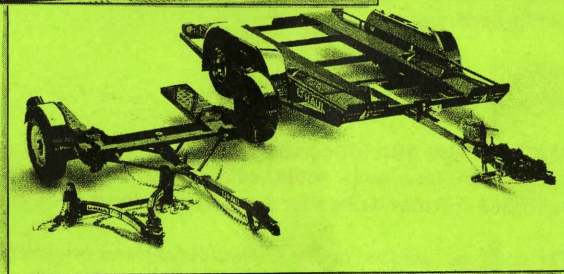


THE U-HAUL ADVENTURES



**COLLECTED COLUMNS
1996-TUESDAY MORNING
BY MIKE FALON**

WRITER MIKE FALOON PRESENTS *THE CHOOSE AN INTRO SWEEPSTAKES!*

Greetings, reader. I'll be damned if I can decide which introduction to use for the *The U-Haul Adventures*, so I'll leave the choice to you. Simply select your favorite intro, and inform me of your choice via mail or email. I'll tally the votes and the most popular introduction will be the one that everyone reads!

Tally ho!

Mike

#1 – For those who like the literary approach:

"A prologue is written last but placed first to explain the book's shortcomings and to ask the reader to be kind. But a prologue is also a note of farewell from a writer to his book. For years the writer and his book have been together—friends or bitter enemies but very close as only love and fighting can accomplish."

—John Steinbeck, *Journal of a Novel*

#2 – For those who dig the dry details:

The U-Haul Adventures could be accurately subtitled "Columns I Wrote for Other Zines That My Friends Never Got to Read, Along with New Stuff I Wrote for Tour." Last summer I went through the box in which I keep copies of zines I've written for. Flipping through the stack I realized that most of my friends never had a chance to read the columns, and never would given that all but one of the zines is now extinct. (Josh Rutledge's fab *Now Wave* being the noteworthy exception.) And that's not right because I often write with my friends in mind. Then, in the spring of '04, after deciding to gather all of the columns into a one-shot zine, I was asked to go on a zine reading tour (with the right fine Todd Taylor, Published Writer). A tour seemed like a call for new material, so I wrote four new pieces and included those here too.

And there we stand. Thanks to the many editors who allowed me to contribute to their zines. Whether they gave me a theme to write about or *carte blanche*, each one was a worthy experience.

Enjoy,

Mike

#3 – For those with little patience:

The U-Haul Adventures, published in August 2004, collects two dozen previously published columns written for a variety of defunct zines in addition to four newer pieces.

The columns included in *The U-Haul Adventures* originally appeared in the following zines: *Angst and Daises* (Buffalo, NY); *Banana Race* (Tucson, AZ); *Big Deal Loser* (Ronkonkoma, NY); *Chicken Is Good Food* (San Francisco, CA); *Foxy Digitalis* (Tulsa, OK); *Metal Men Are After Me* (Oak Creek, WI); Mutant Pop Records catalog (Corvallis, OR); *Now Wave* (York, PA); *Paranoid Time* (Santa Monica, CA); *Schuell* (Lafayette, IN); *Spank* (Des Moines, IA); *Sticky Fingers* (Oak Creek, WI) and show programs for the Primate 5 (Seattle, WA) and Dick Army (New York, NY).

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The April 16 Eight

"Your son has been suspended for his involvement in a conspiracy to harass and intimidate the faculty of West Genesee Senior High School."

My mom and I reached detente the moment after she read the school's letter to me. She decided not to be pissed because she wanted to find out what the letter was referring to and she felt uncomfortable about going through my room in order to find the letter. I couldn't be pissed because I had snagged that letter, which had been addressed to her, out of the mail. And yes, I had been involved in a conspiracy, but I thought the "harass and intimidate" part was a bit harsh.

I was a junior in high school and my friend Pete and I had become fascinated with the movie *All the President's Men*, which depicts Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's efforts to uncover the truth behind the Watergate conspiracy. Pete and I were both raving liberals and had a red hot contempt for Nixon and his cronies, yet at the same time we couldn't stop talking and thinking about their attempted cover up. We were fascinated by the exploits of Magruder, Colson, and Ehrlichman. We even went to the library and checked out record albums of the Watergate tapes.

One night we were hanging out at Pete's house and watching a rerun of *M.A.S.H.* Hawkeye and his cronies had created a fictitious soldier, convinced the Army brass that this guy actually existed and started getting his supplies sent to their unit. Combined with our interest in the Watergate cover up, the show sparked a craving to pull a prank of our own. We came up with the idea of leaving notes around the school referring cryptically to a date randomly chosen on the calendar, April 16th—notes that read, "Remember, April 16th is coming," "April 16th is just around the corner," and "Hey, what are you doing on April 16th?" We would leave the notes all over the school in the hopes that they would be noticed by teachers and then the teachers would start to wonder what would happen on that day. The idea was to present the prank to a bunch of Pete's fellow seniors as a last joke before graduation, and with their help we would figure out what to actually do on April 16th. We decided to put the plan to the test by sleeping on it for a night. If the idea still sounded good in the morning, we'd move ahead.

I woke up early the next morning and called Pete. He was one step ahead of me and already drafting a letter to the effect of, "Seniors, we're about to graduate, let's go out with a bang..." My idea to make it funnier was to quote George Carlin, whom we'd recently seen in concert. So the part that read "let's get the teachers" became "let's get those dirty, rotten, shitbag, motherfucking, asshole teachers." (I later found out that what I intended to be a joke actually frightened the faculty.)

Despite having no proposal for a plan of action on April 16th, the idea was well received. All told eight of us signed on. To heighten the joke, we each took on the name of a Watergate conspirator. But we didn't go for the obvious guys like G. Gordon Liddy or Howard Hunt. We went for the obscure guys. Pete became H. R. Haldeman and I became John Dean. Other friends opted for the likes of Frederick LaRue and Lawrence Higby. And we decided that every note would carry Haldeman's initials H.R.H.

The fun began Monday morning. One of the guys, Alan Darby wrote "Be Aware, April 16th Is Coming" on a stack of note paper and walked down the hall between classes dropping dozens of notes. Steve Carrol left a note on each of his teachers' desks, including the never-left-unattended science lecture hall. Roger Dowl, the school's resident punk, handed out notes like they were candy. I was too anxious to leave any notes, but I got by on my co-conspirator status. After a week of snickering at lunch time, the prank was forgotten. The appeal withered because no one could think of something to do on April 16th. Should we bring flowers to the teachers? Should we skip school? Should we wear suits and ties? We lacked a punchline worthy of the set up. Plus, to make matters worse, not one of the teachers reacted to the notes. As far as we knew no one was paying attention.

We were wrong, the school's faculty was very aware of April 16th. A month later we were sitting at lunch and Roger, the guy with Fascist Pope and Black Flag posters in his locker, was standing in the cafeteria doorway and he was weeping. He stopped by our table, said that he'd been called down to the office and then he left. His face was ghost white, like he'd seen hell.

After lunch I went to health class. I was sweating and out-of-body nervous and my mind was racing, yet surprisingly it's the only discussion from health class that I remember. Mrs. Walsh was talking about pizza as a health food. Then the conversation drifted from diet to exercise. Mrs. Walsh mentioned that exercise is good for you because it quickens the heart rate which strengthens your respiratory system. The class wise ass, Darren Lopes, wearing his Grateful Dead shirt, said, "Wait, cigarettes increase your heart rate, right? So then smoking is a respiratory workout too, only with smoking you don't have to get all sweaty."

Just as Darren was building his case, the principal came over the loud speaker.

"Mrs. Walsh, please send Mike Faloon to my office immediately."

Most of the kids in my health class didn't know my name, so they were surprised to see the quiet kid in the back stand up and leave the room.

I knew why they were calling me down, and even though the joke had only lasted for a week, I knew what to do: deny everything. Just like the guys in Watergate. Just like my friends and I had talked about.

When I got to the principal's office, the guidance counselor, Mr. Howe, was in the room. He stood in front of the window and commented on how nice the weather was. The principal, Mr. Donham, entered, walked behind his desk, and sat down. He rocked back in his chair, put his hands about chest high and pressed his fingers together. He asked how I was doing. I said fine. Then the guidance counselor, Mr. Howe, with his back to me, still looking out the window, began gently asking questions.

"Do you know anything about this April 16th joke?"

"No, I don't."

"Do you know anything about kids passing out notes to teachers?"

"No."

"Are you sure you don't know anything that we should know about?"

"No. I mean, yes, I am sure."

They nodded. And paused. And I waited. And that was it.

"Okay, you can go back to class. Thanks."

"Yeah, sure, no problem."

I sensed that they knew more than they were letting on, and after school I learned that everybody had been called down. They asked questions, we denied. Heads were nodded, then they let us go. Except Roger. They lowered the boom on him. They went bad cop/bad cop, threatening legal action. He walked out to his truck, got the last of his notes, and told them everything he knew. None of us blamed him. We accepted the fact that for all of our intentions, we would have caved too.

The manner in which we got caught leaked out over the next couple of weeks. Turns out one of the April 16 Eight, as we became known in school, Marcus Ruffin, the dumb bastard, had written "Be Aware" on the art teacher's desk calendar, and of course, he wrote it on April 16th. The art teacher instantly recognized Marcus' distinctive lettering. He told the principal at the next staff meeting—the teachers were having weekly staff meetings to decode the mystery behind April 16th—and then the teachers watched who Marcus hung out with

between classes and at lunch. That's how they knew who to call down to the office. They never did figure out who H.R.H. was, though. They ran the initials through the school's computers, the district's computers, and the state's computers. No match. It's too bad we had no agenda because we certainly had their attention.

The second time I was called down to the office they knew everything about everybody. They didn't ask any questions, they only dangled a bunch of unpleasant possibilities in my face—being kicked out of school, having to transfer to a private school, scarring my permanent record which would prevent me from getting into college. To make me squirm they said they'd let me know the next day. I spent the night looking out my bedroom window wondering which branch of the military I was about to enter.

Then I got the news: a one-day suspension. After all of that angst, my punishment was to stay home from school for a day.

When I came back to school everyone wanted to know what happened, heads turned as I walked down the hall. That afternoon, after school, I was inducted into the National Honor Society. I couldn't get over the irony of standing on a stage, holding a candle and pledging my loyalty to the same school that had suspended me the day before.

None of my teachers said anything about the incident, except my Spanish teacher who quietly came up to me and talked about learning from your biggest mistakes. She was cool. Otherwise my life at school was soon back to normal, and it was if the April 16 Eight never existed, especially when the other seven, all seniors, graduated.

Cut to the next fall, my senior year, first period on the first day of school, Mr. Hebner's computer class. Every teacher on every first day of school for my entire life mispronounced my last name the first time they tried to say it. Every teacher got it right that day, though Mr. Hebner paused when he did attendance.

"Beth Faber?"

"Here."

"Mike Fa..." He looked up and clearly projected a thought of "oh, that's the kid," before continuing. "Mike Faloon?"

"Here."

Three weeks later, for the first time in the school's history, a bomb threat was called in. I had nothing to do with it, but as we filtered out of the building that afternoon I received my share of suspicious glances from the faculty. I knew

that when they looked into their crystal balls they saw me being photographed and fingerprinted, one FBI-background check after another. And they were right, I've been fingerprinted by the states of New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Connecticut. I've had four FBI background checks done. Not because of any criminal activity, but because I decided to become a teacher myself. Just like Dean and the other Watergate conspirators, I have only prospered in my post-cover up life.

(2004)

Travis, Andy and Me

That Friday I'd gone into New York City for my friend Anthony's birthday party. Our bands used to play together and we've stayed in touch over the years. Though our tastes are compatible what we really bond around is the fact that we remember each other's band. We don't have the Depression or the Great War to bond around, we have old punk bands, and it's reassuring to know that your obscure band exists in someone else's memory. Around 11 o'clock I decided to call it a night. I left the bar with the intention of going straight to the train station, but then I ran into one of my favorite people in the world, my friend Brian and his wife Lisa. Conversations with Brian can go from the virtues of the latest issue of *Justice League America* to how funny *Chappelle's Show* is to notions of negotiated authenticity in punk rock. Clearly, my train would wait.

By 11:30 we were working through our second round and thoroughly swept up in the Cubs/Marlins playoff game. The Cubs had come from behind and sent the game into extra innings before pulling off an improbable win. We were the only three people in the bar watching the game, but I was having such a great time I felt like I was among 10,000 like-minded people. After the game ended some anonymous soul with great taste got hold of the jukebox, and by the fourth round I was awash in great conversation while songs by the Jam, the Buzzcocks, and the Clash blared in the background. When I noticed that it was 1:15 I leisurely said good-bye to Brian and Lisa and headed to the train station. As I walked my head cleared a bit and I realized that I'd given myself only 15 minutes to catch the 1:30 train, the last train leaving Grand Central.

I arrived at 1:31, just in time to see the fading taillights of the departing 1:30 train. The next train didn't leave until six in the morning, and Grand Central would soon be closing for the night. I'd either have to find another way home or find somewhere else to stay the night.

The trains had stopped, but cabs go all night. Leaving Grand Central I spotted an on-duty cab driver and asked how much it would be to Pound Ridge, the tiny upstate town where my wife and I lived.

"Never heard of it," he said, "what's it near?"

"Mount Kisco," I replied, "it's right next to Bedford."

"Never heard of that either, let me look it up."

As he reached into his glove compartment, another cabbie got out of his car, walked over to me and asked where I was going. Seated cabbie glared at standing cabbie with death in his eyes. A bidding war was on the horizon, and apparently bidding wars are not accepted practice in the cab driving world.

"Damn it, what are you doing, man? You know you can't do that, that's my fare," seated cabbie said.

"Where are you going?", standing cabbie repeated to me.

"Don't tell him," said seated cabbie as he frantically flipped through his book of maps. Then he called out the passenger's side of his cab to a cop standing on the curb. "He can't do that, he knows he can't do that, and you know he can't do that."

The cop feigned interest. "What's the problem?"

"I missed my train," I answered, "I'm just trying to get home as cheaply as possible."

The cop shrugged and stepped back on the curb. As the cabbies tried to find Pound Ridge, I worked out my plan. I'd get a ride to Pound Ridge and stop at an ATM along the way to get the cash. I'd heard that cab rides upstate could cost \$50-\$75. I decided to err toward the high end of the range; I was willing to spend up to \$75 for a ride home.

That's when seated cabbie called out, "\$180, that's what it'll cost."

That ended the auction. I said thanks and headed across town to the bus station at Port Authority. As I walked west on 42nd street, I thought of calling someone. But my wife was out of town and the friends I'd just seen were all en route to their apartments in Queens or Brooklyn. And, I didn't have their numbers on me. Plus, I felt so incredibly stupid for missing the train. My hopes hinged on catching a bus and they rose as I saw that Greyhound was open. The guy at the counter was friendly and knowledgeable, a rare combination in my bus-riding experiences. My hopes continued to ascend.

"4:45 is the next bus to White Plains," he told me, which meant the bus would leave earlier than the morning train but Greyhound could only get me half way home, I'd have to take a cab the rest of the way.

No train, no cab, no bus. It was 2:15 and the reality of a night on the streets began to sink in. As I was about to let self-pity have its way with me, I saw people filtering out of a movie theater across the street. It reminded me of those scenes in 70s movies where the urban loner takes in a late show to pass the time. Like in *Taxi Driver*, only I wasn't in search of one of those movies that Travis Bickle used to pass the time. Once inside the lobby I saw that the theater had no more movies that night. I saw two police officers and explained my situation. I asked if they knew of any theaters still showing movies at that time of the night.

Officer number one laughed and told me to get a girl.

Trying to play along, I pointed to my wedding ring and said that I was married.

Officer number two said, "So spend more." Then he slapped officer number one on the shoulder as they doubled over in laughter.

I flashed an in-on-the-joke smile while privately relishing the perverse joy of knowing that at home, sandwiched between CDs by Blur and the Bomb Bassets is my copy of Body Count's self-titled CD, the uncensored version with "Cop Killer." It's one of the worst CDs I own, and I've long regretted having paid \$13.99 for it back in 1991, but in that moment the Body Count disc paid for itself ten-fold.

Once my Charles Bronson-in-reverse fantasies passed, I came to my next realization: I was broke. Two more realizations followed in quick succession: I was thirsty and needed to use a bathroom. I walked into an all-night Sabarro's and headed for the throne. Then I asked for a cup of water, knowing that they usually don't ask people to pay.

It had been just over an hour since I missed my train and for the first time, I had nothing to do. I strolled down 8th Avenue for two or three blocks before spotting a sign that said "Kung Fu movies for sale." I like the occasional martial arts movie and the sign was lit and the store was open, so I stepped inside. I quickly realized that at this point of the night "kung fu movies" actually means "porn." In this case, aisle upon brightly lit aisle of porn movies, the place was like a grocery store. Not my domain. Sex is a private thing to me. I'm uncomfortable talking about sex with anyone other than my wife. Looking at sex in public? Forget it. Being seen looking at sex in public? Time to leave. As I walked out I realized that no matter what kind of spin I put on this, no one would believe that I'd accidentally stumbled into the kung fu/sex palace. It's just like the time my friend Eric convinced me to drive him to in-store calendar

signing by model Elle McPherson. He bought two calendars and asked me to get in line with him, so that I could get his second signed for him. I complied, nervously talking to Eric the whole time, racking my brain for ways to distance myself from the line of losers in which we stood. I never did notice the cameras from the local TV station. I didn't hear about those until my dad said he'd seen me on the eleven o'clock news. When I tried to explain my side of the story, that I'd only gone because Eric didn't have a ride, and I was only in line because Eric wanted to get two calendars signed and you were only allowed one per person, my dad only replied that he hadn't seen Eric on the news, just me. Needless to say, no one believed me when I pleaded that it wasn't even my calendar, just like you probably don't believe me now.

At that point in the night I would have killed to have someone not believe me, or simply notice me. But even more than feeling lonely, I started feeling incredibly tired. I hadn't stopped moving for two hours. Upon returning to Grand Central I saw that inside one of the entrances, there was a small section roped off and occupied by eight other guys who had missed their last trains home. These were my people. My drunk too much and misjudged time people. Clearly-exhausted, dejected, and in no mood to talk about the colossal mistake of the night; we were united. We ranged in age from early 20s to early 50s, and while some were dressed in suits and others in jeans, there were no illusions of hierarchy. If any one of us had any significant social standing we would have splurged for that overpriced cab ride or that hotel room or anything better than a corner of Grand Central.

That was my last coherent thought of the night. I leaned back against the marble wall, sank to the floor and began drifting in and out of the most uncomfortable sleep of my life. I remember checking my watch at 3:35 and again at 4:45. I also recall a dream in which I was Andy Kaufman. Apparently, he paid off my parents just before faking his death in 1984 and, in early 1985, he returned to society as me. In my dream, I didn't exist before 1985 and I'd been so successful in adapting to the new persona that it was not until that night in Grand Central that I realized that the whole thing had been a ruse and that I was, in fact, Andy Kaufman.

