taste the return of some classic cocktails that were found at Embury, such as the 'Rusted Root,' a local favorite that incorporates Root liquor and absinthe. There are some new and familiar cocktails on the list, as well as a four page bourbon list that makes the mouth water. True to their status as a speakeasy, Acacia does not have any vodka on the menu since the liquor was not popular during the prohibition era. But the lack can scarcely be felt with the variety of drinks and liquors available for purchase. All cocktails cost $10 even, as they did at Embury, a decent price for these types of drinks that end up costing up to $15 at other bars for less quantity and lower quality.

One interesting difference between Acacia and Embury is the selection of beers that Acacia has to offer. While Embury served only cocktails, Acacia has incorporated beer into their menu,

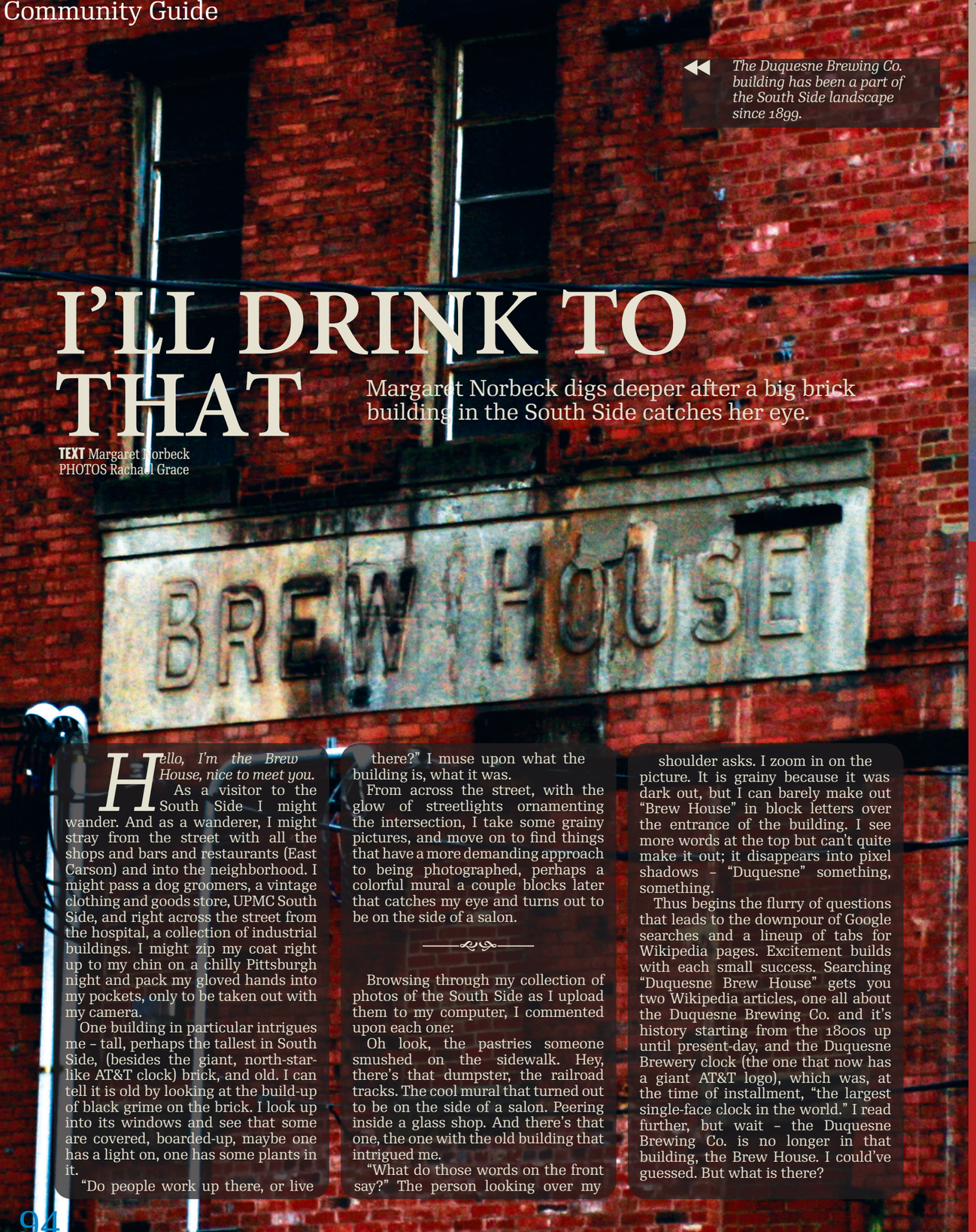
> Cocktail lovers despair no more!

perhaps to accommodate the tastes of South Side drinkers. However, you won't find any Miller or Bud on this menu. Acacia offers some of the finest beers available for prices lower than other bars. On the night I visited, they had Dogfish Head beers available for the low price of $2.50. Now that is a deal worth checking out, and while you're there, be sure to order a cocktail or two. ■

Acacia is located at 2108 E. Carson St. in the South Side.

