



give take give

give

take

give

words and pictures by
Dave Loewenstein

Before we get started, it should be noted that this whole give take give business is technically illegal...

CODE OF THE CITY OF LAWRENCE, KANSAS

CHAPTER IX. HEALTH AND SANITATION

Article 4. Collection, Hauling, Disposal of Solid Waste

9-409 UNLAWFUL ACTS

Unless authorized hereby to collect and dispose of refuse or to operate a service for the collection of material for recycling, it shall be unlawful for any person to: (Ord. 5649; Ord. 6061; Ord. 6385)

- (A) Remove any portion of the contents of any refuse container, or remove any material placed out by residents or occupants of any premise for collection by operators of recycling services authorized under the provisions of Article 9-416;
- (B) Upset, turn over, remove or carry away a refuse container or lid thereto, or to damage such container or lid in any manner;
- (C) Place or deposit refuse or any substance in a container other than his or her own, one which has been provided for his or her use, or a container provided and marked for public use

That man was the Word Tamer. The Tamer spent his nights rummaging through all the trash of the world. He was interested only in letters and photos. He bore each smile, each look, each word of love, or each separation like it was his own story. The Tamer believes that images and words must mix with the ashes of poetry to be reborn in Man's imagination.

- the Narrator

from the 1992 film *Leolo*, written and directed by Jean-Claude Lauzon

Foreword

Dave Loewenstein cares about justice-always. In conversation he asks probing questions and presses one to explore the effects of choices on others, especially the dispossessed. He works for an equitable world through his art and his daily life.

He is a writer, community muralist, painter, print maker, provocateur, underground force and leader in his field. We share a profound interest in the excesses of our material world. I was lucky to grow up near a town dump, the kingdom of freedom. No adult wanted to linger there so it was left to kids enthralled by a pit of free debris.

I learned early to look behind in the alleys where the lost and dumped artifacts told the real stories of any place. So when I came to East Lawrence thirty six years ago I found myself becoming intimate with the river of stuff in the alley behind the Social Service League. The dumpster there is too tall for little kids, military in form, heavy, steady and able to take great abuse. It is weighted with a base scum of grease, bits of plastic, paper, cloth and mud. The rain and snow distills this into a dark essence with compression, then sunlight and pressing weight again. It really is a story cave with a background hum of people asking incredulously, “Who would throw this away?”

So Dave has been closely studying this exchange and the active, daily movement up and down the alley. He's seen the pull of this supply wagon and he knows its significance to the very poor and the well off.

And now we are edging toward a precipice for the dumpster, the League, and the neighborhood. Unhealthy change looms as local power developers in cooperation with patronizing politicians intend to move the dumpster and the League Thrift Store for a year and a half or more. They will build a giant Marriott Hotel while disorienting those who visit the League and the dumpster as a refuge. The whole East Lawrence neighborhood has been declared a Cultural District so moneyed outsiders can leverage our unique people, history and traditions for profit and status. They are blind to us and blind to the gifts of the dumpster - blind to our need to be apart from their machinations and their plans for us.

We have the insights and deep awareness of our neighborhood that come from living here day and night while walking, digging, playing, working and sharing. The people of the

Bottoms know this is an imposed effort to either push us out or clean us up and make our space a place outsiders will feel more comfortable in. The dumpster stands at the edge of all this tension and Dave is watching.

I want to climb into it and float down the Kaw, embed in some sandbar and wait for them to be done. When they do their damage and move on to the next perceived to be cool spot (as they invariably will) those of us able to ride it out can emerge into the sunlight, look around at the debris left everywhere and revel in the gifts bestowed.

See you there Dave.

- KT Walsh, March 2013





The Lawrence DMZ

Since 1999, there has been a large gently sloping field at the southeast corner of 9th and New Hampshire that's big enough for a soccer field or amphitheater. The field is bordered on the south by the windowless wall of the Lawrence Arts Center and on the east by five small buildings, two of which are residential houses, while the other three are used by a massage studio, the Lawrence Percolator and the Social Service League. Ever since the field appeared it has been an active place. There have been concerts (Wilco played there in 2008), Day of the Dead ceremonies, snow sculpture flash mobs, Arts Center classes, poetry readings, Art Tougeau parties, and countless games of tag and frolic. And in the spring it's transformed into a carpet of first golden and then silvery dandelions, the perfect cover for neighborhood rabbits and other critters to mingle.

