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Lauren Elizabeth Valentine Servideo

University at Albany, State University of New York

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A Millennial Little Pieces: Selected Writings from a Gen-Y

An honors thesis presented to the
Department of Journalism,
University at Albany, State University Of New York
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in Journalism
and
graduation from The Honors College.

Lauren Elizabeth Valentine Servideo

Research Advisor: Thomas Bass, Ph.D.

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Table of Contents

Name	Pages
Party On	5-7
The 500- Year Old Flood	8-11
An Origin of Species: A Series of Vignettes On my Pre-Adolescent Love Life	12-17
BFF + DTF = WTF?	18-21
America's Favorite Pastime: Too Dangerous?	22-25

Abstract

This is an anthology of my favorite pieces written during my time at SUNY Albany. The subject matter of each piece differs wildly from the next, but they do share one thing in common, and that is my focus on character and cultural studies. Exploring and dissecting the works of Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe, Martha Gellhorn, and various other literary journalists throughout my undergraduate career has inspired the style of all the creative non-fiction included in *A Millennial Little Pieces: Selected Writings from a Gen-Y*.

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Additionally, I would like to thank Jeff Haugaard for allowing me into the Honors College. His dedication to his students is an art form, and his contributions to the higher-education system are unsurpassed. I would hate to diminish his accomplishments by hyperbolizing his ability, but he truly is a gift to this university.

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Lastly, thank you to my mom, who allowed me to quit ice skating, softball, soccer, and basketball, but told me to never give up on my education. Thank you, dad, for letting me listen to Howard Stern during my formative years, giving me an appetite for writing about all the crude things sprinkled throughout this thesis.

I love you all.

Party On

March 2011

Regular patrons of Max Fish on Ludlow Street waited with bated breath to find out if their favorite New York City dive bar would be closing after twenty-one years.

They let out a massive sigh of relief when the landlord extended the lease for another year- just enough time for another farewell before finding another location.

Opened in 1989 by Ulli Rimkus, Max Fish served as an art gallery and a haven for musicians, artists, and skateboarders; Courtney Love, Rita Ackermann, and Johnny Depp have all had their share of drinks and small talk there. More than two decades later, the same crew of young hipsters still come for a sip or two at happy hour.

Max Fish is a relic of pre-Giuliani New York, a time before gentrification rattled through the Lower East Side, shutting down other grungy establishments like Mars Bar, Pink Pony and CBGB. When residents of the area and visitors alike found out that the mainstay might have to close its doors at the end of January because of a raise in rent, many grew nostalgic.

“Max Fish represents a melting pot of ethnic and bohemian diversity. Low-key, unpretentious and creative. I never felt underdressed or unwelcome there,” said artist Shepard Fairey, designer of the Obama “Hope” posers, in an interview with *TimeOut! New York* magazine.

Like angels waiting at the pearly gates, many hip twenty- and thirty-somethings crowd the outside of the dimly-lit entrance to Max Fish, ushering in passersby with a gust of Parliament cigarette smoke and the acrid scent of cheap well liquors. While it is loud inside “the Fish,” as

frequenters affectionately call it, it comes not from the music, but the chatter. Of course, there are some nights when the jukebox in the back receives a lot of play, but it's mostly the audible sounds of mingling that provide a soundtrack for the night. An occasional *dingdingding* from the pinball machine at the front resonates through to the rear.

Many New Yorkers will complain about the disproportionate square footage-to-rent ratio, but places like Max Fish are strategically small and crowded to force people to enter as strangers and leave as friends- for the night, anyway.

The bathroom, like most dive bar lavatories, reeks of bile and too much alcohol; by 3 a.m. when customers move onto the next party, toilet paper is papier-mâchéd to the heavily graffitied walls. It seems as though anyone who has ever passed through to rid his or her liver of booze has written something.

Unlike the outside, where the light casts an unflattering shadow, the inside practically beams with light- a feature nonexistent in most dive bars. Actor Leo Fitzpatrick once said of Max Fish:

“The crowd—love them or hate them—made the Fish special. You had to be secure in yourself to hold your own in there, 'cause if you weren't, the bright lights made sure you'd be exposed real quick.”

