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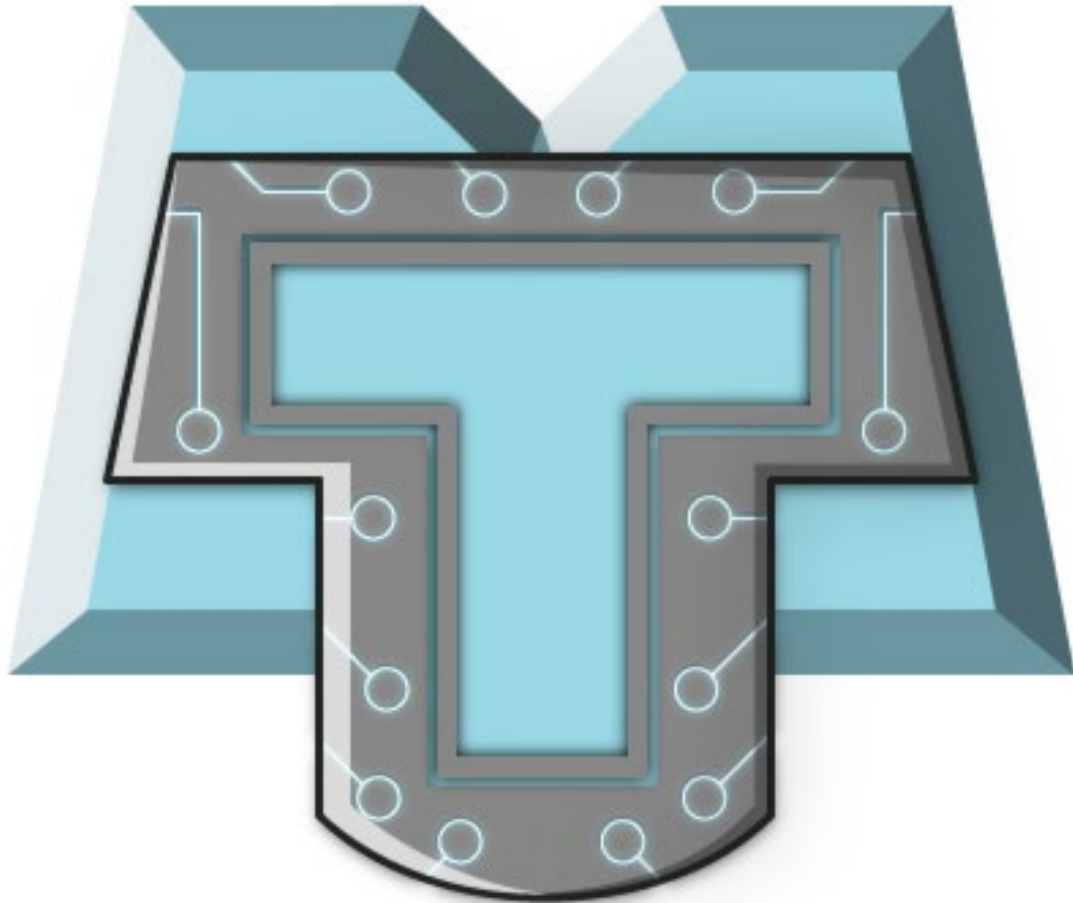


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The Editor's Letter

Every choice we make is an act of defiance. In some way, we're refusing something, an act forged by our own hands. It can be a situation, product, item or event idea. We refuse the reality of living in mediocrity. We refuse the reality of letting down our loved ones and friends so we press forward. We refuse the reality of seeing kids, adults and seasoned elders beaten on the streets, so we protest, speak up, create and vocalize to the world the negatives and disregards we see for our peers. This is our act of defiance. This is how we make a way. This is how we make tomorrow better, today.

BRYAN CARTER

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Volta Studios
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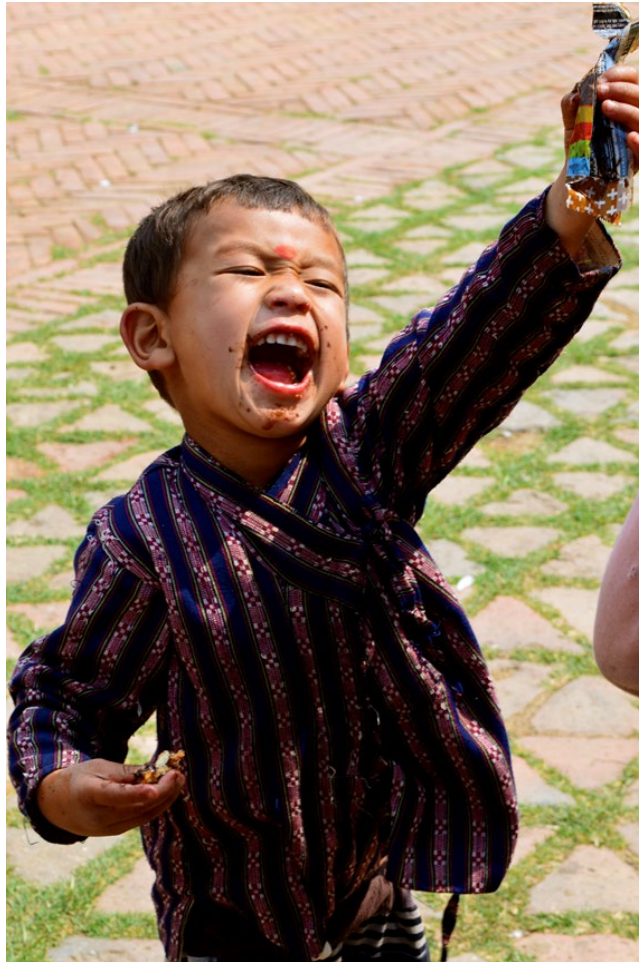
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Photo Credit: Laura Haskin



A Photography Love Affair in Nepal

By: Adriana Fraser

Hiking along the countryside of Kathmandu is oftentimes an ideal destination for any wanderlust enthusiast. For Laura Haskin, it was the place that transformed a fun hobby into a budding passion. Haskin never imagined that her spring break trip to Nepal would spark an invigorating love interest with photography. Photography was simply a hobby that she had a knack for. Haskin's 10-day trip to South Asia unveiled the realization that photography meant more to her than she knew.

"Each of my photos were a connection," the 17-year-old said.

Haskin's explorations with photography began in 2014 with a service trip hosted by her school to Arajuno, Ecuador. While in Arajuno, Haskin was equipped with a simple point-and-shoot camera. It was enough to spark a serious interest in her blossoming love of photography.

Like many people that want to learn something new, Haskin made her way to YouTube, where she got a crash course in the basics of photography. She upgraded her point-and-shoot camera to a Nikon D3200, a DSLR (digital single-lens reflex) camera that Haskin found to be an easier introduction to digital photography. She took her time getting comfortable behind the lens, so that she would feel natural while photographing her subjects.