This open green space adjacent to downtown allows people as far away as Massachusetts Street a clear view all the way over to the Social Service League. It was this view that first enticed Earline James to visit the dumpster behind the League "I was working at SRS and taking an exercise class. I'm driving to class and I stop at the stop sign at 9th and



New Hampshire. I could see it (the dumpster) was just overflowing. And all through class I was thinking, I have to get back and check and see what's in there.”

That was many years ago. Earline has been coming to the dumpster two or three times a week ever since. At first she was looking for things to help supplement her income but now, in retirement, she comes mainly because it gives her pleasure and a sense of purpose. Her regular visits and familiarity with Lawrence's other thrift stores and recycling centers have made her an expert agent of redistribution. When she can't use a thing, she moves it along to where it's needed most. KT Walsh says Earline and others like her are on the front lines of the real reuse and recycling campaigns, and that we should take notice because someday soon we'll all depend on their ingenuity and thrift.

This standard two cubic-yard trash receptacle may not be the most beautiful of designs, but its invention was transformative. Patented in 1937 by the Dempster brothers, the dumpster (a portmanteau combining the surname Dempster with the word dump) allowed trucks to mechanically collect garbage from standardized containers, saving both time and space and improving public health. It also made way for dumpster diving.

Visually, the League's dumpster isn't unique except for its ephemeral skin of local event fliers, and the small concrete pad it sits on giving it the appearance of a sculpture on a pedestal. The dumpster resides in the marginal space between downtown and East Lawrence, a kind of demilitarized zone between the tides of capitalism and the historic working-class neighborhood once (maybe still by some) thought of as dangerous. KT Walsh sees this "inter-zone" as healthy for the community because it brings people from different walks of life into contact with each other,

"Over here you have these people who truly believe in the capitalist system and rely on that and do the capitalist dance. And over here you have people who have struggled for a long time. It's all these people who make other people uncomfortable. And it goes both ways, you know. I think its good because you're forced to see and I hope talk to people who are not like you who may not speak like you whose everyday paradigm is different than yours."

The cycle, the flow and the give take give

"I came around to the idea that the flow is endless. There is no shortage. Just let it flow."
- KT Walsh, Social Service League Manager from 1992 - 1999

There are those who give, those who take and then there are those who do both give and take. These are the people who find themselves, by choice or custom, swept into the current that maintains this small un-moderated gift economy.

Each week the dumpster fills with our unwanted, forgotten or slightly damaged surplus. Archaeologically inclined daydreamers, treasure hunters and urban gleaners come to explore and reimagine its bounty. No one is in charge. There are no rules. And as Kelly Nightengale says, "If nobody's making rules, then nobody's breaking rules." It's anarchy - until Monday

when city sanitation workers unceremoniously attach the dumpster to the back of a garbage truck and watch as it's emptied.

The unspoken, shared sense of caretaking that maintains the dumpster and its environs is apparent to Jean Ann Pike, the current and beloved manager of the Social Service League. "I'm really impressed with the people who root through the dumpster. There are so many people who go through it but there are never piles on the ground. Everybody is so good about keeping it up." When I asked her why she thought people kept it up, she said, "If you've got something, you want to take care of it." The moment we begin "rooting through" the dumpster, we become implicated in its future health and vitality. Like a river we take fish from or a friendship we depend on, without our care and attention they can't be sustained.

On its surface this give and take may look unassuming, but self-regulating gift economies are a radical departure from the system we take for granted. Writer Lewis Hyde connects the dots when he says, "both anarchism and gift exchange share the assumption that it is not when a part of the self is inhibited and restrained, but when a part of the self is given away, that community appears."

Community appears.

Community appears at the dumpster. That's why it is so important and treasured and maybe even sacred if we use E. F. Schumacher's definition, "Anything we can destroy, but are unable to make is, in a sense, sacred."



"I'm ready to cut back, but I don't want to stop until I know that there's somebody who will do it faithfully – like a job or something. Then I wouldn't have to worry about all those hangers going to the landfill."

- Earline James

My friend Eric Farnsworth, who spends much of his free time enmeshed in gift exchanges like the Lawrence Fruit Tree Project, Farnsworth Bicycle Laboratory and Lawrence Percolator writes, “It comes back to an old idea: the quickest way to feel wealthy is to shift your focus onto the great abundance all around us. An act of generosity – a gift – is a very potent way to cause that shift to happen. I have no idea if people are looking around and deciding that being slightly more generous will make them slightly more happy, but I like to believe that such things are contagious, and might just be spreading.” Or as Lewis Hyde puts it, “ We do not deal in commodities when we wish to initiate or preserve ties of affection.”

