



an  
intrepid media  
release

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Intrepid Media is a 2nd generation social network and promotional site for writers and other artists. Founded in 1999, Intrepid Media has grown to over 1000 members around the world, including *New York Times* bestselling authors, writers represented by major agencies, novelists, journalists, freelancers, technical writers, bloggers, students, and everything in between.

great things will happen today: the intrepid media 2008 collection is a look at the last year like no other – funny, biting, witty, insightful, thoughtful – it's the best of Intrepid Media from a historic year in a historic edition. There something in here for everyone and a little something especially for you.



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2008

## **intrepid media**

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Intrepid Media helps writers hone their talent, promote their work, build their brand, and further their career by providing exposure, feedback, tracking, and advice, as well as online and offline networking tools and opportunities. Its content foundation separates it from the majority of social networks by focusing on sharp, entertaining, and sometimes acerbic takes on the artistic process, pop-culture, and social concerns.

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## Foreword

I won't lie to you, by late 2006, I was already sick of 2008.

2008 had all the makings of a banner year, but like all events with monster expectations, the actual did not live up to the hype. I know, 2008 had that historic election thing going for it. But am I alone in wishing said election had taken place in March? Can't we do something about that what with all the Internets and the robocalls and such?

I remember lamenting, somewhere around November 2006, that we were going to get McCain v. Edwards in 2008. Turns out I was half right, even though for a while the prospect of Giuliani v. Clinton looked like an inevitability. I still don't know how McCain got in there. Hell, I'm not 100% sure how Obama took out Hilary. All I know is that the players changed but the rhetoric remained the same. So I was kinda sorta completely right. Even though I wish I wasn't.

Once again, I think we did a phenomenal job of covering the year, piece by piece, facet by facet, and put it all together in a collection you're definitely not going to see anywhere else. It's the straight-up account from those who were at the party, with no ulterior motive or axe to grind. I'm proud of the fact that we did a whole series, a first for us, on the run-up to the election and only handful of pieces around it, all of them solid takes filled with creamy, delicious truth. Plus a little cynicism.

In 2008, the world got more mobile, more digital, more instant gratification, so it should surprise no one that in 2008 we at Intrepid Media made the move to the printed word. Sure, it may look like we're talking a step back into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (a phrase that sounds less and less ironic with each passing year, by the way), but what we're really doing is buying low in anticipation of selling high. Today's paperback is tomorrow's iPhone – which was really just yesterday's Kindle.

And I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that whole downer of the implosion of the financial markets. We nailed that too, right between the eyes, at the beginning and the end of December.

This is a great book and an historic document, and it tells the story of 2008 in a unique way. So now that I've built up the expectations, feel free to gauge it against the hype.

### Joe Procopio

Publisher/Founder  
Intrepid Media

# state of the sizzle

## a late look at the last eight years of intrepid uniqueness

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joe procopio • 1.2.08

I'm not going to lie to you. If you want to know the truth, if you can handle the truth, the one thing that Intrepid Media (smart, funny, yours!) is above all else is old. Older than dirt. Not that there's anything wrong with that. In fact, wearing an eight-year badge in a sea of dot-com failure (snowball, spark, MSNBC.com) and web 2.0 noise (MySpace, YouTube, Twitter) is a sign of accomplishment. Win-win! And as we boldly go where no one has gone before, there's one thing above all else we have to watch out for. Cliché.

Don't get me wrong. The suits here at Intrepid Media, and by "suit" I mean bad haircut, jeans that look like they might be sticky, and a T-shirt emblazoned with a band whom everyone thinks is cool but no one has ever heard, like Les Savy Fav, have an intellectual investment in keeping Intrepid Media laser-targeted, robust, seamless, scalable, turnkey, and best of breed, in that order. We know we've lost first-mover advantage (to be fair, we weren't first, but we were firstish), so now we have to create the perfect storm.

Whatever.

Question: Why is this so late?

Intrepid Media turned EIGHT on 9.1.07. Go Intrepid. It's your birthday. However, to be perfectly honest with you, we weren't ready. See, 2007 was about tracking. The Interweb is a vast ocean of dreck with a lot of gears and ball bearings underneath. We spent most of 2007 capturing as much information as we could about the columns you write while painstakingly making sure we kept our heads above water in terms of your privacy. Thus, when you post something in the Gallery, the wheels start turning immediately. We tell you how often it's been read, where those reads are coming from, and what people think of what you said. The whole nine. This kind of information takes a while to accumulate. But when it's all said and done, it's infoporn. It's addictive. It's the new cigarettes. And if you stick around and build up a portfolio, this information will help you get better. You'll be a better writer, a more fluid thinker. You'll be funnier, sharper, and sexier.

Word up.

So it took a little while to get critical mass on the metadata, but we're aces now.

We did this for a couple of reasons. Intrepid Media is all about the contributor. Everything we do, we do to build the empire of you (in fact, this is one of our own many catch phrases). We're also under the impression, much like in *Ratatouille* (spoiler alert!), that ANYONE CAN WRITE. This is our story and we're sticking to it. Now, out of the gate, not everyone can write good. So what we do is give you the tools and the roadmap: A relatively positive environment, quantitative and qualitative feedback, a process by which the best content always bubbles up to the top - it's like jumping into the pool of free expression and we supply the rubber-ducky shaped water wings.

We make Klostermans out of Tucker Maxes. And we have parties while we do it. The rest is up to you.

