The Urinal Chats

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"I was fortunate (or unfortunate) enough to meet a person who forcibly embedded himself into my mind during my senior year at Hilton High School. He taught English, or was, at least, paid to make people think so. He was a large and robust man, his body frame reminiscent of the fat, golden Buddha I would see every time I went to eat at Chinatown. His gleaming square head looked like something you should serve Kool-aid from. His protruded and buggy eyes would have made him a target for any overly-curious chameleon."

Cover Page Footnote

This prose is available in The Angle: https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/angle/vol2009/iss3/20
I was fortunate (or unfortunate) enough to meet a person who forcibly embedded himself into my mind during my senior year at Hilton High School. He taught English, or was, at least, paid to make people think so. He was a large and robust man, his body frame reminiscent of the fat, golden Buddha I would see every time I went to eat at Chinatown. His gleaming square head looked like something you should serve Kool-aid from. His protruded and buggy eyes would have made him a target for any overly-curious chameleon.

Metherell’s weight proved an insurmountable challenge for his belt, which failed to contain his gut on a daily basis, instead allowing it to cascade over his waistline like an avalanche. I am confident that his weight contributed evermore to the scientific oddity that Metherell was. Perhaps this was what gave him the super-human ability to sweat through the armpits of his blank white polo-shirt even in the dead of winter.

He would waddle decisively up and down the rows of desks, liberally spreading his biting aroma of pungent sweat mixed with musk. Upon the conclusion of his rounds he would stare at us from behind those sideshow eyes, gazing for up to minutes at a time. His ability to hold a gaze at what seemed like absolutely nothing certainly complimented his goofy aura. Metherell never failed to captivate the rest of us.

There were days when he would assure us of the magnitude of work that had to be done. These statements were only further solidified as he progressed, discussing Vietnam, his son in Texas (that worked at that one prison), and the dinosaurs. If a high school English student was looking for copious amounts of useless information, Metherell certainly delivered tenfold. Some days he asked absolutely nothing from us at all. Thinking back, it seems like Metherell spent the majority of our time ranting about whatever thought unwittingly entered his prodigious head. Thankfully he never tried to apply these thoughts somehow to the course curriculum, or English itself for that matter because he would have failed miserably. When he wasn’t ranting, he was taking a bathroom break – where he would continue his overflow of verbal diarrhea to whatever poor soul he happened to meet there. Nothing could be accomplished until Metherell relieved himself. Unfortunately for us, there wasn’t enough time in the day for that to happen.

To my eventual dismay, I spent a good deal of time as a “poor soul” during my senior year. It’s incredible – perhaps even alarming – how vividly I recall the first time Metherell crossed my path in the second floor bathroom by the English loft. I had left study hall to conduct my business within the supposed safety of my own private urinal. The halls were desolate except for a teacher wandering past the library farther down the hall. The bathroom itself was deserted, to my delight. Life is always less complicated when you can relieve yourself in peace and privacy.

Shortly after I had picked my urinal (which was always the one on the end, closest to the wall if available), I began to get settled; I was completely isolated within the confines of the abandoned restroom. Not even the impressively putrid stink I was submerged in could have made me feel less at home. I could have danced the Charleston, sang Irish hymns, or even vandalized the walls in their vacancy and not a soul would have been made aware. My brief moments of solitude were then abruptly interrupted by the ominous sound of Metherell’s voice stampeding down the hall.

“Kim! How we doin’ today?” erupted Metherell’s voice, echoing through the wash area of the restroom as though it were exhaled through an invisible microphone. With Metherell’s assault on my eardrums, I suddenly came to two realizations: first, that the teacher wandering by the library was my economics teacher, Mrs. Saxton. The second, more depressing epiphany was that Metherell was headed into the restroom – my restroom.
I tried to hurry myself as his footfalls drew closer, hoping that I could finish before he covered too much ground. As a male, I had learned through trial and tribulation that this was much too lofty a goal. Instead, I closed my eyes tight with anticipation as I embraced my imminent failure and impending doom. My eyes snapped open and fixated themselves intently on the bleak white tiles on the wall in front of me as Metherell boomed his "friendly" words of greeting into my slowly recovering ears.

"Hello, Mike, how we doin'?"

I had heard stories of Metherell's restroom antics from a variety of sources, which is precisely why I was so quick to establish a hasty defense against his verbal onslaught. My favorite part of those stories, the part that I found the most humorous of all, was about how Metherell would start conversations with his victims from the urinal directly next to theirs. I found myself lacing all traces of humor as he waddled over and set up shop on my immediate right. I was now as ill-fated as those before me, and this fact donated a feeling of helplessness mixed with despair as the conversation began. A depressing concoction of trivial questions and statements was about to breach my defenses.

"So what sorta' colleges have you been lookin' into?"

He placed so much emphasis on each 's' he spoke, that he showered the same tiles I was staring at with flecks of saliva. I could see them splatter and adhere to the drab wall coverings, which almost gave them a shred of character.

"Oh, a few..."

My intent was to trail off and leave him contemplating my vague answer while I made my escape. My weak attempt was fruitless, and Metherell proved its futility by progressing to his next topic.

"So how you likin' 1984 so far?"

Metherell was obviously referring to George Orwell's masterpiece, which coincidentally became one of my favorite books — no thanks to Metherell.

My awkward response was issued just as I finished my business. As I recall, my words were rich with false sincerity, as though they were designed to fool him into thinking I was anything but horribly ill-at-ease and disturbed.

"It started slow, but I'm really getting into it now."

At this point, there was nothing he could have said that wouldn't be interpreted as harassment. I was preparing to leave — how could he try to keep me there, engaging my already savagely beaten ego in more pointless conversation? I couldn't help but feel like less of a man, having fallen prey to Metherell, crumbling like a sandcastle against his formidable onslaught of urinal-to-urinal conversation.

What followed was a suspenseful period of painful silence between us. I was relieved of all burdens to respond at this point. I could sense that he was desperately trying to throw out some clever wildcard, something like "So how's classes goin'?" or "So, we excited to graduate?" Instead he said nothing more and simply admired the marred wall tiles. I knew that this was only a temporary pause, and that it was my best chance to get away and preserve any remaining shred of sanity that I still grasped on to. With that, I took a final deep breath, inhaling that odor of sweaty musk once more, and fled the premises without flushing my urinal. Such things were of minor importance at this point.

Each individual stride was impressively long, as though I were desperately avoiding a viscous predator trailing me across the African Savannah, frothy saliva flowing from its gnashing jaws. The predator in question was Metherell, and his scent trail extended out into the hallway where I knew I would be home-free. As I crossed the threshold out of hell and into safety, I heard him call out one last time.

"See ya."

See ya, as though we were old friends, as though nothing creepy or bizarre had just occurred. Such an interesting phrase was this to conclude one of the oddest and most uncomfortable experiences of my existence. I was surprised. Such a complexly awkward interaction between teacher and student, one so
ridiculously outlandish on so many levels surely warranted a statement of acknowledgement? Perhaps an apology for being so unusual or recognition for beginning such a strange conversation would have sufficed.

The irony behind these occurrences is quite amusing in itself. Not once did these nightmarish interactions occur during English class with Metherell. They occurred during study hall, economics, calculus, any class one can imagine. The man frequented the restroom so often that it made us wonder the condition and state of his bladder. Perhaps he drank an excessive amount of fluids. Maybe he just loved starting conversation with someone who was so incapacitated that he couldn’t walk away. No matter his reason, Metherell affected the lives of many students at Hilton High School, leaving his unique indentation on their memories.