The gift is in the story

I take stuff to the dumpster for a couple of reasons. One is that I want to give the things away - not sell them, the other is that I want an excuse to go to the dumpster to see what and who's there. Giving an offering of sorts, is the gesture that signals one's desire to enter the flow that is the give take give.

It's like when you bring a dish to a potluck, the gift of a Jello salad or hummus dip expresses a desire to share time with the others there. The same is true with an engagement ring or buying a round of drinks, the gift giver in both is actually the one asking for something – companionship. The recipient, on the other hand, is the one who accepts the invitation by taking the gift. When we accept the offering, we begin a relationship.

This reminds me of a great short film I saw a few years ago called *Have You Seen This Man?* In the film, artist Geoff Lupo makes handmade fliers that advertise common items like a saltine cracker, a thumbtack and a pen cap. The curious respond to his ads and eventually meet him at his apartment to inspect the goods. Lupo plays it straight asking only for the thirty-five cents advertised and a Polaroid photo with the buyers. He mentions that we use all sorts of elaborate conventions in order to meet other people and that his fliers are as good a way as any. He offers the gift of an experience. The payment for the cracker or pen cap is only a formality, a symbol for the more significant exchange taking place - an exchange that involves Lupo's whimsical creativity and the buyer's adventurous spirit.

When I interviewed Dr. Rachel Vaughn, who has written extensively about dumpster diving, she described a story reminiscent of Lupo's that took place at an auction house her parents used to run in Illinois. She said, referring to people whose possessions were up for sale and how they attached short narratives to the price tags, "That's the only way some people, in my experience, can part with a thing - it's if the story goes along with it."

What we look for and what we find

I have never found anything I was looking for in the League dumpster, but most of what I hope to find can't be held in your hands. I go looking for a surprise, a sign, a poetic juxtaposition, a break from the literal, a challenge, a missing piece, a story, a push, a friend. This puts me in one of the two main groups of people who frequent the dumpster – those looking for meaning. The other group comes looking for more practical things to sell or to use because they can't afford or choose not to buy stuff. Our interests overlap and we end up giving and taking from each other, but our initial motivations are different.

Earline James spends most of her time looking for metal to sell and plush items for the cats and dogs that she helps take care of at the Humane Society. So Earline's part of the that second group, although occasionally she stumbles into more ephemeral and personal items, "I see all those cards and letters that belonged to someone. It seems kind of sad. So many people start journals, the first five or six pages. I take them home to read them like a diary, and you don't even know who they were." Like the Word Tamer from the movie *Leolo*, Earline bears witness to the words of others, trying to make meaning of them from afar.

When Kelly Nightengale, a women's public health worker from East Lawrence, tells her life story, the League dumpster appears again and again as a combined talisman, altar, and fashion outlet. For her, "Its more than a dumpster. It's like this whole expansion of culture, aesthetics, courtesy, relationships and community that can really be an entire world." Kelly is part of that first group, like me, looking for inspiration and sense of place at the dumpster, but as she told me recently sometimes a doo-dad taken for its poetic charm can change your life



in profound ways. Pointing to what looks like antique lapel pin she explains,

"This is a needle threader. It's a little silver oval shaped flat metal item with a small thin wire that you use to thread a needle. The great thing about this is that when I first found it, I didn't know what it was. I thought it was some kind of decorative item, so I started making earrings out of them, necklaces, wearing them with a safety pin on my shirt. And then one day somebody said "Oh, that's such a good idea what you're doing with that needle threader."

And these, (pulling some sheets out of her shoulder pack), are pieces of tissue paper with color transfers on them. I didn't know what they were. I found out later the way I did with the needle threader. You iron them onto cloth so you can embroider over them. Both the transfers and the needle threader inspired me to start embroidering. It's truly changed my life. It made me feel like an artist when I didn't feel like I had any artistic skills. And that happened because of the dumpster."

The alchemy and past lives of trash

Finding value and meaning from the League dumpster requires an open mind and a sense of purpose. For some this means how to make useful or profitable the castoff bits of capitalism's over abundance, for others it means conjuring magic and a story from the lifeless leftovers, but for all it means reimagining and repurposing what's found in ways that may not initially appear possible or practical. Out of need and inspiration, those who go through the dumpster extract the hidden essences from discarded toys, trinkets and obsolesced technology, like alleyway alchemists, melding them to new purposes and identities.

