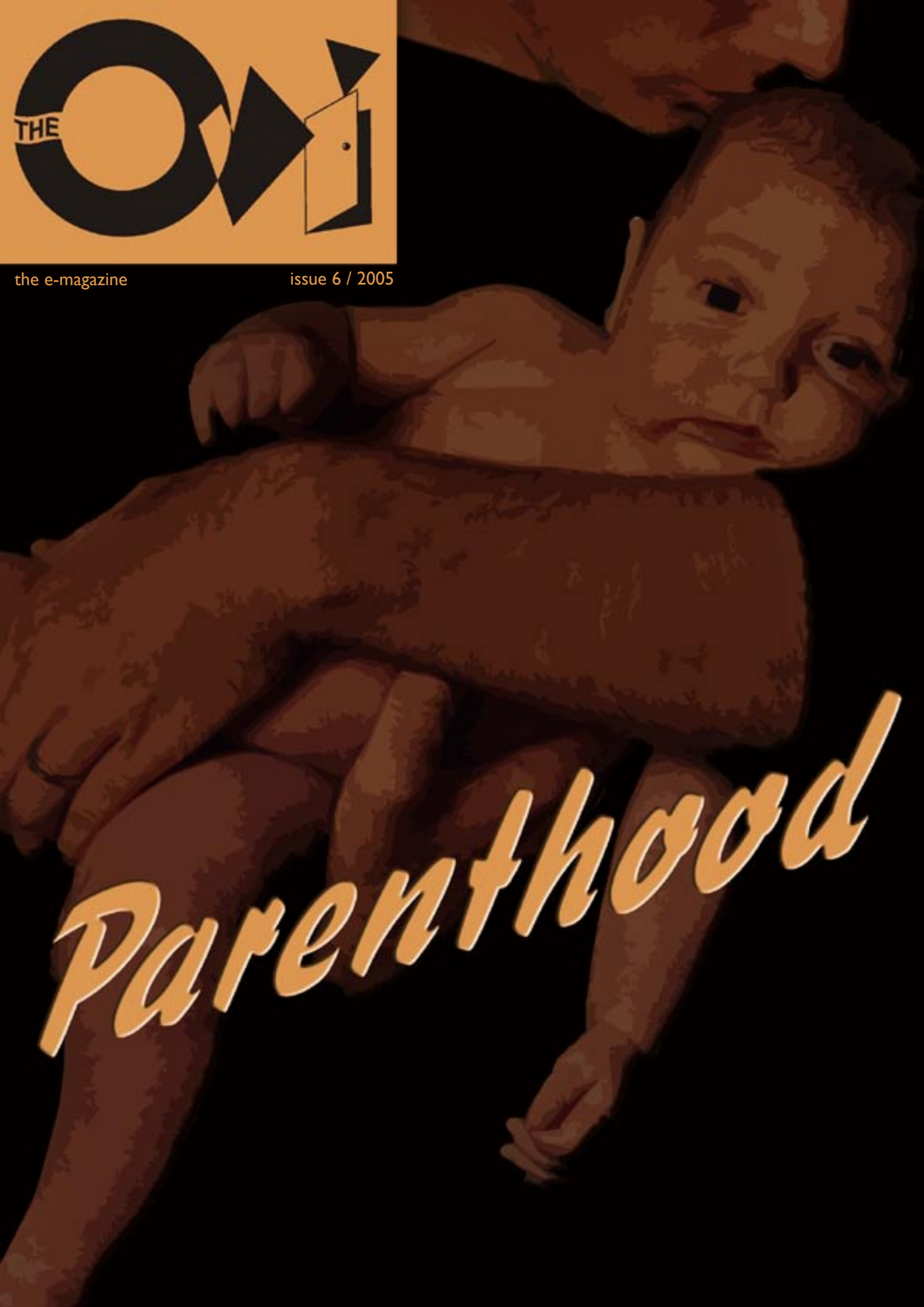




the e-magazine

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Parenthood



Can I ask the fathers a question? When do I become responsible and all grown-up? I have been a Dad for a number of weeks now and, to be honest with you, I don't feel that much different. Sure, my nerves are a little frayed with my wife, but I put that down to the 4am feeds, and I seem to have miraculously shed three kilos, but that could be because I have not had time to enjoy a few beers with the lads over the past few weeks.

'Fatherhood changes you!' proclaim all the Prepare Yourself for Parenthood books, but all I have changed is the bin bag full of dirty nappies and the way I address myself. Seriously, I have gone from calling myself 'I' and 'me' to referring to myself in the third person, it is suddenly 'Daddy will do that' and 'Daddy will wipe that' – is that it? A grammatical change is all they were rambling on about?

When the midwife first handed me my daughter (a recurring theme in my articles this month – the baby not the midwife) I looked at her quite baffled, as if to ask, "Why have you given her to me?" My brain could not comprehend that this was the little womb squatter inside my wife's belly these past 39 weeks and six days. This bewilderment led to issue six of Ovi becoming the 'Parenthood' issue.

Being Ovi, we are not writing about the preferred direction to wipe the mustard coloured shit off a baby's arse, nor will we lamenting the fact that the constant breasts on display are not for your entertainment. Ovi has tried to take the twist of parenthood, or should I say fatherhood, and given it some flavour, some panache, some flair and some of us really need some sleep.

The team have worked hard for issue six and we are once again grateful to our guests for bringing an added dimension to the proceedings and writing about subjects that do not involve placentas, epidurals or tearful men. We still want more guests to join us in our ongoing march to a blurry future, we can see something exciting far off in the distance but we can't make it out, similar to a shortsighted bloke before he puts on his glasses.

Thanos has been particularly gushing this month. He has been piling on the compliments and making me squirm with awkwardness. I even blushed a few times, felt the goosebumps on another and wiped a solitary tear from my cheek reading his kind words of fatherly, err older brotherly wisdom.

Before I come over all Waltons on you, I will bid you happy reading. Now, how do I remove this breast pump?

Asa



There are some times when you want to write about things you feel and things happening to you. Having an issue about parenthood and being a parent of a one-year-old little girl is all about you and, in this case, about me. But this time it is going to be a bit different. It's going to be about Asa, since it is only weeks since he became a parent.

Parenthood is a full-time job that expands in time and this is something I bet Asa's parents know better than anybody else. Even though we did ask them to write, unfortunately they didn't.

So, this is the sixth issue of Ovi magazine and the theme this time is parenthood. Perhaps the name should be new parents, but as usual it is a bit of everything. Back to Asa and, since he is a new father, you can read his sensitive and funny articles about his new experiences and either nod with understanding or feel envy. A very unique character once said to us, "Now with the kids you are becoming more conservative."

However sweet and nice we tried to be with a summerish issue about parenthood we had to face events in London that upset us. There is no excuse for the murder of innocent people. A murder is just a murder and I will never understand or forgive anybody who's killing for any 'good' cause. Who the hell thinks that killing poor workers helps the Palestinians or the Iraqis?

The event was quite strong and shocking for us since Tony, one of our guests, works near the area everything happened, but I think it is better to let Tony tell you more about all that in his article.

We have two more guests. A Canadian who really surprised me because I think he found the solution for the Middle East problem and I just wish people will read his article, or more to the point I hope some of the leaders from all sides, since the sides are not only two anymore will read it.

The final guest and I had a good reason to introduce him last, is Oliver a German who lives in Mexico. His first mail was about the name Ovi and how we decided it, the reason he was asking however - strange but true - when he was young he used to call himself Ovi, so you can imagine the rest. Oliver is environmentally sensitive and I really like his passion. I just hope that it will last for ever.

Finally is us. Our cowboy gives us a taste from the Americas and Wisconsin adding a poem. Me? Hmm, I think I'm back to my usual political self even when it comes to parenthood and tried to keep a bit away from my daughter in my parenthood articles and Asa, well he's full of parenthood.

Please do remember that you can write to Ovi magazine, you can send us your opinions and your articles, you are more than welcome. As I have said before, we like to have articles from people all around the world, including our friends from Japan that made a new record number of visits last month to our site.

You can always register in the Ovi forum, participate in our discussions or start new ones, don't worry we will all join in. So welcome to our parenthood issue. We hope you enjoy it and wish Asa and all these people who became parents on July 6th, 2005, to live the dream of parenthood.

Thanos Kalamidas

Parenthood



Delivering the goods

By Asa Butcher

Lea, our midwife
Kätilöopisto Hospital, Helsinki, Finland
6th July, 2005

Last month Thanos was taken by surprise at my review of a board game. Well this month I felt a profession deserved an iKritic, so midwifery goes under the microscope. Over the course of a week staying in hospital with my wife, I met a number of different midwives and was thoroughly impressed with each – most even spoke English.

Naturally, they all had their own style, personality and good-humour, but what struck me was how much patience they have. I guess dealing with hormonally charged, whinging, worrying, emotional fathers would teach you that, but they were equally as good with the mothers and babies.

It is their job to be helpful, but we all know that just because it is your job does not mean that you always do it with a smile and desire to please. They are able to tell a parent that their newborn baby is the beautiful in the world while visitors scream and recoil in horror. They can gently massage the newborn parents' egos with compliments about their child or adeptness at changing a nappy.

Their skills with a baby are unbridled. They handle a baby as a Harlem Globetrotter handles a basketball. At one point, I was expecting one midwife to bounce the little babe and shoot a three-pointer into the cot. When they wrap a blanket or change a nappy their hands are a blur and following two hours of trying to put the baby to sleep they march in perform some ancient pressure point trick that triggers sleep instantaneously.

All the time the father is doing his fair share of the caring the midwife loves you and will praise you. However, don't forget a breath mint or three after wetting the babies head, since fathers smelling of alcohol is strangely frowned upon in a hospital ward. When we initially arrived in our family room, the midwife offered to take us on a tour. Just as we were about to walk out, I asked, "Shall we leave the baby here alone?" I wiped my brow thinking that was one of their early tests of good parents.

The midwife was always a button away, which provided a sense of security and allowed you to build your confidence handling the baby – it seems babies chill out in the hands of a confident person. One complaint I do have about midwives is that some cannot take a photograph, but I guess that their job description does not require knowledge of aperture settings.

One final thing: Don't forget to support her neck!



Power of the name

By Thanos Kalamidas

"Have you chosen a name yet?" This is the question that every expecting parent hears dozens of times throughout the pregnancy and that is just from the expecting grandparents. Initially, the idea of choosing a suitable name for your child seems simple, you scoff at those who need Baby Name Books and you set to work convincing your other half of the name that you want.

Following countless vetoes and knockbacks you are forced to swallow your earlier scoffs and borrow a few name books from the local library. Every reasonable name that you hear on television, read in a magazine or have suggested to you by enthusiastic friends is considered and added to the growing list. Sadly, each of these is then vetoed by your partner.

Ok, now the baby is born and you still have not agreed upon a decent combination of names and everybody is regularly asking if we have chosen a name yet. The pressure is building at home and that with the stress of a new baby is not helping matters. Following my recent article about naming your pet, I shall see if the same criteria apply to naming your baby. To help narrow the field I shall stick to female names because that's what we need.

Observe your new baby: Following this guideline will result in your baby girl being named after one of the seven dwarfs, such as Sleepy, Grumpy, Happy, Poopy or Sucksonbreasty, but none of these would seem appropriate on her driver's licence in 18-years. I have always felt that your name helps to shape your personality to a degree or you fall into the stereotypes associated with them. Margaret is strong, Tracy is dimwitted, Jane is intelligent, Margot is scatty and Joanna is shy – am I right or stereotyping?

