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Proposed Wal-Mart expansion up for referendum

By LUKE MOGELSON

On April 5 Bennington voters will determine whether Wal-Mart can replace its current building, situated in Monument Plaza, with a new one more than twice as large. This referendum, which promises considerable repercussions for the local economy, comes as a decisive moment for a township that has expressed ambivalence over big box retailers.

Specifically, the vote will approve or reject a zoning bylaw already in place. The bylaw, adopted in January by the Select Board (a committee of elected town officials responsible for issuing permits), imposed a size cap of 75,000 square feet for retail buildings in Bennington's designated commercial area. Vermont law, however, allows residents a twenty-day window during which they can organize a petition challenging such amendments. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Wal-Mart secured enough signatures in February to open the cap to a public appeal.

BLS Bennington, the owner of Monument Plaza who leases space to Wal-Mart, would like to raze the existent 50,000 sq. ft. store and develop one in its place that would stand at



Photo by Kathryn Furby

112,000 sq. ft. Both Wal-Mart's local manager and its national office of public relations declined to specify what additional goods and services the enlarged store would offer. Georgia Hammershell, assistant to the District Manager who oversees Bennington's Wal-Mart, claimed her office had not been informed about plans for expansion.

A newspaper advertisement paid for by BLS Bennington, however, presented a list of advantages to the proposal. Among them: new annual tax

revenue, new jobs, and wider selection of product. It also justified the endeavor to repeal the cap by reminding citizens, "A public referendum is the essence of democracy."

While Wal-Mart succeeded in acquiring the five percent of voter support, needed to force a referendum, some residents considered its tactics manipulative; its assurances disingenuous, and its mention of democracy hypocritical.

The non-profit organization Citizens for a Greater

Bennington, cited a municipally funded impact analysis in St. Albans which alleged a Wal-Mart of equal size to that proposed for Bennington would cost the city \$2.50 in tax losses for every dollar in tax benefit. "The study also found that the 214 jobs created by the new store would be offset by the loss of 381 jobs at other businesses," the organization says.

Daniel Richmond, an active proponent of the cap, has pointed out another local consequence of big box retailers. Up until 2001 the Bennington tool company, Stanley, which employed 168 workers, was the oldest manufacturer in Vermont; but when the levels and squares it fabricated were outsourced to China, the factory shut down. There's a connection, holds Richmond, because Wal-Mart is the largest single importer of Chinese goods in the world.

"The giant retailer who plans to overturn our laws and local processes doesn't seem to care much about democracy or human rights when it comes to getting cheap stuff," he added, referring to China's authoritarian regime and poor workplace conditions.

Wal-Mart continued on page 10

Union Wins Some, Loses Others

By ZUBIN SOLEIMANY
News Editor

Mired in the ninth month of labor negotiations, union workers and the college management seem little closer to striking a deal now than when their last contract expired in the summer of 2004. Most points are stalemated and although the college has made some concessions, the union voted unanimously to reject their most recent proposal, which includes a point that could potentially eliminate union labor at Bennington College.

Union members say they face an uphill battle after conceding much to college management during the last ten years. While the school seems more financially stable than in recent years, anyone who's read the library report or applied for a grant here knows Bennington acts strapped for cash. In these cautious good times, union employees are left wondering where they fall on the school's list of priorities. "We didn't ask for much back then because the college was hurting and we were willing to hang in there until things got better," said one dining hall worker. "But now, things are a lot better for the school, three new houses filled with students, and now we're not getting it

back."

Heather Faley, head of Human Resources and a lead negotiator for the college, again refused to give any other comment about negotiations or the college's relationship with labor in general, other than, "both sides are working really hard and we absolutely value our employees."

Neither side budged on wages, still set for a 3% raise, which the union views as negligible. Currently, union wages range from anywhere between \$9.11 and \$11.39 for dining hall employees, and \$9.18 to \$13.61 for maintenance employees hired within the last twenty years. While those hired before 1984 do earn higher salaries, only seven college union employees fall into this category. Negotiations began last summer with Union asking for a 6% raise and the college initially offering 1%.

"All I want is a decent, livable wage," said Deb

LaFlamm, who has worked in the Dining Halls since 1997. "A 23 cents an hour raise is an insult... it's time for [the college] to stand up and take care of the people they profess to value."

According the State of Vermont's Joint Fiscal Office, the majority of current wages fall far short of a living wage for any employee with dependents. Determined by the amount needed to afford basic needs, insurance, taxes, personal expenses and 5%

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for savings, a single person with no children needs \$11.49 in hourly wages, or \$23, 889 yearly. By the same standard, two people working in a home with two children require \$14.72/hour each (\$61,229/year combined) for a living wage, while a single person with two children requires \$22.74/hour (\$47,284/year).

The college's proposals regarding health care coverage stayed the same as well. Currently, the college pays 90% of Union employees' health care premiums,

a portion that's dropped from 94% in 2000. The new proposal will cover 90% of the fixed cost as of signing; any increases in premium will not be taken into account, but added on top of the 10% employees currently pay.

While management scrapped their proposed cuts to paid vacation time and slightly increased proposed retirement benefits, they added a clause that could potentially eliminate unionized labor at Bennington College. This would not be your grandfather's union busting; according to a source within the union, a section of the most recent contract proposal allows that the school could replace any union worker with a subcontractor after a one year notice.

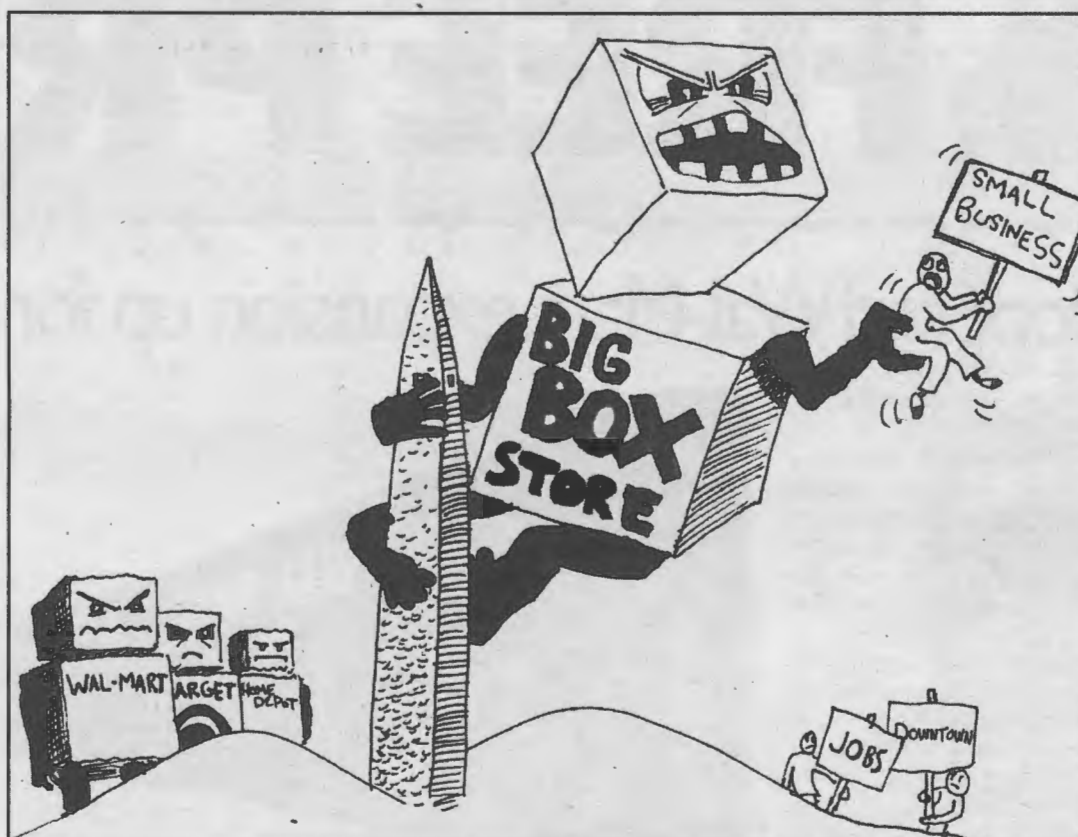
Recruiting outside contractors to work on a job-by-job basis is an attractive option for a school looking to save money. While wages may or may not be higher, subcontracting saves employers the cost of providing benefits to their employees. Several years ago, the maintenance department disbanded its fulltime groundskeeping crew and has since contracted most groundskeeping work to Weaver. "It sounds like they just want to bring in companies and not give anybody benefits," said one union employee.

Union continued on page 5

Stop Wal-Mart: Vote "YES" on April 5

The editors of the Bennington Free Press encourage all students registered to vote in Bennington to exercise their right and vote YES on April 5. The special election will call residents to answer the question, "Shall the voters of the town of Bennington approve the large-scale retail bylaw adopted by the select board on Jan. 24, 2005?" Approving the bylaw will keep the Bennington Wal-Mart under the 75,000 square foot cap implemented by the town Select Board.

The Free Press agrees with the Board. Our town of 16,000 does not need a 112,000 square foot Wal-Mart. The state of Vermont has been named one of America's Most Endangered Places by the National Trust, and we need all students registered in Bennington to help keep big-box retail contained in Bennington. Vote YES.



Drawing by Jim Bentley

Bennington Jr. grows up

By SARAH McABEE
VOICES EDITOR

I'll admit to having referred to Marlboro College as "Bennington, Jr." Sure, they're good, but they're smaller, hipper, and less well known than dear ol' Benn. And have you heard that they banned TV and cell phones?

Through my secret Internet and ex-boyfriend channels, I've learned that not only did Marlboro ban television through their Town Meeting legislative body, but someone recently brought up the issue of cell phones and they rejected those, too. Marlboro does not have cable, does not have network, does not have their own TV in a common area that people crowd around to watch "Gilmore Girls." If you're seen using a cell phone in public, you get smacked with a citation.

First, this column was to congratulate the forward-thinking students at Bennington, Jr. Any upperclassman/woman here who has shaken his or her head while discussing that handbasket we know so well could support the unilateral rejection of such a publicly obtrusive vice. (Yes, I have one, but it's kept in my room so I can call my mom weeknights after 9 to tell her yes, it's still snowing. Swear.) But I got to thinking—Town Meeting?

According to Marlboro College, the Town Meeting is "the one governing body at the college that includes everyone in the community, and has jurisdiction and authority so wide. ... It is a strong illustration of 'the self-governing community' mentioned in the Mission Statement." Sound familiar? The campus elects the members of a Select Board, who

oversee the procedures, then every student, staff member, and faculty member is responsible for hearing issues and voting on them. The pinnacle of democracy.

Our newly proposed committee on handbook revision is a little like this. Hell, every

committee we have is a little like this. But, as a student who ran unopposed for her position on the Judicial Committee (arguably the body that could most make your life a living hell), I haven't seen much interest

in getting the "self" back into Bennington's "self-governance." The recent Campus-Wide Coffee Hour is the example that comes to mind. You're excluded from this rant, Five Other People Who Went.

Listen, I don't want Bennington to be Marlboro. I don't think we need to ban TV, I don't care if you use your cell phone in the Barn. Well, at least not during class. But can we (secretly, without telling them) take a cue from our brethren in Brattleboro and get off our asses? So you don't care about the Handbook. Did you know that Bob Graves is proposing refinements to the fine system? Yeah, now you care. I know it's not as sexy an issue as nudity, but we still need to talk about it.

Fellow Bennsters, I witnessed your fervor at filling out last term's Cereal Preference sheets. I know you have opinions. I know you like to vote, because more than 80% of you did last November. Put yourself back into governance, if not to shut me up, then at least to make Marlboro look bad.

I liked you better on LiveJournal!

By BRIAN PIETRAS

I have a shameful confession to make, one that that will shock some and no doubt confirm the worst fears of others: I have an online journal. Actually, this confession will probably surprise very few of my friends, but I know all of you who see me in the Barn hallways, or smile vaguely as you pass me the ice cream scoop in the dining hall, will be amazed—amazed that I'm not already on your friends list, that is.

Don't feign ignorance, modern young people: if you don't have an online journal, you know someone who does—whether or not they'll admit it to you. Additionally, the phenomenon of online journaling (also known as: "The internet will listen to me!") has already received plenty of press, both in print and online. However, to my knowledge, no one thus far has documented the extensive use of the free blogging service LiveJournal at Bennington.

