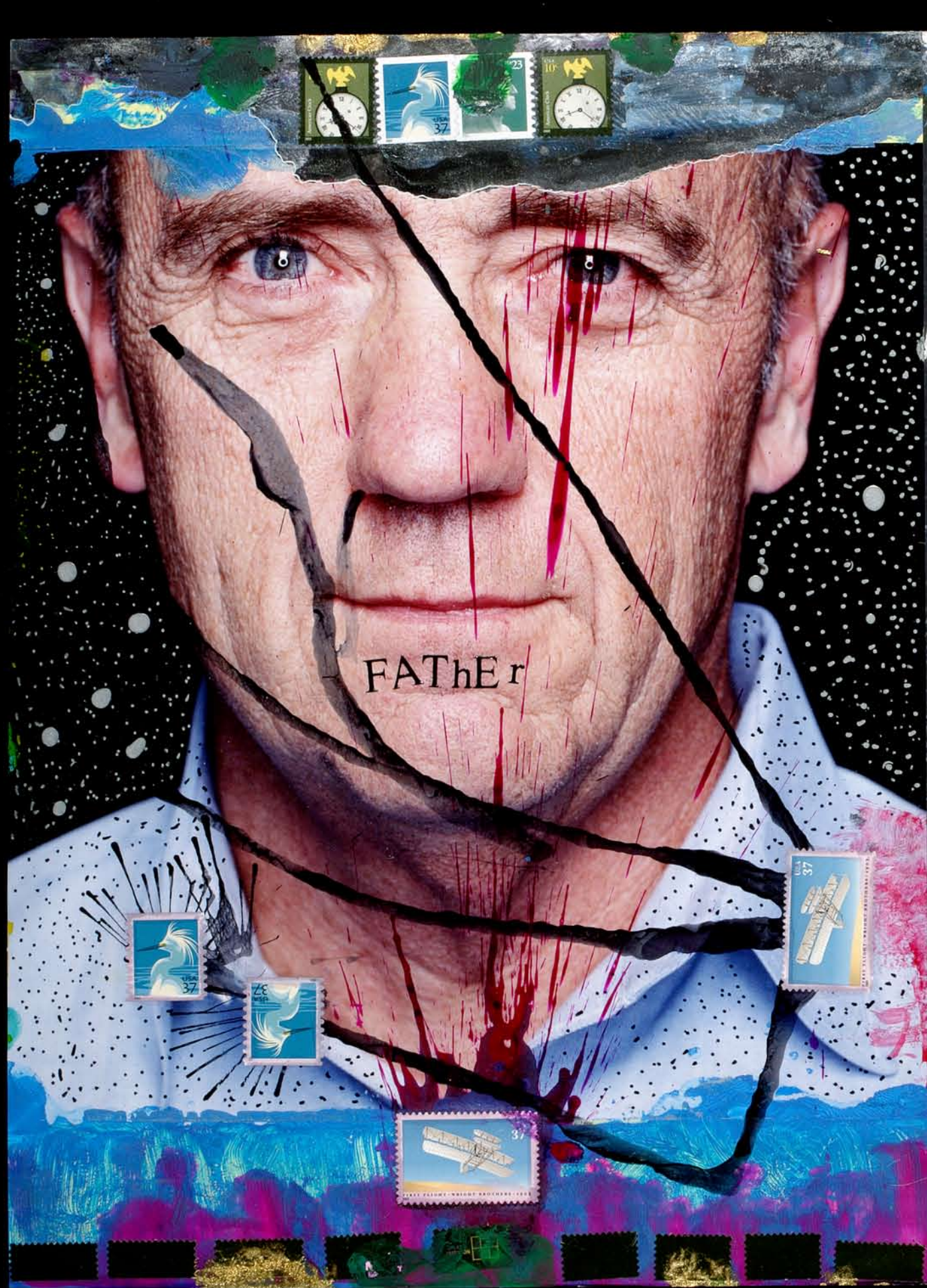


i like to tell stories

© jonathan saunders





Reverend Dr. John W. Saunders Place - Harlem, New York City.