Suitability: Avoiding past girlfriends' names is advisable and will avoid any future awkwardness should you happen to bump into one, especially if they have named their son after you! This criterion also incorporates the necessity of choosing a first name that is a natural fit with your surname, so Sandy Butcher, Ava Butcher and Dee Butcher are all unacceptable.

Be unusual: Due to my wife being Finnish, we discussed the possibility of using a name from her country, but many friends and family are still struggling with Päivi and the Äs and Ös that her language serves up. Unusual can equate to brave with your choice, such as Gwyneth Paltrow and her baby named Apple, while the hippy era can bring inspire choices, like Sky, Destiny, Crystal, Melody, Miracle and Faith, but once again the Butcher surname would not be suitable for any of those.

Human Names: This is obviously continuing a family tradition or honouring a close friend or relative by using their name, with or without permission. One drawback maybe that their ego is carried away and upsets everybody at the christening, so you could always cross genders and change their name to suit, such Paul to Paula. This is beginning to feel more like the route we should take.

Not Too Many Syllables: Once a decision is finally made, you do not want everybody to start shortening it and calling her something else, "We have chosen Annabel!" "Anna, that is a nice name!" You realise that no matter how short a name is there is always somebody who will shorten it. For example, my name is three letters, yet my Dad calls me 'Ace'. Long names should also be avoided because you know how annoying it is to fill in forms when you are older and names such as Chardonnay, Charmaine and Katharine require extra wrist effort.

TV, Sports and Pop Idols: Strangely enough, my parents named me after a footballer and my middle name is after a rock star, so perhaps it is time to follow their example. I guess the days of Britney, Celine and Kylie are over, while Julia, Meg and Angelina made my wife frown and Venus, Ellen and Paula made me grimace.

I guess in the end we will just compromise and call her Ovi!



Parental panic

By Asa Butcher

Somebody asked me the other day if I was ready to be a father, to which I joked, “Hmm, sit up straight! Elbows off the table! Mind your manners! Don’t run in the house! Eat your vegetables! Yes, I think so.” Since then, the seed of the question has taken root in the fertilizer of my mind and been liberally watered with a dose of ever-growing panic.

What does it mean ‘to be ready’? We have all the equipment and a whole lot more. It appears as though my wife has been shopping in Q branch, shoving James Bond out of the way for the latest high-tech gadgetry. There are devices dotted around the flat that look as though they either torture the mother, pleasure her nipples or a twisted S&M mix of both.

Friends continue to offer advice to the father-in-waiting, but most of it is out of context and hard to comprehend. The friends are also beginning to have invites to the pub turned down, since I don’t want the story for the next twenty years to be, “Asa was in the pub when my waters broke.” Turning down invites could be a subconscious sign of my growing responsibility as a father, but honestly it is more to do with holding off embarrassing stories.

Can anybody be ready to be a father? My exterior façade has been brazen and brimming with confidence at the prospect, but when the lights are switched off and I see the silhouette of the bump beneath my wife’s covers...freak out! Tension headaches, sleepless nights and bruises from banging my knee against the cot on my side of the bed; she has not arrived yet and my physical condition is already deteriorating.

The local library has shelves full of books on fatherhood and parenting, while the net also has pages of conflicting advice, but my nervous energy hasn’t the patience to read all this information about bathing, discipline and nappy rash. My own personal argument is that my parent’s generation survived without any literature or guidebooks, humanity has managed this far, so there must be a genetic common sense when it comes to holding a baby the correct way up.

Waiting is the hardest part. The ongoing pregnancy has allowed me more time to dwell upon ifs and maybes, while the arrival of my daughter will force me to deal with the situation at hand and quit the daydreaming. I guess not knowing when the magic moment will happen has its share of frustration and tension because I am completely reliant upon my wife to send up the distress flare and push the panic button. We have both resigned ourselves to the fact that it will happen at 0330; the time that both our patience is at its lowest ebb.

I have digressed from the question, but that is how my mind has dealt with the situation over the past few weeks. I will continue to imagine, panic, chill, daydream and ignore the whole saga because nothing is going to change, except the quantity of painkillers perhaps.



The good father

By Thanos Kalamidas

I know that it will sound strange but thinking of my one-year-old daughter the secret of being a good father is not being a “father” at all. Counting a day with my daughter I found out that I have to act in a number of roles including cook, custodian, educator, playmate, warden, but if somebody could stop me and tell me halfway through, “Now, be a father,” I would have no idea what to do and how to behave.

I suppose having parents that became a classic example of the sixties marriage generation my role model parents were divorced and my father was like all the divorced fathers of his generation who can only be in two categories: absent but generous or just absent.

I don’t want to say that my father was a bad guy. On the contrary, he tried to do his best considering that he had to be in his office twelve hours a day and then he had some homework for the next day at home. He was one of these guys who always wore a tie and smoked one cigarette after another, only having time to check my school grades and occasionally have a game of chess, which I always lost since his attitude was that you don’t learn if you don’t lose.

Later another role model of being a father came from television, where people like Ben Cartwright from the old Bonanza series and his behaviour to his sons was forming the idea of how a father should be and later I thought of Bill Cosby as a nice and cool father.

A result of losing my father early in my life was never enjoying real fatherhood and getting scared of two things. The first was that if I have kids I might die and they will be left alone and the second was that I will never have the time to tell him the realities of my life and here I mean that he never had the time to hear my dreams, help me or advise me.

The combination of those and a small health problem I had to face over the last few years gave me a shock when I found out that I was going to become a father. To add to that I’m not young, actually I have a one-year difference from the age my father died.

Despite all my inner fears, I tried to find the manual of the good father and to my surprise I found out that there are thousands of books in nearly every language written to add to hundreds of thousands of internet sites; all of them with different options. To make it worse, every one of my friends with children had a different opinion on how to become a good father.

Finding out that there is no a leading way to the good father, I took the simplest decision I could ever take, follow my instinct and not listen to anyone. My first step was deciding that I don’t want my daughter to ever call me father, daddy or anything like that, just by my real name.

That was a couple months before my daughter born and since that day I’ve found myself in perfect balance with my identity because in the end that was it. It had nothing to do with the needs of the little finger holding my thumb but with my thoughts and ego.

I learned to love our mornings alone before she goes to day care, when we dance together to the music television and when father and daughter go to day care. I learn to love the sad look she gives me when I leave her behind in the day care and totally enjoy her smile when I’m back to pick her up at four. I learn to love her breathing and her tears when she has a new tooth and most of all I love to love her. And I think this is the only thing she wants from me, to love her. I’m not getting hysterical when she tries to eat the ground - in fact, I have joined her and I suggest you to try it.

We do have good time and I know everybody could go on for hours debating whether I make a good father or not; anyway, my little daughter sure seems to enjoy it!



Changes of a father

By Thanos Kalamidas

One of the oldest stereotypes has to do with the hard logical barbaric masculine and the sensitive feminine with the gift of birth. Actually, from the beginning of time humanity worships the beauty of woman through birth and has turned the womb of the woman into the center of the universe. And to a certain level this is right.

One of my favorite jokes from the beginning of my daughter's birth that my contribution to nine months' pain was a few minutes of pleasure - the reaction I usually get is pretty sad.

If all these weren't enough, hundreds of books have been written for the change the woman goes through physically and mentally after the labor, while ignoring the other half. Perhaps the revenge of the few minutes of pleasure is that men do change as well and in many ways. Mainly the change is mentally which makes it more difficult to identify the problems that come as a result. Every change in the following list is two ways, which can either be proven good or bad.

Confidence: the man becomes a member of a wider accepted club of fathers. The relationship with the kid helps the man to build confidence and self-esteem and that works two ways. The kid takes from the father's confidence building its own. For the first years the kid idolizes the father making him feel incredibly competent.

A close friend of mine told me after the birth of my daughter that he has good news and bad news for me. The good news is that for the next ten years I will have somebody who will totally love and adore me and the bad news is that after ten years I will have somebody who will totally hate me. This is when confidence can turn against the father. Confidence can turn to danger when the kid misbehaves in public - something that is likely to happen - then confidence turns into embarrassment.

Pride: every single step and every single action of the kid is a confirmation that the father is doing a good job in this parenthood thing. However, this can easily turn the other way using exactly the same example of the public misbehavior mentioned before.

Patience: things are going to go wrong one way or another, whether you like it or not. This is where there are only two options for the father, he can either take everything seriously and drive himself crazy trying to change the whole world in one night or he can deal with the situation with humour accepting that it is part of the father's job to make mistakes.

Flexibility: at the beginning of this relationship between father and partner it is very hard to tell the difference between the father's needs, the child's needs and the partner's needs. The needs of these three individuals vary in degrees of priorities and pro-

voke frustration and sorrow. A father has to be able to see the different points at the same time and take a position to balance a depended relationship between mother and kid and the partners at the same time - all that has to be performed at speed.

Childish: the kid gives the opportunity to the father to return to his childhood occasionally living in the worlds of Robin Hood, King Arthur or the Hobbits. Again the key point is to live occasionally in this world and not disappear into fantasy.

Creativity: I found out myself that my little daughter brought with her a different kind of inspiration to me and changed my writing style somehow. The father learns with the kids as well, either helping them with their school work or their hobbies like music, painting or even sports.

Priorities: most of fathers lose their selfish and self-centered behavior gaining a new awareness of somebody else who becomes the center of their own world. Strangely enough, this is a much stronger realization than the one triggered with the wedding.

Values: this is a very sensitive part because it can lead to a fundamental conservatism without a good reason. Suddenly material possession gets a different dimension and impor-

tance, while issues like crime, AIDS, poverty, energy policy or Middle East terrorism take on new values and suddenly start threatening child and family. This can turn to paranoia if not careful.

Having a child helps every man to clarify his beliefs and choices. Telling a kid, especially your kid, that the politician you didn't vote for is stupid is one thing, trying to explain to a kid and make it understand using simple terms what war is, what is the death penalty, why there is physical disability and why some people sleep in the streets drunk is a totally different thing that most of time changes your ideas in a way that may effect your and your family's life.

Being a father is not an easy job, but it is still an interesting job that you can always enjoy, especially expecting the unexpected all the time. The change coming to the man's psyche might prove more constructive than anything else. However, the material changes that occupies up most of the thoughts and worries are the least important.



My mom the ice queen

By John Pederson

We used to gather at the neighborhood ice rink at about the same time every night. We were on a tough schedule back then: dinner at six, followed by snowball fights, sled races, and boot hockey.

We'd savor the day's victory in the warming house until our parents came to get us. The other moms usually showed up in their husbands' coats and oversized boots to rush my friends off to bed. My mom came with a pair of skates over her shoulder.

These were no ordinary figure skates. Their white leather glowed against the snow; the blades were shiny enough to mesmerize the most hyperactive eight-year-old.

The skates were magical. We all knew it. We could see it on my mom's face as she carefully laced the smooth leather around her skinny ankles. She would shoot us a smile and tie them tight with two gigantic bunny-ear knots. But this smile was different from the one my brother and I were use to, the one we elicited almost on command from our doting mother. This smile didn't disappear as soon as I stopped making my "silly face" or my brother stopped hanging from the clothes line; it lingered independently and above us kids.

We followed her to the ice, but not much further. Neither of us could keep up with those magical blades. We watched. And like our favorite Disney video, the scenes never got old. With two step-and-glides she was swirling under the floodlights, sailing on the ice—over the ice—and around the two of us.

We were thankful it was a small lit rink or she might have glided off into oblivion beyond the floodlights. Sometimes I would forget that this ballerina was the same woman who washed my clothes and fed me squash. When she started skating backwards, I was sure it must be someone else. I slowly started to recognize this woman as my mom, or maybe, my mom as a woman.

