

HOW TO START A CAMPFIRE

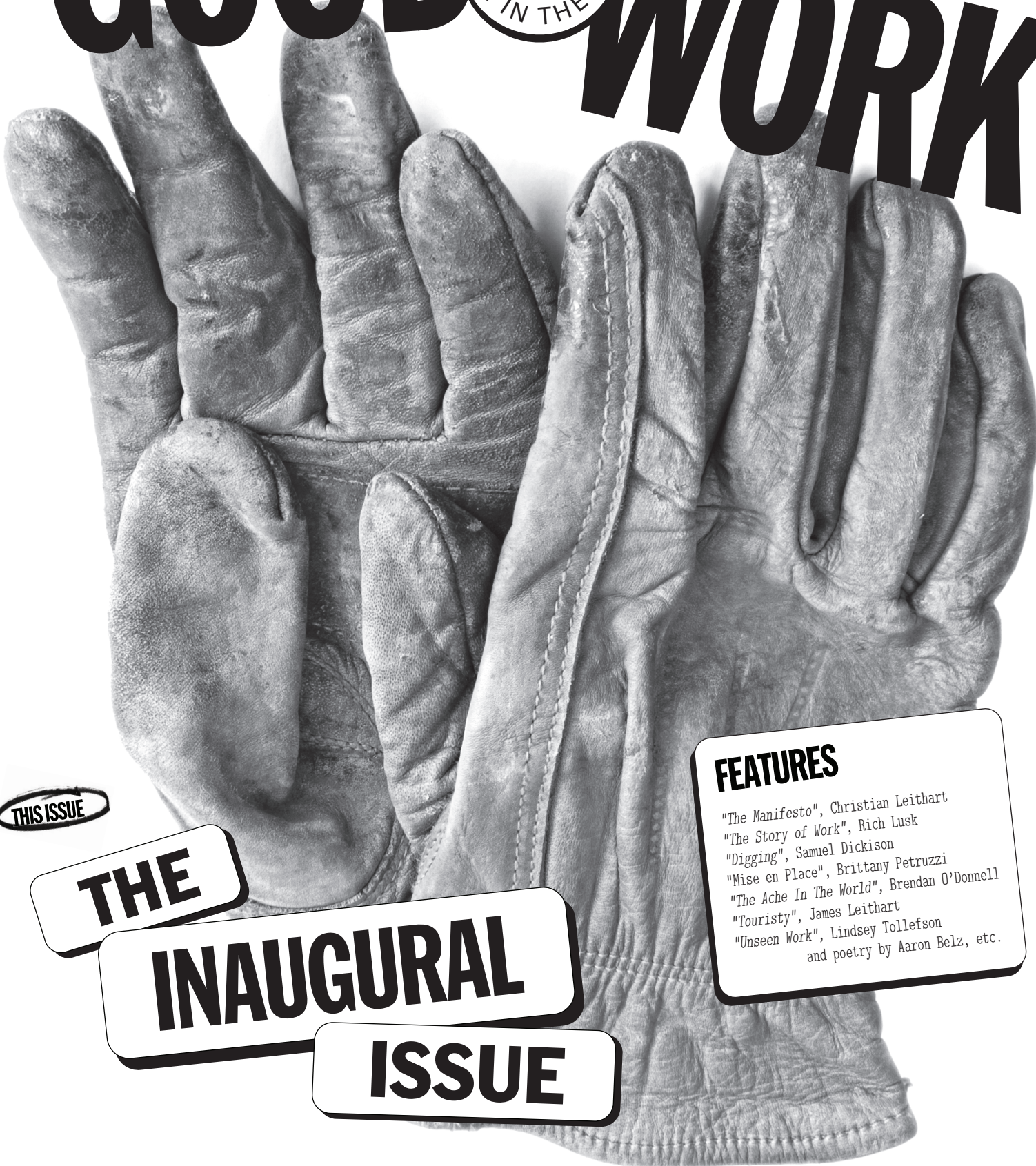
1. Shred page 1 into thin strips.
2. Gently crumple them into a light nest.
3. Make a tent of small, dry sticks over the nest.
4. Use a lighter to set fire to the paper.
5. Slowly add larger sticks until fire reaches desired size.
6. Cozy up.
7. (Supplement with pages 2-16 as needed.)

USING THIS MAGAZINE



GOOD WORK

HOW TO
BE HERE
AND
NOW
IN THE
LINE



THIS ISSUE

THE
INAUGURAL
ISSUE

FEATURES

- "The Manifesto", Christian Leithart
- "The Story of Work", Rich Lusk
- "Digging", Samuel Dickison
- "Mise en Place", Brittany Petruzzi
- "The Ache In The World", Brendan O'Donnell
- "Touristy", James Leithart
- "Unseen Work", Lindsey Tollefson
and poetry by Aaron Belz, etc.

CHRISTIAN LEITHART

“THE MANIFESTO”

"GOOD WORK" EDITOR

For decades, our culture has been the domain of God-hating secularism. After the Sexual Revolution, the Culture Wars began, and Christians have lost every fight since then. Only recently have we made progress, thanks to the Dobbs ruling on abortion, but all other areas of culture are slowly, but inexorably being covered by the dark cloud of paganism.

