John Jay College Celebrates Election New York Style

By Parvez Shaikh

It was a lively sight on West 59th Street on November 5th. Students stood outside John Jay College of Criminal Justice in great numbers. It was almost as if all classes were cancelled. Surprisingly the talk outside the North Hall building and in the cafeteria was not about sports or harsh teachers; rather it was about the election.

The historic election of 2008 has for the first time brought an African American to the Presidency. President-elect Barack Obama claimed a comfortable win over Senator John McCain. Winning by a difference of 192 electoral votes, Obama certainly won by a landslide. Obama was able to win states such as Pennsylvania, Virginia, Florida and even Ohio. Obama’s win brought great smiles to the faces of New Yorkers, especially to students at John Jay.

Despite the rigorous battle between the two candidates, this day brought everyone together at John Jay. “Everyone is ready for a change, and Obama is going to bring it,” said Evan, a sophomore. The McCain supporters gathered with Obama supporters to further discuss the election. A group of five smokers stood around outside of North Hall, laughing and giving their own opinions about what the upcoming year would bring. Two of them were McCain supporters.

Some places around college were completely filled with Obama supporters, and students who did not know each other sat around in large groups reflecting on the election. “I’m glad that this historic event has happened when I was able to take part in it,” said Níkita, a proud Obama supporter.

To an outsider, the scene in front of North Hall seemed like a regular day of college, but when asked, students were quick to express their joy in the election. “Dude, Obama deserves to be the next president, even though I’m a McCain supporter, the way he swept the elections he definitely deserves it,” said Ali, a sophomore.

Students may seem like they are not concerned about the nation, but in fact they are. A group of students who did not want to disclose their political preference believed that the economy should be the main focus of the next President, and that the war was not going to help the economy. “I support the war effort, but I also believe that it is taking our economy down with it. The next President should do what’s necessary to bring back the troops from Iraq,” said Laura, a sophomore.

The McCain supporters were quite scattered around college, and obviously not happy with the election results. They had other things in mind, and went on as if it was any normal day. “McCain could have been a strong leader; it’s just that Obama lacks the experience that is needed right now to win the war. But this is America and this is how democracy works,” Lance said.

Some students simply did not care or give any importance to the elections. “I really don’t care who won, the economy is crumbling and the country is going to hell,” Cecilia said.

Despite the people who are not interested in politics, Obama’s victory meant a lot to the American people. Americans are proud that they could participate in the election of the first African American president. “It’s overwhelming, it hasn’t sunk in yet. My parents were crying watching Obama’s speech last night, it seemed like they had been waiting for this time all their life,” Jaleah said.

Students Walk Against Cancer

By Nabeela Basheer

Students from John Jay’s chapter of Phi Eta Sigma Honor Society joined 30,000 New Yorkers as they participated in the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walkathon in Central Park on October, 19th.

The five mile walk sponsored by the American Cancer Society started at 9:30 a.m. at 72 Central Park Bandshell.

The American Cancer Society raised $2,720,000 with the help of many supporters, said Christine Quinn, City Council Speaker. “The sooner one comes to know the disease, the easier it is to treat it,” said Quinn. “Making Strides marks that hope begins here.”

“The American Cancer Society has an obligation to reach out to many women as possible,” said Sophia Gaines, manager of Making Strides. “Hope starts here, especially since the American Cancer Society has distributed more than $3 billion to researchers, and 42 of those researchers have won the Noble Prize.”

“Being a leader is hard, but when people come together and donate their time and money to an important cause, it shows that they care and it’s amazing, especially in New York City, where everyone has busy lives,” said Neethu Suresh, leader of the John Jay chapter of Phi Eta Sigma.

Guards Work Night Shift

By Kevin Ambroise

“Students think we’re stupid but this is an actual job, we get trained for this, so what they really need to do is back off,” said Daniel Persaud, a John Jay security guard.

It’s around 9:45 p.m. at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. The college’s library is closing down for the night as it always does around this time.

Persaud is walking around in front of his post ready to get off of work in about two hours. Another set of guards will soon take his place for the night. A small amount of students still doing homework are being told to exit the building as the college closes down.

“Thank God I don’t have to work the night shift. You have to do anything to stay awake. I’ve drunk so much Dr. Pepper to stay up that they should give me an endorsement deal,” Persaud said.

It is just the end of another day at the office for Persaud. The responsibilities of the position may go beyond those of any other job at the college, because security is the only job that requires their workers to take an eight hour shift at any time of the day or night for the

Far West Side Story

By Sifat Arad

The temporary relocation of John Jay’s English Department to 54th Street has left many members of the John Jay community feeling disconnected.

A walk from Columbus Circle to the English Department was once as simple as stepping a few blocks up to 10th Avenue, swiping past security and turning left. Dropping off an assignment now involves a 10-20 minute stride past the main campus.

Students must travel beyond the broadcasting stations, Hammar dealerships and construction sites plotted along 11th Avenue, and ride an elevator up to the seventh floor of an unmarked building.

John Jay’s English Department was once part of the vibrant, student-oriented atmosphere located alongside the extracurricular clubs on campus in North Hall on 59th Street. Students were able to visit professors between classes and ask questions whenever they got the chance.

Noelle Davila, a Government Major in her second year at John Jay, would stop by the area frequently to discuss various issues with her professors when their offices were near her classes.

