

LESLEY ANN WHEELER

a little hell of its own

*winner of the 2013 experimental prose contest
selected by Barbara Henning*

Hurricane Sandy tore through Coney Island and set everyone back. The *New York Daily News* reported on the “Sandy Generation,” and profiled children in public housing, separated from the shore by subway tracks and two blocks of amusement parks, who since the storm were unnaturally afraid of disasters. “The world is coming to an end. We didn’t do nothing to God,” Tyril said.

It's August, the week before school starts. I am exiting the auditorium during an orientation, answering the phone to find out whether or not our rental application has been approved. Last week a man was shot on Chauncey Street, in front of the building behind ours. The bedroom window was open at the top and the shots stopped whatever conversation my boyfriend and I were having in our lofted bed.



76
247

Andrea C.
New York, NY

★★★★☆ 8/22/2007

Went on a Saturday night, expecting long lines and attitude but was surprised to find quite the opposite.

Great outdoor area, we scored a table with benches and were able to chill out most of the night - yes, a lot of hipsters and guys with very skinny tight jeans - but I didn't care.

Drinks were served up promptly and bartenders came over when I made eye contact with them. Cool spot, would definitely go back!

Was this review ...? ☒ Useful ☒ Funny ☒ Cool



What a strange day. I slept while the rain came in and made your things wet. The cable man is coming tomorrow. So life should be back to Awesome.

I can hear the baby of the man who was shot last week crying on the next block over.

18. August 22, 2007
2:26 pm

[Link](#)

The Honeymooners lived at 328 Chauncey Street in Brooklyn (not sure if it's Bed-Stuy or Bushwick).

— Joe

INFANT'S BODY FOUND

Roundsman Sheehan of the Coney Island police found the body of a new born infant lying on the sand under the Iron Pier at Coney Island Saturday afternoon. The remains had evidently been buried in the sand and had been dug out by the tide. The officer took it to the morgue on West Eighth street and the coroner was notified.

ITS SLEEP WAS DEATH.

The Discovery Made by a Young Mother at Coney Island.

Mrs. Lizzie Sherwood, of 224 East Seventieth street, New York, took her baby to Coney Island yesterday afternoon, in the hope that the sea air would benefit it. The child was suffering from cholera infantum. Soon after her arrival Mrs. Sherwood noticed that her infant slept, and she walked with it toward the water's edge. When near the drug store she found that her little one had passed from sleep to death. She shrieked hysterically and refused at first to part with the remains. After a time she was quieted, however, and the body was taken by undertaker Stillwell to await the action of the coroner. It was with the greatest difficulty that the mother could be made to understand at once that the law prohibited her taking the dead child back to New York with her.

TRIED TO DESERT HER CHILD

Mrs. Williams Told the Police She Found the Infant at Coney Island.

Mrs. Gussie Williams, who said she was 24 years old, walked into the Bergen street station house on Saturday evening, carrying a 17 weeks old baby in her arms. She told the sergeant at the desk that she had found the baby on the sand at Coney Island and wished to turn it over to the city nurse. When the sergeant began to question her the woman became confused and finally admitted that the baby belonged to her. She said that her husband deserted her about six months ago, after which time the baby was born. He had a daughter 8 years old. Her maiden name was Ebbets and her father, she said, was a farmer at Oyster Bay, L. I.

After being deserted by her husband the woman said that she went to live with a sister in Newark. On Saturday they went to Coney Island together and her sister advised her to abandon the infant. In fact, the child was placed on the sand, but she returned for it, as she had not the heart to forsake it. She then lost trace of her relative and decided to attempt to get rid of the infant by turning it over to the city as a foundling.

The woman was arraigned in the Myrtle avenue court yesterday morning and was sent to the almshouse by Magistrate Nostrand for thirty days. The child in the meantime will be cared for by the city nurse.

When I substitute for an elementary librarian in Kansas City, I read *Strega Nona* to a class. I model the three blown kisses she uses to make her magic pot of pasta stop boiling and then the children can't stop blowing kisses back at me. I have to ask them to stop blowing kisses.