At least, that's how the story goes. In these pages, we'd like to present an alternative.

When King Hezekiah began to restore the worship of the true God during his reign, he faced a similar situation: A once-faithful nation that had given itself up to idolatry. But the problem was not that the false gods had taken over the culture. The problem was that God's people had abandoned the culture they had been given. The temple was there in Jerusalem. They just ignored it. They had books of law and wisdom, including the Psalms of David, but no one read, sang, or taught them. The harvest was waiting, but the people did not gather it in.

A culture is not a battleground. It is the inevitable outgrowth of belief. It is not the root, but the branches. Worship the God of life and you will have a culture of life. Worship anything else, and your culture will collapse like cardboard in the rain. Secularism—the worship of man in his own image—isn't so much a culture as an anti-culture, eating itself away from the inside, actively destroying everything good and beautiful. This anti-culture is not worth fighting over. It needs to be thrown away to make room for the true culture of the Church.

What is the Church's culture? What kind of branches grow from that root? Jesus tells us that He has received all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18), and so, quite simply, everything in the world belongs to

him. This not only includes the souls and bodies of men and women, but oak trees, flamingoes, the Pacific Ocean, debate clubs, steak knives, clouds, fireworks, jet engines, lawn mowers, garage door openers, golf clubs, unpronounceable last names, Saturday mornings, and pancakes. Abraham Kuyper put it well: "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, 'Mine!'" The world and everything in it is bright with the blood of Jesus. He bought it, and then He gave it to us. All of it. The Church is the caretaker of the whole world. We are responsible for pushing the love of Christ into every corner of the universe.

In other words, Christian culture includes everything. Movies are ours. Science is ours. Education is ours. Government is ours. Social justice is ours. We don't have to retake anything. We have to take care of what has been entrusted to us.

This should encourage us. The roofer doesn't have to attach a cross to every roof he repairs. It already belongs to God. The curious naturalist doesn't have to justify rambling through the woods. Every creature that brings him delight brought delight first to its Creator. The politician does not have to reconcile faith and public service. His public service is his duty to God.

We must repent, of course, as Judah did in the days of Hezekiah. A hard heart cannot learn new songs. Unless, by the grace of God, we turn back to his Word, all the political theory in the world can't save us. Without repentance, good food turns to ashes in our mouths. Science becomes madness. Politics becomes murder. Culture becomes a seething mass of sharp-toothed envy. Without Jesus, there is nothing. But if we follow Him, we will find every good thing there, too.

UNSEEN

BY LINDSEY TOLLEFSON

Social

media has had an interesting effect on our culture, making everyone feel like they must be seen. If you don't post an event online, did it even happen? Social media has made it possible for even the most miniscule events of our lives to be documented publicly. If you eat a salad for lunch, you can post your good health choice online for all to commend you. This has created a culture in which it is easy to feel like we are missing out on something if we are doing anything that is not seen. When anyone can attain celebrity status on their Instagram account, everyone feels like they must strive for that. Americans are becoming more and more concerned about being seen, and a fear of invisibility in life is a great temptation. Even Americans who live in the most remote areas and work from home are able to gather an audience. While there may be some benefits to social media and the opportunities it offers to spread truth, it has changed our mindset of the work that for all of history has gone unseen. Many people are called to do jobs that are not public, or that are done for a very small audience. Not all Christians are called to be pastors of large congregations or managers of large companies. Many Christians are called to work in small ways: teachers of tiny classes, pastors of small churches, mothers at home, or working in an office in a small company. Even beyond vocational work, life has endless amounts of work that are just basic to survival. There are always meals to prepare, lawns to mow, bathrooms to clean, floors to mop, laundry to fold. Much of what we have to do as humans goes completely unseen. It feels worthless, pointless, useless. As a high school teacher, I often hear my students say, "Who cares if I make my bed? I'm the only one who sees it." And, of course, this launches me into an extensive lecture about the importance of doing unseen work with excellence. For Christians, the audience of the Triune God should be enough. We should not need approval or the acceptance of anyone else. If our work is unseen by everyone else in this entire world, we should still do it with excellence. Ecclesiastes 12:14 states, "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Everything we do, whether it is sinful or righteous or mundane or important, is seen and judged by the Almighty God. 1 Corinthians 4:5 repeats this same sentiment: "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God." And Proverbs 15:3 says, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." God sees all. He sees the big works that we do in front of large audiences, and he sees the little things we do in front of nobody. He sees the podcasts launched to millions, and he sees the beds made in the quietness of our homes. He sees all the work, and he sees our hearts. He sees if it is done enjoy and gratitude, or if it is done in pride and arrogance.

WORK

The true end of our lives is to do service to God in serving of man.

