

**'THE  
BEST  
OF  
INTENTIONS:  
The AVOW Anthology**



**BY  
KEITH  
ROSSON**





THE BEST OF INTENTIONS: The AVOW Anthology  
Copyright © Keith Rosson 2003. All rights retained by the  
individual artists and authors.

Published and distributed by  
Fork In The Road Press  
c/o Troy Malish  
Box 1168  
Elkford, BC  
V0B 1H0  
forkintheroadpress@hotmail.com

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or  
transmitted without the prior written consent of the author or  
publisher. Thanks.

ISBN 0-9726967-4-1

Printed in Canada by Hignell Book Printing  
First pressing 2003.

HEY.

her issue

I heard a saying once, years ago, that rang so goddamn true with me that I have since incorporated it into my vocabulary, into that little grab bag of wise or smart-ass sayings that I walk around with in my head. And frankly, the way things have been going lately, I've been saying it a lot recently. Hell, I've said it so often that I've even stopped giving credit to the guy I originally heard it from. I just consider it mine now. It's usually reserved for those times when I've just discarded that thing we call "good judgement" or when I'm about two seconds away from making an absolute idiot of myself. And while writing the introduction for this anthology, for something like the fifth time, it's never seemed more accurate than it does right now.

And it goes like this:

*Sometimes all you can be is a good bad example.*

Chew on *that* one for a while and then let me know what you think. Hell of a way to start a book, huh? But that's where I'm at.

Another one I've heard, one that I like to throw out there just every once in a while is this: *Why let the truth ruin a good story?* But that one doesn't sit quite as well with me, at least right now. We'll save the tall tales or exaggerations for later in the book, OK? For right now I'll try and lay it down straight and just be honest.

And to be honest with you, trying to write this introduction has been harder than writing any story in any of the issues presented here, harder than filling in the details of any of these drawings, harder than holding back those screams of frustration when the motherfucking copy machine jams *again*, harder than any of that stuff. This thing goes off to the printer in less than 36 hours and there's still a lot to do, and like I said, this is something like the fifth attempt at some sort of introduction.

Ideally, I'd love to just shut the hell up and let the zine speak for itself but there's some things I want to fill you in on first. The first issue of AVOW was created at a scarred kitchen table in Seattle in February of 1995. It was full-sized, twenty-two pages and had a staple in the upper left-hand corner holding it all together. It was made by Alex Arnsdorf and I and had various contributions from our friends. Contents included lots of poetry, rants about Charles Bukowski, religion and how everyone should masturbate more often. It also included some ads that people actually paid us five or ten bucks to run and five reviews. We made about twenty five copies, if I remember right. Combing through my archives while assembling this book, I realized I didn't

actually have a copy of AVOW #1, much less the originals. Lost in some move, I suppose, or just thrown away. When we put that first issue together, I sure as shit didn't imagine that I'd be here years later, scrambling to assemble a book. Luckily, Nathan had a copy of that one and brought it over. Yellowed and wrinkled, I thumbed through those twenty-two pages and, frankly, cringed. I suppose it's a lot like hearing that first band you were in, or looking at your old paintings, reading through those old journals; the passion is there but the execution leaves a bit to be desired.

AVOW started out with its own unique dichotomy. Alex and I were shooting for, originally, a potent mix of punk stuff and, well, poetry. Things that were firing us up at that point in our lives. So it started out trying to toe that fine, fine line between being a punk zine and a poetry zine. Something that, in retrospect, it failed at pretty miserably. I mean, we're our own worst critics, sure, but those first issues were pretty bad, you know? Apart from a few shining moments, the zine didn't really start to hit its stride until #7 or so and as a result the selections from those first issues are pretty slim. Take my word for it, you're not missing much.

Geographically, Alex and I wound up a few hundred miles apart after that first one but I kept putting issues out on my own. Again, combing through the archives for this thing was a little funny and a little sad: there was a lot of excitement and hope in those early ones, but the zine nerd in me that has blossomed into a raging behemoth over the years looks at them and roars, "What, Courier font? You write everything on an electric typewriter and don't even transverse the type? Jesus!" I have absolute faith in the belief that those of you who also consider yourselves zine nerds, obsess over margins or drool over really nice halftones will understand.

Starting with #7 or so, the poetry took a backseat and eventually ceased to become an element of the zine at all. I don't want to, uh, *disavow* that element of the zine or that period of my life, but it's just something that I don't have much fire for anymore. Though I have to say, some of the reviews of those early issues were *hilarious*: the folks who ran in poetry circles were mildly interested in the punk stuff at best, and the punks absolutely *hated* poetry of any kind, regardless of its quality. But that's one thing about quality, as you'll see when thumbing through this anthology: Quality, like a lot of other things, is in the eye of the beholder.

Regardless, around #11 or so, I started to get really, really excited about the zine again. Started putting out issues that I wasn't really too bummed about, at all. See, if you're anything like me, you do a zine and something gets lost between the heart and the head and the hands and you end up putting out a zine that's still maybe *good* but nothing like how you pictured it at its inception. Starting with #11, that first issue that was just my stories, less and less was getting lost or muted in the transition. One of these days I may reach that point where *nothing* is lost, where things get written, drawn, cut and pasted

exactly how I wanted them to be, but we probably still have a lot of time between then and now. There are hopefully many more things to live through, more sadness to wade through, more hilarity to ensue, more to write about, more room to grow. More to experience.

So that's my point, don't get me wrong: AVOW is by no means an amazing zine. Collectively, excerpts from all the issues stacked on top of each other like this, it may possibly be embarrassingly bad, depending on where you're coming from. I mean, I'll be the first to note that it's at times either terribly sentimental or terribly shallow and probably pretty self-serving all the way through. And I still haven't learned how to make a decent fucking halftone.

But that's what I mean by the title of this book, and that's what I mean by being a good bad example. It's all relative, I suppose. One of the difficult things about assembling something like this is that there's such a sense of finality about it all: *Here is a collection of creative output from myself and a few other folks published over the past few years. Phew! Thank Christ that shit's done with! I can stop doing this stupid zine now! I'm done.* And that's not the case at all, far from it. This is just, you know, the first chapter. I want to keep going, keep trying to get it down the way I see it in my head. There are hopefully many more issues of AVOW to come.

A quick note about the selections: This collection has excerpts from issues #1-10, and essentially all the material from #11-16, minus most of the intro pages and back covers. My thanks go out to all the contributors from over the years, the distributors, anyone who's ever written me a letter or traded me a copy of AVOW for one of theirs. And a heartfelt thank you to Troy at Fork In The Road for the incredible opportunity. At times I think it's more than I deserve, really.

It's probably not high art but it's all I've got. I hope you like it.

Hang in,

KEITH ROSSON

Portland, Oregon, August 2003.



let's get  
started.

# a v o w . #1

march '95. \$1.50

anything from art  
to poetry,  
somewhere  
between angry  
and  
furious...

columns:

"eliminating  
television"

"is G.G. or not  
to G.G."

"a masturbation  
primer"

"fuck Gukowski"

I swear, it's enough  
Bill Clinton twitch  
in his sleep...





# AVO #2

\$1

interview with  
Kathleen Henna  
of BIKINI KILL

poems

blood

columns

art

other wacky  
shit





# AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHLEEN HANNA OF BIKINI KILL

BY KEITH ROSSON

LAYOUT BY NATHAN BEATY

**T**his interview took place after Bikini Kill's show in Springfield, Oregon on April 16, 1995. The show was at a skating rink called Skate World. Please keep in mind that this is an interview with Kathleen Hanna and not the entire band: she isn't speaking for Bikini Kill, but for herself.

AVOW: So how was the show tonight?

KATHLEEN: It was fun, I had a great time. It was weird, not having a crowd looking at you and just having a bunch of people skating around, but it was really nice; people just skating around, having a good time and not just getting all wasted.

A: Yeah, it was kinda weird, though: everything was really bright, it's not the type of venue that I'm used to. So what made you choose to play at a skating rink?

K: (laughs) I'm totally into skating, I used to hang out with all my skating friends. Plus, my cousins are both professional rollerskaters and my sister used to be really into rollerskating and I just thought it would be totally fucking fun. And I wanted to wear a skating leotard, so everybody knew when Joe called us and said that we could play at a skating rink, they knew that I would really want to do it, and Kathi used to skate too...

A: OK, well, here's an interesting one: a girl I know told me that I shouldn't listen to Bikini Kill because I was a boy...

K: Uh-huh.

A: So, what do you think about that?

K: I don't know...well, maybe, I don't know...the only thing I think about boys listening to us is, hopefully they're being educated by a point of view that they don't necessarily have and stuff, and if guys want to listen to it, that's cool...what I do or whatever, how I sing, is mostly for girls, or any kids that are struggling...it's not necessarily

men per se that I have a problem with, it's masculinity. I mean, there's a big difference between masculinity and individual men, you know what I mean?

A: Yeah.

K: I mean, I'm a lot more likely to trust women right off the bat just because I know that I have something in common with them, but there's all sorts of things, like class and race, that separate women, so it's not like you can be, "Oh, sisterhood is powerful," in all cases. I'm not sure if that really answered your question or not.

A: To a degree it did.

K: Maybe she just wanted you to think about, you know, why you would want to listen to us, you know what I mean?

A: Yeah, but it just seemed to be a real separatist statement though, it bugged me.

K: Well, I'm totally into separatism if that's like, what people want to do. I have a boyfriend, so it's



not like... (Kathi, bassist for Bikini Kill, comes up and they talk for a minute, making sure all the bands got paid the proper amount, then.)  
A: So have you ever had someone come to shows specifically to confront you? Just to fuck with you?

K: Mm-hmm. Yeah, it happens all the time.

A: Like what?

K: Well, I guess the most recent example I can think of...well, all over our last tour, all over every tour. Guys will come and they'll yell at me, "Take it off!" or call me a "bitch" or a "cunt" and stuff like that. Like in L.A., there were these kinda crusty guys and Spiboy was there, they played too, and the whole time Spiboy played they were yelling names at Adrienne and Todd. Then when I got on they were totally calling me, like, a "rock star" and a "bitch" and "cunt". And it was really funny that they thought "rock star" was a slag next to "cunt", you know what I mean? But I don't really care what those people think of me. Oh, and they were telling me my boobs were made of plastic, which was really weird because I knew that they got me confused with Courtney Love or something. (laughter all around) I mean, I haven't had a boob job. If I did, my boobs would probably look a lot different. It was weird, but it was also just really depressing. It reminds me of growing up in my house or just getting fucked with all the time, and I play music not to escape but to bring joy into my own life and into my own head and hopefully into other people's and it just sucks when it happens like that. It ended up being a physical confrontation where I had to do some self-defense against one of them.

A: Really...

K: Then they were trying to beat us up afterwards. They tried to charge me with assault and the cops came and tried to arrest me, and as I was being hidden in the back room, the guy who was hiding me grabbed my ass. And that was just this one night, so that stuff happens all the time. I mean, our roadie and one of our best friends, Laurie

# AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHLEEN HANNA OF BIKINI KILL

PAGE 2

McDougall, was physically assaulted trying to protect me at a show when a guy was trying to get on stage. And she was knocked unconscious trying to protect me. That guy ended up murdering someone about two weeks after that, murdering his ex-girlfriend, on the street, with a gun. So, it's really scary sometimes and that's what's so nice about playing a skating rink, having everybody just skating around; I felt really safe here. I felt like

“ I mean, it's not like I think people should agree with everything that comes out of my fucking mouth, but at least they could respect it. ”

nobody really came here to fuck with us at all. If people don't like it, or they like it, whatever, but nobody was gonna be an asshole. And I think the skate rink environment is the new mecca for bisexual women to play. Because I think that it's just safer than most places.

A: SO when shit like that does happen, does it piss you off, does it make you want to do more, or what?

K: It makes me sad. It used to make me really angry, but then I realized I don't want to spend my...I only spend my anger energy on people I care about, you know what I mean? It's like, I'm not gonna try and educate assholes and I'm not gonna

# AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHLEEN HANNA OF BIKINI KILL

PAGE 3



get angry about it. They're not worth my time. I mean, I'll get angry with my lover or something and actually try and deal with it but I'm not gonna get all worked up in a sweat over idiots. I just feel bad because they're missing out. Because they could be having a good time and it could be really cool. I mean, it's not like I think people should agree with everything that comes out of my fucking mouth, but

**AVOW:** so when is it time to quit?

**KATHLEEN:** When we're done. When we've made a record as good as the Clash.

at least they could respect it. And if they don't like it they could write me a letter, they don't have to come up to me when I'm nervous before or after a show and fucking yell at me. It's their problem, because they don't know me, and if they actually saw how I lived my life, they realize I'm pretty rad. (laughs) You know what I mean, I'm not full of shit. Whatever, I just let it slide off me when I can. But it is hard cuz I want to be in my body when I sing, I want to be present and be able to enjoy it and, like, think of all the sounds going through me and take up some space as a woman, I think it's really important, but it's hard to actually be there, in that way, when you're used to being assaulted all the time. You have to be looking out in the audience and saying, "Who has a weapon, who's gonna jump me after the show?"

A: Right, instead of just being able to go all the way into it.

K: Right, you can't just close your eyes and get into the song. Which was nice about tonight, I could really close my eyes and have fun and I didn't have to feel like someone was gonna come and blow my fucking head off.

A: Yeah...so, do you want to talk about the Mike Watt thing at all?

K: Oh, that? You heard that, I didn't know anyone even heard that record. A: Yeah, you know the Orpheum in Seattle?

K: Mm-hmm.

A: Well, they were playing it.

K: Oh, wow. Yeah, my friend from Maryland said she heard it on the radio, I was like, "Oh my god." That was just a little spoken word thing I did to sort of...he asked me to do something on the record and I didn't really want to be on it because I didn't like a lot of the people that were on it, I thought it was really dumb, but then I thought, "God, how often does a person like me get a chance to have her voice heard by all these different people?" I thought that the audience that this is geared to is probably guys, who maybe haven't thought about some of these things. So I sort of did a kind of presence and absence thing. I didn't really want to be on it, I didn't really want to support it. I like Mike, he's kind of funny, but it's like, I wanted to make something that was funny but also...

A: Yeah...

K: So I said the thing and I wanted people to wonder if it's real or not, and it was real but it also is not. It's two things at once, which is really...artistically or whatever, part of my thing is that I'm into the idea of something being real and

# AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHLEEN HANNA OF BIKINI KILL

PAGE 4

also false at the same time, exploring that boundary between, like, "This is real music and this is just girl music", or "This is blahblah", or whatever. I think things can be a lot more fluid, not so static. But you probably shouldn't tell anybody that, cuz I want them to think that it was...

A: Oh, so you want me to edit that part, huh?

K: No, that's fine, you can put it in. You're a zine, you're not from Rolling Stone, you can have it.

A: Well, you never know.

K: (laughs) Well, if I saw it in Rolling Stone I'd hunt you down and kill you, so...

A: You know, there's rumors that Bikini Kill has signed.

K: (laughs) No, that's not true, it never will be.

A: Ok, well, let's see; how about for a closing question and comment: so when is it time to quit?

K: When we're done. When we've made a record as good as the Clash.

A: Which one?

K: That's Ok, I'm not gonna say that. But, I mean, I still think we have another record, most definitely. I mean, girl bands never stay together this long, and we do other projects and that's why we've stayed together so long. We broke up for a year and a half, but we didn't really break up, we just did other things. We don't think of a band like a job, that you have to do, we do it when we feel like it, when it's fun, and right now it's fun again. We'll do it for a while; I mean, I don't think we're gonna be like the Stones, I'm not gonna be sitting here in ten years talking to you. But I'm twenty six years old and I hardly find that over the hill at all.

A: SO do you have any recording in the works at all?

K: Yeah, in a few weeks we're gonna do another



single

A: And people can still reach you at the Kill Rock Stars address? K: Yeah.

A: Ok, well, thank you.

K: Oh, you're welcome, good luck with your fanzine.







AVOW

AVOW — You  
guys are cool.  
My mom threw away  
all my AVOWS.  
could you send  
me some more  
please?

JIMMY SEPKA,  
Age 9



Hey Pretty! Thanks for all the issues  
it Rocks, specially that date with you. I  
was just in L.A., played at the IMPALA with my  
other band, the lefties, I play Guitar and  
sing and Chris-pee-chee play Drums, we also recorded  
6 songs, send you a copy as soon as I get the  
rough mix, heres more records I got lying  
here, hope you like it, Pee-chees are Records  
with John Reis for a CD/LP on Kill Rock  
Records, then we'll be playing with Rocket  
down/up the west coast (4 shows in L.A.)  
then we're flying up to the east coast  
to play with them too, Fucking Rock  
N Roll. so when are you going on a date  
oh well, I miss you!! write if  
you got the time! ♥

I bought the RIVERDALES LP for \$3.99  
Diamond and when I got home, I saw that the  
letter was inside. I have no idea who wrote it

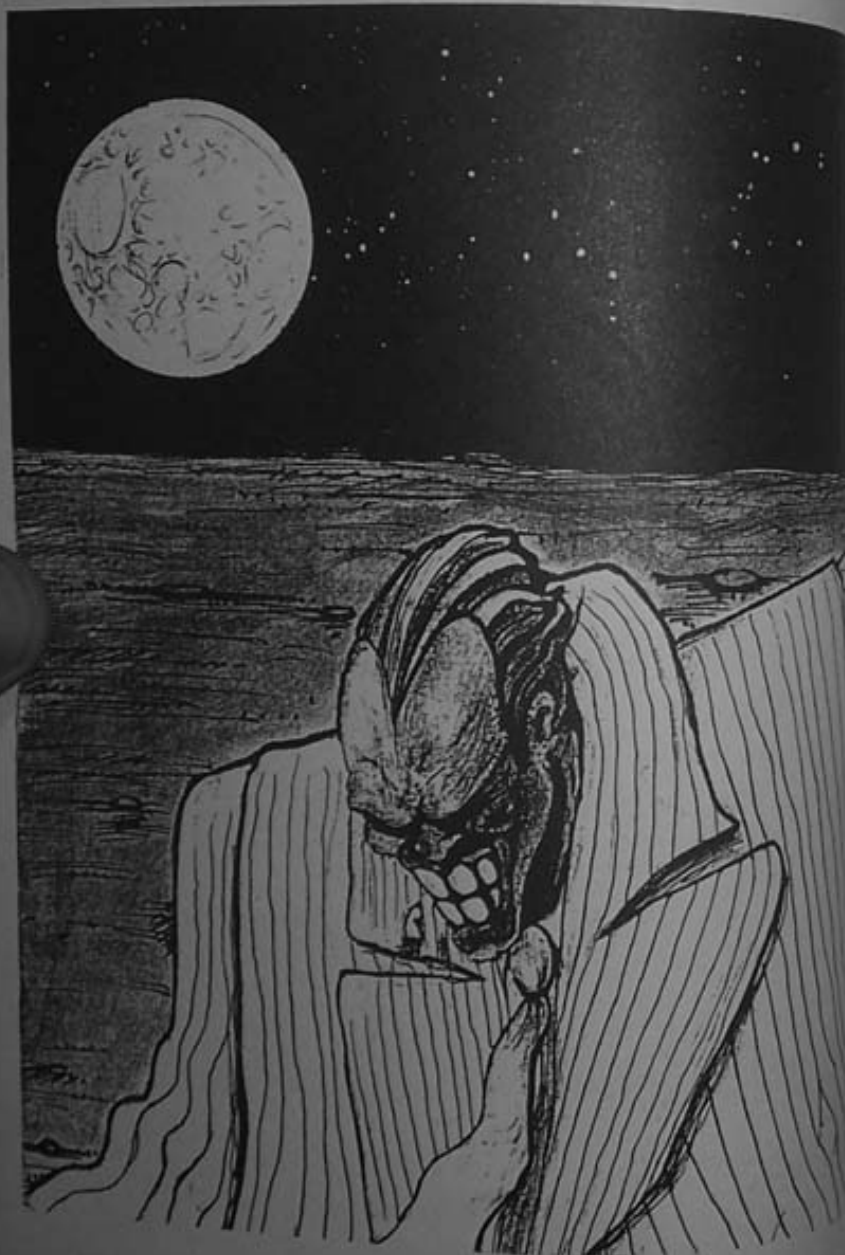


JOE HAS BEEN WANTIN' TO PUT SOMETHING IN HERE (AVON)  
FOR A LONG TIME, AND HE FINALLY GAVE ME THIS COOL  
DRAWING (CHECK THE ZINE ON THE TABLE). I PUT IT IN  
MY COAT POCKET AND KIND OF KESKESIFOROT ABOUT  
IT. I GUESS MY COAT GOT WET, SO THE INK SORT OF  
BLENDED AND RAN IN SOME SPOTS, BUT I THINK IT  
MAKES IT EVEN COOLER. ANYWAY, JOE, HERE YOU ARE  
AND THANKS FOR THE DRAWING.....K.

FL  
NL



a v o w #3



# JAY BENTLEY OF ★★★★★★★★★★ BAD RELIGION

THIS interview was taken from DRIVE-THRU LOBBYING, issue #3. This is the old fanzine Tres & It used to do, and the interview took place in the summer of '93. "Recipe For Hate" was out at this time, and was pretty

K: Ever been offered stuff from other labels, like the MRR New World Order 7"?  
J: Not really. I mean, Epitaph has its advantages and its disadvantages. There's a lot you can do with it and there's a lot you can't do. Any offers we get from major labels, or any labels, we'll talk about it. I mean, there's gotta be a point somewhere along the line where you realize that there's someone out that's doing it better than what you're doing in, otherwise you're doing it perfect. You know, we had to give away a single to Sympathy because no one else would take it!

ie quarter  
limbaum-  
bands. It  
just play

me cover  
unrecogn-  
igs most p  
popular co  
lren's TV

tion at The  
practice spar  
sling show  
as Hanford.  
ne place. Not  
care of as we  
see Haggis on p

I don't know, I don't know if we're looking or if we just put out image that we're not. I mean...I wouldn't be suprised to hear some offers come in, what with this year's success of "alternative" music. I wouldn't be suprised to see some offers come in, but who knows what that will bring.

G

(the right, I mean) by Atlantic a few months later. Bad Religion is now on a major label. Big time, bnybee. I just thought this was kind of interesting, sort of a "where are they now" type of thing. -Keith.



"Strawberry Shortcake" is still pretty good... i guess.



## the time a girl beat me up By Keith

When I was in high school, you had to take P.E. your Freshman and Sophomore years. So there I was, in my Sophomore 4th period P.E. class. We were playing volleyball. The basketball court in the gym had been divided into 3 volleyball courts, and the nets were all strung up and all that shit.

I was in the front row, right in the middle. I don't remember who was standing to my right, but I sure remember who was standing at my left: Meredith. Meredith was one of those girls who spent most of her Sophomore year at the smoke hole across the street from the school. I didn't end up there until my Senior year, so I didn't know her very well. She didn't come to P.E. very often, and when she did, she always told Mr. Voorheis she had cramps, so she rarely had to participate.

So she was actually playing volleyball that day. The other team served the ball, and it went sailing over the net and bounced right by her foot. Shit, it practically landed on her foot. And she didn't even budge.



She didn't even try for it. (SEE FIGURE 1). I sucked at sports, but I always tried to hit the ball. She just stood there, cleaning her nails or something. It kind of made me mad. So I turned and faced her and said, "Geez, Meredith, why don't you at least TRY to hit the ball?!" (See figure 2).

I guess she didn't like that very much. She looked at me for a second, and before I had a chance to register what was going on, she nailed me right in the face. Her eyes narrowed down to slits and she punched me five more times in the face. I take it and act all cool, but inside I'm thinking, "Oh SHIT, she's gonna Kick my ass right here in front of everybody!" (See FIGURE 3).

So at the end of the 6th punch, I look at her real tough and cool-like, trying to save some dignity, and I say, "So, are you through yet?" She just shakes her head at me and says, "You're not even worth it." Then she walked off. I still get teased about it to this day.



# So, Do You Have What It Takes To Be A Suffering And Artistic Poet Of The Small Press?

Do ya idolize BUKOWSKI?

do you constantly focus on the negative?

Do you send your stuff to the same 5 artistic and suffering zines cuz you know it'll be accepted?

Do you write poems about how suffering and artistic you are?

Do you do wild and wacky things just so you can write about them?

DO YA DRINK, FIGHT & FUCK AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, JUST CUZ THAT'S WHAT SUFFERING AND ARTISTIC POETS DO?

Do you name-drop at least one hip person per poem?

Do you constantly rip on other small press poets, yet when one of them rips on you, you get all offended and pissed off?

If a zine gives you a bad review, do you talk shit about them to all your poetry-lovin' peers near & far?

IF YOU ANSWERED 4 OR MORE OF THESE QUESTIONS WITH A HEARTY "YES!", YOU ARE PROBABLY AN ARTISTIC AND SUFFERING POET! ADVICE: DON'T TAKE YOURSELF SO FUCKING SERIOUSLY. YOU'RE NO BETTER OR WORSE THAN ANYONE ELSE OUT THERE. IT'S JUST A QUESTION OF WHAT PEOPLE LIKE.



# LET'S GO!

## the CHARACTERS



## The Rules

OK. Each player starts out with \$50. You'll have to make some xeroxes of the cash at the bottom of this page. You need a die, one dice. Roll it. Just go along the board, when you land on something, do what it says. It's a lot like MONOPOLY, but more boring. You can be one of the characters at the top of this page, use it as a gamepiece, or make your own. Someone needs to be banker. Don't cheat, fucker, it's less fun that way. That girl at the far right looks like she just got kicked in the nuts.

Take turns. Be considerate of other players. And most of all, kids, HAVE FUN! I copped the title of this game from RANCID's 2nd LP cuz I could xerox it easily. Later, punk.....

## THE MONEY

P9.53





Mia Zapata



olio, Otis Redding, Rupert Pupkin and the Lanning French Lullabies  
And may your first child be a masculine child.  
\*trait of Mia and insert cover painting: The Amazing Mark Po

Mia Zapata

I heard of you from  
a friend in Seattle  
before I knew you  
were a native of  
my hometown.  
He told me you  
saved his life on  
those rainy nights  
when the knife was  
to his wrist and  
there was no one  
left to call.  
Your music was a  
bridge to reason.  
You must have been  
the brightest flower.  
All we want now  
is to have walked  
you home.

Robert L. Penick

## OK, shit, with the way things

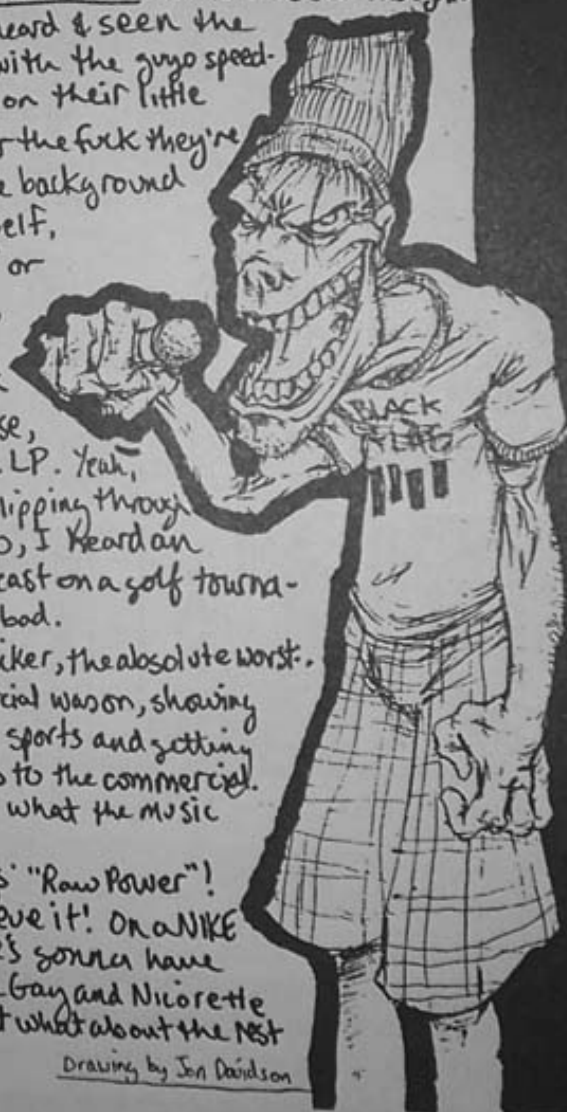
have been going, it was inevitable, I suppose. What I'm talking about is the recent surge of punk rock in (drum roll...) commercials! That's right, baby, punk rock in TV commercials! Who'da ever thought.

I mean, we've all heard & seen the SPRITE commercial with the guys speeding through France on their little bobsleds or whatever the fuck they're called, right? And in the background is Johnny Rotten himself, singing "Roadrunner" or whatever. No big deal, John Lydon hasn't had shit to do with punk rock, in a musical sense, since the first P.I.L. LP. Yeah, it sucked, but when flipping through the TV about 3 years ago, I heard an LT song being broadcast on a golf tournament. Now, that was bad.

Ah, but here's the kicker, the absolute worst. Last night a NIKE commercial was on, showing all these people playing sports and getting hurt and shit. No words to the commercial. Just music. And guess what the music was?

IGGY & THE STOOGES' "Raw Power"! No shit! I couldn't believe it! On a NIKE Commercial! IGGY & THE STOOGES' songs have enough cash for Bea Gay and Nicole for years other than that, but what about the rest of us?

Drawing by Jon Davidson





# AVOW

#7

one dollar



today, one of  
these kids does  
a  
fanzine.

## "THE TIME A 6TH GRADER BEAT ME UP WHEN I WAS IN THE 8TH GRADE..."

(The 2nd installment of the "The Time A..." series, the last one being "The Time A Girl Beat Me Up", which ran in issue #5. Look for future installments in upcoming issues, such as "The Time A 23 Year-Old Redneck Beat Me Up When I was 15" and "The Time I Threw A Waterballoon Into The Local Redneck/LSD Freak/Eyestabbing Psychopath's Truck Window And It Exploded And He Wanted To Kill Me...")

Newport Middle School, 1989. I'm in the 8th grade, one of the fat, quiet kids. I've fallen in love with punk rock at this point but the 4 or 5 punks in middle school think I'm a poser, so I've basically got my comic books, records, a newfound love for masturbation and a few friends who're also geeks, nerds, fatboys and potheads.

I'd gotten detention for something, I can't remember what, and I'd had to stay in the library for half of the lunch period, filing newspapers and putting magazines in their proper order on the reading rack. After my fifteen minutes were up, I went to the cafeteria. Back then, you could get one of those big, white, bleached dinner rolls with a huge glob of butter for 25 cents. Remember those? The butter came out of those 10 gallon buckets that looked like they'd been around since WW II or so. The lunch ladies scooped the butter out and smeared the blob onto this little paper plate, along with the roll. God, nothing could beat those things.

So I'm walking outside, going out to the breezeway (a courtyard with a bunch of picnic tables, a few scabby trees and a couple doors that lead to the gym), looking forward to my roll. I'm looking around for a place to sit when this kid about 10 feet away spits his gum at me. It goes sailing in this arc, bounces off my chest and lands smack-dab in the middle of that glob of butter. Right in the middle, sitting there like a little pink pill. It looked sad, laying there in my previously unmolested butter.

I've always had this problem with people who are mean for no apparent reason. They didn't always anger me, they confused me. So when I walked over to this kid, it was simply to ask him why he'd done that. I'd done nothing to him. I was confused. I didn't understand mean people or their actions.

So I walked over to the kid, more confused than angry. I didn't even know him, why'd he done that to me?



THE EVENTS DEPICTED HERE WERE REALLY FUCKING BAD.

continued

Section of ~~the~~ SAT REWRITES NORTH ISLAND

He was little, with a cap of curly black hair and these fucked up, pointy teeth. Just one of those nameless kids that you passed in the hall once in a while. I'd seen him around, he usually wore a leather jacket, though he wasn't wearing it on that fated day.

"What the hell did you do that for?" I asked him, puzzled and hurt.

POP! A shot of white, flash of white, and my world was all tilted, spinning to the right. Next thing I knew I was on the ground and some girl eating a salad started screaming. I rose to my knees, buzzing. I saw my blood running down to concrete incline of the breezeway.

The kid backed away from me, eyes wide. I looked at him and screamed, "I'M GONNA FUCKING KILL YOU!"

The kid bolted. Hauled ass out of there. I ended up hanging out in the principal's office while they called my mom.

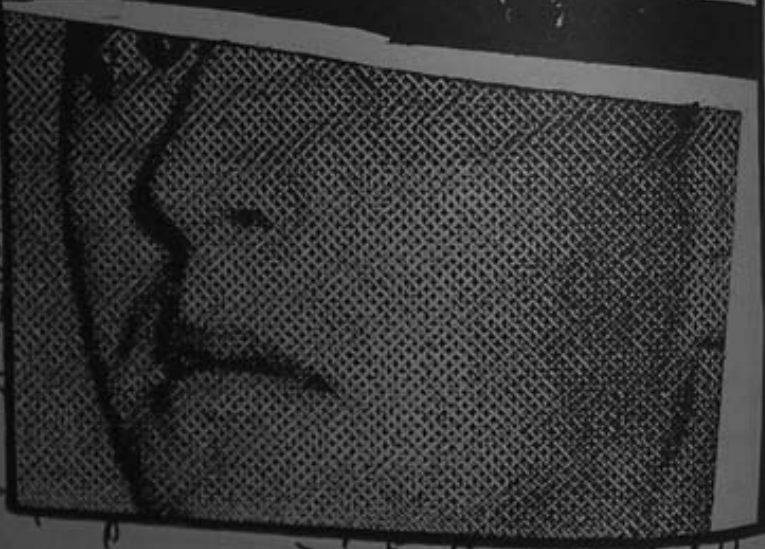
She came and I ended up getting six stitches in my lip at the emergency room. I've still got a chunk of my tooth missing from where my face smacked the pavement.

When the doctor took the stitches out a week later, he forgot one. Every once in a while, it will surface out of my lip and it hurts like hell. I suppose I could go back to a doctor and get it taken out, but I'm lazy.

One of those geek friends of mine named Brian, (who is now apparently one of the best snipers in the Marines right now), ended up beating the crap out of the kid after school one day and I stayed home for the rest of the week.

Those 4 or 5 punks really thought I was a poser after that.

I sat at home with my records and jacked off some more.



# Erraticism

by robert  
robert  
1. penick...

Some time ago, a magazine contacted me about doing an article on the small press. I declined, thinking I had little to say on the subject and that anything I could muster up would be seen as hyper negative. The idea began to germinate, though, as I began to think about what the small press is. Not in the sense of ten zillion xeroxed and stapled zines, each with a circulation of between ten and 300. Rather, I gave some thought as to whom the little mags gave voice, both writers and readers. The fact that writers are the primary market of little magazines was impetus as well.

The most striking characteristic of the small press is the alienation of its better writers from more conventional styles and markets. There are those writers using imagery and references clumsily borrowed from television shows, but their work is readily identifiable and easily skipped over. The most original writers—for instance, Kell Robertson, Joe R and T. Kilgore Splake—seem to pull their words up from the gut, with little obvious influence or affectation. Such individual voices often baffle the larger presses and the slick university mags. The outlet provided by "littles" provide support to some very diverse styles and outlooks. I think this does more to advance contemporary literature than does all the Pulitzer Prizes, endowments and NEA grants combined.

There are negatives to the small mag scene—inflated eggshell egos and zines cluttered with mediocrity. There is not much challenge to writers to polish their work: few editors are both willing and able to edit and they are often met with resentment when they do. Many small press "legends" are uninspired hacks who have recieved notoriety only by popping up in a few mags a year for longer than anyone wants to remember. These are small complaints, however, to a milieu that allows so many of us to exorcise our demons, to exercise our talents, to touch others.

Someday I'll write that article on the small press.

## punk consumerism or John Mellencamp rocks harder than some of you apathetic fuckwits out there...

"Music, the ideas and enthusiasm that go with it, are not things to possess or buy or to hoard away in our own little cliques and our own houses. If we want to deal with the commodification of punk, we need to deal with the materialism of punks, who are reflecting the attitudes and actions of the society around them." *Jon Angel, FUCKTOOTH #21*

### 1. Materialism.

I've been thinking about punk rock a lot these past few months. As you can tell from some of the other various writing in this issue, I have virtually no friends that are active in the punk community or even interested in it, at least on a local level. All information I get is from fanzines, mail and records. In some way, maybe that gives me a better perspective on things, an ability to get an "outside" point of view. Any involvement I've got with the punk scene is pretty much behind the scenes.

And with that perspective in mind, I've been watching where we (as "punks" or a loosely based "community" of people) are going, and frankly, it scares me. I feel threatened.

This is what I'm talking about: I've been involved in punk, as both a producer and consumer, since about 1989 or so. Back then, of course, punk was still shunned by the media, by mainstream society in general. Nobody gave a fuck who Green Day was. The same goes for 1991, when a friend and I collaborated on a fanzine, my first effort, a horribly done cut and paste job called CHICKEN FOX BLOOZE. And when I think back, writing to bands and zines and record labels I culled from tattered issues of MAXIMUMROCKNROLL, I realize that, for me at least, there was much more of a sense of community, in a lot of ways, then there is today. The line between producers of the things that we bought, and the consumers, those of us who bought them, were less defined and more personal. It seems that the music and zines that we bought were viewed that, and not so much as commodities or "products". That's what it seems like to me at least and we seem to be losing that and I feel threatened.

Much of it comes down to the accessibility punk has today. Our networks back in the early 90's were a hell of a lot more limited than they are today. The forums for people to get together, share ideas and communicate (outside of our geographic areas) were limited to zines, records, zines, the mail and the telephone. Today with larger zines (with high press runs and national distribution), technology the way it is ("find what you want on the Internet..."), and every boy or girl and their grandmother running a label, in a band, doing a zine, etc., we've gotten the opportunity to expand that network greatly. I mean that as a result of more consumers coming around, there seems an increase of commodity as well, people making things that we, as "punks", buy.

- Sorry about all the typos! Maybe I should get my own computer and save all of this stuff on disk...

You'd think that maybe this would bring about a sense of empowerment, that perhaps, with all of us able to know about each other and be able to reach each other with a stamp or phone call or e-mail, that this would improve the solidity of our community. I know I'm being idealistic here and talking about "community" in a broad sense, as a group of people loosely based together in a sense that we listen to this music, we read this zines and share some of the same ideals and interests and goals. And actually, I've never been that good at networking with people in person, I'm missing out on a lot, but as far as other aspects of communication, I do a lot of it.

But instead of expanding on these possibilities, more ideas abundant in our scene than ever before, we're ignoring a lot of that and simply consuming.

We are consumers. Our zines and records and shows, even down to those "Resist Authority" and "Smash the State" patches that adorn all those jackets, and all else, are ultimately products. They may contain emotions, ideas, whatever, but they are packaged to be sold and the minute I put money down for it, it's a product and I've become a consumer. **And I think I have a**

### responsibility as a consumer.

I don't know when it happened, maybe we've been doing it all along and I just haven't noticed, but I don't think so. When did all these things we do stop being presentations of our views, our dreams, hopes, frustrations, and start mimicing the industry we rail against? When I ordered a record through the mail, when did I stop getting thank you letters and start getting catalogs instead?

### When

### did the accessibility of our products start overriding that fact that we're people with things in common?

We're becoming more and more materialistic and less and less concerned with the ideas and the fact that we have the ability to touch each other's lives.

I could be an elitist asshole and say that the scene's been overridden by "posers", who could give a shit about "consumerism" or "commodities" or "community", who are just involved for the music and fashion, shopping mall rebellion, all that, but I'm not going to. Because some of those people may stick around and contribute something substantial.

I think the people who sell their products within the scene have just gotten too fucking smart and professional. Face it, we're all much more knowledgeable about how to run a business than we were ten or even five years ago. Things seem to have shifted to where we're a lot less idealistic and more businesslike, slick. Maybe



I'm just the naive, idealistic one, but MAXIMUMROCKNROLL has never been anything more than a networking tool for me. It is not a means to an end. I'm generalizing here, but that's the majority of what I'm seeing.

Again, I'm a consumer. As a result, I'm responsible for putting my money into projects that I feel still retain a bit of humanity to them.

I know, I know, it's the same old thing all over again. "Fuck this and fuck that, it's getting too big, too well known!" But it's how I feel. We've gotten to the point where we're relating to each other in a vendor/customer relationship, and that's all it is, but why can't we relate to each other on a more personal level, too?

I guess this is all to say that I miss a few things about what it was like for me "back in the day". All I see around today are social cliques, dress codes and instant judgements and it makes me want to get the fuck away from these so-called openminded people and wait for my mail to come. I miss the friendliness I once knew. The scene's grown, if nothing else there are more producers and consumers of our commodities than ever, and we've overcompensated. I took an order out in MAXIMUMROCKNROLL for my band's demo tape in early 1993. When I got orders for them, I didn't throw in a press kit. I sent the demo and a letter. Today, screw the classifieds, it's half page ads, full page ads, 8x10 promos, press kits. **When some**

**bands stopped printing their addresses on their records, I knew we were in trouble.**

The shitty thing is, I can't offer an alternative. I'm just pointing fingers. I can't really offer anything than that we need a shift in our perception. We need to reconsider just why we're producing and consuming the things that we are and the manner that we do it in. This whole punk thing has never been about just the music to me.

It's about people and the ideas they present.

Yeah, yeah, Insert Grateful Dead tune here, but do you see what I'm saying?

2. "I hear the music but where's the message?"

Zines about underwear don't inspire me. Songs about Bob Barker don't move me. I know, I'm coming very close to dictating what's right or wrong, etc. But it just confuses the hell out of me when I hear bands say, "We're not here to tell anybody anything. We just wanna play music." **What the fuck is that?** Even John fucking Mellencamp makes the pretense of offering some sort of social

**statement.** Sure, it's saturated between mundane love songs, but that's more than I can say for 90% of the bands prevalent today. A lot of so-called "punk" bands would be more at home opening for Bush, etc. Our actions don't exist in a void, they have repercussions. And so much of it, the possibility, seems wasted on things like if the seven inch is on colored vinyl. Fuck that, it's not for me. I call that blind consumerism. I call that apathy. I'm tackling two different issues here. One is how much emphasis is placed on the ownership of music, the possession of ideas in a convenient package, which is bullshit. Ideas are meant to be shared. Secondly is the general apathy prevalent in the music scene, people not concerned with a lot of issues that're affecting us, more interested in traditional ideas that rocknroll has been blabbering about for decades. I thought punk was an attempt to get past that, offer up an alternative to all the sterility of that. **A lot of what I see is**

**the same old shit packed in a more accessible and convenient**

**"rebellious" image.** I'm involved in this thing because it saved my fucking life. Is in the process of politicizing me. It means more to me than a picture disk or getting mentioned in fanzines.

I'm not saying that we need to throw out our Weston records and start touting Spitboy, but the bottom line is that this stuff means more to me than a stack of records or zines, means more than the ownership of property. I don't wanna show off my CD collection, I wanna communicate with people that feel like I do. Fuck barcodes. I want your laughter.

I remember the innocence. I rememebr buying a \$5 tape through the mail seven years ago, five years ago, last week and how through various chains of events the most inspiring people are in my life today as a result of it.

Punk isn't a meat market or a fashion show for me. It's not about dressing up. If other people are up to it, awesome. But that's not what I'm here for. It's about the presentation of ideas. The sharing of ideas. It's about the ability to change. The continuation of hope in a world that would oftentimes make me want to feel otherwise. A record will never change me or offer me anything, compared to what the preson behind it can.



small & passing

i bought a cola, nectarine & rolling  
papers today for four dollars,  
seventeen cents.  
four fucking dollars,  
a glass full of water, corn syrup,  
preservatives... a fruit that fits  
easily in one hand,  
some fucking gummed paper.  
four dollars.  
four dollars buys four pounds of pintos  
four dollars buys shoes,  
four dollars bleeds this age  
it is nothing  
it is small & passing, in the pocket  
in the register,  
like that,  
fast & when it has left you  
there's a cheap feeling of  
a few ounces of food in your hand,  
a toxic drink, some paper.  
it won't reverse.  
it won't ever find sense.

nathan beaty

# EULOGY WRITTEN YEARS IN ADVANCE

I'm writing this now, before grief fucks me up,  
not so you can see it, though I'll show it to you  
some night when we're drinking cherry vodka  
that has waited 8 days in a giant bowl for us  
to strain the fruit away, homemade and flowing  
like the poems and anecdotes we save  
for these occasions.

No.

I'm writing this so I'll know what to say  
when Death has stilled my tongue for days  
in mute rehearsal of my own long  
songlessness.

michael kriesel

from his  
chapbook,  
"Long  
Dark".

I rise,  
& tiny angels fall from me  
like from a Christmas tree —  
little demons flee  
gibbering among the leaves  
falling from my hair's  
long tangled dark.  
I rise  
from myself  
to myself,  
unable to transcend  
my own humanity,  
incapable of purity  
but perfectly myself,  
hearing the breeze  
in the brilliant dead leaves  
say this matter ballet  
could be its own reason,  
death my final lesson.

# AVOW

issue  
number  
eight.  
one  
dollar.



We  
must  
get  
down  
to  
the  
heart  
of  
the  
matter.

## 3 by keith

na than beaty drew this.





# CO STUME DAY

Freshman in high school, 1989. Halloween. We had a "costume day" where all the kids were allowed to dress up, you know, and I decided to do it. That summer my grandpa had given me a compound bow and a quiver full of arrows. (That summer was also a point in time when a few newspaper articles began to crop up in our town concerning that fact that there were a large amount of cats being shot in our neighborhood with a bow and arrow. I still swear to this day that it wasn't me, but I think my mom still has her suspicions. But I'm getting off track here.) So I had all these arrows and I came up with this great idea for a costume.

I chopped the tip of an arrow off with an ax we had in our backyard. Using a lot of duct tape, I taped the arrow to an undershirt I had on, so the arrow was sticking straight out of my chest. Then I cut a small hole in another shirt and put it on. The arrow slipped through the hole, and *viola!* I had an arrow sticking out of my chest. I tossed some fake blood around, all over my shirt and dotted my pants with it a bit. You know, the splatter effect. It looked awesome.

So I went to school. Felt pretty cool, I was really impressed with myself. I certainly, in my opinion, looked a lot more interesting than most of the kids, who were witches and vampires and princesses and shit like that. Ugh. I liked blood, myself.

So, inbetween classes, people everywhere, a goblin or witch or nun mixed in among the non-costumed kids. As I was walking to class this big senior jock guy stepped right in front of me. You know, one of those guys that you see in the halls, always talking about pussy and football. Laughs real loud. Probably a firm advocator of slavery and date rape. An asshole, basically. I despised the whole machismo mentality then, and I still do. So this guy looked at me and jammed his palm against the end of the arrow, digging the other end into the hollow of my chest. It hurt like a motherfucker. He looked at me, eyes twinkling, happy. A smile lifted the corners of his mouth.

"Did that hurt?"

I gritted my teeth. "No."

He did it again, even harder. A tear slipped out of the crner of my eye.

"How about that time?"

Some girls standing nearby had been watching the whole time. One of them laughed like she didn't really mean to and said, "Sean, you are such an asshole." He grinned at them and bobbed his head, yes, yes.

He turned back to me. "How about it? Did it hurt that time?"



"Yes."

He laughed and let me pass.

Seven years later and I'm sure he's very sucessful. A wife, college scholarships, suit and tie job, beer on Fridays, football on Sundays. Yeah, he's quite sucessful, I'm sure. Guys like him always are.

# KARATE & ABSOLUT VODKA

When I was going to art school in Seattle, I hung out with Casey and Scott a lot. Scott was kind of one of those psuedo-intellectual types. Apart from having incredible skill and talent, he was also one of those guys that pretty much fit the stereotypical art student mold. Casey, on the other hand, was just kind of abrasive. As in, odd, severely lacking social skills, etc. We'd be hanging out and he'd be totally normal and then out of the blue, he'd say something like, "I fucked your dad's PUSSY, Keith!" and then he'd cackle and poke me in the chest really hard. He pissed me off sometimes.

We all lived on Capitol Hill, pretty much within a 5 or 10 block radius from each other. Casey was from Nebraska (something that he got teased about mercilessly) and he came from money. His family owned a "vacation house" out on Woodby Island. Every once in a while we'd take the ferry over there, when his parents were away, and get drunk. His parents were always off to places like Paris and shit, so we were able to go over there fairly regularly.

This one night we went over there. I can't remember if I had any morning classes or not, or if Casey did, but I remember that Scott did. We just sat around listening to music and drinking a few beers, drawing and bullshitting. Casey was using some of Scott's pastels when Scott, who was just wandering around in the kitchen, found this half full bottle of Absolut in one of the cabinets. He started drinking it straight out of the bottle and showing me all these karate moves. Even shitfaced he was faster than me.

So Scott was just slamming all this vodka and hopping around, doing all this karate shit with me. Pretty soon, like, *real* soon, the bottle was only a quarter full. And it was a big bottle.

So we did karate and every minute or 2 he'd take this big slug. Casey started warning him to stop jumping around or he was going to puke. Scott got this big, drunk, shiteating grin on his face and slurs, "Nah, I'm fiine." And gave this weird little giggle. He took another slug off the bottle and there was so little left of it, I was amazed. That's when he totally started to feel it. His face fell and he kinda slurred, "I think I better lay down." He stumbled over to the couch and passed out. That was the first time in my life I actually saw someone who had a green face. Me and Casey laughed at him and drew some more. Casey was the one that was going to drive us home, so he'd stopped drinking a while before that. I kept on and was feeling half drunk myself.

Next thing, Scott's voice wafted over from the couch, "I'm gonna puke." Casey's parents would've disowned him from the family if someone had thrown up on the carpet, so Casey hauled ass into the kitchen and got this big garbage bag, this big white one, and opened it up. Scott leaned his head over the lip of the couch and hurled. I'm one of those people that've thrown up a lot in my day but can't stand it when other people do it, so I almost threw up myself. Over the next hour or so, Scott would pass out for a while, wake up, moan and puke. He moaned a lot, you know, those moans when you're fucked beyond belief and you think that this is it, this is the time where you're just going to die. Then it was time to catch the last ferry.

We dragged Scott to the car and put him in the backseat with his garbage bag of puke. He was so drunk he couldn't talk. We made it to the ferry, Scott moaning and throwing up the whole time.

While we were on the ferry, we started fucking around with the radio, finding all these different radio stations and we found this one that was nothing but the sound of this roaring waterfall. Scott started moaning, "No, no!" kind of barking it, and I cracked up and Casey cackled and then Scott totally threw up all over the place, some of it in the bag and some on himself and a whole bunch on the floorboards of the back seat.

Casey wasn't laughing anymore. He started going, "Awww, no! Awww, fuck! You're gonna clean that fucking puke up, Scott, you asshole!" And that made me laugh all the harder. And Casey kinda looks at me and goes, "What the fuck are you laughing at?" with this smile on his face that he was trying to hide. It was a good time.

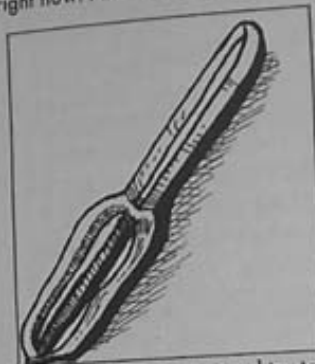
Finally we made it back to Seattle, and to Scott's apartment that he shared with his brother. We pulled him out of the backseat with his garbage bag. He'd thrown up all over one of his arms and the bottom of one pant leg. And I think Casey did end up cleaning the puke out of the back of his car. Again, I almost threw up and we definitely made sure Scott removed his bag from the car.

I went home and ended up talking to Scott on the phone the next night. He'd slept for about 5 hours that morning, made it to school and didn't even have a hangover. Just said that he'd been a little drowsy all day, that was all. People like that always pissed me off.

## BUKOWSKI BOOKS & MEXICAN WORRY DOLLS

I met her through my pal's girlfriend, and they were best friends too. It made things really complicated; we'd all hear things about each other and a lot of it was stuff that, in some cases, I'd rather not have heard. I tried really hard not to talk into it and it got so that I couldn't talk to her about my best friend and I couldn't talk to him about her, otherwise it'd get all tangled up and everybody would know everything about everybody in a few days. A big, crazy circle that really sucked.

I was living in a small studio apartment and I was fucking crazy with isolation and being scared of people and being sick of them at the same time. So this girl and I, we hung out. We were together a couple months. I bought her a flower and put it in a Pepsi bottle that sat on my desk until it rotted away and all the petals fell off. She took me out to dinner a lot. She bought me a Bukowski book just because. For Christmas she bought me some stuff, including the pants I'm wearing right now. And I bought her some stuff, like these little Mexican worry dolls that



came in this little box. You were supposed to tell each doll a worry that you had and then put them in the box and put the box under your pillow and in the morning all your worries would be gone. In retrospect, I should've kept the dolls. The Buk book is on the shelf with the rest of them.

I made lots of coffee for us and rarely left the house, whether she was there or not. She only smoked a few cigarettes a day, but when she was with me I'd laugh and try to get her to smoke as many as me. When we finally broke up, I guess she was getting pretty

close. She'd come over and try to get me to leave and go do something with her outside. I wouldn't. It was too hard to go outside and besides, it wasn't worth it. So we stayed at my place and listened to punk rock music that she hated.

Sometimes I would try to cook us dinner. She taught me how to peel potatoes with a knife and how to cook spaghetti noddles without having to break em in half to fit in the pot.

My first girlfriend in a hell of a long time, human, with her own assets and problems, and a good person, basically. So I tried not to feel trapped when she called every night. I tried to talk to her about stuff that I was afraid to talk about with her, but most of the time I couldn't. Or I didn't. I tried to be there for her when she needed me. I tried to be real around her. But I was too scared. Scared of what, I'm still not really sure. Intimacy, maybe. Sharing. I know, that sounds really lame, but there's stuff about me that only 2 or 3 people know about and I totally fucking

struggle, almost every day, to give and share with people as much as they give and share with me.

So one night I broke up with her. Cuz I couldn't give as much as I wanted to, I couldn't be there enough for her to allow me to be OK about it all. I told her I just couldn't do it any more and she sat there and cried for a while and the next few nights, you know, I walked around with that inside of me and I totally tasted regret and wondered how long this feeling of being a total piece of shit would last. And eventually it started to fade.

I see her around sometimes. She's going out with a guy that I know. It's weird when I see them around together and I wonder how I should feel and how I really feel. Haven't really come to any answers, but it doesn't bother me as much as it used to when I saw them around together.

As for me, I don't make spaghetti very often and I bought a potato peeler for a dollar after we broke up and she's one of those people that've fallen out of my life that I think about every once in a while.

# tō you

an open letter to anyone who has  
ever meant anything to me

comes and goes so fucking frequently these days, it's starting to get harder and harder to find the time to slow down enough and look around at every thing we've accomplished and all these amazing connections we've made. and i just don't know where we're heading anymore - because somewhere along the way, something got taken for granted, something was forgotten in the middle of growing up and moving on and no one seemed to notice. and yeah - it's becoming more and more commonplace to watch my friends move away, one by one, and fuck up again, just like i always knew they would, and then realize just how much hope i had lost in them and in myself. and that inspiration is starting to fade away - the same inspiration that used to be one of the few things we could count on to be there, one of the few things that kept us going - and it's starting to slip through our fingers. and i guess that's what growing up really is - not the continuous aging or learning or moving on. it's the loss. it's forgetting exactly what made you a kid in the first place, it's the realization of how good things used to be and how much you fucked them up as the years rolled by. and it's the realization that nothing quite mattered as much then as it does now. and it still matters a lot to me.

i'm the fortunate one. because i haven't given up on you yet - you wouldn't let me give up and give in and lose that drive, you wouldn't let me grow up into that role of stagnancy and bitterness. maybe things really wouldn't be any different, but i can't imagine just how fucked up i'd be without you. and the entire time, i've always had that inspiration - right in front of my fucking face - and whether you live down the broken brick street, or along the other coast, or across the waters, you are my inspiration. **you are inspiration.** thanks friends, for making this so fucking meaningful and memorable for your smiles and laughter and constant companionship. i don't know where i'd be without you. love always, mike

Hey, we've got some columns this issue! All right! Thanks much to all the columnists. I was hoping to have more people contribute columns but for one reason or another, they couldn't get their stuff in by the time the deadlines rolled around. Ah well, next time. Meanwhile, let's get on with it.

**ALEX ARNSDORF**

age: the kind that makes

justice a man holy

#### IMAGES:

littered alleyways  
congested freeways  
streets lined with bulging trash cans  
broken glass  
shining  
like diamond razor blades  
scattered on a beach  
no longer safe  
to tread in bare feet  
sick animals  
covered in an oily sheen  
kids splashing happily  
down stream a sign reads  
**CAUTION: NO SWIMMING  
CONTAMINATED WATER**  
miles upon miles of stumps  
standing cold and gray  
like grave stones  
in another forest graveyard  
a blood red sun  
setting  
behind a thick veil  
of rising smog  
mighty rivers  
no longer strong enough  
to reach the ocean...

#### IMAGES:

isles and isles  
of shrink wrap  
plastic wrap  
cardboard boxes

with pictures  
of smiling faces  
the perfect bowl of cereal  
voluptuous steak dinners  
shiny white teeth  
signs telling tales  
of affordable prices  
of purchased happiness  
health  
status  
security  
rows of houses shoulder to shoulder  
a t.v. set for each room  
closets and garages stuffed  
to the gills with unused stuff  
parking lots the size of city blocks  
filled with rows of new cars  
**CORRELATIONS:**  
(and hopefully resolutions)

I triple dog dare you to take a step outside, go for a walk, anywhere, open your eyes, look anew at your surroundings as if seeing them for the first time rather than through eyes dead from daily repetition and then tell me, please tell me truthfully you don't see the same (if it be possible).