After the loops, twirls, and spins, we would head to the warming house for a game of foosball. My mom never did anything competitively, except for foosball. She showed no mercy as she tallied the points against my brother and me. Who was this woman? She was certainly more fun than my mom but not exactly someone I wanted tucking me in at night.

The skates always came off. The three of us would walk home and set them by the door. Tomorrow there would be clothes to wash and squash for dinner. But tomorrow night was another story.



Rubbernecking

By Asa Butcher

Following the news that four explosions had occurred across central London on Thursday 7 July, my first instinct was to find a news source and find out more. As I sat watching the events unfold and witnessing pictures of the injured, the emergency services and the remains of the double-decker bus, I began to ask myself why I felt the need to view these macabre scenes.

More than 50 people were killed and 700 injured in these callous attacks on innocent civilians, but how much of their suffering did the world need to see? I was asking the same question back in September 2001 as the World Trade Center collapsed and we saw 2,749 die before our eyes.

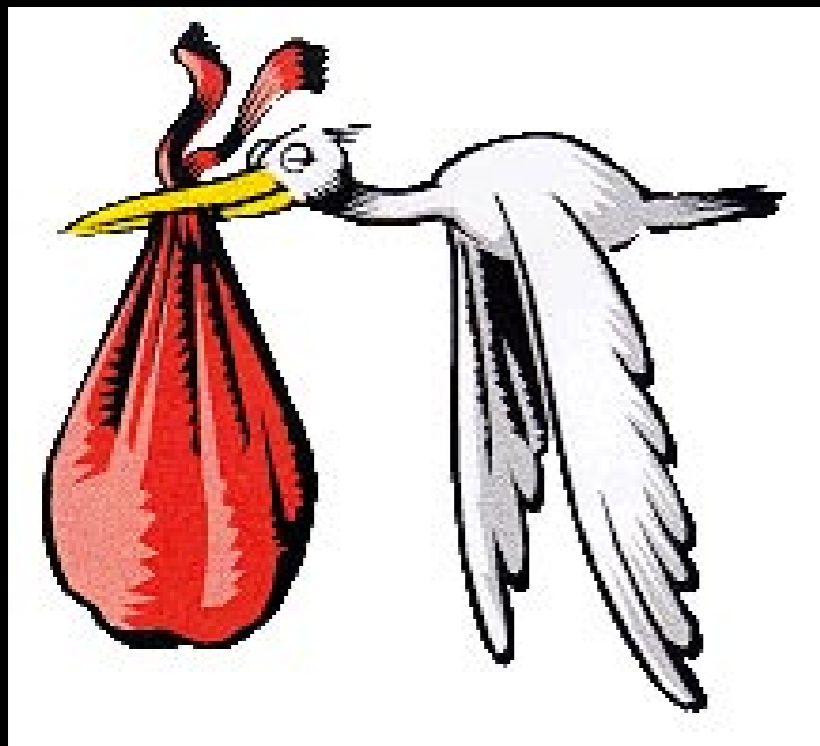
Disbelief at the tragic events and the sickening knowledge that human hands had planned and carried out such an evil action leaves you demanding to know why, even though you know that there will be no definitive answer as the events are still unfolding. The news channels are fed the same looped images until they can get the first briefings from the emergency services and the journalists are already pouncing upon the dazed victims in their attempt to quench our thirst for information.

The mobile phone networks were overloaded, so you turn back to the television set in the hope that you may spot a friend or relative that is unreachable, but again that is highly unlikely. Rationally, you know that all you can do is wait or that at some point you will awaken from this nightmare. Unfortunately, the bad dream continues and the interviews with bandaged, bloodied and shocked survivors are repeatedly shown as the initial abstract idea of the horror is brought home with emotional human accounts, bringing realization that it is real.

Watching these images from your living room has shades of slowing down to look at a road accident; uncontrollably you find yourself becoming a rubbernecker and then feeling quietly embarrassed at your uncharacteristic actions. However, within the majority of people, a veiled section of the psyche that has a disturbing interest in the macabre and obscene, it is home to an inquisitiveness that is buried deep in our consciousness and kept secret for fear of being labelled weird, creepy or freakish.

The media provides many disturbing images to its audience, often with little or no warning to content. Some of may have seen the photographs of hundreds of bodies washed up on shore after the Indian Ocean Earthquake or the video of people falling to their death from the Twin Towers, both are images we did not need to see, yet we saw them anyway and the journey to desensitised individual continued.

Information is the new currency, which raises the question 'what type of information?' Are the sickening images to which we are exposed classified as information, offering the experience of both good and bad in life or is what we see on our screens a surrogate for experience. Clifford Stoll suggests, in his book *Silicon Snake Oil*, that living through an electronic extension of the nervous system dulls many sensations and amplifies too few. Becoming increasingly desensitised to portrayals of violence is less of an issue than becoming numb to the inhumanity of the actual action because when we resign ourselves to more moments of terror, such as the bombs in Madrid and London, then humanity is truly doomed.



Free delivery

By Asa Butcher

For those of you paying attention, this issue is about parenthood because my wife finally experienced that mysterious sensation of her waters breaking. Finally, it happened, the event that signalled that the arrival of another person is imminent. The early contractions and all happily occurred in the safety of a hospital, so there was no helter skelter rush to the hospital and no taxi fare (ch-ching!).

Due to my wife suffering from pre-eclampsia, she had been in hospital for a number of days being monitored and the doctor's decision to induce the labour was decided on the toss of a coin. Last minute cramming for one of life's biggest tests was underway, while my lonely journey to the hospital was spent cleansing my body and soul of the desire to make crass and inappropriate jokes during the delivery.

Upon my arrival, I saw nature had claimed my wife's ability to converse by gripping her vocal chords in pain, but the midwife was not bothered so I pulled up a chair and began to make her acquaintance. "Is this your first delivery?" she politely enquired, "Yes," I replied, "Is it yours?" Five minutes later, the midwife and I were laughing like old friends, until we were distracted by the controlled breathing on the bed.

The arrival of the epidural and the departure of the anaesthetologist brought my wife's eyes back from the top of her head and we then proceeded to monitor the contractions of all the rooms in our ward. "Ha ha ha! Room five is having a hell of a time! Look honey, yours are the highest!" Answer-

ing with a cheery smile, she said, "And I can't feel a thing! What's the name of the anaesthesiologist? Let's name our child after him!"

Calmly reminding her that we are expecting a girl, she resigned herself to the effects of the epidural and exercised her rights as a pregnant woman. Moments before my legs were exhausted from carrying, fetching, rubbing and opening, she fell asleep and allowed me a chance to read a few chapters of my book. You can read the review in [iKritic](#).

Our midwife popped back in and thought it an appropriate time to ask where I was from, which we then discovered she had been to a town near mine and then my wife suggested something major was happening down there. The midwife sighed, rolled her eyes, snapped on some surgical gloves and delved, "Wow!" she exclaimed, "You are fully dilated!" We toasted this achievement by my wife, finished our conversation about the south coast of England and buzzed for a nurse.

A birthing pool was not an option due to the pre-eclampsia, so my wife had the choice of the contraptions within the room. Following a few moments carefully perusing the available options, she chose a delightful looking birthing stool. I believe it was made from pine, with a rather attractive veneer finish, but here I digress. The baby had made plans to check in, so I waited for the multitude of hospital staff to come dashing through the door.

"No Mr Butcher. It will just be me," revealed the midwife, before reassuring me that I can stay the safe end away from the end that resembled a melted strawberry ice cream gateau. Off we went, pushing when her body told her too, stopping when the midwife told her too, and then complaining that I was breathing too heavily in her ear.

Suddenly, the midwife brought the proceeding to a halt and instructed her to bend over the bed. Thankfully, she was not going to spank my wife for pushing when resting, the break was to slow the delivery down I think, except I was mentally gone by then. The occasion of it all was too much for me to take so I placed my body on auto pilot, which also put a stop to any bad jokes.

Back to the birthing stool and it was time for the last big push – over the top and all that. At the mid-way point, the midwife asked if we'd like to touch the baby's head now it was halfway out, which I declined since I was eating a BLT sandwich at the time. The final moments were a blur. I recall checking the clock on the wall and listening to which Simon and Garfunkel track would be playing, and then there was a baby attached to a cord in front of me.

Falling back on my vast word power and journalistic talent at describing momentous occasions, I said, "Wow!" My wife mumbled something about being grateful for not having twins and I offered her the remains of my sandwich. The midwife asked if I was ready to cut the umbilical cord, so I joked, "With my teeth?" Releasing a patient sigh, she handed a pair of scissors to my shaking hand and looked concerned. I reassured her that my hands always shake after witnessing a baby being born and, on occasion, after a heavy night of drinking.

Snip! Camera out and the photo frenzy could commence. During this quiet moment of mother and baby, I took the midwife to one side and asked her, in her professional opinion, if this baby was the most beautiful one ever? She confirmed my observation, so I awarded her the crusts of my sandwich and shook her hand. A job well done.



Mother or father?

By Thanos Kalamidas

For different reasons, it seems that justice is going to engage me in this issue of Ovi again and it also brings kids back into focus. It has nothing to do with Mr. Michael Jackson's case and the shocking, at least for me, verdict but for another kind.

It's a case that I've been reading in the papers and it has to do with a divorced couple and the javelin custody. The reasons the couple got divorced are not to know or be analyzed but for financial reasons the son stayed with the father for two years. When the mother asked the son to join her after finding a job and being able to provide a safe house the court refused and let the father keep custody.

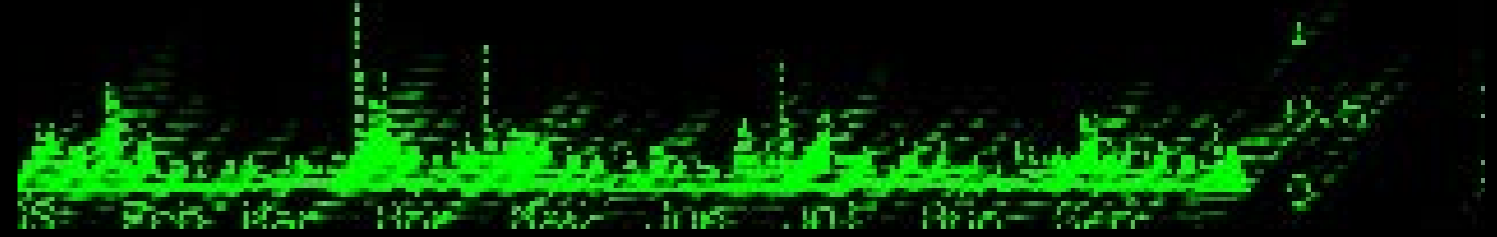
During the trial it became more than obvious that the father had brainwashed the son against the mother turning the feeling of love into hate blaming her for everything, including his nervous condition that drove him to be occasionally violent. The worst thing the court did was calling the boy as a witness and asking him to choose. The boy chose the father and in favor of the boy's psychological balance the court decided that the father should maintain full custody.

According to the mother, it seemed like a conspiracy between the father, the lawyers, the judge and the social workers. The court failed to recognize during the hearing that the boy was under the influence of the father.

The big issue here is the javelin's opinion and why the court thought it so critical. The court managed to alienate the kid from his own mother causing a series of problems that the boy will face later in life. In every case like that, the best interest of the kid is to have communication with both parents.

If the father thought that education is bad and he decided that the kid should stay home watching television all day long and during a court case the kid had testified that this is what he likes, would the court have accepted it? Why don't they accept that the mother has equal rights in the growth of her kid?

Communication with the parents is basic for the education and social behavior of every kid, so a parent that isolates and poisons his kid with the other parent is the least responsible to take over custody. The parents are responsible, not the school or the society, for the kid's education and this is what this certain court failed to see.



