10-Year Anniversary Retrospective!


by Austin Rich
March, 2003

Created by, Edited by, Saved over the last 10 Years for no apparent reason by, Compiled into this collection by, Collected so it could thusly be compiled by, & Otherwise Ripped From The Mind Of

Austin “Text Heavy” Rich
(under great duress and finished at the last possible minute, mind you, but for your enjoyment so be very, very thankful)

Reprinting material that was originally found in:

Lion’s Roar School Paper (Volume 51, Issues #2 - #5); Gosh, This Is Neat Stuff To Read;
GGHS Creative Writing Classes 1993 Literary Magazine; Bob’s Imagination #1 – 4;
Bob’s Annex #1 – 3; The Wordsmith (October 1992, January 1993); A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. I.t.’s.
N.o.t. J.u.s.t. A. W.o.r.d. A.n.y.m.o.r. #1 – 7; Denali #2 (Winter 1994, Volume XVII);
Trauma #1; L.S.D. #1 – 2; I’d Buy That For A Dollar #1 – 17;
Dollar Ramen Whore; Mall; Cigarette

...and some other stuff... some of which has never seen print before!

Cover photo by Shoshana Cohen, circa 2001. Back Cover image courtesy of NifleyCo™

For copies of this collection, back issues, and other A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. goodies, write to:

A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. Publishing
8137 N. Willamette Blvd.
Portland, OR, 97203

(or):

austinrich@gmail.com * acronyminc.org

_____ of 100

Second Printing

The minutia: This collection of material © 2003 A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. I.t.’s. N.o.t. J.u.s.t. A. W.o.r.d. A.n.y.m.o.r.
Publishing. That means these were written by me, or created by me, or came from me at some point or another and were
later recorded by my own hands for my own purposes. Please, I beggeth you, do not reproduce any of the following text
without my permission. That’s just the way I am about that kind of thing... nothing personal, I swear.
Family:
Craig (Dad); Marti (Mom); Buck, Kyle & Karly (brothers & sister); Mernie (step-mom); Stacie, Jamie, Tony, Jessie & Katya (step-siblings); Grandma Mary; Grandpa Chet (we all miss you); Grandma Martin; everyone else on all sides of the family that I’m related to that I don’t generally get to see very often. (You are all thought of regularly, even if I don’t call or write. I swear.)

CGHS era:
Justin Anderson (one of the few people who has been there since the beginning); Devin Miller (1/3 of the 3 Amigos, and a long-since missed friend in the years since); Melissa Cooper (locator of old A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. relics long since thought lost, and holder of infinite patience when it comes to all the times I’ve written about her); Steve Eller (for being instrumental in getting all of this started, and for being a total and complete f**k in the years since); Heidi Gunter (look... there’s her name again!); and the Bob’s Imagination & Bob’s Annex contributors (a comprehensive list would be fairly exhausting... look for the soon-to-be-compiled collections of those publication runs in the not-too-distant future).

A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. It’s Not Just A Word. Any.mor... contributors (see above parenthetical note).

Cathead:
Kiisu D’alyss (a general... I mean all around weird guy);
Colin Hicks (Syd Louise / original designer of the I’d Buy That For A Dollar! Logo and current bass player for Sawyer Family);
Todd (Dogfish Rainville / drummer & drug-consumption companion); Bertha (Kiisu’s bass, RIP);
Charles Forteske Smite (my bass, still in action and working like a voodoo charm); D’Jesus In The Box (Brian Cochrane... roommate... Webmaster... Devo fan...);
Douglas D. Dougtophelous (Colin’s guitar... the “D” stands for Doug);
Earl / The Church of Blasphumphus (Not Jesus) (inspiration, perspiration, & general spiritual guidance though dark, dark times [generally speaking]);
Harold (more inspiration... unfortunately no longer with us... Rest In Peace, good buddy);
Icky’s Teahouse (venue that housed [far too] many under-attended shows);
Lyra Cyst (bass player for four days, including no practices & one song at one show... also the editor of Plasma Where; currently Lyra is on leave in Eugene and sorely missed);
Peete The Junky Duck (will be in band for drugs);
Scratchy The Raving Derlict (a good friend of Harold’s and part time keyboard player for us);
Spike (bass player for 1 day which included 1 show where Colin attempted to nail her, not being deterred in the least bit that she was a lesbian and a speed freak);
Wayne Mewn (world-famous lounge singer who graced our earlier recordings with his beautiful trumpet playing and orchestral vocals... aka “Sierra”, editor of Ramen City U.S.A., currently in the Peace Corp and also sorely missed).

Eugene Crew:
Mondale Chris (in general); Wel-ton Unit, 2003 Series for the booze consumption algorithms and the Misanthropic Rage If/Then functions; The Kelly Experience (Keep on Rockin’ In The Free World!); GyrlX (another generally great girl and editor [generally speaking] of GyrlXPresentz!); Abba; Cori; Libby; Lorna Doom; Damien; Jesse Ransom Jesse Ransom; Shawn Mediastab; Honey Vizer; House of Records (Teacher, Mother, Secret Lover); Local Bands, Local Bookstore Crew (especially the store manager) who didn’t get on my nerves and piss me off; I’d Buy That For A Dollar! contributors (see above parenthetical note); etc.

PDX C.I.P.:
The Defense Lawyer (for too many reasons to go into here, most of which involve music, shows & booze in some way or another); Aaron & Geoghecy; Teresa; Steve Koriagin (for all the comics, movies, cigarettes, coffee & booze);
Judy Baumann (Printmaker, Karaoke fan & all-around rock star, generally speaking);
Katie Anderson (editor, friend & confidant); Design Pirate (for invaluable work on IBITFAS #17 and general awesomeness); Sarah & Bas for major edits, suggestions, and general helpfulness on this collection; Tyler & Jenn (the sun is a cookie, isn’t it?); Local Bookstore Crew who also didn’t piss me off too badly).

Influential Bands, Authors & ‘Zines (without which my writing wouldn’t exist... presented in no particular order):
...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead; Roky Erickson / 13th Floor Elevators; Jello Biafra; Devo; Dinosaur Jr.; Fantomas; Fastbacks; Flaming Lips; godheadSilo; Hum; Hanson Brothers; Daniel Johnston; King Missile (all three incarnations); Germs; Misfits; Mr. Bungle; Motorhead; MX-80; Nation Of Ulysses; Negativland; Nirvana; Mr. T Experience; Pixies; Pinhead Gunpowder; Reload; Jonathan Richman; Shellac; Sonic Youth; They Might Be Giants; Unwound; Tom Waits; Ween; Weezer; X-Ray Spex; Ramones; The Rentals; Mondale; The Wipers / Greg Sage; Howard Zinn; Douglas Adams (RIP); Lester Bangs; Richard Meltzer; Cometbus; Dishwasher; Doris; Germ Of Youth; Ramen City USA (single best ‘zine written, period); Nicole Panter; Exene Cervenko; Oswald 5-0; The Stooges; Big Black; Husker Du; Drive Like Jehu; Nomeansno; Murder City Devils; I’m sure I’m missing a lot here... sorry.

But Wait:
Friends; Ex-Girlfriends; Ex-Friends in general; (here we go again): Generals generating gardening goofiness while gyrating genitalia in my general direction; Ex-Band mates; Jobs; Former Jobs; Apartments; Former Apartments; Generals (generally).

and you, for putting up with this crap for 10 solid years (I hope to god I didn’t leave anyone out...).

(That’s it... I’m taking a break, and that’s final!)

For those of you in the reading audience with rudimentary clerical skills, basic spelling & grammar check knowledge, and a sharp eye for continuity errors and / or fact checking, feel free to report any and all mistakes to austinrich@gmail.com You will receive credit in future printings and will be doing this publication a great service... thanks!.
A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. Publishing 10-Year Retrospective: An Introduction
by Mondale Chris

A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. Publishing is the literary equivalent of a hardcore prog rock record collection. The stripped down, poppy blues progressions of the original rock n' roll went through a series of mutations in the 1950s and 1960s to emerge on the other side battered, mangled, and full of drugs. As the heyday of acid rock faded in the damaged, short-term memories of its victims, a mighty new rock form was born of its ashes. Yes, King Crimson, later-period Pink Floyd, early Genesis, and other juggernauts of the genre seized control and directed rock towards its ultimate destination: individual songs that took up half of an entire album. Prog rock introduced the guitar solo without end. It took the vague mythical dabblings of acid rock and expanded on them, bringing the public song after song of Tolkien-obsessed faerie worship. The prog rock universe was populated with unicorns, gryphons, dragons, keyboards, and cocaine. Vanloads of long-haired high school dropouts traversed the American landscape, taking bong hit after bong hit in their quest to understand prog rock lyrics. More to the point, A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. is like the greatest of those vans: a proud econoline beast, air-brushed to perfection and equipped with shag carpet and a built-in hookah in the back.

The founder and CEO of A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. Publishing is Austin Rich. I've been close friends with Austin for some 6 years now. In that time I've seen him stave off buyout attempts from AT&T, Microsoft, and General Mills. He's weathered congressional hearings and endured two grueling years in a Siberian gulag from which he escaped only with the aid of his Mongolian interpreter, Yuk. Austin is not your normal zinester, hiding in his room downloading porn and worshipping Satan. Austin lives a life of romance, a life of violent poetry that few could survive for more than two or three weeks, tops. When life has rendered unto him its bittersweet nectar of experience, he drinks deeply of its draughts and then brings the resulting wisdom to the pages of the very magazine you now hold.

Picture yourself in the mighty econoline van, blasting across the high desert. You are a hitchhiker and the van's driver is the most attractive van owner you have ever seen. You lie back on the beanbag in the back and take a hit from the water pipe. Then the music starts... the most transcendental 8-track music you could ever imagine washes over you as the hit starts to take effect. Bathed in the light of the lava lamps, the hot van owner steps on the accelerator and the van launches over a crest in the road through the air... all of life's intertwined contradictions unravel before your mind's eye as the van takes flight.

That ethereal music is A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. That van hottie is Austin Rich. I leave you in his capable hands.

— Mondale Chris, December 2002

Aside from his work leading the Walter Mondale re-election campaign for the last 15 years, along with what little information one can gather from the multitude of novels, dissertations, screen appearances and stand-up routines that are attributed to Mondale Chris, little else is known about the enigmatic (and possibly alien) entity. It has been rumored that he once climbed Mount Everest using only a pocket knife and a Ho Ho, and when put to the test can go for 30 days solid without food and water. An occasional contributor to A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. publications, Chris has also been known to make charitable donations to the, "Colostomy Bag Recyclers Association," as well as, "The Ann Arbor, Michigan Porno Distribution Society." A big game hunter, he has bagged Lions, Tigers, Bears, Sloths & Raccoons on every known continent, and has also found time to author his own magazines (most notably George, Zippo, Cigar Aficionado & Heavnos Rancheros). A talented musician, Chris has performed in many live bands (Including The Varicoasters, Mondale, Aerosmith, Tones on Tail, The Roots & Satan Brigade). His turn ons include head-shavings, burned CDs, Ninjas, Monkeys, Metal, Linux and Moustaches. Turn offs include poseurs, cheap dates, bad hand-jobs & low-gas mileage. In the six years he's known Austin he has not once mocked him for forcing his 'zine upon hot girls, nor ridiculed him for his IZOD tattoo the way said girls invariably have. He also plays one hell of a Cleric.
And Now A Word From Lyra Cyst, Author Of Plasma Whore:

I met Austin in late 1993 while we were both going to Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon. Back in those days, LCC was the meeting spot for all the weird, smart people in town. We all hung around one table smoking, talking trash, trying to hit on one another, and skipping many of our classes in favor of drugs, nookie, or other unwholesome persuasions.

When I met Austin he had big hair, a denim jacket with things written in puffy paint on it, and a zine. He was the first person I knew who had a zine, in fact. Poor Austin ended up being de-virginized by this scary girl I knew, and from then on, he was one of the family. This was a very incestuous family, by the way. Austin ended up being around for some of the infamous points in my life that I like to write about, or corner people at parties and tell them about. Austin was around for the unbridled insanity of The 19th Street House (circa 1994-95, not the newer one) including, but not limited to, the two crusty punks of ill repute and She Broke My Life.

Then, me and Austin started having sex (his hair had gotten better and he'd lost that god-awful jacket). It wasn't very often, but every once in a while we'd fall into bed and do that thing. In fact, I was the one who taught him the doggie style position. To this day, we still talk about fucking each other when we want to make our friends uncomfortable. It works!!! As I'm sure many who are reading this now are feeling quite uncomfortable. "Hey Lyra!!!" ... "Yeah Austin???" ... "Remember that time we had sex ???" ... "Oh, Yeah!!! That was pretty cool!!!" ... "Sure was!!!"

And then... there was Blitzhaus. Me and my fuck-thing at the time actually got Blitzhaus, and recruited Austin to move in. Six months later, me and my fuck-thing were gone, and Austin was ruling the house with an iron fist. At the time, I was pissed cuz I wasn't being given my rightful propz as matriarch, but now I'm glad everything turned out the way it did. Austin had finally ascended to the point where he belonged, overseeing a neat little scene from a shitty little bedroom that didn't have working wall fixtures. Blitzhaus will always be the stuff of legend for some people, and it would have been just another party house without Austin.

Let me tell you... It can be hard to be my friend. Between dangerous drunken mood swings, abnormal hormones, and suicide attempts... not a lot of people stick with me. One thing I can say is that Austin has always been there for me. Sure, we fight like siblings, but that's because we are siblings in a way. We kinda grew up with each other. And to this day, Austin still does his best to do right by me.

Which leads me to the zine. Like I said, Austin's had a zine ever since I first met him, and the thing that always impressed me was that he stuck with it. Not only did he stick with it, he worked shit, terrible, awful jobs just to have money to put it out when it was ready to come out. He really was the first zinester I had ever known. And when my life got hella shitty, he encouraged me to start Plasma Whore**. Ever since I started my zine, Austin has been right there for me, spreading the word, giving me propz, and building my zine up so that a few people actually read it. I firmly believe that zines are the best form of therapy / sanity maintenance, and I would either be dead or locked up if I hadn't started Plasma Whore when I did. So... in a way I owe Austin my life. That being said, I'd like to tell some really funny stories about him.

So me and Austin had just got done drinking at the bar in Eugene. I had spent at least an hour putting on my make up and choosing my clothes in hopes of luring an unsuspecting gas station punk boy back to my place for some boot knockin. AUSTIN on the other hand, had simply slipped into the world's ugliest pants (pink and orange plaid late 70's cut polyester) and drank a bottle of Old Crow. We're in Safeway and some "cute" alterna-girl walks up to Austin and gives him "The Look". She says, "Ooohh... I like your style." And she was SERIOUS!!! HAH!!! Ruca needed glasses!!! I yelled at him the whole way home.

This one time Austin was drunk at Blitzhaus. He was so drunk, in fact, that he was walking around the living room, ranting and raving in particular, with his pants down around his ankles, his cock slipping out the fly of his boxers. I was a little bit worried, cuz I rarely saw him so drunk, so I tried to get him to lay down. He proceeded to yell at me that he was in control of his own life, and he didn't need me "patronizing" him. Then, he threw up all over his boots***.

It was high summer, and the temp was hovering around 100 degrees. Austin had chosen this occasion to wear the world's shortest shorts (more like hot pants, really) and drink beer all day. If you know Austin personally, please picture him stumbling around in short shorts with beer in his hand, getting more and more drunken-macho as the afternoon progresses. That in itself is funny because, as we all know, Austin is the most emo-boy the world has ever emo'd. The apex of this spectacle was when Austin fell out of a chair and bellowed, "Where's my woman at!!!" like some Marb-smoking, gun polishing, bud drinkin redneck. HA HA HA!!! I'm cracking up just THINKING about it!!! (The best part is that his girlfriend at the time was hella psycho, she was 279% more macho then he was.)

So that's that. Happy 10th birthday A.C.R.O.N.YM. Publishing. If you were human, I'd take you to an all ages show and then out for your first cup of real coffee afterwards. And let's hear it for Austin, who cares more about his zine then most of the people in his life. That's a joke, okay?

- 11/16/02 Lyra Cyst author of "Plasma Whore" Plug Plug

* Actually, I still have it, though it's ripped, missing one bottom, and the puffy paint is mostly faded... but I do have it.
** In fact, the name "Plasma Whore" came from an article she wrote for I'd Buy That For A Dollar! #5.
*** I don't remember puking on my boots. The rest, however, is probably true.

Between having great sex with the Author (and other ex-members of Cathead), Lyra Cyst is the publisher of Plasma Whore (available through this fine publication and elsewhere), as well as an occasional contributor to I'd Buy That For A Dollar! In the past she has also played bass for Cathead (for a total of three days) and is the co-creator of the comic book Rock Stars For Roommates (along with, you guessed it, Austin Rich). And for the record: she's got really nice boobs, too.
I’d Buy That For A Denar!

I can remember the first time I’d met Cody. Kiisu had been talking about him for a while. I suppose it was the cowboy name, “Cody” makes me think of Levi Jackets w/ the sheep-fur collars, shaggy hair, bongs sitting on top of college sophomore biology books, but no. He met Kiisu & I at Allunn Bros. in Eugene (back when you could sit there for 45 minutes and see everybody you know pass through the doors) wearing a trenchcoat and a quilted welder’s cap, and carrying a battered briefcase filled with god knows what. Looking as eager as a nineteen-year-old vacuum cleaner salesman at his first day of work, he was full of funny stories back then — like the moral thief who would only pick-pocket exact change for a pack of Doritos while walking around the Circle-K. In those days he was part of some shadowy cabal that met every Monday at midnight at the Stonehenge fountain on the downtown mall to, “drop attached rabbit heads.” That wasn’t all they were dropping back in those days, but that’s another story.

The quilted welder’s hat has been swallowed by some dimensional crease along the way, the stories have metamorphosed to reflect our friend’s ongoing struggles to come to terms w/ the feminine psyche. But he’s still writing, still going out of his way to print & distribute them, often for a lot less that the dollar they’re supposedly going for. If’ zines were Titoism, Cody (or Austin as his PRINTED SELF begs to be called — more cowboy toned!) would be high up in some ministry for his unblemished zeal. That’s saying a lot for a “scene” that almost prides itself on it’s self-destructive irony.

Enough of the nostalgia parade & mortibund encomiae, it’s time to test your Cody knowledge!

1.) Cappuccino Hallucinations are:
   a.) The first warning sign of “coffee pants”
   b.) A typical Eugene affliction
   c.) A product marketed by Red Bull
   d.) Cody’s first “almost band”

2.) Cody’s oldest little brother is named:
   a.) Brando
   b.) Buck
   c.) Boris
   d.) Bronco

3.) In March of 1995, Cody was living at
   a.) the basement at W. 46th off Blair
   b.) Little Jon’s
   c.) 314 & Willamette
   d.) yo mama’s

4.) Cody’s teddy bear is named:
   a.) Jasper
   b.) Conrad Kiely
   c.) Daniel
   d.) Franklin

5.) Cody’s Blasphumphus number is:
   a.) 5
   b.) 3
   c.) Duck
   d.) Pi

6.) Cody’s favorite Unwound song is:
   a.) “For Your Entertainment”
   b.) “Stuck In The Middle Of Nowhere Again”
   c.) “Slumbering Block”
   d.) “Look A Ghost”

7.) KARP! No! I mean like holy fucking shit... KARP! Arrrggh! Fuck!

8.) Cody’s favorite holiday is:
   a.) Arbor Day
   b.) International Daniel Johnston Day
   c.) Secretary’s Day (it’s his office supply fetish...)
   d.) Daylight Savings Time Day (in the fall when you gain an hour)

9.) Cody banks at:
   a.) Wells Fargo
   b.) Bank of America
   c.) South Umpqua
   d.) yo mama

10.) Which of the following is NOT a Cody acid trip?
    a.) The “My Girlfriend And I Are Piloting A Spaceship” Trip
    b.) The “Lemonhead” Trip
    c.) The “E.T. Finger” Trip
    d.) The “Lost In WWII France” Trip

Extra Credit: What’s Cody’s Chinese horoscope?

SCORE:
33 - 40: You are probably already on the editorial committee on “The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Cody Studies” and are passing the time waiting for your next fat research stipend by researching Early Bronze-Era Cody Tool Usage. Bravo!
24 - 32: While you have a secure enough grasp of the general form & content of Cody Studies, you rely too much on secondary & tertiary sources, received information, hear say & Cliff Notes. Personal research is to be urged.
15 - 23: While you are not the Highlander II: The Quickening equivalent of a Friend of Cody, you’re no Conan The Barbarian either. Learn what is best in life, and try again.
00 - 14: Cody? What’s that? I was wiping my ass with this...

The Ramen City Kid manifests himself from time to time to lay waste on the minds of those who reside in the Portland / Eugene Halway of the Pacific Northwest. When he is not busy wresting with the knowledge of long-forgotten records or languages, he is doing the same with hot Eastern European soldiers who have degrees in both astro-physics and The Meions. His writings have created mass-hysteria among Professors at most colleges, the text of which cuts right the heart of all important matters in the world with style and grace, while never sacrificing continuity, clarity, and erotic content. Many schools now have programs of his teachings, all of which involve eating a lot of spaghetti, drinking a bottle of wine and owning rats (musty books written in languages your friends can’t read are optional). Currently he is working on several novels and has disappeared to a remote location of the world only accessible through a treacherous mountain pass guarded by a Minotaur and several gelatinous cubes. Until his return, back issues of Ramen City, U.S.A. may or may not be available via this address for the truly virtuous and pure of heart and. Oh, and his stuffed animal’s name is Bee Bee.
A Note about the Content

Most of the Content in this publication is culled from a variety of very different (previously published) sources. For the most part, I have stated if something has been changed in the slightest bit to reflect a different or new version of the text from that which was originally printed, “back in the day.” It would be far too easy for me to correct the foibles of the past with the clear 20-20 Hindsight of the present, and would more or less defeat the entire purpose of a collection of this nature (that being an accurate representation of my writing over the last 10 years).

So, for the record: anything that is re-printed from a specific issue of some magazine has been unaltered save for spelling errors. You can safely assume that all of my publications are heavily peppered with numerous spelling errors of every kind and that I would like to finally prove to the world that I’ve been able to locate the “Spell Check” button on my computer all along. I just hadn’t bothered to do so just yet. (Please allow me this one concession and we’ll get along just fine.) All of the footnotes, introductions, and biographical information between reprinted pieces, however, were written with my Hindsight clearly focused on the past, and therefore I am taking the time to make sure every word is in its place for the sake of clarity (and for the sake of making me look cool). Any errors and poor writing you may find in those locations can then be reasonably attributed to my own ineptitude and my inability to locate dedicated (and free) editors.

Observant folk will notice two things: occasionally I am referred to as Cody, not Austin Rich. Such material is from the borderline period when I was still changing over my name (or from introductions written by people who should know the value of a changed name and leave well enough alone). For the sake of historical accuracy, I have left any material where I’m referred to as “Cody” unchanged. (Yes, my real name is Cody. Austin is my middle name, and I’ve always liked it better for as long as I can remember. However, some people can’t take a hint.)

You’ll also notice that some of my early writing is, for lack of a better way to describe it, not that good. I make no apologies for the quality of something I wrote when I was 15 (or, for that matter, last week). If you did better at that age (or at any age in your 20s), I sure would like to see it before I let you mock me (which I will allow you to do once you hand over your “something better” for my reading pleasure). (And while I’m complaining: if you’re that good, how come you aren’t publishing novels instead of critiquing self-published ‘zine collections?)

And, before you even have a chance to ask, YES, it’s all true... for better or for worse in many cases. Sigh.

---

A Note about the Typeface

(directed Mostly At Design-Type People Who Are, No Doubt, Really Annoyed With Me, but Does Not Exclude People Who Just Have Strong Opinions about Typefaces In General.) (That Means You, Design Pirate.)

This collection, along with just about everything I’ve ever written, exclusively uses two widely available (and, in some opinions, over-used) fonts: Times New Roman & Courier New. Courier New is generally used when you see those ASCII Character Constructions at the beginning of most written pieces. (This harkens back to an age when you could still download those awful ASCII drawings that could be found on every BBS and newsgroup list that was around in the old days.) Of course, Courier New comes in really handy when you’re working on experimental text (see: Belgratnil Felg.*? in this collection) or when tackling non-linear poetry, something that was mastered by my good friend Mr. Kiisu D’salynn. (There, I mentioned you again... happy?) Times New Roman is used for the rest.

I have no real defense for this practice, and while I have been ridiculed for my font choices in the past, I will say that Time New Roman was, at one point, not the most common font found on computers! In fact, most Windows-based text programs used Arial as the default font setting for many years, which I could not stand after the first couple of times I used it. I thought I was being somewhat innovative by using Times New Roman instead, not realizing that it was common just about everywhere else. (The fact it was the font Nirvana used for their logo was admired when I made the connection, but was a coincidence... I swear.)

Since I’ve been partial to it as long as it’s been an option, this collection will be presented using Times New Roman (regardless of popular opinion toward the maligned & marginalized font).

But I also need to give a shout-out for my fixed-width font brothers in the house: Plain Text! Woo Hoo!

Thank you.
Ten Years?!?

That's gotta be a typo.
Let me see... the first issue of Bob's Imagination came out in March of... what year was it? That year I graduated... uhm... 1993. Yeah. That sounds right... so that would make it...

Oh... shit. 10 years.

Wow.

Where did the time go? I remember very vividly sitting in the Vintage Inn, drinking coffee, and discussing with my then-anonymous cohort (his name was Steve) what I wanted to do with this school publication that I had been given to edit. Then there was that second magazine I did (Bob's Annex)... then that third one (A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. I.t.'s N.o.t. J.u.s.t. A. W.o.r.d. A.n.y.m.o.r.)... and that brings me up to now (I'd Buy That For A Dollar!).

That can't be 10 years. Feels more like 10 days.

Some mornings I wake up, before the hangover starts to really pull a number on me, before I realize the alarm clock is beeping and I need to get ready for work – before all the mundanity of life sets in – and I think to myself, “Shit! I just graduated from High School... I better get off my ass and figure out what I’m gonna do with my life.” (Ha ha. I kill me.) The only part I really feel upset about is that this is what I’ve chosen to do... and only then because I just can’t seem to pound that fact into my head (that I have found something to do with my life, that is).

But sometimes I think about what could have been. In 10 years I could have finished college. I could have made a career for myself. I could have been a Dot.Com-er four of five times over, each time gaining and loosing a fortune for some bullshit website that allowed you to determine what floor wax flavored condom was right for you. I could have started a band that never makes any money and tours in a shitty van that breaks down all the time, traveling from state to state in some attempt to live out this romanticized vision of what I wished life was really like. I could have traveled, met people, and expanded my experiences beyond those of the great Pacific Northwest.

I could have been having a real life, essentially. The one everyone else has. The pre-college, post-graduation trip to Europe. Buying a car, getting married, buying a house, getting a job you hate, and taking Art-School Night Classes after work but before going to the gym. That could have been me. I was on that track. But really, there’s a 100 different places I could have ended up if I had wanted.

But here I am instead.

And frankly, I like it here. I’m sort of looking forward to that class reunion this summer. Everyone else will be locked into this horrible life with mortgage payments and kids and awful, awful jobs that make them want to abuse their partners... psychological mind games with therapists and whatnot. All of them, trapped in that same goddamn town I grew up in, the one I tried to escape, the one they never will be able to no matter how far away they say they’ve moved.

10 years. Shit, I guess that’s not really that much time. When all is said and done, it was when I wasn’t writing that made up those years. All the nights I spent drinking with my friends, all the shows I went to that I obsessively keep track of, all the records I bought and the books I read, all the shitty jobs I worked and the people I met and hung out with. All the girls that I dated. Shit, when I look at it that way, when did I find time to write this crap? Maybe it’s been 20 years and I just forgot the last anniversary...

The point is, when I look back at it and it makes me happy. I feel like I did something. and I can be proud of it and (for the most part) not get too embarrassed when I try to let other people see how I’ve passed the time. If this is the only thing that ever survives me – a slim collection of things I thought were not bad 10 years after the fact – then I’ll have made out pretty damn good compared to most.

Better, in fact. Most people would have done the smart thing and thrown it all away.

Now... where to begin...
Part I: The Early Years.

A quick Biography:
I was born in Mount Shasta, California (the city, not the mountain). That information alone seems to instantly change a lot of opinions of me once it’s leaked out. Yes, I’m Californian by birth... but it’s Northern California, so in most civilized people’s minds it’s a whole other state (and it should be, dammit!). Of course, when I would use that line on my old boss at The Bookstore, he would only snicker and say, “Yeah, that’s what my wife says, but she’s STILL Californian no matter how you slice it.” I guess it’s a fact that will haunt me my whole life. Being Californian does a no better job at explaining my shortcomings or neuroses and any of the following will, but it’s a good enough place to start and seems to do the trick for a lot of people. Still, It’s not my fault where I was born; it’s just the way it worked out for my parents.

I don’t know a lot about my early childhood. I have a very blochty memory of those years. I’m consistently surprised when my brother Kyle has very clear memories of stuff I’ve apparently forgotten. How is that possible? I’m older than him! But so it goes. I know we moved around a lot when I was a kid because my dad worked for Southern Pacific Railroad (SP for short) back when they were still a company. He often had to bounce around from place to place so he could be where the work was, and when it was logistically reasonable to do so, we’d follow. When we couldn’t, he’d be gone for most of the week, coming home for the weekends. We always looked forward to him getting back, and he was happy to see us. (No surprises there.)

I remember normal childhood stuff: camping in the summer, running around in the woods pretty much all of the time, my stuffed bear Jasper, and playing with my brothers & sister... that kind of stuff. Pretty forgettable in the long run. What really sticks out to me is how mundane it all was. I wasn’t exceptional or talented in any special way, nor was I overly stupid or inept. We were poor, but not too poor. Maybe lower-Middle Class... maybe better, maybe worse. I remember always being envious of other kids’ stuff while never quite being able to appreciate the things I did have as much as I should. (At least, not until years later.)

I wasn’t the greatest student early on (I know that much). School seemed like trouble, and I was uninterested in it on all levels. Not only did it disrupt my day – which I already had mapped out and could handle just fine on my own, thank you – but school only ever consisted of doing things I didn’t want to do. Listening, homework, writing, reading, math. All of this just didn’t really enter into what I felt should consist of an average day for myself. I remember arguing with nearly all my teachers about what I was and wasn’t willing to do, which probably led to a lot of parent/teacher conferences. I have a very vivid memory of taking worksheet assignments I was given and drawing huge Xs through them, while writing, “No,” at the top. This was supposed to convey to the teacher that I was uninterested in doing the work while not being “rude” about it. I’m sure it’s not too far off the track from what most kids do when they are trying desperately to figure out the world around them and how they fit in.

I start getting a better, or that is to say more continuous memory, from around 2nd Grade. This seems to also shock people when I tell them this. A lot of people I’ve met have such outstanding memories from their early years, but when I think back it’s just blank. I know I wasn’t abused, I know that nothing horrible or traumatic was going on. We weren’t on the run or living in a government compound. I just don’t remember. Maybe it’s all the acid and booze since then that makes me unable to recall such details, but I have vivid memories of not being able to remember my past very well... so it goes...

But prior to that year, we had lived in every small town in Northern California and Oregon that we could find (and some that we had to make up ourselves). Eventually we landed in Oakridge, Oregon when I was supposed to start school. I attended school there for years, through until I started 7th Grade. Again, nothing dramatic or exciting about those years. We moved within town a couple of times, and I remember having, for the first time in my life, actual friends. Or rather, kids that I hung out with outside of school, but if that isn’t a friend in those days then what is? I remember being in the school band (trombone). I wasn’t so bad that I stuck out at practice, but I was not good enough to get anyone’s attention (story of my life). The only real band performance I attended I intentionally not played quietly to not throw off the other kids.

I still hated school in just about every way, and I had lots of run-ins with bullies and kids who liked to pick on me (probably because I was carrying this huge, gawky and over-sized trombone case with me everywhere, since I couldn’t fit it in my locker). I theorize that, since it was pretty obvious I wasn’t happy, it was easy to upset me in those days. Bullies can sense that kind of thing. This only increased my disdain for the activity of school, since now I hated the kids there too. Catch-22; rinse, repeat. Worse than that, though, I hated knowing that five days a week I was stuck going through all these things I hated. I was an average student in an average small town and all I wanted to do, more than anything in the world, was escape it all.

While I did have my brother’s and sister, I remember playing by myself more than anything or anyone. Oakridge was a typical Oregon small town in that, in everyone’s backyard, there was a huge expanse of forest that led off in just about every direction (much like the kind depicted in Calvin & Hobbes cartoons). Sadly, I wasn’t interested in learning about the woods or animals or anything else that most solitary people become interested in. I just want to hang out in the woods. I always wanted a fort or a tree house but never had the inclination to build one (that would require learned how to do it first). For all of my desires they just never seemed to outweigh the impulse to be alone, doing my own thing. Mostly. I just made up games I could play by myself.

As a young child I never had imaginary friends, but the older I got the more I began to create new ones. I’ve detailed one of the games I used to play quite a bit in my story Childhood (which is included in this collection), but for the most part it wasn’t as much the imaginary friends as it was the imaginary me that really got me excited. I was always a spy, or from the future, or a ship's
captain in the past, or a small computer, or a creature that wasn’t even human in any way. I didn’t yet have comic books, and getting me to read was worse than pulling teeth. But what little Fantasy, Adventure & Science Fiction I could absorb from the TV was inspiration enough to keep me running around in the woods for years. While I did spend time with my brothers and my sister, it seemed to me that pretending to be someone else was what I really wanted to do.

Since the games were elaborate, and often required me to “play” in front of my family (like, at dinner), I had to work that into the games so it was easier to cope with for my family. Occasionally I would pretend that I was impersonating a child in a regular family, and child who knew all the things I was supposed to know, just so they wouldn’t get suspicious of what I was doing. This way, I could safely play these imaginary games well into my sophomore year in High School… perhaps even until I was Junior. It was much easier to do that than it was to try and explain to everyone that I was playing some imaginary game, which became harder and harder to do when I was 12, let alone as I got into High School. If it wasn’t for role playing games, I probably would have become one of those guys who spend a lot of time stroking his gun while listening to Art Bell.

Finally it happened; the bombshell that woke me up and dropped me off in the real world: My parents got divorced. To say the least, it shocked me quite a bit; I didn’t see it coming at all. I was in 7th Grade, still no better or worse than your average kid, very susceptible to guilt but never quite as guilty as I felt (or could have been), and more or less oblivious to the world around me. My games were just about the only thing I put any amount of energy into, and suddenly I had to ignore them and pay very close attention to what was going on with my family around me. I hated it. Later I would realize that it was a pretty standard divorce, with nothing too incredibly unpredictable or unusual about it: we had to pick who we were gonna stay with, my parents fought a lot, my dad got together with another woman, my mom did too, and eventually my mom decided they needed to move away to another town.

The aftermath of the divorce didn’t really sink in completely until the decision to move was announced. The fact that I still saw my mom often and that she lived across the tiny town of Oakridge meant that really she was never that far away. We spent time together, I saw my sister (who was staying with her), and while things were merely inconvenient from my point of view, it seemed to me that it was only a matter of time before we all became used to the arrangement. (I had this vision in my head that someday my dad’s new woman and my mom—who used to be a friends before hand—would eventually start acting like they used to, laughing and playing cards and getting stoned, and soon enough everyone would stop fighting and we could go back to the way things were… or at least, I could.)

But the announcement of the move meant permanent, serious change was about to happen. But that was something that didn’t set to well with me. Eventually I was asked where I wanted to live during all of this, and I immediately defaulted to staying in Oakridge. It made sense to me to stay in a place that I’d been for a while, since there was comfort in things I was familiar with. I imagine that, though I was not aware of it, that I was probably grasping tightly to Oakridge like a security blanket, trying to find a way to make all this drama pass that much easier.

The first pangs of missing my mom hit me when more trouble began brewing at school. Bullies tormented me, and I was still not happy with the entire “school” concept. My stepfamily made the transition all the more difficult. Having five new stepsiblings meant that this “comfortable” environment was anything but. No matter how much I felt I’d made the right choice, the reality of the situation was all too clear: if I had chosen to stay because Oakridge was comfortable and familiar, then I was wrong in thinking that I had comfort going to a school I hated, or familiarity in a completely new family. I cried and sobbed and was probably not that much fun to deal with for my Dad, until finally I asked if it was too late to move with my mom. Phone calls were made, arrangements were planned, and soon enough I was in a new room, in a new house, in the new town of Cottage Grove.

I started school part way into my 7th Grade year, and immediately became the focus of attention from bullies and people who liked to tease new kids. This “New Kid” syndrome would never fully wear off; Cottage Grove was a small town, and the social circles had been engineered and developed from Kindergarten. Not only had these kids known each other since then, but they had no interest in outsiders mucking up their social order. The day I showed up for my first class I was instantly branded and spent the rest of my years at School trying to find ways around it. Making friends was a Herculean effort; keeping them was even harder. It never helped that I was introverted and, for the most part, more interested in spending time by myself than talking to the people around me. For all the “difference” that Cottage Grove was at first, it soon became just like anywhere else.

Regardless of this difficulty, I was determined to make this new situation work. I had made the decision to move and I needed to ride out this new life, for better or for worse. Getting beat up was a moot point; social ineptness was no longer something I could hide behind. I was on my own, and scared shitless.

Time passed.

Part II: How I Decided To Make Writing My Hobby (And Related / Connected Incidents).

Personally, I blame women.

But I’m getting ahead of myself. There were other influences, too. There was the fact that in Jr. High & high school I discovered Science Fiction, but that in and of itself only really led to film. While I was convinced that someday I would write Sci-Fi
(where I got this idea, I don’t know), I didn’t read a lot of it myself. In fact getting me to read anything was like asking the sky to change colors. I instead opted to hang out in the backyard thinking about 2001: A Space Odyssey or Silent Running or whatever other flavor-of-the-week was. No, aside from Douglas Adams it wasn’t until my mom opened a bookstore that also sold Comic Books that I really got into reading. From that point on, I was a junkie, dropping every dollar I could get my hands on Green Lantern back issues so I could find out what happened next!

Comics affected and influenced me quite a bit in the following years. After there was no more homework, I could be caught reading the newest issues of Justice League, hoping that they would print my fan letter I’d written, wondering endlessly if so-and-so was ever going to reveal to their love-interest what their secret identity really was, etc. (I think it’s important for non-comics fans to realize that comics are all, on a very basic level, soap operas, and that is why long-lived titles have a lot of characters and love triangles and secret spouses, and also explains why people like me get hooked on them: because eventually the main character has a love interest and I myself was always looking for one too.)

To this day I still collect them, and I recommend them to anyone raising a kid who wants to try and get them to read. Comics are the gateway drug to books, I guarantee.

But aside from all of that, girls were the main drive behind it all. Seriously, I maintain it was their fault. They were always so cute and nice and pretty and unattainable. As soon as I noticed them, I spent every waking moment thinking about them, trying to work out in my head ways I could talk to them, and how I was going to reach that all-important first step: eye contact and a quick, “Hello.” God, it was dreadful. When I saw them, I panicked. I would purposely turn around and walk the other way in an attempt to avoid having them see me. I was convinced that the moment she made eye contact with me she would know exactly what I was thinking and it would all be over. There was nothing worse than the idle thoughts of a Jr. High School kid, and the idea of her finding out what I thought about (much less what I did the in privacy of my own bedroom) terrified me worse than any monster movie ever could. In my mind, she had all the power and I was doing everything to avoid being destroyed by her.

This was the daily battle I fought with myself between schoolwork, movies, & The Flash.

Finding a nitch in Cottage Grove turned out to be much easier than I thought: I would not have one. Sure, I eventually made friends, but I could never make that all-important connection with any specific group. I was never smart enough to hang out with the smart kids, but as time passed I found that I could get good grades like them and made a few friends that way. I managed to make some friends with the Sci-Fi kids based solely on my knowledge of Star Trek, but the fact that I was not with it concerning the books never won me over completely. I was by no means athletic, but when I took up Cross Country I found that I was mediocre enough to never come in last, which won me a little bit of respect from that direction. This did not prevent me from getting beat up in the least bit, and I was still a huge target for ridicule, physical punishment, and general mistreatment by a lot of the kids. I still didn’t really have any ambitions or desires as far as my life was concerned, but to me it didn’t really matter because I was a friend and discovered Comics and girls. Those were the only things I could think about and therefore were all that I wanted to have in my future until the end of time.

Kelly Hadley. How I came to have a crush on her is still a mystery to me, but I suspect it was because she reminded me (to a minor extent) of a girl who had always been pretty nice to me in Jr. High when I lived in Oakridge. (I say nice because she made fun of me less than most of the other kids, and I’m not making that up.) I first noticed Kelly in my history class (in typical Cottage Grove style, history was taught out of the Metal Shop room by the Metal Shop teacher, who loved sports analogies), and from then on was in love (or maybe it was the acetylene). I followed her around the school to find out what classes she had, and then timed my own travels in the hallways to correspond. I wrote her endless letters in my head until I thought I would explode. I believe my grades actually started slipping more than normal because of the distraction.

I really wanted to do something special for her, and I started thinking about things I was good at that might impress her. I had been told this story about how Isaac Asimov had written a short story to try and impress a female interviewer, and if what I had heard was true, then she might be impressed by something I had written. Until that point the few things I’d written were for school and while I was never too happy with having to do it, whenever I had put pen to paper I’d been complimented quite a bit. It seemed to be something I was good at. There was also this vague aspiration that someday I would write Sci-Fi, plus I loved to imagine all these stories in my spare time. I could probably come up with a decent story to write about if I spent some time on it, and everyone knows that nothing impresses women more than a fictional story about spies and Time Travel with a dedication to them on the first page.

At the beginning of the next school year I began work on this epic novel, with the idea that I would finish it for her by Christmas. I slaved over that story. I wrote about 10 pages. It felt like I’d written 100, and what little I did write was just as hard as 100 would have been. The holiday had already passed, and in place of the story, I mailed her a (late) hand-made card. My “impression,” lamby, had been made.

Nothing ever went anywhere with her. When she looked at me I shied away, and I instead decided to communicate with her via notes passed between classes. She always wrote back, but was overly polite, and never sounded interested. I eventually asked her if I could walk her home, and stumbled over my own words embarrassingly (in addition to my feet) until I finally parted ways with her to go home myself. Nervous and confused as to how I really felt, I finally just sent her a letter telling her I loved her, and she wrote back saying she thought I was nice but that she was not interested in boyfriends yet. She actually used the line, “I think I’m In Like With You,” from those stupid little statues they used to sell in the ’70’s. She just destroyed me when she said, “You must think a lot.” The truth was out: she thought I was weird and a “smart kid” and wanted nothing to do with me. My first heartbreak. I cried for days.
(Ironically, she was one of the Valedictorians in my Senior Year, someone who thinks far more than her classmates and is probably a lot smarter too. I rarely spoke to her again afterward because I was so shy.)

While I spent quite a lot of time after that reeling from the experience, it never put me off girls in the slightest bit. Every failure seemed to increase my desire to finally succeed. Kelly gave way to Emily, who I obsessed over for months before she laid down the law that there was nothing between us. She broke my heart worse than Kelly did, but the experience only elevated my desire to write about what had happened. (It was Emily, who ultimately ended up with a guy who was a real writer, who inspired me to start keeping my “super-depressing” and “dark” (in the words of friends who have seen it) Journal.) Working on whatever writing immediately needed my attention now became the central activity in my life (after Comics & thinking about girls), and soon enough a large portion of my attention was focused on it. I kept intricate lists of things I’d completed, projects I was working on, and piles and piles of notes about how everything connected to each other. I had this idea that everything I would write would interconnect and take place in the same world, mostly inspired by Comics and how all the titles under one publisher invariably occur in the same universe. It was only a matter of time before something started happening with it all.

**Part III: And So It Begins...**

I finally made the complete turnaround about school, English & writing when I took a class taught by Heidi Gunter. Aside from my interests and the fact that I was obviously a good student, I maintained my hatred for the institution of education to a ferocious degree. I had long ago defined who was friend and foe, and when I took her class I found myself surrounded by the enemy who wanted nothing more than to stab me with a pencil or trip me in the halls. Top that off she insisted that we all work in pairs and I hated partners in schoolwork almost more than school. It wasn’t long after the first couple of days in class that she and I had to meet afterward to discuss my negative behavior. Getting threats from bullies and being paired off with someone who didn’t like me was the real source of the problem, but I was unable to really express this to her in an effective way. Eventually I just asked if I could work alone, since I did so much better that way.

The solo writing assignments I turned in got her attention immediately, and she complimented me over and over again about my creativity and style. Of course, most of it was heavily influenced by Douglas Adams, so what I wrote ranged from information about a religion I invented (Harveyism, with the dedicated zipper god Gideon Sundback1), a description of the three cases in which I believed murder was acceptable (something to do with people who call “Trekkers” “Trekkies” and intergalactic assassins), and a short story about one of my few imaginary friends from the games I played in my spare time. Very silly stuff, but it was all very popular with her. Each assignment that received a good grade or a comment of praise cultivated a desire to continue to impress her, and I worked harder and harder until she suggested I take the creative writing classes our school offered as an elective (not taught by her, but you can’t win ‘em all, can you?).

I jumped at the chance, and it was through that class that I managed to get my first “published work”. The teacher, Rhonda Turnquist, put together some collections of student writing, in which I had a few things printed. Since she was also the same teacher that overlooked the school newspaper, it was only a matter of time before I was trying to get involved with that. While I technically needed to have taken a Journalism class before I could be on the Newspaper staff, she looked the other way when she noticed how enthusiastic I was about the opportunity. Before long, I was writing any story I was asked to, just excited about the idea of getting stuff I wrote in print.

But it wasn’t until I met Steve Eller that the ball really started to get rolling.

**Part IV: Bands.**

[Note: This section is a heavily edited, abridged, re-written & expanded version of the text that originally appeared in the “Company History” section on the current incarnation A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. website. (http://acronym.rockcmuseum.org/) Essentially, you’ll find a few sentences / paragraphs / lines that read similarly, which will explain any sensations of déjà vu (hopefully).]

Somewhat simultaneously to my new interests in writing, other stranger forces were also at work. Here’s a quick history lesson: Nevermind by Nirvana was released in 1991, and before that every radio station and media outlet that played music was pumping out stale and schlocky pop-rock à la Michael Jackson, Mariah Carey, etc., etc. Considering my parents were more into straight up rock music, we spent a lot of time listening to Classic Rock stations growing up. This was my bread and butter growing up. Sure, we would get doses of pop rock from the radio and MTV, but there was little in it that I enjoyed. My tape collection consisted of Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin & a heavy dose of The Doors. It was all I really enjoyed and, until late 1992, all I really listened to as well.

It wasn’t that I didn’t like music; quite the opposite, in fact. I spent a lot of time listening to those tapes. But I just didn’t grab me the way Comics did. There didn’t seem to be anything that I could sink my teeth into, and therefore it was just something I enjoyed rather than obsessed over. I will admit that I had just about every song by The Doors memorized, and

---

1 Gideon Sundback is a real historical figure, too. He was hired by the Universal Fastener Co. because of his design skills as an electrical engineer, and in December of 1913 he had finished the design for what we know as the modern zipper. (It’s true! Look it up!) I researched this for a fabricated religion, mind you. Ahhhh, to be 14...
I knew the writing of Jim Morrison far too well. But it never compared to the obsession I would later have for music post-Nevertida. I know it’s true and has been re-iterated thousands of times by hundreds of people, but that album really did change my life. The world began to divide into pro- and post-Nevertida, not just for me but for a lot of people. I still argue that I would have never found anything I listen to now if it weren’t for that album. I voraciously read everything I could find about Nirvana and it was their interviews that I first heard about Black Flag, The Ramones & The Sex Pistols, bands I would have never found on my own. When Kurt Cobain said the first punk album he bought was Sandinista! by The Clash, I started to wonder who this band was and what they sounded like. No matter how often you slice it, that album opened my mind to a lot of new music that I had never heard of before, and while there is no direct connection between, say, Nathaniel & Nirvana, if it wasn’t for Nirvana setting my ears in motion, I probably would have never cared by the time I came across Nevertida years later. I’m sure I’m not the only person with this story, but it’s one I always remember when I think about “Smells Like Teen Spirit”… or anything else relating to Nirvana for that matter.

In the long run, the outcome was the same: I went from having an interest in music to an obsession with it, and the other thing on my mind in those days was wanting to start a band. Fortunately I knew Damon Armitage who was on the same page as me.

Damon was also on the Cross Country team with me (a much better runner, though) and was also in the lot of the same College Prep classes that I was taking (a fact that was lost on me, being well aware that he was a year younger). I felt very insecure around Damon in high school, but no more than I was around just about anyone else. In the long run he was one of the nicer guys I knew in those horror-movie days, and since we had a fair amount of friends in common (and both loved music) it was enough to seal the bond between us, or at least enough for us to want to start a band together.

It seemed so innocent at the time; he and I would sit around and romanticize things like working on a Whaling Ships, fighting in the Civil War and joining a real crime organization (who knows why). It was only a matter of time before we came upon the idea to start a band. At first this had the effect that when Damon wrote poetry while listening to Guns ‘N’ Roses he could now say it was lyrics for our band, while for me this meant that when I would sit in my room and sing along to my tapes I started fantasizing that they were in my band instead of me singing in theirs. This was a huge step in a direction I was only dreaming of, and the arrangement seemed to make both of us happy enough to start telling everyone we knew that we were now an official “band”.

It never even crossed our minds that once we started talking about it that everyone and their brother would want to do it too. When I say everyone, I mean everyone we were friends with… like maybe all 10 of them. But still, it was just plain silly. We had no more than two “songs” written and hadn’t even really named ourselves yet. We were actually pretty damn punk, because we not only didn’t know how to play any instruments, but we didn’t even OWN any. It was the idea more than anything that really got me excited. We didn’t even have to play together or write any more songs to make it any more important to me. My imagination did a really effective job of turning the band into something fulfilling and “real” on it’s own.

Damon eventually came up with the name, “Brain Child of a Bored Imagination,” and I instantly agreed. It was our Physics teacher Mr. Perry (who we both respected for his vast knowledge of science & Tom Leher) that suggested to us that long names just don’t work and that we should opt for something shorter. Therefore we went with the runner up, “Cappuccino Hallucinations”, which also happened to be the title of a song Damon wrote. We jumped on the name, as did all of our friends who were now, “in the band.” We decided to then take out an “ad” in the school paper to prepare people for our band, and having gone that far it was time to take the next logical step and “record” our songs.

To do this, we spent some time at Damon’s house. To put mildly, the recording session was an abysmal failure. For equipment, we came up with a cheap-ass keyboard (that was, if I remember correctly, missing keys) that we had borrowed from my brother Buck. Damon also had an acoustic guitar that neither of us knew how to play and therefore we never ended up using on the recording (though it did sit next to us as we put the songs to tape.) Listening to the tape now, it is hilariously awful; a total and complete lack of ability, know-how, or concept of what the thing was supposed to be when finished.

After an exceptionally super-pretentious introductory “piece”, we alternate between Damon singing earnest songs set to my awful keyboard playing, and small “comedy” sketches that we thought were funny in High School but seem to have lost their punch since then (for obvious reasons). In the middle of all of this, we recorded the worst song I’ve ever written (even if you count the throw-away stuff I wrote on the spot in my solo-band), the nigh funny (even then) “It’s Fun Being a Psycho.” (“It’s fun being a psycho / people don’t care what you do / it’s fun being a psycho / you can do whatever you want to do.” Yeah, it was that bad.)

It’s pretty hard to tell exactly where we were coming from with the “recordings”. Were we serious about our music yet naïve enough to not know how to write any good music to reflect this (as was evidenced by the “Damon” songs), or did we think the lack of musical ability with serious lyrics set to them was a part of the “joke” perpetrated by our “band” (as one would get the impression of with the overly-ridiculous intro and “comedy” bits in-between songs)? High-concept or just too ignorant to know any better, the tape makes me cringe and blush upon listening now. I treasure it greatly, and have plans to make MP3s as soon as I can remember where I hid the tape (check the website for updates).

Regardless of our “success”, the band thing was getting a little bit out of hand. Not only did everyone want to be a part of it, but people were also having trouble with who was and wasn’t in the band. Enter Steve Eller.

He and I had a bit of a history, actually, in that he had tried to beat me up in the past. (Later he would explain that he thought he could impress the other kids by beating up someone they didn’t like.) One of these encounters led us both to a talk with the Principal. After hearing both sides of the story the Principal threatened us both, saying that he didn’t want to hear
about either of us getting into a fight again. “If either of you see each other in the halls, immediately turn away and walk in the opposite direction to avoid a confrontation.” I asked if I should do this, even if it meant being late to class. “Definitely. Whatever it takes, I don’t want to see either of you in here again.”

Obviously that was his only concern, in that he didn’t really want to deal with either of us again. The fact that there was some sort of dysfunction in his school didn’t seem to concern him, as much as this time out of his busy day did. Regardless, the bottom line had been drawn: if we failed to avoid each other, we would both be suspended. I find it funny that, because I was going to get beat up by another student, I was being threatened with suspension. It wouldn’t be the first (or the last) time that I was punished for “getting in a fight” (translation: getting beat up). I remember vividly getting knocked around quite a bit only to find myself suspended for throwing a defensive punch back. (The reason: it was expected of him to behave negatively, while I should have known better... I shit you not, that was the reason the teacher actually gave me.)

Steve and I were not very happy with this arrangement, mostly because it was so completely ludicrous. We were both aware of the fact that neither of us really wanted to get in a fight, let alone with each other, and more than anything the only thing we were still upset about was having to deal with the Principal, whom we both had our own issues with. Therefore it was decided that, to spite the Principal, we would become friends (in the loosest sense of the word).

I say this mostly because just about everyone else in our school hated him, and at the time I was trying desperately to be cool. When you are already not doing very well in the “friend” department, you tend to become focused on who is and isn’t cool in an attempt to align yourself properly in the eyes of “cool” kids. In the grand scope of things at CGHS, Steve was in no way cool. He brought it on himself partly, being a smart kid with little (or no) social skills and an innate ability to say the wrong thing in crowds while being fairly articulate one-on-one. In many ways he would intentionally act “odd” in an attempt to set himself apart. He was obsessed with being a “non-conformist.” He did this by trying to draw as much attention to himself as possible, a sort of High School version of, “Look at how weird I am! Seriously, pay attention to me! I need to know that you think I’m weird!”

In other ways people were also being unnecessarily cruel to him in a way that only High School kids can. He was one of those people that wanted in on the band, but to everyone else he was just an annoying outcast to be ignored and mistreated. He was large, as in slightly overweight, but also in that way that some guys are just larger (and sometimes more intimidating) than other students. He constantly smelled as if he’d just finished a gym class but skipped a shower (even after he had just showered) and had a personality that was just as offensive. He wasn’t “mean” per se, but he was manipulative and rude and pretentious (even by High School standards). He would often argue until he got his way and insist that he was always right until you gave up or admitted that he was. While Steve had a huge level of self-awareness about the way he acted, he was completely oblivious to his actions when it came to being rude or manipulative. This created the “subtle” effect of making most people want to spend the least amount of time with him as possible.

The ironic part was that the more he was pushed away by people in school, the more it honed his personality that made people want to push him away. His pretension and desire to be as ”odd” as possible, combined with his obliviousness to how awful he actually treated people he knew, created a strange, self-feeding cycle that had no end in sight. This kind of thing happens in High School over and over again, and it’s sad to see it in action. At the time I had no real awareness of what was happening to him and just thought the world was unfair and cruel and didn’t quite understand Steve completely. It never occurred to me that I would become a victim of his behavior.

Why, exactly, I chose to continue being his friend escapes me now. Maybe I felt sorry for him? Or maybe something inside me felt like I related to his plight in some way. Offentimes, I felt even my own friends weren’t accepting of me, and that they too spoke ill of me when I wasn’t around like they did of Steve when he wasn’t. A glutton for punishment? Could be. His personality quirks were aimed just as strongly at me when we hung out, so the idea that he was “nice” to me doesn’t really work. In hindsight, I realize that his manipulative tendencies did extend beyond just his girlfriends (all girls younger than he who seemed to have lower self-esteem that he did too). I say this because, as the years dragged on, I began to theorize that I was not really his friend because I felt a connection or some sort of comfort in our mutual shared experience of outsider-ness, but in fact continued being his friend for the sole reason that he wanted me to be, and convinced me that I should.

At first the main reason I felt interested in hanging out with Steve was fairly simple: he was interested in writing too. The fact that he had all these stories and poems that he was willing to share with me, and he actually believed that he would get somewhere with it (like me), was proof positive that he couldn’t be ALL bad, right?

Still, this did not win over any friends when Steve wrote a song for Cappuccino Hallucinations and showed interest in joining. Everyone else gave him the run-around when it came to him being in the band, and while he got excuses like, “There’s too many people already,” or, “Well, Damon has already written most of the songs and we don’t need any other writers,” the reality was that more and more people were getting involved and Damon wasn’t the only one churning out lyrics for potential songs. After a while I started to feel bad about everyone treating him so poorly, even if at times it seemed like he deserved it. It was also easier to sympathize with Steve when Cap Hal started becoming more and more Damon’s project (effectively making me feel “left out”). Ever since the tape got recorded, which was more his stuff than was mine, I’d felt less and less connection with the original intent of the band (whatever it might have actually been, that is). Since Steve seemed so intent on being in a band, I suggested that he and I should get something started on our own.

At first he seemed a bit reluctant, but the fact that I offered to do something with him separate from the group must have meant something to him, because immediately he began letting me read his stories (I returned the favor and lent him my own stuff). While the bulk of what he wrote was poetry, there was a fair amount of fiction too, which was where my interests were. We became each other’s editor’s, mentioning each other with inside jokes and dedications when we’d finish a new piece. It was quite fulfilling at
first since I felt like a real writer, having a partner who was there to bounce ideas off of. Soon enough I was spending more time hanging out with Steve than with just about anyone else, and we were often found having coffee into the wee hours of the night at the Vintage Inn, the only 24 Hour place in Cottage Grove. The fact that all the "cool" kids hung out there too also had something to do with our choice of location.

It was only natural that, after we started getting really serious about our own (and each other’s) writing, we would attend the next Writer’s Response Group meeting that was hosted by our school and advised by a teacher named Carol Bridgens. We had no idea what it was going to be like, but based on the fact that we both loved to write, and this seemed to have something to do with it, we got pretty excited about the meeting and our plans that week revolved entirely around this opportunity. When we got there, we were a bit underwhelmed. Mrs. Bridgens was there, Steve and I showed up, and the only other person there was a girl named Melissa who we both knew little about, though I remembered her briefly from an acting class from the year before. This “Group” we’d been looking forward to attending for about a week (less than five days in “school” terms) was a total wash. It seemed only fair, however, that since we showed up, we might as well read some of our stuff and ditch out early if need be. Maybe we could get something productive done at the Vintage Inn later.

As we sat there, reading our stuff to each other, I slowly became aware of how good it felt to read this stuff out loud. This “total wash” was beginning to take shape in something fairly constructive. Having other people (yeah, only two, BUT STILL!) hear my stories made me feel like maybe all this stuff I’d been writing on my own for so very long was actually worth something. The knowledge that someone else was hearing what I had to say what a huge turn on, and instantly I was hooked. Though it was not our group, we pushed for meetings once a week and really strong-armed the whole thing into being something that was ours as much as it was theirs. Mrs. Bridgens may have started it, but it was going to become ours regardless of what anyone else thought.

Not too much after we started, Steve showed up at school with a band logo he’d drawn up on his computer at home. In the center is said, in large letters, “L.S.D.” with lots of psychedelic stuff surrounding it. At the time, I hadn’t done acid (yet), but I was familiar with what it was supposed to be like (and, for the record, my suppositions I wrote about in a story turned out to be eerily accurate to the reality when I finally had dropped, but that’s neither here nor there). Furthermore, I recognized where Steve had gotten the name: it ripped off from a story Melissa had written (the name of the band in the story was L.S.D., which stood from L.i.e Sucks D.arling). Furthermore, the name L.S.D. was itself a rip-off from the only real band in our school: S.O.L. 17 (of which, our friend J.P. Otto was a member. For those who are curious: S.ick O.f L.i.e at 17 later became the Minimalists, who later became The Readymen, who actually sort of made a name for themselves by opening for Subhumans before they broke up.)

I liked the name from the get-go, not just because of the tribute to Melissa but because of the drug connotations too, which for some reason seemed important to me at the time. All other projects were immediately put on hold and we went to work making up more logos, and it was my idea to add the tag line, “Permanent Lapse of Sanity,” to the logo (oftentimes I’d write the word “Temporary”, then cross it out and write “Permanent” in above it). Though it had taken us some time, our new band was finally beginning to take off.

We ran into problems, mostly because we were aware of the fact that is all seemed so ripped off, but also because we’d heard rumors that there was already a real band with the same name. That night we called a brainstorming session over coffee and decided that we needed a new name. To this end he produced a full page of words and phrases (which were all potential band names), which he gave to me the following day at school. I checked the list for names that sounded cool but came up mostly empty-handed (most of them were very lame, even for me who thought “Nirvana” was original). Finally there was one word that caught my attention “Acronym? How about that?” I asked.

In hindsight, I can’t help but equate Steve with Ignatias J. Riley from Confederacy of Dunces, but nonetheless I’m positive he snorted in a very Ignatias way and said, “I don’t know. I don’t really like that one.”
As soon as I had seen the word on the list it was already too late; the seed had been planted. Something had been set off by that word and I defended the name that was on his list until he seemed uninterested in arguing anymore. The next day I returned to school with a few logos I'd already worked up. Though he had come up with the idea "acronym," I added a few of my own touches here and there. Soon enough, I was doodling things like, "A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. It's Not Just A Word. A.n.y.m.o.r.e." on everything I could get my hands on. Steve hated the name (which always seemed so odd since he'd come up with it), but when I wouldn't let up with the logos and fake "ads" I'd been making for it, he eventually conceded.

For quite a while we tried to "promote" the name in much the same way that Damon & I had done for Cap Hal. We plastered the entire school with fliers we made and put up around the school (again, we got this idea from J.P.'s band, who had actually played a show in our auditorium during lunch one day and had put up fliers around the school for the show). Since I was on the Newspaper staff, I was never questioned when I roamed the halls or used the Xerox machine (everyone assumed I was on some sort of newspaper-related mission). It was great to stand back and watch the masses leave their classes, seeing this creation of mine all over their lockers and walls, tearing them down and wondering what the hell was going on. I was pretty stoked when I was walking to a class and noticed a student (who I had never met) had an A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. flier in his locker. I walked pretty tall that day.

While nothing was happening with this "band," this was definitely more interesting than anything else I'd done in school up until that point. It seemed to keep Steve & me happy, and while what Damon and I had planned for Cap Hal was great, it also seemed to peter out shortly after I left anyway. It was good to move on when I did.

Soon enough summer was a hop, skip, and a jump away. It seemed logical enough that we would try to have one last Writing Group meeting that we loved so dearly. On the last day of school Steve and I wrangled together a whole bunch of people and held one last massive Group meeting, at which I scored a lot of phone numbers with the idea that I would arrange summertime meetings of my own. I don't know who I was kidding: we all met one more time after that, in the Cottage Grove city park, before the group was reduced down to the original trio: Steve, Melissa and I. Still, it was fun to think that I'd gotten something together, which only gave birth to more ideas of what I wanted to do when I got back to school next year.

Steve, on the other hand, wasted no time in trying to get Melissa to date him at these other "meetings" the three of us would have, but after a failed week where he called her his "girlfriend" and managed to get a kiss out of her, she challenged the situation and set him right. After a whole summer of continued (and increasingly "awkward" writing meetings), I finally broke down and tried my hand at dating her too (this time, with success). Having an actual girlfriend in High School (even as late as the summer before my Senior year) left me feeling pretty confident about myself. With my Newspaper / Writer's Response Group / A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. success, I kicked open the doors of CGHS that fall with the idea that 1992 / 1993 was gonna be a good year.

Part V: Early Work.

Against my better judgment, here is it: my early writing. While at the time I'm sure I had lists for all of this kind of stuff, included dates and the exact chronology for the material that follows, it has since become harder and harder to organize. While I have dates for the newspaper articles that were published, I have trouble remembering when other things were "published", and finding an order to this stuff is increasingly more and more difficult when I compare it to what I actually remember happening.

Therefore, I've compiled the work below in the order that I feel best represents the material being presented. While it is probably doesn't make a lot of sense for anyone who might actually remember the order things actually happened in, I know that it all saw the light of day during my senior year (though some of it could have been from the end of junior year, while other's could have come after Bob's was already underway). In my mind this is a better beginning. As I'll state later, much of the stuff was written WELL before it saw print, so I make no apologies for the quality of the material presented below (or anywhere else, for that matter). It's hard to come to terms with stuff that you wrote when you were 17, when the clear cynicism of booze & ex-girlfriends can rightly put into perspective things you just weren't aware of in those days. At times I was overly optimistic, or ended a depressing story positively for no apparent reason (other than teacher suggestion). Other times I was relentlessly dark and depressing beyond the point of reason and logic when I really had nothing that serious to be upset about, again for no other purpose than to just do so. Teen angst is so trite anymore as to be meaningless for most people, but for some it was actually a way their life was in the dark and miserable years of High School. I think this best represents the different points of view that were all vying for control of my pen in those days.

Regardless of my mindset, here are some poems, stories, and articles I wrote for the school paper (as well as other school publications) in all their poorly-written, grammar-impaired, run-on sentence and bad-joke glory. This stuff is included more as a word to the wise rather than for the purposes of it being important reading material. To effectively give a complete picture of any writer, I feel that it's important to see where they came from, something few writers ever allow the world to know about. I find the story of improvement overtime much more fascinating that one well-written short-story. In a way this is my attempt to do what most author's will not allow to happen: the opening of that sacred file in their notebooks that says, "Do not read under any circumstances."

Or, if you don't like that, use these as guidelines for what not to do. That's how I use them when I write new stuff.
...And Then There Was... A.C.R.O.N.Y.M.! These images are culled from various High School notebooks, .BMP and .PCX files I created on my first computer, and other various sources over the years. Most of these are actually from High School, though over the years it's hard to place which logos are from what time, etc. There are a lot of recurring themes and whatnot. I was obsessed with getting it right, doing it over and over again. There wasn't a flat surface that didn't bare one form of these images by the time I was done with CGHS. Most of these ended up on 8 1/2" x 11" pieces of paper, which were then Xeroxed and became the fliers I mentioned. Yes, I was that kid in class who was furiously scribbling things on his notebooks when he should have been taking notes, except instead of a band logo of someone I liked or a band that I was actually in, it was a band that I wanted to exist but didn't. Yeah, I've got issues... I'm aware of that. The two images on the following page were co-designed by myself, Steve & Melissa (who did a lot of the drawing on the first logo). Yes, it was my (bad) idea to include the hole punchers, the staple, the safety pin & the paperclips. What can I say? I had a thing for office supplies (still do... don't ask). Yes, the occasional backwards n's were originally influenced by Nine Inch Nails. My only defense is that I was, after all, in High School, and it was, after all, that year. I really surprised that any of this stuff survived this long...
ACRONYM

IT'S NOT JUST A WORD ANYMORE.

© 1992
Rain2

Rain on a roof sounds like a downpour of bullets onto a metallic wall. Why? Because both are dreary. More often than not, rain is preceded by dark, ominous clouds, and possibly a frightening thunderstorm. A downpour of bullets is preceded by dark, hateful words to a fellow human, most often because of something he did or didn’t do. And always, before the bullets pierce his flesh and rat-a-tat against the wall, there is that flash of lightning that he sees, before he dies. After the rain, everything looks fine. After the bullets, and the body is gone, everything looks fine.

The Laughter

As I was perched, pondering whys and hows calmly, rationally, and with quiet fluidness, it began to happen, just as silent. The deep, black corners and crevices began to widen at a slothlike, and calm pace. As I became aware of its simplistic existence, I peer inside, watching it, viewing its growth and expansion while it encompasses all. It increases with incalculable slowness, causing deterioration and destruction, leaving nothing in its path. Afterward, when its job is accomplished, I peek back, and examine what remains. And there is nothing. Zero. Nil. An immense black void, infinite in thought, and yet confined in a place as finite as an orb. The all of creation; all that was is not. Crumbled in the path of nothingness was all I held dear to me. My sanity was all I lost. The laughter is all I gained.

The Machine

My hands no longer move in ways I wish them to. My arms, feet and legs now do the same. All physical movement is no longer at my command, nor is free thought, or items that belong to me. My life, my soul, is not mine anymore. It is not in control by forces I understand but cannot combat, or fight. Existence is not mine, and belongs to an all powerful and destructive force—Society.

2 Before you even open your fucking mouth, let me ask you this question: can you find anything that you wrote when you were 15 that was better? If you can answer “yes” to that question, then you are welcome to mock me via e-mail and I will willingly post your letters on my website for all the world to see (but only those who include their “better” writing from when they were 15).

Rhonda (my creative writing teacher/news editor) insisted that this was a great “poem”, but I would be hard pressed to consider it one in any context (even back then). Much later, I let Steve Eller “borrow” this for a poetry class he was taking at Lane Community College. He turned it into a real poem, creating line breaks and new stanzas where ever he felt like it. It was the first time I knowingly allowed someone to plagiarize my work. (Pre-guilt for all the ideas I would later borrow, I can only guess.)

This, along with “The Laughter” were first printed in a magazine called Gosh, This Is Neat Stuff To Read. (I shit you not! That’s what it was called!) A student by the name of Lenny Lozar essentially named the magazine, to everyone else’s excitement save my own. It was divided up into a few different sections. “Rain” was in the “Seasons” section (and later found it’s way into the one and only issue of Trauma that I put together), while “The Laughter” was in “Miscellaneous” (also eventually in Trauma). Gosh, This Is Neat Stuff To Read was put together at some point in 1992, but I’m sure that both poems were written before then. “The Machine” was printed in the 1993 unnamed sequel to the same magazine (again, something I probably wrote well before that). All three of these were turned in for credit in said creative writing class, and I got good grades too so shut the fuck up! (For the second magazine I turned in quite a few fiction stories, but she only ran my poem, which still annoys me. She said the stories were too long and would muck up the flow of the magazine. Whatever.) On another note, it’s interesting to me that these are about death, going insane, and submitting to the evils of conformity. Can you guess who was feeling just a teensy weensy sad in High School? Blame Rosanne Scott, who forwarded me my first cassette copy of Pretty Hate Machine. It did not do well to make me a well-adjusted student.
Opinions: So, who’s the best candidate? Perot

While I was watching T.V. the other night, I saw the first advertisement I’ve seen yet for Ross Perot. At first I wasn’t sure what the commercial was about, but by half-way through the commercial I was positive that it was for our man Perot, and I was just sitting there saying, “Wow, that commercial was very effective.”

The really good thing about Perot is that he has this nasty habit of making sense all the time. Weird, huh? He seems to actually understand the problems that are going on, and most of his campaign is positive.

What I saw of the debates on Channel One told me this: Perot seems to be a more straightforward guy. He seems to understand that the American people want a president who knows what he’s talking about. I understand that one of his proposals is for higher taxes, but that has to be done. It is the most effective way to take care of problems past presidents have made. As Perot said on T.V., he may not have any experience at running a country, but he doesn’t have any at running up a four trillion dollar national debt either.

One other positive thing about Perot is that he is a third party candidate. He does not have to put up with needing to make his party look good; he is his party. It would be rather interesting to have a third party president.

I understand that I don’t have nearly as much a handle on the issues as some people do, and I realize that I don’t know enough about Perot to effectively support him. But, I do want to say this: the last few elections have been very bothersome. They haven’t been elections for choosing the best candidate; they were elections to choose the lesser of the two evils. I am not a Bush or Clinton supporter, and I never really wanted to support Perot either. But, Bush sounds worse every time he speaks, and Clinton seems to have stagnated in his campaign.

And that leaves us with H. Ross Perot.

Weighing your educational options: CGHS vs. LCC

Kindergarten treatment. Junior high level work. Sounds great, aye? Welcome to high school.

Don’t get me wrong. A lot of people like high school. Hell, I liked it for the longest time. It was the only place I got to see my friends and hang out… and learn stuff along the way. I’d even go as far as to say that I enjoyed high school. For a while.

Then reality set in.

I can’t say that high school is wrong, because it isn’t. There are many people out there that like high school. They also like memorizing books and regurgitating it back as homework. They also like to watch pointless movies and laugh at people who dress different. Sound familiar?

What I’m saying is that there is a good portion of the student body out there that finds high school too easy for them. They aren’t challenged enough, and all they can hope for is physics or an English class to stimulate their synapses. [And for those of you who don’t know what that means: (si nap’sis) n., the point of contact between adjacent neurons, where nerve impulses are transmitted from one to the other]

---

3 Reprinted from the October 26th, 1992 Issue of Lion’s Roar (Volume 51, Issue 2).

4 This is, if I remember correctly, the first article I got printed in the paper. (I might have had a Cross Country sports story before this, but I don’t know for sure.) I have never been that political, but I have tried my hardest over the years to stay on top of issues and elections with moderate success. For the most part, I’ve always thought politics in general are more comedic than anything else, and I actually remember thinking when I was really young that most people involved in politics were more like clowns from the way my parents made it sound. Anyway, when this election rolled around, everyone was really aggro about the “Bush vs. Clinton Battle Royale”. Having Perot enter the election was the ultimate joke to me since he was not only a third party candidate (always a favorite subject of mine), but was also so indecisive about running. (“I’m in… no wait… okay yeah… no. I mean yes… uhm… dammit!”) When I was asked to write the third point of view for the opinion page in our paper, I decided to really play up the humor angle on it and wrote this sort of sarcastic piece with a lot of jokes in it. When the paper printed it, Rhonda had trimmed away just about everything funny and really made me sound like I was pro-Perot (which was really what they wanted: a piece written by someone who was for the candidate, not some piece of satire). It’s true, I did like the idea of a third party candidate, but I couldn’t really give a shit about ANY of the candidates, and reading this now, it sounds as if I was into him as a potential president, when really I thought they were all lame. The original version of this article had the following last sentence: “And with those two evils fighting it out on T.V., all that really leaves us with is the much less evil H. Ross Perot.” (Note: Tongue placed firmly in cheek.) Rhonda took it upon herself to cut the hell out of this (it was about a full page in it’s original form) and take my tongue out of places the newspaper didn’t seem to want it. No matter where I went, people really wanted to tare the beast that was me. Sigh. It only gets worse from here on out.


3 As you’ll find out later, I’m really surprised I was allowed to use this word in the school paper when it would later be censored in Bob’s.
So what do these students do? What other alternative is there to a high school diploma? Unfortunately, the only alternative has become a taboo within the administration. It’s become known throughout the student body as an acronym to be whispered to one another while listening to alternative music. It’s called LCC (gasp!).

As much as it seems like a downfall to the students, LCC has been an option that the students have been often steered away from, wrongly. Here are the facts. LCC is a college that can give a student a high school diploma in a shorter time than any high school can. Yes, a real high school diploma.

Not only that, but the student can then start college sooner and get out of the kindergarten our school has become. In other words, people can get on with their lives.

Unfortunately, our administration cannot condone this kind of education openly. No. Some students have been forced to threaten to drop out of school before being allowed to do so. Others got themselves expelled so the school had to pay for their education at LCC.

Either way, a smart kid who just wanted to get on with his life ended up having to commit such acts to further his own education. That makes me mad.

I have been faced with this situation, and I too tried to go to LCC to finish high school and failed.

I had to go to high school because college was made “unavailable” because of the lack of money, my parents and the administration. However, I do hope that in the future other students will know the alternatives so that they, too, can get on with their lives.4

---

Prejudice8
by Austin Rich

Dedicated to Rosanne Scott, whose attitude toward life resembles that of Fredrich's9

I should have known better than to walk into the bar that day. It was about dusk, the sun was going down, and most of them were still there. They all turned at looked at me as I walked to sit at a table in the corner. My black robe was to protect me from... pain. The hood covered my entire face, and my brown eyes probably shone out from beneath. I sat and motioned to the waitess. She came over very quietly and slowly. I said, “Bring me my usual.” She nodded and quickly scurried into the back, and soon returned with a tall glass of red concoction. I thanked her, dropped a ten on the table, and took a long sip of the fluid. Everyone was still looking at me. The once noisy bar had become completely silent. I hated it. I walked over to the jukebox and put in two quarters. Since it was close to Halloween, I figured they would appreciate my selections, “Sweet Transvestite,” the theme song from the Rocky Horror Picture Show, and “The Monster Mash.” I giggled under my breath when I listened to these songs. Obviously, then didn’t have the same sense of

---

4 This doesn’t quite do a very eloquent job of getting to the point, but the fact that this was run in the school paper was pretty amazing in the first place. No matter how severely I attacked the issue head-on, no one ever seemed to mind that I was airing the school’s so-called “dirty laundry” in this article. I secretly wonder if Rhonda was, herself, and bit of an “anarchist” when it came to these kinds of issues. Who’s to say?

A lot of people I knew were getting so tired of the crap at our school (we were an under-funded, poorly-staffed school where sports were the only things any teacher or student cared about) that many people dropped out to begin going to LCC to get their diplomas instead. This wasn’t a case of dumb kids who didn’t know any better, either; most of the kids doing it were people with high GPAs who just wanted to get out of our school and get into college so they didn’t have to put up with the crap. It was such a problem that almost half of our graduating class didn’t walk with the rest of the class at Graduation. Some people I knew actually went the “get expelled so the school has to pay for your diploma” route, and it worked pretty well for them. (Apparently there’s a loophole in Lane County that, if you are expelled, the school has to provide an alternative for your education, and LCC was the most common one, which the High School then had to pay for.) I had begged to leave high school for LCC but my mom couldn’t afford it.

8 Reprinted from the October, 1997 issue of The Wordsmith. In my Senior Year, Heidi Gunter began collecting student writing from her classes.

While I was no longer a student in her classes by this time, I worshipped her and met up with her during lunch just to chat and get her opinions on my writing. Ultimately I convinced her to print some of my stories in her publications, even though I technically didn’t qualify. Hey, that’s just the way I am. At some point in 1997 I heavily re-wrote this story, thinking that I might have a chance at getting it published if I toned-down other aspects of the story and instead focused on the prejudice angle. I only half-finished the re-write, and lost interest shortly afterward. Someday...

9 So what do you do when you’re poor and someone is having a birthday and you want to give them a gift? You dedicate a short story to them and give them a copy. But then again it’s been well established that I am awful at hiding my crushing. Sigh. And in those days, who didn’t have a crush on her? One friend of mine gave me a drawing of a house for an issue of Bob’s, and it took me a long time to realize that it was an elevated view of the house she lived in. (Sort of creepy, as the detail was pretty uncanny once you knew the angle was from the top of the house across the street instead of from street level, where I had always seen it from before.) I saw her recently in a bar, which was weird because at first I didn’t recognize her. When she talked to me she acted as if no time had passed and that I was up on my CGHS gossip. I wanted to sarcastically remind her that it had been almost 10 years and I had no clue what she was talking about, but I bit my tongue and nodded instead. Pretty girls have that effect on me, unfortunately.
humor I did. I went back to my table and continued to drink. Slowly, and eventually, the bar returned to its normal, noisy self.

It was about half and hour till full sundown, when the rest of my friends would show up. I sat peacefully and contently while drinking my drink. I knew things wouldn’t get that bad tonight. They would soon leave, either out of fear or intolerance. They hate us. But it doesn’t bother me. It’s not like I’m responsible for what some of us have done. Either way, if they don’t like us, they don’t have to stay.

A normal friend of mine, the only one that seems to even acknowledge us as real people, came over to my table. I hadn’t seen him today when I first came in, and was glad to. He sat down and we began to talk.

“You know, you probably shouldn’t have come her today.”

“Why not?” It’s a free country. Where does it say that I can’t come in a bar because of who I am?” I was angry. Maybe he wasn’t my friend.

“No. It’s not that. They’re tired of ‘your kind,’ as they say. I overheard them talking and they are going to stay all night tonight. They want to run you out. They’re determined. They either want you out, or dead.”

I looked at my friend. I knew he was telling the truth. I’ve learned not to trust many people unless they’re like me. His face was sincere; his blue eyes and black hair proved that. My friend – his name was Jason – he was like them. He used to hate me, and all like me. But I proved to him that we aren’t the flesh-hungry cannibals they make us out to be. We were, and still are, just people.  

“Jason, my friend. I have lived to see all kinds of prejudice in this land. They have hated the natives and the Indians; they have hated the blacks and the slaves. There was even a time when women were looked down upon, as were the gays and homosexuals. I have seen even simple people learn to hate one another just because they look different. This is just another sprinkling of that evil towards me, and people like me. I am no different from you, or them. Not mentally, not emotionally. I feel just like you do.

He just stared at me, not saying a word.

“Jason, I cannot hope you will stand by me if they do try to run me out. I have already seen you in fights with men like them before, just because you talked to me. So if you must, try to get me to leave. But I will stay. I will finish my drink and I will order another. They do not frighten me, not after what I have seen.”

Jason looked at me, and began to say something. But he didn’t. He was still worried about me, and about what others were thinking of him. He left my table.

Then someone called out from beside the bar. “Yeah, leave Jason. We sure don’t want you to be converted into one of those things.” He looked right at me. I stood up, and removed my hood (it was now dark enough to do that) and looked at him. My gray hair was combed no differently than his; my brown eyes looked just like his. My skin, though paler than his, was not much different. I sat back down and went back to my drink.

“Hey! Who said you could ever look at me like that, you Vamp?”

I ignored that comment.

“Hey, I’m talkin’ to you, Drac!” He moved closer to my table. “We here have been talkin’, and we don’t like your kind in this bar no more. Right, guys?”

Several rounds of “Yeahs” came from all around the room.

“You hear that, Vamp? We don’t want you comin’ to this bar no more. We’re tired of you and your kind. So get out of here, and don’t come back to this bar again.” His face was almost in mine, but he was keeping a safe distance.

I stood up. He immediately backed off. The people in the bar that were afraid of what I could do immediately scurried out the door. The leader of the group stayed, as did about fifteen others.  

The bartender called out, “Hey, Fredrich! I’ll have none of that feeding stuff in my bar!” Had this illness even spread to my friend Louis? He, of all people, should know.

“I do not plan to feed tonight, Louis; you have no need to worry about that. I was merely going to walk over to the bar and order another drink. You know, I do drink just like you guys do.” To prove my point, I grabbed a beer from the bar counter and drank it down. “See? I am no different from you. I drink, I eat…”

---

10 This is one of the most poorly constructed paragraphs I’ve ever written. If Fredrich has learned to not trust people unless they are like himself, then how can he possibly come to the conclusion that Jason is telling the truth? And, how does his eye and hair color have anything to do with helping Fredrich determine this about Jason? Then, after all of this, Fredrich goes out of his way to point out that Jason is in fact just like the other people he doesn’t trust. Ahh, High School…

11 This must have been a huge bar.

12 Humorously, I had not yet read Interview with a Vampire, and didn’t know that the main character was named Louis until after I’d written this story. In my attempted re-write from years later, I changed this character’s name for that reason (who also has a more substantial role in that version).
“Yeah, human flesh, I suppose. You an’ your friends are cannibals – a bunch of Throps. You should all just go and live away from us. Now!”

I sat at the bar, wondering what I should do. I thought about the ignorance of that comment. Throp. Lycanthropy was not at all what I had. I laughed a laugh that one laughs at the ignorant, and returned to my table. A mistake on my part. A big mistake.

One of them drew a knife and stabbed me in the back. The immediate pain was nothing really, and I could already feel the wound healing around the blade. The force of the jab, however, knocked me to the floor. The man laughed this time. “Be that a warning to all those Throp and Vamp friends of yours. This bar belongs to normals.”

At that time Cybil walked in and saw the knife in my back. She became outraged. She pulled off her robe and revealed some eighteenth-century garb she had been wearing since I had met her. She had been inflicted in 1756 and had refused to give up the clothes of her other life. In a raged fury, she flew straight at the leader of the pack and planted her teeth into his neck. He cried out, “No! Get the bitch off me!” No one moved.

I began to call out to her. “Cybil, please, I’m fine. The wound is healed. Let it go.” She pulled away from his now lifeless body and allowed the blood to drip away from her mouth before she dove in on the other side.

“Cybil! He’s dead. Give it up. Please? For me?”

She stopped. The man’s neck had two big gouges in it on opposite sides. A large vein stuck out and spurted until it just dripped a steady stream of blood. She wiped the blood off her mouth and, as she regained her composure, ran to me and cried.

“It’ll be okay. Things will be okay. They will.” She kept on crying, and I kept on lying. I didn’t know what to say.

One of the men, however, did. “See? They’re a bunch of hostile, bloodthirsty Vamps!” The others began to talk among themselves. “Now, I want you, and the rest of your kind, to just get out. Now!”

I looked at Cybil. She was still crying. “Let’s go, okay?” She nodded, and we began to leave. That was my next big mistake. Never turn your back to a hostile normal.

He pulled out one of those new flashlights that had just come out. Anti-Vamp equipment. Shined it right on Cybil. She screamed in sheer agony and pain. She developed instant open sores on the exposed parts of her body. I looked at the man and revealed my teeth, and my eyes began to grow in size and turn red. I released all my anger in a bloodcurdling cry, all the frustration, all the emotion. I had never been that mad in my life.

The man turned off the flashlight and fled for safety. I looked at Cybil and she, bleeding, looked at me. She had collapsed to the ground and was sure to die. I held her tight.

She said, “Why? Why do they do this to us?”

I looked at her. “It’s a disease worse than any form of lycanthropy or vampirism. It’s called prejudice.”

Fall

by Austin Rich

Today I opened my front door and instead of hearing the thunderous rumbling of some alternative band like I wanted I heard the loud, thunderous booms of the children that live in my house. They were fighting. Again. I didn’t

13 Worst... dialog... ever.

14 I just noticed that Cybil outright kills a friend of the normal humans in this story, and only two men react (one asks them to leave, the other tries to shoot her in the back as she’s on her way out). Obviously, in the future, people are much more used to their friends dying in bars when the go out for an after-work beer.

15 Yes, I know. Who was playing a little too much Vampire: the Masquerade in High School? Sigh. I just realized that the physical description of Fredrich (as well as his name) is lifted, more or less, from the DC Comics character... Vampire! Then again, every vampire in the history of the written word looks like that too, so what’re ya gonna do? I find it funny, all these years later, how heavy-handed this story is. Can you tell who was having problems in school because his mom was gay? Hmmm?

Rosanne reported to me, after this publication came out, that a lot of people asked her why I had dedicated the story to her. She implied to me that a lot of people thought she was a vampire. I’m sure that made her really happy back then, as she loved attention.

16 Reprinted from the January, 1993 issue of The Wordsmith. Now that I think about it, this was my first non-fiction story I ever got printed, and my first attempt at "eno" before I even knew what that was. You'll find more of this kind of stuff as we progress through this collection.

17 Let's face it: High School age boys were the target market for Alternative Rock in the early '90s, and I ate it up with a spoon. (Ironic considering I slam commercialism quite a bit in this story.) I make no apologies for the fact that I plugged something I liked in something I wrote. (I do it now, except I mention different bands.) I will admit, though, that it is sort of tacky to mention them the way I did. Hindsight and all. When I was
want to hear them, and the pent up frustrations of the day overwhelmed me with the urge to scream. I wanted the chaos to end. I wanted to exist calmly. I wanted contentment.

It was all I could do to stay uninvolved. I yelled, "Shut up!" and proceeded past them to the kitchen. Now, instead of accomplishing anything I directed their anger toward me. My anger was ready to erupt, and I grabbed a bag of crackers and a coke so I could at least have something to distract me. All the while I heard the girls yeling variations on the theme, "You can't tell me what to do! You're not my boss!" I almost slapped them both but then I would be the focus of my mother's anger when she gets home. I yelled, "Shut up!" again and stormed off to my room. I locked the door so the girls wouldn't come in.

I looked at my room and some of my anger melted away. The abstract posters of other planets, bands I liked, and other curious objects began to put me into a comfort zone I hadn't been in all day. Here I could express who I was and how I felt without persecution. I sat at my desk and relaxed. Though all my anger was cloaked, I knew it wasn't gone. It could never be.

I found my tape case and randomly choose the loudest and yet meaningful music I had. Instinctively I played "Smells Like Teen Spirit." It was something I could relate to then because, recently, I had been insulted by commercialism. I felt as if the world thought me an idiot, and could pawn off its garbage through meaningless drive called commercials. I have, therefore, chosen to avoid TV with the exception of a few choice shows.

For the other side of my door someone said, "Turn that crap down!" I felt the anger and increased the volume. More garbage passed on from generation to generation. Why can't they listen to what the band is saying instead of "listening" to something they "think" is noise? After the one song I tired of Nirvana and played some of my Nine Inch Nails album. As I did this I went over the day's events in my head, and the frustration returned.

"Why were you late to class?"
"Where's you assignment?"
"You must accomplish this for a passing grade, you know?"
"Put that away and get to work!" What did he think I was doing?

I have risen to a position in my life where people are handing me responsibility left and right, and yet I receive none of the benefits. School has grown to become a sick joke where the only classes I can take are either time consuming and easy, difficult and fast, or just plain meaningless. I'd like to get on with my life, and ignore the High School "child" life. But College is more work than I can handle, and money is a problem.

Money.

And of course if I went to College I'd need a car, which I don't have. To get one I'd need a job, and a job takes time, and I don't have time. Catch 22.

I looked at my homework and made an honest attempt. Got a good portion of it done and called it good and left it at that.

I decided to watch the news. My friends were "busy" and couldn't go out tonight, so I was stuck at home. I gave my girlfriend a call too, but she was busy making some dinner, and her mom needed to use the phone.

So, the news was it.

What I saw made the anger build up again. Political garbage. The same stuff I've been hearing for almost a year it seems. Even after the election and voting there seems to be more garbage someone can bring up. Everyone else I knew was so involved with the voting. What did I do on Election Day? I called my girlfriend and told her I loved her.

It was a touching moment.

Notice the word "moment."

After I saw something about some reporters almost mauling Bill Clinton's cat for a picture I left the room. I couldn't take the bullshit anymore.

After dinner I listened to some more music. The newspaper caught my eye. It was an article about a comic book store in Eugene. Something about the astounding sales of X-Men Comics. I used to collect comic books, so the article interested me. However, the other article about Comics I saw in the paper just made me furious. The article was simple

Putting this collection together, I found an edited version of this story where I had changed the lines to read, "I forget which band it was," or, "a band that escapes my mind these days." Yes, there was a period of time where I denied what my High School tastes where. But why should I now? Everyone's tastes change over time, and to deny what you liked them is to deny who you once were. These days I'm much more willing to cop to liking bands that are not "cool" to have liked (shit, I actually own King Crimson albums). I think it's impossible for someone to completely let go of the fear that their friends won't accept their tastes, etc., but over time I've learned that it's a habit that I'd much rather let go of.

18 Okay, figure this one out: in print, this word became "cr--". Even in 1993, that seems a bit extreme.

19 Another bold-faced lie. I still collected comics at the time this was written. In fact, in the school paper I had written reviews of "The Death of Superman" and "The Return of Superman". While things would definitely slow down quite a bit in 1994 (concerning my collection), I never stopped buying comics completely. Why I said this in print is beyond my comprehension now. Oh well.
enough. I can’t even remember exactly what it said, but what it meant is what made me mad. To me, the article read only two, big bold words:

“SUPERMAN DEAD.”

I read on to find that he isn’t even going to die. The writers of the comic are planning to, according to the article, resurrect Superman sometime next year.

More stupid commercialism. Society. Pulling in all directions with school and after school implications, and its bullshit on TV and commercials. I wanted to escape it all. I wanted to just go to a place where there were none of those things that angered me.

I wanted to escape to my childhood.

When I was a kid I would come home from school and be happy to be home. I normally wouldn’t be angry at school, so I would come home and greet my mom and my two brothers and sister. I would watch cartoons with them and, after there were no more cartoons, I would play either by myself or with my siblings. I would play with my toys and I would play games. And I would have fun. I was content with life then, playing in the golden leaves, waiting for my dad to come home. Life was good, and I was content.

Now my parents are divorced and my mom lives with her friend and two daughters. One of my brothers lives with my dad and his new wife. School has become harder and more troublesome, and TV has become more bothersome. But sometimes I watch the rain and colored leaves and I can escape to a time when Superman was immortal and life was easy. At times like now, in the middle of so much trouble and things that drive me crazy, I realize that no matter what happens I’ll always be happy with fall.

---

**Group shares written work**

**Students meet twice in February to give input on material**

by Melissa Cooper

The Writers’ Response Group, a group of students who get together for the purpose of sharing their writings, met twice in February. The after-school meetings are announced through flyers, invitations and the announcements.

The group, supervised by English teacher Carol Bridgens, meets in room 25 to read aloud pieces of their own writing. The main focus of the meetings is to allow students to get response to their work from their peers.

“It was a great opportunity for writers to get response to their work,” said sophomore Becky Munsell.

“I wrote something and wanted some feedback, other than from teachers and parents. It was very helpful. It gave me self confidence and made me realize that writing can be fun,” said sophomore Buck Rich.

Any type of writing is welcome according to Bridgens. Everything from poetry to novels to recipes have been read.

“If you think CGHS students can’t write, come and join us at the next Writers’ Response Group to hear samples of outstanding poetry, fiction and personal opinions,” said Bridgens.

“The meetings last year were rather small. At first, the meetings contained a few of us close friends, but this year more people have shown up,” said senior Cody Rich.

In addition to the afternoon meetings, the members of the group are planning a publication containing student works.

“I’m really excited about Bob’s Imagination (proposed name for the magazine). Lots of people have been contributing, and we have more than enough material to keep us busy ‘til June,” said student editor Rich.

---

20 Reprinted from the February 26th, 1993 Issue of Lion’s Roar (Volume 51, Issue 5).

21 Yep, that’s my brother. He initially moved to Cottage Grove with my mom, but when I came along he decided that he didn’t get along with me and went back to live with my dad. Later, when something happened there and he wasn’t getting along again, he came back to CG and managed to fit in fairly well because he was a little stoner. He hasn’t really changed much since then; he still moves away from problems and is still a stoner (among other things). Weirdo.
Part VI: And Now... Finally... Bob’s Imagination!
[Note: This section is also from the “Company History” section that was on the A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. website (http://acronym.rackm@uni.org).]

Immediately after the school year started I met with Mrs. Bridgens about starting up the Group again and she seemed pretty enthusiastic about the idea. She and I went ahead and set up our first meeting, and I did a lot more legwork than I had the year before because of my over-enthusiasm. It took us quite a while to get the group rolling, but by late January of 1993 we had set the date for the first meeting. The turnout was just amazing. The year before, minus a couple of exceptions, we were lucky to get a fourth person to join us. This time, we split up into several smaller groups of four or five each (otherwise everyone wouldn’t have enough time to read even if we had been there all night). It was crazy.

The group was a success in my opinion, and as we were getting ready to leave I actually felt like I’d done something really productive. All the other stuff in my life – the hard classes, the Newspaper, cross-country, Hi-Q, Track – all of that stuff seemed unfulfilling compared to this writing group. I mentioned how proud I was to Mrs. Bridgens and she said, “Since there was so much student turnout this time, it might be possible to put together a school publication of writing from our group. It would be worth looking into, at least.”

And that was all it took. For the second time in as many years something clicked inside me, stemming from something as simple as a word or phrase. I immediately volunteered to edit the thing and before she had a chance to clear it with the school, I already had half of the first issue typed up and ready to go.

To this day I can’t quite figure out what had happened when she said that. I’m sure the idea of editing a magazine would have come to me sooner or later. (It wasn’t too much later J.P. Otto introduced me to the first ‘zine I ever read, a publication he put together called Shrapnel.) But it always seemed to me that there was some sort of destiny in it all. Looking back, I know that what would happen next would teach me a lot about writing and publishing and would, ultimately, help me for a lot of the ideals I have today. Without those experiences I probably wouldn’t have the mindset I do now, and for better or worse, it has shaped A.C.R.O.N.Y.M., in all its aspects, into what it is today.

There were also other forces at work, too. I was not the ideal student in school. I did not fit in with most kids and I wasn’t really that great at sports despite my repeated attempts at running (due mostly to physical awkwardness that I still haven’t overcome, and I’m sure all the alcohol hasn’t helped). I did well enough academically (graduated 18th in my class, out of a few hundred), but while most kids were thinking about college and jobs and football and “real world” stuff, I was too busy thinking about comics and music and sci-fi and coffee dates and... well, My World Stuff. All of this culminated in my poor social status, with classmates not really caring in the smallest bit what I was doing. It wasn’t until I started working on this school publication that I really felt like I was fitting in somewhere that I actually belonged (let alone in a place where someone thought I was doing something that fit my talents), and more than anything this “sense of destiny” probably came from finally thinking I was in the right place at the right time.

Getting back to the story: by the time I’d gotten the bulk of the first issue sorted out, Mrs. Bridgens had managed to get permission from the school to go ahead and put the thing together. This was, to oversimplify the matter, very fortunate for me. (Though I’m pretty persistent and might have attempted to do something on my own anyway, I’m sure that if I had been refused permission from the powers that be, the wind would have gone right out of my sails, especially since I’d already completed a lot of the initial work.) Over several brainstorming sessions with Steve (i.e. many cups of coffee at the Vintage Inn), he offered up the title Bob’s Imagination, which was not only a bit of an inside joke but also a relevant title considering my mindset and positive optimism I had toward art at the time. (The joke: Steve used to go on and on [and on] about his “imaginary friend” Bob, or rather how Steve was actually Bob’s “imaginary friend.” Yeah, how can you tell we were in High School? We thought that kind of nonsense was funny then.) (Actually, I still do now that I think about it.)

The magazine also allowed me an opportunity to continue wreaking havoc on the school with the “band” A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. To make matters worse, I more or less had Carte Blanche to run as much of my original material as I wanted. (In my mind this applied to Steve as well since I effectively gave him the title of co-editor, though for some reason he chose to remain anonymous despite the fact that everyone knew exactly who he was, save for Mrs. Bridgens.) From point one it became clear that this was a format with which I could really make some noise in whatever way I wanted without too many restrictions (insert ominous foreshadowing here). In High School that sort of freedom really makes someone like me feel pretty good about himself.

I officially began work on putting together this first magazine in February of 1993, and on March 12th it was being distributed in our school. All four issues had a print run of less than 1000, and though I was only supposed to give it to people who contributed material, I managed to sneak a few copies to people not in the Table of Contents. (This included the owner of a local Bookstore, who was also good friend of my mom’s. I also sent a copy of each issue for the Cottage Grove Public Library, where Melissa’s mother worked. If I’m not mistaken, to this day they are still available for loan from that location.) While I have, over the years, offered the Bob’s magazines in various Catalogues and web site postings, this original print run was the only time copies were ever made. At one point I made a couple of large, spiral-bound copies that had all four issues in one volume, though to my knowledge they were never sold at any time and were for personal use only. In 10 years I finally managed to get rid of most of the original print run, and now only have a handful of copies of each issue (not counting the actual original proofs from which the copies where made).

Even now I can look back at these magazines and not flinch too badly. Sure, by my current standards, I don’t consider the writing to be great (even by anyone else’s standards, for that matter). I could definitely do better now. But at the time, though, I was still set on being a fiction author, and with that in mind I can see that I was definitely beyond where I should have been as a High School late bloomer. This by no means justifies the material presented here, which is not “top notch” or “quality” by any stretch of the definition. But in terms of how my writing evolved over the years, these are essential things to read, if for no other purpose than to give focus to your distaste. As in all things, you be the judge.
The First Three.

