

He gets the daily paper — exactly one half century old — brought to his door.

WALKING OUT OF THE GROCERY ON A cold rainy night, dodging cars and puddles, I heard my name called. It was Paul Duchesne, offering me a sandwich. Out of the dark he appeared, and we huddled under trees. Paul's business is making brown rice sandwiches: fresh, organic, delicious, big. I was delighted and asked the price. "Oh, it's a leftover — free. Plain or cheese?" I walked on, soaked by the rain and flooded with gratitude. A free sandwich! Must one live on city streets, as I once did, poking in trash bins and begging dimes, to be stunned by a gift of food? Some of us have so much that a *free sandwich* is nothing. Earlier that day Pamela and I had talked with street people in San Francisco. An alert middle aged man, braving the ordeal of begging, said, "It's hard for us to be seen as normal people. Most people expect us to be dirty and rude. I work hard at staying clean and being polite." Later a sick old fellow said he was entering a hospital the next day, his fear of surgery mixed with pleasure at the idea of a warm, dry bed of his own, of being taken care of, for a while. Then that night, out of the cold rain, a free sandwich, a good one, enough food for a day, offered with a smile. Does anyone know how these things happen?

Whoosh. "Let's make some mistakes." *Nikola Tesla invented severe TV interference long before TV was invented.* **Basic Music: Make tiny sounds with lips, mouth, and throat. Let your breathing guide you. Continue. Do this with friends; let the combined sound evolve.** *The first snow flurries began as I fled the dorm.*

Court Evidence

George Smedley of Ames, Iowa, reads the daily paper — 50 years late. By arrangement with his local library, he gets the *Times* from exactly a half century back brought to his door. "Great stuff!" he says. "Not a darn thing changes. Same! Absolutely same! Mental bracer, seeing the old stuff again. Couldn't do without it!" *Unlike Communist states, which use censorship, US client state El Salvador enjoys complete freedom of the press, its army having bombed the last two dissent papers in 1981 and hacked two editors to death with machetes on the sidewalk. The papers freely print business news, army bulletins, and election updates.* A friend who's a state ACLU director recommends, "Best to carry a camcorder with you at all times (*très chic*). You never know when you'll need court evidence."

"Dear Tiffany, I know you're mad at me. I can tell. But I wasn't flirting with Eddy! I don't even like him. You can have him. Besides, I met Amy's cousin Dave last week and I'm going to get him. Please don't be mad at me or hate me. I don't want some stupid guy to get in the way of our friendship. Love, Ann. PS: 2 friends + 2 gether = 4 ever." **Squiggle, beep-beep, moo.**

Woman in the Street

In a South American capital where police and military violence against the people is a daily fact, a woman dodges traffic in the middle of a busy street, left arm clutching a stack of newspapers, right hand holding one out to drivers of cars stopped at the red light. "Please, buy this paper! It's the truth of what's happening! I'm the publisher-editor. The state press hides the truth. My paper prints it. Please, read it! It's true!" A few drivers, risking police notice, roll down windows, pass coins, and drive off with her paper, possession of which could lead to arrest or death. Back at her office, she tells a visitor that she took over the paper three months ago when the former publisher, her husband, was murdered by a death squad. Responding to her visitor's comment on her courage she says, "*Tengo que hacerlo. Y por eso, es fácil.* I must do it. That makes it easy." Her fellow workers, standing behind her, stare at the floor and nod.

Around 2000 AD, science shifted its theoretical base from mathematics (measurement, generalization, and the predictably repeatable event) to music (relationship, integration, and the evolutionary unique event). "*I want a new Messiah, leading people away from capitalism and war, toward sunshine and good surf.*" Great suffering and great love are our only disciplinarians. We need no others.

An Avalanche in Switzerland

A man comes out of a shop holding the change from his purchase, walks to a trash bin, picks out the pennies one by one, and throws them in the trash. A college fund-raiser says, "When we ask major donors for big sums, a 'yes' is always nice, but a 'no' is almost as good — it's a solid position you can work with, and often turn into a 'yes'. It's the 'maybe' that's hard — not much there to work with." *I am a changed man. I no longer dream of saving Marilyn Monroe from an avalanche in Switzerland.*



How to read Rollmag: bits and pieces, slowly absorbing. Give it time to sink in.



