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Memo from the Editor: Light the Lights
by Mike Dame

I’m told that this is the part of the magazine where the Editor-in-Chief opens with some personal anecdote, existential musings, stock analysis, or just a few paragraphs of rambling. I’m also frequently told that I happen to be the current Editor-in-Chief. Henceforward, therefore, I am apparently responsible for writing this. I just have no idea what to say.

I guess I’ll start from the top: this is Statler & Waldorf, a literary magazine at RPI focusing on humor, culture, and an unhealthy obsession with The Muppets. In the past year, our membership dwindled to the point of being unable to print issues, though we continued to publish online. By the end of 2012 it seemed like S&W, around since 2001, was going to die, leaving the campus with only The Poly to read. Something had to be done.

It was around then that, following a streak of satirical and probably extremely offensive blog posts, I was drafted into S&W under the esteemed title of “Only Person Even Remotely Interested In Being Editor-In-Chief”. I like to think that things have improved since then.

Ultimately though, this issue wouldn’t have been possible without a lot of help and an incredible amount of work from an incredibly small group of people. I feel like it would be wrong to start this issue off without properly thanking Erika (our SARP), Chaz (our E-Board representative), Chip from Alchar Printing, and of course our writers. I’d also like to thank Christa, who first convinced me that my writing was somewhat tolerable and is thereby responsible for any and all complaints you may have about this issue.

“Why do we always come here? I guess we’ll never know.”

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00,000 years ago, Homo sapiens, like the forgotten iPhones of yesterchristmas, was carelessly cast into the evolutionary archives with the release of Homo sapiens sapiens. Undeniably the best version yet, capable of performing complex mathematics, designing and operating machinery, looking at pictures of cats on the Internet, and literally anything else that you do every day, the new Homo S2s dominated the dominant species market with their impressive intellect and strong aversion to death. The possibilities are endless for the next edition, rumored to be announced just in time for the holidays some 200,000 years from now.

Let’s rewind a bit. “Homo sapiens” translates to “wise man”, for those of you that hadn’t figured that out yet, and as a name it seems vaguely egotistic when you consider that it was given by H. sapiens’ direct descendants during the only time in history when species have been given names. Also taking into account the fact that there are no other species or subspecies designated as “sapiens” for not being “sape-y” enough, humans are clearly the sapiest. The vanity doesn’t stop there, either! Recognizing that our ancestors were intelligent, we named them “wise men”. But, like every teenager who can’t stand their parents, the modern Homo realizes that he is like so much smarter. In a bold statement of pride comparable to getting a tattoo you don’t tell your dad about, the only beings to ever categorically designate other beings by name chose to name themselves not just the “wise men”, but the “wise wise men”. We are Homo sapiens sapiens, setting the precedent for a naming scheme about as clever as that used for iPhones. We, as modern humans, are so undeniably sapien that we’ve gone super sapien.

Which leaves us to wonder when the next time a reassignment of our species will be necessary. Some would argue that civilization is on a downward spiral into celebrity obsession, brand dependence, and political partisanism strongly resembling the exact opposite of the unified nationalism that drove America to win its independence hundreds of years ago. A reasonable argument could be made that our MTV-driven kin have evolved into a more fitting Homo sapiens #snooki. However, there is the slight chance that our ardent pursuit of the unending answers of science will come to mark an advance in our understanding of the world. Will we continue on our march toward knowledge and someday reach the distinction of Homo sapiens sapiens sapiens? It’s not particularly difficult to imagine future anthropologists, clad in lab coats and pocket protectors, researching the societies of the 21st century remarking that “those guys didn’t know shit” and deeming themselves magnitudes ahead of us. Ultimately however, it is somewhat difficult to imagine any society where someone who majored in anthropology actually got a job.
The Players really did a lot to prepare for their most recent play, “The Importance of Being Earnest.” One actor in particular had to go above and beyond the call of duty by not only portraying an extravagant Oscar Wilde character—he portrayed a woman. Robert Stewart took on the role of an older, powerful matron in a surprisingly believable way. “The last two professional performances have had men playing the role of Lady Bracknell—a particular woman played the part in the movie version in the 50’s and her portrayal of it became definitive—man have been playing this role recently like in the last ten years to keep the role fresh and push the boundaries of what has been done.” Robert said he purposely did not watch any versions of the play beforehand so he “could avoid getting stuck into just trying to do what someone else did.” I asked if he was worried about how he would portray the role of a woman and his first response was, “Her position in the play sort of prevents there being any sexual tension. She’s not the focus of the romantic subplot, so that was something I didn’t particularly have to worry about.” Which was probably a huge relief!

