

EXARO VERSUS

BIBLIOTHEQUE NATIONALE

JANET KUYPERS
PROSE, STORIES, ESSAYS,
JOURNALS, BOOKS 1988-2003

THEY WON'T STAY DEAD *Book Reviews*

Janet rules. Period. There's so many feelings and emotional heartache in her works, that many of her pieces can still moisten my eyes and heave my chest even after umpteenth

readings. Sometimes raw, sometimes polished, sometimes shocking in its honesty, and always moving, Janet's writing continually manages to wring some sort of reaction from the reader. One can almost see the tears dripped on the manuscripts, nakedly displayed for all who care to see, be it her tears, or yours. It's

packed with human feelings, much of which concerns feminist issues, but don't let that put you off. This is not Riot Girl ranting, but rather the fears and feelings of a highly intelligent, articulate and talented modern woman. Very emotional, very readable and very recommended. An absolute must for poetry/prose enthusiasts.

NICK DISPOLDO *Small Press Review*

Like Sylvia Plath, Kuypers has a sense of existential rage but, unlike Plath, her rage is more incisive and focused. She is concerned with problems, whether societal or internal.

THE PROSE GARDEN

Janet Kuypers, is art director for a Chicago publishing group and publisher of her own literary magazine. Her works have appeared in print and on the Internet. Through her own experiences, she peers into the emotional fiber

(comments)

underlying society's responsibilities to itself, to its loved and unloved ones, and to its earth. She sees for us all.

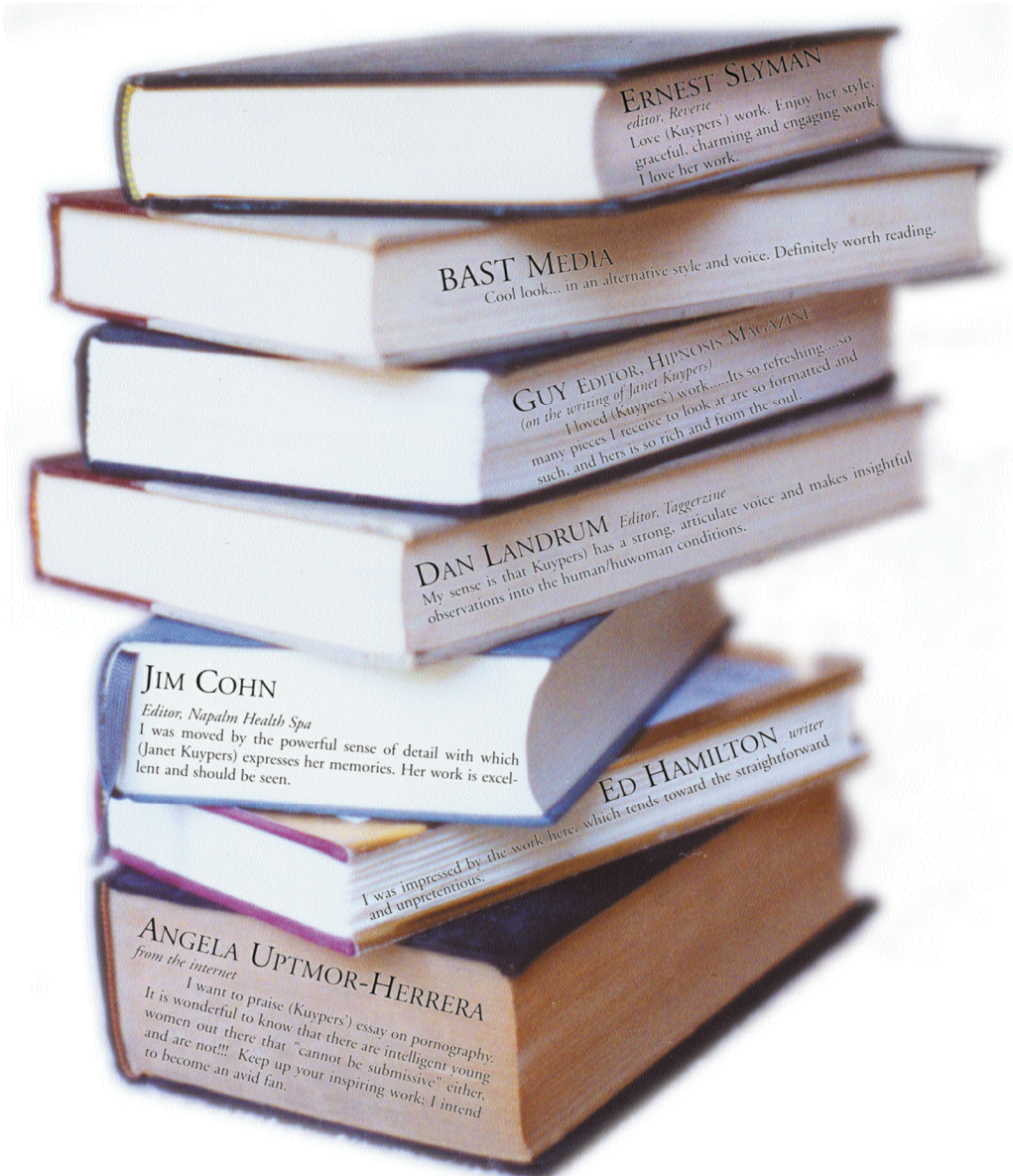
LIONEL BERNARD *Washington D.C.*

I read (I Remember) twice and I must say that it was quite moving. What I like about her writing is that it is very personal and she writes as though you were holding a conversation. Keep up the good work!

EXARO VERSUS



prose collection
janet kuypers
scars publications
with penny dreadful press



ERNEST SLYMAN
editor, Reverie
Love (Kuypers) work. Enjoy her style, graceful, charming and engaging work. I love her work.

BAST MEDIA
Cool look... in an alternative style and voice. Definitely worth reading.

GUY EDITOR, HIPNOSIS MAGAZINE
(on the writing of Janet Kuypers)
I loved (Kuypers) work....Its so refreshing...so many pieces I receive to look at are so formatted and such, and hers is so rich and from the soul.

DAN LANDRUM *Editor, Taggerzine*
My sense is that Kuypers) has a strong, articulate voice and makes insightful observations into the human/huwoman conditions.

JIM COHN
Editor, Napalm Health Spa
I was moved by the powerful sense of detail with which (Janet Kuypers) expresses her memories. Her work is excellent and should be seen.

ED HAMILTON *writer*
I was impressed by the work here, which tends toward the straightforward and unpretentious.

ANGELA UPTMOR-HERRERA
from the internet
I want to praise (Kuypers) essay on pornography. It is wonderful to know that there are intelligent young women out there that "cannot be submissive" either, and are not!!! Keep up your inspiring work; I intend to become an avid fan.

EXARO VERSUS

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fiction is believable when it is filled with nonfiction

*explanations come in nonfiction
look in history for your stories
and it makes the extraordinary a real possibility*

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Introduction

INTRODUCTION

ANGELINE HAWKES-CRAIG

Everything in life is a journey. The journey to self-discovery. The journey of love. The journey of survival.

In all facets of life's journey, people must make decisions. Decisions that will choose the next path to be traveled. Some of those paths lead to new and better experiences. Sometimes the traveler falls off of the path and the journey becomes arduous, perhaps chaotic, perhaps doomed.

In O. Henry's "Roads of Destiny", his character David Mignot is thrust into a cyclical journey that emphasizes the notion that no matter what path a person takes in life—the end result—that person's fate—will always be the same. O. Henry's own journey was marred by alcoholism and prison incarceration, but he managed to write over 300 tales that gave him a lasting literary legacy. Is fate predetermined? Are we just cogs in some invisible master's great machinery—all grinding and turning—just serving out our mediocre existences as parts of "a larger plan"? Can we control our destinies?

All journeys must have a destination. A jumping off point. An end result. Is death that moment of arrival—or departure? If so—is the journey of life solely about death and how we get there? Should we fear it—or embrace it? In *The Written Word*, Janet Kuypers writes, "You can't let the thought of death kill you." Can we live without the constant reminder of death? From the moment of birth, everyone begins to age, to grow, to travel one step closer to the end of the line. Can a journey be made without a thought of the conclusion, the end of the trip? Are there truly those individuals who live in the moment, taking one day at a time, never thinking of the future or what it might hold? I have never encountered such a person—some thought of tomorrow must be formulated in order to get through the present day.

Journeys. A journey of a few written words on paper dancing into a vivid image—and then into a unified collection. From a sentence to a book, the written word expands and travels bringing the reader along for the ride. A journey of whom you are—and how

you got there—how you became that person. And, when you reach the journey's end and look back upon the distance traveled, can you say as Kuypers says in "Seeing Things Differently", "Everything looks different now?" Isn't that discovery part of the journey? What sort of journey have you taken if you get to the end and everything is the same?

Life is a journey—of youth to old age—of ignorance to knowledge. Whether it is a journey to old gas station restrooms—or to the splendor and romance of Paris, France. Whether it is a journey to the hellish remnants of the concentration camp at Dachau, Germany—or to the crowning glory of the spirit of creativity at the Louvre—the journey of life encompasses change and demands evolution.

Kuypers writes, "So I now embrace change with open arms, I welcome it into my life, and I keep my eyes focused on the future, to make the best out of what I have...in order to face the challenges I give myself in the...lifetime to come." That lifetime is the journey. We cannot control each bump or pothole in life's road. Sometimes we don't even get to choose which path to travel—but all of us are in control of how we ultimately make that journey—of how we get to the end. Will you fight or will you run? Will you fade away or will you survive? Will you cower and cave into the pressures and burdens along the way—or will you stand strong, believing there must be a greater purpose to life; there must be a *raison d'être*.

The journey is yours. Bon Voyage!

Angeline Hawkes-Craig
Author of *The Swan Road*
and *Memento Mori*
August 1, 2003

(Kuypers) did a great job on it all, amazing collection and not just from a travel book perspective. I think the book gives a good insight into the complexities of the human character when confronted with grief and disappointment and in recovery and pursuit of goals/dreams. I thought it was great!

Radio Interview INTERNET RADIO SHOW INTERVIEW

HTTP://WWW.ARTISTFIRST.COM 9/11/03

*Welcome to all of our listeners out there tonight. We're talking to Janet Kuypers, the author of many different poetry books, and the new novel **The Key To Believing** about AIDS and a government conspiracy. If you could tell us even more than what I've told all of our listeners about all of the different literary experiences that you do and create, that would be wonderful.*

I've written poetry for probably over twenty years and I've probably got four or five books of poetry published, starting in 1993. I run a web site for Scars Publications, and they've got everything from information about their magazines, as well as downloadable chapbooks (PDF files), there's a news and philosophy text archive, we've got sound files in our audio and video section, there's some really cool stuff there. Primarily what I'm doing a lot of now is performance art as well as trying to get my work out to people, and setting up shows, not only with poetry, but with Journals and short stories as well, and setting them up with images in a display and music in the background (because I'm a photographer and do some music in my spare time).

Janet is going to tell us a bit more about her past books.

The first book was published in 1993, it is called **Hope Cheat In The Attic**, because it is the idea of all those things you want to store up, it is a collection of thirteen years of poetry and prose and art from me. The second one is called **The Window**, and that one has a lot of writings that are parts of their own series. Some are stories, and are parts of a series of what people tell you, and this was the window I was looking through. The third book I did probably has the best title of them all; it's called **Close Cover Before Striking**.

I like that one too...

The byline says, “the book of poetry, prose, political essays, artwork and philosophical rants ... so I get to delve into having more essays and philosophy in my work, instead of just having lists of poetry. I did a very short novel in letter form, called **Autumn Reason**, and I also did a spiral-bound book all about the clash between the sexes, because long ago I did work as an acquaintance rape workshop facilitator, and got to hear people’s stories about dealing with rape - stories about what people have heard or about what has happened to them, so I have this book called (**Woman.**), which has a bunch of pieces, some never published, a lot of short stories, and the last, or more recent, wide-spread book of poetry is called **Contents Under Pressure**. And that one also has quite a few short stories, and a lot of political pieces and essays in it, probably more than in any other book. I’ve done a few small printing runs of books, another woman’s book called **The Average Guy’s Guide (To Feminism)**, and I also did one after traveling around the United States by car with a friend called **Changing Gears**, and it was a bunch of journal entries and stories about going from state to state and what we saw, and what bizarre experiences we’d go through in meeting new people and finding a place to stay. Those were most of them, expect the bug, huge novel, the six hundred-fifty page opus called **The Key To Believing**. It’s a private printing, which we have done right now for it, I’m working with agents right now to get it trimmed down for dealing with a publisher. But that book is about medical researchers that are looking for a cure, or medicines for AIDS patients, and one of them stumbles upon information that leads them to believe that there is a government conspiracy about the origin. And that they may also possess the cure for AIDS. It always started off with a more intelligent bent on learning more about the virus, but it then also becomes much more action-packed, about trying to figure out how to save lives, save their *own* lives when they got this information, from agents.

Now I, Jade Logan, have read this book, and she did keep my interest all the way to the end.

All those pages?

Yes. Now, I have a bad habit when I find something not quite interesting, I skip over it, so I’m glad you’re going to an agent but I did read all the way to the end, I didn’t skip any large portions, like I have in some other people’s books...

Well, that’s good to hear. Thanks. I know there are a lot of details and a lot of information in there, so there’s a lot that goes on within the story, I mean learning about the virus and learning how to live a healthier life is one thing, but learning about the fictional aspect, the government angle on having a cure or learning about the creation of AIDS, is another one altogether.

The main character in the book is a researcher, who's researching into AIDS drugs that help people that have AIDS, and she finds out in the story, what is it the CIA, or some part of the government, had supposedly created AIDS and had an instantaneous cure for it.

Because they had the base components of the virus to begin with, they were able to create a cure for it. That's the story behind it. And then she first had to actually figure out if that information was true or not, because she was only getting bits and pieces of evidence. And she's a researcher, she deals with science, so she's trying to grapple with and learn more about what's going on. And then the people she gets this information from, they start dying, and suddenly she's like, "Why are they- what's happening...?" and then she starts trying to get more pieces together to see if there's any truth to this story. And then she tries to see if there's anything she can do to actually fight the all-powerful government, to be able to help people out at all.

Definitely a mystery, thriller, conspiracy theory type book, all wrapped into one.

Yeah, I don't know what you'd call it. Is it a mystery? Well, there's mystery to it, but there's so much in there...

And there's a lot of philosophy in there, because I think the main characters possess qualities you don't quite often see or read or hear about. But she was able to figure out, with using as much science to find out what she could, and those things are what gave her that kind of drive that people don't often experience.

*In the book that you sent me, **Hope Chest in the Attic** at the beginning of this you did say that some of the items mixed fiction and...*

Oh yeah, that's what I'd usually say about most everything I've written, I mean, usually if you're going to write something down, even if it comes from something that you've understood or experienced or lived through, your own interpretation of it, versus how other would see it, might seem fictitious. Everyone puts their own spin or interpretation on things, and the words you choose to use are a way to get an emotion across to the reader. So I would say that even when there are elements of truth in something written of mine, there will also always be something to make the writing stronger, which might be a bit of fiction.

Would you like to tell everyone how your writing process usually goes?

Well, I don't think I ever have writer's block, because I only choose to write when I think of something worthy of writing about. So I don't write daily and constantly... The only time I've ever had a deadline was with this most recent book, **The Key To Believing**, and I had made a decision that I was going to work on it when I was on a trip and away from other distractions, and because I had nothing in front of me, and when I said I wanted to work on the novel, I actually finished the first draft of the novel. I had

an idea of what I wanted, and I generated an outline, and I previously had time to think about what the main characters would feel and how they would act in any situation, so I was then able to start writing the major content of the novel all at once.

I don't go through writer's block, because I'll only write if I *feel* like it, I mean I wouldn't call that writer's block if I just don't happen to feel like writing a short story or a poem. Often with writing as a poem, it usually comes up after one moment, and I sit down and I write the entire poem at once. When I write like this, I do so because I need to get it out of my system, so I try to think of a way to put it to words, because if I can do that, it will help me to process bad experiences and events that I have seen or gone through in my life, and it will help me get it out of my system, which can also become therapeutic.

Is that why you frequently write about women's issues, and why you studied them in college?

My writing would be about things like that, and no, I'm not the woman that went up in a meeting and asked what could be done to help prosecute a rapist, I'm not the woman that said I was raped six days ago, but this is what you write about, because this is what you see around you, and I put myself into the element to hear all of these things. So yeah, a lot of women's issues will come out, I don't try to make my work scream for women's issues.

I don't think **The Key To Believing** is a woman's issue at all.

No...

I mean, the lead character is a female, she's a female researcher, but she's a very hard-working, and she doesn't think of herself in those ways, so I don't necessarily think of that as an 'empowering woman' issue when I wrote that novel. She's just a woman, and like others, is hard working, driven and very intelligent.

I'd like to remind everyone that you're listening to the ArtistFirst Network, and this is the Authors First Show, I am Jade Logan, your host, and I'm interviewing Janet Kuypers, who has written many different poems, essays, a novel or two, and does lots of performance work in the Chicagoland area.



short prose

knowledge
KNOWLEDGE

I hated going into these God damn gas stations in the middle of nowhere, but we'd been driving for so damn long that I think I lost all feeling in my ass. Besides, I had to go to the bathroom. It couldn't wait. He said he'd pump the gas this time, so I got out of the car and began to stretch when I saw the attendant staring at me through the window from behind the counter. It was an eerie stare. A sex stare. I stopped stretching.

I walked around the side of the building, where the dingy arrows pointed to the washrooms. I really didn't need the signs, for the smell of shit that has been sitting around overpowered the smell of the dust in the air as I walked closer and closer to the bathrooms ... I walked past the men's room and up to the ladies room to find that the door was... gone. It was propped up on the inside of the bathroom wall. "A lot of fucking good it does me there," I mumbled in the stench.

"How the Hell am I supposed to go to the bathroom when there isn't even a God damned door to the damn bathroom??" I thought as I stormed into the store where he was paying for the gas.

He was buying two bottles of Pepsi for the road, to keep us awake. "The door of the women's washroom is off," I whispered with exasperation. "Well, that's no problem, honey -- just go into the men's room. I'll watch the door for you," he said back. The look in his eyes told me that he thought it was such a simple and obvious solution that anyone could figure it out. He thought he had the solution for everything. I wanted to tell him that the women's room frightened me enough for one day, and that I didn't want to risk my life by venturing into the men's room. Besides, men go in there. That attendant probably goes in there. I finally shrugged and waited for him to pay for his Pepsi and gasoline. I turned my head and followed him out. The attendant looked at me as I left. I could feel his stare burning into the back of my head.

We turned the building corner and followed the signs. My shoulders suddenly felt

heavier and heavier as I walked. He checked the room to make sure it was empty for me. He even held the door open. What a gentleman.

I closed the door, but I really didn't want to be left alone with the smell. It smelled like shit. But I could also smell sweat, like the smell of dirty men. I wondered if this is what the attendant smelled like. I lined the toilet bowl seat with toilet paper. I had to use it sparingly -- there wasn't much left. I got up as soon as I could and walked over to the dirty mirror, almost hitting my head on the hanging light bulb. There was light blue paint chipping next to the mirror.

I strained to see my image in the mirror. Instead, all I could focus on was the graffiti on the wall behind me. For a good time call.. So-and-so gives good head... Did that attendant ever call that number? I wondered if I was ever put on a bathroom wall. I wondered if I was ever reduced to a name and a phone number like that. I probably had been.

The floor was wet. I always wondered when the floors of bathrooms were wet if it was actually urine or just water from the sink. Or maybe it was from the sweat of all those men. I didn't know.

I stepped on something under the sink in front of the mirror. I looked down. It was an open porn magazine. I looked at it from where I was standing. I didn't move my foot. It was hard core shit, and it looked painful. Women with gags on their faces... I remember someone telling me that porn was okay because the women in it wanted to do it. But there was no smile on this woman's face. I pushed it back under the sink.

I stepped back. I wanted to hit something. I wanted to hit the graffiti on the wall, the porn on the floor. I wanted to smear the urine from the stall all over the place. I wanted to pull the light from right out of the fucking ceiling.

I put my hands up against the wall. I put the top of my head on the wall. I tried to breathe. It hurt. With my eyes closed, I knew what was there, behind me. It didn't scare me anymore.

When I walked into the bathroom, I was afraid to touch anything. But then I just leaned up against the door, feeling the dirt press into my back, into my hair. I wanted to soak it all in. All of it.

I shook my head and realized that he was waiting for me outside the door. I turned around and grabbed the door knob. I didn't worry about the dirt on my back. I opened the door.

Previously published in *Art/Life Limited Editions*, *Cat Machine*, *Green Cart magazines*, *Linsey Woolsey*, *Lip Service*, *Penny Dreadful Review*, *Speer Presents*, the *Poetry Exchange*, *my-diary.org*, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>, the chapbook *Right There By Your Heart*, the chapbook *I stepped Back* <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, *Children Churches and Daddies volume 4*, the chapbook *Perspectives* and in the book *Hope Chest in the Attic*.

KATHERINE, LONDON, ONTARIO, CANADA (ON "KNOWLEDGE")

I just read (Kuypers') piece of work, and i have to say that it blew me away. Did that experience in the gas station actually happen? What an awakening. I never understood when men argued that the women in the porn mags "wanted" to be there. As if they even look at their faces, searching for a smile! I've often found myself having to use a gas station bathroom on the side of the highway, or in a dingy town with a population of what seemed like two serial killers and a shit load of perverts. I've never wanted to touch a thing in them, afraid that I would then take more of the memory of the place back with me to the car, contaminating it.

the apartment
THE APARTMENT

“Could you pull out a can of sardines to have with lunch?”, he asked me, so I got up from my chair, put down the financial pages, and walked into the kitchen. The newspaper fell to the ground, falling out of order. I stepped on the pages as I walked away. I realized he hadn’t been listening to a thing I said.

He had to look for a job, I had told him before. This apartment is too small and we still can’t afford it. I put in so many extra hours at work, and he doesn’t even help at home. There are dishes left from last week. There is spaghetti sauce crusted on one of the plates in the sink. I opened up the pantry, moved the cans of string beans and cream corn. There was an old can of peaches in the back; I didn’t even know it was there. I found a sardine can in the back of the shelf.

I saw him from across the apartment as I opened up the can. “We have to do something about this,” I said. “I can’t even think in this place. I’m tired of living in a cubicle.”

He closed the funny pages. “Get used to it, honey. This is all we’ll ever get. You think you’ll get better? You think you deserve it? For some people, this is all they’ll get. That’s just the way life is.”

I looked at the can. I looked at the little creatures crammed into their little pattern. It almost looked like they were supposed to be that way, like they were created to be put into a can. The smell made me dizzy. I pushed the can away from me. I couldn’t look at it any longer.



Previously Published in *Art/Life Limited Editions*, *DCCR*, *Gin Mill Productions*, *Gypsy*, *Kaspah Raster*, *Lazy Bones Review*, *Opossum Holler Tarot*, *Poet's Sanctuary*, *poets2000.com*, *Slugfest*, *Tand*, *The Bridge*, *The Flying Dog*, *the Poetry Exchange*, *White Crow*, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, *Children Churches and Daddies* volume 27, *Children Churches and Daddies* collection volume 1, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>, *Poetry Sampler v9*, the chapbook *I Stepped Back* the chapbook *Addicted* the chapbook *New World Order* the chapbook *Perspectives* and in the books *Hope Chest in the Attiand Slate and Marrow*.

chain smoking
CHAIN SMOKING

He had been acting strangely for oh, the last six months or so, but I never thought much of it. He was the type of friend who was always doing everything -- he held two jobs, was a full time student double majoring in pre-med and Russian, he was in a fraternity house and was also involved with Air Force R.O.T.C. And he still managed to find time to go out on the weekends and flirt with every girl he met. He even hit on me three and a half years ago, while we were still mere acquaintances and not the closest of friends.

But he had been acting strangely, not calling me as much, not visiting or going out. After about a month or two of this he came over one night at about midnight and started complaining to me about the stress in his life. Then he started to chain smoke, the man who never smoked before, the man who was studying to go to med school, the man who wanted to be in tip-top shape for the Air Force. It made no sense. It was two o'clock in the morning, and he was still complaining to me, he was still wide awake, and he still looked like he needed something to hit.

I had told him before that he did too much with his life and that one day it would all catch up with him. I figured that's what was happening now.

Every time I saw him after that he was the same way -- irritable, chain smoking, telling me about how he's not sleeping a lot and how he's failing his classes. His girlfriend was studying in Russia for the semester. He flirted some without her around, but he didn't cheat on her. But he didn't miss her.

Recently a group of black guys beat him up on the street one night. They picked him out of a crowd and punched him in the face, the doctors figured the assailant had something in his hand, brass knuckles, a roll of quarters, for he made a clean break in his jaw. He had his mouth wired shut for six weeks. I thought maybe this was part of the reason he was on edge, sucking food through a straw for over a month has to be a pain in the ass. But his behavior changed before the accident. And he still chain smoked through the wires in his mouth.

I figured that it must be because of his family that he was the way he was. His father was a high ranking official in the Air Force, they travelled around constantly, his father was always succeeding, always being the stern perfectionist. He wasn't like that. He wasn't stern. He was sweet, and fun.

And now look, He's probably giving himself ulcers, if not lung cancer.

So I finally got back into town and I decided that I had to get this all figured out. The latest I heard was that he was getting back to religion and thinking of talking to his pastor for advice on some of his problems. It sounded like a cop-out to me, I mean, religion wouldn't give him the answers he needed but the answers they wanted him to have, so I was thinking that if he really needed help he should go talk to a counselor. He gets counseling services free through the student clinic. Oh, shit, I don't even real-

ly know what's wrong with him, I've got to try to talk to him, I hope he opens up to me, we've been friends for too long.

So I asked him to stop by and he came over to my place and he knew very well that I wanted the truth out of him. What was the stress from? Why did he just break up with his girlfriend less than a week after they were looking at engagement rings, why is he chain smoking, is the Air Force doing this to him, does he really need the money from his two jobs?

So he comes in, sits down on the couch next to me, and tells me that he's been coming to terms with the fact that he thinks he's gay. Or at least bi, he's not sure, everything's so confusing. What would the fraternity house say? What would the Air Force say, other than good-bye, and most importantly, what would his parents say? What would the world say?

Okay, so I was shocked, but this wasn't the time to show it. I gave him a hug, let him talk for a while, told him I was there for him. I suggested thinking about counseling. Then we went to a sub shop and had lunch, tried to get our minds off these things.

And we're at the counter of this sub shop and we're making cracks about a six inch versus a twelve inch sub. He told me I was ordering the six inch because I never had him. Fuck, he's doing it again, being his same old self, flirting with women that are friends, and I can take it in good fun and all, but this just seems a little too strange. So then I start thinking, okay, does he make these kinds of cracks to other men? Is he attracted to everything that walks down the god damn street?

So then we're eating our subs and we're sharing the same drink and I start thinking, should I be doing this? Is this safe?, and I still take another drink and try not to think about it. And then he says, "My problem is that I'm horny all the time." Then he



tells me about his boyfriend Brandon and from then on nothing seemed real anymore. I had to ask if the gold necklace he was wearing was Brandon's, it's not his style to wear necklaces. It was. He was even borrowing the guy's car.

So I tell him to call me, and I tell him I'll help him look for a counselor if it will help him deal with the issue, and I tell him he can talk to me anytime. And I get out of Brandon's car and walk back to my place.

And then I just start thinking. This is the man who hit on me at a rock concert we went to three years ago by running his tongue up and down my face. This was the man that I visited on the east coast, we had a romantic dinner in a private room in the Air Force dining hall. We toured Salem, Massachusetts and took pictures posing in the witch racks they have on the sidewalks for tourists. We shopped in Maine and bought glassware and Christmas ornaments together. We went to fraternity dances, I was his date, hey, we even went to a military ball together. This is the man who would sit with me in my window sill, feet hanging out the second story, drinking fuzzy navels with me and singing rap songs. This is the man who was my roommate for a few months, we'd go to the local fitness center together and exercise, he'd be on the bicycles, I'd be on the rowing machine.

This was the man who sat with me one night in my apartment, like we were two kids in high school, and we wrote lists of all the people we made out with. His list of women was relatively short, but I didn't think much of it. He told me at the sub shop that his list of men was longer than mine.

This was the man I went to happy hours with every Friday afternoon. He carried me home once because I didn't eat that day and the beer went straight to my head. He called me spaghetti legs from then on because I lost all muscle control in the lower half of my body and couldn't walk. He carried me home and put me to bed.

