
The
MAGAZINE
Stories about gadgets, urban farms, cosplay, real play, letterpress, and more

# The MAGAZINE

THE BOOK

*October 2012 to October 2013*

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# A Preview of the Book

*The Magazine* brings the best of its long-form non-fiction journalism out of the realm of digital publishing, where it first appeared, and into the lush, inky world of print. This collection of long-form features, drawn from our first 12 months of publication, includes stories about games, play, culture, making things, old technology revived, and going up to (and coming down from) the mountaintop.

This excerpt lets you see some of the writing, illustration, photography, and design you'll find in the full edition. Visit our Web site at http://the-magazine.com/book to purchase the 216-page hardcover edition, which has 28 stories, or the 302-page ebook version (DRM-free PDF, EPUB, and MOBI), which adds 10 more pieces of writing. You can also buy the hardcover and ebook together as a bundle.

Please feel free to contact us for more information at support@the-magazine.com.

Glenn Fleishman
*Editor & Publisher*
*April 11, 2014*

# FOREWORD

*The Magazine*'s name was always intended as a bit of a joke. The name was a play on Apple's Newsstand: we were *The Magazine* for *The Newsstand*. It was an attempt to make it clear that a new publication designed from the ground up to be a crisp and easy-to-read app for the iPhone and iPad, and which omitted ads and was supported fully by subscribers' fees, wasn't taking itself too seriously. And it stuck.

In defiance of our generic moniker, we set out to deliver a set of specifically interesting stories every two weeks that told readers about topics, people, and places they didn't routinely encounter.

The thread that runs through all of our stories is the strong connection between technology and culture. We sometimes write directly about the electronic realm, such as the game *Journey* ("Strange Game," page 77), a video game that doesn't fit our expectations about what multiplayer Internet interaction is like.

But we also like to find tales that deal with non-digital things. We write about letterpress ("Wood Stock," page 172, and "Inkheart," page 225) and dealing with superannuated chickens ("Laid Out," page 123), cosplay ("Redshirts in the Coffeeshop," page 37) and real play: *Star Trek* performed al fresco in Portland, Oregon ("Boldly Gone," page 21).

In our first 12 months, October 2012 to October 2013, we published over 130 such long-form non-fiction feature stories, some reported and some derived from personal experience. But we were solely a thing in the digital ether — and we wanted to take the most compelling, funny, and offbeat stories from our first year and make them "real." Thanks to the support of Kickstarter backers, this book exists! (If you backed our campaign, thank you for your advance support; if you bought the book later, thank you for enjoying what you found.)

The writers, editors, and artists who contribute and produce *The Magazine* find wonder in the world and in other people, and joy in the collaboration that made this book possible. We're delighted to share some of that with you in our first collection.

BKZ

Glenn Fleishman
*Editor & Publisher*
*February 9, 2014*



We've embedded links in this book: type http://magcode.me/ plus the blue code in the margin.

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# A BEACON OF HOPE

By JOHN PATRICK PULLEN

**A dying city glows with optimism over its plan for a giant lava lamp.**

The nighttime view from Brent Blake's window offers a view straight through downtown Soap Lake, Washington, past the soft glow of the Masquers Theater marquee and the neon beer signs in the Del Red Pub, and ending about a mile away, where paved roads give way to sagebrush, high desert, and darkness. Situated at the corner of Main Street and Highway 17, which sports the town's only stoplight, this view is all most people ever see of Soap Lake, as they blow through headed for anywhere else.

The locals, however — all 1,514 of them — see much more. They see the allure of a rugged, almost Martian landscape carved by the cataclysmal force of an Ice Age flood.[1] They see the potential of a once-bustling wellness-centric resort

*Dry Falls above Soap Lake*


Appeared in
Issue 21,
July 18, 2013

town about 180 miles southeast of Seattle, where thousands of early-20th-century vacationers spent summers soaking in the lake's magical, healing waters. They see a home base from which hikers, hunters, and boaters have easy access to the outdoors.

And they see hope in a giant lava lamp standing in the middle of town, drawing curious passersby off the highway with a slow, hypnotic, goopy glow.

However, 11 years into efforts to build the 60-foot-tall whimsical wonder, they've also seen the reasons no one has ever before constructed a six-story tower of lights, hot wax, and oil. Impractical, expensive, underfunded, and perhaps even technologically impossible, the Soap Lake Lava Lamp has proved more complicated to build than anyone had ever imagined. And as the concept became bigger than the city itself, they had no alternative but to build it. "The lava lamp will happen in Soap Lake," says Wayne Hovde, the city's former mayor. "When? I can't tell you — but it will happen."

This year, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the iconic lamp's invention, efforts have renewed to finish the infamous unbuilt public art installation. To date, the idea has undergone three different designs and endured two city mayors, and it may soon outlive its 72-year-old creator. Brent Blake was diagnosed with terminal acute myeloid leukemia last September. He was given two months to live.

## Meet Soap Blake

Blake first conceived of building the world's largest lava lamp in May 2002, while staring out the window and thinking of ways to convince motorists to pull into town and spend money. "Ever-changing, never the same — it would draw people like crazy," says Blake. "It would make it a great tourist attraction."

And while the concept may sound bizarre, it seems perfectly reasonable in comparison to Blake's full body of work. An architect, magazine publisher, and artist, the longhaired, gray-bearded impresario seems never to have heard the word "can't." A tour of his Soap Lake Art Museum begins with his electric chess set, made of sockets and light bulbs wired entirely by Blake himself. He mummifies everyday objects like tennis rackets and toaster ovens on commis-



*Brent Blake and his electric chess set*. **Courtesy of Brent Blake**

sion. On a table sits a model of another proposed project, "Soaphenge," that never got off the ground. A full-sized re-creation of Stonehenge using massive concrete bars of soap, Blake thinks this one is totally doable. "It would only cost around $100,000," he says.

Nearby, at Dry Falls — a horseshoe-shaped chasm 20 miles north of Soap Lake that's 10 times the height of Niagara Falls and is believed to have once been the world's largest waterfall — Blake proposed building a self-perpetuating cascade. The National Park Service, however, politely declined. "If a dry falls is interesting," Blake reasons, "a wet falls is spectacular." HQV

***"The lava lamp will happen in Soap Lake," says the city's former mayor. "When? I can't tell you — but it will happen."***

Yet the lamp concept caught on with townsfolk mostly because of the bizarre way Blake launched the project. Instead of drawing up architectural plans, looking for land, getting financial support, or even asking the city's permission, he created posters, pulled together a Web site, and launched a two-year marketing campaign that made it seem like the lamp was *already* operational.

With Blake's posters in nearly every business and lava lamps adorning the shops, the idea alone generated a buzz that had been absent from Soap Lake for decades. At the Visitors Information Center, tourists descended from as far away as South Korea and Eastern Europe, asking for directions to the lamp. Media outlets from the BBC to the *Los Angeles Times* also flocked to the city. But when they arrived, they found little more than a dozen closed shops on Main Street. SWH, WDM

"This went everywhere in the world, and it's a nonexistent project," says Blake. "It's just make-believe; it's a poster and an idea. But because it was so weird, the media fell in love with it."

