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Brief Interviews

Journal Editors

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Brief Interviews

Lynda Barry

If you could have lunch with any monster, alive or dead or somewhere in between, who, or what, would you choose and why?

Oh this is a good question! Because there are so many I would like to have lunch with for so many reasons, except I would not want to be killed by them. So, I have to ask for the special power of being able to have lunch or a cocktail with them but not be killed by them, OK? I'd like to have drinks with Dracula because I'm interested in people who have no reflection. That is to say, no capacity for reflection. He can't see himself, and I'd love to have drinks with Medusa because she also has a problem with mirrors except she can't stand to see herself. Again, no capacity for reflection. I think it might be possible to talk to both of them if I wore big mirrored sunglasses. And I would love to see the two of them together at the same table. It would be nice to see Dracula try to bite Medusa on the neck and then all the snakes on her head bite him on the face.

If I saw that, I would remember that day forever.

Let's pretend for a moment that your life had a soundtrack. Please name and explain five songs that might be a part of it.

The first one would be this folk song from the Philippines we sang a lot when I was a kid. I only know the phonetic way of spelling it "Chit-chi-rit-chit, ah-li-bahng-bahng," and all I know is it's about a cockroach. This is a perfect example of how kids of immigrants often don't learn to speak the language of their parents. I grew up hearing Tagalog every single day, and I can't speak it. I know songs like this one, but I can't tell you what the words mean. It's an experience shared by a lot of people whose parents were born in other countries.

The second one would be "Moonlight Swim" by Elvis, from the Blue Hawaii album. My family was crazy for Elvis, and the ones that didn't speak fluent English could still sing along with his records kind of like I could sing along with songs in Tagalog and not know what I was singing. I was a pretty devoted hula dancer for most of my childhood. I took hula dancing classes twice a week for six years and I adored it. And I adored Elvis. I had a dream once where he and I kissed while we were both wearing barrels with

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suspenders on them. That was something I saw in cartoons, that was the symbol for naked, wearing a barrel.

Third, “Say it Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud” by James Brown. That was a big song on my street and everybody sang it during kickball games on the corner. It was a mostly Black and Asian neighborhood, and it didn’t seem weird for all of us to be singing it. To us, Black meant more than the color of your skin. It was an attitude. Even when we chanted “Burn Baby Burn” and “Kill Whitey,” it never occurred to me that I might possibly be “Whitey.” We also practiced pimp-walking quite a bit. It’s harder than it looks.

Fourth: “Cheri Amor” by Stevie Wonder. That was my crooning song of love to whoever I was in love with when it played. I thought it was the most beautiful melody I’d ever heard, and I still feel that way about it. I can remember sitting on my front steps with this little radio and looking through the telephone wires at the moon and singing it, and really feeling the tide of love, and crying because of the feeling, and my brother walking out and totally busting me, laughing at me.

Fifth: “Polk-Salad Annie” by Tony Joe White. I shop-lifted that record. That was a song I was ready to go to jail for. I have no idea what drove me so wild about that song, but I played it a million times over and over. The mumbling in the beginning, his accent, his weird-ass grunting, sudden guitar spaz-outs and the lyrics— what that song was about I had no idea. I still don’t know if it’s Polk-Salad or Poke-Salad, but the idea of someone singing so hard about salad just got to me.

If your thirteen-year-old self showed up right now, what's the first question she would ask you? How would the now-you answer?

She would ask me if I had any pot. I would say no and we would both be very sad about that fact.

What's your favorite euphemism for sex?

I don’t have a favorite euphemism, but I have one that creeps me out— someone was telling me he’d had sex with someone named Sheila, and he said “I had a passage with Sheila”—he called it “a passage”. For some reason it really made my skin crawl.

If a 1950s-style London police box appeared outside your door one day, and the man inside said he could take you anywhere in space and time, where would you go? What would you do? Why?

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Well, of course I'd have to ask again for the power to not die, and to be able to return intact. Then, I'd ask to be taken to the thing that is just before the beginning of Space and Time. The starting point. I'd like to go there.

What superpower would you NOT want to have?

Oh. This one is a good one. What superpower would I not want to have? Well, the one that comes to mind instantly is I would not want to have the power to read people's minds. And the reason is I would actually love to have that power more than any other power, but I know that I would not use it for good. I would take advantage of this superpower constantly and in a way that I could not control, because it would be too tempting. That would be my Lord of the Rings ring that I should never put on my finger. But it would be great to be cursed with it for a little while.

Tung-Hui Hu

If you could have lunch with any monster, alive or dead or somewhere in between, who, or what, would you choose and why?

The most monstrous lunch I could have would be a Luther Burger, which is a bacon cheeseburger on a grilled Krispy Kreme donut cut in half.

Let's pretend for a moment that your life had a soundtrack. Please name and explain five songs that might be a part of it.

The Luther Burger is named in honor of Luther Vandross, the talented American vocalist. Some of his songs I would include on my soundtrack are: "For You to Love" (1989), "Endless Love" (with Mariah Carey, 1994), "Love is On the Way" (1993), "Your Secret Love" (1996), and "Power of Love/Love Power" (1991).

If your thirteen-year-old self showed up right now, what's the first question he would ask you? How would you answer?

My thirteen-year-old self would probably ask: "What's your favorite euphemism for sex?"

What's your favorite euphemism for sex?

"Bang" and "boink," two words that seem onomatopoeic but are sounds that have never happened to me during sex.

