



# FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #291 — DEC. 14, 2012

*Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.*  
<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org> [FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com](mailto:FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com)

**INDEX: Click here.**

## **'The Future Is Upon Us'**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 14, 2012)

Obamacare is still a big mystery to most of us, but is about to start unfolding into the public consciousness. Let the revelations begin.

"Obamacare Begins" by Bill Boyarsky, TruthDig

Dec. 13, 2012, ([http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/obamacare\\_begins\\_20121213/](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/obamacare_begins_20121213/))



Dealing with the complex problems of the poor is one of the most difficult challenges facing Obamacare as the historic health reform law slowly but steadily enters American life.

Throughout the country, health professionals, politicians and health care activists are meeting about how to implement the Affordable Care Act now that it has been upheld by the Supreme Court and President Barack Obama's re-election.

I attended one of these sessions recently and saw the potential for Obamacare in the nation's impoverished communities. Among the topics was autism, a disability in which—as is true of much of American medical care—treatment is rationed on the basis of wealth.

Areva D. Martin, an attorney who advocates for children with special needs such as autism, called care for the disorder "a microcosm" of inadequate treatment of the poor, with insufficient diagnoses, limited and scattered facilities, and caregivers—parents, other relatives and friends—so burdened with two or three jobs and low incomes that they can't fight for help in a bureaucratic system.

Martin spoke at a conference at St. John's Well Child & Family Center, which has 140,000 visits a year from residents of South Los Angeles, home to many thousands of working-class Latinos and African-Americans. St. John's provides primary, dental and mental health care; a team approach to complex ailments; and diagnosis and treatment of HIV/AIDS. It is one of more than 8,000 community health clinics across the nation serving more than 20 million poor people, according to the National Association of Community Health Centers.

The clinics are a key part of the Obamacare effort to improve treatment of the poor. The Affordable Care Act provides \$7.5 billion to expand services over five years and an additional \$1.5 billion for construction of facilities. Jim Mangia, president and CEO of St. John's, told me that Obamacare is providing funds for new buildings and remodeling at the center's main South L.A. facility and satellite clinics in the broad area of poverty that stretches for miles south of the office towers, expensive restaurants and high-priced homes of affluent Los Angeles.

Obamacare funding of Medicaid for the poor will put 12,000 St. John's patients, presently without health insurance, on the government care program. By paying for these patients, Medicaid will provide funds to St. John's, which now has to finance its care from donations and other scarce sources.

Autism requires a range of services administered by doctors, schools, health clinics, speech and behavior therapists, psychologists and others. To put all these components together requires parental sophistication and an ability to fight the system. For those in South L.A., it also means finding help at facilities that are often a long bus ride away.

Attorney Martin learned how poverty makes this difficult when she attended a parental meeting to find ways of helping her autistic son learn to read. She knew how to fight the system, unlike some of the poor mothers and fathers she met. Help, she found, is hard to obtain "if you are not educated, if you are not used to dealing with bureaucrats, if you don't have a job that allows you time to go to two zillion meetings, if you are working three jobs."

In a series published a year ago, *Los Angeles Times* journalist Alan Zarembo reported that state spending for treatment of autism is tilted toward whites in more affluent areas. For autistic children between the ages of 3 and 6, the critical period for treating the disorder, the *Times* found that California spent \$11,723 per child for whites, \$11,063 for Asians, \$7,634 for Latinos and \$6,593 for African-Americans.