In combination with the signature polka dot wall murals, the bright interior makes a pleasant backdrop for a debauched photo-op. Behind the black lacquered counter, bottles of wine sit on shelves, unabashedly unused, because a gin and tonic is the fanciest drink any of the bartenders have ever had to make (except maybe an Irish Car Bomb on St. Patrick's Day). The bartenders, many of whom have attained status of their own just from the job position, deposit crumpled dollar bills from \$3 Pabst Blue Ribbons and inexpensive domestic beers into old fashioned

crimson cash registers. With real-estate kings calling checkmate on many historical New York landmarks and turning them into pawns for money making, it's no wonder that some are protesting the change to anachronistic venues like the Fish.

Alicia Torello, a long-time inhabitant of the Lower East Side and frequent Fish-goer said, "I'm so sick of everything being about money. I've lived here for 10 years and it's the most disheartening thing in the world to have to say goodbye to places and people because they can't afford it." She shook her head. "I had to watch CBGB's turn into a f***ing clothing store. Are you kidding me? So lame."

Gen-Xers, and Baby Boomers unwilling to fall quietly into the role of growing old find solace in the eclectic environment of Max Fish. Hundreds, maybe even thousands of trinkets, baubles and Polaroid photographs line the shelves and the walls- none of them alike. This place is a fire hydrant of twenty-one years of art show remains, each virtuoso marking his or her territory somewhere in the bar, whether it's hanging from the ceiling or nailed to the wall. The pool table in the back looks like the body of an old middle school locker, with stickers tattooing every visible surface, except for the green felt where billiard balls clack against each other and skid into respective pockets.

Max Fish defined the dirty, story-laden punk zeitgeist of the Lower East Side for years. It never asked patrons to wear skimpy dresses, pay for \$9 martinis, or be hit on unrepentantly by inebriated frat boys incapable of catching a hint. If the bar had a slogan, it would be "Come as you are," because a venue that can hold sculptors, folk singers, rap stars, and the occasional Wall Street yuppie has no room to segregate anyone, really. So have a toast on a whiskey sour to another year of charm, laughter and the occasional bar fight at Max Fish before the real goodbye party begins.

The 500-Year Old Flood

September 2011

Prattsville is a small town tucked away in the Catskill mountain region of New York, rich with hospitality and coziness. Hovering around 650 residents, the village thrives on knowing every neighbor, and eliciting an ever-present aura of geniality. It seems almost inherent, like they've never known how to be anything but pleasant.

On the morning of August 28th, Hurricane Irene disrupted that soundness when she whipped through the region, mercilessly swooping up entire homes and cars in a torrent of overflowing water from the Schoharie Reservoir.

Zadock Pratt turned the small territory in the Catskills, originally called Schohairekill, into a prosperous town by taking advantage of the dense hemlock tree population in the area. He built a tannery on \$1,300 land he purchased in 1894. Chopping down the trees on those grounds meant more room for dairy farming in the event that the tanning industry fell. In his reign, the area witnessed more affluence than it has ever seen since.

In the wake of the flood, local business owners look past the loss and relish in the idea of creating business that would eventually mimic a Zadockian era Prattsville, abound with opportunity and tourism.

“Prattsville a really cool town,” said Pamela Young, co-owner of Young’s Agway, the local country store. Born and raised, she and her family believe that the flood will never take away the morale of the community.

“It’s about taking little steps forward, even if it’s toe length,” she said, referring to the bits of progress made in the weeks following Irene. Young, her husband, two sons and three dogs work from dawn until dusk gutting their Agway, heaving soggy bags of pet food and farmhand materials outside. Individuals from surrounding towns like Windham and Grande Gorge have also lent a hand in the efforts to restore Young’s Agway.

“We are entrepreneurs and that is our makeup. That saying ‘when the going gets tough, the tough get going.’” Young paused. “That’s kind of this little town. It really is.”

Down the main strip on which all of Prattsville’s major businesses once stood, including the Agway, is another source of American charity: the FEMA tent. A woman dressed in security garb guarded the flaps of the tent. A FEMA communications officer from Texas, who declined his name, could not divulge much information on the steps it takes someone affected by the storm to receive aide.