And though the lamp has been Blake's foremost project over the past decade, he seems barely wistful about the possibility of not seeing it built. That's because for him, the art is in the effort, not in the effect. "People are hesitant to experiment, try, or do — it's a natural hindrance to expression," says Blake when asked

about his legacy. "I say push all that into the background, start throwing paint onto the canvas, and not be worried or afraid that it's not going to turn out right."

## There's something in the water

However outlandish the idea was, Blake rallied Soap Lake behind the lamp — an amazing feat considering the typical townsperson's demeanor. Genuinely warm and relentlessly enthusiastic, the citizens of Soap Lake are proud of their home's slow pace and relaxing atmosphere. They call the frenetic corridor of business from Seattle to Tacoma "the other side," and they enjoy the city's two bars and three restaurants. "The majority of people here, if they turn on the faucet and water comes out and flush the toilet and it goes away, they're happy," says Hovde.

Yet despite being one of Washington's poorest cities, Soap Lake has completed an impressive array of projects in recent years, proving — it's hoped — that they'll be able to light the lamp. In 2003, volunteers raised funds for and opened a 200-seat, $810,000 state-of-the-art theater in the town center. In 2009, the Soap Lake Garden Club dedicated a $500,000 sculpture titled *Calling the Healing Waters*, which, at 45 feet wide, is the world's largest human-figure sundial.

JTP

Locals have also restored the RV park, repaired the visitors center, and landscaped a rough-terrain golf course. As part of an ongoing $1.5 million plan to redevelop Soap Lake's Main Street with new pavement, wider sidewalks, and even LED lighting, the city hall was also remodeled, the city council chambers relocated, and the police station rebuilt.

The lava lamp may seem frivolous compared to these more practical (or at least achievable) projects, but the idea has a foundation of sound economics. For centuries, stretching back to when Native Americans roamed the Pacific Northwest, people have come to Soap Lake to relieve symptoms of arthritis, psoriasis, Buerger's disease, and Raynaud's syndrome by coating themselves with mud and lying in the sun. The lake is four times saltier than the ocean, has as much alkalinity as an oven cleaner, and is one of Earth's most unusual bodies of water. The National Science Foundation funded a study to examine microbes found there, hoping that they could shed some light on Martian life forms. Researchers found a new genus of bacteria.

MTZ

Despite years of research, there's no clear reason why the lake is such an effective treatment for skin, muscle, and joint conditions. In the early 20th century,



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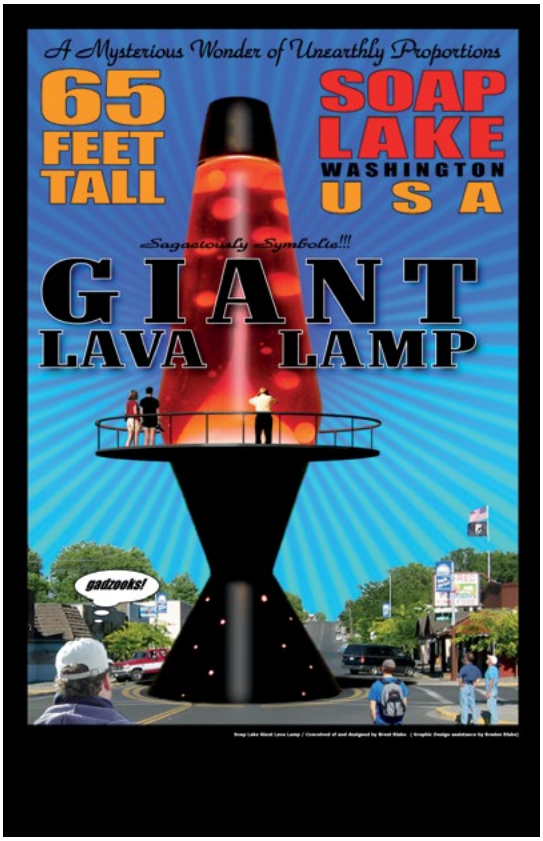
doctors prescribed long stays at Soap Lake's many sanitariums to their patients. Hotels popped up on the hills surrounding the lake. And until World War II, the town was known worldwide as a booming health resort.

But with the advent of sulfa drugs and penicillin in the 1930s, fewer people came looking for a cure. Then, during World War II, personnel from nearby Moses Lake Air Force Base took over the housing, choking out vacationers. Finally, the construction of the interstate highway system in the 1950s swept road-trippers past the small town. Today, more than a million tourists annually drive 50 miles past Soap Lake to the Grand Coulee Dam, where a laser light show projected onto the embankment coaxes visitors to spend the night.

Some still come for the waters, but even they may wind up disappointed. Since the dam was built, reducing inflows, the mineral




***In the early 20th century, doctors prescribed long stays at Soap Lake's many sanitariums to their patients.***

content of the lake has declined. And the mineral-water pipeline that pumps lake water to the last two hotels that feature it as an amenity is out of date, and had to be shut down to repair cracks in 2012. It failed again in 2013. At this writing, its future is uncertain. KHY

As times became increasingly hard for the city, it became clear that the lamp could light their future. "You need to find what your city has that no place else does, and just market it until the cows come home," says Eileen Beckwith, who runs the Soap Lake for Locals site with her husband, Burr. "There are other communities that have mineral lakes, but nobody has a giant lava lamp." FZP

*This poster attracted visitors who thought the lamp had already been constructed.* **Courtesy of Brent Blake**


ALASKA ~
NOT for a WOMAN!
ARCTIC OCEAN
Barrow
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Anchorage

# Clarion Call

## An Alaskan singer goes it alone – with a little help from her fans.

*By* KELLIE M. WALSH

"Lyrics first, and usually there's kind of a spark that makes the lyrics go. If I have a concrete idea, it's so much easier."

Alaskan singer-songwriter Marian Call sits in the finished basement of the home of a board-game designer in an affluent suburb of New Jersey, describing her creative process.

"Once in a while [a song] will come out fully formed...Other ones are like little puzzles. It reminds me of doing quadratic equations. The quadratic formula is so beautiful and elegant. I loved algebra: there was always an answer. You just had to balance and [go] back and forth until you got the answer. I loved making things balance."

Call munches on a post-concert snack of raw broccoli and a cupcake. She has a tall smile, ghostly skin, and dark shadows beneath her eyes that swear to her diligence and autonomy as an independent artist. "Now it's hard for me to see a song if I don't construe it as like a little problem for myself, a problem to solve. There's something very right-brain about the idea, and there's something very left-brain about the solution."

You could say the same about Call's career.

