

stewart

the

stewart

letters



stewart



jason pettus

stewart

December 23,  
1995

Amy,

I've picked up a new fascination in the last two years or so - a fascination with the publication of correspondence from famous writers. I'm not sure that I've actually read a book of letters, but the whole concept is pretty amazing - that people would grope and pine so much for more of a writer's work and life that they would turn to the letters he wrote - "Dear Mabel - Merry Christmas. Hope you and yours are well. Love, T.S. Eliot". Quick, somebody get a price tag on that!

I went to the movies with Katherine last night and it turns out she bought me a present. It's a blank notebook. The cover is this stick-on psychedelic thing. Have you ever seen those flat plastic screens with all the circular grooves that they sell at Walgreens, that you lay on the page of a book to magnify it? Well, it's like 30 or 40 of those put together in miniature, glued on top of a piece of sparkly blue paper and all affixed to the cover of this notebook. She says they were on sale and she thought of me.

I found the desire to do something special with this notebook, instead of my usual journal entries, novel additions, phone numbers, notes to myself. The notebook screams "SPECIAL PROJECT." So I've decided to start something that may turn out to be really interesting or may become a total disaster. I've decided to write nothing but letters to you in this notebook, and then when I finish the last page, I will collect them together and publish them all under one cover. I'm calling it "The Stewart Letters." I hope I remembered your last name correctly.

6 pm. Midway Airport.

A minimum of two hours and possibly three hours until my flight. I'm in this "on the waiting list for an earlier flight but all the flights are delayed" limbo. Listening to Liz Phair, hanging out in a closed gate, and craving a cigarette (fucking non-smoking Midway! You can't even smoke in the bars).

My news about these letters either have you laughing or cringing at this point. I don't know you well enough to know. The process of getting to know someone new is kind of thrilling, isn't it? All these things to learn - all these chances to tell you favorite stories to someone who hasn't heard them yet. Secrets to divulge and to discover.

The things I have to do  
would make a slut blush blue  
But I can't get out of what I'm into  
I figure two more years  
and I'll go back to queers  
But I can't get out of what I'm into  
But it's a steady job  
and it's the only thing that makes me money  
and it gives me something to laugh about  
'cause my real life ain't fucking funny

Liz Phair singing on the Girlysound tapes. Ha! I'm already stealing your writing style.

I don't know what Liz was thinking when she wrote this, but this has been my computer's screen saver for the last month at work, because it exactly mirrored how I felt working at Frankel and Company.

Listening to Small Factory now. Groovy little band - have you ever heard them? My feelings of self-pity and hatred that I had about losing my job have been quickly overwhelmed by that feeling of euphoria that I was telling you about last night. Getting hired to that company opened up these floodgates that can't be closed now, like when Communism fell in the Soviet Union. Getting hired at Frankel taught me for the first time ever that I have skills and a mind that are desirable by companies - and that they'll pay me good money to acquire that. Nothing can take that knowledge away from me anymore. Maybe that's why I'm finding it impossible to feel bad about getting fired. I know that I went in to that company and did a better job at what they hired me for than they ever expected anyone to do. Even they will readily admit that.

I was fired because this job was my first-ever test of how well I could play the Corporate Politics Game. And I flunked. Oh boy, did I get a big stinkin' fat "F" written in red pencil.

That's something that I also can't feel bad about - in fact, I actually feel proud that I knew so little about Corporate politics that the first time I came head to head with it, it chewed me up and spit me out like an 8 year old throwing up half-digested veal.

6:45 pm.

Okay, the earlier flight that I might get on (the 7:25) has just posted its delay time as 8:05. So I have an hour fifteen to wait for that - if I don't get on that, then I wait for my scheduled flight (the 8:05) which hasn't had a delay time posted yet, but you can bet isn't going to be 8:05. I called my parents and they finally gave up and said, "Look, Jason, just call us when you arrive in St. Louis and we'll be by

in 15 minutes.”

If I had to make up a set of rules for the Corporate Politics Game based on my five months at Frankel, this would be them:

1)Success and longevity at your job has nothing to do with how well you perform your job.

2)If your boss is performing their job badly, the best course of action is to sit back, let them run the company into the ground, get caught by their superior, and get fired themselves.

3)Document every move and statement you make on paper and date it, because you will be asked months later to prove you were not involved in a decision.

4)If you have two supervisors, it is inevitable - not even a question about it - that they will have two opposite management styles, both expect you to follow theirs, and that you will automatically get in trouble no matter which choice you make.

5)Personnel departments exist to tell employees exactly what they want to hear, so as to keep them quiet and happily working until the time comes that the company decides to get rid of them, not the employee.

6)No matter what upper management might say, they have no interest whatsoever in your suggestions or proposals for improving the company.

7)If your boss believes that  $2+2=5$ , then the equation is indeed true, and no amount of rational arguments will ever change that fact.

8)The company expects you to perform your job at the minimum level required to satisfy your job requirements; therefore, they will be perfectly happy with this level of output. Any effort to perform your job better will be neither rewarded nor even acknowledged.

9)Your boss will overlook an unbelievable amount of indiscretions if you act as though you personally like them and make them feel that they are smart, funny and attractive; if you do not do this, they will actively seek out small, insignificant things for the purpose of blowing them out of proportion and speeding up your inevitable termination.

10)If you somehow manage to get promoted to a higher echelon, all current rules become null and void; a new set of rules are written

that, again, you are never told about until the point that you are fired.  
11)The one rule that supersedes all other rules is: Cover your ass.

And that's enough of me being bitter for now.

7:45 pm.

I got on the 7:25 (now 8:05) flight. Excellent.

I broke down and bought my first ever airport beer. It tasted surprisingly like a keg-party, hot-August-night, right-before-school-starts kind of beer - cool, refreshing, quenching, with a slight "plastic cup" taste that evokes memories of getting smashed underage. But then again, for \$4.25, it better.

Considering that the last time I ate was ten this morning, my one beer has served the purpose of making me a little loopy. And you know what? The airport is such a more tolerable place when you're buzzed.

I watched an old black man wander down the concourse with a lit cigarette dangling between his lips. Everytime an anal retentive white guy came up and said, "Excuse me, sire, this is non-smoking," he'd yell, "WHAT?" and laugh and keep walking.

Getting on the plane. Bye ---> Jason.



December 26,  
1995

# Amy,

On the flight back to Big Shoulders now. As you may or may not know, Southwest Airlines has no assigned seating - it's first come, first serve when you get on board. Everytime I fly Southwest, I sit in the same seats - that front row that faces backwards towards the rest of the passengers. I sit there because I'm right next to the exit - I purposefully pack for trips as light as possible - slip in my seat, slip out my seat - boom, boom, boom. That's how I like it. So when I sit halfway back the plane, I have to stand around and wait for twenty minutes while all these dumbfuck passengers who don't know how to pack stand in the middle of the aisle and unload bag after bag of carry-on luggage. I'm being punished for a crime I didn't commit! And I resent it!

So, I sit in that backwards front row, which works out well because no one else ever wants to sit up there - no one wants to sit backwards, and I don't know why. So double bonus for me - right off the plane, plus empty seats around me a lot of times.