## “I recall my friends’ faces above the tablecloth, glowing in the candlelight.”

From Jim Ryan’s life story: “‘Will you ever amount to anything?’ My father’s question fell on the redchecked oil-cloth bearing his forearm and fistful of highball, heavy on the kitchen table. Mute beneath his drunken insistence I watched the crew of black angels drive him toward the white light that was death on the highway. ‘Will you ever mount up and look down upon men, with your soft sideways smile, and hear more than an echo of self-adulation ringing from stone?’” Ssss, sshhh, fffff.

**Write your life story in five sentences.  
Or, one sentence, adding one word a  
day. Send it to Rollmag.**

“In Germany,” writes Malcolm Dickinson, “a lighted candle is always on the table when friends gather. Recalling my friends there, I see their faces above the tablecloth, over a glass of mineral water or hidden by the steam of a cup of coffee, glowing in the candlelight. The only transportation for people under 35 is bicycles. Streets have lanes for cars, bicycles, and pedestrians. Walkers straying into red bicycle lanes get bell rings from cyclists, and cars yield to bicycles or face stiff penalties. Heavy bicycle traffic takes over car lanes. The city center is a *Fußgängerzone* (feet-going-zone) — pedestrians, walked bicycles, and buses only; no cars.” *Count Basie, under contract elsewhere, used a fake name.*

### An Oblong Blur

In a parked luxury car gleaming with wax and leather upholstery, a tiny dog sits on the front seat, silky fur coifed, only its face visible behind the plastic window of the carrier its owner has left it in, staring out at a passer-by who gazes in at the double-encased mini-dog-in-carrier-in-car, until a man of executive manner and snarling face, in hot pink jogger’s mini-briefs and dark glasses, crosses the street and unlocks the car, his glare commanding the passer-by, “Get away, you!” and the passer-by backs away, the man and the dog watching him as he disappears down the street. *Natural foods grocery bulletin board message: “Wanted: Personal Detox Aide — Woman, 37, candida microbe recoverer, needs helper — growing wheat grass, juicing wheat grass, and washing veggies. Must be clean and positive-oriented; 15 hrs/wk, \$7/hr.”* At the post office, a bland, fashionably dressed woman, matching career notes with a man she’s just met in the line, says, “I’m seeking corporate funding to promote higher consciousness throughout the world.” *There was a time when we young people in Russia spoke to our friends almost entirely in quotations from American movies.*



One day it became clear that the rhythmic error wasn’t an error at all. It was a new kind of rhythm. On July 10, 1919, President Wilson told the Senate: “The stage is set, the destiny disclosed. It has come about by no plan of our conceiving, but by the hand of God who led us into the way. We cannot turn back. We can only go forward, with lifted eyes and freshened spirit, to follow the vision. It was of this that we dreamed at our birth. America shall in truth show the way. The light streams upon the path ahead, and nowhere else.” A 1920s New England clergyman said he felt God to be “a sort of oblong blur”.

At this point in our story, Jesus, sitting on a charming hand-painted bench, wearing his trademark white robe with matching belt and sandals from The Jerusalem Shoppe, saw a group of youngsters nearby. As you may recall, Jesus was fond of children and often said the ideal religious viewpoint is childlike. In fact, He believed children are an archetype. So when He noticed the adults keeping the children away, mistakenly assuming He’d be bothered to have His lecture on salvation disrupted, He said, in that warm yet always persuasive way of His, “Oh, it’s no bother. I like kids. I’d be glad to talk with them. Why don’t you send them over?”

### Souls in Orange Juice

*In web offset presses, the blankets of the two printing units oppose each other, so that both sides of the web are printed at once. “If I were President of the USA, I’d go around picking up trash.” A man with no place of his own wanders the world, and he’s a stranger wherever he goes; then something happens to him, and he finds a place, his place; and there his life begins. Squeak, boop, crunch.*

Notice in *Business Daily*, April 29, 1965: “Services and materials as required to perform [for the US Army] a research study entitled ‘Pax Americana’ consisting of a phased study of: (a) the elements of National Power; (b) ability of selected nations to apply elements of National Power; (c) a variety of world power configurations to be used as the basis for the USA to maintain world hegemony in the future.” The \$89,000 contract went to Douglas Aircraft, Inc.

*Edward Ericson asks, “Why can’t we just soak our souls in orange juice?”* Let the children come unto me.

### The Heart of Things

“Morning,” writes Charles Farrow, “fogbound; the river is full of ghosts. A hill appears; disappears. Afloat, protected, I paddle down the middle. Birds are my only companions. Fog calms the river’s billows. A moth beats its wings on the water; the surface tension holds its grip; with a paddle tip, I give him the air. I am at the heart of things. All that is not morning, not river, is elsewhere.”