The world of Bennington and the world of LiveJournal are, in fact, quite similar: both consist of a loosely-connected network of individuals loudly affirming their uniqueness in a desperate bid for attention and a long list of friends. Perhaps then it should come as no surprise that so many Bennington students also have LiveJournals: "benningtonvt," the LJ community devoted to the college, has over 100 members. If my hazy memories of math class are anything to go by, this means that roughly 1 out of 6 Bennington students have a LiveJournal. Obviously, not every member of the community is going to be a current student, but there are also plenty of students here who aren't members of the community,

sneakily trying to escape notice.

Because, you see, having a LiveJournal is a lot like knowing dead baby jokes—both bring secret pleasure, but are inappropriate topics for dinner time—unless, of course, you're sitting at my table. This is true even at the endlessly

self-indulgent Bennington; when I once tried to discuss LJ with a staff member at BFP, her face tensed and she whispered, "We

don't discuss that here!" I nodded sagely, understanding that this would all change once we returned to the safe glow of our monitors.

In fact, LiveJournal's popularity on the Bennington campus isn't limited only to the students, as I discovered over the Field Work Term. While whiling away time in the snowy wilds of Buffalo, I noted with interest that a stranger had Friendened me (for the uninitiated, this means my journal was added to the list of journals whose updates they read regularly). I went to their User Info as quickly as my clicking fingers could take me, and saw that they were on the faculty at—where else?—Bennington College.

I actually think it's pretty cool that someone on the faculty has an online journal. That said, I think LJ is becoming a little too crowded for me. I mean, do we really need to read about everyone's drama when we're going to hear about it in the Dining Hall anyway? Really, the only useful part of LJ is that it lets everyone know how many friends you have, which can be accomplished by other online services that involve less whiny updates...

See you all on Friendster.

"The world of Bennington and the world of LiveJournal are, in fact, quite similar."

"Lord, Lord, how this world is given to lying."

By RYAN C. TITTLE

Many students here came to this school having great ideas about promises that were given to us by the campus publications for prospective students. You remember your copy of *The Book on Bennington* and other such stuff. I frequently decide to skim the current version of these items to see (now that I'm here and have manipulated this system for almost four years) what is being said to people entering the college.

One thing that perturbed me greatly was in *Voices: The Campaign for Bennington*, a large and unattractive book that features quotes from faculty concerning a Bennington education. There was a particularly disturbing quote that caught my eye—from a member of the literature faculty who I admire greatly. "The Shakespeare Project is all Shakespeare, all the time...Four terms, four courses, all the plays, all the sonnets, team taught, and everyone in the college can take it."

Something is rotten about the Shakespeare Project

I know nothing of the Democracy Project—I don't wish to know anything about it. I am sure it is doing wonderful things. One of the reasons why I didn't delve into this project was because of the other Bennington "Project" to which the above quote refers. I was part of the first segment in the Shakespeare Project—"The Tragedies"—and it upset me so greatly and was such a headache I begged Dean Hirsch to rid me of it even after the add/drop date.

The "Tragedies" course featured over sixty Bennington students all trying to talk (and you know what it's like being in a fifteen-member Bennington class with all the minds roaming, let alone sixty!) and trying to figure out if the class was ever to be structured any better than it was. Every tidbit on Shakespeare we learned we could've picked up from a footnote in a good Norton Shakespeare (which was the only good thing I got from the class). We were required to keep a separate notebook for the course and show it to Prof. Bernard (what were we in? kindergarten?) and I could've sworn by the end of the class, students were confusing the actual text with the film versions we watched weekly. It was nothing short of ridiculous, overcrowded, and unbearable. Even though I'll concede there were probably many people in the class who felt they gained from it, I knew just as many who felt like they were a part of the dregs of Bennington.

Shakespeare continued on page 10

South Africa for a weekend

By JESSICA ALATORRE
AND
KATHRYN FURBY
FREE PRESS STAFF

In 1961, during peaceful demonstrations against the Apartheid regime, sixty-nine South Africans were shot, many in the back. Victims included men, women and children. On the Night of Stories, March 11, 2005, Patricia de Lille addressed the young people in Martha Hill: "You must never ever allow this to happen anywhere in the world again. These are the lessons in life: that brutality and force are not the answers." For a weekend dedicated to the Democracy Project, Bennington College bore witness to Living Democracy and had the privilege to learn about what it meant to be a part of, and live through Apartheid in South Africa. Ten years later the world has watched as South Africa emerged as a successful democracy.

The South African policy of consistent segregation laws began in 1910. These laws worked at curtailing the rights of the black majority, eliminating voting rights, the right to strike, and political influence. In response, the African National Congress was formed in 1912. However, the 1913 law of the Native Land Act forced the black majority onto only 7.3% of the land in South Africa, and they were not allowed to live or own land outside of this land. After the 1948 election, in which the National Party won, the laws became focused on not only the economic sector, but all aspects of life in South Africa. Interracial marriages were banned, public transportation was segregated, and school curricula were adapted for blacks to include classes such



Photo by Jessica Alatorre

as "dish washing." Elections were deemed free and equal because many blacks were no longer considered citizens.

Mass protests and revolts began. The government banned various unions and organizations, but to no avail as resistance groups continued to demand equal opportunity.

By 1976, the African National Congress (ANC) had formed a militant section, and South Africa declared a police state. Finally, in 1989 the last president of Old South Africa openly admitted that Apartheid was a failure. In 1990 a historic speech was given to parliament in which he announced the end of apartheid and declared that South Africa be a democratic nation.

After 27 years in prison, Nelson Mandela, President of the

ANC, was released and the ban was lifted on the ANC. April 1994 brought the first democratic elections held in South Africa, making Nelson Mandela the first black president of the New South Africa. Thabo Mbeki, Mandela's second Vice President, was elected as president in 1999 when the ANC won again with a two thirds majority.

Bennington College was honored with the presence of distinguished and inspirational guests both from South Africa and the United Kingdom. Mac Maharaj, after overcoming visa difficulties due to a 1965 treason conviction, openly shared his collaboration with Nelson Mandela and the ANC to pushing toward a democratic South Africa. Patricia de Lille, a member of Parliament, started with firsthand

insight in the lives of everyday workers, as unions formed in factories, and the free South Africa movement advanced. Roelf Meyer, retired National Party member of Parliament, told the Afrikaans story. Lord Richard Holme presented the view from the UK. Linda Twala, from the township of Alexandra, brought a very real human perspective and told of his experience as a black person under Apartheid. Along with Mr. Twala were four students from the Phutaditjaba Qoqizwe Choir: Mike Ncube, Raymond Nyadzani, Nomsa Mdlozi, and Basiyami Makati. Roger Barry, visiting faculty member, facilitated the weekend's events.

Events included two special classes aimed at hosting discussions on the idea of democracy as a political and social movement. When asked during the discussion when democracy began in South Africa, Raymond responded, "In 1994, when the name Nelson Mandela came out. People were screaming in the streets and I asked my mother, 'Is Jesus coming or what?' Mother answered, 'The black man is free.'" However, after such turmoil and unrest in South Africa, it seems difficult to forget what happened. Roger Berry asked how one even begins to forgive, and Mr. Twala answered, "If Mr. Mandela can forgive after 27 years in prison, who are we not to forgive?" Raymond continued, "When people throw stones at you, you pick them up and build the foundations to your home." In exchange for students' questions, the South African choir members had their own questions for the president of the college, Elizabeth Coleman. The students tactfully asked, "Would you consider America a democracy?"

South Africa continued on page 9

"When people throw stones at you, you pick them up and build the foundations to your home."

Handbook committee selected

By BECCA ROBINSON

You wouldn't have known it from the miniscule turnout, but the gathering that took place last Sunday evening in Tishman was actually a Campus-Wide Coffee Hour, organized to discuss changes in the student handbook. Chairing the meeting were Dean of Students Bob Graves; Student Council Head Lindsey Gage; CAB Head Dan Briggs; and Judicial Head Heather Burns.

Most notable among the proposed changes is a statement of the "Bennington College Philosophy," which, according to Graves, is "all about what the Bennington community aspires to be". The students who are most intimately involved in the creation of this statement are Ben Weiner (the House Chair representative), a Judicial Committee representative, a Student Council representative (to be determined later), and 3 at-large representatives; Dana Brzezinski, Collette Hill, and Scott Neagle. Staff members involved are Graves, Head of Security Ernie Paquette, Associate Director of Student Life Eva Chatterjee-Sutton, and Crossett Library Administrative

Assistant Lisa Monroe.

After looking at a wide variety of school philosophy statements from other educational institutions, the students and staff working on the Bennington version will co-lead open-forum discussions with the entire student body in an attempt to gain feedback that accurately reflects the values of the campus as a whole. The first draft will be constructed from this feedback, then presented to the entire Bennington community for a consensus approval. From there, a final draft will be penned by Literature faculty member Mark Wunderlich. The goal, says Graves, is "to have something on paper by April 15."

When asked what the impetus for creating this statement was, Graves responded, "the idea is to look at what we have here, and...restate our shared sense of value." To this end, he noted that the statement should be

"educational and not punitive"; in other words, it should be solely a values statement and not a code of conduct. In his mind, it is also "a living thing, something we revisit every 2 to 3 years, to see...are we doing what we say we do?"

Handbook Committee At-Large election results:

Dana Brzezinski
Collette Hill
Scott Neagle

In terms of his idea of achieving a campus-wide consensus, Graves conceded that this could present difficulties, and was quick to add

that the idea is to agree on basic principles, if not all the details, of the statement. He hopes that a compromise can be reached "between what I want and what the students want," and that everyone will feel that they "have a seat at the table" in the decision-making process.

Gage said that she and the rest of Student Council have struggled to attract attention to and involvement in the handbook issue, and have had to postpone the election date for the at-large

positions twice due to lack of candidates. She pointed to the fact that students at Bennington are particularly immersed in their work and often can't find the time to engage themselves in campus-wide issues. "People really focus on what they do here, and sometimes that makes [Student Council's] job difficult."

However, she did mention that the low turnout at the most recent Campus-Wide Coffee Hour could also have to do with the lack of publicity given the handbook issue in the past few weeks. While a letter about the process was sent out to all students at the end of the fall term, very little has been done by the administration to refresh students' memories on the topic since then. Still, Gage said she sees the overall handbook-revision initiative as a positive one, and the goal of Student Council is "to find how everyone - from students to the ECC to Liz Coleman - can have a voice" in the creation of the new document.

Students interested in being active participants in the revision of the Student Handbook are encouraged to talk to Graves or any member of Student Council.

THE SKINNY

New Beverage Policy

After years of upholding the Draconian prohibition on all food and drink, Crossett Library has decided to update their beverage policy. While the updated policy still prohibits food, it allows for beverages in "non-disposable" travel mugs or neoprene [Nalgene] bottles. Paper coffee cups from the Dining Hall are still, of course, prohibited.

Who, oh who to blame first?

Angry at finding all the pool cues in the campus' Quonset hut-style game room broken by vandals, a Bennington student who asked only to be identified as Lucky, remained determined to play a full game of billiards. Lucky and a companion resolved to play without cues, but with their fists. While his companion, who won the game, left the game room unscathed, Lucky shattered his right middle knuckle into a few dozen shards. Lucky has no plans to file suit against the college for not replacing the broken cues immediately.

Dining Hall switches food provider

After years of loyalty to Sysco, the dining halls made US Food Services the school's primary distributor over FWT. After putting bids to find the best deal on wholesale foods, the dining hall found that US Foods, which is housed literally across the street from Sysco's Albany warehouse, offered the best deals on products of matching quality. Head of Dining Services Beth Carlson plans to have brokers host food shows on campus for students to sample some of the provider's new products.

Pigstock '05 is in the works

Pigstock promises to be bigger and better this year. Seniors Jim Bentley and Leah Bell are already in the planning process to put a twist on last year's impromptu Second Street party that left toxic pudding, plan B containers and graphic novelists in its wake. Ideas include an Old Testament-style lamb roast with unleavened bread and a miniature, unparted Red Sea complete with Noah's Ark. Send ideas and comments to bfp@bennington.edu.

The Free Press gets a room

The second floor of Commons is still a place to vent your problems, but now you can do it in under 500 words. The Bennington Free Press obtained a working news room in Commons over FWT, complete with a working phone line (802.440.4544). Office hours are Wednesday nights and Monday afternoons; so come on by and share the news. We'll listen too.

