

I'M TOO YOUNG FOR THIS @#!%

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In Partial Fulfillment of the M.F.A. Degree Requirements

Indiana State University

Department of Art

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## BACKGROUND

I completed a Bachelor's degree in photojournalism and telecommunications at Ball State University in 2003. However, I have never thought of myself as a journalist. Originally, my dream was to shoot for *Rolling Stone* or *Spin* or some other cool music magazine, but getting there wasn't easy.

In order to support my music photography habit, I worked as an assistant to commercial photographers on a freelance basis. Through my membership in the American Society of Media Photographers, I was able to assist photographers from all over the country. I tried to learn as much about the craft of photography as possible during those years, not just about lighting, but also about the business of photography. While I was fortunate to work for dozens of photographers from around the country, there were two photographers in particular that influenced my work greatly. Greg Puls ([www.pulsphoto.com](http://www.pulsphoto.com)) was the first commercial photographer to really take me under his wing. He had this specific way of lighting that was time consuming and really beautiful. (It wasn't uncommon for me to spend an entire day lighting one or two shots.) He was the kind of photographer that editors and art directors hired when they were looking for "arty." Jason Lindsey ([www.jasonlindsey.com](http://www.jasonlindsey.com)) on the other hand, was the type of photographer who did great work and always kept lighting as simple as possible. His strength was in connecting with his clients and subjects on a personal level. (Something Puls often struggled with) Jason was the kind of photographer that made work fun. (There was often drinking involved) Greg was a little more disciplined, but often seemed on the verge of a breakdown.

I followed both photographers around the country for a few years, setting up their gear on shoots for Anthem, eBay, the North Dakota Board of Tourism, Caterpillar, Florida Tourism etc. It was a good way to supplement my income as I travelled around the Midwest and further to shoot bands. By 25, my own work was published everywhere from *Business Week* to *Rolling Stone* and *Spin* to *VanityFair.com*.

When I first came to Indiana State, my work was a mix of what I had learned from Greg and Jason both. I worked in studio and on location for my first exhibit, *Axis of Evil* (<http://www.shearerphoto.com/>). For that show, I followed a group of Goth / Industrial kids around for a year. My philosophy for photographing other people is simple. I fall in love with my subjects, and I try to show the viewer how I see that person or why I'm in love with him or her as a subject. It feels good to connect with people in that way. After the exhibit, I went back to photographing musicians and models for a short time with another photographer friend, Scott Legato ([www.rockstarprophotography.com](http://www.rockstarprophotography.com)). I even shot a wedding here and there when I needed the cash. I did whatever I needed to do to pay the rent with my camera... However, I was so focused on working, that I ignored my own body. It started with a headache. People get headaches, so I would rationalize it away. I shouldn't drink so much, or I'm only going to party on the weekend, or I slept funny. The headaches became more frequent and when I finally went to the hospital, almost a year later, I had bottles of Ibuprofen stashed all over the house. Even though there were other signs, (I would wake up screaming two or three nights a week) I never imagined that I had a brain tumor. Even though I had a brain tumor, I would never have imagined that I had cancer. Cancer is for old people right? According to [planetcancer.com](http://planetcancer.com), "This year over 70,000 young adults ages 15-40 will be diagnosed with cancer."

My tumor was diagnosed at a prompt care clinic. I went in thinking I was having migraines, but left with a brain tumor diagnosis instead. Two days later, on New Year's Day 2009, I had my first brain surgery. It changed my life and the direction of my work completely. I woke up legally blind, paralyzed and speaking in three word phrases with an accent. I did not, however, receive my cancer diagnosis for several more months. I had something called a central neurocytoma. This type of brain tumor accounts for less than 1% of all brain tumors, and 80% of the time it is benign. (I have the distinction of being the second person in Indiana to have this type of tumor.) When it started growing again eight months later, I received stereotactic radiation, which caused an infection called radiation necrosis. After that craziness, I began seeing my acupuncturist, or witch doctor, as I often refer to him. Throughout the entire process I kept a journal of my recovery, mostly so I would remember my life, but it also became a therapeutic tool and part of this thesis.

Years before my diagnosis, I was introduced to the work of David Wajnarowicz, a photographer who died of an AIDS infection. After his diagnosis, he created an extensive body of work dealing with his disease. The cover image of his book, *brushfires in the social landscape*, is a self-portrait of his face, half buried in the ground. This work, more than any other, inspired me after receiving a cancer diagnosis. The biggest difference between he and I being that cancer is not a death sentence. I believe cancer is a chronic, but manageable condition. There have been ups and downs for certain. I have changed my life and the people in it, in order to survive. I often feel like cancer is a cult. After my diagnosis, all my work shifted to cancer and the emotional impact it had on my life. Everything in my life from products I buy or food I eat became about surviving cancer.

## I'M TOO YOUNG FOR THIS @#!%

### SPAZ(TICITY) AND MY GIMP ARM

April 16, 2009 at 2:50pm

"Dear diary,"

It has been about a month since I was released from the hospital, and while progress has been constant, it has also been slow. I am happy to report that I walked two miles today. Not bad, when you consider that I couldn't walk at all just six weeks ago... The muscle spasms come and go, but I am managing. I miss my home, I miss Amanda, and I miss driving. I miss being in school...blah, blah, blah. I miss my friends, but even though they are all reaching out to me, it is just too hard for me to talk to them, and I find myself becoming more and more isolated as the days go by. I am hoping it's all temporary, and they will still be around when I can deal with things better. My left arm is still useless, but I am getting some small movements out of it. It started with my hand... it took my whole body to move my fingers a few millimeters, but now I can open and close a fist. However, I still can't reach out for things, so it's not very functional...yet.

Medicaid is still a nightmare. Now they want us to resend documents they already have. My outpatient clinic won't put me on a two-day program (which would allow me to move home) until it is approved-so keep your fingers crossed for me. Apparently the brain tumor wasn't enough, so I may have to squirt out a couple kids to get any assistance. I can barely take care of myself. Can you imagine throwing kids in the mix? Though it seems the only sure way to get help, I think I will have to pass on that option. The world is passing me by, and I am J Alfred Prufrock, but I remain optimistic that I will get back to a normal life. What other option do I have? I'm far too young to just roll over and die. Finally, I cannot express enough gratitude for all the support I've been getting from you all, my friends and family. I'm sorry if I haven't responded to your individual emails and posts, it's all just been so overwhelming, and I'm brain damaged enough as it is...