How long can history last?
How long should history last?

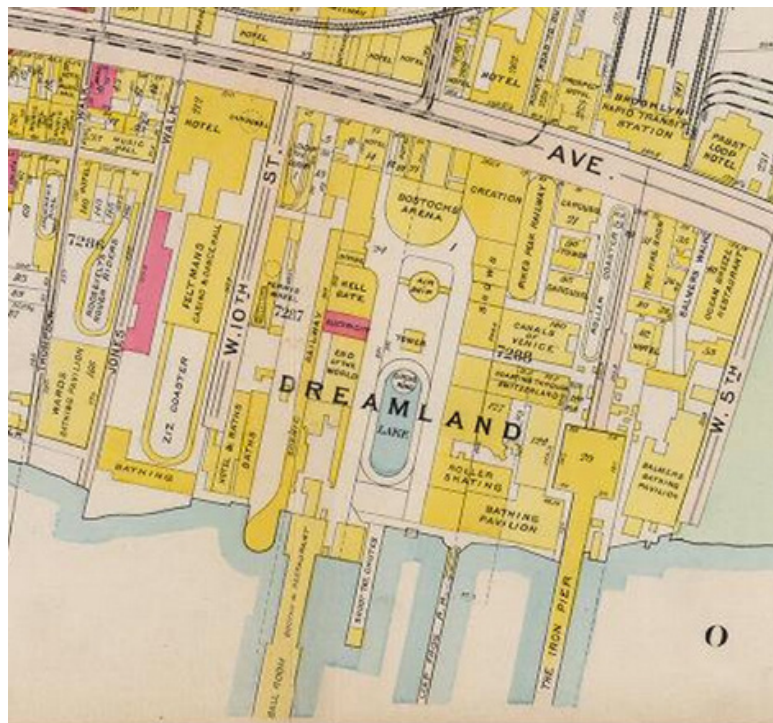
On a cork board between the men's and women's bathrooms at a Pilot gas station in Iowa there is a missing poster for Elizabeth Collins and Lyric Cook. The center of the poster is a VR code made of pink and purple hearts. Last I heard, someone's parents were under investigation. An auto repair shop's security camera caught the two girls riding their bicycles down the street adjacent to the shop. The fuzzy-pink riders cut across the top of the frame; the street view is an unintentional capture and the most important thing it could ever do.

There are men who can crack up
there are men who can crack open the ribcages
of other men
and tinker with the pink insides,
and then there's me I can hardly bother
to open my eyes with pointer and thumb.

The Coney Island Houses were without power or running water for weeks following the storm. When the sun went down, it was dark. Hallways lit by groups of bodega candles, stairwells appeared in the flick of a lighter. In the morning, mothers filled buckets at open hydrants to cook breakfast and flush toilets. NYCHA still expected rent at the end of the month. A future rent reduction was promised.

The people of the CI houses stage a protest in my dreams. In the now-shallow shore, everyone is lined up by floor number in neatly parallel rows. The tide comes in and out around their legs. I see this from above and also in tight shots on their wet ankles.

An old man is found buried in the sand and no one knows if someone did it or no one did it. He must be moved. The protest continues.



In front of the bathroom mirror I rub Crystal Visions dream balm into my temples. I go to sleep I am in New York, coming home from work on a Manhattan-bound B train, explaining to the co-worker who took the seat in front of me how much I miss holding the cold metal pole on a fast train going over the Manhattan Bridge. Then, there's the sense of being back on Maple Street, proximity of people being the strongest sensation.

Here, there is almost no one. Yesterday I sat on our root cellar and watched the trees' branches move on sky. Small planes flew over at what felt like regular intervals, towards the downtown Kansas City Airport. I closed my eyes and faced the winter sun for a long while. When I opened my eyes, everything appeared very blue, as things do in iPhoto when you drag the slide tool towards *colder*. This took whole minutes to fade.