“It may sound strange, but it was a great way to pick their brains and learn from the faculty in general,” Davila said.

She doesn’t have the time to do this anymore since the English Department is located outside of the main campus.

Continued on Page 3
Students Talk About Safe Sex

By Kevin Ambrose

North Hall was awash in a sea of condoms on November 1st for World AIDS Day. However, just because they were being handed out for free in the lobby, doesn’t mean that they were making it into the bedrooms.

Condoms are so accessible these days that they can be found at the Health Center, in the lobby of North Hall during many other days of the year, at bars and clubs, and on the subway.

Even though they are easier that ever for students to get, condoms are increasingly becoming a lost cause as the enemy.

In some situations, asking a person to put on a condom can imply that you think that he or she has an STD, or even HIV. This thought can become a barrier because in the heat of the moment right when you are about to have sex with a girl, condoms are the last thing I want that big oops just to happen to me, said Adam, a high school student who has had unprotected sex several times.

This trend of disregarding protection is not just because of becoming fashion, but that whole excuse is the stupidest thing I heard so far. If I don’t know you, then you better believe you are putting a cover on that wee-tee, said Lewis, a student at John Jay.

Asking your partner to put on a condom can also imply that there has been some cheating going on.

Tina, an 18-year-old freshman, has unprotected sex most of the time.

"Not using condoms with someone takes trust in a relationship. There are girls who have had over five abortions before the age of 17, and others are known for giving guys herpes for fun because they think that it empowers them as women, so they give it to everyone that they know they are cheating on their girl," said Lewis.

Lewis has had unprotected sex with four men, including her current boyfriend, and other girls that I have had sex with, but she has no plans on changing her ways.

While some may think that not using protection on purpose is the worst thing that others see it as a basic human behavior.

"Know that you are not supposed to trust everyone, but it really gets ignorant when a girl gets pregnant out of nowhere. I am clean, if you really cared about that, then you would never do me without protection," said Katherine, a mother of one.

This trend is sadly making its way to children who are losing their virginity at a younger age than ever before.

"The average age for kids having sex is getting younger each year. Five years ago, the age kids started having sex was 16, but now it is 13. Other times, kids can have sex as young as 10 years old. But that is without using protection," said Malaine Clarke, Health Service Coordinator at John Jay.

According to www.coolnurse.com, Swedish teens, Canadian teens and British teens are having more sex than United States teens, but their pregnancy and abortion rates are lower.

"The lack of time parents put into educating their kids is the cause for why these kids are getting curious about sex at a young age," Clarke said.

With this, there is also a lack of knowledge that has made the United States the western country with the highest percentage of teenage pregnancy.

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Debate Coalition Battles at Binghamton

By Whitney Brown

"As I made the four hour trip to Binghamton University further up into the cold weather, I began to prepare for the weekend that lay ahead for me," said John Jay debater Cynthia Caballero.

The John Jay Debate Society, also known as "The Voice" won one of their last tournaments of the semester over the snowy weekend of November 21-23. Caballero's team competed in the varsity division, and with a record of 6-0, they were the only undefeated team going into the elimination rounds.

Sadly, during the semi-final round, Caballero and her partner lost to Rochester Military Academy in a 2-1 decision. "The Binghamton debate team are vegan, so they are only serving veggie food for the whole tournament," said coach Joe Keeton. "This is the only way that they can impose their will on the debate community to eat healthy for once."

On the bus ride to campus the students began to take out their evidence, and realized they didn't bring with them their pens in their mouths. The pen method in debate serves to help debaters pronounce words correctly.

"I have the best time at karaoke," said Chantele Rios, a John Jay debater. "Even though we were in a crowd where there were many people of Spanish decent, we never had the opportunity to have a sledgehammer; "I'm Mine," "Independent Women," and "Livin' La Vida Loca."

"Between attending classes and going to my job, I don't have any spare time; it's just not convenient anymore for me to stop by the English Department," Davila said. The department's accessibility in North Hall made it convenient for students to maintain not only their relationships with their professor, but also their academic growth.

When Davila was asked about any changes in the study habits or grades, she explained that the new location has not affected her academic performance, but that it has impacted the active role she once played outside of her classes.

"If the student doesn't visit their professor then how will that professor know that the student cares about his or her academic performance?" Davila asked.

The distance has also complicated her study habits. "Sometimes I forget to ask my professor questions at the end of class; that's common, so it's harder to communicate and ask your professor questions if they're a good distance away from you."

If Davila was still in the old building, she would have to make sure to have her notes ready to discuss a topic in class, for example, as our classes are now across the street.

The department is expected to move again into the new building, once it is finished in three years. Professor Toy-Fung Tung, who has been teaching at John Jay for three years, has made many changes to accommodate the new location.

"She must now arrange meetings in the Westport Cafeteria for those who are unwilling to travel to 54 Street. This makes it difficult to view files that other students have from when they are doing their independent research." Professor Edward Davenport, who has been at John Jay for 34 years, was initially against the move since it would make it harder for students to find his office.

"The space and the furniture are nicer; the whole place is roomier and cleaner. You don’t get the feeling that the ceiling is about to come crashing down on you," Davenport said.

Despite these improvements, the negatives seem to outweigh the positives.