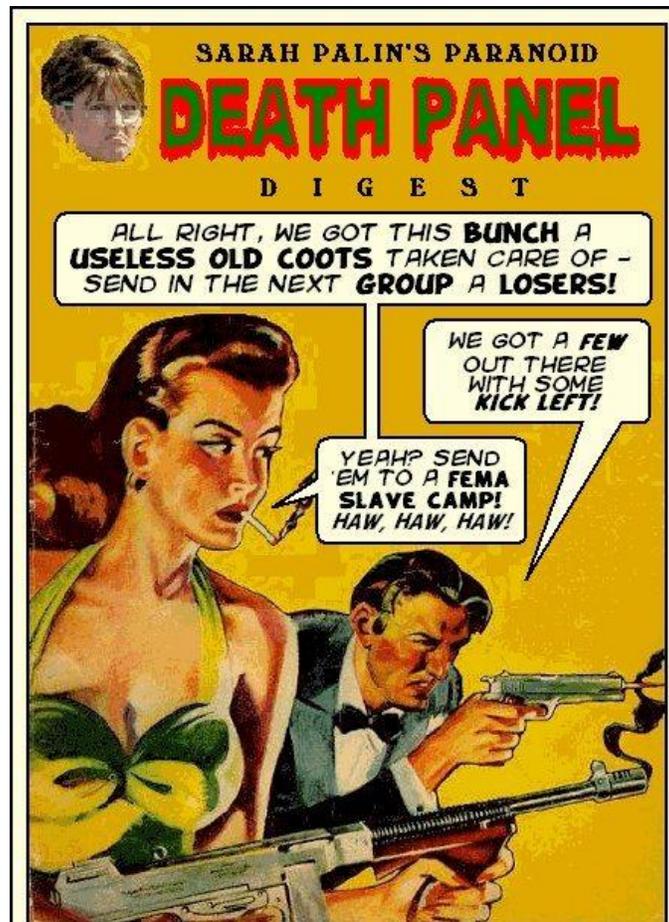
St. John's CEO Mangia said that his organization, helped by Obamacare funds, is planning a large center for special needs children, including those with autism, on a new medical campus being built in South L.A. to replace the old Martin Luther King Jr. Hospital.

"There will be early identification, intervention, mental health care, counseling, speech, psychological and occupational therapy, all the things these kids need here," Mangia said, services now reserved for "upper-middle-class kids whose families can afford it."

Autism is just an example. By putting money into community health clinics, expanding Medicaid, and financing improved primary and comprehensive treatment, Obamacare will improve life throughout the country for the poor suffering from diabetes, heart disease, HIV/AIDS and other complex ailments.

Such care should have been available a long time ago. Medicare for all would have been better. But at St. John's and community health centers throughout America, dedicated health care professionals are making Obamacare work. So are others engaged in setting up the exchanges that will make a variety of insurance policies, with subsidies for the low income, available to those now uninsured.

Their work is the beginning of a journey that will end only when Obamacare—if it is successful—makes decent health care a right rather than something reserved for those who can afford it.



**FotM NEWSLETTER #291 (Dec. 14, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX**

<b>DATE-ID</b>	<b>TIME</b>	<b>FROM</b>	<b>SUBJECT/TITLE</b>
<a href="#">20121214-00</a>		SteveB	'The Future Is Upon Us' by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Obamacare Begins")
<a href="#">20121213-01</a>	06:04	MarthaH	Weekly Contact
<a href="#">20121213-03</a>	09:54	Pam	Re: Weekly Contact (reply to MarthaH, above)
<a href="#">20121213-02</a>	09:53	Pam	Re: Christmas Tree (reply to SandyI, FotM Newsletter #290)
<a href="#">20121213-05</a>	10:44	Art	Re: Christmas Tree (reply to Pam, above & SandyI, FotM Newsletter #290)
<a href="#">20121213-04</a>	10:35	Art	"In Rust Belt, a Teenager's Climb from Poverty"
<a href="#">20121213-06</a>	12:43	Pam	Re: "In Rust Belt, a Teenager's Climb from Poverty" (reply to Art, above)
<a href="#">20121213-07</a>	17:09	Ben	Photos: Today's Seafood Lunch at Apple
<a href="#">20121213-08</a>	19:03	MarthaH	Cartoon: Caught!
<a href="#">20121213-10</a>	19:55	SteveB	Re: Cartoon: Caught! (reply to MarthaH, above)
<a href="#">20121213-09</a>	19:33	Tom	Graphic: Bonus Appliance Bundle: ;-)
<a href="#">20121213-11</a>	23:57	Tom	Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #5
<a href="#">20121213-12</a>	23:58	SteveB	Photo: Cats Imitating Art #2 (Alfred Stevens, <i>The Bath</i> , 1867)
<a href="#">20121213-13</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Lake Chiarkota, Bolivia

<a href="#">20121213-01</a>	06:04	MarthaH	Weekly Contact
-----------------------------	-------	---------	----------------

It's that time again...Keeping the contact going to Boehner, McConnell, Lugar, our congressman, Coats...