“Some qualify for FEMA help, some don’t,” he stated bluntly. “There are FEMA people who help individuals affected by the tragedy and then we have small business administration here who try to pick up and help people with interest loans.”

Despite his stoic demeanor, this seasoned vet candidly admitted that Prattsvile was one of the worst he’s seen in years.

“I’ve been to more places than I can count. This in the top three or four...so much devastation as far as you can walk, you just can’t get away from it.”

Anastasia Rikard, 22, can vouch for this. She lost her house and nearly lost her life when she failed to take precaution for the storm. She witnessed flash floods before but experienced the

typical inch or two of water in the basement, and muck on the bottom of shoes. So on the inclement late August morning, when Rikard spotted water incrementally inching inside her house, she did as she normally would.

“I thought it was no big deal, you know; whatever, it’s just some water. Then it started going in my basement. I grabbed a garbage can to try and catch the water.” When her efforts proved unsuccessful, she took shelter upstairs, still keeping her cool.

At the firehouse just down Main Street, her father, Dave Rikard, kept an eye on his 103-year-old Victorian home from a distance.

“I could see my chimney from the very upstairs of the firehouse and I kept looking periodically as the water got very high.” Thick asphalt curled up like peeled lemon rinds in front of the firehouse garage, preventing any of the trucks from leaving.

Panic setting in at the realization that she would have to evacuate alone, Anastasia’s began to contemplate.

“I was thinking a whole lot of things: I was hoping the house wouldn’t collapse, I was hoping the water wouldn’t keep rising.” She peered down the stairs at the vestibule of her 19th century home: the ruddy brown water had, in a matter of a few hours, usurped the entrance to her house and began to creep up the stairwell.

“Water is coming in through the front door, this is bad,” she thought. Trapped on the second floor awaiting the arrival of a boat, she communicated with her neighbors out of the window, yelling over the thundering current. Her father could no longer see the chimney.

After watching the town in which she grew up disappear quite literally before her eyes, she climbed down a rope to fire fighters on a boat, who managed to stage a coup d'état on the surges of water that had seized access to her house earlier in the day.

Mr. Rikard doesn't blame his daughter for her rather lackadaisical preparations for the storm.

“She did not evacuate as quickly as I hoped she might, being 22,” he chuckles, “But big problem is with the weatherman and TV sensationalizing so much. They hype everything up so much now that everyone just ends up being like ‘Well, whatever. Hopefully it will be exciting.’”

Rikard is far from being excited about the \$400,000 it will take to reestablish his home, which also serves as a law office, but he and his daughter still revel in the fact that they lived to talk of the experience.

As belongings start to dry, volunteers from across the country make their way into the town, dusting and excavating relics of Prattsville. To some, it's extending one small town hospitality to another. To others, it's just a duty as an American, especially in a town where red, white and blue flags are even more noticeable than the camel-colored soot that blankets almost everything.

“America's a great country, it really is. Americans are very giving people...” said Pamela Young. “And we are really experiencing that.”

An Origin of Species: A Series of Vignettes On my Pre-Adolescent Love Life

April 2011

In a great feat of irony, my mother and father named me after old-Hollywood siren Lauren Bacall. That, in fact, isn't even her real name—it's her stage name.

Names hold more weight than most people realize. A kid named Jeeves will likely grow up to be a butler, and studies indicate that a girl named Harmony Sunflower will probably later turn into a hippie or marijuana legalization activist. I don't know what intentions my parents had in choosing my name, but I think it suits me quite well.

Silver-screen directors cast Bacall because on screen and off, she commanded people with her deep, almost masculine voice that juxtaposed so nicely against her delicate but striking face. She married Humphrey Bogart who was 25 years her senior. I would not go so far as to say I am willing to acquiesce to that big of an age difference, but I like my men just that: men.

Exhibit A: my first real crush was Mr. Rogers. *Lend me some sugar; I am your neighbor!* I would stand two inches away from the television, which must have been horribly detrimental to my eyesight, kissing the screen. The static would zap my lips, and I gazed longingly at him as he engaged in completely normal acts, like playing with puppets named King Friday XIII and Lady Elaine Fairchilde in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe. I certainly couldn't have given a damn. He made me feel special without being weird and enabling, and most importantly, he told me there was nothing wrong with being myself. How can you not be attracted to that sensibility?