Markets on solid ground

By Tony Butcher

The more Europe changes the more the markets stay the same. London suffered a dramatic tragedy on July 7th, when bombers targeted Underground Subway stations with precision timed blasts, which caused over 50 deaths and hundreds of casualties. The days events shook the financial markets and the FTSE responded by falling over 200 points at one point in the morning.

Bond & Debt markets rallied as the possibility of future interest rate cuts became more likely. The Bank of England Monetary Committee and the European Central Bank were meeting on Thursday, so the response could have been swift. However, both the MPC and the ECB made the decision to leave monetary policy unchanged. Indeed, the FTSE100 recovered from the near 4% fall to finish the day 71 points down and by the close of business on Friday 8th the market had fully recovered. Bomb, what bomb?

London events overshadowed most of the politics of the month. Gerhard Schroeder played some interesting games after calling for a vote of confidence in his government. This was not altogether surprising given his defeat in recent German elections. For most onlookers the surprise came when he wanted to lose the vote. Elections on May 22nd had left the Chancellor without power in the Upper House, although he has a majority in the Lower House it was making economic reform almost impossible.

If he has any chance of remaining in power he felt an early election would be most beneficial, hence the vote of no confidence. His only other option would be to resign but he would not be able to stand in the general election. Delighted with his No vote the markets are waiting in anticipation to see whether he wins his general election due in autumn. The DAX, which is the German stock exchange, had a positive day on hearing the results because the uncertainty of the future had disappeared. This kind of activity is not unusual in German politics when Helmut Kohl did something similar in the 1980s.

France had a stressful time recently, suffering the blow of losing the European constitution referendum. It then came as a massive shock when London was chosen to host the 2012 Olympic Games, in preference to Paris or Madrid. It makes a nice change to see Britain rewarded for their great planning and effort which was put into the bid. I think it was the first time Britain has beaten both Spain and France in the same day since Trafalgar some 200 years ago; Nelson would be proud.

President Chirac then made his way to Scotland with the G8 and other invited leaders to meet Prime Minister Blair and discuss world poverty, trade and climate change. The whole occasion was clearly disrupted by the bombing of London, but Tony Blair was happy to announce doubling of aid to Africa and an agreement that climate change is caused by human activity and is an urgent problem.

Finally, the mighty world power that is Luxembourg put their name behind the EU constitution with a referendum on July 10th. All of the 223,000 voters made their decision and, with the majority in favour, Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker is saved from resignation. He still believes the constitution has some signs of life; I believe it may have to be cryogenically frozen until a cure can be found.

The markets performed very well amidst the uncertainty and disaster. They have proved that equities are stronger than ever at the moment. Trading on July 11th saw multi-year highs for major stock exchanges across the world. Even the strongest hurricane in the US for decades cannot change that.



July 7th, 2005: My diary

By Tony Butcher

I am sitting at my desk and it's about 6.40am. My boss and I have talked through what we want to be done and I'm getting ready for the day ahead. I'm flying high this morning, I have become an uncle for the first time, as my brother has his first child, and in two years time, to the day, I am going to get married to my beautiful fiancée. The papers are full of London beating Paris and Madrid to the Olympics in 2012 and everyone seems to have a small grin on their face.

The markets open quietly and I begin trying to trade a position we hold in the Short Sterling (UK) market. At around nine o'clock Garry, a colleague, phones to say he's had to evacuate from Bank underground station because of an incident on the line. This happens all the time in London usually blamed on signal failure, I give my boss a shout and don't think much of it.

A minute later, we get news on Reuters that explosions have occurred on the underground near King's Cross and that power surges are to blame. News of more explosions comes through and we begin to get sceptical about the reason given. The market starts to rise as this disruption could have negative effects on the capital's economy (I should point out our market usually move in the opposite direction to equity markets).

We get small bits of detail for about an hour and the market spikes up a couple of times. The reason for the explosion is absolutely crucial. In Spain, on the day of the Madrid bombing, our markets had massive moves because it was unclear whether ETA

or Al Qaeda was to blame. It seems insensitive but it was more or a concern who killed the people rather than how many died.

About 9.50am, we get a phone call from one of the other traders in the office who says he has just seen a bus explode near King's Cross Station. This changes everything, because before this the market is trading on the belief it could be an accident and that no terrorist influence can be confirmed. I am nervous, can I believe what another trader thinks he's seen, we have this news before SKY, Reuters or Bloomberg, the three major new wires.

I sat there shocked at what was unfolding in front of me, knowing it was less than a mile away. Then your brain begins to think at speed: can I take advantage of this, am I in danger, is anyone I know hurt or trapped, what is my position in the market and am I about to lose money. I take a small position in the market which will be profitable if James is right about what he saw, then it appears on SKY.

The next hour was a blur; at one point, the UK Short Sterling market moved 30 ticks, the equivalent to a 25 basis point cut by the Bank of England. It was panic, it became very clear it was terrorism and all markets responded. In the office, there were shouts of "Look at the FTSE!", "Christ! Look at the currency" and "Wow! Look at that bus on TV!" You get a couple of seconds every few minutes to absorb something on TV or listen to our Technical Analyst shouting some information then its back to trading.

As it slowed, people began to consider what had actually happened, the markets retreated a little as traders realised most of the move was overdone. By this time, most of the traders in the office had made their money and were watching the events on TV. We saw the bus that James had seen, ripped open by the blast. People felt different emotions. I only just managed to hold it together at times with so many feelings fighting for control.

The main reaction was anger, in fact it was almost outrage that someone would have the audacity to do this in London the day after we won the Olympics. You begin to think about the people involved, should I be here trading and making money from the tragedy? Is it moral? Or amoral knowing it is wrong but carrying on because it's what you do for a living. I don't think the firemen, police or ambulance crews stopped to think. They knew their job and did it superbly well and no doubt reflected later. We all reflected and were horrified at the destruction brought on our own back yard. I can only tell you it was a relief to finally walk through my front door that day.

I saw this poem written by Chris Neal after the attacks. It makes sense of many of the emotions we are feeling.

London Pride

You come to place your bags of hate
On bus and train, you made us late
Yet we'll be back again tomorrow
We'll carry on despite our sorrow

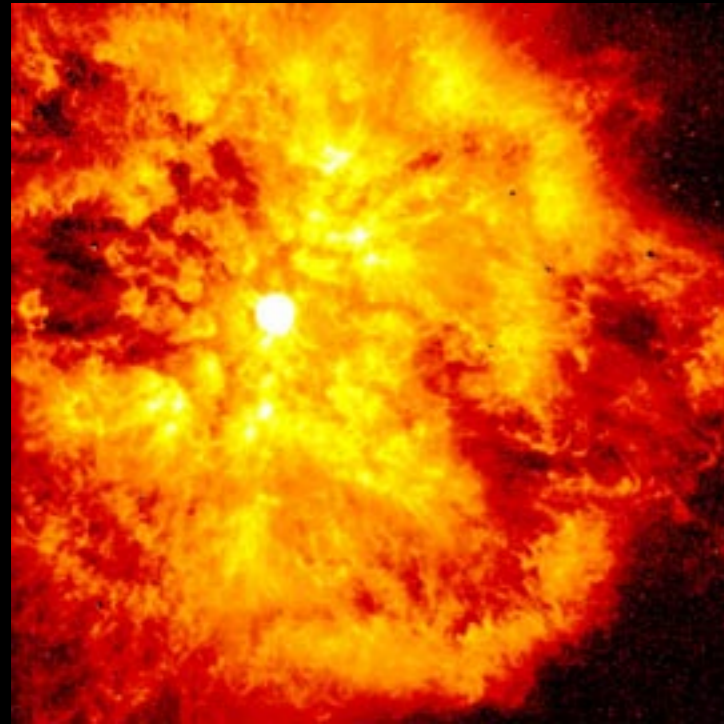
Your bags of hate caused some to die
Yet we stride out strong with heads held high
You'll never win, we will not bow
You can't defeat us, you don't know how

This London which we love with pride
Is a town where scum like you can't hide
Don't worry we will hunt you down
Then lock you up in name of Crown

We're London and we're many races
Just look you'll see our stoic faces
We all condemn your heinous act
You will not win and that's a fact

We'll mourn our dead and shed a tear
But we will not bow to acts of fear
You're out there somewhere all alone
There's nowhere now you can call home

Olympics ours we've won the race
Your timing then a real disgrace
Our strength you'll find remains unbowed
We're London and we're very proud.



Bomb in democracy

By Thanos Kalamidas

It was less than four years to that morning in September when this new nightmare began and, in the name of the civilized world, the President of the United States declared war against terrorism. Then on July 7th the latest to be hit was London, as many people had predicted the whole war had performed one giant vicious circle with tens and hundreds of innocent victims.

Still the worst victim, with the worst damage, hasn't left yet and it is our right to be free. Until now, somehow all this conflict between terror and democracy has damaged democracy with the citizens of the democracies having to be watched and monitored and occasionally of their own will.

It's like the joke with the policeman who asks a man to prove that he is not an elephant. Just because I'm a man doesn't prove it, you must have some solid proof and this is the point when people willingly prefer to lose some of their rights. Nowadays, too many people have European citizenship and terrorists don't have a flashing passport stamp saying "I'm a terrorist". Somehow you let the state watch you and monitor every move just to prove that you are clean.

Istanbul first, with Madrid second and with nearly 400 victims in total with London again on transportation proves that life is something worthless for these people.

Without judging, at that same time the eight richest countries in the world were meeting in Scotland trying to find way to help Africa, a few miles to the south the whole world was coming to terms with pictures of blood and terror on their television screens.

This was supposedly the moment the United Kingdom was the most secure place on the globe. One night before, while people were celebrating the news of London hosting the 2012 Olympic Games, the chief of the police was assuring the people that one of the reasons for the Olympic Committee to chose London was that London is the safest place in the world.

Just a few hours were enough to be proven wrong. What started with 9/11 has become a horror. Afghanistan and then Iraq have given all these fundamentalist groups the excuse they were missing at 9/11. Now we know that nobody is safe and that this cycle will not close soon.

Facing the problem of terrorism like a policeman has made it worse. I think they should face it as politicians and find a political solution instead of using the excuse of democracy trying to force democracy with weapons while they are using the excuse of democracy to kill the rights of the citizens.



EU steam train

By Thanos Kalamidas

Many analysts around the world and the euro-skeptics in Europe were all too ready to bury the EU after the negative referendums for the Euro-constitution and the failure of the EU meeting in Luxemburg. There is also the general skepticism inside the EU for the expansion, especially when it comes to Turkey.

Then came the meeting of the 25 in Luxemburg and the failure of an agreement regarding the budget and the agricultural policy for the next ten years, and the decision to 'pause' for a brief period and understand the problem.

This is what many analysts, especially outside of Europe, considered as the end. What they forgot is that EU is like a train, an old fashion train, with steam machines that sometimes find it difficult to move in the ascent but are slowly moving all the time.

The expansion to include the 80 million people population of Turkey has definitely moved back for 10 to 15 years and nobody is sure about the final decision. Somehow it looks more likely that Turkey will have a special relationship with the EU with some extra privileges and that's it.

Bulgaria and Romania are very close, somehow they are inside the walls and they are going to be full members by the end of 2007. Croatia is going to take a little more time but this has mainly to do with the international court and the war criminals. When they will arrest the last of them everything will speed forward to full membership.

In the Balkans, Serbia, FYROM, Albania and Bosnia, they have invested politically and socially into a future with the EU. For these countries constantly in danger of civil war, the EU dream is of huge importance.

For reasons clearly geopolitical, the EU has to take care of these Balkan poor relatives. The date for their membership will give stability to the talks and negotiations going on this minute between all of them and the minorities they host.