I'd just come to terms with this scenario—abandoning my own identity to take on Andy Kaufman's—when I heard the click of the gate opening. I slowly unfolded myself and stood up, looking kind of like the second to last guy on one of those evolution of man charts. My body ached in places that I didn't know had nerve cells. As I stumbled to my dearly beloved 6:00 train I hummed a song to myself, "Gold Star" by the Jennifers: "That which doesn't kill me, can still hurt a lot." I mumbled the lyrics to myself until I got to my seat and slipped into a soothing sleep.

(2004)

The Figgs in North Carolina

"I don't know what it is/but it's something" – "Right on Their Case" – The Figgs

Man, what a month. I finished my master's degree, got back together with my wife after three years of long distance relationship-ing, moved from New York City to North Carolina, lined up my first teaching job, and then, one week after arriving, we lost our apartment to a fire. Anxious for a taste of home, I embarked upon a 45-minute drive to catch NYC's finest, the Figgs.

They were playing in Chapel Hill, a hop, skip, and jump from my new home of Raleigh, NC. After years of taking the subway to shows, I was reveling in the "crank the car stereo on the way to the big show" ritual, to the point of screwing up the idiot-proof directions to the club. Well, nearly idiot-proof. When it became clear that I'd lost my way, I stopped to ask for directions. Not once, not twice, but three times. The first time I was annoyed because I realized I might be lost and, worse, late for the show. The second time I was pissed because I realized I was definitely lost and, when rolling up the window, the handle fell off. The third time I had to ask for directions I livid because I was still lost, the window handle was still broken and now, when I tried to exit the car, the door wouldn't open. By the time I reached the club—and crawled out the passenger side of the car—I was in the foulest of moods. My 45-minute jaunt had turned into a 105-minute festival of frustration.

Hearing that the Figgs had not yet played brought on a wave of relief, a wave big enough to carry me through one song by the opening band, 2 Ton Boa. By the second song, I had tuned into their game plan: punishment. What I saw and heard struck me dumb but unfortunately not deaf. One drummer, two bass players, and...and nothing. That was it, one kit and eight strings. And long, grating "compositions." They had it all wrong. The drummer had a garbage can lid on a cymbal stand (which, ala Mo Tucker, is very cool) but never used it. Bassist #1 played his bass just like it was a guitar. Bassist #2, who played her four strings like a bass, was also the band's singer, only she didn't so much sing as caterwaul. And squawk. They had too many basses to do anything that might appeal to me and yet not enough basses to cover "Big Bottom" (the Spinal Tap number that requires three basses—and is the exception that proves the "one bass is always enough" rule). 2 Ton Boa had found the perfectly imperfect middle ground. I was in the midst of dismissing them as the worst band ever when it dawned on me that they were so bad they must in fact be really popular in some circles. Or at least one circle. One small circle whose inhabitants were plagued with faulty hearing and cloudy judgment. Moments later I heard the following: "...and check out our new EP on Kill Rock Stars." Suspicion confirmed. Fortunately, they did adhere to one of the dictates of tradition, that which calls for the conclusion of the set to follow shortly after the merchandise mention. Then the Figgs came to the plate.

Their set was sheer bliss, an intoxicating blur of pop and rock. I remember a feeling of pure joy as they launched into the first tune and then before I knew it, the show was over. Elapsed time: unknown. I recall there being a good mix of old and new material but pressed for further details I can offer nothing. My mind was fully absorbed in "marvel" function, "data processing" was receiving no power. Ditto for my social skills as evidenced by my attempt to strike up a conversation with the band after the set, a time during which I unleashed such witty, thought-provoking nuggets as "nice set," "new stuff sounded great," and "how's the tour going?" I was on fire, blessed by the gods of gab. I didn't regain full use of my noggin until I was half way back to Raleigh. Fortunately my internal pop instincts were equipped with reserve power and before leaving, I had the presence of mind to buy a copy of the Figgs' then-new LP *Rejects*.

As I sailed home along Route 40, I tried to figure out, once more, what makes a Figgs show so great. I had no such luck then nor now, as I type this. I don't know what it is about the Figgs but it's the stuff of legend.

(*Now Wave*, #20, Fall 2002)

Fire

I love kids. Really, I do. But the youngsters who lived above my wife and me were fast proving themselves to be a double-barrel pain in the ass. We had been in our new place for a week and not one day had passed without one of the wee terrors tossing a truckload of toys off their balcony and into the small patch of grass that constituted our backyard. Annoying as that clutter was, it paled in comparison to their other pastime: making a lot of noise early on weekend mornings. They had done it the first weekend we lived in the building, and they were at it again on that fateful Sunday morning. Or so we thought.

When we heard the sounds of stuff falling outside our bedroom window, we assumed the dynamic duo were in action once more. Only this wasn't a one-shot thump or quick crash. It was a steady flow of garbage softly falling to the ground. It was a strange sound, strange enough to rouse us at 8:45 on a Sunday morning. When Allie pulled back the shades she saw that whatever was falling from above was also on fire.

That was all I needed to hear. I dressed in a flash, leashed up the dog and beelined for the door, hot on Allie's heels. It wasn't until we were in front of our building that I realized exactly what was happening. It wasn't just some falling debris that was aflame...the building was on fire. Our building.

We sat on the curb in disbelief, waiting for the fire department to arrive. Smoke billowed out from the back of the building, then the first visible flame flickered on the roof. Before long a fountain of flames engulfed the top of the building.

In talking with neighbors we learned that everyone was safe. Knowing that, my thoughts turned to my stuff. I was all too aware of how much stuff I owned. I'd spent the past two weeks packing, moving, unpacking, and arranging everything I own. Thirty-one years worth of stuff. As the fire did its "up yours, mortal" dance of destruction, I mentally rooted through the piles of stuff in my apartment. The records, the CDs, the tapes, the zines, the photos, the videos—all of it. Piece by piece, I pictured my possessions being devoured by fire. Like a hyper-accelerated montage, images sprinted through my mind.

Relative to the fact that we could have died in the fire, the potential loss of things was a minor concern. But a concern, nonetheless. Turns out most of our possessions survived. Sorting through my soggy stuff, I realized that I have a lot. My lapsed Catholic guilt reared its ugly head and I felt like a shallow, possession-obsessed, materialistic bastard.

Two piles of stuff emerged. In pile one there are the things I enjoy but could easily replace. In pile two there are the things that I enjoy but probably couldn't replace. Pretty simply distinction but there is more than obscurity involved in dividing the two camps. With one, I hang onto the item for my own entertainment. With the other, I hang onto it for my own entertainment but also for the sake of preservation, because I fear that no one else will save these things, or that not enough people will do so. Copies of obscure zines and self-released 7"s and underground movies. Zines and 7"s and movies to which future generations need to have access. All the brilliant and underappreciated stuff that this era has been privileged to relish in. This era deserves better than to be judged by the dreck that receives mainstream notice. There are a million copies of every issue of *Spin*, truckloads of each Smashing Pumpkins CD and every Adam Sandler movie. But what about *Rocto*ber zine? Junior Varsity 7"s? Russ Forster's *So Wrong, They're Right?* My quality of life would be diminished significantly without those works and it's not as if I could stroll down to the local Mega Media Mart and restock on such items should they be lost. That's not an option now and it won't be an option for people down the road. So, I retain all of the stuff that rocks my world in the hopes that someone else will get as much out of that zine or 7" or video as I did. It took a move to North Carolina, a fire, and moving into yet another apartment to figure it out, but I've finally come to grips with my pack rat ways.

As for the kids upstairs, they both survived the fire. Ironically, they had to be tossed off the balcony in order to escape.

(Schuell, #L, 2000)

Shaving Cream

When I first started following underground culture I thought every person involved with a band or zine had some sort of revolutionary job, some way of paying the bills that was untainted by the mainstream. That notion eroded over time and eventually I realized that there are no easy solutions. What band and zine people do outside of their music or writing remains a fascinating issue for me. As a zine reader, such discussions are always highlights in interviews and as a zine geek, I usually ask about such things when doing an interview. I'm forever curious about how other people resolve the need to work while maintaining some bit of integrity.

Personally, in the first eight years after I graduated from college, I managed to muddle through a slew of mundane jobs. I was a pizza shop grunt, mall record store grunt, and an office grunt. It wasn't all grunt work though, I washed dishes, too. It seems like I'd done everything but find a practical use for my Communications degree. Don't get me wrong, it's not as if I think I was subjected to torture (though my boss at Columbia's Butler Library may have violated some of the lesser regulations instituted by the Geneva Convention). My dad put himself through college working at a tanning factory. His dad worked at a paper mill. I know I've had it easy but I always hoped that a sliver of satisfaction might come with that ease.

One thing those lousy jobs helped me do was compile a list of factors that I did not want in a job. And really, that list is not much different than Lloyd Dobler's list in *Say Anything* which goes something like "I don't want to sell, buy, or process anything. I don't want to sell anything bought or processed. I don't want to buy anything sold or processed and I don't want to process anything sold or bought." Like Lloyd, I had a dad with a military background which led to an aversion to the armed forces. Unlike Lloyd, I'm a lousy kick boxer so I had more work to do in finding a career. After awhile I began to compile a more helpful list, a list of factors that I did want in a job. That list led me to teaching.

I went back to school to get my masters in Elementary Education. It took over two years and put me eyeball deep in debt and I don't regret it for a moment because last summer I got a great job. I'm now about three quarters of the way through my first year as a teacher (second grade) and I've found that it is possible to derive genuine satisfaction from a vocation. It's been an amazing, amusing, and arduous year.

I've been there as Anna blossomed as a reader, turning reading from a chore to a joy, opening a world of books to herself. I'll never forget the day she missed her bus stop because she was so engrossed in a copy of Roald Dahl's *The Witches*. I've watched Diyana consciously take ideas from her reading and apply them to her writing. I was 29 before I started doing that, she's doing it at seven! She's

not the only ahead-of-her-age kid in my class. One morning my principal greeted me by saying, "I hear one of your students is giving extra curricular classes on the playground." Apparently, the day before not one, not two, but three moms heard the following question upon picking up their children at school: "Mommy, do you and daddy use shaving cream when you have sex?" Each parent called school and inquired about what led their second grader to posing such a question. Turns out one of my students had access to the Playboy channel, and he was giving informal tutorials during recess. (Thankfully, my principal has a sense of humor and we laughed about the situation before talking with the student.) Most of the year has been great, but it has not all been peaches and shaving cream. I've also had a kid bring a razor blade to school and had another child repeatedly say he's going to kill himself, among other challenges.

I work eleven hours a day plus at least one afternoon a weekend. I figured out that, after taxes, I make less than eight bucks an hour. And yet there has not been one 6:30 am drive where I wished I wasn't going to work. Quite the contrary, I'm always thinking of ways to improve my day, to become better at what I do. Not the sorts of thoughts that went through my mind when I was a dough master or working at the Record Shack or sifting through books that hadn't been checked out since FDR was in office.

I'm still not certain if I'll teach for the rest of my life. I've put myself on a three-year plan. After three years in the classroom, I'll see where I am and either return for a fourth year or redirect. My point isn't to congratulate myself but share an example of how it's possible to do something you like for a living. On a good day at school I feel like a magician. On a bad day at school I feel like a war criminal. There are many in-between moments too and that's exactly what I was looking for, exactly what the pizza shop, record store, and office couldn't offer: a totally different experience each day. And a satisfying one too.

(Schuell, #M, 2001)

Electric Bird Digest

Fall 1986

By the time I reached my room, I had sorted through the big issues of my day. I had returned from track practice, scarfed down a box of Wheat Thins or Bugles, exchanged "Hi, how was your day?"s with my mom and brothers, and figured out exactly how little homework I needed to do in order to get through the next day at school. By the time I reached my room I was ready to focus on one thing: music. The Kinks, R.E.M., the Smithereens, any number of brilliant pop records

awaited, choosing one was the most challenging part of my day. Life as a high school senior was anything but stressful.

Fall 1991

By the time I had reached my room, I was still trying to shake off my bad day. I had returned from my job at the record store, tried to eat a snack and muddled through a brief conversation with whoever happened to be home. The last thing I wanted to think about was the next day. By the time I reached my room I was drained. Life as a college graduate was anything but I expected.

The first eight months of '91 were wonderful. I graduated from college and, with two months left on the lease to my apartment, joined my housemates in staying for the summer. I was dating someone too. It was an amazing time, even my temp job—washing dishes at the on-campus restaurant—didn't bring me down. To cap off the summer, my housemates and I went skydiving. Unfortunately, this literal plunge was followed by a figurative one.

By September, my girlfriend and I had broken up, my lease had ended, and I had moved back home. I was down but not out. I still had my new Communications degree and I remained confident that my "real" job in the music business was just around the corner. With that search underway I needed something in the short term—money for resumes, looming loan payments, and keeping my car on the road. I hit the local record stores looking for a job to tide me over.

Only one record store responded and that store was located in the mall next to my former high school. Not only was I unattached and living with my mom, I was working next door to the school I had graduated from four years ago and the same mall I had spent all of high school avoiding. And to make matters worse my new boss had no interest in my music background. I went to the interview expecting questions about my college radio experiences, questions about being the music director (and having to argue with the station's manager that, yes, I did think our college radio station was much better off playing the Young Fresh Fellows rather than Don Henley) and the programs I hosted—questions about loving and wanting to work with music.

But my boss-to-be used to sell suits. He wanted to talk about sales, specifically the lack of sales experience on my resume. I was stunned. Even in a mall record store I expected more. I had to convince him that, despite my lack of sales experience I was worthy of this minimum wage job. This minimum wage job that was the closest thing to a knock on my door. And once I convinced him, I had to convince myself that the job was worth taking.

The real world was making less sense all the time yet I made the best of my new vocation. I unearthed my meager collection of ties (three permanently-knotted

off-tan beauties), saved my jeans for days off (I was sent home the day I wore jeans to work), and usually wore my name tag. When kids asked for the new Guns'n'Roses cassette, I led them to the rock section ("Will that be *Use Your Illusion 1* or 2?"). When parents asked for the *Phantom of the Opera* soundtrack, I led them to the show tunes section ("No, I'm sorry we don't have the Toronto cast's recording"). When my boss said we needed to be extra careful when locking up at night—because the company occasionally posted observers to make certain that we complied with procedure—I overlooked the obvious Orwellian overtones. And I did so, well, not happily, but patiently.

I could handle the short term compromises because I had my eyes on the long term. Yet I could only hold up for so long. I needed this real job to materialize. I worked hard in college and I was ready for the world to reciprocate my efforts by rewarding me with a real job. Sure enough the replies trickled in. Rejection letters, one and all. Form rejections too. "Thank you for your interest. We'll keep your resume on file." The voices of the real world choir were clear and consistent: No thanks, kid.

Before I knew it, September had come and gone and October was threatening to do the same. Meanwhile I had fallen into a routine. I would work from noon to nine and then come home to a growing pile of thin envelopes and a dormant answering machine. Humiliation from the job I had, rejection from the jobs I sought. All while living at home. Oy.

Fortunately, my junkie-like consumption of pop music continued unabated. A bunch of great records came out that fall. I still remember the day I got the Pixies' *Trompe le Monde*, Robyn Hitchcock's *Perspex Island*, and Nirvana's *Nevermind*. But the first thing I listened to when I got home was the latest Young Fresh Fellows' album, *Electric Bird Digest*.

For weeks *Electric Bird Digest* never left my record player. Every day, I'd lift the dust cover, pick up the record, give it a quick flip, scan for dust, place it back on the record player, lift the tone arm and very gently—regardless of my mood—place the needle on the now-spinning record. Then I'd flop onto my bed and wait. Crackle. Snap. Crackle. A pause. (Cue vocals) "There's going to be a reunion..." (Cue band) Wham-slam-crash..."The Telephone Tree" poured out of the speakers and washed over the room. I'd listen to one side of the album a day. One day my routine began with "The Telephone Tree" (side one, song one), the next it began with "Hillbilly Drummer Girl" (side two, song two). Twenty minutes a day with *Electric Bird Digest* was good for what ailed me. It was like those gimmicky exercise routines advertised on late-night television only it worked.

That fall I came dangerously close to losing my sense of humor and yielding to the kind of self pity I've always laughed at. The biggest thing I got from

Electric Bird Digest was a sense of, Get over yourself, sure things suck but it's not as bad you think. It came across in the music and it came across in the album cover.

The early 90s were dominated by angry, angst-ridden, "o woe is me" rock bands whose records featured blurry photographs depicting, well, no one is quite certain. The Fellows, on the contrary, took to the cover of *Electric Bird Digest* donning suits garish enough to make Liberace blush. They posed in the recording studio, cheap beer at the ready, *Archie* comics strewn about, guitar cords snaking this way and that, the band's name blazing across Tad's kick drum in full-fledged ROY G. BIV glory. It was crystal clear these guys were having fun.

It came across in the lyrics too but it's only now, after ten years of listening, that I know the guitar, bass, and drum parts well enough to begin mining the album's lyrics. It amazes me that I spent all of that time clinging to *Electric Bird Digest* like a sonic floatation device but never fully tuned into the lyrics. According to my estimates, I'll have a fix on the lyrics by 2012. Then I can begin working on the album's title.

(*Now Wave*, #19, 2002)

M.R.P.

The dreaded Yankees have emerged victorious in the (anti-climatic) '98 World Series. Rev. Norb is no longer part of Team MRR. The U.S. government, in an attempt to save the Social Security system, has started launching senior citizens into outer space (do not believe for a minute that John Glenn volunteered for that shuttle "mission"). You couldn't blame a guy for taking a dim view of the future. But it is not all dire news. Take, if you will, the following example. I know when I will be able to quit my present job and it can not all be bad when something that good is on the horizon.

I work in Columbia University's Butler library. To be a tad more specific, I toil in the oppressive confines of the school's Monographic Reconversion Project Department. Though I must confess that there is a minuscule amount of satisfaction in being able to answer the office phone with the rather cryptic "M.R.P." (which makes me feel like a member of some secret branch of British Intelligence), there is nothing remotely high brow about my job. Here is what the job entails: one at a time I look at each book on a given bookshelf. If a book has been checked out in the past 10 years, I return the book to the shelf. If the book has not been checked out in the past decade it is set aside for removal. You see, Columbia has roughly six million books in its collection. Some of these titles go untouched for long periods of time. Decades even. Hard to

believe that no one is interested in the Icelandic translation of *Paradise Lost* but that would appear to be the case, and it is my job to clear away such treasures so that the shelves have room for the next six million books (perhaps a Celtic translation of *Private Parts* is on the way). Fear not, Columbia does not throw out these less popular titles. Said books are moved to huge, off-campus storage facilities. So, in the event that you want to brush up on what the Germans were thinking about chemistry during the 18th century, you shall not have to settle for some crummy translation, or worse, some book on "modern" chemistry, you can seek out the original text at Columbia. What a service.

