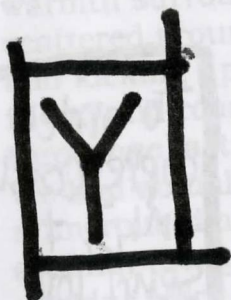
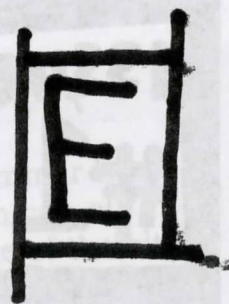
A black and white photograph of a desk. In the upper left, a white cup is partially visible. In the center, a bowl contains a pile of small, irregularly shaped objects, possibly snacks or craft supplies. A marker lies diagonally across the lower right. A notepad with a small drawing is in the bottom left. The background is a dark, textured surface.

Issue #1
two dollars

EARN
YOUR
SLEEP

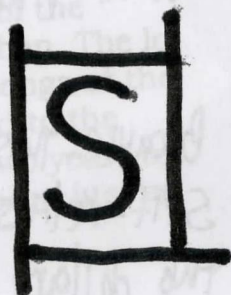
Dear Readers:

Welcome to the first issue of EARN YOUR SLEEP. This project has been a year and a half in the making. It has taken quite a bit of hard work and a fair share of frustration to get this far.



I've always been a firm believer in the D.I.Y. culture. After compiling scraps of stories from notebooks and journals over the years, I decided to self-publish my own writing. I want to do for others what my favorite authors have done for me.

I am not going to set the unrealistic goal for myself to release an issue every other month. I am not going to put a time line on future issues. I will let them write themselves and publish them when I am comfortable doing so.



ISSUE #1

A few things to take into consideration:

1. The names of people in this issue might sound kind of bizarre. Michvll is pronounced MY-chvll. The other names are the names of my friends as I have always known them. It's a nickname thing my friends and I are infamous for.
2. If you'd like to order more than one copy at a time, I will lower the price as per request. For instance; three issues for five dollars (or something like that).
3. If you like what you read, pass it on. order copies for your friends. Pass it around at coffee shops, mom + pop music stores or shows. spread the word if you support what I am doing.

because this zine is being self-released, I am charging two dollars per issue ONLY to cover costs.

To order copies (cash only), to send love and/or hate mail or to send me coffee money, write to:
Dean Omite
P.O. Box 5652
Fort Wayne, IN
46895

+ WITH LUCK UPON OUR SIDES +

It was the first day of August, and the summer heat still fumed off of the concrete like an open can of gasoline. After a two-year residence in one of the city's infamously shoddy apartment complexes, moving day had arrived. It was one of those days where the past seems to linger around like a curious child watching the commotion and yet refusing to pitch in and help.

I awoke that morning still slightly buzzed, a halo of warmth surrounding my head. Friends of mine were scattered around my apartment, stirring in their sleep and kicking up dust from the night before. My best friend and roommate, Michull, and I had decided to throw one last party the night before our lease expired. We had actually been threatened with eviction numerous times for parties such as those. This time around, though, we didn't really give a shit. They couldn't evict us if our lease was up.

So we made the most of it. We weren't really worried about anything other than having one final hurrah for us and our friends. The two years prior seemed to come full circle that night. We talked and drank in the living room, sat perched on the woodwork of the balcony, and smoked cigarettes in the kitchen. The lot of us spent the night singing our favorite songs at the top of our lungs, toasting to each other and to the shitty stereo that had somehow survived two years of being kicked around. It seems that I had been just as lucky.

Sup dog, ~~the~~ here's \$50
for all the beer you
guys have given me
plus a few beers that
you may give me in the
future. Split it with
Michull.

Shamu

+ BADGES OF HONOR +

Feeling slightly sick, we sat around talking about the night before, crafting makeshift ashtrays out of bottles and cans. They were the same sort of conversations we had had a hundred times before. The thought of alcohol made my stomach turn. I could already tell in advance that I was in for a long-haul day. In about an hour I would be hung-over, sweating whiskey and beer out of my pores and moving heavy furniture and boxes. A real endurance test, to say the least.

Our apartment, more of a haven than a home, no longer served its purpose. Sure, we'd still need to live *somewhere*, just not in this particular building. The time had come to move out and move on, to get out from under the roof of the last couple years. Michull and I had torn that place to shreds. We decorated the walls with stolen signs and pieces of billboards from local businesses. Anything we could get our thieving hands on, really. Hell, we even had a manhole cover stolen from the middle of a Chicago street.

The stolen goods had been completely useless in a sense, but we treated them as badges of honor, showing them off proudly like decorated veterans.

It was destined to be a bittersweet goodbye. On the one hand, it had been our first time out on our own learning hard lessons the hard way. It was a scrappy home we built around ourselves. They were our bills to pay, our memories to make, our lives to live. I was glad, however, to be walking away from the missing screen door, the broken garbage disposal and the yellowed walls. Every stain and cigarette burn in the

carpet told stories I no longer wanted to hear, and the memories of the days when time was all we had seemed to be like ghosts rusting into corners and cobwebs.

+BRIGHT LIGHT AND BURNING EYES+

Taking more strength than it should have, I rose slowly to my feet. I pulled down the Pac-Man bed-sheet that was used in place of the missing blinds and let my eyes adjust to the light. The morning sunlight flooded the apartment, a bit too brightly for my liking, illuminating the new destruction we had caused the night before. There was a dime-sized hole burnt into the kitchen linoleum (the first one in two years) and new stains splattered across the carpet like whiskey kisses that had missed our mouths and dribbled to the floor. I opened the sliding glass door to air the place out. I breathed deep and coughed. I had smoked too much the night before and here I was already on my third one of the day. Maybe, I thought, I will smoke less tomorrow. The place was a mess. I picked through bottles covered in ash, shaking boxes of cigarettes to see if there were a couple accidentally left inside. It was like sifting through rubble after a natural disaster.

I emptied ashtrays into trash bags and cleared the place of the bottles and cans that had accumulated throughout the night. The bags were about to burst as I lugged them down the stairs, leaving a trail of beer all the way to the dumpster outside in the parking lot in front of the building. I wondered to myself how often that same trail had been left to dry in the sun.

