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Brian Edwards
Western Washington University

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Is the Counter-culture dead? Was it ever alive? **THE MYTH FALLS** is a eulogy for the dreams of the lost children of the 60's who gathered at Woodstock.

The Lummi Religion was much like Christianity and was known by the North American Indians before the white man ever set foot on this continent. THEY WALKED ON WATER.

Welcome to Western. Get set for the patience required and the frustration felt for **THE UNDERGRADUATE GAME**.

Pete was the Company Clerk. He was also a draftee and rode shotgun in **THE MORNING CONVOY**, an account of one man pressed into service for his country.

Taking drugs was just a game. He would trip to the edge and still try to maintain. Only this time he lost in **DEVIL'S ON MY TAIL**.

Ever sat for hours by the side of the road on a hot, dusty day waiting for a ride? If so, you know the feeling of **QUITTING**.
The youth culture reached its apex at Woodstock in 1969. The frantic years of the late 60's and early 70's are now over and with it has gone the dreams of the Age of Aquarius.

JIM HEITZMAN

Soon after half a million freaks deserted a New York farmer's cow pasture after listening to music, swimming nude and getting high for three days in the summer of 1969, the myth-makers quickly seized on the Woodstock rock festival to proclaim the birth of a new nation.

The myth-makers ignored the fact that three people had died, bummers were commonplace, rain poured for three days, and food and sanitation were either poor or nonexistent. The myth-makers also completely ignored the fact that Woodstock was staged for one purpose—to make money, which it eventually did with movie rights and record rights.

But all that didn’t matter for the myth-makers were ourselves—the long hairs, freaks, counter-culture, or whatever name we liked to call ourselves and the youth revolution.

Although spirits were high at the end of summer, cracks soon appeared in the walls carefully built around the Woodstock Nation that even a movie epic couldn’t repair.

Within four years that nation has evaporated and with it has gone the idealism that set a whole generation in motion.

What follows is a eulogy for the dreams of the lost children of the 60’s who gathered at Woodstock and for those whose spirits led them to believe in a dream.
REST IN PEACE
WOODSTOCK NATION
1969 - 1972
Fall 1969

The Woodstock Myth was still strong by the fall of 1969, although by the end of decade, the first crack would appear.

A new word and a new policy moved into the political life of America. ‘Vietnamization’ replaced escalation in the war vocabulary. The peace freaks saw little difference and countered with the word ‘Moratorium’ in October.

Agnew labeled us ‘effete snobs’ and we loved it. We were the moral being of a new America, the vanguard of the coming revolution. The Age of Aquarius would soon descend on the people of the planet Earth soon and the planets, stars and universe would swirl in unending peace. When the stars were right, then peace would come. We believed all this then because there was nothing else to believe in. The myth-makers had told us that Woodstock was only a taste of what the stars would bring in due time.

Then across the vision of the new age of mankind, the devil danced and taunted us hauntingly with his evil laughter. “Please allow me to introduce myself; I’m a man of wealth and taste.” Mick Jagger and his Stones came to America to play a game of violence, ego and superstardom. Heads spun with images of death, blood and terror.

Before the tour ended, real death and real blood was spilt at Altamont as Jagger sang for sympathy, and the Hell’s Angels murdered a man at the feet of Satan at Altamont.

Suddenly it wasn’t a game any more and even the stars were against us.

Jagger only laughed and said it was only a game anyway and skipped back home. Intellectual writers of the counter-culture shook their heads and said, “That was a heavy trip, man!” Meanwhile the flag of the Woodstock Nation flew at half mast.

Spring 1970

A new decade had begun, but still the war dragged on. Death was all around us. In May 1970 Nixon widened the war on two fronts. U.S. troops invaded Cambodia and the National Guard shot four students at Kent State. More blood was spilled at Jackson State before the wave of violence ended in the bloody spring of 1970 and a time of mourning started.

Was this bringing the war home as the Students for a Democratic Society said they were going to do? We looked at our parents with tear-stained eyes and asked “Why?” Parents stared back and asked, “Why not?”

The state was becoming restless and brought its power down on the Chicago Eight. The Eight staged a circus for an aging judge. He didn’t like the humor, and when he bound and gagged Bobby Seale, the symbolism was clear. The youth movement was on trial, not just eight men.

Summer 1970

Death came not only from the outside but from within. Early 1970 saw the Beatles break up in the midst of petty feuds. It was a musical death. “Let It Be,” was the final message from the electronic gurus.

Soon after the Woodstock Nation celebrated its first birthday, two of its superstars left the stage. “You can leave anytime, we’re just jamming,” Jimi Hendrix told his audience at Woodstock. One year later, Hendrix was found dead in his own vomit from a drug overdose. Soon after the rampaging Janis Joplin met her death at the end of a hypodermic needle.