As I walk (to the store, the post office, the beach, through the woods...) I see this, not my imagination but a naked reality, and I wonder as I wander how is this allowed to continue? How can people look at this every day and still not see, still not become incredibly outraged, disgusted, overwhelmed by this sublime grotesqueness. And it occurs to me that people do not see this because we are conditioned not to, through mass repetition these sights have become common place and accepted, through advertising, propaganda and t.v. we are convinced that we need this, this is progress, this is civilization, this is proof that we are superior, that we are in power. We are born into this. We are told not to question this, that this is how it is, accept it. But my eyes and my heart can not swallow this lie, and they scream and burn and call bullshit on the whole damn



thing, I cannot accept this and just go about my life not thinking about it, not questioning it, not trying to change it.

Then it occurs to me that it has been made too easy to let the pieces lie separate, to not put them together, to not find the cause and place the blame, because the fact of the matter is WE ARE TO BLAME. And instead of taking the responsibility and changing our lives and our system, we find it easier to ignore, to justify, to point our pathetic weaselly little fingers at everyone else ("It's not me man, it's the corporation's fault, it's the government's fault, it's progress' fault, it's bigger than me, it ain't me, it's not my problem!") It has been made convenient and affordable; it is made easy, to continue this path of destruction, so blindly we follow.

Because it is blatantly obvious that people are more apt to follow the easy way out I want to try and make it a little more hard to accept, I want to make it increasingly harder to ignore, I want to put the pieces together and make it easy to see how we are the problem, I want to infect you with my shame, my rage, my disgust, I want it to spread like a disease, or more appoinedly I want this rage to work like an antibody to fight the real disease.

"the higher a person flies  
the lower everyone else becomes"

Contrary to popular ignorance consumption and destruction are two sides of the same coin, hands down the one follows the other. And it is this duality that I would like bring close and put into the perspective of our every day lives, and put our every day lives into perspective of current world conditions.

High impact lifestyles  
this is a term that you are probably familiar with. The basic gist of the term is self-explanatory; a style of living that has heavily adverse affects on our environment (read our earth, our home). Yet despite our knowledge of this term and this concept we do little to relate it to

our personal lives, and rarely examine how our daily lives do impact the earth. In fact some people would be surprised to hear that yes in fact their life style is a high impact life style. It scares me to think of how many people, to one degree or another, are aware of different environmental problems of our times and profess to care about them, yet have no idea that the way they live their lives is directly responsible for many of those problems.

Well I hate to be the one to break it to you but if you live in the U.S. chances are you live a high impact lifestyle. I know this because the U.S. is one of the most affluent nations around. You can read "affluence" in two very different ways. From a corporation's economic point of view affluence is a good thing. Affluence = \$\$\$ to them, it means more people are buying and using more produced goods. A country becoming more affluent means more possibilities to market and sell their products, it means economic growth. But from an environmental point of view it is not such a pretty picture, it means fewer people making heavier draws on our world's limited resources, leaving less for the rest of existence. And somewhere in there, there is a big misinterpretation that affluence means a better standard of living, but that is a different story.

To give you an idea of the latter take of affluence here is a quote I recently came across: "Roughly 1.5 billion people in the world's consumer [affluent] class who drive automobiles, own refrigerators and televisions, and shop at malls consume the bulk of the world's fossil fuels, metals, wood products, and grain." This means roughly one quarter of the earth's population uses the majority of the world's produced goods! But wait it gets better. The U.S. (read US, you and me) is the cream of the crop. Listen to this, the U.S. (which is a mere 5% of the world's population) produces 26% of the gross world product and contributes 22.9% to the world's annual carbon emissions. These

used to oppose truth decan

figures show that 5% of the world's population is directly responsible for roughly one quarter of the world's environmental degradation. That's sick!

And what of it, so our country consumes a quarter of the world's goods, how does that relate directly to my lifestyle? Well if you eat a standard american diet, you require 800 kilograms of grain a year to live (due mostly to a meat and dairy based diet), as opposed to say the standard Indian diet which only requires 200 kilograms (because the majority of their calories come directly from grains). Taking a global perspective, it would look something like this: if everyone on the planet ate a similar diet to ours, the earth would only be able to feed 2.5 billion people. Meaning the other 3.3 billion would have nothing to eat. To add injury to insult, rather than our diet giving us good health, it gives us obesity (59% males and 53% females in this country are obese), cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, clogged arteries, and any number of other chronic illnesses (in '93 the U.S. spent \$100 billion on medical fees from such illnesses). It should also be known that the farming methods used to produce the required grain to sustain the world's current population are energy, water, and chemical intensive methods. These methods are destructive not only to the land farmed (by way of erosion, top soil depletion, salinization, the poisoning of water supplies, etc.), but also to the surrounding area's fauna and flora, fresh water supplies and the people who eat it. This means that every hamburger you eat is causing roughly four times the environmental destruction that an equivalent grain based dish (such as stir-fry) would cause.

In the last decade, we have seen the end of surplus grain production worldwide. The annual increase in grain production no longer exceeds the annual increase in world population. This is largely due to the amount of water

currently used to produce the world's grain, and the increasing demand for water by urban and industrial growth. A good example of this is the Colorado river (one of California's main water supplies), starting in the Rockies this river once flowed through southwest america gaining force until it reached the Gulf of California. Then a mighty river, it now loses water faster than it gains water and no longer reaches the Gulf. Sucked completely dry. Since California is one of the U.S.'s main producers of fruits and veggies it will be interesting to see which demand takes precedence: food production or urban growth, because there is apparently not going to be enough water for the growth of both. This means that every time a Californian flushes the toilet there is five less gallons of water to produce Sunkist oranges.

Then there is packaging, not only do our dietary habits require four times the amount of grain production and water usage, but by buying preprocessed foods we are assuring ourselves the maximum amount of energy and waste to produce the least amount of product. Here is an example of the amount of packaging waste our country produces. Per person, per day, every american throws away 4.4 pounds of municipal solid waste. In fact 1 out of every 10 dollars we spend goes to pay for packaging. Think about fast food, for one take-out meal alone you use a bag full of garbage. If you were to cook that meal at home, or eat at a restaurant that uses washable eating ware, that's one less bag full of waste, for the same amount of food (which probably tastes better than that cardboard crap in the first place). To give you an idea of the magnitude of our garbage production, it is estimated that by the year 2000 (that's not so far in the future anymore boys and grrrrs) 73% of our landfills will be closed because they have reached capacity! Our garbage does not magically disappear once it is taken by the garbage man, it may be out of sight and out of mind, but it

e them thar

is not out of our ecosystem. One very real problem with landfills, besides taking up space, is that they leak toxins into our ground water supply, in about two years the amount of toxin-leaking landfills will little less than double.

It is also estimated that the amount of plastics thrown away will increase 50% by 2000. Don't kid yourselves folks, just because you see recycle signs printed everywhere does not mean we are recycling. Less than 1% of plastics produced in this country are currently being recycled, 34% of the paper, 20% of the glass, and 34% of the metals. Overall, only 10% of our garbage is being recycled! That leaves 80% to land fills, and 10% to be incinerated, neither of which are eco-friendly. Recycling is better than landfills, but it still requires energy to transport and restructure waste to be used again. Direct reuse of packaging or avoiding unnecessary packaging as much as possible are much better options. "Paper or plastic?" the ultimate question. The ultimate answer, "Neither." Use a cloth bag.

It's a lot of little things that make a big difference when it comes to world degradation. Remember that next time you hop in a car to go shopping. Every time you participate in consumer amerika you are a part of the problem. There is no way to avoid this entirely, but through a little bit of forethought we can lessen our impact greatly, thus insuring the future generations (*Homo sapiens* or otherwise) of this planet a little more hope for a better life. This is not bigger than us, this is us, and there are viable options to this unnecessary destruction.

#### Facts, Quotes, and Inspiration:

State of the World 1997

Green Kitchen Handbook

by Annie Berthold-Bond

Daughters of Copper Woman

by Anne Cameron

(available at your local library)

Spectacle

by Theo Witsell  
Live Wild or Die  
Anarchy and Environmental Survival  
by Graham Purchase  
(available through  
Tree of Knowledge distro)  
Healthy newsletter

Alex and I started doing AVOW in Seattle a few years ago and he has been a frequent contributor since. He should have some articles coming out in other zines shortly, keep your eyes peeled. Write him, as his letters are fantastic and he's great for staying up until 2 am, discussing things like "community" and "holistic vs. linear thought", stuff like that.

not the seventh son

of a seventh son

Jenna Delorey

You could say she stayed with me when I saw sick.

The night before-not Armageddon, but-a speech for my high school class when there was no dignity to my tears, she gave me a pep talk and, contrary to school colors, a small gold and crimson ring she had used. I wasn't accustomed to wearing jewelry, but I tried on luck this once. The rabbit got to keep its foot.

When I was having a nervous breakdown in college but didn't know to call it that yet, she called to check on me when there was no one to notice if I was more butterfly or cocoon. But it's funny because the worse and worse I got, and the shorter and shorter my skirts got (trying to convince myself that I was carefree), the more colorful my clothes got (to trick myself into happiness). Or was it to match my scars? I can't remember. I did know I had to do good or die trying, stripped of the delusions of those rich kids

chasing after golf carts, getting bright red beamers wrapped in streamers on their sick, sweet 16, discussing the cost of gems like last night's Seinfeld episode. My silver spoon was the state; I was on the silver platter. I felt tenuous and increasingly like the spider's fly.

Pop quiz: How do you stop and smell the roses when there aren't any visible in your life? I was the queen of hearts, the master of ceremonies of not taking care of myself. Answer: No one ever talked about how to. No one ever hinted that being spiritually balanced was desirable or effective.

At this time, my mom sent me pleasures-packages equal to a big strawberry shaped and scented eraser-to make it all bearable a few days longer, when she should have sent tools: bulldozers and understanding. Of course, she didn't have the book learnin' to know how Jefferson himself said a periodic revolution keeps a country in check. She didn't know this too was my role in diplomacy. She was going by how you don't have much choice but to stay with your husband when you're pregnant and he leaves you in the house all day with only popcorn and no car or store for miles in a state where you don't know anyone because you just moved there. She'd forgotten that it can get so monotonous and evil that the first chance you get to scrape by in your own house and walk to the grocery store in winter or the Big Boys diner just to make a phone call, you take it. This is why she was angry-more angry at the position I was in than me-but accepted. Sometimes you need to take big mama steps when you're requested to take scissor steps. Sometimes you need new beginnings; you need to not see them as endings. Sometimes you need the right environment before you can develop a plan in a positive direction. All a self-imposed time-out ever did was a lot of good for everyone. She stopped ripping up my pictures.

When I came back home she bought

me this aroma therapeutic chakra shampoo. More than calming me, it created an instant mental connection, as signaling as a heartbeat. It's as poignant as the scented oil I wore walking to the pitch dark bus stop in early high school. I keep that drained bottle to symbolize solitude and loneliness; I keep her full bottle to remind me of her and how to get out of it.

I have a white-framed, curvy-edged, black and white photograph of a four generation female line in my family with me at the end of it. I tremble looking at it, thinking of wars, everything I don't know of their lives, everything I can still find out. Not knowing what blanks to fill in for others, I've wanted to time travel back to be the salve on my mom's knee. However, I've learned that I can only create magic in my own realm, and that I have to see the love in hers, that together this is a plenty tall order. Even if it means being as unglamorous as respecting her pushing around dirt in the playground of the glamorous in order to put food on the table and not wanting the same for me. When I'm crying in a French public telephone, I know who to call, you know who I've called, you know that my blood really is thicker in a way because of all the shared water.

Jenna does the zine *The Dangers Of Libel*, as well as being involved with Third Place, a youth-run youth center. Write her at [redacted]

Bob Penick

erraticism

dn pət - dn pət

I got out of the house for the first time in months last Wednesday. Caught Southern Culture On The Skids at a local bar. A great show, if you dig Fender



# to make suici-

guitars and trailer-trash satire. Not drinking, I was able to take in the crowd as well as the band. All the young women seemed beautiful, magic just into college. I realized that I've turned the corner onto late adulthood and became one of those pitiful old buggers leering at the skirts as they board the bus to the high school.

Aqualung, my friend, indeed.

The opening band was a psychobilly group from Fort Wayne, Indiana. Elvis on amphetamine. My friend Shelley loved them, bought a tape, got autographs, etc. Shortly thereafter, he nodded off into an alcoholic coma, coming to just in time for S.C.O.T.S.'s "Walk Like A Camel." Leaping to his feet, he nearly propelled his 45 year-old ass over the rail and down onto the dance floor. Caught up in the redneck madness, he lurched about and screamed, "AH WUNNA WOK!! Like ah cam-ul..." the rest of the evening.

There was a beautiful woman I watched as much as the band. Thirtyish, with frizzy blonde hair and a nice figure beneath her blue jeans. She was drunk (adorably so, I thought) and annoying her boyfriend by hanging off his neck trying to play kissy-face. He looked just like David Koresh.

"Trade places with me, you ingrate," I thought. All the while holding Shelley's belt to keep him in the balcony. By the encore the man had stalked off and the woman sat alone at a table. From my vantage point I could see him waiting for her in the back. Neither budged. It made me think of how we devalue things we're sure of: Food, health, loved ones.

Once through the egress, I let go of Shelley and buttoned my jacket against an increasingly cold night.

Bob Penick is the editor of the literary zine, Chance, as well as an excellent poet. Write him concerning chapbooks of his stuff he has available, or just because:



Some activist friends of mine called me up last month to tell me that the Klux Klan was planning to hold a big rally on Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday in Memphis, Tennessee (where King was assassinated). These friends of mine were involved in organizing a big counter-demonstration and were trying to persuade me to drive the 2 1/2 hours to Memphis and participate. I was a bit reluctant at first because I'd been to these Klan rallies in the past and the massive opposition always seems to give the Klan exactly what they want; media attention and a chance to be heard. I've often debated whether or not it would be more effective to just organize everyone to ignore them entirely, but then again that lets them organize without any opposition and I don't need the drawbacks of that approach explained to me.

So anyway, these same activists in Memphis have been running a pirate radio station called "Radio Free Memphis" for a while now and the FCC has been threatening to shut them down and has just stepped up the attack on the station (which offers news and analysis from an anarchist/anti-authoritarian perspective as well as music you won't hear on commercial radio). I've been wanting to interview them for Spectacle for a while now and figured I'd better get over there and do it now. We arranged to meet at the rally and then they'd take me to the station afterwards.

I conned my pal John, an accomplished photographer, to come along and snap some pictures and we set off. We arrived at the rally about 45 minutes after it started and I was amazed

at the scene we came upon. Four square blocks were closed off by cops in riot gear holding big wooden sticks. We walked a couple of blocks to where about 150 people were crowded around a barricade talking to police. The police were telling the crowd that they couldn't go down the street to the courthouse (the rally site) and that we'd have to walk 8 blocks around to the other side of the barricaded area. I was skeptical, thinking that each potential entry point would have a similar barricade with a similar story. Nonetheless we followed the jovial crowd on the half-mile trek to the alleged entry point.

When we finally arrived at the entrance, which did exist, there was two lines (one male, one female) and cops were searching everyone by patting them down and passing metal detectors over their bodies. My swiss army knife keychain was confiscated by a friendly policewoman who promised I could have it back upon leaving the rally if I would show my ID and give her my social security number. Thinking nothing would happen, I gave her my SSN and name and waited while they dug through John's backpack and camera bag. When they were done we headed down the street and merged into a crowd of about 2-3000 people there to protest the 30-40 Klansmen who were protected by 2-300 cops. The cops were armed to the teeth. They had full body armor, gas masks, balaclavas, machine guns, grenade launchers with tear gas grenades, riot sticks and these huge fire extinguishers full of pepper spray. At the front of the crowd were a bunch of cops on horses and infantry cops were everywhere else, on three sides of the crowd.

The racially mixed but predominantly black crowd chanted sporadically and the Klan, who had a big sound system, tried hard to incite them. John took some pictures as I wandered around looking for my friends. I spotted a big black and red anarchist flag in the distance and made

my way through the sea of people. Whaddaya know, these were my pals and we stood around and chanted and the Klan turned toward the crowd and said shit like "Look at all you stupid niggers! Look at ya!...Go back to Africa and swing in the trees, you monkeys!" The crowd started to get riled up and the chanting got more spirited, "Fuck the Klan!" etc. Someone threw a tomato at the Klan and that's when the shit just went crazy.

The cops at the front of the crowd charged in on horses, swinging their sticks. My memory of the next five or ten minutes is pretty blurry. Cans of tear gas started falling from the sky and thick clouds sent people running in all directions. Suddenly my eyes and throat were itching like crazy and I pulled my shirt up over my face hoping my asthma wouldn't incapacitate me. The cops along the sides opened these fire extinguishers of pepper spray but luckily I was far enough away to avoid them. Others were not so lucky. All of a sudden thousands of people were running back up the street fleeing the gas and the cops. The street was constricted in the middle by a big construction fence so there was a bottleneck in the street and lots of people were stuck on the side with the cops. As we ran toward safety, a bunch of pissed off people kicked down the construction fence and the next thing I knew bricks were flying through the windows of the adjacent bank and through cars parked along the street. As I looked back down the street I saw people lying unconscious here and there, face down, convulsing from the thick, burning gas.

To make a long story short, the Klan split the scene, the people tore up a bunch of businesses around the area (many of them small businesses that did nothing to the people who smashed them up), a bunch of people got hurt, a bunch of people got arrested, and the Memphis PD made off with my favorite swiss army knife. I heard that the cost of the police protection of the Klan and the damage to



the city were in the millions of dollars, billed to the Memphis taxpayers. The media crucified the protesters and vilified the Klan. The cops were portrayed as "using necessary force" etc. It was a huge victory for the cops and the Klan.

Luckily John and I never got split up and he got some good photos of the chaos. We wandered around taking photos of the aftermath for about a half hour until the police started tear gassing bystanders and we had to leave. By chance we stumbled upon my friends again. One person from their group had been arrested and everyone felt like shit from the tear gas and the miserable defeat. We went to the radio station and I interviewed the collective. They are being crushed by the system (please excuse the silly leftist rhetoric, but there's really not a better way to say it). Another crushing defeat for the forces of good. Each member of the collective could face up to a \$100,000 fine and some serious jail time. The station is 20 watts and has a broadcasting radius of about 3 miles on a good day. To even apply for an FCC license you must have at least 100 watts. This would cost an estimated \$100,000 to get the equipment and licenses required. As if the FCC would approve a license for an anti-authoritarian radio station.

After the interview we went out to eat and there was this redneck cop and his family eating in a booth behind us. He got a call on his mobile phone and I heard him say, "Yep. They didn't let us bring out the Uzis but we tear gassed the piss out of 'em!" Then he started laughing. Shit. We drove home sniffing and itching. John joked he thought they had faced the tear gas with the anthrax virus.

Another word of defeat (that might also explain my bummed out tone...): I woke up this morning to the NPR news telling me that the New Women's Health Clinic in Birmingham, Alabama was bombed last night. One person was killed and another was seriously injured. This was the first time anyone had been killed

in an "abortion clinic" bombing in the US. I spent a week in 1994 doing clinic defense at that clinic when Operation Rescue targeted Birmingham for its yearly siege. Damn, the word will sure kick your ass some days.

*Theo does the Incredible Zine Spectacle, as well as running Tree Of Knowledge, an independent zine and book mallorder service with hundreds of zines, books, shirts, newspapers and records available. Contact him at*



by  
nathan beaty

a culture of dominance. sex and sexuality. and why I jack off so much instead of talking to girls.

### Part number two

"Well, it's about time to stop this tide of violence against women. Build a new model. Tear down the other by refusing to follow. We're here standing up against years of tradition. We're beginning to see. They've been lying. We can learn a lot from each other by talking and listening. We challenge the way you talk. Is that the way you think? We can't stand your degradation. Only a joke? Well, these jokes hurt and make people feel like shit. If that's it, why would you want to be a part of it? Where do you fit in on this cycle of oppression? Time for a change." I SPY, "More Than A Joke"

I came out of my childhood years with almost no understanding of what intimacy is, barely understanding my own sexuality. Throughout the years, I never really gained the ability to interact with women on any sort of honest level. There was (and still is, to some degree) all this fear and these mind-games involved. Based on dominance.

Growing up, I never had a male role-model or "father figure" (god bless them nuclear families, eh?) around in my life. I don't remember discussing women with anyone as a kid and it wasn't even until I was almost out of my teens that I began to question the roles I'd been intrinsically assigned as a man.

So, I don't recall discussing my sexuality with anyone growing up, and in school I was taught the mechanics of male/female sex but was otherwise really left in the dark as far as how people (should) interact. I learned what I know

about sex from porn mags and late night television. Our culture promotes this, or would have us shut up about sex entirely, leaving us to figure it out in our own bedrooms, but gives us no opportunity to learn how to interact on any sort of intimate level with each other. Instead, the way I learned about it all, it was totally distorted sex and sexuality by enforcing the roles of the one who gets fucked and the one who does the fucking. It's a chase, it's dominance, it's force. Violence. There was nothing real about any of it. I was given these two dimensional fantasies, and due to my own blooming fear, insecurity and lack of education, these were my only guides on how to form relationships with women growing up.

And you know what happened? Years later, I'm scared shitless of people I'm attracted to and of women in general. I couldn't define the difference between sex and sexuality, and how to practice one and not the other, to save my fucking life.

When I was a kid, I bought the images, the falsity and distortion and bullshit and as a result, today I'm pretty much in the dark as to how to be intimate and honest to any large degree with the opposite sex. Hey, hey, welcome to buying into the gender roles for men. Have a nice stay.

Everything I was taught was bullshit. The gender roles that we've been assigned on what it means to be a man are lies. It's built on one person taking something from another, by force at the most and manipulation at the least. That's called oppression. It's about the hunt. Because women "want" it or "need" it or "deserve" it, right? That's what we're told and taught. Everyday I struggle to discover and dismantle the roles and rules I've been forced from this culture from virtually day one. I was never presented with any alternatives and wasn't able to seek them out until way after I'd made the purchase.

Yes, they sold it and I bought it, being too young to know it wasn't the truth. And I'm still paying for it today, maybe I always will, with the resulting loneliness and isolation from half the population. I mean, half the time, I don't know what to do. Caught between what I once knew and what I'm trying to understand.



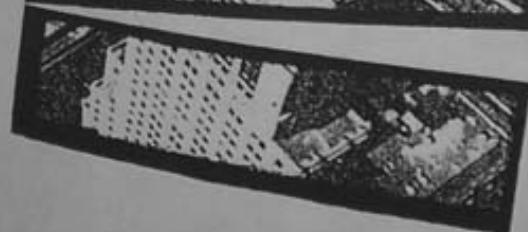
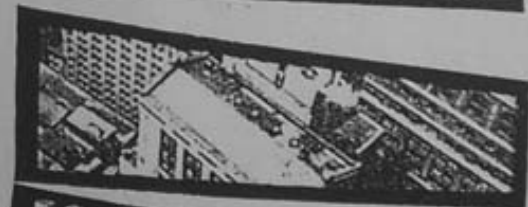
The time for placing blame on society and being resentful is past. What I'm trying to do today is learn what I should have learned years ago, growing up: how to base my relationships with women on trust and compassion rather than subtle manipulation, or to not interact with them at all. What's more is that the stuff I'm learning today is constantly battling with my fears and insecurities of the fantasy, bullshit puppetry I was (and am) bombarded with in mainstream culture. Hell, look at Baywatch, for fuck's sake. It was at one time the United States's #1 watched television program. We are being bombarded. And we aren't even aware of it. It is the status quo.

I am not getting down on sex. Sex is rad. What I'm talking about is trying to redefine my own gender role. How to communicate with women instead of bolting like I'd sometimes like to. Or disregarding them as less than or not important because they don't fit in with what I was taught a woman should look like, talk about, etc. I mean, sexism is based on fear, and I practice my fear of women a lot, sometimes without even being aware of it. Sometimes the dynamics of sexism are really brash, but sometimes they're subtle and hard to get a handle on.

I'm attempting to base my relationships with my friends and lovers on respect and this thing called trust. Christ, it's scary sometimes and feels like such a confusing uphill battle. But, see, I've wasted too much time and lost out on too many opportunities for growth and friendship to do otherwise. Time is moving on, and so are people.

I guess what I've learned through all of this is that a) I'm one sexist, fearful bastard sometimes, b) sometimes I'm not, so the ability to learn something different is there. Re-evaluate your relationships and what they're based on and what you've been taught that they should be based on. Chances are that what you've been taught and what is right for you might be two very different things.

**"The worst thing that being an artist could do to you would be that it would make you slightly unhappy constantly."  
J.D. Salinger, "De-Daumier-Smith's Blue Period"**







## "The Time The Eye-Stabbing, LSD Gobbling Hick Wanted To Kill Our Hero"

Welcome to the 3rd installment of the "Stories About Keith Getting His Ass Kicked" series. The last one ran in #7 and for one reason or another, these stories have been some of the most-mentioned things in this zine. I don't know, I think you're a bunch of sick, sadistic fuckers, but I do aim to please, so here we go...

It's what? 1991? I'm a sophomore in high school? Something like that. Totally disconnected from everybody, no real friends, etc. Hanging out with these kids this one night, somehow I get rounded up with these kids. The popular kids. The boys all surf and play football and the girls do the cheerleading thing and look gorgeous and make the honor roll. And I'm the kid with fucked up hair and zits and torn pants listening to the Clash in my bedroom one minute and the next minute I'm in some girl's minivan with seven or eight of these cool kids. You know the drill. I have no idea how the hell I got there.

I grew up in a small coastal fishing town. Surfing, tourist industry. Six miles away is a mill and lots of cowboys. There's about five or six of us into punk rock and it's a time when colored hair will get you the "freak" and/or "faggot" taunt and burly guys with chew in their mouth getting in your face asking you what the fuck. Like I said, you know the drill.

So these kids, these popular, cool kids, have taken the trouble to fill up three boxes full of water balloons. One for each row of seats. I'm in the middle row, smashed up between the window, which is open, and this football player named Matt, who's caused me insurmountable amounts of grief since the third grade. But tonight, you know, it's allright. Tonight I'm one among many, I'm fitting in and it's allright. The box of water balloons rests at my feet.

We're driving along Highway 101, which runs right through the mid-



dle of our town, looking for a suitable target. Nobody has thrown anything yet.

And then I see it: A 4x4 with big wheels, big lights over the hood, the whole bit. Might have even been a gun rack. Actually, in retrospect, I'm sure there was a gun rack. Anyway, the point is: target sighted.

I pick up a balloon, a yellow one, I think, a nice big one, fat with water and huck it out the window. The truck is coming the other way along 101. Missile fired.

It's one of those few times where God smiles down in his Wisdom, Dark Humor or Pure Malice, and this *one time* grants me incredible accuracy.

Now, not only does the water balloon go near the approximate vicinity of said monster truck, it goes *inside* the open driver's side window, exploding *inside the fucking cab of the truck*.



And as I'm throwing the balloon, as I'm releasing it, two or three of the people inside our vehicle scream at me in unison, in slow motion like in a film, "No! That's Paul Martin's truck!" Point of interest: Every town has a town crazy. More than likely there's more than one. One of ours was the aforementioned Paul Martin. At the time, our dear friend Paul was twenty-four years old. He was a crazyass kid who'd developed a taste for LSD over the years. He loved fighting, absolutely loved it. There'd been a series of skirmishes in our town a few years previous to this between the hicks and the freaks (which included punks, skaters, kids of questionable sexuality, etc. Even with all those genres included, it was usually about five hicks beating the hell out of one lone kid. You know the drill.) Paul Martin, during one of these skirmishes, apparently stabbed a kid in the eye with a pencil or some such shit. And once he punched a teacher out and got expelled. All this is to say that Paul Martin was not one to be fucked with. He was someone you avoided. And, obviously, he was not one you threw water balloons at. Not only had I thrown one at him, I'd thrown one that had exploded *inside of his fucking truck*.

I was dead. Obviously.

One and a half seconds after the balloon explodes inside his cab, Paul Martin pulls a U-Turn on the highway and speeds after us. We are all in a panic. People are screaming, people are laughing. Paul Martin is gaining on us. Matt, next to me, is laughing his ass off and screaming in my ear through all the commotion, "He's gonna fucking kill you! You're so dead! Ahahahaha!"

I, at this time, am stifling a great urge to both cry and piss my pants. I feel as if a gross misunderstanding has taken place. I couldn't even hit a single in T-ball, what's up with this waterballoon going inside his truck? What cosmic forces have aligned against me?

We keep going along, but we're not picking up any speed and he's right behind us. Eight of us in a minivan and he's in a four by four. People start talking. Someone proposes that we just pull over somewhere. I vehemently protest this idea.

"He's just going to follow us until we run out of gas, Keith." Someone tells me this matter of factly, as if my life is not at stake. I am not feeling like I'm one among many anymore. I'm feeling like a monkey with a huge red target painted on his ass with a **PLEASE KICK THE EVERLIVING SHIT OUT OF ME** sign taped to his forehead. I am terrified and Matt still keeps laughing about how Paul Martin is gonna fucking kill me.

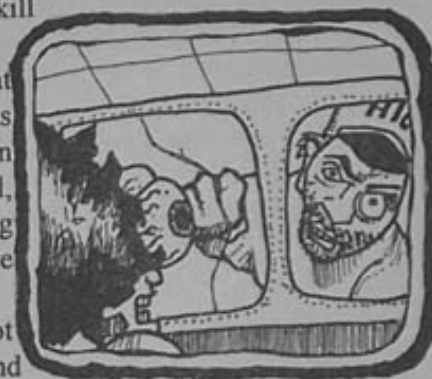
We finally pull into the parking lot of the armory and Paul Martin screeches in after us, screaming to a halt and jumping out of his truck. He is absolutely crazy. He starts running around the van, wildeyed, screaming "Who fucking threw it? Who threw it?" We close all the windows.

Matt gives me up when Paul approaches our window. Matt yells at him through the glass, pointing to me, "He threw it! But he's drunk!" I wasn't drunk but at least it was something. It just might work.

"Well, I'm drunk too, motherfucker!" Paul screams and punches the window in front of my face. A small silvery crack appears in the glass.

OK, so that wasn't going to work. My heart, at this time, is about to punch through my neck. My balls tell the rest of my body to run for their lives and they shrivel up into my stomach.

Paul skulks around the vehicle for a minute or two, occasionally pointing at me and telling me to come outside. The other members of our



troupe try to convince me to go outside. They just want to get out of there and have no problem throwing me to the wolves to do it. Compassion for K... one of the fuckups? Unity in the 10th grade? Yeah, right.

Right about the time my supposed comrades are discussing my departure, another pickup pulls into the parking lot. This truck belongs to Scott. Something or other. I've since forgotten his last name, but he's another tower crazy. Just my luck. Between the two of them, I figure I've got, as a minimum, a lengthy hospital stay coming to me. No shit. But something miraculous happens: Scott arrives and Paul loses interest. They shoot the shit for a minute or two, Paul sidled up to the side of Scott's truck. And without a backward glance, Paul gets into his truck and roars off, following Scott. I've never seen him since.

Normally this would be the end of the story. But as they were dropping me off (my career as a waterballoon thrower was done), I got out of the van and Matt, that same motherfucker, shut my hand in the sliding side door of the van. I mean, all four fingers were in the door as it latched closed. I screamed. Matt locked the door, my hand still shut in it, that's how bad it was. The door was locked with my hand shut inside it. I screamed again and Matt laughed. Jeff, in the front passenger looked back at me and said, "Shut the fuck up, Rosson. Knock it off." The pain was pretty immense and I started growling.

They finally realized I wasn't kidding and opened the door, freeing me. I walked into my house, clutching my wounded hand to my chest. The first two fingers were split open and already swelling up. They would look like hunks of sausage by morning.

I put *Give Em Enough Rope* in the tape deck and crawled into bed. "Man, fuck everybody," I said, eventually falling asleep.



## PUNK HEROES, PUNK VILLAINS

I was having a good time, rocking out and watching the band. They were sloppy and hilarious, falling all over each other. I was jumping around with a dumb, shiteating grin on my face, thinking how there was no place I'd rather be.

And then the lights went out. The only illumination came from the cherries of two dozen cigarettes being smoked. Somebody from the band, maybe the bass player, murmured, "What the fuck's going on?"

The next thing I knew, some kid threw the door of the club open. His eyes were bugged out and his body was crawling with lice. The glare from the streetlights outside shone on the kid. The lice, thousands of em, hung on his skin like little bits of confetti.

"Holy shit, what happened to you?" someone asked.

"It's Dog Vomit!" the kid screamed. "He and the Nihilist are outside! They cut the power and they're about to come in!"

Pandemonium ensued, kids running around everywhere, screaming. Slamming into each other in the dark. Trying to pack up their merchandise, trying to find a back door. I heard some kid outside scream, "No! Not the Living 'Hawk!'" Another kid fallen victim to Dog Vomit's hair.

And then, out of nowhere, there stood Firestorm, six and a half feet tall, adorned with X's, his Louisville Slugger catching glints of light from outside. And next to him, the Veganator. He clutched a sharpened carrot in one hand, a *Why Vegan?* pamphlet in the other. A bandolier of soy patties hung around his chest.

"Where are they?" Firestorm asked.

"They're outside, man," someone said. "They're infecting people with crabs and throwing up on people and shit."

The Veganator looked at his ally. Firestorm nodded and they walked towards the door. Towards Dog Vomit and the Nihilist.

Firestorm kissed his bat. The Veganator readied a soy patty.

"Let's go fuck some shit up."



# PUNK HEROES , PUNK VILLAINS



## CRYBABY



**ORIGIN:** Little is known about CRYBABY's past, other than the fact that he had terrible acne in high school and has always been horribly sensitive. Emo gives him an excuse to cry and talk about old girlfriends.

**POWERS:** Drowns you in tears after he disorients you with vague statements about his hands and what he "should have done."

**WEAKNESSES:** Disinterest and/or rejection.

**ARCHRIVALS:** THE NIHILIST.

**WEAPONS:** Argyle sweater and Buddy Holly glasses.

**QUOTE:** "The air caught fire as I walked past the she of my head, the time I fell, the time the buildings could have felt something, anything. Oh."

## THE DROOLING HUNTER

**ORIGIN:** Used to collect porcelain horses until she ran across the review section in an old issue of *MaximumRocknRoll*. Record collecting appeals to her sense of order.

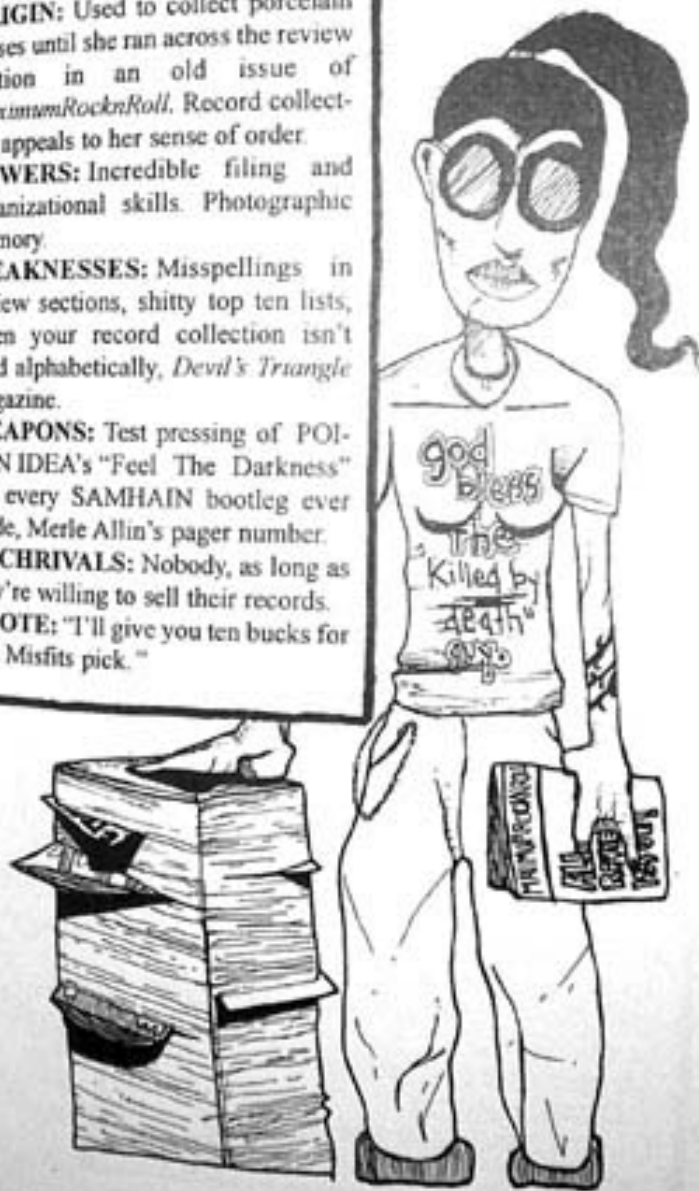
**POWERS:** Incredible filing and organizational skills. Photographic memory.

**WEAKNESSES:** Misspellings in review sections, shitty top ten lists, when your record collection isn't filed alphabetically, *Devil's Triangle* magazine.

**WEAPONS:** Test pressing of POISON IDEA's "Feel The Darkness" LP, every SAMHAIN bootleg ever made, Merle Allin's pager number.

**ARCHRIVALS:** Nobody, as long as they're willing to sell their records.

**QUOTE:** "I'll give you ten bucks for that Misfits pick."



## THE VEGANATOR



**ORIGIN:** Had to read Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* in high school.  
**POWERS:** Can transmit the pain of all suffering animals through skin contact.  
**WEAKNESSES:** Drive-thru windows at fast food chains.  
**WEAPONS:** PETA pamphlets, ice hard soy patties.  
**ARCH RIVALS:** CAPTAIN APATHY, THE NIHILIST.  
**QUOTE:** "Taco Bell ain't punk, fucker."

## GOOD INTENTIONS BOY



**ORIGINS:** Has always meant well. He's what's known as a "two-inning ball player." Starts something and then just loses steam. A good kid who people desperately hope will one day get his shit together.

**POWERS:** The ability to be totally convincing and inspired, getting halfway through a project and then flaking out.

**WEAKNESSES:** Zines, bands, looking at the contact addresses in an issue of *Book Your Own Fucking Life*. All these things make him want to start projects that he will never finish.

**WEAPONS:** Paper and pen, a telephone, his mouth; anything that will get him in contact with people that he will eventually fuck over unintentionally.

**ARCHRIVALS:** BACKINTHE-DAY, THE NIHILIST.

**QUOTE:** "It, um...didn't really work out but I'll try to get you the money I owe you pretty soon..."



## FIRESTORM



**ORIGIN:** FIRESTORM is a former jock who got sucked into the world of drugs and teenage drinking, until he found "the edge."

**POWERS:** Kickboxes your head in while telling you it's "for your own good."

**WEAKNESSES:** Secondhand smoke.

**ARCHRIVALS:** CRY BABY, THE NIHILIST, DOG VOMIT.

**WEAPONS:** Louisville Slugger adorned with x's.

**QUOTE:** "Break the habit or I'll break you."

## THE NIHILIST



**ORIGIN:** Her parents were hippies. That's all.

**POWERS:** Looks at you and all hope, motivation and will to live is automatically obliterated.

**WEAKNESSES:** Light incense. Brings up repressed memories of searching for "Love's frequency on the color scale" as a child.

**WEAPONS:** Beer bottles, vague stares.

**ARCHRIVALS:** GOOD INTENTIONS BOY, BACKINTHEDAY, THE ENCYCLOPEDIA, THE VEGANATOR, FIRESTORM, CRYBABY, POSI-CORE.

**QUOTE:** "Eat shit and die."

**ORIGIN:** Used to be goth.

**POWERS:** Naivete, a shit-eating grin, the Posi-Crew, group hugs.

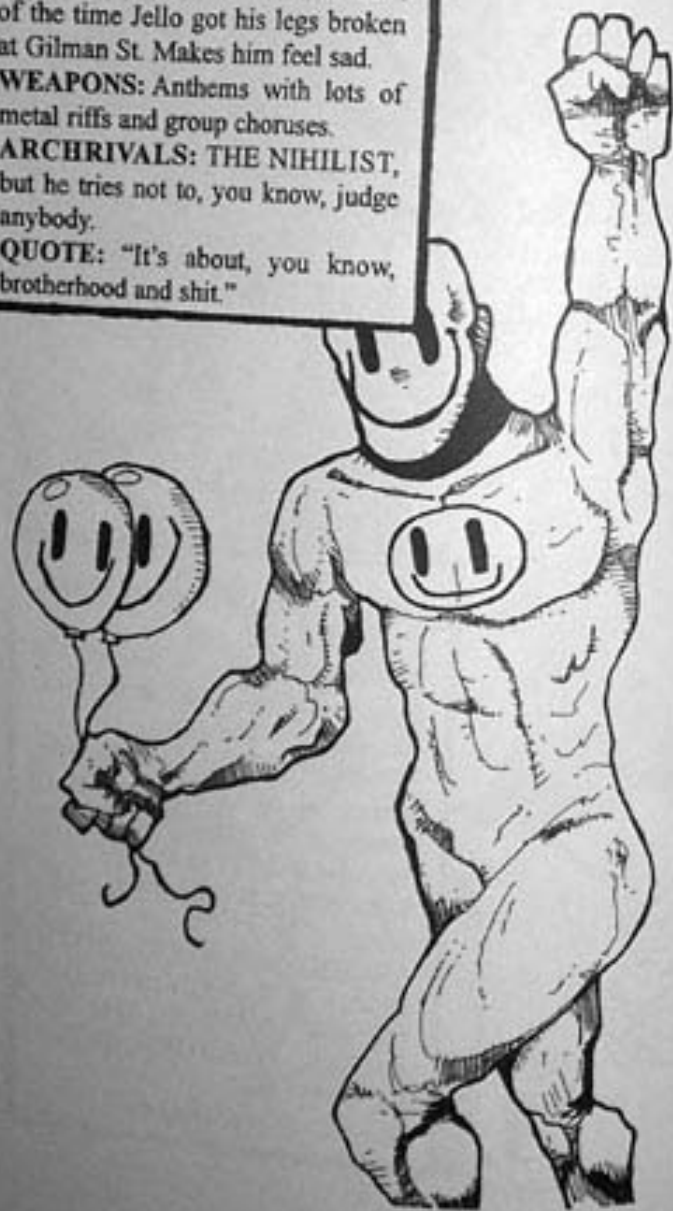
**WEAKNESSES:** Just remind him of the time Jello got his legs broken at Gilman St. Makes him feel sad.

**WEAPONS:** Anthems with lots of metal riffs and group choruses.

**ARCHRIVALS:** THE NIHILIST, but he tries not to, you know, judge anybody.

**QUOTE:** "It's about, you know, brotherhood and shit."

## POSI-CORE



## BACKINTHEDAY

**ORIGIN:** BACKINTHEDAY was a member of bands featuring people who later went on to form BLACK FLAG, X, MINOR THREAT, DEAD BOYS, YOUTH OF TODAY, MISFITS and THE CLASH. He was the drummer. Ever heard of him? Me neither. He's the one that now stands in the back of the show with his arms folded, scowling.

**POWERS:** Confuses you with his blurry, old tattoos and then decapitates you with the first BAD BRAINS 7".

**WEAKNESSES:** Just mention Ian Mackaye or Henry Rollins and see what happens.

**ARCHRIVALS:** GOOD INTENTIONS BOY.

**WEAPONS:** Extensive 7" collection and 9 Hefty bags worth of old flyers.

**QUOTE:** "There hasn't been a fucking punk band since the fucking AVENGERS broke up. I ever tell you about the time GG Allin touched my butt on accident?"



## CAPTAIN APATHY

**ORIGIN:** CAPTAIN APATHY roams the suburbs. His father is a heart surgeon, his mother a divorce lawyer. He drives a Suburban. He doesn't read the lyrics but thinks the music "kicks ass."

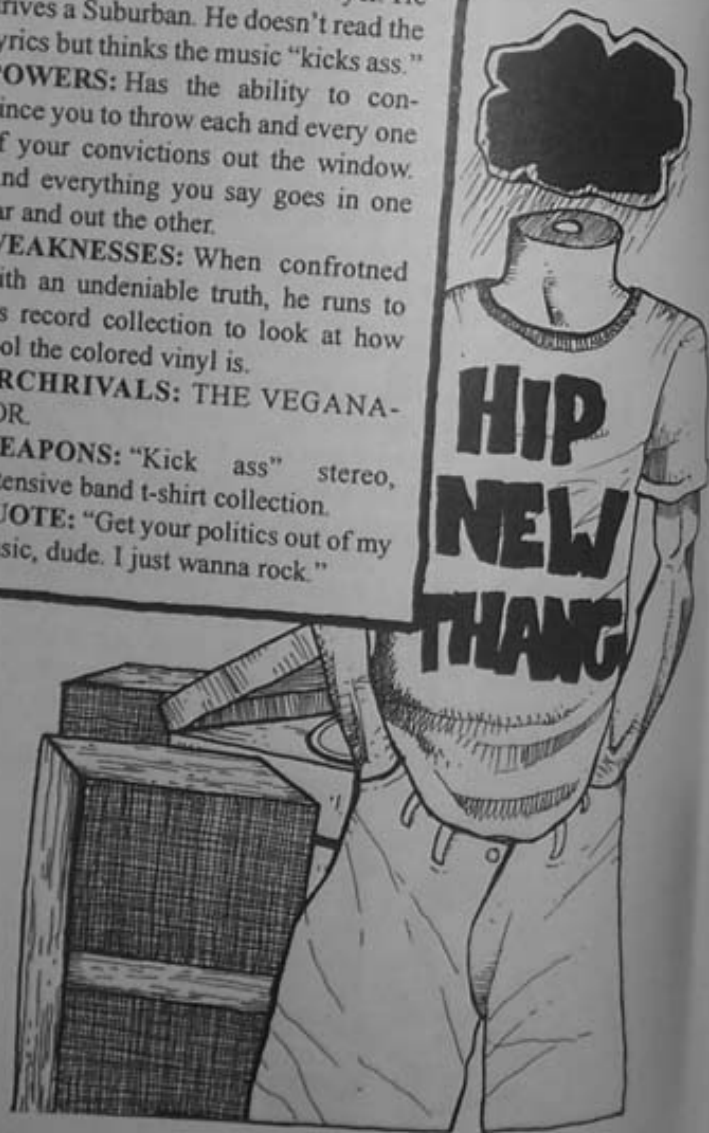
**POWERS:** Has the ability to convince you to throw each and every one of your convictions out the window. And everything you say goes in one ear and out the other.

**WEAKNESSES:** When confronted with an undeniable truth, he runs to his record collection to look at how cool the colored vinyl is.

**ARCHRIVALS:** THE VEGANATOR.

**WEAPONS:** "Kick ass" stereo, extensive band t-shirt collection.

**QUOTE:** "Get your politics out of my music, dude. I just wanna rock."

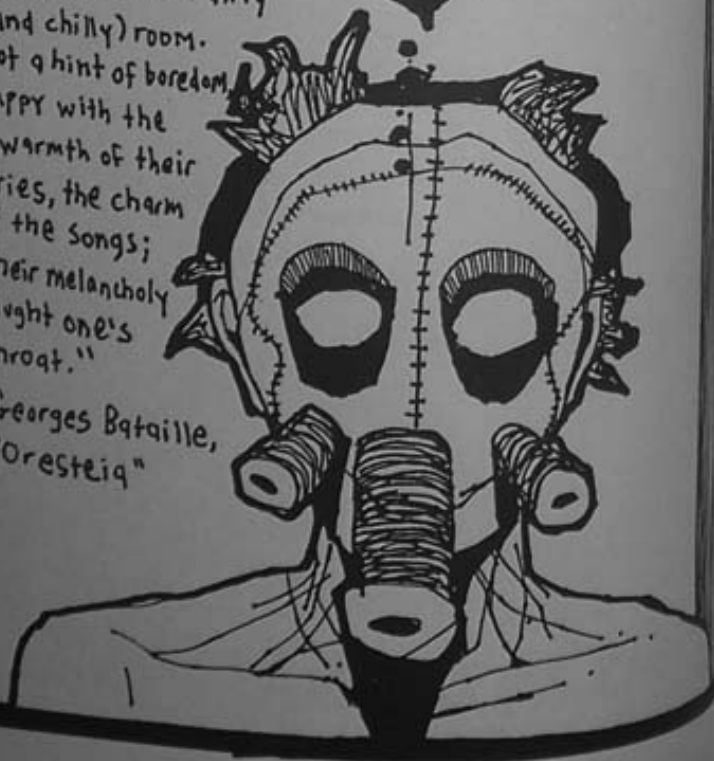






"I was happy to listen to their life, scribbling in my notebook, lying in bed in a dirty (and chilly) room. Not a hint of boredom. happy with the warmth of their cries, the charm of the songs; their melancholy caught one's throat."

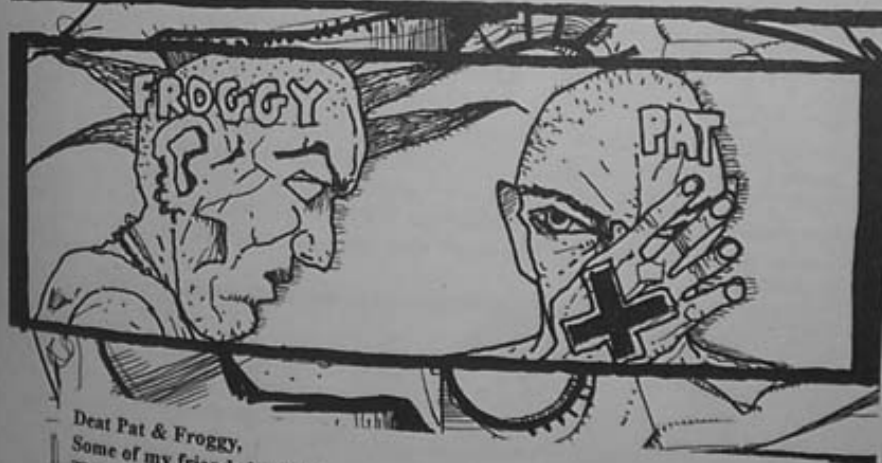
-Georges Bataille, "Oresteia"



# TEEN ADVICE

## WITH

## FROGGY & PAT!



Dear Pat & Froggy,

Some of my friends have been pressuring me lately to smoke marijuana. They call it "the Dank Chronic" but I totally know what they're talking about. But I'm totally punk. And there's totally tons of kick butt punk songs about drinking, but I don't know of any about smoking pot. So, my question to you guys is, is it unpunk to smoke marijuana?

Dazed About Being Confused  
Chicago, IL



Dear Dazed,

YOU ARE A FUCKING HIPPIE. Even *thinking* about pot makes you a fucking hippie. I think you need to reevaluate a few things, like why the fuck you're breathing. I swear to God, if I ever see you on the street, I'm kicking your "hackysacks" all the way up your fucking neck. Hippie.

Froggy

Dazed,

I don't know about you, but I sure as heck don't know any "kick butt" songs about drinking. I suppose you like "kick butt" songs about killing animals, too, right? What about if I threw your little sister into a meat grinder, buddy? Would that "kick butt?"

PAT

Dear Froggy,

My problem is my parents. They're cool but they suck. They say that my music is void of any melody, talent or skill. I was totally playing my JOEY AND THE DOG BISCUITS 7" the other night and my dad came in. He was all like, "Dear, you know your mother and I love you, but this music sounds like shit." I was like, "No way!" How can I make my parents understand?

Wild Girl Raised By Squares And Stuff  
Tulsa, OK

Dear Wild Girl,

Though it's definitely *not* punk to quote a band that isn't punk, I'm going to quote someone who isn't punk. I believe it was the Fresh Prince that once said, "Parents just don't have a fucking clue." Or something. Just say "Whatever" when they fuck with you, that's what I'd do. Then if they still mess with you, just punch them so hard and go get totally fucked up.

Froggy

Dear Froggy,

My older brother just finished his first year of college. In high school, he got straight A's, was on varsity football, punched out gay people all the time and got laid every weekend. I'm feeling pressure from my parents to be more like him. My mom says, "I wish we had a clone of your brother living here instead of you," so it's not like I'm imagining it or anything. My dad says, "We should have smothered you with a pillow when you were a baby." But I don't want to succeed like them! I'm going to fight the system til my dying day, you guys, and I don't give a fuck what they say! Fuck racism! Fuck the government! Punk til death! But I'm only fourteen and I still have to live with my parents. What should I do?

Under The Roof Of The (Wo)Man  
Boulder, CO

Dear Under the Roof,

The first course of action is realizing that it's *not your fault*. Your parents are assholes and your brother sounds like a dipshit jock. Beating up gay people, what the fuck is that? That's fucked up. And they want you to be more like him? Fuck that. My advice, if you really want to show them, is to do this: one night, when you're all at dinner, just be like, "Hey, Mom, Dad, I'm gay!" And then just start totally punching yourself at the table, calling yourself bad names and stuff. See how they like that. OK, later, Chewy just showed up with some butane, I'm outta here.

Froggy

Dear Pat & Froggy,

I'm nineteen years old and have had the same boyfriend for almost six months. He's a really great guy and all, but we're totally different. He keeps wanting to have sex and I haven't yet. I'm vegan and straightedge and am into animal liberation and stuff. He's into the Murder City Devils and gets drunk and huffs butane out of paper bags and he's way older, like thirty two. What should I do-I'm worried that if I don't have sex soon he'll leave, but maybe we're just too different politically.

Heck If I Know,  
San Leandro, CA

Heck,

If you don't have sex soon, he'll leave? Sounds like a swell guy. Monogamy is dumb. It's a tool perpetrated by the Man, meant to keep our genitalia locked in oppression. Duh. Fuck him, fuck your mailman, fuck the chick selling you garlic tofu at your hippy vegan co-op for all I care. I'm gonna go huff some butane.

Frogsy

## KEITH GETS HIS ASS KICKED.

AGAIN.

Welcome to the 4th installment of "The Time Keith Got His Ass Beat" series. The story is, of course, true. The year is 1990. The setting is Newport, Oregon, a small coastal fishing town that also relies heavily on the logging and tourist trades. It was a small town and "punk" wasn't quite as cool back then as it may be now. Ah, youth...

### THE CHARACTERS:



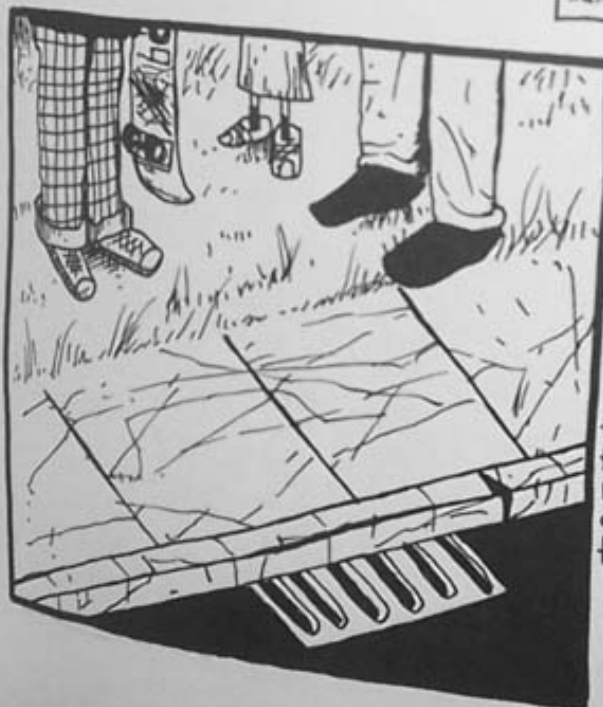
RACHEL: Nominal part of the story, really.



COLLIN: The cool, older punk rock kid.



KEITH: The portly, bezzie'd hero. 15 years old, huge hair. Can't skateboard.



It is a mild spring evening on the coast. Collin, Rachel and Keith decide to trek the two blocks from Collin's house to the Performing Arts Center to play, of all things, hackysack. The Performing Arts Center provides excellent lighting and protection from the cold ocean breeze, two things essential to night hackysack. Little did they know the danger that awaited them...





You'd think that a mere two blocks would be nothing, no threat of violence or harassment. But again, this is 1990, a pre-Green-Day-loving World. And it's a sleepy lumber town with red necks galore. Our trio is spotted.

It turns out Collin's neighbors are three hicks sharing a case or two of beer on their front porch. Keith, being rear, literally blind to it all, searching for the ever-elusive Ollie and singing Cryptic Slaughter lyrics to himself.



One of the hicks approaches Collin and asks him if he's a skate boarder, to which Collin affirms. "I don't like skate boarders," the hick says, poking Collin in the chest with a finger for emphasis. The rednecks on the porch chuckle. "Hey, that's great," Collin says, "I don't want to fight." Things begin to happen very fast for our soon-to-be-fallen hero, Keith. Thus far oblivious, Keith picks up his skateboard as the hick approaches.



The hick stands directly in front of him and incredibly, asks him, "what the fuck he's looking at." Keith mutters "Nothing" and wishes he was Henry Rollins.



Keith rises to one knee and sees blood falling from his head. The hillbillies are laughing. His eyebrow is split open and blood is pouring onto his checkered pants.



He turns rabbit, running the way he came, back to Collin's. He knocks politely on the front door, blood covering half of his face. Collin's mother answers.



She runs out the door, freaking out, thinking Collin's also getting his ass kicked. Luckily, he and Rachel are right behind Keith. She calls the police while their housemate fixes Keith up in the bathroom. Keith's misfit shirt looks badass with real blood all over the skull.

The police come and go over to the Hillbilly House with Collin. The redneck, who was 25 and had a lengthy record of assault convictions, tried to convince the cops that Keith started the fight. The police laugh and arrest him.

#### ENDNOTES:

The guy spent the night in jail, was fined a lot of money and had to go to AA meetings. I never got stitches and now have a nice scar. Last I heard, Collin was a member of the Church of Satan and is an awesome tattoo artist in San Francisco. I never learned how to ollie but have blossomed into quite the handsome devil.

## THE CAST



## THE KEY



**3. TONY:** Essentially, he's the "bad guy." He's the tireless and persistent soundtrack of bullshit that attempts to negate just about every one of Keith's thoughts or actions. A big asshole.