Photos by Brian Adams

## Amok Time

A few weeks before the final run of *Trek* shows, I spoke with Graff and his compatriots: Adam Rosko, who plays Kirk and directs the plays, and his sister, Amy Rosko, who produces them. As we sit down in a local pizza joint, a pair of fans call out from the corner: "Captain Kirk! We're your biggest fans!" Adam smiles and waves — and he does look a bit like William Shatner, even though he doesn't yet have his *Trek*-style haircut, which features pointy sideburns.

Graff, who sports a full Riker-esque beard when it's not show season, says, "I get to spend most of my life incognito. I don't get recognized hardly at all." The only visible evidence that he's Spock is a tattoo of Leonard Nimoy's autograph on his right arm.[1]

***Graff asks, "Have you heard of* Trek in the Park*?" I reply, "Please come into my kitchen and tell me everything."***

FJX

Adam was just 23 when he and Amy started Atomic Arts, the theater company that staged the *Trek* shows as well as a few other productions in Portland. The siblings searched for an idea that would make compelling outdoor theater and that was not Shakespeare. Going through their DVD collection, they came across *Star Trek*, and it seemed an obvious fit: it had colorful costumes, extended fight scenes, and a built-in fan base.

Adam says, "The first YouTube video [we found] was Kirk and Spock fighting. I thought, *I could see that in the park. That would be hilarious*. Then we watched the whole episode."

That episode was "Amok Time," and it became the first *Trek in the Park* production in July 2009. Adam met Graff in a production of *Robin Hood* ("We were bad guys," Graff recalls); Paul Pistey (their original Bones) was brought onboard shortly after.[2]

The Atomic Arts crew performed the episodes as written, preferring not to add campiness or wink at the audience. Because the show has an element of camp to it already, the material didn't need embellishment. "[We] embrace the silliness. I think that the harder you embrace it, the better reaction you'll get from an audience," Adam says.



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## In the park

Watching "The Trouble with Tribbles" performed live is an odd delight when you're used to watching *Star Trek* on TV. The audience in the park laughs at the show's many small gags, cheers during the big brawl scene, and hoots as tribbles (fuzzy fur-balls about the size of kittens) pile up onstage throughout the show.

The episode's plot starts with a dispute over a shipment of grain, but is rapidly sidetracked when Lieutenant Uhura receives a pet tribble from a shady trader on a space station. The tribble multiplies, causing an uncontrollable population boom that threatens to overwhelm the *Enterprise*. Bones (played by Jake Street) remarks, "The nearest thing I can figure out is they're born pregnant, which seems to be quite a time saver."

The audience eats it up. Then Bones seals the deal with the classic line, "It seems they're *bisexual*, reproducing at will. And, brother, have they got a lot of will!" He's a doctor, dammit — not a sexologist.

*Kirk (Adam Rosko) and Spock (Jesse Graff) discuss the growing tribble problem.* **Play photos by Chris Higgins**

# REDSHIRTS IN THE COFFEE SHOP

**This cosplay is pretty serious.**

*By* GABE BULLARD

---

They're lined up five, six, seven deep on the streets of downtown Atlanta. Parents with small children on their shoulders, older folks in lawn chairs, pretty girls with their skinny boyfriends with cool haircuts. Tapping on their phones, posting photos.

Then there are sirens. The police clear the streets. They make room for the army. Storm Troopers, pirates, Doctors Who, and masses of other science fiction/fantasy/comic book characters march through the heart of the city in an unembarrassed display of the kind of nerdery that, years ago in most places and to this day in some, would have led to ostracism at best and being beaten up at worst.

It's the Dragon Con parade, the annual public showing of what happens inside five downtown hotels every Labor Day weekend in Atlanta. And the normies love it.

ZBM

**Photos by Gabe Bullard**


LO


## We can be responsible for machines.

*By* **LISA SCHMEISER**

---

Reproduction is one of the few commonalities across human cultures. Take that away and you have the Shakers. This underscores two sad truths: without reproduction, your culture doesn't thrive; and children and nice furniture are fundamentally incompatible.

By its very nature, pregnancy should be one of those universal human experiences, like eating a piece of fruit you've just picked or smelling the ozone and petrichor that accompany a good hard rain. Yet speaking as someone who was pregnant in the recent past, I found how much it had changed since my mother bore me. For one, she couldn't post a belly-shot montage on YouTube.

Back in grad school, where we sat around and pondered vague and important-sounding questions about how technology would disrupt the definitions of society — in my defense, it was the 1990s, and everyone who was anyone was reading the deconstructionists — we read "A Cyborg Manifesto," by Donna Haraway. The essay is a cri de coeur for the rejection of identity politics, and Haraway uses the metaphor of the cyborg to make the argument for people becoming comfortable playing with questions of personal and social identity.

WRJ, VGD

As I dealt with the technological double whammies of Western prenatal care, with its scans and tests, and the everyday use of what Haraway would probably call a "polymorphous information system" but what we would call "the Internet," I felt very cyborg indeed.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the technological elements of pregnancy — both the ones introduced through social interactions (Facebook and beyond) and the ones I encountered at the doctor's office — were the things that left me feeling most alienated, from both myself and my culture at large.

## A pregnant pause

Although people like to view pregnancy as a binary state — you either are or you are not — it is also a deeply liminal one. For 40 weeks, you're suspended between two separate family configurations. Your family isn't what it used to be, but it's not what it's going to be. You're not who you were, but you're not what you're going to be. You're drifting between borders.

Liminal states can be unsettling, and people cope with the unease in a variety of ways. A lot of my fellow preggos made a determined effort to package their pregnancy for public commodification, as if determining a narrative would somehow eliminate any of the borderlands of ambiguity ringing the daily realization that everything in your life is going to shift and rearrange in unimaginable patterns.

At least, this was my charitable explanation for the explosion of "adorable" staged photos announcing someone's pregnancy or the gender of their child; for the profusion of nursery makeover posts I saw on Facebook; for the vicious message board brawls I witnessed as grown women stressed over what to pack in their hospital bags. As people chewed over the minutiae of pending parenthood, I would read posts from friends and strangers and wonder why I couldn't relate.

My pregnancy was a long slog through a no-woman's land to enter at last



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***We are living through a movement from an organic, industrial society to a polymorphous, information system.*** — HARAWAY

into a wholly undiscovered country. No amount of nursery decorating or posting milestones on my Facebook timeline could prepare me for what lay ahead. Pretending I knew what I was getting into would seem to push me away from my real self, whoever she still was.

I coped with my alienation by re-reading a lot of sci-fi that treated the intersection of technology and pregnancy as a horror show — "Bloodchild," by Octavia Butler; *The Handmaid's Tale*, by Margaret Atwood; and *Dr. Pak's Preschool* and *Piecework*, by David Brin. Somehow, reading about pregnancies that turned into nightmares via invasive, dignity-stripping technology made me feel better about my own Facebook-induced agita.

