

NormalcyMag

Exploring American Culture



Volume 1, Number 1
April 2017

NormalcyMag

A publication of
The Cepia Club LLC

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Distribution:
Unlimited Digital, Free
Print Copies (first 100), Free
To guarantee digital delivery
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Editor's Standard

Welcome to NormalcyMag! In this first issue, and the ones that follow, we offer a most ambitious agenda.

As individuals or as a society we may never have the exact definition of "normal" to define a state or condition of existence. Oftentimes, we only know normal when we see it, when we feel it, when we live it. The rest of our time, if we think about it carefully—or think at all—we acknowledge "normal things" by judging some things as the abnormal, the contradiction to the norm. What do we consider normal?

In a world of diverse and interesting people, and even more in a country as diverse and interesting as the United States, this poses an interesting problem. Does the concept of "normal" define the great middle ground upon which we base our existence? Or, do the ideas of normal and abnormal instead sit as polar opposites on a spectrum where a fringe on each side exists? If so, where do the majority of people, like us, meet in the middle, at the great common table of human conversation? In this space between the fringes, and somewhere between the pages of this magazine, we believe we will find something called normalcy.

In this agenda to explore living in America, we also want to build on concepts of normalcy that we will certainly find. Such building blocks might include, but not limit themselves to: tolerance, education, acceptance, non-violence, volunteerism, stewardship, mentoring, choices, and empathy.

Instead of just criticizing and opposing things, we advocate and stand for something better. NormalcyMag asks you—the reader—to join us in moving history forward! NormalcyMag commits to learning and sharing. Will you?

NormalcyMag offers different avenues to this journey of understanding and living. Within these pages you may read a story, an adventure, a poem, an essay, a review, a response, a letter, see a painting, a picture, a cartoon, encounter a memoir, or even a verbose editorial from yours truly. Either way, in beginning this magazine, we start our journey small and with humility.

Please read with open mind.

Sincerely,

Tim Krenz
Publisher & Editor
NormalcyMag



Table of Contents

Editor's Standard.....	2
Sub Terra Vita Chronicle #46	
Words Made of Letters.....	3
Short Story: Yankee Pride by J.D. Shloss.....	4
Essay: Moments by "The Ghost".....	5
Poetry: Villanelle for Waxwings	
by Louie MacLaughlin.....	5
Review: Of Richard Brautigan	
by J.D. Schloss.....	6
Low Adventures: Trekking Superior	
Hiking Trial, Part I--Introduction.....	7

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Thank you.

NormalcyMag

Cover art, "Untitled" by Kurt Devine.

Sub Terra Vita Chronicle #46

Words Made of Letters

By Tim Krenz

In a prized heirloom which I keep well protected, I can read the words written by my maternal grandfather that he wrote to my grandmother before they married and started a family. Beside old pictures in the photo book where I found the letter—including a black and white photo of my Grandpa at my parent's wedding—I have no other way for him to speak to me. I can conjure no memories of him. My grandfather, Victor Michael Kielty, died almost a decade prior to my birth. My Grandmother Evelyn M. Kielty, nee Yonker, lived until almost age 89, passing away just a few months prior to my 30th birthday. I have memories of her, many in fact, as she lived close and played an prominent part in my life.

Once in a while, Granny Kielty, provided me with stories of Grandpa, some funny, some sad, all good. When talking about her long-departed husband, she always looked fondly at her memories while sharing. She wore her wedding ring proudly until her death. I could see in her the love she had for Grandpa Kielty, the love she never lost. With these few contacts with the past, like the letter, the photo(s), and her own reminiscence, I got to somehow know Grandpa Kielty in the only ways possible. The insights gave me the impression of very good, decent and kind man.

In that letter to Grandma Kielty, Grandpa mentioned things about the life he wanted, some hopeful things, and some stern things about what he did not want. He signed the letter, pre-marriage proposal, "Your friend, Victor." In all the stories, and all the other ways concerning Grandpa Kielty, like his newspaper obituary, I do not trip over the words, but I read into them the place or time he lived. Even more, I try every time to hear his voice, how he thought, the man inside and how he outwardly presented himself. I hear cautious words of a suitor, and the depth of his affection for Granny.