Robert then went on to say, “It’s not so much that’s she’s a woman, but she’s a person and she has motivations and ways to act that I just sort of had to push for. There’s a little bit in physicality that’s different (and in dress, obviously), but for a large part a number of the things I had to take on were mannerisms.” He learned how to walk like an old woman, sit like an old woman, dress like an old woman, and, yes, talk like an old, proper, woman.

All the actors for this production had to take vocal lessons from voice coach Brian Avery, who, as Robert said “taught us a full range of vowel substitutions so you could start with a standard North American dialect and make the appropriate changes in order to make it sound like an upper class British person.” They learned an RP accent for this play. An RP accent or Received Pronunciation was the proper woman voice, “Yes it was all quite, quite difficult to actually end up sounding like you’re a woman. There is some over exaggeration in the speech during the show, of course, because we are trying to play up the melodrama. You always want the accent to come across strong, so the audience accepts it immediately.”

Everyone on stage must wear make-up. Even the men need foundation, eyeliner (or guyliner), mascara, and man stick (a mat skin tone lipstick). When I asked Robert about the new lady make up that he must wear, he replied, “Oh! Probably! Actually I suppose I might be getting the full on lady make-up this time! So that will be interesting.” In addition to the make-up, Robert also had to wear a full Victorian dress, three-quarter inch heels, a very large flowered hat, and a cane. All that work learning how to wear the costume certainly paid off. When I watched the play, I was really convinced that he was an older British woman. In fact, upon seeing him in full costume and make-up for the first time a member of the crew exclaimed, “WOW! No wonder they picked Robert to play Lady Bracknell. He has a perfect Victorian waist!”

English taught in schools at the time the play is set but was later adopted as the standard accent of radio broadcasters.

Robert finished our language discussion by speaking in his newly learned British accent...
Have you ever walked to class and noticed a gathering of barefoot people hopping around on the stones next to the JEC? Or were you heading down to Blitman only to be surprised by an assembly of young men dashing up the approach on all fours, like a horde of crazy jungle cats? These are not incidences of insanity nor are they a warning of the end of days. What you have witnessed are practitioners of free running, or as it is called in France, parkour. These traceurs that you have observed (traceuse if female) are training in a very remarkable discipline. I met with one of RPI’s top practitioners, Scott Steinmetz, to find out more about this unique sport and how it fits into the grand scheme of things at RPI.

**SOME HISTORY**

Parkour is essentially the art of traveling from point A to point B using fluid movement without leaving any trace or evidence behind. It originated in France and was created by a 15-year-old boy named David Belle when his military rescue/firefighting father influenced him to learn about the philosophy of and technique behind physical education and training. RPI’s own Scott Steinmetz discovered parkour while on a high school dance team when his friend, Andy Keller (who now runs and moderates a parkour website), learned some cool-looking travel moves that he taught to his friends. Little did they know they were starting a lifelong journey in a rather intensive discipline.
BRINGING IT TO RPI

