

**ONE
GUY**

**TWO
POEMS**

**THREE
STORIES**

UA·MSA·17

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**ONE
GUY**

In 1980, the summer before my Junior year at The University of Akron, I began working as an apprentice designer at a local business-to-business design studio.

Since then, and for the last 37 years, I have made my living as a designer, art director and creative director.

I create logos, identity, packaging, collateral, advertising and graphic design for all media, corporate, retail, business-to-business, consumer, healthcare and banking and finance.

But I was usually just the “picture” part of the assignments. “Words and pictures” being the classic agency pairing of the designer and copywriter.

But now I wanted to try the “word” part.

So this year I started to write, first as a way to use another part of my creative head, to stretch me in other directions for growth. I really didn’t expect these stories and poems to come out, but I think that’s the point, to open the door.

I’m not used to presenting my personal work publicly, have never put my creative writing out there, and frankly, this scares the crap out of me. But I decided to say “what the hell” and include them in this exhibit.

Thank you for taking the time to experience all the great work displayed in the gallery today. When I try to describe the amazing talent in this building, the faculty, students and staff, words fail.

All the best,



TWO POEMS

CITY POOL, SUMMER '76

Laying on my stomach, eyes closed,
smooth concrete hot against my chest and thighs,
wet towel thrown over my head and sunburned back,
muffled voices, laughter, shouting, talking.

Constant thumping, bouncing of the Duraflex diving board,
the pale blue rough sand paper surface hurls another kid
smoothly into the air.

Ker floush! comes the report of another successful cannon ball,
water droplets hit the towel and my legs.

Good one.

The next diver in the queue mounts the board,
three steps and bounce.

Airborne.

One of summer's small stages.

Only seconds to make it work.

Can you catch the eye of that special girl?

Execute a one-and-a-half before she loses interest,
was it good enough to impress?

Look for the look, hope you get your chance.

Lifeguard's whistle slows a runner on the deck,
wet feet slap past me on the concrete as a kid
returns from the concession stand.

Round shaped grandmas in skirted swimsuits adjust
sun shades over new babies while the new moms
adjust new swimsuits over their new bodies.

Hawaiian Tropic lotion, too fruity gum,
Marlboros and chlorine.

The smells of summer.

The radios are all tuned to the new rock station
that's broadcasting in "FM". Frequency Modulation,
means the tunes come in clear and stay that way.

FM DJ so casual and cool. Voice made smooth
by years of Luckies and Jack. No static at all.

It's a quarter till, a 10 minute break in 5.

Last turn on the board, fulcrum all the way
back, maximum lift, 4 steps and big air.

Silence.

Alone in the moment.

Chest flat on thighs, tight, toes pointed,
2-and-a-half turns, open and enter.

Straight, no splash, only the sound of
the water rushing past my ears.

Cold.

Blue.

Silent.

Safe.

Lay flat on the bottom, 12 feet down.

Lay flat just to do it, plenty of breath.

Legs push up, and one hard stroke to
break the surface at the wall and out.

Was it good enough to impress?

Towel around shoulders, tugging on cut
off shorts over a wet Speedo, wedging
wet feet into hot Converse.

Walk out past all the homies.

Act like you are thinking about something.
Anything. Except what you think they think of you.

Almost to the gate.

Jet black hair.

Green eyes.

Fair skin, spray of freckles on her checks,
a smile that could melt an iceberg.

"Hay"

"Hay"

Passing, holding eyes for a moment
then quickly looking down.

“Going to the Y later?

“I am now.”

Smiles.

Shortness of breath.

Leave fast before you fuck it up.

Black vinyl seats so hot you have to sit on the towel,
steering wheel and shifter too hot to touch.

Open windows and vents to try to cool it down.

Hit the key, big block 8 cylinder, loping rhythm of the cam
shaft and the beautiful throaty rumble of the exhaust.

Cherry bombs, red glass pack mufflers that sound like freedom.

Moving down the street, chirping second and third.

Speed moving hot air over hot skin, the smell
of gasoline and chlorine in my nose.

Couple dollars left on my dresser, 2 milkshakes, maybe malts.

Just enough.

Down-shift. Hear the high pitch of the engine,
tach jumps and then smoothly drops.

Red light, car sways in engine's rhythm, no brake
needed, hold in place with clutch and gas.

I love this 'Bird.

Station wagon in front of me, wood paneled,
huge back gate door, window down, two boys fresh
from the pool and goofing.

They see me see them, one boy goes with the
Chinese eyes, tongue out, the other boy thumbs in ears,
four fingers out and wagging.

I counter with engine rev and roll forward,
with middle finger I slowly
push up my sunglasses.