Suffice it to say, the nature of my work is mundane. But it does not end there. The problem is compounded by the fact that I work for a tyrant. My boss is the coldest, most off-putting human I have ever encountered. She makes Stalin seem like he could have been a member of the band cub. My boss squashes any and all office communication. No talk, no phone calls, no acknowledging that there are other people in the world. Just you and the books. And no matter how deep into the winter it may be she remains convinced that it is always appropriate to have all of the windows open and all of the air conditioners on full. As a result it is not uncommon for co-workers to escape to the bathroom so they can run warm water over their nearly frozen hands. And just today I learned that she filed a complaint because one of the two radiators in our office was "putting out too much heat."

I took this job because it pays much better than my last job, offers full benefits and four weeks vacation, more than enough to entice a lad who needs to work full time yet wants to have generous amounts of free time to indulge in foolish habits (in my case such habits = bands, zines, label, etc.). I have also begun working on a masters degree and my job offers 50% off tuition.

Now for the best part. Next fall I will begin student teaching. It would be ill-advised, and conveniently, impossible, to juggle both M.R.P. and student teaching. One of them must go and M.R.P.'s head is slated for the proverbial guillotine. Each day as I trudge to work I remind myself that is the last (insert current date here) I will ever make such a trek.

But I did not come before you with the intention of complaining. For the light has appeared at the end of the tunnel and it is time to start entertaining thoughts of how I will resign. Plus, the Yankees will not repeat in '99, I hear that the dear Reverend is taking his act to a new zine and maybe, just maybe, launching old folks into space won't become the next national craze.

(Mutant Pop Records catalog/zine, 1998)

Chambers Academy

In the summer of 2001 my wife and I were moving to Atlanta or Akron, the two places from which she had received internship offers. Atlanta offered a good experience and great weather but no pay. Akron offered a good experience and a paycheck. With our other salary, my salary, being that of a teacher, the non-paying internship in Atlanta wasn't an option. Plus, as Allie's soon-to-be boss pointed out in his email, "It's Akron, but it's only for a year." Before we set foot in Ohio we'd lined up one income and a place to live. All that remained was for me to find a job.

My first year of teaching was an exercise in idealism. I co-taught classes with my principal. I served on interview committees. I was given a voice at staff meetings and the veteran teachers listened. I applied everything I'd learned in grad school and I couldn't wait to find a school in Akron where I could build on my experiences.

When we arrived in Ohio I hooked up the computer even before I set up the stereo; I was ready to crank out cover letters and resumes. My plan was to get a job early and spend the rest of the summer relaxing in the mornings and using the afternoons to prepare for the coming year. I contacted every local school district, each of whom directed me to their respective website. I gathered all of my paperwork and readied myself for any question regarding my background. You see, school districts assume there are two types of people applying for teaching jobs: convicted felons and future felons. So schools need to filter out the former and cover their asses regarding the latter. Fingerprinting and FBI background checks are a matter of routine, but the schools in Akron kicked it up a notch. The Revere school district wanted to know what I did for work when I was in high school, so I provided contact information for Wegmans grocery store #1153 on Onondaga Boulevard in Syracuse, New York. The Copley-Fairlawn district wanted not only my SAT scores but where and when I took the test (West Genesee Senior High School, June 6, 1986).

I covered all of my basic information bases and I was equally prepared for the essay questions, meticulously crafting each response. I wrote about the qualities that made me "an outstanding candidate for a position." I wrote about my philosophy of education, typing it for one district, handwriting it for another.

In return I got a stack of postcards: "Thanks, your application is on file." I knew enough not to be deterred, so I followed up with phone calls. The conversations typically went like this:

Human resources representative: "Did you go to our website?"

Me: "Yes, and I completed the on-line application."

"Then in three to five business days you should receive notification of our receipt of your application."

"Do you mean the post-card?"

"Yes."

"I've received that, thanks. I'm wondering, what should I do next?"

"Have you gone to the school's website?"

"Yes, that's where I completed the application."

"Okay, then check the website for job openings."

"Won't I already be considered for upcoming openings because I've completed the application?"

"Not necessarily."

I kept checking and I continued calling, but as the start of the school year drew closer I also began thinking about private schools. I'm a diehard public school advocate. I'd spend my life in public schools. Private schools conjure images of F. Scott Fitzgerald characters, kids taking luxury train rides to Eastern boarding schools, smug and elitist. But I needed a job and two days later I had an interview with Sister Catherine at St. Ann's Catholic school in downtown Akron.

As she took me on a tour of the school, Sister Catherine informed me that they had a 4th grade position available. Stepping inside the 4th grade classroom, I inquired about the science curriculum. Sister Catherine walked to a bookcase and pulled from the top shelf a 3' x 2' cardboard box.

"Here," she offered, "this is the 4th grade science curriculum."

I suffocated the groan that was dying to get out.

As we strolled to her office, Sister Catherine told me that most of the parents sent their kids to St. Ann's because of the school's reputation for discipline and that most of the parents had gone to St. Ann's themselves. I couldn't help but think of all those *60 Minutes* segments that showed how perpetrators of child abuse were, often, once victims themselves.

When we sat down in Sister Catherine's office, she said she had one final question, one that she had to ask and that I wasn't to worry about my response, just be honest: How did I feel about teaching religion? I was floored, not by the question, but by the realization that prior to that moment I had failed to consider how I felt about teaching religion. As I formulated my response, thinking of the best way to present an agnostic viewpoint to someone who had devoted her life to a very particular religious viewpoint, I caught sight of a small ceramic urn that sat atop Sister Catherine's desk. The urn's bold, white letters declared, "Ashes of Problem Students."

Clearly, the good sister was not to be trifled with, so I was candid. I told her that I'd been raised Catholic but was not a church goer and that teaching religion would be difficult for me. She said that wasn't a problem, that I could take on, for example, two math classes and another teacher would cover religion for me. Oddly enough Sister Catherine, though not sufficiently impressed as to bring me aboard at St. Ann's, recommended me to Sister Lucille at nearby St. Leo's.

Sister Lucille was genuinely intrigued by my views on balanced literacy and she offered more than science in a box. The interview went well but I wasn't able to build enough momentum to overcome the final question: How do you feel about teaching religion?

Snubbed by the public schools, shunned by the Catholic schools, I had my finger on the panic button. I'd gone to grad school so I could move past the worlds of fast food and retail, yet I found myself careening back to name tags, training videos, and 28-hour work weeks with no benefits.

Then, in the phone book, I came across the name of a non-Catholic private school called Chambers Academy. They were only seven minutes from where we lived and they needed a 3rd grade teacher. Or rather, she did. Chambers, a boys-only school, was owned and operated by one woman, Ms. Richards.

As I pulled into the parking lot at Chambers, I was struck by how small the building was. It looked more like a hardware store than a school. Turns out, there were only 42 students enrolled from kindergarten through 8th grade. Not 42 kids per grade, 42 boys in the entire school. 4.7 kids per grade level. The middle school—grades 6, 7, and 8—had a total of six boys. The 8th grade consisted of Brian Roberts, just a single student.

Ms. Richards didn't ask for my SAT scores, nor my philosophy of education. With two weeks left in the summer, she needed a body in the Chambers 3rd grade classroom. I had a pulse and I got the job.

Tuition at Chambers was less than most private schools, \$2,700 a year. With a dozen teachers on the payroll the only way for the school to remain open was to

avoid spending money. There was no school nurse, just a first aid kit in the office. There was no supply room, just two drawers full of pens, post-its, and pencils. Each month in our milk carton mailboxes, Ms. Richards left a copy of the electric bill imploring us to cut back on our use of the lights. The computer in my room was a TRS-80, green-tinted monitor, 5" floppy disk drive, and all.

With such small class sizes I'd like to tell you that all of the teaching at Chambers was inspired, differentiated to suit the needs of each individual. But it was a mixed bag, some greatness and a lot of mediocrity, with special consideration reserved for the teacher who gave textbook assignments all day so she could sit at her desk and do crossword puzzles.

Yes, despite the limited budget, each grade had a full complement of textbooks, and textbooks, though inherently lame, are not cheap. But they must be cheaper in bulk because each and every one of the books at Chambers was purchased in 1987, the year the school opened, and not one book had been replaced since. Therefore, my 3rd graders, born in 1993, were reading textbooks published six years before they were born.

And they were peculiar textbooks, too. I didn't think my kids, living in Ohio, the nation's 18th ranked oil-producing state, needed to know the parts of an oil well, so we skipped past the section in our social studies book that required kids to distinguish between air-balanced, beam-balanced, and crank-balanced oil pumps.

I taught what I wanted that year, building most of my own curriculum, and never once was I observed by a parent, colleague or administrator; it was like working in a vacuum. Keep in mind this was the 2001-2002 school year, the country was already in its "teacher accountability" frenzy. And that's where my lesson plans come in.

On the 15th of each month, I had to turn in lesson plans for the coming month. I taught six subjects a day, yielding 120 lesson plans every four weeks. On the morning of the 15th I would send one of my students to Ms. Richards' room with my lesson plan binder. Ten minutes later one of her kindergarten students would bring back the binder with each of the 120 lesson plans signed and stamped. That comes to five seconds a lesson plan.

It's a good thing we had the lesson plans, too. That way when the state made their annual inspection of the school they could subject my teaching to the same scrutiny. I never actually saw the official from the state, just an extra set of initials on my lesson plans one month.

Chambers was indeed a weird world, seemingly forgotten by time, but hardly the den of arrogance I had feared it would be. I liked my kids and got along

with their families. As for Ms. Richards, she was her own one-person band, and with any one-person band you're not supposed to judge the songs and you're not supposed to ask, "Why not have other people in the band?" A one-person band functions best when you marvel at how many things she's able to do at once, focus on the process, forget the product.

In fact, I developed a grudging respect for Ms. Richards and her ability to keep Chambers afloat, and I think she appreciated the efforts of her staff. A few days before Thanksgiving I overheard two other teachers speculating whether or not we'd be getting bonuses the following week. Bonuses are unheard of in teaching and with Allie and me traveling for the holidays any extra money would be unusually helpful. \$25? \$50? \$100? I had no idea what to anticipate.

The day before Thanksgiving I passed Ms. Richards in the hallway.

"Enjoy your bonus," she said, "it's on your desk. And it's cold enough outside that you may want to keep it in your car."

I said thanks and quickened my pace. Sure enough, my bonus was on my desk. It was a turkey. My Thanksgiving bonus was an 18-pound turkey. Turns out her family owned a restaurant and she could get food wholesale. So naturally I roast beef for Christmas, and for Easter it was a ham.

Who needs supplies, up-to-date books, or rigorous standards when you've got a box of meat chilling on the front seat of your car?

(2004)

EnormoMax

I didn't know what to expect from North Carolina, home to Jessie Helms and Superchunk, only that, moving there from New York City, it would be different. Great weather, cheap apartments, and crummy pizza were fully anticipated but I wasn't prepared for everything.

Shortly after arriving down south I finished an issue of my zine. In search of cheap photocopying I discovered that at the local EnormoMax I could get my zine done for half the cost I'd paid in NYC. I was ecstatic but not convinced that a glaring error hadn't been made, so I requested a copy of their price sheet. The math had been done correctly yet the situation still felt like a fluke. Like a good trust-no-one New Yorker I asked to keep the sheet, thinking it might serve as handy evidence the next time I needed to have a zine copied.

A few months later another issue was ready to roll. When I returned to EnormoMax I realized that all of the employees I'd dealt with previously were gone. Fortunately I was armed with the price sheet, which I quickly produced. The manager was horrified by the sight of said price sheet. From the look on his face you'd have thought he was looking down the wrong end of a loaded shotgun.

"Where did you get that?" he inquired nervously.

"I asked for it the last time I had a copy job done here."

"Well, that's property of EnormoMax! It is my duty as an EnormoMax manager to confiscate it!"

Bewildered, I handed over the contraband sheet. At least that's what I think happened. The words "duty" and "confiscate" caught me off guard—This is EnormoMax, I thought to myself, we didn't teleport to a Navy Seals training base, did we? Call off the dogs, Sergeant Hulka, I just wanted to make sure I could get the same deal I got last time—sucker punching me into a state of numb detachment. Then it all got hazy.

Next thing I knew I was walking out of the store, satisfied with a boxful of photocopies. It was like when Batman has to take someone (other than Alfred or some other immediate member of the Bat clan, like Robin or Nightwing) to the Batcave. He gets them into the Batmobile, knocks them out with Batgas, and then revives them with Batuppers once they've arrived, thus insuring they have no clue as to the route they traveled to the Batcave. EnormoMax Manager, like Batman, motivated by a higher calling, must have knocked me out with EnormoMax gas, had me pay for the copies, given the copies to me, and then revived me with EnormoMax uppers. I know little about EnormoMax Man but I'm certain his brand of retail-based loyalty is rare, perhaps indigenous to North Carolina. For the sake of future generations I hope it was an isolated incident. Likewise for this next experience.

The whole time I lived in NYC I rooted for the Mets, even during the Ryan Thompson and Joe Orsulak days. In 2000, the year I moved to North Carolina, the Mets returned to the World Series for the first time since 1986. I couldn't stay up to watch the games on tv (my teaching job had me getting up at 5am, and I need my rest in order to work with second graders), but figured I could fall asleep listening to the games on the radio. That assumption was incorrect. Despite owning a fully functional AM/FM radio and meticulously scanning both the amplitude and frequency modulations, from each room in the apartment and using every possible antenna angle, I found not a trace of the Series on the radio. I harbored the misguided notion that if you lived in the Western Hemisphere you

could get the World Series on the radio. Like any right-minded citizen, I consider this a human right.

In place of the vaunted Fall Classic I heard an interview with a member of the Andy Griffith fan club. I heard any number of religious sermons. I heard the observations of the president of a squirrel watchers club. I heard everything but the dulcet tones of World Series play-by-play action. For the first time in 44 years there was a Subway Series and the best North Carolina could offer were the insights of a schmuck who spent his time leering at rodents.

My protests were loud and laced with anti-North Carolina invectives. My wrath was boundless. I wanted to raise General William Tecumseh Sherman from the dead and have him torch every AM and FM broadcasting outlet in the state. The only thing that saved North Carolina from destruction was the Mets' thoroughly inept performance. My beloved Mets wasted no time in making it obvious that they were going to get doused with a keg of whoop ass. By that point I was kinda of grateful for missing out on the all-together humiliating experience of witnessing the Yankees steamroll the hapless Mets.

As weird and frustrating as some of my North Carolina experiences were, I was relieved to discover that there are still regional differences, that even though the world is increasingly slathered with Appleby's and EnormoMaxes, not everything is the same. And while I never did get to see Superchunk on their home turf I did get to see the legendary Spongetones. Twice.

(*Spank* on-line, 2001)

Curse of the Figgs

Curse the Figgs! They are my third favorite band of all-time (behind the Kinks and Young Fresh Fellows) but I damn them nonetheless. Why this invocation of evil? Because the Figgs rendered me a record collector.

A record collector. The bottom feeder of hobbyists. The lowest of the low. Beneath even the collector of NASCAR merchandise (at least those guys go outside to attend races, record collectors have a half-life of seven minutes when exposed to sunlight). And yet I find myself among their ranks. I am not proud of this recently-realized status nor do I plan to change my ways, so an explanation is order. My perception of the record collector is close to that of the comic book store owner on *The Simpsons*, only with a more relaxed attitude toward personal hygiene. Possessors of the most arcane knowledge, cursed by a ridiculous need to buy crap. All of which is fine by me. Not something to aspire to, but fine.

The thing about record collectors I could never endorse was their willingness, nay, desire, to purchase music they already owned, their need to acquire every pressing of a release even when the contents (the music, ostensibly the reason for purchasing records in the first place) were exactly the same. Regardless of which pressing of *The Wall* you own, the protagonist still loses his dad during WWII, still develops a rather pronounced dislike for formal education, and still doesn't get to eat his pudding. Buy the German pressing or the Japanese pressing or the American pressing, it doesn't matter, the same overblown story awaits. Owning multiple copies of the same record was an inefficiency by which I could not abide, especially considering how many potentially great records I have not yet heard. It was based on such beliefs that I felt that I was at a safe distance from the record collecting hordes. Unbeknownst to me the record collecting gene lay dormant in my chromosomes.

When I was a kid I was hooked to the gills on collecting baseball cards. Nothing alarming about that, plenty of kids develop such habits. Plus, I phased out full-time card consumption when I was in junior high. Each spring I pick up a pack hoping to score an Edgardo Alfonso or Tony Gwynn, but the impulse to collect the cardboard has long been under control. I was master of my domain. The first true clue as to my impending malady (record collecting, that is) came about three years ago, in the form of comic books.

As with baseball cards, comic collecting is common among kids. Yet aside from the occasional issue of *Richie Rich*, I was never one for the funny books. Not until the summer of 1997, at the tender age of 27, did I find myself buying comics. That was the summer I moved to the Ditmars Boulevard section of Queens, last stop on the N train line. Each day my new commute took me past a comic book store. One day I dropped in after work and picked up a copy of the *Flash*. Good story, cool artwork—more than enough to satisfy a whim—so I went back the next month. And the next. It was only \$1.99 and it was only once a month. Not the stuff of which vices are made. Until issue #135, which was part of the “3 of a Kind” crossover, which in turn brought the *Scarlet Speedster* into the pages of *Green Lantern* (#96) and *Green Arrow* (#130). I had vowed not to fall for this thinly veiled marketing scheme. The whole tale could have been spun in one issue, it need not have sprawled into three different titles. For one week I resisted. I purchased only the *Flash* portion of the crossover. The following week I caved. I purchased both the *Green Lantern* and *Green Arrow* comics. And I enjoyed them. It was an exception to my comic-purchasing code, but it was a one-time exception.

Shortly thereafter I made another exception, *Justice League*. Still, not bad, I was spending \$1.99 every two weeks. Then *Iron Man* caught my eye. Big deal, you say. Merely one more title. True enough, dear reader, true enough. Except that *Iron Man* is from the Marvel Universe whereas the others are from the DC Universe. Now with *Iron Man* as part of my routine I was exposed to the

Marvel stuff, too. My habit spiraled out of control. I soon found myself at the comic shop every Wednesday and picking up four or five comics a week. Then I started with the hard stuff: back issues. And when my little store in Astoria could no longer fulfill my comic cravings, I ventured into the stores in Manhattan. St. Marks Comics. Jim Hanleys. Forbidden Planet.

Before long the little stack of comics that was tucked away in the closet needed to be contained in a box. Then three. I would have been shit out of luck and hopelessly addicted were it not for one vital factor: most comics suck. It took me awhile to get past the brightly colored covers and realize how weak the stories were but eventually my habit was under control, I went to the comic store once a month rather than once a week. Unfortunately, I saw this is as an isolated incident, not as an indication of how susceptible I was to the collector bug. Which brings me back to the Figgs. The damned Figgs.