"xxooXOxx"

John D. Shearer

### HANDICAP\* FIELDTRIP

May 5, 2009 at 9:53pm

"Dear diary,"

Today I went on a handicap\* fieldtrip. That's right, me and 7 fellow brain patients loaded up the short bus and went to the zoo today. I'm not sure who picked the destination, but what an adventure! Firstly, I am not used to so much commotion, and I am notoriously allergic to children. Also, I'm not allowed to get drunk anymore... As soon as we unloaded from our tricked out, short bus the shenanigans began. It was every brain patient for him/herself as we poured into the petting zoo. (Goats smell like shit) Next, we went to lunch. I had the 10 dollar veggie burger that tasted like last weeks left over's. After that, the scavenger hunt began. At one point, we lost a brain patient, but she was found 20 minutes later scaring a small group of children. (Don't worry, she's harmless, really.) The trip ended with a "water donkey" or dolphin show. It wasn't like the one in Tijuana, but still entertaining. In general, I see zoos as evil and against nature. Every exhibit is sponsored by a corporation. It's not the ocean exhibit.

It's the old national bank ocean exhibit. No wonder kids are so fucked up these days. They are brain washed so early... However. It was a beautiful day to be out with people who really know what you are going through / the challenges you face every day, plus, I got to trip 3 or 4 kids with my cane... (It really was an accident.) \*Point of contention here. I am allowed to say handicap because I am one. YOU have to say "challenged" or "disabled."

"xxooXOxx"

John d. shearer

## THE SQUARE FAIR AND A TRIBE CALLED CANCER

August 4, 2009 at 8:01pm

"Dear diary,"

Another week has passed, and August is finally here. Historically, August was always one of my busiest months as a photographer. This year, August is a constant reminder of what was... Last week I got another one of those work calls. A contact that hired me to do some promo shots for jefferson starship last year, called and asked if I was available to shoot some lollapalooza band for blurt magazine. Now, I had never heard of the band or the magazine, but I felt like a grounded teenager on a friday night. "I miss everything." The reality is that I'm probably not missing anything, but it still stings a bit to think about missing out on, what has historically been a killer weekend fueled by drugs, dancing girls and rock 'n roll. Oh well, maybe I'm getting too old for that shit anyway. Instead of photographing lollapalooza, I'll be getting an MRI this week. At least the weekend was full of adventure... It was a Whikehart weekend! I hadn't seen them in several weeks, so it was good to catch up. Saturday, Evan and Devan came to our house for dinner. We grilled some burgers and made s'mores. That night, the whikeharts talked us into going to the county fair, or "square fair" as Evan calls it. I hadn't been to a county fair in 10 years. The last few times I went were on a head full of lsd; back then, we were basically a pack of wondering idiots, grinning ear to ear and completely enamored with all the lights and sounds of the magnificent, county fair. A little older, wiser and handicap\* now, I was totally sober. The lights and sounds were less impressive, but this time I was fascinated with the people... The fem mullets and sleeveless shirts were out in full force. (The county fair is a reminder of why I am pro choice) The main event was a demolition derby! I'd never been to one before, but it was surprisingly fun. I went back and forth between the demolition and the people watching. The smell of car exhaust was occasionally interrupted by a passing funnel cake or elephant ear. The crowd squawked as cars collided. It was a cross between the coliseum and mad max; good, clean family fun... Afterwards, we walked around a bit and took in the sites. The petting zoo was closed, but still smelled like shit. Carnies still freak me out a bit, even when I'm not on drugs. Sunday, Amanda and I went to a state park, where I hobbled along one of the paths. I'm not sure if it's my leg brace or my tiny, gimp arm, but I don't even get the fake hello anymore. That night we had a taco dinner at the whikehart's house, and then went home for some much needed sleep. Monday, I went to a support group for cancer survivors. I was expecting it to be a bunch of frail, pasty motherfuckers "walking the green mile," but instead I found a small group of people who seem to be full of life.

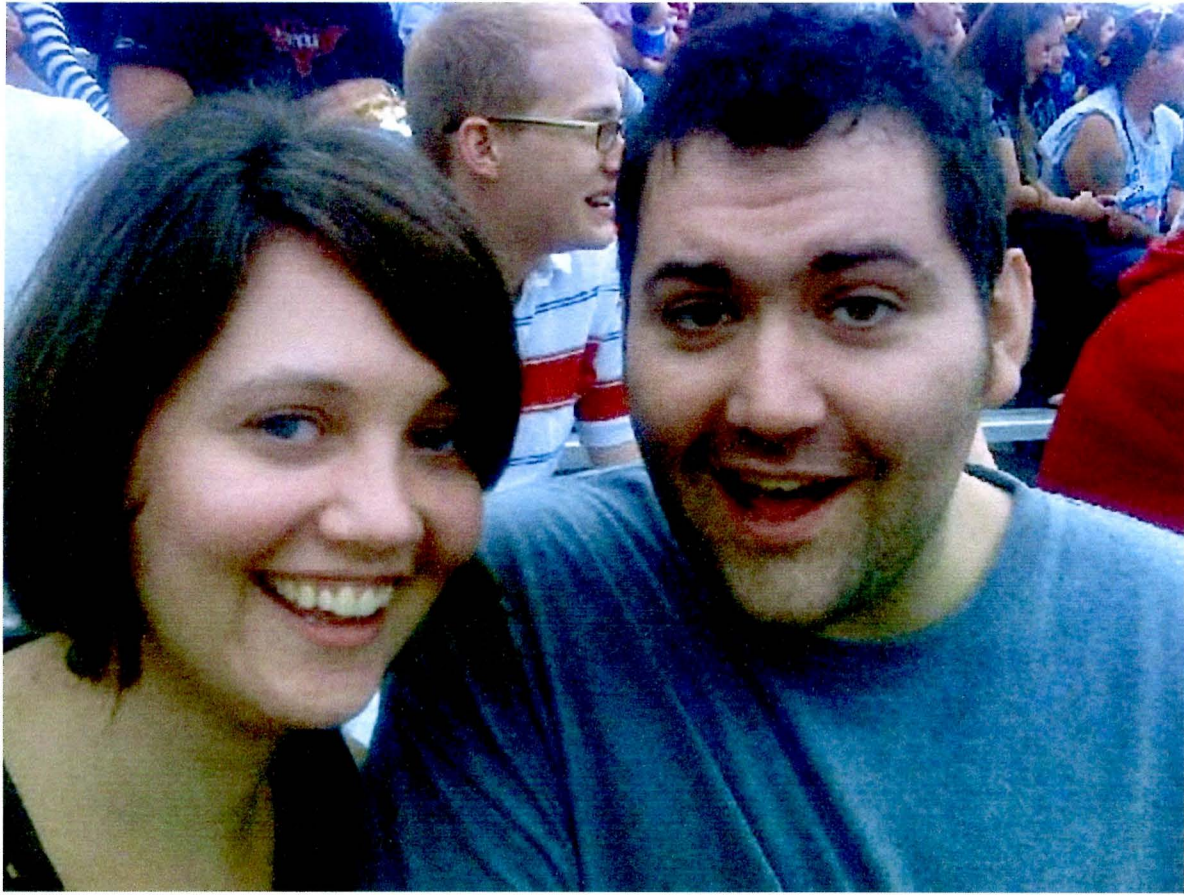
Though I was the only "brain patient" in the group, I felt a certain kinship with these people. Their symptoms, struggles and issues were as close to mine as I have found so