They laugh like hyenas, fall back out of sight,
Mom looks in rear view mirror like “Good heavens what now?”

Light turns green, ease clutch out, slowly begin to move.

Two glowing white butts rise up from below the back gate.
Double moon, well played.

Station wagon pulls away all of us laughing.

I miss second, loudly, boys hoot and shout “grind me a pound!”

They will re-tell that story. A lot.

Good times that bind.

Left turn, find my gear and head up the hill.

August heat shimmering in waves off the asphalt.

Her smile.

That small space between her front teeth.

IRISH BOY.

Pale face kid new in town.

A little bit ginger, bad teeth, whack hair.

No cousins, old sibs. No compass to cool.

The 70's, both parents working.

No man's land between have's and have nots.

No man's land between Chevy and Buick.

No friends to give me a ride in either car.

Lonely.

Found Funk, Cosby, Carlin and Richard.

Learned laughter, timing, punch lines and bass lines.

Alone.

Math, science, contact sports. Nothing for me.

Alphas in rut, chest shoving assholes.

Loud, scared boys.

Stupid.

Mean.

Girls, always smarter, cunning, searching.

They hold me tight, keeping me in reserve,
looking over my shoulder for better than me.

Meaner.

Then Art.

Studio smells right.

Feels right.

Paint spattered sinks and tables.

The only thing that really makes sense.

1 + 1 isn't 2. Not if you don't want it to.

Fuck formulas. No tests.

Does it look right?

Have you invested yourself?

Without fear?

Without reservation?

What is good is always what is pure.

What is good is what doesn't add up.

Dad. Engineer. Time clock. Neck tie.

"Lad, can you make a living at this...?"

No reservation.

No fear.

"Yes."

"Then go Boy. Go."

THREE STORIES

LOVE AND ELDERBERRY PIE.

I had been driving for too long. My eyes were gritty and dry from fighting the glare off the hood of my SUV. The South is beautiful and lush, but driving it's length can weary a man no matter how well appointed the vehicle.

I got off to get gas and maybe a soda and noticed a small hand-lettered sign that announced "fresh fruit pies 1/4 mile." So I finished fueling, tucked the receipt into my wallet and drove away from the highway in search of pie.

The sign was accurate, and a quarter mile down the flat, two-lane, tree-lined road was a small brick building with the same hand-lettered sign in front of the parking lot. There was a smoker on the far side of the building being tended by a man that appeared to know his business.

He was painfully thin with arms and neck showing muscles that looked like steel cords. He split the wood with a practiced swing and economy of movement that declared many years as a pit master. He was focused on the thermometer on the side of the roaster as I approached, and noticing me, his deeply tanned face broke into a smile.

"Pig or pie...we got a special if you have both...?"

As I stood in the intoxicating aroma of roasting pig, the sun casting the long shadows of late afternoon, I knew that this was my reward for all the sales calls of the day, maybe even the whole month.

"Both." Both, please."

He knew he had me even before I answered and began to walk me inside. To get to

the door we walked around a 1970-something "Easy Rider" Harley chopper that was a beauty. Not a pristine restored bike, but an original with many miles and dedicated care.

We went inside and I noticed that this had once been either a garage or maybe a small post office. Square, concrete block. Efficient angles, roof weight carried easily on bearing walls with purpose and economy. But the owner wanted light, and knocked holes in the walls and installed big reclaimed warehouse windows that tilt out to let the air circulate. A large portion of one wall was an industrial garage door that was up, the late day light flooding in and with it the sounds of birds and the wind in the trees.

The Pitt Boss looked across the room to a middle-aged woman in blue jeans and a black t-shirt, raised his chin and said "Special." She in turn held up three fingers and smiled.

"Table 3 has a good view out back, she must like you..."

"I'm from Ohio, everybody likes me." I replied.

He laughed, extended a well calloused hand and said "Ohio, I'm Earl, that's Evangeline, the owner, chef, and my daughter. I do the pig, she does the rest."

I sat down as a teenage girl that looked like a mini Evangeline came and set out silverware, a bowl of rolls, and a small pitcher of iced water that was sweating nearly as much as me.

I said "May I ask what the specials are...?"

"Yep, whatever Earl and Mom makes are usually very special, you'll be happy."

In that place, and in that moment, her answer was perfect, and I believed her.

I poured a glass of iced water and drank deeply, the cold reviving my brain and the water nourishing my parched body. I took out my wallet and placed it next to my keys, the hot square on my right hip grateful for the relief. Then I inspected the mis-matched, heavy silverware and moved the coffee and sweetener packets to clear a little room. Just fussing, like a cat circling before his rest.

