

RATED ROOKIE

subversive stories of everyday

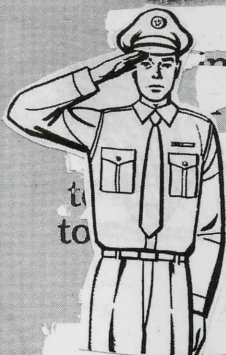
ISSUE (6)
\$3 > US \$4 > CAN

on the trail of a con artist • the barber college project • more reviews

all stars • stupid canadian food • grade school snuff peddling • psychotherapy

BOYD RICE THE UNHOLY SPAWN OF
SATAN, DISNEYLAND AND A SYNTHESIZER
**JONATHAN AMES' SUBLIME
COLONIC DISASTER**
THE SECRET LIFE OF A GOOGLE SLAVE!
GRANDPA CAL'S ACROSTIC INSANITY!

rated rookie looks for a new roommate • kyle hating stuff



dear reader

Holy shit, it's another issue of *Rated Rookie* illegitimacy. And, like all illegitimate scamps, we're settling into a bastardized adolescence. How so, you ask? Well, my little chitlins, we're surlier, somewhat suaver and, contradictorily, less drunk. It's amazing how much work one accomplishes when not bustling to bodegas and buying \$1.25 Brooklyn Lagers from tooth-deprived Latin men. Huzzah, productivity! Huzzah, issue six! Huzzah...huzzah!

So here's news from the *Rated Rookie* mother ship:

1. Our production manager was both married by Elvis and divorced by the state of Washington.
2. Mr. Web Guru fertilized a woman, thereby crushing our drunken prophecy that he'd be elected president before becoming a dad.
3. The chief designer bolted into the woods, binging on whiskey with men named "Gator" and women named, well, there were no women.
4. The copy chief was raffled off as a manservant.
5. A large hole was drilled in our event manager's posterior to permit an unfortunate fluid drainage.
6. The co-designer grew man-killing zucchinis in North Carolina.
7. Thanks to his "Stranger in Strange Lands" story (RR5), the editor was branded homosexual by no less than eight people, including his girlfriend.
8. And, oh yeah, somehow we found enough time to compose yet another issue of the reality-based goodness you've grown to adore and ignore.

Number six is a turning point, my friends. You may notice that we've cut down the cocksucking quotient. This is a good thing. Too many blowjobs spoil the pot, dear readers, and we're tea-bagged out. Not to mention, we're trying a new tactic—not just reporting on ourselves. George Plimpton is dead, baby, and so too is participatory journalism. Unless it involves humiliation. *That* is always funny.

Anyway, this issue delivers Cal Begun, the 76-year-old acrostic poet who writes odes about everything from missionary sex to McDonald's to *Rated Rookie*. In "I Shit My Pants in the South of France," novelist Jonathan Ames undergoes a colonic, unearthing some appalling memories. Are there Vietnamese in Arkansas? Qui Nguyen tells a tale of his mother, a Soul-food cookin', jheri-curl wearin' sass-mouthin', rice-hatin' refugee. Also, fey men shock brains! Vaginas that pay the bills! Vegas loan sharks with regrets! All that, and the entourage: Bands Kyle Hates, a revamped Reviews, 5 Dollars for Five Questions and our motley stew of pathos, inanity and sadly named children. It's a heady broth, dear readers, so grab the bowl and slurp the hotness real slow.

Your friends,
Rated Rookie

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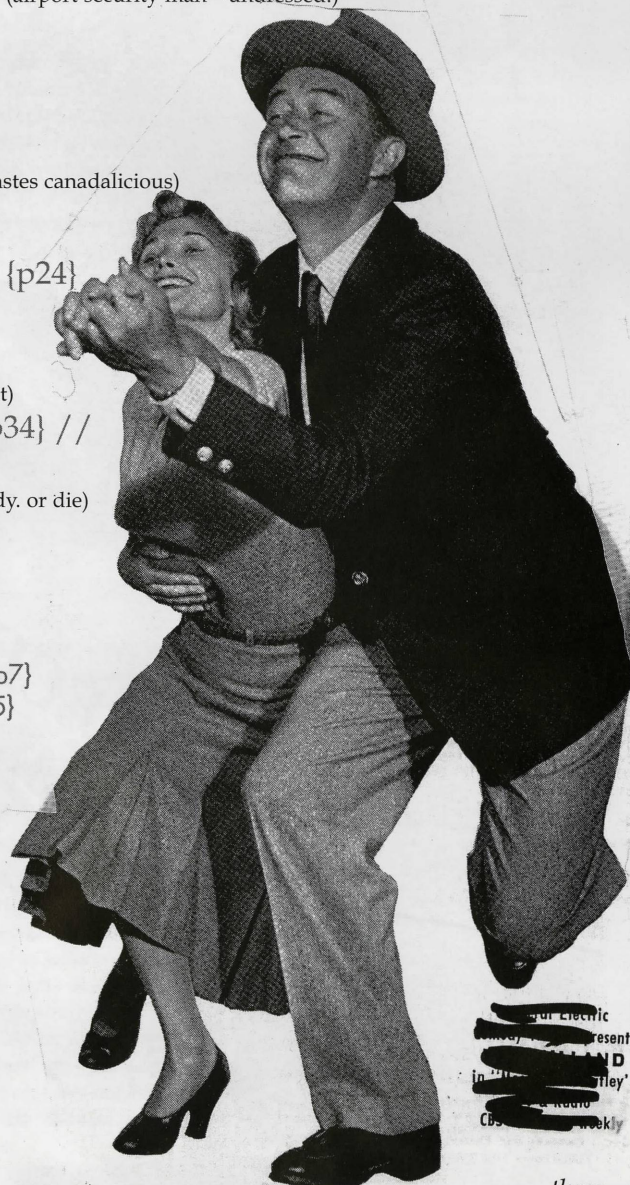
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Graphic—It identifies you



our Electric
present
in 'H
weekly

RATED ROOKIE

ratedrookie (issue #6)
the genius behind your poison:

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(thanks to: the dog house . free beer . tamar fox . jaclyn
 gleisinger . the fates . all the boys that couldn't snowboard with
 aaron . highways and wooden tables)

We're all anarchists but our contributors are not. Please ask
 before you reprint. This stuff still belongs to them.

Want to be published in *Rated Rookie*? Who doesn't.
 Check out ratedrookie.com for submission details.

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Ben Tanzer. After early triumphs on stage (*Sweeney Todd*) and
 screen (*Ghandi*), Ben Tanzer fulfilled a lifelong dream by joining the
 CIA and working undercover on a series of clandestine missions during
 the early to mid-'80s. After leaving government work, Ben briefly per-
 formed with Wham and then Nelson, before abruptly retiring to his
 vineyard outside of Chicago where he currently resides with his wife
 Debbie and son Myles. Ben now tends his grapes, does nonprofit
 work, shoots pool and writes. He has had work published in a num-
 ber of magazines and journals, including *Midnight Mind*, *Outsider*,
Inc., *Abroad View*, *Windy City Sports* and *Chicago Parent*.



Jonathan Ames is the author of *I Pass Like Night*, *The Extra
 Man*, *What's Not to Love?* and *My Less Than Secret Life*. A new novel,
Wake Up, Sir! will be published in July 2004 by Scribner. Mr. Ames is
 the winner of a Guggenheim Fellowship. You can visit his website at:
Jonathanames.com. "I Shit My Pants in the South of France" is excerpted
 from his memoir, *What's Not to Love?*



Claire Zulkey has just published a book with So New Media
 called *Girls!Girls!Girls!* She has written for *Second City*, NPR, the *Chicago
 Tribune*, *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Modern Humorist* and more. Also,
 she posts daily at www.zulkey.com. You can probably beat her at any sport
 other than badminton.



Dave Maass is a writer from Arizona. He's been called a "budding
 Hemingway" by the *Arizona Republic*, a "philosopher-king" by the *Phoenix
 New Times*, a "tortured genius" by Jim Nintzel, senior writer for the *Tucson
 Weekly*, a "talented writer" by Michael Moore and "kid" by Glenn Danzig.
 never mind the contexts. He now resides in England where no one gives a shit.



Rachel Sklar is a corporate lawyer-turned freelance writer
 living in New York. She has contributed to *The New York Times*,
Glamour Magazine, *The Financial Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*,
Wallpaper and all sorts of Canadian publications
 where such things as Nanaimo Bars need not be explained.
 At 31, she still considers herself a rookie and is very
 happy to have been officially rated.
 She is a Canadian.



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**THIS IS WHERE WE LIVE
 AND SHIT** *Rated Rookie*/ 562 Park
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MAGAZINE FISTICUFFS

As you say in your own publication,
"Rated Rookie is a print zine that leads a
 weaker double life online. But our weaker
 half could still kick your better half's ass
 halfway to Cheboygan." Considering that
 we're strictly online and that over the last
 two years you've mustered up enough
 whatever it is you do to put out a whop-
 ping five issues, your ability to stake a flag
 on the whole "abstract reviews" thing is
 simply tenuous at best. Are you saying
 that we stole the idea from you? Or that
 we're on your turf here? Or that we
 should stop, since you know, *Rated Rookie*
 does something similar?

I hope not. I think the *Rated Rookie* site
 is rather good. And I think perhaps, in
 this great big world we live it, once in a
 while two entirely unconnected groups of
 people may come up with similar ideas —
 in this case the novel concept of reviewing
 random things using fewer words.

If you're extremely outraged, I highly
 recommend submitting some reviews for
 next week. Because there's no way in hell
 you're going to kick our asses to
 Cheboygan and if you can't beat us...

...Huzzah, indeed.

—E

Well, one day *Rated Rookie* was perusing
 the Internet, fending off Orbitz pop-up ads,
 when we came upon www.blacktable.com. We
 examined the site — a motley collection of pop
 culture ephemera surveyed with grad school
 binoculars — and were pleasantly surprised.
 For a second-tier website, that is. Anyhoo,
 after much clicking we discovered the *Black
 Table* featured a reviews section similar to that
 of *Rated Rookie*. The good-natured, non-liti-
 gious chaps we are, we notified "E," the oper-
 ation's headmaster, of our previous stake in
 banal reviews. Unwarranted, he unleashed a
 vendetta upon *Rated Rookie*, chastising us
 for only distributing five (now six) print
 issues in two years. Huazzh, we say, "E."
 Men who publish on the In-ter-net should not
 throw rocks. That is, if your sun-deprived,
 atrophied arms can muster the strength.

FUCKING ADVERTISERS

i quit my job and yesterday i got over
 one thousand dollars in traffic tickets and
 nearly was arrested. i have less than 100
 dollars in the bank. you may guess by
 now that whether or not i want an ad, i
 sure as shit am not going to be paying for
 it anytime soon.

—Veronica Maraschino

Now, *Rated Rookie* does not consider itself
 annoying. Forthright, perhaps, with a pen-
 chant for oral sex stories, but never six-year-
 old-bugging-older-brother annoying. Still, this
 young woman — one of life's recent hardscrab-
 ble cases, judging by her recent events —
 contacted *Rated Rookie* several moons ago

about placing an ad in these glossy pages. We
 told her we would contact her in the future, and
 she seemed pleased by our words. Then, the
 future. We queried the young woman in an
 earnest attempt to secure her money. She ignored
 us. We tried again. Nothing. Yet, as we are
 resilient, a third attempt. The reply? The harsh
 words listed several sentences above. We're
 unsure whether to feel pity or prod her fleshy
 parts with pointy objects.

PRISONERS MAKE US SWEATY

i'm all locked up in
 the chain gang
 it's crazy here like
 a bad Disneyland
 i hate it...but i love it
 Thanks for sending free
 to prisoners. Prison is a Blast!

Wish you were here,
 —Rob Reynolds

Rule #452: *Never, ever open an envelope with
 "Property of Hancock State Prison, Georgia"*
 stamped onto the back.

CREEPY CLOWN HEADS

I'm with Madagascar Institute, and we
 have created a super ghetto haunted house
 called "Your Worst Nightmare" and we were
 going to bring it to a party this weekend, but
 we got cancelled out. We were wondering if
 you'd be interested in having it at or near your
 party. Your party sounds more fun anyway.

Basically, we tried it out at a party last
 weekend. We had a 20x20 ft. tent with a
 oooh-scary painted false wall front, charged
 a buck to go inside, and forced people to play
 Musical Chairs of Death while an almost
 naked guy wiggled his weenie in their faces.
 The 1st loser had to wear a heavy giant plas-
 tic creepy clown head and was made to sit on
 the "tingler," then the second loser was
 kicked out (with the first), then the third, and
 so on while being beaten by foam hoses. The
 winner got a fabulous prize. We had fun.
 And made 75 bucks.

We are updating it tomorrow by adding
 scary rooms, like the bad pick-up line room,
 the meat room, the "what's that smell?"
 room, and possibly dropping the musical
 chairs. (Or not)

We would like to set it up someplace, like
 on a roof or backyard, but if you have an
 empty lot next door or close by, that would
 work too. Anyway, whaddya say? Interested?
 —Kim

Rated Rookie and its 562 Park Place posse
 had an October soiree featuring all manner of
 Halloween-centric shenanigans. Half-lesbians in
 lingerie smooching men dressed as sailors; skinny
 boys dressed as fat men with Jesus ties; sallow
 Goth kids guzzling beer; and even straight women
 on roller skates dancing to "Take on Me." Not a
 bad night. The Madagascar Institute — providers
 of flaming street soccer, condiment wars and other
 affairs — wanted to bring on the haunted house
 noise. Alas, space was an issue.



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**RATED ROOKIE
 WANTS YOUR LETTERS**
editor@ratedrookie.com




world's saddest



This is the world's saddest automobile. For the last six months it has lain dormant on a newspaper-littered corner of Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, growing seedier daily. When the red MG was first deposited on the block, we thought nothing of it. "Oh, look, another stripped automobile without license plates or serial numbers. How quaint." Perhaps it was a drug-runner gone bust. Or maybe urban fantasies bested us; the culprit could've been a blown head gasket too expensive to replace. Either way, the situation went weird when children started loading wood into the automobile. Yes, wood. We're talking, stoke-the-hearth, roast-some-marshmallows wood, not puny

branches salvaged from smog-choked saplings, all loaded into the MG's open-air top. Where did kids find wood? Why did they load it into the MG's stripped interior?

We almost found out. One drunken night, weaving back from our local alco-dive, we spied four teenagers hoisting a log the approximate size and length of a weightlifter's arm. "One, two, three—!" they shouted, lifting and launching the log into the convertible. Then they ran away, giggling, as the car shuddered under its unexpected weight. We thought about giving chase, but teenagers terrify us. And besides, it was just wood. Who are we to deny those lil' urban lumberjacks their kicks? 

MY BEST YEAR

By Chris Glazier

Last year, everything came together. I had a cushy work-at-home job that paid way more than I deserved. My rent was cheap. I lived in a garden duplex with my longtime girlfriend. We were saving to buy a house together. I enjoyed *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. I was concerned about healthy living and the best ways in which to help my fellow man. I was the kind of guy who tried making everybody happy. Of all the

people I knew in New York, my life was the most secure. The future felt happy and sated, like a big fat cat stretched out on the couch.

Then I got dumped.

The girlfriend pronounced her departure and I found myself alone with a rent that had doubled, cut off from her and her friends. Dreams of familial bliss sailed out the window, as did my whole concept of who I was and what the fuck I thought I'd been doing. I was shattered, to say the least.

This was the first sign that things were improving.

I spent a lot of time plotting revenge, feeling the betrayal dig in. A friend suggested a mantra to

deal with my frustration instead: "Fuck 'em." Anybody and anything that ran afoul of me was invited to do the same. It worked. It didn't exactly feel good, but it did feel right. I had been charting my life by some middle-class notion of success, and if that was really what I wanted, why the hell did I leave Ohio? If I had stayed, I'd be ass-deep in aluminum siding and Huggies by now. But that was somebody else's notion of happiness: my parents, other people. It wasn't mine.

I'm happy to say my life is a big mess these days. I slack on the job like nobody's business; I drink like a fish and smoke like a chimney. With my extra expenses, I'm blowing through my savings nicely. I live in the same apartment with my wise friend and we irritate the neighbors with our loud band and innumerable cats. I've stepped on some toes, and though I hate to lose friends, I don't bother trying to make everybody happy. My only guiding principle: Don't repeat my best year. Best years are for complacent losers. Fuck 'em.

MY SHITTY COWORKERS

By Eugene Vail

Trish

Trish believed that if something happened to her it was therefore interesting. No matter what you were talking about, she would jump in with her anecdote—tangentially related at best—about how her uncle speaks Arabic, or how she dated a black guy once, or how she used to run a five-minute mile. It was both irritating and deeply boring having her around. She was in her early 20s, with blond hair and blue eyes. Since graduating college she had gained some weight and was now on the Atkins diet, which made her moody and food-obsessed. Sometimes we would have pizza at work and she would grab five slices, gobble down all the cheese, lick off the sauce, discard the crusts and wash down the meal with a huge salad doused in Ranch dressing. She was the worst dieter I had ever seen. She was also an office-supply hound, ordering needless gewgaws while doing no work whatsoever. I orchestrated her termination in less than two months.

Michael

Michael was neurotic and insecure. We worked together for a publisher of cut-rate pornography, and although he had been there longer than me, I was promoted and became his boss. Our job was to edit 20-year-old stories about housewives fucking plumbers, brothers fucking sisters and lesbians peeing on one another. Once you got past the subject matter, it was a shitty job like any other, with endless stacks of doggerel piling up on your desk. Michael was obsessively slow and methodical, which could be good qualities in an editor except that all his editorial decisions were wrong. He would take a perfectly good sentence like, *He put his cock in my butt and fucked me*, and change it to, *Fucking me, he started putting his hammer into my anal canal and began pumping*. And then he would cry when you criticized his work.

Rudolfo

My first job, when I was 14, was with Pinto Pony Rides. Rudolfo, the skinny Cuban proprietor, would pick me up and drive to his ranch, where we would feed and wash Shetland ponies and load them into a tiny trailer. Rudolfo had other child-laborers working for him, and we would cram into his Toyota pickup, as tightly packed as the ponies in the trailer behind us. Rudolfo would drive to children's birthday parties, depositing one pony and one worker (i.e., me) at each. Once deposited, I would heft fat kids onto the saddle of my designated pony and walk them in a tight circle in the yard for a while. Then I would wait for Rudolfo to pick me up. And wait. And wait. The party would end, the kids would go home, and I would still be sitting in the yard with a pony, assuring parents that my ride would be here soon. I worked an average of three parties a day. Rudolfo paid me \$5 an hour—but only for the time spent actually giving pony rides. So my 12-hour days earned me \$15, or \$1.25 an hour. Migrants working in the nearby sugarcane fields were paid more handsomely.

\$5000 WINNER IN OUR
 "LAWS OF LIFE" CONTEST

ALSO:

A touching story of how a few words transformed a small boy

BARBER COLLEGE PROJECT #1

By Britt Hubbard



PLACE: Atlas Barber College
LOCATION: 80 East 10th Street, btwn
Third and Fourth Avenues, New York City
HAIRCUT: \$4
COST OF SCHOOL: \$1500
LENGTH OF SCHOOLING:
Four months, or 500 hours

For the uninitiated, the barber college is an economical savior. Four or ten or fifteen dollars nets a snip-snip from studious students. Sure, their shearer control is erratic and end-products are often rude pantomimes of desired results ("Where...where are my sideburns?"), but whiners are silenced by the swell price. Usually. Then there's violence. But that's not the point.

Rated Rookie wants to pick these baby barbers' brains. Who fantasizes carving buzz cuts into lumpy skulls? Who dreams of taming the mullet? Who craves etching names into close-cropped palettes? In the first act of an ongoing project, we sent Britt Hubbard, our sometimes-event planner, in for a trim. His mission was simple: a before-and-after photo, a couple barber pics and an interview during the cut. The gel-sticky transcripts are as follows:

Rated Rookie: What is your name?

Gaby Shakrob: Gaby Shakrob.

RR: How old are you?

GS: Eighteen.

RR: How long have you been cutting hair?

GS: Four months. Well, studying for four months, out in two weeks. What would you like me to do?

RR: Well, what I usually do is have my hair very tight around the sides, faded and longer toward the top. What I usually do is put gel in it and rough it up a little bit so it sticks around. Would you shave my beard? I let it grow out to test all your skills.

GS: Yes.

RR: I usually have a very short-trimmed beard.

GS: OK.

RR: Do you think I'm going bald?

GS: Yep. You want it shorter?

RR: Yes, a little. Where do you want to start your practice?

GS: I want to work in the city. Actually I'm living in Brooklyn. Borough Park.

RR: Do you think using hair gel in my hair makes me metro?

GS: You're losing your hair.

RR: No, but does that make me metrosexual?

GS: (*Mutters something about my hair, does not understand question.*)

RR: What do you do if you have someone in your chair and you have to go to the bathroom really badly?

GS: What I would do is keep cutting.

RR: What if you had to go REALLY bad and made a mistake, would you tell the customer?

GS: No. I would keep cutting around the area and try to fix it.

RR: What if you could not fix it?

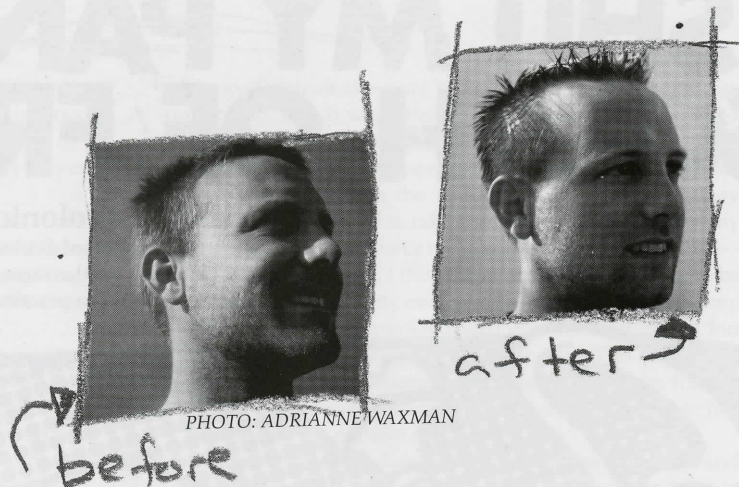
GS: I would not say anything.

RR: What happens if somebody doesn't like the haircut after you're done?

GS: I give them a card; they come back for free next time. See, the thing is some people know what they want but they don't know how to tell you.

RR: Would you be offended if somebody said they didn't like it?

