

5-1-2003

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Recommended Citation

Hellman, Mallory (2003) "Rhythms of Life," *Hieroglyphics: the NSU University School Literary Magazine*: Vol. 10 , Article 14.
Available at: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/uschool_litmag/vol10/iss1/14

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Rhythms of Life

Mallory Hellman

Often, at the wee hour of 1:30 a.m. or a comparably obscene time, I find myself huddled over a history book, drinking frigid water to keep from dozing off, and chanting to myself inwardly (or outwardly if the situation has become accordingly dire), "I want to be a subsistence farmer." This, along with the motivational "Would you like fries with that?" enables me trudge through the bleak late-night hours of studying, to printer jams, and general high-school angst. The latter phrase, I should add, is a mantra to remind me of my not-so-distant future should I decide to forfeit all studies for a life of intellectually uncontaminated burger-flipping. The former, surprisingly, is a sincere and firmly held wish of mine, a dream which I will never fully let go.

You think I jest, but imagine it: the simple life of the subsistence farmer. Up with the sun; fresh vegetables all the time; a happy subsistence family with a subsistence minivan and subsistence trips to Jason's subsistence soccer games, not without the obligatory stop at subsistence Starbucks. The 900 B.C. American Dream. Honestly, though, a delicate existence carried out in harmony with nature and the unaffected rhythms of life seems so peaceful and simplistic as to present itself to me as nothing less than a euphoric dream.

These thoughts stream through my head during the hours I have affectionately dubbed "morning madness," taking the place of the structure and function of the nephron or whether to take the SAT again this weekend. These little escapes serve as guardians of my sanity, as dreams are the careful protectors of sleep at the point when what little mental health I still cherish is being stolen from me at an alarming rate. The thief?

College admissions. At a time when the college acceptance game has become the high school junior's worst nightmare, laden with unforeseen difficulties, random contingencies, and a general lack of anything that could remotely be construed as logic, harvesting one's own corn seems a positively celestial future.

When I was young and naïve, (nigh two years in passing), I had implicit faith in the college admissions system. One's merits and good deeds in the present life would ensure her a comfortable spot in the Kingdom of Heaven (the Ivy League) when the time arrived. So, devoutly, I studied the Good Book (Barron's Guide to the A.P. World History Exam) and attended arduous services Monday through Friday every week to better understand my place in this chaotic high school universe and how best to plot my course to the Kingdom of Heaven. I was positive that with all my intellectual efforts, my acts of loving kindness, and my constant quest for improvement in mind, body, and spirit, I was a prime candidate.

One could say that I experienced my loss of faith toward the end of the tenth grade. It was at this point that I was becoming better acquainted with the ins and outs of the Kingdom's filtering process and was appalled at how arbitrarily the hierarchy of ecclesiastical officials at its gates chose its inhabitants. Evidently, the Kingdom of Heaven is experiencing a pressing shortage of Hispanic people.

Furthermore, walking on water is no longer of much use to Kingdom entrance officials. No, to be qualified for one of the top spots, a student must have certain special criteria. These criteria cannot and will not be divulged because (a). They are

shrouded in the impenetrable mystery of the cult and (b). They are continuously changing and so unpredictable that their revelation would be of no use to Kingdom hopefuls anyway. Face it: even the Savior would have difficulties being accepted to the top tier of colleges nowadays. Everyone has at least that many community service hours.

So, disillusioned with the capricious nature of the system and a confirmed collegiate atheist, I retreat to my bedroom with my cold water and my mantra. I continue to work diligently because I enjoy school and I like to learn. As long as I am accepted to a college where I can continue to cultivate this passion among other people who wish to do the same, its status in *U.S. News and World Report* is of little consequence. If I am not, I can always become a subsistence farmer.