i made these all in less then a minute, in the midst of doing something i shouldn't have done, a fools errand really. i do many things, knowing they are a mistake, yet i still do them, unable or unwilling to control the impulse. i do feel better having done it however, sometimes. this time, following up on other mistakes i cannot fix, this errand had to be done regardless of how i felt about it. i could of ignored it, in the big picture, it didn't matter and made no difference, yet i did it anyway.

today a friend got a tattoo because it was friday the 13th, tim russert died in the midst doing of what he loved and i made a foolish errand that changed nothing as the sun came up on a street named after me, sort of.

Billy Ray Cyrus.



for People

Billy Ray Cyrus.



for me

Marina Abramović kissed me.

6/14/97, 11:31pm - 6/15/07, 11:02pm.



I hadn't been to the Guggenheim in a few years. I went this past Friday, Cai Guo-Qiang had a show I wanted to see. I photographed him for TIME awhile back and have since been randomly finding new work of his in unexpected ways, always smart, always leaving me different then before I saw it.

The last time I went, the best part, was what I saw through this window after leaving the show. I still think it's one of the more beautiful things I have ever seen. Earlier that night I watched one of Marina's performances, this one:

November 14, 5 PM to 12 AM 2005.

Marina Abramović, Lips of Thomas (1975, Galerie Krinzinger, Innsbruck). Abramović ate a kilogram of honey and drank a liter of red wine out of a glass. She broke the glass with her hand, incised a star in her stomach with a razor blade, and then whipped herself until she "no longer felt pain." She lay down on an ice cross while a space heater suspended above caused her to bleed more profusely.

When it was over, she got a loud, long round of applause and cheers from those still on hand. It lasted long enough that security had to force the issue to make everyone leave. I left, went around the corner, and saw a few other people looking through this window. I stepped closer and the small crowd of us respectfully watched and kept quiet. Inside, through this plain unmarked window, you could see her gallerist and her lover or boyfriend or husband (I don't know which) holding her in a blanket as she appeared to be weeping... joyfully.

Another time shortly after this I got to meet her, she kissed me on the cheek, it was a good moment as well.



it all happen in spring 1996 in san francisco, but in june of 1997, across the street from the visual studies workshop and not so far from where minor white did and thought his things in rochester ny, sitting in a church converted into a boarding/halfway house, i decided i would write it all down, i didn't want to forget a single thing.

i can remember writing it so well, the bad desk lamp bounced off the wall, the single window open, the breeze of the crisp june rochester air coming through the window, the soft sounds of night outside and listening to those renting the rooms around me scream and fight because they were trapped in their little rooms too. i couldn't write fast enough.

i dare you to read it on the next two pages.

i wrote this in a journal i have since given away, i have no good copy of this story, other then what i am posting here. i wrote at a little desk next to the light table, a walmart bag and pile of paper next to my feet was knee deep, it was the only bag large enough to hold all the film i just had processed and was scrambling to get printed that summer. i think some part of me knew that vacuum of living and breathing what you love with no regard for the daily nuisance of making a living and normal everyday life was about to end, i miss that vacuum.

it is all about the girl above.