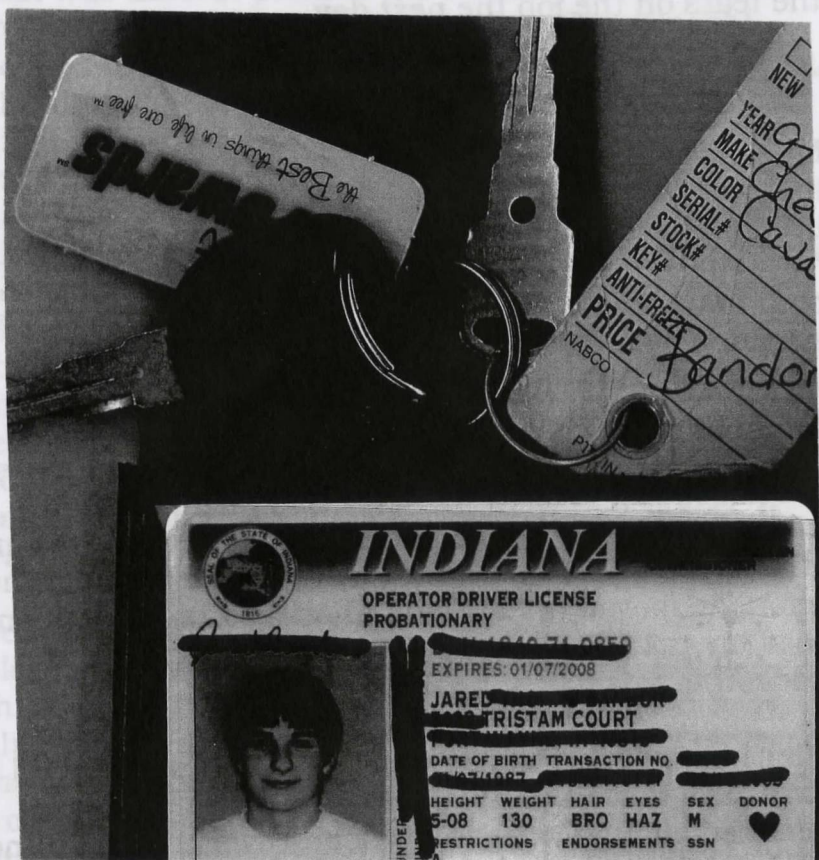
I began my ascent up the stairs. My head was heavy and I was already beginning to sweat. Oh, what a martyr I was. A sinking sense of absence hit me when I saw my friends gathered around that morning. One of my closest friends, J-Rod, had moved across the country only a couple weeks beforehand, and he hadn't been there to celebrate with us. It had been his home just as much as it had been mine. I couldn't cry the night he left. As the door clicked behind him, I wanted nothing more than to sleep. It had come easier than it should have. I decided then that I'd sweat out the tears on the job the next day.

+ CAVALIER ETERNAL +

My girlfriend, Oface, and I had decided to move in together once my lease was up. At the time, we had been together the better part of a year. We figured "why the hell not?" It would be a drastic change for the both of us, but we were ready. The irony of the whole situation was that we were moving into a different building in the same complex I had been living in already. It was cheap, it was familiar and I felt like I had a bit of pull with the landlord, even though I was convinced she loathed me given our history. Besides, Oface and I both worked across the street and I wasn't driving yet. I had a car that I bought from J-Rod right before he moved to Portland. I had sold my drums and used my tax return money and paid him in full. The tradeoff to this day still doesn't seem fair.

After I bought the car, I got my permit to drive. I had sixty days to wait until I could get my license. I had bummed enough rides from friends over the years and I didn't feel like adding another sixty days to that just

so I could get to and from work. Oface and I bought ourselves some time by signing a six-month lease on an apartment across the street. Strangely enough, it was the exact same address as my old apartment, with the exception of the fourth number. Instead of a second story balcony, we'd have a first floor patio. That meant we would actually have somewhat of a view rather than staring into the parking lot of another set of buildings.



+ SIX FIVE FOUR SEVEN +

Oface met the rest of us at our apartment a while after we had all woken up. I had shaken off the hangover enough to have actually begun the work. The first order of business was to get the new set of keys for our place. Oface and I walked over to the office, picked them up and met everyone else across the street in the new apartment. We unlocked the door and walked on in. Even though the layout, position and address were almost identical to my old apartment, it was kind of a shock to see how big of a difference two years can make.

The carpet was new; it wasn't brown and stained and burnt. The walls were all one color. The handles on the doors were all there. The stove wasn't older than I was. We had no choice but to laugh when we saw the countertops were painted the same color as the walls. Once we got the doors and windows unlocked and open, we began moving my possessions from the other apartment. It had only taken a couple of carloads (that's really all I had had or needed), and my friends Moshboy and Doozer had taken off almost immediately afterwards. I was kind of irritated, to be completely

honest. As often as Michull and I had given them a home in our place, they didn't bother to help with the move for more than an hour. But, once I had found out what had happened between the two of them the night before, I wasn't pissed and I had no choice to be completely surprised and almost shocked.

Once I got all of my things into the new apartment, Michull and I had the task of practically gutting out ours and cleaning out all of the unnecessary junk. There were pieces of an unassembled waterbed, busted dressers, milk crates of old paperwork, stolen signs stashed in every closet and corner.

We started simply and efficiently by throwing everything off of the balcony. Huge slabs of wood, drawers and old clothes. It was actually kind of fun and extremely cathartic. It had felt like I was shedding skin that I had outgrown, molting like a snake. Everything that Michull had left behind when he had moved out six months earlier was destined for nothing more than a dumpster. At this point, neither of us had really given a shit about how nice the leftover furniture actually was. We were too lazy and hung-over to attempt countless trips to the Goodwill drop-off in a borrowed minivan. So, everything was thrown from our balcony.

When I had opened the mini-fridge in his bedroom (we had shared a one-bedroom apartment and I slept in the living room), I found a couple of bottles of cream-based liqueurs that could have not possibly been consumable. The fridge had been unplugged for over a year. We tossed the bottles and planned to give the fridge back to our friend Becky.

Once we finally tossed all of the major furniture and excess buildup, I was finally able to witness how downright filthy the place actually was. Spare change and bottle caps were in every nook and cranny. Cobwebs clung to the corners of every room like Christmas lights, and I'm sure if you had stamped your foot hard enough, you would have coughed up a lung breathing in a cloud of dust.

+ YOU HAUL, I HAUL +

With a couple hours of physical labor under our belts, we were both in desperate need of some fresh air and a change of scenery. The two of us decided that it was time to start transporting Oface's belongings. We would finish up at our place later on in the day.

Michull, Oface and I piled into her car and drove downtown to pick up a U-Haul truck. I had no idea at the time that within a few hours the truck would be filled front to back and left to right with everything she had owned. Quite a contrast to my two carloads, I must say.

A friend of ours worked at the U-Haul station and had set us up nicely. Not only did we get the truck and mileage cheaper than we should have under normal circumstances, but Jon threw in a couple of tarps and moving blankets for us free of charge. I tossed the blankets in the back of the corrugated steel truck, headed up to the front and sat bitch.