William Perkins

THE

BY RICH LUSK

Work, like so many other things in our culture oday, has been politicized. Over the last few years, articles lamenting the lack of workers due to the “great resignation” have been common. Some blame the declining workforce on government programs that pay people to not work, while others blame corporations and businesses that undercompensate their employees, but either way, we have all seen the results of an exodus of workers from the marketplace. Help wanted signs are everywhere and supply chains are stalling out. Another example of the politicization of the workplace: California has recently been debating legislation that would shorten the work week to four days, while requiring companies to keep pay levels stable. How the economics of this are supposed to work out – paying people the same amount for less work – is never explained, of course. But it is one more way work has become a politically contentious issue. Different views of work stem from different worldviews.

Confusion over and frustration with work is almost as old as humanity. In the biblical account, work predates the fall. The first thing we learn about God in the Bible is that he is a worker; he works by making a creation in the space of six days, and then rests (celebrates!) on the seventh. The first thing we learn about man is that he is a worker, too, because he is made in God’s image. The human race is given a job in Genesis 1:26-28. That job basically has two components, to take dominion over the earth, using creation’s built-in resources to construct a God-glorifying civilization, and to multiply, which will result in an earth filled with divine image-bearers. In Genesis 2, this job description becomes more focused and specific for Adam: he is to guard and cultivate the Garden of Eden. Work in an unfallen world would

no doubt have been challenging, but it also would have been a constant source of meaning, fulfillment, and joy. Sadly, those conditions did not last long.

In Genesis 3, Adam and his wife revolt against God’s law and design. The result is a curse that we have been living with ever since. The curse hits the woman in the realm of child-bearing and child-nurturing (Gen. 3:16); the human race will still multiply, but now it will be a painful process. The curse hits the man in the realm of work; the human race will still take dominion over the creation, but now thorns and thistles will get in the way, making it a far more difficult task (Gen. 3:17-18).

But as the Biblical story unfolds, we find that frustration and futility for workers in a fallen world are not the only realities. God is continually showing that he will ultimately push back the curse, to bless work and to bless humanity through work. Later in Genesis, Noah works by building an ark. That ark is a cosmos in miniature, and carries Noah and his family through the decreation of the flood into a new creation, inaugurated with a reissuing of the mandate of Genesis 1 (cf. Gen. 9:1-7). In Exodus, we find God’s Spirit giving Bezalel wisdom for the specific purpose of working with the raw material of creation – stone, wood, and precious metals – to create objects of glory and beauty to be used in the tabernacle (Ex. 31:1ff, 35:30ff). Bezalel was filled with the Spirit precisely so he could work skillfully with his hands. Proverbs stresses the importance of diligent labor, pointing to the positive example of the ant and the negative example of the sluggard (Prov. 6:6ff). While the ant is self-disciplined, needing no captain to tell her what to do, the sluggard fails to take dominion over the creation and thus the thorns begin to rule over him (Prov. 24:30ff). While the sluggard’s failure to work reverses the dominion mandate, the faithful son fulfills the dominion mandate. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon not only continues to affirm the goodness of work, even in a fallen, vaporous world, he calls on man to enjoy the fruits of his labors along with his wife/helper (Ecc. 2:24, 8:15). Work is central to the Bible’s wisdom literature because these books (especially Proverbs and Ecclesiastes) are largely about how to fulfill the program of Genesis 1:26-28 in a post-fall creation.

When we come to the New Testament Scriptures, the story of work continues to unfold. We know that Jesus came on a mission of love and redemption to do the work of saving us from our sins. But before he undertook that task, he did a different kind of work. While the gospels focus on the three-year public ministry of Jesus as a rabbi, we know he spent much of the first thirty years of his life working as a carpenter, likely running a small family business and engaging in manual labor, just as his father Joseph had (Mark 6:3). The fact that Jesus served many years in a “secular” vocation, working with his

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hands, before working with words in a “spiritual” vocation, as a rabbi, should forever obliterate any secular/sacred dichotomy for Christians. Work can be a form of worship. Work is Christlike. Charles Spurgeon explains:

The true way to serve the Lord in the common acts of life is to perform them as unto himself; and this can be done with everything which it is lawful to do. God forbid we should maintain, as some do, a broad, unbending distinction between things secular and religious...

To a man who lives unto God nothing is secular, everything is sacred. He puts on his workday garment and it is a vestment to him: he sits down to his meal and it is a sacrament; he goes forth to his labor, and therein exercises the office of the priesthood: his breath is incense and his life a sacrifice. He sleeps on the bosom of God, and lives and moves in the divine presence. To draw a hard and fast line and say, “This is sacred and this is secular,” is, to my mind, diametrically opposed to the teaching of Christ and the spirit of the gospel.

Thus, when tax collectors and soldiers came to John the Baptist to repent and be baptized, he did not tell them to leave behind their “secular” jobs and go on preaching tours as missionaries; instead, he told them to fulfill their respective vocations in righteousness (Luke 3:12-14). The gospel does not take us out of our jobs; it sends us into our jobs to do the work we have been given to do “with gladness and singleness of heart” (as the Eucharistic benediction puts it). Our weekly work is the liturgy after the liturgy. The coming of God’s kingdom does not negate the call to work but restores work to its original purpose.