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## You are the people who know what matters. Please: write. Send anything.

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*Joseph Woodard Zummo, life story at age 3 years, 65 days, dictated to his mother: "I don't want to tell ... I was born in the summertime, but I cried in the nighttime. And then I went to college and I met little master and I hugged him and gave him blanket." Zzz, gg-gg, mlp.*

### By Our Letters We Grow Free

Peering through the propaganda smog, I learn what's happening by avoiding the commercial media and reading letters from Rollmag readers: a river of sense and love. A New Haven Scout leader reports character building among poor boys. A Midwestern businessman studies the Mexican Free Trade Agreement. A "retired" English teacher writes a country & western song ("Oh guys, you gotta learn how to dance, you gotta have more than big hats and tight pants"), and gets local affording housing built. A Texas architect, working nights at a shelter, learns Spanish to talk with the homeless men, and trains to work with abused children. A New York dancer has breakfast with her three-year old son; an Oregon man writes on racism in the USA; a woman near Ithaca ice skates after work; a Connecticut poet converts his farm to the post-oil world; in Queens a woman raises frogs and goldfish. Your letters are more valuable than anything else I ever see: they are the real news that matters. Many get quoted here; others are woven in. Thus, together, we sing our lives, beyond the ad-world, and make a world we love. Please: send your life stories, updates, views. People who "can't write letters" are truly eloquent; people "too busy to write" find letter-writing a key to daily thought. I reply to all letters, usually right away; you are the people who know what matters. Please: write. Send anything. By our letters we grow free. *Lantern fish live 3,000 feet down.*

One more doorway ... one more doorway  
... then the window ... then the Light ...

If you've been troubled by store security systems using airport-type scanners at the door, here's good news: they're obsolete. Dallas-based MicroSure now offers SureDots, a new security system. A pen-like tool puts tiny dots on store items. When you pay for an item, a clerk deactivates the dot with a small desktop nuclear reactor. If you steal it, 5 yards out the door, the dot explodes. MicroSure's Phil Slank says, "These bombs are terrific. They only kill the guy who steals the item. The technology comes from space weapons. It's neat." Best of all, once people get used to the idea (TV ads sing, "SureDots are everywhere!"), a prevention effect will take hold. Mr. Slank, a born-again Christian, says, "It's the Bible in action. You have to fear God's wrath. When folks see evil-doers getting blown away by their sins, we'll have morality like you never dreamed of." *Twitter tweet tweet.*

Bus ride, Friday: The highway overpass columns rise from the marsh, a gray-brown no-color in the winter dusk, reflecting in the glassy water which doubles their length, a concrete grove; two white egrets, inches from the highway and the roaring machines, calmly seek their dinner, pecking and stepping; inside the bus, two little boys, one Anglo, the other Latino, each in Mother's lap, "talk" in universal kids' language — squawks, waves, funny faces — the two moms listless with end-of-day fatigue, unaware of each other or their boys' lively chat, staring out at the formless beyond.



Artist: Pamela Worthington. Sources: Carl Oglesby, Chris Link, Bill Wilson, Lisa Watson, *The Book of Change*, Jim Rizza.

### The Bus Rapper

RIDING THE BUS TODAY I clashed with a rapper. On my way into the city, I found a seat in the middle of the back bench. Both seats next to me were open; beyond them, the two window seats were taken. The rider to my right got my attention immediately — a young man rapping aloud, with dance-like gestures.

You may know the phenomenon: on the bus, a rapper listens to earphone music and calls out the words. It's often loud, and often provocative. Last month a rapper on this same route sparked a fight among the riders; the driver had to stop the bus, walk back, and shout the mess down. More commonly, riders endure it with smoldering irritation, held hostage by the intrusion.

This rapper was fairly restrained, and the motor roar partly covered his voice. But, quick to defend my right to privacy, I leaned over, touched his arm to get his attention, and wagged my finger to say, "Please be quiet."

#### Life in the USA

He was instantly angry. "Why should I be quiet — I don't know you — don't bother me — don't touch me!"

Tension gripped the back of the bus. I eased off, noting reaction ripple through the other riders. Dismayed at losing the thinking time I so value on bus rides — invasive noise blocks me from doing my jobs of writing and composing as surely as handcuffs would stop me from picture framing — I resigned myself to the choice of fuming or listening. So I listened.