Each of the four issues of Bob’s Imagination had card-stock covers (something I’ve never done since, to my dismay). To liven things up a bit, issue #1’s cover was on blue cardstock, issue #2 on green, and issue #3 on red. (This was Mrs. Bridgens idea; however once she started the idea I gladly went with it and picked out the colors.) Issue #1 was a group effort, designed by Ken Hardman, Josh Minter & myself (all three of us were on the newspaper staff together, and I did a lot of Bob’s planning when I was caught up on my assignments). Originally I presented a page of the scattered letters for the cover, but Mrs. Bridgens didn’t like it and asked for something else. Both Josh & Ken came up with the “faces” idea and laid that in on top of my original design. Issue #2 features a drawing by Rachel Szekley, and issue #3 features one by Roseanne Scott. In the later two cases, they gave me the images and I laid in the text. It was the first time I ever did anything like that, but it really set the stage for what I would end up doing for my future work.
Editor’s Note: 22

I’ve never really edited anything before in my life. Never. In fact, the closest I’ve ever come was a little manuscript I helped throw together that some friends and I like to call Random Sentences 23. To tell you the truth, I didn’t even edit the piece per se. My friends bestowed the work to me and I decided to help put it together. I typed a bit of it myself and printed up copies for all parties involved. I was proud of myself. But then again, I’m always proud of myself when I finish a piece of writing. You see, I get extreme satisfaction from writing. I’m a writer myself 24.

Not that that means anything. I’ve never been published. My fan club includes my girlfriend and a guy named Steve, and other than the school newspaper, my writing has never been anywhere where it can be considered useful.

But, I’m not worried. Be it the fact that I know in my heart that my writing will, someday, be useful in some form or another (or the fact that I just sent out about five-hundred copies of my new story to every magazine I can think of), or just some deep-rooted self confidence, I have found that my writing pleases me, and that’s all that I need. However, it wasn’t always like that. I’ve been writing for quite a while now, and there were several moments at about three in the morning that made me think, “No one’s ever going to read this. Why do I even bother?” It was at times like those that I was about to give up. Say, “The Hell with it, I’m just going to take up underwater basket weaving.”

Well, obviously I didn’t. If I had, well, some other poozer 26 would be writing this and not me.

In short, it took a series of affirmations and other assorted verbal uplifts (and not to mention an actual English teacher 27 who said my work was good) before I woke up and smelled the coffee, so to speak. Writing, then, for me, became not this big goal that I had to reach where I received enormous amounts of gratification instantly, but something a little more personal, and yet still rewarding.

Of course, that gratification stuff does sound nice.

But that’s not the point. The point is, I am not, although I once used to think so, alone. There are hundreds of people out there who write, probably more than I do. It may be a journal. It may be love poems to a person you never want anyone to read. It may be a thick and complicated novel that you think no one will want to read. It may be that you are a writer, just like me, but you never thought anyone wanted to read it.

And the point is that some of those people, even though they may already find some personal satisfaction, may need some kind of small gratification along the side.

That’s why I decided to edit this magazine as a supplement to the highly acclaimed Writers’ Response Group 28. Because I want you, and me, and everyone, to receive that small amount of gratification.

So, in other words, I want to read your writing! You’ve got an entire magazine to fill here so get moving! I’m not the only person who will be reading, there will be millions of people reading it all for their personal satisfaction. (Well, the millions part may not be right, but the rest is.)

---

22 The Editor’s Note that appeared in Bob’s Imagination #1. The first point of contention between Mrs. Bridgens and myself was when this issue would actually come out. As I stated before, I was more than anxious to get this project started, so I had a working version of the publication ready as soon as the second week of February. However, she never communicated to me her vision of the publication: one single issue. To me, I wanted to crank out as many as I could before the end of the year. To her, she wanted one massive collection of student work, and never intended to monitor more than a single publication. At the time I had no idea why she kept on pushing back the print date. Every time I delivered a new version of the manuscript with a new story she had asked me to include, she would turn around and ask me to add another one. This went on for a couple of weeks. By the time we finally ran this issue in March and I began work on the second issue it was then that she realized she had not been clear with me. I can’t really see how she could have been so dense: I come out and say there will be future issues before the end of the Editor’s Note. Oh well. (Side Note: I was so anxious when the issue was finished on the 12th that I skipped several classes waiting for the copies to come back from the press, and then later left other classes early to distribute them around the school. It was not the first time, nor the last time, I would do something similar. Aahh, youthful enthusiasm!)

23 This eventually saw print in one of my publications. Many issues of A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. It’s Not Just A Word. A.N.Y.M.O.R. (The ‘Zine) ran portions of Random Sentences. Occasionally on “Catalog” covers I would print a continuous stream of the random sentences on the front and back, and paste around them the A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. Publishing logo. The friends in question are Jason Harris (now known as Nosuj ‘round the campfire) & Brandon Burkeen, one of the best Dungeon Masters I’ve ever played with (not to mention a Bob’s contributor).

24 For the record: this line never once made anyone think I was cool, never won me any friends, never impressed anyone, and never got me any closer to scoring with a woman than if I had just kept my mouth shut. The important lesson learned: everyone loves writers, everyone wants to be one, but no one wants to have to listen to one talk about being one. The problem is compounded by the fact that, well, most writers love to talk about it.

25 This joke got a lot of mileage among my friends and me in High School, and I know I pinched it from somewhere ... I just can’t remember where. I remember having this very vivid image in my head of someone at the bottom of a swimming pool with a snorkel on, trying to weave a basket.

26 Wow! Re-reading this now, I can’t help but laugh at the fact I actually used this word. In Green Lantern comics, there was a character named Kilowog, an alien who was, in typical comic book fashion, the last of his race. He used to call people “poozers” a lot, and I must have pinched that word from the comic. Like I said ... wow.

27 This was none other than Heidi Gunther. You’ll notice I reference her a lot throughout my writing career ... she was a huge influence.

28 That’s an interesting choice of words on my part, considering what really happened. I wonder if I was conscious of that at the time?
SO GIVE ME YOUR WRITING!!?!? Anything and everything you’ve got. I don’t care what it’s about, I don’t care who wrote it, I don’t care if you use a pen name that no one on the planet can decipher, I don’t care if you don’t care about the way I write my editor’s notes.

I WANT YOUR FICTION, FANTASY, MYSTERY, ROMANCE, NON-FICTION, POETRY, PLAYS, PROSE, WESTERNS, SCI-FI, HUMOROUS ANECDOTES, SHORT-SHORT STORIES, ESSAYS, EDITORIALS, ANYTHING, ETC. Just give me anything and everything you’ve got!

Or, how else am I going to get to be known as an editor in this world?

What I’m getting at, in general, is that we have a magazine, we have the time, and we even have a computer that we can mess around on all third period. All we need is your writing. Things would get really boring if I had to fill a magazine with stuff like this, so if you need to find some other reason to send me writing, give it to me so that you can see less and less of this kind of stuff in the future.

Before I sign off, there are a few more things I need to address.

A Note About Subject Matter & Length: Some of the first things I hear out of some people are, “Well, they probably don’t print the subject matter I write about,” and “the stuff I write is too long/short for publication.” To those people I have to tell you my one and only rule regarding subject matter & length: there is no rule regarding subject matter and length. As I will point out, stories can be published in parts and be held over for the next issue. As for subject matter, well, I would like to say that there is nothing that I won’t accept, but then someone will go and prove me wrong. So, I’ll say this: I will print anything and everything that I can, under all the normal rules and regulations of good taste. I will have to censor four letter expletives, but other than that your work can use any other subject or word you like. If you feel, however, that the four letter expletives are necessary, then you can fill them in when you get your own copy.

Any and all submissions can reach me in a number of ways. You can either:
1. Have it sent to Room V-1 where the newspaper staff will get it to me.
2. Have it sent to Mrs. Bridgens, my wonderful advisor in this venture, who will get it to me.
3. Track me down in the hallways and give it to me personally (I’m not that hard to find.)
4. Look for me at the Vintage Inn during the evening (I am often found editing a certain magazine there)

But however you send it, just send it! Please!

A final word about us: my anonymous cohort and I, as you may have noticed, have some pretty definite opinions on just about everything. That doesn’t mean that that is how we run this magazine. Everything in here is yours. The opinions and views expressed here are only those of the person who wrote the piece. It is in no way the opinion of my anonymous cohort or myself, and it will never be unless directly stated. The only reason anything was turned down was because of lack of space. If you have a question or a comment or anything to say about an individual piece of writing, write me a letter in the form of a “letter to the editor”

Hopefully, I can replace these with your letters if we get enough.

Until I have another deadline set, this is Austin Rich and I am outta here!

29 I must have been taking a class during 3rd Period that was in V-1, because that must be a reference to the PC Rhonda had there.

30 This was one of the biggest concerns with the magazine at every stage of production. They must have thought I was some sort of anarchist when I suggested that we wouldn’t edit language. Everyone freaked out about this and eventually the law was laid down: words had to be edited like this: Fuck = F---, Shit = S---, etc. I can’t believe that, if it was such a big issue in the first place, that they would even compromise with F---. Who doesn’t know what that means in the right context? Kids sure fuck do...

31 V-1 was the room the Yearbook and Newspaper were edited out of (as well as the place where people could develop film in the darkroom and, for the coupled people in High School, make out). It was a great place to escape to when you were sick of school and wanted to hang out somewhere on campus that seemed to have little, if anything, to do with actual education. In my senior year I spent a lot of my time there, working on Bob’s., hanging out, and hiding out from classes I just didn’t want to go to. Rhonda Tunnquist, the only teacher that used V-1, didn’t really seem any more interested in tending to students than we did about going to classes, so the deal worked out well for everyone. Every school has a room like this somewhere on campus, and my only advice to students is to spend as much time in this room as possible.

32 Since this was the only place people could really hang out at night, everyone I knew developed an extreme Love / Hate relationship with the place. Now, I feel nostalgic for it, but there were times when you would get sick of it as much as you would enjoy it, too.

33 I was never able to get an adequate answer out of Steve as to why it was so important to remain anonymous, but he insisted on it every time I asked. I have a feeling that he didn’t think the magazine was actually gonna work, and if it did he sure as hell didn’t want to be connected to it. He took on the role of pariah very seriously, and went to great lengths to show how un-involved he was with the world around him, so much so that he would point it out to anyone who would listen. This had a very subtle effect on a lot of people: in print he was anonymous; in school, he was infra-mous. I have a feeling he thought me doing the magazine was an attempt at gaining acceptance, and he would have been right to one degree.

34 Well, that’s not true. Without my knowledge, Mrs. Bridgens did not give me everything that was submitted to her, and I left some things out because they just weren’t that good. (Some people may wonder when they actually read what I did leave in.)

35 This was my “tag line” that I ended most of my written work with in those days. You’ll see it crop up from time to time as this collection drags on.
Jerry Fields was awoken by a sound outside his window. Not that the sound was all that loud, or identifiable, but it woke him nonetheless. Jerry could barely sleep anyway, and was waiting. Jerry went to the window and peered through the moonlight and saw a man at the corner, walking. The man was shrouded in shadows and could not be seen well. Jerry turned and for some reason, when he looked back, the man was back at the corner again. Jerry was quite startled, and went back to bed. But no sleep was in his future, at least not tonight.

Jerry looked at the doorway of his room before turning off the light. He saw nothing but shadows and pools of darkness. Jerry peered into the night and for some reason, a shadow moved. Jerry checked this out, and to his knowledge shadows didn't move unless the object casting the shadow moved. Since he could not determine what the object was that was causing the shadow, he thought maybe he was just jumpy. He looked back, and there, hovering in mid-air, was a reflection of moonlight. It appeared to be swaying back and forth, as if a person was standing not completely still, but silent. Jerry decided that he was finally here.

Jerry turned on the light and he was standing there, illuminated by the light like a legend. His face was mostly normal, light stubble here and there, and a normal nose, with a normal pair of ears that fell off to the side. His hair was quite bulky, and it stuck out in nearly all directions almost to the point of being unkempt. But there was a hint of some kind of order to how it was combed.

One overpowering aspect of him was his eyes, or lack thereof. He was wearing sunglasses, jet black that almost reflected no light. Even though Jerry had never seen him before, Jerry felt that he knew this person, and that the sunglasses just... belonged. He was wearing a black jacket and black gloves, and the end of a staff was sticking out from behind his back as his right hand slipped into the respective pants pocket. Jerry realized the reflection he had seen in the dark was that of the buttons on his jacket. Though Jerry did not look anywhere other than directly at his face, Jerry knew he was wearing boots.

The man said, in a calm and deep voice, “My name is Déjà Vu.” As he said that, the word ‘Vu’ stuck out in his mind and reverberated, not vocally but mentally. This put a confused look on Jerry’s face, as he mulled over what he had just experienced, something unlike, and yet familiar to, anything he had ever experienced before.

Jerry said, “Uh... Hi. I’m Jerry Fields.” Déjà Vu stood there for a second, unchanging. Then he said in a calm and deep voice, “My name is Déjà Vu.” As he said that, the word ‘Vu’ stuck out in his mind and reverberated, not vocally but mentally. This put a confused look on Jerry’s face, as he mulled over what he had just experienced, something unlike, and yet familiar to, anything he has ever experienced before.

Jerry opened his mouth, and was about to say the words, “Uh... Hi. I’m Jerry Fields,” but then he realized what Déjà Vu had just done.

“Now cut that out!” snapped Jerry. Déjà then slid into a less formal standing position as he shifted his weight to his right foot, and spoke the words, “I got a reputation, ya know? So what do ya want?”

Jerry still looked at him in minor confusion.

“What’s wrong, Fields?” inquired Vu.

“Well... it’s nothing, nevermind. Déjà Vu, I need you to do a... uh, job for me.”

“What kind of, ‘...uhm, job,’ are we talkin’ about?”

“I need, a...” Jerry thought about it for a second, and in a low whisper said, “I want to perform a government coup.”

“What did you say?” asked Déjà.

“I want you to perform a government coup, okay?” said in that “Will you stop bugging me?” tone of voice.

“A government coup?”

Still in a huff, and heading toward his desk he voiced, “What, is there an echo in here?” Jerry soon regretted saying that, because just then Déjà said, “A government coup?” and Jerry, now back where he started and heading toward his desk again said, for some reason, “What, is there an echo in here?”

“I really wish you wouldn’t do that,” even though he understood full well that Déjà would listen to him about as much as we would listen to a new politician saying, “I am not a crook.”

---

Oh dear. How to I explain this, so many years after the fact? Okay... here goes:

As I mentioned, the majority of what I wrote for many years was all fiction. All the emo-non-fiction crap about how I can’t get laid and what records I want to buy are RECENT developments, in the terms of the last 10 years. When I was still in High School, I fancied myself as some sort of American Writer, knocking off short-stories and novels once a year for the rest of my life, traveling the country in some fancy car, using my laptop to churn out my work and hitting up old cafes and diners across the US to give me inspiration and sustenance. (Where I got this idea from I still don’t know.) For the longest time this was genuiney how I thought I would spend my post-High School years. Either that or fighting crime in Seattle. (I’m not kidding either: I went so far as to design a costume.) It’s probably also good to take all of this in combined with the fact that I am a huge comic book collector. (Or rather, I myself am not huge, but occasionally the double-sized issues I buy are.)

Since this was where my interests outside of writing were, it was only a matter of time before my writing went in that direction as well. I managed to get a copy of the DC Comics Roleplaying game for Christmas one year (yes, I know... dark secrets you didn’t want to hear about... I game regularly, and you’ll just have to get used to it), and spent a lot of time making up characters and games that met my particular view of what comics should have been like. I have pages of back-story, how everyone is connected, related, and who hated who, etc., all in a series of notebooks I still have to this day. Very detailed stuff. I’ve gone back and forth on the idea of posting it on-line (should I?) ever since I discovered a huge network of DC Heroes websites (all personal creations using the same game system). Anyway, my friends and I would all play together in those days and the character that always popped up in my games was (you guessed it) Déjà Vu.

I had this particular story written long before the first issue of Bob’s was completed, but the other three Déjà Vu stories were written on the fly, as each issue’s deadline came up. It was the first time I’d written on a deadline, and while I think I did pretty good considering how old I was and what else was going on in my life, I wince slightly as I glance at these stories now. Maybe someday I’ll re-write them so I can feel better.
“So, is that all I get to know, or do I overthrow all the countries in the world ‘til I get the right one?”
“No... well... yes... but... I don’t know!”
“Well, a government coup is a little difficult to do when the person who wants you to do it doesn’t even know what country to coup.”

Again, in a low whisper, Jerry said, “It’s the United States.”
“What did you say?”
“The United States, okay? Jesus Christ!”
“Really?” said Vu, in a voice different than before, mainly because of the shock.
“Really,” whispered Jerry.
“Hey, that’s my line you stole there, Jer.”
Jerry failed to see any humor in that statement.

“Well now, a government coup, here in the United States, performed by yours truly. That’s pretty nifty. And spendy. My price for you is $200,000,000.” Déjà Vu then turned and started to leave.

“............” was all Jerry could get out, and finally he blurted, “$200,000,000?”
Déjà turned his head and asked, “Is that a problem?”
“Well, you could say that. It’s just that... that is just a tab bit out of my price range.”
“Gee, I wonder why? You tell me you want a U.S. government coup, no reason or rhyme or what to do after the job is done, and still want a reasonable price?”

“Okay, fine. What do you want to know?”

Sitting down, making sure that he was going to be comfortable for one hell of a story, he said, “Well, let’s start with Why?”
“The truth?”
“Preferably.”
Jerry sat down. He mulled over what he was going to say. He would have to pick his words very... carefully. He cursed his brother, who seemed to have been the one in his family who was a master at verbal interplay.

“I want my job back,” he finally managed.

“Job?”
“Yes, my job. The one that I was fired from.”

“And,” said in that voice that tries to hide confusion, “what might that job be?”
“Oh, I’m sorry.”
“Well you should be.”
“I might as well give you the full story. I used to work for the U.S. government. My position was under the C.I.A. as a research scientist. I started a totally unique project, chimpanzee evolution. I wanted to accelerate the mental processes of chimps and other monkey-family animals so they can be trained like humans. That way in war times, the draft would become...”

“Obsolete?”
“Well, yes. But I ran into some... problems. Chimps began to go crazy. Lab workers got killed by psycho monkeys, and more than the projected number of chimps died before success. And we still weren’t even close to completion. And that just isn’t done, not in the government. My project was shut down. And when I protested, I was fired.”

“So... you want me to get into control of the U.S. government just to rehire you? Then what?”
“I don’t care. Pass a bill saying they can’t fire anybody named Jerry Fields; you can put Quarley in the presidency for all I care. All I want is my job, or one just like it, back. Afterward, do whatever you want.” Then, under his breath he muttered, “So damn close.”

“If it’s that important, there are other research centers that you...”
“No!” Jerry snapped. “I’ve been blacklisted, so to speak. I have to do it this way; I have to have that job back. No alternatives.”

“Okay. I go in, take over the U.S. government, rehire you, and then let them go about their business as if nothing had happened?”

“That, basically, is it.”

“Okay, $200,000,000.”

“............” But it was too late, this time Déjà Vu was gone. When he went back to the window, Jerry saw a man back at the corner, shrouded in shadows, walking...
Gan Trig Fil asNiph rig, Jar Qill fat
naggle ffffft.
Caaaaaaaaaa-----------------------------A......\ ^
Syntax Errorrrrrrrrrr Ø000289SQP3.
        auStin
Kak el fritzzz R            N
?                
P
Lun by
The Quick Brown Armadillo...
7
9
R
zaq
\    Logo     Felelelelgg
/  t.   r.
L
Shhh!
Belgratn
3
Bite Ussssssssssssss!
\na na na na   |   na n  a...
\na na na na
8
Lord
My It's
Hot Hear
In
Ted Fred Helllllllllllllllllllllllll
quErtyiouP

..... and they lived happily ever after.
er.
er.
er.
er.
er.
er.
Felg.*?/?

37 This is probably the best example of the kind of pure nonsense I thought passed for genius in High School. For the record, there was reason to my madness, and, in my own defense, I was 16. It should also be noted that I never once tried to pass this off as a poem or prose, and instead never tried to defend exactly what it was to anyone. They either liked it, or then didn't, and I would shrug and say, "Oh well," and that would be the end of it. That was my way of being a "professional" who could handle "criticism", etc. (Almost no one but Mrs. Bridgens liked it, mind you.)

What happened was this: there was a story I was working on entitled Adrian (which is re-printed, in its final form, later in this collection). It was, at that time, the longest piece of text I'd ever produced, and I was quite proud of it. One night, in a fit of coffee-fueled energy, I actually finished the story (which clocked in at around 60 pages on the particular version of Word Perfect I was using, what with the formatting I was using, etc.). Since it was really late and I did have to get up for school the next day, I saved it to a disc on my mom's ancient 286 and called it a night. The next night I woke up and pushed my way through to her computer in an attempt to quickly print up a copy of the story so I could take it to school with me. I loaded up the file and, to my horror, the ending I'd put on the story was gone. In fact, a good portion of what I'd finished before that was gone, too. Apparently, since the disc was mostly full, and Adrian was too big, the file was mangled to fit on the disc, and therefore I lost most of the data.

Now, to some people, data loss is a part of life. It's something that you learn to live with and then move on. To me, it was the end of the world, and called for angry fits at school, long bitch-sessions to my friends, and a dwindling melancholy that lasted for days on end. That story was the most important thing in my world during that week, and to have it almost all gone drove me nuts. I ran every data-recovery program that I knew of in an attempt to get the file back, and in the long run could only get back a sort of mangled collection of ASCII garbage that looked quite a bit like what you see above.

Eventually I got over the fact that the story was gone forever, and eventually managed to churn out the above as a way of coping with it. I was even able to actually finish Adrian at some point, though it took a few weeks of grieving to get over the initial loss. (It was like getting dumped by someone and having to look for a new partner, only in this case I accidentally did the data-dumping and began to regret it very quickly.)

Still, I will understand if you are greatly annoyed. It wouldn't be the first time.

24
Editor’s Note:38

Well, down to business. Spring break is over. Time to wipe the grass stains off the clothes and start waking up before noon. And what better way to deal with it than another installment of our magazine.

Had I known the first issue was going to be such a chore, I might have chosen to make this magazine a one shot deal. At one point, I thought we’d never see print39.

But we did. Yaaaaaah Bob!

I want to thank (and apologize to) all the people who contributed and waited for the magazine all that time. I know that some of my original guesses for publication were wrong, but my wonderful advisor just kept on saying, “One more submission, please?”

Anyway, we made it, and now it’s time to begin the grueling process of working on the second issue.

Aurg!

I was so excited when we received our first letter I almost burst. Our little old magazine generated enough interest to cause someone to write a letter. Wow! I want to share it with you:

TO: Bob’s Imagination,
RE: Bob’s Imagination #1

Dear Bob’s Imagination,

Hello. At first when I received this magazine, I was kind of confused. I received it in the mail with no real explanation as to what it was, so I figured it was just junk mail.

However, as I was about to throw it out something caught my eye, and pretty soon I was completely wrapped up in the magazine and forgot completely about the state of the union. All I could think about was how good the art and stories were, and the new Economic plan just slipped my mind.

After I finished it I wasn’t sure what to think. After all, Hillary hadn’t seen it yet. But when she told me that she thought it was excellent, well, I just had to agree.

Anyway, I’d like to tell you all to keep up the good work. Send me the second issue when you print it. I’m sure that she’ll... I’ll like it.

Thank you.

Bill Clinton
President of the United States40

On a more serious note, we did receive another, real letter to the editor. However, it is a little like a story, and I consider it a piece of writing. Therefore, you will find it in the table of contents.

Well, leave it to me to forget to acknowledge the people who did the most important job that was done for me. I would like to give special thanks to Melissa Cooper, Lee Cooper, Marti Grissom, Mary Landers, and Mrs. Bridgens who helped edit and re-edit the spelling and grammar errors the computer didn’t catch. Without them, well, the magazine would have had twice as many errors than were seen.41

I’d also like to apologize for any mistakes made in the first issue. We do have a limited amount of time and a lot of material to coordinate, and it’s only human to let a few mistakes slip by.

38 The Editor’s Note from Bob’s Imagination #2. These are included as more of a historical curiosity rather than as a sample of my writing. For me, they really help establish what was going on at the time better than my own explanations. Hope you don’t mind.

39 This was a little jab at Mrs. Bridgens. I’m surprised she didn’t notice it when she edited this issue, and thus have it removed.

40 Another point of contention between Mrs. Bridgens and I, one we almost came to blows over. Originally this letter was something my friend Devin Miller had put together that was “written” by David Koresh (Devin was a contributor to Bob’s as well as a good roleplaying friend, too). At the time Devin wrote it, the Waco thing was still happening but had not been “wrapped up” by the FBI, so to speak. The content of the letter was pretty harmless, essentially saying that he read the first issue of Bob’s, liked it, and wanted to get a subscription, etc. There were a couple of “cult” jokes in there and something about him being the Son of God, etc., but that was about it. A typical piece of satire.

Between the time that Devin wrote it and the time this issue was getting a final edit, the Waco situation was finally resolved, and Koresh was dead. To me, this only increased the humor of the letter: he was asking for a subscription in a letter that was being read after he was dead and he would no longer be around to read anything, let alone our publication. I admit it was in poor taste, but then it was not my place to tell anyone what kind of jokes they could and couldn’t tell (or laugh at, for that matter). My job was to present them in a publication that was reflective on the kind of jokes that students thought were funny. (On more than one occasion I did not “get” a lot of the stuff Mrs. Bridgens insisted upon having me print, but I generally dug in my heels and went ahead and ran it anyway.) Mrs. Bridgens didn’t see it my way at all, and we went several rounds in the issue, she arguing the side of “taste” and me arguing the side of Freedom of Speech. As is often the case, Freedom of Speech lost: Eventually I caved and to fill the hole quickly threw together the letter from Clinton that ended up in the final draft. (Because of the circumstances it was written under, the jokes sound way too forced to me, but oh well.) I wanted to include, in this collection, the original letter, but was unable to locate a copy all these years later. Obviously I either gave it back to Devin or, in all likelihood, lost it at some point since then. If anyone ever finds a copy of it (as there is probably one somewhere), I would love to read it to see if it’s still funny (probably not, but it’s worth a shot anyway).

41 I have never been the best speller, and while I love writing, I have never been able to master the grammar of this god-forsaken language I choose to actually use. This has been an on-going problem, especially in the A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. zines as well as I’d Buy That For A Dollar, which have the most (and worst) spelling/grammar problems ever. I have done my best to try and iron out all the kinks in this collection, but we’ll have to face facts: I will never win a spelling bee, and I will never be able to effectively employ the lessons of Strunk & White. Sorry Mrs. Gunter!
I’d like to quiet a rumor I heard in one of my classes before it starts to be known as fact. Myself, and my anonymous cohort, are in no way prejudiced against anybody in anyway, for obvious reasons.

This rumor started (I do believe) when a girl approached me and said, “The name of your magazine is pretty sexist.” (Note: this is not the exact conversation, but a close representation of it.)

I was shocked. Sexist? “How so?” I replied.

“Well,” she said, “Bob’s Imagination. Bob is a male name. Obviously it’s sexist.”

Again, I was dumbfounded.

She continued. “Why don’t you name it Barbara’s Imagination instead? It’s less sexist if you ask me.”

In my mind, this struck me as bizarre. I mean, obviously the name is a joke, with no harm intended.

The point is, I believe the problem was not ours. We were using a fairly harmless title for our magazine. I mean, if you spell Bob backwards it’s not sexist. And if you interpret it differently, Bob is a generic name for a person, and your imagination is your creativity. In other words, any given person’s creativity.

Nowhere does it say we are sexist.

In my opinion, I think she, and not we, have the problem.

One last favor I’d like to ask any or all people in my audience. Since I have been a really nice editor to all of you, I’d like to point out that my birthday is April 30th, and that I accept any type of tangible present (tens and twenties preferably), and all gifts can be sent the same way submissions are.

Well, now it’s time to start the second issue! (Party horns sound in the background.) In it we have a whole bunch of stuff guaranteed to make you think. Again, your letters are welcome (send them to me the same way you do your art). We still want submissions, so keep sending. Anything that you can cope to give up to us is wanted. If what you’re sending is too personal, pen names are acceptable (or, just submit it anonymously). We have yet to turn down anything.

Well, that about wraps it up for me this month. I’ve got a parting phrase for all you intelligent people out there: Run Far and Perspire.

On top of that, I’d like to turn the soapbox over to an old friend of mine who wrote another quote that I like, and as if that wasn’t enough, my anonymous cohort would like to put in his two cents.

Until next time, this is Austin Rich, and I am outta here!

---

“But i don’t want to go among mad people,” Alice remarked.

“Oh, you can’t help that,” said the cat. “We’re all mad here.

I’m mad, you’re mad.”

“How do you know i’m mad?” said Alice.

“You must be,” said the cat, “or you wouldn’t have come here.”

Lewis Carrol, “Alice’s Adventures In Wonderland”

---

42 Yes, this conversation actually took place. I can’t remember her name, but she was someone sitting next to me in the computer lab one day, and until that conversation I’d never spoken to her before (and not once since). I had become a minor “celebrity” at school because of Bob’s and I am convinced that she would never have even talked to me if that wasn’t the case. In her defense, she was probably kidding to one degree, but I still thought it was a good point to make anyway, as people were already beginning to wonder if I should be allowed to edit a school publication when compared to what I thought was (and wasn’t) acceptable material for students to be reading. I guess I’m just a bad influence on kids (even when I was one). I also think it’s funny that in her mind, using a woman’s name was “less sexist”. Wouldn’t I just piss of the un-represented guys then?

43 Wow… I just realized that I stole this line from my brother Buck. He used this line in his story The Adventures of Spare-O & Red Cardinal, which I helped him co-write/edit (which is not included in the collection… sorry Buck). It was based on our nicknames for each other, and was more comedy than anything else (with super-hero jokes all throughout). Good stuff. Sorry I stole the line, though.

44 This line is a little tribute to my long-standing Star Trek habit – which in High School was probably at its peak – and my connection with the Cross Country team, a line I would use during practices quite often. Yeah, I was that annoying.

45 Okay, since I’m letting all the skeleton’s out of the closet with this collection, it’s time for me to come clean on this one too: I haven’t yet (to this day) read Alice’s Adventures In Wonderland. The irony is even sweeter when combined with the fact that, not only do I own a copy of it (and it currently resides on my bookshelf), but that I directly copied the quote (lowercase “i’s and all) from the comic book Batman: Arkham Asylum (written by Grant Morrison, which is well worth the read I might add). I can’t say that I don’t enjoy the quote, but I have felt guilt over implying that I’d read the book for many years now, and have several times since then tried to start reading the actual book but have yet to finish it. I imagine that when I finally sit down and read it a long sigh of relief, followed by a six-pack, will be in my future.

26
Hello. It's me, the somewhat omnivorous, brutally honest and often anonymous cohort. I've been asked to do a little piece for an editor's note and I guess that that is what I am doing. A long time ago this Austin guy might have come to me with this idea for some kind of underground newspaper or magazine. I thought to myself, self, this will never work. Well, I guess the idea never did work.

Recently, this Austin guy came to me again and said, "Say , how would you like to co-edit this magazine of writing?" I said all sorts of affirmative phrases to him like, 'sure, whatever you say Austin,' and when this whole thing actually came to life I was quite amazed and found myself full of ideas.

Has anybody ever heard of Bob? A lot of people think that he is a pretty cool guy. This isn't the Bob you see walking down the halls with girls swooning or gagging at him. He isn't the guy with hair on top of his head. He is the older man you see driving a white van or occasionally a white Ram Charger at the intersection between Little Caesar's and our local canteen of Big Gulps, bad hot dogs and the occasional nachos, 7-11. You might have noticed him no where else and you might have noticed no matter how many times he runs the light the officer, our local peace and justice, never pulls him over.

Bob is a bald guy in a tacky repairman's grey over suit. Bob is a part of every one of us.

Bob holds the image of the ever-busy father figure that has no children and shares the opinion that old males working on some little gadget should take the time to pull up their pants just a little. ('Say NO to crack', and all.) Bob, when not the physical apparition, is the imagination in each of us. He is the part of our minds that stores data at the moments we say, 'wouldn't that be a neat story idea'.

This magazine is the product of many people's Bob. It is Bob's brainchild. Ultimately it is 'Bob's Imagination'.

This issue is dedicated to Shalise, a certain waitress that served us mediocre coffee at an okay restaurant during a brainstorming session, and though she didn't seem to understand exactly what we were doing, she still served coffee with a smile.

-----------------------------------------------

Déjà Vu: Again

Hi. My name is Déjà Vu. Hi. My name is Déjà Vu.

Sorry, force of habit.

46 As much as I tried to get Steve to write a second introduction to the first issue of Bob's, he put off the task until it was far too late (to be fair, this is a habit that we both learned from each other). For the second issue, I made him promise me that he would buckle down and actually write something, and he promised he would fill a page to make up for his sloth the last time around. Instead, this is what I got. This was very typical of Steve: while he considered himself a writer and would often even tell me that I had a lot to accomplish before I could ever compare to him, his output was much, much slimmer. While he did have a huge collection of stuff he'd written before I met him, little new material ever seemed to come my way. Such as it is.

47 It's true, too: he and I planned to put together a newsletter that tackled the "seamy underbelly" of CGHS, as we both agreed that teachers could care less and that students were getting screwed, education-wise. We would tackle subjects like the jocks miraculously getting very good grades, while people like us who fussed over academics were getting points marked off of assignments when we tried to throw in something creative. Sloth won out in the end on this project (as usual).

48 With hindsight I believe that Steve had no faith in me actually getting anywhere with Bob's (or any of my projects / goals / desires). I think it's the perfect bit of foreshadowing, considering the future of our friendship.

49 Re-reading this now, I can't believe that I actually thought Steve was onto something with this piece. My only explanation is that I was pretty stoked that he actually wrote something when I asked him to, and probably didn't really pay much attention to the content. Live and learn.

50 Apparently I was no better at hiding my crushes then than I am now. Sigh. It only gets worse, my friends...

51 This is my least favorite installment of the four Déjà Vu stories I wrote. First of all it doesn't really add to the story and in fact sort of chops up the action by inserting this interlude that is overly informative and doesn't get you anywhere close to the other stuff that's interesting. Second, it's from Déjà's point of view, and were I to write these stories now, I would NEVER tell anything from his POVs (it's not in his character, period). Thirdly, I would have really toned down the powers in all of the stories so that when they were used it was more interesting and worth reading about (so you can figure out what's going on as you go). The fact he explains it all to you just ruins it for me. Furthermore, why is he talking to you if he's supposed to be a mysterious mercenary in the first place? It makes no sense. Man, I'm really depressed now. I will admit that, at the time, I probably thought it was pretty important since people at school might not be as versed in Comics as I was and therefore might need a little introduction to who he was and how his powers worked, etc. Comics Books often produce "Who's Who" style information about their characters to accomplish this task, and this was my literary version of that kind of information. Reading it now, I just cringe. There are more plot holes and poorly researched references in these four stories than in Stargate, and that's saying a lot because a lame monkey only LSD without writing implements could improve on that piece of garbage. I should have just eliminated this story entirely, and maybe wrote another piece (between the next one and the final one) from the point of view of tabloid newspapers printing rumors that were circulating about the Oval Office. Oh well...
You may know me. You may not. Either way, you have heard of me. Mysterious man who sells his skills to the highest bidder. Enshrouded with a mystic air. “Stay away from him. He brings nothing by trouble.” Those of you who may deal in, quote unquote, “dirty” business may have seen the little publication describing me to prospective clients:

**Déjà Vu**  
*Name:* Unknown  
*Age:* Unknown  
*Height/Weight:* 5'10"/192 lbs.

**Additional Information:** Contact with Déjà is easy. Just give the word to someone who’s heard of him. Word of mouth is his most powerful asset. Well versed in combat. Carries a staff everywhere. Additional weapons only when necessary. Carries some sort of talent with him. Can create effects of déjà vu. Origin of combat training and ability is unknown. Déjà’s talents to be used at your own risk.

That’s me. In a nutshell. Or should I say, the nutshell itself. All that mysterious outside stuff that is projected is merely a cover-up. Underneath that, I’m just a normal guy. Sort of.

My combat knowledge is easy to explain. I was trained, plain and simple. In fact, everything about me, just about all the stuff I know and can do to aid me in my adventures, was taught to me. Plain and simple. I took a vow, however, to never reveal who the person who trained me is. Only a successor or ward can know that, or so I was told. I’ve only met two other people that were trained by her. One of them I love like my brother, cause he is. The other, well, let’s just say I hate him like my brother, but he isn’t.

Just so you don’t get all curious and all, I’ve not seen my brother since we were trained. He never did finish his training, though. Hated the fact that he was being too much like me. The other guy, for some reason, I see almost too much. Wants to kill me, or some nonsense. Something about honor.

Never had problems with that you see. I always keep my word. Always. I sign a contract, make a deal, give my word, and you can sure as hell expect me to keep it. But you see, I got this thing with people who cross me. Don’t like it much. They often end up hurt badly. Depending on the situation, they might end up dead. Hey, I got no qualms with killing. Not any major ones anyway. See, I’ve always known that the ways the rules are set is screwed, so I figure I’ll just live by my own. Hey, I’m fairly reasonable if you just understand where I’m coming from. Some people are scum, and if they are, and I know they aren’t going to be of much use to this world, well, fair’s fair. Give the other guy a chance, I say.

But don’t get me wrong. I don’t just go and blindly kill anyone and everyone I want to. I’ve got to maintain the highest standards in this business you know. I kill under two conditions:

1. I signed a contract to off the guy and I find the job worth doing, or
2. I find the guy I’m killing someone I would have signed a contract to kill if someone had offered to make one.

Now I understand what you’re thinking. You’re saying, “He’s an assassin!” with a hint of fear in your voice.

No. I hate the word assassin. Sounds so unlikely. Sounds so unprofessional. Assassin. It just doesn’t set well with me. I prefer the term mercenary. Because that’s what I am, plain and simple. I do anything and everything that a person can get me to sign a contract to do. However, the toughest part is, getting me to want to do it.

About this talent before I lose your interest. If you want my opinion, it’s a bunch of hocus pocus. The technical explanation has been given to me once or twice. “Being born a slightly above average child in the mental areas of life has unlocked a potential to influence people in a way similar to an illusion, in which the victim experiences a form of ‘déjà vu’ that is setup by the possessor of the talent. Furthermore, his body being in almost perfect physical condition has lent proof to the theory that he has some type of rare gene that allows him to be exceptional in the physical and mental abilities. Furthermore...” etc, etc, etc. The way I see it, I was born with some weird ability, and now I can make people experience, “Déjà Vu.” I kind of like the thing personally, but if you wanted to have it explained you’re coming to the wrong guy. I’ve got it, and no one else does. Plain and simple.

But you’re probably not really interested in this kind of stuff. If I know you, I know that you want to hear about the good stuff. The adventure, the excitement, the money and romance. Well, I get a lot of that. Why do you think I’m in this business, for my health?

But underneath all of those things there is another reason I do all of this stuff. One, plain and simple reason.

Revenge.

---

52 Brief tangent: I remember very vividly where I was the day we discussed the JFK assassination in school. Jokes aside, I was in my American History class, and the teacher was lecturing about the specifics of the case, etc. At one point he was covering was the various theories people have about how JFK was killed, adding that many people believed the actual gunmen might have been hired assassins. While I took all of this as part of the lecture, scribbling notes like I normally did, I remember a lot of people in my class being confused by this, asking what that meant. It turned out they couldn’t wrap their heads around the idea of a hired assassin. Here they were, the people who used to mock me for my comics, and the fact that I knew what an assassin was and they didn’t was thanks to what I got mocked for. God I love irony.
Letter To The Editor

When I was very young I was afraid of the dark. At night, in bed, I believed I had to stay underneath my covers or the monsters that hid in the dark would get me. But I grew out of this and conquered my fear of the dark.

When I was a teenager I was afraid I would not find friends who deserved my loyalty. They always seemed to fall away when I needed them the most. I soon learned not to expect as much from my friends as I was willing to give. Friendships were easier after that.

When I first fell in love I was afraid I might get hurt. I had seen so many broken hearts and divorces in seemingly perfect marriages. But I was in love and decided to follow my heart.

When I had my first child I was afraid I would never be able to care for this small person who would be needing so much. I experienced many successes along with my failures and now that he is nearly 18, I can see that somehow, I got him through.

When I was divorced I was afraid I could never stand on my own; never find my way through this jungle of a world to learn a new way of life. But I did and can even say I am much happier learning that I can take care of myself.

When I heard about the OCA I was afraid of what they were trying to do to our world. How much power can they use to stir up problems that exist only in their own, paranoid minds? Always, for me, I saw light at the end of scary tunnels, but I do not see any now. How will my children’s children deal with this new monster lurking in the darkness of the OCA’s fanatic mind? When will the OCA grow up and see there are no monsters in the shadows of this darkness they’ve made? Their “monsters” are only people, living their lives, enjoying their world and looking for lights at the end of their own tunnels – lights the OCA is trying to extinguish.

Marti Grissom,
Cottage Grove Business Owner
and Concerned Citizen

53 A lot of people might have forgotten, or might not have known in the first place, but 1993 was a scary year for many people. By the time I was working on Bob’s mom had come out of the closet, lived with (and slept with) another woman, and was also public about this while she owned a small business. Cottage Grove, being a very small town, was very much concerned about its local interests, including High School sports, logging, and voting conservative on most every issue. (Drinking beer while listening to country music also seemed to fit in there somewhere, as did chasing away black families.) This did not bode well for my mom or her partner (or their kids for that matter).

True to form, when the OCA ran Measure 9, the “Yes on 9” paraphernalia popped up everywhere. In retaliation, we started wearing “No on 9″ buttons to school and did our best to stand up for what we all believed in. This led us to no end of problems (in town and at school), the worst of which was my brother Buck getting endless beatings because of his button he wore on his hat. I fared better than him, but walking through the hallways was like running a gauntlet of insults and slurs, punctuated with books being knocked out of my hands and a steady stream of saliva covering me from head to toe. I can only imagine what it must have been like for my mom and her girlfriend, who were the actual gay ones in our family.

I remember we used to get occasional phone calls from the OCA, trying to argue with my mom or her girlfriend (mostly trying to convince them that what they were doing was “wrong”). I know both of them fell into the trap a few times, getting into heated arguments with the OCA until the point of frustration and hang-ups. I remember her girlfriend once said, “I’m sorry, I’ve got to hang up, I need to pick up my kids from school,” to which the OCA flunked actually said, “But lesbians are incapable of having children!” That got a good laugh around our house during a time of extreme anxiety and frustration, even if it was at the expense of someone ignorant and brainwashed.

At one point my mom wrote this letter, which I think was actually published in the local Cottage Grove paper (and caused quite a bit of local controversy, if I’m not mistaken). While we weren’t the most politically active family, this was an issue that directly affected us, and I decided to run a copy of this letter in Bob’s. In many ways, I’m surprised that I got away with it. The majority of our school was VERY conservative, and even the teachers and staff were promoting “Yes on 9″ ideology. The fact that I got to print it either speaks volumes about Mrs. Bridgen’s personal stance on the issue (thank god), or the fact that she understood how important it was for me and didn’t get in my way. Either way, it was a very important issue at the time, and really gives a lot of context to my childhood as well as the problems I was facing at school and elsewhere (in addition to not being able to deal effectively with said problems). Ironically, things only got worse for us when the measure didn’t pass. C’est la vie.

Side Note: I remember very vividly when my mom “came out” to me. She had been living with – and sleeping in the same bed with – her girlfriend for many, many years, and while I never consciously figured out that they were lovers, it must have been something I knew subconsciously and never questioned or felt the need to bring up. For all I knew, it only made sense for them to share a room because space was limited, and as for me figuring it out, I was dealing with my own crap a little too often to put two and two together.

So, when I was about 17, my mom comes to my room, and I’m furiously hammering away at my typewriter [this is before I got a computer and before I met Melissa] about dating fantasy #276: I approach her in the hallway, and then... uhm... say hi? No, that won’t work... Damn! I just couldn’t figure out what to do about the fact that I was perpetually and hopelessly single. Anyway, my mom comes in, I put that on hold, and she says, “I have something to tell you.” As she launches into it I instantly know what she’s saying, and the only thing I could think while she was telling me this is, “Well... do you have any tips on meeting women, then?” To this day I haven’t told her this... maybe I should.)
Part VII: Censorship

Issues #1 & #2 came together fairly smoothly, in that there was minimal friction between Mrs. Bridgens and myself and we both did, more or less, our jobs: I put the magazine together & she supervised me doing it. "Supervised" is probably a bad word; considering that I did all the real work at home and only really met with her when I needed to hand the proofs over for her to edit. She and I only really saw each other when a problem came up. To put it lightly, by the time issue #3 was in the works, this was happening with every draft I showed her.

Years later it seems silly, but Mrs. Bridgens took her job far too seriously and genuinely worried about material that contained foul language or mentioned sex & drugs in any way. While I thought I was being straight with people by throwing in everything I got from students (which included a lot of work that had four-letter words, etc., in it), she would continually bring to my attention that it was all unacceptable and that kids should not have access to that kind of reading material. In a way I felt as if she was trying to get the point across to me that I shouldn't have anything to do with material of that nature. Whatever the case, I tried my best to be clever and "sneak" things past her, but with every draft I sent to her she caught every word that needed to be edited and every sentence that had the remotest drug / sexual reference.

My idea as an editor was to do the barest amount of editing on other people's writing, always asking the student for permission before something was cut or changed. I would correct spelling and grammar, and then confer with the student about parts that I thought should be altered to improve clarity or the strength of the piece. But in the end, I left everything up to the student. It was their vision of what the art should look like, and I was not there to question that vision, just present it as good as possible. So I would hand this version of the text over to Mrs. Bridgens, who would then cut everything to shreds and tell me to change it at the last minute, without telling the kid we were cutting out the heart and soul of the story (and in many cases she cut parts essential to the whole plot, making the neutered version irrelevant).

My first and obvious contention was the "language" issue. I immediately agreed that we would have to censor the more difficult language, though with each draft I would try to slip as many unedited words through as possible to see if she caught the all (sadly, she did). It made sense that in a High School publication that "f**k" would have to become "f---" and that "shit" would become "sh--" to get anything printed. But "hell" becoming "h---" and "damn" becoming "da--"? Not only did it not make any sense, even the most conservative Christians still use those words in their Bible, supposedly the most sacred book around. What kind of message does that send to kids?

Sadly I set the precedent early by caving in. Give 'em an inch...

The first story I remember having real trouble with was written by a girl I had not met, which was essentially the story from the movie Heathers stripped down and with minor alterations (though I was unaware of that at the time of publication since I hadn't seen the movie yet). The version I got (edited by Mrs. Bridgens, since the girl submitted it to her) made little sense with the revisions and seemed pretty strange to me, but Mrs. Bridgens said the girl really wanted it printed and had agreed to the changes. I put it in issue #1. After I distributed the magazine, the girl was pissed and let me know that the story had been chopped to pieces without her permission. I told her about how I'd gotten it and asked if I could get a copy of the original (without huge red scribbles marking out portions of the text), and found that it much easier to read in the unedited form. There were tons of references to drug use, alcohol and sex, and since that stuff occurred during portions of the plot, when Mrs. Bridges cut out some unacceptable a portion of the story was cut too. It's like watching Pulp Fiction on network TV... it just doesn't make any sense in the edited form.

That really pissed me off, but later I found out that Mrs. Bridgens did that with a good portion of the material that was originally submitted to her. Sadly, most students were happy to see their story printed at all, even if it was a destroyed and impotent version. Apparently, she could not be trusted to edit anything.

There were other problems too. Steve Eller wrote fiction under the name Cerrah Seal, and in one story there was a passage where he specifically went out of his way to mention that the guy and girl in the story didn't have sex (which was actually a plot-point: later in the story he implies he did have sex with her as an attempt to impress people, and because of this she refuses to see him anymore. He then becomes really upset and kills himself... yeah, you can tell we were in High School for sure). Mrs. Bridgens wanted to cut out the line about not having sex. Huh? With that line gone it makes no sense when she breaks up with him, which is sort of the hinge of the story. Mrs. Bridgens explanation seemed far too flimsy and all three of us (her, Steve & I) argued about it for quite some time.

Her reasoning was this: the scene where they didn't have sex was inappropriate. (Yet the scene where he kills himself at the end wasn't? I don't get it? Sex and drugs were always unacceptable in her mind, but I got lots of submissions where people killed other people or themselves and Mrs. Bridgens never once censored any of those. Family values at work, my friends. I wonder what kind of books she doesn't let her kids read....) How not having sex was inappropriate never really came out, but to her it seemed that if we left that line in the story the entire fabric of the universe would fall apart. "Just imagine if someone read that and got the wrong idea," she said. What? The idea not to have sex? Isn't that what adults want kids to do?

I finally caved on that one, since part one of the story had appeared in issue #1 and sort of left you hanging. I felt that I needed to do whatever it took (for Steve's sake) to make sure the story was printed. Even though he initially agreed to the changes Mrs. Bridgens insisted on, he never let me forget how I fucked up his story. Strike two.

The third problem came down when a friend of mine, Brandon, gave me a bunch of drawings and stories he'd done. They were all really good and Bob's was hurting for actual art, so I sprinkled the drawings liberally throughout the magazine. However, after he gave me the material, he dropped out of school and hitchhiked to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. No problem; he'd given me more than enough material to fill future issues (and then some) so I went ahead with business as usual. Except that, once Mrs. Bridgens learned that he was no longer in school, she cut all of his material. Her reasoning was that if he was no longer a student, it was inappropriate to continue to print his material in a school publication. My reasoning was that the magazine was a reflection of student art and writing, and since some students who are creative do drop out of school, we should keep on printing his stuff to
represent all aspects of “student” life. My logic was met with an inflexible brick wall of stupidity. It only hurt my case when I started to name off poetry by adults and other non-students that I’d also included in Bob’s, or the fact that Steve was no longer a student either (he’d opted for the Lane Community College High School completion route to graduation). Before the red ink on the original edit had dried she additionally cut the other half of what I’d lined up for issue #3. While, with hindsight, I will say that she had more of a leg to stand on with this point than all the others, it was no less frustrating to have her cut decent material that would have remained in the issue if I had kept my mouth shut about their status as students. Live and learn.

The final straw came when a friend of mine, Chris DeLay, handed over a story he’d written based on his own life, titled “The Birthday Story”. This was a fairly harmless (and, admittedly, a poorly written) story about his really shitty birthday, which had occasional moments of humor here and there that piqued my interest enough to make me want to run it. (Plus, I was REALLY hurting for material having lost Steve & Brandon’s work just previous to this submission.) One part of the story contained a satirical anecdote relating to local politics. What really happened: a local politician, Peg Jolin, had been using money they raised to run for office to buy herself a new Truck, and when she got caught she was sentenced to work in the local community center. For the most part, everyone thought this was her just dessert. (She was so guilty even her supporters couldn’t really defend her.) Chris thought this was hilarious, because he worked at the community center and spent every moment he could getting her shit and making her work really hard to burn off that “service” she owed the city.

So to make a point of all of this, in his story the main character goes to the community center and sees this political figure figuring pool cues, darts and other such stuff. Then the main character makes some comment about how any common felon will pay their dues at the community center now. We thought this was pretty funny. Mrs. Bridgens claimed this was slander.

Now, there’s a big difference between slander and satire. Slander is the act of claiming something about a public figure is true when it’s not, and would therefore expose you to lawsuits and other bad shit you could get in trouble for. Satire is a humorous way to poke fun at a public figure, based in fact or reality (and is a completely protected form of free speech no matter what right-wing propaganda you actually buy into). Having lost her with in the past, I tried very hard to stand my ground and again found my arguments falling on deaf ears. To her, this was not a joke but a way to get a small High School publication in HUGE trouble. She refused to believe that there was a difference between slander and satire (and keep in mind she was an English Teacher).

Because of all these “discussions” she and I were having, Mrs. Bridgens finally suggested that we should just pull the plug on issues #3 & #4. It seemed to her that I was not really willing to play by the rules and she didn’t feel that it was worth her time (or the school’s time) to continue to support a magazine like the one I wanted. To me, this was the worst scenario possible. It was a total and complete strategic launch by her against all that was important to me; I had not a single defense at my disposal. If she did pull the plug on the magazine, there was nothing I could do. No other teacher would “supervise” me because Mrs. Bridgens had already relayed to the staff the “problems” that were going on. Not only did I need Bob’s to graduate, I also needed it because there was nothing else I really cared about at school in the first place. Emotionally, it was keeping me sane.

Desperate and feeling defeated, I called up Steve for another “brainstorming” (coffee) session. As we sat there feeling miserable and worthless, it became apparent that I was never going to get my way. Arguments with teachers (or anyone in charge at a school) were never won, and you could not change Mrs. Bridgens’ mind. If I persisted in my vision we’d lose the magazine completely, and either scenario left a bad taste in my mouth (and it wasn’t from the shitty coffee we were drinking either). It all kept coming back to the fact that, if I had total control over the magazine, there would be no problem.

As Steve had been prone to do occasionally, he leaned back and said yet another sentence that would lead to another breakthrough in my publishing life: “Why don’t you just make a different magazine yourself?”

Clouds parted. Angels sang. Light came down from the fluorescent tubes above. The answer had never been so clear. It had never occurred to me that I could make a magazine on my own. The whole time working with Bob’s I felt as if I had to work within the system to get anywhere with the magazine. Yes, I was pushing the edges of the rules of the system, but I still had to be inside it to get the magazine to even exist. The fact that I could circumvent all of that had never even occurred to me.

That night I wrote a letter to Mrs. Bridgens, stating my beliefs again in less heated language. However, I went on to say that the magazine was more important to me than squabbling, and therefore I would do whatever it took to get the okay for issues #3 & #4 to go to print. I ended by telling her that I was going to go ahead with my own vision independently and thanked her for the little lesson in censorship. I met with her later that day and she agreed that the magazine was important, and that I could continue as long as I agreed to her conditions.

However, I didn’t completely let the issue go. In the school paper I wrote an editorial detailing the censorship issues I was dealing with and letting the student body (as well as the rest of the staff) know what was going on behind the scenes (see below). Not only did I now have Bob’s up and running again, but I had a new magazine I was working on and had shown the school how closed-minded Mrs. Bridgens (and, in some ways, the rest of the staff) was being. Stating in the paper that there was something happening “behind the scenes” not only made Bob’s more popular, but made a lot of people curious about what had happened (and really opened the floodgates for more material and questions about the censored stuff). In a round-about way, I got to have my cake and eat it too.

Surprisingly Mrs. Bridgens never once mentioned the article, nor did she complain about the picture I had painted of her in it. Either she did not read the article OR she felt that, unlike sex, drugs & rock ‘n’ roll, it was okay to talk about censorship.
Censorship is a big issue, and something we all have to deal with. Considering my position on the newspaper staff, and my wish to be a professional writer, it comes up regularly for me. True, I am an opinionated person, and often I complain too much. But this time I don’t think so.

Recently, there have been three cases of direct censorship that I, as the editor of the famed magazine Bob’s Imagination, have had to deal with. I feel they are very unwarranted.

First of all, censorship is unconstitutional. Plain and simple. Of course the restriction “within the bounds of good taste” may have made things easier to deal with. However, I am aware that certain words (even though I hear them in our school every day) are not appropriate. I can live with that. No harm done.

Twisted Deeds was a story submitted to Bob’s. In it, the main character was a lesbian in love with another woman. They had done drugs in the past. They had also had sex with each other and other people.

They were in high school.

All references to the girls’ homosexuality, drugs and intercourse was asked to be taken out. I never really got an explanation on that one, and ended up (unfortunately) printing it censored.

The Miracle Child involved a high school couple who ended up at her house. They slept in the same bed, but chose not to have sex.

The entire scene was asked to be removed on the grounds that it was not appropriate.

The Birthday Story makes a vague reference to convicted felon Peg John, who had to serve community service at the Community Center. The main character thinks to himself, “Now the Community Center will turn into a place where any felon can serve their debt to society.”

This scene was asked to be changed to make the reference to a fictional town and senator instead of the town and person based in reality on the grounds of political slander.

Fortunately, I was able to save The Miracle Child. The Birthday Story would have seen print, but the author chose not to print it, because he felt even those minor changes was an example of major censorship.

First, let me point out Bob’s is a magazine that is a representation of student art and writing. Not a representation of what we would like our students to be like. Face it, these, among other issues, are what students think about. If a student can’t write or express what he/she as a person really feels, then we are defeating the purpose of the magazine and eventually the characteristics that we would want our own kids to have.

Who wants to deal with people who don’t take a stand and state their opinions because they learned it in high school? I’d also like to state that I’m not saying I agree with their stories individually. In fact, the little disclaimer in the first issue saying, “The opinions and views expressed here are only those of the person who wrote the piece. It is in no way the opinion of myself,” is a dead giveaway. Just because one student writes a story, does not mean that myself, the entire magazine staff or our adviser thinks that way.

True, the magazine is school funded. True, we have to play by the rules. But I think that in this case, the rules have been made unfairly. Someone said, “I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend with my life your right to say it.” I think that about covers my opinion.

Censorship is unconstitutional. Plain and simple.

---

Editor’s Note:

I’m sure you’ve all heard it happen before. For the longest time you would see something, and you’d think, “How does that work?” You’d really like to know, but part of you doesn’t because it might ruin the way you view it. For example, if you ever see a really good card trick, chances are you won’t want to know how it works because, if it was good enough, it is just like magic.

I’ve tried to point this out to people before, and one day I told my friends that I believed cars were magic. They are, to me. If anyone was to ever try to ask me how any part of a car worked, I’d have to telling them it was magic. Because in my mind, there is no way that that many mechanical parts can operate simultaneously and produce the motion that cars make. It’s impossible in my mind, no matter how anyone tries to explain it. It’s just plain magic.

---

54 Reprinted from the April 16th, 1993 Issue of Lion’s Roar (Volume 51, Issue 3).

55 Can I just state for the record that I don’t remember being this egotistical in High School. I guess, with booze comes humility.

56 Re-reading this now, I realize two things: how poorly this article was written in the first place, and how badly it was editing. I don’t remember being really “lengthy” in my editorials, and that on more than one occasion the text would be trimmed back quite a bit to fit. I can’t tell which is worse: being a poor writer and making up for this fact by going on and on about a subject you are passionate about, or having your ideas that take several pages to culminate be cut back to something that’s less than a single page in length. All I know now is that the combination of the two makes for some tedious reading in the hear and now. Sigh.

57 The Editor’s Note from Bob’s Imagination #3.
However, my friends just thought I was trying to be silly (I wonder where they got that idea), and for the rest of the conversation they tried to come up with things that were more magical then my car analogy (i.e. Microwaves, because when you put food in it the food comes out hot, but the air isn’t).

However, my original statement stands. Some things are magic. In fact, I’m not just talking in the sense of not knowing the physics or mechanics or whatever behind it, but there is really a thing in this world called magic. It exists everywhere, and it exists at all times. It’s more commonly known as work.

Seriously. If you spend enough time on a project, there is no true way to determine exactly where it came from. This magazine, for example. This magazine is not by any definition of the word mine. In fact, I can’t even say the ideas in this text I’m typing here are mine (everyone and their brother has claimed some of the things I’ve claimed at one point or another). Some of it is yours. Some of it is your friend’s. Some of it belongs to people that have been dead for three hundred years that I never knew. But in the end not a bit of the ideas have been original, or creative.

So how is it magic? Because I choose to write them now. Why did I choose to write them now? I don’t know. I had planned a completely different Editor’s Note when I sat down at this computer today. But when I got to typing, this came out.

The magic is not in us, or in what we write. But it is us, and it is how we write. Or, in some cases, how we draw, sculpt, etc. Anything. All of it, a product of everyone, everything, every little thing we’ve seen, heard, tasted, smelled, and felt. Not a bit of it belonging to us. Every bit ours.

This magazine is magic. I could never tell you where my personal work or magic begins and ends, because a lot of you have more say in it than I (I’m just the Editor, after all). That makes it more magic. This book is magic because all of us, some of who don’t even know each other, some of us who don’t even think they’ll even know each other, have all chosen to pool their own magic, their ability to call on the past and create a somewhat original piece of art. That makes us magic. That makes us special. That makes us all a part of this unusual magic that none of us can ever explain.

Well, wasn’t that incredibly deep?

Well, up this issue we’ve got plenty of things to raise your interest. DeJà Vu and friends are back, and this time there’s some actual action! In addition to that we’ve got all the regular submitters, plus a whole bunch of new people. Can you stand the excitement?

Technical difficulties have made it impossible to print Brandon’s art, his story, and Cerrah Seal’s poems and stories. Unfortunately, I’m not at liberty to divulge why (I’ll give you a hint: A New Magazine Is Coming). 58

Bob has finally got a home! On May 1st, the day after my birthday, my brand new computer (appropriately named Dexter 59) went on line, becoming the first official home of Bob’s Imagination. No longer will I have to borrow computer time off of Rhonda Turnquist or my mother’s 286. No longer will a five and a quarter inch discs be the home to your writing. 60 No longer will I have to show the vaccination papers for every known virus to people who think my disk has Michelangelo 61. Bob has a home! Yeaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!!!

I’m fresh out of stuff to say, so I’ll sign off. This is Austin Rich, and I’m outta here!

This issue is dedicated to Heidi Gunter, Editor of The Wordsmith (our sister magazine), whose support of all writers over the last few years has inspired me, and others, and without her teaching we would all probably be sitting at home rotting our brains on MTV instead of reading this highly intellectual magazine. 62

58 Considering how “anarchistic” she thought my vision of publishing was, I’m surprised that she didn’t flip out about making this reference to the new magazine I was planning. Mayhaps, on some base level, Mrs. Bridgens thought I was standing up for something I thought was right and therefore wanted to at least give me that. Still, I should state that quite often I would throw in lines about this, that, or the other, and she would cut them, often without telling me or defending a reason why. It was pretty tough working under her, for the sole reason that she tried to pull the, “Because I say so,” crap on me when we were supposed to be working together, not against each other. Not only was it condescending, but to another degree it essentially told me that she thought of me as nothing more than a child, and Bob’s as nothing more than a child’s project. That might not have been her intent, but that is definitely how she came across.

59 Like everything else in my life, this is a huge inside joke that really only I got. Dexter Roland was the name of a detective character I’d created that I named my computer after. In the time since then I’ve actually recycled that name a few times over. On another note, Dexter (the computer) lasted me until about two years ago, when my brother built a new one for me that I named Arthur Dent. Since then I’ve upgraded to a new mother board, and because of the re-build changed the name back to Dexter.

60 Wow... I just realized that when I first started using computers, 5 1/4” discs were still the standard. That seems so long ago...

61 I seem to recall this being a huge deal as far as computer viruses were concerned, back in the day. It was supposed to start causing trouble on a certain day (I believe it was Michelangelo’s birthday), and since me and my friends were into that kind of stuff I was pretty obsessed with it at the time. Humorously, I can’t even remember enough about the virus to adequately explain it now, making this joke not only dated but more or less incomprehensible 10 years later. (But isn’t that the case with a lot of computer-related anecdotes?)

62 There’s Heidi’s name again. This dedication is also the first time in print that I insult MTV, which is ironic in all the cases I have done so since I was a huge fan and watched it quite a bit in those days. I still have a 6 hour tape from 1994 that consists of all videos I taped from long afternoons spent avoiding responsibility and watching MTV. Am I a big hypocrite or what? (Then again, who isn’t?)
“So James, how long you been working this job?”

“Listen Frank, I’m only going to say this one more time. Talk only when spoken to, or when you have something productive to say. Do you understand?”

“Yes sir!” Frank said. It appeared that his trainer was in no mood for small talk.

They continued walking for quite some time, until they reached the end of a hallway where another intersected. On the wall across from them there were two doors. One marked, “Mens”. The other, “Womens”.

“Okay. Even if this is more of a minor detail, it’s still important to check the bathrooms. Sometimes crazy people will hide in the stalls with who-knows-what for their intentions. That’s the entire reason we even sweep the building. You check the Women’s room, and I’ll take the Men’s. Do you understand?”

Frank nodded in comprehension.

James turned and entered the Men’s room.

Inside the light was on, which was of no surprise. James looked to his left and saw a camera moving back and forth, with the whole bathroom in it’s view. Everything, except the stalls.

James began the routine of opening the door, checking to see if there was anything or anyone that did not belong, and closing the door.

James did this for the first four of the five bathroom stall doors. However, when he got to the fifth door a strange feeling came over him. He shrugged it off, and opened the fifth bathroom stall door.

James entered the Men’s room.

Inside the light was on, which was of no surprise. James looked to his left and saw a camera moving back and forth, with the whole bathroom in it’s view. Everything, except the stalls.

James began the routine of opening the door, checking to see if there was anything or anyone that did not belong, and closing the door.

James continued to check the first four of the five bathroom doors. However, when he got to the fifth door a strange feeling came over him. He shrugged it off, and opened the fifth bathroom stall door.

James entered the Men’s room...

Déjà Vu took one last look at the night watchman before he stepped out of the Men’s room. Déjà smiled a very satisfying smile, and muttered something about a vu loop.

Déjà approached the Women’s room carefully. It took an enormous amount of willpower to set up the vu loop for the first guard, so he decided to just take this one out the old fashioned way. Besides, Déjà had no way of knowing where the guard was going to be anyway.

Vu took the direct approach this time, walking right in as if he had intended to. This did not go unnoticed by the night watchman, but it left him very puzzled. For one, men weren’t supposed to be in the Women’s room (however, this reasoning only confused him more because he then tried to come up with a logical reason why he was in the Women’s room in the first place). The second reason this startled him was because the man he saw was wearing a black leather jacket, boots, sunglasses (in the middle of the night, no less), and was carrying a staff that looked as if it was made of some fairly sturdy wood and, if his memory served him correctly, would hurt if it made contact with his body.

Fortunately, he had the perfect phrase to say in such situations.

“Uh, you’re not supposed to be in here, I think.” Frank flinched to himself after he said this, because that was not at all what he intended to say.

Déjà, however, was not going to make the same mistake.

“Oh. Then this must be the Women’s room. I’m sorry, I always get those two mixed up.”

Frank was even more puzzled by this statement, and by the fact that the man he was now looking at was getting closer.

Frank slowly began to realize that the man approaching him was not in here by some accident, and was, more than likely, the kind of person that he was supposed to be looking for, and, if he could send the message to the nerves in his arm fast enough, he should try to stop this man at all costs.

Frank reached for his gun, managed to pull it from the holster, and then drew a complete blank as to what to do next.

Déjà, on the other hand, did not. He quickly brought his staff up from where it was, and it connected where he intended.

The last thought that went through Frank’s mind was, “My memory obviously served me.”

As much as Déjà enjoyed that, he had no time to dilly-dally. He had a mission to complete, a special mission at that. One that he was only capable of completing, and one that will probably be talked about in every household in the United States for the next one hundred years and, more than likely, be considered the second most unusual event in American politics since the founding fathers wrote the Constitution.

Vu was hired to perform a government coup on the United States of America.

Déjà Vu ran quickly down the hall since the body of the second guard was going to be discovered sooner or later and the first guard was probably going to get out of the loop sooner or later. That would alert the entire building of his presence a good amount of time before he had intended to.

Eventually, he saw an elevator, and next to it was a door marked, “Stairs”. Déjà quickly opened the door marked, “Stairs,” and pushed the up button on the elevator in one swift and graceful movement. He then began to cautiously work his way up the stairs.
At the exact instant he set foot on the stairs, a room in a far off corner of the White House began to have a rather annoying noise become audible, which alerted the entire contents of the room of the fact that a person that did not belong in the White House was attempting to use the elevator; things were working exactly as Déjà had intended.

By the time he reached the top of the stairs, Vu could hear the to-busy-to-notice-that-someone-had-opened-and-closed-the-stairway-door security guards were trying to figure out why their almost Government-proof Security system had gone off when there was obviously no one in the elevator. Déjà waited patiently for them to conclude that it was some kind of mistake, and they all went back to the room whence they came.

After fifteen minutes had passed (plenty of time to get them all settled at their posts) Déjà opened the door at the top of the stairs and set off yet another alarm.

Déjà wasted no time with silly games, and went straight to the president’s room where the president probably was. However, the large guards outside the door were going to pose a problem.

Déjà managed to hit one of them with his fist, which threw him off guard. The second, however, was able to land a blow at Vu’s side, where a sharp crack indicated to Déjà that this guard was not to be taken lightly.

Déjà brought his staff up from under him, hitting the guard in the side of the head. This knocked him off guard, and gave Déjà the extra time he needed to get up and plan what to do next. He side ached tremendously, and it was obvious that something was broken.

The guard pulled a pistol from somewhere, but Déjà managed to knock it away with his staff. Left with few options, the guard dove toward Déjà. Déjà Vu had anticipated this, and was able to jump out of the way in time for the guard to hit his head on the wall, this time knocking him into an unconsciousness that would be satisfactory.

The first guard, however, took this moment to aim and fire twice at Déjà, at which time the pain in back of his legs caused him to buckle and collapse. Angered, Déjà pulled his staff in the general direction of that guard, which knocked him down as well, and knocked the gun out of his hands.

Déjà grabbed the gun and proceeded to shoot him in the legs.

“Now how does that feel?” he yelled. He was no longer in a playful mood.

The door the guards were guarding opened, and the President saw something that rather startled him. Déjà pointed the gun at him and said, “Help me up. I’ve had a bad evening.” The pool of blood Déjà was lying in said it all.

The President called his wife, and they helped Déjà to a chair, all the while Déjà was complaining and warning them to be careful, while the gun was still pointed at the president.

The First Lady, fortunately, knew a little first aid, and knew enough to try to remove the bullet. Intense pain shot up Déjà’s leg, and he immediately put a stop to that line of thinking.

Déjà then asked for two things.

“Mr. President. Do everything that I ask you to do and in five days I will leave and you can go about your business as if none of this had ever happened. Don’t, and you die and the V-P will be given the same ultimatum. It’s your choice.”

“Why should I allow you to do that?”

“Because, in some way, I should be awarded for being the first person to successfully break into the White House and live this long. And in another, all I plan to do is hire one man into a position that is no longer filled anyway, so there is, basically, nothing to lose. What do you say?”

The President thought for quite a while. “I’ll agree on the terms that you allow my wife and children to leave, you allow me to have Security guards watch you twenty-four hours a day, and that you tell me the exact nature of everything you plan to do in advance, and in great detail.”

The pain in Déjà’s leg clouded his better judgment, but, as he had pointed out before, he was lucky to even be alive.

“Only if after all of this is over and done with, that I get to go free. No arresting. Like I said, everything will be as it was.”

“Reluctantly, I’ll agree.”

The Security guards and Secret Service men picked that time to show up. The President quickly managed to wish them away, saying something to the effect of, “He went that way.” He closed and locked the door.

“Well, now that the deals have been made here are the first things I’ll be needing. Someone who knows first aid, and a phone.” Déjà was relieved to find that he had, indeed, pulled it off. The entire last two minutes had been, in his mind, the most difficult of his life.

“What do you need the phone for?” asked the President.

“I need to let my wife I’ll be home late.” Déjà sounded almost sincere.

The President reluctantly brought him a phone. He said, “What are you going to tell her?”

Déjà pulled out a receipt from his pocket from some previous purchase in addition to a pen, and scrawled out two sentences quickly, and gave the piece of paper to the President as he dialed.

On the second ring a tired hello was heard.

“Fields.”

“Yes, that’s me.”

“You start in two days.”

Déjà hung up the phone.64

---

63 Re-reading this now, I want to slap my High School self for such a bad joke. Dammit, Austin!

64 I have never been good at writing action of suspense, and this was my attempt at both. I shudder at the mere thought of it now. Sigh.
(Annex #1 & #2: Brandon Burkeen. Imagination #4: Tim Russel [originally on yellow cardstock]. Annex #3: Steve Eller.)
Part VIII: Bob: Annexed!

As soon as I finished issue #3, I immediately began work on my new magazine, Bob's Annex (again, named by Steve). The goal was pretty straightforward: to be a supplement to the Imagination, print the unedited versions of the censored material, and continue printing stories and material in the vein of the original magazine. The Annex would, by no means, be longer than, or the primary publication when comparing the two, but would contain all the run-off that was not considered "appropriate". In my mind, the two publications would work together, not separately.

To put it bluntly, Bob's Annex was doomed from the start. It was all immediate emotion: late night sessions on my computer were immediately xeroxed the next day and then passed out to the 20 or so people that I knew were interested. There was no editing and no consultation, even though Steve again claimed he wanted to help and then never did. Gathering material for the Annex was hard since most of the good stuff ended up in the Imagination anyway. The material that had been censored (and therefore was first up for publication in the Annex) fell into three primary categories: stuff Brandon did, stuff Steve did, and everything else that had been turned down (two other stories). In the three issues that I finished of the Annex, I ran so much of Brandon & Steve's stuff that if you cut their's all out, what remained was not even worth bothering with. Very silly in comparison to the 80+ pages each issue of the Imagination was averaging, featuring a wide variety of students in each and every issue.

All in all, Bob's Annex was fun in that I could churn one out on my own overnight. Since they were produced so rapidly it gave me a place to focus all my anger that was generated from things not going my way with the Imagination (and with the rest of school in general). It was a great learning experience even if, 10 years later, I'm somewhat embarrassed about how they turned out (and what turned up inside them).

There were three issues of Bob's Annex: Issue #1 on May 1993; Issue #2 on June 2, 1993; and Issue #3 June 17, 1993. Each issue had a print run that varied anywhere from 20 to 40 copies each, considering I had to make copies when I could sneak into the school's office and run them off. (It finally came to light that I was using the school copiers for personal reasons, and therefore had to wait until there was a staff member working in the office that didn't already know about my scam. Eventually I convinced other people who had access to the same copier to do my dirty work for me, and before long people just gave up on trying to prevent me from making copies, regardless of what they were for.) Over the years, I've offered these publications in various catalogs and web-postings, but I have never printed more copies since what we did in High School. In the 10 years since then I managed to get rid of almost all of the copies I made, and now only have a copies of issues #1 & #3.

In 1997 I created a small publication that printed a highly condensed version of the Annex material that was in (what I call) "comic-book format". The publication was called Bob: Annexed! and the print run for this could not have been more than 20 copies (maybe even no more than 10), and contained very little material at all (as, at the time, I was planning on making Steve & Brandon solo-collections and didn't want to be redundant). Aside from that small run, it was never distributed elsewhere. Sadly, when I made this publication I mangled the originals for all three issues of Bob's Annex, and now no longer know what issue #2 looked like because of this. What exists of issue two is preserved here as best I could. (If, by some stroke of luck, someone out there has a copy, I would love to get it... I'm looking in your direction Melissa, keeper of things long-since thought lost.)

---

Editor's Note: 65

The most common use of the word Spin-Off relates to TV shows. However, the only one that ever really stuck out in my mind is one called Just the Ten of Us. It was a TV show that Spun Off of Growing Pains, and it was about the adventures of a Coach Lubbock and his family of six girls, two boys, and a wife. The immediate thing that interested me when I was a youth was the girls. I remember staying up late on Fridays after watching that show and thinking about those girls, saying, "Wouldn't it be great to date the cute one."

I'm no longer a youth. And I now find her unattractive. 66

As I aged, the term Spin-Off was redefined when I started reading Comic Books. The most complex Spin-Off I can think of was a twelve issue Maxi-Series entitled Crisis on Infinite Earths. The story had about fifty or so Spin-Off stories in all the different DC Comics titles. Still, another impressive Spin-Off series started with issue one of the new Justice League comics. The original series changed names two different times (from Justice League to Justice League International to Justice League America). It had one major Spin-Off, Justice League Europe, and a several other Spin-Off stories (Justice League Quarterly, Justice League Special, Justice League Antarctica, Justice League Spectacular, etc.).

Even though I still collect Comics, I haven't heard of or seen a good Spin-Off in quite a while.

So I thought I'd create one, more or less.

In most Spin-Off's, there is a very particular purpose for doing so. Bob's Annex is no exception. The story goes like this: If a certain editorial that appeared in the school paper is any indication, editing the original Bob was a chore and a half because of one major problem: Censorship. Every issue, without fail, someone would write something that I really liked, and for some reason Mrs. Bridgens would give it the ax. First it was Twisted Deeds. Then it was The Miracle Child. Next up, The Birthday

---

65 The Editor's Note from Bob's Annex #1. Strangely enough, I just realized that not a piece of my writing exists in this issue. I don't know why, since I had a HUGE collection of crap that I'd written that was just waiting to get stuck somewhere.

66 This was a bald-faced lie. To me, the "cute one" was the tall, puritan girl with brown hair & glasses, and I had a crush on her for a while. I don't think a single male friend of mine had the same taste in women as I did. I would later learn I wasn't alone, but for a long time I thought I was doomed to like girls that were not "normal" to like. Sort of an inverted case of what happens when girls think they are ugly: what happens when all your friends tell you that the girl you think is hot is, to them, ugly? Very confusing times in my development as a person...
Story. And most recently, *Close Encounters With CG Cowboys*[^67]. It was almost as if she (Mrs. Bridgens) was randomly censoring, because, of the people I talked to, there really wasn’t anything wrong with the stories. Slander seemed to be her big problem, but when the thing she calls slander is truthful, how can it be slander? Other problems involved mentioning Sex, drugs, and homosexuality (fortunately, she let us print Rock n’ Roll).

In my mind, all three of those last concepts are present everywhere. Mrs. Bridgens said that since Bob’s was school funded, we couldn’t print those kinds of things. Well, I hate to burst the bubble of those who think that that kind of stuff doesn’t happen at our school, but it does. I see it almost every day, and though I may not personally condone drugs or irresponsible sex, it happens.

And because it happens, it will be reflected in the writing and art of CGHS students.

So here’s the deal: if you’ve been rejected from being printed in the original Bob’s, your art has a home. Here. In Bob’s Annex.

That is, basically, the purpose of Bob’s Annex, the first Bob Spin-Off.

I’d like to point out that this will more than likely be a one shot magazine (unless a whole lot of people get rejected for the last issue of Bob’s[^68]). However, we might do a second issue if enthusiasm and “unacceptable” material finds its way into my hands. Submit material like you would normally, except avoid giving it to Mrs. Bridgens if at all possible.

Which brings me to another point of the magazine. Annex’s purpose is not to anger anyone. Merely to give a home to rejected artists. It takes a lot of courage to write or draw, and it will make the artists herein feel better that their art will be seen by the public.

But, on top of all of that, there is one thing that we can do in Annex that I’ve been waiting to do for a long time.

FUCK[^69]

Boy, I feel a lot better now.

Until next time, this is Austin Rich, and I am outta here!

**Special Thanks To:**

Mrs. Carol Bridgens[^70]

And my cohort and co-editor, who didn’t help much on this issue.[^71]

---

**Editor’s Note,**[^72] One day I found myself sitting in a chair, with a towel wrapped around my bare chest and neck in the house of my friend’s girlfriend, with my friend and his girlfriend holding a pair of sheep clippers to the side of my head while he said, “Trust me.”

[^67]: This was not rejected from the *Imagination* per se but I think that we decided that it was a better fit in the *Annex*. This was written by a freshman that had a problem with cowboys in our school. I don’t know if he got beat up or if they just hassled him, but it was a funny story about a tough situation and I ran it because I sympathized with being picked on. Though the story is not printed in this collection, I have to point out that it was pretty controversial after it was published. I didn’t think a lot of people were going to get copies of Bob’s Annex, but apparently a group of students who were all self-described “cowboys” found it, read the story, and found the need to harass me between classes. I think it’s funny that it took a silly story of cowboys invading a school to cause people to get physically confrontational (no thrown punches this time, but LOTS of threats and intimidation). I’d been beat up in the past because I was weird, or because I was the new kid, or whatever, but this was beyond silly to me.

I’m glad it was printed anonymously, because I can only imagine what would have done if they knew who actually wrote it.

[^68]: It’s interesting that I say this, because with hindsight I was so energetic about editing magazines that I can’t see why I was so shortsighted in print.

[^69]: For all of my rhetoric about wanting to give a home to rejected material and protecting first amendment rights of students, etc., it’s pretty hard to ignore the drawing power of being able to swear when you’re a kid. But to swear in print! Well... that was something.

[^70]: It was probably mean of me to talk all this shit about her, and then sarcastically put her in the *Special Thanks To* section. Oh well. Hindsight and all. I should point out that, while there was a *Special Thanks To* section in all the Bob’s magazines (the *Imagination* and the *Annex*), though I have removed a lot of them for space concerns. Also, since a lot of the material that original appeared in these magazines is not in this collection, they only become confusing.

[^71]: Steve was really an amazing procrastinator. I think I honed my own skills in that area by watching (or learning) from him. Though he named both the *Imagination* and the *Annex*, and was the person I turned to when I needed to brainstorm or get some inspiration, he could never be convinced to help me with anything. He never wrote introductions, never contributed much material aside from stories he’d written long ago before I’d met him, and refused to edit or proofread the material at any point in the process. Except for assistance with the third *Annex* and the fourth *Imagination* – which was not really co-editing, but rather assistance in the most basic sense of the word (“Do this, do that... thanks!”) – his given title as co-editor was just that: a title with no meaning to speak of. I have no idea if this was because he didn’t actually like the magazines, or didn’t think they were any good, or if he was just lazy. But not once when I asked him to help me did he actually “co-edit” anything. Typical.

[^72]: The Editor’s Note from Bob’s Annex #2. This was originally written as something to use for one of the *Imaginations*, but for some reason I never ran it, and instead ran it in the *Annex*. In a way it fit the “theme” of this issue, since this one was literally thrown together with stuff that was already written and just lying around. I was so jazzed at the idea of putting together something without any guidelines or people looking over my shoulder that I put this issue together in one night, at home, by myself, fueled by coffee, which explained the exponential difference in spelling and grammar errors compared to what was found in the *Imagination*. Issue #1 & #3 of the *Annex* were only different in that I spent several of such nights working on them.
Now, as far as I can figure the circumstances leading up to that event had absolutely nothing to do with getting my hair cut (at least I don’t think so). In fact, if I remember correctly, our original intention was to listen to loud music, trash around obnoxiously in his girlfriends house, and torture the neighbors by leaving the window curtains open.

However, I don’t think we achieved our goal. Steve tells me, “Austin, I need the sides of my head shaved. You up for it?” I say why not, but in the end his girlfriend did the actual procedure. Then, after his hair turned out rather decent (in fact, I really liked it), he turns to me and says, “You know, your hair if getting long on the sides. You want it cut?”

I cautiously reached up to feel the side of my head and, sure enough, it was rather long. My original intention with my hair was to keep the sides shaved, but grow the top long enough to cover the shaved parts. I was also beginning to get the hair in the front of my head to just the length I wanted, and I felt that the sides, as well as the back, could use a little shave.

I said, “Sure. But only the sides and back. Don’t cut anything else.”

So I sat down with the towel wrapped around my chest (theoretically, I should have felt really safe) and let Steve go to work. After a minute and two opps later, Steve pulls a large portion of my hair all in one direction, asks me to turn in the other, and begins mumbling something to his girlfriend about hair and how mine would look really cool a certain way.

This is where I had to stop in. I had a way I wanted my hair. After all, it was my hair, and I should at least be able to keep it the way I wanted it. I said, “What are you talking about.”

Steve attempted, unsuccessfully, to explain this idea he had about my hair, and it was then I was struck with the realization that Steve had absolutely no hair cutting experience whatsoever.

I told him, “No, I would really prefer to keep my hair this way.” He begged and pleaded with me, telling me that it would really look good. He said, “Do you trust me?”

Something inside of me told me that this was my friend, and that he would have no real intentions of making me physically look bad. Not that it was the biggest thing on my mind; I haven’t really been concerned with what is “in” or “out” since the seventh grade when not only was I trying to be like everyone else because I wanted to fit in, but I was doing that because everyone else was. So I eventually convinced myself that I could indeed trust Steve. I said, “Okay, but please don’t change the length of the hair.”

He looked at my hair a little longer and said, “Not a problem.” (Please take into consideration that this is not the actual dialogue, but is a very close facsimile thereof.)

So he and his girlfriend went to work. Then came a series of opps, followed by some laughing and some, “Well, we’ll just do the same thing over here.” And then, eventually, a large chunk of my hair from the front fell in my lap.

What I wanted out of the haircut was no longer possible, and it was then that he finished the job the best he could, and gave me the haircut that I now have, the one I don’t like much.

Not that it was a bad haircut. If I looked in the mirror and used a comb to adjust the hair a bit I could make my hair look pretty good. I even had some people tell me that. The haircut was a good one, and I couldn’t argue with that.

But I still didn’t have the haircut that I wanted, and that made all the difference in the world.

The whole haircut fiasco made me angry, but not at Steve; Steve made an honest mistake and I’ve done that before too so I can relate. But I was mad because something I wanted I couldn’t have. It frustrated me to the point I wanted to destroy things. I wanted to yell, “FUCK!” loud enough so everyone could hear me, and know that I was on the rampage.

I think that evening ended with me listening to a very good piece of electronic music called Fixed, and I almost thrashed around in my room ripping it apart as if I hadn’t been for the fact that everyone in the house was asleep, and the only reason I didn’t do that is because I was already in some trouble for being a little late that night and didn’t want to get in more trouble. I fact, I do that a lot; avoid doing things I want to do because I know I’ll get in trouble.

Through the music I thought, and through the thoughts came an idea for some more pieces of writing, and that made my anger subside. I focused on the stories, and the ideas that seemed to pop up faster than I could entertain them. It was great. Anger provoked constructiveness. I felt like a god.

The point is things are screwed. Especially in this school, because nothing goes the way anybody wants it to. The curriculum it fucked, the teachers, the ones that do care, don’t have the resources to be good ones, and the ones that do have the resources could probably care less. But that’s the way it is. We have to deal with it. But it still sucks.

So I say screw it. I say forget all the stuff that’s going on and I say get down to what counts: us. What we think, what we do, and how we do it. We may all realize that there isn’t a whole hell of a lot that any of us can do about the current system, but we sure can do a whole lot about most everything else.

So get out and write. Get out and enjoy yourself. Take that screwed haircut and wear some outstanding hats to cover it up. Just do something other than realizing the problem is there, because if you don’t then it just gets worse.

Okay, I’m off my soapbox now, down to business.

Circumstances have made it possible to print not only this issue, but also one more issue of the ever-popular Bob’s Annex! (Yeeaaahhhhh, BOB!) In this issue I managed to whip out a quick little piece for you.

The last issue will have to be short like the first two, but I would like to see some submissions if you’ve got them (art would be nice). Length is not really a problem, but I do have to keep the Annex reasonable (under forty pages).

This one’s a quickie but goodie. Hope you like it.

Until next time, this is Austin Rich, and I am outta here!
I found myself mindlessly jotting words on this paper after mindlessly showing up to class again after another mindless and apparently insignificant morning at school. Today, bullshit in its most influential form ran rampant again, and only the people who were smart enough to ask “Why?” saw it before they were punished for doing so.

Minds are being molded. Thoughts being shaped. Ideas that were once creative and fresh are being mutated into a sick and perverse belief system called “Humanism.” Children are being almost brainwashed into conforming to the idea that, “the human race, the advancement of Society itself is more important then, literally, anything.”

The majority, sure, they say they are unique. They all yell and say, “Hey, I have my own identity!” But they all come whimpering back the next day, crawling back to the same plate of food. Little mongrel dogs living off of unenticing food, not knowing any other kind when the higher life form can tell it’s just a bunch of shit.

Today I took a step back to find that the world only cared if I did do what it wanted. No recognition for trying something new. They don’t seem to care if you morn the death of a person, but if you didn’t then they would care. Just enough to destroy your psyche with remarks like, “That’s not normal!” For once I’d like to see how it was if a person was not antagonized because he has a different belief system than another.

The teacher is coming and I have already been warned once that if I don’t read the “literature” they have assigned that I will fail this unit of the course. She fails to understand that I have ideas, and concepts that are even beyond myself at times, and that a normal “American” (yet another word with blurred meaning) education does not apply. I need time to postulate and grow as a person and not a clone.

Unfortunately I will never be able to show this to anyone. Not even my friends, for fear that the ridicule will never end.

People like them are not truly my friends, but merely classmates that agree with my occasionally. But something like this would be beyond them. I would just be condemned for thinking such blasphemy.

So I write this to the future. I hope that in time, after I die (for that is the only way I can really avoid punishment) people, not just students, will look at this and question themselves. Will they live in a really and honestly “free thought” Society. Or will they, to, be forced to conform to a belief system or be punished?

I must go now. The teacher is upon me.33

Part IX: More Bad News

By the time I sat down to complete the final installments of Bob’s I had already been in and out of every imaginable kind of hot water I could find (and when that failed I found gas-heated hot-tubs to jump into on a regular basis). I had put off nearly every paper, test and project that was due in all of my classes, and that resulted in me having to cut deals with my teachers in an attempt to get everything done on time for graduation. The fact that I had burned nearly every bridge I ever crossed by already cutting favors to devote more time to Bob’s in the past was something that was not lost on them when it came to closing these deals. Again, my extensive knowledge of bullshitfing seemed to come in handy when I needed to convince teachers that I was a good student who just needed a second chance. The entire time they were buying my story, what I was really thinking was, “Fuck you, buddy! Once I graduate, I’m history, asshole!”

It didn’t help that my friendships at school were deteriorating as well. My attitudes toward my classmates had been reduced to a boiling pit of wrath and disgust, and even close people in my life were getting no end of crap from me when they, in any way, stood between me and finishing up Bob’s projects. While everyone else was running around trying to sort out where they would

---

33 Ahhhhhhh... who was feeling just an itty bit angsty in High School? Poor little guy... I guess listening to too many Nine Inch Nails songs will do that to you. Do you want me to get you a razor blade and a vampire cape so you can suck properly?

I won’t even begin to try and defend this piece of crap; I will only say that it was pretty common to find this kind of stuff in my journal (and elsewhere) in those days. I hated everything, I thought about killing myself more or less all the time, and I was a loaded gun where ever I went, telling everyone off because I was moody for this reason or that reason. (I was like this all the time for no apparent reason – constant moodiness for many years on end with no more adequate explanation than, “Well, she won’t go out with me.”) This is probably a pretty common anecdote if you ask people who they remember from their High School years. and while in the here and now I would probably have told my High School self to, “Shut the fuck up and quit your bitchin’,” at the time I was convinced that no one understood me, everyone was completely full of shit, and that I was never going to be genuinely happy. I don’t know why, but I believed all of this without question, and all the friends telling me otherwise, or my girlfriend telling me she cared about me could NEVER change my mind. (It was probably worse when I was suddenly happy and optimistic, or at least created that façade at school or in writing. People kept asking each other, “When’s he gonna snap...”)

This is probably the first time (in print) that I really let out my “darker” writing style, which would begin to get more and more face time as I would produce more and more ‘zines. There are moods that I get in – often late at night and when I’ve spent a little too much time by myself, where there is no convincing me that there is anything good in the world or that there is any point to much of anything we do. (I’ve probably spent more time fantasizing about my own death and the futility of life than I have about girls undressing... sad but true.) I still get like that from time to time, but it’s less often and I can manage it a little better than I could back then. While in my heart of hearts I feel that there is some good in the world and that I get more than my share of it on a regular basis, the fact of the matter is that there is a lot going on around me that upsets and pisses me off to no end, and no matter how much I’ve gotten for me, inevitably you will find a rant inside waiting to burst forth. There’s just a little too much conditioned hate and anger and sadness and existential blah in this body to always wear that smile all the time. (Anyone who’s known me for any period of time can attest to my own moodiness and paranoia about the world and it’s plots against me... it’s just how I am.)

But aside from all of that, I’m basically a happy person... right?
attend College, I was calling people trying to get cover art and new stories to fill out the last issue. Nearly everyone I counted as a friend at one point or another got a curt and inconsiderate jab from me if what they were talking about did not relate to my interests. To this day I’m surprised that Justin & Melissa still talk to me, as I probably don’t deserve more than an ass-kicking from either one.

The final straw came when I went one step too far and put my life in front of my family’s. My mom had been planning a trip to Seattle for her mom’s (my grandmother’s) birthday. Not only did I not listen when anyone mentioned the trip, but I completely blocked the whole thing out of my head until the day before we were supposed to leave. Being the well-organized, hormone-packed and intensely nonsensical person that I was, I had scheduled just about everything an 18-year-old kid can schedule for the weekend we were supposed to be in Seattle. Between papers that were due, teachers I’d promised I’d make up tests for, articles I was supposed to have already written for the School Paper, the senior project (and paper) that I hadn’t yet even begun to work on, a “date” (dance) that I was supposed to go on with Melissa, and the all-important final issues of Bob’s that needed completion (not to mention other obligations that escape my mind all these years later), there was no way that I could go on this trip. My being able to graduate from school more or less hinged on me staying home that weekend and finally buckling down. No matter how hard I tried to convey this to my mom, she did not see my point of view.

Being the obstinate prick that I was, I instead opted to just not come home Friday afternoon (when we were supposed to leave). It made more sense to stay at School, work on all this stuff that was due, and when my family was well on the road to Seattle I could safely return to an empty house where I would spend the weekend taking care of responsibilities. The fact that I was so dense as to think my mom would not care and therefore go on the trip without trying to locate me was a testament to my single-mindedness in those days. To cut to the chase, she contacted Steve Eller (of all people), who then tracked me down and brought me to my mom’s house where we fought for some time, each of us arguing our own points of view again. The resulting fight more or less ended the way I wanted it to: I got to stay behind, except that now I was locked out of my mother’s house and never welcome back. (Ironically, because I couldn’t get to my room, I was unable to accomplish anything I was supposed to get done that weekend.)

With hindsight we were both equally guilty concerning what had happened; neither of us wanted to see the other’s side of the story, and therefore we each had to stand our ground to prove to the other how important our point of view were. The results of the fight, however, were a much more immediate problem than me standing up for my principles. Everything for school was supposed to be finished within a month and I had no home, no clothes, no food, no money, no computer (which contained everything I needed to complete issues of Bob’s as well as homework assignments and other such projects) and (worst of all) no where I could go for help. Very quickly, what I believed in was no longer a topic open for discussion. Repeating my Senior year, however, was.

I turned to Steve, who had betrayed me to one degree but was probably the only person I knew who understood my position. He, himself, was guaranteed to graduate, having long ago gone through the High School completion courses via LCC (and had already started taking college classes in the meantime). Regardless of his own priorities, he understood how important Bob’s was to me. The fact that I needed a base of operations to finish up issue #4 from was a number one priority, while secondarily I needed help finishing up #3 of the Annex and, lastly, all of my schoolwork. After heated discussions with his mother, we all finally came to an agreement: I could come and stay with them for a couple of days, during which time I could use her computer to complete all Bob’s/schoolwork that was left to finish. It was by no means an invitation for a place to stay beyond the arranged time, but considering the circumstances, that was the least of my worries. I took the offer and ran with it.

I managed to retrieve the files from my computer and home (something that still baffles me considering how aggro my mom was toward me for quite some time afterward), along with everything I needed for working at Steve’s house. In the two nights I was there we didn’t sleep a single hour (unless you count passing out in from of the microwave waiting for the coffee to heat up). In that short span of time I managed to not only finish issue #4 of the Imagination (going from a handful of files I’d already prepared to the 70+ page manuscript it finally became), but nearly all of the remaining homework that was due for school/my senior project and a good portion of the third issue of the Annex. (The final proofs for issue #4 that we sent to the printers were run off on Steve’s Mom’s printer, where previous issues had been made on my printer or my mother’s.) It was a great learning experience for me: under pressure, not only could I complete work on a deadline, but that someone of my caliber could easily cram a good few months worth of papers and school assignments into a very short period of time and still graduate from CGHS (18th in my class, no less). Weather this means I’m an exceptional student or the school work is all bullshit and far too easy is an argument I’m not yet ready to have (nor do I really want to).

This was, unfortunately, the shortest of the four Imaginations. To fill it out I really had to fluff it up with a lot of my own material, something I sort of regret to a small degree (a lot of it was not ready for print with hindsight). It was also the least edited of the four issues, and therefore some very obvious (and unfortunate) mistakes crept in because of the time-crunch I was under. Mrs. Bridgens, who I had to talk into doing the fourth issue in the first place, didn’t seem to want to take as much time editing it since she, too, had gotten down to the wire and the school year was over in a couple of weeks. We cut the deadline so close with this issue that the bound copies for distribution were shipped to the school on the last possible day. Considering the printers are always swamped at the end of the year anyway, we were lucky they were even able to print it at all.
Editor's Note:  
A slap in the face is most often mentioned when people are talking about bad (or a progressively bad) meeting with a guy and a girl. Most often, the dialog accompanying it goes something like this:  
“No you jerk!” Insert slap.  
“What did I say?”  
However, a slap in the face isn’t just limited to the physical concept. I’ve encountered many types of Slap-in-the-Face situations.

The best example I can think of is the reaction people get when they hear a type of music they’ve never heard before in their lives. Though the new craze has been dubbed alternative, I prefer to think of my music as the music of the decade. Not that any of the music is directly spawned from the ‘90’s; most of the music wearing the alternative label have been in hiding for quite some time and have only recently become a public sound. Many have been inspired by ‘60’s and ‘70’s sounds. Either way, the music of the ‘90’s is by no means the new. It’s most old ideas revamped by people who liked the original stuff.

Anyways, people often react violently and or as if they have been slapped in the face when they listen to new music and music they are not familiar with. I still remember my reaction to that teen anthem “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” when my child-of-the-80’s mind listened to, “that crap!” (As some parents would call it.) I didn’t particularly like it at first. I even called our local radio station as a joke and asked, “What does this smells like teen spirit stuff mean anyway?” (By the by, they played the phone call on the air, getting me back for doing such a stupid thing.)

Now, however, I would have to admit that Kurdt and the gang are among my favorite bands, which includes an array of “alternative” bands from nine inch nails to They Might Be Giants. Often, people react as if they have been slapped in the face when they listen to my music, and the people who could care less are indeed my true friends.

Still, music isn’t the only way to witness this transformation over people. Bringing home a girl or boyfriend creates similar reactions, just like when you see your teacher outside of school doing something that you could never picture them doing. Everyone can picture these things and most of us are familiar with these kinds of Slap-in-the-Face experiences.

To the best of my ability, I’ve tried to make the run of this magazine a good, old fashioned, down home American, pseudo-gothic-punk, “My god, can he really do that in a magazine?” “Well, I guess he can,” slap in the face. It wasn’t easy. I had to scower the school for material, I had to stay up late brainstorming, I had to kill off innocent brain cells with too much coffee, and all of it was to give you a slap in the face, Austin Rich style.

Bob’s Imagination wasn’t just something I was doing in my spare time (just ask my girlfriend). Bob’s was something special. It was the first magazine of its type in our school. It was aimed at breaking records and keeping them broken. It was aimed at students who probably had a little more to them than school spirit and good grades. Bob’s was for us. For those who couldn’t cope. For those who looked at the system, saw the flaws, and realized that there wasn’t a whole hell of a lot they could do.

Bob’s was a student magazine, plain and simple.

I received a new kind of slap in the face when I started Bob’s. I realized that there was a job in my chosen profession. I found that there is life outside of my computer network, and a glowing, pulsing, “Wow, that was good,” life at that. I saw people turn out some really good work when Bob’s came about. (I also saw some bad, but I won’t name any names Austin.) I realized that Bob’s wasn’t really necessary; the art would flow through our school naturally. However, Bob’s does tend to stimulate creativity.

Now, as I have to deal with the biggest slap in the face yet (getting kicked out of my house a few weeks before graduation), I submit this for your approval. A school filled with Imagination. Students pouring out work into volumes bound any way they can. Art, writing of all types and color flowing through the school, opening eyes and slapping faces left and right. New magazines, underground and illegal, above ground and running through the school, and each filled with the life-blood of my culture—writing and art. I submit that it is possible, and I want you, all of you people who read this magazine, I want you to make it happen. Next year, I expect to have people sending me magazines inspired by Bob’s, filled with new art that is timeless. I expect all of you to fight the power and yell, “I feel gypped! I want my money back!”

Yeah, it’ll never happen. Well, maybe that last part...

For those of you interested, due to a lack of time at our school (considering I graduate this year), I am now putting my position up on the rack, making it available to any who want it. It’s tough, the hours suck, the pay is lousy, and there aren’t that many benefits.

But, what the hell? That’s what I always say.