This "garbage," which can at first appear drained of energy and usefulness, simmers under the surface with the residue of past lives and uses. Like the Ruby Slippers in the *Wizard of Oz*, the magic of the stuff in the dumpster stagnates without our active conjuring and belief. Reanimating a thing is done by reconnecting it to a story, like the folks at the auction house, and infusing it with new life and powers.

In Agnes Varda's beautiful documentary film *The Gleaners and I*, she meets the artist Herve, who goes by the moniker VR 99, at his studio in France. VR 99 repurposes found objects from the trash to embellish his paintings. As a self-proclaimed "retriever," he uses a city sanitation pick-up map to plan his gleaning trips. When Varda asks him about why he uses these cast-off bits in his art, VR 99 says, "What's good about these objects is that they have a past, they've already had a life, and they're still very much alive. All you have to do is give them a second chance." He was speaking of objects, but I think this applies to many of the people, struggling to make ends meet, who come to the dumpster hoping to find a second chance.

It's when we relinquish strict control over what we think a thing is for or a person is about, and cast our fortunes to the Fates, that we are opened to the possibilities that the dumpster holds. And sometimes it's not the stuff that's the draw. In the 1970's, C.J. Brune says that activists would meet at the dumpster to "hang out and talk to friends about the speaker at the Union tonight or the latest demonstration."

"It's a cultural icon," says KT Walsh, a place in public where chance meetings occur,

conversations arise and people who once passed each other without even a nod become familiar, adding a new link to the chain of relationships that give strength to the neighborhood. Community appears, or as Kelly Nightengale puts it, at the dumpster, “We’re all at the same party.”

A temporary autonomous zone of good will

Those of us who maintain the dumpster and the gift economy it supports challenge the assumption that chaos will ensue without strictly enforced rules that govern how goods are used and distributed. “The little dumpster that could,” as Rachel Vaughn calls it, insists on being public, free and relatively unsupervised. It encourages a flow of shared obligation and mutual indebtedness moving in opposition to the prevailing flood of anxiety and suspicion that has led to building ever-higher fences and installing security cameras on every corner. It is cared for by a loose affiliation of those of us who frequent it and is therefore vulnerable to our misuse. In other words, there is risk inherent in trust.

The dumpster will return to being filled with garbage if we don’t renew the source of its wealth. It is a temporary autonomous zone of good will, hidden in plain sight, which relies on collaboration and an extended network of givers and takers in order to thrive. If all we do is take and not give, it will disappear. If all we do is give and not take, it will become overwhelmed and unmanageable. We provide the current that moves things along.









Reese's
QUATERED
Artichoke
Hearts

KWIK-SEW
A Kwik Sew pattern

SSVD CLASS
JOHN DEERE CORP.
FIRST CLASS

Handwritten notes and diagrams on envelopes, including a diagram of a bow and the text "Pin on fold" and "Fold".

Over the course of the last year, I made very unscientific inventories of the League dumpster's contents. Here are three plus a last minute bonus.

Inventory #3

Thursday, June 28

8:45pm partly cloudy 95°

This inventory took place two days after the Lawrence City Commission approved a developer's proposal to build a Marriott hotel right across the alley from the dumpster. The potential of the hotel being built was one of the reasons I began *Give Take Give*. My concern was and is that initial construction and long term imposition of the building will dramatically change the use of the alley adjacent to the dumpster by impeding easy access to the exchange and permanently damaging the social environment that has developed there.

More than fifty complete sewing patterns from McCall's, Easy Sew,
and Simplicity for everything from children's clothes to more adult formalwear
Two boxes of slightly dented but unopened cans of vegetables, fruits, and soup
Pair of gray women's jeans size 9
Two pairs of men's dress shoes
Red wire basket with heart decoration
Bunny candle
Wine glass
Small flower vase
"Bless Thee" turkey table decoration
Eight foot long Happy Birthday banner drawn (probably by kids) with markers
KCUR glass beer/coffee mug
Paperback books including:
The Boys From Brazil by Ira Levin
The Tin Can Tree by Anne Tyler
The Mammoth Hunters and *The Clan of the Cave* by Jean M. Auel
You Can't Go Home Again by Thomas Wolfe
O and *Field and Stream* magazines

Inventory #7

Saturday, October 27

5:00pm hazy 43°

Coming back to Lawrence after two months in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, I found the dumpster filled to the brim with misfit toys and wilted flowers. I also learned that construction of the Marriott hotel fifteen feet to the west of the dumpster would begin just as soon as the site was tested for remains of victims of Quantrill's Raid. It's true, the corner of 9th & New Hampshire was, in 1856, the planned building site of St. Luke AME Church. Before construction began back then, the Raid occurred and some believe that African-American soldiers who had been killed in the fighting were buried in a trench that had been laid out for the building. If remains are found, construction would be slowed and possibly put on hold until a full investigation of the site was completed. This being close to Halloween, I can only imagine what might happen if the contractors went ahead with building the hotel on top of such a significant grave site.