Another day at another happy hour when we were both depressed because we thought we'd never find someone to marry he told me that if we were both single when we were forty, we'd get married. It was our little joke from then on to say that we were engaged.

I had a dream a couple of weeks before he told me this that he told me he had AIDS from a blood transfusion. The news tore me apart, my close friend, this couldn't be happening to you, I just can't believe it, it must be a mistake, anyone but you. I told him I'd be there for him, I wasn't afraid to hug him, I wasn't afraid to kiss him. And in the dream I wanted to marry him then and there, just so he didn't die alone.



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Clay
CLAY

so I was at this bar, on the coast of florida -- the west coast, the gulf side, you know. it was this place called lana kai, and my friend gave me a ride all the way from naples, which is a good forty-five minutes south of the place.

and so we were sitting there at the bar, which is half indoors and half on the beach, and all these old men kept staring at my friend's chest. a couple guys bought us beer and one guy asked me to dance. I was surprised he asked me to dance, and not my friend -- men were usually more attracted to her.

but the guys were jerks anyway -- one looked like a marine with that haircut and must have been high on something, one looked like he decided to forgo hygiene, another was twice my age. it's not as if I try to pick up men in bars anyway.

so after a while I couldn't stand being at the bar, next to the reggae band that was playing (I never really liked reggae music anyway, I mean, it's too slow to dance to), so I begged my friend to come walk with me on the beach.

christ, I felt like a ten-year-old with a bucket and shovel when I kicked off my black suede shoes and ran into the water. I always loved the feel of sand when it's drenched in water. it feels like clay as it seeps around my toes, pulling me into the ground.

so there I was, splashing in the water, wearing a black sequin dress, throwing my purse to the shore, taking a swig from my can of miller lite. this was life, I thought. pure and simple. an army couldn't have dragged me out of the water.

so my friend found some guy to hit on, as she usually does, and she wanted me to hit on his friend. I found him ugly as all sin, and impossible to talk to. I told him that one of the rafts on the shore was mine, and instead of driving to the bar I sailed. and he believed me. I told my friend flat out that I wouldn't go with him. she was pissed that I didn't find him good-looking.

so then He strolled up from the bar to the beach, an intriguing stranger, and He walked up right next to me in the water, still wearing his shoes, seeming to know that I

needed to be saved. as most knights in shining armor would.

and He said hello to me, and He started talking to me, and He cracked a few jokes, and He made me laugh.

and okay, I'll admit it -- he was good-looking, really good looking. I remember at one point, looking at him made me think of a greek statue, He had this curly hair, this sharp chin, these strong cheek bones. but those greek statues could never talk to me, they have no color, they don't come alive. they're made of stone.

His name was Clay. and when we talked He crept into my pores, the way the sand made it's way between my toes. His voice tunneled into me, boring me hollow, making me anxiously wait to be filled with more and more of His words.

my friend disappeared with her new-found monosyllabic lover, for hours, until long after the bar closed, leaving me stranded. there I was, forty-five miles north of my home at 2:20 in the morning with no means of transportation. it could have been worse, I could have been somewhere other than on the beach, I could have been sober, and I might not have had a knight in shining armor named Clay to save me.

and as He drove me home (an hour and a half out of his way), I couldn't help but run my fingers through his hair, it was an uncontrollable impulse, like the urge to drag your fingers deep into the wet sand. I told Him I was just trying to keep Him awake for the drive.

it's almost better if I never see Him again. then I can always think of Him this way.

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done this before
DONE THIS BEFORE

I keep looking back at your picture. I'll flip it over to stop from staring at it while I read a page from my book, but a minute won't pass before I'll have to turn the photo over again to see your face. It's as if I can't get away from it.

My flight was delayed, I'm at O'Hare Airport, the airport that departs three planes every second, or is it one plane every three seconds, oh shit, I don't remember. I have to wait at least three hours for my next flight, hey, if so many planes take off here, then why can't I get on one of them? Oh well, so I decided to waste my time in one of the airport cocktail bars, by gate L 4. I thought I'd start with a white zinfandel and work my way to mixed drinks, but this wine tastes so good that I think I might just have to have another.

I'm so exasperated, I hate to wait, and all I have is a good book to keep me company. I used your photo from my wallet as a bookmark. I need these things to keep me sane.

It really isn't bad here in the cocktail bar by gate L 4, the chairs aren't that uncomfortable, even though they're a pretty ugly shade of green that doesn't match anything in the room. It really isn't that bad, in a foreign city, in a foreign airport. Not when I've got my Sutter Home White Zinfandel. And my picture of you.

You know, there's a blonde girl dressed well with a bad perm across the bar, and she's smoking a cigarette. I know I don't smoke, but I'm almost tempted to ask her for one just so I can hold the cigarette the way you do.

I'd like to taste the tar, the nicotine, the way I taste it in your kiss. You think I don't like it, but I do.

They're playing a song in the cocktail bar, a song that reminds me of an ex. I wanted

to marry that man. He had a knack of being able to envelope me, to take my troubles away.

I don't know if I can take away my troubles myself anymore. I don't know if the liquor's helping, or the cigarettes. Your photo helps, my little bookmark. At least for now it helps.

Sitting in this L 4 cocktail bar reminds me of my brother. When I was young he'd always pick us up at the airport, but if he wasn't waiting at the gate we knew to look for him at the seafood cocktail bar. a part of me expects him to come walking through the doorway now, flannel shirt, ski jacket, wind-blown greasy hair, coke-bottle glasses. You know, when I'd look at his eyes through those glasses, his eyes looked twice as big as they actually were.

I could imagine him now, I could imagine the smell of his Levi's of dirt from the construction site. I remember that smell from my father; I'd smell it every day when he came home from work. It's my brother's business now, he's got his own family now to worry about instead of a little sister. So I'll just sit here at this airport cocktail bar, remembering the days when I'd sit with him in a place like this and I was too young to drink.

God, I want to see my brother walking in to this bar at L 4, ordering a shrimp cocktail. I want to see you, babbling on about a movie you reviewed or a gig your band had. I want something that isn't so foreign, like this bar. Or maybe I want something that isn't so familiar.

I took your picture out of my wallet, the wallet that has so many pictures of men who have come and gone in my life, men who have hurt me, men who I have gone through like... like dish washing liquid, or like something I use all the time and replace all the time and don't think twice about.

I'll just sit here, in this airport, trying to care just the right amount, not too much, but not too little.

So I'll just sit here, in this airport cocktail bar, looking at your photo, and wondering if I've done this before.

"Done This Before" was the only piece of writing in the self-titled chapbook *Poem Book* and this has been previously published in *Art/Life Limited Editions*, *Bizzara*, *Gin Mill Productions*, *Linsey Woolsey*, *Oposum Holler Tarot*, *the Penny Dreadful Review*, *Pink Pages*, *Plain Brown Wrapper*, *Poetry Superhighway*, *poets2000.com*, *the Poetry Exchange*, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, *Children Churches and Daddies vol - ume 1*, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>, it was in the chapbook *Right There By Your Heart*, the chapbook *addicted*, the chapbook *Somebody Say Something* the chapbook *Everyday Life*, the chapbook *Perspectives* the 1994 chapbook *The Written Word*, and in the books *Hope Chest in the Attic* and *Slate and Marrow*.

driving by his house
DRIVING BY HIS HOUSE

I know it's pretty pathetic of me, I don't know what I'm trying to prove. I don't even want to see him again. I don't want to have to think about him, I don't want to think about his big eyebrows or the fact that he hunched over a little when he walked or that he hurt me so much.

I know it's pretty pathetic of me, but sometimes when I'm driving I'll take a little detour and drive by his house. I'll just drive by, I won't slow down, I won't stop by, I won't say hello, I won't beat his head in, I won't even cry. I'll just drive by, see a few cars in the driveway, see no signs of life through the windows, and then I'll just keep driving.

I don't know why I do it. He never sees me, and I never see him, although I thought I didn't want to see him anyway. When I first met him I wasn't afraid of him. Now I'm so afraid that I have to drive by his house every once in a while, just to remind myself of the fear. We all like the taste of fear, you know, the thought that there's something out there stronger than us. The thought that there's something out there we can beat, even if we have to fight to the death.

But that can't be it, no, it just can't be, I don't like this fear, I don't like it. I don't want to drive by, I want to be able to just go on with my life, to not think about it. I want to be strong again. I want to be strong.

So today I did it again, I haven't done it for a while, drive by his house, but I did it again today. When I turned on to his street I put on my sunglasses so that in case he saw me he couldn't tell that I was looking. And then I picked up my car phone and acted like I was talking to someone.

And I drove by, holding my car phone, talking to my imaginary friend, trying to unobviously glance at the house on my left. There's a lamppost at the end of his driveway. I always noticed it, the lampshade was a huge glass ball, I always thought it was ugly. This time three cars were there. One of those could have been his. Through the front window, no people, no lights. I drive around a corner, take a turn and get back on the road I was supposed to be on.

One day, when I'm driving by and I get that feeling again, that feeling like death, well then, I just might do it again.

"Driving by His House" was the only piece of writing in the self-titled chapbook *Poem Book* and this has been previously published in *Art/Life Limited Editions*, *Liquid Ohio*, *Napalm Health Spa*, *Opossum Holler Tarot*, *Pacific Coast Journal*, *Poetry Superhighway* <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>, poets2000.com, the *Owen Wister Review*, *the Poetry Exchange*, my-diary.org, poetrypoem.com, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, *Children Churches and Daddies* volumes 2, 23, & 54, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>, *Children Churches and Daddies e-zine collection volume 6*, the chapbook *Right There By Your Heart*, the chapbook *addicted*, the chapbook *New World Order*, the chapbook *Someone Else, Anyone Else*, the chapbook *Dysfunctional Family Greeting Cards*, the 1994 chapbook *The Written Word*, and in the books *Hope Chest in the Attic*, *Domestic Blisters* and *Slate And Marrow*

scars
SCARS

Like when the Grossman's German shepherd bit the inside of my knee. I was baby sitting two girls and a dog named "Rosco." I remember being pushed to the floor by the dog, I was on my back, kicking, as this dog was gnawing on my leg, and I remember thinking, "I can't believe a dog named Rosco is attacking me." And I was thinking that I had to be strong for those two little girls, who were watching it all. I couldn't cry.

Or when I stepped off Scott's motorcycle at 2:00 a.m. and burned my calf on the exhaust pipe. I was drunk when he was driving and I was careless when I swung my leg over the back. It didn't even hurt when I did it, but the next day it blistered and peeled; it looked inhuman. I had to bandage it for weeks. It hurt like hell.

When I was little, roller skating in my driveway, and I fell. My parents yelled at me, "Did you crack the sidewalk?"

When I was kissing someone, and I scraped my right knee against the wall. Or maybe it was the carpet. When someone asks me what that scar is from, I tell them I fell.

Or when I was riding my bicycle and I fell when my front wheel skidded in the gravel. I had to walk home. Blood was dripping from my elbow to my wrist; I remember thinking that the blood looked thick, but that nothing hurt. I sat on the toilet seat cover while my sister cleaned me up. It was a small bathroom. I felt like the walls could have fallen in on me at any time. Years later, and I can still see the dirt under my skin on my elbows.

Or when I was five years old and my dad called me an ass-hole because I made a mess in the living room. I didn't.

Like when I scratched my chin when I had the chicken pox.



"Scars" was the only piece of writing in the self-titled chapbook *Poem Book* and this has been previously published in *the 1993 poetry datebook*, *the May 1995 Poetry Sampler v7*, *Aldebaran*, *Art/Life Limited Editions*, *Impetus*, *Feminist Studies*, *Gin Mill Productions*, *Linsey Woolsey*, *Mythic Blue Corn*, *Opossum Holler Tarot*, *poets2000.com*, *Tand*, *the Poetry Exchange*, *The Starlite Cafe*, *The Village Idiot*, *Victory Scars*, *Ya See I Got This Turtle*, *Hellp*, *Larry's Poetry Page*, *Opossum Holler Tarot*, *Poetic Realm*, *Reuben's Kincaid*, *Short Fuse*, *Snakeskin*, *tc[r]*, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>, *the New Moon Review*, *a Room Without Walls*, *poetry-today.com*, *poets2000.com*, *my-diary.org*, *Third Lung*, *ilovepoetry.com*, the chapbook *addicted*, the chapbook *New World Order*, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>, the chapbook *Everything and Everything* <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, *Children Churches* and *Daddies* volumes 2, 11, 21, 77, 79 & 98, the chapbook *Perspectives* the cc&d literary magazine 1997 wall calendar, the 1994 chapbook *The Written Word*, and in the books *Hope Chest in the Attic*, *Slate and Marrow*, and *Side A/Side B*.

I remember I REMEMBER

I remember the hot tub party at the end of our junior year. Remember how I begged you to take me, because it was a date dance and not a casual party? You already had a date so you set me up with Reedy, and I thought it was just an innocent friendship set-up... Ugh, what a mess, there I was, trying to push him away from me, and then Chad came along and saved me. I have pictures of us from that night, in the hot tub together, with Tres, who won the palest-man-at-the-party award, or photos inside, with plastic leis around our necks.

I remember when we went to the They Might be Giants concert and managed to get seats in the third row. The two of us, along with four other strangers, then yelled requests at the band when they weren't playing music. I still can't believe we actually got them to respond to us while they were in the middle of a show.

I remember when we were travelling through Boston, how we stopped at Cheers to take our picture in front of the front door. We were soaking wet because it was raining on our only day in Boston. But we followed all the painted red lines on the streets to find historical landmarks, stood on the torture devises on the sidewalks, took pictures everywhere.

And when we drove to Harvard campus, we took pictures of ourselves looking "intelligent" - looking upward, hands under our chin, poised in thought, looking as tacky as possible.

I remember how we would sit in my dorm room, in the window sill, feet hanging outside, my stereo blaring. You used to always joke that one day you'd push me out the window. But we'd sit there, listening to music, singing to people that would walk in front of my window. Remember how we'd sing to Potholes in My Lawn by De La Soul or Pump Up the Jam by Technotronic or Hoe Down by Special Ed. How you thought the lines to Istanbul (Not Constantinople) by They Might be Giants wasn't "This is a recording" but "Give it to me, give it to me." How you thought the lines to Headhunter by Front 242 wasn't "Three you slowly spread the net" but "Three you slowly spread the legs." We'd sing, make people look up at us, and either wave or laugh.

Yesterday was the first day that I hadn't cried for you. Those first two days had been so hard, I might have been fine for a half hour and then something would trigger it in my mind and I would want to cry. I thought maybe I'm getting used to the news, but today I cried again.

I remember the Valentine's Dance we went to together. It was at your fraternity house, you came over, dressed up in a nice suit, I was wearing a red strapless Vanna White-style dress, and you came over and you looked so mad.

"Why are you mad?"

"I just came from the house, it's an hour before the dance, and everyone is wearing jeans watching the basketball game. Decorations aren't even up."

I look at my dress. "So what you're saying is that I'm overdressed?"

We decided to take pictures of us dressed up before I changed dresses. We went through a few photos, then I changed into a more casual, cotton, off-the-shoulder dress. We took more pictures with outfit number two. Then I felt a breeze. Apparently there was a rip in the back of the dress, making it indecent at best. So, back to the closet I went, found a casual black dress, and so we took yet more pictures. Then off to the dance we went.

I remember how you'd come over to my dorm on Sunday nights, and we'd order pizza, usually Grog's, Home of Mold, I think, and spend the evening together. We'd play Stand by R.E.M. and do the dance they do in the video. Or we'd play Madonna's Vogue and you'd contort yourself around. Once we even spent the evening writing up lists of exes, like we were in high school.

I remember how we met - I was sitting in the cafeteria with the other girls from my dorm, and you were friends with them so you sat down and ended up right across the table from me. And it was right after Christmas break and I just got back from visiting my parents in Florida and was tan, so your first words to me were, "Is that a real tan?" And I was so mad at you, I thought you were a cocky jerk.

"Well, you could have gone to a tanning salon over vacation!"

I don't know how that could have been the start of one of the best friendships of my life.

And when you called me on the phone to tell me the news you still sounded so happy. Your viewpoint was that anyone could die at any point in time and we have to live every day to the fullest. "And I could be hit by a car tomorrow," you said. You can't let the thought of death kill you. And you were telling me these things, and I was trying so hard not to just start sobbing on the phone.

I remember our freshman year in college, after the horrible way we met, of course, and how we'd go to Eddie's bar for ice cream drinks. They were about the only things we could order while underage, so we'd spend I don't know how many Saturday afternoons drinking Oreo shakes, or maybe peach, or mint. I remember walking home to the dorms with you one rainy Saturday after an Eddie's excursion, and we just decided to walk in the middle of the street, jumping in as many puddles as possible. A truck

even drove by, yelled that we were going to catch colds. And we just laughed. We were alive, and invincible.

I remember when we met up in New Orleans, I was with Eugene, you were with Randy and Jessica, and you found out how to get to the roof of the Jackson Brewing Company building. It was the highest building near the French Quarter, and we had a fantastic view, all to ourselves.

I remember our freshman year you invited me to see the Violent Femmes in concert at Foellinger Hall. You got drunk, and ended up trying to make the moves on me, knowing I had a boyfriend... I knew you had just drank too much, but I had to draw the line when you licked the side of my face. I still like to tease you with that one.

You're not supposed to die. This isn't supposed to be happening to you. I've always expected to be able to visit your family after we all retire, compare photos of grandchildren. You can't leave this hole in my life.

I remember after I broke up with Bill I still tried to remain friends with him so I could periodically borrow his black convertible. So one day I did, told him I needed to get some groceries, but I picked you up instead and we put the top down even when it was sixty-five degrees and about to rain and cruised around the mecca known as Champaign, Illinois.

I remember the Halloween Dance we went to. We couldn't come up with costumes, and last minute we went to Dallas and Company costume shop and you picked up a Dick Tracy bright-yellow overcoat and hat, along with a plastic machine gun with two water cartridges. I put on a black cocktail dress, pulled up my hair, added rhinestones and a dimple and was Breathless Mahoney, but we made a point to fill the machine gun water cartridges, one with peach schnapps, one with peppermint. Someone at the dance would say, "Don't shoot me!" And we would say in unison, "Don't worry." No one could understand why we were shooting at each other's faces.

I remember how every time we were going out for the evening and you'd be over waiting for me to get ready, I'd come out and ask you how I looked and you would always tell me that I looked really nice. Or sexy. Or fantastic. Or whatever. But you'd always say something to me me feel like the most beautiful girl in the world.

I don't want to catalog these events, these times I've shared with you. I don't want to feel as if there will never be any more memories with you.

I remember how every time you guys would come over to my apartment and start drinking, you would inevitably pull out my hats, particularly the wide-brimmed straw ones, and wear them. How many pictures do I have of you with Jay, or Brian, or Brad, all in a drunken stupor wearing women's hats?

I remember how at your fraternity house, every time they'd have a party they'd have to play "Crocodile Rock" by Elton John once. And when they did, people made a ring around the dance floor (otherwise known as the living room), and your fraternity

brothers would then proceed to do somersaults and other strange dances with each other. I'm glad this whole scene frightened you as much as it did me, because I remember how every time we heard the song we'd run into the basement where the kitchen was and hide until the song was over. Usually we'd find some potato chips or salad croutons to munch on, and we'd sit on the steel counter, amongst racks of generic white bread and bulk containers to tomato paste and talk.

I remember taking Dan out for his twenty-first birthday, this six-foot-five animal of a roommate of ours, and how he got so drunk that when he started to get violent in the bar you suggested that he "play with Carol" in order to entice him to leaving the bar. So we carried him through the bar until he broke free and fell right in front of the bouncers at the front door, and you tried to drag him outside, and then the five of us ended up carrying him blocks home, stopping occasionally from exhaustion and setting him in the dirt. When we got him in you suggested we write all over him, but me being the voice of reason suggested we only write all over his back, so in permanent markers you and Chad and Eric and Ray and I scribbled "I am a drunk moron!" and other intelligent remarks all over him. And you, you were smart enough to be gone when he finally woke up in the morning.

And you were on the phone with me saying that you just have to get used to the fact that you're not going to grow old, have a family. That all your superiors tell you, wait till you get that promotion, and you know there is no waiting for the future, you won't be around. People take for granted that they're just going to be around.

You never did, of course, you were the one that was always making a point to cram as much living as you could in a day, but most people aren't like that. Most people are never as alive as you.

I remember you and Sara standing on Green and Sixth waiting in line for the cash station when a cop walked up behind the two of you, and appeared to be in line. You asked, "Do you think the cop wants cash?"

I remember visiting you in New Hampshire, trying to decide where to go out to eat for lobster, 'til I decided on the mess hall at the base. So while you were at work your mom showed me a private room in the hall, with one elaborately set table for two, with china cabinets and a couch and roaring fireplace. I reserved it, went home and put on a black velvet dress and waited for you to get home from work. When you got back, I told your brother and sister to tell you that I changed our plans and I was in the bathroom. You started banging on the bathroom door, and when I opened it you were stunned. You were wearing a uniform that looked like a gas station attendant's, and there I was, completely dressed up for a formal dinner.

Your sister took a picture of us in your hallway, you just after your shower and still in a bathrobe, and me in that dress.

And after dinner we went for a stroll outside, and you were holding my hand, and I remember thinking that I wanted you to kiss me. It's funny how we both have thought about dating each other, but never found the right time.

I remember shopping with you on the East coast, going into a clothing store and watching you look for sweaters. You pulled out a pink patterned one, asked my opinion, and I shook my head no. "I'm not a pink person," I said. You kept looking, so I pulled up a dark brown and black cardigan from the rack and held it up from a few feet away. You shook your head no and said loudly, "I'm not a black person," loud enough for the black security guard to give you a funny look.

I think I want all of my friends to die after I do. I don't think I can handle this. You're not supposed to leave me, I'm the one that's supposed to make the dramatic exit. Besides, whenever I get married, you're supposed to stand up in the wedding. If you die before then, I swear, I'll kill you.

I remember once our freshman year we were sitting in the cafeteria, I don't remember if it was lunch or dinner, my roommate Lisa was there, and we were screwing around trying to be funny. Well, I got up and got a soft serve ice cream cone and acted like I was tripping as I got to the table, like I was going to drop the cone into your lap. Well, I didn't, but the ice cream wasn't securely anchored to the cone, and the next thing I know all my ice cream was right in the middle of your food.

I remember visiting you in New Hampshire, and one night we just watched Ferris Bueller's Day Off over and over again. We learned half the lines to the movie that night.

"I could be the walrus, and I'd still have to bum rides off of people."

"Drugs?" "No, thank you, I'm straight."

We'd always find something, a line from a movie or television show... Oh, and Heathers, we could probably recreate scenes from that movie, we've seen it so much.

"Thank you, Ms. Fleming, you call me when the shuttle lands."

"Tcklooga bullets, I'm such an idiot..."

"Great patè, but I gotta motor to get to the funeral on time."

"Will somebody tell me why I smoke these damn things?" "Cause you're an idiot."
"Oh, yeah..."

God, these quotes make sense to no one else, just us, just you and me. It was like we had our own language.

I remember when you came to Chicago to visit me, it was around Christmas time, and you finally saw the house I grew up in. The only thing you noticed was that all of the lamps in the house were hanging from chains.

You said that some people feel like they are on death's door with a T-cell count of four hundred, and some people can run marathons with a T-cell count of zero. You tell me yours is at eighty, and you feel fine. A little run-down, but that is to be expected.

This scares me. I know I'm being selfish, I know that deep-down inside of you it has to scare you too, but you're too strong to let it beat you. I don't want you to feel a little run-down, I don't want you to feel just fine. I want you to feel alive, more alive than anyone else. I want you to live forever.

I remember once when you took me to an Air Force dinner dance, and afterward I went with you to a party of mostly Air Force people. There were people there I knew, and we were out really late, and by three-thirty in the morning you and Chris walked me home. And we stood out on Fourth Street and talked for a while, and before we knew it you had fallen to the ground grabbing your knee, screaming. You knew how to pop your knee back in place, and granted, from what I understand having your knee pop out is really, really painful, but watching you there almost made Chris and I laugh. After you got it back in place you were just drunk and sad and still in pain and all I kept thinking was "Oh, please, he just needs some sleep," and I just kept thinking, "Oh, we're right in front of my apartment, please, it's four in the morning, let me just go to bed," but I stayed out there with you and Chris until you were ready to get up and make the long journey home.

I remember the Halloween party I held on Friday the thirteenth of October - your birthday. I put up pages from the Weekly World News about supernatural sightings, lit candles and pulled out the ouija board, then you came over, put on one of my hats, I gave you a carnation, and then we all went out for the night.

I remember when you and Jay and Ellen came over to welcome Blaine to Illinois. You got really drunk, fed Ellen my pound cake that my mother gave me, then proceeded to fall asleep in my chair, sitting sideways with your head in my open window sill. And yes, I have pictures, so you can't deny any of this.

I remember going to C.O. Daniel's with you on Friday afternoons with the other guys from the house and how we'd dress up in our Greek Sweatshirts to fit in... Well, you always fit in, that's how you dressed, but I had to make an exception in my dress code for these weekly happy hours. And I remember how we were wallowing in our respective depression one Friday afternoon, saying that nobody loves us and we're ugly and we'll grow up old and alone. Well, the vision I had of my future was that I would be an old maid living in an apartment with forty cats, periodically picking one up and asking "You love me, don't you?"

Well, anyway, I remember how we made a pact that if the two of us were still alone by the time we were forty, we'd get married.

We made a pact. You can't back out on me now.



conversions
STORIES ORIGINALLY FROM POETRY

expecting the stoning
EXPECTING THE STONING

I

You know how you want a popsicle and you want it for the longest time, and you don't even know what it's going to taste like when you get it, and then you finally get it and it tastes oh so good and you have some if it and you want to save it so you can have it later. And then you realize that in order to keep the popsicle from disappearing it has to stay in the freezer to avoid melting and becoming just a liquid pile of remains instead of what you wanted.

That it had to stay in the freezer in order to survive, and you couldn't stay there with it. That it was meant to be cold forever, or consumed.

It was either one or the other. They taught you that fact when you were little. You can't have it both ways. You can try, and it might be fun at first but everyone knows it will hurt later on.

And it will.

II

I think what I liked the most about us was the theory of romance.

No, wait, it wasn't that, it was the fact that it was forbidden; you were a friend of a friend and this wasn't quote unquote supposed to be happening. But I liked the idea of being with you. I would travel across the country to see you. The thought of you and the times we had behind everyone's backs, those times were like poems to me. Maybe looking back we weren't technically together when we couldn't even tell anyone that we ever together in the first place, but it was still nice for me to fantasize.

And what did it get me?

III

Maybe my problem was that it was all in my head, and maybe I didn't realize the novelty would wear off for you. You were like the average American and after twenty seconds of watching a television show you'd want to change the channel with the remote on the arm of your chair.

I didn't know you were a popsicle that would melt when you were exposed to ANY sunlight or ANY heat at ANY time.

I didn't know you had problems. Don't we all. We all don't go to psychiatrists and stay on medications. Maybe I didn't know how bad your problems were.

I didn't know you were a snowman that I made in the backyard at my house in the winter when I was little. A snowman that was fully equipped with a carrot nose, like pinocchio, no, wait, like you, with no hair, like you, with black rocks for eyes, like you.

And yeah, that snowman melted with spring, like you, and maybe I should have learned my lesson from that damned snowman.

I guess there was a lot about you I didn't know because in so many ways I didn't know you.

IV

I remember how little kids would want to build snowmen in the winter. They didn't seem to mind the snowman eventually going away.

I hated the cold, so I didn't play in the snow as much.

Maybe in playing those little games everyone else learned their lesson, maybe they learned something that I should have learned.

V

I should expect the stonings that I am bound to receive for telling you that I know what you have done and that I want the rest of the world to know it too. I will expect the stonings with time, I have been getting used to the punishments for telling the truth, even when people don't want to hear it.

So, thank you for getting my hopes up and then blowing them away with one breath from your lips like anyone would do to a pile of sand.

(or table salt spilled on the counter)

Because I think I needed to learn that lesson. And in a way, for now, I only have you to thank for it.

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Andrew Hettinger
ANDREW HETTINGER

I never really liked you. You never revealed yourself to me, and why would you: you, who never had anyone, you, who always had the bad breaks. Everyone looked at you as different. Where would you have learned to trust? Who would you have learned it from?

I never really liked you. I met you through a friend and he explained to me that multiple sclerosis left you with a slight limp and a faint lisp. Faint, under the surface, but there, traces of something no one would ever know of you well enough to fully understand.

