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# the eye

## ***GIVING UP THE GUN***

*reflections from  
Columbia's military veterans*

***BY STEPHEN SNOWDER***





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# GIVING UP THE GUN

reflections from Columbia's military  
veterans pg. 7

by *Stephen Snowden*

## CONTENTS

- |    |                                     |                       |
|----|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 3  | EYESITES                            |                       |
| 4  | EYE TO EYE                          |                       |
|    | <b>Hard As Nails</b>                | <i>Alex Sanchez</i>   |
| 5  | DESIGN                              |                       |
|    | <b>All That's Fit to Print</b>      | <i>Ana Diaz</i>       |
| 6  | FOOD                                |                       |
|    | <b>Katz's Conundrum</b>             | <i>Megan Cunnane</i>  |
| 11 | MUSIC                               |                       |
|    | <b>The Dangers of a Dance Craze</b> | <i>Sarah Choi</i>     |
| 12 | FICTION                             |                       |
|    | <b>The Morrow House</b>             | <i>Serena Solin</i>   |
| 14 | 20/20                               |                       |
|    | <b>Long Live the Fung Wah</b>       | <i>Dennis Zhou</i>    |
|    | <b>Mobama's Big Break</b>           | <i>David Salazar</i>  |
|    | VFH                                 |                       |
| 15 | <b>Paseo de la Triste</b>           | <i>Hannah Kauders</i> |

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

When I was younger, my uncle, the Middle East correspondent for ABC News, was sent to the region to cover its many wars and conflicts. My mother assured me that he would be safe: The bulletproof vest was just a precaution, the combat boots for walking through the mud. Each night, we watched him report from Israel, Iraq, Afghanistan. We saw him work in deserts and cities and run-down villages. Once, we witnessed a nearby explosion and a second of blackness before the picture returned with my uncle unscathed.

But despite the fact that I could see him on the screen in front of me, the distance between us felt much farther than the 7,500 miles between Jerusalem and my couch in San Francisco. I knew I wanted to be a journalist, but reporting in conditions of violence felt like a fundamentally foreign concept to me.

Today, considering the experiences of many of my fellow students in combat feels even more unfathomable. If I feel a certain distance between myself and the occupation of war reporter, how can I fathom the distance between myself and the people armed with

guns instead of microphones? I know I am not alone in these thoughts: As much as we try to understand, the soldier's experience seems inaccessible, if not downright surreal, to the civilians who have never donned fatigues or reported for duty.

In this week's lead, Stephen Snowden attempts to bridge this gap by telling the stories of four Columbia students who are also military veterans. Although their experiences are radically different in circumstance, Goicoechea, Lagana, Tseng, and Bratton share a collective narrative of trauma and anxiety as the results of a military career. For those of us who haven't served, it is impossible—and it would be disrespectful—to claim to know the effects of such an experience. The best we can do is seek to understand.

*Suze Myers*

Art Director

# OUT OF THE WOODWERK

BY SUZE MYERS

Did you know that Harlem native Azealia Banks used to work at Oren's? Well what if she wasn't the only big name to have worked a banal MoHi job on the bitter road to stardom? In this week's "By the Numbers," we imagine four similar success stories/conspiracy theories:

**1.** Before founding the White Girl Mob, Kreyashawn worked the register at Aerosoles, a fact apparent in her work—if you look closely at the "Gucci Gucci" music video, you'll see that she wears neither Fendi heels nor Prada wedges, but a pair of orthopedic rubber loafers.

**2.** Pre-Odd Future, Tyler, the Creator worked at Book Culture, where the other employees mercilessly mocked his improper use of the comma on his nametag. According to his employee report, he was eventually fired for "being a little too helpful to several female customers."

**3.** Rihanna once worked the counter at the Hungarian Pastry Shop, a job that she claims was a huge influence on her hit "Birthday Cake." While we're happy that a Morningside establishment helped Princess Rhi's creative process, we are a little concerned that our favorite bakery inspired a song about cunnilingus.

**4.** Drake moved to Morningside post-*De-grassi*, where he started at the bottom by stocking shelves at Duane Reade. This explains why half of the "Started From the Bottom" music video shows Drake and friends working there (or at least it looks damn similar). Rumor has it that "Best I Ever Had" is an ode to the Columbia women's volleyball team walking by after practice: "Sweatpants hair tied chillin' with no make-up on..."

## APRIL'S FOOL

# T. S. ELIOT'S GUIDE TO CONVERSATION

BY PJ SAUERTEIG

ILLUSTRATION BY LAUREN PAYNE

T. S. Eliot once wrote, "April is the cruellest month." He was wrong, of course; April is actually pretty lovely (February is by far the "cruellest"). But still, if you were to quote him the next time someone comes up to you saying, "Woah, can't believe it's already April!" that person will be silenced by your cryptic response. This is true of pretty much anything T.S. Eliot ever said. So in honor of his cruellest month, *The Eye* has crafted a "Guide to Conversation": use Eliot's phrases to shock and subdue any greeting, comment, etc. Bottom line: people will respect you.

**In response to: "How was the job interview, dude?"**

*"I had seen birth and death but had thought they were different."*

**In response to the group text: "Anyone interested in 1020 tonite?"**

*"So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing."*

**In response to: "How do you think we're going to do against Princeton tonight?"**

*"The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours."*

**In response to: "That Orgo midterm destroyed me. How'd you do?"**

*"I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope, for hope would be hope for the wrong thing."*

**In response to: "Did you see the new *Game of Thrones*?"**

*"Television is a medium of entertainment which permits millions of people to listen to the same joke at the same time, and yet remain lonesome."*



**In response to: "I just feel like you haven't been really communicative lately. Like you're hiding something from me. Talk to me."**

*"It's strange that words are so inadequate. Yet, like the asthmatic struggling for breath, so the lover must struggle for words."*

## ASK THE EDITORS

# MUST-TAKE CLASSES

Peekaboo—there's a month of spring classes left and it's already time to register for next fall! Where did the time go? We don't know for sure, but we're definitely not complaining about it. And on the off chance that you can afford to pick up an elective or two next semester, *The Eye's* wise, supple circle of elders has assembled to give you their top picks. Caution: Add classes at your own discretion—everything in moderation.

**Kierstin Utter**

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

FOR FEATURES



**Psychology of Stereotype and Prejudice**, seminar with Steven Stroessner, both the most impressive and most approachable professor I've had. Discussions are heated. Opinions are strong. And, somehow, laughs are many.

**Zoe Camp**

LEAD STORY EDITOR

**Merchants, Pirates, and Slaves** with Carl Wennerlind. By the end of the semester, you'll be that person who can point out everything that's inaccurate in a *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie—and you'll learn a lot in the process.



**Suze Myers**

ART DIRECTOR



**Culture in America**. Jonathan Rieder is like the cool, metropolitan uncle you never had. Plus, who can resist a syllabus that includes an episode of *Girls* and the music video for "Damn It Feels Good to Be a Gangster"?

**Kelly Lane**

DEPUTY FOR

ONLINE CONTENT

**American Graphic Novel**, because the professor was the former president of DC Comics and he was THE MAN.



**Alison Herman**

MANAGING EDITOR

FOR FEATURES



**History of the South**. Barbara Fields is brilliant, wise, and grows cotton on the windowsill of her apartment.

COMPILED BY PJ SAUERTEIG



# HARD AS NAILS

MULTIMEDIA ARTIST BREANNE TRAMMELL BRINGS FINE ART TO FINGERNAILS

BY ALEX SANCHEZ  
ILLUSTRATION BY KADY PU

*Most people don't consider manicures to be anything more than luxury grooming. But Breanne Trammell, an assistant professor of communication arts at Ramapo College of New Jersey, sees them as performance art. In her latest project, Nails Across America, the multimedia artist will be taking a restored canned-ham trailer across the country, doling out manicures and making them a forum for exchanging ideas. Mostly funded through a Kickstarter campaign, Trammell's project will offer manicures that reference recurring themes in her own art, including pop culture, junk food, and art history. Her trip kicks off May 28 at Mixed Greens Gallery in New York City. The Eye spoke to Trammell about her journey from fine artist to licensed nail technician and her thoughts on viral nail art trends.*

**You use a ton of different mediums in your work, from wood engravings to embroidered fabric to silk screen to audio composition and now nails. Do you have a favorite medium or one you haven't worked with that you'd really like to?**

I like being able to switch gears depending on an idea and what makes sense for that idea to come to life. So I don't have a favorite medium per se. Lately, I've been collaborating with my friend and artist Jeff Barnett-Winsby, making absurd and funny and weird still life images...The first series was a parody of the stock still life images you might see hanging in nail salons. Jeff is an amazing photographer and really helped bring my idea to life, and the collaboration has been continuing since. We made on-demand still lifes for a day at the New Museum in December, which was super fun. As far as learning new things, I'd like to be really good at woodworking. And I'd love for the New Friends [weaving collective] ladies to teach me how to weave!