By the time we could have legally consummated our love, he had been dead about six years.

My parents were born in the early sixties in Albany. They were an hour from Woodstock during the storied “Summer of ’69” but I don’t think that bore any influence on their parenting decisions. I believe that any oversights made while raising me were a result of my status as the first-born. They have never done anything to deliberately impact the way I view boys, but they have *let* me do things that lead to some stark realizations about men.

They used to let me dance around our oak coffee table in the family room to Dusty Springfield’s “Son of a Preacher Man,” a song about a girl losing her virginity to “Billy Ray,” the aforementioned son of the preacher. I wholeheartedly believe that Mom and Dad didn’t think I would remember doing this fifteen years later. I also used to perform the same dance to “You Oughta Know” by Alanis Morissette. This song is about a woman whose boyfriend told her that he’d love her forever, and she believed it. They broke up; he moved on and she didn’t. Not only does that song allude to giving a man fellatio in a movie theatre, but it’s also one of the most vengeful anti-ballads I’ve ever heard. The song is about Dave Coulier who played Uncle Joey on early 90’s sitcom *Full House*. Out of the entire experience of cavorting around the family table to these two dichotomous songs that instill messages of promiscuity and bitterness, knowing that *Uncle Joey* had carnal relations with Alanis Morissette in a public theatre is the most scarring. Sometimes during tests, when my mind inconveniently escapes to places other than the multiple choice/true false in front of me, I wonder what movie they were watching.

I used to blow kisses to Kyle VanAlstyne in second grade. I sat a few seats back from him the first half of the year, and during the other half, I sat diagonally in front of him a couple of rows. Which meant I physically had to turn around to smooch the palm of my hand and make the

puffing gesture to him multiple times a day. I acknowledge how creepy this is, but back then, it provided me with this very peculiar gratification when he would curl up his brows and scrunch up his face with disgust.

One time my dad and I went on a bike ride and we conveniently peddled in front of the fire station where Kyle's father worked. It must have been April or May, the season when other dads and daughters also begin to dust off their ten-speeds, because he sat at a folding table with a sign draping down the front declaring "BICYCLE SAFETY MONTH." I tried so hard to quell every effort on my father's part to get me to collect the coupon for a free ice cream cone at Stewarts for wearing a helmet.

"You're in my son Kyle's class, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered, trying to slowly distance myself from the situation.

"Ahh, I see." The ends of his lips curled up into his moustache and he narrowed his eyes. I knew that he knew I harassed his poor kid at school with an overabundance of elementary school affection. Maybe he sensed my terror and that's why he never called me out on my obnoxious osculation in front of my dad.

I delivered a hurried goodbye salute and tore out of that firehouse like it was my last lap in a NASCAR race. Later that afternoon, my dad and I shared a free cotton candy sugar cone with rainbow sprinkles, free of any discussion about my strange displays of endearment.

I moved to Schenectady the summer before I turned 9. I hated having to say goodbye to Dale, my former neighbor, but my new next-door brethren Kraig seemed like he could fill the void. Kraig

sported the late-nineties crew cut with caramel highlights at the front of his fringe. He had two huge front teeth, the bottoms rounded off like little icicles. I can't imagine he squealed with delight at the prospect that yet another girl moved to the neighborhood, as there were no boys his age in the general vicinity of our street, but it would be better than the eighteen-year-old girl who lived there before I did. He met me at a time when I was phasing out of my tomboy stage, vacillating between living a life in only AND1 mesh shorts and venturing into the unfamiliar terrain of crop tops and trainer bras.

The summer before third grade we played together almost every day; I always wanted to play kick ball and he usually nagged me to swim in his newly constructed pool. On one rainy, humid August afternoon, when the cicadas ceased their song for just a brief moment to listen to the sound of rain pooling on the pavement, we watched *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* to pass time before the sun came out again. I laid a blanket out in front of the television set. I thought of it as a benign movie watching session between two eight-year-olds, until his younger sister Alexis let herself in through the garage door and begged to let her watch with us.