Paul addresses work in several places. In 1 Corinthians 7, he develops a doctrine of vocation, explaining that the sum total of our roles and responsibilities in daily life are assigned by God. In Colossians 3:23, he tells slaves (and therefore all workers) to do whatever work you find to do “heartily, as for the Lord, and not for men.” In 1 Thessalonians 4:14, Paul calls on Christians “to work with your hands” as a way of providing for themselves. While intellectual labor is just as pleasing to God as manual labor, many in recent years have pointed out that working with one’s hands (whether vocationally or as a hobby) has many advantages, especially in an age of “virtual reality.” Working with one’s hands forces the worker to attend to the nature of objective reality; it is a reality check. Almost thirty years ago Christopher Lasch pointed out that American elites were in danger of losing touch with reality precisely because they had lost touch with the physical world:

The thinking classes are fatally removed from the physical side of life... Their only relation to productive labor is that of consumers. They have no experience of making anything substantial or enduring. They live in a world of abstractions and images, a simulated world that consists of computerized models of reality...as distinguished from the palatable, immediate, physical reality inhabited by ordinary men and women. Their belief in “social construction of reality” – the central dogma of postmodernist thought – reflects the experience of living in an artificial environment from which everything that resists human control (unavoidably, everything familiar and reassuring as well) has been rigorously excluded. Control has become their obsession. In their drive to insulate themselves against risk and contingency – against the unpredictable hazards that afflict human life – the thinking classes have seceded not just from the common world around them but from reality itself.

Finally, John’s Revelation picks up on a prophetic theme (cf. Isa. 60:1ff) and shows us that our work has eternal value. In some way the things we do as workers in this life will become the treasure of God’s kingdom in the consummation of all things (Rev. 21:24). Our works will follow us into the glory of the world to come (Rev. 14:13). Work was already present with man in the beginning, in the Garden of Eden. And the fruits of our work will be with us in the end, in the New Jerusalem. The Bible is the story of God’s creation and the story of man as God’s image bearer. But for these very reasons, it is also the story of work – work blessed, work cursed, and, ultimately, work redeemed.

ORRY

OF
WORK

Your work is a very sacred matter. God delights in it, and through it he wants to bestow his blessing on you.
Martin Luther

It was my first time back in the kitchen since losing my eyesight to, let's call it, "complications associated with a brain tumor." And it was around about the fifth time I'd lost my spatula in five minutes when I truly understood that not being able to see would mean a complete overhaul of my cooking style.

I'd always been a tornado in the kitchen. From the time I was three and "helping" to make the Sunday gravy, I equated the flurry of activity in the kitchen with culinary excellence. A certain devil-may-care efficiency and furious virtuosity characterized my cooking. The result was usually delicious, but always a FEMA-level disaster area. And good luck finding the spatula amid the debris, even with the full use of your eyes. Every meal became a challenge to conquer, every recipe a game to be won. I had no time for organization.

Don't get me wrong, I had always loved the idea of *mise en place*. Television chefs made it all look so simple and efficient: lay out all your ingredients in appropriately-size bowls and all you would have to do is reach for the right one in the moment. But once I'd tried it, the on-the-ground reality seemed a waste of precious time. Why chop and measure everything beforehand when I could chop some while searing the meat and measuring the rest while softening the onions?

And then there were the dishes! A television chef can slip her dirty dishes off set and a line chef can leave perfectly-nested stacks of used containers for the dishwasher, but all of my sundry cups and bowls became an extraneous part of the inevitable kitchen carnage. I'd made my decision: *mise en place* was a wholly unnecessary time-suck that only added to the clean-up.

Then I went blind. And "a place for everything and everything in its place" went from a mom-phrase deserving of every eye-roll to a life necessity. And *mise en place* turned cooking from a constant source of frustration back into the joy it had always been for me. I found that as my attitude in the kitchen turned from results-driven to process-oriented, dirty dishes became my collaborators and time became my friend.

It had always seemed to me that life was too short. But, as I faced the prospect of living the rest of my life without my eyesight, I had never felt more like Hamlet: "How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable seem to me all

the uses of this world." Neither of these extremes are correct. As the Preacher says, "time and chance happen to all" and you have exactly as many days to toil your vain toil under the sun as you need, no matter how you look at it. Whatever you don't get around to in this life will find its fulfillment in the next, making you free to devote yourself wholly to the good that is before you.

Consider the recipe before you as a gift. Add your time and attention and watch as it blossoms into the even greater gift of a shared meal. Perhaps this is advice born of necessity. While going blind does not enhance your remaining senses, it certainly forces you to pay much more attention to them.