**Speaking of nails, what made you first decide to become a licensed nail technician?**

I was in Seattle getting a manicure with a friend when I had the realization that I could be the one giving the manicures. Giving manicures is a way of meeting people and talking about ideas and hearing their stories. My training in nail school included a clinic where people could make appointments to come in for discounted services from the students. Giving or receiving a manicure can be an intimate experience—there's a lot of touching involved! And I found that in some instances, it didn't take long for the client to open up and want to talk.

**Nail art, especially recently, has become a huge part of popular culture. Did this at all inspire your**

**Nails Across America road trip and your choice to use nails as an art medium?**

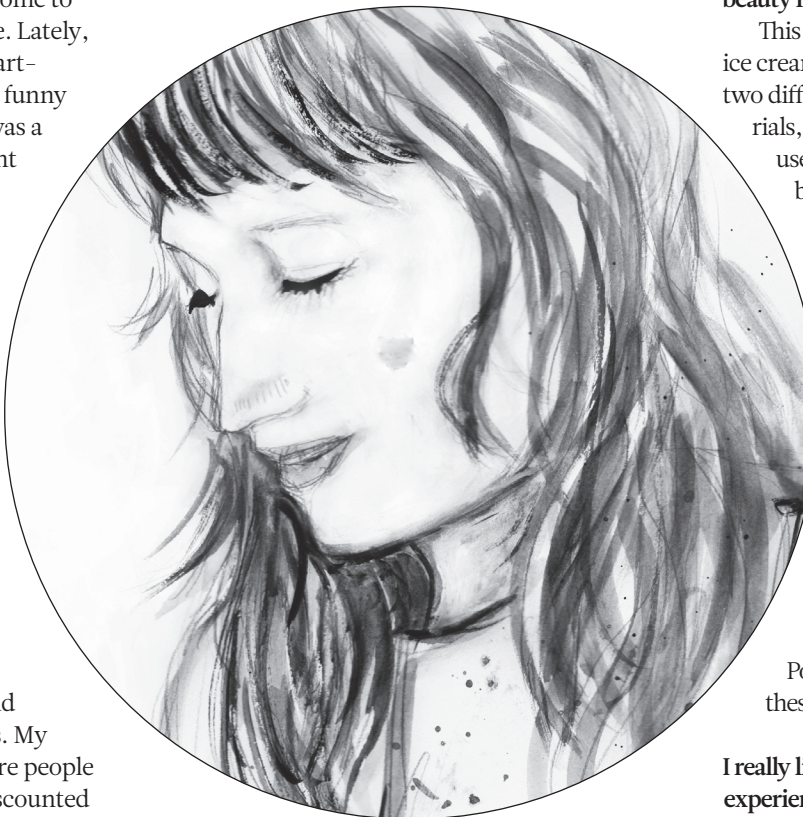
Not so much. It wasn't until after I started nail school that I realized how popular nails and nail art were. People started sending me links to this or that, and it seemed to be a trend developing in the art world as well. The inspiration for Nails Across America came from my own experience receiving manicures (and how at times, there was a language barrier), and I'm just lucky that I am semi-decent at painting nails.

**What made you decide to take your project cross-country?**

I knew that if I invested the time and money in attending nail school, the project would need to be much bigger than setting up a nail salon where I live in Wassaic, which is a rural hamlet two hours north of NYC. "Nails Across America"—it was a no-brainer!

**In what way does your manicure experience differ from the average salon's?**

I'll perform the manicures in my Shasta travel trailer, so already the environment is set up to be more intimate.



**"GIVING MANICURES IS A WAY OF MEETING PEOPLE AND TALKING ABOUT IDEAS AND HEARING THEIR STORIES."**

**Has your experience as a nail technician changed or affected your methods as an artist?**

Well, the experience of attending nail school and taking the state board exams showed me the importance of fully following through with an idea. It's been a long process from starting school in February 2012 to taking the last test in February 2013, and I just recently received my state license on March 12. I'd also like to note that I had perfect attendance in nail school!

**What do you want the people who follow your road trip or those who are given manicures to take away from your Nails Across America project?**

I want the participants to feel like they are a part of the project. Without them, this project would not be possible.

**What do you think the social implications are of a trend like nail art?**

Nail art can be expensive, and rightly so—it takes skills, time, and patience. However, for those who might not be able to afford a professional nail art manicure, a DIY approach is a natural alternative.

**Nowadays, you can find pretty much any kind of nail art or beauty tutorial on YouTube and blogs. How do you think this DIY approach to beauty impacts the beauty industry as a whole?**

This is kind of like asking how the neighborhood ice cream truck affects Ben & Jerry's. I think they are two different things. However, with DIY beauty tutorials, there's often a shout-out given to the brands used in the tutorials, so those brands could be benefiting from this content depending on how large the viewership is.

**It also seems that, because of the popularity of nail art, just about anyone feels that they can consider themselves a "nail artist."**

**Do you think this is OK, or do you think it takes away from those whose careers are in the beauty industry?**

Again, I think these are two different things. The DIY approach creates community and can be empowering—both very positive things. I think it's great to share tips, sources, and inspiration if that is what you're into. Sharing is caring. I remember seeing Miss Pop's tutorials last year—before that I had no idea these kinds of instructional videos existed!

**I really like that you're diversifying your manicure experience by offering a "MANicure" on your menu of service. I find that a lot of beauty products and services are aimed only at women. Do you think this is a problem?**

Whether it's a problem or not depends on context. I want Nails Across America to be accessible for everyone. Men, women, white collar, blue collar, janitors, boxers, farmers, artists, grandmas, sanitation workers, and sorority girls. ●

# ALL THAT'S FIT TO PRINT

THE MANY APPLICATIONS OF 3-D PRINTING

BY ANA DIAZ

ILLUSTRATION BY WHITNEY WEI

"The Digitizer" sounds more like a machine that makes "wibbly-wobbly timey-wimey stuff" (as *Doctor Who* fans would put it) than a groundbreaking piece of real-life technology. But Makerbot, a 3-D printing company based in New York, made news at Austin's SXSW festival this year with the unveiling of its new 3-D desktop scanner. Able to "save your kid's play-dough sculptures," the Digitizer does as its name implies: It makes digital files out of physical objects. The files can then be tweaked or played with on software, and exact copies can be made into solid objects using a 3-D printer.

Makerbot is one of several 3-D design and printing companies established in the tail end of the 2000s with an eye toward making 3-D printing a household reality. Their factory is housed in Brooklyn, but last year they opened a retail store in the Nolita neighborhood of Manhattan. There's a decidedly twee streak in the use of 3-D printing for general do-it-yourself consumer culture. Take, for instance, some printer names: Makerbot's first was the Cupcake CNC, and the Raspberry Pi. What's more, the retail store has a wall lined with colorful gum-ball machines where customers can put in their dollars and get out small 3-D-printed toys and models. There are several printers for the viewing public, one of which is set to constantly make small, free bendy bracelets.

Makerbot isn't alone in this trend; just take a look at its competitors Buildatronic, Up!, Ultimaker, and Kraftwurx. It isn't difficult to imagine websites like Etsy becoming sale-sites for all sorts of 3-D-printed knickknacks and crafts. The market is already there.

The futuristic boundlessness of 3-D printing's applications is something Makerbot's brick-and-mortar store in Nolita is quick to capitalize on. Behind one glass display, a designer's statement reads, "This [technology] almost makes up for not flying around in hovercrafts yet." At any given hour, half of the store's customers are parents whose children are excited by the prospect of designing and printing their own toys; the other half are adult techies, usually employed by computer graphics or multimedia firms, who are—let's face it—excited for the exact same reason.

If you know how a standard paper-printer works, you're on the right track to understanding how a desktop 3-D printer works, too. While someone can print several copies of a few essays from their home printer, its capacity and speed is nothing compared to that of the machines that print whole novels for publishing houses. Similarly, researchers and artists have used 3-D printing for decades in a process called "rapid prototyping," and the technology itself is used in manufacturing industries on a large scale. But in the last half of the 2000s, a substantial amount of interest has formed around the idea of desktop 3-D printing—printing both standard and custom objects at home.

3-D printing is a versatile technology with a score of possible benefits. For example, customers can use 3-D printers to manufacture new shoes from the recycled material of worn or outdated shoes. Researchers are working to ensure a similar technology is safe enough to generate biocompatible organs out of organic materials. Using a patient's own cells, 3-D printing can manufacture a replacement organ for patients without donor matches.

