

AVOW



NUMBER
EIGHTEEN

TWO
DOLLARS

OK

HEY THERE.

Time, the idea of longevity in punk, is a funny thing.

Record stores and distros will still carry albums that were put out years ago, even if the band has since broken up and various members have gone on to form other bands and fervently talk shit about each other in the pages of various zines. But fewer distros and stores will carry those selfsame zines at all. And if they do, it is generally only the current issue of said zine that they keep in stock. So, unspoken: punk music is a timeless medium, punk zines are ready for the grave almost as soon as they're published.

It's an odd dichotomy, music and the word. I've sidestepped it to a degree by having very few interviews with bands in AVOW's less than illustrious lifespan, things that can hopelessly date a zine, but I can still feel the tug of the grave once I've had an issue out for a while - I can feel it all getting a bit stale. Which sucks, because I want these stories to stand alone, to be timeless, ageless.

Regardless, here's my new shot in the dark. Yes, there's more stories. After hours and hours and days of writing and editing and rewriting (there were probably about 8 nearly-finished stories in here that I ended up scrapping), I have lost any sense of quality control. This could be the worst piece of shit I've ever laid on the glass of a copy machine for all I know, I can't tell anymore. I'll let you figure that out.

I debated calling this one "AVOW #17.5", I almost feel like it's one of those annoying CDEP's, the ones with, like, two songs from the upcoming record and two unreleased songs, one of those half-assed sort of things. But I hate half issues, and I don't think it really *is* half an issue, so number eighteen it is. But I also don't think I'm gonna be doing another story issue for a while; frankly, I wonder if I'm running out of them. I mean, there's a story in here about me *almost* getting beat up by Marines, how boring is that? So, the next few issues will be a bit different. I mean, I've got plenty of bad ideas, check it out:

AVOW #19 will probably be a recipe book of sorts, a drink guide. Perusing the next issue will allow you to stroll into any bar of your choosing and order a "Mary Kate and Ashley Olson" with ease and confidence. When the bartender frowns and asks you what's in a "Mary Kate and Ashley Olson," you'll be able to look him or her square in the eye and say, "Zima, Mike's Hard Lemonade, Sprite, two Gummi Bears and a fine frosting of cocaine around the lip of the glass." On second thought, maybe it's not such a good idea after all.

AVOW #20, just in time for AVOW's 10 year anniversary, will probably be something I've been wanting to do for a couple years now: a 60-70 page punk rock choose your own adventure story. I want to try my hand at *making up* a dumb story, rather than just recounting dumb ones that actually happened. But in the meantime, here's this one, a little something to hold us both over.

Right now, it's two days before the Portland Zine Symposium (*there I go again! I have now transformed this zine! It's no longer literature and has now become a periodical - when am I gonna learn?*) and I still have to edit this fucker again, print it out somewhere, lay it out, do the drawings and then print the final master copy into badly xeroxed zines that you will, hopefully, eventually hold in your sweaty little palms. But it's a cool day, at least, and there's coffee, smokes and the great *Wayfarers All* comp on the stereo. So there's a bit of hope on the horizon there, what the shit. It'll all work out, one way or another.

So take care, and drop me a line sometime,

keith



CONTENTS:

1. You're Being Volatile

2. Georgia's

**3. But Duran Duran Can Still
Kind Of Kiss My Ass**

4. Avow's Only Frickin Show Review, Ever

5. Don't Sell Out Your Friends

6. It Turns Out Cryptic Slaughter Kind Of Sucks

7. A Thank You Letter To Bob Edwards

8. Yo, I'm Dribbling Emo All Over The Place

9. Joanie's Got A Radon Patch

But I Can't Even Talk To Her

10. A Stone Thrown In The Water

1. YOU'RE BEING VOLATILE

The crewcut dude, father of two, will not leave me alone.

"You strike me as someone who's gone through some tough things and has matured quite a lot," I say to him. He takes a sip of his beer and tells me he has two kids and hasn't been in a fight since his oldest son was born.

"Oh yeah? How old are you?" I ask. Conversationally. Trying to diffuse this guy, who has, for the past half hour or so, been inching closer and closer towards Beating Keith's Ass Land, or at least closer to deciding to, you know, pack his bags and fetch a taxi heading towards that particular airport.

"Twenty nine," he says. "And if you'd said to me then what you said to me tonight, I'd have kicked your fucking ass right here."

"And you strike me as just the sort of virile, agile young buck that could do it, too," I say, nodding at him and taking a drink of my own beer.

See? I can't leave well enough alone sometimes.

And people keep asking me how I wind up here, in situations like these, and I just innocently shrug and say, "I dunno," all wide-eyed and sweet. But that's bullshit, isn't it? Because I think I'm made up of three parts, and I know exactly what all of them are. Definitions as follows:

There's the part in me that just wishes somebody would come up and drop me sometimes, every great once in a while. There's the occasional thirst for that. Not even with the idea of fighting back, particularly, but just desiring that singleness of mind that comes from getting stomped, that fight-or-flight burning of adrenaline that shoots terror from the top of your head straight down to your asshole, your legs and arms absolutely thrumming with energy, throat constricting for air from the fear, that simplification of life that comes with going from Point A, standing upright, to Point B, laying on the ground in the blink of an eye. Life is distilled into one fuck of a raw, simple and gorgeous panorama when it's like that. I certainly wouldn't want to live like that, to be there in that state all the time, but every once in a while I just get the itch, you know? Oil barons and stockbrokers spend tens of thousands of dollars climbing Mount Everest to get that feeling, that simplification and energy. I'm thrifty: I wind up getting it from a handful of Marines who want to beat me up.

But there's also something in me that loves that sense of almost, you know? The space of time inbetween the last word and the first swing, that period of time that can seem like hours, days, everything simultaneously moving at light-speed and slow-motion. You can see things escalating, getting warmer, the guy in front of you is not letting up, not getting out of your face, ugly as hell, so angry with you and you don't really understand that anger at all, how he sustains it. That sense of almost, of how close can I come and still get away from here? How long do I linger? Do I run now? Or do I talk shit some more? It's a ballet.

Of course, the third and most frequent mode of operation I employ is that of, essentially, a coward with a slightly-above-average vocabulary. This is the state I most often find myself in and it's almost always the one that gets me in trouble. As a combatant, I find it very doubtful that I will ever go farther beyond running away or trying to curl up into a ball. I've grudgingly come to accept the fact that I just don't think I have much fight in me.

But a punching bag? I make a pretty good one of those.

And twenty minutes later:

"Hey," the tan guy says, getting up right in my face. "You ever heard the AC/DC song 'Heads Will Roll'?" Tanner's Marine buddies guffaw laughter, forming a loose, mildly-weaving circle around Christina and I.

I get the drift, the implied threat, and wonder where the hell all these other guys came from. Then I hear myself telling him I'm not much of an AC/DC fan. I am in that second mode, that one that wants to see how long we can play this game before someone decides to throw a punch. My hands are in my pockets. I assume someone is going to swing, knowing it won't be me. Knowing that I simply don't have it in me, it's simply not in my nature. And that I'm mildly scared and also mildly interested in seeing how much verbal mockery I can get away with before I get dropped. It depends on how mad the other parties are, how raging, how pissed - then the fear takes over. Here, there's about six jocko Marine types and Christina and I. They're still doing more talking than anything.

Then Tanner rolls up, right in front of me, and takes my glasses off my face, deft as hell. Or at least it seems deft; I'm drunk, the guy's arm seemingly reaches out as fluid and sure as a snake (a snake that visits a tanning bed, that is) and grabs them off my face. The traffic passing us on 16th doesn't give a shit, and neither do my friends, apparently: I look past this loose-knit group of drunks and see Scott and Jake, two blocks up, fuzzy little specks on what passes for my horizon line. Thanks a lot, guys.