6 A. 97 1131 p.m.

6-47-97 11:31p.m.
I was lonely. It was a Friday at midnight. I was printing. I stopped and looked at point. A picture for my friend Ben I would later never mail. The loneliness started to really hurt. I couldn't remember what it was like to be touched. A hug, a gentle stroke of the arm. The close smell of another person. Their texture, their clothes texture, the feel of hair on my skin. I couldn't remember the feeling of touching another person with purpose and with affection, lust, love, and curiosity. I ran from darkness. I ran to the money machine. I ran 10-15 blocks to the cheapest nude/lap dancing place in San Francisco's Tenderloin area. I paid my \$5 and went inside. I sat near the aisle not far from the entrance but also not too close. I watched a woman dance. Soon they were approaching me, asking me if I wanted company. I was still feeling too much hurt to get a lap dance ~~and~~ yet so I just watched. The one dancer left and the main attraction dancer came out with her absordity and confusion beyond repair. I watched her try to work the crowd that was about maybe 10 men just as lonely and confused as I. It was making want to leave. I didn't and haven't really ever enjoyed just watching them on stage. About half way through the show a dancer came up to me from over my shoulder. She leaned close and asked me if I wanted some company. I could smell her hair. I could feel it on the base of my neck. I wanted to talk to her. I played stupid. I asked what the "rules" and the "prices" were. She sat in the chair next to me. My right elbow was brushing against her left breast. She told me the prices. We both watched the dancer on stage. She asked me what I did. I told her I take pictures. We started talking more. She was soon moving into the city to start art school. We talked for what seemed to be a half hour. She got up and said she had to get back to work or she wouldn't make much money that night. I didn't want it to stop. I'd been in San Francisco a year and this was the best conversation and most comfortable and one of the only women I had met. I had \$45 dollars. It was \$40 for a topless lap dance in a private room upstairs. I felt like an asshole asking her to go up there with me after our talk but if I didn't I'd never see her again. She just smiled and took my hand with hers and led the way. We got up there in the dark and I gave her my forty and sat on the couch. She stood in between my knees, took off her top and climbed into my lap. The next song started. She was facing me. I was running my left hand up and down her right leg and my right hand up and down her back and through her hair. We started to stare at each other and then she started talking again. Then we just sat there together with her in my lap like any other people do. We talked about pictures, where I was from and so on. A few songs went by. She said she had to get back to work but we agreed still wanted to talk. While she was putting her top back on she asked me to meet her somewhere tomorrow. I showed up to meet at ME's Diner on Lombard street. She walked me down and towards the exit and we said goodbye. I showed up at ME's early. I was convinced she wouldn't show. I couldn't remember her name or even what she looked like. After all the staring I had no idea. I was sitting in a window or saw a woman walk by from behind towards the entrance. I knew it was her. My heart sank. She came through the door, looked at me and we both started smiling and laughing. "So we finally see each other in the light and neither of us have run off yet" she said as we sat down in the booth. Then she asked me what my name was again as I did ask her name. She was so beautiful I apartment hunting today. She was wearing a black dress with a white sweater. I had brought some pictures to show her like I started getting more and more frightened by her beauty as we spoke. I had brought some pictures to show her like she had asked the night before. It was silent while she went through them. I stared at a broken eyedish resting on her right cheekbone. Her finger went off about an apartment and she had to go. She asked me where I lived and we were to meet there later. I went home and waited. When she came over we sat on the floor of my room. We looked at more pictures and kept right on talking about the only things that really mattered. ~~She~~ She crawled into my bed and I got close and we kept talking. I kept staring and holding but the desire to touch her, kiss her, and touch her more. She called about her apartment, she didn't get it. She got upset and went home to Santa Rosa and I had an assignment out of town for a week and when I got back I called her. We spoke of the truth together. Of how we had made love. Thinking of each other all week and of why she asked I didn't start touching her the other day of my place. She was to work in San Francisco again soon and was going to call me. It was 2:30pm she was leaving work to come stay with me for the night. It was 3:45am when she arrived. Heavy make-up from work. We went to room and went to bed. We looked at each other in our underwear and turned off the light. I started kissing her neck and back while she layed there next to me moaning internally. She told me she was on the rag but I didn't have condoms so we just kept it. I was a real man I'd make out her tongue and fuck her anyway. I didn't have condoms and she told me she was feeling each other. After awhile she wanted to go home. I tried to kiss her as we lay there and she said she'd stay if we just didn't kiss anyone because it was too intimate. I didn't want her to leave and she said she'd stay if we just went right to sleep. She went to sleep and I masturbated lying next to her. When she woke up in the morning I watched her dress and couldn't stop thinking of how pathetic my life was. A dream come true. I "beautiful" woman that wanted me or at least someone which is my problem originated day. It wasn't me. It just had to be someone. I asked if she wanted to go get breakfast she looked at me and said "do you mean together?" That is when I knew I would never see her again. A month later she called she was spending her first night in SF in her new place. I went over and we talked ~~as~~ as we once had. She gave me a sweater and I took a picture of us in the mirror together with her in her nightgown. I always had my paint and shut camera with me because it was my only camera at the time. I went to see her once without a camera and she got mad at me and made me take pictures of her with her camera. After I helped her move. I never heard from her again. I called and she'd never call me back. I mailed her the picture of us and asked for another chance and told her she was my angel. There were a few times over the next year I would drive by her apartment to see if the lights were on. Sometimes when I went by I'd see her car and want to knock on her door but I never did. I was too scared. I knew she must never think of me even though I knew my pictures were on her walls. I would wonder how many other men she'd done all this with, been through all this with and I felt smaller and smaller whenever I thought of her. I hated not knowing how she was now. I went to the place I met her once. I hated not knowing how she was now. In time, of course, my thoughts of her faded but not really. she was always there. JUST LIKE all the others before her with some resulting awkward, tense, confusing pain. Then a year or two went by.

