THE MUSE

Reflections, Memoirs, & Vignettes From Cornell University



VOLUME II * 2006

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VOLUME II **❖** 2006

Then let us linger on a while
Where wisdom flows; in friendship's smile;
And ling'ring, sing a Cornell song.
The world can wait; it's waited long.
We oft would hear before we go
The chimes at evening, sweet and low.
It's sad to go while voices swell
In praise of Thee, Cornell.

- Albert W. Smith

THE MUSE

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www.cornell-muse.com editor@cornell-muse.com

Photograph on back cover by Xi Wang. Generously supported in part by the John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines, the Department of Linguistics, the Bartels family, the Dean of Students, the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, and the Student Activity Fee.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

he Muse is now in its second year, and, though it might be overly optimistic of me, I like to think that the second year of a publication is like the second year of a relationship: if, once the idealization and the excitement of newness fades, you're still around, then you're in it for the long haul. (And if that is optimistic of me, am I being optimistic about publications or relationships?)

For those of you who missed the first issue, *The Muse* is a collection of essays and anecdotes written by graduating seniors. A looming commencement date, much like the fin de siècle, inspires introspection; one begins to take stock of the previous four years (give or take a year) with a combination of nostalgia, regret, and hopefully fondness. *The Muse* is an outlet for that introspection, encouraging Cornellians to sit down and collect their thoughts, and to share their wisdom with the community. The goal, ultimately, is to capture the real Cornell experience in all its many forms — which we hope will be valuable to prospective and current students and alumni alike.

What strikes me as most interesting about the following collection of essays is that, although they come from all corners of campus, from Engineers and English majors, there is one thing they all have in common: the aspects of Cornell that are most challenging are the aspects that inspire. The weather, the endless uphill battle to class, the nigh-unbearable workload, the difficulty of adjusting to a new place with new people — the gauntlet of Cornell assures that, though you may emerge victorious, you will not emerge unchanged. In this way, Cornell is a muse to us all.

Unforgettable

Sarah Brubaker



will never forget my first morning at Cornell because I wear it on my right ankle, a half-inch-long scar above the knobby bone.

I had been roused far too early that day by my brand new alarm clock after a long, tiring day of moving in, unpacking, registering in colossal Bartels, and taking part in icebreakers with the girls in my corridor. I hadn't known quite where I was when I opened my eyes, but I soon figured it out and headed toward the bathroom to shower. Despite many whispered claims that the mysterious Balch Hall is palatial (which it is), the restrooms are some of the worst I have seen on campus. I struggled to shave my legs — an easy, mundane task at home — in a white plastic box of a shower. My hand slipped, or my foot slipped, or my elbow banged into the shower wall for the twenty-third time; suddenly, a strip of flesh hung off the razor, and blood oozed from my ankle.

More than three years later, the scar is still there, every bit as deep and long as it was in August 2002. How could I forget, then, that I had to go listen to Hunter Rawlings' New Student Convocation speech at Barton Hall in less than an hour? I was so panicked that I left my glasses in the back pocket of my jeans after putting in my contacts, only to discover them two speeches later, at the end of the former Arts and Sciences dean's rant in Bailey Hall. We were introduced to Ithaca's miserably dreary weather that morning, all of us galumphing back to North Campus in a downpour. I shared my umbrella with a guy I haven't spoken to since; I sometimes wonder if he recalls that rainstorm when he sees me on campus.

Within a few short days after convocation, we were off—struggling to climb all those hills in the 15 minutes between classes, chasing down professors during office hours, and lugging books home from Olin Library for our first research papers. We thought 2006 was a long way off, and it was, really. So many weeks and months have passed since that rainy day in August that I'm sure most of us can hardly remember which writing seminar we took when, or whether or not we attended seven hockey games or 17.

At least that's how it is for me; most of my days at Cornell have blurred together, forming a whirl of generalities that has forced the little things to disappear from my memory. I remember lunches at the Ivy Room, yes, and endless reading assignments, but I have no recollection of what I at each day, or how many pages I read. Nevertheless, I will carry with me far more than my first morning because, without a doubt, Ithaca is a place, college is a time, and Cornell is an experience that no student can forget. The professors. The papers. The gorges. Pyramid Mall. McGraw Tower. College Avenue. Ho Plaza. The steps of Goldwin Smith. All of these — and more, of course — have formed permanent scars in my mind. But these are not defacing scars, scars that I try to conceal with a shirt collar, or with hair draped casually over one eye. They are badges of honor, almost, that I proudly display, like Ludwig Bemelmans' Madeline, who couldn't wait to show her appendicitis scar to the 11 other little girls in two straight lines.

I regret that many of my college experiences have already been buried irretrievably in my mind, but there are still so many memories left. Between all those lost lunches and pesky problem sets, I have endured unimaginable stress, discovered my independence, and learned about Africa, the Middle Ages, England's Romantic poets. I have juggled meetings, internships, and on-campus jobs. And I have succeeded beyond anything I could have ever hoped for that day I skinned my ankle in the shower. Many miles and years will someday separate me from

Cornell, but I will never forget my first morning here. I will never forget the way the bitter January wind sliced mercilessly through my jeans, numbing my shins. I will never forget the way the warm spring breeze ruffled my skirt as I sat at the top of the Slope, gazing contemplatively at Cayuga Lake. I will never forget the way it felt to conquer an Ivy League exam (or to fail one). And I will never forget the way the raindrops hung off A.D. White's green shoe, like a strand of silvery pearls, strung along one by one. ❖

SNOW GLOBE Cameron Cooper

here is something about the Arts Quad at night. A quiet energy that connects you to the lofty old black trees, the inky night-haze of the air, the pinpricks of yellow light from the windows of Olin, where everyone else is

studying, just like you have been and will be — the white face of the Clocktower which seems to *see* you, especially at night. In the silence and the closeness under the trees, the whole vast world is there. You are yourself and part of something bigger than yourself, the way you can sit on the stone bench at the top of the Slope and look out over the lake and know that others before you have sat and looked, with much the same feeling. The way you can burst through the doors of Sage Chapel on an airy night, under the fresh pink buds of the trees, having shared something, music, with all those other people — something still wholly and resolutely yours, on your way back to North or West or Collegetown.

One night freshman year I was walking back to North Campus from the Straight. I think it snowed more that winter than any of the others. My jeans were crusted with that sloppy, denimclimbing salt, and big, cartoonish flakes covered my hair and eyelashes and coat. The ground hid under mounds of icehardened snow, with already a fresh inch or so on top. I made my way through the Arts Quad, under the trees, with Sibley to my left and Rand up ahead, home still over the bridge, where I'd look down into the gorge at icicles as long as I am tall. The sky was white and overcast, muted, like the ground, and as silent passersby shuffled and trudged along, like me, I felt in that moment as if I were inside a snow globe, and I knew it was all right here, my whole world. �

FOUR Asya Kleyn

One.

t was past midnight and I was packing. The year was finally over and it was time to sweep up the history it left on paper, leaving the room as clean and bare as it had been before me. This was odd in a hall like Balch – the funny old chandeliers and empty fireplaces were still there, and the windows shone with grids of little glass squares instead of modern full panes. Yet the students that passed through the hall left not a trace in its rooms. When I moved in, I could only guess who had come before me. Soon no one would know that I had lived here, either.

For now, though, the packing was going slowly. Although I wished to burn old notebooks in a bonfire and dance around it happily, there were the notes that could come in handy later, the random *Daily Sun* articles that had struck a chord, the doodles I just had to keep ... By two in the morning I was still awake, and so hungry I had to go looking for a vending machine even though I'd never seen one in Balch. Perhaps it was hiding in the depths of the basement?

Twenty minutes later, I had a very cold bottle in my hands and was ready to go back to packing. The door at the side of the staircase was ajar for some reason. Rain was rustling invitingly outside, and I could swear there was a perfume wafting through the air. Work could wait.

Outside, the rain was warm. The sky was a muted pumpkin orange. And flanking the door on both sides were two lilacs in

bloom, their flowers almost glowing, giving off their inimitable scent. Their leaves shone wetly and nodded a little in tune with the rain. For a while, I did not want to go home after all.

Two.

Class of '26 Hall was a nice place to live. Tiny and plain, it had no claims to fame, but there was something very home-like about it. It was small enough to get to know most of its residents at least a little. For another thing, it was much nicer to look out from it than in. Students whose windows faced east would be alerted to the new day after an all-nighter by a blue glow spreading across the sky, a rousing chorus of crows, and then an even more rousing ringing from the chimes. From the west windows, a stunning view of Ithaca lay like a living map with the streets drawn in traffic lights and streetlamps.

More than the Slope separated life on West Campus from the rest of the world. There was something different about it. When I try to define it, many little things float through my mind. Someone had decorated the ceiling of my room with glow-in-the-dark stars. One day an irate RA called our floor together to demand that whoever stole all of the boys' shower curtains return them. After a thick snowfall, a red canoe appeared in a neighboring tree. In May, someone hung out flyers looking for a lost golden ring (of sentimental value) with writing on it if you warm it up.