I hear one of the kids that has been shooting pool and vibing me out, he's wearing a baseball hat (fucking turned backwards, of course) and is forming a part of this looseknit circle of guys, mutter to his friend and giggle, "Shit, we should just take this fag out."

I'LL FUCKING
SHOW YOU
VOLATILE!



Christina, Scott, Jake, Adam and I are hanging out at the bar, getting mildly drunk when these dudes just roll up on us. The bar is quiet, one pool table's empty, there's a couple guys quietly playing a game at the other, the lights are as dim and muted as the juke and they've got the AC on too high. I keep taking my jacket on and off as we roll through a few pitchers, finally asking the very nice bartender to turn it down a bit. Don't get me wrong, sunshine, I like the bar itself just fine.

And then these guys roll up on us, grab the seat next to ours, despite the place being virtually empty. Big guys, a couple off them veer off and head for the empty pool table. They are hammered, or at least mildly so. More than us, right? There is the big, nice guy, the soberest of the bunch, who turns out to actually be an ex-Marine. Then there's the Father Who Doesn't Fight Anymore, who sidles up to me and starts talking talking talking, turning his chair backwards and already getting too close, already getting in my space. Then there's Tanner, one of those guys with rugged good looks, nice clothes and tattoos of oh-so-fashionable Japanese characters running up one of his arms. Scott is a lot like me: get a few drinks in him and he starts mouthing off, seeing how much he can get away with. I've seen him insult dudes twice as big as himself and a lot more formidable, but he does it in such a way that they think he's paying them a compliment somehow. It's incredible to watch him do this- and also really unnerving, as a friend. The two of us combined could probably kick Benji's ass, or maybe Flipper's, if we were armed with chainmail and cattleprods and Flipper was asleep and taped down in a bathtub, but beyond that I imagine we're pretty useless combatants. And Scott's already getting into it with Tanner, something pointless about computer programming applications, I don't know. Adam watches as Scott brilliantly and subtly mocks the guy, laughing into his beer while Tanner defends the majesty of Renob 750-X Query Models or whatever the hell passes for computer programming talk. Somewhere along the line he confesses that he does, indeed, visit a tanning bed. I mean, shit, it's March.

Meanwhile, the other guy is still in my face, making me nervous, and a couple other dudes have corralled Christina into showing them her tattoos. They are all around us. Jake sits next to me, drinking. It's so dead in the place that the bartender rolls up, saving us the trouble of hitting the bar. She asks us if we need anything and I look at her and, pointing at the Father of Two, who's leaning in close enough to nibble on my ear if he wanted to, I say, "Ma'am, this guy's being volatile." She ignores me and brings both parties another pitcher.

You know how, when you reach a certain point of drunkenness, there's a tendency to focus on one thing, one event, one saying, one moment, with the ferocity and detail of a laser? That's what happens here. The guy is all up on me, repeating what I said, muttering about an asskicking, etc. The fact that I've called him "volatile" enrages him, starts a landslide in his head. Things start going downhill fast after that. I spend the next halfhour trying to talk my way out of him knocking me in the chops but unable to help myself when I can lay a little verbal jab in there. 'Tis a quandary, yes.

"You don't wanna beat me up. I've been beat up too much, it's no fun," I tell him.

"You know why, don't you?"

"Why I get beat up? No, not really." Knowing, of course, exactly why. At least some of the time.

"It's because of your fucking mouth, that's why. You've got a fucking big mouth. I'm being 'volatile.' Shit, I should show you volatile." He's weaving in his chair by this time. Tanner looks over and starts to lay some barbs my way, too. Things are getting tense. Christina's still talking to the tattoo aficionados and Adam and Scott are

talking to Tanner and his pal. The kids playing pool roll up and he lays the "volatile" bit on them. Things are not looking up.

"Look, man," I tell him. "You don't wanna beat me up. I work with kids, I'm a preschool teacher. I can't be rolling in there tomorrow all fucked up."

"You work with kids?"

"Yeah, preschoolers." This is a lie. Partly another line of bullshit, partly trying to save my own ass. Still playing the game. Seeing how far I can run with this. Jake laughs in his beer. The Great Father doesn't notice.

"What about your tattoos?"

"Longsleeve shirts all year round. Gets hot in summertime, let me tell you."

The Great Father gets up and goes piss, giving the pool guys time to come over and crowd me a bit. If nothing else, these guys have got the pack mentality down tight: no respite for the target. If someone goes into the john to puke up Pabst and jo-jos, the next guy's on him in a heartbeat. Tanner, across the seat, mentions something, yet again, about "volatility", and the waitress calls out last call. I take off my glasses and hand them to Jake. I say, "These kids are gonna jump me when we get outside, I bet. Hold onto these for me, OK?"

(Sidenote: This is how pathetic I am: having long ago run out of stories to write about getting my ass beat, I am now reduced to penning missives about nearly getting my ass beat. At 2:40 on a Tuesday morning, this strikes me as a sad state indeed for AVOV and my own integrity as a zine dork. Am I shamed? Yes, I am shamed.)

Indeed, last call is called, we all gather our belongings and, mildly drunk, trudge outside. There is some confusion as we walk: the Marine guys are a good block behind us, but so is Adam, talking to them. Worried, more than a bit scared, knowing that the fact that I'm heading back there will seem like an invitation to fuckery, I do it anyway. Christina comes with, Scott and Jake keep walking. I don't know when Adam leaves, but he eventually ends up circling around the block and getting back out of his car, into the little group, just as things are winding down.

Very little happens. Tanning Bed takes my glasses off, Christina walks up to him, takes them back and says, "No, you don't do that to people," and hands them back to me and then the nice guy, the ex-Marine, grabs me by the arm and says, "You guys better get going. These guys are getting restless." And we do. And, like most things, it ends quietly.

Christina and I split. I killed it. More cowardice on my part, more fatigue, more weariness with the world, with myself. Haven't talked to her in some time. Haven't called. I'm not such a good guy much of the time. There's something to be said about a woman who will walk up to a man that you yourself are afraid of and demand respect simply by being herself. Me, I wound up in that same bar the next night, half-hoping those cats would roll in, half-hoping they wouldn't. It's a sometimes depressing, sometimes refreshing thing to realize that one's idiocy apparently knows no bounds.

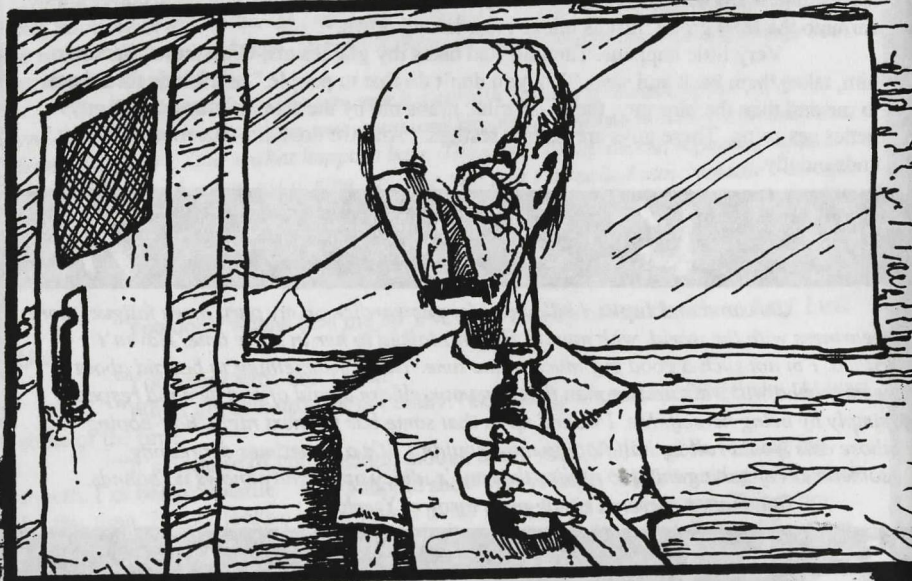
But, man, not even a single puch thrown. Yeesh.

