

# The Fatal Figures



# The Fatal Figures

*(or How I Got In Trouble With  
The Law While In Art School)*



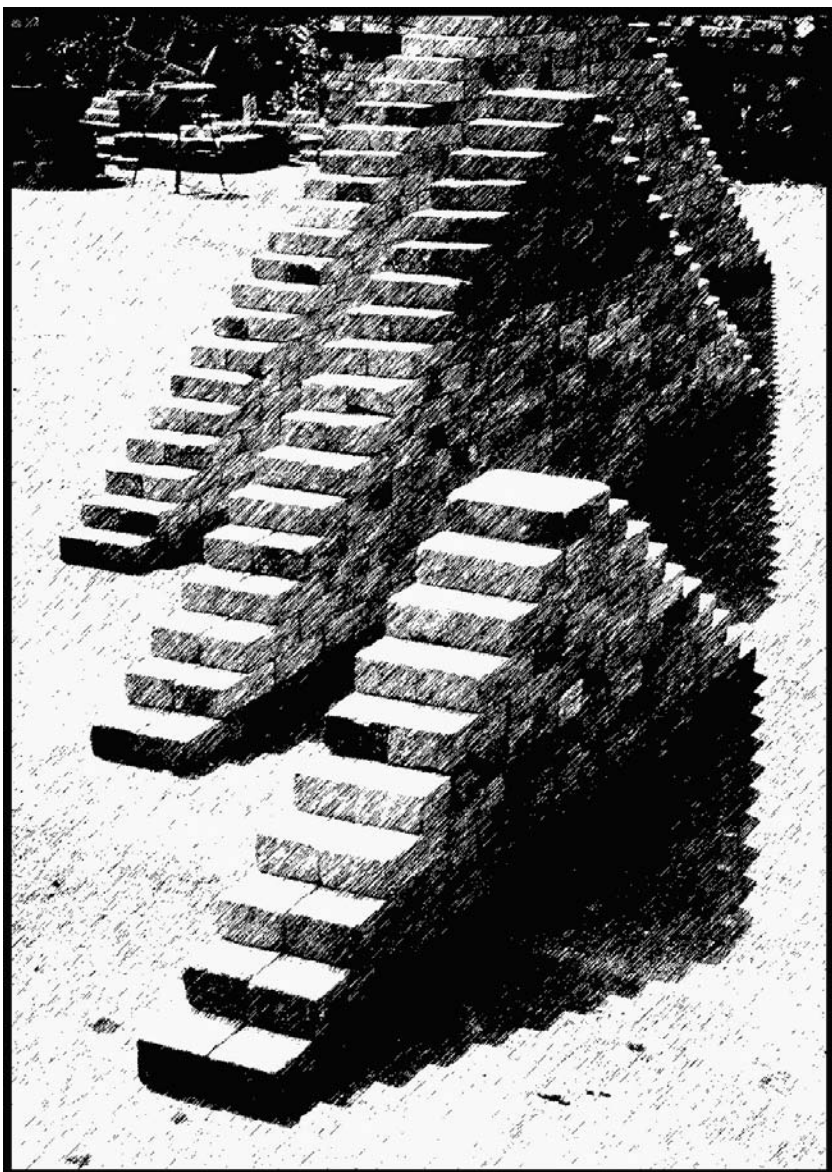
By Stu Jenks with Bo Petersen

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Dedicated to the twelve who died.



**In the Fall of 1978,** I was studying Studio Art at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

My college career was anything but exemplary. I started out in the Drama Department, but it became a little difficult to memorize lines since I was smoking dope all the time. I moved to the Scenery Department and eventually flunked out of college all together. (Not hard to do. Just don't go to class and don't drop the classes you don't go to. They become Fs after a year.) After I brought my grades back up in Summer School, I returned as a Sculpture Major in the Art Department. There, I was sort of an oddball, and that's saying something in the Art Department. I got the nickname of 'Brick' for making brick sculptures in the Summer of 1978. A single sculpture every day—1,196 bricks each time, each sculpture, for a month. I did some other odd stuff, some ceramic pig noses, this and that. I was unfocused and I was mostly ignored by everyone. I smoked a boat load of pot, and took acid as often I could stand.