We drove back towards our side of town, talking and sweating in the midday sun. We stopped off at Oface's

storage complex and she tried her best to remember where her storage unit actually was. She hadn't been inside the place since she had loaded it up a year or two prior.

Once we had found it, we parked and sat idling. We had had the air conditioner on full blast and the humidity was destined to be suffocating. You could practically see it. I jumped out of the cab into the heat of the day and leaned up against the truck for a cigarette. I took as long as I could without looking like a slacker, flicked it down the drive and the three of us headed into the building. Her storage space was down the hall and around the corner.

I was surprised to see how much stuff had been crammed into such a small space. I had been in bathrooms bigger than that. We attempted to form a train and run everything down the hall and out the door. That had lasted all of about ten minutes. We gave up on that idea real quick and just carried what we could. There were lamps and boxes of Christmas decorations and other odds and ends that seemed completely trivial. Once everything had been loaded in the truck, the enormous table that we weren't going to keep around got shoved half-assed into the truck.

We got back in the cab and we drove slightly out of town to where she had been living with her parents. Once we got done sorting and sifting through everything at her parents', the truck couldn't have possibly fit any more items. It was ridiculous how one person could own that many clothes and furniture. I made my thoughts on the subject quite clear and got a

disapproving glare from Oface while Michull and her mom just laughed.

+ DUMPS AND TRUCKS +

We made our way back to Blackhawk and parked the truck on the street that ran right along the backyard to our new place. Michull and I began unloading furniture down the ridged steel ramp without the aid of a dolly, and almost too late did we realize that we were going to have to watch every step we took in the yard. The grass looked like a minefield with piles of dog shit strewn about. Our new neighbor had apparently gotten used to letting her dog have free reign in our yard given the fact that there had been no one living there for a while.

I cussed under my breath profusely while lugging big, awkward furniture through the yard. It was almost funny in a sick sort of way. I am almost sure of the fact that our neighbor had heard us bitching and complaining while hauling everything into our place because, later on the day, there was not one turd to be found in the yard.

Our friend Marisa met up with us at the new place in order to help Oface begin arranging everything while Michull and I finished up our work. None of us had eaten yet, and the time was as good as any to order some pizza. I had been running on fumes up until this point and some delivered pizza would be a good pick-me-up.

The four of us sat around a massive heap of furniture and boxes and took a breather. I did my best to stay

awake. The recliner was making it hard to do, however. The pizza arrived quicker than anticipated and we feasted on meat and cheese and soda. Afterwards, I had definitely not been hungry any longer, but I was sleepier than I was before. There was still too much work to do and sleep wasn't an option. I had no choice but to keep moving and ignore the exhaustion. Once you get so far outside of your comfort zone, you'll realize you possess a complete reserve of strength you didn't know you had. It's empowering to realize the mind is stronger than the body under certain circumstances.

+TWO BEERS FOR TWO YEARS+

Michull and I headed back across the street after finishing our dessert cigarettes. As the hours moved on, it was damn near eight o'clock by the time we finished half-ass cleaning up the apartment. As I was tossing out spoiled condiments that were practically glued to the refrigerator door, Michull yelled across the room, "Hey! Keep a couple beers in the fridge!". "For what?" I asked. "The last beers in the apartment, man", he responded matter-of-factly.

What ended up being about ten hours later since the beginning of the day, the only things left in the old, run-down apartment were two beers, a Chicago manhole cover and the two of us. We sat on the floor and I lit two cigarettes for the both of us. I passed him one and we cracked open our Pabst.

"Here's to the apartment and two fuckin' years, dude", Michull said, raising a toast. "Amen, brother", I said, "We made it".



We looked around the place, taking everything in one last time. There were no ashtrays left. We just ashed on the floor, adding to the mess we had already left. I searched the walls, looking for some sort of goodbye. I didn't know exactly how I was going to get one, but I tried. The walls seemed to have turned their backs on us, a cold shoulder to the fact we were finally moving out.

We finished our beers in silence, each feeling more than we could really announce at the time.

"Well, man, I'm heading home", Mike said, dropping his butt into the empty can, "I'm exhausted".

"Ain't that the truth", I replied, "Thanks so much for everything. You didn't have to."

"I know, man. But you know I've always got you. Anything you need, no matter what."

He walked out the door and down the stairs. My ears were ringing from the silence. I left the two beer cans in the middle of the floor and decided to move the manhole cover across the street. I figured I could scrap it for a decent amount of money. It weighed close to a hundred pounds, if not more, and I damn near broke my finger trying to slide it slowly down the stairs. I rolled it across the parking lot and through the grass and across the street. I propped it back up on my back porch. Funny thing was that that had been the most exhausting part of the day. It took me close to fifteen minutes, hunched over and back burning, to move it.

+ A NEW VIEW +

I grabbed a slice of pizza and a beer from inside my new apartment and sat down on a lawn chair on my

back patio. I could breathe easier now that the day was finally over. It was then that I realized just how fatigued I actually was. I could feel the exhaustion pumping through my blood, throbbing in my veins with the nicotine.

Marisa was in the process of getting her stuff together and heading out for the night. I went in and said goodbye to her, thanked her for everything. She took off and I began unpacking dishes. I put about half of them away and decided to call it a night. Oface and I went into our new bedroom, and she went into the bathroom to take a shower as I crumpled on the bed like a folding chair.

The next thing I knew, I was being woken up by Oface. I didn't even realize that I had fallen asleep. I got undressed, locked the doors and crawled into bed with her. I kissed her goodnight and was asleep before my head hit the pillow.

+FUCK THE FOR SALE+

It had been about a month after Oface and I had settled into our new apartment, and J-Rod's absence still weighed extremely heavy on me. There I was, finishing up the last days of summer without one of my best friends who had been there throughout rain and snow, heat and ice. It was just something I had to eventually get used to.

One random night, I dropped Oface and our friend Cupcakes off at a local bar. It was a night where I just felt like keeping to myself and letting my mind wander.



I have nights such as those every so often. It's a good way to take a mental inventory of everything shifting in and out of life at any given time. Besides, neon lights and wall-shaking bass from trendy pop songs was the last thing I needed, even if the beer was cheap.

Money had been pretty tight for me at the time, and I was running low on cigarettes. I had already inquired at a couple of local gas stations about special sales in cigarettes. You know, those buy-one-get-one-free offers that are almost always taking place. I was given nothing more than consolation smile and a shrug of the shoulders from the employees.