Twists of fate are never simple: there is a date, barely visible in the concrete of the root cellar. 1917. I know everything would be easier if I didn't care about New York. Dear Kansas City expands in the view from my front porch, now that the trees have lost their leaves. At night it sparkles like an urban dream.

To enquiring friends: I have troubles today that I had not yesterday. I had troubles yesterday which I have not today. On this site will be built a bigger, better, Steeplechase Park. Admission to the burning ruins — Ten cents.

—George C. Tilyou, posted on a sign the morning after the 1907 fire that destroyed Steeplechase Park



Coney Island Cyclone

@TheCyclone



Follow

"We will rebuild." Over 300 volunteers from Luna Park joined the Coney Island Alliance in clearing the boardwalk.

fb.me/SSBKpqxo

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2
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10:33 AM - 12 Nov 12 · Embed this Tweet

The teacher refers to a blog post featuring microscopic images of sand from around the world. I've seen it. Each grain a surprising cosmos with colors and textures that cannot be seen at a glance.



© Professor Gary Greenberg / SWNS.

A baby went missing in Gloucester, MA. A walk with her mom, older sister, and dog— a ball bounced, her's? Her sister's? Someone else completely? The mother went to get the ball. She had to go under a footbridge. She had to go over a footbridge. She returned and the baby was not there. While she was walking away, while she passed under or over the bridge, while she ducked under to go back to her daughters, something had happened. The baby was not where she was before. The mother could not see the baby. They were on the beach. That night, and the next day, people searched for the baby. Specialists were brought in to question the sister. The specialists were special because they could ask a four year old questions “with sensitivity in mind.” Who *couldn't* do this? On the second day since the baby disappeared, it began to rain. The searchers who dove and the searchers who combed sand and bramble could not search in the rain. The rain continued for three days. An Amber Alert was considered. It was dismissed because no one saw her disappear. There was no license plate number and vehicle description to flash over the highway.

An inquest will be made tomorrow.

An investigation is underway in Ankeny, IA. A man could not contact his son for three days. He went to his son's house. His four year old grandson answered the door and told him his father was sleeping. The father had been dead for a few days, in his armchair. Our friend lives in the neighborhood. He's seen a cop parked on the street all week.

Two bodies found by a hunter in the woods today. Although no one has confirmed it, people are reacting as if certain. I did not know until today that the cousins went missing on Friday, July 13th.

LIFE ON CONEY ISLAND.

**Yesterday's Crimes and Casualties at
the Seaside Resort.**

The research never leaves you. More writing for just writing, running on the topic to anywhere. I was angry, washing a giant silver salad bowl. I didn't know I had just started to bleed.

The girl from the fifth floor's baby died somewhere between getting in the elevator and reaching her apartment door. Shifting him in her arms to get her keys she realized he wasn't sleeping. There were screams and yelling and an ambulance. From my sixth floor bedroom window I saw women from the building falling over themselves crying. An empty gurney went in and came out with the girl holding her baby close to her chest. The way she holds him, it's impossible for the EMTs to work. *It was with the greatest difficulty.*

A shrine grew in the lobby. On the floor next to the elevator were devotional candles wrapped in the images of saints, stiff new teddy bears, blue dyed carnations. A piece of cardboard taped low on the wall above the shrine held messages of sympathy and promised strength to the girl from the whole building.