I lived in this beat-up old farm house at 608 Airport Road just north of campus, an old hippie house. There were six of us living there, artists, construction workers, students, mostly guys but a few girls too. I lived in the garret. The parties were so large at 608 that one of my roommates would guard the banister going upstairs, because if too many people leaned against it, it would topple over. The punk rock dancing upstairs would get the downstairs ceiling to sagging. One art project I did there at 608 was to leash myself to our front porch with a huge rope tied around my waist. Called it "Leased." I didn't talk for twenty-four hours. Then

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I went out and ordered ice cream with my girlfriend Annie. One of my painter roommates (painter as in canvas, not as in wall, but we had some of those painters too) had a TV destruction party with a wall of television sets in the backyard, a pendulum, a rope and a smaller TV as a swinging projectile. I left that party when it became violent. The crowd started smashing televisions with rocks and their hands. I guess they didn't like TV. Probably just a blend of booze, dope, coke, acid and a vision of the coming apocalypse. That night, I wasn't tripping so I left.



I don't know where The Big Idea came from. I hadn't seen any Perry Mason shows lately. But 608 Airport Road was a house that sat right on Airport Road. The sound of the traffic, especially when it rained, came through my window. I remember I liked that sound. It was like a river outside, rain or shine, flowing smooth and constant. It might have been raining the night I had The Big Idea.

I was sitting at my desk smoking a bowl of Marijuana. It was about two o'clock in the morning or thereabouts, when The Big Idea hit me. I knocked it around in my head for a while. It was big. I would get in trouble. I didn't care. OK, I cared a little but not enough.

The next morning I walked uptown to the Chapel Hill police station. It was October, 1978. When I walked under the pines, I felt fresh and more than a little arrogant. Striding through the door to the police station felt more like stepping into a cage, but I didn't let my fear show. So I walked right on in and asked for the information I wanted. I didn't give them my name. They didn't ask for my name. I guess I looked like any college student in Chapel



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Hill in the 1970's. Full beard, John Lennon glasses. I didn't stick out. The policed were happy to give me the information I wanted. (I later found out they just assumed I was a journalism major. Who else would ask for information like this?)

I found out from the police that twelve fatal traffic accidents had happened in Chapel Hill from 1970 to 1978. I found out where each fatality had occurred. And I walked out. Easy.

I went to the Art Lab Building, where studio sculpture students worked, on the outskirts of town. I made some very large pieces of chalk out of plaster. I went out to the parking lot and began to trace my body as if I were tracing a dead man. I filled up many parking spaces with these interesting little dusty images. But the chalk blew away. I would need to make a more lasting image. So, I went out and bought some white spray paint. And I did one on the wall too, the outline of a Fatal Figure. A ghostly outline on a wall. That may have been a mistake, for it became a clue to the Police later on.





I called them Fatal Figures. I've always liked alliteration.

I remember the first one I did. It was on Highway 54 east of town. It was three o'clock in the morning. I parked my car in a church parking lot, my old Karmann-Ghia with the funky bumper stickers and the makeshift silver paint job. There was very little traffic on the road that night. You could hear for miles. I wore a sweat-shirt as it was cold. I had the chalk and the paint in a backpack. I outlined my own body in chalk in the middle of the street, this one in a spread-eagled position. I got out my spray paint can and sprayed over the chalk. I was exhilarated that I was doing something dangerous, something forbidden, something big. It might even be against the law. Probably was. But I was tired of almost getting run over by cars in pedestrian crosswalks and I wanted to raise the consciousness of people. Shake them up. People die on the streets, so would you slow the fuck down? And it was a very powerful drug, painting these Fatal Figures. Pure uncut adrenaline. I've been a good boy most of my life, or at least pretended to be. Not anymore.

When I returned to my Karmann-Ghia, I decided to drive over the Figure to see what it looked like. I didn't see it right away, then



suddenly, within ten feet of it, the white paint flashed into my eyes. It was a brilliant image, frightening in and of itself, and before I knew it, I was over it and gone. I remember saying to myself, ‘I’ve created a monster.’ But I said with a wry grin on my face.

I did one more that night, a figure a little more dangerous, right out front of the University of North Carolina Administration Building, and then I went home.