It was Scott and his friend Brian Wilczewski who brought parkour to RPI. Both of them have taught the art to students in formal classes, but when they pitched the idea of starting a club, they ran into a lot of friction. They were told that “for liability reasons, the school can’t actually allow that.” Then, they talked to a Union official who told them they might be able to form the club if they had some certification. Scott went on to say, “Brian and I got a certified tour group in London (to help). They come over to the U.S. once a year in a tour called ‘American Rendezvous’. The founders of parkour, the Yamikaze (the Frenchmen), came and we learned from them how to teach and got a level one certification—we came back and talked to the club people and it still wasn’t good enough. Basically the attorney guy said no.” There went the club idea. The school would not allow a club, but that didn’t faze the freshly-trained traceurs. They didn’t need an O.K. from RPI. They could gather on their own and that’s just what they did. From then on Scott and Brain singlehandedly trained any person who wanted to learn how to do parkour. Scott said, “Basically, we’re trying to build a self-sufficient group of guys who always meet and train together.”

The new parkour “not-club” was up and running, but it still had constant intimidation from the administration. When Scott and Brain tried to put up posters about the first free running lessons, they were immediately told to take them down, since only clubs could post public fliers. When I asked Scott if he was frightened of the administration possibly shutting down their parkour operation, he replied, “Yeah, all the time. It’s not even really their fault, it’s just that the legal system sucks so badly for liability.” For example, if a student slips and falls while performing a parkour move, that student may try to sue the school for having slippery rails—many administrations just don’t want to deal with the court cases. “There’s a huge move in the community to keep that punk aspect away. If we want to get commercialized in any way, we have to present a really professional outlook. So, if we see a Public Safety officer or police officer, we don’t run, and we don’t make fun of them. We’re super open; if we get asked to leave we just leave.” There are places where parkour is very much allowed because the officers know the group that is training, and that group cleans up and essentially “leaves no trace.” However, it is becoming more and more common for places to not allow parkour in fear of bodily and financial risk.

INJURIES? THEY’RE GOOD FOR YOU

Has anyone in the group ever been injured during their training? Scott replies, “No, not at all. There are some chronic things not due to individual events that are over-use injuries from training too much—sort of like regular sports injuries, honestly.” Scott says he has been training for six years, since his sophomore year of high school, and has only been injured once. How can these practitioners do so many apparently dangerous moves with so few injuries? They do their research. While training, practitioners do a considerable amount of examining and exploring. They know exactly how each pair of their shoes will react with different surfaces, from stone to metal to different types of paint. Once traceurs become confident with the training, they can simply look at a landscape and just go. “When you do parkour it changes everything about your life because you start to think about things you never thought about. If you listen to how quiet you can get yourself, it will pervade, and once you have that softness of touch, that translates into fluidity of movement.”
Parkour tests its students on many levels. Not only do practitioners learn balance and overall grace and flow; they also learn speed, agility, and body control. They can face their fears with a newly learned confidence. But possibly the best perk about practicing parkour is that those training are also building their minds. Scott believes that training muscle strength is not enough. “If you get injured and you don’t train for three months, your muscles atrophy and you’ll keep skill, but your strength is gone. Your goal should always be a more permanent thing. If you train your mental strength—if you train your ability to overcome obstacles, and how to move fluidly—then in 40 years or 50 years when you’re old, it won’t matter, because you still have all your mental strength. Your mind will stay with you. Your body won’t.” In addition, those training under the discipline of parkour develop what is referred to as “parkour vision”. With parkour vision, people look around much more and notice things that they never would have noticed before, from the different types paint used on the campus railings to the rooftops.

This particular art of movement forces the practitioner to learn how to take care of their bodies. “Basically the whole idea is about being silent, about being quiet, about being smooth and fluid and reducing shock on your joints. So, as you learn to be a better practitioner, you are effectively saving your body from damage.” There are people who still train in parkour even when they are in their late fifties. When we walk and move we make sounds to allow other people to know where we are—but to a traceur like Scott, this noise means a lot more. “The shock sound that you hear is impact, and that impact is not being absorbed—it is being sent bluntly through your body. This shock gets absorbed mostly in your joints, so that’s going to damage your knees, your hips, and your ankles.” Being quiet in parkour is synonymous to being graceful, fluid, and in the long term, healthy.