Brightly colored crocheted infant jumper

Cannonball Splash waterslide

Small orange life jacket

Black Aqua Socks

T-strap women's black flats size 4 1/2

Murder on the Orient Express by Agatha Christie

Red cardigan baby sweater

Lime green plastic coffee cup

Two large Snoopy-like stuffed animal dogs

Small women's black cardigan sweater

The Ocean book from Scientific American

Madonna's *Bette Davis Dub* cassette

Large Gap green sweater

Infant "Hunny" play seat

9" x 12" Frederic canvas board

CD/cassette portable audio system with speakers

Cut Canna Lily plants that had been growing next to the dumpster

Inventory #11
Thursday, February 7
3:00pm sunny 45°

Coat hangers, some of them nice wood ones
from The Edgewater in Madison, Wisconsin

A couple of raw yams

Straw hat

Two pairs of flip-flops

Two fresh banana peels

Small colored bible quote / prayer cards

Men's Footjoy golf shoes

Many books including:

The House on Hope Street by Danielle Steele

Introduction to Economic Science by George Soule

Gather Together in My Name by Maya Angelou

Discipline and the Disruptive Child

Kansas City Scouts tote bag

Blue sidewalk chalk

One ping-pong ball

They Grow Like Weed posters by Anne Geddes

Pioneer Investments white baseball cap

Handwritten cardboard sign that read -

"Homeless & Pregnant Cold, Hungry + Very Tired Please Help! Thanks"

Close to a full set of 1958 World Book Encyclopedias

Bible Fun coloring book and mazes

Dried dandelions carefully wrapped and packaged in plastic bags

1991-92 color proofs for cover of *Explore Magazine* from the University of Kansas



Inventory #14
Friday, March 29
6:30pm clear 65°

Many, many Playboy magazines from the 1970's - 90's



Thanks to Pat Slimmer for the tip and the photo.





THRIFT
STORE

Drive Thru



"I'm a life-long diver, clearly something I'm passing on to my children."

- Lane Eisenbart, East Lawrence Neighborhood Coordinator



FOODNOT
BOMBS
FREE FOOD
EVERYONE WELCOME
SOUTH PARK
EVERY THURSDAY 6-8 PM

COMIDA
BOMBAS

Let's Eat the Fat (The Story)
A book by the author of the first book in the series...
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SOUTH PARK
EVERY THURSDAY 6-8 PM