GS: Mm, yeah, a little. Shorter?
 RR: Ya, almost a military cut.
 RR: When do you use trimmers and when do you use scissors?
 GS: Well, on short hair I use trimmers and on long hair I use scissors.
 GS: What is this for?
 RR: It's going in a magazine. (People in background start whispering, telling each other CNN is here.)
 RR: Why did you pick Atlas Barber School?
 GS: Because I didn't have \$10,000 to go to beauty school. I'm paying \$1500 for this school.
 RR: How did you find Atlas?
 GS: My friends. You want it shorter?
 RR: Yeah. (I show him how much shorter with my fingers.) So what first made you decide to pursue cutting hair?
 GS: I like it.
 RR: Where do you get your hair cut?
 GS: At a salon on Broadway.
 RR: Is that the kind of place you want to work at or would you want to work at a barbershop?
 GS: I don't care; I enjoy spending my time cutting hair.
 RR: Why don't you get your hair cut here?
 GS: Because they could mess it up.
 RR: Would you tell me right now if you messed up my hair?
 GS: I would tell you, take a picture, and show you in the other office.
 RR: Are you feeling nervous because you're being recorded?
 GS: Yep.
 RR: Do you ever cut children's hair?
 GS: I never cut children's hair. I don't like the pulling, the screaming, the biting. I don't like cutting children's hair.
 RR: What do you hate about cutting hair?
 GS: The moving. You have to hold their head.
 RR: Do your friends ask you to cut their hair now?
 GS: Yes, sometimes.
 RR: Do you charge them?
 GS: No.
 RR: Do you think you have a sense of fashion?
 GS: Yeah. I mean, the people that work in fashion, they work for Kenneth Cole and Ralph Lauren. They make like \$5000 for one job. They are the richest people, I think. They're making easy money. (I ask the guy behind me if he went to the same school. He says, "Yes, I graduated two years ago." I ask him if he has a job. He says, "Yes, I own a salon.")
 RR: Do you just concentrate on the head, or do you wax people, too?
 GS: I just concentrate on the head.
 RR: Are there any tricks to getting good tips?
 GS: Yeah. Just talk to the people. You know, small talk.
 RR: Do you ask the same questions to everyone?
 GS: Yeah, pretty much.
 RR: Do they teach you that in class, how to talk to the customer?
 GS: They only teach you how to do the hair, what is brush, what is comb.



bb Do you concentrate on the head, or do you wax people too? dd

RR: Do you have to learn tricks like using the thinning shears for choppy hair?
 GS: Sometimes. Nobody likes to give his or her own tricks. They keep them.
 RR: Do you think males or females are harder to work with?
 GS: Females are very hard. They're so picky, that's why we charge more money. (Ed note: \$5.)
 RR: How long does it usually take you to do a haircut?
 GS: Fifteen, twenty minutes.
 RR: How about when you first started doing it?
 GS: Forty minutes, an hour. (Mine took an hour.)
 People know what they're getting when they come in here.
 RR: Meaning what?
 GS: We're students. (The surrounding students laugh; he points to a sign explaining that they are, in fact, students.)
 RR: So do you think my hair is pretty easy to do?
 GS: Yeah. I like your style.
 RR: Have you ever cut anybody?
 GS: You mean in school?
 RR: I mean with scissors. And made them bleed.
 GS: You mean before I came here?
 RR: Like cut a person while you were cutting their hair.
 GS: Cut a person in the chair? No, no.
 RR: I don't know about letting you shave me now; I'm getting nervous.
 GS: No, don't worry.
 RR: Do you use a straight razor?
 GS: Yep.

RR: Has anybody ever asked you to spell something in their hair?
 GS: No, but I could do it. You want me to?
 RR: You sure you could?
 GS: I don't know. But I'd try.
 RR: How long have you been in New York?
 GS: Many times; I'm always traveling. I grew up in Europe. My father is Russian. My mother is from Asia. And I'm always traveling.
 RR: Has anybody ever gotten upset after a haircut and tried to hurt you?
 GS: No. No, not me.
 RR: Have you ever heard of anyone being attacked?
 GS: Yep.
 RR: Do you want to stay in New York and get established?
 GS: Yeah, I'd also like to move, maybe go out west to Arizona.
 RR: What about another country?
 GS: Well, maybe Holland. But New York is like the center of all this. You can do whatever you want. (Gesturing in the mirror toward my hair:) How's that?
 RR: Can you go a little bit shorter?
 GS: Do you want some gel?
 RR: Yes. (He fills handful of cheap green gel and saturates my hair. I lie, say everything's okay, shake his hand and leave. I still need a haircut.)

I SHIT MY PANTS IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

By Jonathan Ames

I had my first colonic the other day, and for me, it was a dream come true. I've wanted a colonic for the last ten years, but I kept denying myself something that I needed. I do the same thing with shoes—I can't buy a new pair or have the soles replaced until I'm practically barefoot. But you can't treat a colon as shabbily as a pair

of shoes, you can't leave it overnight with a cobbler, so I finally broke down and went to a colon hygienist in SoHo. I envisioned my colonic as a sort of fall cleansing—a getting ready for the new 1997 school year, though I'm no longer in school.

I should mention that the week before the appointment, I took a lot of fiber supplements and ate mostly fruits and vegetables. I was trying to purify myself before I went to the hygienist because I didn't want to be embarrassed. I was like a woman cleaning her house before the maid arrives.

But the hygienist turned out to be a nonjudgmental fellow. Bowel cleansing is his business and his name is Ismail. He's a short, kind, radiant man from Uganda. He has a feminine smile, the likes of which I've only seen in photographs of enlightened nuns.

His office is incredibly tiny—it's the size of a walk-in closet. There's room for the bed you lie on, and that's about it. On the walls are articles about the colon and numerous letters from grateful patients. Above the bed are two square plastic containers with water whooshing around inside. They're like the containers, filled with purple- and red-colored drinks, that one sees in old-fashioned diners. But Ismail's containers don't hold artificial grape juice; inside them is filtered water that is pumped into one's colon via hoses and tubes.

Ismail had me undress and put on a medical gown in the tiny bathroom attached to his office. Then it was onto the bed, where I lay on my side with my back to him. He discreetly parted my gown and inserted a lubricated tube and I wanted to suck my thumb.

He began to pump water inside me and then he reached around me and massaged my intestines in the area just above the groin. When I was really filled up, he hit some kind of switch and the water was let out and released into a big plastic bag at the end of the bed. Essentially, I was defecating in Ismail's compassionate presence.

"I'm going to find all your treasures," he said, and then he asked, "What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a writer."

"I'd like to write a book," he said. "The things I've seen. I have one woman who I call the Animal Kingdom Lady."

"Why?"

"She came in here and I asked her, 'How often do you go?'"



The taxi driver whipped his head around and looked right at me, following the odor's vaporous trail. In French, he shouted at me, "You shit in my car like a dog."

She said, 'Every two months.' I didn't think I heard her right, so I said, 'Every two days?' She said, 'No.' I said, 'Every two weeks?' She said, 'No, every two months.' Can you believe it?"

"Wow, she must have been really impacted. But why do you call her the Animal Kingdom Lady?"

"I was pumping her out, and after twenty minutes, I told her to go sit on the toilet and rest. She was in there and then I heard screams. I opened the door, and she was shouting, 'Bugs! Bugs!' In the toilet there were five or six giant parasites swimming. I flushed them down!"

"How big were they?" I asked, horrified.

He spread his fingers and indicated a size of at least six inches. "My God," I said. "How did she survive with those things inside her? I guess they left her a few crumbs to live on and took the rest of the food themselves. That's why she hardly ever went to the bathroom. They were eating all her food. Freeloaders! The bastards!"

Ismail was impressed with my deductive reasoning. It seems I'm a natural when it comes to the intestines. And adventurous too. I'm sort of the George Plimpton of the colon—one of my motivations for going to Ismail was so that I could write about the experience. It's scatological *participatory journalism*, but each writer must find his or her domain.

In speaking with Ismail about the bug lady, I further showed my flair for the subject by guessing that the parasites looked like spiders, which was correct. And Ismail, impressed again by my savvy, explained to me that New Yorkers are loaded with parasites and worms that they get from bad meat and fish. And suddenly the whole city felt like a place infested with bugs, inside and outside of us—just that morning I had lifted up my hat from the kitchen table and two cockroaches, probably teenagers necking, had scampered away.

Ismail sensed my darkening mood and he said, hoping to distract me, "You're a writer, tell me a story."

So I told him the following tale, which I thought he would appreciate: In 1983, I spent the summer with a good friend in the South of France taking classes. I was good-looking then, with a full head of blond hair, and one night my friend and I were in a café with three lovely Dutch girls. They were praising me endlessly, telling me I looked like a young Robert Redford and that someday I would be famous. I was loving it, and my friend had to tolerate me getting all the attention. Then the evening wound down and the five of us only had enough money for the girls to take a cab back to the dormitory, where we were all staying.

Off they went and my friend and I started walking home. A dirty man standing in front of a café offered me a tuna sandwich that was resting in the palm of his hand—sans napkin. I had a few centimes left and I was hungry and I bought the sandwich. My judgment was impaired—I was drunk from the praise of the girls and the beer we had been drinking. I ate the sandwich. My friend and I continued walking, and five minutes later I was convulsed in pain and had the most overwhelming need to shit that I had ever experienced in my life. We started to run back to the café.

"I'm not going to make it!" I shouted. "That sandwich!"

"Maybe if we stop running," my friend said.

I stopped and immediately exploded with diarrhea like a ruptured sewer main. "I shat in my pants!" I wailed. I had never used the past tense before. My friend ~~crumpled to the~~ ground laughing.

I limped into an alleyway, removed my pants, took off my underwear, which was filled like a baby's diaper, and I hid the revolting package under a parked Peugeot. I pulled my pants back up and my legs and ass were vilified and slick.

We went back to the taxi stand. I was walking very slowly. We planned to take a cab to the dorm and then my friend would run to our room and get money for the driver. We got in a taxi, I thought everything was going to be all right, and then my own smell came to my nose and my friend's nose. We quickly rolled down the windows, but then the stink made it to the front seat. The taxi driver whipped his head around and looked right at me, following the odor's vaporous trail. In French, he shouted at me, "You shit in my car like a dog."

He made an immediate U-turn back to the taxi stand and told all the other drivers I had shit in my pants and not to take me in their cars. Humiliated, my friend and I walked home. It was a two-mile journey and my legs were encrusted. Just as I approached the dorm, salvation, I convulsed and shit again in my pants. Robert Redford, my ass!

I finished my story and Ismail, weak from laughter, was leaning his head tenderly on my hip. We felt very close to each other. At the end of the session, we hugged good-bye.

I walked through SoHo and I experienced the most profound happiness. I was relieved of all tension and anxiety—it was magnificent. My colon was clean, my spirit was light.

I then headed up Fifth Avenue for an appointment at a publishing house. I was going to see a friend of mine, an editor, because her publisher wanted to meet me. He wasn't going to publish my new book, due to come out next August, but he was a fan of my work in the *Press* and had heard that I'd sold a novel. My friend brought me to the publisher's beautiful

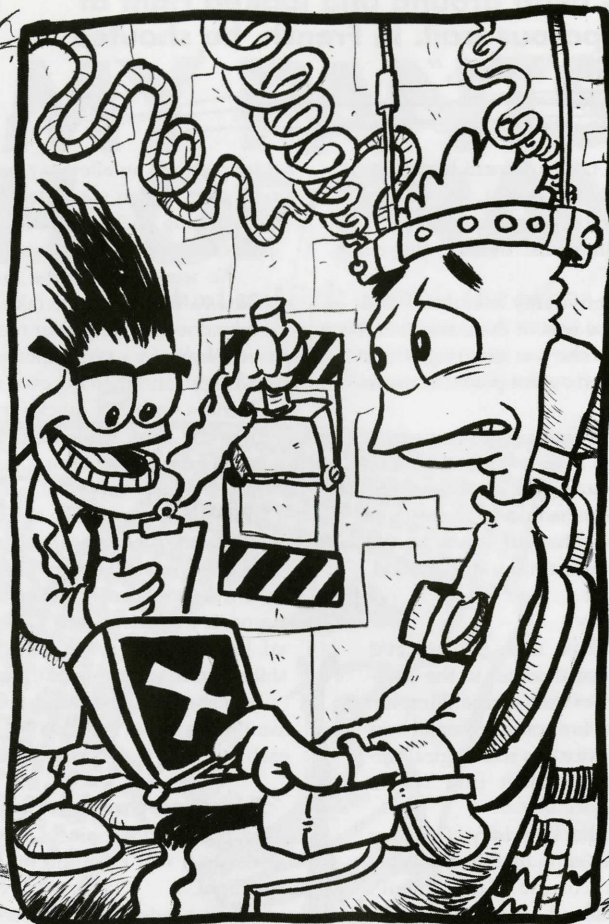
I munched the cheese stick while the publisher praised my work, and then suddenly I felt a crushing spasm in my colon.

corner office and the man offered me a gourmet cheese stick.

"No, thank you," I said. I didn't want a cheese stick right after my colon had been cleaned, but the man, a good person, insisted. How could I refuse? How could I tell a stranger I'd just had a colonic?

So I munched the cheese stick while the publisher praised my work, and then suddenly I felt a crushing spasm in my colon. I was still pumping out water that Ismail had injected me with. I was overwhelmed with the need for release. Sweat jettisoned out of my bald spot. The publisher told me again that he loved my work. I didn't think my sphincter would hold. I was going to crap in my pants in a publishing house as I was being praised. Couldn't I have one moment in the sun? It was Robert Redford all over again. Then the publisher had to take a phone call and I whispered to my friend that I needed a toilet. I rushed down the hall and made it just in time.

A half hour later, I was walking home on Fifth Avenue. The spasms hit me again. Hard. I fought them and I lost. I shat. People in their fancy clothes walked past me unawares. I craned my neck and on the seat of my pants was a big wet spot looking like a Rorschach blot. I deciphered its simple psychological message: You're a loser. ☹️



KING OF SHOCK

THIS MAN WILL MAKE YOUR BRAIN TWITCH FOR MONEY

By Josh Bernstein

During fiscal year 2003, team *Rated Rookie* sold its brains to science. Both the editor-in-chief and head designer, as well as the quartermaster, enrolled in a sleep-deprivation experiment. At the end of a 60-hour sleepless marathon (netting \$400, mind you), a fey, grinning researcher offered the chance to make even more: "We want to stimulate your brain while you perform tests," he said. Stimulate? Tests? Money! Groggy, we all agreed. Groggy, we entered a world of incomparable suck.

We were seated in a lime green dentist's chair, an Apple Powerbook arranged before us. The technician then inched a defibrillator-esque paddle across our pate, searching for the sweet spot dictated by a red "X" on a computer screen. Bingo. The machine whirled like a vacuum cleaner. Then—a thousand humming birds attacked our sweet, sweet cerebellum. We wanted to suck our thumbs, but were duty-bound by money and the computer test. While the hummingbirds peck-pecked, we examined a set of six consonants on-screen. Then they'd disappear for seven seconds. A letter would reappear. If the letter appeared earlier, we pushed a green button. If not, the red. Over and over. And over. Until the session ended and we were sent home, our rent money hidden deep in our underwear, brains smarting.

Team *Rated Rookie* is a glutton for pain, though, and the researcher had oodles to offer. Every several weeks he'd tender more shocking, more money. With the other option full-time employment, we chose the shocking. That's who we were—impoverished bastards who'd suck the goop from a horse's hoof if it meant a steady, office-free paycheck. But who was Mr. Shock-O, the man behind the brain games? How'd he find the job? Does he feel remorse? And, more importantly, why the hell is he hurting our brains? On the condition of anonymity (hey, even a sadistic researcher needs to make a living), he conducted the following interview. Zap!

Rated Rookie: Alright, Mr. Shock-O, what exactly do you do?

Mr. Shock-O: Transcranial magnetic brain stimulation (TMS). It's a touchy-feely term for shocking neurons into activity or inhibiting them.

RR: Where does one find such an odd job? Did you have any previous experience with medical experiments?

MS: I took my job out of necessity. A boy has to eat. I had worked in a private practice, but never "stimulating" brains.

RR: Understandable. So, you know, what is

the purpose behind the brain shocking?

MS: This particular experiment is looking at the effects of sleep deprivation on working memory—basically we stimulate neuronal activity to see if there is an inhibitory or excitatory effect (if a person is better or worse at the task they are tested on). If anything can be found, it could actually have lots of practical applications. It's a DoD- (Department of Defense) funded project, but besides sleep-deprived military personnel, there could be civilian uses as well. Airline pilots, doctors, long-distance truck drivers...brain stimulation could be an alternative to speed. And it's less harmful than crystal meth in the long run.

RR: Can TMS be used for other, less nefarious purposes?

MS: There are lots of things that TMS can be used for, such as mapping neural pathways (finding the places in the brain that are connected together for learning, thinking, reasoning, emotion, etc.). It's also being used to treat depression and Parkinson's disease. In the past, the only way doctors could look at how different parts of the brain worked was to study stroke patients—people who had function impaired to parts of their brain. They looked at the damaged part of the brain and how that affected the person who had the stroke.

RR: Alright, but now tell the readers about the pain.

MS: Tap your head with the end of a pencil. TMS feels like someone is knocking on your head. The sensation depends on the location of stimulation. If the stimulation is more toward the front of the head, facial muscles get engaged and your jaw and eye usually twitch—you can't always feel it but it looks pretty funny. Stimulation at the back of the head feels like a light tapping/tingling sensation. When I've had it done I usually fall asleep, but also feel invigorated afterward. There's the thought that neurotransmitters are also released during stimulation which can make you feel giddy.

RR: Now, has anyone reacted horribly to TMS? How do you calm a harried patient?

MS: The worst reaction was when someone (who had not even received any stimulation) passed out because they were nervous. Though if you're going to pass out a hospital is the place to do it. If someone is feeling queasy, feed them candy—a certain staff member was quite fond of brownies. Food seems to work miracles. Or just stop the stimulation. It can get a little annoying after awhile... Stopping, yeah, that's the best remedy.

RR: How do you find suckers willing to be shocked?

MS: Ah, now let's differentiate here—for a majority of our studies, including the sleep-deprivation study, we used "normal controls"—meaning, non-patients, healthy volunteers. Patients in a study we conduct would be people who are clinically depressed and have been diagnosed as such.

Airline pilots, doctors, long-distance truck drivers...brain stimulation could be an alternative to speed. And it's less harmful than crystal meth in the long run.

MS: Our "normal controls" come from word of mouth and from ads posted. Craig's List has been a big help in recruitment. Mostly, we get unemployed or underemployed young people—lots of people trying to figure out what they want to do but need some extra cash. The money is the draw.

RR: Why would a shmoe want the TMS?

MS: Well, if you're depressed or haven't had luck with medications, it might help your depression. If you're just curious and are healthy, then you might earn a few bucks in the name of psychiatric research.

RR: How much remorse, if any, do you feel for the subjects?

MS: None. It's not like I'm tying them down. I feel badly that the tests can be so boring, but they're getting paid better than I am (on a per-hour basis) so how can I feel remorse?

RR: Where do you see yourself going after this, Mr. Shocker Extraordinaire? Are you through with the medical field?

MS: Not at all. I am interested in the brain, though. There are so many things unknown, so many things to discover.

RR: What, if anything, will you take from your job?

MS: My stapler. I love my stapler. I'd nab the three-hole punch too, but I think someone would know it was missing. In all seriousness, I've learned a lot, though, from manipulation (kidding) to phlebotomy. I can also navigate red tape pretty well at this point, too.

RR: Final words?

MS: Try it, you might like it.

RR: I doubt that.

5 DOLLARS FOR FIVE QUESTIONS



GLEN

Why would you fire me? I only fire anybody if they fuck me over. If someone fucks me over, fuck them.

Who did you vote for in the last election? Independent. Let's just leave it at that.

Are all people created equal? Of course.

If I ask you nicely, will you give us your best raise the roof? (He does it. We rate him a seven.)

What's the last thing you did for money that you regret? That's the toughest one. Do I have to tell the truth? Whore myself out to a midjet.



DARREN

Will you answer the questions? That's one.

When is the last time you were in a man sandwich? Never.

Will you teach me a word? Yes.

Darren, please teach me a word? Glacier biathlon. Each person gets a set of skis and a rifle. First one to get a cougar wins.

What would you do for five dollars? I'd have to answer five questions.



PAUL

When is the last time you huffed apple cider vinegar? Dude, I don't huff it. I just drink it straight.

How long will it take you to touch your toes? It depends on how many I've had to drink, dude.

When is the last time you got jiggy with it? I won't answer that one. (While his friend makes numerous jokes about dipping IT in the kiddie pool.)

What is your favorite Atari game? Pong. That's that old ping-pong ping-pong game.

What's the most you ever paid for a pair of socks? Usually I just...nah...eight bucks, I guess.



SARAH

What are the women in the kitchen doing? Making food for themselves, I hope. Or waxing their [snow]boards.

How excited are you on a one-to-ten scale? Maybe like a four.

What's on TV? A bunch of bullshit. Actually, propaganda bullshit fed to us by the rich fucks of the world.

When will the world end? Well, I think our sun will turn into a red giant in 500 billion years. I figure it will end. If you mean an end to civilization, as soon as Bush decides.

Would I look better in a black leotard? If you wanna go for a tight half-spandex shirt like European men or whatever. So it shows your nipples.



DAN-L

Who is your muse? What's a muse? (Rated Rookie explains.) Everybody but myself.

When is the last time you bitch-slapped somebody? Yesterday.

Will you tell us about it? Stupid dumb bitch wanna be a stupid dumb bitch then I gotta slap her.

Got any bruises? Fuck yeah.

Can we see them? (See photo.)

Eat This, Walt Whitman

Cal Begun Might Be a Genius —
Or The Worst poet Brooklyn's ever known

By Josh Bernstein



PHOTO: ALEX SCHAEFER

It's Monday night in a Brooklyn coffee shop and Cal has brought a compliment from Bensonhurst: "My wife wanted to tell you she liked your story about your, you know, circumcision," Cal Begun says, pointing toward his lap. "She was laughing all over the house." I thank Cal and sip my scalding coffee: It's not every day a 76-year-old ex-computer programmer with an acrostic poetry obsession pays you a compliment. It's not every day you *meet* someone who writes acrostic poetry. It's not every day — wait. Do you even know what acrostic poetry is?

Think back to recess and presidential fitness tests. Fourth-grade English, perhaps? Teacher tells you to scrawl your name down the page like so:

J
O
S
H

Then Teacher tells you to write a poem describing yourself, each line starting with a letter from your name.

*J*ust about the shortest guy is me

That's an acrostic. It is to free-verse sonnets what Lincoln Logs are to an architect. To Cal Begun, though, the acrostic is a poetic art rivaling Shakespeare or Rimbaud's best. To Cal, the acrostic is the *only* kind of poetry. The puzzle and chess-loving retiree doesn't "enjoy reading other poetry because they're always writing about insignificant things like flies." Cal hates depressing poetry. He likes happy poetry, poetry that spells out people's names. And he's just about spelled all of them.

"I think I've written, oh, 500 or 600 poems," Cal says, rifling through his green, checkerboard satchel. Inside the fraying satchel are inch-thick folders — some covered with cats, others monochro-

matic — filled with Cal's favorite poems. Inside these folders — labeled Names, Birthdays, Holidays and so on because "it's the only way I can keep track" — are enough odes to choke a librarian: there are odes to gambling, flying, Hanukkah, waitresses, CVS, bus drivers, garbage men — and even one for Ramadan.

What do you know about Ramadan, Cal? You were a computer programmer for Merrill-Lynch and Oxford Health.

"Oh, I kind of read a newspaper and took all the facts and made them into a poem," Cal says, his nearly full head of hair inches from his satchel. "I don't really know too much about Ramadan."

A-ha! Red-handed! But you have to be guilty of something to be caught red-handed. Cal, the self-described Bensonhurst poet, is only guilty of scattering poetry across the Brooklyn borough. Satchel in tow, Cal spreads his acrostic love wide: "I'll give a poem to a checkout girl, a barber, a dentist; I have a poem for just about everyone," Cal says, still shuffling his papers. "I'm always asking people's names and if they're married; I have a poem for just about everything. And if I don't, I'll write it."