far, and yet they refuse to admit defeat. Some of them still have tumors growing inside of them. Some of them have been through battles that no one should be asked to fight; yet they still have hope. You see, I've been floundering. I've been looking for a place to belong. Looking for something to be a part of. I'm not sure if this is exactly my tribe or not. The brain tumor support group starts in a couple of weeks, but they sure were welcoming, and it was comforting to listen and share stories with them. The only awkward moment came when they brought up spirituality. Some of the weirdness is totally in my head, but there is always a certain awkwardness when you tell believers that you don't believe. If one more person says, "I'm praying for you," I may throw up in my mouth; just saying. Tomorrow I get another MRI. It's a bit unnerving, but I've not had any headaches or dreams for a few days, so I'm hoping for a clean scan. So diary, thanks for listening to me again. How are you doing these days? Cash for clunkers: stimulating the economy or more government waste? Will insurance companies kill any real healthcare reform? Are you going to fall for any more of that right wing, hate machine fear shit? Can't we do better?

"xxooXOxx"

John d. shearer





Our first demolition derby



Carnie



## STEREOTACTIC MOTHERFUCKER

by [John Shearer](#) on Thursday, August 6, 2009 at 2:13pm

"Dear diary,"

Eight months have passed since the surgery to remove my brain tumor. I paid a heavy price physically and mentally, but I've been healing. I thought I had bought myself some time. Yesterday, I had a follow-up MRI... It revealed, what appears to be, a new, abnormal growth up in my nugget. It's tiny, but will require radiation to remove. There's no such thing as good radiation, but stereotactic is all the rage right now... so tomorrow, instead of going to physical therapy, I'm going to an oncologist. Hooray! I've always wanted to know what happens when you put a brain in the microwave. My disappointment was pretty tremendous. Everyone told me that the resection would cure me. I had to pay on the front end, but it would be worth it. I'm still not done healing, and now radiation? Shouldn't my arm be functional first? I don't want anything to slow down progress. After getting the news, Amanda and I went to Gatti's, with Mike and Barbie, where I ate entirely too much pizza. Hanging with the Garretts was a good distraction, and I forgot about everything for a little bit. Then I went home. Laurie, my birth mother, calls all hysterical and still trying to bully her way into my treatment. I'm working on a letter to her right now..."Dear mom, Fuck you." Needless to say, I didn't sleep well. Today, I spent most of the day finding new, dramatic ways to throw myself in the bed. My favorite so far is the "Mary Catherine." I stomp to the bed, let out a big sigh, and fling myself onto the bed. The "Shelley" is a close second. It's basically the same as the "Mary Catherine," but with even more teenage, art school angst. Whoa is me.. It's almost 2:00, and I'm still in my underwear. I'm going to allow this ridiculousness for today only. Tomorrow, it's back to recovery. I'll keep you posted on the radiation though. I'm going to try to get some medicinal marijuana or at least valium to get me through, sobriety has really been sucking lately. That's it for me diary, thanks for letting me vent. Did you do something new with your hair? You're looking even more fabulous than usual...

"xxooXOxx"

John d. shearer

## BANANA MELTDOWN

by [John Shearer](#) on Friday, August 14, 2009 at 8:49pm

"Dear diary," I'm here and I'm there; the last week has been alarm bells and romance explosions. Last Friday I finally heard that dreaded word: cancer. I don't know if I'm just that stupid or that brain damaged, but I had never considered my tumor to be cancer. I had a brain tumor. It was removed. Therefore, I didn't have cancer. My oncologist disagreed. In fact, he looked me in the eyes and said, "You have brain cancer." The nausea hit me like a kick to the balls. How could there still be tumor? They crippled me to get it all out, but there it was, clear as day - my tumor was alive and well. Then he tells me, he wants to nuke the entire cavity of my brain where the original tumor was, but don't worry, I think we can get it done in about five weeks. At this point, I'm ready to vomit. I'm still healing from the 1st surgery. Going into a new battle, already wounded, seems suicidal. Also, didn't the Germans lose the war by fighting on two fronts? Shouldn't I claim victory in one theater before fighting in another? Perhaps it was an optical illusion, but I really thought all I had to do was recover. Here comes the meltdown. Where would I find the strength? You see, there's this girl back home. This girl who is totally twisted and loves me.

