

TWENTY-EIGHT PAGES
LOVINGLY BOUND
WITH TWINE



A FANZINE BY HANGMAN

ISSUE
#7

Page I (front cover): The front cover is a hand-printed linoleum block print. All of my previous lino-prints have been printed using water-soluble inks, but I'm going to try out some oil-based ink for this print. Exciting, huh?

Page II: This very page.

Pages III through XXII: The journal I kept during a weekend retreat with a bunch of Buddhists, which takes up most of this issue. The best part is the little "Seafood" illustration I drew for page five. A good Buddhist shouldn't be prideful or vain, but I can't help but be proud of creating such a fine illustration.

Page XXIII: Bottled water is such a waste of natural resources.

Pages XXIV through XXVI: "Practicing Compassion" A fanzine publisher named Cullen Carter was in a bad accident. If you can afford it, and feel moved to, please donate to the Cullen Carter Benefit Fund.

Page XXVII: I created this page using an Olympia manual typewriter, a Fisher-Price Arts & Crafts Printer's Kit, and a Stockwell Office Products Rubber Type Printing Kit. Call it "art" if you want to. But when all is said and done, I still can't figure out when I should use "who" and when I should use "whom". Whom is worrying over silly grammar rules? Or is it: Who is worrying over silly grammar rules? Here's what *The Heath Handbook*, 12th edition has to say about this dilemma that we all face:

...try a personal pronoun in its place in the sentence. If he, she, or they sounds right use the nominative who; if him, her, or them fits the grammatical context, whom is correct.

Page XXVIII (back cover): Will Buddhist practice ever help me rid myself of vanity? Yet again, I have placed images of myself on the back cover as if it's the glossy jacket of some ghost-written celebrity tell-all memoir. *Vanity, vanity all is vanity*. Wait a second, that's from the Bible I think. I should be able to recall a good Buddhist quote about vanity but alas...

Check out the
centerfold-out
Section!
Haiku are so
very Zen.

Subscription Information
(prices are postage paid)

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3-issue sub: \$5
6-issue sub: \$10
a dozen-issue sub: \$18

1ST Printing
298
of 648
CM

If you live outside the U.S., add a little extra for postage. Please specify which issue you'd like your subscription to start with. I'm out of issue #1 and don't plan on printing anymore. I have a few copies of #2, but once they run out, it will be out of print. Wholesale copies \$1.20. \$1 if you order 20 or more.

My address will now and forever be:

Christoph Meyer • Post Office Box 106 • Danville, OH • 43014 • USA

Acknowledgements: The monk lino-print on the front cover will appear soon in an issue of *Lilliput Review*.

Regarding the Twine Binding this Issue: I haven't actually bought any twine yet for this issue. But I recently saw some schnazzy skeins of triple-ply jute twine that were dyed green. If this issue is tied with thick, gnarly, green twine then I was successful in my efforts to procure said twine.

Preface: P P R E F A C E :

I don't trust the motivations of people who go door to door, Bible in hand, trying to convert folks to their brand of Christianity. How can one be so vain as to think that they have THE answer, not only for themselves, but for others too? No matter what brand of Christianity they believe in, their way just happens to be the ONE TRUE way.

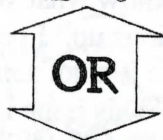
I'm a Buddhist— have been since I was 18 years old. I'm 28 now and I don't have any answers for myself or others, much less THE answer. Nonetheless, I'll follow the Buddhist path for this life and the next and the one after that. It's something I believe in that deeply, but I don't want to convert anyone to *my* way of thinking. Sure, if someone asks about Buddhism, I'll talk about it, but usually only if they bring it up and even then I have my hesitations. I rarely mention Buddhism to anyone, even my wife. My faith in the Buddha's teachings is as great as my doubt. Opposites don't truly exist, so are faith and doubt different?



Where Will You Spend
ETERNITY

Front covers from actual
tracts I've been given.

HEAVEN



HELL

WHICH FOR YOU?

This issue of 28PLBwT isn't meant to be like a Christian leaflet handed out on the street; I'm not out for your soul. At the end of 2002, I attended a weekend meditation retreat and during that weekend I brought along a notebook, which I wrote in during my free time. This issue is mostly that journal.

I will, of course, mention all sorts of Buddhist-related stuff. But I believe that one should do the exact opposite of converting others, that is, encourage them in whatever path they choose to pursue. There is a Zen Buddhist group in Columbus, Ohio that I sat with a couple times. They met in a Quaker Church. Those Quakers weren't trying to win us over to their way of thinking; they helped us pursue our path by providing us a space to meet in. The people of that Quaker Church had the right idea.

If you are a religious person, chances are you believe in some version of Christianity and, I must confess, I wouldn't be too interested in reading a fanzine about a Christian weekend retreat. Christianity is already familiar to me because it is so prevalent and I know all that I care to know about it. But if someone were to write about a weekend spent practicing Hinduism, Native American religions, Islam, Paganism, Jainism, Judaism, Baha'i or any other religion that I don't know as much about I'd be very interested. I like learning about how others see the world.

If you are non-religious or even anti-religious, please realize that Buddhism, particularly Zen and Ch'an, are often followed by agnostics and atheists. Many people think of Buddhism as a philosophy more than a religion since there is no God figure or original creator. Buddhism does have its fair share of "religious" ritual and ceremony but behind these traditional religious trappings lies the Dharma, or teachings. The robes, statues, temples, incense, chants, bows, shaved heads, cushions and bells are all fluff.

Future issues will contain more of the usual 28PLBwT fluff which hides no deeper truths. There will be poorly-drawn comics, Herbie stories, personal essays, letters to corporations &c. But you never know what you're gonna get in 28PLBwT; I'm going to try to mix things up. I probably won't do anymore Buddhist stuff just because it's not something I often feel moved to write about.

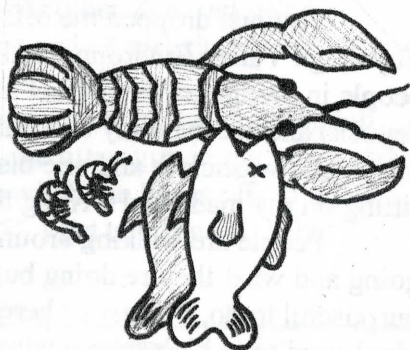
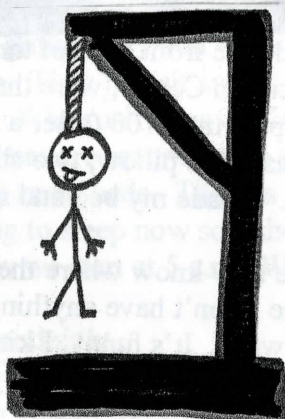
This issue is very very light on any sort of Buddhist teachings. Buddhist teachings are designed to help people rid themselves of the false sense of "self", "ego" or "I" that we all cling too, but this issue is all about me Me ME! It's a journal and I just write about what I'm doing and thinking, so if you learn anything about Buddhism along the way, it was purely an accident and I sincerely apologize. And if for some reason you actually have the ridiculous idea that you want to convert to Buddhism after reading this, please reconsider! Or at least don't tell me about it because you'll make me feel like a stupid rotten missionary.