There are certain things that people get unusually obsessed about, like on Seinfeld when George gets obsessed with making good time on the highway. Finding a good airplane seat is one of my obsessions. Here are some others:

Find the cheapest pack of cigarettes in the city.

Knowing the exact amount of time an el takes from point A to point B.

Memorizing the stops on an el line and the order the train hits them.

Packing light (as mentioned before).

Finding really good deals on pants - not any other type of clothing, either.

There are others, but I can't think of them right now.

The only problem with sitting in the front rows is that it is where the babies, old people, and others who need "special assistance" sit. There was a child sitting next to me when I sat down, and a woman was standing next to her, keeping her entertained. She was young and attractive and personable and I assumed she was an attendant. Then the flight started and she sat with the child and I realized she was the mother. It still constantly shocks and amazes me that people my age are having babies. No, wait, that didn't come out right - I've had peers having babies since I was fifteen. What I mean is, that I'm shocked and amazed everytime I realize again that people my age are planning on having a baby - is a natural part of their plans on life - and that that is okay - is now smiled upon by society instead of frowned upon. It constantly sneaks up on me that I

am now old enough to comfortably start raising a family. To me, I still seem way, way too young.

The subject of children raises these dual yet opposite emotions in me. On the one hand, biology is starting to kick into my internal clock - I'm starting to feel that want, that desire, to be a father - that biological urge to father, to protect, educate, teach and raise a child. If you didn't have that instinct built into your genes programmed to kick in at a certain age, we'd never reproduce.

On the other hand, there is no way on God's Green Heaven and Earth that I actually want a child right now. Jesus, I can't even keep a plant right now without killing it out of neglect. I watch a mother like the one next to me, completely occupied every second of the flight trying to entertain some baby and keep it from swallowing nails and screaming and running up and down the aisles, and it's enough to make my eyes bug out and scream "FUCK!" in my head. There is no, no, no absolutely no way that I am ready to give up my own life to take care of another one right now.

Yet, I still feel that biological desire to procreate. Strange.

Here's a random thought - do you ever think that somewhere out there is a manuscript, and it refers to you in a story as "this person sitting in the seat next to me"?

8:15 pm.

The train ride from the airport to my apartment lasts approximately three times as long as my flight from Chicago to St. Louis.

I forgot another obsession of mine - writing long letters. I mean, really, long, letters. And it's not when I'm writing to someone specific, either - I've written fifteen page letters to my mom before. The first time someone gets a letter from me they usually freak out, because it's so long and they think that I'm trying to say something (unspoken) by the act of writing such a long letter. I guess I'm saying don't think strange things about me or that I'm trying to give some weird psychotic signal because I'm writing such a long letter. I think my record still stands at 34 pages, which I wrote to Brynn and Sam this summer when I was in Missouri for a week.

I don't know how to refer to you in my head. There's things I want to say in this letter comparing you to various women that have been in and out of my life in the past - the natural tendency is to write, "You know, I've never gotten in a relationship before with someone that..." or "You're the first person I've dated that..." But we're not really at that point yet, are we? We're in this unusual, strange, slightly

uncomfortable position of having had sex the first time we ever went out to do something - and then having sex the next 2 nights after that in a row - and then separating for a week and a half (or... a week. I'm not sure at this point). And we're right at this exact point where it's impossible to talk to the other person about what's happened, what it means, and where it's going, because you're terrified that you're going to say the opposite thing of what the other person is thinking and the whole thing will turn into a nightmare and blow up in your face (I've been both on the giving and receiving end of that situation - whoo boy).

By the way, I'd like to present to you now...

THE ANNOYING HABITS OF JASON PETTUS - A SERIES.  
PART I - Tendency to overanalyze.

Thank you.

So, let me just say for the record - I don't sleep with people unless I've already decided that they are interesting, intriguing - someone that I want to get to know better and do different things with besides have sex. I don't think that came out right. What I mean is that I've never been the type of person who could have those friends that I get together with and have a bunch of sex and nothing ever happens beyond that.

Now, that being said, let me also say that for the last four or five days, all I've been able to think about is what you back looked like when I was on top of you that first night - muscular and warm and freckled. It keeps getting me excited everytime I think about it.

# Jason



December 27,  
1995

# Amy,

On my way to my first temp assignment in 5 months. It is an oddly comforting feeling. I feel in control of myself, of my surroundings, like I know exactly what is expected of me, which is a nice feeling.

Christmas. Here's a quick rundown.

Fri, Dec 22 - Got in, went out to dinner, promptly fell asleep about 10 pm.

Sat, Dec 23 - did my last shopping in the morning. Aunt (Carol), Uncle (Bob) and one cousin (Ian) got here in the afternoon. Cousin taught me how to play "Doom" on the Mac. Went to Union Station (St. Louis' old railroad station that's been converted to a big, expensive mall) for dinner. Went to the arcade and watched two young black men play this game where you hold a big plastic gun and shoot things on the screen. They both held their guns sideways and their wrists wrapped over the handles, like you see gangsters do it in movies. Dinner was okay.

Sun, Dec 24 - The other cousin (Rob) and his wife (Michele) got in. We all had an early dinner and opened gifts. I think I did well on my choices - Mom flipped when she got the sweater and declared that it's the best gift I ever got her and wore it the rest of the weekend. Dad opened his CD-ROM, said, "Hmm, how interesting," and quietly stole off after the presents and spent the rest of the weekend playing with it.

Oops, gotta go ---> Jason

December 28,  
1996

Amy,

I hate mornings like this when I sleep later than I want to, because then I feel like I'm in this panic the rest of the morning. Rush, rush, rush - and then when I get where I'm going, I still feel that rush, rush until noon.

The place I'm temping for called my agency yesterday to tell them that they absolutely love me and wish I could stay full-time. I have the advantage of being overqualified for temping, because I don't want to take any full-time secretarial jobs, unlike the other good temps who all end up leaving quickly. As a result, I end up getting assignments finished much faster than the places had scheduled time for, assuming a regular temp was coming. In the case of this company, four hours faster.

Back to Christmas. This is what I got:

\$15 from my maternal grandfather

\$500 from my paternal grandmother and her new husband (they've decided to start giving away some of our inheritance now)

From Carol and Bob:

R.E.M. "Life's Rich Pageant" (my favorite REM album - lost it years ago)

Douglas Coupland, "Life After God" (I adore Douglas Coupland. This is his most depressing book. Gave my copy away to an ex-girlfriend two years ago).

From my brother:

Hasn't gotten here yet.

From Mom and Dad:

White button down shirt (too big - Mom's exchanging it and mailing it to me).

This little metal toy that bends into all these weird shapes.

A "Pocohontas" mousepad.

100 Games of Logic. One of those books of logic puzzles that you have to draw those little charts for.

Scott Kirby, "The Complete Scott Joplin, Volumes III and IV".

ANNOYING THINGS ABOUT JASON PETTUS - A SERIES

PART II - Likes ragtime a little more than he should.

A bad-ass, take-no-prisoners, 19" color television set with smart picture, smart sound, built in closed captioning, stereo surround, on screen programming and automated commercial recognition.

This TV literally kicks ass. I feel a little uncomfortable with it, though, and I'll tell you why.

December 29,  
1995

God, it's taking me a long time to get through this story.