"I felt that it was more important to learn about composition as opposed to the specs," she said.

When her school, Friends Select, organized a trip to Nepal, she was given a chance to further explore her interests in photography. Haskin and a group of classmates and faculty members traveled to Nepal in March. Haskin used the trip as an opportunity to encapsulate the essence of the different people and places that she experienced there—and to take her photography skills to the next level.

"I knew I didn't want to be one of those tourists that just snapped pictures of people without really connecting, or without trying to make any effort to be on that human level with [someone]," Haskin said. *"You lose some of*

that humanity.”

While in Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal, Haskin visited many religious sites, including stupas and temples, as well as different popular landmarks, such as Durbar Square and the Palace Museum. Haskin found herself forging connections with many of the locals in Nepal. She was especially drawn to the young children and elderly people that she encountered as she explored different villages. The young children in particular were excited and eager to be her subjects whenever she asked to take their pictures.

Although Haskin and her subjects did not speak the same language, they garnered a deeper level of understanding through her camera lens. She gained a closeness to those whom she captured. One young boy found her to be particularly interesting and followed Haskin for several hours while she traipsed through the countryside of Kathmandu.

“I didn’t know anything about him, but there was this kindness that he showed me,” she said. *“He embraced me.”*

Haskin’s photography helped her to focus on the people of Nepal and also provided her with an enriched experience of the country through a unique perspective. Her trip to Nepal has influenced Haskin to bring to her life the same connections she captures with her camera.

Haskin has found success with her photography pursuits. She was able to sell prints from her trip to Nepal for her school’s fundraiser, which raised money for those affected by the deadly earthquake that devastated villages in and around Kathmandu in late April. She has also revitalized her blog, Cedar Kitchenette, with photographs of food and various places that she has visited. The blog is growing in popularity with views from all around the world.

As her senior year approaches, Haskin has her eyes set on college. She’ll be keeping busy as senior class president, a member of her school’s Model UN team, and as a contributor to Friends Select’s literary magazine, The Cauldron. Haskin doesn’t have any plans of slowing down with her photography. She hopes to become skilled enough to encompass the essence of life through her lens.



“The neighborhood you come from should not determine the intellectual currency you have access to”

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Photo Credit: Laura Haskin

We're Talkin' Brunch



By Evan Knutla

What exactly is brunch? Is it merely the marriage of breakfast and lunch, commonly recognized as a weekend activity only? Is it a gluttonous expenditure of precious weekend hours? Or is it something much more?

Occupying a peculiar place in our culture, brunch has become an extension of the party. Nothing says “the fun shall continue” like making late-night plans for brunch the next day. French toast starts cooking up in the imagination. Mimosas lavishly pour. The aroma of hot coffee wafts from the cup, floating to the noses of woozy weekenders. And in Philadelphia, it’s practically a burden to decide *which* restaurant to stumble into.

There are the giants—Sabrina’s Café, Honey’s Sit ‘N Eat, Green Eggs Café—that boast multiple convenient locations. Then there are the others. It’s easy to find flocks of folks lined up in front of Café Lift, Sam’s Morning Glory, and others still. Even bars offer brunch now, so it isn’t unusual to see them bustling in the morning.

The brunch landscape shifts rapidly in this city of neighborhoods, and there may be no neighborhood quite as brunch-progressive as South Philly. Like in most pockets of Philadelphia, the current scene in South Philly is vastly different from what it was thirty, twenty, or even ten years ago. As the city has risen, the restaurant world has taken root, attracting droves of young people to a new atmosphere on the old Italian Passyunk strip, where a busy center of twenty-some-things and young families are eager to go brunching. So, without further ado, let’s introduce the main attractions of the new creative cuisine in South Philly.

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Mega Ran: Ambitious, and Talented

by Andre Sapp Jr.

Mega Ran: ambitious, hungry, and talented. Raheem Jarbo, a.k.a. Mega Ran, is a trend-setting chip-hop rapper making his mark on the hip-hop scene. Mega Ran draws musical inspiration from old-school video game music to create a distinctive, enjoyable sound. Mega started out as a teacher in Philadelphia, until touring and recording took precedence in his life. Mega Ran has found success in the underground by promoting himself through YouTube. Today he tours and performs shows full-time, helping pioneer the chip-hop sub-genre in America's hip-hop culture.

Andre Sapp: Good afternoon Mega, to start off, do you want to tell me a brief summary of who you are and what chip-hop is?

Mega Ran: Hey man, thanks for the opportunity to chat. I'm Raheem Jarbo, just some guy who taught middle school and wrote raps and played video games, and now I get to travel and make a menial living doing so, ha.

Chip-Hop combines chiptunes (music made using the original NES or Game Boy hardware) with new production techniques in a hip-hop style. A lot of chiptune's mystique comes from guys making such lush tunes with technology that is 30-years-old, and they do some amazing work. I apply a bit of that science to making rap music, leading to some cool results.

Who helped influence you to pioneer the chip hop genre?

Listening to video game composers like Koji Kondo, Maname Matsumae, and the man, Nobuo Uematsu. Using the most limited software, they made music that has been stuck in my head for years. That showed me the potential for what we can do.

Later, I met guys like A_Rival, Danimal Cannon, and Chibi-Tech, all chiptune artists who have taken some of that stuff to the next level. I guess I was jealous because hip-hop didn't have that. We don't value our past as much as video game culture does. I wanted to make hip-hop that pays tribute to the past while showing optimism about the future.

Your stage name is Mega Ran, can you give readers the story behind the name?

Well, I was known as Random, releasing music under that name since 2006. Recently, I noticed several other artists using that name, one of which is a Swedish chiptune legend. It got harder and harder to separate my music from the other Randoms on various music and tour date aggregator sites.

In 2007, I had an idea to mix Mega Man with hip-hop, and I called the album Mega Ran, a combination of Mega Man and Random. This stuck, the name stuck, and I became Random a.k.a. Mega Ran. I made traditional hip-hop under the name Random and chip-hop under the name Mega Ran. Then I got tired of splitting up my musical catalogue, so this year I decided to just go by Mega Ran to make it easier.

So which version of Mega Man is your favorite and why?

Mega Man 3 is my favorite. I feel like they got the gameplay, the music, and the difficulty all right on the third one. The rest of them—they’re just basically trying to recreate *MM3*. I’m a big fan of the classic series, though I like *X* a lot too. *Mega Man X4* is my favorite of those. I dig the faster action of the newer ones.

Besides Mega Man, what video game franchise do you hold in the highest regard?

There are a bunch, though none has hit me like *Mega Man* did. The franchises that have inspired me in various ways are *Zelda*, *Resident Evil*, *Metroid*, and more recently, *Uncharted* and *Bioshock*.

How do you perceive hip-hop’s increasing presence in the video game community, and in what direction do you see it moving in the future?