**HOW DO I JOIN?**

If you want to join, all you have to do is show up. The parkour “not-club” meets outside of Sage dining hall for about an hour every Monday at 5:00, Wednesday at 7:00 and Saturday at noon. New-comers are recommended to bring a bottle of water and to not wear sandals. When stating to train on campus, a traceur or traceuse will generally start off on an easier but varied landscape, like the newly constructed walkway between Low and the Sage dining hall. This is a good place to start because, as Scott puts it, “It has a lot of levels, and there are a lot of things to do there that look really impressive that are actually really really simple.”

Those who join might learn the classic parkour move called the Kong vault, where the traceur puts his hands down on a surface and then swings his legs through the box made by his arms (much like how we use crutches). This move can be visualized as the Puma logo. With enough training, a newbie can get skilled enough to practice parkour in Scott’s personal favorite place: the Poestenkill Gorge. Located down the road past Moe’s, the Poestenkill Gorge is what Scott calls a “glorious landscape.” He explained to me that it’s the extraordinary surfaces that make the Poestenkill Gorge so ideal. If you are a traceur, this landscape really makes you think. As many other practitioners have accomplished, our young traceurs expect to stay free running for as long as their years will allow.

**MORE ON PARKOUR:**

Website: americanparkour.com
Documentary: Jump London
Book: Cine Parkour
In an exclusive survey of vagina owners ages 18 to 25 by the S&W team, fedoras have been found to be the most important factor women use to determine if they will sleep with a man, ranking above other factors that have often topped the charts in past surveys such as personality, body type, style of dress and even basic hygienic practices.

When questioned after the survey one woman simply said that she was “just plain tired of sleeping with the forward jocks and hunks that always hit on her so confidently at clubs and bars” and that she “deserves so much more than those jerks”, with others simply stating “they’re so nice I just have to sleep with them!”. When survey respondents were shown a photograph of a man in a fedora, there was often an audible ‘sploosh’, at times combined with a poorly muted moaning.

With sales of fedoras up more than 300% since 2003 and market growth estimated at almost 20% over the next year, the numbers speak for themselves. This astonishing year over year data seems to provide evidence that the results from this year’s survey are more than just a fluke, and that this recurring trend is more than just a number but a sign of the return of an era, and a higher plane of masculinity. Perhaps now more than ever male beauty will be defined outside of physical perfection.

It seems that in a time where few of the constants we often take for granted can no longer be counted on to be true, a woman’s tastes have changed to fit the times. With such true gentlemen dominating the dating scene, it can be safe to assume that social domination by jocks, tools and jerks is coming to an end. While it remains unclear what this change means for society at large; one thing is for certain: the times are changing. However, only one real question remains: will this change in taste change the very men they taste?

Mad Dog 20/20 is a drink my father has been joking about for a number of years. Growing up I heard stories about alcohol like everyone else, and my dad always described it as a “hobo wine”: something cheap, dirty, and disgusting designed to get the job done. Well, a good friend of mine came to me less than a week ago with a bottle of dragon fruit flavored MD 20/20, and I’ll be damned if it wasn’t good.

Now, I have never had a dragon fruit. In my experience there are a huge number of things that are named dragon fruit, but I’m not certain that here in the US there are a large number of folks that even know what dragon fruit is supposed to taste like. To me, this 13% A.B.V drink just has a generic fruity taste, but the surprising thing about the whole deal is that it’s good.

This drink, for all its decidedly low quality, doesn’t burn as it goes down, is relatively smooth and doesn’t taste god awful. I’m sure it’s filled with terrifying chemicals or something, there has to be a reason its weighs in at less than 5 bucks a bottle, but it’s all in all not a terrible drink. Two weeks ago I never thought I’d be saying this, but hobo wine is actually okay. If you’re looking for a drink on the cheap, go for it.