I never really liked you. You never revealed yourself to me and I never wanted you to; you scared me too much. You, plagued with physical ailments. You, with a limp in your walk. You, with a patch over your eye. You, who stared at me for always just a bit too long.

They told me the patch was from eye surgery with complications and now you had to cover your shame, cover someone else's mistakes, cover a wrong you didn't commit, cover a problem not of your own doing. The problems were never of your own doing, were they.

I heard these stories and I thought it was sad. I heard these stories and thought you had to be a pillar of strength. And then I saw you drink, straight from the bottle, fifteen-year-old chianti. And I saw you smash your hand into your living room wall. This is how you lived.

The house you lived in was littered with trash. Why bother to clean it up anyway. It detracted you from the holes in the wall, the broken furniture from drunken fits. This was how you reacted to life, to the world. You didn't know any better. This is how you coped.

I never really liked you. You would come home from work, tell us about a woman who was beautiful and smart that liked you, but she wasn't quite smart enough. And I thought: We believe anything if we tell ourselves enough. We weave these fantasies to get through the days.

I never really liked you. Every time you talked to me you always leaned a little too

close. So I stayed away from the house, noted that those whom you called friends did the same. I asked my friend why he bothered to stay in touch. And he said to me, "But he has no friends."

This is how I thought of you. A man who was dealt a bad hand. A man who couldn't fight the demons that were handed to him. And with that I put you out of my mind, relegated you to the ranks of the inconsequential. We parted ways. You were reduced to a sliver of my youth.

I received a letter recently, a letter from someone who knew you, someone who wanted me to tell my friend that they read in the newspaper that you hanged yourself. Your brother died in an electrical accident, and after the funeral you went to the train station; instead of leaving this town, you went to a small room and left us forever. Strangers had to find you. The police had to search through records to identify your body. The newspaper described you as having "health problems." But you knew it was more than that.

And I was asked to be the messenger to my friend. The funeral had already passed. You were already in the ground. There was no way he could say goodbye. I shouldn't have been the one to tell him this. No one deserved to tell him. He was the only one who tried to care.

I never really liked you. No one did. But when I had to tell my friend, I knew his pain. I knew he wanted to be better. I knew he thought you were too young to die. I knew he felt guilty for not calling you. He knew it shouldn't have been this way. We all knew it.

I never really liked you. But now I can't get you out of my mind; you haunt me for all the people we've forgotten in our lives. I don't like what you've done. I don't like you quitting. I don't like you dying, not giving us the chance to love you, or hate you, or even ignore you more. My friend still doesn't know where your grave is. I'd like to find it for him, and take him to you. Let you know you did have a friend out there. Bring you a drink, maybe, a fitting nightcap to mark your departure, to commemorate a life filled with liquor, violence, pain and death.

I never really liked you, but maybe we could get together in some old cemetery, sit on your gravestone, share a drink with the dead, laugh at the injustices of life when we're surrounded by death. Maybe then we'd understand your pain for one brief moment, and remember the moments we'll always regret.

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AN OUTLINE TO THE APEX
an outline to the apex of rites of passage
OF RITES OF PASSAGE

It was one of those rites of passage. A Bah Mitzvah of sorts. But this was bigger, much bigger than shaving for the first time or getting your period. This was the chance for all young high school men to lose their virginity and a chance for all young high school women to dress up, feel like adults, look pretty. Everyone felt the driving need to go through this rite of passage, to not be left out, to be a part of the group. Either way, you got to take a day off of school.

But like every rite of passage, the high school prom is probably more traumatic than fun, because no matter what, you feel like you have to go, and the entire time you have to look like you're having fun. Especially for the photographers. You have to have a perfect record of your perfect life so you can upstage everyone else.

With every aspect of prom, there was always a conflict, an expense, or an irony. I mean, this is supposed to be one of the best times in your life, and it's wrought with confusion. First, find a date. Has to be someone socially acceptable, otherwise it would be less embarrassing to just not go. Then, go through the trauma of asking your prospective date to actually go with you, or if you're a woman, wait to be asked, which is almost more cruel. Then, see which of your friends are going, organize what group you'll go with to your prom.

Then you have to start working on the details. For men, this meant transportation, the cheapest tuxedo, what kind of corsage to buy, something that pins on, something they wear on their wrist, or something they carry, like a bouquet. Oh, and don't forget the most important part: enough liquor and/or condoms. Note how suddenly the prospect of multiple hookers performing anything you'd ever want is both less expensive and less of a hassle than this quote-unquote "date." For women, the details meant picking out the right dress, the right shoes, the right purse, the right jewelry, the right perfume, the right make-up, the right hair style. Note how you have to then coordinate your clothing with your date. So much like real life.

Then, beg your parents to let you wear the dress you picked out, or keep the make-up and hair style the way you wanted it. Beg your parents to let you borrow their sports

car. Beg your parents for enough money to pay for the limo, the flowers, the clothes, the film for the camera. Beg your parents to let you stay out past curfew, how about 6 a.m., just this once. But, come on, it's prom.

Then the Big Day arrives. Ditch school, because you know, getting you hair done can take hours, and you want to spend some time in the sun, so you don't look as pale as a ghost for the pictures. Then, after getting ready for an inordinate amount of time, meet up and take the pictures. Urgh. This usually entails the man picking up the woman, taking pictures at the woman's parent's house, then going back to the man's parent's house and taking more pictures there. It's almost worse than a wedding.

Then finally arrive at Prom. Take more pictures. Talk to as many friends as you can there, compliment their dresses and tuxedos. Find out what everyone else is doing after prom, see if anyone is doing anything better than you. Note how many women are repeatedly pulling up their strapless dresses so they don't fall out of them. Note how many men are already drunk, and look, it's not even dinner yet. Take lots of pictures with your instamatic camera. Let's do a group shot. Oh, let me take a picture with so-and-so.

Then eat. Try to figure out how to eat your salad without using your knife. Check to see how little all the women are actually eating. Note how many women go to the bathroom in groups. In any case, whatever you do, don't stop feeling awkward. But keep smiling.

Then the dancing. Try to remember what your father taught you. Try not to look stiff. Try not to sweat. Dance in a box. Right foot forward, feet together, left foot left, feet together, right foot backward, feet together, right foot right, feet together. Or go for the high school standby; wrap your arms around each other and sway, occasionally making out in the middle of the dance floor. Note how many women have their lipstick smeared across their cheek, or on their date's collar. Note how many bow ties have loosened.

Then collect your things, say your good-byes, take a few more photos and head out for the after-prom activities. Possible options include a late dinner, a four-hour boat cruise, a walk along the lake, a bonfire, bowling, a hotel party, or the back of dad's sports car. Note how disheveled you look by six a.m.; try to clean yourself up in the car before you get to your driveway, in case your parents are waiting for you. Don't make out for too long as you say your good-byes in front of your house.

Then, get in the house as quietly as possible, drop all your clothes into a pile in the middle of your bedroom floor, and collapse on your bed. Here's a helpful hint: drink a glass of water and take a vitamin and some aspirin before crashing; it will help with the hangover. Try to get some sleep before the day-after-prom amusement park trip, and keep in mind that even though prom is over, your friends will be rehashing it for at least a week. This is the ritual. Now go to sleep.

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transcribing dreams three
 TRANSCRIBING DREAMS THREE

I was walking into your living room and there was a ten-gallon fish tank there. You just bought it. You were looking at the fish, that's when I walked over. And I saw a shark fish in the tank, one about eight inches long, and he was at the bottom, killing and eating a four-inch fish. There were other one-inch fish swimming at the top, neon tetras, small things. And I walked over and the shark was just eating the four-inch fish, and soon he was completely gone. And you were just looking, you could do nothing to save the fish. And then another four-inch fish came out of hiding from behind a plant on the left side of the tank, and he darted around. It looked like he was in a state of panic, maybe he breathed the blood of the other four-inch fish, his ally, his family. And he started darting around the tank, and the shark was just sitting at the bottom of the tank, and the other four-inch fish darted more. And then the shark opened his mouth, and in a darting panic, the four-inch fish swim straight into the shark's mouth. All the shark had to do was close his mouth and swallow the fish whole. There was no fight, like with the first one. There was no struggle. And I looked over at you, and you were amazed that this shark just ate your two fish, which were probably over ten dollars each, and that they didn't just get along in the tank together. And I looked at the tank, and I saw the one-inch neon tetras darting around along the top of the water. They knew they would be victims later, trapped in this little cage, and that the shark would just wait until he was bored until he administered his punishment. I wanted to ask you why you bought all of these different-sized fish and expected them to live together peacefully. Maybe you didn't even realize that the shark would need more food than he was prepared to buy him. Besides, a shark that size shouldn't even be alone in a tank as small as ten gallons. He needs room to grow. But before I could say anything, I saw the shark swim to the top of the water, push his head and nose out of the water, open the lid to the top of the aquarium. You weren't looking, so I told you to look to the top, and not to get too close. And the shark just sat there, looking at you, and it looked as if he wanted to show you what a good eater he was. It was almost as if he was looking to you for approval.

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everything was alive and dying
EVERYTHING WAS ALIVE AND DYING

I had a dream the other night. I walked out of the city to a forest, and there were neatly paved bicycle paths and trash cans every fifty feet and trash every ten.

And then a raccoon came right up to me. she had a few little baby raccoons following her, it was so cute, I wish I had my camera.

And she spoke to me, she said, "thank you thank you for not buying furs, I know you humans are pretty smart, you have to be able to figure out a way to keep yourselves warm without killing me."

And I said, "you know they don't do it for warmth, they do it for fashion, they do it for power." And she said "I know. But thank you anyway."

Then I walked a little further and there was a stray cat. she still had her little neon collar on with a little bell. And she walked a few feet, stretched her front paws, oh, she looked so darling. And then she walked right up to me and she said "thank you." and I said "for what?" And she just looked at me for a moment, her little ears were standing straight up, and then she said, "you know, in some countries I'm considered a delicacy." And I said, "how do you know of these things?" And she said. "when somebody eats one of you word gets around." And then she looked up at me again and said, "and in some countries the cow is sacred. Wouldn't they love to see how you humans prepare them for slaughter, how you hang them upside-down and slit their throats so their still beating hearts will drain out all the blood for you?" And she said, "isn't it funny how arbitrary your decision to eat meat is?" And I said, "don't put me in that category, I don't eat meat." and she said "I know."

And I walked deeper in to the forest; managed to get away from the picnic tables and the outhouses that lined the forest edges. the roaring cars gave way to the rustling of tree branches crackling of fallen leaves under my step.

When the wind tunneled through, the wind whistled and sang as it flew past the bark and leaves.

I walked listened to the crack of dead branches under my feet, and I felt a branch against my shoulder. I looked up and I could hear the trees speak to me, and they said, "thank you for letting the endangered animals live here amongst us. We do think they're

so pretty, and it would be a shame to see them go. And thank you for recycling paper, because you're saving us for just a little while longer."

"We've been on this planet for so long, embedded in the earth. We do have souls, you know. you can hear it in our songs. We cling with our roots; we don't want to let go."

And I said, "But I don't do much, I don't do enough." And they said "We know. But we'll take what we can get."

And I woke up in a sweat.

So tell me Bob Dole, so tell me Newt Gingrich, so tell me Pat Buchanan, so tell me Jesse Helms, if you woke up from that dream would you be in a sweat, too?

Do you even know why we should save the rain forest? Oh preserve the delicate balance, just tear the whole forest down, what difference does it make? Put in some orange groves so our concentrate orange juice can be a little cheaper.

Did you know that medical researchers have a very, very hard time trying to come up with synthetic cures for diseases on their own? It helps them out a little if they can first find the substance in nature. A tree that appears in the rain forest may be the only one of its species. Or one like it may be two miles away, instead of right next to it. I wonder how many cures we've destroyed to plant more orange groves. Serves us right.

You know my motives aren't selfless. I know that these things are worthwhile in my life. I'd like to find a cure to these diseases before I die of them, and I'm not just a vegetarian because I think it's wrong to kill an animal unless I have to. I also know the excess protein pulls the calcium away from my bones and gives me osteoporosis, and the excess fat gives me heart attacks, and I also know that we could be feeding ten times more people with the same resources used for meat production.

You know, I know you're looking at me and calling me an extremist, but I'm sitting here, looking around me looking at the destruction caused by family values and thinking the right, moral, non-violent decisions are also those extreme ones.

Everything is linked here. we destroy our animals so we can be wasteful and violent. We destroy our plants, we destroy our earth, we're even destroying our air. We wreak havoc on the soil, on the atmosphere. We dump our wastes into our lakes. we pump aerosol cans and exhaust pipes.

And you tell me I'm extreme.

And these animals and forests keep calling out to me, the oceans, the wind.

And I'm beginning to think that we just keep doing it because we don't know how to stop, and deep inside we feel the pain of all that we've killed, and we try to control it by popping a chemical-filled pain-killer.

We live through the guilt by taking caffeine, nicotine, or morphine, and we keep ourselves thin with saccharin, and we keep ourselves sane with our alcohol poisoning. And when that's not enough maybe a line of coke.

Maybe shoot ourselves in the head in front of the mirror in the master bedroom. or maybe just take some pills, or walk into the garage, turn on the car and just fall asleep.

In the wild you have no power over anyone else. now that we're civilized we create our own wild.

Maybe when we have all this power, the only choice we have is to destroy ourselves. And so we do.

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short stories

A Microcosm of Society

A MICROCOSM OF SOCIETY

No one appeared in the back half of the courtroom. Thoughts raced through Steven Kohl's mind as his eyes darted across the room. How did this happen? Was he really to blame? Will the jury members decide whether there is enough evidence against him to warrant a trial? Why are there cuts on his hands? Why can't he remember the last three weeks of his life?

Steve thought he might wake up soon, and discover that none of this had ever happened. That he wasn't trying to defend himself. That Erica wasn't dead.

He shifted in his chair. The wet cotton of his shirt collar burned against his neck. Like the branches of the trees in the ravine where Erica was found, the wool of his suit scratched his legs, his hands. He wanted to wipe the sweat from his forehead, but he was afraid that he would seem too nervous to the jury if he moved. He wanted to run out of the courtroom, stand in the February snow and feel his tears freeze as they rolled down his face.

He looked over at the papers in front of his lawyer. The names Stonum, Smith and Manchester embossed the top of the page. Steve couldn't bring himself to look at Stonum's face.

Stonum's face was chiseled and sharp. There was no room for emotion, unless closing remarks in a case called for a strong emotional appeal. The same thought kept going through Stonum's head: this boy couldn't remember who he was, much less where he was, for the last three weeks of his life. When Stonum suggested that Steve go to Dr. Litmann for a psychological examination, Steve broke down. He told Stonum that his cocaine use became daily about six weeks ago, and he started mixing drugs shortly before he lost his memory.

It was the beginning of the fourth day. The prosecutor stood.

"I would like to call to the stand a Miss Kathleen O'Connor."

Stonum jumped. “We have testimony from a Doctor Litmann, with whom she has been seeking therapy, that Miss O’Connor should not be able to testify in this case. I submit his report to you, your Honor, which outlines the fact that Miss O’Connor has been known to compulsively lie and that her perception of the truth is often distorted. We believe that it would be inappropriate and possibly detrimental if Miss O’Connor testified.”

The testimony for the case was beginning to rely on character witnesses, and because no specific reason was mentioned for having Kathleen O’Connor testify, the judge said he would review the report and decide whether or not to allow her to testify the next day.

Kathleen looked at Doctor Litmann seated next to her, then bowed her head. Her letters to him were in a pile on his lap. She stood up, adjusted her dress and solemnly walked away.

Dr. Litmann stared at the chair where she had sat. When he gained the strength, he looked at the letter at the top of the pile.

Dear Doctor Litmann:

I just had a session with you, and you asked me to start writing letters to a friend every day so that I could start to open myself up and understand myself more. Well, I don’t have any friends. I don’t know if I’ll ever let you see these letters, but I’ll write them to you.

You were asking me about my childhood in session today. Do all doctors ask about a person’s childhood? I guess you must figure that any patient of theirs must have been abused by their father or wanted to kill their mother or something. No, I wasn’t beaten, or starved, and I didn’t even know what the word “incest” was until I was checking the spelling of “insect” in the dictionary.

I know, I know, I’m avoiding the subject. Open up, you said. Open up, God-damnit. Fine.

As a child I wasn’t liked by other kids. I was too smart, you see, and I had been taught at an early age to respect authority. Actually, I don’t think I was ever taught that, because my parents didn’t seem to teach me much of anything. I just knew I had to listen to them when they yelled at me.

All of my life I was afraid of my father. He never really was a father to me, for he wasn’t home often, but when he was home, all he seemed to do was yell at me. I always figured that I must have done something wrong, because he was never happy with me. Hence the self-esteem problem, I guess. I think that’s why I got messed up with all those other men, too, doc. But you said we’d get to that in a later session.

The thing is, they always told me that I had to act a certain way, and that I had to do all of these things, but I never knew why I had to do them. If it was to be a good person, then I wanted to know who the hell decided what was good. From what I understood, good wasn’t fun. It wasn’t even self-fulfilling.

But I was going to do what they wanted. I got into a good school, and decided to

study in a field that I didn't like. But, you see, that would get me a job with good pay - even if I didn't like it -- and would make everyone in society think that everything was good in my life. If I just went through the motions, people would think I was happy, and then they might leave me alone.

But that didn't work.

Doc, I'm tired. The medication you make me take at night really knocks me out. I'll write later.

She never signed her letters, and she always typed them so that they could never be traced to her. She made sure she covered all of her bases.

Litmann pressed his right hand over his eyes, almost in an effort to hold his face together.

Dear Doctor--

Hi. I'm back. It's night again. I like writing at night. I write at the desk in my room by two candles. I could turn on the lights, but the candles make shadows on the walls. I like the shadows. They make me think of everything out there that I'm not supposed to do.

In our session today you wanted me to tell you about the turning point of my life. You figured out that there was some sort of event in my life that made me want to rebel against all the empty values my parents tried to shove down my throat. That event was a man.

You see, he was a boyfriend of mine -- a boring one that fit into my plan of having a boring future. I'd get a boring job, and I'd marry that boring man and we'd live in a boring house with boring children and act happy. I thought it would all be simple enough -- I mean, the man seemed harmless and all. But he wasn't.

He went away to school with me, and at the first chance he got, he got me drunk. And he raped me.

It occurred to me then that my boring life wasn't going to happen. Doc, I thought I could just float by life, going through the motions without feeling anything, whether it be pain or happiness. The rape tore me apart inside. This man was supposed to be the security in life, and he killed any security I thought I could ever feel. I knew that what he did wasn't right, but I also knew that there was nothing I could really do about it, because society seemed to ignore things like rape. Nothing seemed right anymore.

I looked into different religions. I read the new testament, and I tried to go through the old one, but the reading was just too dry. God just seemed like a joke to me. I deduced that religion was just a means to keep the masses in their place. But it wouldn't hold me down.

I wonder why I don't tell you all of these things while I'm in session with you. Maybe it's because you're trying to make me "normal" again -- normal in the eyes of society. Well, their rules don't make sense.

Dear Doc --

I can't love unconditionally.

I think everyone thinks I'm just very cold. But it's just that I can't love someone that I can't respect or admire. I don't think I love my family, because I can't respect their values, and I can't love other people because I can't trust them. That's where my value system comes in. I decided that the only person I could trust and love is myself. So my goals should be to make myself happy, right? If I do that, what more could I want? Why should I want to please others?

And I liked having those one night stands. I liked the power I felt when I could make a man want me so much and I had the power to do with him whatever I wanted. You could say that I wanted to get back at the man who raped me, you could say that I was looking for someone to care for me the way I wanted my father to when I was a child -- but I wanted the power. I wanted the control of others -- and it was an emotional control, which was even stronger than a physical control. I felt an emotional high from making them weak. I don't know which high was stronger.

Dear Doc--

I'm not afraid to tell you the next part, for even if I do give you these letters, you can't tell anyone about them. I've checked into the laws, and because of the nature of the case and client confidentiality privileges, you couldn't utter a word.

Now, I never got into drugs. I drank a lot, which I guess I get from my father, but I never touched drugs. But I had ways of getting a hold of them, and cheap. So I started selling stuff to some of the college students -- particularly the good looking men. If my plan was going to work, I had to pick the right kinds of people. I'd go to the men in the elite fraternity houses -- the ones that you needed not only good looks, but also a lot of money and a lot of connections to get in to.

Then I found the man. Steve. Gullable bastard, isn't he? Then I found the woman. A typical bitch -- bleach blond, sorority, stupid as all hell. The type that makes me look like something is wrong with me for not wearing designer clothes. I knew I could make Steve do something he normally wouldn't -- and maybe this would be my little way of destroying a microcosm of the society. It's destroying Steve. And it destroyed Erica.

Litmann looked up. He pulled his glasses from his face. He didn't know if the steam on the glass was from his sweat or his tears. He got up, clenching the letters. He left the room.

Portions of the story "A Microcosm of Society" appeared in the chapbook *People Today*, and this story has been previously published in *Art/Life Limited Editions*, Linsey Woolsey, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, poets2000.com, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>, the chapbook *Everything and Everything* the chapbook *Perspectives* the chapbook *Gasoline and Reason* the 1994 chapbook *The Written Word*, *Children Churches and Daddies* volumes 11, 77, 85 & 94, the 1995 chapbook *Old Wives' Tales*, and in the book *Hope Chest in the Attic*.

Seeing Things Differently SEEING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

I was sitting at Sbarro's Pizza in the mall taking a break from shopping and eating a slice of deep-dish cheese pizza when I caught parts of a conversation happening two tables next to me. It was two-thirty in the afternoon, so it was kind of empty in the eatery.

"So what's it like to be back?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know, to be free again - I mean, to be back to the places you haven't seen for so long?"

"Well, of course I missed it. It's strange being back, actually."

"How so?"

"Well, everything looks different now."

"Well, it has been nearly six years, a lot happens, even to a suburb. There's been a lot of construction around here, and -"

"I don't mean it looks different because it changed. I mean it looks different because I have."

"How have you changed?"

"You mean how did being in prison for half a decade affect me?"

"Well, what do you mean you see things differently? Like colors look wrong? I don't get it."

"No, it's not like my vision is different, at least not literally. It's just that people seem different to me now. The places all look the same, one street looks the same as the next, it looks the same as it did five years ago. But I see things about people now, things I never noticed before."

"Like what?"

"I don't know, exactly. But I read people. It's like I know what they're thinking without having to talk to them, or even know them."

Then they both paused. I guess their timed pattern of one person eating while the other one talked finally got messed up and they were both eating at the same time. Oh, did I mention that they were both women? One had a baby in a stroller sleeping next to her, that one was the one that didn't go to prison. They both looked like they were about twenty-eight years old. Regular suburban women.

"You see, it's like this: when I was in prison, I was all alone. Being in a federal prison means the crimes are big time, so everyone in there had a big chip on their shoulder and wanted to either have you for their girlfriend or beat the shit out of you when you were on laundry duty. And of course everyone knew that I was the cop killer, and

everyone also knew that I swore up and down that I didn't do it. So when I went in there they all thought I was some big sissy, and I knew right away that I was going to be in big trouble if I didn't do something fast."

"So what'd you do?"

"Well, I figured they knew that I wasn't a tough bitch or anything, so the only persona I could put on that would make people scared of me would be to act like perfectly calm ninety percent of the time, calm, but tense, like I was about to snap. And periodically I would have a fit, or threaten violence in front of guards, timed perfectly so that I would never actually have to do anything, but enough to make everyone else think that I was a little off the deep end, a bit crazy. Then they'd give me space."

"So... did that work?"

"Yeah, for the most part. But the first thing I had to learn was how to make my face unreadable."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you can see someone walk by and know they're bored, or sad or angry, or happy, right?"

"Well, sometimes..."

"Well, I had to make sure that when people looked at me all they saw was a complete lack of emotion. Absolute nothingness. I needed people to look at me and wonder what the hell was going through my head. Then all I'd have to do is squint my eyes just a little bit and everyone would see so much anger in my face, you know, because usually there was nothing in my face to give me away."

"And when you got angry -"

"- And when I got angry and threw a fit and smashed chairs and screamed at the top of my lungs and contorted my face all over the place; I just looked that much more crazed and in a rage. Like out of control."

"Wow. That's wild."

"And I became completely solitary. I talked to two other people the whole time I was there, at least in friendship."

"Wow, two people?"

"Well, in a screaming fit, or in a fight, then I'd be yelling at people, but yeah, I had to limit the people I talked to. Couldn't let others see what I was like."

So I was sitting here eating my pizza listening to this, and then I remembered, oh yeah, I remember this story from a long time ago, they convicted this women of killing a cop, shooting him at point-blank range, and just in the local paper three weeks ago they found the person who really killed the cop, and they let the women they convicted of the crime five years ago free.

It seems the cop pulled her over and had her license in his car when the murderer came up in another car, and this woman managed to get away, but the cop died and her license was there on the scene. So I get up and go to the fountain machine and refill my Diet RC Cola and come back to my seat and I just start thinking that that's got to be rough, I mean, going to federal prison for over five years for a crime you did-

n't commit and then having them come up years later and let you out early and say, "oh, we're sorry, we had the wrong person all along." It's like, oh, silly us, we made a mistake, please do forgive us.

But how do you get those years back, and how do you get rid of those memories?

So I just spaced out on that thought for a minute and the next thing I knew they were talking again.

"And I knew from the start this one woman didn't like me, I could just tell from her face. We never spoke, she was like my unspoken enemy. And so once I was doing laundry work, and there are rows of machines and tables for folding and shoots for dirty clothes to fall onto the floor and pipes running all along the ceilings and steam coming out everywhere. And there were others there with us, and guards, too, but once I looked up and it was totally silent and no one else was around except for her. No other prisoners, no other guards, nothing. And she was just standing there, facing me square on, and she was swaying a bit, like she was getting ready to pounce. And I knew that she planned this, and got some of the other inmates to distract the guards, so that she could kill me."

"Oh my God, so what did you do?"

"Well, I turned so my side was to her, and I grabbed a cigarette from my pocket and put it in my mouth. Than I said, 'Look, I'm not interested in fighting you, so-', and then I reached into my pocket, the one that was away from her, like to get a lighter, and then I took my two hands and clenched them together like this, and then I just swung around like I was swinging a ball-and-chain, and I just hit her real hard with my hands."

"Oh my God."

"Yeah, I was hoping that I could just get in one good blow then get out of there, like teach her not to fuck with me again."

"Oh my God, so what happened?"

"Yeah, so here's the punch line, so when I hit her she fell back and hit her head on a beam that ran from floor to ceiling, and just fell to the floor. So I go through a back hallway and find everyone in the next room and just sort of slip in there, but then I hear a guard asking about Terry, that was the woman I hit. and everyone looks around and they see me, and I have no expression on my face, so they don't even know if Terry saw me or not, and so everyone starts to look for Terry and they find her dead, right where I left her."

"Oh my God, you killed her?"

"Well, she hit her head on the beam, my blow didn't kill her. But no one knew who did it to her, and of course no one bothered with an investigation, so there was no problem. But after that, no one ever bothered me again."

"Holy shit. You killed her. When did you know she was dead?"

"When they found her, probably. Not when they saw what kind of shape she was in, but the instant they saw her I thought, 'she hasn't moved.' And I knew then she was dead. It was kind of unsettling, but I couldn't react."

"Kind of unsettling? I think I'd be screaming."

“But that’s the thing, all these women had killed before, at least most of them had. I’d be condemning myself if I reacted.”

“Wow.”

They sat in silence, the young mother staring at the other while she ate the last of her pizza.

The murderer grabbed her soda and drank in between words.

“Yeah, so prison - and everything after that, really - seemed different. I figured out how to remove all emotion from myself when I had to.”

“...That’s wild.”

“And once I figured that out, how to make my face unreadable, it was easy to be able to read what other inmates were thinking. I could read anyone’s face. Someone could twitch once and I’d know whether they were afraid of me or not. Any movement made it obvious to me what they thought of me, themselves, or their life. That’s why I look around here and just see what everyone else is feeling.”

“Really? What do you see?”

“I see some dopey men and some bitchy women.”

“Shut up.”

“No, it’s true - and they care about little details in their life, but they don’t give a damn about the big picture. They scream if someone cuts them off in traffic, they freak out if they have food stuck in their teeth after a meal. But they don’t care what they’re doing in their lives.”

They got up and walked over to the trash can, dumped their paper plates and napkins into the trash.

“I see a lot of people walking around with a blank stare, but it’s not an emotionless stare. It’s that they’re all resigned, it’s like they all assume that this is the way their life has to be.”