Fall 1970

Protests, marches and moratoriums continues; the war was the focus for most of the New Left’s energy. Somehow we thought we could end the war machine with enough clenched fists. Some countered violence with philosophies of non-violence.

Canada, for others, became an idealized haven for those whose conscience told them the Vietnam War was morally wrong.

New names cropped into the New Left’s roster of heroes; Angela Davis, the Berrigans and the Soledad Brothers. A new breed of radical was developing, a radical skilled in the school of guerilla street warfare.

Newsweek claimed, “The country is in the grip of the worst spasm of left-wing violence since anarchist days.”
clenched fist held a bomb and the flowers of the past replaced the weapons of war. The country's criminals moved from the kidnappers, murders and gangsters to radicals. The FBI's 16 most wanted list included nine gun-toting revolutionaries. For many the war was in the streets.

Spring 1971

"They are going to have to arrest every young person in America," Rennis Davis proclaimed, "before we can be stopped." May Day 1971 saw the young flock to Washington, D.C., to hear the prophecy of Davis, organizer of the mass movement to close the government down for a week.

Somehow nobody thought to ask how unified the youth movement really was, but Davis' statement only added to the myth of a youth culture solidarity.

Two events in the war caused Americans to ponder their fate and to search their conscience, A young man stood trial for the My Lai Massacre. His words echoed through our minds, "I acted as I was directed and I carried out the orders I was given, and I do not feel wrong in doing so."

In June a new name and hero shot suddenly into the middle of America. Daniel Ellsburg broke the code of silence and made the Pentagon Papers a national bestseller.

These events caused a reflectiveness to move onto America. A calm settled on America's fighting young and many retreated inward to try to understand themselves and situation of growing up in the United States.

The reflectiveness brought with it another hero; this time it wasn't an Ellsburg, Berrigan, Rubin or Kennedy. Fascination increased for a man who walked the earth 2,000 years ago. The Jesus Cult weaved its way rapidly into the confusion of the times.

Many copped out and decided being a freak meant one thing—getting fucked-up. The terminology was changing. Words reflected the different meaning. Getting high was replaced by wasted. The goal of drugs became confusion instead of spiritual liberation; instead of a way to perceive reality drugs became a way to deceive reality.

Summer and Fall 1972

If there was going to be a revival of the political youth movement, it would have to come with the presidential elections of 1972. Since we now had the vote, 1972 became a test for the power of the movement to work peacefully for change.

McGovern won the nomination and was defeated in a landslide vote.

Winter 1972

Many gathered around the nation to protest the inauguration of Nixon, but it seemed like the old standbys. No great proclamations were made about the power of the counter-culture. The myth was gone, only cold January winds marked Nixon's first day in office for a second term.

The war began to matter less and less. Everybody was too busy trying to scrape up $10 to buy a lid.

"The counter-culture isn't dead, man! Not when you can still buy a hit of acid for $1.50." A Western Student

Fall 1973

College campuses are now quiet; students are more concerned with getting term papers done than bringing the 'Ivy Tower' down. The peace symbol and the clenched fist are no longer a part of anybody's language. "Revolution, Now" has been changed to "Revolution, huh?"

Nobody waits for the Age of Aquarius anymore and the flag of the Woodstock Nation has been trampled in the dirt.

Fall and Winter 1971

Late 1971 and early 1972 saw the youth movement fracture into the non-political sphere. Instead of politics the movement became natural foods, gay liberation and women's liberation, ecology and religion.

The fracture left many confused and alone for the first time. No direction existed and the holes in the Woodstock Myth became more and more apparent.
"It was not necessary to put marks down on paper, because we lived the religion . . . it was our way of life and we passed it on unknowingly."

THEY WALKED ON WATER

JIM BROOKS

A slow-breaking, somewhat sly smile crossed his friendly round, brown face as if he knew something that I didn't and relished the idea. He radiated a sort of guarded pride and dignity. A sensitivity which usually comes to one who has been unjustly ridiculed and scoffed at for holding beliefs that are different from the norm, yet convictions one desperately clings to.

Joe Washington, 54, is a deeply religious elder of the Lummi Indian Tribe and he seemed much more reserved and reluctant, at this, our second meeting. Last time we talked, he had freely expounded on his Indian heritage and its conflicts with the white man—something he was most willing to reveal—to stir the white conscience for the wrongs it has done him, his people and his culture.

Now, he seemed to be wondering, with a mixture of suspicion and amazement, about the motives of this young, white reporter attempting to infringe on a sacred subject that his white society ordinarily dismissed as superstition.