2. GEORGIA'S

This is a little pocket of a downtown ghetto, right here in living color. Georgia's Grocery, to me, has always seemed like an odd sort of temporal intersection; a place where loose ends meet, shoot the shit for a minute and then unravel some more. I've been coming here for years. The lady who sounds like Tom Waits and calls me "honey" doesn't even card me anymore, everyone else still does.

Georgia's is like the nexus of all these different elements of downtown. It's a block south of Burnside, which over the past year has come a long way towards becoming absolutely, terrifyingly yuppified. A Whole Foods grocery store has gone up, where a five pound bag of potatoes will run you four fucking dollars, it takes up the ground floor of a monstrous new building, all angular black steel and uber-modern. And lofts, there are all these new lofts thrown up for rich folks, they've remodeled three or four old buildings, like the old Weinhardts brewery that, on summer days, would make the street stink so bad of hops and yeast that you could hardly fucking stand it, they've remodeled all these buildings and they're all lofts now, gourmet boutiques, lofts and offices.

And a block south, there's Georgia's, right in the middle of this six or seven block stretch, this little pocket of Skid Row. There's another Skid Row, down on 5th and 6th, in the bus mall, Northside, but to me Georgia's is situated in its own little constellation. Peppered among halfway houses, motels that rent by the hour, day and week, dive bars, abandoned buildings, adult stores, dirt-strewn parking lots, this little pocket where wrecked things meet. You'd probably have to hit 82nd to see as much of a concentration of mullets, sleeveless hot-pink t-shirts, jailhouse tats and mustaches as you do at Georgia's. We're all broken, to some degree, it's just that at some times and some wheres, the springs and busted clockwork show through a bit more.



And at Georgia's, we are all marionettes, dancing down the boulevard with our strings cut. Sure. There's the guy in matching shorts and button-up shirt, all of it replete with ocean waves and tropical, waving palm trees, rendered in hot blues and yellows. All that and sandals, even though it is literally pouring rain outside. He's buying a bottle of wine with mounds of change that he keeps pulling out of his pockets. The woman behind the register is calmly counting the change with him; she's not rushed. This is common, this is the day to day. The gutterpunks are sparechanging outside, two doors down and they'll be in here soon enough, doing the same thing, but hunting for 40's instead. I've rolled in enough times with my own mounds of change and crumpled one dollar bills to just stand back and wait my turn.

To me, in this little stretch of downtown, the idea of class division is never more startlingly black and white, divisive, apparent. The highrise here, the lowlifes there. And I'm smart enough to know that I'm just skirting the fringes of this place, this pocket of the world. That privilege allows me to flounder and fuck up in both worlds: I get the same sense of being sized up when I'm in line at Georgia's as I do when I loiter outside the lobby of those condos.

And we're talking about the difference here, and when we talk about the difference, about class, we're talking about the dollar. You try sparechanging in front of Whole Foods, or on the sidewalk in front of one of those lofts and I'd be willing to bet that within three minutes some harried, underpaid shitworker will be out there telling you to leave or threatening police intervention, probably unaware how thin of a line it is that's separating them and the very people they're threatening. And if we are constellations, if people are stars, then Georgia's and the street it's on is like a nexus, a place that allows us to congregate. A place where we meet and then disentangle again. The division is in the fact that we can't even get *into* those highrises. And that division is one that will only become more and more apparent over the years, believe it.

3. BUT DURAN DURAN CAN STILL KIND OF KISS MY ASS

"Fuck the eighties, fuck the fucking eighties, fuck the eighties, they sucked."
-PELVIS WESLEY, *Mikey Died Eating Pop Rocks (And You're A Dumb*

Motherfucker)

OK, it's official- I have, for all intents and purposes, rocketed so far out of the realm of coolness, it's not even funny. Not only that, and not only do I have to grudgingly and shamefully eat the words I once so carelessly threw out into the world, but it appears that I've got to reevaluate my entire existence, the values and morals that constitute the very fiber and backbone of my being.

And while I'm eating those words, you might as well throw a fucking sweatband and one of the dudes from Flock Of Seagulls inbetween these yellowed choppers as well. I'm screwed.

See, here is something I will always come back to, this idea that there are milestones and catalysts in one's life; huge, life-altering events that cause one to reexamine their value system, their very moral code, if they consider themselves owners of such lofty things. Point is that sometimes big shit, big changes, come rolling down the avenue and we've just got to hang on and figure out how in the hell we're gonna deal with them. Nine times out of ten, we have no idea what the eventual fallout will be from such things, and ten times out of ten we can never fully imagine the multiple, subtle ways in which the said event will have an impact on our lives.

But then there are the smaller events, not life-altering by any means, just little things that change you, that you wind up thinking about, say, while you're taking a shit or halfheartedly trying to rub one out during that episode of *The Third Wheel* where the dude keeps showing his dick to all the girls. Not that I've ever done that, of course. Watched *The Third Wheel*, that is.

But make no mistake, this is confession time, and the taste in my mouth is a bitter one indeed.

Here we go:

For months now, I've been going to a dance club nearly every Friday night.

Yeah, that's right, me. Doing that. *Me*, twitching and cavorting to hits from the 80's that, nearly across the board, almost entirely sucked in the first place. Not every week or anything, but pretty fucking often. Enough times so that a fine sheen of sweat, birthed in shame and embarrassment, peppers my brow as I type this. I mean, yikes. *A dance club. Dancing.* To songs from the eighties. *Fuck.*

Shit, man, please don't tell anyone. I mean, I've got a reputation to uphold here. And jeez, I fucking *hated* the 80's, man. The music, the politics, the entire excessive ball of shit, as it were. And yet there I am, shuffling around, sloshing my overpriced beer onto my shoes, and having an absolutely marvelous time. What the hell happened?

I used to have this theory about those people that said they "listen to all kinds of music." It was a barometer for me, a way of pigeonholing them, I suppose. I mean, that's such a vague answer to give, you'd think that it would lend itself to not being able to pigeonhole or label someone, but those "all kinds of music" fuckers were, to me, just another category. You know, you ask a kid and he says he listens to punk, you've gone a bit of the way towards getting a handle on him. Not saying it's a good thing, and God forbid that's all you wind up going off of, but it's there and we do it and maybe it serves as a catalyst for a conversation or something, right? OK, *I* do it, mayhap you're just more openminded and spiritual than I am. Some woman says she listens to country music, you got a small inkling into what her values and beliefs might *possibly* be. But if we are to use music as a cultural barometer or as a precept to gauging someone's beliefs or personality, those "all kinds of music" people just throw the whole thing in the trash, don't they? They ruin it for everyone else. There was something shifty, shiftless, in a basic, vital way, in my regards to people like that.

You know what I mean? Like, those people, in my mind, were sitting on the fence, and quite possibly had *less* of a personality than someone who listened exclusively to polka 78s from the 40's. At least those people knew what they loved, knew what struck a chord inside them. There was something intrinsically wrong, shallow or malformed about people who owned both the first Violent Femmes LP and Garth Brooks' debut record. If both of those records garnered some sort of emotional response in you, there

was something a bit off about you, that's how I looked at it. Such people were not to be trusted.

You like bluegrass music and death metal? Say what? Butterbutt, there is something seriously wrong with you. But this is how I viewed the world: I had this shit dialed in, punk was the foundation I built much of my life and worldview on. That's something that I'm still grateful for, this out I was provided, but it also has the potential to be absolutely stifling. What about punks who play bluegrass music now? Or plain old acoustic stuff? Those people wouldn't fit into that worldview at all, would they?