> features

This ain't no Field Work Term

By KARA BLOOMGARDEN-SMOKE

In November of 2003, six months after President George Bush declared an end to major combat operations in Iraq and a month after Iraqi resistance units, calling themselves "freedom fighters," began using ambush tactics and suicide bombings aimed at coalition forces and checkpoints, then-Bennington College sophomore Dan Ambia went to the Recruitment office in downtown Bennington and enlisted in the Reserves.

If there seems to be something incongruent about a Bennington College student joining the army, the recruiting officer for Southern Vermont, Sergeant Matthew Caron, picked up on it.

"I have never heard of anyone from Bennington College joining the Reserves," he said, citing Bennington College's traditionally liberal reputation. "But then again, in the time that I have worked in this area, I have also only had one student enlist from Southern Vermont College."

Sergeant Caron added that the numbers of students from four-year colleges is usually pretty low. He is careful to present both the positive and negative aspects of military service to all potential enlistees and ensures that each enlistee has thought this monumental decision.

"I could tell that Dan had thought about it, he seemed sure of himself."

Ambia remembers being pleasantly surprised at the extent to which Sergeant Caron made sure that he knew what joining the Reserves entailed and the possibility of deployment.

Going overseas did not figure into Ambia's decision.

"I wasn't really thinking about Iraq," said Ambia, as he sat in a dorm room in Fels, dressed in his army uniform and boots. "I guess I was thinking that it would be a way to save money and something to do. It was a spur of the moment decision, but I had been thinking about it since September 11."

A Bennington student joins the Army Reserves

This past February, Ambia, whose rank is currently Private First Class and is training to be a Quarter Master, was told at an Assembly that he would be sent to the Mideast next August. The army was unable to tell the future soldiers any information about their mission, saying that it was too early to share and the information was too sensitive.

"They didn't tell us shit, they acted like it was some kind of spy mission," said Ambia. This news came after eleven weeks of basic training last summer at Fort



Bennington student Dan Ambia Photo courtesy of Adrian Agredo

Sill, Oklahoma and training throughout the past year at a base in New Hampshire.

Military training at Fort Sill was broken down into units that focused on a specific set of skills.

At the end of each unit, the future soldiers were tested on the material.

The training began with military customs, where the men and woman learned when to salute, how to march, and progressed through "hardcore" first aid (focusing on giving help to the fallen on the battlefield), a two week intensive on shooting,

proper care of a rifle, map reading tactics, and tactical movements.

"The training seemed very primitive, almost like they haven't updated it since World War II," said Ambia, although he added that before he is sent to the Middle East, he will go to Fort Drum for intensive combat training.

In addition to receiving basic uniform, weaponry, and protective gear upon joining, each soldier is also given approximately fifteen vaccinations, of which Ambia could only name two.

"I got one shot in my ass. It was crazy, all the guys went in and bent over and got the shot. I

couldn't sit down for two days."

A part of basic training that left a deep impression on Ambia was a simulation Arab village, where they played Middle Eastern music and were taught to suspect everyone they encountered of potential terrorist activities.

Veterans from both Iraqi wars were on hand to share their firsthand experience. The first thing that every Vet mentioned was the heat, the second was the difficulty in trusting the Iraqis, even the children. They told of children stealing supplies of convoy trucks and men shooting at the trucks as they passed.

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Bob Graves: Term Two

By DALY CLEMENT
NEWS EDITOR

When Bob Graves was hired last autumn, he entered a school in the midst of rapid transformation: enrollment is at an all time high, ambitious building and renovation projects have been planned for the near future, and new faculty are being hired at an ever-growing pace. There may be little about the college that isn't changing, in fact, and it seems fitting that Graves has become the first "Dean of Students" in Bennington's six decade history.

Now well into his second term, Graves has consistently shown both an interest in community discussion and a willingness to make controversial decisions. We sat down to discuss his first term at the school and his thoughts about the future.

BFP: What excites you most about Bennington College?

GRAVES: First, I'm excited about many things that are happening at this campus. The South African Festival, for example: it's a wonderful thing, and fascinating. I intend on bringing my ten-year old to some of the events. That's one of the benefits of being here at such an exciting time. There are many things happening.

Thinking about student life -- I look at Bennington, and I see that we need to set some priorities; I've been trying to listen to students about what they see as challenges for them. We need to

sit together and understand why we are doing what we are doing. I'm looking at this handbook project here -- I think we should have something that says what we aspire to be, verses having a code of conduct that says, "this is what you can't do." While you need a code of conduct that says what the boundaries are, we also need to say what we aspire to be. We want everyone to feel welcome and included.

BFP: Is this what the philosophy should be?

GRAVES: Well, no. That's not exactly what it is, but those are some of the things that I value.

What I'm trying to say is, I don't know exactly what it should be about. That's where you have to get in a room together and have people say...I know what I value in a community, and I think this is about what we value in a community. Last term was hard. There were challenges. It was a tough term, but I have to say, I learned a lot. It was heartwarming to see how students on this campus were willing to care for each other. Those are some of the things that I care about.

BFP: You would like to write the philosophy, literally, in paragraph form? In other words, would you like to change the one that we have?

GRAVES: This is about philosophy of life outside the classroom; it's not the mission of

the college. We need to always ask 'Is this in line with what we say?' And it doesn't have to be done overnight. But, again, I want to work with student government. We also, in that process, get other people to pay attention to what we're about, and what we're not, about.

BFP: Bennington is very much about an idea of education. I'm interested in how you see Bennington in relation to other colleges -- the college "system" -- in the United States. Colleges have been changing radically recently. It's much different than it was ten years ago. So, in a sense, we may have to change the statement defining what the college is.

GRAVES: Not change, necessarily, but maybe redefine. I don't want people to get the wrong idea, and that's why we need to be clear about this.

Think about technology and how technology changes: now, you have to look at policies and ask, 'Does this still make sense?' But I think, in a community, you're constantly asking 'What does that mean to our community? How does it fit in?' These are exciting things. For instance, we are building a building [the new student center]. Faculty and staff have been involved in the process.

Graves continued on page 10

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Pell Grants to raise \$500 under Bush administration

By SASHA HEER

According to a memo from David Schnittger, Communications Director for the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, the Bush administration has called for a \$500 increase in the maximum size of single Pell Grants over the next five years. A bipartisan group of twenty-five senators is pushing for an even greater increase: \$450 this fiscal year, raising the maximum grant per student from \$4,050 to \$4,500 "in light of recent tuition increases and past stagnant growth", to quote a

National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) report. Though Pell Grants were supposed to increase in size annually in relation to the economy, the last increase was during Clinton's presidency in 1994, as reported in a fact sheet put out by the House Education & the Workforce Committee.

Federal Pell Grants are generally only available to undergraduate students earning their first bachelor's or associate's degree and do not have to be repaid. The amount

given to an individual student depends on financial need, the cost of attendance at your chosen place of study, whether you are a full or part time student, and other factors. More information is available from the Student Guide from the U.S. Department of Education, which can be found online at <http://studentaid.ed.gov>, or in the college's Financial Aid office.

What do these increases mean for students, especially at a pricey school like Bennington College? While the increase in

maximum grant size will come closer to meeting the needs of typical students, it does not come close enough. \$4,050, the current maximum, will only cover a quarter of typical institution's tuition by 2010, which is 10% less than it gives now, according to NASFAA and they predict that even the president's suggested \$500 increase will not be enough to keep the percentage Pell Grants cover even. Although every dollar counts, Bush's measure is small help to people attending expensive schools like ours.

Moderation at Colby?

By JIM BENTLEY
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Moderation at college is usually learned the hard way. Students battle the excesses of all-you-can-eat dining, last minute cramming, chain smoking, oversleeping, undersleeping, "free love," and the king of them all, binge drinking. By the time students reach senior year, they try with futility to warn the green and gluttonous first years of the dangers awaiting them.

In an effort to teach moderation and counteract binge drinking, Colby College of Waterville, Maine has recently allowed students to drink beer and wine in one of their main dining halls.

The program was proposed by two students, one an international student from Singapore, and the other a student leader who had lived abroad. Both found American attitudes toward drinking alcohol unhealthy and distasteful and decided to work with the administration in changing policy at Colby.

The program was limited to select Friday nights during the fall semester and was reserved for students aged 21 and older. A student could pay \$1 per drink and was limited to two.

The program was popular with both students and administrators who have decided to expand it to most Friday nights for the spring semester.

In an interview with the Portland Press Herald, Janice Kassman, Colby's Dean

Maine College allows drinking in dining halls

of Students said that "people appreciated it because it's a good way to show that alcohol can be handled in a good and responsible manner."

Could a similar program promoting moderation be enacted at Bennington? Currently the college allows for legal drinking at the Downstairs Cafe and at college functions with the proper Vermont state liquor license. Beer and wine have also been served in the dining halls during the MFA writing program.

"I think if you wanted to organize a senior dinner, and work with the dining hall, then it would be okay" said Bob Graves, Dean of Students. "But I don't think that its going to necessarily teach moderation."

Student organizations have been formed around the consumption of alcohol in the past, but have never been able to last for more than a few terms. Cocktail Club promoted of age drinking with formal attire, while the Brewing Club taught students how to brew their own beer.

Graves suggested the new handbook would be a good place to start in terms of healthy alcohol consumption. "I have a strong philosophy regarding alcohol, and I'd like to talk about it with the handbook committee."

Organic dinner planned for global issues talk

By SARAH McABEE
VOICES EDITOR

If you've ever wanted to give the government a piece of your free-tradin', sustainability-lovin', organic-eatin' mind, thank Student Action Network and your friendly Civic Engagement Coordinator (cough cough) because you'll get your chance in Downstairs Commons on Monday, March 21, at 6 p.m.

An organic dinner lovingly prepared by Student Action Network will be followed by a discussion between Bennington students and faculty; students from Southern Vermont College, Community College of Vermont, and Mount Anthony Union High School; and State Senators Dick Sears (D-Bennington) and Mark Shepard (R-Bennington), State Representatives Tim Corcoran (D-Bennington) and Joseph Krawczyk (R-Bennington), who

is also a member of the Vermont House Committee on Natural Resources and Energy.

The Organic Dinner, made possible through a grant from the Vermont Campus Compact, marks the first time students and legislators have come together at Bennington College since last November. This dinner will provide a forum for you to bring your concerns

about fair trade, sustainability, alternative energy, organic food production, "green" building practices, and anything else your little heart desires. Student Action Network will be holding an organizational and brainstorming meeting before the dinner, so keep an eye out. As always, if you have any questions about getting down political-style on campus, come find me. I hope to see you all in Commons on the 21st.

Get your chance in Downstairs Commons on Monday, March 21, at 6 p.m

Union continued from front

Management also removed a proposal to loosen job descriptions, making it possible for housekeepers to work in any building from one day to the next, or to eliminate distinctions between upstairs and downstairs jobs in the Dining Halls. LaFlamm worries that the provision, which will be revisited after a contract is signed, would work to cut employees out of the college community. "Right now,

students know us when they see us at the snack bar, in the Dining Halls or in their houses every day; if we're moving all over the place, we won't get to know the students anymore."

For now, the college has given its "last and best" offer and the union, which has yet to have signed a contract extension, is waiting to renegotiate.

New Student Center set to break ground

By SAMUEL RICH

Construction of a new student center will begin next month, when crews break ground behind the current cafés on April 22. The center is expected to be open at the end of next January and aims to fill the need for a quality space dedicated to social events on campus, events which frequently outgrow the present café facilities.

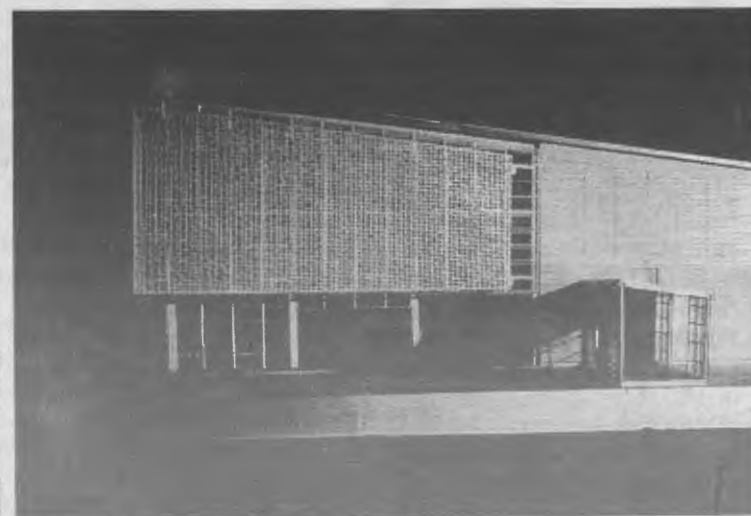
The new building will be built on the space currently used for faculty parking. As designed by Thaylor and Burns of Boston, the center's architecture most closely resembles that of the new houses, and includes several features lacking in the Up and Down Caf. Air conditioned, as well as equipped with garage-style doors that will open up onto a terrace between the old cafés and the new building, the center will include an improved snack bar, designed with input from the dining hall staff, a mini convenience store, a large stage, and lighting designed by Michael Gianetti. After concerns about the sound system were brought to the administration, an acoustician was hired to sonically redesign the new space. In addition to the new, high powered P.A., a smaller, easy to use sound system will be installed so poetry readings and open mic nights can occur without the aid of a sound board operator.