As with everything else, hip-hop is taking over. It’s everywhere now. I see it slowly creeping into video games, but it’s gotta’ be done the right way for me to be happy with it. Developers will say there’s no room for hip-hop in their games, but then they have Jay Z or Macklemore at their release party. It’s weird, but I can see it changing. In the future, I see less violent shoot-

er games starring rappers, and more rappers stepping into voice-acting roles, performing original songs for soundtracks, overseeing production, and even popping up in “non-hip-hop” games. I’m proud of what’s been happening and I hope to be on the forefront of that in the next few years.

Which rapper do you think influenced your style the most?

It’s hard to choose one, so I’d say a combination of Biggie, MF Doom, Redman and Rakim.

“Splash Woman” is an incredible song. What other songs from your discography would you recommend to new fans?

Thank you. It’s a fun song to perform live. I ask my fans all the time which songs they show to people to get them into me, but there’s a few that I would choose: “Push” (*The Call*, 2006); “Grow Up” (*Mega Ran*, 2007); “Splash Woman” (*Mega Ran 9*, 2009); “Dream Master” (*Forever Famicom*, 2010); “Higher” (*Heroes*, 2010); “Avalanche” (*Black Materia*, 2011); “Language Arts” (*Language Arts*, 2012); “Black Bags” (*TRAP*, 2013); “Venting” (*A Gamer’s Anthem*, 2014). They’re all on Spotify. In fact, I made a playlist: [Meet Mega Ran](#).

Your sound is very unique. Are there any artists out there you would like to collab with, anybody you feel would complement your skill set?

Thanks. There’s a few folks I’ve been making tracks for, in the hope that I’d one day meet them: K-Os, Kanye, Del The Funky Homosapien, MF Doom, Cee-Lo Green, and Busdriver, just to name a few.

You were a teacher before. Did your students listen to your music. How’d they react when they first found out that you were a rapper?

Absolutely. I used to use my CDs to bribe them. I tried to keep it from them, but kids are smart, and they find out everything you try to hide from them. So I decided to embrace it. They’d say one thing in front of me, usually “you aiiight.” Then they’d go home and show their friends my YouTube page and brag about their teacher being a rapper. Always a fun time.

“Chip-Hop is the combination of chiptunes, or music made using the original NES or Game Boy hardware”



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Well, it just happened. While on tour this past year at MAGFest in D.C., I did a special freestyle, and in it I proposed to my girlfriend of four years. That was pretty special. Most importantly, she said yes. To have 2,000 people going nuts and cheering for love—that was deep, man. A few people caught it on [video](#). It's a moment I still can't believe is real right now. I'm still getting goosebumps.

Congratulations man! I'm happy for you. Sounds like an amazing thing to experience as a fan. It seems like you love being involved with your fans. I definitely do. My fans are my fam. They encourage me, they motivate me.

How is life as a premiere underground rapper?

HA! It's a little like being a struggling beginning rapper. It's still a constant hustle to get more ears, better

shows, prioritizing what you think you're worth vs. what you're being offered, and what's worth compromising on. I love my life right now, but it sure isn't getting any easier.

“I want the world to see the true potential of hip-hop music, in gaming, in education, and beyond.”

What about this profession keeps you going 110% every day?

It's the love for the music, the thrill of knowing that you're one song, one tweet, one show away from the next level—and one terrible decision from hitting the bottom and starting all over again. I think I'm addicted to the grind. It's like a role-playing game. You have to beat the same blue slime over and over again to level up, but once you do and can unleash your sick special moves, it's so much more special because you know you worked for it.

What's the one thing you want to get across in your music, the message you want the world to hear?

I want the world to see the true potential of hip-hop music, in gaming, in education, and beyond. I think that through some strange combination of those three, we can change the world. It's a crazy notion, but I really see it. I don't know how to unlock it yet, but it's there.

Last but not least, what's your favorite Pokemon?

HAHA! I've only played two Pokemon games in my day, but I always grab a Charizard whenever I can. But I can't front, I still get excited when I see Pikachu.

Great interview Mega Ran, I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you. You gave some great insight into the life of a rapper and I wish you nothing but continued success. Your music is very inspiring and you've convinced me to revisit my *Megaman* days on the Gameboy advance.

That's dope. Thanks so much for the interview. I appreciate it.



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Ben Volta and the Exploratory Collaboration

by Mary Anna Rodabaugh



It is early Monday morning and Ben Volta is already up and working away in his studio on the second floor of Olivet Covenant Church in Fairmount. Sun streams through stained-glass windows, casting rainbows on the studio floor. Volta's office buzzes with the gentle hum of an industrial-sized printer. He's working on several projects at once and bringing incredible, collective ideas to life.

What do you want to be when you grow up? That is one question that Volta didn't quite have an answer for as a kid. His older sister went to art school. His younger brother and sister were into music. Volta was in the middle, skateboarding a lot and enjoying the present. It wasn't that he lacked ambition; he just didn't really like school. Every day he went and every day he daydreamed about skateboarding. Until one day he received a wake-up call that changed everything.

Volta hadn't turned in a single assignment all year. His English teacher gave him a note stating he would be repeating the eleventh grade, hinting that even summer school was out of reach. So Ben came up with a plan. For extra credit, he offered to create a unique piece of art based on the book the class was reading, Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, the first book Volta had ever enjoyed. His plan worked and he passed the class.

I realized then that art was the thing that helped me and made everything more interesting," recalls Volta. *"It helped me get through the things I really didn't want to do."*

He started looking at academics through a creative lens and managed to graduate high school. His friends attended the Tyler School of Art and Temple University, while Volta went to community college. During his first semester, he learned that the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA) doesn't base acceptance on grades; rather, the school looks at portfolios. The January after graduating high school Volta applied to PAFA and was accepted.

Volta spent two years at PAFA and then applied to the University of Pennsylvania's night school. One essay later he was a Penn student. *"I ended up loving it,"* Volta says. *"I was able to choose the classes that I wanted to take. I viewed them as building and feeding my artwork."*

From his time at PAFA and Penn, Volta learned a few things about himself. First, he did not enjoy being alone in his studio for hours on end. He preferred to collaborate with others to create art. Second, he enjoyed working with kids and guiding them through the artistic process. While studying at PAFA, Volta taught 45-minute drawing classes to fifth- and sixth-graders visiting the museum. He looked for any opportunity to work with kids in summer and after-school programs.

"I was teaching but I didn't view it as teaching. I viewed it as my practice as an artist, using education as a medium to explore ideas and make new things," Volta says. Volta's collaborative artistry led him back to the institution that once bored him. While working with the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Art Partners Residency, Volta was placed at Grover Washington Jr. Middle School in the Olney section of Philadelphia. For two days a week, he worked alongside a math and science teacher as an artist-in-residence. His students produced a large project at the end of the year that served as an expression of what they were exploring in the classroom.