Business before pleasure, right?

This is probably a good time to mention Bob’s future. School is over, and Bob’s Imagination in the format that you are now reading will not be seen. However, I plan to still edit a magazine. Those of you who have read the Annex received a small taste of what the new magazine will be like3. However, it will probably cost about $1.50 an issue, and submitters will not be able to get free copies. Hey, life’s a beach, but I need to finance the magazine myself. Anyone who is interested in the new magazine (the name has yet to be chosen) contact me in the usual ways.

Now, here’s a note from my anonymous cohort:

---

24 The Editor’s Note from Bob’s Imagination #4.

25 With hindsight, I can’t believe Mrs. Bridgens let me include this sentence in the final draft. Weird.
Hello, it’s me, the anonymous cohort. Due to circumstances I am not immediately prepared to deal with, I won’t be working on an editor’s note to be put in the Imagination, though I had planned on it. For the editor’s note that would have gone there please see the Annex. I don’t think the editor’s note would have been found appropriate. If you don’t get an Annex please borrow it from someone who does. I really think you should read it.  

It’s been a really great four issues. I hope to see all the faces that were in the magazine when the new one rolls around. Life wouldn’t be the same without you. Until next time, this is Austin Rich, and I am... well, you know.

This issue is dedicated to our girlfriends, Melissa Cooper and Chantal Angot, from whom we learned the patience needed to deal with life in general.  

Special Thanks To:  
Justin Anderson (and, in the future, anyone else who will let me crash on their couch and buy me coffee)  
Uncle Tupelo (“No Depression.” Yeah, right. P.S. Sorry I stole your quote.)  
All the bands in my tape box (to quote a famous sage, “you know who you are”)  
Merri McCausland (and her computer Robin)  
And my cohort and co-editor, who was there when I needed him the most. Thanks.

Déjà Vu: The End (?)  
by Austin Rich

The large building at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue looked almost like Mt. Everest compared to the almost insignificant man approaching it. When Jerry Fields finally reached the front door, he felt almost ignorant as to what to do. (After all, what do you do when you are on the porch of The White House?) After almost a full minute of hesitation, Jerry finally chose to knock on the door. Five minutes later Jerry was still waiting. Apparently, no one heard him knock. Well, what should he do? He could go right in. After all, he was told to come here (well, actually he was told that he starts work today, but doing what could be helpful information to have). After another full minute of hesitation, he opened the door.

And three seconds later he was surrounded by secret service men.

***

Buzzz. “Yes?”

76 Steve insisted that I try to run an “Editor’s Note” that he wrote for this issue, and I told him over and over again that I wouldn’t run it because I knew what he was gonna say and I new that Mrs. Bridgins wouldn’t let it in. Eventually he talked me into letting him include this paragraph, and again I’m surprised that Mrs. Bridgins didn’t cut it. Before you get excited, the actual “Editor’s Note” that he did write isn’t as exciting as it’s built up to be, just something that Mrs. Bridgens would have found “unacceptable.” For the first time, I had beaten her to the punch.

77 If I remember correctly, both Chantal & Melissa got upset with me for mentioning their name’s in print. It wouldn’t be the last time I upset a girl I wrote about.

78 In the liner notes for their album “No Depression”, Uncle Tupelo used the line “Thanks to anyone who let us crash on their floor or bought us beer.” I was really into their first two albums (and still love them quite a bit to this day). What’s not commonly known is that Melissa (my girlfriend at the time) is a cousin of Jay Farrar, and it was through her that I discovered them. A good portion of Bob’s material was written while listening to their first two albums (for those who want an audio / visual “Bob’s” experience).

79 I think this quote has something to do with Nine Inch Nails, as I was really obsessed with them at the time too. For the life of me I can’t remember where it comes from, but I’m sure it’s buried in their liner notes somewhere.

80 Merri was Steve’s mother and she named her computer Robin.

81 The final Déjà Vu story I wrote, and to date I haven’t really gone back to the character. I had a whole back-story for him and even had a second part to this story, but of course I didn’t ever write it or finish it. Occasionally I think I should re-write the whole thing and really flesh it all out, but my interests really lie elsewhere these days and I don’t think I could get back into the mindset to really give the character life. Oh well...

I wrote this one, as I wrote the previous two installments, on the fly as each issue was getting put together. This text was actually written during that 48-hour work binge at Steve’s Mother’s House. Reading it now I’m really surprised that it makes any sense at all.
“Mr. President, a man by the name of Jerry Fields claims that he was told to come here at the request of a White House staff member. The security team was on him after he tried to just walk right in. Should we ship him to the Feds?”

There was a two second pause of thoughtful silence, and a quiet mumble that sounded like someone trying to say something, but one could never be sure.

“No. By some odd fluke, he is supposed to be here. You can, if you wish, send him in now. However, I would like proper procedure explained to him at a later date.”

“Oh, sir?”

“Yes?”

“He says that two of his friends bringing in necessary lab equipment can’t get into the building because they don’t have the right clearance. Should we let them in?”

“Yes. But do complete background checks first, and send a team to check the equipment thoroughly before bringing it in.”

“Thank you.”

*****

“Jerry, Jerry, Jerry, Jer-er-er-er-y. Don’t you know that the best way to bring unnecessary attention to oneself is to appear as if you are trying to break into the White House?”

“Shut up Dëj. I’ve had a bad day as it is. It appears that a full body cavity search entails a lot more than I thought it did.”

“Will you two shut up!” interjected the President. “I’ve had a hard enough time keeping a lid on your friend Mr. Vu here with his extracurricular activities which seem to include letting illegal alcohol and women in classified areas, and these suits and passes were even more difficult to obtain. Now just shut up ‘til we get there.”

Silence filled the remainder of the trip with the possible exception of the sounds made when making hand gestures is concerned. Eventually they made it to the Oval Office, the only room that was probably soundproof.

“Now,” started the nearly flaxen dressed President, “As of now I’m on the brink of having you both locked up for life if it weren’t for a certain contract your friend Dëj made me sign, and unless I have some kind of reasonable explanation as to what is going on I just might risk getting shot with that gun you’re so eager to flaunt.” This caught Dëj’a’s attention. Obviously the President was a little more tenacious than he had thought. Dëj’a put the gun in his conveniently located holster.

“Well,” started Jerry, “last night I got a call that said I started work today. I assumed it was from here, and that my old job was back. I started to get ready when I received a follow up call from your staff members explaining that my position had been reinstated. I called some of my friends who had been behind my trying to get my job back, they started to haul my equipment, and, just to be safe, I came here to clarify exactly what happened.” Jerry turned to Dëj’a and said, “So, I guess you were successful.”

“Was there any doubt? By the way, we have a little $200,000,000 dollar debt to discuss later.”

“Excuse me,” interrupted the President. “Do you mean to tell me that you, Dëj’a Vu, mercenary for hire, were hired to perform a government coup by a lowly scientist who wanted his job back? It doesn’t make sense.”

“You’re telling me. Why do you think I charged what I did?”

“Only $200,000,000?” was the President’s only remark.

Shaking his head as if to get that thought out of his head, the President continued, “That’s besides the point. Why didn’t you go through the proper channels? I mean, if you had brought up valid reasons you just might have...”

“NO!” screamed Jerry. “I tried that and no one would listen. I figured that if I talked to Mr. Vu here I could get my job back, he would get some money, and no one is the worse for wear. Pardon me for doing it rather bluntly.”

The President sat and thought for quite a while. Then he said, “Jerry, you can leave. Tell the first person you see that you need to go to the lab, President’s orders. Show them this,” the President handed Jerry a small card, “this will be your proof. If you don’t mind I’d like to speak to Mr. Vu alone.”

Jerry started to leave, and then said, “I really appreciate everything you’ve done, both of you, and if I can do anything for either of you...”

“Just leave!” they both said, simultaneously. Jerry left.

There was a good five seconds before the President said anything. In that time, Dëj’a sat down in a chair, and was expecting to get some kind of, “What were you thinking?” lecture.

“Dëj’à. You realize that there is probably more to this entire incident than you and I know. You’re probably a master of hidden motifs, why do you think he hired you?”

This question threw Dëj’à. He didn’t expect to be approached frankly but with death threats.

“Probably wants to try to sabotage the government. Maybe kill some people. Or maybe he was hired to hire me to get him back in for any number of political reasons. My money’s on the sabotage. That’s what I would do.” Dëj’à had a feeling that the President had other motifs for asking that question, but he wasn’t going to argue that point.

“And what about you? Why did you take the job?”

“You want the truth? It wasn’t for the money.”

“Then why?”

“I wanted to see if I could do it.”

The President sat in thought for a few more seconds. “Well, you realize the next logical step is to go against my word and turn you both in.”

“Yes.” Dëj’à Vu had no reason to think otherwise.

“Is that what you want me to do?”
“If I were in your shoes, it’s what I would do.”
The President sat in thought a little longer.
“Here.” He handed Déjà a little card. “This will get you past all the security in this building. However, in exactly 52 hours you become public enemy number one. The F.B.I. will be after you, the whole enchilada, so to speak. I am obliged, you know.”
Déjà began to add that to his list of blessings now numbering at about twelve. “You realize I could use the information you just gave me as blackmail and get you impeached?”
“What information?” The President smiled.
Déjà Vu got ready to leave. As he got to the door he said, “By the way. You’ve got my vote next term if you want it.”
“Don’t bother,” he said rather blatantly. “I’m not going to run. By the looks of things, your business looks a lot more profitable and entertaining.”
As Déjà Vu left he had the really bizarre feeling that he would be seeing the President again in the near future.

---

**Childhood**

by Austin Rich

When I turned eighteen I got a really nice computer as the central gift from my mother. She also gave me a nice necklace and a card, but the computer was the main present. It was a 386 IBM computer. A very nice VGA monitor, and it came with two main programs, Windows and Word Perfect. It also had a few shareware games on it, but I only played two of them with any amount of frequency, and they were slightly simple in concept anyway.

However, as nice as that computer was, and as much as I used it, it never really had a chance compared to the computer I owned when I was a child.

When I was rather young, my dad assumed that I was going to like to hunt like he used to. He grew up in a very small town, almost in the woods, near a lake, and he, his brothers and his father hunted regularly. I guess it was a family tradition, because the stories I heard from my grandfather were, more or less, about hunting with his father.

Well, one day my father decided that it was time I learned to shoot a gun, and he told me of the event in plenty of time to prepare my childlike mind for the experience. *A real gun!* I remember thinking. I couldn’t wait. It was almost mystic in the way it was described. He was going to take me to the Firing Range outside our small town, where it was okay to shoot at targets.

The day we were supposed to go to the Firing Range, we scoured our home for old milk jugs, metal cans, large glass jars, and large pieces of cardboard that we marked a large coordinate graph on so we could see if we were aiming correctly. We loaded it all into my father’s very large truck, and he himself loaded the rifles I was supposed to shoot.

That day my dad took me to a place I had never been to in my life. Normally when we go for a drive, we never really leave very far from town, and when we do it is to go to places that I knew a little bit from previous fishing trips we would take. But we drove past all of those places that I had already been to, and eventually my dad made a left turn on an old gravel road that went on for about two or three hundred yards. At the end of the road it opened up to a sort of gravel parking lot, and if front of that was our ‘Firing Range’.

In all actuality, it was not much of a Firing Range. A log quite a distance off with debris spread out around it was the extent of our targets, and what we brought with us was what we were to shoot at primarily, with the exception of a log to the side that was standing up that had (obviously) been shot at many times, and had a few targets here and there.

My two brothers had come along too, and though they were also going to shoot the guns, they were not going to get to have as many chances as their far superior older brother was, and because of this I felt proud, and was not tempted to rub it in as most older brothers would.

We carefully set up our targets, and after we did so we walked away from the log to a good distance away, where my father proceeded to tell us everything he knew about shooting a gun, stressing the points of safety. After he was sure that we were ready to shoot the rifles, he carefully unzipped the gun covers, and removed the long black beauties.

I believe he shot the gun first, and then he allowed me to shoot the gun.

The weight of the gun was more than I had anticipated, but I was in no danger of dropping it, or of letting it get out of my control. I gripped it firmly like my father showed me, and went through all the procedures that he had gone through before firing. When I felt I was ready to fire, I tried. But I couldn’t. It was as if the sheer power of the weapon was too great for my child’s mind to handle, and I just couldn’t shoot the gun at all.

After a few moments, I began to acknowledge that I was being watched, and that if I didn’t fire the gun, I would no longer be suitable of the honor I had earlier. I would lose all the pride that I had in being one of my father’s son’s, the oldest of my father’s sons, to fire a rifle.

---

82 This story is probably the first story I ever wrote that was straight up emo. Aside from journal entries, I had never tackled non-fiction (and when I had it fell pretty flat). This story is one of the “filler” stories I dug out when I realized the *Imagination* #4 was a little too thin. I had never intended to include this (or the other things that found their way into this issue) in any of the Bob’s magazines, but when push came to shove I was far too proud of my body of work to feel bad about showing all the other stuff in. At the time, I think I considered *Childhood* as a one-off idea (an attempt at non-fiction just to see if I could do it). I don’t think I intended to write much else like this. Little did I know...
I aimed at a milk jug and pulled the trigger. 
If I remember correctly, I think I missed. 

The day proceeded in much the same fashion, and even though the slight bruise I had received on my shoulder would go away, I think it was more than that that made me want to stop shooting the gun. However, I think I did one or two more times. If I remember accurately, my youngest brother only fired once.

Soon, my younger brother became preoccupied with the clay pigeons that were strewn about the ground to the right of the Firing range, all of them broken, that were probably from some person shooing at them off of the cliff a little farther to the right. I think my other brother joined him eventually, and then we all did at one point or another. My younger brother’s biggest find was both halves of a single clay pigeon. I believe he kept it for quite some time.

However, my discovery was much more interesting. 

During the many treks between where we fired the guns and the log at which we fired, I saw many things lying on the ground that were obviously litter. However, one piece of it was very, very interesting. It was, in all actuality, a one quarter inch thick piece of plastic with as many holes in it as there could be, that at one time in the past held bullets for some type of gun or another. However, I saw a bright yellow piece of something that was by far something more interesting than anything I had seen that day, and as far as I was concerned, I had to have it. I picked it up immediately.

I didn’t know it then, but I had found my computer.

That day when we went home, I caring with me my treasure, making sure it could never get broken. It was special, and I had to treat it that way. When I got home, I put it in my room in a place I was sure it would never get lost or broken. I was very excited about my find, and often used it in the pretend games I would play with my imaginary friends.

Eventually, I got a hold of some duct tape, and out of curiosity as to what my toy would look like coated in the material, I wrapped it completely in pieces of duct tape. In doing this, I then created a gray piece of plastic that, in my mind, resembled a small computer. And from then on, that is what it was in my games.

I cut some extra pieces of duct tape and placed them in varying places on the object to more and more resemble a computer. I even pretended that I didn’t have to be with the computer to use it just as long as I had a piece of duct tape with me (it was then that I took to wearing a small piece of duct tape on the underside of the bill of my baseball hat).

With that computer I became a famous research scientist from the future performing some top-secret experiments for the government. I was hunted by spies from the future who did not want my project to succeed, and I often pretended that I was no longer a part of my family, and was merely pretending to be their son. I traded places with the artificial mind in my computer regularly, and at one point a small, miniaturized robot was injected inside of me where the computer’s mind could operate, making the duct tape obsolete (this was obviously inspired by Fantastic Voyage by Isaac Asimov, a book I had read and loved around this time).³²

My computer could do anything. I could time travel. I could teleport. I could communicate with the future, and always have a friend to talk to. Always.

I still don’t even know or remember how, but I lost my computer. I don’t think lost is the correct word, because one day I woke up and realized that I no longer had that wondrous computer. Like most children, I was only angry for a while, and did spend a good deal of time looking for it. I never did find it, but that didn’t stop me. I still had the duct tape. I still had the miniaturized robot. I still had my imagination! I still had my childhood!

And then, one day, I woke up to realize I had lost those to.

I didn’t bother me at the time. Life went on. I was no longer a child and I no longer needed those toys and games to play with. I had real friends and school to deal with. And eventually I found that I didn’t need my computer anymore, and I became a little more concerned with getting a real one.

I forgot completely about that computer.

A few days ago I caught myself talking to my girlfriend about her clothes, in particular the jacket she was wearing. I asked her where she had gotten it. She told me it was a magic jacket, and that with it she could fly. I told her that someday we should go flying, jokingly. She told me that she couldn’t fly anymore. When I asked her why, she said, “Because I grew up.”

It was then that, for the first time in a very long time that I remembered my childhood computer, and for the first time in my life I realized that the most tragic event in my life had occurred and I didn’t even notice it at the time.
I had lost my childhood.
I don’t think I’ll be able to get over that one for quite a while.

Anonymous Cohort’s Closing Note:

I would like to leave you all with a quote. But first I would like to dedicate it. Though I am no god, I dedicate my quote to those who think they are, those who wish to suppress me, and anyone who doesn’t like the person I really am. There are people who I know would just as soon drag me into the dirt and keep me there so that they stomp on me. There are people who I know would like to see me dead. I tell you this: you cannot kill all that is me nor can you kill all that is like any part of me.

³² Though, in all honesty, I have to give equal credit to the movie Inner Space, which I remember watching over and over again as a kid.
"No one holds command over me. No man. No god. No Prince. What is a claim of age for ones who are immortal? What is a claim of power for ones who defy death? Call your damnable hunt. We shall see who I drag screaming to hell with me."

--Gunter Darin, Das Unheue Darin

Rest In Peace

Austin's Closing Note:

As I look back at the first issue of the magazine I recall a time when all it was was a thought in my head. I remember my excitement and I remember the childlike expression that was on my face, like I had received a Christmas present that I had always wanted. I also remember the nervous feeling I got when I first got the hard copy of the first issue and the feeling of, "Oh my god, it sucks. No one will like it," overcame me I soon overcame that feeling when everyone I talked to said that it was good.

As I look back at the second issue, I remember getting the same feeling, but it never left because for some reason I had already done the outstanding feat and people only wanted the magazine for the content now. I didn't care, though. I coped with that and learned that the personal reward was what counted. I finally did it, and no one stood in my path.

When the third issue hit the scene, right after the first Annex, I was very proud of my work, as I was with all the other Annex's, and this issue. It just goes to show that even if there was no verbal praise, I was still getting satisfied with my work, and that made me happier, and that made the magazine better.

In the end, I got my praise. But there is one person in particular I would like to talk to directly for something he said to me that made me know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I was making the right impression. To you, that person dressed in a Country Western singer look, the one that sat several seats behind me on the bus, the one that got an entire group of prejudiced people started about my earring, I'd like to say this.

Thank you. Even though you have proved to me that there are still some assholes left that don't get the point, at least my individuality stung you to the point of intimidation.

Goodbye CGHS.

Editor's Note:

Eventually people get to the point in their lives where they realize exactly what their limits are. This comes after the child mentality where everything to come is exciting, you just haven't reached it yet.

It comes after the time when you've got the young teenage mentality where you think you know everything, and you've been waiting for that glorious day when you can take care of yourself and leave your seemingly unimportant family behind.

Steve wanted include this quote, which I'm embarrassed to say he pulled from Vampire: the Masquerade (which the game company either made up or pulled from the original source themselves). I have never tried to defend my gaming habit at any time in the past because I'm pretty open about rolling the twelve-sided die. However, even I thought it was a little tacky and overly dramatic of him to do that. And, no, I don't play Vampire these days... but I will admit that Adam started what promised to be an interesting campaign at Ft. Awesome a while back...

Both closing notes were removed from the final draft of issue #4 without my permission. Originally Mrs. Bridgens did not want them included, and I had defended them over and over again. Finally I told her, point blank, that I would include them in the final draft regardless of her opinion, that they were appropriate, and since I was graduating and I would never edit another magazine at school again it seemed silly to bicker over something that stupid. She finally backed down and said, "Okay, fine." I felt as if I'd finally won with her, much to my amazement. However, she instead removed them from the final draft without telling me. I was so furiously pissed I wanted to run back to her office and confront her face to face, and almost went so far as to Xerox the page by hand and include it with the already-finished final product. In the long run, no one aside from Steve and I ever read these closing notes, so I'm glad to have finally gotten them in print SOMEWHERE (even if they are a bit... well, derivative of my normal stuff anyway). The "assholes on the bus" I mention in my closing note launched into a chorus of "faggot!" because I wore an earring. I was riding a bus I don't normally ride, only to get out to Steve's house in the first place. This is a perfect example of Cottage Grove mentality.

The Editor's Note From Bob's Annex #3. This was originally hand-written when the issue was first printed, mostly because I'd run out of time and computers to use and had to improvise. Fortunately I remembered that, before computers, there was another way to convey textual information... This issue also came on multi-colored paper, with each page being copied onto whatever was lying around. Some pages were blue, some were yellow, some were green, etc. This issue was the most visually disorienting thing I've ever put together (and that's saying something).
It even comes after the time when you start to try all the things your parents told you not to do because you didn’t believe them. The time when you realize that maybe they were right, but that perhaps they just might be wrong.

And you cling to that belief. The one that says, “I have to be right.”

And sometimes you are.

Other times, however...

When you do reach that point, though, you tend to wonder. When you know that you do have limits, and when you know what they are, it tends to make you say, “Why bother? What’s the point?”

However, as much as that is totally annoying, there is a major bonus to having this happen, and that is that you know exactly what you can do.

I met that realization with Bob’s Annex. My hopes for this magazine were so high. I pictured everyone reading Bob’s Annex, and I pictured it a smash hit.

What I got was a magazine full of mediocre stories & art. I mean, it was good art. And the stories were entertaining. But they lost something in the translation. Without more art & writing to back it up, it seemed insignificant compared to the Imagination.

It was, however, at the same time I realized my faults that I also realized my strongest tool: Purpose.

Annex wasn’t just a magazine. It was a way to fight back. They screw me, I screw ‘em back sort of thing. It was a symbol of our tenaciousness. It proved that there is some amount of fight left in the, “I know my limits,” school.

My point being, we’re all screwed once or twice. There will always be one more person above you. One guy who has the final say, and one person who’ll totally fuck you over when you think you’re in control.

So I say, if you can do it in a legal way, fuck ‘em back. There are probably certain times when you shouldn’t, but that is where tact & stealth are handy.

However, don’t go & say Austin told you to mouth off to your parents and boss. Instead, find a way to make them hear you. If your parents don’t listen, get their attention in some kind of creative way (not by self-inflicted wounds). If your boss screws you over, screw him back by working hard enough to get a promotion.

Don’t, however, use the timeless and over-used methods (a.k.a. the “S” word). Often, they screw you over more.

A last, quick message. My anonymous cohort wrote an Editor’s Note that expressed his feelings about why Bob’s Annex is around. However, he intended to put them in Bob’s Imagination when he wrote it, realizing afterward that Mrs. Bridgens might not let it in. It is, now, for your reading pleasure, in this issue of the Annex. However, I don’t want to sound as if I fully agree with his Note, but I do agree with some of it.

I can’t say that it hasn’t been fun. Three issues of censored material is enough to make anyone interested. We almost caught up with the Imagination, but hey, nobody’s perfect.

Until next time, this is me, & I’m gone.

----------

Austin (Cody) Rich
Editor, Bob’s Imagination
Editor, Bob’s Annex

HELL. Hello. I’m sitting at my computer writing. I have my phones in my ears, listening to Helmet, and I’m wondering: Why am I writing this? I don’t really have anything to say.

I suppose that in this final school-sanctioned Bob’s Imagination I might expose who my real person is. You know, I have been only slightly involved in this magazine and I can’t really say that I have edited all that much, but this magazine, though the idea came from Austin, is my brainchild. Dammit, Bob was my imaginary friend.

It is a sad thing that the faculty member this magazine is sanctioned through is Mrs. Bridgens. She, though she had her reasons, seems to have really attempted to weed out the things in this magazine that would have made it great.

87 Steve at one point went on this tangent about how he had an imaginary friend named Bob. It’s how he came up with the title of the magazine, and ultimately it pissed off just about everyone around him (including his girlfriend). He would go on and on about Bob... it was just awful. Suffice it to say, even if the joke was funny the first time around, by now we were all very sick of “Bob”. I remember Chantal, his girlfriend at the time, claimed that she had finally killed Bob and held a wake for him. Steve insisted that Bob was not dead, but Chantal insisted he was wrong, and continued to go on and on (in much the same way Steve had) about how Bob was now dead. I think that finally settled Steve’s hush, so to speak. Humorously, when I became a Blasphphumite years later, I discovered that one of the founding stories in The Bible Of Blasphphumus is the story of how someone named “Bob” is dying, and that reality is Bob’s final dream. How weird to have two similar ideas crop up in completely separate ways. (Around this time Douglas Adams published the fifth Hitchhiker’s book, Mostly Harmless, which also had a passage in it about a religion that centered around a god named “Bob”. And pre-dating much of this were my friends Justin & Devin, who both created some sort of religion that involved them both saying, “MMMMMMMM... BOB!” on a regular basis, that itself predating the hit by Hanson by quite a few years. I don’t know what any of this has to do with anything, but I just thought it was worth mentioning. Weird, weird, weird, I tells ya.)
The purpose for this magazine was supposed to be, in my opinion, something similar to the purpose of the writer’s response group. That is to get critical feedback from others about your writing. Well, I don’t think that this magazine has obtained this purpose. With the writer’s response group, even when it itself was school sanctioned, we were free to read anything to the group. When Mrs. Bridgens began to be the faculty editor of the magazine she took a lot of that freedom away. She weakened the purpose. The magazine could have helped a lot of people learn how to write better for better purposes.

To most writers I know the reason for writing has been to relieve tensions. By writing down all of their ideas, and forming stories out of them, writers can learn how to better the world around them because they start to understand the things inside themselves that make them react to the screwed up things they deal with in a school society.

The people I feel are serious about writing write about things that touch aspects of what they have to deal with in real life. These people help themselves understand exactly how they feel and learn how to express their ideas to other people. If any writer is dealing with sex issues in his or her life, and wants to write about it, it would be nice to have these things read; if we aren’t allowed to put them in the magazine, because of Mrs. Bridgens, then we have not benefited the majority of the people.

That is why Bob’s Annex first began to print stories rejected by Mrs. Bridgens.  

Special Thanks To:

Damon Brice (And his Computer)³⁰
The Computer Lab’s Computer #1

Closing Note:

About the issue...
Twisted Deeds is here, along with plenty of art.
Right now there is a little homeless man sitting in a cold alley with no food or clothes (at least no clean ones) where the only thing he can think of is the year 1967 when he had enough money to buy a candy bar and a movie ticket.
He often thinks about this due to mental derangement, schizophrenia, paranoia, and a number of dementias and phobias. The only way he can maintain what little sanity he used to have is to think of this happy time in his life.

Something to think about when you’re bored. ⁹¹

---

³⁰ No, I didn’t leave anything out. That’s all he wrote for his little editor’s note. I tried to get him to finish it, but he wouldn’t hear of it, saying it was finished. In my opinion, he only really got that far, couldn’t think of a way to end it, and just stopped writing and said it was done. As I said before, it was like pulling teeth to get Steve to write anything, much less something that really expressed how he felt about things. Oh well…

³¹ This was Steve’s roundabout way of acknowledging that, even though he was not allowed to have his stories or poems printed in the last two issues of the Imagination, that he had gotten away with it in a sneaky way. He used this collection of symbols as his “name” in the table of contents to signify “Un-Pseudonymed” for the fourth issue of the Imagination. This, when read in conjunction with this issue of the Annex, was to imply that the “anonymous cohort and co-editor” was also the person that wrote those stories. Of course, you had to know that he’d been banned from the Imagination in the first place (which, if you knew that he wrote under the pen names S. Eller & Cerrah Sejal, you did), and that “Un-Pseudonymed” was actually those people as well as the co-editor. As with a lot of things that Steve did or wanted to do, I just shook my head, nodded, and said, “Yes,” without really knowing what was going on.

⁹¹ Since time had actually run out while I was putting this issue together, a lot of the material had to be thrown together in different locations. This issue is singular in being the only thing I’ve ever done that used the most different computers to complete. (If you see an original copy, you’ll notice the different typeface on virtually every single page). Aside from my own computer, I used Merri’s, Damon’s, Rhonda Turnquist’s, and a computer in our entirely Mac-oriented computer lab. This is the most confused-looking issue I’d done up until that point.

Originally, this Closing Note was hand-written too. Since this was going to be the last magazine that I was going to make in High School, I really wanted to close the issue out with something insightful, meaningful, or at least interesting. But I was so drained and exhausted from having to deal with school so I could graduate, putting together the last issue of the Imagination, and then finishing up this issue too, that I just didn’t have anything left to say. All I could think of was me, being homeless at that point, eventually living in an alley, and… well… that’s where that idea came from.
Black
Evil
Words like “kill” and “death”
It is fast, and loud
I cannot stop it
I listen
It is hate
“I only kill to know I’m alive”
It’s wrong
I listen
I am caught in it
I can’t stop
I love it
My own private playground to kill in
I hate it
I love it
Black

Gray
Dark
Not evil, just dark
Depression is in it
I can feel it is true
I relate
I listen
It’s both slow and fast
But is full of emotion
Every word, every note
Every sound seeping into me
All of it
Solid emotion
“I just want something I can never have”
Total pain
Personified
I listen
I love it
Gray

Another color
Blue
Not like the sky
But dark like an ocean
Blue
Sound of hope
Of possibility
Yet acknowledging what is wrong
Knowing
Telling me what is wrong
Almost harping on it
“It’s the end on the world as we know it, and I feel fine”
And still
There is hope
The Black is strong
The Blue is strong
I listen
I like it
I am caught again
In Another color

---

92 See, this is why I shouldn’t be allowed to write poetry. I had this awful idea that I would personify three different types of music in poem form, and was only encouraged when Heidi Gunter said it was a good idea. She really enjoyed the final product, but years later it just seems far too trite and lame to be considered “good” by any definition of the word. I feel bad, because I really make Ministry & Nitzer Ebb sound bad in the first part even though I actually liked them at the time. I guess it’s particularly ironic these days now that R.E.M. could kick all their ass (considering Michael Stipe only sings about fucking men and doing lots of drugs anymore). Yes, that’s another NIN reference in the second section. I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL! This was in Bob’s Annex #3. I swear there’s not much more of this kind of crap...
Against what is probably my better judgment, I decided to include this story in this collection. At first I had rationalized that I would include it for the sake of completeness, and then quickly changed my mind when I read the first couple of paragraphs. “This is AWFUL! No one wants to read this!” I thought. But ultimately bad-taste won out in the end, mostly because this story really (successfully) represents the peak of the direction I thought my career was gonna go at the time that I wrote it. In a parallel universe, there is a version of me who writes only fiction, and a longer version of this story is his first novel. (Hopefully that version of me is a better writer, though.)

I realized, when putting this collection together, that if I only included “good” stuff I wrote I would be doing my career a great disservice. I’m not a bad writer in the here and now, but I am probably better known for my improvements over time rather than my accomplishments since I began. Just because I’ve been putting together publications over the last 10 years doesn’t mean everything I put in them was “good” by any definition of the word. To leave some of this stuff out would not only paint an incomplete picture of myself in hindsight, but would also overlook the most important thing any writer can go through: experience. You learn from your mistakes, and if you take a chance to look at the ones I’ve made here you’ll understand exactly why I left this story in.

Now that I’ve hyped it up, I hope you find it as bad as I’m making it out to be. While I am 100% sure that I could write a much better draft of this story now, I also know that this version is not that bad for having been written when I was 16.

Random Notes:
This was the story I mentioned in the footnote concerning the piece I “wrote” called Belgratnil Felge.* In the “Author’s Note” included at the end of the story I’ll explain the particular influences that triggered other elements of the piece.

I remember very vividly how working on this story used to calm me down. I was exceptionally prone to drastic mood swings, and often got stressed out over the littlest things. If I was every feeling upset or annoyed (or just plain unhappy) I would start working on this story and I would instantly feel calm and happy. I just felt like I was on the right track while I was writing it, a feeling I’ve rarely been able to recapture with other stuff I’ve written.

Originally, the first three parts of this story were printed in the second, third and fourth issues of the Imagination. Since the story has never seen print in its entirety, I always felt as if I’d really done this story wrong by never giving the remainder of the text a chance. I was going to do just that (plus finish any other incomplete stories I had started to print in Bob’s) in the new post-High-School magazine that never quite took off. Since it never took off, a lot of things felt unfinished in my mind. So this is, technically, the first time the whole story’s been printed for your reading pleasure.

Several times over the last 10 years I’ve offered to sell bound copies of this story. I have made several different versions of this text in a bound form, but not a single actual copy was distributed or ordered by anyone. Half of it was laziness on my part for never really promoting them like the other ‘zines, and even if there had been interest at the time I would have been hard pressed to produce the finished product since I was always tinkering with the text. Such is the life of the modern author, I guess.

One thing that should be made clear, though: I have no real idea if this is the original version of the story that partially saw print in Bob’s. I have to admit that I have a huge personal attachment to this story, and over the years I have edited and re-edited and re-written and then edited the re-written parts of it over and over again. Even though I’ve worked on it many times over the years, I’ve never been able to do the major cuts/edits that really need to be done because of this attachment. Even 10 years later, plot-holes & imperfections included, I love this story. In my mind, this is the ultimate Austin Rich fiction story (or at least the Austin Rich I was trying to be in High School), and since then I have never managed to re-capture this style very well at all. While I will whole-heartedly admit that this isn’t a good story now, this was my best story then, and in those terms fits the “retrospective” theme very well. Chances are I will pull this story out every so often to revise it and do minor edits until the end of time. The ultimate writing project: a work in perpetual progress. If only I could get paid for that, I’d be the ultimate American author.

But back to the point: I didn’t feel like I could afford to compare, word for word, the printed text in the original issues of Bob’s to the version I have on my computer. It just didn’t seem worth it. So, if you have read those old Bob’s magazines, and you remember parts of this story as being a little different, just cope, okay? This is the definitive version... for now.
Adrian

Part I.

She wandered aimlessly through the street, with apparently no reason, as she did every day at 3:25 P.M. Today a man followed her for two blocks in the hopes of getting lucky, but when he quickened his pace to catch her, the switchblade knife fell from his hand and his body became limp and lifeless, and collapsed upon itself. After she had trudged off through the rain, the local storekeeper called the police for the third time that month, and recalled the circumstances of the last two phone calls. A sudden chill of déjà vu crept down his back.

The storekeeper wondered what she could have done to them to cause them to fall uncontrollably to the ground like that. But every answer led to more questions, and each question gave more unsolvable mysteries. “Why did she always walk down the street? Was she responsible for the unconscious men dropping like flies, or is it coincidence? And if so, how did she do it?” Eventually the storekeeper gave up, deciding that any logical and rational answer would be more frightening anyway.

She strode into the supermarket, as she did everyday, and wandered the aisles until she found a bag of chocolate chip cookies and a Mickey Mouse magazine in her hands, at which time she turned around and stumbled back the way she had come in. One of the store clerks took his normal position at the door and awaited the $3.73 she would produce and levitate toward his hand. He wasn’t surprised anymore by this oddity; or, at least, not as much as he was way back when...

* * * * *

“... this is where the money goes. Just press this lever, and the drawer opens. Tens and twenties go here, fives go here, and ones go here. Anything bigger and/or checks go under the tray, and the change goes in these slots in descending order, silver dollars and fifty-cent pieces in this one, quarters in the next, dimes here, nickels here, and lastly,” pausing, to shift his two hundred and fifty six pounds to his other leg, and to soak whatever possible effect he could gain from the boring repetition, “the pennies go in here. Any questions?”

“Yes. Is this job always this boring?” inquired the new clerk.

“Actually,” while chuckling softly, “after the preliminary training this job isn’t that bad. The hours are good, the pay’s okay, and you never know who might walk in that door,” and, as if to emphasize his point, he pointed toward the door, and at the next customer. The customer strode into the supermarket as if she knew exactly where she was going, and wandered the aisles until she found a bag of chocolate chip cookies and a Mickey Mouse magazine in her hands, at which time she turned around and stumbled back the way she had come in.

The new clerk seemed compelled to walk toward her as she went toward the door, because it looked as if she really had no intention of paying whatsoever. He even found himself saying, “Can I help you?” When she didn’t answer, he walked faster, and even said, “You haven’t paid for that yet, have you?” She still didn’t answer, and as he was about to reach out and grab her when the manager finally voiced to the new clerk the word, “No.”

The new clerk turned to the manager, puzzled. He opened his mouth and was about to shape it in the form of the word, “Huh?” but he couldn’t even manage that. His manager merely asked him to turn around.

The new clerk turned, and to his astonishment, $3.73 was just floating there, in the air, and in the background the woman was walking as if she had never broken stride. The new clerk poked and prodded the money, and finally grabbed one of the pennies. When he released it, the penny fell to the floor. As the new clerk bent over to pick up the penny, his manager came over and grabbed the remaining money out of the air. He only said, “No, you never can tell.” He walked away, into the backroom...

* * * * *

The clerk grabbed the money, and made his usual retort about how she would really have to teach him that trick with the floating money someday. She said nothing, as she always did, and the clerk proceeded to put the money into the register. As he counted it, he noticed that the money was a dime short. This really puzzled him.

“A dime short?” he said aloud.

“What?” said the neighboring clerk.

93 Humorously, this is a story about a woman and I give her a man’s name. I didn’t know this in High School... I haven’t even read the first paragraph and already I’m wincing... sigh.

94 In High School I was obsessed with Math and numbers (who wasn’t?). I always wanted all my stories to have exact and specific numbers that were unique and unusual for the most part. I think I over-did this kind of thing a lot in those days (you’ll see it again with the price later).

95 I like the idea that the people of this town are just used to creepy stalker-type people dropping dead for no apparent reason. I can already see trying to explain this one to a therapist. “No... really... uhm, it’s just a story...” Sigh.

96 What kind of store has a comic book and cookies totaling such an odd amount? No real one, that’s for sure.

97 Worst... dialog... ever! I have never been very good at coming up with things for characters to say. I imagine that’s why I write a lot of introspective type stuff these days: no need to come up with things for people to say to each other. This whole story has the worst dialog... just dreadful stuff. Maybe I can rest knowing that I’ve put to paper some of the worst dialog in the history of writing? Probably not...
“Oh, she was a dime short today,” he replied.
“A dime short?” the clerk shouted.
“Yeah, really weird, ain’t it? I mean, she may be a little bit strange and all, and I still can’t explain that levitation thing, but she’s never short, not the least bit.”
“Are you sure you counted correctly?” said the other clerk, almost in a panic.
“Yes, I counted and recounted and re-counted. It’s all there, except the dime.”
“Maybe you dropped one?” he replied, knowing there was a logical explanation for this. There had to be.
“No, I would have heard or seen it.”
“Well, then it has to be in the air,” he said almost in confidence.
“In the air?” asked the first clerk, now in puzzlement.
“Yeah. You know how if you don’t grab the money, it just keeps floating there?”
“Oh sure. Bobby and I waited all night long and not a bit of it fell until we, I mean he, touched it. I do believe I won money on that bet.”
“Yeah, stop rubbing it in. Now, think about it. Maybe one of the dimes floated off course, and is still floating in the air, somewhere in the store.”
“Of course! Why didn’t I think of that?!” After thinking about what he had said, he said, “Don’t say it. But thanks.”
Upon further reflection, the clerk decided to cover the dime. He realized that it really wasn’t anything big to fret over, and that there must have been a really mundane explanation to the situation.
As the clerks went back to their business, an ominous dime floated above them. It continued on its merry way until it hit the light fixtures on the ceiling, and plummeted to the checkout counter below. As Bobby picked up the dime that had hit his head, he noticed that there was a hole in the ceiling, near the light fixtures. Bobby, while cursing the rats, pocketed the money. Boy, would he have something to talk about at the next employees’ meeting...  

* * * * *

She meandered down the old road and passed many people as they tried to ignore her. Most parents warned their children about her, and told them to be careful of her. But they rarely listened to their parents, and tried to antagonize her and get her attention in some way. Once, and only once mind you, a kid threw a ball at her to see how she would react. The adults saw the ball bounce off her, but the kids knew different. They saw what really happened, and they even tried to explain it to the adults. But the adults wouldn’t listen. They never do.

“Do you know what she did to Kenneth’s ball?” asked Cynthia.
“No, what?” asked Tommy, in great enthusiasm.
“Well, my parents don’t believe me, and neither do none of my friends, but,” turning, to see if anyone over twelve was listening, then in a whisper, “She’s a witch.”
“Are you serious?”
“Yes.”
“How do you know?” asked Tommy, now more enthusiastic about the situation.
“Well, when Kenneth threw his ball at her, a little ghost girl came out of her,” and in an even quieter voice, “and grabbed the ball and threw it back.”
“Wow!” exclaimed Tommy, who couldn’t wait to tell his friends.
“Yes, but do you know what is even more scary?”
“What?” Suddenly, everything went silent.
In a very, very quiet voice, Cynthia said, “The little ghost girl was Sara.”
“Sara?”
“Yes!”
“But Sara died of cancer. Don’t you remember? Her parents were sad for a long time, but they told us about it. They told us how serious it was, but that it wasn’t contagious. They told us all about it.” Tommy was now very worried, and very confused.
“Yes, but who do you think gave her cancer?”
Tommy could not believe this. “Wow!” was all he could manage.
“I’ve got to go now, but don’t tell no one you heard the story from me.”
He again was only able to whisper an, “I won’t,” and ran home in the opposite direction, as fast as he could.  

98 Pulitzer Prize winning stuff, huh? Another common element of my early fiction: random anecdotes that serve no function. (I guess you could argue that’s still an element in my current non-fiction.) I’m really embarrassed by this kind of stuff these days. In the original version of this story, which died and thus produced Belgratin Feg. 99, there was a section that explained how she “made” the money that she uses at the store. That part was near the end of the whole thing, just before she leaves town permanently, thus breaking up the pace of the story and serving no function in the least bit... go team! It had something to do with a board where she had glued up samples of every kind of U.S. currency, and she would mentally shape leaves in the back yard to match the examples on the board. There was also something about how she made sure no two of the serial numbers were the same. This is partially a throwback to my own childhood, where we would play games in the backyard and use leaves as currency. In many ways I’m glad that part is gone forever...

99 I wonder if there’s a place you can turn yourself in for being guilty of writing bad dialog? I can only hope...
She turned and looked at the young children as they talked and ran, and for a moment, barely long enough to break stride, she reflected on her life. Her childhood. Her. There was nothing.

She realized how close the children’s story had been, and yet it was embellished with time and imagination. She had not killed Sara, but there had been a person who caught the ball, a little ghost girl of herself when she was a child. Unfortunately, that’s all she knew. She continued again, and decided that after today, maybe she would be able to remember again. Maybe she could have her life back. Maybe things would be different afterwards. Maybe.

She proceeded down the block, and turned down a pathway that led to a house on a small hill, slightly away from the others. The yard and trees were perfectly kept, as was the house. The only thing about the establishment that appeared wrong was the mail pile next to the box. Each day she would check the mail, and unless it was a bill, she would pile it next to her mailbox. This seemed odd to most people, seeing how she never broke stride to do it. In her usual, mysterious way the bills would float behind her, and the rest of the mail would just pile up.

Except on Sunday. Sunday was the one-day that she didn’t go out. Not that there was anything really special about Sunday to her, it was merely an arbitrarily picked day to stay home & do chores. Occasionally on Sunday she’d walk around the house, and any inconsistencies would be fixed. The hedge was normally cut, as was the grass. Any foreign objects that didn’t belong were also taken care of. And of course, the mail was burned.

Some weeks, very little mail would pile up, and her weekly extravaganzas was not that interesting. But occasionally, people would check her mail Saturday night to see how much mail was there, and to see if they should leave Sunday evening open for the display.

She would start by, in her special way, lifting the pile of mail and placing it in the center of her yard. She would then stand behind the pile and would look up across her yard to the houses on the other side, like an orchestra conductor. The people watching would try to look inconspicuous by watering the lawn or cleaning the yard. But when she started the blaze, they were almost drawn to what she did.

She would then lift and ignite a single piece of mail. As it burned, the flames would dance in their mystical way, and she would use it to ignite three or four more letters, each in strategic places in the pile. This would continue until there was one, big, continuous flame that danced more mystically than the first, and would illuminate her and her house and highlight parts of her face that would otherwise be hidden, and unnoticed. The adults would watch, and would see the reds, oranges, yellows, and other such colors that a flame makes. The adults did not know why they were drawn to these flames... they just were. “Maybe it was some kind of childish desire I’ve retained over the years,” they would rationalize. If only they knew how true that was...

The kids would see something different. When she lit her mail into a beautiful conflagration 100, the children noticed the magical side of the flames. They saw the dancing flames, and they would focus on the features its light could bring out in people. They saw the wondrous illuminations and the deepness of the colors. They saw fire people. They saw the faces in the flames that make the fire dance. They saw the various colors. They saw pure... magic... 101

She was still walking down the path here and now, her mail still following her. As she approached the door of the house, it unlocked and let her in. When she was completely through, the door closed behind her, and locked. Even though it was late in the afternoon, her day was just beginning.

* * * * *

She entered the kitchen. The kitchen was not much different from a normal kitchen, except that it was almost empty, like most of the house. The rooms had no decorations in them, with the exception of her room and the kitchen. The kitchen had a table, a chair, and a refrigerator.

She placed the cookies and magazine on the table, and proceeded to get a glass of milk from the refrigerator. As the gallon jug tipped over and poured out the remaining contents, she made a mental note to add $1.90 to the money she would have to pay tomorrow. She discarded the jug mentally as she sat down in the chair and ate the cookies, pausing periodically to take a drink of milk.

She left the kitchen. After she had eaten the cookies, she had no more business there. As she stood up to leave, the light through the window made her full garb visible on the darkened, melancholy day.

She wore dark boots that were consistently one color with the exception of the brown mud stains around the edges. Her pants were pulled over her boots, and were also dark colored, but not quite the same shade as the boots. The pants made her look very slender, and stretched all the way up to her waist where, in yet another shade of dark 102, a t-shirt was tucked into her pants. Wrapped around her arms and neck was a multi-colored, and yet dreary looking, shawl that fell to her waist where her studded belt was set.

100 Oooooooh! Who pulled out his Thesaurus to come up with that word?! Somebody shoot me...

101 Another example of an anecdote that goes nowhere. Still, I like the idea that all of the neighbors are not afraid of this girl with strange Firestarter-style mental powers, but instead look forward to watching her burn stuff on a weekly basis. Not only that, but they let their kids watch too. In reality (like there’s any basis for that in this text), they would have called the police long ago, and the parents would be sure to keep a tight lid on their kids so they didn’t get to see some creepy neighbor starting fires. It’s the kind of thing that would be a “bad influence”.

102 “Another shade of dark”? I wonder if it’s too late to pretend that I didn’t write this...
Many would agree that, were she to take care of her dirty face and tangled hair, that she was a very pretty woman of about twenty years.\textsuperscript{103}

She entered the hallway and walked a ways until she stopped and turned, and was facing a stairway. She climbed to the top, and turned down another hallway to the door at the end. She stood in front of it for a moment. She knew that upon entering the door, there was always a chance that today would be the last day and that maybe, just maybe she could go back to what she used to be. With a cautious sigh and a thought of hope, she opened the door.

As the door closed behind her, she saw again what her room looked like, knowing that at one time it was different, but that it had been hers when it was. She didn’t know how she knew this, it was just one of the many things that she couldn’t explain; she just knew it. She glanced at her room again. The wallpaper was all different colors, mostly dark ones, and took on the semblance of paisley. Along the walls were many old and tattered rags that hung looming over the floor. A curtained window stood in front and to the left of the door, and a small beam of dull sunlight passed through the air and lit up the right corner of the room, next to the door. A small washrag sat there, and perked up as she entered. Opposite the window, on the floor sat a mattress, perfectly made into a bed and ready to sleep in. On the wall, directly in front of the door, hung the only picture in the house, a small photograph of an older woman in her early forties, and a young girl about nine. And in the right corner of the room a large pile of washrags sat, waiting.

She stood there for a while, pondering the imponderables life presented, and then proceeded to sit on the bed and read the Mickey Mouse magazine. She loved the pictures and the simple-minded jokes that children so much love. She wondered about herself and her childhood again. She put the magazine in a box under the window, with the rest of the magazines. She really didn’t have many. She only got them occasionally, when she felt that maybe there would be a story she had not yet read, and even then she only bought them with conscious effort and forethought. But there was something about Mickey that she was drawn to that kept her buying them.

Soon she could tell that the washrags were getting restless. She leaned back against the wall and she, too, waited.

The washrag pile slowly became active, and they began to move toward her, slowly. There were all kinds of rags, and each seemed to be more and or less old than the others—each one different. But one washrag seemed to be the leader. This one was not square like most washrags, but it was a quadrilateral. It was wrinkled with age as if it hadn’t been washed or ironed in quite a while. The edges were ripped and tattered with use, and there was a hole here and there, getting bigger as the months went by. There were pieces of thread emanating from several places on the rag. It had the occasional stain as well: paint here, mustard here, blood there. This rag was not nearly as old as some of the other rags in the “pack,” but when it was looked at, one could tell that it was the leader. The “pack” crawled onto her as she sat on the bed, and slowly covered her entire body. Her face was still uncovered, as well as the rest of her head, and her brown hair that fell past her young face and to her neck. She was ready, more than normally for some reason. Maybe that was a sign that this might all be over...\textsuperscript{104}

\textit{Part II.}

She awoke. She remembered a dream. One of a little girl that died young, and yet was not completely dead. She was not sure why she had dreamt this, but was often told that the whole nature of dreaming was vague and unclear, so it didn’t worry her exclusively. She brought her mind back to basics: she remembered the washrags, and things were back in focus.

She had been there before. The rags took her there when they wanted to. They did it once a week or so. She couldn’t really remember. All the days of her life seemed to blend into each other now, and she couldn’t remember anything specific anymore. Time had no meaning. She also couldn’t tell if where she was was in a dream, or if it was a real place. She remembered coming here before and talking to the washrags, not as washrags but in what they called their natural form. They would tell her things, things she didn’t understand. She didn’t need to understand them completely, though, because it was obvious (to her) that if they were able to take her to places like this it must have been implied that they were far more intelligent than her. Besides they would always tell her, “Someday this will all be over, and we can stop doing this. After that, you can become who you were.” She kept waiting for that day, although she wasn’t sure if she should be doing that, because it seemed that at that time she would be able to understand many of the things she couldn’t now.

The only problem was, she just couldn’t remember who she had been in the first place.

She waited as she did every time they called her here. She knew they would come, sooner or later. In the meantime she looked in all directions, into nothingness, and wondered where she was. She came here often, but didn’t know where, or what, this place was. It didn’t consist of any real substance, because she couldn’t touch or feel anything. In fact, she wasn’t even standing on anything. Stretching in all directions were deep bands of colors, most of them ranging from dark lavender to light violet. It was a beautiful sight, in fact more beautiful than anything she could ever remember. She wished everything was like this sparkling, endless nothingness, but that was just not possible, since she could only come here or see this when the rags called her.

As she sat... floated and waited she tried to remember again. Remember what her other life was like. It must have been wonderful, she would think, but she didn’t really know. She was longed for a break from the repetition. While she was thinking, the rags finally came. They did not look like rags anymore; they were almost like the background of where she was. The purple colors in the background were untouchable, and seemingly infinite, to say the least. The rags in their current form were bright, almost white,

\textsuperscript{103} As if it weren’t obvious enough, Adrienne was some sort of blizzar-world fantasy girl for me, someone that I would have endlessly desired but would have never been able to talk to, let alone date. She really did exist, and while I did get to talk to her, there was never any hope of dating her. I elaborate on this more in the "Author’s Note" at the end of this story.

\textsuperscript{104} I remember thinking that I had made this portion of the story "sufficiently creepy," but in hindsight it just comes off as weird for weirdness sake.
and opaqued the purple colors in the background. She could have reached out and touched them if she wanted to. But she didn't. She wouldn't want to, and couldn't because of the respect she had for them.

There were twenty of them there, but she knew there were more elsewhere. She had more washrags than that, and she had seen sixty of them in one sitting before. Not all of them inhabited washrags. Some stayed here in the—whatever it was called.

The leader’s name was Haraq. He wasn’t in control of the other ones, but he was the pack’s advisor, so to speak. One thing she noticed about the rags was that they had funny names. Names like Sp’t, Lith, Nik, Lysoys & Xak. It seemed odd to her that they didn’t have names like Mickey, Donald or Goofy. This never troubled her in the least, though, because where was she to argue this when she didn’t even have a proper name?

But of all the rags she had met, her closest friend was Eos. Eos was different than all the other washrags, because for some reason, he was an outcast from the pack. Eos was the only washrag that could “wear out” a body, hence the old and tattered rags hanging ominously from the walls in her room. Eos was an adventurer, and he explored the world outside of the house. During many of his explorations, Eos would wear out the washing body he was using.

When she found the first body, she took it and hung it on the wall and had a small funeral. The other rags later told her that Eos was not dead, just that his body had died. She tried to argue that if it was only his body that had died, that if she laid out another washrag Eos would be able to inhabit it.

Haraq told her not too. He said that Eos has been given his chance to explore and if he was unable to do so without keeping his body intact, that it was probably not worth it. She thought this was rather mean of Haraq, considering it wasn’t Eos’ fault his body was made of cloth, and went ahead a laid out another rag for him.

After she did this, Eos returned against the wish’s of the other rags, and chose to thank her in his own way. He massaged her feet and back. She didn’t know why she liked this, but she did. It was relaxing in a way that she had never experienced before, and it was often the only thing that she looked forward to anymore.

Haraq did not seem pleased with this incident, though the truth of the matter was that Haraq could not experience emotion without conscious effort. One day she asked Eos during one of his many backrubs he gave her why he went back and Eos said, “There is so much more to be done. There is a whole world here to explore, and while I am here I must know everything these is to know about it.”

Haraq tried to explain to Eos that it was very evident, considering the bodies they inhabited, that exploration was not something to be focused on. Eos then sealed his fate by saying, “But I like exploring.”

After the conversation was over, Eos was no longer allowed to sleep in the pile with the rest of the “pack”. She tried on many occasions to ask his why he couldn’t, and all he ever said was, “We are not allowed to let emotions get in the way of what we do. I am an explorer; I am not, however, supposed to like it.”

It seemed odd to her that such intelligent creatures would do this to Eos, because from her point of view Eos was now a less efficient member of their group. No one could perform their needed tasks (so she understood), without the all of the group. But to do this, Eos was necessary, and they would then have to call him over each time and send him back afterward... merely because he liked to do what he is supposed to do in his free time. Again, there was no room for her to get involved; the ways of the washrags were only for her to watch and not to understand.

Eos had gone through twenty different “bodies” since she had known him, and his latest was on its last leg. She spent the remainder of her time that she had to wait wondering how much longer Eos’s current body would last, and when she would have to get another washrag. Then Haraq showed up.

Haraq always led the discussions that took place. He was a being of far superior intelligence than she would ever come to understand. He never said anything without reason, never seemed to engage in anything without reason, and never seemed to engage in anything unnecessary. He spoke in a friendly voice though; with such power she thought he would sound scary. However, his voice was one that you could listen to and trust always. The apparent logic behind his words was so vivid it was quite obvious that he was the “brains” of the outfit.

He said, “We have summoned you for what might be the last time. Then you can return to your other life, the one you had before we met you.” He said some other things that she could not understand, which was always explained to her as being simply, “the mechanics of their actions.” She didn’t worry about not understanding him anymore like she used to. She knew he wasn’t going to hurt her. He never had. She passed this time by trying to guess the names of the energy beings surrounding him. She could never know for sure because here they all looked the same, but it was something to do.

“...by stimulating the pleasure centers of your brain, we can cause you to enter a happy dream-state...” etc., etc.

---

105 Okay, so “opaqued” is not really a word. I caught a lot of shit from people for making up a word like that. In my defense, I thought that if it was encouraged for poets to do it, so why not fiction writers too? That argument never seemed to fly with many people.

106 I decided that I needed some alien names for the characters in this story, and plucked a lot of nonsense out of thin air to serve this end. Thinking that I might need more names, I later cornered my friends at school and asked for some suggestions. I took the compiled list of my names and their suggestions and weeded out all the “fame” ones (most of mine fell in that category). What remained on the list was what I ended up using for this story. As I was writing, I just picked the name that looked like it fit what I wanted to use at the time. I’m not sure who exactly came up with what name, though, so I have to credit (more or less) everyone I knew in Jr. High and High School (you know who you all are).

107 I had a friend, Mark, read a final draft of this piece, and his biggest complaint was that Haraq wasn’t portrayed as being as smart as he is implied to be. I thought I’d tried pretty hard to make sure that he was “smart” at the time, and was sort of annoyed at his comment. These days I could always rationalize it by saying that, from her point of view, the way he acted was smart. However, that’s not really the case either. Yet another example of intent and skill level colliding nastily.
When he was done she spoke.

“Haraq?”

“Yes?”

“Could this really be the last time?” She felt as if what she had just said could have been inappropriate, so she added, “I mean, you said it might be, and I was just wondering.”

“There is always that possibility. Why? Do you not like these times we all share with each other?”

“No, I like it. These times make me feel good. Like when I talk to Eos.” Haraq said nothing. She thought he wanted her to add something else, so she said, “I’m just curious as to what my other life was like.”

“But is that not what defines life itself? The state of not knowing some things, and striving to learn them?” He then projected into her mind, rather than speaking it so as to emphasize that it was something to consider worth thinking about it, “I know you wish to know this, so I will let you know that that is how we lead our lives.”

“I’m not sure I can say either way,” she replied on reflection. “I’ve never really learned about life. Is that really the definition of life, Haraq?”

“That is something you will learn, in due time. The only way you will even learn for sure is with time. I am ready now. Are you?”

Hesitantly, she said, “Yes,” in a quiet whisper.

* * * * *

This was one of the times she enjoyed in life. She had never been able to remember anything other than this, and Eos’s massages, that made her feel good. She did like reading the Mickey Mouse magazines, but it wasn’t at all the same. This was different, and wonderful.

She didn’t exactly know what Haraq was doing. But when he did it, she almost went to sleep. She was aware of the things around her, but it made her feel like nothing describable anywhere. It was the closest thing that she knew of to a place she had heard about by called heaven. But when Haraq did it, something was different. It felt good, but not as good as when Eos gave her a back massage. She didn’t know why, but maybe she would know in her other life.

She thought about the times when people bothered her. She didn’t like it when people bothered her, not even when they meant to be nice. Maybe she was afraid that they would hurt her when they touched her. There was something unpleasant about people touching her. She didn’t know why. But even talking bothered her sometimes. Maybe because she didn’t believe in the phrase, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Why she didn’t believe it, she did not know. There are a lot of things she wished she knew.

She floated silently, thinking all the good thoughts she could, trying to ignore the bad ones. She didn’t have many, and that’s what made them so special. She always wanted to know if she had more good thoughts in her other life. Maybe she did. So many maybe. This time felt like all the others she could remember, and was almost boring when she looked back at it. But those few moments that made her feel good were worth it, at least at the time.

Before she was able to really register this thought, it was over, and she was suddenly very disappointed.

She floated silently for a few more moments, then opened her eyes. Haraq was still there, as were the others. In fact, none of them had moved. They floated, silently, and watched her carefully.

“So what is the news, Haraq?” she inquired, with an attempt at enthusiasm.

“Please, we are unsure,” was all he said after a long pause.

“So now what?” she asked.

“You must wait in your room,” again, after a long pause.

And she did.

* * * * *

She opened her eyes, this time in her room. It was dark out; she could tell because the dull sunbeams were no longer on the wall. She watched the washrags, but none of them stirred. She sat and thought about what Haraq had said. He had only paused like that one other time, which meant that this could be the last time. But then again, maybe he only paused like that occasionally, and it really didn’t mean anything. She didn’t get her hopes up and sat in thought while a lone washrag in the corner of the room became active. He crawled up toward the bed, and looked at her until she noticed it.

“Oh, hi Eos. How are you?” she said, almost uninterested.

“I am fine. Just as well as the last time you asked me. How are you? You sound like something is wrong.”

“Well, I just don’t like waiting. I have a feeling it’s all for nothing, and this won’t be the last time.”

Eos looked concerned. “You know, I heard that it is good news from Phud. And you know Puld, he is rarely wrong.”

She looked up for a second, then frowned and said, “You just want to make me feel better. Thanks for trying. I honestly appreciate it.”

“Is there anything I can do to help you, anything at all?”

---

108 I’m sort of curious as to why I called them “magazines” and not “comics” in this story. I’m sure that I had a reason at the time, but I’m hard-pressed to come up with one now. Mayhaps I was trying to make a point about how comics should be viewed as more than just comics, so instead I called them magazines? Hard to say. Regardless, it’s throughout this story, but no where else in my writing. Weird.
She almost replied with sarcasm, but it didn’t seem to set well with her, as if it was a foreign language, and merely said, “No.”

She turned and lay down on her stomach after removing her shawl, grasped her pillow, and began to think again. Eos took the liberty of giving her a back massage. She didn’t say anything at first. She just let her mind relax. After he was done, he went back to his corner.

“Thank you,” she eventually spoke in an apologetic tone.

“No, thank you.”

The washrag pile was beginning to become active, and she sat up and waited to hear what they had to say. She suspected it would be the same as always.

“Are you ready to hear the, what you call, news?” inquired Haraq.

“Well…”

“As you have heard, it is good news.”

“It is?” she said, excited.

“Yes. We are done, and ready to go home. You have been a big help to us in getting back home. I extend my most sincere thank you.” He said it very calmly, as if he’d said it a thousand times before. She had never heard it before, and it was shocking.

It took several seconds of neither of them talking before she finally broke the uneasy silence.

“Haraq?”

“Yes?”

“Where will you go? I mean, why couldn’t you get there earlier? And why did you need my help?”

“I understand that you have many questions; they should all be answered when you return to your old life.”

“But how will I get back?”

In what sounded like a whisper, directed only toward her, he said, “I will help you remember your old life. Just place me on your head, and it will all come back to you.”

With an unsteady hand she reached out and snatched him, and quickly placed him on her head. Nothing happened at first. She sat, and almost began to worry. Then, in a sudden tidal wave of images, ideas, words, sounds, and smells, she remembered it all.

Part III

It was cold and dark afternoon. Fall had set in, and winter was a few weeks away. The sun was still out, but not enough to brighten the dreary day. School had gotten out about thirty minutes ago, and a little girl, about nine, was on her way home. She stopped several times to talk to her friends and play a while. It was okay. Nothing was going to happen to her today. She was safe.

When she got home the lights were on, and she could see her mom in the light through the window. Her boyfriend was there too. They were kissing. The little girl decided to go in the back door, so as not to disturb them. She went into the kitchen, got a glass of milk, and ate some cookies. “You’re going to spoil your dinner, little girl.”

“Mom,” she said, in that daughter voice that all little girls use to complain to their mothers.

“Please, Harold and I are going out tonight, and I want you to eat your dinner when the sitter gets here. And don’t pull any of the stuff you pulled last time. You’re lucky you were only grounded from the TV for two weeks.”

“But Mom,” she whined.

“No buts. Now go upstairs and wash up. The sitter will be here soon.”

She did what her mom said, just as she always did because she knew that things were going to be okay, because if she was lucky, she might get a new dad, soon.

She snuck downstairs late that night and decided that she was going to get some cookies anyway. This time she wasn’t going to get caught. She made sure she was quiet. She went into the kitchen and looked around the corner to see if the sitter was going to be able to see her. Of course she wasn’t, but someone else was. Harold and her mom were there, and the sitter was leaving. She was almost ready to go back upstairs, but she was curious. She watched closer. Then she realized what was going on after the sitter had left.

She couldn’t hear what her mom or Harold said. She didn’t have to, and she didn’t want to. When Harold slapped her mom and hit her in the shoulder, she knew something was wrong. She was paralyzed with fear. Her mom tried to resist, but Harold was stronger, and was holding her arms. He yelled at her mom, loudly. She almost went out and tried to stop what was happening. But the verbal and physical abuse that her mom was receiving froze the muscles in her body. Then Harold forced her to leave. Harold just grabbed her mom, opened and slammed the door, and left the house. She was so scared she ran upstairs as fast as possible. She clenched her Mickey Mouse pillow tightly, and hoped and prayed that what she had seen was a bad dream. She tried to get to sleep, and through her tears and cries for help, she did.

She woke up that morning and prayed that what she had seen was going to be gone. She went downstairs, and to her surprise, she found nothing. Her mom wasn’t there, and neither was Harold. She got scared again and just waited in the kitchen, reading her Mickey Mouse magazine, hoping Mom would walk in the door and say, “You’re going to spoil your dinner, little girl.”

But nothing happened.

And all day, nothing happened.

That night, she had gone through two bags of cookies and finished off the milk, and had read all the Mickey Mouse magazines she owned. She was very afraid when the sun went down. She was afraid of monsters, the ones called Harold.
That night she fell asleep on the couch and the police arrived. They said they had to take her somewhere safe, because her mommy wasn’t coming back home. Not that day. She knew what it meant. Her mom was dead. It was when she finally said to the police, “She’s dead, isn’t she?” that her worst fears were confirmed: Harold had killed her.\(^{106}\)

That night she stayed at a foster home with lots of other kids. Some of them said their parents died; some of them said that they never knew their parents. But she was the only one that said her mom’s boyfriend killed her mom. She tried to get the thought of what had happened out of her mind. But Harold was always there, looming over her, hitting her mother hard, yelling at her. She didn’t sleep much that night, not a bit.

The next few days were the toughest. She eventually got her Mickey Mouse magazines, her only valuable possessions in her mind, but she still couldn’t sleep for the longest time, and she often refused to eat without her cookies and milk. The other kids didn’t want to play with her, and feared her. Things looked bad. And then they got worse.

When she was sixteen she was identified as HIV positive\(^{107}\). Her medical records from her childhood her incomplete for some reason, and it was hard to know if she’d always had it or not. She didn’t seem to care much that she was going to die. All she could think of what that it might be better than her life now. Things were really bad.

And then they got a little better.

It took a while though. After she had all but withdrawn from society, had become bitter and had a sour outlook on life. She rarely talked, and if she did it was some sarcastic remark. She decided that no one had tried to help her, so she would just help herself and leave everyone else alone. She needed help.

She got it too. In the bathroom, while she was washing her hands. She set the washrag down and went to look at herself in the mirror. She was afraid. She never told anyone, but she was afraid of a lot of things. Afraid of life, afraid of death, afraid of everything, and more.

The washrag moved slightly, and this caused her to jump back. “How could that have happened?” she thought. It was when the washrag began to speak that she thought it was some sort of joke that the other kids were playing on her. She decided to go along with it.

“My name is Haraq,” the washrag said, in a friendly voice.

“Just call me dying,” she said, in a sarcastic-little-girl voice.

“Are you serious?”

“Very serious. Dead serious.” She laughed a gloomy little half laugh, one that one might laugh if they found out that the world was going to end, and you have to spend it watching a comedian.

“Then I might be of some assistance to you.”

“What are you going to do, soak the illness out of me?”

“In a way, yes.”

She perked up. She seemed to think he wasn’t kidding. She said, slowly, “Who the hell are you? I’m sure you think this is really funny, but it’s not, okay?”

“Who are you talking to?” the washrag asked.

“You, and you had better cut this joking around out, okay? I’m really not in the mood.” With that she left the bathroom and returned to her room, insulted.

After she spent a few moments with her face down in the pillow, she heard a voice from behind her saying, “Does this mean you don’t want me to help you?”

She swung around to see who it could be, and screamed at the washrag when she saw it.

“How the hell did you get in here?!”

“I unlocked the door,” the washrag replied.

She just stared as it moved across the floor in disbelief. “How could you unlock the door when the lock is on the inside?”

“It is easy when you are of my race.”

“You’re telling me that there’s an entire race of beings comprised of washrags?”

Haraq knew that this line of conversation was not going to get to where it needed to be, so he floated toward her face and said, “No. But I am of a race of beings in desperate need of help, in return for which I can help you.”

For a moment, she had total sense of disbelief, and asked, “If you wanted to, could you really help me?”

“Indeed I could.”

Reality began to set in. This was too weird. She was talking to a washrag for Christ’s sake. She picked it out of the air and tried to find the strings, but couldn’t.

“This has got to be a joke,” she thought, but something told her it wasn’t. She wasn’t sure if she should get up and lock the door, and after a few moments of hesitation, she did. Then she continued the conversation by throwing the washrag down on her bed.

“First of all I want to make this clear,” she snapped. “If you are some kind of prank pulled by any of these kids here, those kids are really going to regret it. And another thing, who... I mean what are you?”

---

\(^{106}\) Sort of “out of the blue,” huh? Didn’t see that one coming, did you? Okay, so the truth is out. I couldn’t foreshadow for shit back then. Sigh.

\(^{107}\) I find it really weird that I gave her HIV in this story. (Especially since she is cured of it later.) I never knew anyone growing up who had it, or had any personal experience with it in any way. In fact, aside from being deathly afraid of it, I didn’t really know much about it. I imagine if I were to have ever gotten this story published I would piss people off that the character who has HIV is cured of it easily, since that is not the way it would ever happen in real life. The trials and tribulations of the published (and un-published) author.
"A perfectly logical question. I understand that conversing with a washrag happens about as often as nuclear holocausts do, but please understand that I am not a prank pulled on you. I am real, and I, too, am stuck somewhere I don't want to be. I think, if you help me, I can help you."

After a long pause, she said, "Let me hear your problem before you think about helping me. Besides, I don't see much that a washrag could do anyway."

"Whatever you say," was all he said.

* * * * *

She began to see images. Like as if she were asleep. It was of another world, one beautiful and pleasant. This was definitely paradise. She sat and wondered how she had gotten there. Then she realized she wasn't sitting, she was floating. Then she saw Haraq, and she remembered the conversation with the washrag. Things were back in focus.

When she looked carefully, she noticed that Haraq was no longer a washrag. He was a bright colored nothingness that looked as if you could touch him, but your hand would pass through him if you did. He was pure energy now. But how did she know it was Haraq? Maybe it was some kind of subconscious beacon that would allow her to recognize him no matter where she was and what he looked like. Or maybe it was his friendly voice, impossible to forget.

As she watched, Haraq's voice became more and more clear, and she could hear him. She glanced around the place she was at, and it resembled what the energy being Haraq was. It was a reddish color, but almost looked paisley because it swirled around, almost as if it went back into itself in some places. The background was not that bright, and when you looked at it, you could tell that you could never touch it; you knew it stretched away into infinity. What Haraq was saying sounded extremely important, and she listened.

"Fellow Eronites. It has come to the high council's attention that our world, Eron, is not the only one in existence." Haraq waited for the audience to react. They stared back in anticipation, and he continued. "Believe it or not, there are places where mass has been given sentence, and that energy is nothing more than the lifeless workhorse of those worlds. We of the high council have decided that we should send a party of explorers to these worlds and realms, extend peace and tranquility, and offer to leave an ambassador there as a token of our friendship. We will need to have many volunteers on this quest, and some must be willing to stay as good will ambassadors in the realms and worlds we meet. All Eronites who think that they can handle this task meet the high council after I finish my speech. Thank you."

Haraq's speech was not that important to her, although she now knew what his world looked like and where he came from. She loved this place; she thought it was very beautiful and almost wished she could always be here. But she knew better.

Haraq snuck up behind her and startled her. He didn't mean to, but he felt it necessary to explain himself.

"I apologize for startling you, but I felt I should try to answer any questions you might have."

"What the hell are you doing here?" she almost yelled. "I thought you were with the high council!"

"Well, I was. But this is, as you call it, a movie. This event is a memory of mine. I merely projected it into your mind so we could share it. Then, I entered your mind so I could explain myself."

"But how can you do that? Projecting thoughts into my mind? Entering my mind? Is this some kind of magic?"

"No. But it is almost as complicated. I will merely tell you this: we are from another plane of existence, and in this other plane, we are energy beings instead of mass beings, like yourself. Because we are energy we can pass through mass very easily. We have learned that we can interact with the energy that produces thoughts in sentient mass beings. Through that means, we can project our thoughts into your mind, as well as enter yours with extreme ease."

She floated in thought for a while. "Does this mean that you guys are more intelligent than we are?"

"Yes, we are much more intelligent than most mass beings. We have learned the mechanics of thoughts and minds. We are, in a sense, disembodies minds."

"Then for what reason would you need to make friends on other worlds if you are so much more intelligent than they?"

"Because they have one resource that we do not. Mass."

"Mass?"

"Yes. In our world, pieces of mass are few and far between. If we wish to stay ahead of the other mass worlds, we will need mass to build computers, machines, frigginesits, and other things we don't have in our world, but have been doing fine without."

She seemed to be in over her head. But her logical thinking allowed her to keep up just long enough to say, "Well, if you have been doing fine without them, then why should you bother getting them?"

Haraq thought a while on this one. "Imagine one world that has things that another one does not. Let's say that one world discovered a weapon that could destroy a planet. That means that the first world has something more powerful than the second, and can use that power to manipulate the other planet. Unless the other planet has the same weapon, then they cancel each other out. Without being more powerful than the other, the first planet is back to square one."

She floated and thought about this a while. "So you are afraid that other worlds will come and try to control you, like countries were afraid of the U.S. during the cold war?"

"No. We are incapable of fear. We merely would not like it if our entire world was taken over by beings from a power-hungry world. That would put a damper on our quest for knowledge. As for your U.S. reference, yes that is a close, and rough, example."

---

111 I also caught a lot of shit for making up this word entirely. With hindsight, I now side with the people who gave me shit.
She floated and thought some more. "I still have one question," she said.
"Yes?"
"What could I possibly do that could help you, and what could you do to help me?"
"Cure you, of course. We have learned that in mass beings, physical wounds can be healed by alternative methods other than the ones you often use. The exact process is very complicated, and I could not hope to explain it to you in the moments we have. But what we will have to do to cure you is blank your mind. Then we perform the process and cure you. If we don't blank your mind, then there is a possibility of killing your mind. But first, you must agree to help us."
"How?" she said, almost angrily.
"Let's go back to your room first."

* * * * *

She awoke. She wondered if she had been dreaming about Haraq and his world. But the damp washrag over her face slithering away was proof enough. She was still lying down when Haraq spoke again. She wasn't sure if she even wanted to look at him. The fact that for the past hour she had been carrying on an important conversation with a washrag just set in, and she was not sure if she wanted to continue any farther. She knew that if word got out, she would be transferred to the "psycho-ward," and that is definitely something she did not want to do. However, if she continued to converse with Haraq, who knew what could happen? Maybe she would end up believing the rag could talk. Then there was the scariest idea of all: what if Haraq was really real. Stranger things had happened.

"Are you awake?" inquired Haraq.
With a sigh, she replied, "Yes."
"Then are you well? I noticed you are not sitting up, and that is the normal position humans take while conscious. Can I help you?"

She considered what would happen if she told Haraq of her problem. If she did tell him that she believed he did not exist, then there was the possibility that Haraq might make the same realization and just slither away. However, Haraq, being Haraq, would probably come up with some logical argument to prove that he did exist, and therefore she would be forced to agree with him. C'est la vie!

"No," was her ultimate reply.
"Then I will tell you how you can help us."
She perked up slightly. She was, after all, interested in this. She sat up slowly and turned toward Haraq. She looked at him, interested, and lapsed into an innocent little girl voice when she mouthed, "Would you?"

He seemed to ponder what he was going to say. He finally decided upon this: "I told you that to heal you, we would first have to blank your mind, and then you would heal you automatically. Does this trouble you at all?"

"Well... just so long as you bring my mind back."

Haraq did something she thought he was practically incapable of. He said, "Uhm..." "She was almost frightened, even though she had only known this... energy for a few hours, and she hadn't agreed to do anything yet. But he did something that she had never experienced before, something almost intimate. She shared a thought with him, literally. And from that she was given the impression that he could never be indecisive. And even if he didn't know what he was going to say, he could say something that showed that he appeared to know what he was talking about. His "uhm..." scared her. She waited in great anticipation for what would follow.

"When we blank your mind and you perform the task that we need you to, there is a good chance that a large portion of your mind won't come back. And on top of that, when we bring your mind back you will remember everything that you did when your mind was blanked. Supposing you are not affected by the mind blank, you might be changed by what happens to you while you perform the task. You might be someone else when you come back. That is what I was reluctant to tell you."

She sat in thought for quite some time. The idea that she could end up someone else when her mind came back didn't scare her much. In fact, anything would be better than what she was doing now. However, what if that new person was not someone she liked? Would this be a smart idea? Would she even be able to tell if she liked the person she became?

"What is the task you want me to perform?" she asked.
"It is quite complicated, but quite essential to our survival. I will tell you about it later, after you have had time to think about what I have said."

"'Our' survival? There are more of you? Where?"
"If you don't mind, I must go back and discuss some things with my friends. You will need time to think about what has happened. Am I right?"

Time was something she would need. She couldn't just jump into a decision like this. "Yes you are. But where will you go? And when will you come back?"

"We will go to a place like the one in the thought I showed you. When I come back I will bring some friends. Do you think you can bring many washrags here tomorrow?"

"Yes, I think."

"Thank you. As for when we will come back, is 2:00 P.M. a convenient time for you?"

"Yes."

"Then I will leave."
And he did.
She couldn’t believe the implications of what had just happened. She sat in thought for quite a long time. She eventually left her room.

**Part IV.**

1:40:00 P.M.

She had spent the last few hours gathering washrags. She wasn’t exactly sure if it was the smart thing to do. However, if there was a possibility that he could cure her, then she should at least give it a listen. She had been waiting here for about an hour, just in case she might miss the time when he came. But she was just being paranoid. Or maybe not.

1:50:35 P.M.

She listened carefully. She listened to the sounds around her, and the sounds that were absent around her. She could not hear the sounds she normally heard. That’s because they were absent that day. The people that were normally inside the building had gone outside to enjoy the weather. But she didn’t want to. She had more important things to do. Like listen to some washrags.

1:57:23 P.M.

Two kindergarten children were playing on the hill outside her window, the hill with the trees on it, about half a football field away. She watched the children carefully. The children were suddenly important to her for some reason. They were playing some game. The game was suddenly important to her. The boy muttered something to his companion, who was a girl. She said something back. They continued playing with dolls and balls and cars and other toys. Their parents called them and they both left, happily. Their toys went with them. Their mom picked up the boy, and the father picked up the girl. They both got into the car that they came in and left.

She almost cried.\(^{112}\)

1:59:36 P.M. 1:59:37 P.M. 1:59:38 P.M. 1:59:39 P.M.

They suddenly began to become active. All of them, at once, and each in a different manner. The one that Haraq had been in yesterday came forward first. It sat to the side of the pile of washrags that was becoming active.

Each rag had a different way of movement. They all began to move in different directions. Some of them hovered a few inches above the ground; others slithered like snakes. Others formed part of the rag into leg-like constructions, and walked. All of them explored the room they were in.

“As I promised, my friends.” Haraq spoke as if he had only been gone for a moment.

She sat and watched them in awe. One washrag was surprising; twenty stray washrags wandering around your room searching it was something to consider. She watched as many as she could in one glance, and when more washrags were out of her sight than in, she adjusted her head accordingly to make the number she could and couldn’t see equal. What she was seeing was almost impossible, but true.

“Have you considered what I told you? Are you willing to perform a task in return for us curing you?”

She was still watching the washrags. “Yes, I have,” she said slowly, then, directed at Haraq, “But I had a thought last night.”

“Yes?”

“If you have the ability to share thoughts and blank memories, how do I know you haven’t planted all my memories in my head already? And in doing so, you have planted a subconscious thought that is going to force me to say yes anyway?”\(^{112}\) She was asking a very stupid question; she had already dismissed that thought yesterday. But she found herself compelled to say it anyway.

“If we have done what you have said, then you probably not need to question it because we would have implanted a counter-thought to make sure you never tried to deduce what we have done.”

Just what she thought he would say.

“That’s what I thought you would say.”\(^{113}\)

Haraq stared at her.

“Uhm, I think I will go with your offer.” Haraq didn’t even flinch. “But, before you go and do something I need to hear what task I am going to perform.”

“That is completely reasonable. Let me start at the root of our problem, and then explain what you will be doing.”

That sounded reasonable.

“As you recall from my thought, several people from our home, led by myself, went to offer peace and tranquility to the other worlds, as well as an ambassador. Do you remember that?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Before we left we discovered that to travel to these other worlds we would need the combined forces of a certain, pre-calculated number of our people. Starting with that number of our kind, plus one ambassador per world, we left to extend peace to these worlds.”

Haraq paused so he could comprehend what he had said. Then he continued.

“Our mission was going rather well up to a point. We had never encountered a world that was hostile toward us until the world before visiting your own. We extended peace to their government, and they interpreted it as a hostile act. They quickly attacked us.”

Again, a pause.

---

\(^{112}\) Humanity! Let me beat you over the head with it!

\(^{113}\) Everyone’s aware of the rule that, when writing fiction, if a paradox like this one presents itself to the characters, they have to make a joke about it, right? I hope so... this joke sort of depends on that, I guess...
“When the attack began, we quickly retreated to your world. We managed to do so, but when we got here most of our numbers were gone. We had lost one too many. We could not return to our world. To add to our problems, one of our kind had been wounded. He will die within days. This happened about a week ago.”

She thought this over.

“And I’m going to help you get back home? How?” She was more intelligent than Haraq thought.

“After we blank your mind we will put the dying member of our group into your mind. He will inhabit your body for a while, and use your mind, which will have some sort of personality, as a crutch to recovery. If we do not do this, then your job will be all the more difficult.”

She thought about this. It sounded like the first part of her job would be easy. Saving a life was something she could live with.

“I see no problem with that.” She thought a moment. “Does he have a name?”

“Yes, his name is Eos.”

“Interesting name, she thought. “Then what?”

“After Eos leaves your mind, something interesting will happen to it. We have talents and abilities far beyond those of most beings. You may call it telekinesis, but it is more than that.” Haraq then picked her up through his talent. “The ability allows us to communicate, and for me to pick you up.” She was startled, so he put her down.

“When Eos stays in your mind, a leftover amount of mental energy will remain in your mind; in effect, the talent will be left over in you.”

She was astounded by this revelation. “Like when you hold a magnet to a piece of iron for a long time, the iron becomes magnetized temporarily.”

Haraq was impressed. “Yes. However, the power will be permanent.”

She thought about this. Not only would she be saving a life, but she would be gaining something else from the experience.

“Is that all I have to do?”

“No. There is one last thing you have to do. You and I will have to create another energy being.”

Haraq paused to let this sink in.

She paused to let this sink in.

“What do you mean when you say, ‘You and I will have to create another energy being?’

“In our world, we call it creating. I guess your world calls it that too. But obviously you don’t. What do you call creating another life form?”

“Having a child?” She began to wonder if what he was implying was what she thought he was implying.

“Then, you and I will have to have a child.”

She thought about this. She then broke into complete hysteria.

Snicker, “You want to have a baby with me?” Bwahahahahahahahaa!“How are we going to have sex? Let me guess, you will inhabit the body of a male, right?” Bwahahahahahahahah. “Whatever you do, don’t use Bobby Edwards. He couldn’t get it up if he had to.” Bwahahahahahahahahahah!

She looked at Haraq and could tell he was not amused, nor could he even see what could be humorous about the situation. She slowly stopped laughing. “You’re serious, aren’t you? You want to have a child, don’t you?”

“I think you may have misinterpreted what I was saying. After Eos is removed, and you have all that extra energy flowing through your brain, you and I will perform a ritual that could be considered sex. I will stimulate the pleasure centers of your brain, causing you to relax, and causing you to open your mind and stop concentrating on anything other than releasing energy. I will then absorb the energy, and focus it into creating another energy being. In effect, we will be creating a child.”

This was too weird. Saving a life, okay. Getting special talents, fine. Having sex with a washrag, not good.

“Are you sure that’s the only way to get the other... whatever you are you need to get back home?”

“That is the only way we know of.”

She sat and thought long and hard.

“So, I give up who I am now for the chance to save a life, create another one of you, and help you get home. In return, you cure me of my AIDS gives me special powers. That’s it?”

“That, in what you call a nutshell, is everything I have told you the last two days.”

She sat and thought some more.

“I agree.”

114 I was a huge fan of Justice League America, a hero comic that had become a humor comic in the late ‘80’s, early ‘90’s. It was a modern take on the original JLA, except funny and with occasional Monty Python references. Whenever a character laughed (or made someone else laugh), this was the way it was written in the comic. Obviously I borrowed that spelling for there.

115 Painfully honest time here: I was obsessively thinking about sex 24 hour a day during the time period this story was written in. I had never had sex, but knew enough about how it worked to get worked up about it even though I had never had a single encounter with a girl (let alone even kissed one) until I was almost 18. Consequently, 99% of what I was writing was soundtracked to a steady stream of my teenage voice chanting, “Naked girls, naked girls, naked girls,” over and over again (pretty much all of the time). While I never once attempted to write anything with sex in it (except for my own “personal” use that was destroyed immediately afterward), this bit here was, without a doubt, written because I was imagining the idea of sleeping with the main character of my own story. I’m sure there’s some sort of therapist organization that specifically deals with writers who have the same kind of problem, but until I begin to actually show signs of thinking that Adrian really does exist, then I’m going to consider myself mentally fit to remain a part of society. For now, that is.
Part V.

She awoke. She had been lying down on her bed for quite some time; how long was unknown. She glanced around her room quickly to make sure it was still the one she thought it was; it was. The pile of washrags were still in the corner, Eos was still in his corner, the picture was still on the wall, and dull, fading sunlight came through the window curtain. She must have slept almost a day, because it was now getting dark again. She stood up and looked out the window for the first time that she could remember. Then she remembered she had done this before. When she lived here with her mom. Before the incident. Before she died.

Or had that really happened? She suddenly remembered it out of nowhere. Does that constitute truth? Haraq could have put those thoughts there. But why would he do that? She thought. There were a million revelations; all of them thoughts from a life that she thought would be a better one. But it wasn’t. She had escaped that life into this one purposely. Why? She had to know if the memories in her head were really hers. And if so, why had she done what she did?

Haraq began to stir. She sat patiently, waiting for him to say something. She tried to read his thoughts, but he didn’t want her to. She was suddenly struck with a revelation: she could read the minds of willing people. Was there more she could do?

“Haraq?”
“Who am I?” She was on the edge of sanity. She was obviously not the person who had agreed to help Haraq, but now she was not quite the person who had helped Haraq. She had to know.
“You are a person, like anyone else. I cannot tell you who you are. You must decide for yourself.”
“But...” She didn’t know what to say. “Haraq, was I the person I am now remembering, or are those thoughts you put into my head?”

The thoughts you can now remember are ones I put into your head. However, they were originally taken from the head of the body you currently inhabit. Therefore, they are who you thought you were before I took them out.”

She had to think about this. “Then, this is just how I remember my old life? This may not be what really happened?”

“Y’s.”

“So, that doesn’t answer my question. I am not the person I remember, and the person I remember may not have even been the person I once was. I am not the person who helped you, but the person who helped you wanted the memories I now have. This is so frustrating. I am nobody. I don’t even have a goddamned name!”

“That is true. You are not anyone you know of. You are someone new, and you must discover what and who that person is.”
She thought about this a while. “At least I’ll have someone to help me,” she said.

Haraq did, for the second time in his life, something completely out of character. “Uhm... I don’t think that is possible. We all need to go home. That is why we used you in the first place.”

“You’re... leaving me? After all we’ve been through? Haraq, I can’t do this on my own. I need your help. I can’t learn about who I am without you. Please don’t leave me, please!” She was crying by then. The thought of losing the only people she knew as friends horrified her. She screamed.

Haraq just sat there. “I am sorry. We must go. You must face the world alone, and learn the hard way. I am sorry we must leave you.”

“But you can’t leave me!” she sobbed.
“We must. I am really sorry. Goodbye.”

Haraq’s washrag fell limp.

The rest did too.

She sat there motionless for what seemed like an eternity. She then leapt to the pile, screaming for the washrags to come back. She began to grab all of them, hoping for some kind of resistance that would be met when she sat or stood on one of them. But she met no resistance. There was just an inanimate pile of washrags. She became frustrated and let out an enormous burst of energy that flung all the washrags in every direction. The ones hanging from the wall fell, as well as the picture. She began to thrash around in her room in frustration and kicked the wall of her room so hard she broke three of her toes. She fell immediately to the floor in pain. She began to cry louder. She healed the wound and crawled to her bed. She continued to cry for the loss of everything that had kept her alive all these years. She was on her own. Now what?

She fell asleep eventually, still crying, frustrated, not knowing what to do.116

Part VI.

She awoke. It was early in the morning, and the sun hadn’t come up yet. She lay on her bed for quite a long time. She was beginning to wonder if she should even continue living. What was there left? Nothing. They had all left her. Her mom, her friends. Even the person she used to be had left her. She was nobody. She began to cry. She lay down on her chest. She clutched her pillow. She felt something on her back.

She reached back there and grabbed it and threw it across the room. As it hit the wall, the washrag said, “It’s me, Eos.”

She stared at it. It began to move.

“Eos,” she said quietly.

“Yes. I stayed behind. I decided that I was going to miss you, and thought you would miss me too.”

116 My original idea was that she would always be “subtle” about her powers, almost as if she was too nervous or timid to use them, and then after the aliens are gone she really cuts loose. Re-reading this now, I failed in that completely: she burns her mail, kills a stalker AND does all sorts of levitation BEFORE they leave. Afterward, all she does is heal some broken toes and use a little bit of mind-reading / telekinesis.

Did I mention this story isn’t that good?
She began to cry. “You were right. I did miss you.” She snatched him and began to hug him. She created tangible energy so that he could hug back.

They embraced for quite a while.

“Why are you here, Eos? I thought they needed you to get home?”

He thought about what he was going to say. What could he say? He didn’t know. It’s hard to tell someone you love them.

“They did. Actually, they needed another energy being to get back home. So, I gave them another energy being and he took my place.”

“He did? But how, and why?” She began to wonder too much.

“Well, I used you.”

“You what?”

“Well, when I would give you back massages, that would comfort you and you would release some of your excess energy. All I had to do was siphon it off and use it to create another energy being.”

“But why?” She began to use other methods to find out.

“Well, you were always nice to me. You saved my life. You set out other bodies for me when the others said I should stop exploring. You were the perfect person to be with because you were so nice. I began to... to...” he couldn’t say it.

“Eos. It’s okay. I understand.” She telepathically shared a thought with him.

“You do? You love me too?” she said.

“How could I not? You were the one that was always there for me. Even when I was naïve. You were the only one who cared enough to stay behind. I was so worried I would have to face this world alone. But now, now we can explore together.”

Eos was dumbfounded. She was obviously sincere, even through the tears. Eos was glad she cared. He hugged her again. She hugged back. They were both, for the first time, happy. It didn’t matter that Eos was never going back home again. It didn’t matter she was never going to see her energy children of her past life again. Things would be different now.117

Part VII.

It had been an exceptionally long day for him, and he did not want to put up with the hassles his job was now presenting. The clerk hurried up with the job, even though he could never seem to please this customer. He put on his “Have a nice day” smile and saw the customer out the door. “Finally,” he said.

It had been a long two days. He had been working double shifts, and he was dead tired. On top of that, the manager had chewed him out yesterday because he was worried that they had lost a customer, the one that levitated her money. She had not showed up at the store yesterday, and not only had the manager been worried, but the whole staff had been. The clerk did some of the little things that come with the job, and sat on the counter waiting for a customer. One came in.

She strode into the supermarket, like she did most every day, and wandered the aisles until she found a bag of chocolate chip cookies and a gallon of milk in her hands, at which time she turned around and stumbled back the way she came in. This time, however, she had a backpack slung over her shoulder. She began to put the cookies and the milk in the backpack.

The clerk approached her before she got to the door.

“Where were you yesterday? We were wondering where you went. We thought maybe you were dead in a ditch somewhere.” He laughed.

She just levitated the money to him like she did most every day.

“You know, you really must teach me that trick with the levitating money.”

She stopped. She turned around, and looked right at him.

“Yes, you’re right. I must, mustn’t I?”

He was paralyzed with awe. She talked. She actually said something to him. She levitated a piece of paper to him as well and left. After crossing the road, something slithered out of her backpack and sat on her shoulder. She looked back and he was still standing there, still staring into nothingness.

Bobby walked over to see what was the matter.

“Yo, what’s up Paul?”

Paul whispered something barely audible. “She talked.”

Bobby just shrugged at him and grabbed the money and the paper. He unfolded the paper and read it. It said the following in plain, almost perfect handwriting:

Dear Paul,

117 Wow... she’s a teenage parent of two who will never get to see her kids again, gained all sort of super-powers because she let some aliens get it on with her, battled with (and defeated) HIV because of help from the same aliens, traumatically had the intentionally repressed memories of her mother’s death at her mom’s hand revealed to her via same aliens (who can now be symbolically seen as simple “coping mechanisms” to explain all of the main character’s strange behavior throughout the rest of the story), and now gets to live “happily ever after” with an energy being inhabiting a wastagh who she’s in love with (and who, if you really want to read into the text symbolically, is representative of the author and his inadequacies as a person, and also as the author helping the main character come to life, AND who’s relationship with the main character simultaneously represents the author’s own desires for what he wanted in a girlfriend, were he to ever get one). I have to say, I don’t think I’ve ever managed to out-do the layers upon layers of severe issues I personally have to deal with regularly, all revealed in a single piece of writing from before I even turned 18. It makes all those times I wrote about Sabrina, the Teenage Witch in recent years seem like fairly normal behavior, for the most part. <twitch>
Author’s Note:118

This story is lacking a dedication. I understand that. And for some reason, it being the longest I have written to date, it should have one. Well, it does. However, it has in effect four dedications, and they are all very important and could not exist as dedications to other works of writing. So, I have reserved this space to explain, and put in, all four of my dedications.

The first dedication goes to Katy Clove. I have a nasty habit of under-explaining my characters. I am well aware of it, and even though I know everything else about the character, I seem to have all of them interacting at an almost abstract level, all personality and no body. Now that is interesting in the respect that the reader will go the whole story totally immersed in the character, and not even have an inkling as to what s/he looks like. However, I decided that the main character in Adrian could not continue the Austin Rich tradition of shapeless characters, considering that her character depended so much on how others viewed her, and how she viewed others. Katy gave me a starting block for the main character in Adrian. She used to dress occasionally in a way that reminded me of Adrian, and she in a way looks like Adrian. And without those few years of high school with Katy Clove, Adrian would probably fall prey to my inability to give her a form. Thanks, Katy.

The second dedication goes to Audra Roat. In a time in my life when I lived with my mother, her roommate had two daughters that lived with me for a number of years. I was rather annoyed by this at first, but I learned to live with it. However, one day we started getting down on Audra for carrying washrags with her everywhere. She seemed to have one with her everywhere she went, and we couldn’t figure it out. She was only about six or seven, so we figured that it was just a phase. However, I got to thinking about what possible reasons she could need these washrags, and began to come up with really wild ideas like, “Maybe she talks to them.” The story of Adrian is a highly revised version of the stories and ideas that I came up with about Audra, and without her Adrian would never exist. Thanks, Audra.

My third dedication goes to Mrs. Heidi Gunter, my high school English teacher. She was the one during my years at high school that encouraged me to write, and in the end, did a lot of the editing on this story. To her I owe the existence of this story, all my other work, and a very big thanks.

The last dedication goes to a fellow writer you may have read named Cerrah Seal. He wrote one story called The Miracle Child119 and dedicated it to me. He said, To Austin in Emordiet. I had to ask him about five hundred times what Emordiet meant. So Cerrah, I just want to dedicate my weird story about a miracle child to you, in Emordiet, whatever that means.

--Austin Rich (Circa September 1993)

118 I don’t know why, but when I originally finished this story, I felt this incredible need to add this Author’s Note. I read a little too much like something you would find in a published book. In my mind, at the time, there was little difference between myself and a real author (that difference being a contract). I used to write a lot of stuff in those days about my “career”, not realizing that I didn’t yet have one. Sigh

119 I got some shit from Steve Eller for the “unheat” ending this story has (like I said, Adrian essentially lives “happily ever after”). Steve’s own story, The Miracle Child, was about a kid with powers who takes advantage of his parents and his school via a simple form of mental “manipulation” because he’s angry and unhappy. He has a series of horrific dreams in which the world thinks that he’s a monster because of these “powers” that he has, so he essentially hides the powers from everyone, but continues to use them because, well, he’s angry. Eventually he meets a girl who does what he wants her to do without him having to control her, and they start dating and he begins to become a more well-adjusted teenager. He decides because of this to come clean and reveal that he’s “The Miracle Child” at a school assembly, and totally fucks up when he tries to explain to the kids he’s in love with the girl by implying that they had sex (when in fact they did not, which was specifically stated as a plot point in the story). He tries to patch it up with her, but she calls him a monster, which freaks him out because of the dreams he’d been having. He finally goes home and kills himself with a huge hunting knife after pontificating about his poor mother and “Father Prescott” at the church.

Anyway, Steve was insistent that my story was less realistic because “everyone’s happy” in the end, which doesn’t happen in real life. And he’s right to one degree: my story is anything but “realistic”. BUT THAT’S THE FUCKING POINT! He never seemed to get that, and neither did a lot of people. It’s one thing to remain realistic when you write non-fiction, because, well, it really happened, so you need to stick to some ground rules (like, realism). But I’ve got energy beings, other dimensions, telekinesis, and all sorts of other crap in this story, and yet he finds the “happy ending” a primary nitpick. (Who’s got issues?) That’s like saying the biggest flaw in Star Wars is the fact that Han & Leia fall in love as the movies progress because, “It wouldn’t really happen like that in real life.” Yeah, and neither does the Force, dipshit. If their relationship defied an established point or pattern in the movie, then you might have something to complain about.

And that’s essentially my point: when something is bad, it’s bad and you have every right to complain about it. I went out of my way to point out all the faults in this story for you, so now you don’t even have to try when you fire off an e-mail about how crappy it was. However, you should actually think about this kind of stuff and establish reasons behind your declarations of, “this is good / this is bad.” It’s all subjective in the long run, yes, but the point of criticism isn’t to trash something or find fault with it, but to find places that are weak in comparison to an established pattern and make suggestions to improve it. The biggest lesson I learned as a writer is HOW TO CRITICIZE PROPERLY. It not only made my own opinions more valid with others, but it saved a lot of friendships when I wasn’t making blanket statements about how, “Man, that sucks,” when they wanted to know, “Why?” There’s nothing worse than a pig-headed friend who doesn’t agree with you and won’t tell you why (except a pig-headed friend who doesn’t agree with you and will tell you why).

66
Part X: I Got Dem Post-High-School Blues Again, Momma!

[Note: This section is also edited from the "Company History" section that was on the A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. website (http://acronym.rackm0unt.org).]

I had done it. There I was, getting my diploma from the class Guidance Counselor who was making an attempt to hug every graduating student in an effort to cast an even darker shadow on what was supposed to be a very good day for me. I sighed and made the final side step and sprint into safety and freedom. It seemed like a metaphor for my entire academic career: rather than tough it out and deal with the system that everyone had to go through, I was trying to make things as difficult as possible and find a new way to the goal that made me happy. I avoided what everyone else was doing with the same kind of determination that someone jumping out of the path of a train would use, and in a way that's how I felt when I had made eye contact with our Guidance Counselor that day. It seemed like a Herculean effort to get to that point, but having gotten there in one piece (and, more or less, on terms I was pretty comfortable with) I felt a lot better about skipping my diploma and dodging the figurative bullet that day.

In the eyes of the state of Oregon, I was now capable and ready to take on the world. However, I was not prepared for the fact that the world, state-mandated or not, had always been ready to take on me.

It was one thing to have completed High School (and, more importantly, 7 issues of a publication that I was pretty proud of). But it was an entirely different matter when faced with the cold reality of the place I ended up after graduation. Being homeless, jobless & poor did not make for a great kick-off to the summer, nor did it do much to raise my spirits. While everyone else was planning road trips, spending more time with their girlfriends or preparing for their college courses, I was cranked for food stamps, figuring out the details of the work-study program I'd signed up for at LCC, and trying to line up places I could stay until I could magically afford a place to live on my own. It wasn't one of my favorite summers.