Okay... Have you ever walked into someone's apartment and it's small and they don't own a lot, but they have this giant, expensive TV, and their apartment is so devoid of other stuff that the TV becomes the dominant focal point of the room? And you think, "Well, here's someone who's got their priorities a little fucked up."

Well, that's just how my apartment's going to look. Don't get me wrong - it's a fine TV, I'm happy to have it, I think it's cool that my parents decided to go out of their way to get me this gift - I'm just afraid people are going to come to my apartment and think, "Well, he hasn't even bought chairs yet, but he's got a 19 inch color TV. Just how addicted is this guy?"

By the way, did I mention that I tend to overanalyze?

You're the first person I've... well, whatever... that has parents that are sane, normal, that have a good relationship with their daughter. I guess you could say that my parents are the same way. My parents are the ones that my friends always hoped would show up to the parties. Does that make sense? Actually, I don't really want to get into this topic right now... so I won't.

I was talking to Brynn last night and we were discussing that we think today's the day you get back, and I mentioned that I was excited about seeing you again, and Brynn got all freaked out and started yelling at me. "For God's sake, Jason," she said, "Don't forget that you hardly know each other. Don't flip out or get all serious or push things too fast! You be careful!" So I said, "What, just because I bought a ring over Christmas?" Brynn failed to see the humor.

Brynn's scared because she sees me as someone in the past who's sort of fallen into relationships, without ever quite knowing that it was happening - and yes, sometimes it's been fast. Brynn and I's relationship was real fast. But it's what we both needed at the time.

And she sees you as someone who gets spooked easily by relationships and will avoid situations where it looks like one is forming. Now, this may just be me, but I think in the short time we've known each other, we've done a pretty good job at finding this great middle ground, where things aren't too serious or fast, but aren't what you'd call real slow, either. I don't know.

Well, that's all I have to say about the subject. Hopefully I'll see you tonight.

# Jason

December 30,  
1995

Amy,

Godamn, this el station is cold!

Just leaving the library. The Harold Washington Library has been the source of constant controversy since it was built, but I personally like it. The outside is grand and old-fashioned and makes me feel like I'm doing something important - but the inside is very warm and inviting and non-threatening, laid out easily and lots of low ceilings and individual lamps to make me feel like I belong there.

Doing my job search for this publishing job I want to get. I found 17 places I'd really like to work at, about 35 more that would be alright to work at, but would want to move after a couple years, and maybe another 20 that are last ditch places.

5:35

I couldn't find fuckin' anybody home, so I decided to go out and entertain myself this Sat. night. It's a weird feeling, because it's what I did every weekend for at least the first six months up here, and I got used to it quickly, but it's the first time I've done it in maybe two months now, and it feels weird being out by myself. And I'm not sure what I'm going to do tonight, because the usual plan was always to go to a bar and have some drinks and attempt to hit on people - which, admittedly, is a little pathetic, but then so am I. But for obvious reasons, I'm not in much a mood to hit on people, and I'm not particularly in the mood to drink, so... hmm, I'll play it by ear, I guess.

I'm in the Village Theatre right now, at Clark and North. I stopped by because almost without fail, they're showing a film that I wouldn't mind seeing for \$2.50. And they are again - Get Shorty. This better be good, for all the hype I've heard.

7:45

It was excellent! Much, much better than Pulp Fiction, I have to say. Sam paged me halfway through the movie, which was cool because now I have some-

thing to do. So I was going to call her after the movie, but then five minutes later she beeped me again, so I thought it was urgent - ran out of the theatre and called her, and she said, "No, it's not urgent - I just didn't think my first page went through, because I didn't hit the pound button."

Having this pager has been the weirdest thing - having this little box that lets you know immediately when anyone is trying to get ahold of you. It's like... it's like being hard-wired, if that makes any sense.

There's this great desire that's been opened in me since I got this pager - to be technologically mobile. I want to get a cellular phone and a Newton - do you know what those are? It's a little tiny computer Apple makes - no keyboard, just a screen across the whole side. You write on it with a special pen, and it converts your writing into printed text. It is pretty fucking cool. It comes with a notepad, an address book, and a day planner. The coolest thing about it (well, the only thing that makes it worthwhile) is that it comes with a cable that plugs right into the back of your Mac. So - you spend the day writing in your Newton (for example, I could sit here and write a letter just like this, or write part of my novel) and then once a day, you dump everything into your Mac - all your writing, and the things you've added to your day planner, etc. - and start over all fresh. And it's already typed for you!

The new Newtons come with a modem built in and a plug for phones - and a number of online services make software compatible for your Newton to get online. So, theoretically (theoretically, mind you) I could sit down on the el, slip my phone and computer out of my pocket, get and send some e-mail, check my voice mail messages, call people back, check my appointments and dash off a letter. Oh, yeah, and work on the cover of my new novel on my Mac Powerbook with CD-ROM that I've also bought. As long as we're fantasizing, right?

I could do all my business, contact anyone I ever need to, in any form I could think of, for about \$4000. My oh my oh my.

I think this next page will break my record of longest letter, except it doesn't really count, because if you had been home when I was thinking you were going to be home, I would've given this to you and it wouldn't be so long. I guess it depends on if you look at it as a series of normal letters over a ten day period that are just being batched together, or one long letter written in a series of parts. But if you look at it that way, then I guess the whole book will be one gigantic letter, which is kind of cool, but kind of weird, too.

# Jason

December 31,  
1995



Amy,

Looks like I'll be spending New Year's Eve in Wicker Park, my first time back since I moved out of there last April, utterly disgusted by the citizens of the neighborhood. I'm going to some party by one of Steve's Art Institute chums, who's in a band who's playing at the party. It should be... interesting.

I still have no idea if you're showing up or not - got a VM last night that you were tired and wouldn't be joining us Sat, or maybe tonight either. It makes me feel like something's going on - you know, something weird's going on - but I've been wrong before.

My brother keeps paging me - three times now - and telling me to call him collect - but his number in Denver has a collect-call block on it. He's such a dork.

January 2,  
1996



I'm going to assume that the feeling I had of something weird going on is right. After not calling me at all, you canceled your plans when Steve called. But then you did show up, after I took drugs, which was weird. You were in this strange, very dramatic mood - hard to talk to. When I asked if you wanted to leave, you announced that you will be going home alone, which wasn't quite the question I was asking, but... hmm. Then Steve and I went to the bathroom and when we came out, you and Sam were gone. So I decided to give you until bedtime of New Year's Day to page me before I would decide to stop attempting to get ahold of you. And now, here it is, January 2, so that should tell you something.

The thing that's disappointing is not the prospect of being rejected - I've forced myself to develop a thick skin about that in the last four years - but the fact that no word of explanation seemed necessary. It makes me sit here and wonder what happened.

So anyway, I've decided to continue my letters project to you, which is weird, but I like the groove and pace that I've hit in this notebook. And who knows - maybe this strange story will keep continuing to take these unexpected turns. I expect I'll give you a copy of all this when I'm finished up with it.