Mon-Sat: 5pm-2am

For more info and menus visit http://acaciacocktails.com/



The Duquesne Brewing Co. building has been a part of the South Side landscape since 1899.

I'LL DRINK TO THAT

Margaret Norbeck digs deeper after a big brick building in the South Side catches her eye.

TEXT Margaret Norbeck
PHOTOS Rachael Grace

Hello, I'm the Brew House, nice to meet you.

As a visitor to the South Side I might wander. And as a wanderer, I might stray from the street with all the shops and bars and restaurants (East Carson) and into the neighborhood. I might pass a dog groomers, a vintage clothing and goods store, UPMC South Side, and right across the street from the hospital, a collection of industrial buildings. I might zip my coat right up to my chin on a chilly Pittsburgh night and pack my gloved hands into my pockets, only to be taken out with my camera.

One building in particular intrigues me – tall, perhaps the tallest in South Side, (besides the giant, north-star-like AT&T clock) brick, and old. I can tell it is old by looking at the build-up of black grime on the brick. I look up into its windows and see that some are covered, boarded-up, maybe one has a light on, one has some plants in it.

"Do people work up there, or live there?" I muse upon what the building is, what it was.

From across the street, with the glow of streetlights ornamenting the intersection, I take some grainy pictures, and move on to find things that have a more demanding approach to being photographed, perhaps a colorful mural a couple blocks later that catches my eye and turns out to be on the side of a salon.

Browsing through my collection of photos of the South Side as I upload them to my computer, I commented upon each one:

Oh look, the pastries someone smushed on the sidewalk. Hey, there's that dumpster, the railroad tracks. The cool mural that turned out to be on the side of a salon. Peering inside a glass shop. And there's that one, the one with the old building that intrigued me.

"What do those words on the front say?" The person looking over my shoulder asks. I zoom in on the picture. It is grainy because it was dark out, but I can barely make out "Brew House" in block letters over the entrance of the building. I see more words at the top but can't quite make it out; it disappears into pixel shadows – "Duquesne" something, something.

Thus begins the flurry of questions that leads to the downpour of Google searches and a lineup of tabs for Wikipedia pages. Excitement builds with each small success. Searching "Duquesne Brew House" gets you two Wikipedia articles, one all about the Duquesne Brewing Co. and it's history starting from the 1800s up until present-day, and the Duquesne Brewery clock (the one that now has a giant AT&T logo), which was, at the time of installment, "the largest single-face clock in the world." I read further, but wait – the Duquesne Brewing Co. is no longer in that building, the Brew House. I could've guessed. But what is there?

Click, click. Skim other Wikipedia article - "The Brew House Association".

Nothing is more frustrating to a student raised on the Internet than coming across a topic with a lack of information on the web. "Why wouldn't you have an official website?" Click, click. "Who wouldn't have an official website?" Click. "Where can I find the most recent event, this was from months ago." "Why isn't there just a list of names of artists?" Click, click, click!

"It's so great to have a place that's not on the Internet," says Pixelle. She has short brown hair, a young face, and colorful knee-high socks. Pixelle lives in the Brew House with a handful of other artists. "It's like a secret society."

"So, what did you want to know?"

"Everything," I try to convey my seriousness with a smile.

"I don't know everything," says Pixelle.

Well, who does?

The Brew House Association was officially started in 1991, but artists had been living there, according to stories, since the '70s. The building itself was built in 1899. (There are actually two buildings – the Brew House and the building across the street that has the brewery clock.) It has survived for 113 years. It survived Prohibition, and it survived World War II. The Duquesne Brewing Company closed in 1972. Apparently, after that, some artists got together, wanted a place to live, and moved on in.

The Duquesne Brewing Co. was modern for its time, being one of the first brewing companies to use horseless carriages, refrigeration, and pasteurization. It was one of the few breweries to survive Prohibition.