The letter I discovered gave me this "hearing" of him, the first real sense I ever had of him, and can ever have, unless I find more of his letters. Growing up, I always had wished I knew him in my life, even if too young to remember it. If I only had a word or picture of him holding me, I would have enjoyed it. More than for me, I always wished that he and Grandma Kielty would have lived old, for the sake of Granny who always seemed sad at the end of her stories. Grandpa left the world at the age of 52. He died far too young.

In a different letter in the same photo album, I found a letter from my maternal great-grandmother, Katherine Yonker, nee Yiddake, to my Grandmother Evelyn. I reach further back into the history of my maternal family, to before the birth of my own mother. I know that Great-grandma Katherine died a long, long time ago before 1940, and the circumstances of her death remain a mystery, speculation notwithstanding. I may have never known her, if not for a letter.

I don't remember Great-grandpa Yonker, Katherine's husband and my Granny's father, but I know from stories that I attended his funeral when very young in the early 1970s. He died in old age, and had lived as a widower. I have an heirloom from him, however: an old ring, a beautiful whitish agate on a sterling band. I found no letters from him, but I have the ring. Yet, somehow, I understand part of his life. In Great-grandma Katherine's letter, I hear that ghost-like voice, one of a sad woman, depressive even. The family lore I hear confirms that she lived a very, very sad life before dying awfully young.

In the photo album of my mother's family, I recognize some of the great-

aunts and great uncles, and more recent relations when full of youth and exuberance. I can also see that many relations now living share similar looks and features of our ancestors. Not myself in that album, because I look like my father's side of the family.

I can touch and smell the ancientness of the frail paper on which my heritage wrote their letters. I can smell the chemical decay of the photos, too, as they fragment away in the thick, black paper of the album. I have memory now of those I did not know, because I could read their words and sense their time, by sight, by touch and by smell. The pictures survive, too, though the photos disordered and got loose in the book, by the age of the glue worn away. Like photos and letters, we survivors of our ancestors, on both sides of my family, begin the long journey to brittleness and fragility by age and living.

The letters, especially, I have something that both excites the sense of history, and daunts the passing of our time. In the relics, I can touch them in the careful way to avoid damaging them. I feel the threads of the note paper, unmarking themselves by time of the now faint colored blue and red lines. The pen and pen scripts erode. In them, I have the authentic history, that historians cherish in their research, of a primary document created by those people important for me to define present things. I actually can touch the paper held by my Grandfather. That gave me more reality and closeness to him than I ever knew before I found his words and his voice. In touching the letter, I create the shape of the room where he wrote. I see the lantern giving him light to write. I see the desk. The person blind to my actual memory comes alive.

The photos give me a different sense. The black and white smoothness speaks the words that I cannot express. Images of them give me the image of their minds. Drying their sweat in soiled work clothes, lurching from pails in the shade of the house during fall harvest on the plains of southern Minnesota and northern Iowa. My Grandpa Kielty met my Granny Kielty while harvesting with a crew one season on Grandpa Yonkers farm. I pretend to see that moment of spark.

I touch that history, that identity of the Kielty family, their heritage that I do not know by personal experience in the Great Depression, but that I see in their faces. I hold the moment that my grandparents beheld, even if I cannot see what they looked upon. But even that picture gives me words in my thoughts of their home and hearth, their land and their work. Holding these letters and pictures, I behold them.

Regardless of what others think, I need these things to understand better, allowing me to comprehend my present better, and help point me in the direction of my future. I cannot covet the letters and the photos on a computer, which digitizing may preserve them for an historian and journalist (like myself), but having them and holding them mean so much more to my spirit. I have to forget the intellect, the ingenuity, the very technology that runs the work and the social world. I have to create these persons from real fragments.

I cannot hold something an ancestor held in their hands through any number of computer pixels in order to bond with my heritage. For most of my life, I could feel the absence in my heart of those people I never knew. In touching their affects, I found a contact with that side of my family, and that itself fulfilled a missing part of my spirit. I could never have asked for more, when all technology fails, than for touching an accidental discovery to surprise my sense of heritage.