DFW

YRR, JXS

JLB

## Arranged in order of size

If you are a middle-class pregnant female in North America in the early 21st century, you will likely find yourself at any one of a number of Web sites aimed at expectant parents, all of which offer weekly email newsletters which will tell you what's going on in your body as the pregnancy progresses.

I signed up for two of these newsletters. And every week, I read that "your baby" — never a fetus, always "your baby" — was the size of a poppy seed, a sesame seed, a peppercorn, a nutmeg. Once I hit the second trimester, we left the spice drawer and moved into the crisper: a Persian cucumber, a mango, a small summer squash, etc.

I unsubscribed from one newsletter the week that I learned I was carrying the equivalent of "two heirloom tomatoes." I refuse to let any editor think it's

**Food photography by Michelle K. Martin**

acceptable to draw a direct line between slow food and slow gestation.

The specificity of the emails made me worry that my cohort and I would be relentlessly factual in our pregnancies. What would we talk about — how our blood volume had increased by 30 to 50 percent?

Thankfully, no. We talked about the emails. "Are you getting the food comparisons?" was the first thing someone would say. The second was, "What was the food item that made you snap?" For my friend Maria, it was a cheese-covered mango. "Who does that? Why would you cover a mango in cheese? Why not just use a burrito?"

Finding kindred spirits to wax wroth about fetus-as-food comparisons provided one of the few moments where I felt a graceful integration of the cultural aspects of pregnancy and the technological tools that had sprung up to service and supplement the culture.

I need not have worried that I was finally easing into some serenely networked Mother Earth role. There were still plenty of liminal spaces left.

## Echoes in the depths

Many parts of being pregnant remind you that you aren't the first to bear a child; you are linked through physical sensation to every mother who came before you. The strongest twinges can knock you into the pleasantly dislocated feeling of being adrift on a river out of time. Oh, your left hip is doing that thing where every step you take causes an exquisite, narrow lance of pain from pelvis to ankle? I bet some poor pioneer woman felt that when she was walking beside the covered wagon.


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***There is nothing about being "female" that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as "being" female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices.*** — HARAWAY

Still, the pioneer women didn't have the pressure of feigning maternal feelings at the 12-week fetal scan. Because I was what the doctor's office charmingly termed "elderly primagravida" — and because I had spent the first month of my pregnancy, before I was aware I was enceinte, marinating in hot tubs, drinking a lot of very good French wine, and eating a lot of mercury-laden shiro maguro — I had an ultrasound so that we could manage everyone's expectations.

The screen was filled with what looked like a Rorschach test. I squinted as the technician pointed out the blobs that were presumably the fetus's working kidneys, hummingbird-fast heart, and rapidly developing brain. I feel like I should have been thrilled by this proof that cell division and differentiation were ticking along.

But I was more bowled over by the notion that someone, somewhere had said, "What if we assigned a visual representation to the mathematical distance calculated by the speed of sound and the time of that sound's echoing return? Wouldn't that be cool to see off what that sound bounced?" The notion of taking

one set of physical measurements to find something new and undiscovered — much like archaeologists are doing in Honduras with LIDAR — is breathtaking. A weird blob that lives in your torso with bits and pieces occasionally pulsing? Eh.

FCC

Going by the prevailing rhetoric on my birth board and among my friends, I was an outlier. The majority of people who gazed upon their little Oort clouds had crossed some cognitive and emotional chasm. Not only were these women carrying babies, they were already calling themselves mothers, and all of their acts and thoughts seemed to be motivated by some gush of motherly love.

Eh, I thought again. There's always the 21-week scan.

***We are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs.*** **—HARAWAY**

Alas, my 21-week appointment also failed to fill me with the rush of transformative maternal wonder. I had visited my friend and fellow preggo Maria shortly before, and she had had her 20-week ultrasound framed. In it, the silhouette of a snub-nosed baby boy was clearly visible, exciting proof that Maria was carrying an actual human baby. I was looking forward to my own adorable photographic proof.

Part of the visit included genetic counseling, which I was partly looking forward to because the phrase "genetic counseling" suggests a tearful session where recessive alleles sob, "I just want one chance to express myself!" while a doctor holds up a warning hand and tells the dominant alleles, "You've already had a chance to speak."

The reality was that a very nice woman got derailed when I asked where the Punnett squares for all the genetic disease alleles were. She wanted us to be relieved and grateful that neither of us was heterozygous dominant for any heartbreaking hereditary conditions, and instead I was openly piqued I couldn't see the PCR films that would have sequenced our DNA and showed the specific markers on sequenced genes.

LBX

I had already opened an entire condiment tray's worth of emails telling me the average fetus's probable size for the week. What I wanted was to know what was written in this specific fetus's genome. We had the technology; why weren't

we using it? I may as well be back with all my relatives, clucking about someone with, "You know she's having a girl? Girls steal all their mother's beauty and she's looked terrible since she started to show."

My husband defused my snit. "There, there. Soon you're going to be speared with a harpoon for science."

## Prepare to be boarded

"I'm really looking forward to my amniocentesis procedure" is not a phrase commonly uttered during pregnancy — mostly because nobody says, "I am eagerly anticipating the moment when someone jams a 20-gauge needle into an internal organ" — but I really was looking forward to it. KWN

I've always been fascinated by what lies underneath my skin. I was excited to see some of this amniotic fluid, since I didn't remember my first exposure to it. And I was even more excited by the prospect that we'd find out even more medical markers for our pending child.

My husband has a mild needle aversion, so he did not share my fascination. "Oh, don't worry," I reassured him. "The needle's so big, it has to be wheeled in. The beeping of the forklift will warn you it's coming."

Getting amnio was really no big thing. You don't even feel the needle — there's a local anesthetic to numb the area — and then there you are, watching it fill with a slightly cloudy golden liquid, which the technician assured us was that color because the baby was peeing in it.

And off went our baby's pee — and other liquid substances — to be analyzed for signs of any chromosomal problems that the genetic counseling panel had missed, plus other nightmares like metabolic disorders or neural tube defects. I sourly thought, There goes another data set I'll never see.

Then we moved on to the ultrasound. I took my husband's hand in preparation for what surely would be one of the most tender moments of our life together...

...And saw the nightmare crest of a Viking battle helmet. The fetus elected to give us a full frontal shot, so what we saw — grinning skull with outsized cranial cavity and hollow eye sockets; spindly, claw-like appendages; disturbingly sharp ribs — was suitable for framing only if the proud papa were H.R. Giger.

Phil and I both reared back. The technician gave us a look that suggested we were already terrible parents. "Is baby's spine," she said in a Russian accent that her years in America hadn't worn down. We could see every mace-shaped vertebra floating below that grinning death's-head noggin. "Is baby's heart. Looks good. Is baby's kidneys. Looks good. Baby has toes" — they looked more like velociraptor claws, really — "baby's brain."