The reason Davenport doesn't feel like the ceiling will come crashing down on him is because he has no ceiling in his new office. At times, it is difficult for him to discuss personal matters with his students. The lack of privacy has become a problem, even in a place as deserted as West 54th Street.

"Students may not be able to concentrate when Davenport’s independent study courses meet in his office. "The professors are powerful they are a part of it too; they stop by and make comments," said an amused Davenport.

The distance has made daily tasks complicated for Tung. "We are far away from the core services of the college, such as the copy center, the administrative offices, the library, and so on. Turning in grades and other such errands must now be planned in advance-I cannot just run over to the registrar or library on the way to class, for example, as our classes are now in Westport," Tung said.

The deserted buildings standing alongside the construction site on West 54th Street can often leave professors feeling isolated. "It makes the English department feel like we are outsiders when in a sense we should be complete insiders," said Professor Adam Berlin, who has been at John Jay for over 10 years. "All students pass through the English department, they have to take composition and literature classes. If any department should be at the center of John Jay’s campus, it should be English."

Alex Gonzalez, a security guard at the department, claimed that there is not a lot of traffic from John Jay at the new location. He sees about 25 students during his shifts, which last from the morning until late in the afternoon. That is a small number compared to the amount of students Berlin saw when the department was still in North Hall. He remembers seeing five students on average during office hours, but now the influx of students has diminished to one or none for any given office hour.

"It has made me feel like I'm distant from what’s happening and it’s disappointing," said Berlin. "Part of the joy of being a teacher is the relationships formed with students, and these relationships have suffered because students don’t make the walk from the main campus to 54th Street."
Soldiers Caught in Insurance Limbo After Discharge

Right after leaving the Army, veterans may find themselves in the Emergency Room without any form of health insurance from TRICARE, their active duty provider.

Every soldier is offered primary health care by Veterans Affairs after leaving the military. As long as the veterans go to the Veterans Affairs offices for all their health care, they don’t need to pay anything. “We gladly offer all veterans health care, but there comes a point where we can only do so much,” said Eric Myl, an official at the VA from the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs in New York City.

“When the veterans find themselves needing the ER, they couldn’t possibly come to us to get a limb sewed back on,” Myl said.

Randall Combs found himself in a predicament just four days after leaving the Army. Randall was helping his father, Thomas Combs, put on a new roof at his home in Fayetteville, North Carolina. While laying the tar down, Randall slipped and ended up breaking his left leg. After being treated at the ER, Randall was asked to pay his medical bills.

Randall called the military health care provider TRICARE multiple times, and he was told that the day you leave the Army is the day your health insurance ends.

“I had heard rumors about the health insurance ending as soon as I left, but I was hoping this country would see how I protected and served and would maybe help me out a little bit,” Combs said.

Another soldier, Kyle Comstock, found himself in the same situation. Three weeks after leaving the Army, Comstock was in a park playing football with some friends when he was unexpectedly tackled. He broke his wrist in two places. Comstock went to the ER where he received excellent care.

Four days after the ER trip, Comstock received a notice in the mail that pertained to the payment for his hospital stay.

Confused, he called TRICARE, and was told the same thing Randall Combs was. “I was surprised to hear my insurance ended the day I left the Army, I thought I had a buffer to help me while I searched for a new insurance,” Comstock said.

“If I had known that, I would have gone back to my Army instincts and treated myself,” he laughed.

TRICARE is the main provider of military health insurance given to all soldiers. “This job breaks my heart, I receive hundreds of phone calls a day dealing with veterans lack of health care,” said TRICARE representative Christine Cullen. She also explained that as soon as soldiers leave the Army, they are immediately cut off from their TRICARE insurance.

“It truly breaks my heart, I have thought about quitting many time, I’m really just disappointed in this country,” Cullen said.

Hell’s Kitchen Market Goes Upstate Green

By Hollan George

It’s a dreary, bleak rainy day in Manhattan. There are people rushing down the sidewalk, bee-lineing it to their next destinations for the day. But there is a different kind of buzz on 9th Avenue between 57th and 58th Street as people crowd around the large tents that line the sidewalk.

“How much are these onions by the pound here, sir?” asked a hurried woman toward the sign above her head, she cracked who looked way too caffeinated and distracted to notice the large green sign positioned neatly on the sidewalk, and all crowded around the large tents that line the sidewalk.

“It’s a dreary, bleak rainy day in Manhattan, you feel an aura of togetherness and family. A feeling that these people aren’t something larger than themselves,” explains Morgiewicz. Being that he has been with the organization for ten years, he would know what exactly he is talking about.

“The mission of the Green Market Organization is to get fresh products to the New Yorker, but, at the same time, getting us an outlet, and more of an income, for our produce,” explains Morgiewicz.

“Standing in this place, in the middle of Manhattan, you feel an aura of togetherness and family. A feeling that these people aren’t something larger than themselves.”

Joe Morgiewicz tends his stand on Ninth Avenue.

Morgiewicz.

“With me, my produce will be just picked yesterday,” he said. Judging from the amount of people crowding around the stands, it is easy to assume that through this organization, farmers make a good profit from selling produce directly to consumers.

“About half our income comes from selling around here in the city,” Morgiewicz said. People are glad to take advantage of the Green Market and they appreciate the products that the farmers offer. “I’ve bought peaches and apples, and corn or something, can’t remember,” said Professor Mairino, who teaches Physical Education at John Jay.