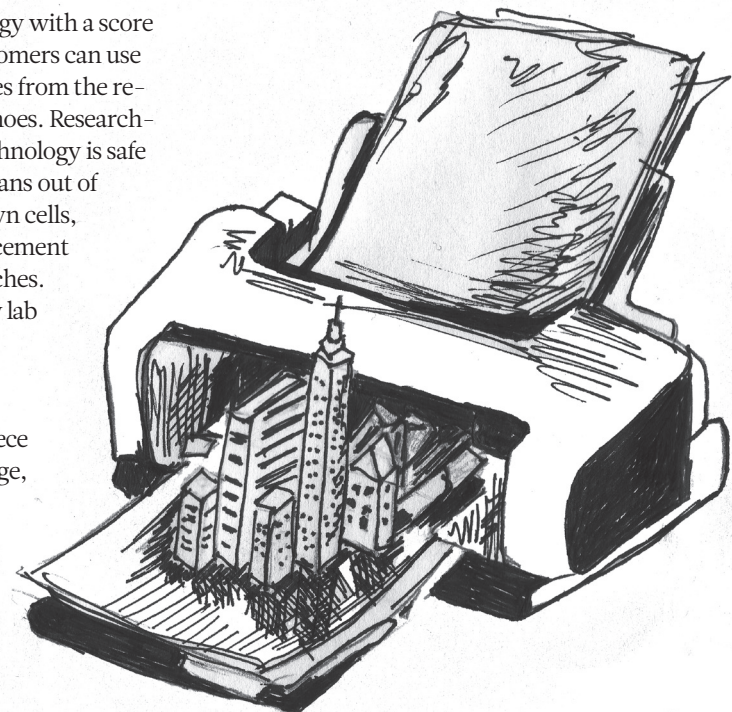
"I've been using 3-D printing in my lab for 10 years, if not longer," says Jeremy Mao, associate professor of biomedical engineering at Columbia. "Across the board," he says, the lab can make "a piece of skin, segment of blood vessel, cartilage, tooth, even internal organs."

Before Makerbot's store opened, the company launched a website called Thingiverse, a collaborative design site that operates under the creative commons license, allowing users to take each other's creations and adapt them however they see fit. The 3-D printing community is very active across the Web, with users posting the designs and results from printing items such as bathtub drains or model cars. This give-and-take, YouTube-style model of the process is one that has many lauding 3-D printing as an "industrial revolution."

Others, however, are not quite as convinced. Right now, 3-D printing still has too many kinks to become the next steam engine. It takes several hours to print most objects. "We didn't think it took so long," said one mom who'd brought her two kids along to the Makerbot store to see what all the fuss was about. For eager children, the technology is still not quite as thrilling as science fiction tropes like teleportation. Designs will often break during the printing process, either because the structure lacks sufficient integrity or because of the way the melted plastic cools over. And it really is a slow process.

What's worse, 3-D printing generated the wrong kind of attention last year when the Wiki Weapon Project, an ongoing plan to make digital copies of firearms accessible to all, was launched online. Its website says the mission is to "produce and publish a file for a completely printable gun," and "to facilitate a printable firearm creative commons."

"I can imagine how any robust technology will probably be used that way," says Mao of the media blitz that ensued over how easily 3-D-printed guns could be accessed by anyone with a printer and a high-speed Internet connection. That's not to say that the project is currently very plausible, since most people would still need a sufficient understanding of weapon parts and assembly to print their own guns. Furthermore, the fact that desktop 3-D printers only print objects out of very fine and fragile plastic puts a stop on realistic weapons manufacturing. (While Makerbot's products print in only two different kinds of plastic, many 3-D printing companies offer online



**WHILE 3-D-PRINTED FIREARMS MIGHT BE A PIPE DREAM, THE PRINCIPLE OF AN "INSTANT" FLOW OF ITEMS IN AND OUT OF DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL SPACES IS NOT.**

services to users that allow them to design items out of materials like wood or glass or aluminum, which the company prints and ships to them.)

Even if desktop printers become affordable in-home products (like laptops or iPods) for the majority of consumers, the potential for them to print weapons is still out of reach. Keith Yeager, a biomedical engineering lab manager at the School of Engineering and Applied Science, is more worried about 3-D printing's ability to make a difference than its ability to make guns. "As a household commodity, 99 percent of the stuff printed will probably be disappointing knickknacks," Yeager says. "Occasionally someone will create something 'cool' that everyone will copy and print immediately, make some small variation, and claim vast improvement ... But ultimately they'll all be forgotten in a month when everyone starts printing the next cute big-eyed puppy-dog character, phone case, or hipster jewelry."

While 3-D-printed firearms might be a pipe dream, the principle of an "instant" flow of items in and out of digital and physical spaces is not. It's easy for someone to design an object from home, send it as a file to a friend with a 3-D printer, and have that friend essentially "download" whatever it is they have made. It's almost like teleportation—just with a lot more lag-time and potential glitches. ●



# KATZ'S CONUNDRUM

THE EVOLUTION OF NEW YORK'S JEWISH DELIS

BY MEGAN CUNNANE  
PHOTO BY AYELET PEARL

On Feb. 25, a sign went up on the doors of Lansky's, a Jewish delicatessen on the Upper West Side. It read: "We have tried our best, but due to rising costs, we could no longer stay in business."

The closure of Lansky's was something of a shock for many—the deli, after all, always seemed to be full. It boasts 327 reviews on Yelp, many from self-identified regulars, and was even visited by Jon Hamm (he ordered matzo ball soup). *Saturday Night Live's* "Weekend Update with Seth Meyers" spoofed one of the menu items, the Jackpot Sandwich, which is made up of seven pounds of meat (turkey, pastrami, corned beef, and salami), Muenster and American cheese, 10 pieces of rye bread, coleslaw, sweet peppers, and Russian dressing. "Of all the Jewish Delis in NYC, you're the best I've ever had," an online reviewer proclaimed.

Yet even with its dedicated following, Lansky's couldn't make it. This isn't a rare occurrence: David Sax, who wrote *Save the Deli*, a book documenting his visits to delis around the U.S., Canada, and even London, notes that while New York City was once the "teeming capital of the deli," barely a dozen Jewish delis remain open in Manhattan, even fewer in Brooklyn, and "a mere pair in the Bronx." A Jewish deli, defined by Sax, is one just like Lansky's—its food (pastrami and corned beef sandwiches, matzo ball soup, knishes) originated in the kitchens of early Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants, and when you walk in, the smell is the first thing you notice.

**WHILE NEW YORK CITY WAS ONCE THE "TEEMING CAPITAL OF THE DELI," BARELY A DOZEN JEWISH DELIS REMAIN OPEN IN MANHATTAN, EVEN FEWER IN BROOKLYN, AND "A MERE PAIR IN THE BRONX."**

Sax chose to fight for these delis because they represent, to him, an important connection to Jewish culture and community. "That matzo ball is who I am," he said in a talk he gave at the Sixth & I Historic Synagogue in Washington, D.C. However, as Lansky's feature on *Saturday Night Live* reveals, the deli is as much a part of New York City's culture as it is a part of Jewish American culture. The crowded tables, the noise, the diversity, the



brusque yet genuinely welcoming staff—who call you "hun" in their New York accents but also don't take any bullshit—are all classic deli characteristics that are also unique to New York.

The reason for Jewish delis' decline is threefold. First, each deli faces an "atrocious profit margin," according to Sax. To prepare pastrami at a good deli is to brine raw meat, smoke it, and steam it. When a friend of mine ordered a pastrami sandwich from Katz's Delicatessen, the oldest Jewish deli in New York, a huge, meaty brisket was pulled onto the counter across from her, sliced for her to sample, and then sliced again for her sandwich. As she walked away, the brisket was slid off the counter. Sax explains that this process, in which something like 25 percent of the brisket is actually used, earns a deli a dollar or so of profit for each \$15 sandwich it serves.

The second reason Sax thinks delis are declining is new "health trends." An average meal at a deli is two half-sandwiches as tall as your fist, filled entirely with meats such as pastrami and corned beef. With America's growing sensitivity to the issue of obesity, and especially the recent increased awareness of portion sizes in New York City brought on by Bloomberg's controversial soda ban, these sandwiches are regarded with more caution.

Finally, delis are often family-owned businesses, and it is up to the third or fourth generations of immigrant families to commit their careers to maintaining them. It's a tough business to get into, and fewer and fewer young people are interested.

The character of the deli has been evolving to combat these issues. Katz's and Lansky's are delis of the traditional type—informal, crowded spaces with warm lighting, prints of

New York's skyline, signed photos of celebrities arm-in-arm with managers (whose last names most likely match the names of the delis themselves), and knickknacks like antique tin Coca-Cola signs. But then there are delis like Mile End, a small restaurant in Brooklyn that opened in May of last year. It's as big as a dorm room, with space for just five or six tables, all made of light varnished wood with black faux-leather seats. There is no obvious color in the space—nothing on the walls except a chalkboard bearing specials and a reminder about Shabbat meals every Friday. Beside the cash register is a large tip jar, clear and simple, with a little black label that reads "whadda' mensch!" (Yiddish for "person of integrity").

"Katz's is the Yankees," Sax explains. "Katz's is like the steady link to the past. Mile End is something new and great and also in its own way touching the past." Mile End's new aesthetic doesn't change what's quintessential about a deli—a dedication to preserving the food and culture of Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants.