I was lonely. I was sitting on my couch watching the fog on a Sunday afternoon hating my medication. My pager went off. I didn't know the number and dreaded the thought of working for some one new. When I called a woman's voice said JON IT'S ME. I knew ~~it was her~~ who it was right away. She said she needed to see me, right now. We agreed to meet at the beach by the zoo in 45 minutes. I stood out in the fog, in the evening, out in the cold and tried to remember how our original intensity had been. She pulled up in her car parking illegally, got out, ran around her car and into my arms. I had forgotten how beautiful she was, how her hair smelled, and how good it felt to touch her. We got in her car and went closer to the beach. The wind was blowing and the sand burned our skin and our eyes so we got back in car. She told me she had been driving all over California seeing everyone she knew to say good bye to them. She told me she was going to kill herself and that San Francisco was her last stop and I was to be the last one she saw. I asked her why she had called me and it was because of the picture of the two of us where I had told her she was my angel underneath the photograph. She was at a pay phone trying to think of someone to call and I came to mind just because of a silly picture and a few words. The car got uncomfortable so we went to my room. She laid out on my bed and I sat next to her showing her pictures to get her mind off the earlier topic. We stopped looking at the pictures and she asked me to massage her neck, then her shoulders, then her arm. I did what she told me how to do it better. She started talking about her death again and asked me if I ever got depressed. If I ever hated myself. If I ever hated my life. If I ever wanted to kill myself. I told her that I did. I told her that I felt and thought these things often. I told her a lot of people do. I told her the triumph of life was not more than killing yourself could ever be. We started joking about it even though she started taking out how we should kill ourselves together and how we could do it. She asked me if I had again. She asked me about jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge. It grew silent. I was still rubbing my hands all over her body over her clothes. Her back. Her neck. Her hair. Her face. Her chest. Her legs. Her stomach. Her arms. Her feet. Her ass. Her pussy. Her hips. Her shoulders. She looked at me through her hair and said "I need to be comforted" and smiled. From previous conversations over a year ago I knew she was asking me to fuck her. I smiled and continued touching her. I knew with her experience compared to mine, I could never give her the dick she wanted, desired and I guess needed. I knew that if would also just be me fucking her. She would just lie there and let me do things. That she had no real desire for me spiritually compared to all the others before and the one she was with currently with who she said was stupid but was the best sex she ever had and that when his dick was in her how much it made her love him. I was still touching her and she was still lying there. I long quit hour or so went by. She sat up and said she was hungry. We went to get food and I played with her long enough to make sure she wouldn't purge it. While we had been in the car at the beach earlier she spoke of her bulimia. She told me of how she went to see two mojos today and binged and purged all the way through them both. She told me she'd been bulimic for years. She told me she called me after the second movie today. As we walked from the restaurant, we had our arms around each other. It felt really good walking with her clutching my arm so hard it hurt. I felt alive for the first time since I don't know when. She had to go to work. She was to page me at 3am when she was done. I hugged her goodbye. She squeezed me hard. I started kissing her neck then her