"So we see," we murmured. Part of my brain was hissing that I needed to be grateful for all the good news, that this was infinitely superior to spending an entire pregnancy hoping for the best but knowing nothing. The other part of my brain was musing that sometimes, technology lets us push the "I can do it!" button while completely ignoring the "Should I do it?" button.

"You want to know sex?" the technician asked. I shrugged and pressed the "I can do it!" button.

"No penis. Is girl."

This was something I could see, as opposed to some third-party pronouncement I was expected to swallow without question. So I was going to have an alien queen. I hoped she wouldn't ram her spike-like ovipositor down my throat the first time I tried to ground her.

The technician printed out a set of ultrasound prints, suitable for framing and giving to people upon whom you wished permanent psychological damage. We debated for only a moment before concluding that throwing the prints out would not make us bad parents.

When I went online after the Alien Queen reveal, I was saddened but unsurprised to discover that my cohort had all had photogenic ultrasounds: lots of adorably snub-nosed fetuses in profile, waving tiny hands at nothing in particular but captioned with things like, "Baby girl saying hi to her mama!"

I had seen my fetus's skeletal system and working organs and been reassured that all her chromosomes were in order. That still didn't make her feel any more like "baby girl." She was an organic data set, forever expanding with new parameters to query weekly. All the medical data in the world didn't change a fundamental truth of pregnancy: I was incubating a stranger.

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***Cyborgs have more to do with regeneration and are suspicious of the reproductive matrix and of most birthing.*** — HARAWAY

## A familiar place

In the end, I had a scheduled C-section. A combination of data sets — my physiological measurements plus the fetus's measurements — led my obstetrician to suggest it, and I liked the idea of knowing exactly when this damned liminal state would end.

So one sunny, warm Monday afternoon, I waddled into the admissions area while my husband was parking the car, got prepped for surgery, and killed time reading on my Kindle until it was time for me to go have a baby.

I was wheeled into the operating room. The anesthesiologist gave me the lumbar puncture that made me numb from the mid-chest down, two nurses erected the please-don't-faint drape, and a pregnancy that had been remarkably transparent in terms of raw data ended with a delivery shrouded in mystery.

From my end, it felt like a bunch of people playing rugby, with my gravid form as the ball. I was rocked back and forth. There was a mighty pull, a shift of

pressure right around my center of gravity, a high blatting sound, a shift in my brain. That was my baby, and she was crying.

My OB held up the baby, and I lifted my head. She was pink and round and had a lot of hair — the old wives were on to something with the heartburn. My baby was crying, and despite the fact that I was currently strapped to an operating table and gutted like a trout, I tried to get up and get to my daughter.

I said, "My baby needs me. I'm the only one she knows."

***We can be responsible for machines; they do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they.*** **— HARAWAY**

It took minutes to wash, weigh, and swaddle her. I made Phil go hover next to the nurses, saying, "The baby can't be alone!" because apparently nurses didn't count as company. Someone somewhere was saying something about there being too much blood, about the bleeding not being under control.

Despite being the only person in the room who was likely to be bleeding, I could not have cared less — all of my attention was focused on listening to my daughter's furious shrills, and I kept saying, "I have to see her. She needs to be skin-to-skin, it will soothe her."

In an operating room, as people sloshed through great pools of blood, I rose above on a surging wave of maternal love. The tiny, spectator part of my brain marveled at how easily I fell into one of the biggest myths about motherhood, the one where you instantly love your child. But I did love this baby the minute I saw her as a baby. And I felt like her mother.

Just like that, the liminal stage was over.

# Just Desert

## Africa, a devil, and Burning Man meet in Eastern Europe's little desert.

*By* COLLEEN HUBBARD

Appeared in Issue 25, Sept. 12, 2013

With its brick-and-stone houses painted in muted rust tones, the small village of Chechło is typical of this region of southern Poland. The streets are empty save for the lunch rush at a cafeteria-style restaurant where scoops of steam-table chicken, potatoes, and cabbage land on industrial white plates.

As in most of Poland, the population in this region is dropping and graying: entry into the European Union in 2004 coupled with the easing of immigration standards among some member states meant that many of Poland's young people left to pursue educational and occupational opportunities elsewhere. From 2004 to 2011, the country's population decreased by one million people.

Yet Chechło's town green offers a sight that distinguishes it from surrounding hamlets, with their renovated farmhouses and gated gardens. Between a shrine of the Virgin Mary and a silver-blue fir tree, a statue of a Bactrian camel glares at an empty bus stop across the street. The camel's peach lips curl into a snarl, and time and sunshine have conspired to drain the color from patches of fur on his humps. His ear is another matter.

**Photos by Colleen Hubbard**

# Three Strikes, You Shout

***Moneyball* documented a change in baseball, but not everyone has done their homework.**

*By* PHILIP MICHAELS

The MAGAZINE 1 Year

Appeared in Issue 27, Oct. 10, 2013

When you wonder why strikeouts are designated as a K on a baseball scorecard, please direct your complaints to Henry Chadwick, an Englishman by birth and a sportswriter by trade, who adopted the cricket box score around 1859 to create a record of exactly what transpired in a baseball game.

Chadwick gets credit for establishing the use of consistent statistics against which multiple games, teams, and seasons could be compared. But despite that early start, baseball executives, sportswriters, and fans spent most of the next 144 years making decisions from the gut: observation and experience trumped any underlying story that numbers might have told.

TCB

But a change took place that moved numeric wonkiness from periodicals like *The Bill James Baseball Abstract* or Web sites like Baseball Prospectus, which were for a long while the sole concern of hardcore enthusiasts, into the broader sphere of public consciousness.

MYV

We can circle the date on the calendar when this happened: it was in 2003, when *Moneyball*, by Michael Lewis, hit bookshelves.



Illustration by Jenn Manley Lee

## Trim figures

Subtitled "The Art of Winning an Unfair Game," *Moneyball* outlined how the Oakland Athletics were able to pursue champagne aspirations on a near-beer budget. For the 2002 season that Lewis chronicles in *Moneyball*, the A's won 103 games, tying the New York Yankees for the best record in baseball. The A's spent a shade under $42 million on player salaries to win those ballgames; the Yankees spent in the neighborhood of $126 million.[1]

The blueprint outlined by Lewis could essentially be boiled down to: stop trusting old assumptions and start looking at hard data. Other teams overpaid players who tallied up empty stats like batting average and runs batted in; the A's looked for undervalued players who excelled at getting on base. (Or, to put it another way, not making outs.)

While their opponents were busy bunting and stealing bases, the A's were drilling into the minds of their players and coaches that those strategies didn't pay off. And when it came time to scout players for the amateur draft, the A's defied the conventional wisdom of the era by favoring collegiate players over high schoolers, preferring the predictability of performance over projecting what an 18-year-old might one day become.

"Too many people make decisions based on outcome rather than process," then–assistant general manager Paul DePodesta tells Lewis at one point in the book. He's talking about a particular at-bat in a particular regular season game, but really, that quote could be stamped on every other page of *Moneyball* and still be contextually appropriate.