As my eyes adjusted to the interior light, I poured a second glass of water and drank more slowly, and began to take in the room. There were a couple men at a table near the counter in deep shade working through a pile of ribs, myself, and an older couple sitting in the fading sunlight talking quietly.

The man was dressed in average clothing, old guy denim, Etonic sneakers, a three button golf shirt. She in conservative older lady stuff. Comfy. Except for the floral pattern scarf she wore wrapped around her head. Very stylish, but I noticed that it was because her hair was gone.

I settled in and just tried to chill. The breeze freshened, making the treetops swish, raising the napkin edges. I relaxed my breathing, the bird songs became clearer, and the sound of soft laughter.

I looked at the older couple and the guy, probably in his mid 60's with his elbows on the table, leaning in listening to everything his wife had to say. His smile was hidden by a great walrus mustache, but the corners of his

mouth curved up and his eyes were lit. She in turn leaned in, delivered the heart of the story and they both cracked up.

After the laughter eased up, they turned to look at the sun on the back lot, the bird song returned and they went back to a shared slice of pie.

Their movements, like Earl's, were so natural, so practiced, so dependable that it produced an intimacy without hurry or doubt. Or fear.

Mini Evangeline arrived carrying a large platter heavy with a rack of ribs, a portion of smoked sausage, a pork chop, cole slaw and red beans and rice.

With a smile and a pat on the shoulder she said "Special. Told jah."

The meat was amazing, great smoke crust, tender juicy inside, flavorful sauces, the red beans and rice made with love. It was an epic meal.

As I finished Mini appeared and said "Ready for pie?"

"Do I have a choice of what kind or is it special...?"

"You'll be happy."

And she was right. I have heard of elderberry pie but never before eaten it. And now I may spend my life looking for one that is this good. The perfect ratio of elderberries to goopy elderberry stuff to the best pie crust I have ever had.

Ethereal.

As I was trying to make the pie last I looked at the couple again and was struck by their love. She looked like she was ill but on the other side of it, her color returning helped by the setting sun, the laughter, the fresh pie. His hand on the table, hers on top of it. No words to clutter the moment.

They stood to leave, straightening clothing and checking pockets. He stepped back to allow her to leave first, and as she passed him she reached down and grabbed his butt firmly.

"Looking good Stan."

The boys eating ribs, myself, Mini and Stan all got a big kick out of that. One of the boys said "Hey. I'll have whatever he had."

I was sorry when Mini gave me the check. I really did not want this to end. But my stomach was full, the gas tank full, and there were many miles in front of me.

At the register I had to ask her, "What makes that pie crust so good?"

Mini just smiled and said "It's the lard. High quality, cold lard."

As I drove down the highway in the fading light, I saw a motorcycle coming up to pass me. It took a moment but I recognized the chopper from the restaurant. Stan was driving, sunglasses in place, mustache pressed flat against his cheeks by the wind. His wife was on the back, relaxed with her back resting against the sissy bar, eyes closed, with the beautiful scarf waving in the wind behind her.

As they passed me and moved into the distance I replayed the day, and decided the secret to happiness is hot buns and cold lard.

THE QUIET.

The water was hot, and I stood in the shower a long time after washing.

I shaved as closely as I could, and used more deodorant than necessary.

My suit, shirt, tie and shoes were all waiting on my bed where I put them after too much ironing and fuss.

It was so quiet. Normally the house was a place of action, people coming and going, a working farm to be run, kids to get places and back, a joyous mayhem only relished when it is lost.

Two days ago after feeding the cattle and fixing the hand clutch on our ancient Allis-Chalmers tractor, it was time to come in for lunch. I came in through the back door by the driveway, into the small side porch where we hung coats and shed dirty boots and shoes to keep from tracking the farm into the house. Coming into the house from the bright midday sun was a relief, cool and dim.

It was only as my stocking foot landed on the first step into the kitchen that I realized something missing. The house was still.

The Quiet was waiting just inside the door, and our lives changed. Again.

Mom was on the floor in the front room, having died while dusting the top of the console television. I knew that she was gone, but pressed my fingers to her neck like I've seen them do in movies. Feeling nothing, I wept.

The Sheriff came with the ambulance, all arrangements were made, the wake planned. A person's death is quite orderly, taken care of by polite officials that secure the remains and fill out papers. All this so the so loved ones can grieve, gather their tribe and focus on cataloging memories of the life lived.

Now, sitting on the landing looking into the kitchen, I am amazed at the stillness. The room is dim, and I see all the small red lights glowing on crock-pots full of food for the gathering. The glass lids clatter softly against their steamy wet seats letting the aroma of braising meat and lovely side dishes sneak out into the air. This food was made with love and soul, and is meant to heal, but today I want none of it.