This girl that I promised I wouldn't leave... not yet anyway. Thinking of her calms me down, but visions of her keep getting interrupted by thoughts of my brain in a microwave ever since. I've never felt my skin crawl before. It's even creepier than it sounds. So with all that going on, I really needed a distraction. Cue my 10-year-old friend, Tyler. I asked our friends, Mike and Barbie, if we could watch their son for the night. It would give them some alone time and keep me distracted. The only thing I didn't think of is how the kid would do. My guess is, he was bored out of his mind. I was too out of it to play video games or entertain in any way. The poor kid basically spent the night playing games and watching TV by himself. Mandy said that I was crying in my sleep that night. The kid must think I'm a freak. To add insult to injury, I was the only one who spilled a drink. Red, kool-aid to be exact. With Friday's disaster behind me, we decided to go swimming, even if I could only go in circles. There is only a ladder to get in and out of the pool, so as soon as I got in, I had to make sure I could get out. I needed some help out, but we got it. I really could only swim in circles at first, but eventually I was able to get my left arm and leg in on the act. Within an hour, I felt like Michael Phelps. Amanda kept insisting that I hold onto some type of floatation device called "a noodle," but I don't need a noodle. What am I, a handicap? I nearly drowned that day, but I swam without a stupid noodle. Later, we grilled some steaks by the pool and I took a vicoden the size of my head. Sweet release... Sunday morning, I had a pill hangover and was all out of distractions. This led to even more dramatic ways to throw ourselves into the bed. I was finally able to perfect "the Richard." "The Richard" is the same as "the Shelly" (see last note, stereotactic motherfucker) only, I do a triple axle as I fling myself into the bed. Amanda seemed to prefer "the Kelly." This is the classic method as seen on soap operas and bad movies, where one collapses like a noodle, hand on forehead. It was an exhausting day. Monday and Tuesday came and went. Still nauseous, skin still crawling. Wednesday, I returned to NRC after my two-week suspension. To be honest, coming back after two weeks, the facility and the program itself were even less impressive than I remembered. All of my groups are over; the patients that I drew hope and inspiration from are all gone now. I went on my final handicap field trip. I'm the only handicap, so instead of a short bus, we took an SUV. Amanda, my therapist and I went to the Indianapolis museum of art (IMA.) Contemporary art is total bullshit. My friends at ISU are doing more intelligent work than anything I saw there. The highlight of the trip was a photo portrait of Pablo Picasso, by Richard Avedon. It was the least pretentious thing in the museum, and I loved it because of its simplicity. A man smoking, in an empty studio. The film grain and fiber paper gave it a gritty texture that is hard to replicate with digital. It was lit with natural light coming from an open window. It was that simple elegance that really drew me to the image. Plus the rest of the museum was pretty much bullshit. Teapots that look like dicks, bowls shaped like vaginas. How original. How moving. Puke. That night, Amanda and I stayed at the "bed bug inn," where I made three, maybe four romance explosions throughout the night. I'm not dead yet motherfuckers...Thursday, I went back to the oncologist. After talking to some colleagues, he has decided the best course of action will be to radiate the current tumor and not the whole cavity, sparing my brain for now. Finally! Some good fucking news! I can survive one dose, but five weeks was pushing it. We got home that night to find our front door smashed in. we had been robbed. The stupid fuckers only took our fire safe, which has no cash. It did have passports, social security cards, birth certificates and car titles. I don't know if they can even get the box open, but what a pain in the ass. Could it be another meltdown coming on? Diary, why is Obama still paying black water (XE)? Why won't Michael Holder prosecute Bush / Cheney for war crimes? Will we ever get the fabled, public option? How are you? How's the family? When will I see you again? All my love... "xxooXOxx"

John d. shearer

## STEREOTACTIC MOTHERFUCKER PT. 2

by [John Shearer](#) on Tuesday, August 25, 2009 at 4:20pm

"Dear diary,"

It's been nearly two weeks since we last spoke. It's amazing how much can happen in 10 days... Please forgive me for being so frazzled, but I'm finding it hard to organize my thoughts these days. I'm starting to feel as though I have completely lost myself. For almost nine months, I have had nothing to talk about except the tumor, the damage done and cancer in general. Today is no exception. WTF has happened to my life? I still can't believe how quickly I went from partying with rock stars to staring at the walls with brain patients. It boggles minds. I'm guessing that you want to know about the radiation, but let's back it up to just after my last note, two weeks ago. Not only had "cancer" just become a part of my vocabulary, I also learned a new word, "malignant." Typically, the type of brain tumor I had would be considered "benign," but I went for the gold - "atypical /malignant." Some of you are thinking, "Oh no... that's terrible." Not to fear, my resolve is as strong as ever. The way I see it, a day being sick with cancer, getting poked and prodded is better than the alternative, (death) especially when you consider I have the love of a good woman to get me through it all. Besides, geezers beat cancer all the time. I will too. Also, the irony is certainly not lost on me. I've never worn sunscreen in my adult life and I smoked a pack and a half a day for nearly 12 years, but I didn't get lung or skin cancer. I got brain cancer. Go figure. That weekend, the Whikeharts met us for a day at the beach. Normally I would have been self-conscious about being one of the pastiest, hairiest, doughiest motherfuckers on the beach, but not this summer. I have cancer. You see, my diagnosis freed me, in a fight club sort of way. I don't have to care what people think - I have cancer. If you're a stupid fucking idiot, I'll tell you because... I have cancer. This whole thing has enabled me to break free from the shackles of social norms and fake pleasantries. The material and superficial things that had plagued my life are no longer important. In a weird way, I feel thankful. It was a fantastic day, aside from the fact that... I have cancer. Don't break out the violin yet, I'm gonna turn it around. The good news is that I have people in my life who care about me. The good new is that I'm alive motherfuckers! The sun will rise and fall again tomorrow, and I will witness it all with Amanda by my side. In a weird way, I feel lucky. I spent Sunday and Monday bracing for the radiation that was to come. How would I fair under the gun? I went to my cancer support group, and was amused to see our substitute caseworker vibing on my buddy Dave. He's a throat cancer survivor, but still full of game... You should have seen that old, dude go. It was like being in 4th grade again. Tuesday morning arrived like a bullet, and proved to be one of the most traumatic days of my life. We got up at five in the morning, went to pick up Devon (I thought it best for Amanda to have someone with her) and made the long drive to Methodist. I seriously wondered if it would be my last sunrise... (Thankfully not the case.) We arrived around seven. I was taken back to a room with tools spread out on the exam table. I knew I was fucked because the tools included a screwdriver and a ratchet, seriously. I'm not sure why, probably my lack of insurance, but I had to remain awake as the screws were drilled into my head. First, I got four shots of a local anesthetic, two in my temples and two in the back of my head. It burned like fuck and made me cry like a little bitch in front of the girls. At one point, I was in so much pain that the doctor wanted to stop the procedure and do a less invasive, but less accurate radiation treatment. Faced with the decision to deal with the pain or possibly radiate good brain, I dug deep and we finished with the injections. "You're gonna feel a little pressure now." That was an understatement. The good Dr. came at me with a ratchet in his hand and began to tighten the screws of the frame to my skull. My head felt like a spare tire, in an auto garage.