I was an A's season ticket holder (right-field bleacher seats) during the season Lewis wrote about in *Moneyball* as well as during the year the book came out. And for me — and I suspect a good many A's fans — the book offered not so much a glimpse into another way of looking at the game we love as it did a validation of our choice in teams.

Being an A's fan means forgoing the certainty of meaningful postseason baseball (something the dilettantes who've pledged their troth to the New York Yankees take for granted) in favor of a greater ideal.[2] To root for Oakland is to root for the beauty of revealing greater truths about baseball, about life over mere championships.

A's fans have to overlook a crumbling stadium and the series of penurious owners since the beloved Walter Haas went to the big ballyard in the sky so that

we can live and die with the team we love.[3] And what *Moneyball* told us was that we had chosen wisely. "Your team is doing things correctly," the book might as well have said. "Smart, intelligent fans realize that, even if braying sports talk radio types do not."

If we felt something of a vicarious thrill thanks to *Moneyball*, imagine how the people actually profiled in the book made out. The book became something of a sensation in business settings, where its themes of exploiting market inefficiencies and finding value where your visionless competitors did not resonated.

Billy Beane, the A's general manager, became a popular figure on the corporate speaking circuit, which he remains on a decade later. (In fact, while the A's were fighting for a division title in September, Beane jetted off to Prague to fulfill one of his corporate obligations.) At any rate, you know you've won the acclaim of the larger world when Brad Pitt is tasked with playing you in the movie.[4]

## Beane counters

The baseball establishment, however, was not so smitten with the book. And that's understandable. When the central premise of your book is that a lot of people running teams do dumb things for no good reason, the people doing those dumb things may not appreciate the constructive criticism.

The blowback came not just from Beane's fellow GMs and the baseball scouts who felt that *Moneyball* gave short shrift to their role in spotting talent, but also from writers and columnists who had appointed themselves Guardians of the Game. Antipathy from the former was certainly understandable; the reaction of the latter, though, reeked of a kind of anti-intellectual hostility to anything that challenged conventional wisdom.

Lewis wound up detailing the anti-*Moneyball* reaction from within baseball's establishment in a postscript added to a later edition of the book, titled "Inside Baseball's Religious War." "There are many ways to embarrass The Club," Lewis wrote, referring to the coterie of old-school baseball executives and beat writers making lemon faces about his book, "but being bad at your job isn't one of them. The greatest offense a Club member can commit is not ineptitude but disloyalty."

And so the critics took their shots — at the A's, at Beane, at anyone who thought the team might be on to something with how it was approaching the game of baseball. The A's weren't a *real* success story, the critics suggested,


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because the team hadn't won a World Series using Beane's crazy schemes. (It's easy to see how Oakland might have been able to out-think people who found the results of a five-game sample size more illustrative than a full 162-game season.) Billy Beane was an egomaniac, they griped. (As compared to the selfless, modest souls who otherwise find success in sports, one might counter.) An especially laughable contingent of the Flat Earth Society wing of baseball commentariat even concluded that *Moneyball* wasn't the work of Lewis — who after all had only written *Liar's Poker* and *The New New Thing*, among other books — but rather of Beane himself. PFQ, BQB

The most strident voice in that chorus belonged to Joe Morgan, who used his position as both a Hall of Fame player and lead baseball analyst for ESPN's *Sunday Night Baseball* to routinely blast everything about Moneyball at the slightest provocation. Morgan's rhetorical assault on the book might have proven more effective had he not only bothered to properly identify the author but actually read the damn thing, too.

"I played The Game," Morgan says in a 2005 *SF Weekly* profile that perfectly illustrates the obstinacy that greeted Moneyball in some quarters. "You're reading it from a book. I played. I watched. I see everything. I know what happens out there.... My baseball knowledge is accumulated over 20 years of playing, 20 years of watching The Game, so that's what I care about. I can't care if next week somebody comes up with a new way to evaluate The Game. Am I supposed to say, 'Aw, that's good. I'll go that way now'?" PCL

It shouldn't matter, of course, that Joe Morgan has to perform mental and verbal gymnastics to explain how a team that wins 103 games on a workman's wages is, in fact, a miserable failure. It shouldn't bug me that Bruce Jenkins, the baseball beat writer whom I grew up reading but who has now become the sort of "old man yells at cloud" columnist who invites parody and routinely peppers his columns with diatribes about "stats-crazed dunces" who are ruining baseball for all right-thinking people. NGT, XWX VQB

But it does — and not just in the tribal "someone is saying something bad about the team I like" way. These are people paid to write and commentate about baseball, and when it came to one of the biggest shifts in how people think about that sport, Morgan and Jenkins and their ilk couldn't be bothered to do the assigned reading.

Well, we've only had a decade since *Moneyball*'s publication, not the 20 years Joe Morgan demands to reach any concrete conclusions. Still, there's been


YOU
ARE
Z
BORING

# TELL ME MORE ABOUT YOUR FOOD BLOG, PLEASE.

*By* **SCOTT SIMPSON**

Everything was going great until you showed up. You see me across the crowded room, make your way over, and start talking at me. And you don't stop.

You are a Democrat, an outspoken atheist, and a foodie. You like to say "Science!" in a weird, self-congratulatory way. You wear jeans during the day, and fancy jeans at night. You listen to music featuring wispy lady vocals and electronic bloop-bloops.

You really like coffee, except for Starbucks, which is the worst. No wait — Coke is the worst! Unless it's Mexican Coke, in which case it's the best.

Pixar. Kitty cats. Uniqlo. Bourbon. Steel-cut oats. Comic books. Obama. Fancy burgers.

You listen to the same five podcasts and read the same seven blogs as all your pals. You stay up late on Twitter making hashtagged jokes about the event that everyone has decided will be the event about which everyone jokes today. You love to send withering @ messages to people like Rush Limbaugh — of course, those notes are not meant for their ostensible recipients, but for your friends, who will chuckle and retweet your savage wit.

# Light Motif

## A pinhole cap finally brings infinite focus and undistorted images to digital cameras.

*By* DAVID ERIK NELSON

Justin Lundquist was watching TV in 2009 and saw a commercial for one of the first cameras built around the new Olympus/Panasonic "Micro Four Thirds" system. These are high-end digital cameras with interchangeable lenses, and are similar to digital single-lens reflex (DSLR) designs, which show precisely through the viewfinder what the camera captures via its lens.

PJW

The design goal with Micro 4/3 was to make a professional camera significantly more compact than any DSLR. What got Lundquist on the phone to his soon-to-be business partner—another Chicago-based photographer, Ben Syverson—was a word that probably didn't impress anyone else watching that ad: "mirrorless."

In order to shrink the camera body, Olympus/Panasonic did away with the

Pinhole photos by Justin Lundquist

angled reflex mirror at the heart of any high-quality camera. The mirror allows a shooter to see, via a tiny viewfinder, what the lens sees. Because the design had a compact camera body and no mirror in the way, Syverson and Lundquist (who happens to be my brother-in-law) realized that they could remove the lens entirely and place a usable pinhole within a few millimeters of the camera's CCD sensor.