This is also, in fact, what keeps us from being a writers site. Some of our best stuff is written by folks who would never call themselves writers. They just happen to be brilliant. Cyberspace tears down the walls of formality in this regard. We figure you can pretty much hash out grammar, mechanics, and structure on your own along the way. Some of the best phone books in the world are written to perfection. We're here to make sure you write something people want to read. Although, to be fair, the Denver metro phone book is an effervescent and thought-provoking read. Two thumbs up.

The other reason we got our hands dirty with the data was to separate us from the blogosphere/blogiverse/blogicipality. Sweet Betty, I can't even stand the term "blog." But they're here, and apparently they're making beaucoup money and putting criminals behind bars and adding another delicious option to your well-balanced breakfast. It was only fair that we took it upon ourselves to differentiate (and strengthen) the core of our site - after all, if we're going to demand your uniqueness, we had better give you an experience worthy of that quality.

So the concepts we put in place at the very beginning are still in use today. The only issue is, as I said up front, the fact that we're old. It's nearly impossible to keep things stupidfresh after eight years. We're a little niche, maybe a little exclusive, and we know who let the dogs out. That's good. We're also a little tired, a little repetitive, and no one really cares who Keyser Söze is anymore. That's bad.

The Intrepid Media Experience will never be for everyone. This was never the goal, and good on us, because MySpace does the universal thing quite well and 98% of MySpace is unreadable or unabashedly commercial (ironically, much like a phone book, if phone books were put out by secret societies of cool eighth-graders). Intrepid Media will also not work every time out, as evidenced by this column, or entire initiatives along the way that have bombed, like Karma Factory, Google Ads, or Heather Millen's Invent-a-Cocktail Tuesdays.

But if we don't do this, if we don't make an attempt to try new things, put them out there on display for everyone to laud, attack, or very condescendingly tell us how much they enjoyed it...

"I LOVED the Big Country column. It was so BOLD!"

"Did you read it?"

"Of course I read it."

"Did you get the joke about Duran Duran?"

"Yes. Hysterical."

"There was no joke about Duran Duran."

"You're really straining our friendship, you know that?"

...then we're doomed to relive the clichés forever.

So while the trends come and go, the catch-phrases catch-on, and web pages become sites become portals become second lives, we'll be here, doing our thing, evolving, and generally trying to become what we were meant to be. And all we ask is the same thing from you.

Have a wonderful and eventful 2008 - and make sure you tell us about it along the way.

## **Post**

2008 started off on a sketchy note for us, huh? And I'll level with you, I toyed with not including this column in the collection, mostly because it's kind of pretentious for a column about Intrepid Media to be the lead-in to the book. But when I re-read it I kind of identified where it was going, and it's a little bit like 2008 itself - starting off with a whirlwind of confusion and ending with a bigger whirlwind of confusion and an economic mess on top of that, but also a lot of, what that's word... hope.

Now, for us, the confusion was there because I knew in January 2008 that if we didn't pull the trigger on the book publishing side quickly, we'd stagnate this year, and I didn't quite have enough sense to be able to communicate that. But soon after, I got to that point where it was now or never, and we got our act together, resulting in the 2007 collection release as a test run real late (11/08), the partnership with Lulu in 2009, and then this book you're now holding in your hands soon afterwards.

# imaginary friends and enemies

## tv characters the strike makes me miss... or not

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jael mchenry • 1.4.08

Hold onto your hats, folks. The 1988 writers' strike lasted almost 22 weeks, and we're only on week 8 of this one. I was going to open with a good news/bad news, but honestly, the good news is a little thin on the ground. Maybe the Worldwide Pants exemption that brought Letterman and Ferguson back with writers? Ish?

What we've got on TV these days is a mishmash of reruns and "reality", not exactly the discriminating primetime viewer's regular diet. Now, I'm not saying I'm not excited for the return of "American Gladiators", but one of the things I enjoy most as a writer and a viewer is witnessing the creation of an amazing, entertaining, breathing character who I can't wait to see from week to week.

Right now, I've got none of those.

So instead, I'll sit here and be quietly sad, and list for you the characters I miss most (shhh, they're just napping) and the ones I don't miss at all.

### **The Missed:**

**Lt. Kara "Starbuck" Thrace, "Battlestar Galactica"**. BSG's third season ended a while back, so it's not like Starbuck was torn from me by the writers' strike per se, but the ache got fresh again during her brief scenes in the November broadcast of "Razor". She was saucy and strong and far, far more interesting than anyone else on screen. I know it won't be the same -- she did, y'know, die and all that -- but whenever the new season starts, she'll be at the center of the action.

Plus, the promo gives me serious chills. Get her back here ASAP! So say we all!

**The Brothers Petrelli, "Heroes"**. They count as one, because they're two sides of the same coin. A hot, hot coin. Peter traded in his Emo Bangs of Sadness for the Buzz Cut of New Purpose, while Nathan went wild with the Unruly Curls of Dissipation. No, I didn't particularly enjoy Peter's plotline during the fall season (Peter : "Caitliiin!!!" :: Michael : "Waaaaalt!"), but I enjoyed having him on my screen anyway. And Nathan's endearing rapport with Parkman ("Get out your gun.") was priceless.