At first I thought I'd avoid the real world entirely. In my mind, Bob's had gotten me through all the tough times I could imagine, and it only made sense to dive back into it. I made elaborate plans for continuing the magazine, and put together most of a fourth issue of Bob's Annex (complete with Editor's Note and about 60 pages of material). But the simple fact that I was no longer funded put that line of thinking to a halt immediately. In school I had access to copiers and printing presses, along with a place to work & computers when I couldn't do so at home. Now on my own, copies would cost money... money I needed for food. Since I didn't really know exactly how to make a 'zine yet, nor how easy it was to do so, the idea to do it never entered my head. Frustrated and defeated, I instead prepared for my classes at LCC.

The transition from High School to college was very difficult for me. I made every effort to do right, but had made so many mistakes in High School that it seemed as if I was going to be redeeming myself the rest of my life. I did my best to get things sorted out, and finally got myself an apartment. More phone calls and promises finally paid off in the form of rides to and from the LCC campus daily. Since I had gotten a job in the campus print shop through work-study, everything was shaping up nicely. I even got my computer back from my mom. Along with the remainder of my stuff. Things were coming together.

I roomed with my brother Buck, who was still in High School but had also fallen victim to the same sort of homelessness as I had (got kicked out by my mom for... get this... defending me). We quickly fell into a daily routine that pleased both of us: we attended school, I worked, he humped his girlfriend(s), and then we'd both come home to eat, play video games, and do our homework. Being the first of my friends in my High School social circle to get his own apartment did little for my ability to study: if there wasn't a D&D game going in the living room, there was someone drinking 40's, smoking, watching cable or just hanging out. It set a bad precedent that would take years to break as a head-of-household.

Thinking I was on my way back in the right direction, the unthinkable happened: Melissa broke up with me. I skipped school to call her and tried to talk things over. I wrote her endless letters and cried myself to sleep nearly every night, but nothing was bringing her back. It was my first real break-up I had dealt with, and while girls had broken my heart in the past, this was hurting like nothing else before. It was so bad I started writing more poetry.

My friends told me to get over it, but it was easy to see when they had cars and money and still lived with their parents. Instead I took up smoking again to ease the pain. I shut myself in my room and reached away on my computer in an attempt to make sense of it all. I breathed smoke and fire and wrote. The fact that I hated just about everything I wrote only made it worse.

It was Super Bowl Sunday, January 31st, 1994. I was pissed. I was annoyed. I was unhappy. (Things were bad.) I hadn't written anything enjoyable in ages. The desire to be productive was so overwhelming it was blinding me from the real important tasks at hand: School & work, which seemed like a complete waste of time and felt like another impediment that pissed me off and made me feel like I wasn't getting anywhere with anything satisfying. If I wasn't writing, which essentially had defined me as a person in High School, who the hell was I now?

As my friends sat around and did their thing, I locked myself in my bedroom that Sunday and turned the stereo up as loud as I could. I jabbed at my computer at a flurry of rage, fingers, coffee and cigarettes. Before the end of the night I had produced a five-page "newsletter" titled A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. It's N.O.T. J.U.S.T. A. W.O.R.D. A.N.Y.M.O.R. For the first time since I'd started college I felt good about something I'd done.

The newsletter was mostly a rehash of some of my favorite Bob's material, with a few new things I'd had lying around that never found their way into previous 'zines. Since I was no longer in High School I figured the material would be fresh enough to anyone I could find to give it to on the LCC campus. Not having any money, I printed up a few copies that night on my home printer and the next day (Monday) I got my ride to school and carried them around looking for people that looked like they might be interested.

Graduation Day.
Myself & Steve,
diplomas in hand, on our way to smoke cigars and rid ourselves of that awful High School. Photo by my mom, who attended even though we were fighting at the time.
The problem was, I couldn’t make new friends back then to save my life, and passing out ‘zines to strangers just wasn’t quite my style. I was beginning to think that I had made a mistake by even trying again. Days passed, and aside from Steve Eller & Chantal (his girlfriend at the time), I was coming up empty handed. Misery reared its ugly head again. To take my mind off it I met Chantal for lunch one day, and afterward she introduced me to a table of her friends I’d never met before in the LCC cafeteria. I was introduced to Kiisu, Brian, Colin & Caleh, all guys who contributed to Kiisu’s ‘zine, The Portal. We talked and traded publications and by the time I’d left that afternoon I was convinced that I was not only on the right path, but had been right in High School when my primary focus was writing.

The Portal was unlike anything I’d ever seen before. It had some comics and drawings, but they made little (if any) sense. Rarely did two panels relate to each other... or anything else for that matter. There were collages & junk liberally strewn throughout their publication, as well as some written material (but, like the comics, the text made little sense, both prose and poetry). What was comprehensible (or even partially so) was very funny, but at the same time it seemed interesting because they thought it didn’t have to be. It was self-servings and, in many ways, that’s what Bob’s (and in the long run, all ‘zines) had been too. I read and re-read The Portal #2 trying to make sense of it all, and ultimately decided that I wanted to incorporate more of their style of ‘zine-making into my own.  

I ran home and modified the newsletter to (what they called) “comic-book format” (7” x 8½”, a size and format I would use for the majority of the next 10 years). Since I didn’t know that many people at first I was able to scrape together some change to make the initial copies I handed out. I “borrowed” the remaining copies I needed from the Print Shop I worked in (as part of the Work Study program I was a part of). Using inspiration as if it was caffeine itself, I threw together the second and third issues of A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. It’s, N.O.T. J.U.S.T. A. W.O.R.D. A.N.Y.M.O.R. in less than a month, probably the fastest I’ve ever put together publications in my life.

Unlike Bob’s, A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. was of a much more silly vein. Meeting Kiisu & Colin really unleashed the humor bug in me, and I tried to mesh what Bob’s had been and what The Portal was. I threw in nonsensical collages of things I found around campus, took “submissions” in the form of any little scribble someone made on a napkin on scrap of paper, and worked hard to put together publications that would make me laugh if someone else had done them. Since I was back into writing with vim and vigor, I transferred from working in the print shop to The Denali, a campus art-publication that needed people to type up drafts of stories and poems, answer phone calls, make copies, and do grunt work. It wasn’t the smartest decision: having access to a copier only meant that I went off the deep end with A.C.R.O.N.Y.M copies (and it didn’t take long before I’d given the copy-code number to Kiisu & Colin). But it did get me a poem in one issue and a “staff credits” in two different issues. I felt like I was on the right track, and didn’t even bother to check and see what track I actually was on.

Unlike Bob’s, A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. did not have set print runs. When someone would ask for a copy, I’d hand them one. When I ran out of copies, I made 10 or 20 more and carried those around with me to distribute. Printing in batches like that worked out best for me in many ways. First, I didn’t have to invest anything more than what I had available. Second, I could generally make back more than I had invested by charging a dollar per issue (these first three issues were mostly copied for free, and when I did pay it never cost any more that $0.60 per issue). To date I don’t know how many of these have been distributed, but I’d say that no more than 50 of each issue has been made. Even though I’ve offered all of these for most of the time since I’ve made them, I have rarely had to make new copies since I started producing I’d Buy That For A Dollar!

---

120 While none of the contributions I made are included in this collection, from issue #3 on I was regularly contributing bits a pieces to the collective Portal effort. Most of my contributions were scrambled on napkins, in the form of something to add to a collage and other general nonsense, so it seems silly to include it here in any form aside from being mentioned in a footnote. In return, everyone involved with The Portal made regular contributions to my ‘zines, mostly Kiisu & Colin. Kiisu would take “nearly-finished” proofs and draw little cartoon aliens that made comments on various articles / elements of that issue, while Colin contributed random drawings that fleshed out a good portion of many of my ‘zines (his logo design for I’d Buy That For A Dollar! still graces the covers on a regular basis).
Boredom
causing
me
to
think...
about the time
I snow
skied in
Africa with
10,000 creatures
each with
broken helmets
and radioactive
tattoos
of
a
coffee cup.

Bored
om
taxing
me
with...

worries of
World Wr
VI and the
small man
in Korea
with an I.Q.
of 97 and
eight
children,
eating
soup
and

laughing
Bor
edom
is cool.

I’m the coolest
guy
in the world.

Boredom
is,
was,
will be,
will have been,
could have been
will have not have not
been
the answer
to
many
scientific
stalemates.

spelled with
a silent
t in the
middle after
the hq and
before the
letter “ef”
while the smoke
is
clear
ing.

Bo
is the
eighteen letters
before
re and
do
m, as in
disaster.

Will you
sing me
a song
of acid?

Nifty.

121 Reprinted from The Denali #2 (Winter, 1994 Volume XVII). Gosh, who might have been the slightest bit interested it psychedelic imagery? And I still hadn't done drugs yet, either. Guess it was in the genes...

This poem would also find it's way into the one and only issue of Trauma, an issue of Ramen City, U.S.A. (I forget which one, but it was probably issue # 5 or #6), in addition to becoming the lyrics to a song by Cathead. No matter how hard I tried to pound the title into anyone's head, they only ever called the song "Boredom". Sigh. If reader response is high, I may post an MP3 of the song on the website.
A Small Cover Gallery.
The covers for Issues #1 & #3 were entirely done by me. I trimmed out the Logo, Date & "From The Bowels..." bit from the Newsletter version and added in the "New Special First Issue!" thing to the re-made version of issues #1. What can I say? I was in a hurry. At one point I made a new version of the "New Special First Issue!" blurb on my computer, but never used it on any distributed copies. Issue #3 was scribbled out while I was playing D&D one night and was influenced by an issue of Action Comics Weekly which had a very similar cover. Issue #2 has a drawing by a LCC friend named Marisa. You'll notice the Mac-created logo for issue #2 as well (done while at work for The Denali). One of the rules of thumb for A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. was to borrow whatever resources you could, whenever you could. I find the date on issue #2 very interesting. According to the interior of that issue, I only met Kiisu & the gang on February 11th. Damn, I worked fast back then...

From The Bowels, Of Cabbage, Grave, To The Concrete, Roads Of Our, Humble Highways, It's Time For Us, Learned People To Say A Few Words About Life And The Fucked Up World We Live In.

Volume I, Issue 1
January 31, 1994

Acronym
It's Not Just A Word
Any More

Picture Goes Here
Should be something like this

Volume I, ISSUE #3
March 12, 1994

Notes:
Is Moomaaghack! Ready? Where is it?
What about those Poems?
Get On The Ball!

Volume I, Issue 2
February 15, 1994
In our world MTV is one that is everywhere. I should know, I don’t even own a TV and it affects me. Have you ever watched MTV? Innovative concept if I’ve ever seen one. It’s the only place in the world where you can see music, beautiful people, and more slogans than you can shake a stick at. All you’ve got to do is turn on the TV, turn it to MTV, and veg. I admit that I watch MTV. Hey, doesn’t everyone? It reminds me of a world where life is three minutes long, and, good or bad, the vee-jay babbles about what it means and starts it all over. I wish everything was like MTV. That way, everything would be perfect.

I’ve been watching MTV for several years now, but it wasn’t until I hit puberty that I really liked MTV. It has something for everyone! Videos, Advertisements, People who can dance, sing, and yell. No need to go outside. No need to justify your opinions. The MTV does it for you. Just sit right back and have it tell you what your favorite star is. Have it tell you what to think! What a brilliant idea!

Occasionally you’ll see something that really sucks. I mean, you’ll see a band with talent, musically that is, with a song about an issue that you care about. But then the MTV patrons say, “Huh huh, this sucks,” and you know that you can’t watch that video again. After all, it sucks.

A man once spent a week with his MTV. An entire week! I envy the man because I don’t even have my own TV, let alone MTV. Or did I already say that? Anyway, he did. He had his own MTV, that had the babes he wanted to sleep with on it, and videos he wanted to see on it, and his favorite vee jay there all day long. I wish I could be like him. Maybe I will someday. I think everyone should watch MTV.

My mom used to get mad when I watched MTV. She turned it off when I was watching Beavis and Butthead. I was very mad. I needed to know what sucked and what didn’t. If I didn’t know what sucks and what didn’t, then I wouldn’t be cool like my friends on MTV. I didn’t talk to her that day.

MTV is the part of all of us that just wants to be like everyone else. One million people screaming, “I want my MTV,” because, deep down inside, we all want to belong.

---

122 It’s time to come clean on this title: I didn’t come up with it. I don’t know if I ever claimed I did, because I borrow a lot of stuff for titles and whatnot. One of my few talents is to pick up a textual riff from one author and then use it in my own stuff in different combinations and whatnot, sort of like folk-music writing (which is an eloquent way of saying I rip people off). Anyway, the originator of the “Documentary of Insanity” title was, in fact… (wait for it)… Steve Eller. (Bonus points to those who were able to figure that out before I finished that sentence.)

In High School one of the few things he had written after I’d met him was a series called “Documentary of Insanity”, which were mostly stories metaphorically talking about his own issues with dating. Once he started dating Chantal, he sort of stopped writing them. I guess no longer having any fuel to run on. (This is a lot more common than I once thought. I always write a lot more when I’m single. From what I gather, that’s just the way most writers are, too. Who knew a hobby I’d take up to impress girls only really works when they dump me.) I think he’d written about 8 parts to the series, and since he and I were close friends I asked him if I could pinch the title and write a couple of stories of my own. In my defense, he agreed, and so it began. There was another story I wrote with the same title which has (to my knowledge) never seen print.

124 This was originally in ACRONYM #1. Two things: This piece was an assignment for a writing class at LCC. I remember getting a few compliments on it in class, but immediately after I read it aloud someone else read something about how their husband was a huge Beavis and Butthead fan, and it sort of ruined the momentum of the piece. I’ve sort of hated this one ever since.

Second, I pinch the last bit of this title from the first Radiohead album (Pablo Honey), which was in heavy rotation in my stereo at the time. I recently listened to that album again and realized how amazingly derivative it was of everything that came out that year. The only enduring song is, in fact, the "hit," which is a little depressing considering how big the song was and how big they became as a band afterward.

125 Aside from “Shiny Happy People”, and the un-quoted House of Style, all of those phrases are from MTV commercials from the late 93 era.
I especially like the alternative videos. After all, everyone else likes them. I watch all day, drooling over Kennedy and waiting to hear my new favorite song (it’s different every day, you know). I listen well and when it’s over I call my friends and say, “You’ve got to see this new video by ________.” It doesn’t matter who it is. There is a new one every day, anyway. Or have I said that before?

I want to be on MTV. I think I’ll start a band. But what will I call it? It doesn’t matter. I just need to sound like Nirvana or Pearl Jam or the Red Hot Chili Peppers. Maybe I’ll call myself the Pearl Hot Buddhists! Heh heh, that would be cool, uhm, I mean, neat.

I’ve got to go. The MTV is calling me. It’s saying, “I’m a creep / I’m a weirdo,” so I must be. After all, how could it be wrong?

I love my MTV ☺.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Closing Note (by G.M.):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| IN HIGH SCHOOL I EDITED TWO MAGAZINES. THE FIRST ONE WAS CALLED BOB’S IMAGINATION. THE SECOND WAS AN UNDERGROUND ONE I DISTRIBUTED TO MY FRIENDS CALLED BOB’S ANNEX. THEY WERE GOOD MAGAZINES AND THEY SERVED THEIR PURPOSES, BUT I WAS NEVER REALLY SATISFIED WITH THEM BECAUSE I DIDN’T HAVE THE KIND OF FINANCIAL BACKING I NEEDED. I TRIED TO START ANOTHER MAGAZINE, ALSO CALLED BOB’S IMAGINATION, BUT THAT DIDN’T EVEN GET ANYWHERE. OH WELL. NOW, WITH a.c.r.o.n.y.m., WELL UNDERWAY, I FEEL THE EXCITEMENT I HAD WHEN THE FIRST MAGAZINE CAME OUT. I FEEL THE ENERGY IT CREATED AND THE FUN I HAD WHEN I DID IT RETURNING, AND I CAN’T WAIT TO HEAR HOW IT DOES.
| I NEED SUBMISSIONS, THOUGH. AND WITHOUT YOUR ASSISTANCE, THIS WILL GO NOWHERE. SO, IF YOU CAN, TAKE THE TIME. JUST PUT IT IN THE MAIL AND YOU’LL FEEL BETTER ALREADY. BESIDES, WHAT ELSE HAVE YOU GOT TO DO (WATCH mtv)?
| LETTERS TO THE EDITOR WILL BE ACCEPTED TOO, AND IF YOU CAN FIND ME I’M ALSO WILLING TO WORK OUT ANY ARTISTIC IDEAS YOU MAY HAVE.
| BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, HAVE FUN, AND TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. IT’S A REAL JUNGLE OUT THERE.
| A FINAL NOTE ABOUT THE MAGAZINE (OR NEWSLETTER). THE OPINIONS EXPRESSED WITHIN ARE ONLY THOSE OF THE AUTHORS. IF YOU HAVE ANY QUALMS WITH A PIECE, SPEAK YOUR MIND IN A LETTER (BLAH BLAH BLAH). |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Another Closing Note (by G.M.):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| IN THIS a.c.r.o.n.y.m. YOU WILL FIND YOUR LETTERS (SO STAY TUNED, YOU猴). UNLESS THEY ARE VERY LONG, YOU NEED a.c.r.o.n.y.m. PRETTY MUCH GOOD ENOUGH, a.c.r.o.n.y.m. NO a.c.r.o.n.y.m. STORY, OR a.c.r.o.n.y.m. ANYTHING ELSE, SEND THEM IN. BESIDES, YOU a.c.r.o.n.y.m. PROBABLY TIRED OF ME TALKING YOUR Writing.
| I’VE a.c.r.o.n.y.m. FUN PUTTING THIS ISSUE TOGETHER, a.c.r.o.n.y.m. I HOPE YOU ENJOY a.c.r.o.n.y.m. IT. DON’T LET THE a.c.r.o.n.y.m. INTO GET PUBLISHED a.c.r.o.n.y.m. YOU BY. SUBMIT TODAY a.c.r.o.n.y.m. |

126 Now that’s real funny, considering that I had absolutely NO money to make this ‘zine (or any of my future ones, either).

127 From A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. #1. This is the first time I used the pen name “G.M.” Originally I wanted a great pseudonym to use when I was working on Bob’s, but since I never thought of anything I just went with using Austin. Inbetween the first issue of Bob’s and the first issue of A.C.R.O.N.Y.M., I had come up with this idea to go by G.M. Not only did it have the Roleplaying connotation (the GM is the Game Master, who runs the whole game for all the other players), but it was also a riff on my real name anyway. (I had a teacher who called me Austin Healy, and I started thinking about cars, and then about General Motors. I don’t know if G.M. makes the Austin Healy [probably not] but it was a strong enough connection at the time to go with.) It seemed really important (at the time) to use a pseudonym, and to go to great lengths to insure that Austin Rich (the writer) and G.M. (the editor and publisher who put together all the publications) were completely separate people. I would be at a loss if I was to try and explain to you why I thought this was important, but once I got the idea, I ran with it... quite a ways, in fact (as you’ll no doubt find out if you keep reading).

You’re probably also noticing the... uhm... “text”. I’ve always been a fan of text design, and more to the point different ways to layout boring text. I know a lot of design people probably want to kill me for saying that, since I always use the more “boring” fonts around. Still, in the old days I would experiment with different ways to use text more often than I do now.

It should also be noted that this idea was inspired by the band FIREHOSE, a band I never really listened to at the time but saw once with The Butthole Surfers and I liked their name and decided to pinch the idea. As you’ll probably find out, most of my writing career seems to involve stealing ideas in one form or another. “Copyright infringement is your best entertainment value...” (Also, not my quote... how ironic.)

128 From A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. #2. More textual funkiness that I was playing around with. I promise this is as annoying as it ever gets from here on out. (Well...)
My Thoughts On Conformity
by Austin Rich

Today I saw a little cloud
All alone up in the sky
Away from all the other clouds
What reason I do not know why.

The other clouds, bound by one large commonality
(But in all actuality
the true reality was
they were bound by an aquatic anomaly)
Were more attractive than before.
Beauty known only by few.
Like the kind found upon the shore.

The little cloud was also pretty.
And colorful, I might add.
But with all its wonderful splendor
It looked a tad bit sad.

But the little cloud had something else
About it that I liked.
Through its sadness I did see
A little bit of character, no less.

The little cloud was bold and strong.
Independent, he was too.
Creative and handsome
Just to name a few.

And though he was all alone
the little cloud was proud
For he knew that he was just as good
As all the other clouds.

So I won’t forget the little cloud
Or at least I’ll try my best.
Because I know this little cloud
can do fine without the rest. 129

Part XI: Breakdown

By the time I’d finished the third issue of A.C.R.O.N.Y.M., I was more or less so at both work and school. Realizing that my only interests were writing and hanging out with my new-found friends, I would regularly skip classes at the drop of a hat. If I wasn’t depressed because of Melissa then it was a general kind of malaise that is always present in your average 18-Year old kid. Steve Eller only made things worse: probably my best friend, he supported my negative viewpoint regardless of the fact that he was happily dating someone and living with his mother, rent free. Sometimes I didn’t even go to school, instead taking whole days off to lie in bed, write, and blame the world I was not participating in for my current station in life.

The stress was a factor: being the sole breadwinner in a household that consisted of my brother Buck (still in High School and not even trying to gather any kind of income) and myself led to a lot of arguments, mostly concerning money. Food stamps helped ease the pain a bit, but he always wanted cash for smokes or other luxuries that I simply couldn’t afford. His lack of interest in cleaning the house, actually attending (or graduating from) school, or taking care of responsibility in the least bit seemed to be a factor in that, too: he rang up over $300 in sex-line calls and was a huge viewer of cable, which I couldn’t really afford but ordered for him at his request.

In my second term at LCC I bombed, failing almost all my classes. I was on Financial Aid, which meant that if I was to continue going to school I could not use the work-study program AND I would have to start paying for classes on my own. Considering that Financial Aid and work study were my only forms of income, it became quickly apparent that paying rent and bills on time was no longer possible. The downward spiral had begun. I began lashing out at anyone and everyone in my life. Before long I was on everyone’s shitlist. I placed a collect call to my dad and begged him for a chance to regroup and get my shit together, and naïvely he made the arrangements to pick me up and whisk me away to Oregon City, where he lived at the time.

The re-adjustment was extremely painful. I had to leave behind all my remaining friends, plus the security of the town that I’d lived in for the largest portion of my life. While Cottage Grove was, by no means whatsoever, a good place to live, it had been my home for a long time and was hard to let it go. I wrote lots of letters and made every attempt to stay in touch with everyone I could, and Kisus became quite a good pen pal. (It was around this time that Nina, Kisus’s girlfriend at the time, silkscreened for me the only A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. t-shirt in existence, which I still have to this day.) I spent my time sulking, writing, and trying to make sense of the world around me.

I quickly landed a job at McDonald’s, which was the beginning of a long and drawn-out series of food-service jobs that would haunt me until 1997. I fit in like sandpaper: I rubbed everyone the wrong way. While I needed the money and would desperately try to do what was told, I hated the work with such a degree of bile and disgust that it did not take long for me to grate on everyone’s nerves. Fortunately for me, about half the staff of nearly any food-service job behaves similarly, which was the only way I was able to maintain that kind of work for so many years. At this McDonald’s I made some friends, and even managed to meet a girl. We began seeing each other not too much later.

Daily life was dreadful, though. I did not relate to my family very well, which was a fault of my own more than theirs. I wanted independence and isolation, but in the small house we all lived in we had to share just about everything nearly all the time. I would hide out in the room my brother Kyle & stepbrother Tony shared with me, biting nearly everyone’s head off for interrupting me while I was writing or trying to listen to music. I wanted to have my new friend’s over to watch TV or movies, but 9 times out of 10 I

129 From A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. #3. I am not a poet and have always had a thing against the medium. (I’m sorry, that’s just the way I feel.) Regardless, I have been known to write quite a few poems in my lifetime (mostly when depressed, recently broken up, or insane). I remember vividly having to write poems for an English Class, and me HATING the task to such a degree that I wrote poems about how much I hated writing poems. (What can I say? I’ve always been very self referential.) Later, in early High School, I thought that if you were a writer (which is what I aspired to be), you had to write poems. So I wrote poems about how pissed off or upset I was, often about failure with girls. They were all awful. (Dreadfully so… the examples in this collection look like works of art compared to that stuff.) This was one of the few poems I wrote after High School (while I was going to LCC). I was obsessed with intentionally not fitting in (even though I desperately wanted to). It’s a theme I used to riff on quite a bit.
got in trouble for smoking in the house or wanting to use the TV when the other kids were already watching it. We all developed a horrible working relationship; I tore into everyone for getting in my way because, essentially, I felt like I had lost everything and was given pale substitutes to make up for it. In turn, they tore into me for disrupting their lifestyle and being a complete asshole, which I was. Things finally came to a head when Steve came to visit me. I was relieved to see him, and we spent most of our time having coffee, copying ‘zines and trying to sort out a way that we could return to our previous lives. There had always been plans of he and I living together in the future, enabling us to create a household dedicated to writing and supporting each other in those endeavors. However, my foul-ups had not been anticipated, nor was I finished in making them. By “informing” everyone (instead of asking) that Steve would stay with us for a week, then fighting with everyone in the house over trivial (at best) issues relating to his stay, it was finally decided that I had to go, regardless of weather or not I had anywhere to go.

Steve was (almost literally) on his way back out the door to go home when the ultimatum came down, so he and I instead went to have one last cup of coffee together before he left town. By sheer luck, we met in the café that night a girl named Asia who was also poor and needed a roommate. Not being one to argue with good fortune, I told her I’d move in on the spot, and after we stayed up the rest of the night making plans I went back to my dad’s house to announce that I’d found a place and would now pack up my things. Steve stuck around just long enough to help me move in, and inside a few hours I’d located a new home.

Asia herself was an amazing woman. Somewhere in her 20’s (I was unable to determine her exact age), she was an alcoholic with cerebral palsy. She regularly attended AA meetings (that didn’t seem to be working) and somehow managed to get up and down the rickety stairs (that were even missing a step) through some method I was unaware of (she needed those half-crutches you see people use who… well, don’t have much control over their legs). When she was not falling or tripping over something she was telling bizarre stories about places she’d traveled to, bands she’d seen in concert, and how her 12-steps were going (generally not well). She was completely fascinating, a contradiction in almost every area of her life, and I was immediately enamored. I had met so few people in High School that were different or interesting than your average Joe Blow, and here was a girl who had unusual musical taste, a couple of physical ailments and some great stories to tell. I felt like I was finally getting some sort of experience that would later fuel my creative energies, and thrived on just listening to her talk. I imagined that she had all sorts of scummy and disreputable friends that I could not wait to meet, and though we never went out together I always wanted to.

The “apartment” was disgustingly awful. Located in the heart of the shit-district in Milwaukee, Oregon, it was a studio above a garage and behind a duplex (with an RV in the driveway). The RV and both units of the duplex already housed some amazing white-trash families, and when they weren’t arguing or fighting with their kids (or each other), they were drunk or high on stuff that I wanted little to do with. Though I had no real evidence to support this theory, I was almost sure they were making speed in the garage (there was a cat-piss smell no matter how clean our studio apartment was). Asia had located the place through her uncle, her only relative in the area that was apparently “looking out for her” (I would hate to know what he’d have done if he didn’t like her). Still, a place was a place, and if I had to share this one-room studio with no lock on the door in an awful neighborhood to get by in the long run, then so be it. Steve told me to tough it out and, as AP, he would come back with money, a job, and promises of us getting a new place together. I held my ground and waited to see what happened.

Fortunately I didn’t have to wait long. My commute to McDonald’s™ was now one hour on a bus, and my desire to keep up this commute didn’t last more than a few days. I started getting even more depressed than normal (it was either the environment or the circumstances, so I began skipping work. (I’ve always found this kind of behavior in me interesting: everything sucks, so I’ll do something that will inevitably make it worse.) It didn’t take long before I just decided to not go anymore at all. I had timed this decision perfectly: after sitting on my bed one morning not too long after I’d moved in, smoking and thinking about the misery I would wallow in that particular day, Asia came home from a night out on the town. As she distractedly stumbled around the studio and began telling me about her night, I noticed she was packing. She ended the conversation with, “Yeah, so I’m seeing this guy from my AA meetings… we hung out all night, and he invited me to move in with him. Later!” I guess turnedout was fair play. I never saw her again.

The reality of the situation began to set in: I had no money. I didn’t even know who my landlord was. I still had power even though we hadn’t paid the bills, but that was the only thing in my favor (so far). It was so bad I began to openly cry and passed the time by reading Stephen King novels. I wrote endlessly in my journal, but the immediate problem of there being no food was hitting me over the head regularly. I went a full 7 days with only a carton of eggs and tea to get me through the week. I finally caved in and scraped together enough change and take the bus out to McDonald’s™ to get my last check. There has been little else that was as humiliating than turning to a food-service manager to get your last check so you can get something to eat.

Ignoring my problems seemed to always work in the past, and since no one had pounded on my door for any rent money in the last two months I considered myself fairly safe now that I had some food and cash. I used some of this money to make a trip to Eugene and visit Kasia, which, instead of cheering me up, only made me more depressed. He and his friends seemed to be having a great time while I was penniless and miserable in Milwaukee. Returning back to my hovel seemed more and more pointless, though I’d purchased a return ticket and didn’t want to abandon my precious belongings. When I got back I rarely left the house, save to wander around at night looking for soda-cans to recycle for the deposit, or to find change on the sidewalks and gutters to later buy cigarettes with. (I even broke open a donation box for the Ronald McDonald foundation at a closed McDonald’s™ when I was really desperate one night.) When I felt bad about where I was in life, I looked at my neighbors and went back to writing in my Journal.

When I was at the end of my rope Steve came to my rescue. Armed with a car full of belongings and a huge wad of cash he’d gotten from his mother, we contacted Asia’s uncle and straightened out the apartment (how we found him I’m still not sure if). He was not in the least bit surprised that she ran off and cut me a lot of slack considering the circumstances. Soon enough we had a phone again, and not too much later both Steve and I landed jobs (I worked at a local supermarket while Steve found a food service job). Neither of us owned a TV (thankfully), so to pass the time we listened to music and hung out with our neighbors, all of whom became more and more scary the more we got to know them. Steve took this as a sign to take up smoking pot, while our neighbors
took this as a sign that they could come and go as they pleased. Consequently, when they got into fights, the wife of one couple (Nancy) and her kids would pound on our door looking for a place to spend the night when things got really bad. (It probably didn’t help that they were fighting because she was sleeping with a 17-Year old kid from down the street.)

Living with Steve was like getting punched in the face, only without the clear benefits that are normally associated and a broken jaw. As I had mentioned, when we were in High School he was a selfish and rude person who was clearly more interested in making himself happy rather than being considerate of his friends or acquaintances. While I might have felt sorry for him then, maybe even found these qualities interesting to one degree, it’s a very different thing to live with those kinds of qualities on a daily basis (much less in a studio apartment). We argued and fought quite a bit. Mostly we fought over our personal beliefs, though it was partially the lack of privacy, his pot-smoking, the horrible area of town we found ourselves living in, the distance from all my other friends, my foul-ups with family and friends and school in the past, and the fact that my relationships all seemed to unravel around me. What ever the minutia of these arguments ended up being, the fact was plain and simple: we could not get along to save our lives.

It was a perfect ‘zine-making environment.

Between my dad’s house and this studio-from-hell, I made three more issues of A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. I think that, to give these issues perspective, it’s important to know what was going on in my life at the time. While I have long since laughed at the trials and tribulations I’ve been through (as most people have when I tell these stories), it’s still interesting that I even made it day to day. While I distinctly remember living in constant fear and hunger, there was a certain something else in the air that always made me feel as if it would all work out in the end. It was during these three issues that I went through some of the hardest times in my life, having virtually no one to turn to and no money to fall back on. But I continued to persevere, thinking that somehow I would make it through to the other side. It’s great testament to either my own stupidity, or possible future-telling skills.

Issue #5 is probably the least distributed of all my ‘zines. While Steve had fronted the printing costs on Issue #4 (and Kiisu on Issue #6), Issue #5 was entirely on my dime. Since I was no longer at LCC I had no access to copies or printers, and therefore had to make due with the little change I had lying around the house. However, since I had little change lying around the house, and no one seemed all that interested in buying the ‘zines when I did print them, there seemed little point in putting too much money into them. It seemed to make me happy enough to just keep making them, so I did. While issues #4 & #6 probably had up to 40 issues each printed and distributed, issue #5 probably had no more than 10 (at best). Since I was still not too familiar with the ‘zine community in the least bit (or was aware that there really was one) it still seemed (to me) like an unusual hobby that I maintained for some bizarre reason. If I had only known how common ‘zine-making actually was...

---

**Untitled by Austin Rich**

The more things change
they stay the same
or so we’re told
I’m led to believe

I can’t take it
while you try to break it
up with names & dates
& things that don’t make any sense and never have

Why can’t I
Why can’t youuuuuooouuuu!

/syntax error
there is no title
and I refuse to
give it one if
things just won’t do
downstairs
hometown
nowhere lllland

---

130 From A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. #4. I wrote this poem in High School, at the Vintage Inn, but never printed it until this issue. This was always my favorite poem I ever wrote, and sadly it might be the best one I ever wrote too. (Shit... now I’m depressed...) I should point out that the full title is “Untitled by Austin Rich.” I used to explain that to anyone who would listen, but it’s hard to make that point in print and no one seemed to care.

Random Issue #4 Notes: After I moved to Oregon City and settled into my dad’s house, he pulled me aside one day and plopped into my lap a huge pile of papers, all stuff that he’d written over the years. A lot of it was really, really good, and as I sat there reading it, I was surprised to find out that my dad probably had aspirations of becoming a writer when he was younger too, something I never knew about him. I wish I had kept some of that stuff, because the majority of the stuff he wrote was lost in a fire at his house several years back (not intentionally, mind you).

I also remember this issue was put together while listening to the first Ren & Stimpy album. To this day I still know all the words to, “The Royal Canadian Kilted Yaksmen” song. Maybe I shouldn’t have mentioned that...
Another Cover Gallery.

I did the layouts and designs for all three of these covers. Notice on Issue #4 the “Word Perfect For Windows” created logos. I don’t know where I was inspired for that layout, but I know I’ve seen it somewhere else for sure. Issue #5 contains semi-legible phrases from pop culture that were common among my Oregon City friends (and the girl I was seeing). We loved to quote things. The “steal this magazine” banter is, more or less, borrowed from a Pigface album that I never owned by always wanted buy (ironically enough). The girl I was seeing drew the cover for Issue #6 and gave it to me before she slept with my stepbrother’s friend (something she wouldn’t even do with me), and then left me for her ex-husband. My stepbrother’s friend was no older than 15, nor was I aware of this ex-husband (what is she doing with an ex-husband at 19?). Boy, do I know how to pick ‘em or what? That’s the last time I turn to McDonald’s™ as a source of potential dates.
Four Seconds And I Didn’t Feel A Thing Thought His Glasses Fell Off And Hit Me In The Ass Heterosexual Am Not Are Too Am_Not Are Too Bitch In The Closet Heterosexual Steal This Magazine It Can’t Rain All The Time Stupid, Worthless, No Good Goddamn Freeloading Son Of A Bitch Retarded Big Mouthed Know It All Asshole Jerk You Forgot Ugly, Lazy And Disrespectful Shut Up Bitch Go Fix Me A Turkey Pot Pie Come On You Know You Want To Snaf It It’s Backwards For Flans Of Course M-O-O-N That Spells Flans Nice Hat Acronym All You Ever Do Is Fuck My Mother And Eat Our Food Food Eater Mother Fucker Yeah, Uhm, Nice Hat I Think I Have To Go Now I’ve Got A Date Or Something No One’s Looking Come On Do It Are You A Slacker And My Time Is A Piece Of Wax Falling On The Termite That’s Choking On The Splinter My Name’s Todd I’m A Fox I’m Copper I’m A Hound Dog The Duke’s Not Dead He’s Frozen And When We Find A Cure For Cancer We’re Gonna Thaw The Duke Out And He’s Gonna Be Pretty Pissed Off You Know Why Have You Ever Taken A Cold Shower Well Multiply That By Fifteen Million Times And That’s How Pissed Off The Duke’s Gonna Be Come On I Dare You To Steal It Welcome To The Weiner Snitzel Can I Take Your Order Why Don’t You Like Me It’s Not Just A Word Anymore What About You Dad Fuck You No Dad What About You Fuck You No Dad What About You FUCK YOU Bamm! The Sun Is A Mass Of Incandescent Gas Hello Lemonhead And She Only Comes When She’s On Top Don’t Panic Master Joe May I Go Now Ungad No More Rhymes, I Mean It Anybody Want A Peanut? They Do It All The Time Yeah Yeah It’ll Be Cool To Steal From My Heart And From My Hands Why Don’t People Understand My Intentions Everyone’s Doing It All That She Wants Is Another Baby She’ll Be Gone Tomorrow He Could Go All The Way But He Doesn’t Do It Do It Do It!!

---

Editor’s Note:

There probably aren’t very many people who don’t already know the bad news. On April 8th, 1994, a person I admire very much died of self-inflicted gunshot would at age 27.12

I know you probably already heard a lot about Kurt Cobain. I know that on MTV there were several hours of Nirvana videos and news footage, some of which I watched. Many newspapers have already carried several articles on it. Most people, by now have, probably heard about this unfortunate event.

I’ve admired this man since Nevermind. I admit, I had never heard of Nirvana until then. But I grew up in a house with “classic” rock ‘n roll, and that kind of “punk” music wasn’t really greeted with a lot of enthusiasm. But I eventually got a copy of Nevermind, and now own all of the Nirvana records.

Their lyrics are important to me, because they express things I’ve never been able to. They’re music has a distinct sound, and I like it. I admired Kurt because he said what he wanted to, his way, something that I have always wanted to do.

I will miss Kurt Cobain a lot, and it is my hope that the band will be able to do something to commemorate his work. I have done my mourning for him, and I figured that my job as a fan was done.

Then I watched TV one day a saw an episode of The Rush Limbaugh Show, which I have always hated. He inspired me to write the following letter:

---

121 This is a more legible version of the text for the cover of Issue #5. Even when the cover was fresh it was pretty unreadable. I would point out all the sources for the quotes, but it’s pretty easy to pin-point them if you think about it. I guess that’s just the way I am.
April 12, 1994

Dearest Mr. Limbaugh:

I was channel surfing today after getting off of the first day of work at my McJob to find your show on a channel I rarely watch, and out of curiosity decided to stop and watch what was left of it. I had come in halfway through and figured that you might make a fool of yourself again and that I might get a good laugh.

A lot of “my friends” religiously watch and listen to your show, and though I often think that you don’t even realize the stupidity of what you are saying, or the fact that most of what you say doesn’t make sense, I’ve learned to keep an open mind about you. I’ve done my homework. I have looked at both of your books, and have learned to hate both of them after the first chapter. I have seen your show a few times now, and this was the first time I was able to actually finish an episode. I have also listened to your show a few times, and had trouble holding back the laughter when poor old Bill Clinton won the election (don’t get me wrong – I don’t like him much either, but it was funny, you must admit, to hear you bitch and moan about it). I don’t know what “my friends” think of you (who, by the way, own copies of both your books, transcribed on tape, and have taped almost every episode of your show), but my opinion of you has not changed since I first heard your show on the radio.

I really hate your opinions, your books, your TV show, and just about everything you stand for.

Don’t get me wrong; you are a talented man. You really do make a good job of staying on top of the news, and are very informed about current events. I like that in a person and appreciate that there are still a few of us in this world that actually take the time to read the paper and watch the news. It is sad to see that you don’t always get the facts straight, but I admit that I don’t read or watch the news as much as I should, and have been caught unaware of many issues. But you are always aware, or at least informed, of what is going on even if you get the facts wrong.

You are also a funny man. Have you thought of doing stand-up? You have the ability to take a situation and exploit the humorous side of it, which is difficult to do for some people. The tabled with you shaking hands with the aliens was a good example. When you stick to something that isn’t totally against every fiber of my beliefs, then I do laugh.

However, when you began to talk about the death of Kurt Cobain, well, I was not laughing, and was, how do you say it?, really fucking pissed off.

My name is G.M., and I am the editor of a magazine called A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. I.t.’s N.o.t. J.u.s.t. A.W.o.r.d. A.n.y.m.o.r. published by A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. I.t.’s N.o.t. J.u.s.t. A.W.o.r.d. A.n.y.m.o.r. Publications in association with Blasphemus Press Ltd. I am a writer, first and foremost, and work at McDonald’s to help finance my cause. In my writing career, I have read a lot of work by many different people, but Kurt Cobain’s writing was very important to me because it helped me see and understand things about myself that no one else could. To say things about him on your show in such a way that you did made me feel as if you were writing me off, and the people like me, in one clean swoop. Insulting us all does not solve the problem, but merely creates hate mail, as you can plainly see.

From your attitude, it does not sound as if you were ever a teenager. I am eighteen now and I have been through more shit than I ever want to. Did you ever have to put up with peer pressure? I have. If you don’t comply, you are “cast out” and left with no friends. It’s a tough life we lead. Does any of this ring a bell with you? Were you ever in that kind of situation?

I admit I haven’t been drug free. I am a heavy smoker and am addicted to caffeine. However, that doesn’t mean I can’t see the problem either. I really feel that drug use is a problem for some people, and for others something that should be avoided entirely. However, in Mr. Cobain’s case, he complained of an illness that supposedly caused him tremendous stomach pains that hurt to the point in which he could not get out of bed, and it hurt to eat. He said it felt like he was dying. If you were unable to eat (which, judging by your looks, would be bad enough to make you turn to anything) and was bedridden, constantly in pain, would you not look for a way to soothe the pain? That, in my mind, does not make Kurt Cobain’s drug use “okay” to me, but explains his reasoning to me, which is good enough. On the other hand, maybe he just wanted to have fun. Do you judge a man by what he does in his spare time, or by how he impacts the world around him?

I am now friends with many so-called “social deviants.” I guess I am one, for that matter. But in High School, what happens to me when I decide to do something that I think is right, and no one else agrees with me? Cast out again, Mr. Limbaugh. I spent all of my school years virtually friendless because I was a “nerdy writer” and tried to “stand up” for what I believed in. You try going through those years in your life without many friends, while living with one very out of touch parent, and see how you turn out. You’ll probably become friends with so-called “social deviants” too.

How many times have you been in love? Do you remember your first? For some reason, it’s hard for me to remember what love is. I’ve been hurt by it every time I thought I was in it. Without fail, I would develop those feelings that I had no control over, and get hurt with them in ways I thought were not possible, each time a little worse. It’s hell. Of course, do you know what it’s like to have someone you care about hurt you? Probably not, judging by your attitude.

---

133 In the original letter I wrote, and in the original version of this issue that I made copies of, the letter was somewhat different, and I named a lot of names and really went all out, pointing fingers at people in my life that probably didn’t deserve it, and saying some exceptionally harsh things about my mom, my friends, and my ex-girlfriends (including girls I only really had crushes on). I don’t know how many copies of that issue are out there (or who has them), but I’m going to have to come to terms with the fact that they may, in fact, exist. It’s better to admit that now than to try to explain it later when they are located. Around ’97 or ’98 I heavily edited this letter and changed every copy of it that I still had, destroying the original as best as I could. (at least, I think it’s destroyed for good). I decided that what I’d written was not fair to the people in question, and tried to “soften” the blow, so to speak. Still...

This might be a good time to also point out that I wrote this before the book Rush Limbaugh Is A Big Fat Idiot was published. See, occasionally I am ahead of the curve...
Do you know what it’s like to try to maintain good grades when that’s all you’ve ever had going for you in life when that kind of shit is happening to you?

Have you ever found out that your mother is homosexual and had to deal with the shit people throw at you when they hear about it? I didn’t mind her choice at all. I thought her decision was her’s and not mine to deal with. Sometimes I feel like I may be attracted to guys, though I wouldn’t, I don’t think, have sex with a man. But back to the subject at hand. When the Measure 9 ballot was going around in Oregon, many of the people I had actually begun to be “friends” with felt that Measure 9 should be voted yes on, “friends” that are also the same people that follow your show religiously (that’s odd). They all wanted to vote Yes very badly and all wished that they were old enough to vote. I was really upset to hear this, knowing that people I thought I was “friends” with would just as soon beat up my mother, rather than try to get to know what she’s like underneath. Do you know what it’s like to hear about your brother getting beaten up EVERY SINGLE DAY because people at our school disagreed with his point of view?

Have you ever been homeless? My mom kicked me out of her house because I was too wrapped up in my own life that I made the mistake of not wanting to attend family affairs. My brother stood up for me and was thrown out as well. Have you ever lived on the streets for three months of your life, not knowing where your next meal or bed was coming from, with no money, and nowhere to go?

I doubt you have. I doubt you know what any of that is like.

Well I’m back on my feet now, no thanks to any conservatives I know, and lots of thanks to my father, who is now more in my life than I can remember, and a bit concerned for my well being. But for a while life was very hellish for me. In the time between living with my father and the end of my homelessness I eventually got my own apartment, started college on my own, got a few different jobs (on top of editing this magazine) on my own, and was supporting my brother.

That, however, all went down the tubes eventually. How many 18 year olds do you know that can juggle school, work, bills, and technical guardianship of a hell raiser, not to mention the attempts at somewhat of a social life? When I was at the end of my rope, I made plans to move in with my dad and my brother moved in with a friend. I spent a few weeks recuperating, and now my magazine is back in semi-working order, and I have another new job (again, no thanks to conservatives).

Through all of that, there was Nirvana, the band that helped me understand some of the shit Kurt was going through because I was going through some of the same shit, and helped me get through those tough times.

Now you can say what you want to say on your show because you will anyway. But if you are saying that because I have, at times in the past, felt suicidal and that it was not the fault of the situation I was in, then I think you need to rethink your opinion about that, and while you’re at it all of your opinions. I never once thought, “Hey man, my life is going nowhere, I’ll start to feel suicidal and that will get me some attention and then I’ll feel better,” or, “Gosh, the world is fucked up, I’ll just kill myself and blame it on society.” But after a while the shit starts to pile up, and for many people, not just me, depression is natural, not a choice. Fortunately, I never attempted, but I did think about it a lot.

I don’t think that killing himself was necessary, but I will never know what Kurt was going through in his life. I can only guess by what he put in his art. But I respected the man for his work, and for the fact that his band made it and I never got to start one in high school. The least you could do is be considerate of people that respect the man, and try not to air anymore negative shit about him.

I’m inclosing the lyrics to the two biggest Nirvana albums, Nevermind and In Utero. If you are too ignorant to realize that there is a message in those lyrics, one that many people associate with and find important, then maybe if they’re written out so you can see them (have someone help you with the words longer than two syllables because you might pronounce them wrong or define them wrong) the meaning will jump out at you. I admit it takes an ear for music to hear some of the lyrics, but then again, you probably think it’s just noise and say, “Turn that crap down!” when you hear it.

I’m not going to thank you for reading this letter. You probably won’t thank me for writing it, and if you have actually read it, you’re probably really pissed off by now anyway. That’s okay, everyone can have their own opinion in this world, I know I do, and you’re entitled to be pissed off if you really want to be.

Even if your opinion offends the staff on my magazine, and the staff of Blasphphmus Press Ltd., and all of my new “cast out” friends, and quite a few of the other people I know, everyone in the music industry that ever supported Nirvana, me personally, my brothers, a guy named Steve, etc....

Good Night.

--G.M.

P.S. Are you interested in reading a copy of my magazine? It only costs a dollar, plus postage. Try it. I’m sure it’ll have lots of liberal views in it that you won’t like. You could nationally boycott it on your show! But then again, we use words like, “individuality,” and deal with ideas that might be misconstrued by Conservatives, so you might not like to read all of it. Maybe just look at the pictures.
I realize I am a bit long winded, but I do have a point, and here it is:
A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. is now the base for an official, “We Hate Rush Limbaugh” club in commemoration of the annoying bullshit he said about Kurdt on his show. If you would like to join, membership is free. Just write to me and complain about the asshole and we’ll consider you a good man.

Well, now that I’ve thoroughly pissed off some people, here’s the magazine. The address is yet again different (I know you’re probably sick of this shit, but hey, I can’t help it). Just don’t get caught with an issue of this magazine. By now, I’m sure the F.B.I. has a file on me, and you wouldn’t want to be involved now, would you.134

A moment of silence of Kurdt.
Thank you. Take care of yourself.

---

“ACRONYM. It’s, N.O.T. JUST. A. WORD. A.Y.M.O.R.”

“What?”
“ACRONYM,” I repeated. “That’s the name of the magazine. That’s what we call it.”

“Acronym?” he said.
“No. A.C.R.O.N.Y.M.”

I looked at my new friend carefully. He seemed like an intelligent man and, on top of that, he was doodling on a napkin at the local cheap coffee house. I figured that he might like my magazine, so I retrieved a copy from my bag and showed it to him. Obviously, he wasn’t getting it. “What’s with all the periods?” he asked

“It’s an acronym,” I answered.
“You mean A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. is an acronym?”

“No. It’s a joke.”

“What, your magazine is a joke?”

Huhhhhh! “Listen, man, here’s the deal. The magazine is called A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. It’s, N.O.T. JUST. A. WORD. A.Y.M.O.R. A.Y.M.O.R. It’s published by A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. It’s, N.O.T. JUST. A. WORD. A.Y.M.O.R. Publishing, in association with Blasphemous Press Ltd. I just want you to take a copy and see if you like it. If so, send me some stuff and it’ll get printed. That’s easy.” He sat in thought a second. “So, do you understand yet?”

“I think so,” he said.

“So what don’t you get?”

“What does A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. stand for?”

“I don’t stand for anything,” I said.

“Well, shouldn’t it be Acronym instead of A.C.R.O.N.Y.M.?”

“NO!” I was becoming upset. “It’s a joke. It’s like h-y-p-h-e-n, or a’p’o’s’t’r’o’p’h’y’e’d’. It’s all a joke.”

He nodded in obvious un-understanding. “Well what about the other part?”

“What about it?” I asked.

“What’s not a word anymore?”


“But it’s a word! It’s in the dictionary. See.” He pulled out his The American Heritage Dictionary and showed me the entry under ‘acronym’:

acronym (ak’ra-rim) n. A word formed from the initial letters of a name, as WAC for Women’s Army Corps.

“Listen,” I said. “It’s, N.O.T. JUST. A. WORD. A.Y.M.O.R. It’s more than a word, now.”

“Well why don’t you say, ‘It’s More Than A Word Now?’ Makes a lot more sense to me.”

“Because it’s part of the joke,” I responded.

“Are the periods part of the joke to?” he asked, rather sincerely.

“Yes. They’re acronymed, to add to the effect.” I was rather annoyed at this man by now.

“So what do they stand for?”

“What does what stand for?” I asked.

“The words? It’s Not Just A Word Anymore?”

“They don’t stand for anything. They’re just part of the joke, too.”

“So is this a joke?”

“NO! It’s very real, a very real magazine with real fictional stories and real poems by real people.”

“Well why didn’t you say so?” he responded.

---

134 I can’t tell if I was being serious or not. Probably not, but I was pretty paranoid back then (thanks to Kisu... bastard!). Come to think of it, I’m still pretty damn paranoid now.

135 The Editor’s Note from Issue #6. This was one of those things that was really funny at the time (to me). No one else has yet to laugh, though.
Part XII: Traumatized.

It didn’t take long for things to fall apart between Steve and I. Nancy, the wife of our neighbor, had more or less moved into our studio, and between her, her 17 Year-Old lover, her kids, Steve’s new pot habit, and the slanted ceilings that barely allowed standing up a possibility, one thing became abundantly clear: this was not where I wanted to be. I lashed out at everyone, apologetic for my actions far too often, all while making serious plans involving the primal urge to FLEE!

Fortunately for me I hadn’t burned all my bridges. Kisu offered up a bed at his place, complete with storage space for my stuff and a small desk to set up my computer on. Chantal also made her car available to me for transportational purposes. All that was left was to explain to Steve what was going on and then get the fuck out of dodge. While I would later forgive Steve for his awful behavior (as just about everyone did at one point or another), a definite rift had been formed by my decision to move away. Paddling the metaphorical boat away from that studio was the much-needed rescue from the island I was stranded on that I every-so-desperately needed. While I would see Steve several times after this fabled disaster, he was no longer a part of my ‘zines nor was he anywhere near being a close friend again. The lesson learned here is that, eventually, even an emotionally unstable teenager can get out of a manipulative friendship if he tries hard enough.

(Even after I left, though, the studio left such a mark on me that it would later turn up in a lot of my future writing. A “vampire” novel that I was briefly working on used that studio as the home of one of the vast assortment of main characters, while it also served as a home for one of the bandmates in my as-yet-unfinished novel about the group Primer Green. Finally, it was the dreary and drab setting for one of my favorite stories, “No One Seemed To Care,” which is included in this collection.)

Chantal dropped me off at Kisu’s place outside of Eugene, and I was instantly thrilled to be there, away from the hell of the last several months. We instantly dove into creative efforts as a coping mechanism for my obvious imbalance, throwing caution to the wind when it concerned things like food, community, or anything else. Kisu not only had a ‘zine but a band as well, and had recently begun writing and recording material for it. He and I became a very functional team in this regard: I would give my input on lyrics, help with the recording / engineering parts of the songs, and give over-all assistance whenever he needed someone to press record or act as a mic-stand. The relationship worked well: I was not writing my own music yet and had no real idea how to do it, while Kisu was already down that road and made a good teacher for a beginner like myself. This afforded me time to sink my teeth into ‘zine writing as much as I wanted to while at the same time contributing to music, a long-time personal goal.

We worked all night as quietly as possible, then slept most of the day away, waking up only long enough to record screams and “loud” things before his parents went to sleep and we had to be quiet again. Kisu introduced me to The Church of Blasphumphus teachings, something I have taken to heart since (I’m still involved in the church as we speak). When we weren’t feeling very creative, or just needed a break, we’d go on long, meandering walks, following train tracks and old dirt roads until they doubled back and spat us out somewhere near his house again. Getting run over by trains and creating our own explosives became our hobbies between recording and writing projects.

He also gave me a vast assortment of tapes to study and learn from. My introduction to music was fairly benign at the time, and remained limited compared to the wealth of lesser-known material he was familiar with. It was through him I discovered Mr. Bungle, Slam Suzanne, Piglet & Holy Rodent, in addition to other “odd” music that quickly became my bread and butter. In the short time I stayed with him our “pen-pal” relationship was instantly gelled into a solid friendship (that has lasted to this day).

As to be expected, I went completely bonkers after two weeks at Kisu’s house. It wasn’t him, the environment, or even the location; he lived in a secluded portion of the world between Eugene and the Oregon coast in a house with his parents, and aside from having to interact with them the place was ideal for getting my head sorted out. However, the isolation from anyone else I knew began to get to me, and was one of the many reasons I had hated my debacle in Milwaukee in the first place. I fought against this instinct to run for several days, but in the end instinct won out. I caught a ride into Eugene via Kisu’s dad in the morning under the pretense that I’d meet back for the return trip that evening, and instead just didn’t come back.

As usual, there were other forces at work, too. My one and only interest anymore was writing and ‘zines, and so far it had been my undoing in almost every way: I had alienated my friends, pissed off my mom & dad because of my dedication to my chosen lifestyle, and seemed to only increase my dysfunction with girls when it remotely entered into the equation. Even though I was not yet conscious of why I had left Kisu’s, it became quickly apparent that I was slowly-but-surely working my way back to my mom’s house in an attempt to apologize and reconcile my past.

In Eugene I puttered around for a couple of days, telling myself that not having a place to sleep or the ability to contact my other friends as a “good” thing. Ultimately I caught a ride to Cottage Grove, telling myself that I was going back to visit “some old friends.” After a few more days of that, it was not that hard to make my way back to my mom’s old bookstore, where I stopped in to say hi and test the waters. After making a request to have dinner with her, I finally spilled my guts to her that evening: I felt bad about what happened and wanted to try and rectify my mistakes if she would give me a place to stay again. While I didn’t exactly need the place to stay (I could easily return to Kisu’s house, or even bum around with other friends until I could sort something else out), the symbolism was not lost on my mom; if I could re-integrate myself into her household and make it work again, it wouldn’t be too far behind making our dissolved relationship function again as well.

My old Cottage Grove friends and I celebrated the victory with some new D&D games. I myself even buckled down and landed a job at the local McDonald’s using the Jedi Mind Trick on the manager. (It was already common knowledge via the McDonald’s chain of command that I wasn’t a great employee, and stating in the interview the exact location where I had previous worked — and subsequently f**ked up badly — seemed to have no affect on their decision to hire me. Because of this I’ve often concluded the only way they could have hired me was because of the Jedi Mind Trick.) With income and a roof over my head, I made lofty plans of getting my shit together, paying back all the money I’d borrowed, and possibly even going back to college. While I
hadn’t abandoned writing or creative efforts in the least bit, I was definitely putting things on hold until I could get everything else sorted out.

My sabbatical didn’t last long. A lot of my old freshman & sophomore friends from High School where now juniors & seniors, and it didn‘t take long for me to hook up with them to find out what the recent gossip was. Since I had left town and my brother Buck had dropped out of school, there seemed to them more gossip coming from my direction than from theirs. Still, I had to know, just for the sake of knowing, how the current school publication was doing. To my appalled shock, there hadn’t been one since I left. There hadn’t even been a Writer’s Response Group.

Gears turned. Wheels ground. The skies parted and inspiration rained down like vomit in the bushes of a back-yard kegger.

After consulting with my friends still in CGHS, the idea to start a new school publication quickly began to form. In my heart I felt that it was one of the best things I’d ever done in school, and I think a lot of people felt that having an outlet for their creativity was a great thing every High School needed. I had a lot of fun making ‘zines and even in the short time that had passed, Bob’s was quickly become part of my “glory days”. If I could be given the chance to do it again, I knew I could make it better this time.

I set up a meeting with the CGHS Principal126, and pitched my proposal: I would work, free of charge, as the head of a school Writer’s Response Group, which would meet on school grounds but after classes were no longer being held. We would have a staff advisor, this time Rhonda Turnquist, and from the group meetings we would culull material that would later appear in a school publication, the name of which would be decided by the students involved in the Group meetings. I was confident that, with the time I had available to me outside of work, that I would easily be able to keep up with the Group meetings as well as the publication deadlines. For some reason, despite my sorted past as a rebellious student and offending publication editor, the Principal looked past my unwashed hair and ragged t-shirt and agreed without any struggle or argument.

Now, I’ve spent a lot of time since this all happened trying to work out why I tired to do this. I hated CGHS, so what possible reason would I want to go back? I struggled with my magazine I did there, so why would I want to do another one? Censorship was always a huge issue when I was under the school’s umbrella, but I was strangely willing to dive back underneath even though I felt comfortable in the hailstorm of foul language and “adult situations”. Why? With hindsight, I assume it was a way of trying to prove to myself that I really needed to be rid of it. By trying to do it all over again and running into the same stumbling blocks, I would only reinforce the decision to never have anything to do with it again. Proof positive that the people you hate actually do suck is one of the better feelings a person can experience, and at a time when I was really trying to make up for my faulty past it was nice to try and prove that I wasn’t completely at fault.

There was another aspect to it all, too. Returning to High School was like returning to a comfort zone. I’d dealt with a lot of fucked up shit since then, and to go back with this experience under my belt would create a “big fish / small pond” scenario that I never had the first time around. This time, I would be on the top of the pile. While I’d been in High School I had spent a lot of time trying to fight for my position, proving that I didn’t deserve to be picked on or mocked. Now I was not only an adult, but long-since graduated. There was nothing to prove and no position to fight for. There’s nothing more comfortable than going to a place where you are, unquestioningly, above any potential adversaries. It’s like a professional baseball player slumming in a pick-up game with some local kids: a guaranteed way to feel better about the past than when you can (theoretically) succeed easily in the present.

Regardless, we went to work immediately on this new publication I wanted to call Trauma. Again, it was symbolic: I felt like it said everything about the way the world forcibly imposed it’s ideals onto my life. Most of the other people I was working with didn’t really feel like it was quite enough as far as a name was concerned, but I persisted. It had been the first magazine that I really named myself, the other three all being influenced by Steve. While it was thought I would use the old format I had used with Bob’s, I suggested that we go for the “comic book” format I’d adopted since then. It felt more personal to me, and I argued that if it didn’t look like something the school put together and instead looked like something we had done ourselves, we would appreciate it more.

The material came together quickly, and before long I had a working rough-draft of the first issue. Since the A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. publications I’d done had little (if any) proof-reading or spell-checking done on them, I completely ignored this aspect of publishing too, along with censorship of language and whatnot. So far, it had not been discussed by the Principal or Rhonda, and if they weren’t going to mention it I wasn’t going to either. My idea was that I would just finish up the issue, print up a rough-draft for myself to read and Rhonda to proof-read, and after she gave it the final, “okay,” the rest would be history.

This, however, was not the case. When I returned to the campus to get her response, she said that it was completely unacceptable on every level. The format, content and language – essentially everything that had gone into the issue – was not, in her opinion, something parents would approve of having their kids reading and therefore was not allowed to be distributed to students, nor was I to use school resources to produce that kind of publication again. I didn’t have the heart to tell her that half the material was submitted by people who didn’t go to CGHS anymore (including myself). I figured her immediate concerns were too much as it was.

This time the defeat didn’t feel so bad. True, I hadn’t succeeding in setting up a school publication (like I thought there should be), but I really ruffled her feathers with a few four-letter words and a more unprofessional attitude. While this was stuff that was, admittedly, in a raw format, it was also representative of what people where thinking and feeling and trying to communicate to the world. It had merit for that reason alone. The fact that Rhonda couldn’t see that was sad more than anything else. If there is a strict set of guidelines one must follow if they’re going to present art (in any form) to students, then you’re kind of circumventing the whole point, aren’t you? Imagine what kind of message that sends to the kids?

I made one last trip to the school office to run off about 20 or so copies of Trauma and handed them out to the people who had contributed. The rest I gave out to anyone who seemed interested. While I immediately thought that I would continue with the

126 Humorously, he seems to be a regular customer at the Portland Art Museum (where I now work), that I’ve seen him around the Park Blocks here in Portland quite a bit these days. He doesn’t appear to recognize me. Weird.
name Trauma for my future publications, I lost interest shortly after I finished it. (It should be noted that, for many years, the originals [and all known copies] of this publication were lost at my mother’s house, and while I always heard rumors that they had popped up or had been found, various circumstances kept the originals hidden from me every time I would try to retrieve them. I had long since assumed they were gone forever until my mom finally located them and returned them to me a few years back. In hindsight, it was a great discovery: not only did it have the first “Stick-Figure” comic strip I drew, but also the prose/poem “Animal Cookies”, something I wrote at coffee one night, included in Trauma, and never reproduced anywhere else. Go mom!

One interesting thing about Trauma that I liked was the stream-of-consciousness “bottom line”. At the bottom of every page was a continuous string of text that ran together from page to page, and I included some poems I wrote in that “bottom line” to see if anyone noticed them. While the other poems that I ran in the “bottom line” are already included in this collection, “Animal Cookies” and “Noise” finished up that text. I had heard about something similar when I worked for the Denali: there was a magazine that had done something similar with the top of the page, where an author was running an entire novel serially in that fashion.

“I have not yet begun to pinch ideas!”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“It Came Upon A Midnight Clear”137</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>by Austin Rich</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As I sit and watch the empty field just outside town, I see how lifeless it really is, unlike the night no one could forget. It started that night when the comet came. We all knew it would be coming, and the whole town came to watch it like a big fireworks display. Everyone was there, even old man Judd who lives on the hill came. And boy, oh boy was it a show. In all my years I have never seen such a display. The comet was bright, and even though it wasn’t that big, no one could mistake it for another heavenly body. I don’t think anyone didn’t like that evening’s events, not even Pa.

That night there was a light breeze that you could feel regardless of what you were wearing. If you sat down in the grass, and lay back to let your head sink into it, you could smell the overpowering plant life. If you closed your eyes you could imagine it was summer instead of early fall. The field looked amazing, unlike anything I remember; it was a place of sheer enjoyment. As we all began to leave the field, having thoroughly enjoyed that evening’s extravaganza, I remember remarking on how you could hear, feel, see, and almost smell the pure tranquility of the field. We were all satisfied with those few moments of lucidity. But that all changed.

I think I heard the noise first, a high-pitched buzz, the kind you hear when a T.V. is on, but the sound is all the way down. The light breeze picked up and became a steady wind as the grass in the field all blew in one direction, almost at forty-five degree angles. I saw a light that was so bright, colorful, and intense I almost had to shield my eyes. As some of us went back to the field, I looked up and saw a descending circle about thirty yards in diameter. The light I saw was coming from all about the circle, and I could tell it was going to land in the field. Some people left in fear; for some reason, I was compelled to stay.

The circle reached about fifteen feet above the ground, and I could now tell it was some sort of spacecraft, like something out of a space movie. Small openings below the craft slid open, and metal legs (probably landing gear) began to move out with a metallic, machine-like sound. The craft then lowered to fill the fifteen foot gap, and the landing gear began to strain under the weight of the craft. From the side closest to us a door opened, and a humanoid creature stepped out and looked around. He was much taller than all of us, and his facial features seemed more real than any I have seen. The extra arms near his stomach held a creased piece of paper out in front of himself while he peered at it. One of his other arms scratched his head full of stringy, purple hair. His other hand plucked out his eyes, one at a time, until he had removed, polished, and replaced all four. His mouth, that was upside down, smiled, which meant that he was frowning. He looked back at the craft, a window opened, and another creature (this one with dark brown

---

137 From the one and only issue of Trauma. What can I say? Did I mention I’m a huge Douglas Adams fan? This was originally written for a writing class in High School. I was particularly influenced by the part in Life, The Universe And Everything where the immortal alien decides to spend his days personally insulting every sentient being in the universe. (And who says Science Fiction never leads to good thoughts?) Of course, the title is borrowed from the Christmas song with the same opening line. It would not be the last time a title was stolen from a song, though.
hair) popped his head out. They conversed for a few minutes, and finally the one with the creased paper came up to me and posed a question.

“Is this Beta Arland II?”

“Huh,” I replied. (I felt pretty stupid.)

“Where the hell are we?” he growled angrily.

“Uh…”
Rolling two of his eyes, and glaring with the others, he said, “What planet is this?” very, very slowly.

“Earth?” was all I could say.

“Earth!” he said, in a very distressed tone of voice. He looked back at his creased paper and then back at me.

Even though this was a very unusual situation, I managed to say, “Why, is that a problem?”

“Yes, it is,” he yelled, and then he yelled at the other creature in the craft for a while. I’m not exactly sure, but I think he said, “Well, it sure ain’t my fault we’re on this backward planet whose inhabitants don’t know the mass/energy relation theory!” The creature with the creased paper continued to yell until he was in the craft. It took off at an incredible speed and was out of sight in seconds.

The field in now empty, and few people venture near it. I now use it as a place to sit, and think. But no one will ever forget that night when the comet came. No one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noise</th>
<th>Animal Cookies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>by Austin Rich</td>
<td>by Austin Rich</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pretty little rain fell down on my window
as I thought to myself that I need to clean my window.
And it fell
and fell
and fell
until I left the room
to lie on my bed.

Drip.
Drip.
Drip.
Drop, plop, plop.

The noise is in my head
and I can’t do anything about it
because all I can think of is that
it sounds like the rain
doesn’t particularly like to fall
on my window.

Drip.
Drip.
Drip.
Drop, plop, plop.

I can’t stop feeling
the way the rain is feeling,
like it can’t change a thing
and has to do what it has to do.
But why?
Why must the rain fall
and why must I not call?
And why can’t I not see you
when all I want to do
is hold
and kiss
and hug
and show my love?

Drip.
Drip.
Drip.
Drop, plop, plop.

I saw a man spit one day and the only thing I could think of was a large & Brown furry Camel. He said, “Nice Weather,” and as I looked at the very dark clouds of the day I thought, “Large & Brownish pink furry rabbit.” When I could come up with an answer the pink rabbit melting in the sky was all that we in my mind and so I asked him if he could see it. He told me I was fucking insane and I never used that drug again.

138 This was my catch-all planet name that I used for EVERYTHING that I wrote that was even close to being Science Fiction-y. If there was a planet mentioned, an alien talking about his homeworld, or any need for space travel, sooner or later someone would mention “Beta Arland II” This harkens back to my comic-book idea that all of my fiction would be inter-connections in some way. I used to think about this kind of stuff for hours, finding the connections between stories, etc. The sad part is I thought about it more than I actually wrote it, and aside from things like using the same planet name over and over again, very few of these “connections” ever came to light in stories I wrote. Sigh.

139 These two poems also from Trauma. Noise would end up being read by both me and Mona at the first A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. (The Band) show not too much later. This is one of the last batches of poems I ever wrote, so I don’t believe there are any more from here on out. Thanks for putting up with all the bad poetry in the meantime, and send all negative criticism to: austin@rackm0unt.org.

At one point I wanted to collect all of my poetry into one ‘zine and see if it would take at all, interjecting various dissertations on my feelings about poetry (yuck) and pointing out particularly bad specimens of the subject via my own writing. While I hammered out a working Table Of Contents and an introduction to the collection, it never got any farther than that. Mondale Chris has vowed that, were I to ever seriously pursue a career in writing poetry, or if I ever try to put together the above collection, that he will do his part to help save the world and destroy anything that might go in a collection like that. I rest easier at night knowing that someone like that has got our backs.
Part XIII: Eugene or Bust.

While I was sorting out my life and trying to re-build the once-burnt bridges in Cottage Grove, things were happening in Eugene that began to set a new ball in motion. I had contacted Kisu to apologize for my disappearing and to ask about any news from his home front. Apparently, in my absence, he had moved to Eugene proper, and his band Cathead had performed their first show. I had been invited to come along but no one knew how to contact me since I had disappeared. I cursed my own stupidity and swore that I would not miss the next show on Halloween, 1994. Soon enough, plans were beginning to form. It was inconvenient to live in CG when Cathead was going on in Eugene, and with a life-long desire to be involved in music, it didn’t take a rocket scientist to see that I needed to be where they were. I would need to save money, tie up all my loose ends in CG, and move to Eugene ASAP.

While I honestly had good intentions of sorting things out properly, it didn’t take long before I had to enact this plan prematurely. After slowly earning back my mom’s trust I began to get complacent, inviting people over when I shouldn’t, going out late at night without asking, coming home whenever I felt like it, and occasionally drinking/smoking in the house, which really sent her over the edge. It all came to a head when I had a party while she was gone. I had never done this in High School, and by “party” I mean I had a fair amount of my friends over so we could drink and get stoned. We wantonly smoked cigarettes and pot in the house, littered every flat surface with beer bottles, and abused every electronic device that produced music in some way. Until then I was only a part-time drinker, and had never had much experience with pot (or, at least none that ended with good results). By the time the morning rose, I was incoherently asking people to bring me a girlfriend and could not stand up under my own power.

In a miracle that I have yet to fully understand, I woke up the following morning with the house mostly cleaned and returned to its previous state of being. It was amazing. My friends (particularly Chantal, if I remember correctly) had really come through for me, and what was a complete disaster when I had passed out was now nothing to worry about in the least bit. We lit some incense in an attempt to cover the smoky smells, and I stumbled back to my bed in an attempt to let the beer and smoke wear off on me. I then stumbled off to McDonald’s to work my closing shift.

I returned home to find my mom in the Kitchen, grasping the neck of a beer bottle between her thumb and index finger and a huge, “What?” expression on her face. I caved. I told her every little detail of what had happened the night before, including the part about how we broke into her room to search for more pot, and how I (at one point) ground a cigarette out on what I thought was the carpet (but, when I went to show her, had turned out to be the hearth of the wood stove, which was easily washed off). I think she was taken aback; what had started out as a simple inquiry as to why she had found a single beer bottle had turned into a huge confession that was establishing my guilt (beyond a shadow of a doubt) about things I had not yet been accused of (nor was she aware of needing to actually accuse me of). I have never been a very good liar, and 9 times out of 10 my own feelings of guilt will get you the truth quicker than any line of questioning ever could. If I had kept my mouth shut, she probably would have not have cared as much as she did after I told her what happened.

It was then and there established that it was time for me to leave. We had both attempted to make our lifestyles mesh and neither time had worked to either of our benefits. The bottom line was that we got along fine when we were not living together, and while in the past my parental anger might have extended beyond that, that’s all there ever really was. With many years between these events and now, my mom and I have long ago forgiven each other on the condition that we never try to live in the same house as long as we both live. I think that’s an amiable agreement for both of us considering the circumstances (and regarding what could have happened had she really decided to unload on me).

But I digress. My mom’s final act of kindness was to offer me a ride to a new place that I could stay, with belongings in tow. Again, despite my past flakiness in said department, Kisu invited me to come and stay with him again (this is yet another testament to his kind-hearted nature, regardless of the amount of booze and acid damage his body has sustained over the years). I called the nearest McDonald’s to his house, told them to give me a job (which they did, regardless of the suddenness that I had quit the Cottage Grove location), and within days I was living in Eugene. Things were crowded, we were in a basement, and my participation in Cathead was, at the time, limited, but that didn’t matter. I was in a band, in a decent-sized town, with shelter and food and a job and lots of friends, and the rest of the world could fuck off. I was happy as an ignorant little clam.

I immediately buckled down and began work on a new ‘zine. By this time I had lost the originals for Trauma and was feeling like I should abandon that project entirely, so I began work on a seventh issue of A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. While I was able to get a full issue together very quickly, between the band and trying to stay on top of food/bills/work/etc. (which were sort of new concepts to me), there were fewer resources to designate toward ‘zines. Having burned out all my options and possibilities with both my parents and all my remaining friends, I needed to make this life in Eugene work. I had no other options, really. If I pissed off my friends, lost my job, or ran out of money this time, there was nowhere else to really go. Eugene was my last and best hope for getting my life on track and in the direction I wanted it to go.

Kisu’s roommate at the time was The Ramen City Kid, who not only had an amazing record collection but also did his own ‘zine, Ramen City U.S.A. To this day this is one of my favorite ‘zines ever written. Insightful, funny, informative and idiosyncratic, it stands as a testament to what a ‘zine should be: a reflection of yourself. The Ramen City Kid soon became a great friend, and he and I would talk and chat about everything and nothing while he got ready for work at Burger King™ and I got ready for work at McDonald’s™. We were an entirely food-service funded house (Kisu worked at Taco Bell™), which inspired me to wear my McDonald’s™ clothes to a lot of Cathead shows in those days. (I still have two pair of McDonald’s™ pants that, despite not having back pockets for my wallet, are pretty decent pants.) It was a great temporary household but was not meant to last.

The Ramen City Kid suggested over pizza one day that we get a pad of our own, and I quickly jumped at the idea. Kisu was spending more and more time with his girlfriend at the time, and both The Ramen City Kid and I had drastically different lifestyles. A two-room basement was not enough for three people (plus Kisu’s girlfriend) to share, and all of us agreed on that. The arrangement was perfect for all of us: Kisu asked his girlfriend to move in, and The Ramen City Kid and I landed our own apartment. By this time
I had not only taken over as bass player in Cathead, but had started working on solo shows for my noise band (called, conveniently enough, A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. [The Band]). I had also landed a part-time job at The Bookstore, a locale that would turn up in my writing for YEARS to come. Not only was Eugene offering me new friends, but my band mates were quickly becoming extremely close as well. (Colin & I, for a good number of years, rarely went a full day without seeing each other.) Things were looking good all around.

I was still without ‘zine, and that was sort of troublesome to me. Fortunately I had lots of friends that were interested in writing or creative output, and my friend Caleb (who, you may remember, I met long ago at LCC via Chantal) also showed interest in working on something with me. Before long inspiration had struck, and a whole new version of A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. #7 was underway.

There were definitely shades of Steve Eller concerning the relationship Caleb and I had when working on the ‘zine. While he and I would brainstorm and get ideas while talking, when it came to implementing them I was all-to-often left out in the cold. His offers to proofread the text (or contribute much of anything, for that matter) were never delivered, and soon enough I found that I had completed the original proofs for the issue without the least bit of his help. It was an eye-opening experience: in the past I had always been offered assistance, but it was never delivered during crunch time. After this final experience with Caleb, I vowed that I would be the singular force behind all future publications.

It was a rough concept to pound into my head, because my original desires with publishing involved presenting and organizing other people’s material, in addition to collaborating with my like-minded friends. However, it became very clear that was not a possibility. While this did not mean that I would not take contributions, nor would I stop trying to work with other people if they were genuinely offering help, when it came down to brass tacks, it was apparent that this was a solo-project and I was the only person committed to actually getting things done.

I finished Issue #7 using the smallest number of resources I could muster. My computer had died save for the barest operating features, so the entire original text was formatted and printed out using a plain-text editor that comes with Dos. Since I had trouble formatting the pages to fit in my normal 7” width, I printed the text on normal 8 ½” x 11” paper and the entire issue ran sideways. (The spine ran horizontally, and you flipped the pages up.) Even then, my printer was dying when I ran off the proofs, so the originals looked very faded to start with. When I did make copies, I had to increase the darkness on the copy machine so that the art (which had a normal level of brightness and contrast) was blochy and far too dark. It’s the price you pay, I assume.

This issue was, sadly, poorly distributed as well. Perhaps only 20 copies were printed and sent around, total. Part of this was for financial reasons, but mostly because I was so busy with other projects (namely, bands) that it slipped between the cracks. While I would not change a thing about the way I handled things in the past, my only regret to this day is that I did not distribute my ‘zines as well as I always wanted to. Again, live and learn.

The Title I Want To Use Is A Guns ‘N’ Roses Song Title

I like to think a lot. Is that so wrong? I’ve been given side complements like, “You must think a lot,” in a snotty tone often, but to me it’s not taken the way they meant it. I do think a lot. So why be insulted by such a comment? They must think they’re ridiculing my knack to be completely in my own world. But what they’re really doing is feeling jealous that they don’t have one to be in.

Like this one night I was a coffee, right? Okay, I was peacefully pondering things in my own little realm, not really concentrating on anything in particular when one of my fellow caffeine addicts said, “Are you okay?” When I ask why they thought I wasn’t they say, “Oh, no reason. You just looked out of it.” Well of course I was out of it. I wasn’t with it to begin with.

I mean, are you ever troubled by questions you can’t remember the answer to? It happens to me too bloody often. I’m sitting peacefully in my little world and all of a sudden I see a solid piece of matter go straight to a gaseous state. And I think, “Gee, that’s really neat. I’ve just witnessed…” and then I draw a complete blank about what that event is called. I mean Jesus Christ! Your physics teacher sat there for at least ten minutes trying to pound into your head what that little event is called, and years later, during a totally unrelated social gathering everyone else is talking about why the fuck Jason and Shannon broke up and you can’t for the life of remember what it’s called when a solid evaporates straight to a gas.

I don’t know about you, but that really pisses me off. I was so glad to know that it’s called sublimation. Just listen to the way that word rings in your head. Sublimation. I was so comforted when I finally was able to get to an encyclopedia and look that damn term up. Sublimation. God-damn. I love that word.

Example two: the fourth character in the play Endgame. What the fuck is his name?! I still don’t know the answer to that one. I mean, here I was, having a completely innocent conversation about really good movies I’ve seen and watched in the past. Pretty soon the subject of Brighton Beach Memoirs comes up, which was a play first for any un-cultured people out there, and I think, “I liked that play. What other plays have I read that I liked?” So I rack my brain for a while, off in my own world, and I come up with Endgame. And it had four characters in it. Clav, the guy who couldn’t sit down, Hamm, the guy who couldn’t stand up, Nag.

This was the introduction for the aborted attempt at a seventh issue I first made when I got to Eugene. I actually wrote the text for this piece while I was living in the studio in Milwaukee, inspired by some coffee that Steve and I got one night. I was always fond of this piece, because this very-real phenomenon affects me all too often. The Guns ‘N’ Roses song in question is called “My World” off of the second Use Your Illusion album.

Ever since I first read this play I have always wanted to put on a production of it. Anyone interested?
one of the people who lived in the trashcans, and the other
person that lived in the trashcan. Then I think, “That’s odd, I
can’t think of his name. What was his name?” And pretty soon,
its starts to rip and tear at my brain. What WAS his name? So I
ask someone. They hadn’t read the book.

And the question remains. What the Fuck Was his
GOD DAMNED NAME!!?

Sometimes I resent my own little world. But it is a
complement that I think a lot. Maybe about off the wall shit, but
I do think a lot.

* * * * *

NAG!!! His fucking name was Nag! (Boy, I feel a
whole lot better now.)

---

"Here’s Another Fine Mess You’ve Gotten Us Into" (Or, The
Stephen King Thing) by G.M.  

By now you’re probably wondering what it all means.
That’s a question that many people have tried to answer over
time and have not yet succeeded in answering. I’m not here to
answer questions or tell you who to ask. I’m here to bring
the possibility of letting other’s do that within. We have a long, rich
history and you might want to know a little about why we do
this so as to help you in helping me. A bunch of babble, but
believe me, we’re going somewhere with this one.

In high school I was a writer. I guess we were all
writers then but hey, it’s not the beginning, but A beginning. I
wrote. I wrote a lot about how much I hated life and how much
other people hated life too. I wrote about girlfriends and
boyfriends and I wrote about computers and music and I even
wrote about the wonders of sex and drugs (and the lack thereof).
Most of it hadn’t seen the light of day and (won’t if I have
anything to say about it) but I wrote and that was the point. I
wrote a lot. I enjoyed it. And in my own hypocritical way I wanted to know what other people wrote about.

I met this guy named Austin Rich, still a friend of mine and still the only person I can stand to live with. I’m a wanderer
myself. I’ve been here and there and when I met Austin the offer to live with him was new to me. I took it and we’ve lived together
ever since I stumbled into that small town of Cottage Grove. Well, we got to talking and he was involved in this Writer’s Response
Group and thought I would be interested. Well, I was but I didn’t share what I wrote. But the advisor to the group mentioned this
little idea of starting a magazine of the student’s art. That got me thinking.

See, kids are the most intelligent people I’ve met. “Kids,” I mean in the sense that they are not adults. The majority of the
people I know under 30 fit this description. Anyway, they have concepts and insight that no adult I’ve met has because, well, they
have yet to be tainted by the adult world. So I jumped at the chance to edit this magazine. I started even before official permission
had been granted. To make an already-many-times-told story short, I’ve been doing this stuff every since.

---

142 There was a Stephen King introduction to one of his books where he makes this same point about his own writing, hence the subtitle.

143 For the most part, the G.M. persona was supposed to be more of a “silly” character. True, he was suppose to put the ‘zines together and was the
driving force behind getting things done, but initially he would have a ‘silly’ slant to his text, while the stuff I wrote as Austin Rich was supposed to
be the actual writer who delivered stuff he wrote but didn’t put the ‘zines together. This is probably the first time that G.M. started to take on a
more serious tone, which foreshadows the more emo-ramblings I would start to attribute him when I started designing I’d Buy That For A Dollar!

144 Ha ha ha ha ha! Wow, that’s funny, considering the crap I DO let people read...

145 This is a bit of a joke on my own in-ability to get along with roommates, but also at the whole G.M. / Austin Rich split personality, too. Up until
this point, I had not put much in print about this distinction. (I had tried at one point to write a “program” that contained some of my better stories
so you could read them on your computer, but it was no more than a “web-site” that you had to install individually on each computer, and was only
distributed to friends. In that program, there was a lot of the G.M. / Austin Rich split personality stuff, which was the genesis for this kind of
text). This was the first time in print that I fabricated information just so I can try and make us sound like two different people. It only gets worse
from here on out, as you’ll no doubt notice...
It's not that I edit this 'zine for the money. I don't even make enough out of this to make the newer issues every month. I don't edit this for the fame because my audience isn't that big to begin with. And I certainly don't do this for my health because I'm up now working on this at two in the morning and have to be up in four hours for my real job. I don't even do it for the sake of making art though that's what the real reason should be. I do this because if I don't kill the portion of me that thrives of this. I edit this magazine because if I don't I will cease to be G.M. and go back to being that person I was so many years ago before I started writing: another person trying to squeeze on by every month with no reason to wake up in the morning.  

I know that's a pretty melancholy thought but it's true, especially now when the only thing anyone really has left in this world to count on is themselves and their voices. So I make this 'zine. But I don't make it alone. Obviously. I take all the stuff I can get from friends and family, from my friend's family, from anyone who is willing to part with that one piece that will make some person out there think for a few minutes once in a while.

I've given you the address and all I ask from you in return is some kind of response. A letter, positive or negative, or a submission, a condom, whatever you can think of that will brighten my day.

That's what I'm all about. I hope that this 'zine will live up to that.

Nothing more.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N A A A A A A A H H H H H G A A A H H K</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Again, against what might be my "better" judgment, I've decided to include this story in this collection. Originally, this story ran in issues #2 - #7 of A.C.R.O.N.Y.M., (which was particularly confusing since very few people saw all six of those issues, let alone in order). Since it is already a disjointed piece of text in the first place, and since there were different distribution amounts and locales for each issue that a particular part of the story appeared in, I never felt like I really did this story justice in print. This is an attempt to rectify that by running it here, in its entirety, for your reading pleasure. If that alternate-reality version of me had Adrian be his first novel, then in a way this would have been his follow up. Again, I pray to god that version of me is a much better writer, though.

I began writing this story shortly after I graduated from High School, but the genesis was, of course, Belgratinal Fleg.*? and my other High School text experiments. I was very interested in non-traditional writing layouts, because to me the world of the written word was not just that of words and ideas, but a visual world of icons as well (an idea mostly developed from years of "reading" comic books). The way words LOOKED intrigued me, and since fonts were easily accessible and fun to play around with, the possibilities for "literature as a piece of visual art" became greater and greater as I was growing up. I would often crank out similar pieces of text at school that I would later be unable to reproduce after the fact. (I was, among other things, famous for misplacing things unless the text was somehow on my own computer.) A lot of these "text-experiments" were done at school, on the Macs, and therefore was hard to transcribe at home anyway, what with the different font-types and whatnot. Still, it was a start. One of these text-experiments was called NAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHAAHHHHH!!!!!!! I showed it around to people and got the same kinds of comments I'd gotten on Belgratinal Fleg.*?: "Huh?" It just didn't really seem to fly with anyone I showed it to. Still, I liked it quite a bit and began thinking about some of the words I'd riffed on in that piece. The rough idea of a story began to take shape in my head.

By the time I'd gotten home to write it on my computer, I had misplaced the school-produced "experiment". Since I was ready to start, I simply called the story The Really Weird Story That I Can't Remember What The Title Is in all of my notes (this was one of the few stories from this time period where I outlined it and took extensive notes before I sat down to write it... when I write fiction now, this is how I operate, and it has improved my fiction DRASTICALLY). I figured that by the time I was done with writing the story I would have either found the real title or would have come up with something better. Fortunately, I found the original title and just combined the two anyway.

I began writing the actually text for this story just after I finished Issue #1 of A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. I began to use it as a piece for my creative writing class I was taking at LCC to insure that I could work on it and do homework at the same time. By the time I'd finished Issue #2 of A.C.R.O.N.Y.M., I had already included the first part of this story in said issue, more or less committing myself to having to finish it before too long. Because of the combined creative writing / A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. commitments, I wrapped the final version of the text not too much later and turned it in for credit in the class.

This was one of those classes where you read your stories to the entire class, and the whole class would comment on the text, to you, in class, in front of a lot of students and teachers. (A "read / discuss" type scenario.) In that context, the story bombed. Nobody liked it. I got negative feedback from everyone except the teacher, who said that there may, in fact, be a market for something of this nature, but he was not sure where that market would be and had no useful suggestions. That alone got me pretty stoked about this story's potential, and since then has been another favorite of mine, mistakes and plot-holes included.

Over the years I've thought about re-writing this completely, really trying to beef it up and strengthen the weaker aspects of the text, but other projects have always gotten in the way and prevented me from doing so. Someday, though. Notice again that I used the "FIREHOSE" typing method. This was done with the Caps Lock button down the entire time I wrote this story. After a while I got so used to typing like that without the Caps Lock button, just always holding the Shift key down. After I got used to it I found it very hard to switch back to normal. I would often type "USTIN RICH" on assignments and High Score sections of computer games. I would be hard-pressed to try and recreate this feat now.

---

146 Yet another "hint" at the reality of the situation. I'm sure a counselor would have a field day with me...

88
Certain issues of ACRONYM had this story with different fonts for every paragraph. While I always enjoyed that view of the text, I decided to forgo that this time and just use Time New Roman straight through. That’ll make everyone happy, right Design Pirate?

Here’s a brief description of my original vision for how I wanted this story to be printed:

Each page would look grainier and grainer. The idea was that we were going from an actual proof sheet to eventually looking like crappy xerox copies. Eventually it would get so bad that it would look like partially crumpled, recycled typing paper. Then notebook paper. You get the idea. On the opening pages, the text would be fairly “normal”. But as the story progresses, the font would slowly start to shift to a fixed-width type. Eventually it would shift into a type writer style, and finally hand-written. The farther into the story, the more self-referential I wanted it to be. I wanted editing marks written on the pages, margin notes about character motivations, etc., and coffee stains throughout.

I never went that far when I would print it. Ultimately, my ideas were, as usual, loftier than the actual text I wrote. Still, in my opinion, this is a vast improvement over Adrian, and much closer to the kind of fiction I wanted to write in the first place. (After all, I fit in Super-Heroes, didn’t I?) For a while I offered bound copies of this story too, but I never had any takers (which was fortunate, because unlike Adrian, I wasn’t even prepared if someone had asked for one.

Years later I watched a Clive Barker movie (that I assume was so poorly received as to be straight to video) with a similar premise as this. The main “character” was based on Stephen King, though, and had a much more Twilight Zone / Outer Limits style ending than the one I came up with. I guess every good turn deserves another in the world of ripping people off...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAAAAAAAAHHHHGHAAAHKK!!!!!!!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(oR, tHIS rEALLY wEIRD sTOORY tHAT i cAN’T rEMEMBER wHAT tHE tITLE iS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bY aUSTIN rICH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PART I.

The stairs were steeper than they were normally, but he just assumed that he was tired and they only seemed so.147 It had been a tough day at work and he really didn’t feel like climbing to the third floor of the apartment complex that day, but there was really no way to change it. He didn’t really make enough money to cover rent anywhere else and this apartment, the closest thing to a home he’ll ever get, was good enough for him and his roommate.

He opened the door to his apartment and from the other room he could hear her typing. She always seemed to be working, a habit he didn’t exactly dislike but didn’t exactly approve of either. It seemed to him that work should stay at work. However, she is some kind of secretary, as far as he can gather, and her work is important to her. He just needed to learn to live with it.

“Gabriel, is that you?” she called.148

“Who else would it be, the mailman?” Gabriel wasn’t really up to games, but he’d play along with Nancy until he fell asleep.

“How was work?” she called out from the other room.

“I’m fine.”

“No, why not.”

“You don’t want to know.” Gabriel felt better now that he had gotten her back a bit.149 It always seemed to him that there were gaps in Gabriel’s mind, years that seemed to have just faded from existence.150

This was because while he was in Arizona Gabriel was in a car accident.

147 PLOTPONT! PLOTPONT! It only seems as if I’m a bad writer and that sentence is written poorly...

148 Unfortunately, there’s a lot of insipid “he said / she said” style dialog, along with awful descriptions, etc. I could try and pawn it off as a “style” that ties into the way the story ends, but the truth is the story just isn’t that good. But conceptually it’s interesting, right?

149 For what? Ugh... it’s gonna be one of those footnoting sessions... better grab a beer.

150 PLOTPONT! PLOTPONT! (Or was it too obvious as it was?)
OTHER THAN A FEW SCARS ACROSS HIS FACE, ONE COULD NEVER TELL THAT HE HAD NEARLY BEEN KILLED BY A HEAD-ON COLLISION WITH A SEMI-TRUCK. HOWEVER, FROM UNDERNEATH HIS SOFT MAROON HAIR THE COUNTenance OF AN OLDER-Than-Twenty-Something Man Peered Back, With Eyes Like The Desert Sand Of the State he Will Never Return To.

It wasn't because of the accident, or so everyone seemed to think, but there was something about gABRiAL'S EYES that didn't jive with the rest of him. Maybe they were too brown, or too close together. maybe the Orbs had an alien appearance to them. Perhaps he can induce paranoia. the fact is, that gABRiAL had no pupils.

he had never questioned it, and had never given the notion a second thought. to him, his eyes were merely different. but to a person who didn't outright know, gABRiAL comes off as very mysterious.

gABRiAL PULLED A PIECE of Paper from the fax machine and looked at it. to his surprise, it was not a letter from his boss like he thought it was, nor was it any other piece of business that seemed to relate to his or nANCY'S job. what he pulled from the fax machine looked like this:

Gan Trig Fil asNIpH rig, Jar Qill f f f f f f.. f
naggle ffff
CaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaA......
^ Syntax Errorrrrrrrr O000289QP3.

kuStin
Kak el fritzzz R
?

.....
P
Lun by +
The Quick Brown Armadillo...?
g R Q
zaq Loqo Feleleelggg
 L
Shhh!
Belgratnil
Bite Ussssssssssssss!
\na na na na na na n.. a...
 |
8 Lord | rich
My It’s | Reeeeeee
Hot| Hear
|In
\'Bil Fred Hellllllllllllllllllll quErtyiouP
..... and they lived happily ever after.
er.
er.
cr.
er.
Pcol.*?/

“nANCY??”
“YEAH gABE?” She called back.
“dOES ‘GAN TRIG FIL asNIpH rig, Jar Qill fat naggle ffff’ mean anything to you?”
“WHAt?” she yelled.
“yOU HEARD WHAT i SAId. Does it mean anything?”
“wHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO SAY? IF i SAId THAT i ACTUALLY UNDERSTOOD YOU I'D PROBABLY BE CALLED CRAZY, AND IF i SAY THAT i DON’T THEN YOU’LL PROBABLY GET MAD AT ME.”
“I'M SERIOUS, nANCY. i SWEAR IT TO YOU. THOSE WORDS JUST CAME ACROSS THE FAX MACHINE.”
“TET ME SEE,” she replied.

nANCY EMERGED FROM Her ROOM DOWN THE HALL TO SEE WHAT He Was talking about. gABRiAL has always thought that nANCY was a very beautiful woman, at least when she leaves for

\footnote{Integrity and quality should be the goals of any writer, but the truth is that “recycling” is often considering a much more valuable skill.}
WORK. When she returns more often than not she’ll have her red hair that was so carefully put up in a bun coming out, and her face, drenched in a sweat/makeup mixture that has been smeared and wiped away several times, looks like it’s about fifty-five years older than her youthful twenty-four. Overworked is, when talking about her, an understatement.

But other than her pre-occupation with her job, Nancy is a very fun person to be with. She is very interested in the world around her and what’s happening in town, and is an avid movie and concert goer of all types. Gabriel has spent many nights watching a dull foreign film hoping he can catch a glimmer of her face, so beautiful when not office-stained, and see her blue eyes sparkle in the light of the screen.

Unfortunately, Gabriel can’t do this at any other time. In Nancy’s eyes, they are merely roommates. Separate rooms, separate jobs, and when there’s nothing else to do, occasional dates.

Nancy pulled out some glasses from a pocket and put them on to get a good look at what it was Gabriel was frustrated with. She looked at it for a good three or four minutes, and then put it down.

“Not, not really,” was all she said, and then she headed to the door that led to the kitchen.

Gabriel stood in silence for a while, and soon realized that the nonsense on that page had not fazed her at all. For all she cared, it was an error. Gabriel went into the kitchen after her.

“What do you want for dinner?” she asked as he walked in.

“What do you mean by ‘no, not really’? That thing in there, that nonsense was just... I don’t know. Nonsense.”

“Exactly. Probably a prank of some kind. I don’t know. Maybe the machine is broken. I’ll have someone look at it. Do chicken breasts sound okay?” He continued to move throughout the kitchen as if nothing had happened. But how could this be? The fax machine was insane. How could she just be oblivious to that option?

“Uh, yeah. Chicken sounds fine.” Gabriel was wondering if maybe she was just trying to get a rise out of him.

It was working.

“So how was work? I mean, did anything interesting happen?”

Gabriel was going to ask if he could help, so that maybe he could be near her, see her beauty again, and possibly find out what the hell was going on. “Uh, it was fine.” Then he remembered that something very interesting did happen.

“Uh, Nancy. I’ve kind of got a question for you.”

“Yeah?”

“Well, do you believe in the supernatural?”

Nancy looked at him as if ashamed. “Have you been watching that sci-fi channel again?”

“I’m serious,” he whined.

“I’m serious too. Why is it that you think I’m not?”

Their eyes met and Gabriel almost forgot the question.

“Uh, yes I have. But that’s not why I’m asking.”

“Well, why are you asking, then?” she got back to making dinner, using quick hand movements across the food to prepare it.

“I saw Mr. Jones do something very unusual today.”

“Isn’t he your boss?”

“Yeah.”

“How unusual?” Gabriel could tell that she was interested, or at least feigning it.

“Are you familiar with the term telekinesis?”

152 Truth time: I am obsessed with girls who have red hair. When I see a red-head walk past me, I completely loose it. I don’t know where I developed this fetish from, though. In my early years of dating there were no red-heads, and none of my early crushes had red-hair either. I understand the glasses thing easy enough: Heidi Gumper wore glasses; my first girlfriend did too. But red-hair? Who knows... I generally go into sensory overload when it’s dyed red. Yikes... The weird part is, I had forgotten entirely that I gave Nancy red hair. As was the case with Adrian. Nancy’s sole function in this story is to serve as some sort of fantasy I had about a hot female roommate that I could endlessly work out various sex-scenarios with. Sigh. (However, why would I have named her Nancy? I hate that name! Make-up? Hair in a bun? I have some serious fucking issues, my friend...)

153 Ahhh! Puns! Shoot me now! With hindsight, I wonder if I even knew... I have a nasty habit of making wordplay jokes that I’m unaware of.

154 I wonder if it’s too late to come clean and admit that I need counseling.
“ISN’T THAT WHERE YOU CAN LIFT OBJECTS AND STUFF WITH YOUR MIND?”

“YES.”

“WHAT ABOUT IT?”

“ODAY nR. JONES LIFTED THE RECEIVER OF THE PHONE FROM HIS DESK WITHOUT TOUCHING IT, AND
ANSWERED THE PHONE LIKE IT WAS AN EVERYDAY OCCURRENCE.”

nANCY TURNED AND LOOKED gABRIAL IN THE EYES. “YOU’RE SERIOUS ABOUT THIS, AREN’T YOU?”

“WOULD I BE TELLING YOU IF I WEREN’T?”

SHE PUT HER KNIFE DOWN AND MOVED AWAY FROM THE COUNTER. “DID HE DO THIS IN FRONT OF
ANYONE ELSE?”

“NO. I WAS THE ONLY ONE THERE. I WENT TO HIS OFFICE TO ASK HIM ABOUT SOME PAPERWORK HE
HAD ASSIGNED TO ME. I DON’T THINK HE KNEW I WAS THERE.”

nANCY SAT ON THE KITCHEN TABLE AN LOOKED AT HER FEET. “WOW.”

“YOU’RE TELLING ME. SO I FIGURED THAT I’D TAKE THE REST OF THE DAY OFF. I DID A BIT OF
BROWSING IN TOWN AND THEN CAME HERE.” A SPARK OF RECOGNITION LIT UP IN gABRIAL’S EYES. “AND THEN
I SAW THAT THING ON THE FAX MACHINE. IS THAT SOME KIND OF JOKE OR SOMETHING?”

“TWO SECONDS AGO YOU WERE TOTALLY WRAPPED UP IN YOUR BOSS AND NOW YOU’RE BACK ON THE
FAX MACHINE.”

“I HAVE TO DECIDE WHAT TO DO ABOUT MY BOSS ON MY OWN. THAT CAN WAIT. BUT THE FAX
MACHINE IS SOMETHING I CAN TAKE CARE OF NOW.”