“I got a cookie, yeah, that’s it. Was expensive though, we just stumbled on it really,” said Shawn, a sophomore at John Jay.

“Na, I didn’t buy anything so far, man. But it’s more fresh, I’m sure,” said Raphael, also a sophomore, as he relaxed in the back of the library with Shawn.

“Yeah, it’s a good thing and a good break from the city stuff,” said Nancy Egan, a librarian at John Jay.

“It’s pricey, but I feel better that they taste fresher, and I know they’re locally grown,” Egan said. “Besides, they’re small farmers who could, you know, use the money.”
By Jaja Grays

“I was walking the beat the other night over on Merrick Boulevard and 109 when I saw a young black male run out of a bodega with a gun and a bag in his hand. As soon as he saw me he ran, but he didn’t get far,” said officer Anthony Singleton.

“As we both ran, I shouted ‘drop your weapon,’ it didn’t take him long to stop, he was young and scared,” said Singleton. “I took him down to the station for questioning, and I asked him how he got the gun, he told me ’off the street.’”

“It shouldn’t be this easy to obtain a gun. The crime rate is rising and it’s mainly due to these illegal guns,” Singleton said.

Delano Martin, a member of the Southeast Queens community was a victim of illegal guns. “I was just walking in Baisly Park one night, and these two men dressed in dark clothes started shooting at me and my friend, they got me in the leg and ran,” he said.

Later, after the investigation was finished and they caught the criminals, the detectives told him that the men were too young to even be registered for a gun. Member of the community are beginning to express their feelings that there is a need for greater gun restrictions.

“I hope this will not happen to anyone else, something should be done to enforce stricter gun laws,” Martin said. Another victim, Dequan Randolph, echoed the same sentiment. “I know half these guys don’t have registered guns,” said Randolph. “It’s happening to too many of us, and no one is doing anything about it.”

Detective Russo, of the 113th Precinct, said “This area is only going to have a certain number of police patrolling it.” The detective went on to describe the system that determines the crime level. Level A is for the least amount of crime which means little to no crime. Level B means that there is more crime in the area, but not an immense amount. Level C means that the area has constant crime occurring, said the detective. “This is a B area, so you already have a set amount of police that can patrol the area,” he said.

At a rally for a recent victim of illegal guns, local school counselor Leroy Conmee explained what he plans to do about this serious problem. “We need the police to get out of their patrol cars and get on their feet, walking around the area,” said Conmee. “We also need to establish more youth programs to get these kids off the streets.”

Other residents also feel that there are not enough programs for area youth, but they have a different solution to the problem.

Hugh Devero, who owns a corner store, thinks that more needs to be done to get guns off the streets. “I know in Brooklyn they established a gun for money program, in which anyone who was in possession of an illegal gun can drop off the gun at local churches and receive one hundred dollars,” Devero said.

Maybe stricter gun laws are not enough of a solution. Perhaps a combination of more outreach programs for the youth, and a “gun drive,” would be helpful for the community and the youth alike. Regardless, more needs to be done to save lives.

Want to learn to write for the newspaper?
The English Department is offering the following journalism electives for the Spring Semester 2008:

ENG233: “Introductory Journalism”
section 01 meets Tuesday/Thursday from 12:30-1:45
section 02 meets Monday/Wednesday from 7:50-9:05

ENG290: “Beat Reporting”
section 01 meets Tuesday from 1:55-3:10

By George Jones

When the final pitch was thrown on September 21st at one of the world’s most famous sports stages, a new chapter in New York sports history was opened. But the impact of the new Yankee Stadium on the surrounding community goes way deeper than sports.

As construction closes, and the smoke settles, it is easy to see that the neighborhood around Yankee Stadium has drastically changed. Some, like Bronx native Mercedes Barroto think it’s for the better.

“The neighborhood looks 10 times better than it did seven years ago, and the closing of one of the parks in the neighborhood is a price I’m willing to pay for the neighborhood as a whole changing for the better,” she said.

Others seem to look at the situation as much more negative. Samantha Rodriguez, a mother and resident of the area, is one of the many people directly feeling the repercussions of the destruction of Macom’s Dam Park. “It is said that they didn’t even consider the people here now,” she said. “There were plans to build new parks in the future, but that is too far away to make up for the void left in the neighborhood now.” While parks were torn down, renovations took place. With the negative side of the story, positive, but one usually has to outweigh the other.

When news first broke of a new stadium going up on 161st Street and River Avenue opinions varied widely. Some thought that the stadium would be great for the neighborhood, that it would create jobs, and that it would bring more attention to a community already in need of an overhaul.

Others found that the closing of Macom’s Dam Park was too much for the residents of the area to surrender. The closing of the park left a huge void in the neighborhood. The young men who used Mullayle Skate Park were forced to move downtown. “I went to Lou Gehrig Plaza on 161st Street and Walton Avenue. “It sucks that we were kicked out, but we can skate anywhere,” said David Gomez, one of the many skateboarders who have been displaced.

Another huge portion of the people who will be seeing a change are longtime Yankee fans. Fans will likely have to ante up a bit more of their hard earned cash to visit the new stadium. “So far with the new and improved stadium comes bigger price tags.