One could say that the Brew House Association started before 1991. A man named Richard Bernstein, who had a national reputation for architectural preservation, came to Pittsburgh in the early '80s. He embarked on several projects in the area. In 1986, he bought the brewery for $570,000 dollars. He got a group of investors, and outlined the $9.3 million dollar renovations. In the end, Bernstein never made the needed renovations.

At that point, however, the Bernstein Group, Inc. was already in decline. He lost the building in 1992 for non-payment of $82,000 in taxes; the city seized the property. The tenants formed a group and cooperated, deciding they wanted to continue living there. The tenants themselves made many improvements to the building. (The tenants and the Brew House Association would continue to make improvements, and to this day the spaces open to the public are up to code, but those on the upper floors are not up to standards as living spaces. Some spaces are nice apartments, others are bare-bones.)

The deal with the city, back in the day, was that individuals would make renovation and continue maintenance on the building to bring it up to code in what was referred to as "sweat equity." They kept a big chalkboard in the lobby to log hours. The practice stopped when the organization became a nonprofit.

Trans 101

I get there about fifteen minutes early and find the doors locked. I heard a shout from behind, in the parking lot on the street.

"Oh, are they locked?" Says a smiling young woman with two big brown buns on the sides of her head.

"Yeah...is there another way in?"

"There is, around the side, but – oh! - there, someone is coming,"

Somebody pushed open the door and invites me in.

Later, I would find this person to be Ebba, the photographer who took the forty-three pictures at the event focusing on transgender. Before the actual event, which was a short presentation and discussion about general transgender FAQ's and etiquette, I walked through the gallery space to view the photos. They were large, black and white, and close-up shots of faces of transgender men. Each had the name of the guy and where they were from underneath.

Stepping into the gallery itself is as you would imagine from looking at the outside. High ceilings, a little room off to the side, white walls, concrete floor, exposed beams and wires. The pictures are hung up without frame in a line, so one could be eye-level with the people in the pictures, walk from face to face as if inspecting a line of troops.

Looking at the photos, you can't tell they would be or could be anything but men. In fact, looking into the face of each and every one, I came to realize the obvious, but important truth, that if this weren't a product of the "Other Men Project" I wouldn't have guessed they were transgendered. That each of them was a person with long hair, short hair, scraggly facial hair, clean-shaven, piercings, tattoos, caps, lines around their smiling eyes, a glow on their cheeks, a tough expression, a loose one... I eventually found my way to the seating area behind a projector - a collection of mismatched chairs facing another white wall.

"I like the Brew House because it isn't stuffy and stuck-up, people aren't walking around in suits and ties. I like that there's dirt on the ground," says Ebba, scuffing the ground. It was Ebba who had introduced me to Pixelle (the name she uses as an artist). Good thing, too, because Pixelle would later admit to not checking her email frequently and not answering her phone.

Space Heaters and Empty Bottles

"We would like to emphasize the relationship of art to all aspects of life, offering and promoting programming that enhances not only the intellectual growth of those directly involved in the creation of work, but to increase the understanding and appreciation of art by the general public," says the Brew House Association Strategic Plan 2002-2005.

Pixelle offers me a tour. Walking around the perimeter of the building, we cross under some railroad tracks and turn to face the giant yellow painted sign "Make it Duke" on the side. Although "Duke" started out as a nickname, the company changed it to be the official name in the '60's. The advertisement was probably meant for passengers on the passing train.

It becomes clear to me that these artists have made their home in the carcass of a historical artifact. We step into an elevator, one that you open the door, then slide the metal gate open. The inside is painted red. It turns out to be a smoother ride than the elevators from my freshman dorms.

The inside of her apartment: a little kitchenette, a bathroom area separated from the rest of the room by hanging garage door panels, paintings she did on the wall, a space heater, a computer (though no internet access), some instruments by her bed.

We climbed out her apartment's window, stepping onto a stack of cinderblocks a couple feet high and then down onto the ledge. She points out a chunk of black pipe that was laying split in half.

"That almost fell on my head!"

I ask about some splotches of neon spray paint underneath the window.

"It was going to be something, but then something fell and I went back inside…"

From the window ledge of Pixelle's apartment, we climbed onto a rusted metal deck and into a doorway, minus the door, in the adjoining wall. The space was dimly lit with rays of sunshine peeking in some holes in the ceiling. We walked past some metal sculptures leaned up against the wall, about the size of toddlers, with a raw form and texture.