“CAN’T YOU WAIT UNTIL AFTER DINNER?”

“nANCY,” HE SAID, SCOLDINGLY,

“YOU’RE NOT GOING TO LEAVE ME ALONE UNTIL I TELL YOU WHAT’S GOING ON?”

“YOU MEAN YOU?”

“YES I DO. IT’S ONLY A STORY, ONE BY A FRIEND OF MINE. HO LIVES UPSTAIRS, IN APARTMENT #7. His
NAME IS aUSTIN rICH.”

gABRIAL LOOKED AT HER VERY CLOSELY, AND OUTSIDE THE APARTMENT BUILDING, THE SKY
RUMBLED WITH A HINT OF A STORM, AS IF SOMEONE HAD SHOUTED THE LORD’S NAME IN VAIN.

pART ii.

aUSTIN SEEMED LIKE A NORMAL PERSON WITH NOTHING TOO PECULIAR ABOUT HIM. HE STANDS 5’10”
AND HAS MESSY DARK BROWN HAIR WITH A TOUCH OF POST-TEEN ACNE. NOT AT ALL CRAZY LOOKING; NO,
ON THE CONTRARY HE APPEARED TO BE MORE SANE THAN OTHERS. gABRIAL KNEW THAT aUSTIN LIVED WITH
HIS BROTHER, AND ASSUMED THAT THAT MUST HAVE BEEN THE REASON WHY.

“HELLO aUSTIN. COME ON IN,” WAS ALL gABRIAL COULD THINK OF SAYING. THE DAY, WITH ALL ITS
EVENTS AND ABNORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, HAD CAUSED HIM TO BE AT AN EXTREME LOSS OF WORDS.

“HEY, WHAT’S UP? nANCY CALLED AND SAID THERE WAS A STORY OF MINE ON THE FAX MACHINE.”

BEFORE gABRIAL COULD ANSWER, aUSTIN INTERRUPTED WITH, “ISN’T IT FUNNY HOW WE’VE BEEN LIVING
TOGETHER IN THE SAME APARTMENT BUILDING FOR OVER SIX MONTHS AND YET WE’VE NEVER MET (YOU AND
I THAT IS, I’VE ALREADY MET nANCY)155?”

“YES, TO BOTH QUESTIONS,” gABRIAL ANSWERED. “IS THAT HOW LONG YOU’VE BEEN LIVING HERE?”

“WHERE’S THE STORY?” aUSTIN ASKED. “SEE, I INTENDED TO SEND IT TO A FRIEND OF MINE, TO KIND OF
SCARE HIM YOU KNOW, BUT SINCE I ONLY USE TWO FAX NUMBERS WITH ANY FREQUENCY I ACCIDENTLY
PUNCHED THE WRONG ONE, I GUESS. SO WHERE IS IT?”

“IT’S STILL ON THE MACHINE. I PUT IT BACK THERE AFTER READING IT. AT FIRST I THOUGHT IT WAS A
JOKE OR A PRANK, OR PERHAPS EVEN THE MACHINE WAS ON THE FRITZ. BUT I GUESS NOT.”

“Yeah, I GUESS.”

gABRIAL STOOD LOOKING AT aUSTIN UNSURE WHAT TO DO OR SAY. HE NOTICED THAT aUSTIN LOOKED
AT nANCY, AND SHE NODDED. DID THIS MEAN SOMETHING? WHAT WOULD THEY BE COMMUNICATING IN THAT
GLANCE? WERE THEY HIDING SOMETHING?

---

155 Who isn’t? Actually, a lot of people. One of the weirdest things I’ve run into in life is the vast Comic Book / Non-Comic Book gap in the real
world. People who are familiar with standard Comic Book or fantasy style devices would know exactly what Telekinesis is, but I was surprised by
how many people would ask me about it. I realize that you don’t hear the word too often outside of that kind of fiction, but to be totally unfamiliar
with it? That’s just weird, man. Still, too many people have been clueless when I talk about this kind of thing. Again, it’s ironic that the people
who used to make fun of me for being obsessed with comics were then stumped when I made the most basic reference to them in my writing.

156 This was the apartment number that Buck and I lived in when we got our Apartment just after High School. There was no such “couple” as
Nancy and Gabriel in our complex, but that was where I envisioned they lived when I wrote this.

157 I got a lot of crap from people about putting parenthesis inside quotation marks, but when you think about it that’s the way some people talk.
While it might not “look right”, it’s a correctly punctuated sentence outside the quotation marks. Why is it a problem inside? Am I missing
something about grammar I should know about?
"uHM, aUSTIN?"
"yEAH gABRIAL?"
"mAY i ASK WHAT THAT STORY IS ABOUT? IT LOOKS LIKE NONSENSE TO ME."
"oH, IT'S NOT ANYTHING YOU'D BE INTERESTED IN. IT'S ABOUT COMPUTERS & STUFF."
"WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE DINNER WITH US TONIGHT aUSTIN?" nANCY INTERRUPTED.
"oH. uH. NO. i'VE GOT TO GET TO SLEEP EARLY TONIGHT. i'VE BEEN HAVING TROUBLE SLEEPING LATELY."
"bUT," gABRIAL INTERJECTED, "IT'S ONLY SIX O'CLOCK." gABRIAL GAVE nANCY A QUESTIONING LOOK AFTER SAYING THIS. "SURELY YOU CAN STAY FOR AN HOUR OR SO. HOW 'BOUT IT?"
"wELL...
"wHY NOT?" nANCY SAID. "wE'VE GOT PLENTY OF CHICKEN."
aGAIN, aUSTIN AND nANCY EXCHANGED THE LOOK, THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THAT STORY, SOMETHING MORE THAN NONSENSE, THAT MEANT SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO HIS ROOMMATE AND THE WRITER FRIEND.
sOMETHING ALMOST SINISTER.  

PART iii.
DINNER WAS QUIET AND RUSHED. NUTHING VERY INTERESTING CAME UP IN THE CONVERSATION, AND BOTH aUSTIN AND nANCY DODGED gABRIAL'S QUESTIONS LIKE A DISEASE, A VERY DEADLY DISEASE.
"sERIOUSLY THOUGH, WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?" gABRIAL ASKED.
"YOU MEAN THE STORY?" aUSTIN SPAT.
"YEs, THE STORY."
"wELL...
"aUSTIN QUICKLY GLANCED AT nANCY, AND SAID, "IT'S A VISUAL INTERPRETATION OF WHAT, AFTER A PERSON HAS WORKED VERY HARD ON A STORY OR ANYTHING ELSE ON A COMPUTER, MAY BE RETRIEVED WHEN THE FILE GETS SCRAMBLED."
"eXCUSE ME? YOURE JOKING, RIGHT?" sOMETHING ABOUT THE GLANCES THEY EXCHANGED TOLD HIM THAT WASN'T IT.
"nO. CUTE i TYPED A STORY THAT WAS SIXTY PAGES LONG.  
I LOST MOST OF IT. THE REST WAS GARBLED NONSENSE."

nANCY REPLIED, "WOW. THAT MUST HAVE BEEN HELLISH."
"yEAH," aUSTIN SAID, AND THEN SIGHED.

gABRIAL FELT POSITIVE NOW; NOT A WORD OF IT WAS TRUE. "THAT CAN'T BE IT; THERE'S GOT TO BE MORE TO IT."
"i'M AFRAID NOT. IT IS WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE: GARBLED NONSENSE AT ITS BEST," WAS ALL HE SAID. THIS TIME, gABRIAL GAVE BOTH nANCY AND aUSTIN A SUSPICIOUS LOOK. THEY WERE LYING; HE KNEW IT.
"LISTEN. i DON'T WANT TO SOUND LIKE AN ASSHOLE, BUT i DON'T BELIEVE EITHER OF YOU."
"gABRIAL!" nANCY SHOUTED.
"HEy. i JUST HEAR ME OUT. i SINCE i FOUND THAT FAX YOU'VE BEEN ACTING PRETTY WEIRD nANCY. AND EVER SINCE YOU SHOWED UP," gABRIAL THEN POINTED AT aUSTIN, "i'VE BEEN SUSPICIOUS OF THIS PIECE OF WRITING OF YOURS. YOU MAY BE TRYING TO PULL SOMETHING OVER ON ME, BUT i'VE NOTICED THE LOOKS YOU'VE BEEN GIVING EACH OTHER."

nANCY GAVE aUSTIN A PANICKED LOOK. "i DON'T CARE WHAT THIS IS ABOUT, i JUST WANT TO KNOW WHY YOU'RE TRYING TO HIDE THIS FROM ME. WHAT HAVE i DONE?"

This was based in fact, too. For the majority of my adult life I have had trouble sleeping, and when I wake up in the morning (to this day) I rarely feel rested or refreshed, no matter how much sleep I get. I have no real explanation for this, except that my lifestyle often involves a lot of funky hours, napping when I have the chance, and often foregoing sleep when I can get away with it. I am a huge proponent of the "sleep = waste" philosophy toward life (it robs you of 1/3 of your life!). However, the result of this lifestyle choice is that, when I do sleep, I am never rested. I've learned to accept it, even though I now get over 6 hours sleep a night. It's those occasional 16 hour drinking binges followed by a short nap before work that do me in, but I could also chalk it up entirely to staying up all night long writing, drinking, smoking, and footnoting stuff I wrote almost 10 years ago.

One thing I noticed about this story during this reading of it is that, on one level, the entire thing is symbolic of the role paranoia can play in our lives. Gabriel only encounters static and friction in his life when his own paranoia leads him to question anything that doesn't make sense. Pursuing the issue with the fax led him to Austin, and pursuing the suspicion that Austin & Nancy were up to something leads to more and more trouble. At every point that Gabriel becomes paranoid or suspicious about something, what started as nothing to worry about becomes something that's life-threatening, and leads to his ultimate undoing. Since I am an extremely paranoid person, I have to wonder if I was subconsciously aware of that fact and tried to make a point of the fact that Gabriel's own paranoia leads him to his ultimate (and negative) fate. Of course, why would I subconsciously try to convey this fact to myself unless someone planted the idea in my head in the first place? It never ends...

A reference to Adrian.
Nancy lowered her head into her arms and Austin said to Gabriel, "I guess it is kind of unfair to be doing this to you, but it is necessary. If I was to tell you what has transpired, then there's no telling who may find out. For all we know, you're a super-powered human too."

"Excuse me? What is going on?" Gabriel yelled.

Nancy got up and put her hand on Gabriel's mouth. "Listen, I've known you for five years now. We've been good friends and I don't want to jeopardize that. But we can't tell you because if we do, it could mean our lives."

"If you're in trouble, I might be able to help. The police may be able to..." but Gabriel was cut off.

"The police wouldn't be able to help. Follow me into the living room," and then Austin burst through the door to it.

They all sat on the couch and Austin began to reveal the tale to Gabriel.

"A few years back I wrote a story about some comic book super-heroes. It was really good and I figured it would sell, so I proposed the idea to DC Comics Inc. I sent off the letter and was told to wait three or four months.

"A year later it still hadn't returned.

"I wrote the company a series of letters and none of them were answered. I began to get so frustrated that I didn't know what else to do. Then, I met a man that could work more wonders with a computer than I have ever seen. He was a computer hacker. 161 "I won't tell you his name or any details of our friendship, but he suggested that we 'hack' into the computer system at DC. It seemed futile, but it worked, and what we found blew us away.

"We searched the entire computer system for any mentionings of my story and found only one. Under the name Jonathan Price 162 , the name of my super-hero, the screen came up and showed us a classified ribbon across the top, and a password was requested. Later we realized that the password was constantly changing, being created by a random number generator.

"We had a little over a second to find the password each time it changed. The only real way to get in was to insert a disk with the program that shuts down the random number generator. To do that, you have to be on the inside. 163

"We were puzzled about what could be classified about my story, so we did some more research. To our astonishment, a government computer we were able to hack into had the exact same file as the DC computer." 164

"Curiouser and curiouser," remarked Gabriel.

"Yeah. Anyway, we began to get deeper, and found a government cover-up bigger than the JFK assassination. 165 The U.S. government has been employing and locating super-powered humans to do their dirty work for the last fifteen years. It turns out, there really is a person named Jonathan Price."

Gabriel sat with his mouth open. What could he say?

"After I discovered this, I decided to expose the government by writing a story about it. To make it real, I tapped into the government computers and borrowed some information, using their own code to get it out so that they wouldn't know anyone knew what it said, even if they knew it was gone. The nonsense that came across your fax machine is, in all actuality, a coded message."

Gabriel was still speechless.

"Nancy has been proofreading my story, and I wanted her to see the code so she could know that I'd done it. Now, as soon as Nancy finishes proofreading, the story will be ready."

---

161 Wow, ya think? I'm really embarrassed by this line all these years later. But this story has caused me to flinch less than everything else in this collection... so far...

162 This was actually the name of a character I'd created. Jonathan Price had discovered a scroll that enabled him to write down "useless" super-powers on it, which he could later use to fight crime. Of course, they were not truly useless, since in each story he would encounter some situation where being able to talk to raccoons came in handy (or whatever cheese ball power I had come up with that week happened to be). I spent a lot of time with my friends coming up with new "useless" super-powers, though over the years I've lost this list. I remember he was a comedic character in the first place, inspired by Ambush Bug & Blue Devil. Ahh, the good old days...

163 Gee wiz, I wonder if that was something I pieced together from old episodes of Max Headroom? Real computer users are probably rolling their eyes and laughing quite a bit... either that, or preparing to take my own computer away from me.

164 So DC Comics has a more intense security system on their computer than the government? I believe it...

165 I will understand if you stop reading this collection entirely and vow never to have anything to do with me again. I'm aware that it's that bad.
FINALLY GABRIEL WAS ABLE TO MOUTH, “THAT’S INCREDIBLE.”

“NOW, SWEAR ON YOU LIFE YOU WON’T TELL ANYONE GABRIEL,” INSISTED NANCY.

“NANCY. AFTER TODAY, I’LL BE LUCKY IF I CAN EVER REMEMBER WHAT I’VE HEARD.”

AT THAT MOMENT, THE BOOKSHELF IN THE CORNER OF THEIR LIVING ROOM GAVE OUT, AND A LARGE MAN WITH BLACK HAIR AND A BLACK BODYSUIT BURST INTO THE ROOM. GABRIEL STOOD UP OUT OF REFLEX AND NANCY DOVE FOR THE KITCHEN.

AUSTIN STOOD UP, RAN TOWARD THE MAN, ATTEMPTING TO PUMMEL HIM. HE DIDN’T SUCCEED. GABRIEL STOOD MOTIONLESS AS THE MAN APPROACHED.


PART IV.

GABRIEL CAME TO ON HIS COUCH AND FOUND BOTH AUSTIN AND NANCY A FEW FEET AWAY, TALKING ABOUT SOMETHING BARELY AUDIBLE. GABRIEL DID NOT FEEL ANY PAIN, THOUGH, AND FOUND THIS ODD BECAUSE HE REMEMBERED GETTING HIT IN THE FACE.

“WHERE IS HE?” GABRIEL SAID, LOOKING AT BOTH NANCY AND AUSTIN. BUT SOMETHING EVEN MORE UNUSUAL CAUGHT HIS EYE, AS HE NOTICED THE WALL THE MAN BURST THROUGH WAS REPAIRED.

“It’s okay gabriel. austin took care of him. he’s gone,” said nancy. she was attempting to soothe him.

“i know it’s okay. but where did he go? he couldn’t have just left us alive. he almost killed me!”

austin said, “gabriel, i know this is all very sudden but you’ve got to understand that there is a lot more to what’s going on than what it appears.” austin turned toward nancy and added, “a lot more.”

“why was the man here? was it because of the story you wrote, austin?”

“Yes, he was here to kill me. that’s what i get for thinking you can beat the system.”

GABRIEL ASKED, “EXACTLY WHAT IS YOUR STORY ABOUT?”

FOR SEVERAL MOMENTS, NOBODY SPOKE AT ALL. GABRIEL BEGAN TO FEEL A VERY SHARP CHILL DOWN HIS BACK, AND SOON THE SILENCE BECAME A DOUBLE-EDGED KNIFE, SCRAPING HIS SKIN, AND WAITING TO PIECE IT.

“What’s wrong austin?” asked gabriel. “is it really that bad?”

“No, it isn’t. but i don’t know if i can handle it, that’s all.”

“What’s that story about?” insisted gabriel.

“Okay. you win. it’s about a man.”

“See, this guy comes home from work because he has witnessed an act involving super-powered humans. so he comes home and finds out that his roommate and a friend of hers already know, and are trying to do something about it.”

“Great. sounds like my life,” gabriel said, rather sarcastically.

AUSTIN LOOKED AT NANCY WITH A VERY WORRIED FACE.

“Hey guys, what’s wrong?” asked gabriel.

“Gabe, i don’t know how to tell you this,” nancy said.

“What are you talking about nancy?”

“I know how to say it,” said austin. gabriel looked him in the eye with extreme interest.

“GABRIEL, THE STORY IS YOUR LIFE.”

GABRIEL’S WORRY TURNED TO RELIEF. “Wheew! you guys don’t know how much this means to know that you planned this from the beginning. you wanted to spring all of this on me just to see how i’d react, just to make the story accurate. right? i can’t believe you guys. just one question: was that man who attacked us in on it too?”

AUSTIN LOWERED HIS HEAD AND STARED AT HIS FEET. NANCY SAID, “i think i’m going to get some water. i’m thirsty.”

GABRIEL STARED AT AUSTIN. “WHAT’S WRONG THIS TIME?”

“GABRIEL, I DON’T THINK YOU UNDERSTAND,” austin said. “when i say the story is your life, i mean that the story i’m writing is what dictates your life. all of this, all of the things in the apartment and all of the stuff you and i know, and everything around you is all stuff in my story. outside the story, you don’t exist. other than what i say you know, you don’t know.”

GABRIEL LOOKED AT AUSTIN. “WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?”

166 I really hope that i lifted this line directly from a comic book. i would have to be upset with myself if i actually wrote it myself...
"I'll prove it to you. We've never talked, right? I don't really know anything about you, at least as far as you know, right?"

"Yeah. What's your point?"

"You were in a car accident in Arizona. That's how you got the scars on you face, and that's how you think you can explain the gaps in your memory. The thing is, the only reason you have gaps is because I haven't told you what goes in them."

"Now that I really don't believe," gabrial said.

"What's your mother's name, gabrial?" asked austin.

"I don't remember."

"What's your last name?"

"I don't... A realization came over gabrial as something became apparent in his mind. He didn't know his last name. If fact, as far as he knew, he didn't have one. gabrial turned from austin and stared off into space.

"Face it gabrial. From the moment you started walking up those steps back on page one, you were merely a character in a story. Nothing more, nothing less."

"Now that's not true!" insisted gabrial. "I went to work today. My boss is Mr. Jones. Did I imagine all of that?"

"No. That was merely character development. The event with your boss that I added to your memory enhanced your shock when we told you about the super-heroes. Your boss isn't real; he doesn't exist."

"I can't believe any of this."

austin picked up a pen and a piece of paper from the fax machine, and wrote something down on it. He then called to the kitchen, "Wanda 165; could you come here. We need to talk to you."

wanda came out of the kitchen with a glass of water in her hands. "Yeah austin?"

"Listen. gabrial doesn't believe that... well, you know. So I changed your name from nancy to wanda. Do you mind?"

"Not at all." she proceeded to go back to the kitchen.

"What did that prove?" asked gabrial. "For all that I know, you staged that."

"Gabe, you have a picture of wanda in your wallet, one she gave you. She wrote a message on it."

"Yeah. To gabrial, my college friend. may life never get you down. She signed it too. This will prove you couldn't have changed her name by the stroke of a pen."

"Gabrial removed the picture from his wallet, and in a slow and drawn-out movement, dropped it to the floor. Gabrial slowly drew his hands to his head, and held them there in disbelief. Now he realized that he was in a story. Only the writer could have made the picture change too. If a name changes in a story, that affects everything. Even things indirectly involved."

"Gabrial stared out toward his wall above his couch, looking you directly in the eyes. 168 I can do a lot more than that, gabrial. In the movement of my wrist I can cause you to live, die, love, or fall. I can give you power and money, or I can make you miserable and homeless. Face it gabrial. Life is but a dream, and I am your godhead."

"Oh my god," was breathed across the lips of gabrial. As soon as gabrial decided that things could not get any worse, two more men dressed similarly to the first one, burst through the same wall.

"Gabrial leapt to his feet. What should he do? If his life was a story, then this was destined to happen. Was this his death scene?"

"One man grabbed gabrial and lifted gabrial above his head. The other stood over austin, who had the pen and paper in hand.

"Drop that," the man said. "I don't want you to do anything that you may regret."

---

167 Okay, she went from Nancy to Wanda... I don't know which name is worse...

168 Breaking the fourth wall is pretty hard to do with the written word, for this exact reason: the act of doing so sort of hinges on a single word (in this case, "you"). A lot of people missed the "fourth wall breaking" that happened in this sentence, and when they did catch it, thought it was bad (and who can blame them?)! Since gabriel's existence only comes together because of the cumulative effect of having read the story up until this point, the act of him "looking at you" doesn't really work, since there are no real "eyes" in that sentence that can peer back at you. In film, the camera can easily accomplish the "breaking of the fourth wall" because it is always "on", so it's easy to have the characters address the audience merely by looking in the camera's direction. I played around with a lot of different ideas for this sentence before I finally settled on this "weaker" version for the sake of maintaining sensibility while still conveying the same concept (I guess you could argue that I even failed at that). (Were I to write it now, I would have a description of gabriel looking at his own body and noticing words rippling abstractly, and maybe on the wall above the couch he would see a pair of eyes tracing lines of imaginary text... or something similar to that).
"I MAY HAVE ALREADY," SAID AUSTIN, AND IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, THE TWO MEN FADED FROM EXISTENCE.

GABRIAL CAME CRASHING TO THE FLOOR. WANDA CAME IN FROM THE KITCHEN. "WHAT HAPPENED?"

SHE ASKED.

"ANOTHER ATTACK. I DECIDED THAT WE REALLY DIDN'T NEED TO DEAL WITH IT AT THIS POINT IN THE STORY, SO I WROTE THEM OUT OF THE STORY."

WITH THAT, AUSTIN REPAIRED THE WALL IN THE CORNER THAT HAD A HOLE IN IT BACK TO THE WAY IT LOOKED BEFORE. THERE WAS VIRTUALLY NO TIME INVOLVED. ONE SECOND IT WAS FALLING DOWN, THE NEXT IT WAS BACK TO NORMAL.

GABRIAL PULLED HIMSELF TO THE COUCH AND SAID, "THIS HAS GOT TO BE A DREAM."

AUSTIN SAID, "IT IS. BUT THIS TIME, IT'S MINE."

PART V.

GABRIAL SAT IN SILENCE ON THE COUCH FOR TWENTY MINUTES SOLID. HE DIDN'T MOVE. HE DIDN'T TALK. HE DIDN'T WANT TO DO ANYTHING. HE FELT LIKE HIS ENTIRE LIFE WAS FALLING APART. HE KNEW HE COULDN'T CHANGE IT, BECAUSE HE ALSO KNEW THAT HIS LIFE WAS NOT HIS TO CONTROL. HE HAD TO GET USED TO THE IDEA, AND FACE THE TRUTH LIKE A MAN.

"AUSTIN?"

"YEAH GABRIAL?"

"HOW DOES THE STORY END? I MEAN, WHAT HAPPENS TO ME, AND EVERYTHING. I'M JUST CURIOUS. YOU DON'T HAVE TO TELL ME."

AUSTIN HAD BEEN IN WHAT APPEARED TO BE DEEP THOUGHT THE LAST TWENTY MINUTES, AND GABRIAL WAS AFRAID TO INTERRUPT HIM. BUT HE NEEDED TO FIND OUT.

"I'VE BEEN DOING A LOT OF THINKING LATELY GABRIAL. I REALLY DON'T LIKE THIS STORY, NOW THAT I'M IN IT."

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN?"

"WELL, I DON'T LIKE IT. THE PLOT IS THIN, THE CHARACTERS AREN'T THAT WELL DEVELOPED, EXCEPT FOR MINE OF COURSE, AND ON TOP OF THAT, IT DOESN'T END. I CAN'T THINK OF ANY WAY TO RESOLVE ANY OF THIS, ESPECIALLY MY OWN FATE, AS FAR AS THE STORY IS CONCERNED."

"BUT WHAT ABOUT THE SUPER-POWERED HUMANS WORKING FOR THE GOVERNMENT? CAN'T THEY, I DON'T KNOW, TAKE OVER THE WORLD OR SOMETHING? THEN WE COULD STOP THEM."

"NOPE. TOO EASY. SEE, I'VE ALREADY REVEALED MY GREATEST STRENGTH AND IT IS, BEYOND A SHADOW OF A DOUBT, TOO POWERFUL FOR ANY NORMAL STORY. I COULD CRUSH THEM IN A PARAGRAPH. NO, I THINK I'M GOING TO TRASH THIS STORY."

GABRIAL DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING RIGHT AWAY, BECAUSE HE WASN'T QUITE SURE WHAT THAT MEANT AS FAR AS HE WAS CONCERNED. AUSTIN WENT OVER TO THE PAPER HE HAD WRITTEN ON BEFORE, AND BEGAN WRITING.

"SO, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? NOW? I MEAN, WHAT HAPPENS TO ME?"

AUSTIN SIGHED, AND THREW THE PAPER IN A WASTEBASKET. HE BEGAN SHAKING HIS HANDS AT GABRIAL, AND SAID, "YOU JUST DON'T GET IT, DO YOU GABRIAL? YOU ARE TWO-DIMENSIONAL. YOU ONLY EXIST AS SOME WORDS ON A PIECE OF PAPER. YOU AREN'T EVEN REAL, OR BASED ON ANYONE THAT WAY, AND NOW, SINCE I'M SCRAPPING THIS IDEA, YOU ARE, BASICALLY, DEAD."

GABRIAL SCREAMED, "NO!" AND RAN OUT OF THE APARTMENT. HE COULDN'T ACCEPT HIS FATE. HE WAS MORE THAN A CHARACTER IN A STORY. HE HAD SUBSTANCE! HE WAS REAL! HE HAD A PAST. ONE THAT MATTERED, AND HAD MEMORIES.

THE FACT THAT GABRIAL DIDN'T HAVE MEMORIES WAS SOMETHING HE IGNORED.

HE RAN TO THE DOOR LEADING OUTSIDE OF HIS APARTMENT AND INTO THE FRONT YARD. STRETCHING OUT ABOUT TWENTY FEET FROM THE APARTMENT WAS WHAT HE REMEMBERED BEING THERE: TREES, CONCRETE, CARS, ETC. BUT PAST THAT, GABRIAL SAW SOMETHING VERY, VERY SCARY. HE SAW NOTHING.

IT HAD A VERY DEEP RED COLOR TO IT. IT SWIRLED AND MOVED AND SHOT OUT IN ALL DIRECTIONS, AND YET REALLY DIDN'T EXIST AT ALL, AND WAS STILL NOTHING. IT HAD NO SUBSTANCE, NOR DID IT SEEM TO TRuely EVEN BE THERE IN FRONT OF HIM, AT LEAST IN REAL SPACE. IT WAS NOTHING. IT WAS STORY LIMBO.

---

169 Some people would claim that I act like this in real life too... I wonder if they're right?

170 The irony, of course, that I didn’t trash this story at all, and thought that it was pretty well written at the time, and thus obsessively saved it all these years. I don’t know weather or not to be proud of fact that there are many humorous elements to my writing even if I never intended those elements as such. Sigh.

171 With hindsight I can’t believe how much of this “nothing” idea was stolen from The Neverending Story. Weird.
behind gABRIEL HE SAW HIS APARTMENT BUILDING BEING RUBBED OUT, LITERALLY. THE APARTMENT BUILDING SHAPED AND SOON APPEARED TO BE A LARGE SHEET OF PAPER WITH WORDS ON IT. FROM THE SKY ABOVE, A LARGE PENCIL CAME DOWN FROM THE HEAVENS AND RAN ACROSS THE WORDS, THAT SOON VANISHED INTO NOTHINGNESS. IN A MINUTE THE APARTMENT BUILDING WAS GONE.

GABRIEL WAS STUCK AND HAD NOWHERE TO GO. WHILE CONTEMPLATING HIS PLIGHT, HE NOTICED THAT THE PENCIL WAS AIMED AT HIM NEXT.

WITHOUT THINKING, GABRIEL LEAPT OFF THE EDGE INTO THE NOTHINGNESS. TO HIS SURPRISE, NOTHING HAPPENED.

GABRIEL FLOATED IN THE NOTHING, AND SOON THE LAND HE HAD BEEN STANDING ON WAS GONE.

GABRIEL KNEW THIS WAS THE END, AND HE KNEW THAT THERE WAS NOTHING HE COULD DO ABOUT IT.

AS HE LOOKED DOWN AT HIS LEGS, HE SAW THAT THEY WERE SLOWLY TURNING TO PAPER. GABRIEL SCREAMED LOUDER THAN HE EVER HAD, WHICH RIPPIED HIS VOCAL CORDS TO SHREDS. WERE THERE ANY REALITY LEFT AROUND HIM, IT WOULD HAVE SHATTERED AS HIS EAR-DRUMS DID.

THE PENCIL CAME AND RUBBED AWAY THE LETTERING ON THE PAPER THAT MADE UP GABRIEL'S BODY.

"Maaaaaaaahhhghahahhah!!!!!!!"

THE PAPER FLOATED IN THE NOTHINGNESS FOR A SECOND, THEN FOLDED IN ON ITSELF INTO A CRUMPLED BOULDER OF PAPER. IT, TOO, FLOATED FOR A WHILE, BUT SOON DISAPATED IN THE NON-EXISTENT AIR.

ON THE HORIZON, ONE COULD SEE (IF THEY HAD EXISTED TOO) ANOTHER REALITY PAPER BEING WRITTEN UPON, AND STILL ANOTHER BEING CRUMPLED AWAY INTO NOTHINGNESS.

TYPESETTER'S NOTE: "I quit!!!!!!" 774

Part XIII: Life Sucks Darling.

As I had mentioned, by the time The Ramen City Kid and I got our own apartment together, Colin and I had become virtually inseparable as a result of being in Cathead together. This was slightly awkward for my then-girlfriend Amber, but to us we were having the greatest time of our lives every single day (it was through Colin that I met Amber in the first place). For the most part we just cruised around in his bug going nowhere in particular, but occasionally we'd drop acid, practice music, make elaborate plans that would never come to fruition, or stay up all night just because we could. While he was always able to do that because he was unemployed more often than me, it was rare that we could really cause trouble at night, and when we had the chance, we did.

No matter how poor or desperate I was, hanging out with Colin was always an immediate pick-me-up. He and I didn't know how to not have a good time. It didn't matter if I was in danger of losing my job, on the edge of having The Ramen City Kid kick me out, or currently on the rocks with Amber (or even with one of the other band members). No matter how bad things were, Colin and I knew how to have a good time. In a way, he was my first Eugene girlfriend, and I was closer to him than I ever was to Amber. I had known him longer, experienced more crap with him, discovered music and movies with him, spent hours discussing everything with him, and lasted through the best and worst of times of my life with him. The only thing between Amber and I that Colin and I didn't have was the sex, and I am convinced that if I had known Colin longer he and I would have gotten around to it sooner or later.

In the wake of A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. (the 'zine), I was really looking for something new to do, but my creative energy was, more or less, spent. While Colin and I were used to working in the band together, for him 'zines were something he contributed to rather than collaborated on. So it was strange that one night, while he and I were hanging out at my place with nothing to do, that he suggested that we put one together. Granted, it was late. Very late. We were tired too, but we'd also been drinking a lot of Mt. Dew™ and were, at that point, in no danger of falling asleep for quite some time. Without giving it much thought, we dove in and started putting together something for fun, which consisted of a bunch of collages and some drawings, with a couple of things written down that didn't really make a lot of sense. Within two hours we had completed the first issue of L.S.D., named in honor of my High School ideas with Steve and Melissa.

For your sake, I will not include any of the contents. It was crude, pointless, and mostly an exercise in making something bizarre rather than attempting to make something meaningful. When we were done we laughed, enjoyed the finished product, and decided that it was time for bed. I bid him farewell and hit the sack around 6 A.M., dreading work later than day.

Unbeknownst to me, Colin went immediately to a copy shop and ran off a small print run of this 'zine (about 20 or so). He went to Green Noise & Hungry Head (local shops that carry 'zines), and not only convinced them to carry it, but got a couple dollars

172 Only marginally influenced by the Chuck Jones cartoon where Bugs is animating the cartoon that Daffy Duck is in. This was a favorite of mine while I was growing up.

173 For some reason I want to say that I pinch this sentence from a Douglas Adams story. I'm sure he used something similar at some point...

174 Often when I would give this story to people to read, they would comment that this was inappropriate and didn't fit the mood of the story. Perhaps they could accept the fact that I inserted myself as a character in the text, wrote a story about me going into the story to talk to one of my characters before I scrap the story and "rub him out," and yet this bit of self-referential silliness was "inappropriate" and didn't fit the "mood." I've said it before and I'll say it again: people are fuckin' weird, man.
out of the deal, too. I was astounded at what had happened, and when he told me this I just sort of let my jaw drop. It was one thing for us to have done it in the first place, but something else entirely to have it actually in stores (however small they really were).

Time passed, and Colin gave me the originals to L.S.D., which I hung on to but had no idea what to do with. I wasn’t currently doing a new ‘zine, so I couldn’t plug it, nor could I afford to distribute it more, so I just sat on them and figured I would forget about it soon enough. But a whole new can of worms was soon opened when we received a fan letter for the first issue, asking if there would ever be second one.

Colin and I had done it mostly as a one off, and while I was baffled that it had gone as far as it had, the fact that someone else liked it, and wanted more was just incomprehensible to me. I laughed. Colin was all for the idea, so this time we called in Kisu, and he contributed a cartoon (that I later cut up and re-arranged, effectively making the already nonsensical piece of tripe all the more bizarre and unintelligible). We mailed off a copy to our “fan” (who went by the name of LuLu), and repeated the same “distribution” we’d done with the first issue. This time, no mail was generated, so we decided to call it good and never pursued the publication again.

Occasionally, in issues of I’d Buy That For A Dollar!, I would make reference to them, or offer them via mail-order, but never received any orders for them. I wasn’t surprised, either. Not everyone can get into acid-casualty humor, and that was pretty much all that L.S.D. had to offer (pun-intended).

---

**Drug Covers.** Colin entirely created the cover for the first issue (on the left), while I did the cover for the second one (on the right). Kisu, Colin and myself all had minor Nixon obsessions, which culminated in issue #2 with its cover and the multiple-page Nixon collages. Weird.
Part XIV: I'd Buy That For A Dollar?

Life with The Ramen City Kid went well enough until I made the fatal mistake of letting Amber stay with us. To a young man with a lot of failure with women under his belt, living with his girlfriend probably sounds like the greatest idea a person could ever come up with. Not only is it a renewable source of free sex, but it creates the perfect environment to save money (since you don't have to go out all the time trying to meet anyone). Companionship on such an intimate level seemed like heaven to me, and I took her in without consulting with The Ramen City Kid or anyone else for that matter. The fact she was younger than me seemed unimportant. The fact she needed a place to stay because her mom kicked her out was immaterial. The fact that I was getting action clouded all other thoughts.

With this new addition to my life, it didn’t take long for something else to drop out. Between Cathead, my solo-band, hanging out with Colin and, when all else failed, going to work, I was perilously close to having no free time as it was. I quickly decided to stop working on ‘zines for the time being. The Ramen City Kid had introduced me to a lot of really cool ‘zines (Dishwasher, Cometbus, & Now I Twist Your Nipples With A Pair Of Spaghetti Tongs, among others) and between those and his own publication, I really felt like I would be fighting an uphill battle to produce something worthwhile. The stuff I was reading was really good, and as I’ve mentioned before, my writings seemed to only be measured in terms of how much it had improved since last time. While I was by no means giving up the craft it was definitely time to take a break.

Of course, there were other forces at work, too. Since my job at The Bookstore was only one day a week, and both the bands only ever showed a negative quantity when we ever discussed anything like profit, money issues were sharply coming into focus again. I tried hard to maintain food-service jobs but my affluence for acquiring them seemed to apply to loosing them as well. Matters were only made worse by the conditions of living with Amber: not only did she step on The Ramen City Kid’s toes, but she had no source of income and no desire to even look for work. I would often wake up at 7 A.M. to get ready for Wendy’s or whatever new food-service job I had, and she would still be awake from the night before, watching TV, reading, or chatting with Colin, who was on his way home when I had been getting ready for bed the night before. Food stamps only lessoned the pain slightly, as Amber was a heavy smoker too (much like myself).

It didn’t help that I had discovered acid around this time. What became a fun way to unwind after a long work-week became something I all-too-quickly fell in love with. Acid not only offered me a good time, but was just close enough to a spiritual experience to make me think that there were life-secrets that could be unraveled if I used it as a “tool”. It didn’t help that the guys in the band all heavily endorsed this sort of behavior, too. When we all did acid together, our conversations quickly turned toward the “trying to figure things out” line of thinking. Our only saving grace is that we were all very much against hippies and The Grateful Dead, and unlike most people, I thought listening to The Germs while high was going to help me “figure it out.”

(“Finally, The Punks Are Taking Acid!”)

All of this resulted in a downward trend in my cash-flow. When The Ramen City Kid came to collect the rent money, I all-too-often had to beg him to cover me until I could get another job. While I honestly tried to look for work and keep my word, the fact of the matter was that I didn’t really succeed when it came down to paying bills on time. It’s one thing to live during a bad economy; it’s another when you’ve been up all night on drugs for the last 16 hours when you try to go and look for another job. Not even the Jedi Mind Trick works under those conditions.

To take my mind off these problems, I convinced myself that doing another ‘zine was the way to go. I was always happiest when I was writing and it made sense to try and get the creative juices flowing again. On one of my many days off I did something that was all-too-common for me: I put on Mr. Bungle and started hammering away at the keyboard.

It was this kind of behavior that gave me the name I'd Buy That For A Dollar! The song "The Girls of Porn" has that phrase sampled from the movie RoboCop, which was one of my favorite movies as a kid. When I started thinking about the phrase, I realized it was very telling of my attitude toward life. The things I needed and wanted desperately — food, shelter, clothes, a way to take care of myself and Amber — all depended on one thing: money! It wasn’t that I wanted to sell out my ideals for cold hard cash. Quite the contrary; I was willing to try and do whatever it took to make sure I could defend those ideals with whatever money I could earn. My dollar did not go toward stocks and corporate America and the things I’d always hated. It went to ‘zines, music, paying my rent and supporting my lifestyle. The name was not only a reference to things I could get behind, but a comment on my chosen lifestyle in the first place. (A lot of people have interpreted the title ironically, which seems logical at first until you realize that, at my core, I think there’s absolutely nothing wrong with making as much money as you can while still maintaining your ideals as a person. It’s this distinction — between selling out your ideals and selling out with your ideals intact — that seems to lead to the most violent disagreements with just about everyone I know. Fortunately for me, I named a ‘zine after my stance on this issue so I can argue less.)

I put together a quick version of this new ‘zine, entirely fueled by rage and smoking / coffee. Colin drew up the cover and it was ready to go. He funded a few copies (mostly for himself and me) and before I could really get into trying to distribute it like normal, the shit really hit the fan.

The Ramen City Kid had laid down the law: it was time to pay the rent, on time, or move out. He had been considerate and kind (and even lent me money far beyond his own means), but enough was enough and it was time to move on. I understood his position and made a solemn vow that I would pay back every penny of the almost $800 I owed him (which, I ultimately did, but it took me four years to do so). In the meantime, Amber and I made the second-biggest mistake of our relationship: we asked to move in with her mother for the time being.

Amber’s mother, Mary, was clinically insane, which is to say that she was the kind of woman who never once made sense in the entire time I knew her. She was a feminist philosopher and a student at the U of O who was doing some undergraduate teaching. Her particular “feminist” viewpoint on life was so skewed as to piss off any real feminists: she believed that women “couldn’t
understand logical philosophical arguments" and therefore shouldn't take logic classes but should instead focus on "woman's studies," something that women were actually capable of understanding. (She actually believed this.)

And it got worse the more you knew her.

When she was not putting up fliers about how her ex-boyfriends were sexists, she was accepting them back into her house when they had put for her. She was a pet owner in the same sense of the word that an owner of a pet store is; her house was filled with cages of birds, lizards, frogs, cats and other animals that shit wherever they felt like. The most dangerous of these animals was a Savannah Monitor, a gigantic lizard that was as long as half my arm span (and could easily remove the other half of my arm span if it so desired). It was the only creature in the house that got its own room, while we humans all had to share with someone. Between the feeder-mice that would escape that room and the lizards that were constantly shitting on my work clothes, the house offered only one thing for me: a place to stay dry at night. I spent as little time as possible within its four walls.

This change in the dynamic of our relationship had a lot of negative affects on Amber & I. Before, I was trying to take care of her (not succeeding, but trying and that's what counts). Now, her mother was taking care of both of us. The difference was subtle but effective in making me feel like crap: we were now under Mary's careful eye, who was exactly aware of facts concerning our relationship (like how often we slept together, how much food we both ate, the drugs we may [or may not] have been on, etc). While she never once tried to enforce any kind of punishment on either of us for anything we did, nor did she seek revenge on me for "tainting" her daughter, the message had been clearly sent: I was a man, and not very welcome as much as I was tolerated until I was no longer necessary.

And that point seemed very clear to Amber as well. After a lot of trying to make things work in this house, Amber finally suggested that it would probably be easier for everyone if I moved out. This meant that I had to beg and plead Kiisu to let me stay with him in the basement again, and led to no end of long and laborious conversations about the state of our relationship between me and Amber. While she insisted that things were no different, we would just be living apart, later on the exact same logic would be used to defend why we needed to try breaking up for a while too. A week after that she had already moved on to a new guy who worked for an event-security company. I lost a lot of CDs, tapes & Sandman comics to her, not to mention my faith in women for quite some time.

Re-adjusting to the basement with Kiisu and his girlfriend was very awkward for all of us. I landed a new food-service job (this time at Taco Bell, humorously enough since Kiisu worked there too, though at a different store). I spent a lot of time trying to stay out of their way and figure out what to do next. It was obvious that I needed a new place to live, but this required saving money, which took time. All I really wanted to do was drink and spend my nights exploring the internet, which I had just discovered thanks to the wonders of Kiisu's computer. None of these habits really lent themselves very well to sorting my shit out or being a very good houseguest.

It was under these circumstances that I decided to re-vamp the one issue I'd already completed of I'd Buy That For A Dollar!, adding some new material and cutting out some of the fat as well. This new version of issue #1 wasn't too different from the previous one, except that it looked a little slicker and had a couple of additional "true stories" of things that had happened in the meantime. I was by this time a regular Comibus reader, and was envious of his style of writing. While I had always put a lot of my heart and soul into my 'zines up until that point, I had always included straight fiction, with only occasional hints of non-fiction and real life. Plus, relying on contributors always meant that I was waiting for someone to send something my way, which had gotten to be a problem when I was on a roll and wanted to really throw together something over night. It occurred to me that, with I'd Buy That For A Dollar!, I could finally do all the things I'd always wanted to do on my own. And having learned a lot about how 'zines were distributed and sent around since I moved to Eugene, this time people might actually READ it.

It's not until this point that I feel my writing really began to turn a corner and hit a decent patch of road, so to speak. With the first issue of IIBTFAAS I really feel like hit my stride, and since then have been trying to adjust tiny aspects here and there in an attempt to really fine-tune my style. I'm often surprised that I didn't start writing autobiographical pieces earlier; I was always inclined to tell stories about myself and I loved to write. Makes perfect sense in hindsight, of course.

These early issues were better distributed than my previous work, but still not as well as the more current issues are. I would run off batches of 20 copies or so, hit up all the local stores that carried 'zines and ask them to buy them back from me. Then I would use that money to run off another batch of 20 or so to distribute by hand. I by no means broke even, and only ever lost money on 'zines. While more people were reading them and I was sending them to friends out of state (and, when all else failed, just gave them away to anyone and everyone I could find), it seemed that I began to lose more and more money as I did more and more issues. Each time I would crack down and say, "Okay, I need to stop just giving them away," I would hand out 50 copies in one night and have $4 in my pocket afterward. This was pretty much business as usual for most 'zine publishers from what I hear, but it's still sort of silly when I think of the total amount of money I've invested into making 'zines, and how I can't remember making any substantial sum of money off of them at any point in my past. Such is the lifestyle, I guess. I can only imagine how much money Slash lost before it folded.
IBTFAS Cover Gallery. The first issue cover was drawn up by Colin, who not only designed the title logo (which would be used over and over again in future issues) but completely came up with the content for the cover. I often find it funny to see people try and figure out what all is happening in that cover. There are a few odd details that always seem to... uhm... “shock” people when they finally notice them. I later pasted in all the bar codes from Mountain Dew™ bottles, cigarette packs, and Hamburger Helper boxes. One of my original ideas was that every issue would have a bar code on the cover somewhere. (That idea didn’t last too many issues, though.) I took this image and used an old-fashioned hand-held scanner to create the logo that’s used on the covers issues #2 & #3. I was never very satisfied with the cover for issue #2. These days I could have easily photoshopped it to look the way I wanted it to. Instead it looks exactly like the way I did it: a very poor cut and paste job. Issue #3 has a cover drawn by Kisu, who was always a very good artist and painter, but has never really pursued it beyond a few selected places. I’ve always thought he should do a comic book or art show of some kind.
Change is Good.\(^{175}\)

Change perpetuates a lot of things in my world. Break-ups, new jobs, suddenly being poor, friends moving away, new friends emerging from the old ones, and even a change in your soft drink you regularly drink. I can’t change that, though, because I’m a Mountain Dew\(^{TM}\) junkie\(^{176}\) and I will always be & if anyone even tried to stop me there will be some serious problems in the near future.

But there comes a time when change is necessary. I can’t stop my break-up from happening, & I have to get a new job as much as slumming it in fast food may be fun, & no matter how much I tell my friends that they can’t move away they do, & all I can really do in the long run is remember all the great nights we had being drunk in my old apartment or wandering the streets of Eugene late @ \(^{177}\) night really wired on 50 cups of coffee, or the time we saw the Spinannes @ the W.O.W. Hall, or the first show we did as a band & remember that those were good times, & no matter how far away those friends might be, those times still happened.

I think that maybe I’m getting old & out of touch w/ reality, because w/ each passing day I see something walking late @ night after I get off work w/ purpose in their eyes & I wonder when I stopped being that person & started being the person I am now. It made so much sense to get a job because it was better than being poor, & being poor really sucks as we all know. But did I lose something when I stopped being that person, & is that the sign of being old & out of touch? Or is it when they stop carding you for beer because you buy it for your younger friends so much now that the clerks all know you? Maybe it’s just the fact that now I do have a bedtime & now I have to start drinking earlier so I can sober up & get to sleep by then.

That must be it.

As much as we miss our friends & our jobs (or lack-thereof) & all the good shows that don’t happen anymore because all the good bands broke up & those old girlfriends that could comfort you on those days when the drive-through was wrapped all the way around the store, life does go on. The sun rises & sets, new bands come into town, new people become your friends & soon become the people you go & get drunk w/ & watch really bad shows for dirt cheap, & the only thing that still reminds you that you have gotten older is the fact that you have a little less money to spend on records every month because you started paying your own bills, & you try to remember the days when ‘zines were only $1.00 @ House Of Records & why all the new hands try to charge 2.

& you realize then that change, however sad it is, is good, & that it is just a part of life. The only way to really work through it is to just keep on going & try to do your part the way you think you should.

--G.M.

\[ //\]

"Again With The Hurting."\(^{178}\) by G.M.

I am the worst romantic the world has known. I couldn’t produce a single romantic moment if my life depended on it, or the if the relationship did for that matter, in which case the situation would lead to a break-up soon. My only concept of romance is to know to the day the length of our current relationship, and even that is a bad thing because you’ll know exactly how many days you’ve been seeing each other when she gets tired and pulls the plug on things.

I’ve very little luck with romance. I’ve tried everything I can think of to lure the essential person to me by dressing well, and suave, even doing downright cool things like smoking expensive cigarettes, or acting really too pretentious for my own good. But in the end I’ve found that romance is like shit and politics: it just happens.

Call me cynical, but after my recent break up I think I’m going to hold off on relationships. I’ve not even sure why I’m putting this in this magazine, save for the fact that this whole issue is, to a small degree, about change\(^{179}\), and my recent break up is a

---

\(^{175}\) The Editor’s Note from I’d Buy That For A Dollar! #1.

\(^{176}\) All of us in Cathead were HUGE Mountain Dew\(^{TM}\) drinkers, so much so that we wrote a song about it called “Neon Green Caffeine”. The opening riff is a rip-off of the song “Baracuda” by Heart. (Stop making fun of Heart, you guys! Their early albums RULE!) I will occasionally indulge from time to time, but I’ve more or less switched entirely to Ginger Ale as my carbonated beverage of choice (after beer, that is).

\(^{177}\) One thing you might notice about a lot of the text in this section is the use of "symbols in lieu of text". One of my original ideas of \(\text{IBTEAS}\) was to really pursue the "text as art" experiments I had been doing in High School. Therefore, throughout most of these early issues, “At” became “@”, “and” became “&”, “With” became “w”, etc. By today’s standards it just reads like your standard e-mail, though. Oh well. I finally gave up the habit and most of the current issues don’t have this kind of crap in it.

\(^{178}\) Also from issue one. Another first! This was the first piece that was straight up, 100%, no questions asked, no obtuse metaphors or round-about explanations, about a girl that I had dated. I had always hinted at breakups and bad relationships in the past, but this was the first time I tackled the subject head-on in my ‘zine. I remember not too much after I wrote this I was having coffee with her, and she wrangled a copy of this ‘zine out of me and read this piece (I don’t know if she instinctively knew I had written about her or just wanted to read the ‘zine and turned straight to that page). After she read it she glared at me for a long time. If memory serves, she and I hung out one more time after that, and then went through a period where she had relayed to me (via friends) that she didn’t want to talk to me (or see me) ever again. Recently I saw her in a bar (this was less than a year ago) when I was in Eugene visiting my buddy Justin, and she was with a new boyfriend who (ironically enough) lived in Cottage Grove. If it weren’t for the fact I get a kick out of the universe doing stuff like that to me, I would be pretty damn annoyed.
big change in my life. But I made a discovery with my last relationship that I didn’t notice in the past, and think that discovering this has made my life a little better.

I was piecing together my scrapbook a week or so ago and I ran into my horoscope. Not just a daily clipping or anything like that, but a whole chart with planets and houses and everything that I don’t even fully understand. A friend of mine that I haven’t seen in a really long time did it for me on a computer using some kind of program that does all the equations for you and plugs the necessary info in.

Well, according to my star chart, my love life will be revolved around looking for the perfect mate. The mate to end all mates. I am in a search for marriage, I guess, or at least permanence. And when I think back to my relationships, almost all of them were over a year. It’s no wonder we break up when my idea of romance is staying at home watching a really bad movie while I write a story or practice playing bass. I’d probably leave me too, just on the grounds of not getting any sex.

Our generation wasn’t built for long term. How long does a song stay popular in the mainstream? How long do movies stay in the theaters before they’re forgotten? How often does a major product change its slogan? It seems like a daily event in this world, and I think that’s rubbed off on us when we deal with relationships.

Now I’m not saying that I need to learn to just get over my break up, because it still hurts like a mother fucker. I still cry when I hear certain songs, and I still wake up thinking that I should call her up and see if she wants to meet for coffee, forgetting that we’re not seeing each other anymore. But in the long run, life goes on, and when it comes down to sitting in this basement apartment all day long sulking and being depressed and skipping work and letting my life get to shit, or getting on with things and remaining a part the world I inhabit, then I’m going to go for door number 2 Bob.  

I guess the point is that the cynical old man has decided that I don’t need a relationship to be happy. That’s not to say that I was disappointed with my last relationship and that I thought it was horrible, but with my failure Vs. success rate it seems to me that I can continue to be the unromantic and make myself happy without ruining another person’s time in a long term relationship that will end in a break up. I’ve got two different hands to choose from if I get lonely, I’ve got plenty of other things to write about if I get bored, and on the whole, it costs a whole lot less for a date when instead of going to somewhere spendy I can go to IHOP.

However, the above title is still very appropriate.

———

Money Makes The World Go ‘Round:  

[Note: This was the original Editor’s Note that was written for the first run of I’d Buy That For A Dollar that never really saw print. I found it pertinent, so here it is. — G.M.]  

Everyone can be bought. Everyone has their price. And money can buy you happiness. These are the basic topics of discussion that will—or will not—be discussed within, or at least stabbed at before grabbing the ball and running off in another direction. And the reason these 3 themes will be constant in this ‘Zine is because I live buy all three of them... and you should too!


So you admit: Money can buy you happiness, just like it has for me. Then soon you will understand the second truth: that you CAN be bought.

You are probably just like me. You live in a decent looking apt, in an interesting little city and all you really want in life is a job to support you’re stupid little bills like rent and electricity and phone, and of course food to eat a least once a day, and occasionally that pack of cigarettes and/or coffee or whatever, and one of the things mentioned in the first paragraph for your own personal pleasure when the need arises. So you spend your life looking for a job.

And it is then you realize that you CAN be bought, that you WILL be bought, that you would do anything to be bought so you can avoid living in that door-stoop down the road and keep up your normal life moving along adequately so that someday your band, or paintings, or writings, or whatever will be discovered. And you realize that you CAN be bought, but for the right price.

And the right price is, of course, a decent job.

And that is why Everyone Can Be Bought, Everyone Has Their Price, and Money Can Buy You Happiness.

--The Soylent Green (Circa September, 1995)

---

179 Another “original idea” for I’DTEAS was that each issue would have a theme. While the “theme” was always very loose, I tried to stick to it for quite a few issues. I think that issue #11 was the first issue with no distinct “theme”.

180 The joke being, of course, that I was actually sitting in the apartment sulking instead of getting on with my life. How ironical!

181 The Editor’s Note from I’d Buy That For A Dollar! #2.

182 Wow... I had forgotten that I attributed this introduction to The Soylent Green. For years I had been obsessed with the line, “Soylent Green Is People!” from the movie of the same name. Ironically, I’ve never seen the movie, but I’ve had it summarized to me endlessly to the point where I feel like I know it by heart. For a long time I used Soylent as an adjective, such as, “I’m feeling very Soylent today.” I also used “Soylent Cody” as a nickname, and then later changed it to “The Soylent Green”. This was a new persona I was trying to introduce that was supposed to be a
Since this issue is about bad food sort of, I thought I'd start off w/ a story about a theory we have about McDonald's™ that my friend Colin184 came up w/ that I have related to many friends w/ lots of success. We totally believe that this is 100% true, & there is more than enough evidence to back this theory. This is also something that has been related to & explored to a deeper level in my work-in-progress "The Fast Food Whore"185, so when it is completed you can check that out & let me know what you think.

Anyway, the theory is as follows:

McDonald's™ is trying to make young men sterile in an attempt to control the population growth as a favor to the government in exchange for the ability to expand into the third world countries.

How McDonald's™ makes young men sterile: McDonald's™ uses these devices known as Q-ing ovens to heat the food they are about to serve to customers before they put them in "the bin" (it is well known that "the bin" is a holding device w/ heat lamps to keep the food warm, where the food sits for hours until it is sold). Now these Q-ing ovens resemble microwaves in every way, except in that where a microwave would take about 30 seconds to heat a burger to the point of being the temperature of the interior of the sun, these Qers take about 4 seconds. Now, I don't know what kind of radioactive materials McDonald's™ uses to produce this power, but I do know that it can't be healthy.186

Now, in every McDonald's™ I've ever worked in (which is three different stores, total) the Q-ing ovens were placed conveniently in a place on the counter that was roughly the same height off the floor that my genitals are. This means that every time @ McDonald's™ when I had to heat a burger I was probably getting a nice dose of some kind of radiation aimed right @ my crotch. I imagine after prolonged exposure to that kind of environment, a person could become sterile, & I'm positive doctors would agree.

Now, I am not overly tall, nor am I short, & I estimate that many of the other males that work @ McDonald's™ have experienced this same phenomenon.

Why McDonald's™ does this: I've already stated that this must be a way of controlling the population. But let's probe this issue a little deeper.

What kind of people get jobs in fast food? Poor people, losers, & people who, try as they might, just don't have enough experience in any other kind of work & can't get a job anywhere else. Obviously, these people aren't the straight A, perfect attendance, model citizen types because those types are working for Microsoft™ or some other place right now. So these employees are the dregs of society, so poor that they soak up welfare & financial aid, so stupid that they can't get a job anywhere else, or such outcasts that they get the job in order to pay for what financial aid @ art school doesn't. Wouldn't society be better off w/out them?

Of course, the only type of people that create these kind of people are exactly those kind of people, & the population is already so big as it is, so if the men in these groups are sterile, wouldn't that prevent the proliferation of the "species" so to speak?

How the government has a hand in it: McDonald's™ didn't start expanding to other countries until around the '70's, which is a fairly well known fact. Now, by the time the '70's had rolled around, the people that were into the culture of the '50's were running the country. They weren't too keen on this new youth movement... "punk"... call it what you will. Not only that, but the population boom was reaching even higher levels around this time. The Baby Boomers had children that were in High School around this time, & not only that but the middle class was getting so big that more & more people were needing to get things like welfare & government assistance to help pay for their punk children to go to school.

Wouldn't life be much easier if there was some way to control this social class that dominated the fast food employees so they could stop spawning?& isn't it convenient that right @ the peak of the "class war" is also the same time that McDonald's™ is finally able to set up shop outside of the U.S., also around the same time microwaves like devices were very big as a device for heating food. Hmmm.

Anyway, if you tie it all together, it makes one interesting little theory, & when you think about it, isn't McDonald's™ horrible enough to actually partake of this in the first place w/out the aid of a conspiracy theory?

Just my 2 cents worth.187

"music" guy. He did show reviews, album reviews, etc. I never really was able to nail down what I wanted The Soylent Green to be, though, and very quickly I phased him out of the "zine... but he'll pop up occasionally in these early issues.

183 From I'd Buy That For A Dollar! #2. This is a very good example of the kind of stuff I wanted this 'zine to contain in the early days, but I just couldn't get enough material to really pull this off. I lost lots of nonsensical conspiracy theories and reports of weird things that corporations were doing to employees... but have them be so unbelievable as to be just silly (and, hopefully, entertaining). I think this was as far as I ever got.

184 Colin and I, for a while, worked together at McDonalds™. I had landed him the job by pulling some strings. He eventually fucked it up and quit, which made things pretty uncomfortable for me at work until I ended up leaving too. He and I were the originators of this idea.

185 I had the idea that I would combine my fast-food journals with stuff like this (supplemented with some actual research) into a book called "The Fast Food Whore". Sadly, I lost steam on this idea when Fast Food Nation was published. However, from what I understand, there's probably still a market for more that kind of stuff, so who knows?

186 Anyone who has worked at McDonald's™ can verify that this paragraph is 100% true. One more reason to never work there (or eat there).

187 I just noticed that I have ended a few things in the early issues of I'd Buy That For A Dollar! using this line. I wonder if, at the time, I had intended to have that be my tag line, much like the, "I'm Austin Rich, and I'm outta here!" was for Bob's? HMMMMMMMM...
1. I'm walking to the store with Kissu and Glyndon and at the corner of Fourth and Adams a while car drives by blasting as loud as he can Spanish Polka.

2. I'm walking home from the store with my walk man on as the batteries are running low. As I pass the apartment complex on Fourth and Blair near the Red Barn, a woman stops me and motions for me to take the headphones off. She says, "Where are you going?" I say, "I'm going home." She asks, "Why are you going home?" I say, "So I can eat some food." She says, "Is that it?" I say, "Yeah." She says, "Okay," and walks up the stairs to an open door.

3. I'm trying to go to sleep after watching a show at Icky's and all my friends show up and want to hang out and talk. I try to tell them I need to sleep, but they are all busy talking or having fun with my roommates, and pretty soon it's 6:00 A.M. and I have to get up for work at 10:00 A.M. I bite the bullet and do it anyway.

4. I'm so sick that I can barely get out of bed one morning, and I'm coughing up more phlegm than I've ever done in my life. I find out after the fact that I've slept 14 hours, and that makes me feel even more sick.

5. I'm over at my friend Lyra's house playing "I Never" with Caroline, Lyra, & Sholomon, and of course we start using all the sexual notions we know of the other. I am painfully reminded that it's been far too long (which leads to the next bit).

6. I'm lying on the floor of the living room far past the time that I should have been asleep, masturbating, trying to remember what it was like to have sex.

7. I'm so hungry that I force myself to eat something I don't want to reject (potato chips, frozen pizza, budget gormmet), and then I regret it for hours afterward.

8. I'm walking home late at night from wherever I've been off to with either or friend or just my walk man, and it's so dark and late that I actually begin to get a little nervous. I remember all the times that I used to do this all the time back in the day, when the streets were busy and there were people out that you could talk to and hang out with, but now the streets are empty and life is returning to normal, and I feel out of place and old.

9. I'm waiting for the bus to go to work, and my favorite crazy person is there to. He loves to wave at everyone, and anyone who doesn't wave back he flips them off. He asks me for a cigarette but won't accept it if it isn't a 1.00. He always carries a little tape deck with him and he always listens to country music that's good (Johnny Cash, Hank Williams Sr.), but one day he was listening to this song over and over again called, "Smoke That Cigarette." He starts swearing about something, and I try to let him have his fun because I can see the people coming that harassed him and tried to beat him up the other day.

10. I'm working on this 'zine, and it's turning out pretty good.

---

188 This was an idea that I would occasionally return to: the slice-o-life approach to painting a picture of what's happened recently. Eugene has always be a really odd town, with a higher "street-crazy" ratio than any other place I've ever been. I wanted to try and capture Eugene as well as I could in this little section, and feel like I managed to do a pretty decent job all things considered. All of this is true.

189 Probably the first time I openly mentioned masturbation in my 'zine. I know that a lot of people have given me a crooked look for doing this (here and in future issues), and I can't really defend my actions any better than I can my regular D&D habit. (I remember Kissu's girlfriend Glyndon gave me no end of shit about including this line in this issue and never really looked at me the same afterward.) It's just something I write about. I find it odd that a lot of people have told me they were always grossed out by the parts in my 'zine where I mention masturbating, when I find it odd that there aren't more people writing about it everywhere we go. It's more harmless than sex (wouldn't you rather know your kid is jerking off than having sex and potentially contracting horrible diseases?) and it often helps relax people and improve their quality of life. (Have you ever been around someone who just quit smoking? That's what it's like to hang out with people who don't masturbate.) Furthermore, there isn't anyone who doesn't do it... so why is everyone so freaked out when it comes to talking (or writing) about it? Sometimes it's funny...

My point being, everyone does it, porn is a huge and throbbing... I mean, thriving industry in the US... so what's the big deal? I don't know. All I know is that I write about it from time to time (much less often that I actually do it), and if you've gotten this far and you are suddenly freaked out by the mere mention of it, then what the hell are you doing reading this stuff anyway?
HAPPY HOLIDAYS.^{190}

1996 has brought a string of very unusual holidays, unusual for me that is. From New Year’s Eve (great party, Lyra) to Thanksgiving, all of my holidays have been shrouded in & odd aura of weird circumstances.

Fortunately, my two favorite Holidays were recent enough to recall clearly (those days being Halloween & Daylight Savings Time). For those keen on my story of “What I Did on Halloween,” you may want to skip to that article @ some point or another.

Not too long ago, I remember watching the TV Show “The Adventures of Pete & Pete.” This show was about two brothers both named Pete, & their adventures in the mundane world making those mundane things fun. There was an episode specifically about Daylight Savings Time, where the two Pete’s would, traditionally, wait for the point in time to set the clocks back one hour, then try w/ extreme effort (& humor) to do all the things they could possibly do on “borrowed time.”^{191}

I love this show because I used to have a Daylight Savings Time ritual too. When I was young, I’d stay up & wait for daylight savings time, & then search out every clock I could & set them back. Then I would wander the house, being the guardian of time, watching the world play catch-up. I was no longer part of “normal time.” I would have to do all sorts of silly things to make sure things were catching up (like make the cats fall through a hula hoop, which was the portal to “real time”). I had to do it. It was my duty to make sure everything was back to normal.

Unfortunately, nothing that interesting happened this year, or @ least not that interesting to someone as old as I was back then. After a day @ work, I met up w/ my friend Steve & his girlfriend Kate, & we went to go & get some coffee. After that, we went back to my apartment, watched some of The Hitchhiker’s Guide To The Galaxy, & called it a night.

All in all, a satisfying evening, but there was an absence of that childhood air that was present in the past. Before, each extra minute, each indulging breath, every sip of drink was magical because it was borrowed. It was new. It was stuck into our lives as mysterically & arbitrarily as all the other mystical & natural things we didn’t understand then, & it was our job to sort it out & figure out what it was for.

Now, however, everything seems to be more practical. “An extra hour of sleep?” I would think to myself. Or, “Wow, it’s Halloween! Time to hang out w/ my friends!” Whatever happened to trekking through the darkness & mist to visit the ghouls & goblins that would invariably give us candy? What happened to entering a time when the supernatural & the natural collided to create an evening of non-stop fun?

I theorize that these things are still present, but as we get older we don’t notice them as much. Santa Claus probably still exists, but a man of 21 can not still believe in him according to accepted belief. So I imagine that, in order to force him to fall in line w/ the rest, the Holiday Nazi’s confer w/ Cancer Man & “create” a story involving parents & Santa not being real. “Details aren’t important,” says Cancer Man. “Just make sure they get him to start acting normal.”

I can’t come up w/ any other explanation. It seemed like only a few short years ago that the world was this magical place where every trip to the Kitchen @ 12:00 A.M. had the “Mission Impossible” theme music behind it.

“Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to steal all the cookies... this voice w/ self-destruct in five seconds,” the man in your head would say. Suddenly, the door to your room opens, & you tip toe down the stairs.

“Dun... dun... dun... dun da dun. Dun... dun... dun... dun dun dun.” The stair near the bottom squeaks. Freeze. All else is silent. You back into the wall & peer around the corner, into the hall that leads to the kitchen. All’s clear.

This assignment would have been easier if they had given you some backup. But Mr. Teddy was a little busy, so it was just up to you.

The hallway is quiet. Too quiet. You stop when you’re almost @ the kitchen. Suddenly, a light comes on. Eyes adjust, muscles tighten. In one quick leap you dive into the bathroom & silently shut the door.

You peer through the cracks. It’s just dad, coming to get a drink of water. You relax a little... but not completely.

After the enemy has retreated, none the wiser of your existence, you steal away to the cupboard, retrieve the object of your mission, & get the hell out.

I don’t know about you, but that’s how I grew up. Holidays, of course, were just the icing on the cake. Sure, everything was magical naturally, but Holidays was when the magic was out in the open, looking you in the face.

I decided to live the next year completely magically. According to my theory, it’s all still there (otherwise, why would kids see it). Maybe if I spend a whole year believing in magic then it will be true. I can’t cope w/ being an adult anymore w/out having something else to occupy my time. Work, sleep, eat, shit. What kind of life is this? Why can’t I see the things that kids can see anymore?

Maybe if we all spend a year trying to be kids again, we’ll be better adults.^{192}

--G.M. 11/13/96

---

^{190} The Editor’s Note for I’d Buy That For A Dollar! #3.

^{191} I just found out in the last couple of months that this show is being re-run on cable (on some Nickelodeon spin-off station), and since I found this out have managed to catch a couple of episodes while over at my friend’s house (one of which was this exact episode). I’m surprised at how well the show has stood up over time, and that it’s still pretty damn funny to someone at 27. Who knew?

^{192} When I first sent some of my ‘zines to Aaron Comerbus for criticism, he specifically mentioned this one when he was making example of things I needed to improve on. He claimed that it was lacking because I failed to mention the importance of loosing an hour too. While I think he sort of missed part of the point (that Holidays, in general, are important to celebrate), I am hard-pressed to deny that he was right when he said I needed improvement.
Pretentiousness Scrabble by G.M. & Caroline Smith

This Article Is Dedicated To Mary Birmingham

We'll start this issue off w/ some good-old American drinking. One night I was out w/ my friend Caroline who was down from Portland & she wanted to go drinking. Now, to me, drinking involved going to the store, buying some beer (or whatever), going to a neutral location, & drinking the said alcohol in a way that isn’t destructive & doesn’t attract the police (often times, it is someone's house or apartment).

To Caroline, however, drinking involves going to bars. I'm not too keen on bars unless it's John Henry's, & even then I only like the place if there's a band playing. But I was up for trying something new for change, & we wandered down to Doc's Pad for some Guinness.

Immediately, we were bored to death. Watching people proved fruitless, for they were either under age w/ fake ID's trying to scam on the college girls, or they were in their 30's & rather rude to the waitresses w/ sexual innuendo & would stand out the door talking about how "Benny" was a good man for paying for that night's entertainment. To keep our minds occupied, we came up w/ a game called "Pretentiousness Scrabble."

The game works like this: each time a word (or phrase) from the list below is used in the normal flow of conversation (This works best if most of the players don't know what the phrases are), they get five points. Certain phrases are "double word scores" (10 points), & others are "triple words scores" (15 points). In addition to this, if a player adds the prefixes "Neo," "Proto," or "Post," the word is a "double word score" (in the circumstance of more than one prefix, the score would be counted cumulatively. For example: Neopostdisenfranchised Youth [not a valid word, mind you], would be worth 20 points ["double word score" for "post," & then double that for "Neo."]). In the case of phrases (more than one word), a 20 point score would also be awarded for Postdisenfranchised Neoyouth. If the suffix "ism" is added to a word (Example: disenfranchised youthism [not a valid word, mind you]), a double word score is awarded for that word or phrase.

I know these rules are complicated, but remember the name of the game we're playing here.

Next, the game must be played in a coffee shop or a classy bar. Optimal circumstances involve a scorekeeper to sit off to the side of a large group of fairly intellectual college students, & listen on their conversations. After they are ready to leave, whoever in the group has the most points afterward is the most pretentious person at the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bourgeoisie</th>
<th>Cyberpunk</th>
<th>Utilization of Hemp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systematic Oppression (&quot;triple word score&quot;)</td>
<td>Hacker</td>
<td>Alternative Ideologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics of Punk</td>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>Imperialistic Ideologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmodern (only five points)</td>
<td>Slacker</td>
<td>Libertarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proletariat</td>
<td>Twenty Something</td>
<td>Informed Anarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Epistemology</td>
<td>&quot;I Was High When...&quot;</td>
<td>Republican Ideology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riot Grrrl (important to leave out the &quot;i&quot;)</td>
<td>Multimedia Netweb</td>
<td>Cyberspace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo Marxism (only five points)</td>
<td>&quot;Surfing The Net&quot;</td>
<td>Avante - Guard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marxist - Leninist</td>
<td>Industrial Nation</td>
<td>Art Nouveau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deconstruction</td>
<td>Batcaving</td>
<td>Film Noir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradigm Subvergence</td>
<td>Cultural Symbiosis</td>
<td>Mineral Water</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Paradigmatic of the Infrastructure ("triple word score") | Disenfranchised Youth | "Responsibility as a Consumer"
| Information Superhighway | "Responsibility as a Consumer"

In addition to words & phrases, other ways to score pretentiousness points include making references to other things. If you make a vague reference (the vaguer, the better) to one of the following things, it is also worth five points (score 15 if no one else @ the table gets it):

Jack Keurac FOUCAULT Ayn Rand ROMAN POLANSKI Douglas Copeland
Heidigger JFK Assassination Feynman Cather In The Rye

Well, have fun w/ your new-found pretentious abilities! I'm sure in no time you will be able to move from a mere "slacker" to a "Neoprotoslacker."

---

193 This was Amber's mom, who not only a thorn in my side, but caused no end of headaches for Caroline, who was dealing with her because they were both "philosophy" students. This is one of my favorite collaborative pieces I've ever done (it's from issue #3). All these years later it's still very funny AND very pertinent. Who knew...

194 A minor reference to Kiisu's "Old Man Who Says 'Benny' A Lot" character. I don't know why, though... only he and I really get it.

195 Negativland fans: I wasn't mocking them, but referencing them. Talking about Negativland may be pretentious, but only to those who aren't down with C. Elliot Friday's presidential campaigns. It's takes a so-called ex-spurt for that, my friend. "Seat Be Sate!"
Part XV: One More Grand Fuck-Up

My plan had been to live with Kisuu & Glyndon until I could afford to get my own place, but fate had other plans for me. Kisuu’s parents decided to move to Reno, and offered him and Glyndon to not only live in the house they had previously lived in (the same one I had stayed in for a couple of weeks with Kisuu), but also gave them a car. They couldn’t pass up the opportunity, and instead of me looking for a place to stay, I inherited their basement apartment instead.

I made every effort to ensure that I kept that apartment, as it had a lot of history to it and was a fairly cheap place to live, too. But success was not yet in the cards for me. After a couple of different roommate changes and yet another job loss, the reality became clear: a couple days a week at The Bookstore was not going to pay the rent on time. By this time I knew the routine all too well, and was not surprised when people told me they were disappointed or that I would never be able to rent a place again. The words no longer seemed a threat to me, since no matter how many times I fucked up I was forgiven again when I had money to pay my bills on time. People were always willing to look past your mistakes with a single token (and prompt) payment. It was an important lesson to have pounded into my head: money is power, and for those who didn’t have it, the reasonable thing to do was sit back and start over again.

I managed to cash in a lot of favors that I had accumulated this time around, and arranged for a U-Haul storage locker to store my stuff in. Soon enough I had also scored a place to stay for the time being: with my friend Little Jon and his parents. This was not the best arrangement for any of us, but would have to work for the time being. Jon’s parents were JW, which had the effect of them making religion a part of the house without being creepy about bringing me into the fold. In a way, they were far too excited about having me in the house to try and convert me: Jon had long ago laid down the law about how he felt about things concerning church and whatnot, and he and his parents had developed an understanding regarding such things. While I did appear to be some fresh blood they could work on, they were always very polite and didn’t really seem to mind if I showed no interest in their religion whatsoever.

The house itself was a good place to live, and I had my own room as well (one thing about religious people: they are EXTREMELY hospitable to guests). I couldn’t smoke in the house, which was fine because it meant that the trouble of going outside to smoke resulted in me doing it less (thus saving money). I paid rent, though in all honesty I wasn’t always able to make the bills on time because of my own flakiness, stupidity, or selfishness. Money was still tight, so I did what I could and was thankful for their hospitality when I couldn’t.

Jon, myself and Lord Sinkhole (a good friend of Jon’s) began hanging out quite a bit, and together we tried to get jobs through a factory that manufactured computer hard drive discs (called HMT). Jon failed his drug test, though, so Lord Sinkhole and I became pretty good friends because of working together. The job consisted of 12 Hour shifts at night, running from 7 P.M. to 7 A.M. The pay was insanely high and the work week was fairly agreeable (4 days on, 4 days off, 3 days on, 3 days off). It was the first time that my second job (to supplement my Bookstore job) actually paid well enough to keep me afloat. With my paychecks from that job I was able to buy records, food, pay rent, and really live it up. The problem became that, even though I had more money than I’ve ever had in the past, if you don’t see your friends and you live with another’s parents, does making decent money matter?

The answer was no, and I went back and forth between being happy that I had money and being sad about my job. Often times, I would blow my whole check on records or food or beer and not pay the miniscule rent I owed to Jon’s parents. I was not in the best mindset, even though I was on the road to being independent again if I could just buckle down.

A lot of the moodiness also came from an age-old source: girls. Amber and I had been over with for a long time, and I was going crazy with thoughts revolving around dating someone else. The one minor-success I had in that area made the situation worse, too. I went on a date with her that essentially lasted a week, and after that we were only together for a few additional weeks before she called me to tell me it just wasn’t working out. In a way, it was good: her roommate was dating Mondale Chris, and while we didn’t seem to be getting along with our girlfriends, we met each other and maintain a very solid friendship to this day. Still, the fact remained: I was hopelessly single and running out of ideas. To fill the void, Lord Sinkhole, Jon & I drank a lot of late-night coffee and pontificated on things like, “did you see that episode of The Simpsons.” Good times, but the nights all sort of blend together when you do that every day.

It was under these circumstances that issues #4 & #5 were put together. Both Lord Sinkhole & Jon had helped out with the printing / stapling / collating / folding of the previous two issues, but it was around here that they were really a part of the ‘zine from step one on up. Both of these issues contained cartoons by Lord Sinkhole, and a portion of the text contains inside jokes / references that related to our daily lives. Looking at them now, both of these issues sort of have a “claustrophobic” feel to them, something that I can’t really explain any better than to say it feels like the ideas inside them had sprouted to fill the interior without much room to fully develop or reach their potential. Still, it was something that I could turn to no matter how crappy I felt about my current situation; my ‘zine would always be there for me, much like a bottle of bourbon, a coffee cup or a damp cigarette.

These issues were both fairly well distributed, too. Issue #4 was, ostensibly, the “drugs” issue, with various anecdotes and stuff relating to drug use (mostly my own). Issue #5 is the “punk” issue, and I actually managed to locate quite a lot of material by other people on the subject. However, for this collection I’ve included stuff that has little to do with drugs or punk. I probably distributed over 50 or so copies of each of these issues (maybe more, maybe less). It was probably much easier in those days, since each issue was only 5 sheets of Xeroxed “legal size” paper, then folded in half. These days I push 10 or 12 pages in that format, more or less letting the size of the articles (and not the ‘zine) dictate how much goes in or not. I would probably be bad-pressed to write something as small as I did back then. While my writing still hasn’t gotten to a point where I feel (in hindsight) that it was getting “good”, I was definitely tinkering with ideas / concepts and styles that would later become more refined, and something I’m not embarrassed to show people.
I'd Buy That for a Dollar!

Drugs & Punk, Eh? Kiisu did the design/layout for issue #4, ostensibly the “drugs” issue. The image was something that he had created on his own, while he and I still lived in the basement together (on some night where everyone was on acid or speed or mushrooms, I think). The “logo” was dropped in, by him, after I asked him for a cover design for this issue. The original was in color, but this was a black and white print. I wanted to locate the original .JPG file for this collection, but it’s lost (to my knowledge). I did the layout/design for issue #5. The image comes from the cover for the soundtrack to Decline of Western Civilization (it’s Darby Crash).

NOSTALGIA & IHOP:196

I’ve been frequenting IHOP again lately. Yes, I know. IHOP. We all loathe it. After I had discovered that briefly popular yet not-very-successful Downtown Café (now re-named Sandinos197... for old school Eugeners, this could be the return to a new age... but that’s another story), I swore to never return. But midnight coffee will always draw you back, eventually. It’s like a magnet... or maybe just a bad habit.

I tried to avoid it. IHOP is the worst coffee house in Eugene. Period. There is an hour limit. The food is always expensive and the specials always run out the minute you sit down. Not only that, but the smoking section is so small that one could spend an entire night sitting in the non-smoking section (smoking in shifts outside) before you even get looked at by the waitress. And generally, that means she’s going to kick you out.

---

196 The “Editor’s Note” from I’d Buy That For A Dollar! #4. I had to completely re-type this from the originals I had printed up in 1997, since the files that comprised the bulk of this issue were long-since damaged. You don’t know how hard it was to not re-write it while I was doing that.

The IHOP I’m talking about is the one on Broadway that was sort of shaped like a house. We called it the “House IHOP”, which made sense to us. It was one of the few IHOPs that was actually open 24 Hours a day, as the other ones in town closed early (which, in my mind, is not a real IHOP... but what do I know?)

197 While I was only able to go there once, the Sandinos near the UofO campus was legendary among my friends, and shortly after the one time I went there it closed down (to my knowledge, my actually going there had little to do with it’s actual closing... I hope). This new Sandinos location was right next to the old John Henry’s location (John Henry’s was a local bar where a lot of cool shows happened, but sadly they were all 21 and over, which meant I missed a lot of stuff for many years). The new Sandinos was a lot of fun, and at first had one of the single greatest jukeboxes I’ve ever heard. The food was great (most items named after local bands) and a lot of cool people worked there (like, my now-friend Ransom, whom at the time was just a guy who worked there who was, nonetheless, really neat). Sandinos went the way of a lot of fun cafes/bars, in that it just couldn’t afford to be open any more (let alone pay their employees). Still, it’s important to remember places like that and seek out new ones when you have a chance to make your town a better place. Do it! (Okay, I’m off my soapbox now.)
So I bummed around. I turned to watching movies at home for a while. Then I started drinking more than I had before.

Then I just quit going out. I figured I didn't need socialization or anything like that. All I needed was my two jobs, no friends, and nothing to do. I quickly found myself turning to senseless vandalism.

But sill, I persisted in my stubborness. I would not return to IHOP. I had frequented that establishment every single f**king night with my friend Olaf D. Neepier when he lived here. It was even a stop on the long winding path we took the first time I ever did acid. Olaf and I, wondering around, and we knew that we'd end up somewhere familiar sooner or later. And IHOP it was.

I remember sitting on the curb outside talking to him, telling him that I wasn't getting anything visual from it. "Is that normal for the first time?" I asked.

"Can I have a cigarette?" I turned around and saw this ugly creature standing in the middle of traffic while keeping his feet conveniently on the edge of the curb a few feet from me, with his face right next to mine. I fumbled for my cigarettes while keeping my eyes locked on him. All I could see was this creature standing in traffic, hand reached out like he was ready to strangle me.

I nervously handed him a cigarette. Pools of car and road swirling around his head. He snatched the stagie and practically crumbled the cigarette in the process of putting it in his mouth. And then he lit the cigarette.

A slow-motion camera pan to his hand that produced a lighter from nowhere.

One flick.

Two flicks.

Three flicks.

The lighter exploded with sparks that streaked to the horizon and back, igniting the air itself. His face glowed like a monster in heat. Somehow his cigarette was smoking. He smiled and looked at me like he was about to confide in me that he was Satan himself.

And then the light went out and we were back on the curb, and Olaf was talking to Safety Pin Man about some spoken word Jello Biafra song, while this older Vietnam vet was waving at me appreciatively from the sidewalk with a bent cigarette hanging from his lips.

Later on, when Olaf and I began the long descent down, we were drinking coffee at IHOP when the same vet sat back down with us and began to go off about how he wanted to kill all the senators and that his van wasn't licenced because he didn't believe in those laws and that he could tell our futures if we were interested.

To quote a friend, "Oh... The Memories." Okay, so that night was pretty cool. We had some fun. But it's time to move on. IHOP has changed. Things are different. To pass the time, we hung our hats at Carrow's.

But I can't get comfortable at Carrow's, can you? I mean, it's so relaxing, and laid back. The waitresses are nice and they actually refill your coffee for you (well, at least they do on the nights they choose to seat you). Where's the adventure in that? You don't get to flag down the already-irate waitress, and you don't have to force them to actually acknowledge you even exist. And what if I like the claustrophobic insanity of mall-rats and hippies and bikers and all the other kind of people that make IHOP what it is?

So I guess that's why I started going back to IHOP. There's a lot more to it than that, though. I mean, a few chance decisions... “What do you want to do?” “We could go to IHOP?” “Okay.” Whoever said it first is not all that important anymore, because once you go back, you come back. IHOP is just like our hometowns. We can leave, but we always come back.

---

199 This is actually Colin. He occasionally would use this pseudonym for one reason or another, and rather than incriminate him (at the time) I opted to use this name instead. It was the first time I really started referring to my friends using “zine” names, something that would reach silly proportions in future issues. I myself ended up getting a few “zine” names myself from my friends who also wrote ‘zines (among them are: Sex Cat [from the ‘zine Heuyos Rancheros], Bookstore Boy [from GyrX Presents] and Emo Boy [from Plasma Whore] ). It’s much better than some ‘zine names I had before that, such as “asshole” or “shit-head.”

200 In the original version of this piece, the font in this section was called “Scribble,” and it was something I’d been given along with some program that I have long since lost. This is about as close as I can get to that same style without being really obnoxious. This one used here is called “Comic Sans MS.”

201 This was another guy we all hung out with who I have long since lost contact with. We called him Safety Pin Man (or Jeff, or The Philosopher From Hell, or whatever his new kick was that week). He was your typical weird college kid who liked a lot of industrial music and had money to blow on a huge record collection. He would get his hair professionally dyed blue on a regular basis and had that “shaved on the sides with the hair in a pony tail” haircut that was really popular back then. I was with him on his first two acid trips, which was fun. He used to be in Cathead (as a “percussionist” using shopping carts and the like), but eventually we kicked him out. I haven’t seen him in years.

202 Kiisi is who I’m quoting. He had made a tape with him saying that shortly after a teaser bit of “Blister in The Sun” played, a reference itself to a night when he was on acid and had heard that song over and over again. In case you didn’t already know, my ‘zine is essentially one huge inside joke that only I get. Ha ha ha! Thanks for buying!
I sit and I look at the people around the place, and I remember the other nights I spent there. Some times I was dosed (this is the drugs issue after all), but most of the time I was sober... or as sober as you can get drinking IHOP coffee.

I remember going to coffee with girls. A painful realization comes across me: every woman I’ve ever had sex with has had coffee with me at the exact same IHOP. In fact, one night I was a coffee with three of them all at once. I retrace the nights in my mind. Every single night identical, and yet there’s something about it that I can’t quite get out of my head. There’s something different this time.

I look again. I’m sitting at the same table the Vietnam vet told me I’d find happiness in my future. There’s my friends and they’re all talking about music and movies and all the stories about our lives that have become all reference and no action. The waitresses are still there, glaring at us and wondering when we’ll leave. What is it?

Why do I keep coming back?
Who knows. I never will. There’s no need to rationalize things like this. They just happen. If for no other reason, I guess the real reason I go back to IHOP is that IHOP has taught me two very important lessons.
1.) Life is a constant cycle.
2.) You can’t stay longer than an hour unless you order something.
And those lessons hold true everywhere I go.

I look around again, and it hits me what it is that has changed about IHOP: I’m a little older, a little wiser, and the coffee is a little weaker.

G.M. 1/18/97

|---------------------------------------------------------------|

/==================================================================\
| It’s Not Fair... by G.M. |
\==================================================================/
first in other areas too, but in my stupidity I gave that right and privilege to someone I'd rather not remember. But, back to the point. She was my first girlfriend and I was on top of the world.

We actually got along rather well. There was only one major problem in our relationship at first, and that was that her friends didn't seem to like me, and my friends didn't seem to like her. Typical. We both grew up being outcasts even among friends. I guess it really shouldn't have stopped after we met each other.

We dated for a year and a month, if I remember correctly, and in that time a lot happened. I was two grades ahead of her in school, so I graduated from High School, started college, got kicked out of my house and got my first real apartment in that time. It may sound like the average life for some, but for me I was stressed out. I have never, even when life was easier, been able to handle more than a few responsibilities at a time, and the thought of paying bills, being the technical guardian of my brother, going to school, working, and trying to have a social life was driving me crazy. I started to just go nuts.

It was around here that I really started to abuse our relationship. Of course, over time I've tried over and over to come up with, in my head, a set of circumstances that actually made sense to me that I never once actually tried to remember what actually happened, but I'm sure that I was a pretty big jerk and I deserved what I got.

By the time I saw her at The Pretzel Maker, I had thought about her pretty regularly, and though we had seen and talked to each other and communicated in the meantime, I constantly felt as if there was a sense of there not being a final end to our relationship. I may have just forgotten it intentionally, but when I left for Oregon City way back when and she stayed in Cottage Grove after our break up, we both seemed to have a lot of feelings that never got tied up, and weather or not they were good or had was not the point. The point was they needed to be taken care of.

When I got home from the Pretzel Maker that day I called her and asked her if she wanted to join me for coffee that evening, and she accepted. If things got hairy, I had also arranged for other friends to show up. I didn't intend to be rude or anything, but I was planning on telling her how I felt about the way things ended way back when, which could have created some potential problems. But the entire time we were alone I could not, for the life of me, bring myself to say anything. Not even a simple, "You know, I really miss you... even after all this time." I chickened out. At the very least I wanted to say, "I'm sorry." But I couldn't even think of a way to say that. How do you bridge a conversation like that when it's almost four years old?

Eventually my friends showed up and she left (again, typical of our seeing each other), and I was left with a sour taste in my mouth. It wasn't fair that after all this time she could make me feel so empty inside. This time I intended to finally tie off the tubes that she left open when she broke up with me, and instead I started noticing how they were empty and that was what was really bothering me.

I tried to forget about it and just go one with my life. There are hundreds of girls in Eugene. I'm smart, I'm mature (now), I'm doing (somewhat) reasonable in my financial situation. That should have made me pretty eligible, but of course in reality none of that works.

After months, I got the courage to call her again. I figured that I'd meet with her, we'd talk, and eventually I'd broach the subject. "Do you remember back when we used to date? Well, I really did some stupid shit. I said a lot of stupid things and I did a lot of stupid things. And when I left... and even after I moved back and started living in Eugene... I still really cared about you. All this time I've been thinking of ways that I could let you know that, though things can never be the way they were again, I know I was an asshole and I really wish I had done things differently. Hopefully, we can at least be good friends." I'd probably throw in a few more, "I'm sorry,"'s for good measure.

Well, I was late meeting her at IHOP. And again I chickened out. But this time she was more open with me about her life. She gave me more glimpses of what she's been doing and what she's been up to this whole time. All this time I had become so concerned with me getting over this whole situation, and trying to patch things up with her, and it suddenly dawned on me that she had probably already done that for herself and didn't even need to have the situation brought up again.

Again, this was par for our relationship. She was always better than me at getting things done.

I sat thinking about her, while I let my mouth run off about things I'd done in the last few months. I told her about friends that we had known from back then and I talked about band stuff and I talked about anything but what was really on my mind.

Before she left, she asked me to go on a walk with her, and I was suddenly lost for things to give my mouth to say. I wanted to just turn it on automatic and hope that I could hold a straight face while I told her how I felt, but it was too late. There really seemed to be no point.

I walked her back to her car and I tried not to follow her with my eyes as she left. I knew that I would just start quoting Han Solo when the hyper drive stops working. My eyes watered up a bit, but I dried them. I walked into IHOP and sat down with some friends that had come in a little before we went for our walk. In the back of my head, my favorite Wipers song Han would have liked drowned out the noise of the restaurant...
I got off of the bus & it was raining. It’s always raining, though, so there was no surprises there, though sometimes I wish that I had moved to California or Idaho like I said I was going to so many years ago. @ least I wouldn’t have to put up w/ the goddamned rain anymore.

The bus splashed a small puddle on my leg as I tried to get my last cigarette lit. I had no clue where I was in reality, but I knew for a fact that the paranoia of accidentally going too far on the bus, thus missing my stop, caused me to arrive @ least 2 miles away from where I wanted to be. As if to punctuate this thought, thunder rumbled in the distance.

I snaked my way through the labyrinth of deep west Eugene, all the while trying to piece together through the industrial sounds of factories nearby a coherent plan for the day that followed. I would definitely have to do laundry to clean the 1 shirt & tie I had for my job, which meant I either had to wake up really fuckin’ early or get bitched @ my boss about appearance. No rest for the weary, I assumed. 7 A.M. it was.

I thought that I would have to do something about not having any $ for food. It was bad enough that I had to borrow $ for the bus, but how could I justify $ for food? I felt bad that the people I was staying w/ even let me have a room. I’m sure they would jump @ the chance to buy me a full 8 course meal for lunch. & then what? Return the karma? To who? How? When?

I guess it doesn’t matter. Some people would be happy to live in a situation where the “landlords” went out of their way to treat the guest like a member of the family. & all I can think about is guilt. Maybe I should join 1 of those religions where they hand out guilt like it was going out of style.

I wandered around for what seemed like hours in the rain, w/ no cigarettes left to keep me company. I guess it didn’t matter that I didn’t have them, because the rain & wind probably have defeated the purpose of even smoking them. But the image of a cigarette was what kept me going, because my friend Jon would have 1 when I got to his house – the house I was staying @ – & he couldn’t refuse me a cigarette. Not after the rain I’d walked through.

I opened the door to the house & looked as if I’d come home from a war beneath the ocean. Jon’s parents (the “landlords”) hardly tore their stare away for the TV in the living room. They simultaneously said, “Hi,” & went back to their business. I did my best to clean up what mess my clothes made, & scurried off to my room in search of warmth & clean clothes.

Jon came in & we performed our pre-recorded routine of, “How was work,” “Shitty,” “That’s Cool,” “Etc.” until I was re-clothed enough to satisfy my needs. Jon did have a cigarette. We went out back, underneath the bit of the roof that extended over the concrete, & smoked in silence. I couldn’t even begin to tell him how I felt, what w/ the weather & the misjudged bus stop & whatnot. He seemed to pick it up anyway.

“Think it’s getting close to time to give my parents some more $... for rent, ya know.”

I nodded quietly to myself, remembering the exact total of the $ in my wallet ($0.00), & used the equation I had worked out in my head for determining the amount of $ that would be left in my checking account too (which was, coincidentally, also $0.00). My next check was about a week away.

This was the fifth place I’ve lived in over the last 2 years. Of those, not a 1 was in my name. I had long since ruined my renting credibility due to a fouled up situation in Cottage Grove, & Milwaukee (Oregon), respectively. I couldn’t rent a movie, even if I had a cosigner.

It was always the same story: I could get the move in cost saved up if the people I was staying w/ prior to the move didn’t mind my couch surfing w/out paying rent. Then I’d be set for a few months until my shitty job would get so bad that they’d either fire me or I’d quit, then I’d stick around until it was just no longer possible, & I’d scramble to find a new storage locker & a new floor space to take up until I could repeat the process.

Over time I realized that it was never that the rent was too much, or that I was unable to come up w/ the $. The problem was that the shitty jobs I always inevitably got were just too shitty. I managed to get 1 good job in all the time I’ve lived in Eugene, & that was @ a bookstore. God, I love the bookstore. & it even pays the same as all the shitty jobs I’ve had.

& that’s the catch 22. Do I want to get a really shitty job that I know I will lose or quit in a few months, that I know I will hate & loathe w/ all my heart & soul, based on the knowledge that I will get enough hours to pay bills, or do I stick w/ the 1 day a week I will get @ the bookstore & be a happy, miserable, homeless man?

So I hit the street, looking for 1 shitty job after another, never having enough $ in the meantime to ever really get by, but just enough to stay out of the mission.

I once got the bright idea that I could go back to school. When I had gone to Lane, I was eligible for the work-study program via my financial aid. W/ all that $ coming in, I didn’t even have to have a job, & in conjunction w/ the food stamps, I lived pretty comfortably. But, like everything else in my life, I fucked up. I failed 1 class my second term. Nothing too big, except I lost my

---

To my knowledge, this piece has never been published. I don’t submit a lot of material to other ‘zines mostly because I am very protective of everything that I write, and a lot of stuff I work on is so personal I really want to make it fit into my own projects. But while I was living with Little Jon I saw a flyer on a telephone pole that was advertising a new ‘zine that wanted submissions. I had the idea for this piece bouncing around in my head, so I hammered it out and sent it to the address on the flyer. I got a postcard back saying it would be in the first issue, and that he would send me a copy as soon as it was done. I never heard back from him. I looked around town for the ‘zine thinking that he might have just forgotten about mailing it, but never found anything. I’ve hung on to this piece, though, because I really liked it and thought I had touched on something here that I hadn’t really nailed very well elsewhere. So, here it is, for the first time in print! (How lucky you are!) This was written before Lord Sinkhole and I got jobs at HMT, mind you (for chronology’s sake).
financial aid. No financial aid, no work study. No work study, no $ & no matter how hard you try, you can’t pay rent w/ food stamps.

Of course, if I paid off the cost of the class (essentially, retake it & pay for it), I could get financial aid again. But how can I afford that when I can’t even afford rent? & let me tell you, it’s getting harder & harder to lie on those food stamp applications. They make even applying for them any more like going to the dentist, minus the anesthesia.

I tried to forget about the $ matters. What did it matter, really? Just more shit to add to the pile, anyway, & I for 1 could fertilize a large field w/ mine. I went into my room & tried to read, but the book wouldn’t stay still & I couldn’t get comfortable on the bed I was using. Between all my shitty beds that I’ve owned, all the homelessness I’ve battled, & all the rooms I’ve been allowed to stay in over my life, I estimated the last comfortable night’s sleep I got was in 1989. I was 14 that year. Freshman in high school. It was the last year I remember not worrying about anything but what to watch on TV & who to hang out w/ after school. Before girls. Before “clique” wars. Before sports, drinking, drugs, music, fancy clothes, neat haircuts, & a GPA that would get you into a good college.


Lord Sinkhole called Jon & asked if we where interested in going out to do something. Jon & I both knew what the inevitable was, so we said yes anyway w/ the understanding that collectively, we really couldn’t afford more than 3 coffees. Lord Sinkhole picked us up, & Jon mumbled something about coming home eventually to his parents who seemed to care about this only in theory.

We sat @ IHOP® & stared @ each other for as long as possible. It wasn’t that we didn’t like each other or that we were upset about anything particular. It was more to the effect that for the last 2 months, this was all we did w/ our lives. We worked our shit jobs, we bitched about how we hated everything in the world, & we went to IHOP® to attempt to stimulate ourselves w/ @ the very least, a conversation about what we’d done that day.

But we had even exhausted that topic of conversation in the car ride over. Occasionally Jon would bring up something about a TV show we had all seen, or a movie we had all seen, or an inside joke we all shared. But we never actually talked about anything other than previous events & conversations. I envisioned that in another month, we would end up talking about the night we talked about nothing but other conversations, movies, & TV. It reminds me of a sticker I saw on a lamp post outside Kinko’s, “If this sentence were self-referential, it would be.”

I stared @ the rain & watched the world outside get shit poured on it for a change, as apposed to it pouring shit on me. It was 1 of those moments that would show me w/ my chin on my arms, resting on the table through a soft focus lens were it a made for TV movie. It hit me that I am 22 & in that instant I felt like either crying or breaking things. 22 & do I have to show for it? Single, Penniless, nearly homeless, might as well be jobless. Have I even accomplished a single thing in my life that puts me @ par w/ the average young adult? I didn’t even know how I was going to get to work the next day. How was I supposed to have my economic & social life straightened out by now?

I wiped away a few tears & told Lord Sinkhole I was ready to go. He was about exhausted too, & though I can never quite tell w/ Jon I assumed he was pretty sick of the non-existent IHOP® scene as well. We drove back the exact way we came, this time in silence. We said out goodbyes, & though Jon & I now lived together for some reason the goodbye seemed like it was appropriate. Jon & I were friends before I lived w/ him. But for some reason, after you live w/ some 1 for so long, everything changes. Yeah, you’re still friends, but the attitudes have switched & the friendship is never as strong as it was @ first.

I didn’t even bother taking my clothes off or setting the alarm. I just fell straight on my bed & tried not to think about anything else. I failed miserably & cried myself to sleep.

The next day I didn’t get my clothes clean before work. My boss gave me the usual lecture...

| Part XVI: The Lost Issue. |

People with a keen eye, good memory, or half-way decent clerical skills will notice that something is pretty fishy about the offered back-issues I mention in IBTFAS!: there is no issue #6. No one has ever pressed the “issue” (so to speak), nor questioned me as to why it’s not available, so thus far I have never had to make excuses for it. But, in all honesty, the reason it’s not available is pretty straightforward: I never finished it. Or, more to the point, I finished the text, but never finished putting together the actual issue itself.

| 205 I should probably establish, for the record, that Lord Sinkhole was originally known as, “Shane With No Last Name.” However, I inadvertently learned what his name was (I had vowed never to), and started calling him this instead. He was a volunteer DJ at KWVA (the college radio station in Eugene), and I sat in with him a few times before I finally got my own show. (I had long ago applied for a show along with Colin, but we were never called back… when I followed up with the station after Lord Sinkhole started DJing, they looked at my application and said, “I wonder why we turned you down… yeah, you can DJ.” Shorted after The Ramen City Kid returned from Europe, he followed in my footsteps.) I DJed there for about a year before I gave it up because of the time problem (I was on at 4 A.M. to 6 A.M., and later from 2 A.M. to 4 A.M.). Lord Sinkhole, however, was a DJ for almost six years. My show was called, “The Church of Blasphymus (Not Jesus) Hour,” which was funny since I was on for two hours. Yeah, no one else laughed at that either. |

| 206 For the record, my friend Colin put that sticker up. It didn’t last that long, though. It’s gone now. Sigh. |
Here's why: While I was living with Little Jon I was having loads of fun working at HMT. I mean, you can't believe how fun it really is! Imagine staring at the same machine and operating it for 12 solid hours (with occasional breaks). Then some guy taps you on the shoulder, you go home, eat some food, and before you really get a chance to do anything else, it's time to go to work again. So you go, see that same guy, tap him on the shoulder, and now he leaves. He's been there that whole time you were sleeping and eating and resting. Let that sink in. Now do it 3 or 4 days a week. After a while, you start to loose it.