Doing mushrooms on New Year's Eve was strange. It was the first time I've done psychedelics in about two and a half years, and the first time I've done mushrooms in about four and a half years. It hit me a lot harder than I expected it to - much more than I thought mushrooms could hit you. Steve and his roommate, Heather, left the party at one point to get some food, and a great wave of dread, paranoia and uncomfortableness washed over me as soon as they left. I became convinced that I was stuck in some low-budget, student film production of Dante's Inferno, where, since they can't afford any real special effects, they had to film everything with high symbolism, like the red light-bulb hanging out in the hallway, ringing the front door cracks in red light, symbolizing that we were standing on the verge of hell - like some bizarre cocktail-party-limbo.

January 4,  
1996



Amy,

Things are weirder - it's the day after you called to tell me that you've been acting like an asshole and you wanted to apologize and get together and attempt to explain. So tomorrow we are - so we'll see how that goes. I haven't decided yet when and how's the best to tell you about these letters. Maybe tomorrow - maybe when the book's finished - maybe sometime in between.

I've decided to start writing a zine again! I've been thinking a lot recently about these plans to start up an independent publishing house around the age of forty, and I've been thinking, "you know, there's nothing stopping me from starting up a basement press in the next year or two, and building up from there". Of course, the first step for that is a zine, get a regular publishing schedule down, make some contacts and some people that like your work and are willing to review... etc. etc.

Plus the fact that I just fuckin' love zines. They are the greatest form of printed communication ever invented - cool and easy to make - highly intelligent with the most out-there stuff left in - completely cutting out the middle-man, which is great.



January 5,  
1996

Amy,

Writing with this stupid fuckin' red pen because apparently I've lost my black one sometime in the course of the night. It's maybe an hour - hour and a half - since we parted company. I went all the way downtown to see 12 Monkeys - rushed my ass over to the theatre - to find out they were sold out! Arrgh!

So I came back up to Addison to go to my secret guilt bar, the Sports Caddy, which is right on the corner of Addison and Sheffield. I say secret guilt because it's a big, stupid frat-sports bar, but I secretly love coming here. I don't know - the whole second floor is forgotten and always empty, and it's like drinking in somebody's apartment - a fireplace, wood-framed windows - it's really weird.

I like watching the people at this particular bar - I don't know why. They seem to be one notch more intelligent than the usual frat-sport geeks - yet utterly vapid at the same time, which makes it fun. I became friends with a bartender named Glenn here - I think, over the years, my favorite friends have been the guys that look like frat types and hang out with frat type people, yet are highly intelligent, well-versed, into a genuine underground culture (i.e. not Hootie and the Blowfish, you see what I'm saying?) I guess maybe because I've always wanted to be one of those guys - I've always wanted to be a big, strapping, handsome, popular guy who happens to be intelligent, witty, well-read. To me, these guys have it all. And I guess that's how I see Glenn.

What a lot of information to digest tonight! I don't want to go too into detail on what you specifically said tonight, because I realize beforehand that I will be making these letters available for public consumption, and since you don't know that yet, I don't want to presume to share your private thoughts without your permission.

I think Sam wants to protect me and keep me from getting hurt, which is why she questions the validity of me wanting to continue whatever it is we have. And I have to admit, I wasn't quite sure what to expect, going into it tonight. It occurred to me that really, I haven't known you that long, and you might have some big, weird freak-out story to tell me tonight about why you haven't called me. But, after listening to you, I have to say that it doesn't sound like anything too out of the ordinary - or, at least, nothing I haven't gone through myself before. Questions of self-esteem - alienation for the city you're living in - confusion about the opposite sex, relationships, and your role and priorities in them. These are not unusual things to fret about.

I find myself in a weird predicament - I was thoroughly committed to not getting involved with someone (mentally) that was unsure of themselves - no, wait, that came

out all wrong. I told myself that I wouldn't become attracted anymore to someone that has the capacity to make my life a living hell. Yeah, that's better. No offense.

What I mean, of course, is that you really do have the capacity at this point to make my life confusing and, in theory, miserable, which is why I told you tonight that it's important that you decide as soon as possible what kind of relationship you wish to pursue with me. I've already gone through that period of my life where I've hung around a woman who's been attracted to me --> pushed me away --> been attracted to me --> pushed me away --> repeat ad nauseam. I have no desire to do that again, and I will not do that again.

But back to my original point, which is that I do find myself attracted to you, which I never meant to happen, considering what a shaky situation we're in. Oh, but I guess one really can't control who one is or is not going to be attracted to. But, boy, it'd be great if you could, wouldn't it?

Hey - wow - I'm saying a lot of stuff tonight that I didn't mean to blab, aren't I? It's because I'm drunk. Just thank God I've cut off my access to call my old friends in the middle of the night when I'm drunk, right? I'll answer that - yes, yes, yes. It's one of the many reasons I got rid of my phone.

Hey, found my black pen! I'm feeling much more sure of myself again. With as much handwriting that I do, I really should buy myself a decent pen. But I keep writing with all of these shitty nickel-a-pen things that I steal from my temp jobs.

"Warlock II" is on the TV that's right above my head, and I don't know whether or not to take it as some sort of sign. Ooh, boy, we got free tickets in college to see the original "Warlock" and I swear, the movie was so bad, we asked for our money back after the film.

The thing was - we were all huge fans of Julian Sands, from Gothic and Siesta and Room with a View, and we really thought, "Julian Sands cannot make a bad movie," just like I think right now, "Eric Stolz cannot make a bad movie". But, oh boy, were we wrong. And, you know, Julian Sands hasn't made a film since "Warlock" that I know of. Coincidence?

I wonder how many Eric Stolz movies I can list off? Let's see -

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (I loved)

Mask (I loved)

Some Kind of Wonderful (where I fell in love with Mary Stuart Masterston for the first time)

The Waterdance (with Helen Hunt - haven't seen, but supposed to be very good)

Killing Zoe (not his best, but still good)

Pulp Fiction (what can you say?)

Sleep With Me (haven't seen)

Bodies, Rest and Motion (which I absolutely love and all my friends hate)

recurring character on "Mad About You" (which I used to watch religiously but haven't since they moved it to Sundays)

And, of course, he dates Bridget Fonda, who I have a huge embarrassing crush on. And here's a list of films of hers that I've seen (feel free to skip ahead)-

Godfather III (dates Andy Garcia and shows her breasts - kinda boring movie)  
Scandal (plays a British hooker and shows her breasts - also a boring movie)  
SWF (plays the protagonist and shows her breasts - I like this film)  
Singles (again, a film I love but all my friends hate)  
Bodies, Rest and Motion (aforementioned - shows her breasts here, too)  
Point of No Return (which I really should hate because of the bastardization of La Femme Nikita, but I can't)  
It Had to Be You (ooh, MAN THIS FILM SUCKS!!! NEVER, NEVER SEE THIS MOVIE UNLESS YOU HAVE A CRUSH ON BRIDGET FONDA)  
Doc Hollywood (SEE ABOVE)  
Little Buddha (which rocks so hard I don't even know where to begin. If you haven't seen this movie yet... SEE IT!)

And here's Bridget Fonda films I know of but I haven't seen yet-

Leather Jackets  
Shag  
Camilla  
The Road to Wellville  
City Hall (not released yet)

Oh, I got it bad. Yes I do.



January 10,  
1996



Amy,

There's a beautiful woman sitting on the el next to me and it's making me uncharacteristically nervous. It's eight in the morning and usually all I'm concerned with this time of morning is if I can drag my sleeping ass to work on time. I'm not used to having to worry about how I'm presenting myself to the world this early in the day - if the back of my hair is sticking up or if there's sleep in my eyes.