Washington is a short, pudgy figure with clipped, graying hair. He suffers from a heart condition and knows his days are numbered. He is highly articulate and versed on Indian legend and religious beliefs.

Toward the end of our last talk, he had casually mentioned that he could tell stories from the Indian religion that would "surpass Ben Hur and other such epics in their magnificence."

But now, when I asked him to relate them, he begged off by telling me that these stories can only be told once a year when the moon is in a certain
position, in accordance with the dictates of the "Great Spirit." On that occasion, he said, the words are uttered through his mouth by the Spirit and only to a few selected people.

Washington described this God as "one who walks and watches from above, knowing all thoughts and intentions of man."

He said the religion was much like Christianity and was known by the North American Indians before the white man ever set foot on this continent. The teachings were not written down, he said, but traveled from "mouth to ear."

"It was not necessary to put marks down on paper, because we lived the religion ... it was our way of life and we passed it on unknowingly."

Washington said that according to Indian legend, when they lived by His teachings the Indians had miraculous powers. They could walk on water and make things disappear.

He took his car keys in hand to emphasize this point. "They could take these keys, throw them on the ground, and turn them into whatever they chose," he said, illustrating the legend.

"Then the Indian was taken into greed and jealousy. He no longer lived according to the teachings, and the special gifts were taken away."

Before that time, Washington said it is widely known that the Indians rarely suffered from disease and for any sickness, they seemed to somehow know which animal to kill or what forms of "natural" medicines to use.

The "Great Spirit" put the moon in the sky for the people "to count their passing days," after they strayed from his teachings. Before that, it is believed that the people lived to be from 500-1,000 years old, Washington said.

"He who made all things, cursed the world for the abuse of his teachings," he said. "The gravitational pull of the moon caused the skin to wrinkle and the body to grow old."

Washington then pointed out how contemporary man has contaminated the air we breathe, the water we drink and the land we walk on. Just as the Indians took their religion for granted, he said, "You take something for granted and it will destroy itself."

Another ancient practice of the Indians was to give a son his grandfather's Indian name if he resembled his grandfather. They had been instructed by the "Great Spirit," they believed, to pass these names on as markers from the beginning of time so the Spirit would know the names and that the people were fulfilling his teachings.

"Along with his grandfather's name, the son would inherit all his grandfather's sins and faults, and by doing so, would leave him free to go to the Spirit," Washington said. "In this way, the son knew to take care of the name so no disgrace would be passed on to his family."

Washington said that according to the Indian teachings, the sun will go out one day and the "earth will become like the moon with freezing temperatures and a barren look." This is to be the judgment day.

One of the few beliefs that are still held by many Indians is their outlook toward death.

"Most Indians that live according to the teachings actually relish the idea of death," he said. "The living shed tears at a funeral, not for the lost brother, but for themselves who must remain behind on this earth."

Washington is a firm believer in most of the Indian teachings and said he had prayed before our conversation that he would not reveal any of the sacred teachings that might disfavor him with his God.
Your ex-roommate is getting married. Before he/she moved out of the dorm he/she ripped off eight place-settings of china from Saga. As a wedding gift your dorm rips off eight place-settings of flatware to match.

You receive a mid-term deficiency report for a class that you are not enrolled in. Go to Old Main.

Security catches you picking a dandelion in front of Huxley. Lose five credits and one turn for defacing the campus.

You go for your Senior Evaluation and discover that you neglected to take Tiddelywinks 101. Go back to Start.

You move into a co-ed dorm. Discover that your roommate of the same sex you are. Drown sorrows at the Kegger.

You made it! Now you can join the working class and make $100 an hour as a garbage man/woman/person.

You run for AS president and win. You get your name on the front page of the Western Front and your own office in the Viking Union. Unfortunately, nobody knows who you are. Go back to start.

Go to Old Main.

Go to the library to check out a book. Four days later you find the main desk . . . the book has been checked out by a prof . . . since 1926.
You hear that there is a KEGGER on Indian St. You go to the address and for 50c they let you in. You make your way through 400 people to the other side of the room where you discover that you are at a Turkey Shoot.

Go to the BOOKSTORE
You can finally afford the book for Complicated Science 555, your final is tomorrow.

You drop a class and come to the bookstore to return the book. It cost you $25, but since you wrote your name in it you pay the bookstore $5 to take it back.

You pay $18 per quarter to park six blocks from campus. You get a parking ticket anyway. Go to Security.

You didn’t show up for Universal Theory 221. Take one free turn.

CONSTRUCTION
Go back ten spaces.

You didn’t show up for Universal Theory 221. Spend the hour in the Coffee Shop.

COFFEE SHOP
You bring your own tea and your own cup. You pay 10c for the hot water.