7.5/10–would buy again if broke.
On page 9 of the November 6 issue of *The Poly*, a box appears with the words “Last Exit Before Toll” written along the bottom. When we noticed this, S&W editors stared at the page in horror. How could they steal OUR ideas? How could *The Poly* plagiarize like that? One of the editors fainted from the shock.

We at S&W take our work seriously. In fact, we take it so seriously that you will never find a joke in between the soft, glossy covers.

Additionally, *The Poly* has been publishing beer reviews. This isn’t our trademark move, so we feel less angry, but still! Who do they think they are? Are they trying to become S&W?

Once our anger melted enough for us to see clearly, we decided to sue *The Poly*. We are also publishing a Top Ten—except, ours is going to be MUCH better. Why? We’re going to describe the top ten muppets instead of frou-frou things.

**10. BEAKER**
Beaker is the iconic lab assistant to Dr. Bunsen Honeydew. Characteristic of most lab T.A.s, Beaker always has little idea of what’s happening and doesn’t speak any English. However his shy, insistent “meep”-ing conveys the sense of urgency and socially inept struggling similar to that of the average RPI student, which is why he opens our list at number ten.

**9. FOZZIE BEAR**
With his impeccable fashion sense and ground breaking comedic style, Fozzie Bear is known for his catchphrase “Wocka Wocka Wockal!” Supposedly adored by his seldom-seen fans, Fozzie is a childhood friend of almost every other Muppet on the show, making him a key player, and for this he ranks in at number nine.

**8. ZOOT**
He has sexy blue hair and will school you at the sax. He plays saxophone in the hit band Dr. Teeth and The Electric Mayhem. According to his performer and builder Dave Goelz, “Zoot is just a fifty-year-old burnt-out musician.” Quote: “I don’t have no other pants.”

**7. SWEDISH CHEF**
Wearing his signature toque blanche he has bushy eyebrows that completely obscure his eyes. He is an expert at all culinary creation from chocolate mousse meatballs. His cooking show has taught us all how to entertain our guest with both food and outrageous behavior. Quote: “So, de beency bouncy burger, eh? Bork Bork BORK!”

**6. GREAT GONZO**
Known for his extreme stunts and excitability, Gonzo is the show’s daredevil extraordinaire. Consistently taking his stunts above and beyond the call of awesomeness, he has no fear when it comes to launching himself out of a cannon. A puppetized Evel Knievel, Gonzo’s got balls and will always deliver a showstopper performance.

**5. ANIMAL**
Constantly jamming out sick beats and epic drum solos, Animal is the drummer for Dr. Teeth and the Electric Mayhem. Described by his puppeteer in “five words: sex, sleep, food, drums, and pain”, Animal’s party hard, rock and roll attitude gives just the right amount of fucks (zero) to makes him the perfect *Muppet* to get trashed and wild out with.

**4. SAM THE EAGLE**
As the most American character on the show, Sam ranks at number four on our list, beating out the many un-American characters on the show. Standing for all that is good in the world, Sam would frequently lash out against “weirdos” and “namby-pamby conservationists” whenever he would deliver editorial pieces on the state of the nation and the world at large. After becoming disgusted with the state of the show he left to join Statler and Waldorf on the balcony.

**HUMOR STAFF**
Elizabeth Anderson, Cassondra Breyfield, Mike Dame, Chris Dower, David Hodson.
3. MISS PIGGY

Never being anything less than fabulous, she is convinced she is destined for stardom. With her capricious nature, she is determined to convey an image of feminine charm, but suddenly flies into a violent rage. She keeps the audience and costars entertained with her intense personality and mad Kermit crush. Quote: “All my scenes are my own. A double? Impossible! I am unique.”