ear. She pulled away slightly and gave me a short kiss on the lips and gave me a small smile. I looked into her eyes and gave her two more kisses. She said goodbye and got in her car. I watched her leave and went to my door. Something was wrong. I had left my only camera, my laptop, at the restaurant and got in her car. I watched her lights were down. I ran full speed into the door broke the lock and got my laptop from the balcony. I went home and cleaned my room, took a shower, and put new sheets on the bed. I lied there awake from 10-230 am thinking about her. At 2:30 I knew she wouldn't call at 3am. She didn't. I went to where she worked the next night, she wasn't there. I called her old # in the city and got a new one. I called it from her work. She answered. I told her I was worried about her. That I missed her that I wanted to see her again. She now lived near Reno. A few days later I got a strange page but I was working couldn't answer it. When I called later I got an answering machine about divorce. I knew know she was in town. I went to her next that night. I sat in the seats and watched her go into the back with the men. I was scared she'd see me and scared she wouldn't. I got up and stood in the back in the dark for an hour in my fear of her. She saw me. She smiled. She climbed over 4 rows of seats in her huge heels, her G-string and her small top and came running to me and into my arms. I closed my eyes and felt the good. We got down with her in my lap and we watched her friends dance. Then she looked at me and said kissing me was a mistake. She never kissed. Not even her current man with the dick of love. I waited to leave work with her. We went to eat. I stayed with her long enough she wouldn't purge and she drove me home to be alone. I was going to pick her up the next night from work. She was to call me at 11. When she called at 11 pm she was back in Santa Rosa. She had binged and purged at the movies all day again and gone to the beach near Bodego Bay. We found a lonely quiet spot and ate. After we had eaten I held her close so she wouldn't want to purge. We fathers for a help and comfort I couldn't provide. I went to see her the next Sunday in Santa Rosa. She stopped me. She told me that ever layed there for a while and I touched her over her clothes all over again. Time passed. She stopped me. She told me that ever letting me touch her was a mistake. That she wanted me to be a friend. I couldn't be her friend. I didn't know how to be hurt to much to be near her and not be needed, wanted, desired, and needed. And I also knew she didn't know how to be my friend. And that deep down in her somewhere she really didn't even want to. We slowly got our stuff together and I packed my cameras away for good and we went to the car. I drove us back to her father's in silence. She turned a letter in my car from another girl I knew that also only wanted to be my friend. She questioned me up and down about heart. I answered the truth. We sat in the car in the driveway and tried to have some small talk. There was no point. We smiled our goodbyes and I drove home. The next day the friend I work for paged me. I had been telling him the daily happenings between her and I. He had talked to his mother who had just returned from a therapy convention near Reno. He got eating disorder therapists #'s from her and had urged me to pass them along. I called her and she answered. I gave her the #'s because she said she wanted help. We had some more awkward small talk and hung up. She had said she'd call them in the morning. I called the next night still worried. Her roommate answered and went to get her. He came back and asked who it was. I told him. He went to tell her. He came back and asked if he could take a message. I never heard from her. I paged her with a voice mail before I left California. But I still worry about her. I think of her too often. 6:15.97 11:02 pm