I can still hear the clicking noise the ratchet made in my head, as the screws tightened, I felt like my head was in a vice... Talk about being "under pressure." Any tighter and my head might have popped. After all the abuse they asked if I wanted some breakfast. The catch was, that I had to eat my eggs through a football helmet. There's nothing like an egg biscuit through a straw to get your day started right...What happened next was a series of really awkward moments. My mom, Laurie, starts blowing up Amanda's phone. Then, my sister starts calling her. I had told Laurie that if she wanted to come and wait in the waiting room, that would be fine, but I didn't want her bullying us or the doctors around, so she couldn't come into the consultation or treatment with us. She decided not to come at all, but to bully by phone instead. I believe her last message to Amanda said something like "Amanda, if you don't want to talk to me, then fine. You don't have to talk to me." I haven't heard from her since... Not only is my mother a drama queen, she's something of an emotional retard. As usual, she had taken my brain tumor and made it about her. My grandfather, the dude, arrived just in time to witness Amanda's meltdown. Laurie had finally crossed the line with her. It wasn't pretty. In all the years we've been together, I've never heard her cuss like that. We were under a great deal of pressure. Looking back, I'm sort of glad she pissed Amanda off. If it were up to me, we would have stopped dealing with her long ago. It had always been Amanda who insisted we deal with her. "She's your mother John." She never believed me when I told her my mother was a bully and should not be dealt with, she didn't believe that Laurie's help always had strings attached. Now though, she has seen the light. Laurie has written herself off the show, and we now have special ring tones for when she calls, including top gun's "danger zone" and "don't answer this call, it's your mother-in-law." I'm used to her shit, but poor Amanda inherited it all. (Side note here. There is no escaping death. I hope it will be a long, long time down the road, but when I kick it, I don't want Laurie to make any decisions regarding my "final resting plans." I want Amanda to have total control of my possessions and last rights. You see, we're not technically married, and I don't yet have a will, so I'm hoping this will suffice. Amanda knows what I would want, when I do in fact, kick it... She knows me better than anyone and should have total control over such matters) And we're moving on... Happy thoughts people. Thankfully, Devon and the dude were there to calm Amanda down, and once she cooled off things even seemed relaxed. Finally, the doctors came for me around 3:30. Remember, I had been wearing the head vice since about 7:00. It took them all day to plan their attack against the tumor, but spare as much good brain as possible. By 4:30, I was heading home. The treatment took about 10 minutes. Even after they took the vice off my head, I felt like I was wearing it for days. My brain felt like cookie dough... totally fucking useless / frizzle fried. I also began to wonder if my sperm would glow in the dark... Oh yeah, I had my head radiated, not the other. I don't really know how else to describe having the center of your brain radiated. Basically, my head was killing me and I had never felt so tired in all my life. The next day was even worse because in addition to all that, I was just pissed. I'm not sure at exactly what, but holy fuck I was mad. Pain does that to me... I spent the rest of the week lounging around, dreaming of being on vacation. (Thanks Mike. My short-term memory went to shit from the radiation. After three or four sentences, I would forget what I was talking about. It seems to be getting a little better though. If that tumor is finally fucking dead, then it was all worth it... I'll know in a month or so. That Friday, I found out the state of Indiana had approved my insurance. It took the state almost nine months, two applications, one denial, one appeal, one decision to overturn and countless wasted hours calling and writing government offices for them to decide a malignant brain tumor, was in fact, a disabling condition. They will now pay for my brain surgeries. Five months ago, the state offered to pay for me to go to college for free... You figure it out, I can't. The feds came to the same decision after a 10 minute phone call. Thank you Mr. President, now where is that public option at?

Fuck it. I want the Kucinich, single-payer shit. Let's not half-ass this... Yesterday I went to my cancer support group again. I've been going for a month now, and I think they see me as part of the gang now. Sadly, it was also the 1st time I realized we wouldn't all be together for very long. Some of them are really sick. Some of them won't beat cancer... For now, I am content to say, "see you next week." Though I wonder if it's true or not. That's it for me diary. What's up with you? Send any good news, no matter how small my way. I hear laughing is good for my recovery. When was the last time you laughed diary? All my love,

“xxooXOxx”

John D. Shearer

## THE ROARING 20'S

by [John Shearer](#) on Tuesday, September 1, 2009 at 5:04pm

"Dear diary,"