One day I saw a toddler and a squirrel play hide-and-seek. They were going in circles around a stone pillar. The squirrel peeked around a corner until it just saw the child, and then it raced a little further around. Then the boy would turn in the other direction, but the squirrel was still one step ahead. All three of us were enjoying ourselves. In a place that was never predictable, even the usual indifference between humans and squirrels could not be taken for granted.

Three.

When I was a high school senior visiting Ithaca, my mom and I met another girl and her mother in the Cascadilla gorge. The girl was a Cornell senior, but she had never been to the gorge before. So having seen the gorge and the Plantations by junior year, I was rather proud of myself. Then a friend decided to take a few of us for a walk to Farmers' Market. I didn't know there was a market! For that matter, I had never seen any of the places he led us past — Ithaca Falls, the shore of Cayuga Lake, the boat canal ... Real life had turned out to be strikingly like classes — no matter how much you thought you knew, there would always be someone to learn from!

Four.

Being an engineer can take you to interesting places. In the autumn, one of my classes went sampling a creek in knee-high rubber boots. The boots were nice, but they were shorter than the water was deep. When this was discovered, half the class froze where they stood and the rest ended up pouring bucketfuls of water from those lovely boots onto the shore. By winter, we had to "appoint" someone to be an umbrella holder during experiments.

But the most unforgettable image in my mind is the sight of two dozen would-be engineers rushing a dam. The dam was a monster. It was shaped like a gigantic bowl. Inside, it had enough room for four football fields. Its steep walls, covered in thick grass, were the height of the Slope and McGraw Tower put together. Everyone scrambled up the walls, some of us feeling muscles we didn't know we had. It looked a little like a mass battle scene out of *Braveheart*. Then we stood on top of the dam and faced the other side. Before us lay an equally steep slope we were about to descend. The emerald bowl of the dam lay behind us nearly empty, and to us that actually made sense. ❖

THE WALK OF SHAME FOR OVERACHIEVERS Kimberly Biason



alking home from the library between 3:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m. is kind of like the Walk of Shame, but not.

Instead of a purse, you have a backpack the size of a small child. Hot top and heels? Playa please, you're rolling in sweats and flip flops. The Quintessential Party Girl contrasts with Big Bad Cornell Nerd. Instead of getting buzzed and hooking up, you were making sweet, sweet love to your textbook.

There are, however, some similarities. You're still wearing the same clothes you put on 12 hours earlier. You're walking home. There's no one around. And, above all, there's shame. Yes, friends, *shame*. Because the few who do see you are all thinking the same thing: "Haha ... Wow, that sucks."

Welcome to the Walk of Shame for Overachievers. �

BIG RED EMBARRASSMENTS

What Was Your Most Humiliating Moment at Cornell?

- ❖ My most embarrassing moment at Cornell was dropping my tray at RPU. Everyone makes a loud roar and looks over at you.
- ❖ Incorporating deep vein thrombosis into a misguided pick-up line.
- ❖ Debating in front of a couple hundred students on North Campus ... and completely blanking in the middle of an argument.
 - ❖ Arriving five minutes late to my 2:55 every single time.
- ❖ Kissing a complete stranger in the Uris stacks. It wasn't embarrassing at the time, but it is now, in a cringe-inducing "Why did I *do* that?" kind of way.
 - ❖ Walking into a wall in Jansen's.
- ❖ I gave a presentation to my history seminar and used my laptop to display my visual aids forgetting that I'd set its screensaver to scroll a cutesy romantic message to my girlfriend. For a tenth of a second, I actually thought everyone was laughing about the chief exports of Kazakhstan.
 - ❖ Probably falling somewhere.
- ❖ My most embarassing moment at Cornell was probably the time I was hooking up with a girl and then noticed there was blood all over her face. I apparently had a nosebleed and was too stoned to realize until it was way too late.

- ❖ I got locked out of my own house three times.
- ❖ Admitting that I had no interest in going to law school after going through the entire application process.
- ❖ Either getting stuck in a tree on the Arts Quad, or rolling down the Slope in front of a tour group.
- ❖ I actually can't think of any extremely embarrassing moments at Cornell except when I make really silly mistakes with my English.
- ❖ I fell down the icy front steps of Rockefeller; I would've fallen down the entire flight if three strangers hadn't caught me by the arms.
- Saying "hi" to my coworker, Grant, for a solid three months before he told me his name was actually Peter.
- ❖ Walking into the boys' bathroom on the first floor of Alice Cook thinking it was the girls'.

Doing it again. And making full use of the facilities.

They really need to start putting urinals in those things.

ALL THESE PLACES HAVE THEIR MOMENTS Melissa Medoway

was wholly unprepared for college. I blame my parents. They never even sent me to camp. And then suddenly they were dropping me off in a new place, with new people — people I did not know, and people who, as far as I could tell, I did not like. I felt like my little brother who, upon arriving for his first day of preschool and hastily surveying the crowd of unfamiliar children, declared, "I don't like any of these kids," and stalked out of the classroom. Unfortunately, I was not four, and despite my protestations my parents would not let me leave.

College had seemed, in the abstract, like a good idea. Boy, was I wrong. Who the hell were these people? Why did they all seem so happy? Didn't they understand how horrible all of this was? Standing on the Arts Quad I still felt like that awkward 16- year-old who had opened the Cornell brochure and dreamed about one day being a sun-tanned, smiling college student who read weighty novels under dignified Oak trees — and here I was, in all my glory, very alone and very scared.

Then, five hours into my first day of college, I met Jen. We sat next to each other in the last row of Kennedy Auditorium during the College of Human Ecology's convocation. She was (or at least appeared to be) one of those happy kids, rationally listening as a cappella groups warmly welcomed her to Cornell. I sat and tried to stop crying and ended up gagging. She handed me a tissue.

Later that week, I met Simmie in our Freshman Writing Seminar. When Professor Jones asked who played sports, we were the only females to raise our hands. We joined the Gymnastics Club together. I met Elise in an introductory Human Development class. She would always arrive breathless, having run from her previous class, and then stumble into the seat next to mine in the front row. For a few weeks we made idle chitchat. Then Elise shut her arm in a folding desk. I showed her the matching blue bruise on the inside of my right arm, and we were friends.

* * *

In the spring of my junior year I went abroad to Copenhagen, Denmark — home of Legos, the Little Mermaid, and rampant xenophobia. I spent my days eating copious amounts of herring and getting to know the Danes, which basically involved me attempting to speak Danish and them pointing and laughing. Surprisingly, I adjusted easily to life abroad. I learned to enjoy eating fatty foods, gagging when I spoke (an unfortunate side effect of the quite guttural Danish language), and relaxing for three hours after a meal. I felt as at home as I could feel in a blonde-haired, blue-eyed, Danish-speaking country without dying my hair, getting colored contacts, and shoving a potato in my mouth before speaking.

In March, Simmie, Jen, and Elise came to visit. We all crammed into my tiny room, catching up on all of the events that had transpired over the past two months. And we all laughed until we were nearly sick to our stomachs.

In the days that followed, Jen would leave for Ireland, Simmie would head back to Cornell, and Elise would catch a particularly virulent strain of what we termed "The Danish Flu." They were only able to stay for one week, and then they were gone again.

* * *

When I set about writing this essay, I tried desperately to wrap all of my Cornell experiences into a neat little, Ghandi-quoting package. I wish I could distill college into a single quote or adage, but I can't. Instead, for me at least, college was a moment, that one moment, when my friends and I were curled up in an apartment in Denmark. That moment is why I was able to adjust to life three thousand miles from anyone I knew. And that moment is why I know that today and ten years from now we will all be okay. Because it's much easier to enter the world knowing that somewhere you are at home. And because someday, 50 years down the road, we will all gather at someone's house for some reason, and we will have another moment where we laugh until our sides hurt and know, inexplicably, that everything will be okay. ❖

Unfinished Business

Jim Shliferstein



ith a terrible sense of dismay, regret, and indeed loss, I am realizing that four years was only enough time to do half the things on my list.

Every year, *The Sun* compiles a list of the experiences that the year's graduating seniors feel every Cornellian should make a point of enjoying.

"Urinate on the law school!" they advise, enthusiastically.
"Streak across the Arts Quad!" "Play tag in the rare-books library!" At first, I wasn't too upset to calculate that I had only tried 55 of their 161 suggestions, because it turns out that the best and brightest of our generation are psychotic morons.

But I have to admit that all those empty checkboxes are really starting to bother me. Not that I have any special hankering to "milk a cow!" or "ski to class!" — but I don't want to feel like I missed out on any of the opportunities and adventures and nuggets of wisdom that Cornell offered us, and I'm beginning to feel exactly that.

It is actually painful to tally up the projects I've left incomplete. There's the entire Western canon, aging on my dormitory shelf, a bookmark stuck in each volume to mark the point at which *Veronica Mars* suddenly seemed more appealing than finishing St. Augustine's *Confessions*.

... The eleven mailing lists I've been on since freshman year — from argentineliberation-L to zeppomarxfans-L — all of which

I once expected would become major social outlets, but none of whose meetings I've ever attended.

... My final transcript, a long string of GOVT's and ECON's and HIST's and PHIL's without a single PSYCH or ANTHR or SOCI or ENGL, to say nothing of an ARCH or a MIL SCI or a CS.