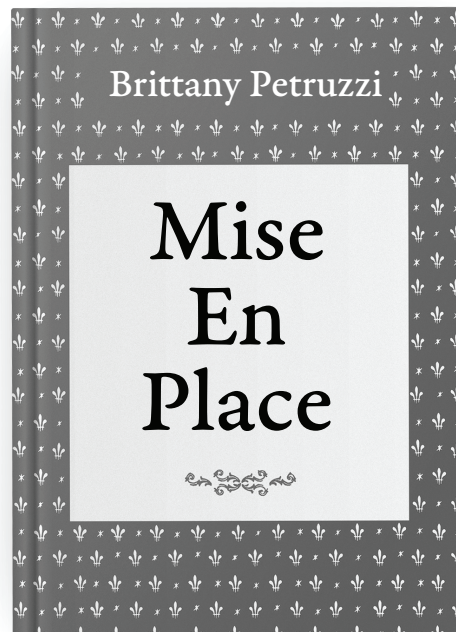
Pay enough attention to feel of the onion beneath your fingertips and the action of the knife, and you don't need your eyesight to create an even dice. The sizzle of

meat in a pan will strike your ear like poetry and the fragrant oils of freshly chopped herbs will rise to your nostrils like smokeless incense. Taste as you go and follow the story line of a sauce from disparate ingredients to a glorified unity. And, if you retain the use of your sight, pay attention to color, shape, and proportion as you plate each element. Remember that each element is a gift that you have enhanced by your time and attention to create an even greater gift for others.

You will find that when you give so wholly of yourself, you cannot lose. As my *mise en place* allows me to move effortlessly from one step to the next, I have the leisure to rinse each bowl and place it gratefully in the sink or dishwasher as I go. I tend to marshall my ingredients by

storage locale, so they stand just as ready to return as they had for use. And so, instead of a harried race to the finish amid an explosion of cookware, the counter stands ready for service. And I can make any finishing touches with rest in my heart and a smile on my lips.

Whether you do this with Kraft macaroni and cheese or Julia Child's Boeuf Bourguignon, when you prepare well and give of your time and attention, you participate in the archetypal feast of the Lord's Supper. "This is love," said His beloved disciple, "not that we have loved him, but that he loved us and sent his Son to the propitiation for our sins." And He prepared this gift from the beginning of time. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. As my grandmother would say, "Mangia!"



TOURISTY

A

What do you do?”

I’m settling into my window seat of a Boeing 737, preparing for the five hour flight from Tirana, the capital city of Albania, to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. The flight crew has finished their safety briefing, the fasten seatbelt light is on, and we begin to taxi toward the runway. As I flip through the entertainment options on the flight, the man next to me has struck up a conversation. One of the most common ice-breakers in the world: “What do you do?”

What the man in 17C doesn’t realize is that I have no idea how to answer this question. First of all, I don’t fully know what he is asking. Is he asking about what pays my bills? What I do on a day-to-day basis? Or maybe, and most unlikely, what drives me and gives my soul fire? And without knowing what he is asking, it’s hard for me to know how to answer.

I could tell him what I do for a paycheck, but then how far do I go? The simplest, easiest answer is that I am a media marketing specialist for a nonprofit organization. And that is true, but I do more than that. I could tell him that I am being flown to Dubai to shoot social media content for a five-star resort on The Palm, which is also technically true. It’s not my regular income, or a typical day in my life, but it is something that I do.

My typical day-to-day is even more different. Having worked from home for most of the last four years the most consistent thing in my daily life is going to the gym. So do I tell 17C that I work out? Surely he’s not asking the literal question of what I do, but rather looking more toward the income side. Although, there’s always a chance that he wants to know what it is that fuels me, what passions I have, what makes me tick.

I could go a whole new direction on that. I travel. I tell stories. I take photos, and I make YouTube videos. That is what I do. It pays a bill or two on occasion, but it’s a far stretch from my primary income. But that is what drives me, that is what I wake up each morning looking forward to, and what I want to be known for...

But that’s not what my fellow passenger is asking. He is asking the simplest, ice-breaking question you can ask someone when you sit next to them on a plane. And it is boring. I fully understand that you can’t sit down on a plane and ask your seat neighbor what their greatest fear is, but surely we can do better than just asking how they pay their bills. Why can’t we just dive slightly deeper?

As a traveler, I have set foot in almost three-dozen countries—more, if you include airports, which I don’t. For a long time, I was chasing an arbitrary number, checking countries off a list, putting a foot on the ground and calling it good. The problem with that mindset was that I often never fully experienced the countries I visited.

One time I was staying in Monaco and, just to cross Italy off my list, I hopped on the train and got off at the first stop, a small town called Ventimiglia. I had some food, walked around for an hour or two, took exactly one photo, then climbed back onto the train and rode back to Monaco. I’d visited Italy. Or had I?

After living in Albania for over four years now, I am realizing more and more how just “setting foot” in a country is really not experiencing it in the slightest. I’ve spent the last four years driving or hiking to the most remote corners of Albania that I could find and I still feel like I’ve only just scratched the surface of what this country has to offer. And this is a country so small that I could drive from one end to the other before lunch. My mind boggles when I try to grasp what might be available to discover in countries like Italy—over ten times bigger than Albania.

There I was, thinking that by eating gelato in Ventimiglia I’d been to Italy. As if crossing it off a list was some big accomplishment. In some ways, it doesn’t feel like I’ve been there at all. Now, when asked if I’ve been, my response is; “Well, kind of, but only for a couple hours...” I don’t have much to say about it, no experiences to share. I’m like a guy on an airplane, willing to talk to a stranger, but only at a surface level. It’s likely just my introverted nature coming out, but if someone asks what I do in order to be polite, I’d rather they not ask me at all. And if we want to get into some real conversations, let’s not put so much focus on what someone does to pay the bills, and more focus on what makes them who they are.