Construction will disrupt life on campus, however. Leigh and Fels residents can expect to shelve their alarm clocks next term, as construction will begin bright and early each morning. Fels house chair Billy Ulmer thinks the current construction

schedule is "a little absurd," pointing out that breaking ground a month later than scheduled would spare students half a term of noise pollution and the center would open when students are actually on campus, instead of over FWT. Vice President Joan Goodrich, however, says the extra month over FWT will give college employees time to get to know the new facilities, ensuring a smooth start-up when students return to campus next Spring.

Also, Celebrity Row parkers will have to search for a new status symbol, and the ping pong club may have to redshirt next season as both the game room and the parking next to it will be used by the construction crews. The game room will also be torn down upon the project's completion and the games will be incorporated into the new space. The cafés will remain open, however, and even after the center is open the Up Caf will remain as before, while the Down Caf will be used as a staging area for bands.

Other concerns have been raised, as well. The current blueprint requires food being brought from storage to behind the snack bar to be carried, or in the case of heavier products, dragged, through a room where the dumpster will be housed, hardly an appetizing prospect. Also, some Dining Hall employees have reservations about the combination of the snack bar and Down Caf, which will place student snack bar workers temptingly close to the beer taps.



Architectural model of New Student Center



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> arts

Public art graces New York's Central Park

BY MAJ ANYA DEBEAR
ARTS EDITOR

On February 12, 2005, at 8:31 AM, the unfurling of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's "Gates" began in New York City's Central Park; only twenty-six years after the artists had begun planning the installation. They were removed sixteen days later, on February 28th.

The "Gates," which consisted of 7,500 flowing saffron fabric panels suspended above 23 miles of Central Park's pathways, created a serpentine tracery throughout the park, and added a burst of summery golden light to the drab winter cityscape.

Christo's work is similar in some ways to that of the Scottish sculptor Andy Goldsworthy. Although Goldsworthy uses only natural materials, whereas Christo's are manufactured, both artists design short-lived installations for very specific settings. There is something about this ephemeral, site-specific quality that makes these works seem very powerful and poignant. They offer uniquely personal, once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

On February 12th, expecting a dramatic falling-dominoes-like unveiling of the \$21-million project, people swarmed to the park for the unfurling, many of them dressed in their own matching saffron outfits. Although the actual unfurling turned out to be a slower process and not as exciting as most of the onlookers had expected or hoped, the crowds themselves provided quite a spectacle. The City had estimated that the "Gates" would bring in approximately 200,000 tourists, including Christo fans, or "Gate-heads," and art lovers from all over the world. But most of the spectators seemed to be native New Yorkers.

"This is the first dog-friendly art opening I've ever been to," said Todd, the owner of a pinscher named Rudy.

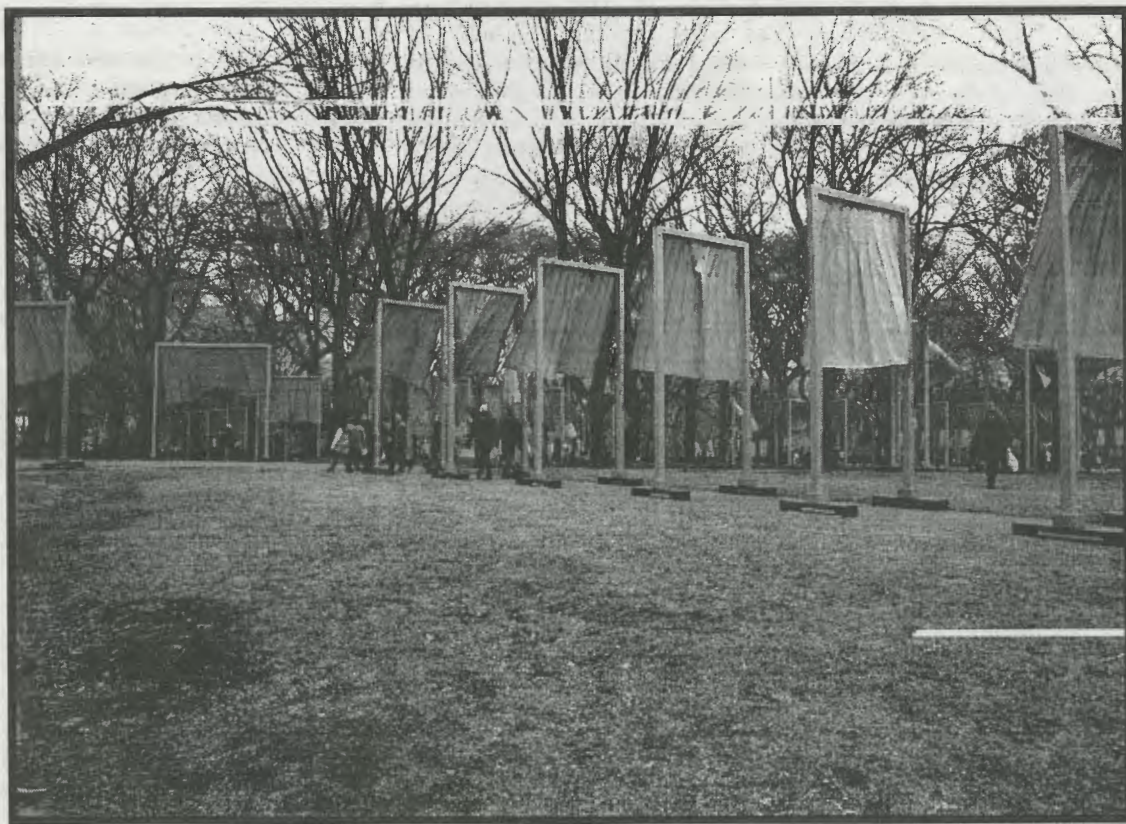


photo by Alycin Bektesh

Todd was one of many Upper West Siders who had relocated their usual morning walks from Riverside Park in order to see the "Gates." East Side canines were equally well represented. At the unfurling, Central Park resembled a gigantic, tangerine dog run.

Besides the six hundred volunteers who had spent the morning redecorating the park in their neon orange skullcaps, there were also plenty of onlookers who wore clothes to suit the occasion. Susie, an Upper West Side mom, dressed herself and her daughter from head to toe in Christo orange. "It's glorious, and I don't usually get excited about this stuff," she said. "I'm a middle-aged working mom and this inspires me to go make my own public art. I'm going to go home and bake an orange meringue pie."

Some people were less thrilled about the installation, claiming that the color was "too

seventies" or that it looked like a "construction site," but overall, New Yorkers tended to respond positively. Perhaps it was because the installation was, quite literally, a gift to the City. Christo and Jeanne-Claude had funded production of the entire project, including security, on their own. They did not profit from the tourism that they brought to New York. And visitors did not have to pay to see their work.

It is also important to understand the original context of the idea. In 1979, when the artists first conceived of the installation, Central Park was very different from what it is today. It was in shambles, badly abused and poorly maintained. The "Gates" were the artists' way of recognizing that beneath that urban grit and grime lay a beautiful body of land. Although the environment had been vastly improved by the time the "Gates" were actually

erected, the message still came across. The fluorescent canopies accentuated the natural beauty of the park by literally outlining its pathways and natural features. The color brought warmth to the park during a time of year when it is not usually regarded as being beautiful.

Some people considered it strange that Christo had decided to install the "Gates" in February, the coldest and dreariest month of the year. But this was obviously a very deliberate and inspired choice. First of all, the artists clearly wanted the "Gates" to be visible from any vantage point—to form a sort of golden network undulating about the landscape. If they had planned the installation for the warmer months, the foliage in many areas would have been too dense to allow spectators to view more than those canopies directly overhead or in the immediate vicinity. Secondly, while it may

have seemed risky to install such seemingly delicate works of art in an outdoor setting during a month that tends to have unpredictable weather, that unpredictability proved to actually enhance the beauty of the "Gates." The fabric created one visual effect when it was caught up in the wind, waving like thousands of glorious flags. It created a totally different, equally lovely, though somber effect when it rained, and the panels were dark and heavy. And yet another when the brightness of the fabric was amplified by the brightness of snow to create a startling and refreshing effect. The "Gates" served as reminders not of their own beauty, but of the natural, ever-changing qualities of landscape and weather.

A number of Bennington students, including myself, spent their Field Work Terms working for art galleries in which almost all the energy, concern and conversation centered around the business of buying and selling artwork, and the works themselves seemed of secondary importance. For some of us, the "Gates" proved to be an especially rewarding final exhibition. Whether or not the installation was beautiful can only be decided by the individual viewer. But most people, I think, would agree that there is something wonderful about artwork of such idealistic intentions appearing in a city that is so well known for the highbrow intellectualism and exclusivity of its art world.

The "Gates" were not confined to the walls of an admission-charging museum or a commercial gallery, or the pages of ARTFORUM. They were in the most accessible, most central place possible (almost by definition). They were as available, as inviting, and as appealing to a hot dog vendor at Bethesda Fountain as to a Chelsea gallery owner on his way to the Met by hansom cab.

> theater

Staged reading of new play to show over weekend

BY THALIA GILBERT

Playwright Ryan C. Tittle looks to explore questions pertaining to beauty and more in his new work-in-progress, *Songs of the Valley*. Tittle, a fourth-year, has decided to mount it in a way which has rarely been seen by a college audience. He has decided to "workshop" the show in order to be able to make changes as he and the cast see fit—a method often used in the professional world, but hardly made use of on a college campus.

Tittle has chosen ten experienced actors who he knows will be up to the challenge of this play. This will not be a regular, staged reading. The actors will be moving around on stage—not seated in a line facing the audience like most readings. The actors have been faced with doing full character work in a very short period of time—six days—and have been given the challenge of grasping the interweaving plot lines and complicated characterization. The actors, though, are fully welcome to

comment on changes that should be made on the play while working. Tittle was careful to choose actors who were analytical thinkers as well as spirited performers. It is important to Tittle that his actors be able to tell him what is or is not working in the play as the workshop develops.

The play itself is an interesting combination of a farcical Southern comedy and some deeply tragic themes. Tittle looks to explore the electricity between the comical characters and the tragic ones. He explores beauty by juxtaposing two different kinds of women who are beautiful in very different ways. For instance, one character is the epitome of the ex-beauty queen while there is also a young woman of natural beauty who does not try to improve her appearance with make-up. Tittle, who is originally from Alabama, comments in this play that this second kind of beauty is not valued as much as it should be in the South.

This workshop is part of

Tittle's two-part senior project. Depending on how the first readings of *Songs of the Valley* go, Tittle will do one of two things for another reading: since he is trying to figure out whether the emotional core of this play works, he may put on an revised version of the show, which will hopefully show that growth. Another thing he may do is decide that he is done with it (for now) and decide to move on to another play he has written. This is a very exciting and unique production for the Bennington audience to see. Witness it will give Bennington students the experience of watching a play being honed and developed for the better.

Songs of the Valley features Catherine Hessing, Tom Shoemaker, Stephen Reinstein, Tara Mackey, Eli Phillips, Emma Givens, Sofia Alvarez, Caleb Rupp, Penn W. Elo Genthner, and Brian Schultis. It will be performed on Friday, March 18th and Saturday, March 19th at 8:00 pm in VAPA D207.

Lawson Wulsin has a lot of obsessions, but then again, don't we all? In his new play, *Edif*, Wulsin explores those little things we think about on long, silent car trips, those weird dreams we all have, and that first thought in our heads after waking up in the morning. Wulsin doesn't know where these thoughts come from, but in his play we see the actors grapple with them, trying to make sense of why we think things, and what they mean.