Lundquist, a freelance photographer, has experimented with pinhole cameras for decades. The mirrorless guts of the Micro 4/3 allowed him to finally see beyond the necessity of hacking together his own little digital pinhole camera: He could offer a pinhole add-on to an existing body. The Pinwide, a "pinhole cap," is the result. It transforms any Micro 4/3 camera into an honest-to-god ultra-wide-angle digital pinhole point-and-shoot.

RBH

## A super brief foray into physics

A lens creates a sharp image by gathering photons and directing them toward its focal point. Collecting more light reduces exposure times and noise, creates brighter images, and increases detail. But a lens bends the light it gathers; the image it casts is not true to the object. The most obvious example of this is the barrel distortion created by a wide-angle lens.

You and I both know that no architect designed a roofline with that curve, and no masons tried to build it that way. This image is grossly distorted, but every image coming through a lens has at least subtle distortions corrected by optics and electronics.



*Strong distortion from a fisheye lens.* **Photo by Wade Patrick Brooks**


WOOD
STOCK

## A once-obscure bit of printing history on the shores of Lake Michigan finds rekindled interest.

BY JACQUI CHENG


Appeared in
Issue 20,
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The remnants of the Hamilton district in Two Rivers, Wisconsin — the former headquarters of the country's largest producer of wood type in a town that once hummed with manufacturing — now largely sits quiet. The industrial building housed two last bits that came out of over 100 years of wood manufacture: a laboratory furniture operation, and the Hamilton Wood Type Museum. Save some old business cards scattered on the ground, the factory is empty.

Thermo Fisher Scientific, the descendant owner of Hamilton Wood Type Manufacturing and its buildings in Two Rivers, announced abruptly in 2012 that it would shut down its furniture division in Two Rivers. The museum was forced to move, and found a space a few blocks away. Now relocated and only recently chugging back to life, its unofficial motto is unchanged: "Preservation through use." The museum houses one of the few remaining shops in the world that can produce wood type, a mainstay for a century in the production of many kinds of printed work.

Like vinyl records, the sales of which have climbed back into the millions a year, wood type

Photos by Jacqui Cheng

appears to be getting its groove back. A branding and exposure makeover for the museum, combined with the rapid rise of maker and crafts movements, have helped wood type carve out a new space.

Wood type has kept its appeal even as the born-digital generation starts to take charge of the world, maybe because members of that demographic have become aware of what they are missing. Current museum director Jim Moran says he can't teach enough traditional letterpress classes to satisfy demand. He believes if he had more time to carve new wood type, he would be able to sell every last piece.

***Hamilton came up with his own style: cutting the characters out and gluing them to blocks of wood. The process was cheap but effective.***

## Type-cast

From Gutenberg's day to the early 1800s, movable type was cast in metal; wood blocks were used primarily for illustrations. Then in 1827, Darius Wells disrupted
BTL the industry by coming up with a way to mass-produce wood type for the large letter sizes that had begun to be desirable for advertising and newspaper headlines. This had numerous advantages over metal type, which was expensive to cast at such sizes, remarkably heavy, and susceptible to warping before it was cool.

Wood, on the other hand, was relatively cheap, light, and resilient, and could be carved with smooth surfaces. Wells released the first known wood type catalog just a year later, a move that led wood type to share the market with metal for almost 150 years.

In Two Rivers in 1879, James Edward Hamilton began working at a chair- and table-making factory as a lathe operator. Hamilton's friend Lyman Nash, then editor of the *Two Rivers Chronicle*, felt Hamilton's skills could be put to better use — namely, to carve letters for a poster he was printing on a tight deadline. Nash knew he could never get type delivered fast enough from the East Coast, where all other type was made, so he asked Hamilton to carve something — anything — he could use to get the poster done on time.



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"Hamilton didn't know anything about type," Moran says. "He didn't see the future of it or anything like that. He was simply helping out a friend."

With no background in type carving, Hamilton came up with his own style: cutting the characters out and gluing them to blocks of wood. The process was cheap but effective — so much so that Hamilton found himself making more and more type for Nash's posters. Hamilton's hand-carved type evolved to the point where he thought he could turn it into a business, and in 1880, he did.

"Hamilton's business grew at such a rate that, as competition will do, some people were forced out of the market. Others simply sold to Hamilton because it was the easiest thing to do," Moran says of Hamilton's sudden success in the typemaking industry. The company's rapid growth can be attributed to the fact that every time he acquired a competitor's fonts and techniques, Hamilton would refine his own carving methods. (Hamilton also made type cabinets to store metal and wooden types, first from wood and later from steel.) ZCQ

One of his most notable acquisitions was the William H. Page Wood Type BJH

*The old Hamilton building*

# The Wet Shave

## A relaxing, rewarding, and self-indulgent morning routine.

*By* LEX FRIEDMAN

Appeared in Issue 2, Oct. 25, 2013

KRX

I used to hate shaving. I ranked it below flossing on my list of bathroom-related activities that I would dread. Of course, no one knew if I skipped flossing; everyone could tell if I skipped a shave.

My father taught me to shave using an electric Norelco razor, an approach I stuck with for years. My biggest problem with the Norelco electric razor was that it left me with a crappy shave. It was quick enough, but I never looked truly clean-shaven.

In college, a friend introduced me to acoustic shaving, with more-traditional, disposable razors. Over the years, I kept up with the blade arms race, switching to razors with two then three and four and even five blades over time, some with batteries that made them vibrate, some with lubricating strips, some with built-in trimmers on the flip side.



*Truck drivers shaving at truck service station, Washington, DC, 1940.* **Photo by Jack Delano**

I didn't like the disposable razors much either, but I stuck with them for years. The shaves were still mediocre at best, shaving the mustache region never felt great, and I found over time that blades were produced with lower quality: I'd need to chuck newer replacement blades ever more quickly.

Finally, I got fed up with shaves and razors of frustrating quality, and I made a change. It's a change that saves me money, gets me a dramatically better shave, and converted me from a begrudging shaver who hated the morning shave into a guy who looks forward to it as a highlight of the morning ritual.

## Be nice and clean

Traditional wet shaving is perhaps most easily defined as "the kind of shaving your grandfather probably did." It involves the use of a safety razor, a shaving brush, shaving soap, and a handful of other supplies.

The safety razor is the most intimidating part of the setup. I use a double-edged safety razor. That's a razor that takes disposable double-edged blades. The razor itself may be the most expensive manual razor you'll ever buy; I use the Merkur Model 180 long-handled safety razor, which costs about $35. VFX

There are many manufacturers of double-edged blades; you'll likely spend 10 cents a blade or thereabouts. Some folks change their blades once a week, while others swap them every couple of days. I use a blade for six shaves before I get rid of it.