It’s been a hard day’s night.

The Beatles



B

**BY
JAMES
LEIHART**

POETRY

Fine Work

By Christian Leithart

after *William Carlos Williams*

Now the pan simmers
With an easy song
Casually with purpose

Like the cook
Who regularly moves
From sink to stove

Across the tiles
Preparing lunch
Without hurry or waste.

The onion in peeled
Halves has been
Minced thoroughly

Into a handful of white
Pieces and is added
To the hot oil.

The cook humming
Lifts a spoon to his lips
And runs his tongue along it

Afternoon Fade

By Aaron Belz

Not a huge fan of my work.
Like how it's always irked me
that Jerry Harrison didn't popularize
himself under the mononym
Jerrison: Or how your
forearm's velvety skin
could be a silk purse or
a horse's ass for all I know.
Analogies aren't exactly my
hotsprings, if you can sniff
not only what I'm steppin' in
but the chemical spray I've been
applying to try to get it off.

Or how literally a million
/literally litter the allies of U.S.
rhetoric, near-wrecking it.
Oh, and I've been as unsure
when to hyphenate as you are
ready to pop the question's
answer both for your own sake
and for the good of others.

Treys

By Aaron Belz

There's a difference between
receiving an award and *being*
a ward of the state. Similarly,

there's a difference between
being recognized with a plaque
and being recognized with plaque.

At least you were recognized.
And plaques are plaques, some say.
Yes, and birds are birds, yet if I

flip you one, things change.
There's that pivot, that fulcrum.
Meaning, meanwhile, like Newton's Cradle,
just keeps on click-clicking.
Like Fonzie's hair keeps slicking
with a double thumbs up and an "ayyy."

Pivot again, and 'ay is for 'orses,
and 'ere we are in East London.
Or *Heast London*, as it was once known.

For More Information

By Aaron Belz

For more information about putting plastic on your eyeballs, contact lenses.

Notes on the Chorus

By Aaron Belz

The purpose of the chorus, we are told, is to echo, advance, question, and sometimes subvert the singer's argument — or the singer himself.

In Joel, for example, the narrator's real question, "Should I get a set of whitewall tires?" is met with an apparently rhetorical question: "Are you gonna cruise the Miracle Mile?"

It should be noted that, in this instance, "Miracle Mile" refers to a premium shopping district in Manhasset, on the North Shore of Long Island.

Of further interest to scholars of classical rock, the voices seem to be the singer's own voice, multiplied. It is as if he is gently chastising himself within the complexity of his own self-awareness.

September

By Samuel Dickison

In fall, when the river is low, the green banks loom. I find a pool, all sky shot through with grass, and fish.

Heavy cows pin down the field across, so my lure makes a quiet shock, rumples the clouds.

I drag it, spinning cast-off light, through stems. The yellow rod yanks, dips, breaks silver from the mud.

I pull a minnow, slapping, to me—squelching from its sideways eye; the wet grass squeaks.

Work out the treble hook, the slick skin, milking blood, then slip it back into the water—one more living vein

run shining through the dark. A line I cannot see barbs deep: a tug, weighed hidden like the moon.

Bomber's Moon

By Samuel Dickison

Civilians in their black-eyed houses learned to stay inside, to jail light behind hands and blankets when the moon was big, had draped the cratered fields in silver, sharpened hedges to a thousand hard-edged branches, made the target world a wide-eyed lover.

Those nights they'd listen over crickets for the purr of engines from above the clouds, X's floating in between the blinking stars, insomniac and hunting. Old men who'd flown would freeze, sometimes, in moonlight, too, remembering the terror of their spotlight wings—

outlined naked in the sky, be drawn, like homing birds, to land—to close their eyes.

A Sacrifice

By Samuel Dickison

All day the sky has shook her hair and rained. Now:

every ditch a brimming cup; trees' fingers stream; cars hiss up sheets of spray.

My children stomp and plume the yard, the wrung-out grass.

And still—

The west: clouds shoot with flame, tear hot and burn

so all the air is light. It licks up everything—each crumpled leaf, the honking birds, our hands—

consumed: the day, our sodden alter, burnt in wild, holy proof.

To work without pleasure or affection, to make a product that is not both useful and beautiful, is to dishonor God, nature, the thing that is made, and whomever it is made for.

Wendell Berry

The camera lives in my truck for the most part. When I see a picture, the tool is near at hand. My photographs tend to begin with the door flung open, the truck idling on the side of the road, me atop an embankment with a view of the light that fell upon a field, a hill, a house. Two minutes later, back in the driver's seat, back to humdrumming through the day. For every picture I've stopped to take, I've passed up six or eight in favor of getting where I'm going two minutes sooner. Often I've regretted getting there sooner, regretted the loss of the six or eight. Never have I regretted a stop, never the one I got.