As a result, I'm fidgety and I can't seem to find a comfortable position on my plastic chair. I sit here and wonder what's going on in her head. I wonder that a lot about people I sit next to on the el.

6 pm.

If you haven't been able to tell yet, I have a fascination with the el. The novel I'm working on right now, my first project since moving up here, is loaded with el references. The main characters meet and fall in love on the el; it also falls apart on the el; the characters you're not supposed to like hate the el - they call it "dirty" and "dangerous".

To me, it is two things at once - the el symbolizes urbanism so much to me, which I am so totally entranced with at my tender age of 26 right now. I want to be an urbanite - I want to be THE Urbanite. There's something so incredibly romantic in me right now in the notion of living in the city and



never leaving the city limits - buying my cigarettes one pack at a time - picking up the newspaper at a newsstand everyday - not owning a driver's license - seeing a homeless guy pass out in front of me and not even be fazed - and, of course, riding these rickety trains back and forth, everyday, to get where I want to go.

Which gets me to the second reason I like the el so much, which is the historical perspective. The el is a foundation of the Chicago mystique - one of those handful of things that any person in the nation can list off about any large city if you ask them. I imagine the el is the oldest thing in the Chicago mythos that is still in existence and/or operation.

I have a more general fascination with old-world Chicago - the terra-cotta skyscrapers and the slaughterhouse - Burnham and Wright and Van Der Rohe - the Machine - up in my neighborhood, the art deco hotels and the big bands. The el slips very easily into that fascination. Knowing that you're traveling the same route that the train took one hundred plus years ago - that you're stopping at the same stops - well, I know it's not everyone's cup of tea, but I think it's really cool.

By the way, for the last couple of days, I keep thinking I'm seeing Liz Phair everywhere. I keep swearing that I'm standing right next to her on the el or in a store, until the woman turns around, and they look a lot like her, but it's not her. I'm not quite sure how to interpret this, so I'm taking it as a sign that I'm actually going to run into her again soon.

# Jason



January 11,  
1996

# Amy,

Brynn and I just got done seeing *Everyman* at Steppenwolf, which sucked more than you could ever imagine a live theatre experience could.

A quick sidebar - I'm watching a young white man and a young white woman sit together on the el. They won't make eye contact with each other, and I can't tell if they're strangers or a couple that I am a witness to a middle of a fight. It's strange to watch, to say the least.

Anyway, I took the opportunity tonight to grill Brynn about any and all things you may have said to her about me. She wouldn't tell me a lot, but she did say that you said that it seemed like, once I realized we weren't going to have sex, I wasn't interested in having a friendship at all. Now, I know there's a good chance I'll never give you these letters, but I feel this need to explain to you why I was acting like this. Brynn mentioned this particular thing to me because she said it seemed unusual behavior for me, which it is, because that's not the reason I was acting like that.

I made a decision when I moved to Chicago not to form plutonic friendships with women I'm attracted to. I did this a number of times in college, always with disastrous effects. Every day I would hang out with them, I was constantly reminded of how much I liked them and how they couldn't return that attraction to me. It reminded me on a daily basis how I was a failure at finding romance in my life. Eventually the woman would forget that I was attracted to her and they would start telling me the problems involved with someone else that they've become attracted to, which would inevitably make me miserable.



(January 12)

So, it might be harsh of me, but I made the decision not to put myself in that position anymore, and frankly, it's made my life a much happier one. BUT... it has nothing to do with whether or not we'd be having sex. I just know that it would be very difficult for me to go out and do "friend" type things because I like you - well, I like you in a romantic sense - you see what I'm saying.

I'd like to convince you that sex is not that important a thing to me, but I know that you'd never believe it, because 1) of the sexual history you've had; and 2) because I'm a guy. But, really - it's not. I admit, it used to be - I used to have this obsession with the ramifications of what sex said about a relationship - it used to be very important to me. But I think the facts that 1) I've recently gone a long time having hardly any sex (if you don't count us, I've had sex two times in two and a half years) and 2) both those times was with someone I wasn't dating and 3) in that time, I've gotten into two relationships that I didn't have sex at all - all combine to make me realize that it's something that's not very important in my life anymore. I guess it's that I learned to live without it, which I suppose is pretty depressing, but is the truth.

Anyway, there it is. I was a little drunk by the time Brynn and I parted company (which I always seem to be when Brynn and I get together) and I stopped and called you last night to explain this to you, but you weren't home. But it was kind of nice because I woke up this morning with a page waiting for me - you called sometime during the night to return my call, which is the first time I think you've done that since Christmas vacation. I want to call you today and tell you these things but I work in a very public location and I think I'd feel weird discussing this subject in front of people I don't know.

# Jason

p.s. Everyman really, really, really, really, really sucked.

January 12,  
1996



## WHY I DRINK.

A bitter little essay by Jason Pettus.

- To remind myself of the lows that human nature can sink itself to.
- Because it's there.
- So I can have an excuse to feel sorry for myself.
- So I can have an excuse to play the jukebox.
- For all the wrong reasons.
- Because I'm bored.
- Because I figure it will give me the courage to hit on women that I want to hit on, while in reality it makes me even more withdrawn than when I'm sober (example: I'm sitting in a bar drunk right now and I'm writing in this stupid little fuckin' notebook).
- Because I hate mankind and drunkenness makes it easier to do so.
- Because I have no friends.
- Because my cigarettes taste better when I'm drunk.
- It's a secret attempt to rebel against my parents without letting them know that I'm rebelling (ha-ha).
- As an excuse to tip heavy.
- Because, no matter what anti-substance abuse people say, it does make your problems go away, at least for a night.
- I'm cultivating the personality of a moody, obsessed, alcoholic literary genius, so that when I die young and become a cult hero, my fans won't be disappointed.
- It's cool to order weird, expensive types of liquor.
- I get to be the cynical, misogynistic, racist bastard that I always want to be when I'm sober but don't have the courage to go through with.
- I like to be self-pitying and think of all the fun things my friends are currently out doing.
- Occasionally I'll meet a cool person or get a date.



January 13,  
1996



# Amy,

You could say I was drunk last night.

Despite all my efforts, every so often I get in an extremely self-pitying, self-destructive mood, which usually involve me drinking myself into a stupor. I could try to come up with a complex rationalization of my behavior, but the simple truth is that at times I get scared or depressed or lonely, and I take the easy way out. I take comfort in the fact that I do it a lot less now than I used to, but it still exists.

Um, that's all.

# Jason

January 14,  
1996



Amy,

I'm off today to shoot the author photo for Dreaming of Laura Ingalls. I've got two ideas: in one, I'm playing in the street in the Loop with a bunch of toy cars; in the other, I'm dressed up like an angel in a school play (white sheet over me and a coat hanger bent into a halo with tin foil over it) and I'm looking real bitter and smoking cigarettes, like on the el or in front of the Art Institute, etc. Katherine and I are shooting for each other - she needs some photos of her in a cocktail dress for an article she's doing in her zine.

Speaking of zines, I went to the opening night of a play a friend of mine is directing ("The Ugly Man") and her friend volunteered to do some illustrations for my zine, which is cool because supposedly he is pretty good, although I've never seen his stuff.