I headed down the road about a mile or two and decided to try my luck at the gas stations down in that area. Yet again, not one special offer was to be found. I bought a couple packs of Mavericks and left the station. I was tired, but it was too early to call it a night. I got back into my car, and as I was starting my car, I realized that I wasn't too far from where J-Rod used to live. Given the fact that him and his mother had moved out to the West coast, I hadn't even seen the place since our Fourth of July cookout.

I figured I would go and take a look at the place, pay my respects in my own personal way. I lit up a cigarette, turned up the music and pulled out into the road. I turned left into the side of his edition that I am still not too familiar with, and headed into the neighborhood shrouded with trees and dim streetlights.

After only a few minutes, I found myself on the complete opposite end of the edition, facing the street

that I had crossed over earlier. I had the feeling that I would end up losing my way and, sure as hell, I did. It was no matter to me, though. I really enjoy night drives. As cumbersome as things seem to get some times, there's always an open road and music. The simple things that seem to be taken for granted far too often. I turned right, back onto the main road and decided to head the direction I knew like the back of my hand. Two turns later and I pulled into Tristram Court, a cul-de-sac outlined by trees. J-Rod's house stuck out like a sore thumb.

Painted against the backdrop of his backyard trees, his house casted a cold and uninviting shadow. I idled my car, turned down the music and stared. I lit up another cigarette and burned back a good, long hit. I felt heat behind my eyes. What once was our home away from home, a haven for kindred souls, was now left to gather dust in the moonlight. So many memories of that place still hung around in my subconscious.

I thought of things that hadn't even crossed my mind in months. Parties and all-night campfires. Dead squirrel holidays. Baby rabbits. Seeing double while pissing on trees. Watching the sun rise drunk at seven in the morning. Everything. I took in every inch of the house. I tried staring through the darkened windows, past the leaves gathered in tiny piles on the driveway.

I wanted to tear the "For Sale" sign out of the ground. Perhaps put it in someone else's yard. It had honestly been hard to even look at the sign. It felt like a slap in the face, a blatant disregard for those of us who kept memories of the place tattooed on our souls. As the



stark façade grew ever the more desolate, I didn't feel like overstaying my welcome. I tossed my cigarette out of the window and shifted my car into drive. I drove out of there faster than I drove in.

+ONE FOR MY HOMIES+

I felt a beer or two was in order after those few emotionally draining minutes. I drove down to the Side Pocket Pub and walked inside. I was greeted by Mr. Carl, a frequent bartender who, unbeknownst to me, would be a coworker of mine in a couple of weeks. I paid him two dollars as he brown-bagged my tall bottle of beer. Thanking him, I turned my back and walked out the door.

I tossed my keys on the couch when I get home and headed out onto my back porch. I took big pulls off of my beer and thought about everything. J-Rod hadn't been gone very long, and I already missed the hell out of him. On a daily basis something always seemed to be missing from the big picture. And I was always reminded in one way or another that he was gone. The times were a changin'; that much was true. I smoked a couple more cigarettes, stubbing them out in a puddle of spit and finished by beer.

It was going to be rough without him. That was for sure. But I knew in my heart that he would not have wanted us to let our futures be affected in a negative way because of it. I took comfort in that, and thought of my brother on the West coast. I knew I'd see him again. I just didn't know when. I crumpled up the paper bag and took one last look into the



neighborhood. It was a peaceful night, and there was a chill in the air. I smiled. Things were going to be okay.

+ BLUE COLLAR BLUES +

Shortly thereafter, I decided that it would be in my best interest to pick up a second job. The extra money was definitely welcome, and working two jobs has never really fazed me. It's a practice that I've gotten quite used to over the past few years.

The Side Pocket Pub, which was about two blocks away from where I had lived the past couple of years, was actually the first and only place I needed to apply at. The bar was under the same ownership, staff and clientele as the Corner Pocket Pub. I had been a "regular" at Side Pocket for a couple of years, and I knew all the bartenders and waitresses for the most part. A few of them I actually got along with quite well.

According to the big marquee on the corner of the street, they were hiring for a cook. I was completely qualified for the job. I have worked in the food service industry for years, and it's something very familiar to me. The only difference was the fact that I'd be cooking for a bunch of drunks and stingy pool players this time around.

I walked in and asked for an application. The bartender served me a cup of free coffee as I filled it out. I filled out the application slower than I normally would have so as to make the most of the free refills. I'm a total sucker for free coffee.



I filled out the paperwork and headed home. Two days later I got a call from the kitchen manager. He wanted to interview me for the job. I wasn't looking for another full-time job. I just wanted a part-time position a couple nights a week. Turns out, that's exactly what they were looking for. After an interview that hadn't lasted even five minutes, I had the job.

It was my first foray into late night shifts and bar food. I was pretty excited to begin working. Cooking is a big passion of mine. I take it very seriously, even if it is a matter of deep-frying frozen appetizers and toasting sandwiches.

I get compliments on my cooking almost every night I work. I always tell the customers the same thing, "I won't serve you food I wouldn't eat myself." It's actually pretty sad when they are surprised to hear that. Who was responsible for ruining that trust? What happened along the way to make people think that the people handling and preparing their food didn't have their health and safety in mind? It makes me kind of sick just thinking about it.

And, so, I was to begin my first night at Corner Pocket. Their kitchen closes at one in the morning, and I was scheduled to work the whole night. I had worked a full day at my other job. I'm a meat-cutter at the Scott's grocery store, and I had a couple hours to kill before going in to cook at Corner. I wasn't exactly sure how I was going to get through the night. I was exhausted already, and I had another seven-hour shift ahead of me. So, I did the only thing I could have kept doing, and that was to just keep moving. No sitting down, no



reading, no TV. I just needed to stay on my feet and I'd be alright.

I went into work that night, looking at the bar with a different set of eyes. I was used to being in front of the bar, a drink in hand with friends around. Now, I was working behind the scenes, cooking for my friends and whoever else decided to eat that night.

I learned a lot the first night there. Although the line cook position wasn't new to be, there were a lot of nuances that needed to be picked up on while working in the kitchen. After that first night, I got a hang of it pretty quickly. In less than a month, I was closing and working entire shifts by myself.

That night, one a.m. took a while to roll around. I did my best to avoid looking at the clock. It's like suicide if you're trying to stay awake. A co-worker and I finished up the dishes, filled the cooler of beer for the bartenders and closed the kitchen.

I stank to high hell when I clocked out that night. I felt like I was in a cocoon of grease and chicken wing sauce. I sat down and had ordered a pint of beer. One is never as thirsty as they are after a fifteen-hour work day. I sat quietly and watched sports highlights on the television, sipping my beer like it was hot coffee.

