



# AMERICAN PATRIOT



---

*A collaboration:*  
Jim Daniels & Charlee Brodsky



## On a Personal Level

I have tossed massive truck axles onto pallets  
at the end of the assembly line, Ford Sterling  
Axle, down Mound Road seven miles  
from the Motor City. Huh (lift)/ Ugh (toss)  
alternating with another guy to allow  
a few seconds of human recovery time,  
though at the end of my early shifts  
my arms tingled and ached with numb  
strings of sweat as I wobbled toward  
the time clock. What I want to say  
is I lived in a little house like this  
at the time: grungy pale green siding  
with aluminum awnings that would never  
be white again due to the nature  
of the air from factories like mine.  
Why bother scrubbing?

On a universal level, how about  
that flag? Nobody laying on that  
pallet. You could be crucified on it,  
and I believe a few people have,  
while the rest of us were busy  
carving tree stumps into cute  
little bears. How much power  
does it take to keep it upright  
and useless, some odd compromise  
with sacrilege not to toss axles  
or bags of fertilizer or mysterious boxes  
on it when tossing things on the damn  
pallet is supposed to be All-American  
in the first place. Why bother

scrubbing, I guess I am asking.  
The bear looks lonely  
or constipated from this distance,  
the *real* flag to the right, a little  
ragtag, ridden hard, out  
of breath against the perfect  
fake shutters next door.

Is it just me, people,  
or is that flag pulling  
the whole house crooked,  
tilted to the right? I try  
not to read too much into  
things. Er—I mean, that's all  
I do is read into *things*. So,  
when your gutters don't connect—

which came first, the pallet  
or the flag? I lived in a house  
like this. The guy I alternated with  
took extra axles when I first started  
to give me more of a breather.  
We didn't talk about it  
and he didn't expect any favors  
back. I don't think anyone  
ever noticed. The steel pallet  
grease-infused, though  
looking back on a personal level,  
somewhere beneath the grease,  
that pallet was red, white, and blue.  
Huh (lift)/ Ugh (toss).

Feel free to make fun of the bear.  
Why bother scrubbing?







## Yes, Trespassing

I've been thinking a lot about trespassing  
lately. When does wandering turn bad?  
I have never gotten a citation for wandering.

Wander a mile in my shoe. The other shoe  
dropped. I'm wandering into that flower box  
and remembering the bright scent—

of betrayal? A turn  
for the worst. Who knew turning up  
the volume would crack the cement?

Bad flowers! Painting the steps  
always a bad idea. Never paint  
your steps.

If the flag is the brightest thing  
in your window box, you're screwed.

•

Oh, I'm full of the wisdom  
of the I told you so's  
and the already damned.

This too is America, I know,  
414, and your neighbor 416  
who's sick of living next door

to your heap of—hey, can you  
at least pull the weeds? Is it  
trespassing or wandering

or stupidity that makes me want  
to walk through the open gate  
and into the darkness

that sure as hell ain't no Eden?  
America's got a cellar, sure,  
well-vented for the stench.

What's that saying about not  
wanting to see what goes on  
in the sausage factory?

It's cleverer than that.  
Cleverness has no business  
being in the basement of 414.

•

I've been wandering a lot  
about thinking, lately. Like,  
it is okay to kneel for the anthem

if Aretha is singing it?  
Must be the fumes getting to me  
out those vents. I've got a weakness

for reggae and redemption.  
God must get pretty tired  
of blessing us. Or dealing

with the clowns who imagine  
they have the authority  
to speak in his name.

I've spent my life trespassing.  
I've carried the cross  
and I've carried the flag

and I've carried the fire  
and I've carried the water

and I just want to rest my weary soul  
on the steps of 414. Yeah, I see the tools  
on the porch, and I know there's work

to be done. It don't much matter  
if those are scrapers or weeders  
or paint brushes up there

with that 5-gallon bucket of primer.  
414, that's a start. I understand,  
Americans being big on numbers.

That shoe,  
it looks just my size.



## Don't Stop Me If You've Heard This One

The brick garden was doing just fine  
until X moved into the neighborhood.

Yeah, we're moving out. Not  
surrendering, we're just giving up

in the great American tradition.

•

If you love your country  
you'll buy my house.

Flag included.  
Wave proudly.

A rare Siamese Twin flag.  
For luck.

Don't worry about the X's.  
Oh, you're X too?

I just thought. Nevermind.  
You'll need it, the luck.

•

Shoulda known  
bricks don't grow  
in this kind of weather.

That's why the sign's up high.  
Keep from catching  
what the bricks caught.

That's why the flag's higher.  
An arm's length can kill you.

•

We're going some place  
where no X's live.

They stole our flag's shadow.  
Said it was a misunderstanding

•

We're taking  
every one of them bricks  
to our new glass house.

The boy's out back  
loosening up his arm.





## Behind the Scenes

*No protection is needed for a television antenna or flagpole whose mast enters the earth. Both are automatically grounded, and lightning will simply travel down their length into the soil. But an antenna or other pole that does not contact the earth has to be linked to it by means of grounding equipment. —NYTimes*

The colors of mud and industry  
fail to register on the spectrum of flags

yet they are everywhere we bend down  
to make or build a miracle.

•

In the sag of wired stillness above,  
don't you long to be electrocuted/

I mean electrified/I mean connected  
to the larger human grid of cut wires

and mad dancing?

•

Poles for light and telephones for electricity and flags.

What else must be raised above us  
and who decides, and when?

•

The detritus lies out back next to the rusty skid.  
Our tour guide might be napping inside.

Let them sleep in the holy womb  
of the discarded.

We know lightning strikes highest objects first  
and water is the magic ingredient

for life. What we do with that information  
in the tilted face of blue sky?

•

How many of us have stood on a loading dock  
and directed a truck backing in to load

or unload? Held up our hand and nodded  
and said, that's good?

Raise your dirty hands  
but do not smudge the flag.

•

I'm seeing a tank and thinking battle  
I'm seeing a flag and thinking grief.

In the stillness, in the wreckage.







## Superstition

or, what keeps us safe.  
13 stripes at 113 Superstition  
and on every single flag.

Fifty stars, now, and  
I'm guessing forever,  
but you won't find them

ordered like this in the sky.

•

If you ring the bell, a family  
of tiny flags will emerge.

I can't predict what they will  
have to say, but I think God

will come up rather quickly.  
I can't predict whether

they'll let you in and offer  
you a Virgin Bloody Mary

and a bowl of Better Maid chips.  
They might have better

snacks next door,  
or a loaded gun.

I think American flags  
should be made with colored

duct tape. But that's just me  
wandering the neighborhood

looking for my country.