The camera is a Fujifilm X100F that replaced an older version of itself that died of a software error. I still have the 1970's-era Minolta SRT-101 that I learned on: a fully-mechanical hunk of metal with manual controls for everything. It still works, but I lack the time, space, and money to deal with developing film and striking prints. It lives on a shelf in a closet now. Using the X100F feels as close to the old Minolta as any digital I've handled. It has body dials for shutter speed, ISO, f-stop, and focus, essentials of the art that some digital cameras obscure within menus and sub-menus. Most important, I've screwed an extension onto its lens that turns it into a 50mm-equivalent, which is what is still attached to that old Minolta that sleeps in the dark. 50mm means the camera sees what the eye sees, more or less, without the distortions a wide-angle or telephoto lens would introduce. I want, as much as possible, the camera to see what I see.

The camera searches out land and buildings and trees beneath various kinds of weather. Structures groaning beneath the weight of use or neglect. People in various states of ignorance of the lens. Rights-of-way: railroads, rivers, roads; the vehicles upon them. That 50mm lens: if something is too far away, I can't zoom in; I must walk or climb or drive closer. Sometimes I stay put and frame instead a faraway subject, but trains and rainsqualls will also obligingly close the distance. When the truck door is flung open, the spontaneity and urgency of the moment dictates that I bang the shutter a bunch of times in search of the thing I've seen. If time does not press on me, I hold the instrument at my chest, taking things in without technical mediation, and when I finally hit the shutter, I've made a more deliberate decision about what the tool sees. How the curve of that dirt road imitates the saddle in the hills above it. How the shadows cast from the poplars obliterate the detail in the wheat field beside them. How the low ceiling in the barroom hangs heavy over the shoulders of the man brooding over his drink.

The camera is not the end of the picture-making. The darkroom—now the editing software—has always been essential to the art. A camera provides the raw materials, the proverbial slab of quarried marble, from which a photograph must be made. Periodically I disgorge the contents of the camera's memory card onto a computer and look for images worth another look, those possibly worth another's gaze. Finding one is the beginning of the work. Then I must crop it - or decide not to crop it. The shutter may take in an image, but a photograph is finally composed when you trim, or slash, the edges. That's when the house at the center is shoved to the left to create symmetry with the stand of pines to its right. When the smiling girl's face is excised in favor of the glowering couple caught in the frame over her shoulder. Or, in a shot snatched in search of something else, a boy's face is discovered pressed into the crook of his mother's elbow, her hands running through his sweaty blond hair.

The camera translates light into something legible to a machine, and after a picture has been composed through cropping, the light and color, enervated by the journey from the roadside through the instrument into the computer, must be attended to. Details emerge from lightened shadows or sink into heightened contrast. Murky landscapes freshen through tweaks to the exposure. Clouds darken. The sunlight on the fir needles glows. And a thousand other things besides. Only small, subtle changes, though. Software makes it too simple to turn a picture into an ad for itself. An oversaturated blue sky above well-lit people in a bright green grassy field can be had at the low, low price of moving all the dials to the right. It's the small, subtle changes to the light that finally articulate my own emotional connection to the photograph—and how I hope to direct another's feelings about what I've seen.

What have I seen? The phrases for it elude me; I make photographs because words only fumble after it. But it issues from a love of a place, the Inland Northwest, that is either dully described as "rolling green hills" or ignored as desolate flyover country. The attention most pay it is sentimental or dismissive, but it has been given to me, as one who lives here, to make a deeper assessment of it. It was a hard-won love—this place can be ugly when forest fires blot out the skies, when the sky turns to slate in February, when a grain elevator is felled or a field is paved over for a thoughtless subdivision. Loving this place—honestly, like loving any place—involves accepting the ache in the world: the vapor of all labor, the gone-ness of what has already passed, the brooding dissonance between people and their work. The possibility of seeing that and looking it in the eye and clarifying it and showing it to someone else and hoping they will look at it, too, and then keep looking: that's what keeps the camera at my side, near at hand in my truck's console.

BRENDAN O'DONNELL

“Digging” by Samuel Dickison

Beside the white house on Van Buren Street where I grew up was an occasional garden. It was there I first learned that there is a kind of magic in turning up the earth.

On one side of the garden sat my father's baby-blue 1970 Chevy Impala. It never ran, but the interior smelled like hot dust and oil, and once I found an old Swiss army knife in the ashtray. On the other side was a high fence. The garden backed up to a tool shed with one intact window. There was a bench inside where my brothers and I plucked a dead crow we found in the road one morning. We made an Indian headdress from the feathers. The headdress lasted until our mother looked out the kitchen window and saw her youngest son, crowned in glory, leading us around the yard on an enthusiastic warpath.

The only thing that grew consistently in the garden was a thick patch of volunteer rhubarb. Some years we also had squash and cucumbers, some years tomatoes, and some years weeds—thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold. It was one of those summers that I asked my mother if I could dig a hole in the garden. She said I could.