In this short story, contributing writer J.D. Schloss introduces the spring season with this little tale of lust and baseball. TJK

Yankee Pride

by J.D. Schloss

She was an Ernie Banks, “Let’s Play Two!” kind of woman. Hell, “Let’s Play All Goddamned Day,” was more like it. But today, there would be no game. Darcy was in church, listening to the organ playing “Amazing Grace” as she walked toward the casket surrounded by countless beautiful arrangements of white roses.

Darcy Dubois had always wanted to sleep with a shortstop. Shortstops are special. She could spot the good ones in a crowd just from how they stood. Soft hands and range that doesn’t quit; with cannon arms that can make the throw from deep in the hole. Lithe. Muscular. Graceful. Reflexes like a master martial artist... What’s not to love about a shortstop?

She wasn’t lacking for offers. Problem is that she’s straight as a batting practice fastball. As team Captain of the Smith College women’s softball team Darcy had been propositioned by lady ballers up and down the Eastern Seaboard. Sure, Darcy had lost her virginity to a ballplayer, but he was a right fielder and that just wasn’t going to do. She’d slept with a left-handed pitcher, a few lacrosse players, and one of her professors. All of the shortstops she’d met were either insufferable pricks that she wouldn’t lower her standards for or she found them sorely lacking in the requisite diamond skills.

Darcy showed up at the funeral dressed to kill. She knew she’d be swatting away propositions left and right from the scores of lesbian ballplayers here to pay their respects to softball legend, Christy Bristol.

“We used to call her Crusty Brittle,” whispered the man who had joined Darcy at the open casket. Darcy looked over and sized the man up. He appeared to be in his early twenties and was a little over six feet tall and stood with hands on his hips, left leg slightly bent at the knee, right leg straight and set back about six inches. The relaxed stance of a shortstop in repose and drop dead gorgeous.

“I feel kind of bad looking at her like this,” the handsome man continued, “We also used to call her ‘Open Casket.’” Darcy stifled a laugh. With the ease of a shortstop he moved closer to her and continued. “Yeah, she looked like she was 865 years old back when she was at Tech. She coached my grandmother’s field hockey team about 50 years before that and grandmother said she was mummified even then. She might’ve looked 1000 but damn, she was as cantankerous as someone much, much older.” Darcy was aghast at the noise that came out of her mouth—a rumbling snort that sounded like a mule reaching orgasm. There was an audible gasp from the crowd behind the couple at the casket.

“You are simply ravishing. Let’s get out of here,” the man said to Darcy’s delight. He gently wrapped his right arm around Darcy’s waist and led her out of the church.

She loved that he kept his arm around her as they made their way to the parking lot. He opened the passenger door to a brand new, sable black 1972 Cadillac Eldorado and helped her in. “Beautiful car!” she gushed.

“Paid for it in cash with the bonus money I got from the Yankees. Drove it right off the showroom floor.”



The rightness of spring, April brings its rite of baseball. In the photo above, the dugout of a local home team rests empty prior to spring training for semi-professional town leagues for Wisconsin. With baseball, all fans remain young in soul, skeptical of the umpires, and avidly for their team. As a normal part of Americana, all fans in the spring cannot wait to hear the words, “Play ball!” Photo courtesy of The Cepia Club.

“I knew it! You’re a shortstop, I bet?” Darcy was certain that she’d be bedding him before the sun set.

“Aren’t you just the most fabulous little creature,” the man proclaimed as he flashed another smile at her. “Yes, I’ve been a shortstop since T-Ball. The Yankees paid me but they’ve been so, so beastly.”

“Whatever do you mean?”

“They put a clause in my contract stating that if word gets out that I’m gay, that the contract will be voided.” 



Moments


By "The Ghost"

In a world ever so obsessed with time, I choose to focus on moments. Time is a calculation. Time is merely a unit of measure to gauge our successes and our failures. Time is stress. I must be "somewhere" by "this time," or I am late. If I do not get "this done" by "this time," then I fail. Don't get me twisted, I personally believe that punctuality is very important and shows respect not only for oneself but also to the other people involved. The same can be said about responsibilities and obligations having time tables. Today's dissertation is about moments. Moments do not have time. A moment has a beginning and a moment has an end, but between that beginning and end there is no "time." Once one looks for the time, the moment itself is lost.