FRIDAY

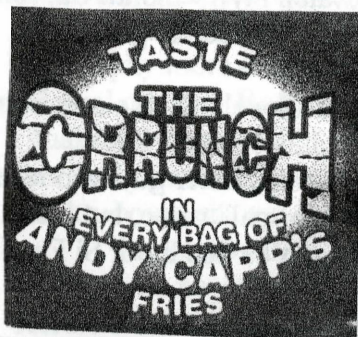
So here I am at a meditation retreat; the first one I've been to in oh, let me think about it... eight years or so. These days, the group that I regularly sit with meets once or twice per month in Wooster, Ohio. I don't get to sit with them as often as I'd like because it's a 45 minute drive each way to Wooster. Plus, they always meet on Mondays, which is the one day that my wife, Lisa, works late, so I have to find someone to watch my 19 month-old son, Herbie, in order to go. But it's still the closest Buddhist group out here in rural Ohio.

The main temple for this group is in Cleveland. No one from the Wooster Sangha is coming to this retreat, so I won't know anyone here except for Seafood, the Priest/Zen Master guy who runs it. I've never heard anyone call him by a "normal" name, but his Dharma alias sounds like "Seafood." It might be See Fu or Si Fu. I don't know so I'll just refer to him as Seafood.



Lisa calls me "Hangman" when I attend Buddhist get-togethers. While attending college in Chicago, I sat with a group for three years. This Sangha practiced Korean Zen and I officially became a member. I took my lay vows and got a ritualistic burn on left forearm to signify my officially joining the Sangha. The burn is, as far as I know, only used in Korean Zen. I also received some schnazzy Buddhist robes (which I should really start wearing when I go grocery shopping and the like) and a Buddhist name. My name translates into "Right Action" (I think) and sounds something like Hangman, although I can't even remember it now. Hangman, Seafood...it's all good.

It's late afternoon now. This retreat is being held at in the "beautiful Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area" which is on the way to Cleveland, so Lisa is dropping me off and continuing on to spend the weekend with her family in Euclid, a Cleveland suburb. On the way here, we stopped at a convenience store to buy a bottle of juice and I also purchased a bag of Andy Capp's BBQ Fries. I've been trying to eat better and cut out the junk food. Since I'm going on a retreat I feel like I should be trying even harder to be "good" but you know how it is. Damn you Andy and your BBQ too.



INGREDIENTS: Degermed Yellow Corn Meal, Vegetable Shortening (Partially Hydrogenated Cottonseed and/or Partially Hydrogenated Soybean Oil), Dried Potatoes, Salt, Sugar, Brown Sugar, Dextrose, Maltodextrin, Onion Powder, Monosodium Glutamate, Hydrolyzed Corn Gluten, Soy Protein & Wheat Gluten, Tomato Powder, Molasses Solids, Spices, Red Bell Pepper Powder, Artificial Color (Corn Meal, Partially Hydrogenated Soybean Oil, Yellow 5 Lake, Blue 1 Lake), Red Pepper, Citric Acid, Natural Smoke Flavor, Paprika, Garlic Powder, Extractives of Paprika, Disodium Inosinate, Disodium Guanylate, Natural Flavor, Red 40 Lake, Freshness Preserved By Sodium Bisulfite, TBHQ, BHA, BHT.

BBQ FRIES

Lisa just dropped me off. Inside the front door of the Cuyahoga Valley Environmental Education Center, were three people in orange robes to greet me. I paid my \$100 (after a \$40 deposit) and received my one pillowcase, one pillow, two sheets, one towel, one washcloth and one blanket. I made my bed and now I'm sitting on my made bed writing this.

People are walking around like they know where they're going and what they're doing but since I don't have anything purposeful to do, I'll just sit here and write. It's funny, I kind of feel like I used to in high school when I was out of place socially and wanted someone to talk to so I could fit in. It's not by any means the raging insecure fear of high school, but I can feel hints of it and it's something that I haven't felt for some time. So I do what I always do; I bury myself in a notebook and write. Everyone else looks busy so I should be busy too, right? I couldn't just do nothing, could I? There'll be plenty of time for nothing this weekend.

I kind of know what to expect this weekend since I went on a few retreats with my old Chicago Sangha. I expect that this will just be a variation on that theme. Expectations are a delusion that inhibits one from seeing things as they truly are. Although one of the four great vows that I say most everyday is "Delusions are Infinite- I vow to cut through them all", I'm still very very deluded.

It's 10 p.m.— past my bedtime. Yes, I usually have a bedtime. I customarily go to sleep by 9:30 because I wake up everyday at 3 a.m. to write. We just had an orientation followed by sitting, walking, more sitting, Dharma preachin', even more sitting then chanting.

My legs already hurt— mostly in my knees. The fellow in front of me has a wallet in his back pocket. I was uncomfortable just looking at it. How can you sit comfortably with a big fat wallet under one butt cheek? He got up in the middle of a sitting period to exchange his zafu (i.e. sitting cushion) for a bench. What a wimp. Even though I told myself that I would just sit through the pain, I adjusted my legs once or twice. I'm a huge wimp. I even had a hot flushed feeling on my face during the second sitting. I hardly concentrated at all.

I wonder if I will concentrate well this weekend? That's just a stupid thought getting in the way of practice but that's how my silly mind works. I wonder what the interview will be like? I hope there are no koans. I don't like koans. Koans are those "what's the sound of one hand clapping" type riddles. I'd be happy to find a Soto Zen group; they don't use koans or other Zen tricks and gimmicks. They just sit and sit and sit and sit and sit ever so patiently. Why rush things? Koans bug me.

There are several large sleeping rooms in this building, all filled with bunk beds. There is only one other guy in my room and he is going to sleep now so I should switch the lights off. It's late. Tomorrow we start at 5 a.m. Wow, 5! I get to sleep in! What a treat!

Goodnight.

PAGE VII

SATURDAY

↓ It's 5 and I'm awake. But I've been mostly awake since I first woke up and saw 3:38 on my watch. This retreat is easy— I get to sleep in. Ha! My legs are going to be sore today for sure; they were hurting yesterday after only a brief sitting. I should sit more often.