Looking to my right I could see the metal sheet, part of something, where a big abstract shape was cut right out.

I discovered a board with nails sticking straight up. "Uh-oh," and Pixelle promptly piled some nearby bricks on top.

"We could just move the board?" I suggested.

"It could be covering a hole or something."

From there we walked across a rusty metal grid bridge, it was covered with a long wooden board that liked to move when I shifted weight. I clung to what I could, a pipe-looking thing that may have been put there as a handle, or part of the original mechanical structure, whatever that was.

> **Like a Mother Art, creating little pieces of art within her, being the home to her artists. It is simultaneously dying and growing, like a patch of industrial jungle, colorful, dark, mysterious.**

I even stuck my hand on a cluster of bird feathers, but at that time my mind was occupied with balance rather than sanitary concerns. We did find the bird skeleton, located at the cross of the two grid bridges.

It brought me back to my jungle-gym days. A ladder over here, a hiding space over there. Suspended over instead of a few feet, a few stories. I look into the darkness and feel alive. Later, I would find out that the back of the building had been sealed off due to asbestos.

Pixelle described her particular type of creation as "dressing up like different people and taking pictures" of herself. My favorite persona was Bill, a Systems Analyst, complete with double chin, a mustache, and a dorky hairstyle. (If only Bill were real, he could maybe make a website for the organization.)

Rooms and rooms. Hallways speckled with the occasional painting.

One has double doors, with an electronic handle you had to type in a code for.

"I might move into here" we step into a room with the sun streaming in. It was smaller than her current room, but had a fresh-built wooden loft that just about doubled the square footage.

We saw another room with a new loft as well. It also had a single leather chair in the middle, a mirror leaned up against the wall, and an empty bottle on a table. "Oo, I might move in here…Nope, no window." Down a hallway, someone had filled a trash bin with empty bottles. Down another hallway, someone had set up a bowling alley. Every room we looked in had something to peer over or under or into or out of.

"Oh hey, a bong." It was hiding in a lampshade in a room that had all-brick walls. The roof has some seating, a grill, some containers for gardening, and a compost bin. We leaned over a fence that had electric tape covering sharp bits sticking out. She shouted down at another resident getting into his truck.

When you brew beer you follow a recipe. Sure you can add hops and yeast, but everyone knows you can ferment just about anything to make it alcoholic. It's up to you what amounts of what ingredients you put in. Good beer, you could say, is an art form. So too, is life.

The Unused

The building is huge, but only a bit is actually fixed-up. There is a whole half (the part you can see from the train) that remains dead yet attached, like a snake that hasn't quite peeled out of its old skin.

People just left things there when they moved out. A bicycle, some fabric, some furniture, a picture frame in this room. Pixelle told me a story about one of the guys living there, who suddenly got bone cancer and passed, leaving behind no friends, relatives, and all of his stuff, including an entire room of photography equipment, lighting, backdrops, and a musty smell. Oh, and a super awesome expensive telescope, located near the door to the roof.

> **The building is huge, but only a bit is actually fixed-up. There is a whole half that remains dead yet attached, like a snake that hasn't quite peeled out of its old skin.**

My natural business instincts told me this would be a prime opportunity to revamp the building in some sort of green fashion, something new-age and community involving, and the project title might be "sustainable" something, something. It has already been started; it just needs a little push, maybe. There just has to be an eccentric billionaire somewhere willing to invest in this building. A historical society? A Pittsburgh philanthropist?

Maybe the stories of the renegade artists of the '70s aren't so well documented, but the founding of the association in the early nineties was because of buzz surrounding ownership of the building.

Enter developer Michael Milan, who won the bid for ownership in 1993.

The Brew House Association also made a bid, but it was fifty thousand dollars less than Milan's, although the city was not required to accept the highest bidder. Interestingly, an artist named J.S.G. Boggs, who was famous for recreating U.S. currency and exchanging it for goods, made his own bid of just over sixty thousand dollars. Disagreements with the Association, however, left him and the organization parted.

Milan wanted to turn the place into apartments and studios, maybe even build a restaurant. He assured them he would not turn the place into a nightclub. He said it would be a "family project." He even said he would continue to let artists live there, at a reasonable rate.

But the artists didn't want a developer. They didn't want just anybody claiming ownership.

If I have to apply an art term to this whole situation, it might be a collage.