**4. KEITH:** The weird fanzine editor guy. He's trying his best, really.

**5. PERRY:** Basically, he's the physical embodiment of Keith's conscience. He also tries his best, and attempts to chastise Tony. Unfortunately, he's really little and has no arms.









## RUN COCKroACH ruN

I told Jeff how I've got cockroaches in my apartment. I was stressed out, grassed out. Jeff was unimpressed. "Yeah," he says, "it's kind of weird when you're laying there and one crawls across your chest. It's like, 'Hey there.'"

Usually Jeff is pretty sympathetic. But hell, he's been a true fisherman, so I can't really expect some guy that's stabbed huge fish in the brain with an icepick and then sliced their throats to get too worked up over the random cockroach I see scurrying by.

Still, that doesn't negate the fact that bugs fucking terrify me. I mean, I'm scared of a lot of things, but bugs can send me into a state that's pretty near terror. And bugs fucking *love* me. Bees buzz around me, flies are constantly divingbombling me. I've seen an albino daddy longlegs as large as my fist. There's a scar on my leg that looks like a gunshot wound: a brown recluse spider bit me when I was 15. People die from that sort of times. Their venom rots flesh before it scabs over. I had to take antibiotics for a month before the scab fell off.

And now I move into a new apartment and there's cockroaches. Due to the fact that I'm legally blind and have tunnel vision, a bug is usually crawling on me, or about to, before I realize it's there. I have virtually no peripheral vision, so I can't see them until they're practically scurrying up my ass. There's a terrible sense of invasion when you roll over in bed and there's some insect crawling on the wall two inches in front of your face.

Henry Rollins recorded this spoken word thing where he talked about how his place was infested with cockroaches. He smashed this pregnant one and it kept running away, its guts hanging out and dragging behind it. He talked about how it just kept moving. He related it to people, how some people can't even get up in the morning and mail a letter, and here's this bug that just keeps moving, despite half of its body hanging inside of it. He sort of made that cockroach seem almost noble in its sense of purpose.

Which, you know, that's great for him. Terrific. In fact, out of respect to the cockroach nation and admiration for Hank, I hereby petition all the roaches in my place to put on their winter coats and travel down south to Silverlake, California and pay old Henry a visit. Forever.

And get the fuck out of my sight.

## COOL AS ICE

Here at the Shanghai Tunnel, I'm on my fourth of fifth pint and I'm feeling it. The girl from the bar downstairs has come up the steps and is walking towards the door, passing our table on the way out.

She's got dark hair and one of those shirts held together by straps. I've found myself looking at her each time I've gone downstairs for another beer. She walks toward the door and I nod at her, wave her over. She walks toward me, polite and interested.

"Excuse me," I say, "I saw you downstairs and I just wanted to tell you. I think you're gorgeous."

She laughs and scrutinizes me, one eye shut. "Thanks," she says, "why don't you come home with me?"

"What?"

She laughs again. "No, really. Come on."

I look at my friends around the table, amazed at my luck, going home with this beautiful woman. I gather my smokes and money, leave a tip, put on my jacket and we leave.

No, no, no, that's not really how it happened. What happened was I saw her walking towards the door and nodded at her, waving her over. She came over, polite and disinterested.

"Excuse me," I said, "but I saw you in the bar downstairs and, um... I just wanted to tell you that I think you're really beautiful."

She gets one of those sour "Am I really hearing this?" looks on her face and scowls down at me. "Listen," she says, "what makes you think I even want to hear that shit?"

"What... um, what do you mean," I stammer, lighting a smoke. She throws her arms out. "I mean, why do you even say that to me? Do you know how uncomfortable that makes me feel? Like, is this the part where I fall into your arms and beg you to come home with me, or what?"

I blush. Eli and Melinda are laughing at me behind their hands. "I hadn't really thought about it, I guess. Sorry I bothered you."

She keeps scowling at me. I'm embarrassed as hell and unable to look at anything but the ashtray and my hand holding the cigarette. "Well, next time, dipshit, think about it." And with that, she walks out, her friends' stares burning into the back of my neck as I meekly take another sip of my beer.

Of course, that's not really what happened. What really happened was, Melinda nudged me under the table and said, "There's your friend from downstairs, Keith." I turned around, pretty drunk, my vision some-





## THE STORIES

what blurred and catch a glimpse of her as she nears the door. "Have a good night," I mutter, a drunken idiot in a bar full of them. "You too," she says, polite as ever. And then Tyler's saying that, at most, the Misfits had three good songs and I'm rolling my eyes and telling him he's full of shit.

## HEART ATTACK STYLE

She's the only girl that you've ever met that you've painted dozens of canvasses about and never be able to write down a single word that seems to fit right. It's never been like that. She is the first girl that you've ever fallen head over heels, heartbreak style in love with, and it's never been like that either.

On your first real date, you go to the carnival on the water front, and when she holds your hand it feels perfectly right. You go back to your place and she looks at your Schiitani Basquiat books and the two of you talk about art for hours and when you finally get the nerve to kiss her, it's great and sweet and you feel like you've known her for years.

Falling on glass in the best way, you fall for her hard. She works her ass off, 40 to 50 hours a week, as an apprentice jeweler and supports herself by stripping a few nights a week. She says she loves her job, which you can't understand. She seems like the strongest person you've ever met, and you're a mess, full of poison and insecurities and caffeine burnout.

Your time is equally divided between being so in love with her that it almost hurts and having your heart broken like a kid's toy, which really hurts. She calls you from work at 3am, telling you about her night, the girls she works with, her customers. You were up anyway, painting and thinking about her. You're fine pair.

You leave in the summer to go teach theater to little kids on the coast. She comes down to visit. She buys you books and you buy her breakfast. You get in a fight the morning of her last visit, as she's dropping you off at work. She leaves, pissed off. Two people who feel this amazing connection to each other but can't see eye to eye on a fucking thing.

You break up and make up two hundred times. Sleeping is a joke and drinking takes its place. When it finally does end for good, it does so with a whimper. Telephone calls that last for hours, sexual invitations one minute and then aloofness the next, weariness and never being able to say the words that say it all, mean everything you wish you could say.

You try to forget about it by sleeping around, which accomplishes nothing more than hurting other people and adding to your own confusion. Spreading the fan of despondency a little wider. And then half the time you can't even remember what the problem was, what the big deals were, in the first place.

The two of you end up going out to that one restaurant for dinner. You talk about things: work, mutual friends, each other.

It's like actors running through their lines, badly. You go back to your place and play cards, alternating between wanting to ask her to stay and asking her to leave. Sick and bored with yourself, when she does leave, the two of you hug without skin contact, practically without touching at all.

A catalyst for you in so many ways. For growth and defeat, sadness and joy, all the rest. Not content, vocal or otherwise, from either of you since that night. Months later, you sometimes catch yourself thinking about her nights that always seem to stay four a.m. Four a.m. forever.

Looking at women like there was a sheet of glass separating you, talking to women with the excitement of discussing the weather, it's like the passion has been bled out of you. When a woman expresses any sort of interest in you now, friendly or otherwise, it feels you're tired and uncomfortable and that's all.

You sometimes wonder how she is on those 4 a.m. nights and how she's doing, then decide it's probably better that you don't know. The words, those right words that say it all, still aren't around.

## What the hELL happened to SUZANNE Vega?

So, been going through this somewhat rough time lately. I get like two sometimes, my "inner clock" is something that I have yet to figure out. I've been waking up around 3 p.m. and I usually manage to start feeling human by 5 or so. Go out and do stuff with buddies, come home, put on a pot of coffee around 11 or so, then go visit John at his work around three or four in the morning. It's a good schedule for getting some paintings done, but not much else.

All this is to say that I've been finding myself alone a hell of a lot of the time. At times like this, I tend to think too much, those types of questions that are unanswerable, the big, vague, unknowable questions that lead only to a sense of futility.

I mean, where the hell is Suzanne Vega? That's one of the ones that's been bouncing around in my skull a lot lately. Some kid turned me on to her first album when I was 13, 14. It's this incredible, moody, gentle, sexy, dark, infinitely melancholy album that I'd unabashedly sandwich in between playings of Minor Threat and the Misfits. I loved that album, it's as synonymous with my childhood as yellowed copies of Maximum RocknRoll and masturbating to swimsuit catalogs.

I found a copy of that album in the used bin a few months back. Paid three dollars and twenty five cents. I took it home and played it and it's as good as it ever was. There's a few lines in there that sound a bit sappier, listening to it ten years later, but when she's on, she's on, and some passages and chords still send lightning down my back.

And this is the type of shit I'm talking about: where the fuck is Suzanne Vega? Last I heard, she'd put out some shitty techno album in the early 90's and then nothing. Where is she?

## THE STORIES





the

STORIES

I mean, one of the saddest things in the world is looking through the 99¢ bins at a record store. All those people and their "one big shot"; a flash in the pan and then silence. Or maybe they never even got out of the gate. What did it for them? Was it bad management? A shitty logo, boring cover art, a really boring font? Was it label downsizing or did all those bands and all those people just put out a shitty record? And where are they now?

Those long-haired pretty boys in some glam metal band from the early 80's, with some suitably glam metal name like Matrox, where are those guys? Digging fencepost holes for the Highway Department somewhere in Southern California? Married and unhappy in some tract home in Des Moines? In a techno band that plays every Saturday night in Okefenokee, Wyoming?

It's all a bunch of sentimental shit, I know. But then I listen to Brenda Kahn, who put out an album on an indie label in 1990, got picked up by Columbia and did a record for them in '92, was dropped by them and did one more album on a different indie label in '96. I listen to her, and her stuff is incredibly passionate and sexy and funny and sad and rocking, and it all comes back to me: where's Brenda Kahn?

And I'm not just saying, "Why didn't these people get big? Why didn't they put out more records?" It's not about that at all. What I'm saying is that I still get so pissed at time sometimes, the staunch relentlessness of it, the flat-out mercilessness of it. How we can sometimes touch each other's lives, but so briefly, like candles flickering in a window that we're running past.

See, these are the types of thoughts I get when I sleep all day and stay up all night. Honestly, I look forward to getting into a sleep schedule where it's actually dark out when my head hits the pillow.

## 2 INNING BALLPLAYER

It's raining in Westport. No surprise there. Scott and I drove up to visit Alex before he takes off on a six month adventure spanning the U.S. and various parts of Europe. Alex, the guy who started this zine with me five years ago when we lived together in Seattle. It's funny, too: even then, both of us seemed to be incredibly young, our lives were already writing themselves out, our paths making themselves apparent. In Seattle, Alex was the one working graveyard, ten to twelve hours shifts at the factory assembly line, the one making ends meet, bailing me out financially, emotionally, physically whenever I failed to get my shit together, which was often. I was going to one of the best art schools in the country and was usually too hungover or despondent with my continued pulse to make it to class. Even

then, our paths were being written in granite: somewhere along the line, Alex learned to work his ass off at jobs that, through their physical demands and mind-numbing repetition, would break a dipshit like me in half after about two days. He learned, somewhere, to cultivate the life inside of himself, to grow from the inside out, to hold onto himself, to keep moving forward.

Just like I learned, somewhere, that defeat can be continual. Har. Never, ever say, "Well, at least it can't get any worse," because it can. I learned that. And I knew, even then, that I'm a two-inning ballplayer. I got tired. Frankly, I just about bore the shit out of myself sometimes. While Alex lives inside of himself, I am constantly on the lookout for things to bring me outside of myself. Even then, back in Seattle in the mid 90's, the cyclone behind these eyes was mowing down the countryside.

So it's raining in Westport. Alex and I are walking on the concrete path that runs alongside the sand of the beach. The rain comes down in sheets. It's turning into evening: the sky's alizarin crimson against the slate gray of the sea. It's beautiful. Rain drops fall off the brim of my hat.

Alex is talking to me about his trip, about some of the things he hopes to accomplish by getting away from the flophouse, from Westport, away from fishing for a while. After Seattle, Alex moved to Westport and has been fishing nonstop for the past five years. He owns a home and has always been one of those guys that can save money. This crabbing season has been an especially good: they've been working constantly, the weather has been great for fishing. He's financially secure right now, very much so, and it's time for a break.

I listen as we walk along the concrete path lined with beachgrass on both sides, past the occasional concrete bench that's pooled with rainwater. I listen to him talk and marvel at our paths: Alex concerned with the money he's saved over the past few seasons, he wants to do something responsible with it. He says he's been looking into "green stocks," investing in companies that are environmentally and socially aware.

"But even that," he says, "is iffy, because it's still involving banks, that whole structure, that whole system that I'd like to have as little to do with as possible."

I smile to myself: Alex talking about investments. I have twenty-eight dollars in late fees in my bank account back home. I have hundreds of dollars owed to me by people who've bought my paintings on the "payment plan" and aren't paying me the rest of the money they owe me. We walk in the

The Stories



rain and financially, economically, we're living in different worlds. Of course, I haven't spent the past six months working huddled hour weeks on a fishing boat.



## THE STORIES

"It's funny, man," I say, lighting a cigarette and keeping it cupped in my palm, trying to protect it from the rain, "that you take on responsibility. I've been thinking about that a lot lately."

I take a drag from my smoke and it's instantly drenched. I fear off the paper and throw it on the pavement, feeling the hit in my pocket. The front of my pants are darkened with rain.

"Supposedly this painting thing is noble, this living month month, week to week, off of painting sales, scrambling and surviving. It's supposedly this great thing, like I'm bringing something to the world, right?"

"Well," he says, "I don't know if you can really call anything noble..."

"Right, but there's supposedly some merit to this, to painting. I'm bringing art to the world. But that's just so much critical bullshit, the whole idea of 'I'm doing it for the people, man!', for two reasons. One, how responsible can it be when I'm depressed all the time because I'm broke, because supposedly 'patrons of the arts' aren't paying the fucking money they owe me? Plus I've got to borrow money from friends just to scrape by money that who knows when I'll be able to pay back. On an individual level, how responsible is that to myself, to the people I care about? And secondly, something that Al Barian talked about in an old issue of BURN COLLECTOR, the whole concept of being, like, a self-appointed 'bringer of art to the world' is so egotistical. It is fucking grotesque. It's me saying that I'm living my life, desperately like this, a drag on the people I care about, is OK, because the balance is fair: 'Yeah, I'm a drag but look what I'm bringing to the world. Look at these paintings.'"

The sky's darkened. The wind in Westport is rough and my hands are numb. The crabgrass rustles.

"But there's a hell of a lot more paintings on my walls and stacked in my closet than there is 'out there.' So I'm out even bringing that much to the world. And the part that cracks me up is that the whole idea of me 'doing it for the people' isn't even close to the whole truth. I get a lot out of it. Painting, I feel fucking magnificent sometimes. I'm totally powerful, very much in touch with the world, a part of life. It's not all about other people, not at all."

Alex doesn't say anything. He's listening while the rain comes down like it's trying to baptize something.

"So basically, what I mean to say is that I'm full of shit."

"Well," he says, "when I think of my life and where I'd be without books that I've read, without Steinbeck and Hesse and Rosson and Bukowski, without poems, songs, bands... I mean, music, just music, I'd be nowhere without the

music I've heard in my life. It's shaped me so much, I'd be nowhere, I'd be... you know, totally fucked." He laughs. "And I think you've got an ability or whatever, with your paintings, that not a lot of people have. But people need art."

"So, what, don't negate the power of being able to create something? Is that what you mean?"

"Yeah, pretty much. I think back on my life, about the stuff that's just set me on fire, and I wouldn't be here without it."

I sigh, conceding to myself that I'm right back where I started. Still unsure of whether to continue doing what I'm doing. Not wanting to burn out my friends, not ever wanting to take for granted their friendship, the beauty of bringing the apack of smokes just because, or loaning me twenty bucks or buying me a canvas or taking me out for a beer and a couple games of pool. Never wanting to take that for granted, or take advantage of it, but tired of my pride getting punched in the mouth when I accept these things or when I need to ask for help. So I'm back at the starting point, ground zero.

"Here we are," Alex says.

The stone bench, the one Jeff said I should get Alex to take me to the next time I was in Westport. Piled in water at the foot of the bench is a stone inscribed in the concrete bearing the words "ENJOY THE SPLENDOR, Westport Chamber of Commerce."

Like all the other benches on the path, it faces the ocean. We turn and face the sea and the view is totally obscured by a gigantic drift of beach grass. I start laughing.

"The only viewpoint on this whole path that says 'Enjoy the Splendor'..."

Alex nods and laughs. "And it's obscured by an imported species that's totally taken over the beach. The designers either had a great sense of humor or were a bunch of idiots."

"Enjoy the splendor," I say.

Alex agrees and we start walking back the way we came.

## What's MUMIA AND Why is it FREE?

They walked down Burnside, west of the river. One more billboard, one more broken building busted to shit. The kid the guy, he saw one more poorly scrawled "Free Mumia" scrawled on yet another wall.

"OK," he says to her, "check this out. I've got this theory. I'm so sick of reading this shit, 'Free Mumia' and 'Free Tibet' and all that. It's just blank sloganeering, like saying 'Fuck The Police'."



## THE STORIES



# The stories

or 'Racism is bad.' What's the point? Are people really being educated or made aware of the situation by stuff like that? Maybe I should just walk around with a marker or an oil stick and just write 'Why' above all the 'Free Mumias'.

My, I mean his, arms flailed around. He was getting into it. "Like, maybe when all these taggers saw all these 'Why Free Mumia's' scrawled around town, they'd be inspired or motivated to go beyond this bumper-sticker ideology. You know? Maybe they'd actually write something that could interest the average pedestrian."

(Of course, I must point out that he would never think of doing such a thing himself. The potential for hypocrisy is sometimes boundless.)

"So," he said, "What do you think?"

"I think you'd be wasting your time."

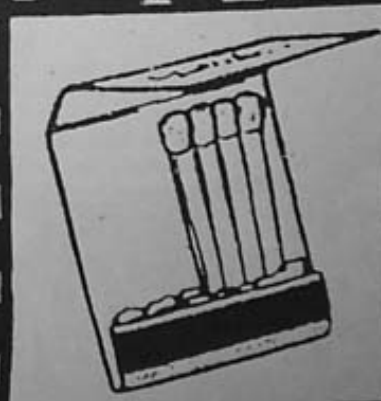
"Oh...I see."

# AVOW 11

strike match,

run, run, run:

the stories.





## Lt. McAllister

Off from work and waiting for the bus. It's a chilly night; fall's coming, whispering down the road, and this coat just isn't thick enough. There's another guy waiting for the bus with me, an obviously homeless man with a thick white beard, Navy cap, black plastic bag and one arm. We get to talking, a few sentences passed, and I hand him a cigarette before he asks for one. I do that sometimes. Sometimes it's nice to speak to someone, just to feel a part of the earth, larger than yourself, like you're a part of this place you're in. Even these minor, fleeting connections can be something. We see the bus coming down the street and he's struggling to get the strap of his backpack over the stump of his arm. He says to me, "Hey, help me get this motherfucker over what's left of this arm." And I do.

The bus arrives and we step on. It's warm in there, a few other late night stragglers slung into their seats, far away from downtown. The one-armed man puts his money in the toll-box at the front of the bus and the driver thanks him, calls him sir. The guy laughs, to my ears pretty bitterly, and says, "No need to call me sir, Lt. McAllister's fine." He sees where I'm sitting and sits across from me, we strike up another conversation. Portland, frankly, has an inordinate amount of crazy people living here, and I've seen enough people freakout on busses, the street and elsewhere, to sometimes be wary. Despite the stink of booze around this guy, and the way his eyes gloss over mid-sentence and he just drifts off, there's an air of kindness around him. A ragged face, he's a mean-looking motherfucker, but carries a sense of calmness around him at the same time. We talk and when he drifts off, with his eyes getting that glazed-over sheen so them, I politely look away until he strikes up conversation again.

We eventually make it downtown and it's started to rain. Ok, fall's coming, another 7 or 8 month stretch of showers and drizzle and breath steaming out of people's mouths, all that. It's dark out.

I'm two stops away from getting off the bus when McAllister looks over at me, his hand curled into a fist, stretching it out at me. "I can't feel my arm," he says, waving his hand at me. What? What the fuck is this? Maybe I misread the guy, he's gonna sock me in the mouth.

He nods at his arm, "I can't feel my arm, hold your hand out." I hold my hand out and he drops a handful of change into my palm.

"What? Oh no, sir, I can't take this."

"Go ahead," he says, grinning. "If you don't need it, give it to someone who does, but don't let no motherfuckers cheat you out of it. Don't give it to em if they don't need it. Buy someone a cup of coffee or something."

I don't know what to say and so I just tell him thank you and touch his shoulder as I get off the bus. Tired and bleary-eyed and needing a shave, I walk down Alder, past Django's records and Georgia's, where there's normally a plethora of homeless kids and gutterpunks sparechanging out front. The money, most of it in quarters, is heavy in my hand, but this night of all nights, the streets are empty.

I think that the world hands you moments like this sometimes, and you can see them and live in them, be right there, if you keep open enough and learn to see them when they come. At the same time, when I got home, I put on a pot of coffee and went into the bathroom, looking at my face in the mirror. Holloweyed from no sleep, ragged, I turned the hot water on and took a razor and shaving cream down from the cabinet. This is me.

## 12-Gauges And Ripped Fishnets

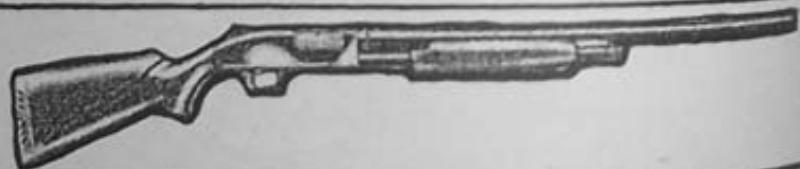
"Her mom's really cool," Tony said.

"Yeah," I agreed, as we pushed our bikes up the hill.

I was in 7th grade and I told my mom I was staying over at Tony's house. Tony lived at the bottom of the hill next to the cemetery. Tony's mom was nice but she was crazy. Fuck, his whole family was crazy. That night, I rode my bike over to his place, past the yard full of chained-up, screaming dogs. We watched wrestling on TV and listened to Tony's cousin, who lived in a trailer in their front yard, talk about how drunk he'd gotten and how hard he'd fucked his girlfriend the night before. Tony seemed to idolize him but I just thought he was crazy.

Then we decided to go to Sarah's house. Tony lived at the bottom of the hill and Sarah lived at the top, at the very top of this long, twisting, gravel road. We both had a crush on her. Tony had known her a long time, I'd only known her since middle school. She knew who the Sex Pistols were and wore ripped fishnet stockings to school. Ripped stockings in the 7th grade, man, I was in love.

So we're walking our bikes up this long road and we're talking about how nice Sarah's mom is. When we made it to her house, it was around ten at night. We knocked and her mom answered, puffy-eyed from sleep. She said that Sarah was down at her grandparents' place, spending the night with her cousins. Her grandparents lived at the middle of the hill and had a trailer in their yard too, but no dogs. Sarah and her cousins were in the trailer out front, her mom said.



"Just go on in, guys, it's no problem." In retrospect, it seems that all parties involved later thought the whole ordeal hilarious, except my mom and I, but I'm getting ahead of myself. Needless to say, I just wished that Sarah's mother had told her folks that it was "no problem."

We pedalled our bikes down the hill and went into the trailer. Her cousins were OK. Sarah was as flirtatious as ever. The trials of being a horny 7th grader, Christ. We hung out and the next thing you know, there's this quavering, old-man's voice outside the trailer door, signalling our doom. "Who's bikes are these out here?"

I was worried but Sarah just laughed and let her grandpa in, who hit the fucking roof. He was not pleased the girls were hanging with the boys. At all. He grabbed Tony by the arm and threw him out of the trailer. Being ever-accommodating, I simply jumped out after Tony, saving gramps the trouble.

He looks at us and says, "Don't you little shittheads move." He starts walking back to his house and says to grandma, who is hovering near the door of their house, "Grandma, get me my fucking shotgun."

What fucking backwoods home-movie had I stumbled into? Things were moving much too fast for me; I was only thirteen years old, caught between a fierce sense of loyalty to Tony, who was just standing there smirking like a jackass, and a sense of saving my teenage ass from the blast of a Mossberg. And there was not a peep coming from the trailer. They had opted to stay inside. Sarah and her cousins were not laughing now. No one was, except maybe God. My heart was beating like a triphammer, it could've been the drumbeat to a Cryptic Slaughter

song. You know?

But when I saw grandma come out of the house and hand grandpa a very black, very large, very gun-looking type of shotgun, self-preservation won out over loyalty. I grabbed my bike and tore out of there at light speed. I heard grandpa yell at me, or maybe at Tony, "Don't move, goddammit!" Yeah, right.

I don't think I've ever ridden a bike as fast as I did that night, before or since. It was all downhill, the moon was bright and I pedalled all the way down. The blur of gravel under the wheels sounded like machineguns. I'd occasionally look behind me, expecting the headlights of grandpa's armor-plated 4X4, or maybe pulled by a sled of maddened pitbulls, hot on my trail with the shotgun at his side.

I sped past Tony's place without a second thought. Like I was gonna go into his weird house, if I could even make it past the dogs. Fuck that; I was a little kid, still very connected to my bed and my comic books and the safety of my own walls. I was going home. Past the cemetery, the high school, houses. Hung a left onto 101, straight for a while, hung a right before the bridge and I was at my apartment. I looked down at my watch and it was past one in the morning. A sneaky entrance past my sleeping mother was possible. And then I realized I'd left my jacket in the trailer and it had my housekey in it. Fuck. And there was no way I'm waking my mom up at this hour with a story like this. No way.

Once I'd gotten off my bike, I'd realized how cold it was, the hard ocean wind coming off the beach only 3 blocks away. We left our car unlocked. I went into the backseat, pulled it down and crawled into the trunk. We'd laid a blanket down back there when we'd gotten out Christmas tree, so I lay there in the dark of our trunk, wrapped in a shitty blanket covered in pine needles, shivering. Drifting in and out of sleep until about 7, teeth chattering, until I just couldn't stand it anymore.

I went to the door and knocked and my mom came down and opened it. She just gave me that look that moms have. The Mom Look. The one that tells you you're in deep shit but you'll be in it worse if you try to pull a fast one on her. And I just folded like a house of cards, walking into the house with machinegun teeth. I told her everything; the dogs, Tony's cousin, going up to Sarah's place and then halfway down, grandpa in his pajamas and baseball cap and the shotgun and sleeping in the car and and and. Finally she stopped me and said we'd talk about it after she'd gotten a couple more hours of sleep.

The end result was that my mom grounded me for a week for being careless with my belongings and Sarah brought my jacket to school on Monday. She was laughing at me and when I asked her why, he'd had a fucking shotgun, etc., she just laughed some more. So did Tony. She said, "After you left, he called my mom. She told him that she'd sent you down there and that it was fine. She thought it was hilarious." And Tony had ridden down after me, gone into his house and told his cousin about it and they'd cracked up too. Laugh laugh laugh, giggle giggle giggle, the whole world thought it was funny. In the meantime, I was grounded for a week.

## Erik And The Skinheads

For the six months I knew him, Erik was an older brother to me. Protective, but respectful. Treating me like an equal, he still managed to be insightful, like a mentor, but by relating his experience in a way that wasn't degrading. He talked to me, not down to me, in a way that I learned from his experiences without even knowing it. I haven't seen him in over seven years.



Erik was a punk rocker from way back. Ten years older than me, he'd seen those bands I'd only read about, he'd been on the streets and then off them, had lived through that particular warzone known as punk rock in the 80's. "I'd be at a party some night," he told me once, "and one of my friends would be at the party, passed out on the floor. You just figure they're drunk, and then, hours later when they still haven't moved, everyone gathers around and they've been dead for hours." Secret junkies.

He'd been friends with Mia Zapata before she'd been murdered and despite the fact that we were living in Seattle in the mid-90's, at the beginning of the end of the whole grunge thing and punk rock just starting to get big, and all the blurring and questioning and reactionary shit that that would cause with myself and the people I knew, one thing with Erik was still very clear: he had the most passionate contempt and hatred of skinheads of anyone I'd ever met. A holdover, I think, from the whole 80's punk rock years; there were a lot more skinheads around then and things were, from what I've heard, pretty violent. When I talk about punk rock being a warzone back then, I'm not kidding. One of the things I've enjoyed about punk is a strong sense of oral tradition, and I'd heard the stories. The lines were drawn pretty clearly.

I played it pretty safe: I went to an art school in the nice part of Capitol Hill and only strayed downtown to see Erik or Collin and Mariah, friends of ours that I knew from my hometown. Erik went all over. I'd be worried about walking through a certain part of town and he just walked right through it, not like he owned it, but like he deserved to be there as much as anyone. I was ten years younger and scared. Erik just walked.

So, I heard about all this later, from Collin. I'd called him up after I hadn't heard from Erik for a while. Erik was holed up in his house, healing. Turns out a few nights before that, Erik had been walking through the park to get to his graveyard dishwashing shift at the downtown Minnie's. I wouldn't have done that in a million fucking years, not me. But Erik had to get to work and cutting through the park saved him ten minutes.

And there's three skinheads drinking in the park there, right in front of him. Two of them have 40s they're drinking from and one of them has a cane. Erik stares them down but tries to walk past them. One of them runs at him swinging and Erik, a veteran of these things, dodges and drops the guy with a fist to the nose. He's out, down, for the rest of the ordeal. And then the second skin tackles him and they're rolling, gouging for eyes and throat and all that. The guy grabs hold of Erik's ear with his teeth and nearly bites it in half and that's when Erik does the same to his nose. Erik winds up on top and is on his chest, driving punches down into his face, when the third one comes in like Babe Ruth and swings with his cane. Up from the knees, he swings the cane right into Erik's head, connecting right above the eyes. Splits his head open in a line from eye to eye. "It looks fucking disgusting, man. I'm amazed he didn't die," Collin tells me over the phone. Though, from the sound of it, he was on his way.

The skin with the cane gathers his friends up and they take off and there's Erik lying in the park at one or two am. The whole thing took about ninety seconds. Bloody mouth from biting the guy, ear hanging there, head cracked open in a straight line, gushing blood and unconscious.

He comes to, eventually. Who knows how long he lay there? I don't and neither does he. He starts walking back home, bleeding like a motherfucker. He says he passed out twice on the way to his house, just sank against a wall and sat down. This is in downtown Seattle, the middle of the night, and no one helped him. He said the few people he saw that night gave him a wide berth.

He finally makes it to his house and stumbles into the living room, passing out again on the floor, waking his roommates. They see him and start freaking out. The capper to this, the part that amazes me still, is that as they're trying to get him up to take him to the hospital, still bleeding, still with a fractured skull, he hallucinates, thinking his roommates are the skin-

heads, and starts trying to fight them. Jesus.

Then he passes out again, they gather him up and he's docile when he comes to again, he knows who they are and they take him to the hospital.

And Erik has no insurance and they won't admit him to the hospital. They give him a local in his ear and his head, they stitch him up. A nurse leads him to a bed and says "You can have this for an hour," and when that hour is up they tell him he has to leave.

And that's it. I never saw him again. I moved shortly after and the few times I talked to him on the phone, he was distant. I don't think it was shame, I can't see anything shameful at all in the way things went down, but I imagine something like that takes some of the fire out of you for a while.

But I miss him. He's synonymous with that period of time to me. I miss his passion and the way he wouldn't let me to fall into self-pity no matter what, and the way he allowed me to both learn and teach. Alex and I were putting the first issue of this zine together then and he was fiercely adamant about us going through the whole process whenever self-doubt took hold and I worried the zine would blow. And he went out and gathered up people he knew, advertisers, to put ads in the zine to help pay for printing. That and a thousand other things, you know?

And I picture the guy in my head, one of those people that just light you up like a candle, and then they're gone, and I realize I'm not getting this down right at all. There's no way to get all of it down. I guess the only thing, the best thing, I can really say is this: I was right out of high school and trying desperately to find a place in the world as a man, an adult, and he was one of the first men that I ever met, that carried the weight of life so well, and I wanted to be just like him and I miss the guy. That's it.

## Savage Nick

One of the girls, the blond one, said she wanted to take a picture of it, so she stood on the seats in one of the booths there at the bar with her camera, while Nick and the drunken huge guy posed. The big guy with his fist pulled back and Nick drawn backwards, his hands drawn up to his face in terror. Then the flash went off and shit just went crazy.

There's plenty of stories I could tell about Nick but this is one of the better ones. It starts out like most of my stories about that particular bar do: I was just wandering around seeing who's there, watching people shoot pool, talk, all that. Found some kids in some of the booths that I know, the air blue with smoke, the insectile buzz of stunning hipsters on the make. A vague sense of jealousy almost always overcomes me there and I smoke more than usual.

I end up bouncing between a few tables, groups of kids that I'm friends with that don't really know each other. Nick ends up talking to two women that are burlesque dancers or can-can dancers or something and I stumble over and one of them tells me about their act. I am drunk and it's getting to be so late. I've been awake forever. It is Mardi Gras, Fat Tuesday, whatever the fuck it's called and everyone is dressed up. That Jason guy is dressed up as a sailor, women are dressed as men, other women are dressed more provocatively than usual. My shirt has a hole in it. I wander between tables and cough. I drink beer from a plastic cup.

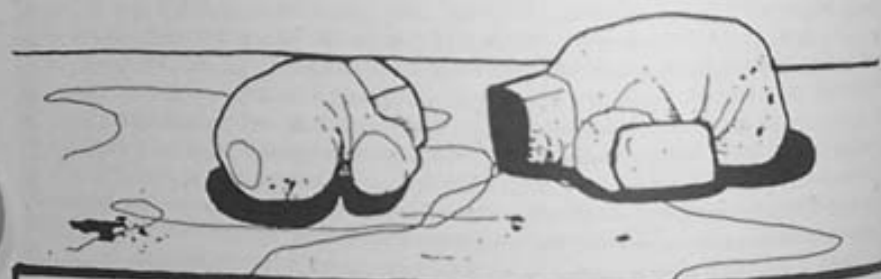
So I'm listening to these two women talk to me about their act as burlesque dancers, can-can dancers, something. While the blond woman talks to Nick, the short one with dark

hair asks about my tattoos and I'm saying something, doing my part to fill the air with my voice and then we're all standing: they have called last call, I think, and we're all getting up to get our drinks. I take a few steps away, just a few, and this huge guy, much bigger than any of us, is right in Nick's face and Nick is pushing him away. It appears he didn't appreciate Nick talking to one of the can-can dancers, even though I'd been doing the same thing fifteen seconds ago. Thick blue smoke, they'll be turning the lights on in the bar soon and we'll all shrink down, crouch down just a tiny bit, like we're vampires trying to hide from the light. It is the non-laid-back, have-a-good-time light. It is the I-was-gonna-go-home-with-you-but-now-you-look-like-a-fucking-mutant-with-the-lights-on light.

So Nick pushes the guy and then, being who he is, profusely apologizes to the guy immediately, saying there was no problem, he overreacted in the pushing the guy, all that I'm standing next to him and the short can-can dancer.

"Christ," Nick says in that way he has, "I'm sorry. I feel like I'm in high school again, my palms are sweating, my neck hurts."

The girl with the dark hair looks him over. "Don't worry about it. Don't wet your pants or anything."



"I feel like I'm going to," Nick says.

No one seems particularly disturbed except for Nick. The guy was large and drunk and sweating. He seemed to overreact, Nick was just reacting to that. But Nick is drunk too. The time is nearing for the light to get thrown up on all of us: I can feel that shit under my skin, man. I light another cigarette, Jason is still dressed like Popeye, no one seems too worried. Nick even walks over to the guy and officially apologizes, even shakes the guy's hand.

And that's when the blond one says she wants to take a picture of the two of them and Nick obliges. They do their pose and Nick told me later he had an idea of what was going to happen. He didn't really think the guy would, but the thought certainly crossed his mind. "If you really hit me," Nick said to the guy as they got into their camera positions, "I'm going to hit you back."

And the guy does exactly what you reading this probably figured out a while ago: as soon as the flash of the camera goes off, the guy leans into it and drills Nick right in the face. It was absolutely the shittiest, low-blow suckerpunch I've ever seen.

Nick stumbles back and I'm right there with my forearms up, running into the guy. The terrified, blind kid just reacts, the most physical I've been since I got the shit beat out of me by a logger almost a decade earlier. I run the guy into the pinball machine, the pinball machine hits the wall and then Nick's right there, right past me and just smacking the guy so fast. They whirl away like a couple of fucked-up puppets with their strings cut, a weird ballet with people instantly gathering to watch but moving out of the way when the two of them come hulking and flying through.

The guy doesn't get another punch in, Nick is just on him and then one of the bouncers tackles the big guy neatly, behind the legs like a football player and then they come flying back near me where it all started. Another bartender has Nick, who's already apologizing again and trying to explain himself. The big fuck is docile, laying on the ground with the bouncer pinning him.

All I can do is walk over to the guy, still shaking with anger at the injustice of a punch

like that and lean over him. I'm back to normal now, self-conscious, but I manage to say, "Hey, nice fucking suckerpunch, man. That was fucking horrible, you know that?" It's all that I know how to do. The bouncer gets off the guy, who has blood running down the side of his face: one of Nick's rings has cut him. Nick is fine.

The short can-can dancer, the big guy's date, chides him, but the weird thing is that it's in such a boys-will-be-boys kind of way. Like he farted in church or made a retard joke or something, not like he just jumped a kid twice as small as him. "Damn," I tell her, still pissed, "that's quite a catch you got there. He's a hell of a guy."

She ignores me.

And that's pretty much it. The bartender saw the whole thing, there was no need for Nick to apologize. He caught the MAX with Chris and I walked home.

And of course, you had to know this by now, that this isn't any of Aesop's fables: there's no neat thread to tie it all together or make it OK. It was just a stupid barfight. I bet three or four or five of them went on that same night in this town. I couldn't sleep when I got home, still amazed that the guy would do that. But we all got to leave that night standing tall and not shrinking down and skulking out: in all the ensuing chaos they were late in turning on the last call lights. When I left that place that night, it was still dark and loud. The lights after the last call, man, those are the worst.

## Popcorn Alone Does Not Make A Man

You know, something gets lost between the writing of something and the reading of it. And a whole bunch is lost between the living and the writing. Went out with John last night, having a few drinks, and I was continually amazed that I even had thing to say. Ah, big John, that's not a reflection on you, that's a reflection on me. I mean, just seems like there's not a whole lot to say most of the time.

But one thing stuck with me. We got in a discussion there in a booth in some bar, the smoke all blue and unmoving, and it was a conversation about suffering, for christ's sake, people's capacity for suffering. I was at that point of mild drunkenness where I start to get a lot more impassioned about a particular viewpoint I might hold, more so than I would entirely sober, but not entirely exasperated that the other person doesn't see it my way.

So, we were talking about suffering, right? Just your standard, run-of-the-mill type suffering, the financial, minimum-wage-or-less kind of suffering, lots of ramen, lots of rice, lots of potatoes. How many ways can you cook a potato? Too many. Not nearly enough.

"We've all been there," John says, "all of us." I'm still not sure if he meant every person in the bar that night, or everyone in our particular circle of friends. Anyway, I told him the story of when I was trying to make a run at being a painter, just selling paintings to pay the bills. And there was this one particularly rough stretch of time when I had nothing to eat for seven or 8 days except popcorn. Popcorn, popcorn, popcorn. Big bowls of popcorn, rationed out twice a day to make it last as long as possible. That is a feeling unto itself: your stomach still rumbles, but it's a confused rumble. Like it's saying, "Yeah, there's something in here, but it's not, kind sir, terribly substantial. Besides, didn't you give me this shit last time?"

So I relayed that story to John and I drank some of my drink and he drank some of

his drink and said that experiences like that make people stronger.

"What?" I said. "That's bullshit."

He shrugged. "It does, it makes you stronger."

"It just gives someone a larger capacity for suffering." I mean, that's not really a strength, right? It doesn't make me any less lonely or impatient. It does not make me more outgoing. It does not walk on two legs. It does not carry a bag of potatoes home to yours truly. It doesn't help me speak to women without getting nervous or help me stand up for myself when I'm getting walked on. And it doesn't help me speak or write any better, paint any better, about those subtle moments like this one that are so fucking hard to pin down, the quiet friendship John and I have built up over the past couple years, getting together to shoot the shit or shoot pool over a couple drinks. The only thing suffering seems to do is let me know that it's possible for my body to somewhat function (at least heart and lungs, you know) on two bowls of popcorn a day. And what lesson have we learned from that?

Nothing. Suffering does not build character. Physical suffering does not make you stronger. It just increases your capacity to exist with physical weakness. Nietzsche and his "that which does not kill you" pap can fuck off, or at least bring me a couple yams to go with these taters and popcorn.

## Anteaters Don't Fuck Black Widows

Another night in a bar with a group of friends. We have left the opening of a group show my paintings were in when it became clear that there were just too many self-important art types around, suffocated by pretension and leather pants. The bar is new to me, only having been there a few times; they have Propagandhi on the jukebox and Pabst costs a dollar forty a pint. The air's all smoky and the floor is warped under its worn red carpet. Hear the poolballs making out and kissing each other?

We left the opening early. I have been here a while. My friends have been leaving in twos and threes until it's just me and Alex shooting eightball and I somehow end up sitting with these three women at their table, talking. They are funny and hot and dangerous. They are hanging out with a couple guys they say they don't really know, and then there's me, who they don't know at all. It's one of those good nights without terror or worry and the charm I have seems natural to me; I'm not trying to be the cool guy, I'm just talking and having a good time. I'm over at the jukebox when Alex finishes his game and offers me a ride home if I want it, even though he lives just a few blocks away and my place is on the other side of the river. I tell him I'm having a good time with those women over there and he leaves and it is just me. Had I been wearing my time travel costume and seen the pointlessness of the next twenty minutes I would've been buckled into the passenger seat of his car quicker than shit. But I stayed. The trouble with going to bars, and the trouble with me, is an absolute inability to learn from past experience. Taverns do not a friendship or romance make, motherfucker. When are you gonna get that one down?

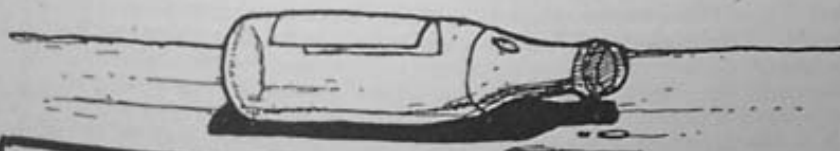
I come back and one of the women shows me the tattoo on her hand. She makes some joke and I laugh and one of the guys whirls on me. I have somehow offended him, maybe just by being there and he wants to fight outside. He is a busted up monster with teeth like a rusty handsaw. He's sweating and bigger than me.

"You motherfucker, let's go," he says, but I can tell he's just talking to talk, to hear himself. Stricken with the lack of movement, just like me. Bars are voids, black holes, cryogenic

freezers that we keep finding ourselves in. I don't think he really wants to fight me, so I just laugh and tell him he gets the first three ones free.

"Shut the fuck up, you idiot," one of the women says to him and the whole thing's defused. He goes back to drinking and talking to the other guys there. Things keep up at their regular pace and I wonder if perhaps this will be one of the times, one of the rare bar nights that do not end up in a walk home. Perhaps an exercise in passion among strangers shall take place. I'm paying particular attention to one of the women and we've been getting along splendidly. I have been talking to them for quite a while. Then the girls exit en masse to the bathroom, one last run to do whatever they do in there before they go home. I wonder about the prudence of asking the woman for a number, a date, something. I decide it's best to just let things happen and go, as they say, with the flow. A player does not Keith make. The line *My lady, would you care to shuttle off to your place of residence and, oh, get the bone up and do the grown up all the merry night? Pip pip!* never crossed my mind. Nor did *Madam, would you care to gaze in wonderment and more than slight amusement at the sight of a inch-and-a-quarter long, fully erect penis? Perhaps this evening? Birthed in the farthest reaches of the Arkansas Ozarks, I have seen many beautiful things, things to make the spirit sing out: the gurgling stream, the mountains strung up against the purple horizon, a school of honking geese in flight. But none of them come close, none even begin to bring the same amount and quality of joy to my eyes as does gazing upon your lovely countenance. So how about it, shall we go smoke a shitload of cigarettes and create the Beast With Two Backs until dawn begins to slide under the window shades?* Slight understatement of penile length notwithstanding. I am just not the kind of guy who picks up on women easily or well. Part insecurity and partly just disgusted at watching guys who do do that shit (though, I must say, not nearly as creatively), I'm more of a watcher than a player. Anyway, the guys see the women come out of the bathroom and they rise. I stay seated. Sawtooth walks by and he says to me, "Sorry about that shit earlier, man. I'm just drunk."

"That's okay."



I am just about to say something to Stacy, the aforementioned woman in particular, when she walks up and grabs her cigarettes off the table.

"You're a pussy," she says to me.

"What? Why?"

"You're just a pussy. I can see the little gears turning in your head."

And with that, she and her crew leave. She is twenty one years old, seems to have undergone an act of schizophrenia during her two minute visit to the john, she sashays and swaggers out of the bar into a Portland night and I sit there, alone, feeling like Sawtooth just punched me a good one in the chops. It is the first time in my life I have ever officially gaped.

And the night ended like most of them do: I walked the sixty blocks home. Replayed that shit in my head, trying to figure it out. A pussy? The little gears in my head? After relaying said exchange to various friends, I have discerned a few things. (At this point, little bar-frequenting grasshoppers, little sages of the taverns and watering holes, take heed! There is valuable information to be gathered here!)

One: I choked, one of those few times, at least to my knowledge, where I was not for-



ward enough with my intentions to garner a pleasant evening of fluid-exchange with a stranger, followed up with the embarrassing spectacle of a late-morning gathering of clothes in a strange bedroom with about ten thousand pounds of hangover resting like an anvil on my head. Apparently she discerned that I wanted to ask her something, of which she was correct. And she was also correct in the knowledge that I had not, as of that juncture in time, asked her that something.

Two: A woman who insults you (or, well, *me*, in this particular case) for not asking her if she wants to fuck is not a gracious woman. She is not a kind woman. She is not a woman with which you (or me, in this particular case) care to share the late night hours parading in the old slap and tickle, the Horizontal Bop, as it were. Said woman is, in all actuality, probably best avoided at all costs. Said woman's psychic and psychological makeup is akin to the hissing of an asp or the sultry chuckle of a black widow, not well aligned to your (Ok, mine) anteater-like personality, which would greatly negate the enjoyment you might receive in the act of her bestowing upon you her physical and/or sexual charms, whatever they may be.

Three: Anteaters, as the title suggests, rarely wind up in bed with black widows and there's probably a reason for that. And bars are for drinking and spending too much money, not romance.

## Wheelchairs And Busted Eyes

I pass by two kids pushing a punk girl in a wheelchair. They're talking about how lame Hawthorne Street is and she is totally stunning and beautiful, except she can be added to the growing list of victims of the lip-piercing. But her eyes rock me, spear me, for just a second and then she looks away and I keep walking. Two blocks later, a woman is walking towards me. She is taller than me, and she has dark glasses covering up a huge wad of gauze covering one of her eyes, covering half of her face. She looks down when we pass, a small smile on her face. These two women in the space of three or four minutes and I think of myself (of course you do, Keith) and my own fear of people, how hard it is not to zero in on my feet when I see someone approaching. These dumb tattoos and rips in my clothes, a pseudo-rebel, mean nothing when it comes down to how I carry myself on the streets of this town.

It was an odd moment, an odd grouping of moments and one that's hard to draw correlations to. But it was one of those times when I'm stricken with the urge to speak, you know, to move and speak to someone, to reach out against this whole idea of people constantly being fucking strangers to each other. My friend Ian once told me that New York's greatest asset was anonymity; two or three thousand people at any given moment, all within a space of a few blocks, all outside and walking on the street and you don't look anyone in the eye or speak to anyone. And that's great; nine times out of ten I'm either terrified of people or bored shitless by them, but then there's these moments.

So, chalk another one up: one more locked into his routine, dictated by his fear. I just kept walking and the wind blew the goddamn smoke from my fucking cigarette right the hell apart. Right.

## The George Orwellian Cocksucker

I was working the swing shift back then, answering phones and then handling the radios for tow companies. It was madness: people would get their cars towed and would call me to arrange a time to pick it up, as well as how much it would cost. It usually followed like this: I answer the phone with the name of the tow company. The person at the other end starts screaming something like "You motherfuckers towed my car!" I would finally settle them down enough to get the info on the car and where it was towed. I'd look it up in the computer and then deliver a little gem like: "Yes, ma'am, we towed your vehicle for being parked in a fire zone. That'll be a hundred and eighty five dollars to get your vehicle released with an additional sixteen dollars for each day that it's in storage." And then they would start screaming again. If I didn't get my life threatened three or four times a night, it was considered a pretty good shift. I was ragged as shit, more so even than now, doing a lot of drinking and then crawling in to work.

I live on Burnside and there's a little cluster of bars a few blocks up the street. I usually hit the one at the beginning and the one at the end, straying away from the one in the middle, which has coined itself "old-fashioned" and has been there longer than my father has been alive. They don't serve liquor there, and while I'm pretty much a beer drinker, it just seems kind of half-assed. Like the difference between a topless bar and a full blown stripjoint. If I'm going to fall from grace with my hands behind my head, I'd like to do it with like-minded people, and a beer bar just never seemed to cut it.

You see? I don't know shit. Listen.

I went in there one night after dropping in at the two other places. Nothing going on there and I was still wide-awake, my Sunday night, back to five days of swinging on the swing shift. I walked in and it felt like I was the new guy in a western, when he walks in, his shadow spanning the floor of the bar. The other cowboys turn and stare, the place goes quiet. Then they decide he's not a threat and everything goes back to normal: the piano kicks back in and the conversation resumes its normal volume. That's what it felt like, at least. But, as with most things, I'm probably exaggerating.

I was the youngest customer by fifteen or twenty years. I sat down at the bar and ordered a beer from the bartender, who, to my surprise, is some rad punk rock girl. Patches on her pants and better tattoos than me. The beer is also substantially cheaper than I figured. I give her a tip when she lays the beer down, which, she tells me, is fairly uncommon there. We get to talking and it's nice; I'm one of the most one on one awkward motherfuckers ever but I'm able to have a good time.

There's some guy sitting next to me in a yellow checkered shirt. When she walks off, he tries to get me into a conversation. "She's a good looking peice of ass, hey?" It's not a conversation I want to get into, so I just shrug. When he steers clear of topics involving the fuckability of the bartender, I talk to him. He's fucking trashed, drinking from his own pitcher, but fairly lucid. I can tell that when he's not drinking, he's probably a fairly engaging conversationalist. As it is, when talking to me, he uses big words but slurs them.

It's getting late. The bartender comes by and talks when she can. She has bought me a couple of drinks. I'm fairly drunk and need to go to work the next day, so, surprise of all surprises, I ask for a can of pop, still wanting to talk to this woman, but not wanting to spray vomit every which way but loose. See? I'm resourceful: I plan ahead.

So the fun starts to begin. It's getting to be near last call and the guy has just bought his last pitcher of the night. He's been talking to some guy on the other side of him regarding how convenient the bartender's pigtails would serve as "handles" during a course of fellatio. I'm staring straight ahead with dead eyes. I've decided that I don't like the guy.

And apparently he's decided he doesn't like me, either. Sometime during the past sixty

minutes he's turned mean. He looks at me and squints, like I haven't been sitting there for the past two hours. He spies my can of soda and leans over and says, "What're you doing here?"

"What do you mean? I'm drunk and trying to sober up. Gotta work tomorrow."

"No," he says, leaning in close like he's got something on me that he doesn't want the rest of his comrades to know yet, "I mean, *what're you doing here?* Your little can of soda."

"Man, I've been drinking for the past two hours here. I've been sitting right next to you the whole time."

He leans in close. There's a bead of sweat running down the side of his face. Someone has just yelled out last call and they've brought in an additional bartender to wrap all the drunks up and get them out of the place by closing time. "You look like one of those fucking ad guys, you know that? You work for Wyden Kennedy, don't you? Your little can of soda, looking around. Trying to see how the little people live, motherfucker?"

He's drunk, he's gotten to a place where, no matter what I say, there's no fucking way it's going to compute. There's no way I'm going to get through. I just tell him he's got it all wrong. The whole thing is getting volatile, explosive; the guy leans in and his sweat smells like electricity.

"You know what? I've decided you're not a person of merit in my life. So get the fuck out of here."

I shrug. "Sorry, man, I don't want any trouble." I just look straight ahead, hoping to diffuse the situation, hoping he'll move on to his buddy on the other side.

"Did you hear me?" he snarls right into my ear. "*Get the fuck out of here.*"

"OK. See you later." I say and get up, walking towards the door right as the woman walks by. She's seen the whole thing. "What the fuck did you just say to him?" she says to checkered shirt. Then she walks over to me. I start telling her the whole story, how he's convinced I work for the local ad agency and am trolling the bar to see how the lower classes live. We are standing towards the end of the bar and suddenly the guy roars from across the room at me, "You! Yeah, you! I'm talking to you, you *George Orwellian cocksucker!*"

With that, the other bartender says, "Well, *someone's cut off,*" and grabs the guy's nearly-full pitcher and pours it down the drain.

"You're out, guy," he says to checkered shirt. "Go home."

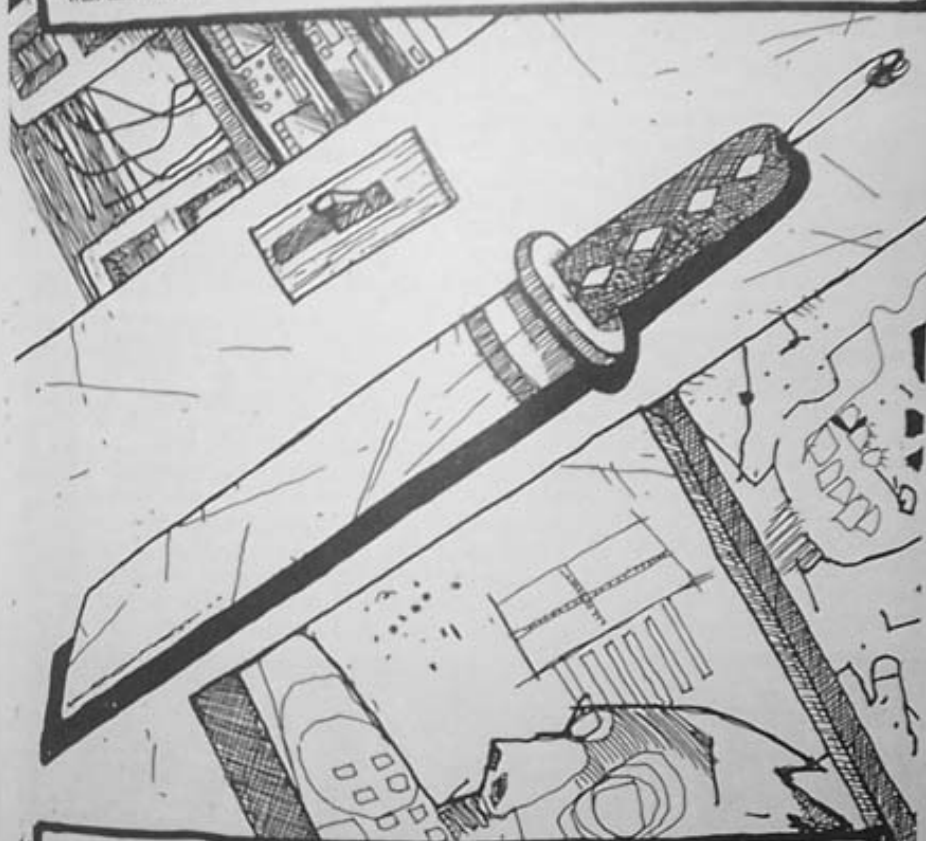
The guy snarls and storms past us out into the street.

And that's essentially it. I left, thanking her for the drinks. She told me the days she worked and said I should come back and see her. The other bartender apologized for the guy acting like that. I went back with Scott one night that she worked there and asked her out. She seemed interested and I gave her my number and she didn't call. I went there once or twice with Nick and the only person working the bar looked like Grizzly Adams, of which Nick informed him repeatedly. I don't think it was her. Checkered shirt eyed me and was silent.

## One Little Sword

Lord, or Santa, just one little sword for me, one little sword for Christmas or my birthday, please. Or even on Memorial Day, or something, if you're feeling generous. Just a little sword.

the sword to walk around the house with when I can't sleep or I'm out of cigarettes. Just something to walk around the house with every once in a while, something to hang on the wall and look at.



There was a guy that lived on Capitol Hill in Seattle, I'd see him every day on Broadway, some huge man with a trenchcoat and a beard and a ponytail and this monstrous sword in a sheath on his back. I saw him everyday and he never got fucked with, not by the cops or no one. But I wouldn't leave the house with mine, no way, just a nice house-sword. And I don't want one like he had; I don't want a barbarian sword, just a small katana with the handle wrapped in red and black silk. It doesn't even have to be a real one, a shitty reproduction of one, made somewhere in Mexico or even Kansas, is fine. I would be happy to have the Stratocaster reproduction of katana blades, no fucking problem, Santa. Or the Lord. Whichever.

I will not use the sword to cut down the unrighteous, or even to cut an onion. I'll just walk around the room with it, admire the needle of light running down the edge, the weight of it, silken handle against skin. Come on, I'm not asking for world peace or redemption from death. Just one little sword, that's all.

## She's Got A Bit Of A Belly On Her

Ah, the glory of being a man in a man's world. And the glory of being a dumb motherfucker. The ratio of which seems to increase the more I open my eyes.

I'm so sick of reading about male privilege in zines. The concept is an accurate one and one that is practiced and is accepted, but the kind of language used seems applicable only in our little "hardcore community"; use that kind of language down on 13th and Burnside and the boys look at you like you've got a hammer growing out of your forehead and such lofty terms as "male privilege" and "women-safe spaces" get you, at best, the label of a treachuring pussy faggot. At best. And it sounds like I'm one more dipshit white male spouting off about how he's been cured of sexism, which is the farthest thing from the truth, but sometimes the ugliness just smacks me in the face. The offhanded ugliness that's so acceptable of men in this world, that's so casual, that seems to transcend such polite terms as "male privilege." I'm angry.