Let me describe the practice that Seafood instructed us in yesterday. In short, when meditating, we are to go back to the

“antecedent mind”, the mind before the senses (seeing, smelling, thinking, hearing &c). We are to do this while we are sitting and when we are going to sleep at night. In a way it sounds like a bunch of bull to me but I know that it’s this kind of bull that I need to help me become more focused and clear. Besides the antecedent mind practice, we’re supposed to ask, “Who?” as we perform all other tasks besides sitting and going to sleep. As in, “Who is brushing his teeth?” “Who is walking?” “Who is eating?” &c.

I should stretch a little now while I have a few minutes before the first meditation period.

It’s now less than 10 minutes until “work practice”. We just chanted a long morning service, sat, walked, sat again, walked outside in the cold, then ate. The sitting wasn’t too hard because I slept some. Yeah, it’s possible to sleep while sitting up and not fall down. “Who is being lazy?” “Who is a sleeping during the first meditation service of the day even though he got to sleep in till 5?” My left foot decided to go to sleep too, and it stung with pins and needles when we got up to walk. It’s 8:15.

•**The guy sitting next to me at breakfast only ate half of his oatmeal. What about the starving little Buddhists in China? “Who is being a judgmental idiot?”**

•**One of the hardcore guys (a “monk” with fancy orange robes) must have forgot his hat since he didn’t have it on during our walk outside. It’s very very cold out.**

My feet are cold. I just put on an extra pair of socks and now I’m off to work practice...

It’s 9:20. I think sitting starts again at 9:45. I wish I had a schedule. For some reason I keep belching and my belches taste like sesame. At breakfast we had roasted sesame seeds (still oven warm!). I love love love toasted sesame seeds. Needless to say, I applied them liberally to my oatmeal (along with some raisins and maple). It’s not an unpleasant taste to burp up. In fact, it’s making me hungry for more, but all I have is my burps, which are but echoes of the meal, just like that Greek guy in the cave seeing shadows. The world we see (and taste) is a shadowy illusion.

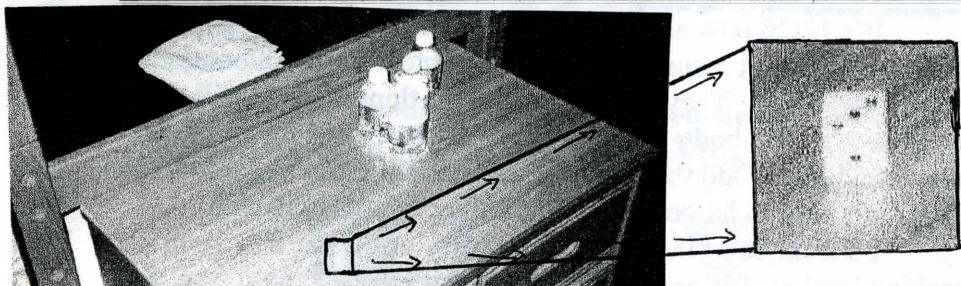
•**A woman said, “excuse me” when she wanted to get by. Shut up! Bad naughty Buddhist. We aren’t supposed to talk on retreat.**

•I also said, "excuse me" to someone. It's habit and it just came out before I could stop it. But I'm certain that I was just being polite.

Our work practice consisted of stuffing envelopes for the environmental center (the place we are staying) and then cleaning up the building. I really like that we all paid \$140 bucks to stay here and then we do work for them. I really really really like that. It makes me want to help others, *sincerely* help others. I remember reading about how monks try to do favors for other monks without them knowing who did it, like sewing up a hole in their robe or cleaning something. People should really try to be more giving and helpful to others. Anonymous giving seems so pure and sincere.

Another thing that I like is that since I've been back in my bedroom (just me and my roomie and lots of empty bunkbeds) my roommate has been sitting in a chair just looking at the ground. "Who is sitting in the chair looking at the ground?" I don't know but it ain't me. He doesn't appear to be sad or dejected, which is what that pose would normally bring to mind. He's just sitting. He's trying to be aware, to concentrate.

I'll probably have my first interview soon. Interviews make me nervous because I have so little real understanding of Buddhism. Rather than thinking about it, I should just be open and ready to learn. The reason I practice Buddhism is because of the sincerity of it. There's no reward or reason to practice; one simply practices because it's what one should do. Even though I don't sincerely practice often enough, I do sincerely want to sincerely practice, and that should count for something.



There's a die sitting on one of the dressers. Whatever group used this building before us probably played a board game up here. Or high stakes craps perhaps. It would be fun to think that some youth organization or church group on a weekend retreat in the woods was shootin' craps for **BIG** money. Unfortunately, there are some board games in the mudroom downstairs so I'm guessing they were just playing Monopoly or something. Bummer.

The person who left the die here rolled a 3. This room is very clean and tidy; there is nothing else interesting anywhere besides this die. I have a feeling that if I rolled it right now I would roll a 6. Should I see? Maybe I shouldn't. What happens if I do roll a 6? Would I congratulate myself? And if I don't roll a 6 did I somehow fail? I'm gonna roll it, of course; I've thought about it too much now so I have to roll.

If my roommate was here right now I wouldn't do it. Isn't that dumb? Why should I care what someone thinks of me if I roll a die for no good reason? But he's not here so hold on for second while I roll the bones...

...I rolled it on the floor, which is covered with very thin, hard carpet. It seemed like it would make too much noise if I rolled it on the dresser. It's so very quiet. I rolled a 6. Yeah, it felt good to roll a 6. I was nervous as I rolled it but when I saw the side with 2 rows of 3 dots facing upward, a wave of relief washed over me.

Now I'm thoroughly convinced that I have some sort of super-duper Zen Power like the ones I've read mention of here and there in Buddhist literature. I've read stories about monks who could fly or see the future or tame wild animals. I'm takin' my Zen Power to Vegas.

It would have been disappointing to roll a different number. A little too disappointing. It could have just been dumb luck, of course. It's only a one in six chance after all. But I'm not gonna roll again, be it here or Vegas. I'll quit while I'm ahead and bask in the glory of my prescient power.

It's 12:26 now and time for the big break of the day. Meditation doesn't resume until 2:00 but interviews will continue through the break. They're going slowly; I think mine is still eight people away. My body feels tired (but not sore) and my mind is behaving oddly. Odd thoughts are continually surfacing, odder than usual. It's hard to let go of such intriguing mental gibberish.

I should be trying harder than I am. At home, I've been working hard for the past few days and this retreat should be a little push to help keep me moving forward. Forward? It sounds as if I'm on the straight and narrow path of righteousness where one can but move forward, or else. My balance isn't good enough to walk that tightrope-thin path. But the Buddha's path isn't a wide, tree-lined boulevard either. There is no path. My body is tired, my mind is racing here and there, and I'm frantically scribbling in this

spiral-bound notebook. Where is the mind before this? I should be trying a little harder than I am.