... Even the 200 Big Red Bucks still left over in my account from last semester, which in four days either will revert to the monopolists from whom I bought them, or will be transformed in a last-minute panic into dozens of bags of lime-flavored corn chips.

... Which of course I will also fail to finish.

Sometimes I eavesdrop enviously on freshmen, enjoying May's perfect warmth on an Arts Quad that they'll have three more years to frequent. Watching them is poignant to the point of being bitter. I catch myself screaming silent prayers to the statue of Ezra Cornell: "I've got unfinished business! I'm not ready to go! Let me stay a little longer." But his bronze face is completely unmoved.

Lousy overglorified telegraph repairman.

So, ready or not, they're Big-Red-Booting us out of the dorms in three weeks. The question tugs at my brainstem and nags me when I want to sleep: *I only had one shot. Did I miss my chance to blow? This opportunity came once in a lifetime, yo!* (Wait. That's not my subconscious. It's the idiot's stereo next door.)

The answer, when it comes, is not especially cheering: yes, I wasted an opportunity. I wasted plenty. Cornell offers too many opportunities, both valuable ones and stupid ones, for any four-year visitor to take advantage of all of them.

Not that that helps much at all.

The only closure I can find comes when I wonder if maybe this horrible irresolution, this half-panicked mix of anticlimax and unfulfillment, isn't actually part of the purpose of college. If Cornell had instead left me with a sense of conclusive accomplishment, would I really be well-served?

Heck, I know people who have that sense of conclusive accomplishment, and I don't like them: the self-satisfied alumnus who, having skimmed Henry Adams and William James, believes he now "understands enough" of what academia has to offer, and is prepared to move on to bigger and better things. The haughty haute couture hottie who, having tried Prada and Pabst, thinks at 22 that she's wrung the last drops of high culture from the College Experience, and can now rest on her cultural Ralph Laurels and preen her way to trophy wifedom. People like that might as well never have come here.

They're fools if they think they're already done gettin' civilized. Cornell has only been a brief advertisement for the civilized life. It gave us a chance to taste intellectualism, to sample from culture, and to try our hands at living and leading effectively. It is up to us to ensure that those experiences are not wasted.

Some of us will waste Cornell. They will be the ones who split their time between fulfilling family lives and high-paying jobs. For them, Cornell will have been nothing but an appetizer for life — vocational training before a career — a preview to endure before moving on to the feature attraction. If they're satisfied that they're done learning, it's because they *are* done learning.

But the rest of us will use Cornell well. We, too, will split our time between fulfilling family lives and high-paying jobs — but, inspired by memories of HIST and GOVT, we'll also manage to shoehorn in occasional chapters of Herodotus and Holmes; or we'll spend one of the remaining 3,500 weeks of our respective lives on autodidactic ENGR; or we'll find the time to subscribe

to an academic journal or two. We'll leave Cornell, but only physically.

When I reflect on my departure in that light, it doesn't bother me so much that I'm leaving Cornell without having completed all the things I'd wanted to get out of it. Cornell is not Shanghai, but Manila: we've conquered it, all right, but only as a staging ground for the larger campaign.

The campaign continues today. The campaign may have no end.

Good! Thank God for unfinished business. I hope I never feel done. \clubsuit

FEBRUARY THAW Josh Katz



ear-death experiences are always a good time. That's what I thought as I sat with three of my friends at The Chapter House around twilight on the last day of February. Under normal Ithaca circumstances,

a blizzard wouldn't be anything special, but this had been a fairly easy winter — "February thaw," as my roommate from Binghamton so unscientifically put it. That day, Ithaca regained its identity once more, and the snow came down in droves.

I sipped my beer, something like Dark Dead Black Forest Heavy Ale, and ruminated. Usually when I went to the Chapter House I'd order my customary fruity Apricot Wheat — light, and doesn't taste much like beer. It's like drinking a Juicy-Juice, and that's what I liked about it. But now, I needed something that would put meat on my bones, as the old saying goes.

The four of us dug our dirty hands into that "never-been-washed" looking bowl of popcorn, and watched the Williams slope from our table. We were sadistically entertained by watching the cars try to make it either up or down the hill. Someone would drive by, stop right before the slope, ponder whether he or she should take the risk, and then usually back off.

But one brave soul drove up, took a look at the slope, and decided to make the trek up the hill in his truck. The truck made it up the slope a few feet, and then took a slight skid. It trudged on, progressing a few more feet before it fell into a dangerous spin, almost putting the driver's side door perpendicular to the street. That's when all of us safely nestled in the Chapter House eating

our popcorn let out a simultaneous gasp. That's when the driver must have had an epiphany: "Mayday, Mayday!"

The safety of the Williams parking lot was to his immediate left. He could retreat now: leave the car in the lot, and walk wherever he had to go. He began to make the turn, and then his back tires got stuck in the snow. Changing his mind again, he decided the best thing to do was give up his chances at the parking lot and once again head for the top of the hill. In the Chapter House, we all screamed "No!" and pleaded for him to turn back, to the consternation of the other drinkers at the bar. The driver jammed on the accelerator and vigorously fiddled with the wheel, until, yes, finally, he was free. And then he went into a skid. The car lost complete control. The car started descending back down the hill, despite his frantic acceleration.

And then something caught. He slowly began plodding back up the hill, skidding to the left and to the right, up, and up, and up. "Go, go, go!" we all yelled. And finally, yes, he had made it to the top! The car turned right, and disappeared from our sight.

Maybe I misinterpreted our reaction during this incident. Yes, we were concerned as we sat comfortably in the bar. I'm sure we were all deeply worried that anyone would get hurt. But at the same time, we were enjoying this. We were thoroughly entertained. And we were horrible individuals.

The irony of this story is that the *same thing* had just happened to me not one hour earlier. In a classic stunt of idiocy, I drove my friend to the Statler to drop off his test. "The roads are fine," he said. Well, there was certainly some skidding on the way there, and that was before the roads got bad. The trip back was much worse. Imagine for a second driving down Eddy Street, and then beginning to turn right onto Buffalo. Now imagine gazing down the steepness of Buffalo, your only way home except for the even steeper Williams. The street is buried under inches snow, and all

you can see is "down" for about a mile. And your car has already been skidding all over the place.

To make matters worse, my mother had sent me an omen of an instant message the night before the blizzard saying, "Don't drive tomorrow, because we never got you those snow tires." The three of us in the car crossed our fingers and prayed to every god we could think of.

I never let my foot off of the brake the entire time we descended. The car started out moving slowly, and then the tires stopped catching. The brake pedal started bouncing up and down under my foot; I had no control over it anymore. I did my best to offset any skidding and keep the direction of the car straight, but it wasn't really in my hands. And then we gained speed. The car went faster, and faster ... and faster, as my feet rattled with the brake, and as my friend sitting shotgun whispered in the most consoling voice possible, "Oh God, Oh God."

We tumbled through the intersection at Stewart, and luckily there were no cars in front of me for some distance. I tried to stop for my street, but the car had too much momentum and we barreled past it. Eventually, I managed to slow down the car enough to make a left turn two streets later. After we took our share of deep breaths, I made the slowest K-turn of all time and retraced my steps uphill on Buffalo.

I was able to make a left into my small street now, but I got stuck in the snow at the entrance. I jammed on the accelerator, but the tires only threw snow up into the air. We had no shovel, so my friends had to get out of the car and clear the snow from my tires with their hands — and they had to scoop quickly, because I was still partly sticking out onto Buffalo where cars were potentially hurtling downhill and couldn't stop. As my friends cleared the snow, I was able to inch my way into the street. After about 15 minutes, I had parked. We were safe.

Someone said, "I need a beer." We all looked at each other and agreed. We walked over to the Chapter House, which was around the corner from our house, and met another friend there. I looked at the Apricot Wheat on the board, and decided to try something new. We sat down by the window, ate popcorn, and watched and laughed as the cars struggled to make it up the slope. ❖

RIDING HOME FROM A GLEE CLUB PERFORMANCE OF VERDI'S REQUIEM IN MASSACHUSETTS

Matthew E. Crooke

hen I get back to Cornell, I'll have the long list of things to do: laundry, cleanup from Friday night, unpacking from the weekend at Holyoke, and of course, two articles to read, a paper to ponder,

e-mail, some *Confessions* and perhaps a novel. When I get back, I will also tell myself that I must nownotlater sit down and write this very reflection, some clever anecdote or chosen observation, summing up a way of life for the last four years. I'll sit down snug in a cushioned chair in an old room of a rented house. For three years I've escaped the dorms. I find their hard floors of tile or carpet either too clean or too dirty. I will sit with my feet on my old wood floor, and compose a few needed lines. Among the riff-raff details I'll avoid nostalgia like a person with bad breath. Inevitably, my sentences will constrict in convolutions, coils of coordinate clauses and scale after shiny scale of listed Things. I think it is safe to say I've spent four years trying to learn how to be a student, how to study, how to write, and how to find a reason for curiosity. None of these exertions have come into final fruition, but the fallout has felt occasionally satisfying, frequently wearing. As a voice in the now urges the memory to collective, to speak in unisons across counted days of scratch-polished wood floors, slushing boots and rock salt, eroded sidewalk and bitter wind, the fine smell of old books in the stacks leaps to the front, suddenly, like wandering through that ancient pine forest in the hills of Damascus, Pennsylvania.