My body burned and I liked the feeling. My head was heavy, my feet hurt with every step and fatigue wrapped itself around my body like a heavy blanket. My flesh was tired, but my spirit seemed to be more alive than I can ever remember. I looked around the bar. I was trying to spot someone who seemed just as weary as I. I didn't bother making small-talk with



anyone sitting around me. I can't stand it most of the time. I wanted to be alone with my thoughts and attempt to wind down. There was no point in shooting the meaningless shit with someone I didn't even know.

I felt like I had an edge on everyone else. There they were; well-dressed people who probably ate three square meals a day and slept eight hours a night. And there I was, trying to stay awake while sitting at the bar, hungry and alone. I bet I looked like a mean drunk with a chip on my shoulder to anyone who saw me that night.

I left a couple dollars on the bar, said my goodbyes and headed out the door. It was a cool night, and the breeze caressed my burning skin. I unlocked my car and got it. There was frost on my window so I left my car warm up for a bit. I felt peeled and cored. I lit up a cigarette and sunk into my seat. I was alone with my thoughts in a car full of spilled coffee. After my car defrosted, I put a Weakerthans album in and headed on home.

+ "AND I EASE US BACK INTO THE TRAFFIC" +

There seemed to be construction happening everywhere that night. I was totally alone on the road. I don't think I saw one vehicle as my turn signal clicked like a metronome, counting the miles until I was home. I hit every green light, and the occasional yellow. They were like arrows, pointing me in the right direction. Everything felt into place that night as I headed home. The album fell into rhythm with the street signs and traffic lights and I was happy. Tired

and hungry, but happy. I could get real used to this, I thought to myself.

To this day, I'm still working both jobs. People used to ask me that once I become the head meat-cutter and get a raise, if I'll quit my other job. I always tell them no.

They seemed surprised to hear my answer. It gives me an edge on everyone else, I tell them. I hack and slash my way through days and nights, working myself to the bone. I like the feeling of actually coming home at two in the morning and being able to sleep. I've earned it. And then a few hours later, I'm back at work. I feel lucid, I feel alive. It has become who I am. I don't want to change that.

+SHOTS FIRED+

I closed the kitchen after an uneventful night at work. I had just finished a fifteen hour day and was weary beyond comparison. After I clocked out, I ordered a couple beers to take home for me and Oface. As one of the bartenders was brown-bagging them for me, Oface called me. She sounded distressed.

"I think I just heard gunshots," she said in shaking voice. "I'm really scared."

"I'll be home soon, hun. Lock the doors and stay inside."

I drove home as quickly as the law would allow me. I didn't know what the hell to think. I had actually heard gunshots a couple of other times while living in Blackhawk with Michull. The first time it happened, it



was half a block away from us, right behind our apartment building in the parking lot of a mini strip mall. We called the cops and they never showed up.

When I got home, the doors were locked and she was discreetly peeking out the blinds. We embraced and I tried to calm her down. They were probably just fireworks, I said. It was then that she told me she had seen someone carried out on a stretcher into an ambulance.

At that point we both knew that it hadn't, in fact, been a fireworks explosion gone awry. I did my best to relax her. I had worked both jobs that day, and it was about two in the morning. I was tired. My heart seemed to be racing just to keep me on my feet. I wanted to sleep because I had to be back at work in about five hours, but I wanted to make sure she was taken care of first.

She hadn't actually seen the gunshots, but it was enough to scare the living shit out of her. We later found out that it had been an attempted break-in and that the two guys had known each other, so it hadn't been a random shooting. I guess that wasn't enough to ease her mind completely.

We smoked a couple of cigarettes in the bathroom because I didn't think it the best idea to stand outside. We drank our bottled beer quietly and eventually decided to call it a night. I double checked the locks and peeled off my greasy work clothes and crawled into bed. I wrapped my arms around her until we fell asleep.

+BLACKHAWK SUCKS+

It had been two months since we signed the lease, and she was willing to do whatever she had to do to break it. She didn't feel safe living there anymore. I told her I would go right along with her, but I was in no financial situation to attempt to pay rent, break a lease and put down a deposit for a new place to live. I did want her to feel safe, sure. But at the same time I didn't want to burn my bridges.

I made her well aware of where I stood on things. As much as I disliked moving so soon, I was willing to do it for her. She couldn't feel safe in her home, even if the home was a rented apartment that we were both all too familiar with. Blackhawk wouldn't allow us to break a six-month lease, so there didn't seem to be a whole lot of options.

The only thing we could do at that point was to think through things as rationally as possible. After a week of constant discussion, which I grew extremely bored with almost immediately, Oface told me that her parents were willing to pay the charges we'd accrue by moving out of Blackhawk early.

I didn't want any favors and I didn't want to owe anyone anything. I wanted to do things on my own terms. But the only way out, it seemed, was to let her parents help us. I told her that I didn't want to be responsible for owing her parents money. She said not to worry, that it would be her own debt she would pay off. After all, it had been her idea to move. A one-off incident such as that didn't bother me, but it did her.



With the financial burden out of the way, finding a place to move into was the other problem. Granted, a lot more was available this time around because I had a car that I was able to drive. We wanted to stay on the side of town we were familiar with. We had been paying just over four hundred dollars a month in Blackhawk, plus electric. We wanted to keep our new rent somewhere in that price range.

The couple of places we looked at were just too damn small. We didn't need a lot of space, but the buildings we looked at were smaller than our Blackhawk apartment. And that's really saying something.

+GARFIELD? LIKE THE CAT?+

Oface's brother, Adam, was living with his best friend Nick in a building that Nick owned. It was a tri-level apartment building that was more like a house. The two of them lived in the basement, and they had had someone just move out of the ground-floor apartment.

Their plan was to move into the main apartment level, which would free up the basement if we wanted it. Oface and I drove over there one day to take a look at it. She had been over there numerous times, but it was the first time I had ever seen it. It was big. It had a full kitchen, washer and dryer, two bedrooms and plenty of space. I had never been used to that kind of space before.

When we arrived, Nick and Adam had yet to begin moving their stuff into the floor above them. It was packed to the walls with their stuff, and I was trying to visualize the place without everything in it. It was hard

to do. They had a tanning bed in the kitchen and no kitchen table. I liked the place enough, though.

We said we wanted to move in. Nick was only going to charge us four hundred dollars a month with no utilities to worry about. You could barely find a one-bedroom in town for that cheap. We knew we had ourselves one hell of a deal.

A week or so later, it was decided that the place would be ours when we wanted it. To make things less troublesome financially, we finished off the month in Blackhawk. That means the only money owed to them was the two months early termination fee. It was easier than trying to prorate another week or two by staying.