2. KERMIT

Kermit represents the struggle of the everyman: his coworkers are crazy, his girlfriend is crazier, and to top it all off his skin is green. He’s the soft-spoken man in charge of the entire The Muppet Show, and he never fails to make sure the show goes on, bringing what is often the only shred of sanity to the cast.

1. STATLER AND WALDORF

The namesake of our magazine, Statler and Waldorf, are grouchy, old men whose only purpose on the show was to heckle the rest of the cast. Despite the show never being up to their standards, they still found themselves in the best balcony seats every week. Not even they know why, and it’s that attitude that we like to represent here at RPI.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE: THE NERD EDITION

Across.
3. What half of RPI is
6. Not a proton
7. Common freshman class
8. Ideal future devoid of material wants
9. Candy that we all are
14. TV show portraying socially awkward physicists

Down.
1. A castrated Multix
2. Abbreviation of this game is a teenage girl’s favorite saying
4. What we believe Shirley has
5. Go Red! Hint: round and black
10. Managing editor of S&W in 2011 (time to check out our archives!)
11. Go red! Hint: February
12. Good posts get this
13. Something Archies don’t get
Let’s face it folks, we live in a dangerous world. Muggers, carjackers, that one time three years ago when a student got beat up by middle school aged children less than 100 feet from the Pub Safe building, we just ain’t safe. No two ways about it.

There are a number of ways to try and keep you safe. A lot of folks carry a small knife; martial arts are a solid choice for many as well—and let’s not forget about safety in numbers. As far as I am concerned, though, my ideal choices for self-defense are taken from our brothers and sisters in the animal kingdom.

Many people, in fact, almost everyone, overlook our fellow beings’ methods of self-defense in favor of more “human” methods of protection. I have gone on record many times in my years on this dangerous planet stating unequivocally that such a path is speciesism at its most base level, and now I’m here to justify this claim.

**THE SEA CUCUMBER**

First, let us look at that most noble and active of creatures, the sea cucumber. The primary defensive technique of the sea cucumber is in many ways similar to what a good friend of mine once described as the wallet defense. When confronted for one’s wallet, simply say, “yo, here is my wallet.” The technique espoused by our cousin cucumber is slightly harder to train, but in my experience no less valid. The technique is broken down into steps and is as follows:

1. Identify threat
2. Turn backside to threat
3. Remove pants
4. Expel lungs and respiratory system at attacker
5. Flee in ensuing confusion

As I mentioned, this technique can take years to perfect, but it’s successful execution can be devastatingly effective in both driving one’s attackers away and in sending one’s self to the hospital for a relaxing stay and dosage of morphine.

**THE STAR FISH**

Years ago, clam and oyster farmers were having trouble with starfish populations eating their crops, so to speak. Their response was to simply go along their field and just cut any starfish they found in half and move on. Here is where I can reveal their incredible defensive technique:

1. Be cut in half (or receive any other damage)
2. Have each half regenerate into another full person

Utilizing the raw genetic power of this technique, the starfish populations doubled continuously until the farmers saw the error of their ways, and so too will you double until you crush your enemies beneath you.

**THE MALAYSIAN EXPLODING ANT**

Much in line with their name, the defense technique embraced by this last example is as powerful as it is permanent. The Malaysian exploding ant is a cousin of the plain old carpenter ant, but with the exciting addition of over large mandibles that can tense up and rupture sacs of poisonous adhesive gunk. The true technique associated with this is the second simplest I will talk about in this article:

1. Wait for enemy to threaten you
2. Explode

It’s short, sweet, and hard to confuse with any other plan. Okay, so you die if you do it, but sometimes simplicity is better than effectiveness in self-defense. Not, like, a lot of the time, but the cases are there.

**THE SLOTH**

The sloth, in both its two and three toed variety, has one of the simplest and most effective self-defense techniques in the entirety of the animal kingdom. This on top of being god damn adorable and the single greatest creature to ever have a diet consisting primarily of leaves and tree bark. Its technique is as follows:

1. Give zero fucks
2. Sleep

Any further questions regarding the sloth should be directed to the YouTube video, *True Facts About Sloths*.