**Barney Stinson, "How I Met Your Mother"**. I love everyone in the HIMYM gang, especially the wonderfully doofy Marshall, but the

relentless and persistent power of my childhood crush on Doogie Howser tips the scales, and Neil Patrick Harris' performance as Barney is what I miss most about the show. It's a flashy role, but the great thing is, the writing is generally good enough that I only think of it as a "role" on rare occasions. Usually, it's just -- *Barney! Isn't he made of awesome? Isn't he legen -- wait for it -- dary?*

**Deb Morgan, "Dexter".** I may not always agree with the character's choices, but I find her absolutely fascinating. Part of it is that the actress Jennifer Carpenter just knocks it out of the park, but a lot of what I love about Deb is her (generally profane) dialogue. Sharply, smartly written stuff. And her plotline gave me something to hold onto in a second season that was definitely not as good as the first, shedding quiet conundrums and internal struggles for overwhelming dread, cheap threats, and, well, stuff blowing up. A heavily edited version of "Dexter" may be coming to network TV to patch up the strike gap; if I do try watching it, it'll probably only be to see how they handle Deb.

**Bill McNeal, "Newsradio".** Yeah, it's been 10 years. But I will never stop missing Phil Hartman.

### **The Not Missed:**

**Sylar, "Heroes".** Yes, Zachary Quinto's hot, and yes, he made superpowered braining serial killers fun for all of us, but no, they shouldn't have brought him back for the second season. The overthetopness of him is just... there are no words. He chewed the scenery, spat it out, constructed new scenery from sheets of Laffy Taffy bolted together with Tic-Tacs, and chewed that too. Gah.

**Dr. Gregory House, "House".** Now, I love "House". Seriously. I adore that show and have since the start, all through the sublime and the ridiculous, through Cameron's crush, and House's temporary and impossible recovery, and even through *Tritter*, for heaven's sake, and the hiring and the firing and the slugfest of new characters that was this entire fall season (Ridiculously Old Fraud, I think I'll miss you most of all). Because it's a fun and ridiculous show. But this season, House himself has been... boring. His demented ringmaster act could have worked, but for some reason they've junked it up with boob jokes nonstop (poor Cuddy, poor Michael Michele, poor all of us), and I'm tired of it, and of him. I hate to say it, but I'm happier with reruns for now.

**Judah Friedlander on "30 Rock".** I'm not a regular viewer, so I don't know his character's name, but anytime he shows up on screen in one of those trucker hats, I want to change the channel. And often, I do. I'm down with Liz Lemon, down with Kenneth the Page, totally and in all other ways down with Jack Donaghy, but this one guy just

bugs the bejeezus out of me. I can't explain it. Although I'm sure it's probably somehow related to the trucker hats.

**Maya, "Heroes"**. Because we tried to miss her all season, but she wouldn't go away.

So, that's the list. Cross your fingers for productive negotiations, and in the meantime, there's always Netflix.

And "American Gladiators". Because there's nothing like spandex-clad beefcake monsters lurching at each other with outsize Q-tips. Nothing.

## Post

Ah, the writers' strike. On one hand, it was shorter than we thought it might be, and therefore not as bad... but the far-reaching implications are undeniable. The shortened seasons of many shows threw off script plans, and resulted in rushed plots at a minimum and momentum-killing breaks right and left. Would Pushing Daisies and Dirty Sexy Money still be with us if not for the strike? No way to know. Would Heroes still suck? Yeah, probably.

I watched the new American Gladiators once and then bailed. Who knew it would be less exciting when they added fire bursts and water pits. You can still watch the classic (should that be "classic"?) version on one of the ESPNs, though. I will never not be rooting for Nitro.

# the perfect column

## why it won't ever happen

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michelle von euw • 1.11.08

There's a word I removed from my vocabulary a long time ago that's now creeping its way back into my life.

The word is "perfect." I decided a long time ago that there's no such thing as the perfect job, the perfect marriage, the perfect life, and I wasn't doing myself any favors by striving for some idealistic unreachable goal that allowed no room for human error, and by definition, was unachievable.

It may be possible that I banned the word from my vocabulary in the several months before my wedding, when the pressure to plan the perfect day was at an all-time high. All that effort, all that time and money and stress, and yes, I loved the day, and I did my best to keep a level head throughout the process, but the need to obtain some mass-marketing high cost version of perfection is enough to make even the sanest girl want to burn her *In Style* wedding issues at the

feet of Vera Wang and Martha Stewart.

Certainly my theories on perfect have been bolstered by the recent success of one of my favorite sports teams. The Patriots may have finished the regular season with a perfect 16-0 record, but I've heard nothing in the past two weeks -- and actually quite before that -- except how that perfection won't actually be perfection unless the Pats keep winning, all the way through the Super Bowl. And even so, some will still claim their perfection is marred by the videotaping scandal that hit game one. One so-called sports expert even stated that the Patriots didn't actually have a perfect season; rather, he considered them 13-3, as they won three very close games in the final minutes of play.

On the last weekend of 2007, my hometown paper ran a piece focusing on perfect Boston moments, and inviting readers to their website to post their own. I mentally assembled my list (the stuffed French toast at Zaftigs, the "P through Z" row at Newbury Comics, the skateboarders at Copley, Fenway Park during the offseason), but found instead of people posting their own beloved Boston landmarks, most of the discussion was focused on just how far from perfect the city itself is.

The problem with perfection is any time we attach that word to something, it almost immediately highlights the flaws. What's perfect? U2's *The Joshua Tree*. The first season of "Veronica Mars." The indie movie *Once*. The Red Sox winning the World Series.

But upon further investigation, everything on my list has something that deviates it from perfect. "Exit." That episode about the stolen dogs. That one song the guy sang to the girl that was too long and just a little bit overwrought. The fact that the Sox clinched in Colorado and not at home in Boston.