“Oh, come on, it’s not that bad.”

“Yeah, it is. It’s like they all were in prison too.”

And they walked out into the mall, and I sat there, staring at my drink.

the twin within
THE TWIN WITHIN

The music was still blaring, even at 4:30 in the morning, it was a movie opening after-hours party, Hollywood style. All the top models were there, all holding cigarettes in one hand, drinks in the other. The lights were pulsating in time with the throbbing music, dancing in the smoke rising to the ceiling and the condensation dripping from the outside windows. Some movie stars were there, all in little groups, trying to look more important than the rest. Of the few musicians left, the ones that were not still on the dance floor were in corner booths of the club, tossing white bags at each other. Some of the cast made an early escape, but the leading actor was still there, at a corner table with a few agents and lackeys.

His date wasn't in this film, but her fame was great enough that she was still the most wanted at the party.

They were the perfect couple, the tabloid writers thought, two starlets of the silver screen, partying together, winning all the awards together. The young actress knew just as well as the young actor that their relationship was only for the cameras, they knew that this was the price they chose to pay for the lives they had.

For the money, for the fame. The loss of who they were.

It bothered Veronica less than it bothered Alan. He needed to cover his homosexuality in order to get the roles that would make him famous, and their relationship for the press worked perfectly. And she knew that with this man by her side at these parties, she would be guaranteed more media coverage.

Not that she needed it. She had won awards for two films in three years, her newest film hit the box offices three weeks ago and was still breaking records in ticket sales, and everyone under the sun wanted her in their new movie. She was gold, and she knew it. But she was a business woman at heart, a marketing agent, and Alan was added security.

She didn't have to mingle at this party; people came to her in waves. She knew she made enough appearances for the night, besides, it would be breaking up soon, and she

signalled for someone to make sure her limousine was out front, then walked over to Alan's table.

"Alan, honey, I'm going to go, are you going to be all right?" she asked.

"Sure, honey, go ahead. I'll talk to you when I get back." Alan usually used the same term of endearment for her that she used for him if he couldn't think of one on his own. No one noticed.

She left the building, and the two bouncers at the door escorted her to the door of the limousine. Even at 4:45 in the morning a small crowd waited for her.

She crawled into the back, opened her purse, found the half-pack of cigarettes and tossed them to the floor. She only smoked when she was at these damn parties. Thank God I don't have to go on the set tomorrow, she thought. As soon as one movie is over another one begins. Can't even enjoy the riches for a minute.

"At least I have tomorrow off," she groaned aloud to the empty back seat of her private limousine.

If there is a God, she thought again. She rolled her head back against the car seat and tried to find some stars in the early morning sky as she rode through Manhattan.

The driver escorted her to her door before he parked the limousine. She got into her home, kicked off her shoes, left them where they fell. She could do that, she thought, because she was famous.

"Maybe I am God," she said aloud to the empty, well-guarded house. She walked upstairs.

12:30 rolled around this particular Sunday afternoon when Veronica rolled over in her bed and reached over to her phone. She dialed her chef, asked for a good amino acid breakfast shake. She then dialed One World Spa, the best place in town, the only place that happened to have a standing reservation for her. She said she'd be there at 1:30.

At 1:40 her limousine driver escorted her out of the black Mercedes and to the front doors. The afternoon was needed for rejuvenation, she thought. She used facial peels, but avoided the mud baths and favored the massages and water tanks.

Back home she went, after shopping a little. She told her staff they could go home for the rest of the evening, so she could have the house to herself. She told her chef to have a pizza delivered before he left. That always irritated him.

She went upstairs to find her shopping bags waiting for her in her bedroom. One by one she pulled out her purchases and spread them across the bed. She tried on one straight silver dress and walked downstairs. The house was so quiet when she walked through it and no one was there. No chefs, no maids, no guards, no landscapers or decorators. The heels of her shoes clicked against the marble hallway floor. She stopped, watching the shadows her furniture cast over the walls. She turned around and watched her own shadow. It must be fifteen feet long, she thought, and then she stretched her arms over her head in a triumphant arc, watching the shadow stretch even further.

After surveying the house in her first outfit and seeing that no one was there, she walked upstairs, back to her bedroom, to her safe in her bathroom. In the back of the safe was the key she needed; she closed the safe door, covered the safe with the wall panel, and walked to the end of the hall to the top of the stairs.

Her staff knew the two doors at the top of the stairs; one was to the roof, which only she was to go on, and the other was for the storage attic. Tonight, instead of sipping champagne and watching the east coast from her rooftop, she opened the second door.

She told Monica the coast was clear. She reached over and turned on the light by the door; it was a small light that only half-lit the attic. The kitchenette and bookshelves were well-lit now, but the back half of the mini-apartment was still in darkness.

At last, as if making her own grand entrance the way only Veronica would, Monica slowly walked toward her, out of the darkness.

“God, Ron, could you have waited any longer to get me out of here?”

“Just come downstairs,” Veronica replied, “I bought some new dresses.”

They sat on her bed, three hours later, Veronica wearing her new silver satin dress and Monica wearing a black strapless cocktail dress, eating the last bites of the pizza.

“Oh, I’m stuffed,” Veronica moaned as she threw her body back on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

Monica got up, and walked over to the mirrors. “I think we look good in this black dress, but we have so many. No one can tell this one apart from all the others. Couldn’t you get something more contemporary?”

“They can tell it apart, Monica, and we can buy as many dresses as I want.”

“You’re being frivolous. And selfish.”

“I’m being whatever I want to be, because I can.”

For a while, the silence in the bedroom was only broken by Monica turning from one side to the other in front of the mirror. Veronica remained face-up on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

“Ron, why don’t you let me out more?”

“You know I bring you out whenever I can. It’s tough to get the entire staff out of here. We have to be careful.”

“I know, it’s always careful. But I fidget up there. I could take your place more - you know you could use the rest.”

Veronica looked at her twin sister in the mirror, and wasn’t sure whether or not she was looking at herself.

“Monica, you know that’s not a good idea. You’d go out there and look like me but not remember a thing that happened the day before. I can only brief you on so much. We agreed that the only time you’d replace me was when I was ill and needed some time to recuperate.”

“Well, you’ve been Veronica for a while. I can’t stand it up there. You’re getting to

call all the shots out there.” Monica walked closer and leaned over the comforter. “I want to live, too.”

Veronica sat up on the bed. “Monica, you know it’s better this way. We agreed.”

Monica sat on the bed next to her and looked at her twin sister. They looked over to the mirror and stared at themselves. Veronica put her arm around Monica’s shoulder and smiled.

“Besides, we both reap the benefits of this success,” Veronica told her sister. “You’re up there now, but when we get enough money for the both of us to retire we can get away from here and live in luxury and never have to worry about a thing again. You want that, don’t you?”

Monica paused. “Of course,” she said under her breath as her eyes darted away. She knew she couldn’t argue with Veronica, even if she wanted to. Even though they were twins, she always thought she couldn’t fight her.

“There, that’s better. Do you want to stay down here tonight? I can set the alarm early so that things are clear before the staff comes back.”

Monica didn’t know what to answer.

She realized it didn’t matter, that she’d still have to go back sometime, whether it was now or a few more hours from now. “I don’t care,” she answered.

The next day was back-to-the-set day, Veronica worked the next few days, but after the fourth day she felt very tired and wanted to stay home. This isn’t like me, she thought, I never get sick.

Monica pushed a little harder every night in her attempt to get outside. “Look, Ron, you’re obviously not feeling well, and you don’t want to mess up filming at this point. Let me fill in for a few days. I mean, you said that that is what I’m here for.”

Her arguments were winning Veronica over, and two days later Monica slept in the master bedroom while Veronica stayed in the attic. Before Veronica moved into her secret hideaway, however, she made a duplicate of the attic key.

“I’m making an extra key, Monica, so don’t get any ideas.”

“Did you really think I’d do that, Ronnie? I told you I’m doing this for both of us. Now, don’t worry, I won’t screw anything up, and I’ll check up on you tomorrow night when I call off the staff, just like we discussed. Now get some sleep, honey - you’ve been so exhausted, you probably just need to sleep this illness off. There’s vegetable soup for when you’re hungry, just use the hot plate to heat it up.” Monica paused.

“Are you going to be okay?”

“Yeah, sure.”

Without another word, Monica walked out of the attic and became Veronica.

The new Veronica walked down to the basement, to the second bar, and dropped the wrapper from the jar of sleeping pills in the trash can. She couldn’t have Veronica find them while she was staying behind the second door upstairs.

For the next few weeks they went back and forth, and although people noticed a difference from day to day, the main difference was mood change and slight forgetful-

ness. That everyone attributed to the stress of filming. And possibly the trouble Veronica was having with Alan.

The tabloids were revealing the fact that Alan was getting more and more destructive in his lifestyle, and more and more depressed. Everyone else thought that had to be having some effect on Veronica.

And one day Monica - Veronica - went to see Alan to make sure he was okay. They usually didn't bother getting together unless it was for appearance's sake, but his behavior was starting to affect Veronica's appearance in the public eye, so off she went.

Alan was sitting in his living room. His apartment was clean to the point of being antiseptic - the walls were white, the couches were white with black accents, the tables and cabinets were black with white and chrome accents. The walls were bare, except for one black painting framed on the north wall, above the bar and adjacent to the entertainment center. Mozart was playing through Alan's speakers. Alan, holding a low-ball glass with his fingertips, was sitting in the center of his couch. The ice spun around with the thick, clear tan liquor when he moved his hand.

Monica - Veronica - walked into the living room. Alan sat slouched, head leaning back, instead of sitting upright, as he normally would, paying attention to his posture, his appearance, or his guests.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Don't do this to me, this affects me, too. Tell me what's going on."

"Oh, as soon as it affects little Veronica, oh, then we have to do something."

She stood in silence next to the couch. She didn't know if she should stand or sit.

A moment, or a minute, or ten, passed. She finally sat down on the couch next to him.

"Really, Alan, I want to know. I wouldn't be here if I didn't."

Alan turned his eyes toward her. He let his drink slip out of his hands on to the carpet, spilling all over the floor. He didn't move.

"Veronica, we put on this show for everyone, and all the while I have to hide my lover, hide who I am. Do you know how that makes me feel?"

She didn't answer.

"Do you know how it makes my lover feel?"

She could have answered, but didn't.

"I'm tired of this, Veronica. I don't know how much longer I can go on with this game."

She looked over and saw a shattered bottle on the adjacent floor; streaks of tan liquor dripping from the black painting on his wall.

Monica came home, ordered the staff out immediately. Within ten minutes they were gone, and she made her way for what was normally her bedroom.

"Ronnie - get out here. There's a problem."

Veronica stepped outside into the hallway.

"Alan is thinking about going public. He's freaking out."

"What - why? Was he going to tell me?"

"I had to fight to get it out of him. Ron, do you know what this means if he comes out?"

"It means I'll be the laughing stock of Hollywood. 'I didn't even know my own boyfriend was gay, and had a lover.' It'll destroy me." Veronica paused, in exasperation, and leaned her head against the hallway wall. "Shit, what do I do?"

"You mean what do we do, Ron. I got you this far, and -"

"And the more we mix roles the better chance we have of getting caught. We've got to stop this, so let me get to Alan, I can shut him up for a while, I can call him tomorrow and -"

"And nothing, Ron. We're not playing it your way anymore."

"And since when did you get so cocky?"

Monica paused, then turned to walk away. In a quick moment she turned back and pinned Veronica by the neck to the wall. "Remember, Ron, according to the rest of the world there's only one of us. No one would miss us if one of us happened to disappear." She let go of Veronica and walked down the hall to the staircase.

Walking down the hall, Monica continued: "A body floating down the canal two weeks from now wouldn't look like Veronica anymore. It would be some Jane Doe, some runaway teenager, the police would think. Besides, why would anyone think it was Veronica? She'd be still alive, filming her best movie yet." Her voice became more and more quiet, more and more calculated with every word she spoke.

She took the first step down the stairs at the end of the hall, then stopped and turned back. "And I'm not disappearing anymore," Monica said before she walked away, leaving Veronica bruised and shaken at the top of the stairs.

The next day Veronica was on the set, she got to the studio at four-thirty in the morning for make-up and was in front of cameras by seven. They filmed at the studio and on location in the morning, and by eleven-thirty she was starved and ready for a drink. She walked over to her trailer, her make-shift dressing room and second home. Inside she poured some bourbon into a glass and sat in the only chair not covered with costumes.

Someone knocked on her trailer. "Who is it?" she asked. A young male voice responded, "Hi, my name is John, I'm a really big fan. I just wanted to say hello and tell you how good your work was."

She knew every male thought she was beautiful, and no male thought twice about her acting. She got up and moved her way to the door. As her door creaked open, she saw a handsome young man, nervously grinning from ear to ear.

"Well, you can say hello, but actually talking to me will cost you."

The young man stood there, a few steps below the trailer, dumfounded.

"Look, kid, I'm starved. Get me a sandwich and I'll talk to you while I'm eating before my next scene, okay? I could go for a falafel or something. There's a place down the street that makes them - would you mind?"

"No problem - I mean - I mean, it would be my pleasure. Falafel - okay, cool, no problem. I'll be back in a minute -" and the young man turned around and ran off toward the next block.

Waiting for some food was killing her. She rummaged through her mini-refrigerator and found some white bread and cheese slices and gave up on the young fan. She was getting used to fast food and hard liquor for her lunches, hard liquor and cigarettes for her dinners. She didn't want to go home much anymore. Monica got a hold of the extra key, so now anyone could take over, if one of them would slip up and let the other take over. The longer Veronica stayed away from the house, the longer Monica had to stay there to protect their secret - and the longer Veronica was Veronica.

Her fan never showed up with lunch, but she didn't care. Someone else will always get her food. But she liked the idea of talking to someone new.

At eight-thirty at night, after working sixteen hours, Veronica sat in her trailer again, this time eating a rice cake with her bourbon. A knock came on her door again.

John appeared as she opened her door and let him into her trailer, even without food.

It was nice, she thought, to have a fan adore her like this. Even if it was two in the morning.

For hours John sat there, leaning forward, eyes widened in amazement that he was actually talking to Veronica. He would ask a question, and Veronica would tell him all about life with fame, what this actor was like, how she got into show business. It was nice, she thought, to have someone think so much of her, to pay her so much attention. He was just some nobody to her, she couldn't even imagine what he looked like, even though she was sitting right there with him, staring him in the face.

But she didn't care what he looked like. What she cared about was that she was still loved, for one reason or another. And so she gave this fan what he wanted - time with her. And she talked.

And after two in the morning, John left. And Veronica passed out in her trailer.

The next thing she realized was that someone was knocking on her door. She woke up. Looked at the clock. It was already eight-thirty in the morning, she had no sleep, her make-up wasn't ready, and someone outside was expecting her to shoot the next scene. She couldn't even remember what scene the crew was filming today. She dragged herself out of her make-shift bed and got to the door.

"Ms. Phillips - are you ready for the first scene?" asked a young stage-hand. He was wearing a t-shirt, jeans, a baseball cap, a crew badge around his neck. He was holding a pot of coffee.

She looked at him in silence, leaning on the door frame. She was barely conscious.

"Oh, Ms. Phillips, did you hear the news already? Oh, you don't look very good. Why don't you sit down - I can get you some coffee."

"What news?" she managed to say.

The stage-hand then realized that she hadn't heard the news, turned and ran away.

It was the director who came to her trailer with the morning paper. He poured her coffee as she read that Alan died the night before of a drug overdose.

The next three days were a blur to Veronica. She had to act sad, and although she didn't want him dead, she really didn't care about him, either. So she put on her actress face and did her best mourning job, wore some of her best black dresses, and gave up being social. Besides, all she really wanted to do was stay at home and drink herself to sleep.

But Monica was more concerned about their future. "You don't think any of Alan's sexual past will be dug up, will you?"

Veronica leaned against her bar and rubbed her face in her hand. "You know, I really don't know. What would anyone have to gain from that?"

"Ron, you mean to tell me Alan's not going to have a bunch of male lovers popping out of the woodwork saying they have a right to part of Alan's estate? What do we do if that happens?"

"Well, there's nothing we can do now, is there? If Alan's reputation gets smeared there's really nothing we can do about it."

Monica paused, then went to the bar to get Veronica another drink. "There's got to be something. And if I were you, I'd mourn a little more. If some of his lovers do come out of the woodwork, you'll look like a jealous ex that found out he was gay."

"And what difference does it make?"

"Just keep our bases covered, and we should be fine."

"I have nothing to cover up, Monica. Besides, there was no foul play involved - he just killed himself."

Monica leaned back and lit a cigarette. "All I'm saying is that you could stand to look a little more clean."

Veronica put her head down for a moment, then got up the strength to get up and go to bed. She reached the end of the room when Monica spoke.

"Oh, and Ronnie - you look like hell. I'll cover for tomorrow."

Veronica just turned away and walked out of the room.

At 5:07 the next afternoon Monica slammed the attic door open. "Veronica, turn your television on. This is it."

Veronica walked over to the set, turned it on, and stood there for a moment while Monica changed the channel. Veronica tried to fix the reception while they both listened to the press conference on the evening news.

"I have every reason to believe that Veronica Phillips murdered Alan. Coroners found traces of cyanide in Alan's bloodstream, and Alan didn't do drugs - he was a drinker, but he never shot up."

The press standing below him roared with questions. "But why do you think it was Veronica Phillips?"

"She was nervous about her career being shattered if her boyfriend - Alan - came out of the closet - which he was contemplating doing."

Another roar from the crowd ensued. "And how do you know all of this?"

"Because I am his real lover," the young man said.

"Change the channel," Veronica said. When Monica did, the police chief of the

local county police department was being questioned. "With the findings from the Coroner's office, we definitely agree that there was foul play. As for Veronica Phillips, well, we'll be contacting her to answer some questions, but that is all we can say at the moment."

Veronica got up and turned off the television set, then sat back down on the bed. Monica lit up a cigarette. "Well, you better call the lawyers," Monica said as she took a long drag.

"But I didn't do it," Veronica mumbled under her breath. She dropped her head into her hands.

"No, of course you didn't, Ronnie," Monica said. She took another drag. "You know that, I know that -"

Veronica looked up. "Oh." She sat in silence.

Monica sat in silence with her.

Veronica figured it out.

"Oh my God," whispered Veronica. Veronica couldn't say any more. Monica picked up her head and looked at Veronica and waited.

"Monica, you did it, didn't you?" she finally asked.

Monica then looked down at the cigarette she was inhaling from. She pulled the cigarette away from her lips. "Well, honey, I've got to take care of you, now, don't I?"

Veronica jumped up from the bed. "I can't believe this! I can't believe you did this to us! Now you expect me to cover this up? What if someone saw you there, or saw you going there? Or what if someone from staff here saw you? God, Monica, this is why I'm the one on the outside most of the time, this is way out of control! You can't go around killing people! Do you think this is going to make my life easier? Monica, we need to have only one of us on the outside at a time - oh, God, and now I've got to figure out a way to get us out of this? Take care of me? You call this taking care of me? You've turned our life upside-down, you've possible destroyed our only chance for the future we wanted, and you call this taking care of me? And another thing, I'm the one that takes care of you, not the other way around. I've managed perfectly well so far, I've managed to not kill anyone, and then you go out when you're not supposed to and do this. And what if we have to go to jail?"

"First of all, Ronnie, only one of us can go to jail. The other one would have to go into hiding. Remember that there's only one of us on the outside. Second, this is a perfect time to have both of us on the outside. I went there at twelve-thirty or one in the morning, and since you weren't home I knew you were at a club, so you'd have a room full of witnesses to back you up. You have an air-tight alibi, Ronnie. Third, Alan was only going to be trouble for us later on, and -"

"Monica, I wasn't at a club, I was talking to a fan in my trailer until two in the morning. Jesus Christ, I can't even remember his fucking name, it was, oh shit, it was -"

"Veronica, you didn't go out that night? Damn it, Ronnie, you can - but wait, the fan, just remember his name and he'll come forward."

"Um, I think it was John."

Monica sat for a moment in silence.

“John.” Monica paused. “John - that’s all you can think of, John? No last name?”
“He never told me his last name.”

“So what we’re saying here is we’re supposed to go out on a search for a fan named John in all of California?”

“Well, don’t blame me, I’m not the one going around killing people.”

Veronica put her head back into her hands. Monica got up and walked to the door. “Well, you will be blamed if you don’t find this mysterious John. So tomorrow, you go to your lawyers, tell them the whole story about John. Then talk to the police, with the lawyers, of course, and tell them exactly what you did. The more details you give, the more convincing it will be. Then have a press conference, looking for the fan. I’m sure he’ll show up to get more fame, to see you again, and... To save his damsel in distress.”

Monica opened the door and checked to make sure the upstairs hallway was empty. She leaned back in the room. “And yes, Ronnie, remember that you aren’t the one going around killing people. I am.”

Monica turned away and shut the door behind her.

Veronica watched the cigarette smoke Monica left behind glide up toward to solitary ceiling light. “But if this doesn’t work, which one of us goes to jail?” she spoke out loud to the four empty, cold walls.

The next day went perfectly according to plan. Veronica got her team of lawyers together, and she explained everything. She put on her most conservative suit and went to the police without being asked. She had her lawyers set up a press conference for five o’clock in the afternoon that day.

As everything was happening around her, all she could think was that if this didn’t work out, if Veronica Phillips was going to go to jail, then she would go into hiding and let them drag Monica away.

But five-o’clock rolled around, and the room was filled at Veronica’s press conference with news reporters, photographers, other actors, anyone who could get a badge. Veronica looked out from the edge of the stage, and wondered if they all came because they loved her or because they hated her.

This would have to be her best performance yet, she thought, sound intelligent, look sweet, act conservatively, use emotion, but not so much that it is unbelievable.

Her head lawyer went up on stage first, delivered a seven-minute speech, then fielded questions from the press. They questioned him for nearly ten minutes. Then he handed the stage over to Veronica, and she started her carefully prepared speech. Explaining that she wasn’t alone but talking with a fan in her trailer on the set, all she asked was for that fan to step forward. Hot lines were set up, toll-free phone lines were activated, all he had to do was call. John was the only thing that could prove her innocence to her, and she was sure he would step forward.

At least that is what she said in the press conference.

Veronica went home that night feeling worse than in the morning. She delivered her speeches to the lawyers, to the police, to the media flawlessly, but no John had stepped forward. She waited at her lawyer's offices, waiting for John to call, for hours. He never did.

"What if he never comes forward?" she asked herself over and over again in her limousine ride home.

Hordes of media were waiting at the edge of her driveway, following her car in after eleven o'clock that night. The police cars that followed her home pushed the media away long enough for her to get into her home. She had her lawyers call for bodyguards and security for 6 a.m. the next morning.

Veronica went upstairs, and a moment later Monica came back down. She asked her staff to close all the shades that weren't already closed, then to go on a small vacation. The less people around, the better. "I'm sure you understand, and I appreciate your consideration during this time for me. When I need you again, I'll call you all back," she told her staff.

Within twenty minutes the house was empty. Veronica went downstairs to the bar and poured herself a glass of bourbon. She sat at a chair, with her elbows on the bar, her left hand on her forehead. She couldn't move.

Monica circled around her, pacing back and forth. "Well, we're going to have to come up with something. And you, Ronnie, you look like hell. That better be an act because we need your mind sharp when you're out there."

"Monica," Veronica responded, "Alan is dead, you killed him, and everyone thinks it was me. I look like hell because I'm in it."

She looked down, swirled the bourbon around the bottom of the glass, and finished her first round.

Veronica poured herself another glass. Monica started to walk out the room when Veronica spoke.

"So, cyanide, huh? How did you give it to him?"

"In his drink. He was already sloshed."

Veronica paused. "Did you take the glass with you?"

"Of course. And yes, I wore gloves. Don't worry, Ronnie."

Monica walked up the stairs.

Veronica wondered how many opportunities Monica had to lace her drinks, too.

For the next few days she had the lawyers call her at home and visit her instead of going out herself. She had security posted at every doorway, and a few monitoring the windows around her property. She felt like she was already in prison.

During the third night, while Veronica sat in her living room with a glass of sherry, Monica leaned over the back of the couch and whispered in her ear, "Are you beginning to see how I've felt all of these years?"

Veronica closed her eyes. She was afraid to say anything to Monica anymore. Monica walked away, whistling.

The fifth day was when the phone call came. John called at noon, and they immediately arranged a press conference for five o'clock in the afternoon. By three-thirty, John was at the police station with Veronica's lawyers. Veronica stayed at home and prepared for the press conference.

She only first saw him when he came on stage to join her. Her eyes turned into saucers when John walked on stage, but she quickly regained her composure. They answered a few questions, then Veronica took her lawyers, and John, out to dinner. By eight o'clock that night, the police issued a formal statement that Veronica Phillips was not considered a suspect in Alan's death. A celebration was in order.

Everyone went back to the lawyers' offices and drank from their private bar. At nearly two in the morning, they decided to leave.

Veronica stayed in the parking lot with John while her lawyers, one by one, drove away. In a few minutes, the two of them were alone.

She turned to him. "You're not John."

"Yes I am, Veronica, John Lowry. I-"

"Sure, you're John, but you're not the John I met."

"I know." He paused. "I was wondering what you'd say."

"What are you doing? Why did you come forward and say you were the man I was with?"

"Miss Phillips, your fan wasn't coming forward. I know you didn't do it. I know you couldn't do it. And I'm sure you were with a fan. I couldn't let the police drag you over the coals, and they were about to do it."

"But where were you then? Could someone identify you as being somewhere else at the same time?"

"Miss Phillips, I live alone, I have no family around here, and not many friends, either. I work as a pool cleaner in Beverly Hills. No one knows anything about me, and no one saw what I was doing that night. I was alone, in my darkened apartment, on the phone with no one. I was reading a book, in my bedroom, which doesn't even have any windows. You have nothing to worry about."

"But what if the real John comes forward?"

"Miss Phillips, if he were going to come forward, don't you think he would have done it by now? I think you feared that he would never show up. If you didn't, you wouldn't have remained silent during the press conference."

Veronica leaned against her Mercedes in the parking lot. A street light illuminated the ground behind her car, leaving the two of them just out of the spotlight.

"But why did you do it?"

"I told you. I know you're innocent. I know you wouldn't do that. And -"

"And what?"

"And... I'm a big fan, too."

They sat in silence together, both leaning against her car.

"I don't know, just to be able to meet you, to talk to you, that's a big enough thrill, but I thought, hey, it would be an honor to help you when you needed it."

"But I don't know how to thank you, I mean, I could give you something, but then

it would look like I was paying you off, and -”

“I’m not asking for anything. I mean, I got something - I’m the only person that could save you, and I did.”

John looked up at the insects circling around the street light.

“Maybe, Miss Phillips -”

“Yes?”

“Maybe you could keep in touch. A phone call, or dinner once or twice a year.”

“I think I could do that, John. But one thing -”

“Yes, Miss Phillips?”

“You have to call me Veronica.”

John looked down as a sheepish grin came across his face. “Sure, Veronica.”

She gave this stranger a hug before she got into her car and drove away.

Veronica called her producers the next day and told them that she would have to take a few days off from filming to recuperate. She stayed in bed late.

Monica walked into the master bedroom at eleven-thirty in the morning. “Why aren’t you on the set?”

“I called in and told them I needed a few days for myself. They understood. I told them less than a week.”

“Ronnie, why the hell did you do that? I could have covered for you. You don’t want people to wonder what’s going on.”

“Monica, people will wonder if I’m able to just go right back to work after all this happened. It’s natural to need some time off after something like this. It’s traumatic.”

“You are such a whiny bitch, Ron. You should have checked with me first.”

Monica walked out of the bedroom, but popped her head in for a brief moment.

“Oh, and get this, Ron, the morning news updates say that Alan’s lover is now the primary suspect. What a riot. Now the little fucker will get his for pointing the finger at us, right?”

Monica started to laugh as she left Veronica’s bedroom and walked down the hallway.

Veronica spent the afternoon drinking. By four-thirty in the afternoon she decided to make a phone call.

“Doctor Wolcott’s office.”

“Yes, I’d like to make an appointment to see Doctor Wolcott as soon as possible. It’s a bit of an emergency.”

“Have you visited with Doctor Wolcott before?”

“Yes, but it hasn’t been for a few years. Look, is there anything available in the next day or two? Tell him it’s Veronica Phillips, he’ll remember me.”

“Oh, Ms. Phillips, let me check with the doctor and see what we can do.”

She made an appointment with her psychiatrist for the next afternoon.