It was summer once, when we were smaller, and the family vacation took a detour to the dairy my great grandfather ran in the

'40s, a handful of buildings on a meadowed grade sloping down under a smear of July blue. We walked, my brothers, parents, and I, among the skeletons of chicken coops, peered up into the yawning door of tired oak planks that hung at the summit of the barnhill, and made our way leisurely to the grove of pines bordering the old pasture. They were white pines, thick, and taller than I'd ever known, grown in so close that neither light nor wind could penetrate the canopy to much affect. It was still. Quiet. Nearly dark in the middle of the afternoon. The ground at our feet was a perfect, numberless infinity of dead needles. They make a soft crunch under your worn sneakers. And the smell that rises, only from the disturbance you make, to mingle its essence of the dead with the essence of the bleeding sap hanging slightly higher, at eye level — where the true green points stand guard year round — is a youth and a morbidity at once; the dead air and the visceral growth together are not pine, not Christmas, no, but the shudder in my memory of the stacks in Olin Library, where religion and philosophy tomes are call number group BS, are perhaps insignificant in their clerked singularity, stashed in my school bag; but here, as in the forest, in row upon glorious row, they lie engulfed and engulfing in their power, their timelessness: the hands of generations, in black and white, touching them, leaving their bits of essence and fading away themselves, in their wholeness enriched with the contents of knowledge, in their fragments, in their frailty, their marks left without meaning to, they are rushing, you and I, up from this Hill, treading out from that forest, into the lives of ones we will never know.

Perhaps a reflection, written in the failed afternoon glimmer, that cavity of time when nothing intellectual seems to move forward, is not the best thing for me. I have set down here my task for the evening's writing in the afternoon. A failure — yet somehow relieving to know, like most things at Cornell, it is almost done. The flow ebbs to a drip, my curiosity chomps on stale, empty air like only the teeth left over for Shel Silverstein's Hungry Mungry, whom all the world was not enough to satisfy.

But the world is still there — here in this bus, back in that Springfield concert hall, at Cornell in the stacks, in all the towns I pass by. When I leave school it will be another vacuous departure unmerited of reflecting. It will reflect nothing more than the spin and cleavage I impose. At long last Cornell, my alma mater, will fall away, and find a way inside my memory, like the Damascus forest smell, only to be jolted up later, lovingly, popping into place, when the next best creativity demands its experience, its expression. �

THE GREAT MOONBUGGY RACE

Simmie Berman

ometime sophomore year I decided it was time to enhance my engineering education with some practical hands-on experience. Who cared if I was taking five classes and didn't really have time? Who cared if it resulted in my friends bringing me "lap-food" (food stolen from the dining halls by hiding it in one's lap before wrapping it in a napkin and stashing it in a pocket)? I was going to get down and dirty and be a real engineer.

So I did what any sensible engineer would do: I joined a project team. I liked space, so I chose the Moonbuggy Team. Our goal was to design and build a man-powered vehicle that we would race at the Great Moonbuggy Race at the NASA center in Huntsville, Alabama. Seven of us worked day and night for seven months in preparation for the big race ...

It's two days before the race, and we're sitting in Emerson machine shop with a buggy in pieces. In 48 hours we are supposed to be sitting at the starting line of the race in Alabama. Whoops. We have been working almost nonstop for the last two days. Our buggy is barely functioning, and after a number of trial runs, we're working out the last few kinks. At one in the afternoon, it's my job to cut sheet metal. Cutting sheet metal involves stomping on a giant pedal, and apparently one shouldn't put her foot underneath this giant pedal before stomping down on it. This is one fact that I clearly was not aware of, because I wind up crushing my own toe. After a quick trip to Gannett and a less than pleasant experience with a small drill, the pressure and the pain in my toe has subsided.

By five in the afternoon, we still have a ways to go. Time is running out. We still have a 20-hour drive and just over 36 hours until race time. At 9 p.m., I call my friend to have her bring me a snack:

"Hey, Melissa."
"Hey, Simmie, are you in Alabama?"
"I'm in Rhodes Hall."

Shortly after midnight, we are getting desperate. We decide to finally leave Ithaca. We pack up the buggy and we're off ... to a very slow start. After three days without sleep, our drivers are having trouble keeping their heads up and their eyes open. We drive through New York, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee, and finally enter Alabama. It takes 20 hours and we're exhausted — but we still have work to do. On the upside, it's warm.

Finally, it's race day! We pull up to the Marshall Space Flight Center, surrounded by rockets and space shuttles. It's hard to believe after the hundreds of hours of work we put in, it all comes down to a few minutes. The winner is determined by three parts: our buggy must fit into a four-foot cube, we have to be able to carry it 20 feet, and our combined assembly and race time is recorded. We breeze through the first two requirements, but the last part trips us up a bit. The assembly time takes longer than expected, but we figure we can make it up during the race.

The race course is a simulated lunar surface. For our purposes, a simulated lunar surface consists of hills, bumps, craters, and other obstacles created out of gravel. Surprisingly, our buggy makes it through the course fairly well. My legs, not as much. By the end of the race I can hardly walk, but it only takes us four minutes and 11 seconds, which is good enough for first place. We have one more chance to fine-tune our buggy and improve our race time.

By the time the second race rolls around, we are ready. We know the course, we know how to communicate with one another, and we know we can do better. Most buggies don't make it through the first race, and fewer make it through the second. Luck was on our side and we completed our second race while improving our time.

After a long day, we finally get the results. Our time of 3:33 minutes is good enough for second place! We beat over 30 teams from around the world, but we are just happy to leave in one piece and with a nice tan.

The last three days have been a blur, but we still have the ride back. Bright and early Sunday morning, we are packed up and ready to go. Most of us are stumbling around in a sleep-deprived stupor and are anxious to be back in Ithaca. Only a 20-hour drive and five states stand between us and the comfort of our beds. Our ride begins uneventfully ... until we reach Pennsylvania. After the warm weather and southern sun, we had completely forgotten that up north it might still be winter. 16 hours into our drive we hit a giant ice storm. Traffic is stopped, cars and trucks are on the side of the road, and we're sitting in a cold car in t-shirts. By 2 a.m., we have been sitting on the icy interstate for four hours. It takes another two and a half before traffic starts moving again. After 26 hours, at noon on Monday, we finally arrive at Cornell. We are exhausted, dirty, and filled with relief and satisfaction.

I joined the Moonbuggy Team to get experience as an engineer, but gained more than a supplement to my coursework. Over the course of seven months, I learned about teamwork, hard work, and the satisfaction of a job well done. Two years later, I look back at those four days in April and realize it was then that I finally knew I wanted to be a Cornell engineer. ❖

CAMPUS METAMORPHOSES

If You Could Be Any Part of Cornell's Campus, What Would You Be and Why?

- ❖ I would be a beam in Sage Chapel so I could listen to lots of music.
- ❖ One of the fistulated cows, because then everyone could see my inner beauty.
- ❖ Actually, I would most like to be the sunshine *above* campus, because it makes everyone on campus extremely happy.
 - ❖ The libraries; they see so much of what goes on at Cornell.
- ❖ The age-worn bench at the top of Libe Slope engraved with these words: "To Those Who Shall Sit Here Rejoicing To Those Who Shall Sit Here Mourning Sympathy And Greetings So Have We Done In Our Day."
 - ❖ I would be Redbud Woods. Son of a bitch ...
- ❖ Ho Plaza, because of the amount of activity that goes on there.
- ❖ The bitter, vengeful ghost of Boardman Hall. Because I imagine that both of us feel equally strongly about ridding the campus of its 1960s-era modernist abominations.
- ❖ The stacks, because lots of people make out there. I hope to God I'm not wrong.
- ❖ The part of Uris facing the Slope, because I'd always have a great view.

- ❖ The Lynah Zamboni: though recently replaced with a spiffy new red truck, the old original was really the Chariot of the Gods at Cornell.
- ❖ The Clocktower chimes, because then everyone would have to listen to me, whether they wanted to or not.
- ❖ I would be Libe Slope. Be it Movies on the Slope during orientation, sledding on the Slope during the winter, or Slope Day, anything and everything Cornell happens on the Slope.
- ❖ The Dairy Bar, because what is better than ice cream all the time?
- ❖ I would be the Clocktower. What is it, like 800 inches? And hard all the time ... I just can't compete with that right now.
- ❖ I would be the huge oak tree on the southwest corner of the Slope, because it's beautiful.
- ❖ I would be the ghost or spirit that roams in the McGraw Clocktower and Uris Library, because then I could get a great view of the school campus and Cayuga Lake during fine weather, see what students are up to, and retreat into the stacks to read when nothing else interesting is going on.

Notes From the Underground Xi Wang

12 May 2005 02:25:00

The scientist

t's two in the morning and I'm crammed into the hot, suffocating basement of Uris Library with 60 other kids. It's a breathing, living underground. I promised myself sophomore year I would never sink so low as to step foot in this place again, but I guess principles must be compromised when you're a desperate college student. College is like a cult.