The perfect Christmas took a big hit this year when my parents spent eight hours in the emergency room with my uncle on December 24; my perfect week home marred by watching the toll sickness has taken on my family, who've had a particularly difficult fall. Since I've moved away, Boston has become a sort of perfect ideal for me, but five minutes in the 20 degree weather and then hearing everyone's nightmare stories about being stuck in their cars the week before after a freak Thursday snowstorm crippled the region, and suddenly home doesn't seem so perfect.

All things that serve reminders of why I've avoided the word altogether -- if I don't tag a moment, an experience, a work of art with the term "perfect," than I can just appreciate it on its own merits, correct?

But it's my football team that's forced me to reevaluate that assumption. No matter what the out-of-town pundits say, the Patriots' regular season was perfect, as defined by the terms we've used to measure that word, and the reason it was so is the same reason Barry Bonds kept hitting home runs long after the steroid allegations destroyed his reputation. Sports are sprinkled with achievements, with examples of perfection that sparkle above all else. DiMaggio's 56 game hitting streak. The '72 Dolphins' 17-0 season. Wilt Chamberlain's 100 points against the Knicks.

Perfection gives us all something to strive for. It doesn't matter if we actually reach those goals -- I know my life will never be perfect, but it is strung together with moments and snippets of possibilities that do fit the definition of perfect. Every region-crippling snowstorm begins with the first perfect flakes that dance from the sky, silver specks across a barren winter snowscape. No people are perfect, but pretty much everyone I love has done something at some time to earn the term, particularly in a time of need: each one of us can identify moments in our lives when our friends and family have stepped forward with the perfect word, the perfect gesture for that exact moment.

I may never write the perfect story, but there are times when the tiny idea that I could write something that could be someone somewhere's version of perfect keeps me at my laptop, tapping away at that possibility. My husband may not be perfect, but I believe he's the perfect person for me.

Last August, I got a phone call from my friend Kate just after she'd given birth to her first child. "She's perfect," she said, and suddenly, that word seems exactly right.

## **Post**

I know why Joe picked this column for this collection, but if I'd had my way, I'd instead be talking about my Friday Night Lights one, instructing you to watch this brilliant show now that it's on NBC again. (You know what? I'm going to do that anyway. Go. Now. Watch.) Anyway, this column is a rather abstract meditation on the word perfect, which makes it a bit hard to reflect upon a year later, but I do like that rather writerly sentence about the snow in the second to last graph.

# construction: the underdog: part i

## the invitation

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jeffrey d. walker • 1.21.08

2008 will be a year of change. And that's not just because Barack Obama says so. On November fourth, 2008, or at least shortly thereafter, the next president of this country *will* be elected.

Wait! If politics isn't your thing, I implore you to stick around at least to the end of this article. This is a really short piece by Intrepid Media's standards, so my pitch won't take long.

I get pretty freakin' excited about presidential elections. It's like a hunger I can only satisfy every four years. It starts building during the first round of caucuses and primaries. After the majority of candidates are forced out sometime in February due to a lack of funds, a lack of support, or a lack of hope, I am left to savor a small plateful of candidates, whose morsels I will pick over for months until my stomach is upset by the political rhetoric, my acid reflux keeping me up over what the future may hold. My political hunger will hold me on the verge of nausea by the time November rolls around, and election day finally comes, and I will stay up for hours feasting on percentages and gorging on maps of red and blue states until either a president is announced and my hunger is satisfied, or else I fall asleep in my chair in front of a television much like I will after eating to much on Thanksgiving.

Can you see how much fun this is for me?

Last time a president was elected, I tried to entertain myself and at least a couple of others in a series of four articles collectively entitled "Enter the Underdog", where I pretended to run a third-party presidential campaign. Of course it was a joke from the outset; I wasn't then, nor am I now old enough to be the president. I'll also admit, the whole thing wasn't all that well thought out. At any rate, the exercise of writing a campaign that can't succeed anyway (due to my youth, of course), is not something I want to repeat.

But I still want to talk about politics. Only this time, I'd like to have a conversation. And I am formally inviting each and every one of you to participate. Whether the hunger for politics is something you already share or not, I'd like you to join me. Over the next nine months, February through October, I'm planning on writing a series of pieces, each concentrating on one of the challenges that our next president will likely face. For each topic, I plan on researching opinions from a variety of sources to present to you as balanced and informative a format as I can manage. Of course, it would be un-Walker-like to

forego any opinion. However, my goal is not to preach, but instead to discuss.

The beauty of the internet, in my opinion, is the ability to talk with people you wouldn't usually be able to discuss things with. Here at Intrepid Media, I've enjoyed sharing ideas with people across time-zones, across different generations, across political boundaries. By virtue of the diversity available by this forum, I am now hoping to get a true discussion on the issues going. I'm hoping to hear opinions from not only those who can't contain them, but also from those who don't usually mention them.

For those who are willing to speak up who aren't already signed into Intrepid, it's free. Your input is desired, and will add to the discussion I'd like to have. Believe it or not, I want to hear from you.

As I begin, if you have a topic or two that you'd really like me to cover, you should let me know. If I'm asking you to participate, I'd sure like to cover your interests.

Here's what I won't do: mock you, try to convert your opinion to mine, or correct your grammar. I am honestly hoping that, if someone who is going to be in charge out there, or someone who speaks to our next president, is scanning the internet looking for a forum of opinions, we will have each put ours on record to be heard.

And if nobody is listening, and if things aren't the way we'd like them to be four years from now, well, at least I'd technically have a chance to win.