It follows, then, that Mile End's aesthetic also doesn't change the atmosphere that grows out of this dedication—the feeling of comfortable permanence, an atmosphere Sax and I agree resembles that of a family kitchen: warm, informal, and marked by the casual coexistence of the past and future.

When the food comes at Mile End, the waitress smiles and hands you a worn-out hand towel as a napkin, with a red stripe running from edge to edge. This sudden color somehow draws your eye to a very subtle, white shelf high up on one of the walls. On it, perched like photo albums between two jars of pickling red peppers, are six copies of *Save the Deli*. ●

# GIVING UP THE GUN

## *reflections from Columbia's military veterans*



Iban Goicoechea is having a nightmare. He's standing in the living room of his house, talking to a friend with whom he served in Afghanistan. The friend wants to take leave and visit some family elsewhere. Goicoechea is helping him with the request form. He glances down at the sheet of paper to verify that all the boxes are correctly filled in. He looks up at his friend. "Wait a minute," Goicoechea says, suddenly remembering. "You're dead." Then he wakes up.

Goicoechea, a member of School of General Studies class of 2015, served in the Marine Corps from 2006 to 2010. In 2009, while he was deployed to Afghanistan, four of his friends were killed after being trapped and burned alive inside a military vehicle that had struck a roadside bomb. He was forced to watch from a distance as the rescue effort failed to save the Marines in time. "I thought I knew desperation before, but there was nothing like that," he says.

He is one of about 300 undergraduate military veterans at Columbia, mostly in GS, with another 200 or so spread among the University's graduate schools. And on a campus full of student-driven efforts to improve wellness, the experiences of these students have been noticeably absent from the discussion.

When Goicoechea arrived in the fall of 2011, he decided to do something about that. His own experiences with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder had taught him that silence doesn't make things better. He got in touch with the director of the Trauma and PTSD Program at the New York State Psychiatric Institute—the director, Yuval Neria, is also a researcher at Columbia University Medical Center. Together, they've started work on a project that aims to convince veterans to talk about their wartime experiences and to seek help if they need it.

In my experience as a military veteran, veterans are often reluctant to do either of these things for a variety of reasons. But if a project like this one can succeed anywhere, surely it can do so at Columbia, where students

**NAME: Lance Corporal Iban Goicoechea**

**SCHOOL: GS '15**

**IN ACTION: 2006–2010, MARINE CORPS, AFGHANISTAN**

have started to place a premium on wellness—and where administrators pride themselves on the assistance they provide to veteran students.

I sat down with more than a dozen veterans and asked them to tell me their stories. A few of these narratives—too few, to be honest—are told here.

### **'I Was Comparatively Lucky'**

The first person I talked to about his experiences was Dan Lagana, a member of the GS class of 2013. He enlisted in the Army as an artilleryman, but, he says, "that pretty much went out the window for Iraq," where he usually just filled the role of an infantry soldier—conducting patrols and raids in Baghdad in the spring of 2005. Patrols scheduled for 12 hours could stretch to 36 as various emergencies arose in the city.

His squadron lost 23 soldiers over the course of the yearlong deployment, most of whom were killed by roadside bombs. One of them was a close friend. When Lagana came back from Iraq, he says, "there were a lot of emotions going through me that I couldn't really explain. I didn't know how to explain them."

Back in the States, he couldn't get Iraq out of his mind. "I ate, breathed, slept Iraq," he says. "I didn't care about anything else but that ... It was this tractor beam. I was drawn to it."

Nonetheless, his contract ended soon after his return, and he left the Army in June 2008. He went back to his home of northern Virginia and found a job as a busboy at a restaurant while attending community college.

*by Stephen Snowden*



One of the first problems Lagana noticed was that he had a constant ringing in his ears. He went to a doctor who told him that he had suffered some hearing loss.

Emotionally, too, Lagana began to realize that he had changed. He was having trouble sleeping. “It would get to the point where it ... would be two or three days without sleeping,” he says. He was quicker to anger than he had been. “I could not acclimate myself to being back.” Eventually, he was even fired from his job.

In time, he went to a local Veterans Affairs clinic to see if they could help him with the ringing in his ears, which “would get to the point, sometimes, that it was really driving me crazy.” When he walked into the clinic, he saw older veterans with prosthetics—“Vietnam guys,” he assumed. He paused for only a moment before turning around and going back to his car. “I just thought to myself, ‘You know what, you don’t even remotely have it hard,’” he says.

“I have all my bits and pieces,” he continues. “Despite the fact that I was having trouble going to bed at night, and my ears were ringing ... I was comparatively lucky. I’m six feet above the ground. I felt almost ashamed that I would go in there, and there are guys with missing limbs or people that really have suffered mental trauma.”

No response was more typical among the veterans I talked to: Whatever traumas or injuries they might have endured, they couldn’t help but focus on the fact that many others had it worse. As a result, many expressed guilt when talking about their own experiences, and chose to direct their energy elsewhere. On campus, veterans find projects to organize and classes in which to excel. It would not be inaccurate to say that, for many of the veterans I talked to, their experiences in combat and the way they’ve processed those experiences are a big part of why they’re at Columbia today.

**NAME: Corporal Dan Lagana**

**SCHOOL: GS '13**

**IN ACTION: 2003–2009, ARMY, IRAQ**



“When I came back,” Lagana tells me, “I was much more focused. I was ready to get going.”

Lagana’s high grades at a Virginia community college caught the attention of the School of General Studies, which wrote him a letter encouraging him to

**“I’M SIX FEET ABOVE THE GROUND. I FELT ALMOST ASHAMED THAT I WOULD GO IN THERE, AND THERE ARE GUYS WITH MISSING LIMBS OR PEOPLE THAT REALLY HAVE SUFFERED MENTAL TRAUMA.”**

apply. “I worked my butt off in community college,” Lagana says. “I made sure that I got straight A’s.”

**‘No One Talks to You, But Everyone Stares at You’**

There’s no question that combat is a traumatic experience. But getting shot at isn’t the only way that military service can result in emotional injury. In some cases, soldiers who might never have fired a weapon outside of training nonetheless find that they have serious issues to work through at the end of their service.

Jessi Tseng, a first-year student at the School of International and Public Affairs, doesn’t look like Hollywood’s idea of a soldier. Born in Taiwan and raised in San Francisco, she was 17 years old and weighed 98 pounds when she signed her enlistment contract.

After basic training, she was assigned to a Stryker infantry brigade in Fort Lewis, Wash.

Serving in a unit that was 95 percent male, Tseng was always aware of the eyes on her. People looking to see if she would measure up. Looking to see if she could hack it. People looking, maybe, just to look.

When I asked her what it was like to be a woman working in this

type of environment, Tseng answers, “As a female, you’ll never get more attention in your life, but at the same time you’ll never feel so lonely. Because no one talks to you, but everyone stares at you.”

Determined to meet the unit’s rigorous standards, Tseng pushed herself to excel. She entered her brigade’s Soldier of the Quarter contest—a grueling, weeklong test of strength, endurance, knowledge, and soldiering skills. When she entered, “I was the only female in the competition,” she says. A week later, she was the first woman ever to have won it.

Impressed, the brigade commander moved her on to his personal security detachment. “At the time, it was kind of a fact that we were going to deploy at some time to Iraq,” where female suicide bombers were beginning to become a more common occurrence, she says. “He wanted someone that could keep up with the other guys to be on the security detachment,” so that a female soldier would be available, if necessary, to search Iraqi women.

Until now, Tseng’s duties had consisted of filing paperwork as a human resources specialist, but when she went to work for the colonel, she began training for combat operations with the men who made up the rest of the detachment.

By the time her unit deployed to Iraq in mid-2007, Tseng had made enough of an impression to be promoted to sergeant, and had a soldier working under her supervision—a young woman like herself.

When Tseng wasn’t working with the brigade commander in Iraq, she was in the brigade’s Tactical Operations Center. One of her duties there was to update the unit’s “Memorial Wall”—a wall that displayed the pictures and biographies of soldiers who had died during deployment. Tseng estimates that one soldier per week was added to this wall. It was her job to find the pictures and to write the biographies.

On July 19, 2007, Sergeant Tseng was listening to radio reports coming in from units that were patrolling the area around Taji. Suddenly, a cacophony of noise filled her headset, as a unit called in to report that it had struck a roadside bomb. “I heard them screaming and asking for medevac and all these things.” The request for medical evacuation meant that there had been a casualty—at best, someone was pretty seriously hurt. Initially, Tseng didn’t know who had been injured. “But it’s 50 guys that I’ve been training with for three years, and I knew that I didn’t want it to be any of them,” she says.