Did you see what Murdock blamed for his defeat???? The Liberal media!

Dear Senator:

I once was a registered Republican and Richard Lugar was my college hero as a political science major. Along came Zippergate, and I saw hipocracy in Congress from those who cast stones--and then the party I had worked for as a YR and intern at the state party went BONKERS even further. I disavowed my allegiance and came to know that honesty, honor, and duty are by far more important than a label or party loyalty. Serving select wealthy supporters in the name of party loyalty by blocking things that will strengthen our country for our grandchildren's futures is dishonest, dishonorable, and lazy. Will you serve the future or serve the donors? Your caucus is out of touch with the voters and reality when they ignore the majority of We the People. Step up.

<a href="#">20121213-03</a>	09:54	Pam	Re: Weekly Contact (reply to MarthaH, above)
-----------------------------	-------	-----	--

Good for you, Martha!

20121213-02 09:53 Pam Re: Christmas Tree (reply to SandyI, FotM Newsletter #290)

This is why we don't have one. :-)



20121213-05 10:44 Art Re: Christmas Tree (reply to Pam, above & SandyI, FotM Newsletter #290)

Ditto.

20121213-04 10:35 Art "In Rust Belt, a Teenager's Climb from Poverty"

Well, the rich have been soaking the rest of us for a very long time.

Does all this not remind you of feudalism just a bit? The nobility arose in Europe primarily in the late Dark Ages in response to the Viking raids. Once they became entrenched they made sure it stayed that way. Better diets made them stronger and better able to handle weapons. Their money bought them armor and weapons training that assured they stayed on top. No central government meant that everything passed from father to son (interesting to read about primogeniture). Pretty soon it became a fixed class with no one else allowed in. For a lengthy period they actually largely controlled most kings (Warwick the King Maker etc) and it wasn't until late in the middle ages that they were finally overcome - stronger kings and especially gunpowder which took out castle walls.

The rich are sort of like that today. No inheritance taxes, daddy buys them the best schools, they start out with millions to begin with, and we are slowly grinding down the middle class.

And there are Republicans who say we need to kick these people in the ass to get jobs. From the below article this young lady has already been "kicked in the ass" more than a few times and maybe in the face too.

Good article if you have not read:

"In Rust Belt, a Teenager's Climb from Poverty" by Anne Hull, *The Washington Post*

Dec. 8, 2012, ([http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-12-08/national/35701739\\_1\\_anne-hathaway-art-club-bible-club](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-12-08/national/35701739_1_anne-hathaway-art-club-bible-club))

Week after week, the mailman climbed the steep hill of Shenango Street to the house with the busted porch steps. "Dear Miss Rouzzo," the letters began, or "Dear Tabitha Rouzzo." The college catalogues barely fit in the mailbox. They stuck out like gift-wrapped presents against white aluminum siding gone dingy from decades of wear. On the

porch were three new Linen Breeze decorative candles — a nice try, thought the actual Tabitha Rouzzo, who came walking up the hill every afternoon with her mind on the mailbox.

The 11th-grader seldom brought anyone home, and when she did she would sort of draw in a breath and say, “Well, here it is.”

Her Victoria’s Secret bag was crammed with track clothes and school papers. At 17, with dark hair and dark eyes, she was a version of the actress Anne Hathaway if Anne Hathaway had stars tattooed on her hip, chipped blue nail polish and lived two blocks from the projects.

Tabi shared the rental house with her mother and sometimes her mother’s boyfriend. Her four older siblings were grown. None of them had graduated from high school. They wore headsets and hairnets to jobs that were so futureless that getting pregnant at 20 seemed an enriching diversion. Born too late to witness the blue-collar stability that had once been possible, they occupied the bottom of the U.S. economy.

“I’m running from everything they are,” she said.

The question was whether Tabi could outrun the odds against her.

She knew that colleges sent out millions of letters to 11th-graders who took the Princeton Review prep course. The whole Dear Tabitha campaign was about as personal as fliers from Tire Express. But nearing the end of her junior year of high school, without a single item of value to secure her future — not even a \$50 U.S. savings bond from a departed relative — the mail was all she had.