From these examples I think it is more than clear that the animal kingdom has more to teach us about how to protect ourselves than we do. So the next time you’re in a bind in a dark alleyway, just think to observe what your fellow travelers on spaceship earth are doing and maybe you’ll come out of the situation ahead.
College is hard. There’s no denying that. Yet, too often, I’ve seen people take the easy way out. If you don’t believe me, check RPI Reddit or any of the RPI Class of 20XX Facebook groups. Everyone’s asking “What’s the easiest HASS class?” or “What’s the easiest elective?”. Few people ask “What’s the HASS class that will teach me about X?” or “What elective will prove very useful to me in the future?”. In my STS classes, the engineers will often be worried about getting an A to bring their GPA up, instead of worrying about getting a thorough grasp of the material.

Yeah sure, you say, skeptically. Elizabeth, you’re a HASS major. Your classes are easier. If I had easy classes, OF COURSE I’d take some challenging classes.

Easier to get an A? Yup. But, when I apply for graduate schools or jobs, I’ll be competing with lots of people who also got lots of A’s. I need other things to stand out, such as research, extracurriculars, recommendation letters and job history. It is a different playing field than the “C’s get degrees” mentality. Also, majors-only classes are much more difficult than Intro to STS, Intro to Economics, or even standard 4000-level HASS courses, which tend to be very easy for me, too.

College is a tool to get you where you want to be in life. It is not just about grades and doing the minimum to get by; it is about networking, personal and professional development, and taking advantage of the opportunity to learn. If you’re Bill Gates and you figure out something really great, you don’t even need to finish college (disclaimer: your idea needs to be really good in order for this to work well). You might end up doing something for a career that had nothing to do with your degree, but has a lot to do with the networking and skills you developed during your college education.

My dad is an engineer. He’s told me that some of the classes that have proved useful to him were his anthropology and English classes. Especially these days, engineers need to be able to work with people from many different cultures. Understanding the differences and working well with people who come from very different backgrounds from yourself will greatly help when working on a project. English, or writing and grammar in general, are very useful for communication. Now that much is done over e-mail and other electronic communications, being able to write well helps prevent misunderstandings. At RPI, we have communication-intensive classes instead of English class. I really like that—it is much easier to motivate yourself to write when the subject is interesting—but I am on my fifth communication-intensive course and none of the previous ones have been very challenging. I have learned far more about writing through being on S&W and The Poly than through those communication-intensive courses.

You are at college. Take advantage of the opportunity to learn whatever you can. Networking, by joining clubs and making friends, as well as talking to professors, will help you secure a job in the future. If you got into RPI, that probably means you’re pretty smart. RPI also has a lot of amazing clubs, amazing classes, and amazing opportunities. Trust me. You WILL have fun doing more than just taking the easy way out.
The ride up is silent, each of us a stranger
Each of us with bad news
I watch a husband and a wife hold hands
They press the seventh floor
We go to the fourth
It is said that the human soul after death wanders the bardo plane
For forty days and forty nights before latching onto a body
Perhaps that’s why
When I turned the wrong way, I saw women preparing to be mothers
And I turned around and walked to hospice
They say that heaven is obscure for the Jews
But I know that he isn’t living beyond the clouds
But in all of us
Sitting at a table, cutting carrots
Pointing out the boats that anchor in the middle of the Hudson River
Arguing with us at dinner as to the cause of the light
That blinks
On the top of the Palisades
They say that I have his hair
(though there’s nothing wrong with being bald)
And I hope I have his energy
Like when he dived onto his wedding bed and broke it in half
But as I walk into the room,
All I can hear is sharp breaths.
I hold his hand,
And recite,
as if it was made for this moment
planned for this purpose
“Let us go then, you and I
When the evening is spread out against the sky…”

-Writing started at 10:05 PM, thirty five minutes after the death of Irving Eiferman

The McKinney Contest is RPI’s annual writing contest sponsored by the Department of Language, Literature, and Communication. The competition gives an opportunity to Rensselaer students to showcase their artistic side in poetry, essay, fiction or drama, and electronic media. Winners are given the opportunity to display their work in Statler & Waldorf’s fall issue.