One of the greatest gifts in the world is acknowledging when you're wrong, when you've been a fucking idiot. And it's an incredibly big, diverse world out there, isn't it? I'm grateful as hell that we made it through that particular landmine known as the 1980's, I'm grateful as hell that I've become (slightly) more tolerant over the years, I'm grateful that I have friends that are willing to get shitfaced with me and go to some two-dollar dance club so that we can shake our drunken asses to those same Iggy Pop and Joy Division songs over and over again and take it all for what it is: the joy of friendship, of movement, of simple human interaction. I'm grateful that punk rock still lights a fire in me.

Most of all, I'm grateful that my own definitions have loosened a bit over the years, have grown a little less constricting, that my definition of punk has slowly helped me become a bit less judgemental, that it encompasses motion, joy, energy, fellowship and that rocking the fuck out is not only something that we do at shows, but something that we carry with us, something that we sometimes manage to do in our daily lives, everywhere we go. Even to The Cars, and absolutely irony-free.

4. AVOW'S ONLY FRICKIN' SHOW REVIEW, EVER

(June 13th at Liberty Hall, Portland, Oregon: Duck Duck Grey Duck, 1905, Submission Hold)

PART ONE: THE MUSIC WAS PRETTY GODDAMN GOOD, TOO

DUCK DUCK GREY DUCK: Can I just say how rad I think it is when punk kids manage to bring punk sensibilities and aesthetics to other genres of music, and do it well? This was a seven-piece band (with women actually making up the majority of the group, fancy that), replete with keyboards and an accordion and a rad This Bike Is A Pipe Bomb feel to them. I wound up getting the LP and it left me a little cold, it seemed to ride more on musicianship than on that certain energy that just lights you up. I know, that's a dumb thing to say, denouncing musicianship, but the LP turned out to be just a bit too ...cute for me. Live, and especially with a questionable PA, they had to work for it in order to be heard and as a result some of the LP's sheen was rubbed off and some raggedness showed through. In the best way.

1905: Good old Dave Roche was as excited as I was after 1905 finished playing. He said, "You know, about halfway through their set, I realized, 'Oh yeah, this is why I love punk rock.'" I was trying to track down the Submission Hold kids while they were playing and missed some of the songs in the middle of their set, but the stuff I

caught led me to believe he was exactly right: they were fucking stellar. Good enough for me to buy their CD, *Voice*, without a second thought. And the nice part is that while it's not as good as their live show, it's great in its own right and I've been listening to it incessantly while putting this issue together. I hear elements of The Assistant (mostly due to the fact that both bands do the male/female vocal tradeoff so well, with moments of harshness coupled with these haunting, beautiful instrumental arrangements), a little Bury Me Standing thrown in there, the intricacies of Life At These Speeds and a few instrumental tracks that could've come off a frickin Iron & Wine demo session. These kids can sing *and* scream, know what I mean? And they can play their frickin instruments in a way that gets under your skin but doesn't dilute the passion or the fervor an ounce. Definitely one of the best records and bands I've heard in a long, long time.

SUBMISSION HOLD: Haven't seen em since Olympia in 1998. Despite technical difficulties and the fact that they were playing at about 4 in the afternoon, they were as stunning as ever. Young Sam Danger rocked it on the side of the stage for the first half of the band's set, replete with his huge yellow safety headphones (which the audience and band could have used while the band tried to get the tech stuff figured out. Feedback city, right?) and plastic guitar. Watching him hop up and down to the music his parents and their friends were making, I realized that he, at three or four years old, has better rhythm than I do.

The new songs sound totally different than the last record, and at the same time seem like a natural progression. They're more subdued (with Andy playing the bass with a bow on a few of them) and yet just as haunting and well-crafted as the other stuff this band's done. Shit, this is reading like a record review. Let's run it like this: the music these people make is just as gorgeous and intense and apocalyptic and joyous as ever. I get the feeling that I am seeing something fucking epic when I watch them. The end.

PART TWO: THE STRAIGHT DOPE, THE WHOLE SHEBANG, WHATEVER THE HELL THAT IS

I'd never been to Liberty Hall before, but Anna and I didn't have much trouble finding the place. Shows are easy to spot; look for the kids milling about, look for the bikes locked to trees. Feel the heart leap in the throat, just a little bit.

They had a nice set up going on: five bucks, reentry, an afternoon show, a guy selling pints of beer down in the basement, no glasses outside, no smoking inside. A fine setup for a community space, and one that we all seemed to respect, at least from what I saw. I remember throwing a show with a fairly similar deal in my hometown back in 1993, '94, grand plans of having them become a regular deal. The show went off well, local and out of town bands got paid well and sold a shitload of merch and I even had enough money to go out to dinner afterwards. Except someone threw a bomb in the toilet halfway through the show, leaving a half-inch of shitwater, shit and pine needles on the floor. Tres ended up cleaning it up, but the custodian was less than thrilled and informed us they'd never let punk shows fly there again.

Sometimes I think punk's greatest hindrance, the stubborn, idiotic quality that we just cannot, at times, seem to get past is the incredible urge we have to shit where we eat. To inadvertently destroy that which we've built, you know? And it was nice to see that we weren't playing that particular card this time.

And the dude selling pints of beer out of a keg in the basement was really nice too. We could debate for pages and pages about punk rock's ultimate potential as a vehicle of change (and many have done just that and many more will in the future, myself included, I'm sure), but the simplest facts sometimes rest within the simplest of acts, and here's one. The fact is I just fucking love this music and its accompaniments and at

times can even laugh my ass off at most of the trappings that come with it and recognize my own hypocrisies and strengths in regards to those trappings. And also that sometimes the coolest thing in the world is to just be at a show, watching a band and think to yourself, "My God, that woman can both sing and scream her guts out."

5. DON'T SELL OUT YOUR FRIENDS

Look, let's think about this. What matters? What's important?

It's a quarter past five in the morning and I'm tired and out of cigarettes, so here's an analogy, a bad one: that sometimes I think of us all as lanterns. Even cornier, sometimes when I am sick and hungover and trying like hell to hold a coffee cup in my hands, or when it is even earlier in the AM and I'm lonely, I think of the world as a big, dark river, with the shore far off, invisible in this near-permanent nighttime. You know? Like our bodies are the boats and we're drifting with the current, or we're rowing down it, or we're rowing against it. Whatever. The point is, the current, that's what we're on, that's our lives, that's what constitutes the tide of our lives. Sometimes we're fighting it, sometimes we're rolling with it. Sometimes we're simply locked in stillness. And each of us is a light, a lantern, each of us is a lantern in this sometimes terrifying, sometimes beautiful, sometimes deadlocked life. And sometimes we see these other lights and for whatever reason we wind up heading towards the fuckers, and sometimes friendships are forged because of it. Because we fit together, the laughter is good, we click. Because the more light there is here, the better.

And the point is, don't sell out your fucking friends.

I have seen enough people in my life use others as flotsam, as stepping stones, as subtle and not-so-subtle whipping posts in order to inch themselves up just a little higher, to last me the rest of my fucking life. And I'm talking about the people that I don't know, people that I don't care for at all. This is among people I actively call enemies, or at the very least, people that I wouldn't, for one half of a heartbeat, for one half of a breath, call a friend. And yet, continually, this is also what I run across among my friends, among this loose-knit group of kids I run with: this endless knifing of each other, this deprecation in order to elevate, this stupid, dull murder of camaraderie.

I mean, I'd already seen enough of the "let's rip on each other as a form of friendship" game by the time I was a freshman in high school and that was an embarrassingly long time ago. It's a stupid game now, and it's wasn't a remotely good game the first time around.

And this is no youth-crew, posi-core '88 "stab me in the back" chorus I'm touting here: this is a simple acknowledgement that we have a myriad of choices available to us, in our relationships with other people, at any second, during any day, in regards to how we choose to forge and maintain our friendships, in the way we talk to each other, in the way that we choose to build up or tear down, and so fucking often I see it being built on a foundation of shit.