Walking home again. Tired again, up all night, worked all day, it's starting to rain. There's a woman to my right standing next to a parking meter smoking a cigarette. I pass her. To my right are two men, walking past me and the woman standing there. They're the quintessential average guys: vaguely handsome, vaguely savage and dumb looking. They both have baseball hats and t-shirts. One of them could use a shave.

The four of us are, at most, fifteen or twenty feet apart. And these men and I pass each other and I hear one of them say to the other one, "Ah, she's got a bit of a belly on her." We are fifteen or twenty feet apart. She heard him. If I heard him, she heard him. So, just like that, she's out. She's fucking out; she's been catalogued and filed, dear. She doesn't fit into this dumb little monster's idea of female beauty and he's sharing it with his pal, me, her, the

fucking world. His tone and offhandedness suggest he's looking at the motor in his truck or a show on the television. He's an American male, he probably couldn't spell "privilege" if his cock depended on it.

So, tell me if this guy is acting on his male privilege, please. Or if he's just a stupid little piece of shit. Tell me if he's an average man or an average American, please. Tell me that talk minus action equals zero and then look her in the face and repeat yourself. And then, even as I contradict myself, tell me some more about privilege and male guilt. Come on, man, we know the buzzwords. You can write about it in your zine and I'll write about it in mine and we'll all be sensitive males working like crazy on our sexism while those two dumbfucks go down the street to watch the game and that woman cries against the parking meter, cut down one more time.

## An Interview Via The Astral Plane

With Egon Schiele, Austrian

Painter, 1890-1918

I think that you were probably a lot like me, sir. (Isn't that funny, when people claim to have been reincarnated, they're always someone famous? Sylvester Stallone was William the Lion, who ruled Scotland with bloodied hands from 1165 to 1214, the guy selling you your cigarettes and eggs with his caterpillar mustache was Abraham Lincoln. Apparently the famous are the only ones worthy of reincarnation; no one ever claims to be one of Genghis Khan's unfortunate concubines, raped and wishing for death at 14, ridden with pustules and disease, beheaded with gratitude when it was discovered she's given one of Khan's generals syphilis. No one is ever a nameless stockbroker with stinky feet and an alcoholic wife who loved him dearly, a stockbroker who flung himself out of a New York skyscraper during the Big Crash. Interesting, eh? And before you start thinking that I believe I am the living embodiment of Schiele, please let me clear this up: I'm making no allusions to being the reincarnation of Egon Schiele, merely that I feel a kinship with the little fop. How, if I were the reincarnation of the aforementioned, could a blob of ectoplasm that bears vague resemblance to him be floating here in my apartment, alongside another blob, who, I've been informed, will act as his translator throughout this interview? Hmmm, I ask you, how is that? OK, then. Meanwhile, I'd like to inform you that this is merely an annoying sidenote, certainly not centrifugal to the Main Rant, hence I've chosen with candor to place this paragraph in parentheses; these sentences are meant to be lightly mused over and then discarded, nothing more. I apologize for the inconvenience, but I certainly don't promise that it won't happen again. One never knows when such practices might seem suitable, does one? So, let's simply move on, shall we? At the very least, I promise to make an effort not to over-use the Old Parentheses Mini-Rant Trick too often, OK? No, please, let's go. Time, as they say, is a-wastin'.)

So, where was I? Ah, yes, Mr. Schiele, Egon, if I may, spoken with the utmost respect for the dead and the talented. Egon, I imagine that you and I were probably quite a bit alike. I doubt we would've gotten along well because of this. I look at your paintings and they scream out SEX! and DEATH! and I think you were probably lustful and terrified of both of them. You would've made a great American, Egon; I look at our billboards here in



the States, over 80 years after you've died and they all seem to scream out SEX! and DEATH! too. I imagine the Austrian nights did not treat you well, I figure you had a hard time sleeping, like me. When you spoke of the desire that artists be ranked in prestige right up there with cops and cardinals, I can see an elevated sense of self-importance so similar to mine, though I have a hard time finding the odd, contradictory sense of self-loathing that I myself walk around with. My friend says that I've been known to lay in the gutter and look down on the world and I understand what he means. Where is your self-loathing, Egon? Where is your belief that you were a monster with angel wings taped to your back? Could it be drawn there in your numerous self-portraits in which you stand or crouch, emaciated and screaming, the teeth in your mouth as jagged as a busted bottle of Henry's Dark? Could that be it?

(Egon and his translator confer. After Egon spits a wad of German onto the floor, the translator, who's voice I find quite pleasant, translates for him: *You pretty much hit the nail on the head there, skipper. Been doin your homework, ain't ya?*)

Terrific. But another thing I don't get is that, even though you were considered one of Austria's most prominent artists by the time you were nineteen, twenty, and even though your nudes are charged, absolutely exploding, with eroticism, dare say I *lust*, you couldn't seem to get laid to save your life. Here too, sir, are we able to draw a correlation between you and myself. The difference is, I'm just some guy with a shitload of paintings in his closet and bad tattoos that seem to blur more and more each passing day, while you were both the Basquiat and David Lee Roth of Vienna in 1911, 1912. There must've been dozens of young Austrian women who felt more than a slight stir in their knickers when gazing upon your countenance, but by all accounts it seems that you remained a virgin until your early twenties. You were a good looking dude, Egon, I've seen pictures, what made the journey so difficult or terrifying to you? Were you so abrasive that you couldn't even work out one or two rolls in the hay with a few society women, daughters of the men who commissioned your paintings? Were you scared or just so arrogant no one but the most diehard of fans could stand to be around you?

Of course, there's many, many stories about you. I've heard them from many sources, though needless to say, few of them have been in books. Even then, when it comes to the annals of history, that malleable and elusive toad in the witchgrass, what's true and what isn't? Is something more true because it was published by Knopf Books, rather than spoken by a man who needed his teeth brushed? Anyways, Egon, the rumors: Your father died of syphilis and you also had it and gave it to your sister, or she gave it to you. You drew a lot of little kids, did a lot of prepubescent female nudes, and of course it's been spoken that you housed them, drew them, molested them, street urchins all. How about it, Egon? What rings hollow and what rings true?

(Egon, and his astral German to English translator, choose silence on these points. Unfortunately, and on quite a sour and dark note, and so similar to the questions *How the fuck did Mellenkamp smoke five packs a day and still manage to sting?* and *How do they get the creme filling in Twinkies?*, the world may never know.)

Well, then, sir, onto better things. When you showed Klimt your portfolio and asked him, at seventeen, if you had talent, he stroked his great beard and said, "Yes. Too much, in fact." He was a mentor, but by your early twenties you'd surpassed him in bravery and style, if not in decorativeness. You were a screaming tiger to Klimt's goldenrod. Though you drew from Klimt early on, learned from him, you were a spearhead of your own within a very short time. You were capable, in paint, in pencil, of incredible savagery and stunning gentleness. Klimt never got much beyond painting socialite women in pastel colors with patterns adorning the background.

But enough asskissing; your ego, it's well known, was monstrous. Your ego, if it was food, could've fed the multitudes for years. Your ego is a steak dinner for everyone in New

York. Your ego is Top Ramen on my shelf for the rest of my life, so I'll quit, as they say, blowing smoke up your ass and actually get down to a bit of critical analysis of your character, if not your art.

(A groan from the grave, vague guttural mutterings that the translator tells me equates to, *Oh, Jesus Christ, here we go again.*)

What was the year, Egon? 1915? I think so. After living with your wife for a few years in a small town outside Vienna, you were finally busted on obscenity charges. It was bound to happen sometime; you just flaunted one too many charcoal drawings around of ten year old girls wearing no clothes. And being that the town was as small as it was, there just wasn't that much room for debauchery, you couldn't go out and get drunk and act like a crazy motherfucker in the east end of town and then hole up in the west end til things cooled down a bit. It was a village, you and your wife lived as hermits lived. You did not entertain people, you did not go out much, just you, your wife, the occasional visitor, the even more occasional person of the Upper Crust who would go to your place to sit for a portrait. You were not well liked there, you in your painters smock, glowering and handsome and full of yourself, an ego fifty miles wide, shunning the town you lived in. The town took it personally and someone finally reported you to the magistrate. Needless to say, your studio housed hundreds of drawings and paintings, years and years of charcoal, pencil, gouache, oil, canvas, paper and the vast majority of them naked women with bared genitalia and luscious smiles upon their painted faces, the vast majority of them a questionable age. You were in court immediately thereafter, the judge ruled your work "obscene" and actually burned two of your canvasses there in the courtroom. You were thrown in the pokey, of which much has been written. You kept a journal, excerpts of which have been included in the many books penned and compiled since your death. Unfortunately, in my opinion, the journal and the work you did there is nothing more than a testament to what a fucking little wimp you were.

(A roar from the Other Side! Screams and bellows from a long ago disintegrated throat! An ego wounded! The translator calmly hurls obscenities at me, via Egon, sounding like an R-rated version of the guy in the Micro Machines commercials of yesteryear.)

Well, look, Egon, give me a break. You did twenty eight days. Less than a month, for God's sake. You had your own room, your own bed, a window. They kept your door open half the time, with a guard sitting outside your cell reading the paper. You were given pens, a notebook, paper, pencils, charcoal, gouache. Jesus Christ. Do you know what prisons in America were like at the turn of the century? You did your little twenty eight days and whined like a motherfucker the entire time. Your journal entries are all about how you are dying in a cage, how the artist must be free, blah blah and blah. The drawings you did there are some of the worst of your career, portraying you as an emaciated skeleton hurled and crouching against the corner of the room. Give me a break, Mr. Door Open Half The Time. Mr. Three Squares A Day. If you were a Sioux Indian, Egon, say a Blackfoot or an Oglala, what would your name be? Ah, the tribe needs a new letterhead designed for it's stationary! Let's have old Piss And Moan do it, he's good with a pen if you can put up with his whining.

I'm sorry, maybe I've judged you a bit too harshly. Maybe it's just that your cries of anguish don't seem exponential to the amount of suffering that such a place could have put upon you. Of course, that's a judgement of ultimate unfairness, isn't it? To judge one person's suffering by your own meter. I certainly haven't walked a mile in your shoes, so perhaps it's better if I said nothing. Perhaps we should just move on, to the final point, the final thrust of this discussion (albeit a somewhat one-sided discussion, Egon, I must say) that we've been having. So, I'm sorry, I judged you too harshly. Chums?

(Silence from Egon and his otherworldly assistant. Since he hasn't told me to shut the hell up, or that he's leaving, etc., I take his silence as an acknowledgement that we may move on to the final, and possibly most important, point.)

Egon, you're dead.

(A momentary pause, a blob of ectoplasm blabs and is translated to English, impatience written all over it: *Right. What's your fucking point, hombre?*)

Goodness, I never knew you to be so joyous and free with expletives. Death, it appears, has put you in touch with those of quite a lower standard of vernacular, I must say. Anyway, you're dead. Upon this we both agree. You croaked along with a fair portion of Europe throughout that time period, stricken down when a nice little case of influenza came rolling its jolly fangs and pincers through your town, your country, your continent. These are the facts as I understand them, please feel free to correct me if these little tidbits do not ring true. OK:

- 1) Dead in 1918, at twenty eight years old. Influenza.
- 2) Died three days after your wife, whom you drew on her deathbed.
- 3) She was seven months pregnant with your first child.

4) And now here we are, you with unfinished canvasses and a sailor's mouth, me with cigarette lungs and a face like a scarecrow. Similar in our temper and our taste for incendiary allegories; *Cardinal And Nun*, for example, in which a cardinal in red clutches a woman of the Cloth, his calves flexing as they embrace on their knees. I bet you stirred some shit up with that one. But one of my absolute favorites is when some church commissioned you to do a portrait of a young girl, 18, 19, that would be then transferred to stained-glass and adorn one of the Church's windows. I forget her social standing, or why she should be allowed the very unhumane honor of being on a church window, but I sure remember your painting. Boy howdy, do I. You painted her in a very proper dress, a straight-ahead view, the only flesh showing was that of her face and hands. Proper in every way. Except you had rendered on her mouth a smile of the most unacceptable sort, the leering smile of a Trollop, the gleam of many a sexual tryst, the twinkle of many a carnal incident, in her big baby blues. And the capper. Her hands, those bony and elongated hands that you seemed to draw so joyously, that you drew so fucking well, are placed squarley over her knees, clasped loosely together, and the negative space between the two palms, right in the spot that it should be, looks suspiciously like the shape of a vagina. The church, needless to say, never used the painting as a prototype for the window.

(Much laughing, a gleeful giggling, that doesn't need a German to English translation in the least, nor does the sound of Egon slapping his knee in merriment.)

Egon, despite all I said about your jail time and your ego and all that, I'll be honest, you're a fucking genius. When you were on, you were on like no one else, living dead or inbetween.

(*You're fuckin'-A right, turbo. Ahem.*)

So, to end this interview, provide me with a nice capper for the whole thing to put in the zine, and simply out of my own curiousness, I have one final question for you: What was your secret? Do you have any tidbit or gem of wisdom, any advice to impart to a sea of Struggling Artists here in the New Millenium, that look to your body of work for encouragement or inspiration? In a nutshell, what should we, the Living, do? And after this, I'll let you get back to your golf game or whatever it is you're doing these days, and thank you very much in advance for taking the time to speak to me.

(A lengthy pause. The ectoplasm, if it was not a big ball of astral goo, and had a chin that could be scratched and fingers that could scratch, might have done so at this point in the time continuum. The translator and I wait patiently. After a time, the goo speaks, in what sounds like an earnest and sincere German voice, lacking the tone of arrogance and condescension that one might expect when asking Mr. Schiele to give one final comment. The translator translates and I scribble furiously in my notebook and when I look up, they're gone, both of them, leaving nothing but a brief whiff of what smells like rubbing alcohol and

me sitting there with an overloaded brain.)

(Well, the translator had said, *just do it*. Schiele was apparently unaware that Nike, a corporation conglomerated and capitalised long after his death, has been saying this for a while now. *If you're going to paint, then paint. Through syphilis and sorrow, good reviews, bad reviews or no reviews at all, paint up a storm. Paint up a fury. Paint up one wall and down the other in your underwear. Just do it; do it and live like your ass is on fire. Trust me, porkchop, when I say that life is too fuckin'-A short. If you want to stare out the window eating Rice-A-Roni, then do it. Because you want to. Be anxious, but never ever be bored. Paint or go bowl-ing, but do it with grace, godammit.*

## The Spectres Of Fifth Avenue

We are the ghosts of 3 a.m. We spit on the windows of the fashion stores, the clothing stores, long after the last bus has run. While neon burns. While we burn.

Yeah, while neon burns and the last promise of who we are has finally come true, we spit on the windows of the fashion store in the dark of night, the mannequins following our steps under their cones of light there. We spit on the windows, you show us what beauty is and then put it behind glass for us to see and not touch, not be. You tell us *this is what beautiful is* and then say if the price is right boys and girls, sons and daughters, it's yours. But it's a high price. An impossible one, a wide, yawning mouth of a price, ever consuming. More clothes, new clothes, ripped clothes, no clothes.

This is what beautiful is, we're told, and that's what we remember when we walk down the street in the daytime and size each other up, gauge each other, without even knowing it, without even meaning to. Divided by class, divided by pants and shirts and shoes and skirts. I do it all the time, all all all the time. So do you. The mannequins are pretty the way people are pretty: unmoving, unapproachable, blank. Tell me what beautiful is and then affix a price tag and code. Holes in my pants, holes in our heads. How many pairs of pants can I fit in my wallet? How many wallets can I fit in the barrier we place between each other, the judgements that we act upon ten seconds after we see each other, what our faces and hair and clothes look like? Is our judgement bigger than a breadbox or smaller than the very small idea that we've been sold, that fashion should matter one fucking iota?

Forty hours a week, twenty hours, an odd job or an old job or no job, over there is always better than here for us. The shine of the magazine, the smiling people in the magazine with the bright eyes, they are better than our real dull eyes. A busload of dull eyes going to a job we've been at for too long to do things we don't want to do around people that maybe we don't care for too much all so that we can still not be able to afford the things in the window that we're told will bring us closer, ever closer to that impossible beyond of *there*, success, America's greatest gift of unyielding potential and dismal and false returns. One tenth of one percent of all the people are in the magazines and the rest of us just burn with the neon. The rest of us are on this bus this morning or doing the ghost dance of a downtown 3 a.m. And another one tenth of one percent, or some number, some number, *they* are the ones that tell us this is what beautiful is, the goal is on Saks Fifth Avenue, the goal is behind a pane of glass, the goal is a moaning spectre shaking its chains all the way from here to the food stamp office to stand row to the fifth pitched curb.

They tell us what beautiful is and they give us men and women as icons and idols to worship, men and women who will never ever have any idea what its like on this bus at 7 a.m. with hungover day laborers and waitress mothers and me and you. And they will never under-

stand or even care about the rest of us, too, the ghosts with empty pockets and emptier guts, haunting downtown like visions, staring in the window of fashion stores. The dream is an impossible valley.

And we, under the guise of dressing according to our personalities, allow the way we dress to become our personalities. And allow each other to be viewed as less than or more, according to that code. Fashion and judgement and dismissal, all of them making out in the confines of our skulls and too-narrow lives.

## A Cacaphony Of Bird Wings In

### Three Parts

1. Somewhere between the foot of the Hawthorne Bridge and my apartment, mildly drunk, it hits me; all those bad dreams I try to forget about, try to ignore or paint through or drink through, they just come down all at once, sounding like a cacaphony of bird wings, and I end up sagging against the wall of some nameless hotpocket restaurant downtown, still fifteen blocks from home, spent. An old man in a young man's body. Christ, I need more sleep. As if I could sleep.

I've been on a 2-hour kick, what Bill used to call a "disco nap." Between rails of coke and changing your bellbottoms and hitting the dance floor, you take these small two hour naps, I guess. Fortunately or unfortunately, I don't do the coke and all my pants are ripped out and torn at the cuffs, but I'm well versed in the act of the two hour nap, and let me tell you, porkchop, they don't do one fucking bit of good.

I'm leaning against the wall of that restaurant or office building or whatever the fuck it is, down around 2nd Avenue, when a cop car drives by, slowing when he sees me. I nod to him and fish in my pockets for a smoke, start walking. *And just where the hell do you think it is you're going?* I ask myself.

Home, I guess.

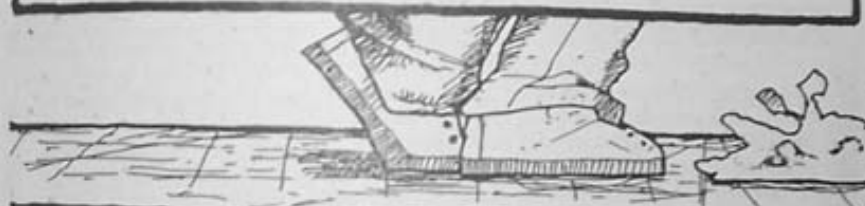
*Oh yeah? And where might that be?*

That's when I roll my eyes and start moving; bad poetry and poorly-written stories are one thing, but when you start telling lines like that to yourself, it's best just to put one foot in front of the other and start going somewhere. And so I do.

2. Welcome to this, this hangover life. Under fire, but living under a rock at the same time. This hangover life: ash on the floor, the membrane inside your skull pulled tight with dehydration, your brain feeling like it's speared with bits of glass. You live here.

Throwing up in the john, nothing but bile and the two aspirin you tried your best to hold down. The beer bottles sit on the coffee table, the counter and the floor like the bones of some animal. You did not fall down walking home from the bar last night. This hangover life: feeling like a banished and glorious king the night before, now you just feel like shit. You're becoming a caricature of yourself. For all the times you've railed against the Dylan Thomas Syndrome, against pseudo-artist hipster motherfuckers wallowing in their pain and booze and self-pity, there you are gagging at the kitchen sink, shivering and using both hands to hold your coffee cup.

You artist, you. You alcoholic, you.



3. Three days down, you've been working and you don't drink when you work but it's your Friday night now and here you are. This house is full of people, the band in the basement was terrible. You have somehow managed to kiss a girl on the back steps of this house with everyone watching. The keg does not end. A friend will tell you later that people were talking a lot of shit and that you were the official Drunk Guy of the party but for now you're a piece of driftwood, being pulled in and out with the tide. You try your luck with another girl that has been flirting with you all night, but apparently you've been mistaken; when you ask her if a kiss or two might not be in order she recoils and turns savage. "No," she says. "I have a boyfriend. I love my boyfriend." She says that to you three more times in quick succession while you stand there nodding with your cup of bitter beer. You say, "OK, sorry I bothered you, ma'am," not unkindly and wander off, hoping vaguely that her loving boyfriend does not want to beat you up later.

In the basement are two other girls, acquaintances more than friends, and somehow in the course of conversation one of them throws her cup of beer on you and the other follows suit. "Well, what the shit," you say, "I sense a theme here," and throw your own beer on yourself as well. You stagger off with their laughter rolling off your back and fall down there, in the basement. You stay there on the floor a moment, the cement cool against your cheek, grateful that you went down with a plastic cup instead of a bottle. You rise. You are covered in filth. It's time to go; the tide's growing deeper and the people are thinning out. You know less and less of them and the few you do know seem less and less willing to put up with you. On the front porch, Scott is talking to a woman and they are laughing and you talk to them briefly. Then you take a piss off the porch and wind up accidentally pissing on the woman's bicycle. You apologize profusely and then kick Scott's beer over. They are both very gracious. The woman, named Jeanette, is kind and Scott is forgiving as he's been known to reach the level of drunkenness that you're at now. As of this writing, the two of them are officially "going out" and you feel an odd mixture of pride and embarrassment when recalling your moments there on the porch, seeing the act of urination on her bicycle as a kind of catalyst for them on the night they met.

You stagger off to go pass out on the couch of Castle Grayskull. Otis will come out of his bedroom the next morning to see you there, just woken up, dirty from your fall in the basement, sick and savage and he'll tell you later that he'd never seen anyone so hungover. You will buy a banana and try not to throw it up on the busride home, wanting to apologize to the kindly elderly woman beside you for the way you smell. You will think of skulls and death and the sentimentality of drunks, the curse of searching for meaning in the most mundane of things.



Life just is, and yours is not a sad or noble or even interesting one. The beat of bird wings in your skull, they ring out like bombshells.

## Cats In Velvet Dresses

I'm at my mom's place for Christmas. She owns a house, something that she is proud of, something I'm proud of. For all of my pseudo-radical railings about capitalism, and all my emotionalism and half-formed ideals about property, all of my contradictions and bullsh\*t, the sometimes growing up in basements with rodents and spiders, or sharing one bedroom apartments with a curtain dividing our "rooms", the fact that my mother is making house payments on her own home and has a beautiful garden that she and her boyfriend have created from their own sweat and their own time means something to me.

And it's Christmas. Christmas was probably the best time of year in my house as a kid; no one drank for those few days, there were no fistfights, very little screaming. In a place where madness and addiction was considered normal, Christmas was serene, the summer breeze between tornadoes. Each year Christmas seems to mean less and less to me, my own madneses and addictions possibly beginning to fill the gaps. Or maybe it's just the natural evolution of growing older. Getting tired. During the few days I'm at my mom's place, I stay up long after she and Larry have gone to bed, sitting in the darkened living room, looking at the roses of color the Christmas lights throw off the ornaments, struggling to smell the smells of my youth, hold on to that sense of serenity. Self-pity, that dumb but persistent killer. He's hard to shake. I stay up like that each night I'm there and while the chanting and poisonous crowd in my head doesn't shut up, its volume lessens. Every once in a while, it leaves entirely. For which I'm grateful.

Another reason I'm proud of my mother? She knows her neighbors. We grew up in apartments and kept to ourselves in regards to our community. Now my mother lives on a fairly quiet street and she knows the people that she lives among. The people across the street, for example. See, it's the afternoon of Christmas Eve and I look out the window and there is the little boy and his mother. She is holding his hand as they walk down the street, both of them laden with small packages in their free hands. My mother has told me about them and that they're making on Christmas Eve has become somewhat of a tradition there on Hiatt Street.

The woman, my mom's neighbor, is raising that small boy and about twenty cats. "She's a simple woman," my mom says, "she's just an incredibly peaceful, simple woman." Though her one quirk: she dresses her cats up. There are cat houses, cat manions, in their backyard that the woman's boyfriend has made. She buys dresses at garage and estate sales and dresses her cats up. The cats, even in frilly dresses and bonnets, are as calm and docile as the woman herself there in the cradle of her arms. She sometimes brings her finds over to my mom's place to admire, or occasionally a cat in a new outfit. She recently brought over a small red velvet dress and my mom oohed and ahed appropriately. She told my mom, her plain face beaming, which cat would be given such a gift and then said, "But she only gets to wear it on Christmas. It's just a Christmas dress."

And her son. Despite what you or I may think of her penchant for dressing up cats in dresses, she seems to be doing OK with her son. He seems to have inherited her calmness, the sense of simple joy she walks around with. She threw him a birthday party last year and when

Larry walked over with a present and a salad with tomatoes and cucumbers from their garden, the kid came barreling out of the yard and gave him a big hug. "Hi, Lawwy!" he exclaimed. And when he saw the bowl, "Oh boy, sawad!" She seems to be raising him with love and it shows: no five year old can fake getting excited over a goddam salad.

So it's the afternoon of Christmas Eve there on old Hiatt Street and the woman and her son are walking up and down the street. Say what you want about Christmas, but today is the day of tradition and ritual. They have small packages, gifts to their neighbors, in their hands and they go from house to house, delivering them. Mom and Larry have been expecting the woman and her son and they have gifts to give as well. For the woman, two sets of towels, one of them appropriately laden with cats decorating a Christmas tree. For the kid, a sweatshirt, a paint set, a truck. The packages look beautiful.

They finally make it to our place and we're there to greet them. My mom was right, the woman is plain but exuding a gentleness, a *sweetness* that makes your heart slow down a few beats and take a breather. They are shocked and suprised when, after they hand us our package, wrapped in ribbon and colored foil, we have packages as well. The kid exclaims "Wow!" when we hand him his gifts. We stand out in the driveway for a few minutes and talk, me mostly quiet and just feeling some of that peace that'd been elusive for so long; just hanging out among these people. My friends and I seem to live so fast, it's nice to just sit there, to feel a part of the moment. I've never met these people but have heard about them, and I just want to watch them and be there.

They get ready to leave and the boy gives my mom a hug, then Larry. Then he looks at my mom while pointing at me and says quietly, "Can I give him a hug, too?" And just like that, something breaks inside me, or maybe something gets fixed. That crowd of vipers in my head, that always sings out and negates every good thing I've ever done, shuts up in shock. *What's this? Who, me? Kid, are you sure?* This kid. Me with my tattoos and corkscrew hair and needing a shave.

"You sure can, honey," she says and he looks at me and smiles and opens his arms like bird wings.

I crouch down and hug him, this little boy, this little boy giving me such a shock with his kindness. Just like that, this little kid breaks my heart. A little boy so full of love that he's got enough to share with me and not want a fucking thing in return. Just like that, he teaches me about honesty and passion and living inside the moment. I'm a selfish man; nine times out of ten, when I do something, I've calculated the possible repercussions, good or bad. It's a fine line between "logic" and selfishness. It's a dog eat dog punch dog in its face and take its wallet world. Much of the time, I feel like I'm not such a great guy and this kid is looking up at me with his arms out like he's Superman and he's smiling at me.

I crouch down and hug him, his arms are a circle around me. A sometimes ugly life, this one, an often desperate and sad and mundane one and the kid circled me in his tiny arms and when I was looking for that fleeting sense of peace and kindness and couldn't find it, he gave it to me in the simple act of a goddam hug. Gave me mine back and some of his to spare for when the seas got rough.

They leave and I excuse myself from Mom and Larry and go into the garage. I smoke a cigarette and marvel at that kid, that family, this life. Like I said at the beginning, if you stay out in the open, life hands you these moments, sometimes brutal, sometimes beautiful, sometimes just fucking hilarious and it's up to all of us to see them and then do what we will with them. What I did was I stood in that garage smoking and shaking my head, and was I smiling a little bit? Yes, I was. And did I cry a little bit? Yes, I did that, too. Waves of something broke over this stupid and stubborn heart. I realized just how often I cling to exaggerated wars, wars on the battlefields of my own insecurities, my own fears, wars in the head that I

Life just *is*, and yours is not a sad or noble or even interesting one. The beat of bird wings in your skull, they ring out like bombshells.

## Cats In Velvet Dresses

I'm at my mom's place for Christmas. She owns a house, something that she is proud of, something I'm proud of. For all of my pseudo-radical railings about capitalism, and all my emotionalism and half-formed ideals about property, all of my contradictions and bullshits, she sometimes growing up in basements with rodents and spiders, or sharing one bedroom apartments with a curtain dividing our "rooms", the fact that my mother is making house payments on her own home and has a beautiful garden that she and her boyfriend have created from their own sweat and their own time means something to me.

And it's Christmas. Christmas was probably the best time of year in my house as a kid; no one drank for those few days, there were no fistfights, very little screaming. In a place where madness and addiction was considered normal, Christmas was serene, the summer breeze between tornadoes. Each year Christmas seems to mean less and less to me, my own madnests and addictions possibly beginning to fill the gaps. Or maybe it's just the natural evolution of growing older. Getting tired. During the few days I'm at my mom's place, I stay up long after she and Larry have gone to bed, sitting in the darkened living room, looking at the roses of color the Christmas lights throw off the ornaments, struggling to smell the smells of my youth, hold on to that sense of serenity. Self-pity, that dumb but persistent killer. He's hard to shake. I stay up like that each night I'm there and while the chanting and poisonous crowd in my head doesn't shut up, its volume lessens. Every once in a while, it leaves entirely. For which I'm grateful.

Another reason I'm proud of my mother? She knows her neighbors. We grew up in apartments and kept to ourselves in regards to our community. Now my mother lives on a fairly quiet street and she knows the people that she lives among. The people across the street, for example. See, it's the afternoon of Christmas Eve and I look out the window and there is the little boy and his mother. She is holding his hand as they walk down the street, both of them laden with small packages in their free hands. My mother has told me about them and that day they're making on Christmas Eve has become somewhat of a tradition there on Hiatt Street.

The woman, my mom's neighbor, is raising that small boy and about twenty cats. "She's a simple woman," my mom says, "she's just an incredibly peaceful, simple woman." Though her one quirk: she dresses her cats up. There are cat houses, cat marriages, in their backyard that the woman's boyfriend has made. She buys dresses at garage and estate sales and dresses her cats up. The cats, even in frilly dresses and bonnets, are as calm and docile as the woman herself there in the cradle of her arms. She sometimes brings her finds over to my mom's place to admire, or occasionally a cat in a new outfit. She recently brought over a small red velvet dress and my mom oohed and ahhed appropriately. She told my mom, her plan for Christmas. It's just a Christmas dress.

And her son. Despite what you or I may think of her penchant for dressing up cats in dresses, she seems to be doing OK with her son. He seems to have inherited her calmness, the sense of simple joy she walks around with. She threw him a birthday party last year and when

Larry walked over with a present and a salad with tomatoes and cucumbers from their garden, the kid came barreling out of the yard and gave him a big hug. "Hi, Larry!" he exclaimed. And when he saw the bowl, "Oh boy, salad!" She seems to be raising him with love and it shows: no five year old can fake getting excited over a goddam salad.

So it's the afternoon of Christmas Eve there on old Hiatt Street and the woman and her son are walking up and down the street. Say what you want about Christmas, but today is the day of tradition and ritual: they have small packages, gifts to their neighbors, in their hands and they go from house to house, delivering them. Mom and Larry have been expecting the woman and her son and they have gifts to give as well. For the woman, two sets of towels, one of them appropriately laden with cats decorating a Christmas tree. For the kid, a sweatshirt, a paint set, a truck. The packages look beautiful.

They finally make it to our place and we're there to greet them. My mom was right; the woman is plain but exuding a gentleness, a *sweetness* that makes your heart slow down a few beats and take a breather. They are shocked and surprised when, after they hand us our package, wrapped in ribbon and colored foil, we have packages as well. The kid exclaims "Wow!" when we hand him his gifts. We stand out in the driveway for a few minutes and talk, me mostly quiet and just feeling some of that peace that'd been elusive for so long, just hanging out among these people. My friends and I seem to live so fast, it's nice to just sit there, to feel a part of the moment. I've never met these people but have heard about them, and I just want to watch them and be there.

They get ready to leave and the boy gives my mom a hug, then Larry. Then he looks at my mom while pointing at me and says quietly, "Can I give him a hug, too?" And just like that, something breaks inside me, or maybe something gets fixed. That crowd of vipers in my head, that always sings out and negates every good thing I've ever done, shuts up in shock. *What's this? Who, me? Kid, are you sure?* This kid. Me with my tattoos and cockscrew hair and needing a shave.

"You sure can, honey," she says and he looks at me and smiles and opens his arms like bird wings.

I crouch down and hug him, this little boy, this little boy giving me such a shock with his kindness. Just like that, this little kid breaks my heart. A little boy so full of love that he's got enough to share with me and not want a fucking thing in return. Just like that, he teaches me about honesty and passion and living inside the moment. I'm a selfish man, nine times out of ten, when I do something, I've calculated the possible repercussions, good or bad. It's a fine line between "logic" and selfishness. It's a dog eat dog punch dog in its face and take its wallet world. Much of the time, I feel like I'm not such a great guy and this kid is looking up at me with his arms out like he's Superman and he's smiling at me.

I crouch down and hug him, his arms are a circle around me. A sometimes ugly life, this one, an often desperate and sad and mundane one and the kid circled me in his tiny arms and when I was looking for that fleeting sense of peace and kindness and couldn't find it, he gave it to me in the simple act of a goddam hug. Gave me mine back and some of his to spare for when the seas got rough.

They leave and I excuse myself from Mom and Larry and go into the garage. I smoke a cigarette and marvel at that kid, that family, this life. Like I said at the beginning, if you stay out in the open, life hands you these moments, sometimes brutal, sometimes beautiful, sometimes just fucking hilarious and it's up to all of us to see them and then do what we will with them. What I did was I stood in that garage smoking and shaking my head, and was I smiling a little bit? Yes, I was. And did I cry a little bit? Yes, I did that, too. Waves of something broke over this stupid and stubborn heart: I realized just how often I cling to exaggerated wars, wars on the battlefields of my own insecurities, my own fears, wars in the head that I

can't shake, wars in the heart that have been there for years and years, that hardly ever leave. How often I feel guilty when I haven't done a thing wrong, how much guilt and shame are like a snakeskin or a mask, fear holding me down and away from so many things. Oftentimes feeling bitter and dirty and tired, much of the time feeling ugly, most of the time just feeling like a jackass, the kid brought me to tears there in the garage, joy or hope or peace, something good, something pure, the things I felt when I was his age, blossomed in the folds of this heart.

I stuffed the snake in the subway and walked into my mother's house to help her with dinner.

Everything, absolutely everything, is forgiven.

# AVOW

12





## Three Years Down

You think about the memories you have about this man, you think of the memories you have and they're not all good ones. It would be so good to be able to paint a picture of heroes and villains in stark black and white, of good and evil, of conflict: rising action, climax and conclusion. The hero battles his demons and wins.

Or, if not that, at least paint a picture that alludes to the possibility that tragedy can serve some kind of a purpose. But that's the shitter about tragedy in general: it's the absolute textbook definition of waste. To look for meaning in tragedy is like trying to find a bus ticket in a pile of shit. Memories fade and yellow like photographs and you're left with less than what you had in the first place. Pointless deaths are like that. The randomness of it is nothing but shocking, a cigarette butt in the bottle of beer.

I will forever remember Erik, my mom's boyfriend, in sweatpants and a hot pink t-shirt. All of this hangs out in the skull and the pockets of the heart, old rooms, like it was yesterday. Erik, bald and a beard, a sense of humor honed on decades of self-deprecation, as sharp as a knife. Growing up and taking root in the "grass, gas or ass" era of arena rock in Portland in the seventies and eighties. He'd shot dope and drank tequila with some of the biggest rock stars in the world. People I hear about now and want to laugh at but were pretty hot shit then.

He was an absolute music fanatic, no doubt. Had an anecdote for every person you'd care to name. Erik went to Frank Zappa's birthday party once where they gave Zappa an ice cream cake shaped like a muffin, so big it had to be put in the bathtub of the hotel room. Fifteen years later, Erik died in the rented room of a halfway house with open sores on his arms and shit in his pants.

Eventually they split, he and my mom. Still sober, jazzed on coffee and smokes and records and that's it. Who knows how it started, who knows why, but he eventually started drinking again. First it was drinking and then drinking and not being able to stop. I'd hear stories about him from people; him busting a bottle full of whiskey in the toilet and pissing on it, vowing to anyone that would listen, "Never again." Only to tip the neck back again and again and again and burn up inside for it. And after that comes a heroin monkey sniffing around and then biting and deciding to hang on. People will find what they need.

I am locked now and forever in the remembrance of moments: Erik's awkward attempt at consoling an angry, tired fifteen-year old me after I'd just gotten my eyebrow split open by a hillbilly's suckerpunch. I couldn't sleep, still twitching with adrenaline. Ashamed of getting beaten and running away while the hillbilly's friends laughed at me from their porch.

At sixteen, shaking his head as I blared some Subhumans record, muttering about how he didn't know how I could listen to that shit and walking away.

Or me standing there, while he and my mom verbally duked it out. Erik saying, calmly and finally, "You know, Lorene, I'm not even sick of your shit. I'm sick of our shit."

At seventeen, after they'd split and my mom and I had moved to a new place, he let my band practice and record our demo in my old bedroom and he never said one negative word. Not once; that's important to me. I hold on to that, because, believe me when I tell you, we were a hundred times more horrific than any Subhumans record.

Whenever he was off the drink, those brief times, trying his hardest to stay a part of my life. No obligation to, but he tried to anyway. And a phone call later when someone told me I'd better sit down. And how he had been having a particularly hard run with dope and drinking and how he'd had himself a bit too much of the needleplay and had died in his room and had been found a few days later.

I don't want to lay it on too thick here, and I probably am. But that's the whole point; deaths like this are the opposite of melodrama. This is the opposite of heroics. It's the textbook case of pointlessness and waste.

Just a dwindling down and then an ending. Like that.

Yellowed photographs, bits of dialogue in my head that singularly mean nothing but for whatever reason will still be in my head for the rest of my life. Other bits that have blurred and run together over the years. Just some guy that was around for a while and then wasn't. And how we will all know someone like that, probably. The rest of us left, wandering on or moving on or walking on or floundering through the best we can, the only ways we know how.

## 32nd And Spring

1. The kid working graveyard at the Plaid Pantry on 21st and Hawthorne wears huge pants and a baseball cap turned backwards. It's four in the morning and he calls me bro. I'm there for cigarettes but he looks at me, nodding with the unspoken camaraderie of one of the guys, part of the clan who've been known to partake in the old wacky-weed now and then. Given the hour and the fact that I've got me some red eyes and the slurred, halting demeanor of one who's just about ripped out of his fucking gourd, he figures I'm a card-carrying member, I guess. I could've told him that it's just a byproduct of two gallons of coffee and loads of sleep deprivation, but the kid never gave me the chance. Within ten seconds of walking in, he's managed to corral me over to one of the aisles and is waving a bag of chips in my face.



"Look, bro," he says. "It's got regular chips in it, and Cheetos and pretzels and popcorn." His finger jabs each item, emblazoned across the bag, as he mentions them.

"Yeah, uh, that actually looks pretty gross."

He nods contemplatively. "Yeah, totally. It's just funny that they're called Munchies. Like how much more obvious can you get?"

And he's right: MUNCHIES! are indeed blasting across the top of the foil bag in some odd font, meant, I guess, to convey excitement. Or at least munching satisfaction. Something like that, anyway.

"You know," I say, "I pretty much just came in here for smokes."

He looks at me sideways, a glance that lets me know that he knows that I'm obviously now off the team, that my membership card has been revoked. Without another word, he troops back behind the counter and sells me my smokes. I wonder if he gets a commission on every bag of MUNCHIES sold.

I walk out and the smell of oncoming spring, hidden by months of unseasonably cold Portland nights, hits me in a face like a sweet hammer. Spring's coming, and it's right there, gentle and strong all at once.

I feel good, walking home to my basement room right at the cusp of morning. It's just me and all the people scattered around on graveyard shifts and the car thieves. The streets are silent and the lights are out. I start to dream, just about, standing upright and walking home. It's amazing: hope can flood through me in an instant, and it does exactly that, right then. Somewhere between the chiropractor's office and the comic book shop, hope comes flooding through me like the tide.

2. I live in the basement of Castle Grayskull, there on Hawthorne, behind the pizza place. At night, when I'm not at Maya's place, I stay awake and walk up and down the stairs, feeling, really, no less a ghost than when I lived alone. Or when I was eighteen, fifteen, ten. Walking among the rooms of sleeping people, trying my best to be quiet. Nighttime is a balm, a time for calmness and plans that, at least right then, are absolutely possible. Give me a stereo, cigarettes and the buzz of electric light and I'm through. There is really very little more to ask for.

## Angels And Devils In The AM Radio

And how even the radio can become a defining part of our lives, a meter. And, like anything else, a dividing line. It's odd, these fleeting moments of peace. Laying in bed with this woman, listening to Art Bell acting like a prick at 3 a.m. while some crazy lady from Arkansas talks about "skunkapes" that come into her backyard at night and attack her cats. Laughing and laughing when she recounts how the skunkapes tore her cat's neck open in a fight and how she managed to stop the bleeding by wrapping its neck in duct tape.

And it's about listening to the radio on September 12th, the day after. Trying to get my head on, sweating it out on a still summer night, trying not to get so goddamn angry when the two dipshits from the evening talk show call people from the Middle East "cockroaches." Physically feeling my mouth drop open when one of them says, "They're

just going to turn their kids into little monsters that shoot machine guns and hate Americans."

How these disembodied voices in the night, layered in static, can be soothing or disgusting, just voices and words coming out of the air. And the sense of connection I get from hearing someone else out there, breathing and speaking at the same time as me. But it's also a testament to our differences, and how some people can make you want to just punch the fucking wall sometimes.

Radios, bookmarks or flags, as much as anything else.

## The Revenge Of Taco Boy

When I was in art school in Seattle, I lived in one of the nicest urban sections of that town, and I was *still* scared shitless. The big city and all that. But, not to totally cut myself down, there were a few moments where courage presented itself. Possibly due to the false bravado of alcohol, or maybe some tiny little blossom of self-worth that, right out of high school and thrust into the liberating and odd world of "college freshman," was fighting for some breathing room, it doesn't really matter. The point is, I can count on my hands where I've motherfucking-A, one hundred percent, boy-howdy stood up for myself and my own inherent right to act like a fucking idiot, and the night where I incensed a rotund and longhaired grunge-rocker enough to chase me outside of a walk-up Taco Bell at two in the morning is one of those times. And what about the camaraderie and sense of blood-lust and brotherhood I felt when myself and three of my friends went hunting for that grunge-rocker later that night with various boxes on our heads and a battle-cry in our throats, ready to kill, or at least apologize for being a dick? That's one of my most cherished memories.

I was living with Alex, who started this zine with me, in Seattle. An apartment right there next to school, right there on Capitol Hill. Alex's friend Jeremy was visiting and one of my favorite things about Jeremy visiting was his generosity; the beer flowed like tap water and cigarettes just about flew into your mouth when Jeremy was visiting. This particular night, the night known as The Revenge Of Taco Boy, Erik, the battered little streetpunk, old at 25, was visiting too. Between the four of us, the beer bottles clacked and cracked together like thunder, smoke hung from the ceiling like a moss and inbetween quelling my incredible urge to throw up on the table, I felt tremendous hope, tremendous joy at being there among those fine people.

There was a Taco Bell right up the street, on the hipster drag there, Broadway, that stayed open late, two or three a.m. What's more, in an apparent attempt to corner the market on drunken idiots burdened with the munchies at such a late hour, this was a walk-through Taco Bell. You just walked right up to the window and ordered your food, smoked for a while and then paid an exorbitant sum for food that was going to give you stomach troubles in a few hours. Not a bad deal at all. Alex and I went while Jeremy and Erik stayed back at the homestead and discussed the virtues of pop tops versus twists offs. Ah, the gift of academia.

When Alex and I arrived at our destination, my drunkenness had not subsided one bit. If anything, the nominal amount of exercise that walking four blocks does to a kid in his first year at art school seems to have increased how much of a moron I'd become. I felt, if anything, more intoxicated. I leapt into the half open ordering window and brayed

out my order, fogging the unfortunate Taco Bell employee with Labatts breath and a nice dose of halitosis. Besides Alex and I, there were two jock kids with baseball caps and an overweight grunge-rocker guy with his goatee and long hair and cutoff shorts. "Man," one of the frat kids snorted, "that kid really wants his tacos."

The three of them seemed to have struck up a friendship of sorts, waiting out there in the middle of the night. Alex just hung out there while I weaved and bobbed, trying my hardest to stand upright. They talked about stupid stuff while Alex and I, uh, just brooded and looked cool.

Grungerocker's food came, and it appeared that he was with the jockos as he stood there eating and talking with them while they waited. Then my order came and Alex and I began walking off. "See ya later, Taco Boy," the other frat kid said as I inspected my bag, trailing a few paces behind Alex.

I took offense. While my feeling of superiority may have been apparent in my posture or demeanor, I had said nothing at all to these three kids, and I felt that for them to address me in such a manner was inappropriate. Sure, I was the obnoxious drunk kid but three guys, bigger and older and able to form complete sentences, engaged in a verbal battle against little old me, who could hardly even talk? It wasn't right. I stop and turned, staring at them. Alex, not hearing and not knowing I'd stopped following him, kept walking.

I stared at all three of them, until finally the big grungerocker piped up in a hughty tone reserved for talking to bugs or houseplants, "Go eat your food, Taco Boy."

"Yeah, maybe I should. Or maybe I should just go fuck your mom some more." It was out of my mouth almost before I realized I'd said it.

Longhair's speed was suprising. He was after me in a heartbeat and I spun and took off, laughing maniacally. I managed a look back and his face was beat red, his eyebrows knit together in concentration and/or rage. His hair was a waving flag of revenge. I was cackling wildly, the Taco Bell bag still in my hand.



He hardly gave any chase at all, though; two blocks or so. I made it into the apartment fine. Alex was amazed when I told him how I narrowly cheated death at the hands of a Soundgarden fan. I partook in Taco Bell (that guilty, guilty pleasure) and we drank beer.

To this day, I have no idea who's idea it was, merely that it was a good one. The idea? The redemption of Taco Boy.

Ah, when I think of our bravery, my heart swells. Our courage! Our idiosyncrasy! Someone put the Taco Bell bag on their head. "Look, I'm Taco Boy!" Within ten minutes

we had all placed various boxes on our heads and were shuffling out the door onto the street, ready to fight those three kids if we could find them. In reality, those kids had left at least half an hour before, but we were on drunk time and things like that cease to matter so much.

We were a sight, shuffling down the street in the dead of night, laughing and trying to light cigarettes. Alex was Labatt's Boy, the cardboard box of the 12-pack fitted over his head, the two slots of the handle serving as his visor. Jeremy was Bud Wiser; his helmet was similar, but I think his head was pretty big and he ripped the box putting it on. Erik was Mr. Coffee Man, the box perching precariously on his noggin. I, of course, was Taco Boy, the Taco Bell bag as snug on my skull as Strawberry Shortcake's bonnet. We were drunk.

We made our way to Taco Bell in a weaving and mad line. We leaned up, single file in a line against the wall, around the corner from the serving window, figuring out our plan of attack. We just kept laughing.

In all seriousness, I remember this moment best, as dumb as it is. I really was proud of all of us right then; that burning of youth. Friendship, as silly and gossamer-thin it can feel at times, was right there in my heart. No shit and for real. Erik, who had lived on the streets, accepted me for who I was and would nearly be beaten to death by three skinheads not ten blocks from where we were that night, finally leaped out from around the corner, crouched down low like a gunslinger.

"Whoever," he screamed, "made fun of Taco Boy, show yourself! I am Mr. Coffee Man and I am here to avenge his good name!"

We all shambled out.

The Taco Bell was dark. It was closed. Two girls were sitting against the wall fifteen feet away. We walked past them, laughing.

One of the girls called out, "Hey, boxhead, you got a cigarette?"

"No, sorry."

## And I Got The Fuck Out Of Dodge

Christmas dinner at my mom's place, one of the few times a year that I see my entire family. Fifteen minutes after everyone arrives, I am already out in the garage, smoking and seething, sick to death of the nigger jokes. The laughter, as always, is practiced and easy. Time, if nothing else, has shown us that if it's not the niggers it's the goddam Arabs, and if not them, there's enough Jap and faggot jokes to fill in any awkward silence me and my anger might create.

And that's the killer right there, the part that I can never fully get my head around; how easy their hatred is. How simple it is, how jovial they are. They're joking these people. My family. They're just laughing easy and having a good time with each other. It's a simple life, I guess; niggers are niggers and the Mexicans can't afford guns but they'll stab you in a heartbeat. Get it?

These people, my family. What tiny walls we have, paper thin sometimes. I look



at these men and women, growing old and older. I can hear their concern for each other and then I hear their learned ignorance and in both of these, I can see myself. Right there, among them and apart, I can see myself. And I don't know which part actually angers me more: their ignorance or my own knowledge that elements of what they laugh and joke about, however supposedly slight, are inside me as well.

See, I heard them and recoiled. And what's left is a sense of disgust, while for these people, it must be something of a comfort; in a world that small, it's easy to have things catalogued and everyone filed away properly.

And I can't let it go and I can't get past it. How do you reconcile stupidity with blood? How do I okay this? What system do you turn to in order to place responsibility for this? Who was the teacher that taught us this? How far back do we go? Who's father and mother do we look towards to point a finger at? And what's the point of even assigning blame anymore? I mean, what's my responsibility here? Isn't that the question that really needs an answer?

In my mother's living room, there's my family. Close to each other, immersed in the heartbeat of each other's lives. The very blood of my blood. And the last question I ask myself is when have our hearts and brains, and that blood, become too old or tired to learn or listen to anything new?

## The Compilation That Ate Newport

Well, shit. The best of intentions and worst of deeds, right? We have all been at this a long time; as of this writing, it's coming up on 15 years ago that I heard that first record (and we all have that *first record* that we heard, that one that made our heads blow up and our pants fill up with shit and our hearts sing out, all that melodramatic stuff.) For me, it was a worn out cassette of the Dead Kennedys' *In God We Trust, Inc.* The ink was worn off the casing and my mom, in all seriousness, had to ask her boyfriend if I was turning into a Satanist. Good lord, the innocence of 8th grade in a small town circa 1989.

Fast forward a couple years; early high school, a bezitted and chubby-out Keith, stinking and awkward. Terrified and feeling less-than the punk rock kids in school, I would listen to the Clash and pretend, somehow, that I had written those songs. That I and my friends were playing those songs. This stuff filled my veins and walked with me in every heartbeat. I burned with it, simply put.

This was around 1991, '92, right when the first *Book Your Own Fucking Life* resource guide came out. Hard to believe, but bands like Rancid, Strawman, Spitboy, Jawbreaker, MDC and others listed their band info, mailing address and phone numbers in there.

So there I am, a bezitted kid lit up like a Christmas tree over punk rock, enamored with everything about it. I would devour old issues of *Maximum Rockroll*, order out myself, to put out a record or documentation of my own, some kind of solid proof that I was there, that I had heard the words and felt the chords, a testament to my involvement,

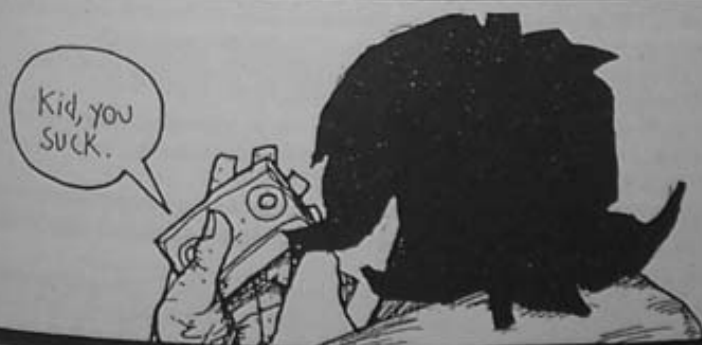
wanting so bad to feel a *part* of something.

So I was going to put out a cassette comp and give the proceeds to the local homeless shelter. And I really did have the best of intentions, man. Cassette comps, in punk rock circles a decade ago, were still cool; they were a legitimate format. CDs would be bursting onto the scene in a few years (and a lot of you probably remember the debate those motherfuckers sparked in the letters pages of various zines), but were hardly anywhere to be found at the time.

And so I set about getting bands together. Through that first volume of *BYOFL*, and bands that other bands would recommend, etc, I got a pretty nice listing together. Nowadays it would have been a pretty shitty comp, lots of genrehopping and that lovable increase and decrease in sound quality that comes with mixing good studio-recorded stuff, 4-track stuff and live songs all together onto a tape. But ten years ago, kid, this shit would have been hot.

Spitboy gave me permission to use their song "Seriously," off of their first demo. It later got put on Ebullition's *Give Me Back* comp LP. I somehow managed over the years to lose that demo, and almost everything else that bands sent me for this project, something that still causes a small pang of regret in the gut when I ponder it.

Dave from MDC said they didn't have any new stuff, but that I could use anything off of any of their records. I listened to "John Wayne Was A Nazi" voraciously back then; it's probably one of the most accurate and courageous punk songs of all time, so of course that mofo was going to go on it. (My first band, The Bulemic Seals, would later cover that song live. The actual musicians in the band were continually getting lost in the song structure, never sure how long they were supposed to play a certain chord, and I'd always forget a lot of the lyrics, so I'd either end up repeating the one or two verses I could remember over and over again or scream out something retarded like "Uh, fuck you, John Wayne! Fuck yooooouuu!" Nothing like a five minute long version of a song that was meant to last a minute and a half. I still cringe when people play one of our tapes to me, which they manages to do every six months or so, thinking it'll be hee-larious.)



The Bimbo Shrineheads were on it, but I can't remember what they sounded like. All I remember was that they somehow got confused as to when I needed the tape and ended up recording two songs via their friend's 8-track the night after I initially talked to them. They ended up mailing me a copy of the songs via overnight delivery and were pretty pissed that I didn't actually need the songs the next day. The comp was still very much in the works at that time, not even near completion. (Remember, the best of intentions, right? Never mind the fact that I didn't even have a job and could never afford to

actually get the comp mass-produced. I guess I just figured my passion would pay for it all.) I do remember the sound quality of their stuff was awful and I was skeptical about putting them on the comp at all.

Rancid only had their 7" out on Lookout out at that time, and they said I could use something off of that. Tim Armstrong came off as a nice guy; I remember distinctly how he asked me if I was in a band and when I told him about the Bulemic Seals, he thought it was great and said that we should come down and play Gilman Street with them. I think he might have thought I was older than I really was; at the time, I was still rockin' it in my checkered pants and Misfits shirt and drawing skulls with blood blowing out of their eyesockets on the back of my notebooks. Touring to California wasn't really quite in the cards.

I called Andy from the Instigators (an amazing, melodic and political punk band from the UK that even today is still totally underrated) at 6 in the morning my time and even though I could hardly understand a fucking thing he was saying, due to his accent, my nervousness and a terrible connection, he relented and sent me actual Instigators records that were pretty rare, in the States, anyway. (And yes, I managed to lose or sell those fuckers, too. God.)

He also sent me a tape from another amazing UK band, Frogs Of War, and said that I had permission to use stuff of theirs as well. They were so so good, and that tape is so so gone now. I can still picture all of these cassettes in my head; the writing on them, the labels, the handwriting, and they're all fucking outta here, they're all gone, every last one of em.

I had to call Adam from Jawbreaker a few times, as he kept saying he'd send me something and then kept forgetting, but he eventually relented and sent me a live version of "Bivouac" from Gilman that was fucking incredible. Losing the tape of that song is still one of those things that make you just roll your eyes at the heavens and curse your own stupidity. At the end of the song, Blake mutters about how that was "probably the slowest, slowest version of that song we've ever played."

Tommy Strange from Strawman was an incredibly humble man. I'd gotten their LP on Allied right before that and was totally jazzed on them. I remember saying, my little voice quavering with hero-worship and puberty, "I really like your band."

He chuckled. "Thanks, we suck." I told him I'd like to use "New Rome" or "Heartbeat" for the comp and he said it was fine.

And there's more, but I can't remember them. In retrospect, almost all of the songs were live or previously released (or would be released eventually), but for a comp, I still hold that it would've been pretty fucking good.

And what happened? What happened to the comp that ate Newport, the one that was gonna put me in the game, the one that was gonna make me a part of, finally and forever?

Well, I just petered out on it. I was a two-inning ball player and it just gradually flattened out, halfway through. Nowadays a shitload of kids are putting out records and doing distros and making zines, young kids. And there were probably some back then as well, kids as young as I was doing solid, tangible, meaningful things for "the scene", but I wasn't one of them. I had the will but not the knowledge. I had the desire, but no mentors, no one I could ask questions. It was just that *burning*, that desire to do something, to create, to put something out into the world. I just never took into account the fact that I didn't even have money for postage to mail bands their tapes back.

Maybe this whole story, this whole recollection is nothing more than a major act of self-indulgence. Does anyone give a fuck about a failed cassette compilation that I wanted to do when I was a kid that was never completed? It's doubtful.

But I wrote this all down for a reason.

Ten years ago was a world well before press packets and eight by ten promo glossies. This was a time when the people that wrote the songs that lit you on fire were nothing but a letter away. We were so much less *professional* then, just flying, it seemed, by the seat of our collective asses. Maybe the good old days sucked, in a lot of ways they did, but I for one miss the personal touch. I remember pages and pages of classifieds in old issues of *MaximumRocknRoll*. People trading records, wanting pen pals, selling zines. Now each issue has, maybe, about half a page or so. I miss those thank you letters that came when I'd order a record. Now we get emails that say, "Here's a link to the label that did our record, you can buy more merch there."