i found this polaroid this week cleaning my journal table.

the polaroid is a picture of peter ment. peter died in the summer of 2004. he was a friend of friends and he helped me on a few shoots. i didn't know him that well, but i always enjoyed his company, he reminded me that it should all be fun when i got stressed out on some silly shoot by simply laughing at me, in a good way, at least i thought so. i wish i could remember what this shot is from, but at the moment as i write this, i cannot remember. i can remember almost every frame i ever took of anything, how i lit it, where it was, who it was, but this one is escaping me. there's a chance i set it up and never shot it, i do this often. either way, i am glad i found this one polaroid.

the polaroid is the modern day equivalent to the deguerrotype. this object is a picture, a one of a kind, a tangible, touchable one of a kind that was once in the same room, place and moment at the same time as the photographer, and more importantly, the subject. present in its physicality at the time of its creation by its very nature.

i remember sitting right here at my computer when my friend sitting on my couch got a phone call, i knew after hearing just a bit of the conversation, it was bad news, but not what it was or who it was about till he was off the phone. it all felt so unreal and took a long time to sink in.

i went to his eulogy. it was given by stéphane sednaoui who knew peter pretty well, it was beautiful.



the person i mailed this to says he never got it, but his wife remembers it, i don't know what that means.

color copied, mailed and almost forgotten. undated. all prior to 1998. not mailed to anyone pictured.



you

touch me

touch yourself

return no love

drive. i was driving from san francisco to rochester, i had been driving at least 15h, it was dark, i was in one of those states where its just dark all around, you could be on a highway or the moon. i put all the windows down, turned the music up all the way, screamed along to the music, picked up my only working camera i owned at the time, my little olympus point and shoot, jammed it up into the steering wheel and pressed that little button.

bed porn. it was my third time living in a boarding house, a kinda place where you pay rent weekly. it was even my second in rochester, the boarding house was right across the street from the visual studies workshop and although i never actually went inside VSW, i liked having it across the street, it somehow brought me comfort knowing it was nearby. the first thing i always did in these places was inspect, i never even knew what for, i just wanted as much from the previous occupant gone. well, experience had taught me to look between the mattresses. this time, instead of rodents or insects, it was porn. when i got it all stacked to toss out (it was heavily soiled), the stack was 2 feet high. i even found a compact magnifying glass hidden in the pages. there were victoria secret catalogues and random odd issues from times square stores dating back to the 70's.

san francisco woman. it was one of my first walks with my first leica. i owned the body almost a year before i had the money for the lens. i loaded it with konica 640 chrome film i had gotten for free and went out. no agenda, just made images as i needed to. i loaded the camera and looked up and she was right in front of me, the first thing i saw after getting the camera ready. i raised it to my eye and squeezed the button. it felt right.

rail yards, rochester. i was back after 2 years and went for a walk again. when i first left rochester, it didn't feel like it was for good. now i was back again on yet another random walk, ignoring all the things i should of been doing. rochester was my first home in many ways, the first place i was ever on my own. i have even been back since i made this picture, returning there then and since, has always felt special. it took me 14 years, but i finally got my degree, i even attended a few classes, but my path to a BFA was not a straight line, course or plan. much like my walks around that place.

RJ. old friends came to visit me in san francisco. we went to get food. i grabbed the leica but only made a few frames all day. this is one. she was talking to one of my best friends at the time who also happen to be her husband and looked at me while stretching and telling a story when i took it. everyone accuses me of being in love with her, but i never thought so. she was just one of the only women in my life in anyway for years. things are sometimes never as them seem or look, sometimes they are and sometimes it's the exact opposite.