Here's some stuff that happened: Sitting practice, followed by walking meditation, followed by some sort of Tai Chi/Yoga exercises, followed by more sitting followed by outside walking meditation, followed by lunch, followed by me going upstairs to my bedroom to put pen to paper. I'm Now writing the words you are Now reading. So No w we're caught up. We're Now. We're living in the moment.

Do such things as the past, present and future even exist? The past doesn't exist except as you recall (and recreate) it from your limited perspective. The future doesn't exist because it's just a daydream of your ego. But the present doesn't exist either. The present moment is just a slippery flow Nows that we can but futilely try to hold on to. I'm writing in this notebook NowNowNow NowNow... It's still Now; but it's not now. Blah blah blah...



Now can be very boring so let's go back to lunch... There was miso soup and a rice dish with tofu, sesame seeds and veggies (carrots, broccoli and cauliflower). Nothing too great but I made sure to eat plenty so my belly wouldn't gurgle while sitting. Some other folks have had gurgling bellies which are very loud in the quiet meditation hall.

•There is a large blackboard in the main room/dining room downstairs on which someone has written **Who?**

W h o ?

The guy in front of me is named Mel Shelton and he still has his wallet in his backpocket. I've been staring at that damned wallet for many hours already and although it makes me uncomfortable, he doesn't seem to notice.

I don't know what else to write about and there's still a whole lot of time left in this break... Hmmmm... Here's something: There are 16 folks here on this retreat and the cushion on either side of me is empty. To my right should sit a certain DINO CARDAMONE. I know Mel's and Dino's names because we all had assigned seating. There were little pieces of paper with a name on them in the middle of each cushion. Dino's is still sitting on his cushion; he's a no-show I guess. My name is in my pocket for safekeeping. CHRISTOPH MEYER is mine.

Mel put his just behind his cushion where I have to stare at it. You know, just below the wallet-lump I've also been staring at. It's amazing what one's mind can latch onto when it is deprived of its usual distractions. The mind doesn't want to concentrate on the practice which will eradicate it, so in an attempt at self-preservation it goes wacky-crazy thinking about any little thing it can think about just so it can go on thinking.

Right now I can hear Seafood's deep, resonant voice through the floor. The interview room is below my bedroom. The tone of Seafood's voice is casual and conversational. I'm straining to hear but I can't understand anything aside from a stray word or two. "Who is trying to eavesdrop?" Hangman, that's who. Whoever he's interviewing has a very thin voice that I can just barely hear.

It's 1:12. I took a brief nap filled with strange, deluded dreams. My mind is acting quirky. Serious practice can bring all sorts of stuff to the front of one's mind and even my lackluster level of practice is having an immediate and noticeable effect.

I just pooped and there were sesame seeds floating in the toilet. Just five short hours and the food is already through me. Life is fleeting.

More of the usual: Sitting (which hurts), walking, stretching (which hurts too), more sitting (which hurts more), walking outside, then supper. Supper was mushy eggplant and zucchini, I think. The Parmesan cheese was self-serve in a little bowl on the side so I was a good little vegan. There hasn't been any non-vegan food yet besides this cheese.

I finally had the interview and it was no big deal. We didn't yell or say cryptic, nonsensical Zen BS. No silly Dharma combat or anything spectacular. I just bowed and sat down (in a chair) in front of Seafood and he asked how things were going and I said they were going okay. He wanted to know if I had any questions and I did. My questions were about the "antecedent



THE TREES ERUPT UP **P**ARALLEL BEFORE THEY FALL **L**IKE CALLIGRAPHY

mind" practice. He answered them, but naturally I'm still a little, or possibly a lot, confused. The interviews with the Zen Master in my old Sangha in Chicago were full of wacky koans and I was obliged to pound on the floor as part of the interview ritual. I like these interviews better; they're laid back.

It seems like a good time for a walk now. My camera has a half-spent roll of black and white film in it and I'm gonna go walk in the woods and take a few photographs.

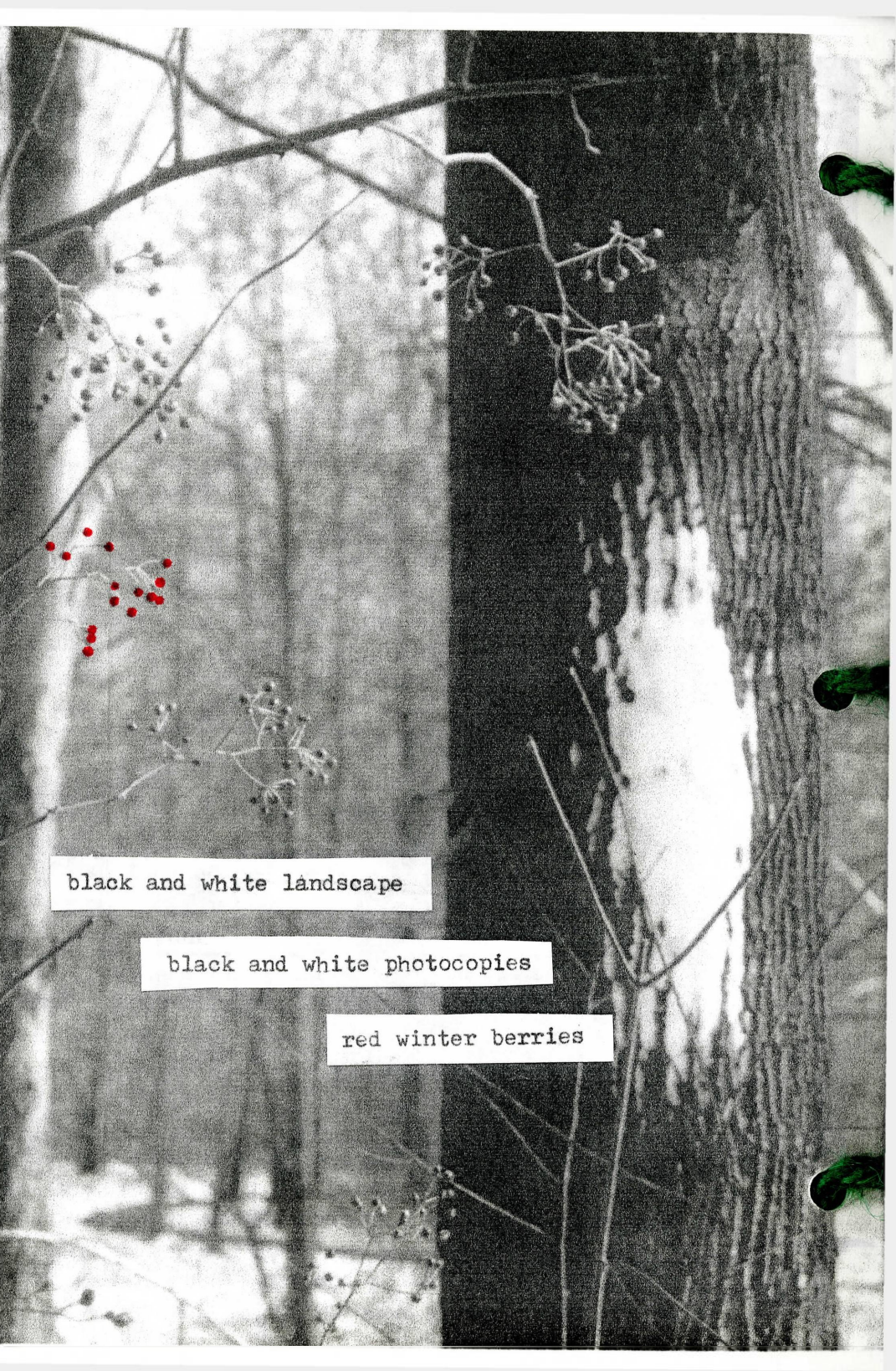
It's 5:31. I took a constitutional in the woods and snapped a couple of shots but the light was going fast.