“Remember, Ron, according to the rest of the world there’s only one of us. No one would miss us if one of us happened to disappear. A body floating down the canal two

weeks from now wouldn't look like Veronica anymore. It would be some Jane Doe, some runaway teenager, the police would think. Besides, why would anyone think it was Veronica? She'd be still alive, filming her best movie yet."

For the rest of the evening Monica's words kept pounding through Veronica's brain.

From the living room she heard Monica walking down the stairs. "Veronica, I'm going out to the clubs tonight. Don't go anywhere, will you?"

"I won't," Veronica answered. "Try to look like you're shaken up, will you?"

"Don't worry, darling. I'm a great actress." And with that she turned around and headed for the door.

As Monica walked away Veronica listened to her footsteps. The heels of her shoes clicked against the marble hallway floor. The front door opened, closed. Veronica looked around at the shadows her furniture cast over the walls. She sat with her feet up on her couch. Her drink was almost empty. She reached over for the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Tony?"

"Yeah, who is this - Veronica?"

"Yeah, hope I'm not calling too late."

"No, honey, I was just going to go out in a bit. What do you need?"

"Well, after this whole fiasco with the police I feel like everyone's watching me a little more closely. I feel so unsafe, even in my own house. I know you offered this to me before, so -"

"You want a gun for your house?"

"Yeah, Tony."

"Well, first you gotta learn how to shoot the thing."

"Would you be interested in teaching me?"

"Sure, Veronica. When do you wanna do this?"

"As soon as possible. Can we get together tomorrow?"

"Yeah, but only at like noon. Do you want me to pick you up?"

"Sure, Tony. And thanks."

"No problem. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Yeah, Tony. Oh wait - I might be going out to the clubs, so if I see you out tonight, don't talk about this. I don't want other people knowing I'm getting a gun."

"Got it, honey. See you later."

"Bye, Tony."

She laid the phone down on the cocktail table. She got up and walked into the bathroom. She turned on the light and stood in front of the medicine cabinet. She stared at herself in the mirror, noting the new wrinkles she gained over the past two weeks. She opened the cabinet, found every package of codeine and lithium, as well as two jars of sleeping pills. She walked upstairs and did the same in the master bathroom. She then walked down the stairs into the kitchen and hid everything in a crock pot, and put it in the oven. Monica couldn't poison her, she thought, if she couldn't find the drugs.

She straightened herself up, left the kitchen, walked into the living room. She looked

around her quiet house. She used to like it when she let the staff go for the night, she like the feeling of being alone. Never before did it feel unsafe, or even lonely. She got her glass, and walked to the bar. She had twelve more hours to kill before seeing Tony.

The next morning went perfectly. Since Veronica was in bed when Monica came home, and probably because Monica was still drunk at dawn, she went to the attic to sleep. Veronica got up, took some aspirin, and got ready to see Tony.

When she saw Tony pulling into her driveway, she walked outside. She got into his car and they made their way towards the shooting range.

“Hey, Veronica, in the back seat - do you like it?”

She looked in the back seat and saw a .38 special laying in the back seat. It looks like it was just thrown there nonchalantly, she thought, by someone who didn't know what it was capable of doing.

“Is it loaded?”

“Nah. Thought I'd teach you how to do that once we got to the range.”

She reached to the back seat and picked up the gun.

“It's a beauty, ain't it, honey?”

She didn't answer; she just sat there in amazement at how heavy the gun really was.

Tony explained everything to her, and after two-and-a-half hours she felt calm and focused when she shot her new gun. He brought her home by three-thirty, which gave her just enough time to hide her gun in the pot in the oven, change clothes, and take her limousine to her doctor's appointment.

She walked through a back entrance into the office to avoid the exposure. She walked in with a calm she thought she couldn't have until after she talked to her old doctor.

Doctor Wolcott's previous appointment had already left, so he was waiting for her when she arrived. She walked into his office and immediately sat on the couch. He got up from his chair, walked around and sat on the corner of his desk.

“Ms. Phillips, it's good to see you again.”

“Monica's getting out of control.”

Doctor Wolcott paused. “The last time we talked was a few years ago, but then you said that Monica wasn't bothering you.”

“Well, she's come out of hiding, and she's on a rampage. I'm scared of her. I'm afraid she's going to try to take over me.”

“Why would you say that Veronica? You're a strong woman. You know you can handle her, you've done so before.”

“You don't get it, Doctor Wolcott,” she answered. She paused, took in a deep breath. “She killed Alan.”

Doctor Wolcott leaned his head back. His smile faded.

“It was her, doctor. I swear, it wasn't me. I wasn't there. She did it, and I had to cover it up.” Her eyes started to water; she put her hand to her cheek, brushed her hair

back behind her ear. "And she's been threatening me, saying she's not going to stay in hiding anymore, that no one will miss me if I'm found floating down the river two weeks from now by the police. God, I really think she's going to kill me."

"Veronica, she's not going to kill you. She needs you. She needs you to be alive. What she wants is to take over your spirit and rule your life. What you have to do is fight that, fight her will."

"No, Doctor Wolcott, you don't understand. I think she fed me sleeping pills a couple of weeks ago. I keep finding codeine and lithium in the medicine cabinets that I didn't put there. I've had to hide it from her. I'm really afraid she's trying to kill me off."

"Veronica, I'd like to admit you somewhere to get some rest. You could be away from Monica then, you'd have time to recuperate, time away from work, time to fight her and win yourself back."

"Doctor Wolcott, if I do that, then she'll definitely take over my life. She'll get out, there's nothing I can do to stop that. And she'll make it so I can never get back out. She'll never let me out."

"Then you have to fight her will now, Veronica. Let me help you."

Veronica's tears slid down her face in quiet desperation. "I have to fight her. I have to get rid of her."

Doctor Wolcott responded to her comments, but she no longer heard them. For the rest of the hour all she could think was that she had to confront Monica, do it reasonably and rationally, make it a test of wills. She always won in the past. She has to do it again.

At six o'clock, Veronica left the office and stepped into her limousine. She checked to make sure there was some liquor in the back. She told the driver to drive around. She didn't want to go home yet.

After two hours, she told her driver to stop at a liquor store and buy her a bottle of red wine. Then she asked him to drive her to the shore.

He drove her to a hill near the shore, so that she could watch the sunset without having to leave the back of her car. Veronica sipped her wine as she watched the glowing red sun slide down into the cool blue waters, illuminating the sky with oranges and purples.

"You know, I haven't watched the sunset in years," she told her driver as they pulled away from the hill and headed back to her home. Inside, she wondered if it would be her last.

Veronica walked into her home at nearly ten-thirty that night. She heard classical music playing from upstairs. She hoped she could avoid her confrontation for just a little while longer. She kicked her shoes off at the front door and started to head for the bar when she stopped.

"God, I haven't eaten all day," she thought, and turned around and headed into the kitchen.

The light was on in the kitchen, and she walked around the island to her refriger-

ator to grab a piece of cheese. She set the block of cheese down next to the refrigerator and grabbed a piece of french bread from the counter, ripping off the end and shoving it in her mouth. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw the oven door slightly open.

A wave of fear fell over her. In a mad panic, she ran up the stairs to her bedroom.

She grabbed the door frame at her bedroom to stop her forward motion. Monica sat in the center of the bed, bottles and packages of drugs and boxes of bullets fanned around her. Veronica's gun was resting in Monica's lap; Monica gazed intently at it as she repeatedly ran her fingers along the handle. She didn't look up to acknowledge Veronica's arrival.

Veronica stood in the doorway, holding herself up with the door frame, panting.

Monica continued to stroke the side of the gun.

"I'm so disappointed in you, Ronnie. Did you really think I wouldn't find this?" Her eyes never left the gun in her lap.

"I just bought it. I was afraid of freaks trying to hurt us because of Alan's murder."

"And that's why you were collecting the drugs, Ronnie?"

"No, I was afraid you were going to hurt yourself. We've both been under a lot of stress, and I didn't want you resorting to -"

"Do you really think I'm stupid, Ronnie?"

Veronica stopped making up an explanation and just looked at her. Monica picked up the gun from her lap and got up from the bed.

"I mean, do you really think I'm that stupid?" She asked again, this time louder, almost screaming.

Veronica stood motionless in the doorway. Monica walked up to her. Their noses almost touched.

"I'm smart enough to know that the two of us can't do this any longer, that the two of us can't go one being one person any longer. One of us has to die tonight, for the sanity of the both of us."

They both stood in silence, waiting for the other to make the first move.

"Remember, Ron, according to the rest of the world there's only one of us. No one would miss us if one of us happened to disappear. A body floating down the canal two weeks from now wouldn't look like Veronica anymore. It would be some Jane Doe, some runaway teenager, the police would think. Besides, why would anyone think it was Veronica? She'd be still alive, filming her best movie yet."

Thoughts raced through Veronica's mind. She finally spoke. "You're the one who decided that one of us has to die tonight, not me. But I'm not going to -"

In mid-sentence, to catch her off-guard, Veronica pushed Monica down and ran out the room toward the stairs.

Monica quickly jumped to her feet, picked up the gun and ran after her. She caught up in the living room. Monica started to yell.

"What, Ronnie, getting another drink? You can't drink yourself away from this one, Ron. I'm not going away. I'm not blowing my entire career because you can't handle it."

Veronica started to cry. "I thought we were a team. I thought we needed each

other.” Veronica slid to the floor and leaned against the bar.

Monica crouched down next to her. “It’s got to be this way, Ronnie. You know it does.”

“But I don’t want to die,” Veronica whispered. She looked down at the carpet.

“One of us has to go away in order for the life of Veronica Phillips to move forward. All of her work will be forgotten if we’re fighting on the sidelines.”

Veronica looked up. “I’m Veronica Phillips,” she said as she swung her right arm and punched Monica. Monica fell back, but jumped back and lunged for Veronica.

From two blocks away, a pair of joggers heard a single gun shot during their daily run.

It was two mornings later when the police entered the home of Veronica Phillips at the request of Doctor Wolcott. They found assorted pills and drugs scattered on Veronica’s bed. And they found Veronica Phillips laying dead on her living room floor next to her bar, with her gun in her hand.

“I should have done something,” Doctor Wolcott said under his breath.

“Did you have reason to believe she was going to kill herself?” one of the police officers asked while a plain-clothes officer took photographs of the scene.

“No,” Doctor Wolcott responded, “but she was afraid her other personality was going to kill her. She saw me two days ago, she made an appointment for the first time in years. When I worked with her before I knew she had multiple personality disorder, but she had been in extensive therapy with me and she said that Monica - the second personality - wasn’t around anymore, wasn’t bothering her. So, I never admitted her anywhere. And just two days ago she came to my office, saying Monica was back.”

Doctor Wolcott stood back while the paramedics carried a stretcher into her home.

“And now she destroyed both of them,” Doctor Wolcott whispered.

On the set, her director got a body-double to finish the film.

On the other side of town, John was waiting for Veronica Phillips to call.

crazy
CRAZY

This dialogue is transcribed from repeated visits with a patient in Aaronsville Correctional Center in West Virginia. Madeline*, a thirty-six year old woman, was sentenced to life imprisonment after the brutal slaying of her boyfriend during sexual intercourse. According to police reports, Madeline sat with the remains of the man for three days after the murder until police arrived on the scene. They found her in the same room as the body, still coated with blood and malnourished. Three doctors studied her behavior for a total period of eight months, and the unanimous conclusion they reached was that Madeline was not of sound mind when she committed the act, which involved an ice pick, an oak board from the back of a chair, and eventually a chef's knife. Furthermore, she continued to show signs of both paranoia and delusions of grandeur long after the murder, swaying back and forth between the two, much like manic depression.

For three and a half years Madeline has stayed at the Aaronsville Correctional Center, and she has shown no signs of behavioral improvement. She stays in a room by herself, usually playing solitaire on her bed. She talks to herself regularly and out loud, usually in a slight Southern accent, although not in a very loud tone, according to surveillance videotape. Her family abandoned her after the murder. Occasionally she requests newspapers to read, but she is usually denied them. She never received visitors, until these sessions with myself.

The following excerpts are from dialogues I have had with her, although I am tempted to say that they are monologues. She wasn't very interested in speaking with me, rather, she was more interested in opening herself up to someone for the first time in years, someone who was willing to listen. At times I began to feel like a surrogate parent. I try not to think of what will happen when our sessions end.

** Madeline is not her real name.*

I know they're watching me. They've got these stupid cameras everywhere - see, there's one behind the air vent there, hi there, and there's one where the window used to be. They've probably got them behind the mirrors, too. It wouldn't be so bad, I guess, I mean, there's not much for me to be doing in here anyway, but they watch me dress, too, I mean, they're watching me when I'm naked, now what's that going to do to a person? I don't know what they're watching for anyway, it's not like I can do anything in here. I eat everything with a spoon, I've never been violent, all I do, almost every day, is sit on this bed and play solitaire.

Solitaire is really relaxing, you know, and I think it keeps your brain alive, too. Most people think you can't win at solitaire, that the chances of winning are like two percent or something. But the thing is, you can win at this game like over half the time. I think that's the key, too - knowing you can win half the time. I mean, the last four rounds I played, I won twice. Now I'm not saying that's good or anything, like praise me because I won two rounds of solitaire, but it makes a point that as long as you know what you're doing and you actually think about it, you can win. The odds are better.

I think people just forget to watch the cards. Half the time the reason why you lose is because you forget something so obvious. You're looking for a card through the deck and the whole time it's sitting on another pile, just waiting to be moved over, and the whole time you forget to move it. People just forget to pay attention. They got to pay attention.

You know, I'd like to see the news. I hate t.v., but I'd like to see what acts other people are doing. Anything like mine? Has anyone else lost it like me? You know, I'll bet my story wasn't even on the news for more than thirty seconds. And I'll bet the news person had a tone to their voice that was just like "oh, the poor crazy thing," like, "that's what happens when you lose it, I guess."

But I want to see what's happening in the real world. I just wanna watch to see what, you know, the weather is like, even though I haven't seen the sun in a year or two. Or, or to hear sports scores. They won't let me have a t.v. in the room. I think they think that I'm gonna hot-wire it or something, like I'm going to try to electrocute the whole building with a stupid television set. They let me have a lamp in the room, like I can't hurt someone with that, but no t.v. They won't even let me have a newspaper. What can a person do with a newspaper? Light in on fire or something? If I had matches or something. But it's like this: I've never been violent to nobody in all of the time I've been in here. I haven't laid a hand on a guard, even though they're tried too many time to lay a hand on me, and I haven't cause one single little problem in this whole damn place, and this is what I get - I don't even get a t.v. or a newspaper.

You know, I don't really have a Southern accent. See? Don't I sound different with my regular voice? I picked it up when I started sounding crazy. See, I'm not really crazy, I just know the kind of shit they do to you in prison. I think it's bad enough here, I would've had the shit kicked out of me, Id've been sodomized before I knew what hit me. I think this voice makes me sound a little more strange. I'm actually from New York, but I mean, changing the voice a little just to save me from going to prison, well, I can do that. Here it's kind of nice, I don't have to deal with people that often, and all the crazy people around here think I'm some sort of tough bitch because I mutilated someone who was

raping me. Oh, you didn't hear that part of the story, did you? Those damn lawyers thought that since I wasn't a virgin I must have been wanting him. And he wasn't even my boyfriend - he was just some guy I knew, we'd go out every couple of weeks, and I never even slept with him before.

What a fucked up place. You see, I gotta think of it this way: I really had no choice but to do what I did. In a way it was self-defense, because I didn't want that little piece of shit to try to do that to me, I mean, what the Hell makes him think he can do that? Where does he get off trying to take me like that, like I'm some butcher-shop piece of meat he can buy and abuse or whatever? Well anyway, I know part of it all was self defense and all, but at the same time I know I flipped, but its because of, well shit that happened in my past. I never came from any rich family like you, I never even came from a family with a dad, and when you got all these boyfriends coming in and hitting you or touching you or whatever, you know it's got to mess you up. Yeah, I know, people try to use the my-parents-beat-me line and it's getting to the point where no one really believes it anymore, but if a person goes through all their life suppressing something that they shouldn't have to suppress then one day it's going to just come up to them and punch them in the face, it's going to make them go crazy, even if it's just for a little while.

Society's kind of weird, you know. It's like they teach you to do things that aren't normal, that don't feel right down deep in your bones, but you have to do them anyway, because someone somewhere decided that this would be normal. Everyone around you suppresses stuff, and when you see that it tells you that you're supposed to be hiding it from the rest of the world, too, like if we all just hide it for a while, it will all go away. Maybe it does, until someone like me blows up and can't take hiding all that stuff anymore, but then the rest of the world can just say that we're crazy and therefore it's unexplainable why we went crazy and then they can just brush it all off and everything is back to normal again. It's like emotion. People are taught to hide their emotions. Men are taught not to cry, women are taught to be emotional and men are told to think that it's crazy. So when something really shitty happens to someone - like a guy loses his job or something - and he just sits in front of a friend and breaks down and cries, the other guy just thinks this guy is crazy for crying. Then the guy rejects the guy that's crying, making him feel even worse, making the guy bottle it back up inside of him.

I think people are like Pepsi bottles. You remember those glass bottles? Pop always tasted better in those bottles, you could just like swig it down easier, your lips fit around the glass neck better or something. I wonder why people don't use them anymore? Well, I think people are like Pepsi bottles, like they have the potential for all of this energy, and the whole world keeps shaking them up, and some people lose their heads and the top goes off and all of this icky stuff comes shooting all around and other Pepsi bottles want to hide from it and then the poor guy has no Pepsi left. And how can you do anything when you have no Pepsi left? Or maybe you do lose it, but you still have some Pepsi left in you, and people keep thinking that you don't have any left, and then they treat you like you shouldn't be allowed to tie your own shoelaces or you should be watched while you're getting dressed.

Can't you turn those cameras off?

I heard this story in here sometime about Tony, this guy that was in here for murder, and after he was in here he went crazy and cut off his own scrotum. I don't know how a man survives something like that, but I guess he did, because he was in here, and from what I hear he was using the pay phones to call 1-800 numbers to prank whoever answered at the other end. Well, I guess he kept calling this one place where these women would answer the phone, and they got fed up with it, I guess, and traced it or something. They got the number for this hospital, and talked to his doctor. I think he told them that Tony cut his balls off, now I thought doctor-patient records were private, but I suppose it doesn't matter, because we're just crazy prisoners, killers who don't matter anyway, but he told these girls that Tony cut his balls off a whole two months ago. And then he called them back, talking dirty to them, not knowing they knew he was a murderer with no balls and they laughed and made fun of him and told him they knew, and he hung up the phone and never called them back. True story, swear to God. Can you just imagine him wondering how they knew? Or were they just making a joke, or...

Did you know that I write? I figured that if they won't let me read anything, maybe I could put stuff down on paper and read it to myself, I guess. I try to write poetry, but it just don't come out right, but I've been trying to write a thing about what I went through, you know what I'm talking about? Well, I just figure that if other people that are in prison can get best sellers and make a ton of money, then so can I, I mean, my story is better than half the stuff that's out there, and I know there are a lot of women who have a little part of them that wants to do what I did. I think all women feel it, but the most of them are taught to suppress it, to keep it all bottled in like that. But now that I think of it, what am I going to do with a bunch of money anyway? I'm never going to get out of here to enjoy it or anything. Anyway, how would I get someone to want to read it in the first place, now that everyone thinks that I'm crazy?

Sometimes I get so depressed. It's like I'm never going to get out of here. I think I wanted to have kids one day. It's easier, I guess, not having to see kids, I guess then I don't miss them too much, but...

For the longest time they tried to get doctors to come in here and talk to me, and you know what they did? They got men doctors - one after another - and then they wondered why the Hell I didn't want to talk to them. Amazing. People really just don't think, do they?

I guess it's hard, being in here and all, I mean. I was going to go back to school, I had already taken the GED and graduated high school, and I was going to go to the local community college. It was going to be different. Sometimes I wonder, you know, why this had to happen to me, why I had to snap. I really don't think I could have controlled it, I don't think any of this could have happened any other way. It's hard. I have to find stuff to do, because otherwise all I'd want to do is sleep all day and night, and I suppose I could, but then what would happen to me? At least if I write a book about my life, about this whole stupid world, then maybe everyone would at least understand. It wasn't really my fault, I mean, I think we women have enough to deal with just in our regular lives and then they keep piling on this sexism crap on us, and then expect us not to be angry about it because we were taught to deal with it all of our lives. Maybe this guy



was just the straw that broke the camel's back or something, maybe he was just another rapist, maybe he was just another drunk guy who thought that he could do whatever he wanted with me because he was the man and I was his girl, or just some chick that didn't matter or whatever, but shit, it does matter, at least to me it does.

I know I've got a lot of healing to do, but I haven't really thought about doing it. I mean, what have I got to heal for anyway? To get out of here and go to prison? Then I'll just get abused by guards over there, have to watch my back every second of the day. At least here people watch my back for me. They think everything and anything in the world could harm me, even myself, so they're so overprotective that nothing can go wrong, unless it goes wrong in my own mind.

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NICK DISPOLDO, SMALL PRESS REVIEW

Kuypers is the widely-published poet of particular perspectives and not a little existential rage. One piece in this issue is "Crazy," an interview Kuypers conducted with "Madeline," a murderess who was found insane, and is confined to West Virginia's Aaronsville Correctional Center. Madeline, whose elevator definitely doesn't go to the top, killed her boyfriend during sex with an ice pick and a chef's knife, far surpassing the butchery of Elena Bobbitt. Madeline, herself covered with blood, sat beside her lover's remains for three days, talking to herself, and that is how the police found her. For effect, Kuypers publishes Madeline's monologue in different-sized type, and the result is something between a sense of Dali's surrealism and Kafka-like craziness.

Gabriel GABRIEL

She had lived there, in her fourth floor apartment on the near north side of the city, for nearly three years. It was an uneventful three years from the outside; Gabriel liked it that way. She just wanted to live her life: go to work, see her new friends, have a place to herself.

But looking a bit closer, it was easy to see what a wonderful life she had. Her apartment was impeccable, with Greek statues and glass vases lining the hallways, modern oil paintings lining her walls. She was working at her career for a little under two years and she had received two hefty promotions. She served on the board of directors for the headquarters of a national domestic abuse clinic and single-handedly managed to increase annual donations in her city by 45%, as well as drastically increase the volunteer base for their hotline numbers. She managed a boyfriend, a man who was willing to put up with her running around, working overtime for her job, visiting clinics. A man who loved and respected her for her drive. Not bad for a woman almost twenty-five.

Yes, life seemed good for Gabriel, she would dine in fine restaurants, visit the operas and musicals travelling through the city. And she had only been in the city for three years.

Eric would wonder what her past was like when he'd hit a nerve with her and she would charge off to work, not talking to him for days. She had only lived in the city for three years, and he knew nothing about her life before then. In the back of his mind, he always thought she was hiding something from him, keeping a little secret, and sometimes everything Gabriel said made him believe this secret was real. She told him her parents lived on the other side of the country, and even though they dated for almost two years there never was talk about visiting them. She never received calls from her old friends. There were no old photographs.

This would get to Eric sometimes; it would fester inside of him when he sat down and thought about it, all alone, in his apartment, wondering when she would be finished with work. And then he'd see her again, and all of his problems would disappear, and he'd feel like he was in love.

One morning he was sitting at her breakfast table, reading her paper, waiting so they could drive to work. "Hey, they finally got that mob-king guy with some charges they think will stick."

Gabriel minded her business, put her make-up on in the bathroom mirror, hair-sprayed her short, curly brown hair.

"Hey, Gabriel, get a load of this quote," Eric shouted down the hallway to her from his seat. He could just barely see her shadow through the open door to the bathroom. "My client is totally innocent of any charges against him. It is the defense's opinion that Mr. Luccio was framed, given to the police by the organized crime rings in this city

as a decoy,' said Jack Huntington, defense lawyer for the case. 'Furthermore, the evidence is circumstantial, and weak.' What a joke. I hope this guy doesn't get away with all he's done. You know, if I—"

Gabriel stopped hearing his voice when she heard that name. She had heard Luccio over and over again in the news, but Jack. She didn't expect this. Not now. It had been so long since she heard that name.

But not long enough. Her hands gripped the edge of the ceramic sink, gripping tighter and tighter until she began to scratch the wood paneling under the sink. Her head hung down, the ends of her hair falling around her face. He lived outside of the city, nearly two hours. Now he was here, maybe ten minutes away from her home, less than a mile away from where she worked, where she was about to go to.

She couldn't let go of the edge of the sink. Eric stopped reading aloud and was already to the sports section, and in the back of her mind Gabriel was wondering how she could hurt herself so she wouldn't have to go to work. She would be late already, she had been standing there for over ten minutes.

Hurt herself? What was she thinking? And she began to regain her senses. She finally picked her head up and looked in the mirror. She wasn't the woman from then, she had to say to herself as she sneered at her reflection. But all she could see was long, blonde straight hair, a golden glow from the sun, from the days where she didn't work as often as she did, when she had a different life.

She had to pull on her hair to remind herself that it was short. She pulled it until she almost cried. Then she stopped, straightened her jacket, took a deep breath and walked out the bathroom door.

Eric started to worry. As they car-pooled together to work, Gabriel sat in the passenger seat, right hand clutching the door handle, left hand grabbing her briefcase, holding it with a fierce, ferocious grip. But it was a grip that said she was scared, scared of losing that briefcase, or her favorite teddy bear from the other kids at school, or her life from a robber in an alley. If nothing else, Eric knew she felt fear. And he didn't know why.

He tried to ask her. She said she was tired, but tense, an important meeting and a pounding headache. He knew it was more. She almost shook as she sat in that car, and she began to rock back and forth, forward and back, ever so slightly, the way a mother rocks her child to calm her down. It made Eric tense, too. And scared.

Work was a blur, a blur of nothingness. There was no meeting, the workload was light for a Friday. But at least the headache was there, that wasn't a lie. She hated lying, especially to Eric. But she had no choice, especially now, with Jack lurking somewhere in the streets out there, winning his cases, wondering if his wife is dead or not.

She never wanted him to know the answer.

Eric called her a little after four. "Just wanted to check if we were still going to dinner tonight. I made the reservations at the new Southwestern place, you said you wanted to go there. Sound good?"

Gabriel mustered up the strength to respond, only coming up with, "Sure."

“Do you still have the headache, honey? Do you want to just rent a movie or two and curl up on the couch tonight? Whatever you want to do is fine, just let me know.”

She knew at this point he was doing all he could to make her feel better. She didn't want to put him through this. He shouldn't have to deal with her like this. She searches for her second wind. “No, Eric, dinner would be fine. We can go straight from work to save the drive. Thanks, too. You really have a knack for making my days better.”

Eric smiled at the end of the line. And Gabriel could feel it.

They got off the phone, she finished her work, turned off her computer, started walking toward the elevator when it finally occurred to her: Jack might be there. She can't go. Even if he's not there, she could see him on the street, driving there. She just couldn't go.

She pressed the button for the elevator. And he could just as easily see me walking out of work, getting in Eric's car, she thought. I have to stop thinking like this. This is ludicrous. And he won't be there, he won't see me, because, well, the chances are so thin, and Hell, it's a big city. I have to try to relax.

But she couldn't. And there was no reason she should have.

At the restaurant, they sat on the upper level, near one of the large Roman columns decorated with ivy. She kept looking around one of the columns, because a man three tables away looked like Jack. It wasn't, but she still had to stare.

The meal was delicious, the presentation was impeccable. She was finally starting to relax. The check arrived at the table right as the place began to get crowded, so Gabriel went to the washroom to freshen up before they left. She walked through the restaurant, feeling comfortable and confident again. She even attracted a smile from a man at another table. She walked with confidence and poise. And she loved life again.

She walked into the bathroom, straight to the mirror, checking her hair, her lip stick. She looked strong, not how she looked when she was married. She closed her purse, turned around and headed out the door.

That's when she saw him.

There he was, Jack, standing right there, waiting for a table. He had three other men with him, all in dark suits. She didn't know if they were mob members or firm associates. Or private eyes he hired to find her. Dear God, she thought, what could she do now? She can't get to the table, he'll see her for sure. She can't stare at him, it'll only draw attention to herself.

And then she thinks: “Wait. All I've seen is the back of him. It might not even be him.” She took a breath. “It's probably not even him,” she thought, “and I've sat here worrying about it.”

Still, she couldn't reassure herself. She took a few steps back and waited for him to turn around.

A minute passed, or was it a century?, and finally he started to turn, just as they were about to be led to their table. She saw his profile, just a glimpse of his face. It was him, it was Jack, it was the monster she knew from all those years, the man who made her lose any ounce of innocence or femininity she ever had. She saw how his chin sloped into his neck, the curve of his nose, how he combed his hair back, and she knew

it was him.