The radiation burns are all beginning to scab over and heal. I'm at a point in my recovery, where I wonder, am I better off now than before all this happened? Am I more alive now, than I was before I had cancer? Don't get me wrong, I miss having a working, left arm. I miss being able to walk without a leg brace, but I am more alive now. I've laughed/cried/loved/felt more in the last nine months than in the previous five years. "I am more me." Before I blather on about my week, I want to thank you diary. I'm still shocked by all of your support, especially in response to last week's post, I don't have the focus or attention span to comment on every post, (more than two or three steps will throw me these days) but I greatly appreciated all of the funny videos/ photos and especially your personal stories. Thank you diary, for helping me to laugh when I was down. It's amazing how quickly things can turn around. Last weekend was fucking awesome! (I don't take the use of exclamation points lightly folks. It really was fantastic.) For starters, I'm alive bitches. I am going to beat cancer. Life gave me it's best shot, and with the help of my leg brace and my lady and my friends and some therapists... I got up and walked it off. Also, it was Amanda's birthday. I can't tell you the last time I'd seen her so happy—seen her smile so much. She and I are both incredibly rich when it comes to having good friends. You know, the important shit in life. What I wanted for Amanda, was for her to have some fun. I wanted her to be able to forget about my diagnosis. With the help of some friends, I think we made it happen. Friday, I sent roses to her office. C'mon, that's just standard protocol, but she seems to dig it. Friday night, her BFF from college came in from N.Y.. Julia has always had a way of bringing out the best in Amanda. It's really cute. Amanda wanted a strawberry cake for her birthday, but none of the bakeries sell a strawberry cake, so Julia and I baked her cake ourselves. Yep, I baked a fucking cake. What domestic bliss... Saturday, Her other BFF's showed up. Alycia came down from Indy and Steph came down all the way from elkhart. Of course, it's not a party without the Whiteharts. Amanda was grinning ear to ear all day. We did the standard birthday song and had some cake... Then we went to the brewery. It should be noted that I had not had a drink since my diagnosis. (nine months ago) That might explain why I got drunk halfway into my first beer. It was a sad thing, but true. Don't worry, I asked my doctor, and he said it was o.k. to have "a couple" of beers. I had five pints instead, but that was with dinner. I've had two brain surgeries, quit smoking and have otherwise been an angel this year... Besides it was a celebration. By the time we all got back to the house, I was ready to sleep. Like a crayon, I wear easily. I passed out around eight, but the party raged on till at least 11:00. Holy fuck! We are getting old... The next morning it was just Amanda and I. We had the laziest, lazy sunday. It was bliss. Her birthday got me thinking about my 20's in general. I'll be 30 in less than a year...

At 20, I met the love of my life. By 25, my photos had been published around the world via rolling stone, spin, people, vanity fair, blah blah blah. At 27, I traveled Europe with my lady. At 28, I was diagnosed with brain cancer and at 29, I had my second brain surgery. What adventures will my 30's bring? What mysteries will reveal themselves? What new highs and lows are waiting for me? Will I live to see Kennedy's dream of universal healthcare? Just between you and me diary, I'm cautiously optimistic...

"xxooXXOxx"

John D. Shearer

## RIDE THE CLICHÉ

by [John Shearer](#) on Tuesday, October 27, 2009 at 5:03pm

"Dear diary,"

It's been about six weeks since our last visit. Let me start by saying how stunning you look today. Those teeth whiteners were worth every penny... Oh me? I currently have one foot in the rehab world and one foot in the real world. It's fucking exhausting and I'm in constant pain, but I'm always looking forward and hoping for better days. As Bill Johnson once wrote, "...I'm down, but I'm not out bitches." So you're probably wondering, why the cold shoulder for all those weeks? One of my doctors put me on diazepam. I spent a month in this purple haze reminiscent of my teenage years, and then, BAM! Everything just started happening... I'm driving, I'm back in school and I'm in therapy four days a week. It's no excuse, but things just got away from me... I have finally transitioned all of my therapies to Bloomington, and am much happier. Most recently, I started working with a voice therapist to get rid of my Borat-like accent. It seems to be working already, but I've got a long way to go. People often ask why I care so much about the accent, and there are two reasons. First, when I meet people, they always want to know where I'm from. I tell them the truth, I'm from Indiana. Then they think I am lying or making a joke, so I tell them I have brain cancer and it makes me talk this way. You can literally see any joy or happiness that had existed, drain out of their faces. Basically, I'm tired of ruining other peoples' day. Second, I had my voice for 28 years and just woke up with a new one. It fucks with your mind a bit. I have also started going to a third support group. This one is for brain injuries. It's like being in a meeting with 20 people who all have ADD, but it's a nice change from the cancer groups who tend to be older and more somber. If you've never been to a support group, I highly recommend them. The voyeuristic component of it all is completely addicting. Tell me of your woes, sir. Perhaps it will make mine feel less tragic... I'm not sure if it's that I'm paying more attention or what, but brain tumors are really trendy right now. When I was first diagnosed, it seemed like such a novelty act... Wow! I have a brain tumor and I'm going to fucking die! I didn't see that one coming. Now, there are no less than three, prime time shows exploiting my disease. You can have the tumor back, I don't want it any more... I don't know why it bothers me so much, as I've always been some sort of cliché. The tween / The pimply, star wars geek / the under achieving, teen on pot / the Kerouac, Ginsberg reading undergrad / the sleaze bag photographer... If you don't know, most photographers, including myself, are either dirtbags or deviants. The stereotypical, mouth-breathing pervert with lines like, "That's great, now unbutton your blouse." I know hundreds of photographers and only a couple are in it for anything other than getting people naked. In other cliché news, I like to listen to the theme song from Rocky when I'm on the treadmill or doing squat thrusts at the gym. On Friday night, I sometimes take too many pain pills and vomit in the sink. I've got another half dozen examples, but I'll save them for another time.

Finally, some of my old doctors and therapists had speculated that as I gained more use of my arm, I would have less pain. The opposite seems to be true. I don't mean to complain, but the first thing I did today was pop a norco. It was also the last thing I did yesterday... Now I'm looking for the proper dose of miralax, or the next few days might get awkward. That's it for me diary. All my love.

"xxooXOxx"

John D. Shearer

## TREADING WATER

by [John Shearer](#) on Friday, June 25, 2010 at 4:36pm

"Dear diary,"

It's getting harder and harder to know what to say or how to be. For the first time in my life, I feel lost. I've always known who / what I wanted to be. Sometimes it was as easy as knowing who I didn't want to be. (The only good thing my dad ever did for me.) I'm in such a weird place lately, but I keep hoping that I'll shake it off. I keep hoping that my best days are still ahead of me, but I worry this is not the case. Do you remember that, "anything is possible" feeling? God I miss that. I don't miss seeing spots, and am currently debating the pros and cons of gouging my fucking eyes out. I don't think my insurance covers that though... Anyway, I'm trying really hard not to be a fuck up. I start rehab again next week. (My fourth rehab facility in nearly two years) School will start again before too long, and I will finally be back to full-time status. I've just got to keep my shit together a little longer and not get all Jack Nicholson / the shining on everybody. I've got to resist that urge to throw my arms up in the air and say, "fuck it all." How do you do it diary? How are you so cool all the time? It's like nothing gets to you. The good news is, that I can take a piss standing up and without turning on the faucet, a relatively new development. Also, when I get really high, I lose my "foreign accent." I'm still jogging 10 miles a week: Last week was my one year anniversary. I walked and / or jogged just over 395 miles in the last year (not counting the 20 or so miles I walked backwards) My life is different these days, but it's still good. Mostly because I still have Amanda. In a weird way, I'm kind of excited to find out what's next. It feels like this life has been anything but ordinary... I like that.

