

12-1-1990

McDonaldLand

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Recommended Citation

Biggs, Theresa (1990) "McDonaldLand," *Forces*: Vol. 1990 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.collin.edu/forces/vol1990/iss1/12>

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McDonaldland

Alone I walk into the lobby of "The Clinic." Pale blue walls seep through my numbness. Mechanically my feet carry me to a window where a smiling young nurse awaits me. I am tempted to put in an order for a Big Mac and fries.

"Please have a seat and fill out these forms."

I confront dozens of stiff, unyielding chairs, allowing the one hiding in the farthest corner to support me. Mindlessly I fill in my name, date, age, week of pregnancy, etc. Pinch me. . . I'm dreaming. I return the forms to the girl with the McDonaldland smile and follow her into the "Group Room."

In an antiseptic, white atmosphere I meet the "Morning Girls." I, too, belong to this dubious club. We are taken care of in the morning as opposed to the "Afternoon Girls" who are taken care of in the afternoon — logical. Ten small chairs are grouped around a larger one. I find incredible irony in the fact that ten adult women are sitting in chairs designed to seat a group of five year olds. I wonder if we're supposed to be cute.

I allow my eyes to wander from one woman to another. We appear to be a small cross section of the country. Various races, sizes, ages, and classes are represented. In amazement I hear one very tired looking woman confess that this was her third time. She has five at home.

I remain mute. This isn't happening. Another smiling nurse from McDonaldland enters and sits at the only adult chair in the room. I am vaguely aware of her words, charts, smiles, laughter, more words, smiles . . . and she's gone.

We are all herded into another room and handed paper robes and slippers. I never did find where the Golden Arches were monogrammed, and the slippers never lasted through one night of dancing.

A nurse strolls in carrying a tray of nine small paper cups, each containing one pill. A pill that will obliterate the pain, stop us from caring, surrendering us both physically and emotionally. Anxiously I wait for mine. She approaches me last, with nine empty cups.

"I'm sorry dear, as you know you're allergic to most drugs, and its been impossible to find a substitute you will tolerate. You may back out or go ahead with the operation. You are eleven weeks along though, and after twelve it gets complicated. So if you'll . . ."

I feel myself detach from this body that's causing me so much trouble. I am watching myself from above, observing this soap opera; we are separate.

How sad and scared I look. The "Morning Girls" are quiet now and have begun to leave the room one at a time on a gurney. I see them help me onto the bed on wheels. I follow, curiously. Another room, very dim, very quiet, empty and cold envelops me. The only furnishing is a table with stirrups upon which they lay me, and a smaller table filled with various tools and varying widths of metal tubes.

A nurse enters and I see her speak to me, but I can't hear what is being said. She spreads a sheet over my lap, places my feet in the stirrups and helps me shift into the most vulnerable position ever conceived. Nauseated, I wait for the next visitor knowing it won't be Ronald McDonald yet praying it will be.

The doctor finally marches into the room, nodding to the nurse; he barely acknowledges my spread legs. I hear him inform me that due to circumstances this will be an un-

comfortable experience and if I should move or utter a sound he will stop the procedure and leave the “little problem” to me

McDonaldland vanishes; my mind and body slam together. The first metal tube, as thin as pencil lead, is inserted into my cervix. The pain is sudden, shocking. This is replaced by a second, a third, then a fourth, each tube larger than the last, forcing me open, violating me. The pain increases with white hot intensity.

The nurse takes my hand and tells me to push, to squeeze. I share my pain with her, allow her to carry some of my burden. She winces under the pressure from my grip. The blood rushes through my body; I cannot hear anymore. The loudness of my heart beating, the sound of blood coursing through my veins hurts my ears.

Gentleness has become a word with no meaning. Another object enters me. I watch the nurse’s mouth vacuum . . . I read her lips. This metal snake tears into me, twisting and turning, sucking away the child, this child of violence.

My organs scream out in rebellion, “Stop! Stop!” I remain silent, cold sweat pouring off my body. I don’t think I can stand it any longer. I’m losing my sight, consciousness is slipping from me.

Abruptly my body is left alone. The doctor is gone. The nurse is trying to help me to my feet. My muscles have rebelled against this act I perpetrated on my body and they refuse to carry me. I am lifted onto the gurney like a child.

The recuperating room is sunny and bright. Most of the “Morning Girls” are smiling, getting dressed and gossiping around a table heavy with milk and cookies. I lay on one of the beds, curled in the fetal position, trying to ignore the pain. I envy their drug induced state and am angered at the injustice of mine.

“Help me! I need something for the pain! Please help me!”

Someone’s screaming; I realize it’s me. A nurse bustles over, then two. They whisper, “What can we do?” There is nothing they can do. I fall into a troubled sleep, dancing in and out of consciousness.

It’s time to leave, my ride is here. I am helped into a bathroom and left with a pile of my clothes, a sanitary napkin, and shaking knees. I jump, startled by my own reflection in the mirror. I am reminded of the photos of the Appalachian coal miners’ wives. The same blank stare, ashen white skin, desperate and numb; I barely recognize this face. I dress. My hands caress my belly as if to comfort.

I am ushered through McDonaldland one last time. I pass the “Group Room” now filled with the “Afternoon Girls” and my heart feels as if it might burst in sympathy. One of the girls is no older than thirteen.

The lobby is now filled, filled with men. These men were so much a part of today’s events, yet will never know, never feel their loss in this particular way. Our loss was not only emotional but physical as well. All eyes turn to me as I enter the room. I lower my eyes. I want to hide. I feel these men searching my face, trying to find some clue as to the mystery their women were experiencing. I refuse to give away the secret.

I leave McDonaldland letting the door close heavily behind me. The sun is shining. There is a playground across the street that I never noticed. It is filled with children. . . I never noticed before how many children! They play, swing from monkey bars, throw balls to one another. The children are laughing, high musical giggles, unrestrained, their whole bodies joining in their merriment.

I take a deep breath, tilt my head back so the tears pool up in my eyes. I can’t allow them to fall. No one cries in McDonaldland.