OLD MAIN
Lose one turn to climb the steps.

SURPRISE! A new statue was erected during lunch. It is President Flora in a Viking outfit.

Your schedule says you have a class in MH 747. You go to Miller Hall and walk around for an hour before you discover there IS no MH 747. Lose one turn.

Welcome to Western! Whether you’re a new student or a returning one you’ve got an equal chance to win (or lose) when you play the campus game. Rip out the gameboard, borrow some tokens and dice from an old Monopoly set, find yourself a couple of other students and follow the arrows.

Remember, it’s not whether you graduate or drop out, but what you do with your four years that counts.

The first step in playing the Welcome to Western game is to remember that patience is seen as a student virtue.

This means that the average student spends half of his college career waiting around for things like the line in the bookstore, the line at the registration center, the line in the dining halls or the coffee shop, the line to get into a concert, film, or play, the line to add a class, the line to drop a class . . . not to mention, for some, the line at the unemployment office and the line at the food stamp office.

If you are going to add some realism to this game, line all of the players up and make them wait for 15 minutes before you begin playing.

As for the order of playing, this can be determined in any number of ways, class standing, last grade point, but perhaps the most fair and random way is to base the order of play on the last registration dates you had. If you didn’t have a registration date, go to the end of the line and wait.
DENNIS MANSKER

Pete was the last man to arrive at the morning briefing. He came sloshing through the dark from his tent, sending up little splashes of muddy water at his feet with every step he took. His helmet joggled around loosely and the neckstrap bounced against face. Lieutenant Bryant had already begun talking when Pete came up behind the group of soldiers huddled in the rain around the door of the operations shack, put his rifle carefully under the overhanging roof of the building, and jumped up on a low sandbagged wall behind the rest of the soldiers.

"'Spencer!'' Bryant said sharply.
"Oh, uh... here, sir."
"Answer up, Spencer. I don't like to have to call you twice."
"Yessir."
"Grab yourself an M-60. You're riding shotgun in the number two truck."

Pete slid down from the wet sandbags and pulled the damp fatigue trousers away from his skin. Damn it all anyway, he thought. A damn M-60 again. He didn't mind riding shotgun on convoys, but he hated to wrestle with the long bulky machine gun, and it was all but impossible for him to clean it to the armorer's satisfaction. Mumbling to himself, he threaded his way through the group of men and grabbed the heavy gun from the armorer's hands. The armorer grinned at him and whispered, "That gun better be spotless when you turn it in this time, Spencer." Pete

"We're making a run to Lai Khe," Bryant was saying in a low, clear voice. "Ammunition and C-Rations. We're gonna go up fast, unload fast, and get back fast. If we get hit, keep moving; if we have to stop, shotguns out of the trucks and take up position. If your truck blows up with you in it, you're no good to us..."

Pete knew this briefing talk by heart and yawned. Okay, okay, he thought, We've all seen John Wayne about a million times... He looked at the field of gently bobbing helmets suspended above a wall of backs uniformly covered with greenish-gray ponchos. Water from the drizzling rain ran around the rims of the canvas-covered helmets to form small rivulets down the back of the ponchos. That's the Army for you, Pete said to himself. Everything's got to be identical. He yawned again and reached under his own poncho to hitch up his flak vest. He hated to wear it because it was hot and heavy and always made his armpits itch. He scratched, cursed under his breath, and returned his attention to Bryant, who was glaring at him.

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Fifteen minutes later the door opened and the driver of the truck, a blond kid of about nineteen or so, got in. Pete didn't recognize his face.
"Hi!" the kid said in a loud and friendly voice.
"Hi," Pete said in return. "You new in the company or something? I don't remember seeing you before."
"Naw, they sent me over from the 261st. One of your drivers went on sick call and they sent me to replace him."

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He started the truck’s engine and raced the motor slightly to warm it.

Pete reached his hand across the cab. “I’m Pete Spencer.”

“Chuck Williams. Glad to meetcha. You a driver?”

“No, I’m the company clerk.”

“Company clerk? Why the hell are you on convoy? Our clerk can’t even get out of the orderly room. He couldn’t go on convoy even if he wanted to. They need him too much, I guess. At least that’s the story he tells. He says the company would fall apart without him.”

Lieutenant Bryant’s jeep splashed by, sending up twin roostertails of muddy water from each fenderwell, and took up position at the head of the long line of trucks. The convoy slowly pulled out of the compound, past the sandbagged guard bunker at the gate and onto the asphalt highway. Pete snapped open the dun-colored ammo case and took one end of the long shiny belt of M-60 bullets out of it, lifted up the loading plate on the top of the machine gun and slipped the first shell into its slot. He snapped the plate down, clicked on the safety, and balanced the gun on the bipod legs, holding the stock lightly in his hands. Before long the convoy turned off the smooth asphalt of the highway onto a wandering mud-rutted track through the rice paddies and rubber plantations northeast of Saigon.