I told Brynn last night that I called you Friday, and all she did was groan and shake her head. Once things start going bad, I have this wonderful habit of completely driving them into the ground. Nice, mmm?

The driver of our el just walked off the train. I hate it when they do that, because it always makes me think there's a fire on the train or something.

Well, we're at my stop - Jason.

January 18,  
1996

Amy,

A couple of random things I've been thinking the last few days, that I wanted to put on paper:

-I've realized that my bathroom has become my sanctuary. I've never owned such a nice bathroom before - everything's brand new, so there's no grime or mold or gunk on anything. I own a seven foot long clawfoot bathtub (well, maybe not seven feet, but it's long). I've gotten in this habit, I've realized, that whenever I'm stressed or tired or bored, I'll run a very deep, very hot bath, using this scented bath oil I bought at one of the foo-foo "Bath Shop" places. The I'll just soak and let the water sweat out my stress - smoke a cigarette in the tub, which is one of my favorite things to do - watch some TV or listen to an album. It's a new sensation to me - a new, clean bathroom where I'm enjoying long baths.

-You know you've given up on the idea of meeting someone when you wake up one morning and realize that you don't even make a pretense anymore of cleaning off the other half of your double bed. I woke up this morning and realized that I have a radio, a notebook, a couple of pens, my remote control, and a number of magazines I fell asleep reading on the other side of my bed. They've all been there for weeks.

-I just got done reading Charles Bukowski's Hollywood. In it, he talks a number of times about how he's getting increasingly sick of humanity - how most people that exist just seem like idiots, and when he meets new people, nine times out of ten the incident serves to just put him in an even worse mood.

I recognize parts of this already in myself, at 26. I wonder to myself if I will be as bitter as Bukowski by the time I'm in my 60's. I used to tell myself that I would always keep my optimism, that nothing in life would get me to not keep looking at the bright side of things. But, in the year and a half I've been in Chicago, I've already lost like, half my optimism I had in college. A big city has this way of making you extremely cynical and jaded. Hmm. So, I've got 40+ years ahead of me - I wonder how much worse I'll get.

-I've made the decision this week to pepper my next novel with all kinds of references to the Star Wars trilogy - like those "Sailor" books, that the movie Wild at Heart was based on, are peppered with references to The Wizard of Oz. I think I should be able to make a good go of it and not make it too stupid. Hopefully.

Bye - Jason.

10:40 am.

On my smoke break. A friend of mine said to me the other day, "You know, I just can't figure you out." She likes to grab onto a certain trait of someone that is the dominant part of their personality - file them away under that. She said I don't have that - that I'm so many different things at so many different times.

It's true, and it kind of bothers me. I wish I could find a trait to stick with, at least so I can have some identity, even if it was bad - "Oh, Jason Pettus? He's that angry guy, right?" or "Jason Pettus? He's that pervert." Something like that.

I think it's why I have so many problems with jobs or thinking about a career. Once I learn how to master something, I no longer have any interest in doing it. Which I guess is the opposite way of find a good job. Take, for example, my radio work. Once I got really good at being a DJ and a programmer, I quit. And my friends will ask, "Well, why don't you try to get a job in radio? You're good at that." And I think, "Well, I've already learned how to be an extremely successful DJ, so why would I want to continue doing that? What a bore!"

There are just way too many other, exciting things out there that I've never tried or I'm bad at, and I can't stand the thought of going back to something that I've already learned and just going through the motions, repeating the formula I know will be a success, when there are so many new, uncharted things I could be doing for the first time. Another example - right now in my life, I'm trying to become a better writer. But at the same time, there's a part of me that's really interested in moving on and learning how to: sing, ballroom dance, design web pages, direct movies, play the violin, make amateur pornography, and play football.

I'm really beginning to understand now that this is why I majored in conceptual photography - it's the one thing in my life, I feel, that I have tried and tried and studied and worked on, and still absolutely suck at. I mean, I think I just blow. And I guess most people would never consider making a career out of the one thing in life they're the worst at - but it's how my mind works. By majoring in photography, I knew that I would be constantly challenged and never grow tired of it (or, at least, not for a really long time). Which is why I think I'm getting back into writing again so heavily.

And, you know, I turn 27 in about a month and a half, which is creeping up on 30. I've had an opportunity in Chicago to become friends with a number of people over 30, and they've all said the same thing - that when they reached their 30th year, they got into a blue funk because none of them had done the fantastic things that they all told themselves through their 20's that they were going to do, and they realized for the first time that it was too later for some of those things.

And, damnit, I want to have some kind of an inkling of a long-term career started by the time I'm 30. I don't want to still be temping

[letter not finished]

January 22,  
1996



My eyes hurt from looking at all this little, tiny type. I'm trying to find a literary agent for Laura Ingalls, and I halfsized when I xeroxed the list of agents, to save money.

How do you decide? They all sound alike! "Accepts fiction and non-fiction; no unsolicited mssgs; query first. No reading fees; handles film and TV rights. Agents in all major foreign markets." Well, I mean, what the fuck does that mean? Who's the agent that's going to turn my book into a seminal Gen X cult hit, and who's the agent who's going to put my book on the backburner and send me a bill for twenty bucks each month for "copying and postage fees" and never get the damn thing published? God, I wish I knew more about how the literary world works. I feel lost and scared and like there's a thousand people out there right now that are just so completely ready to take advantage of my naiveté.

I saw Bret Easton Ellis speak, and I mean goddamn he just looked so fucking sure of himself. I wanted to jump up and yell, "Wasn't there a time you didn't know what you were doing? Come on, tell us! We need to know that our heroes were once schleps like us!"

But then again, he got his first novel published when he was 20, which became a national sensation and was made into a movie with Andrew McCarthy, Robert Downey Jr. and Jami Gertz. So maybe he never went through that. He admitted at the talk that he had written three or four novels before *Less Than Zero*, so that means... well, he had to have been 19 when he finished it, so he had written 4 complete novels by the age of 19. Fucking amazing. Well, if you ask me, anyway.

My literary heroes right now? They fall along fairly rigid lines of a list of writers that the rest of the nation seems to hate right now:

Douglas Coupland (who is God)

(and also the most hated of all cont. writers right now)

Bret Easton Ellis

Donna Tartt

Mark Leyner

Banana Yoshimoto

Greg Bills

January 25,  
1996

Amy,

I went to this poetry reading the other night, re-met a girl I had met months ago, named Carrie. Now, at the time I originally met her, I was hung up in this philosophical dilemma involving her best friend, Rachel (AKA Backpack Girl. Have I ever explained my theory of assigning supervillian names to people? Another story, another time). I was very confused because I was attracted to Backpack Girl but repulsed by her at the same time, so I didn't really have a chance to concentrate on meeting Carrie. But I re-met her last night and I realized that she is interesting and kind of cute, and has a good story about life to tell.

Anyway, at one point Carrie and I were at the bar ordering drinks and we got into a conversation and then pretty soon the conversation had taken over and we were over in the corner, ignoring everyone else and having this really deep, intimate discussion.