But some fans are excited for the new facilities. Edmanuel Guererro, a displaced New Yorker, is just one of the many fans who will be making a trip back to the city just to experience the new stadium. “I’ll definitely be heading up there for the first game,” he said. “That is something you can only experience once in a lifetime.”

Others feel like the higher ups in the Yankees organization have forgotten those small people who have carried the organization over the years. “They’re charging as if it were a Broadway play or something,” said Raymond Fernandez, a Manhattan native and longtime Yankee fan and supporter. “It’s like they ditched the little guy for large corporate customers,” he said.

While ticket prices have not been officially released yet by the Yankees, many fear that the prices will be a far cry from the five dollar tickets that were available a few times in the past.

Chris Rella, one of the many construction workers who have been contracted to work on the stadium, is one of the people who realizes that the experience Yankees fans have in their stadium, what we”的 Yankees really went all out, but I feel like it’s more of a corporate stadium than anything else,” he said. “It’s not going to be an affordable experience for middle class families like mine, but it’s kind of expected with the way corporate America has taken over the sporting industry.”

Not everyone in the neighborhood has felt the impact of the construction, except in terms of what they may see on their way to work. Workers at Stadium Gourmet Deli on 161st Street and Walton Avenue claim that they really haven’t seen any difference, other than how the neighborhood looks. “I don’t see that much change,” said one worker. “I feel like they ditched the neighborhood for the sake of enjoying the stadium.”

With the final season in the old stadium over, and a neighborhood still torn over the impact of the new stadium, we have only to look to the next season for a conclusion. Opening day is April 16, 2009.

Subway Platform Poet

By Marshall Li

In the midst of a busy subway platform, Donald Green sits on a black plastic milk crate with only a purse by his side, as thousands of people frantically rush for their trains.

With a pen in one hand, and construction paper in another, Green jots down his thoughts before the morning rush hour ‘1 Train arrives at the crowded platform. As the commuters dissipate, Green begins to set up posters. One poster proclaims “New York Times Published Poet.”

As the next wave of busy New Yorkers race down the stairs, Green clears his throat to speak:

“Does life have within it the ability to return? The earth offers flowers, The earth greets the dead

The body still seeds
So if the world through war
Was turned to debris
Can there be energy to settle on space and rise?”

Often ignored, Green talks about his true passion for the art of poetry. “I write because I must express myself,” he said. “I discovered my passion for poetry by accident.”

Even at a young age, Green had high hopes for his future. “I always wanted to be a famous singer,” he said. After attempting to try for several years, Green realized that singing wasn’t his true calling and decided to find something else. “As a kid I used to get upset a lot, so I decided to write all those thoughts and ideas down, and it made me feel good to express those emotions,” he said.

For many people, their true calling usually happens by accident. For Green, it wasn’t until his English teacher at Frederick Douglass Junior High School assigned the class to write a poem. As the deadline approached, Green handed in his poem titled ‘Who I am?’ not knowing that it would spark his passion for poetry. “The following day my English teacher told me she wanted me to present my poem to the entire eighth grade assembly,” he said. “One of my greatest achievements was having my poem published in ‘the New York Times,’” he said.

Green admits that it all happened by accident when a journalist approached him and asked him if he would write a poem for the New York Times. “His name was Tom Paul, he messaged me back and we talked about a piece of my work. He’s like a literary critic,” said Green.

Green often mentions that he is motivated to write even through difficult times in his life. “Lorraine Hansberry was one of my biggest motivators,” he said. “When I saw ‘Raisin in the Sun’ on Broadway as a teenager, it kept me inspired to keep on writing. It showed me that if I kept working hard at it, I would eventually make it happen.”

Green hopes to one day put away the pushcart and the milk crates for good. “I don’t plan on doing the subway scene for long,” he said. Green is currently working on a book, which he hopes to publish.

Until then he can sometimes be found near the crosswalk between 14th Street and the 6th Avenue subway station. However, he moves from spot to spot. He offers copies of his work, a manuscript, for sale, as well as handwritten poems on the spot to those who request them.

Despite his current status, Green is striving to publish his poetry. “Publication is key,” he said. With his book under way, Green, the pushcart poet, may find himself winning the prestigious Pushcart Prize and retiring his pushcart for good.
From Bushwick to the Front Lines in Ohio

By Constantinos Kokkinos

“New York? You’re a long way from home. You’re in the wrong place, son,” said the police officer when Dan Weber got back to New York on November 8th. He had been in Ohio working as a youth organizer for the Obama campaign. He was outside of a rap concert registering voters, and he had just put up an Obama poster when the cop tore it down.

“Come here, I’m gonna write you up for littering,” said the police officer, tapping Weber by the arm and bringing him to another location. The officer ultimately let Weber go, but not before he made Weber aware of where he was working, and of who he would be dealing with.

“I’m a Chicago boy in my life, and he finally says to me ‘I’m gonna give you a warning for littering’ and this other cop chimes in ‘No, I’m gonna give you a warning for trespassing, now get outta here’,” Weber said.

Aptly, while he was gone, his roommates were producing a play heavily influenced by the political atmosphere of the campaign. The play was called “No City,” and presented a view of the progression of American politics, and of how humanity and politics mix. Aaron is a little over six feet tall and is thin, but broad shouldered, with a beat of a nose, and blond hair that adds half a foot to his height. A look of envy and shame surfaces within his steady, tired eyes when he speaks of missed opportunities such as acting in his roommates’ play, or creating music with them.