It was now well into daylight and the morning was getting hotter. Pete struggled out of the poncho and wadded it up behind the seat, pushed his helmet back on his head and wiped his sweating forehead with the back of his arm. Squirming around in the seat, he loosened the nylon flak vest and let the cooling wind from the open windshield blow around his sweaty body. He grunted, scratched at his armpits, and slouched back against the seat, letting the butt of the machine gun ride against his thigh.

Looking out at the bright green rice paddies laid out in perfect squares to the horizon, bordered by graceful palms and small banana groves, Pete thought it hard to believe that there was a war going on. Occasionally they would rumble through a gigantic rubber plantation, with its tall stately trees, each with a series of slash marks on its trunk, some with a bucket hung below a fresh slash to collect the raw rubber that oozed from it. The trees were planted in perfect symmetrical rows, like some vast American fruit orchard, and Pete was almost overwhelmed by the feelings of peace and calm that they seemed to exude.

When they went through a hamlet, filled with corrugated tin shacks, bamboo lath huts, a few brightly-painted concrete houses and garish advertising signs, dozens of brown children came running out to the edge of the roadway, waving wildly and yelling, “Chop-chop!” Pete grinned at them and waved back. He liked the Vietnamese kids, and he always saved part of his C-Rations to toss to them on the return trip.

“We’re being hit!” Almost a rattling of a machine gun cl

“What the hell,” Williams said strangely. “What are you doing?”

“I guess I haven’t convinced the Old Man or the Top of that yet. As it is they both hate my guts and get rid of me every chance they get.”

“Why? Are you a troublemaker?”

“No . . . not in the usual sense, anyway. I just hate the Army and they both know I won’t put up with any lifer bullshit. They’ve tried to get me transferred out, but 6th Battalion won’t cut orders on me. It looks to me like they can’t find any other company that will have me, so they’re keeping me right here.”

“And you keep being sent on shotgun. You must be a draftee.”

“You know it, baby.”

Pete jerked around to glare at him. “Just what are you trying to say, Williams?”

Williams looked back at him and shrugged. “Spencer, you just can’t expect to treat these stupid gooks like people, man. Hell, they’re just a buncha gooks—”

“Aw, shut your goddam face, Williams!” Pete said angrily. “I’m fed up with you and all your kind!” He turned back to face the front, feeling the anger flush into his cheeks. Oh God, why was I ever put down in the middle of this? Why do I have to put up with bastards like Williams every goddam day? He slouched down in the seat and pulled the helmet low over his eyes, wishing he’d never heard of the Army, of Vietnam, or of Chuck Williams.

Williams looked at him and chuckled. “Whatsa matter, boy? Can’t face the facts of life?”

“Screw you, Williams,” Pete mumbled, looking out the window and trying to imagine what it would be like to be
home again, away from the Army and its sadistic cretins
like Williams.

They skidded their way up a long hill and past the big
“Sherwood Forest” sign, lettered in green Old English
script. As they started around a corner, suddenly there was
an odd, popping sound from the rear, along the line of
trucks, and Pete jerked up out of his slouch. The butt of
the gun dug viciously into his thigh. Just as he was turning
to look out the window toward the rear, Williams yelled,
“We’re being hit!”  Almost simultaneously Pete heard the
rattling of a machine gun close ahead. The truck in front
swerved and skidded crazily and its trailer fishtailed
violently in the wet mud. It came to a sudden stop and
Williams cursed and jammed his foot on the brake pedal.
They slid into the trailer with a bone-jarring crash and it
topped over, its gray boxes of C-Rations cascading down
into the mud.

Pete began looking frantically into the brush at the side
of the road. He felt Williams digging at his side. He looked
over and Williams shouted something he couldn’t
understand and jumped out of the truck. Just then Pete
remembered the words of the morning briefing: “shotguns
out of the trucks and take up position . . . .” He jerked his
door open and slid out onto the mud, dragging the machine
gun with him and carrying the ammo box under his arm.

Now he could hear the sound of firing all along the line of
stalled trucks. Hunched up on his knees and elbows,
cradling the machine gun in the crook of his arms and
dragging the ammo box with one hand, he crawled quickly
toward a patch of tall grass at the side of the road next to
the overturned trailer. He had just passed the large gray
heap of C-Ration boxes when the explosion came, a quick

loud metallic blast that compressed his chest, blew off his
helmet, and peppered the ground around him with tiny bits
of mud, metal, and rubber.