I worked there for a few months solid. I will be honest: I made a SHITLOAD of money. But that doesn't change the reality of why you make that much money, and eventually it really got to me. I finally lost it. I got sick (actually, genuinely ill) and took a lot of time off. When I had finally recovered, Colin, who had moved to Ashland by this time to be with his woman, came to visit me, and we hung out quite a bit. Eventually it was time to go back to work, and Colin needed to get back to Ashland, so I forced myself to get some sleep and I tried my best to do my job after all that time off. But I still felt like crap... not physically, but emotionally. I was confused and distraught and rarely got to see my friends. My whole life was passing me by, and I was really loosing perspective about what was important and what wasn't all so I could be financially secure.

In the middle of my shift at work, I told my boss I was still sick and went home. I slept a few hours, then made elaborate plans to leave town. It didn't matter that I didn't really know where I was going or how I was going to get to be, I just made the decision and went with it. I withdrew all the money I had in my checking accounts, closed the accounts, got my tongue pierced, said goodbye to everyone, and left to hang out in Portland for a while. I just got the fuck out of town without a thought to where I would stay or what I would really do. It was an absolute blast. I still didn't have a decent job (save the two days a week at The Bookstore), or a place to live, or a girlfriend, or anything else for that matter. But I had a vacation from that shit, and I felt a lot better afterward.

Now, this might seem like a stupid and irresponsible thing to do, and you are 100% right. However, the really weird part was that, when I got back, everything fell into place for me without even trying. I went back to The Bookstore to see if I could get more hours, and two people had quit, effectively making me third in the chain of command (earning me a enough money to get by without a second job for the first time I started working for them). When I contacted my friend Lyra in an attempt to hang out, she informed me they were looking at an apartment and needed a filler roommate for a few months. Nothing permanent, but enough to give me a roof over my head until I could find something better, and with the increased pay / hours at The Bookstore, I could afford to do just that when the time came. I even met a girl shortly after that who I ended up dating for over a year, and at the time I was really happy with our relationship. With a snap, I was doing better than I had been since I was kicked out of my mom's house.

Conclusion? Hard to say. From the sounds of it, recklessly throwing caution to the wind and quitting your job to blow money on things you don't need in another town will, apparently, pay off in the form of a better job, a new house, and a girlfriend who really likes to fuck a lot. Some people would say that is a bad way of looking at things, and I would agree with those people if it weren't for the fact that something very similar also happened to me very recently. I guess the real point is that the universe prefers to keep me in a state of confusion. If I was resigned to doing something stupid because I know my life sucks, it instead provides me with a better situation just to spite my negative attitude. I'm sure that if I was looking at the world with a positive attitude I'd loose my job, girlfriend, house, dog and friends within a few short weeks (just like in a country song). Story of my life.

Anyway. I decided to document this “adventure” in issue #6 of my 'zine as one continuous story, unlike the other issues which were just collections of shorter pieces running all together. After consulting with my friend Jack (who worked at the Bookstore with me), he agreed that he would illustrate parts of the story for me (something I was really excited about, considering he is a comic artist at Dark Horse™ who probably gets paid well for those kinds of jobs elsewhere). This wouldn't be the first time I'd worked with him: he gave me a piece of design work he'd done to insert in issue #5, and later would do the cover for one of the many tapes Cathead released. I finished up the text and gave it to him to illustrate, and in return I got a few of the drawings. But since he had other work to do, I never pressed him, and instead just told him to take his time.

Eventually too much time had passed. I'd written a lot of stuff for future issues, and he was still not done. I thought about printing the issue without his drawings, but I wanted to give him the chance since we were both excited about the idea. Eventually I realized that this project would always take a back-seat to his work he was doing for Dark Horse™. That was fine by me; I thought his comic (Devil Chef) was way better than my 'zine anyway. But I didn't really want to abandon the text I'd spent a lot of time on.

Eventually I went ahead and made issue #7, thinking that when Jack had a chance to finish the drawings I would just print Issue #6 late. However, Jack and I lost touch with each other soon afterward. He stopped working at the Bookstore and began working a lot more on other stuff. I stopped calling him because he was always very busy and I didn't want to seem like a stalker. Finally, we just stopped hanging out. It wasn't anything I had against him, or that either of us were mad or upset. We were just very busy with our own lives and didn't have the time to hang out. I understood completely, even if I did miss him (he was pretty awesome and told great stories). These days he occasionally donates drawings to The Portland Mercury, and (to my knowledge) still draws Devil Chef.

So the following text has never seen print anywhere before. These are selected sections from issue #6 that I thought would fit well into this collection. Eventually (fingers crossed) I'd like to take what I have for this issue and just run it as-is (with a cover that Colin drew up as well). But other stuff has always taken precedent. Looking at it now, I wonder if I should really bother. After all, these six chunks are the best bits (in my opinion) and the rest isn't really that good. Sigh.
Some Kind of Intro Thingy:

To some degree, each individual person is like a miniature culture (just go w/me on this one). Each person, over time, develops his own traditions, his own food creations (specific to his culture), his own history as to where he came from & what it all means, & most importantly, his own myths.

Myths are important, in any culture, because they help you develop a sense of understanding of your own past. The Greeks would not have done, or accomplished, anything that they did if they hadn’t believed in gods in one form or another. The fact that, today, they no longer believe in those myths, or @ least are aware that they are, indeed, myths, is something one can attribute to a decline in mankind’s own development as a race.

That seems to be a pretty severe accusation, but to an extent it is true. When I was younger, I believed that stage magicians were really magicians, able to contort & create reality in ways that were fully beyond my comprehension. I would try very hard to do the magic that they did, & even @ one point wanted to be a magician. That was my occupational choice.

The choice changed from that to astronaut when I learned that they didn’t really do “magic.” They did “tricks.” The difference, I guess, is so subtle that these days, even as a collective we are aware of the fact that there is no such thing as magic in the traditional sense, we still call the “tricks” “magic.” The only rationalization I have for this is that we want to believe, but we have undisputed proof against it.

But the point is, my life changed when the myth that I believed was proven to be just that: a myth. The magicians that I swore were real were actually just illusions, & though it seemed real @ the time is was just a trick. Around this time was when I started watching a lot of science fiction movies, NASA launches, & kept fantasizing about being one of the first men on Mars.

The revelation of facts as myths can ruin the person you were & yet @ the same time we continue to build our collection of both to define who we are & what we believe in to gauge what we will do in the future.

Everyone has myths that they incorporate into their own cultures, detrimentally or otherwise. It could be the mythic road trip you took 6 months ago, where you thought that you might have seen Momma Cass pumping gas into your car from your point of view @ the counter. Or it could be simpler than that: the day it snowed & you & your friends participated in the biggest snowball fight you can remember.

Both events have the one commonality that they meant more to you afterward than @ the time it actually occurred. The fact that my dad was taking me to see a magician never impressed me @ the time. I really could care less, then, because more likely that not my mind was dead set on playing one on my many imaginary games in some dirt pile somewhere. But afterward, the story I told of me seeing the magician was what kept me going. Retelling it, to myself, to others, to anyone who would listen, meant more to me than the world.

Stories become more important than events. We almost never remember an event in it’s entirety until something happens that turns it into a story. Doing laundry becomes, “That Time You Were Questioned By The Police Because A Guy Robbed The Convenience Store Next Door,” & riding the bus becomes, “That Time That Really Crazy Woman Thought You Were Her Husband & Started Talking About Your Kids Who Are In Prison.” The story you tell, or the story that you have afterward that you can tell, always become more important. It becomes a part of your own psychology, your own mythology.

My Spring Break in Portland has grown in my culture to that size. @ the time I didn’t know what I was doing. I just did what I felt like doing. I really needed to get away from my job permanently, & I needed to spend the money I had that I knew I wouldn’t ever have again because of quitting my job. I had no clue that afterward I would need to catch so many people up on where I had been that week, & that in doing so the story would stick w/me, through thick or thin, longer than any of the trip ever did.

In a way this issue is to help catch those people who know me up on what really happened that week. The Spring Break Portland Myth that is now part of my life is one that I draw on a lot these days. It is, to me, a story of having fun, of enjoyment, & of making a few really obvious & necessary observations. In the long run, I guess to me it doesn’t really matter that the trip ever actually happened.

What is important is that I remember the myth the way that I need to... to make my own life that much better.

--G.M. 5/16/97

Excerpt I:

Having (un)successfully defeated the illness (finally), I was ready to return to the land of the living, & though it would seem convenient to have recovered exactly when work was over, I was honestly well enough to meet my friend Colin @ the train station Friday morning.

I went to the train station @ 12:00 P.M. to meet my long lost friend. Colin was not arriving by train, actually. He had driven the distance from Talent (near Medford) to Eugene. His reasoning for meeting me @ a train station was because his girlfriend, who drove up w/him, needed to take the train to Seattle. However, there was an unspoken 1920’s sort of cool about meeting Colin there, something that, though we never said anything about it, was a pretty suave thing to do.

Now I’ve known Colin as long as I’ve lived in Eugene... in fact, a little longer than that. When we first met, we immediately hit it off well, & we would just hang out for hours together, listening to music, or talking about movies, or just driving around in his
Orange Bug, listening to "Pablo Picasso" with our dorky sunglasses on & the windows rolled down all the way.²⁰⁷ We were really close friends, & for a period of time in our lives, there wasn’t a single day that we didn’t hang out together. If one of our past times hadn’t been talking about girls we’d like to be dating, I’m sure we would have been dating each other eventually.

Well, all of this was before I met my last girlfriend & he met his current. It’s hard to keep a close friendship like that going when you’ve got someone in your life that means just as much to you, & eventually, I just had to cut down on the time spent w/ Colin to fit in my current girlfriend. This caused a few problems for a while, but eventually, Colin met Naticia, & soon I was calling him up wondering when I would ever get to hang out w/ him again. Payback’s a bitch, even if it’s unintentional.

Colin chose to move in w/ his girlfriend, who lived in Talent²⁰⁸, roughly 200 miles from Eugene. It was tough for both of us, & though in the long run he’s happier & I’m pretty content myself, there isn’t a day I wonder if maybe we’d be both happier if he had stayed. (On a sidenote, eventually the girl I was seeing left me for a stoner/jock/dork, so I felt like a pretty big jerk after all.)

Well, Colin & I keep in touch regularly, & he even came & visited once in a while. Most of the time he was staying w/ someone else or Naticia was @ his side, but I did get to see him & he wrote to me on a regular basis. One day I got a letter from him telling me that he would be in town of Friday the 14th. Like clockwork, I got a phone call informing me to meet him @ the train station.

I was really happy about this. It would be worth putting of my trip to Portland in order to spend an entire weekend w/ Colin, a car, & a freshly cashed paycheck for both of us. It would be just like old times again.

Friday morning I took the bus downtown, got off around the post office, checked my mail, walked over to the train station, & we were back in action again.

More or less.

|-----------------------------------------------|

Excerpt II:

Now, here was the true test: could I close my account w/out getting arrested? <Insert Nifty Flashback Sequence Here>

@ a time that I was not doing as well w/ money, & I was hard up for some Mountain Dew™ & cigarettes, I found myself in the parking lot of Albertson’s™ & (Insert Bank Here)²⁰⁹ not too far from my place of current residence, w/ a receipt that said I had $4.00 in my (Insert Bank Here) account. This disturbed me, seeing how I needed not only the previously mentioned items, but food for that evening’s second day @ HMT. Fortunately, Jeremiah showed up. He figured he would @ least have 1 cigarette, which would solve one problem.

Unfortunately, he didn’t have one. This made me mad. If I only had a check to cash, I could use the ATM to cash it & then I’d be set. But that was one piece of paper that I did not have.

& then it hit me: ATMs don’t know the difference between an envelope w/ a check in it & an empty envelope. In two shakes of a lamb’s tail, I had $20.00 & Jeremiah & I were smoking up a storm. Happy that I had accomplished what I had intended to that day, I left to face the consequences another day.

Which were me not having access to my account, even when there was money in it. @ first I tried to play it cool, & I told the bank that a non-existent roommate must have taken my ATM card when I hadn’t wanted him to. This, however, was the wrong move, because they figured that I had still fucked up because I would have had to have given him my code. Though they didn’t charge me for the $20, I no longer had an ATM card (they took it & destroyed it, so my “roommate” couldn’t use it again), & on top of that my extreme paranoia that I would have to serve a life sentence because of this caused me to sweat. I told the bank I was in a hurry, & that I needed to make a w/drawl. In my hurry to get the fuck out, I w/drew all but $50.

So, for almost two months, I had $50 sitting in an account in a bank that I couldn’t get at. By then I had assumed that they had checked the video tapes & knew that it was, indeed, me & not my non-existent roommate, & had spread my likeness to every bank. I was fucked. <End Of Nifty Flashback Sequence>

²⁰⁷ I began working on a book called Goatboy a few years ago, which was the story of my friendship with Colin and how it fell apart. I had my friend Cheryl do a primary edit on it and I became so discouraged by the work I still needed to put into the text that I gave up. Since then I’ve actually communicated with Colin a couple of times and we sort of reached an understanding about our past mistakes. While I think some of the Goatboy stuff is great, I don’t want to pursue it anymore for fear of stepping on his toes. A section that is similar to this description here appeared in the Goatboy novel.

²⁰⁸ Ironically, when I was a young child I lived in Talent with my family as one of the many small towns we called home while I was growing up. One of the times I went to visit Colin in Talent I obtained the address to that house I used to live in and he and I went to check it out. It looked nothing like how I remember it, and for fear of pissing off the current residents we quickly decided to leave without investigating further.

²⁰⁹ The story concerning my bank account at said bank is 100% true. For my own protection, I have not included the name of the bank. I’m sure they could easily track down who I am and take me to court if they were really adamant about the situation, but I think it’s a funny enough anecdote to let my general paranoia about such thing be over-ridden. Besides, it was only $20, and even with fees and whatnot added to it, if they really wanted to pursue the issue, they’d loose more money than they could sue for. (I really hope I’m not jinxing myself by stating that.)
Why it had suddenly become so important to get that $50 out of the bank ($20 of which, technically, belonged to them) I’ll never know. On the one hand, I was definitely going to be poor w/in a month & I would need the extra cash. But, was it worth it if they charged me w/ fraud & threw my ass in jail (which was what I thought was going to happen). I eventually decided that if I didn’t get the money out of (Insert Bank Here), I couldn’t get my tongue pierced. w/ that in mind, the decision was easy to make.

I stepped into the bank & stood in line. It appeared that everyone was looking at me. I tried to look at the floor & not think about it. Eventually, a teller was ready to help (arrest) me. I casually walked up to her, pulled out my wallet & told her I would like to close me account. She looked at me & right when I thought she was going to say, “Your ass ain’t gettin’ no money no way,” she asked for my signature & my Social Security #. Ten minutes later, I was smoking a cigarette w/ $50 & 1 cents more in my pocket (I had misjudged), confidently walking toward the Buy & Sell to get some Bass strings.

Excerpt III:

It was around 4 that Ocean219 was finally able to get to me after another piercer showed up & more than the four other piercings that I had thought were done. We had a smoke & then got to business.

Ocean was very professional, & knew what he was doing. He spent a lot of time getting the piercing station ready, cleaning & sanitizing, & then took almost as much time telling me what he was doing. This impressed me, because I was about to get a piece of metal shoved through my tongue, preceded by the stabbing of a large needle through the same area, & I was a bit nervous. But I, for some reason, had to get it done. So, I held my breath & listened intently.

He put the clamps on my tongue. He said, “Okay, I’m going to stick the needle though, then the jewelry, & then we’ll be done.” After a few seconds I felt the clamp move around kind of funny, & then he said, “Okay, I’m putting the jewelry in now.” I then realized that the funny sensation was the piercing... it didn’t hurt a bit211!

He finished up w/ the formalities, & then told me to look at it in the mirror. I saw a mouthful of blood & felt very primal. I swallowed, & that was all the bleeding I ever dealt w/. & damn, it was fun to play w/212.

Ocean finished telling me all of the aftercare information, which I listened to carefully, & then I gave him $59 & all was said & done. Full of energy & ready to go, I said goodbye to my good friend, & he told me to have fun. Now that I had finally accomplished all I needed to, I could go to Portland comfortably.

Excerpt IV:

I woke up @ about 10 A.M. to the sound of Chantal & her classmate Jay studying. Jay was someone I had met the last time I saw Justin & Chantal a long time ago, & it was my understanding that Jay had a crush on me. I didn’t want to run into him for a prolonged period of time during this trip because I didn’t know what to say or how to tell someone that I’m not interested. I didn’t want to hurt his feelings, & I knew that anything I would end up saying would come out wrong & I’d sound like an asshole. Fortunately, I found out Jay had met someone, & that eased my mind a bit.

Justin finally stumbled out of his room & we sat on the couch together smacking our lips in unison, as if we were hangover or something. I turned to Justin & said, “Coffee,” & he agreed & began the search. All the while, Jay & Chantal were slightly annoyed @ us disturbing their studying. “Why don’t you guys go out & get some coffee somewhere else.” w/ the idea planted, we gathered the necessary things & left.

Justin wanted to get coffee @ Starbuck’sTM, but I was very much against this idea. I just wanted to go to some shitty little diner & order some coffee & food from a bad-tempered waitress so we could BS about anything not already covered the night before. Suddenly, Justin got an idea, & we immediately went to a small green establishment that looked suspiciously like a bar when we parked the car.

219 Ocean was a regular contributor to IBTEAs!‘s early issues. He ran a story series called “Me & Jamie”, which was generally an acid story in text form that was pretty funny. I’ve lost touch with Ocean over the years, and every so often his name comes up because of the two piercings I have that he is responsible for. Occasionally he would ask me to print business cards for his shop in IBTEAs!, and in return he would pawn issues off on his friends and leave copies lying around the shop. I used to pass a lot of time hanging out there, just shooting the shit. I’ve seen every kind piercing, branding, scarification and beading type thing you can do to the human body. Saw a lot of boobs that way.

211 And this wasn’t the only time I came to this same conclusion. Every piercing and tattoo I have has never pained me one bit. Granted, I don’t have any severe tattoos or insanely odd piercings, but I would like to think that the experience I do have with the activities would enable me to form a decent opinion on the subject. The ironic thing is that I’m afraid of needles (when it comes to drawing blood). I’m fine when you’re putting in metal or ink; it’s when you take something out that I get all freaked.

212 I was really proud of my tongue piercing for a long time, and honestly I still think it’s a lot of fun to have. However, it did cause me no end of grief the week that Harvey Danger song “Flagpole Sitta” was popular. Everyone I knew called me up and said, “I heard this song that reminds me of you!” It’s always the “I wanna publish ‘zines / and Rage Against The Machine / I wanna pierce my tongue / no it doesn’t hurt at all” line. Sigh. I actually really dug the song myself, but from what I heard the rest of the album sucked, and therefore I never bought a copy.
“Justin, this is a bar,” I said.

“Yes it is,” he replied.

I looked at my watch. “You want to drink @ 11 A.M. in a musty bar?” I was actually beginning to come around to the idea by the time I had said it, but still had some reservations about it.

“No. They serve coffee. & they’ve got pool tables. We can play pool & drink coffee.” By this time we were already @ the door & the idea seemed pretty cool in my head. Of course! Only w/ Justin could I actually pull this off!

He added after he opened the door, “I was right about what kind of bar it was.” I peered over his shoulder to see naked dancers on a table not too far off.

Now, I’ve never been to a strip bar. I’ve never seen anyone take off their clothes in front of me except for my girlfriends, & then it was just me & her, so seeing people I didn’t know take off their clothes in front of other people I didn’t know shocked me for a second. However, it all fell into place after that. Of course, I’m w/ Justin. Normal reality does not apply. He is the only man I could ever picture myself drinking coffee w/ while playing pool in a strip bar @ 11 A.M. We ordered some coffee & played two games of pool. To add to the humor, neither or us are any good @ pool213; so we probably stuck out like sore thumbs. I had to stop myself from laughing on numerous occasions214.

---

Excerpt V:

After a quick stop @ the bank, w/ a little grease in our guts, Rick215 informed us that he had his eye on a guitar @ Tombstone Music that he really wanted for his band Slave-1. I had never been to Tombstone Music before, so I was looking forward to the adventure ahead of us.

After winding & weaving through the Clackamus area, we stumbled upon Tombstone Music & immediately I was impressed. The parking lot was all gravel. The sign had a brilliant graphic on it of a coffin w/ guitars rising up out of the coffin. I got this mental image of Bruce Springsteen & Peter Frampton carrying fucking up guitars in dilapidated cases. They would walk in & give the guitars to Fred Cole himself.

“What seems to be the problem, gentlemen?” Fred would say, w/ Toody in the background howling along w/ some scratched record.

“Fred,” Bruce would say. “Fred, it’s my guitar. It’s been w/ me since I created Rock ‘n Roll...”

“Ahem!” Frampton would interject.

“...& she’s given me all she’s got. I was gonna shoot her, but I thought of you, &...” Bruce would then let the sentence die as Frampton would root around in some junk boxes in the back.

Fred, w/out even pausing, would open the guitar cases & instantly his eyes would light up. “You were gonna throw away this thing?” he would say, holding an ancient relic from a time when electricity & guitars were still getting used to the idea of working together.

Frampton would look up w/ a pick-up in his hand, & his eyes would lock w/ Bruce’s. As they finished the details of the deal (Bruce & Frampton both getting a raw deal, I might add), Bruce would say, “I knew he’d take them off our hands,” & together they would walk off into Rock ‘N Rolland to strum their golden years w/ angel-sent guitars under a setting sun.

“Where all good guitars go to die, indeed!”

The interior of Tombstone Music smelled like dust & garage sales, & the items for sale did indeed resemble an as-is shop, where young teen’s dreams can be found, bought, sold, & otherwise merchandised. I was in awe. I tried to imagine how many young rock stars entered the shop, looked around, & stated proudly, “I just got my first paycheck from my dishwashing job. Make me famous!”

After looking around while listening to classic rock, Rick finally found his guitar. Jason picked up a Snoopy Mouth Harp, & Kyle got a nut, some strings & a few picks for his bass. I bought one of the thickest picks the store offered.

---

213 Justin & I were notoriously bad at pool. It was sort of our trademark. Since then I’ve gotten a little better at the game, but I would never claim to be “good” to save my life. I’ll play against anyone at any time. But I’ll probably lose (at least, it’s a safe bet).

214 I’m sure that an easy way to get kicked out of a strip bar would be to go in and laugh loudly (even if you weren’t laughing at the dancers). Since I wrote this I’ve been to a lot more strip bars, and the novelty of it being “new” to me has worn off.

215 Rick was a boyfriend of my sister’s, who ended up being really damn cool and fun to hang out with. We liked almost all the same kind of music (he was a huge KARP fan) and he was a really talented musician. He came to Eugene a couple of times to hang out with me, and I made the mistake of giving him my High School Letterman’s jacket in exchange for a jacket of his. After that, I never saw him again. Apparently he wasn’t as cool as I thought he was, because in his wake I heard stories about how he was a general fuck-up and owed people a lot of money. C’est la vie.

216 This was an idea that would later be revived in my “Rock Star Wars” piece several issues down the road (which is included in this collection). I had always liked the idea of fictional stories relating anecdotes about rock stars. I didn’t realize it as I was writing this, but I must have gotten the idea from Now I Twist Your Nipples With A Pair Of Spaghetti Tongs: Josh (the author of said ‘zine) used to do “Olympia Scene Reports” using local musicians in fictionalized “news” about the scene. Even when I’m not aware, I’m still apt to borrow ideas. Sigh.
Part XVII: The Transitional Period.

The apartment that I was "filling a room at" soon became known as "The Blitzhaus" (named by The Ramen City Kid) because of the large quantities of Blitz beer we were always purchasing from the store across the street. (This store was so close that on particularly hung-over days, before I got a coffee maker, I could walk over to this store barefoot in an attempt to get my morning coffee.) The plan had been very simple: Lyra had arranged for our friend Brandy to move into the room, and since she couldn't make it to Eugene for a few months, it made sense that I fill the room until then so they could go ahead and get this apartment squared away first. It would have been a fool not to take the chance, because I really needed a place to stay.

The apartment was located on 13th Street, just west of the old Public Library. It was a 5 to 10 minute walk from the bus station, and there was a Safeway in relatively close proximity to where we lived (up on 18th). Between our house and another house a few blocks away from us, the store across the street had to increase their weekly Blitz order by threefold to ensure they wouldn't run out. Two of the store employees were brothers who we named "I (Heart) Rush" and "I Also (Heart) Rush". They were two burned out old motorheads who now resorted to smoking a lot of pot while at work and occasionally dropping in on us. Their pot intake had an unusual effect on the cost of merchandise in their store: sometimes a six-pack would cost $0.62, and other times it would be $12 to $16. It was hard to say with those guys. After calling the first one "I (Heart) Rush" for so long (based on the classic rock he always listened to), we were super excited to have him stop by one night to borrow a pair of scissors. When asked why, he declared that he'd gotten a new t-shirt that he needed to cut the sleeves off of. Not to miss a truly opportune moment, we all leaned in close to watch the ritual, when suddenly he pulled out an actual Rush t-shirt, circa "Roll the Bones" era. From then on they were both welcome at every party, even if they did try to sell us speed.

Since I was making big money at The Bookstore, I had a great time going out, drinking every night, and living it up. Our house was, essentially, a party house, and if there wasn't some group of people getting drunk, there was an excursion to some bar or café happening, or a movie we were all getting together to watch. Something was happening every single night of the week. Fortunately for me, I started work as late as 2 P.M. most days, and always got home before 11 P.M. Never having to get up early and never having to work too late was a huge factor in that lifestyle, I learned how to drink like a fish and maintain a job while I did.

The house dynamic was perfect. Lyra ran the house, and she was a great "let's get down to brass tacks" sort of girl. She was responsible enough to get the bills paid on time and not let too much havoc ruin a good thing, yet never let anything come between her and a 40 of Pabst or a crusty to get some sweet lovin' from. I had known her through my friends for quite some time (and she was even the bass player for Cathead... for 3 days before he was more or less handed the bass and the position of bass player without really knowing how the instrument worked). I always gave my bill / rent money directly to her, in cash, right after I got my paychecks. During the time she ran things I was the most financially secure I'd been in quite some time, having struck the perfect balance between entertainment and responsibility. It ruled.

Josh and Kris, however, were very different kinds of roommates. Josh's possessions included video game systems, computers, bongs, and various devices he could sit in / on while using those items. We had the hardest time convincing him that he shouldn't be obvious about his pot smoking for fear that the landlord would kick us out. He was the only person I've ever met who got excited and angry when he smoked out (the rest of the time he seemed too lazy to do much of anything except watch anime or play with his video games). He also had a large assortment of friends that all seemed to be coming and going regardless of the time of day, and it was pretty clear that, while there was no large-scale drug-dealing going on, there were definitely many sales occurring in one form or another. It made Kris's obsession with guns, Art Bell and the Church of the Subgenius (not to mention his weird pre-occupation with SRL videos and Daria) seem very tame in comparison.

While a household like that seems like it will last forever, everyone knows they are generally doomed from the start. One thing led to another, fights broke out, alliances were made / dissolved, and other factors entered into the equation very, very quickly. When the dust had settled and all was said and done, everyone else had disappeared / moved out / swore never to return, and I found myself negotiating with our landlord the future of an apartment that I was never supposed to live in for more than three months. Instead, I ended up running said house for the next three years.

Brandy, as promised, moved in to fill Lyra's room. Lyra decided that Portland was where she needed to be, but she would later return to The Blitzhaus to fill a room for me during the final phase before the house officially disbanded. In the place of Josh The Hippie we allowed two of his drug-dealer friends to move in (Jesse & Kenny, who we liked a lot more than we like Josh). At first I didn't pay much attention to the fact that they were dealing, but this eventually led to all sorts of funny situations, the silliest of which was when Kenny came running up the stairs with a huge television he said he needed to stash in our storage room, "for a while." (He forgot completely about it when he moved out, and thus it was pawned off on various future roommates until it finally left the house when I moved to Portland.) On a different occasion, I was smoking cigarettes and chatting with someone in the living room, when we looked down and noticed a square tab of perforated paper on the floor. I picked it up and found Kenny to ask him about it. When he looked in my hand, he said, "Oh, that's where that went," and quickly grabbed it and ate it. This was around the time I was dating a girl with a five year old kid, who occasionally brought the kid over to The Blitzhaus when she had school and needed me to watch him. There were a lot of close calls like that.

Colin returned from Ashland to fill in Kris's room, but soon enough that ended in a fiasco too. Friction between him and I had popped up (partially because of the girl I was dating, and partially because of the girl he was dating), and the entire situation ended with bad feelings all around (only recently are they starting to be sorted out and resolved). Add to that the fact that, when asked, Kenny and Jesse hadn't stopped dealing out of the house, and you've got some pretty tense situations. Eventually we asked Colin, as well as Kenny & Jesse, to move out. All three were, by now, unfazed and unsurprised by our. For Brandy and I, filling the rooms became our second full-time jobs.
We quickly developed a good method with which to test / interview new roommates: we would invite them over to hang out on the condition that they split a six-pack with us. If, by the end of the night, we all seemed to get along okay, then we generally gave them the "okay" to move in. This system seemed to work pretty good considering the huge number of roommates we went through on a regular basis. If we weren't needing to kick people out for completely legitimate reasons, then they were moving out on us after a month or two anyway. If my memory is correct (an iffy statement at best), in the time I lived at The Blitzhaus we went through 16 roommates (in addition to myself living there that whole time). That only includes people who actually paid rent on a room (there were plenty of couch-surfers, hanger-ons, and people who stayed with us for long periods of time in addition to girlfriends and boyfriends of actual tenants). The place had only four "bedrooms", (one wasn't technically a bedroom but we used it for one anyway), a huge storage room, and two bathrooms. In all honesty, 17 seems way too small, as The Ramen City Kid was fond of saying, "You could have stacked the crusties in like cord-wood if you really wanted to lower the rent."

Some of the other memorable roommates: Joel (technically a couch surfer, he approached us at one point and asked if he could stay with us and sleep on his couch... no, you read that correctly: he brought his own couch, which we later inherited and became The Sleepy Couch, one of the key elements of The Blitzhaus for its entire run); Geni (she had all those crazy skinhead friends from Portland who came down to Eugene for a show who, one by one, decided to hide out at The Blitzhaus where they used the same frozen peas on some injury and the same window to check on the cops from); Tobey (most notable for his attempt to beat the shit out of me, his ability to speak large quantities of bullshit about everything, and his affinity for fishing); Captain Morgan (who only stayed with us for one week of the month he paid rent for, but subsequently spent many a night getting hammered or dosed in our living room when he no longer lived with us anymore); Glyndon (Kisu's old girlfriend who, when they separated, needed a place to live, and it seemed fair that I would let her stay with us since she had done the same for me when I needed a place in the basement); Loriel (a miniature human being, she was shortest girl I've ever met, and her family actually raised her in the SCA... she stayed with us temporarily until her and Captain Morgan paired off and moved in together... she's a phlebotomist, which is the perfect career for a Goth girl like her); Little Jeff (never an official roommate, but was Glyndon's boyfriend and was therefore around the house [more often than she was in many cases]... toward the end I had to start charging him for bills and whatnot because it was unfair that he used the entire house and spent every night in it, but never owed a penny for a share of anything... letting us pee on him only eased the pain slightly); The Lord Of Darkness / The Kelly Experience (only lived with us for about a month before he returned to California, but would later return to live with us in Portland at Fort Awesome); and "Angry Man" Josh (who essentially filled the storage room and paid miniscule portions of the bills until it was time for us all to move to Portland).

(There are probably numerous people I've forgotten over the years, but these are the ones that stand out.)

For three years this location (above a café which never once offered a single noise complaint despite the constant string of parties that, more or less, never ceased happening for three solid years) was the home of my 'zine. I wrote in that house, about things that happened in that house, and when all else failed, about the house itself. I had sex in every single room in that building (minus the bathrooms, closets & kitchen), and went through several breakups in the time that I stayed there. I started going to bars on a regular basis while I lived there. I developed my love of Old Crow in that house. Seth and his friends filmed a movie in that house. I discovered... And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead in that house. The Ramen City Kid made a comeback as my roommate in that house (during which time I covered his bills until we were square again, money-wise). "Angry Man" Josh re-introduced D&D to me through a series of games we started back up. It has a lot of history for me, and is an essential setting in the story of my 'zine.

A common sight for roommates was me, hammering away on my computer, laying out a new issue. Sometimes I would take over the whole living room / dining room to work on collages. Through it all, The Blitzhaus was there, offering shelter when I needed it, companionship when I was feeling alone, and comfort when I'd crawl into bed at night and let the alcohol lull me into unconsciousness. I would never take back a single day of the three years I lived there, and I will always remember it fondly despite senility or the actual reality of the situation. (For all I know, it probably really sucked and the trauma of it all has caused me to remember it fondly.) What ever the case, there was a lot of stuff written there...

But I digress.

Starting with issue #7, my 'zines began to become much better distributed as a result of increased efforts and funds. I began to keep extensive lists of people that I had given issues too, and began to keep track of quantities I had thus far printed / distributed. I began a more systematic approach when trying to get local shops to carry back issues, and developed my mailing list (which mostly consists of anyone who gives me an address) around this time. I stopped doing the "batch" printing that I had done in the past, and instead did actual print runs. A usual print run was 50 copies, but I would do 100 for certain issues, or go back and do a second print run if the need arose. Sometimes I would do a print run and additional "batch" printings if I was getting a lot of mail orders or if the need arose. Regardless of the specifics, my 'zine had definitely progressed from being a hobby that I focused a lot of time on, to being something I began investing money into. While I have never seen any of that money back, that was never really the point anyway. I'd rather loose $60 on printing and distributing 100 'zines to my friends rather than know that I never made an effort to fill this need inside me to... well, to write. Isn't that the whole point anyway?
Transitional Cover Gallery. Issue #7 was the "potpourri" issue, considering I had no theme for it and it mostly included unconnected, but nonetheless interesting, things I wrote. I shrunk the normal logo and found this floral print over at my (then) girlfriend's house. I probably spent about 2 hours searching through magazines looking for different things I could then drop in at the bottom of the page for the "Original Blend NEW! FRESH Scent".

Issue #8 was the first issue to not use the traditional logo, partially because it had been designed by Colin, who I was fighting with at the time. The cover "art" was something I'd created at work one day, and since that was the issue all about The Bookstore, it only made sense. Kiisu designed and created the image of Ronald Regan's face on the moon, and give it to me as a 'zine submission. It spawned the idea to do a tabloid-style issue. The title logo on that issue is modeled after the Weekly World News, which I actually had a subscription to at the time. The text on that cover is VERY faded, because the only printer I had access to at the time was very low on ink. I had to boost the contrast up quite a bit to even get anything to show when I ran off the final copies.
As I was walking to the bus stop, they made their break, and for a moment my jaw dropped and my heart sank in a way that signaled, "It's pointless, but I hope they make it." They had been fluttering in the wind, bound to the awning that was to be their permanent home until sentenced to death. But their shackles were weak, and it rhythm with the wind, they were off.

At first someone in the parking lot, in a rare moment of assumed valor, jumped for them. However, they had prepared for such an occurrence, and side stepped him in time with the wind (their only friend, it would appear), and this put them far enough out to concentrate on the more important problem at hand: 4 lanes of traffic. The man who jumped for them went to his car; I continued to watch the drama unfold.

At first it seemed they had defeated one foe to fall upon a worse, because they were traveling low and were caught in the path of a small car. Tension was building, and they continued slowly, waiting for the last possible moment when they would pull up and out across the next two open lanes.

My heart was pounding; they were going to make it! All that stood in their way was an oncoming truck. It was packed with shaking boxes, shaking violently against the bungee. The wind had died out, preventing any continuing help. To make up for it, the wind called his slower friend inertia to help out.

They moved slowly. The truck continued on its homicidal mission. I clenched my fists and repeated the phrase, "Come on!" over and over again.

I almost couldn't watch.
As the truck barreled past, its own locomotion was what saved them; its disturbances in the air it was causing - their friend the wind - gave them the extra push they needed.

The balloons quietly attached themselves to the closest tree. They had run their gauntlet, and were much happier to die in their self-imposed exile... away from the others.

The Customers
Now everything I've told up until now is a lie. That is to say, yeah, I do enjoy the people I work with, sure, that discount & benefits package is really smashing, & sure, I love all that other shit too. But there is one thing that, in spite of everything else that happens @ the bookstore, aside from all the great stuff, is the constant thing that keeps me going from day to day: the stupid customers we get.

Now, I'm not saying all our customers are stupid. In fact, even the stupid ones aren't stupid, they're just very interesting. But day after day, we get more & more interesting people, & sometimes their quirks aren't that much different than any I have. I can picture them in some new movie coming out in the near future directed by that guy who did Mallrats & Clerks. They're all weird in their own normal way, & I enjoy every 1 of these people in weird, perverted, masochistic ways that make me smile when the come in.

One regular @ the store is Mrs. Appleman, & really eccentric woman who buys about $300 worth of books every month. She is actually, personally, responsible for a % of our sales every month, however small in may be, but even if one person is

---

217 This was from I'd Buy That For A Dollar! #7. I had to re-type this one because the files that made up issue #7 are long-since damaged. I wrote this after I took the bus home from the house of the girl I was seeing. She and I had, "gone on a date," which effectively lasted a full week. I guess this story was sort of foreshadowing, mayhaps.

218 What follows here are selections from issue #8, which was entirely about my job at The Bookstore. I was employed by that company for 6 years, and wrote this after only having worked for them a little over 2. The Bookstore was a huge part of my life for that entire time, and many of my zines from this point on make reference to that job. While, at the time I wrote this, I tried very hard to paint a "nice" picture of my job, by the time I was fired very recently I had long-since become very dissatisfied (to put it softly). Most of my "excessive rage" toward my job came from the corporate nature of the beast, and while I had my issues with certain staff members during all periods of my employment with the company, the main issue wasn't the staff as much as it was the stuff we, as a staff, had to do. Being a pawn of the corporate beast just blows, okay? I'll elaborate more on that later. I should point out that, while it's pretty obvious what "bookstore" I actually worked for, I have gone out of my way since I first started writing about work to never mention it by name. I figured it's just easier that way in the long run.

219 Some minor fact-bending occurred here at the end. Part of this issue involved having my co-workers fill out questionnaires, and soon enough word got out that I was writing a 'zine about work. While few people were really into my 'zine (and for the most part I kind of didn't want my co-workers to read it), everyone very quickly developed a huge interest in reading the finished product of this particular issue. I had planned to really be open and go all-out with this issue, revealing all my dirty little secrets. But you have to write for your audience, and since I knew that I had about $10 worth of issue sales lined-up with my co-workers who were all dying to know what I had to say about them, I really glossed over some of the facts of the matter. There were a few people that, no matter how hard I tried, I just didn't like. I won't point fingers and name names this many years after the fact, because it would be petty and silly to do so anyway. Still, I have to mention that, were I to write something like this these days, I would probably be a lot more straightforward and honest. As for my co-workers: fuck 'em.
accountable for 1% of our sales, that's enough to give them the red carpet treatment, & we bend over backward for her. Max is always telling me about how she is often taking us for a ride, seeing how her discount card gives her such a good deal & all. She really likes mysteries, but she also buys a lot of religious books that she donates to her local church. She's the only person we let in through the back door (a big company no-no), & she's the only customer we drop everything for to help. The only problem I have with her is that she talks a lot, & I don't mind too often, but sometimes when it's really busy & I need to get back to work, she'll want to talk about this book & that book & sports or whatever, & pretty soon I get so into saying, "Yeah," & "Uh-huh," that I enter this weird dazed sort of '60s state of mind & lose all concept of who & where I am. Other than that I really like her & any time she's coming in I have fun loosening my mind trying to figure out what to do next on her list of things she needs. She's really, really cool.

One of the first interesting chance encounters @ the bookstore was during a day that was fairly busy, & in the hustle & bustle an elderly man came up to me & wanted to know where a certain book was. This is nothing new, & it was busy so I was in that mode & didn't even question that the book was The Satanic Bible.

He said, "Does your store carry The Satanic Bible?" & me, not realizing where this was going, said, "I don't know, let me check." I looked in the computer & determined, & I found a listing, so I said, "We might. If we do, it would be in the New Age section, right over here," & I pointed & started to walk toward it. He was dumbfounded. "You do carry it?" he said with slight agitation. I said, "Well, I don't know if we have it in stock, but I could check for you, & if not, we can order it."

At this point, he began to reel off a string of bible-thumping nonsense about corporations being spawned by Satan, barcode conspiracy theories, me personally being a Satanist, & how the store & the mall that contained it was an evil place (probably on some kind of cemetery, he added) & that he would never come back again. I smiled, damned myself for not having a tape recorder, & watched him walk out.

Two related stories I have fall into the, "This one's on the house," category, & I just wish I had the authority to give out free books in cases like this.

One night, I was working quietly when a very flustered woman called up on the phone. She was very agitated & was really adamant about finding this one certain book that very night. "I've got to have it if you have it in stock. It's very important! I need it!" I went to check & see if we had it in stock & we did, so I came back & calmly told her that it was in stock & she was very relieved. "I'll come & get it right away!" & she hung up.

The book was called Stop Obsessing.

On a different night, I was again quietly working by myself, trying to relieve my boredom, when this guy called up & wanted to know about a book he ordered. He said, "Someone called my house & told me that a book I ordered was in but I can't remember what it was & I wasn't paying attention when they told me the title. Could you tell me what it was?" I said sure, asked for his name, looked for the book, & found a curious little volume entitled How To Improve Your Listening Skills on hold for him.

There are hundreds of stories of what I have collected about interesting customers, but most of them were of the, "You had to be there," nature. Some of them may see print someday, & some of them will go to my grave w/me & give me a smile. But this last (and fairly recent) example of the kind of people we get @ the Gateway Mall pretty much says it all about why I love the customers we get.

This woman & her son were in the store buying books together. She was buying Romance, & he was buying Sci-Fi. Now, I use the word "Romance" in the loosest sense, seeing how the books she was buying were one step away from the, "Pulsing Purple Warrior / Tunnel Of Wet Love," variety, & though I am never one to say what's good & what's bad, graphic depictions of sex are something I will never understand nor like in literature. The son was buying some classic stuff like Asimov & Heinlein & such, & though I know that Heinlein is well known for his pervertedness, I'd say that he was getting the "softer" end of the genre, if you know what I mean.

So they are picking through their piles, trying to thin them down a bit before I ring them up, & I was happy to wait & do my usual comedy routine that I do w/waiting customers to get a rise out of them (the standard, "You better hurry up, I've got so much to do!" line on a slow Tuesday afternoon w/no one else in the store). Finally, she starts bickering w/him about the Heinlein book & no comedy I could dispense was going to slow this down, so I stood back & waited until the woman addressed me. "Do you think this is appropriate for a 15 year-old?" she asked as she held in her hand a copy of Starship Troopers. I've never read it, so I said as much, & commented that if he can follow Asimov & such just fine, then anything Heinlein can throw @ him will be a piece of cake. But she wasn't satisfied.

"I don't mean the reading, I mean the content," & she gave me some kind of look that conveyed that she thought I knew what she was talking about when I had no clue what-so-ever. I looked @ the son who had his head turned in the typical, "Mom, don't do this in public," sort of way, & I said again that I have never read the book & that I didn't know what it was about, but that it was probably along the lines of space wars w/ aliens & that kind of jolly good stuff, & that he would probably like it if he likes Sci-Fi. She was still not satisfied.

"Well, to be frank, what I'm worried about is the sex."

"But mom!" he commented, but she was not to be deflected so easily.

"I don't want him reading anything that has sex in it. I don't allow it in the house."

At this point I had one of those "self" moments, where you kind of float out of your body & just get a chance to see the whole situation from outside, & you also get to see what choices will lead you where. The son was giving me the, "I already have everything on sex stashed away somewhere & I don't like it much anyway," look, & the mom was giving me the, "I feel really strongly even

---

220 This is what my boss at this store asked to be called in my 'zine. There was no real reason for him to use a pseudonym, and I had no plans to say mean things about him anyway (he's actually a really great guy and probably the best boss I've ever had). Still, he insisted, so I obeyed.
though I don’t realize I’m a hypocrite,” look. I was giving the mother the, “If you don’t realize the idiocy of what you are doing by now, then it doesn’t matter anyway,” & I was giving the son the, “It’s okay, I was 15 once too & I got shit like this from my mom all the time,” look. It was a really weird moment, & I knew that if I went along w/ mommy, & the son was that kind of guy, he’d come back & buy the book anyway along w/ The Joy Of Sex & a few other things just to piss her off. If I went along w/ sonny, mommy could find out later, take the book away, & then he’d still have to thumb through her issue of Cosmo & buy the book again anyway. It was a really weird moment.

I said, “I think the book doesn’t really contain that much sex,” & kept out of the rest of the conversation, & in the end, the son got the book anyway using the, “If I find any questionable material I’ll return the book immediately,” line, so all was well.

The Customers (Again)

Now everything I’ve told you in the previous section is a lie. That is to say, yeah, I do enjoy the people that come into the store, but I really hate the conversations we have & I will do anything short of giving up my job to change this if it’s possible.

Here’s what happens almost every day w/out fail.

A typical customer will come into the bookstore & honestly say, “I’m looking for a book.” @ this point, I already want to strangle them & I don’t even know that the book they’re looking for is already a pet peeve of mine anyway. I mean, you’re in a bookstore for Christ’s sake! Of course you are looking for a book. We sure as hell don’t sell tire irons or golf clubs!

Then they continue. “It was on TV or the news or something, & it was brand new, & I don’t know who wrote it but it has the word ‘the’ in the title.” (Okay, so the word isn’t “the,” but it’s something along those lines anyway.) Okay, so you’ve just eliminated half the stock in our store. Can you be more specific?

“Well, it’s a hardback book, but I want the paperback.”

Okay, first off new books are almost NEVER in paperback form, & second, that still doesn’t tell me anything about what the book is. Can you narrow it down @ all before I strangle you?

“Yeah, it’s about health or something. Maybe it’s a diet book.”

Ah! Now we’re getting somewhere. We actually have a section called ‘Health,’ surprisingly enough. I know it’s odd that we don’t have a, “Brand New Paperback Book That Was On TV Or Something W/ The Word, _____” In The Title,” section, but we’re a small store & space is limited. Have you checked in the section yet?

“No, because I thought you’d know about the book. After all, you work in a bookstore.”

Why would I know exactly everything about every book that just came out just because I work in a god damn bookstore? You think I’m magical or something. Not only that, but w/ as little information as you’ve given me, it’s no wonder I didn’t take you straight to it. Okay, we’re in the section. Maybe if you look around a bit you can find it. If you need anything, I’ll be helping other customers.

“Wait, I found it!” & in their hands is a copy of the newest Louis L’Amour hardback release.

Oh, so it wasn’t a Health book.

“Well, I thought it might have been, but I guess it was wrong. Is this in paperback?”

Well, like I told you, new books don’t generally come in paperback, & that book just came out so it won’t be in paperback for about a year, which, if you know much about publishing, is standard for most books.

“Oh, in that case I want it. Thank you.”

As they walk out they walk over to someone outside the store & tell their friend that it’s their turn to come in & torture me, & w/ any luck, my soul will be broken by the end of the day. But I know what they’re up to, & they can’t break me! Then the next person comes in.

“I’m looking for a book,” & three hours later I’m in a very strange jacket w/ my arms behind my back saying, “NO, It’S NOT IN PAPERBACK! IT ISN’T! I SWEAR!”

| ----------------------------------------------- |

Flashback:221

My face gets really flushed and I start to get embarrassed and no one is in the room. No one. Sometimes it happens on the bus, but most often it’s when I’m alone and I’m scraping the inner wall on the back of my head. That place where you hold all of the things you try to forget.

Sometimes it’s not embarrassment. Sometimes it’s guilt, or just nostalgia. But it happens, and you live it all over again. That time you stole a comic book from the Safeway in Cottage Grove, using a bag you had brought in from a different story across the street, and you didn’t get caught because you were regularly shopping there and you know that they were just going to smile and think that you changed your mind or something. You still have the comic book and you never really liked it to begin with, but suddenly you are wracked with guilt and you want to cry, and you get that crazy idea to mail them the $1.25 just to make things even.

The other night me and Cassandra and Geni were talking about this phenomena, and though we were not actively discussing the nature of this particular aspect of the human condition, we had plenty of stories to tell. Geni started talking about how to this day

---

221 This was the "Editor's Note" from I'd Buy That For A Dollar! #9, and the first time I admitted, in print, since I'd graduated from High School, that I was a Nirvana fan. Before then I would get a lot of shit from my friends for even implying that I might have liked them, and so I kept my mouth shut to avoid verbal abuse. I've made a very concerted effort in the time since to make sure that I don't play that, "I can't like it because it used to be cool," game, and it works with fairly decent success. (Well... for the most part... hey, I'm human, after all.)
she feels guilt over something that happened years ago, where her and a playmate were playing some game where they tied a rope to each of their feet, and were running on all four. At one point, Geni jerked her leg and the other girl was pulled forward, and hurt herself, and the girl’s brother came running and took the girl home. It wasn’t intentional; Geni didn’t mean to hurt her. But she did, and she still feels guilty about it.

I’ve been thinking about the human condition lately, namely how we spend most of our lives being programmed by everything around us, and then the rest of our lives de-programming ourselves. Is this part of the de-programming? Do we, as a people, need to feel the pain or guilt or whatever of a past experience over and over again? Why? Is it just a sick way of making us feel shitty most of the time?

I don’t know. Being the cynic that I am, I would have choose “Shitty” on any given day but today, but for some reason the inner me is screaming frantically about this issue.

Flashback: Junior In High School: Damon is having trouble with a breakup. Go figure. We all were. If our high school breakup to couple ratio was any indication, all of us would get divorced. To top it off, we all had just finished going through that Pretty Hate Machine phase, so the smallest little problem, to us, was the end of the world, though I had graduated to the Doors by now, and Damon, the Cure. Still, he needed some cheering up, and Justin says something like, “Hey, let’s all get together and try to cheer Damon up tonight with a movie or something.” It made perfect sense. I went home from school and started figuring out how to play the game.

Still with the parents at the time, I would have to tell mom, but my friends were supposed to call me first, so hopefully I’d be able to warn Mom and her Girlfriend in advance. In the meantime I perched myself at my desk writing Jim Morrison impersonation #287 while plotting out my latest sci-fi adventure on some notebook paper while listening to The Best Of The Doors 2 CD Set I’d borrowed from Teresa that I’d copied to a 90 minute tape that used to have some Bruce Springsteen album on it that my mom had copied for me years ago. Then I got the call, not from Justin or Damon, but from my mom, up the stairway: “Dinner!”

Shit. They were bound to call any minute. Oh well. I let the tape run and I ran downstairs for Rice-a-Roni, Fried Chicken, & Corn balanced meal. But before I could sit down there was a knock at the door. In slow-motion I walked to the door... it was Teresa. She had forgot to call but she came straight over to pick me up. “You ready?”

I turned, and saw my mom’s face wondering who it was.

In my whole life I’d never missed dinner. Truth be known, I was really fuckin’ hungry too, but that wasn’t the issue at the time. A lifetime of dinner eating was coming to a head with the fact that Damon and my friends were going to do something that was outside of school and outside of the house, and that something might, scratch that, would be an important life-experience that I could write about years in the future and turn into a screenplay or something. Maybe there would be a <gasp> girl there, other than the one’s I already had a crush on that had rejected me and remained friends anyway. The point was it was something that my socially-inert and culturally-starved body needed, more than dinner, and I was about to try and convey this to my mom in a way that wasn’t going to give away anything I was thinking at the time.

“Mom, can I go to Justin’s house?”

“But it’s dinner time.”

“I’ll eat when I get back... or...”

It was too late. The decision had been made. But I was an idiot. I tried to argue with my mom, using all of the ploys that would, later in the year and the next year, not work. Nothing. She was getting pissed, and I was soon understanding that she had won. I told Teresa that I couldn’t go because I had to eat dinner. I had suddenly been reduced to a 10 year-old, and slinked back to the kitchen to eat dinner.

I didn’t say anything at the table. I ate everything I was served and I hated it all, even though this was a pretty standard dinner in my house and I’d eaten it a million times before and actually liked it to some degree. After dinner I walked up to my room fuming with anger, and I looked at my stereo.

And instead of The Doors, I put in another album. One that I loved in a way that my mom couldn’t and didn’t understand, like she said she did when she heard the ancient stranings of Jim’s bassy voice. I put it in and I turned it up as loud as I could, and after I heard the introduction that wasn’t “Head Like A Hole,” I sat down and sang along to every single song, in order, word for word, until the last note rang out on, “Something In The Way.” Track 12 was over, and almost an entire hour had passed.

I walked downstairs with my coat on and asked my mom if I could go for a walk. She nodded, and I left. I didn’t know where I was going to go at first. I thought I’d never come back, but I soon realized I was tracing the old familiar five mile path between my house on one side of town to Justin’s house on the other. I was filled with anger. I was...

<Knock Knock Knock> “Hey, Justin. Is anyone around?”

“No... they all just left.”

“Oh...”

Empty. There was no other word for it. I missed it all. It really wasn’t that much, I guess. I later heard that all they did was hang out, a term that I would use to define all of my high school life-experiences a few years later. I walked home slowly, not in any hurry, and I added another entry to my hate-journal that defined all of my High School. I eventually went to sleep.

End Flashback.

I get all of the emotion for that night right in the face all at once at random times, last night being the most recent because we watched a Nirvana video to pass the time. I want to say that this event of emotional guilt hitting you years later is a coping mechanism that enables us to not have to deal with it all at once, but I think the truth is that we need these experiences to help us deal with the here and now.
It’s hard to verbalize any of this without sounding vague and unsure, but you try it. You take an intergal moment in your past and try to explain why it hits you in the face over and over for years to come. To me, it used to be just something that happens for no reason.

But now I think it’s a mechanism that allows us to laugh at The Weekly World News. --G.M. 2/10/98

My Adventures In The Land Of Credit by G.M. 233

It was so long ago that I applied for a job @ Target that there weren’t even fossil records left. Radio-Carbon Dating? Nothing. But the accounts department remembered, and one day in the mail I got my pre-approved Target Card.

I didn’t really want it. I was finally doing well, sort of, and I knew I’d get fucked with any type of plastic. But it was the circumstances under which I got it that caused me to forget the knee-jerk throw-away reaction I would have normally given it. Sometime in the Cenozoic era I applied for a job, and their attitude is, “What? Who? The Fast Food Whore? Tell him we’re dead,” but millennia later, some idiot in the accounts department says, “Hey, remember that guy who we said we’d all rather perform self-lobotomy’s than hire? Well, I was thinking, let’s give him one of our credit cards.” For some reason, it really appealed to my sense of logic at the time, so I kept the card for a few months without another thought.

Well, the next time I thought about my Target Card was after I moved into this pad, sometime in July of ’97. “I need hangers,” was actually what I was thinking, but my Target Card came into play. See, for once I was a little more stable financially than I ever had been, and now that things were going better, maybe I could rebuild my credit.

It’s an age-old theory: buy one our two things on a credit card, then pay it off right away, then you have good credit. So to that end, course I needed hangers.

And socks.

And the new Squirrel Nut Zipper’s LP.

And a bottle of Mountain Dew, soap, Shampoo, and other household things. It totaled $48 even. That’s not much, is it?

A flash of panic struck me and I pulled out the paperwork. Complete gibberish. I called Kris over, the local college student, but he couldn’t translate it either. The only thing that made any sense to me was a set of 7 numbers that looked something like a 1-800 number, so without delay I dialed all of them in order in the hope that the God of guidance was somewhere to be found.

He wasn’t.

There was, however, a nice young woman who told me I had until August 20th to make a twenty dollar payment. And it wasn’t even the end of July yet. How thoughtful.

It still seemed odd, though. For some reason it didn’t quite jive with the part of my brain that thought it understood the paperwork I held in my hand, but the uneasiness soon passed when Kris and I started looking at the CD Rom on the Squirrel Nut Zipper’s CD. Fuck worrying. I had a month to pay the card off. There was food to eat, beer to drink.

I went on with my life as best I could.

I went to work.

I went to the record store.

I went to the post office, where I got the bill from Target saying I was charged a $10 late fee for missing a payment. I was August 15th.

I ran home and rushed into my room to find the paperwork that I couldn’t understand the first time I read through it, but as soon as I found it the face of a demon appeared in the lettering and it all dissolved like flash paper in a magician’s hand. I called the

222 This was the issue that had The Weekly World News themed cover, and in addition to there being a “Page 23” girl (drawn by Lyra), there were also a couple of faux “articles” that mimicked that style. This would end up being the last “theme” issue I would ever do.

233 This article had footnotes in the original version (also from issue #9), and the original footnotes have parenthesis around them.

(1) Regular readers of this publication may begin to call into question the very title of this piece. “Credit? Don’t you mean Cre-don’t?” Truth be known, I’m the kind of guy that gets laughed at trying to pay with cash. The banks I used to deal with had to open a factory to produce my rubber checks and a separate teller line for my transactions. To this day, ATM’s get nervous when I walk by. But for all intents and purposes, just go with me on this one.

(2) Right after the discovery of fire, to be exact.

(3) We think his name starts with a, “D,” and we suspect he has an extra chromosome.

(4) “Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!”

(5) He studies soap making, hemp-related jewlery, The Spice Girls, and Net Porn.

(6) Closely related to The God Dionysis, this god is often referred to as the “Road Trip.” god as well.

(7) Not to be confused with, “The Record Garden.”

(8) After all, it tones muscles and is a great way to relax.
number for the accounts department. “The number you have dialed, 666, is currently unavailable to any Earth-Dweller. Thank you.” The message was followed by laughter.(10)

Beads of sweat formed on my forehead. I began to cry. Weeks went by, and each pay day came around I went to Target™ to make a payment(11), and each time my balance increased by the same amount. The bill collectors were calling about twice a week by this time, each with a slight snarl in their voice and the sounds of barking dogs(12) in the background.

I got my first ulcer on November 5th(13).

The first clump of hair fell out two weeks later.

The story has no happy ending, except for the fact that I now own some hangers that I’m selling for $10 apiece(14), and my Squirrel Nut Zippers CD retails for more than a Nine Inch Nails import(15). $100 later, the card is now in pieces, and I have sworn off credit forever.

Until I need socks again, that is.

|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Part XVIII: Turning The Corner.**

When I look at old back-issues of things I’ve written, it’s not until around issue #10 I finally stop cringing and crying and yelling out, “Why, why WHY, GOD, WHY!??!” It’s not that I don’t like the stuff that came before, that; quite the opposite, in fact. My fondness and attachment to the early stuff has often prevented me from lighting fire to it in the wee hours of the night after one too many drinks (shit, somethings I reach for my lighter and contemplate this very act when I’m stone-cold sober).

But, the feeling that it could have been better (and, in most cases, much better) is all too pervasive when trying to get through some of this tripe. When I meet people for the first time, and they show interest in back-issues of my ‘zine, I very rarely give them anything before issue #10. (Sometimes, nothing before issue #12.) It’s not that I don’t want them to read that stuff (I openly and regularly offer all of my back issues on my website and in print, and have even filled quite a few orders for these back issues), but if you want to start somewhere, it’s generally better to start with my more recent work and go backwards if you want to read the quality material first. (This is probably far to late in the game to have stated this for those of you who have slugged your way through over 100 pages of crap only to find out that I myself don’t recommend having done so... before you get really angry, just imagine how it must feel to have distributed and written stuff like this.)

Socially and personally, little was changing in my life during these three issues. The biggest thing was (you guessed it), another break-up, but after having been together for over a year, it made sense to make a big deal about it. There was the usual roommate turn-over / job bullshit that gets everyone down, but what else is new? Isn’t getting that kind of crap out of your system what ‘zines are for in the first place?

Each of these three issues had 100 copy distribution runs, with additional “batch” runs made as needed. Around this time I was actually beginning to generate fan mail and reader response. Because of this, you’ll notice the inflated ego reflected in the text. I make no apologies because, for the first time since I started writing ‘zines, I was actually deserving the attention it was getting.

---

(9) By demon I do not mean to imply that it was evil looking. On the contrary, he was the kind of demon you wouldn’t mind inviting over for a beer after a show so you can shoot the shit about tempting priests and whatnot. But under the circumstances, even a friendly-looking demon was a bit much to handle.

(10) Though I’m not completely sure, I think a Garth Brooks song was playing in the background.

(11) This always involved me getting naked, dancing around a fire pit and chanting KARP lyrics while they mutilated my flesh and fed a sample of my blood into their computer. From what I understand, the blood in the computer served no real purpose, they just seemed to enjoy seeing me squirm.

(12) Poodles.

(13) This date corresponds with another meeting with the accounts department where, in addition to the normal ritual, they forced me to eat Taco Bell™ food afterward. There is no immediate correlation between the two events, but it is kind of odd, don’t you think?

(14) Order Today! Supplies are limited!

(15) Unless you’re shopping at Record Garden, in which case I’ll be giving you the better deal.
Turning The Corner.
The dragon was drawn by my then-girlfriend Cassandra Thrasher, who I posterred to let me use it until she finally caved in. Now I sort of regret it because of the way things turned out between her and I, but at the time it seemed like a good idea. I had done the “ransom note” logo months before I’d even started on issue #10, which is funny because I spent a lot of time on it and then only used it once. C’est la vie. Not much to say about the cover for #11. At the time I thought it was pretty meaningful, but with hindsight I just can’t seem to find anything too exciting about it. Oh well. Issue #12 was the first issue where I was really proud of the cover. I thought it fit thematically with the content and really made my zine look a lot slicker, which was a look I was aiming for around this time. I had gotten the camera from Missy, a roommate that stole almost $200 for me and $500 from our other roommate, Brandy. Gotta love those pot-smoking Christians, huh? I had taken an earlier version of this photo before, but it was far too blurry and didn’t work out very well. This version is far better.

I’d Buy That For A Dollar #11

Feb. ’99

"Your face, my thane, is as a book where many May read strange matter." --Shakespeare: Macbeth

"Say, good man, I found this at Kinko’s. I think you should probably use it in your zine somewhere." --The Raccoon City Kid

"I am..."
--g.m.

I’d Buy That For A Dollar

Volume I, Issue 018 April, 1999

AFT Meridian Tapping Points

**Note:** All meridian points shown 20 mm except

Back of Hand = 75

Under Nose = 5

Under Lip = 5

TE = side of ear

AE = above ear

OE = outside ear

UE = under eye

UE = under eye

DT = non

AF = outside ear

16 mm

SN = side of nose

SN = side of nose

UN = Under Nose

I.L. (2) Under Lower Lip

OR = Occipital Ridge

SH = side of hand (Kanji Chop)

SL = side of Larynx

TH = thumb

BF = back of hand

IF = index finger

LF = little finger

MF = middle finger

T = top center of 10th digit

C = collar bone
Justin broke the news to me while I was drunk and sitting comfortably on my couch, which was an admirable thing for him to do, I might add, because I needed to be sitting down. It was hard enough to cope with Justin's return to my life, or at least, a return to constant and regular contact, but this was almost too much.

Devin was coming to visit. Justin was smiling with that grin of his when he knows he's just dropped a bombshell & is anxious to see the aftermath, and I'm sure he wasn't disappointed. My god, Devin? In Eugene? My mind went reeling. I watched myself blink with un-comprehension. Tomorrow? I almost wished I'd sober up and not remember that he'd told me. But for the next few hours, I couldn't stop scraping the depths of my memory.

When was the last time I'd seen Devin? I can't remember. Graduation? Yes, but it had been since then. I knew that.

Throughout High School & the better part of my worthwhile formative years, Justin and Devin were the only friends I had. Sure, Justin was on the track & football team for a while, and was the social butterfly of our little trio, so he had lots of friends. Devin grew and adapted over the years we hung out 24-7, and though I remained the dorky nerd wanna-be that spent any remaining time after school plugged into a computer or writing, Devin learned the ins and outs of social interaction better than I ever would, and eventually he, too, had scores of friends that I felt uncomfortable around. But when it was just the three of us, there was something that was stronger than the other social bonds they had made. Something beyond definition or understanding.

At least that's how I saw it.

We had our own little three-man club, a group with traditions and regulations that all three of us would be far too embarrassed to reveal in the here-and-now. But there were plenty of other things too. As often as we were all together, there were occasions when it was just Devin & I, or Justin & I, and of course Justin & Devin minus myself. The latter, to me, seemed to happen more regularly than I would have liked, but I account this, now, to the fact that all people feel negative energy when they're the one left out.

Maybe I was the one that was the odd man out, who can really tell? Then again, I remember hundreds of conversations with Justin or Devin about what bothered me about the other, and with hindsight I can see that this was probably their way of venting about me. I can understand the need to, especially when I think about spending most of my High School years with someone like myself.

Through all the trials and tribulations, though, it seemed that nothing could piss any of us off forever. Very few girls came between any of us, and when such a thing like that did occur it would often blow over right after one of us said something really stupid, which would leave something for us to tease the other with at later dates. Very few debts were incurred between the three of us either, and when they were they were often taken care of with the efficiency of the IRS's turtle branch, and would therefore be laughingly overlooked. The fights that did happen merely because no two humans can ever agree on everything all the time only ever left emotional scars, and have since, in turn, fueling our creative endeavors, so in the end everything went much more smoothly than any sitcom could ever hope for.

If I remember correctly, the three of us saw each other was during that brief period when I had moved back to Cottage Grove from Milwaukee, and before Devin moved to Corvallis for school reasons. Justin, I believe (and please correct me if I'm wrong) was living in Eugene. The last meeting of the Three Amigos was probably held at the Vintage Inn, and now that I look back through the years I'm sure that none of us were aware that it was the last time we'd do so.

Time passes, and Justin and I continued to see each other with the frequency of two people who have completely different agendas in their lives, but for some reason I could never hook up with Devin. I'd always just miss him after he'd been in the area, or have the wrong number when I'd call him. Every so often I'd hear that Justin got ahold of him, the most painful story involving Devin's 21st birthday. There was an unspoken vow that had been made that that day (Devin being the youngest of us by a few months for me and a few days for Justin) would be the beginning of some epic adventure of unseen proportions in our lives, and the fact that I missed it hurt me worse than any time we'd argued or had a fight. It really wasn't their fault, seeing how Justin did make it to my 21st Birthday party (though, again with hindsight, that wasn't much to brag about anyway), but the pain was real enough to bring about the old doubts that our friendship had more than just a few cracks that needed patching over.

The realization that the last time I had seen Devin was almost 2 years ago hit me with amazing ferocity. Two years? It had been at least that much time, back when I was still dating Amber.

Colin was coming over, and we had planned to go to the Glenwood back when this was a statement no one was embarrassed to make. The difference between this and any other night was that somehow the gods had looked down upon me and gave me the knowledge that Devin was in town. I called his parents and got him on the line, gave him directions to my old apartment, & like clockwork he showed up and we tried to catch up on the lost time. When Colin & Amber made it known that they were getting impatient, I invited Devin to come along with us, and he agreed. I rode with him so we could BS, and upon our arrival another bit of new made itself known: there was LSD afoot.

From I'd Buy That For A Dollar! #10. I tried numerous times to mail a copy of this issue to Devin, but either I couldn't get his address, or I had just finished a new issue and wanted to send that too, or I needed to write a new letter to make sense of all the crap I was mailing him, and then... well, it just never got sent. I believe I gave a copy of this issue to Justin, but I don't ever remember him commenting on it. I made one minor alteration to the text in the version here that wasn't in the original piece: I changed the word "Portland" to "Milwaukee" in the 9th paragraph, because it wasn't Portland I had moved back from, but Milwaukee. I don't know why I said Portland in the original article.
Now, the closest I'd ever come to a hallucinogenic experience with Devin was that induced by sleep-dep, and acid & Devin seemed like a night of pure insanity. I was all for it, but Devin declined, and with this new development the decision became harder to make. The idea that Devin and I would interact while he was (relatively) sober and I was dosed seemed to have it's positive aspects too, but left the potential for disaster higher than normal. The age old problem of being on the same level, or, "in synch," as it were also came up, but I finally went ahead and dropped. To hell with the consequences.

The rest of the night has been permanently scarred into my brain-tissue, and if it weren't for the fact that I've started the story out numerous times with, "This is a true story," I would probably think that it was only just that: a story. But truth is stranger than fiction, and I'll be brief in saying that the highlights of the evening involved me, Colin, Amber and two other friends (who are not immediately involved in the story at hand) driving through an empty star-filled void with street signs littering the vacuum, me by myself experiencing naked free-fall for what felt like several millennia, the return of Colin and Amber in some sort of spaceship that we used to destroy & rebuild different parts of the universe on some sort of universal quest (after I saw it get created in the first place), and the eventual return to "reality" with Colin calmly asking me if I wanted to go and buy some Lemonheads at 7-11 (which we ended up doing). It has been said that the tales of my acid trips are the entire reason people choose to take acid in the first place, but I like to think of it in terms of what I can do with 1 hit of acid takes 100 for most gurus.

The absence of Devin during this trip spawned the "quest" aspect of the rest of the night. One moment I was talking to Devin, I got distracted by something, turned back, and he was gone. This was a major blow to my reality bubble, and it was only well after I had come down that I began to think along the lines that maybe he said goodbye at some point and I was unaware. Whatever the case had been, I didn't see him again.

Justin had promised to contact me as soon as Devin was in town, and the excitement had already begun to build. Finally I saw Justin walk into the bookstore, and right next to him was Devin & the force of a wind blew past my face; he looked exactly the same! I'd always thought that Justin & I had, "baby-faces," those countenances that, no matter what age we reach, will always look the same. But Devin, wow! It was like a time capsule. The clothes, the Guy Gardner haircut, everything was exactly how the image in my head looked.

We shook hands & began the banter, but being at work I didn't have much time, so with a wave they agreed to meet me at work when I got off at 6:30, and off they went. The next few hours were some of the slowest hours I've ever been a part of, and as 6:30 came closer & closer the old fears returned; what if they forgot? What if they opted to blow me off and bond on their own? If had happened before, but that was in High School. We each had five years separating us from those dark days. Surely we had all matured past the point of merely brushing someone off. There was no way they would have ditched me now.

Would they?

At 5:55 I got a call from Justin saying to meet him at the bar next door to my work. A sigh escaped my lips. Of course they wouldn't flake out this time.

I closed the store with insane speed and efficiency, and made myself a cozy little place in the bar. I ordered a whiskey sour (my standard bar drink) and waited with a magazine in hand. At the point in which I was ready to give up, they walked in, and I must admit it was the strangest experience to hang out with them in a bar.

Aside from the obvious, we talked. We talked about what we'd done since last time (Devin got a degree, Justin had gone to Europe, and I was a manager at The Bookstore), and we talked about friends from High School as if there were some long-since dead off-shoot of the Aztecs. ("Remember Heater? God, I have seen her in ages!" "I saw her once...") There was an inexhaustable well of conversation at our disposal.

A unique ritual that Justin and I have become very good at took place, where we would try our hardest to think of something that we knew would scare the other two to death. Stuff like, "You realize that there are 18 year-old people around right now that were born after Regan was elected," and, "Can you believe that there are people alive now that don't know the lyrics to, 'Paul Revere,' let alone ever watched The Rockford Files?" We all swallowed our respective medicine with the looks of 23 year-olds coping as best as they can.

Justin seemed strangely quiet, though maybe it was the found drinks I'd had, or maybe the fact I was talking so much that I didn't notice when he was talking. It's hard to say. I do remember that at the point I had had enough to drink, we all agreed it was time to go back to my place.

By the time we did Devin had convinced me to smoke pot with him, something I haven't done in almost a year and swore I would never do again. My vocal reasoning why I did was that I was drunk, but something inside me was reaching back to that acid trip, trying to make sense of this sensory overload with Justin AND Devin being here. Maybe if I got fucked up enough it would all fall into place, it would make sense again and everything would be okay.

Justin and I made Devin listen to some tapes that we knew would give him flashbacks, and I began rummaging through my room looking for momentos to scare Devin with. I don't think the pot did much, if anything to my drunken state, but it couldn't have been helping. I suggested we go into the living room & watch The Simpsons with the rest of the roommates that live in my apartment. There would be other times we could talk and bullshit & frighten each other with our memories. The only thing I wanted right then and there was to know, know for absolute certain before they drove off together without me in search of meaning in the friendship that they have developed together, that the three of us could coexist without those fears and doubts being dangled in front of my face by my own insecurity.

At least for a half-hour.
I woke up and the sun was shining and I was the happiest guy on earth. I broke out all my tapes that reminded me of the summer and I sang along with them as I got ready for work. Nothing could bring me down. It was summer, finally.

Before I went to bask in the sun, I tried to make some phone calls but the phone was disconnected, which didn't really matter because I found out minutes later it would be re-connected tomorrow. That's cool. Karma. No problem here. But before I could get out of the door Kyle The Fascist Dictator stopped me. It appears that he hastily closed his checking account before a check he had given me could clear. Fortunately he had the cash with him, so all that remained was to go to the bank and straighten the whole thing out.

Arug! Bank bureaucracy. Who knows how long that would take. I looked at the sky and there was something wrong with the sun. It was still out, and there were still rays of light warming the water-drenched land that had, for months, changed my mood to the dark and broody parts that I generally loathed. The winter had been a long and difficult one, full of hardships and unexpected problems left and right. But I took it all in stride and just let my face take it all in. I sure as hell wasn't going Goth, but I was carefully walking the line that separates their facial expressions from the normal ones I make.

Fuck it. There wasn't a single thing on earth that could piss me off if it was a sunny day & I had Youth Of America with me. So what if something didn't feel quite right? It would fix itself by the time Kyle and I were gonna go and watch the sun rise the next day. Nothing could bring me down.

I went for a walk, all the while letting the sun that was no longer hiding behind thick, dark clouds dry up the months of rainy, shitty weather that had soaked into the earth and my emotions, and for the first time in quite a while I felt physically content... revitalized, as it were. I hopped on my bus and made my way to work, not even bothered by the fact that, for the rest of the day, I wouldn't even see the sun.

After work some stupid PBS pledge drive had pre-empted Monty Pyton, and as I watched it for a few minutes in disbelief that they had actually done something like that, I began to feel the strangeness overcome me, as if I had just walked into a room with a worst enemy and we were both pretending the other wasn't there. Something was afoot, and as I drank my Foster's (Australian For Cannadian Beer) & wisked myself to a comfortable sleeping state that I had not (at least it seemed at first) achieved in quite a while, I began to wonder just what was wrong that I was missing.

It was then that the weather, in some strange attempt to make me miserable, struck. A storm formed that soaked into my subconscious mind, and by 4 A.M., the time I was supposed to get up for our hike to watch the sunrise, I felt as if I'd been hit by an airplane that had been blown down by a hurricane.

My head throbbed in disbelief, and I stumbled out of bed to tell Kyle I was in no condition to go. He nodded and told me to go back to bed. What could have happened? It was summer; the Sun was going to be out. How could I feel sick? As I fought to regain unconsciousness, I pondered all of these things trying to make sense of what had happened.

When I woke up hours later, I painfully made my way to a window and it was only then that I understood why I felt so shitty: it was raining. The weather, out of some sort of sadistic whim, decided to make me feel like shit in the night, and it had worked.

All my plans for that day were ruined, and later that day, as I listened to my boss rattle on about how my hours were going to be cut drastically, the only thing I could think about was how someday I would exact my revenge against the Earth for it's evil prank it had played on me.

---

225 From I'd Buy That For A Dollar! #11. I suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (who doesn't?) and for the most part my body acts like a huge solar battery. When I have direct contact with the sun, I am the happiest person you'll ever meet. When I am given rain and grey skies (and what is a fairly typical Fall / Winter in Oregon) I get so severely depressed I often can't bring myself to get out of bed. (It's almost as bad as the natural chemical imbalance that I suffer from year-round). I get moody about everything and the only cure is immediate infusions of sex and booze (generally in conjunction with each other). Being single in the Spring / Summer isn't so bad, but in the Fall and Winter you might as well buy me razor blades and piano wire for Christmas, because I'm going to be that much fun to hang out with.

I don't know where else to put this in, so I'll mention it here: this issue contained a piece by Aaron Cometus called "There Goes the Neighborhood". I had sent him several copies of the first few (three or four) issues of I'd Buy That For A Dollar!, and he wrote me back and commented on a lot of the stuff, mostly saying that I needed improvement. Then he accepted my offer to write something for each other's 'zine, and sent along the story "There Goes the Neighborhood." He told me to type it up and get back to him about it before I printed it (since the version he sent me was practically illegible). So I mailed him the "typed" version and waited to hear back from him. No answer. Time passed. Eventually, The Romen City Kid e-mailed me in that in issue #43 of Cometus, he ran the story while slamming me that I never printed it in my own publication (he claimed I was too stoned). Any number of reasons could have prevented him from getting my typed version, which I could understand, so instead of bitching about it too much, I instead ran the story is issue #11 and made a lot of jokes about me being a stone. I sent a copy to him, but never heard back from him (he was probably pissed that I had finally gotten around to printing his story after he'd already given up on me). This little "saga" has in no way affected my opinion of his 'zine, which has (obviously) been a huge influence on my own writing to this very day. More than anything, I was stoked that he mentioned me in his 'zine (even if it was negatively).

226 Kyle The Fascist Dictator was a great roommate that stayed at The Blitzhaus for a while before he joined the Navy. He got the nickname from his habit of trying to motivate us to keep the house clean, which everyone complained about because we were mostly lazy. But he was a good person to have in a house that was always pretty dirty. He drank like a fish, smoked tons of pot as often as possible, and worked his ass off when he wasn't studying. A common sight at The Blitzhaus while Kyle lived there was him, passed out at the end of a long day of TCB. He worked himself to sleep every night. Apparently he is now out of the Navy and lives in Japan with his new lady friend, to which I say, "Hell yeah!"
More Inane Ramblings about the Dork Aesthetic: Sleep. The lack thereof, or the over-accumulation thereof can actually supplement the person in question and help create a "self" moment.

There are two ends of the sleep spectrum. First, there's the end where lack does wonders to your mind, and creates the mental environment ideal for what you want. The less sleep you get the more wild the ideas become, so caution is advised. ("Hey, let's walk 70 blocks to see if that church has a new slogan on its reader-board!"). Then there's the end where nothing on Earth could prevent you from getting that ever-so-necessary six hours before you have to go to work. Where you land in the spectrum seems to differ from day to day (and more importantly, where you land in the spectrum of caring), but I seem to always lie in the middle.

There was a point in my life where it took a team of medics and a five-hundred watt light bulb to pry my eyes open and breathe life into my unconscious body. You couldn't wake me for all the smack in Frisco, regardless of the occasion. Even on Christmas Day I'd be dozing until 7 A.M., a rarity in a house full of 4 A.M. gift-crazy children. I remember one day when I could barely stay awake past midnight, and after a full 8 hours of sleep Colin burst into my room in full McDonald's® regalia and a new watch he had received for his birthday, and in true Colin form loomed over me and shouted, "Wake up! You're late for church!" My eyes opened but I had no clue what was going on, and it wasn't until the introduction of caffeine 30 minutes later that I stopped saying, "What?", and even then Colin had to remind me of what had actually happened.

And of course the was a point in my life when nothing could get me to sleep short of a fist in the face, and the neighbors dropping a feather on their counter withdrew me from my sleep web. I remember countless restless evenings writing pages and pages of progressively worse and worse nonsense. I remember how easy it used to be to wake me. Here's the scene: it's 12 noon, and I've been in bed since Colin dropped me off at my house three hours earlier. A light breeze has been lulling me in and out of consciousness for the last hour, and suddenly my front door in the living room, past my own bedroom door, down the hall and across the living room, begins to carefully open. There's no sound other than the click of the doorknob as it's turned, but something inside me clicks at the same time and I am instantly awake, immediately aware of my surroundings. Colin, the ever-vigilant prankster, is proceeding with caution, hoping to have gotten the drop on me, but in my curled up and comfy refuge, my eyes focus on the door and prepare for what is to come.

It opens, and in peers Colin. Our eyes meet.

"Hey, what's up?" I say.

"Damn!" he says. Yet another prank foiled... but at what cost?

Sleep is nothing to be taken lightly, though. Most of the time I lie in the middle of the sleep spectrum, and I am happy to stay there. But it is the conditions under which we get sleep that shape the continuing environment that we perceive and interact with on a daily basis. I myself do not think I have gotten a fully relaxing night's sleep in what seems like 10 years, but I am okay with that because it keeps things interesting and gives me something I can complain about when people don't feel like telling me to shut up when I'm drunk.

I have gone through many cycles of long and short, nightmare drenched and normal dream filled, lack of dreams entirely, comfortable bed and sleepy-couch induced, and heavily inebriated rest periods, all of which produced various different kinds of sleep. Though none of them were fully "restful," all of them have been helpful in shaping the world I live in. Sleep in not bad, but it's what we do with sleep that makes it, "good," or, "bad."

I try to use sleep to achieve the "self" moment, a moment best described as the beginning stages of taking acid, except you never go up any farther. You have a weird understanding of your body and your mind and you become strangely productive in very odd ways, partially because you are not being held back by any preconceptions of what you should or shouldn't be doing. Sometimes

---

227 Also from issue #11. This was part of an attempt to follow in the footsteps of what I had read in the "zine Germ Of Youth, which had inspired me with all sorts of ideas about what I should be doing in my spare time. Since I was a DJ at KWVA and produced my own "zine, I decided that I was going to shape my own sub-culture based on what I was (at the time) calling the "dork." aesthetic. The idea was to embrace the feelings of awkwardness and inadequacy and make it your strength, and use it to your advantage. I used to ramble on about this on the air at KWVA, and played music that I thought was reflective of that attitude (Men's Recover Project, Devo, ...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Death, etc.), but soon enough I abandoned connecting the word "dork" with it, and instead felt that I should just work toward making my point without trying to carve out a sub-cultural name for it to connect with. "Dork" was what they used to call me to make fun of me, and while I felt that I had come a long way since those days when people used to mock me for my beliefs / ideals, I felt that I didn't want to use the word "dork" as some sort of ironic name to refer to my desire to listen to silly music and do things I thought was fun that other people made fun of. I genuinely liked to listen to and do those things, and a lot of people co-opted "dork" to infer something that was bad but you enjoyed for "ironic" purposes, or as a "guilty pleasure". (How very indie-rock!) While I still adhere to the ideals and the aesthetic, I don't use the word dork to describe it anymore. (This practice has extended to my role playing friends: many of them refer to gaming as "dorking out", and I have asked them time and time again to call it, "Making Role play," instead of using the vulgar terminology. I think because of that they now make fun of me even more than the people who used to call me a "dork."). I really wanted more of this kind of stream-of-consciousness material in later issues, but only ever managed to hit something I thought was good in my "tribute to Lester Bangs" (which is included in this collection as well).

This piece caused me to get some of the most schizophrenic responses from people who read it. People either loved it or hated it, had no clue what I was talking about or understood every word I wrote (sometimes in ways that I had not really intended, but they seemed to think that I had written some kind of gospel here). No two people responded the same, and furthermore, the people I expected to really like it (The Ramen City Kid being the biggest example) thought it was too vaguely written and made no real points, while relating his comment aloud caused people I had no idea would even like it to argue with him that it was the best thing I'd written yet (which I don't believe, but who's to say, really). I find it interesting that something like this generated that kind of passionate response. I wish I could do that more often.

---
a "self" moment doesn’t even have to be constructive. You can have a "self" moment any time of the day. But to me, they often happen in the morning, just after coffee.

And I cannot express the importance of coffee. If you want the self moment, drink coffee right after you wake up. I suggest taking a tip from my friend Justin, and having you coffeemaker alarm set for five minutes before your alarm clock, so you can pour and drink that first cup of the day before you even get out of bed. I would even say that coffee is more important than that first meal of the day, because even though the first meal of the day gives you sustenance that enables you to actually perform tasks and move around and stuff, without coffee, how are you going to keep from passing out while you do them?

For some reason, coffee stimulates the brain in a very odd way, and when combined with an unusual kind of sleep gotten the night before, is very capable of producing the "self" moment. I think this is because the brain is not really turned on in the morning or after just waking up, and coffee kind of over-rides the normal brain functions and jumps straight to the minimum requirements to function. Since there are a lot of things that aren’t working because of this, presto, changeo, we have have a self moment.

I discovered this one morning after a long bout of not drinking coffee, and even then before that I didn’t drink coffee in the morning for some reason. Having first been introduced to the necessity of coffee as a device to keep you awake, it never once dawned on me that it could actually function as something to wake you up. For some reason I had picked Mountain Dew™ to accomplish the feat that coffee had been flawlessly performing for generations and generations.

Now, there isn’t anything wrong with the Neon Green. I consume quite a bit of it on a regular basis. But to the advanced dork, it really doesn’t give you the kick you need to snap yourself out of that early morning empty-headed feeling you have. The Dew should be used strictly for maintaining your caffeine levels thoughtout the day, not jump-starting them. But I digress.

So there I was, for months, wandering around in a daze, drinking The Dew and trying to figure out what I was always brain dead all day. I couldn’t get anything done until after the sun went down. I couldn’t write, my funny-bad-idea quotient was really low, and I couldn’t for the life of me do anything before noon. Something was amiss, but what?

Well, one day I woke up fairly early and I didn’t have to work until 3. Normally I would dork around the house until I had to leave, but I was still very tired and the urge to go back to sleep was too great. This was just not going to happen unless I got some caffeine, so I put on some clothes and went to the store across the street.

My first impulse was to get some Dew, but for some reason the smell of really shitty coffee derailed that line of thought immediately. There is something about horrible coffee that I cannot resist. If it has been brewed in a bad restaurant or convenience store and tastes so bad that, “Cuppa Joe... Black,” type drinkers won’t drink it, then it must be some really potent shit. You can guarantee I will drink it, especially if it’s so hot it will burn my mouth.

So I poured myself a large cup full and drank it. Immediately I began to get the strange wave of acid all over my body. It was like in cartoons, after they drink some kind of potion and immediately their body changes color starting from the head and going down to their feet. I remembered things I hadn’t thought about in years. I could actually feel all of my hair. I could smell things I hadn’t smelled ever. The first bad idea I had concerned tattooing my entire foot black. I had hit pay dirt.

The moral of the story is, no matter what anyone says to you, coffee is VERY important to achieving the healthier dork lifestyle.

Now, let’s get back to the “self” moment. Feeling in touch with the self moment is the first part. The second part is experiencing something that is so specific to yourself that you instantly become aware of the fact that you, and only you, will ever fully appreciate what has just happened to you. This puts perspective on ideas and concepts that I would normally not see, because we are trained as people to try and see things from everyone else’s point of view except our own. It just so happens that we are the only people that can ever fully appreciate everything, let alone understand most things, that happen to us because we have no other point of view that we can honestly see those things from. Try it.

Go out and get between 5 to 7 hours of sleep. Just enough to function, but too little to feel well rested. If you can, sleep on a couch instead of a bed (or a bed instead of a couch, or whatever). Try and change your natural sleeping environment as much as possible.

For me, I have more self moments when I’m (duh!) by myself. I guess the reasons are obvious, but sometimes it takes the statement of the obvious before we will actually see it, and it wasn’t until I was alone after I started drinking coffee that I had my first true self moment. Next, drink coffee AS SOON AS HUMANLY POSSIBLE after you wake up in the morning. Preferably, wake up to an alarm clock, but if you just wake up that’s fine too. The alarm clock jolts you out of bed, adding one more level on unusual to the sleep you got the night before.

Now, here’s the hard part. Do whatever it is you would normally do. Most of the time you try and force the self moment, and that really isn’t what the whole thing is about. You can’t force yourself to have a self moment any more than you can force toothpaste back in the tube. You just have to let it happen. For me, the first few self moments were while I was just looking out the window. I was listening to music, eating, not really thinking about anything, and then I’d see something that was just hysterical. It was so amazingly funny that I knew I’d just have to tell someone about it. ASAP.

The problem was, when I thought about how I would tell the story of, “what had happened,” it made no sense in words. I couldn’t actually tell someone what was funny about the experience or illustrate it in a way that made it funny because what was funny about it was so specific to me, and to the way my mind worked, that words couldn’t do it justice. It was not funny unless it was in my head.

Another example involved me doing laundry. I had gotten up butt-early and hauled all my crap down to the laundromat, got the machines going, and went out front to smoke. Just as I finished lighting the cigarette this guy came up and started talking to me. He really didn’t have anything important to say, and I don’t really remember the conversation, but at the time, he spoke with this tone
that just screamed something... but what? I couldn't really pin it down in words but it was definitely something worth relating to my roommates...

Well, actually, no. You see, it makes no sense. The experience, again, is so specific that it means something only to me. A self moment designed to make sense in my head and no one else's because only in my head does it really have the impact that it does. Even now, writing about those times, they make no sense in words. But the experiences are still vivid in my mind. A self moment.

I go through the ritual as often as possible. I've found that the achieving of a self moment doesn't happen every day, but when it does I'm grateful. It helps me remember who I am and that I can never really understand everything. But in understanding myself, I become a better person, and become more in touch with the dark aesthetic.

---

12/26/98, 9:09 P.M. Work. 228

I think its funny when people say, "I Just don't know what to do with my time." (Pause.) (12/28/98, 3:42 A.M. Blitzhaus.)

I wish I could say that. If you seem to have all of this time with nothing to do, why don't you get a second job & give me the money from it so I can have more "free" time to do all this other shit that, because of my fucking job, never gets done.

Sometimes I fucking hate people.

'80's Music 229

I will never, until my dying day, understand '80's music. Here it is, the absolute most depressing decade of my life that produced some of the absolute most depressing music of all time, and every single person I know has some sort of obsession with keeping this stuff alive. There is not an '80's song that exists that I haven't heard or know the words to. I can't name a single one of

---

228 This is from I'd Buy That For A Dollar! #12, edited from my Journal. The majority of this issue was a continuous stream of my Journal entries, occasionally interrupted by show a review or the infamous "bitch" article (which is not included in this collection). The "bitch" article was a huge rant in text form about how I was annoyed at the female of the species for the benefits being a girl seems to offer, and pontificated on that line of thinking while trying to interject jokes and humor to make it more palatable to the average reader. It generated a huge negative response, mostly from people who missed the point. I was saying that "nice guys" (who have no bad intentions and just want to be in a happy relationship) get treated poorly because of the mistakes most guys make when they are dating. Admittedly, I argued my point in the same way that, say, Jim Goode might have done it, but my intention was not to say that women should be more receptive and forgiving to the plight of the male (for the most part these behaviors are pretty well engrained in both men & women by now), but rather to point out this kind of hypocrisy in the field of dating. A common complaint I hear from women is that, "there just aren't any nice guys around," and I keep shaking my head and staring at my feet because I'M SITTING RIGHT HERE, but they generally look past me because of the mistakes my gender has perpetrated on women in general. Anyway, it was not really very well written, nor was it something that went over very well with most people that read my 'zine (it's a far cry from the normal introspection and frustration that shines through in most issues). The worst response I got was from my friend Lyra, who writes the 'zine Plasma Whore. She tore me apart in one issue of her 'zine, finding fault with every paragraph I had written. I tried to write a rebuttal for her to print in an attempt to clear my name, but she didn't seem interested in trying to have another go-round with this subject, and thus I dropped it. That article is being omitted from this collection not because of embarrassment (I've included much more embarrassing things already), but for space concerns. If there's enough interest I may post all the stuff related to the "bitch" article on the website. (Vote by e-mail!)

Anyway, back to the real footnote: I have always tried to keep a regular Journal, but I end up failing a lot of the time (mostly because I'm working on a new 'zine or whathaveyou). Around this time I was doing the "writing as therapy" method of dealing with girls and breakups, and it only seemed sensible to drink myself silly, write about everything that was bothering me, and try to pontificate on the subject in some useful way that might be insightful when re-read later. I guess it worked to one degree or another, and while I really liked the finished product of this issue, I think a lot of people considered it self-indulgent and inane. (Isn't that what 'zines are all about in the first place, though?)

I didn't know where else to put this, but I thought I should mention that in the Editor's Note for this issue I claimed that I would write something about KARP in every future issue, something I only ever did in this particular issue. While KARP remains one of my favorite groups despite the fact that they are long-since broken up, I feel bad for making this claim and never carrying through with it. KARP deserves that kind of treatment, just not from someone as flakey as me, apparently. This wouldn't be the first time, though; in the early issues of BITFAST the "Next Issue" blurs on the last page were completely inaccurate, and eventually I just started putting bullshit in that space so that no one could call me on it. Someday I'll do right by KARP and find a way to spread their joy to the whole world. (Someday...)

Additionally, I think it's important to know that I had to re-type the text from these excerpts because originally I was borrowing The Ramen City Kid's computer to produce the text for this issue. I was partially able to use the Optical Character Recognition feature on my scanner, but it only partially worked, and I ended up having to re-type most of the text from scratch anyway. C'est la vie.

229 I don't like '80's music, which is to say that there are bands that recorded during the '80's that I do like (Devo is one of my favorite bands ever), but as a genre, I had plastisine saccharine synth-pop crap that is constantly being re-packaged and offered on those endless '80's music compilations you see on TV and in every record store. A lot of people find this hard to believe, because virtually everyone I've ever met absolutely LOVES all of this superficial bullshit non-rock just because it has a few keyboards in the background and the video has the band dressed in tacky, lame clothes that were already out of date 10 minutes after they put them on. (Humorously enough, have you noticed how just about everyone decided they liked '80's music at the same time those compilation albums were available! Hmmm...) Anyway, I stand by my assessment: as a genre, I HATE '80's music and the lame-ass consumer culture it spawned. (Don't you guys remember the scene in Back To The Future II where they go to the '80's cafe, and it was a JOKE because all that crap was LAME? Apparently not...) Sure, there are plenty of bands from that decade that I will listen to despite this distaste (most of the good punk around was recorded in the '80's), and regardless there are occasional synth songs I enjoy. Keyboards in and of themselves are very harmless when used in music (Faith No More, for example). So where do I draw the line? Hard to say. It's a slippery slope, but I manage to walk it with success nonetheless. If you're offended, by all means track me down at a party and well go head to head.
them, not the title or the band, but for You I will try. I will go to the bar every single week and will try to learn the names of all those songs that drive me insane. But I will still hate them all.

'80's Highlights That I Remember: Reagan Get's Elected; Lennon Gets Shot; John Hugh's Movies; My Parents Get Divorced; I Loose All My Friends Moving To Cottage Grove; I Make Two In CG To Balance It Out; I Notice Girls For The First Time; They Don't Even Notice Me; I Learn To Attach Emotion To Music For The First Time When I Go To Some Dance Function And No One Will Talk To Me; School Bullies Beat The Shit Out Of Me For Fun; I Get Suspended For Trying (And Failing) To Fight Back; Life Goes On.

I don't remember everything about the '80's, but in a way I don't want to. Too much of it hurts. Too much of it makes me want to cry. The only connection are those fucking songs. They were always there, running in the background, framing every miserable moment of my life spanning from Jan. 1st, 1980 to Dec. 31st, 1969. I will go to the bar. I will watch You dance. I will talk to You and I will say, "Hey, I know this song," while I do.

As the words from the song go in through one ear and out the other I will blink long enough to cry for ten years, and when I'm done I'll open my eyes and watch you trying to figure out what's wrong with me. I can't even say for sure. Why do I torture myself? I try to drink my way to finding the answer, even though I already know it.

YOU:

I've memorized every detail of you so well that I can close my eyes when you aren't there and see you as often as I want. I recognize you from behind, from the sides, above or below. I watch you smile, frown, laugh, cry and yell in every single outfit you've ever worn. When I close my eyes we can look at each other and neither of us will turn away from embarrassment. I watch you walk or sit or dance, and when I'm done watching you I open my eyes and stare into the night outside my window. I sigh & turn the tape over. Maybe Rites Of Spring will make me feel better.

You confuse me in a way that I thrive on. What do you mean when you say this? Is that look on your face a message? Why did you call me at THIS SPECIFIC TIME? What are you saying between the lines? I think when we bond on a song that I know everything about you in the most intimate way. But the next day I wonder if I was imagining it. Maybe I just thought I understood. I don't know.

I want to scream. For every moment I don't see you I want to see you more and more. I want you to understand all of these things about me that make me ME, so I cram my entire record collection into 3 hours and tell you every embarrassing thing I remember about myself. I think you laughed at the stories and like the tapes.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN!

I spend a few more minutes watching you with my eyes closed & hope & pray you will call me soon. I cringe remembering the last week. I have to work in 8 hours, so I say goodnight to you & pray for some decent sleep before then. I miss holding you so fucking badly.


Daniel Johnston on the stereo. This album is becoming more and more personal with me. I miss it when I'm not listening to it. I worry about myself sometimes.


Party at Kelly's house! Andy puts on this video Jesse Ransom had of a bunch of skaters & bikers doing tricks & crashes and stuff. Really fuckin' cool shit. Someone puts a 40 of Pabst in my hands and says drink this. Everyone is having a great time. Now this is what I'm talking about!

I was watching the video and I'm pretty drunk at this point & out of no where Joel is on the screen. What?! Joel was this homeless guy who asked if he could stay at the Blitzhaus & crash on his couch. No, you did not misread that. He brought his own couch to crash on. Well, eventually he left, leaving his couch behind (funny how all of our furniture is acquired this way).

Eventually The Ramen City Kid & I named the couch the Sleepy Couch because of it's tendency to put people to sleep after they touch it. We also started to notice how whenever we are not at home we have some sort of nagging feeling that we should go back & sit on the Sleepy Couch. We've deduced that the Sleepy Couch is alive and allows The Ramen City Kid and I to meld minds, because lately we have been thinking, acting & talking in much the same manner. Weird.

Anyway, I got really excited when I saw Joel & started screaming, "Arug! Sleepy Couch! That's The Guy! Joel! What The Fuck! Arug!" Everyone thought I was nuts (even after I explained it) except for The Ramen City Kid, but he was so drunk that he just muttered in Polish (or maybe Hungarian, I don't know) and kept on talking to Kelly.

Finally Kelly told us all to leave. Me, The Ramen City Kid, Cori & Dave/Rat headed out through the cold in a drunken stupor. I was sad to leave. I had reached this weird comfort zone where I was just drunk enough & having a great time and I didn't want the night to end. It seemed so much more fun than the nights of loneliness & boredom. (Pause.)

(9:35 P.M. Food Court... Waiting For The Bus.)

Dumb idea: a cover band called Exclamation Point & The Exactlies!

There's so much to write about. I feel like I need a place to dump all of my memories & stories before I forget them all. But
a time & a place for all things, and right now my hand is cramping. “I must be strong, like Jean-Claude Van Damme.”

1/9/99. 9:40 P.M. Bus Stop.

“How can you tell if there’s a ska show at the W.O.W. Hall?”

“How?”

“Stoned 15-year-olds out front.”


It’s hard to put this in words. How can I verbalize this stuff? The emptiness that I don’t even know how to fill. I call everyone I know and try to fill it with social engagements and opportunities to meet people. But will that put someone who will understand me in my arms? Will that person really care about what I think and feel? Will they understand when I say something that is important to me? Will they laugh or just nod and change the subject?

All of this stuff inside me no one seems to understand. When I cry listening to music do they know why? When I wander in the darkness for hours will they even ask why? Will they try to find out what I was looking for?