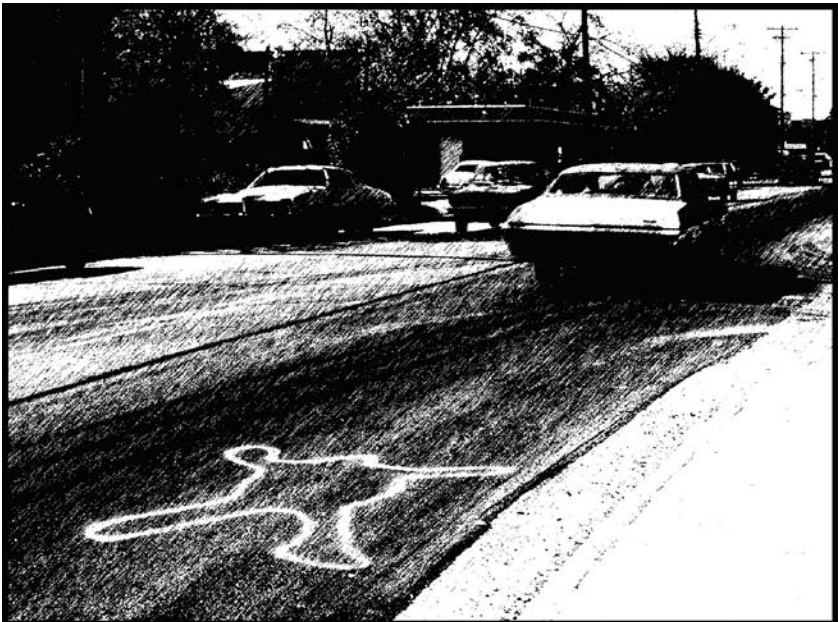
Then I started fucking up. Making mistakes. Stupid mistakes.

It wasn’t going back to the sites to photograph them. That wasn’t a mistake. No one saw me and I was cool. No, how I screwed up was I began to talk about what I was doing, bragging about it to my fellow art students. Look at me, damn it! Looking back, if there was one thing I would have changed, I would have kept my mouth shut. If I hadn’t said a word, no one would have known it was me. But come on. Who am I kidding? Contemporary Art, back then, was mostly about Hey-Look-At-Me-Doesn’t-This-Mess-With-Your-Head. Still is. Most of it, I think. Not a whole lot of universal appeal in Late Twentieth Century Contemporary Art, post-1975, if you ask me. There are exceptions, but I digress.

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Then again, who knows if it was wrong to talk to people or not. Some of the worst things that have happened in my life have turned out to be some of the best. Some of the best have become the worst. In other words, if I had kept my mouth shut, the long weird chain of events would have never unfolded. I would have just been another stoner art student who thought he was a big deal, when in actuality, I was just a stoner with ideas and no work ethic, no long term vision, no plan, and no really good work. Just talk. But with *The Fatal Figures*, I had a series of work, an interesting idea, some vision and a little work ethic.

I'd only done two of the twelve *Fatal Figures*. It was important to me to complete all twelve, to complete the series. Put them down on the asphalt, leave without being seen and get home safe and sound. This was dangerous work in a number of ways. Painting the streets was easy, the other stuff screwed me up.



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A few days later I did two more. A couple days after that, I painted another two. Half way through the project. Six down, six more to go.

That's when the newspapers picked up on it.

I remember seeing my first newspaper article at The Art Lab Building, and my heart just about exploded out of my chest. It was *The Chapel Hill Newspaper*, an article talking about ghastly images, a Halloween joke two weeks early. Was it a bunch of kids doing this, roving the streets?, the paper asked. The Chapel Hill Police were interviewed, talking about a young man who asked where fatal traffic accidents had happened. That would be me. The cop said I stated I was a journalism student. (For the record, I never said I was a journalism student. They just assumed. I said I was doing a project. Didn't tell them what kind of project.)

I was thrilled. Here I was, somebody who had felt like he like a nobody, for so many years, now doing something big. I'm in the press. I felt like somebody. But I must have looked like a scared rabbit to others. Thank God for the few friends I had, that I could talk to. I don't know if they actually believed it was me doing The Fatal Figures or not, but I think they realized I wasn't bullshitting them for I was scared to death. I'm not a big fan of jail.

The night of the first newspaper article, I painted three more Fatal Figures. Three more glowing images of death on the highway. Nine down, three more to go.

The shit really hit the fan after that. This was beginning to infuriate the police. You have to understand it from their perspective: You're just driving along in your car, minding your own business, and suddenly you run over the outline of a dead body. It scared the hell out of me and I made these damn things. Imagine what it was like for every one else. For all I know, motorists drove more recklessly after driving over The Figures, swerving this way and that. Hard to say. But it is a thought.

At The Art Lab Building, there was lots of talk about me, or so I heard from others. Conversations would sometimes stop when

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I walked up on other art students. The campus cops were questioning people and knew that a guy named Stu, who was an art student, was painting *The Figures*. But I felt compelled to go on, to finish the project. Only three more to go. Art teachers and others started telling me I had to turn myself in. I was creating a bad name for the Art Department. It was intolerable what I was doing. Blah, blah, blah. I disagreed with them. This is the biggest thing to happen in the Art Department at Carolina in years. This is not bad press. This is good attention. Most in The Art Department didn't see it that way.