Pete gasped for a breath, jammed his steel pot back on,
and scrambled for the side of the road. Once in the long
grass, he rolled over on his back and looked at his truck. It
was barely recognizable: a mine had been detonated almost
directly under the cab and the truck looked as though it
had been sprung open in the middle. With a sick feeling in
his stomach, Pete rolled back over and searched the jungle.

Where are the shots coming from? How many of them are
there? It seemed as though he could hear them all around
him. He began firing random bursts into the thickest parts
of the bush, looking vainly for a target. The actions became
mechanical: hold tightly, squeeze the trigger, let up, make
a quick visual search, hold tightly, squeeze . . . . The sounds
of the firefight seemed to grow farther and farther away
and he had a sudden fleeting mental picture of himself as a
robot, programmed to go through the same absurd
repetitious motions. He halted the ritual and shook his head
to clear it.

It was then that he heard the rapid footsteps coming
quickly through the jungle from the direction of the rear of
the convoy. They grew louder and louder and suddenly
Pete could see the man, dressed in the black pajamas of the
Viet Cong, running through the brush and looking behind
him frantically. His face was filled with panic and his eyes
darted around wildly. Pete jumped up onto his knees,
jerking the muzzle of the gun up toward the man. The Viet
Cong saw him and stopped, his mouth working soundlessly.
Terror filled his eyes. He threw up his arms protectively.
His hands were empty.

Time seemed suddenly to expand: Pete felt the vibration
in his own throat as a low rumble, heard the sound coming
from his mouth as a distant thunder. The machine gun,
buckling in his tired hands almost under its own power, felt
as though it were gently swaying. A look of shocked
surprise spread over the yellow face of the Vietnamese as
the bullets slowly ripped through his body. He crumpled
over backwards and bounced to the ground.

Pete got slowly to his feet. The shooting had stopped
and the jungle seemed filled with an ominous silence. He
heard, as though from a long ways away, slow footsteps
cross the road behind him. Williams appeared at his side,
looked down at the dead Vietnamese, then at Pete, and
finally back at the dead Vietnamese. Breathing a low
whistle, he walked over and nudged the dead man with his
toe.

“Wow, nice one, man,” he murmured. “You got him
right in the chest and the guts.”

Pete fell back to his knees and felt the vomit well up in
his throat.

Williams lit a cigarette and nudged the corpse with the
toe of his jungle boot again. “Stupid gook,” he said.
I CAN'T LOOK BACK
BECAUSE THE DEVIL IS ON MY TAIL

STU PIGEON*

You might say I have a problem. Not an insurmountable one, but care must be taken as not to aggravate the situation. I have this unique sensation, or can I call it unique, that my heart sometimes does not beat. So I will pull out my watch, put two fingers on my wrist, and feel for the steady beat of blood coursing through my veins, checking to see that my heart is beating 68 times a minute, that being what the average, out-of-shape man's heart beats in America.

Sometimes I will check my breathing also. And when I am breathing a steady 14.5 breaths a minute, which is also an American average, my mind will return to whatever it was doing before.

I am a college student and college students are notoriously known for their strange habits, so people hardly glance at me when I stop in the middle of Red Square and look at my watch. But I didn't always do this.

I was what you might call a heavy doper. Nothing to look forward to but the morning high, the afternoon high, the evening high which sustained my mind high above my thoughts and my dreary, sick-filled life until crash time when my thoughts were subdued in darkness, surrounded for eight hours of dreamlessness. Never dreaming, because dreaming lets you move from your body and see exactly where you are.

The stones would come and go, some harder, some easier, some pleasant like the times of carefree ease sitting at the water's edge on a sunny day, when the sun would beat into your skin as the gently lapping water lulled you into a soft vision of life. But the stones got closer together, or farther apart, near and nearer, until what was being stoned? I mean, it was hard to tell one from the other and everything moved behind glazed eyes.

You see, I dropped only the best of chemicals, smoked only the best of hash, or so I told myself, but there were those god awful nights of cramps and strychnine highs couple with shit speed, PCP, DMT or some other substance never intended for human consumption. Then there was MDA. Wonder drug it was labeled. The perfect lay-back stone that still allowed you to move—to function.

Beginnings are always so simple. An ounce of MDA sitting on the table—freebies to night folks, communal high from the roomie, the dealer, and I wanted to get high, good and high. It's hard to judge chemicals in bulk. Fluffy and white, the crystalline mixture sat there invitingly and the right amount? Who knows.

I left that up to my roommate, the

*Ed. Note: This is not the author's real name.
Rushes that wouldn’t stop, welling up from the bottom of my feet, sweeping through my body, coming out my eyeballs.