KEEP
LAW
RA







WDO

WDO

WEATHERBOOK
© 2000-2001





CAUTION
DO NOT PLAY
OR AROUND

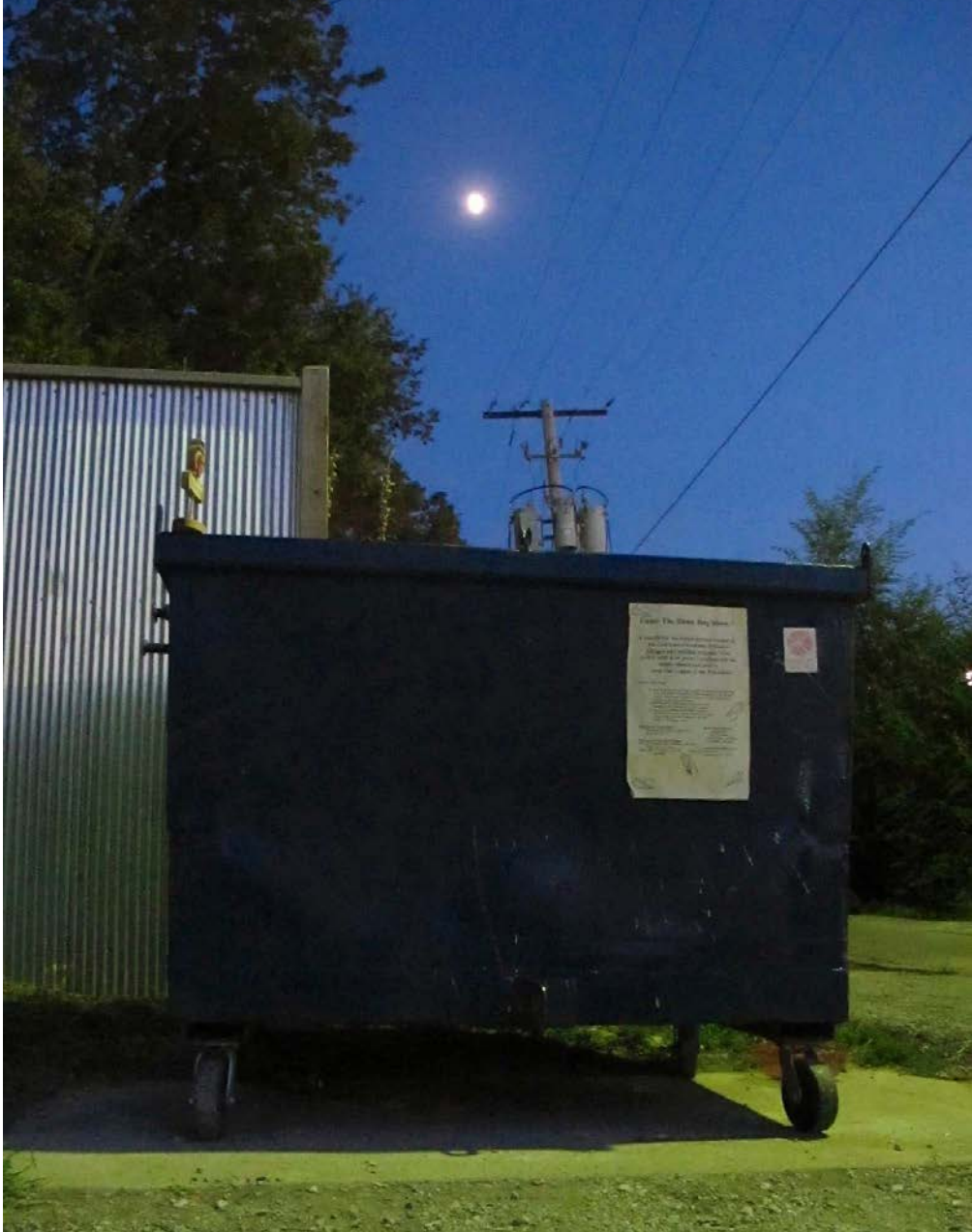




CAUTION
DO NOT FUM
IN OR AROUND

COMPOSTS













The Giraffes

One Saturday afternoon my boyfriend came home carrying an armload of various giraffe items which he proceeded to lay out one by one on my coffee table. The first item Paul revealed was an eight inch tall giraffe that seemed to be made of some sort of animal hide with the characteristic spots painted on. It's worn appearance and deep fine details made it appear to be older and a bit grubby. The next item he produced was a teeny tiny silver new age giraffe mama and baby mounted on a slice of pink geode. The final two items he revealed included an eight inch tall wooden giraffe and a sixteen inch wooden giraffe mask.

Paul was pretty excited about the giraffe score and since Paul had just been in the 9th and Rhode Island neighborhood, I figured he had purchased the giraffes at the Social Service League. Both Paul and I frequent the League at least weekly and it is not uncommon for either one of us to come home with treasures for ourselves, friends or each other. Although I mostly stick to purchasing items from in the store, occasionally I have seen items poking out of the League dumpster deserving of a second glance. A few times I have gone with the urge to investigate and occasionally a dedicated dig leads to a pretty awesome find.

When I asked Paul where the giraffes had come from he confirmed that he had found them in the Social Service League dumpster. Apparently someone was over their giraffe phase and had decided to leave the once beloved items hanging out on the edge of the SSL dumpster. I know that ordinarily Paul would not buy a giraffe of any kind, but for some reason seeing a horde of giraffes in a lonely dumpster made the prospect of liberating a few from a dirty death irresistible.

Filled with the thrifter hope that there still lurked a treasure in the dumpster, I quizzed Paul about what giraffe items he had picked over and left behind. Paul told me that he had left behind multiple giraffe dolls, figurines and even a giraffe sweater. The sweater is what got me. So, lured by the promise of a mystical giraffe sweater I jumped in my car and took off anticipating a thrifting score!

Once at the dumpster I found the giraffes and the sweater. The sweater turned out to be a hideous sweatshirt that I am just not ready to call retro. I saw beanie baby giraffes, a rubber squeezey giraffe, various plush giraffes, another small wooden giraffe, and a few plastic giraffes.