I did the last three a couple of nights later. The last in particular I remember quite well. The last one was literally 100 feet up Airport Road from my house. I walked out my front door at two in the morning, walked up Airport Road with spray paint and chalk in hand, laid down, whipped out a *Fatal Figure* (I could paint them pretty quick by now), walked back down the street and stepped inside my house. It took all of three minutes, if that. I found out later a police officer in a cruiser drove over the spot

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before I painted The Figure, and went to the bottom of the hill which took him all of three minutes. He had driven into the A&P Supermarket parking lot when it was radioed to him that another one had appeared on Airport Road, just where he had driven, minutes before.

This was shaking up City Hall. Or rather, it was really pissing off the cops.

I knew I had to go on the lam at this point. And my best art teacher, Mike Cindric, told me to stop talking to anybody about anything.

“Keep your mouth shut!” he said one afternoon.

“OK,” I said.

Heat was coming down on Mike too from the Art Department administration. I was one of his students, don't you know. One of his best students. Cindric was tall, bald on top, long hair. He looked like Bozo the Clown with this really great bushy mustache. He wore cut-off Army fatigues. He had this look in his blue eyes where tempered rage and deep compassion lived. He was a very good man. He helped a lot.

I had a meeting with the people I lived with at 608 Airport Road. I said I would go live with an old girlfriend, but I would recommend we, they, get all the drugs out of the house. They were not pleased. There were probably enough seeds in the couch to grow a good field of marijuana, much less the miscellaneous acid and cocaine dispersed throughout the house. They did their best, got rid of the bongs, cleaned up and vacuumed.

That night, I went to my ex-girlfriend Annie's house, a woman I had been in love with, but we had broken it off, or rather she had broken up with me. I scratched on her door and begged to sleep on her sofa. Round face, curly hair. She was a Christian Scientist. I was a drug addict. It was a match made in hell. Once, I quit smoking tobacco for her and ended up smoking marijuana by the carton. I remember when she broke up with me, she said she couldn't support me in my art. And she wasn't talking just

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financially. She thought I was nuts. I was nuts but in a nice way, if you ask me. She didn't want to see me that night. I was still in love with her. I wanted to make love to her again. I told her I was on the lam. She let me in and let me sleep on the couch. That night at three in the morning, the time I would have been out painting the Figures on the street, she came in the living room and said for me to come to bed. I left the next day. I didn't spend another night there. Just a one-shot deal. Again, she was done, done, done with me.

The Chapel Hill police contacted Cindric. Mike told me they had made arrangements for us to come down to see them the next morning.

"Don't talk to anybody about this, OK?" he said. He looked at me hard.

"I won't," I said.

I was terrified. I didn't know what they were going to do.

The detective was a crusty old guy with steel eyes and a large marijuana leaf pressed between glass on his office wall. We shook hands. I told him the details of my artwork and that my intent was not to hurt people.

"How many have you done in the county?" he asked. I looked at him.

"I haven't done any in the county," I said.

"Well, they're starting to turn up in the county now," he said.

I was honored yet troubled by this news. My original intention had not been to randomly throw down outlined bodies. My Figures had a point.

"That's terrible," I told him.

"Do you know about the boy on Estes Drive?" the detective asked.

"No," I said, "What boy on Estes Drive?"

The detective then told me a story. A very sad story. A painful story for me to hear. One of the Figures I'd done was directly across from an elementary school. A little boy had been run down





there by a car on his way to school, right where he lived, right across the street from the school. The mother of this dead child woke up one morning and found a Fatal Figure in her street. The information I had gathered about the fatalities was only time and place, not the specific circumstances of the accidents. I guess I could have asked but I didn't. This was the first I heard of this little dead boy. I felt ashamed.

"Are you willing to talk to the mother?" asked the detective. "Are you willing to talk to the press? What are you willing to do about this? Will you pay for the city to paint over them?"

I offered to paint over the Figures myself. He smiled sarcastically. I told the detective I wished to write the mother of the dead child a letter explaining the purpose of The Fatal Figures, my intentions to have motorists drive safer, my sadness and regrets of painting one in front of her house, that I apologize for any harm I had done to her. The detective agreed.

"That's a good idea, son," he said.

I agree to pay the city to paint over The Fatal Figures.

"Good," said the detective "And we wouldn't be charging you with any crime because you haven't technically broken the law. We can't get you for destruction of public property for that statute deals specifically with buildings."