When something like this happens on the battlefield, there’s an element of chaos as the affected soldiers try to figure out what happened and how to respond. In a TOC, the goal is for everyone to stay calm. The battle captain, the person in command of the operations center at a given moment, issues the necessary orders to get medevac and a Quick Reaction Force moving. Radio operators communicate these orders to the appropriate people and provide assurance to the affected unit that help is on the way. Intelligence soldiers offer threat assessments based on what has happened and what sorts of enemy practices routinely follow in such an event.

Tseng and her subordinate would have had reports to prepare, documenting what had happened and who had been affected. Of course, they didn’t have all those details yet, although at some point it became clear that someone had died in the attack. “I had to be professional about it, and I



just carried on with what I was doing, and made sure that ... all the reports were straight,” Tseng says.

Soon, it was over. The medevac had taken the casualties away, and the rest of the patrol returned to the base. As the line of Strykers pulled up in front of the TOC, Tseng and her subordinate went outside, along with many others, to meet the patrol as it returned and find out who had been killed. While they waited, the doors of the Strykers swung open, and tired, shell-shocked soldiers began climbing out of the vehicles. At some point it was announced that the person who had died was Corporal Brandon Craig, one of Tseng’s best friends.

Tseng steeled herself in preparation for the moment, but her subordinate had not. “I remember exactly the moment that they said it, she broke down. She fell to her knees, and she was crying,” Tseng recalls.

What happened next, Tseng says, is something she has always regretted. “I remember that moment so much. Instead of, you know, mourning for what has happened, I grabbed her by the arm and I took her inside and I told her that if she needed to cry, that she needed to go into her tent.”

**“BUT WHEN YOU DEPLOY TO IRAQ OR AFGHANISTAN, BECAUSE YOU SHUT OUT THE FEELING AND EMOTION WHEN YOU’RE OVER THERE, PAPERS START TO PILE UP, AND YOU CAN’T SHUT THIS CABINET ANYMORE.”**

“I think back to this all the time, and I really wish I had reacted differently,” Tseng continues. But at the time, she believed she was doing her soldier a favor—that women who wanted to be taken seriously in the Army “couldn’t let other people see us cry, because that’ll show weakness.”

As for Tseng herself and how she dealt with the loss of a close friend, she says, “I didn’t deal with it. I focused on my work and I stayed professional ... I felt like that was the only way to deal with Iraq.”

The casualties continued for Tseng’s brigade at the rate of about one person killed per week. Around 50 soldiers died during the deployment. Each death was another biography she had to write and another face for her to add to the memorial wall. “I look back to every single one of those people—I remember all of their names, I remember when they died, I remember

for what reason. I remember if they have a family,” she tells me. “That is never going to leave my life.”

Tseng’s contract was up at the end of her deployment—before the end, actually, because she had been stop-lossed. So she returned to the United States and left the Army about two weeks later. While in Iraq, she had applied and been accepted to the University of California, Santa Barbara, and soon after leaving the Army she matriculated there. She graduated with a degree in sociology and came to SIPA for graduate studies.

Upon leaving the Army in September 2008, Tseng says, she didn’t feel like she had PTSD or anything to work through in terms of her experiences in Iraq. “I thought I was fine. It’s sad because, you know, I think it’s one of those things that ... comes at you later on,” she says. But she acknowledges that working through her wartime experiences has been a struggle.

“Someone explained it to me like a filing cabinet. Normally you have experiences, and it’s on a piece of paper, and you file it in the proper folder in your brain and it’s very neat. But when you deploy to Iraq or Afghanistan, because you shut out the feeling and emotion when you’re over there, papers start to pile up, and you can’t shut this cabinet anymore. So when you come back home ... you have to pick up every single one of those pieces of paper and you have to re-file it.”

Like the other veterans I spoke to, Tseng found plenty of work to do after leaving the service. At UC Santa Barbara, she became active in Student Veterans of America, helping veterans navigate their way through the college admissions process and mentoring returning vets. She spent a year in China, studying at Peking University, where she excelled academically. After graduating, Tseng came to Columbia to earn a master’s in public administration.

#### ‘The Careful Construction of Multiple Realities’

Elegance Bratton, a member of GS class of 2014, was kicked out of his home as a teenager for being gay. After a decade of homelessness, he happened to meet a Marine recruiter. In the winter of 2005, he reported to Parris Island for boot camp.

Boot camp is stressful by design. It was especially stressful for Bratton, though, because he had to keep his sexuality a secret: At that time, “don’t ask, don’t tell” was still in force, and homosexuality was grounds for being dismissed from the military.

“I tried to be evasive,” Bratton says. Knowing that the drill instructors had access to all of his possessions, he carefully avoided creating any evidence of his sexuality. “If you’re writing stuff

to yourself in your notebook, eventually your drill instructor’s gonna find it, right?” he explains. “So I would write about girls.” When the recruits were told to write down something they wanted from home, Bratton wrote, “black pussy.” His recruiter sent him pornographic pictures of women in the mail.

The drill instructors and the other recruits saw all these things. “They ended up making fun of me for being nerdy and skinny and smart,” instead of for being gay,” Bratton says. “I created a conversation to have about myself that was slightly off-center, in order to create space for myself,” he adds.

He graduated from basic training and became a combat production specialist—sort of the military equivalent of a graphic design artist. “I was combat Kinko’s, basically,” he says. His first duty station was in Hawaii, and when he arrived, he found he also had access to cameras and video production equipment. He had always been interested in film, so he began to learn how to operate the equipment and soon found himself receiving assignments to photograph visiting dignitaries or to create video projects.

Over time, Bratton says, through “the careful construction of multiple realities,” he found ways to have sexual encounters in Hawaii. But there was never a time when he didn’t have to be careful about which reality he was presenting, and to whom. “You build these close associations with people, who love you, who would die for you and you would die for, but at the same time you also maintain a lie, because you have to do so to protect yourself,” he says.

To deal with these difficulties, Bratton says, “I buried myself in work.” He read training manuals cover-to-cover and constantly looked for opportunities to take on more responsibility. In his down time, he built a second professional life in Honolulu, one in close contact with DJs and other members of the city’s creative community. He began doing music journalism for local publications.



**NAME: Corporal Elegance Bratton**

**SCHOOL: GS '14**

**IN ACTION: 2005–2010, MARINE CORPS, HAWAII AND NEW YORK**



But the community Bratton built for himself wasn't a perfect replacement for what the other Marines had: "You're watching people get promoted, and they're taking their picture, and they've got their mom and their dad and their wife, and their kid, and their girlfriend or boyfriend."

When Bratton got promoted, the only people with him were his co-workers.

Through his work on the post and elsewhere, Bratton occasionally came to know other gay Marines. He didn't pursue relationships with them, however, because he wasn't willing to risk being caught. In one case, a Marine friend of Bratton's came to him to confide that he had been raped. The Marine had been at a bar, and "someone had put something in his drink, and raped him. And the only person he could talk to was me," because seeking professional help would likely mean disclosing his sexuality and throwing away his career. "I don't know how to make that better for him," Bratton tells me. There was nothing he could do. It was just another burden DADT had placed on the shoulders of gay service members—another secret to be kept.

Bratton's second duty station was at a small post on Long Island. If Hawaii was difficult, New York was "a nightmare," Bratton tells me. Hawaii was a small post, but the New York assignment was smaller by far. Only 79 Marines were assigned to the Garden City base. Bratton was no longer working in graphic design—now, he was a security guard. Instead of working with people who shared his interests, he was working with Marines who had come from combat-oriented jobs—riflemen, artillerymen. "I dress different than them, I listen to different music than them, I watch different movies than them. I don't talk about what they talk about," Bratton says. Worse, he adds, his new co-workers were "really homophobic, and they were really violent."

The hours at the new post were long and monotonous—up to 96 hours

a week spent in a guard shack, watching vehicles come in and out of the base. Bratton became an easy target for other bored Marines in his new unit. "They would talk about how I dress, how tight my pants were, how much dick I was taking up my ass, how much fucking dick I could suck. It was like locker-

**"I DON'T BELIEVE IN RECOVERY," HE EXPLAINS. "I THINK THAT'S ALL BULLSHIT." HE DOESN'T EXPECT HIS PROBLEMS TO GO AWAY, BUT HE IS LEARNING TO MANAGE THEM.**

room stuff, where if you cry about it, everything they're saying about you is now true." There was rarely a break: "I would go to bed getting bullied, I would wake up getting bullied."

The abuse sometimes went beyond juvenile taunts. "They used to threaten me, beat me up, all sorts of stuff," he says. "It was awful."

Bratton left the Marine Corps in the winter of 2010 and came to Columbia shortly afterward. After leaving the service, he buried himself in his academics and began work on a documentary. "There was a moment when I dealt with nightmares because of my time in the Marine Corps," he tells me. "There are moments when I still do."

Because of this and other traumas, such as the untimely death of one of the subjects of his documentary, Bratton has begun receiving counseling at Columbia's Counseling and Psychological Services Office. Of all the

veterans I talked to, Bratton was one of only two to have sought mental health treatment. He told me that although he thinks it's good for him, he doesn't expect his life to magically get better from it. "I don't believe in recovery," he explains. "I think that's all bullshit." He doesn't expect his problems to go away, but he is learning to manage them.