The point is, don't sell out your friends.



LAW
HOW

ZINE

So I've recently been trying to examine the way in which I interact with my friends, in the ways we treat each other. The subtle ways that, even among people we actively choose to spend our time with, we manage to turn conversations into some sick little kind of swinging-dick contest. How the line between teasing and shittalking is fucking-a thin sometimes, as thin as the point of a knife, as thin as the difference between kindness and compassion and using someone else's supposed shortcomings as a rung on the ladder we use to elevate ourselves.

And I can't help but think that, goddamn, we are all just too old and too fucking smart and inherently kind to have to treat each other this way. So how the fuck did we all get here, guys? More importantly, how do we get past this? I'm reaching a point in my life where, frankly, I'd rather sever friendships that are based on this shit rather than string them along and have them mean very little to me as a result.

The point is, if we're friends, let's not sell each other out like that.

This is what I'm looking for. And I know that oftentimes it's the nature of friendships to fade or dissipate, we move in and out of each other's lives sometimes, it seems like a natural process; I remember plenty of times, certain events, moments, in which I realized that there was nowhere I would rather be and no one I'd rather be with, and in many cases, the majority of those people are no longer in my life. Sometimes, that's just the nature of the way things work. We move on. Different roads. This brings us back to my less-than-adequate analogy: some people's lights fade and for some, the currents change. But this isn't the same. This is not about moving on, this is simply about not treating each other like assholes.

So for once, let's try this out: let's try putting our insecurities in the backseat, lay down these chickenshit knives of ours, me as well as you, all of us, and let's try being among each other as friends.

6. IT TURNS OUT CRYPTIC SLAUGHTER KIND OF SUCKS

Man, what a bummer. It's nothing as tragic as a loved one dying, or as romantic as mooning after the one that got away, you know, and it's not even as melancholy and sappy as, say, all your dreams lined up and shot in the head, but in a way it's all of those things.

But I digress.

See, Jeff took me out shopping for my birthday present, the concept was that I'd pick a CD, any CD and he'd foot the bill. A very nice gesture in and of itself, Jeff's a kind man, and the lesson it relayed to me over time more than paid for itself.

For the price of a new CD, I ended up buying a couple "skufs" instead; slightly scratched CDs that are cosmetically fucked-up but still totally playable. I ended up getting a pretty bad comp with a few good songs by X-Ray Spex, The Stiffs and The Nosebleeds, the CD version of the first two Fugazi records (the old version, before they re-mastered it, which, by the way, brings us to a sidenote: why bother with the remastering bit? What's the point? It's not like it was recorded badly in the first place. Are they running out of ideas, or what? Why fuck with near-perfection, guys?) and last

but not least, the new, reissued CD version of Cryptic Slaughter's seminal 1986 LP, *Money Talks*.

Relapse reissued this one late last year, I think, the studio version of *Money Talks*, complete with a bunch of practice sessions and a song from their last show with the original lineup, before they got that really bad singer, turned into a bunch of hippies and put a fucking *peace sign* on their last album. No, this is the one with Ronald Reagan holding a fist full of dollars, cheering into a microphone, mushroom clouds bursting on the horizon. The crest on the podium he's standing behind reads *Lie, cheat, steal! Lie again!* This cover, for me, somehow sums up the odd dichotomy I associate with that decade: the absolute corruption of a government with a populace still trying to hold on to the last tendrils of a Kennedy-like veneer of innocence; when this record came out we were years away from blowjobs in the Oval Office, planes becoming killing machines, kids blowing each other's guts out in the schoolyard with rifles and automatic pistols. But Reagan was one dirty, crooked motherfucker and the 80's are a decade mired in history as one replete with greed, falsity and excess. Plus, we should keep in mind that at the time we were *not* years away from the threat of nuclear annihilation dangling its big dick on the news every night, we were *not* years away from a government which vowed to do battle against terrorism while funding the coups of some of the most murderous, torturous dictators on the planet, we were *not* above a government who drastically reduced spending in assloads of social service programs throughout the country, shut down mental and drug rehabilitation programs pretty much across the board, threw billions of dollars into a soon-to-be-archaic orbital arms race and eventually developed the ability to conveniently forget exactly how things went down whenever they were called to task regarding certain events. (Yeah, I know, correlations can sure as shit be drawn here, but I am still talking about Reagan.)



Anyway, *Money Talks*, for me, sums up that sense of outrage, that sense of helplessness that I associate with the 1980's. A little inarticulate and very naive, but goddam, you had a sense that they meant every motherfucking word.

I spent a lot of my "formative" punk years with that record, it's sandwiched in my mind somewhere between the Accused's *Martha Splatterhead's Maddest Stories Ever Told* LP and that Jerry's Kids *Spymaster 7*". I swear, if you're 16 and you listen to those three records right in a row, back to back? By the end of it, you pretty much figure that you can take on the motherfucking world. I remember thinking that there was

probably enough energy, speed and passion in those three records to pretty much power my shitty, redneck-laden hometown for a week.

So Relapse re-releases the album, complete with additional live tracks from their last original-lineup show and a practice session or two. And it called out to me and I grabbed it up and brought it home and popped it in. And guess what?

It's *bad*. Embarrassingly bad.

I could go into a point-by-point analysis about the multiple ways in which this album is flawed, but I'm not going to. For one, I don't want think I'd be able to afford the increase in cost it'd take to print this issue and secondly, I'm trying desperately to keep in mind it's relevancy in regards to history. This thing *is* nearly twenty years old, and while there are many, many records that old that still sound fresh and savage and great today, this fucker isn't one of them. But, yeah, like the super-corny liner notes that accompany the booklet say, I guess it is a pretty good argument that Cryptic Slaughter was, "at the time, one of the fastest bands on the planet."

But who gives a shit, really? The point to all this is just that it's sometimes incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile history with the present. It's like seeing an old lover that you haven't run into in years: you parted on good terms, and you're happy to see them, but there's just been too much distance, too many scars and joys laid down, you're fucked if you try to make it like it was. That's not how it works. Music ain't people: it's static, it ceases to grow *with* us. Now, if I'd had that album the entire time, from 16 til now, I'd have pulled it out every now and then, played it, and I'd continue to associate my life and circumstances with it. But you dump the record somewhere and then wind up picking it up again years later, on a whim? The record's the same but you, you're different. The distance between then and now, the old you and the current, breathing you is just too big. There's a chasm there, forged by time and change, and it's just too big of a fucking jump sometimes.

Again, the point to all this? Hell, I don't know. I'm still bummed at having to reconcile the fact that Cryptic Slaughter kind of sucks compared to a lot of the shit that's coming out now. Yeah, I don't know. But if I had to come up with a moral or bumper sticker for it all, some nice Aesopian tagline to sum it all up, I guess I'd have to say this: *History is meant to sleep quietly, we aren't meant to live there. And I'm really excited about the new Amanda Woodward record that's coming out.*

7. A THANK YOU LETTER TO BOB EDWARDS

My open letter to the employees of NPR, OPB and, most importantly, National Public Radio's morning program, *Morning Edition*:

Mr. Bob Edwards and associates;
Sir.

You are my salve and my salvation. Let me tell you, there is nothing, virtually nothing that beats what happens to me at 3 A.M.: A fresh pot of coffee, a new deck of smokes still tight in their shrinkwrap, electric light beating down, armed with paints or a

keyboard and the sound of *Morning Edition* coming through the tinny speaker of the clock radio that I found in the garbage years ago. Nothing beats that. To me, that is nearly the quintessential, textbook definition of freedom and joy right there, live and in your face.

I go through these periods (usually when accompanied by a lengthy and severe lack of money, when the daily hustling around for food and smokes becomes paramount, never mind buying new records) where I listen to the radio a lot; where I get sick of my records, stifled by them, the sameness of them, feeling that thirst for something new; new voices, a new sound of some kind.