That means I go through about 61 blades a year, or about $6.

Before you ever let one of these scary-looking blades near your face, you must first prep your face. That's where the brush and soap come into play. The brush is most commonly a badger-hair brush, though horsehair, boar-hair, hybrid, and synthetic brush options are all available (badgers and boars are slaughtered for their meat and hair; horses merely get a haircut to provide the hair for a horsehair brush). I use a cheap Tweezerman badger-hair brush; I lust after some synthetics and hybrids. DHS TXK, ZZT

While you can use a brush in tandem with the traditional shaving creams, gels, and foams that are sold in fluorescent aerosol cans, you shouldn't. A significant portion of the joy of wet shaving comes from the slew of skin-pampering, delightfully scented shaving soaps and creams made explicitly for this form of shaving. This is where the real fun in wet shaving comes in, and I use — and enjoy — many, many brands, scents, and types of shaving soaps. My favorites include Proraso, Taylor of Old Bond Street, and Mitchell's Wool Fat.

## Lather, rinse, repeat

The purpose of the brush and the soap is to form a good lather. Wet shaving requires a wet face; you rinse your face with hot water and then apply your lather — also made with hot water — to your face. This helps open your pores, soften your stubble, and relax your skin.

I first learned to make a good lather using a shaving bowl, which is probably a smidgen easier for beginners. I now prefer face lathering because it's barely more effort, and it leaves me with one fewer thing to clean. Whether you're using a shaving soap (fairly solid) or cream (goopy), the general process is the same: thoroughly wet your shaving brush with hot water, give it a couple of good shakes, and then rub it on your shaving supply. You need a comically small amount of shaving soap or cream to make a good lather. With a solid soap, you need a little more water to get enough onto your brush; with a cream, about a nickel-sized amount does the trick. As you experiment and shave, you quickly learn: when there's tons of shaving lather left on the brush and your face is already smooth, you're using too much cream.

Get a small amount of shaving soap or cream onto the brush, and start swirling the brush in circular motions all around your face. I generally start with a thin layer of soap around my face, and then add small bits of hot water to the tip of my brush and repeat the swirling. If your brush is too wet, the lather ends up dripping down your face in annoying rivulets that won't get you a good shave. If it's too dry, your shave will hurt. Your shaving brush should end up with peaks of lather that look a lot like the shaving cream you'd squeeze from a can. Experimentation is key.

You can always add more water to your lather. Taking water out of the lather you've spread on your face is a major challenge.

## Swift strokes

Once your face is fully lathered with warm, wet soap, it's time to shave.

If it's your first shave, you'll probably be a little nervous. My advice: Get a good shave with your old method the day before. Take a hot shower. Spend an extra minute soaking your face under the hot water before you shut off the shower.

Build your lather. Scrub it onto your face, adding water and swirling more as


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necessary. Grab your razor, and remember the three keys to successfully maneuvering the blade on your face: angle, pressure, and patience.

You want to hold the razor against your face at approximately a 30-degree angle. That is, the handle should be at a 30-degree angle, starting from parallel to the floor. That angle — depending upon your razor and blade — should just allow the edge of the blade to reach your skin, which is what we're going for.

On the pressure side, forget everything you know about disposable-razor shaving. Disposable razors use densely packed, lousy blades; you're accustomed to pushing hard against your skin to remove your facial hair. That's not how wet shaving works.

Rather, you hold the razor gently against your skin. The weight of the razor — and trust that it will weigh considerably more than the plastic doohickey you bought at the supermarket — provides the oomph the blade needs to cut your hair. Instead of pressure, your method for acquiring a smooth shave is repetition.

***Get a small amount of shaving soap or cream onto the brush, and start swirling the brush in circular motions all around your face.***

That's where patience comes in. You'll make multiple shaving passes along your face to achieve impressive smoothness. When you're new to wet shaving, my advice is to do but a single pass, with the grain of your beard. (And remember, only shave where your face is lathered. With a disposable razor, you might shave over the same spot again and again. With a safety razor, shave where there's lather. If you miss a spot, get it on the next pass, but only after reapplying lather.)

After you get comfortable with the process, add a second pass that goes across the grain of your beard — not against it. Starting your second pass requires the same prep as your first: Again rinse your face with hot water, again build a fresh lather on your face. Your brush is already loaded with lather; you don't need to reload it with soap. Add a few drops of water to the brush and then start swirling it on your re-wet face.

When you're comfortable with the across-the-grain shaving pass — give yourself a couple of weeks — it's time to add the final pass, the against-the-grain pass. Once more you rinse your face with hot water, once more you re-lather from your still well-loaded brush. Now, after again repeating your "angle, pressure, and patience" mantra, you carefully shave against the grain of your beard.

I love that third pass. My face looks smooth before it happens; it feels smooth afterward.

## After the shave

When the third pass is complete, I rinse my face with cold water, and then with an alum block. This is a fragile block of soap that you can buy online; it's a naturally occurring astringent. I wet the bar with cold water, rub it all over my face, and rinse five minutes later.

RMH

The cold water and the alum block close your pores. It can help prevent ingrown hairs and other problems. I love mine. Generally, the alum block merely feels cooling. If it burns, I know that I have a shaving problem: I'm pushing too hard, my angle's off, or the blade is dull, and I'm hurting my skin with my current shave — meaning something has to change about my process.

Finally, I apply an aftershave lotion; my preference is to choose an option that's alcohol-free.

## That's it?

Building a lather, making three complete shaving passes, the brush, the alum — it's an awful lot. There are not-insignificant startup costs involved with wet shaving.

For me, though, the process is well worth it. My kids object to stubble, and they give me a kiss test many mornings to verify that my face is as smooth as it ought to be. I'm saving money by not buying multi-bladed monstrosities from Schick and Gillette.

And the whole shaving process takes me 10 to 15 minutes from start to finish. Longer than it ever took before, sure, but a far more relaxing, rewarding, and self-indulgent process than any other approach I've tried. I feel like I'm caring for my face, and my face seems to appreciate the attention.

# How He Met My Mother

## The unlikely sequences that lead to a new life.

*By* **JASON SNELL**

I'm driving my parents' car down a two-lane desert highway, my father in the passenger seat. Chauffeuring him feels a little odd, but despite his fierce independence he seems to acknowledge that it's a kindness.

From my parents' house in the Arizona outback to the suburban Phoenix hospital is an hour's drive. My father is 81. A year ago, nearly to the day, he had a pretty severe heart attack. He doesn't have much energy to begin with, and what little he had this morning he depleted at my mother's bedside.

My dad has always been a storyteller. My mother would retreat from a room as he regaled the guests with a favorite anecdote — entirely new to the appreciative crowd, but one she had heard dozens of times before. These days, his short-term memory in disrepair, he repeats those oft-told stories even more than he already did.


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*The author's mother at his birth.* **Photos courtesy of the author and his family**

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