

PATRICK HAMBRECHT

Plasma, phones and pepperoni

Like any citizen, there's nothing I hate more than the feeling of "Where am I? Why am I naked in front of all these people? Why am I balancing on the back of a cow?" Nevertheless, that was what I felt on that ill-fated day in Richards Hall.



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I'd been hired to pose nude for a live portrayal of Marc Chagall's early masterpiece, "Moo Moo Moon." Perched on the back of a jittery green cow, I held a cardboard moon above my head, as UNL art students surrounded me, scribbling on sketchpads. Embarrassment screamed through my mind like an air-raid siren on a runaway ice cream truck, and I remembered how it all began.

My urgent need of cash has driven me to the depths of teen-age employment. If a job offers a plastic name tag and no benefits, I've probably worked there: I've done everything from flipping burgers in the greasy steam pit of McDantes to selling pornographic magazines with names like "Foot Fetish!" "Barely Legal" and "Prison Tales" at Rasker's Porn and Pet Shop.

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So far, I've never been sucked into toiling at Plasma, Phones and Pepperoni: a fiendish combination of an Italian restaurant, blood bank and telemarketing agency. Inside this mockery of job safety laws, IV tubes hanging from the ceiling suck all salable body fluids from the ghostly workers while they cook pasta and make phone sales. Employees take their coffee breaks wherever they pass out.

Never before has a proletariat purgatory so perversely exploited peons in such abhorrent proportions. "There but by the grace of God..."

Inevitably, all of my jobs ended and I found myself a teen-age destitute on the summer streets of Lincoln. The jobless youth took me in and taught me how to do nothing faster

than I ever could do nothing before. We wasted our time with a passion: randomly piercing each other's skin, organizing gladiator battles between hair lice, dancing to A.M. radio. If only the thrills of youth could last.

Soon, even Satan ran out of things for my idle hands to do and I was bored, wretchedly bored. Insanity, suicide, voting — they all failed to interest me. And that's when I was handed a flier that said:

Insanity, Suicide and Voting Lost Their Thrill?

Why Get Weird

When You Can Get Naked and Weird?

Turn Your Lack of Dignity into Cash!

It's Better Than Selling Seeds!

Contact Dr. Betty Steinliener!

So I did. But now, naked upon a spray-painted farm animal, I knew I had hit rock bottom. As I looked at the artists who were bringing my goosebumps to life on paper, I wondered if I'd see some of them smirking in my classes and I felt truly miserable. I looked at the animal and wondered if a farmer knew that someone had kidnapped and painted his cow. I felt nauseated. I heard someone enter the room and say, "Hi, I'm from the Daily Nebraskan! Do you mind if I take pictures?" That was all I could take.

When I woke up, I was lying on the floor and someone was dabbing a wet rag in my face. "Forget the ambulance!" someone else mumbled. A young woman wearing a PETA T-shirt looked down at me reproachfully.

"You really scared the cow, you know," she said.

Dr. Steinliener helped me off the floor. She asked me, "Are you all right?"

I nodded.

"Fantastic. Listen, Patrick, maybe the cow was too much. We'd like you to pose for something totally different — if you think you're up to it."

"Something with more clothes?" I begged.

"You bet!" she said, and smiled. She handed me a studded contraption made of black leather.

"Just put it on in the bathroom," she said. "We were thinking you could pose with Morris, our gender-studies student. Something in the Mapplethorpe domain, with a wooden cross maybe, or a tub of living —"

I screamed and fled the room, into the honest, sane light of day. My naked feet hit each step before Richards Hall, taking me away from cows and artists to the haven that I knew would be another menial job.

I could bitch about the cruelty of plodding through one benefit-free job after another, but there are bigger fish to fry. In America, even a bum like me is king of the third world. I'm wearing jeans made overseas by some poor woman at 50 cents an hour and shoes made by a 10-year-old during his 10-hour work day.

Compared to how those two pathetic souls are slaving away for me, Plasma, Phones and Pepperoni is the working man's pal.

Hambrecht is a junior news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

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