## **Post**

So, for year 2008, I decided to clarify my role at Intrepid Media, meaning that I decided to pick a single topic and roll with it for a majority of the year. I figured frequent topic switching amounted to shooting myself in the foot for repeat readers from month to month. I thought the way to grow a fan base would be to pick a general topic and stick with it. And, with the elections coming up, and with a title like the "Chief White House Correspondent" attached to me at IM, I figured politics the most logical topic to pursue.

Using "underdog" in the title was a call back to the referenced 2004 "enter the underdog" series. What isn't mentioned was how ill-conceived "enter the underdog" was, and how unpopular it was in comparison to other stuff I've done at IM in terms of readership. The insanity is, undaunted by the failure "enter the underdog" was, I decided to undertake an even longer political series, with the aim to grow readership, and I did so again without fully planning out the concept. Exhibit "A" of my lack of preparation is the relative brevity of

this intro piece: a tell-tale sign that I wrote this last minute. But, I figure you never achieve great results without bold undertakings. I made the intelligent move to not make myself the focus, and instead just talk issues.

In case you are curious, my plan to increase readership failed: the year ended with roughly the same number of reads I usually got, if not a minor drop-off. Also, my quoting Barack Obama in the opening line was not meant as a prediction. If it were, at least I'd have gotten one thing right in this series.

## the simple life

### four down, a lifetime to go

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jason gilmore • 1.23.08

Marriage is a shape shifter -- a caterpillar that becomes a butterfly, then a caterpillar again, then a gerbil, or a Corvette. The forces that propel it are as elusive as the origins of a sinewy summer breeze. But for all the studies and sheer years of practice, nobody can really conclusively say what makes them work. Some offer their shared faith in a higher power, others swear by communication.

For me, marriage is listening to my spouse ramble on a nightly basis on a subject for which I have no interest, because I love her and want her to get it out of her system. She talks about her unenviable job as an elementary school psychologist in South Central Los Angeles -- her incompetent principal, the often irresponsible parents, the general pointlessness of counseling otherwise smart kids who are punished for being uneducated by those who refuse to educate them. And I, unable to add much to the conversation besides, "Uh huh," or "That's okay, baby," try valiantly not to fall asleep in her face.

Like no other subject since trigonometry do I find Mr. Sandman knocking at my door than when my wife begins railing about the countless mini-tragedies that occur when bureaucracy and poverty become bedfellows. I can understand her everyday hassles, but they don't interest me. Then, she goes into technical terminology, and that hits me like Thera Flu.

**Her:** I can't believe she stormed into the meeting demanding an SSS. First of all, CBA requires a PSS before we could even initiate a CDC into an ARB!

**Me:** (nodding) That's okay, baby.

For my part, I regularly force her to watch basketball and football games and documentaries on the Beatles and other things that she

has minimal interest in, at best. Despite a limited menu, I am a competent cook, yet often fake amnesia or narcolepsy when asked to make dinner. I attempt to engage her in debates about Miles Davis's most groundbreaking album or whether the Houston Rockets would have won both of their titles if Michael Jordan hadn't retired the first time, then explode in amazement when she fails to share my enthusiasm.

We are so different at times. For example, she does not trust people. Ever.

Once we rented a truck from U-Haul and both circled the truck to check for damage before leaving the lot. I ambled around it once and was content to find only a minor scratch. She circled it four times and found the same minor scratch. But it was important that she circled the truck four times.

I tend to deposit checks into my bank account via ATM. I may not even write my account number on the envelope. This approach, though admittedly lax, has never failed me in the past. Meanwhile, ATMs make my wife paranoid: she worries about getting robbed at them and is also untrusting of the logic behind placing her hard-earned money into a large metal box that doesn't even have a voice.

When I suggest that she should just go into the bank if she feels that way, she rails on about the probability of the bank being held up while she's there. Apparently, she feels that this is more than a certainty. Ideally, if she has to walk into a bank, she would prefer to walk inside the bank's safe and change over the check herself. She has inherited a whole list of strange superstitions from my mother-in-law, some of which have been related to me as gospel:

- 1) Don't put up a New Year's Calendar before New Year's Day. You will die first.
- 2) Talk to your plants. Otherwise they will die.
- 3) Don't wash clothes on New Year's Day. Someone in your family will die.

Still, we have weird things in common, and these are some of the things that brought us together. We were both plucked as preteens out of comfortable, predominantly black inner-city environments and dropped in the middle of a white suburbia that turned out to be more *Blue Velvet* than "Leave It to Beaver". We are in touch spiritually, which, I've learned, isn't necessarily synonymous with the fact that we grew up practicing the same faith. We had similar childhoods in many ways, her mother and both of my parents were all born in Arkansas. (Consequently, we were raised Southern, even though we weren't raised in the South.) We are so in sync in many ways that I'm rarely down when she's down and her opinion mirrors mine so often that I

occasionally regard it before I regard my own.

But still there is friction: Lately, we do this thing where we boo each other whenever one of us utters an unpopular statement (and by unpopular, I mean anything that refers to some undesirable, newfound task that the other person is being asked to complete.) The boo comes out flat and nasal, similar to a cow's moo, but its unenthusiastic delivery does little to sedate the contempt behind the statement.

For example:

**Me:** Would it be possible for you to clean up your side of the bedroom today? I almost sprained my ankle trying to get to my dresser.