+ PORTLAND IS LEAVING +

It was the weekend we were planning on moving into our new place, and Michull was going to visit J-Rod in Portland. He asked me if I would give him a ride to the airport in Indianapolis. It was only about a two-hour drive, and I said sure. I figured I still owed him rides any ways. His plane would depart at seven a.m., so we had to be out of town by three just to make sure we had time to get there and he had time to go through all the security bullshit that is necessary for flying.

I worked at Corner Pocket until one a.m. the morning we had to leave. It had been an extremely busy night and I was exhausted. We were to leave town in a couple hours and I decided that sleeping wouldn't do me any good. I stayed on my feet and nervously picked up things in my apartment and looked at them. Books,



up things in my apartment and looked at them. Books, movies and whatever else caught my eye. I was trying to put out of my mind the fact I could barely stand on my feet. Two a.m. finally rolled around and Oface, Michull and I decided to go to IHOP for an extremely early (or late, depending how you look at it) breakfast. I wasn't hungry, so I just drank a bunch of black coffee.

They ate their food and I drank my coffee and then it was time to leave town. If everything would go in our favor, we'd be out of town by three and back home and in bed by seven. Funny thing is things don't work out like that every time.

We got in my car and hit the highway. I was tired, but if I'm behind the wheel, I'll stay awake. I felt surprisingly clear-headed. It was probably just the pot of coffee I had just consumed. About a half an hour outside of Indianapolis, we got turned around and ended up lost. I'm not very good with directions any way, and I had never driven to the airport. Oface got behind the wheel and attempted to get us to where we needed to go. Finally, after about an hour of being lost, we got Michull to the airport with a bit of time to spare. At that time, I didn't know that the next time I would be driving him out of town would be the last.

Oface and I left the airport terminal and headed back home. Rather, attempted to head back home. We got lost yet again and wound up driving around in circles for over an hour. We stopped off at a gas station and asked for directions to our exit. MapQuest had up and fucked us again. It was almost seven thirty in the morning and we were still in Indianapolis. We were



supposed to have been home already. We braced ourselves for the long drive home. Oface decided to drive.

At that same gas station, we bought Red Bulls and cigarettes. At this time of the morning, it was our only hope for staying awake. We hit the road. About forty-five minutes into our drive, the early morning sky began to lighten, and sun began glowing behind the horizon. "Wouldn't it be cool if we saw the sunrise?" I asked Oface. She glared at me, and I immediately regretted saying that because, in fact, we did see the sunrise. At nine o'clock in the morning. We had been on the road for six hours straight and were still almost an hour from home.

All the caffeine and nicotine wasn't enough to keep me awake. I tried, though, mostly to keep Oface from falling asleep behind the wheel. Strangely enough, when I'd doze off, she would, too. I didn't know this until later. Somebody or something was apparently looking out for us. We finally got home around ten in the morning. I had been up for twenty-four hours straight, and hadn't eaten in just as long.

+ BIG APARTMENT +

After living in Blackhawk for only three months, we would be moving into our new place at the beginning of November. Nick and Adam had finally moved all of their belongings into their apartment and the place was ready for us.

I was on paid vacation from my full-time job, as I had been the first time we moved, so there hadn't been a



whole lot of pressure to get everything done in one day. I awoke the morning of the move hung-over. Again. It was a Sunday that seemed to have begun without me.

I composed myself and called a few friends. This time around, we had more than enough help to move everything. It was a nice change of pace. Everyone met up in Blackhawk, and we began moving furniture, boxes and dishware in whoever's car would hold it.

Our new place wasn't that much further away from Blackhawk, and it was only a ten minute drive from work. The hours passed by and we wore out paths in the street to and from Blackhawk to our new apartment.

After four or five hours, we were all ravenous. The day began early and I had missed breakfast, along with everyone else. I didn't have any of my pots and pans unpacked, and I really didn't feel like attempting to cook for ten people. Getting pizza delivered was obviously the best choice. I was going to foot the bill as a thank you for everyone who helped. I placed the order and the employee told me when to expect the pizza. It ended up being over forty dollars. Christ, I thought to myself. With the coupons I had, it should have been half that price. I was too tired to argue and decided to bite the bullet.

After we finished eating, we finally got everything moved and arranged. It had taken less time than it did in the past, but only because we had had so many friends helping us out. I am still to this day extremely thankful for that.

Everyone eventually went home to rest and enjoy the rest of their Sunday. I got in the shower and scrubbed off the past couple of days. It felt real good. I put on a clean t-shirt and clean pair of boxers and joined Oface on the couch. We watched some TV and our friend Werling, who promised to help with the move and hadn't, showed up around eleven that night unannounced. "Nice to see ya, bud!" I said with more than a hint of sarcasm. I only pretended to be angry. He had been busy with his family all day and just couldn't make time to help out. He apologized profusely and we shared a couple beers.

He had stopped by to see us, and he wanted to be one of the first to see our new place. He really liked it. All of our friends, actually, really liked the new place. We talked about the past week or two, moving and our plans for the upcoming week. We were going to get together when I wasn't so beat.

He made his way out the door, and I made my way to bed. Our bedroom was coal-black. Since we now were living in the basement, there wasn't a whole lot of light shining in, especially at midnight. I kissed Oface with one eye open, half-expecting to see a ghost. I rolled over and tried to sleep. I heard Nick and Adam's television blaring through our ceiling. It lulled me right to sleep.

+ PERIQUE +

A couple of months passed and I was still working both jobs. My exhaustion became like that of a marathon runner. Day in and day out I'd travel through streets as old as I was and sleep always

seemed like my oasis in the desert. I had no choice but to keep rising every single day for eight or fifteen hour days six days a week. I stole sleep whenever I had the chance. When I slept, I made every minute count. I looked at sleep as a prize, an incentive to work for.

I'd sleep when I could get the chance, even if it would be a week of waiting. I spent days and weeks at a time just trying to get to my next cup of coffee, my next cigarette. They were simple little breaks here and there that gave me the energy to survive. I synced my heartbeat up to the pulse of the streets. I felt one with the city. I beat the hell out of the day before it got the chance to beat the hell out of me.

Fort Wayne got hit with the harshest winter I can ever remember. I've been living here my whole life, but I had never seen a season like that. It was on mornings during this time that my car and I shared a lot in common. Shaking and cold, trying our hardest to wake up and work. I coasted half-asleep through roads as weary as I. It was my personal war I waged upon myself. I carried myself with a sleepy bravado. I felt alive. Sleep wasn't as important to me as seeing friends, spending time together and living life.