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If a 1950s-style London police box appeared outside your door one day, and the man inside said he could take you anywhere in space and time, where would you go? What would you do? Why?

Where: San Francisco. When: The end of time. What: In-n-Out Burger. Why: To see if the universe ends with a bang or a whimper.

What superpower would you NOT want to have?

Decline to state.

James Kimbrell

If you could have lunch with any monster, alive or dead or somewhere in between, who, or what, would you choose and why?

That's easy: Cookie Monster! As a lover of cookies and monsters, this choice is an obvious one for me. We'd have lunch a little south of Oxford in Hot Coffee, Mississippi, again, for obvious reasons.

Let's pretend for a moment that your life had a soundtrack. Please name and explain five songs that might be a part of it.

Track 1: "Love Hurts" by Nazareth because it was my favorite song in first grade. I'd call AM 62JDX and request it and then wait by the radio until they finally played 3 days later, the bums.

Track 2: "Love Hurts" by The Flying Burrito Brothers, because if there's one song better than Track 1, this is it.

Track 3: "Wildwood Flower" by The Carter Family, because I too will twine with my mangles and raven black hair, whatever the hell that means.

Track 4: "He Stopped Loving Her Today" by George Jones, because it's so damn sad it makes me want to crank up the riding mower and drive into town for another case of Pabst.

Track 5: "Boogie Nights" because when they played it in 1979 the black-light came on and my white t-shirt would glow beneath my overalls and I'd slip my fat handled comb into my back pocket and speed off around the corner on the fastest 8 wheels in the universe so that everyone at Candle Stick Skate Rink in Jackson, Ms, circa 1979, could bare witness to my undying disco testament to the courage and honor and hope and pride and

compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past.

If your thirteen-year-old self showed up right now, what's the first question he would ask you? How would you answer?

Q: Got five bucks? I'll wash your car.

A: No, but here's a buck. Go get me some damn Skoal.

What's your favorite euphemism for sex?

William Shakespeare's "The beast with two backs" has always been a great one, although I suppose it might exclude certain positions, and "beast" is hardly euphemistic. So, scratch that. How about "bumping fuzz," "skinning the squirrel" or "teleporting the dream monkey via the tunnel of love" or "bobcatting" or, in the case of sexual difficulties of various ilk, as in should the shoe not fit so well, "throwing a hot dog down the hallway" or, should the fault lie with the other party, "like trying to shove a wet rag into a coke bottle." Or, if you're a Republican, "Drill baby drill!" Thank god we don't have to hear that anymore... Are ya'll going to get in trouble for this?

If a 1950s-style London police box appeared outside your door one day, and the man inside said he could take you anywhere in space and time, where would you go? What would you do? Why?

I'd go to London, around 1950 say, and I'd find one of those police boxes, and wait for some unsuspecting bloke to drop by, then I'd offer to take him anywhere in space and time, because what is space and time if not one mirror facing another? Otherwise, I'd go center stage of the Soul Train and get my funky ass groove on, because American Band Stand ain't nothing but a stone cold lie, honkey.

What superpower would you NOT want to have?

The ability to wear those geeky p.j.s under my coat and tie, cause if I was a superpower wielding bad ass, I'd be going commando pretty much 24/7 so that when I shape-shifted myself into the form of a timber wolf or the world's most rabid armadillo, I wouldn't get all tripped up in some elastic waste band.

Barry Kitterman

If you could have lunch with any monster, alive or dead or somewhere in between, who, or what, would you choose and why?

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I would have lunch with one of those vampire dudes, maybe the original vampire, Count Dracula, and I'd take him somewhere for fresh organic vegetables, because what most people don't know is organic vegetables are death to vampires, and I'd make him eat a whole plateful of something like Swiss Chard, and just before he died, I'd say "that's what you get for making people write all those stupid stories."

Let's pretend for a moment that your life had a soundtrack. Please name and explain five songs that might be a part of it.

1. Aaron Copeland's "Fanfare for the Common Man." That's me, common as dirt. Plus Copeland is getting away with appropriating a lot of stuff he didn't really write, and I'd like to get away with more of that.

2. Eddie Cleanhead Vincent's "Cleanhead Blues." Folks call me Mr. Cleanhead, cause my head is bald on top It says Clean is Beautiful.

3. Ken Hicks' "For All The Good People" -- I've known some good people.

4. Eric Clapton's "Leila" in its original loud and crazy version. Because it's cool, and it even sounded cool on a crappy VW car radio circa 1971.

5. Bill Evans'"Here's That Rainy Day." And if you can find the version Sarah Vaughn sang, I would really like to have it. It's the most beautiful song ever.

If your thirteen-year-old self showed up right now, what's the first question she [sic] would ask you? How would you answer?

"She" would say, what's up with the sex change?

What's your favorite euphemism for sex?

E-mailing an old friend. (Excuse me while I go have a cigarette.) [Editor's note: This interview was conducted via e-mail.]

If a 1950s-style London police box appeared outside your door one day, and the man inside said he could take you anywhere in space and time, where would you go? What would you do? Why?

I'm not exactly sure what a London police box is. We didn't have them where I grew up. But if it's like a time machine—hell yes, we had those.

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I would go talk to Jesus. I would like to see what the man looked like and hear his voice. And I would ask him if he knew any funny stories.

Why?

I like funny stories.

What superpower would you NOT want to have?

All the ones I have are working out pretty good. How about you?