"Oh," I said, trying not to smile.

They couldn't get me for malicious mischief either, for my intentions were good. Frankly, I probably could have walked out

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of that office and told them to stick it, pay for it yourself to paint over The Fatal Figures.

Except for one thing:

608 Airport Road. My home, the hippie house slash illegal pharmacy where I lived. The police could have busted us at anytime for anything. I didn't want to get busted for drugs, nor did I want my roomies to get popped. I may have been a jerk but I wasn't an asshole.

"I'll pay the costs to paint them over," I said to the detective and to the county attorney, who was also there with Mike and I.

The detective set up an interview with the press. *The Chapel Hill Newspaper* came, *The Durham Morning Herald* as well. I told my story. It was then I learned that newspapers don't always print the truth. There were things in quotations that were not things I said. Maybe I was a buffoon but I looked more like a buffoon the way they printed it.

Things were set in motion outside my control. The radio stations called. I became a weird little blurb on the television news. I found out later a friend in Chicago saw anAP/UPI news wire story on The Fatal Figures, and when he found out it was me, he couldn't stop laughing for a very long time.

The response of my parents wasn't what I anticipated. I expected my mother would find it somewhat amusing and my father would be furious. The opposite was true.

My father, Stuart Jenks Sr., was driving home from the Research Triangle Park where he worked as an upper level manager in the IBM Corporation, when he heard on the radio:

"Stuart Jenks turned himself in today, the person creating the silhouettes of dead bodies, the proverbial Fatal Figures in the city of Chapel Hill. He explained he was a conceptual artist, blah, blah, blah."

"Well, I didn't know I did anything in Chapel Hill," said Dad to me later and then laughed.

My mother, Mary Jenks, on the other hand about died from embarrassment whenshe saw my story on the local television news.

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My sister, Pamela Jenks, found out about it when our mother called her at work.

“You won’t believe what your brother has done?” my mother told my sister. I don’t remember what Pamela’s opinion of the piece was at the time, but later I learned she was proud of my artistic successes, so there’s that.

I watched the initial television broadcast at a friend’s house, The Cookie Factory, a small cinder-block house on a lake west of town, the former home of a man who made it rich with a cookie he invented in its oven. I watched with Scrap Man, who lived there, and two women from the house next door. I remember at the end of the broadcast I stood in shock, still not aware of what was happening to me. And Scrap and the girls all applauded. I don’t think I’ll ever forget that moment.

A couple days later, I saw the City of Chapel Hill painting over The Fatal Figure in front of my house. I went out to document it as I documented everything in those days. I took a photograph of the city painting a big black square over The Fatal Figure. The bill from the City came to \$138.36, a figure I also will never forget. I had no idea where I could get that kind of money. I worked as a dishwasher at a local posh restaurant and I was pretty broke all the time. This was back in the time when most Carolina students were not rich.

Then I came up with another idea and went back to The Art Lab Building. I made up some porcelain, squashed it into a rough circle, created a stamp of The Fatal Figures from plaster and stamped it into the porcelain. I fired them all in a kiln. They were five inches in diameter. I made a banner out of a sheet, with an outline of a large Fatal Figure in black and yellow paint. I went to the center of campus at noon, a couple days later, tied the sheet between two trees and put the porcelain Fatal Figures on a table selling them for \$1.00 each. I didn’t anticipate what would happen next.

People came by screaming at me, calling me names. Journalism students yelled at me for making it harder for them to get information



from the police. I tried to explain to them I didn't say I was a journalism student. The police just assumed that. They wouldn't hear it. Others screamed, 'You're crazy!' and walked away.

A few people were supportive, yet the verbal onslaught was surprising.

I sold fifty.

At a Halloween party at 608 Airport Road I put a map on the wall with photographs attached and a collection bucket under it. As I said earlier, our parties were quite large. Usually 200 to 300 people showed up. The beer was drunk. The joints were smoked. I collected probably \$20.00, and a couple of joints. I was still about \$60.00 short.

By this time I had become a minor folk hero about town. I became part of the Inner Sanctum of the Chapel Hill Music Scene, which meant the quality and quantity of the drugs I used increased.

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I went from sitting in living rooms smoking joints to being invited to the back rooms and offered cocaine.

I was hot news for a few weeks.