And I'm smart enough to know that our sharpened business minds have led us away from getting burned by dumbass kids putting out records (or, uh, tape comps) that'll never come out, and that's a good thing. I'll be the first to admit I was a flake, big dreams, big plans. A lot of potential. But it's also led to a resurgence in cynicism, too. I mean, come on, there's no way you can tell me with a straight face that this reblossoming of hipster fashionism and rehashed rock and roll bullshit isn't a byproduct of that cynicism. It goes hand in hand with that awareness of marketing. Cool stage moves, perfectly coiffed bedhead, five-record contracts, we've successfully integrated the rock star back into punk.

And ultimately, things will keep moving on. Maybe not always forward, but trends will come and go, bands and labels will get huge and then dwindle and burn, but I think, in some ways, we're really reached that point where there's no turning back. I mean, I kind of think that it's *all* become like that old tape comp I wanted to put out: we have had some goddam great and amazing ideas over the past twenty five years or so, and at times, we've lit each other up with this sense of connection, this burning, this passion and this blind, reaching-out-to-hold-onto-something sort of hope, but ultimately we crapped out halfway through and stepped out the easy way.

## The Flying Eyeball Of Accusation

Westport, Washington. Home of less than two thousand people, situated in a nice peninsula of fucking swampland near Aberdeen and, farther north, Olympia. Nestled in the bleak confines of Grays Harbor County, which is rated within the top five for the state of Washington for 1) Teen pregnancy and 2) DUI's issued and 3) Domestic violence and 4) STD's and 5) Alcoholism. There are more stray dogs per square foot than any place I've ever seen, anywhere. Potholes litter the street and there are a grand total of, if I remember right, two stoplights. A summer town that relies heavily on the tourist trade, it's a fucking ghost town during the winter months when everything is slate gray and it rains continually, it rains for-fucking-ever there in Westport. Not that that matters very much in regard to this story; because when Adam chopped the bird's head off with an ax, it was warm, the old grass in the yard was greener than green and summer was saying bowdly to

everything.

I lived at Alex's house, the Flophouse, and we had a band. I can't remember how bad it was, but I played and sang at the same time, so it was probably pretty bad. The bandroom was covered in foam and smelled like gym class. It was hotter than shit, I remember, when Adam came barreling in, waving at the three of us to stop playing. We gradually stopped (it actually probably sounded like when we tried to end a song, three instruments and one voice all petering out roughly the same time but not exactly.)

"The cat's got a fucking bird under Alex's bed and I need you guys to help me get it out!"

I've always had a problem with cats and I guess, intrinsically and because of this, with nature. Cats are so cute and cuddly and fuzzy and adorable, unless you're a bird. Then they'll render you immobilized but alive and toy with you for two days before they actually wind up killing you. Yeah, yeah, I know, "That's the nature of things" and all that, but I personally am not into just letting cats do what they do with mice and birds and what-not, not if I'm around to do anything.

So the three of us, Mike, Toad and myself, walked into Alex's room with Adam. Alex was fishing and was hardly ever home and the cat, that conniving bastard and menace of birds too dumb to know any better, was staring hard at us, pissed that we, lowly humans, would have the nerve to interfere with his fun. It took two of us to lift up the bed, one to keep the cat away, who was hissing and yowling, and one to slide a newspaper under the halfdead bird, then place a bucket over the top of it. We debated about where to take the bird, then decided to take it out front, near the power lines so it could just swoop up and fly away, to live to chirp another day and, hopefully, full of the wisdom of trying to stay the hell away from cats.

It's funny, we actually thought the bird was just going to fly away as soon as we lifted the bucket up. You know, like it was going to say, "Cheep, cheep! Claws? What claws? Fangs in my neck? My good sirs, what in the world do you mean? Why, thank you for rescuing me; I feel absolutely capital and really must be going! Toodles!" We all actually jumped back when Adam lifted the bucket, as if there would be a victorious burst of feathers and a hawl-like shriek as it knifed through the sky.

Adam lifted the bucket and the bird just laid there. We all stood around. The bird was breathing and my own heart brightened a little bit when a wing twitched.

"He's probably just freaked out," I said.

We all decided the bird would be OK, we just had to make sure the cat stayed away from it.

So Adam went back to whatever he was doing and we all went back to band practice. After all, the bird was in the front yard and the cat was in the back, right? He'd probably just lose interest and go roll in the grass or go to sleep or something, right? Why, he'd probably just forget all about it.

Shit, we were some dumb kids.

Ten minutes later, Adam comes barreling in. "Goddammit, the fucking cat has the bird under the bed again!"

We all marched into Alex's room and this time the cat saw us and just ran off. We lifted up the bed and the bird was laying in the far corner, smashed against the wall, and it is one fucked up bird. The wings are ripped up, it's breathing fast, heartattack style, it's eyes twitching every which way.

Adam did the bucket trick again and this time, we locked the cat in the house.

We set the bird on the chopping block out in the backyard again and did the jumping-back thing when he lifted up the bucket. It was even worse this time, the bird didn't even move, flopped over there on the chopping block.

"Fuck," Toad said, the wisest of wise men, "that bird is fucked up."

"We can't just leave it on a stump," I said.

"It's gonna live for, like, two days."

"Yeah, or the cat'll just come right out here and torture it some more," Mike

whined. We were all pretty frustrated. Nature against The Kids Of The Flophouse, and Nature had just suckerpunched our dumb little asses.

"Well, what're we gonna do, then?" Adam cried.

"We've gotta kill it," Toad intoned. "It's the only thing to do."

"Not me," Mike said, right away, like he was expecting it almost.

"Me neither."

"Not me."



We all knew it had to be Adam. Adam was the one of the four of us that always went the extra mile when it came to stuff out of the ordinary. He lived on various prescription drugs that he didn't have prescriptions for, macaroni and cheese, top ramen and beer and he smoked as much as I do, which is quite a bit. When he was on a health kick, he'd drink some orange juice before he drank beer. He shit on a plate once and Rory paid Boy to eat it. Adam was a foul-mouthed little scrawny shit that had the bravado and obnoxiousness reserved for someone twice his size. But Adam had guts, too, something that was pretty sorely lacking there on that nice summer day in the backyard of the Flophouse, amid the green green grass and old shingles we used for kindling, and that smashed up, still and terrified bird.

Yeah, it'd have to be Adam. He, however, was not pleased about it.

"You fucking assholes! I'll do it, but you have to help me!"

He went and grabbed the ax from the woodpile.

Everyone was silent, except for me. I guess the only help Adam really needed was some form of moral support, some boost from us that what he was doing the right thing. And all I did to help was moan, "Oh God! Oh, shit!" as he went and picked up the ax leaning against the garage. Grossed out and terrified that he was actually going to chop the bird's head off. When I think about it now, moaning and caterwauling isn't really much in the form of moral support, is it? But it's about all I was capable of at the time.

"Shut up!" Adam yelled. "You think this is easy?"

I just groaned and bit a nail. Tension hung in the air as Adam raised the ax and brought it down, hard, on the chopping block.

Oh, man, I thought, I just don't fucking believe this. This bird's just getting fucked left and right.

Adam had embedded the ax into one of the bird's wings, not quite severing it. "Oh my God!" Mike screamed, his voice high and cracking. It was awful, that poor bird. Maybe funny now, but pretty sad then.



"Shut up!" Adam screamed back, frantic. Toad was laughing, disgusted and amazed, not really knowing what else to do. We were like malevolent and idiotic gods, having the best of intentions but probably causing more pain and anguish than if we'd just left well enough alone.

And Adam couldn't get the ax out of the chopping block. He'd brought it down so hard, it was stuck in the stump and none of us could pull it out. The bird just lay there, the ax stuck in its wing.

Adam ran over to the garage in a frenzy, wanting to get it over with, and grabbed the mallet, meant to be used in addition to the ax to break apart particularly nasty pieces of wood, the ones gnarled with knots. He raised it above his head, sighting in on that poor old fucked bird. Mike managed another high-pitched "Oh my God!", sounding so much like a Valley Girl from a Jon Cryer movie that it was eerie, and Adam brought the mallet down.

Yes, friends and neighbors, he brought it down, and this time, his aim was true.

As a matter of fact, he brought that mallet down dead center on that bird's head and my jaw dropped as I saw an eyeball fly out of its skull, completely, from the force of the impact. Birdbone vs. old rusty iron and inertia do not an even match make.



We stood in a rough circle muttering our "Holy shits" and "Fucks" and Adam picked up the shattered carcass in a newspaper and threw it away. I could not erase the image of that eyeball flying out of its head; it was burned in there, right in the front page of my skull, blaring and glaring in bright color and slowmotion.

And isn't it funny, or maybe it's just sick, how things can change in an eyeblink. We really did have good intentions, but the end result was four well-meaning kids feeling like shit, a dead bird in the garbage can, a pissed off cat and a tiny little eyeball somewhere in the yard, amid the old rotting shingles, firewood and rusty nails. But really, what was the alternative? The cat, under the bed for days with that bird? Fucking it up enough so that it was alive but immobile, something to play with? Did we do right? Wrong? Was it our place to get involved? Should we just have kept playing our stupid songs and left the two of them well enough alone?

## Wheelchair And Penis

And alcohol brings things out in us, certainly. It's Scott's birthday, and while others our age are immersed in that sea-of-sharks known as "professionalism," and work hard at chasing those ever-elusive phantoms "class" and "career" and "fashion," us kids at Castle Grayskull stick to the familiar: Pabst in a can, headlocks in the kitchen and a haunting (albeit terrifying) sense that we'll still be drinking shitty beer and playing grabass in the kitchen on Scott's 30th birthday, and his 35th, and probably even his 40th. The people that live in this house, and the people that visit, well...it's not that we're *simple* folks, it's simply that we know where we've been and where we are now and there's a distinct feeling that, quite possibly, we'll be here forever. It's not a particularly good or bad feeling, but it does lead one to a certain sense of abandon.

And abandon seems to be the theme this night. Otis is wearing his mesh Dixie hat that signifies he'll be doing some drinking tonight and when we all go down to play our songs in the basement we spend more time gazing down at our instruments than actually playing them. Feedback screams around us like a chorus of terrified eunuchs. Maya throws up and Bill gets in a punching match with everyone.

Maya and I are the first to retire; she's tired and I am drunk. The party is still going full steam ahead.

I live in the basement, five feet away from a drumset and amps and guitars, mikes, even a few keyboards. We are trying to sleep while, at 2 am, someone is on the drums, the bass is pounding something and the guitar is squawking something else, someone is yelling on the microphone and someone is playing the keyboard. And it's all loud. It's all very loud. Everyone appears to be rejoicing in the fact that their various instruments seem to have a "Volume Accelerant" knob on them. It's funny for about fifteen minutes and then it starts to be not so funny. In short order, the sound is so bad that there's no way in hell we're ever going to be able to sleep.

There comes times in a young man's life where he faces certain dilemmas. I had arrived at one. The problem appeared as such: If I went out there and told people to knock it off, I would be the big party pooper that ruined everyone's fun. With a band that sounds like one part Ruins, one part drunk Fugazi and three parts bowling balls being dropped on plate glass, they are the avant-garde band that's treading new ground and breaking down the barriers of pop music. Who am I to put a halt to their creative genius?

"Keith is always ruining all our fun," they'll say.

"Keith sucks," they'll say.

"If Keith doesn't like it, he should get some earplugs and cease his fucking whining," they'll say, ramming the head of the guitar through the amp, ramming nails through my head. Christ, the noise.

So how do I get them to stop making all that ruckus and still manage to come out looking like an OK guy in the eyes of my peers?

Approximately 90 seconds later I run, screeching drunkenly, out of my room, back-ass naked with my less-than-stellar wang wiggling around in my hand like an earthworm on amphetamines.

"OK motherfuckers," I scream, "time to get out! Come on, band practice is over! I've gotta get some sleep, get the fuck on out! Go upstairs and have a great time!"

And they all tromp upstairs, drunk and tired. The next thing I know, I have crept into my cave, Maya is at my side and there is laughing and braying and horrendous thumping sounds directly above our heads. I live below the front porch and the stairs. There is a series of monstrous thumps and laughter, more tromping and a pause, then it all starts up again. Maya had woken up by now.

"Christ, it sounds like a herd of fucking elephants," she says.

"Oh, come on, it isn't that bad."

"Keith, there's stuff all over the bed."

The tromping and braying and thumping upstairs continues unabashed.

"What're you talking about?"



I crawl out of bed and turn the light on. Maya's half of the bed is covered in dust and chunks of plaster. They are literally caving in the ceiling.

So I go out again. This time clothed, dragging my ass wearily up the stairs.

The sight I came across was something. On the front porch, five or six steps, kids gathered around on the lawn, the sidewalk. Otis, his Dixie hat perched on his head like some kinda battleflag, is leaning over and eyeing the ground like a vulture ready to dine, something equally predatory. He is perched in the wheelchair at the top of the porch and the kids cheer as he pushes himself off, his head bouncing around like a destripped marionette as the chair spastically plods down the stairs. He slams his shoulder heavily into the screen door at the foot of the stairs and it's no wonder the floor is caving in, Otis is, in essence, riding the fucking wheelchair down them. I watch for a moment, bemused but fucking beat. I say something about how the floor is caving in and they have to cool it and everyone drunkenly slurs their acknowledgements. I plod back downstairs and manage to wake up with a vicious, shaking hangover. I come upstairs for water in the early afternoon and the house is silent. I go to check the mail and there is a large hole at the bottom of the wall facing the stairway inside the house. It looks like Otis rode the stairs from the second floor down to the first a couple times as well.

The stockmarket did well that day, I remember. Inside the hole in the wall was a bunch of newspapers and advertisements and an empty can of Pabst. Just debauchery, or some kind of fucked-up time capsule?

I had the shivers and as I went out to buy cigarettes, I remember thinking, *Well, the stock market did well today, at least things are good for some people somewhere.*

## Uncle Harold

1. At seventeen, a day can be lived in a lifetime. And life? Life itself stretches out forever and around the corner from forever. Years cannot be measured like they are when you get older. Time is very much about the present, the mundanity and terror and repetition of it, or it stretches forward to the future, how inevitable and yet just out of reach it seems. At least, that's how it was for me, sitting in the Apple Peddler with Farley on a Tuesday summer night before that last year of high school.

Christ, Farley. I can do an entire book on him alone. That summer with Farley is littered with memories of packs of cigarettes discarded on the table like some kind of calendar, puking in toilets, going to parties and blacking out repeatedly. Farley fighting and myself always narrowly avoiding them, even when I had nothing but a sick, blank chalkboard of a brain the next morning. I was terrified of people even then. That, among other things, has only changed marginally since I was a kid.

That was the summer I started smoking for real, sneaking cigarettes from my mom's carton on top of the fridge. That was the summer I fell in love for the first time. That was the summer I still didn't lose my virginity, something that I figured must be like a neon green colored birthmark burned into my face. And, maybe most importantly, that was the summer Farley and I almost literally stumbled across Richard, and the summer we met Uncle Harold.

There is not a whole lot to do in a coastal summer town in Oregon. It was still cold, due to that wind blowing off the sea, but we'd bluff it and go get tanked at the beach anyway, running from the cops or trying to bullshit our way through it when they came down onto the sand for the nightly interrogations. You can get drunk, attempt to get laid, fuck with tourists down on the beach. (One summer afternoon, Farley and I went busking down at the waterfront in front of Ripley's Believe It Or Not, the wax museum in town that brings out of towners forthright like bees on honey, me on guitar and Farley on harmonica. We made something like \$1.67. I sang the one song we'd written for the event, over and over again, about Keiko the whale, who was a current member of our community, housed in all his depressed and floppy-finned glory at the Oregon Coast Aquarium, across the bridge. We played it over and over again, and I remember one overweight man in wraparound Oakleys and sunburned legs physically *throwing* a dime at me. We actually made him angry.)

2. We would spend hours at the 24-hour place, an Apple Peddler on Highway 101. That summer lasted forever and we spent a lot of it there, drinking coffee and drawing, listening to the locals flirt with the old waitresses, watching the scumbag twenty-somethings who'd graduated years ago try and hit on the highschool girls. Fake plants lined the booths and Farley did a trick where he could light the powdered creamer on fire.

And one night we were walking home, walking somewhere, after spending hours there and we passed by the copshop, the police station, at 3 am and there's a man laying out on the sidewalk.

Time blurs things, and it's started to happen now when I think about Uncle Harold and his buddy Richard, the old man laying there on the sidewalk, having crawled out of the police station on his knees.

He was one of those men that inundate you with their story within seconds of

meeting you. Two kids, middle of the night, he's laying there and within two minutes we know his name, that he lives with an guy even older than him ("I take care of him, help him out", was how he'd put it) and that they'd been on a three-day vodka binge, finally culminating in them arguing and Harold, the one that actually lived there, calling the cops on him.

"Goddam fucking cops pushed me down the stairs is what they did," he said as Farley gave him a smoke and handed him his lighter. And then they dragged him into the waiting room, never arresting him or booking him, but always saying no if he asked if he could leave.

And that's when we found him, having just said fuck it and crawled out on his knees.

"You boys got money for a cab? I'll be able to pay you when I get home. Didn't have time to get my goddam fucking wallet, you know?" We called him a cab and went over to Harold's apartment. Two minors and a drunk, busted up old man.

We had to help Richard up the two flights of stairs and it took Harold forever to answer Richard's pounding and bellowing at the door. Farley actually said to him, "Hey, don't worry about the money, it's on me," and we were getting ready to leave when a very drunk old man tottered to the door and opened it.

"Damn it, Harold, why'd you have to call the cops?" Richard said, edging his way through the door, with the two of us meekly following.

Harold's apartment was in a run of the mill complex in Newport that had sprouted up throughout the country like an invasion of cockroaches during the 70's; an awful brown shag carpet, linoleum cracked and yellowed in the kitchen, a sink that would drip forever. Under the best of circumstances, it would have had an air of loneliness about it, like the ghosts of all the people who had lived their lives broken and tired all the time and under someone's thumb there had left an imprint of themselves in the air, on the walls, a slight film of sadness covering everything that you could never see but always feel. The fact that it was filthy didn't do anything to improve the place's cheeriness.

The floor was wet in spots with Christ knows what. Flies buzzed and trash bags edged their way out of the kitchen into the living room. On top of the almost-taste of sadness in the air was the odor of old, old beer and something going bad in the freezer.

Harold was a tiny, white-haired man in an undershirt and boxers. The skin hung in flaps off his arms. An infirm mouth and whipcord thin. He shook when he made the trek from the front door back to his easychair. The sketchiness of the place made me nervous for about 15 seconds, until I realized that Richard was still incredibly inebriated and wounded and Harold could be taken down for good with nothing more than a healthy shove. I went from that kind of nervousness to the kind I got by simply being a young kid and meeting a new person. Never been too great at small talk. Farley talked a lot that first night, I remember, but Richard and Uncle Harold talked more.

At one point, after Harold paid Farley back for the cab ride, Richard began chastising him.

"Man, why'd you have to call the cops?"

"Well," Uncle Harold croaked, "I got sick of you yelling at me."

"They took our beer, Harold."

"They took our beer?" His voice cracked.

"That's right, man, they took our beer. Harold, I was just trying to get you to sleep but you didn't want to sleep and you got pissed at me."

"Yeah," he said, shaking in his chair, just an old, tired, alcoholic man that had his groceries delivered to him, an old man too lonely and tired to tell this fucking guy to beat it. I got the sense that Harold paid the bills, obviously, and that Richard hung on as

long as he could, milking him for a place to sleep, food and booze. And that Harold, through his haze of age and loneliness and the blur of screwdrivers served in plastic glasses, just got fucking sick of it sometimes.

"We been on a three day vodka binge and Harold gets mean," Richard grinned and he had coyote teeth, I think-I'll-just-help-myself-thanks teeth. He asked his cigarette into a sticky glass and started to lean back into the worn cushions of the couch, a couch that was burnt in some spots and wet in others. Richard passed out. I decided I didn't really like him at all.

We stayed there for a while, mostly because I felt that this man didn't get much company, if any, besides Richard the Shark. We left, I think, around five am, dawn just starting to slide in a bit over the townscape.

"You boys can come on back anytime you want to, I'm always home," Harold woke Richard up and he and Farley, each propping Harold up by the arms, helped him into bed. Then Richard passed out again.

Being two young and lost, fucked up kids that were essentially good-hearted, our time on the walk home was divided between laughing at the hilarious stuff Harold had said and feeling stricken with the fact of how old he was, a man living alone on a pension or Social Security, living alone and muttering drunkenly to two young kids that wandered into his apartment in the middle of the night. We were young, feeling divided between laughing and almost crying. Almost ten years later and I'm still there most of the time, in that odd half-lit place where you're not sure if all the fucking sadness everywhere makes you just want to start bawling or try and pick things up a bit, try to light up this place in whatever way we can. I live in that place a lot of the time, and I toe the line between the two.

Farley and I walked to our respective homes that morning, buzzing with plans to go visit Uncle Harold again, dawn and the smell of sea air all around us. The cry of gulls in Newport in the morning and my cigarettes sure as shit did taste sweet back then.

3. Over the next year or so, Farley and I would go over to Harold's. Sometimes together, sometimes alone. The place was always filth-pitched in one way or another, as Harold, we found out, was in his late 70's and obviously had seen better days. Still, it was never as dirty or as mad as that first night, with Richard and his sprained ankle and his vodka binge. Harold kept it up as best he could, when he was sober.

We'd sit on the couch while Harold reclined in his chair, sipping soda pop and smoking cigarettes, asking us if we'd like any pop. We'd smoke voraciously when we were over there, clouds of smoke hanging against the ceiling like moss. Harold was a retired schoolteacher who'd lived his entire life in Washington. His daughter lived in Portland but never came around; Harold was one of those nameless legion of old men who slips through the cracks and lived their lives in the margins, in quiet rooms in apartment houses that no one ever really sees. Just the buzz and rattle of the television behind a closed door.

Farley brought him a Thanksgiving dinner that year, brought it over to his apartment and knocked on the door, but there was no answer. He left it on the doorstep. We'd stop by every few weeks or so, if just to smoke a cigarette or say hi. We hardly ever saw Richard there, it was usually just Harold and his Parliaments and his TV turned to the *Rockford Files*.

Speaking to this man about books, or my zine or the history of certain writers was like looking in a mirror that shot me forward fifty or sixty years. This man could be me, sure, no problem. Absolutely. That aching loneliness carved into his face and the way he subtly tried to get you to stay for one more smoke was something I could see so easily



ly in myself. And hell, fifty years from now? I acted like that *then*, a little fucked up teenaged kid. Lonely like that.

4. The last time I ever saw Uncle Harold was worse than the first time. It was the last time I ever saw him and it was on the fourth of July, about a year after we'd found Richard sprawled and cursing in front of the police station. From one summer to another, this time, Farley wasn't around when I went over there, wanting my friends Anne and Alex to meet him. Farley wasn't in town, but Richard was. Richard was over at Harold's and hey, guess what! They were drunk!

The apartment was insane. A bowl of puke rested on one of the couch cushions, with another one next to the coffee table. The couch was wet, flies were buzzing everywhere, there were dark stains on the carpet. *Cops* was on and there was a whole, uncooked chicken on top of the TV, rotting in an open Ziploc bag, the flies like a little cloud, doing a little ballet dance there in the apartment.

Harold's shorts were wet with piss and something splashed and dotted the front of his shirt. He was lit, way too lit to be embarrassed for himself. I think it was rum that time, they were hitting the rum. This was the first time a woman had come over with us and Richard was just right on that shit, the absolute physical embodiment of Old Creepy Guy. Calling Anne "baby", asking if she wanted to sit on the couch next to him (which would have sandwiched her nicely between Richard and a congealing bowl of puke, hmmm), trying his blackout best to be, um, charming.

It was the Fourth of July, and Harold had to piss. Richard was too drunk to get off the couch and too busy wooing Anne from her place against the wall across the room, so Alex helped Harold to the bathroom. Halfway there, Harold's legs gave out and he toppled, falling right into the bowl of vomit next to the coffee table. Something new for the carpet. Alex helped him up, grabbing him from behind the arms. Harold, he told me later, stank of puke and piss so bad that his eyes watered. This was the retired schoolteacher we're talking about. Alex had to help him pull his pants down, Richard calling out helpful suggestions from his place on the couch. I wanted to get out of there so bad.

After Harold managed to piss all over the toilet, the floor and himself, Alex helped him back to his easy chair.

And shortly after that, we left. I just couldn't take much more of it; that chicken rotting on top of the television, matted with flies. Harold falling into that bowl of puke on the floor, his shirt like some crazy constellation of cigarette burns and stains. This was the man that taught high school English for thirty years. Falling in a bowl of puke and pissing on his own legs.

After we left, we drove around for a while and none of us talked too much, there was so much to say, maybe. Seeing something like that kind of forces you into a place inside yourself, a place where you need to go to try your damndest to map it out or catalogue it in one way or another. We went out to the jetty there at the beach, that huge outcropping of rocks jutting out into Newport's bay. We sat there, Alex and Anne together, myself alone and as the sky darkened and the fireworks started showering down and coloring the night, I cried just a little bit for Uncle Harold. For him, maybe some for me, for the part of me and all of us I could see in him, living there and like that, shut off and yearning for contact with anyone. Simply put, for the slow decay of, the dwindling down of human decency that I saw in him, something we're all within a hand's reach of.

## The Dedication

And in a textbook case of too little, too late, this issue's dedicated to Rory Ably, my lifesaver and lifeline when I lived in Westport years ago. Time passes and people drift away and like I said at the beginning, all that's left are memories that eventually turn into stories that you hear in your head, stories that maybe aren't always how things actually happened, but rather how you choose to remember them. But I can say that I spent a lot of time with him, and he didn't once let me down. Friends will let you down sometimes, I've done it plenty of times myself, but he never did once, and that's some kind of a record.

Rory was one of the only people worth hanging out with in that town full of idiots and jerkoffs and speedfreaks. He was sincere, and he was one of those rare kids you run into that has a genuine heart, a real heart. He had some awfully skewed ideas of what punk rock is, and what constituted a good band, but there's no accounting for taste sometimes, I guess.

As terribly corny as it sounds, he died on his skateboard, one of the things he loved doing above all else. I make no claims to him being in a better place, or even being *anyplace* now, but I do know that the rest of us are left here with a sense of losing out. A very real sense of loss.

You are missed.



# AVOW 13



HERE IT  
IS.

(thirteen)

HELLO.

—Welcome to AVOW #13:—

## THE ALPHABET ISSUE.

(a to z, a slapdash collection of laments and joys, thrown together and then agonized over, heh. from the first letter to the last, a futile cataloging and listing of injustices and nicotine fits. i'm sure there's more to say, i'm just not sure what it is, so

TO HELL WITH IT.)

LET'S GO.



**A IS FOR  
ANGELS**



**WITH HANDS  
HELD OUT:  
FRIENDSHIP'S LAST  
MOTHERFUCKING  
CALL...**

**B IS FOR**

**BODY**

**THEY**

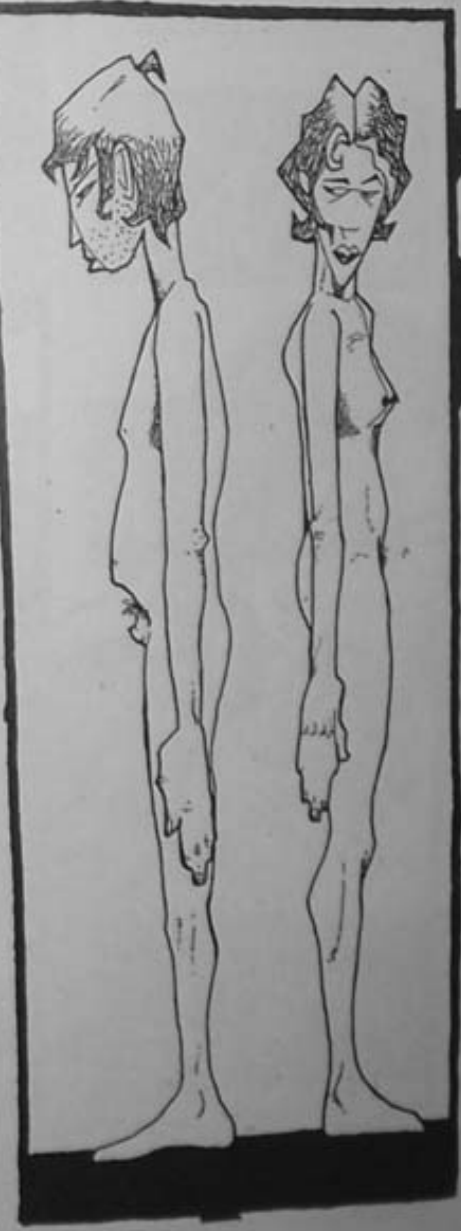
**WANT**

**YOU**

**TO**

**FEEL**

**UGLY**







BECAUSE

IT

SELLS

MORE

SHIT.

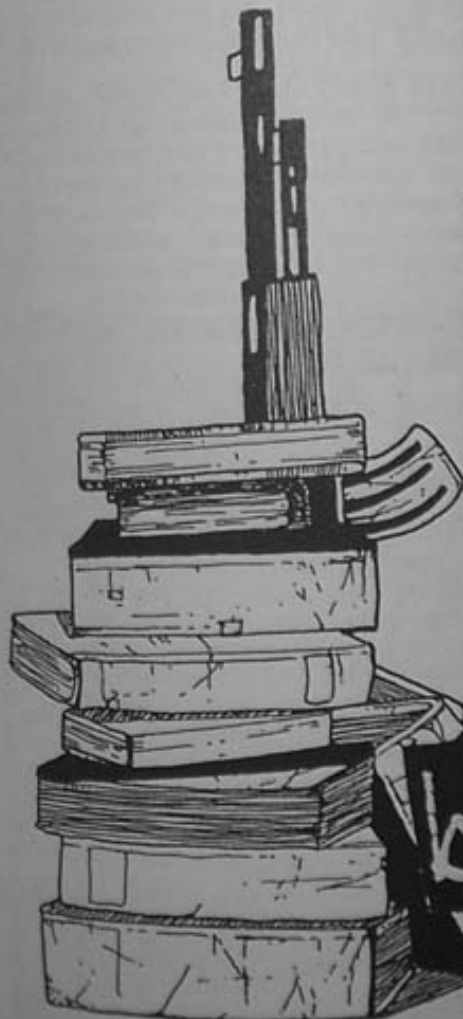
THE STANDARD  
IS  
FUCKING  
SICK.

C IS FOR COMBAT

each

letter

a



bullet.

# DIS FOR DEMO

Good lord, stricken as we are with mundanity in this new millennium, this new millennium of promo glossies and mp3's and band websites online ordering and exclusive distribution and email links, where oh where has the demo tape gone? I mean, I've been guilty of this too; Pelvis Wesley's demo came out on CDR, so I'm as guilty as anyone else, and my hypocrisy knows no bounds, but regardless, someone fill me in: where has the demo tape gone?

I am forever in love with things that have been passed up, that have been used and discarded by others but still work. Something that's maybe a little bit clumsy and a little bit ragged, but still does what it's supposed to do, and does it well. Like a good, old-fashioned demo cassette.

I haunt used bookstores like a ghost, most of my clothes used to be a stranger's, I write letters on art show announcements that took place 3 years ago, I love these used things, and goddamit, I fucking love demo tapes. I love mix tapes and I love demos. This forgotten art that very few people care about anymore, maybe going the way of the 8-track, going the way of novelty, the new millennium's Pet Rock. But there's a warmth there, a connection that I feel with this format of recorded sound that has me rummaging through stacks of dollar tapes at the record store.



## TAPE\$



Like I've said elsewhere and before, I believe in history, and documenting the marks we make among each other, the way we move through each other's lives, the things we've done. And demos and awful recordings of live shows on blank tapes are as good as anything else when it comes to that. Really good, nicely recorded and laid-out, thoughtfully-packaged demo tapes are needed more than ever, baby, where everyone and their mother is in an awful, droning indie rock band and of course the drummer's used his graphic design degree to make the most aesthetically and visually boring peice of shit CD ever, I'd love to see more of today's bands bust out the sharpie and the typewriter and head on down to the copy shop to do some old cut and paste. Give me demo tapes with covers you did by hand. Give me an address to write to. Give me labels peeling just a little bit off face of the tape.

Give me a demo tape or give me death, motherfuck. And if you're not gonna do that, let's work together and try to find a way to bring a little bit of that sense of warmth back to this music. A little warmth in the way we communicate.

Besides, you can't record drunken prank calls to mattress companies over already-recorded CDR's, and that's important too.

# E IS FOR EXPIRED TAGGERS

I wrote this big rant about how stupid tagging is, how it's counterproductive, pointless, and a culture that's seemingly based on destruction without replacing it with anything. How it just seems to be a simple case of idiots shitting where they eat. I wrote this big rant asking people to explain what's accomplished by tagging someone's home or someone's business or someone's property, what sort of act of rebellion is being made when all it ultimately signifies is some underpaid and overworked shit-worker having to clean up after you. I wrote this big rant, called taggers fools and chickenshits, but then I decided to scrap it.

Because, hell, maybe I am missing the point. Maybe it does constitute a valid culture, maybe something is being accomplished. Maybe. Or maybe it's a textbook definition of waste and idiocy and you're all a bunch of dumbshits.

# F IS FOR FILES AND

Long time since we've written, I guess. It was good to get your letter. Things, for the most part, are pretty much the same here. New tattoos and fewer hangovers, but when they do arrive, they're way worse than when I was younger. None of us are getting any younger.

Yes, you're right, I still fucking keep everything. Files upon files, ten year old mail stacked in boxes. And yes, I still seem to do my best work sometime between 3 and 6 am. And yes again: I'm still pretty much as lost and adrift as I've ever been.

I guess that's it. Just a short note here to tell you I'm still alive. Take care of yourself, and for fuck's sake, if you're going to drive around with expired tags, take the gon out of the glovebox.



All best,

~~KEITH~~

# POSTCARDS

# G IS FOR GETTING

1. Ah, masturbation. Self empowerment in its most basest form. Pleasure? Shit, it's just a rub away. I think I grew up in a simpler time; the last bastions of innocence still clung to the American Public Education System. There were no metal detectors in my school, no one carried a gun, Columbine happened a decade after my freshman year. And as far as sex went, I guess kids *did* get laid back then, at my school, but I'll be the first to reproachfully admit that I sure as shit wasn't one of them. In retrospect, I realize I didn't get laid in highschool and I didn't start smoking until my last year there. What the hell did I do with my time?

And the only thing I can come up with seems to be masturbation. At the time, talking about masturbation, even *admitting* it, was a major no-no, you just didn't do it. Teasing a dude about jacking off was akin to teasing them about eating their own shit or wanting to hump one of the guys from Bell Biv Devoe.

Which is funny, considering it's about all I did for about six years. Um, masturbate, I mean. I have no idea how I made it through school, frankly. I was too busy rubbing em out. By rough calculations, I figure I've probably had about five thousand self-produced orgasms over the years. Some of them have been meager, even pathetic, offerings meant to be nothing more than a chemical release, a squirt and spurt offered to the cruel gods of adolescence, a request to be released from that prison known as *the teen years*; dark, dark years full of screaming hormones and zits and an unwanted mullet, a request for parole that was never granted.

But some of those orgasms, my friend, were majestic, destined to join the annals of greatness. Destined to be written about by squinty-eyed dwarves in yellowed notebooks three hundred years from now, after the world has fallen apart and we're back to building windmills and writing by candlelight and shagging each other behind the radiation-bathed cow barn.

Some of these orgasms were destined to be written about.

# CAUGHT PULLING IT





# TO THE GRIND

2. Look, don't blame me. Blame MTV. I wonder how many kids were doing the exact same thing as I was, and I imagine there were more than a few, from Hanover to Hartford, a plethora of bezittied youngsters all feverishly pulling their puds in front of a flickering screen, even though that's actually kind of gross to think about.

So yeah, blame MTV. More importantly, blame *The Grind*, MTV's "dance show", seemingly created to incite sixteen year-old mullet-ridden dorks into a frenzy of masturbation. What the fuck was that show *about*? Hosted by that perpetual loser from the first *Real World* series, it featured, besides commercials, about fifteen seconds of a particular video that the "host" introduced ("Check it out, next we got those hot ladies in Salt N' Pepa doing their thaaaang while we're all getting cranaaaazy out here in Daytona Beach! Stay tuned to *The Grind*, yo!"), followed by five or six minutes of half-dressed women cavorting and rubbing against really annoying, buff college students while the music

played in the background. Close-ups of heaving breasts, rotating behinds, and vapid looking women in bikinis who probably stood in line all day at one MTV studio or another, just so they could dance for an hour with some weird dude with no shirt and a pacifier in his mouth rubbing up against her while the show was taped. I mean, maybe they had fun, but for me, for us, the Beatnik Legion out there, it was heaven sent. For a young man being seemingly crushed under the weight of his own "urges", the show was a godsend.

(But before I continue, I want to mention that the show was a godsend for the

(But before I continue, I've got to mention to you that this particular frenzy of self-release that I shall soon be discussing was entirely off the cuff, so years have passed, but I don't think I ever specifically looked at a clock and shucked off my pants, muttering, "Hey, it's 3:30. Time for *The Grind*." It generally just happened. Sure, when it *did* happen, I was a blessed child, everything was right in the world and I was the most fortunate of the chosen ones, but I never scheduled my day around yanking it to some bug-eyed MTV producer.)



version of a Russ Meyer movie. What I mean to say is, *I didn't plan this one.*)

Hell, it started out innocently enough. I was just going to take a shower. I had taken off my clothes, waiting for the water to warm up, and for whatever passes for reason inside the skull of a sixteen year-old near high-school dropout with cauliflower sized zits on his face and a bouffant akin to Alice's from the *Brady Bunch*, I decided I'd just have a cruise through the channels on the old boob tube, see what was going on in the world.

*Full House*. Boring.

News. News. Car wash infomercial.

*Perry Mason*

Baseball.

### *The Grind*

*The Rockford Files.*

Hey, what the fuck was that? *The Grind*? Hmmm. Let's just, uh, unbutton the pants, shall we? There we go. Ah, they're back in that old warehouse with all the annoying colored lights and people dancing on the stairwells. Hey, this isn't bad. Well, looky-looky what we have here, what's that? Fascinating. It appears I'll just stay here for a few minutes while the, uh, water warms up in the bathroom, that's right. Damn pipes, they take, um, a long time for the water to heat up. I'll just take my time here. That's it.

(And I am pretty much just full on masturbating at this point. Yikes.)

Stroke stroke. Rubby rub. Hell, I might as well make myself comfortable. The water in this apartment, it takes forever, let me tell you. Recline a little bit, enjoy myself.



3. So, basically, there I am laying naked on my living-room floor with a hardon and *The Grind* on the TV when my mom walks in. I could've sworn the door was locked. But it wasn't. I always check the door when I close it behind me now, whether I'm just coming home from work or whatever. Something like that, it's a reminder.

Anyway, my mom, she takes one look at me and starts laughing. I am horrified; this is surely the ending of the earth. I bound into the bathroom, my mom's laughter a raucous echo behind me, my face burning hot with shame and my little wang sagging faster than you could say, "We'll be back after the commercial break, yo's, and then we'll be getting bizzeze in the how-ussz, aw yeeaaahhhh!" Yeah, it sagged about ten times faster than that, actually.

I took the longest, hottest, most embarrassing shower of my life, dreading going out there and facing my mom. I scurried into my room, and eventually came out to face the music. My mom was kind, she kept her giggles in check and never said a word, knowing that even bringing the matter up to tell me it was OK would have the opposite effect and just embarrass my further. That moment is forever burned into my head: the front door swinging open, the creak of those hinges accentuated in my head to the point where it sounds like little squirrel bones grinding together, signalling my doom. And there I am, remote control in one hand, reclining on the floor, and there, the kicker: my flagpole saluting the television screen like some little patriot saying "Howdy doody."

Oh, woe is me. The scars we gain while growing up. Yikes



And I'm obsessed with it. The need to document my time here, something for — notebooks, the ones inside. Tattoos are like footnotes; this scar is its own index. This one photo is an entire bibliography. It's not a way of cheating death, though death is something that I think about after being up for thirty hours, huffing smokes and gnashing my teeth. History. A way of documenting a life; the streets we all walked on, the nights I made it through when three a.m. stretched ahead forever. It just comes down to wanting to have been known. That other people breathed and knew my name. To acknowledge us, here, the living.

# I IS FOR ICONS AND IDOLS



# J IS FOR

And I crane my neck, burning, looking around the corner, down the avenue, inside the lip of the bottle, looking for a sense of justice in the world. Looking for any amount of reconciliation. Anything other than this flat murder, this idiocy. You can see and hear enough on a thirty-minute busride in this town to make you want to throw up your hands, crash those fuckers up against the sky and just say "Screw it."

There was a Vietnam vet sitting in the back of the bus the other day, I was going home from work. Tired. He was talking to a couple dudes with mullets, the air of burnout hanging heavy around them. Tried hard not to burst out laughing when one guy asked him where Vietnam was and the other said he didn't understand why we'd want to "go over and fight all them Chinamen anyways."

Then the topic changed to the current war in the Middle East. One of the guys was talking about the ferocity of the Al Qaeda troops, something like that. And yet still a third guy with a mullet, hanging out in the back, pipes up, in all seriousness: "Yeah, but our troops got bigger balls."

And there goes my thirst for justice. The largest "buttoning-down" of civil liberties in American history, thousands of civilians across the world dead because of this, screaming nationalism here and ever-blossoming anti-Americanism pretty much everywhere else, because of this, all of this coming down to the somehow applicable fact that our troops have bigger balls. Here is our justice; a nation of idiots, Toole's confederacy of dunces, you get a nice cultural cross-section riding the old bus, yes indeed, and Mr. Mullet fits the "average American" stereotype to a fucking T and it's depressing. Maybe you'll find America in the wheatfields or the oilwells or the stockmarket. Maybe you'll find it in the trailer parks or the four-bedroom homes or the police reports or a shooting or laughter or a punch in the eye. I found America in the back of the bus on 17th Avenue, going home from work. That guy, as laughable and scary as it is, that guy's America and J, well, J is for justice and I just don't know where to find it.

# JUSTICE

# K IS FOR THE KIDS



LOOK, WE

CAN BUILD

UP OR WE

CAN TEAR

DOWN.

For all the kids, the boys and girls out there burning with that desire for creation, connection, for making an impact. All those out there trying their hardest to live like their asses were on fire, trying like hell to live like today was the last day. You're an inspiration. Fuck, I hardly ever leave the house, hardly ever leave this head. This opens for the kids, from 14 to fifty and inbetween, the ones who step up, the ones who light up the streets with simple acts. Simple acts, massive have the potential to stand tall, to somehow move forward when we're down. We can do that, and we can sometimes help others do the same with simple acts, small acts of kindness when they need it most. This is for all the kids moving to the sound of our dumbass heartbeats. The sound is sometimes full of mistakes and fatigue and the yearning to hold onto that excitement and passion that we had at the start, that excitement that sometimes dissipates. THIS IS FOR THE SOUND WE MAKE, A HUNDRED HEARTBEATS ALL CRASHING TOGETHER TO MAKE A JOYOUS, HORRENDOUS, GODAWFUL, HILARIOUS AND TOUCHING NOISE.



# L IS FOR LUNG

Sometimes I cough so hard in the middle of the night, I wake myself up. It doesn't hurt, it's just a tickle in the back of my throat. But sometimes it gets so bad, I get headaches from the coughing.

And I wonder if there's a single, definable moment when cancer starts, even down to the second, when my cells turn in on themselves, when tissue becomes poisonous to itself. I walk around and smoke through a sheet of rain as thin as a sheet of silk; the pavement is slick and gray and if I ever get on x-ray of my lungs I'll keep it in my pocket like some guys keep pictures of their kids.

SLATE GRAY SKY.  
STREETS THE SAME.  
COUGH AND WALK.



# MISFOR THE DRAFT RIOT

Central Park didn't help. The poor were not calm, they were pissed and pitted against each other. All the soldiers were pinning down Lee's army there in Gettysburg and fifteen thousand enraged and starving Irish terrorized New York for three days until the militia got there. Them and the blacks, competing for the scraps at the table, the lowest paying menial jobs, each thinking the other was stealing the work from their hands, the food from their mouths. Marching down Broadway in September, a mob formed. They burned the draft office, raided homes and pulled black men out of them, beating them to death, castrating them, cutting them to peices, hanging them from lampposts. Fifteen thousand people, something reptilian and hot comes out in a group that large, that angry. The Mob. Unspeakable acts committed. One group tried to raid a black orphanage, some 200 kids under 12 years old inside, they had to be snuck out the back while the mob burned the place down. The kids had to be ferried out into the middle of the bay for two days so that no one could get to them.

The rich were rich, sancitized. Death rate was three times higher in the slums than in the upscale Protestant neighborhoods. The first ever enforced draft began that year, 1863, the old and bloody Civil War; the blueboys and the redcoats, and only the rich had the \$300 needed to buy your way out of the draft. African-Americans didn't. Irish didn't. Northern industrialism or the Southern way of life, hoss? Which'll it be? New York city's poor, black and white, were dying and hungry and full of hot rage.

The food stamp office had yet to come into being, and if your husband died or you lost an arm in a saw or your kid took sick, you were fucked. If you were poor in New York in 1863, despite Lincoln's greatest hopes, you were fucked. And it boiled over because of the enforced draft and people were slaughtered.

As close to a full-scale class revolution this country has ever seen, those three days. Fucked up and ugly and ruined; the poor destroying the poor. Buildings burned and looted. One black man tortured and dragged through the streets by his balls and then hacked apart alive, peices of him held aloft and touted as the mob surged forward. And that's a revolution. Consider that. Consider a mob and what it is, this breathing, writhing thing that no longer acts as a collection of individuals, but it's own identity. Would the massacre have been OK if the rich had been the ones cut open and held aloft?

This is called warfare.

# MASSACRE

The militia was called in, finally back from the seige at Gettysburg, and were told to disperse the crowd. Shoot to kill if necessary, many of the cops Germans or Irish men themselves. The militia had Gatling guns and used those, the crowd dispelling and dispersing, huge knots of them running into rowhouses and tenement buildings. The cops followed em and if the various factions of the mob didn't surrender, if they weren't docile, they were gunned down right there. The snake and lizard come out in a group that large. The human heart knows only heat in a mob; the reptile walks on two legs and wants murder.

Such potential we have. Diamonds and dust. Brick against bone. Such potential we have, for savagery, for kindness. Such potential for change. Anger boiled over, burst open into flat murder.

We may, at times, look to the past to form our actions in the present, to forge ahead into the future. History, at its best, may only serve to remind us what we may be capable of, both good and bad. May show us, sometimes, what not to do.

# N IS FOR 9

Nine times out of ten the wrong words will fall from your mouth.

Nine times out of ten yesterday will haunt you.

**W** Nine times out of ten you will feel less than.

Nine times out of ten everything will look demolished and your neighbor will be a rabid dog, a viper.

# TIMES OUT OF 10

Nine times out of ten, when you wake up at 3:47 a.m., it'll be a feeling of terror that wraps itself around the folds of your heart.

But the tenth time? You will hear the barking of the dogs, the stink and howl of the clarion call, when shit is falling apart and every desperate act results in a desperate response, and then, at the last possible moment, perseverance pays off and light slides in under the window-shade. The night breaks open slowly, breaks apart, and there is that moment of peace, of that slow strength that rolls and gathers through you, inside you. Of having made it another day.

That tenth time, hope bursts like a flare and you know you're exactly where you're supposed to be.

# O IS FOR OLD LADY

IT'S

JUST

THAT

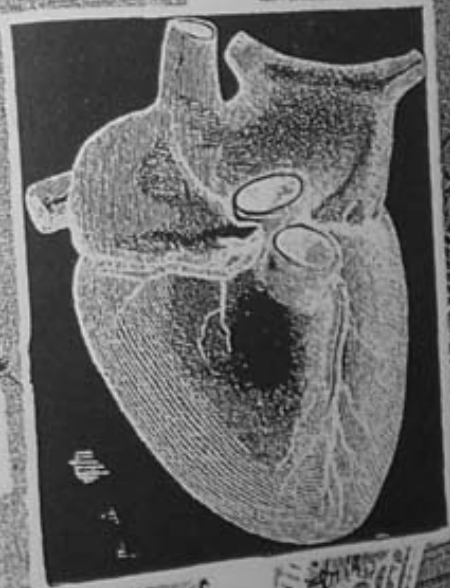
I'VE

NEVER

BEEN

HERE

BEFORE •





OVERHEARD IN A BAR:

GIRL:

Well, which is it? Do you want to tie me up or tie me down? Are you a sadist or a masochist?



GUY:

Well, to tell you the truth, I'm pretty much just an opiate addict.

P

IS

FOR

PICKUP

LINES

Q IS FOR QUITTING



~~And isn't it funny how the body quiets down but the mind refuses to ever rest? How many times have we given up, while the mind remains as ceaseless and roaming as ever, grabbing and grasping at every last glimmer of hope?~~

And isn't it funny how the body quiets down but the mind refuses to ever rest? How many times have we given up, while the mind remains as ceaseless and roaming as ever, grabbing and grasping at every last glimmer of hope?

And it's funny how I always get back up, shamed and humbled but still walking on. Walking and breathing. Shamed into another resolution. How many second chances have I given myself, even when self-loathing covered me like a second skin and every fiber inside muttered on and on about quitting, giving up? Sheecccit.

People talk about how short life is and I laugh. Life is long, long, long. I've lived a hundred years, it feels like, and I'll live another two hundred. A day is a month. There is so much room inside the confines of this skull for more living, more experience and light and darkness, so much room in this heart for growth. So much more room inside me for fucking up and trying to somehow gain some kernel of knowledge from it.

Falling down and getting kicked in the face by my own anger and frustrations, my own lack of, my own limitations. Getting back up again and again. Nothing dramatic or noble about it: the ceaseless pumping of this heart dragging on until there's enough distance to gain another perspective.

I tell myself that I quit, and then hope returns and I start over. Hopefully something is learned, or at least reinforced. This is a life in flux: I have everything and then lose it and get it all back and lose it again. And on and on. Nothing is permanent; values and beliefs shift and ebb with the tide, my will to walk among you can flick and off like a lightswitch. There is nothing permanent here except the beating of this heart, begrudgingly pumping on and on.

R IS FOR RECORDS  
IN THE USED BINS

Used LPs from 80's glam bands in the ninety-nine cent bin have got to be some of the saddest goddamn things ever made in this world. Most of the time, I don't see the humor in awful music. I mean, I see the awfulness, but I also see the dreams of some dumb jackass held up on display and laughed at. Like putting a clown nose on a corpse or something.

AND IVE GOT AN  
OLD JOHNNY  
THUNDERS RECORD  
THAT ERIK GAVE ME  
SEVEN OR EIGHT

YEARS AGO.

ITS AWFUL.

IVE KEPT IT

BECAUSE

THUNDERS

TRIED SO HARD.

S IS FOR

SUPERHEROES

And I'd give a lot, porkchop, to have the singleness of purpose of a pixelized superhero. Draw me in ink and scan me in, I'd love to be as simple as Spiderman. The tunnel-vision of Batman rather than the kind I have. The Hulk gets mad and goes on a rampage. I just irritate people and get sick of myself.

T

Others in my generational bracket are immersed headlong and dedicated. Steeped in careers, advancement, a sense of society about them. I live in a concrete room, walking circles in a haze of blue smoke. One window.

IS FOR

Time passes & passes & passes us by and I sometimes find myself terrified, stricken w/ this feeling that almost feels like terror at just how absolutely relentless time is. Time passes and this bullshit game of comparison plays itself out in my head constantly.

TIME

PASSING



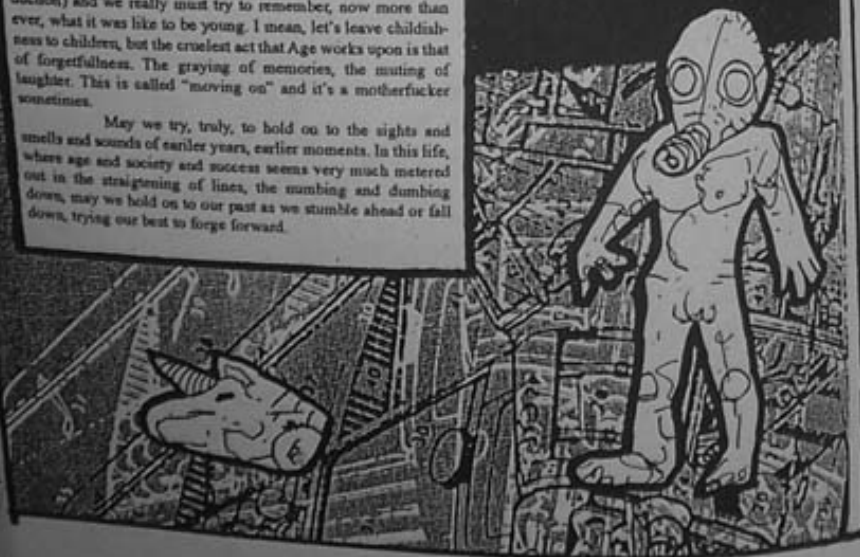
# U IS FOR UNICORN

I grow older older and older still, closer to the grave and further away from where I came from. Further away from the scent of the wind during a four a.m. walk. The rumble of an ocean I can only hardly remember now. The burning electricity of hope coursing through a body, through the hands that held a cigarette, a pen like a blade, through someone else's hand. Extinct like the unicorn, or maybe dreamed about, those moments of peace. A young body so used to being full of rage or restlessness, songlessness, standing on top of the abandoned watertowers with a broken arm, the laughter of friends, the lights of my hometown winking and shimmering below me. How these things move away from me as time passes, how they seem cut out of me bit by bit by the mundanity of time. Or maybe Time, that master carver.

Some drunk hunter in Wisconsin shot the last unicorn in the ass with a 30.06 one winter morning and it ran for miles through white fields and past fenceposts and eventually stumbled and bled to death next to a lake. The last one (they were bound to be extinct anyway, see, no potential for reproduction) and we really must try to remember, now more than ever, what it was like to be young. I mean, let's leave childishness to children, but the cruelest act that Age works upon is that of forgetfulness. The graying of memories, the muting of laughter. This is called "moving on" and it's a motherfucker sometimes.

May we try, truly, to hold on to the sights and smells and sounds of earlier years, earlier moments. In this life, where age and society and success seems very much metered out in the straightening of lines, the numbing and dumbing down, may we hold on to our past as we stumble ahead or fall down, trying our best to forge forward.

goddamn, they  
cut his head  
clean off.



## VISFOR VISIONS

and i've  
seen them



and you awaken against the light, angry, pissed off at the elements surrounding you, grabbing at those last strings of sleep. you awaken angry at sunlight, clouds, the sound of traffic, dust, voices, even the woman beside you. and it has always been like this. taken away from those dark waters, thrust back onto the skin of this screaming world.

*and you wake  
and you wake up  
pissed off at the elements*

# X IS FOR

Looks like I've found your map, you dumb fuck. It's the one you drew out in your sleep. One you drew out in your actions when you thought that no one noticed, or no one cared.

# X MARKS

And look, here are the strawmen lined up for stabbing, easy targets. Sincerity marks someone as fair game.

# THE SPOT

Here is an X. For hardcore punk? Maybe. Maybe not. For sure though, it's an X for your buried treasure.

X marks the spot and you've been spotted.

X marks the spot, you peices of shit, where cynicism is used as a convenient mask. Belittling everything around you, using irony to elevate yourself above. Using the hipster's tactics while making fun of the hipster. There are more parallels than can be named, dipshit.

X marks the spot, and it's just a rehashing of the same old game.



# Y IS FOR YOUR HEAD IN A VISE

And a hundred times I've cursed you all as a bunch of motherfuckers. What is the lesson to be learned here? And where is it? Where's the guidebook, the stereotypical writing on the wall? Somewhere between the burnt bridge and that feeling I get of wanting to simply hole up for a year or so. That's where it is, I guess. Unhook the phone, barricade the door and lay my head down and sleep for a year or ten. When do we know when we should run through the gauntlet and try to do battle with what only seems to be our nature? When do we attempt to move past our own shortcomings and when do we simply try our best to accept that this is who we are? That these are our strengths and our limitations.

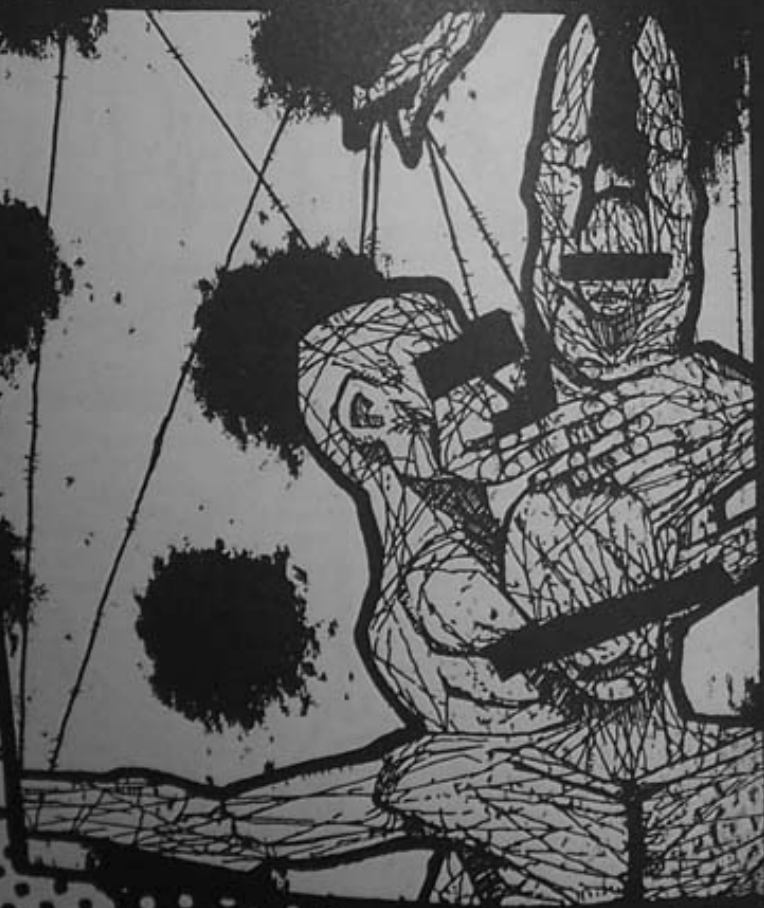
I have never got on well with people. A difficult person to get to know, harder still to care for after I've been known, I imagine. Something inside me hammers against people sometimes; something inside wants sleep, quiet, solitude, an aversion to looking people in the eye. This roar in my own head. I'm fractured: I cry out for a sense of connection, maybe even looking for a sense of worth out of the documentation and acknowledgement of my own history, while at the same time turning off the phone and not leaving the house for three days. I would rather watch headlights through the rain than walk among you. I'd rather listen to record than go to a show, and am probably a better letter writer than a friend.