So she sweated it out the old-fashioned way, joining Spanish Club, Chess Club, Bible Club, Art Club and the track team, where she may have been the worst pole-vaulter in the Pennsylvania-Ohio border region. On Wednesday nights, she was at church waving her praise hands in the air, and on Friday night, it was a school production of “No, No, Nanette.”

With no working vehicle at home, she had to walk most places. You could see her hoofing across the industrial landscape, her pink bag slung over her shoulder.

Tabi kept the college mail upstairs in her bedroom. She wrote back to 22 schools that offered biochemistry programs. Her goal was to be a forensic scientist in North Carolina. “It seems nice,” Tabi said, though she had never been. She had never flown on an airplane. Her laptop was a secondhand PC she bought from a guy for \$60. Her bedroom window overlooked a field strewn with Filet-O-Fish wrappers and Keystone Ice empties and, lower in the valley, the stacks at Ellwood Quality Steels chugging smoke.

Long before the recession, New Castle was a place of vanishing opportunity. It was 50 miles from Pittsburgh but felt farther, and while Steelers banners hung from awnings, the hard hat was a remnant of the past. Retail and food service jobs now outnumbered manufacturing jobs in the county. The top three employers were the hospital, state government and Liberty Mutual insurance company. Number seven was Wal-Mart, where Tabi’s older brother worked in dairy until he was fired for stealing an energy drink.

Tabi heard stories about the olden days. She came from welders and ceramic production workers. But, to Tabi, the sprawling Shenango China factory where her grandfather and great-grandfather worked was just a boarded-up place on the way to Wal-Mart.

Her New Castle was the one that existed now: white, working class, with poverty that had deepened into the second and third generations. Nearly three-fourths of the students in Tabi’s school qualified for free or reduced-price lunches, and one-third of New Castle families with children younger than 18 had incomes beneath the poverty level.

During the 2012 election, the campaigns of President Obama and Mitt Romney visited Pennsylvania a combined 38 times. With Ohio next door, the candidates and their wives barnstormed the region like few other places, focused

almost entirely on the economy and strengthening the middle class. After the election, New Castle was still a hard town to be young and poor in.

They had \$50 prepaid phones and \$5 Day-Glo earbuds with the Chinese innards spilling out. They went to Township Tan for the 15-minute prom special. But the backwash of America's affluence was a dim substitute for the promise of the middle class, which had moved farther from their reach. The decline in economic mobility has made the bottom more difficult to climb up from.

Unlike her counterparts in higher ranges, prepped for ascension, Tabi Rouzzo had only herself.

At 13, she started working in a deer slaughterhouse. Her friend Gloria told her about it, and Gloria's mom drove them out there. They were greeted by a cold room with kerosene heaters. For \$10 an hour, Tabi was to stand at a table cutting butterfly filets.

With a bloody knife in her hand and a circular saw whining behind her, labor laws being violated by the minute, Tabi decided on the spot that work offered freedom. She went back the next two winters, through 10th grade. Off-season, she cleaned rental properties, clerked in a mini-mart and baled hay at a farm.

In 11th grade, Tabi needed a job she could walk to and found Splitstone Entertainment, a storefront that sold used electronics, along with a selection of stun guns, nunchucks, ninja throwing stars and factory-boxed Star Wars collectibles. People brought in their Xboxes and PlayStations to unload, and Tabi cleaned them for resale.

"The controllers are real greasy," she said one Saturday afternoon, pulling back her hair for the task. She was not complaining. Even describing the slaughterhouse, she sounded like a butcher and not a squee girl. "I'm a grown man," she joked. It was somehow true. She had not a line on her porcelain face but a weariness was already in her.

After work that night, she met Gloria at Sheetz for dinner. Gloria was working midnights at the Subway inside the Pilot gas station for \$8.60 an hour and was no longer in school.

"This town is dragging everyone down," Tabi said a few days later.

The mailbox at home remained a repository of hope. Tabi's mother brought the mail in every day. "She's got colleges all the way from Texas wanting her," said Patricia Edmonds, bragging about her daughter.

Tabi didn't spend much energy correcting the record. School, and her future, had always been hers to figure out.

Her mother had five kids and no husband at age 23. Tabi, the last born, was a welfare and WIC baby who grew up with evictions and lights getting cut off. Her 39-year-old mother remembers it differently.