Since arriving at Columbia, he's filmed over 90 hours of footage for a documentary on the importance of Christopher Street to the gay rights movement. The documentary started as a paper for a sociology class, but Bratton—who went to Christopher Street on the night he was kicked out of his home—found more material than he expected. "I

started doing interviews and within a couple of days, my notebooks were filled," he tells me. He expects to premiere the film, titled *Pier Kids: The Life*, next May.

Looking back, despite everything, Bratton has no regrets about his service in the Marine Corps. "I got skills I never would have learned at home. I learned how to face my problems. I learned how to face myself."

#### Preserving Health, Preserving Honor

Every veteran I spoke to for this article has endured traumas outside of what is normal for civilian life. And most of them—in fact, most of the veterans I've ever known—have decided to cope with their experiences by themselves. They have never asked for help. There is nothing more predictably characteristic of veterans than this sort of self-reliance, this determination not to let their problems become anyone else's problems.

This is exactly why Goicoechea believes his wellness project is so important. He says that he felt the same way when he first left the military, but for veterans who are really suffering, it's not a workable long-term solution. He found himself binge drinking, suffering from nightmares, and misdirecting built-up anger at innocent bystanders, such as his girlfriend.

"They think that right now they can deal with the issues themselves and carry the burden on their own," but their friends and family often end up having to carry some of that weight as well, he says. "Everyone feels it, it's not just them."

He says part of the reason more veterans don't ask for help has to do with the negative consequences they associate with seeking treatment for mental health. Many veterans believe they will lose security clearances, or be blacklisted from future government employment, if they ask for help. "That's just not the case," Goicoechea says, but the challenge will be in educating veterans.

How exactly he's going to do that, Goicoechea doesn't quite know.

Ultimately, the choice to seek mental health assistance is a personal one, and veterans will have to decide for themselves whether they would benefit from doing so. Goicoechea doesn't want to make that choice for anyone. He just wants them to know that options are out there. For himself, he says, it was the same memory that had given him nightmares—the memory of his four friends trapped in that burning vehicle—that caused him to seek help.

That event "cost them their opportunity to live. I still have that opportunity," he tells me. "I was using the opportunity that I still had, that they had taken from them, to slowly self-destruct."

He came to believe that, in not seeking help, he was dishonoring the memories of his friends. "I'm sure that if they had one more day to spend with whoever they chose, and it was either have that day, or give it to me on one of the days I went on a fucking drinking binge, they would kick me in the nuts and take the day. So what the fuck was I doing?"

*For more Columbia military veterans' stories as told to Stephen Snowder, visit [eye.columbiaspectator.com](http://eye.columbiaspectator.com).*

**NAME: Sergeant Jessi Tseng**

**SCHOOL: SIPA '14**

**IN ACTION: 2004–2008, ARMY, IRAQ**





# THE DANGERS OF A DANCE CRAZE

*"HARLEM SHAKE" AND THE PROBLEMS OF CULTURAL APPROPRIATION*

BY SARAH CHOI

Out of context, the idea of a slightly overweight pop star in a blue velvet blazer sounds unappealing at best. Throw in some pelvic thrusting and the thought becomes downright absurd—nothing an American audience would embrace.

Yet "Gangnam Style" received more than a billion hits on YouTube and made its mark on the face of every social medium out there, from Facebook to Twitter to Tumblr. The "Gangnam" fever reached its peak when schools, teams, and clubs around the world took on the task of making their own "Gangnam Style" videos, replacing "Gangnam" with their names and mimicking the video's outrageous dance moves to the best of their ability. Our own Columbia University made "Columbia Style," featuring two of CU's finest riding their invisible horses and flicking their wrists in front of Alma.

But time passed, and we came to our senses. We put away our bow ties and Wayfarers—because they looked ridiculous anyway—and replaced them with neon body bags, Bane masks, and a whole lot of shakin'.

The "Harlem Shake" meme took off in February when a group of Australian teens uploaded a video with Baauer's song "Harlem Shake" playing in the background. Little did they know their YouTube video would not only inspire the U.S. military, the national swim team, and the Miami Heat to make their own "Harlem Shake" videos, but also stimulate discourse within and outside of the Harlem community about cultural appropriation and what it means to be "whitewashed."

Being South Korean, and also having lived in Korea as an American expat, I have personally confronted "whitewashing" as I straddled the line between two drastically different cultures. The moment I stepped into Korea, I was labeled as "whitewashed" by my peers. And who could blame them? I didn't know how to speak Korean, and K-pop was as foreign to me as the language.

But, at the same time, living in the U.S. and Japan has taught me that I am identified not only as Asian, but Korean. My fundamental values could not be categorized as either Korean or American. Such simple labels aren't fair to the household I was raised in. Yet I didn't want to abandon either of them. So when the "Gangnam Style" frenzy began, I was left confused as to whether I should approach the craze as a Korean or an American.

The "Harlem Shake" brings up similar questions of "whitewashing." Even though the original dance

existed about three decades ago, appropriation and filtration have made it into a larger phenomenon than anything we've seen before.

The original "Harlem Shake" was created in 1981 by Al B, a Harlem resident, and requires more than just shaking uncontrollably. After Al B first came out with the move, it appeared in later music videos like "Let's Get It" by G. Dep. The original "Harlem Shake" is now so overshadowed by the Internet meme that it is almost impossible to find a video of the original dance on YouTube.

When Schlepp Films went out to the Harlem community to survey what it thought of the viral

tends that the "Harlem Shake" "has an aspect of minstrelsy in terms of arguably appearing to make fun of Harlem dancers and residents," adding that transforming an original dance and its meaning "has never been a totally innocent move." He says the re-creation of the "Harlem Shake" is almost "cultural theft," and the rampant re-creations may have something to do with why "black music circulates as popular music ... rather than as art music."

In the wake of this and other Internet fads, Fine Brothers Production started a YouTube channel dedicated to filming reactions of various age groups to viral YouTube videos. Recently, they surveyed

young people's reactions to the Harlem Shake. Although most could easily recognize the track, almost none could name the artist (Baauer).

Those who proliferate and manipulate the song, therefore, are not interested in the artist. Whereas the "Gangnam Style" frenzy was all about PSY, the "Harlem Shake" phenomenon is not about Baauer at all. "Gangnam Style" video makers were trying to imitate PSY, and as such the movement was labelled as cultural appropriation. But can the same label be applied to "Harlem Shake" if the videos aren't imitating Baauer himself, but something only arbitrarily related to the song?

Perhaps the "Harlem Shake" video fad is evidence of the culture that exists within the Internet, and which is completely separate from the cultures that exist in our reality.

Further, Baauer himself has stated that there was no real reason behind why he named his song "Harlem Shake." Popular culture is often solely concerned with entertainment and trying to find deeper meanings or motives is often futile.

Still, some can't help but see the "Harlem Shake" as problematic. As Fellezs puts it, "For white audiences, black music has always been a space to act outside of social norms—to get their freak on—for reasons that have to do with the ways that black music and musicians had been portrayed in minstrelsy ... and now hip-hop."

The "Harlem Shake," it seems, was just another excuse for the world to break from "appropriate behavior," sans consequence, all in the name of humor.

And it was funny. But memes are only innocent, we've learned, until the moment someone says "whitewashed." From then on, it's personal—and a different kind of shake begins in earnest. ■



**HE SAYS THE RE-CREATION OF THE "HARLEM SHAKE" IS ALMOST "CULTURAL THEFT," AND THE RAMPANT RECREATIONS MAY HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH WHY "BLACK MUSIC CIRCULATES AS POPULAR MUSIC ... RATHER THAN AS ART MUSIC."**

video, many responded in anger. They felt "Harlem Shake" videos misrepresented Harlem, blindly disregarding its true culture.

The anger is perhaps unsurprising. Kevin Fellezs, a Columbia professor specializing in popular music and protest movements in the African-American studies department, con-



# THE MORROW HOUSE

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FICTION BY SERENA SOLIN

My sharpest memory of elementary school is a portrait of Anne Morrow Lindbergh at the end of the third grade hallway. It's strange to think she didn't know about the baby then, but when I used to walk by it, neither did I. She didn't know that her child would become America's biggest news since the Resurrection. She's the only thing I ever come back to see, although if you asked me why I don't know if I could tell you.

In Anne's wake, children of my state and my generation learned to be cautious; Anne wed Charlie with an airplane before God without realizing he wasn't there or looking. It didn't have to be her. It could have been anyone. You are taught this young when you're born in New Jersey: Hold on tight to your own hands, pray to keep them.

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I know things about my sister she thinks are secret. She can hide them from our parents, but not me. She treats the three years between us like an era.