My sisters came this morning to prepare the house to receive the mourners as they had done only 5 months ago for my wife. I lit the day's first cigarette and thought of Kate, and the day The Quiet

came for her. A police officer arrived at the screen door about 8:30 that morning and told me of the accident. A drunk driver had come across the road and hit her car head on. She died instantly, and most of me did too. As the policeman drove out of the lane the only sound was the fading engine noise.

I stood there very still for a long time.

I gathered 5 kids from school and we held each other closely, rode out the storm in each other's arms and found our laughter again.

And then The Quiet came for Mom.

The glass crock pot lids softly rattle, and the timer on the oven loudly counts down the minutes until the main courses are ready to serve.

My legs begin to cramp so I stand to work out the kinks and grind out the cigarette in the ashtray. Stretching, I hear the dogs barking to announce that my sisters are back from picking up the kids.

The four door Ford pickup is coming down the drive kicking up a thick plume of dirt. Excited dogs giving chase, my laughing kids hanging out the windows yelling words of encouragement to them as they all race to the front porch.

When the truck comes to a stop they all tumble out to play with the dogs and verbally abuse each other as siblings do, all the while being put into head locks and getting skinny butts pinched by their aunts.

It is glorious.

I drank all this in from inside the screen door, the absolutely normal moment.

Aunts + kids + dogs = joy.
And it healed me.

Too late I realized that I was so concerned with keeping my creases sharp and shirt unwrinkled that I was standing at the door in my boxers and t-shirt. My clothing, while beautifully prepared, still lay on the bed upstairs. My oldest sister opened the door to let everyone in, snapping me out of my thoughts.

"I see your Father has decided that the wake will be held in beach attire" she said loudly, to which they all hooted and laughed.

On the way passed she tossed me a sideways glance with a smile and said simply, "Idiot".

Now the sounds from inside the house are many. Two less voices, but still just as loud.

Quiet no more.

MY OLD HUBCAP.

This old hubcap is one of my most prized possessions. It's from a Ford truck; maybe around 1938 or 1939.

The late 1930's were pretty tough on people and Ford, the country still struggling in the grips of the Great Depression. For most, money was not easy to come by for a new vehicle. In spite of this, or maybe because of it, Ford designed new, innovative, rugged trucks while keeping prices within reach of their consumer.

These now "classic" hub caps are described as "dog dish" style due to their bowl shape, measuring roughly twelve inches in diameter, and bear the "V8" symbol for their powerful eight cylinder engines.

A common design approach for the "V8" logo in this era was to create an "Art Deco" look with a circular numeral eight inside a sleek "V", or a large eight overlapping the "V" creating a very bold and ornate design.



Instead, Ford chose a simple, elongated "V" with a small condensed numeral eight nested inside. The finished logo is stamped into the chrome and filled with dark blue enamel, then surrounded by the deep green paint color of the truck. It was distinctive, and reflected the vehicles power and the brand behind it. None of this mattered one bit to me in 1967.

On a sunny Saturday afternoon my sister's boy friend Bill took me over to his parents home so I could meet their new litter of Beagle puppies. I was 7 years old, and those puppies were as happy to see me as I was them. They were in dog pens behind the garage, and I played with them as long as their protective mom would let me.

On the way back to the house Bill motioned me over to the garage to meet his father.

Clyde, a co-worker of my fathers at the local steel mill was working under a baby blue and white 1957 Chevy, and I was introduced to his lower legs. I heard a voice from below this great beast of a car say "Hello David!" as he scooted out from under it on a creeper.

I shook his hand and it was like my Dads, calloused and firm. He smiled, swept out his arm and said "Welcome to my shop!"

It was a single car garage with a flat panel door that swung up on a pair of hinges. I took in all the shelves of nuts and bolts, the tools that hung from the walls, out of date calendars featuring women in scant swimwear, and then on the side walls a collection of license plates and hub caps hanging on nails.

I had never experienced anything like this and was overwhelmed for a moment. I could still feel the sticky puppy licks on my hands and face, and now my nose was filled with the smell of car wax and gas and oil. There was crunchy cat litter on the floor to soak up something dark, and two boxes on the floor, one marked "clean rags" and one "dirty rags". Getting my bearings, I started looking at the walls more closely.

Back then, every year people were issued stamped metal license plates with a distinctive color

scheme that was different than the year before. Clyde put past years plates on the wall creating a beautiful pattern of numbers and colors.