My roommate wasn't present for meditation or supper; he split town. I wonder why? "Who is wondering why?" When sincerely practicing, one doesn't waste time wondering about other folks' business. But what can I do? I think he couldn't take the heat so he had to get outta the kitchen. During the midday break I saw him hurriedly packing his bag.

The weird thing is that he stayed through most of the break. He was just sitting in his chair, doing "nothing" and presumably practicing when all of the sudden he got up, packed up his stuff and split. It obviously wasn't a planned departure. He was probably sitting there debating whether or not he wanted to finish out the weekend and finally decided that he didn't. This is the same fellow who only ate half of his oatmeal at breakfast. Obviously he's an all around untrustworthy, rotten guy.

I thought that it might be nice to leave once or twice but could never really consider it since Lisa dropped me off. But I wouldn't have really considered it even if I had a car. The embarrassment of ditching early would be far worse than the pain in the legs from staying. The retreat is hard but that's exactly why I need to do it. Time to go sit on my sore legs...

It's 9:42. My legs hurt hurt hurt. Time to sleep. Had another interview. Told him my legs hurt, that's about it. I also told him I thought I should try harder. He said that only I could decide how much effort I should put into my practice. During the final meditation period I finally caved in and changed my sitting position from a half lotus (right foot on left thigh) to a sissy position resembling the folks who use sitting benches in which one's calves fit under the bench one sits on. I sat on two cushions with my legs straddling either side and my feet behind me. It was much more comfortable but my legs still hurt a little. Time for bed. No one in the room but me tonight.



black and white landscape

black and white photocopies

red winter berries



I N THE TANGLED LINES S USPENDED IN A DRAWING T HE SNOW IS NESTING

SUNDAY

4:47 a.m. The wake up bell rang five or ten minutes ago. I'm not sure what time I need to be in the meditation hall but other folks are still walking in and out of the bathroom so I have time to tell a funny story.

I woke up around 3:30 but my watch for some reason has an inexplicable function that one can engage if one randomly pushes buttons in the dark, that makes it read 6:10. I thought I had overslept! Even though I was very tired, I never sleep until after 6! That's so very late. I was panicked. How did I sleep through the loud LOUD wake up bell? Quickly, I put on my clothing and went to the bathroom. Not a sound. I listened carefully for any tiny peep of sound but I didn't even hear any snoring. Everyone was already in the meditation hall! I ran down to the mudroom where all of the shoes, jackets and hats are kept, but they were still hanging there.

Confused, I went back upstairs and fiddled with my watch and somehow it now read 3:30. Everyone was still asleep— sleeping silent as the dead. I lay back in bed till the wake up bell rang but I didn't go back to sleep.

•**Mel didn't take his wallet out of his pocket all day yesterday.**

Everyone's heading downstairs now. Time to start another day of meditation.

7:20. "Sitting will resume in the meditation hall at 8 o'clock." Clack! Clack! Clack! I got 40 minutes. That's a stupid thing to write, of course, since it shouldn't matter whether I'm lying in bed or sitting on a cushion. Either way, I should be attentive. But my deluded mind thinks I have 40 minutes. My 40 minutes. Woohoo! 40 minutes for ME! Mine mine mine!

We chanted the long morning chants, walked, sat, walked outside, then ate breakfast. Breakfast was some sort of bready pudding stuff. It was okay but not as good as the oatmeal. There were lots of little bowls full of condiments with yesterday's oatmeal, and I absolutely love condiments. There were walnuts, peanuts, maple syrup, raisins and those oh-so-yummy toasted sesame seeds. No condiments were served with the pudding. Stupid pudding.

I could go out for a walk and take some more photographs but I think I'll just lie here instead. I've been doing stuff during all my breaks but right now I just need rest. The retreat doesn't end until 3 o'clock today and I'm so very weary and sore.



Comfortmaker

hot can be made cool

beware the Comfortmaker

cold can be made warm

Comfortmaker

•A fellow retreator was shooting up something in the bathroom this morning. Insulin? Probably, but wouldn't it be cool if he was just casually shooting a little heroin.

•I took a shower this morning. My sore shoulders really wanted burning hot water but the water was cold. Maybe I should have risen earlier and hogged an unfair share of the limited hot water resources for myself and let my dharma brothers and sisters freeze. Hey, it's either me or them. And it sucked being me.

11:52. Meditation resumes again at 1 o'clock. There was a lot of sitting during the last block of time but I did okay. I had another interview and I told Seafood that I have been doing better and concentrating some. Seafood's further explanations of the antecedent mind practice helped clear things up and I've also managed to find enough energy to practice more earnestly.

My trouble with the antecedent mind practice was that I associated the word "before" with time, so I ended up thinking stuff like, "What was my mind like before the (sound, smell, sight &c.)" Now I understand "going back to the mind before" to be what I would call attentiveness. Not being attentive of each and every sensation but attentive of "it". Just letting it be...blah, blah, blah. That explanation doesn't quite convey what I mean but I suppose that's because any description relies on words. And this ain't about words and definitions.