In my life, there have been moments of joy and moments of pain. Moments of love and moments heartbreak. Moments of gain and moments of loss. The joy, love and gain never seem to last as long as I would want them to last, yet the pain, hurt and the loss seem to last too long. Why is that? The answer to that question is because I measure the moments with time. A moment, good or bad, has no time limit. A moment only has a beginning and end. Therefore, to truly appreciate the moment, one must just be in it. However, if I am aware I am in a moment that is positive and want it to last longer, does it speed up the process instead? What about

if I am in a moment that is painful and I want it to end, will knowing I am in the moment prolong it? Oops, there I go putting time on moments again. You see I am an over analyzer and I have a very hard time appreciating a moment for what it is. Unfortunately for me, most of the time the only time I can appreciate a moment is after the fact. I look back and say, 微妙, that was a moment ·

Once the moment is gone it cannot be regained. Similar to waking up from a dream, I can't just fall back asleep and be back in that dream. I must understand that the moment is gone but the memories of the moment are what I get to keep. I can always look to the memories to remember the moment but never relive it. Once the moment is over, I must embrace it and realize that a new moment has begun.

My challenge to myself and any of you out there is this: Live your moments. Feel the feelings. Appreciate the timelessness. For these moments are all we will ever have and are the only ones we are going to get. 

"The Ghost," a native of the St. Croix Valley, lives, writes and works in the Twins Cities, MN.



A Villanelle For Waxwings by Louie MacLaughlin

With old man winter they've begun their race
To warmer havens, eager to unwind.
Today they swarm the flowering crab with grace.

Their sleek black masks attempt to self-efface,
Creating beauty even more refined,
But no escape from winter's frigid race.

Its heavy branches, full of fruit, encase
A treat for gray squirrels frolicking behind
The flowering crab tree full of waxwings' grace.

This gathering of strength quickens the pace
Of birds in flight—their journey must remind
Us winter has begun its frigid race.

Tomorrow new horizons they'll embrace,
But will they keep this forlorn tree in mind?
The one they left abandoned, stripped of grace?

As cedar waxwings plan next winter's chase,
En route to this crab tree they'll be entwined
With victory in yet another race.
Until then only squirrels give this tree grace.

Review of:
Willard and His Bowling Trophies, by Richard Brautigan
By J.D. Schloss

"*Willard And His Bowling Trophies*," by Richard Brautigan, used to be one of my favorite books. Published in 1975, it's a short, playful novel billed as a "Perverse Mystery." I had read it as a teenager after being introduced to Brautigan's most famous work, "*Trout Fishing in America*." He writes odd, funny, jarring poetry and stories that really appealed to my marijuana and beer woozy brain. Willard is a papier mache bird that stands watch over an assortment of 50 bowling trophies. This is a road story; a tale of vengeance; and a unique look at what we do when our domestic tranquility gets a barrel of monkey wrenches thrown at it.

After reading and loving this book, I loaned it out, and like all great books, it found several homes without returning to mine. Back in those days, I was an avid re-reader, and began a six-year quest looking for another copy. I traveled all over the US over that time and visited scores of used bookstores without any luck. Couldn't find it in any libraries and the book was out of print. On a cross-country trip I found myself in Powell's bookstore in Portland, Oregon and was stunned to find that they had over 10 copies! Ranging from a few dollars for a beat up paperback like the one I'd originally read to a several hundred dollar 1st edition

The novel begins in San Francisco as Constance and Bob are engaging in some rather ineffectual, sad, and pathetic bondage play. The "amateur sadism" is by no means sexually graphic. Brautigan is able to use the ineffectual, rote bondage scenes to highlight the pain, regret, shame, yearning, and confusion of Constance and Bob's marriage. Their world has been changed due to indiscretion and they struggle to adapt. Forced to use condoms in their lovemaking, they go through the motions of trying to force intimacy and connection. Bob is checked out and unable to communicate. Brautigan is a master at using the perverse to describe every day feelings and acts. Constance feels as if, "...she were making love to somebody who lived in another country." Bob hates, "the way the wet warm rubber occupied his hand like a dirty joke from outer space."