“You’re never gonna leave again are you Weber?” said his roommate, Tom Kelly.

“No, I miss you way too much,” Tom said Weber, as he patted Kelly’s back.

Weber graduated in August of 2008 from Marymount Manhattan College with a degree in political science. He had been in the school primarily because they would accept the many acting credits that he had acquired from attending the Acting School for Film and Television in New York. To explain why he hadn’t pursued a degree in the arts, he attempts an explanation of his psyche.

“I have two sides of myself that are continuously at odds with each other. This artistic side that hopes to do well in acting, and an intellectual side that goes and finishes a degree in political science,” Weber said.

Weber was a senator in the student council and graduated valedictorian at Ros Common High School in Michigan, and he tells of the aspirations that his teachers and parents had for him to attend an Ivy League school and become successful. He also played large roles in many of his high school’s plays. When Weber came to the city, it was his first time supporting himself and being on his own, and then acting on the backburner. He did some paid acting work for the School of Visual Arts, and he had a part in a pilot for Nickelodeon, but acting hardly paid his rent and living expenses.

“I never got so far as to join the union, or even have an agent because I was so busy supporting myself for the first time in my life,” Weber said.

Weber knew that he wanted to better the country by trying his hand at politics, but acting would incessantly tempt him. And it doesn’t help that all of his roommates act, play music or create art.

He is 23-years-old and lives with seven other people in a large loft apartment in Brooklyn that is an art project all in itself. When he has his friends over at the house, they tore every wall down and built a new loft space with five separate rooms. We sat in his living room, with the bare wood posts which support the many rooms surrounding us.

To constantly be around actors, and see the joy they feel starring in a play, or producing one, can be very inspiring. When he attended Marymount he had roles in some plays, but many of the arts he participated in included his roommates’ many projects.

Then he got a call from his mom in September that rearranged his values.

“My mom had called me and told me that my new step-dad had been laid off from his job in Michigan, the economy is so bad there that people can’t afford cable anymore,” Weber said.

His step-dad worked for a company that took a toll on his mind and body. Being alone in a part of the country you know nothing about, and working long hours, prompted more than one nervous breakdown. He was hired to organize Youth Vote Corps in Bowling Green, which is the branch of the campaign that focused on university students and tried to create a buzz around campuses for Obama.

“Then I started to feel uneasy, and I started to feel kind of stir-crazy,” Weber said.

He applied to the Obama campaign directly after graduating, and to the Working Families Party, where he ended up working for a month on Daniel Squadron’s state senate campaign.

“All of a sudden I was driving over the Williamsburg Bridge and I got this call from the Obama campaign saying they wanted to offer me a job in Ohio, and asking me if I could start next Monday,” Weber said.

It took about a month for the Obama campaign to call him from the day he applied, and he had doubted they would ever get back to him. He took a job in construction after finishing with the Squadron campaign.

Although he doubted the Obama campaign would hire him, the lateness of the call was perfect because it gave him a month to gain organizing experience with Squadron. He had been trained on numerous campaigning tactics with the Working Families party.

They taught him how to effectively canvass a neighborhood, conduct phone calls, train volunteers and about “cutting turf,” a tactic where a campaign divides districts into designated portions for individuals to work in.

This was the beginning of the campaign’s vying for his soul, Weber said. The work was incredibly hard, and it took a toll on his mind and body. Being alone in a part of the country you know nothing about, and working long hours, prompted more than one nervous breakdown.

He was hired to organize Youth Vote Corps in Bowling Green, which is the branch of the campaign that focused on university students and tried to create a buzz around campuses for Obama.

Continued on Page 8
The English Department’s new poetry professor, Alexander Long, plays bass with his band, Redhead Betty Takeout, when he’s not writing or teaching.

Poetry and music have always been a part of Long’s life. A soloist in his high school choir, he also played the trombone in a school band. “That thing was bigger than I was,” he said. Music was the primary means of keeping him out of trouble in an unsafe neighborhood, and he’s been strumming ever since his father brought home a bass guitar. His dad gave him a few lessons, and he picked up the rest by ear.

Long’s informal training led him from one band to another since he was 12. He and various inconsistent groups created tunes influenced by the Beatles, and they performed in high school talent shows, bedazzling some private parties (none of them were old enough for bars yet).

For Long, Pennsylvania was a place where he found escape. Playing was something for him to do. “The two pastimes are drinking and snowmobiling,” Long said. All the spare time made it possible for him to lose himself in music, and the boredom and the slow-paced lifestyle of Pennsylvania would also allow him to perfect his next hobby.

As a sophomore at West Chester University, Long needed an elective to receive financial aid and complete his undergraduate studies. He enrolled in a poetry workshop, which he underestimated the difficulty of, and which he knew nothing about. “I thought poems came from the heart. I thought you just write your emotions down, but that was not the case,” he said. The professor was 63, “serious and very imposing.” Long was terrified initially.

He began writing his poetry off the top of his head and did not meet the standards according to his professor. The professor, then, Clive Buckley, asked to speak with him during office hours. Long’s performance led him to believe that poetry was not his specialty, and he considered dropping the class.