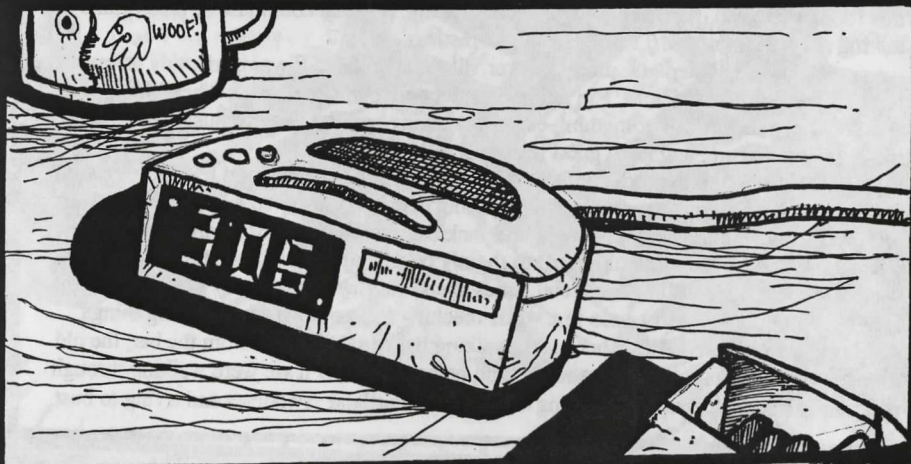
And dear NPR employees, it is eternally 3 AM, it seems, in my life. I sleep fitfully, I sleep in the daytime or at night, face turned away from the sun that comes in my window, just a few hours at a time, waking up alone and, sometimes, lonely. Every angle in the apartment, every angle in me cut by a butterknife. As in, dull. Sharp as a switchblade? A stiletto? Yeah, right. So how do you do battle with loneliness? Get out of the house? Where do you go when it's 3 AM? Who do you speak to?

Nobody. I hang out with Bob Edwards all night, painting, writing, smoking, walking the walls, restless and lonely but grateful for these voices, these selves.

And now Edwards has been somewhat forced into a pseudo-retirement after 30 years as a host for various NPR programs. Edwards recently released a book, a biography of Edward R. Murrows, and did a book tour, including a spot here at Portland State University. I didn't go, but the point is, it served as a sort of closing capstone to his NPR career. And while this new guy isn't bad, this new guy they have on, but that sense of the pieces all just fitting together isn't quite there, you know? I'm sure I'll come around eventually, he does a fine job, but there's something to be said for consistency, especially when you're living a life with not a whole lot of things that tether you down.

I will be the first to say that I'm too sentimental, that I put too much stock, too much worth in too many small things, but maybe there comes a point when you realize that you can either spend your life going against your nature or attempt to accept it and embrace it. That's the kind of decision I continually come to at 3 AM, that fork, sitting in front of this computer screen with those voices coming out of that fuzzy speaker. We can accept that we are sometimes lonely, sometimes restless, that we do our best work at 3 AM, and with that, we can take what solace we receive wherever it is we get it. For me, it's the hum of electric light and the radio.

And, shit, that's not a bad deal. It's better than fine. It's exactly right.



8. YO, I'M DRIBBLING EMO ALL OVER THE PLACE

I been stepping out lately, getting out more. Doing things. Summer's here, you know, beating its hot little fist on the door, and it's like a rock hitting you in the face in the best way ever. I can smell it when I go out to buy cigarettes at 4 am, I can hear it when I walk through the petals that whisper on the concrete as I walk past, I can see it on the arms of the punks when they start to wear sleeveless t-shirts again- a slight tan that stops a little above the elbow and then turns to Portland-white by the time you hit the bicep. I can feel it gathering in me, my own restlessness, my desire to get out of this filth-pitched room, with it's one cracked window with the view of the freeway overpass. What's the line from that Strawman song? Oh yeah.

"I can smell spring in a dead end season."

I don't smell that much anymore, not as much as I used to, nowadays I just seem to smoke instead, but you turn spring into summer and I know exactly what he means. Bless ya, Mr. Strange, goddamn, you got that one right.

And this has been a dead-end season, absolutely.

Know what I mean? Days strung up together, a long, a seemingly endless line of them, holing up. Hours and hours spent in this cramped little place, punctuated with brief excursions outside to buy smokes. Hours alone in here, that old answering machine staring at me with its unblinking red eye. Hoping someone would call, almost desperately, and then letting the machine get it when, rarely, someone does. School? What the shit's that? Money? Who's got it? Friends? Hell, that's what the radio is for. This is, essentially, how it seems like I've whittled away the past few months, watching the rain fall down in sheets. There's this distinctive feeling, walking the parameters of this room, that yeah, I am definitely wasting my life. But that could just be melodrama talking (*No! Imagine that!*) I know, I'm just restless.

So when I step out, motherfucker, all the flags bend towards me; this, in and of itself, is some kind of victory. I'm going out, stepping out, hanging out where kids move and breathe, goddam. It's something else. I am taking part in the world just a little bit more, here and there, and it's a good feeling.

However, a byproduct of this good feeling is the not-so-good feeling in my arm and the one in my leg. Apparently, "stepping out" lately seems to consist of hanging out with Anna a lot and going over to Ben and Jackie and Jill's place to get drunk. And going over to their house to get drunk seems to mainly consist of drinking ourselves into a destructive stupor, heckling bad metal bands at shows, Ben occasionally getting bit in the face by a pit bull and every once in a while reaching that point where smashing things sounds like a cool idea. The other night, walking back to their place from the bar, the old drunken urge to smash stuff overtook us and before we knew it we were walking through residential streets at three am, kicking over City of Portland sawhorses and trying to bust

out the flashing lights on top of them. That done, we'd set them up in the street with the vain, pointless attempt at blocking traffic the next morning. And during one of my attempts at The Reaper's Lash (also known as a drunken, flailing mockery of a dropkick) Jackie picks up a sawhorse and swings it perfectly into my elbow, the same elbow I broke about seven or eight years ago while skateboarding. *(Not that I actually skated with any merit; I was a shitty skater at fifteen and when I was twenty, someone gave the skateboard to me and I tried to do a trick over this big speedbump thing and I fell and hurt my elbow. Then I tried to do it again ten seconds later and landed in the exact same way. That time I broke it.)* So as I rolled around on the ground and moaned about my arm, Jackie asked me if I was alright, Ben smashed the lights on the sawhorses and then set them up in the street, blocking residential traffic for people's Friday morning commutes. Anyway, I'm typing this with a nice, fattened elbow and the knowledge that yes, random acts of destruction and idiocy like that are totally pointless. And also that, yes, I paid for that idiocy dearly, in the form of a bruised rib and an arm that can't extend much beyond twenty degrees and a crushing hangover that did not aid me in the fifty-block walk home down Burnside on a hot ten AM.

And that's it. You'll find no bigger picture here.

Friendships have been forged on less than this, and I know a good time when I have one. May we stay here for as long as we can, in these moments, these moments that tell us nothing except that we are living and laughing, that friends are good to have and better to keep, that if we have managed to meet people in our lives that can not only stand us but *enjoy* us, and vice versa, that we do what we can to hold on to them fiercely, that we recognize that if this is as good as it gets then so be it, that walking home down Burnside on a hot Friday morning, holding your swollen and throbbing arm, wishing for a smoke and trying not to puke in the middle of the sidewalk is a fair price to pay.



9. JOANIE'S GOT A RADON PATCH BUT I CAN'T EVEN TALK TO HER

1. I've had it with the falsity of it all, these costumes, yours and mine. I tell Christina one day that I think crusty punks, with their mohawks and acid-washed jeans and spiked leathers with The Boils or The Exploited logo on the back, that those kids are laughable, that they're silly. That they're dressing up, it's a costume or uniform as much as anything else is, and that it's just laughable.