One night, working as a dishwasher, I was told a patron wanted to speak to me. I walked out smelling like stale vegetables and Hollandaise sauce. I believe he was gay. I believe he thought I was cute. He asked me if I had paid off the debt to The City. I told him no, I hadn't. He reached into his pocket, pulled out a check, signed the bottom and gave it to me blank. I found out later, he was an administrative assistant to a very wealthy local entrepreneur. He took me out to lunch to meet this rich man, in early 1979. Nice clothes, pleasant demeanor, a warm old face. At the time I was too stoned to realize I was letting a possible patron of the Arts slip through my grasp. Pamela was the one who told me who this old man was. I got to tell you, after all these years, I regret that the most. If I had been the least bit conscious, I would have played that lunch meeting differently.

In gratitude for the check, I gave the nice gay man, my map of The Fatal Figures.

And now that I was part of the Inner Sanctum, I learned something quite disturbing. Even though I was famous or infamous, all most people cared about were The Figures on the streets. Most people cared no more about who I was than they had before. I was just a flavor of the month. I was angry. It hurt too. I'd walk into The Cat's Cradle and people would glance, raise an eyebrow. I was something weird and special, this guy who might be a little bit dangerous. But they liked my edginess, even though it would be years before I made peace with that side of myself. At the same time, a part of me realized that I was living a image that I had created myself, along with the newspapers. I was really in new territory. I didn't have a map, nor did I know how to ask for help.

And even though I was given lots of cocaine and pretty women were looking at me who never looked at me before, no one cared any more about the soul and spirit of Stu Jenks than before. I did

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get laid a lot. Quite a lot. I remember sleeping with women, very casual sex, very shallow. Feeling quite full of myself. I remember one woman, the Cat's Cradle woman, who ran The Cradle's bunkhouse where the bands used to spend the night as they passed through town.

I was lying in bed, one night, after we had fucked, thinking 'I'm part of this scene, getting laid by women, using them and they using me. Cool.' Another little voice inside of me though said: 'I don't think this is very good for you, Stu.'

I didn't care, Pass me the joint. Hand me the straw.

By the end of the semester I was getting tired of people asking me if I had painted on the streets lately.

I remember I did do one last Fatal Figure piece after all of the hullabaloo had quieted down. It was a crucifixion Fatal Figure with the arms out stretched, like a cross on the asphalt in back of The Art Lab Building. I built one of my brick pieces around it so it was entirely enclosed in brick. People could crawl through a hole and sit in there. I heard Mike Cindric held one of his 3-D design classes inside this sculpture, students sitting on the white Fatal Figure paint.

The remainder of my senior year at Carolina was one big sophomore slump. How do I top this? I formed a rock band called Wobbly Gumbo with a couple friends, but broke it up after only two gigs. I hung around town working in a print shop for a few months after graduation. And I grew more and more depressed.

Within a year, I left town. The following year I was living in the mountains of North Carolina, working as a magician in a theme park and wanting to die.



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I seriously considered driving my Karmann-Ghia into a tree. I even picked out the tree.

No, I didn't kill myself, nor did I try. I eventually ended up in Tucson, Arizona, working as a waiter, and to my surprise, married. In 1984, as my wife and I flew back to North Carolina for Christmas, I told Denise "I bet someone I don't even know will ask if I've painted on the streets lately."

"That's absurd," she said. "It's been six years. Most of those people are gone."

"Mark my words," I said.

On Christmas Day Evening, at friends of my parents I barely knew, one of their daughters looked across the dining room table at me and said,

"Stu, have you painted on the streets lately?"

I turned to Denise and smiled.

She said nothing.

From when I graduated from art school in 1979 to 1985, I got a bit lost. Probably long before that. Frankly, the forest grew very dark and I couldn't find my way out. In 1985, I was able to ask some good people for help, and I began to find my way back, thanks to them. It took me a while. Denise and I got divorced, among a lot of other things. Not everything needs to be told here, but I'll gladly tell you over coffee.

I was a jerk. I'm less of a jerk now.

My sister Pamela took an art history course at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1990. Dressed in her power suit, she introduced herself to the class by stating that she herself was an artist, that her medium was embroidery and that 'My brother was a conceptual artist here at Carolina.' The professor looked at her last name, looked at her face, and gave a slight shake of the head.

"You could see it in the eyes," Pamela said.