“Will you guys act it out?” she asked. I expected him to quickly hush her up by telling her to shut up or punching her in the arm, but he said nothing.

“Why not?” I tried to evade the awkward silence by doing something, anything really. He reluctantly stood up. Then I stood up, and we faced each other. We stood that way until nearly the end of the film, hardly using our acting chops.

Alexis wasted no time in playing director at her own convenience, yelling, “Kiss each other! Kiss each other!” when the fairy tale began to come to a close. Snow White is presumably dead while lying on a slab of concrete in the middle of the forest and the prince must kiss her in order

to revive her from her eternal slumber. In a fit of gender reversal, I played the prince and kissed Kraig out of impulse and not any actual romantic desire. He clenched his lips and jaw so tightly it turned into more of a facebutt. He pulled away but didn't question it. Ever. I'm certain he has no recollection of this happening, mostly because he probably tried to repress it, but I remember, because after that point he started being meaner to me.

Kyle McKenna was my first "boyfriend." I put boyfriend in scare quotes because most people would agree that anything before high school does not count as a legitimate relationship. In typical fourth grade fashion, he asked my friend Victoria Obercon to ask *me* if I'd go out with him. She posed the question as I got up from my desk, probably to grab a book and pretend to read while occasionally peeking up over the pages to quickly glance at Kyle, who sat on the other side of the room.

"Kyle wants to know if you'd go out with him. Is that cool?" Victoria asked. I wanted the scene to play out as perfectly as possible so that when Victoria told Kyle my ultra-bold, ultra-perfect answer, he'd think of me as an even bigger babe.

"Tell him, uh, erm, duh!" I said.

Despite my verbal shortcomings, Kyle still wanted to be my boyfriend. I never kissed him, but we went to a school-sponsored roller-skating party and we held hands during the couples skate. I even took him figure skating once. He fell and I extended my hand to help him. I think he just wanted to retain some sort of dignity on our date by getting up himself, but he lightly slapped my hand away and I was insulted. The final blow came when his mom wouldn't let him see *Pearl Harbor* with me. If it hasn't been made clear by now, my parents lacked basic knowledge on

censorship when it came to letting me watch, listen to, and engage in certain media, like music, television, and movies. *Pearl Harbor* was rated PG-13, so of course, when my mom called Kyle's, she objected. I'm almost positive we just stopped talking after that and never even officially broke up. It could mean we've technically been going out for the past 9 years, but I choose to believe that it's possible to end a relationship via non-verbal communication; telepathy, if you will.

BFF + DTF = WTF?

February 2012

Growing up on sitcoms deceived me into believing that a simple dichotomy exists in sex: You enjoy it with someone you love, or else you prefer “I don’t know you, and you don’t know me, but we’re both super horny” hookups. For many of us, there just isn’t time for colorless intercourse in our overworked and underpaid lives.

But is there a place in between for occasional physical encounters between good friends who demand no commitment with their sexual recreation? Some people seem to think so.

The notion of “friends with benefits” is nothing new, but lately it’s been marketed as such. Last year, two movies came out trying to tackle the subject and came to the same conclusion: FWB just doesn’t work. Sex exists on a spectrum, and FWB blankets the awkward, strange purgatory in the middle.

FWB is wrapped up in a fancy, emotionless package, offering the merits of sleeping with someone you know isn’t harboring a legion of STDs in his or her nether regions, and who also won’t force you into some kind of commitment. And, if you’re lucky, it’s someone who you can still bond with—platonically, that is.

There are some people in the universe who can successfully spend a long time teetering on this weird sexual seesaw; one “couple” that comes to mind is Elaine and Jerry. It wasn’t always that way, though.

In Season 2 of *Seinfeld*, in an episode called “The Deal,” Elaine and Jerry discuss whether sex with friends can actually work. They devise a list of rules that they believe will facilitate them from falling into the pitfalls of a romantic relationship. Some of the rules include “no calls the next day” and “spending the night—optional.”