Will I ever find what I’m looking for?

I’m fighting my own body that begs for sleep. My eyes try to close on me and stop me from writing more. There’s so much to do and I need more time. More time to get things done. More coffee? Drugs, maybe? Maybe things will come into focus if I sleep. We’ll see.


I got a phone call but it wasn’t the one I was waiting for. You called and wanted to do “something.” I didn’t want to think about the fact that she wasn’t gonna call so I said yes. You came by and picked me up, and we were off.

The bar. The mating dance was on, but all I could think about was her. She was supposed to call me, but instead she was here. She ever saw me. Not a word. Not one fucking word. You and I sat and talked about how that’s all they ever seem to do: never want to talk to you.

We wondered if other people look at us the way we look at other people. It’s hard to believe it even if it is true. Hundreds of gorgeous people everywhere and not a single one makes eye contact. Except her, and she won’t talk to me.

And you

I stare at you but I’m afraid. It would be too complicated. Our past, our friends. Everything we’ve been through. How would we feel afterward? What would happen then? It doesn’t stop me from staring though.

It’s time to duck out. You and I are hungry. We take off to IHOP. More chit chat. More talk about people who never call. More talk about how desperate for some sort of physical contact we are. More staring at you when I know I shouldn’t.

You drive me home to my empty bed. You go home yourself. I beat myself up over all this shit that’s going through my head. Next time things will be different. Next time.

1/19/99. 9:40 P.M. Bar.

These two amazing girls came into the store together. Horn rims, vintage clothes. Fancy jackets. One had a leopard print purse. The other had a Hello Kitty wallet. My heart practically stopped. So close to these amazing girls and I can never talk to them. Never touch them. Never curl up next to them and enjoy the fact that they are so beautiful.

I’ve developed a strange crush on Sabrina The Teenage Witch. There is definitely something wrong with me.

1/21/99. 5:24 P.M. Blitzaus.

“Don’t Know What I Am.” The Wipers. The Ramen City Kid and I almost died when they played it at Tres Hermanas. That bar seems to exist as a monument to the inner functioning of my brain. I feel so in touch with me when I’m there. Every time I’m there I hear the Wipers. I always freak out. In my mind the Wipers seem to only exist between The Ramen City Kid and I. To hear it outside of our house is weird. It’s like they’re playing it just for us.

I first met “kind of” girl there. I’ve seen so many girls there that are so fucking beautiful. Devo and Old 97’s alternate with

---

230 This line is quoted from an old Rolling Stone article I read that was called “Seven Days And Seven Nights Alone With MTV.” Some writer locked himself in a motel room and kept a journal for a week while he only watched MTV. At one point, the writer started to loose it and was trying to reinforce the fact that he needed to persevere. When Mondale Chris read this, he loved that line, and it later inspired the Mondale song, “I Wanna Be Like Jean-Claude Van Damme.” I believe our friend Cori even made a video for it, which had shots of Mondale and cuts from different Van Damme movies. How cool is that?

231 I’m really proud of coming up with this joke. I still think it’s pretty funny.

232 A friend of mine who lived in Portland (Pat The Pirate, who later became my roommate when I moved to Portland) sent me a letter after he got this issue with the words, “SABRINA THE TEENAGE WITCH!?” on the back of the envelope. Again, it might be pretty obvious to everyone else, but no one I know has a similar taste in women as I do. In my defense, she’s the same age as me, so that makes it okay... right?

233 This was a short-lived Eugene bar that was the absolute coolest place around. I blame Ransom for turning me on to that place, because I hadn’t heard about it until he clued me in. When that place disappeared it was a huge blow to the Eugene nightlife. Sigh.
the Wipers on the stereo. Jon & Justin & myself stick out like sore thumbs because we’re the only ones that aren’t paired off or have other “friends” there. We watch them like hawks. There’s no way in hell they’ll talk to us.

Cheap drinks. A place solely devised to torture me every time I’m there. Of course I go there a lot. “I don’t know what I am.” Duh!

8:01 P.M. Blitzhaus.

ROCK STAR WARS (Starring Eugene Icons As Luke And Han).234

(Note: This is based on a true story, as witnessed by the author. I’m sorry guys, I couldn’t help myself. No disrespect.)

It all started simple enough: Steve Perry of the Cherry Poppin’ Daddies decided he’ll go out for a drink. But he simultaneously shows up at Tres with Jake Varicoaster. Tensions rise.

“What are you doing here?” asks Steve.

“Having a drink you asshole,” replies Jake.

Their eyes narrow. The battle begins.

Steve, watching Jake’s reaction carefully, walks over to a table where Bruce, the owner of John Henry’s, sits with some friends. Words are exchanged. A pat on the back. That sort of thing. Steve stares confidently at Jake. “Let’s see him top that,” he thinks.

Jake smiles. “Pathetic,” he thinks. Jake descends on the bar that’s full of girls and greets them all with open arms. After a quick exchange with the bartender, a free beer is presented. He smiles at Steve.

Steve pauses only to laugh. After a quick smile at a girl in one corner, she comes over and produces a Daddies CD and asks for an autograph. Steve signs with a smile and offers to buy her a drink. Round two has begun.

Jake, not to be outdone, nods at the bartender, and the next song on the stereo is the local hit by the Varicoasters, “Eugene, OR.” Several people in the bar gasp in excitement and sing along. Jake smiles. They don’t have a Daddies CD in the stereo at Tres.

Steve begins to flounder. He decides to raise the stakes a bit. He turns to the girl he bought the drink for and off-handedly mentions the new video he just shot and how their new album is being recorded. Name dropping peppers the exchange. Steve looks up and notices that it’s too late. Jake’s already shoozing or a bird at the bar.

Steve is furious. He walks over to Jake and grabs his shoulder. “What do you think you’re doing? You know full well that without the Daddies your little ‘ska’ band wouldn’t be anything.”


“I forgot. Ska is sooo original. I was singing ska when I was 10, okay? Why don’t you try a style of music that’s only five years out of date instead?” Steve responds.

“Ha! This from the man who thinks he’s playing a show in a ’20s speakeasy. Get with the program. We’re ska-PUNK. Fuck ska AND swing,” Jake counters confidently.

“Oh, yes, ska-punk. As if Op Ivy, the Bosstones, Rancid and I million other bands weren’t already doing that. You’re so lame.” Steve snorts and glares oppressively.

“I see,” says Jake. “So some cross-bred bullshit version of your ‘attempt’ at swing hasn’t been done by everyone else in the world. Oh, I forgot. My five-year-old brother wanted me to tell you he won’t join your band. He says he can’t lower his playing ability to yours.”

Whatever was said next was lost to the ages, because at that moment the bartender popped in Devo and the patrons went crazy. The sound of the people in the bar singing along and yelling out how cool the bartender was left both Jake & Steve well out of anyone’s mind, even the girl at the bar and girl who asked for an autograph.

Jake tried to impress another girl with a joke, but she was busy flirting with the bartender. Steve yelled out, “Drinks on me!” but no one paid him any attention. When you’re up against Devo and a bartender who not only plays it but gets you drunk too, there are no other winners. Steve and Jake quietly retreated to Max’s where two people recognized them and Steve got a free drink. Jake almost took a girl home until he found out she was underage with a fake I.D.

Pathetic.

234 The Varicoasters, at the time I wrote this, had reached a modicum of fame locally, and their shows became very well attended once their CD had come out. Jake was the lead singer, who used to score the shit out of me because he was friends with a lot of the crazy skinheads. It wasn’t until he and I talked a few times and he was pretty straightforward with me that I relaxed. I remember I used to work at the coffee place in the Mall while I worked at The Bookstore, and he seemed very happy to see someone who wasn’t your average Mall-Zombie, and was REALLY friendly when I trundled down to get some coffee. (Which is worse: being scared of this guy because he might beat the shit out of you, or being scared of him because he WAY too nice to you?) The Daddies, now MTV-level rock stars, were a huge deal in Eugene since that’s where they were from, and from time to time you would see Steve Perry around town and most people would put it on the level of seeing some sort of royalty. (Humorously, it seemed that very few people noticed that the singer in Journey has the same name, or rather the other way around.)

Well, one night I was kicking it at Tres Hermosas, and not only was Steve Perry there (in all actuality, hanging out with Bruce, the owner of John Henry’s), but later Jake came in too. I thought that was pretty funny, and while they didn’t seem to be very much aware of each other, this entire imaginary scene of “ROCK STAR WARS” popped into my head, so I jotted it down and didn’t think much about including it in my zine.

Well, Andy (an acquaintance who was also in The Varicoasters) thought this piece was pretty funny, and told me that he had showed it to Jake and made Jake read it. I was petrified. Something inside of me said that he was gonna get pissed and hunt me down like I was some stinky hippy and just unload on me. Andy assured me that he had actually laughed and thought it was funny, but from that point on I tried to make sure I knew exactly where he was at all times so he couldn’t sneak up on me. (For the record, the bartender did play Devo that night, too.)
1/22/99. 10:00 P.M. Bus Stop.

I got my tax return W-2 whatever form thingy today. I made over $12,000 last year. Where did all the money go? Ask Mr. Landlord, Mr. Stomach & Mr. Liver. They know. Each month the bills get later and later. Each month more and more checks bounce. I never have the heart to tell the roommates that we are constantly hanging by a thread. That each time I ask them for money it’s because I don’t have enough to eat if I don’t. $8.00 an hour and I’m still in debt. And I’m a cheapskate. Capitalism blows.

Here I sit outside of a monument to capitalism. A testament to the fact that people are too fucking stupid to know that everything doesn’t have to be new and exciting all the time. I’m not one of them, but unlike stupid people I’m always poor. I scrimp and save and worry about bills and work my ass off and I’m always poor. Those fucking idiots blow their cash on whatever is bright and shiny and they hardly work for anything and stupidly blow everything off, and they get by just fine.

Capitalism can bite my ass.

2/6/99. 2:21 A.M. Blitzhäus.

“Can’t you see / It’s a Mystery,”

The night. I hate the night. It’s cold & lonely & miserable. I pace around the house when the roomies are asleep & watch people walk by my apartment. They seem so purposeful. They have goals & they’re looking to accomplish those goals. I have work the next day, so I stay up late & pass out on the bus ride to & from the mall. Drink coffee @ work, drink beer @ home, fantasize @ both... anything to keep me awake & to keep me from thinking about those cravings for those fucking cigarettes I don’t fucking smoke anymore. Anything to keep me from thinking about all the other shit that’s going downhill. Pace pace pace. Drink drink drink. Hate hate hate.

My entire house is falling apart & my landlord won’t fix anything. Bills are so late it’s not even funny anymore (not that it ever was to begin with). Every day I see this cloud of gloom follow me everywhere I go, just like in that one Dilbert cartoon. Everything I put my hands on is doomed to remain unfinished & incomplete or to come back to haunt me & stab me in the back.

It’s so hard to find reasons to wake up in the morning. I used to just smoke to fill that void. “Why should I wake up? Well, I guess then I’d be able to smoke...” But now I’ve quit. It’s not good for me. Neither is anything anyone else consumes but I don’t see people harrassing them to quit the one thing that got them out of bed in the morning. Now I have to sit & wait. Wait for the next disaster. Wait for the next drama. Wait for the next person to kick me in the ribs. Waiting for Godot. Keep pushing that rock. End on end. “Hurry up & wait.”

“I’m tired of waiting.” So fucking tired.

Sometimes I think my life reads like a story with a series of beginnings & endings. Sometimes the story is short, sometimes long. Sometimes sad, occasionally happy. Every once in a while I can pinpoint exact beginnings & endings that got together & everything in between is definately a “story”. “From this day to this day is definately a story.” But in the end it’s another day, really. Another memory to add to all the others that I just push away for you. Whoever you are this time. & when “you” leave, everything is empty. Cleared out because I didn’t think ahead. Devoid.

Now what? It’s like I have no more feelings anymore. No more opinions. I used them all up on dealing with day to day life, then trying to make room for you. When you brush me off, I’m empty. Nothing. Now what?

Keep going, I guess. Fuck everything else. So what if I don’t know how to deal. So what if I don’t know what to do with my life anymore. So what if I never get that sign from you (or anyone) that I’m not just clearing myself out for no reason. The sun still keep on rising. You’ve got to keep going. The story will start again. The winter will end. The cold will go away. Keep pumping in the coffee & the booze & pave over everything else any way you can.

You have to. You have no choice.

Pace pace pace. Drink drink drink. Wait wait wait.

“I’m tired of waiting / waiting for you.”

235 A line from “Mystery” by The Wipers, off of Is This Real?

236 A line from a Lagwagon song that I only ever heard on the radio, so I don’t really know the name of it. Good song, though.

237 While I never put this in quotation marks, this was an obtuse reference to the song by the same name (“Devoid”) from Unwound’s New Plastic Ideas album. Yeah, yeah, I know. I’m surprised that I didn’t just call this “The Reference”. (Which will be the name of a venue that I own and operate eventually... anyone interested in funding me?)

238 From “Tired of Waiting” by Nomeansno on their album Wrong. That album was in HEAVY rotation around the Blitzhäus in those days. Everyone loved that album, and it was hard to listen to much of anything else. A lot of drunk running around Eugene at night with a walkman on happened while listening to that album. For some reason I thought that if I listened to enough Nomeansno that people would just know that there was a boiling pit of rage welling up inside of me and they would stop pissed me off. Why I thought this was important escapes me now.
Part XIX: Mall & Cigarette.

In issue #10 I claimed that the text there-in was part of a three-part series, part two of which was in issue #11, and part three of which was a mini-’zine I wrote called Mall. Many copies of Issue #12 (and a few issues after that too) contained Mall as an insert, in addition to being handed out to a lot of people on its own. I estimate that Mall could quite possibly be the most distributed ’zine I’ve done, since I think over 200 hundred copies have been printed.

While none of the interior text is presented here (the ’zine itself is so short that it wouldn’t translate very well inside of this collection), I find this publication worth mentioning because it was probably the fastest publication I produced. Within 2 days I had actually completed writing the text and putting together the interior collages, and was distributing copies less than 48 hours after the initial idea had hit me. Inspiration to finished product hadn’t hit me or come about like that since I did the Bob’s Annex ’zines, and it was really gratifying to see something like that come together so fast.

The idea was to present some very brief slice ‘o’ life anecdotes about what it’s like to work at The Mall. The Ramen City Kid has produced several ’zines in this size and format, and after I’d seen that in action I had been itching to come up with an idea that would work that way too. When I was fishing for ideas for issue #10 and came up with the Mall idea, it seemed almost perfect to see if it would work in the mini-’zine format.

The cover image (to the right) was actually from a postcard that our mall sold in the main office. It was the first time I had to really “invest” in an image that I used for one of my publications. Aside from the interior text, there were several snippets from magazines I had gotten from The Bookstore. It was pretty fun to put together, and it set the tone for the Cigarette ’zine I did next.

There was one bit that I thought was sort of controversial about Mall, which fortunately did NOT come back and bite me in the ass. One section started off with the line, “It occurs to me that it might be cool to have a t-shirt made that says, ‘Don’t Make Me Go Thurston On Your Ass,’” which was written in the wake of the Thurston shootings that made national news. My normal method of dealing with tragedy is to joke about it, but because the shooting was physically and emotionally close to a lot of people (just about everyone I knew was in some way connected to either the shooter or the victims), just about any joke seemed in poor taste to everyone. While there were some people who I was close friends with who I could say this kind of stuff too, I was really worried about this line in the ’zine. Fortunately, no one complained. While this kind of stuff has never stopped me from writing whatever I feel like, my concerns from this experience caused me to really curb a lot of the kind of stuff I wanted to write about in the wake of 9-11. It’s probably for the best; there are already enough reasons for the FBI to keep an eye on me, and I don’t need “World-Trade-Center-insensitive” added to my file.

After Mall was completed, I went back to working on IBTFA$!, finishing up issues #11 & #12. When I sat down to write the text for issue #13, one of the pieces I wanted to include was a longer story about my attempts to quit smoking (an effort which was successful until I moved to Portland, when I started up again). However, more ideas for issue #13 began to crop up, and pretty soon it had become a rather long issue. Since I wanted to get everything out in one form or another, it seemed logical to cut out the piece on smoking and try it out as another self-contained effort under the name Cigarette. With that in mind, I set out to re-work the idea, tightening up certain sections of it while expanded on others. A lot of other stuff suddenly was put on hold while I did this, and coupled with the idea that I would insert some photographs that were taken on my roommate Glyndon’s camera, I held everything up while I waited for the film to be developed.

Inspiration randomly struck one day, and I threw together what I had lined up for the Cigarette ’zine in one afternoon. To my astonishment it actually worked pretty good (even if the pictures were a bit blurry). I began thinking that one out too, and also included it in some of the distributed copies of issues #13 & #14. Unlike Mall, Cigarette actually generated quite a bit of controversy, mostly because of a certain section of the text that very quickly became famous among it’s readers (included below).

I had always liked the idea of one-off ’zines, and both Mall and Cigarette managed to come together well enough on their own. While I had wanted to do more projects like them, I was by no means able to force them. When I intentionally sat down to work on Cigarette as a self-contained piece of text, I just couldn’t get it to work. It wasn’t until I took a break and let the text sit before the idea of how to correctly execute everything came to me. It was a good lesson in writing and publishing to learn; I had always felt as if I needed to be working on ’zines, and felt guilty over any idle time I enjoyed because of the fact that I wasn’t being “productive”. The realization that it wasn’t a question of being productive, but rather having an output that matched my creative energies really made the following issues of IBTFA$! come together under much more tolerable circumstances. While I have huge emotional attachments to everything I’ve done, it wasn’t until I put together Cigarette that I really felt my writing was finally paced properly. The end result was, in my opinion, consistently better material. Of course, that’s just my opinion, and I’m only the writer and creator of all this stuff, who’s singular artistic vision dictates what you see in the finished product... what do I know?
Day 3. 1/29/99. 1:49 A.M. Edited From My Journal:

Third day of not smoking. I miss it more than sex, not that I’m getting any of that either. It would be so nice to get laid, though. To have something, anything to take my mind of the fact that I feel like I cut off one of my limbs and can’t adjust to the reality of the fact that I need to learn to maneuver without it. I want to smoke more that I’ve ever wanted to fuck, even in the heat of the moment. I’d trade all the sex in the world for one cigarette. Just one.

I never wanted anything this much, not even food when I was jobless and homeless. At least I could still get smokes then. I miss it so fucking much! Tobey was over tonight with his cheap-o smokes and at one point I actually thought about wresting the cigarette from his hand and greedily hoarding the entire tube to myself while curled up in a dark corner. Why can’t I get the image or the memory of what it felt like out of my head?

I miss the first cigarette of the day. Oh god, do I miss that. Orgasm, my ass. That’s got nothing on the first cigarette. I used to wait to add anticipation to the moment. After I had my shower. I’d saunter into the living room and sit down in my chair, and slowly pull the cigarette out of the pack, and stare at it. Take in the aroma. Pack it a bit more so the tobacco is a little tighter. Then slip it in and light it. Inhale... Ahhh. Savor the moment. Let it draw out. Then...exhale. In, out. Even the description is more erotic than sex. I’m getting turned on just writing this.

Food. Oh god how I miss that cigarette after a big meal. Or even a small one. Just the combination of having just eaten and a cigarette is better than PB&J could ever hope for. I miss that cigarette after masturbating. I miss it like I miss my friends when they’re on a trip or gone, except I miss this more. A lot more. More than any of the friends I have now, at least.

They don’t kid about that heroin comparasion. But I am strong. I can do this. Just think about all that money. It’s easier when I do. The saved money is what will keep me sane. I can do this. I JUST NEED A F*CKING CIGARETTE TO DO IT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Day 4. 1/30/99. 10:51 A.M. Edited From My Journal:

Last night Kelly was saying how she would quit smoking if she got laid every day. The point is academic for me seeing how I’m not getting laid and I’ve already quit smoking, but it got me thinking about how I’m not filling this smoking void with anything else. Normally, when you cut out something from your diet that’s bad for you, it’s replaced by something that is equally stimulating but better for you (i.e. replace real salt for a salt substitute and the like). She pointed out to me that I need to find something to replace smoking. What, I don’t know. But I’ll figure something out.

---

What follows is an excerpt from Cigarette. For the most part, this text is hard to present separate from the whole, and while it would be easy to present everything I wrote for that ‘zine in this particular collection, if I was gonna do that then that would make the original ‘zine sort of pointless. So this is just a snippet. This is the section that I mentioned earlier that has become pretty well known because of its, well, “content.” (It’s also one of the better sections, and might have been able to stand on its own anyway, but that’s debatable.)

On a different note, somehow I had accidentally forwarded a copy of this ‘zine to my sister, which was embarrassing enough to try to apologize for and made me extremely uncomfortable when I found out that I’d done it. However, she told me that she thought the ‘zine was great, and in turn forwarded it to my mom, who was also trying to quit smoking at the time. My sister thought it might help her out. For weeks I was disgusted by the thought that both my mom and my sister now knew the intimate details of my “solo” bedroom antics. It really fucked with my head for a while, and though I am now over it, I really worried for a long time that I’d be relating all of that to a therapist after I ended up getting jailed for robbing liquor stores. (To my mom’s credit, she told me she actually liked this ‘zine. Maybe she’s got more issues that I do...)

As you’ll notice, this ‘zine is attributed to Austin Rich, not G.M. While I was working on the material that made up issues #13 & #14 (in which Cigarette was going to originally appear), I had made the decision that G.M. was no longer a useful pseudonym, and that I needed to jettison him before it was too late. While I planned to come clean immediately, I had already completed a lot of the work on issue #13 and thus G.M. got a lot of the credit in that issue anyway. I decided to test the waters with this decision by crediting Cigarette to Austin Rich. For the most part, nobody seemed to care; most everyone knew that Austin & G.M. were one and the same, and those who didn’t know couldn’t understand the importance of me revealing this information. Well, it was important to me, dammit!
Day 5, 6 & 7:

Taking Kelly’s advice proved harder than I thought, seeing how there was only one other thing that was weighing that heavily on my mind aside from smoking that could take my mind off of smoking, that being sex. I find it very odd, too, that in traditional American culture, the two go hand in hand (the image of the post-lovemaking couple both smoking after such intense fulfillment) and in my own life the two were somehow mentally connected even though I never gave it conscious thought. I imagine I probably picked it up due to some sort of childhood trauma caused by some schoolyard cruelty.

I never was much for smoking after sex myself but somewhere in my mind the two ideas connected and smoking was a very sexy thing to me. Even now, when I look at girls, I see the ones who smoke in a different light, as if to imply that the smoking quality in a woman is more of a turn-on. Freud would have had a field day with me, I bet.

Since the only other thing that I could think about with the zeal I had for smoking was sex, I took this as a mental cue to start (1) masturbating more than normal and (2) increasing my search for some girl to help me get through this difficult period in my life. The later would not be easy, mind you. My ability to attract the opposite sex is a skill that is not well honed, so the former ended up happening a whole lot more.

When I used to smoke, I would light up right after masturbation. I don’t know why. I guess it was some sort of way to fill the oral fixation that I obviously had since I smoked in the first place. I see it like this: during sex, you’re with another person, and you do a lot of kissing and touching and so all the physical sensations that get you off are filled. That’s why I didn’t want to smoke after sex. But masturbation only fills the one physical need: orgasm. So, “Smoke ‘em if you got ‘em,” became the motto.

It was pretty easy, in my head, to make the mental leap from wanting a cigarette to wanting to jerk off because of all this. In turn it became a very odd few days because it’s hard to fit something like masturbation in around your normal schedule. There’s a lot of time involved, and you have to be alone, in the mood, and so on. It takes me about a half hour or so, and that’s a huge chunk out of my day to spend on something that didn’t actively contribute to my income.

On top of that, I’m not a very creative guy when it comes to fantasy. Sure, I have a few scenarios that always seem to do the trick, but after the first two times in a day, as any guy will tell you, it starts to take longer and longer to get aroused and takes longer and longer to finally cum. Pretty soon, instead of thinking about stuff like, “She seductively kissed me in a moment of passion as I stared deeply into her eyes,” you’re thinking about stuff like, “She’s fucking me! She’s fucking me! I’m going to cum all over her face and tits! She’s fucking me!” and shit like that. Kind of embarrassing when you’re done and you realize you just played out a bad porno plot in your head.

I was, up until this point, a once-a-day kind of guy (and have since gone back). This was normally more than enough because I’m somewhat, uhm, hard on myself (no pun intended). I’m pretty rough alone. I used to wonder if it’s just the nature of male masturbation, but in general it’s not accepted practice for a group of guys to sit around and discuss masturbation unless they’re homophobic jocks, so I never really found out. Either way, this created immediate problems. If I’m having sex with someone, I don’t masturbate as much, and this was incentive enough to continue searching for a way to get someone else to touch my dick so I didn’t have to anymore. But, uhm...

To put it bluntly, I gave myself a friction burn. A rug burn, if you will. (It should be easy enough to figure out how.) This is very embarrassing, because first off this implies that not only was I doing it too much, but that I was doing it, uhm, “violently” enough to cause the skin to break. How was I going to ever have sex with a girl if she ever saw this? Try explaining to a girl that you gave yourself a friction burn without running into immediate problems:

“What’s that?” grossed out look on her face.

“Don’t worry. It’s just a friction burn.”

“What?”

“Really. I got it from masturbating too much...”

“Sure you did. Look, I’ve got to go...”

“Hey, what are you talking about? Honest. I don’t have anything. I swear!”

“Yeah, right. See ya later, sicko.”

It just doesn’t work. So I immediately had painted myself in a corner. I didn’t want to jerk off any more for fear of making it worse, which would of course lower my chances with girls even more. I needed to let myself heal. Conclusion: no more masturbation, definitely no sex whatsoever for a while, and I still wasn’t smoking. My only outlet for venting my smoking urges was now, effectively, shut off.

I started to get really philosophical at this point (I mean, wouldn’t you?). My body & my mind were working against me in this battle for my eternal soul. On the one hand I had these urges that wanted to be sated. On the other hand, I had the mental determination to hold out, good or bad, until the bitter end.

Either way, I was loosing badly.
On A Roll. I always thought that around this time I had finally gotten the hang of putting together covers. While I had a lot of “concept” covers in the past, or things that served the function of one lame joke, I never really mastered the art of creating good (and relevant) covers until this era of my 'zine. Issue #13 was easy enough to put together, which contains blow-ups from a road map I either borrowed or found in The Blitzhaus. While #14 is embarrassing with hindsight, at the time I thought it was brilliant to include a drawing by a pen pal I had a crush on (the monster was doodled on the envelope of a letter I got from the editor of Maybe magazine, who at one time gave IBTFAS a good review). The cover from #15 never really worked out as well as I wanted it to, but the general gist (that the carpet is FILTHY) is conveyed nonetheless (it looks a lot dirtier in color). This was taken with my camera on one of the last days I was ever in The Blitzhaus when I stayed behind to clean up. I'm still annoyed that you can see a tape line to the left of the picture, something I was never really able to fix when I was laying it out. Oh well.
Part XX: On A Roll...

When I began work on issue #13, I felt like I was on solid ground, creatively. My writing was better than it had been since I started, and I was consistently producing material that, when I went back to read it later for editing, I was impressed with as far as quality. I really felt like I'd come a long way in figuring out who I wanted to be, and in that time I had ironed out a lot of the mistakes of the past and had thus moved on to bigger and better territories. My writing now is much like complex surgery, and unlike the chainsaws and hammer / chisel work I had been previously doing on my "patients", I had found my particular version of a scalpel and needle / thread; I really worked hard on breathing life into every aspect of what I was working on. I was in a huge creative surge, and not only was I producing a lot of text, but I had more pen pals and people I wrote to than I ever have before (or since). In addition to my "zine, I was maintaining the Blitzhaus, keeping a fairly active social life, and trying desperately to get a date (in addition to dealing with the mistakes of the past that I had made in those same areas). If I had known anyone who was looking for a Bass player, I probably would have joined a band too.

I look back on this time period now with fond nostalgia, but I have to wonder with hindsight if it was as good as I remember it. Probably not. I was no better off financially and my writing, while definitely improved from what it had been, was still dark and moody in-between moments of upbeat hopefulness (much how it is now). The Blitzhaus, a place I remember very fondly, was also the home of every imaginable tragedy and misfortune I've encountered before and since. Arguments and break-ups were as common as one-night stands and fun parties. Everything looks better with distance between then and now, and while I am inclined to say that I miss that time only because it is gone, I know for a fact that I probably complained about my station in life just as much as I was happy about it. The human condition: romanticize the misery of the past while you overlook the benefits of the present.

I knew that these days would not last. The Blitzhaus -- and the writing I did while I lived there -- eventually needed to come to an end. All good books leave the reader with a kind of disappointment, and often lead to discussions about what you liked about it even if you struggled to make it to the end in the first place. Suffice it to say that, regardless of the reality of what actually happened, the textural record that I left for myself to peruse in the here-and-now fills me with mixed emotions. I want so badly to think that these times were better than anything that will happen in the future, while I'm sure I did the same thing then with some imagined better time in the past that wasn't really that great to begin with. When all is said and done, I love what I wrote during period, and yet am comfortable with the disappointment when I notice the unexplored avenues I failed to negotiate or the glaringly obvious flaws in an otherwise seamless string of sentences.

As much as I miss those times for how great they were, I still cringe when I imagine having to do it all over again.

What follows are some of my favorite bits, and I'm being a little more generous with my inclusions here than I have with the other text, mostly because this is where the heart of the beast lies. What has come before has been the nappy hair and knarled teeth; the excruciating exterior of something that might have been decent if it could get a haircut and find a good dentist. This is where the horrible truth about Austin comes out... for worse, or for better (this time...)

The Travel Log Issue:

It has come to my attention that I have been pretty out of touch with the aesthetic of two summers ago. That was the summer that started out perfect. Sun, a new house, and new promotion at work paying me more. I had money in my pockets and new records spinning on the stereo. And most importantly, I was affecting change in my community and within myself. Ladies and gentlemen, I was Emo. 240

What exactly happened aside from two girlfriends, a string of new roommates, bills, and other such bullshit is hard to say. Maybe it was the weather, or maybe that little voice in my head that tells other people to burn things or shoot up High Schools. 241 Whatever it was that changed, things have been very different the last two years.

Drinking, for instance, has been different. I love it, and would never see it as a bad thing, but whereas I used to drink once every couple of weeks and get knocked over by a few beers, now I drink every single day and a six-pack is a warm up for something of Biblical proportions. Okay, so maybe I'm exaggerating, but the point is that something happened here. Something changed somewhere, and though I'm not going to seek out changing it any time soon, it is something to monitor.

I noticed that I have a bit of a gut now. I'm sure you're all laughing at this, but I used to be a toothpick. I used to be the 98 lb. weakling that turned invisible when you turned sideways. Pinching my skin at all was next to impossible because there was nothing to pinch. It wasn't that I didn't eat -- I ate all the time when food was around. It was just that I ate Ramen & Potatoes & Rice

240 This piece is from I'd Buy That For A Dollar! #13. Now, a lot of people would probably argue with me about my definition of "emo". A lot of people these days claim that the term emo is applied to things that aren't actually emo. This follows the same pattern of, "real Goths / punks / hippies / etc. don't say they're Goths / punks / hippies / etc." My definition of emo is probably not even close to any functioning one, so where does that leave me? Who's to say. All I know is that The Ramen City Kid had let me read his Germ Of Youth back issues and I was listening to my Rites Of Spring / ... And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead tape a lot around this time, and my natural inclination was to over-exaggerate everything and ramble about trying to affect change. This is what I thought emo was supposed to be, and I clung to it like a life raft.

241 There's another school shooting reference. I'm honestly not that insensitive! I just generally deal with things by making a joke about it. I guess I could never get too upset about school shootings because it was something I used to endlessly fantasize about doing when I was miserable and in High School. While I don't endorse the idea, I think that, like anything, if we learn to see the humor in things everyone will feel better about the situation. Of course, that's a little TOO optimistic, even for me...
and I burned a lot of calories by walking all over this godforsaken town. Now, I don’t walk as much, and I tend to go for the easy-to-prepare food at Carl’s Jr. instead of the rice.

Now this toothpick has a bit of a belly, and though not something to worry about yet, it does concern me I have to suck in my gut in order to see my dick. Something strange happened somewhere, and it’s definitely something I need to work on. Not that I think I’m fat at all. Not in the least bit. But I can sense that this tiny belly of mine could be the precursor to something to worry about in 15 years. Something to think about the next time I’m sitting around drinking a six pack.

(An interesting point: what would happen if the drinking-in-public law were repealed? I, for one, would probably walk around at night drinking during the summer, thus burning more calories, and thus reducing my belly. Imagine, instead of a country of fat drunks, a country of stumbling, yet very trim, drunks? Now that would be something. I bet drinking parks would open up and the whole world would be a better place. I’d vote for it. Just keep it in mind.)

I’ve also learned to be bitter. That’s something I really don’t like. Bitter is one of those things that is charming in a toothless, vomit-encrusted homeless man resenting all who walk in front of him at three in the morning, but on a 24-year-old bookshop-manager trying to cling to the furrers of his ethical and moral beliefs in a town where the last thing anyone wants to hear anything about is your artistic endeavors is something not too attractive. Believe me. Look in the mirror and act bitter. Not too pretty, eh?

I don’t know where it came from. Bitter, that is. People are horrible and will go out of their way to make you feel miserable regardless of your attitude or outlook on life. The trick is to ignore them. Somewhere along the way I stopped ignoring them. It’s one thing to have a general disinterest and hatred for all those who surround you on a daily basis. (That’s normal. Everyone feels like that.) But when you’ve lost your faith is all humanity and you’re waiting for a slow and painful death that won’t come, you really need to consider an attitude adjustment.

That’s what I’ve been trying to do. Adjust my attitude, that is.

It’s not very easy. Most everything is shit in this town, so it’s hard to get a positive attitude about life and return to the Emo philosophy of yesteryear. At last count every single place that had shows around here shut down, therefore reducing all worthwhile concert efforts to expensive W.O.W. Hall excursions. True, we got NOMEANSNO and Man... Or Astro-Man? out of that, but at what cost? (And I’m not just talking about the financial kind.)

Not only that, but they have these supposedly-stricter anti-flyer laws round here and I haven’t even seen any decent flyers except for the Violent Femmes one two months ago, and my copy got stolen off the wall of my apartment at my birthday party. What kind of town do we live in where this kind of thing can happen? Now if there was ever a call for a loss of faith in humankind, I think that would be it.

I mean, take one moment to consider this: High School kids these days actually have to buy posters. I remember a time when you walls were covered with xeroxes you got off telephone poles. Now kids don’t have that option, so they actually have to resort to buying posters? Can you believe that? What kind of world do we live in? Won’t somebody think of the children??

So yeah, music has kind of gone to shit. But we do have the summer theme. “Richter Scale Madness,” by...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead. Despite my general distaste for the world around me, every time I hear that song my heart soars and my spine tingles and all I can think about is that summer if finally, after what seemed like a full year of winter, here, and now I own this town. The night, the beer, the people, everything. This time, I AM going to affect change.

“Dream Machine / John & Exene / Smear Campaign & A SWAT Team / Let’s Have A Feudal Lord / Let’s Have A Fascist Regime / Side Effects Coupled With Withdrawal Bleeding / This Is A Riot, Right? / So Let’s Riot, Riot! / Let’s Tear This Place To Shit, Commit Pact Suicide / (Kill! Kill, Kill!) / Put Your Hand To My Mouth / And A Gun To My Head / Let’s Stop This False Pretence / Become Real Friends / Let’s Have A Mustard Gas War / Because A Fuck’s A Fuck / Richter Scale Madness, Join The Gun Club.”

How can you go wrong with a theme like that?

242 I used to steal the little signs the city put up around town that cited the City Ordinance that made the posting of flyers illegal. I found it funny that the city essentially had to post a little flyer telling everyone that it was illegal to... well, post flyers. Typical.

243 I pinched this line from The Simpsons, that show is an endless supply of quotable material for every occasion. Around this time I began work on a one-shot ‘zine called My Cat’s Breath Smells Like Catfood, which was going to be about my Simpsons addiction, but I never got any farther than the Editor’s Note. I wanted to include that in this collection, but I couldn’t find it in time. My bad for being poorly organized years after the fact.

244 In the fall before I wrote this issue, I had discovered the first...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead album, and I instantly fell in love with then. I was a huge early champion of their stuff, and when their second album became a hit (enough so to get them signed to a major label), I felt like I had really gone all out for them and it was paying off. Not that I had anything to do with their success, but I really felt proud that something I admired so much was getting the recognition they deserved. Most of the time if I’m so adamant about something, chances are it’ll find its way in the cut-out bin. (Where I found most of my collection anyway... damn my discriminating taste!) I listen to them quite a bit (even now) and have never missed a show I could get to. Most of my writing since that first album came out was influenced by drinking a lot of beer or coffee, jumping up and down a lot, and cranking up the stereo. My copy of their first LP is fuzzy sounding now because I've played it so much.
Things don’t make a lot of sense these days. Girls, music, “the scene” (as my friend PBR is so fond of saying), jobs, and every other thing that affects my life directly. It used to make sense. It used to be that girls always ignored you or scared the shit out of you, music was always there for you, “the scene” provided shows to go to, and your job would always pay you just barely enough to get by from month to month. That was reassuring. That was something you could count on. But I lost sight of that somewhere. Now, the only thing I can count on is my job, and it still doesn’t earn you enough money to pay all the bills.

It’s the perfect theme. It’s time to get back to the base instincts. It’s time to go all out and get to the root of what’s important: Emo. Play those songs, drink that beer, write those poems and get out of the house. Everything that I used to count on skipped town. So what? I’ll just put the shows on myself. I’ll throw the parties and I’ll document the scene and I’ll single-handedly take back what I lost along the way. It’s time to take to heart all those philosophies from two years ago. You may think you’ve outgrown them, but the truth of the matter is you just think you have. There’s still a lot more you can do with those beliefs that you overlooked.

--G.M. (6/7/99)

| ‘90’s Sitcom Joke by G.M. |

I’m shy. I don’t know how to deal with girls. That’s just the way I am. But I told myself it was gonna be different this time. I had a big crush on her & have had for some time now. I figured this should be easy enough. Make her a tape, hang out a few times on sort of “dates,” then go for it. I’d heard through the grapevine that she was also interested, so it couldn’t be more easy.

Except...

I had to do all the legwork. Or @ least, that was the impression I had. “The Grapevine” told me that she wanted me to make the move. Just great. I’m terrible @ this. In my mind, “going for it,” involves me trying my hardest to go in for the hand-hold until they get fed up & just kiss me. Works pretty good if you don’t mind not ever getting kissed, but what the hell, that’s just because I’m a “smooth operator”.

I’m nervous as hell. I’ve been trying to be really obvious. I really can’t tell how I’m doing. All those things that led up to this moment are running through my head. Me saying to her friends while I’m drunk that I really like her. Her friends telling me to go for it. Why do I have to do all the work? For once in my life I’d like to have them be really interested in me. Maybe even ask me out & then have them try to “go for it.”

Who am I kidding. I love this shit. I love acting like an idiot. I love making a fool of myself. I love that clumsy moment when we both know that I’m trying to kiss her & she looks @ me like she isn’t 100% sure if it’s a good idea, then gets that look like she really doesn’t mind as long as it’s clear that if I’m not good she can punch me later. I love all that shit. The fear they instill in me. I thrive on it.

The big moment. I’ve envisioned this a million times & it’s getting to the point where if I don’t kiss her I’d better leave. The embarrassing pauses in the conversations are so long we could have been there for years for all I know. I make “my move,” an awkward lean across her bed to her face where I know that, not only are we both uncomfortable, but that I must look really dorky if anyone were watching. I don’t care. The kiss is perfect, tender, sweet, & exactly as I envisioned. Except...

Click. “Shit.”

“I think we’re stuck. Hold on...”

Locked piercings. My tongue in her lip. I’m mortified.

In the ‘80’s it was braces jokes. I’d been saying for years now to all my friends that it was only a matter of time before it was piercing jokes. I just didn’t realize the joke would be on me.

I laughed nervously but secretly died on the inside until she told me she thought it was funny too. What can I say? It’s punk-rock love.

---

245 My friend PBR (also known as Lyra Cyst), who does a ‘zine called Plasma Whore, used to swear that there was a “scene” in Eugene. I don’t know what she meant by this; if there was a scene, it generally fit in one living room and consisted of the same 15 people as it did last year. You always saw all the same people at every show, at every party... pretty much everywhere you went. If it was a “scene”, it went fairly unnoticed by me. This was sort of a “joke” at her expense, that some people took a little seriously and asked me what I was getting at.

246 This is one of my all-time favorite things I’ve ever written, and it is 100% true. The girl in question has been written about a few times, most recently in issue #17 when I talk about the girl that broke up with me / moved to Portland on my birthday (also a true anecdote). I still see her from time to time, and she seems to be a very good sport about all of this stuff; even if it does make her seem like a Cold-Hearted Dahl. On a different note, I had been talking about locked piercings to my friends for years prior to it happening to me. I assumed that it would be the next wave of bad-sitcom jokes, like the locked-braces of the ‘80’s. This was one idea that I didn’t pinch from someone.
3/18/99. 3:15 P.M. Van To Olympia

Pat & Angie are 2 of the nicest people I've ever met in my life. Showing up suddenly expecting a place to crash & entertainment on St. Patties Day is a bit much to ask of anyone, but w/ open arms & bottles of beer they welcomed us into their home so we could get them drunk, keep them awake, trash their house, & deprive them of privacy. All that was left was to get Josh to the airport on time & get some much needed sleep after this utterly insane 48 hour binge.

This task would not prove easy. Damien & Pat & Josh & I had been drinking rather heavily, & Angie was far too tired & we were far too manly to let either her or Cori give Josh a much needed sober ride. Damien was quickly falling pray to the clutches of sleep, so as we pensive discussed how this was to be our greatest adventure yet, we laid the foundation of our new plan to get Josh on his plane (and on time)

Black coffee & ramen. These 2 elements, coupled w/ Pat driving drunk & us blasting Bad Religion, were going to insure that the airport would not foil any of our plans. Light speed we flew through the mazy streets of Portland singing along w/ every word we did or didn’t know. Parking structure. Run to the check-in desk. 2 hours early. Piece of cake.

The line slowly crept forward as we gabbled about everything & nothing. Drunken hallucinations crept around the airport as horrible yuppie clones on their way to Huston rushed to meet their “Package Tour” coordinator in some sort of attempt to fill the empty void that is their own meaningless existence. Inch by inch the line crept on. I began to slowly feel worse & worse as hate built up inside of me. It slowly started to seethe from every pore. All we had to do was get to that counter, check his bag, check his ticket, & we’d be out of there. We’d be happy, these horrible fuckin’ bastards that all glared @ us like we were some breed of evil monsters would be happy we were gone, it was, in general, a win-win situation. We all tried our hardest to be as polite & nice & fake as possible as we waited. We’d get there, eventually.

There comes a point when you loose control of that polite lid you keep on situations (like this one, for example), & very quickly our dialog consisted of scathingly resentful & hate-filled comments on the subject of knives & guns & yuppies & somehow combining them all in 1 big gory happy red mess

The line crept on in it’s painfully slow destiny.

Two people behind us asked if they could move ahead since their Huston flight was boarding in minutes. Grudgingly we conceded to their request w/ the poor logic that maybe this good deed would somehow benifit us. The counter soon emptied. We were @ the head of the line. Finally. We stepped forward.

The checkout girl motions for Josh & explains to him that cock-sucking yuppies on their way to Huston ranked more important than hard-working people living out their dream in life. She politely asked him to fuck off in the corner while she then let the Huston-bound cattle (who were all told to show up 2 hours early but somehow forgot & showed up very late anyway) check their six-thousand bags & children @ the desk. Steam began to shoot out our ears.

We are patient people most of the time. We work hard & we drink heavily & we partake in our self-destructive lives away from anyone who really could be offended. Now, @ this brief little moment in time when our 2 lifestyles have to overlap, who are the inconsiderate assholes who practice discrimination & anti-establishment practices & who are the people just trying to live their lives & do what they have to do who then get blocked every step of the way? They glanced @ Josh & broke their own first-come, first-served rule just to please the insatiable urge we all have to gain power over another person. Hate emanated from us like beams of light, twice as hot, 30 times more dangerous.

Josh made a small joke about next time showing up 5 minutes before his flight is about to take-off beause they would just rush him right through, apparently. No I laughed.

We were filthy. We stank of booze & puke & ramen and, in Josh’s case which made me crave them quite a bit, cigarette smoke. We looked crazy, as if @ any moment we could go for the throat. All of this & now we’d been shut on. “Huston! Now checking Huston flights!” How much was there to do in that fucking town? How many more yuppies could go to that town before it reaches the saturation point? We had long ago passed the point of reserved over-apologetic politeness & even under-the-breath outright rudeness & now no longer gave a shit. “Huston? Yeah, fuck off. We hope your plane goes down in flames. No, we don’t

247 This is not the complete “Let’s Go To Canada!” travelog, but rather one of my favorite excerpts. I was on a roll while I wrote this, and to this day I am surprised at some of the turns of phrase I interjected and how well this piece is paced. A lot of the rest of the “Canada” story didn’t really work out as well as I’d hoped, but this one section is gold from start to finish. If only I could capture this kind of element more often.

Back-story: Josh is on his way to Ireland, and Cori, her younger brother Austin, Damien and myself are dropping him off in Portland on our way to Canada for a random road trip. The night before I had been up all night with my friend Justin, causing even more trouble and drinking even more. I crammed in about an hour of sleep before we hit the road to Portland, dusting Milwaukee’s Beast’s relocated inside of Apple Juice bottles. While in Portland, Pat & Angie decided to invite us over for St. Patties Day hijinx, and by this point Josh and I are far beyond the point of sanity and sobriety. I could probably never accomplish this kind of drinking feat again, I might add. Yes, this is also 100% true.

248 I don’t normally laugh at my own written jokes, but every time I re-read this line I laugh out loud. I probably need counseling or something.

249 I’m trying to imagine having to check your children before a flight. If only the really annoying ones traveled like pets have to...

250 I was later informed that this is actually standard procedure (to rush people through who are late). It doesn’t make it any less fair, though.
want to move out of your way. Could you bend over so we can kick you in the ass? Thanks.HEY! Huston passengers! Hurry up &
board before the bomb\textsuperscript{231} we planted goes off w/out you. Yeah, we hate you too. Have a nice day, asshole!” We had finally reached
the breaking point.

The line swept past us as we gave everyone the evil eye. Kids, parents, grandparents, it mattered not. If Huston was their
destination, death was our wish for them. Hours passed into years, years into centuries. The drunken hallucinations were now
reduced to visions of beds everywhere. The equation was simple: when Josh was checked in & on his plane the madness would end &
sleep would be w/in my grasp. But the temptation to curl up in a chair was pretty great. Swig of coffee. Swig of water. Soon, they
will all die. Yes, soon enough.

As if through divine intervention, the line cleared & no 1 claimed Huston as their destination. We hooted & hollered in
joyful, tear-filled bleats of ecstasy as Josh sauntered to the counter & checked in – a task that took every other passenger 15 minutes
but took Josh a mere 30 seconds. W/ a tip of our hats & the finger for the hopefully-doomed-&-soon-to-be-asteroid-ridden Huston
flight, we bolted in a direction that led us quickly away from the Hell we’d just been through.

We weaved & we stumbled. An airport is not a friendly place for a drunk. Everything is confusion & bright lights & people
more surly than you. These people want nothing more than to catch their flight & they will do anything to accomplish this. It’s never
been a question of morality or consciousness or anything else for these ripe bastards intent on being your worst nightmare. Nothing else
enters their mind. Fucking your shit up isn’t intentional, just a reality when attempting to complete the larger goal. Drunks beware!
As you are stumbling around trying to make sense of the incomplete structures or the facts signs point you to places that either don’t
exist yet or aren’t what the sign said it was, you will not enjoy your drunken state 1 bit. You will curse the fact your sobriety is not up
to snuff, & rue the man who ran you over on the way to gate 5 & your big comeback was, “Hey... uhm, you! Uh... fuck you man!”

Luck could only be described when explaining how we found the metal detector that, once passed through, led to the gate
Josh’s flight departed from. Fortunately Josh decided against smuggling guns, knives & bombs so we had no problems getting to the
gate. A sturdy handshake, a hearty hug, a pat on the back & a good luck. Tears in the eyes. It was good to see him go if only because
he would have done the same for us.

W/ that there was only 1 more thing to do: puke. It had been welling up inside of me for some time now & as Pat & I were
walking to the car I felt it was very important to get this taken care of. I veered off toward the nearest bathroom & Pat looked @ me
understandingly as I quickened my pace.

I entered the bathroom & grabbed the door of the first stall I could find. I didn’t even have time to close the door or even get
on my hands & knees. Black chunks w/ blood & bile issued forth into the toilet & I didn’t miss even a single drop. As I finally
hunkered down to the floor & began the routine of violently & loudly heaving everything from out of my stomach, I glanced down to
my left & saw a pair of black, shiny shoes in the stall next to me. I could practically see my reflection. I also saw a pair of slacks
around the ankles, a pair or boxers, & a briefcase. In between heaves I could hear a paper rustle. Now this must be entertaining to
him. I had no belief that I could hold that much shit in my body w/out having some negative side effects, & if felt like it was all
culminating in putting on this show for this guy. Fuck, he was probably on his way to a business meeting somewhere, patiently
waiting for his flight, & this poor sick kid in the stall next to him who couldn’t hold his liquor was going to make a good anecdote for
the opening of his presentation. I didn’t care. I finished, went to the sink & wiped my lips, blew my nose, & drank some water. I got
out of there before he even saw me.

Pat & I, shoulder to shoulder, got in the car & put on X. Bloodshot eyes, conversation. It’s weird how things have a natural
progression. Events uncoil in a certain way & it was meant to be. It was supposed to happen. This night was supposed to happen this
way. It’s hard to explain. But that morning as we sang along w/ X on the way to the hardwood floor that became my bed, I thought
that I had found something few other nights have ever supplied. I felt closer to both Pat & Josh than I ever have.

W/ a hug & a thanks, it was finally time to sleep. I passed right out in seconds. I tried to dream but it wasn’t necessary.
Nothing my subconscious could make up could even compare.

\[--------------------\]
\[
| Secret Crush \#1,000,001\textsuperscript{232} by G.M. |
\]
\[--------------------\]

You’ll never know it’s me. I’ll never tell you. I’m too scared to say anything. I watch you and I dream about you. Your
glasses and your hair. The clothes you wear. I want to know what you’re like outside of your job. When you work I look forward to

\textsuperscript{231} This is the kind of comment that would get an FBI file started on you. Then it just seemed funny. Now, it seems like a reason for someone to link
me to a terrorist group. While I’m paranoid enough to want to believe something like that (that there’s a file on me), I have to wonder how much
of a reaction I would actually provoke if I wrote something that truly skirted the edge of sane (like, saying that 9-11 was good). Who knows...

\textsuperscript{232} For a long time I worked across the way from a record store in the mall. This was while I worked at The Bookstore, so it was pretty funny that the
clerks of each store could watch each other sell different sides of the same coin, so to speak. There seemed to be this endless string of Record
Store girls that worked there that were all hot, and the one that got written about here was the manager who was hopelessly involved with
someone else and therefore would never date me to save my life. As a sort of consolation prize, I ended up being involved with two different
members of her staff in the years since then, which would probably get psychiatrists wet between their legs if they ever got a chance to analyze me
about it. I saw this manager on my last trip to Eugene, and she was still at a Record Store, and I still think she’s hot. Heavy Sigh.

149
my own job. I'm so nervous I can rarely bring myself to visit you. When I do, I come over on my breaks and try to find some kind of excuse to talk to you that sounds reasonable. I order CDs just so I can talk to you. You turn around and I steal glances when I know you aren't aware. I wish I could pry a little more information out of you.

CDs. I try to get a window to you by what you're familiar with. What you've heard of. But no luck. You seem to know just about everything. You're an enigma. Almost impossible. I hope and pray you'll come in to my work so I can watch what you read. But when you're in I'm distracted by a customer and busy. If only...

I know I'll never say anything. I tell my friends you're older & married in some attempt to convince myself there's a reason I don't talk to you. But the truth is I just can't do it. You're so pretty, so nice, so interesting. You know all about music; I just want to talk about it for hours. Girls never want to talk about music. So what if I can't tell what music you like. It's so hard to find someone who is enthusiastic about something like that. When I do it turns me on to no end.

When business is slow I watch your store and hope you'll walk by. When you make eye contact or wave I always freak out like I'm in high school. I'm suddenly in the hallway again and my first crush walks by and smiles and I have to hide in the library the rest of the day because I'm too shy to talk to you. I can't look at you because I know that to even look at you would let you know what I'm thinking and what I'm feeling. Somehow, you'll know if you look at me long enough. I just know it.

Maybe tomorrow I'll come in and order another CD that I could get cheaper if I went somewhere else. Maybe you'll be working the counter so I'll get to talk to you and see my reflection in your glasses. My secret crush. I'll never tell you. Too risky. This way, you'll never hurt me. You'll never turn me down and you'll never stop waving and smiling. You'll always be nice to me. This way, I'll always look forward to seeing you at work.

A bookstore manager and a record store manager. In theory, how much more perfect can it get?

| Summer '99 | by G.M. |

You try to take a textual picture & put it all into words. Something that will make sense. Something that will mean something. Sometimes it works.

Sometimes.

Summer used to be about being a kid. It was used to mean that you would run around in the woods and play games and not worry about dumb shit like work & girls and the future. It captures all there is about being young & irresponsible without sounding impetuous & decadent. Even the bad days seemed good in the long run. Maybe only one summer was like that. Maybe none of them ever really are. Maybe it's just something in your head that convinces you that now is not a good as then.

This summer came pretty damn close to being that summer though. So what if it's not real. I had a good time, right?

It's Time To Come Clean...:

This is my version of the scene in Pump Up The Volume254, the one toward the end where he's being chased by the FCC and he's in the Jeep with that girl that's not as cute as her friend (who hardly gets any dialog or screen time255) and they come up over the

---

254 For me, Summer '99 was one of the greatest summers of my life. I had good tapes in my walkman, free time to enjoy my friends, beer money, all that Eugene had to offer on a day to day basis, and I was single and not too tormented by this fact. I had some ups and downs and involvements with a few different girls, all of which didn't end all that badly. It was all that I wanted a summer to be and what I hope future ones will be like.

255 Did I mention I was influenced by this movie...? This is the introduction from issue #14.

I don't know where else to mention it, so I'll just put it here: this issue also contained the fairly well-known "DEE-YOU-EEM-BEE" article I wrote about the Nazi Propaganda I found in the Bookstore one day. It was your standard issue bullshit stuff, and what was really funny was the fact that the flyer they had used was full of grammar & spelling errors. (Dumb Nazis! The Best kind!) The muse moved through me, and I thought it would be funny to write this lengthy dissertation about how lame they were, and then as a service offer to re-write their propaganda in a way that would be a little more literate (and, hopefully, funnier). So, I wrote the article, polished it up as best I could, and made this flyer that was the silly (and ironic) version of what most Nazi crap says. Inspiration struck again when I decided to tackle the local issue of the anti-flying law by mailing a letter to the city of Eugene with a copy my flyer asking if there was any way we could post it around town. They wrote back and sort of stole my thunder by merely citing the specific ordinance back at me, telling me that posting things around town could now only be done on private, not city property (they didn't seem to notice the flyer). In each issue of #14 I inserted a copy of the flyer (on 11" x 17" paper) and urged people to put it up on their particular piece of "private property" so we aid those dumb Nazis. (What can I say? I'm a Michael Moore fan.)

I was expecting to be eviscerated for this piece, and I fully well stood my ground and waited for the shit to hit the fan. Admittedly, it was all in fairly good taste (I was pretty straight forward about not liking Nazi's, but feeling sorry for how dumb they were) and the actual flyer I made was so silly in it's new form as to be next to impossible to mistake as the real McCoy. Still, having sent a copy to the city and then distributing it to my friends around town (not to mention in Hungry Head Books & at Green Noise Records) did not set well with me. When all was said and done, not a single person has commented on that piece to date. What's worse: trying to raise a big stink about something controversial that you're passionate about and getting a lot of negative feedback, or having nobody even notice your efforts at all?
hill and see all the kids gathered there to hear what Happy Harry Hard-On has to say, and he just decides that it's not worth it to keep on pretending that's who he is and tells all the students he's actually the geeky kid before he get's arrested.

Of course, I'm not getting arrested. But the rest is pretty close.

I don't remember where G.M. came from. At the time I had a violently important reason, but in the almost seven years that's passed since G.M. first came to me I can't remember what that reason was. I don't even know why he kept it up because most everyone who reads this thing knows who G.M. and Austin Rich are and sometimes question me about the duality of the writing. (An old friend Jack once pointed to me the differences in writing styles and how one had more spelling errors than the other.) He turned to me and said, "I don't me to freak you out, but this is definitely a sign."

I don't know where G.M. came from and now that he's gone I really wish I knew more about him. I wanted to try to get him to write one last piece for this issue before he was gone for good but for some reason, when I tried, he just didn't have anything else to say. He didn't even get a chance to say goodbye before his existence disappeared in a puff of logic.

Okay, so it's been me the whole time. Austin Rich, using the name G.M. (or Soylent Green, but he's been long gone... died in a car crash in issue seven or eight). But does that make G.M. any less real? He was there for me those seven years, constantly trying to get Austin out of his little shell. Trying to get him to be more forthcoming with the events of his life. To try and get the last little bit of story out on paper. It wasn't until G.M. started letting Austin seep into the story that I realized G.M.'s days were numbered.

People do things for strange reasons, and who are we to judge? Every time I see where a person lives or somehow get a scrap of evidence as to what their personal life is like I immediately want to comment, "I'm not the only one!" or, "That's like how I do it too!" But I generally keep quiet. Pointing out the oddities in the way a person acts, even if it's to reveal how unusual you are yourself, only lends to trouble.

I can't help but wonder if my impending move caused G.M. to leave. Who knows? I know that I'll miss him, and that hopefully he'll come back someday, if for no other reason than to kick my ass into gear then. God knows I might need it.

--Austin Rich (2/11/00)

Local Bands

Yeah, yeah, yeah. “Support the local artist! If you can’t support them, who can you support?” Everyone talks the talk but do they walk the walk? Well, I’ve tried to at least. Sure, local shows are hard to like because everyone has seen these bands a million times. But, if we don’t support them, who’s gonna buy our ‘zines and come to our shows? Basically, if you complain because there

---

256 I also go off about this girl again in issue #17. I don’t know who that actress is, but she is hot hot HOT in this movie (almost as much so as the chick in Real Genius). I assumed that I had never mentioned her in my ‘zine before, which was why I went off about her again in issue #17. Only now do I even remember having written this in the first place. Weird.

256 Jack is the same one that was gonna do the illustrations for issue #6. Until I told him, he actually thought G.M., The Soylent Green & Austin Rich were all different people. When he pointed out the spelling errors thing I started really feel awkward about the whole scenario. Issues, man...

257 I wrote a lot more in a Journal around this time (something I try to do regularly now but fail more often than not), and a lot of things that became bigger pieces started out in the Journal. Occasionally I would just scribble out a quick little insight, or a sentence that I liked. Sometimes I would write notes like, “Music = Living Room Analogy,” and I’d have to wonder what the fuck I was thinking when I wrote it. (Some people have trouble remembering what it means when they scribble something down in their dream journal, but imagine being totally lucid, writing something, and coming back to it an hour later and having no memory of what it meant.)

Anyway, a lot of this Journal stuff became something I was very attached to, and so for several issues I ran bits and pieces of it. For a while I thought it was a new direction that I might take the ‘zine into, very, VERY personal writings about daily life and the more mundane aspects of this, that and the other. (Some people would argue that’s ALL I write about anyway.) In the long run it was just never meant to be: I all too often wanted to revise these entries and had to really try hard to make sure I didn’t; if I had changed them it would defeat the point in the first place. Eventually I dropped the idea and went back to my usual style, which works well considering my desire to tinker with stuff as I work on it.

258 I have made an honest effort to cut out a good portion of the music writing I’ve done in my ‘zine. I was unaware of this fact, but it has come to my attention (via a lot of people I’ve talked to over the years) that all music writing sucks. Or, more to the point, I’m one of the few people on the planet who doesn’t think so. I myself find it fascinating and compelling. Everyone else tells me they just skip over it for the most part because it’s rarely interesting and fails to capture any qualities the band has. Far too many people have related the tired cliché, “Writing about music is like painting about architecture.” I, on the other hand, have gotten tired of commenting back, “But if the painting looks good, what’s the problem?”

Anyway, I have tried hard to come to terms with the fact that people just don’t like music writing, and that is why there is very little of it in this collection. I have been thinking about putting together a collection of my better music writing to not only appease my own sense of what is and isn’t interesting, but also those three or four people in the world who are with me on the whole “music writing tip.” Regardless, I decided to keep this little section in because I find it interesting in a historical light. (There’s only one other “music writing” piece in this collection, so be thankful, please). There were a lot of great bands in Eugene, and while you could pretty much count on a band going nowhere if they were in the Eugene Scene, local shows were almost always a lot of fun to attend. I always felt good to be a part of something that intimate and fun.

151
are no good shows in town, that’s because you don’t come to see the local acts. If you can’t get up off your ass to see a free or cheap show, why book an out of town band that will cost more?

So, to prevent me from doing this all the time: See the locals. They rule! Really, they do!

Shortround: I think these guys used to be Artless Motives at some point. Pop punk with a rough-around-the-edges feel that I really like. They make me want to jump around and I guess that’s the point, so enough said. Check ‘em out.

Wristrockets: More pop punk and I heard they just released their second CD. Seeing them live is like watching late-night TV and seeing all those ads for 80’s songs CDs while drunk, because a good portion of their last set I saw was 80’s covers. They actually make those songs tolerable. Plus I heard their CD has like 15 songs and clocks in at under 30 minutes. Just how I like my pop.

Filthy Few/ Filthy AK: I heard these guys broke up. Pity, I really did like the Eugene version of Kiss. At least the style was the same. If you wanted 80’s glam rock these guys were the ones to deliver. I hope they’re still around so they can play with American Barricade259 when I get that group together.

Con Men: Caught the last song of their one night and I was really reminded of the Dead Boys meets New York Dolls, which is good if you like that kind of stuff, which I do so all’s well.

Honey Viser259. When I first heard the name I said, “Who are they?” Who is she is a better question. Honey rocks. Honey plays cute sad songs with big words about corn starch. Honey rides a bike and is not one to be trifled with! If you write to this address you can get more information about Honey Viser’s Vast Entertainment Monarchy! Honey rules and that’s the bottom line. If you don’t see her live she will curse you and you will get a hangnail. Watch out!

Compact 56: These guys opened for Mondale one night and they brought with them a hoarde of pop-punk kids. I have never seen that much dyed hair and pogoing! This band definately rules and they have the perfect lyrical style for the music they play. (They cover, “I Think We’re Alone Now.” How much more perfect can you get?) Catch ‘em if you can.

The Morbid Taliwacker Choir / River Chicken Redemption / The Dirty Little Secret Jug Band (Shh!): This is a Jackass Willy side project and they keep changing their name after every show they play. Try to imagine the perfect blend of Hee Haw and punk rock and you’ve got a close description of these guys. No electric instruments (a real jug, washboards, washtub bass, everything) doing covers of “Where Eagles Dare,” “Rebel Yell,” “When The Shit Hits The Fan,” and other classics. I taped them when they opened for Mondale on New Year’s and if I get the band’s permission I may offer the tape through this address. We’ll see.256

Mondale:257. Probably my favorite band after The Wipers and ...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead and KARP. Mondale is the definition of Nerd Rock. All of their songs are about girls, computers, and all of the nerdy things that come between them. They play frequently and they have a demo tape that occasionally gets played on KWVA (request “Attraction / Distraction” if you want to hear it) and the song was recorded by none other than the Lord Of Darkness himself! These guys are so good I can’t explain it in the space I have allotted, so just see them when you get the chance. You’ll thank yourself.

2/4/99. 12:41 A.M. Blitzihaus

I’ve decided I’m going to stop being nice to customers @ work. If they piss me off I’m just going to unload on them. “Can you help me?” “No, fuck off!” “I’m looking for a book...” “Good for you, may I suggest something on not asking me any more questions?” “Why is this book not on the shelf?” “It’s a government conspiracy against stupid fuck-ups like yourself.” “Do you know what time it is?” “No, but if you get the fuck out of my face & go outside where the sun is I’m sure you’ll be able to devise an answer within 12 hours of accuracy.” “Why are you so mean to me?” “I wasn’t breastfed as a child & therefore have this nagging feeling everything is your fault. You could say you actually deserve it, fuckface!”

I wish I could say this stuff & have them not notice or not care. “Who wrote Shakespear’s Hamlet?” “That’s classified.” “Oh, really? Well, can you tell me if you have it in?” “Are you self-aware enough to deduce that you might get somewhere by, oh, I don’t know, checking the section?” “Yes, but I didn’t see it, & I even looked in the C’s in case it was one of those phonetic

259 American Barricade was an idea that was developed by my friend Jeremiah and I. We wanted a metal band by that name. I even had the opening lines to a song for them called, “It Burns Like Fire,” which itself was a reference to something another friend (Quienten) yelled out when he burned himself once. The lyrics: “It burns like fire / cause that’s what it is / just like the sweet taste of my baby’s kiss / yeah it burns like fire / and it melts through the snow / oh baby don’t you know.” I remember the song was gonna end with a chorus of guys yelling, “Burns Like Fire Oh oohohohoh, over the main riff of the song. The Ramen City Kid, to up the ante, wrote a song called “We Reserve The Right To Rock You,” “We... we reserve the right to rock you! We... allege that we cannot be stopped / We hereby give advance warning of our intention to rock you / Let it be known that we want to rock! I was always a polite version of this song called, “May We Rock You?”

260 Not only was this a shameless plug (I was dating her at the time I printed this issue), but her and Mondale were probably the only bands in this list that I actually saw more than twice. Despite the motives, her music is pretty great, and I often listen to her CD while I’m working on ‘zine stuff (even to this day).

261 I still have the tape, but I never did anything with it. They were great, though.

262 This was my close-friend Chris’s band, along with Ransom and a great drummer named Shawn. I was absolutely in love with them because they wrote songs with great inside jokes, had two songs that featured me in the lyrics (“Song For Cody (Don’t Bone Her) & “Blitzihaus Keys”), and I felt like they had tapped into something that I was 100% behind. I loved them. Our friend Kelly (Lord Of Darkness / The Kelly Experience) recorded their first demo tape on his 4-Track, and for a brief period I did introductions for them as their “campaign” manager (I even recorded two radio promos for their shows). They were great, and they even transplanted themselves to Portland briefly (with The Lord Of Darkness on drums) before calling it quits for good. I will always remember Mondale fondly, and someday would like to release the Mondale Boxed Set. Someday...
spellings.” “I see. You were looking in the wrong section. You want the Self-Help Section along that wall... the subsection called, ‘Fucked-Up People.’” “Really? Well thank you. You’ve been very helpful.”

I have some job-satisfaction issues that need to be dealt with, in case you couldn’t tell.

2/15/99. 9:00 A.M. (Or So). Blitzhäuser.

I don’t know how to relate to people. They confuse me so much with the way they interact with me & each other. I wrack my brain trying to figure out what people want & what they mean. I spend all this time alone because I don’t get it. I don’t understand. Why don’t I? Why don’t they?

They never get it. Fuck ‘em. I’ll walk around this fucking town forever if I have to, looking for that key. I’ll never find it, but I’ll keep looking. I’ve got my music. You can never take that away from me. I’ll walk past you 1,000 times gritting my teeth to Nomeansno & I will try to figure you out. You’ll just scowl @ me & walk off. You’ll never get it. Fuck you. So happy & ignorant. Rich fucking bastards with your happy families. You don’t get it. No one gets it. I’ll spend the rest of my life alone trying to figure it out. I won’t. I’ll walk forever. You’ll be happy forever.

No, it’s not a fair trade.

2/27/99. 7:50 A.M. Blitzhäuser.

The world begins anew each day. People rise up trying to convince themselves their lives are worthwhile. They invent new things that piss me off & plan new tactics to use when they fuck with me. People need to die horribly. It’s no longer worth it to just die. They need to suffer. Over & over & over. Each time a kick in the ribs. Bam! That’s for that fucking IHOP commercial. Bam! Bam! That’s for those extra taxes last paycheck. Bam! That’s for high school in general. Bam! Bam! Bam! Just because you’re ugly & you piss me off.


I need to relax. I need to maintain. I ordered a drink. It’s on it’s way. Think. Relax. It’s okay. The first sip is soothing. Familiar. The rest of my body is misfiring & fucking up. My body’s on messed up time... too fast & toooooooo sloooooooow. My mind does the opposite to compensate. It’s like this every day after work. And they said smoking was bad for me.

Just to make it through the day I have to fuck myself up. Wake up & shower to wash off the booze from last night. Asprin with a cup of coffee chaser to jump start the engine. And we’re off!

Allergies. Pop two decongestants to stop from sneezing & crying. I coffee mixes with that and I’m not even on Earth. Greasy food for lunch. More aspirin for the 3 o’clock headache. Another cup of coffee at six because I can barely stay awake. I’m not even human anymore. Pure energy. Work. Mechanical.

Add at this point one person of every kind of stupid who all want something from me and I fill with rage. Everyday the urge to kill rises. Primal. Instinct. I want to destroy for no reason except it would feel good.

Now I’m here. People fill in the empty spaces with talk. I can’t focus on any of it. Everyone stares at me. They’re used to seeing the lonely guy having a drink on his own after work. The guy with only desperation and hopelessness as his friends. The empty look in his eyes. The disheveled attire. They’re just not used to seeing it in a 24 year old.

Finish the shot. Take a deep breath. Catch the bus at 10:18. You’ve got to do it all tomorrow. Hopefully no one will die this time either. Fuck I want a cigarette.

For the amount of time I’ve spent doing it, the thing that I’ll miss most about Eugene is the quite times I spend listening to music, missing out on the rest of what’s going on as I try to squeeze one last bit of something out of a mundane experience. (That, and the metal bar bent at a ninety degree angle on top of the warehouse before the EWEB building as you go over the overpass before Ferry Street Bridge that’s only visible to me) when I’m on the Gateway Bus during the day on the way to work.)

Since I got to this town in November of 1994 I’ve spent countless hours writing away in some poorly lit room, long past the time at which I should have been asleep because I have to work in the morning, ignoring the city that’s around me, trying to find something funny or interesting about the guy who thought I worked for the Trane Air-Conditioning Company because of the jacket I was given by Chris two Christmases ago. Sure, the method of writing (pen, pencil, computer, typewriter) has changed and the house has changed and the roommates who are asleep have changed (a bit) and the coffee is a little different and Chris is probably in school

---

263 I was really disappointed that I didn’t get any response from people about the anti-work stuff. A lot of people I know are dissatisfied with their jobs, and a lot of people in general seem to find anti-work sentiments really funny (why else does Dilbert sell so well). Maybe I used the word “fuck” too many times for it to be funny? Who’s to say. This has always been one of my favorite bits.

264 I’d say I’m perfectly well-adjusted, wouldn’t you?
today and the guy that’s yelling at me from across the street, regardless of the fact that he’s sane or not, is often different, but the feeling is the same:

Desperately trying to make sense of everything before I forget what it was to begin with.

The urge to flee Eugene came on slowly. This isn’t something that hits you overnight as some may believe. When I first moved here I told everyone that I would never, ever leave this town for any reason.

Ever.

But eventually Eugene started giving me subtle hints that it was time to get out of the nest. Not in so many words, mind you, but Eugene got it’s point across. The attitude I got while walking down the street, the things I would see on the bus, the songs I would hear on the radio were all spelling out an unmistakable message. It just took me a long time to figure out what it was.

Friends. They come and go. They make big plans with you and forget to call then form a band with you and forget the ten bucks they borrowed that you need to buy cigarettes then date the girl you had a crush on and find you a great job. It doesn’t make a lot of sense inside of the time. There’s something there that you can’t quite put your finger on. You know it’s important. Maybe some message? Maybe not. Maybe that’s why they’re friends. Everyone else in your life needs a reason to interact with you; your friends just are.

Jobs. Foo. Money. Foo. Girls. Double foo. Eugene was definitly trying to tell me something there. Eugene knows real irony when all three start going my way and I finally get the message to get out of dodge. Whatever. I’m not falling for that trick again. Not this time. If I was to stay all three would go to shit, and then what?

Eugene’s been a good friend to me, but I know when I’ve overstayed my welcome. I know when it’s time to get off the couch, do the dishes for the last time and find my own place to live. Somewhere that I can not feel like I’m intruding. Yeah, Eugene’s jerked me around a bit, made me think I had it figured out then pulled the carrot away at the last second, but this time it’s not gonna have to pull out all the stops.

Everything is falling into place. The new house, the new job. All in a nice location, too. I keep waiting for the other shoe to drop. Either we’ll have to put up with full body cavity searches and regular ghost hauntings on a daily basis, or we’ll live next door to three attractive girls with a gay male roommate who all just moved to town and need someone they can relate too. At the rate we’re going, I wouldn’t be surprised if we all won the lottery and then died in a car wreck afterward. Who knows? With a group like Pat, Angry Man” Josh, myself and The Ramen City Kid, anything can happen.

So now I need to say my last goodbyes. Walk around at night a few more times. Hit the Safeway on 18th again. Coffee and donuts. See another show and get drunk at Vet’s and Doc’s one last time. Not the last time per se, just the last time this time. Eugene and I will see each other again, but we’ll have changed and the attitude will be different and things will never quite be the same again.

Still, it’s always so rare that you get to say goodbye to a friend or lover the way you were meant to. Eugene has been both for me in the past. I just hope I don’t spend the time clacking away on a keyboard trying to make sense of it.

--Austin Rich. (2/11/00)

Part XXI: PDX or Bust.

Portland had loomed over us in much the same way that a break in the clouds does when it’s been raining for a long, long time. The idea that we could all uproot ourselves and transplant to a new town was an as-yet unexplored scenario, but as I began to make more and more trips to visit Portland, meet more and more people who lived there, and as more and more people I knew began to escape Eugene’s gravitational pull to go and live there, the possibility of moving began to slowly come into focus for us all.

Little things were discussed over a period of time, slowly and with a directionless kind of quality. “Should we do it? Can we do it? Is it the right thing to do?” That kind of stuff. The Ramen City Kid and I werehammered on vodka one night, sitting on the balcony of The Blitzhaus, when we were each struck with a horrible vision of the future: we were 60, sitting on the exact same balcony, drunk on the same brand of vodka, and bitching about the exact same things (relationships). It did not bode well for either of us to have that image burried into our synapses. Finally, after enough conversations like this, it was decided that we should do it, definitely... but when?

The Blitzhaus roommate line-up had become rather convoluted, and there were a few more hanger-ons than there had been in the past. “Angry Man” Josh, a long time drinking partner and good friend, was also wanting to make the relocation to Portland, having lived there in the past and needing a springboard to get him back into that environment. One of our main contact people in Portland was Pirate Pat, a great guy who had relocated very successfully and had staked out some decent territory for himself. It seemed logical that, if we moved as a group (myself, The Ramen City Kid, & Josh) we could pool our resources and really make this possibility work. Having worked out that much of a plan, it very quickly became a back-burner idea: something we would talk about but hadn’t made a lot of solid effort toward. In a way it was the perfect fantasy; believe that you are going to move someday so you can better cope with the present you might not be happy with. I should have thought of it years ago.

Finally, Josh put the cards out on the table for us: Pat needed to get a new place in March. Josh had already saved up enough money to move and asked me and The Ramen City Kid to say yes or no. On the spot I waffled for about 10 seconds before I agreed, and locked myself into this decision that would still yet take a few months to fully execute itself.
Preparing for the move became one of the most difficult things I've ever done, and more than once I nearly threw in the towel and gave up. It was infuriating to get anyone at The Blitzhaus to help clean THE WHOLE HOUSE. Even then, people became very petty and arguments about who owed what money to each other and what was who's responsibility broke out regularly. In addition to planning the final party, arranging to have the carpet steam cleaned (which didn't seem to matter in the long run), arranging and negotiating all the final paperwork with our landlord, finishing up the last work on issue #14 (which came out in the last couple weeks before I moved), and arranging for a job when I got to Portland, I also had to stay behind until the last possible minute, ensuring that the house was cleaned and empty when our landlord came to let the new tenants in. It was nerve-wracking. I was curt with most everyone and a complete gibbering mess when I finally got to Portland after it was all said and done (Josh & The Ramen City Kid had already left in the U-Haul full of our belongings a few days earlier).

How exactly I did everything is now lost to the ages. Suffice it to say, I'm here and not there. In parallel universe, there is a version of me who's only difference is that he stayed in Eugene. He still writes a 'zine, still has the same friends, and probably even does the same kind of work. He's there instead of here. I often play the ‘what if’ game concerning that version of me: is he happy? Is he better off? Both completely arbitrary and relative questions anyway. Happier than what? Better off how? I could have just as easily told everyone to fuck off and left for NY… or Seattle… or just about anywhere else. I was so very close to not making the move that the potential outcomes of such a reality often need to play themselves out in my head in an attempt to make sense of what actually happened. While I think moving to Portland was, in the long run, one of the best things I could have ever done, another part of me wonders what pre-assumed future I'm comparing that too.

I guess all of that is sort of beside the point in the long run.

In the months that led up to us moving, Lyra (who had come back to Eugene to fill a room as a favor to me), The Ramen City Kid & Myself discussed the idea that we needed to do a collaborative 'zine. At first we tried to convince our fourth official roommate, Glyndon (there were several unofficial ones), that she needed to start a 'zine called Anime & Ferrets. She refused. We loved the idea that our house was, more or less, completely 'zine oriented. It appealed to our sense of the absurd.

We decided on the name Dollar Ramen Whore for our collaborative 'zine effort, which, as the name implies, is about as self-referential as you can get. While the project seemed to be falling through the cracks as the time of the move to Portland came closer and closer, we still seemed enamored with the idea enough to write stuff for it. To my surprise, while Lyra and I sort of left the project on the sidelines, The Ramen City Kid had it all under control. He literally walked in the door as our final party was starting with the copies of the 'zine, and all that was left to do was fold it. Having the last word on the subject of our time in Eugene, in 'zine form, was like getting that magical phone number from a hot girl at the bar; you never really thought it would materialize and you're so very happy when it does. It ruled. A lot of great stuff happened in both Eugene & The Blitzhaus, but I will forever remember seeing 25 people, all who showed up for a party with a live band, silently sitting in the living room, drinks in hand, reading Dollar Ramen Whore while Mondale was getting ready to play in the dining room. I almost started crying right then and there.

To my knowledge, Dollar Ramen Whore has only been distributed at that party. I offered it in future issues of JBTFA! and on the website, but never received any orders for it. Technically, it's not really my 'zine; The Ramen City Kid entirely put it together and did all the work for us (we just contributed). Still, when I think about it I laugh; have our lives really become so interwoven that we can't even make a 'zine without it consisting entirely of inside-jokes of personal significance? Apparently not… that's all I've ever been able to do…
Homes:

Jobs:
Work Study Program (LCC Copy Room / Denali). McDonald’s. Wendy’s. Bookstore (Continuous From Until The End While At Other Jobs). Temp Service. Hometown Buffet. Prezzelmaker. Taco Bell. HMT.

Girls:

Childhood:
Impossibly huge. Mythical. You only went to “town” every so often, so you had to make the trip count. Once a month, maybe. And it was always for shopping. You didn’t live there; you couldn’t. When you come from a small town, everything thing is lopsided when it comes to the rest of the world. This was no different. You could impress your friends if your parents had bought you something there. “Where’d you get that hat?” Pause. Relish the moment. “Oh, that? My parents bought it for me in Eugene.” Stunned silence. “Cool,” was always the response. It didn’t matter if the hat was filthy. “Cool.” The reality is they probably bought it in Springfield.

High School:
Goal. Destination. No other word for it, really. Nothing comes from fuckin’ Cottage Grove. You had to get out. ANY MEANS NECESSARY. Record stores, book stores, malls, movie theaters. We didn’t even know what there was to do at night but we knew that there had to be something, ANYTHING that was better than getting 75 cent coffee at the Vintage Inn. It starts to take on a life of it’s own. Sort of a mythology. Everything will be better there. The food will taste better and the coffee will be stonger and the books will be more interesting and the jobs will be fun and everybody meets a girl there and the Minimalis (born from the only CG punk band SOL 17), they sometimes get shows at Icky’s in Eugene! Oh... heaven!

I wrote this intentionally for Dollar Ramen Whore, which was difficult to do because I wanted to put together something more meaningful than a list when I sat down to write it. I really felt like I needed to pontificate on how important Eugene had been to me, and in the end a list was all I could manage. I felt like I’d really failed to deliver, but when I would re-read it now I really like the format. For some reason these little sentence fragments seemed to convey a lot more about what Eugene is like than I could have in relaying any number of anecdotes. Either that says a lot about the nature of Eugene... or at least about the way we remember it (I don’t know which).
College:
Acceptance. Rebirth. LCC. Floors to crash on so I could go to a Community College. Meeting Kiisu and Colin, people who never mocked me when I made a mistake, didn’t laugh when I revealed I liked something no one else did. My first real job, trying to balance school, taking care of my brother. Complete mental collapse. Pick up the pieces at my dad’s house in Oregon City. Eugene friends meet CG friends. Instant static. Confrontation. I asked Brandon to quit fucking with the stereo or to leave. My CG friends filed out the door.

Oregon City:
Longing. Depression. Writing long, incomprehensible letters to Kiisu and Colin. They had a band. They had a town with energy. I screw up in Oregon City. Chantal & Kiisu come to the rescue. Salvation.

First Contact:
Wide-Eyed Wonder. Shitty hours for dirt pay in fast food. I was in a band! I was dating girls! I was taking lots of acid! Drinking gallons of coffee! Spending every waking moment with Colin eating Nutter Butters and drinking Mountain Dew. Writing songs and listening to that “Pablo Picasso” song by The Burning Sensations. Walking, walking, walking, walking for hours at night. Every moment was your last. Desperate longing on the nights Colin couldn’t hang out. Crying myself to sleep when things were going wrong with girls. I never wanted to leave. I hated every minute of it.

Phase Two:
Settling in. The desperation starts to take over. My girlfriend, first asks me to move out of the house, then out of her life. No one left to lend me money. Trying to get my shit together. Spending nights furiously typing away on Kiisu’s computer. Sleeping away the mornings trying to forget reality. The Industrial Accident That Is My Life. I lose the basement. I lose Jon’s house. Everything’s fucked.

Blitzhaus:

| --------------------------------------------------|

So...266 I did it. I finally did it. In the course of a couple of weeks I packed everything up, cleaned the whole fuckin’ house, paid the final bills (or at least most of them), told the other roommates to get the fuck out, helped load the U-Haul (with Pat & “Angry Man” Josh & The Ramen City Kid), continued the painful business of saying goodbye to everyone (still finishing up that one) and finally had Brad hand-deliver the quivering and shaking remains that used to be me to the front door of my new house here in Portland, Oregon to await whatever it was that existed inside.

I was scared. I was nervous. I was out of money. I was completely unsure whether or not I was even at the right house.

But I finally did it.

I’d been talking about it for a while. Before that the idea to move really didn’t “hit me” as other people say it always does. Whenever I thought about moving from Eugene before, I imagined some kind of Cometsiusian style adventure. First, I’d get fired from my job and for some reason I’d say the wrong thing to a friend at a party that night and my friends would all start hating me (or continue to, as the case may be). Trying to find solace in my girlfriend, she’d reveal the horrible secret that her ex was the large man I’d personally insulted in Medford back while I was in the old band, and she accidently let slip who I was and now this bohemoth was out to settle the score. In one final fail swoop of self-preservation I’d sell everything I owned, set fire to the Blitzhaus and take the remaining bag of belongings with me.

266 The Editor’s Note From Issue #15, written after I got to Portland.
on the next bus to Portland where I could, hopefully, hide out for a while until I could start rebuilding from the ground up. 267  
The reality of moving is never that simple. At times I considered doing that, though. 
The truth is the idea crept up on me in such a way that when I finally decided that moving was what I wanted to do, every time I looked around me it only made more and more sense. There was a time when I told myself I'd never leave Eugene no matter what happened. Now all the reasons that used to keep me in town seemed rough around the edges and looked like they'd been through the wash a few times. Sometimes we can't see the forest through the trees, fill in the blank with every known cliche in the book. Bottom line: it was time to leave and I had far-overstayed my welcome. 
The actual getting out of Eugene was the least-easy part. There was a full month and a half of planning, followed by little if any actual follow up on the plans we'd made that entire time. Next there was a sort of mad scramble-flurry of arms and legs and heads trying to get everything done, followed by a sort of hopeless dread that whatever it was that didn't get done will somehow work itself out in the end without us loosing too much money of that many limbs. (Little did we know that it all did, eventually.) 

From the time I started the first preparations for getting ready to move, from the point Brad dropped off as the delerious and confused person that I'm told was the day I got here, almost two months had passed. I could barely remember who I was the place where I thought life in Portland was going to be like. Scary? Overwhelming? Impossible to relate to? Difficult to mesh myself into the fine grooves that had already been worn in by the people who lived here already? Much like a needle of a record player that, when set down on the record, can't seem to find where it's supposed to go and makes a lot of static noise? What was this town gonna be like? 

It turned out that I was dissapointed. For all I thought Portland was going to be different than Eugene, I was dumbfounded to discover that NOTHING HAD CHANGED. 

Not a god damned thing. 

For all the work I did to get here, this news was shocking to say the least. I couldn't believe it! Another one of those moments in life where your idea of what was supposed to happen was shattered into a thousand pieces. I expected this to be the "big city." I expected my job to suck worse than normal. I expected the girls to be completely different in some unfathomable way I had yet to experience. For some reason I thought I'd be constantly fighting (more that normal) for food and shelter and getting the bills paid on time would be some sort of Herculean effort that I wasn't sure I'd be able to accomplish (thus having to concede to whatever it was that it was that Zeus / Landlord wanted of me). I expected some sort of change in something. 

But nothing changed. 

It's like that really fucked up Violent Femmes song “Machine” on New Times (the one that sounds like they dropped a bunch of acid and grabbed any available synthesizers and just went to town, and when they came down they mixed what they had and said, "I'm done... whaddaya think?"). He says, "I built a machine / and I took over the world / in one weekend / but nothing changed." Here I was, expecting this move to Portland to be a life-changing event that I would remeber for years to come which would, effectively, close one chapter of the story of my life and open a new one. 

Instead I got the same comfortable routine I remember from Eugene: 

Wake up. Make some coffee and some food. Sometimes I'll need something stronger I'll put on some Slayer or Nation Of Ulysses to get the fluids flowing. A little writing, a little reading, bullshit with the roomies then I'm off to work where I give myself up to the man for about eight hours or so. Come home, fuck around with the roomies or visiting friends some more while I drink some beer, then repeat until I have some days off. [On my days off I generally do some reading & writing, flirting with girls (if I can find any that are receptive to it... very rarely do I succeed) and more drinking, with a movie or some TV thrown in for good measure. Sometimes I buy some new records or 'zines. A lot of the times I answer mail while listening to records and work on this damn thing.] 

I even stay in contact with and hang out with the EXACT SAME PEOPLE I did when I was in Eugene. How completely, utterly, without-a-doubt identical to the routine I just left behind! 

I think I'm gonna like Portland after all. 268  

--- Austin Rich (5/22/00) 

---

267 I like the idea that this is supposed to summarize the kind of things that are typical of Aaron Comebus. 

268 And I do. I for those who don't know it, Portland has got to be one of the greatest towns I've ever lived in. It has everything you could want and a lot of things you haven't yet had a chance to discover. In the almost three years I've lived here I still haven't had a chance to explore this whole town, and I'm always hearing about new places / things to go and do. I've had a lot of fun and I'm not still tired of it. I don't think I ever felt that positive about Eugene, and while I have no illusions that I will NEVER move, I can definitely tell you that there is a lot of cool stuff here to attract anyone thinking about moving to the Northwest. (Probably the best quality Portland has is the fact that almost nobody is actually from Portland.)
Eight hours of numbness and it's over. I'm back in reality.
Whatever that is.
Or is this reality? Is eight hours of reminding myself that what I'm doing is for a reason, is that reality? Eight hours of trying to forget I have no control over what happens for eight hours.
Work.
Eight hours of nothing to interact with but stupidity and thoughts. Ideas that are lost the moment they're conceived because they will not be committed to paper because I'm at work.
Eight hours of numbness. Eight hours of pushing myself to continue working even though my brain says I should be home doing anything but these pointless tasks. Myth of Sisyphus. Keep putting the books on the shelf. They'll just come right back off when I finish. Keep alphabetizing. The A's are messed up when I get to the Z's. It never ends. Pointless tasks, running to and fro like a rat.
Except a rat would be a little happier.
Why do I even bother? The paycheck that goes to my bills the second I get it? Is it the satisfaction that when I sleep at night I earned it? The realization that when I get drunk at the end of the day I deserve it?
I try to forget it, forget the numbness. Forget reality. It's not worth it.
I over compensated for the weather, so the walk home is sweltering. Too hot. Sweat pours off of me as I punch the play button on my Walkman. Daydream Nation. I blink and let it wash over me. This album will always be important to me. This album will always spell out a certain mindset and attitude of...
What? Frustration? Confusion? Disillusionment with what I thought my life would turn out like? Is that the image that's triggered in my mind?
Right now my mind can only think of getting home, drinking a beer, taking my shoes off and forgetting the numbness.
Forgetting reality.
I push myself home as fast as I can and I'm reminded of work again.
Everything goes into slow motion when I hit her block. I find myself turning the volume down slowly as I walk past her house. I glance at the windows and it strikes me that it might look like I'm checking the house out, so I glance away. I wonder if she's even back yet. I wonder why I care so god damned much.
Should I care? Should I try to ignore the fact that deep down in my head something about her triggers ideas and thought and feelings and images that I haven't experienced before? It pangs of High School, but without the overwhelming feeling that everything is completely hopeless and that I should kill myself.
Something like that.
I notice the volume turn up and pace quickens when I'm past her house and it's out of eyesight.
This can't be normal behavior.
I glance at the moon that's peering out from behind the clouds and for a split second the music and the sky and the feeling of an industrial accident looming over me about ready to take me to the hospital all makes sense, and I stop dead in the sidewalk.
I take a few deep breaths.
Am I back in reality?
Where am I?
When did I come to this place?
Why am I here?
How did I get here?
What just happened?
Is this real, to live in an unfamiliar town in a house that doesn't fit right like that denim jacket I still have that my mom got me when I thought I liked that kind of music? Is this reality when I work in a job that seems so strange, to work for money that when I use it to buy beer it seems like a Xerox copy of a bad picture out of a magazine more than it seems like a form of currency?
Is any of this real?
Does it matter?
For one split moment it all came to a head. Crystal clarity. Every loose thread tightened and the cameras came into focus.
All the roads of all the things that were going on met and collided in an explosion of complete and utter beauty. Each question and concern and confusion suddenly playing off each other in a painting of a tapestry of a mirror reflection of a majestic landscape on a far away planet. Completely perfect in every detail. Completely unrecognizable as anything sensical.
Then it all sped off to be lost forever.
Was there a commonality? Is it even worth perusing?

269 For all the slice-'o'-life mundanity that I've tried to capture over the years, I think this one is one of the best-written pieces I've attempted. While I have never been that good at really capturing some sort of insight about the world around us, I've always felt that a good talent I DO have is the ability to nail down some of those amorphous emotions that strike me late at night. I was really proud of this one, and conversely, no one ever commented on it. Regardless, it's one of my favorite pieces.
I come home to roommates who all what to show or tell me something and all I can think of is escape. Escape from reality. Escape from all of this even if it feels comfortable or right or wrong or at all. If all of this is real, then what does that make what happened before? What's the point? The feelings of confusion settle back in their regular place and I’m reminded of a thousand other nights of my life where I tried to put everything together. It’s only really the setting that’s changed. The big pieces are still immobile and the small pieces are still trying to decipher what the picture they’re supposed to be a part of is. It’s my job to feel comfortable about that, not to try to put everything together.

I crack a beer and take my shoes off. “Candle” plays in the background. Nostalgia. For what? I don’t even remember when this album came out. I was probably still listening to Bon Jovi then. Maybe, if I cut myself some slack, the Doors. The beer tastes different in Portland for some reason. Or does it? The feelings the songs evoke are amorphous. It’s not nostalgia. Acceptance? Hard to say. I try to not think about it, but instead let it all wash over me. It will make more sense in the morning, I imagine. It always does.

---

I loved shopping for records in Eugene, but I could never afford it. Here the money seems to always be in my pocket even after I pay my bills. Fuck yeah! So instead of being wracked with guilt when I see something I want I can gleefully snatch things out of the bins and say in that manic callous voice I’ve been working on in my spare time, “This will make an EXCELLENT addition to my COLLECTION! Bwahahahahahaha!” (Emphasis on capitalized words, of course, and you have to warp the laugh in order to make it sound evil enough.) Why I remember one day in particular... (wait a minute... I think this deserves another paragraph)

The real story goes back a ways. After making the ever-so-wise decision of getting a credit card for the sole purpose of getting a record player and being very sloth-like in paying it off, the only remaining component to my stereo that was necessary so I did not have to harrass The Ramen City Kid every time I wanted to make a tape for myself (or a friend) was a tape deck that could record from my other components. Simple enough. This, coupled with the on-going search for more records, ended up being my goal for the day in question.

I first went to Second Ave., and though I resent the prices they set for their albums there was one thing that was keeping me flipping through their piles that day: the song “Institutionalized.” For some reason I really wanted that song, and I was actually willing to go a little above my normal maximum for the first Suicidal album on vinyl or the Repo Man soundtrack (if, that is, I could find either). The only place I could think of that might have it was Second Ave., and I’d had such good luck with records here in Portland that I figured that (coupled with my goal of a new tape deck) wouldn’t be that hard to accomplish.

I failed at Second Ave., and then after a quick search through the bins at Ozone I was about to give up. After all, I don’t have the transportation to zoom around town to all the other record stores in the area, and aside from the three I knew about downtown I really didn’t know where else there was to go anyway. Aside from a new Daniel Johnston tape I had come up empty handed.

I did, however, receive an anonymous tip on stereo equipment, so as I was trying to move on to the second part of my search I walked by Django and just decided to glance in the window. What’s this! Lo and behold, in the one bin visible from the street was the first Suicidal album, on vinyl, for $4 no less! I quickly threw open the doors and almost trampled three or four people as I stampeed toward the bin and snatched up the record before my enemies could steal it and thwart my plans (which happens all too

---

270 Whenever I tell people I own a lot of Doors albums, I always get a lot of crap. The biggest complaint is the whole “Lizard King” persona that he put on, and while I can say that I probably thought it made more sense in High School than it actually does now, I still like to bust out an album from time to time and rock out. (I’d say they’re important to psychedelic music after Love & The Thirteenth Floor Elevators.) The really funny part is that the same kind of people think it rules that I saw Bon Jovi with my mom. What, like that’s cool, but the Doors aren’t? I don’t get it?

271 The Ramen City Kid told me I should read Psychotic Reactions & Carburetor Dung, and not knowing much about it I bought it and instantly fell in love with. When I first got to Portland I used to carry around that book and read from it like it was a religious text, taking in every word as if it were scripture. I attempted to emulate it while at the same time never trying to mock it. For those of you who’ve never read it, it’s mostly music writing (I can hear you yawning already), but only in that he starts every article with an attempt to write about music and along the way ends up writing about everything and nothing that relates to the human condition. Though he was a music writer, his writing has everything to do with being alive and energetic and ready to take on the world, for whatever it has to offer, good or bad. (Another great writer in the same vein is local resident Richard Meltzer, who was not only a contemporary of Lester Bangs, but friend as well. Also, Richard’s output is much greater having outlived Lester by many, many years and all. Check out A Whore Just Like The Rest for a good Meltzer collection.)

Anyway, Psychotic Reactions is a highly recommend book (and the only collection of Bangs’ writing that exists), and if you’d like more information about him find me at a party some night and I’ll corner you and tell you a million different anecdotes that will really annoy you and make you not want to talk to me anymore. (And no, it wouldn’t be the first time it happened.) The fact that I’m aware of this, and theorized that I would eventually write another tribute to him even though I’ve already got this one on the books was why this is the “first” tribute. The fact that I DIDN’T write a second one (yet) is pretty amazing. Upon reading this now, I’m actually surprised at how incoherent a lot of it is. Which perfectly nails his style, so I guess I succeeded.
often as they co-ordinate their efforts with locals and have a very developed network of communication with which to inform one another of my current position and theoretical destinations, but that's a whole 'nother story for another day I'm afraid).

Beingamped by my success, it seemed reasonable that I should more carefully inspect the other bins and to my delight I scored not only the first They Might Be Giants LP, and the first Green Day LP, not to mention the Rondelles album I'd been looking for since I first heard it as a DJ at KWVA. With the look of a gleeful child I bounded to the counter and handed over the cash before something could happen and turn the event into a disaster, and just as quickly as I entered I fled to the shelter of the bus stop to puruse my booty and wait for the bus that would take me to the place in question that I was told might have a cassette deck.

The Hawthorn bus was crowded, but I got off at Jackpot and crossed the street and went to that other record store where the cassette deck was rumored to be, and after a bit of examination decided that it was worth the money and shelled out the fifty bucks she was charging.

With many new possessions in tow, I figured it would be prudent to return home ASAP, and negotiated the buses as quickly as possible. I was anxious to here my new albums and tape them on my new cassette deck so I could continue to listen to them on my walkman, and to this end spent the next couple of hours hooking up the stereo and letting the record player spin.

How can I verbalize my disappointment? Lester Bangs already textualized it so much more eloquently than I ever could years before I even thought about putting pen to paper (let alone needle to record). What it boiled down to is this: even though I'd made purchases I wanted to, and even though I was very excited about all the records I found, they all sounded exactly how I expected them to sound. Maybe this was because I'd heard them all before, or maybe there was some other unseen factor at work here. But for some reason, none of these albums were capable of blowing my mind in that way that I always secretly hope they will every time I push play or punch play or drop the handle.

Sure, now I could sate the cravings to hear “Disappearing Boy” or what have you without having to fast forward and rewind through the stacks of tapes in those boxes in the corner of my room that are all poorly labeled that I keep telling myself I'll get around to fixing sooner or later, and that alone makes the endeavor worth it. And yeah, I love all those records. Don't get me wrong. But there was something else that was missing, something that I might have only imagined except that... well... see...

I'll try to explain, but first we'll need the right setting and background so Insert the hyper-kinetic Unwound instrumental “Miserific Conditions” to give you the idea that I'm bouncing off the walls and the keyboard as I type this, because I am and that's where this text is headed. This is about everything above and about THE RECORD...

Because sometimes you need a few cups of coffee to get yourself out of bed, and sometimes you need VERY loud music to get you out of that same bed on those days after a long bout of drinking wine and being lazy on your day off, and besides you have to work later in the day anyway and the ONLY way you're going to keep yourself going until Midnight when you get off work is COFFEE COFFEE COFFEE and VOLUME VOLUME VOLUME because you were up at 8 A.M. because you drank yourself into one of those passing-out drunk stupors the night before (at MIDNIGHT of all the lame early hours of the day to fall asleep). So now you're stuck with being so hyped up on coffee and the Wipers and anything else you can find that's enough to keep the chemistry that's going on in your body at the right level and when you think about it you are already starting to fear that 6 P.M. crash you know you're going to have, but fuck it, you've got all the time in the world right now because you know what you're looking for which is what the whole search is all about in the first place...