**Her:** Booooooooooooo!

OR

**Her:** This wouldn't be a problem if you made more money.

**Me:** Boooooooooooooo! (throws tomato at her)

Occasionally, adlibs are thrown in, like, "Your mother's a (whatever insult was previously said)" or when really insulted, we retreat to the insanely popular, "Hey, Gilmore, you suck."

Ours is a home where one can be booed for coming home late from work or forgetting to buy milk from the supermarket. And there are other strange habits: In the middle of serious conversations, we suddenly quote entire blocks of dialogue from movies like *Coming to America* and *What's Love Got to Do With It*. Dave Chappelle jokes are referenced to the point where it can become difficult to carry on a conversation with us unless you are a fan of his. We hired an imaginary maid named Jennifer, and wonder aloud why we haven't fired her, since she never comes to clean our house. Already, in four years of matrimony, we have given birth to a considerable assortment of weird personality traits that have ensured our future children will enter a very strange world.

I bought a second television shortly after we got married, so that we wouldn't argue about the remote. But we still argue. Meanwhile, the new television sits in our bedroom, abandoned, engulfed by cobwebs and lonely, damning the day that we stripped it from its happy, popular life sitting on a Circuit City shelf. Our marriage is not really about having two televisions. It's about wanting the company of your spouse, but wanting this company while watching basketball and hoping that soon, by sheer will power, your spouse will cease liking the things she likes more than she likes the things you like. It never works, and yet, part of the twisted fun of marriage is coming home each day to try it again.

Growth: When the Food Network competes with *Monday Night Football*, we have learned to alternate on commercial breaks. And on those nights where one of us realizes that we really don't have to watch our favorite show, we gladly surrender the remote, in order to sit quietly together, as content as hummingbirds.

## Post

I was working on a book of autobiographical essays that, unfortunately, has yet to see the light of day. I had been sending the essays out, individually, to literary journals, attempting to get them published and build up a little buzz, as they say. And they had been returning to me, individually, like boomerangs, with uniform, stale letters whose second paragraph always began with the word "Unfortunately." When comments did accompany them, they alluded to my stories not being "universal enough." In deciding to write about my then four-year-old marriage, I concluded that just talking about my marriage wasn't enough. It had to be in relation to something more grand, like, say, the history of marriage in general. So I did a lot of research. And that version looks just like the version you see today. (Minus a lot of footnotes documenting my surprising revelations of the origin of common law marriage and heartbreaking statistics on the sky high divorce rate in Malaysia.)

Unfortunately, that essay didn't meet anyone's needs either. I realized that writing about my marriage was enough. I stripped the unusual anecdotes about courtship in Japanese feudal times and went back to talking about the strange quirks that made my own marriage unique. The feedback I received via Intrepid has been overwhelming. Apparently, through my specifics, I did tap into some sort of universal understanding of the fragile, beautiful nature of what makes a marriage work. That was the whole point.

And I've also had a lot of people say that, thanks to my article, they now boo their spouse regularly. Still not quite sure how I feel about that.

## portrait of an artist: bret anthony johnston

### sharing the contents of his writing toolbox

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tracey kelley • 1.28.08

As director of creative writing at Harvard, Bret Anthony Johnston could easily put his feet up, and let all emerging writers bow before him while placing small tokens of favor in his hands.

Instead, Johnston sneaks up behind you and spills everything he knows about writing onto your desk, right down to the rattling nuts

and bolts and whirly gizmos. His latest work is *Naming the World*, a collection of writing exercises and philosophies offered by some of the top authors of contemporary literature. His approach demystifies the process to provide a gateway to the magic of the art.

**I'm skipping ahead to page 51 in the book to your chapter that shares the book's title, *Naming the World*. What does that mean?**

Without sounding too grandiose, I think the job of the writer is to name the world around us. Every writer strives to capture in language the complexity of life itself, its nuances and contours, and every writer strives to render that complexity as perfectly, as succinctly, and as originally as possible. We've all had those moments, both as readers and as writers, when we hit upon the absolutely ideal combination of letters to communicate an emotion or describe a physical presence. The book aims to give writers the tools to find those letters, to name their worlds, whether real or imagined.

**Why was it important to create a gumbo of writers' perspectives?**

And isn't "gumbo" the perfect word, in light of your previous question?

The goal for the book was always to create a kind of gumbo, to incorporate as many voices and visions as possible. I wanted, quite simply and quite shamelessly, to persuade the best writers and teachers in the country to allow readers glimpses into their bags of tricks.

I wanted Dorothy Allison and Joyce Carol Oates to write about generating stories; I wanted Tom Robbins and René Steinke to explore language and revision; I wanted Richard Bausch to engage dialogue and for Elizabeth Strout to look at POV; I wanted Elizabeth McCracken to discuss plot and Ann Packer to talk about characterization. I wanted the book to be as practical and as applicable as possible, rather than touchy-feely and self-helpy. I wanted it to be a craft book that writers reach for when they're stuck, a reference for those times when you don't know what words comes next, and so I reached out to the finest writers I could and implored them to offer the perspectives, advice, and technique.

**Please give us a tasty nugget to chew on regarding Tom Robbins. For example, was he naked when you talked to him? (I ask this mainly for personal reasons: *Jitterbug Perfume* was the first book I gifted to my then-boyfriend, now-husband. He was excited after reading it, because he thought I was a brazen hussy.)**

I'm proud to say that Tommy Rotten and I have become friends as a result of working on *Naming the World*. Because he's so famous and productive, he was one of the writers I thought would say no immediately, or wouldn't even respond to my initial note, but he was actually one of the first and most enthusiastic writers to hop aboard. There are few prose writers who employ language with the same verve and originality that he does. You read anything he's written, whether it's an email he's dashed off in two minutes or one of his novels, and you can't not want to write.