Tomorrow Today is the first day of finals. People must really relish the intense atmosphere, because why else would you want to imprison yourself with a few dozen zombies in the God-awful hours of the morning, cramming a whole semester's worth of information just so you can forget half of it after today?

Earlier, at midnight, a group of selfless, concerned students dressed in black robes and wearing white masks streaked (unfortunately — or maybe thankfully — not nude) through Olin, screaming "good luck" and pelting people with candy. The trajectory angle of the release of candy from their hands indicates to me that they were trying to cause people enough brain damage to alleviate some pain. And if they got really lucky, they might have even caused a concussion or two so that a few injured souls would be spared their exams.

Yes, I admire the upstanding morale of college students during finals week.

18 May 2005 19:14:00

Walking back to my desk at Olin Library earlier, the realization finally sunk in. Things seem empty, perhaps because there are only two more days of finals left and students have already started going home. There is still a shuffle of people here. But the library is empty.

All day I have been working on my last final paper, which is due tomorrow. There really is no time to think or sleep — and really, not that much has been budgeted for eating either. This is probably one of the most important papers I have had to write, because of the number of things that hinge on it. And until now I've exerted an amazing amount of self-control. Enough to surprise myself. I am sitting at a desk staring off — something I never consciously allow myself to do, but this time I'm willing it — and trying to reconcile a void I can feel but cannot yet reach. Just enough reconciliation so that I can put it off until tomorrow, after my paper has been turned in. Yes, tomorrow. I pull out my headphones and pull up U2, whom I haven't listened to in over two months.

Walk on, walk on
What you got they can't steal it
No they can't even feel it
Walk on, walk on
Stay safe tonight

It describes in perfect detail the things I remember feeling and the things that I now feel I can't leave behind. But I know I will have to, once again.

I realize there is something silly about idealizing someone so much that you slowly, unconsciously begin to invest in them emotionally. But it doesn't make the feeling less legitimate. It's not about how good he is or what he does or does not do, but

how much I've allowed someone to endear himself to me. The way one allows oneself to be attached to a place when there is no place to call home, the way one tries to be tied to it — anchored somewhere.

04 November 2005

04:22:00

Telling Tales

I've been studying in the quiet and vacant depths of Uris Library. As I got up to go to the bathroom, I took a moment to gaze into the darkness of the autumnal Ithaca night. Scattered and dim, the lights of the city flickered beyond the blackness of the Slope. And as I leaned closer to stare through my own dim reflection against the brightness of the lights of the room behind me, I saw two deer grazing no more than eight feet away from the glass. Wow. I think I'm finally realizing that I really like living in a place where things fall upon you, or perhaps you upon them. It makes life seem intensely happenstance and whimsical. This particular incident recalls a certain feeling of anticipation - a mixture of tranquility and excitement - that I felt one night in Yosemite this past summer as I sat in complete blackness: surrounded by endless miles of wood and park, encapsulated overhead by a dome of endless stars. It was then, in the complete absence of light, that I felt nature's beauty and grandeur of the most. In a different way, what is equally inspiring about this campus is that the things which fall upon you are both of nature and of human interaction. And during these strange moments of recognition of either the strange or the familiar, there is a singular moment of shock, dread, and rapture when you realize that it is perhaps both. What is so frightening about the heimlich — the 'unheimlich'? And what was it in the Mariner's glittering eye?

The Cocktail Lounge is a strange type of homecoming. ❖

STAR TREK Daniel Nelson

npacking my things on move-in day freshman year, I was struck by what I suspected would be one of the most difficult things for me (and I suspect nearly all freshmen): trying to define myself as a distinct

individual, while fitting comfortably into multiple social circles. My first night at college, I observed — with great trepidation — large groups of freshman congregating in groups and heading off to Collegetown for what I presumed was collective debauchery. This worried me, because I saw these individuals already coalescing into larger social groups. I felt that my own introverted personality and distaste for alcohol would prohibit me from climbing out of the purgatory of awkward half-friendships that was orientation week. Of course, in retrospect, what I was feeling was silly to say the least. I realize now that everyone in those large groups of freshmen was probably just as apprehensive about making friends and beginning a collegiate process of self-discovery as I was. Indeed, they probably huddled in groups because of their fear.

Still, at the time, I was preoccupied with somehow fitting in, and was becoming worried that my unabashedly dorky personality would prove to be a hurdle. After orientation week, classes started and I became momentarily distracted by the rush of comings and goings that the beginning of the fall semester brings. During this time, I started taking my Freshman Writing Seminar, a comparative literature course analyzing *Star Trek* as a cultural medium. It was a guilty pleasure for me; I had watched *Star Trek* since I was very young and probably still have a far more encyclopedic knowledge of the show than I would like to admit.

From the very first class session it was clear that my classmates shared at least that much in common with me.

The most striking thing about the group of us was that we were utterly without the presence of females. Actually, that's not entirely true. Our teacher was a woman and on the first day there was one girl in the class who sheepishly admitted that she had signed up for the course solely to accommodate her equestrian schedule. After commenting that she didn't realize there was a difference between Star Wars and Star Trek, she received the collective death stares of everyone else in our class and was never heard from again. The stereotypical male dominance in a course on Star Trek was only a mere hint of what kind of individuals that classroom contained. There was the guy who had the technical blueprints of the Enterprise "just in case." There was the guy who had a Starfleet uniform in his closet, ready to go for when a Star Trek movie came out. Yet another admitted to once being fluent in Klingon, although he would hastily add that he had forgotten all of it.

However, for all their absurd, individual eccentricities, these people were totally reaffirming of my own personality. On the one hand, for once, here was a group of guys who made me feel hip and cool by their mere presence (no small feat). Yet, at the same time their own zaniness allowed my idiosyncrasies to blossom. Although I lacked some of the more stunning oddities that some individuals in that class possessed, I certainly held my own when it came to the ultimate playing field in that class: knowledge of *Star Trek*. Heck, I even realized my first crush was on the doctor from *The Next Generation* when I was six or seven.

The liberating effect this collective dorkiness had on my personality gave me a good deal of courage when it came to other social areas of my life. I found, for better or worse, that I could be happy at Cornell if I did not suppress my stronger character traits in order to endear myself to a specific circle or to gain access to a larger social scene. Although I lost track of most of the people in that class, I still felt a certain kinship with them and tried to keep track of their activities if the opportunity provided itself. Indeed, I did occasionally come across the exploits of my friends from that class. One became the director of a student theatre production. Another became heavily involved with film production and design, and a third won a prize for his work with international relations. But what is most significant to me about our experiences is that we were able to rise up from the awkwardness and apprehension of freshman year and to boldly go on to leave our own unique imprint on Cornell. �

INTO THE WILD BLUE YONDER

Elise Kramer

am driving home from Cornell for the weekend, traveling mile after mile of rural highway, skimming the outskirts of mountain ranges and moseying past grazing cows. Once I get home, I'll be jumping on a plane and heading to a metropolitan Midwestern city, where I will begin to plan the next five (or six, or seven) years of my life. With the exception of a brief sojourn to Denmark (and, in the process, the depressing wasteland of Keflavik airport in Iceland) it will be the farthest I have been from home — but I guess it's not my home anymore, is it?

Four years ago, a trip like this would have been unbearable. A childhood outing to the Ikea an hour away that culminated in a terrible stomach ache led to a visceral fear of long car rides, not to mention an aversion to the smell of cheap endtables and lingonberries. For years, I dreaded traveling farther than half an hour away from home, and any trip that exceeded that comfortable length would necessitate hours of preparation, both mental and physical. I'd fill the back of the car with a carnival of diversions, go to the bathroom three or four times before finally leaving the house, refuse to drink or eat anything while we were gone — in short, I'd drive my parents nuts. I was too embarrassed to tell them what was wrong, so to them my behavior must have seemed completely bizarre.

In retrospect, even if I hadn't had the adolescent mentality that telling your parents *anything* about yourself was horrifically humiliating, I'm not sure I would have been able to tell them what was really wrong. To my young mind it was a simple cause-and-effect issue — if I go out, I will get sick, and I don't want to get

sick — but now, to my slightly-older-and-educated-in-psychology-but-still-pretty-young mind, it was clearly a manifestation of a larger fear: a fear of the unknown. Maybe it was the result of a childhood spent in the city, where wandering more than half a block away from home by oneself was *verboten*, but once I had reached the age where I had any kind of autonomy, I wanted none of it. I hated going places I had never been before, I avoided entering a room when I didn't know what was inside, and I had a crippling fear of meeting new people. I traveled an hour and a half each way to my high school in Manhattan, and never strayed from my well-worn route. Fortunate enough to have ample public transportation (and parents who didn't mind chauffeuring), I was able to avoid getting my driver's license and having to drive by myself, when I could get into an accident or, worse, lost.

College was the biggest unknown there was, and I looked forward to my freshman year with a mixture of dread and horror; I envisioned myself becoming a recluse, the kind of person who spends her days crouching in a corner, unwashed, muttering to herself, while her hallmates ask her unfortunate roommate, "What's up with *her*?" When my parents drove me up to Ithaca and left me there, I sat on my new, lofted bed and cried.