At that, he removes his chalk-stub fingers from his bag. His eyes twinkle as he hands me a photocopied page.

"I wrote it for someone else, but you get the idea," Cal says. In my hand is an "Ode to Joshua." A smirking teddy bear is on the page. Smiling politely, I slide the poem into my pocket. Cal returns to his bag, removing laminated bits and folded scraps. There's a note from his granddaughter, thanking him for her name poem. Another crumpled sheet acrostically exalts Wendy's. And McDonald's. And a barbershop. And a taxi company. He *has* written a poem for everyone.

I met Cal one windy afternoon at a Brooklyn small press fair. *Rated Rookie's* designer and I were sitting in the grass, hawking *Rated Rookie* to disinterested lesbians, when Cal strode up: "I'm a poet," he said. "Take a copy of my book."

He handed us a Xeroxed yellow booklet with "Poems by Cal Begun" typed across the front. We opened the booklet and found page after page of acrostic poems. There were odes to waitresses, barbers and his wife, Gloria. Eulogies for Brooklyn cronies. And paeans to Weight Watchers. An example:

Ode to Beauticians

B ecause you face an impossible job day after day
E veryone looks up to you as you go about your way
A lthough they enter looking like Medusa (the Gargoyle)
U nder your skilled hands they go out like goddesses (in oil)
T hese customers come to appear and feel great
I t's no wonder they say, "It's You I Appreciate"
C hances are they think you've been with Oleg Cassini
I 'm sure, though, you've learned from the Great Houdini
A lot of beauty is what you always create
N ot a hair is misplaced for that important date
S o how come you have trouble finding a mate?

Cryptic. Oddly creepy. Mildly misogynistic. And, not least of all, delusional genius. We were awed. "How do you like my poems?" Cal asked, pointing a bent finger at the pages. Andrew and I, pondering "Ode To Donuts" (D elicious to the palette—especially the cream), had one answer: "Fantastic, Cal," I said. "We love the poems. Can we give you a call if we want you to write one?"

Cal agreed. Two weeks later, he submitted "Ode To a Fart" (published in *RR5*). The grandfather wrote acrostic fart poems. I was ecstatic. An interview was arranged. Several months later Cal sat across from me, recounting his beginnings.

Cal Begun has two children and five grandchildren. They were born because of his initial acrostic. It was written 52 years ago for a woman named Gloria. "We'd been dating two weeks at the time, and she went away to the Catskills," Cal recounts. "And I wrote her a 'GLORIA' poem. We were married one year later." A successful beginning, yes, but Cal didn't write another poem until his grandniece's birthday 33 years later. "I don't know why I stopped, but that got me going again, though," Cal says. The Bensonhurst poet then wrote an acrostic for his employers' newsletters ("To Your Health," for Oxford Health), which was well received. He wrote a few odes for neighbors, chiropractors and Anytime Car Service. Years passed. Cal added an ode to Easter and a trip to Atlantic City. More years. More odes. More acrostics. Until Cal, after retiring from his last computer programming job with the city of New York in the late '90s, dedicated himself full-time to the things that keep his mind active: chess, crossword puzzles and, of course, acrostics.

"C

al... Cal... Cal!" I shout.

Cal's head is still inside his green checkerboard bag. He's looking for another "JOSHUA" poem, he says. I have enough, I tell him. But could you please tell me how you write your acrostics?

He looks up and bares his missing-tooth smile. "Are you sure you don't want a cookie or something first?" he asks.

"Yes, err, no. The poems. How do you write them?"

"Oh, I just think real hard about the person or situation I'm writing about," he says, "and try to make people happy." Sometimes the poems take several hours or several weeks. Cal will devise a few lines one day, then a few more another day. That is, if he's writing the poem from scratch. These days, Cal has so many poems he usually copies lines and says the same thing, but just spells it out differently. "But I always end with, 'May all your dreams come true

or something like that,'" Cal says, twirling his coffee cup.

However, Cal's cut-and-paste jobs have brought him prickly situations. A few years back, he wrote a poem in memoriam for Anthony Nucifaro, a neighborhood man who'd recently passed away. The poem was well liked. Several weeks later, another tragedy—and another Anthony. Time-conscious Cal passed the same poem to the new-Anthony mourners. Success—almost, that is, until Anthony Nucifaro's son walked into the ceremony. He looked at Cal, then at the poem, then, according to Cal, said, "Did you at least change the date on it?"

Cal smiles. Laughs. Returns to his bag. For a man who, several years ago, received 41 straight radiation treatments to cure his prostate cancer, Cal earned the right to laugh about a death snafu. Especially after Gloria, his wife, beat her cancer, too. A few rustles later, he retrieves his Hanukkah and Christmas poem. This interfaith poem was Cal's most difficult to write. He labored for weeks. Not wanting to anger anyone, Cal hoped the poem would embody the "spirit of the season." Did he do it?

C elebration time! 'Tis the joyous season.
H oliday of lights is Chanukah, but what is the reason?
A victory of the Maccabees when all seemed lost.
N ow we know. We must fight whatever the cost.
U sing oil that was meant for a day's light,
K indled, it shone for eight. What a great sight!
A miracle we see reminds us of God's ways.
H ow shall we follow him for all our days?

& Now I speak of Christmas—the holiest day of the year

C hildren always get presents, but God's message isn't clear.
H ow to deal with our mortality is heavy stuff for one.
R emember, Christ lives on and his work is never done.
I t's time for new beginnings as we prepare for the new year.
S o we vow to help our poor brethren. It's okay to shed a tear.
T omorrow we shall live in a world free from strife.
M ake today something special, as it's a wonderful life.
A ll of God's children are blessed with His love,
S o enjoy the fruits of brotherhood—our present from above.

"Did you like that one," Cal asks. "Did you?"

"Yes," I say. "I liked that one very much, Cal. But I'm wondering: Have you ever branched out beyond poems?"

"Well, I once wrote words for a song called 'Ode to the Homeless.' That one should appeal to your readers. It's about the down-and-out. Do you want me to find it for you?" Cal asks, reaching for his satchel.

I politely decline.

"Then how about hearing my 'Dentist' poem? I have that one memorized."

I agree. Cal beams beatifically. Then with much finger-wagging, and the glint of a man telling a well-rehearsed joke to people who always, always get the punchline, recites the poem with all the requisite tooth-and-pain jokes.

I sip my coffee and smile the smile my mom taught me to give Rabbi Fox when he pinched my cheeks.

"You see," Cal says, looking straight ahead, "I try to write inspirational stuff. I try to make people happy. Do you want to hear another poem? I have a poem for everything."

If you want Cal to write a poem for your special occasion, send an email to: GrandpaCal@aol.com. Or, write: Cal Begun, 1949 66th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11204. ☺

I Try to write Inspirational Stuff I Try to
make people happy Do you want to hear
Another poem? I have a poem for everything

Where My Sheets Have No Shame:

10 PLACES I DIDN'T DO IT

Little Pigeon River: Gatlinburg, Tennessee

Baby, I love you, but how are supposed to hump in an inner tube? Watch out for the rock!

My Parents' Hot Tub: Dayton, Ohio

Twelve masseuse-worthy jets. Ten oscillating water streams. Seating for eight. My parent's hot tub was my number-one cause of masturbatory fantasies between the ages of 14 and 18. Oh, I'd ravish Julie from Algebra, the underwater light illuminating all. Cheryl would shudder when I took her on my mom's orthopedic headrest. Tari's moans would mingle with the 106-degree steam, drifting deep into my suburban subdivision. The sexual reality: a failed experiment with Canola oil, a water jet and my finger.

Tenement Apartment: New York City

Wow. Your apartment is really...great. I really like the toilet in the kitchen. Is the shower your living room? Sweet. Yeah, I'm sleepy, too. In that loft? Don't you hit your head? Okay, but why does chicken wire cover your windows? Oh, old tenants had chickens. So you've got your pants off. I've got my pants off. Do I have a what? Shit. Yeah, well, it was nice meeting you, too.

Some saps are haunted by the ones that squirmed away. I'm tormented by the places. Like an AAA guide to my failed sexual landscape, this is where my sheets have no shame.

By Josh "I Swear I'm Not Impotent" Bernstein

Taco Bell Bathroom: Little Rock, Arkansas

Holy bejesus, is that hot sauce or blood on the floor?

Some Beach: Riomaggiore, Italy

The Italian Riviera was so goddamn romantic. A rocky beach. Three bottles of wine. Seclusion. The all-access cloak of night. I was so ready for a slow-motion sexing, the kind movies soundtrack with "Take My Breath Away." My do-it-yourself sex kit was complete save for the disclaimer: Girl not included.

Burning Man: Black Rock Desert, Nevada

Woeee! A utopian community in the middle of the desert! Pass me the 'shrooms! Hey, hit me with the Jack Daniels. Wanna go to the communal sex tent? Whoa, a seminar for masturbators. I am, like, so gonna get laid! If my tent is a rockin' don't come a knockin'! Hahaha—what? I have to share a tent with another dude? No one told me about sandstorms. Why is it raining in the desert? Why am I so dehydrated? Please don't let me die.

NO SUCH NUMBER
New York, N.Y. 10012



PHOTO: SUSAN HICKMAN



Rooftop: Astoria, New York

My rooftop, with its full-on NYC skyline view, was perfect for squooshy city passion. New York! New Yo-o-o-o-o-o-r-k! I am a part of it. However, fantasies ignored my roof's three-inch layer of spongy, silver-and-black toxicity. After rolling on the roof, a schmutz-covered girl and I resembled extras in a coal miner porn.



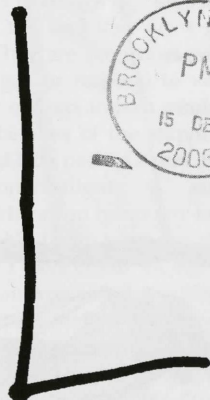
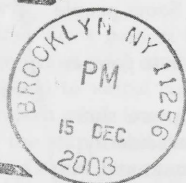
PHOTO: TIM MCKEE

Tiffin Hall: Athens, Ohio

"Man, chicks *dig* psychedelic posters!" the head shop employee said, winking. Impressionable and still wearing boxers my mother bought, I purchased an iridescent mushroom poster. I duct-taped it to my freshman dorm wall, above my Pac-Man-sheeted bed. Combined with Geoff's Bob Marley poster, I envisioned our boxy room as Spanish fly to suburban co-eds. Oh, hindsight, how you make me laugh! You should be a comedian!

Colt Vista Station Wagon (Baby Blue): Suburban, Ohio

Three rows of polyurethane seating meant triple the possibilities. The possibilities! Sheepskin-covered seats that reclined *all the way*. A hatchback trunk. And—dirty bird, you—a stick shift. The Colt Vista was Japan's mid-'80s answer to the Astrovan, the scene of untold teenage deflowering. But even with seven seats, I only deflowered my transmission.



Crack Alley: Denver, Colorado

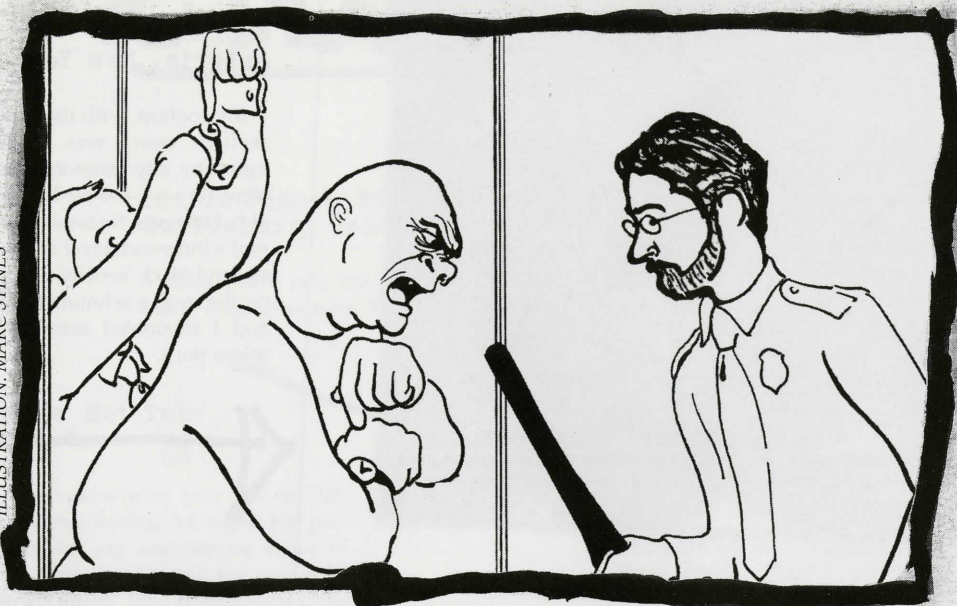
On your leisurely tour of Denver's crack alleys, make sure to visit these scenic locales:

1. Mount 40-Ounce
2. The Bum Homestead
3. Needle Mile
4. Cat-or-Rat Street
5. Failed Sex With Josh Bernstein Bend



PHOTO: TIM MCKEE

ILLUSTRATION: MARC STINES



By Claire Zulkey

SO WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU DO, MARC STINES?

They usually end up an inch away from getting the cops called because of the stupid shit they do. One 80-year-old lady packed a gun in her purse to shoot terrorists on the flight.

I conduct a lot of interviews, and when I got a friendly email to do one on people with interesting-yet-everyday jobs for this publication, I said, "Sure! No problem!" Then I promptly pushed the deadline back several weeks because what turned out to be "no problem" involved a deacon at my local church who for some reason had a problem with talking with me about what it takes to ring the church bells. Bastard. Oops! Sorry, God.

Fortunately, I had a backup plan. A fellow I know made the quite natural transition from working at a multi-story Banana Republic on the glittering Magnificent Mile here in Chicago to handling security duties at O'Hare International Airport. When I found this out, I was full of questions. Fortunately, I got these down on paper.

Claire Zulkey: How did you end up working security at the airport?

Marc Stines: A friend worked for the HR company doing the hiring for the security firm. I got the scoop and went for it. The real story is the hiring process, nearly two full days of mental and physical assessments. But the real trial was the paperwork. I had to recall everything I had done for the past seven years. I can tell you that right offhand I couldn't recall shit, and certainly not my parents' social security numbers.

CZ: What else can you tell me about the hiring process?

MS: Well, it was about two full days of training, with 16 hours of paperwork. Then there were physical exams, and I had to give a urine sample

for drug testing. Also, they tested your proficiency in English on the computer.

CZ: How hard was it?

MS: So easy. Just testing fill in the sentence and present and past tense and stuff. Some people didn't do so well, though.

CZ: Do you work for one airline or do you get shifted around?

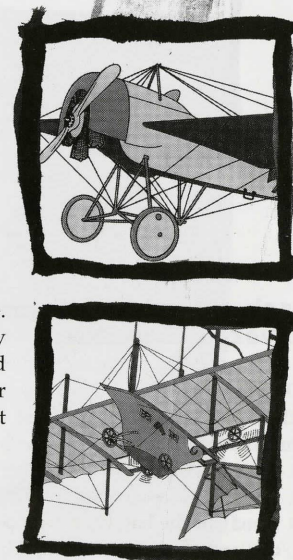
MS: I get shifted around. There are shift bids, and what you get depends on seniority. Right now I'm at a pretty sweet spot, and I handle a lot of first-class and business-class fliers. They're friendly, they know what they're doing. Once I had to work a checkpoint that had six lanes. We were handling more than half of the planes' load with a third of the workforce.

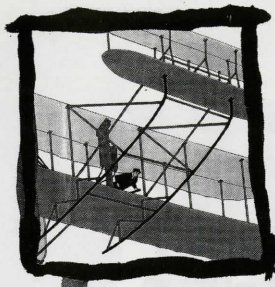
CZ: Do you think you would have considered the job if that position hadn't gained so much attention in the last few years?

MS: I actually hadn't heard about the TSA before I applied. I live under a stone in a cave, current events-wise. I had always wanted to run the X-ray when at the airport. I never would have thought of actually trying for that job. Even as a kid it is easy to spot the jobs that suck.

CZ: What are your coworkers like, are they similar age/positions as you?

MS: I work with every kind of





But some people just don't give a fuck. One woman asked for a female screener and then yelled, "Don't look at my vibrator!"

person imaginable. Old men and women. Kids just out of high school. I work with people of all ages, races and genders (if you include hermaphrodites as a gender). All these people are fuckin' crazy in one way or another.

CZ: What have been some of the more unusual things you've seen on the job?

MS: The most unusual things are actually very common. It is just creepy to put the face to the sex toy. And that is what everyone wants to know if we have seen. We see a lot of porn and sex toys. Valentine's Day has the highest concentration of dildos. I saw a woman's bag on the X-ray with only a change of clothes, a bottle of wine and a dildo that looked like a deer antler. The other unusual stuff breaks down to how stupid the passengers suddenly become once they set foot on airport property. Suddenly they lose the ability to read signs right in front of their faces, literally in front of their faces. I see people move the sign out of their way to get through the line, then claim to not have seen it when we ask them why they didn't remove the laptop from the bag.

CZ: How do you handle it when you find a vibrator?

MS: Just common sense, don't wave it around, take it to a private screening area. But some people just don't give a fuck. One woman asked for a female screener and then yelled, "Don't look at my vibrator!"

CZ: Do you ever see people who seem really sad, or upset to be flying?

MS: Yes, and they are a pain in the ass to deal with. They are paralyzed with anxiety. They can't read signs or respond to verbal commands. They usually end up an inch away from getting the cops called because of the stupid shit they do. One 80-year-old lady packed a gun in her purse to shoot terrorists on the flight.

CZ: Have you heard any bomb jokes?

MS: No bomb jokes are allowed. If we hear the words "I have bomb" in any order in the same sentence you won't be flying that day. It is not a joke to us. Chances are if a bomb were found at the checkpoint, guess where it would be detonated.

CZ: How seriously do you take the job? I mean, do your supervisors tell you things like "people's lives are in your hands," etc.?

MS: Based on the last answer, we take it pretty seriously. Lives are in our hands. If the security on September 11th didn't let the box cutters [on board] the incident would not have occurred... Given that, I wonder why so many people still pack box cutters.

CZ: Why do people have to take their laptops out of their bags?

MS: Because we said so. Just take it out of the fuckin' bag and stop making it so hard for everyone. So we can get a clear image on the X-ray. Given that information, can you imagine why people still go ahead and put the bag back on top of the computer?

CZ: Where would you be working if the economy

was great and you could be anywhere you wanted?

MS: I don't know. I don't like jobs. I would like to be my own boss.

CZ: How long do you think you'll stay in airport security?

MS: I have no idea. I thought that I'd be out of here by now.

CZ: Do you like your job?

MS: Sometimes. Like right now, things are slow and it's pretty easy.

CZ: Do you wear a uniform?

MS: Dark blue pants, black socks, black shoes, a white shirt with patches on it and a clip-on tie.

CZ: Why a clip-on?

MS: Security reasons, in case somebody decides to choke you and pull at your tie. Policemen wear them for the same reason.

CZ: What are some of the dumbest questions people have asked you after you told them you worked airport security?

MS: What are some of the most unusual things you've seen on the job? I'm kidding. That is the most common question. People want to know other people's dirty secrets or want to know if we are really safer with the TSA, "Are y'all catching terrorists?" No, I can't say I've caught a terrorist. I doubt any will be bothering us for a long time. I do, however, stop a lot of garden-variety wackos and possible murderers from bringing weapons on the plane. I'm more afraid of pissed-off, recently laid-off airline workers killing people than any Arab. Remember the term "going postal"?

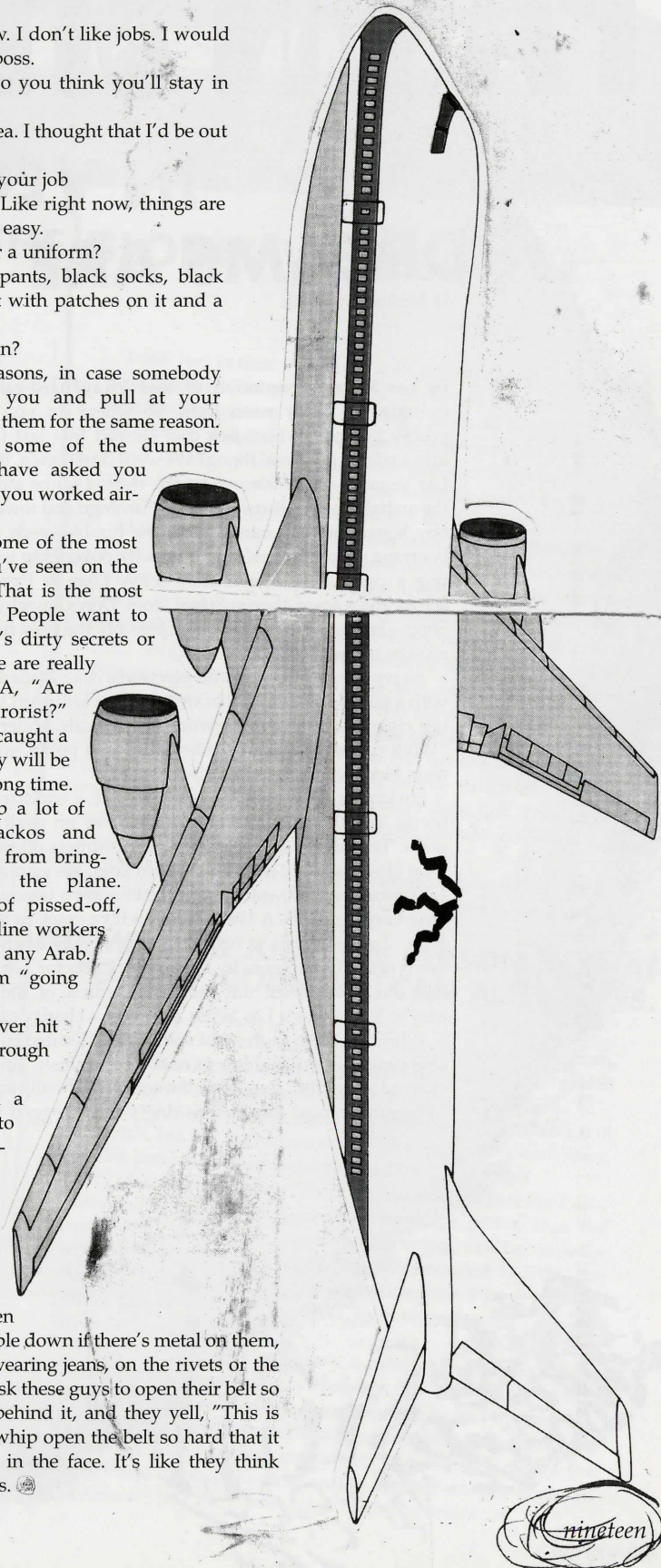
CZ: Have you ever hit on anyone going through security?

MS: I've flirted a little bit but I need to keep that to a minimum to keep it professional.

CZ: Have you dealt with air-ragging flyers?

MS: Sometimes.

There are times when you have to pat people down if there's metal on them, like if somebody's wearing jeans, on the rivets or the belt buckles. So I'll ask these guys to open their belt so I can check it and behind it, and they yell, "This is bullshit!" and then whip open the belt so hard that it practically hits you in the face. It's like they think they're Indiana Jones.