Other McKinney winners from 2013, as well as the rest of the entries excerpted here, can be found online at sw.union.rpi.edu.
Excerpt from “Redefining Strength”
by Gibran Liezer Esquenazi
First place winner, undergraduate essay

The shower was teeming with hair. The hair had spread along the walls and had clogged the drain like a miniature beaver dam. My Father had relapsed and the hair loss was just one of the side effects induced by the Chemo to treat his Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. It may seem odd, but even though I had witnessed how he had lost his hair, his body mass, his energy, I had successfully managed to block his deterioration. My father had facilitated my denial by presenting his illness as if it were a seasonal flu. He pretended not to die; I pretended not noticing he was dying. After all I was entitled to a strong father. I was entering puberty and I needed a strong man to show me the way. However this delusion was shattered the day I walked into his bedroom to witness one of his post treatment convulsions. Like a rag doll that is violently tossed around by a dog, his body shook aimlessly. I stood there for a while observing this. I was detached, yet curious and estranged by my own behavior, until he turned around and with his eyes he suggested that I forgive him. I felt ridiculous as I imagined myself to be Blake Dutcher, a hopeless kid who everyone detested for tripping and falling down on the soccer field precisely when the team most needed him. I felt ashamed, emotionally slow and inept.

At the time, this was quite a contrast to what I was experiencing. Outside my gloomy home, I was a popular thirteen-year-old player admired in the soccer league. During recruiting season I was usually courted by several coaches and since my family was going through financial hardship, Mr. Debauche and Mr. Burnett offered substantial donations so that my endowment would not be interrupted by my Dad’s tragic condition. They believed in me, in my potential and were willing to support my ‘future’. I had a future because unlike the others with uncoordinated dribbling and reckless slide tackles, I maintained my status as the fastest and the most agile on the field. Of course, this was due partly to my genetic make-up which kept me at a stunted height until the age of seventeen. Regardless, it seemed that my confidence was unshakeable. The men that surrounded me, my soccer coaches and my trainers nurtured this image of “soaring strength and wonder”. Without me consciously knowing, I had replaced my father, who stood in direct contradiction to what I was experiencing—he was decaying, weak, absent and unable to protect me. His substitution out of the line-up did not really enhance my attributes in the long run. I knew I had betrayed him and began to spiral into a deep depression, no longer having a zest for life. My father and I had always been very close—his absence could not go unnoticed.

One day we took a family trip to Tijuana, Mexico, to accompany my father to an alternative cancer treatment center. I had been to Mexico numerous times, before the cancer. My dad had been adamant on us keeping in touch with our Latino roots. However, my memory of Mexico remained fairly sheltered to family members’ homes. My dad found relief in knowing that even though his kids did not speak Spanish, phonetically they had been introduced early on, and would be able to potentially speak it without an accent if they so desired. Furthermore, his main concern was to imbed us with the Mexican cultural values: respeto a la familia, al trabajo, y la tradición.

As soon as we crossed the border, we hit a pot hole. “Welcome to México,” my father comforted with a slight mischievous grin. I was glued to the window—where was this treatment center anyway? The deteriorated road we traveled on took us through countless adobe huts fortified with hand-made barbwire and shards of broken glass. Mangy dogs roamed the streets feasting on rotten garbage. I noticed a sign clipped to an improvised clothesline, it read “Beware of Dog”. I wondered, “which dog?”

TO READ THE REST OF THE STORY, GO TO http://sw.union.rpi.edu/2013/10/mckinney-2013-first-prize-undergraduate-essay/