The budget problem and the agriculture policy, if you put aside the theatrical reactions of the British and the French, is easily sorted and they have already come to an agreement.

Britain, Italy, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria and the USA will do everything possible to help the Balkan countries join the EU mainly because nobody needs another war inside Europe.

There are two new countries that have shown interest in joining the EU family, especially after their 'orange' and 'roses' revolution and the change to a more western type democracy. Ukraine and Georgia have already started talking about it and the former USA Foreign Minister Mrs. Albright emphasized their European future in a speech she made in the EU parliament in Luxemburg. These two countries have the full support of the former East European countries and, especially, Poland.

The Euro is gradually coming to the levels that all the Europe analysts wanted. We all agreed that the Euro was very low in the beginning but suddenly it started climbing in a way that damaged exports and tourism. Suddenly, even a visit to the United States became cheaper for Europeans.

So, nothing has really changed. It's just a slow old-fashioned steam train that moves forward all the time.

Le Métèque

Check our inside magazine



How many frogs have you kissed today?





The Dutch Koran

By Thanos Kalamidas

In a very peaceful country like Holland, supposedly to be the kingdom of tolerance, the murder of a controversial director on November 2nd, 2004, provoked a series of reactions between the Dutch people and the Muslim minority, which partly led to the Nei in the Euro-constitution referendum.

In an article I wrote for the last issue about the No vote in France and Holland, I missed something with the excuse I didn't know. Holland had never had a referendum before and the Dutch people found this a good chance to show their disagreement on a series of issues, including the expansion of Europe to a Muslim country, Turkey.

The conversation has started for sometime now in Holland about Islam and with all the latest incidents is turning into a conversation about Muslim immigrants representing more as an element of insecurity than victims of an unfair international system. Those who came to Holland and to Europe, in general, trying to escape dictatorships, civil wars or genocides are now being seen only as a group of Muslims carrying with them unaccepted values for the western civilization, such as the women's role in the society and the house.

Many intellectuals in Holland, including a radical rabbi, have written over the last two years reminding about the hunt of the Jews during the 1930-1940. Naturally, to compare the anti-Semitism of that period with the Islam-phobia of today is an exaggeration and it can be acceptable only in the cause of a warning before worst comes.

After the murder of Theo van Gogh and according Monitor racism en extreem-rechts, an NGO monitoring racism between extreme rights, they counted 164 hate incidences with over 60% having Muslims as a victim. The 15% responsible for these incidents were right wing organization, which starts to show that the problem expands to the whole society, since a formidable number of new members have joined these organizations. These numbers show that these organizations have doubled their memberships since 2003.

For a long time, Holland has been thought of having an electoral system that can give the chance to any party, plus it has been the only European country with a small extreme right party strong enough to reach the lowest limits of the electoral needs.

Holland in the early-70s, under the demand of workers, had to ask working hands from countries like Spain, Portugal and Turkey. The majority of the immigrants then came from Turkey and everything finished in mid-74 under the pressure of the number of immigrants entering the country. Using the laws many Turks brought their family, including grandfather and distant older relatives. The Turk population amounts to something like 900,000 people (over 5.3% of the country's population), which are figures that naturally scare the Dutch people.

The Dutch government is under pressure. From one side the state is separated from the church but according to European laws they have to help minorities adapt to the local population's life, so they have to fund and help build mosques and temples. Something that naturally causes reaction from the population that sees payment for all these while they cannot do the same with Christian churches, for example.

To make it worse, in the name of anti-racism and a multicultural society, the Muslim minority is able to open and operate private institutions that promote the teaching and the lifestyle of the Koran. Something that people don't want to accept reminds them of stories they heard about similar institutions in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

An MP, Mrs. Ayah Hisri Ali makes a real strike against Islam in the name of women's rights and democracy and another Dutchman, Mr. Sefer, notes that: "We live next to each other without ever meeting, not going to the same pub or café, each community has its own school, butcher and probably soon its own street and neighborhood."

All these things became more important after the murder of Theo van Gogh and another controversial persona of Dutch political life, Mr. Pim Fortuyn known for his ideas about immigrants.

Perhaps Dutch people should look at the problem more calmly and try to find a better solution since these people are citizens of the country. We cannot blame the Catholic Church and the Pope for what the IRA does in Ireland in the name of Catholicism, the same way we cannot blame Islam for what some extremists do.



Army of One

By John Pederson

Today, Amanda Gino faces the same stress as any other college student during the final exams, but this twenty-year-old Iraq veteran also remembers a time when she struggled alone, far away from her fellow students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Although she never experienced combat, twenty-year old Amanda Gino fought her own battle during the year she spent in operation Iraqi Freedom. Gino says she suffered from depression during her tour of duty but denied the symptoms in the medical screening process. She feared the stigma of psychological disorders in the military and the possible delay of her release.

Gino remembers the experiences, "You go through these forms with doctors. I put down that I was feeling depressed and really down. The doctor looked at it and said, "Was this something you wanted to talk about?" Gino says she didn't want to talk about it because she feared the consequences, "With my leader being the way she was, I was afraid she would make me a hold over."

After spending twelve months stationed at Camp Udairi, near the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border, Gino looked forward to reuniting with family and friends and was eager to put the experience of war behind her. At nineteen-years-old, neither the weekend

reserve training nor the classes at UW-Madison prepared her for the stress of active duty.

Despite her unit never experiencing combat, she remembers the difficulty of military life, "I would cry a lot. It was tough being so far from anything that makes your life easy." But, according to Gino, she didn't want others to see her internal struggle. She says the stigma against psychological problems kept her from expressing her feelings, "Sometimes the military is like a big high school. When someone finds something out they just go and tell everyone. I didn't want it being put on my military record and have other people find out about it."

And no one did find out about it. Today, Gino has little time to think about her experience in Iraq. Yet part of the transition to civilian life is coping with the psychological trauma of military service according to readjustment counselor Tom Deits, "We don't want to make this process one where we just brush off human frailty and go on with our lives. You're not going to be able to digest it and just go on with your life."

There are thousands of soldiers, like Gino, who do go on with their lives. By hiding their pain, these individuals represent today's true "Army of One."



Road to peace

By Bohdan Yuri

“THE ROAD TO PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST OR THE ROAD TO ARMAGEDDON: WE MUST CHOOSE NOW!”

I'd come across an article that had highlighted a peace plan for the Middle East that was presented by Abe Hirschfield and Dr. Mohammed Mehdi. The day it was presented was September 11, 1974, a date that could have made history.

Now, thirty years later, that date 9-11 means more than it ever could have back then. Yet, on that day thirty years ago, was perhaps the most important event that might have prevented not only the airplane terrors but also the loss of many lives that were and still are being sacrificed for the sake of ill causes.

What if just three summers ago, when Arafat had proposed a ceasefire, Mr. Hirschfield's peace plan was again in play? It wasn't, and the violence in Israel only escalated. And does any Jew actually believe that the Palestinians will stop at only a small piece of their former land, not to mention “no right of return”.

Well, again, we are faced with a time when something bold needs to be presented. Only this may truly be our last chance for any true peace, not only in the Middle East but also perhaps throughout the world. As religions and philosophies are spread out so are the factions that are ready to explode into more wars.

As the “war” in Iraq has placed an ominous burden of any chances for a peaceful settlement, Israel and Palestine should lead the march for a peaceful solution. In spite of the string of assassinations, on both sides, of the innocent and the guilty, let all governments and organizations declare a new ceasefire.

Impossible, you say. Can't be trusted, butchers every one of them. (Describes both sides, doesn't it?) But, what if...

What if indeed it becomes possible that the first hurdle of

peace has been cleared by the agreed upon “true” ceasefire, then the next step should be taken with the utmost care as the next hurdle may cause us to fall and may prevent us from ever crossing that finish line of total peace. Yet, how should we proceed? Obviously, proceed with caution at most, but also with a possible belief and understanding of trust. That is the name of that next hurdle - trust. It always has been. And to clear it, what may our next step be?

Sometimes the most obvious step is the most difficult to accept.

In 1974, Mr. Hirschfield, a Jew, and Dr. Mehdi, an Arab, had presented a plan for peace. This may be its last chance for implementation. But it must be taken seriously this time, as what lies beyond failure may be annihilation. Everything else tried has been and will be a failure; Jerusalem will perhaps change hands once again through wars just as it did during the time of the earlier Crusades. We still learn nothing from history.

So here it is: the only solution never seriously discussed is that which will allow Palestinians and Jews to live side by side, literally and logistically as next door neighbours; sharing not only the spaces with each other but also learning to live as friends in peace, and with respect. Sharing the same environment, the same living standards, can make all the difference.

Obviously, this is only a pipe dream, even a madman's delusion, ask anybody. They would kill each other, wouldn't they? If the answer is yes, then what's the use of trying anything? But, if they'd learn to share the dream of better futures for their children then perhaps they can heal the wounds that are carried into each child's generation. After all, it is the children who must learn to live in peace from any time on. For the adults, the hate has already taken hold; therefore, only their God-given logic can overcome their hateful passions. And with each new generation, the hate grows ten fold.

Yet, peace can be achieved and perhaps this is how it can be started. Throughout all of the disputed Israeli settlements on the West Bank and throughout former Palestine, propose that the disputed housing communities shall remain intact and with a new plan for expansion, for the sake of this amendment, this experiment. Each house/apartment shall have as its next-door occupant the opposite, an even distribution of Palestinians and Jews; thereby, creating an environment of neighbours. Hopefully a community that can learn to live in peace and with respect towards one another, a new kind of country; even by name, if necessary. Perhaps, “New Jerusalem”, instead of Israel-Palestine, as these are the two warring countries that will not stop fighting until one side has complete control to call its own, and which name first?

Ironically, this plan may even create a bombproof and helicopter attack proof neighbourhood. Any explosions in such a neighbourhood would surely have victims from both sides, a deterrent, perhaps. But also, those who would live this experiment must and would need extreme courage, as many would try to destroy that kind of peace. But it would be up to the leaders from each side to also show the courage of leadership. Perhaps that should have been done in Gaza as well throughout these years. Instead what could have been shared will now be destroyed. And the divide continues.

Most assuredly, make no mistake, there will be problems from the start but how else can both sides learn to live in peace with each other? Let's see if it could work. After all, isn't that the most obvious goal?

A small portion of land for peace is perhaps the real delusion, a “pipe dream” lost in the smoke of carnival mirrors. Who would be satisfied at only getting back part of a house when the whole house should be yours after it was taken from you by force?

Every country/state is first a state of mind. The United States was first formed in the mind of freedom. The land only serves as a place to fulfil that dream of spirit. It is with that kind of state of mind that peace should be dealt, not by flags, walled boundaries, or religions.

As for the rudimentary issues of government (both religious and civil), all matters of government should be drafted to show equality, including such matters as teaching and understanding the history of both religions in the same classrooms; flags, combine both as to reflect the peaceful country of New Jerusalem.

If the fear of a Palestinian majority in any new government is a roadblock, then form a government and constitution that this “Holy Land” of the Middle East shall be shaped, represented, and governed by an equal number of ministers no matter what the population majority.

It isn't simple! But you have to start somewhere, lives are wasted and both sides are tired of it. Instead of saying it won't work, why not try to find a way to make it work. It is time to find out which leaders have truly attained their wisdom by age forty? But, if by the gift of grace, it does work at these trial sites then this approach can be offered throughout.

Surely, only a dream of hope, but imagine what true horrors may still lie ahead. So why not try hope as our dream. We already have insanity.

This time let us find and embrace “...hope, an unfolding lullaby for the soul.”