"xxooXOxx"

John D. shearer

## FACING EAST PT. 2 (LAY YOUR HEALING HANDS UPON ME)

by [John Shearer](#) on Thursday, July 8, 2010 at 12:25pm

"Dear diary,"The last week has been marked by some unexpected improvements, reminding me that I am still recovering from the assault on my brain over a year and a half ago. You probably want to know about my trip to the orient though... It's a nondescript, brick building near Bloomington hospital. The treatment room is full of posters depicting men transcending to the heavens, pentagrams and yoga poses. The doctor reminds me of abed's evil twin (if that makes sense). I laid quietly on the table as the witch doctor placed needles in my forehead, hands and feet. One area in my feet was quite painful, but I'm told this connects to the cancer in my brain somehow. As I lay on the table, the witch doctor lulled me into a meditative trance of some kind where I was completely detached from both my cancer and the painful side effects of previous

treatments. I noticed results immediately after the acupuncture treatment. For the first time in years, I had no pain. Even my peripheral neuropathy (painful tingling) was gone.

Of course, the effects were short lived, and by the next afternoon I needed all the pills again. I'm hoping that the treatments will have a cumulative effect though and I might live a pill free existence one day. (or at least only be taking fun pills) Around the time of my first "alternative" treatment I was able to move my toes, but it took a great amount of concentration to do it. Today, I can move them much easier and with more range of motion. I am excited to see what else this witch doctor can do to cure me. The flip side is that he wants to sell me a bunch of supplements because today's multivitamins are only giving us a fraction of what they claim. I am told that there is some truth to this, but I'm not sure about what he is selling either. I am willing to try anything though and I'll keep you posted. False alarm on the MRI. This is the problem with having two doctors scheduling appointments for you. I get my next scan in August... All my love.

"xxooXOxx"

john d. shearer











## THE STATE I AM IN PT 2 (A NEW HOPE)

by [John Shearer](#) on Friday, July 16, 2010 at 1:54pm

"dear diary,"

I must be getting better, because I am seeing fewer spots every day.

Thanks to the witch doctor, I am taking massive doses of prescription strength vitamins and supplements, and visualizing my brain absorb the necrosis infection. I'm probably pissing most of it out (my urine is literally highlighter yellow) However, it is my hope that the august scan will show the infection to be smaller or gone completely. (I would really like to avoid any more surgeries for a while.) For the first time since this all began, I am able to visualize a relatively normal future for myself. I've still got a great deal of work to do before that happens, but I can't help to think that people beat cancer everyday. Why not me? I have Amanda to think about - She needs me to get my shit together...

What I hope for everyday is to be happy and healthy and to know how to love. Most of all, I hope that Amanda is happy and healthy and feels loved - I hope that you are happy and healthy and loved. That is the importance of now. To be in the moment -to hold on to what is good.

It seems like the dark shit is always just over the horizon. Recently, I got pissed and punched a hole in the wall. The scariest thought I've ever had in my life was not about cancer or death but, "Am I turning into my dad"? Amanda came home for lunch today and all we did was fight. It is incredibly difficult to keep my emotions in check sometimes. (the witch doctor blames it on my fire imbalance) I may never be the man I want to be, but I'm going to keep trying. What was it Ghandi said about being the change you want to see? All my love.

"xxooXOxx"

john d. shearer

## THE STATE I AM IN PT. 3 (LIFE AFTER CANCER)

by [John Shearer](#) on Tuesday, June 21, 2011 at 4:16pm

"Dear diary,"

It has been almost a year since my last update. Here's where I'm at with it all (today).

Physically, I'm quite possibly in the best shape of my life. I typically run about 20 miles a week now, with my record of 27 miles in five days, just last week. Not bad, considering I can literally remember my first steps at RHI just two and a half years ago. As an added bonus, I've also lost 40 pounds in the last year. I feel great, and have more energy than ever. It's a real Forrest Gump kind of scenario I guess. I'm working with my fourth personal trainer right now. I'm about to start tai chi lessons on Mondays, and when I have the funds, I plan to return to the yoga studio KYKP.

Intellectually, I had a particularly rough year at school. All my time and energy got sucked into a course on Greek art. I did manage a B, but it was stressful as hell. I remember thinking, why the hell am I doing this to myself? The good news is that I am slated to graduate, with honors, in December. I never thought I would say this, but I am actually looking forward to returning to work. I will always be thankful for the social security safety net, but I know I am capable of returning to work and making a middle class living. They don't make it easy though...

I met with my fourth voc. rehab counselor recently and she made it perfectly clear that they could game the system; so that I could work just enough to still collect my benefits. Who does that? They seemed really surprised that I was intending to return to full-time employment, hopefully, soon after graduation.

Emotionally, It has been almost two years since my cancer diagnosis, and well over two years since my first brain surgery. I am finally at a point where I can visualize a totally normal future for myself. My doctors might not agree, but I consider myself cured. Bloomington has become our home, and I can almost see myself returning to work, buying a house and having kids here. To that end, I'm working really hard to think of my cancer as past tense, but there are times when I get a sore in my mouth or see a weird spot on my skin and I panic. Oh my God! I'm dying... Wait, no I'm not, but something is throwing me out of balance. Amanda is so over the cancer thing, that I really have nowhere to go when this happens, and I can feel us drifting apart more and more. Fortunately, the witch doctor has armed me with several different herbal remedies to get me balanced quickly. Not to mention my affirmations, "I am happy. I am healthy. I am healed." repeat x100 or so a day. I just keep thinking that if I can hold us together a little bit longer, everything will be fine. My neuropsychologist, Dr. Trexler, had speculated that as I got better, Amanda would become a bit of a freak out, a sort of delayed reaction to the whole experience. At the time, I thought he was crazy, but perhaps not... Fortunately, I believe we will work it out, soul mate style. I'm willing to do whatever it takes to fix "us."

