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On Tubes, by Ted Stevens

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Artist's rendering of Bryan
Furuness

Sex is a series of tubes. One tube going into another, that's all it is when you get right down to it. The electrical grid, sewage system, subways, phone lines, hell, more than half the infrastructure of this thankless nation: tubes.

Life is a story of tubes. Life begins in the *vasa deferentia* and fallopian tubes. Birth? Baby squeezed out a tube. To stay alive, you eat, which means shuttling food from esophagus to intestine, then expelling it, on good days, in tube form. And when you die, supposedly you go down this long tunnel toward the light. But what comes next? Once you hit the light? None of those near-death people have ever been able to tell me, because they all came sliding

back before they got to the light.

My guess is you never stop moving, even after you're in the light. Heaven is a series of tubes.

I'm not obsessed; I'm just aware. I live in a state known for its pipeline and my wife breeds dachshunds: is it any wonder that tubes come to mind when I describe the internet?

Hell would have to be a series of tubes, too, I suppose. As are guns, and jail bars — but also trees, and grass, the worms under the grass, the pen in my hand, my blood vessels, the heart of any living thing, my wife's throat as she calls me to bed, my ears that catch her sound.

A few years ago, I had the fiercest dream. I'd just watched *Inner Space*, which is not the greatest movie, but it's an okay rental. Martin Short plays a guy who gets shrunk down to microscopic size and injected into some other guy's bloodstream. That night I dreamed I was in a pill and my wife swallowed me. All night long I circulated around her body, and after some initial horror — *What if I dissolve? What if she digests me?* — I relaxed and enjoyed the ride. Down the femoral artery, up the switchbacks of her spine, places no man had been before, not even her high school beau, Claus.

Here's a ride they should have at Six Flags: it starts with a vehicle that is basically a giant blood pressure cuff, big enough to hold me. I get inside and the Six Flags employee pumps and pumps until I'm like a human Combo. Then the employee lays me down flat on my back, gives the cuff a gentle foot-shove, and off I go, flying down a bobsled track.

I'd love to be a bowling ball, just to go through the ball return. I'd love to spend a day as a container at the bank drive-thru, shooting up those vacuum tubes at high velocity. I'd love to be a bullet, but not the gun that sends it out. To go spinning through that chamber with a slick metallic whistle — the last thing I'd ever know — to fly into the light.

Bryan Furuness has published stories in Ninth Letter, Southeast Review, Sycamore Review, Hobart, Freight Stories and other literary magazines. He received his MFA from Warren Wilson College. He lives in Indianapolis, where he teaches at Butler University, and serves as the associate editor for the journal Booth.