I was no longer in control and my vision would come and go behind crashing swirling waves of rushes that would roar from beyond the walls and crash over my head. I was suffocating in those rushes, drowning in a sea of hallucinations. I wanted to get up but I had no control over my legs that were dripping out of my pants and I could feel the floor beneath the overstuffed, overupholstered chair as the waves forced me down. Voices came from some outer void through those waves of hallucinations and patterns. Everything was going too fast—too fucking fast.

I was startled to awareness by some primal force that still remains nameless. I had been sitting in that space ship seat and hadn’t been breathing. I’d forgotten how to breath. I summoned all the power in my fragmented mind and welled one big suck of air, drawing those waves of blue and green swirling patterns that fogged my brain but the little air I got wasn’t enough. All concentration, all awareness went to my lungs to keep my heart beating that would feed my blood that would keep my brain that would keep those blue and green waves swirling around my head. I wanted so to sit there and succumb, washed onto beaches of space floating above me, but wait—I had to breath. I mean, you don’t breath and you die. It’s like if I don’t breath, lungs suck in, by now you’re putting your whole body into that single motion of sucking that air into those empty sacks) if I don’t make myself breath, like man, I just won’t breath.”

I was no longer in control and my realization that I had to get up, move around and not stop breathing. My head was spinning in the cosmos, so weak I could barely move, but I got up as my entire life consciousness focused on it. Joe was looking at me, his face broken into a fragmented frown, his 270 degree face protruding like a jet stream from his nose.

“Hey man, what’s wrong?”

“I don’t know man, it, it’s like I can’t breath. It’s like if I don’t breath man, I don’t know, It’s like if I don’t (stop, lungs suck in, by now you’re putting your whole body into that single motion of sucking that air into those empty sacks) if I don’t make myself breath, like man, I just won’t breath”

And the word overdose started moving slowing from some obscure place, reverberating in my head, until I was breathing to the tune of Overdose.

“Hey man, how much of that shit did I take?”

He looked away, and he looked away because you took a fucking overdose, and it’s got you, man, on a giant ferris wheel that goes up and down and around and around and a guy wire snapped and it’s gonna come crashing down. Crashing down hard.

“Not much, man you didn’t take that much.” He wasn’t convincing.

Stoned people can sense those subtle emotions in human beings. I was seeing right through Joe and I panicked at what I was seeing. The rushes were now closer together now. I was desperately breathing, in and out in and out in outinoutinoutinout. My body was tingling, the kind of tingling that I imagine preceeded—death. My mind was going so fast, so much faster than my body, which just wanted to lay down and give up, quit, give in to those ultimate sensations but my mind cried so desperately against that, cried for—life. I had to keep going. I hopped from foot to foot, my face showed the fear that pervaded my being, reflected in the face of my roommate.

My heart sounded like a machine gun in my ears. It was somewhere about this time that I wanted to call
an ambulance, to give my body over to those who are trained to cure.

"Man, I'm not sure but I think I want to go to the hospital. With each rush, I knew more and more. With each desperate breath that required more of my whole being, that required the utmost concentration, that would begin in the pit of my stomach, muscles pulling, but never enough air. It was then, my vision fading into darkness, then I said "I gotta go to St. Lukes, you gotta get me there—now."

My heart, my lungs, everything was going too slow, and it was too late to slow my mind down.

I rushed into the emergency ward, to be met by the glare of stark fluorescent, sanitized hall where a short moustached man in his late twenties waited, dressed in white.

"You gotta help me. I don't know, but man I can't breath. I took some MDA. I don't know how much, but you gotta help."

The words wouldn't come out fast enough as I stood rocking from foot to foot, shaking my hands to keep the circulation going, each breath painful like the last, with each breath the terror that it would be my last filling me.

"What did you take? How long ago?" Why didn't he understand, He had to help me—now.

"I don't know, it didn't look like that much, maybe two-three hits, I don't know. I took it about four, five hours ago." All this time we stood in the stark sanitary hallway, my roommates, very fearfully, timidly stood near the doorway.

"Do you know what this stuff was?"

"I don't know man, I suppose it was some kind of speed."

He led me into the emergency room, where two patients beds sat in a row, with medical gear, respirators, oscilloscopes, all the modern technology lining the wall that would save my life—if indeed it could be saved.

I lay down on one of the beds, staring at the tiled ceiling with three thousand four hundred holes in each tile, my chest heaving in and out in and out, my wild eyes staring at the tiles that slowly quivered. The short white man took my blood pressure, and pulse rate while the tiles quivered and shook, then left me, went to a phone, and minutes later another short white man with heavy black-rimmed glasses, looking so stern, so evil, came and looked at me, just looked at me—then walked away. The conversation was barely audible except for—"There's nothing we can do for him."