I have liked the Figgs since '93, when my friend Brett loaned me the "Happy"/"My Mad Kitty" single. Cool a-side, good b-side. I put it on a mix tape but at the time my record budget was nil so I did not purchase my own copy. A year later, when I was writing reviews for a local paper, my editor passed along a copy of the Figgs' then-new *Low Fi at Society High* CD. It knocked me silly and I did all I could to convey as much to the readers of the *Ithaca Times*. I revisited my mix tape with "Happy." Still held up. I thought about seeking out the 7" but I was still scraping by and stuck to my policy of not buying music I already had on tape. Meanwhile, *Low Fi* became one of those records that my friends and I all agreed on. It did not matter if one preferred pop over punk or vice versa, the Figgs hit our collective spot.

In '95 I finally saw the Figgs live. How could a band have such an amazing album under their belt yet still have an even better live show? This was excellence the likes of which I had not encountered before. The greater question became how could I cling to my "don't buy it, if I have it on tape" policy while the band continued to make their brilliance so obvious. Did they not merit an exception to the rule?

In '96 the Figgs' *Banda Macho* hit the world, topping even *Low Fi*. I saw the Figgs a couple more times that year and they only got better with each show. Whereas I once made an effort to get past their merchandise table quickly, in order to avoid temptation, I was now shuffling by at a pace that got slower with each show for the Figgs' table was now decorated with a slew of 7"s, each offering songs not on the full-lengths. Only the knowledge that my friend Steve was scarfing up those 7"s kept me from indulging.

In '97 I finally taped those 7"s from Steve. Damn. The treasures tucked away on those relatively obscure releases took my admiration and appreciation for this fab combo and knocked it up a notch. Maybe 10. Songwriters spend lifetimes

trying to craft a gem like "What Became of It." The Figgs? The put it on the B-side of a 5". It was at this point that I considered making an exception to my frugal ways. What if I picked up one of those 7"s even though I had the songs on tape? Maybe the "Go Before"/ "Let's Get Arrested" single. Two brilliant pop tunes that would only set me back \$3. Plus, not owning the 7" meant I was a mere snap of a cassette from being denied access to those songs. Why put that much faith in a 99¢ Maxell? Wouldn't those songs be great to have when I am old and gray? Wouldn't they spice up the Winnebago trips of my golden years (not to mention the three and a half decades I have before then)? No. I mean, yes, they would serve those functions but, no, I had to remain strong. My long-held policy was showing its first sign of weakness.

The dam broke in '98. My wife and I were visiting family in Seattle. My brother-in-law took me on a tour of local record shops. It was slim pickings that day and I was about to leave the last of the stores empty handed when a bin of 7"s caught my eye. I did not want to keep my brother-in-law waiting so I took an unusually brief spin through the 7"s...and came upon a Figgs single. It was the "J Card"/ "One Hit Wonder" record. It was not rare. It was not super cheap. But on a whim I bought it. I bought it even though I had the songs on tape and not for a second did I regret doing so because, once more, I did not see this simple action as being an indication of a larger weakness.

Upon my return to NYC, I pondered my move in Seattle. I had parted with a mere four dollars and taken a step in solidifying my Figgs collection. Collection. The word slipped out accidentally but there it was. My Figgs collection was underway and if it were to continue growing at any point in the future this was the time to do it, before records started going out of print. I dove in head first.

Next time I saw the Figgs I bought four 7"s. After that I got the *Ginger* tape, tracked down the *Hi Fi Dropouts* EP and mail ordered the 7" compilation that came with *Sponic* zine. I even went to eBay (which yielded zip) before hitting a brick wall. By that point I had a copy of everything the Figgs brought to shows and had exhausted all of the other resources of which I knew. A normal person would kick back and bask in the glory of all those releases. A record collector remains focused on the records which elude him (I use the gender-specific "him" on the assumption that women are smarter in this regard than guys are). When I realized that the latter held true for me I knew what was up: I was a record collector.

And I still am. I preside over an impressive Figgs collection (which includes both LP and CD copies of *Banda Macho*) yet I am still annoyed by the fact that the "Miss Velvet" single is not in my apartment. Ditto for the 7"s split with Coffin Break and the Incredible Casuals. And, yes, ditto for the "Happy"/ "My Mad Kitty" single. The very same single I passed up seven years ago. Since the

Figgs brought my frugal policies to a screeching halt I have since added a couple of other bands to the ranks of "must own all that they release," but the Figgs were the first and that is why I curse them. I am record collector, watch me grovel.

(Note: This column was fueled by a \$2.49 six-pack of Natural Ice. I wanted to point out that while I spend money on records like a moron, I retain my thrifty ways when it comes to buying other stuff.)

(Spank, #29, Spring 2000)

1% for the Figgs

12/18/99. 3:42 am. The Figgs are the greatest rock band on Earth. Bar none. Details to be revealed tomorrow. If I were their equal as a columnist I would offer proof of their excellence here and now, just after returning home from the best Figgs show ever. But as it is I am not their equal, I am a card-carrying pansy and I need my sleep.

12/18/99. 12:05 pm. I'm back, relatively rested, and ready to discuss the Figgs. Well, sort of. I feel like Keith Richards always looks, like I drank a case of bourbon and smoked a carton of filterless Lucky Strikes. In fact, I had but two Rolling Rocks, hardly enough to make me feel like a decrepit 60-year-old junkie. It was not the bit of beer that did this to me. It was the Figgs. They blazed through the most extraordinary set of unbridled rock last night. Just being there aged me a decade, and it felt great. Oww! (That's a devil sign "oww," not a toe stub "oww.")

They took the stage at 12:20 am. I think they would have waited another five or 10 minutes but the yutz at the club dropped in a Pearl Jam CD and that seemed to draw the Figgs out from the backstage area quicker. They kicked off the show with three songs I did not recognize. Three AMAZING songs. Three hair-singeing songs that knocked me silly. Had the night ended then and there I would have returned home perfectly satisfied. Mind you, I'd have been out the \$8 cover charge and the two hours spent on the subway getting to and from the show, but that would have been a small price to pay to hear those three songs. For it took but three songs to solidify my belief that it was one of the best shows I'd ever seen. The band had just returned from a tour, but rather than show signs of road fatigue they came out guns ablazing, like they had something to prove. They were so incredibly on that I was awestruck. Mind you, I have seen many a Figgs show and they *always* deliver—to the point where I no longer allow myself to miss one of their performances—but last night they launched into their set like they were out to conquer the world. Or more accurately, like they had already conquered the world and this was the celebration. I felt privileged to be

there. I would relate more about those first three songs but I can't remember much about them because a) they are totally new to me and b) they were followed by nearly *two hours* of stunning rock. The Figgs played until 2:15 am. By that point my legs were killing me, I was famished, I thought I had inhaled enough smoke to seriously jeopardize my entire respiratory system and not for a second did I want the show to end. When it did end I was exhausted. Had the sound guy not resumed playing the Pearl Jam CD I would have collapsed to the floor and been swept away with the spilled beer and broken glass. But Eddie Vedder's anguished howl was sufficient motivation to get me out the door.

Back to the Figgs. They played songs from each of their three albums. They did three Kinks covers ("Starstruck," "Father Christmas," "Tired of Waiting"). They did their entire *Christmas Shake* EP. They discovered the blueprint for how to put on the perfect rock show, did everything listed on said blueprint and topped it off with a few tricks of their own, and they had the crowd with them the whole way. Why else would a group of people stay in a dumpsy club like Brownies until 2:15 in the morning? This is NYC, these people could have been doing anything they wanted at 2:15 on a Saturday night but they had the smarts to take in this Figgs show. If indeed the world collapses in 13 days it will have nothing to do the failure of computers to properly interpret the double zeros in the date code. The world may very well end on January 1, 2000, but it will be because this planet was not equipped to accommodate rock of such proportions. I may be a mere mortal but I am smart enough to know when I am in the presence of greatness and on this night the Figgs were drawing on something or someone that was not of this world. I am not certain that we were meant to have access to such glorious sounds. Fear not Y2K, do fear the unraveling set in motion by the Figgs' one hour, 55 minute set of sustained rock brilliance on the night of December 17, 1999.

I set out on this night expecting another great Figgs show—the Figgs are never less than great—and hoping to purchase a copy of their new EP which, I was told by my good friend and fellow Figgs Freak, Steve, was to contain seven new tracks. It has been nearly two years since the Figgs last proper release (1998's *Couldn't Get High*) and I was in dire need of new Figgs material. The EP was out but the band did not have any copies with them. Disappointing? Sure. Surprising? No. The Figgs are never in synch with their new records, whether it's not having their new release or not focusing on the songs from that new release. Even when I think I know their newest material they are forever dropping new songs into their sets. I thought I had worked my way around this conundrum when, back in '96, I got an advance copy of their *Banda Macho* record (again, courtesy of fellow F. F. Steve). I absorbed the tape as best I could and attended a Figgs show that was taking place prior to the record's release. I thought I'd know their whole set but it was not to be. They played still newer stuff; they were ahead of a record that had not yet come out. It was still a marvelous set but I felt like Nelson from *The Simpsons* was standing over my

shoulder the entire evening. Ha ha. The Figgs may never be in synch with their new records but, you know, it's hardly their fault.

Not long after the release of their debut album, *Low-Fi at Society High* (1994), their record label, Imago, went belly up. They moved to Capitol for their follow up, *Banda Macho*, but Capitol pulled the promotional plug on the record shortly after its release. In one record store I found an LP copy of the then-new *Banda* for \$4.99! In another store, they offered it for a buck or two with the purchase of another piece of vinyl! You're damn right I bought a copy on both occasions. I should have bought more. Giving a reasonable discount is one thing, but underpricing of this magnitude is disrespectful if not criminal. Whoever instituted such pricing policies will be punished severely by the rock gods. I swear on it. And the clown at Capitol who greenlighted the Figgs being dropped is going to be savaged in the afterlife. I shudder to think what that dimtwit is in for. But I digress. My point is to give you a sense that while the Figgs are appreciated to the point where they have been able to release three full-lengths, complemented with a slew of 7" releases and compilation appearances, they have yet to get the treatment they deserve.

The Figgs offer the sort of excellence that one finds in the best Kinks, Elvis Costello and the Attractions, or Replacements records. Big rock action coupled with well-honed pop smarts. Though I should make it clear that the Figgs are hardly mimics of those legends. The Figgs have certainly studied the finest but that was merely to get them underway. From the start they had their own voice. Or rather, voices as they are blessed with two genius tunesmiths, guitarist Mike Gent and bassist Pete Donnelly (drummer Pete Hayes does not contribute songs often but has two gems to his credit, "The Bar" and "Wiser Goldfish," and former guitarist Guy Lyons was just coming into his own as a songwriter when he left the band after the release of *Couldn't Get High*). Each of their three records is a full-blown masterpiece, the sorts of records that people will be talking about years from now (and a fervent following having been talking about for quite some time). And their 7"s and compilation appearances are anything but throwaways. Do what you can to track down the 7" compilation that came with *Sponic* zine. The Figgs' contribution, "Who Hung That Sign?", is a simply divine number that may be my favorite Figgs song, it's as soothing as basking in the warmth of the mid-day sun. When I got the 7" in the mail I listened to "Who Hung That Sign?" six times before I listened to even one note of the other bands' songs (then I sampled the other bands' offerings and promptly returned to "Who Hung That Sign?" for another five laps). The 4-tracked acoustic tunes that appear on their split with Prisonshake (Flipped Out Records) display just how diverse a band the Figgs are. All three originals shine and their take on the often-covered "Don't Lie to Me" (credited to Chuck Berry but I think it was actually penned by Tampa Red) is sublime.

I could go through their entire discography and sing the praises of each song but that would probably be of little interest to you (though if I've misjudged you in that sense, give me a ring, I'll chat about The Figgs as long as you want). It is just this: the Figgs are one of the best bands ever and not enough people are aware of that. If they were to break up tomorrow the legend would kick in but the beauty of it is that the Figgs are still with us. Still gigging, still putting out compelling new material and frankly, they are making it perfectly easy for people to get on board their bandwagon (well, sort of, the Figgs never make things easy). And people should do just that, take up the Figgs cause and let their Figgs flags fly! During the band's tenure on Capitol I devised the "1% for The Figgs" campaign in which labelmate Paul McCartney would hand over 1% of his annual gross in order to subsidize the Figgs. You know, promote their records, give them proper tour support, cover their rent so they need not bother with day jobs, that sort of thing. McCartney would not miss the money and the Figgs would get the financial backing they so richly deserve.

Well, McCartney's people never responded and now it is up to us, ladies and gents. Don't wait for this band to break up to enjoy their splendors. The Figgs are one of the most important bands in rock history. I truly believe that. I also believe that in the years to come many scribes will wax poetic about the Figgs, both their records and their shows. Sure you can hold off and dig the records later but there is nothing quite like being into a band while they are at the top of their game. As much as I love the Kinks, Elvis, and the Replacements, I feel like I have only been able to get part of the picture because I got into each band long after their peak years. I can and do fully enjoy their records but when I read about those bands I feel like I missed out on something great. That is why I feel so fortunate that I have been able to tune into the Figgs while they are still a force to be reckoned with. Classic records such as theirs hold even greater weight if you were there when they came out and with the Figgs, the best may be yet to come, especially if that 12/17 show is any indication of what's on the horizon. There is nothing wrong with appreciating the greats in their time.

(Angst & Daises, #1, 2000; Schuell, #K, 2000)

Egghead. Tour Diary

It all began last spring. A friend asked us to play her wedding in Iowa. We thought to ourselves, "Iowa is half way across the country. Such travel will cost us hundreds, perhaps thousands, of dollars. Plus, we'll have to rent tuxedos. Of course, we'll do play the wedding." Actually, we said yes before we took any of those factors into consideration. Then it dawned on us to book a tour around the wedding. Before we got too far into planning the tour the wedding gig fell through. The wedding was still on but some of the parents had reservations about Egghead. as a wedding band. By then we'd caught tour fever. But if we

were going to tour in November why not go south? We pulled out a map, set up an ideal tour and started calling everyone we knew. (Though in all fairness, our bassist, John, did the work. To compensate for his efforts the driving chores were handled by me and our guitarist, Johnny Reno.)

A few weeks later we had eight shows booked for our 10-day tour. Plus, Adam and Jeannie from Dirt Bike Annie asked us to play their Halloween party the day before we left. (We cracked ourselves up by going as the guys from Dreamworks, Katz, Spielberg, and Geffen—golf shirts and name tags was all it took.) Nine shows, in 11 days. I'd waited years for this. We told ourselves that shows would fall through. That we'd lose money. That the rented van would give us headaches, and that we'd get lost. All of which was deemed acceptable because, come hell or high water, Egghead. was going on tour.

Friday, November 1. Honeybrook, PA. Amish country. Just down the road from the towns of Blue Ball, Climax, and Intercourse. Tonight's show is the first for a young promoter named Tony. Nice guy. Has trouble saying "no" to bands, though. That's why there are nine slated for tonight, and they're all supposed to be done by 11:00, and there's no p.a. for the vocals. People are pissed at Tony. Tony is pissed at people. Eventually everything comes together. People show up and a bunch of them enjoy our set. The tour is off to a good start. This night we're staying with Thom from Throttle Jockey. Thom drives a huge van, which he calls the "bitch-getter." We ask Thom if he's had any success with said van. He says no. We discuss the "bitch-getter" while we head to a local diner. The waitress forgets my order. Twice. When my pancakes arrive I'm told that my meal is on the house. We've upgraded to a great start.

Saturday, November 2. Baltimore, MD. We have played in Baltimore before. Plus, my brother lives here, so we expect to have much fun. And we do. Local favs Sick have set up the show at a club called Fletchers. Fletchers has a private band room with free beverages for the bands. This is a first for us. We load in at 7:00 and leave at two in the morning. My brother hangs out with us the whole time, his patience is boundless. We play a good set and a bunch of friends come by, including Skizz. He is a local filmmaker who also hosts screenings of underground films at his house, The Mansion, which is an old funeral home. On top of that he drums for Garage Sale. He is one of the coolest people we've ever met. Every good thing that has ever happened to us in Baltimore, and there are many, is because of Skizz. After the show we go back to my brother's apartment and gorge on the Chex mix my fiancé, Allie, made. Life is good.

Sunday, November 3. Baltimore, MD. This is one of two scheduled days off. We had a slim shot for a show in Roanoke, Virginia, but when we called the promoter, Barry, his mom said he was out back painting the fence. Don't let us down gently, dude. We try to find an open mic night in Baltimore, but have no

luck. Just as well. John and I have colds. Despite this we go record shopping. Then my brother heads to work and we go back to his apartment. Turns out I've brought the wrong keys and we're locked out. And sick. As we sit in the stairwell of my brother's apartment building, life is a little less good.

Monday, November 4. Chapel Hill, NC. We arrive to find the club, Molly McGuires, locked. None of the flyers we've sent them are in sight. The place opens at 9:30. "There's a band tonight?" asks the bartender. We feared the turnout was going to be lame but they asked us to do two sets and we love getting to play more than once in a night. "What p.a.?" Those were the words that sank our night. As we were loading in, John inquires about where we should set up. The bartender points to an area currently occupied by a pool table. Fine. We then notice that there is no sign of a p.a. When we ask about said device we learn that they have nothing of that nature. We call the promoter. "I didn't tell you that we don't have a p.a.? That's so funny. I always tell bands that first because it's so funny that we don't have a p.a." A little less funny when you've driven from Baltimore. The show cancelled, we seek out a motel. After checking in, we cross the street to Starvin' Marvins and purchase a six-pack. Let the decadence begin. We each have half a beer, eat Chex mix and take in a Nixon documentary. I was waiting for Mick and Keith to show up. Fucking Keith.

Tuesday, November 5. Election Day. This is the other scheduled day off. We have two choices. Stay in Chapel Hill or move on to Athens. We opt for Athens, our best decision yet. Upon arriving in Athens we do laundry and get to watch Dole's concession speech.

Wednesday, November 6. Athens, GA. The Dead Body House. A couple years ago a murder suspect claimed to have buried his victim's body in the woods just outside of Athens. Those woods are located directly behind 2200 Lexington Avenue, which is where we're playing. (No body was ever found.) The guys who live there let us stay for two nights. We've never met them before. We've never spoken with them before. We got the show through someone (Jason from Tres Kids) who doesn't even live there. The town is wonderful. We find a great record store, Wuxtury Records, and it holds many treasures. When the manager declines to take some of our 7"s on consignment, one of the clerks, Ryan, offers to buy one. His band has toured before and he understands what we're going through. He's just started a label, too, called Kindercore. Everyone we meet in Athens is as nice as Ryan. When my credit card gives them trouble, the guy at the counter, not Ryan, apologizes to me. This is like bizarro NYC. I like Athens. The show goes really well that night. We play a large bedroom, the hat is passed, people show up and have fun, and nothing is broken. All house parties should be like this.