One night the forecast had called for an ice storm that would ravage our already-frozen town. The morning after the storm I had the day off of work. It took me forty-five minutes to scrape the inch of ice that had encased my car in a transparent shell. I thought nothing of it. I had seen ice storms before. Then I found out that the ice had felled trees all over the city, and most of the city had been without power. Friends of mine had lost power in their houses and without a

backup generator, some of their living spaces had dropped down to twenty-five degrees. Power was out in parts of the town for a couple weeks.

My power had gone out for only a few hours one day. I decided to pass the time by doing some writing by candle light. I need to make some coffee, I thought. Half way to the kitchen I realized that without power I wouldn't be able to. It was the first time I can ever remember walking to the gas station for a cup of coffee and being wary of a branch falling on me. I walked down the street looking up the entire time, keeping an eye and ear open for branches about to crack under the weight of ice.

I remember driving through my side of the city one day after the ice storm and it looked like a battle zone. It scared the shit out of me, actually. The forecast wasn't getting any better and I wondered how long our town would be stuck in a frozen limbo of closed roads and no power.

As weeks passed, I began notching my belt further and further down. The lack of sleep, along with the coffee and cigarette diet, was beginning to take its toll on me. I began eating healthier, too. I felt leaner, stronger. I knew my resilience would overcome anything the day or month or year could throw at me. It seems that the winter had become my proving ground. I forged my body and mind in the frozen wasteland of Fort Wayne. I felt carved out of ice.

+ RYE WHISKEY +

Michull's family was going to host their annual Christmas Eve party. The plans had hit a snag,



though, when the power kept going out at their place. Christmas Eve had every one stuck in an anxious limbo. J-Rod was visiting for the first time since he moved away six months ago, and I was so excited to see him. He was spending time with family earlier on in the day. My heart was in my throat with anxiousness. Finally, Michull's power came back on and actually stayed on. Phone calls were made, the food was prepared and I went to the liquor store to pick up beer and rye whiskey.

Oface and I drove over to Michull's that night. As I was loading up the Harvest Moon I had bought at a discount price into a tub of ice, I saw a pair of legs next to my head dancing and stomping the ground. I looked up and it was J-Rod. I hadn't seen him in six months and there wasn't anything to say other than "HOLY SHIT!" We embraced for a good minute or two. Other friends from out of town made it over to the party as well.

We began a new tradition that night. It was decided that Gremlins is and will always be the best Christmas movie ever made. We ate from a huge spread of food that Michull's mom prepared, got drunk off of beer and rye whiskey and watched the movie. After the movie, we all sat around talking. There was so much to talk about, but not enough time. We passed a couple bottles of rye around and took pulls as we talked. We sipped our beer and sang our favorite songs. When it came to be three o'clock in the morning, we were all drunk as hell, sleepy from gorging ourselves on food and alcohol. It was the best Christmas Eve ever.

+ THE BOSS IS IN THE HOUSE +

After Michull had visited Portland, he had made the decision to move there as well. I knew that would be the news as soon as he called me from Portland that first time. "You're gonna hate me for saying this," he said, "but...Portland blows Chicago out of the water, man." I voiced my disbelief, but really had no frame of reference. I hadn't been to Portland, and it was highly possible that it was in fact better than my favorite city. I was just trying to convince myself that he was blowing a lot of hot air, because I really didn't want both of my best friends to move out there.

He hadn't been blowing a lot of hot air, and come the first week of February he was going to move. He had bought the necessary tickets and would travel across the country by train. I decided that I would have a going-away party for him, which just happened to be Super Bowl Sunday. It would kill two birds with one stone, not to mention the fact that Bruce fucking Springsteen was playing the half-time show. My friend, and Michull's brother, Jake, and I were the only ones looking forward to that.

I bought a keg of Shock Top from the Side Pocket. I got it straight from the distributor, so it was dirt cheap. I was going to put the keg in our bathtub and fill it with ice. Oface didn't want me to and we got into an argument about it. Turned out, it was a damn good thing I didn't, because our plumbing decided to start backing up on that day.



Right before our twenty some guests showed up, I went into the bathroom and the water level on the toilet was about to overflow. The bathtub was half-full of sewage. Perfect, I thought. I told Nick immediately and he said that that happens once a year, and that's when he knows to get the sewer lines cleaned out. Real fucking responsible, I thought. The water level eventually evened out, but our guests weren't allowed to use the toilet more than necessary. "Yellow let it mellow, brown wash it down" became our mantra for the day. The guys would piss outside, and the girls couldn't flush.

Other than that, the party went off without a hitch and it was a real good time for everyone. I accidentally got wasted way too early and ended up passed out in a corner for an hour or two. My friends that showed up later saw me and asked if I was drunk. "No!" I told them, "I'm just tired". My slurring was a dead giveaway that I was lying. After a power-nap, I was back at it, mingling with friends and drinking the ice-cold beer from the keg.

+BLAZING A TRAIL+

A couple of days later, Michull, Flounder, Becky and I went out to breakfast at one of our favorite diners. It would be the last meal we ate together before Michull moved. We talked over coffee and toast and bacon and eggs. We talked about conspiracy theories that Flounder brought up. It was fun, albeit a little too deep for such an early time of day.

After breakfast I went home and took a nap. I hate naps, and usually never take one regardless of how tired I am, but we were leaving town at five a.m. the next morning and I planned on staying up all night. The day passed uneventfully, and the next thing I knew I was at Michull's surrounded by a bunch of friends saying our last goodbyes to him. We ate pizza and I drank a beer. I knew if I had had more than one it would have put me to sleep, and I needed to be awake and alert for the drive.

Friends came and went that night. Some had to work in the morning and others were riding with Michull and me to the train station in Waterloo, which was about an hour out of town. Oface stopped by for a while, and when she went to leave, Michull gave her a hug and told her "take care of my boy". It broke my heart. It eventually became two in the morning, and I couldn't keep my eyes open any longer. I decided to crash out for a couple hours. I put my hat over my eyes and fell asleep sitting up on the couch. Michull woke me up at about four-thirty and the next thing I know we were out the door. It was fucking freezing that morning. I let my car warm up and I did my best to stop shivering.

We hit the road a short time after. Michull was in the backseat with Becky and Flounder. Kyle rode shotgun. Half way to the train station, Becky asked Michull how he was feeling. In a voice full of anxiety, he mentioned he was having second thoughts. It really bummed me out. But it was too late to change his mind and he knew that. We made good time getting to the train station, and ended up waiting for the train for about twenty minutes. We sat in my car with the heat on full



power. No one said anything. There wasn't anything left to say.