Nothing they could do for me? Nothing they could do for me. It was too late, I was going to die, and I didn't want to die. They stared down at me and so softly said "Here, breath into this bag," as they put it over my mouth. It was then the terror that had been slowly subsiding in the hands of the people in white burst from me. It was the scream of a desperate, dying man.

"Joe, Ken, they're trying to kill me," I screamed for help, for someone to help me. Joe and Ken appeared in the doorway, looking very frightened. They stared down at me and so softly said "There's nothing we can do for him."

It was minutes later before the full realization grew into fruition. I wasn't dying, I hadn't taken an overdose—the only overdose had been my head. Or had I? Who know?

I lay there for several more hours, alternatingly breathing into the paper bag, until I thought I would pass out, then removing the bag and gulping in fresh air. All the while the little holes in the ceiling tile quivered and moved in unison to the cracking and snapping inside my brain, guy wires snapping inside my head.

While I lay there, another man came in—this time with two police officers. He didn't look much over twenty, clean shaven, short hair, wearing a yellow wind-breaker and looking so scared.

I had taken a bottle of aspirin. I didn't watch and all I could hear was "Why did you do it?" over and over mingled with the sound of vomiting until finally only the gut-rendering hacking of dry heaves filled the still air. The young man sat there between the two doctors and two policemen and vomited while they stood over him and wanted to know why. They led him away soon after as I lay there staring at the quivering tiles.

To this day I'm not sure how I got into drugs. It was never for me, as it was for some, a deeply mystical experience, exploring the inner cosmos of the universe, but only a game. A minor diversion for a bored college student. The game was to bring yourself to the edge and maintain. Only this time I had lost.
The blacktop curb that runs along Highway 101 above Leggett, California, is a stale puddle of asphalt and small rocks that can be easily picked apart by a person's fingernails. I know that because that's what my fingernails were doing for several hours one morning last August.

Shifting my weight from curb to pack to pavement, I watched numbly as Joe took his turn standing by the roadside stretching his thumb toward San Francisco.

It was starting to get hot. We had arrived at this patch of roadway an hour before the sun—thanks to redwood shade—but now we were losing our property rights and the steamy, sweaty sunshine was taking over.

I think the sun cutting through the redwoods had been innocently trying to inspire an “It’s great to be alive” feeling, but people who spend all morning picking rocks out of highway curb are not easily convinced.

It seems I spent a lot of time picking rocks that trip. Or throwing rocks at my pack. Or just gazing down at the pavement, trying to lose my thoughts.

Every now and then, hiking off to piss in some bushes helped break up the monotony of the long roadside wait. That was like trying out the bathrooms in airplanes and busses—not because of any great bladder urgency, just for a change of pace.

It’s best not to read or write poetry during the long waits; keeping one’s mind active only increases the awareness of each passing minute.

“Joe”
“Yeh?”
“I give up.”
“What?”

We were going to die and rot like skunks before we would get on a Greyhound.

“I mean I give up. I quit. I’m never going to do this again. I’m quitting hitchhiking.”

It wasn’t the first time I’d ever said that. Three years ago I said it in Georgia after getting sick during a ride in a chicken truck.

The previous summer I said it in southern Washington when a fat man in a suit and Cadillac offered me fifty dollars to spend the night in bed with him.

And I said it one morning in Ohio when a bout with diarrhea caused me to spend countless hours walking between the freeway and the nearest men’s room.

I’d quit before and I’d probably quit again.

What made things worse was that Joe was a newcomer to this sport of hippies. That gave me not only my own boredom to contend with, but a growing guilt for talking Joe into this tour of highway curbs.

I looked down onto the main street of Leggett, some 100 feet below the highway. A Greyhound station glared up at me.

The bus station spoke of people going here and there at appointed times, of getting to destinations without indefinite waits and without lugging heavy packs around at a dozen points along the way.

Yet, there was more involved. It wasn’t just a matter of giving up hitchhiking and jumping on a magic carpet. It meant paying for a ticket, sitting around in a bus depot (the most depressing place in the world), climbing aboard a plastic Scenicruiser (the second most depressing place in the world) and sitting in an impossibly narrow seat while somebody’s grandmother asks me what I’m studying in college.

No, we couldn’t do that. We could swear at the passing cars, at each other and at God; we could kick the pavement until our feet were blistered; we could chew up the blacktop curb and spit the rocks out at Leggett—but we were going to die and rot like skunks on the road before we would get on a Greyhound.

So we quit hitchhiking. Instead, we took turns standing by the roadside with our thumbs out. If a car stopped, that would be fine; we’d get in. But if none stopped, that was okay too.

It didn’t matter—we’d quit.

QUITTING, and other forms of procrastination