The play centers around the story of Moja, played by Mac Young, and his quest for individual freedom. It combines movement and theater, using actors very willing to work with

their bodies. Through his play, Wulsin experiments with the idea of converging dance and theater, discovering what arises from it.

The set, which Wulsin spent his Field Work Term building, is decidedly minimal: a projection screen attached to two pieces of scaffolding on which the actors are slowly learning to maneuver. The projection screen will play an interesting role in the production, displaying a series of images created by Hans Werner Jatzke, who is also one of the four members of the cast. Wulsin is exploring the use of projections onto the bodies of the actors, creating a truly beautiful visual spectacle.

Songs of the Valley

Friday, March 18th and Saturday, March 19th at 8:00 pm in VAPA D207.

Edif

Friday, April 1st and Saturday, April 2nd 8:00 pm
Margo Tenney

Long days journey into Tishman

By ANIKA WILSON

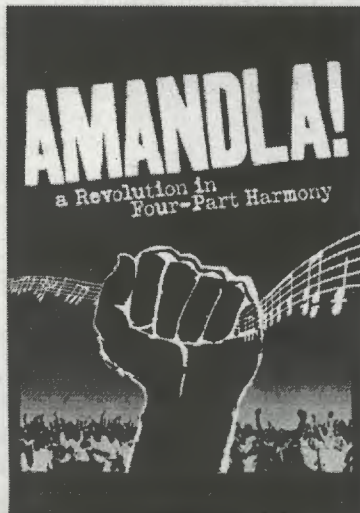
The South African Film Festival, which took place on February 25-27, ran in conjunction with the visitation of several South African leaders, negotiators and politicians. The festival consisted of the five following films:

Amandala: A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony: "Amandala!" The word is shouted into a microphone, into a crowd, and is returned with a thunderously passionate reply: "Ngawethu! Power to the people!" The intensity of the chants and heartfelt songs to which this documentary pays particular attention is not only beautiful and emotional, but played a large role in the fight for freedom during Apartheid in South Africa. The film, which won the Freedom of Expression Award in 2002, is a compilation of several interviews and conversations with South African freedom fighters, activists, musicians and survivors of Apartheid who explain (among other things) why music played a key role in the eventual victory over the government of a segregated nation.

Malunde: Young black street children and elderly white, divorced men usually have little in common. In this film, however, one of each finds himself temporarily dependent upon the other. *Malunde* is a traditional story about an older man finding himself by means of a journey with a young person. The content of the film, while a little drab and overused, does do a good job of addressing some of the more pressing issues of racism and economic separations in South Africa.

Long Night's Journey Into Day: An Academy Award nominee for best documentary feature, it is one of the more emotionally demanding films shown during the festival. The documentary follows four stories of Amnesty applicants as they tell their

accounts of past events, to the families of those they killed and to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (formed after the Apartheid in order to obtain full comprehension of exactly what occurred during those horrible years and in return offer the possibility of Amnesty to those who stepped forth). These stories include interviews with the applicants, their families, friends and peers. Some are obviously apologetic for their crimes while others seem oblivious to the wounds their actions inflicted. The questions addressed, however, are difficult ones: what crimes are understandable and in turn excusable in relation to political moods, desperation and the lack of other options and which are the true crimes of hate and an evil heart.



Chikin Biznis: Slightly humorous, though difficult to understand (Several of South Africa's eleven languages are spoken throughout the film), it is a film about everyday life in South Africa. It is the story of an elderly South African man who makes some questionable business decisions while selling chickens at the local market. Things go awry when his wife discovers that he has been seeing another woman and then attempts to destroy his business as revenge. Though little of the

dialogue is comprehensible to an English speaker, the movie is fairly visual and the meaning still apparent.

Wa'n Wina (Sincerely Yours): Perhaps the most believable and realistic film, this documentary, made by a young South African man and centering around his own community, addresses the issue of AIDS and sex among young people living in poverty in an area with high infection rates. Because the people in the piece are apparently friends of the filmmaker, their comfort and ease with him strip them of the usually inevitable falseness of a person in front of a camera. The documentary follows them through daily life, at home, on the streets and at parties while recording their thoughts and feelings about living under the conditions of poverty, teen pregnancy and an overcast shadow: the threat of AIDS.

The films were chosen by Paul Voice, who has spent 25 years of his life in South Africa, as a means to "provide a visual landscape for students" before the arrival of the South African leaders on March 11.

In addition to the film festival, three subsequent videos were played later on. *The Scarlet Pimpernel* is the personal epic of Mac Maharaj, one of Mandela's closest allies, a peace activist and a minister in the government that followed Apartheid.

Bound to Strike Back is another documentary centered around Maharaj that addresses political upheaval and the fight for justice in South Africa.

Facing the Truth with Bill Moyers is a feature length film which centers around the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the years after the war.

The films will be available in DVD form at Crossett Library for those who missed the original screenings.

Lecture series on dance comes to Bennington

By LAUREN CARBONELL

This term at Bennington will host a wide range of exciting dance events. The first of these is a lecture series with Suzanne Carbonneau. Suzanne is a performance critic, historian and a consultant who specializes in audience development. She has written for the New York Times, the Washington Post, Dance Magazine, Dance View, among other publications. The series will take place from March 14th to March 17th. The lecture topics are: Minimalism and American Dance in the 60's (March 14th), Cakewalking, Lindy-Hopping, Tapping, and B-Boying: African-American Vernacular Dance (15th), The Zen Aesthetic in Contemporary American Arts (15th), and Contemporary American Dance (16th). The last two lectures in the series are being

given today, March 17th: Dance Criticism: What It Is, What It Could Be (during dance workshop from 4:30-6:00 p.m.), and The Globalization of Modern Dance (from 7:30-9:00 p.m., during Dance on Film Class). They will be held in Tishman and all are invited. During the lectures, Suzanne will be showing rare footage that she obtained through her travels.

The second event is an evening of dance, video, and music by the multidisciplinary artist collective, 7 ARTS. The artists, who describe their work as pushing traditional boundaries of narrative and genre with a fresh approach to performance, film making and exhibition, will present: "born is my still try" and "resurface." 7 ARTS is Thomas Dunn, lighting designer and video artist (Bennington '96);

Eva Lawrence, choreographer and performer (Bennington '96); Edmund Mooney, composer and electro-acoustic musician (Bennington '93); and Hanna Yampolsky, graphic designer. Joining 7 ARTS for these performances are guest artists: Cortney Donahugh, Nathalie Dessner, Leah Nelson, Carlos Pacheco, and Emily Watts. Additional activities include a dance technique class for intermediate and advanced dancers on March 17 from 10:15 a.m. to 12, and a multi-arts workshop for dancers, videographers and musicians from 1-3 p.m. Both workshops will be held in VAPA E303. The performances of "born is my still try" and "resurface" will take place on Friday, March 18th at 8 p.m. in Martha Hill.

> CALENDAR

March

Thurs. 17 - Irregular Bagels Sitcom - 10pm Downcaf
Irish Caeley - 11pm Downcaf

Fri. 18 - Frankie and His Fingers - 9pm downcaf
Songs of the Valley 8pm VAPA D207

Sat. 19 - Songs of the Valley - 8pm VAPA D207
Karaoke - 10pm downcaf
St. Kilpats - 12am Kilpatrick living room

Thurs. 24 - Irregular Bagels Sitcom - 10pm downcaf

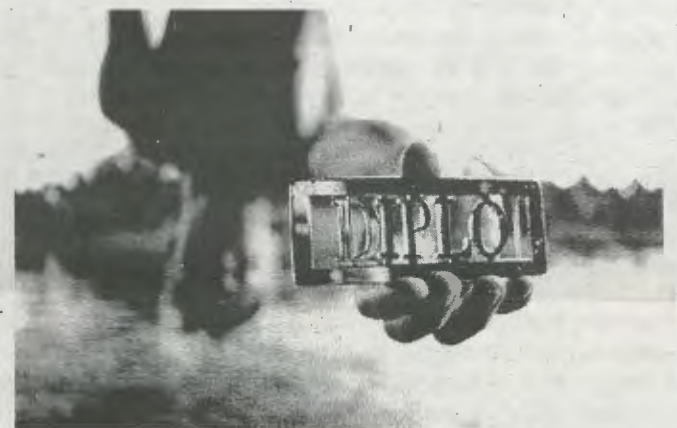
Sat. 26 - Howard Fisherman Quartet - 7pm North B.VAE
\$15
Drum n Bass Party - Kinoteca Hallway

Mon. 28 through Sun. Apr. 3 Art by Larry Bissonnette
Drury Gallery, Marlboro College

Thurs. 31 - Irregular Bagels Sitcom - 10pm downcaf

April

Fri. 1 Band: Diplo 10pm downcaf



Fri. 1 - Edif - 8pm Margo Tenney

Sat. 2 Music Don White 6:30pm Sacred Heart Parish \$15
Sat. 2. Edif 8pm Margo Tenney

Poet John Baer downcaf
120 Minute Dance Party 12am Booth living room

Wed. 6 Debate: Social Security Reform 7:30pm
Bronfman Auditorium, Williams College

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Immersion Teaching

BY EDWARD HOAGLAND
LITERATURE FACULTY

We read and write in order to learn how to live (which is to say, how other people did it), and no endeavor is more important. That's why to teach and write is such a privilege. I've taught for 40 years, written professionally for 50, and would do either for free. But teaching is a different craft—not simply an extension of one's writing abilities. Filtering out the dreck of your own experiences and miscellaneous reading to impart your best insights face to face is not the same as to an anonymous readership, nor like a journalist's techniques in interviewing people. The journalist is trying to snag the details of the story to his own advantage, not take the time to figure out what might be enriching for those he's talking to.

Teaching—which so many writers do as a secondary vocation—engenders a unique relationship, “like feeding deer: don't touch,” as a friend puts it. *What is important to this person?* you ask yourself, with no ulterior motive except the fun of testing ideas and a form of friendship. Or perhaps it resembles feeding fish (assuming fish are our peers), in the sense that much of a college student's life may be occurring down in the unfathomable waters of hormonal alarums, below our ken. We see her or him when they surface in the classroom to examine what we are offering.

You like Kerouac's *On the Road*?, we ask. Try J.P. Donleavy's *The Ginger Man* ... That also you liked? Then *Ulysses*. ... Yes, then you love James Joyce? Try Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, or Joyce Cary's *The Horse's Mouth*, or *Don Quixote*, or Nikos Kazantzakis's *Zorba the Greek*, or Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. If someone is ravished by Eudora Welty, introduce her to Elizabeth Spencer. Angus Wilson, if they like Margaret Drabble. If F. Scott Fitzgerald, try John O'Hara. If Philip Roth, maybe Rabelais. If Don DeLillo, how about *Gulliver's Travels*? Or have they read Henry Roth, if they've devoured James Baldwin? If *David Copperfield*, of course *Tom Jones*. *My Ántonia*, if Whitman, and *War and Peace*, if Homer. Perhaps resurrect Erskine Caldwell or go on to Gabriel García Márquez for students riveted by Faulkner.

With authors such as these doing the heavy lifting, like a tsunami, you won't need to worry unduly about your teaching, and may notice some in your class walking the campus antsy and flushed, as you yourself felt when absorbed in a masterpiece. But convey the fact that good writing is accomplished by people who are not entirely extraordinary, that they have ups and downs, ins and outs, fecund spurts and drab hardship, and that enlightened reading is a commitment, too. Yet remember the fervent love letters, the friendship tantrums the students are probably exchanging by late-night e-mail, the fluctuations in confidence they feel. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Samuel Pepys went through much the same and might do well as reading.

The buffet is immense: Read Samuel Johnson after Benvenuto Cellini. Ask how much Daniel Defoe would have enjoyed *The Sot-Weed Factor*, or Colin



Photo by Jessica Alatorre

Thubron. Is B. Traven as intriguing as his fellow recluse, J.D. Salinger? Or swing with that Kerouac enthusiast alternatively toward Henry Miller, Ambrose Bierce, Nathaniel West, Lawrence Durrell, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, plus Dostoyevsky,

“scarred for life.” Similarly, they won't break your heart if they plagiarize, lie, and otherwise screw up. You'll merely veer your attention elsewhere, as a parent can't. It's a lighter relationship than a job supervisor's also, more delicate and optional, because

“Teaching--which so many writers do as a secondary vocation--engenders a unique relationship, ‘like feeding deer: don't touch...’”

