

TRANSFORMATIONS

David Pulsipher—Editor

During the summer between my junior and senior years of college, I learned about the often subtle processes of transformation. Being full of simple and unfocused academic ambition, I bought an old Mazda, strapped my bicycle to the back, and set out across America on what I saw as a grand intellectual adventure. Imagining myself as a modern Alexis de Tocqueville (or perhaps a Bill Moyers in embryo), I sent letters to a dozen or so writers and academics, offering them the privilege of an interview with me.

As you might expect, the majority of the responses were negative. The most gracious denial was a handwritten note from Annie Dillard—*My many family and work obligations prevent my meeting the many kind readers who propose meetings*—and the most caustic was a manually typed and hand-corrected postcard from John Updike—*That's a lovely vision, of you traipsing across the country in a last fling before adulthood closes in. But leave me out the tour, please.*

Still, armed with three interview appointments, I set off across the barren hills of Wyoming, which gradually gave way to the flatlands of South Dakota, then the gentle hills of Minnesota and Wisconsin. And as I drove I tried to conjure great questions, dewes of profundity descending from heaven. It wasn't until I was travelling into Chicago late at night, in the passenger seat of a tow-truck (my car's head gasket exploded just outside the city limits), that I discovered I was both terrified and stupefied at the task I had created for myself.

The next morning as I squirmed on a hard chair in Wayne Booth's office at the University of Chicago, I realized I had no profound questions. I mumbled some vague inquiry about the current state of American culture. He was kind enough not to let on that I was academically immature. Instead he smiled gently and offered me a scrap from his intellectual table—"Watch the billboards. You can learn a lot from billboards."

I left a little disheartened at my lack of depth, but not defeated. As I drove I took his advice and watched the billboards—*Love the Sun, Worship your Skin; The Virgin Speaks! Call 1-800-SEE-MARY*—and tried to decipher their cultural meanings. But here too, I soon became lost.

So as I wound my way from Chicago to Kirtland to Boston to New York, I began to transform my expectations for the trip, from a great intellectual odyssey to something more modest, but perhaps more meaningful. I began to focus on finding and appreciating small gifts along the road—a warm handshake from a large black woman during the Gospel-Fest in Chicago, the surge of Niagara over the precipice, a smile from

Frazer the Homeless Comic on the streets of Philadelphia, a thundering chorus of frogs at midnight in a quiet Princeton neighborhood—and I found upon my return home that I had been transformed, not by ingenious interviews or grand epiphanies, but by the collective weight of a thousand tiny moments.

A similar transformation is happening again. Last summer brought the initial euphoric moment, a prophetic charge to transform Ricks College into BYU-Idaho. Like many people at the time, I felt the rush of expectation, glimpsed the glories of what might be, and eagerly offered my naive hand to the task. But now, after a long cold winter, in the quiet of my office, as I face the daunting tasks of creating syllabi, selecting texts, and ratcheting up my intellectual skills for courses well outside my comfort zone, I am reliving the Wayne Booth moment, wondering if I am really up to the task.

Reading many of the essays in this issue, I have come to realize I am not alone. During the months since the big announcement, people across campus have gradually awakened to the incredible pain and effort required by the task. We have been humbled. But we are not defeated, because fortunately we find ourselves, as I did in Dr. Booth's office, greeted with generous smiles and gentle wisdom.

I also sense from our contributors that in the wake of our humbled intellects are springing a thousand tiny miracles—a thought here, a suggestion there—which are collectively transforming our campus like crocuses pushing through the cinder-soaked soil in spring. Even big announcements which on the surface seem like sudden grand epiphanies (such as the Three-Track Admissions system), turn out to have burst from clusters of diverse seeds blown onto campus over several years and from myriad directions.

It is these small manifestations of grace, seen in their collective beauty, which give all of us hope to press on despite the pain, and demonstrate the great interconnectedness of our talents and aspirations. We hope *Perspective* might help chronicle these individual moments and suggest their relationships to each other, but also that it might be one of the small miracles contributing to the current transformation.

In that spirit and with that hope, we offer this issue to you. ☺