When returning from my interview, which is conducted in the building we sleep in, not the mediation hall, the brash outside world momentarily intruded into our little world of quiet yet vigorous reflection. The disturbance came in the form of a park ranger. He was dressed in his greenish, brownish uniform complete with a proper wide-brimmed park ranger hat. There's an entryway just before the meditation hall, where one takes off one's shoes and coat. I was just about to reenter the meditation hall when he burst in and loudly stomps the snow off his boots.

"Hi there!" he bellows.

I wave hello and smile.

"I'm looking for a phone! Do you know where a phone is?!"

He probably wasn't actually shouting but it seemed like shouting after so much silence. I was about to explain to him that people were meditating in the adjacent room and he should be quiet but he asked, "Are you an intern or are you with the group here?!"

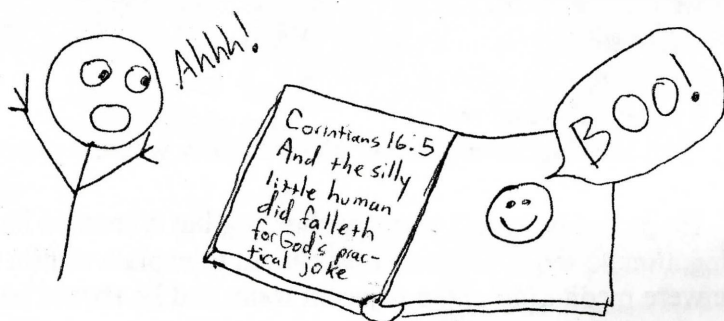
"I'm with the group here," I replied. It felt odd to speak. The everyday world is so harsh and loud.

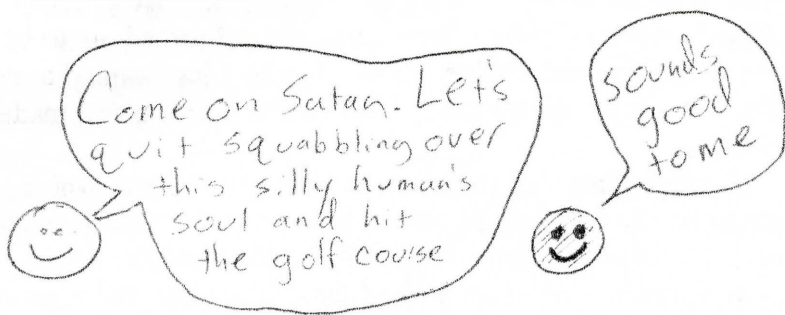
"Hey! Can I go in there or are there people in there right now?!" he asked, pointing towards the mediation hall. Before I could answer, a guy who seemed to be doing a lot to help run the retreat came out of the meditation hall. He took Ranger Rick aside and whispered to him. Probably told him something like this: "Hey Rick! Shut your yap-hole and go find a phone somewhere else!"

•Mel? Where are you Mel? There was no Mel in front of me during the last sitting, no wallet in a back pocket to stare at, just a little piece of paper that read "Mel Shelton". What happened to you Mel? First my roommate and now you. I'm going to have abandonment issues.

I wrote that I was practicing with more verve and sincerity but it wasn't all hard work; I mentally goofed off too. A few weeks ago, I wrote a little mini-comic entitled "What God Has Revealed To Man" in which God torments an Everyman fellow who is seeking the Truth with a capital T. When sitting, one cannot physically run away from the monotony and discomfort but one can mentally flee. I had an idea for a sequel to my comic and I spent a good long time mentally composing it while sitting. It took up a whole sitting session and made me feel like I "accomplished" something. The time sure flew while I was off in Comicbookland "Who is goofing off?" Christoph Meyer. I think the comic will be funny if I ever get around to publishing it. "Who thinks he's one helluva funny guy?" Yep, Christoph Meyer.

Lunch was good: Miso soup, a good rice dish, and breakfast leftovers for desert. I've got time now so I'm gonna go ahead and sketch out a rough draft of my comic while it's fresh in my head...
Note: The next seven pages of my notebook are taken up by the comic. Here are two (out of context) doodles from the rough draft:





I became so involved in my comic that I was almost late for meditation. It's so easy for me to become enraptured in the thrill of creation. After finishing the comic, I glanced at my watch, expecting to see that I had 20 minutes or so left in the hour-long break. My plan was to go take a few more black and white photographs in the woods before the next sitting period started. But the time was 5 till. Damn! Not very attentive of me.

I hightailed it to the meditation hall and sat and walked and sat again with a moderate amount of attentiveness. Although I had purged the comic from my mind by putting it on paper, I did congratulate myself more than once on composing what I thought to be a funny comic.

After the last sitting we all relaxed and talked. Although I felt close to the other 14 people (16 minus my roomie and Mel) in the room, it was odd to finally hear them speak. We hadn't said a word to one another all weekend but we still knew each other. After all, we had been stuck together for hours and hours, and we couldn't help but observe one another. Even without talking, you form general impressions of people. I've often taken the stance that stereotypes exist because people act in stereotypical ways. After observing my fellow Buddhists, I had come to a few judgements about almost everyone in the room but when they actually opened their mouths and talked I was taken aback. I'm happy to report that almost all of my judgements and stereotypes were way off.

My biggest misimpression was of the guy who guided us through the Tai Chi and Yoga exercises. He has longish (below the shoulders) black hair, streaked with gray and was the only person in the front row of robed folks who wore a black robe instead of an orange one. His black getup made him look like a martial arts instructor, which I'm assuming that he is. I'm not sure what I

expected him to act like, but I didn't expect to like him. When everyone loosened up after the retreat was officially over, he immediately started grinning from ear to ear and turned out to be a downright pleasant and affable fellow. Maybe I just wanted to not like him because he always had us do this one exercise that made my arms hurt.

Another thing that surprised me was that this kid, who I thought to be 18 or 19, turned out to be 16. The last time I was on a retreat, I was 18 or 19 years old and all the other people in the group were much older so I felt like I understood him and what the retreat was like for him. And when he spoke, he reminded me of myself back then.

I miss having a Sangha to be a regular part of. Since I left college, I've just been a Buddhist all by my lonesome even though I really enjoy meditating regularly with other Buddhists. The Sangha is one of the three jewels along with the Buddha and the Dharma, or Buddhist teachings, and it's for a good reason. One shouldn't isolate oneself from the world and associate only with people who believe as you do, but it's nice to at least have regular contact with like-minded folks. Since Buddhism is a practice that one does, it's helpful to practice with others. Plus, it's always a good idea to have a teacher who can help guide one's practice.

Lisa came by to pick me up just when I was getting to know a few people better. I asked her to bring Herbie in. Herbie was sleeping but I introduced a few people to Lisa and my sleeping son and then we left.