"I tried to give them everything," Patricia said. "You wouldn't find one of my kids without a matching bed set."

Monthly income for Tabi and her mother at the house on Shenango Street was an \$824 check from Social Security, food stamps and survivor's benefits for Tabi from the death of her father, a welder who died of an overdose. Patricia spent a lot of time on Facebook, posting shout-outs to her four grown children, "I'm cookin' sauce, you comin' home or what?" She listed herself as a "Stay at home mom" with a qualifier — "QueenBitch."

Tabi thought her mother should get a job. "I don't ever want to sit on my butt, waiting on hand and foot for someone to help me," Tabi said.

It was her greatest motivation. The college mail reminded her how badly she wanted to escape her mother's destiny. And yet the glossy pictures of emerald campuses revealed how far away that green world was.

Tabi's alarm for school went off at 5:45 a.m. It sounded like a firehouse bell, as if to stress the urgency of the moment. Tabi used to share the room with her older sister. One morning, Tabi's sister decided not to get up, and that was that for high school. Tabi pulled herself from bed.

The crowded halls of New Castle Junior/Senior High School enveloped her. "Yo, Tabs," a teammate from track called. Tabi wore khakis and ballet flats. The hard protective shell Tabi wore at home was gone.

Despite her aspirations, Tabi was not pushing herself at school. She rarely brought work home. Some of her teachers used class time to let students complete their assignments. If Tabi had extra homework, she blew through it at lunch. Even so, she maintained a 3.0 GPA while taking honors courses.

Four and five decades ago, when New Castle High was full of factory workers' kids, the school taught Chinese, Latin, German, Spanish, French and Italian. Now it was Spanish, French and Italian. As students became poorer, standards dropped lower. Tabi's junior year, the average SAT score was almost 200 points below the national average. To boost scores, the school has made the Princeton Review college prep course free for all sophomores during class hours. Private tutors are luxuries of a different solar system.

Tabi planned to take the SAT before the school year ended. She kept reminding herself to sign up.

She worked other angles. The annual science competition was coming up. In the ninth and 10th grade, Tabi made it to the final round, and she was hoping for a repeat performance and trip Penn State.

"The main campus," Tabi said, as if speaking confidentially. "Maybe someone will see my project and help me get a scholarship."

What would have been nice was to be her friend Matt. He had an iPhone and two parents. They recently took Matt to visit Robert Morris University, a small liberal arts school outside Pittsburgh, and invited Tabi to come along.

A week later, in her school cafeteria, she was still talking about the trip. The campus tour was beautiful, and afterward, they met with an admissions counselor who estimated the cost of one year was \$34,000. Tabi jumped in to warn Matt.

"I said, 'Matt, you're going to be paying off the loan for the rest of your life!'" she recounted at lunch. "His dad said, 'I think I got it covered.'"

There was more. On the way back to New Castle, they stopped for dinner at Olive Garden. Tabi couldn't help noticing the bill. "It was like \$70!" Tabi said. "And it was no sweat off their back."

In the cafeteria, she went back to her free lunch and packed up for pre-calculus.

She needed to stop by the guidance office. At New Castle High, the office was the make-or-break room. It's where college-bound seniors stopped for applications — for loans, waivers, scholarships and grants. Mrs. Gibson, the senior guidance counselor, helped them fill out the paperwork. She also arranged etiquette dinners that taught proper grooming, eating and the do's and don'ts of dressing professionally.

But decorating the ceiling of the guidance counseling office was her most inspired idea.

It was a patchwork of college T-shirts. They were stapled across the entire ceiling. Each was autographed by a New Castle High grad who had gone on to glory: Slippery Rock University, Youngstown State University, Robert Morris University, Butler Community College, St. Vincent's College, Clarion University, Penn State and Pitt. The parachute hovered like a subliminal cloud: You can do it.

The deadline to sign up for the SAT came and went. Distracted, Tabi forgot.

Every Wednesday night, Tabi got a break from the hand-over-hand climbing that consumed her life.

She usually sat in the same spot: the front row, closest to the preacher. When Pastor Shawn told Tabi she would look back in 20 years and be blown away by all the things God had done for her, she hoped he was right.

But on one night, the chairs were cleared out. An inspirational thrash metal band was performing live at First Assembly of God. Half the teenagers in New Castle seemed to be going, Jesus-loving or not.