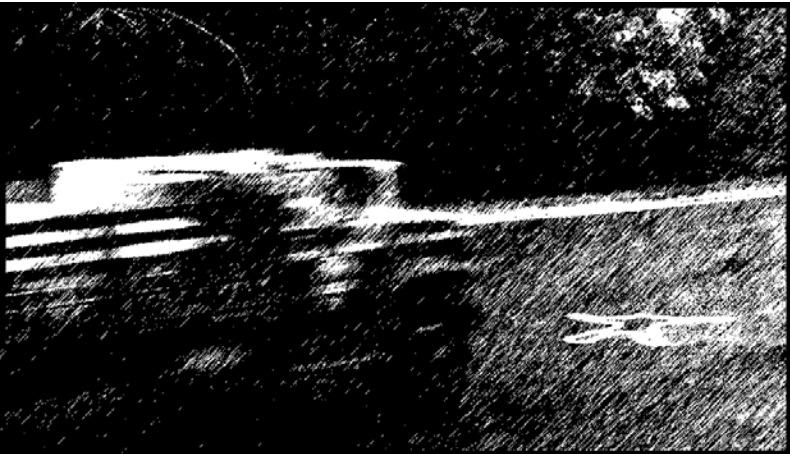
In the Summer of 1993, I flew back home to attend my 20th high school reunion, and to do the at-least-once-in-a-Southerner's-lifetime-pilgrimage of Civil War battlefields. I visited

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Mike Cindric. I visited my folks. I also visited Chapel Hill. One place my rental Mitsubishi took me to was The Art Lab Building in Chapel Hill. Pinned to the wall by a wooden cabinet, flying like an angel, bright and silvery as if it was painted yesterday was The Fatal Figure on the wall. As a summer rain fell on the tin roof, I pulled out my Sony Camcorder and shot it from a few different angles. No one saw me. No mistakes this time. A circle connected.

So, I guess it's time to put these ghosts back in the box and look around at what is alive in 1996. An African crucifix with Christmas lights that burn year round hangs from my living room wall. Nocturnal time exposure photographs of Utah Canyonlands hang near the kitchen. Prayer sticks made of saguaro ribs, owl feathers, and yellow paint stick out of a bottle. A photograph of a circle of standing stones constructed on a hilltop hangs on another wall. Clay vessels with sparkling interiors created during Holotropic Breath workshops sit on my desk. A knitted purple and blue scarf made by a woman with soft skin, blue eyes and a gentle soul lays draped over a chair.

Suddenly, it's Christmas morning. I throw open the shutters, look out onto the snow-covered lane, and become Ebenezer Scrooge.





## Acknowledgments from the 1988 and 1996 Editions of *The Fatal Figures*:

**To Bo Petersen**, for transcribing the first tapes and writing the first draft in 1988, and for giving me an appreciation of Duane Allman leads.

To Mike Cindric, for teaching me to trust my own vision, and for Hot Doughnuts Now.

To my parents, Stuart and Mary Jenks, for paying for Art School, and for letting me escape.

To Tom “Scrap Man” Whicker, for being the cinematographer of many a conceptual art piece, and for being the heartbeat of the Wobbly Gumbo.

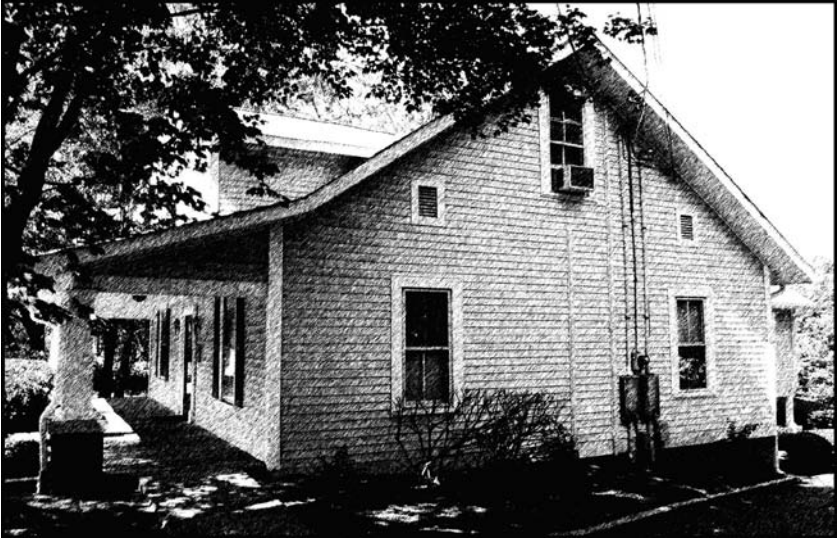
To Levi Neill, for mentoring me through the Early Days, and for teaching me I didn’t have to be perfect.

To my sister, Pamela Jenks, for finding the Fatal Figure slides in the damp moldy basement of our ancestral home.

To Michael Doll, for the use of his computer and his tutorial on Wordperfect, and for having the patience of Buddha.