FREQUENCIES

by Ben Volta with teaching artist Brad Carney
and youth from the Lenfest Center in Hunting
Park: Juanielle J. Kimani S. Nazir M. Mytris S.
Patrice C. Jhoanny B. and Maniya B



3812 Old York Road, Philadelphia, PA 19140
Completed - September 6, 2015

Created in partnership with the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, the Paint Quality Institute, the Franklin Institute, and the Philadelphia Science Festival; sponsored by DOW Chemical and the City of Philadelphia Department of Human Services, with additional support from the Mural Arts Program Restorative Justice GUILD.

Photo Credit: Volta Studios

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Photo Credit: Volta Studios

The placement was scheduled to last only ten weeks, but then-principal Gerald Branch knew his school and other schools in the district needed more of what Volta had to offer. Branch helped Volta get a contract with the School District and Volta went on to work with the students of Grover Washington Jr. for the next six years.

“The core of that work was to see what happens. How a classroom can change with an artist present and activate the learning and how unexpected artwork is made through collaboration.”

That was just the beginning. Over the past ten years, Volta has taught in over 35 different schools, working with students to leave behind a legacy of vibrant artwork. Just last year, Volta, in conjunction with the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, collaborated with students at McMichael Morton Elementary School in Mantua to create “Micro to Macro,” a 12,000 sq. ft. mural encompassing two blocks of the school.

The radiant work of art begins as a map of the world that transforms into trees, neurons, DNA, atoms, and particles, encouraging students to explore the evolution and inner-connectedness of nature and community. Volta was back at McMichael Elementary for a second year in 2014. The students focus on working with patterns and pattern recognition by extending the mural from the inside vestibule to the office hallway.

“Inspired by Buckminster Fuller’s ideas, we’re trying to change the world for all people,” Volta says. *“How can we create global structures and global symbols to bring change?”*

Many of Volta’s collaborative works end up taking on a scientific theme. This began with Grover Washington Jr. Middle School science and math teacher Jerry Jackson. The artist, teacher, and students were looking for project ideas and kept coming back to the math and science curriculum. Science, which takes something and examines it deeply, is similar to art. Volta believes there is so much more to discover in the realm of art.



“Science happens whenever you try to figure something out, really focus and unpack it,” he elaborates. *“I think artists want to do that.”*

In addition to school murals, Volta has collaboratively created a SEPTA El Train wrap called *We Are All Neurons*. In partnership with the City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, students visited Volta’s studio after school to create the brain-centric train wrap that can still be seen today. *Amplify* is a mural on the side of the Union Transfer music venue at 11th and Spring Garden. Pieces of Ben Volta’s collaborative artistic process can be found scattered all over the city.

The retrospective rearview mirror is always an intriguing path to self-discovery. Besides that failing notice from his 11th grade English teacher, Volta pays homage to another type of teacher. From 2000-2010, Volta worked with the historic collective Tim Rollins and Kids of Survival (K.O.S.). In 1982, Rollins launched the Art and Knowledge Workshop in the South Bronx and worked with young people after school. Since its inception, Tim Rollins and K.O.S. have produced work that has been exhibited worldwide.

“Tim really mentored me as an educator and as a teacher,” reflects Volta. *“He was that very important voice giving me permission. There are many ways to become an artist, but being an educator is one of the highest paths. Sometimes you just need that person in your life to give you permission.”*

With several large projects in the works, his artistic plate is quite full. Through his journey, he shows us that you don’t have to have it all figured out. Whether it’s an initial artwork or your life’s calling, just go into things with intention, understanding that the skills you’re building will inevitably be used in unexpected ways later on.

Little Spoon Café

In October 2014, Little Spoon Café sprouted up on the corner of 15th & South, an elegant, adorable eatery situated right where a restaurant boasting brunch fare was sorely missing.

Little Spoon gets their coffee from Philly Fair Trade, their bagels from South St. Bagel, and their eggs come from cage-free chickens bred at local farms. Don't expect a corporate food truck to pull up out front. Expect locally sourced ingredients—a testament to their homegrown philosophy. The owner, Jeanne, says the team at her restaurant happily *“takes pride in the ingredients we're using. We've worked hard to establish a certain vibe. Not a corporate environment. We're more of a group of friends than a business.”*

Regarding Little Spoon's role in the area, Jeanne is pleased to say that the restaurant is *“community-oriented. We're regular-customer-driven, and we've gotten so much support.”*

It's little wonder why. If the delightful façade isn't inviting enough, inside the light filters through large windows, creating a comfortable atmosphere that feels simultaneously retro and modern, complete with wooden tables, quirky chairs, and friendly faces.

In the culinary world, presentation is half the battle. Win their eyes and their taste buds will follow. Little Spoon pays attention to presentation. Dense, cheddar-chive pancakes topped with apple-whipped yogurt throw a new light on pancake possibilities. The delicate balance between savory and sweet is splendidly struck.

Although the menu at Little Spoon is fairly meat-heavy, they do cater to vegetarians and vegans. For those with diet restrictions, Little Spoon serves items like tempeh bacon, which can be served as a side, or on what they call their TLT (think BLT). Add avocado, and there's a delicious, wholesome option you'll be coming back for. Their spacious menu contains scrumptious specials, including a special brunch menu for the weekend crowd.



Inkster Inc: Clothing, Community and Change

by Aurica Hurst

The South street district is no stranger to fan art, niche markets, or attracting the unique at heart. There is something for everyone on South Street. Inkster Inc., a new addition to the area, has created its own lane. Store and brand owner Douglas Wong came from Astoria, Queens to make his roots in Philadelphia, where he lives with his loving, supportive wife and three beautiful children. He has worked at the Marriot Hotel for 20 years, all while mentoring a community of artists and running a digital T-shirt printing business.



With no traditional schooling or training, Wong has managed to create a store and outreach programs that help artists come into their own and support the needs of the community. About two years ago, Wong created Inkster Inc., which now has four locations in the area, including two distinct divisions: Inkster Cares and Inkster Prints. These entities all embrace Wong's mission: to give artists an outlet where they can show off their work and make money from it.

The Journey

Wong has maintained his brand even in times of trouble and financial burden. His first location was in North Philadelphia in what used to be an abandoned crack house. This is where he started printing his own shirts and helping others to print their own. Moving around the city and teaching himself how to run a business, Wong studied management, SEO (search engine optimization), networking, employee motivation strategies, and how

“I think he was more worried about surviving”

to use social media for business. Even through the ups and downs, Wong maintained a store in the Olde City district on 3rd and Market, and now has a storefront on 4th and South under the same landlord. *“The barbershop on the block and other businesses visit frequently,”* said Wong. *“The environment is really family-oriented.”*

Community Impact Apparel

“Everything we sell we try to give 20-25% of the profits back to the community” said Wong. *“By discounting prints for reunions and sponsoring events for kids, we’ve branded ourselves.”* Through Inkster Cares, Wong's non-profit, he sponsors community outreach projects, like giving out bottled water at neighborhood parks. *“I split the profit with the staff and family, donating T-shirts, basically giving back.”*

Inkster Prints - An online portal where people can print and set up text and images, this service employs local college students. Wong teaches them not only what he does at Inkster, but how to be productive and efficient, and what that means when running a business. Right now, Wong works with Drexel students, but is open to the idea of working with others who end up being slammed with debt when they graduate.