Thursday, November 7. Lexington, KY. It's a cold, wet, dreary night when we arrive in Lexington, itself a seemingly dreary looking burg. The club, Area 51, is the coolest looking club we've ever played. Great jukebox, too. No one will show up that night. We blame it on Phish, who are playing across town. We blame everything on Phish. Also, on the bill is Subduing Mahra. Terrible band name but they're nice guys and they remind me of dumptruck. They know of and like dumptruck, which is cool. Turns out they, Subduing Mahra, are from Albany, New York. They know the Figgs, which is even cooler. We also meet a guy named Jerry. He's visiting from Nashville. He really knows his country music. And his punk rock, too. Jerry smokes filterless Camels and drinks a lot. He's a great conversationalist. After the show we join Subding Mahra in trying to find a diner. They have no idea where they are going. We're bored and hungry and follow them around for 30 minutes before heading to our motel. (We find the diner the next morning. While waiting for my \$1.50 pancakes, I run into Jerry. He's wearing sunglasses and clearly hungover. He's reading *East of Eden* and nursing his burger'n'beer combo. He's a little less talkative than he was last night.)

Friday, November 8. Knoxville, TN. Tonight's show is at Gryphons, a bar/laundromat. This is the second bar/laundromat establishment we've seen. Such a great idea. 30 Amp Fuse have set up this show. We played with them once in Baltimore. I bought a 7" from them and struck up a brief conversation. That was the extent of our relationship prior to the tour. No matter. Frontman Mike Smithers goes out of his way to do us a favor. It's 30AF's last local show before they hit the road and they draw a great crowd. Reno and John meet one of the guys from the Judy Bats. We play really well. It's such a relief to have people ask, "Do you have a 7"?" instead of, "They still make those?" This is the best show of the tour. Also the smokiest environment I've ever been in. Viva Knoxville!

Saturday, November 9. Charleston, WV. This is the one show we got from *Book Your Own Fucking Life*. It's a coffeehouse called Common Grounds. They have a warehouse size space behind the actual coffeehouse. Brian, the promoter, has put together one of the strangest bills we've ever been on. (Actually Brian said no to at least one of the bands who then went over his head and called the coffeehouse manager.) The night starts with local metal heroes, Sick World. You can't begin to imagine how much they suck. Each song is seven to 10 minutes. Each begins with a sample that the bass player must search out on a tape deck (no need to cue up things ahead of time, right?). They get pissed when, an hour into their seemingly eternal set, they're told "time for one more." We hit the stage next. We play our best show of the tour. Good jokes, too. Nothing. A mighty wall of indifference from the few people who have bothered to come in. Just not our crowd we figure. We're followed by One Eye Open. They're from California. They tell us they liked our set. They learn that we like cub and promise to do their version of cub's "Little Star." I like these

guys even before they play. I listen to their set as I pack up my drums. They are insane. I can barely keep up with their frantic fusion of ska and punk. I figure they will go over well with the kids. Wrong. One Eye Open do no better than we did. Strange town. Vile are next. They're as bad as Sick World but at least Vile open their show with an explosion and have a smoke machine. After the show we go to Brian's house. We stay up till 4:00 trading contact information with One Eye Open. They supply most of the names and numbers; they've been on tour since July and plan to continue touring through Thanksgiving. Like I said, they are insane. The next morning I'm told that Brian's parents were home all night. How they slept with us giggling away in their kitchen is beyond me.

Sunday, November 10. Pittsburgh, PA. Last show of the tour. A house party at the most disgusting college house I've ever seen. Despite the omnipresent crud, the inhabitants are, once more, really nice guys. Without the slightest provocation they feed us a pasta dinner within 15 minutes of our arrival. The turnout is low this evening but the other bands—The Dick Kerr 5K, Witch Babies, Simpletons—are good. After the third band plays, everyone squeezes into the living room to watch *The Simpsons* and then we take the stage. Or rather the basement, which leaks so much that the house drum kit has rusted rims. We rig up a second mic by taping a microphone to a broomstick and then affixing the broomstick to a chair, and then we rock the house. No one can hear the vocals but the crowd is really supportive and in some strange way this is a really nice way to end the tour. After the show a friend of mine from college takes us to the infamous "O" for French fries. He also puts us up for the night, letting us read his comics and, the next morning, dine on his Capt'n Crunch. Life is great.

Thus ends a tour. We didn't get lost. The rental van, dubbed Kaiser Shit and armed with "K Triple S" (Kaiser Shit Security System), didn't break down and, rental cost aside, we broke even. We played a bunch of great shows and met many cool people. That's the way a tour should go.

(*Foxy Digitalis*, #4, 1997)

Kung Fu Monkeys Tour Diary

1971: An American family, the Louds, agrees to allow a film crew into their home for the purpose of shooting a documentary. The film crew spends seven months with the Louds and the resulting documentary airs on PBS. As a nation watches, the Loud clan disintegrates.

1998: The Kung Fu Monkeys—a bubblepunk band comprised of James Cahill, Chris Mazer, and yours truly—prepare to embark upon their first road trip. My bandmates agree to let me document for you, the *CIGF* readers, the trials and

tribulations of our journey. Life on the road has destroyed many fine bands, and we will have the added pressure of traveling under the watchful eyes of zine readers around the globe.

Saturday, July 11. 9:15 am. James picks me up at my apartment in swinging Astoria, Queens. Weather conditions are ideal and spirits are high.

10:00 am. We rendezvous with Chris and his friend, Ashley, at the KFM Compound (aka James' dad's house). We approve the final draft of the latest "showgram" (the KFM propaganda distributed at each of our live performances) and prep the KFM Cruiser for departure.

11:30 am. Having filled the gas tank and brought our tire pressure up to specs, we are now en route to Ithaca, New York, site of our first out-of-town gig. Liberal portions of salted snacks are passed around the cabin of the KFM Cruiser and the conversation is flowing. Within the first hour, we have discussed the boldness of roadside advertising (going so far as to design a new ad campaign for Camel cigarettes: "I enjoy smoking a Camel after I fuck!") and the fact that, according to James, Karl Marx developed hemorrhoids from sitting so much while doing his research. Chris mentions that Arun from i-farm is working on a musical based on *Das Kapital*. We try to figure out why Marxism is known as "Marxism" and not "Engelsism" (after Marx's co-writer Frederick Engels) and chalk it up to shrewd marketing. "Engelsism" is too difficult to pronounce.

12:28 pm. In the midst of our stimulating conversation, we are interrupted by a severe "thud." A wave of panic sweeps through the van as we attempt to ascertain what caused the racket. Ever the rational one, I calmly inform my bandmates that a gremlin has landed on the roof of the KFM cruiser and that we should ready ourselves for the ensuing siege. The siege fails to materialize and I sense that the lads are a bit skeptical of my gremlin theory.

1:55 pm. Lunch break in Tannersville, PA. The diner we have chosen offers "good food fast" and a mobile chapel in the parking lot. If you will not to go God, he will come to you. In an 18-wheeler.

4:00 pm. Still no concrete evidence of the gremlin.

6:00 pm. We arrive at the club, set up our gear and are afforded a quality sound check. One of the other bands, the Skylarks (well, they insist that their name is Fist Her Face '55, but that is the worst band name I have ever heard. I think they were once called the Skylarks and that is how I shall refer to them for the purposes of this column. We're given the right of free speech on the assumption that we'll come up with better band names.), approaches me about the possibility of borrowing my drums. This is not a problem since I have borrowed

equipment on many occasions. I assume the Skylarks have a snare drum and cymbals, a standard assumption when it comes to loaning and borrowing drums. I get partial credit; they have cymbals in tow but no snare drum.

6:10 pm. The Skylarks guitarist, on behalf of his drummer, asks, "Can we borrow your crash cymbal...and sticks?"

I flip my lid. What?!? You arrive at a show sans sticks? This is improper! I admit that we drummers are flakey, but arriving without sticks is a clear violation of the guidelines set forth at the International Convention of Timekeepers. At this point, I am steamed, as is my right, and I do what all great rockers do when irked: I go for a milkshake.

6:20 pm. State Street Diner, home to delicious, soothing chocolate milkshakes. Once again, all is right with the world.

7:30-10:00 pm. The patrons at The Haunt, the site of this evening's gig, are rocked by a succession of quality punk rock bands. The Skylarks kick off the show and they are followed by the Heartdrops. The Kung Fu Monkeys wrap up the festivities. We turn in one of our better performances despite James being hopped up on Motrin and Pepto Bismol. Chris, whose family lives in Ithaca, is treated like a god by the multitude of friends and family in attendance.

10:30 pm-1:50 am. We attend a shindig at the local punk house (where Chris, in self defense, mind you, nearly engages in fisticuffs with a severely out-of-place *GQ*-like yutz with whom Chris attended high school), return to the State Diner for another round of shakes, and then head to the Mazer household. Mr. Mazer and I talk baseball while we all watch *The Beastmaster*. It is the end to a most successful day.

Sunday, July 12. 11:30 am. Thinking I am the first member of the band to arise, I am surprised to find the other guys already up. Mrs. Mazer treats us to a breakfast of champions.

3:00-4:00 pm. Arrive at the local go-cart track, the Ringwood Raceway. We don our stage outfits and Ashley snaps a couple of photos. The competition is fierce this day, and though each of us drives well and without incident, it is clear that Chris is the champion driver with the ranks of the group.

5:00 pm. Dinner at the Country Kitchen. While enjoying a tasty grilled cheese sandwich, I reveal my preference for Pepsi over Coke. James and Chris are silent. They do not share my view. Suddenly the future of the band is in jeopardy as an age-old conflict—one that has turned brother against brother—threatens to rip apart the band. The air is filled with uncertainty as we board the KFM cruiser. Fortunately, Ashley also hits from the Pepsi side of the plate, thus

maintaining some semblance of balance as out trek continues. Meanwhile, each of us is racking his respective noggin in search of an honorable solution to our pressing problem. Is it possible to reach a compromise that allows both sides to keep their dignity?

8:15 pm. Yes, yes such a compromise is possible. In keeping with diplomatic tradition, we have employed the view that "the enemy of my enemy is my ally." The enemy in this scenario being diet soda, which we agree is a vile and inherently inferior beverage. As the group scoffs at the notion of sugar-free carbonated beverages, we strengthen the bonds that were subject to so much strain just hours ago. The fire that is the Pepsi/Coke controversy has been extinguished within the ranks of the band. Unity has been preserved.

10:30 pm: The lads drop me off at my apartment. Whereas the Loud family crumbled as the public caught a glimpse of their private lives, we, the Kung Fu Monkeys, subjected to the same scrutiny, have triumphed. We sleep well this night.

(Chicken Is Good Food, #5, 1998)

Moses at the ATM Doors

I am tired of apologizing for my lack of technological know-how. Granted, when I hear talk of the web I assume it's shorthand for Spiderman speak. And when it comes to cell phones and beepers, not only do I fail to understand how they function, I can't begin to comprehend why we have them in the first place. As far as I am concerned the need for portable phones began and ended with Agent Maxwell Smart (Don Adams: Master Thespian!). If your wireless phone is not located in your shoe, you have no business owning such a device. And yes, as you might have guessed, I'm the type of dimwit whose VCR features a perpetually flashing clock. (When will they make VCRs with non-digital, read-the-two-hands clocks? *That* would be progress.)

I concede each and every one of these points yet I continue to flash my "Knower of All Things Technological" ID badge. On what grounds do I maintain such a claim? Allow me to illustrate with the medium of recorded music. A few years ago, at the onset of the digital age, I bemoaned the rapid rise of the compact disc. There were many like me, calling attention to the boring, sterile, little bastard that was (and is) the CD. We tried in vain to call the public's attention to the fact that they were getting the soiled end of the stick. We fought the good fight, but ultimately most of us yielded. Personally, I spent that time clutching my vinyl LPs and 7"s, fearing the day a new Young Fresh Fellows record would not be available on wax, and babbling on and on about the virtues of full-size cover art and the warmth of analog sound.

I have not changed all that much since (and I still can't specify much when it comes to that crap about "warm" sounding recordings—face it, all analog purists are bluffing) but if you think about it, relative to the course of human history, vinyl is a new technology. Relative to the big timeline, even one of Edison's cylinders is a cutting edge, top-of-the-line, confusing-the-guys-at-Radio Shack, mind-blowing revolution. "Recorded sound?!? Put away the opiates, mate, that shit ain't possible?" That is what any one of us would have said just over 100 years ago. The fact that recorded sound has changed formats, in terms of how we consume it, is a footnote. LPs, CDs, 8-tracks, they are all pretty much the same thing (one notable exception being the 3" mini-disc, the lamest, most misguided format yet, even worse than the short-lived effort to install turntables in automobiles (yes, such a thing was attempted in the early 1960s). It matters little that I prefer LPs over CDs.

So in the grand scheme of things, I am stunningly well-versed in technological matters. Stack me up against all the people who have ever lived and only a tiny percentage of them can best me on this subject. For instance, George Washington, though far short of perfect, was a pretty impressive guy—he helped win the Revolutionary War and was wise enough to decline an offer to turn the newly formed U.S. into a monarchy, instead pushing for democracy—but bring him into the modern age, ask him to turn on the light switch and his powder-wigged mind would be fried. Me? I've turned on light switches every day for nearly 30 years and I have yet to screw it up. (Hell, half of the time I'm in the dark when I do it.) Joan of Arc boasts mighty impressive credentials herself—a 17-year old military leader in 15th century France?—but how far would she get trying to make a mix tape? Moses at an ATM? Ten to one odds he couldn't even part the doors.

Basically, I'm secure in what I know about technology but I do have one request. Just once I'd like to hear someone say "Yep, this new device is pretty cool but, upon greater reflection, we don't need it. Let's work on something else instead." We are a people who looked at that can opener and said, "This instrument is too difficult to operate, let's add electricity." We have electric paper towel dispensers. I may not know everything about technology but I know we can do better than that.

(Chicken Is Good Food, #6, 1999)

LoonBot 2000

The year 1998 is upon us and yet neither you nor I not own a robot. I do not believe that this situation stems from a lack of technology. The problem is misguided market research. I would argue that the people calling the shots are

short-sighted twits, morons who guess what people want and devise machines to fit those perceived wants. As a result of such efforts we end up with useless crap like mini-discs and automatic flush toilets. I have done my own research, exhaustive research I might add, and I feel that I have a better grasp of what people really want. This has led me to begin work on the perfect machine, a multi-purpose robot. Dubbed the *LoonBot 2000*, my robot will take artificial intelligence to new heights. As my financial backers would prefer to remain anonymous I am not at liberty to discuss how the project is being funded. However, I am proud to share with you the many functions the LB2 is capable of performing. And remember, this is just the beginning.

1) By merely scanning a piece of vinyl LB2 can provide an accurate total time for any LP or 7". LB2 also informs you which tracks are inferior in nature and therefore not worth recording. Further, LB2 can look at a blank cassette and inform you how much time remains on a given side. Making mix tapes will never be the same!

2) Programmed with a social conscience, LB2 is currently promoting its cable TV reform bill (House Bill 1688.75). The goal of this bill is to get the cable industry to restructure their package plans. As it now stands cable subscribers have very little choice in what they receive. Under the LB2 plan you will pay only for those channels which you have chosen. If it is but four channels that ye desire than tis but those four channels for which ye shall be billed. There's no need to receive and pay for (and subsidize) channels for which you have no use. Channel surfers be aware, the beachfront of cable TV is about to undergo major changes!

3) LB2 has the capacity to properly gauge the freshness of all dairy products. No longer will you have to guess whether or not your milk and cheese are still fit for consumption. With the LB2 the "sniff test" is a thing of the past!

4) LB2 will convince my boss that when one lives in NYC it is a sign of clinical insanity to run the air conditioning units on the 17th of December. LB2 will help ease worker/management relations around the world!

5) During the off season, LB2 will be a part-time scout for the Los Angeles Dodgers. He will also be granted the authority to make trades on the team's behalf. This winter the top priorities are a center fielder with top notch defensive skills and a reliable closer. LB2 is also in the process of tracking down the legal loophole which will invalidate Rupert Murdoch's acquisition of the Dodgers. Even if a team is based in California, they don't deserve to have any connections to Fox.

6) In its spare time LB2 will go over every inch of tape from the Beach Boys' legendary *Smile* sessions. LB2 will scan the psychic vibrations emitted by Brian

Wilson during those sessions and then create the *Smile* album, in its entirety, exactly as Wilson had conceived it. Listeners will likely cower in fear upon hearing the results, but at least we'll know. Upon completion of this task, LB2 will create the environment necessary for Brian Wilson to write new material. And not the crap Brian's been doing for most of the past 30 years but vintage Brian Wilson material. The reviving of one of pop's living legends is underway!

7) Of course, LB2 is capable of fulfilling any duties within the realm of cooking and cleaning. LB2 is also working to improve the nutritional value of great tasting foods. Fritos with 100% of your daily fiber needs. French fries with all of the recommend amount of potassium, no fat, and great taste. Snacking Americans will embrace LB2!

8) LB2 comes complete with a video library. It is able to store tens of thousands of full-length feature films in the space of four 3.5" x 3.5" discs. These files are updated annually with the latest movies and because LB2's storage capacity is so efficient you need not worry about losing use of other functions as you add to LB2's video collection. You can watch the flicks on LB2's video monitor or have LB2 tap into your own television.

9) Powered by solar energy, LB2 requires no additional energy source. While running errands the LB2 collects more than enough light energy to perform each of its daily tasks. Yes, even on the cloudiest of winter days LB2's solar panels absorb sufficient power. In addition, with its patented "autoscan" circuits LB2 can monitor its own well-being and make any necessary repairs. Once you have completed payments on your LB2 you can enjoy its many services safe in the knowledge that there are no added expenses. LB2: friend to the cost-conscious!

Look for LB2 ads soon!

(*Metal Men Are After Me*, #1, 1998)

Listen to Travolta, People

I'm incredibly jealous of you! You're in the midst of one hell of a show featuring the Primate 5, the Rock'n'Roll Adventure Kids, the Zombie IV, and the Cripples. Like any great band, tonight's hosts, the Primate 5, realize that you, the ever-wise rock'n'roll concert goer, need something to peruse while the bands are moving their gear, or perhaps reading material for tomorrow morning. Hence, the existence of this program for the Primate 5's fourth "last show ever," and, to a lesser extent, this article. Our topic today: *Battlefield Earth*.