And To Annie Gordon, the second Annie, for putting her hand on my heart, and for loving Christmas as much as I do.





Addendum from the  
2001 edition of *The Fatal Figures*:

Maybe it's because my parents have cancer that prompted me to pull out *The Fatal Figures*, do some editing to the 1996 story and put it on the web. Or maybe it's because I was recently interviewed for an article on my current series of circle and spiral images, and *The Fatal Figures* came up. Whatever the reason, here is the story for your pleasure. I'm not doing this kind of artwork now, but the *Figures* were a good piece and they are part of my history.

Keep your lamp trimmed and burning.

Stu Jenks,  
Tucson, Arizona  
March, 2001



## Addendum from the 2012 edition of *The Fatal Figures*:

**Well, who would have thought** a dyslexic kid from the suburbs would end up making money being a writer. Go figure.

I'm back editing this God-forsaken story again, because a) I want to perhaps make a little coin from it as an ebook, b) I'm a better writer now and Christ, can't we just fix some of this crappy writing?, c) I don't take myself nearly as seriously as I used to. I cuss more, pray more, eat more, laugh more, and my writing reflects that. And d) so what happened to those people I mentioned in the story?

Letter 'd' ranks highest in importance, behind more money and better writing.

Tom "Scrapman" Whicker still lives in North Carolina, near his elderly mother. He's a good son. I talked with him last year. He's fine. We were close back in the day but we aren't now. No big thing. Just the natural fading of friendship if it doesn't stay watered.

The first Annie? I haven't a clue. Last I heard she was successful in Washington, D.C., but that was many years ago. I hope she's well.

Second Annie's good. Still a massage therapist, still an artist, still loving her cats. We are not boyfriend-girlfriend anymore but we are still very good friends.

The folks who lived at 608 Airport Road? Only one of them I've heard much from, over the last thirty plus years. All are alive except one. He died of a heroin overdose. It's amazing to me most of us are still live. And the house at 608 Airport Road has been renovated into a posh realtor's office. Don't lick the floors. You may get high.

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The Cat's Cradle still exists but in a different location in Chapel Hill. I can't even remember The Cradle Girl's name. Sorry. I hope she's happily married somewhere with lots of children and grandchildren.

Levi lives in Kansas and wears a big hat. Michael recently got married and spends his spare time helping others. Bo and Cathy Petersen and their twin adult boys live happy lives. All is well.

My father, Stuart, died of a weird ribcage cancer in 2001. My sister, Pamela died of breast cancer, last year. My mother, Mary, died of dementia, two weeks after my sister passed.

Stuart loved his son as best he could, but he never really liked me very much. It's OK. I didn't like him that much either. Mary loved her son too, but due to her own narcissism, she had a hard time seeing beyond her own nose. Just the way it was. And Pamela was a royal pain in the neck until the last six months of her life, when she knew she was dying of cancer. For those six months, Pamela was the sister I always hoped to have.

I don't miss Mom and Dad that much but I miss my sister terribly. Few days go by without me wishing I could talk with her on the phone. Love you, Pamela. You too, Mom and Dad. It's all good, as the kids say.

So it's just me now. I have no kids but I have a very nice girlfriend. Lovely woman. I'm self employed but not very successfully. I may have to eventually return to working as a licensed substance abuse counselor but I really don't want to. Life is what it is. Little is truly within our control, don't you know. And I'm only slightly angry that my creative career has taken such a big hit during The Great Recession. OK. I'm pretty pissed, but I'm not ungrateful to the gifts of life. I have a sweet apartment, a good studio, my old truck, my mother's Buick, a little money in the bank and many friends who love me. I have nothing to complain about, but I still do.

And my old art teacher Mike Cindric, his wife Susan Toplikar and I are still close. In 2011, when I was back in Raleigh often, selling the old house for a song, I stayed with Susan and Mike.

## THE FATAL FIGURES

We ate savory and sweet pies at Pie Bird Restaurant and laughed and lied. I lied. They laughed. I wish I was geographically closer to them, and to the pies.

One dawn last Fall, I walked alone to an old cemetery near Mike and Susan's home in the Oakwood neighborhood of Raleigh, North Carolina. Cicadas grew silent as the sun rose. The peaty smells of wet grass and ground collected in my nose. The smells awed me. I saw old and new tombstones grow brighter in the early light. I felt happy and sad, all at the same time. But not very afraid.

I glad I'm not so afraid anymore.

I hope it sticks.

Stu Jenks  
Studio BR-549  
Tucson, Arizona  
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