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The Business Model

“I can teach you what not to do in a business, and how to change fast, but I made a lot of mistakes,” said Wong, smiling through his words.

“I created a website that allowed people to put up their own artwork . They posted pictures of their cats, dogs, donuts, all types of art. My time wasn’t being spent effectively. I learned that people actually buy fan art because it’s emotional, so Inkster Inc. comes from a need to give the public what they want.”

The Inkster Inc. site provides T-shirts from *Gravity Falls*, *Pokémon*, Nintendo games, and popular comic book titles. A featured artists section includes names like *Steven Universe*, *Sailor Moon*, and many more. These collections can be ordered in hoodies, t-shirts, tanks, and totes.

“People love fan art. Fan art pays the bills, so I have to be a niche market. I don’t have millions of dollars like my competitors. I’m just a small guy so I had to become a niche market.”

One of the many interesting pages on the site is the Blog page. The Blog page is dedicated to newsworthy topics, from discussions on graphics to how to get the most out of your social media sites.

Motivation

“I grew up in the hood, a black and Hispanic neighborhood, where being Chinese wasn’t considered cool. I come from a dysfunctional family. I ran away from home at 16.”

“I think he was more worried about surviving,” said his wife Rose. *“Thank God I’m a hustler;”* said Wong.

Jeffrey Jones, who helped Wong get his life back on track and focus on his business, was a major influence on Wong’s success, as was Mastermind Jack Barry. Jones, founder of Greater Days Ahead and winner of the BME Leadership Award, helped Wong understand his potential. *“He really helped me out and set me straight,”* said Wong. Wong’s story of how he got to be the man he is today is inspiring. To show how important community is to his business, on the fourth Friday of every month Inkster Inc. opens up its doors and hosts an event with live music. Check out the site at www.inksterinc.com

INKSTERINC

2 Steppin' with Project Positive

by Brooke Brunson

Finding the positives in life can be a struggle, but there is always hope for the youth of today. Created by Philadelphia native Damon Holley, Project Positive is making a resounding impact on the community. Through dance and music, it strives to inspire young people by giving them an alternative to the streets. I had a chance to sit down with Damon, and while chatting with this young man I could hear the passion and drive in his voice. A modern-day superhero, Damon has found a way to share what he loves while staying active within the community. So if you have the talent or drive to dance, definitely check out this amazing team and its creative workshops.

Brooke Brunson: What is Project Positive?

Damon Holley: Project Positive is a unique and innovative organization that expresses its message through hip-hop dance. We are best known for our performances on SEPTA's subway system and in other public areas.

What inspired you come up with the name Project Positive and start an organization with its title?

In 2010, I came up with the idea to create a dance group. When I was younger, I always felt like dance was my way to escape reality. With so much negativity going on in my community, I felt inspired to create a dance group that would not only incorporate the neighborhood youth but also help others express themselves through dance. The name Project Positive came from a friend of mine named Brian Newby, a.k.a B-Boy Hannibal. One day we were on the street performing and out of nowhere he said, "Project Positive," and ever since that day I decided to keep the name.

Does your team work with community outreach programs or non-profit organizations?

Alex helped us get a grant through the Knight Foundation with BME (Black Male Engagement) for \$10,000 to help advance

Photo Credit: Max Grudzinski

the work of Project Positive.

What exactly is the work of Project Positive and how was the grant money used to advance it?

Project Positive's mission is to inspire the youth through hip-hop dance. We hold workshops in communities that don't regularly see programs like this, welcoming teens, adults, and kids ages 6 and up. The grant money I received from BME helped me to open up workshops in other communities besides my own. I was able to tap into a wider audience, provide uniforms and transportation for my performers, build a stronger social media presence, and develop a multi-use studio space.

So, if I'm out and about in Philadelphia, where can I expect to find you guys? And, is it the same routine, or whatever comes to mind at the time?

I've decided to refrain from street performing to think more about the future of Project Positive for the youth. I'm not saying that I'll never street perform again, but to harness my craft and continue to perform, teach, and travel abroad, I must look past the streets. Nonetheless, we will be at the upcoming spring and summer festivals of 2016!

What kind of workshops do you offer for the youth?

We offer a Hip-Hop Dance Workshop in West Philadelphia each and every Thursday at the Christy Recreation Facility (728 S. 55th Street). We help children understand the fundamentals of hip-hop dance and how to utilize them in everyday life.



Chayya Café



Chayya Café sits right in the thick of South Philly’s brunch traffic on Passyunk Ave. And if you’re a worn-out, thirsty bruncher in need of a caffeine fix, look no further. Chayya serves fresh, different coffees every day, in the form of pour-overs, French presses, or even siphons. (A siphon is a Bunsen-burner-looking device that brews in two chambers by vapor pressure and vacuum.) It is a complex, expensive cup of Joe, which is proof of how seriously they take their coffee.

The ambience at Chayya is also very inviting, with hardwood floors and comfy chairs to lounge (if there isn’t a line out the door). Their slogan, “Coffee. Food. Shelter,” feels like an appropriate summary of their homey principles. Again, at Chayya, ingredients are locally sourced, evidenced by the local produce truck that pulls up periodically. Their coffee is “Fairly traded, locally roasted.”

If you have diet restrictions, consider their vegan cream cheese or vegan chorizo. Millennials preoccupied with brunch and inclusiveness care about these choices. Consumers are becoming more and more aware of where their food comes from, and the impact their consumption has on the environment and their health.

Chayya’s brunch fare is fresh, colorful, complex, and presented with care. Be sure to try a homemade hybrid, like the French Toast Waffle, brioche battered and pressed in a waffle iron, served with macerated berries and syrup.

Speak with the owner, V, about her restaurant, and themes begin to emerge. “*We know all of our customers really well,*” she begins. “*We’re a really integral part of our community.*” Indeed, Chayya recently hosted a comedy night, a baby shower, and is now working on hosting a jazz night. V trumpets Chayya’s “home cooking and reasonable price point” as motivating factors in the business. And her patronage clearly appreciates the attitude of the staff. “*My staff comes to work happy to be here,*” she says. “*I trust my staff. I try not to micromanage them. I treat my staff and my customers like they’re in my home.*” Indeed, this sincere attitude has helped to shape another successful South Philly staple.