The Iranian wound

By Thanos Kalamidas

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's victory in the second round of Iran's presidential elections comes as a surprise only to the ones who seriously believe that there was even a trace of democracy in this country. Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had the support of the Islamic establishment in his country - translated as the mullahs - and that was enough to make him president whatever the wishes or the hopes were.

That there are two sides in Iran, the conservatives and the reformers comes as a surprise, since both sides have the blessing of the Ayatollahs and the guardians of the Islamic revolution. However, Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad promised that his government will include people from both sides and his aim will be only to help the poor of his country.

Iran is facing 40% unemployment and increasing poverty has led to inhumane levels. Aside from helping their people pray to an obviously merciless god, the only thing the mullahs managed to do well over the last few years was to provoke international opinion with their determination to make a nuclear plan with unclear aims.

During the same period, when the price of oil is reaching its highest level, an announcement from the new president that he will reconsider Iran's price policy and we should never forget that Iran is the fourth biggest producer of oil in the world makes the international stock market worry and triggered chain reactions to countries' economies.

For the first time in a long while, the White House had to agree with the Iranian left in exile that the Iranian people had to chose between the plague and the cholera; the only way to help and reform a rich country with very poor people would be if the Islamic dictatorship would finish here and now.

This is not going to happen soon. While the world will have to find ways to face a stubborn and irreconcilable regime, the only ones who will truly suffer are the poor subjects of Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.



Associates to a murder

By Thanos Kalamidas

A month ago my worrying family and friends called me to find out what was going on since they had heard on the news that an explosion in a chemical factory somewhere in Finland had caused a dangerous cloud of gas. They told me that supposedly the Finnish radio was warning people to stay indoors and try to avoid any exposure to the cloud.

My first reaction after checking the English version of the news agencies in Finland was to call somebody who could understand Finnish and tell me what was going on. It was only then that I found out that there is a small village in east Finland called Siilinjärvi which is home to one of the biggest chemical factories in Europe. I found out that the evening before, due to small accident, a cloud of a dangerous chemical had escaped clouding the nearby village and that the local authorities had warned the population to stay indoors until the cloud dissipates.

However, later the Finnish news agency had a one-paragraph long article informing about the incident, which actually disappeared the same evening and nothing was mentioned in the mainstream media, including radio or television.

It was as though there was a national conspiracy. However much I checked on the net I couldn't find anything about it, and then by accident I found somewhere that this was the second accident in the last three years by the same company.

Over the last few years, I've asked many times about what happened in Finland during the Chernobyl nuclear crisis and the answer I regularly get was that this happened in Russia, not here, so nothing happened even though Chernobyl is only a few hundred kilometers from Finland. When a similar horror occurred in Germany and Holland, Greece and Italy were in panic and started killing the cows, even though both countries are thousands of kilometers away.

What happened with Siilinjärvi Kemira is scary, I mean really scary, but what is scarier is that the media suppressed the information and much worse is that political parties and environmentalists kept quiet. I would imagine that in any other normal country I would have seen people demonstrating and the Green Party making it a huge issue in Parliament.

The national papers would give the incident blanket coverage and television stations would have full-day coverage from the certain village. What happened in Finland? Nothing! The Green Party keeps dreaming about the free dope, ignoring the real problems and the people still worry for the lotto numbers or the cost of beer.

The only answer I can find to all this - however stupid it sounds - is that these people think that if they talk they will harm the good reputation of their beloved country, forgetting that by ignoring it they are becoming associates to the murder of their own kids.

You can't save the world!

By Oliver H.



“You can't change the world!” I have heard that enough times in my life. Considering I'm 20 years old, I sometimes feel like that is true, but the real thing is that it isn't. Why? Because life is a gift and it's a way of being in which we are changing the world without even taking notice of it. We transform the air surrounding us into Carbon Dioxide for the plants or pollute it with our cars. Depending on our mood, we influence others positively and negatively - there's that saying: To fight and love, two are enough.

I was born near Guadalajara, Jalisco Mexico. My mom is German and my father was Mexican. From there my mom, dad and I moved to Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco Mexico. My father died when I was three-years-old in a car accident and still I can remember him, even if it's a dark memory like those black & white movies. They say he was a good person, always helping others. He had a car rental “Quick” that still exists today in Puerto Vallarta, but it doesn't belong to us anymore.

I grew up with my mom in Puerto Vallarta until I was five, then we moved to Cancun where it was nice and calm in those days – you can't compare it with today's Cancun. I remember flying to Germany for the first time alone aged four or five. I flew for almost 12 hours every year for vacations to Munich and then two hours by car to Muhr am See in the north, Franken, where my Grandmom lives. My Grandfather died a short time after I was born, but he got to see me as a baby.

You could say I grew up surrounded by women and still I'm not gay. I think, well, I don't like men, not even HuMen ;) We always had those Christmas Days where the tree was magically decorated in the house and it was snowing while we kept warm beside the

fireplace, then like magic the presents appeared under the tree! Not too often, we went to church. I never really believed in God and it's still a mysterious thing for me to explore in Life.

Anyway, I grew up with a lot of believes and good thoughts. My mom did everything she could for me. She was and still is my protecting Angel. When I was ten we left Cancun and moved to Munich, where I was integrated into a school. I was always amazed by Germany and its clean streets and snowy winters. I don't know if it was me or the world around me, but something had changed. Some would call it growing up...but I felt that every day I was losing something.

Probably what lets us act and think as a kid is all the protection that surrounds us. If there's a problem, mommy will fix it. And suddenly there are things that come up, that mommy can't fix, such as fights in school, being in love, feeling alone, feeling the hate and seeing the bad side of the world.

I suddenly realized that everything I thought I knew suddenly was strange to me. I used to believe that people are like the nice stewardess lady that accompanied me on all the 12-hour flights, who worried about every problem I could have. Well little Oliver, your eyes aren't that closed anymore. I used to believe that police would protect, even if they had to face death! But if I tell you that in Vallarta they protect known drug dealers when they host their public parties on the street, including music bands that cost more than \$10,000! And the drug doors, where everybody can buy their drugs are wide open. I remember seeing a friend of mine powdering his nose in front of the police cars. “What about them?” I remember asking him. “Oh, those guys? They're paid to guard

everything. Don't worry.” Huh? I couldn't believe my eyes or my ears, but now things like that really don't surprise me anymore, especially here in Mexico.

Now I think often about the Human Race. It's so intelligent, it's hard to believe we are killing our own species. I sometimes feel ashamed to name myself a “Human Being” because for me it has almost nothing to do anymore with “Human”. We are intelligent enough to invent fire, but we forget the fire extinguisher. We invent cars, but don't care about pollution or security risks! We invent GOD, and GOD'S WILL to fight wars and kill ourselves. We make rules, so we can break them and punish others. We point with the finger and don't care about the fingers pointing to us!

What can I say? I feel very, very lonely and ashamed of what my species has done to this world and I'm still trying to create a conscious for myself that gives me self-confidence and lets me act responsibly for my actions. That's almost impossible to do without getting into a moral conflict. I eat meat and I don't care at that moment if that animal was treated well, while it is the same with a drink. I buy a Coca-Cola and indirectly sponsor companies that are destroying the world! I give a dollar in Church and guess what! The family of a friend of mine were the ones selected by the Priest to count the money.

Every Sunday my friend showed me a 20cm high and 50cm diameter bunch of uncounted money covered with a simple towel over the desk of his family with letter envelopes in which the counted money should go. Of course, the family wasn't there, but sometimes he grabbed a bunch and then we had an expensive night. The first and last I must add. Magical things happened that I almost got my nose broken by his “friends”, crashed my mom's car and so I called it a warning from God and never agreed to that sort of entertainment anymore.

Anyway, I have been through enough things to realize that I, and only I, have the decision and power of guarding those wonderful thoughts of doing something good in the world in my head. The power of positively influencing the people that surround me, giving them a bit of protection we all had when we were a foetus and somebody worried about us.

“You can't save the world!” There it is again. I can't be with every child that is being brutally violated at this exact moment. I can't save the animals that are losing their homes, and I CAN'T clean up the mess everybody does consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly. “You can't be thinking of all the animals suffering! You're just hurting yourself! You have to ignore it!”

What I always think in these cases is, “I can't be an unworried happy ignorant living in an unrealistic world like so many others, but I can't be suffering in a sad realistic world like few on this planet.” I can make a little space in my head to keep such “truths” in me. Just in case someday I have the key to do something big. I think it will be someday, if I am not killed by a car or by breathing the polluted air in the central heart of Mexico City. In fact, I can't smoke anymore and that's a good thing. The air is so dry and itchy, I feel better drinking tea right now.

I have taken decisions. I have to remind myself constantly because feeling alone and isolated in this world lets you believe that, “You can't save the world!” I remind myself it's not about saving it; it's about being part of the “change” and becoming a team member, like a good ant. There's another saying that says: Watch the ants and you will learn from them.” Well, I'm happy to be one of many, even if we aren't that much and step on each other's feet in the street. We communicate and keep connected through our hearts and thoughts.



Anti-smoking hysteria

By Thanos Kalamidas

From June 1st, Sweden became the third European country to forbid smoking in public places even in open areas, such as parks, squares and alleys - except in the places there is a sign. Ireland and Norway had been the first and who knows which others are going to follow.

The excuse has been the protection of public health, even though at the same time thousands of products proven to cause cancer or using cancerous material are in the shops and supermarket providing easy access for everybody, including products for kids.

60,000 people die every year in Europe because of the cities' pollution. 10% of the kids in Europe suffer from asthma for the very same reason, then there is an increasing number of kids with leukemia and nobody seems to do anything about those.

Logically for our protectors of the public health, we have two kinds of cancer, the good cancer that there is everywhere around us and it is permitted to exist and the bad cancer that comes from smoke. It is for this bad cancer that we have to punish the smokers.

However, punishing the smokers is not something new in history; the first one to punish smokers was the Holy Inquisition and the Catholic Church. In Orthodox Russian, the smokers were publicly lashed, had their noses cut and then sent into exile. In Muslim Turkey, they used to stick the cane of the nargileh in their noses and even the non-violent Buddhists in China were cutting off their heads. While the ones who actually took the same measures against smokers were the Nazis and the enemy of smoking was leader Adolf Hitler.

I'm not trying to compare anything here and I do understand the non-smokers. What we are really missing is that the whole thing has become a strong prejudice against smokers who have to live now in an alienated world lying about their life. If they want to be accepted socially and have work, they have to hide their identity and that takes us on to other examples. Let's hope this growing prejudice won't end with racism and then...we have a serious problem.



One bobber at a time

By John Pederson

I used to have a tackle box. I remember when I got my own and no longer had to share one with my brother. We would sit on the porch, organizing our lures. I remember the smell of plastic worms and fish attractant that would leave tiny oil spots on the water. Rapalabs treble hooks, and, of course, bobbers of all shape and sizes.