Have you ever had one of those moments where you're in the middle of a really good conversation, and then all of a sudden a light clicks on over your head and everything comes together in this great moment of clarity and you realize, "Wait a minute - this person is hitting on me!" and then you think "Wow! How great!" because 1) You're proud of yourself for actually recognizing the fact that someone's making a pass at you and 2) it's just great to get hit on, because it reminds you that you have a sexuality that other people can see and appreciate - a thing that I think most of the people in my circle of friends don't get nearly enough of.

So I don't know if anything's going to happen between us, but I asked her out for Saturday and she said "sure", so there ya go. To recap: I got a date through a girl I wanted to have sex with but was afraid of having sex with, and I'm telling the whole story to a girl I did have sex with, which promptly killed the relationship we were forming. I really need a change in lifestyle.

6 pm.

I'm at Third Coast! I've always wanted to come and hang out here, but was always a little intimidated because it's in the middle of the Gold Coast, so all these really rich, beautiful people hang out here, plus most of the celebrities who are in town to do a touring play loiter here because it's right next to the two or three big hotels that they usual-

ly stay at.

The place is okay, but yeah, you can just smell the money in the room - it oozes out of everyone's pores. Oh, and a bowl of soup cost four bucks, so that should tell you something.

I need to get back to New York again, where you can hang out in a place like this anywhere in the city and still have a decent chance of seeing somebody famous.

Mom told me last night that one of my assistant principals from high school died. His name was Kyle Thrasher - I had maybe a total of six or eight principals and asst. principals throughout high school and out of all of them, Thrasher was the only one who ever gave me any shit. He hated everyone, and he would go out of his way to blow up innocent incidents, enact new school laws for no particular reason, or sometimes just completely fabricate things, all for the purpose of screaming and yelling at 16 year olds. He even put the valedictorian on disciplinary notice, which was the first time she had ever got in trouble in her entire academic life!

Anyway, it turns out that Thrasher had a nervous breakdown a couple of years ago and had to be put in a mental institution. Apparently it didn't help, because he went into depression again and committed suicide last week. Now, did he deserve to die? Well, I don't think I'd go that far. But am I sad that he went away, humiliated himself and his family, and went through a long period of insanity-driven self-torture? Frankly, no. Nor am I surprised. The Destruction of Kyle Thrasher is, in a way, concrete physical support of my theory that anyone who chooses high school administration as a career is, at best, a weak, anal-retentive idiot who wishes to boss others around but lacks the intelligence and guts to do it to other adults; and, at worst, mentally imbalanced, which I really do believe a great number of high school administrators are.

I mean, here's a guy that terrorized, bullied and unfairly held a hand over thousands of high school kids - over his career, probably tens of thousands. Now, remember, this is a very traumatic thing for 15-18 year olds - they have yet to develop a thick skin and an enlarged cynicism that allows adults to deal with assholes like him. I personally know half a dozen girls from my graduating class alone that Thrasher made cry during the course of one year. So do I feel said about what happened to him? Hell, no - I think the little prick got everything he fucking deserved.

It surprised me how angry I am about the subject, ten years after the fact. But that's high school for you, I suppose. The few years you are there develop anger, bitterness and neuroses that you keep with you the rest of your life.

Today is another important ten year anniversary for me - the tenth anniversary of the space shuttle explosion. Now, everytime I bring the subject up, my friends all groan and yell at me that I'm sounding "too fucking Gen X," but the fact remains that the explosion was a major, major turning point in my life. Let me explain.

By the time I came into my own as a young adult - early/mid '80s - just about everything in life had already gone through its period of disillusionment. Ever since a small child, I had already been raised not to believe in the government, politicians, television, the news media, advertising, big corporations, religion, idealism, and the notion of guaranteeing the "safety" of anything - from the safety of our new car to the safety of a long-term job.

The only thing left was NASA. When I was growing up, the public perception of NASA was this goofy, yet highly efficient, group of nerds whose only interest was pure

science. Politics? They don't need 'em. Cutting costs and shoddy workmanship? Why would they care? NASA wasn't about pinching pennies - it was about pushing the envelope. To my mind, NASA had no need to cut costs 'cause they were still receiving megabucks from the government, and no one does shoddy work, because everyone wanted to work at NASA, so they could pick and choose from the cream of the crop. I've thought about this subject many times since then, and I still think that it was the one and only institution in the world I could believe in without reservation.

God, how I wanted to be an astronaut! In third grade I memorized the planets and their order - in junior high dad and I built a telescope, a really kick ass one, that you could see the rings of Saturn with, and on a clear night, the Orion Nebula.

I was a member of the McDonnell Douglas Astronomy Club, too - a bunch of middle-aged geeks with these humongous homemade telescopes, that they'd set up on a Saturday night and we'd all hang out on someone's back porch and look at Neptune, all hazy and blue and like this jewel that was so utterly attainable and unattainable at the same time, like you could reach out and put the thing in your hand and you would be able to carry immortality with you always. I used to dream of the day that I would rocket into space and do my bit to raise the collective human consciousness just a tiny notch. I'll tell you something I've never told another person - to this day, I still dream of floating in that brilliant void, of crushing moon dirt under my boots. It makes me cry everytime I think about (like I'm doing right now, in the middle of Third Coast - how pathetic) because I know it's never going to happen. I'll never get into space. Like you would say, "it's a fucking shame."

The explosion changed everything. First of all, I happened to be in a position to see the explosion live, because today also happens to be the tenth anniversary of my Senior Skip Day (86 school days from the end of the year - 1986, the year I graduated, you see the connection). My friend Andy Muenks and I were waiting for snow to melt before going to the mall, and I was watching the launch to kill time.

Now, it also happens that just about every grade school in the nation was also watching the event live, because, least you forget, this was the long-awaited "first teacher in space" flight, which had been touted for months by politicians as the biggest national warm and fuzzy moment since... well, I don't know, since America fell in love with the Cosby's. A national, exhaustive contest had been held to pick the best teacher in America - and they found our sweet martyr, Krista McCullif (I don't know if I'm spelling that right), a woman with the combination of Mary Poppins-sweetness, think tank-scientific purity, Zen monk-discipline, and Mary Tyler Moore-sexiness. The photograph of that smiling crew was splayed across every newspaper front page as if it was the Mercury program all over again. McCullif was a national hero before she ever even got in the damn thing. And it sparked a pop-culture/grade-school science tie-in that wasn't matched until Jurassic Park.

So, initially, just the pure shock of the explosion - the fiery death live in front of your eyes - the evening news video clips of hundreds of children in a gymnasium, gathered around a large-screen television, crying and screaming and running around in miniature panic, the adults unable to stop them because they were in a blind daze themselves, thinking, "That could have been me. That almost was me" - this alone was enough to start my head reeling.

Then the investigation. Shoddy o-rings. Inspectors who signed forms unseen so they





could knock off early and get a beer. People in the company that knew this was going to happen but didn't say anything because of office politics and petty fights over who was "in the loop." People who did say something but were ignored because upper management was whispering in ears, "If we don't get these flights up on time they're cutting our budget."

And everyday, everywhere you turned, people scrambling for cover - people saying the same thing over and over-

"It's not my fault."

"It's not my fault."

"It's not my fault!"

Various things that I used to hold dear to my heart have died over time. 1986 was the year that my ability to devoutly believe in something died. And in the ten years since, I've never been able to look at anything or get involved in anything or meet anybody without a part of me thinking, "Okay- so where's the catch?"