Gogol, Nabokov, *Life on the Mississippi*, Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Notebook*, and Geoffrey Chaucer. Parents aren't paying college tuition for them to be bottom feeders, but on the other hand you may need to troll a bit in the swirling depths adolescents inhabit for individuals who are reluctant to rise to the bait. A teacher is a tipster, a time-keeper, an interrogator, and often, yes, a paternal or maternal figure. But teaching is not like parenthood, because it's provisional: not all or nothing. If you turn out to be terrible, the kids have other professors and in any case won't be

even the kindest mentor at work depends on his employees' daily performance to hold onto his own livelihood. Teachers are thus useful for confiding in, as you can't with an uneasy boss or a volcanic parent, and may be observed as models who need not be reacted against, like kin. In fact, you ask them calming questions, like what Jane Austen and Theodore Dreiser, Henry Green, or *The Good Soldier* though was important in life.

Suggest that they compare Thomas Mann's social interweave with John Updike's, or the natural history of William Bartram and Gilbert White's; or Melville's pelagic visions with Joseph Conrad's; and

Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji* with Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. Have them read Bernal Diaz del Castillo's *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, then Claude Levi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*. Since every reader has an orchestra playing in her head, but in chatting you may discover that they're short an oboe, have them read *A Bend in the River* or *The Tin Drum*. And is their realism magic enough? Are they due for some Anne Tyler *Winnesburg, Ohio*, and Anthony Trollope after Márquez? Or will Montaigne's essay complete the trick?

Prose is the genre we pine in and think in, with pangs of intricate, edited regret. That's why we read Chekhov, Mavis Gallant, and *Middlemarch*. In my writing classes, over the years, I've seen numerous tales of parental neglect, sexual initiation, drug overdosing, serial portraits of zany stepmothers, #1, 2, 3, or friends and lovers' betrayals—with the student watching my reaction to validate their own. Yet a workshop tends to teach itself once the participants get balanced and rolling. As the bold ones dip their toes in deep places, the rest begin to also, drawing courage from each other, and maybe learning to sit tight at a desk for hours. One doesn't teach people how to write, exactly, but can improve whatever they're doing and help them cut to the chase with it. By classroom dialogue, reinforced by the views of their contemporaries, what's harsh or glib or blather is thrown into relief, and they broaden their gauge by a gradually bolstering, loosening, healing process that may cheer the whole class along as well.

It's not group therapy because angst is grist for the mill—writers tend to envy those who are saddled with it—and nobody expects a cure. But as the humor is honed and the mercy calibrated, everybody gets to know everybody a little, and lessons are learned. Meanwhile the teacher is, ideally, all things to all people—ageless, genderless—open to any reasonably civil sensibility, and with prior experience of the major hazards or gratifications of a life. Although impressionism and expressionism are not formal terms in literature, you can sway a good student toward paths that parallel these, and more immediately, as young people show you their journals of mishap and misadventure, can indicate with polite indirection whether you think their behavior was sound—much as a parent would, if they were on speaking terms with their parents. (Try Kafka's *Letter to His Father*, or Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull*, *Confidence Man*, if they aren't.)

Even a maladroit student may gain certain desk habits and sizing-up skills from a writing course that will be valuable in another career, such as how to recognize a serviceable idea and organize it, or spot the piquancy in an individual for purposes of either trust or mistrust. If we do read and write in order to learn how to live, this is a pretty big deal.

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> arts

Architect shows in Usdan

By LISA DIETRICH

Learning about Art:

This week, for the first time, I made friends with architecture. The usual jumble of lines on paper, the angular symbols and frightening numbers all dissolved into shapes so striking and purposeful in their harmony with nature and their focused relationship with sky and earth that there was nothing to see but art. That was not all: the conscious connection between a space and its purpose, the civic and even political implications of creating space that can be shared, unifying, controversial and functional. All of that introduced to me the great potential of architecture as not only art, but a tool for social change.

Learning about Kevin Alter:

The chase began in VAPA with Liz Pellerin and next stopped at a post-lunch meeting with Joan Goodrich (so kind!) in the President's office. Snippets of clues, a copy of Liz Coleman's pre-lecture introduction (Good evening, I'm Liz Coleman, President of Bennington College), and my notebook began to fill with misshapen lumps of Alter-related information. Next, I lurked in the corner of the architecture studio as Mr. Alter guest taught one of Donald Sherefkin's classes. His open face and the arcs of sweat by his underarms underlined the thoughtful and pointed advice he gave to a class of four: "You cannot learn to swim before you get in the water. Dive into your projects."

He was, as he said himself, spinning many plates on both hands simultaneously – which must amount to quite a juggling act. With a number of projects in progress currently, Alter traveled from his home in Austin, Texas to be this year's Candace DeVries Olesen Distinguished Alumni Lecturer. When he answered the phone on my third attempt to catch him in a still moment, he was warm and patient (although I heard his new baby crying close to the receiver). We spoke about his impressions of the college now, twenty years after he graduated, and he enthused about VAPA from an architect's perspective. VAPA, Alter says, is inspiring as an art space without being overly imposing. It allows you to do what you want and, furthermore, invites you to do it. His admiration for Bennington was clear as he spoke earnestly about the privilege of having a gallery like Usdan on campus, the presence of student art in administrative buildings, the "handsome" new student houses (Alter lived in Sawtell as a student), and something as simple but unique as sharing mealtimes with faculty in the dining hall. As a student, Alter studied architecture, ceramics and math. His final projects were multiple and ambitious and included plans for a lodge on the Appalachian trail that considered how to integrate

a structure into a natural environment as well as a more urban design involving plans for towers in New York City's Chelsea neighborhood, that would incorporate the high-line. Kevin Alter still seems in touch with the spirit of Bennington students; he noted a familiar degree of lunacy about us that he appreciated.

Learning about Alter's Art:

Mr. Alter's path as a professional and well regarded architect is an inspiration to those of us misdirected and lost liberal arts students who struggle to find the connection between our studies and some "real-life" occupation. He is one of the few who passed out of undergraduate school with a degree that he specifically expanded on (at Harvard) and then remained consistent in making that subject his life's work. Perhaps it is the breadth of scope with which he approaches architecture that makes it so continually sustaining for him. At his lecture, he introduced his work from a civic as well as an artistic angle and presented the complex and fascinating bigger ideas that drive his inspiration. Among these: that a deep knowledge of one thing leads directly to a deep knowledge of other things, his firm interest in reaching large population with his work and thus moving beyond a traditional architect's firm into teaching, writing, and holding exhibitions of architecture-related art work. His breathtaking and unexpected creations are underpinned by the constant thought that space can invite its own use if properly designed and furthermore, that buildings can be an artistic expression of dissent.

This last idea was most clearly presented in a residence designed for a family with modest income. The site for the new house was amidst a typical, affluent suburb with rows of boastful but homogenous homes receding from groomed lawns. The alterstudio (Alter's firm) design was a conspicuous white tower with cubist faces, surreal angles and nothing resembling gables or a line roof. Moreover, it was entirely constructed of Styrofoam. The lot itself had been affordable only because it lacked a view. The design of the house spoke to that deficiency by climbing high above obstructions and including a large roof-deck. Not only was the design a complete departure from the maintained status-quo of the surrounding neighborhood and therefore in itself an expression of dissent on many levels, Alter worked with the budget of the client family and through unconventional materials and design created a space that was affordable as well as a direct response to location and the clients' wishes. Both this kind of unique sensitivity to environment, as well as the healthy desire to disrupt the numbing sameness so rampant in popular America today is clearly a mark and an aspiration of a Bennington education.

Bennington in NYC: Jabu at the Flea

By RYAN C. TITTLE

Elizabeth Swados first captivated audiences with her musical, *Runaways*, which premiered off-Broadway in 1978 and then transferred to Broadway. Since then, she has composed (and often directed) over thirty pieces for the musical theater, including *Doonesbury* (with book and lyrics by Gary Trudeau), *Dispatches*, *The Haggadah*, *Alice in Concert* (with Meryl Streep), *Lullabye and Goodnight*, *Rap Master Ronnie* (again with Trudeau), *The Red Sneaks*, *Jonah*, and *Groundhog*. She has received three Obie Awards and five Tony nominations. She is the author of novels and children's books and is on the faculty at Tisch School of the Arts. She also happens to be a graduate of Bennington College.

Her new musical, *Jabu*, juxtaposes Alfred Jarry's famous absurdist play *Ubu Roi* and his life to form a musical extravaganza now being performed Off-Broadway at the Flea Theater in New York.

The production also involves other artists associated with Bennington including Sue Rees, drama faculty member who has designed the set, puppets, and video work for the show, and Garin Marschall, a member of the class of '00, who has designed the lighting.

Rees, who has exhibited her installation and video work across five continents, has worked with the Kadmus Theatre Studio, Creach/Company (the brain child of Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Terry Creach), composer Jonathan Bepler, videographer Cathy Weis, playwright Len Jenkin, and has worked multiple times with drama faculty member Jean Randich. For her work on

the dance piece, *Running*, she received a 1991 'Bessie' Award. She has been on the faculty since 1988.

Marschall is the resident designer at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. He is also the company lighting designer for Creach/Company and the technical director for The Culture Project. He has worked on projects at LaMama and the New York City Fringe Festival, and in the Fall of 2004 he was guest faculty at his alma mater.

The musical, *Jabu*, follows the plot of *Ubu Roi*: the story of Pa Ubu and his cronies who assassinate the King and send a country into chaos. At the same time, it tells the story of the erratic Jarry's attempts to get the famous theater director Lugne Poe to produce his play. The world premiere of *Ubu Roi* induced riots when it premiered in France in 1896. *Jabu* features elements of vaudeville, puppetry, clowning, circus, and musical theater and features the Flea's resident acting company, "The Bats."

The show, which premiered February 26th, will continue to run through April 2nd, 2005. It runs Wednesdays through Fridays at 7:00 p. m. and Saturdays at 3:00 and 7:00. Tickets range from \$20 to \$25, but there is a "Bennington Night" scheduled for March 23rd, where you can purchase tickets discounted for \$15 and stay for a reception with the artists after the show. For more information, contact Jenna White, the manager of Alumni Relations, at x4345 or at jennawhite@bennington.edu. To find out more about *Jabu*, go to www.theflea.org.

South Africa

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Liz Coleman took a moment before answering, "The challenges facing democracy are not only in emerging democracies. The assumption being that mature democracies like the United States can be the teachers are hugely false ideas. Yes, we live in a democracy, but a democracy that has much to worry about." Students from both sides hugged at the end of class, deeply moved by their conversations, proving that from talking and listening with respect for one another comes the deep understanding necessary to live in a global world.

The Night of Stories was filled with first hand accounts of being a part of the resistance movement: from imprisonment tales to finally sitting around a negotiation table and writing up the interim constitution. Mr. Maharaj stated in the first ten minutes of this gathering, "History does not teach what to do, it teaches us what not to do." Ms. De Lille added, "My father taught us that there was only one race, the human race, anything else was artificial." The evening became a series of questions on

identity, humanity and respect. In the Truth and Reconciliation Trials, Apartheid was classified as a crime against humanity. De Lille fully agreed, naming the brutality of Apartheid inhuman. "How can one human being do this to another human being?" When questioned about the effect of years in prison, Mac Maharaj responded, "I went to prison able to kill in anger. I came out not able to kill in anger, but certainly able to kill in cold blood." The audience heard the shocking truths of one test for colored people: the "Pencil Test." If a pencil was placed into a person's hair and fell out, then you were not a "colored." Mr. Maharaj, with commanding presence, informed us that the people on stage, including himself, were heroes by accidents of history, and the real heroes were the relatives, those that kept him from becoming a broken man. Meyer openly admitted that he had wanted change and reform, but he had been slow at doing the right thing. What Bennington College witnessed was a powerful dialogue between party members once extremely opposed.

As the weekend continued, the focus shifted from South Africa as a case study, and instead shed light on today's issues. Maharaj adamantly proposed, "What Americans must know now is that they are not just electing the President of the United States of America, but the leader of the world." The tone of the audience quickly became one of frustration at our own political system, realizing that the power of one individual to affect change was minimal. To the audience, Maharaj said, "I see a President that can be a cowboy on the world stage and still get away with it." But in an exclusive Free Press interview, he consoled two disillusioned reporters by reminding them that he only had one term left. Then Maharaj inquired, "What are you going to do as leaders in society...it's not just what you do, but interactions with others that describes our humanity. In South Africa, we have the word *Ubuntu* which means 'You are human through others.'"