But it is more than just that, because it was created by more than one person, more than one artist, even by people that weren't artists.

Like a Mother Art, creating little pieces yartists. It is simultaneously dying and growing, like a patch of industrial jungle, colorful, dark, mysterious.

But how can something so industrial be so inviting? The white walls of the gallery begged to be decorated, like pages of coloring books. You feel this overwhelming urge to create. You aren't done exploring. It appeals to the part of you that never got a treehouse when you were a kid, the part that colored on the walls, the part that forgot what it was like to explore without wanting to carry a can of mace around.

You suddenly get an urge to quit college, maybe move into that room without the window, hang up some curtains from the Goodwill down the road, drink some wine, grab your Canon AE-1 and get to it.

Distilled

The residency program, called the Distillery Program, is a six-month program that provides a space for artists to work in an environment that fosters creativity.

The space is where the old stage used to be; it is now a bunch of tables, and to the side some people have rented space to dump a silver retro trailer that had been gutted. The artists are free to come in and work as they please.

According to Wikipedia, "distillation is a method of separating mixtures based on differences in volatilities of components in a boiling liquid mixture." You heat the beer (or whatever), the vapor (alcohol) rises, then condenses and voila. If you distill beer you get whiskey, if you distill wine you get brandy, and if you distill artists, you get…

Cute metaphors aside, Kara Skylling, a past participant of the program, likes to think of the Distillery program as along the same idea as graduate school – a place for artists to really focus on their specific goals, which they presented in their application to the program.

Kara has a degree in fiber arts, which she describes as "any type of art you can think of, except then you use fiber or fabric." She teaches at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, but also has some other jobs, including contracted sewing work.

Her duties as co-director of the residency program include finding interesting people to come talk to or critique the artists. How does she know what speakers to bring in?

"People who know people," she says, " I guess you'd call that networking?"

Networking amongst the art crowd in Pittsburgh isn't apparently all that hard, where even the "head honchos," she says, are still relatively accessible, such as Eric Shiner, Director of the Warhol Museum, who met with the individual artists each for about fifteen minutes to critique their work. Kara enjoys her work; she likes to search for inspiring people.

Mentors are usually previous artists, and "other people we gather."

Artists chosen, anywhere from six to nine of them, are chosen based on their goals for the program, and whether they would fit well with the chemistry of the group – in terms of being similar enough they can work together to an extent, and different enough that they are not all working on the same thing. At the end of the residency, they have a show.

Pixelle heard about the residency program from a former teacher. Laurel, a photographer and graduate of D6 (the abbreviation used for the sixth year of the Distillery program), had heard of the program through her school. Everyone else I talked to either couldn't remember their first encounter with the Brew House, or had heard "through a friend." I'm guessing that networking and finding connections isn't uncommon, possibly even expected. I would even go so far as to say essential to one's survival as an artist.

The connection to the community is visible. It is the philosophy and practice of the Brew House to support local artists. A 2003 article from the South Pittsburgh Reporter talks of the Brew House's participation in an apprenticeship program for middle school students in South Pittsburgh. Another paper has a 1999 article about a children's art show in Space 101.

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Fermentation – the process of converting sugar to carbon dioxide and alcohol with yeast.

I'm not sure how the pieces of the "Distillery 6: The End" show fit together as a cohesive body of work. Giant cardboard cut-outs create a larger-than-life picture of a dragon, presumably a kite, attached by strings to a parade of people below in a piece called "Mayday." A collection of photographs depicts fortunes from fortune cookies. Silk dying. A series of graph-looking pictures has the names of what my friends and I decided are U.S. presidents.

A puppet show is set-up outside. A wooden box is photo-booth-style complete with a curtain to pull shut while you are viewing the show. To start the show, one must say the keyword, "tater tot." Listening in, I found that the show has something to do with the world's largest tater tot. One lady with her dog on the leash goes inside; we snicker at the dog's tortured eyes as he stands outside the curtain. "C'mon, tater tot!" she said out of frustration. She didn't realize they needed time in between shows to get set up.

There is a DJ as well, a friend of one of the artists, who plays records during the three-hour event. A spread of food lies on one wall with cheese, crackers, fruit, cookies, and drinks. The evening starts with a crowd, but by sunset attendance starts to dwindle.

Space 101, the Brew House's gallery, opened in 1995. It used to have regular visiting hours, but now it is only open to the public for specific events, and by appointment.