For years, Tabi rode the church bus that swept through New Castle's threadbare neighborhoods picking up poor kids. On the night of the concert, Tabi got an upgrade. Her friend Miranda gave her a ride. Traveling by private coach was the way to go.

Not a single space was left in the parking lot as the arrivals poured in — Tabi by car and the poor kids by bus. They tumbled down the stairs in a cloud of Sexiest Fantasies Body Spray. One girl was holding her MP3 player in the air like a transistor, the tiny rattling of Mindless Behavior's "Valentine's Girl" piping out through the 1-by-1-inch speaker.

Inside the church, God's abundance overflowed. Pastor Shawn had ordered enough pizzas and nachos to feed the Rust Belt. Shawn Galla, the 26-year-old youth pastor, had convinced church elders that a night of metal music and free prizes was more likely to bring in New Castle's teenagers than praise music and juice boxes.

Having grown up in working-class Pittsburgh with a single mother, Pastor Shawn thought he knew his audience when he took the job in New Castle in 2008, until he launched a fundraising drive for his kids and found their parents selling the Auntie Anne's pretzels for cash for themselves.

Tabi had inched her way to the front of the crowd when the lights went down and the screaming started. Pastor Shawn was on stage ready to start flinging CDs and McDonald's gift cards into the crowd.

"We're giving away free stuff!" he yelled. "EVEN JESUS!"

The band Icon For Hire was pierced and mohawked. "WHAT'S UP, NEW CASTLE!" the lead singer shouted, and the head banging commenced. The evening's motivational speaker, Seth Franco, a former Harlem Globetrotter, told his story of injury and comeback and invited anyone to raise their hands and come forward if they wanted to accept Jesus Christ.

"There's more to life than nothing," Seth said, as the electric keyboard softly lulled and the lights dimmed. "There's more to life than this town."

Words to Tabi's ears. She was not exceptionally pious and she had made her share of transgressions, but she always felt better at this moment when she closed her eyes and let go. The kids from the bus had their heads bowed, too. Some were wiping away tears, a few were sobbing, their shoulders heaving in the darkness of the church.

Then the lights blasted back on and Pastor Shawn was onstage, holding something small in his hand.

"WHO WANTS AN IPOD?"

The silver sporty coupe arriving at Tabi's one Saturday night was so polished and punctual that it made the sagging house sag a little more. The Dodge Stratus idled at the curb. Tabi came down the busted porch steps in a skirt.

In Deric Lewis she had a boyfriend with the right mix of qualities. "He has goals," Tabi said. "He's kinda smart. He works. He's always there five minutes early."

But he was also a source of tension in the house and had stopped going inside. Tabi's mother said Deric was a snob and was turning Tabi against her family. Tabi said that Deric was the best thing that ever happened to her. Opening the car door, she left her mother and "Storage Wars" behind.

Deric was 19 and smelled of soap. He worked full time at Castle Cheese, where he wore a hairnet in 100-degree heat reaching into milky buckets of mozzarella for \$9.65 an hour. His dad was a scrap-metal worker. Determined to have an office job someday, Deric was a full-time student at the community college.

He and Tabi were headed for the outlet mall in Grove City, 30 miles away, to see if Deric could use a \$20-off coupon he had at Aeropostale. Tabi leaned in close as he drove, until he yawned, and she punched him in the arm.

"Hey!" he said, laughing. He reminded her of his 6 a.m. shift that day. Tabi pointed out that she had also worked eight hours that day.

They were the oldest teenagers in America.

All around them in the rural dark, energy companies were buying up land for natural gas exploration. Deric heard in class that Shell Oil was building a \$3 billion refinery site in Beaver County. There were millwright jobs across the border in Youngstown. Deric wondered if he was doing the right thing pursuing a business degree, which would take three more years of killing himself at the cheese plant.

Tabi thought school was the answer, and they should stick to the plan.

"We're lucky; we both work," she said, as they arrived at the outlet mall. "We have the advantage that others don't."

They held hands as they walked to Aeropostale. Deric didn't find anything. He folded the coupon and put it back in his wallet. Tabi took an armful of clothes into a dressing room. It was nice to try on new things.