Patricia and John live in the apartment below Constance and Bob. Willard and his bowling trophies reside in Pat and John's living room. The bowling trophies are the property of the three Logan Brothers and the trio has been on a three-year cross-country trek looking to reclaim their prized possessions. The Logan Brothers had spent their lives consumed with bowling. Their mother spends her life baking in the kitchen and their father finds his only comfort in fixing transmissions. When the bowling trophies are stolen, mother can only bake and father can only wish that people were transmissions.

Vacant minded Bob finds his only solace in reading fragments of ancient poetry to Constance. He weeps frequently. This is a novel of waiting. The Logan Brothers, after rampaging their way across the country tracking down fruitless leads, are waiting in a hotel room for the call that will tell them where their trophies are. Constance and Bob are waiting and wishing things could be different. Being gagged is part of their bondage routine. She hates it and gets thirsty and sad Bob brings her peanut butter and jelly sandwich for her hunger. Mother Logan does so much baking while her boys are on the road that Father Logan can't even find his coffee cup amidst the towers of baked goods.

Patricia and John revel in the oddity of Willard and his trophies and enjoy late night t.v.; playful banter, and sex. The Logan Brothers rasion d'etre is merely an ornamental, conversation piece to Patricia and John.

Brautigan pulls it all together with a most perverse final action that is satisfying and, well, perfect.

Fast forward 21 years, I've lost, sold, deserted library after library I've built up due to the vagaries of addiction and I see a hardback copy here in Taos, New Mexico. Rereading it all these years later brought me pleasure, for sure. Does it remain one of my favorites? No. Does it bring me immense joy? Most definitely. I wholeheartedly recommend this book and if you like it, I'm sure you'll love some of Brautigan's other offerings. "*The Abortion*" and "*The Hawkline Monster*" are both wonderful. Peace, JD.



www.Superjunkmag.com

The Low Adventures: Trekking Superior Hiking Trail Part 1: Introduction

By Tim Krenz

Why on god's otherwise even-leveled earth did I spend two or three weekend trips a year, or sometimes 8 or 9 days, climbing trails with a heavy backpack, if those trails always went up and up hills and mountainish peaks, instead of the nice, level ground between them; or walk almost 800,000 steps on the soles of battered, smelly boots; to cover almost 280 miles of trail, sightseeing detours, and spur trails to the car and back; why did I endure warm or freezing rain, snow, and depressive heat that made fog over Lake Superior on hot, sunny, windless days; for what did I trek in total from Two Harbors just north of Duluth, MN, to the Canadian border, and not in a straight line or in any sections of trail that made any logical order or plain sense in the way we did them?

For almost a decade now, I pondered that question: The "why did I do it?" question. What compelled me to challenge my overweight body and my smoker's lungs, my crooked knees, my butt-grabbing pain to literally carry myself over the next step or hill? The severe challenge of the Superior Hiking Trail now rests in a hubristic memory, a feat that I did that which so many others did in much better style, and could do in a few weeks what took me and my worn out body six years to find time to finish.

I swore at those hills that never stopping climbing. I cursed the rain that forced me to eat cold suppers of some dehydrated crap in a metal bag, in my tent, while I wrote the journal of this low, not high, adventure. I know the answer now, to most of my questions, and the "why did I do it?" question. I will admit no guilt, other than accomplice in this particular story of my life. The camping high court of adventure gods would not condemn me for my act of extended temporary insanity. Why did I trek the Superior Hiking Trail? Well, I blame my good friend, Craig.

The story, of course, has its beginning. This story began in November of Two-Thousand-and-One. By then, I had lived in my apartment for over two years, since around the time Craig returned from Africa with his Peace Corps fiancée, Jennifer, the daughter of a Kansas pastor. The apartment on main street Osceola, WI, itself possessed many qualities besides spacious rooms. It owed a view from its upstairs window of Wilke Glen and the Cascade Falls, and rebounded the sound of crashing water to white noise me asleep or into relaxation whenever I left the window open.