The ANC resorted to the use of force to bring about change in South

Africa, but in the twenty-first century Mac Maharaj argues that even terrorism will not be eradicated by force. Patricia de Lille would add, "War didn't bring peace. Don't believe this absolute nonsense about going to war to bring peace." The South African conflict was a vital context for the rest of the world. Today we continue to see issues of race, governance and prejudices around the world in the Northern Ireland Conflict, the Sudan, and Iraq, to name but a few that continue to question our ideas on democracy. Indeed we learn not from history how we ought to do things, but how we ought not to do them. It is our duty as rising global citizens to criticize the injustices in the world, and then to do our best in acting and reacting to these situations. It is not simply enough in the modern world to be an informed citizen. With democracy comes an incredible amount of responsibility.

Walmart continued from front

Downtown businesses, of course, are also concerned. Jay Zwynenburg, owner of Jay's Art Shop and Frame Gallery, which has operated in Bennington since 1972, said he supported Wal-Mart's initial arrival, but will vote to keep the cap.

"It isn't like it's going to eliminate big box stores or retail, but at least they'll have a level playing field," Zwynenburg said.

The teams on this field include K-Mart, Home Depot, Price Chopper, and potentially Target. Steve Himchcliffe of Nature's Closet agreed that the 112,000 sq. ft. Wal-Mart would reduce competition not only in the Mom and Pop arena, but among corporate chains as well.

Recent ethical qualms with Wal-Mart are vast and various: both as an employer (from unsatisfactory healthcare benefits to discrimination of women workers) and as a retailer (from censoring musical albums to refusing to sell contraceptives). But as the last state in the union to accept this corporation into its economy, Vermont harbors a unique set of reservations.

In 1993 when Wal-Mart first started planning to settle in Vermont, The National Trust for Historic Preservation put the state on its list of eleven most endangered places. Obligated to compromise with communities skeptical of big box intrusion, Wal-Mart went first to Bennington where it consented to refurbish a vacated building rather than construct its own. Shortly thereafter it launched stores in Rutland and Williston.

Little happened for a decade, but now Wal-Mart has applied for a permit in St. Albans, and the Vermont Guardian recently reported that it's also considered leasing from independent developers in Middlebury, St. Johnsbury, and Morrisville. If stores were established at each of these locations, Wal-Mart would achieve a pervasive presence in a state that ten years ago was reluctant to tolerate the company at all.

Bennington Town Man-

ager Stuart Hurd, however, wants voters to remember that the upcoming referendum is not just a question of yes/no to Wal-Mart. "It's unfortunate that it's been framed that way," he said, adding that the purpose of the cap is not to dissuade large commercial retailers from Bennington. On the contrary, according to Hurd the cap was enacted so as to help maintain a competitive market in which a number of them could coexist.

Hurd also said that the Bennington Planning Commission originally recommended a 50,000 sq. ft. cap, but the Select Board deemed this too small. Subsequently 75,000 sq. ft. was chosen as the most appropriate size for the local economy.

Before petitioning for a referendum, Jonathan Levy, president of BLS, applied for a waiver of the amendment, which he misunderstood to be an interim law. The Select Board denied his request, explaining that the interim law had recently been adopted.

But according to Hurd that wasn't the only problem with Levy's proposal. Regarding the 112,000 sq. ft. Levy asked allowance for, Hurd said: "We don't know if that's what they [BLS Bennington] need, or just what he [Levy] wants." Furthermore, Hurd made clear that Levy has failed to supply the Board with any studies or reports that would help justify a waiver.

This shortcoming of Levy's is especially disconcerting because the bylaw, in addition to imposing retailer size caps, requires developers to fund community impact studies for projects exceeding 30,000 sq. ft. These studies would assess the consequences of a new retailer in terms of local employment, tax revenues, and property values.

Regardless of its politics and policies, Wal-Mart's advertisement was not wrong in calling a public referendum the essence of democracy. No board, no committee will repeal or ratify the bylaw: that decision has been referred to the judgment of the people.

Army Continued from page 4

"One Vet thought that the Iraqis were happy with the US invasion. Now, I haven't been there, but I can't imagine that this is true. I definitely don't get that sense from the news." The news gives reason to worry.

As reported this past week in USA Today, battle deaths for part-time troops from the Army Guard and the Army Reserve, who make up about forty percent of US troops in combat, have been significantly higher than for part-time troops in past conflicts. "Army Guard and Army Reserve soldiers are assigned some of the most dangerous missions in Iraq, including convoy duty and guarding facilities," wrote USA Today. "And Guard and Reserve soldiers are being counted on heavily to support the US-led occupation."

Ambia follows news of the war regularly, but doesn't let it get to him because, as he reminds himself, the chance of dying "is, statistically not that high."

Basic Training drew people from all over the country, and Ambia met people from Middle America, Texas, and the South.

A summer camp-like dynamic developed among the men.

"Kind of like Bennington, but without the girls," said Ambia. "We were not allowed to have or read books, except for religious texts. They didn't give us a reason, though. Some guys would make their own playing cards for entertainment. And guys would wrestle and horse around."

Unlike Bennington, cigarettes and alcohol, even for those who are of age, are not allowed and the consequences for not following orders were strictly enforced.

"We had to do drills to stay awake for long periods of time," said Ambia. "Usually, when you have to do it you just do, but one time I fell asleep on my rifle and got kicked in the head. I was wearing a helmet, though, so it wasn't that bad."

Many of the men that Ambia met did not have a college

education, although Ambia said that age, not education, is what divided them.

Ambia had some trouble explaining the concept of a small liberal arts school to the men in his unit.

"I really sold the concept of Bennington, especially at the beginning when the experience was kind of grueling," said Ambia. "I really made it sound like heaven, I told the guys that you could party whenever you want and that there were three girls for every guy."

Comparisons with Bennington notwithstanding, Ambia's decision did not come as shock to his friends.

"I guess I am both surprised and not at all surprised that Dan joined," said high school friend and Bennington College junior Adrian Agredo. "I knew that he wanted to and had been thinking about it for a long time, but I never actually thought that he would."

Ambia received the reaction that one would expect from his liberal-arts school friends. That is, when they were sober. "My friends from Bennington would all say that I shouldn't go and that it was dangerous. But when my guy friends were drunk, their male pride would come out and their politics would go out the window," explained Ambia. "I guess that their inhibitions were lowered. They would tell me how much they respect what I am doing and even that they wished that they could do it."

This emotion reflects a striking contrast between the "antiwar" youths of the Vietnam era and those of today. A lot of criticism of the anti-Vietnam movement has stemmed from the treatment of soldiers upon returning home. Today's anti-Iraq movement has been careful not to replicate this mistake.

"There has been a lot of emphasis placed on disagreeing with the war and the administration, but still supporting the troops," said Amy Heuer, a Bennington College student who spent her Field Work Term work-

ing at a radical antiwar organization.

Ambia's parents have not had as easy time supporting their son. His parents, especially his mother, are politically left and have a hard time understanding their son's decision to willingly put himself in danger for a war which they do not believe.

"My parents were very upset, my mom cried," said Ambia. "My mom keeps looking at articles on the internet and getting hysterical. I haven't told my parents that I am supposed to go to the Middle East, and I don't plan on it. I am just going to tell them that I am being sent to Germany. Anese Vincent, Bennington College sophomore and Ambia's girlfriend, attested to Mrs. Ambia's reaction.

"Dan and I went to New York last term and before we had even sat down she started yelling at Dan and telling him that he was going to die," said Vincent. "I mean, I don't like that he is going, but it's his decision."

Ambia considers his political views left of center, and does not support the war politically, a view that, while not shared by everybody, is not uncommon. "My parents don't understand the logic of the war, and I don't either," said Ambia. "But the army got to me and made me feel part of something. I just view it as something I am doing."

Ambia is aware of the difficulties that he will encounter when he is sent to the Middle East, but is confident that he can get through it.

"I know that I'll be miserable for the first month or so," said Ambia. "But I think that anybody can get used to anything. And that is what gives me hope for Iraq."

Graves continued from page 4

People will criticize different things about it, and they do. Now, when you look at the design, you start thinking, "oh, this is what it's going to be." You start to see how it might change things. And we also have to worry about bugs -- how is going to change the use of other buildings? What are we going to do with the old space? Those are new challenges. And that is exciting.

BFP: I hear a lot about a few things. I hear a lot about the new student center, and I hear a lot about building renovations, but I hear far less about changes to academics. I know that this is not your area, but it's something that you think about in relation to the things you do handle. I'm interested in this school, more than anything, as a place of learning. I'm here to discuss books. I'd love to have a new student center, but I wouldn't mind sitting in a cave with an amazing professor.

I'm sure that you've read the library report more than once. It's a problem. It worries me that the library isn't the priority.

GRAVES: I think what you need to see also brings attention to what's on the institutional agenda. The library is moving up to the top of that list, but please understand that there are many institutional priorities.

BFP: I suppose one of the reasons I worry has to do with money. I believe that when I started here, the school cost \$32,000. That was three years ago. It's gone up now, to \$41,000. That's a big price raise. I'd love to have a new student center, but most of the students here won't see it. We certainly won't enjoy an improved library. I still have to go to Williams if I want to do research. So much money and energy is being dedicated to the student center, which is important -- we do need one -- but the library has probably been bad since the sixties.

GRAVES: What you're really asking is how the priorities are set and who decides this. We're trying to play catch up, in some ways. Lots of schools have amenities that other schools don't have, such as a student center. I believe Bennington students need this space, and the campus will be better once we have it. However, let's not forget that the core function of this college is academic, and that will always be the core function.

Shakespeare continued from page 3

In short, I do not like to think of the Shakespeare Project as a representative Bennington accomplishment. And yet, *Voices* makes it out to be just that. In the back of the book, it reads: "[i]n its first term...[the Project]... became the most popular course on campus, enrolling more than a tenth of the entire undergraduate population." I was outraged by this for many good reasons. I thought back to the beginnings of the Project and I remembered many teachers were passing around rumors that the Shakespeare Project was going to be "required" for literature students at Bennington. This caused quite a scandal because Bennington does not have required classes for divisions (and neither does it have Honors Seminars either, although those have come a-cropping). Many people took the Tragedies course in fear because the literature students on this campus have a tough enough time getting into any lit class at all. So, because there was such

an enrollment, it's no wonder that the Communications department thinks it was the most popular class on campus.

The Shakespeare Project has continued. Or dragged on, shall we say? I refer back to the quote saying the Project teaches "all the plays." This has actually come to be a falsehood and I'm sure the person who was quoted does not know this. The Comedies course actually left out many of the comedies and romances of Shakespeare, according to the student who took it. Aside from this, the Sonnets course had a difficult time getting its quota to even enroll and currently, we have a Histories course.

The Shakespeare Project will end soon, thankfully. The Democracy Project has just begun. Let us pray that Bennington College spends more time refining its current system instead of adding new projects and praising them even when they do not work.

letters

To the editor:

We cannot allow rules intended to protect the community from genuine threats of sexual harassment or assault to be exploited and used recklessly for silly reasons. If the term "sexual harassment" can be applied to the baring of asses in a campus that revels in its right to expose our bodies (and protests for that right!) then who is to say that HER short skirt, or HIS topless guitar playing when the summer rolls around is NOT sexual harassment?! Where will it end?

--Eva DeAngelis-Glasser

To the editor:

When I first met Boaz, I didn't really like him. But in the short amount of time that he has been here, he has grown so much. Boaz is now one of my closest friends. I know many people who feel the same way. Wouldn't it be a shame to see him go because he mooned someone?

--Lydia Thein

To the editor:

The seriousness of the allegations against Boaz Sender has caught my attention and, as a member of this community, I feel compelled to speak up. I am not involved in the trial and played no part in the actions leading up to it, but the judicial system (and sexual harassment laws in general) are here to benefit us all and to uphold an atmosphere of trust and security. In order for the integrity of the system to remain intact, the tradition of 'a fair and just trial' must be preserved. That said, one could view this as an informal testimony in favor of Boaz. With the expectation that Boaz's whole person rather than an isolated action of his is being examined, I offer this: never in either a professional or personal setting have I ever felt threatened, sexually or otherwise, by Boaz or his actions. No one can argue anyone else's feelings of being violated, and that's not what I intend to do. I aim only to help a friend's cause, and expect, as we all should, fair judgment.

-- Holly Khil

To the editor:

I wish to express my utter disappointment with these proceedings, and hope that sexual harassment charges be reserved for a situation that is actually devastating to the victim, rather than pulling it as a card in a private argument between two people.