"Why?" she asks me. "If you live a crazy, fast life, why not show it?" And I didn't know what to say to that. Still don't. What do you mean? Is this the same old argument, the one about distancing yourself from the status quo, spitting in the face of The Man by gelling your hair up into spikes? Give me a fucking break. I bought that when I was fifteen but I don't know if I buy it now.

The bummer is that the majority of the kids at shows that I go to can fall under some banner, some alignment in regards to dress, how they present themselves to the world.

But then when you think about it, so can I. And you put me in a long sleeve shirt and I look like a pretty normal dude. And isn't that an association in itself? Isn't everything? We're all aligning ourselves with something, right? Either by our fashion sense or our lack thereof, right? Even a lack of a costume can be considered a costume. Everything's got a tag attached, even if it's just a guy in chinos and a buttonup chambray shirt. You still think "Normal Guy" when you see him. Isn't that a classification, a label, in and of itself? So, hell, why not wear a dogcollar and throw bleach on everything you own, right? Fuck it. Let's wear black in summertime and run some patches all over the fuckers.

And ideas like these are so simple and baffling, it's pathetic. There's no answer to it all, and, in the long run, in regards to the big picture, with missiles whistling and gunshots ringing all around the world right now, it means very little. This is the type of shit that sixteen year-old kids ponder over in coffee shops, chain smoking Marlboros and writing things like "life is meaningless" over and over in their journal while secretly mooning over the waitress. Or at least that's what this sixteen year-old was doing. In the span of time between then and now, you'd think I'd have come to terms with punk rock's inherent vanity, and my own, but I'm not quite there yet.

Fashion, man. I think about it a lot, as a defining term, a dividing term. In a lot of ways, fashion has the potential to be a powerful tool, right? Or at least a tool of recognition, of alliance. Just think about the punks! You know, "If The Kids Are United" and all that bullshit. Think of the potential there! If everyone who looked the same, felt the same, at least about something! If we all weren't so tied up in our own vanity, our

politicking, if someone approaching someone else at a show just to say hi didn't earn you odd, sour looks, if we were all able to remain receptive to communication just a bit, goddamn, think of that. We could wreck the world! We could rebuild the world! But doesn't it sometimes seem that punk's vehicles of revolution, our incredible, heart-rending potential as people simply gathered together, ends at the pressing plant, ends at the record store? Ends at the end of our cute one-inch button makers or the backpacks that are covered by them? Ends at our perfectly-coiffed bedhead, our perfectly-crafted disdain? I talk shit about punk a lot because I love it, because this is my home, this is my house.

2. By all intents, and according to the five-member team of scientist cyborg-monkeys I have at my bidding, Portland is renowned for three things when it comes to the old punk rock: 1) The high concentration per capita of kids who are putting out zines. 2) The prolific crust/d-beat scene and 3) Our insane, grossly large quota of art-damaged hipster motherfuckers. Again, we are talking fashion, we are talking about the bar serving as a runway, we are talking about the color black acting like a birthmark and how I wish sometimes, so badly, that we weren't mired in the last, gasping cultural trappings of a movement that started nearly thirty years ago, that we weren't such standoffish assholes sometimes. That so many of us fall into that trap of remaining unapproachable, of shitting where we eat. I mean, on one hand, I guess I do admire the spike punks: the way they present themselves takes some work. It's hard to get your hair up like that, man, it's hard to wear a leather jacket in summertime. Now if we could just manage to talk to each other for five minutes, we'd be on to something.

Sometimes I think our patches, our shirts, our buttons, our presentation serves as little more than a badge, an access pass to a club that the "normal world" neither knows or cares about. And that's fine. It's when we walk amongst each other at a show, on the street, and *it doesn't serve as a beacon as well*, that's when we're fucking up.

3. I understand the desire to align, associate, to feel a part of something larger than ourselves. I understand the rage, the disdain, the frustration with the world. With a world that tells us to shut the fuck up, that we must buy in to get in, to strive for a near-impossible plateau of success that will always be eternally out of reach. A world that hates women and indoctrinates in men that they must act like monsters. I understand the desire to present ourselves as people that do not align ourselves with this, that we do not believe in this. And it's just a bummer that we are all here, maybe separated only by a few degrees (*I can just about guarantee that I've got more in common with the woman coming out of the show with beads of sweat running tracks through the dirt on her neck than I do with the guy wearing slacks and a five-pound wristwatch going into his loft on 12th and Burnside*) maybe by something as dumb as musical differences, maybe by political differences, maybe by the margin of difference in the ways we all live our lives. But that's the thing that fashion does - it helps us marginalize, file things and people. This either cuts us off from most of the world, or allows us to move through the world with a minor amount of fuckery, of *being bothered*, depending on how you look at it. But when it also doesn't serve as some sort of marker *to each other*, when we remain as aloof to each other, that's when we're fucking ourselves. That's when fashion defeats itself, its own purpose.

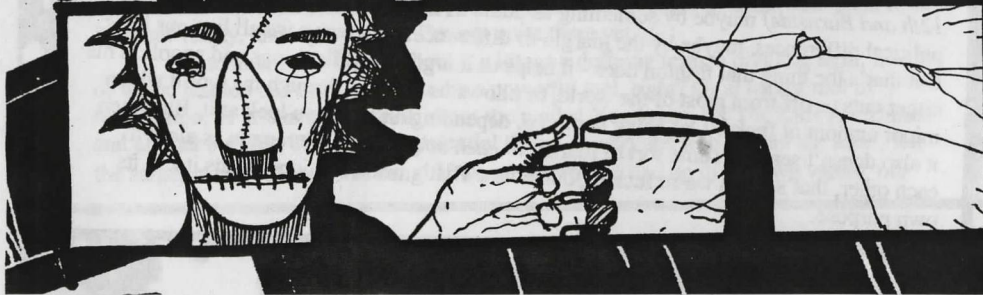
10. A STONE THROWN IN THE WATER

I was twenty years old, living in this insanely small, insanely expensive apartment on 21st and Irving, up in Northwest Portland. First time living on my own, no roommates or anything. The place had a pullout bed, two windows that got sunlight from about 3 to 4 pm and walls painted a dark, dark green.. I once spilled a box of laundry detergent on my floor and had no vacuum cleaner; it laid there for weeks. I avoided it like it was a landmine and eventually borrowed the landlord's vacuum, but regardless of how many cigarettes I smoked, that place always smelled like a laundry room. Shit, my food tasted like detergent.

Like I said, I was twenty, and playing that bad, dumb game, even then, known as the "Unintentionally Starving Artist." Which meant, in theory, that I was supposed to be slowly chipping away at those costly things like rent, bills, cigarettes, food and blow-up love dolls via "freelance artwork." Ideally, I would do things like design tattoos for people, sell drawings, write stories for independent-but-reputable literary magazines that would pay me a paltry sum, but it would all add up and I would somehow make it through, money-wise. That I would hustle my ass off. What I really did consisted mostly of this:

- 1) Write hot checks for cigarettes, coffee, potatoes and rancid pot-pies.
- 2) Listen to the Swingin' Utters' *A Juvenile Product Of The Working Class* CD fucking over and over again.
- 3) Write astonishingly bad poetry and send them out to equally-bad-and-not-reputable-at-all literary zines, who didn't pay shit and actually rejected me more times than not.
- 4) Drew insanely detailed renderings of naked women, though certainly not in the "life drawing" capacity if you know what I mean.
- 5) Smoked a lot.
- 6) Hand-write and decorate (via collage, ink and colored pencil) 5 to 6 page missives to other degenerates and zine nerds about the abysmal state of poetry, literature and zinedom.