Coney's Games Still Go

*and now the children are afraid
of snow, night in the hall*

*a society of abandoned children
we cannot muster the family*

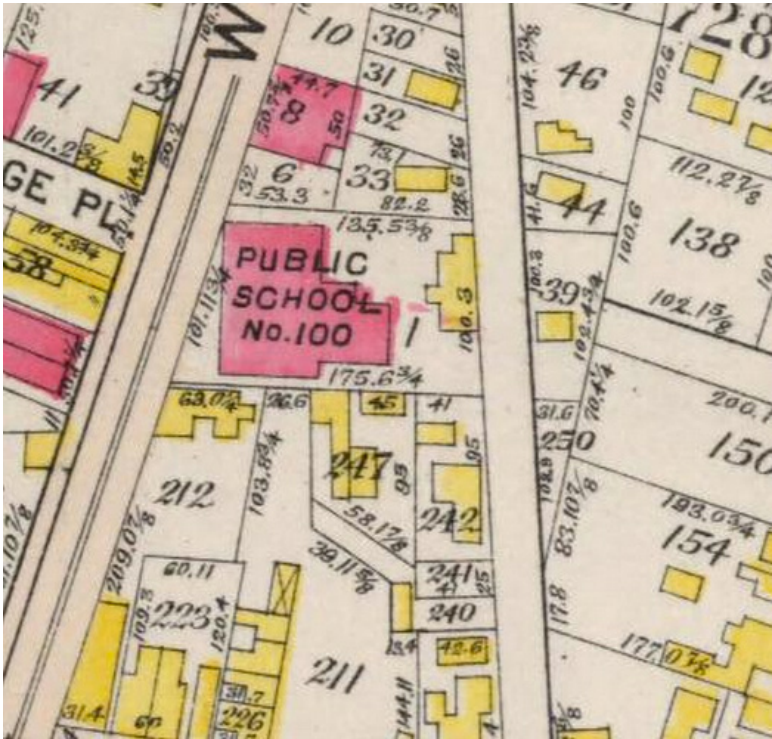
they are owed / a parade

*down fifth avenue ending
at the beach for summer sorries,
so*

As a first-year teacher in the NYC DOE, I receive:
a clear trash bag with 12 markers, 24 pencils, a
package of loose leaf notebook paper, two pads of
easel paper and a classroom with eleven computers
piled in a mouse-infested closet.

Sallie Mae called me nine times today. Their number ends in 3321. Normally I take any unplanned occurrence of 3-2-1 in my life as a positive sign, something saying *you're doing the right thing, this is the right path*, etc. The faculty member at who hired me for my first adjunct teaching job was in room 321 of her building. When I worked as a camp counselor for an international writing camp in Iowa, my dorm room number was 321. We lived at 11 Maple St, 220 North Dodge St, and then 3308 Bell St. A natural progression, An order relievingly simple, and because of obvious contexts very primary.





GUT:

the basic visceral or emotional part of a person

part of the alimentary canal and especially the intestine or stomach

plural : fortitude and stamina in coping with what alarms, repels, or discourages

to destroy the essential power or effectiveness of

In Gloucester, Massachusetts, the turbulent waves of Sandy brought tides in at record heights, and washed debris ashore. In the days following the storm, a man walking along Good Harbor Beach found a tangle of rope and pieces of fishermen's nets that had a shred of pink fabric caught in it. Somehow this shred of pink becomes reported, Caleigh's feuding parents are called to view it, and it is decided that the shred was part of the pants that she wore the day she disappeared. The conclusion is drawn that she must have wandered into the ocean and drowned.

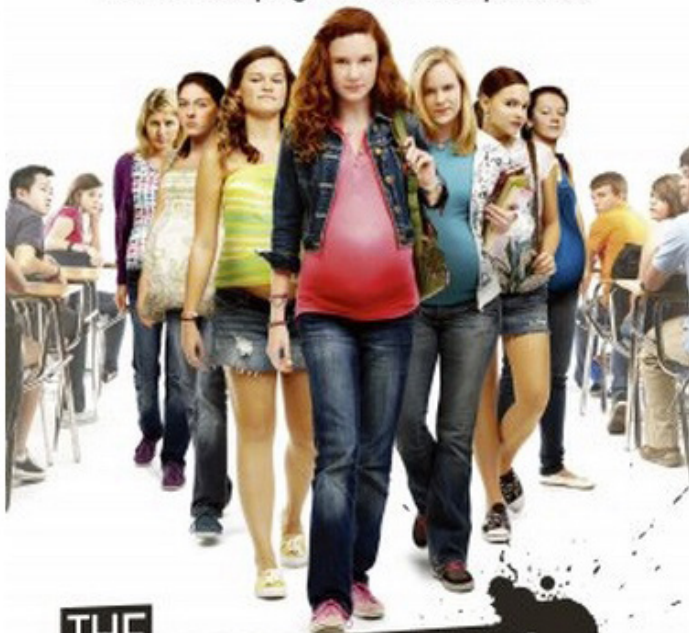


MYSTERY OF A DEAD CHILD

Body of the Waif Picked Up at Coney Island Is Unidentified.

