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Anonymity and Concession

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By Steve McFarland

A Private Journal for the Tufts Public

One

"I am relieved that you are an attractive sleeper because I have been enamoured with the idea of you for weeks and there's nothing I hate more than disappointment."

"They're Just Sheets," *The Public Journal*

"I treat it nonchalantly, but bulimia has absolutely beat me down. I binge on everything. I hate it. I grab everything in front of me and just charge it down my throat. There is never a feeling of full, and the out of control hunger surges."

"Therapy?," *The Public Journal*

"I am so much smarter than all of you; if I had been less of a lazyass in high school I would be at the best fucking school in the world right now."

"Confessions I," *The Public Journal*

Two

With deep brown, carefully tousled bangs and a tan, petite figure, Daniela Perdomo (LA '07) stands just over five feet tall as she hurriedly greets me at her door on a Friday afternoon in the Boston springtime. She is everything our phone conversations had led me to believe—pretty and charismatic enough to not come off as pushy or brash—but as we climb the stairs of her house, it occurs to me that she is nothing like the person I had imagined as the driving force behind a publication like *The Public Journal*.

"It's almost like a conversation piece," she told me as we settled into her room, "this brings up a lot of issues." In her right hand, Perdomo held the 65 softbound pages that make up the first issue of Tufts' newest literary outlet, for "things not meant to be published." "The point of this," Editor in Chief Perdomo said, "is to lose the pretension about writing. We often try to be deeper than we really are. When you write for yourself, you mean it—it shows."

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Four

The writing, in this nominally pretension-free effort, takes center stage and shines at it. The authors craft prose of different styles and from different places in life, but always with frankness that makes the writing immediately accessible. Each entry can be a mirror for one's own life or a voyeuristic peak into another's. "The End" tells the story of a trip home to a dying family pet and the immense pain that entails: "I make some silly remark about smelling Missy before I see her. Later, I make the mistake of looking out the front window and seeing her sprawled there, licking at some old weepy skin sores." Reading it, my jaw hurts and I notice that I've been grinding my teeth for two dozen lines. The matter-of-fact sketch capping this story seems cruel and contrived after such emotional reality.

There are digressions into AIM transcripts and the sort of bullet-pointed list (as in "Things I've Learned in College") that seem like they were penned by an Animal House caricature. Yet when surrounded by the most honest and accessible writing that is available on this campus, these entries exist not as the "throw away articles, duds," that Chiu and the other Journal editors attempted to avoid. They offer those voyeuristic moments, one a series of fleeting glimpses at the sort of life that few truly lead, the other ("Illusions of Grandeur") a telling example of the chauvinism and misogyny that pervades college life.

The Public Journal makes no effort to censor the content of its contributors, has no qualms of discussing bulimia in one breath and offering up the juvenile image that girls are like soup in the next.

"It's shocking, angsty, depressing—we all have emotions," Perdomo said. She and the other editors are now beginning work on the next issue. "The next deadline is April 12th," Chiu added. "We don't just want submissions from friends, we want everyone involved in this." Plans are in the works for "confessionals" on campus, replete with music, pens, notebooks, and couches. The editors would like to reach 100 pages of "quality work." The idea has already garnered interest from NYU and other schools, and plans for a New York City Public Journal are in the works for this summer.

It's an idea that's gaining steam and generating interest, and for good reason. As Perdomo says in the closing of her Editor's note, "We thank you because we needed it as much as you did ... Here we are safe because when we judge you, we judge ourselves."

Five

As we finish the interview, Perdomo glances over at her laptop—"Facebook—that's embarrassing. Whoa." Collecting my things, I thank her for her time. We exchange niceties as I walk down the staircase, descending into a smoke-filled common room. She accompanies me only halfway down the steps, her mind already on her next task. With a wave and a goodnight, she is back upstairs before I can even turn to the door, seemingly gone in an instant. As one of some three-dozen contributors to this new endeavor, however, she has left a mark inside the glossy cover of The Public Journal. A new medium for this "PowerBook wielding generation," the Journal is the perfect complement not just to the literary life of this campus, but to the social and academic ones as well. As an embodiment of our deepest thoughts, the publication is wholly Tufts' like no other outlet can be, flaws and all.

From 80 submissions, the editors whittled things down to the 25 that appear in this issue. They range from South American love letters to meditations on a dying childhood dog to pithy responses to the prompts, “What turns me on,” and “When I was little... and nowI...” At once beautifully written and infinitely more vulnerable than a friend’s LiveJournal could ever be, The Public Journal showcases anonymous Tufts authors exposing their most personal works. In her Editor’s Letter, Perdomo writes, “‘Feigned’ is a swear word here.” She tells me, “the only restrictions are no poetry and no fiction, and we tried to edit only for clarity or if the gender or age of the author was important but unclear.”

To aid in the free exchange of thoughts and ideas, names are immediately removed from all submissions. “Only Daniela knows who wrote what,” said Arts Editor Jordan Chiu. “Some people would give me sealed envelopes and I would pass them along to Daniela to keep confidentiality. Even myself, in laying things out, I have no idea who wrote what.” All contributors are collectively acknowledged on a page at the front of the publication, but individual entries carry no bylines. Perdomo continued, “I think the anonymity helps writer and reader. You won’t think, ‘oh, this is a girl,’ you’ll just take it for what it is.”

Three

The idea began with Jonah Green and Dylan Grief at Cornell University. Of a visit to the school, Perdomo said, “I sat down on the couch with a copy and I laughed out loud; it was like nothing I’d seen before. It’s their concept,” she said, “and I thought, ‘Tufts is a small, square school—are we quirky enough for this?’”

Collecting friends for the initial team, the group set out to discover if they could “try to attract people who would like this ridiculous stuff.” After gaining recognition from the TCU Senate and clearing the bureaucratic red tape, the Journal editors flyered campus with especially interesting confessions and times for general interest meetings.

Taking most submissions online, the team discussed each entry (by assigned number) as they attempted to achieve the most potent and diverse mix. “We have engineers, liberal arts students and museum school students,” Perdomo said. The open-ended nature of the journal elicited responses from a wide range of students.

The finishing aesthetic touches include artwork and layout by Chiu. “We were shooting for innocent and fun—kitschy,” Perdomo said. Chiu explained, “when we started, we weren’t sure of size and color limitations so we wanted to keep it simple.” Chiu created the small drawings that adorn individual entries, sketches that he wanted “to sum up the story, or after reading the story it would explain the drawing.”

The finished product is a professional looking book of sorts, more resembling a bit of Dave Eggers-style confessional than a student publication.