PAWN SHOP TALK

IN VEGAS, DREAMS ARE 10 CENTS ON THE \$

By Michael Quiñones

In Las Vegas, temptation to toss away hard-earned cash twinkles in every neon light. So where do you go when you've busted on blackjack and shoved that last George W. into a silicon goddess' thong? We went downtown, the heart of Las Vegas in the 1950s, where the dusted taupe streets offset the archaic flash of Bugsy Siegel's Flamingo and towering cowboy Vegas Vic. Out here among the tumbleweeds of a once-booming strip, you can't flip a novelty poker chip without hitting a pawn shop. We chose Stickys Loan & Pawn Shop—across the vacant thoroughfare from Don's Jewelry & Pawn Shop—because it featured quite possibly the only hand-painted sign in town.

As we opened the door, the electronic *dong* rustled up a lady with a puffy peach hairdo from behind a cardboard box, where her cigarette burned. She wore her bifocals under her chin. "What can we do for ya?" she asked in a polite, westernized rasp. Her name was Millie.

Stickys smelled metallic and old, like a sanitized nursing home. The thin, aqua carpet curled over on itself along the walls. The horseshoe of glass display counters offered a quagmire of washed-out silver and shorn gold. We estimated about 1,000 rings and 500 watches, ironic in a town famous for slack time-keeping skills. A 1980s Nikon with a crack in the lens; an *Elvis' Luau* record; a Nazi-era motorcycle helmet; monogrammed fountain pens by the boxful. Collector's items? What loot did Millie shell out for the gawdiest of the decrepit? Maybe Millie was a Las Vegas anomaly: a charity case.

While we were in the pawn shop, we decided to do a little shopping. I instructed her to remove a whitish, goldish, dog-chewed ring the size of a Swedish meatball with a .357 Magnum carved into it. The ring's story begged to be told.


"Please tell me you remember the guy that came in with this," I begged, envisioning chest hair and track suits. Alas, Millie was clueless. "I couldn't tell you who brought in 90 percent of this stuff," Millie said. "I ain't been here *that* long." I asked what one might be compensated for relinquishing such an item. Millie put on her bifocals and held the ring on her fingertips. She pursed her nonexistent lips. "I'd say, oh, I guess, oh, maybe seven to 15 dollars." The price tag? Forty dollars. Not bad to look like a dime-store Soprano. Still, we had not but 14 dollars between us. We scoured our pockets, and I withdrew my year-and-a-half-old Samsung cell phone. It had started shorting out only a day earlier—I later hurled it against the hotel room wall. "That's not going to cut it, sweetie," Millie said when I explained the phone's defects. "No resale value."

Resale value? And what about the tarnished shaving-kit instruments, the prototype fax machine, the bowling balls? "Do you see many sporting goods stores around here?" Millie chided. We hadn't, though bowling alleys were noticeably absent, too. Millie, hands on hips, waxed nostalgic: "Back when the conventions were down here, this place had a run on everything. They had a run on crucifixes. You believe that?" Vegas provokes lots of repentance and marriage—we could believe it.

In all the faded pawn glory, one hocked item stood out: the slightly bow-curved sword in a finished wood scabbard hoisted up on its mount. Millie looked at the weapon like she had won a trophy. "That sword is from World War II; it was used by the Japanese. A katana. An old vet brought it in a while back. He said he was fighting on some island in the Philippines and captured it from a Japanese officer, a major, I believe." Millie's pride turned into a disappointed nod, scolding the old soldier's ghost. "I guess the guy was pretty tanked. He was showing off his war tattoos. Said he'd be back to get it."

"What do you think he got for that?" I asked. An evening at the roulette wheel? Another round of drinks? A showgirl fantasy come true?

Millie snapped. "I know what he got. A lot of regrets."

I told Millie we'd come back for the sword after we won it big. "If I had a nickel for every time..." Millie said. We stepped out onto the thoroughfare, where we saw a posting, "The Lady Luck Casino: Hot dog and Beer, 99 cents." We walked there under the desert sun, and spent our money well. 



FIERCE DETACHMENTS

DISPATCHES FROM THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

By Meghan Aftosmis



I wept with fear my first night in Romania. That long, gray day closed around my new Communist-bloc apartment building and the feral dogs started barking. I couldn't stop the tears—the new world surrounded me and there wasn't a bread crumb leading back to my own. Abandoned.

Logically, I knew this feeling would lessen. *Adjust, Meghan, let yourself adjust.* For my first international excursion, I studied in Spain for three months. Other Americans accompanied me then to ease the shock, but it was there, and had passed. This would, too; slowly, when I made a friend at work that week; and the next when I made three friends, relatives of friends from home; and the next when I met a Romanian-American girl my age. I forced myself from my shell. I shed my preconceived beliefs. I introduced myself

IF ANYTHING WILL ROCK A MCDONALD'S-EATING, BUSH-RULES MINDSET, IT'S TRAVEL.

to strangers. By the end of three months, I had a life, in Romania, if only as a temporary magazine intern, and I liked it.

I loved the people: the middle-aged men in the office trying their rough English with me; the young couple who made me part of their family; the 20-something women forever up for hitting the town and who always, always knew the new places; the mother and daughter at work who took me in as daughter and sister respectively; my two editors who made work fun with their easy-going nature; even the young man who forced the music of Johnny Cash and other American country "greats" on my ears while simultaneously explaining what the U.S. could do for Romania. I owe these people my passion for their country.

While I submerged myself in Romanian culture and examined the globe from a non-Americacentric point of view, I found reason for my travel-writing profession. If I could make one person pack a bag and trek to another country—even if only for the beloved American long weekend—I would feel successful. If anything will rock a McDonald's-eating, Bush-rules mindset, it's travel. And meeting just one person in that "other" country—it is so often the taxicab driver or that person you stop on the street for directions—can alter lives.

This is my dream: I scan atlases and ponder far-flung locales and the people who call it home. Who are they? What stories will they tell? Will I even understand it? Recently, I was inches from quitting my job and packing my bags for these tales. But before testing unemployment, I reconsidered the logistics of that kind of travel. Rewarding, yes; fiscally possible, no. In the end, I started listening for stories in my backyard. The world was here, if only I opened my eyes.

I did. Just in time for dinner with a friend and her Australian mate, Richard Jones, or "Stretch" to friends because of his six-foot, six-inch stature. Besides being a foot and a half taller than me, Stretch and I quickly cemented our common passion for travel. He thought of nothing better than meeting a family member or friend overseas, taking time to catch up and understanding their daily routine. He nailed it. Could anything be better?

How about the insane amount of traveling Australians expect is the norm? While most friends who've graduated in the past ten years have maybe road-tripped across America or taken two weeks to travel some foreign land, Stretch often takes three-to-six-week jaunts. Four times in five years, to be exact. He's hit the U.S., Singapore, England, Switzerland, Greece, Trinidad and Tobago and Thailand, to name a few. And for a 29-year-old Aussie from Calliope, he tells me this is below average.

"After college, probably the most popular thing to do is to travel to the UK, Canada or Ireland and to use these countries as a base to gather funds to explore nearby countries," he says. "My sister and a few other friends have done that. They're generally looking to see the sights, whilst not always working in their chosen careers."

While my old and new friend reminisced over college memories and friends from Central Queensland University in

AND MEETING JUST ONE PERSON IN THAT "OTHER" COUNTRY CAN ALTER LIVES.

Rockhampton, I wondered, if we all—meaning every American, Afghani, Brazilian, Chinese and on and on, everyone—traveled more, would there be so much conflict in the world?

All my idealism won't allow me to pretend that travel will stop wars, but if it puts a face on the "foreign" and lessens fears, could it break down the barriers that allow us to hate?

My ideas are not unique. The International Institute For Peace Through Tourism, a non-profit based on a vision that the world's largest industry, travel and tourism, can become the world's first global peace industry, was founded in 1986. But maybe I'll take it one more step, which even I barely like to admit. Maybe to start, you don't have to pack your bags and leave for another country.

The other day on the subway, I overheard two teens. One Caucasian boy was telling a Hispanic boy how much of that morning's Spanish-language church service he had understood. He added that he had understood more because the other boy's mom often yelled at them in Spanish. I smiled. Yes, maybe the shock value of abandonment within another culture is not so valuable; it's just the introduction that's important. ☺

EATING ABOVE THE 49TH PARALLEL

By Rachel Sklar

A CANADIAN'S GUIDE TO CANUCK CUISINE

When I was a single-digit youth, my parents would take a break from their three kids and head from our home in Toronto to Las Vegas, leaving us with our Zaida, who always threatened to pull off his belt if we were bad but never so much as reached for the buckle (Zaida was all talk). At my age, I had no concept of what earthly delights my parents might know in Vegas; I was interested only in what I'd get upon their return. The house would vibrate with rising garage doors, and three kids and a dog would shoot for the front door in time to collide with our parents, who in my memory wore only the funkier of '70s duds and the glow of their swingin' weekend.

Who cared about their glow? I was interested in their booty: three big brown paper bags filled with candy, one with the name "Rachel" written across it in my mom's trademark magic marker. This "Las Vegas," it seemed, was a giant candy store, filled with sweet and endless

veiled not at what I could find, but what I *couldn't*: namely, Smarties and Coffee Crisps and Aeros and Dairy Milks and Crispy Crunches. Crunchies? Nope. Mars Bars? Nowhere in sight, though suspiciously similar to the vastly inferior Milky Way. Your Kit Kats were waxy and slightly stale, your York Peppermint Patties no Pep, and I couldn't find a Malteser to save my life. As for the Caramilk Secret—like the fourth son in the Passover Haggadah, you guys didn't even know to ask the question (look it up, my goyische friends, you've got Google).*

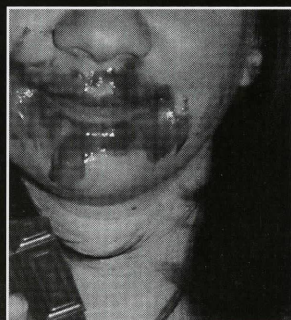
Nonetheless, 10 years later I moved to New York, secure knowing that decent chocolate was just a short-haul flight away. Over the years (five, so far), I realized two things: one, we have a lot of tasty stuff in Canada; and two, Americans shut up about Celine Dion and whether or not I said "about" pretty quickly when they're stuffing their faces with our chocolate.

for Nanaimo, British Columbia, where, incidentally, pot is legal.

Beaver Tails—Hot, fresh, tasty, sweet and moist where it matters. Fresh dough is stretched into the water-slappin' end of a beaver's tail, cooked in oil, oven-baked and served piping hot, slippery with butter and topped with something sweet, usually cinnamon sugar or something maple-related. By the way, they were pioneered by the Hooker family. No lie. Canadians love to sex it up.

Timbits—You can keep your Krispy Kreme—Canada's most ubiquitous donut chain is also its best, and pioneered the concept of the Timbit (or "donut holes" in your people's vernacular). I put away many a party pack of 65 in my time. Old-fashioned glaze, chocolate glaze, cinnamon sugar, jelly-filled—gone in two bites, but definitely not forgotten. Tim's has good coffee, too; you can "roll up the rim to win!" but that's another story.

Butter Tarts—Hard to make this one sound



PHOTOS: KELLY RIDDLE

confection in all manner of rainbow colors to widen my eyes and stain my tongue. Thus began my love affair with American candy.

"Love affair" overstates it somewhat, I suppose—my opportunities for U.S.-bred treats were few, owing to my residence north of the border and infrequent forays south of it. That, of course, just made me want your sweet Yankee goodness even more—your Baby Ruths and PayDays, your Whatchamacallits and Hundred Grands (which I had difficulty finding my first time looking, as I was not on the lookout for binary code). I marveled at the gum ("Look! Their Extra is long and fluorescent and wrapped in foil!" and the quaint terminology (Candy bars? Soda? What was this, the '50s?). That weird, semi-tasteless gum with the metallic rainbow packaging and the friendly giraffe was high on my list, too.

When I finally entered the States unchaperoned (well, sort of—on a trip to New York with my synagogue's confirmation class) I mar-

Chocolate, in fact, is only the beginning (and, truth be told, is not our triumph alone—chocomaing Cadbury is English and fanfreakingtastic). Aside from back bacon and beer (neither of which I am much acquainted with), here are a few of the culinary wonders Canada has up her long-underwear-and-bearskin-clad sleeve.

Poutine—The phrase "cheese curd" never did imply haute cuisine, but some smart Quebecker struck gold when he decided to combine it with fries and gravy. Looks kinda like someone blew chunks (to borrow a phrase from another Canadian—Mike Myers) but mmm-mmm, it hits the spot after a snowshoe across the tundra.

Nanaimo Bars—These quintessential Canadian treats are made with three layers of goodness: the thick, cookie-like bottom layer of graham cracker crumbs, cocoa and coconut; the sweet, creamy-custardy middle layer, barely crunchy with sugar; and the hard chocolate icing topping it off. They are named

good, but, Mother of God, they are beloved on our shores. Standard tart shell filled with something akin to jellied butter and a few raisins; after baking, the buttery goo turns translucent brown (crusty on top, mmm-mmm good) and gooey on the inside.

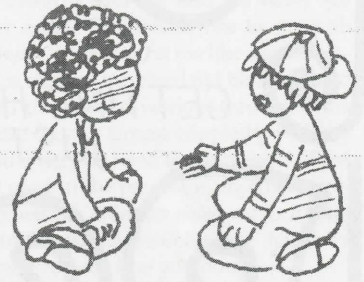
My point is not to rag on your vittles, people—I live in New York, for God's sake; trust me, I eat plenty. I'm just looking out for your best interests. Here's a secret: Canadians love being noticed and appreciated. Take an interest in the native cuisine of the nearest Canuck and I guarantee you'll be showered with treats the next time he or she heads to the Homeland. In the meantime, just try figuring out how they get the damn caramel in the Caramilk bar.

See? Not so easy.

*"How do they get the caramel inside the Caramilk Bar?" Dozens of Canadians have filed through commercials seeking the mystery's answer. ☺

AN INSECURE RUMBLE IN THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL JUNGLE

VS. ~~the Top~~ ~~the Spic~~



By Jared Jacang Maher

he called me a Japanese motherfucker. Japanese motherfucker? The bell had rung, recess was over. We were walking toward school through the large field spattered with crabgrass and dandelions. There was an incident. A soccer ball was involved. He was a short, dark-as-dark Mexican kid with greasy strands of black spaghetti hair. Joe. The recess aid shouted *Let's go, guys*, flailing her clipboard. She had a whistle and was not afraid to use it. We quickened our pace. Joe staggered and threw the ball at my head. He missed, of course. He wore eyeglasses thick and obscured as glass ashtrays. And behind those lenses were eyes that were foggy, the right one more so, with cataracts. When I said sorry, I meant *Sorry about kicking the soccer ball that hit you in the face, dude*. But when his grayish eyeballs gaped upward from the dirt, hands grubbing through weeds for glasses, I also meant *Sorry about your eyes*.

We entered school. Joe was in a different sixth-grade class, so he disappeared through another door. But when I returned to my classroom, Mike—the legendary instigator of fights—was whispering his way from desk to desk. I heard Joe's name, then my name and, finally, my new name. Mike came up to me, his braided rat-tail wriggling: *You gonna let him call you that?*

It felt written this would happen as my first week drew to a close. As a new kid, my mystique was a reeking cologne of introversion and indifference alerting anyone within sniffing distance that, yes, I was way too cool. My previous school operated under a system of middle schools rather than junior highs. This meant I began sixth grade at a middle school, only to transfer back to elementary school's sticky-palmed world. Ring, ring, children, time for recess.

Recess is so gay, I thought. Middle school had changed me in a way unimaginable to these kids. But I was careful not to appear condescending to my new classmates. I choreographed my comments mindfully, letting remarks drop like loose-leaf paper: (1) *What, no lockers?* (2) *I can't seem to find the snack bar.* (3) *Wait, so we only have one teacher all day?* And if anyone asked, I would have reluctantly told them that, just last month, I fingered a girl at the RollerRama. (Like my new persona, this was half true. There actually was a girl, and she was

roller skating—and I did have fingers, so...) Regardless, my classmates' murmurings of adulation when I sharpened my pencil and grinding respect when I ts-k-ts-ked the handprint cutouts that fluttered in the hallways meant this: Reinventing yourself was never so simple.

But Mike, that fat fuck, wouldn't shut up his fucking fat fuck face.

That's messed up, he said to a group of girls. Their six-inch bangs bowed as they nodded in agreement. Mike, arms folded, said that if he was me, he wouldn't let Joe get away with it.

You know why? He paused, waiting for a response.

Why? the tallest bang finally said.
'Cause that's racist.

Racist? Hmm, I hadn't thought of that. Besides me, Joe was the only non-white kid in sixth grade. And Joe was wrong, anyway. I was Filipino, not Japanese. If someone called a black kid a spic, was that still a racial slur?

But what I counted as linguistic limbo my peers branded racism. Cut-and-dried. Inexcusable. My classmates, buoyed by a collective memory of Martin Luther King Day biography videos and Harriet Tubman storybooks, conveyed their sympathies and outrage. *Wasn't I pissed?* they asked. It was the most anyone talked to me all week. I told them I didn't know. Matt Greenwald rose and told a story about the time he and his brother rained eggs onto a neighbor's house who, aside from being a regular racist cocksucker, was totally a Nazi too. A chorus of *Yeahs*. Their eyes burned with self-righteousness, a symptom of maturity.

I bent over and adjusted my jeans, tight-rolling the cuffs around my ankles like two angry, pursed lips. My image was fading. I was once more the weak one that needed defense and protection. Not again. Not at my new school. The worst thing a person could be, I reasoned a week ago, was not just to be a joke, but a joke people laughed at because they pitied the person telling it. To be a child among children. Was that me again?

No, I told myself.

Mike and the bangs nodded at me. I, slouching coolly into my chair, nodded back.

I left class at 3 p.m. Like a half-moon guided by my gravity, a cacophony of sixth graders bounded behind, hungry and chattering. We found Joe waiting for his mom on the concrete path in front of school. I walked up to him. He looked at me. He looked at the hoard circling him. He turned to me again, squinting through his ashtrays like we were in a dark room and I was a shadow.

Me, matter-of-factly: *You called me a Japanese motherfucker.*

Joe, smirking, unsure: *Nuh.*

Again, me: *You named me something not my name.*

Joe, confused, putting down his backpack: *Huh? So?*

So. I was scared of him. I was scared of stopping. I was scared of the kids surrounding us. So I hit him.

I remember thinking fighting felt different than I expected, like your first slow dance at the sixth grade social—you are both sweaty, unsure of the mechanics of your bodies and wondering if you are doing everything completely wrong. *Am I doing this right?* I wanted to ask as I swung blindly toward his head. *Don't worry*, I thought before kicking him, *this will soon be over and we can go back to who we are*. He tottered backward. *Others are watching; you're doing great*. I grasped his hand firmly, held it for a tiny moment, and bent his fingers until he squealed to the ground. When I kneed Joe in the face his glasses spun off his head and pirouetted in the air, flashing chunks of afternoon sun onto me. I blinked. The glasses hit the flagpole with a *bingggggg*. Joe and I stopped, panting heavily. We looked at the kids hopping with excitement, shouting our names, white faces contorted with ecstasy. The Spic. The Japanese Motherfucker. We raised our small, knotted fists, peeking around for a teacher to stop the fight. None came; we looked harder. Then we continued—the cheering, our dance steps. Both our eyes, his and mine, too fogged-over to see much beyond anything.

GETTING HIT ON BY YOUR THERAPIST
JUST ISN'T SEXY

PSYCHO THERAPY

A By Xhenet Aliu

Andre handed me a droopy-eyed porcelain hound dog. "I bought this for Franki," he said. "It reminded me of her. Always walking around with her tail between her legs."

Franki was Andre's ex-wife. She had died of cancer a couple weeks earlier. I held the statuette in my hand and mustered my most sympathetic half-smile.

"You remind me of her, you know? So desperate to take care of others, but unable to accept care from anyone else."

I nodded, if only to move the conversation along.

"The freak who can neither love nor be loved," he continued. "But it's just a god-damned lie, okay? You better believe me on this, girl. You're beautiful. Beautiful." He was crying. "I'm sorry about this. There's just so much pain."

"It's okay," I said, and continued fingering the hole in the arm of his vinyl chair. Comforting people has always made me, uh, uncomfortable.

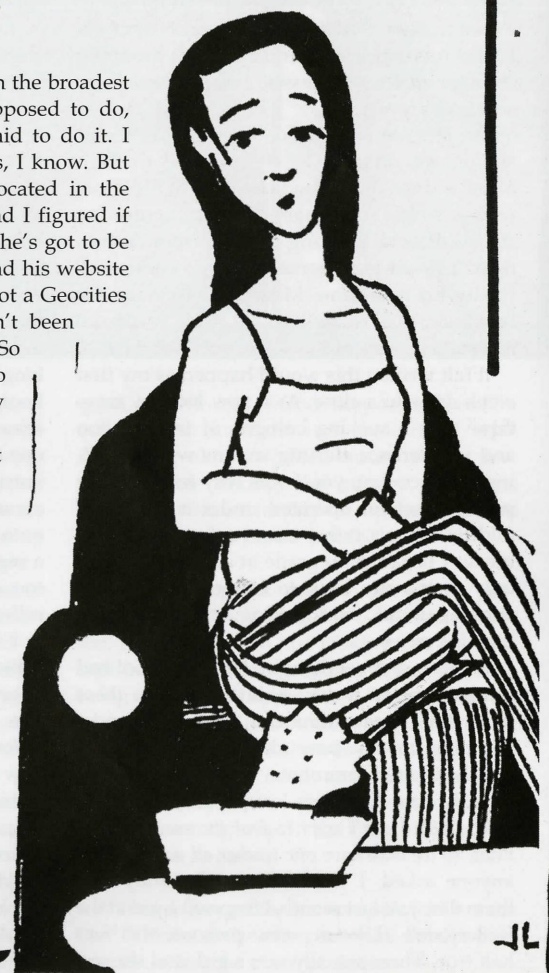
"So how much do I owe you?" I finally asked.

"For this week and last. \$120."

See, Andre was my therapist. Analyst. Shrink. Call it what you will. Don't you worry about what brought me to him in the first place. That's not relevant to the story, or to

this story anyway. You know in the broadest terms what therapists are supposed to do, and you know that they're paid to do it. I found him on the Internet. Yes, I know. But his practice/apartment was located in the heart of Greenwich Village, and I figured if he can pay the rent there then he's got to be somewhat well established. And his website was a fairly professional job, not a Geocities personal homepage that hadn't been updated in three or four years. So I bit. This is how I've come to judge one's respectability, by the quality of their website.

My first appointment was set for a hot, humid June day. I rang, and a white-haired, thick-featured man in denim short-shorts opened the door. A *West Side Story* poster hung on the wall. *He's gay*, I thought. Score. I've always felt most comfortable around gay males. And for a while it was fine, or at least as fine as therapy sessions get—I'd bitch or cry or make broad sweeping proclamations regarding the state of Xhenet, and then I'd write a check





for \$60. I didn't necessarily feel, you know, *treated*, but I got to whine for 45 minutes or so, and there are few other opportunities to indulge that.