The world gives John Travolta a lot grief about *Battlefield Earth*. He spent tons of time and money getting the movie made. In the face of unrelenting criticism, John defends *Battlefield Earth*. He thinks it's "misunderstood." He thinks it's a good movie and that people will come to like it over the years and that it needs a sequel. (Not "deserves" a sequel, mind you, "needs" a sequel.)

The world is wrong. John is right.

Well, almost. *Battlefield Earth* is misunderstood and does need a sequel but it's not a good movie. It's a horrendous movie. But it's so thoroughly incompetent that it sails off the conventional scale of good/bad and lands in that fascinating realm of "good god, were they paying any attention when they made this movie?" That realm reserved for the likes of *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, *Showgirls*, and just about any movie starring Sharon Stone. *Battlefield Earth* uncontrollably swerves off the road of regular expectations and recklessly plows through fields movies were not meant to go through. And, yes, it's incredibly entertaining. There is not a single scene during which you won't find yourself laughing out loud and/or scratching your head wondering "what the hell was that?"

Travolta? He's awful! You've never seen him overact more than he does here. Not even in *Michael*. Not even in *Swordfish*. To reinforce the clumsy acting Travolta and his fellow aliens all wear really big boots. You see, Earth has been taken over by a race of aliens who tower over us yet in the movie they just look like regular people wearing incredibly cumbersome footwear. Instead of looking physically imposing, they look really awkward and uncomfortable, like a bunch of NBA rejects wearing hi-heel sneakers on the wrong feet.

The science fiction? Worse! Sure, we can blame a lot of it on L. Ron Hubbard, whose novel of the same title was the basis for *Battlefield Earth*. (Though, for the record, I don't blame Hubbard or any other Scientologists. For anything.) It's conceivable that somewhere in his two or three thousand page novel Hubbard was able to rationalize some of the plot. Fortunately for us, the movie wastes no time on such matters, yielding a very confusing flick that gives us a ton of reasons to like it. These are my favorites:

- The aliens conquer Earth in nine minutes! On the one hand, it's too bad we only get to hear about this battle. On the other, such a battle might have been genuinely engaging, thus being completely incongruous with the rest of the film.
- The aliens maintain a colony on Earth so that they can mine Earth's precious metals, especially gold. They love gold. Yet in their 1,000 years of dominance they never come across Fort Knox.
- The ever-brilliant aliens, developers of technology advanced way past ours—remember, they conquered us in the time it takes to listen to

"The End"—don't get even slightly suspicious when the humans, or rather, "man-animals" teach themselves to smelt gold

- A thousand years and they still refer to us as "man-animals"?
- The aliens, unable to breathe our oxygen-based atmosphere, reside in an enormous greenhouse-like structure. In the end we find out that that structure, complete with a roof made out of single pane glass, provides all the security of a petting zoo.
- When the man-animals mount an attack they use long-buried fighter jets, jets fueled by 1,000 year-old gas. The gas in my mom's lawn mower could never last through the winter but in *Battlefield Earth* fuel lasts a millennium!

The aliens can barely move, they can't breathe our air, and their intellect is suspect at best. Yet *Battlefield Earth* wants us to believe that they have kept us in submission for 1,000 years. The beauty of it is that *Battlefield Earth* does nothing to suspend our disbelief. The more attention you pay to *Battlefield Earth*, the more inconsistencies you'll find. I agree with John Travolta, *Battlefield Earth* is misunderstood, entertaining, and begging for a sequel.

(Primate 5 Last Show Ever program, #3, 2002)

Battle of the Cities

This is the tale of two cities, Los Angeles and New York. Our editor, A. J., has asked that I compare these two municipalities and, I am assuming, render a verdict as to which of these burgs is superior. Without further ado let us meet and examine our competitors.

In this corner we have Los Angeles, or, as it was originally known to the Spanish when they founded it in 1781, "Nuestra Senora Reina de los Angeles" (it did not become property of the U.S. until it was captured by Commodore Stockton in 1846). I have spent but three hours in LA. and the entire time was passed in the airport where I was introduced to smog (well, the smog was outside the airport but I did see plenty of the brown crud) and Hare Krishnas (they were inside the airport but it would have much more interesting had they been outside the airport, floating about like the smog). My favorite LA-related entities can be appreciated without actually traveling to LA. For instance, the Dodgers. I have been a fan of theirs since I was eight, which takes us back to the days of Garvey, Lopes, Cey, & Baker (and a little known outfielder named Glenn Burke. Glenn did little of distinction during his days with the Dodgers (a meager .237 career average though he did have not one but two nicknames, "Mandingo" and "Mad Hatter") but after he retired he became the first major leaguer to come out of the closet). These days the Dodgers are owned by the goons at Fox which has led to a crisis in my baseball faith (something I will be

writing about at length in the soon-to-be-published, all-baseball zine, *Zisk*). Plus, I can catch the Dodgers when they come when they come to NYC or when they play on TV.

I also enjoy movies and they tell me a lot of movies are made in LA. Seemingly this would be a plus for the L.A. side. However, I can take in all the movies I so desire without leaving NYC and in so doing I not need spend any time in general vicinity of people who make movies. (Speaking of movies, last night I rented a flick called *Zero Effect*. It stars Bill Pullman and Ben Stiller. It's clever, funny, and in its own strange way, rather touching.) Or, to be more specific, the thousands of waiters, bartenders and temp workers who are *really* actors, writers and directors. (And the only thing worse than an aspiring Hollywood type is a successful Hollywood type.)

In the other corner we have New York City, or, as it was known to the Dutch when they established a trading post here in 1609, New Amsterdam (it did not become New York until 1664 when the British captured it and named it in honor of the king's brother, the Duke of York). I have lived in NYC for five years. I once hated living here. I have progressed to the point of disliking it. Like LA, New York is stuffed to the gills with annoying people. Unlike LA, New York has excellent public transportation and two major league baseball franchises.

Though I prefer NYC to LA, it is not by such a wide margin that I am going to step into a cheerleader's uniform, grab the pompoms, and try to rustle up support for the Big Apple. Let's face it, no one really loves either of these cities (including Randy Newman), we just lie to ourselves to justify putting up with all of the crap that huge cities put their citizens through. Or so I like to think. Give me the suburbs! Give me a garage in which my band can practice free of charge. Give me a break from the endless noise and pointless congestion. Give me, ladies and germs, the green, green grass of home! Or, at the very least, a reasonable facsimile thereof.

(*Paranoid Time*, #1, 1998)

Battle of the Syracuse Bands

Syracuse, New York has long been known as the Salt City. With the recent success of native sons Earth Crisis, Syracuse has become known as the vegan hardcore capital of the world. Syracuse is also my hometown. Never in a million hockey seasons (one hockey season = 17.8 Earth years) would I have guessed that the band that put Syracuse on the proverbial music map would be a group of militant vegans. This is not right.

By this point in time I thought Syracuse would be known as the home of Dracula Jones. They were local favs in the early 90s. If ever a band was MTV-ready, musically and visually, it was this quartet. I thought they sucked but no one agreed with me. (Typically, the more I think a band blows the more popular they become. This is known as Trent Reznor Syndrome, or T.R.S. The inverse is also true, and this is known as Tortillas You Wanted Syndrome, or T.Y.W.S.) It wasn't just that Drac Jones, as they were known to the faithful, wrote dull songs. No, the Jones Boyz topped off their *sandwich du suck* by a) selling glossy 8x10 band photos at shows, b) having a lead singer who wore a leather vest without a shirt underneath and often struck an eyes-closed, arms-parallel-to-the-ground-ala-Christ-on-the-cross, "dig me and my sensitive ways" kind of pose, and c) doing push ups before shows (as confirmed by the guys in milf). But damn were those lads popular. Huge. At least in Syracuse. And their manager was highly connected. Rumor had it that the Drac Jones demo tape was circulated on the Soundgarden tour bus. I figured if any band was going to sprout legs and leave the small pond that is Syracuse it would have been these guys. But at some point they fizzled. Turns out never every case of T.R.S. is chronic.

Syracuse would like to be known as the Home of the Dome. That's what Syracuse-ians call the Carrier Dome. This is where the Syracuse University football and basketball teams play their home games. The Dome has been host to many memorable concerts over the years, yet it remains a terrible place to see a show. I saw my first concert there in February 1983, the Police and the Reflex ("Politics of Dancing"). My brother Pat and I took in the festivities under the guidance of our Uncle Steve and his buddy. Our \$12 tickets landed us over 100 yards away from the stage with a lovely view of the video screen. Our lousy vantage point was complemented by a crappy sound system. (Who'd have guessed that an all-concrete structure would lack quality acoustics?) To build excitement for the inevitably disappointing Dome shows, the local classic rock station would do something called "A to Z Minus One," playing all of a group's songs, alphabetically, minus one. The person who phoned in the title of the M.I.A. song won a pair of tickets to the show. Doofus that I was, I decided to endure the whole "A to Z" marathon when Bruce Springsteen came to town in 1985. I'd already bought a ticket and wanted to maximize my upcoming Dome date with the Boss, you know, get pumped! By the day of the show I was experiencing Extreme Bruce Springsteen Overexposure, E.B.S.O., or in layman's terms, I'd been Bruce-ified. The subsequent concert was a bore. He played forever, took a long intermission, and left the lights on for the second half of the concert. The only thing worse than an arena rock show is seeing all of the other dweebs who are there with you.

Syracuse should be known as the home of King Otter and the Electric Flem. I played drums for the Flem during the summers of '87-'89. Over the course of those three summers we released three tapes (on our label, Oy Records) and two concert films (aka, videotaped living room performances). All this despite playing before the public on just two occasions (an open mic night and a friend's

graduation party). We covered the Kinks, the Who, R.E.M., Buddy Holly, and the Ramones and mixed in a handful of originals. We ruled our corner of the rock world.

Now, I ask you, fair reader, who is more punk and therefore worthy of bearing the title Kings of Syracuse Rock? The band who pressed on unfazed by their obscurity (the Flem) or the band embraced by millions of grumpy kids and who will soon be opening for Ozzy (Earth Crisis)? You know the one true answer is King Otter and the Electric Flem! Earth Crisis, false prophets of Syracuse rock, be damned! All hail King Otter and the Electric Flem, true purveyors of Salt City rock, once and forever.

(Sticky Fingers, #4, 1997)

Battle of the Metal Bands

I still have no idea how they got into my apartment. But the means of their entrance was the least of my worries. At this juncture I was faced with two concerns: who and why. Who were these goons and why had they interrupted my night's slumber. They answered both of my questions without muttering a syllable, merely handing me a note that settled my queries.

They were (editor) Joey K's associates and they were there to pick up an article from me. This was the first I had heard about any such article. For a fleeting moment I entertained the notion of explaining to my new friends that I needed to conduct extensive research before embarking upon such an assignment. Then there were the painstaking procedures of drafting, revising, and editing, to be followed by three weeks paid vacation. Such thoughts were quickly dashed when I caught sight of their maniacal grins. They knew what I had been thinking and their expressions were a polite, well, at least non-violent way of saying "Write the article now, funny boy." Again, without so much as a grunt or click. These guys were nothing if not efficient.

The task at hand was an article about my favorite heavy metal band from the 1980s, a difficult subject for me. I spent my junior high days under the spell of early 80s Top 40 (the last great years of Top 40, I would argue). As I entered high school I lapsed into a progressive and classic rock-induced coma. It was not until the end of high school that I was awakened by punk rock. All in all, an enjoyable romp but one that left me without experiencing a metal period. But let's face it, one could not escape metal during the 80s and after extensive contemplation my vote comes down to one of two candidates, Judas Priest or Iron Maiden.

Ah, yes, Priest. A lovely quintet of British gentlemen who were trying to thrill bored teenagers, frighten parents and make a few quick bucks in the process.

They were also my younger brother's first favorite band. Attempting to be a good older brother I tried to nurture Casey's new found interest in music. As a result of the constant exposure given to the video for "You've Got Another Thing Coming," my brother had purchased Priest's *Screaming for Vengeance* cassette. My enthusiasm, perhaps misguided, led me to quizzing Casey on the names of the guys in Priest. Anyone could identify frontman Rob Halford, but Casey could name the whole lot of them. (Aside from Mr. Halford, the only name that sticks with me is that of guitarist K. K. Downing. How could I forget a guy named K. K.?) If it was not for my brother I would never have developed a proper appreciation for "Breaking the Law" and "Living After Midnight." Combined with "You've Got Another Thing Coming," that gives the Priest a grand total of three good songs.

With Casey well on his way, metal and I parted company. We were recently reunited, however, and this time the band was Iron Maiden. I completely missed the Maiden boat on the first go around (maiden voyage of the Maiden bandwagon?). I was intimidated by the Maiden t-shirts donned by many of my junior high school classmates and could only assume that they, the band, not my classmates, cranked out nothing short of the most terrifying and menacing sounds imaginable.

Looking back on Maiden they were really quite tame, but the first crack in my wall of thought occurred when I heard, and enjoyed, "Run to the Hills," their pop song. Then my new band, the Sheldrakes, was invited to partake in an Iron Maiden tribute record (tentatively titled *Maiden the Garage*). My bandmate John was excited about covering "Can I Play with Madness?", a tune I'd never heard before. He gave it a great arrangement and by the time our guitarist Adam was done with it we had a song that sounded like Boris the Sprinkler. I could not be certain how much of that success is due to the original song, but Maiden deserves some of the credit, thus giving them two good songs.

As the buzzer sounds, the scoreboard reveals that Judas Priest has topped Iron Maiden by a narrow 3-2 margin, and as I print out my final draft, I think I have won over my visitors. Both of my kneecaps are unscathed and, as they prepare to depart, they have engaged in an age-old debate: who looks better in leather, Judas Priest's Rob Halford or Iron Maiden's Bruce Dickinson.

(*Big Deal Loser*, #7, 1998)

Karn Evil 9

I was thrilled when *Sticky Fingers* zine asked me to write for them. C'mon, a zine dedicated to the 1988 Helen Slater movie of the same name? I'd be a fool to pass up such an opportunity. Then my girlfriend said that the zine probably

wasn't about that movie. She pointed out that very few people have seen the flick and most of them probably didn't enjoy the experience. She seemed convinced. Then I realized that the zine was about the Rolling Stones album. A bunch of people bought that record and most of them liked it.

When I first heard the LP I was living on the lower east side of Manhattan. I think. It was the early 70s and I was rarely sober. But the Stones were the exception to the rule because my buddies and I mostly listened to progressive rock. ELP, Yes, King Crimson, Traffic, Genesis, the whole gang. The money we didn't spend on weed went to prog rock. We'd sit around, get high and listen to records. Only when it was time to get up and flip the album did anyone speak. Epic drum solos and lyrics about knights and damsels were the order of the day and I couldn't get enough. I craved songs in 5/4 time. I felt cheated by a song that fell short of eight minutes. Better yet, have the tune take up the entire side of a record and break it up into parts or movements with a hefty supply of roman numerals. Those were the days.

Actually none of the above is true. Aside from the bit about my fondness for prog rock. Most people gaze at their Jethro Tull records and blame the whole experience on a weakness for one chemical or another. Not me. I was stone cold sober every time I tossed a Moody Blues record on the turntable. As were my friends. We were sober and living in the suburbs in the 80s. We had no excuses for listening to 70s progressive rock. Yet I joyfully embraced prog rock and felt that punk was the sole province of spikey haired mutants.

Enter Dave Finney. He played guitar in our high school's sole punk band, Milk Cow Pumpkin. I knew Dave from the track team. He was a nice guy but I'd have none of this punk rock he often spoke about. I'd seen punk on TV, I knew what I was talking about. Then Dave, knowing I had a tape-to-tape deck, asked me to copy a tape for him. The Minutemen's *Three Way Tie for Last*. I figured I'd give it 30 seconds and then leave the room, but thirty seconds was all it took. I was drawn in like Al Gore to a fund raiser at a Buddhist temple. Everything about the Minutemen ran counter to my favorite bands. Where were the massive overdubs? Why were the songs so short? "Ack, Ack, Ack"? What the hell was going on here? I copied the tape for Dave and then I made a copy for myself. I was hooked. I went out and bought a copy of the Clash's *Combat Rock*.

Okay, I had some learning to do, but I was on the right track.

I admit that I still own all of my progressive rock LPs (even the Moody Blues' *Octave*). I also admit to enjoying them from time to time. But once my demons are exorcised I return to punk rock with no regrets and a clean bill of health. Of course, most of prog rock's crappier elements have since resurfaced in the even worse world of contemporary hardcore (if I'm going to listen to long,

pretentious songs, I'll take *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* over Snapcase every time) but that's a topic for another day.

(*Sticky Fingers*, #3, 1997)

The Absence of Boundaries

Fuck me. I'm stuck here in Times Square for the next three hours. If you have ever visited Times Square, I have your sympathy. If you have never visited Times Square, don't. If you have heard good things about Times Square from friends, sever those relationships. Times Square sucks. (Unless crummy electronics stores and four-story photos of Ricky Martin are your cup of tea, in which case you have my sympathy.) Prior to getting stranded here, I had no intention of even mentioning Times Square in this, my debut column for *Spank*.

My original theme was based on this great quote from Orson Welles: "The absence of boundaries is the enemy of art." Sounds mighty pretentious but my goal was to show that though he was talking about theatre, his theory is universal in application.

The idea came to me while taking a cab home from a show in Manhattan. (I live in Queens and do not own a car. Thus, in order to get my drums to and from local shows, I need to take cab.) Without exception, my late night cab rides are terrifying experiences, cab drivers recklessly racing through the streets, placing my life in danger. During the day there is so much congestion that your average cab driver cannot build up enough speed to pose a threat. Only the truly gifted can put a genuine scare into a daytime cab ride. Come one or two in the morning and it is a different tale. No traffic, no cops, no one to tap the cabbie in question on the shoulder and say, "Perhaps you would consider refraining from this insane behavior." Sitting in the back seat, I attempt to play it cool and act unaffected but deep down, I am always on the verge of soiling my trousers for I am quite certain I am about to be laid out on the slab.

It is not much different with music. What happens when a band is free to do whatever they want in the studio? Free jazz. The Allman Brothers. Smashing Pumpkins. Unlimited budgets and no restrictions lead to crap. You need something to keep you in check, some sort of challenge to overcome.

The same goes for movies. *Clerks* versus *Waterworld*. Would not the new *Star Wars* flick be infinitely better if, at some point during the 15 years of conceiving and making the picture, just one person, exerting the merest hint of restriction, had leaned over to George Lucas and said, "You know, things are looking swell but, in addition to being offensive, that Jar Jar character is irritating and should probably go."

Of course, there are exceptions on both sides of the fence. Some big budget productions are entirely satisfying, like Tim Burton movies, for example, and a lot of low-budget/underground fare sucks worse than an *Ernest* movie (there are too many examples to list here, cite your own).