I was eight and had seen enough John Wayne movies to know what constituted a respectable foxhole. The ground was hard and I had to jump on the shovel with both feet, and then wiggle my whole body back and forth until the blade sank down. But the dirt came up in thick, shiny slabs and I made quick progress. I remember the unmixed joy I felt as the hole grew beneath me—deep, smooth-sided, but hairy with worms—the air cool and fat with the smell of fresh planet.

I dug all morning. By lunch I had excavated a rectangle the size, I imagined, of a standard-issue adult grave. There was a sheet of old plywood leaning against the shed and I dragged it over. It just spanned the hole, with enough of a gap on one end for an eight-year-old boy to slide through. I piled dirt on top of the plywood then dropped to my knees and slid down into the darkness. The space beneath the board was cool and damp and so quiet I could hear the ticking of the wood as it settled and the small patter of dirt crumbling off the wall. I was very happy. I had discovered, unwittingly, that digging is a powerful act—that burrowing and burying are human and primal; that dirt we are and to dirt we are called.

One summer when I was twenty-eight I got a job with a local farmer named Phil. I taught

three of his daughters during the school year, and he was kind enough to employ me from June to August. The house he was building sat on several acres at the edge of town, and he wanted to dig a pond at a low spot on the property. Like all the farmers I've ever met, he was a great acquirer of machinery, and he'd bought an old tractor-scrap-er: a long, yellow machine with a giant hopper in the middle. The tires came up to my chest. The cab sat high off the ground, in front of the hopper, and if the blade was set too deep the whole machine bucked and rattled.

My job was to dig out a pond roughly the size of a basketball court. I'd start at one end, set the blade, then scrape across the ground until the hopper was full. After that it was a long, bumpy drive up to another corner of the property where I let the dirt sift back out. The summer was dry, and the dust followed me like a sideways thunderhead.

The work was fun. I was driving a 90,000 pound machine, and there was a pleasant, zen rhythm to the laps. I felt like a true mover of the earth. After a few weeks I told my wife she should bring the kids—we had three by then—and they could watch me work.

When they arrived my oldest, four, was as impressed as I'd hoped he'd be. I waved from the cab and started up the engine. At its deepest the hole was close to eight feet—far enough down that my boots, working the pedals, were almost level with the field beside me. I had just reached this point when I felt the whole machine list to starboard. There were sections of the ground where water was starting to seep up, and I thought I had just hit one of these muddy patches. I raised the blade a touch and opened up the gas. The cab bucked and I sank farther. I throttled more; the machine didn't move. I killed the engine and hopped out. The right front tire, slick with mud, was hanging off its battered steel rim—defeated, and flabby. I walked over to break the news to my expectant family; they'd gotten to watch me dig for two minutes. My son handled the disappointment well: the next best thing to watching big things work is watching big things break.

Phil had other work for me, and when the school year started back up the scraper was still sitting there, halfway across the hole. I drove by later that fall though, and he'd gotten it out. He told me he hired an excavator to finish the last bit. I drove by again in the spring, and it had all filled up with water. A flock of ducks was bunched up against one side, shaking and splashing in the wind, perfectly at home on the pond I had dug.

A few years before my summer with Phil my wife and I had moved from Hawaii back to my

hometown in Idaho. The forest fires that year were especially bad, and all summer the sky was smudged and oily. We missed the sun, and decided to paint our apartment “Lantern Light” yellow. It was small with big windows and the kind of wide trim you see in old houses. We were on the second story, so our living room was level with the branches of an old maple tree that grew in the yard. On sunny mornings our walls would toss and shake with the shadows.

One Sunday in August we woke up early and snuck out into the living room while our son, fresh off his first year, slept. It had been over a month since the pregnancy test, and I still felt that little jolt of joy every time I remembered we were going to have another child.

I was sitting on the couch when my wife walked out of the bathroom, her face gray. “I've been bleeding,” she said. By that afternoon she had passed the baby—a small, tangled little bit of skin. We wrapped it in a rag and put her—for some reason we were certain it was a girl—in a jar. We decided to bury the jar; it wasn't something we could throw in the trash.

I'd proposed to my wife in the ruins of an old farmhouse several miles south of town. On one of our long drives we had discovered, in a dip between two green hills, the outline of a stone foundation flanked by tall trees, and an old, one-room house that stood a little ways back. It seemed like a good place to dig a grave.

It was evening when we drove out, and rain clouds had begun stacking up across the sky. By the time we parked the wind was blowing steadily, and the fields looked like sheets snapping on a clothesline. I pulled a shovel from the back seat and we walked to the foot of one of the big pines. The ground was soft under a skin of moss, and the first shovelful I turned up was dark and fresh—the vintage of centuries gathered in a crook of roots. In a few more scoops I'd made a deep hole. We set the jar down carefully in the bottom. Then it started to rain.

We had brought a Book of Common Prayer, and we sat in the front seat of the car and read the Service for the Burial of the Dead while the wipers brushed water off the windshield and grass thrashed the skyline. It felt, all of it—the sky, the grass, the trees, the rain—concerted and perfect. As if our small grief belonged exactly there; as if we had put into the ground not something dead, but something dormant, ready to break up out of the dirt into the shaking hills when spring next came—wild, green, and ripe for digging.