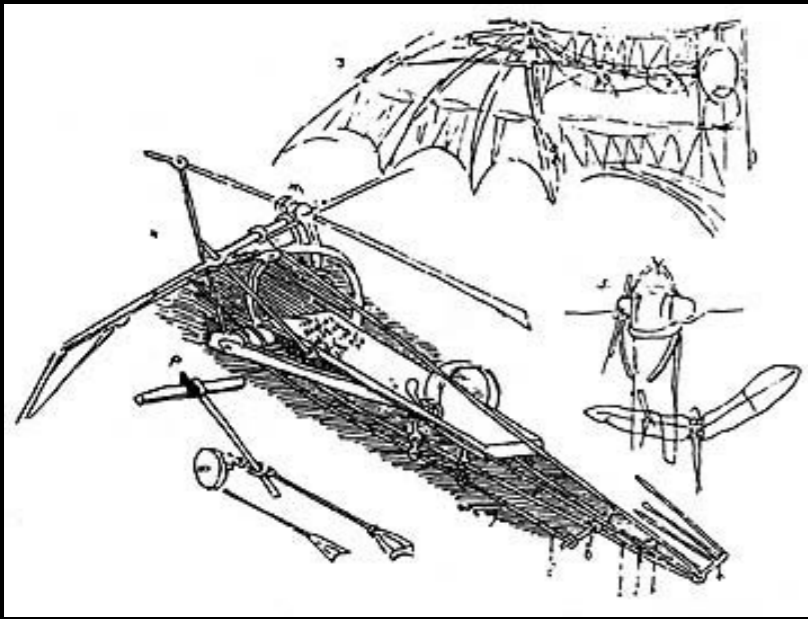
My box actually started as a bobber collection, the hollow plastic ones were all my dad would entrust to me. I graduated to slip bobbers and then to hooks, I still remember my first pack: they were "eagle hooks", beautiful golden golden barbs from my uncle—I never took them out of the package.

Each birthday and Christmas made my collection grow more complete, independence seemed to be the goal, autonomy. Our boxes grew larger and larger, "Bass-a-Reinos, wire leaders, compact scissors, everything we needed for the catch of the day. My dad would come from Mills Fleet Farm with an orange bag of the latest fish tackle technology; his boys were to have every advantage in the great sport.

Soon we did it ourselves. We grew less and less dependant on dad's magic box, as he gave us the tools to do it ourselves. I wish I could go back now and empty my box, throw my lures, my blind search for independence, overboard.

I wish I knew that the time would come when, whether I liked it or not, I would have to bait my own hook, tie my own knots and detangle my own line. I haven't fished for a long time. But the next time I do I will not take my own tackle box, full childish pride. I will use my dad's if he will still let me—not because I need to—but because I can.

He taught me to fish knowing I would someday rather hang out with girls, because he filled my box with dreams and tools that would be used to separate us, because I can now fish without him, but would never want to.



Is it a bird?

By Asa Butcher

Bored this August? Why not fly to the UK, head to my hometown, dress up in a funny costume and jump into the English Channel? You can do it for charity or you do it for financial gain, either way, you will end up bobbing in the cold waters with the cheers of the crowd ringing in your ears.

The Bognor Regis Birdman is “a flight competition for human powered flying machines” that involves individuals (or pairs) launching from Bognor’s 140-year-old pier and trying to fly/glide/plummet/tumble the furthest distance before plunging into the sea below. There is a generous reward of £25,000 for the furthest flight over 100 metres, although the record currently stands at 89.2 metres.

The origins of this crazy contest began in Selsey 1971, another seaside resort on the south coast, but the crowds were becoming too large by 1978, so it was moved to its current location. Moving further down the coast provided a higher take-off platform and slightly warmer water for the serious competitors, while the event also began to attract the attention of the world press and D-list celebrities, such as Eddie the Eagle.

Every year almost 30,000 people watch from the shore and millions tune in watch worldwide, while in excess of £70,000 has been raised for charity. This year there are 20 serious entries selected from all over the world, including USA, France, Australia, China, Canada, Taiwan, Ireland, Japan, Scotland and England to name just a few, which is a new record for the contest.

Following a technical error the first year, the contest is now held at high tide and flyers can rely upon sophisticated measuring equipment to triangulate their exact distance. Many of the charity flyers manage only a few metres, such as the Birdman’s first blind competitor last year who dressed as a flying piano.

Bognor’s Birdman takes place over two days this year, so try to attend and witness a spectacle that guarantees to bring a smile to your face. If you are interested in entering, then check out their website and ask for an application pack for 2005.

Happy flying!

<http://www.birdman.org.uk/>



Olympic problems

By Thanos Kalamidas

For the last year and because of the Olympic Games in Athens, I wrote a series of articles for different papers. It was a weird feeling since I opposed the idea of Greece hosting the Olympic Games from the beginning. I was against the way they have become and I was never happy to see how right I was with a poor country taking over such a demanding project.

Not that the Greeks failed. They totally succeeded in transforming Athens into a new city and giving the world one of the most beautiful stadiums and the safest games. But when the bill came they found out that even their grandkids will have to pay for these magnificent stadiums, and to satisfy whom? Coca Cola and Canon, Nokia and Vodafone. The highest cost came after the international community demanded a safe Games which translated to €4 billion and a luxury cover for the Olympic stadium which totaled €1 billion.

I’m not saying here that London will have a better destiny since - except the pride to host the Olympic Games - nothing will change the situation of the nearly 600,000 homeless who slowly die from poverty on the pavements and the Tube. They are going to be an extra cost since London, like Athens, will have to move them somewhere else so the happy American tourists will not see them and spoil their enjoyment of the Games.

Seeing some of my friends so happy I didn’t want to remind them of these numbers, I didn’t want to tell them that Great Britain has a huge problem of underage single mothers who live in conditions of poverty and I became cynical enough to say well it is their choice and, like Athens, it seems that 15 days of glory is more important for them than 600,000 dead citizens of their own country.

And please don’t tell me here that the Olympic Games attract more tourists. Athens has on average one million visitors to the Acropolis hill every month from March to October. Last August 1.4 million people visited the Acropolis during the Olympic Games, an increase of 40%, but it was 700,000 in June, 600,000 in July and just 500,000 for September.

There is the excuse that people saved their holidays to combine a visit to Acropolis and see the Olympic Games, but if you add up the numbers you will see that they don’t work so well.

I saw the 3D animation with the plan of the Olympic village and the new stadium in London and I was really impressed with the amount of greenery and parks. It looks beautiful and I’m 101% certain that it will look exactly the same in 2012 but what’s going to happen with the Olympic village after the Games?

Are they going to house all these homeless people? Please don’t have illusions, don’t expect all these beautiful parks to be wasted on the dirty alcoholic homeless. They are going to be luxurious houses for the new liberal yuppies.

Coming to safety, tragically the night before bombs exploded in the center of London, the head of Scotland Yard was assuring everybody that London is the safest city in the world: let’s see how many more billions this will now cost.

I didn’t say anything about the Olympic Games of 2008 in Peking, since I still haven’t understood how the Olympic committee, which is so sensitive to democracy, allowed a country ruled by a monolithic party, with no respect for human rights to host the Olympic Games. China is going to use every possible resource to make a successful Games, including the slavery of a nearly billion people in the name of the great wheelman.

I would have never written all this if the modern Olympics had the spirit of the Ancient ones that tried to promote peace, equality and love for the nature. Nowadays, the Olympic Games are all about Coca Cola, HP and television adverts. The only things I can wish is these London homeless people to rest in peace and send the Olympic committee to hell.



Radical, not political

By Asa Butcher

Advancement of the football zine movement in the late-80s did provide supporters with a host of alternative and radical media to choose from, while the initial success proved that the market was there and interest was high. The advent of this medium was not purely driven by zines; some had become hybrids incorporating characteristics from mainstream magazines. The combination of traditional zine and magazine conventions placed these hybrids in the position of having authenticity and credibility, but could they have both?

Two of these hybrids were *When Saturday Comes* and Newcastle United's *The Mag*; one described itself as a 'half decent football magazine' and the other as the 'Independent Supporters magazine', both followed a few conventions of both mediums but as their popularity has grown they have taken on an appearance all of their own.

Many of the zines that emerged during the boom followed a standard zine formula that was parodied in an article by Tom Davies, in *WSC#43*. His representation of the average simulacrum of a male zine writer began with a five-point plan that began by

exposing the real inspiration behind many zines, which was just to see your name in print and not to articulate the fears of the football fan. He continued by detailing the required inclusion of a badly drawn cartoon of your rival manager's sexual deviancy; distribution proving who your real friends are; use obscure tracks from your favourite band as match report headlines; and avoid extremist Militant politics.

In only a short period, the zine had acquired a set of stereotyped features, which may explain why some editors adopted a magazine-hybrid. Most who ventured into this publishing sub-culture did so not because of ego, but to rally against the institutions that were ignoring the problems.

The *Mag*'s editor Mark Jensen explains that he saw no conventions at the time, "The whole thing with the fanzine culture was that it could be anything you wanted it to be, so a fanzine doesn't have to be photocopied, hand-written or whatever, as long as the core thing is that its written by...people who pay to go to the matches, not these journalists who turn up in the press box and are on expenses."

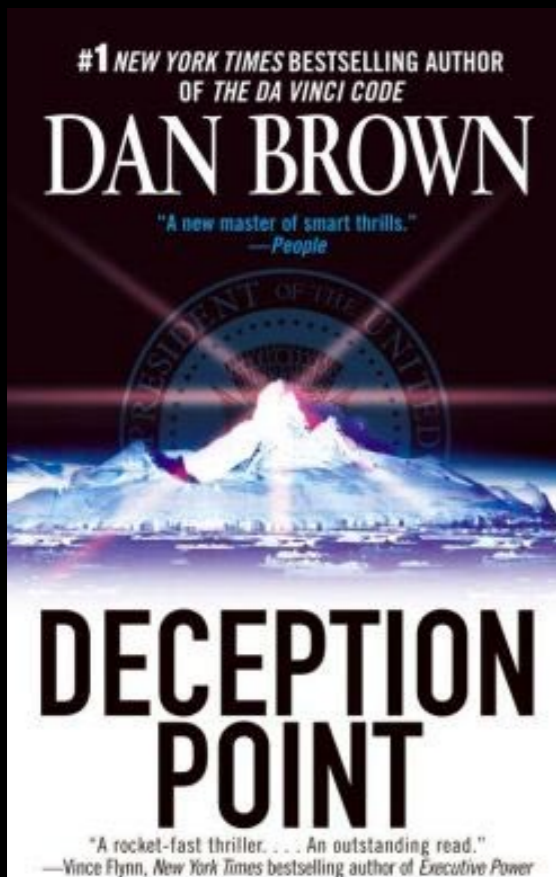
Mark considers that his readers view *The Mag* as a magazine but realistically it was a magazine written by fans. The content of *The Mag* is anti-establishment, there are typos and it fulfils the criteria laid out by theorists, such as Stephen Duncombe, on the characteristics of a zine.

Duncombe describes zines as, "non-commercial, non-professional, small-circulation magazines, which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves". However, *The Mag* contains advertisements, has always been produced on professional equipment, has a circulation of 12,000, Mark has a staff of over 40 writers, employs over 20 match day sellers, articles do not always unite readers and the editor is commonly quoted in the mainstream press.

Therefore, if it is not a zine, what is it? The difficulty in defining its position in the media stems from the confusion of the term 'alternative media', which has become an all-encompassing definition with its boundaries increasingly blurred. In his book *Alternative Media*, Chris Atton states that his own model of alternative media is as much concerned with how it is organised within its sociocultural context as with its subject matter.

Atton begins by highlighting the findings of the Glasgow University Media Group and their view that industrial relations are always from the position of the powerful, such the board of directors, politicians, Sky television, while those of low-status, the supporters, are shown as irritants.

The rule of the dominant or hegemonic powers in society has always been the antagonists for inciting producers of alternative media to rise up and resist the ideologies disseminated by them. Whether encouraging anarchy, condemning capitalism, criticising mass media or championing their own political stance, the alternative media continued to flow against the tide of culture produced by the mainstream media. Antonio Gramsci termed this counterhegemonic culture and it has since been established throughout zines and other modes of participatory culture.



