

Things that blow up

by Jeffrey Miller

For as long as John could remember, he loved to blow up things. It started back in grade school with firecrackers and cherry bombs—he would put them in toys, tin cans, shit like that to see what would happen. Then he advanced to stronger stuff, M-80s. Skip and him brought M-80s to high school one day and threw them in one of the girl's toilets between classes. That got him a five-day suspension.

Then with another buddy, Tom Ortega, they learned how to make pipe bombs by compressing match heads in an aluminum pipe—actually the leg from his mom's lawn chair that we cut off with a hack saw. They planned on making two or three of the homemade bombs and throw them in the Vermillion River to blow up as many gar fish as they could, but they never got that far. One night, while they were packing those match heads into that aluminum pipe, the fucking thing exploded. They couldn't hear for a week; Tom lost his right pinky finger.

The judge told John he had two choices—either do some time or join the army. He joined the army and for his talents, the army taught him how to disarm the bombs other people wanted to detonate that would maim and kill people like John. What comes around goes around because one day, while disarming an IED in Iraq, the roadside bomb blew up in his hands.

Until he got fitted for a prosthetic right hand, John learned how to hold an M-80 in his left hand and light it with a match he stuck in his mouth. Old habits died hard.