Here was the dramatic plot divergence, the moment when my entire college career could have gone either way: I could have barred the door to my room and never spoken to another human being again, or I could have run out into the hallway, screamed "LIKE ME!" and smashed a beer can against my forehead.

I did neither of those things, in fact. I dried my tears and I started to make the campus my home, not through any strength of my own character but through Cornell's inherent welcoming quality. I learned the ins and outs of a giant campus, the shortcuts behind — and, in the winter, through — buildings. I went to parties, although I hated them. I made friends and took "study breaks" with them during late nights at Bear Necessities, and when

they all started dating each other, I made more friends. I went to the lounge in my dorm intending to study, and wound up wasting hours laughing and joking with my hallmates.

So no, I didn't become a recluse, and I'm proud to say I shower regularly, but the most important thing I gained was not the ability to make friends. At Cornell, I learned to love the unknown — to see possibilities as enriching rather than overwhelming. I went to classes not knowing whether I'd understand anything the professor was saying, and I learned things I might never have known: philosophy, theoretical linear algebra, even the discipline to which I plan on devoting the rest of my life. I got my license and a car, and I learned to enjoy wandering and exploring and getting hopelessly lost. My car was totaled one icy night when an idiot in an SUV careened into me on Route 79, and I learned that, even when bad things do happen, things can turn out fine in the end. I fell in love, and I learned that you often find exactly what you're looking for only if you aren't looking for it.

And now here I am, driving home so that I can finalize my plans to leap into the biggest unknown yet. Four years ago I would have curled into the fetal position and pulled a blanket over my head, but with eight semesters of Cornell under my belt — eight semesters of the unexpected, the unpredictable, the unknown — I'm actually enjoying myself. I have a Travis CD in the stereo, and there's something about the music, the way a few austere notes plinked out on a piano blossom into cascading harmonies, that transforms the road ahead from an endless conveyor belt of cartoon background to a path stretching off into the future.

I'm reminded of my favorite moment at Cornell: it was the end of my sophomore year, a sunny day in May, and I was taking advantage of the gorgeous weather by sitting under the statue between Uris and Olin libraries. I was reading something, probably the newspaper, and the Clocktower was chiming its afternoon concert. The chimesmasters had just struck up a

particularly energetic rendition of "Piano Man" when I began to notice small, white objects falling around me — not snow, I realized after taking a closer look, but little plastic army men with white parachutes. Looking up at the Clocktower, I saw a group of students hanging out of the windows, releasing handfuls of the paratroopers at a time. The sky was filled with them; from a distance, they looked like flocks of white birds. There was a strong, warm breeze that day that carried the army men to the farthest reaches of the Arts Quad, where they alighted in the grass and the branches of trees like cherry blossoms.

But there was one paratrooper who got swept up in a stronger wind and traveled even farther: up, up above the treetops, above the old belltower of McGraw Hall, above the dome of Sibley Hall. While the chimes rang out I sat there squinting in the sunlight, watching him drift further away from campus, gaining altitude and speed. I watched him until he was just a tiny white speck in the bright blue cloudless sky, and then he disappeared. ❖

Across Five Januarys Andy Guess

hat I marvel about still, months after graduating from Cornell — aside from what I'm supposed to marvel at, which includes a litany of lessons learned (Cornell's seemingly contradictory facets,

spanning from the liberal arts to a vocational school for hotelier hopefuls; the subordination of the academic to the social in the importance of the college experience to life development; the eventual collapse of one's disparate social circles into one giant bubble of friends by the end of four years; the vital role played by one's own personality and interests in determining what, exactly, the "Cornell experience" is; and on and on) — is, simply, the precariousness of it all:

Almost not visiting campus in high school. (After a week driving up and down the East Coast, being generally unimpressed in comparison to the Great West, and this being our last stop, being ready to call it a trip and drive straight home. Being forced by my parents to go anyway. Somehow, miraculously, being floored by Ithaca. Falling in love with the place, unexpectedly. Note to admissions officers: Yes, summer *is* the best time to visit.)

Getting waitlisted. (Enough said.)

Getting moved from the waitlist to the "J-frosh" list. Deciding that, actually, I'd rather not be whipped back and forth by the whims of said admissions officers, and that I'd like to start college in August, not January. (Settling on UCLA, for some reason, as the place on which I would set my sights. Purchasing a set of clothes suitable for that region, complete with requisite Hawaiian shirt. Detaching myself from the idea of attending Cornell.)

Coming home to an empty house, after a week away, to be greeted by a phone message from Doris Davis of Cornell Admissions. (Do you remember me, Doris? I remember you.) Remembering that I was still, technically, eligible to attend come January. Learning that, "if I was interested," I could come instead in the fall. In August. (It was June.)

Decoding a lengthy conglomeration of numbers with which I could dial my parents, who were at that moment yodeling in a barn, in a rural Alpine village, in the farthest reaches of Switzerland. Somehow connecting, and somehow reaching my mother, who somehow picked up the phone on the first ring.

Being told, in no uncertain terms, that I was to attend Cornell in August.

(Smashing our entire set of deck furniture.)

* * *

UCLA was gracious upon my notifying them that, unfortunately, I would have to renege, forfeit my dorm assignment, and bid farewell to the dream of heading to California. (They understood, even if they weren't sure where exactly Cornell is.)

Needless to say, that first January came and went without incident.

It somehow made sense that, upon barely sneaking in on the wobbliest of circumstances — an afterthought of a student, begrudgingly accepting a backhanded offer of inclusion — the culmination of my tenure at Cornell would be just as uncertain:

My first attempt at graduation came at the end of junior year. Some of my best friends at the time being seniors, I was living vicariously through their hopes, their fears, their end-of-year traditions. (I stayed on for Senior Week. I attended Senior Carnival. I even went to Convocation, watched Bill Clinton speak, and, in my role as a reporter covering the event, elbowed my way to the front of the rope line afterward and embarrassed the President into giving me 30 seconds of extemporaneous platitudes. He really likes Ithaca, apparently.)

I actually felt like my four (three) years were coming to an end. What, then, would become of our exploits? Our cherished memories together, which included, but were not necessarily limited to, the following: driving to Ithaca College, learning that it is almost impossibly ugly, stepping onto the ice in the middle of campus, and falling through into what was apparently a serene reflecting pool during the summer; making regular trips to the State Street Diner at 5 a.m.; spending an interminable day filming an actor in Boy Scout regalia traipsing back and forth atop the crosswalk next to the Ithaca Commons, for film class.

They graduated, and so did I, in spirit. I was left behind, not for the first time, and, like my false start, was given the illusion of an end. It was then that I had the first glimpse of the ephemeral, fleeting, contradictory nature of Cornell. It crept up on me, grabbed hold, told me it was time to go and still, to this day, consumes my existence at the least expected moment.

My second attempt at graduation came when it was supposed to, at the end of the school year, 2005. (This attempt went relatively without incident, mostly because I wasn't there at the time. The decision to stay an extra semester already having been made, I was vacationing in Budapest, where my parents had taken abode during the past year. This time around, I missed Convocation, Commencement, and Senior Week.)

For most of that last week, it was hard for me to feel depressed, despite most of my friends moving on to that next stage of life I'd postponed. It wasn't until the party invitations began trickling in

from across the Atlantic that it began to hit me: I was being left behind. (Again.)

But that's the funny thing about Cornell. Every time you think it's over, you're given a chance to build a new life, a new image, a new set of friends, a new segment of that vast concoction on a Hill we hold together in a loose collection of experiences.

Real graduation came and went, and this time it was for good. (OK, OK, fine: it wasn't real and it wasn't for good; they called it a "Recognition Ceremony" and informed us that, in fact, I wasn't technically a graduate until my degree was confirmed next month — but no guarantee! But, it was real in the sense that I dressed up in my cap and gown, my mom flew in from Hungary to witness the event, and I went out for a celebratory dinner in Trumansburg. Oh, and they called out our names individually, and I got to look up into President Rawlings's deep blue eyes as I shook his elephantine hand.)

* * *

I didn't receive my degree until this past week in March 2006. But, as I have found, saying goodbye to Cornell is a gradual process. I didn't shed a tear that college was finally (sort of) over, because it had supposedly been over several times over. Because it was hard to believe that this was actually it. The real thing. Seriously. It's over.

Now I sit, my final official transcript in hand, noting in automatic computerized script both my failures and successes in academia over the past four (four and a half) years. (That time I pulled two all-nighters in a row, staying up for 64 hours straight, madly trying to design and implement an entire computer processor that would constitute most of my final grade for CS 314. Realizing it was probably time to stop procrastinating. Receiving a C-, the lowest grade in my academic career.)

However, my transcript doesn't note that I sat both embarrassed and under the influence of Bacardi while my own voice boomed from the theater speakers during the presentation of my thesis film. It doesn't record that I spent much of my sophomore, junior and senior years hunched over a newspaper flat downtown at the *Sun* office. It doesn't mention that, when given the opportunity to present an issue of concern to the Board of Trustees, I dressed up in my Sunday best to dress them down in the only way I knew how. It fails to note that, for two years in a row, I tragically decided to live in a "Multicultural Living Learning Unit," comprised of cell-like single dorm rooms in the Clara Dickson basement, which destroyed the concept of campus community more effectively than any single act of violence.