It was my disillusionment, it was my Watergate, it was my \$64,000 Question, it was my Ralph Nader, and fuck you if you think that sounds too Gen X, because it's true, and it will remain true regardless of whether anyone else in my generation feels this way.

I was channel-surfing last night and I ran across an interview with Krista McCaullif's mom. They asked her if she was bitter at NASA, and she said, "I can't be, because no one purposefully sent my daughter up to die. It was just a case of human error." God, am I depressed.



January 26,  
1996

# Amy,

A random thought-

The popular notion of "Generation X" right now is of these freaks with long hair and big sideburns and nose rings, who are too idiotic and weird-looking to hold a decent job if their life depended on it.

People tend to forget that in Generation X, the Douglas Coupland book that started the whole craze, all three of the main characters were people who had held corporate jobs, for a year or more. They realized the jobs were killing them, so they made the decision by choice to go back to bartending, which they all did in college. The people in Coupland's book were conservative looking, in their mid to late 20's, highly educated, who liked money just as much as the next person. Baby boomers have changed the image of Generation X into a bunch of lazy, shiftless imbeciles, because they are threatened by the idea of people who are just as smart and ambitious as they were when they were 25, but who so disdain and reject the ideas that Boomers have about success, that they refuse to accept jobs that will pay them a decent wage.

On the el on the way to work this morning, a guy sat down next to me. He reeked of liquor, and it almost made me vomit.

February 2,  
1996



Amy,

I find myself in a strange position tonight. I am in "Governor's", a cheesy frat-guy-hang-out-after-work kind of bar in the loop. I come here on Fridays because 1) it's right next to my temp agency and 2) it used to be where we'd go "after work" when I was at Frankel and I keep hoping to run into Frankel people here.

The weird thing about this bar is that the entire bar staff are these attractive, slacker girls that live in Wicker Park. Hmm, I don't know, so don't even ask.

Here's the strange position I'm finding myself in - over the last several weeks, I have developed a crush on one of the women behind the bar - short black hair, kinda sassy and a little pissy - all the traits I find irresistible in a woman.

But - there's a wai

[letter not finished]

February 3,  
1996

Sorry - my friends showed up mid-sentence and I never got to finish my letter. What I was saying...

There was a waitress that kept flirting with me all night. I was folding my 100 query letters, waiting for my friends, and she came over and asked what I was doing and I gave her one of the letters and she carried it around while she was delivering drinks and read it and then came over and we had this little discussion about writing and books, etc. etc.

So, this continued through the evening. At one point, on a whim, I tell her that I'm reading on Tuesday nights at Sweet Alice if she's interested in hearing what kind of work I do. And it turns out she lives just a few blocks from Sweet Alice, so she writes the info down and says she'll probably come Tuesday. Plus, she's doing all these little things all night, like emptying my ashtray when I'm not her table, and getting the other waitress about halfway through the night to switch so that now she's my waitress - little, inconsequential things like that.

I've been thinking a lot, a lot, in the last few weeks about how I currently interact with the opposite sex, and the situation with these two women are a perfect example.

I'm very attracted to the bartender, but the thought doesn't even cross my mind of asking her out, because she has made no first forward move. The waitress, on the other hand, is someone I probably wouldn't think twice about (romantically), yet I flirt with her, "ask her out" in this friendly, round-the-bush kind of way, and would probably even get in a relationship with her (or at least probably sleep with her), all because she took the trouble to flirt with me first.

Let me interrupt for a moment - I just noticed some red spots under my feet on the el, and I looked around, and the entire floor of my train is covered with splatters of blood. The opposite wall of the train, too.

So... on introspection in the last few weeks, I've realized that my



dating habits are starting to regress, to my pre-college days. In the last six-twelve months, I've realized that I'm starting to think in that old way - that women I'm very attracted to couldn't possibly be interested in me, because look at them - they're beautiful. I take any sign of a lack of explicitly flirting as a sign that a woman is not interested at all. And I end up going out with women that I wouldn't normally go out with, that I might not even be that attracted to, simply because they express outwardly an interest in me, and I think that if I don't take advantage of the invitation, I won't date at all, and it occurs to me that it's better to date people that I kinda like, kinda attracted to, who are kinda interesting, than not date at all.

Surprisingly, my romantic life is at its busiest since 1993, when I ended up in things with Beth, Brynn and Amy in a six month period. But it's a cold, sterile romantic life. I don't really get that involved with these women that have been in and out of my life in the last six months - when they fall apart, as they always do, I feel no sense of disappointment, jubilation, anger - I am devoid of emotion on the subject.

I suppose that it's a good way for me to be right now, because I used to get rather... overwhelmed by women, should we say, and it's good for me to be casual for awhile. But... there is no passion in my life. Women enter my life, I go out on dates, I sleep with them, exchange gifts with them, and they leave - and throughout, I am rational and blasé. I just think that ultimately it's a bad way for me, because ultimately it is teaching me to once again be afraid of attractive women, which will lead me back to not dating at all.

February 4,  
1996



Amy,

Have I told you yet about this new open mike I've been going to? It's at this bar in Wicker Park called Sweet Alice, and it is filled with an unusually large percentage of really good writers. Oh, and plus everyone's hot, which is beside the point but a fun bonus nevertheless.

February 6,  
1996

# Anyway...

I've been getting a big response to my work there. Last week I got close to what you'd call an ovation, and five or six people I don't know stopped by and shook my hand and told me how much they liked my story. It's the most recognition I've received for my work since I've moved to Chicago. I realize for the first time in two years that I miss it - I miss the recognition, the "fame." I should explain.

This is difficult for me to talk about, for reasons that I haven't quite figured out yet. But, it is, so if this comes out sounding weird, that's why.

How do I put this? By my last year in Columbia Missouri, I had become very successful - I had an extremely high recognition factor. There was a guy in Columbia and whenever he'd introduce me (to people or at events) he would refer to me as "Jason Pettus, cult hero." And I suppose that's a fairly accurate title - I definitely had followers, people that supported my new projects unconditionally, who thought I was... well, that I could do no wrong, artistically. Let's put it like that.

And there was definitely people who saw me as a heretic, that everything I did was part of a complex conspiracy of shams perpetrated on the Columbia public - that thought I could do no right.

I spent a lot of time massaging all the projects I worked on - performance art, the art gallery, my one-man show, my weekly radio show, my comic strip, the comedy improv group, my work in Stir, the open-mike night, and on and on - massaging these projects for the greatest public exposure and greatest self-promotion possible. And it worked - God, did it work better than anybody ever thought it would. By the time I left, I was the small college town equivalent of a household name - a multitude of people I would never meet would have opinions of me - I would be introduced to new people and I would say, "Hi, I'm Jason Pettus," and they'd go, "Well, duh," or they'd say, "Oh, the Jason Pettus?" and how do you respond to that? "Well, I'm a Jason Pettus - I'm not sure about the Jason Pettus."

I treat these last four years in Columbia as a microcosm of what my eventual national fame will be like. And... hmm. I don't know. I have a lot of issues involving fame, and they aren't nearly to the point of being worked out in my head.

(This is the last page of the notebook)



# scars **no!te!e!qnd**

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