The Brew House Association has officially existed since 1991. Over twenty years later, one can measure some progress being made. The stage area had to be taken down; it didn't meet regulation. Instead, a new ramp for wheelchairs and such was put in. A sprinkler system, new doors.

I too have officially existed since 1991, and I too feel the push and pull of being both old and young. The process of creation is exciting, but can't be rushed.

I asked Board President Tim Kaulen if the Brew House Association wasn't considering the idea of taking the "Brew House" out of the "Brew House Association." In other words, wouldn't they consider moving to a different building, to keep the organization alive?

The Brew House needs more everything – more space, more money, more publicity maybe, a more cohesive online presence, more work on the building. But adding these things won't make it more of a hub of creativity. You can have a bigger building, fancier brewing technologies, and more employees, but none of these things are guaranteed to sell your beer. Well, I might say that better marketing would sell my beer. But my point is, unless you change the recipe, you aren't changing the quality of the beer itself.

I would say that the formula to the Brew House and the artists that live there is experimentation. If I see any common thread between the artists, their work, their life, it is this exploratory element.

I meet an artist named Stephanie at the Beehive. A couple of blocks away from the Brew House, the Beehive is along the street in South Side, the one with all the shops and bars and restaurants. She orders a coffee martini – espresso with vodka – specifically requested in a big, heavy mug.

"I love it here," says the pretty brunette. She's been going there since she was a student. "I'm glad there are still people here that are invested in keeping the South Side weird." I asked Stephanie about the art scenes in other cities, but she had only lived in Pittsburgh.

I look around – I can see why the Beehive would attract an artsy crowd. A mural covers the back wall, mismatched furniture crowds the cozy space, glass lamps in blobby shapes and different colors provide a warm glow as the sun gets lower. City sounds barge in through the open door on this unusually nice spring day.

Stephanie did a residency but also served as a mentor from 2008 to 2009. I asked her, why the Brew House?

She described the situation that led her to apply for the residency – one that combined artists of different ages and who worked with different mediums. She had been in a serious car crash and had lost fine motor control. It was during the residency that she experimented with different kinds of art as she slowly regained control of her muscles.

I ask her if it wasn't scary enough living the artist's life.

"It is scary," she affirms as she smiles, looking down and swirling her straw. "It is." ■

◀◀ *Photos from the "Distillate" Alumni Exhibition artists:*

Rachel Debuque
with Tifany Lee
Becky Slemmons
Jaci Rice
Ashley Pixelle Andrews
Morgan Cahn
Wendy Osher
Anna E. Mikolay
Rob Katkowski
Aimee Manion
Rose Clancy
Joshua Space
Stephanie Armbruster
Carolyn Wenning
Ryan Woodring

▶▶ *Background: "What Once was a Dell is Now a Field Folded" from "Platonic Folds and How to Make Sense of a Canyon" by Meghan Olson.*

Farewell

Another year over, another issue of The Original completed. Over the past three years, this magazine has consumed my life. As maddening and stressful as it has been at times, working for The Original has given me more than I can say. It gave me a creative outlet for my photography when there were no photo classes to be had at Pitt. It gave me a place to hone my writing skills, to gain constructive feedback from the many talented editors and writers that I have worked with over the years. It gave me countless opportunities to explore the city that I now call home, to seek out new places and faces and put them into print.

I will never forget the first time I got to see my work in an issue of The Original. It was issue 7 that I first contributed to the magazine and it is odd to think that I have had my work featured in almost half of the Originals that currently exist. To hold each magazine in my hands, to flip through its pages and see the incredible work that has been featured is always an amazing feeling. To see my own work there is to remember each story, every moment that has become a memory now of my college life.

On the verge of graduation from The University of Pittsburgh, the work that I have done for The Original has been some of my best. In many ways, it is this work that will be most invaluable to me for my future. I have worked harder on this magazine than I have worked for many classes, but the results are tangible and well worth the effort.

I would not be here without my fellow Original members, from the editors who first brought me on board, to the other writers, photographers and designers who have influenced my own work. The Original gave me a creative community to thrive in and the friends that I have made through the magazine are people whom I feel honored to have worked so closely with.

With the future looming bright and shiny before us now, I bid you all farewell as I bid farewell to The Original -- my longterm labor of love -- and to Pitt. I hope you enjoy this issue, and all of the issues to come.

-Emily O'Donnell
(Photographer/Staff Writer/Designer
& Head Photo/Visual Editor for The Original)
(2010-2013)