After perusing the collection, I finally settled on two plastic giraffes. Although I felt like we were being greedy taking so many giraffes, I did so with the certainty that if the allure of a giraffe collection faded we could always sneak them back into the dumpster to await discovery by a fellow SSL digger.

- Ellen M. Kearns







awash in extras
fine things and soiled depends
bright rainbow'd toss offs

my daughters digging
deep tunnels through the springtime
in sweet dumpstered joy

we found it for free
that calligraphy set cost
fifty bought brand new

dumpster soap: said ASS
on one side and oh! it said
FACE on the other

the fourth world lifestyle:
we inhabit the spaces
between money'd streets

she told the city
that dumpster belongs to me!
and to all of us.

peeking from the snow
mechanical chickens greet
towers of giraffes

we were all right there
joined in sweat and sharing finds
poking for treasures

Jean Ann, my hero
standing over the abyss
real live cashmered queen

- Rachael Perry

photo by Rachael Perry



THRIFT
STORE

CAUTION
DO NOT PLAY
OR REPAIR



A Thin Plastic Wizard

I remember a warm summers night, a happenstance ladies night traveled by foot for a party of three. Courtesy of the Social Service League's annual ball, it was to be an evening of live music and dancing shared by friends of the league. We danced and departed early. On the quieted canvas of East Lawrence neighborhood we paused per ritual for the Social Service league's dumpster. In a bed of discard we discovered and excavated a thin plastic wizard-head mold. We took it home to fill it with food. Our first inclination was chocolate, but we settled on a layer of sweet almond bark over Rice Crispy treat. With the wizard tucked-into our freezer we took to slumber; couch, bed and floor, anxious for our creation to set. The following nights we came together to snack on our shared creation. It is a marker for many such nights of created fun of unknown adventures with friends here and now far away.

- Authors Unknown

“I was walking down the alley in my tattered work jacket, thinking about how I really needed to replace it, and I came upon the League dumpster. There, right on the top was a Carhartt jacket in much better shape than my current jacket. So I exchanged the two. Some time later, when I'd made the FBL logo stencil, I spray painted the back of the new jacket, thus making it official.”

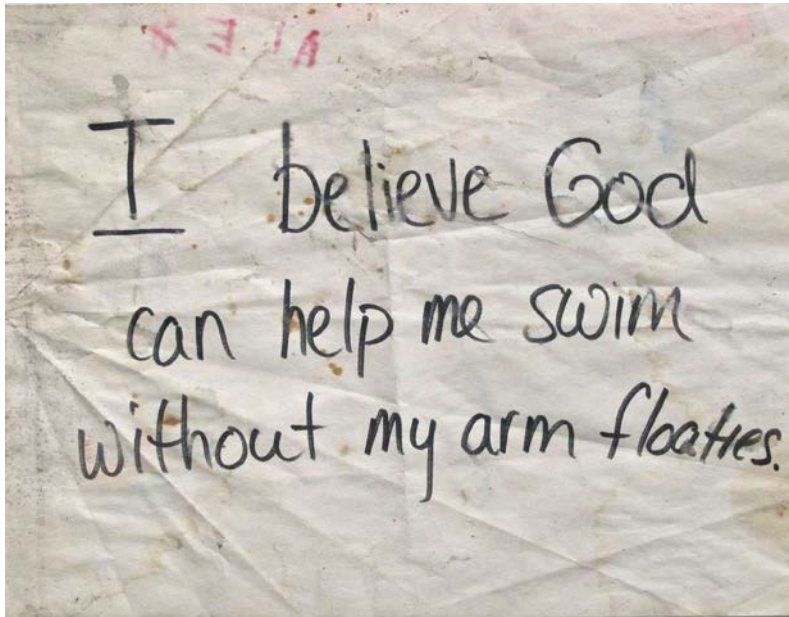
- Eric Farnsworth



“The title translates to: ‘Atheism and modern science.’ I wish I could read the entire book so that I could see whether I agree with it, or if 1977 Russia had other, wacky approaches to atheism, science, and the combination of the two.”

- Andrea Repinsky





"I got it out of the dumpster in like 1997-98. It was all wadded up. I don't know why I unwadded it. It says, "I believe God can help me swim without my arm floaties," which I thought was absolutely hilarious. I'm an atheist. Keep the arm floaties on until you're sure! It must be written for a little kid, I don't know. There is a story here. This is hung on my bathroom wall. Its hung next to an art piece I did years ago where Barbies are sitting at the bottom of the ocean drowning. They've got chains wrapped around their arms and legs. They're on either side of the quote because it seemed like they ought to be. I could just see someone splashing around and going down for the third time. The atheist in me had to have this."