The inside of the car smelled wonderful! Lisa had picked up takeout from a restaurant called Soul Vegetarian and brought some for me! Mmmmm. Herbie woke up as we put him into his carseat. He just barely opened his eyes for a moment and managed to say, "Juice, juice." Lisa had gotten a "strawberry heaven" drink from Soul Vegetarian and he wanted some. After one cursory sip, he fell back into a deep sleep while clutching the drink with both hands, the straw still in his mouth. As we drove home, Lisa and I told each other about our weekends.

She asked if I had a "peaceful" weekend. I explained to her that it was anything but peaceful. Sure we were quiet and took slow strolls through the woods and spent a good deal of the day just sitting on our asses. Outwardly it was peaceful but inside we were confronting our deluded minds with all the vigor we could muster. We were attempting to rid ourselves of the delusion of "me" or "I"

that doesn't really exist. We tried to just sit and dwell in the place that exists before our senses corrupt everything.

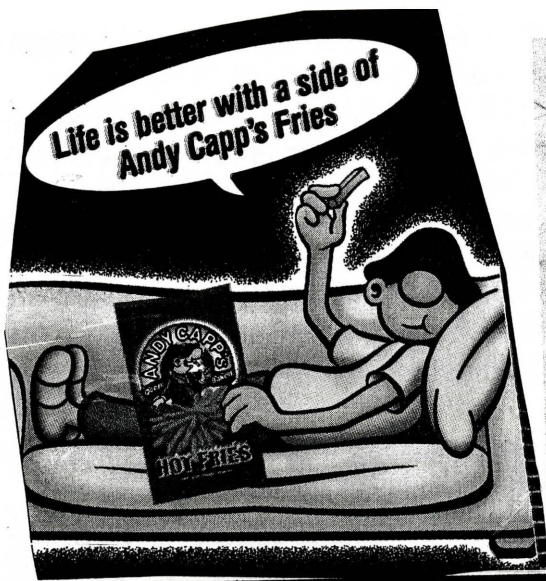
When one sits still like this, he or she is confronted with the myriad thoughts that routinely bounce around in everyone's mind. Your mind doesn't want to be still and it rebels by tossing out the silliest, most disturbing, most innocuous, most brilliant, most random, most confusing, most illuminating, most boring, most dumbest thoughts it can think. The ego thinks any and every thought it can think to distract you from the monumental task at hand—its obliteration. Lisa considered this explanation and replied, "Oh...well that sucks." I love her so much.

I devoured my delicious take out, which made me thirsty so I snatched the strawberry heaven right out my sleeping son's little hands. Ha ha ha! "Who is stealing from the hands of sleeping child." Me! Me! Me! And here I am writing in this spiral notebook as we drive back to our home in Millwood. Through the car windows, the world is speeding by and next to the seat I spy my bag of Andy Capps's BBQ Fries. It's half full and neatly folded up beside the seat, just as I had left it. What better way is there to start and end a retreat than with junk food?

We are travelling the same road that we traveled to get here and I'm eating the same bag of Andy Capp's BBQ Fries, but at the same time, the road and the BBQ Fries are different. I'm different too. Not much different, but enough to notice. The Buddha taught that everything changes. Nothing is constant. Everything is impermanent.

On this very day (December 8th), 2565 years ago, the Buddha attained the Highest Perfect Enlightenment beneath the sacred Bodhi Tree in India and here I am stealing juice out of my sleeping son's hands and eating junk food. What a truly beautiful world we are blessed to live in.

•This issue of Twenty-eight Pages Lovingly Bound with Twine is dedicated to Dino Cardamone. His nametag sat to my right for the entire weekend to remind me that one's plans and best intentions amount to nothing in this impermanent world. Poor Dino probably lost his \$40 deposit too.



Dear Folks at Deer Park®:

I recently went on a meditative retreat with my sangha (Buddhist congregation). The organizers of the retreat provided us with plenty of Deer Park® water to drink. There were as many little "Half Pint™" bottles as I cared to drink and over the course of the weekend I drank not a few and thus stayed hydrated.

The water was clean-tasting and good but that is not the reason that I'm writing. You see, during the retreat (which was conducted in silence) I had plenty of time to ruminate on many things. One is supposed to clear one's chattering mind of silly thoughts on such retreats but every time I saw a "Half Pint™" bottle of Deer Park® water, a question kept nagging me: Why is the water bottle labeled "Half Pint™" when a cup is half of a pint? Why not just label it "One Cup" since 8 fluid ounces equals one cup?

Labeling a cup of water "Half Pint™" is the same as labeling a pint of water "Half Quart". It just seems silly to use a bulkier term when a more succinct one already exists. But then again, maybe I should have been concentrating more on my meditation and less on such trivialities. Nevertheless, I'd like to hear your thoughts on the matter so please respond.

Sincerely,

Christoph Meyer

Post Script: Another suggestion I have is to label your "Half Pint™" bottles as "Two Gills". I realize that cups and pints are more commonly used and more widely understood. Gills might seem a bit archaic, but I think it's far more poetic. You could, of course, just use the metric system but I would strongly discourage that since it is so very sterile and practical, and lacks any semblance of poetry.

Post Post Script: I'm such an idiot. It never even occurred to me that your term "Half Pint™" was meant to be like the cutesy phrase that adults sometimes call little kids. Well, I guess that there's not much of a point to this letter but I won't let that stop me from mailing it. Did you ever watch the television show *Little House on the Prairie*? Pa always called Laura "Half Pint". It may have been a little preachy and sentimental but that show was still pretty good.

Dear Mr. Meyer:

This is in response to your recent letter in which you asked about half pint label on the Deer Park Bottle. We thank you for your concern and suggestions regarding our labels. Please accept the enclosed coupon for your personal enjoyment.

If you have any further questions or concerns please contact us at (800) 288-8281.

Sincerely,
Deer Park Consumer Affairs

Consumer Affairs Department



FREE
Any One (1)
Deer Park®
Product

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Practicing Compassion

I write reviews for a fanzine review publication called Xerography Debt. Davida, the publisher of XD, regularly sends me a pile of stuff to read and review. I read through my pile, send the stuff I don't care for back to her and write reviews of the stuff I like. I could write nasty reviews of the stuff I don't like but I'd much rather just write positive reviews about the stuff that I enjoyed reading. One of these publications sent to me for review was entitled The Secret Life of Snakes and I wrote the following review of it, which appeared in Xerography Debt #10.

A Fanzine that I VERY Highly Recommend ***The Secret Life of Snakes #2 by Cullen Carter. \$2 U.S./\$3 elsewhere.***

When I read Burn Collector #11 a few weeks ago I was very happy to have found a fanzine with good writing that could stand above most mainstream publications. But since I had read many glowing reviews of Burn Collector I was expecting that it might be good. The Secret Life Of Snakes, however, was an unknown; just one of many fanzines that Davida had sent to me for review.