Dan Brown: Author

By Asa Butcher

By Dan Brown
Pocket Books, 2001

Dan Brown, or Mr. Da Vinci Code, has written more than one book some of you maybe shocked to learn. In fact, this is the first Dan Brown novel I have read and that means that I am one of the few yet to read the aforementioned much-discussed book. Dan Brown is new to me, but following the completion of *Deception Point*, he will no longer be a stranger in my bookcase.

Deception Point feels as though it was written in the staff room of a University campus. By this, I mean, that there are liberal doses of history, geography, technology, science, politics, philosophy and English literature, naturally. These individual subjects are blended together to create a very interesting story that makes you stroke your chin and say, “This could really happen.”

The story follows Rachel Sexton, an intelligence analyst for the National Reconnaissance Office, who is asked to verify the authenticity of radical discovery beneath the Arctic ice. A bold deception is discovered and she finds herself being hunted by a deadly team of assassins before she can warn the US President. There is never a moment during the story that makes you snort in disbelief and this made me enjoy the book even more.

“What if” books are one of my weaknesses and this book taps directly into that passion. The book relies heavily upon scientific analysis of problems and events, such as glaciology and oceanography, but Dan Brown approaches these complicated subjects

with a flair for simplifying it to a notch above patronising. The acknowledgements give the impression that his research was important to him and this reinforces the idea that this fiction could easily be fact.

Dan loves his technology. He really loves gadgets and equipment. During some of the action sequences, you feel the text has been lifted from an arms dealer’s catalogue: Delta-One was preparing a dehydrated protein meal when his watch beeped in unison with the others. Within seconds the CrypTalk communications device beside him blinked on alert.” Every page seems to have reference to the latest technological advances, but the author states at the very beginning that all the equipment in the story exists, which makes you shake your head in quiet amazement.

I loved the characters in *Deception Point*, especially the ambitious Senator Sexton and the quirky Dr. Corky Marlinson. There were not too many clichés in the main characters, just enough to forgive Dan and accept them as quick character developments.

Overall, *Deception Point* was a great book to read over a few days. The ideas made me open my eyes to the possibilities to deceive the public and the technology that is available to help them. I just hope that the Delta Force are never after me.



You and the Little Mermaid

By John Pederson

This American Life radio program:
Best of Album, “Recording for Someone,” Act Four by Jonathon Goldstein
Aired: 1/11/02

“You and the Little Mermaid can go fuck yourselves!” has become a running joke among my circle of friends. The more I listen, the funnier it gets.

The only reason I can come up with this critique is that I’ve heard the piece so many times, but the more I listen, the more I feel that the extended preamble by Jonathon’s highly animated and agitated friend, Josh, obstructs the main story.

It poses him as such a dominant character that listeners expect him to resurface throughout the piece. I was surprised, but also glad, that he dropped out of the main storyline and his caustic attitude seems too contrived to carry an entire piece.

Josh’s Mall Rats rant makes for a gripping introduction, but shortening this tirade from the Brodie Bruce wannabe might allow the piece to build more naturally.

Online at: <http://www.thislife.org/>

Lenin's sofa

By Thanos Kalamidas



The Lenin Museum
Hämeenpuisto 28, Tampere, Finland

I suppose there are few reasons to visit a specialized exhibition but there are two main reasons to excuse your visit. One is because you know what the exhibits are about or just curiosity. Last week in Tampere, Finland, I visited an exhibition for both excuses. I was aware about the theme of the exhibition and curious about what they were showing; a couple of friends of mine, who were just aware of the theme, accompanied me on that visit.

The exhibition, a permanent one, is about Lenin and his brief life in Finland. According to what I read, the museum was created sometime in the end of 1946 and even though Lenin's name was part of 20th century world history, it seemed that the Finnish state was not exactly ready to accept and honor his visit to the country.

According again to the museum, the initiative to establish the Lenin museum originated from the people of the city of Tampere. As early as the 1920s, the students in the workers' institute discovered they were studying in the same Workers' Hall where Lenin had pledged to a delegation of townspeople to further the cause Finnish independence. In the same building, Lenin and Stalin met

for the first time in 1905. Finally the museum has undertaken to preserve, exhibit and research the objects, documents and symbols of the Soviet era.

That's when the theory and the poor marketing finish and reality starts. The exhibition is hosted in two small rooms, plus a very rich gift shop. In the first room everything is about Lenin's life in Russia, which later became the USSR. It follows the revolution days of 1917 and his last days; there is even Stalin's and his death masks on display.

Most of the exhibits were photographs or photocopies of newspapers from that period. For the ones who read history, I presume most of the photos were familiar and for the ones who are familiar with Soviet history it is even funnier since they were the official photos.

For the ones who don't know, in the Soviet era some of the leaders stopped being favorites of the system and found their way to Siberia or into exile abroad. These people were somehow wiped out of the photos, so you can see photos where Leon Trotsky was supposed to be standing next to Stalin and Lenin but without... Trotsky and Stalin is standing in a very peculiar way giving you the sense that something is missing. At the end of the room there is

an oil painting with Lenin in the middle and a two-seater sofa, but I will return to the sofa later.

The second room was more interesting, at least for me. I didn't know that Lenin and Stalin met for the first time in Tampere, while Lenin lived here; actually I was a bit shocked reading the rest of the names in that meeting. It seemed that all the leaders of the first years of the revolution had been in Finland. We must always remember that Finland is a very young country and then it was just another county of the Great Russian Empire.

There you can see photos, newspapers and magazines, even Lenin's books in Finnish. I was impressed, not from the quantity which I have to admit was very poor, but knowing Finland and how 'friendly' the Finns were to the Communists during that period and that some people saved all this material and preserved it so well. I suppose having all this material some people had actually endangered their lives. A gigantic metal statue of Lenin was standing in the end to the room next to his desk, chair and the set of china he used to have his tea.

It doesn't matter if you agree with his ideas or not, the feeling that this man thought and wrote his ideas at that table is amazing and makes you stand there quiet for a few minutes. Returning to

the other room, I was sure that the small wooden sofa with green fabric that looks old and faint was the place where Lenin sat reading a book or made one of his historic conversations. There is a small sign at the top with the names Lenin and Maxim Gorgy.

Maxim Gorgy is one of the biggest names in Russian literature for the 20th century and friendly to the Bolsheviks, so your first natural reaction is...wow! And you will probably never bother to read what it says underneath. Well, I did! It read: 'This is where Lenin and Gorgy sat during Lenin's visit to Helsinki University.'

It actually took me five minutes to stop laughing. So, so clever. I'm sure they had made a poster and sold it on the streets. I mean poor Lenin, he was tired and then he sat for a few seconds on that sofa and it became an item for an exhibition. What's next? This is a part of the asphalt Lenin walked one day and people walking in front the bulletproof exhibit saying wow?

My friends had already left while I had a quick look at the gift shop. You have seen the t-shirts with Che Guevara face, but have you ever seen Lenin's familiar face with the recognizable small beard on a plastic bag? What about a make up bag? A hair comb? Underwear? That was fantastic and I can see why another couple of visitors just stayed in the gift

shop and spent money on these funny gifts while we paid four euros each to look around the exhibition.

Coming out from the exhibition I found my friends were really disappointed for a real waste of money and time. They said that they had seen many of the items and they'd actually seen some originals, not bad copies. They were angry because it was too small and the ticket price was too high.

I totally enjoyed it and I will definitely go again sometime in the future. I loved the gift shop, since it shows how history demythologizes itself within years; Lenin had become knickers. I loved the small sofa and I forgot to mention that I really liked an exhibition just at the entrance of the hall by somebody from the left youth.

The museum is open from 0900 to 1800 on weekdays and from 1100 to 1600 on weekends. These hours can be extended upon agreement. Admission is 4 € for adults, and 2 € for children (7-16 years), students, pensioners, those doing their military or non-military service. Guided tours must be ordered in advance. 17 €/34 € per group.

<http://www.tampere.fi/culture/lenin/>



Dear Asa

By Thanos Kalamidas

Dear Asa,

When we decided to make an issue about parenthood we both were thinking about your little daughter coming and my little daughter's first birthday and looking at it now I think we did a small mistake, we should have called it fatherhood. And is been so strange for me watching you or listening you on the phone, is like listening my self a year ago and I feel sometimes embarrassed, you know what I mean the short of 'oh shit, did I act like that?' and the same time so happy.

One year I have enjoyed every single day and the few days I needed to be away from my daughter hurt me like nothing else. I was missing her recognition or smile even when I knew logically that she wasn't really aware for who am I.

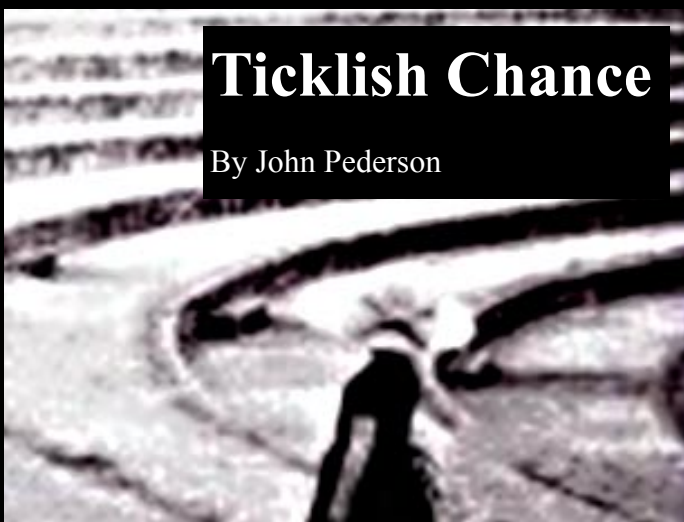
Through these two years I know you, you became something like my little brother and the morning you called me that your daughter was here I felt nearly the same I felt when my little daughter came and you know better than most people that Daphne was something like a life dream for me. I found me; I know is hard to believe it, needing to go out for a walk and I felt something funny like tears in my eyes. Really weird and if I wasn't living in Finland endangered to be arrested I think I would have started ringing bells and telling people that my little brother had a daughter.

Asa, there are nearly twenty years difference between us but in this fatherhood adventure we are new both of us and one thing I have realized is that there is no good advice on how to bring up your kid. I think the best I try to do every day is to love her and try to understand it been aware that I have to do all the way to her and not her to me, I have to understand her needs and not her mine. I have to be there to support her by holding her hand while she tries to walk and then step aside to let her make her small steps and I suppose that's going to be for the rest of our lives. Be always there, support them in their first steps and then let them alone walk but on the side watching, ready to help, guess and support their wishes and dreams. Something like our parents did with us.

Is strange how much I missed my own father since I became a father my self. And this is where you are lucky, because I think Brian will make a perfect grandfather and as my grandmother used to say; my child's kid is two times my kid. Can you see how lucky we are? Of course life is full of small disappointments but is full of happy a moment as well and have a daughter is one of the most beautiful events in this life. Did you notice? Apparently I didn't use the word 'moment' because this is life time happiness.

Perhaps now you will understand why Brian is always there supporting your little steps twenty-six years after. I didn't forget Helen but since we talk about fatherhood...

Lad, I'm really happy for you and your "most beautiful girl in the world" will have a great future because she has a great father.



Ticklish Chance

By John Pederson

Bouncing down the stairs she hit her head
I thought it was funny but nothing was said

My friend and I thought that she was fine
I felt in my heart that she would be mine

But I played it cool, focused on the race
While my heart sped ahead, at a frantic lover's pace

Then came the day of our first kiss
The most natural union, the definition of bliss

Love took off, passions unfurled
A true friend who could rock my world

We laughed a lot, her and I
God I wish that I was still her guy

I think of her big brown eyes and beautiful body
God, I wish I was there to get a bit naughty

This limerick may be funny, but my love is no joke
Cause this girl made me feel like the world's luckiest bloke!