You don't have to be smart to know there's something weird about her. There are a lot of people like her in the nice part of this suburb. I've heard Mom joke that it's the water, but I think it's the wealth. That's what I've learned from private school: Money gives you

PHOTO BY DAVID MOSES



permission. If you are smart enough to be strange, you will be rewarded.

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My sister and I used to look forward to the days when Mom drove us to school. Usually, though, Sasha drove. In another family it might have been the other way around, but Sasha was serious, and didn't play games. The responsibility of driving his younger half-siblings was new and heavy on him. He and Genie are eight years apart, he and I eleven.

Sometimes when Mom drove, she would let us ride in the trunk of the car. She would pretend she was kidnapping us, and we would play along. This was how I knew she wasn't from New Jersey like we were.

One day when Mom was driving, Genie curled up against the back window and pretended to hide. Mom didn't realize we were still playing and opened the trunk too fast. Genie fell out of the back of the car so hard, I heard the wind go out of her. She wasn't hurt, but after that, we were never kidnapped again.

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I was born in New Jersey with two broken collarbones. As they wheeled me away to put together my bones, one of the nurses told my parents that I was the most beautiful baby she'd ever seen. —I don't say this to all parents, but he's perfect, she said. She was either a bad nurse or a terrific liar.

It is strange to think that Mom and Sasha are not related because sometimes they seem it. They look at Genie the same way. They treat her like she's an accident that hasn't happened yet. My sister attracts bad things slowly, in little collections. I came back to the elementary school for one thing, but Genie returned for many. I was a patient at that hospital just once, but Genie returned there often, too.

The parking lot of our elementary school has not changed, but it seems smaller now that I can drive through it.

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When Sasha came home from college, he was supposed to sleep in my room. My blue, second floor bedroom had once been his. He always ended up with Genie.

I remember standing at the bottom of the stairs to her attic bedroom, trying to listen to them talk, catching odd little pieces. —Did you know that the word *mafia* is never used in *The Godfather*? Sasha's laugh was like a snake unwinding.

After Mom and Dad had gone to sleep, he would take her to see R-rated movies. I would listen to the two of them tiptoeing by my door at night. The second floor always felt darker when I knew I was alone on it.

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I was with Charlie when I found what Genie was hiding. We used to spend a lot of time together, Charlie and me, until we turned thirteen and stopped liking the same things. His mom and my mom still say hi to each other, even though he turned out stupid and freckly. Whenever he was over he would ask me questions too big for our kitchen, questions he didn't make up. —If you could release every innocent man from jail, but you had to kick a horse to death, would you do it? It's tied down, and you're wearing steel-toed boots.

Most of what I remember about Charlie is his hair. Even when I see him now, that's all I notice. I remember watching it, lying on Genie's bed as he crawled under. He had two older sisters who were older than Genie but younger than Sasha. At the time he seemed to know a lot about girls. He told me we were looking for the box where she kept all the stuff girls own. I don't remember being very interested. I knew she didn't keep a journal because I would have found it. I had already seen her new tampons, her Band-Aid bras. Charlie wanted to see little pink things he couldn't imagine on his own. I wanted to watch his hair.

I remember being surprised to hear him find something. Genie and I used to play under her bed, used to imagine that we were lying under the sea because the bottom of her mattress was a plastic blue. Now she kept things there I didn't know about.

He was right about one thing: it was a box, a little black box, one I recognized because it had been a Christmas present from Sasha's mom, who got Genie and me stupid presents even though we weren't her kids and even though she didn't know enough about us to know what we liked.

I got off the bed and we crouched over the box. I don't remember where Genie was at the time. Charlie took the lid off. I didn't know what was going to be in there.

I don't remember any of the things in the box but the papers at the bottom. Genie had been ripping pages out of books for years and keeping them, but Charlie didn't think that was interesting. I glanced at them and recognized books Mom and Dad revered but wouldn't let us read. Pages from magazines and newspapers. A simple, finished crossword in Genie's all-capital handwriting. No notes from friends, as Charlie pointed out. At the very bottom was a piece of paper that had been unfolded and refolded so many times the fibers barely clung together. I don't know why, but I knew it was important, and so did Charlie. When we opened it, we didn't understand what it was.

It had my brother's name on it—his real name, Alexander, in official lettering. And our last name. And confirmation from the United States government that he had registered for the Selective Service. It seemed important then, but it couldn't have been. Some of the text was so faded it could barely be seen, where Genie had folded it and unfolded it a thousand times. I couldn't tell why it made me feel tight on the inside. I know what it is, now. I have one of my own. She kept it because it reminded her that he was a man.

Charlie didn't bother to put anything back. He let me do it, and I did. My mom made him a grilled cheese, and he ate it. There was no way he could have known what he had seen, but he didn't come back to the house again.

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I think about the 1930s as if they were much longer ago than they were. When I was a kid, I thought Anne's portrait was Roman. It's funny how we ended up right where Dad started. Our county is either convenient or magnetic. These are the things you assume when your parents teach you art but not logic.

It isn't hard for me to imagine her whispering to him in the dark, upstairs, when he was home from school, and him laughing, and putting his arm around her shoulders. Being at the bottom of the red stairs in the red hallway made me sure. I think I started to know what was going on between Sasha and Genie a long time before Charlie found what she'd been keeping. I think we all did.

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It's slowly starting to get warmer. They're saying April snow this year, but I don't think so. I keep thinking that tomorrow, the next day, will be the right time to ask her, but I can't stop her moving towards him. Mom and Dad can't see it, but I know. Some people are like her: she knows things, and knowing makes her dark.

Sometimes Genie doesn't look like me, but sometimes she does, and as she comes across the parking lot of our elementary school, I see it, kind of, in the way her eyebrows fade across her forehead. Since going to college she has begun to wear her bangs short, and whenever she comes back people tell us we look more alike.

She unlocks the car. —You wanna drive?

—Don't give a shit. Yeah.

In a week she will be back at the university she chose, out of this state, closer, no doubt, to her other brother than she will be to me. I'll stay here, go back to physics, which will make sense, and the way Charlie looks at me in the hallway, which won't. Driving alone will get quieter. In my own way, I'll miss her.

They found Anne's baby. They spent two months looking for him, but he was killed the night he was abducted. He's the reason kidnapping is a federal crime. These are some things I have learned from the Internet that have stayed with me.

I'm not worried that Sasha won't come back, because he will. Mom thinks when he comes back for good he'll be married, maybe even have a child, but I know better.

Having Genie sit in the passenger seat makes me feel old. I watch the school growing distant in the rearview mirror. In it, I can see the three of us moving farther and farther away from each other, so wretched and tall and clear. ●

The Eye is accepting short fiction submissions. Send your piece to [eyefiction@columbiaspectator.com](mailto:eyefiction@columbiaspectator.com).

# LONG LIVE THE FUNG WAH

BY DENNIS ZHOU

When the Fung Wah closed at the beginning of last month, my friends and I mourned for it as if it were an uncle we counted on to buy us beer. How else would we travel between Boston and New York for the price of a movie ticket?

The Chinatown bus did not offer a luxury service. What it offered was an opportunity for people to run to or from something, to have some semblance of spontaneity in their lives. Or, in our case, the preferred method of transporting hungover kids up and down the coast. People who take the Fung Wah know a secret about travel: It is as much about leaving as arriving. And it is incredibly exciting to know you can leave for \$15.

The Fung Wah is for cutting it close. It's for making it to a party in a different city that you heard about that morning, for seeing a past love on a whim. People who take it *do* something, not just get somewhere—even if that is to just get off the bus, walk to Washington Square, and lie on the grass wondering where to sleep that night.

I have ridden the first and last Fung Wah of the day, slept hurtling down an empty highway, and sat, cramped inside a packed one, sometimes drunk and always uncomfortable. I have passed out and stayed up all night on it, gotten where I was going in under four hours and over six. My parents knew that I had left only about a third of the time.

The first time I came to New York, I arrived on the Chinatown bus. Passing the visible sprawl of the edges of the city steadily, as if drawn toward its pulse, I watched the buildings rise until I stepped off the bus, looked up, and saw them tower above me.

As a first sight of New York, Grand Central and JFK each offer their own sides of the city. Chinatown does, too—a side that showcases the seediness one can find, if one wants to, in New York. That's always why I wanted to go: not for the Empire State Building but for the walk along dark, dismal streets, feeling the undercurrent of a still-risky city. At Grand Central, you stand with your bags until you spot a person you know among the

crowd and hurry toward them. In Chinatown, you are immediately part of the crowd.

The importance of the Chinatown bus is not that it is terrible, although it is. You can rarely communicate with the driver. The seats are cramped. People bring chickens onto the bus. But its importance is that it exists. For everyone who has ridden it, a reminder lodges in the back of the head that the chance for pure impulse still exists. Like a modern boxcar, the Fung Wah offered one of the last few depraved forms of travel I know of in the United States.