"How'd those work out for you?" a saleswoman asked. Aeropostale would not be getting a dime of Tabi's money. The \$124 in her purse — she was a fanatic about counting her cash — was going toward a trip to Chicago with the Spanish Club. She returned every item.

Back in New Castle, they drove around, killing time. High on a hill, the lights of the city blinked below, and in the pockets of darkness were the abandoned mausoleums of industry.

"They say money doesn't buy happiness, but I would love to be crying in my Porsche," Deric said.

Tabi's phone flashed with a text. Keys in the mailbox.

"Well, mom's going out," Tabi said, sounding both annoyed and apprehensive.

Later that night, Deric brought Tabi home to her dark patch of Shenango Street. She was almost to her front door when she heard her name being called. The woman was vaguely familiar, a neighbor, someone her mother maybe knew. She asked to borrow Tabi's phone. Then the woman asked for a glass of water. Tabi put her stuff down and went to the kitchen.

When she came back with the water, the woman was gone and so was Tabi's purse.

With crystal force, the stolen purse exposed the tension between Tabi and her mother, proven out in the weeks that followed.

Tabi partly blamed herself for responding to someone on the street at 1 in the morning. But she also blamed her mother for living in a neighborhood where people needed money at 1 in the morning.

For years, Tabi hid her cash in small stacks around her bedroom. Tabi was more flush than her mother. If her mom asked for a loan, Tabi charged 20 percent interest. Once, when her mom ran out of food stamps, Tabi, as if to impart a lesson, went out to eat.

Patricia Edmonds felt her daughter's judgment. Tabi was different from her other four. Patricia marveled at her as a spectator would, watching something rare and unexpected.

"She wants so much for herself," Patricia said.

Patricia hung Tabi's awards on the living room wall. The sprawling constellation gave Patricia a tangible sense of accomplishment.

In her face and spirit were traces of the cheerleader who got pregnant in the eighth grade. Patricia's father was a welder and her mother a nurse's aide. The love of her life was a dark-haired welder named Frankie Rouzzo, Tabi's father. They had two daughters and Tabi on the way when they split. He died when Tabi was 10, and since then Patricia had maintained a fragile livelihood on the survivor's benefits for her three daughters.

She tried pleasing her vegetarian daughter, buying Tabi her favorite chocolate soy milk and making special trips to Wal-Mart for the bags of lettuce Tabi liked. "I made her Taco Bell Grande with tofu meat," Patricia said.

But Tabi had withdrawn. She came home from track practice, poured some lettuce on a plate, doused it in ranch and took her dinner upstairs.

The explosion happened on a Saturday night. Patricia was bigger, badder and louder than Tabi. But Tabi had resentment that went back years.

She said Deric hadn't brainwashed her against her family; the feelings were entirely her own. There was a difference between bad luck and bad choices, Tabi said, and she had grown up captive of her mother's choices.

"You think you're better than me, don't you?" Patricia yelled. "I had five kids!"

"Mom," Tabi yelled back, "you quit school. Does it dawn on you after your first [child] not to have a second one?"

It was a lethal blow, as only a teenage girl could deliver. Patricia got pregnant in the eighth grade, the same age Tabi was when she started at the slaughterhouse.

Patricia grounded Tabi for a month. She confiscated her phone — which Deric had paid for — and banned all activities except school and work.

One day after school, Tabi went to see her Uncle Bill about moving in with him. He worked at the jail and was a steady presence. When Tabi was 10, she went to stay with him when her mom was in a period of chaos. He took her to violin lessons.

Standing on the sidewalk at Uncle Bill's, the sun beat down. Tabi and her uncle and his wife were quiet.

"What are you gonna do?" Bill said, still in his jail uniform.

"It's up to you, Tab," Sybil said.

Tabi left their house on foot. She took the broken sidewalk that led her downtown. The beige mannequins and the Coney Island, the old motor lodge and legal disability clinic, Tabi hardly looked up.

"If I move out, my mom would lose the check, lose everything," Tabi said, weighed down by the decision.

When she reached home, it was different. Pine scent wafted. Folded stacks of laundry sat on the couch. The cleaning spree went on all week. Patricia went room to room, carrying out bags to the curb and posting her progress on Facebook. She was serious about taking a course in emergency medical technician training.