**Do you consider writing a competitive sport?**

Writing is masochism. It's also nothing less than the profound act of witness.

**Describe the most horrific detail of the worst story you ever wrote.**

No thank you.

**When is your birthday?**

No thank you.

**Could you have written this book seven years ago?**

I couldn't have written this book a week ago without the help of the other 65 authors. I'm grateful to them for their generosity and great good will toward the project.

I'm not a writer who believes in talent or inspiration, and I'm not a writer who took a lot of creative writing courses in college; they weren't offered where I went to college. I say this because I've always had a different concept of "workshop" than many writers.

To me, a workshop is something akin to my father's garage. A place crowded with tools and blueprints and scraps of lumber and spare engine parts. So, when I've been in workshops, both as a student and a teacher, I've always been pretty pedestrian and pragmatic, pretty blue collar actually, and the idea behind the book was to give readers and writers a toolbox for their writing, for their workshops. Having trouble with character development? Turn to page 94 and read what Lee Martin, finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, has to say. Unclear about which POV might work best? Turn to page 136 and take a cue from Susan Straight, finalist for the National Book Award. I want the book to become the Chilton's Guide for writers.

**You have one day to do whatever you want, eat whatever you want, go wherever you want. What will the day be like?**

Why do I only get one day? How many days does Tom Robbins get? This isn't fair at all.

**Pages Magazine named you as a member of "The Next Generation of Literary Lions". Do you think you've grown into your paws yet?**

Here's how big my paws are: After that issue, the magazine went kaput.

**You're crammed into the backseat of a taxi with one musician, one writer, and one actor. Who are they, and why does it matter?**

Are we splitting the fare? That's important. I don't want to pick artists who are just going to use me for a free ride uptown, you know.

**You were a professional skateboarder before becoming a professional writer. So, if we remove the superhero mask, which is the real Bret Anthony Johnston?**

Let's talk about superheroes, shall we. My favorite has always been Super Grover. He's actually in *Naming the World*, that's how highly I think of him. O brave new world that has such monsters in it.

**How many bones have you broken as a result of skating? Provide a diagram.**

I don't know. The broken bones are, in fact, the least of it. The worst injury I've had was knocking my pelvis out of alignment. I didn't know I'd done it for a few days, so I just kept walking around and skating, then woke up one morning and could barely move. Because I'd knocked myself out of whack, I'd been having to stretch ever so slightly farther to reach the ground with one of my legs and over the course of a few days I'd torn and stretched my groin muscles.

See, writing's painless by comparison.

**When can we expect the Bret Anthony Johnston Street Skate Extreme game?**

Bret Anthony Johnston only skates ramps.

**Did I sprinkle enough writing exercises throughout this interview to promote the book well?**

Let me check my Amazon ranking and I'll get back to you.

## Post

I've workshoped with Bret Anthony Johnston at the Iowa Summer Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa. We've shared beers and sushi. He defended my stripper with a knight's gallantry. He's tolerated my mocking of his footwear. He's Clark Kent and Superman: grounded, sincere, and able to leap tall buildings in a single bound if it will help you tell a good story. In the interview, we didn't mention his National Endowment for the Arts fellowship or his National Book Award. See? Literary superhero.

## good night, brown eyes.

i don't exist.

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daniel castro • 1.30.08

The days slow down, office white. Right now it feels like the sound of static anticipating its jarring release. Fluorescent light bulbs and daylight are one and the same. My eyes are weary with neon. I communicate through Post-Its and e-mail. I'm eastern, central, mountain and pacific all rolled into this mess of non sequiturs. Coffee and paperwork. Youtube chuckles, Facebook nudges. Patterns in meaningless data. I've always been terrified of signing along dotted lines. You've never been one to read through them. It's been this way before. We've walked down these paths, but always stuttering. Nervous. Half-hopes and "what-if"s. Walking bridges before burning them down. But it's never been like this. Like this, when I find myself throwing punches at the moon out of frustration. When I talk too much and make too little sense at night. Yelling through a cell-phone and grasping for any connection whatsoever. When... when? When was the last time I was really honest? To anyone, about anything. About where I'm stuck, about the way I feel, about my interpersonal skills and the way some relationships seem to end up disintegrating, like so much sand falling through clutching fingers.

Good night, indifferent brown eyes. I don't exist.

## Post

Funny you should ask me about this column. This was written just before I was laid off from that job. Nowadays, roughly a year after this was written, here in my new electronic cave everything is still the same; it's just a new office. Relationships still disintegrate, but some new, better, ones are created almost instantaneously. I even spend more time on Facebook than before, but I'm not sure what to blame that one on.

## **About the Authors**

### **Joe Procopio**

Joe Procopio hopes to start trading on his own name very soon, because too many people know what Max Barry looks like these days. He's written for a number of online and offline publications from the late, lamented Smug to the fancy-pants Chicago Tribune and also for television (Hip Hop Nation, Undiscovered Genius). He's a novelist, a shredder, and a joker, but also a family man, just not in that horrible Nic Cage way.

### **Jael McHenry**

Jael is tired of being stereotyped as just another novelist/poet/former English teacher/tour guide/"Jeopardy!" semifinalist/bellydancing editor-in-chief with an MFA who was once an overachieving oboe-playing alto newspaper editor valedictorian from Iowa. She was also captain of the football cheerleading squad.