By the washrooms, she stared at him while he took one step away from her, closer to the dining room. Then she felt a strong, pulling hand grip her shoulder. Her hair slapped her in the face as she turned around. Her eyes were saucers.

"The check is paid for. Let's go," Eric said as he took her jacket from her arm and held it up for her. She slid her arms through the sleeves, Eric pulling the coat over her shoulders. She stared blankly. He guided her out the doors.

She asked him if they could stop at a club on the way home and have a drink or two. They found a little bar, and she instantly ordered drinks. They sat for over an hour in the dark club listening to the jazz band. It looked to Eric like she was trying to lose herself in the darkness, in the anonymity of the crowded lounge. It worried him more. And still she didn't relax.

And she drove on the expressway back from dinner, Eric in the seat next to her. He had noticed she had been tense today, more than she had ever been; whenever he asked her why she brushed her symptoms off as nothing.

The radio blared in the car, the car soaring down the four lanes of open, slick, raw power, and she heard the dee jay recap the evening news. A man died in a car accident, he said, and it was the lawyer defending the famed mob leader. And then the radio announced his name.

And she didn't even have to hear it.

Time stopped for a moment when the name was spread, Jack, Jack Huntington, like a disease, over the air waves. Jack, Jack the name crept into her car, she couldn't escape it, like contaminated water it infiltrated all of her body and she instantly felt drugged. Time stood still in a horrific silence for Gabriel. Hearing that midnight talk show host talk about the tragedy of his death, she began to reduce speed, without intention. She didn't notice until brights were flashing in her rear view mirror, cars were speeding around her, horns were honking. She was going 30 miles per hour.

She quickly regained herself, turned off the radio, and threw her foot on the accelerator. Eric sat silent. They had a long drive home ahead of them from the club, and he knew if he only sat silent that she would eventually talk.

While still in the car, ten minutes later, she began to tell him about Andrea.

"Three years ago, when I moved to the city, my name wasn't Gabriel. It was Andrea.

"Seven years ago, I was a different person. I was a lot more shy, insecure, an eighteen year old in college, not knowing what I wanted to study. I didn't know what my future was, and I didn't want to have to go through my life alone. My freshman year I met a man in the law school program at school. He asked me out as soon as he met me. I was thrilled.

"For the longest time I couldn't believe that another man, especially one who had the potential for being so successful, was actually interested in me. He was older, he was charming. Everyone loved him. I followed him around constantly, wherever he wanted me to go.

"He met my parents right away. They adored him, a man with a future, he was so

charming. They pushed the idea of marrying him. I didn't see it happening for a while, but I felt safe with him.

"And every once in a while, after a date, or a party, we'd get alone and he'd start to yell at me, about the way I acted with him, or what I said in public, or that the way I looked was wrong, or something. And every once in a while he would hit me. And whenever it happened I thought that I should have looked better, or I shouldn't have acted the way I did. This man was too good for me. And I had to do everything in my power to make him happy.

"Eight months after we met, he asked me to marry him. I accepted.

"We were married two years after we met; it was a beautiful ceremony, tons of flowers, tons of gifts—and I was turning a junior in college. My future was set for me. I couldn't believe it.

"And as soon as we were married, which was right when he started at the firm, he got more and more violent. And instead of thinking that it was my fault, I started thinking that it was because he was so stressed, that he had so much work to do, that sometimes he just took it out on me. I was no one's fault. Besides, if he was going to climb to the top, he needed a wife that was perfect for all of his appearances. I had to be perfect for him. Take care of the house and go to school full time.

"Money wasn't a problem for us, he had a trust fund from his parents and made good money at the firm, so I could go to school. But he started to hate the idea that I was going to college in marketing instead of being his wife full time. But that was one thing I wasn't going to do for him, stop going to school.

"He'd get more and more angry about it the longer we were married. After the first year he'd hit me at least once a week. I was physically sick half of my life then, sick from being worried about how to make him not hurt me, sick from trying to figure out how to cover up the bruises.

"I'd try to talk to him about it, but the few times I ever had the courage to bring it up, he'd beat me. He'd just beat me, say a few words. Apologize the next morning, think everything was better. I couldn't take it.

"I threatened with divorce. When I did that I had to go to the hospital with a broken arm. I had to tell the doctors that I fell down the stairs.

"A long flight of stairs.

"When it was approaching two years of marriage with this man, I said to myself I couldn't take it anymore. He told me over and over again that he'd make me pay if I tried to leave him, I'd be sorry, it would be the worst choice I could ever make. This man had power, too, he could hunt me down if I ran away, he could emotionally and physically keep me trapped in this marriage.

"So I did the only thing I thought I could do.

"I wrote a suicide note. 'By the time you find my car, I'll be dead.' I took a few essentials, nothing that could say who I was. I cut my hair—I used to have long, long hair that I dyed blonde. I chopped it all off and dyed it dark. Then I drove out to a quarry off the interstate 20 miles away in the middle of the night, threw my driver's license and credit cards into the passenger's seat, put a brick on the accelerator, got out

of the car and let it speed over the cliff. Everything was burned.

“So there I was, twenty-two years old, with no future, with no identity. My family, my friends, would all think I was dead in the morning. And for the first time in my life, I was so alone. God, I was so scared, but at the same time, it was the best feeling in the world. It felt good to not have my long hair brushing against my neck. It felt good to feel the cold of the three a.m. air against my cheeks, on my ears. It felt good to have no where to go, other than away. No one was telling me where to go, what to do. No one was hurting me.

“I found my way two hours away to this city, came up with the name Gabriel from a soap opera playing in a clinic I went to to get some cold medication. I managed a job at the company I’m at now. Did volunteer work, rented a hole for an apartment. Projected a few of the right ideas to the right people in the company. I got lucky.”

She told him all of this before she told him that her husband’s name was Jack Huntington.

She brought him home, sat on the couch while he made coffee for her. He tried to sound calm, but the questions kept coming out of his mouth, one after another. Gabriel’s answers suddenly streamed effortlessly from her mouth, like a river, spilling over onto the floor, covering the living room with inches of water within their half hour of talk.

She felt the cool water of her words sliding around her ankles. And she felt relieved. Gabriel, Andrea, was no longer Mrs. Jack Huntington.

Eric told her that she could have told him before. “I’d follow you anywhere. If I had to quit my job and run away with you I would.” It hurt him that she kept this from him for so long, but he knew he was the only person who knew her secret. He smiled.

There was a burden lifted, she felt, with Jack’s death, the burden that she didn’t have to hide who she was anymore. She didn’t have to worry about public places, cower when she felt his presence, following her, haunting her. It’s over, she thought. She can walk out in the street now, and scream, and run, and laugh, and no one will come walking around the corner to force her back to her old life, to that little private hell that was named Andrea.

But sitting there, she knew there was still one thing she had to do.

She put down her coffee, got on her coat, told him this was something she must do. Gabriel got into her car, started to head away from the city. As she left, Eric asked where she was going. She knew she had done what she could for the last three years of her own life to save herself; now it was time to go back to the past, no matter what the consequences were.

He thought she was going back to her family. She was, in a way.

She drove into the town she had once known, saw the trees along the streets and remembered the way they looked every fall when the leaves turned colors. She remembered that one week every fall when the time was just right and each tree’s leaves were different from the other trees. This is how she wanted to remember it.

And she drove past her old town, over an hour and a half away from the city, passing where her parents, her brother could still be living. She didn’t know if she would

ever bother to find them. Right now all she could do was drive to the next town, where her old friend used to live. Best friends from the age of three, Sharon and Andrea were inseparable, even though they fought to extremes. And as she drove toward Sharon's house, she knew she'd have to move quickly, if her husband was still there.

She double checked in a phone book at a nearby gas station. And she turned two more corners and parked her car across the street. Would she recognize her? Would she believe she was there? That she was alive?

Gabriel saw one car in the driveway, not two; she went to the window, and looking in saw only Sharon. She stepped back. She took a long, deep breath. She was a fugitive turning herself in. She was a fugitive, asking people to run with her, running from something, yet running free. She knocked on the door.

Through the drapes she saw the charcoal shadow come up to the door. It creaked open. There they stood, looking at each other. For the first time in three and a half years.

Sharon paused for what seemed a millennium. Her eyes turned to glass, to a pond glistening with the first rays of the morning sun.

"Andrea." She could see her through the brown curls wrapping her face. Another long silence. Sharon's voice started to break.

"You're alive," she said as she closed her eyes and started to smile. And Gabriel reached through the doorway, and the door closed as they held each other.

They sat down in the living room. In the joy, Sharon forgot about the bruises on her shoulder. Gabriel noticed them immediately.

They talked only briefly before Gabriel asked her. "Is Paul here?"

"No, he's out playing cards. Should be out all night."

"Things are the same, aren't they?"

"Andi, they're fine. He's just got his ways," and Sharon turned her head away, physically looking for something to change the subject. There was so much to say, yet Sharon couldn't even speak.

And then Gabriel's speech came out, the one she had been rehearsing in her mind the entire car ride over. The speech she gave to herself for the years before this very moment. "Look, Sharon, I know what it's like, I can see the signs. I know you, and I know you'll sit through this marriage, like I would have, this unending cycle of trying to cover the bruises on your arms and make excuses—"

Sharon moved her arm over her shoulder. Her head started inching downward. She knew Andrea knew her too well, and she wouldn't be able to fight her words, even after all these years.

"I went through this. When Jack told me I'd never be able to leave him, that I'd be sorry if I did, that I'd pay for trying to divorce him, that's when I knew I couldn't take it anymore. No man has a right to tell me—or you—what you can and can't do. It hasn't gotten better, like you keep saying, has it? No. I know it hasn't. It never does.

"I know this sounds harsh, and it is. If I was willing to run away, run away so convincingly that my own family thought I was dead, then it had to be serious. Do you think I liked leaving you? My brother? Do you think this was easy?"

Gabriel paused, tried to lean back, take a deep breath, relax.

“No. It wasn’t easy. But I had to do it, I had to get away from him, no matter what it took. In spending my life with him I was losing myself. I needed to find myself again.”

They sat there for a moment, a long moment, while they both tried to recover.

“You don’t have to run away,” Gabriel said to her. “You don’t have to run away like I had to. But he won’t change. You do have to leave here. Let me help you.”



Within forty-five minutes Sharon had three bags of clothes packed and stuffed into Gabriel’s trunk. As Sharon went to get her last things, Gabriel thought of how Sharon called her “Andi” when she spoke. God, she hadn’t heard that in so long. And for a moment she couldn’t unravel the mystery and find out who she was.

Sharon came back to the car. Gabriel knew that Sharon would only stay with her until the divorce papers were filed and she could move on with her life. But for tonight they were together, the inseparable Sharon and Andi, spending the night, playing house, creating their own world where everything was exactly as they wanted.

And this was real life now, and they were still together, with a whole new world to create. They were both free, and alive, more alive than either of them had ever felt.

“I want you to meet Eric. He’s a good man,” Gabriel said.

And as they drove off to nowhere, to a new life, on the expressway, under the viaduct, passing the projects, the baseball stadium, heading their way toward the traffic of downtown life, they remained silent, listened to the hum of the engine. For Gabriel, it wasn’t the silence of enabling her oppressor; it wasn’t the silence of hiding her past. It was her peace for having finally accepted herself, along with all of the pain, and not feeling the hurt.

Andrea. Gabriel.

The next morning, she didn’t know which name she’d use, but she knew that someone died that night, not Jack, but someone inside of her. But it was also a rebirth. And so she drove.

“Gabriel” was in a self-titled chapbook (1993 the chapbook *Gabriel* was released), and it was also previously published in *Art/Life Limited Editions*, *poets2000.com*, *ilovepoetry.com*, *Plain Brown Wrapper*, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuypers.html>, *Children Churches and Daddies* volumes 8, 71, & 87, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>, *poetryboard.com*, the chapbook *Everything and Anything* and in the books *Domestic Blisters*, *The Window* and *(Woman)*.

CHRISTINE, ON “GABRIEL”

All I can say is wow. This story is so moving. So many emotions went through me reading this. thank you for sharing it.

A Fe (male) Behind Bars
A (FE)MALE BEHIND BARS

January 29, production room, Seattle Magazine

For only two weeks she had been preparing for this interview. She struggled to get it approved at the magazine she worked for. See, Chris Hodgkins was a flash from the past, there was no current interest, no timeliness in doing an article on her. In fact, she knew from people who have checked on her whereabouts that she was just living in an apartment on her own, occasionally working, usually not in politics or her usual seminars. The public forget about her anyway - no one wanted to hear what she had to say anymore. Not that she had fallen out of favor with the American public - in fact, she was loved by most women when she decided to leave the public eye. If anything, the American public had fallen out of favor with her.

But Melanie wanted to write about her, find out why she left, why she really left. The editors knew Chris didn't grant a single interview since she decided to leave her work in the women's rights movement. Besides, even if she got the interview, Chris knew how to deal with the media, with audiences, and she would probably manipulate Melanie into asking only what she wanted asked.

But the writer said she was sure there was something more, she could feel it in her bones, and the editors always told her to follow that feeling, so please let her do it now. So the editors and the higher-ups told her to try to get the interview, and get back to them with her progress at that task.

They expected to never hear about the matter again.

Bet she came back to them not one week later, saying one phone call was all it took. She called Chris directly, and not only did this elusive leader grant her an interview, but in Chris' own home. Editors were a bit stunned. They let her go ahead with the interview, told her to focus on the "where are they now," "why did she leave" angles, and they'll put together a long piece for a future issue. A long fluff-piece, they thought, but they had to

let her go ahead with it, after having no faith in her ability to get an interview.

Maybe it was just because no one tried to get an interview with her anymore, the writer thought. Maybe the editors were right, that there's no story here, at least not anymore. But now, even after feeling this fear which began to grow into a dread, she had to go through with it. She had to research this woman, inside and out, and talk to her. See what makes her tick. What made her decide to give it all up.

And the more she looked, the more questions she had. Maybe it was the journalist inside her, to question everything put in front of you, but she couldn't get those questions out of her head.

writer's tape recorded diary entry, February 11

I didn't know what I was getting into when I decided to interview her, Chris Hodgkins, feminist leader. I did all the research I could, but for some reason I still don't know where to start, and I have to walk into her apartment tonight.

The more I studied her, the more I was interested. She became a prominent figure in the women's movement when she wrote her first book, *A Woman Behind Bars*. The theory was that all women in our society were behind bars, in a sense, that they were forced into a role of looking beautiful, into the role of mother for children, servant for husband, employee for boss, sexual object for single (well, probably all) men.

The chapter that interested me the most was the one on how women adorn themselves in our society in order to please men. Women put on make-up, they grow long hair and long nails, both difficult to work with. They shave their legs, they shave their armpits. They tweeze their eyebrows - they pull hair out of their face from the follicle. Perfume behind the knees, at the ankles, at the chest and neck, in the hair. The list goes on.

But that's not even the point of all of this. The thing is, a few years ago she managed to pull together the majority of twenty- and thirty-something women out there into her cause. Everyone loved her, in a strange sort of way. She had a great command over audiences. She would hold rallies in New York, then San Francisco, then Chicago, and before you knew it, everyone was talking about her, she was running seminars all around the country, she was appearing on morning talk shows. She was the first real leader in the feminist movement, a movement which for years was felt in everyone but laid dormant because it had no Hitler.

Did I say Hitler? I just meant he was a good leader. I didn't mean she was Hitler, not at all, she's not like that, she's not even calling anyone into action, she's just telling people to educate themselves. She's not even telling people to change, because she figures that if she can educate them, they would want to change anyway. And usually more radical feminist and lesbians are leery of that, they want more action - and she doesn't do that, and they still support her. A movement needs a strong leader, and she was it.

Chris is an interesting looking woman. You'd think she was a lesbian by her appearance - she was tall, somewhat built, but not to look tough, just big. She had chin-length hair, which seems a little long for her, but it looks like she has just forgotten to cut it in a while, and not like she wants to look sexy with it. She almost looks like a little boy. Sharp

bones in her face, and big, round eyes.

That was all I knew before I started doing research on her. I started looking into her childhood first, found out that her parents were killed in a robbery when she was fourteen, so she started high school in a small town where her aunt and uncle lived. Her aunt died a year later, and she lived with her uncle until she moved out and went to college. Her uncle died a year before she began to gain fame. In essence, there was no family of hers that I could talk to, to find out from if she played with Barbie Dolls with her best friend in her bedroom or played in the ravine in the back yard with the other boys from all over the neighborhood. To see if her theories were right - even on her. All of that was lost to me.

She took honors classes in high school, kept to herself socially. In fact, most of her classmates didn't know whether or not she was a girl, she looked so boyish. Even the other girls in her gym class didn't know sometimes, I mean, they knew she was a girl because she was in gym class with them, but she never even changed in front of them. She wouldn't take a shower and she would change in a bathroom stall.

So I started hearing things like this, little things from old classmates, but as soon as they started telling me how they really felt about her, how they thought she was strange, they would then clam up. But it was in my head then; I started wondering what happened in her early childhood that made her so introverted in high school. Maybe the deaths of her parents did it to her, made her become so anti-social. Maybe the loss of her aunt, the only other maternal figure in her life, made her become so masculine. It was a theory that began to make more and more sense to me, but how was I supposed to ask her such a question? How was I supposed to ask her if her parents molested her before they died, and that's why she's got this anger inside of her that comes out seminar after seminar?

the interview, Friday, February 11

The apartment building was relatively small, on the fringes of some rough neighborhoods. Not to say that she couldn't take care of herself, she had proven that she could years ago. The interviewer followed the directions explicitly to get to the apartment, and Chris' door was on the side. She knocked on the door.

Snap one, that was the chain. Click one, that was the first dead bolt. Another click, and the door was free. With a quick jerk the door was pulled open half-way by a strong, toned forearm. Chris stood there, waiting for the interviewer to make the official introduction.

"Hi, I'm Melanie, from Seattle Magazine," she blurted out, as she tried to kick the snow off her boots and held out her hand. Chris nudged her head toward the inside and told her to come in. The interviewer followed.

She followed Chris down the stairs, looking for clues to her psyche in her clothes, in her form. Grey pants. Baggy. Very baggy. Button-down shirt. White. Sleeves rolled up, make a note of that. Not very thin, but not fat - just kind of there, without much form. Doc Maartens. She had big feet. She was tall, too - maybe five feet, ten inches. But her feet looked huge. The interviewer stared at her feet as they walked down the

dark hall. I'll bet no one has looked at her feet before, she thought.

Chris lived in one of the basement apartments, so they walked past the laundry room, the boiler room, and then reached a stream of tan doors. Hers was the third. Chris opened the door, the interviewer followed.

She looked around. A comfortable easy chair, rust colored, worn. Walls - covered with bookshelves. Books on Marx, Kafka, Rand. History Books. Science books. No photos. No pictures. A small t.v. in the corner on a table, the cord hanging down, unplugged. Blankets on the floor. Keep looking, the interviewer thought. A standing lamp by the chair. The room was yellow in the light. Where were the windows? Oh, she forgot for a moment, they're in the basement. Sink, half full.

"May I use the washroom?" she asked, and without saying a word, Chris pointed it out to her.

Check the bathroom, the interviewer thought. No make-up. Makes sense. Generic soap, organic shampoo. Razor. Toothbrush. Colgate bottle. Hairbrush. Rubber band, barrette. Yeah, Chris usually sometimes her hair back, at least from what the interviewer can remember from the photographs.

"Wanna beer?" Chris yells from the refrigerator to the bathroom. "No, thanks," the interviewer says. She turns on the water.

She wants to look through the trash, see what she can find. No, that's too much, she thought, besides, what's going to be in the trash in the washroom that would surprise her so? Nothing, she was sure of it, and from then on she made a point of avoiding even looking in the direction of the trash can.

This was getting out of hand, she thought. There was no story here. Nothing out of the ordinary, other than the fact that Chris decided to give up her cause, and now she's living life in this tiny, dark basement apartment.

The interviewer walked out into the yellow living room. Chris was stretched out in a chair, legs apart, drinking a beer with no label.

"I really appreciate you offering me this time to talk to you."

"No problem."

The interviewer sat there, suddenly so confused. Chris was terse. She didn't want to talk, yet she accepted the interview and offered her home as the meeting place. They sat in silence for a moment, a long moment.

"What kind of beer are you drinking?"

"My own." Chris sat for a moment, almost waiting for the interviewer to ask what she meant. "You see, the landlord gave me some keys for a storage room on this floor, so I converted it into a sort of micro-brewery. I've come up with this one -" she held the bottle to the interviewer - "and another one, a pretty sweet dark beer. I call this one 'Ocean Lager.'"

The interviewer felt she had to take the bottle. "Ocean Lager, that's a nice name," and she took a small sip and passed the bottle back to Chris.

"Yeah, I used to be a photographer, back when I was in high school and college, and I loved working in the dark, timing things, and I loved the stench of the chemicals. I've given up on the photography years ago, so I thought that this would be a hobby like that.

You know, it smells, it's dark, you have to add things the right way and wait the right amount of time. I like it. And it's cheaper, too," she said, and with that she took another swig. "Cheaper than photography as well as buying beer from the store."

The interviewer tried to listen to her voice. It was raspy, feminine, almost sexy, but it was very low; she didn't know if she'd ever heard a woman's voice this low before.

"I was looking at your great career," the interviewer finally started, "and thought it surprising that you just decided one day to leave. You had everything going the right way. People were listening to you. What happened?"

She thought she had dropped a bomb.

No one ever got a straight answer for that question.

"Well, it was my time to go. I couldn't take the spotlight anymore. I wanted to become who I really was, not what the world wanted me to be, not what the world perceived me as. I still haven't done that. I haven't become myself yet."

"When were you yourself? Or were you ever?"

"I suppose I was, when I was little, but by the time I got to high school, I started hiding from everyone, because no one seemed to want to know who I really was. I didn't fit in as who I really was. So then I started with my seminars, started trying to work my way to success, and people started to like me. But in all of that time that I was working on women's rights, I wasn't who I really am deep down inside. Not that I didn't believe in the cause, but I was doing it because it seemed like the best route to success. And when I reached the top, people still wanted more out of me, more that I wasn't ready to give. I wanted to take some of myself back."

"Have you gotten any of yourself back since you've left the spotlight?"

"Some." Chris paused. "I can sit at home by myself and act the way I want to, without having to project a certain image for everyone else. People have begun to leave me alone." She paused, then looked at the interviewer. "Not that I consider you and interruption; I wouldn't have accepted the interview if I didn't want you here. In fact, I think I really wanted to be able to tell someone how I feel, what I've gone through. I don't talk to many people nowadays. This is like a confessional."

The interviewer wondered for a moment what Chris was planning to confess.

Chris paused, swirled her beer in her bottle, then looked up. "Sometimes I think of getting a pet. I'd get a cat, but then I think of this stereotypical image of an old woman in an apartment alone with forty cats, where she keeps picking a different one up and asking, 'you love me, don't you?' I don't want to be like that. Maybe a dog. But a pet requires too much care, and I think I'd end up depending on it more than I should. I should have another human being in my life, not an animal. But I'm so afraid I'll be alone."

"Why do you think you'll be alone?"

"I carry this baggage around with me everywhere. People know me as Chris Hodgkins, and that's not who I am. I don't want anyone liking me because I'm Chris Hodgkins. That's not real. Chris isn't real, not the Chris everyone knows. The only way I could escape her is to go off to another country in a few years, maybe, and start life all over again."

“Isn’t that a scary thought, though? I mean, you could ride on your fame for a while longer, make more money, be more secure. You wouldn’t have to work as hard at anything. And people respect you.”

“People respect a person that I’m not. Okay, maybe that person is a part of me, but it’s not all of me. The world doesn’t know the whole story.”

“What is the whole story?” the interviewer asked. By this time she put her pen and paper down and wasn’t writing a word. She was lost in the conversation, like the many people who had heard her speak before. Suddenly she felt she was thrown into the middle of a philosophical conversation, and she was completely enthralled. “Can anyone know the whole story about another person?” she asked.

“Do you really want to know my story?” Chris asked.

“I wouldn’t be asking if I didn’t.”

“You realize that if I tell you, it goes off the record. Besides, you won’t be able to substantiate anything I say. More than that no one would believe it, especially not your editors.”

At this point, she didn’t even care about the interview. “Off the record. Fine.”

the confession, February 11, 10:35 p.m.

Chris sat there for a minute, legs apart, elbows on her knees, beer hanging down between her legs. She kept swirling the liquid in the glass. She took the last two gulps, then put the bottle on the ground between her feet.

“I wanna take a bath,” she said, and with that she got up and walked toward the bathroom. Halfway there she stopped, turned around, and walked to the refrigerator. It creaked open, she pulled out another beer, let the door close while she twisted the cap off. She walked into the bathroom.

The interviewer could hear the water running in the bathtub. She didn’t know what to do. Was she supposed to sit there? Leave?

Chris popped her head out of the bathroom. “I hope you don’t mind, but I really need to relax. Besides, it’s cold in here. Sorry if the cold is bothering you. We can continue the interview in the bathroom, if you want,” and she threw her head back into the bathroom.

Melanie didn’t know what to think. She edged her way to the bathroom door. When she looked in, she was Chris with her hair pulled back, lighting one candle. “The curtain will be closed. Is this okay with you?” Chris asked.

The interviewer paused. “Sure,” she said. She sounded confused.

“Okay, then just wait outside until I’m in the bathtub. I’ll yell through the door when you can come in.” And Chris closed the door, and the interviewer leaned against the door frame. Her note pad and pen sat in the living room.

A few minutes passed, or maybe it was a few hours. The water finally silenced. She could hear the curtain close. “You can come in now.”

The interviewer opened the door. The curtain to the bathtub was closed. There was one candle lit on the counter next to the sink, and one glowing from the other side of the

curtain. The mirror was fogged with steam. Chris' clothes were sitting in a pile on the floor. There was no where to sit. The interviewer shut both seats from the toilet and sat down.

"Okay, I'm here," the interviewer said, as if she wanted Chris to recognize what an effort she went through. "Tell me your story." She almost felt as if she deserved to hear Chris' story at this point, that Chris had made her feel so awkward that she at least deserved her curiosity satisfied. She could hear little splashes from the tub.

"You still haven't asked me about my childhood. You're not a very good reporter, you know," Chris said, as if she wanted the interviewer to know that it didn't have to come down to this. "You could have found out a lot more about me before now."

They both sat there, each silent.

"It must have hurt when your parents died."

"I suppose. I didn't know how to take it."

"What was the effect of both of your parents dying at such an early age in your life on you?"

"I was stunned, I guess. What I remember most was that my mother was strong, but she followed dad blindly. And dad, he had his views - he was a political scientist - but no one took him seriously because he didn't have the background. He wasn't in the right circles. I just remember dad saying to mom, 'if only I had a different start, things would be different.' In essence, he wanted to be someone he wasn't. He failed because he wasn't who he needed to be."

"Did it hurt you to see your father think of himself as a failure?"

"He had the choice. He knew what he wanted to do all of his life. He knew the conventional routes to achieving what he wanted - he knew what he needed to do. But he chose to take a different route, and people thought he didn't have the training he needed, that he didn't know what he was talking about. But he made that choice to take that different route. He could have become what he needed to in order to get what he wanted. But he didn't, and in the end, he never got anything."

"But you, you got what you wanted in your life, right?"

"Yes, but that was because I made the conscious choice to change into what I had to be in order to succeed. If I didn't make those changes, no one would have accepted my theories on human relations and no one would have listened to my speeches on women's rights."

"How did you have to change?"

The interviewer finally hit the nail on the head.

"I'm not ready to answer that question yet. Ask me later."

The interviewer paused, then continued.

"Okay, so your parents died and you had to move in with your aunt and uncle. How well did you know them?"

"Not at all. In fact, they didn't even know I existed. You see, my father had no family in the States, he moved here from England, and he lost contact with all of his family. Mom's family didn't want her marrying dad, I still don't know why, so they disowned her when she married him. She never spoke to any of them. In fact, my mother's sister didn't even know my parents died until the state had to research my family's

history to see who I should be pushed off on to. When my aunt and uncle took me in, it was the first time they ever saw me. It was the first time they even knew I existed.”

The interviewer could hear the water moving behind the curtain, and then Chris continued.

“My parents were in New Jersey, and my aunt and uncle were in Montana. It was a complete life change for me.”

“How did you get along with other kids from school?”