“We’ve tried to arrange a situation where we’ll be able to do this once in a while but still be friends,” Jerry says to George over a sandwich the day after he and Elaine consummated their friendship.

George guffaws to the point where he needs to stand up.

“Where are you living?!” he howls. “Are you here? Are you on this planet? It’s impossible! It can’t be done!”

By the episode’s end, they’re dating. If you watched beyond this episode, you know they inevitably break up and proceed to sleep with each other at least four more times.

The possibilities of a successful friends-with-benefits relationship resonate with a lot of people, especially young, uncommitted people exploring their sexuality. In theory, FWB gives friends with a bit more chemistry a hand at putting their spark to the test. Sometimes, it gives ex-flames a chance to reunite without the amorous restrictions.

“We knew each other’s bodies, but without a relationship, we were able to explore each other in new ways,” says “Hannah,” 20, of her FWB experience with a former boyfriend and current acquaintance who swore up and down that their relationship would never be more than physical.

The term “friends with benefits” is relatively new; it has been in common usage only in the last decade. Before that there was “casual sex,” which was less specifically defined than friends with benefits: Casual sex could mean sex within a casual relationship (the closest definition to FWB), or extramarital sex, or promiscuous or otherwise emotionally uninvolved sex. Going back to the cultural revolution of the 1960s, there was plenty of talk of “free love,” which then referred to an unrestrained sexuality that rejected establishment norms and could mean anything from orgies to drug-enabled sex with total strangers. (This should not be confused with the free-love movement

that dates to the 18th century, which held that love relations should be freely entered into and not regulated by law; which has roots in both anarchism and feminism; and which was later embraced by artists and bohemians.)

If the 1960s version of free love eventually left a dirty aftertaste, and the term “casual sex” had too many negative connotations, perhaps “friends with benefits” was a new generation’s way of trying to make uncommitted sex sound safer, more trusting, more acceptable. But does it work? In a 2011 Michigan State University survey, 26 percent of FWB ended with a ruined friendship. While that statistic isn’t particularly harrowing, Dr. Timothy Levine, the professor at Michigan State who conducted the survey, discovered that the passion levels in FWB relationships were incredible low, suggesting that FWB sleep with each other because there’s no one else.

“After the sex, we fell into old patterns: holding each other, talking, sometimes sleeping over,” Hannah admits. “That is what made it messy—because we were emotionally involved again. We were in a specific relation to each other, whether we intended to be or not.”

While the notion that FWB is a desperate and blinding cry for intimacy might seem obvious to some folks, it might not be to the individuals who walk into a FWB situation hoping that something more might come out of it.

“As long as we were in each other’s lives like that, neither of us would be able to move on,” Hannah says. “There was always a part of us—a part of me, at least—holding back, waiting for the other to be ready.”

Many—if not most—FWB relationships end with a preemptive move to prevent any lasting feelings from blossoming. In this “break-up,” nonsexual feelings are hurt.

Levine’s research showed that the lackluster nature of FWB means that we have made room for colorless intercourse in our overworked and underpaid lives! In the movies and on television,

everyone is a grade-A badass who thinks love is for schmucks.

In reality, every relationship, platonic or otherwise, is multidimensional; it can be a considerable risk to sexually pursue a friend with the intention of staying only friends. It may be that the only workable FWB circumstances are long-thought-out and take more than just sex into consideration.

For now, many will shove FWB into a restricting corner of “things that will never work.” Maybe one day a nonfiction couple will be able to salvage its reputation, but at the moment, most friends and ex-friends alike stay reluctant.

“They’re a disaster made in rom-com heaven,” says Alyssa, a begrudger of FWB. “Or hell, depending on how you look at it.”

America's Favorite Past-time: Too Dangerous?

September 2011

His mind fights off the instinct of fight or flight; *just make it to the end zone*, he thinks. *There are other people to fight for you*. He violently waltzes across the field, drunk on rush of adrenaline, dancing past the 40 yard line, and then 30, and then...

CRACK.