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Porto

A hop, skip, and jump away is Porto, the final stop on our tour of South Philly's brunch scene. Porto is cute and charming, and the owner, Christine, injects the space with a highly unique hospitality: she won't let you just eat there; you're part of the play at Porto, and Christine is the director. Regular customers will rope you in as well, offering tidbits of Philly history over a cup of coffee.

Porto has another mainly meat menu, yet vegetarians can enjoy the tofu scramble, fresh bagels, and homemade muffins that disappear by the afternoon. The falafel tacos are a standout dish: warm, soft falafel, not too dry and full of fabulous flavor. And for hot-sauce enthusiasts, Porto's rainbow of variety aims to please.

"People come here for my charm. And my etiquette," Christine says with a wry grin. That's part of her game. Porto is South Philly flavor maxed out. Don't be taken off-guard. Dive in, dig in, and enjoy the food and the concept. *"I do whatever I want,"* Christine says. *"This is one of a kind, this place."*

Be sure to check out Porto's "Yo 'Cuz, How You Doin'?" entrée, a chicken and waffle sandwich with bacon, cheddar, lettuce, tomato, jalapeno, and a maple yogurt butter glaze. Other standouts include the kielbasa-kale pierogies and the raisin bread French toast, served with espresso-cocoa powder and fresh fruit.

Back to the main question: what exactly *is* brunch? It's an old concept that's been entirely reinvigorated. It's an *experience*, a new cultural happening. From the focus on quality ingredients to the personalized service, it represents the sheer creativity of the culinary scene. And in South Philly it is exploding. Like Christine from Porto says: *"This is just brunch,"* before offering up a whimsical look, *"or is it?"*



Are workshops the only thing Project Positive has to offer the youth? Are there additional events or opportunities Project Positive plans to provide?

Our weekly dance workshops serve as a catalyst for students to grow and enhance their skills to become professional performers. We also offer the opportunity to take part in performing year-round at festivals, concerts, community events, and much more.

I see some members are pretty skilled, which could intimidate others

“We believe in peace and Positive Energy that Allows Constant Elevation. (P.E.A.C.E.)”

aspiring to join Project Positive. What’s the intake process like?

The ages of Project Positive members range from 7 to 40, and everyone has something to offer. Where one lacks in skill, another may be better. This allows each one to teach one. No matter the age or skill of any member, our mission is to inspire, not intimidate. Our intake process starts with people coming to our workshops to determine their skill level.

What’s the day to day like for Project Positive? Do you guys randomly link up or is there a system to how you get around?

Project Positive’s day-to-day really depends on how many shows we have coming up. We have slow weeks/months, and then there are times when we’re completely booked. Over the summer we hit the streets a lot, so we link up just about every day.

We’ve noticed that there are other groups similar to Project Positive. Is it safe to say that their dancers were, at some point, a part of Project Positive, or were influenced by your team?

Philly is a really small city, so it’s not uncommon for dancers to come across each other at some point. I learned how to hit the streets from a dancer in New York and built it with dancers in Philadelphia. There are dancers who used to be down with Project Positive that have gone their own way, and then there are people who learned it from me or learned it from other places. It’s just a similar style.

Does Project Positive have a motto or quote?

We believe in peace and Positive Energy that Allows Constant Elevation. (P.E.A.C.E.)”

Where do you see Project Positive in the next 5 years?

I see us touring all over the world, leaving a lasting impression on everyone we encounter.

What steps are you taking now to put together a tour, if any?

During the winter, I revamped Project Positive so we can have a big push in the spring. I am getting my studio space together and working on some things personally so I can give the group the fuel it needs. Hopefully, we’ll be able to put on a tour for the late summer.

And the game plan for 2016? Where can we expect to see from Project Positive by June?

A lot of practicing and training going on. Of course we still have our workshops going on, and we still do shows, but I want to relaunch Project Positive in the spring and hit Philly hard.

Before we wrap things up, do you have any last words for our readers?

Make sure you guys follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Google under our name Project Positive. Also, check out our workshops along with our amazing and talented kids. Peace!

For more information checkout project positive on social media:

IG: @projectpositive

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Facebook: Project Positive

www.projectpositive.com



www.iamartlife.com

Bob Marley and Marcus Garvey



I Am Art Life

“We are dedicated to uniting artist and raising the creative consciousness of the community”



Kysha Woods

The Beauty Guru of Keitt Media Agency

by Jeremy Pierce

Kysha Woods began her professional career as a teacher, hair stylist, and make-up artist. After crafting her skills at some of Philadelphia's most prestigious salons, Kysha opened her own salon at the age of 21. Through her business, she established a mentorship program with the Boys and Girls Association, and participated in clothes, food, and technology drives to support those in need. Additionally, she partnered with local schools to promote entrepreneurship and self-wealth.

Kysha later expanded her career into radio and television. She produced shows for New World Radio 1540 AM, and legendary WHAT 1340 AM, reaching over a quarter-million listeners in the Delaware Valley. Kysha has also produced and hosted her own television show, *Be With Kysha Woods*, which airs on Comcast and Verizon Networks. In 2012, Kysha became a member of the Grammy Recording Academy, as well as one of the producers of *Myra's Angel*, which received six nominations at the 2014 American Black Film Festival. Today, she is founder of Keitt Media Agency and a soon-to-be-author.

How long have you been an entrepreneur?

For over two decades.

Let's talk about the Sanctuary of Beauty Spalon. I've never heard of a "salon."

I was the president and CEO, and we recently closed it. The salon was a vacation in the middle of the day with the best products the industry had to offer. It allowed customers to get in touch with their five senses, and it just felt right. We always had aroma therapy, tranquil music, candle light, coy pond, refreshments. We romanced our clients in a resort manner, serviced them well, and they were done in an hour unless their Spalon experience called for further relaxation, such as facials, yoga, Pilates, or therapeutic treatment.

Tell me how you got the name "Beauty Guru"?

I believe in a wellness lifestyle. To me, beauty comes from the inside out, doing the best that you can, and being happy with yourself. I had so many satisfied clients that someone called me the "Beauty Guru" and it kind of just stuck.

Has being the "The Beauty Guru" led to some other opportunities?

I was approached with the opportunity to executive produce my own radio and talk show on New World Radio 1540 AM, and WHAT 1340 AM. That transitioned to my own television show, which we are currently producing.

Talk to me about that first foray into the T.V. biz.

There would be times when the production crew wouldn't show up. I couldn't get things filmed or edited. I had to learn on the fly and really take charge of it. So it's by default that I became a producer. Philly Cam has helped me to become a better producer and to develop the management skills I learned as an entrepreneur. Now, people that want to transition into other ventures contact me, so I've begun consulting clients and managing artists.

I can only assume that you're good at talking to people.

Absolutely. I like to talk and interact with people. It helps me to individualize and customize service for the client. That's what I do best.

And the show's new season?