--Alex Rosenberg

To the editor:

In regards to Boaz's Sexual Harassment charges.

Sexual Harassment:

The making of unwanted and offensive sexual advances or of sexually offensive remarks or acts, especially by one in a superior or supervisory position or when acquiescence to such behavior is a condition of continued employment, promotion, or satisfactory evaluation.

Despite the predictable header, it's important to ask what sexual harassment is. And although a dictionary may not be able to address all of the issues behind the current charges put forth by Boaz's accuser, I feel that this definition will provide us with a starting point for conversation, which is the sole purpose of this letter.

Boaz mooned someone. And we'll all agree that nobody wants to see Boaz's ass, yet, is this a sexual advance?

I have had several interactions with his accuser. Although the interactions were brief, I left each feeling that she was a smart young woman. I have also observed her, half-naked, pulling on pudding-covered panties. My point is that she's not

the squeamish type. I don't believe she ever felt uncomfortable in a sexual manner. However, I do believe she's tired of Boaz's actions, and I do believe that she has the right to do something about it. But I ask, is a sexual harassment charge the right venue for the situation?

I have lived with Boaz for an extensive period of time, on and off campus. At times he acts like a jackass, but this never changed the fact that he has one of the biggest hearts that I've ever come across. Boaz is first and foremost a gentleman.

I have heard and observed Boaz's feelings in regards to the opposite sex for two years now. It is my opinion that Boaz is one of the least sexually active people I have ever met. More importantly, Boaz is not concerned with sex on any level. He is not polluted by the issue like many young men are. He may in fact have no libido at all. Boaz had made a conscious decision in his life to not think or act out on the behalf of a sexual nature.

There can't be sexual harassment where there is no sexual desire. Both men and woman have butts; so, Boaz was not using his accuser's sex to constrain her physically and mentally. He was just annoying someone who was fed up with him, adding insult to an already existing injury. Perhaps Boaz does require some sort of discipline, but not under this guise.

I know it's a delicate issue. It's hard enough for a woman in our society to speak out when she feels that she has been mistreated sexually, and I'm sensitive to that. But I have a hard time believing that this is what this case is really about.

Much love,
Jeffrey Hollister Barnes

To the editor:

There are no objective witnesses to share their account of the events that follow. These events are based on the description given by Boaz Sender, and for all intents and purposes, these events do comply with the charges brought against him. On December 8, 2004, Boaz Sender, in a hallway in VAPA, pulled down his pants for ten to fifteen seconds and exposed his bare rear-end to Charlotte Sullivan and Viktorija Abolina. While Ms. Abolina reportedly laughed and walked away, Ms. Sullivan's reaction was not so light-hearted. Offended, she remained and proceeded to retaliate verbally, attacking his character and virtue. Allegedly, Ms. Sullivan expressed her feelings that Mr. Sender should not have been admitted to the same school as she. In response, Mr. Sender said, and I quote, "Na-na na-na boo-boo," and thumbed his nose. Ms. Sullivan threatened to report his actions to Eva Chatterjee-Sutton, Associate Director of Student Life. Mr. Sender blew her a kiss and walked away. The next day, Ms. Sullivan did indeed visit Ms. Chatterjee-Sutton and filed sexual harassment charges. The school then issued a restraining order, barring Mr. Sender from contacting Ms. Sullivan in any way, and he has not. These are the facts, as we understand them, which comprise the sexual harassment charge against Mr. Sender.

The hearing against Mr. Sender occurred last Monday, March 14 and results of the hearing will be given within seven business days. We cannot speculate as to whether or not Ms. Sullivan was truly offended or not and to what degree, but we must assume her reaction to be genuine.

Regarding the Kilpat porn tree, people ask the question: "What exactly creates a hostile environment? Where can we draw the line?" These questions are being revisited already. The charge brought against Mr. Sender is 'hostile environment sexual harassment', the same clause of the school's sexual harassment policy under which the porn tree was classified. So what constitutes a hostile environment? Who's responsible for deciding?

The next question is that of precedent. Sexual harassment is indeed a

very serious issue. All claims should be diligently investigated. But the claim that Mr. Sender's harassment was sexual is tenuous at best. To suggest that the child-like act of mooning someone is any way related to the serious allegation of sexual harassment is to dilute the weight of the charge. Sexual harassment is commonly perceived as something more sinister in nature. The handbook gives examples: "sexual assault, coerced sexual intercourse, unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other physical or verbal conduct of a sexual nature." Mr. Sender's actions, however juvenile or inappropriate, do not constitute the harsh conditions of sexual harassment as described by the student handbook.

It also cannot be overlooked that Ms. Sullivan and Mr. Sender had a history of bad blood. When they lived together in Welling they engaged in petty arguments over things such as the toilet seat being left up to complaints about doors being slammed. It seems that an accusation of this nature is an escalation of previously trivial quarrels.

It may seem to some readers that this is really none of our business—that this is strictly between Mr. Sender and Ms. Sullivan. To the contrary, we think this concerns us all. If this kind of charge constitutes sexual harassment, we should all have reason to be concerned. Be careful who you hug, touch, or even speak to. According to the handbook's definition of sexual harassment, speaking to someone who doesn't want you to speak to them, whether you know it or not, can constitute sexual harassment. And whatever happens in the case, Mr. Sender's reputation will be irrevocably tarnished among some. Yesterday, Boaz was informed that he may no longer maintain certain parts of his duties as an audio/video technician; the parts of his duties that required him to be a representative of the college and interact with guests have been revoked.

Those of us who know Boaz know that he has changed. His whole manner has been altered by this event. Boaz lives with three girls, is great with children, still doesn't put down the toilet seat, but is known to be respectable among his peers. As the authors of this letter we have tried to present the facts fairly and clearly and let their strong implications speak for themselves. Hopefully, the committee deciding this issue will see the obvious and reasonable response to this charge. Mr. Sender remains anxious. "It seems like the school's really going to make an example of me. It's really unfortunate."

--Jacob Wolf and Alex Bleeker

To the editor:

Though I have known Boaz since he came to this campus I hadn't spent very much time with him until recently. My interactions with him were within a more social setting in which I found myself humored, but never uncomfortable, by his presence and manner. This winter I found myself sharing a living space with Boaz, we shared a kitchen, a bathroom, living space and car rides back on forth from Bennington for the entire FWT period. Though there were others living in the space as well, I feel I spent a particular amount of time learning to live and share a space with Boaz. As many know, Boaz has his own beliefs on how he chooses to live (as we all do), I cannot say we agreed on everything, I cannot say I was not frustrated at times with his behavior, nor can I say that he was not frustrated by mine. In some ways Boaz and I see things very differently, we have different boundaries, and at times these differences would lead to a point of conflict, but even within these conflicts I never believed his actions to be malicious. I found that during particular points of tension Boaz was genuinely responsive to my requests for him to give me space; from quarrels over food, how long one can stay in the

shower, to what kind of language I didn't like, etc. In each instance we discussed both of our points of view (sometimes more heated than others), and regardless in the end I felt comfortable that my opinion had been heard and accepted. From my experience, both socially and within a living situation, I do not believe Boaz would cause harm to another person knowingly and with intention to do so.

-Natalie Pelham

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In loving memory of Elissa Sullivan

Every time I ever saw Elissa, I received a hug. Whether I had just crossed the country or returned from the bathroom, she always gave great hugs. I remember in middle school when her hugs were slightly hesitant. Those were the days when, if a boy received a hug from a pretty girl, he would have dreams of one day reaching first base. I'll be the first to admit it, I was going through a bit of an awkward stage. These were the days when Elissa's hair shone like her smile and she was always at the height of fashion. Everybody wanted to be her friend. I was lucky, despite minor deformity (buck teeth, Pink Floyd t-shirt, sweatpants and bifocals), I was her friend from the beginning. No matter how uncool I was, Elissa greeted me and left me warm from her hugs.

Later on down the road, Elissa's hugs came complete with patchouli oil and incense, her hair didn't so much shine as it did clump. Her hugs were longer and tighter. You really felt special when in her arms. As Elissa grew into a young, accomplished artist and flower child, I began to wear my hair long and continue in my less than popular lifestyle. I could have been moseying around the halls of Daniel Hand High School, and in an instant I would have arms wrapped around me, dreadlocks tickling my face and neck and the most energetic set of blue eyes staring up at me. She would smile her smile and for those few minutes, I was cool.

The hugs came into a time of infrequency beginning with our college years. Nothing will quite match the feeling of being embraced by Elissa's soft touch and hard metal crutches. No matter what was going on in this scary new college place, her door was always open and she would always be there for me.

I would not be where or who I am today without Elissa Sullivan. Our summer of senior year, Elissa told me of a college without grades or tests, where there is no pressure to get dressed in the morning, or at all. Elissa and I shared a powerful lust for life, art and Guinness. I like to think that when with her, the world made sense and was more easily appreciated. How were we ever so fortunate to have known her?

-- Matt Keating



To lose someone who encompassed the very idea of life is incomprehensible. Elissa was life, and she spent the time she had living hers to the fullest. I always wondered how a girl could be so brilliant, beautiful and creative at the same time. She did life up – wouldn't she want us all to keep doing the same.

*A moral fire
Like Anna on the other side –
ENS is true.*

- Phoebe

How do you deal with this kind of a loss? That I don't know. I have been in a state of numbness since Friday and I don't know how I can express this emptiness that I now feel. Friday morning Elissa burst into my room and woke me up to tell me she was leaving. She had asked me to come with her to the Armory Show in New York City. I politely declined and went back to sleep.

Sleep has not come easily since then, needless to say. We had just spent two whole days together watching movies, eating Chinese food, and wearing sunglasses inside. It was so funny because our friend Brian "The Wadd" Tasker was there with us and he kept taking his glasses off, but she called him on it every time, "Are you in the club or not?" she would say.

I can honestly say that I loved few people as much as I loved Elissa. She was the total package: extremely gorgeous, intelligent as hell, more talent than anyone I had ever met, and damn, she had a sense of humor on her. It was next to impossible for anyone who knew her to not feel her indelible charisma, and uncompromising love for her friends and family.

The loss is tremendous and the hole cannot be filled, but we do have memories, feelings and prayers to keep her with us always. I know that she is sending down all the love that she has, and we are all sending it right back.

"Much have we loved you... And ever has it been that love knows not its own depth until the hour of separation" - Kahlil Gibran

--Daniel Trigg

Elissa was so elegant, so graceful. We thought how could we ever just be us, be normal, around this girl who seemed too perfect. But then it clicked, so fast. She made us feel comfortable with her, whether we were crying or laughing, wearing sweatpants or dresses. She did that for everyone. She knew how to draw people close, even when they were a little bit intimidated by everything that she was. But the intimidation faded quickly once you spent a few minutes talking to her from behind the counter of the bookstore or sitting on her bed in her room. That's why it was so easy to love her. As fancy and sophisticated and elegant and smart as she was, she never wanted anyone to feel less than her. She wanted everyone to feel special.

We were best friends. We were three in the front seat of the Buick. We were the pretty girls dressed up and single and going to dinner in big earrings and fancy shoes. We knew the Elissa that went out and partied, the Elissa that was always ready with a slew of Cosmo for anyone who walked in her door, but we also knew the other side of Elissa. Not just the beautiful painter or the girl who could keep up on current events—we knew the whole Elissa. She was there for us and we were there for her. Life is hard even when things are going smoothly, and we all understood each other. It was three years together and we knew each other so well that it was easy to tell what was serious, what was panicking and what was something that needed to be laughed off. The three of us had the ease of friends who had known each other for years. It was easy to gage what could help; whether it was a long talk, a trip to Lake Shaftsbury searching for ducks, or a round of white wine in the middle of the afternoon. It wasn't always easy staying close friends because we were all so different, but our differences held us all in place and kept us needing each other.

Now, the two of us can easily remember how happy we were, looking too nice for just a trip to the dining hall. It is easy to smile and think about the recitation of comedy routines on a Saturday morning. Or how the three of us claimed Jim as our fourth girlfriend and nicknamed him the ugly one just so we wouldn't have any competition. We can look back on the hours we spent in her studio, finding our own projects of making Burberry cigarette boxes with Jaimie using pink and gold spray paint while Elissa worked on her newest canvas.

There are too many more to keep listing. The memories we had with Elissa seem to fill more than just a few years of time. There is no way to forget her. Her life has shaped us and the loss of her will remain part of us forever.

-- Elliya Kane
and
Minden Koopmans