And was I surprised! I loved what he was saying, felt he spoke for me, putting in his words what I try to say in mine, raw and blunt. I could only hear part of it over the engine, and he often turned away toward the window, but what I heard, I knew to be the truth of life in the USA.



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## If you and I have any free future at all, it begins by listening to Mitchell Powell.

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Luckily, I only heard his voice, not the band he was hearing in the earphones — pop synthetic sounds and drum machines cause me pain. What I heard was a young man telling his truth, a truth which is everyone's.

### In the Back of This Bus

In snappy rap rhythms and rhymes, he spoke of four centuries of barbarism to his people: slavery, lynchings, and confinement in the "projects" where "drug war" is white man's cruelest scourge, police and courts mocking justice to hold his people down.

He spoke of the white masters ruining the earth with greed, of aerosol hair spray no one needs ripping the ozone. "They're killing every one of us, black and white, red and yellow, killing themselves too, and don't even know. Wake up, white man, before you kill us all!" He spoke of children needing to learn right and wrong, people needing schools, decent homes, health care, jobs, getting free of racism and advertising, working together, living in dignity.

This is just my paraphrase, but whatever the words, his message was the truth and a call to justice. Deeply enraged, deeply hurt, he talked plain sense. Here beside me on the southbound #20 suburban bus was Malcolm X all over again, his message pouring from a young man born a decade after the great man's murder, rising again, unstoppable and unstopable, dressed up today in rap style and a dancer's grace, ancient lies undone by simple words, taboo broken, the whole American nightmare of race crime laid bare, the deep wounds given yet another chance to heal by exposure to light and air, life pushing up from the earth where Dr. King and Emmett Till sleep with God; and as the bus cruised down the scenic highway the young rapper sang out, "We shall overcome, we shall overcome, we shall overcome someday!"

O Malcolm, O Dr. King, O Sojourner Truth, O Harriet Tubman, O Paul Robeson, O Rosa Parks, that you could sit here in the back of this bus, to hear and praise this rapper!

### A Real Audience

Of course, when I started listening, I was wary, having heard that rap meant senseless violence — not believing it, but lacking other experience. I'd only heard rap years ago, when living on the streets of New York; then it was new, sprouting from real people's lives, before big business took over. A side-by-side look at Malcolm's speeches and the media fairy tale of Malcolm shows how useful it is to avoid the media if one wants to know things accurately. White people hate hearing black people's truth, and one wouldn't expect rap to be an exception.

My wariness melted when I heard the rapper speak the truth so well. I listened enthralled. Trying to avoid making him self-conscious or fearful of another complaint I wanted him to know he had a real audience, and tried to catch his eye. He paused to snap, "I don't want to hear you!" but then I got through. I said, "I believe you. What you're saying is true. I'm listening. Thank you."

He gave no reply, but from then on, we were together. He leaned toward me to emphasize lines and I nodded back. Our fellow riders watched uneasily. The rapper spoke at a normal level but the phenomenon of rap had set up tensions all the more confused by the sight of a middle-aged man in glasses and necktie actively listening and responding.

### Surprises

As we crossed the Golden Gate Bridge and approached my stop I wondered how I might talk with him. Months ago (as you may recall) I'd blown a chance to span gaps of age and pop culture when a young man at his bar mitzvah had seemed to call out for human contact; I'd held back, fearing to play the fool. This time, I must not fail; better a fool than a robot. I plunged.

"Listen — I want to talk with you. You may think I'm crazy but that's fine. Please, just listen." He took off his earphones for the first time. "I publish a paper and I want to write about you. I'm going to say what a jerk I was telling you to be quiet when you weren't being noisy, and how I love what you're saying, what good sense you make,

how it matters to everyone." He brightened. Probably I had surprised him. I told him my name, and asked him his.

"Mitchell Powell."

Where did he live? "Oh, here and there. Around." We shook hands, eyes meeting for a long time. Then Mitchell Powell surprised me. He threw his arms around me. In ten years of riding buses I've never been hugged by a stranger.

### Free Future

Mitchell Powell made my day and he gave me hope. Whether or not I see him again, I want him to see this story, and know that he matters.

White USA doesn't much care about Mitchell Powell. He'll need more than his beautiful rap to make himself a life. The road is rocky and steep, the gates narrow, for all of us but especially for Mitchell Powell in today's USA.

The schools have failed him, yet he has found a way to educate himself and speak out well — his rap has more real knowledge than a heap of school papers. Learning it took work and courage, and I thank him. If you and I have any free future at all, it begins by listening to Mitchell Powell.