Craig still calls that the ultimate bachelor writer's pad. Aside from the window views from the top of the corner building, downstairs, I could sit on the sidewalk at the coffee shop next door, and I could walk to the public library or the brazier for ice cream, both of those within one block. Most of all, as Craig said, I had a trout stream and the Mill Pond kitty corner across Cascade Street. I lived an idyllic, though rather empty life. Of importance to me, two months before that day in November 2001, I committed to significant changes in my personal and spiritual life, heretofore run rampant in lethargy and slackness. I had barely begun that razor's path of enlightened learning, but I knew fuller, more purposed and even some deliberate living lay ahead.

That November Saturday, Craig brought his family to Osceola to visit his parents, and he stopped by my place alone to talk about Bill Bryson's book, *A Walk in the Woods*. Then he asked me to trek the Superior Hiking Trail on the northern Lake Superior shore together with him. While I fitfully watched a tense, and ultimately disappointing, Michigan-Wisconsin college football game, Craig talked. And he talked. And, . . . he talked. The idea deeply intrigued me. I asked questions, but his answers always came clouded with no certainty as to how many years of weekend camping it would take us to complete the trips. But if anything happened to me, he promised get me off the trail, even if it took several trips (Huh?).

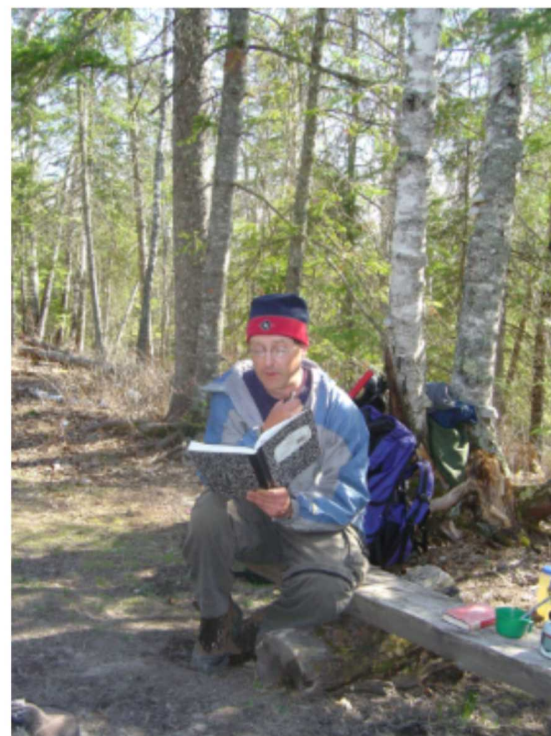
I always enjoyed camping, as a kid with my family, and in Boy Scouts. I always wanted to do long distance backpacking. With my new commitment to more vigorous, actual living, instead of dreaming, I eventually said, "Craig, I'll do it!" I felt enthused, and honored, that my good friend since college years, (we did not know each other in our smallish high school), asked me to go on this great adventure.

"Tim, let's go for ride," Craig said. "My dad let me take his classic car today, his classic, mint conditioned car. We'll ride in style and talk more about it." I did not know that Craig's dad had a

collector's car, and I knew nothing about hot rods or "muscle cars," so as the football game entered halftime, we went out the downstairs door and into the garden out the back of the shops.

We walked through the parking lot on that cool, cloudy fall day, and I asked Craig, "Where's the car?"

"Right there," he pointed, at a classic and mint car. I looked at this immaculately-conditioned white car with a red racing stripe along its length on the side. Craig drove to my place that day in a great looking, flawlessly preserved, Ford Pinto. Although we had to wait for spring to trek the trail, the real adventure just began.



A couple years into Mueller and Krenz's so-called "low adventure" project of walking the Superior Hiking Trail (SHiT), the author (above) bores the complacency of several camping friends with a reading from his trail journal, of the sights and sounds, musings and pontifications of all they probably had just seen during the walk earlier in the day. Photo courtesy of Craig Mueller.

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