But I had to scrap that original idea. After roasting in the mid-day sun for awhile, and waiting for tickets to go on sale much later than I was led to believe they would, I was unable to concentrate on such lofty concepts. Instead I ducked into the Virgin Mega Store. My goals were to fend off the headache that place inevitably gives me, kill time, and avoid spending any money. Lo and behold I came across a bin of 7"s and found a trio of cheap gems (Loli and the Chones, Egghunt, Grandpa Boy). Okay, so not everything about Times Square sucks.

(*Spank*, #27, 1999)

Mr. Blue Sky

By the power invested in me by *Spank* (a power on which I have an increasingly tenuous grasp because a) this column is arriving late, b) it mentions E.L.O. is a positive light and c) I should know better than to open a column with such a needlessly convoluted sentence), I decree that from this day forth the term "guilty pleasure" shall cease to exist. Cleanse it from your cabeza and let it vanish from the vernacular, from now on this phrase shall plague us no more. In time it shall cease to be used in any and all contexts, but our battle begins in the realm of music because listening to music is one time when we should live guilt-free. Actually, I think we are pretty close in this regard, it is when people are talking about music that these misguided notions of guilt or shame enter the picture.

I am a recovering user of the phrase "guilty pleasure." I confess, I was once embarrassed by some of the music I like. E.L.O. (you were warned), Olivia Newton-John, Queen. If I ever mentioned such acts to my friends it was done with a heavy dose of ironic detachment. Subconsciously I distanced myself from certain music because it was safer that way, easier to explain. Then I met Brother Mike.

He lived in my dorm when I was a freshman in college. He was the king of our college radio station and deservedly so. He had an enormous record collection and an expansive knowledge of music. He helped me develop my new found interest in punk rock and, among other things, introduced me to the Replacements. But when asked who his all-time favorites were he would say Billy Joel, Bruce Springsteen, and the Grateful Dead. No reservations, no shame, no irony, and, from my way of thinking, not enough oxygen to his brain. Billy Joel? Okay, one of his songs was used as the theme for *Bosom Buddies*

and his then-wife was in *Vacation*. But Bruce and Jerry? What was the otherwise respectable Brother thinking? How could he know of and enjoy Bob Stinson and yet still turn to Bob Weir? I wanted some really complex, involved rationale but it was all quite simple. To his ears those bands delivered the goods and he figured it was foolish to pretend otherwise.

He helped me realize that being embarrassed by what you like, even slightly, implies that there is some sort of universally recognized hierarchy of good and bad. Further, this implies that someone out there can define what constitutes good music. Anyone who lives under this impression is in denial. Establish any rule for good music and if you are honest with yourself, you will find worthy exceptions. I used to hate all country music and once subscribed to the belief that no song employing a steel guitar could not be worth a plug of Skoal. When my first band, King Otter and the Electric Flem, decided to write original songs, the first set of lyrics I submitted was for the eternally witty and oblique, "I Hate Country." (Get it? I expressed my contempt for the genre of country music by reaching into my soul to pen a set of lyrics titled "I Hate Country.") Nashville barely recovered from the impact of my wrath. A crafty one I was. Actually my second effort was "My Parents (Were Transvestites When They Met)" and I still find that idea amusing.) But one summer, at the height of my "buy all the wacky, I don't *really* like this but I bought it anyway" phase, I picked up a 50¢ copy of *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison* at a garage sale and sincerely enjoyed the record. Then I got hooked on Buck Owens (who I now feel is probably the greatest American songwriter ever, and what a set of pipes on that guy) who often puts steel guitar to use and makes it sound amazing.

It makes sense for each of us to have our own hierarchy of music (mine begins with the Kinks and runs all the way down to the depths represented by uber twit Perry Farrell, who I would argue is the exception that proves my rule—you really should feel awful if any Perry Farrell-linked project works for you. Toss out those records! Rig up some sort of acupuncture to erase the part of your brain that houses any Lolaploooza-related memories, and when you figure out how to do so, please let me know how you did it. I went to the second one. We missed Lush, saw the Jesus and Mary Chain perform in broad daylight (good band but under no circumstances do I want a good look at either of the Reid brothers) and on occasion I still wake up terrorized by images of a fully-funkin'-out Flea) but to think that one is better than another is goofy, as if appreciating music is an analytical process. I think it was Aaron Copland who wrote a book in which he attempted to establish what makes for good music. I read it in college. Aaron Copland is a tool. Save the formulas for furthering physics and snazzing up snack foods but keep them at a safe distance from music. My theory is that we react to music on an emotional level and just about anyone outside of Aaron Copland would probably agree.

If I were to devise a checklist to guide my listening habits, my record shelves would be empty. In order to eliminate all of the Top 40 garbage that drives me batshit, my first rule would be to avoid all music with inane lyrics. Which means I would also have to dump this swell Bitchschool 7" that is currently spinning in the background. "Never got an 'A' in Bitchschool/Too busy breaking all the rules"? Those are truly inane lyrics. I would argue they are so inane they are in fact brilliant but in so doing my logic would start having so many qualifications and clauses that I would end up tripping over my logic. Plus, it would be a ridiculous waste of time and energy. Why not just react naturally to music *and then* dissect it, try to figure out what makes your favorite music work. Admit to your friends that you walk down the street with Amy Grant's "Baby, Baby" in your head. It's okay! Hell, it's better than admitting you like Avail.

Back to E.L.O., Olivia, and Queen. I realize why people make fun of those bands. I harbor no illusions of perfection. I own the flawed *Xanadu* soundtrack (E.L.O. & Olivia!). I own Queen's *Hot Space*. At their worst, each has been guilty of pumping out lifeless pop pap in the interest of trying to write music that a lot of people will like (and if you're going to be misguided there are far worse routes to travel than fantasy-laden, roller-skating musicals like *Xanadu*). But I like some of that lifeless pap! They wrote it so people would like it! Are such motives really that different from those of the scores of punk and/or ska bands who crank out one cookie cutter record after another and tour relentlessly not because they love their music or the "kids" but because doing so pays more than their local surf shop? Freddie Mercury loved to play arenas because he loved to rock out with a ton of people. At least he was having fun. Based upon my experiences at Queers shows, Joe King enjoys punk shows slightly less than my dad does. So if it spins your clock, leave it at that. Why complicate such simple thing?

(Note: I promised to mention E.L.O. in a positive light and only did so implicitly in the part about Xanadu. I love Out of the Blue. It makes a number of mistakes (there is a string section on every song (guess that was kind of stable with E.L.O.), there is excessive use of the always-misguided Vocorder, and it is a double LP), but it has spaceships on the cover and hooks me to the gills from side one through side four.)

(Spank, #28, 2000)

Doug Henning: Soccer Coach

The van rolled into our driveway. "Another One Bites the Dust" thundering from the stereo, threatening to shake every shingle off the house.

"Mike, your ride's here."

Like most rational people, I loathe soccer. Games that end in ties, a field that is far too big, insufficient distinction between who's on offense and who's on defense, and, worst of all, only one player who's allowed to use his hands. But I wasn't always this clear-minded. In the fall of sixth grade I signed up to play in the Western Onondaga Youth Soccer Association.

The previous two years I had played Pop Warner football. Clad in helmets and pads, my friends and I felt invincible. We could collide with one another at full-steam and bounce back unscathed every time. Our game plan consisted of one play: hand the ball to Tom Kelly. The rest of us blocked whoever happened to be in the way. Every game, every practice had but one goal—to have fun.

The next year I had a different coach and different teammates. The "Tom Kelly" play was replaced with a 20-page playbook we were expected to memorize. Unable to do so, I scribbled notes on my hands. Practice no longer consisted of endless collide'n'bounce frolicking. Instead we plodded through the playbook from cover to cover. We also ran a lot of laps, and whenever someone asked how many more laps, Coach Williams would respond, "two more now that you asked!" To top it off, our team sucked so most of the plays ended with our quarterback, also the coach's son, rehearsing his best hands-on-hips, disgusted look of "How could you, oh lowly ones, fail me yet again? You've dropped yet another of my perfectly spiraled jewels and have, once more, slowed my progress to the NFL." I no longer felt invincible.

In the fall of sixth grade I opted for new territory: soccer. "Something to do" is the sole reason I could offer and my parents, well, they supported whatever I did, as long as I finished what I started. Though I endured the season I have few memories of it. Of the practices, I only remember my teammates chewing tobacco while waiting for their rides. Of the games, I recall only the perverse joy of getting a yellow card for an illegal slide'n'tackle (I wondered how many times a kid as small as me could get away with such a maneuver). The utter lameness of the game made its impact in little time, everyone ineptly chasing the ball around and around and around in circles of futility. I wanted to quit but could not dodge my parents' rule; I had to finish the season. My only hope for early salvation was my coach.

He was in his early 20s and he was a hippie. Well, a long-hair anyway. He looked like Doug Henning and drove an enormous van, complete with foot-deep shag carpet and a rattle-your-skull loud stereo. He was the very antithesis of my clean-cut parents. I figured my folks would be begging me to quit rather than have me risk continued exposure to my Cheech and Chong coach. No (fuzzy) dice.

I began to suspect that my folks were out to teach me a lesson. When they stopped coming to my games, and asked my coach to pick me up, my suspicions were confirmed. I was too naive to know what to fear from this freakasaurus but my instincts served me well; I knew enough to be uncomfortable. Very uncomfortable.

Even at that young age I felt like a square peg in a round hole and never more so than when I boarded my coach's rolling den of hedonism. With his Queen 8-track set to 11, he could announce his arrival without so much as a knock on the front door. And without so much as a peek through the window, everyone in my family knew who was out front. Head hung low, I dragged myself from the comforts of home to the seedy confines of that ominous van that had come to collect its cargo. I felt like collateral in a lost bet.

Perhaps, I thought, my parents had gotten used to my weird coaches. The previous spring I'd had a baseball coach named Bongo, a jughead high school kid whose practices consisted of team chicken fights. The difference being that my folks came to my baseball games. They tolerated Baron Bongo, keeping a close eye on him. For though skewed, he was on the right side of the fence—he coached baseball.

Over time it dawned on me that it was soccer that brought out the vengeful side of my folks. They did not want to tell me about the lameness of soccer, they wanted to show me. Making me complete the season was like making a first-time smoker go through a carton of cancer sticks. Making me ride to games with my coach was like rubbing my nose in the stink of the sport.

They succeeded. I never played the game again. I don't remember how the season ended, only that it did. Soccer is an inherently foul contest, best avoided by all. (Note: If you have kids one day, and if you opt to let them play soccer, and if they end up with an off-kilter coach, and if you decide to let that off-kilter coach drive your soccer-playing offspring to and from games, make certain s/he has good taste in music. I think Queen rocks with the best of them. I do not wish to associate Queen with soccer and lameness. My coach's fondness for Queen was, apparently, his sole redeeming quality, the exception that proves the rule. A pox on soccer, viva Queen.)

(Banana Race, 2000)

Let's All Drink to the Kinks

It was St. Patrick's Day 1983. I was standing on James Street in downtown Syracuse. I was watching the annual parade and I was freezing. Growing up in Syracuse I'd become accustomed to freezing and how to deal with it: I stepped into a record store. As usual I headed for the cut-out bin. The first thing that

caught my eye was a Kinks cassette. My friend Joe had heard his older sister talk about the Kinks' song "Lola." I hadn't heard the tune (and certainly didn't know what it was about) but I was intrigued. The cover showed all four Kinks wearing matching hunting jackets. For six bucks I got two tapes with a total of nearly two dozen tunes from four guys with coordinated outfits. Little did I know that I had made the best move of my first thirteen years.

To this day I've never heard anything quite like what I found on those tapes. The music and lyrics suggested a wholly different world, simultaneously beautiful and tragic. But this wasn't a sci-fi world of goblins, gremlins or hobbits. No, there was certainly nothing D&D-like about the Kinks' universe. The songs were like a series of perfectly scored, two-to-three minute movies. Each filled with well-rounded characters and stories about the working and middle classes in post-WWII Britain. The irony was that these flawless tunes were composed of many flawed elements. For starters no one would ever accuse Ray Davies of being a great vocalist. Drummer Mick Avory was kicked out of an early version of the Stones because, in the words of Keith Richards, "he couldn't find that off beat." And to this day some people have so little faith in Dave Davies' (immensely underrated) skills as a guitarist that they insist Jimmy Page played the perfectly chaotic solo on "You Really Got Me." (Not true. Even Page says so.)

Liking the Kinks has always been an intensely personal experience. Most people know of the Kinks and have heard a handful of their songs. If they grew up in the 60s they know "You Really Got Me." Children of the 70s know "Lola" or maybe "Celluloid Heroes." For 80s kids it's "Come Dancing" or "Destroyer." With the exception of "Celluloid Heroes" they're all fine tunes. But I quickly learned that there are very few people with whom I could discuss the Kinks. It's not like I could stroll into a high school party and throw the *Arthur* LP on the turntable. "Hey everyone, wanna listen to the story of an English family emigrating to Australia in post-Churchill Britain?" Thing is they could have danced to that record, and, as it remains the 20th century's greatest piece of music, they should have. Loving the Kinks is conceding the fact that you'll seldom have the opportunity to discuss your favorite music. It means having to bite your tongue when the Rolling Stones are labeled the greatest group ever. (A lie.) It means having to say "yeah, I like the Beatles but..." (A lot.) It means very few people will ever understand and it's not worth the time and effort trying to convert everyone. You're either a Kinks fan or you're not. I think it's predestined. Of course, with mixed results, I still make the occasional effort.

My greatest Kinks konversion success came with the obscure "Death of a Clown." The backing vocals on the song (supplied by Ray's first wife Rasa) sounded exactly like our neighbor, Mrs. Engles. Well, I'd never actually heard her sing but I was sure this is what she would have sounded like. One night I put my theory to the test during a sleep over with a bunch of kids from the neighborhood. I played them "Death of a Clown" and suggested that the "la, la,

la, la"s were actually Mrs. Engles. They agreed and somehow this obscure, Dylanesque, non-hit became a sleepover favorite that entire summer.

When I was in college I did a Kinks radio special. During each talk break I labeled the Kinks "the greatest rock'n'roll band ever." I was trying to provoke someone to call in and debate. I failed. The one person who did call was my old roommate Chuck. He was stoned and didn't even know why I was on the air, he just heard my voice and picked up the phone. The year before when I'd done a similar show a guy called in from SUNY-Cortland. He said the Kinks were playing there in a few weeks and asked if I'd like to interview Ray. We talked for awhile and I gave him my phone number. I didn't think it was a prank but he never called back.

I shouldn't make it seem as though no one likes the Kinks. A few summers ago my bandmate John borrowed my copy of the Kinks' *Give The People What They Want*. He got hooked on, and has suggested covering "Around The Dial." My other bandmate, Johnny Reno, wants to cover "Do It Again." (Bonus points in both cases because no one covers Kinks tunes from the 80s. That's a shame because there are a number of great ones.) My uncle Steve says that *Muswell Hillbillies* is one of his favorite albums of all time. My buddy Jeff loves *Arthur* and my old bandmate Dan owns a copy of *Preservation Act I* and got our band to cover "House In The Country."

Truth is the Kinks were one of the most popular bands of the 60s British Invasion. While early singles from the Who and Stones floundered in the lower reaches of the pop charts, the Kinks' first three U. S. singles reached the Top 10. But within a couple of years the Kinks couldn't get an LP into the Top 200. Don't feel sorry for them, though, they brought it upon themselves. In late '66 Dave got into a fight with an official from a musicians union (some say that punches were thrown). The fisticuffs led to the Kinks being banned from touring the U. S. for the next four years. Add to that Ray's insistence on writing about tea and village greens and it's understandable how the kids forgot about the Kinks. One more thing the hippies missed the boat on.

The early-to-mid 70s were a boozy haze for the band, filled with loads of concept albums. In the late 70s Clive Davis signed them to Arista and the Kinks worked on becoming an arena rock band. It took a while but they nailed it on the live *One For The Road* (1979) and *Give The People What They Want* (1981). The early-to-mid 80s saw a revitalized Kinks culminating in 1986's *Think Visual*.

U. K. Jive (1989) quickly deflated that resurgence and *Phobia* (1993) was the musical equivalent of backing over a dead body. Okay, it wasn't all bad. There were four really good tunes and the *Did Ya* EP that preceded the album features one of Dave's greatest songs ever ("Look Through Any Doorway"). The ensuing tour was poorly attended and the Kinks were forced to cancel a number of dates. Sigh. I firmly believe the Kinks have at least one more great album in them. I'm willing to wait.

For my money these are the 10 Kinks albums to get:

- 1 - *Face to Face* (1966)
- 2 - *Something Else* (1967)
- 3 - *Village Green Preservation Society* (1968)
- 4 - *Arthur (or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire)* (1969)
- 5 - *Lola vs. Powerman and the Moneygoround* (1970)
- 6 - *Muswell Hillbillies* (1971)
- 7 - *Kink Kronikles* (1972)
- 8 - *Give The People What They Want* (1981)
- 9 - *Word of Mouth* (1984)
- 10 - *Think Visual* (1986)

(*Foxy Digitalis*, #3, 1996)

Worry When We Get There

I helped start a zine so I could write about the Wrench. I helped start a local music radio show so I could send the Wrench over the airwaves and I got involved with community radio so I could continue doing so. More than any other band, the Wrench compelled me to get involved.

I am not sure how their native Buffalo perceived the Wrench during the band's early-to-mid '90s run, but the band ruled my world throughout that stretch of time. I got to know them through a high school friend (and former bandmate in King Otter & the Electric Flem), Dan Smith, a.k.a. Schmidty, who happened to be the Wrench's lead guitarist. But the inspiration I drew from them wasn't simply a case of "if someone I know can do that, so can I." I was enthusiastic, not delusional. I knew I could not play or sing or write songs as well as they could. I couldn't write or DJ all that well either but I had to do something, remaining idle was not an option, not when a band got me so worked up and yet received so little attention from the rest of the world. I considered the Wrench one of the great bands of the era—local, regional, or otherwise—and wanted as many people as possible to know about them.

To that end I played my Wrench tapes (*Monkey Wrench* ('90); *Anything We Can Do, You Can Do Better* ('91); and *What, Yonk!?! ('92)*) during every one of my shifts at my crummy restaurant jobs. Endlessly I yammered on to friends about the virtues of the Wrench. But that wasn't enough so I got involved with local radio and zines. All of which was taking place while I was living in Central

New York (Ithaca and Syracuse). By the time the band's sole CD, *Worry When We Get There* (New Red Archives) was released in 1994, I was living in New York City. I was still very much involved with zines but I was also far removed from my native Central New York, denied the comforts of a familiar local music scene and easy access to Wrench shows. Theoretically, the situation was ripe for the Wrench CD to disappoint me. Local bands seldom survive a change of scenery, either on their part or a listener's. Their context, their setting, is usually a big part of their appeal. Not so for the Wrench and me (which sounds like an After School Special, a thousand pardons).