But the sessions intensified over the next few months, and by intensified, I don't mean delved deeper into my psyche. He began crying as he spoke about September 11th. *Okay*, I thought, *it was an emotional time for all*. I'll allow him that. But a few weeks later, he cried as he talked about *The City of Lost Children*, a film he'd viewed almost weekly since its 1995 release. Then he cried over my "amazing, deep eyes" and my "father hunger." *But Xhenet*, I'd tell myself, *you know you can't quit. He's not making you uncomfortable, you're making you uncomfortable. This is how normal humans form bonds. You're the freak.*

So I continued, and thankfully many of the sessions didn't revolve around his emotional breakdowns. They revolved around sex. I brought up a filmmaking class I was taking, and he responded by telling me about his amateur filmmaking foray, an updated Juliet story in which several Juliets and one Romeo recite their iambic pentameter in lingerie. And he liked buying the lingerie. A lot. He'd prod about my romantic life—"So, have you fucked Kevin? Where?"—and he'd respond to my generic answers by talking in detail about his girlfriends—yes, girlfriends—and how the *Kama Sutra* taught him how to entwine their bodies for optimum sensitivity and extended durations. Still, though, I convinced myself that this was treatment. I'm generally uncomfortable with intimate exchanges, and maybe this was how I'd overcome my frigidity. Maybe this had all been conceived. Maybe he's really a psychoanalytic genius.

So when he said my progress wasn't coming along as it should, and that he'd like to increase our sessions to twice a week, I agreed.

With plenty more time to kill, he began playing records during our session. "Listen to this," he'd say, and put on Joni Mitchell's *Ladies of the Canyon*. (I was Estrella, Circus Girl, Wrapped in Songs and Gypsy Shawls.) Or he'd read passages from books. (I was either Madame Bovary or Anna Karenina, I can't remember.) By this time, I'd mostly just show up and sit in my usual chair without taking off my coat, and for minutes at a time I'd be silent. I told him I was tired of listening to myself whine. Or, between records or classic literature, I'd talk about what I ate for dinner or what cities I'd like to visit, anything that would show as little insight into my inner psyche as

possible. I mentioned that I was hoping to get a four-track recorder. He perked at this.

"Really?" he said. "Have you researched them?"

"Yeah," I said.

"Why don't you show me which one it is?"

"Um, alright," I agreed. I followed him into the bedroom, where he kept his computer. It was my second time in there, the first being when he showed me the trailer to his Juliet movie. By this time I would not use his bathroom because it seemed too intimate, and I'm sure I visibly squirmed while standing beside his bed. I directed him to samash.com and the

I CONTINUED SEEING HIM. THANKFULLY,
MANY OF THE SESSIONS DIDN'T REVOLVE
AROUND HIS EMOTIONAL BREAKDOWNS.
THEY REVOLVED AROUND SEX.

machine I'd been considering, a time-tested Tascam that sold for \$250.

"I'll get my credit card. We'll get it for you today," he said.

I jumped from the seat. I mean, 'twas the season, but, crazy as I might be, I thought therapist generosity should be capped at the lowest fee on the sliding scale. "Really," I said, "That's not necessary. I'm sure I'll be getting it for Christmas," though I wasn't sure at all.

"Okay," he said. And crazy as I might be, I swear he sounded disappointed.

By now I was through with Andre. Yet when my roommate asked if I'd had a good session, I'd tell him that yes, it was fine. But I'd find excuses to cancel. I picked up a second job and told him I couldn't make it very often, and he asked if I was sure I could handle that. I assured him I was. When I made it to a Saturday appointment at the end of December, my first in several weeks, he asked me if his generous offer made me uncomfortable.

"Well, yes," I'd said. But we scheduled the next appointment anyway. I reluctantly wrote out a \$240 check for the past four sessions.

On the way out the door, he handed me a book, Rebecca Miller's *Personal Velocity*. Apparently I reminded him of a central character. I wondered if that character also reminded him of Estrella, Circus Girl and Madame Bovary.

"It's nothing," he said of the gift. "It's no recorder. I just thought you'd enjoy it." I thanked him and, as I stepped out onto Bleeker Street, began thinking of excuses to cancel the next appointment.

I didn't need to. The following Monday, I received an email from Andre:

Subject: Your Therapy

Xhenet,

I'm writing to tell you that it would best if you stop therapy with me and we never see each other again. The reason has to do with Franki's death which has hit me like a giant harpoon and is making me bleed old blunders and hurts that I thought I'd worked through years ago. I realize they've almost crippled my ability to give you what you need in the present. What you don't need in the present is impulsive gestures of generosity from an older man chasing ghosts, broken boundaries in therapy that serve only to pressure and close you down.

Please consider the The National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis, a highly reputable place, for your future therapy: www.npap.org; especially their referral service which'll get you an even lower fee than you paid me: www.npap.org/referral_service.html. What you need now is a solid, conservative therapist who can see deep and is relatively contented—I'll never say happy—in his or her personal life; a therapist who won't deluge you with emotional currents that have virtually nothing to do with your own valid, complicated struggle to find and show your true self. In Rebecca Miller's *Personal Velocity*, the one heroine that reminds me most of you is Louisa, not for the cause of her struggle, i.e., her obsession over the loss of Seth, but for her compulsive behavior with men. You've taught me that your obsession is the freak who can neither love nor be loved by anyone, that horrible, disgusting worm in your heart that drives your compulsions with men. If you've learned anything in our brief time together, please grab hold of the notion that the freak is a simple lie, a little girl's mistaken explanation for why she was deprived and manipulated, just like Louisa's flawed explanation of the loss of Seth.

In the future I promise to imagine you recording your own beautiful music, as I plod through *Guitar Coach* at least one hour a day on my magnificent, used Almansa classical nylon string, with spruce top, rose wood back and sides and ebony finger board. By Summer I hope you'll have created some original music come straight from your heart, and that I'll have attained a level of competence sufficient to play Segovia's *Platero and I* before a few trusted and supportive! friends.

Chère Mlle Xhenet Aliu, I sincerely wish you "une quadruple dose de merde" in the years ahead.

NOW I HAD MY OLD ISSUES, SOME
BRAND-NEW ONES, AND NO MONEY FOR
BOOZE TO DRINK AWAY ANY OF THEM AWAY.

MAYBE THIS HAD ALL BEEN CONCEIVED.
MAYBE HE'S REALLY A
PSYCHOANALYTIC GENIUS.

So I wasn't crazy. And, more importantly, I didn't have to see him again! So I was somewhat disturbed by his message, true, but I could deal with his aftermath if only because he was out of my life. And, despite what I considered some pretty far-out unprofessionalism, at least he'd had the sense to realize he'd used me to act out his ex-wife issues and stopped before ethics became a suggestion, not a moral code. It was a relief, actually. See, it wasn't me! It wasn't father hunger! It was all about Franki! Poor dead puppy dog Franki!

Therapy just wasn't for me—I'd stick to avoidance and denial from here on in, thank you very much. I was done with that Freudian shit. I moved right on. I continued working my crappy job and was happy to do it. Happy to file things and answer the phone, which, as is often the case on Monday mornings, was ringing.

"Good morning, can I help you?" I said.

"Xhenet? It's Andre."

Fucking hell.

"Listen, about my email... Can we meet somewhere and talk? Not my apartment, but somewhere?"

"No, I'd rather not do that," I answered.

"I know I've hurt you deeply," he said. He was, as I'd come to expect, crying. "I know you feel you've been deserted again."

I wasn't sure what he meant. Deeply hurt? Deserted? By him?

"You deserve the truth, Xhenet. What I wrote in my email simply wasn't true. I was

afraid of being rejected by you so I used Franki's death as an excuse. The truth is that I'm in love with you."

"Okay," I said. "I'm going to go now."

I hung up. I was shaking. I considered unplugging the phone for fear of picking up the receiver and hearing his voice on the other end. But as the secretary, that was out of the question. In the end, such measures weren't necessary. He never called again.

He did write, though.

Subject: A cowardly act that needed to be owned up to

Just for the record. I promise never, ever to contact you again.

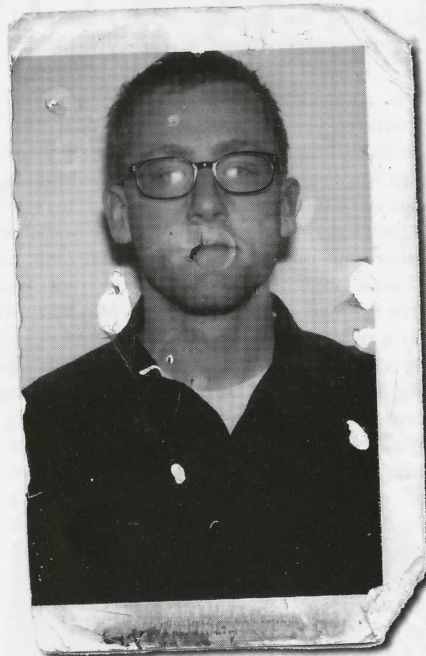
The truth is my letter wasn't about my chasing ghosts from 20 years ago and projecting them onto you. The letter was a screen carefully designed to hide my true feelings for you. The truth is I care deeply for you. I'm falling in love with you. I know it's impossible. I know you can never feel the same about me. So I don't expect anything in return from you. But you deserve the truth. You deserve honesty from me. I hid my true feelings in that letter because I was terrified of being rejected by you. But what I did was cowardly and I know my cowardice has hurt you, deeply. It's important, absolutely crucial, for you to know that it's the real you I care about, the beautiful girl *inside* who's brave and honest and talented. And I want everything good for you. I want you to finish Rebecca Miller's book. I want you to read less Lorri [sic] Moore and more Alice Monroe. I want you to make and record original music that gives joy to your soul. I want everything good for you. And I want [sic] ever ask you for anything in return.

Well, except he kind of did ask for something in return. A few days after I received his email, I dipped my ATM card into the Fleet machine. Instead of spitting out the \$20 I requested, I received the message that my transaction could not be processed due to insufficient funds. He'd cashed the check. Yes, that check. The check intended to cover professional services ultimately not rendered. The check that could have been written to a new therapist with whom I could work to reverse the issues instilled by the old one. The check for a four-track cassette recorder. So now I had

my old issues, some brand new ones, and no money for booze to drink away any of them away. Merry Christmas, Xhenet.

My roommate insisted I report Andre to his licensing board, and I said I'd look into it. He even sent Andre an email disguising himself as a perspective patient and asking him his professional qualifications. Andre responded by sending the link to his website, which, at second look, never indicated any advanced education or licenses. I never followed through, though, and I'm fairly convinced another young woman will soon tell a similar story about her therapist Andre.

For the record, he's mostly kept his word about not contacting me again. I was included on two mass emails inviting me and everyone else in his address book to a viewing of his Juliet film at Village East Cinemas. And I was CC'd on a somewhat disturbing email apparently sent to his friend in which he bragged about his 20-plus years of UNICEF-style sponsoring of poor Palestinian girls whom he called his "Juliets." I'm still unclear as to his intentions, and I'm not going to bother with a Freudian analysis of his Juliet complex. Like I said, I'm done with that shit. ☹



this is a picture
of our friend Mike,
it takes up space.



HE'D CASHED THE CHECK. YES, THAT
CHECK. THE CHECK INTENDED TO COVER
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES ULTIMATELY
NOT RENDERED.



**» JOSH THINKS
THIS PICTURE IS FUNNY.**

COME CO-HABITATE WITH RATED ROOKIE!

Team *Rated Rookie* has rocked some roommate woe. Since relocating from Queens to a Brooklyn 'hood known for equal parts fried chicken and gunshots (but the rent, you can't beat the cheap, pre-gentrification rent!), we've entertained no fewer than nine roommates. Let's see: there was Harry, the insolvent actor who never acted like he paid bills; Ken, the hermit drummer who only abandoned his room to eat lemon cookies and drink flat Sprite; Rob, the Phoenix boy who wanted his squalor slightly less life-threatening; and a half-dozen motley photographers, engineers and designers rotating through the 562 Park Place palace. And now Jay, our internship-workin' engineering student, is returning to upstate New York. Hence, our illustrious, tenth-roommate search. We posted an ad online at Craig's List—the electronic equivalent of the world's largest corkboard/swap meet—and let the responses roll into our inbox.

So, who will it be? Mie, the Japanese model who "would like if you are French"? Or maybe Anna, whose neighborhood, Flatbush, "is getting more hostile by the minute"? Still, let's not overlook Mary, the "punk-rockin', overdrinking, nicotine-addicted financial planner and part-time cynical law student." She may be swell, but as swell as Luke, who "pay[s] on time, and occasionally get[s] laid"? But read on, dear reader, and see if you can select who we choose as the tenth member of the *Rated Rookie* household! The answer will be in RR 7. Who knows; if our roommates remain fiscally irresponsible, you, too, could live with *Rated Rookie*. Josh makes a fabulous chicken marsala and Andrew, well, he keeps a mighty clean toilet.

**Note: emails have been printed verbatim. That means, all them there errors are the fault of the wannabe renters. And being anal copy editors, this, of course, reflected mightily on our decision. I mean, if you can't use a period, will you ever do the dishes?*

HELLO
my name is

Amanda

Hi,

I am looking to live with a person or persons of the not entirely frightening variety. I'm female, 24 (almost 25), a graduate of a midwestern liberal arts school. I am fairly pleasant, a terrible cook (though I purchase excellent groceries), kind and sensitive about sleep on the weekdays (I work 9-5, damn you youngsters). I live in Astoria at present would very much like to move back to Brooklyn (and Prospect Heights in particular). The pluses of living with me are my ownership of fine cleaning supplies (or at least 409) and my access to free high-quality texts. I am deathly allergic to cats in case you have those. I am a non-smoker but I have been known to slip, if only outdoors. I don't like to dance but have no particular problem with those who do. Ring me if you please. XXX.XXX.XXXX

Amand

HELLO
my name is

BERNARD

hi, would you be interested in a 32 yo very easy going with a cat named after tito puentes? I currently live in Dumbo, but i have to move by the end of the month so, I am looking for a place in your area or within the walking distance to the atlantic Ave LIRR station. If interested call me or e-mail me. I can drop by anytime after work.

Thanks,
Bernard.

HELLO
my name is

Brooke ☺

I am responding to your ad for the room. A bit about me: I am a 27yo woman, freelance writer & occasionally working actor, gainfully employed at a trading firm in Manhattan as a research consultant. I lead an extremely active social life & do quite a bit of volunteer work. I usually spend 3-5 nights a week with my boyfriend in Park Slope, i.e. I am a bit of an invisible roommate, rarely around. What I am looking for is simply a quiet relatively neat place to unwind during my sparse down time, work on my writing, and something to show the parents when they're here so they don't think I'm living with my boyfriend-ha. I am pretty clean but not obsessively so. I do not mind pets or smoking...just hoping to find

some sane, easy-going roommates. You can email me or reach me on my cell: (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Thank you for your consideration.

All Best,
Brooke XXXXXXXX

HELLO
my name is

Mie

Hi there,

You really sounds like fun. I just moved to NY a couple days ago. I never been to NY and do not know many people yet. I am looking for nice roommates and friends. I moved here from Germany, so I apologize my bad written english. I work as an editor for a photography agency close to Union Square, so I would not be around during the week. I do not mind parties at all. I like to smoke cigarettes and drink beer even if had to find out that it is not a easy thing in NY. Oh, I forgot I am a 23 year old gay male.

I am a clean and responsible person and easy to get along with. My interests are traveling and enjoying night live. Right now staying at my friends place but it is just for a short time. I is not that easy to write about my self in english, but if you are still interested you can give a call.

Thanks, Dennis

HELLO
my name is

Dennis.

Hi. I have found your ads in village voice and i was wondering if your room is still available... i am japanese female and professinal who work in a Gallery i have done some modeling in japan and just came back. and i would like to share inrerest with someone who is into art and fashion , photography. non smoker, computer literate. i do not mind if you are m, f, smoker, non smoker have pet, gay, how old i am just flexible frendly person. i am looking for a room immediately and i just came back from japan and do not have any firniture yet.. i like to cook so i do not mind for cooking for two when i cook but i can not cook everyday, iam available to come see the apt after work tues-sat after 6:30 or my days off sun, mon.

i would like to know about your apt, if i can have the own bed room, nearest subway station and min to station., size of the room in ft., when the room will be available, the rent, dsl, phone line, nationality, i just speak 3 languages Chinese japanese French. i would like if you are french!

your name?

f/M?

is your room furnished ? if so what do you have? do you have bed and computer desk?

please let me know asap and when you will be available to show me the room.

thank you.
mie

HELLO
my name is

Mary

Hi. I'm 23. I'm a cleaned up punk rockin overdrinking nicotine addict-ed financial planner and part-time cynical law student. I make a lot of money, I think i spend most of it on bourbon and cigarettes and shoes. Good bourbon. I share.

Uhm, I want to move ASAP. Like, i would love to move this weekend. But I don't have to. I've got a place until 12.1.03.

Uhm, what else. In terms of "rules" I just want roommates who won't beat me up if i'm too drunk/lazy/tired to do my dishes the second i finish eating. I want people who let me blast obnoxious music from time to time. I want people who won't steal my flip flops and let their dog eat them and then let the same dog pee on my pile of clean clothes. I really like dogs, it's not the dog's fault.

Mary

HELLO
my name is

Yuko

Hi,

I am a 27yo female college student from Japan. I am looking for apt, and your apt sounds cool. Here is about me... I go to school and work for weekends at a hair salon. I am laid back, respectful and clean. I like to chill at home when I am there, so I don't do a party, but don't mind if my roommate does. Very east to live and get along with. I don't bother anybody unless I am bothered. oh, and last thing, I pay my rent on time.

If this sounds ok, please contact me

Yuko

If answering machine turns on, leave me a message. I will get back to you shortly.

Thank you and Have a great day.

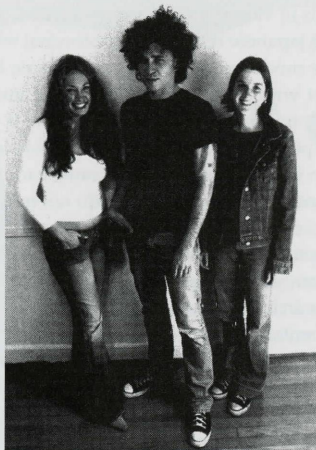


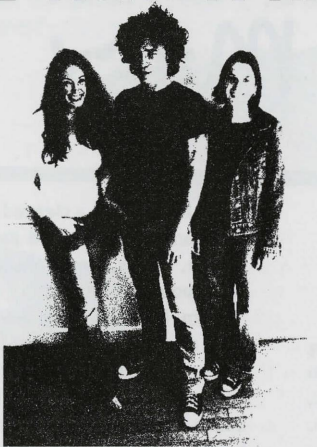
PHOTO: JILL MOORHEAD



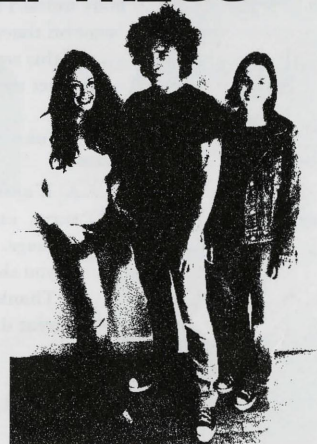
BENEATH THE FOLDS

By Jill Moorhead

A ROUNDTABLE WITH A RAPE THERAPIST,



ABORTION COUNSELOR AND PUBIC SCULPTRESS



the players

"I'm a big fan of vaginas. I'm very supportive." Meet William Randle, 28. He plays bass in a punk band and passersby might see him writing contemplatively in a coffee shop window. "I am that guy," he admits. Randle works out daily, frequents diners and tells 20 to 30 people a week—female and male—that it's okay to feel shitty, that rape happens and it's not their fault.

"One time the power went out. I had to hold the flashlight for the clinician, and I got to see all the way inside the vagina." Meet Laura LaChance, 27. She walks her dog, is a bona fide vegetarian and is sure to be at Le Tigre or Sleater-Kinney shows. She also warns women that there will be protesters outside her clinic on sunny Fridays from 9–11 a.m.

"I'm ripping your hair out with hot wax. It's supposed to hurt." Finally, meet Trista S. C. Sudy, 32. This buxom beauty was in the running for *Maxim's* Hometown Hotties. An event designer, painter and mother to half a dozen cats and dogs, Sudy is professionally certified to sculpt pubic hair into the shape of a Tiffany box and dye it blue, should her clients desire such eccentricities.

A tool for reproduction. The symbolic representation of womanhood. An inspiration for good—and bad—art. A discussion topic for men and women in bars worldwide. A script subject for Sex & The City. The vagina is culture's 10-in-1 Swiss Army knife. And, for many, a source of income. But the world's oldest profession is not alone. The bikini waxer, the abortion counselor, the rape therapist, all make a living servicing what is out of sight, but not out of mind. Let's devour the psyches of this trio, who were comfortable with vaginas long before they became associated with monologues.

voices

"I tell my grandpa that I work at a women's health clinic," LaChance says when asked how she presents her job as the manager of the only Planned Parenthood in Columbus, Ohio, to perform abortions, "but my mom is pleased. We don't talk about sex; she wasn't happy when I moved in with my boyfriend at the age of 23, but she's pro-choice. She's proud of me."

With friends, she's more open. "People are either completely silent, or voice their opinion to me. I talk to women at parties about their yeast infections. [My job is] interesting to me; if people want to talk about it, I'm usually game. I want people to know as much as I do, or more," she says. "A lot of people talk about discharge."

"I tell people that I'm a line cook at McDonald's or an art student," says Randle, who is a psychotherapist for trauma victims (survivors of repetitive rape and sexual abuse). "People look at me in horror when I tell them what I do. They ask if I can tell what they're thinking, or what the worst thing I've

ever heard is. I go through great lengths not to think about it." Randle is required to see a therapist himself, and admits to needing the hour-long sessions to deal with the stories he experiences 50 hours a week.

"Guys think it's hot," says Sudy, of her job as an aesthetician, a skin specialist. "They think it's a lipstick-lesbian fantasy. 'She comes in for the bikini wax and we wind up licking one another.' It's not like that."

Unlike LaChance and Randle, money was a draw for her profession. "I don't necessarily like it; women show up without underwear on. They want to be pampered. They want four magazines, a pillow, lemonade; they're demanding." She worked for a Victoria's Secret model who insisted on hard wax, a process that requires Sudy to pull off the wax, rather than the typical cloth strip that removes the hair. The model wanted her to go "in far." "I would have to hold skin down in very...personal areas. She'd always come in stoned."

LaChance's draw to working with Planned Parenthood was natural. She had always been a feminist, and was pro-choice. But after studying sociology, she became concerned with providing healthcare to all socioeconomic groups. "The hardest part is when I work as an educator. Women come in and say they want to have an abortion, not because they're starting college or because they just got a new job, but because they don't feel like they do enough for their children already; they feel that they're not worthy of having more. It's probably a good thing that they're having an abortion, but it's also heartbreaking, dealing with women who really have to struggle with the choice they're making."

Randle's rise to being one of the youngest—and only males—in his field was triggered by personal experience. When he was 22, he dated a girl for a year and a half without having sex. They only kissed twice. She eventually told him that she had slept with many men and was raped by her stepfather. Now, she was unable to have sex because she was in love. For her, the two did not equate. "I couldn't do anything. I hated being helpless. I hated just saying, 'I'm sorry,'" he says. "So I went into this. But I still can't do anything. I'm still helpless and can't change what happened to any of my patients. I can just listen and be human. I react to their trauma. A sympathetic witness can work wonders."

This group is the vaginal equivalent to the full-service oil change, the kind where they

replace the air filter, check the brake lights and put those paper mats down to avoid musing the car interior. Rated Rookie thought it a good idea to bring these genital compatriots together. Like a spark to three piles of gasoline, Rated Rookie asked the questions and let the experts answer. Let's listen as they join forces on men, Bush and the almighty Brazilian wax.

dialogue

Jill Moorhead: What event, person or thing has created the biggest impact in your profession in the last 10 years?