Patricia declared she was turning it around. Tabi had heard it before. But this time, her mother made a promise and extracted one from Tabi — she had to break up with Deric.

Wanting to believe, Tabi agreed.

On a Saturday morning in June, Tabi walked to school to take the SAT. She had remembered to sign up for this one. Five interminable hours later, it was over, and Tabi went to work.

Summer without Deric was empty. There were grimy Xboxes to clean at Splitstone and swimming at the rock quarry. On Friday nights, Tabi and a friend hung out at a convenience store where a handwritten sign on the beverage station said, in friendly curlicue, "Smoothies, Slushies and Fountain pops cannot be bought with food stamps!"

Tabi got her first plane ride — a church mission to Guatemala.

When school started in the fall, senior year felt different. An hourglass had been turned and the sand was falling. The college buzz greeted Tabi in the hallways, and it gave her the feeling that she was somehow already behind.

"Everybody's asking, 'Where are you going?'" Tabi said. "That worries me I don't have it figured out."

Applications to fill out, deadlines to meet — it all hovered. Her SAT results were not what she hoped. They were above the average score at New Castle but well shy of the national median.

But Tabi, a master of contingency, already had a Plan B. On top of school, she started night classes to get certified as an EMT. True to her promise, her mother enrolled, too, and they sat side by side, sharing Tabi's textbook.

Patricia, who had not been in a classroom since eighth grade, spent afternoons at the public library. She and Tabi left Shenango Street for a new rental house, funded with help from Patricia's boyfriend.

Buried in school, work and EMT training, Tabi began to recalibrate.

The Navy recruiter was in the cafeteria at school when a 17-year-old girl approached. She was ready to sign her name — Tabitha Rouzzo. She didn't want to hear a pitch. Tabi had learned enough online about a reservist's pay and travel. College could wait. When it did start, tuition would be on the Navy and Tabi would be gone from New Castle.

[20121213-06](#) 12:43 Pam Re: "In Rust Belt, a Teenager's Climb from Poverty" (reply to Art, above)

This is the 47% Mr. Romney and the tea baggers want to push off the cliff. You're right, Art, it is exactly like feudalism. Not much has changed but the technology.

[20121213-07](#) 17:09 Ben Photos: Today's Seafood Lunch at Apple

I love meals like this: one of an infinity of variations of fish and vegetables.

Chef Patricia presented a plate as beautiful as it was tasty: a perfect moist trout filet with not even a hint of desiccation in the thin areas; creamy faintly but richly cheesed polenta, crisp roasted cauliflower and succulent bits of roasted sweet potato, garnished with fresh arugula and a light, lovely lemony garlic cream sauce. *Marvelous!*

(I added a Good Faith Ginger Snap on the way out the door. Not pictured here, but quite perfect, reminiscent of subscriber Larry N's perfect cookies)

Here's lunch:



Seared Trout over Mascarpone Polenta



Someone else had the catfish (crop).

20121213-08 19:03 MarthaH Cartoon: Caught!



20121213-10 19:55 SteveB Re: Cartoon: Caught! (reply to MarthaH, above)

Now, that's really, really bad. Just a reality check... :-)

Bonus that comes w/ our new Appliance!



[And I was thinking it came with free sex... Oh, well. At least she seems like a nice, clean girl. -SteveB]



<http://jennybennett.net/category/travel/>



—Friends of the Middle,  
Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

You can subscribe to this free, no-obligation, daily Newsletter filled with lively, intelligent discussion centered on politics and government, but ranging to anything members feel is important, interesting, or entertaining. To subscribe, use the form on our website or blog, or simply reply to this email with "Yes" or "Start" in the Subject line, then add our email address (below) to your Contacts or Safe list. To opt-out, reply with "No" or "Stop" in the subject line.

Welcome to all our new members who may be here for the first time. We want to hear from YOU! To submit your comment, you can use the form on our website or blog, or reply to this email with your two cents worth. Be sure to sign with your desired user name.

Your email address will always be kept strictly confidential.

Feel free to forward this Newsletter to anyone you know on the Right or the Left, though your motives might be different in each case. Regardless, PASS IT ON! Help keep your friends and acquaintances informed and thinking.

<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org>  
[FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com](mailto:FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com)

original material ©2012 Steven W. Baker, all rights reserved