### **Adam Kraemer**

A native of Elkins Park, PA, Adam Kraemer spends way too much of his time repeating "K-R-A-E..." He moved to New York City in 1998 and earned Master's in Journalism at NYU; don't let his writing fool you. He feels he is best known for saying the things no one is thinking, but afterwards wish they had been. He spends his free time wondering where all his free time goes and why he can never come up with a decent kicker for the ends of his articles.

### **Michelle Von Euw**

Originally from Boston, Michelle is a writer, editor, instructor, obsessive sports fan, loud talker, quick laugh, and chances are, she watches more television than you do.

### **Mike Julianelle**

Mike Julianelle is the kind of person who doesn't write bios.

### **Tracey Kelley**

Tracey likes to shake things up and then take the lid off. She also likes to keep the peace, especially in a safe, fuzzy place. She is the owner of re: communications, mainly because she was caught running with scissors in the corporate world and, well, people started to talk.

## **Erik Lars Myers**

An expert with pints, a master with yards, erik lars myers is a professional beer drinker. he has been drinking beer for various professional organizations and charity causes for years and is pleased to be able to lend his ample beer gut for the good of others. his current pet projects include two websites (the people's regime and topfermented), growing his own hops, culturing yeast from the dregs of your bottle of beer and far, far too many video games.

## **Jason Gilmore**

The Toledo, Ohio native has also been published at ThaHipHop.com, native magazine and Gadfly. His feature-length screenplays have been recognized by the Sundance Screenwriters' Lab and the Texas Film Institute, while his coming of age novel, *Somewhere Between Here and There*, is currently being considered by several literary agents. A short film, *How Shawn Parker Fell in Love*, in which he wrote, directed and starred, premiered at the 2007 San Francisco Black Film Festival.

## **Jeffrey D. Walker**

A practicing attorney and semi-professional musician, Walker writes for his own amusement, for the sake of opinion, to garner a couple of laughs, and to perhaps provoke a question or two, but otherwise, he doesn't think it'll amount to much.

## **Russ Carr**

Russ is available for YOU! A qualified graphic designer, manager, art director, advisor, consultant, publisher, editor, writer and SO MUCH MORE wrapped up in an attractive mobile case.

## **Maigen Thomas**

Maigen is a Flight Attendant-cum-Jumpseat Therapist, it seems. People come to her with problems, but people also don't realize she's hearing more than they want her to. She's traveling the world and writing about her experiences with life, love, food, travel and people. Mostly people. Because they're funny.

## **Alex B**

A happy-go-lucky raspberry swirl in a decidedly vanilla world, Alex B has a head for business, a bod for sin, and a weakness for ice cream during all seasons. As a bonus, she is even equipped with a wide range of big words to choose from. (Don't let her deceive you when she bats her lashes. She owns a whip).

## **Heather Millen**

Heather has a penchant for drama, both personally and professionally. She secretly wishes people spoke in song and wholeheartedly believes that everyone deserves a standing ovation now and again. She finds it appalling that people reserve champagne only for special occasions, when champagne is clearly best on a Tuesday, while riding the subway, accompanying a slice of kick-ass pizza.

## **Margot Carmichael Lester**

Deftly walking the line between fire-eating sideshow attraction and sex symbol for the intelligentsia. Margot's a journalist and writer, covering business and pleasure for a variety of newspapers, magazines and web sites across the land. She's also the author of four books, including *Be a Better Writer: Power Tools for Young Writers* -- co-written with her husband, Steve Peha -- won the 2007 Independent Publishers Association gold medal for teen/young-adult nonfiction. A Southern Belle, she was born, raised and still lives in Carrboro, N.C.

## **Daniel Castro**

Great, outgoing guy in his mid 20's. Works and parties hard. Obsessed with music. Oh wait, this isn't match.com

## **Reem Al-Omari**

Reem holds a BA in Journalism and is practicing it as an editor in chief of a newspaper in Denver. She loves animals and movies. Add books and traveling to the pile, and she's a really happy camper.

## **Robert Melos**

Robert is the author of the novels *Cool Mint Blue* and *Melba Ridge*, and is the creator of the on-line comix *Impure Thoughts* found at his web site. He is a staff writer for QBliss where he has a monthly humor column. In his non-writing time, when he's not studying the metaphysical or creating a tarot deck, he sells real estate in Middlesex County New Jersey, hangs out with his dog Zeus, and grooves to the music in his mind.

## **Dan Gonzalez**

Maybe it's you, maybe it's Dan. Things aren't quite the way they should be. And now it seems Dan's peace of mind has come up for the bidding, and those that he respects and trusts must all have been just kidding. Dan's little world has lost control, but still it keeps on spinnin'.

## **Cheryl L**

Photographer. Writer. World traveler. Gamer. Avid reader. Computer enthusiast. Connecticut yankee-turned-Chicagoan. Hockey fan. Drives American. Eats organically and locally. Supports no-kill animal shelters and children's charities. Likes intelligent debate.

## **Kevin Sonney**

Kevin Sonney - who, contrary to popular opinion was NOT raised by wolves - grew up in central North Carolina. He fell into the technology field by accident in 1991, when he gave up the wild and crazy lifestyle of an on-air AM radio DJ to become a mundane technical support monkey. The technology industry has never really recovered from this. In his spare time he rescues stray animals and plays video games with his two sons. His girlfriend, we're sad to say, helps him get past the really hard bits.