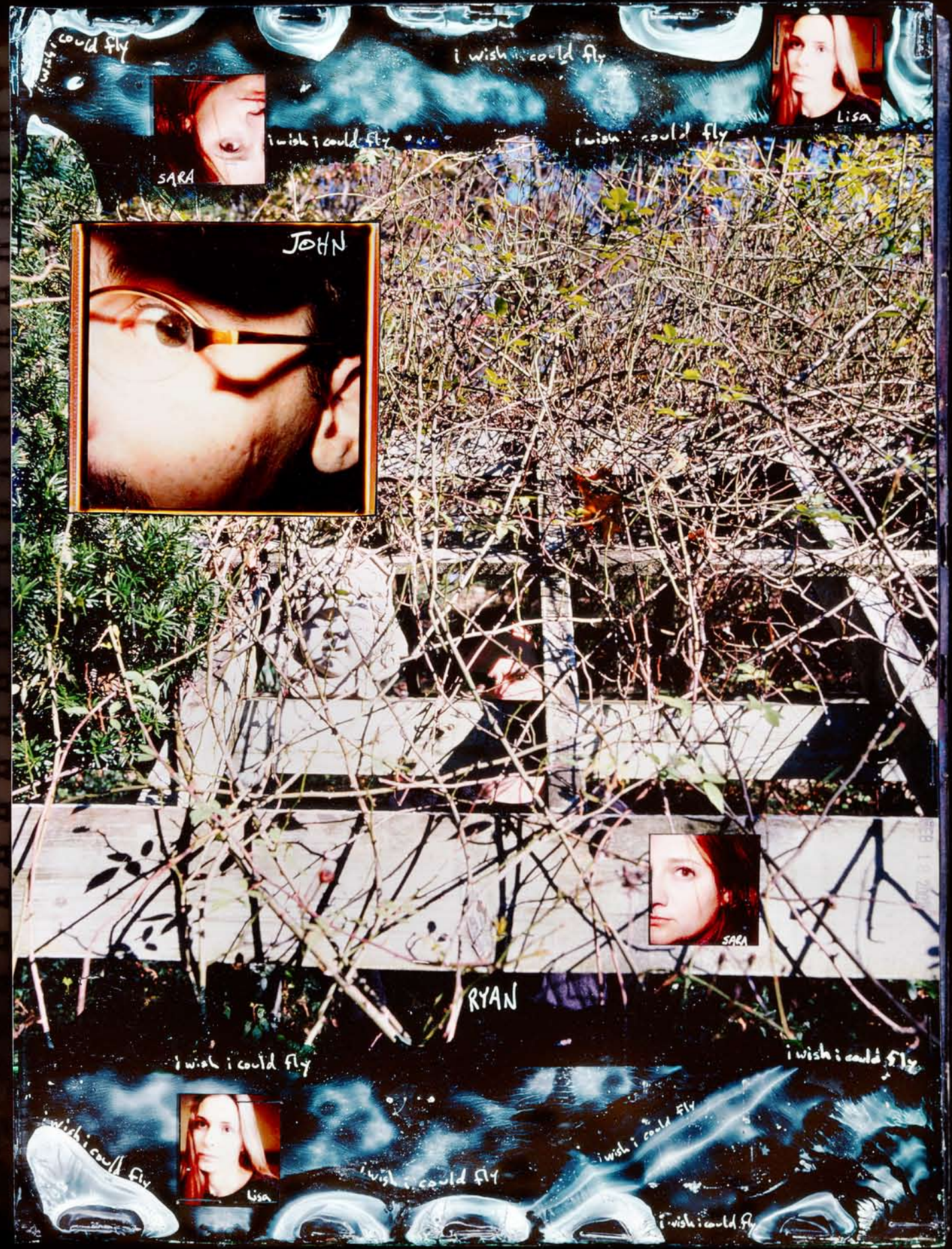
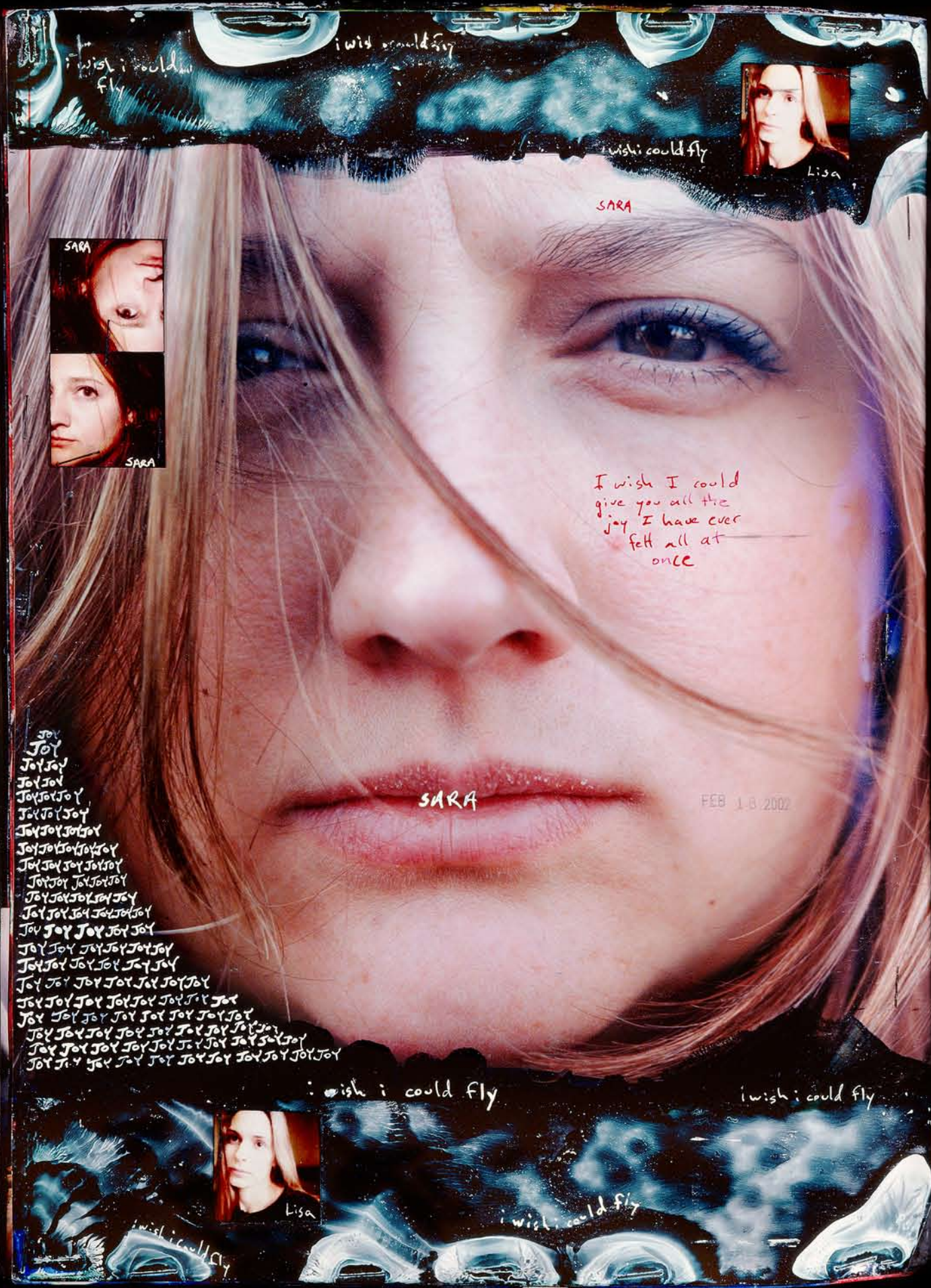
KC. the first professor i ever had. i cannot find words for how thankful i am that i got him, his first year teaching at this big photo school was my first year at it. the assignments were unlike anyone else's. i walked out of my first class so excited, someone was finally going to help me learn all that i wanted to. my class hated him, they tried to have him fired. in the end, he even made the students that hated him smarter. the school reacted too, after that year he was never the same and eventually ran away too. some 10 years later, me and two friends who had him later then i did hit the road to attend a lecture of his. it was worth it. i made this the summer i returned to print for 10 weeks only to run away again. right after i took it, he asked, 'what gives you the right to take my picture?' i remember him swinging at me, but i cannot remember if that really happen, or if it's just what i know he wanted to do.

M.

35 tournaments in 232 days. that's a competition every 6.5 days for 7 months on average. 3200 registered targets attempted in competition, 2364 broken for a 74% for the year. the goal was top 10 at nationals or the krieghoff cup. that was the quest.

i fell short, shute kicked my ass and i didn't get the girl.

[illegible]



www.iliketotellstories.com

jonathan@iliketotellstories.com