Laura LaChance: (Absolute in her answer:) George Bush. The option of abortion has definitely become more threatened. Medicaid cuts are making it harder for Medicaid patients to get birth control, to go to the doctor, to get their annuals. (Defeated, she continues) Part of our mission is to help women who don't have money or insurance to get healthcare. And that's getting cut.

JM: Could there be a possible positive outcome, concerning Bush?

William Randle: People might vote more. That's pretty much what I'm hoping for.

LL: It's opening a dialogue up for people who never considered [abortion] being threatened in the past. Now it's a real threat.

Trista Sudy: I feel like my answer's so light, after that.

(Everyone laughs.)

TS: (Confidently:) Brazilian waxing has completely revolutionized the industry.

(More laughter.)

WR: Is that the exclamation point-looking one?

TS: Yeah. Like, everything off. Both sides, around to the back. Everything. Except for that little bit. (She signifies a quarter of an inch with her thumb and forefinger.)

WR: Is it hard to get that symmetrical?

TS: I don't do them. You run a big risk of...well, the lips. It's hard to get in there. Even clients who don't really want one want to know what it is. And then you see a lot of people wanting it

THE VAGINA IS CULTURE'S 10-IN-1 SWISS ARMY KNIFE. AND, FOR MANY, A SOURCE OF INCOME.



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all off. It started in fashion magazines. Some of (*She rolls her eyes*) Hollywood's *whatever* were starting to do it—having no hair, or only a little bit—and then people were like, “Ooh, I want to be like Jennifer Aniston and have no hair.”

LL: It was on *Sex & The City*, too.

TS: That episode pissed me off. It was bogus. They made it look too easy. It's not just one strip. You have to rip in the direction of the hair growth, and then rip the opposite direction. As anyone knows, that's not all just one direction down there.

WR: (*Hands in air*;) I didn't know that. I never really thought about that before.

TS: (*Laughing*;) If you look at it, there's a lot of different directions. As *things* turn, hair turns. Yeah. You can't do it that easily. I was like “*Oh puh-lease*.”

WR: I guess I've never seen the forest through the trees.

(*Laughter*.)

WR: I guess for me, HMOs have changed a lot. But that's not recent. With HMOs I can't treat someone for trauma through their insurance. I'd have to get another diagnosis, like bipolar disorder. It's not (*Quietly*), it's not acceptable. Trauma is underrepresented. But I really can't think of anything in the last 10 years. I got nothing...

TS: (*Softly*;) Maybe that's a bad thing. Maybe things need to change.

LL: Was there anything with the Brandon Teena story? When that came out? There was a lot of dialogue about that.

WR: The way our media works, people will be like “Oh priests! Oh pedophiles! Oh shit!” But then you see this big spark. (*Mock terror*;) “Awareness, awareness, awareness! The children must be saved,” and next year it's gone. History shows that we don't want to think about it. If we had to think about it, we'd have to work for change. We'd have to do real change, instead of just “let's throw more money to children's services.”

TS: That's how our society is, though. If

it's the least bit unpleasant, we don't want to think about it. (*Waving hands and shaking head*;) “No, no, no, no, it's not happening.”

WR: Right. People say “it must be a Catholic problem.” It was Little League coaches in the 1980s. And Boy Scout leaders.

TS: (*Sarcastically*;) Because there are no other pedophiles out there, beside priests.

WR: (*Agreeing*;) Right. Yeah.

JM: Would you say that men are wimpier than women?

LL: The only people who have ever passed out during an STD test were men.

TS: (*Nodding*;) Oh yeah. I've never [*waxed*] a [*man's crotch*]. I always refuse. But I used to do some men's backs.

WR: (*Surprised*;) No shit?

TS: (*Matter-of-factly*;) Yeah, some guys have a lot of hair on their backs, and want it taken off. I know the back is a bigger area, but there's no way that your back is as sensitive as your bikini area. They would act like you were *killing* them. They'd be like “*Omigod I need a minute, I need a minute*.” (*She waves her hands in the air*.)

WR: It would hurt in either place, but I think that my crotch would hurt a fuck-load more.

(*Laughter*.)

TS: Men always act like it's a much bigger deal.

WR: (*Softly*;) Well, in working with male survivors of sexual trauma, it's kind of a different animal. With men it's... This is going to sound really fucked up, but in our society, it's normal for a woman to be raped. *THAT's* fucked up. (*He pauses*.) But when a *man* is raped, especially a straight man, it fucks his whole gender identity. If

you're sexually abused, or if you're raped, and you're a guy, you're no longer a man. Because then you're a victim. You're not *supposed* to be a victim. It's okay for women to be victims. I'm not saying that's *good*, but it's how our society works. Guys are a lot harder to work with. It has to be slower. In many cases, it's harder for a guy to work with a male therapist. (*Gesturing to himself*;) Because he has to do that with another man, he has to *show* that. But I won't say *wimp*. I'd get a lot of shit for saying wimp. Men aren't as... Men aren't as prepared to cope with it.

TS: (*Quietly*;) You don't expect straight men to be raped. Unless they have to go to prison. It's like a punishment. If you got raped, and you're a straight man, then what'd you do?

WR: (*Agreeing*;) That's really how it is. I've worked with a lot of straight men who have been raped. Sometimes I know it in the first 20 minutes of a session, but it will take two months for it to come out. It happens a *lot*. One in five men is sexually abused *before* the age of eighteen. (*He gets louder*;) That's a *lot*, compared to what we (*Motioning to everyone*) think. When we think of men getting raped, we think of jail or *Deliverance*. “*Squeal, boy, squeal*.” (*He pauses and starts again, quietly*;) That's not how it works. It perpetuates the fucked-up-ness of the situation.

(*He stops to contemplate*.)

WR: I say fuck a lot when I talk about my job. I say the word fuck a lot at work, too.

TS: (*Softly*;) It fits. ☺

IT'S OKAY FOR WOMEN TO BE VICTIMS. I'M NOT SAYING THAT'S GOOD, BUT IT'S HOW OUR SOCIETY WORKS.

FRESHMAN YEAR: 40 OUNCES AND FRYING PANS TO THE HEAD

Somewhere between his seventh and tenth beer, Adam Rogers took a cast-iron pan and bashed his skull.

"Holy shit, Adam," we said, sipping our King Cobra 40. "What the fuck are you doing?" *Rated Rookie* just watched Adam—our gangly, Lurch-like neighbor—tumble down a hill. But he brushed leaves from his sandy hair and clambered up to our AstroTurf porch. So there he stood: stagger-style drunk, a five-pound iron pan dangling from his hand. Smiling. Wide.

"Not again, man; that cannot be good for you," we said. But Adam wobbled and shook his head like a rabies-ravaged mutt. Then he bared his gums. And nodded his head. Slowly. "Don't you see," he'd say, "I have to do it. I HAVE TO DO IT!"

Clutching the cast-iron tight, he extended the pan, hesitated, and—ouch. Ouch. Ouch. Ouch. And, umm, ouch again. He took five or six thuds before his steam ran out and his head started swelling. Then he staggered across the street and slept the sleep of the psychotically satiated.

Did we ever stop him? No. Adam was a psychology major. We figured he knew what he was doing. We figured wrong.

We met Adam fall quarter of freshman year. Back then we smoked Camel Lights, loved ska music and hated on everything. Call it a post-grunge hangover. Adam was our mirror. He, too, adored binge-drinking two-dollar six-packs and shouting, "Yarrrrrrrr!" at math teachers.

You could say we bonded.

To the passerby, we were Mutt and Jeff: he towered above six feet; a last-gasp puberty push shot us past five. He was a Catholic from a dying industrial town. *Rated Rookie's* suburban parents were neurotic Jews. Still, we shared a world-weariness that left us too apathetic to ash our cigarettes.

Which means as freeloading college students, we fabricated despair.

"Chicken sandwiches...again," we'd moan in the dining hall. "They're feeding us chicken ad nauseum."

"Yeah, this is so oppressive. The situation reeks of patriarchal bullshit," Adam would say.

We'd nod our head, satisfied at the new language we were learning: ad nauseum, patriarchal, oppressive. Oh, and lest we forget: alcoholic.

Angry at the world, we drank away our feigned malcontent with alarming regularity. Our nightly routine was this: drink ourselves into cantankerous personalities, then scream along to brain-shredding punk. Or slander sororities and the fat-cat bourgeois (not that *Rated Rookie* knew any bourgeoisie in its quiet Appalachian college town). Sometimes we'd attend parties and steal beer. Other times we'd silently chain-smoke until our lungs bled.

Oh, yes, we were the bee's knees.

Then Adam went crazy.

At first, things were funny.

"Look what I have!" Adam screamed at 3 a.m. In one hand he had a lawn troll, a red deck chair in the other. Grass clung to the troll's head. "They're beautiful!"

After his fifth beer, Adam liked punch his hand through drywall. "I got three last night," he said, displaying his bruised knuckles like prized daisies.

We would nod our head slowly, a plastic grin decaying our worry.

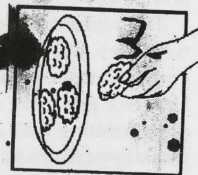
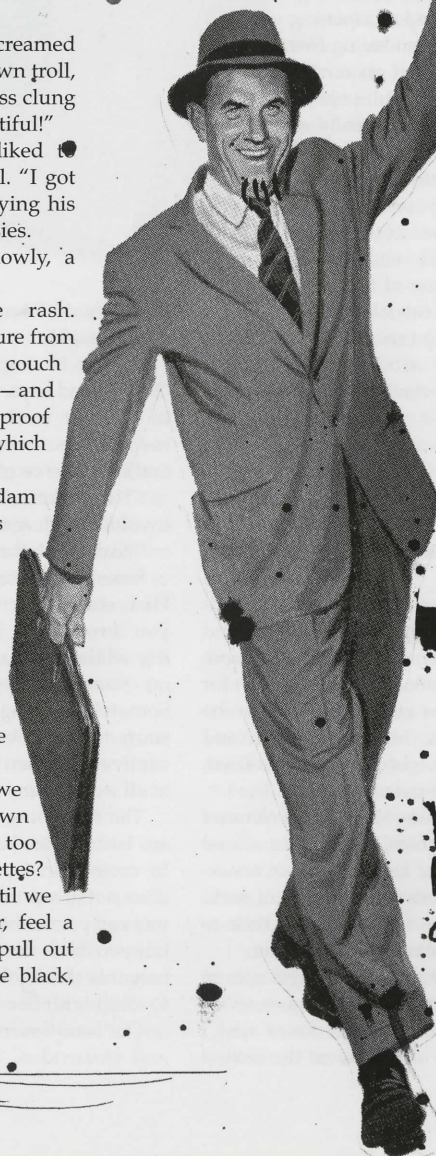
His behavior grew more rash. Sometimes Adam dragged furniture from his house—secondhand speakers, couch cushions, busted end tables—and poured large quantities of 195-proof Everclear onto the combustibles, which he would then incinerate.

"Pretty awesome, isn't it?" Adam would say, home furnishings smoking into the starry sky.

Once again: fake smile. Then: slink home and lock the doors tight.

When the frying pan started, we knew our friend was gone. The first time was, admittedly, funny. The second, curious. The third, fourth, fifth, sixth, scary.

Still, we did nothing. Maybe we were too locked in our own alcoholism? Maybe we were too enamored with easy punk rockettes? Maybe we ignored everything until we graduated and, three years later, feel a twinge of failed duty when we pull out our cast-iron skillet and, into the black, drop two cracked eggs.



how to
be a
college
student

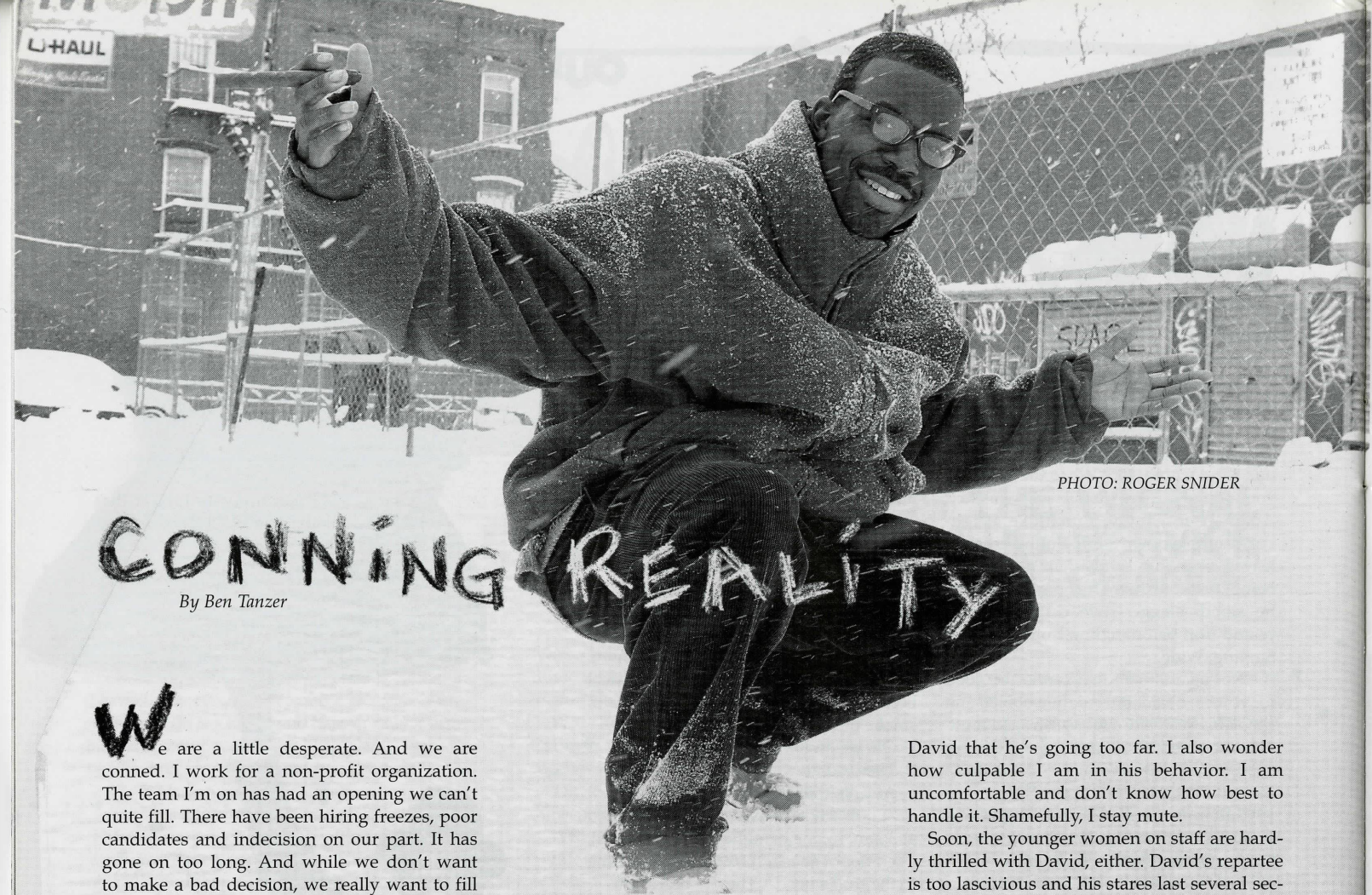


PHOTO: ROGER SNIDER

CONNING REALITY

By Ben Tanzer

We are a little desperate. And we are conned. I work for a non-profit organization. The team I'm on has had an opening we can't quite fill. There have been hiring freezes, poor candidates and indecision on our part. It has gone on too long. And while we don't want to make a bad decision, we really want to fill the position.

David is seated across from us in the conference room. He is a big man in a spiffy suit. He has a Ph.D. and a goatee dotted with specks of gray. He is also black and bald. Kathleen, Michelle and I are none of the above. We are slight, white punks in casual clothes.

"Do you have any questions?" I ask.

"Well, I've looked around," David says, "and I'm wondering whether a bald man will be accepted here?"

"Of course a bald man will be accepted here," Kathleen says. David smiles. Intertwining his fingers behind his bald head, he leans back in his chair, his girth filling the room. It is silent. I think about our office, mostly white, and mostly female.

The various departments exist in competitive silos. We fight for limited dollars and pounce on one another when we smell blood. One vice president casually strolled in late for a big meeting with our constituents. When he was flippant about it, he was berated, and when he childishly fought back, he was fired, no second chances, no redemption.

I look at David and say the office welcomes anyone regardless of race, religion or sexual orientation. "However," I add, "you can't fuck-up here; the office is not so accepting of fuck-ups." David thanks us for taking the time to meet with him. He starts two weeks later.

I learn that David has a teenage son in Florida. He has been married three times, twice to the mother of his son. "I don't know why I thought she would be any different the second

time around," he says, and then laughs at the very thought.

It is fun having another male to banter with. "So," David says, "when someone needs to go to D.C. for work, will you consider sending me? There's a woman there I'm involved with and it would be great to see her."

"That's funny," I say, "I thought you were involved with someone in Atlanta."

"Yeah, well, there too," he says.

Initially, the staff likes David, and why not? He is smart, charming and funny. He can walk you through the intricacies of web conferencing while simultaneously complimenting you on your good work and sense of style. Somewhere along the way, though, something starts to give. David is like a house of cards, captivating when first aloft, but shaky and not at all trustworthy when the cards start shifting.

The first thing I notice is the humor. There are boundaries (sexual ones, have you) not to be crossed in an office full of women. David does not grasp this. In the safety of your office you can comment on your interest in someone, but you don't do so in a team meeting, and you certainly don't joke about how you would like to sleep with her. There are rules, after all.

Our boss Susan is not thrilled with the jokes and innuendos. I wonder if I should warn

David that he's going too far. I also wonder how culpable I am in his behavior. I am uncomfortable and don't know how best to handle it. Shamefully, I stay mute.

Soon, the younger women on staff are hardly thrilled with David, either. David's repartee is too lascivious and his stares last several seconds too long. I ask Greer how David is doing.

"He can do the work," she says, "but he's a little too pushy, you know?"

"No, I don't know," I say.

"Let's just say he lets you know when he's interested, but doesn't back off when you let him know you're not."

The situation escalates. David utilizes John's email address book to elicit feedback on trainings he would like to develop. People from the list contact John and ask him why they have received the email. John, who is also a vice president, is furious and lets everyone know it. John's fury seems out of line with David's transgression, but John doesn't feel this way. It's his list, and it's been disrespected. All eyes focus on David—the house of cards is crumbling.

Susan revisits David's resume and questions arise about his Ph.D. When Susan calls David's school, officials are ambiguous about their Ph.D. program. Is it accredited? Is it affiliated? Is it even a school? The school also cannot confirm whether David was a student. Officials say they will call back. David is asked to produce proof he attended the school. The school never calls. Susan informs David he can forget the proof; he's being terminated.

I feel bad and try calling David. David may have conned us, but I like him and wonder whether I could have better protected him. I leave David a message, but receive no response.

My coworker, Barbara, also calls David and reaches him on the phone. David tells her the termination isn't fair, but without much passion. He seems resigned to this fate and

beaten down. He's moving on—his time with us is over.

None of us speak to David again, and this is not a great surprise. People come and go when you work in an office. With some, relationships develop that transcend the office place, but this isn't the norm. Work is a place we go to pay the bills, and the people there are

and Lisa push cake into one another's faces and dance their first dance. It is happy and moving and we feel the love.

As I watch the show, I know I must talk to David. There is a story here and I need to call him. "Hey David," I will say, "how's life man, kind of random, huh? I mean, here you don't see someone for years and then—boom—there they are getting married on television. It's amazing." We will then make small talk.

"Thanks man," he says. "What about you, is there a little one?"

"Yeah, 20 months now," I say. "This whole thing is amazing. I mean, there you are, getting married on television; what is that, marriage number four?"

"Well, technically it's number five," he says. "Three and four were with the same woman."

"You were married twice before her?" I ask. "Yeah."

"No shit."

"So, hey man," I say, "I'm sorry about all that went down here; I really enjoyed working with you."

"Thanks. You know, we don't always understand the path we're on," David says.

"How so?" I ask.

"I met my wife Lisa at the Atlanta airport while returning from a site visit when I was still working with you."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah, we were both in line waiting to check in for our flight and I told her she should sit next to me. She said no, but we stayed in touch, emailed each other, and then I went out to Los Angeles to be with her."

"That's just the kind of story I would expect from you," I say. How else would he have met her? Or ended up where he is? David had an opportunity to recreate himself, there was a woman involved, and he ran with it.

"It's good talking to you," I say. And I mean that, I really do, I'm happy to hear he's doing all right. "What exactly are you doing out there any way?" I say.

"I'm the Director of the Center for Memory Disorder and Cerebral Dysfunction," David says.

Once again, I'm not surprised. David has always existed inside his head, moving from one reconstructed memory to the next. Who better than to talk about cerebral dysfunction and memory disorders?

"Hey man," he says. "Send me an email so I can send you a link for this conference I'm putting on."

"Will do," I say. "Talk to you later."

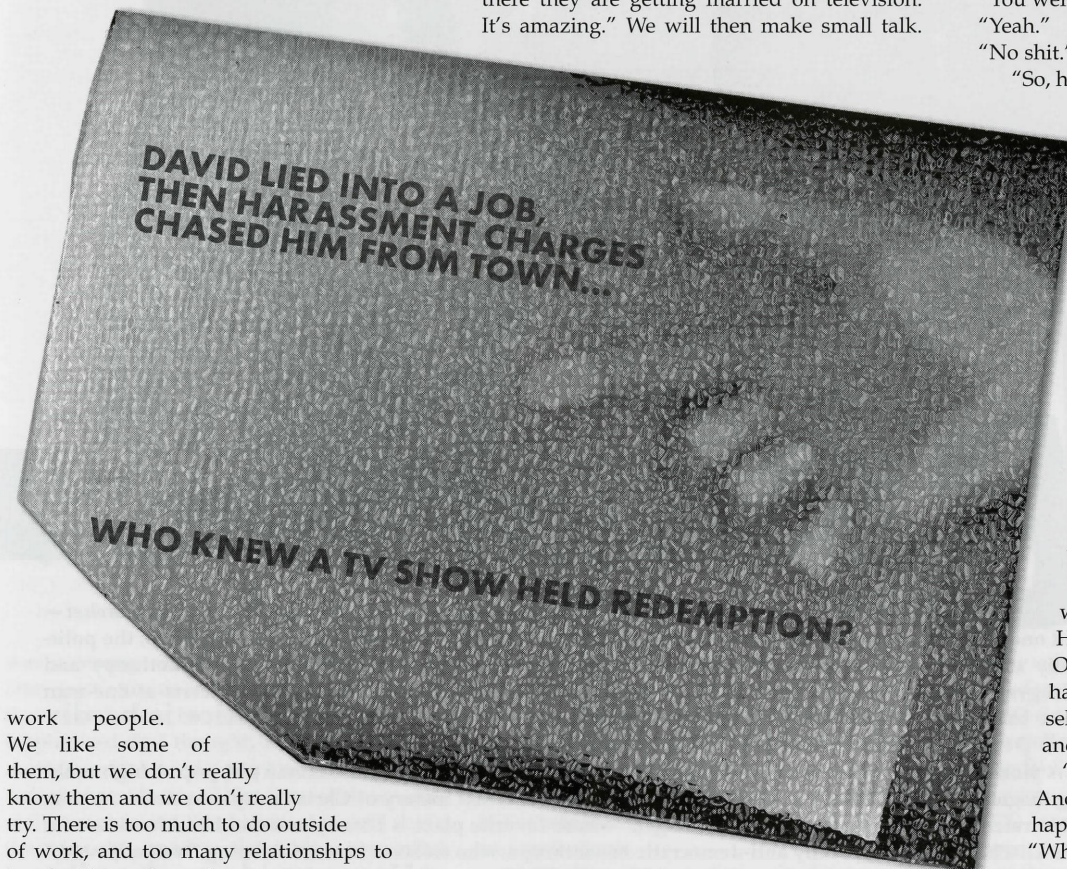
I won't, of course, and I hate myself for even saying it. We are no more connected now than when we worked together. Then again, I am in the middle of an elaborate dance with David. He has rebuilt his house of cards, and I am uneasily trying to place one more near the top.