Spiritually, well I don't really bother thinking about silly shit like that. The closest thing to it would be that I am working on forgiving myself and others. I am working on being happy. I am working on connecting with people and places and things that make me feel good. I am working on living a life of no regret. To that end, "I lovingly release my past."

Even though I am working on forgiveness, I don't particularly want any kind of relationship with my parents or siblings. It's just healthier for me that way. I'm working to forgive them, but it will take time. I do, however, think it was a mistake to withdraw from family completely. I am really lucky to have a large, extended family. In my haste to be away from those aforementioned, toxic relationships, I completely ditched out on everyone else... I'm hoping to correct some of that this summer.

Finally, I thought my life was good before cancer, and it was, but life after cancer brings a kind of happiness and contentment that I still can't really quantify with words. The closest thing I can find was written by Eric Johnson, of the fruit bats, "Oh what a day for sunshine. Oh what a day for blue skies..."

All my love,

“xxooXOxx”

John D. Shearer

# Axis of Evil

photography by John D. Shearer



*Reception: March 28, 2008 5 to 7 p.m.*

*Bare - Montgomery Gallery*

The first 20 visitors will receive a free book of selected images from the show.

*March 28 - April 10*



axis of evil

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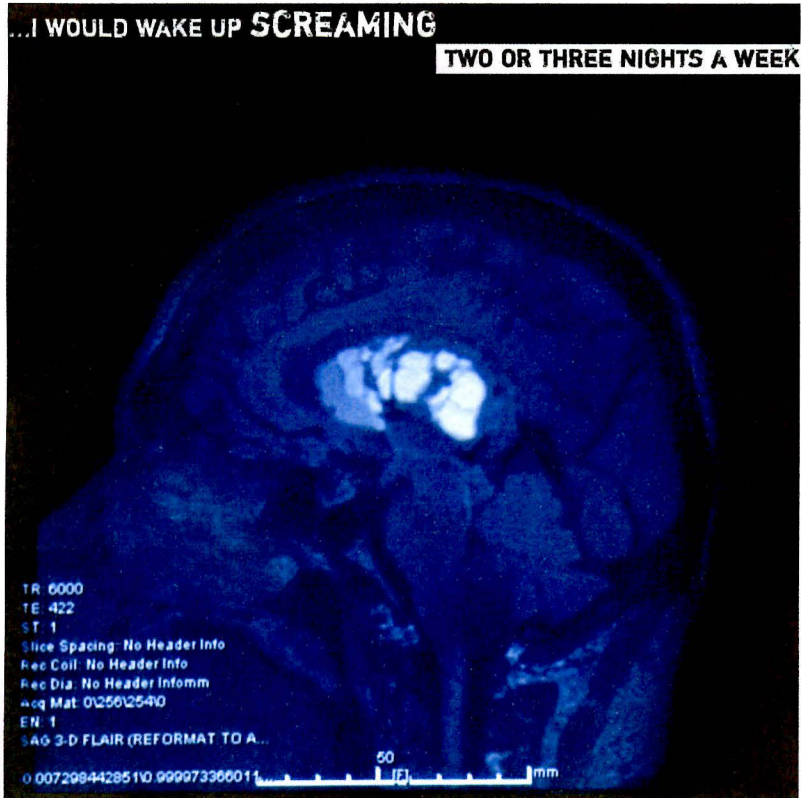


TRANSLATE TO SOMETHING OMINOUS.

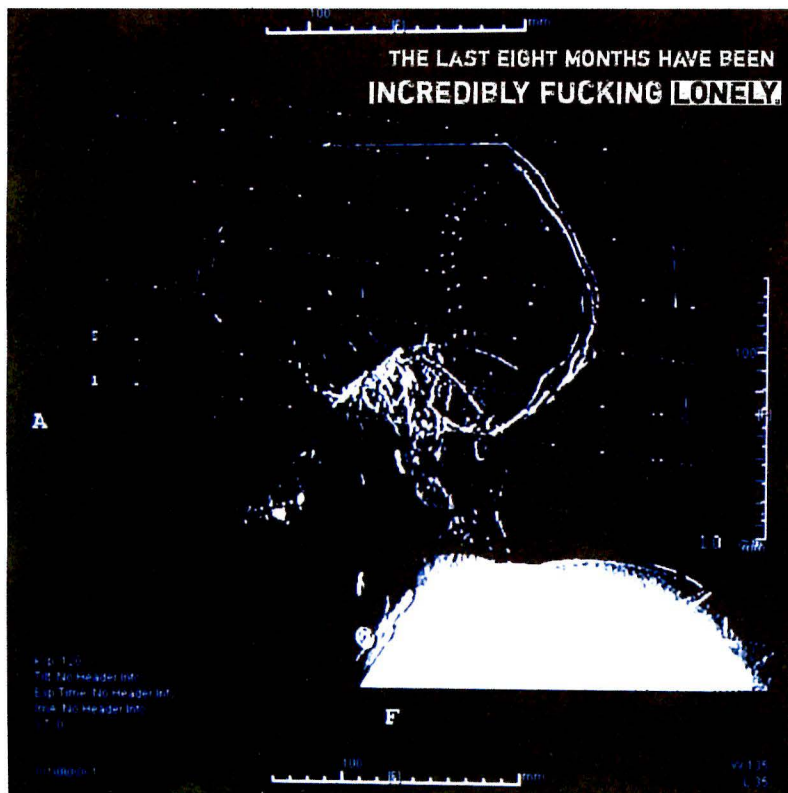
My brain 12/30/08.

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My brain 12/30/08.  
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Radiation planning (August 2009) Font courtesy of:  
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"Uncle Scott" and the lizard man (2008)  
Eight days before my first brain surgery