Worry When We Get There instantly leaped into heavy rotation in my apartment, and every mix tape I made for friends was given its requisite dose of Wrench magic. To my very core I hoped that this was but the first of many Wrench CDs, the beginning of their rise. Instead it marked their apex. The band followed up with a self-released 7" (the brilliant *Cop Krueller* ep) in 1995 and closed up shop shortly thereafter.

No description I conjure up will do justice to *Worry When We Get There*. For the uninitiated I'd try the following: High-spirited, smart yet self depreciating rock that walks the thin line between pop and punk, and calls upon the sounds of fellow snow belt residents Husker Du, Soul Asylum, and the Replacements. Or maybe the Wrench's sticker said it better, "The guitar thumps yelling boys like a huge top."

The Wrench, and *Worry*, forever changed the way I think about and react to music. For the first time I couldn't accept at face value my appreciation for a great band. I was forever digging through their sounds and lyrics trying to get a fix on how Wrench songs, and *Worry* in particular, managed to be so thoroughly intoxicating. Like any worthy adventure, the more I figured out, the more I wondered, marveled. From the sounds of it you'd think I'd discovered the fountain of youth. I realize that life doesn't offer such easy outs, but it does offer records like *Worry*, stress annihilating and supremely satisfying every time. Six years after its release, *Worry When We Get There*, one of the finest pieces of recorded music from the 1990s, never fails to make my day better. I'll be saying the same thing in sixty years.

(*Angst & Daises*, #2, 2000)

Drummers, Local Bands, and Life in Ohio
(aka *The Best Shows I Saw in 2001*)

1. Soft Boys, Young Fresh Fellows - Baltimore, MD (March)

Wow, the Soft Boys reunited! The Soft Boys were a great psychedelic pop band who, unfortunately for their bank accounts, existed in the late 70s, when the rest

of the world was wrapped up in either punk or arena rock. A classic case of great music, bad timing. The Soft Boys featured Robyn Hitchcock and Kimberley Rew (who went on to be in Katrina and the Waves and wrote "Walking on Sunshine"). It was thrilling to see the Soft Boys play "Underwater Moonlight" and the rest of the set was great, too. The only drawback of the reunion hearing people say "I never really liked Robyn Hitchcock, I was always more into the Soft Boys." Which, given that the Soft Boys broke up about 20 years ago and, during the time they were active, never released a record in the U.S., is a) annoying, b) unlikely to be burdened by any shred of truth, and c) rather like saying "I never really like the Beatles, I was always more into the Quarry Men." Yet despite the joy of seeing this legendary pop band, the Soft Boys were only the second best band on the bill. Opening the night were the Young Fresh Fellows, the best live band I've ever seen. The Fellows have been around since the Soft Boys broke up (give or take a year or three) and they're still capable of surprising their Young Fresh Flock. They were in full force this night, even if drummer Tad Fellow had to use a rented drum kit (which is rather like asking Batman to take a night off from the Batmobile and drive a Ford Escort). Elaboration will only muddy the waters. The Young Fresh Fellows: yes.

2. Graham Parker, The Figgs - Cleveland, OH (October)

What a killer double bill. First, the Figgs, then the Figgs backing Graham Parker. En route to the show I nearly ran out of gas and I vastly underrated the length of the trip, thus causing myself to miss about half of the Figgs opening set. It'll never happen again, I swear. Each time I see the Figgs I come away with a new way of appreciating them. This night's new aspect of appreciation: the Figgs can completely overpower the stage as a headliner and then drop back and play support band, yielding the spotlight to someone else. Not to imply that Graham Parker is reluctant to snare an audience's attention. He's passionate and funny and he knows how to blend the old (ample doses of *Squeezing Out Sparks* and *The Mona Lisa's Sister*, my favorites) and the new (enough to pique my curiosity in his latest CD). He's also short (nearly as short as Lou Gramm, the guy from Foreigner, whom I cite simply because he's the only other short rock star I've seen in person, and no, I didn't pay to see Foreigner, I saw him at some music convention, and yes, I probably would have paid to see Foreigner in 1982 when I was enthralled with their 4 album. I've since recovered, thank you very much) and a good, short rock star (as opposed to short rock star like Lou Gramm) rocks like no other.

3. NRBQ - Cleveland, OH (October)

On record these guys craft some of most tightly wound pop I've ever heard, sprinkling in some weird stuff now and again. On stage they tip the balance the other way, pretty much ditching the straight pop and winging it. Not my typical

cup of tea but these guys can be trusted. (It's worth noting that they've guested on Young Fresh Fellows, Figgs, and Captain Lou Albano records, appeared on *The Simpsons*, and when the Shaggs reunited a couple years ago, Tommy from NRBQ was their drummer.) The best part of the show was when they brought Tommy out front and all four band members sang oldies while the soundman played a CD of backing tracks. The CD proceeded to skip repeatedly and while they did smirk, they never gave way to laughter and managed to finish the songs. I guess if you can keep time with the Shaggs a malfunctioning CD player is pretty much like metronome.

4. The Figgs - Chapel Hill, NC (March or April)

Hey, even the mighty Figgs have off nights (relatively speaking), how else to explain their presence this far down on the list? It was early in the tour and while individual songs were played quite well the pacing was a bit off, the set lacked the head-to-toe flow that typically marks a Figgs show. With most bands the difference wouldn't have mattered, but with the Figgs it's the distinction between being the world's second best live band (YFF still top the charts) and mere excellence. This night's new aspect of appreciation: the importance of pacing. So at show's end my jaw was about mid-shin as opposed to scraping the floor.

5. Dirt Bike Annie, Media Whores - Columbus, OH (this date I remember, 10/20/01)

I miss having great local bands. I know, I know, anything that veers even close to "support local music" is typically croaked by only two species: local musicians and the people who date them. Still, when I was living in NYC, the local bands consisted of the Figgs, Sea Monkeys, and Dirt Bike Annie. I miss seeing a great band every few months, tracing their progress, hearing the new songs fresh out of the practice space. Seeing DBA in Columbus was an invigorating blast from the recent past. I had no choice but to forsake my hearing and plant myself up close, right in front of the band's too-loud speakers. I was in such proximity to Dirt Bike Danny's bass cabinet that, according to the statutes of most Midwestern states, he and I have a common law marriage. The band's new stuff sounded even better than their latest EP. Good enough to make me miss NYC (never thought that would happen). Also on the bill were the Heartdrops (nice enough guys, never been a fan), Ben Heartdrop's side project (name escapes me), and the ever-fab Media Whores (!!!), a band that appeals equally to well-mannered pop dorks and beer-swillin' hellions. The Whores also sprinkle in Cheap Trick and Replacements covers upon request. If I lived in the Media Whores' home town of Columbus (as opposed to Copley, two hours away) I'd consider staying in the "birth place of aviation" state for the long haul. (Even though it was on streets of Columbus that I was on the receiving end of more harrassment than I ever experienced in NYC, or anywhere

else, for that matter. I was standing outside of the club, talking pop music with drummer Dirt Bike Mike, and not once, not twice, not thrice, but four times we were given some variation of the “nerds go home” treatment. Where was Booger when we needed him?)

6. The Operators, Churchbuilder - Akron, OH (I think it was 8/7/01)

Living in aforementioned Copley (population: very small, gateway to Akron (itself no longer the mecca that gave us the likes of Devo, Tin Huey, the Bizarros, etc. during the 70s)), I usually have to shlep to Cleveland to catch anything of interest. Imagine my surprise when the Operators (from Boston) made a mid-summer's stop over in the Rubber City (that's Akron, lots of tires made there). They rocked the joint with their brand of loopy, switching-instruments-a-lot indie pop. They had an unspoken self-effacing attitude but were serious enough that they wanted to put on the best possible show (and succeeded in doing so). The poorly-named Churchbuilder, the local band on the bill, churned out pretty good keyboard-driven indie pop. Unfortunately, they favored the “can you tell we find this ‘pop music’ to be colossally tedious and that, in addition, we find everything, including you, pedestrian, to be quite tiresome” brand of public performance. They'd do well to take a page from the Operators' manual. Then perhaps I'd have a local band to follow, something to perk up my stay in Copley.

7. Jonathan Richman - Chapel Hill, NC (May)

A night for minimalists. Jonathan plays an acoustic guitar, his drummer usually uses brushes. There's no one else in the band. The opening act chose to take the two-piece route, too. It was neat being able to enjoy a show without my head pounding from an-overdriven PA system. Sure, a full band could have worked well but that'd have made the whole experience significantly less Jonathan (I've come to realize that his fans rarely make use of his surname, I guess he's like Prince or Topol in that regard). I had myself a fine time but lost some of the effect because I kept wondering whether or not this guy's for real, how much of it's genuine and how much is a put on. My friend James, a good judge of Jonathan shows, said this one was a good one, not the best, not the worst. Which reminds me, I still owe James money for the ticket. Pardon me, I've a check to write.

(Schuell, #N, 2002)

Dick Army

"I saw this band, Dick Army, and I stole their guitar in the middle of their set."

"They're the worst band in NYC."

Dick Army had a hell of a reputation long before I heard them.

The first quote is from my friend John who went to high school with one of the original Dicks, Jim. What kind of band could turn my mild-mannered friend into a hijacker?

The second quote is from the *New York Press*. Having played on bills with all of other worst bands in the city (play eight gigs at the legendary Spiral and you'll cover a lot of ground), I expected, well, dick, from Dick Army.

Then I heard them. *The First Four Beers 7"* is a masterpiece. The playing is sloppy and the instruments sound like they're spilling out of shoebox, but it's an excellent EP. C'mon, you aren't charmed by those handclaps on "Absolute Zero" or the ill-conceived sax playing on "Ryan Hushion is Unemployed"? I just listened to *The First Four Beers* again and it still stands up. Or maybe it's more a matter of falling down. Regardless, you get all of that plus, with the lyrics, all of the self-loathing of a Hunter S. Thompson novel without having to read a Hunter S. Thompson novel.

Then came gems like "All Pilled Out," the *Decimate* EP, and the *Unsafe* CD. All of which had gobs of bitching about work and high praise for cheap beer. Dick Army could tap into hackneyed subject matter without yielding to cliché or pretense; punk rock populism. And catharsis, too. Ten minutes of Dick Army could clear away eight hours of office work.

As each Dick Army record came out, and surpassed its predecessor, I declared them the best punk band in New York. (Mostly because I believe it, but partly because I hate the *New York Press*.) No one—not even Matt Army—ever agreed with me on this point.

So, being familiar with the whole Charlie Brown/Lucy/football scenario, I'm not going to take another stab at convincing the world of Dick Army's greatness. But I still want to address the matter of their reputation. And if I can't stake out either the "worst band" or "best band" positions, maybe I can clear up a misunderstanding.

Most of you reading this were probably at, or have heard about, the release party for the Dizzy Records CD compilation, the show held at the Vital Mailorder office in the summer of '99. I organized that shindig. Everyone I talked with

said they had a great time, but Tom from Vital was nearly evicted because of the party. Not because people were spilling beer in the office or stealing plants from the lobby. No, it was because a group of kids went down the wrong staircase, opened a door that said "Do Not Exit," and tripped a fire alarm that wasn't turned off until Monday morning.

Because of Dick Army's reputation, most people assumed that a Dick Army fan set off the fire alarm. Not true. Sure, the DA faithful contributed their part to the beer sloshing and plant theft, but not the fire alarm. Delinquents? Yeah, you could say that (one of the guys in Dick Army once described their fans as "a bunch of problem drinkers"), but they can read clearly labeled "Do Not Exit" signs.

I have no idea where Dick Army's reputation truly lies, but let's at least get the facts straight.

(Zine from Dick Army's last show, 2003)

Westchester

Like most people I've got a beef with prejudice. And like most people my aversion to prejudice doesn't mean that I'm immune to it. I dislike the rich and I must confess that I don't see my loathing for the loaded subsiding any time soon, especially after living in Westchester for a year. My wife and I were moving back to the New York City area and we wanted to be near New York City, but not in New York City. Long story shorter, we moved to a little town called Pound Ridge, and all of my assumptions about the rich were substantiated.

The people of Pound Ridge are wealthy and they are nuts. They have so much done for them by servants, au pairs and gardeners that they are baffled by the basics of daily life. When George W. Bush, Senior was in office there was an infamous incident at a supermarket wherein the Commander-in-Chief marveled over the scanner used by the checkout clerk. I always assumed that there'd been a misunderstanding. I thought that it was unlikely—and hopefully impossible—that the guy with his finger on the The Button was unaware of and impressed by the checkout scanner, a device typically operated by kids five years shy of their first legal beer. Moving to Westchester revealed the flaws in my assumptions.

A week after we moved to town, I was waiting in line at the post office. I was standing behind a woman wearing fur from head to toe. She stepped up to the counter, held up a magazine-size envelope and asked the clerk, "Can I mail a package here?"

How detached from reality must you be in order to pose such a question? All the post office does is mail packages and it's not as if they do it so well they've diversified their services. It's not like you can go to the post office for a pedicure or a pack of sausage patties; they're a one-trick pony still ironing out the kinks in that one trick.

A few weeks later, our landlord told us that her neighbors had the oak tree in their front yard appraised. For \$40,000. I still haven't figured out which aspect is most disturbing: having a tree appraised, that a tree can be worth forty grand, or that there is sufficient need for tree appraising as to necessitate a local tree appraiser.

These examples aren't limited to life at home. I teach 5th grade at a nearby elementary school. One afternoon, as a particularly fun and messy class party was wrapping up, I went to the custodian's room to get a vacuum cleaner. Upon my return a helpful parent insisted upon vacuuming. Faced with a flood of things to do before the kids were dismissed for the day, I yielded. When I heard the roar of the Hoover, I assumed all was well and continued wiping off tables. Then I felt a tap on my shoulder. This parent, a millionaire, had the vacuum running but couldn't figure out how to move it. Granted, it was one of those complex "step on the large orange plastic button, pull back on the arm, and then push it around" types, but still...

Another time at school the kids were planning to sell lemonade to raise money for a field trip. One of the parents came up with the idea of building a lemonade stand. This moment of seeming clarity dissipated as the mom continued talking, "Sure, a lemonade stand is a great idea. I'll have my carpenter build one." My carpenter, she actually said, "my carpenter." Not my husband, the carpenter. Not my neighbor, the carpenter. Not my friend the carpenter, but my always-on-the-payroll carpenter.

That was weird and excessive, but at least it wasn't neglectful. That trifecta— weird, excessive, and neglectful—is reserved for the parents who can't get their kids to school on time because of the morning appointments they schedule with their personal trainers. When parents bring their kids to school late, they have to go to the office and sign the tardy list. A bunch of people have had the audacity to write, "ran late—appointment with personal trainer." There's no shame involved, in their world such an excuse makes sense.

However, odd as these experiences have been for me, they're nothing compared to what my wife goes through. She is a veterinarian. She works at an emergency hospital, and she's seen it all, because history has given us no relationships like those that exist between rich people and their pets. One night my wife was in the back room, filling out charts when she heard screams

coming from the lobby. She burst into the lobby and saw a panic-stricken woman clutching a cat. Keep in mind this is 4:30 in the morning.

"My cat...my cat...my cat has this, this bump on his chin. It's ghastly! Dear god, help me! What could it be? It's cancer, right? Oh God, it's cancer, I knew it! My Napoleon is going to die! My muse! My muse is going to die!"

My wife looked at the cat's chin and responded, "It's acne, miss, it's just acne. And it's bothering you much more than it's bothering the cat."

A few months later a guy came in with a field mouse. He found it on his doorstep and though it was comatose, the mouse was still alive—and this guy was going to save the mouse come hell or high water. At this time of the night there was a \$75 charge just to see a doctor. My wife reminded the client of this charge and spoke candidly: the mouse was likely going to die at any moment.

"How can you be so callous?", the guy ranted, "This is a living, breathing creature! What can you do to save this mouse?"

"Well, we could do x-rays, but that's \$200."

"Fine."

"And that would also require oxygen therapy, which is \$60 an hour."

"This isn't about money."

The x-rays were done and they were inconclusive.

"So, what's next?"

"Sir, in my professional opinion the animal is going to die momentarily. I don't know of anything we can do to save it."

"You're not even trying, doctor. Do you even care? I'll ask again: what else can be done?"

"We could do blood work."

"Good, let's do that."

"I have to let you know up front that the blood work will be another \$110."

Again, nothing was revealed and again the guy insisted that they press on. They put the mouse on intravenous fluids. That was another \$100, and another hour

on oxygen. Before another course of action could be considered, the mouse died.

The bill came to \$700 and the guy handed over his Master Card without reservation. Till the end he ranted about how insensitive and uncaring my wife and her staff were, how he would never come back, and how he would tell all of his friends to avoid this inhumane hospital. In hindsight, my wife figured the mouse was poisoned by something in the guy's garage.

My favorite story involves a couple in their mid-40s, he's a stock broker and she's a lawyer, and their 14-year-old German Shepard whom they loved dearly. The dog had a very advanced case of cancer and had been suffering for months. He was blind, he was barely able to walk, and he was unable to control his bowel movements. Clearly, they were keeping the poor pooch alive for their sake more than his. Finally, after much deliberation, the couple decided tomorrow, and tomorrow alone, was the time. They also decided that no one but my wife could perform the procedure. They called my wife's hospital only to learn that she was going to be leaving early the next day. Knowing how much the dog was suffering and how hard the decision was for the owners, my wife agreed to come back to work and meet the couple after the hospital was officially closed.

She arrived at 7:30 and saw a moving van in the parking lot. Then she saw the couple step out of the van. They walked around back, raised the door and revealed their living room. Everything. They had brought with them the couch, the end table, the recliner, the coffee table, the lamps, the rugs, the whole nine, which they insisted on setting up inside the hospital. And they did. They recreated their home inside the hospital. Could my wife have come to their actual home? Yes. Could another doctor come to their actual home? Yes. Could they have come on another day? Yes. All of these options were available, but that's not the way Westchester works. Unlimited means leads to unlimited idiocy.

It's at this point that I'd like to close with some reflection, the insight that ties together the previous anecdotes and concludes the piece. In this case something along the lines of "but aren't we all a little bit like these Westchester eccentrics?", or vice versa. But, no. They really are nuttier than the rest of us because they always have someone else to mail their packages, vacuum their floors, and built their lemonade stands. And when they don't, they're rushing their pets to the hospital at 4:30 in the morning because of zits.

I'm glad that my wife and I have since moved out of Westchester, but I have to admit that after living there for a year, the world makes a lot more sense to me.

(2004)

Mike Faloon edits Go Metric and Zisk. He contributes to zines such as Roctober and Chin Music and is included in the recently published Zine Yearbook: Volume 8 (Soft Skull Press). He lives in Brewster, New York, roots for the Mets and experiences mild discomfort when writing about himself in the third person.

Official White House Photo



The author relaxing in front of his Cape Cod beach house.