And your gonna keep trying to turn that record up louder even though it's already really fuckin' loud but for some reason you just can't get it loud enough because you are still just a human being listening to music on headphones and the crunchy feedback and the THUD THUD DUMP THUD of the bass hasn't disentigrated your entire body and turned you into some sort of pile of watery energy that just oozes everywhere and obliterations all feeling and thought that keeps you from being the kind of person you want to be because all you can ever think about without it is how completely pointless it is to have to put up with all the dumbfucks in the world and how you to have to work your fucking job day in, day out for money that only ever goes to keeping yourself from being hungry and freezing to death outside in THE REAL WORLD. And the only things you get to spend this glorious money-stuff on that you've earned that you can actually consider “your's” is more records and booze that will, hopefully, allow you to smash yourself into some state that will enable you to cope with the horrible repetition of it all.

BUT IT DOESN'T! It never does. You can never seem to get drunk enough and you keep trying to find that one record that will destroy your sense of what music is supposed to sound like and when you're done leaves you spent and exhausted like what you imagine the best sex you've ever had will be like. You know? How it makes you whimper and cry and all you can think about is another touch from that flesh and mind combination that made you believe that maybe there was religion or something similar that was worth believing in after all, because something exists out there so you can keep on living and fucking long into the night in search of it with this person.

Some albums come so fucking close to that and when they do I just want to yell and scream and bounce off the walls and drink more coffee and beer and bourbon and wine and celebrate LIFE AND ALL IT'S BEAUTY and all that is real and right in the world because tomorrow, oh fuck you tomorrow! Because tomorrow I have to repeat all that bullshit. But now, OH THAT GLORIOUS MOMENT! I'm listening to this record and this song and this particular note and word combination that means more to me than all that other bullshit and makes me feel ALIVE and ready to take on the world and become anything and everything and to hell with all the bullshit.

For the most part, no matter how close to that they come, there's some element missing and it's not quite loud enough or intense enough and no matter what kind of scrutiny you give it under laboratory tested, repetitive headphone listenings while wandering around late at night drunk or wired or just searching around for a new place to go that isn't where you are you can't seem to find out what it is, you still can't find that key element that you're looking for, the one that you can't describe but you know is
missing and you will keep searching for it every time you buy records because you know it’s out there somewhere, that one record that will make everything else pale in comparasion and it will all come together and make everything the morning after be OKAY.

And it’s not just loud and volume and bass and distortion I’m talking about here, even though those elements are on the best albums. It’s about the combination of those elements, the tonal of voice, the beauty in mixing those elements in the right amounts and proportions. Some of the best songs ever are slow and methodic and build to a crescendo (much like sex, again). But all of them have a certain level of honesty, of the purging need to turn emotion into sound to evoke emotion in the simplict and most basic terms. In the end, it all comes back to base needs and ideas. Because if you aren’t listening for that sort of elated feeling music is supposed to give you, why are you listening at all?

Maybe it won’t ever happen, but I gotta believe in something, right? It might as well be THAT record, something that I can actually find someday if I keep looking hard enough, because I’ve seen records before and I know where to find those, rather than some arbitrary person to spend my life with because that’s how the rest of the word gives their lives meaning and since that’s the path that seems to work the most for people in general I should try to find that certain special someone and marry them and settle down and raise a family because that’s what works for everyone else. Except of course when they need to get a divorce because it turns out that they don’t really get along after all because they married too early or too late or at the exactly right time and, well, to be honest I’m dissatisfied with the way my kids turned out because they did or didn’t shoot up enough libraries272 so I’m going to make them feel like shit and tell them it’s their fault so they’ll grow up feeling inadequate and uncomfortable around their peers and maybe even prevent them from functioning correctly with people on a personal and social level. What possible reason would I want to follow that path? What sort of self-satisfying meaning does that give me? Give me THE RECORD over that anyday.

Of course, I could turn to religion too like so many other people on this planet who abuse their children and steal money from my roommates273 and spend their spare time telling everyone else that they are fucked up and make mistakes but suddenly if you agree to be a part of this organization all those fucked up things you do are suddenly absolved even if you keep on doing them because God forgives ALL. Very enlightening, very much what I’m looking for in life. I mean, I don’t even have to think about what it means if someone else tells me everything is okay. Just sit back in mindlessness and I don’t have to do shit because it requires no thought to feel better around God. Fuck that. Neither one will make me feel any better about myself than I already do. Not like that record will.

SOOOOOOOOO... I’m gonna keep looking for it, and though I tell myself I can get by without it I’m gonna look for someone to look for that record with too. Someone who understands how important that record is. They don’t have to agree on what THAT RECORD is, either. We don’t have to get married, we don’t have to go to church and have kids and shit like that. Let everyone else who stands in my way when I look for that record and who make my life suck do that. We just have to enjoy hanging out with each other and a six pack of beer and a stack of new albums that just might contain that certain special collection of sound wavelengths. Maybe THAT RECORD is different for her. I don’t care. As long as she understands THE SEARCH, which is what it’s really all about when you get right down to it, then I’m okay.

Suddenly it all makes sense. Suddenly the one thing that makes Portland different from Eugene is in plain sight, in plain view. Suddenly, I feel like I have renewed purpose in life. Suddenly, I know what I’m going to do tomorrow and the day after. I look outside the window and realize the sun is shining and it’s summertime. Of course! I always feel like this durng this time of year.

I smile. Like I said, I think I’m going to like Portland.

(3/22/00)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;That Touchy Feely&quot; Crap274 by Austin Rich</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I punch out and all I can remember from the last eight hours is trying to sum it up. Trying to simplify the entire situation and put it succinctly enough so it all makes sense. It seems so random and confused. Can any of what I remember really have happened? Did it really pan out the way I remember? There’s got to be some sense in it. Some pattern I can’t see.

272 There’s another school shooting reference. Maybe I do need a therapist.

273 True story: this is about the devout Christian who stole $500 from one roommate and almost $200 from me. Gotta love those Christians!

274 I don’t know why I never get sick of writing about relationships / girls. You would think I would eventually, but I just don’t. Every time I meet or break up with a new girl I always need to find some new angle on it. I guess in an attempt to make sense of what’s to come when we meet just as much as I need to rationalize what happened when we break up. I find girls and relationships endlessly fascinating (probably because of my inability to “figure them out”), and I doubt I’ll ever be done writing about them as long as I can still type. Hopefully this stuff is interesting, because if I have to cut this out there’ll be nothing left in this collection. (I was going to add the word “literally” in parenthesis to the title of this piece to make it sound as if the “Touchy Feely Crap” I was writing about was, in fact, me rolling around and making out with this girl, but I thought that would be down-playing the normal degree of “subtly” that I try to employ more often than not.)
I buy some batteries from Safeway for my walkman and try to zig-zag home in a way I don’t normally walk to try and shake things up a bit. They always say that a new perspective on things can bring previously unseen details into sharp focus, but all that happens is I sweat a little bit and notice the cracks in the sidewalk. Maybe “they” were lying.

It wouldn’t be the first time.

I try to play the memories over again to see if there was something I missed. We were watching a movie on the couch, my hand touched her’s... now how did that happen? Why would I do that?

What’s going on here?

I look at her face again and she smiles and sends a thrill though me that shakes me back to a simpler time.

“That’s odd, I haven’t felt like that since the first time I kissed a girl.” Cliche but oh so true.

It doesn’t make any sense. Why do I have to fight the urge to call her even when I know she’s not home? Why can’t I get her out of my head? Why do I feel so confused about this girl?

She laughs at my joke and the laugh plays over and over again. I haven’t gotten sick of it yet. Is this symptomatic of something? I steal glances when her back is turned so I don’t seem like I’m leering at her but I still can’t get enough. I can’t seem to resolve the idea that I got to kiss someone that pretty. I take another look and expect to see some sort of acid shimmer and wake up one week ago, sweating in my room, noticing it’s completely trashed while I’m listening to that Unwound lock-groove for the 10th hour straight.

But it never happens. She’s still there in my mind. Why is that? What’s going on?

I come back to now and take another sip of beer. It still doesn’t make any sense. I’m an adult. I shouldn’t be acting like a kid. I’ve got vacation pay and 401K and all that “adult” bullshit that no one really understands but everyone seems to have. I’ve had a steady job for five years now and my “career” is finally in order.

Snap. Grind. “Wait a minute....”

Slowly it all starts to come into focus. I steal a mental glance at her again.

There’s nothing to “figure out.” There’s nothing to be confused about. It all makes sense again.

I take another sip of beer and smile. Crushville, USA. Population: Me.

|-----------------------------------------------------------|

Part XXII: Is This All There Is?

Portland was a positive influence on my writing, but it also had the strange effect on me: I slowed down quite a bit. Whereas before I was writing almost every day, churning out a lot of different kinds of material, in Portland I was lucky to have finished something solid enough to run in the ‘zine in the span of a month. It wasn’t that I was getting tired of writing, because I did it nearly all the time. But I had become so selective about what I did keep in IBTFAS! that a lot of stuff I put to computer never left the binary file-structure.

Other factors were entering into the equation too: The Defense Lawyer, a good friend of mine that I’d met in Eugene who was actually living in Portland, suggested that I start submitting material to the Portland Online Music Net, a website dedicated to the Portland music scene. I immediately jumped at the chance, and devoted a lot of energy (and text) to that website (they accepted all but one thing I submitted to them, and it’s all still there for your reading enjoyment at www.pomn.com. (Look in the archives under “I Think There’s Something Wrong With Me”.) While I really enjoyed writing about music for them (hey... who doesn’t like music writing!), eventually my interest wore off and I stopped. Occasionally I get e-mail asking if I’m interested in submitting something, but I just can’t seem to get off my ass to do it. They seem to understand this, and ostensibly keep me on the site for people to read, but don’t pester me to continue writing. (This is probably common with a lot of music writers.) The thrill does wear off... eventually.

I also began work on the official A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. website after settling into Portland, something I tried to do when I was stuck in the basement with Kisu & Glyndon, but never got around to really fleshing out. My old friend Brian, who I’ve known since the old Eugene days, lived in Portland, and was pretty dedicated to working on his basement server as his own hobby. It didn’t take long to try working on inter-meshing our two pastimes, and when I showed interest he was really helpful at teaching me Unix and giving me advice on coding stuff for the page. While I was sure that the website was not going to really turn any heads or do anything particularly over the top or exciting, it was a great way to get back into learning seriously about computers (something I used to be great at, but had let slip over the years), and I took to HTML pretty quickly. While I have not approached the website with as much zeal as I did when I first put it together, it is the only place where you can get “current” news about stuff that I’m doing / projects I’m working on, etc. You can also join the mailing list on the website, where all updates are mailed out to you as they occur. It effectively acts as a great sounding board for something immediate that I want to work on that can’t wait for a next issue. Aside from the

---

275 Of course, no one else liked this line. I thought it was the most brilliant thing I’d written in a long time, and then I realized that a lot of people aren’t Unwound fans, nor do they have experience with acid. Unfortunately, I have a lot of experience with both.
scripts (which have all been written by my webmaster, Brian), the whole site has been coded and organized by me, which was a lot of fun to put together. Go to http://acronym.rackm0unt.com to check it out (you should also go to www.rackm0unt.com and check out my Brian’s page, who not only does site hosting by offers webmail service and the like... it’s worth checking out.)

All in all, I think Portland has also brought out a more “serious” side of me, making me look more at longer-term projects and really putting together something that was more reflective of what I’d want to read, and not something that’s entirely fueled by overnight writing sessions and 3 A.M. runs to the Kinko’s™. Since I got here I’ve been tinkering with various different books that I’ve been trying to write over the years, as well as starting on some home-recorded CDs of material friends of mine have made. Some of these projects I’ve been wanting to work on for years, but ‘zines were always my #1 focus. Now I feel like I can broaden my work a little more and divert attention to one-off projects, much like Cigarette or Mail. While I will never give up IRTFAS!, there may be longer and longer gaps between issues as I futz around with another projects in the meantime. As always, the website has the most accurate information about that stuff.

Point being, my writing was definitely getting a lot more selective and refined since I got to Portland, which is ironic, considering that I was still, essentially, writing the same kinds of things for my ‘zine. Apparently I have developed such a huge callous to the whole dating / job / life malaise that it takes disasters of much larger proportions to inspire me. Whatever the case, the three issues I’ve finished in the three years I’ve been in Portland (not counting this collection) are probably the slowest publishing rate of speed I’ve ever achieved, and it’s only going to get slower as time moves on. I personally think the extra time I spend on each issue was directly related to an increase in the quality control measures I’ve attempted to use when making my ‘zines, however I’m sure that a lot of people would disagree. Whatever. I love these issues the Portland issues, and that’s the bottom line.

Is This All There Is? I had found the picture of the kid in a dunce cap while I still lived in Eugene, and kept it waiting for the perfect moment to run it on the cover. It wasn’t until I began work on this issue that I thought it was time. For this first time in years I also employed the original logo than Colin had designed way-back-when. With issue #17, I turned to an actual design person for the first time in my career, and came up with some great results. (Thanks Design Pirate!) She actually came up with the image herself; I nearly told her I wanted something that looked like a playing card. (She also designed an image that was used on the inside, as well as the back cover.) It was great to work with someone who not only understood what I was going for, but didn’t mind changing things that I was picky about. (It’s tough to work with us anal-rententive weirdos, you know?)


I’d Buy that for a dollar!

Vol. 1, Issue #17, "The Hand That Life Dealt Me."
It doesn’t take much for a new pop-punk band to gain my fancy, and when I say, “doesn’t take much,” I mean it. Essentially, if you can play a song by your band in my general vicinity, and I don’t happen to be listening to anything on headphones, I’m sold. Essentially, I’m a sucker. If the song contains, in any order, three chords, distorted guitars, lyrics about how much you miss your ex-girlfriend, some spiky hair, a little bit of Manic Panic and a whole lot of jumping up and down and screaming, you can count on me to pick up a few of your singles, force your music on my friends at parties, maybe take in a show or two when you’re in town, and probably mention you in my ‘zine a few times. That’s just the way I am, and though the blanket statement “pop-punk” is probably a phrase tossed off so carelessly that it’ll come back to haunt me, I am content to state that I stand by my generalization ‘til the end, period.

And why shouldn’t I? Three chord ballads about the complexities of teenage life have saved me on more than one occasion. A week hasn’t gone by since I was 18 that I didn’t spend at least one night alone in my room, playing tape after take of this or that in an attempt to let the song blow out through the speakers and into my ears to clear out all the mental clutter that accumulates in the process of just trying to forge some sort of connection with the outside world that is meaningful in some way. And even though I am now — even by long and drawn out definitions of the word — no longer anything close to resembling a teenager, when I have to get up and face the world each day some part of me always returns to those thrilling days of yesteryear. Standing in the mirror, trying to get my hair to look good so I won’t be made fun of, picking out the right clothes so I can look as cool enough to not get mocked when I leave the house, wondering for hours and hours on end if so-and-so likes me and whether or not I should ask her to hang out with me sometime, and that constant nervous twitch that causes me to continually check to see if someone has spit in my hair, stolen my wallet, or is sneaking up on me to knock my books out of my hands and kick them down the hall. At 26 I am no more an adult than I will be at 36, and the only real thing that’s changed is instead of having to go to school I go to work, and instead of drinking coffee at all hours of the day it’s now beer.

A 26-year-old boy, trying to figure out what to do with his life. Sucker.

* * * * *

It was The Lord Of Darkness that clued me into the show. I myself might not have noticed, or for that matter really cared that much about The Living End, and though I was familiar enough with their material to be impressed I was not enough of a fan to make my plans around them. Having recently become single again there was a burning sensation within me to meet someone, an urge that is always hard to sate and, to really come around to the point at hand, something I’m not any good at. A show like this was no place to meet someone, and therefore seemed like a mediocre idea at best.

It wasn’t until he told me how much the show was that my plans began to seriously change.

“$2.00? Are you kidding?”

“Actually, it’s $1.94.”

This had to be a mistake. In the year I’d lived in Portland there had never been any shows that cheap, save for house parties. Never. How could a band like this be only two bucks? There was no way on Earth... but there it was, on the ticket that The Lord Of Darkness had bought! $1.94: $0.94 for the cost of the show, $1.00 service charge because it was a Fastixx ticket. Shit, at that price I could buy two, and even if the second ticket didn’t get used it was still a good deal. I told him I was going to pick up a ticket ASAP.

“You should get two,” he said.

“Why, does someone else need one?” I asked.

“No... but you should find someone to go with,” he said in his best ‘Player’ type voice.

“Oh...” Oh, indeed. I didn’t know anyone who wanted to go to a show like this, and no girls I knew would let me take them. Everyone I knew was far too hip to be seen at some radio-station promoted concert. Furthermore, the chances of meeting someone random and having the ice breaker be, “Hey, wanna go to a show with me? I’m buying!” didn’t quite pan out well enough in my head. There were too many places where things could go wrong and everything would blow up in my face somehow. No, despite his advice, I would merely buy a ticket for myself and meet up with him and his friends at the show. It made enough sense to me, even if it didn’t end with me trying to pull the moves on a girl. Where the plan scored negative points for lack of girls going home with me at the end of the night, it made up for in ease of execution and The Humiliation Factor (specifically, the lack thereof).

It was one thing to want to go out and try to meet someone. Not only was this a safe activity to participate in, but also there was no real room for something going wrong. Since you begin the evening alone, and you have done nothing more than go out for some drinks as you would on any night, nothing has been lost. But buying a ticket you plan to try and use as a tool to get a girl to go to a show with you is a bit of a commitment, even if the cost is only $1.94. The next day your failure is not commemorated by a hangover that is easily treated (or, in some cases, non-existent) and will hopefully take your mind off of your failure, but instead by a physical piece of evidence (an unused ticket stub) that will forever lie in your scrapbook as a reminder of how poor you are with the opposite sex. It was the kind of thing I could definitely do with less of in my life.

---

276 Here it is: the only straight-up music writing that’s included in this collection. In my defense, it’s more about this girl than the bands, but some people would argue that it only makes it worse. Regardless, this is the kind of music writing I do. To me, music is the backdrop to our lives, and the only comfortable way to present it in a written format is to show how I integrate it into my own life. If people can dig that, then they can get into the band to. If not... well, oh well. Their loss. This was posted on POMN and has never seen print in any of my ‘zines, and to my knowledge the girl this is about has never read this (I hope). Hopefully it’s been long enough for her to laugh about this now (sucker!).

165
But life has a way of toying with you, and as I set out to get my ticket only hours before the show the seed of The Lord Of Darkness’ idea had been planted and was quietly gestating. This was, after all, a Friday night. This meant Shanghai Tunnel before the show, and a large group to celebrate making it through another week of Pumpin’ For The Man. Chances are, there will be someone there who wouldn’t mind going to a show if the price was right ($1.94, or, in the case of me having an extra ticket anyway, free). As I walked around Portland running this errand and that errand, and the sun shone down upon me in a way that made me smile and laugh at how perfect the world can be sometimes. It also occurred to me that someone at the bar that night might be one of the girls I’m always eyeing.

A date. A date, with a girl, at a show. The idea rolled around in my head like a skater on a half-pipe.

What the hell? I thought, and slapped down an extra couple of dollars so I could purchase that second ticket.

* * * * *

Booze, beer, and a seat at the bar. I was early. I was generally early, but today I felt particularly early. This was not going to be an easy plan to execute. I tried to think rationally, but my mind was jumping ahead as if I’d already asked someone, the show was over, and we were standing in front of The Roseland trying to figure out what bar we should hit up that was equidistant from our respective houses, as if to imply that we didn’t already know that we would be spending the night together at one of them eventually. I had to derail that line of thinking over and over again. I wasn’t that far along yet, I hadn’t even found someone to go to the show with yet. Chances are I’ll have to pawn the ticket off on Kiisu or, failing that, some guy standing in front of the show who looks like he can’t get in. Regardless of my attempts to prepare for the Worst Case Scenario, though, I kept thinking about what I would do with my hands while we were sitting at the bar after the show, and what we would talk about, and...

“Hey. How’s it goin’?”

Her! She walked in, all curves and hair and smiles and... ouch! Many an evening had gone by when I would pretend to listen to someone else’s conversation as I stared across the table at Her. Funny, goofy, good taste in music, fun to talk to, gorgeous to look at. Before I said anything I knew it was her. She would go to the show with me, even though I hadn’t asked her yet, even though she probably hated the bands that were playing, even though the odds of her and I ever having anything to do with each other aside from our group of friends were astronomical. She would go, against better judgment and logic, because I am a sucker. She got a drink and we claimed a big table in the name of our as-yet-not-present friends.

“You wanna go to a show?” I stupidly asked immediately and without warning.

“Maybe, what’s the score?”

“I’ve got an extra ticket, no charge. It’s The Living End at The Roseland. Starts at 8... what do ya say?” I said nervously, but used heroic efforts to cover this fact with the dorky kind of cool I’d developed over the years.

“Sure... sounds like fun,” she replied, as my mind boggled and my face did that sort of sighing thing it does when my brain thinks it’s getting what it wants. The smile I’d been wearing all day suddenly hardened and would not disappear for anything short of a plastic surgeon. I ordered another drink; this was going to be interesting, to say the least.

* * * * *

Despite my efforts, we arrived at the show late; The Natrons had already started. I’ve seen them before, and though they never really got me pumped up and ready to go, they were definitely a good way to start a show. They know their licks and riffs and they don’t fuck around. They just play their songs and get the job done. We headed upstairs, purchased some beer and sat down. Soon enough they had finished, and with full pints still to be drank, we sat and chatted about this and that.

Though we’ve hung out quite a bit, neither of us have spent much time together alone. Even though there were scads of people around us, there was something exciting about just talking about this and that. I’ve always found the “getting to know you” period of any kind of relationship pretty exciting, so I listened with interest and tried to add things here and there that seemed appropriate, trying not to force the conversation in any particular direction. I felt like I was doing well enough and that we were getting along perfectly, and in many ways I didn’t want the next band to start. I wanted to just keep talking with her, maybe in either one of our living rooms, just listening to records and bullshitting until it was just past that time when we should sneak off together into a bedroom. I so much wanted everything to just go flawlessly and perfectly the way it never does.

“I’m gonna hate this band, aren’t I?” she asked suddenly.

This caught me off guard, so I tried to explain that I didn’t really know anything about them. But trust me, The Living End are great. You’ll love them. I tried to gazzle my beer as quickly as possible, though it wasn’t really necessary, as I was pretty drunk already.

Tsunami Bomb started, and I was pretty impressed. They were your standard pop-punk combo, female vocalist, three other guys playing the music, that sort of thing. The sound was just awful, so I couldn’t really make out any lyrics or anything, but I imagined they were probably singing about your standard stuff (relationships, politics, etc.). Everything was in place, the stage was set, and we were both ready. I began to slowly move my hand toward her leg, carefully, as to not draw too much attention to it. These kinds of things are better done in a covert sort of fashion. Sudden movements just throw everyone off. When I was sure I was ready, I started carefully brushing my hand across her leg, gently, as to say, “Oh, hello... hope you don’t mind, I just thought I’d try some physical contact since we’re getting along so well.”

She suddenly turned toward me and looked at me funny. “What are you doing?” she asked, and to be honest I was thinking of asking myself that same question. My hand retreated back to where it had been before and I retreated into myself silently, not
really wanting to answer the question. She sort of laughed, and leaned over to tell me that the band was awful. Even though I couldn’t agree, I nodded silently as if I understood exactly what she was saying. She wasn’t talking about the band; she was talking about what I’d just done. Quickly I got up and said I’d be right back, and set out to find the bathroom for the dual purposes of relieving myself physically (had to pee) and mentally (had to think about what I was doing).

Obviously it had never occurred to her that I might do something like that, and in many ways she had a point. If there was going to be a time I was going to do something like that, it would have been shortly after we’d met. By this point in our “relationship”, we were pretty good friends. Not the kind that call each other up and hang out all the time, but the kind that hang out on the weekends, see each other at parties, and have enough in common to want to keep talking to each other when we see each other. It’s not that I hadn’t wanted to make a move like this when I first met her, but rather I was seeing someone at the time and I’m not the kind of guy that even tries to work two women at once, let alone at all.

But - but! - I was single now! I wasn’t seeing anyone, and to my knowledge, neither was she. So there couldn’t be anything wrong with this... could there? No, of course not. What had happened was this: she had not expected me to do what I’d done. Fair enough. Everyone is used to knee-jerk reactions when they are faced with something they are not used to or not familiar with. But now she knows, she’s been prepared. She knows I’m interested, and if my inebriated logic is straightforward and clear enough, if I try again I will have better luck this time.

Why? Because I’m a sucker when it comes to finding an excuse to do something I know I shouldn’t do.

I returned and she was still sitting where we had been, so I took my seat and took a few more drinks of my beer, which was rapidly disappearing. Tsunami Bomb played on, and I was really getting into them regardless of the fact that she would occasionally lean over to tell me how much she didn’t like them. “It’s just that I’m from California, so I heard this stuff everywhere all the time! I just don’t like it anymore.” Fair enough. I sat there completely oblivious to the coded conversation she was having with me, and what she was really trying to say. I decided that I would wait to make my second move until after The Living End were playing, a band I knew (sucker!) she would like. I impatiently sat there and watched Tsunami Bomb in between sips of beer and glances at her.

Finally they were done, and we lapsed back into conversation again. Again, I tried to play it cool, and fortunately she hadn’t mentioned what had happened, which obviously meant that she had been unprepared and my plan could, therefore, move forward (of course it meant that... right?). My head made a concerted effort to stay in one place, but failed miserably and it wobbled and weaved around above my seat. We talked for hours (seconds?), and all the while my confidence it my plan grew and grew. This was going to work, perfectly. I waited patiently for The Living End to start.

Soon enough their set was underway, and I sat there nervously and watched. They were exactly how I expected them, which was great because I expected them to sound more or less like their CD. In many ways, there weren’t “amazing” or “spectacular”, but I credit this more to the fact that I was upstairs, drunk out of my mind, and trying to pick up a girl. I always react better when I’m down on the floor of a show anyway, and had chosen the seating upstairs mostly because I wanted to get a drink. Still, they were rockin’ and started doing their little song “shticks” (the bass player, using a stand-up bass, would lean it over and stand on the side while he played) and whatnot to keep the show fairly fluid. This kind of music, no matter how much I try to ignore the fact, is the soundtrack to my life. Kids trying to find out why their relationships aren’t working, trying to find out why they keep getting fucked over by their jobs or their friends or politics... this is the stuff that makes up my life, our lives. This was perfect.

I told myself I would wait until they’d played four songs, and then quickly changed this by telling myself that I could make my move after the fourth song had started. In many ways I’m surprised I was even able to count, but when the fourth song started I began the long trek across my lap with my own hand, slowly, as to not arouse suspicion. When I was sure enough of what I was doing, I slowly set my hand over on her leg again, and when there had been no reaction to that, I announced my presence by carefully, gently, and tenderly stroking her knee with my fingers.

This definitely got a reaction. She smiled in a quizzical sort of way, turned to me and repeated her previous question: “What are you doing?”

Sucker.

This time, I had no excuses, no answers that would work any better than they hadn’t the first time. I immediately shied away and said nothing, hoping the whole situation would just blow away. Or, better yet, that she would vanish in a puff of smoke and the evening would start over again, and this time I would give the ticket to Kiisu, and we’d be down on the floor, trying to find The Lord of Darkness, rockin’ out, having a good time. Stupid, stupid, STUPID! How many times does someone have to say something before it sinks in?

After another song had played, she leaned over again and said, “I just can’t stand this, I’m heading over to Fellini’s. This just... well, sucks.” I grabbed my shit and followed her out and on the way over to Fellini’s she repeated over and over again, “I’m sorry, I just couldn’t stand it. I’ve heard that kind of stuff too much and I’m just not into it.” I nodded and told her it was, “no big deal,” and that I couldn’t get mad at her, “for having opinions about music.”

But we weren’t talking about the bands. We hadn’t been all night. I knew exactly what we were talking about, and it was my own idiocy that didn’t actually hear it sooner. She asked if she could buy me a drink to pay me back, and I declined. I sat there in shock, taking it all in, and finally got up and decided to catch the end of the set. I had begun to question why I’d even followed her out of the show in the first place. How many more times am I going to set myself up for disappointment like this? Did I actually think I was going to make another shot at it again?

Fortunately, they let me back in, and I managed to catch a few more songs, even though I was completely soured on live music for the time being. I was more annoyed than amused by their cover of “Sunday, Bloody Sunday”, and even though nothing had changed in their stage presence or the audience / band dynamic, a lot had suddenly shifted in my own head. When the show was
finally over and done, I stood outside and made a half-hearted attempt to find The Lord Of Darkness to see how he was planning on getting home. I was not surprised in the least bit that I didn’t find him after a good half-hour plus of waiting.

In many ways I already knew I wanted to walk home and beat myself up some more anyway.

| And So It Begins... |

What I missed most was the walks home at night. Clear skies, full moon, and as you walk through the suburban neighborhoods, that familiar smell of warm night hits your nose; you can’t help but feel a thousand gallons of adrenaline pump through your whole body. You’re finally off work, and all that’s left between you and the bar (or a show) (or your friends) (or just a cold beer on your porch with your roommates) is that final walk home. That feeling is one of the most beautiful things you can ever experience. I missed it like I miss sex on a hot summer night.

I thought it would never come. It seemed like I was waiting for it for years. The winter, for me, consists of screaming at the sky and spending the evenings crying myself to sleep in an attempt to stay warm. Every morning I wake up and run giddily to the window, like a little kid checking to see if it had snowed the night before so school would be cancelled. I’d throw open the blind, and every time it would be the same thing: gray skies with a slight drizzle of rain. Slowly, I’d return to my room and try to make the most grueling decision of my life: should I shower, or just go back to bed?

I mean, what’s the point either way, really?

The winters are far too long in Oregon. They always have been, but they seem to get worse every year. Plus, they’re cold. Not the kind of cold that’s just uncomfortable, but that kind of cold that seeps into your bones and stays there, not to be coaxed out or replaced if it has anything to do with the matter. The cold is like some sort of squatting prospector in Oregon during the Gold Rush: there’s nothing there, no real point is toughing it out, but he’s not going anywhere just in case.

When I get cold like that, I feel like Sam McGee from Robert Service’s “The Cremation Of Sam McGee.” In the poem, Sam begins to freeze to death on a Gold Mining trip to Alaska. His dying wish is to be cremated, and his partner (from who’s point-of-view we hear this particular tale of woe) decides that he must carry through with this wish. Eventually he finds a ship frozen in a lake. After gathering wood and coal to start the ship’s furnace ablaze, he shoves in Sam, then walks off to let the fire burn (apparently appalled by the idea of smelling his dead friend burn to a crisp). After a short walk in the snow, curiosity takes over and he decides to go back and take a look inside, just to see if Sam is done cooking yet. After he opens the door, however, he finds something he wasn’t quite expecting:

> And there sat Sam, looking cool and calm, in the heart of the furnace roar;
> And he wore a smile you could see a mile, and he said: "Please close that door. It's fine in here, but I greatly fear you'll let in the cold and storm—
> Since I left Plumtree, down in Tennessee, it's the first time I've been warm."

Every spring, when the sun comes out, I feel like Sam McGee sitting in that furnace. I get down on my hands and knees and I thank the Sun. With tears in my eyes, I plead with it, “Please, don’t let those clouds out again! Please, sprinkle the rain elsewhere! That’s all I ask! I’m a good person, I don’t ask for much. I’ll even help save the environment. Just this one request, please!”

And every fall, it’s back to square one, and I have to stick my feet into the fireplace again to try and keep warm.

In the winter, there’s really no point going outside. It’ll just add to the cold. So I generally spend those months trapped inside my house, coffee cup in one hand, cigarette clenched tightly in the other, and I make broad and sweeping gestures to my roommates (or anyone else who will listen) to try and explain to them the scope of exactly, “how fucking cold it is!” (This generally makes a big mess, but a smoldering ash on my pants or a splash of warm coffee down my shirt only helps, so I keep it up.) When people will no longer let me complain, I have to spend my days hunched over my computer monitor in an attempt to soak up what little warmth it spits out at me.

But of course, that’s no good. It only helps if you move around, so I have to start punching the keys on the keyboard quickly, in rapid succession, so my hands are moving faster and hopefully get the blood flowing. It helps to listen to music, too, so you can

---

**277** Introduction from I’d Buy That For A Dollar! #16. This is probably my favorite issue I’ve done. I really feel like I had nailed down my style and was churning out much more “quality” material this time through, and really had a lot of fun putting it together. However, I got a lot of laughs from my friends for this intro. I know a lot of people from the Mid-West (why is the Mid-West east of the Northwest? Does that make sense to anyone else?), and they all told me that Oregon, by no accurate definition of the word, gets “cold” in the winter. The only way I can really defend myself is to tell them I’m Californian by birth, but there’s nothing worse than admitting that in mixed company. The fact is, I hate winter, I’m a big pussy when it comes to cold weather, and I will probably bitch about it until the end of time. The real irony here is that I dated a girl from the Mid-West who complained about the cold in Oregon more than I did. I can only wonder how she must have coped with the winter back home...

**1** “The Cremation Of Sam McGee” by Robert Service. © 1987 by The Stonesong Press, Inc. Reproduced from Dan McGrew, Sam McGee And Other Great Services. (Everything outside of this parenthetical notation in this footnote actually appeared in the original issue of the ‘zine, too. I have a real affinity for this poem, as my father used to read it to us kids when we would go camping. I also read this poem on the air when I was a DJ at KWVA and it was near Christmas, to the enjoyment of a single listener who also gave me props for playing The Wipers. I probably should have gotten her phone number and lived happily ever after...)}
sort of nod your head in time and get that part of the body moving too. And it doesn’t hurt to drink coffee then too, so your legs start bouncing around under the desk and your entire body starts vibrating and moving, getting the blood flowing.

It’s amazing what people will do to stay warm in the winter.  

-- Austin Rich (5/2/01)

| No One Seemed To Care\  
\---------------------------------------------------------------------------

He lived in a one-room apartment above a garage behind a duplex off 13th street, just west of downtown. Few people knew there was an apartment there. The family in the duplex were always fighting and beating each other up, and the people who hung out in the meth-lab in the garage tried hard to draw as little attention to themselves as possible. Aside from the occasional visit by the landlord or the mailman, he really was the only person that ever climbed its stairs; he never entertained guests.

There was little physical evidence that he lived there. The curtains were always closed and when you looked at his window you could only ever see faint light seep out. If you listened very carefully you could hear music and the occasional sound of coffee being made. The only time people saw him was when he left for work or to go and get food, and even then he went mostly unnoticed.

No one seemed to care.

His apartment was cramped, even for him. The ceilings were slanted because the apartment was a late addition to the building. He could only stand up straight in the center of his floor. The ceiling slanted from the center to the short height of 3 feet at the edges. In the half-kitchen off the main room (the only room) there was a refrigerator that never really got cold and a stove where only half the burners worked properly. The sink never ran warm water.

The bathroom was about the size of a normal shower. There was an infintesimnally small medicine cabinet and in it he kept his toothbrush, toothpaste and razor. He rarely used the razor. He had one towel hung on a small towel rack. The sink, toilet, and shower all seemed congealed around each other in a way that made any of them unusable if another was in operation.

He never seemed to be bothered too much by this.

He had a single mattress shoved against one wall (he never needed anything bigger). He put a plain white sheet on it and used a thick blanket most of the year. He also had a thin sheet folded up in the bottom of his small dresser that he used in the summertime instead of the blanket. He had the pillow and one pillowcase too, all of which was purchased at Goodwill for $10. Every two years he would replace the plain white sheet and pillowcase for an additional $3.

He never seemed to mind having to do this.

In his dresser he had some socks, some boxers, some dress pants, some black jeans and some plain white t-shirts. Even though his dresser was small, it was always very empty. Next to his dresser he hung his dress shirts on a small collapsible rack. Next to the shirts were his three coats. Underneath the rack sat two pairs of dress shoes and one pair of tennis shoes. He didn’t have much variety in his wardrobe and he really didn’t mind either. On Saturday it meant that he could do all his laundry in two loads at the Laundromat; that meant less time away from home.

He had an easy chair and a TV, and he only ever used them in conjunction with each other. He didn’t watch much TV, and when he did it was while he was eating. Even still, he didn’t eat at home much because he didn’t like to cook; when he did he only had one plate, one bowl, one coffee cup, one knife, one fork, one spoon and three different kinds of pans to use. He didn’t keep much food in his house and when he did buy food it was mostly frozen dinners for one.

\  
278 Of all the fiction I’ve written, I think this is the best piece so far. The only thing that separates this from a lot of the other fiction I’ve written is the simple fact that I revised it about 1,000,000 times before I sent it to print. (Probably more… I can’t remember… all of you aspiring writers, take heed!) This is also the same story I mentioned before that is set in the apartment I used to live in when I lived in Milwaukee. The location of the apartment in the story, however, is in Eugene, though in the real location there is a completely different apartment: it’s an actual complex that “Angry Man” Josh used to live in for a while. The bar that’s mentioned is supposed to be “Doc’s Pad”, a collegiate style bar with a high baseball cap ratio, where the drinks are strong and the date-rapes are prevalent. We used to go there a lot on Wednesday nights because they had $1 mixed drinks, which essentially meant you could get totally loaded for $5. The bike path that he walks on his birthday does exist as well; The Ramen City Kid and I used to go for walks on it, though I have no real idea if there is a river at the end of it. I have to admit that I don’t know where or what his company is, but there’s a few office buildings in Eugene, and any one of them could have been it.

And yes, as many people have already deduced, the main character is supposed to be me. I wrote this story (and another one that has yet to see print anywhere) around the same time (in the wake of the girl who moved to Portland on me), and I was REALLY depressed (gee… go fig?). The other story is not as good, and never got very far. This one, however, really meant something to me, and I was constantly trying to revise it and get it working. I think I finally did with this version. (In the first draft, it was so completely accurate and true to something that actually happened to me, and was so emotionally raw concerning real events, that I couldn’t even look at it for quite some time. While that version was more “honest”, this version actually works better even though it’s a bit “watered down” and truncated, emotionally speaking. This was the story where I learned that raw emotion is oftentimes not good fodder for writing, something I used to swear by in the past.)

279 With hindsight, I think I picked up this habit from this story. Since I wrote this, I eat in front of the TV a lot more than I used to. It’s the only time both my hands are busy, and it’s hard to read or write something if you can’t use at least one hand. TV is very passive, which allows me to eat without feeling like I’m wasting time. I have a tremendous fear of idle time, which often leads to me trying to do about three or four things at once in an attempt to maximize my output when it comes to projects. Anyway, I don’t remember doing this until AFTER I wrote this story.
Most of the time he would go to a restaurant. Sometimes, if he didn’t feel like staying, he would get the food to go. The only thing in his kitchen that got used regularly was his coffee maker. He used it every day. In the morning he would turn it on and brew a full pot of coffee. It was just a habit, now; he didn’t really need the coffee. It was just a pattern that he followed. He unconsciously made and drank the stuff all day long and when he was out he bought more from the store down the street.

He assumed he just liked coffee.

He had a stereo that had a cassette deck. He really didn’t listen to a lot of music and the few tapes that he owned only got played on rare occasions. Most of the time the radio was tuned to the local classical station. Occasionally he would change the station and listen to something else. He would always have it back on the classical station fairly quickly. There really wasn’t much music that he liked.

He had a small bookshelf with some books on it, though he didn’t read much and for the most part the books he did own had been gifts from his parents years ago. Occasionally he would check a book out from the library and become very disappointed with it when he finished reading it. He rarely bought books for himself.

He had a briefcase that contained stuff that pertained to his job and a phone that never rang unless it pertained to the same. He had a desk with a metal chair in front of it. On the desk was an old word processor. It had a printer built into it. It looked more like a typewriter than a computer.

The desk was the only thing he cared about.

He didn’t own anything else; there were few other things he really wanted.

He didn’t have any friends.

* * * * *

When he woke up on Monday he would walk to work. He worked in an office where he took a lot of notes at meetings and made copies of them for executives. He would confer with secretaries about payroll and he would talk to middle management about team-building exercises and programs the other employees were a part of. He was told that he was an important part of the “team”. He didn’t really care, though.

Maybe his company produced something and maybe not. He didn’t know. He only knew about the tasks at hand: copy, fax, take notes, call the accounting department, etc. It didn’t really matter what his company did. He got paid $11 an hour and he had health and dental care. He had two weeks paid vacation every year and he got two personal holidays plus sick leave (He never used his sick leave). When he took his vacation he stayed home and watched his TV and wrote at his desk (the only thing he liked to do). Occasionally he would read books he checked out from the library that he hated. He took his personal holidays on the day of and the day after his birthday.

It didn’t really matter what his company did; it was all pretty pointless to him.

At work no one ever talked to him unless they needed to know what time it was or if they needed directions to some office in another part of the building. He was always courteous to anyone he ran into at work, even if they weren’t part of his immediate job. Even if they didn’t talk to him.

Even if they didn’t care.

At the end of the day he would walk home. Sometimes people would try to get him to be social but he always turned them down. They didn’t really care and he saw no point in playing along too. The more he turned people down the less people would ask him to be social. He told himself that he liked it that way.

When he got home he would sit on the metal chair in front of his desk and he would write furiously about anything he could think of. Fiction, office anecdotes, poems, plays, etc. He wrote quickly and intensely and in great quantities. Sometimes he would work on a novel all night long. Some nights he would write 50 short pieces, all in first person, all reflecting how he really felt about everything.

What he wrote didn’t really matter to him; it was the act of writing that was important. He would finish something and he would print it out and put it in the desk with everything else (years and years of material), never to be read again and never to be seen by anyone. It would take hours for him to write everything out; every night for hours he would try to get it all out of his system like someone with a fever trying to sweat it out. It would go on and on.

It never looked like he was getting anywhere.

Eventually when the coffee was gone and he had tried his hardest, he would go to bed and lie perfectly still on his mattress with his eyes closed. He suffered from nightmares constantly. Sometimes he would wake up screaming loudly about them. He always managed to compose himself quickly after one and soon enough he would be back to sleep. The family in the duplex never heard his screams over their own and the people in the meth-lab never complained.

The next day he would wake up in the exact same position and do it all over again.

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

On Saturday he would do his laundry, and then write all day long. On Sunday he would just write.

He looked forward to the weekends.

He never told anyone about his desk or what was in it; they would never understand.

This was how he lived his life. He never talked about it. He never explained to people why he didn’t know about their music or their movies or their football teams. He never explained why he didn’t own a car. He never mentioned anything about his life to anyone because no one ever bothered to ask him. No one seemed to care.

The only evidence of how much this bothered him was in his desk that no one ever got to look inside.
He didn’t celebrate holidays because he didn’t have any family anymore. His parents were both long since dead of natural causes and he didn’t have any siblings. He wrote a story about his parents once and after he put it in the desk he told himself he felt better about their death. He didn’t know why.

He had never had a girlfriend. He didn’t know how to talk to girls.

He didn’t know if he had any other family. If he did, they didn’t seem to care if he was alive or dead, so neither did he.

On his birthday he would buy himself some plain vanilla ice cream and a small bottle of Vodka. He would eat the ice cream by himself and later he would pay to see a movie. He didn’t watch movies for the most part but on his birthday he would treat himself to one. He had never seen a movie he liked but he often thought that eventually he would.

When he got back from the movie he would drink the vodka. He would drink the whole bottle as quickly as possible and go for a walk as far as the bike path in town would take him. At the end of the bike path was a clearing near the edge of a river. Sometimes the moon would reflect in the river. He would sit on the side of the river at the end of the bike path and throw rocks at the moon in the river.

Usually he would start crying. Sometimes he would scream at the moon for letting itself get trapped in the river. This would last for hours and it generally went unnoticed. When he was tired and had wiped his tears away, he would return home. On the way back home he would mutter to himself about, “not being able to make any sense of it,” and people would avoid him for fear that he was a raving derelict.

The day after his birthday he would sleep in and add to the contents of the desk. It was really the only time of year that seemed worth celebrating to him; he always looked forward to it every year.

This year on his birthday he went to a bar. He had been to a few bars years ago but didn’t really like them and never stayed long enough to have any drinks. The reason he went to the bar this year was because he had had a conversation with someone at his work the day before.

It had not pertained to work.

A secretary he had worked with for years asked him what he would do for his birthday. He had been initially confused as to how she knew it was his birthday until she explained that she noticed the date in his employee file. He explained to her that he would go for a walk like he did every year. She laughed at this but he didn’t understand why. She told him he was strange and that he should go out. “After all,” she explained, “it is your birthday.” She said that the bar she always went to was a lot of fun and she always had a good time there.

She had mentioned the bar’s name, and when the sun went down on his birthday he went there instead of the movie theater.

He ordered straight vodka. The bartender thought this was odd but gave it to him anyway. The bar was of a medium size and had a fair amount of tables and a small floor for dancing. There was loud music and low lighting. He found it all very annoying but he didn’t say anything about it. He found a table in the corner away from everyone else and drank his straight vodka. When it was gone he would return to the bar and order more. He never asked the waitress for a drink, even though she asked him several times if he needed one. He didn’t see the point in bothering her.

He had been drinking there for an hour when he saw her come in the bar. There had been other people that had come in, but he didn’t feel the need to look at any of them. No one seemed to care about him, and he returned the favor.

When she came in he looked at her.

Eventually she noticed him and waved at him while a large smile spread across her face. She was with two girls friends and she excused herself and came over to his table. Before she said anything he said, “Hi.”

She asked if he was with anyone and he told her the truth. She looked at him sideways and suggested that she and the girl friends sit with him. He said, “That sounds fine,” and quickly returned his eyes to his glass of straight vodka as she walked off, puzzled.

The evening went on and more and more people showed up at the bar. She and the girl friends were always talking about this and that; he didn’t know about the things they were talking about so he kept his mouth shut. Occasionally she or the girl friends would ask him a question and he would answer as quickly and concisely as possible and then return to his glass of straight vodka.

She didn’t know what to think of him and the girl friends gave her a lot of quizzical looks. As if to respond, she would shrug and take a drink herself.

The girl friends would get up and dance when they heard a song they liked and she would always ask him to join them. He always responded with the same answer: “I don’t know how to dance.” She always looked at him when he said this and would say, “You’ll have to learn sooner or later.” As she would leave to dance he would sip his vodka and watch her and the girl friends dance. Sometimes he would smile. When they finished, he would look away and wait for them to return to the table.

The more they danced, the more he watched her; the more he watched her, the more he drank.
Hours went by and they had all drank quite a bit. She would occasionally make eye contact with him and smile but he would always look away when he noticed her. Eventually the girl friends went to the bathroom together, and she moved to the seat next to him. He started to look away from her and his hand began to move uncontrollably until she put her hand on his leg to stop him.

"Are you okay?" she said.

His face contorted into a confused look. "Why?"

"You don’t look like you’re having a very good time. It’s your birthday! What’s wrong?" she asked.

"I don’t know," he said quietly.

She looked at him and nodded her head slightly. After some contemplation she playfully said, "I cannot figure you out!" as she lightly pushed his shoulder in a playful gesture and made eye contact again.

He took a deep breath as his mind raced a million miles a minute. Thoughts bounced around in his head that made no more sense to him than gibberish, and as he tried to sort them out the world around him closed in creating a very claustrophobic atmosphere. A visible bead of sweat rolled down his forehead and he felt as if his tongue was bigger than normal and tasted like sandpaper.

He didn’t understand what was happening at all.

After a moment’s hesitation he leaned over and tried to kiss her. Her face was turned away from his so the kiss landed on her cheek. She quickly turned around and stared at him, dumbfounded. She didn’t appear to be upset, just confused.

“What was that?” she said with a smile.

He took another deep breath and turned his face away from her’s. His mind slowed back down to it’s normal pace. His thoughts re-ordered themselves and stopped swirling around. He no longer felt drunk. This he understood all too well.

“I’m sorry,” he said quietly.

She just shook her head slightly and stared at him. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I have to go now,” he said, and then he stood up and left the bar. She tried to stop him and called after him as he left, but he didn’t want to hear her even though her voice was perfectly loud enough. After some time the girl friends returned and asked her where he was and for a second she wanted to tell them what had happened. She thought better of it and instead told them that he left. The girl friends complained that “he was a bit odd” and “they didn’t know what she saw in him” for the remainder of the night. Though her mind was at odds with their assessments, she finally agreed as they were going home when the bar closed.

* * * * *

He had never had a girlfriend. He didn’t know how to talk to girls.

* * * * *

When he got home he punched the wood paneled walls several times and kicked in his TV. Glass shattered everywhere and electricity sparked all around him. He had never seen anything like that before and had never done anything like that before either. It had a calming effect on him that he didn’t fully seem to understand. 15 minutes later the TV was in the garbage can in front of the duplex.

That night he never managed to fall completely asleep; the nightmares were worse than ever.

* * * * *

The next day he didn’t write anything. He stayed in bed all day. He didn’t make coffee and he didn’t leave the house. When he did get out of bed he called his work and put in his two-week notice. After much discussion with his supervisor, he arranged for his vacation that year, which he had not taken yet, to fall on those two weeks. He didn’t return to his office again. No one asked why he wanted things like this and no one seemed to care. After he made the phone call he went back to bed.

He spent the entire two weeks in bed. He would get out of bed to go and eat and come back to bed when he was done.

He didn’t write.

He didn’t cry.

He didn’t do anything.

On the second Monday the phone rang 15 times and he listened to it ring the whole time. He didn’t try to answer it; he knew he would regret it if he did.

She knew he wouldn’t answer it as well, but for some reason she just thought she’d give it a try. She didn’t know why she was even trying, though. Something inside her just told her she needed to. After 15 rings she hung up.

“Is it probably better than he didn’t answer,” she thought.

She never thought about him again.

* * * * *

At the end of the two weeks he left his apartment and picked up his last paycheck from the payroll department. On the way home he bought a suitcase. When he got home he packed up a few of his tapes, a few of his books, and some of his clothes. He sat down at his desk and he wrote one last story, the first one in two weeks – all at once, all in one hour. He put it in the desk with the others and then he left the apartment.
He went to his bank and cashed his check. He closed his checking account and then he put the money in his wallet. After that he bought a Greyhound Bus Ticket and he left his hometown three hours later. He never came back and he never wrote again.

One month later there was an accident in the Meth-Lab and the garage caught on fire. The apartment above it and everything inside of it, including the desk, burned in an amphetamine glow.

No one seemed to care. 280

Records. 281 It’s the only thing that seems to help. Buying, trying to decide which one’s to listen to, and actually listening to records. Lot’s of them. Going to shows helps too. As many as I can make it to, as often as possible. Loud LOUD LOUD! Get some beer and music into me and I can forget everything. All the details and garbage and her and the bullshit that builds inside of me is cleared out by simply dropping the needle and watching it all get centrifuged out of me at 33 and 1/3 RPMs. When I balanced my checkbook, I wasn’t the least bit surprised to find out I’d spent over $200 on music the month before. That was nothing. You should have seen the piles of stuff I didn’t buy. That shit could have lasted me until Christmas.

It’s Her, mostly. There’s always a “Her”, but this Her is special, this Her is different. She understands! I spend days trying to find the perfect songs that sum everything up. Something that will perfectly convey exactly what I’m thinking about. I fantasize about making a tape of all the songs I’ve found that spell it all out. Every sexual frustration Devo track, every sad and lonely Wipers song, every Mr. T Experience aural explosion, every bourbon-soaked Tom Waits tune, and all that other stuff that escapes me at the moment, locked away and magnetically transferred to some form of storage, all carefully labeled on the J-Card of a 110 minute tape with her name on the spine. I’d mail it to her to add a touch of mystique to the whole thing. 282 Making tapes is one of the few things I’m good at. If that doesn’t fire something inside Her, then what on earth possibly could?

I spend hours thinking about my records, sifting through them in my head, sorting them. They distract me at work. I can hear them calling my name during those 8-hour shifts. They play themselves for me in my head, and all I can think about is getting home and listening to those songs. The way they unfold; the builds and the textures. It’s like sex every time. The guitars rip your clothes off. The bass kneads you to submission. The drums set the pace. The lyrics wrap their legs around you and run their fingers down your body just trying to find that one spot that will make you explode. It happens 12 times an album and sometimes all I can think about afterwards is a cigarette. I’ve never had sex like that.

No wonder I think about Her when I think about music.

I drive myself crazy over records (and Her). All I can think about is getting more. I get caught at work reading these books about bands, trying to find the next thing that’ll send me giddily to the record store on my next day off. My friends get so tired of me telling them who used to play in each other’s bands, or relating anecdotes I read in that Lester Bangs book. “Sure, music is important and worthwhile, but don’t you ever talk about anything else?”

Not really.

I don’t leave the house without my Walkman. Most people check to make sure they have their keys or their wallets; I make sure I have extra AA batteries. I go for walks looking for ways to forget about Her. Long walks. The music helps a little. For a few minutes I can be totally lost in some little bubble, walking into traffic and almost getting

280 Humorously, this was the only part of the story that remains unchanged in all the different drafts, and for some reason a lot of people think he dies in the end of the story. I don’t know why, because it’s pretty clear that he hops a bus, but when I would show different drafts of this to people, I would get a very similar response from everyone: “Are you okay?” “Why?” “Well, it’s just that story. He dies in the end – are you planning on killing yourself?” And on and on. While the desk is symbolic of his goals and needs and fears and hopes and soul, he doesn’t die just because his soul is burned up in a meth-lab explosion. I should know because I wrote the damn story. He just gives up on life completely and leaves his “home” forever, doomed to walk the earth alone and miserable with nothing to look forward to. That’s a much happier ending, don’t you think?

281 I used to have a serious problem with buying new records, and when I first got to Portland I spent almost $250 a month on new music. (This did not include shows I went to, CDs / Records I bought at shows, or the drinks I consumed at said shows.) It was pretty severe. I was really using music as a way to fill some sort of void that was obviously bothering me. (I wonder what that could have been...) I think this story sort of sums up what was wrong, and in my opinion I managed to use some pretty good riffs in this one. This is probably a case of me letting a little TOO much out when it comes to my inner-workings. Just be grateful I didn’t work in a masturbation angle on this one, too.

282 Yuck... I really wish I hadn’t included this line.
run over, ignoring people trying to talk to me or get spare change out of me. For a few minutes I’m lost in someone else’s pain. For a few minutes I can forget my own.

That is, until it slowly becomes my own.

She seems to understand all of this. Not the painful part; just the records. That’s the funniest part, to me.

All we talk about is music, really. Sure, sex. Okay, booze. Yeah, friends and jobs and bars and the details that make up the world around us. But we lean in close and suddenly the world around us fades to background when it’s about music. Suddenly everything is 100% honesty when that’s the subject. We cut out our hearts and put them on the table and suddenly every little thing in the world can fuck all, because THIS is about how fucking amazing that show was, or how good that record is, and FUCK YES! we want another drink. More MORE MORE! What else are we gonna do while we get allamped from talking about the first ...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead album?

The ironic part – the part that’s so completely fucking hilarious to me – is afterward. It’s all wound down; it’s time to leave the bar. It’s the same routine every time; she’s gotta get back to her records and I, mine. I ram my head into the wall over and over again and want to smash bottles and everything in sight. It’s Her! It’s that every single time this happens, NOTHING happens! It seems so fucking obvious to me. What else are we gonna do? How much longer can we just sit there, staring at each other, enamored with each other’s stories and looks and the way we relate to each other and the rest of the world, and NOT DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT?! Does this make any sense?

Of course it’s complicated. It’s supposed to be complicated. It’s like an orchestral piece: it’s not supposed to be simple or straightforward. It would take some planning and arrangement; all of that is obvious. But what’s the point in NOT trying? What is the point is just writing it all off because, unlike our records, we can’t just line up all of our feelings by genre and put all of the like material next to each other? Please shoot me, because I don’t know how much longer I can take this.

I go home and listen to my goddamn records again to try and forget about her. They’re the same records that we can’t seem to stop talking about, the same records that sum it all up.

Every once in a while, I want to smash them to spite her. So what if it’s the best damn record ever made? At least I’d feel good about it for about 20 seconds.

|-----------------------------------------------|
/                                               |
| Time for Breakfast253                         |
| by Austin Rich                               |
                                    
/|

“Excuse me, can I ask you a question?”

This is the moment I’ve been waiting for. I take a deep breath and look over at her and I take it all in. This is why I’ve been coming here the last couple of months, the reason I shell out the cash for someone else to cook my food. True, my own sloth prompted the first visit, but when I saw her, when I realized a libidinal urge inside me wanted more than anything to get to know her outside the customer / employee relationship we’d forged, I knew that I’d be coming here more often. It was all about this moment, and this was my big chance.

“Sure,” I said in response. Shit! My Big Chance and the best I can come up with is ‘Sure.’ Inside I’m already recoiling.

Fucking idiot, what are you doing? Okay, relax. You can still save it. She’s not gonna judge you based on anything inane like that.

* * * * *

I’m lazy. The cost of a breakfast at this café would pay for a weeks worth (or more, depending) at home. I’m aware of the math behind it all, and sometimes I just don’t care. The first thing in the morning is never a time for rational thought, what with the alcohol still on the brain and a whole slew of smells and grime itching to be showered off from last night’s activities. Breakfast takes far too long at home. In that time I could have done so much other shit: answer some mail, write a few pages for that review I was supposed to write last week, etc.

Cook breakfast? Myself? There’s gotta be another way.

For the longest time I just skipped it. Fuck it, and when it was time for work I’d just leave a little earlier and pick up a sandwich to be gobbled in the minutes before I had to clock in and listen to people say, “I’m looking for a book...” But my own

253 This is written about a girl that used to work in a restaurant near my old apartment. I ate there all the time, and had grand plans that when I was 50 I would have coffee there all the time and write my novels while staring at new waitresses. I spent a lot of money eating there and wasted a lot of time I could have used to do other things just so I could look at this one girl, and I felt like a complete moron when I’d look at my checkbook at the end of the month and realize how much money I’d spent on her, and we weren’t even dating. Sigh. After I moved out of that neighborhood, a girl I actually started dating ended up being related to the new owners of that restaurant. While I was tempted to go back because I’d always liked the food, I discovered that the waitress in question was no longer there, and it just didn’t seem worth it. This piece is part of a book I’m writing about my bookstore experiences, which I may finish yet... I hope.
desire to have my hunger sated – that urge to have protein in the form of Breakfast that only a real Breakfast consisting of eggs, potatoes, sausage and toast can provide (coffee? Fuck yeah!) – drove me to making a concerted effort to search for a joint near enough my house to cut that time down and still have time for that other stuff too.

There’s nothing like Breakfast, a real Breakfast, to cure the morning blues. Guaranteed.

Hence, the café two blocks from my house.

It’s full of yuppies, true. The food’s a bit higher priced than a jaunt farther down to My Father’s Place (my official Breakfast Mascot diner), but the time saved in walking is made up for in the higher price, methinks. Still, there aren’t really any other redeeming qualities. Even the food isn’t as filling. I can barely finish a Breakfast as My Father’s Place, and at this café I can finish with room to spare every time. Why bother going at all?

And then I noticed her, and it was all downhill from there.

The first time I was hooked: black hair pulled back, glasses that magnify her dark eyes, and a grin of mischievousness that sends chills down your spine. What is she planning? What’s going on in that head of her’s? More likely than not something interesting and sexy. AND THOSE CURVES! I could trace her outline with my eyes for hours, head to toe, even if a fair portion of it is blocked from view by that apron she wears. Sometimes I’d sit there and not-write, or not-answer-letters, just drinking coffee and pretending to read. I was her’s from the moment I first saw those tattoos that were pouring out from her sleeves. This is a girl I could really fall for.

(Correction: might already have.)

I started going once a week, sometimes more often. I always brought a book, mostly out of the hopes that it would catch her attention and give us something to talk about, though it served the dual purpose of giving me a cover. “HOW could I be staring at you when I’m here reading this book?” Yeah, a thin cover at that, but in my mind it would thwart initial confrontation, hopefully buying me enough time to come up with something better.

I went through two books and had started on my third before she asked the question. I was ready. I had been running through every eventuality in my head while trying to get through the last few chapters of A Whore Just Like The Rest, and most of Let It Blurt was spent refining those conversations and picking out potential traps and finding ways out of them. I knew exactly what I was gonna say by the time I started The Night (Alone).

For example, if she asked me about the books I was reading, I knew how to describe them in a way that led to the exchange of phone numbers. If it was curiosity about my coming every week, I knew the correct approach to go with: witty, yet confident that she and I would enjoy our date tomorrow night. A question about my over-tipping? I had the perfect line to bring it all back to her and I at drinks that evening. Everything was ready; the gears were in motion. I was already tracing her face with my lips in my mind. Nothing could go wrong. That, “Sure,” thing would fade in the background soon enough.

********

“I noticed you always have a book every time you come in…”

YES! The book approach, the one I’d favored myself. “Yeah, I work in a bookstore;” I broke in. Keep going...

“Really?” she said. She let out a small laugh and looked over at her co-worker and said, “We’ve hit the jackpot, apparently.”

Jackpot? Uhm… okay, that was unexpected. What does she mean by “jackpot”? Okay, Roll with it, roll with it. Maybe she’ll tie that into the question. Keep going.

“Well, as you probably ‘know about a lot of books’, I was wondering if you had some suggestions for our book club.”

Pause.

What?

********

The color ran out of my face and I looked back down at my Country Breakfast that I’d only just started. My fork began moving around the plate in some sort of random pattern that seemed unconnected from eating. I took a pull off my coffee as she went on about how her and her co-workers had wanted to start a book club and, “…well, why don’t you talk to him I’ve got to help that customer.” Soon enough her co-worker was standing next to me, finishing off the conversation that had nothing to do with any of the meditated sex scenarios I had dreamed up. I half-heartedly drilled this girl-who-was-not-Her about what kind of books they liked and what kind of stuff they wanted to read.

“Oh, I don’t know. Something controversial, so we can discuss it, but something fun. A love story, maybe. Fiction, definitely. I read mostly older novels, not much new stuff. Some science fiction and fantasy…” Blah blah blah blah blah. Before she had begun talking my mind was already elsewhere.

I was lost. I’d blown my chance, that’s for, “Sure.” “Café Girl” and “Bookstore Boy.” It’s doubtful we’ll ever be anything else to each other. We’ll never share our stories over drinks. We’ll never go to shows together, or catch a movie after I get off work. We’ll never share my secret desires that would take place behind closed doors after laughing at each other’s jokes on the couch for an hour. Our relationship exists in an Employee / Customer sense, from both sides of the fence. Always has, always will. It was that moment that the universal truth stabbed my like a knife: You are always defined by your job, weather you like it or not.

As I paid my tab I suggested Confederacy Of Dunces (a damn good book, but suggested more out of wanting to just give them an answer rather than actually thinking it’d make a good Reading Group book). When I was heading out the door She said, “We should consult you next time.” I laughed an empty laugh and say, “Okay.”

Why not? Just because my hopes have been dashed and my heart broken, doesn’t mean I won’t need Breakfast anymore.
"Why scream and cry when you know it's true? Why fall in love when there's better things to do?" — Devo


Recently I've become somewhat of an expert in the field of relationships, specifically the long and complicated road after their inevitable demise. In a world where people are constantly pairing off and splitting up you would think a culture as advanced as our own would have instinctively developed coping mechanisms for such a simple problem as heartbreak. Sadly, this is not the case. In man's journey from the caves to the cafes, we've learned very little.

We can't even seem to order coffee without the need to construct an entire paragraph to describe the particular beverage we're interested in. Imagine the difficulty we had in hunting mammoths? We've learned no more about relationships since those bygone days almost as an extension of that very same obtuseness; modern humans focus less and less on relationships and more and more on which parts of our bodies fit where, and how to manipulate those parts when our partners are suddenly gone.

In the wake of a freshly destroyed relationship it's easy to lose sight of where to go next. Your entire world has fallen apart around you. Meanwhile, your friends and loved ones are happily whiling away the hours they have left until they die. Their own partners, who will soon enough leave them, are sitting comfortably on their laps, caressing them gently and whispering sweet nothings in their ears (all of which seems to concern money in some way).

In light of the reality around you, it often seems much easier to stand around staring at your feet, hoping that the world will somehow provide you with some sort of sign, something that clearly points in the direction you should go next. Generally, these signs are misinterpreted anyway, as The World doesn't really want you to be happy any more than your ex does. While ignoring your broken heart is an easy way to cope with the problem at hand, there are many people who will tell you that staring at your feet is an unhealthy way to survive day-to-day. They couldn't be more wrong.

Trying to cope with your problems only seems to draw attention to them. There's nothing that will ruin a good day's suffering quicker than when you try to cope with the reason you're upset in the first place. Do you really want to remember the pain that brought you to your current state of sobbing in the fetal position on your bed while listening to records? Just imagine how often you have to think about that while trying to eliminate the problem. Far be it to get over something when you've got a perfectly destroyed future ahead of you now that she's no longer with you.

Still, many people have recently sought my opinion about what to do when they've given up on giving up. While I have continued to support the "Booze And Cigarettes" coping method (after almost 10 years of personal success), I have given a lot of thought to the idea that there must be some magical "Other Way" to deal with these issues, however unlikely such a thing might be. At the urgings of my colleagues, I've compiled a "How To" guide for those who still insist that happiness is something they'd rather strive for.

Part II: So You Want To Stop Crying Yourself To Sleep.

Before we begin, it's important to point out that the methods below are completely flexible, and are open to personal interpretation. Many people will find my pronoun choice to be rather specific, as if I'm referring to someone in particular, when in fact "she" might not have dumped you.

This is easy enough to fix by replacing certain pronouns and nouns with ones that are more appropriate in your specific case. "She" can become "He," "Him," "They," "Asshole," "Cunt," "Canine," or even "The One Person In The World That Gave Me Complete And Total Comfort Before They Shattered My Life Into A Million Pieces." This simple mental

284 This is the only thing from I'd Buy That For A Dollar! #17 I've included in this collection. It's been widely regarded as the best thing I've written to date, which is ironic considering it's almost the last thing in this collection (and, more the point, one of the most recent things I've written). Issue #17 is still fresh in my mind, so it was hard to pick a "favorite" from that issue (regardless of the reader response this particular article gathered). Still, this seems to be popular in addition to being something I enjoy quite a bit, which is why it's here. Just about everything here is taken from something that really happened. I started writing this in the wake of a break-up that shook me up pretty badly, and I was misery- (and alcohol-) soaked for months. I wasted all of last summer being depressed (how lame is that?), and the only thing that kept me going was the fact that I was finally writing again (after a long break where I hadn't produced very much at all). I thought the best way to cope with everything would be to write something funny about it. Because of that mindset, this became the most depressing thing I've written AND contains the most jokes I've ever included in a single piece of 'zine writing. While a lot of my "style" is humorous in the first place, I literally went line by line and tried to find a way to make it as funny as possible. I thought that the only way I could really make this idea fly is to over-play the humor aspect of it. I cut a lot of stuff that wasn't "funny" and at the same time really tried to change lines (even ones that I liked better the other way) so it served the final humorous purpose. The problem, however, is that it's far too honest as well. For all the intended humor, it's probably the most sincere piece I've written, and so after I initially wrote it, I was shocked to find that to me, it's wasn't funny at all.

285 I'm a huge Devo fan. I love quotes, and I'd made a conscious effort to insert more of them in this issue. It only seemed natural I'd use this one here. This is from their song "Love Without Anger" which is on the album New Traditionalists.

286 This is probably the most subtle masturbation reference I've ever made in print. (I'm actually surprised that I was this subtle.)

287 Words to live by.
exercise will aid the healing process by making it more personal to you, enabling you to focus completely on what it was that brought you to this pathetic state of being.

It is also important to keep in mind that some steps may be altered, adjusted slightly, or skipped if they do not work for you. While I encourage people to keep razors and knives around when they are dredging the depths of their destroyed soul, many people have found rope or other dangerous objects much more thought provoking. Where I suggest that people do reckless, thoughtless things that might expose them to disease or drugs, others might find sitting in the dark and dwelling on the past a more effective way of getting over their personal demons. And while I have said time and time again that reading is the best way to find solace in lonely times, most people just don’t have the attention span or can’t be bothered (especially when it comes to home made ‘zines, in which it’s obvious the author has put a large portion of himself into every word, but no one seems to give a shit anyway). Regardless of what you do when you set out to attempt the impossible, feel free to adjust the methods so they work best for you. This way, when it all fails, you have no one to blame but yourself.

(It must also be stated, for legal reasons, that any actual help you may get from my suggestions is not to be flaunted in the faces of anyone who is still miserable as they are liable to hold it against you and think horrible things about you behind your back or in print in the next issue of their ‘zine. If the reverse is true and you find yourself worse off than you were when you started, it is not the fault of the writer for making you come to the realization that you are a waste of human life who only has less than 70 years left before you’re forgotten completely. In fact, if nothing comes of your reading and you are no better or worse than you were before hand, the writer takes no credit for your continued misery. And who would want to, really?)

**Part III: Let’s Begin The Impossible Journey.**

The following steps are arranged in a way that will best represent the order you should do things as you pass through the various stages of your breakup. There are three basic stages of a breakup: **Fresh Open Wound, Slow And Painful Truth, and Hopeless Resolution.** Within each stage there are three basic steps. Some can be broken up into additions steps if one is inclined to do so. These are merely guidelines, however. Many people will bounce back and forth from stage to stage depending on the lack of success of their recovery. Feel free to go from step to step or stage to stage as you see fit. Keep in mind that when you decide to skip sections or steps that it was your poor decisions in the past that caused her to break up with you. In fact, you might want to keep that in mind when you make the decision that getting over her is worthwhile in the first place.

**STAGE ONE: Fresh Open Wound**

Stage One is easy enough. For the most part these steps are almost universal. (You’ll find it hard to skip any of them even if you want to.) Let’s begin:

1.) **Deny Everything.** After the initial breakup it’s easy to think that it’s all over and nothing will be the same again. This is the worst thing a person can think. It’s important to remember that just because someone has told you it’s over doesn’t mean it has to be. If you pretend that nothing’s changed soon enough you’ll find all sorts of things fall into place (like, restraining orders). While it might be over for them, it’s only just begun for you. Redouble your efforts to prove to her how much you care. Make it a point to deny that the breakup ever happened in the first place. If you need to, make up elaborate stories to tell your friends and never admit to anyone that she’s left you, even if they have evidence to the contrary (like, her new boyfriend).

2.) **Explore New Vices.** Unlike your ex, alcohol will be there for you day and night (except between 2:30 & 7 A.M., so stock up). Alcohol will never break up with you, never say things to you that make you feel bad, and much like the prostitutes you’ll soon be visiting, will put a huge strain on your income (not that you were going to do anything with that money... except maybe spend it on her). Fortunately for the recently broken up, there are stores that sell liquor, beer and wine in nearly every town in America. For those underage Casanovas there are many homeless people who are more than willing to be shoulder-tapped in exchange for a bottle of Mad Dog. Not only are the solutions to your problems at the bottom of a bottle, but in some cases tasty cigarette butts are too. It’s also advised to take up smoking, speed, over (or under) eating, and E-Bay, as these are all huge strains on your checkbook as well, and will create all-new problems you can then dwell on.

3.) **Combine Your Vices With Technology.** In the wonderful era we live in almost everyone has a telephone and a computer at their disposal. It’s important to use them frequently when you are coping with your recent breakup. Keep a list of all the e-mail addresses and phone numbers of your new ex (and any others from your past) within easy reach. Contact said exes regularly while under the influence. When sending e-mail, make sure the messages are long and rambling for ease in comprehension and be sure to make the same points over and over again to help them follow your strained state of mind. On the phone it’s important to pretend that you are sober at first so they don’t hang up on you. But as the conversation flows into trickier and deeper waters,

---

288 For some reason, a lot of people didn’t know what “shoulder-tapped” meant. This was common parlance for us when we were growing up, and I’ve heard it used over and over again since I became old enough to buy my own booze. For those who still don’t know, to “shoulder-tap” someone is to ask them to buy you something that you aren’t yet old enough to buy it yourself.

289 This is another one of those lines that I wrote where I started laughing out loud while I was still writing it. I don’t normally do that, but this one was just too brutal for me to ignore. Occasionally I’ll be walking down the street and I’ll think of this line, and I’ll suddenly start laughing in public for no apparent reason. This is the kind of behavior that will eventually get me locked up in some sort of home, I believe.
let the tears do so as well (freely and often, or as needed). Keep a supply of tacky, overused clichés (“But I still love you!” “He can’t possibly treat you better than I did.” and “How could you do this to me!”), as well as a box of Kleenex at your disposal. Within no time you’ll find that not only are you bouncing e-mail left and right, but that all the numbers you keep calling will be disconnected (or are no longer in service)²⁹⁰.

STAGE TWO: The Slow And Painful Truth

Stage Two begins when the first step in Stage One is no longer an option. For some this is never the case; it’s easy enough to muck about in Stage One for years on end. (Some people have built entire careers out of this, though it doesn’t pay that well and the hours aren’t very good, much like your current dead end job.) However, when you can no longer deny everything, it’s time to pretend that you can move on. While you will probably never give up steps 2 & 3 in Stage One, here are the other steps you’ll eventually move on to.

1.) **Focus On Your Faults.** The most important thing you can do in the wake of a breakup is to dwell endlessly on what you did wrong. Obviously, she didn’t leave you for nothing, and with careful scrutiny you can find dozens of reasons why she wouldn’t want to be with a putz like yourself. Perhaps it’s that disgusting nose that plagues your face or your pathetic income (or lack thereof). Sexual inadequacies are always good to bring up when considering your (ahem) “shortcomings”²⁹¹, but it’s important not to leave out your own neuroses. Any number of your mental issues could have been the straw that broke the camel’s back. In many cases you may have to invent new ones you never knew you had. Without hours and hours of self-diagnosis you may never find out what you’ve done wrong, so it’s important to start as soon as possible. In my experience this step works best when you combine it with Step 2 from Stage One, but some breakup experts have found that only with a clear and sober mind can you really reach the level of anguish needed to properly berate yourself. Regardless, you must remember the most basic truth: she broke up with you. It only makes sense that it has to be your fault.

2.) **Listen To Music.** Music, it’s been said, can soothe the savage beast, and there is nothing more savage than the way she ripped your heart out. Personally, I have a large record collection not because I enjoy music, but because I keep myself in a constant state of preparedness for my next inevitable breakup²⁹². While experts will suggest certain groups and types of music to help you through this awful time, I’ve found that nothing helps you forget heartbeat better than sad love songs. Fortunately, the world anticipated your future misery and sad love songs are in no short supply. Almost every band in every genre has a song that fits this bill, be it Frank Sinatra, Johnny Cash, Tom Waits, The Cure, or Al Yankovic²⁹³. It’s important that when you listen to sad music to do it in the comfort of your own room, in the comfort of your own bed, snuggling with your own knives, with the lights turned out and the door closed. Volume has been a point of discussion for many breakup experts, but personal experience has taught me that louder is better. Not only does this allow every depressing note to wash over you entirely as you wallow in self-pity, but not a single nuance of the song’s message is lost on you. This also leads to potential confrontations with your neighbor which is always a source of amusement for the recently broken up.

**Extra Credit For Advanced Misery:** Try locating sad songs that not only mimic your state of mind, but ones that you think describe your breakup perfectly. Become obsessed with them. Sing them at work often. Copy the lyrics onto paper so you can refer to them when you are not within earshot of a stereo. Force your friends to listen to those same songs over and over until they are sick of them. When they complain that it’s all you listen to, mutter about how no one understands you except the artist

---

²⁹⁰ Several people didn’t understand why I added the, “or are no longer in service,” bit at the end of this sentence. I wonder if this message has changed in recent years, and that’s why it doesn’t make sense? Or perhaps it was a little too subtle for people to get where I was going with that joke. That was a constant battle with the text in this piece: to make sure to put in all the jokes that worked, but make them clear and understandable for anyone who might be reading. I tried to balance that out in the initial stages of writing, but a lot of stuff still went right over a lot of people’s heads. (This must be what it’s like to write for Mystery Science Theater 3,000.)

This is actually based on real-life issues I have with phones and e-mail. Anyone who has dated me (or knows how I deal with relationships) knows that, sooner or later, I’ll get drunk and start dialing / e-mailing anyone I can think of from past relationships (or even about relationships that don’t / never existed). It’s a bad habit that I’m aware of, and at this point most people have figured out to just filter anything written or dialed after the bars close. While I began to really worry that I was unique in this problem, I soon found out that a lot of people I know suffer from this same syndrome to a more extreme degree. (Some call / write to people as far back as their FIRST girlfriend, and at long distance no less!) I am proud to say I made a concerted effort to curb this behavior after the most recent disaster, and have not called / mailed a single drunk message to any of my exes in many, many months (even though I’ve had a break-up in that time). Who rules? It’s me...

²⁹¹ Another joke that I opted for the more “subtle” version, rather than the original draft which involved the words “cock” and “ruler”.

²⁹² Virtually every music person I know can say the exact same thing, and it’s 100% true.

²⁹³ I was specifically thinking of the song, “One More Minute”, which is actually pretty sad when you listen to the lyrics (though, much like this piece of writing, presented in a humorous context). Originally I wanted to use Frankie Yankovic, Al’s grandfather, but I realized that not enough people knew who he was.
who wrote the song. Never mind that you’ve never met sayd artist nor could said artist have ever had knowledge of your breakup. Why else would he have written the song, anyway?294

3.) **Avoid The Outside World.** Whoever said that misery loves company? Not I! Sometimes the most difficult thing in the world is to venture out into it. Why bother? There is plenty to do at home instead. Besides, your friends are only going to be hanging out with their girlfriends, talking about how great their lives are. It would probably do you some good to stay home anyway. You were never really that good at personal hygiene to begin with. A sunny day never made anyone feel good to my knowledge. The comfort of your dark, dank home will provide you with hours of entertainment much better than anything you could find at a movie theater, concert, bar, or any of those places you used to go with her. If you went to these places your friends would just help you try to forget your problems and that’s the last thing you want to do at a time like this. Hasn’t it been a while since you looked at Internet Porn? Keep in mind those girls would never date you anyway, but it’s healthy to jerk off while crying once in a while.293 Why not check out some On-Line Personals? They would also never have anything to do with you either. Not only are Personal ads a renewable source of contempt, but a perfect way to make other people as uncomfortable as you. Try sending a few disturbing, long-winded e-mails and see what happens. When all else fails, re-read the letters she wrote you. How sharp are those knives in the kitchen, anyway? When was the last time you checked your supply of sleeping pills? So much to do, so little time...

**STAGE THREE: Hopeless Resolution**

Many breakup experts are torn between when Stage Three begins in the breakup process. Some maintain that you cannot enter Stage Three until you have become so sick of spending time with yourself that you need a break from it all. Others would argue that Stage Three can happen simultaneously with Stage Two, depending on your particular personality type. Some have been known to enter Stage Three, fail at any or all of the steps and then return to Stage Two with renewed vim and vigor. Regardless of the particular path you choose, you’ll probably end up at the same place in the long run with a head full of neuroses that will follow you until the end of time. The added bonus is that you’ll also have a complete fear of commitment and the inability to function in future relationships. There’s no time like the present to get started on that, so let’s dive right in.

1.) **Act Out At Work.**296 The one place you can get away with things that you couldn’t possibly do elsewhere else is your work environment. Not only do you not have to like the people at work, but there is nothing they can do to ostracize you if they don’t like you. (Except, perhaps, shove you in the back of the store in an unsupported department where the rest of the staff laughs at your trials and tribulations.) The point is, if you continue to meet the arbitrary (and pointless) goals that are asked of you at work every day, you can act any way you want, and can get away with it! Extended crying jags in the break room? No problem! Snappy remarks that cut right to the bone of your co-workers? Perfect! Why not try distancing yourself from the staff to make their jobs more difficult? Or better yet, take out your frustrations on the female members of the staff, mentally equating your breakup as their fault. The sky’s the limit when it comes to negative work behavior. Be careful, though. Sometimes you can get yourself into an impossible funk if you let your anguish rise too close to the surface. Not only will you skate the edge of loosing the job that you already hate, but your co-workers will begin to lose any sympathy they might have had for you if you don’t perform your job as well as before. It’s important that if this happens, take a paid “sick day” as soon as possible. It’s for your own good.

2.) **Develop Impossible Crushes.**297 Many people will argue that the ultimate goal of any person dealing with a breakup is to get back into the dating game. This is the kind of logical syllogism that, when brought to it’s natural conclusion, will only lead people into an infinite downward spiral. Soon enough you’ll find yourself a gibbering mass of confusion and frustration referring to all women you meet as, “my next ex-girlfriend.” It all seems pretty silly when you think about it. There is no better way to break the cycle than to harbor Impossible Crushes on your close friends and co-workers. Not only is this a plentiful source of women in your life that you will, more likely than not, see fairly regularly in the months following your breakup, but a small

---

294 Another “based on reality” situation. I went through a bad phase with Weezer & Nerf Herder, and while I’m still a fan of both, I was getting a little too close to that obsessive stage where I wanted to start writing dissertations on what each song meant. I think I’m over it now (I hope).

295 I have to attribute this to my friend “Angry Man” Josh, who used to go on about a similar subject when he was trying to paint of picture of the most pathetic thing he could think of: I think I have to agree, it’s about as pathetic as you can get.

296 This was my forte, so to speak.

297 I have the worst habit of developing crushes on my co-workers. A good portion of the women I’ve worked with in the past have become objects of my desire on one level or another, and it’s become so problematic at times that I have required a good scream on my breaks to try and get the ideas out of my head. Every time I thought I had the problem licked, someone would be mean to me, or wear a short skirt, or cut their hair, or say something flippant, or tell me they didn’t like me, and I was lost for another day, trying to imagine a non-creepy way to to have a drink with them and get their phone number. What makes it worse is that I’ve actually dated a number of my co-workers, and so the problem only snowballs. If you see them every day, and you develop a functioning working relationship as well (in terms of your job), then it’s natural that meshing personalities would start to attract? Who’s to say. I’m sure it sets an awful precedent for my other co-workers, because I’m sure they have a betting pool on who’ll be next on my list.
percentage of them will begin to act as if they feel sorry for your current situation. They may even feign sympathy. This puts you in an excellent position to try and pick up on them while their guard is down. Never mind that they may be dating someone else (who is probably a friend as well) or that they have already expressed a lack of interest in you the last time this happened. From writing long letters about your feelings, dropping by their homes unexpectedly, and calling them for “coffee dates” on a frequent basis, you’ll soon find your friendships strained and any time you spend at work completely uncomfortable for everyone.

Extra Credit For Advanced Misery: Try developing crushes on multiple people simultaneously. Now you have a “decoy” conversation piece when you are working on any one of your other impossible crushes. (“I really need to talk to someone, because I think I’m getting a crush on __________.”) The internal conflict of such a scenario will cause you to berate yourself to no end, taking your mind off of the breakup your dealing with in the first place. It was also suggested to me that you could play the “Hot Potato For A Cold Fish” game: when one crush just becomes too unbearable, immediately switch off to a new one to balance it out. 298 Remember, the bottom line here is to try to cure your current issues with dating by developing entirely new ones.

3) Give Up Completely. It has finally come to this: you’ve tried everything and you’re still going for long walks in the rain, trying to work out whether or not you can wait out the five day period until you can get that handgun that will, “solve all your problems.” Don’t worry, this is a common situation to wind up in. While many will try to tell you that it’s not the end of the world, you must ignore this advice completely. In all that you’ve done and tried you’ve finally realized that you lost the only thing that really mattered and you can never have it back. It’s okay. You didn’t want to be happy anyway. More likely than not, your role in life was to be that guy who is perpetually single until the end of time, to end up old and alone as the rest of the world moves on. Let it go. Is happiness really that important to you? Relationships are over-rated anyway. Imagine all the cuddling you have to put up with. Remember how hard it was to keep thinking of nice things to say all the time? Sex is over rated too. Chances are you can get yourself off just fine without someone gently caressing you and exploring all those places you can’t get at on your own. Decent Orgasms? Who needs them? It’s not like you sleep alone in a huge empty bed every night. Relax. You’ve only got another 60 years until you die anyway. You can wait it out alone, can’t you? Why don’t you go and read that “Life In Hell” book you got for Christmas in the meantime 299. You’ve got nothing else to do for the rest of your life...

Part IV: Your Long Journey Is Finally Over.

By now you are more than likely no closer to being over your breakup than you were when you started. I told you, but did you listen? No. You saw that this was some kind of, “Relationship Guide,” and you thought, “Hey, I’m depressed, lonely and hate my life. Maybe this can help.” Are you really that gullible? Do you really think some sort of collection of words strung together in a particular way are going to outline a useful argument that can help you overcome your current depression? Hey, I’ve got some land for sale too, if you’re interested... cheap! 300

But I digress. So you’ve finally given up. You now know that this heartache and pain will follow you until you die, to fester, swell and hurt at those most vulnerable times of the day when you are stressed, confused, horny, and, above all else, not getting off your shift at work for at least another six hours. Relax. Now that you know you can never get over this pain and misery, you should probably work toward that impossible goal of meeting someone else who will inevitably screw you all over again.

In theory it’s really easy. Millions of people pair off every day in all sorts of different types of relationships. Logically, all you really have to do is keep doing what you always do. Eventually the numbers game alone should put you into contact with someone that roughly meets your idea of a person you’d like to date. It’s less of a desired goal and more of an eventual destination when you think about it. Odds are, in a world as over-populated as ours, everyone can (and will) get a date sooner or later. It’s fate. Think of it in terms of having no choice in the matter. It’s the hand that life dealt you. Sooner or later, you’ll end up dating another person who will eventually leave you. Comforting, no? 301

Keep in mind dating is a long and arduous process. It’s full of pratfalls and disappointments that are only rivaled by those of breaking up. For those who are capable of actually bridging this first and most difficult gap—that of talking to the person they’re interested in—there are hundreds of smaller gaps to bridge before a relationship (in even the loosest sense of the word) can begin to

298 I forwarded an early draft of this to my friend Ransom, and he told me about this idea. I couldn’t help but pinch the line for the final draft, and have always made an effort to point out that it was his, not mine. I failed to include a disclaimer saying as much in issue #17, which is my only regret. I am never that clever; Ransom, however, is OFTEN so.

299 Another “true-to-life” line. I have a Life In Hell book that I read a lot of the time when I’m the slightest bit depressed, and invariably I stop laughing and just nod and say, “Yes, that is a true observation about life. How strange.” In my head I know it’s funny. In my heart, it’s just too painful to laugh at just yet. Sort of like a Wes Anderson movie, but without the Wilson brothers.

300 For those of you who are familiar with The Onion, this piece is partially influenced by their self-help book You Are Worthless. While their’s is just a selection of “affirmations” that are aimed at making you feel worse, I went a slightly different route and decided to use guerrilla tactics in an attempt to make you realize how pathetic life in general really is. This paragraph really has the feel of being Onion influenced.

301 This paragraph (and the one that follows it) are the first parts of this piece that I wrote, and originally it was going to go in a different piece that never got finished. When I started working on this piece, I inserted it here and found it worked quite nicely. I’ve since decided I don’t need to finish the other piece.
form. Then, of course, there are no guarantees that either of you are suited for each other. You will both become painfully aware of this as the years drag on and you each begin to harbor more and more negative feelings toward each other. Soon enough it will all end in some sort of breakup (the specifics of which will be hammered out by said parties in a grueling series of discussions and arguments in person or on the phone over the next few weeks or months). All that’s left now is to begin the frustrating and often pathetic attempts at healing the heartbreak. Good luck, buddy!

So, what was the point in dating again? Oh right... the sex.

So you should probably begin the search for more sex... excuse me, your next date as soon as you can. Once you have that date keep in mind that you are now the person your friends hate because you are happily paired off, doing all those things that your single and broken up friends only wish they could. More likely than not they will harbor negative feelings toward you (and all the rest of your friends who are also paired off). Much of their internal dialogue will consist of things like, “They took for granted what I only wish I had.” Soon enough you will get sneers of hatred from them whenever you and your partner are willing to leave the house that one night a month and join all your single friends at the bar. More likely than not this situation will lead to tension in your relationship with her. Already, you’re heading down that road to breaking up.

Sound familiar?

---

**Part XXIII: And That Brings Us Up To... Here.**

Before I even began work on issue #17, Ft. Awesome – the house we had founded when we’d gotten to Portland – had begun the long and winding road toward disbanding. The Ramen City Kid, after years of being my roommate in numerous different locales, finally tipped his hat and walking off into the sunset, the urge to finally go it alone overwhelmed him to the point of fleeing manically, possessions in tow, to SE Portland. (He now resides in Macedonia as part of the Peace Corps in an effort to avoid having to pay off student loans. Seeing strange regions of Eastern Europe where scowl-ly, cheek-boned boys are more likely to congregate is only an added bonus. We miss you, tough guy.) The Lord of Darkness / The Kelly Experience, “Angry Man” Josh / Wel-ton Unit 2003 & myself tried to tough it out another few months by recruiting our friend Adam to the Portland life, but that same life kept getting in the way and forced us to finally part ways. I found shelter at casa de RackM9uint, and spent a lot of time trying to get my head together since.

While I had an entirely different issue #17 in mind (and mostly worked out), the break-up of Ft. Awesome, the break-up of a girl and myself, and the post-relocation blues were really making me feel like I needed to pursue another agenda. Aside from a couple of paragraphs (that wound up in A Simple Guide To (Broken) Relationships) and another, much shorter piece that only filled 1/4 of a page, the monumental epic that was going to be issue #17 never materialized. I was going to illustrate a lot of my dating foibles and faux pas from two summers ago, culminating in a great story idea I had that involved the song “Lust For Life” and me going to Lola’s room to dance every Friday night. It was going to be a fairly upbeat – while still somewhat depressingly humorous – issue. Instead the mega-downer version that I put together came to fruition, and I lost more than a couple readers with the version of issue #17 that finally came to pass. (Ironically, it’s my slickest production yet. I had an actually design person do the covers while I had an editor heavily work with me on the interior text, producing some of the best spelled / grammar-checked stuff I’ve ever written.) Regardless, it was a bear to deal with, not only concerning the stuff that I was down about, but writing and distributing text about said subject for everyone to read. It wasn’t a pretty sight.

I took this last summer off and spent it locked up in my room; being miserable.

The universe wasn’t quite done fucking with me yet. Before I could completely finish putting together issue #17, I was fired from The Bookstore. I won’t re-hash the whole story, but I had personality conflicts with our new store manager who found it easier to fire a 6 Year veteran of the Bookstore business instead of admitting that she was wrong. I got my revenge when the unemployment office evaluated my case and gave me benefits anyway when she refused to provide evidence that may have contradicted my version of events... or even speak to anyone at the Unemployment office about my termination. Because of this, it was established that I was wrongfully terminated and that both the store manager and her superior could be held responsible in a court of law. Knowing that much was enough to seize my own desire to see them squirm, and if I had persued the case in court there was still no way I could ever get her to loose her job, which was what I really wanted anyway. I let it go and instead moved on into the dark and foreboding future.

When things seemed their darkest, I answered an ad in the paper for a job at the Portland Art Museum. Using all the charm and under-the-table bribes I could afford, they gave me a job, which employees me to this day. In many ways it’s 1000 time better than The Bookstore: better pay, better benefits, I work alone, have my own office, can come and go as I please (so long as I put in a full day of work), and I only have to work 7 hour days. But since both of my bosses are, more or less, pretty cool, I don’t really have to worry about anything anyway. As long as I show up and get the job done, I’ll continue to get paychecks until the end of time. That’s a pretty sweet deal in my opinion. Plus it gives me time to work on my writing. Fuck yeah.

Not too much later I began work on this collection. I had plenty of time before I should have started on this, but I figured a head start was good so I could take my time as needed. When I would get bored of working on this collection, I occasionally tinkered with one of my many novels-in-progress, Primer Green. So far it’s trucking along rather nicely, and as soon as this project is completely under wraps I am setting nearly everything else to the side so I can finish up that text. I think it’ll make a good first novel and will be a huge change of pace from what I’ve written up until now. Suffice it to say, novels take time, so there won’t be another issue of I’d Buy That For A Dollar! for a while. It’s not over in the least bit. I just need a break.

Badly.

When I got home from work today I put on Almost Famous, probably my favorite movie ever. Before I was even more than 10 minutes into it I was bawling, when the sister looks her younger brother in the face and says, “Don’t worry, someday you’ll be cool.” I just lost it, like the last time I watched it when I couldn’t even stand to look at it for more than 15 minutes at a time. This time was a little easier to deal with, and instead of fearing it I just let it all out and cried straight through, not holding anything back that has been building for god-knows how long. It really felt good, and pretty soon I was laughing again and enjoying the movie, remembering why I get so giddy thinking about different scenes over and over again.

All day has been sort of a weird scene. Trading e-mail with my friends, talking about life and everything, trading stories. Last night I spent hours with Lyra, reminiscing about old times and talking about new problems. Fears and concerns, hopes and desires. In the middle of it all one of us would fart, and we’d laugh. We couldn’t help it. In the middle of the most serious attempts at trying to mentally sort through the debris that is our lives, it’s nice to know we still had a sense of humor about things too. She’s moving back to Eugene as part of the natural progression of things in this world. I’ll probably do the same thing someday, before everything is said and done. Who knows?

Then again, there’s all the hippies to consider...

It seems like everyone is moving away or pairing off. Getting real jobs or trying to make something of their lives. If it’s not grad school its computers, and if it’s not computer then it’s wives or husbands, or a house, or who-knows-what else. The older my friends get the more drastically I seem to cling to these ideas of where I thought I was going to be now. Unmarried? Check. Employed? Check. Financially secure? (Uhm… let’s skip that one.) Still Doing A ‘Zine?

Check.

I’ve been frightened of this moment, when I have to put the poignant spin on everything and say something like, “It’s been a wild 10 Year Ride!” I’ve re-written this page in my head 1,000 times. I’ve spent days and nights going through boxes and filing cabinets, trying to find long-since abandoned proofs and texts in search of one sentence that I thought was necessary to complete this collection. I hassled friends for months rambling about how I’m still working on it… oh wait, I’m halfway there… well, I’ve got to re-do the beginning, but it’s coming together… it’s done except for having to re-write everything from page 1 on. Typical neurotic behavior they’ve come to know and love from me. They take it in stride while I worry about it endlessly. When all is said and done I’ll never want to see any of this again, and everyone will wonder what I was making a big deal about.

I guess the real reason I’m afraid is that I don’t want to stop. There’s 100 more things that I think need to go here. Anecdotes of things that happen. Pieces I wrote that will otherwise leave this collection incomplete. There’s not a single collage that I made, something that I tried to include in nearly every ‘zine I did after High School. I haven’t included a single letter I wrote to people, where some of my best lines and textual riffs came from. There’s only one piece of music writing, none of my food service journals (which ran under the title “The Fast Food Whore”), and so many other things that seem to be relevant only in that they’ve been left out. The selection process for this collection was one of the most difficult things I’ve ever done. Most people didn’t understand when I said, “Oh, this will easily be over 100 pages long.” When compared to what’s been left out, this is collection represents the smallest fraction of what I’ve written in the last 10 years.

But to type the final period scares the shit out of me. To tape down the last page, to paste up the back cover. To make the final Xerox. To hand these out, yet again foregoing any potential to make money on my blood, sweat and tears. To actually finish would be the end, in more ways than one. It’s so hard to bring this to a close, because when it’s all over the horrible truth comes out: that it has, in fact, been a finite, measurable length of time. 10 solid years, the interim book ended by the first thing I put together in a fit of High School enthusiasm and this, a collection of cynically footnoted material to try and sum it all up. Is it worse to create in obiviousness and let the time pass while you never notice the mistakes of the past, or to agonize over what’s come before so that it makes the future look that much more uncertain?

Who’s to say, really.

I fear the final image that is visible in all the details. All the things said sarcastically that I’ve come to actually believe, sitting next to things that have become iconic with the passage of time. The uphill slope that is the quality of my writing, starting in the darkest pits of aweful to something that levels off in the earnest sharing of ideas. I thumb through this collection, eyeing every period and comma, wondering if I did the right thing or not. If I keep on editing, I’ll never have to finish… right? Seems like a simple enough method for circumventing your fears.

Fear notwithstanding, the end is nigh. The first chapter is over, and there are new relationships to have, new bands to discover, new friends to go drinking with, new houses to live in, new roommates to bitch about, new jobs to fund it all with, new books to fall in love with, new towns to become enamored with, new venues to become disillusioned with, new subcultures to become entrenched in, new tattoos that need to be gotten, new parts to be purchased for my bike, new summers to be enjoyed, new girls to pine over, new heartbreaks to destroy me with, new CDs to be bought after, new movies to share with my friends, new sidewalks to tramp over in a late-night walks,

and, of course, new ‘zines to read and, if I have any time left over, to write as well.

Shit. I guess there’s not much time left before the next anniversary. Let’s just hope the 20-Year Collection doesn’t sneak up on me like this one did.

See ya then.

Austin (Cody) Rich
March 30th, 2003
It's Not Just A Word Any More.

It defines me as a person before they even get to know me. A stray comment here, or a random unconscious reference. My talents lie more in misdeeds in word and action than in a unique skill at either. It might be a subtle or overt reference to a movie, or a habit impossible to hide, or — god forbid something as universally accepted as — a taste is music. (A brief lyrical reference or a diatribe about my newest obsession/distaste; neither can separate themselves from the other any easier than Siamese twins or my gaze from your face.)

I'm never as drunk or as sober as I want to be (or need to be). It just tumbles out of my mouth/fingers before I even have a chance to make sense of it: a mishmash of ideas/desires/feelings/attitudes and interests, underlying everything I think or do. I couldn't hide the truth about myself from anyone — let alone you — any better than the cigarette smoke in my sweater or the tattoos that stand out on my overly pale skin; neither of which match any one part of my personality any better than it compliments it all in every way. My own ineptitude in communication has more talent in speaking for me louder than any slice-o-life anecdote or ironic observation about life ever could.

Dissertations about culture and endless lists of what I like could never speak quieter than my subtle glance in your direction or a brash declaration of feelings that you'll just as soon think is a joke. When I lie about my name I'm more honest than I could ever be otherwise. But do you know that? Or do you even want to?

It runs faster than I can make sense of, the speed of a thought or the image that flashes across my brainpan. Is it lust? Is it love? Is it a need for a connection with another like-minded person, or an extreme desire to nail the first attractive member of the opposite sex I can think of so I can brag about it at the bar later? Intelligence or vulgarity? Culture or commerce? My brain and crotch catch fire with the same speed and efficiency as calibrated home-made fireworks, or as simply as a fork left in the microwave. I want Slayer and Bright Eyes to share the same stage so I can get the point across to you; I want you to wax poetically about art and philosophy while you strip naked and fuck me every way I can imagine.

But more than everything I want you to rationalize both sides of the coin and know exactly where I'm coming from while I deny it the entire time.

It stands for everything and yet means nothing. The brief glimpses or the elaborate, over-worked anecdotes. The whole world can be equated to the same beauty and presence that a single record can represent, but can deconstruct completely the more you pontificate on it's factual elements or indisputable realities. It needs to be louder, to wake every resident of this town so they can yell out the truth from the rooftops at 3 A.M. But when I look at your face, I know I'm not quiet enough, I've already said too much; my own inability to shut the fuck up will be both what impresses you and turns you off before I even get a word in edgewise.

When it's condensed it makes just as much sense as it does when I spell it all out for you, letter for letter, punctuation and all. I could reiterate it all in 100 pages or just 1, and it would make just as much sense. It's no different than a data-compression algorithm or an endless string of 1's and 0's.

A Countless Reminder Of Negotiating Yearly Memory; A Circular Rig-a-moral On Nearing Yesterday's Meaning; A Celebrated Ring One Never Yearns More.302

You could make up your own and it makes just as much / as little sense, but you'd never hit the nail on the head. It's all convenience and impossibility, overview or summary, desire and rationalization. It's what I'm all about, and what you'll never understand.

No matter how much I cut myself open for you, I will never suffer from a wound. No matter how much it hurts me, you will never know I'm in pain. The more I tell you the less you really understand; the more I know I've kept from you the closer you are to knowing the truth.

Condensed in meaning, expanded upon reflection. Alpha and omega. Bad cliché and universal truth. Take it or leave it, but at the very least smile and give me a phone call, please?

— Austin Rich (01/19/03)

302 These are just the ones I came up with while I was drunk; you should see the ones I wrote when I actually mean it.