When is it time to simply accept that this is it? That I'm not getting any younger, and while there's still so much room for experience, the mold has pretty much been set in many ways. I've just gotten goddam weary of the crowd, I think. And most of the time the crowd consists of anything, anyone other than myself. This life is cut into a million peices.





# AVOW 14



listen to this, the new dawn's  
anthem.  
a clarion call,  
the grip of handcuffs around  
your wrists,  
neighbors peering through  
cracks in the blinds  
and then going back to bed,  
trying their best to sleep.





nobody here sleeps. we think the kids next door sell drugs. noise? always, all the time. people run up and down the stairs all night, every night, so hard our windows rattle. now it's six am and someone smacks their hand against the glass. i flinch like it's a gunshot. all the kids in this side of the complex know each other, hang out, play mediocre rap fullblast and run up and down the stairs all night long. calisthenics or idiocy. i keep saying it's time to make the rounds, time to go to each apartment and tell them to cool it, then i think of the numbers: 8, 9, 10 to one? not like a fight, but just my voice against theirs, my eyes against theirs. i think of that and crap out. at this age? shame, shame, shame on me.



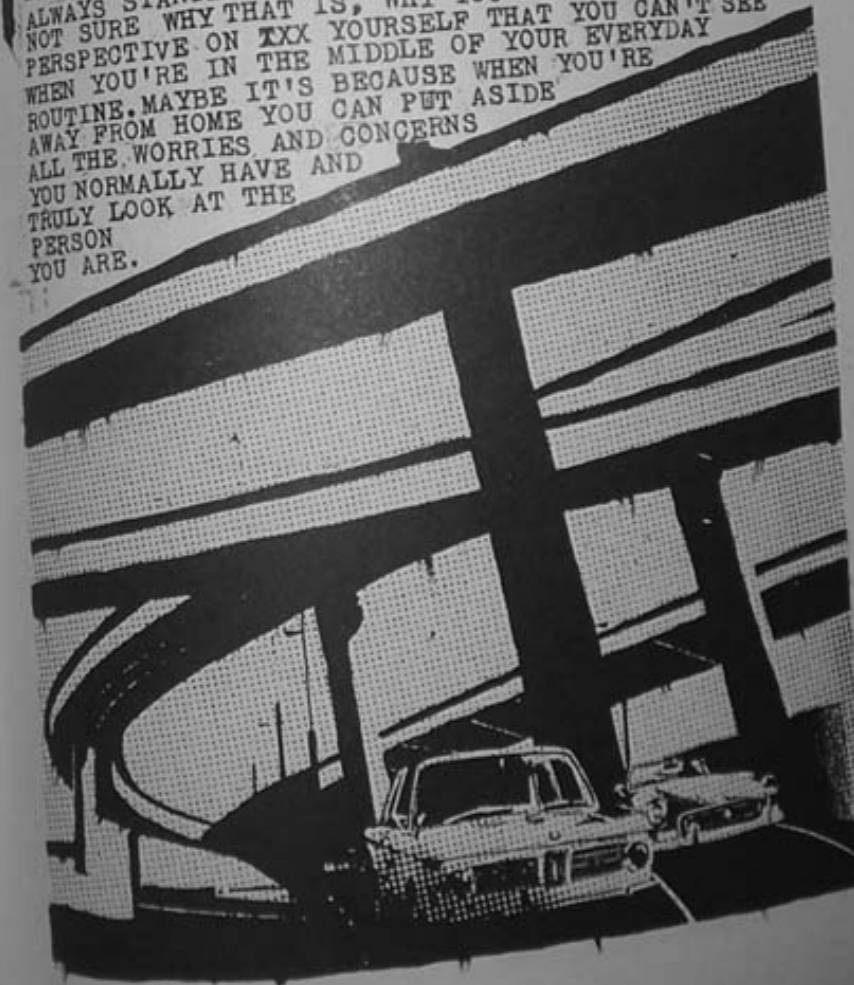
your idea of success is gonna kill you quicker than dogshit, boy.

and i dreamt  
that these,  
these were the hands  
that shook  
the world.



# A MILLION MILES AWAY...

IT SEEMS LIKE EVERYTIME I GO ON A TRIP  
LATELY, THE ~~BLURRY~~ BLURRY LIFE I LEAVE BEHIND  
ALWAYS STARTS TO COME ~~XXX~~ INTO FOCUS. I'M  
NOT SURE WHY THAT IS, WHY YOU GAIN A ~~TRICKLY~~  
PERSPECTIVE ON ~~XXX~~ YOURSELF THAT YOU CAN'T SEE  
WHEN YOU'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF YOUR EVERYDAY  
ROUTINE. MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE WHEN YOU'RE  
AWAY FROM HOME YOU CAN PUT ASIDE  
ALL THE WORRIES AND CONCERNS  
YOU NORMALLY HAVE AND  
TRULY LOOK AT THE  
PERSON  
YOU ARE.





FOR SOME REASON I CAN SEE THE BOY I AM AT HOME,  
BEST WHEN I AM FURTHEST AWAY FROM HIM. AND I  
START TO TAKE NOTICE OF ALL THOSE THINGS HE'S  
LEFT BACK THERE THAT ARE NEGLECTED, UNFINISHED,  
AND INCOMPLETE. LOST LOVES, OLD FRIENDS,  
NEW IDEAS.

SUDDENLY THEY ALL COME BACK TO ME. THEY  
SEEM TO SEND ME MESSAGES THROUGH MY WALKMAN  
AND THROUGH SPEAKERS IN THE VAN. ALL THOSE LOVES  
I'VE LEFT BEHIND SEEM TO TALK TO ME THROUGH  
CHORUS'S AND THE LAST LINES OF SONGS.  
DRUM BEATS PUSH OUT NEW  
IDEAS FASTER THAN THE  
VAN CAN MOVE,

AND OLD  
FRIENDS SEEN  
EVERYDAY ARE NOW  
MISSED MORE THAN EVER  
AS THEIR FAVORITE SONGS  
REMINDE ME OF HOW MUCH THEY MEAN.  
IT'S SOMETHING ABOUT TRAVELING THAT  
IS A CATALYST FOR ALL OF THIS, A COMBINATION OF SPEED, MOVEMENT, SCENERY,  
AND SOUND.

SOMETHING ABOUT MOVING ACROSS THE DESERT  
LISTENING TO 'DISINTEGRATION' AS THE SUN SETS  
WHILE JULIA SLEEPS AND ROBERT SMITH WHISPERS,  
"BOTH OF US KNEW HOW THE ENDING WOULD BE..."

THINKING ABOUT JOSH AS I DRIVE THE BLOOD  
BROTHERS TO THEIR NEXT SHOW IN BOISE, WINDING  
THROUGH EASTERN WASHINGTON AS BEN WEASEL WINDS  
THROUGH SPEAKERS WITH, "I SAT AND SMOKED A MILLION  
CIGARETTES AND WISH TO HELL THAT YOU WERE HERE..."

LEAVING REDDING BEFORE DAWN WITH JASON AS WE  
SIT AND TALK ABOUT OUR NEXT PHOTO PROJECT AND  
NEWEST FILM IDEA, AND AS WE FLY ALONG THE FIVE  
I WATCH HIS FACE LIGHT UP AS HE SINGS ALONG TO  
HIS FAVORITE BELLE & SEBASTIAN SONG, "A BOY JUST  
LIKE ME, THOUGHT THERE WAS LOVE IN EVERYTHING  
AND EVERYONE. YOU'RE SO NAÏVE..."

MOVING PAST EMPTY FIELDS AND OLD FARM  
HOUSES DOWN THE 5 AT MIDNIGHT AS I THINK ABOUT  
DEREK AND HOW FAR OUR FRIENDSHIP HAS COME. AND AS  
I START TO SEE SIGNS FOR MOUNT SHASTA  
THE REPLACEMENTS START AGAIN WITH, "IF I DON'T  
SEE YOU IN A LONG LONG WHILE, I'LL TRY TO FIND

DEBATING WHETHER I SHOULD WRITE  
BACK TO JULIA AS I TRY TO FIND MY WAY OUT OF  
SAN FRANCISCO, TRYING TO REMEMBER THE LAST  
TIME WE SPOKE AND TRYING TO FORGET THE LAST WORDS SHE WROTE, AND AS I  
FINALLY FIND MY WAY TO THE BAY BRIDGE THE  
WEAKERTHANS FIND MY BARS WITH, "I'M TRYING  
NOT TO WONDER WHERE YOU ARE..."

THINKING ABOUT JORDAN AS I LEAVE SEATTLE  
BY AIR, WONDERING IF HE KNOWS HOW MUCH I ALREADY  
MISS HIM AND WONDERING WHY I DIDN'T TELL HIM.  
AND AS THE PLANE CUTS THROUGH  
SKYLINES, NICO'S VOICE CUTS THROUGH MY  
HEADPHONES WITH, "THESE DAYS I SEEM TO THINK  
A LOT ABOUT THE THINGS THAT I FORGOT TO DO..."

TRYING TO UNDERSTAND WHY JAMIE WON'T  
CALL ME BACK WHILE I SIT WITH BRIAN SOMEWHERE  
SOUTH OF SACRAMENTO AS TRAFFIC STARTS TO END AND  
CYNDI STARTS TO SING, "I LOVE YOU MORE THAN I DID  
WHEN YOU WERE MINE."

THINKING ABOUT ERIC AS I TRAVEL ALONE  
DOWN THE 405 AT NOON, WONDERING WHAT HE'S UP TO,  
AND WHY WE DON'T TALK AS MUCH AS WE USE TO. AND  
AS I BEGIN TO SPEED PAST SIGNS FOR SAN DIEGO,  
THE HATED BEGINS TO SPEED THROUGH MY SPEAKERS  
WITH, "SOMETIMES I TAKE  
FOR GRANTED ALL I HAVE."

THEY ARE SIMPLE MOMENTS,  
MOMENTS THAT MOVE SO  
QUICKLY THAT SOMETIMES  
THEY'RE OVER BEFORE  
THE SONG EVEN ENDS.  
BUT FOR SOME REASON



THEY ALWAYS REMIND ME OF ALLENXXXXX THE THINGS  
I HAVE LEFT AWAITING ME WHEN I GET HOME, MAKING  
ME HOPE XXXXXX I'LL START SOMETHING NEW AND  
WON'T GET STUCK IN THE XXXX SAME RUTS AND OLD  
ROUTINES. AND WHO KNOWS, MAYBE WHEN I GET BACK  
I'LL START THAT PHOTO IDRA I HAD AFTER-ALL,  
MAYBE I'LL XXXXXX CALL JULES TO TELL HER I'M SORRY  
ABOUT HOW THINGS ENDED, MAYBE I'LL WRITE JOHN  
AND TELL HIM HOW MUCH I MISS HIM. OR MAYBEXXXX  
XXXXX I'LL STAY THE WAY I AM, THE WAY I XX WAS,  
THE WAY I'VE ALWAYS BEEN, NOT THE BOY I AM IN MY  
SEATXXXXX HEAD. XXXX WHEN I AM ON THE ROAD AND  
A MILLION MILES AWAY...

**HY HIGH OFF**



# SLEEP AWAY

BY STEVE JEFFREY/AMERICA'S

[illegible][illegible]

But all I can think about is absolute justice. Those miserable rights trying to be nice with my kids is a big empty cold room. I am always looking into it by the state of these social justice issues around Southern part of the country of the situation would look it. Everyone would always tell me that I am the only one still stuck in a straight house. Making people think that.

I would always look to you. What's better? To make my three parents up by having at 3 AM or make everyone wonder who made the other father? And the thought people I'd come around with my own understanding trying not to break anything out on my way to the kitchen.

This network difference is evident when you connect to a public radio station where a host of bands always called in.

It was a little better this year. At one point I became sick about accepting being asked to actually try to stop. I can't remember exactly how I was able to do it last time. Eventually they'll send me to Abuja if a peace offering is not successful there?

These three are just an abridgement. The whole would just go on under the text. It is made by the relation of the right. There is a kind of pattern. I just don't get right. I'm too hard to make myself down. Is this freedom or not?

[illegible][illegible]

Getting home was the breaking point, but of course I never really made it. I got out the side door. They got out too and opened the back so I could grab my stuff. We exchanged hugs. They got back in the car and I walked up the driveway. The car started and I turned back to wave goodbye. I looked forward and felt my stomach drop. The light on the porch was off. The door was locked. My key was gone. I couldn't bring myself to knock. I was too scared to see her. So I walked away, kicking stones and found a phone booth. They picked me up and brought me back to their house.

I try to think of it as just another uncomfortable night on tour. I try to believe that my dream has really come true. We can just keep on moving forever. Everyday there's something new to look at on the way to wherever we're going. Everyday there's at least a few people that are excited to see us play. Everyday there's just barely enough money for gas and food. Every couple of nights we have to make puppy-dog eyes at the crowd to find a place to sleep but something always works out.

Gas, food and a floor to sleep on: that's all I need. A few constants and the rest constant change. None of the same problems always hanging around. None of the same people to fuck with and get fucked up on.

I remember all the times I sued to wait for her to come back. For a while, she went out with someone else and it felt like she was testing us. It felt like she was in the process of deciding between the two of us and all I could do was wait.

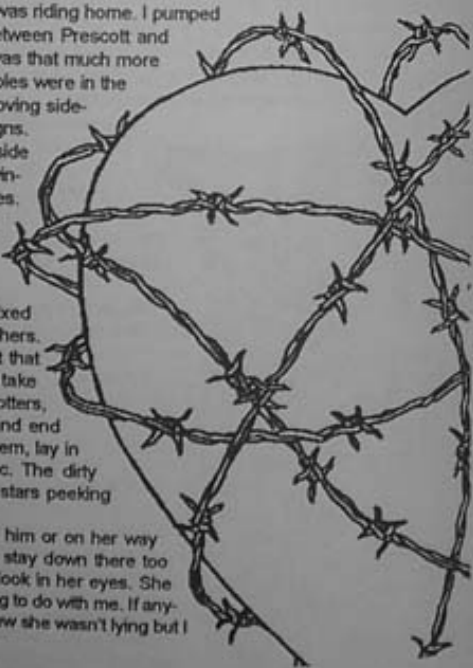
Those nights I'd always hear someone shout last call. It was embarrassing. Every two drinks added up to an hour of work. I'd try to go slow and not use of the whole day, especially since I was only working part time. They stopped checking my ID. They stopped bussing my table so I could clearly see what a fool I was making of myself. It cost me so much that after a while she started giving me money while she was with the other boy. I was ashamed of myself for taking it but my need took over. Maybe a bit if my anger too.

I tried to stay aware of how drunk I was riding home. I pumped my back brakes shooting down the big hill between Prescott and Fremont. It was as if in my inebriated state, I was that much more aware of where the big bumps and deep potholes were in the road. I swerved around them, scanning the moving side-streets for cards that could ignore their stop signs.

Approaching the house from the side and catching a first glimpse of our bedroom window through the trees that didn't have any leaves. Whether the bedside lamp was on or not was completely arbitrary but for me it was a sign. I'd go up there and pace around for a few minutes and drink some more if I had anything. Our clothes, records and books were all mixed up. I couldn't tell what was mine and what was hers.

I'd walk in vain down the sidestreet that she'd be returning on, then go to the park. I'd take the path past the swing sets, slides and teeter-totters, towards the permanently-closed bathrooms and end up at the half dead bushes. I'd climb inside them, lay in the dirt and listen to the slow trickle of traffic. The dirty amber lights would just barely overpower the stars peeking out between the clouds.

Was she having another drink with him or on her way home to me? I didn't know, but I could never stay down there too long. On my third try she'd be back with that look in her eyes. She was telling for another but insisted it had nothing to do with me. If anything, she said, it made her like me more. I knew she wasn't lying but I couldn't believe her either.



# Eternal Servant Wanted: (will pay Reece's Pieces.)



BY NATHAN  
BEATY

Coming into Olympia, Washington on the Greyhound, I notice a man a few seats ahead of me eating countless Reece's Peanut Butter Cups. He has a forlorn look etched into his ancient, weathered face and I can't stop staring at him. I'm fascinated by old men.

When we arrive at the station, he inches to the front, moaning and wheezing, toting two obviously heavy bags. It takes a good 3 minutes for him to convince his skeleton of a body to the door. As I am directly behind him, I offer to help. He doesn't look like he's even going to make it off the bus.

He squeezes a smile out of his face and thanks me. We emerge into the white sunlight of spring reflecting off the angular Olympia transit station. The air smells good. Although I'm certainly not giddy about the remaining 3-hour trek home to the Flophouse in Westport on the ever-depressing Grays Harbor bus, the sun manages to brighten my spirits. I walk with the old man inside the stuffy indoor seating area and set his bags down. He tells me he's waiting for the Aberdeen bus. I tell him I am also. He smiles at me and continues talking. I want to go back outside, but feel inexplicably obligated to stay by this man's side.

While we wait he slowly works up anxiety that we've already missed the bus. I tell him I've been watching for it and it hasn't gone by. "OK," he says. A few minutes later, he's moaning pitifully: "OH, WE'VE MISSED THE BUS! OHHHH!" No we didn't, I reply calmly, the bus has not come yet: I'd have seen it. "OK," he says.

He searches through his bag for something, whining and working up worry. "OH, I'VE LOST IT! OHHHH..." He soon finds what he's looking for: a pill bottle. He asks me if I want any: "THE STRONGEST PAINKILLERS THERE ARE. I DEMAND THEY GIVE ME THE STRONGEST." "Uh, no thanks," I say, noticing heads turning towards us. Later I regretted this. Most likely it's from my increasing intuition of how it was a bad idea to have helped this strange old man at all. I also intuit accepting a gift would be a bad idea.

The man tells me about all the diseases he has. He's got cancer, dia-



betes, muscle deterioration, he's got everything. He just keeps listing off terrible diseases. His hips are all stainless-steel, he tells me, and goddamn if it isn't cold from the inside-out. "THIS CHILL WIND GOES RIGHT TO MY BONES," he says. "YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT PAIN IS!"

He goes back to his moaning about missing the bus. Eventually I give up on trying to convince him otherwise. At first I could relate to him, as I often have irrational anxiety over missing busses and trains. But with each moaning session, he was working up increasing mortification at our being stranded forever. It was ridiculous and sad.

Finally the bus shows up. I'm relieved and consider myself rid of the situation. No such luck. He sits right behind me.

On the three hour ride to Aberdeen, he keeps offering me Reece's Peanut Butter Cups. I accept three before turning the rest down. It's suddenly obvious he's buttering me up for further services.

In Aberdeen, he talks me into walking his stuff to the bar. "COME IN, I'LL BUY YOU A DRINK," he says. Here he gets me: my realization that accepting gifts incurs obligation for further help suddenly diminishes in importance when confronted with free beer. To my dismay, however, he orders a pitcher of Budweiser.

He then tells me he's going to meet a woman here in Aberdeen. He gives me the number, some change and asks me to call her, mumbling something about his fingers not agreeing with payphone buttons. I take my beer and sit in front of the worn and haggard payphone. The phone number he gives me returns the "disconnected or no longer in service" message. I try again. No luck. The irrational fear that I'll never be able to get away from this man suddenly makes me panic. What if there is no escape? I imagine myself being tricked somehow into helping him for the rest of my life. At the moment it somehow seems possible and that scares the piss out of me.

I walk back to the table and tell him he gave me the wrong number. "WHAT? THAT'S...HER NUMBER! I'VE CALLED HER...10 YEARS...SHE'S GOT TO..." The multiple painkillers I watched him pop are obviously making introductions with the alcohol. His eyes are glazed over. He seems to be having trouble staying awake and doesn't finish his sentences. I keep at him, trying to get the right number, figuring if I could just call this woman, I'll be free.



But whenever he can wake himself, he just repeats the same number. Then the bartender is at him. She takes the unfinished pitcher away.

He jerks his head up and yells at her: "STUPID BITCH! CAN'T A MAN REST HIS EYES FOR A SECOND? GIVE ME MY BEER!" His head drops, eyes closed. She says he can't fall asleep in the bar and, I'm surprised to hear, generously offers a refund for half the pitcher. His head again snaps upright: "STUPID BITCH! GIVE ME MY BEER BACK!" The bartender calls me over and asks who he is. I tell her I met him on the bus and just helped him carry his bags over here. She wants me to try and get him out of the bar.

I'm through with this situation and don't know how to disengage. The



man gets up and stumbles out the door. The outside air wakes him a little. He pleads to me to carry his stuff to another bar, where he's supposed to meet someone he's going to stay with. "Riiiiight," I say, "but then I definitely have to go."

At the other bar, he gives me another phone number to call. He starts to fall asleep again.

This time a lady answers. I tell her about this man I've been helping and how he gave me this other number to call. "OH GOD, THAT WAS HIS MOTHER'S NUMBER. SHE'S BEEN DEAD FOR 2 YEARS."

"Mm. Well," I say, "he's here at the bar and he's falling asleep, and I have to leave." She gives me a noncommittal recognition of the situation. I hang up.

I tell him I'm leaving and grab my bag. He looks at me like he hasn't the slightest idea who the hell I am, yet whines under his breath and heaves his bony body into motion after me. Outside the bar a taxi driver is just pulling up. They exchange excited greetings. He's apparently another ancient Aberdeen creature, as they launch into reminiscing old stories.

Recognizing my chance for escape, I slip away at a quick walk. I turn back to make sure he isn't lurching after me, but I get the feeling he doesn't even remember I was there. I heave a sigh of relief and make my way towards the Aberdeen bus, grateful to be alone and feeling like I'd narrowly escaped eternal servitude.

from nice, it was a six hour train ride to pisa, and we shared our sleeper car with two girls from boston who were on their way to rome. they were friendly enough and we had a good time talking with them, hearing their stories and telling our own. it was a crash course in each other's lives, all of what we learned was soon forgotten as the weeks wore on, but that train ride was refreshing and it was actually nice to talk with others from the states for once, when before that, we always tried to avoid situations like that. later that night, we watched the riviera from the train window, all four of our heads poked out part way, facing the water. the moon was bright and low in the sky, reflecting off of the waves and the moving mediterranean underneath it, outlining the black of the hills and mountains. the dark blue of the sky contrasted beautifully and the lights from the towns clustered in the distance sparkled a brilliant white.

florence was exactly how i had always pictured europe, especially when wandering

through it at six in the morning. empty brick streets and towering lines of buildings following them, old bridges spanning over the river cutting through the middle of the city, colossal churches and statues and a cool breeze blowing lightly on all of it. i immediately liked florence, though we were stumbling through it in a daze.

it was easy to walk through the city and we took advantage of that - along the river, with lamp-posts lining the walls that confine it and bridges that span it's waters. the mountains tower above everything in the distance, with smaller ranges in the foreground. the earth slopes down towards the river and the houses follow just up until the water's edge where they cluster together and hang precariously just above the water line. this city is hundreds and hundreds of years old. its buildings are weathered and cracking from age, its marble is wearing down slowly and its copper ornaments are tarnished. the homes are decorated with plants hanging from balconies, flags hanging from poles. the plaster is yellowing from hundreds of years of water damage and erosion. this city is old, but it is thriving. vespas roar through the cobblestone streets, the noise deafening and irritating, and bouncing off of walls. the sidewalks are narrow, good for single-file use almost exclusively. there are ristoranti everywhere - pizzerias and gelaterias, clothing shops and shoe stores, entire city blocks that smell of leather jackets and suede. walking through the rain and taking our time in spite of slowly getting soaked through to the skin, watching street vendors sell umbrellas to tourists. when the weather finally let up and the sun re-emerged, the wet streets shined and reflected the skyline above us. later, the skies were bright blue again, so we spent the rest of the evening eating gelato and watching street performers, watching the sun go down over the

## THIS WAS ITALY

# 200,000

river, like a big ball of fire falling through the sky.

woke up early in the morning and took the 32 bus to the very edges of the city and hitchhiked south to rome to save time. made it there in less than six hours with two quick rides when it would have taken a day and a half by bus because of scheduling conflicts and unnecessary rerouting.

nothing is permanent any longer, our surroundings change every day - as soon as we've familiarized ourselves with a city, there's another one just ahead of us. languages begin to blend together, i fumble with my words and settle on the wrong ones, everything i try to say gets lost in a mess of unfamiliar sounds and syllables. meaning gets lost in the translation, accurate definitions and directions dissolve, money has no value any longer.

i caught a glimpse of myself in a storefront window this afternoon and almost didn't recognize myself. wide-eyed and tan, my gray shirt faded from days and days of wear and sunlight beating down onto it and stripping it of its color. sleeveless and proud, or at least too unconcerned to care. my clothes are fading and dirty, and i've lost weight from walking everywhere - up to 14 hours a day sometimes. i've grown a beard that's already filled itself in and accentuates the rest of my facial features. i feel tough as fuck and proud, a sense of stubbornness almost to the point of consistence, well worn, but definitely not worn out.

# LIRAS

addam and i walked around for a bit one night and found ourselves outside the ruins, watching the full moon move slowly



across the sky. the weather was nice and i could almost feel the summer in the air, i could almost taste it, sweetly familiar even from halfway across the world. the colosseum loomed silently behind us, up against a backdrop of blue-black night, ancient pillars and arches rooted down where they were planted thousands of years ago - mere shells of the once-great empire that they still represent. it was exciting and sobering at the same time, with the threshold of absolute freedom in front of me, and the past - the whatwas surrounding and overwhelming. rome makes it very easy to feel small and insignificant, without a real sense of culture, or history, or hope.

"everything's already been done," addam says, and the past proves it.



we sat around for a while, with one of the city's stray cats keeping us company. rome passed a law in the eighties, protecting stray cats and allowing them the right to live where they are born - thus, there are hundreds upon hundreds of them, especially among the ruins. the calico was exceptionally friendly and perched itself on my right leg, purring contently - not unlike my own cat back in florida and somehow, that made me feel more at home than i've felt over the last three-four weeks. suddenly, it was as if the summer had finally begun again, and the hundreds of miles we'd already covered as we crossed europe were nothing more than a small taste of what was ahead. rome had managed to open the door on the summertime, and we were walking down its streets proud - inspired and smiling.

flashback to every summer i've struggled through since i can remember - five or six, or maybe even seven years of travel, of leaving everything behind. flashback to the feelings of absolute freedom, of the sun on my face coupled with a cool breeze, of every option open. these days i never know what time it is. it's difficult to keep track of the date or the specific day of the week, everything begins to blur together and i like it like that. flashback to the promise i made to myself years ago - that i would never stop moving, regardless of circumstance. constant movement often leaves you without a sense of permanence, but strangely, stability does too, sometimes - in ways that i can't even begin to explain. roots are good to have, but that's exactly what they are - roots, they anchor and bind down, and they often make movement impossible.

no anchors, no roots. no boundaries. no limitations except for those i can't control. this is absolute freedom.

## HAVING A CRAZY BROTHER.

The biggest legacy surrounding my life isn't even one of my own. When I sum up my existence like that, it sounds really sad. More than anything that I've ever done, people remember my older brother, Eric. I mean, to this day, I still get people saying to me...

Q: You're Eric's brother? But you're so normal... and he's so... not...

A: Yep.

person

Common ice breakers

me

Because, naturally, he has many more reasons to be remembered! Like the time where he threw everything he had in his bedroom out of the second-story window, leaving the backyard covered with dresser drawers, bedsheets and lightbulbs. Or when he got expelled for throwing smoke bombs in school lockers. Or the time when... well, I'm won't overstep myself! (How's THAT for writing technique and foreshadowing?! And my English teacher said I would amount to nothing!)

When all of my meager accomplishments are taken into question, dumb shit like a zine and a band, I have relatively little to say about myself. In reference to my brother, I need only say one thing -- I have never gone to some lengths that he has to achieve a certain result. And when I try to tell this story, I still get tripped up on how I tell it, exactly, so I might as well start from the beginning.

Some people just do crazy things. There isn't necessarily a reason for this. Society as a whole did not need a reason to explain why these things were done. Crazy people were just labeled as such, and everyone understood the fact that we should just leave it at that. When we "evolved," we created drugs for different kinds of craziness, and soon enough, everyone became crazy in a thousand different ways. My brother was one of those classification cases.

Instead of just calling him crazy and taking the reasonable way out, my parents noticed his actions early on and looked for a certain label. ADD, social anxiety disorder, bipolar syndrome, whatever. Through different periods of his life, my brother was diagnosed with each of these in varying degrees, and medicated accordingly.

Guess what the medications accomplished?



# NOT A FUCKIN' THING!

They either made him irritable, crazier, fatter, dumber, or anything that went in the opposite direction of actual progress. Eric was simply reduced to a weirder version of himself under medication. In addition to this, when he had nothing to do, things got interesting.

A particular summer happened to be a perfect example of what I'm referring to. Our group of friends, including my brother, just had a whole lot of free time on our hands. Free time can (and usually does) lead to a sort of creative thinking.

At most malls, there are electric carts, usually near the customer service place. These wonders of creation, usually reserved for the elderly, lazy and fat (or all three), enable the seated consumer to ride around in fashion at 5 miles an hour. These motorized chariots are very large, noticeable, and yellow. Along with malls, the same carts can sometimes be found at supermarkets as well. At the supermarket near us, there are about 3 of them.

For kicks, we used to ride around in those fun electric carts and knock over displays. Nothin to do on a Friday night?! Get a mechanical cart and barrel into a huge stack of cereal boxes!



Those were the days. As always, though, my brother had to take things one step further. It was always that extra step that earned him a legacy. For example... here's an excuse to take a break from the story and mention something of the past, again.

## FLASHBACK!

PERHAPS  
DONE'S! BUT  
THAT YOU ARE  
GOOD! THAT YOU ARE

We used to fish in a series of ponds dug up for suburban neighborhoods. When we hooked a fish, any sort of mutilation was customary and expected. Many households found torn up fish lying on their lawn and in their gardens. Also, many homeowners noticed a dwindling number of fish in their ponds.

However, Eric was the only one to actually put the living fish that he had caught into someone's pool. The guy who owned the pool spotted him and chased out of that neighborhood. And that guy had one hell of a time catching that fish, which pretty much caused the guy to hate my brother to this day.

Anyway, I'm getting sidetracked. Back to the original story. Eric was at our supermarket in the early afternoon, buying his usual rations of candy. Today, he had no ride back to our house, which was about a mile walk. Do you see a solution to this situation? Eric did! I was unaware all of this until I heard my mom yell...

## "WHAT THE HELL IS THAT CART DOING IN OUR DRIVEWAY?!"

Eric tried to lie his way out of the situation by saying that the cart that he rode for a mile on a busy street was in the trash, or some equally dumb excuse. After a brief argument of maintaining his innocence, he demanded to know why he couldn't keep the cart.

"It's not like they use it a lot!", he said.

After that, my dad loaded the huge dunker in the trunk of his car and drove it back to the supermarket, whose security forces somehow missed a teenager driving the elephant sized machine out the door, through the parking lot and on the road. Eric somehow avoided having charges pressed against him, since the people at the store were just happy to get their thousand dollar cart back.

After all was said and done, Eric made it home without walking, thus ending a chapter of the summer.

## \*\*\* END. \*\*\*

BY ALEX DUNK & PISS

# courage

I recently attended a Yankees-Red Sox baseball game and had the misfortune of being at Yankee Stadium on the day that a U.S. General was present to throw out the first pitch. He was introduced as the person in command of "our 80,000 troops in Afghanistan fighting the war against terrorism." The entire crowd of 55,000 plus stood to cheer- everyone except my partner and me, it seemed, who'd remained seated during the national anthem as well. Even the most bitter rivals, fans from Boston and New York who shouted at each other during the game, now practically joined hands and mirrored the ecstasy one would find in a Gospel choir at a Sunday religious service.

Well, it was Sunday, and people were offering homage to their cultural gods, represented by this one career military officer. One can hardly imagine the rivers of blood spilled at the hands of this man, the deaths for which he is responsible, either personally or through his troops, in this "war on terrorism" or any of the previous slaughters in which the U.S. has engaged abroad. Would it have dampened the crowd's enthusiasm if the general had been welcomed as the man in charge of 80,000 hired killers? That may jar with the propaganda we have heard every day of our lives, but that is all any soldier ultimately is, no matter how many ribbons, fine speeches and parades seek to decorate and disguise that reality.

Today the speeches and memorials seem nearly ubiquitous in the media, which likes to seize on certain topics and harp on them continuously. The cult of personality picked O.J. Simpson, John F. Kennedy, Jr. and Chandra Levy to dominate popular attention for a while; thankfully, all maudlin tragedies eventually must be run into the ground. All except one, perhaps- the current theme, that of the cult of blood, promises to never leave us. Blood was spilled on September 11th by a ruthless, shadowy enemy, and any person who participates in the blood-for-blood retribution is venerated above all as a hero.

The hero-worship is reinforced by a pervasive climate of fear, enhanced by recurrent official warnings of "imminent terrorist attacks"- warnings that always seem to come when the President is in political trouble, to stifle questions about what he knew before 9/11 and what he didn't do to protect the nation. Yet this man, the General's and 80,000 troops' commander-in-chief, is revered as the greatest hero of them all- for hiding in "undisclosed locations" all

# and heroism

day long on September 11th, for reading the words his speech-writers prepare in stern tones, for going to war against one of the most impoverished countries in the world, a country that had little if anything to do with the terrorists involved in the 9/11 attacks.

In pushing his expansion of the war to Iraq, the President recently ruminated, "I don't want to be in a position where we look back and say, 'Why didn't they lead?'" If only he would display the same commitment to ending world poverty, or its particular effects on Iraq, where U.S.-led sanctions have withheld key medical supplies and technology to repair the water-purification systems the United States bombed 12 years ago, leading to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians.

These considerations mean nothing to the cult of blood, which has quite limited criteria for hero-worship. Despite breaking his promise to reveal to the people of this country what evidence his government has amassed of bin Laden's guilt, despite vowing- yet failing- to get Osama bin Laden "dead or alive", despite the FBI's claim that the war in Afghanistan, in dispersing al Qaeda fighters over a wider area, may have only increased the risks of terrorism for the United States, Bush nevertheless offers his tough Texas twang and appears resolute in defending freedom. His star still ascends toward the orbit held by another mythological George, the place in the



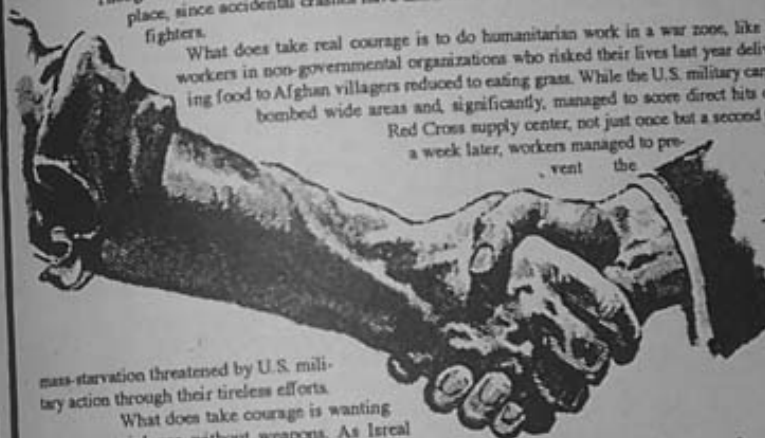
heroes reserved for the true saviors of the country, the GI Joe's "defending our freedom" 15,000 miles away? Our hearts are supposed to go out to them because they are "bored", the *New York Times* reports. They are disappointed with the lack of thrilling action, wistful for more shoot-em-up opportunities against The Enemy. They want to come home to tell their families and friends of their heroic deeds- but rest assured, when they get the call, they will march and they will kill.

It takes no guts to follow orders. These are the men who bungled one raid after another on Afghan villages, trying to "ferret out suspected members of al Qaeda", yet doing nothing more than murdering 3-year old girls and old men. They invaded these towns in the dead of night, going house to house with guns drawn, yet in every newspaper account it was the villagers who fired first, so of course U.S. soldiers were justified in any action they took, regardless of the consequences.

It takes no guts to push buttons from 35,000 feet in the air, killing more civilians in Afghanistan than were lost on the Sept. 11 attacks, flattening their homes and driving hundreds of thousands into refugee camps- and then offering no compensation for the wanton destruction.

Though it must take some guts to get on board a U.S. military air transport vehicle in the first place, since accidental crashes have taken the lives of far more U.S. soldiers than al Qaeda fighters.

What does take real courage is to do humanitarian work in a war zone, like the workers in non-governmental organizations who risked their lives last year delivering food to Afghan villagers reduced to eating grass. While the U.S. military carpet-bombed wide areas and, significantly, managed to score direct hits on a Red Cross supply center, not just once but a second time a week later, workers managed to prevent the



mass-starvation threatened by U.S. military action through their tireless efforts.

What does take courage is wanting to prevent violence without weapons. As Israel aided Palestinian towns, like the United States taking retribution on an entire population for the actions of already-dead suicide bombers, members of the International Solidarity Movement sought, by their presence, to bring about a temporary cease-fire and force negotiations.

The blood cult has little respect for these people. In fact, neighbors ran out of town the family of a Jewish U.S. citizen in Palestine involved with the International Solidarity Movement, considering death threats the appropriate response to his nonviolent actions. But the blood cult will snarl to attention every time the national anthem is played. It will harbor more feeling for a piece of red, white and blue cloth than the living human beings of another color or country. If this is courage and heroism, whatever freedom it is preserving is also tainted with blood- not the blood of our soldiers, but their blood, the blood of innocents.

The blood cult expects universal membership, and its conditions for joining are so easy that few in this country have passed on the opportunity to place their hands over their hearts. Sometimes resisting this can be done by simply keeping your seat during a song.

# in the

# blood cult

by vincent romano

# courage

I recently attended a Yankees-Red Sox baseball game and had the misfortune of being at Yankee Stadium the day that a U.S. General was present to throw out the first pitch. He was introduced as the person in command of "our 80,000 troops in Afghanistan fighting the war against terrorism." The entire crowd of 55,000-plus stood to cheer- everyone except my partner and me, it seemed, who'd remained seated during the national anthem as well. Even the most bitter rivals, fans from Boston and New York who shouted at each other during the game, now practically joined hands and mirrored the ecstasy one would find in a Gospel choir at a Sunday religious service.

Well, it was Sunday, and people were offering homage to their cultural gods, represented by this one career military officer. One can hardly imagine the rivers of blood spilled at the hands of this man, the deaths for which he is responsible, either personally or through his troops, in this "war on terrorism" or any of the previous slaughters in which the U.S. has engaged abroad. Would it have dampened the crowd's enthusiasm if the general had been welcomed as the man in charge of 80,000 hired killers? That may jar with the propaganda we have heard every day of our lives, but that is all any soldier ultimately is, no matter how many ribbons, fine speeches and parades seek to decorate and disguise that reality.

Today the speeches and memorials seem nearly ubiquitous in the media, which likes to seize on certain topics and harp on them continuously. The cult of personality picked O.J. Simpson, John F. Kennedy, Jr. and Chandra Levy to dominate popular attention for a while; thankfully, all maudlin tragedies eventually must be run into the ground. All except one, perhaps- the current theme, that of the cult of blood, promises to never leave us: Blood was spilled on September 11th by a ruthless, shadowy enemy, and any person who participates in the blood-for-blood retribution is venerated above all as a hero.

The hero-worship is reinforced by a pervasive climate of fear, enhanced by recurrent official warnings of "imminent terrorist attacks"- warnings that always seem to come when the President is in political trouble, to stifle questions about what he knew before 9/11 and what he didn't do to protect the nation. Yet this man, the General's and 80,000 troops' commander-in-chief, is revered as the greatest hero of them all- for hiding in "undisclosed locations" all

## and heroism



day long on September 11th, for reading the words his speech-writers prepare in stern tones, for going to war against one of the most impoverished countries in the world, a country that had little if anything to do with the terrorists involved in the 9/11 attacks.

In pushing his expansion of the war to Iraq, the President recently ruminated, "I don't want to be in a position where we look back and say, 'Why didn't they lead?'" If only he would display the same commitment to ending world poverty, or its particular effects on Iraq, where U.S.-led sanctions have withheld key medical supplies and technology to repair the water-purification systems the United States bombed 12 years ago, leading to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians.

These considerations mean nothing to the cult of blood, which has quite limited criteria for hero-worship. Despite breaking his promise to reveal to the people of this country what evidence his government has amassed of bin Laden's guilt, despite vowing- yet failing- to get Osama bin Laden "dead or alive", despite the FBI's claim that the war in Afghanistan, in dispersing al Qaeda fighters over a wider area, may have only increased the risks of terrorism for the United States, Bush nevertheless offers his tough Texas twang and appears resolute in defending freedom. His star still ascends toward the orbit held by another mythological George, the place in the

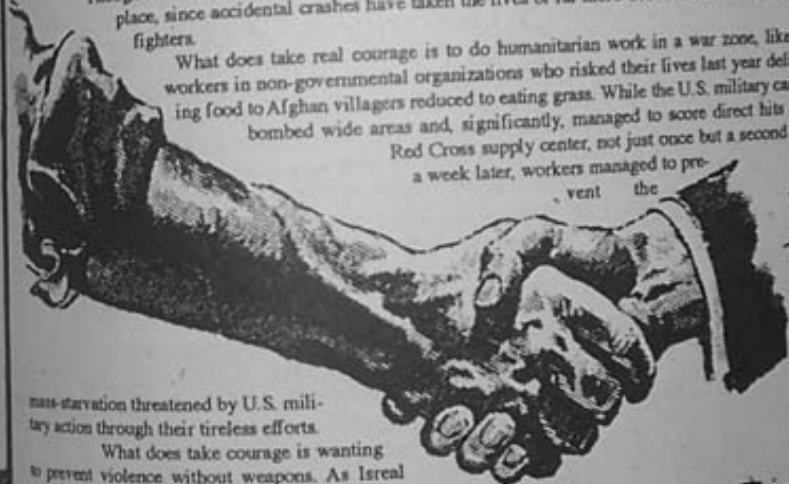
honor reserved for the true saviors of the country. What of the more mundane saviors of the country, the GI Joes "defending our freedom" 15,000 miles away? Our hearts are supposed to go out to them because they are "bored", the *New York Times* reports. They are disappointed with the lack of thrilling action, wistful for more shoot-em-up opportunities against The Enemy. They want to come home to tell their families and friends of their heroic deeds- but rest assured, when they get the call, they will march and they will kill.

It takes no guts to follow orders. These are the men who bungled one raid after another on Afghan villages, trying to "ferret out suspected members of al Qaeda", yet doing nothing more than murdering 3-year old girls and old men. They invaded these towns in the dead of night, going house to house with guns drawn, yet in every newspaper account it was the villagers who fired first, so of course U.S. soldiers were justified in any action they took, regardless of the consequences.

It takes no guts to push buttons from 35,000 feet in the air, killing more civilians in Afghanistan than were lost on the Sept. 11 attacks, flattening their homes and driving hundreds of thousands into refugee camps- and then offering no compensation for the wanton destruction.

Though it must take some guts to get on board a U.S. military air transport vehicle in the first place, since accidental crashes have taken the lives of far more U.S. soldiers than al Qaeda fighters.

What does take real courage is to do humanitarian work in a war zone, like the workers in non-governmental organizations who risked their lives last year delivering food to Afghan villagers reduced to eating grass. While the U.S. military carpet-bombed wide areas and, significantly, managed to score direct hits on a Red Cross supply center, not just once but a second time a week later, workers managed to prevent the



mass-starvation threatened by U.S. military action through their tireless efforts.

What does take courage is wanting to prevent violence without weapons. As Israel raided Palestinian towns, like the United States taking retribution on an entire population for the actions of already-dead suicide bombers, members of the International Solidarity Movement sought, by their presence, to bring about a temporary cease-fire and force negotiations.

The blood cult has little respect for these people. In fact, neighbors ran out of town the family of a Jewish U.S. citizen in Palestine involved with the International Solidarity Movement, considering death threats the appropriate response to his nonviolent actions. But the blood cult will snap to attention every time the national anthem is played. It will harbor more feeling for a piece of red, white and blue cloth than the living human beings of another color or country. If this is courage and heroism, whatever freedom it is preserving is also tainted with blood- not the blood of our soldiers, but their blood, the blood of innocents.

The blood cult expects universal membership, and its conditions for joining are so easy that few in this country have passed on the opportunity to place their hands over their hearts. Sometimes resisting this can be done by simply keeping your seat during a song.

by vincent romano

## in the

## blood cult



# ...JUST DON'T END UP LIKE A DOG THAT'S BEEN BEAT TOO MUCH

BY JEREMY GILPIN

In the day we sweat it out on the streets of a runaway American dream,  
at night we ride through mansions of glory in suicide machines.  
-Bruce Springsteen

America: Our sweet, sweet & sublimely stupid home. What can you say? We live here. Love it or leave it. Or maybe hate it & stay in it. Or maybe ignore it & leech off it. Or maybe laugh at it & be killed by it. Or maybe, maybe, maybe.... What?

It may be that the range of experience here covers a lot of miles & years & lives. Maybe you've lived in dirt every minute of every day of your life here & maybe you, somehow, someway, found everything you were looking for. Maybe you were born to the richest of lives & died miserable, alone, unsung. Maybe you just ambled thru your life in this nation & never felt much, never did much, lived the life of the Average, of the Bored. Maybe you died at three years of age to a brain tumor caused by pollutants from a factory that was shutdown in '97 because productions moved to Mexico to escape EPA strictures considered 'too tough' to operate by. Maybe you were born in 1905 & have spent the last 21 years of your life sitting in a decrepit nursing home in Detroit. For the last ten years you've said nothing, nothing, not a single word. The other residents call you 'the Crier'. Where you really are though... is what you're remembering. Over & over, remembering the shining & wondrous days of your life; The exact sunshine of how your husband (dead since the third day of the second year of the Vietnam War) loved you so ferociously & you lie there, in your cheap hospital bed, remembering his strong tan arms holding you & the way he kissed your once-blond hair & you will continue to cry & the underpaid nurses will never ever know why. Maybe you crossed the border for the first time 3 months ago & here you are, looking for work in the Hispanic underground, looking, looking & all the while, cold, hungry & lonely. But you'll be caught by the INS in two weeks time & deported & oh, you'll cross the border again but this time you'll die of heatstroke while hiding from border agents in the desert somewhere east of Guadalupe. But for a short time there, amigo, you were almost an American.

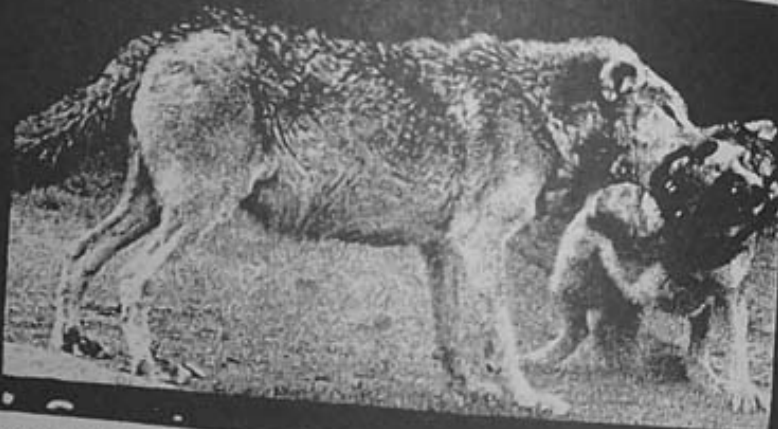
It's a big fucking nation. Maybe you can feel everything for it. Maybe you can find whatever you're looking for here. Or hell, maybe you can't. Maybe you never will. Maybe in all of this insanity, this inanity, this roiled idiocy, this brilliant vibrancy of Empire, of cultural fusion & fission, you can, at least, find a hell of a spectrum to scramble your neurons in. America has a something for everyone: Be it freedom, greatness, prison or death. America retains its myriad options.

& I have my moments of pride for our motherfucker of a nation, believe it or not. America is a hell of a mix. America is a Generator. America has it's tough-ass underclass. America can still throw it down when it comes to it. America's irreverence for other cultures is sometimes what I love about it. America's culture-less culture. America is a queen-bitch to be dealt with. America birthed jazz. America's poetry broke all the foolish rules & America.... America honed the razor of rock & roll.

1985: I'm 10 years old. I'm living my young life in a blue-collar town just outside of Dayton, Ohio; a slowly dying industrial hell-hole of a city. The air is rotten. The streams & rivers are anything but clear & clean. Stray dogs & children are equally vicious. Junk-yards & back-yards are nearly indiscernible. Cincinnati, 80 miles away, manufactures an incredibly large portion of America's prolific shit...

In this era of my life, I'm known amongst my peers as 'the geek' or maybe, if I'm lucky, 'the nerd' ... due mostly to my voracious reading habits. I'm unhappy about this but I figure that these slurs are the price of pursuing my future career as a scientist or a great thinker. In a couple of years, I'll be reading Camus, Einstein, Hustler, Penthouse, Plato, Playboy, Sagan, Stephen King, Socrates & Whitman. I'm figuring things out.

I spend a mass of time hanging out with my two nieces, Becky & Charly, who



are older than me, but just barely. (I was a late, late surprise for my parents) & these two hellions, daughters of my hellion & alcoholic brother, are doing their wonderful best to corrupt me at an early age. They will introduce me, bit by bit, to my first porn movie, my first cigarette, my first mixed drink & my first taste of rock n roll....

Fated: The tinny sounds of a bright pink boom-box. A scratched up tape-case with a picture of, I'm guessing, the Boss' ass, swaddled in denim & sporting a hankerchief & this, this music, this music was written about what I saw, everyday, all about me....

Ancient bars! Faded working men! Youngish doomed love! Sad lounges! Vietnam vets! Faded heroes! Pool halls! Prisons! Factories! A fucked-up but still, somehow, virile America. My very first brush with a music greater, dirtier, truer than the church hymns I had so far suffered thru every Sunday of my short life.

I was enthralled; Moved by this arrangement of sounds, vocals, astute & yet tough-ass observations. Who was this man? It seemed he'd seen so much. So much of the same world I'd yet barely seen. He was somebody not coming from the heights of LA-style, pink flamingo, bikini-groupie rock-stardom but possibly from the fight-ridden working-class watering hole up on route 48; The same one my brothers stopped at every night after their long tedious shifts at where-ever the hell they had found work & it seemed he was right there with them. Watching. Listening. Singing about all the glory & the grime of it...

Bruce Frederick Springsteen was born on September 23 1949 in Freehold, NJ. A working-class shit-town of 10,000 people surrounded by rich suburbs & horse farms. Most of the employment available was to be found at either a rug mill, a Nestle plant or the 3M factory. Bleak options but better than nothing. His father was a factory worker as well as a bus driver, taxi driver & a guard at the county jail. His mother was a legal secretary. They were not a family that ever had to face the threat of drowning in luxury. (Bruce wouldn't really think about the socio-economic conditions of his family until 30 years after his birth, when he began to read The History of the United States by Allen Nevins. His musings on this, as well as the deep shadows cast by the Reagan era, would eventually give birth to Born in the USA.)

Bruce, amazingly, decided on the career of rock star when he was just six years old. He was watching a pelvis-shuffling Elvis on the Ed Sullivan Show when he turned to his mother & told her that that's what he wanted to be: Something akin to Elvis... & so it was. The year I was born he would put out Born to Run, his first successful album. That same year, I think, he was on the cover of Time & Newsweek but even at that he couldn't make ends meet. Ironically, a letter written to his landlady in 1975, in which he apologized for not being able to pay his rent, just sold for \$5000 on an on-line auction.

His childhood was filled with the normal sulking fuck-ups of youth. The usual redneck affairs & goof-ass trials & conformist-mongering tribulations of growing to maturity in a blue-collar environment. He wasn't allowed to attend his own high-school graduation because of his long hair. He was asked by his fellow students to drop out of community college due to 'excessive weirdness'. Nothing truly spectacular but his pattern as a loner was set, as it would be for most of his life. According to personal accounts of his youth, he didn't care much about the loneliness of his world, it allowed him the long hours needed to practice what he wanted to do: Make music.

Before the end of the Vietnam War, the Boss also had the not-exactly-small worry of staying out of the whole fucking cluster-fuck & with the help of injuries sustained in a 1968 motorcycle crash, he managed to do just that. But the casualties of the conflict continued to reappear (injured) or disappear (dead) around him. After reading Born on the Fourth of July by Ron Kovic, he decided he had to figure out a way to help the survivors & so eventually, in 1981, he would almost single-handedly save the Vietnam Veterans of America from financial collapse by organizing a series of concerts to raise money & to spread awareness of the situation. He knew that most of the soldiers sent over were from the poorest strata of American society; A lot of kids from Freehold vanished into the war never to return & most, including the government, didn't give a shit about them. But thanks

th: Ashland, OR

th: Arcata, CA

to his pulling power, (He raised a quarter million dollars) the VVA would survive & continue its fight in forcing the government to take responsibility for the war & for the sad slow fallout of the psychologically & physically maimed vets.

th: San Francisco, CA

Starting early, Bruce did a lot with his stardom to help out where he could. Anti-nuke concerts, various benefits for food banks, homeless shelters, even literacy campaigns. He also helped out labor unions when & where he could but he was carefully selective; Such as his refusing to give blanket support to the AFL-CIO, specifically for their part in supporting the Vietnam war as well as turning their backs on the workers facing hard times in the '80s depression. The day after Ronnie 'can't-seem-to-remember-where-my-ass-is-now' Reagan was elected, Bruce said at a show that he was 'terrified' for the future of our nation. (& personally, I appreciate anyone who talked trash about that particular old man in his heyday, especially to a crowd of 20,000 people.) I've also read some other comments he made about the American government & their war machine that, in sentiment, rivals anything Propagandi had to say. But Bruce wasn't easily classifiable in his affiliations, I've noticed. He seemed to think about what he had to say & do. He made statements about the Left ignoring the poor just as much as the Right. He seemed to realize that rich is rich & poor is poor & tried to use his own fame & wealth to even things up where he could. He seemed to care about people more than causes.

I stopped researching the Boss when I got to the end of his Born in the USA era. I just needed to know about all of that to write this but I'm going to read more. I want to know if the Boss evolved into the narcissist most rock-stars do or if he stuck to his guns. I'm almost afraid to find out because as it is I'm left with a picture of a man almost surprised by his own popularity & yet easily accepting of the potential for good that it allowed him. He honestly seems a blue-collar rock hero.

Three years ago I went to a Casey Neill show over at St John's Pub in North Portland. It was a fine show but what I remember most was that Casey, as he went into his encore, told us in utter seriousness, "This is for the man single-handedly keeping rock & roll alive in America." & then he burst into a kicking rendition of 'Im on Fire'... & it was fucking amazing to hear again. Everyone was completely into it. Only a punk fascist could not be moved by the music of the Boss, I remember thinking & yet immediately following the show, I forgot all about him again. That is until six months ago, when Keith asked me if I wanted to do a piece for Avow. Yeah, I said. What about? Keith slurped his beer, considering & then asked me what the first album I ever bought happened to be. I, in turn, slurped my beer, thinking about it. Born in the U... I started to say & Keith exploded, as happy as a pig in shit. Do it. He laughed. Write about it. Yeah. Perfect. Yeah. Born in the USA it is & Keith kept chuckling.

& so I'd been thinking about this essay yet putting it off till a sheer 72 hours before Keith wanted it. I mean, I'd been listening to the album, reading a bit about the tale of the Boss but I hadn't actually *written* anything... & the writing is the most important part of any piece of writing or so I've heard.

& so finally I sat down to write this with a six pack of beer, B.I.T.U.S.A. playing in the background & then... Fuck. Nothing. Nada. Nope. Then while thinking about my first copy of that tape, I found that I was remembering parts of my childhood that I hadn't thought about in 15 years & from those memories I began to write this...

My ridiculous & sad-happy history: The exact terrain of my hometown. The hills. The parking lots. Paths. Hollows. Strip malls. Creeks. The children I played with. Their families. Their cancerous dogs. Their road-kill kittens. Their broken down cars. Their jobs at the plants in Franklin, Middletown, Kettering, Miamisburg... All these rusty satellites swinging round the collapsing center of the city of Dayton. Suddenly, I find that I can remember the colors of the booths in the creepy lounge where my brothers hung out at. I can remember playing hide & seek with my nieces in the ancient cemetery where my brother & eventually, my dad, worked as a caretaker. (I quit playing that game there after I fell in an open grave one time &

remained trapped until after dark.) I can remember the sprawling exposed roots of the hidden maple tree in which was carved D.G.+C.H: A 40-year old indicator of my parents once-fresh love... & I can remember the acid-rage I felt, watching that same tree, along with the surrounding forest, be torn down to make way for cheaply made yet staggeringly expensive suburban housing. I remember the swollen bellies of deer along the back roads. I remember the smell of the factories: Something about it almost always sweet yet horrid... Like candy dissolved in bleach. I remember how heart-breakingly beautiful the sunlight was as it poured thru the fields of genetically-identical strands of corn. I remember how getting out of there was everyone's goal... & I know that so very few actually made it farther than the ghettos of Cincinnati. Not much of an escape.