Buckley asked him what he was reading, and he confessed that he wasn’t reading any poetry. The intimidating authority figure was kind, gave him a reading list, and encouraged him to keep trying. He kept practicing and the office visits became a routine. Long eventually met Buckley’s demands and worked diligently. “If you earned his respect, you had it for life,” Long said. His terrified first impression withered away and his willingness to achieve strengthened both their relationship and his poetry.

After graduating, Long worked as a sous chef, which he claims is not as fancy as it sounds. He spent 12 to 15 hours a day on his feet in a 90 degree kitchen. When he wasn’t cooking for a living, he wrote obituaries for a local newspaper in order to make ends meet. “I still consider myself that stupid kid writing obituaries,” Long said.

He described his second job to be “equally awful.” It required that he deal with family members in grief and kooky funeral owners. That job made him a little desensitized, but the constant reminder of loss ultimately left him unnumbed, and he sometimes crawled into bed shak ing.

The work was tiring and kept him busy enough to put off his writing for two years. Buckley called him up one night and asked why he was cooking for a living. “I need to pay bills,” Long said.

He was encouraged to stop by a Buckley’s class even though he was no longer a student. Buckley got him to continue writing, and inspired him toward his future career. “I didn’t know it then, but he was showing me what my life could be like,” Long said. Buckley saw something in him that he didn’t see and advised him that it was time for graduate school. “I was ignorant. I didn’t know how to go about pursuing the thing I enjoyed. Buckley saw something in me, and he pulled it out,” Long said.

He got accepted to Western Michigan University, where he received his M.F.A. Again, the dull atmosphere allowed him to keep perfecting his work. He did nothing but read and write. Next, Long was accepted to the writing seminars at Johns Hopkins University, where he earned his master’s degree. He later went on to obtain his doctorate from the University of Delaware.

He and his former band friends—Neil Mcgettigan, Drew Rolli, and Tim O’Donnell—reconvened after a while, and the group kept the name Redhead Betty Takeout.

Today they play at a mix of Irish pubs, private parties and world-class venues that bring in nationally known acts. “It’s exciting being on stage and interacting with the crowd while people are clapping. I get that rush people talk about,” Long said.

They now play whenever they get the chance, which often results in them having to communicate electronically in order to mix melodies. Then they pick up on each other’s mistakes and fix them during performances.

“We know each other inside and out when we’re playing. If we had just met that would not be the case,” Long said.

They have a creative connection and get along like family. The group has been fusing sounds together since 1996, and they don’t plan on stopping regardless of what the compensation is. “Would it be great to get a six-week check in the mail? It would be, but we’re not holding our breath,” Long said.

His experiences served as inspiration for much of his writing. The tragic loss of his two friends, through a suicide and a motorcycle accident, would pop up in his poems.

Even writing obituaries and working in a kitchen influenced his writing and reinforced his work ethic.


His second book of poems, “Light Here Light There,” will be released by C&R Press soon. “I always have that need to create something,” Long said.

New Yorkers Find Spiritual Solidarity at Ananda Ashram

By Jerry Rengel

Deep in the forest of the Catskill Mountains in Monroe, New York, a small group has congregated to practice spiritual meditation. Along the banks of a quiet stream, a young man wearing an NYU shirt sits beside a middle-aged man who keeps his BlackBerry close at hand. Besides them, a woman wearing a white T-shirt and a purple pillow while her husband rests on his favorite New York Jets towel, his knees pressed tightly against his purple pillow while her husband rests on his favorite New York Jets towel, his knees bent inward, and his fingers Buddha-like.

At the forefront of the small group, a slight grey-haired Indian man wearing a soft golden robe sits above a stone.

Back in the real world, they are individuals whose lives run parallel to one another. But at the Ananda Ashram, their paths have crossed in the pursuit of enlightenment. Together, they break the overwhelming silence of the forest with the resonating sound of “Ommmm.”

Visitors to the ashram are led in meditation courses and thematic discussions by gurus and senior disciples throughout the weekend. “I’ve been practicing meditation for only a year and haven’t found anywhere like it. If the economy gets worse, I’ll probably have more time and more of a reason to meditate,” said Luigi Martinez, an aircraft maintenance technician for Jet Blue. Martinez, like many other Americans is fixated on the economic crisis plaguing the stock market. But Martinez has found an answer to this problem. “Meditating helps me concentrate on personal issues, when I meditate I don’t think of my work or being unemployed, it really helps,” Martinez said.

At the Ananda Ashram, you can find Wall Street businessmen, college students, retired citizens and housewives meditating together, and sharing their weekends at this spiritual retreat. More and more people from all walks of life are in search of retreats like these, and attendance seems to be growing.

David Harshada Wagner, a meditation teacher in Manhattan agreed. “The growing interest in the ashram, and the general quest for answers has been cultivated by the trend of national crises that have impacted individuals, and have gone unanswered, untested and unquestioned, he said.

Wagner teaches students the “inner-workings” of life through meditation, and its use as spiritual and medical regenerator. Wagner believes that political and social unrest can be the factor for the growing numbers of ashram visitors. He thinks that meditation is the best substitute for the intoxicating high he used to derive from drugs. “I began meditating at the age of twenty, after losing my mother to cancer, and withdrawing from a period of drug use,” Wagner said.