I will not learn whether David misled us, or how he has presented his tangled past to his new bride. Nor will I learn how he came to be on the show. David is a con man and, for that breed, the past is the past. Now that we have spoken, he can return to who he has become.

I send the email and attach photos of my family. David writes back immediately.

"You got a beautiful family," he writes. "Aren't we lucky?"

"Indeed we are," I write back. 🐼



work people.

We like some of them, but we don't really know them and we don't really try. There is too much to do outside of work, and too many relationships to juggle. This is the reality.

I am at work two years later and Greer enters my office, videotape in hand. "You're not going to believe who I saw on television," she says.

I have no idea. "I saw David," Greer says. "He was on this new TLC reality show *For Better or For Worse*. He lives in Los Angeles and he's remarried."

The premise of *For Better or For Worse* is that a couple allows friends and family to plan their wedding in seven days for under \$5,000. The show provides the \$5,000 and a semi-hipster wedding planner. All the producers ask for in return is the couple's permission to tape the spectacle.

Greer pushes PLAY and there are David and Lisa, his fiancée. We discover he repeatedly asked her to marry him until she finally relented one romantic evening on the beach. This doesn't surprise us. We know David is all about the pursuit; we have since learned of a woman he cyber-stalked while working at the office.

The wedding is seamless and David and Lisa are married in the ballroom of an old Los Angeles hotel. Lisa's mother attends, as do her friends. David's friends are there as well, but I don't know that I see any of his family. David

When the moment is right I will ask about his motivations, the alleged lies and his ability to recreate himself.

I visit TLC's website and learn that David works at a university in Los Angeles. I call the school and ask for his direct line so I can call him back when I feel ready. It has been a long time; while I want to reconnect and learn more about him, I worry whether it's proper to do so. David left the office in shame; who am I to remind him?

The receptionist connects me to David's office. He answers the phone with a booming "Hello."

"Hey man," I say, "it's a voice from your past."

Pause.

"It's Ben from Chicago."

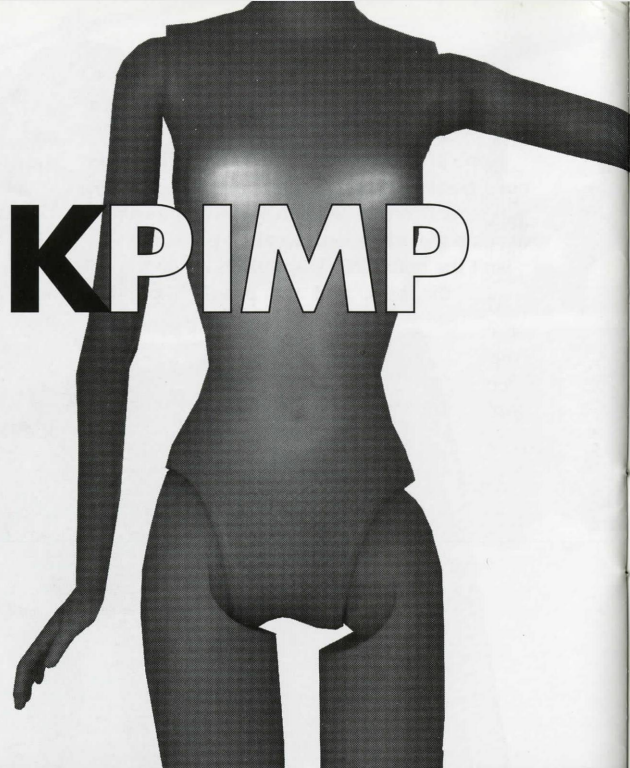
"Yeah, yeah, of course," he says. "How are you doing, man?"

He's friendly and ebullient and it's totally disarming. I want to ask him all sorts of potentially uncomfortable questions, and it would be easier if he was a little more distant and seemed to care just a little less that I called.

"I saw you on *For Better or For Worse*," I say. "Mazel tov."

THE BLACKPIMP

By Brian M. Clark



B

oyd Rice is a recording artist, writer, orator, actor, prankster, filmmaker, occult researcher—and one of the most reviled figures in underground music. Why? Well, Rice flirts with the taboo, the politically incorrect and the downright forbidden. Fascism, Satanism, Social Darwinism, misanthropy and misogyny are all favorite subjects Rice has explored in the last quarter-century. His concerts as one-man noise band NON are oft-protested and occasionally cancelled. As a person, however, Rice is hardly the poster child for evil. Rather, Boyd Rice is a paradox.

A pioneer of ear-grating noise music, yet a big fan of '60s bubblegum and German girl-pop. A high-ranking magister in The Church of Satan, who's writing a revisionist history of Christianity's mysteries. A man often referred to as a "Nazi" and "hatemonger," whose favorite place is Disneyland and has a fondness for '60s kitsch. A sardonic, vocally anti-democratic misanthrope, who refers to himself as being "well adjusted," and claims to be "one of the nicest men you'll probably ever meet." How would you describe this old friend of Charles Manson with a minor Barbie fixation?

Brian M. Clark: To what extent are you currently involved with The Church of Satan?

Boyd Rice: Virtually not at all—to almost no extent.

BMC: Do you still consider yourself a Satanist?

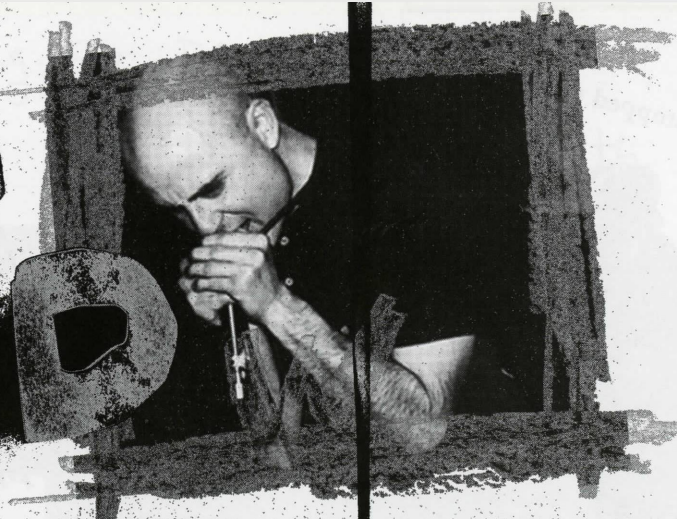
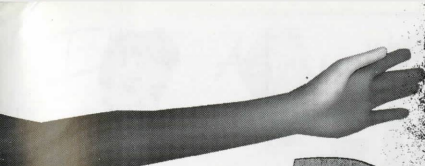
BR: Well, I use the word Satanist, but I don't know if I ever really considered myself as somebody who's into Satan. I was into Gnosticism and Hermeticism before I met [Church of Satan founder] Anton LaVey, and when I went on talk shows as a spokesman for The Church of Satan, that's what I'd talk about, those ideas. Those ideas still form the basis of my thought, more so than worshiping some figure of an adversary. Anton LaVey was really the archetypal Satanist. He was like a figure out of literature or something. He embodied that whole spirit. When he was alive, and he was my friend, I was proud to say

I was a Satanist—that I was a member of the inner circle of The Church of Satan—but since his death, my research into occult matters has evolved exponentially. So less and less does The Church of Satan have any relevancy to my life.

BMC: My conception of the typical Satanist is someone who was picked on a lot in high school. As a means of overcompensation, they change their name to Damien Lucifari, or whatever, and then they go around wearing a pentagram necklace, and they think that this gives them some sort of power, or changes their nature, which is not going to change at all. To me, it seems like the average frat boy lives out a more "satanic" life than any of the Satanists that I've ever met.

BR: Well, I think that my initial attraction to the Satanic thing was that it seemed like there





BOYD RICE

NOISE ROCK VISIONARY, PARTRIDGE FAMILY DISCIPLE AND CHARLES MANSON'S PAL

was a strong element of this sort of Social Darwinist attitude in Anton LaVey's Satanism that was latent, but was never stressed or emphasized. So I thought, This would be a far more powerful creed if you brought out all that was strongest in it—all that was harshest—and really emphasized that aspect of it. And that's the way the creed evolved after my initial involvement. I'd never heard LaVey use the term Social Darwinist once when I initially knew him, but then soon enough that became what was emphasized. Now, if you read these modern Satanic people, they all mention that. So I think that's something that I brought to The Church of Satan.

BMC: What is your conception of God?

BR: It's an all-encompassing creative/destructive force that binds the universe.

BMC: So it's dualistic then?

BR: No, it's Trinitarian. I think that the original idea of the trinity came from the fact that you have a creative force, and a destructive force, and then the third part of that is the union between them—the balance between them. So yeah, there's a duality, but the duality is transcended, because it's all part of the same force.

BMC: What's your favorite thing about Disneyland?

BR: Well, I've always liked it, since I was a kid. I'm coming to have more of an appreciation of the occult nature of some of the rides, since learning that Walt Disney was a Master Mason. Now when I ride Pirates of the Caribbean, I'll see encoded into this ride, all this symbolism from the old mystery religions and their rituals.

BMC: The Pirates of the Caribbean was always my favorite, followed closely by The Haunted House.

BR: Yeah, well there was a ride that hasn't been there since the '80s, where you went into a microscope, and the idea was that you'd shrunk down to being smaller than a snowflake, and you'd go past all these giant snowflakes. Then you'd end up shrinking so much that you enter the heart of an atom—you go into a room where there's this big blinking red bulb that's supposed to be the center of an atom.

BMC: That must've been from back in the '50s and '60s when everyone was interested in scientific stuff.

BR: Yeah, it was made to tell about the miracles of nuclear power at one of the World's Fairs. When you got off the ride there was actually this muzak of people singing songs like

(Singing voice), "Miracles from molecules, helping modern man. Discoveries for happiness..."

BMC: So, tell me a bit about your interest in Barbie dolls.

BR: Well, actually that's something that's been very overstated in the press. When my last CD came out, I got reviews from about 52 different major U.S. newspapers, and about half of them said that I had the world's largest collection of Barbie dolls, and I don't. I have two Barbie dolls. My interest in them arose just because I had a lot of cousins who were girls. They had these dolls at the time, and the dolls were so nicely dressed and looked so elegant, and had such great hairdos. I was just forming my ideas about sexuality and about females, and I thought: I can't wait until I'm a teenager and I can go out with girls who look like this! But before I became a teenager the world had changed, and I never really got to experience the girls with the flip hairdos and bubble cuts, and things like that. By the time I was a teenager everybody was dressing like pigs—until glam rock happened. There were some good-looking women during the glam-rock era, but otherwise it's been mostly downhill since the mid-'60s.

BMC: I heard that you actually met the original Barbie once, is that right?

BR: Yes, I did. She was incredibly embarrassed by my enthusiasm. Unfortunately, she

I stopped visiting [Manson] because I went [to his prison] with a bullet in my pocket.



The actual charge was smuggling an explosive device into a federal penitentiary.



looked more like Malibu Barbie than the 1961 ponytail Barbie.

BMC: That was kind of a letdown, then?

BR: Well, she was working as a secretary at some video-editing studio. She was just some normal girl who just had the misfortune that her father worked for Mattel or something, and named these dolls after her and her brother Ken. Now what's that gotta be like, growing up with that? Being a brother and a sister, and then having these dolls, which are like the archetypal teenage male and female, and they're obviously boyfriend and girlfriend... It's like Isis and Osiris or something: (*Laughing*) "He's my brother but he's also my husband!"

BMC: What is it about people like Rod McKuen and Lawrence Welk that interest you?

BR: Well, McKuen particularly, because he was the world's best-selling poet for a while, and when you listen to his albums, there is a lot of material that you wouldn't expect to hear from the world's best-selling poet—a lot of really strange, dark stuff, and a lot of unusual philosophical stuff. Even his books of best-selling poetry—and these are things that unmarried high school English teachers would read—he'd have these poems about feeding apples to his dog on the beach and stuff like that, then you turn the page and the first line of the poem says "I can't remember how many times I've jacked off in this room." It's like, "What! Rod?" So he must have shocked many a high school-English teacher back in the late-'60s and early-'70s.

BMC: What about Lawrence Welk?

BR: I just like him because the people on his show all wore look-alike outfits and stuff, and he's very weird. He's written a couple of books that almost read like *Mein Kampf* or something. He's got a book called *My America, Your America*, in which he lays down his ironclad principles for success in life. This is a book about his life and his success, but if you were to read paragraphs of it to virtually anybody on earth, and say, "Who do you think said that?" they'd say Adolph Hitler or Joseph Stalin.

BMC: So, you're a member of The Partridge Family Temple [a religion based upon Partridge Family worship], and I understand that you have a Partridge Family shrine somewhere in your house, is that right?

BR: Yeah, there's a room in my house called The Red Room, and I painted part of it to look like the Partridge Family bus. I turned it into a shrine, and I have a lunch pail that Shirley [Partridge] signed, and autographed pictures of every member—except for the original Chris. Chris is missing because the first Chris went away, and it was before the second Chris came, when the person who gave me the lunch pails got the autographs.

BMC: Were you pretty heavily involved with the Temple, or was it more of a passive interest?

BR: Well, I became pretty immersed into listening to the music and watching the shows again, so I got way into it for a while. It's one of those things, like being interested in Martin Denny or something; it's an interest that never really goes away. It kind of fades into the background, but then as soon as it comes back into

the foreground you get excited all over again, and remember what was great about it.

BMC: Besides co-authoring *The Manson File*, what exactly was your relationship with Charles Manson?

BR: I was on his visiting list for a while, and I used to go see him in San Quentin. I was trying to release some tapes that he'd done in jail, and trying to put out a record or CD of that.

BMC: I'd read somewhere that the two of you were friends, that you considered him a friend.

BR: Yeah, well, I did consider him a friend at the time. He was really one of these amazing individuals who is a larger-than-life character. It was very interesting to meet him and to get to hear all his stories firsthand. He told me amazing stories and anecdotes—things that have never been in any of those books about him. He's one of these people who has an incredible amount of insight, and he'll tell you little stories that embody these insights. Like he'll be telling you a little joke, and there will be a sort of a moral to it that will encapsulate the exact meaning of the thing.

BMC: I heard that he had a name for you like "The Black Pimp" or something?

BR: (*Laughing*) No, well, that's on one of his CDs. He says, "Boyd Rice is a black pimp."

BMC: What is that supposed to mean?

BR: I have no idea what that means—some weird Manson thing. Actually, at the time, his name for me was Abraxas. He said: "I'll call you Abraxas, because you stand in two circles at the same time."

BMC: So why did you stop visiting him?

BR: I stopped visiting him because I went there one time with a bullet in my pocket, and was arrested, hauled off to jail and taken off his list. The actual charge, I think, was, smuggling an explosive device into a federal penitentiary.

BMC: Jeeze. That's ridiculous!

BR: (*Laughing*) Yeah, well to get to where Manson is, you've gotta go through about three different metal detectors.

BMC: And you just had it in your pocket because you'd forgotten it was there or something?

BR: Yep, I just had it in my pocket...

I'm As yellow as a Kung Fu Flick,
yet my roots are from down South.

NO FRIED RICE FOR YOU!

A SASSY VIETNAMESE MAMA SERVES ARKANSAS' GOOD OL' BOYS THE UNEXPECTED

By Qui Nguyen

The most common reaction when people discover my origins tends to be disbelief. Take a good look at me: you'll see the typical black hair, almond eyes and golden skin of a classic Asian sensation. I'm as yellow as a kung fu flick, yet my roots...well, my roots are from down south. Deep south. We're talking "chicken-fried steaks, grits and a side of pickled pig's feet" south.

Down south, food is culture. Simple as that. We don't have any famous museums or theatres or music (Unless you count "country," which is about as artistic as a wet beer fart). Instead we have food. Big food. Food meant to make a man out of your skinny city boy. Hipsters need not apply.

My moms, though uber-yellow, is a master of the high-cholesterol culinary arts. Trained by beautiful black ladies to flavor her veggies with spice and her meats with soul, my mother's

parents were no exception to this blatant hate. So, my moms found refuge in the one area of town not afraid of Yellow Fever. She moved into the projects. And as the story goes, there goes the neighborhood.

Fast forward years later, my moms is now the first Asian to sport a jheri curl and a Bob Marley Rasta hat. To celebrate her new Soul-cooking skill, she bought a diner in the middle of town and started selling fried chicken to fat truckers. As one would guess, a smack-talking 4'11" Far East woman vending down-home vittles stirred more than a few questions.

"Hey, I'd like some fried rice, an egg roll and some Wonton soup," the typical first-

"WE have NO egg roll, Fat Man."

cooking is 100 percent Southern-style with a touch of Asian flave. How did a teeny little Vietnamese lady learn to fry so well?

Flashback to a time when most of us were still sporting Superman Underoos. It is 1975 and my folks have landed in America. The Vietnam War just ended and my parents escaped the newly unified Communist nation by moving smack into the rural south. As thousands of Viet refugees flooded America, the government needed to find a place to house them. And since there were an excess of unused camps built during World War II (AKA Japanese internment camps), the South and Middle America became prime locations to relocate thousands of Viet exiles. From there, families were sent into small communities to stay with foster homes for job training and help in cultural assimilation. My mom was sent to Arkansas.

Now, I'm from the South. I hate the stereotype of all Southerners being bigots because I know it's not true. However, in 1975, in the backwoods world of El Dorado, Arkansas, Southerners were not nuts about a whole buncha Yellas moving into their 'hood. My

time customer would ask upon arriving to Nguyen's East Main Diner.

"We have no egg roll, fat man," my moms would correct.

"You got no egg rolls? How about the fried rice?" they'd persist.

"Are you stupid? How many diner you see have fried rice and egg roll?" she'd respond.

"But you're Oriental," they'd retort.

"Fuck you, fat man. I hope you have big heart attack while you watch *Hee-Haw* and fuck your sister!"

My moms was not the best salesman. However, she did find a way to convince folks that East Main Diner, though Asian-owned, was indeed a diner and not an all-you-can-eat Chinese buffet. Her solution? Put it in the greeting.

"Hello, welcome to East Main Diner, we don't have any goddamn Chinese food. You want Chinese food, go to a goddamn Chinese restaurant. Look at my menu, you see anything Chinese? Fuck no. Order something else. Now, what the hell do you want?"

As I said, my moms is not the best salesman, but her point was made.



Whether it was the novelty of Soul Food from a Yella or just folks wanting some quick eats from the closest sit-down joint, the citizens of El Dorado did venture into the quaint dive of my mother's food establishment. And as the years went by, the diner earned a large, loyal following. Some stayed for the food, but most visited daily for other reasons.

"Hey, can I get a burger today?" a regular would ask.

"No!" my mom would yell.

"Oh, come on, Tong. I need some red meat. I want some red meat. If I don't get any red meat, I'll die."

"You too fat, fat man. You get any more red meat, you will have heart attack. Today, you get garden salad with no dressing."

"But..."

"But nothing, fat man. I want you to come to diner, not to early grave. Besides, I hate funerals. I look terrible when I cry."

"You'd cry for me, Tong?"

"What?"

"You'd cry, Tong?"

"Do you want salad or not?"

"Sure, Tong, I'll take the salad."

The biggest attraction to the diner isn't its novelty, the food or even the little Asian owner speaking '70s jive. It's much deeper than that. The regulars at this corner joint are what you'd expect to see in a Sam Sheppard play. They're older, largely single and a bit alcoholic in nature. They are the divorcees of the South, the abandoned, those accustomed to watching *Wheel of Fortune* from their Barcaloungers. Perhaps because the geisha-sized cook knows well what it's like to lose a home, she knows it's important that her restaurant be a place where anybody can hang a hat. So, here, in the smoke-filled, greasy-spooned world of hamburger steak plate lunches, she's made this place their home. The regulars come to the diner because, after all, it's just a diner.

Trained by beautiful Black ladies, my mom's a master of

the high-cholesterol culinary arts.



PHOTO: ALEX SCHAEFER

I WAS A GRADE SCHOOL SMUT PEDDLER

By Dave Maass



I've been out of the biz for about seven years now, but back in the day I was the schoolboy Larry Flynt. In middle school I was the kid you went to for live-action pornography; I had a VHS tape containing six hours of uninterrupted Playboy Channel content and it could be yours for \$5 a night, \$20 for the weekend.

In high school, I was even more enterprising. I was working at a gas station in Scottsdale, Arizona, but when the boss wasn't around I operated an exclusive gentlemen's club out of the garage. Members of Dave's Scottsdale Mobil Crew—usually skatepunks and potheads—had access to cigarettes, soda pop and a peephole that looked in on the women's restroom.

I don't want this getting back to my mother. What you read in *Rated Rookie* stays in *Rated Rookie*. Whatever success I achieved I've left behind me, shed it like snakeskin. But just so you know, here's how it all started.

I want to begin by thanking Erin Sheehy and Matthew and Gunnar Nelson. Erin was the first girl to join me for the Couples Only round of Crismon Elementary Skate night, and holding her clammy hand during

Nelson's *After the Rain* made my career in smut-peddling possible. It was the late-'80s. I was in the fifth grade, and to my folks this was my first expression of heterosexuality. And according to the twice-an-hour public service announcements, it was never too early to teach your kids about safe sex.

At the time my father was little more than an adolescent himself. The man played Advanced Dungeons & Dragons every Thursday night well into his 30s. Yet, whether he meant to or not, he'd turned into a fine provider for our family, working steadily as an engineer at the local Motorola plant. The plant wasn't the best place for a math club dweeb to develop social skills. Perhaps this explains why he ignored the advice of the world's top child psychologists and used a *Playboy* magazine to guide me through the intricacies of human sexual intercourse.

He fanned out the centerfold and bashfully tripped over his words as he pointed out all fleshy parts of her anatomy, explaining what their purposes were and what part of my anatomy could be inserted where. And then he peeled back the doors of the den closet and introduced me to the rest of his collection. It was monstrously enormous, and I say monstrously

enormous because, at the time, if you stacked it up his *Playboy* collection was taller, heavier and older than I was. It gleamed from one end of the top shelf to the other, like Dad was St. Peter ushering a hungry soul through the gates of a heaven.

"Use this as often as you like," he said. "Just don't let your mother know."

Now, Mom was wired like an atomic clock. Every day it was lunch at noon in front of Dick Van Dyke, then some house work, her soap opera ("the play") at 2 p.m. and a nap immediately after. So, when *Guiding Light*'s credits were rolling, that was the signal—nekkid ladies at three o'clock, skipper. I'd read *Mad Magazine* in the living room until I was sure she was asleep, then I'd creep down the hall, past her room where, through the cracked door, I could hear her vaporizer sputtering like a drowning beehive. And then it was 10 paces to the den.