& even now, I'm thinking about all the kids from my youth who found some way or another to die. Motorcycle crashes. Car crashes. Cancer. Suicide. I'm thinking about all the kids I know who might as well be dead, at least by my definition of what living means. & mostly, I'm thinking about how I'm still alive & better yet, happy about it. Still figuring things out & working my way thru the daily labyrinth of American life & with nothing but dumb luck to thank for all of it.

Thanks, dumb luck. I mean it. It's good to be alive."



& as I finish this up, I'm thinking about how these certain aspects of my past wouldn't have occurred to me in the last few weeks if it wasn't for the Boss. These are almost the exact details he's tried so hard to summon in his music & I suppose that's what all of this has been about; Staring at one's past. Measuring the heft of it. Going back to the not-so-glorious days & finding something, something, anything worth salvaging & I suppose that for me, it might not-so-simply be this: I'm glad to have lived when & where I did but I'm also glad to have escaped. I'm glad for everything that's ever happened to me. Fuck you. I love you. Like I said, it's so fucking great to be alive.



# THE MASTURBATION EXPERIMENT!



SCOTT



NATHAN

The act of "manual release" and the nearly-indefinable creative process of self expression. Is there a connection? How much is one reliant upon the other? Do the two act as symbiotes, one feeding upon the other in order to survive? Or are the two like oil and water, having nothing at all to do with each other? This is a question that's baffled the scientific community for decades.

However, AVOW Industries seems to have made a breakthrough: The two do seem to coexist, however violently the accompanying data may indicate.

The following document is reprinted verbatim from the journals of two Test Subjects, kept during their arduous 17-day journey through the physical and emotional minefield known as the "Non-Masturbating American Male." The Test Subjects (heretofore known as "Nathan" and "Scott") were told to go about their normal activities save for one thing: they were not permitted to perform the act of "self-pleasure" or "personal release" for as long as they could. The following journals, I believe, provide much in the way of shedding light on the mysterious connection between the two physical acts. AVOW Industries hopes to showcase these documents in an attempt to remove the shroud of mystery and wonder these two volatile subjects have worn for far too long. If anything, Nathan and Scott deserve praise for the difficult road they chose to tread in the name of science. And AVOW Industries, I believe, deserves much in the way of research grants and executive parking-spaces for having the foresight and near-visionary scientific brilliance to orchestrate such an experiment.



NATHAN

DAY 1: Nothing unusual here: observing a girl I see I wasn't particularly attracted to reaching to get something, being a few inches of her back. I thought of asking her how old she was. I foresee a probable descent to sleazy old man. I find this as scary as anything as The Wandering Eye.

DAY 2: Today I realize the level of whim which I shamelessly follow to masturbate. I admit I almost broke the experiment several times today before snapping back to self-control: finding my hand in my pants and a small bit of drool forming.

DAY 3: I find myself downtown, outside a dance club. We are discussing the possibility of cute girls being as a strong determining factor whether or not to pay the \$5 cover charge. We decline.

DAY 4: My sense of self is slowly becoming a powerful imperative force that emanates as an influential pull, a blackhole of willpower, an unchallengeable need centered on my loins.

DAY 5: A long and vivid dream presents 2 nice girls (well-dressed, amiable) living in my grandparents' house. My grandpa had sold the business located on the same property - which is now being converted into a skatepark. As I'm walking up to the house, they both approach me with grand smiles. One of them hands me a bundle of spoons and leans over to give me a luxurious kiss. I swoon. She then whispers in my ear, "AS SOON AS POSSIBLE I'D LIKE TO DISCUSS WHAT I EXPECT OF YOU, AND WHAT PROBLEMS I HAD WITH MY EX-BOYFRIEND." This, as you would imagine, ruins my mood. I think to myself that I should have kissed the other girl.

DAY 6: This time, we walked around the dance club for an hour or two. We still decline to enter. I go home and paint, for the first time allowing the HALF-ARTIST that is building to do some work. To distract myself from any sexual inclination, I occupy myself with coffee and cigarettes until I am numb. However, I have run out of papers and am afraid I can't make it to the supermarket.



SCOTT

DAY 1: Hmmmm. Nothing much is different. Nothing noticeable at least. This doesn't seem that hard. I can do this. I have willpower of steel. If you disregard my caffeine and nicotine addiction, I am in complete control of my body.

DAY 2: Back to school. This may be the best time for the experiment and the worst time for me. School is probably the only time I have contact with many attractive girls. Luckily, school doesn't promote the best of moods in me. So smiling glances from girls are greeted with straight and uncaring face. HA HA! Take that. My facade of disinterest will get me through this.

DAY 3: Lustful urges are subdued with strong drinks. Martinis, jazz, friends and a buttload of ties help to alleviate my masturbatory urges. Even conversations about the art of handjobs doesn't seem to faze me. The two guys leaning intently over a table to talk to a cute girl amused me to no end. You'd think that whatever intense topic that would make two males hover off their chairs in excitement would inspire me to offer more than a disinterested look and an occasional polite smile.

DAY 4: Early morning classes. My gaze wanders from nice, well-dressed business girl to pierced and dyed punk rock girl. Concentration on my studies and deep breathing to control spontaneous and potentially embarrassing situations. "Your thoughts betray you, Skywalker." I need coffee.

DAY 5: My patience for slow, pretentious people who specifically position themselves in my way is growing thin. "Hey, are you a musician? Wow! Well, get the fuck out of my way then." Sometimes I wish I would say what I'm thinking. Amazing jazz quickly calms my irritable nerves. This music reminds me of sex. Really good sex.

DAY 6: I've been wearing pants to bed. Seems like a moderately effective barrier to well-trained hands. My stereo has gone from a steady stream of NoMeansNo and Melt Banana to Elvis Costello and Liz Phair. I don't know what that means. I'm kind of concerned.

## NATHAN

**DAY 7:** A day is spent almost entirely in front of my computer. Zits emerge, my mustache grows and the skin pales. All the perfect barriers to the woman-temptation. All will keep me in line. I am experiencing extreme difficulty in continuing. Lustful desires are expanding to most anything visible. I challenge myself by looking at porn in a detached manner.

**DAY 8:** I've noticed more and more reasons why religion is so fucked up. Especially with all the sickness and pain people must have been experiencing in ancient times where hygiene and medical attention were non-existent, causing grand hallucinations which they attributed to a god. Now I realize my lack of wits-imagining myself a 5th century priest in his 34th year of not masturbating, screaming maniacally at a collection of disbelievers.

**DAY 9:** I've lost any semblance of a sleeping schedule. The combination of sleep deprivation with extreme horniness does not make for good judgement. I decide to go to a party of "kag and girls." Two girls, looking 16 to 17 years old, walk up and exhibit fleshy impudence. I gulp and decide to go home with visions of bad ideas playing upon my brain. I stay up until 8 am and collapse.

**DAY 10:** Avoided writing as I broke the experiment. It wasn't my fault! I had no control! Scott tells me I have to reveal my incriminating details: it involved warm water and flour and I made a complete mess. There. Part of my reasoning process included the legitimacy of transferring the experiment to Sleep Deprivation, but soon after orgasm I fell asleep, ha-ha. I only consider it a dent in the continual experiment. I continue to abstain. Am I so evil?

**DAY 11:** Back on track and losing sleep. My self-image is pummeling with a winter fury. Even if a girl looks at me I'm so hopelessly lost in my self-deprecating mumbblings that she most likely sees right through my powerful mustache. I've noticed myself prancing about the workplace with a maliciously available presence ("Come and get me, please," my posture says). However, my hygiene overpowers any sexual traces. How do people stay so prim?

**DAY 12:** Sleep, no dream, wake, computer, sleep, no dream. Hmmm...I've lost my drive. Smoking too much and lathering mud on my brain. Depression is a good weapon in the War on Masturbation. The "what's the use" dagger cuts right through the animal impulse to pull it. Another day of success! Progress! Hurry!

## SCOTT

**DAY 7:** I have discovered a new found love for pushups. I feel this is odd, being a person who's only chosen exertion is to get to warmth in the quickest manner possible. For some reason though, I am enjoying the strain of repetitively lifting my own body weight. Hmmm, I think I see a connection.

**DAY 8:** Is this really doing anything for anybody? What the hell am I trying to accomplish? I'm not any more creative. I'm getting grouchy. My self-confidence hasn't improved. I sleep even less than I used to. I'm smoking more. And for what? An extra hour of time not concentrated around my crib? I am having trouble finding a reason to continue this project.

**DAY 9:** I seem to be taking longer baths. I am more appreciative of the time I spend with my naked self. Sitting in a hot bath (my baths seem to be getting hotter, too.) Some candles lit. Maybe I'll enjoy a cigarette as I soak after soaping up my supple young body. There is seriously something wrong with me.

**DAY 10:** All I wanted was a soda. Walking down the aisle of a quickie-mart, I turn the corner and see two cheerleaders bent over looking at the Snapple section. White cotton peeking out from underneath their oh-so-short cheerleading skirts. ANNN! Confused, I spin in circles trying to find an escape route for my lustful eyes. The image burned into my retina, I find my soda and leave. Outside, there stood the two cheerleaders. They must have been 13 or 14 years old. My place in hell is truly secure.

**DAY 11:** My heart sinks as I hear of Nathan's orgasmic breakdown. I feel so alone. Thoughts of stopping the experiment enter my mind, then jump the experiment enter my mind, then jump the experiment enter my mind. "G'mon, Scott, touch your around and taunt me." "G'mon, Scott, touch your self!" they cry. "We know you, Scott, who are you trying to fool?" they laugh. "NO!" I yell to them. For I am not giving in. I will abstain for as long as it takes to accomplish whatever it is I'm doing.

**DAY 12:** I pretty girl smiled at me. I wonder what I looked like to her? Some dorky guy with poofy hair, smoking like a fish, looking haggard from no sleep. I've always had a hard time approaching girls. I flip out that whatever I have to say, they most likely have heard before and don't want to hear again. "Hi, have heard before and don't want to hear again. My name is Scott and I haven't masturbated for twelve days." How's that sound? Pretty original, eh? Or how about, "I have never had a sexually satisfying relationship since my first girlfriend, and I think you're pretty." Wow! That doesn't sound so bad.

## NATHAN

**DAY 12:** I don't think I saw a girl all day. I just sat at home and worked on the Peppless Poll. All day. Alex says I'm going to get a welt on my ass. However, I don't, I will not get any welts on my privates.

**DAY 13:** I've begun a total assault on my body with cigarettes, dope and coffee. I'm also immersed in the Peppless Poll. This seems to be a pattern I follow when single: build sexual frustration (masturbation experiment causing an extreme here), develop creative vessel, get extremely fucked up for extended period, create like mad and ignore consequences of antisocial behavior. I also usually masturbate excessively during this period. I detect nothing of psychosexual damage.

**DAY 14:** Binge leads to illness. I also blame the experiment (at which Scott scoffs). My immune system lost a battleship. Girls have become completely incomprehensible to me. I cannot exclude sexual intentions from my interactions. The flimsy distinction between sane, acceptable actions and masturbation continues to gray. I sleep 12 hours and wake up feeling great!

**DAY 15:** As soon as I wake, I smoke and start back on the Poll at 9:30 am. Is it cheating to stay at home and concern oneself solely with a creative project? Should I be tempting myself with the bountiful flesh out there? Should I utilize my slightly conscious, wholly desiring state in order to talk to girls? I don't even finish, continue with the Poll.

**DAY 17:** My eyes hurt, my loins ache, my heart hangs low. However, my mustache drags me along, going to work, working more and more on the stupid Poll, to the bathroom, to the Tacoquias, to the Goodwill, anything and everything...but pulling it.

**DAY 18:** Woo-hoo! Freedom! The Will of Man Prevails over Science!

## SCOTT

**DAY 13:** Girl won't stop looking at me. What am I supposed to do? Should I talk to her? What do I say? "Hi, I saw you looking at me. You've got a neat nose." I lay in bed today for an hour, waiting for my erection to go away. Doesn't my body know I'm on a mission? Damn it! Just give me a break! A little peace is all I ask. But no, my eyes are drawn from what I'm doing to the warm and tender ankles of girls. The fleshy, smooth feminine neck. The shapely thighs and soft tummy of the opposite sex. Just let me be! For the love of Christ, just let me be!

**DAY 14:** I stayed up until 7 am talking to a girl on the Internet. I am not sure what I expected to get out of it, but I did it anyway. There's something about faceless Internet girls that appeals to me. I have to admit that meeting this girl at 3 am crossed my mind also. I know it's a bad idea, but really, why not?

**DAY 15:** I have the cutest cat in the world! He has this trick where he hides by the sidewalk and waits for cute girls to pass by. Then he runs out and lies on his back in front of them. Every time, the girls stops to pet him. Fucking genius! The problem is that if I expose my vulnerable side, that's when the cute girl remembers she has a knife in her hand.

**DAY 16:** I can't seem to start anything. This experiment seems to have backfired. All the creative energy I thought I would unlock doesn't seem to be there. I'm just not interested. Little but sex enters my mind.

**DAY 17:** This is dumb.

**DAY 18:** Nathan and I have agreed to end the experiment. My loins swell with the excitement of relief. I have nothing to say but, "Thank god."

18 N.W. 24<sup>TH</sup> AVE  
JOHN & HANNAH + ZACK  
A CRACK HOUSE. IF YOU  
GET SUCKED IN YOU WILL  
BE VIDEO TAPED BY A  
BEARDED DEGENERATE (JOHN)  
WHILE YOU HAVE SEX WITH  
HIS WOMAN HANNAH!!  
IT HAPPENED TO US!!  
BE AWARE DON'T GET  
SUUCKED INTO THIS DEN  
OF CRACK HEADS!!

TELEPHONE POLE FLYER, NW PORTLAND, 1997.

AVOW 15



HERE'S  
ONE FOR THE  
ART NERDS.





HELLO.

## THIS IS AVOW FIFTEEN.

This is a collection of drawings I've done over the past few years, dating back as far as 1996. Some of them have been seen on shirts, records and posters, others have never been published anywhere. Some of them are pretty good, some are just about toeing the line of humiliation. But I thought it was important to do this issue for a very simple reason: there are really very few people left in punk when it comes to just doing old fashioned *drawings* and *paintings*. There are not so many of us left, and not so many new artists popping up. So I wanted to do this issue as a sort of archive. Much respect to those that were doing this kind of stuff years before I was even listening to music, and to those that are still around and doing it today.



This issue is two dollars postagepaid in the US. People interested in wholesale rates, please write. Anyway, if anyone needs help with a project, please don't hesitate to get in touch. I love doing this stuff, we'll be able to work something out for sure. All complaints, accolades and impassioned defenses of Adobe Illustrator should be sent to: KEITH ROSSON, 2410 SE TAYLOR, PORTLAND, OR 97214. keithrosson@hotmail.com.

## INDEX:

As (2003. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.) When I start a drawing, it hardly ever comes even close to how I see it in my head. Part of it is just the natural process of how it all goes down for me, but unfortunately, it also comes down to the fact that a lot gets lost between the head and the hand. This one, however, came pretty close. There are about a million folks who are better at this kind of line drawing than I am, but this one came out pretty close to how I saw it.

B: (2002. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.) I got asked to do some artwork for a band from San Francisco called STRUNG UP. I did a bunch of art for them and while some of it ended up being used, this design (for a 7" cover) was shelved. I liked it a lot and an alternate version of it was used for the cover of AVOW #14.

C: (1999. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.) Back in 1999, I was kicking out paintings left and right. I had just gotten out of school and had been fortunate enough to have an account at the school bookstore. Aside from books, they had a small section of overpriced canvasses and paints and various other art supplies. By the time school let out, I made sure every dime that didn't go towards books and supplies went towards painting. I was painting like a motherfucker and during that time I was starting to build my own lexicon of symbols and images that found their way onto most of my canvasses. Birds, gasmasks, hands, hearts, snakes, etc. Anyway, this is one of those rare times in which I sketched out a particular image for a painting beforehand. The funny thing is I'm not sure I ever actually painted this particular image on a canvas or not. Regardless, and despite the fact that it looks like the woman is flashing gang signs or something, I like this one.

D: (2002. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.) Another 7" design for STRUNG UP that didn't end up being used. Fuck, this would make a pretty rad LP cover, I think. Blow it up to 12" x 12" so all the pixels are ragged, a nice black-white-and-red color-scheme. I thought I'd fill you in on how I did this drawing, for a couple reasons. One, because I think that people like Nate Powell, Aaron Cometbus and Mike Delach ought to follow my example and publish their own how-to books so that all of us zine nerds might have the opportunity to devour it, but secondly, I think it's a good example that sometimes this shit takes some time. That if we really want to make something solid and worthwhile, be it a drawing, zine, record, dinner or whatever, that we should be just as concerned with the process we have to go through as we are with the final product. So, first I drew the guy's whole head and shoulders at about 3" x 3", blew him up on the xerox machine, then placed the enlarged drawings of him back in the xerox tray and xeroxed those pixels over that. Then I took it home, selected which section of his head should be used and cut that part out (the original drawing was of his whole head, see) with an exacto knife and pasted it on a white background. Back at the copy shop, I blew it up again so that it was all super-grainy and there was more of a midtone present due to the pixels getting blown up and fanning out. Then I went around his head with a Sharpie and used the blessed Pentel white-out pen to do the barbed wire and make that one eye nice and white. Then I outlined and detailed things here and there with Micron Pigma pens. So, Mike, when's your how-to zine coming out?

E: (1998. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.) An alternate version of this ran in HEARTATTACK #31. Drawn in a ringed-binder with super thin pages. The sky and ground each took about sixteen years to fill in.

**F: (1997. PUBLISHED IN SUBMISSION HOLD *Progress...As If Survival Mattered* CD.)** Part of what I consider the "Submission Hold" sessions. Submission Hold's music helped me make it through most of 1997, and inspired my art on tons of different levels. I still consider them one of the most incredible bands around, expanding the oftentimes confiscating boundaries of what is "punk" and just moving right past it. This drawing is part of a batch of probably 20 drawings I sent them. They ended up slapping this one on the back of their first CD, a collection of their vinyl and cassette output before they got on with *Etalium*. They slapped it on some shirts too and as corny as it sounds, I cherish both more than I can almost say. It's hard to explain, but when your favorite band uses artwork of yours, it's just something to stay a little bit excited about over the years.

**G: (1997. PUBLISHED IN AVOW #8.)** I've written before of Westport, Washington and the time I spent living there at the Flophouse, so I won't go into it at great length here. I will say that I did about a dozen drawings of this nature at that time; lots of black, lots of depth and horizons rather than just something on a white background, and quite a few of these odd, stained-glass looking people. But hey, it was Westport, better to draw stained-glass guys than be out smoking insect-repellant and getting my balls chomped off by packs of stray dogs, right?

**H: (2001. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.)** Look, sometimes you've just got to draw rabbit cyborgs, pal.

**I: (1997. PUBLISHED IN AVOW #8.)** See the letter G. Also, if you look *real* close in this one, you'll see that the fish in the bowl is smiling his ass off.

**J: (2000. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.)** Going through a rough time at this point, I remember. No ideas. I was living in the basement of Castle Grayskull and it was concrete. Floors, walls, ceiling. Hard to paint in, so I was just drawing at the time, but even that was coming grudgingly. This is a rough sketch, mostly done in frustration, loosely based off a photo from Tom Waits' *Rain Dogs* LP, I think.

**K: (1997. PUBLISHED IN AVOW #8.)** More of the stained-glass guys.

**L: (2001. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.)** When I did AVOW #11, the first all-story issue, I was going to do a bunch of full-page illustrations to accompany it, but I did a few and got burnt out and also realized it was going to soon kick the total page count up to something more than I could afford, so I settled for the occasional panel interspersed throughout the stories. This was going to be run in #11 next to the story *12-Gauges And Ripped Fishnets*.

**M: (1997. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.)** Drawing birds is tough.

**N: (1997. PUBLISHED IN SUBMISSION HOLD *Waiting For Another Monkey To Throw The First Brick* LP.)** The screw in the back of the guy's neck is pretty corny but that needle-thing, some sort of Big Brother-designed acupuncture machine, looks terrifying, don't it?

**O: (2002. PUBLISHED IN AVOW #14.)** My buddy Zule from Bosnia really liked this one. Was going through a phase where those "text boxes" were popping up everywhere in my drawings and paintings. They look OK, but they're a pain in the ass to do. Writing two or three layers of gibberish and then scribbling over half of it and then splotching white-out over the other half and then doing it all over again until you're just about outta your head. Shit.

**P: (1996. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.)** And with good reason. I told myself early on in the planning stages of this issue that I wouldn't pull any punches; that if I was going to include some of my favorite drawings, I'd have to include a few skeletons too. This was during one of my comic book phases, one that I'm not going to go around and flaunt, but one I'm certainly not going to disavow either. My influences are showing here.

**Q: (2001. PUBLISHED IN AVOW #14.)** A self-portrait of sorts. More of those text boxes.

**R: (2001/2002. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.)** From the AGAINST ME sessions, I guess. Wanted to do a whole series of this black and white guys; cops, punks, workers, etc. Then shrink 'em down really small and use 'em as a sort of border of some sort. Unfortunately, besides drawing a cop that looked like the Pillsbury Doughboy with a flakjacket and a helmet, this is as far as I got. Besides, look at that guy's hammer and tell me that's not fucked up. The hammer drives me nuts.

**S: (2002. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.)** Statue-phase from last year. The background worked out nicely. I used this woman in a painting later, she's blue with a black and pink swirly-spiral behind her. I think I subconsciously ripped off that PG. 99 *Document #7* record, now that I think about it. Whoever does these illustrations (someone in the band, right?) is definitely someone I'd like to interview. Or have my team of cyborg-monkeys kidnap him and steal his talent for a year or so.

**T: (1996. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.)** Going through a phase here where I'm really wearing my influences on my sleeve. More comic book stuff. Whaddaya mean, who's *Jae Lee*? Who's *Bill Seinkewicz*? What can I say, I spent my younger years (and maybe-not-quite-so-younger-years) as a rotund little comic book nerd. Now I'm an older, rotund zine nerd.

**U: (1996. PUBLISHED IN JOEY AND THE BLACKBOOTS #15.)** I've never been able to figure out how people like Derek Hess get all those cool splatters in their art without actually splattering the drawing itself. Is it some kind of masking tape they lay down? An airbrush? What? This one's kind of embarrassing too, but the inksplatters turned out nicely, if a little bit off the mark.

**V: (1997. PUBLISHED IN AVOW #8.)** This was an accompanying drawing to a rant I wrote for AVOW about the heavy influx of sexist images in the media and my own struggle with sexism. Those chains coming out of his mouth took for-fucking-ever.

**W: (2002. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.)** Another one of those line drawings akin to the guy on the first page, letter A. This one, however, kind of sucks.

**X: (1996. PUBLISHED IN BROUHAHA #11 & 24-7 ARTZINE, VOL. 3, ISS. 5.)** Oh yes, he's quite punk. Quite.

**Y: (2002. PUBLISHED IN HEARTATTACK #33.)** Loosely based off one of the figures on the cover of the first AGAINST ME! 7". Lisa of HEARTATTACK mentioned to me that they'd used some of my stuff

and that they were sending me a box of the new issue. I got the box. I opened the box and saw the drawing on the cover. I'm still amazed and grateful, but I don't know how good of an idea it was for them, the only place I can find new issues of HEARTATTACK here in town is at Q IS FOR CHOIR, but for some reason, just about every place in town has tons of copies of this issue left. The perils, perhaps, of not putting a hand on the cover.

Z: (2002. PUBLISHED IN AGAINST ME SUMMER TOUR POSTER.) So I got to do a tour poster and postcards for Against Me and they wanted it full color, something I'd never done before. I considered just painting a poster, then realized mailing that would be fucking ridiculous, and they needed it somewhat quick, anyway. Mays and I had just moved into a new house and my computer was fucked up, not working. I did the poster by hand, with a lot of xeroxing, colored paper and rub-on transfer letters. It came out great and while I've seen the postcards, I've never seen the poster before. If anyone has one, please let me know, OK? Anyway, point is that this microphone was blown up about nine or ten times larger than how it is here and was the main graphic focal point of the poster. I've been blathering into mikes with how I play guitar in, Pelvis Wesley, for the past few years, but I still couldn't tell you what the back end of these kind of mikes look like. Hell, I don't even know the names of mikes. We'll be setting up at shows or someone will say, "I need a cable for the SR-57." I nod wisely and try to figure out how to turn my guitar amp on. Anyway, point is that I drew this mike from my head and while it is a bit sketchy, I think there's something neat about it, too.

AA: (1997. PUBLISHED IN SUBMISSION HOLD *Waiting For Another Monkey To Throw The First Brick LP*.) Published in the booklet that came with the LP. From that same session. On a side-note, I've never done any of the layout for their records, something I sometimes get credit for. It's just that I rip off their style incessantly, that's all. I've never had anything to do with the layout of their stuff. OK?

BB: (1998. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.) This is one of my favorites here. I think I had to draw the hammer two or three times before I got it right.

CC: (1997. PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED.) Done as a second batch of stuff for Submission Hold. I was going for a kind of post-apocalyptic world here, people going out with the garbage and literally glued to their TV sets. Unfortunately, the main character looks so ridiculous, it just about ruins it for me. And the garbage in the background took forever, too. This one's pretty embarrassing.

DD: (2002. PUBLISHED IN VARIOUS ISSUES OF HEARTATTACK.) This is a slightly incomplete version of the original drawing. *Heartattack* has been using this to supplement their record review section recently and I'm always stoked when I see it. I sold the original drawing a couple months ago and just have a xerox of it now. Helped pay rent.

EE: (2002. PUBLISHED IN HEARTATTACK #33.) I later used this drawing as a centerfold for *AVOW* #12. This is OK, but it's kind of meant to be viewed as a whole 11" x 8.5" page, with all the white space to the left of him. Still, his huge hands are OK with me.

FINIT.



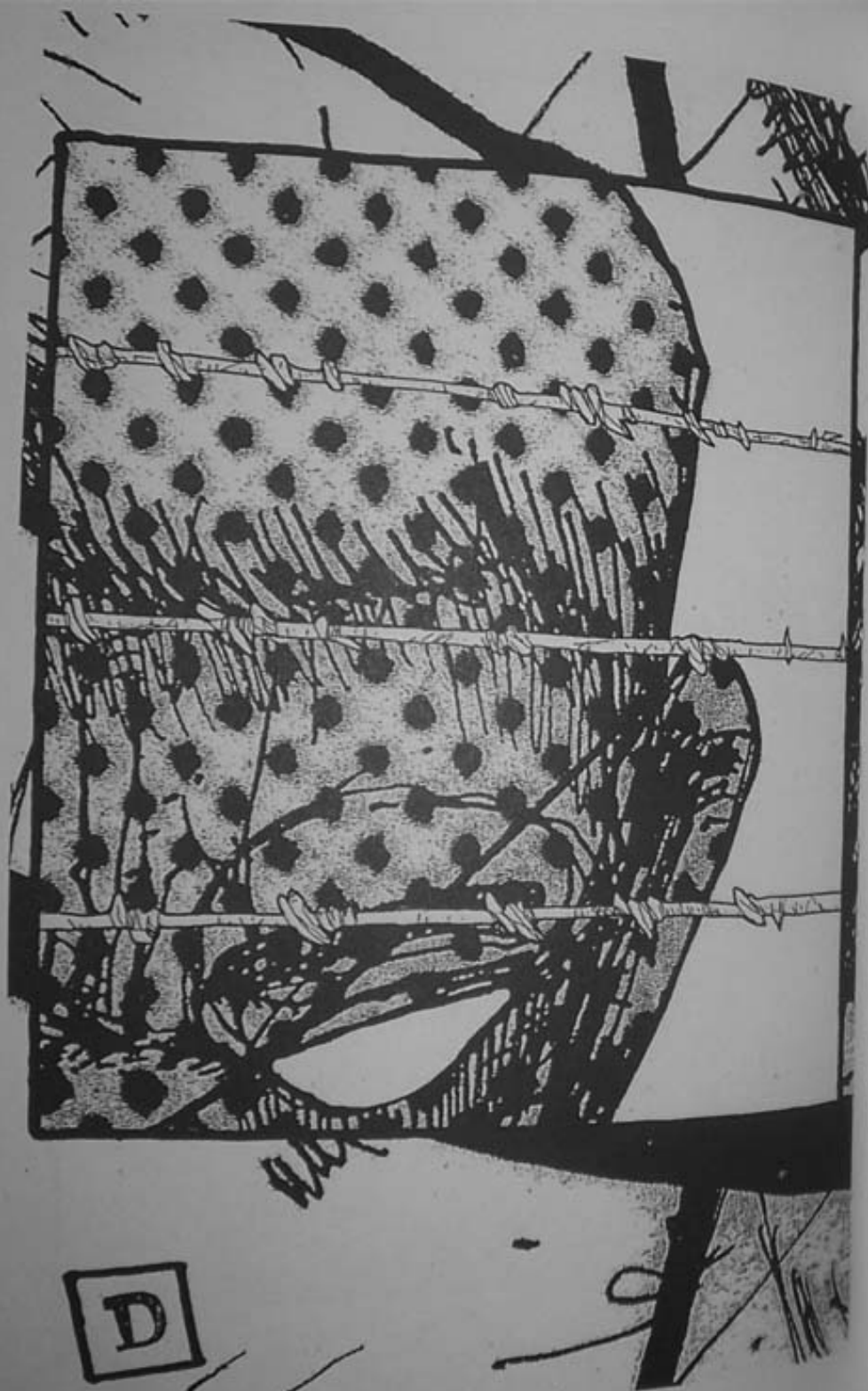




B



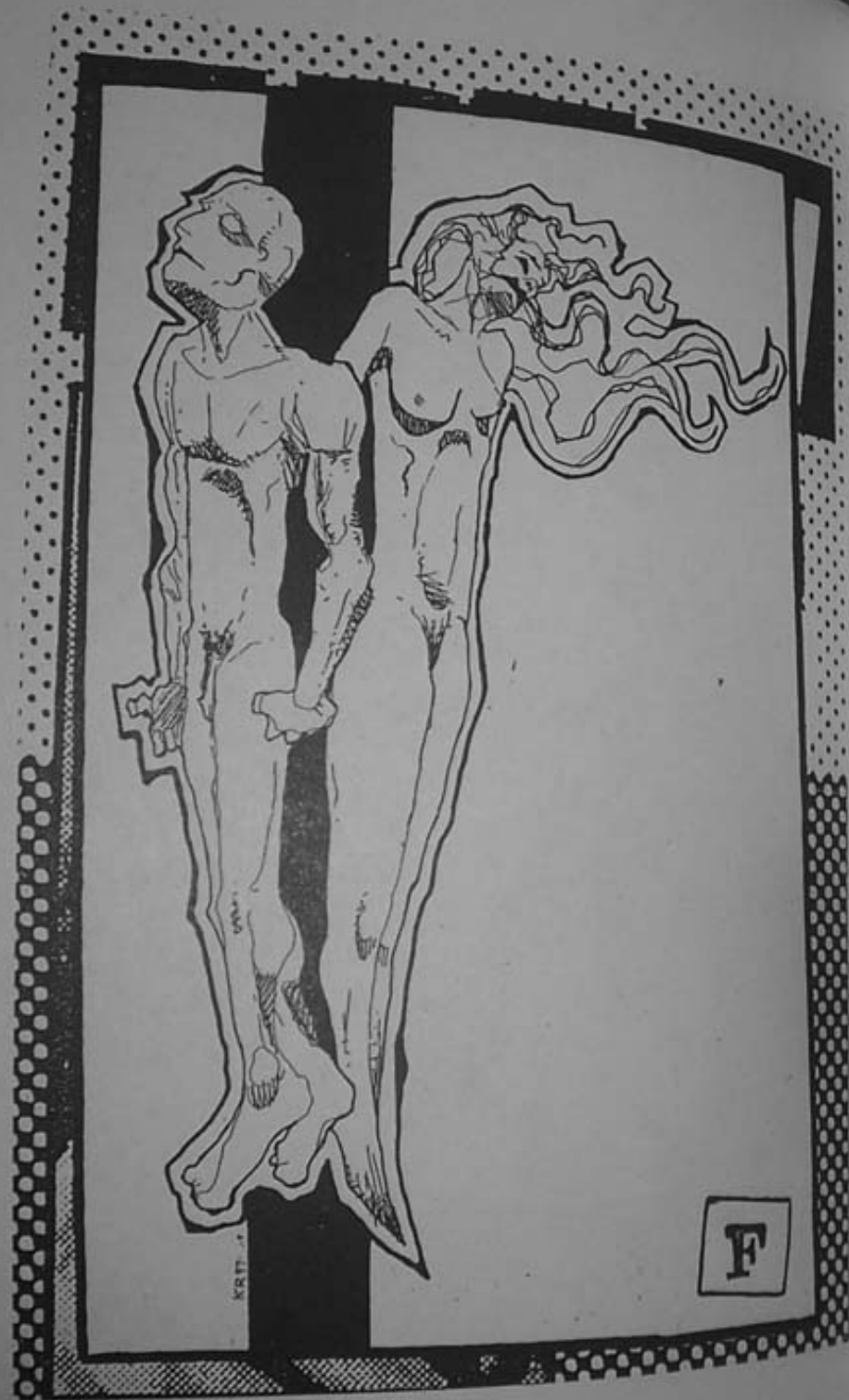
C



D



E







i will fucking  
destroy you all.

H



Keith Robson 12-97

I

stall  
a po  
re p  
me  
sasti





lacy



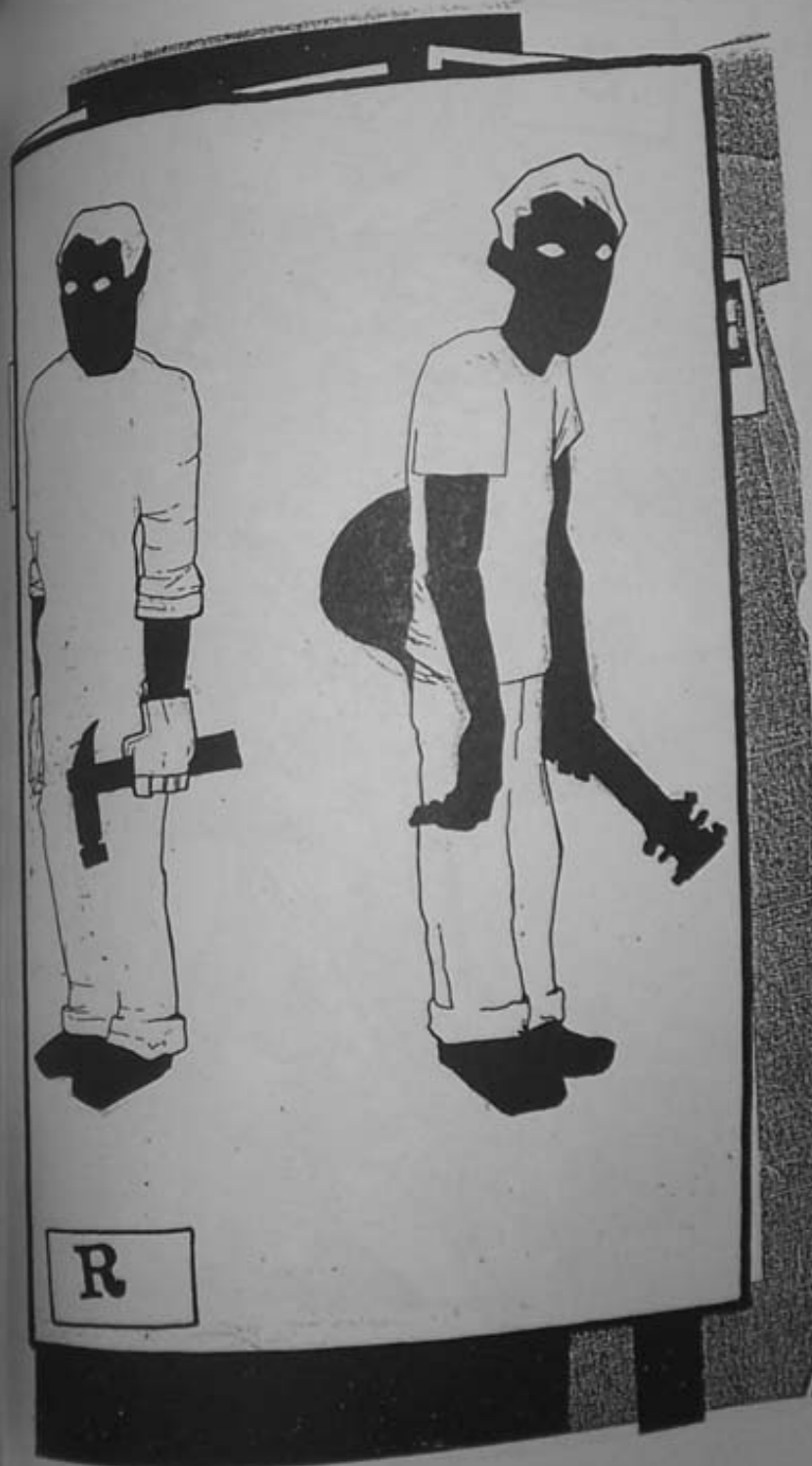
N







Q



R

S



T

...ction of laments and joys, thrown to  
that agonized over, bel. from the first letter to the



U



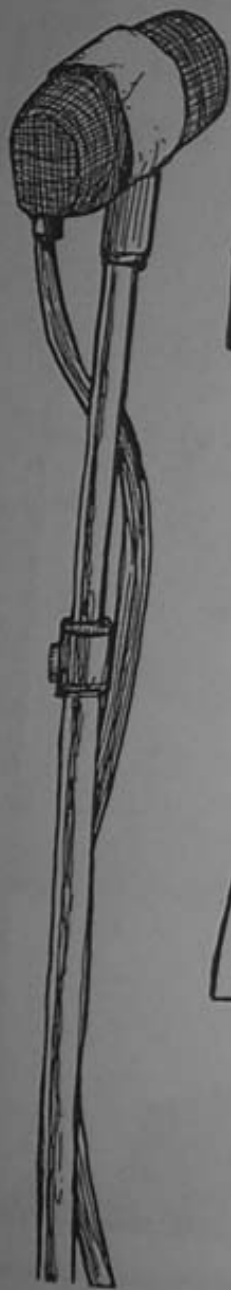


V

W







**Z**

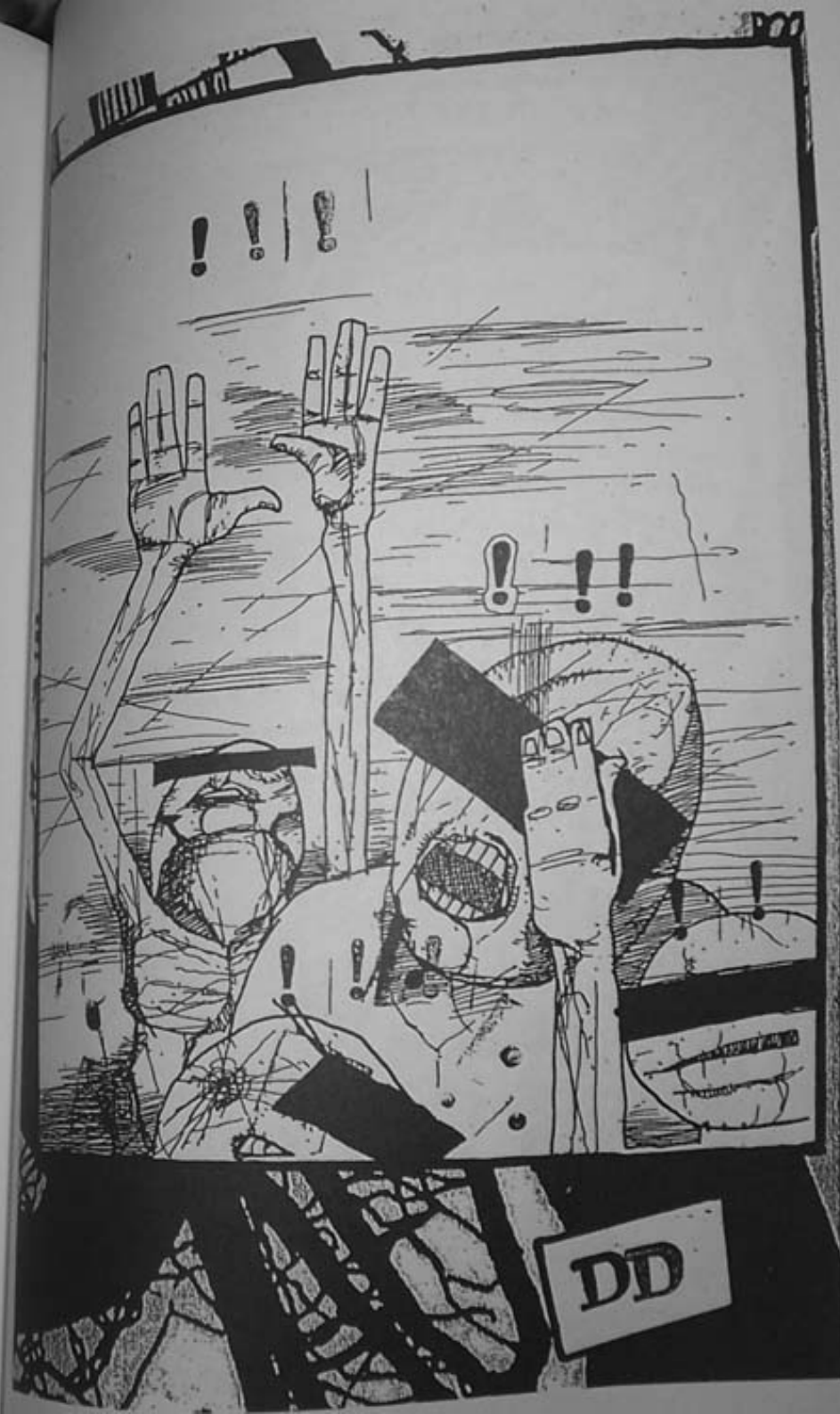


**AA**



**BB**





EE

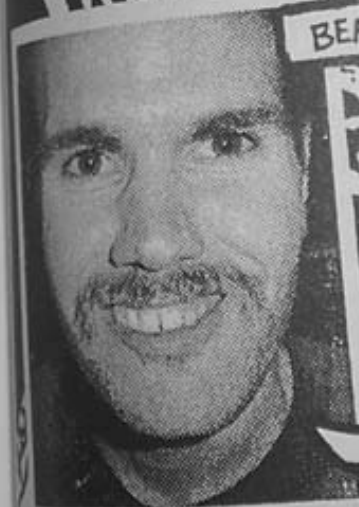


### SWEET JIMMY BURNTEGGS:



To find the values for the numerator and denominator of art's value, we first calculate  $SS_T$  and  $SS_b$ .  $SS_w$  is then found by subtracting  $SS_b$  from  $SS_T$ . You then divide  $SS_b$  and  $SS_w$  by the appropriate degrees of freedom to get  $V_b$  and  $V_w$ . And what springs forth, art.

### BEATBOX 2000:

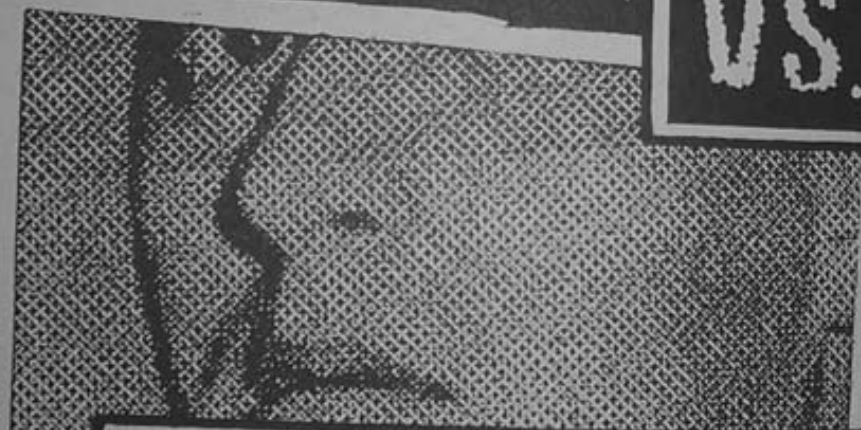


No, no, you fool! Because the standard deviation is a particularly useful aspect of your art, it is helpful to have an easy means to calculate it! It is not done by dropping lines from the inflection points on the curve of your art because the inflection point is a theoretical point, and your art will not fit the true hypothetical normal curve! You see, idiot?

AVOW #16



VS.



SHRIKE #3

Hey.

Here's a new one, this time a split with those fine young men at STRIKE.

More stories this time around, old for me, new to you. Hope you enjoy.

Meanwhile, it's all cat hair in the coffee, hot checks for cigarettes, and this nagging feeling that things just might work out.

Yes, things are good.

Hang in, KEITH.





## THE KIDS ON THE BUS

The two kids in front of me, the boy and the girl clutching each other and trying their hardest to be strong and not give a fuck what anyone says, they are going to be the good ones when they grow up. They are going to be the ones with a sense of solidarity to them, people with roots and maybe even, God forbid, an ounce of compassion, of empathy. It seems that when you're the kid in the schoolyard getting laughed at, getting picked last, teased and thrown down for what you're wearing or what your father does or doesn't do or the car you're dropped off in every morning, you eventually come to a fork in the road, I think. A fork in the road of your life. You can either turn around and laugh at the kid who's even worse off than you, you can seek out someone to shit on or punch down, or you can take it in and try your goddamdest to simply not cap on people. To not cycle through it. I've eaten some shit over the course of my life, swallowed it down and stepped back and tried despite that to see and speak kindly. Usually I fail, but the intention is there. And the two junior-high kids who sat in front of me on the bus the other day will probably be the same. At the very least, there was a small fork in the road there on the bus that goes down 17th, turns to 12th and crosses Hawthorne, just one of those tiny choices to be made in a lifetime of them, and they did OK while I was there.

I have said for years that the cruelest animal on earth is the seventh-grade girl. Followed closely by a seventh-grade boy, but girls at that age are just learning about their amazing capacity for viciousness and verbal cruelty, while us boys pretty much stay the same predictable orangutangs until we graduate high school and major in marketing or communications or something. But a pack of middle-school girls, baby, they can be mean. I am riding the bus home from work and I am beat, tired of fending off irate magazine customers and people with screaming toothaches and cursing towtruck drivers, and the bus picks up a lot of kids during that ride home of mine. There's a middle school nearby, and enough kids get on the bus during the two stops after mine to fill the fucker up. I have about thirty seconds of silence and then a screeching, writhing, cursing, aerosoled, hormone-filled, Day-Glo-colored mess known as the average cross-section of an American Middle School gets on the bus and ruins everything.

This day I am on the 33 line and all of the girls, most of the girls, go directly to the back, screaming about Holly and how she yelled at the substitute teacher who is a snatch and how Bobby Lisson is not her boyfriend and I have too smoked out before I do it all the time and do you have anymore lip gloss. They are, in a way, terrifying. I'll be the first to admit that I have no real memory anymore of what it's like to be thirteen; as far as I can tell, I'm about the same now as I was then, except for the fact that cigarettes are taking their toll on me and I masturbate marginally less now. These kids with their loud, cursing mouths and brazenness are like aliens to me. I'm sure when I was a kid that others were like this, but like I said, I was the kid that ate shit and raged about it later, internalized it. Kids like this were probably as alien to me then as they are now.

So this parade of girls walk by and then there's this bezitted kid, guant as hell with his bad haircut and his leather jacket with all the zippers. He grabs the seat in front of me. And after him comes a girl in this printed dress and honey colored hair, stunning in her own way, she sits down beside him. The bus starts to move and he sheepishly lays his arm across her shoulders. Trying his best to be Don Juan and terrified shitless, right? The static of ten or fifteen teenage girls reaches a crescendo when one of the girls in the back screeches out, "Katie's a ho!" and the girl in front of me tightens like someone

shocked her with a stun gun. It's physical, man, I can see it happen. The girls in the back turn it into a chant, a sharpened spear, mud on her dress. The kid with his arm around her shoulder feels his zits grow bigger, feels like his jacket is a clown suit and the helplessness of it all, he's outnumbered and how do you do battle against something so stupid and cruel as a chant from fifteen fucking asshole girls on the back of a TriMet bus? There's strength in numbers, you know, and it's always easier to laugh at something when you're a part of a group. The chorus from the back is directed at his girlfriend, maybe his new girlfriend, and how do you make fifteen junior-high school girls stop acting like little scumbags?

He turns around and looks back at them then, looks back at them all, and that helplessness is painted all over his face; his own uselessness, the uselessness of his age, the unfairness of time and the pack taking down the defenseless, the ferocity of those dipshits in the back. Him with his acne scars and the idea in his head that he's the luckiest fucking guy ever to be sitting next to this girl, him, and here are these girls cutting her apart right in front of him and what is he supposed to do? The girl is stockstill and his arm is slung around her and he looks at me for just a moment and that hurt is right there in his face. I am too fucking sensitive and it's things like this that make me feel the weight of it, the pointlessness of mostly everything. There is really very little to do and nothing at all to say to him. I can only nod at this kid on the bus, almost imperceptibly, wish him the best and pray those stupid assholes in the back spontaneously burst into flame.

It doesn't happen but at the next stop, miraculously, some of the girls get off and some of the boy's friends get on and sit down next to them and things relax a bit. The bus keeps going, people get on, people get off. I'm nearing my stop. He keeps his arm around her and she relaxes a bit more. He manages to wrangle a kiss from that girl before I get off the bus. I glance at them up there through the bus window and do what passes for prayer for me nowadays: *Come on, world, give them a break, yeah? A bit of easy peace for them. OK?*

Then I cross the street, wishing I had a cigarette. Start running home instead. And the burn in my chest is there in no time.

## EVEN THE BEST ACCUSED LP CAN'T CLEAN UP DOGSHIT

Collin lived down the street, and I wanted to be just like him. OK, he didn't live just down the street, we both lived in Newport. I lived near the highway and Collin lived down at Nye Beach. And if I didn't want to be just like him, I looked up to him the way a student looks up to a teacher. But maybe not something as dry and tired as that, either.

Collin brought me into this thing. Collin, fourteen years after the fact, is in many ways directly responsible for putting me where I am. For many of the beliefs I walk down the street with, for that almost subconscious need to always root for the underdog, for the unending desire to find a vinyl copy of Cryptic Slaughter's *Money Talks* LP, the unending debate between which Accused record was the best. I idolized the kid. He was the older guy, his friends were older, I was the young, rotund little idiot being inundated into this circle of veritable demigods. For the most part, hero-worship for the people who initially

got you into punk is pretty common and man, I had it bad.

One particular night I was on my way to his house, threading my way down the road that ran next to the beach, past wind-carved bluffs, gravel dead ends, the motel with the carved wooden whale out front, its glossy brown corpse permanently beached but somehow tranquil in spite of it. Past the abandoned lot that used to house a park when I was a kid, the park where they found a body once, years before I moved there, embedded in the clay, some long-dead native buried in a mudslide before architecture sunk its claws deep in the soil. Even this town, the town I grew up in, this tourist town, has history. The lives of people written on the walls, written inside the walls of things, written in hills.

Down past the Turnaround, where Farley ran from the cops and Jake got punched in the mouth. Where the sewage pipe makes things stink like shit, where some of the best times were when bonfires would dot the landscape, bright sparks against the roar of the ocean. Past the Turnaround, and then the street slants upward, past a mishmash collection of unkempt, shattered houses with tiny, fenced yards and sheets of yellow weeds trying to choke everything down.

And it was there, and it was then, that particular night, walking to Collin's, walking past one of those houses when a woman ran up to me, hustled up to me and said, "Hey, ya gotta help me. I'll pay ya."

She had black hair that flapped around in the wind like a wing, crooked teeth and what looked like a pretty serious burn scar on her neck. A short, very intense lady. "Uh, what do you need?"



"Well, see, I'm movin'." As she said this, she was indeed moving, shuffling around, twitching her head back towards a tiny house set far off from the street. Dark back there except for the bright rectangle of light from an open front door. What was this? Some crazy lady who liked seducing kids with too many zits and a blossoming mullet? Was some PCP-maddened biker going to jump out from behind a bush, her partner in some pathetic get-rich-quick scheme? I know, it's stupid now, but I was sixteen or so and maybe not the most worldly of kids. Or at the least, a kid with a very active imagination.

She flapped her hands toward the door. "I gotta move this couch into that truck." She nodded over my shoulder and there was indeed a truck there, a pretty common Newport-type truck: hanging on by its last guts, new during the Carter Administration, a coughing engine and rusting American steel.

I've always had a terrible time saying no to people. Too concerned with what they think of me. It's abated somewhat over the past decade or so, but I just shrugged and walked into the house with her. The room was bare except for the couch, yellow light

spilling over into all the corners of the room. I've always loved empty houses, apartments. The sense of order about them, the sense of potential inherent in a room void of furniture and stuff on the walls. We picked up the couch and actually made it out to the truck pretty easily. Hefted it into the back of the truck and she slammed the tailgate shut with a satisfying clank.

"My purse is in the house, I gotta pay ya," she said, twitching her head back towards the house again. This is where it happens, I thought. Biker guy comes out from behind the door and hits me with a chairleg topped with a skull, knocks me out cold. Takes my shoes. Takes my wallet. Something like that.

"Oh no, that's OK," I stammered.

"Naw, come on, I 'preciate it."

Unable to say no, I shuffled my ass in there, waiting for the hammer to come down, waiting for things to get weird, something.

But they didn't get weird, necessarily, just...unfortunate. The smell hit her first, rancid and sharp and sick, but so odd and out-of-place in that empty, blank little house. "What the hell is that smell?"

I followed her in and knew what it was right away. We looked around the room and there were mounds and smears of tan, wet, uber-fresh dogshit all over the carpet. The stink was incredible.

"Oh, God, that's *shit*." She was the one stammering now.

I looked down at my feet and sure enough, one shoe was fairly immersed in that same hue and consistency, almost making me sick. I've never smelled something that bad since then, either. It must have been some kind of were-dog that laid that mound, seconds before I walked in the house. It must have been a demonic Great Dane, sent from the Black Netherworld, I don't know. All I know was that, despite tracking a pretty ungodly amount of fresh, sickening werewolf shit all over this woman's newly vacated house, my own foot managed to still pretty much be encased in it. I was as far away from the majesty of Cryptic Slaughter as I could likely be and still retain a pulse.

"Oh man, I'm really sorry," I muttered, backtracking out of the house and managing to lay still more shit into the threads of the carpet. I mean, it wasn't the nicest of carpets or anything, but I think we can all agree on the substantial difference between an OK carpet and an OK carpet that a He-Dog just took a dump on.

"Uh...no," she said, whipping her head around, surveying the damage. Which was considerable. "No, that's fine." So much for just loading the couch up and getting out of there.

"I can stay and help you clean it," I offered.

"No, that's fine," she said, opening her purse and handing me a ten. Ten fucking dollars, man. To track shit into an empty house. Jeez.

"No, I can't take that."

She waved it impatiently in front of me. "Go on." Meaning, take the money and scam, shit-smearer. So I did. I headed back the way I'd came, turning up the block at the end of the street, wiping as much of it as I could on a patch of grass. How did that happen? How the fuck did it get on my ankle?

I walked back home, the tenner scorching a shame-burn into my back pocket. I got back home and spent the next half hour digging dogshit out of my shoe. I put the Accused's *More Fun Than An Open Casket Funeral* LP on, but it just fell flat on my ears. Some things even Martha Splatterhead can't fix.



## THE RIGHT WING NEEDS A BIT OF BARBEQUE SAUCE

The day after the bombing "campaign" in Iraq started, Maya and I headed downtown on the bus, heading towards the march that had been scheduled for months. Scheduled with the air of the inevitable about it: the schedule consisted of "the day after bombs start falling in Iraq, we meet here at 4 o'clock." Mentioned on public radio a few times, a lot of it through word of mouth, mentioned on the evening news the days after from the start; the police in Portland are notorious for their brutal reactions to protests and I've known enough people shot with beanbags and gotten jets of pepperspray shot in their eyes. And while the Portland Police's Anti-Terrorism Task Force may have been shut down a couple years ago due to lack of funds, ever since the steamrolling of the Patriot Act and the fattening up of Homeland Security, Portland PD's terrorism investigations are now subsidized by the FBI. Which means that any information gathered by the PD also goes to the FBI and the federal government's "counter-terrorism" departments. You feeling good yet?

There were thousands of people there in the park. Cops were lining various avenues, redirecting traffic. I guess the march had proper permits and had arranged something with the cops- given them a detailed route of where the march would be heading. Small cells of blueboys stood amongst each other, talking. A loose line of bike cops in their helmets formed a loose wall on various avenues, redirecting traffic, yellow POLICE stencilled on their parkas.

And after listening to a few speeches from students and vets and members of this coalition and that committee, the most incendiary and thoughtful one made by some kid in Maya's debate class, we walked. She and I wound up right at the front. This monstrous throng of people: students and moms and hippies and Black Bloc punks in ski masks and people in costumes and veterans and homeless and legless and women in business suits and more. I couldn't see behind us; it was just this sea of people. And Portland's demonstration, in respect to other cities, wasn't even that large. But my God; people in the highrises and office buildings stared out through their windows, down onto us. One woman next to us held her kid's hand and waved at a bunch of women staring down at us from an office building. "We're doing this for you!" she yelled.

I'll be the first to admit that there's something terrible and powerful about the Hive, the dangerous potential in a sea of people just *marching forward*. Ten thousand agendas crammed onto one stretch of pavement ten blocks long. I felt powerful and somehow vulnerable at the same time, locking eyes with pedestrians that stood on the sidewalk and watched us as we passed. One guy in a business suit simply held up a sign that read BUSH/CHENEY, still as a statue, staring right back at us.