“Before my parents died, fine. Once I changed schools, I didn’t fit in. I didn’t know how to fit in. I thought it would be too fake if I tried to act like all the other girls, even the ones who were like me, who didn’t fit in. I just didn’t know how to be a girl. I wanted to, and I tried, but it was so hard.

“I just wanted to be looked at as a girl. I didn’t want anyone to question it.”

“Why would they?”

“Because I looked so boyish. Because I didn’t go on dates. Because I was so anti-social.”

“Do you think that has something to do with the fact that your mother died, then a year later your aunt died? They were your maternal figures, and you lost them both at a crucial age.”

“Yes. But my aunt didn’t know how to deal with me. She never had children. She left me alone most of the time. She knew that was what I wanted. I remember once she asked me if I had gotten my period yet in my life. I didn’t, but I didn’t want her to think that, so I said yes, so the next day she bought me pads. I didn’t know what to do with them. The day after that I told her that I would buy them myself from now on, so she didn’t have to, but I thanked her anyway. That way I knew she would think that I was still buying them, even if that box in my closet was the same box that she bought me.

“Relations with her were strange. And when she died, I only had classmates and my uncle to take cues from. I wanted to be like the girls in school, so I tried not to take cues from my uncle. I tried to avoid being like my uncle. But sometimes I couldn’t help it.”

“Why did you want so hard to be a girl? Did you want to fit in? Or do you think it had more to do with your mom?”

“No, it wasn’t that at all. There wasn’t a part of me that said I needed to be feminine. But at that age I knew what I wanted to do with my life, and that was work in political science and sociology - specifically, in women’s rights. I knew I wanted that, and I knew that I’d have a better chance of succeeding in that field if I was - well, if I was a girl.”

“But you were a girl, no matter how much you didn’t fit in.”

And that was when Chris decided to drop the bomb.

“But that’s exactly it, Melanie - I’m - well - I’m not a woman.”

“There are sometimes when I don’t feel feminine - when I want to go out and drink beer, I know what you -”

“No, you’re not listening to me,” Chris cut in. “I’m not a woman. I’m a man. My name is Chris, not Christine. I am a man, I have a penis, I’ve got testosterone running through my body. Just not a lot of it.”

“You don’t really expect me to -”

“Look, when my parents died, I knew what I wanted to do with my life - I knew

before they died. But I also knew that I wouldn't be taken seriously in the field unless I was a woman. So at fourteen, when they died, I had a clean slate. I told everyone I was a girl. I was given to my aunt and uncle as a girl. I went to my new school as a girl.

"And I went to gym classes and I didn't have breasts, and I had to hide from all the other girls. Although I was boyish-looking, I wasn't manly, so I got away with it. I shaved only occasionally, only when I had to. And once I got out of high school, acting like a girl was easier. No one questioned who I said I was. People accepted me as a woman.

"Then I started doing the work I did, and people loved me. I got a lot more fame for it than I ever anticipated. I was succeeding. It was wonderful.

"But then it hit me - I'm all alone, and I can tell no one about who I really am. I've been doing this all my life, and people would look at me like I was a freak if I went out and told them the truth now. I'm a man, and I like women, I'm not gay, and I could never tell any women that exists that has ever heard of me the truth, because then they will no longer trust me or anything I have ever said regarding women's rights. I would take the whole movement backwards if I told the world who I really was."

"That you were a man."

"You still don't believe me, do you? I'm telling you this because you wanted to know, you wanted me to tell you this. And because I needed to tell someone. But I can't destroy women's chances of being treated with respect in this country by telling everyone."

"So what you're telling me is that at age fourteen you decided to become a woman so you could do the work you wanted to do in your life."

"Yes."

"But that's a lot to do to yourself, especially at fourteen. What made you decide to do it?"

"My mother's strength, but her submission to my father, made me want to go into the field. My father's desire to do what he wanted, but his failure to achieve it because he wasn't what the world wanted, made me decide to become a woman. I realized then that I could never succeed in this field if I wasn't one.

"And look at the success I've had! Look at all of the people I managed to bring together! I was famous, people were reading my books, people wanted my opinions. I was succeeding.

"But even with all my success, people still expected a messenger for the welfare of women all over the world to be a woman - even the other women expected this. No one would have listened to me for a second if I was a man."

"And so you stopped because -"

"Because there's a price you pay by becoming what the world wants you to be. My father knew that, and he didn't want to pay that price. He didn't, and he failed at what he wanted to do. I was willing to pay the price, I made the sacrifices, and I actually beat the odds and succeeded. But then I realized that I lost myself in the process. I'm a man, and look at me. People think I'm a woman. I wear fake breasts in public. I have no close relationships. I have nothing to call my own other than my success. Well, after a while, that wasn't enough. So this is part of my long road to becoming myself again.

"I'm going to have to change my identity and move to another country, I'm going to have to start all over again, I'm going to have to more completely separate myself from working on women's rights, but it's the only way I can do it. I'll know I did what I wanted, even if it cost a lot. The next few years will now have to be me correcting all that I changed in myself in order to succeed. Correcting all my mistakes.

"I want to have a family someday. How am I supposed to be a father? There are so many things I have to change. I couldn't go on telling the world I was a woman any more. But I couldn't tell them I wasn't one, so I just had to fade away, until I didn't matter anymore."

The interviewer sat there in silence.

"Do you have any other questions?" Chris asked.

The interviewer sat there, confused, not knowing if she should believe Chris or not. She could rip the curtain open and see for herself, she thought, but either way they would both be embarrassed.

"No."

"Then you can go," Chris said. "I want to get out of this bath."

Melanie walked out of the bathroom, closed the door. Then she started thinking of all the little things, not changing with the other girls in school, looking so boyish, the low voice, the way she sat, her feet, the razor, the toilet seats. Could she be telling the truth? Could he be telling the truth, the interviewer thought, is Chris a she or a he? She didn't know anymore. But it seemed to make sense. Her birth certificate would be the only thing that would prove it to anyone, unless she somehow got it changed.

She could have had her birth certificate changed, the interviewer thought, and therefore there would be no real proof that Chris was lying, other than looking at her naked. It was such a preposterous story, yet it seemed so possible that she tended to believe it. It didn't matter anyway, because she couldn't write about it, proof or not, she offered this information off the record. She grabbed her pencil and note pad from the living room and walked to the door.

Just as she was about to leave, Chris walked out from the bathroom. She walked over to the front door to open it for the interviewer. Melanie walked through the doorway, without saying a word, as Chris said, "Good story, wasn't it?"

The interviewer turned around once more, but didn't get to see Chris' face before the door was shut. Once again, she was left with her doubts. She walked down the hall.

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give a man a fish

the testaments
a 2003 collection of stories throughout history

the book of Helena

time: 26 CE

place: Alexandria, Egypt

Helena only passively kept interest in Antony, the man who had once courted her in Greece, though he kept his eye on her. Her state treated her and other women on very unequal footing with men, but she knew that her country thought she had some value, even if her value could only be through raising children or tending a home for a future husband.

Knowing she wanted to tell the world about injustices she had seen in society as she was raised in Greece, she looked forward to her chance at further education and reading through the extensive libraries in Egypt. Thinking about chances to learn in new lecture amphitheatres and study in exquisite libraries and museums, Helena was sure her future would be strong and bright, finding fascinating new people to interact with and experiencing new elements in her society for her potential new loves of life.

Her awakening was after her moving out of her parent's house to live and study. There were great libraries in Alexandria, and her friend was moving there to work and study with Helena.

Everything was going to be different for her once she got out on her own.

Haimon and Rhea, Helena's parents, worried that it was not a good idea to let Helena to move to another country and live without a man, they worried she may be thought of as a loose woman and she would not find a man to marry and would resort to prostitution. But Helena's pleas were unrelenting; they knew of the greater chances she would have by working and studying in Alexandria versus their small town in Greece, and they understood that her intelligence and strength would help her through her life, and she could always come home if things on her own did not work well quickly. They wondered how she would be able to study in libraries to learn while there; but after Helena and her future roommate relented, Helena's parents were able to pay for her half of paying for Helena and Lana's home for one year. After a tearful good-bye with her parents just after she turned eighteen, Helena left with a carriage full of belongings with her friend Lana.

Lana and Helena were close friends, but they had their differences. Lana liked different music styles and had different interests from Helena. Lana was even thrilled with watching the colosseum attacks in Greece - but Helena wasn't interested in Lana's interests and realized their differences when she was so much more interested in studying at the Library of Alexandria than Lana.

Either way, they were both happy to be on their own and were ready to celebrate their new home on their own.

Antony had worked the previous year for the State in Alexandria, and he was thrilled that Helena and Lana were moving to his city to study and work. He would live less than one mile from them; knowing they would be unfamiliar with customs and styles in their new town in this new country to them, he arrived at their home on the Sunday afternoon they arrived at their new home to help them move in.

When they first walked into the rooms where they were staying, Helena saw the area first as she carried her belongings in. As Lana and Helena scanned the space for where their belongings could go, they had to quickly decide where they would sleep and where their clothing would belong. Because of a lack of money and the difficulty in getting places to live in Alexandria, their home was one large room, so they shared the same area for sleeping, working and eating. They even just knew which side of the room each of them would sleep in - Helena liked being near where their book cases would be for her work; Lana liked being closer to spaces she can clean herself up to make herself beautiful for going out of having company over.

They knew they had more unpacking and rearranging to do of their things, but they were getting tired - and hungry - and they wanted to just take a breath and enjoy the fact that they were in their home - and in a new land - for the first time in their lives. Although they had moved most everything into their home, sunset was approaching and they had not considered food. After Antony explained to them that there are so many people from different countries in Alexandria they would not have to worry at all about learning another language to fit in, Antony then offered food and drink that he would bring to their new place a little later in the day.

The sun started to hide behind an adjacent building, so Helena pulled their candles out and placed them in lamps so they would have light for the evening. Lana grabbed one of the candles and went to a mirror to brush her hair. "Helena, you should be getting ready for Antony coming Over," Lana said.

"I'm just trying to clean up as much as we can tonight, so we can find our way through here more easily when we wake up tomorrow," Helena called back as she searched through boxes she was trying to still unpack.

"Well, he's your boyfriend, I'd think you'd want to look nice for him."

"Lana, I..." Helena tried to come up with the rest of her sentence before she finally knew what she wanted to say. "I - I'm not his girlfriend, we dated before, but we're just hanging out now."

"You still date though, right?"

"...Yes, but he's not courting me for a wife."

"You don't think. He still likes you, girl, and you could think of liking him back. He's could be a stable man for a good home for you -"

"I'll worry about making sure I'm stable first, but thanks, Lana..." Helena turned back to the stack of books to start putting them on shelves so there was less to step over in the morning. she heard Lana yelling from the other side of their home, "Why did the two of you break up anyway?"

“Lana, he moved. He’s been in Alexandria for almost a year working. He would come back to our town to visit his family, and that’s why we still saw each other occasionally. Besides, I don’t know, he may have spent time courting others and dating women since he’s moved, and it doesn’t break my heart that we’re not dating - I don’t think we were meant for each other.”

Just as Helena finished her last words, they heard a loud thumping on their door. Because Lana was near the door, Lana ran to the door and asked through the wall, “Who is it?”

She could hear a muffled voice from outside. “It’s Antony. Is that Lana?”

Lana laughed as she opened her door and saw Antony standing there with his arms filled with cloth bags for food and his fingers wrapped around a few bottles of wine and liquor. “Do you need any help carrying anything?” Lana asked as Antony made his first step toward the doorway and Helena started to walk toward the front door.

“No, I’m fine, but thanks. Where is the table so I -”

“That table is right back here, before the cooking area,” Helena said. She looked at what he brought in and asked, “Did you get all this food for us?”

“I know that cooking is done earlier in the day and you two wouldn’t have a chance to go to a market right away, so there are a lot of fruits and nuts that can keep in this bag.”

“And you brought lots of wine!” Lana said as she walked toward them after closing the door and joining them.

“One container is of water, because you won’t be able to get water until tomorrow. And the wine is drink for us to celebrate your moving tonight into your new home.”

“I’m excited ... and nervous,” Helena said. “I hope I’ll be able to leave the house enough to read or get books from the main library.”

“I see all the beautiful veils over by your beds,” Antony said. And I know a few people who work in the libraries near here, and I think you can go to the library for work and stay in a corner where you can remove your veil and read. I’ve told my friends that you’ll be moving in today, so you should be fine to read and study there. And you know, Helena,” Antony said as he reached for her hand so he could pull her toward him to embrace her, “my friends didn’t understand why you moved away to study.”

“They haven’t lives where we came from, Antony, and they must be too used to living here in Alexandria. It is amazing here.”

“But Helena, I think they thought it was strange that a woman was so interested in reading and learning instead of finding a suitor and taking care of a home.” Antony gave her a look to let her know that she would be thought of as an improper woman for wanting something more than what women are supposed to normally ever want.

“Well, if I’m supposed to be a proper girl and meet a future husband, this would be the place for me to go, no?” She said, smiling after glancing at Lana. “And where would I find a proper man? Well, libraries would hold men of intellect, so -”

Lana cut in. “You’ve come up with quite the system, Helena...”

“I had to convince my parents there was a good reason for my coming here to study, Lana...” Helena said.

“Well, you’ll have plenty of time to acclimate yourselves here,” Antony said, “and

- do you have money for food from the market? Because -"

"My parents gave us a set amount of money for this home for a year," Helena said, "but I found the place, and I know it's small, but it's much cheaper than what we had for money for this house, so we should have plenty of money for food."

Lana laughed and reached for the wine. "That's why Helena does the negotiating with money - it saved us..."

Antony cut in when he saw Lana getting the bottle of wine. "Where are any glasses for the wine? You two should be celebrating." Helena got up to get glasses and Antony saw her head looking toward one wall, so she got up to get glasses for the three of them. Antony came back with three cups and said, "I also have wine at home and I don't live far and my neighbors are going out tonight, so they might stop by with additional wine I had at my home, so we should have plenty for the evening."

"There's plenty here," Helena said, "I don't usually drink." Lana looked over at her when she said that to Antony, because Lana wanted to drink, and she wanted Antony to allow them to celebrate their new home together.

They only snacked on the fruits and nuts Antony brought them; after not eating most of the day they weren't hungry for a lot of food to fill them up. Antony kept refilling their drinks for them.

"It's a good thing my neighbors Senbi and Pamiu were going out this evening," Antony said as he finished pouring the last of his original bottles of wine into a glass for Lana. "If they didn't bring any more liquor, we'd have to call it an evening."

"But the night is young," Lana said.

Helena put on a mocking tone, saying, "Lana Kiya, what would your mother think..."

"My mother's not here," she retorted. "Are you going to be my mother now?"

Helena laughed. "Of course not. It's just fun to see you so excited to be on your own..." She thought in the back of her mind that it was strange that Antony was pushing so much liquor on Lana, but not as much on her. She eventually decided that he was probably just being nice to her because she said she didn't drink.

Helena was having a good evening, and it was nice to talk with someone other than Lana on her first night in Alexandria. Antony was there to bring food, though they didn't eat much of it that night, and he was like a servant bringing drinks for anyone who wanted it. "You know, it is usually the woman's job to cater to the group with food and drink pouring."

"I know, but I'm right here," Antony said, "and it's your first night here and you should enjoy yourselves. And you don't know how good it is to see the two of you," he said, as he moved over two feet so he could hug her. "It's nice to have people from my home town here, people I have memories with and stories from our past."

"Well, I'm glad you're here too, it's nice to have a sort of welcoming party for my arrival here."

"I wish we came earlier in the weekend," Lana said. "Then I might have places to go to celebrate our arrival."

“You have plenty of time for that,” Antony said. “Besides, now you have all week to look around and see where you’d like to go next weekend when there are more people out and about.”

Another hour or two passed, it was getting very late, and Lana looked like she was about to pass out. Helena was drunk from the evening of drinking too; she was having a hard time holding her head straight up and her speech was getting slurred. Antony finally spoke. “Lana, if you want to lay down, that’s fine,” and he turned to Helena and said more softly, “I can go home in the morning to get ready for work, so I can stay here.” He then leaned over and kissed Helena.

“Um, if you want to, you can,” Helena said, “but there’s not a lot of room here.” She looked over at their two beds, not five feet apart.

Antony glanced at Lana Passed out, still sitting at the corner of her bed. He looked back at Helena and put his arms around here. “I can find room.”

Helena had to wake Lana from her sleeping sitting position in case she wanted to get ready for sleeping on her reed mat for the night, but Lana didn’t even want to bother changing into clothes to sleep in. Lana just groaned, giggled a little when she saw that Antony was still there, and started to move her body so she could just rest there and get to sleep. When she found a blanket from one end of the mat, she dragged it up her body and turned her head to face the wall.

Turning around to walk back toward where Antony was sitting, she watched him pick up his glass of wine, then extend it out to her. “What? That’s yours,” Helena said about the drink he handed her, but Antony answered with “We still have some left to go through, and Lana won’t mind.”

“We shouldn’t wake her.”

Antony didn’t even lower his voice, because nothing woke her. “Of course not. But I don’t think she’s moving anywhere.” Antony looked over at her sleeping on the mat, and it seemed that she moved her body and the linen cloths over her so nothing would disturb her.

They talked for a few minutes; Antony then leaned over and ran his hand along the side of her face and said, “I’ve missed you,” before moving to kiss her.

“...I’ve missed you, too,” she said, though he wondered if she just appreciated there being someone she knew in this new town and new country more than missing him specifically. She didn’t know what to think, but they were there together, and Lana wasn’t waking up. She kissed him back. But Antony kept being more physical with her, and although she wanted him to go home, and although she didn’t want to disturb her new roommate, passed out only feet away from her, she didn’t think to say anything to him.

The next morning Antony was still there, and Lana still wasn’t waking up. Helena saw that he was there and knew he had to go so she curled up into a ball at the far end of the mat before waking him. “Antony, wake up. You have to go to work.”

When Antony came to and saw that it was daylight, he sprang up to get his things together. He went over to Helena to embrace her and kiss her, but she moved herself away and whispered that he shouldn't be late for his work.

His running out woke Lana, but only hearing the noises, she did not see him as he left. "Helena... how long have I been sleeping?"

"It's morning, you're fine, Lana."

"Did..." Lana looked around their home and saw they were alone, "Did Antony stay over?"

Helena knew Lana wanted Antony to have stayed over, and if he did Lana would think Antony would be obliged to marry Helena. Helena knew she did not want to be with Antony, but she feared anyone knowing what he did to her.

"Do you see him here?" she asked, hoping that would be enough of an explanation and Lana would not ask any more questions. Helena used most of what little water they had to try to scrub her skin and clean off from him, but she needed to take buckets to the nearby stream to get more water. "Oh, I'm sorry, Lana, but I used most of the water we had," Helena said. "I was going to get water before you woke up."

"We've got extra barrels," Lana replied, "so I can go with you and we can get a lot of water so we don't run out right away," she said as she moved off her mat to find walking shoes before she brushed her hair for going out. Helena and Lana got their belongings together to make the trip to get water for themselves.

As they got to the stream, there were only a few women there; Helena figures that most of the women probably already got their water from the stream earlier in the morning. Lana walked to the water with a cup and bucket, crouched down at the edge of the water and started scooping up water for the first bucket. She was working for a while because the buckets were relatively large, and she hoped that if she filled the buckets separately, Helena could walk back and forth with the water because of their weight once filled. Lana was almost finished filling the first bucket when she looked up to see where Helena was, so she could get the water and take it back to their home. In the distance, she saw Helena standing in the stream, with her knees into the water, dipping her hands repeatedly into the stream and splashing water onto her face.

Lana didn't know what she was doing; no one else was getting into the water the way Helena was, and she started to worry. "Helena," she yelled, and saw her silhouette turn to face Lana. "What are you doing?"

Helena didn't have an answer, and waited a moment before yelling back her answer. "I had to do this after our move, Lana."

Lana knew the almost full bucket of water wasn't going to move, but instead of walking over to where Helena was, she thought about switching their roles and said, "I'll bring the water back to the home if you'll stay here to fill the buckets with water. Is that okay?"

Helena knew she couldn't walk back and forth to and from the house repeatedly if she was soaking wet, so she started walking toward Lana. "Sure," she said as she got closer. "I'm sorry I got drenched like this. I can fill the water buckets if you don't mind the walking."

"That's fine, I've got this first huge bucket almost filled, so I'll just take it now. You

start filling the other ones here and I'll be back."

Lana reached down to get the large bucket filled with water for her trip back to their house. As she started to walk away, Helena took a bucket and saucer, then said, "Thanks, Lana," before starting to collect more water for them for their home.

Helena spent the rest of the morning working with Lana on getting food from the market they could keep for a week's worth of food, and they finished trying to rearrange their belongings in their new home. Lana wanted to go back to the market to see if there is anyone she could meet there; Helena wanted to head straight to the library to collect information.

Walking into the library, she tried to see where she'd need to go for books for the word she decided she wanted to do. As she turned a corner to go to a wing that contained Greek fiction and nonfiction, a gentleman walked up to her. "Pardon me, are you Helena -"

"Do I know you?" Helena answered, wondering who knew her name and wondering if she was not allowed there.

"I'm sorry, I'm a friend of Antony's, and he told me that his girl Helena is in town and would be coming to the library today."

She let a moment of silence pass before she answered. "I'm not his girl, but I am Helena."

"Oh," he answered. "Well, if you need anything at all, please feel free to track me down. My name is Pedibastet, and there are a few other people working here who knew of you being here, so I'm sure anyone can help you out."

"Thank you, I was just going to pull some books from authors like Sophocles and Socrates, or even some of Plato's writings."

"Helena, this section back here," the gentleman said as he walked further forward and turned right into a new wing with Helena following, "has Greek work from writers as far back in time as Homer. Do you need help finding anything in particular?"

"No, I'd like to just do some reading and take some notes," she answered, holding her tablet.

"There are extra ink wells at the tables over there, so good luck with your work."

"Thank you, Pedibastet," Helena said, as she started walking toward the aisles of books to see what her choices were.

She turned one corner and started reading titles of authors in the books set in rows on the shelves, listed in order of the dates of the writings.

Homer	Hesiod	Alcaeus	Sappho
Archilochus	Aesop	Thales	Anacreon
Simonides	Theognis	Thespis	Aeschylus
Bacchylides	Pindar	Hecataeus	Sophocles
Euripides	Socrates	Lysias	Aristophanes
Plato	Herodotus	Thucydides	Xenophon
Demosthenes	Aristotle	Menander	Dyskolos

Helena grabbed two volumes from Plato's work and was about to grab a book from Socrates, when Pedibastet walked from aisle to aisle to find her. "Helena, we just received a copied set of books from the philosopher/mathematician Aristotle. I don't know what you're looking for, but there -"

"What do you have. I want to see them."

Pedibastet saw Helena's eyes turn to saucers when he mentioned Aristotle. "Yes, these books were apparently in a vault until about 100 years ago, and they have been in a library in Athens. Before they were taken and brought to Rome, a scribe made a copy of the writings, and we were just able to get a copy of the volumes. So we have around 25 books."

Where are they? I'd like to look them over, please. And thank you."

They walked over to where the collection of books was held, and Helena immediately grabbed **Nicomachean Ethics**. "I might take **Magna Moralia** after I look over this one."

"Good first choice. I've heard people say that **Nicomachean Ethics** is usually favored over **Eudemian Ethics**."

"I've got plenty of work to do right now, with these other two books I first took. But thank you for letting me know about Aristotle's writings here in the library."

"Not a problem at all. What are you studying for?"

"I..." Helena didn't know what to answer, because the ideas she just created in her head was that she wanted to write, but she knew that as a woman her writings would be ignored. "I'm collecting writings and data for future work on a book."

"Does the writer have anything in the library?" Pedibastet asked.

"He doesn't, as of yet, I think he has just been collecting essays."

Oh. Maybe I know of his writings. What's his name?"

Helena had to quickly think of her pen name. "Agathangelos Alcaeus is his full writing name."

"Strength, and an angelic messenger - wonderful name for his work. I've never heard of the name, but I'll keep an eye out for it."

"Well, I should get to work for him, but thank you for everything."

Pedibastet smiled and went back to the other hall where he was originally working, and Helena turned to the row of tables so she could read and starting taking notes on her tablet for future work. As soon as she sat down, she pulled the pen from the holder and gave it some ink so she could write down her first thing in her notes. At the top and center on the page, she wrote 'Agathangelos Alcaeus', because she just gave herself a name for her future work.

The first thing she did was start reading over **Nicomachean Ethics**. She scribbled notes, and started immediately generating theories of moral and sound treatments for women who have been abused by men.

"...and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and

the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right?"

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics book 1 chapter 2

Helena knew that women were taught to be there for men, and they were taught to not fight back; she knew that women would not want to stand up for themselves, but something would have to be done if women would not be hurt from men in the future.

She had to stop and pull back from the table. She put her hand over her mouth. All she thought about was a forceful attack by a man to a woman, but this didn't happen to her. He just gave her liquor. "I know I don't drink," Helena thought, but there is no crime in drinking the way she did. Or the way Lana did, who drank more than her.

Wait, she thought, Antony was pushing the wine of Lana more than her, she remembered that much. But why was he doing that? Helena thought all along it was because he wanted the two of them to have fun, but then it occurred to her that Antony didn't have to worry about making any noises to wake Lana because she had passed out on the other mat.

It then clicked in Helena's mind. It was his intentional effort to make her roommate pass out so no one would stop him from doing what he thought he could do to Helena.

When she realized this, the thought made her sick.

Then she realized there were many ways people could be using their power to gain more power, but she was sure that there would be no allowance for hurting others to achieve your own happiness. She happened to have **Nicomachean Ethics** in front of her, and this would only be one more scrap of evidence she would need to know that what was done to her was wrong.

She knew she couldn't tell anyone about it, she'd be forced to marry him - which she did not want. Maybe her writing would be her only way to win her rights back.

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Days after their arrival, Helena let Antony know that she did not want to see him; although he did not understand why, Antony had no choice but to let her go. During the next three months Helena worked in the library feverishly with help from Pedibastet and other men who worked at the library like Eutropius and Paramonos, and especially Ariston, a transcriber for book printings. After reading extensively from Aristotle, Pythagoras, a little writing from Parmenides. She tried to find writings from Anaxagoras and Anaximander, and during this time she learned to match writing styles to these philosophers and construct a number of essays on philosophy in reaction to non-violent behavior.

She made a point to make sure her references were not focused on treatment specifically, but underlying these readings, they could be used to help women as well. She managed through circulars to post smaller portions of some of her essays in common places so people could view them, and she even heard people talking about seeing the notes and reading them when they were in market near the postings.

One mid-week day in the library Helena found Ariston and asked him about his press capabilities.

"I don't work at a printer and declare what gets printed and distributed, but I transcribe things for those who need the type before printing," Ariston said.

"Oh," Helena said almost under her breath.

"What do you need it for?"

Helena looked up at him and asked, "Have you heard of Agathangelos Alcaeus?"

"...Yeah, I've seen postings of his around town. Alcaeus is a good writer, but I - wait - why did you ask me about him?"

"I've been taking notes for him and he was been writing in his spare time."

"Why doesn't he take the notes?"

"I don't think he has the time, Ariston. Besides, I don't mind doing the work and helping him out."

Ariston leaned back, and then moved forward to ask Helena his next question more personally. "You know, I do know people at the presses, and I think they'd like to get a hold of his works - especially the presses that do textbook printings. They might like his work. I can talk to them to see if they want his writing, or if they want to meet with him."

Helena couldn't quite believe what she was hearing. "I ... I'm sure he'd be thrilled ... He likes to lead a solitary life and he doesn't get out to talk to people, I'm sure I can talk to him about this, but he might want me to do his representing, but I can give you anything of his writings and do anything I can to help."

"Sure, that would be great."

"I could get rough copies of his writings for you, but I may only have one copy of some of the essays."

"Helena, I can transcribe anything, so I could probably make duplicates of everything so he doesn't have to lose his copy."

"Oh Ariston, that's wonderful. When would you like the writings?"

Ariston smiled. "Whenever you would like to give them to me."

Helena was too thrilled and said, "Name your time and place."

"...I can take you out to dinner and get these papers for transcribing."

"Let me give you notes to show you where I live," she answered, as she kept smiling and turned to a blank page to place directions on.

An open book is shown from a top-down perspective, slightly angled. The pages are a light, muted grey color. The text is centered on the pages in a dark grey, elegant serif font. The book's spine is visible in the center, and the edges of the pages are slightly darker, suggesting depth and texture.

the essays
and politically one-sided rants

Nonfiction NONFICTION

Let me tell you a story about a woman. I can't tell you her name, because the law prevents me.