Although the ashram was founded in 1964, and enjoyed popularity throughout the 1960s counterculture revolution, it has since enjoyed an influx of motivated and spiritually driven youth. The ashram has reported increased attendance this year. This is largely attributed to pressing issues such as the war in Iraq and the economic crisis that has entered the national spotlight.

Jennifer Tanjeloff, a student counselor, spiritual advisor and Columbia University graduate is representative of this fact. “Many people are trying to find answers to the problems they have back in the real world, some are financial and some are political even, here at the ashram, they are able to focus and find the answers to those problems within themselves. It truly is an amazing experience,” Tanjeloff said.
“I was on campus with a clipboard and a long board, basically a crazy guy from Brooklyn getting people registered to vote,” Weber said.

Of course, no one wants to talk to the person with the clipboard, even in Ohio, so he had to be inventive. He would knock on dorm room doors, encouraged by his superiors to do whatever was necessary. At the campus he was working on, the ratio of Obama supporters to McCain supporters was 60 to 40. There were many times he found himself in the wrong place.

“I walked down this one hall,” said Weber, “and it was obviously a lot of McCain supporters, I had seen signs hanging in their rooms. It seemed like the college put all these like-minded people in the same hall, and they were all these redneck, you know, good ol’ boys, listen to their music,” Weber said.

One of these McCain supporters was listening to a song from the late 1960s, which Weber informed him was a Vietnam War protest song. “He said to me ‘Yeah, I like the democrats’ music but I don’t like their ideas.’ So again I was like I’m in the wrong place,” Weber said.

The McCain support on campus was suppressed, but it existed. So although he was a New Yorker coming to claim an Ohio campus for Obama, the resistance had the chance to organize, they just didn’t.

That’s not to say that the Obama campaign he was working with was the most organized bunch. It was not just the long hours he worked, the headquarters was ridden with personal conflicts and passive-aggressive behavior, which made the job harder.

“You’re working for people who had been on the campaign for months and months, and I felt at that time that people felt threatened by my new ideas, or how I wanted to arrange things, and how I worked,” said Weber. “People on the campaign had a saying: ‘Oh the bureaucracy.’”

As Weber put it, to attain workers’ souls they purposefully take people from their home states and send them across the country, so that a worker will not have any connections to the community they work for. No friends, no family to visit, and no usual hangout spots to relax in.

“And I guess that will have you devote more time to the campaign,” Weber said.

His rent for the apartment in Brooklyn is around $800 a month, and although he did not disclose specifically how much he was paid, he worked 14 hours every day mostly to pay his rent.

“It was never about the money, and they sort of made sure of that. Money was never brought up during the work, I just signed a contract in the beginning and that was the last of it,” Weber said.

All of the campaign workers didn’t really have time to go out and grab a drink, they would work, go to sleep, and wake up to work again. Although he didn’t feel like it was necessary, it was nice to have a night on the town. They had finished their work early and Aaron went out alone to find civilization, and a drink. He went to the center of town in Bowling Green and was shocked to find a lively night scene.

“I was kind of impressed because it’s out in the middle of this little town, the buildings aren’t taller than three stories, but I walked into this one bar, and it was all these goths partying down to this crazy dance music, and I was like ‘Woah, look at this subculture, go BG’,” Weber said.

At the home stretch of the campaign, one week before the election, he was driving people to the polls for early voting by the bus load with a political action campaign called Vote Today Ohio.

“It was funny, I had gotten no sleep one day and I was responsible for picking up and dropping off a whole list of people, mostly older voters who didn’t have the means to get to the polls. I was driving a 12 person van and on one trip I took a bumper right off of a parked car,” Weber said.

Before leaving for Ohio, Weber was full of hope and drive. He needed to test his mettle, and to see if he could work in politics. He has come back an experienced organizer, but not without cost. The work for Obama shifted the focus of every individual working or volunteering for the campaign from themselves to getting one man elected. According to Weber, this is good and bad because it brings you outside of yourself, and like meditation, it can help organize your own thoughts and desires.

“I think the thing that the Obama campaign did so well was to completely take away the individual in our lives, because no matter what you’re doing, or where you are, it’s still about you, and this was something bigger than me and myself,” said Weber. “There was something really unexplainable about that because you remove yourself from the work and from the situation.”

He may still be energized, but he is swimming in murky economic waters. Weber is now jobless, and sees visibly weakened and emotionally fatigued from his work on the campaign. His job in construction that he did for a week and a half before the campaign paid him around $20 an hour, a stark contrast to how much he was paid working for Obama. He has been on four different interviews for jobs waiting tables in Manhattan, and he hasn’t been called back for any. Perhaps he will become a construction worker again, but he has heard from his former buddies in the business that the recession has greatly impacted the sector. One friend told him he had been given one construction job in two weeks.

Now, Weber’s desire to act can take priority. After being on the backburner to politics, Weber feels as though he can allow himself to pursue it with more tenacity. He plans to get headshots and go to some auditions.

“I did this great thing, it was an incredible experience, and I won’t be involved in anything cooler in the next four years,” said Weber. “I think auditions are something that now I want to do.”

Before he finishes speaking, Weber’s girlfriend, tall like him with the features of a model, walks down the stairs of their loft space and beckons him to join her in his room with a gentle touch of her hand to his cheek. Weber is whisked away by his counterpart, and they go upstairs for some much needed rehabilitation.