It doesn't mention these things, but it does add credence to the notion that, at least for one former student, the delicate house of cards that is one's record of assorted Cornell accomplishments and memories can, in one moment, crystallize into what is hereby referred to as "the Cornell experience."

Date of degree: January 18, 2006. (Four and a half years later, some semblance of finality to a precarious chapter that can in no way be encapsulated in a single document, or a single afterthought.) �

EAST HILL REGRETS

Looking Back on Your Time at Cornell, What is One Thing You Didn't Do That You Wish You Had?

- ❖ This is a tough question. There are many things I wish I had done: taken ballroom dancing, equestrian, been more outgoing and gotten to know more people in my major, not have been so shy and reserved, read more books, etc. But I guess if I could change only one thing, I think it would be stepping out of my comfort zone and getting to know more people in my current major.
 - * Study abroad.
- ❖ I wish I had dropped Bio 101 during the second week instead of sticking it out and getting a C-!
 - ❖ Gone to Dragon Day.
- ❖ I wish I'd taken a sociology class, sailed on Beebe Lake, savored like wine each fleeting joy of my vanishing youth, and tried all the different ice cream flavors. There's a whole lot of ice cream flavors!
 - ❖ Explored more buildings. Talked to more strangers.
 - ❖ Worn more Spandex.
 - ❖ I'd attend a Cornell hockey game.
- ❖ I wish I had milked a cow. Freshman year I was promised I would be able to milk a cow, and as an animal lover, I'm kind of

upset I never go to fulfill that desire. Maybe I'll do it sometime in the future, when I get my own farm — it's something to do with a history major.

- ❖ Join Chorale sooner.
- ❖ Should have been a Hotelie ...
- ❖ I've never been to a hockey game. I only regret this because when I say, "I've never been to a hockey game," everyone looks at me as though I've just said "I enjoy shaving my eyeballs with rusty razor blades."
- ❖ I wish that I had gotten involved with rock climbing. Hardly anyone realizes that Cornell has the best wall in the country!
- ❖ I wish I'd had sex with every girl I had the chance to. I guess that's more than one thing.
 - ❖ I wish I had taken more classes outside my major.
- ❖ I wish I could have been there for Dragon Day at least once. It seemed like the architects had quite the party.
 - ❖ Nothing.

ROLE-PLAYING

Jared Wolfe

will never forget the day that I realized I was a man.
Sophomore year, I lived in South Baker Hall on West
Campus with a few "friends," and one day my friend ran
through the hall screaming that she and her roommate saw a
squirrel running around in their room! Oh my God! So the two of
them ran out, and of course, due to ridiculous social constructions
of masculinity and femininity, my friend Guy¹ and I had to be the
heroes and save these girls from this disgusting, vicious animal.

So the two of us go into their room, timidly searching around for any signs of a squirrel. Where the fuck is this thing? How long is it going to take to prove my manhood? And the anticipation — this is all too much. Guy looks fine though, as of course he would. After all, he clearly thinks he's more of a man than I am — he's the one with the sports posters all over his room while I've got Ziggy Stardust blasting from my computer.

We wait and wait, and what probably was two minutes seems like an hour. And then I muster up the courage to move the bed, an idea that Guy most likely had but wanted to wait to see if I would do it first. I'm moving the bed, and then all of a sudden, the beast leaps up out of nowhere, projecting itself halfway across the room. We've got him cornered and I turn around to see what Guy is about to do ... umm, Guy? Where are you?

At first glimpse of the flying squirrel, Guy ran out of the room and locked the door from the outside. I'm now stuck in a locked

¹ Name changed to protect his masculinity.

room with the squirrel. No time to think of the irony of the situation. So I'm deciding which action to take: stare down the squirrel? Punch the shit out of it? I really don't know what to do, all I know is that ... wait! The squirrel is now on the window sill. The squirrel turns to me, and stares me down for a while. It then looks outside the window, and decides to jump out. Thump. Followed by a conspicuous lack of scampering. This squirrel had committed suicide. This squirrel had stared at my face and then decided to take it's own life.

Before I had a chance to make a decision, the squirrel had made one for itself. Its very last one. A very Cornellian thing to do, or so the stereotype goes.

I leave the room and find Guy with his unemotional, unexpressive role-playing face on, as if nothing had ever happened. But something definitely did happen. He pussied out. He, who had made jokes about me not being the manliest of men, ran out of the room like a little schoolgirl. The role he assumed, "Manliest of Men", failed to be convincing when confronted by a squirrel with suicidal tendencies.

Role-playing is bullshit. Just because you are a girl from Long Island does not mean you should have unnaturally straight hair parted down the middle. Just because you are from Long Island in general doesn't mean you should like Dave Matthews Band.

If you're boring and unappealing, don't pretend to look down on those who go to parties on their Friday nights and get drunk just because you can't. Deep down inside, you know that if you were actually invited to get drunk and go to a party, you'd jump at the chance. Just because you aren't from Risley, don't assume that we're all burnt out, flaky drug addicts. We have the highest GPA of any dorm on campus, so fuck you. And if you happen to live in Risley, don't assume that there aren't a million cool

and interesting people outside of it. And don't buy every Velvet Underground album just because you think you're supposed to.

If you strip away everyone's hang-ups, insecurities, and ideas of what they should like, dislike, hope for, fear, etc., based on little more than what they see when looking in the mirror, we are all basically the same.

We all want to stop feeling lonely and give and receive as much Love as we can. Seriously. Everyone. That girl with the pseudointellectual dark-rimmed glasses who plays with her coffee and laptop for hours and hours in Olin Café. That guy with the fauxhawk who wears a different Urban Outfitters shirt everyday because becoming a hipster is the easiest way to being cool at Cornell after being such a nerd in high school. Those girls who go "Awwww!" all the time. Those poor individuals who spend their Friday nights studying Orgo because it helps them forget about how lonely they really are. That relatively unattractive sorority girl who feels the need to show off the little bit of cleavage that she has on her Facebook picture, hoping to be noticed by guys perusing the site. Those kids who attend every a capella concert on campus. Those rich girls who walk around with their unbelievably giant black sunglasses. Those psychos who are on the e-board of basically every organization on campus. Those guys who come to class in a shirt and tie. Those fools who attended the Collective Soul and Third Eye Blind concerts — they may have high SAT scores, but they're retarded when it comes to music. Those snobs who think they are better than everyone else just because they like music that the critics like. Those guys who are secretly afraid of squirrels.

We're all curious about each other and don't want to be afraid to say step up and say "hi" to someone that looks cool to us. If we all just stopped assuming roles, maybe the intimidation, limitations, and isolation would go down a little bit. Think of how much we've missed out on at Cornell. The fun we could have had by branching out from our homogeneous group of friends. Our group of friends that mainly assumes the same role as us. No matter how many friends I can have, part of me is still always lonely. I know you feel the same way, too.

All of us need each other. *

A Typical Thursday Morning Gregory King

eturning back to my room after a morning shower, I looked at my clock and knew that I would be late once again. I lived quite a distance away from campus, and my Honors Analysis class at 8:40 a.m. in Malott Hall would require me to hike up to Stewart Avenue, cross over to West Campus, ascend the Slope, stride across Ho Plaza, and sprint the rest of the way up Tower Road — all in less than fifteen minutes.

To those who might say that such a trek doesn't seem possible: it doesn't. But, then again, I am a Cornellian ripe with gumption. And as I had done many Thursdays previously, I would commit myself to the challenge that lay ahead. So, I strapped on my finest pair of running shoes for the speed walking that would be required of me. Quickly stuffing my bag with my books, I set out into the brisk morning. You see, Honors Analysis was the make or break course for my undergraduate mathematics education, and I had committed myself to never missing the class.

The difficulty with this pledge was that Wednesday evenings just happened to be my favorite night of the week. As a member of the Cornell University Glee Club, Wednesday was our sacred social night at the Chariot — the local bar and pizza house — where we would congregate, drink, and sing our songs of Cornell. I had sworn to never miss a Wednesday night with the Club, because I knew that I would only regret it later. Much later. While I might not regret missing the weekly event the next morning or the even a month afterward, I knew that years later, as an adult looking back on my Cornell experience, I would regret missing out on each and every night of cheerfulness and song.

After three years at Cornell, seeing the Glee Club's alumni make a yearly pilgrimage back to Ithaca for Homecoming to partake in the song and merriment found weekly at the Chariot had convinced me of how special and sacred this tradition would be for me later in life. Our Wednesday ritual had taken on extra importance in this semester because the Chariot was due to close in a few weeks. It had been the group's watering hole for over fifteen years! As a result, Wednesday nights had become increasingly successful as the spring semester passed. I set out for Math class with memories from the previous night fresh in my mind.

I quickly glanced at the clock as I left my house and it read 8:26 — fourteen minutes until my class was to begin. I had never covered the distance this quickly before. I reared my head down and charged up the small rise to reach Stewart Avenue.

Immediately, I could tell that my body was unhappy with me. I had been up the night before until 2 a.m. and had consumed perhaps a drink or two too many. Passing ABC Café and The Chapter House, I thought back to some of the experiences that I'd had at these establishments. Brunch at ABC Café, the quintessential Ithaca experience, had been a pleasure of mine on many a Sunday morning. Just one or two weeks earlier, The Chapter House had been the location of my 21st birthday celebrations. As my mind wandered back to that night, I realized that I was running late. With no time to reminisce, I forced myself to pick up the pace.