Tête-à-tête, skin-to-skin, mesh-on-mesh, helmet-to-helmet. His joints throb and scream; bones fractured like a fortune cookie. His brain feels split in two, the instant migraine squeezing each neuron like a vice. He rips his arm from under his opponent's torso and un-straps his helmet. Coaches and aides rush over, feeling his pulse and praising him with an orchestra of reassurance that he'll be okay. But the player and his conductor know that's not always a promise easily kept.

In an industry where the average team is worth \$960 million- more than the NBA and MLB combined- it pays to suffer. American football is perhaps the most violent of professional sports, clocking in at 3.7 injuries per week per team, and the share of players injured at 63%, according to an NFL labor report.

How primal is it to make a holiday out of watching a three hundred pound tumor of muscle, brains, bone and flesh sack another three hundred pound tumor to prevent him from running a ball of tanned leather measuring 21.25 x 11.25 x 28.5 inches to a goal line. The plays and politics behind each game exemplify the intricacy of the sport, but at the heart of it, American football is second to boxing in terms of how native men can be.

It says even more about us as consumers that sitting around a table with friends eating chicken wings with bare hands (another relic of cavemen days) and releasing shrill battle cries at the sight of a human's body being pummeled across several feet of turf is considered a national pastime.

As a result of this cultural reinforcement for a love of all things involving football, three million boys play on youth teams, and another 1.2 million play at a high school level. They're not being paid the big bucks that keep all-stars like Mark Sanchez and Tom Brady coming back for more, and at a time of acute mental development, is it okay for them to be sacked several times in a row at practice?

According to a Time article on NFL head injuries, high school football players suffer 43,000 to 67,000 concussions per year, not including the thousands who fail to report their symptoms. In old age, these repeated blows to the head, neck and body result in a plethora of problems, mostly neurological. In the same study, the NFL found that ex-pro players over age fifty were five times as likely as the national population to receive memory-related-disease diagnoses.

In a game so lucrative, players sacrifice safety in the name of speed because swiftness is where the money resides. They vacillate between wearing too little padding, to improve agility and speed, and wearing more; helmets have grown so big that the NFL urged players to wear girdles with built-in padding on the hip, thigh and tailbone to decrease injuries to these areas. Time is money, and every minute that needs to be spent on the bench or in physical therapy is another dollar short. A study by professors at UConn's Department of Kinesiology found that the full American football uniform (padding, mesh jersey, helmet, socks, sneakers and shorts) were concurrent with hypotension, heat stress, and exhaustion- an algorithm of harm that could take a

player out of the game forever. An annual survey of football injury research revealed that nearly 39 deaths have occurred from exceptional heat stroke since 1995.

A tackle jostles the player's stomach that's usually filled with an upwards of 5,000 calories. To put it in perspective, that's 25 chocolate glazed donuts or 7 pounds of spaghetti; the latter is more likely to be ingested by a player. Sports medicine consultants at Lehigh Sports found that 2.7 grams of carbohydrate per pound of body weight per day needs to be consumed in order to perform to the best of one's abilities.

He can feel the water sloshing around with the food in his gut. Players can sweat up to 10 pounds during practice. Feeling the pressure and lights of the stadium on game night can increase that number, and dehydration won't help a linebacker in his quest to sweep an opponent up and off of his feet. The repetitive blast to the abdomen often leads to unnoticed internal bleeding and interior trauma.

The NFL union spends up to \$ 7 million dollars on compensating for these injuries sustained by former players. But those seven figures hardly pay the bills. Some players only receive \$200 a month, which is expected to cover scans, shots and exams that actually cost closer to a grand per month.

In the moment of being tackled, repercussions of what happens in that instant never cross his mind. His head hitting the back of his helmet at a rate of 20 miles per hour produces stunts any thought process that could ever occur. Feeling his 3/8 Reebok cleats being tugged from the rubbery, artificial grass and flung into the air is the only thing he can conceive. There is no thinking metaphorically when you can't determine how you will land on your back.

“You didn’t want to sit out a game, because there’s always somebody behind you who can take your spot,” said Bob Brudzinski, 52, a former linebacker for the Miami Dolphins, in an interview with the New York Times.

“I never thought about concussions, never thought about blowing my knee out. The one thing I really wish is that I could remember more. We used our head too much, in the wrong way.”