Not only do I take them on my journey, but you get to see other people's journeys as well. I have people from all different walks of life on the show. What viewers find real is seeing themselves in someone else, someone they can connect with, someone to encourage them, someone to say to them, "Be the best person you can be."

The diversity on the show is great. What about diversity in your life?

Philadelphia is a diverse city, rich in culture, history,



keitt media agency

and hard workers, so why not have a little something for everyone. My whole family is diverse. I've lived in diverse neighborhoods and have gone to diverse schools. It has never been a new experience for me and has become my "normal." I believe in diversity and equality and being the best person that you can be. The way you can do that is by presenting options to people.

Where do you see the show going, and do you want to run it yourself?

I see a few reality and spin-off shows forthcoming, encompassing what I do as a person. I don't necessarily want to run it myself, but sometimes that happens. I've been an owner of a business for over two decades, so I've always managed other people. I'm on the executive side of things.

What is the Keitt Media Agency?

Keitt Media Agency is a consultant management firm that handles business, entertainment, and civic strategic planning for many companies, and also produces material for T.V. and film.

Tell me what's changed from when you started to where you are now with Keitt.

It's a journey, and a long one at that. I started out as

a make-up artist, but I've always been very entrepreneurial and independent. I like for people to feel good about themselves. That was my vision. I learned from other people by being their hair stylist. The hair stylist is your lawyer, doctor, psychologist. We know your deepest darkest secrets. We're there at every important moment of your life. We're one of the few people who are licensed to touch you personally, and I began translating that to other facets of my life. I started out behind the scenes doing hair and make-up for artists and models. While behind the scenes, I overheard things that led to advice, consulting, and then managing. Learning that way.

It sounds like you really like being involved.

I love seeing other people accomplish their dreams. I love being a part of that process. Things are larger than T.V., larger than entertainment. I do more than just that.

This is so cliché, but where do you see yourself five years from now?

The sky is the limit. I want to help others succeed. You've got to make mistakes and learn from others. That is what contributes to success, and I want to be the platform that allows people to do that.



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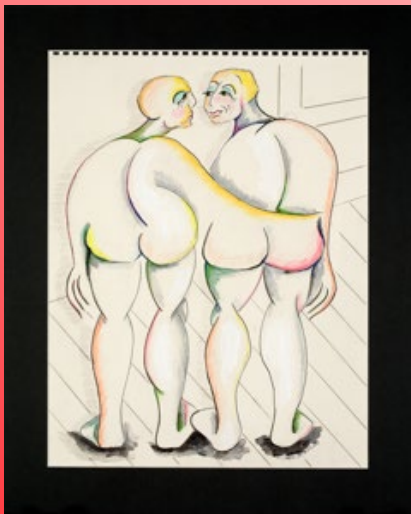
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Blood Buddies: Amandarose Szezorak and Carol Scavotto

By Marc Londo

In Philadelphia, our artists play a prominent role in transforming the raw grit and reality of the city into a visual mix of creative consciousness. It is the connection between what is seen with the eye and felt with one's heart that inspires the visual language of our artists. Their art speaks to the reality that surrounds them. Like a vaccine, their works promote life where there is decay. The notion of art as an agent of health and healing is poignant, and it takes on greater meaning when an artist gets sick. While we surround ourselves with their bright creations, it is easy to forget that their images are a one-way mirror. The work itself acts as a wall, and we are all too often oblivious of the ailments that conspire to rob an artist's health.

Frida Kahlo once said, "Don't build a wall around your own suffering or it may devour you from the inside." It is an artist's nature to spend great periods of time working in solitude. For artists coping with illness, that presents an interesting juxtaposition. As an expression of consciousness, art requires its maker to connect. However, when artists confront their own mortality, how do they sustain a mindset for making authentic art as opposed to just raising walls as a means of escape? Furthermore, how does



health infringe on an artist's worldview

when an elastic mindset is so critical to making art? Where do they go for the understanding that they so freely give to us?

Harkening to the 'art as vaccine' analogy, there is said to be a reciprocal relationship between art and health. Creative arts therapist Shawn McNiff writes that the act of creating emits the same energy as healing, which can have the transformative effect of curbing the artist's—and by extension, the viewer's—pain. So, if that's the case, then perhaps escapism through art is actually good.

When Carol Scavotto saw my post about photographer Amandarose Szezorak's cancer diagnosis in our art group, she PM'd me for an introduction. Amandarose's diagnosis, Choroidal Melanoma, was especially devastating because it was located in her left eye—the same eye she uses to compose her camera shots. Having gone through her own struggle with ovarian cancer in 2008, Carol spent a lot of time distancing herself from being "sick," and began recording her thoughts and feelings in great detail through a set of 43 drawings and two paintings called "Artistic Healing." Now, eight years out, she understands the depth of Amandarose's distress. She reached out and they became fast friends, "blood buddies" to put it in Carol-speak.

Recently, I caught up with Amandarose and Carol and they were gracious enough to share their feelings about art, healing, and friendship with Main Course.

What is most important to keeping a healthy mindset when battling illness?

Amandarose Szezorak: You have to live life and not worry, the best you can. Honestly, I feel weak emotionally sometimes. I feel like I'm not what I use to be, and then other times I slap myself in the face, saying it's a placebo effect.

Carol Scavotto: Well, I call it putting on the LIPSTICK face. My dad was 96 years old when I was diagnosed. I



Top and Bottom Picture: Amandarose Szezorak (back)
Carol Scavotto (front)



Photo Credit: Carol Scavotto, "Blood Buddy"

could not tell him I was sick. I force people to maintain a charade of normalcy. Yes, it was a year of great deception, except with my art and my small group. But it was how I needed to get through it.

How did your diagnosis impact your life?

AS: On 1/21/15, I was told I have cancer. You need to live life slowly and be happy. Since day one of being able to work, I've always worked stressful jobs. I realized that I need to not be in such stressful situations and that life is fragile.

CS: Well that is an easy question to answer. For good or bad, I live everyday like I'm 20-years-old. I push myself hard. I guess the short answer is I live my life like there may not be another.



Was your art affected by your treatment?

AS: My artwork has changed. I no longer use my left eye, which is the eye I have always photographed with. I now use my right. I believe I see color differently now, compositionally, and I feel more attached to things when I photograph them. I use film again. I enjoy having to wait and be patient to see the image. I love being reminded of what pictures I've taken. It helps jog my memory too.

CS: I begged them to let me stay at work as I underwent treatment. I was denied. I have a small but very strong support circle. But I was alone most days. Just me and my art supplies. No rooms to decorate, no clients to interact with. It was at this point that my art and what I had to say became primary. I would not go so far as to say it was a gift in disguise, but I could still be decorating and creating true art for fun.

How best can friends and loved ones offer support during such a physical and emotional crisis?

AS: I've met so many people during this year. It's amazing what people will do when they know someone needs help or a friend. It's changed me too, to see that kindness. I am more kind myself.