People mourned the Fung Wah, tongue-in-cheek, because while they bemoaned the grime and sweat and told each other that this time the bus actually *would* crash, they relished how truly awful a discount bus line could be. Travel became not only utility, but a shared experience.

At the end of the line I look back on the Fung Wah with fond memories. They found cracks in 21 of 28 buses. It was awful, and dangerous, and smelled—but I will miss it dearly, in all its terrible romanticism. ●

# MOBAMA'S BIG BREAK

BY DAVID SALAZAR

I remember a lot of people being puzzled the night of the Academy Awards, not because there were any huge upsets (quite the opposite, really), but because, when it was time to announce the award for Best Picture, there was First Lady Michelle Obama, looking beautiful as always and surrounded by marines in full regalia. Immediately, the Internet exploded with people asking why she was there—why a famous actress wasn't presenting *Argo*'s cast and crew with their statuettes instead of the woman married to the most powerful man in the world.

The short answer is that she presented at the Oscars because she could. The larger question is whether or not people like the first lady should be doing things like presenting Oscars and helping Jimmy Fallon chronicle the evolution of mom dancing in the first place.

Well, why the fuck not?

TV is one of the best mediums for politicians, or anyone pushing a message, to get their point across in a straightforward way to the most people.

Michelle Obama's TV junket to promote her wellness campaign is equivalent to Justin Timberlake performing on *Late Night with Jimmy Fallon* for a week straight. Both of these people are selling something: Obama is pitching wellness in an increasingly obese country, and Timberlake is hawking his latest album. Given their motives, which of these people is more important to have sitting on Jimmy Fallon's couch?

But moving beyond simply promoting agendas, politicians stepping into the limelight by appearing on TV or at award shows are just indicative of the interesting nature of the celebrity that politics affords people. What defines celebrity in general is people's desire to emulate certain qualities they see in a famous person. It's admiring someone for a quality that people see as valuable. Given that, I would say that the celebrity of politicians—at least those who aren't soulless (looking at you, Paul Ryan)—is a better form of celebrity in general. It's a celebrity of substance rather than one of surface appearance. Kim Kardashian is famous because she

filmed herself having sex, and her vapid, spray tanned siblings are just famous by association. Michelle Obama is famous, yes, partly because her husband is the president, but also because she is a strong female role model. Joe Biden is famous, partly because he's a great legislator, but also because he has a no-bullshit attitude that Americans want in their politicians.

So the real question might be, why aren't more politicians presenting at award shows? Why wasn't Hilary Clinton at the Oscars, and why isn't Elizabeth Warren on Jimmy Fallon? It would mean more interest in what politicians are up to, more involvement in the issues they're trying to bring to the forefront, and more politicians people will admire rather than vilify.

After all, it's not as if Congress has a really great public image to protect, and it might make the legislature a little bit more popular if its members communicated their messages and goals more clearly. ●





# PASEO DE LA TRISTE

FINDING HOME IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

BY HANNAH KAUDERS

ILLUSTRATION BY HANNAH SOTNICK

I shivered under heated blankets against the cold steel of the operating table, and a nurse with colored contacts strapped me down to keep me still. The OR was so cold that I searched for trails of breath in the air—so many people moved about the room that I imagined the walls expanding as we exhaled into a common cloud. A man I'd seen before emerged from the periphery and paused to pull my socks up over my ankles before injecting the anesthesia into my IV, and as I shut my eyes I heard him whisper, “buena suerte.”

When I awoke in post-op, I was still and warm and felt against my throat the dry sharpness of a peach pit. The nurse's synthetic hair extensions grazed my exposed arm as she leaned across the gurney and tried to force a popsicle into my hand. I had to fight against my drowsiness to comprehend some instruction she was communicating to me, yet I could hardly see her beyond the fog of my eyes, and without speaking I heard myself say his name. Álvaro... I whispered. It hurt even to breathe.

“I can't understand you. Don't speak if it hurts.”

“Dónde está?” I pleaded. “Conoces a Álvaro? Dile que venga, dile que venga.”

She must have checked my chart, because this time her voice grew louder and irritated and she said to me as to an obstinate child:

“Hannah, I can't understand you. We speak English here.”

And all at once the room broke over me and I saw the fire-engine red of the cherry popsicle melting into a plastic cup and felt the coarseness of hospital fabric against my shoulders. My face must have crumpled like a bit of newspaper set to flame as I wept so violently that it should have hurt. The nurse took my hand as if in apology—I perceived the softening of her expression as she asked me to rate the pain on a scale of one to 10 and promised me that the medicine would come soon.

I did not cry for pain. I cried for the gypsy melodies that tangled in the formidable shadow of the Alhambra, Pauline in the morning rubbing her wide eyes and asking me to pass the milk, and Eric teaching me to beat out the *seguriya* with wooden spoons on the kitchen counter as the tortilla burned. *Uno, dos, tres...cuatro, cinco.* I cried

for the sweetness of café con leche to replace the metallic taste of blood upon my tongue, and for the dark safety of the classroom where Juan declaimed verses of Quevedo and Góngora in a voice darkened by tobacco and despair.

The first time I visited Spain, I was 15 and traveling with a group of American high school students whose enthusiasm for mischief and Mahou light beer I did not comprehend. They snuck out at night to the *discotecas*, attracted by tequila and white rum, while I stayed in, transcribing passages from my leather-bound *Obras Completas de Charles Dickens* onto airmail paper. My roommate would return past midnight smelling of hookah and guilt, her mascara collecting in dark deposits beneath her eyes, and she would scoff, “Isn't Charles Dickens, like, British? Why are you reading that in Spanish?” I wanted to tell her that I read Dickens in Spanish precisely because she couldn't understand it, because a new language brought new life to the stories I loved, and because the volume shed the same sweet scent of age and mothballs as the attic of my grandmother's summer cottage. Instead, I told her that *I didn't know and that it's not like I understood any of it, anyway.*

We migrated from north to south, and in every province, I collected words. Asturias taught me *callos*, which exercises the jaw much like the dish it represents, and *moriscos*, in which I hear the incessant whisper of the wind across the Atlantic. In Castilla, I learned *trigo*—it sounded like the song of crickets among those interminable fields of wheat. On my 16th birthday in Madrid, I fled from the company of the group to the Reina Sofía, where I beheld *Guernica*. I learned *inquietante* from the curator's plaque and from the fear I experienced in the presence of that dark canvas when the color had drained from my complexion straight into the asphalt beneath my feet. I found color in Granada, in the cerulean sheen of *azulejos*, the evergreen leaves of *hierbabuena*, and the crimson folds of the polka-dotted skirts that moved like water about the feet of the *bailaoras*. I heard my heartbeat in every *palo* and longed, for the first time, to dance.

I returned to Granada three years later, after completing my first year of college in New York City. During those months in Manhattan, the English language grew up in spite of me—blameless syllables became haunting pleas of limbless men on subways whose faces I could not forget and well-rehearsed

excuses of old friends not to visit. By spring, my back had grown sore with the weight of books and my head ached after three hours without a cup of coffee. As I watched Columbia graduates drag their soggy Commencement robes through polluted puddles, I planned my escape. I longed to shed the excess of Hannah and to be Ana again, simpler and younger and free.

This time, I arrived in Granada alone and on my own terms. I read signs and asked directions and, in Spanish, I made my way. I found the tiny school in the Albaicín where I took literature classes with Juan, an endearingly pedantic, bespectacled hippie with a great quantity of facial hair and even greater skepticism. I came upon the dusty three-bedroom apartment on Paseo de los Tristes, and in it I found a blue-eyed guitarist who practiced long afternoons with breaking fingernails over the hum of the fan and a beautiful Swiss dancer who offered me friendship in three languages. She spoke French to me when incredulous, I spoke English to her when outraged, and we spoke Spanish when we wished to be certain that the other understood. When she wanted me to purchase a specific flavor of ice cream at the market, she spoke slow and deliberate Spanish, as if to emphasize the gravity of her choice. When she told me stories of the Camino de Santiago as we climbed the hill to school each morning, she chattered on in Spanish. And when, on those several occasions I will never forget, she threw her arms about my shoulders and told me how happy she was to know me, she said so in Spanish, and her kindness broke my heart.

Had I not already scheduled the surgery, I might have stayed there with the guitarist and the dancer, drinking Coca-Cola from glass bottles, arguing with Juan over poetry I could never quite grasp—living in the language that had carried me across concourses and cobblestones to a place where I found love.

I waited in post-op as the anesthesia wore off, and eventually, Álvaro came. I couldn't read the characters on his nametag, but I recognized the shape of the *tilde*, and I smiled in spite of the pain and said, “Álvaro, eres tú?”

“Let's get her started on some fluids,” he told my parents. I was grateful—I had run out of tears.

Dad dragged his hand along the comforter until he found my foot, and squeezed. Mom saw the goose bumps rising along my arms and pulled the blanket up around me. They didn't speak—I didn't want them to. I was home. ●