I was, essentially, living life like I was toying around with speed, except that my speed constituted nothing more than a constant intake of 34.5 oz tins of Safeway Special Roast. I'd pretty much pull two days up then one day down. This was before I'd gotten back into those particular magics known as laying a paintbrush down against canvas, or the bandage that writing a good story could provide to a life that seems like a badly-healing wound, like a car crash that's slowly unfolding in front of your eyes like



one of those origami birds that are impossible to put back together once you've taken them apart.

In short, I was losing it. OK, maybe not losing it, but I was coming a bit unravelled at the seams, you know?

The one thing I can say for sure is that I had ambition. Hope ran hot then. The fact is that if I have to consider myself an "artist" or "writer" today, it's with more than a bit of self-consciousness; I think I pretty much have the scope, in both fields, of a guy looking down the end of a straw. But the point is, I *have* improved over the years. In idea and execution. But only marginally.

It's just that, at twenty, I really wasn't that good.

But the *ambition* was there. The fearlessness was there. Somewhere along the line, that fearlessness has been whittled out of me, replaced with that self-consciousness, that uncertainty. But at twenty, I'd xerox twenty or thirty drawings, take a bunch of photos of some pretty bad paintings (with the camera's flash reflecting off half of the canvas, washing it out and pretty much turning it into a vaguely-colored rectangle) and fire off various packages of this stuff to record labels, skate companies, magazines that I thought might pay for freelance illustration work. Complete with another barely-legible, coffee-stained letter saying, essentially, "I want to draw your shit for you." In short, I was hustling my ass off; any extra money went towards stamps and typewriter ribbon. I have no idea who originally said it, but whoever came up with the line, "I found that my ambition far exceeded my talent" is a fucking genius. That was my story, that was my experience at twenty years old. Absolutely burning with hope, with that persistent belief that *tomorrow*, tomorrow would be the day I'd get that letter from someone saying, "I think we can fit you in here. Give us a ring, we're working on a project and can use you."

And it didn't end there. I'd pull out my portfolio, this huge leather case that measures about four by four feet, the leather all cracked at the edges, with a zipper that never quite worked the way it was supposed to, load it up with charcoal sketches and more xeroxes, some paintings done on canvasboard, and I'd hoof it around town. I'd walk around my neighborhood, go into the boutiques and floral shops and record stores and furniture stores, all over the place. I'd roll in and try to sell myself. And time after time, the proprietors of whatever establishment would wait patiently as I tried to pull that zipper down, would smile politely as I lay a stack of ripped, charcoal-smeared drawings on their counters, they'd cringe a little as they leafed through my stuff and politely shoot me down. They'd say something like, "Well, I don't think we're looking for any sort of, uh, logo designs or artwork or anything right now, but thanks for coming in. We'll get in touch if we need anything."

So let me amend that earlier statement: it was apparent, to pretty much everyone but *me*, that my fearlessness obviously outweighed my talent.

And the funny thing, the ironic thing, is how time works. Because it's almost a decade later and I'm finding myself in the same boat. A college dropout, yet again, toying with the idea of trying to make it through the day by laying down bad words and bad drawings as my ticket out of the foxhole. That fearlessness is gone, for the most part, but, like many of us who've stuck with punk and it's evolution over the past ten years or so, I'm a fuck of a lot smarter when it comes to marketing. I mean, there's a hell of a lot of trepidation involved, but that hope is down there in the guts, glimmering, that hope that says *Shit, man, you might be able to pull it off this time.*

But, yeah, the worry is there. I remember this one time, lugging that big cracked leather portfolio along after another fruitless hustle at peddling my shit. Walking home, up there in Northwest somewhere, and I pass this woman. An older woman, nicely dressed, walking slowly down the sidewalk, even the hum of traffic was somehow trendy

and offhandedly hip in that part of town. She had a nice, muted green dress on, I remember this, a large dark purse, she was walking slowly down the sidewalk, like there simply wasn't anywhere to go. Taking her time. Not lost, but resigned. I start to pass her, smiling.

Her eyes brighten for a moment. She smiles back. Sees my portfolio, that big old hulk of a thing.

"Oh, are you an artist?"

I nod, twenty years old, even then a small snake of thought in my head worming its way along: *Hmmm, a rich donor, perhaps? Should I bust this thing open and show her my stuff? Maybe she'll buy something.* Hungry and broke and hopeful.

"My son was an artist," she says, and there's a burr in her throat, her words crack a bit when she says that.

Me, oblivious. "Oh, yeah?" I say, still smiling.

She nods, and says, "He killed himself."

And all I do is say, "Oh." And this is how our passion blinds us: I saw then that her dress was wrinkled, there were dark hollows under her eyes. She was not taking her time walking down the street, she was shellshocked. And I didn't know what to say to her. I had no idea what to do.

And there we are. And she is openly crying now, this little husk of a woman standing there next to me while traffic mumbles next to us, this small woman who blinks back tears as she says, "He was a painter."

All I manage is a muted, "How old was he?"

"Thirty. He was thirty. He killed himself last month."

And I have no idea what to do, but I remember that I had some money, I had a little money, a couple bucks. I say, "Would you like to go have some coffee?" I had enough to afford it. I have no idea what to do, standing there next to this woman, shellshocked and placing a handkerchief against her nose as she sniffs. She lets out a little laugh and pats me gently on the arm. "No, thank you, honey. I'm just going to walk, I think."

"OK," I say as she begins walking. And it's two blocks later before I realize that I never even managed a *Sorry*, some sort of an acknowledgement of her grief, you know?

And now here we are, nearly a decade later, that woman could be in the ground for all I know, or she could have grown with her scars and gone a fair way towards healing, though I'd be hard-pressed to see how. I don't know if we were meant to outlive our children, especially with the weight of guilt that a child's suicide must lay on someone, on a parent.

But it's nearly a decade later and I'm considering trying the hustle again and thinking about hope a lot. Thinking about passion, hope, persistence. Thinking about that thirty year-old man every great once in a while, always thirty, thinking of he and his mother a lot more recently. And thinking of the weight of failure and the high cost, literally, of living sometimes. Thinking of the price that death exacts, not only on us, but on those around us; the tides of our lives rippling outward, a stone thrown in the water.

BYE.

Look, I know it's always nice to see our names in print. And I sometimes feel the urge to just give everyone I know a namedrop in here, just as a way of saying, "Hey, I like you a lot. Thanks for being a part of my life, porkchop." But the simple fact is that while I've got a pretty good amount of friends, not everyone has a direct impact on this zine or my other projects. I'm not saying that they don't have any impact on *me*, but that thank you lists sometimes seem to miss the point, and I'd kind of feel like I was lying if I just listed everyone I've hung out with since the 4th grade, you know? Shit, thank you lists are hard, someone always gets bummed. Anyway, the people listed below have, directly or otherwise, participated in the production of this zine or my other burning irons in one form or another. For those people that are my pals but aren't listed here, it doesn't mean that I don't like you, it just means you and I have to figure out a way to get a good Kinko's scam going together.

THANKS:

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GOOD:

Wayfarers All LP compilation, **TYRADES** CD, *1905 Voice* CD & live, **RIVETHEAD** *City Sound Number Five 7"*, **LIFE AT THESE SPEEDS** CD, **DEAD MOON** *Sabotage/These Times With You 7"*, **ABORT!** Anthology zine, **SNAKEPIT** book, **PINHEAD GUNPOWDER** *Compulsive Disclosure* CD, **LEATHERFACE** *Dog Disco* CD, **OFF-LINE** zine, **JOE STRUMMER & THE MESCALEROS** *Streetcore* CD, **THE MINDS** *Plastic Girls* CD, **THE MOB** *Let The Tribe Increase* 2XLP discography.

Keith Rosson
1631 NW Everett #401
Portland, OR 97209
keithrosson@hotmail.com



**"The days are too few now,
WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO
FUCK AROUND."**

—rivethead