The hubcaps were many, some from cars, some for trucks, chrome, painted, chrome with painted sections, solid color with raised letters, even one with what they called a "Spinner" on it.

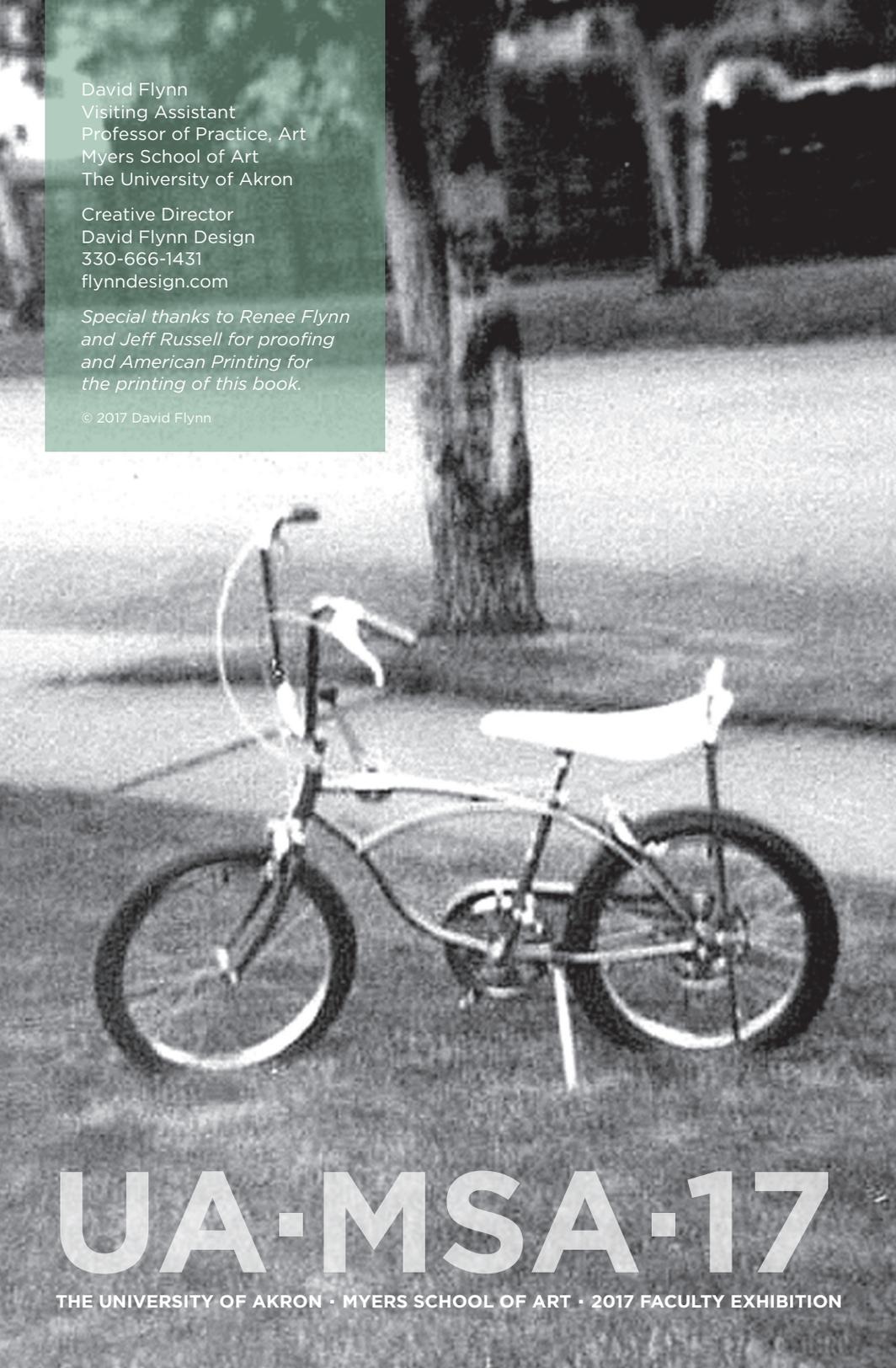
Near the back right corner just before the window hung the green one with the chrome center from the 1930s. It was the coolest thing I ever saw.

And Clyde knew it.

So I left there that day with new friends, covered in puppy spit, carrying an old hubcap that will ride with me for the rest of my journey.

It has hung in my room all my kid life and college life, and in each of my studios all my professional life. There is something about the typography, the shape, the history of the actual piece that pleases me. And it warms me knowing how and by whom I came to have it.

I am not sure how many miles Henry Ford expected out of this truck and it's parts, but I know that this particular hubcap still works hard everyday, and has a lot more road to go.



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