I read the first piece, a tale of car-troubles which is actually about being a father, and it was pretty good. Next was a short piece of fiction with a funny O. Henry style ending. I was enjoying TSLoS but it wasn't until the third piece that I realized that this guy is a really good writer. That piece was just a scene from his life but it was told in the form of a short play and it was very very well done.

Wow, a good writer. I started the next piece, a longer short story, with some hesitation; although I was really enjoying this fanzine, I was afraid that I had already read the best parts. I love discovering new, good fanzine writers but I don't find really good ones often enough. After I read the next story, which was the highlight of the issue, I knew that this guy could write. The story is based on a not too original science fiction premise and the ending is foreshadowed and you see it coming a mile away. But what made this story so good was that even with the unoriginal genre idea and the predictable ending, the polished writing carried the story brilliantly

And after this great story, I read the three following book reviews as a kind of afterthought only to discover that they too are well done and interesting. This is a good fanzine by a serious writer. Get it.

I was very eager to read more of Cullen's writing so I sent him a couple bucks, a copy of 28PLBwT #6 and a letter requesting that he send me whatever other writing he has published in exchange. A couple days later I received a letter- not from Cullen but from Davida. It contained a print out of an e-mail, which I'll partially print below.

"...I unfortunately have some bad news, and I was [interested] in letting the zine community know about what is going on.

"Last Tuesday night (April 1st), on his way home (biking) from class, Cullen was hit by a pickup truck who apparently never saw him, even though he had lights on his bike. It was right at dusk. Cullen hit the windshield, then hit the roof, denting it, and then landed in the bed of the truck. The man did stop, and the police have done a full investigation. The DA decided not to press charges, but that's another story.

"Right now, Cullen is in a deep coma. He suffered a brain injury (called Diffuse Axonal Injury), which is similar to what happens to boxers when they get a hard right hook and are knocked unconscious (it is also similar to shaken baby syndrome), although to a much greater degree.

"He was wearing a helmet, which probably saved his life. He also suffered a broken left hip, broken bones in his face, bruised lungs, cracked ribs, vertebrae fractures (which do not affect his spinal cord) and some facial lacerations which were probably caused by the windshield, then hit the roof, denting it, and then landed in the bed of the truck. The man did stop, and the police have done a full investigation. The DA decided not to press charges, but that's another story.

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"He was wearing a helmet, which probably saved his life. He also suffered a broken left hip, broken bones in his face, bruised lungs, cracked ribs, vertebrae fractures (which do not affect his spinal cord) and some facial lacerations which were probably cause by the windshield. He is not breathing on his own; they inserted a breathing tube at the scene to stabilize him (which is standard procedure). He is stable; he is not in immediate danger of dying at the moment."

The e-mail goes on but you get the picture.

The very next day I received a letter in the mail. The return address was Cullen's, and the name printed above the address was CARTER. I felt ill. Did Cullen write me a letter before he got hit by the truck? When I opened it, I found out that the letter was from Allyson Carter, his wife. She was returning my money since she didn't have any copies of Cullen's fanzines aside from the one I had already read. Most of the letter described the events that I had already read about yesterday but the end of the letter is worth quoting.

...Thank you for your kind words regarding Cullen's work. It really means a lot to me right now. If you'd like to be on the email update list I'm putting together (sent out once a week), email me at ccarter@ticon.net.

I'll keep the zines you sent so Cullen can read them when he wakes up ☺.

*Thanks again,
Allyson*

That last sentence made me cry when I read it, and right now as I type this I'm crying again. Although I've never met or even exchanged one letter with Cullen, something about his accident has moved me deeply. Try as I might, I can't stop thinking about it. I feel this way because I identify with him and his writing and I can't help but think that it could have happened to me. What would happen if I got hit by a truck, fell into a coma and left Lisa and Herbie all alone?

I keep thinking of Lisa trying to answer my mail (as Allyson answered my letter to Cullen) and cope with Herbie and our pets and life all by herself while I lay in a coma. It's a horrible thing to dwell on but I can't seem to stop thinking about it.

When one sincerely puts the Buddha's teachings into practice, one gains wisdom and insight. Along with the wisdom and insight, a sense of compassion and empathy naturally develops. The line separating each of us from the rest of the universe is an illusion and when one intuitively grasps this concept, compassion for others is a normal result. There is no line between the observer and the observed.

Below is a paragraph that already appeared earlier in this issue but I'm going to reprint it here because I think it means more printed here than in my retreat journal.

Our work practice consisted of stuffing envelopes for the environmental center (the place we are staying) and then cleaning up the building. I really like that we all paid \$140 bucks to stay here and then we do work for them. I really really really like that. It makes me want to help others, sincerely help others. I remember reading about how monks would try to do favors for other monks without them knowing who did it, like sewing up a hole in their robe or cleaning something. People should really try to be more giving and helpful to others. Anonymous giving seems so pure and sincere.

A benefit fund has been set up to help pay for Cullen's medical expenses. I have never met Cullen, except through reading one issue of his fanzine. You may have never even had the opportunity to read his writing but I'd like to urge you to donate to The Cullen Carter Benefit Fund regardless. We should all practice compassion in our everyday lives and compassionate acts towards strangers are acts of pure and selfless love. Even if it's just five bucks, donate something if you feel moved to. The world needs more acts of anonymous love.

Here is the information on how you (yes, you!) can donate:

Mail checks to:
Bank Mutual
Corporate Headquarters
4949 W Brown Deer Rd.
P.O. Box 245034
Milwaukee, WI 53224-9534

Checks should be made out to **Cullen Carter Benefit Fund.**

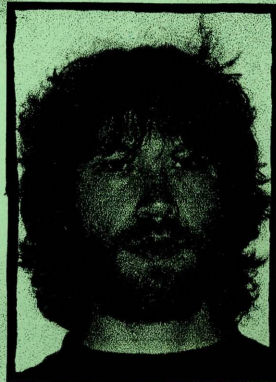
Cullen Carter Update!

Cullen is doing a lot better now. He's still having a lot of trouble talking and moving but he's conscious, breathing on his own, eating a little on his own and starting his rehabilitation with physical therapists.

A bake sale was recently held to raise money for Cullen and \$1500 was raised. They didn't have \$1500 worth of baked goods but people were paying \$10 or \$20 for a brownie. Fuckin Aye! Also, zinesters are getting together on August 3rd in Chicago for a benefit to help raise more money.

For more recent updates on Cullen's progress or information on the benefits being organized on his behalf you can go to www.ashabot.com.

Who is shaving his
head like a monk?



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Hangman - that's who.