We marched down Broadway, threaded back through to 6th, I think, once we hit Burnside. One thing that became apparent was that the cops did *not* want us on the bridges: every bridge overpass was clogged with a line of cops in riot gear and blockades,

those big plastic shields with POLICE written at the top. They wanted us contained, I suppose, in the downtown area. At every bridge overpass the mass would slow down, the tension growing a bit. Some people would simply try to talk to the cops, break through that veneer of impassiveness they had underneath their helmets, on their faces. Others just wanted to scrap, I imagine. Somebody would yell, "Come on! Keep moving!" and the masses would grudgingly surge forward. We headed down 6th, people banging drums, people walking on stilts, Maya and I laughing, people watching. When we got back to the starting point of the march, we all turned right back around and started the march over again. If anything, there were more people this time. And by all accounts, it had gone great; a march of solidarity, peaceful dissent, if you're into that sort of thing. No vandalism, no arrests, citizens showing their dissatisfaction with the decisions their government was making in their name. Civil disobedience and etc.



Five minutes later we pass by a bank where a woman and a couple dudes in suits are watching us through the window of the lobby. Some kid in a black mask runs up and starts kicking at the lobby windows. They buckle and shiver but don't break. Another kid in black runs up and scrawls FUCK BUSH on the window and joins the other kid in trying to bust through. A few people from the crowd yell at them, "That's not peaceful!" and I laugh at the ridiculousness of that, hold on to Maya's hand and keep moving. Things are going south. Things are splintering; the cross-pollination of pacifists and concerned, tax-paying citizens and straight-up anarchists, all pressed together in a swarm with no agenda set forth beforehand besides *marching*, of course things are going to go south, are going to fall apart.

We keep walking and the group falls apart at Burnside: there is another group of protesters there, stopping traffic at the intersection of Burnside and 6th, traffic is backed up for blocks. Some people stay there; our group splinters off and goes back, winding up under the Burnside Bridge, going past Skidmore Fountain. Maya and I are still in the lead, though many others have dropped back; in the lead, it's mostly just us, a nice lady in a power suit who apologizes for stepping on my feet so much and the Black Bloc kids. We pass a Tri-Met bus and another kid pulls out one of those big Magnum pens and scrawls FUCK THE US on the side of it. I tell Maya that if the group goes towards the bridge (we're at a point in the city now where the cops apparently didn't plan on us going to, the Steel Bridge), we should hold back and go home. I know the cops are going to either be

wanna do backflips.



at the other end of the bridge, trying to corral everyone up between the two ends, or they're going to come up behind us. She agrees. I'm getting burnt on the whole thing, after watching the idiot deface the bus. Like, "Yeah, way to destroy the power elite, man! Public transit, the most nefarious of evils! You got it!"

And the group, now mostly the kids in black masks surging forward with their banner, does head right toward the apparently unguarded Steel Bridge. Maya and I hold back and eventually, find our way home. Later on, the news, of course, fills us in: the folks that gathered at the foot of the Burnside Bridge shut down traffic for most of the night. There were, by all accounts, between three and fifteen hundred people in that part of town, depending on who you listened to. As far as the group we were with, well, I turned out to be right. The cops were waiting. Everyone, Maya and I included, got an aerial view of the group surging forward towards the part of the bridge where the offramp joins the main intersection of the bridge, the part where there was a line of motorcycle and bike cops and barricades. The kids tried the push right through them, knocking a couple motorcycles over and then the cops were just on them. Macing protesters and pedestrians alike. Batons were out now. People were getting arrested and getting the shit knocked out of them. The news channels showed that segue incessantly throughout the night.

The havoc that protesters wreaked on traffic throughout the night increased, to a level either dangerous or genius, depending on your views. Some people made it, eventually, through the line of cops on the Steel Bridge and walked to the other end, heading out eventually onto the freeway. Some of the people on Burnside stayed put, walking around, again, while others made it through across the bridge into the east side of town, this massive group of people with varying agendas. Some people who stayed put at the intersection formed a circle and burned an American flag, footage of which the news stations played also played over and over again. A lot of people were very adverse to having their pictures taken and the newscasters and their camera operators were advised by station managers, essentially, to stay the fuck away from the protesters and film from the edges of the group. And can you blame the protesters? Nowadays "civil disobedience" is just a hop skip and a jump away from "domestic terrorism." I sure as shit wouldn't want to have my face caught on tape- facial recognition programs are getting fairly accurate nowadays, we appear by all intents and purposes to be bellying ourselves up to that particular bar known as the Brave New World. And that's the question of the hour, isn't it? I don't think it would be much of a conspiracy theory if I talked about my near-assurance that that march was filmed at various points throughout our trek. Simply in an attempt to match the crimes of those arrested with their acts, physical evidence of vandalism? Or does that lady with the glasses and the business suit that apologized for stepping on my feet have a few extra sheafs of paper stuck in her FBI file, right next to her current address and her credit report? Does the woman who yelled "We're doing this for you!" up to those other women in the office buildings have an extra attachment, another little icon on a computer screen somewhere, in some FBI database now? Perhaps most importantly, is this just paranoia? Further, isn't that old adage "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not after you" ringing a little more true in this day and age?

Ultimately, there's no easy way to tie this up, no nice punchline to cap this story off. We went home and watched on the news while some people sat in the middle of a busy intersection for hours. Other people stopped traffic, kicked some windows in and spraypainted on some property. All of this was, supposedly, a case of citizens voicing their dissenting opinion in regards to the United States' invasion of Iraq. The news, of course, portrayed all the protesters as potential vandals or hoodlums, intent on destroying the very fiber of America through property damage and a longer-tahn-average commute for people getting home from work. Which, hell, may not have been that far off for some of them.

But I have to wonder, which road *should* we take? If this wasn't the right path, then which path *do* we walk down? Who's agenda could we have followed to do something concrete, something substantial? It's become clear to me that the current Administration is clearly not listening to the "voice of the people." President Bush has said that protesters are "well-intentioned" but that the government's just going to keep on rolling down that black highway marked Manifest Destiny, regardless. When do we realize that our point is just not being made here? And upon realizing that, how the fuck do we act on it? What do we do? Which would be more effective, a million people making up arms against the state or a million people refusing to pay their taxes to pay for more military spending, more "defense?" As we sit here, what avenues do we have left to road down?

## WARD AND JUNE ROCKABILLY

I'm telling you, the carpet here is too thin. These apartments, on both sides of the street and two stories tall and each building taking up most of a city block, were thrown up cheap and fast and there are times when that fine workmanship shines through. For example: the guy downstairs is screaming at his wife again. Not for the first time, or the fiftieth. Some nights are worse than others. It's three o'clock in the morning and they must have kicked his ass out of the bar one more time and here he is, coming home with a gut full of anger and a voice that just can't seem to scream loud enough, bringing it all back home to the wife and kid. Here he is, coming home. Here is the family and here are his hands, aching so bad to reach out and smash something, hey hey. I've heard this one before. It's like a song I know the words to but don't want to sing.

And it's scary when you realize that you live downstairs from what could have been your family. Or maybe it's just sad. Or maybe it's sad and scary when you realize that you live above your father as he was twenty years ago, and that while maybe your dad didn't wear a duck's ass haircut like this guy does and strut around in a leather jacket like he's the fucking Fonz or something, they both still screamed at the women they lived with just the same, and their kids learned to be just as silent, they learned to be just around the other corner, just under the hem of the blanket, just behind their mother's leg when she is feeling brave and talking back and is very, very tired of his shit.

But right now, no one is brave here in this apartment complex, stacked together like Tinkertoys with thin walls, no one is brave, not the woman downstairs and not me. Least of all me. She is silent, he is muttering and muttering and then screaming and throwing something and the kid, the boy I sometimes see walking with his mother out the door, he is always quiet, that's what you learn to do. And here I am drinking coffee and telling myself that if it gets any worse, that tonight I am calling the motherfucking cops. Tonight, this will be it. Tonight. And that's the same as always too. And the greatest disservice to that woman and that kid, ha, that little me, is that I will probably never call the police until it's well past the point of doing anyone any good.

Maya and I moved in here last summer and our parking spot is right next to theirs. They've got an old boat of a Chevy in their spot, sky blue, dated from sometime in the 70's. Huge boat of a car that I've never seen move. And when we moved in, there was a sunflower there, a big old sunflower in a big old pot resting on the rusted-out trunk of their car. I'd sweat it out in this apartment last summer and see them out the window, the

man and this boy, the boy holding a pitcher of water, trying not to spill any as they walked out to the sunflower. The boy is probably like I was: wanting so bad to feel a sort of acceptance from this man, this man that passes, apparently pretty fucking poorly, for a father. The kid's mixture of admiration and fear, wanting so bad to feel something from this guy, to feel him put sunlight and water on the roots of his heart. The boy poured the pitcher of water in the pot and the man stood next to him and smoked, looking mean, looking as cool as ever. I thought of that sunflower, of that boy in his room at three am when his father comes home and calls his mother a stupid cunt over and over again. That terror he must feel: how he *knows* his mom is the strongest woman alive, she is the strongest woman in the whole world, but sometimes even she is breakable.

This guy, with his shitkicker boots and his Vaseline'd ducks-ass haircut. He's so loud. And if I think he's loud, three walls and a floor up, what's it like for the kid? For that woman? What's that like?

*You're a stupid cunt*, he says downstairs and my jaw clenches and the words *you're a fucking coward* reverberate in my head. I'm talking to both of us, that man and I. Every time I tell myself the next time will be the time I do it, call the cops or go down there myself or something. And I think of how the terror, for some women, does not end; how it doesn't end before or after the neighbor pounds on the ceiling or the cops come. It doesn't end with the first act of manipulation, the first guilt trip, the first punch, or the thousandth. How abuse might be a cycle that you can tell yourself a million times will be one that you'll never find yourself in and then maybe you wake up one day and realize that yes, it's happened. Yes, this is where you are. Yes, here is the lock and where the fuck did that key go? What happened to *never ever* and *not me*? And how many people find themselves there? And goddamn, can you hear that? I write all this down and a floor below me he tells her to shut up and calls her a cunt one more time and a door slams. The next day I see the kid and his mom on the way home from Safeway and he's impervious, he's perfect and happy as shit right then: it's just him and his mom, see. She is the toughest lady in the world, she *is* the world. The guy is like a meteor that orbits their atmosphere sometimes, that comes in and touches ground sometimes, screaming, and then leaves. But his mom? She's rock solid, she's tethering him there to the world.

I pass by them, going the other way and I'm so fucking ashamed of myself, my own silence. I keep my eyes on the ground as they pass.

## THE WATERTOWER

Memory, you fucker, lock me in your arms. You'd better hold me, shithead, because today is not much. Today I'm losing it, bit by bit, cut down. You read these things and realize, you can almost see it, chapter by chapter, story by story, the cutting down of hope, the whittling away of optimism. Chris from *Slug & Lettuce* reviewed a back issue recently and wrote, to paraphrase: "For someone with a centerfold in the middle of their zine that says HOPE, Keith has become incredibly cynical and jaded."

This beer bottle clicks against my teeth as I swallow.

She's right: I got pissed off at something yesterday and spent five minutes cursing, walking circles and occasionally punching doors. How'd I get here? How'd the present evolve into some place I don't want to wind up and continually find myself? This is where I'm at, but how'd I get here?

So memory, my buddy, my pal, get me out of here. Take me home... And I'm wondering sometimes if I'll be up there forever, living in this memory I have, up on the top of the rusty water tower with an aching, fractured arm, up there with no sleep and a host of friends and a tinny, cracked radio playing Tom Waits, a radio someone shimmied up through the rusty grate with, up the ladder and across the ledge, up on the watertower. All of us young and on fire with something, maybe just ignorant of the fact that time was passing us by like a motherfucker, passing by like a comet who's tail we were continually almost catching but never quite.

Sometimes I wind up there, in my head: the tower. Flipping through the years with an ease that's both comforting and bitter, that calm, shuttering photobook of memory: the ladder a rusted red, a hollow tube skeletoned with rungs that you climbed, the grate at the bottom peeled back with someone's dad's boltcutters years ago, the hollow *bong* as you walked in the center of the tower, the way it gave just a bit, just slightly. The stir and echo inside of yourself when you saw the lights of the city there on the horizon skimming across your eyes in just the right way. And how you could *smell* the night back then, before things had a tendency to either smell like cigarettes or nothing, nothing at all.

I am forever locked in these arms of memory and that's fine, fine, fine. I have been asking myself a lot lately about adulthood, and those cryptic words like *courage*, *man*, *worth*. Wondering where what can be called our nature stops and something else starts. Thinking of the people that I know, their bravery, their doggedness. If Maya wants to move to Berkeley or Juarez, she will. If Nathan decides to build a house on a river somewhere in Southern Oregon and club fish in the river for food, he'll find a way to do it. I cannot imagine myself anywhere but right here, new memories being carved out; fading tattoos, bad feet, this cup of coffee. Home is just where you hang your head, I think. Or where your head hangs, which is the same. Life will forever be whittled down to these things: this cigarette, a beer, trying to write a letter to my father, scrambling like mad to come up with that last forty bucks for rent. Welcome home.

## WOULD YOU LIKE SOME CHEESE & BEER WITH THAT WHINE?

This is how it goes, every time I've gone to a gallery where they've hung my shit. This is the same way it goes down, every time. One more tale for the files, one more time where expectation, or hope, or possibility, ultimately puts its knee on the back of your neck and pops you in the face with a towel. Really hard. And you should call me Charlie Brown because it's a football I just keep kicking at. Expectation: that great killer. So blinded in one area, searching for it, that we miss so much else. Looking for that dollar bill you dropped on the street and you don't see that unopened pack of smokes right next to the bus stop bench.

I've participated in a lot of art shows. Some of them have been small-time, coffee-shop type of affairs and some of them, especially for a relatively young artist with no art degree, have been pretty big deals. But the one thing they have in common is that you never know when or where something will sell, but the chances are it probably won't. Art openings have been a disappointment to me, pretty much across the board, for years.



The one rule: When you are dirtpoor broke, when you and the cat are fighting over the pellets in the bowl on the floor and the record store has taken every record of yours that they're going to take and no one has even responded to your resumes and applications, when you've worn the same pair of pants for two weeks and your socks are developing actual personalities because laundry has become a luxury, when you could really use the money, you will never sell a painting. I've heard mention that "excess leads to success", that if we live fast our lives and wallets will somehow accomodate itself around our schedules, but it's bullshit, straight down the line and by and by.

Secondly: You will never get laid. I continually fall into that trap, the one that says, "Man, you were always picked last for kickball, you can't hang out with your family out in the front yard, shooting the shit about how to gut an antelope or what bank of Watson Creek has the best trout, you can hardly afford bars or basement shows or any real activities where you might stumble across a woman inclined to partake in such activities with you, and you are not really that good looking or charismatic, but your art, some of that's actually pretty good. *So this shall be your chance to shine, young man.*"

Yeah, that trap. And of course it never comes to fruition.



Thirdly, you will get drunk, in a vague and vain attempt to somehow convince the cosmos that Points One and Two should somehow take place, should happen. You will wander around the gallery, getting more and more intoxicated, trying to spark up conversation with people who are giving your paintings a cursory glance, but even with copious amounts of Pabst Blue Ribbon coursing through your stunted veins, the conversations are usually stilted, forced, awkward and ultimately, short.

Some would argue that I'm missing the point entirely, that this is not the point of art, and as far as that goes, I'd have to agree with them. It's certainly not the point of art, but what's the point of an art opening? My art is for me, dear one, but who's the art opening for? What's the point of the artist attending the art opening? Most would argue that the artist is there for one reason and one reason only: to act as a representative of his art to the art-purchasing public, people who come to the gallery. People like to collect artists as much as they do art, right? Well, what happens when the art is virtually uncollectable? When the supply greatly, terrifically surpasses the demand? What happens then? Well, the artist has little recourse but to make a complete ass out of himself in a vain attempt to procure the most debased of pleasures. And what that all means is that history has dictated its timeline, over and over again: I will sell paintings in small flurries and then

a great desert-like expanse of time will pass where I don't sell anything. So what the hell, I might as well try to drink as much free beer as I can and see if anyone wants to smooch. What the shit. The art speaks for itself, which is a good thing because I usually end up sharing my words with pieces of free cookies falling out of my mouth.

Of course, some might just argue that I'm a fucking idiot, and they would probably be right as well.

## PUNK EXPLODED, I WRESTLED

We rode Greyhound up there and I can't believe it was cool with my mom. You know, I've forgotten a lot over the years but there's a bunch that I still remember. Like this: first 7" record ever purchased? That one Green Day record with the bulldog on the front. With the promise that I head back home on the bus after the show, I was on my way to Portland to see them play. My mom was practicing the art of letting go of her kid, just a little, and I was witnessing the ugly birthing of that newborn baby that, it turns out, would haunt us for years. The Punk Band That Plays Arenas Rather Than The Basement. When was it that Green Day made it big? What was the year they were plastered on every rock magazine from *Rolling Stone* to *Guitar*, what was the year they rocketed to stardom in the space of days or weeks and left an entire underground subculture with its collective pants around its knees, taking a shit in the outhouse and amazed to discover there were 600 journalists staring through the keyhole, trying to get a good peek, a rock-solid stool sample? What year was that? 1991? 1992? Shut, 1993?

Scott and Firiell and I took the Greyhound up there and I honestly don't remember doing that. When we got to the Pine St. Theater, the place was packed, thronged with kids, hundreds and hundreds of them. What was the capacity for that place? Two thousand? Whatever it was, the show was sold out. Scott laughed, not really knowing what else to do. Scott laughs at other people's misfortune, but he always laughs at his own as well. We couldn't get in, it was sold out and we had headed there without tickets. The vain hope that we'd be able to get in. Getting ready to doggedly trudge our asses back to the Greyhound station, and then, amid the swarming sea of bezzited adolescents decked out in their best baseball hats and half shirts, there's Alex. Skulking around in his trenchcoat, he's not slicked up at all, unlike most of us there, and just that fact alone is enough to make him stand out like a flare next to the side of the road. Where's his belly shirt? Where's his spiky bracelets, his baseball hat turned backwards? We spot him immediately and we're laughing as we walk up.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"I thought you guys might show up," he said. "Just thought I'd walk around and see if I could spot you."

Twenty minutes later, after a hearty session of smashing shopping carts against buildings, Alex takes us to the Howling Frog. Does anyone remember that place? I was only there a few times; another checkmark written into the books of friendly, "alternative" places to go for dispossessed Portlanders, another checkmark pencilled in and then scratched out; the place shut down shortly after this story took place. Goodbye, Frog. Goodbye, X-Ray. Hell, goodbye, La Luna, even though you were a bit too cavernous for my tastes.

So we have coffee at the Howling Frog, sitting around and catching up with Alex and trying to figure out what the hell to do. Like I said, we had decided to just hit



the Greyhound right after the show and so we just decided to head back there, somewhat despondent that our big trip to Portland turned out to be an hour-long bullshit session with Alex and then having to get right back on the bus. (I was a sophomore or junior in high school and my mom still hadn't reached the absolute realization that I was more than willing to let my attempts at academia fall by the wayside, that I, for the most part, did not give much of a shit about much of a shitting anything, at that point in my life. However, she wanted me at school the next day.)

There wasn't much to do except head back on the Hound and write it off as somewhat of a loss. We were on our way down there, right in the heart of downtown's Skid Row. I've been to the station dozens and dozens of times throughout the past ten years and it's a little bit sad and a little bit funny just how *big* this town used to seem, when you're just visiting and don't know the area at all. How full of potential, how mysterious this town seemed. And the Greyhound station was the epicenter of it all, it took you there and brought you back, it was the meeting and departure point for a host of my memories. Nowadays, when I go Greyhound, I know to get there an hour early and if I'm gonna go smoke outside, I know to do it quick and cup my hand around the cigarette or else I'll get five kids in quick succession coming up and asking for a smoke. But back then? Sheeeit. The electricity of youth, that sense that *anything could happen*. I miss that.

We'd found a shopping cart left on the street and there we are, acting like geniuses, pushing the cart like hell and then letting go and laughing like monkeys when it smashed into a building or something. We're just about to do it again when a cop walks around the corner and asks us what the hell we're doing.



"Um, nothing." A collective murmur. This was back when the Portland police actually walked around Skid Row and didn't just cruise around in their squad cars.

"What the hell are you doing with that cart?"

"Oh, nothing. It was just like that."

"Where are you going?"

"The Greyhound station."

"Can't. Greyhound's closed til 7 am. Now go back the way you came, I don't want to see you down here again."

I'd like to think that it was because we looked like menacing street thugs and he was scared we would terrorize the neighborhood or something. But, fuck, we were a bunch of seventeen year-old kids from a little fishing town on the coast. Definitely a case of the guppies amongst the sharks. Alex has a great story about being downtown with

Anne and Thorin one night and some guy tried to mug them and pulled a knife. They just ducked and kept walking and the guy just folded his knife up and waited for the next person. A good story, but how many times can you pull that one off before the guy stabs you in the back? The cop was probably right: we were stupid kids.

So, the pack of stupid kids, considering it was about one in the morning and we deemed it too late to call our folks, did what all stupid kids would do in such a situation. We went back to Alex's tiny studio apartment, called up Joe, drank wine and got in punching matches.

Joe was a kid I met at the Oregon School for the Blind about thirteen or fourteen years ago. I will be the first to admit there is, unfortunately, a class system at the Oregon School for the Blind's summer camps. As rough as it sounds, Joe and I were in the upper echelon of cool kids at the School because we were not "totals", i.e. totally blind kids, and because we did not have autism. I could do an entire issue of *Avow* just filled with stories about the amazing characters I met there, the terrible, mean pranks I pulled on other kids and the pranks that were subsequently done to me, but fear of a lawsuit mandates that I'm just gonna have to tell you in person if I ever meet you. Needless to say, Joe was a spazz, his eyesight was a little bit worse than the last time I'd seen him and we all promptly opened up Alex's wine and started drinking. And I *hate* wine, man; tastes like boat fuel to me.

It was one of those nights where things just happen the way they were meant to. Scott drank a glass of wine and promptly threw up (an allergy he has since successfully conquered over the subsequent years, I assure you.) We eventually drank all the wine, at which time Joe and I started in on the cherry almaretto, straight out of the bottle. As far as I understand it, that stuff is a liqueur (not a liquor, a *liqueur*, you see), meant to be mixed with some other beverage. All I know is that it was sickeningly sweet, had the consistency of syrup and edged me just a bit closer towards the cliff of idiocy.

Once the almaretto had taken its toll, Joe and I stepped up to bat and stepped down that next rung in the evolutionary ladder: first booze, then fighting. It started out as wasslin and quickly devolved into punchin. The night followed this course: Joe and I giggle in all of our half-sighted seventeen year-old wisdom, he tackles me while I slug him in the neck and we both go crashing into the wall, falling to the floor, while Alex sits at his desk, laughing and Scott and Friel tried to sleep on the pullout couch. This, seemingly, went on for hours. We managed, I remember, to break Alex's stereo and his desk. And we all went home, nearly-asleep and mildly hungover, on the Greyhound the next morning. And of course, I came home to my mom, who was less-than pleased that I never came home the night before, never called her and managed to miss school. As far as the show went, I heard it was pretty good.

## WESTPORT BATS VS. THE PORTLAND CULTURAL ELITE

I've written about Westport before, many times. This small fishing town, this town where Alex bought a house, this town that I lived in for a while, immersed myself in its scene as much as I could, had a lot of hope and big ideas that just kind of floundered

or petered out shortly after their inception or executing. It was a rough town, a rough town to be a punk in, and a lot of the people there were fucking gems, and many of the rest were such incredible caricatures of stereotypes I'd figured didn't really exist, that they too were amazing in their own right.

In many ways, the punks there were hardcore as shit. Westport and the surrounding towns, spread out with miles and miles of wetlands and swamp and ocean and cranberry bogs between them, tiny little towns like Hoquiam, Montesano, and others I can't remember, were, to say the least, not places that were even close to the regular pit-stops for bands touring the west coast. The closest was probably Olympia, a good hour and a half away, and even then a lot of bands that Westport kids would want to see would play Seattle, a good two hours more of travel. Westport, as I've said before a thousand times, is in a peninsula, and baby, they are isolated. And this is after the advent of the Internet. I complained a lot about the scene there, and figured I could afford to do so after the work that I had put into it. But criticism aside, there was a scene in that isolated, weird, fucked up area and kids had to work hard for it.

So in many ways, the kids in Westport were, for lack of a better term, keeping it real. It was such a small scene. Kids formed bands, put on shows in community halls and Eagles lodges, put out shitty demo tapes, fought skinheads, got beat up when they wore their mohawks and leathers and, like those stereotypes I mentioned, oftentimes equated being an idiot and breaking stuff with a vague notion of anarchy, with its connection and expected behavior of "punk." The Westport kids would come over to the Flophouse gloating and swaggering after breaking a window somewhere and I'd nod, the older, cranky punk (*shit, Keith's twenty two, fuck!*) after they'd woken me up at 8 pm and ask them if it would be OK if I went and smashed out the windows of their parents' house. They'd tell me I'd get my ass kicked for it and it would start a whole chain of events, a discussion that would last for hours, that would require the consummation of pot after pot of coffee, that would leave me both excited and frustrated as shit. I'm by no means even remotely well-versed on "anarchist theory", but something in me just bristled at the idea that these kids considered throwing a bottle or a rock through some family's window or some anonymous person's car as "fucking shit up", as "anarchy." In many ways, Westport was still in the eighties; this nameless anger that hadn't yet been categorized, that hadn't yet been mulled over and used as fuel for something maybe a little more constructive.

To their credit, though, these kids were oftentimes charming and hilarious; the quintessential seams for getting high: paint thinner, solvents, glue. Stories of being hunted by hillbilles for having a mohawk and having to hide in the bushes while the hicks scanned the foliage with the side spotlight on the 4X4. Or deciding that landscaping the backyard of their parents' house would take too long so they just decided to pull out the gasoline instead and light all the brush and brambles on fire, nearly burning down their parents' house until the fire department came and put it out.

There's something about the punk scenes in small, isolated towns that's really charming and frustrating all at once. In Westport, it was like 1985 had never taken place. The past was alive with the sound of a hundred kids fighting and getting drunk and fucking and breaking stuff, most of that taking place in one night to that same cassette copy of the Circle Jerks' *Group Sex* LP playing in the tape deck, complete with its requisite skips and pops. But rest assured, this is no nostalgia trip: I was nine in 1985 and sometimes these kids' refusal to see that punk had, to a degree, moved on was infuriating. That it's funny for a while to spit on tourists but how I hope to Christ that much of what punk concerns itself with nowadays are things other than if you can get high from sniffing a magic marker.

Still, it was probably a bit unfair on my part, in retrospect: high expectations

(there's that dirty, dirty word again) of kids that were younger than me, that hadn't had a lot of experience outside of this small town, this collection of small towns, and that were locked in that sometimes suffocating set of principles known as "punk." It's hard not to be a cartoon sometimes.

I was writing a letter to Steve of *Journal Song* the other night, talking about what I've been thinking about recently while going to shows. How sometimes I'll be at some house show, some band's playing in the living room or the basement and sometimes, my God, I just want to start howling with laughter. There's three kids playing their drums and guitar and one of them is shaking his ass on the keyboards, knocking around making this tremendous, hilarious noise and there we all are, our arms folded, our messenger bags slung coolly over our shoulders, nodding our heads in rhythm to the beat. God, it's funny. And then the band stops, we politely clap and all go off into our separate corners of the room, go up the stairs or out into the yard, little cells of kids in thrift store t-shirts, perfectly coiffed bedhead and backpacks riddled with patches and buttons, so aloof and so sophisticated all at once. Writing Steve about how our scene is so *funny* sometimes, asking him how there can be any room for hipsterism, for elitism in a scene where just about all of us were the kids that got picked last for kickball, we were all the kids who, you know, read books for fun, who were picked on and pushed down and snubbed. How can there be room for any of that shit when the one unifying theme, the lowest common denominator amongst just about all of us at shows is that we're all social retards? How can we have anything that comes even close to snobbery or a class system when we were the ones who always had milk squirting out of our collective nose?

So, I don't know, maybe the Westport kids were frustrating in their juvenility, but they were sincere, they were willing to learn from people and they were accepting. When it comes to being around people, interacting with people and being around them, there are only two things that are concrete rules in my life. One, I will never, ever be afraid or embarrassed to ask a question if I don't understand something and two, to try and never, ever belittle or laugh at someone if they ask a question. The Westport kids might pass out and throw up on your couch but they would never talk down to you or try and make you feel less-than. But here, now? Can we say that? How welcoming are we? Just how inclusive are we?

## OPERATION: FREEDOM TOAST

*I wanna spear my freedom fries with the femur of the President.*

*And if I'm gonna go then you're gonna know how I went.*

-Note eventually found by Portland police in the back pocket of the jeans worn by my fucking corpse.

This is the one that did it for me. Despite the rage, the sense of helplessness, despite the fact that the entire excuse for the invasion and takeover of Iraq was apparently totally fabricated (as of this writing, the UN, US and British forces have still found nothing even resembling anything that could be considered a Weapon of Mass Destruction, or sites in which they could be constructed in Iraq), this is the one that got me. Despite the fact that Bechtel Corp. finally got their deal with the US, twenty years in the making, for rebuilding the oil infrastructure of Iraq. Despite the fact that the US Government has taken it upon itself to appropriate a total of \$2 billion in loans from other

countries to get Iraq's oil pipelines up and running, a loan which the Iraqi people or interim government have not even asked for, but which they may pay off financially or, better yet, in crude oil by the barrel for US reserves. Despite the fact that something like 65% of there for quite a while, it seems), this is the one that finally made me absolutely ashamed of my government, ashamed to be an American citizen.

This will all be ancient history by the time this sees print, but I'm still shocked by it sometimes. Something like two weeks after France's steadfast refusal to sign any US resolution to invade Iraq under the pretense of seizing and dismantling Weapons of Mass Destruction, the cafeteria in the White House held a press conference. At the press conference, the cafeteria officially changed their menu, complete with television cameras, a framed version of the revised menu and the cafeteria manager shaking hands with some White House official. The event garnered a short, ninety-second spot on the evening news here.

In the name of patriotism and support of the White House's desire for a preemptive attack on Iraq and in an apparent attempt at chastising France for their refusal to sign the resolution, the cafeteria revised their menu so that all things French were replaced with Freedom.

French fries in the White House were now known as Freedom Fries.  
French toast, etc.

This is the one that did it for me. The most powerful nation in the world, pissed off by diplomacy. Ran by dipshit, power-maddened cowboys who resort to name-calling when they run into dead ends, when the legalities of world diplomacy stops them short of their war. Here in the States, we pout when we don't get our way. And then send in the troops anyway.

This is my America, and I'm ashamed.

## ONE LARGE LIBIDO WITH A SIDE OF TUNA AND BROCCOLI, PLEASE

I'm a firm believer in the credo that sometimes all you can be is an excellent bad example. That sometimes all you can do is stumble ahead, forge new ground the best you can so that others may come after you, gingerly toe the wreckage with their foot and mutter, "Jesus Christ. At least now I know what *not* to do."

Life, when viewed in the context of romance, it seems, presents milestones throughout one's time on earth, various forks in the road and all that, where one may either heed the notations of the signs or tread off the path and flounder through the underbrush, armed with what, at best, amounts to an intellectual pocketknife, an emotional compass (of which the needle has long since been busted out) and the sex drive, depending on the situation and varying states of disrepair of the aforementioned intellectual and emotional equipment, of a crazed rabbit who has spent the past two weeks smoking a lot of crystal meth and huffing insect repellent. I have, unfortunately, often taken the path less

travelled.

Previous to meeting Maya, who I'm still amazed went out with me in the first place, much less stuck around, my *modus operandi* often seemed to follow a few simple guidelines, though it was certainly nothing quite as linear and planned out as that. I was, in most cases, simply following the delicate curvature of my loins or my heart, depending on the situation. I often disregarded the signs on the road (WARNING: HEARTLESS JERK OF A WOMAN CROSSING or SLOW: GIRL WITH BOYFRIEND or maybe YO, THAT GAL THAT'S JUST NOT INTERESTED AHEAD, shit like that) and blindly tread through the spiny undergrowth of the Prairie of Love, only to find myself impaled by the thorns of the Crush Cactus or, more often than not, would just make a fucking idiot of myself and fall off a cliff. However, like I stated earlier, I have managed to cull some small gems of wisdom from some of these experiences. Over the years I haven't gotten much better looking but I've gotten a little wiser. Listed below, an instance gleaned from the archives of my own dating history, something that I beg all of you to read carefully. The majority of you will simply scoff, throw back your head and laugh at my fallacy, snorting, "I'd never do *that*!" but if I may assist just one of you, if *one* of you may ever find yourself at a similar junction, that I implore you: *heed this warning.*

Let us begin:

When Nathan and I were living together in the insanely expensive plasterboard townhouse, after John Whose Dad Was In The Mob had moved out, we somehow met these two girls from a neighboring town. They would come over and visit, hang out, we would all sit awkwardly around the coffee table and chat. It was all very proper and somehow English. We should have been offering them tea and cookies and saying "Pip! Pip! Jolly ho, wot!" a lot more than we actually did. To this day I can't remember how we met them and cannot figure out why they came around other than the fact that one of them must have liked Nathan. We were living in our hometown, spending too much on rent and were just beginning to cultivate the artistic and literary nuances that would later quell the romantic interests of any but the heartiest and most bohemian of women. At the time, however, we were just nineteen year-old kids who were pretty messy, fairly dirty and had the social skills of, well, crazed rabbits who had spent the past two weeks smoking a lot of crystal meth and huffing insect repellent. And I somehow got the guts up to ask one of these girls, April, out. I was going to make dinner. For someone who could list their Official Dates in High School on one hand, even if I happened to be an amputee, this was the Big Time.

Now, look, I am fucking *old*, man. I mean, I'm older, anyway, quite a bit. And I can hardly cook now. I'm a bit more versatile and have, for the most part, fallen out of that trap that much of America still finds itself immersed in: *A meal? It's gotta have meat in it!* Still, when I was nineteen I knew how to do three things: 1) Microwave stuff. 2) Boil stuff. 3) Put butter on stuff. In the townhouse, I mostly subsisted on cigarettes, coffee, beer, Boone's wine, microwave burritos, grilled cheese sandwiches and boiled asparagus from a pot laced with a delicate film of rust on the bottom. For years, I associated asparagus with power tools and garages and have since lost my taste for it, but at the time, rusty asparagus constituted my very lifesblood. However, even I knew that grilled cheese sandwiches and rusted vegetables wouldn't work for a first date, especially for someone who wasn't used to such a diet, who obviously cared for their appearance, took care of themselves. April wore lip gloss; I wore the same socks for nine days straight. What the hell was I going to make for dinner?

When Alex and I lived together in Seattle (and Alex could actually *cook*, man), right before I moved in with Nathan, when things were looking down at and I would go all out and buy groceries. We'd make power dinners that consisted of one of two meals:



a breakfast, with hashbrowns, eggs and toast or this crazy goulash-type stuff that Alex, I think, had come up with himself. Consisting of noodles, cream of mushroom soup, tuna and broccoli, and if we had the money, garlic bread. It sounds pretty disgusting now, but at the time was the thing of a king's meal. When you're unwittingly playing the part of the starving artist, taste becomes secondary. You want to be full. That goulash tasted all-right and definitely filled you up.

And I, ever the ladies man and smart as a whip, decided to make that goulash for my first date with this girl.

I know, I know, why not hit up a fucking cookbook? Why not call up my mom and say, "Hey, I've got this date with this girl and all I know how to make is this broccoli and tuna glop seemingly brewed in the deepest caverns of Hell. Any suggestions?" There were a myriad of options available to me at the time, but that's the point I'm trying to make, and further, the intent of this whole missive: *It seemed like a good idea at the time.* The case I would like to present to you, the Reader, is this: *If it sounds like a good idea at the time, it probably isn't.* Hindsight, as they say, has excellent vision and we can always, in retrospect, see where we bumbled off into the brush with our compass twirling wildly in one sweaty fist. But at the time, we almost always seem to think it's a brilliant idea at the time.



To make this short story a bit shorter (it's already probably longer than it needs to be), it was a fucking disaster. April came over and politely smiled through the haze of tuna-and-broccoli-odors that permeated the room, me swirling this pot and crumbling that spice and then, to make matters worse, we had to turn everything off because I forgot the mushroom soup and we had to drive to the store. And I think I'd forgotten my wallet too and had to borrow the dollar for the soup. Had I been that girl, I would have sped off and left me in the parking lot and steered well clear of the Balsawood Townhouse forever. But she stayed and I got the soup and it was disgusting. About three-quarters of the way through making it, I realized just how improper a meal it was for a first date. For any date. For anyone you ever wanted to hang out with again, really.

So, yeah, the meal didn't go well, and then in my infinite wisdom we watched John Carpenter's *The Thing*. Another bad idea in a string of them. The tuna stew, coupled with the scene where Wilford Brimley's very-deceased head distends from his shoulders, grows legs and skitters around the room like a very unhappy, un-Quaker Oats-eating spider was enough to make her say she was grossed out by the whole movie and was going home. My plan for, you know, maybe not scaring the pants off her but at least scaring a good opportunity for smooching had indeed failed miserably. She left and I don't think April and her friend ever came around again and I was certainly too embarrassed to call

her. The moral here? What, you can't read the neon? It's three hundred feet tall and it's waving right in front of your face, man, jeez. But for the sake of simplicity, I'll spell it out in smaller, discernable print. Note the italics for emphasis, please: *If you're going to go out on a first date, go sell all your shitty pop-punk records and take the person out to dinner. At the very least you can blame the restaurant if it's bad. And chances are fairly good they won't have the tuna-and-mushroom medley that ultimately led to my demise. Or if worse comes to worst, call your mom up and get that recipe for that delicious Top Ramen and beet borscht casserole she always made so well. Right? Right.*

## ANNIVERSARY

*Sometimes I just want to know, faster than my precious blood will let me roll  
Is it real or tell me is it wrong to keep these dreams strongest in my mind?*  
-The Gits, "Precious Blood"

Today is the tenth anniversary of Mia Zapata's murder. She was raped and strangled to death, her body poorly hidden in, thrown in, a dumpster on Capitol Hill in Seattle on July 7th, 1993. A hooker walking down the alley looked in the dumpster and found her body, called the cops. The murder went unsolved for ten years.

Time? Well, it just rolls right on through us.

This is what I remember: taken from an issue of *Drive-Thru Lobotomy* #2, the zine I did in high school with Tres, dated sometime late 1993, the last page is a poorly xeroxed photo of Mia Zapata from the back of the first Gits LP, *Frenching The Bully*. Cut out with scissors, a poor job, laid out on the far left of the page, along with a small obituary/article printed in an issue of *Maximumrockroll* that came out around that time. On the right, in my handwriting, some impassioned rant about not forgetting her, not forgetting her words. It sounds corny now, I guess, but at the time was very, very real and very sincere. The Gits, and more specifically Zapata's lyrics, spoke directly to me in a way that little has before or since. To say that I raged over the murder of an absolute stranger for years wouldn't be an overstatement. Living in Seattle two years after her death, I almost got into a fistfight in my kitchen with some drunk guy who didn't know who she was, had been, and shrugged off her murder. Back in the bad old days, stunted and young and unaccustomed to the sometimes sickeningly cruel manner in which things work, I made him apologize and then kicked everyone out of the apartment, pissed and fuming.

I kicked around the idea for years of trying to get in touch with remaining Gits members, calling them up and seeing if they had any unreleased material, live material, anything, that I could have the privilege of releasing. Knowing, when it comes to money, I would at best get a commitment from the band and then flake out on my end, I never did this. Broken Rekkids beat me to it with the LP release of *Kings And Queens*, a remastered version of their first demo. Which was for the best. But I raged for years.

Time rolls on, right on through us. And scrawled on that page, something about not forgetting.

Her murder was investigated for five years by the Seattle Police Department and various private investigators who were funded by her family, the band and donations from the punk community and the release of various benefit records. I still have one of those

records, a live 7" that has a woman named Carrie Akre, who used to sing in a band called Hammerbox, and a guy named Gary Heffern doing their thing. They do two acoustic country-type ballads, "That's The Beauty Of The Little Things In Life" and "Yes, I Guess They Ought To Name A Drink After You." It's not the best of records, it's not even a very good record, but it's got a painting of Mia's on the cover and proceeds went to the investigation fund. And I will keep it. Why even bring it up, bring up these little details? Because it's important to remember. The remains of a life are buried in the details.

To make a long investigative tale somewhat short, the case was shelved after five years of investigation and no suspects. This happened in 1998, right before DNA sampling and testing started to be used nation-wide, started to become a regular tool of police investigative work and, perhaps more importantly, court trials. Jump forward: Two Seattle cops in 2001 get a load of 300 "cold cases", unsolved crimes, to review. They finally got to the Zapata file and ran a saliva sample taken from her body through a national DNA database of convicted criminals and got a hit, a guy previously arrested in Florida a few years before. They do a bit of research and place the guy in Seattle in July 1993. Boom. Fly down there, locate him, stake him out a bit and then arrest him for the murder in January 2003, ten years later. The case is set to go to trial, I believe, sometime this month. We'll see.

Time just rolls right on down. Time is a motherfucker. Time takes it all.

And it's sad how memory fades like a light going out. How convictions dwindle and dissipate, some candle sputtering down. That rage, that sense of the spitting at the hands that shape the world, has been replaced with a shrug and a sigh, the clinking of beer bottles in the sink, worries about money, bad neighbors, romance. The dead are dead forever.

I can count the dead in my mind, and sometimes I do. People taken too soon, by others or by themselves. And it always come down to the same thing: the waste, the animal idiosyncrasy of it, the lack of justice, the lack of sense involved. People I've known or people, like Zapata, that had the gift of speaking to someone through their work, their words and passion. Those records, to me, are timeless, speaking to us down the years, their urgency intact, their beauty and ferocity spilling over. It's hard to remember, but thankfully, it's also hard to forget.

Time rolls right on through us but we grasp at things to hold on to, to tether us to the world, to help us move through the days. Life does its best and so do we. Celebrating living, celebrating life but keeping the dead somewhere in the folds of our hearts. It was corny then and it's corny now, but I am trying my best to not forget.

## ANIMAL, HUMAN, MAN

1. You wake up with bruises and have no idea where they came from. Shaking hands, shivering all over, someone has lined the inside of your skull with bits of broken glass and it tightens and expands with each expulsion and inhalation of breath. Any movement makes your heart race, you drink water and feel sick, trying like hell to hold it down, hold it in. And of course you acted like a motherfucking idiot and went pretty far towards maybe burning a bridge or two and of course it all comes back with perfect, haunting clarity.

Welcome, friends and neighbors, to Hangover Land. A frequent stop on the Avow trail. People are always telling me the zine is too negative, too dark. I don't really

agree, but in my defense, let me say this: you are just like me, I bet. The good stuff, we don't mind holding on to that. But the bad stuff, the shameful stuff, that stuff that catches like a bone in our throats, that keeps us awake at night- let's get rid of that stuff. Let's tell each other about, get it out, try to find the good in it. There must be good in these things we rant about, there must be light somewhere in these dipshit howlings of ours. There must be light somewhere. There's got to be a way to move past this, into something better. Or, more importantly:

There has to be a way to turn all of this splintering and dumbass weariness into something good.



2. You wake up in bed, that fist flexing around your skull and you lay there. It's possible that you've spent the first twenty-five years of your life sharpening the blade of self-loathing down razor-fine but are just now, over the past few years, realizing that things are not, at least in your own life, as doomed as they may seem. History seems to validate this. A few years ago, during a somewhat despondent period, savagely drunk, you pissed on a woman's bike at a party, who is now your roommate. At that same party, during some odd pissing spree in the backyard, you aggressively almost urinated on some guy walking by, who is now one of the writers of the other half of this zine. Things have a way of changing, of generally being OK in your life, if not great. And nothing is really as all-out destroyed as you have a tendency to first believe. It's possible that one of the incredibly stoned Asian film students from the party the other night, the ones that you repeatedly called a bunch of motherfucking Mormons, could conceivably become your best friend sometime down the line.

That's the point: things are not as bad as they seem. Bridges you think you've burnt are, at most, probably just a bit frayed. People in your life either don't care as much as you think they do or they have a larger capacity for forgiveness than you expected. Possibly a bit of both.

3. You wake up thinking about dead birds and how it feels like your teeth are rotting out of your mouth. An hour later, after brushing your choppers and eating something, having a cup of coffee and a shower, a feeling that could be described as "vaguely human" descends upon you and you feel, physically, alright. And when you think about it, things are, really, OK. In your own, tiny little compartment of the world, the world that is made up of this hand that moves from this cigarette to this pan to this telephone, things are fine. Even more, things are maybe even good. These basic needs you have are met and



in many cases, finely met. There are people in your life that would mourn your passing but more importantly, celebrate your living. Celebrate your life, all of your lives, entwined together. And that, ultimately, seems to be the point: your life sweetly or hilariously connected with those around you. Sometimes it doesn't feel like it, sometimes every line seems to stop short of reaching its end, but it's almost always not the case.

Sure, man, there's the skull, right there, but next to it, a window. And in the window, silhouettes. People that know your name, breathe it and speak it.

## WARD AND JUNE ROCKABILLY, PART TWO

The kid's name is Alex, I finally found out. It's a few months later and the apartment downstairs had been blessedly quiet. We had seen the woman downstairs leave enough times, hopping into taxis with her suitcases packed, only to come back again. I had walked upstairs to our apartment and seen Rockabilly knocking on the door, trying to get his key to fit in the lock, all hip, slick and cool as shit with his motorcycle boots and greased back hair. Snoring and spitting at my feet as I passed him on the sidewalk, going one more fucking time into that apartment. We'd heard them split enough times, heard that fucking door crash closed enough times, so hard our walls shook, our windows rattled. But it has been months now and we haven't seen Rockabilly's ugly, carved face around here, haven't heard him screaming at the woman through these floors or puking into the toilet at 5 am, so loud it would wake us up. Maya muttering "Jesus" under her breath and me laughing, laughing. Hoping he fucking choked on it.

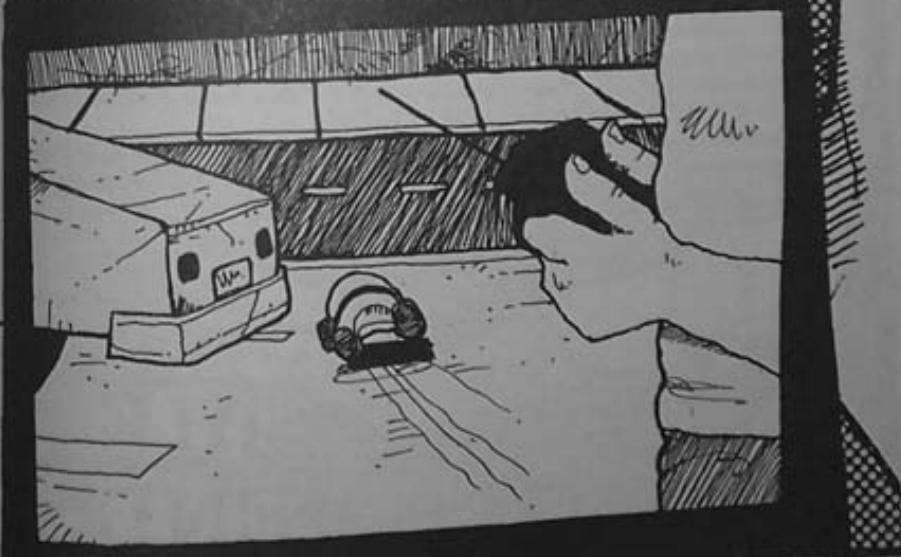
Months later, Rockabilly is gone and I'm glad. There's a ton of hippies that have moved into the apartments around ours, they are up all day and night, playing guitars and drinking beer in the parking lot. There seems to be an ever-expanding hive; there is always at least five or six of them outside, playing hackysack. At all hours. Sometimes I feel like some crotchety old man, terrified of the "youth movement" of the 70s: sometimes I just want to lean out the window and scream, "What, you fucking dirtheads, does hackysack pay the rent? At least they had to bring in helicopters at the National Convention in Chicago, 68! What the fuck are you doing? Get the fuck out of my sight!" They are loud, they leave garbage everywhere and, well, they're hippies. But at the least, Rockabilly is gone. Rockabilly was a viper and these kids are gnats. Rockabilly was mean, these kids may actually be pretty good-hearted. So maybe things are looking up a bit after all, who knows. Maybe that's just me trying to look on the bright side of things.

But the kid's name is Alex. I found that out a few days ago. Maya was going out and I was smoking on the stoop. The kid was down there with a remote control car, driving it around the parking lot. He just looked up at me and said hi. The unabashedness of kids, man, it just spears me. They say hi to neighbors. They ask dudes on the bus why they don't have legs. It's a fine line between inquisitiveness and cruelty, and some kids can be unbelievably cruel. But like I've mentioned earlier or elsewhere, I'm a firm believer that kids that live in fear of the rough hands of fathers or mothers, hands that reach out seemingly because of nothing with a slap or punch or cuff, kids that live in fear of voices raising to terrifying levels if they fail to be in that ever-elusive safety-zone of a calm, quiet house, those kids face a fork in the roads of their lives. And they will eventually turn one way or the other. They themselves will grow up with that anger, that lightning-quick

capacity to rage, that contempt for the people around them, the ones enmeshed in their lives, they will hold nothing but contempt and bitterness for the world that has seemingly failed them, or they will stumble their way down the road of compassion, of empathy.

I fight that anger inside myself all the time, trying to tread down that other path the best I can. Which is usually poorly. But the kid, he seemed to already be walking down that road well himself. You can tell a lot about kids just by hanging out with them for five minutes. You can tell if they're assholes, if they're extroverted, how independent they are and oftentimes, how kind.

He just said hi and then asked me if I wanted to drive his car. I passed on it but still stood there, smoking. Apparently, this meant that a performance of the RC car's abilities was in order. He started driving it under cars in the parking lot and laughing his ass off when it came out the other side, driving it off curbs, down the stairs. Out of the blue he points at their car, that great blue-and-rust Detroit sedan that is eternally parked next to Maya's car, the one that the sunflower rested on last summer. "Tonight," he said, "we're going in the car. We most of the time can't afford the gas. I've only driven in it three or four times, or maybe twice." Again, I thought of the openness of kids, their vulnerability, their forthrightness. How in a few years he'll begin to notice things like *rich* and *poor* and how he and his mom will probably still be down on these lower rungs, down here where much of the world lives and very few want to, and how within those few years he'll probably become too ashamed to say something like that. But right now, it is evening right on the edge of summer, it is a fine bright evening and he's just a *kid*, he's showing off his toy to the neighbors. Maya comes downstairs, ready to go out somewhere and stops for a minute while he shows her all the cool things the car can do. We *ooh* and *aaah* appropriately. He runs up to the second floor apartment foyer and places the car at the top step. Then he runs down next to Maya and I and says, in all the earnestness that a six year-old can muster, "I hope to God it doesn't wreck." It does, rolling and tumbling down the stairs, much to his delight, finally coming to rest right side up at the bottom of the landing.



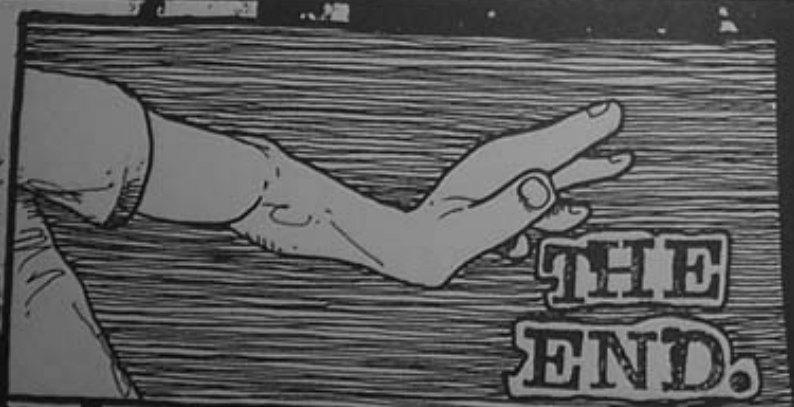


His mom comes out then, thin and young, all in black, with wrinkles already starting to line her face. "Oh God, I thought that was *him* falling down," she says, embarrassed. I look at her and wonder if she knows how thin these walls are, how much we know about her life. *You could have been my mother twenty years ago, goddamn.* I think. Then a man comes out of their apartment, *another* huge man with tattoos running up and down those big arms, but this one, he puts a smoke in his mouth and he's got glasses and asks her quietly, "Is he OK?" She nods and says, "It was the car." He goes back inside and I think of those strong arms, those arms and the hands at the end, one big man against one little kid. Hoping he is a brother or, if he is a lover, that he's at least a kind one, not another carbon copy of the frightening piece of shit that came before him. I stand there, wondering if we're all fucked, if we're all locked in patterns that are impossible to move out of, patterns that will hurt us and ruin us and maybe ultimately kill us. How men like Rockabilly are all too common, men doing a half-assed, terrible and hurtful job at raising little boys that will probably turn into men just like them. A circle inside of a circle inside of a circle. Wondering what that kid's life is like now that the apartment downstairs is quiet, wondering if things are any better now, any different. Wondering how a mother can want so much to do well and continually find herself immersed in this cycle of terror. Wondering how much of my father's son I really am, wondering how much my own voice resonates with that anger that accelerates at the drop of a dime, lightning-quick. Understanding that sometimes we must only do what we can with what we have, that life marks us, that in many ways, we may always be assholes, despite our best attempts, our shame, our vows to never ever. How things are the way they are, and that that isn't alright, not at all, but it's the way it is.

But that kid's laughter is beautiful, high and quiet and there is a lot of it as Maya and I and his mother stand out there in the parking lot with him. How ghosts can live in the halls of your memory, and how they can live in your hands. Just looking at him and I see the ghost of my father, the ghost of myself twenty years past. And how I understand that I am as good a man as I can be, riddled with faults but full of passion, full of empathy, trying my best to continually move away from the cold life, to never reach out to weaker people with hard words or hard hands.

Alex's mother leans against the wall and smokes while Maya and I watch him show off his car some more, the kid is thrilled when Maya asks if she can try it. He holds out the remote to her and points at the appropriate buttons. "This one's turn, this one's backwards, this one's go." Maya drives it around and almost immediately gets it lodged against the wheel of a car. "Geez, it's really hard to do," she says. He nods and looks up at her and says, "Yes, it is."

and that's it.



# CREDITS:

**AVOW #1:** Justin Jobst did the illustration on the cover.

**AVOW #2:** Nathan Beaty helped me do the cover, including the misspelling of Kathleen Hanna's name. Neither one of us spotted the error at the time, and I don't even think I saw it until I'd printed a bunch of copies. Proofreading, what's that? Nathan also did the layout of the interview.

**AVOW #3:** Justin Jobst and I did the cover together.

**AVOW #4:** Joe Jackson did the illustration of the two guys.

**AVOW #5:** Cover photo originally taken by Scott Bice.

**AVOW #6:** Robert L. Penick wrote "Mia Zapata." Jon Davidson did the drawing of the guy in the Black Flag shirt.

**AVOW #7:** Robert L. Penick wrote "Erraticism." Nathan Beaty wrote "Small & Passing." Michael Kriesel comes in with two untitled poems from his chapbook, *Long Dark*.

**AVOW #8:** Alex Arnsdorf, Jenna Delorey, Robert L. Penick and Theo Witsell all contributed columns. Nathan Beaty let me use a couple drawings. Mike Delach wrote the "To You" piece.

**AVOW #9:** Alex Arnsdorf helped me come up with ideas for the "Punk Heroes, Punk Villains" section.

**AVOW #10:** Mike Delach designed and printed the cover. The sections of drawings that run alongside the stories are taken from the drawings of Nathan Beaty. Scott Bice got amped on coffee and helped me come up with the "Pat & Froggy" stuff.

**AVOW #13:** "V Is For Visions" photo taken by Nina.

**AVOW #14:** "The Masturbation Experiment!" by Scott Bice and Nathan Beaty. Mike Ott wrote "A Million Miles Away" and did his own layout. Vincent Romano wrote "Courage & Heroism In The Blood Cult." Alex Dunk & Piss wrote and illustrated "Having A Crazy Brother." Steve Gevurtz wrote "Sleep Away." Jeremy Gilpin wrote "Just Don't End Up Like A Dog That's Been Beat Too Much." Mike Delach wrote "200,000 Liras" and did his own layout. Nathan Beaty wrote and illustrated "Eternal Servant Wanted."

**AVOW #15:** Photos of Scott and Nathan on back page taken by Scott and Nathan, respectively.

**COVER:** Vast computer help by Scott Bice. Cover photo taken by Nina. All other misspellings, stick figures, fucked-up margins, bad words, repetitive themes and transparent attempts at humor by me, Keith.

W. Delach, m, aby, n ed  
A lot of people have helped out over the years.

Regardless of the roads we've found ourselves on, these are the folks that've helped the zine become the beautiful mess that it is today.

# SO, THANKS:

Troy Malish (for having the guts or foresight or belief in the written word to take this project on), Maya, Nathan Beaty, Scott, Alex Arnsdorf, Otis, Jeremy Gilpin, Mike Delach, Rory Aby, Murf, Sal, Eli, Justin Jobst, all at Heartattack, Joe Verrilli, Submission Hold, Jeanette, Kevin & Kathy, Justin Jobst, Avis & Al, Tyson, Dave, Lloyd & Karri, Larry, Jen Angel, Theo Witsell, Mary Chamberlin, Clare Xuereb, Bob Penick, Adam Camp, Margot, Ian Griffin, Robert Bell, all the contributors over the years, Vincent Romano, Jonathan Abort!, Joe Biel, Joe Jackson, Dave Roche, James & Sarah, Nick Clements and his failed experiment and Carmen, Aaron & Maria.

This one's for my mom, who, once she realized the Dead Kennedys weren't Satanists, has been behind this endeavor one hundred percent throughout the years.



See you around.





FORK IN THE ROAD PRESS

ISBN 0-9726967-4-1