On this particular morning, I hit a second wind as I began to ascend the Slope. By now, there were many other students walking alongside me. We share the experience together despite little conversation amongst early class-goers.

There is something special about the fact that most Cornellians

walk uphill to class. Before one can begin their educational journey each and every day, effort is required. In a way, this seems all too appropriate for Cornell, a school so expansive that most everything requires a significant initial effort. If a Cornell student did not have the drive to get up the hill each morning, they would most definitely not have the energy to tackle the rigor of Cornell classes or the chaos of their numerous extracurricular activities. Just like getting to class in the morning, everything at Cornell demands a high initial effort; to be a Cornellian one must possess an extraordinary amount of gumption.

I glanced behind me at the lake and majestic view afforded by the Slope. Songs of Cornell popped into my head. "Music with the twilight falls, o'er the dreaming lake and dell; 'tis an echo from the walls of our own, our fair Cornell." These words, taken from the *Evening Song*, are intended to describe the early evening in Ithaca after sunset. While this time of day may be the favorite of most Cornellians, I have a special fondness in my heart for Ithaca in the morning; the air is ripe with moisture and the anticipation of a new day.

Singing the *Evening Song* to myself, I was reminded of a short and sweet quotation which is engraved on a bench overlooking the Slope just 100 yards from where I was walking at the time: "Love to thee, our fair Cornell." The night previously, locked arms with my friends in a circle, I had sung this song along with the Cornell Alma Mater at the conclusion of yet another night at the Chariot.

As I crested the hill onto Ho Plaza, it seemed that making it to class would be possible. The Clocktower read 8:36 a.m., and I knew from experience that the walk up Tower Road could be done in just four minutes. Passing by Ho Plaza, I made brief eye contact with a friend of mine who had been at the Chariot the previous evening. We smiled at each other as if to communicate the entire experience of socializing, sleeping, waking up, and then getting to

class early the next morning. It was nice to know that others made the same sacrifices as I when it came to balancing our social and academic lives.

My phone read precisely 8:40 a.m. as I entered my math classroom and took a seat. The professor had just begun, and it appeared that I had missed nothing. After the efforts of the morning walk to campus, this class was going to be a breeze. ❖

Straight on Ithaca, Turn Left on Hoy Alice Parrington

've lived at Fairview Townhouses with the same three girls for the past two years. Fairview is in Collegetown, just past the crazy six-way intersection all the way up at the top of Dryden Road. Anyone who lives up there or has visited a friend in these Collegetown boonies probably knows that the easiest way to get to campus is to walk past the intersection and down Ithaca Road, turn left at the red blinker, cross over the gorge, and continue on Hoy Road past Rhodes Hall. I calculate that at this point I've walked this path more than five hundred times.

Sometimes I walk on autopilot. Sometimes I sprint, trying desperately to get to a prelim on time. Sometimes I stroll, enjoying the warm weather or lovely fall colors. Occasionally I talk with a friend as we make our way to class together.

Mostly I've been alone. What makes this path different for me is how empty it is. It can even be a little frightening at night as I hunch inside my jacket and scurry on, not quite keeping my mind off the fact that if someone wanted to kidnap me, this would be the perfect place.

During the day the emptiness feels more like that of a huge cathedral. The occasional car goes by. I might pass a student or see a deer, but these are all fellow worshipers within the space. Somehow we are pushed more within ourselves by the greatness of the place without. When I look up, the sky goes on forever between the trees.

Pushed within, the path is a great place for thoughts. Oh, the thoughts: they seem innumerable, all caught on the five minutes it

takes to travel from home to campus. Thoughts of the future and of the past, ponderings over silly things, musings about the inner life of man, panicked alarms of homework left undone, contemplations of the beauty of the situation.

The thoughts all flow together through the two years. And I can't remember: was it the new green growth on the trees that made me want to paint them or was it the sun glinting off their icicles? Was it raining when I decided to teach in Philadelphia or was it snowing? Maybe it was sunny. The thoughts feel a part of the place not of any time. As if the walk waits for me to come, to plunge me into the river of the mind, different and the same every time. And apart from me — not mine. Maybe someone else started this river long, long ago. I am just one more thinker out of the dozens, hundreds.

If I ever come back to Cornell years from now, I want to walk this path again. I'll start out at the bizarre intersection, walk down to the light, cross the gorge and drop myself back into the river's flow. I'll be older then.

I wonder what I'll think about. ❖

CORNELL WINTER

Yun-Wei Susan Chen

us Cr Br

ushed flurries of dandelion seeds Crown the heads of the new elite, Breathing Chinese Whispers As we walk over Thurston Bridge;

Welcoming with white kisses, They melt into the contours of our skin, Sugaring the sun, and lulling the earth to sleep, On our first day at Cornell.

In heated fights between earmuffs and ice And papers and pens and cellulite, the Frosted white congeals all life, A milky coat from North to West, Uniting orange, brown, yellow and pink And countries near and far, and Huddling together we seek our Own pursuit in a blizzard of Information.

Whiteness thickens the roads
To Collegetown like a burden
While the misty sun, lifting off loads,
Chuckles at our arduous folds,
Pitying our deprivation and
Caffeinated minds as we learn to cram
Ships into bottles and the world into us.

Brown abandoned slurp Reveals our chosen paths and Borders our steady walk As reminders of our passion While alabaster footprints, Lost like the cutting of a stream, Recall our family's old proverbs Like old teddy bears and herbs.

The last flurry trickles,
Consoling our weariness,
Showering us in praises of silver confetti
With tingling hugs and cheers
As we near another beginning with
Our black caps of feat
Flourishing on the rich soil of Cornell,
And the snowflakes sing
As we enter the world
Like the first rain of spring. ❖

CONTRIBUTORS

Simmie Berman is a Mechanical Engineer. Next year she will be either building spacecrafts or living in a hut in Africa.

Kimberly Biason is a Human Development major from Jersey who probably should have studied Communication instead. She is known for dancing on tables, swimming on sidewalks, and being committed to too many activities that she enjoys. She leaves college now feeling like she did it right.

Sarah Brubaker, an English major, grew up in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. She aspires one day to write wildly famous children's books. Some of the greatest lessons she learned at Cornell were that sleep is very valuable, that it is unwise to eat after 9 p.m., and that the class you think will be the worst is often the best.

Having started out as a Science of Earth Systems major, **Yun-Wei Susan Chen** will be graduating from Cornell with a B.A. in English. She loves winter, especially Cornell's.

An English major from the Midwest, **Cameron Cooper** has mastered the arts of list-making and running uphill. She hopes to avoid Starving Literary Artist Syndrome by getting married as soon as possible.

Matthew Esmond Crooke comes from a small farm north of Philadelphia, the city in which he will work for the next two years with Teach For America. An English major at Cornell, he is predicatably artsy, overtly critical, a lover of Nature (Six Mile Creek especially) and enjoys literature.

Andy Guess is still not sure what he studied while at Cornell, but it involved secretly videotaping people and modeling neural networks. He is still recovering from the experience in Washington, D.C., which is full of ambitious drifters like him.

Josh Katz is a History and American Studies major. He is currently looking for a job in entertainment and would very much like to become the next Jon Stewart. When that doesn't work out he will probably go to law school.

Gregory King is an Operations Research engineering major in the School of Engineering at Cornell. He hails from the great state of New Hampshire and hopes to someday earn a PhD in applied mathematics. In his free time, Greg is a competitive distance runner, an avid R.E.M. fan, and enjoys climbing mountains.

Asya Kleyn, from New York City, is an Environmental Engineering major. She dreams of getting a job and a good night's sleep.

A Human Development major from New York City, **Elise Kramer** plans on staying in school for the rest of her life — or at least the rest of the decade. She works for a bunch of campus publications, including this one.

Melissa Medoway is a Human Development major. Next year she'll be teaching elementary school in Chicago, and until then she'll be eating lots of cheese.

Daniel Nelson is a Music major from New Jersey. After Cornell he hopes to make his living composing music, but fears that it will involve composing burgers at Wendy's.

Alice Parrington is a senior Physics major in the College of Arts and Sciences. She is really hoping to work in Taiwan next

year as a teacher in an English Cram program. Why Taiwan? Just because.

Jim Shliferstein is graduating from the College of Arts and Sciences and will be teaching either elementary school or high school history in Chicago. He channels his aggression exclusively in unhealthy ways.

If you thought **Xi Wang** is homeless from her entry, you will be relieved to know that she is not — she calls China, Northern California, and Colorado her home, as well as many states in the Midwest that most people have never heard of, which is why there is no point in naming them here. She is an English major, but physics will always be her first love. Or is that marine biology?

A Human Development major, **Jared Wolfe** is about to begin the process of selling out by working at a law firm next year. He hopes to determine what he wants out of life before it's too late.





The echoes of the chimes have died away;
The noisy crowd has vanished from the hill;
A single lingering one is left astray;
His fading footsteps cease and all is still.

- Albert W. Smith