CS: While I was sick, I did not want anyone to ask how I was. It is very delicate. Just offer someone the space to share what they choose, never push for more, and always leave the door open. Call and say, "Want to grab a coffee?" Nothing heavy. Let them lead the way. If they close the door, respect that, but knock again.

To see how Carol dealt with her diagnosis and treatment visually, visit her website www.carolscavotto.com and click on "MY TRIP TO THE DR."

Facing the Book

by David Amadio

The Facebook logo, consisting of the word "facebook" in white lowercase letters on a blue rectangular background.

I came to Facebook late. Ten years late.

Why the decade-long delay? For one, I didn't want the burden of managing a second self. A manic enough monitor of my first self, I

couldn't see investing time and effort into curating another. Also, I didn't want to be an accomplice to what film critic Steven Rea termed "the collective movement toward Me-ism," which has turned narcissism into a global pastime. I was reluctant to join the chorus of people chanting, "Look at me looking at myself," because I've always believed that real introspection takes place alone—not in the company of 2,000 friends.

Nevertheless, in the spring of 2014, at the urging of friends and colleagues, I put aside my lofty principles and created an account. Almost a year later I'm still an active member, but every day I flirt with the idea of quitting Facebook, turning my back on the bottomless scroll and all of its attendants. On a few occasions I've come very close to committing digital suicide, only to cave under the pressure of the Big Log Out. This may be something that all Facebook neophytes must go through: a period of doubt in which the user questions the value of the social network and his/her place within it. Judging from the "800 million people who use the site on an average day," this period doesn't last very long.

The former statistic comes from technology writer Alexis Madrigal's recent article in *The Atlantic*, "The Fall of Facebook." Despite the ominous title, and the ink he devotes to competitors Yik Yak and Snapchat, Madrigal concedes that Facebook will never fall. He begrudgingly refers to Facebook as "the most powerful information gatekeeper the world has ever known," as durable "as anything American capitalism is capable of producing." He attributes Facebook's longevity to a pair of contrary yet complementary vir-

tues: distributing vast torrents of general information while ensuring a "personalized" internet experience for its users.

As one of those users, I'm not here to challenge the efficacy of the machine, for I too have been dazzled by its magic. My question is this: Exactly what kind of information is Facebook distributing, and how much more of my free time can I afford to spend consuming it?

For the first month of my Facebook membership, I posted nothing but quotes from celebrated thinkers, luminaries such as Bertrand Russell, James Baldwin, Gandhi, and Montaigne. These posts—articulating some of my deepest-held beliefs about life on this planet—were largely ignored, receiving little to no attention from my virtual chums. Having struck out with the heavies, I decided to take a lighter, more generic approach. I shared an old picture of my date and I at a high school dance in 1990, catering to the weekly event known as #tbt. Within thirty minutes the picture had generated more likes and comments than all of my previous posts combined, not to mention a half-dozen friend requests from people I hadn't thought about in years. What did it matter that most of the attention was centered on my date's hair—the picture was the talk of the town, it was getting traction, it was *relevant*.

Or was it? By ignoring the quotes and chatting up the photo, my friends had chosen nostalgia over knowledge, amusement over enlightenment. They didn't want information; they wanted disinformation, which is an altogether different animal (though Facebook would have us believe they are one and the same). "Disinformation," says the media critic Neil Postman, "is irrelevant, fragmented, or superficial information—information that creates the illusion of knowing something but which in fact leads us away from knowing." Facebook is awash in disinformation. At its worst, the site resembles a river after a storm, fast and muddied and overflowing its banks with all manner of flotsam and jetsam: photos, links, videos, memes, songs, articles, jokes, cartoons. Notorious tributaries Upworthy and BuzzFeed produce the oiliest debris, churning out stories with titles like, "This Anti-Cop Activist Has A Change Of Heart After What These Cops Did," and "Their Dirty Dancing Routine Brought Their Wedding Guests Instantly To Their Feet Cheering." Packaged as legitimate news, these sensationalized articles can be relied on to give the reader

an emotional jolt, but little else. Like my soph hop picture, their popularity is based solely on their capacity to entertain, not their capacity to inform. One begins to see why Gandhi & Co. got snubbed.

I don't mean to sound like a wet blanket. I like fancy bullshit just as much as the next guy. But when does it end? When do people stop sharing *every other thing* they come across in their daily cyber-travels? When does Facebook cease to be a dumping ground for the middle- and lower-brain and mature into a place where frivolity is the exception and not the rule? It seems the only time Facebook users get serious is when Zuckerberg issues a decree which threatens the integrity of the site. Then they unite under the banner of self-preservation, rallying in defense of privacy and the right to free speech. But the effect of their protest is muted when it comes on the heels of "I just made the best pineapple salsa!" The boy who cried wolf loses his credibility because he lies too many times; the bored shepherds of Facebook have lost their credibility because they've posted too many times—too many rants about NFL officials, too many videos of old people dancing, too many pictures of their adorable kids. By the time they get around to saying something meaningful, it's far too late in the game for me to be taken in by it. I've already written them off as frauds.

And yet, for all its glaring defects, Facebook does have an upside. When the father of an old friend from Atlantic City passed away last summer, I drove down the shore to attend the funeral and reconnect with my homeboy, something I never would've done without Facebook—the place where I read the obituary. When one of my acquaintances landed in the hospital with a rare blood disease known as TTP, he used Facebook to organize an emergency blood drive, and the community responded by donating enough AB+ platelets to keep the man alive. And when I first joined the network, the welcome I received from the crowd of veterans waving me through the door was so hearty and so warm it felt like a homecoming. Amid the flux and fluff,

these moments remain. How many more of them I get to experience depends on my willingness to endure the dross, and I feel my strength is ebbing.

Alexis Madrigal writes, "making yourself legible enough to the Facebook machine that your posts are deemed 'relevant' is exhausting labor." I have worked, and put in overtime, pursuing and paying the short-lived attention that makes the widget hum. Even when I'm not "on" Facebook, my mind is straining toward it, appointing energy in the construction of future posts, the enhancement of my second self. And just as I feared he would, my first self has begun to suffer—always distracted by the lure of his laptop, chasing the ghost of that #tbt fluke. A lifelong enemy of disinformation and a fierce protector

“Making yourself legible enough to the Facebook machine that your posts are deemed ‘relevant’ is exhausting labor.”

of my personal space, perhaps I'm not cut out for Facebook "life," if one can even call it that. Go ahead and label me a crank for saying this, but life doesn't happen within the borders of a screen. Life happens outside the borders, in the

unnavigable here-and-now. Too large to fit on a Wall, too complex to be merely Liked, it is not meant to Feed but to test us, and those who are prepared to walk un-Friendly roads will be the first to close the Book and resume the task of living.

Wow. I should post that.



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