- Jean Ann Pike, Social Service League Manager



Why Not?

On my refrigerator, I had a list of FREE THINGS TO DO.

At the top of the list was this: 1) Visiting the Social Service League Dumpster. It started as a place to peruse for free stuff I might need, the next step beyond thrifting, but proved itself to serve many purposes. Over time, this big blue metal institution would become my social barometer, a gateway to hijinks, a psychic seer, the fringe town square, a back alley Jesus, an ever-morphing Larrytown shrine. It was located at a crossroads between the public and the private. Seedy romanticism reverberated from the walls of the dumpster. DANGER! CRIME! BAD SMELLS!

The League Dumpster was first stop on what I informally called my Beauty School Dropout Tour of East Lawrence. In a creative rut? You could count on the League dumpster for a rut reversal. Need a friend? There were many new friends to meet at the dumpster. Why do you think they call it “The League?” The dumpster jump-started my perspective in walking and exploring my neighborhood. After a session at the dumpster, I learned to see things in my neighborhood the way they should be seen.

One night a friend and I finished up at the bars and took my tape player to the League Dumpster, in passing. This evening we were not alone in perusing the contents of the dumpster. A man with shaggy hair, a pair of red and black cowboy boots with fiery inlays, a ripped up western shirt and a pair of brown pants with contrasting stitches was holding court with another fellow in a splashy printed long dress. I didn’t know then that the cowboy fellow, John Huff, would later become a treasured friend. At the time I was delighted that a stranger was tapped into the same habit I had: pulling random objects out of the dumpster and conjuring outlandish histories behind them.

There were two identical, medium-sized lampshades in the dumpster. We put them on our heads and wrapped ourselves in two pieces of scrap fabric, held hands and spin around. It was unlikely the two lampshades were actually used as headpieces for twin synchronized roller skaters posing for Rorschach test inspiration photos. But that’s what we proclaimed the

lampshades to be. WHY NOT?

If someone could see a teddy bear by looking at the clouds, if entire books regarded with some authority tell us that stars in the sky are constellations representing exquisite mythological creatures, the Social Service League dumpster could provide a backdrop for the dreams of East Lawrence. A family of tinker toy spider people could live in a space pod made from jello molds and lost computers. Godzilla can be sighted playing croquet in the walls of the dumpster. Thrown away Slinkys can become Tesla coils riding in Barbie's corvette on the highway to trash heaven. We can all look like and feel like a million bucks on a pauper's salary.

WHY NOT?

- Kelly Nightengale



Afterword

As of this writing, the field adjacent to the dumpster is still a field, albeit one surrounded by a chain link fence and signs of imminent disruption (construction of a new Marriott hotel was supposed to begin months ago). I walked over to it today to find dandelions just emerging through the gravelly soil. Across the alley, the dumpster was full of coffee mugs, shoes and toddler's toys, with a group of regulars excavating its riches.

Hopefully, this book will not become a nostalgic elegy for something that was. Hopefully, the give take give at the League dumpster will continue on where it's always been. But even if it's moved or disappears all together, there is this thin volume to spark our memory and prick our conscience. It is a gift and an invitation. Pass it on and keep the current flowing.

Dave Loewenstein, April 2013



for Ashley and Mojo



Sources and Inspirations

Code of the City of Lawrence, Kansas

Leoló, a film released in 1992, written and directed by Jean-Claude Lauzon

The Gift, a book published in 1979, written by Lewis Hyde

The Gleaners and I, a documentary film released in 2000, directed by Agnes Varda

A Guide for the Perplexed, a book published in 1977, written by E.F. Schumacher

Have You Seen This Man?, a film released in 2003, directed by Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck

Debt: The First 5000 Years, a book published in 2011, written by David Graeber

The Gift, a book published in 1950, written by Marcel Mauss

The example and spirit of Bill Hatke

The Shelley Miller Free Sale

Interviews

Eric Farnsworth, September 21, 2012

C.J. Brune, November 9, 2012

KT Walsh, November 20, 2012

Rachel Vaughn, November 28, 2012

Jean Ann Pike, December 4, 2012

Chris Lempa, November 30, 2012

Earline James, January 11, 2013

Rose and Tim Morland, February 19, 2013

Kelly Nightengale, February 19, 2013

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For more about Give Take Give, check out -
givetakegive.blogspot.com

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