The police of the Coney Island Precinct have so far been unable to learn anything as to the identity of the infant's body found on the beach at the foot of Twenty-ninth street yesterday morning. A number of theories have been advanced as to how it came to be where it was found, but no facts have yet been brought to light to substantiate any of them. There have been no inquiries at the station house about the child, and no person has offered to identify it. The infant was about 6 months old, a boy, dressed in a long white cloak, with black stockings, no shoes and a white lace cap. It was partially covered by sand and had apparently been resting where it was found during all or the greater part of the storm of night before last. There were no marks of violence whatever on the body and nothing on the clothing by which any information as to its name could be learned.

Not all teen pregnancies are unplanned.



THE PREGNANCY PACT


SATURDAY
JAN 23 9/8c

Lifetime
myLifetime.com

There is a day when all but two of the campers go to Des Moines on a field trip, and I am asked to stay behind. It is the fifth consecutive day of 100°+ weather in Iowa, and so I decide to stay inside of my dorm room with the A/C pointed at the top bunk while I stream a Lifetime movie. It's a dramatized take on the 1998 incident at the high school in Gloucester, MA when the school was suddenly full of pregnant teenaged girls. The made-for-TV-movie's angle is that of an investigative journalist returning to her hometown to gain true insight into the situation, but she largely becomes overshadowed by her bumbling use of a camcorder as a reporting tool. Her genuine care and compassion for the misguided teens is underscored when she offers to turn off the camcorder and just *talk* with them.



A hawk sat on a low branch over the playground at recess. His feathery brown back was to the children. I heard violins playing in unison. I'm overly warm, but I believe it is because I have on three shirts. The loan company called me seven times yesterday, nine before that, and so far four times today. There is a framed picture of Maria Montessori at this tiny teacher's desk. Is the sun out? It is cloudy. The Baptist church across Wornall Road is placing orderly small white crosses in its yard in rows. The seven colors of colored pencils are ordered by color in same-colored cups. It is nearly time for dismissal, I can hear the spinning wheels of the janitor's bucket.

a·ban·don¹  [uh-ban-duhn]  [Show IPA](#)

verb (used with object)

1. to leave completely and finally; forsake utterly; desert: *to abandon one's farm; to abandon a child; to abandon a sinking ship.*
2. to give up; discontinue; withdraw from: *to abandon a research project; to abandon hopes for a stage career.*
3. to give up the control of: *to abandon a city to an enemy army.*
4. to yield (oneself) without restraint or moderation; give (oneself) over to natural impulses, usually without self-control: *to abandon oneself to grief.*
5. *Law.* to cast away, leave, or desert, as property or a child.
6. *Insurance.* to relinquish (insured property) to the underwriter in case of partial loss, thus enabling the insured to claim a total loss.
7. *Obsolete.* to banish.

Etymologically,

the word carries a sense of "put someone under someone else's control." Meaning "to give up absolutely" is from late 14c. Related: Abandoned; abandoning. The noun sense of "letting loose, surrender to natural impulses" (1822) is from Fr. abandon.

relinquish *to*,
surrender control *to* another power

If the baby is left in the sand, what power is asked to take control?

Encyclopedia

Encyclopedia Britannica

abandonment

in Anglo-American [property law](#), the relinquishment of possession of property with an intent to terminate all ownership interests in that property. Abandonment may occur by throwing away the property, by losing it and making no attempt to retrieve it, by vacating the property with no intention of returning to it, or by any other act manifesting a complete disclaimer of ownership in the property. The general effect of abandonment is to give [full ownership](#) of the property to the first taker.

Learn more about [abandonment](#) with a free trial on Britannica.com.