When the train pulled up, we all got out of the car to say our goodbyes. The train engineer responsible for loading up the passengers was a total dick. I barely had time to even give Michull a hug and wish him luck while the engineer was yelling for him to get on the train because they were running behind. Not my fucking fault, bud. Michull grabbed his luggage and got on the train. It pulled out of the station almost immediately.

+ THE DREAM TEAM +

We drove back to Fort Wayne in silence. We were all upset to the point of muteness. It was our second friend in less than a year to move to Portland. I drove back to Michull's house where everyone else's car was parked. We said our goodbyes to each other and Becky and Kyle drove home. It was about eight in the morning and I didn't feel like going to sleep. I felt that if I went to sleep it would be closure on the whole situation. As long as I stayed awake, it would feel like Michull wasn't gone.

Flounder and I decided to go get some coffee at my favorite diner in the city. I was too upset to eat, and we talked over coffee for a couple of hours. Afterwards, we went picked up some more coffee from a gas station and went book shopping. We each found some things we were looking for. I bought him a copy of Henry Miller's "Nights of Love and Laughter" because he had never read it, and I thought it was a fantastic book. We

spent most of the day together, and then he decided to go home.

I was dog-tired, but I didn't want to sleep. I went and ran errands that didn't really need to be ran and spent most of my time on my feet. Somehow I had made it through the entire day without dozing off. By the time Oface got home from work after eleven that night, I was still awake. "Did you take a nap?" she asked. I shook my head. "Jesus" was her response. I was so tired I felt dizzy. I had been awake for forty-six of the last forty-eight hours. We grabbed a quiet dinner and went home. I crashed hard.

Oface and I spent that weekend in Chicago. It was a good way for me to take my mind off of things, and it was really good to get away from town for the weekend. We rented a cheap hotel room and fucked to the sounds of the El barreling down the track right outside the window. I fell asleep to the sound of the train chugging and grating along in one of my favorite cities.

+ DOWNPOUR +

About a month after Michull had moved to Portland, the plumbing problem that had reared its ugly head on Super Bowl Sunday invited itself back into our apartment.

The night began just as any other Saturday night in Fort Wayne. I got together with some friends and we sat around trying to figure out something to do. Nick and Adam were having a party upstairs in their apartment, so we all decided to go and see what it was all about.

Nick and Adam, along with a few of their friends, were in the middle of a beer-pong game while crappy music pumped out of the speakers. We stood around drinking Pabst and watching the game. I was bored and tired, but there wasn't much else to do on this particular Saturday night. I stepped outside to have a cigarette and watch the rain. Thunder cracked while the rain came down in sheets. Lightning flashed and the streets tried to keep up with the downpour. I thought nothing of it and headed back inside.

After standing around for a while longer, we had run out of the Pabst that we had brought with us. None of us were going to drink the "game beer" the guys had bought. I needed to take a piss any way, so I went back downstairs into my apartment and grabbed some more beer. I set the beers from the fridge on the table and headed into the bathroom.

As soon as I flipped the light on, I noticed the water level on the toilet was about to overflow. I immediately ran upstairs and told Nick what was going on. He seemed just as surprised to hear about it as I did to actually see it. We both went back downstairs while the beer-pong game continued amidst yelling and rap music blaring out of the sound system.

The two of us just sort of stared at it for a while, not really knowing what to do. As far as we were concerned, the problem shouldn't have been recurrent. The rain continued to pound the outside world, and before we knew it the tub and toilet were flooding. The only thing to do was get empty paint buckets and whatever else we could find to start draining the water by hand.

Nick and I, along with others that decided to help, spent the next couple of hours draining the water and trying to stop the flood. At about two or three in the morning the water levels returned to normal.

That Monday, after Nick had the plumbing team come out to take care of everything, we found out the reason for the flood. The gutters hadn't been cleaned the entire time Nick had owned the place (we are talking three years, readers) and the rain was so heavy it flooded the gutters and sewer line.

+STORM CLOUDS ABOVE MY HEAD

Thus began a few months spent in nervous anxiety. When it happened the first time, we forgot about it. But quickly thereafter, our toilet and tub would back up with sewage on a nightly basis. Whenever someone from the other two apartments would run a shower or dishwasher, our tub and toilet would fill up an overflow with raw, black sewage. It hadn't been so easy to put out of our minds this time around.

Nick had plumbers come out on a weekly basis to try and fix the problem. Every time they left, the problem seemed to be taken care of for a couple days. And then, as if on a schedule, Oface and I would hear the toilet and tub gurgle and the flood of backed-up sewage would begin all over again.

This daily occurrence became a war I felt like I would not win. True to my over-analytical nature, I obsessed over the plumbing. I was terrified of the fact that it would flood when we weren't there. I became a shell of



myself. I couldn't focus on anything else. I couldn't stand to be at home for the longest time. I couldn't sleep for fear of the plumbing backing up.

Oface and I talked about moving since the problems didn't seem to be getting fixed, but I couldn't commit myself to anything. I took the problems as a sign of biblical proportions that Oface and I shouldn't be together, ignoring the fact that problems like this happen to people all the time. It just happened to be happening to us. I figured if it was a sign we shouldn't be together, the options of moving out and on would be available. They weren't.

After what seemed like years of sleepless nights and chest pains, the cause of the problem was eventually discovered by the plumbing team. After snaking the lines several times in those few months, they had found out the reason for the plumbing failures. Leslie, the girl who lived in the upstairs apartment above Nick and Adam, had been flushing her tampons. Given the fact that the plumbing system itself is as old as the house, her simple, idiotic mistake of flushing her feminine products caused the entire system to back up constantly. After Nick made her pay the three hundred dollar bill, she quickly learned her lesson.

+CARRY ON +

We were finally able to shake off the terror and anxiety the place caused us. The place didn't continue to feel like a dungeon of self-doubt. After we talked through everything, and after I got slightly caught up on sleep, things seemed to work out just fine. It's amazing what lack of sleep can do to rational thinking. I look back on

the situation now as yet another proving ground for resiliency. In the last couple of years, I would like to think that I have learned more by dropping out of college than I ever could have while attending. I've seen my friends and myself crushed by the weight of the world, and I've seen the lot of us rise to manic heights. I take comfort in the fact that lessons, on occasion, need to be learned the hard way. I am stronger than what the days, months and years can throw at me. Rolling with the punches is something you just have to get used to.



MY OFFICE.

2009

BEAR HUGS + SLOPPY KISSES TO:

All of my friends for the constant support, companionship and inspiration over the years.
All of the firm believers and supporters of D.I.Y.
All of my favorite bands for giving me perspective on so many things. All of my favorite authors including Aaron Combs, John Fante and Charles Bukowski. I love you all.



**TAKE WITH LOTS
OF COFFEE**