I'd inch open the closet doors as carefully as possible—Mom had hair-trigger eardrums—and there it was. Candy-effin-store. It was a wall of gloss, a *Playboy* for every month I've been on the planet, including my time in the womb, and a couple of special

editions for the days that Dave-coded tadpole waited in my Dad's Fruit of the Looms.

The ratty brown couch in den was no stranger to bodily fluids. My parents liked to ground me to that couch. When they did, I'd cry into the pillows. One day, after I swung my little sister into a wall, my parents ordered me not leave the couch for any reason until they came back and told me I could. To spite them, I pissed all over the cushions. That same couch in the den was where I'd camp out with the *Playboys*, while one hand crept into my underwear. For the first few months I was too young to do anything with it except hold on for dear life, but then...

Moving on. Yeah, so I wasn't one of the most popular kids in the fifth grade. I was the Jewish kid who was friends with the outcasts: The Muslim Kid; The Tae Kwon Do-Blue Belt White-Trash Kid; The British Kid with the Runny Nose. I wanted what all misfits do—to be accepted among those who exclude.

I whined until Mom loosened the talons on the credit card and bought me some Jimmy Z T-shirts and Morey Boogie shorts. I spiked my hair down the part and combed the bangs in a shallow wave. Even in disguise I couldn't penetrate the ranks of the cool. I tried getting into basketball card collecting, making generous and stupid trades to kids so they'd keep hanging out with me. Once all my Michael Jordans and Karl Malones and Charles Barkleys were gone, so were they.

Okay, I'll admit it. I was a bit of a spazz and that would never change, but I didn't know that. Sitting there on the couch exploring the inner thighs of LaToya Jackson (porn's so much better if it's the older sister of someone you think you know), I realized that porn might be the ticket to popularity. Bait. I could lure the cool kids over with smut, hook them, get them coming back to my house five days a week, and soon enough they'd get to know me, friendship would ossify and I'd never spend a Saturday afternoon alone again.

Mike Raio was my first successful catch. He was the kid down the street with the perfectly fitted baseball cap, and the first in class to wear it backward. He was so cool that popularity contests didn't matter. He and his best friend Peter Judge did whatever they wanted, ignoring Skateland and kickball and the Pinewood Derby, while still commanding everyone else's respect.

At first, I'd borrow the magazines one at a time and the two of us would hop the fence of the abandoned house next door. Mike, displaying the Alpha-male tendencies of all popular kids, hogged the issues and I couldn't read over his shoulder without, you know, poking him in the back. So, I had borrow two at a time. After awhile I grew sick of the stealth routine returning the magazines into the house, so I reckoned Dad wouldn't notice if I replaced them on the shelf with issues from my *Sports Illustrated For Kids* subscription.

Then, once I'd gotten away with that, I began to steal stacks at a time. Four, five, 12 *Playboys* in one run, until one day we

It was like he'd tripped on a mine—but he fell like he'd been shot in the back.

decided to go for broke. We would grab them all, every single *Playboy*, just for one day, and compare each woman until we'd found the ever-elusive perfect naked body.

This isn't exactly what happened, but this is how I remember it.

For the mission, we'd brought in Chris Baltzer, the pretty boy fourth-grade A-lister who lived around the corner. He was small, wiry, quick—perfect for the score. I was in the lead, Mike Raio behind me and Baltzer behind him. Mom was napping in the living room on the couch below the panoramic window that looked out onto the front lawn.

Mike, Chris and I snuck in through the backdoor and tiptoed down the hall to the den. I climbed on the desk and pulled chunks from the collection. Mike and Chris caught them underhanded and awkwardly, the magazines falling every which way into disorganized stacks. Then the three of us ran out of the house, each of us tightly hugging a glossy pile of disarray, like a thousand-pointed paper star, to his chest.

Once we were outside again, we thought we were in the clear. It was autumn then. Little hard seeds from the front yard's shade tree lay thick on the lawn. The grass crunched under our Nike Airs. Our route cut across the lawn because it was a faster and safer; the tree shielded us from the ever-watching Crime Dog eyes of the neighborhood. I had planted my foot on the first square of the abandoned house's driveway when I heard Chris Baltzer gasp.

The way I remember it, the whole world slowed down and my ears rang with a dark classical musical score, tympanies, a choir, an army of bassists and cellists. Baltzer's foot had caught on a sprinkler head. He was falling and it was like a scene from a Vietnam flick. It was like he'd tripped on a mine—but he fell like he'd been shot in the back. The magazines flew out of Baltzer's hands and fluttered like wounded pigeons to the ground.

I looked over my shoulder toward the panoramic window. There was a moment of dead silence, my heart in my ears, and just when I was beginning to think we were safe, Mom's head shot up from the couch like a spring-triggered mailbox flag. We were fucked.

This is where the slow motion ends and the *Black Hawk Down* jiggle-vision begins. Chris scrambled across the ground gathering magazines. "Go! Go! Go!" I shouted, but Mike'd already scaled the fence. Once Chris was half on his feet, I started running. I hefted the magazines over the wooden gate door. I took a three-step running jump at the fence.

"I can't get over, I can't get over!" Baltzer

squealed five seconds later. Raio and I each grabbed an arm and dragged him over, scraping limbs across the chipped wood of the gate. Then we hit the ground, our cheeks resting against a blanket of magazine covers.

"Did she see us?" Mike asked in a whisper.

"I don't know. I thought I saw her perm out of the corner of my eye," I answered.

"Maybe she didn't see us, then."

"Dude, we're busted," I said through my teeth. "Chris left *Playboys* all over the front lawn."

A moment later we could hear the rocks outside the gate shifting under her feet. Then we heard the vocal siren I knew too well, more sinus than larynx, my mother's nasally screech.

"Day-Vid! Come out here right now!"

Mike and Chris looked to me. I signed that if we kept quiet maybe she'd go away. She repeated herself three times and then stopped. Baltzer looked upward, then Raio, then I. There were her eyes and her perm, both suffering from a rude awakening, leering down at us over the ledge.

The rest is a blur.

There was talk of me visiting Chris and Mike's parents and apologizing. I don't think it happened, but I wouldn't remember it if I did. Chris and Mike didn't talk to me after that. For my ego's sake, I want to say that's it not because they didn't like me anymore, but that their parents had cautioned them to keep away.

All I know is that there are two things in my life for which my father has never forgiven me. The first was when I was maybe seven and I was horsing around, tripped on a shoelace and knocked a bookshelf onto my father's 12-string Yamaha acoustic guitar, snapping its neck. The second was the day after the botched mission, when every issue of my dad's collection went into the dumpster. 🗑️

That same couch was where I'd camp out with the *Playboys*, while one hand crept into my underwear.

Haiku Hell

WELCOME TO A DREAM JOB AT GOOGLE

By Abby Reynolds

The cursor blinks as I look at the nine programs running on my Windows XP toolbar. None of which are Excel, which has, as of late, become my personal hell. I've got four IMs running, full of whiny, complaining drabble to my similarly wayward-feeling friends; Outlook (the sole purpose of which, I have decided, is to click "Send/Receive" with a gusto reserved for a four-course meal); some ridiculous Oracle calendar program that (1) crashes every five minutes and (2) is the staunch reminder that I do, in fact, have meetings to attend; one IE Browser running, set to my company's website, of course; and this lovely email where I begin the diatribe of my occupation, also known as "Why I Really Wish I Was a Full-Time Freelancer."

My friends call me a fool. You see, I work for what may just be the best company in the world (i.e., Google). I agree entirely—the company, without fail, is nothing if not amazing. A true dot-com in the barren dot-com-less land of late. Yet my job, "Creative Maximizer," though sought after across the country as the hot job for writers, requires only the main talent of writing ads, which are basically jazzed-up haikus. With the character limits and strict editorial guidelines, I find myself swimming in a sea of "Buy Now!," "Learn More" and "Get Info Here." Creative it is not.

Many of us Maximizers heeded the call of the ad as a glorious beckoning from that great big dot-com in the sky. "Google!" we proclaimed. "Glory be to God." We made it through the 11 interviews, chatting with other Googlers (a term, once hired, we've learned to use with fervor and frequency) about the interactive arena, about our backgrounds, about what it's like to work 10-hour days while housebreaking a puppy. After much waiting, much anticipation, much praying to anyone and everyone to grant us this opportunity, oh wonderful HR administrator, we landed it. Hallelujah!



Somewhat disillusioned, we found not the land of buoyant, colorful language that we so longed for. Instead of the blank MS Word documents we expected, we found ourselves swimming in a torpid sea of Excel spreadsheets. Instead of fabulous hyperbole and the poignant frustration of choosing the perfect word, we found ourselves in a generic ad-copy shop, with spartan character limits to boot.

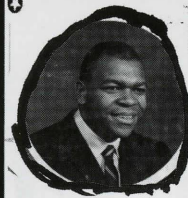
Methodically, our days begin and end with keywords, often nonsensical ones at that. Instead of "New York Hotels," we find "York Hotels New," and don't you think for one second that it's not our job to correct these. Each and every one of the often 10,000-plus of these. It's a wonder I can write more than three words at a time without ending every sentence in "Shop Now!" When I realized that I was dreaming of spreadsheets, thinking that there were keywords in between my sleeping boyfriend and I, I acknowledged that I may, in fact, have hit rock bottom.

Yet this is Google. GOOGLE!, I repeat. The land of milk and honey; or, more accurately, of limitless Odwalla bars and Snapple. The people are fabulous, the pay is above respectable and I've become quite attached to the lava lamp on my desk. I dare not complain to my number-crunching, Internet-surfing friends, especially since their clicks on the ads I write pay my bills. Surf away, I say, and thus return to the mind-numbing land o' Excel.

So with my creativity nicely locked away in a cabinet in some Hoboken train station, I find myself back in the land of short words, irritating clients and blinking cursors, where:

*Here I Sit and Write,
Pointless Drabble, I Create,
But It Pays My Bills.*

DON'T PULL HAIR FROM NOSE
May Cause Fatal Infection



BANDS KYLE HATES

By Kyle Sowash



One upon a time, this band XBXR_X emailed me asking me if I would set up a show for them. I'd never heard of them, but they seemed like nice enough kids, so I thought, "Why the hell not?" It'd be easy, I figured. I worked at a bar.

I should learn not to figure. There was already a big show that day; I had to harass the promoter until he agreed to make room for XBXR_X on his show (a process lasting four or five days). He even secured a \$50 guarantee. Whoa. I hadn't received their CD yet, so I told the promoter, "Dude, it'll work out, they'll fit on this show. These guys rock." That is, if "rock" is another term for suck like a toothless hooker.

Then I got their *GOP IST MINEE* CD in the mail. I listened. Whoa. These guys... Well, I have yet to drink enough to make this music enjoyable. Their music sounded like an Eastern European vacuum cleaner. A broken one that screams. I went on the web and did some research. Non-deaf people appear to love XBXR_X, even if no one knows what those stupid letters mean. How? Why? Huh? Well, I'm a likeable guy so I decided to give them a shot to wow me with their live extravaganza.

They arrived at the bar. They dressed pretty hip. Some wore white belts to keep their tight pants flood-level. They seemed nice, though. Very hip indeed, though...almost *too* hip. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe... Maybe not. After they made fun of the first band (who weren't all that bad, AND who happened to bring a few people to the show), they all donned costume party masks and stepped onstage. After bitching to our sound guy for a few minutes, they said, "Fuck it, let's play." And "play" they did. They made noise and screamed a lot. Nine minutes after their first note, they fled offstage.

I asked, "Is that it?"

Their singer explained that they only play for ten minutes. Where most bands expend their energy throughout a 45-minute set, XBXR_X would rather compact the energy of a 45-minute set into 10 minutes. It was a very spastic nine minutes, I guess. Anyway, as I stood there, still shocked that this band played for nine minutes and expected 50 bucks, their 15-year-old guitar player got up in my face, saying "You never said we had to play for a certain amount of time! Give us our money!"

Maybe I'm not hip. Maybe I just don't get it. But as I stood there, that 15-year-old leaping around like a nattily dressed monkey, I just had one thing to say:

XBXR_X, I hate you.

THE INNER SWINE

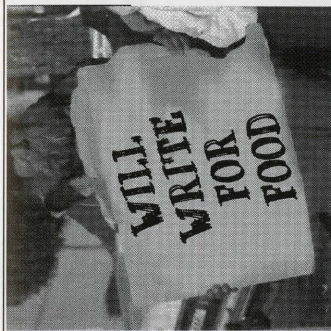
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Okay, so it's not really a proper equation. But you get the idea, right? Sell your band's shirts, make money.

*black shirts with white on one side

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COMING OUT TO MY MOTHER

I'm so sorry, Mom. I know there are better ways to tell people I'm gay than while we're opening presents, but isn't Christmas the season of giving? I wanted to give you—Dad, Tim, Angie, Uncle Stu, Aunt Marie, Grandma Ally, Grandpa Paul and even Buttons and Whiskers—the greatest gift of all—me, as I really, truly, impossibly am. I mean, I couldn't stand staring at your smiling faces, thinking that "Laura" was my girlfriend. She's just a girl from my Psych 101 class. I like boys, Mom, and I always have. Ever since fourth grade when Jimmy Drew and I played in the woods, Mom, I knew. I didn't mean to hide my feelings so long, but I...I just didn't know the right time. Maybe when Dad was opening his Jerry Garcia tie was *not* the right time, but you can't pick and choose these things, Mom. I couldn't hold my secret one second longer. Do you understand? Mom? What's wrong, Mom? Don't you want to open your present? Don't you want to know what I got you? D+ (RV)

OILED UP

Working from home had its privileges. I got to make lunch. Each day I woke up dreaming of fresh produce and olive oil. Damn good olive oil, too. None of that Goya shit.

This day I had decided to open a new bottle from Spain and make black beans and rise with a sofrito of aromatics, peppers and mushrooms. But the olive oil wasn't on the counter. I rifled through the trash, tore through the cabinets, fridge, living room. Nothing. Then I went into my roommate's hovel. The olive oil was sitting, uncapped on the window sill by the bed, a ring of dried, golden liquid at its base.

I asked him why he needed my prized oil. "We didn't have any lube," he said, shrugging.

D- (JRM)

A BLOODY GOOD MORNING TO YOU, TOO

The menstrual blood was clotting around the tub's drain, leaving a viscous trail. There was only one possible culprit: the slimy roommate's greasy-haired, pockmarked girlfriend. And there was only one recourse: call that girl at work and demand she return to the apartment, clean up the carnage.

She answered the phone. I went straight to the point. "Are you going to make it a habit of menstruating in the tub and leaving it as a gift?" Under her stumbling "ums" and "ahhs" and "err," I heard the tinny acoustics of an open office. She wasn't coming back to clean up her mess. She was mortified.

"I wasn't wearing my contacts. Sorry." Click.

I immediately dumped gurgles of bleach into the tub, helped it along with the mop and was all icky as I finally got my shower.

Later I learned she and the boyfriend were bumpin uglies in the shower that morning. Slimy roommate man said it was hot.

F (JRM)

IT'S SPEECHIFYING

And...An...Ann...And always that g...g...god....goddamned stutter nev...er...er allowing me to say what... what I really mean to...to...to...to think.

C+ (JRM)

ELLIOT SMITH DYING

Well, at least he did it with style. Screw that Kurt Cobain pussy shit, blasting your cerebellum into a million molecules. Ho-hum. Or like Hendrix, suffocating on that quiet pool of bile. Hell, he even trumped that Sublime dude's overdose. Mr. Santeria didn't even mean to die! Thanks, Elliot Smith, for showing the world that indie rockers ain't wussed-out sweater wearers. A knife to the chest does wonders for street cred.

A- (JB)

BRITISH GOSSIP TABLOIDS

About two weeks ago I found a British celebrity gossip magazine called *Heat* lying facedown on the floor of my friend's apartment. Pulitzer committee, take notice: Smack in the middle of the September issue was an illuminating photo-narrative headlined, "HALLE BERRY LEAVES BAG BEHIND." It's the gripping tale of an Asian waiter chasing Halle Berry and presumably her boyfriend (with whom, according to this month's *Heat*, she's just split) down what I think is Hollywood Boulevard. In the next photo, success! It's classic visual storytelling. Action: waiter has stopped Halle and is showing her the purse she left behind. Reaction: Halle's shoots him a sharp-edged look. The next frame reveals her boyfriend accepting the purse with a smile while she intensifies her evil eye. That would be her right eye, which is the bigger of the two and a smidge crooked. The denouement is a close-up of a grim Halle checking for oncoming traffic before crossing the boulevard.

Although a short article featuring an interview with the waiter accompanies the September piece, the photos still speak several thousand words. Here are five that went unwritten: Halle Berry is an ungrateful bitch. I was fascinated, beginning to end, and I was left with the urge to purchase a telephoto lens and hit the streets. I can see the headline now: "ASHTON KUTCHER EATS A BOOGER." I fucking hate that guy.

Heat A+, Halle Berry F+, Ashton Kutcher D- (DM)

THAT...SMELL

Oh, oh, my gosh. What is that smell? Is it me? It must be me. Of course it's me! But, how? Sure, I wore those pants for three days straight, but really now. How did that...that...stench come from me? I use Dr. Bronner's Peppermint Soap. I shower every day. Well, not *every* day, but if you average my showers I take at least 4.75 per week. Let's see a hippie beat those numbers! So, come on now, the smell? It's rotten half-and-half mixed with stale P.B.R. and spiked with subway. The G "Murder" line at 3 a.m.! And it's coming from me! Joe, do you have an answer? Jim? Melinda? Jessica, please don't walk away from me. The smell's not that bad, is it? Is it?

F (JB)

PIGEON PIE

Pigeon Pie is fucking delicious—especially after I drink a 12-ounce glass of straight Triple Sec in a French fashion designer's \$3-million TriBeCa loft. Apparently, it's simple to make—just four or five garden-variety pigeons, some puff pastry, maybe a little beef, cinnamon, salt, pepper and powdered sugar. It is at once a meal and a taste-bud blue ribbon.

Drunkenness allows me to believe that utensils are ridiculous, so I thrust my paw into the sphere of flying rat meat and spice. It feels soupy on the inside, arid on the outside—little bits of pigeon meat, which is dark and stringy, are caught beneath my nails, and I'm repulsed, feeling like Euro-trash Caveman. One bite, however, alleviates my misgivings. Pigeon pie is miraculous, blending the sweet and salty better than dipping fries into a Frosty. After three large handfuls, I've had my fill...and three large hours later, it all comes back up somewhere on the Bowery. The pigeons knew where home was.

B+ (AS)

SPARXX (THE CARBONATED, CAFFEINATED MALT LIQUOR)

Marketing Guy 1: Red Bull is really, really hot now.

Marketing Guy 2: Totally. Red Bull and vodka is, like, the hottest drink.

MG 1: Totally.

MG 2: Totally.

MG 1: So, uhh, what other alcohol can we mix with Red Bull?

MG 2: How about...uhh, malt liquor?

MG 1: For serious?

MG 2: Yeah! We could make it, like, a Colt 45-Red Bull. Kids would totally drink it and get fucked up.

MG 1: But won't that taste horrible?

MG 2: Nah, we'll add a whole bunch of sugar, and some cherry flavoring.

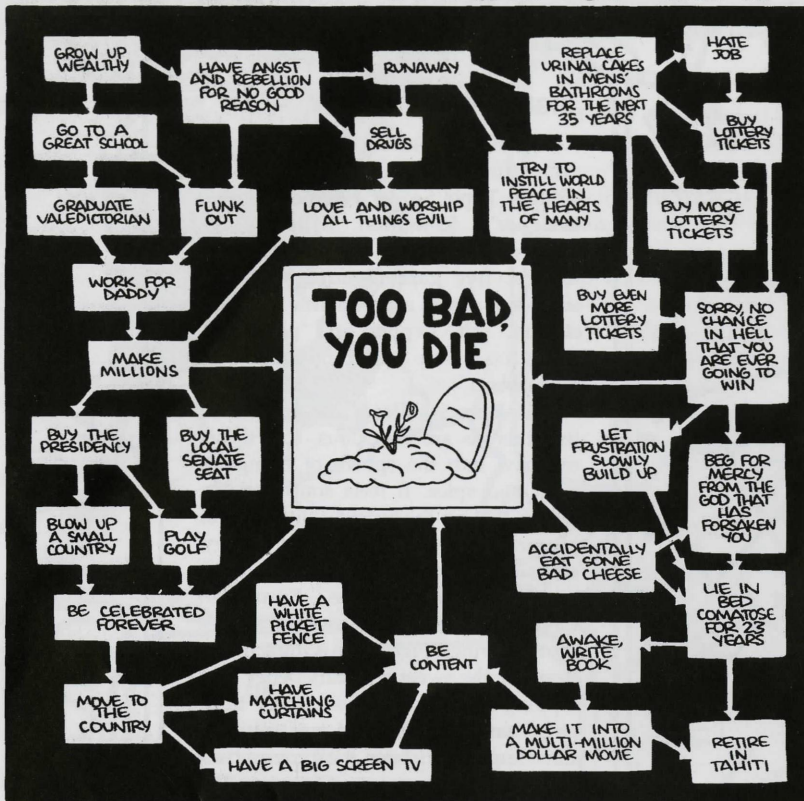
MG 1: Just like Robo-truckin'!

MG 2: Exactly!

So, yeah, imagine drinking a sugar-saturated Red Bull infused with only the choicest malt liquor hops. You'll enter hypoglycemic shock before you get drunk. In the words of our quartermaster, Steve Eshenbaugh, after consuming three free Sparxx at a party, "My teeth hurt."

D- (JB)

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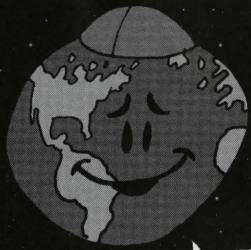
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THE MALAYSIAN PRIME MINISTER RECENTLY SAID THAT "THE JEWS RULE THE WORLD." YES, I'VE HEARD THIS THEORY BEFORE. MANY TIMES, IN FACT.



SHALOM!

WELL, WHAT I'M WONDERING IS, IF JEWS RULE THE WORLD, WHY DO I WORK IN A TINY CUBICLE AND LIVE IN A DIRTY QUEENS APARTMENT WITH TWO OTHER GUYS?



I MEAN, SURE, I'M NOT RELIGIOUS, BUT I'M STILL JEWISH, SO COME ON: WHOEVER'S IN CHARGE OF THE JEWISH WORLD RUNNING COMMITTEE, HEY, HERE I AM.



OH, WAIT, MAYBE IT'S NOT REGULAR JEWS THAT RULE THE WORLD. MAYBE IT'S THESE GUYS:



THEN AGAIN, HAVE YOU EVER SEEN WHERE THEY LIVE? AT LEAST HERE IN NEW YORK, HASIDIC NEIGHBORHOODS ARE PRETTY GHETTO. PLUS THEY HAVE TO WEAR COATS IN THE SUMMER. WOULD YOU DO THAT IF YOU RULED THE PLANET?



SO I GUESS IT'S EITHER:
A I'M JUST NOT IN ON IT AND NEVER GET INVITED TO THE SECRET MEETINGS... OR...
B WE NEED TO STOP STEREOTYPING PEOPLE. WHAT DO YOU THINK?





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