ABANDONED HER CHILD

On the night of September 3, Arthur Knox, a fireman on the Nassau Railroad, found a two months old child on the beach at Sea Gate. The infant was placed in charge of the city nurse by the Coney Island police and to-day Detective McCluskey, in whose hands the case was placed, arrested Rose Shaughnessy of 6 Clinton avenue and Mary Beuner of 176 Flushing avenue as being responsible for the child's abandonment. The former confessed to the detective that she was the mother of the child, saying simply that wanted to get rid of it. When the women were arraigned in court, the case was adjourned until October 1.

MOTHER PETS BABY SHE HAD ABANDONED

**Child Left in Coney Island
Marsh Holds Out Its Arms as
She Bends Over Crib.**

SHE BLAMES TAXI DRIVER

**He Said Child Would Be Picked Up
In Half an Hour—She Is
Locked Up.**

I fall asleep in fleece sheets and wake up after a nightmare. I move to a recliner. I fall asleep two hours later. In my dream I visit a psychic I know and have visited with before. She knows me. I don't have an appointment but she is ready for me and asks me to have a seat on her couch. I need to focus more on the women in my project. A psychic in New York needs a personal assistant. She is comforting, understands my anxieties, and laughs them off. When our time is over I ask her *how much do I owe you?* and she reminds me my special price is \$16. I hand her a twenty and she hands me a twenty and a five back.

I make a note to myself to smile more.
It becomes more and more difficult
to remember. You describe the music
as “all travel; no arrival,” and I become
paranoid that my life follows the same
pattern despite my desire for the
contrary. Patternless laps around the
country. How foolish my little lines
transversing the globe are. And for
what? I flew at high altitudes for hours
and threw a coin in a fountain.

PART OF A BODY FOUND.; The Remains of a Woman Recovered at Coney Island.

[DISPLAYING ABSTRACT]

The lower part of the body of an unidentified woman was found yesterday afternoon floating in the water at the foot of Kensington Walk, Coney Island.

 E-MAIL

 PERMISSIONS

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We're sorry, we seem to have lost this page, but we don't want to lose you.

Coney Island is my playing board, the ocean the southwest border. The surface ends not far from there and the top is an avenue with auto repair shops, ATMs, and a thousand shuttered windows. And all the deli men are in dirty plastic candy thrones. I play my pieces all over it, entering and exiting the game on the elevated path of the Q train. The map is glued to a foldable square of cardboard whose edges are tucked over with linen like the headband of a book. It's an original contour drawing of a brand new coastline filled with Dutch rabbits, printed off of the internet yesterday. There are eight men in a row who are asleep on the train. Only one man opens his eyes at each stop, the others know when to get up.

This boat has wings, they flap when we settle in to our plank seats, the man announces the start of our journey, we fly on. My sweetheart, my man on the moon. What an odd place to land after the Whip and Top, the Down and Out Slide, the Ghost Train, Honeymoon Lane, the Hell n' Back walkthrough.

In my dream I am with children at an elementary school, and I try to teach two lessons. Neither are successful, both are simple and contained on a single piece of paper—thick like cardboard. Each time I present a lesson to a child, any child, their head would start to itch or they could look anywhere but the sky.



This school used to be a Montessori school. It's written in the concrete pillar outside. *Good luck*, a teacher says to me in the hall—a reflection of her own struggles more than how my day will go, I remind myself. Zonnie can't understand why I walk backwards as I walk the class down the hall. And why I sometimes switch to walking frontwards. I tell her I learned how to do it at teacher school.

The windows are opaque. They let in light and shadows, but you can't tell what's out there until it comes real close—a face with a hand cupped at the brow, a basketball's quick approach and disappearance.

The pledge starts at 9:35. Murmurs from all directions. *Liberty and justice for all*, the child's voice crackles with extreme volume on the PA, the excitement of being the loudest of all in the whole building. Office phone ringing in the background. On the regular teacher's desk a Bible quote typed, printed, and taped carefully.



POVERTY GAPPERS PLAYING CONEY ISLAND.