You see, this woman is the typical victim of a stranger rape. She was walking down the street after getting off of a late train from work and she was cornered by a man with a knife. She was violated, she was hurt, she had the blood stains and bruises to prove it. And she decided she wanted to report it.

She went to the hospital the next morning, after she put on an extra layer of clothing and huddled in her bed the night before, trying to sleep. The doctors took her clothing for evidence, and then they took samples.

She leaned back in a cold chair half-naked in a doctor's office, feet in straps three feet apart, and then they took samples from inside her to see if they could prove who was there. They pulled fifty hairs from her head and twenty-five pubic hairs with their fingers to compare them to what they brushed off her.

She then talked to the police. Because she couldn't identify him, because he had time to flee, because the police couldn't match the evidence to anyone, she couldn't find justice.

But her friends helped her through this. They slept in her room with her at night, when she didn't want to be alone. They listened to her. They accepted her. And she was able to take the first steps toward recovering.

It's a sad story, isn't it? She didn't deserve it. But it seems, especially with her attempts to find her attacker and with the support she received, that she may be able to eventually get over the pain.

Now I would like to tell you the story of another woman. I could tell you her name, but I told her I wouldn't.

She begged me not to.

She's a junior at a state university. The first day she came to college, the day she moved in, her boyfriend raped her.

He gave her roommate so much alcohol that she passed out, and wouldn't know

what was going on. He gave his victim so much alcohol that she could barely think or move. During the course of the evening she wondered why her boyfriend was pushing alcohol on her roommate. Now she knows, hindsight is 20/20, and now she feels guilty. She should have said something to him, she thought, but what could she have said at the time? And why should she have suspected anything?

She didn't go to the hospital. She thought something was wrong with her only because she didn't want him. She thought what happened was normal. She couldn't understand why she was so hurt.

She didn't tell anyone. She didn't talk to her boyfriend about it --- in fact, she didn't even break up with him until weeks later, when she couldn't take it anymore and had to come up with an excuse to avoid him.

No one understood why she was acting so strangely. No one understood her mood swings. No one understood why she would break into tears for no reason. She would stand in the bathroom of her dormitory, look in the mirror, and cry before she took her morning shower. She looked so tired in the mirror those mornings, like she had been attacked just the night before.

She waited about six months before she told anyone. She told one friend. He did everything he could to help her. But there wasn't much he could do. She never told her family. She felt ashamed. She felt alone.

And as she told more people, she received more support. But it only came one year, two years later.

You see, even though it wasn't her fault, and even though she had help from her friends, she still couldn't help but think that she could have done something to stop it. She teased him. She was drunk.

He was her boyfriend.

Now, these are two pretty depressing stories, I know. But when people hear the word "rape," they tend to think of story number one first. The man could have been jumping out from a bush, an alley, or breaking into her home in the middle of the night, as long as he was a stranger. He had a weapon. It was a crime. But both of these stories are similar, because they both are rape. Pure and simple. According to Illinois law, for example, if a woman is intoxicated, she cannot consent to sex, just as she cannot consent to driving a car. That alone defines what the second woman went through as rape. Her feelings, her pain, also define it as such. But still, the endings to these stories are very different.

Let's imagine that the woman in the second story pressed charges against her boyfriend. Better yet, let's take another crime, like a mugging in an alley, and ask the victim the same types of questions the woman in the second story, or even the woman in the first story, would be asked.

We'll set the scene: A man leaves a bar that he entered after work, took a short cut home and was mugged in an alley. He is now at the stand, testifying, being questioned by the defense.

"Now, let me understand this - you were in a bar, drinking."

“Yes.”

“And you were talking to strangers, you even flashed around your money around.”

“I bought a few people a beer. That’s all.”

“You bought a few strangers a beer. And what you were wearing - it was a nice suit. And your watch - it had to cost a lot. What were you doing in a neighborhood like that wearing clothes like that if you didn’t want to be mugged?”

“That’s not the point. I -”

“And you left the bar, and it was late. What time was it, sir?”

“12:30 in the morning.”

“Did you think it was safe for you to be walking alone at night, especially looking the way you did, in the neighborhood you were in?”

“Well -”

“Let me ask you another question. Have you ever given money to a charity before?”

“Yes, but I don’t see how that -”

“Now if you’re just giving it away freely, you’ve done it in the past, hey, you even bought drinks for complete strangers at the bar just hours before, then why wouldn’t this man think you were giving it away now?”

“Because, he was robbing me -”

“Well, did you see a weapon? Do you know for a fact that he had a weapon? And did you scream, yell, fight back at all?”

“He had something in his pocket, I thought it was a gun. I didn’t want to yell, I thought he’d hurt me. I panicked.”

“But you didn’t see a weapon, you didn’t yell, you were wearing that suit and flashing your money, you were in a bar and you were walking alone in a bad neighborhood late at night. Really, sir, some people would say you were asking for it.”

Society tends to blur the lines between sex and violence when the attacker is someone you know. The sexes are antagonistic toward each other: this is just an extreme. Men are taught to chase women, to try liquor or money to get a woman in bed, and women are taught to hold out sexually, which naturally puts the sexes against each other.

Women in society are taught to be “feminine”, to be giving, and to be weak instead of assertive. They are taught to look good for men, and they are taught that they are nothing unless they get married. They are taught that all they have is intuition, but it is usually wrong and they shouldn’t stand up for it. If a woman doesn’t feel comfortable in a situation, it is probably all just in her head and she should just get over it.

Men in society are taught to think of sex as a competition -- by “scoring” and “getting some” -- instead of thinking of it in terms of love and affection. Looking at terms for sex in today’s society shows this perfectly: scoring, banging, bopping, hammering, nailing, pumping, bagging. All are violent terms, and half of them are related to either hunting or building, typically male dominated activities.

Men are taught to look at women as objects - making them feel less than human, making them feel as if they should serve men. Harassment at the workplace, obscene phone calls, stalkers, wife beating, pornography, cat calls and whistling at woman on

the street - none of these things would happen if this wasn't the case.

And women are taught to be objects for men, to bend over backwards to make themselves beautiful. Make-up, long styled hair, shaving their hair, wearing skirts, or high heels - half of these things are painful, and the other half are time-consuming, yet women are taught to do these things for men.

And maybe the woman in the second story knew she had friends she could trust, but still couldn't break free from what society taught her.

If you want a happy ending here, you won't to find one. Not for these two women.

But maybe it would be easier for women to heal from rape if men and women began to see each other as people and not as just sexes. Maybe then rape would end, too. And then there would be a happy ending for everybody.

It is reported in some surveys that one out of every four women will be raped before they leave college, and that one out of three women will be raped in their lifetime. And 90% of these crimes are by someone they know (either someone they know well, like a boyfriend, husband or family member, or by someone they know, but not well, a coworker, a classmate, someone they met at a party or a bar earlier that night).

A University survey in Illinois reported that the three most common places for a rape to occur were: (1) in a dormitory, (2) the man's house/apartment, or (3) in a fraternity house. In other words, it doesn't happen in back alleys or behind bushes, and because the woman knew the man, and felt comfortable with going to his house. It happens because the man won the woman's trust.

Or it happened because the woman didn't really like the idea of going over to his place, or letting him in to her apartment after he walked her home, but felt like she couldn't tell him no, that she owed it to him. That maybe after a while he'd just leave. She wouldn't want to sound rude.

Women, as a rule, don't "cry rape," or falsely accuse someone of raping them. Most are frightened so much by the system that they don't even report it, and the incidence of "crying rape" is currently at about 2%, which is comparable to national averages for robbery. It is estimated that as many as 90% of all rapes go unreported, which is drastically higher than other violent crimes.

And why are so many women frightened by the judicial process? Because many times women are blamed for the rape, by men as well as women. Because men still equate this act of violence with the act of sex. Because on the stand, a woman has to defend her past, defend what she was wearing, explain why she went to his place, why she was alone with him, why she kissed him. The accused's past is protected, and in essence, the woman becomes the one on trial.

But many people want to blame the woman because it's simply the easiest way. No one wants to go through life believing that a violent crime like this can just happen to them, for no known reason. If the woman is at fault, then she can change her behavior and not be at risk of being raped again. And other women can feel safe if they just don't let the wrong things happen. And men can feel safe that they're not doing the wrong thing. When in fact they may be.

And the effects of rape are longstanding. Some women leave the city they lived in, worked in, had friends and family in, because they are afraid they will see their attacker again. Some women have extreme difficulty ever sustaining an intimate relationship with a man again. Some women never tell their experience to another person, keeping their feelings bottled inside, eating away at them.

The world is a difficult place to live in for a person who is a rape survivor. Their values no longer make sense to them: if you can't trust a boyfriend, if someone you cared about could do this to you, what else could happen?

Different women react to rape in different ways, and the time it takes to recover from it varies greatly. Some will say you never recover. Many go through denial. After admitting it to herself, a rape survivor then begins to face those difficult questions: why did this happen to me? What did I do to deserve this? How could he do this? Can I ever tell anyone? Can I ever be close to another man again? Can I ever trust again?

Telling others also helps, because positive support from her friends will make her feel that her feelings of anger or hostility are justified, that it wasn't her fault, that she can get over it. But she may still harbor ill feelings for years, she may shy away from all relationships, she may become a man-hater, she may go on "sex-binges," using men the way she felt she was used, taking her revenge on others, and still not feeling any better.

The thing is, something can be done to stop this. Attitudes about women in general have to change, for sexism as a whole gives some men the mentality that this really isn't a crime. I mean, I bought her dinner, and what do I get for it? She's been holding out on me for so long, what is she trying to do? I gotta get some, and I know she wants me. It's not a crime, it's sex.

On the following pages are some of what I have written and created because of sexism and rape. It's a shame to have to see this work exist. Hopefully in time we as a culture will be able to make a change.

Most seem to feel that an act of rape, acquaintance or stranger, is just too bizarre to actually have no reason for happening, so most will look for a solution to the puzzle - an action that caused the rape, something to safeguard people from it. It may seem too strange to think that a man you've never met before could just come out of a bush, pick you out and attack you. It may seem too strange to think that a friend, or a boyfriend, or someone that you thought you could trust, could turn on you in such a way for no apparent reason and hurt you so much. In this world, things don't just happen— there's a reason for things, and there is sense in the world. Besides, the victim probably brought themselves into the trouble and therefore deserved what they got. If we as onlookers just don't make the same mistakes that they did, we won't have the same problems that they did. In this way unexplainable, traumatic acts such as rape can be explained away and therefore be easier to handle.

This is the line of reasoning that many people go through, and it is commonly called "victim blaming." It seems to make sense at times, but there is a note that we as a society have to remember: just as a robbery victim doesn't ask to be mugged, a survivor of sexual assault doesn't ask to be raped. No matter what reasons people come up

with to defend a rapist, she was wearing provocative clothing, she was drunk, she kissed him - none of those things means that she consented to have sex with him.

If a woman can victim blame another woman, then she can eventually say to herself, "That has never happened to me, so it must have been something she did. Well, if I don't do what they did, then I will be safe." Since women have to live with the fear of rape all the time, victim blaming makes them feel better about the irregularities of the world. If a man blames a woman, it may be because he can't understand that another man - possibly someone that he knows, possibly a friend - can do what the accused did. If another man has the capacity to do that, than that male onlooker may have that capacity, too. It's a frightening thought to think that you could be a rapist. The man may eventually say, "I couldn't do that, and therefore that other guy couldn't do that. It must have been something that she did."

Many victims will even blame themselves for what happened. I should have been more explicit in what I wanted. I shouldn't have had so much to drink. I shouldn't have been so nice to him. I should have said something afterwards: to him, to the police, to myself.

If there is a reason for everything, then there must be a reason for something as insane as rape - even if the reason doesn't seem immediately apparent. Maybe, as many come to think, maybe the reason that it happened is because the victim led her attacker on or didn't do enough to stop him. When someone blames the victim, the behavior is then correctable, and when the victim corrects that 'wrong' behavior, then they feel not only safer, but also a better person for correcting their own faults. If one keeps looking over the pieces of the puzzle, something will fall into place and make it all understandable, all comprehensible. If you keep looking for what the victim did wrong, you'll find something, and then you will be able to explain away what happened. If the victim is blamed for what happened, then the problem of rape is solvable, avoidable, and correctable. It makes the world make sense again.

Victim blaming may, however, give women a false sense of security, if they feel they are safe by taking certain precautions, but not others. It's possible to be more aware of what is happening around you, to always stay with friends in social situations, to avoid walking in bad neighborhoods at night, but that doesn't mean that you are at fault if something happened to you. And it doesn't mean others are at fault if they were attacked.

When a woman speaks at a trial about someone who attacked her, instantly her past becomes important, her sexual history, what she was wearing, and so on. And the defendant's criminal history is barred from use in the case, even if he was convicted of sexual crimes in the past. Instantly the woman is on trial, and the survivor of the rape is tried and not the rapist.

It's hard to understand something like rape. But that's exactly what a survivor of an attack needs.

The Wrath of Valentine's Day THE WRATH OF VALENTINE'S DAY

Valentine's Day is here again, and like most unattached women in the United States, I'm filled with a vague sense of panic, fear and dread. What was meant to be a holiday to express your love for the one you care about has now become (a) a contest between coworkers for who can get the best flower arrangement delivered to their office, (b) a month-long guilt session from one half of an unsatisfied couple to the other, using the holiday as an excuse to vent their anger for being in a loveless relationship, (c) one more occasion for single men to skirt the constant badgering for a commitment (they already have birthdays and Christmas to contend with, this holiday makes winter pure Hell), or (d) a day-long seminar on depression where women sit at home alone, over-eating, watching must-see-TV, wondering if they will ever find someone to love and honor and cherish them and save them from the horrible fate of becoming the dreaded "old maid."

Valentine's Day is supposed to be a heart-felt holiday all about love, but has instead become a commercial holiday about either desperately trying to not feel alone or desperately trying to spare yourself from getting a guilt trip from the one you're supposed to love.

Half of the confusion, I think, is from how men and women interact on a romantic/sexual level. The other half rests on how people define love.

The Battle of the Sexes

What do women think of when they think of love? Commitment, finding a soul mate, having someone romantically sweep them off their feet. What do men think of when they think of love? Being tied down, finally giving in, getting the old ball-and-chain, or else something to fake to get sex. Speaking of sex, women generically think of sex as the greatest connection between two people, something sacred, while men jokingly refer to the act with analogies to power tools or sporting games (see the cover, which is from the art series, "What Sex With Women is Called").

Imagine a woman, looking for commitment, having what was most sacred to her taken away because a man thought he earned it by buying her dinner.

Granted, these are brash generalizations, but the fact that these examples exist gives an inkling to the differences between men and women, and the potential conflict between the two when it comes to relationships. How is love supposed to flourish when the two halves come in with such distinct ideas and plans?

The Definition of Love: Altruism Versus Respect

Love, by a dictionary's definition, is rooted in three different ways: from kinship or personal ties, from sexual attraction or from admiration or common interests.

Think about that for a minute. From the first way, you'd love someone because they're your family. Not because you like them, but because you've grown up with them. From the second way comes the more spur-of-the-moment feelings, none of which usually last. From the third way, you love someone because they share interests with you and you admire them.

Admire comes the closest to defining respect, and as a result, it comes closest to defining permanent and earned love. Unlike a religious-based altruistic love which tells you to love people even if they are not worth it - especially if they are not worth it, a love based out of respect and admiration, as well as common interests, is a strong, earned (therefore not easily lost) love.

The altruistic "give everyone in your class a valentine because everyone deserves to be loved" doesn't even fool grade-school children - usually someone is left valentine-less. The question children haven't at that point figured out how to ask is "Why do they deserve it? They haven't earned it."

People claim to fall in and out of love sometimes with amazing turnaround, it seems, and I think the reason for that is that they were never actually in love in the first place. Unless someone you once admired and respected revealed that their life and your perception of it was all a lie, or else drastically changed their life so as not to be respectable any longer, the admiration and respect probably wouldn't die. Real love is a strong, earned (therefore not easily lost) love.

In my lifetime I have met only a handful of people that deserved respect. Imagine how difficult it must be to find someone to respect so highly, to have common interests with, and to be attracted to - that feels the same way about you.

Imagine a woman, looking for a soul mate, someone she could respect and admire, looking for a man who wants the same things in a relationship, finding men that are looking for a mate that will do their laundry for them, that will be subservient to them.

Images of Romance in an Unromantic World

Even to those in a happy relationship, Valentine's Day has lost some of its appeal. If you're in a happy relationship, you don't need an occasion to celebrate it. And flowers and candy are hardly good symbols for true admiration and respect - real love. Who needs us as consumers to spend the money on these items anyway, other than businessmen?

So what place does Valentine's Day have in our world? It helps conjure up the language of poetry, the beauty of flowers, the romantic notions of a world long gone... and sometimes you get a heart-shaped box of candy to boot. But in our world, considering the different ways men and women are raised to view themselves and their mates, there are a lot of other issues that have to be taken care of before we can make a valentine card out of a doily and pink and red construction paper hearts and have it actually mean something.

Previously Published in *Art/Life Limited Editions*, *Challenges*, *poets2000.com*, *Children Churches and Daddies* volumes 89, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuyppers-writing.htm>, *A Wrath of my own at* <http://www.yotko.com/a-rant-of-my-own/the-wrath-of-valentines.htm>, <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>, <http://www.mishibishi.net/kuyppers.html>, and in the book (*Woman*).

Child Molesters & the Government:
CHILD MOLESTERS & THE GOVERNMENT:
Big Brother is Watching
BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING

I was listening to the radio the other night - talk radio (it keeps me awake when I have to drive a long distance during the night). It keeps me awake, usually because there's enough there to get me so angry that I actually want to yell back at the radio.

Honestly, I actually once heard someone call in and say it was their constitutional right to food, that the government had to give them food if they didn't get it themselves (tell me where in the Constitution does it say that citizens of the United States of America have the inalienable right to "life, liberty and blocks of cheese"). Last time I checked, The Pursuit of Happiness meant that you have the ability to do what you need to in order to acquire the things you need, such as food, not that the government has a responsibility to feed you.

So anyway, I was listening to the radio, and the discussion on this particular evening was about child molesters. Doctors and other experts has pretty much agreed that they are incurable, that castration doesn't stop their urges to hurt children, because it is a power struggle more than a sexual venting. So the question arose: should people living within a community where a child molester is going to move into be notified that this person was convicted of molesting children?

A similar story arose after a convicted rapist abducted and killed a neighborhood child after he was released from prison and "started anew." The neighborhood was in an outrage; if they knew this man was a rapist, they said, they would have been more protective of their children.

So the question going over the air waves on this particular night was whether or not it was right to notify people of the acts you've been convicted of in the past.

People were talking about the heinousness of these crimes, how these child molesters should be killed, etc. - some also brought up the fact that the information about these people is already on public record - the only thing this law would be doing is

informing people about the child-molesting history of such-and-such, instead of making individuals search out this information for themselves, which they would undoubtedly never get around to.

But first of all, it is not the role of our government to intervene with every aspect of our lives. The government is not supposed to protect “society.” As the closest thing to a capitalist society on this planet, “society” is made up a a group if individuals, and the government should work for the individual. Currently, any individual has the right to find out information about a person (this kind of falls into that “pursuit of happiness” thing), but we should not expect the government to hand it to us on a silver platter.

If a potential law does not apply in all situations, it is not a good law. So let’s apply this idea to other crimes: if you move into a new neighborhood, should all you new neighbors know that you shoplifted when you were nineteen? I don’t think so - all it will produce are negative effects.

People should be more responsible for themselves instead of asking the government to help them out more, then get angry when the government gets out of control and continually hies your taxes to support the massive network of laws created on whims such as this one.

Furthermore, If this law went into effect for molesters already in prison, they would be in essence receiving two separate sentences at two separate times for a crime they were tried for once. That goes against everything this country was founded on. If they need a greater sentence, give it to them when they are sentenced.

Letter on Religion

LETTER ON RELIGION

Thank you for writing to me about how you felt about your religion. You wanted a response - and I wanted to tell you the things I'm about to over the phone so you could actually hear my voice - I wanted you to know how honest, sincere and open I'm being in what I say. How much I believe in what I'm saying. We never seem to get the chance to discuss this, and when we are on the phone, it does seem a little difficult to say, "hey, let's change the subject to our differing religious beliefs."

So, so you don't think I was avoiding the questions, I'll answer them now, point-by-point, from your previous letter.

You first ask me what I think happens to us when we die. You believe one of two things happens - you're either saved by Jesus Christ and spend eternity in heaven with God, or you spend eternity separated from God.

Whoa, I think I've got to cover some other ground about me before I even respond to that one. Okay, here goes: I'm a very rational person by nature (you may not think so by some of the stupid things I've done in the past, but I've grown up, as have you, and I'll get into all that later). There is no proof that a God exists - that is inherent and necessary in religion, abandoning reason and having faith that a God exists. And for every situation where a religious person refers to God's influence, I can give at least three other possibilities that are more grounded in reason - reality - than theirs. The concept of a God doesn't make sense to me when there are so many other, more rational, possibilities. Something has to be proven to me in order for me to believe it.

Or at least be provable.

Morals taught by religion and the notion of a God are not usually bad, in fact, they are often quite redeeming in society - not killing people, being monogamous, being kind to others - but those are morals, virtues, values, which by definition are not based on religion. One can learn good values, morals without a God or religion. It's just that

most people, as I see it, cannot see a consequence to being “good” unless the consequence is a God. I see consequences in doing good, for myself as well as others, and that is why I choose to be a good, kind, successful person.

Okay, I think that starts to cover the basics, so now I can go back to your letter...

You believe there are two possibilities for you when you die. Since I don't believe in a God, I believe one thing happens - you die (worm food, to be rude). That I believe is the other major reason why religion and this notion of God has existed for so long - because people are afraid to face death - people really don't want to believe that death is an end for them. Well, it is an end - for their body, for their personality - of course, their matter and energy go on to exist in new forms after their death, but when you die, you die. That's what I believe. Your memory can last in others, you can have an effect on other people's lives after your death, but when you die, you simply cease to exist.

Then you say that you want me to be in heaven with you. Thank you, I really thought that was very sweet. If there was a heaven, I'd want to be there with you, too. If there was a heaven, I would hope that your God would look at the life I've lead and think I'm a good person and give me the chance to be a part of his Kingdom after my death. After I've seen his existence. If your God was unwilling to give me that chance, then I don't think I'd like your God.

Then you refer to sharing the joy of heaven with me, and the joy of being with the Lord. There's another joy I experience, not related to a God, which I don't think you realize. I'll explain in a moment.

Yes, you've always claimed to be a Christian, and sometimes you haven't led a very Christ-like life. Most people are that way, and it bothers me that people claim to have beliefs but don't live by them. They're not really beliefs then, and all these people are lacking a belief system that they understand. The fact that you've decided to actually pay attention to the beliefs you claimed to have before is an admirable thing. Personally, I think you're going in the wrong direction, because I think the structure your beliefs depend on - Christianity - is a falsehood, but at least you've decided to live by the beliefs you've claimed for so long.

You write that since your decision to grow in the Lord, you haven't felt like running away and trying to fill an emptiness in your life with alcohol or sex. That's good - we all have to come to that point at some time in our lives in order to adhere to a value system. I think I've come to that point as well, but by a different means.

Then you ask me: which is better, being a super-intellectual who doesn't believe in God and has an emptiness in their life, or being the person who has Christ in their life filling that void?

Wow. There are a two things I'd like to say about that last sentence. First, it's funny how a super-intellectual doesn't believe in God, but apparently you can't be a super-intellectual and believe in God (well, that's true, but I didn't think you'd write it). Second, you forgot my category - being a super-intellectual who doesn't believe in God and has no emptiness in their life. I fill my own void. I am whole.

You see similarities between us, and you say that in my searches for the right party or the right man I was looking for Jesus. Well, in the past I suppose I was searching for

something else when I was looking for the right party or the right man, but I found it. Myself. I've discovered that I'm an intelligent, powerful, beautiful, dedicated, driven woman who can do whatever I set my mind to. I've discovered that when I use the best tools I have - my mind - I can succeed in making myself happy, in accomplishing my goals. And you know, knowing that about myself, believing in my abilities as a person - gives me the drive to do what I want and need with my life, and makes me truly happy, deep-down happy. It gives me what you call joy.

And it gives me even a greater joy knowing that it is my mind - my mind, my abilities, my power, not some God's - that makes my life complete. I have complete dominion over my life. I'm the one I answer to.

I can have a bad day or I can have a good day. Something wrong can happen to me or my circumstances. But I know who I am and I know what I'm capable of, and I have no regrets, and I know that I'll make it though anything I choose to tackle. I'll make it through what I choose to tackle, not what your God helps me through. And knowing that I'm a complete human being gives me great joy.

You write that God has helped you in your dealings with considering your mortality. I'm sure it has - when your world doesn't make sense, when you're faced with your own mortality, it's a great comfort to make sense of it all. That's often a course of action for many people who have to deal with their own mortality, when they don't feel they are strong enough to depend on themselves.

People I know in AIDS groups, for example, say that's one of the common routes for people who find out they have AIDS. That's one of the steps most sufferers of traumatic events go through. That's what victim-blaming is in cases of rape - it makes no sense that a man did this to a woman, but if it is the woman's fault, the woman could know what she did wrong - correct the actions of the woman, and the woman is safe from rape - but it's just not true. This is what other people do with God when they have different problems; this is what you've done with your God. God was your answer to all of your questions - not the right answer, in my opinion, but an answer when you could find nothing else.

You say that God is using your situation to help others. No, you're using your situation to help others. It's that simple.

You feel that your church is a place for activism. Your church rejects homosexuality. Your church doesn't believe women are on equal footing with men. The Bible says so. Activism within the church could mean the sharing of values and morals and good beliefs, but I fear that activism within the church would mean the spread of narrow-minded ideas such as homophobia and sexism.

Then you share a few verses with me. The first is John 3:16 (He gave His only son...). You then say "That's unconditional love. God loves me and you no matter what we say or do. I think that's wonderful."

I don't think that's wonderful. It makes no sense to give unconditional love. If love is unconditional, then there is no value in it. If you love something or someone whether that something or someone is good or bad, you love something or someone whether you want to or not, then it is not earned, it is not chosen, and it is not a value and it

possesses no worth. Value is a standard to be judged by; worth is defined as deserving of or meriting. To me, love is a standard that people earn and therefore deserve, and that is what makes it valuable to me.

You say you can't believe you lived as long as you did without believing these words. "Yes, it means you don't get the credit for the things you've done, but at the same time, you realize the Lord has a hand in it," you write. But God didn't have a hand in it, Gods have been created by people throughout the ages to answer the unanswerable. People created rain gods when they didn't understand the weather. People created gods for harvests when they didn't know if they could sustain themselves, when they didn't have the knowledge to harvest successfully. People created gods that reflected the stars and planets when they didn't understand the universe beyond the world. People created a God to explain how the world began, how to live well, and what will happen after our lives end. All these gods reflected the image of man and earth. But they were all created.

God doesn't have a hand in what you do, you do, and you should thus take responsibility - and credit - for what you do.

"Yes, bad things still happen, but you know that God will see you through them," you write. Yes. bad things still happen, but you know that you will see you through them, you, not your God.

And that brings us to the difference between happiness and joy. Happiness comes and goes. Joy is forever. I even have times that aren't happy, but I never lose Joy or Hope.

You wrote that sentence, and you wrote it about your God. I could have written that sentence, but it would have been about me.

You really want me to experience the same joy you have. I think I do. And my joy comes from within. You can't find joy from within, so you find it in your God.

Then you write: "Now let's say I'm wrong. When you die, you're just dead and there's nothing else. Well I'm still happy trusting in God and I won't have lost anything."

The thing is, if there is no God, you have lost - you've lost your life. You've spent your life living for something that wasn't real, that didn't exist. You've spent your life relying on something other than yourself. You've spent your life under false assumptions, not to your full potential, doing what you were not meant to do as a human being. You've wasted your life. And to someone who doesn't believe in a God, you're life, this lifetime, is all you have, so you've lost everything.

"But if I'm right, wouldn't you like to be with me in heaven?"

As I wrote before, if there was a heaven, I would hope that your God would look at the life I've lead and think I'm a good person and give me the chance to be a part of his Kingdom after my death. If I saw a God, if he was shown to me after I died, I think I would be on my knees praising (I mean, you'd have to respect the guy if he really did everything religion claims). If your God was unwilling to give me that chance, then I don't think I like your God. Besides, that wouldn't be a God that loves me unconditionally.

I don't think you're some brainwashed right-wing preacher, as you write. I do think you have intelligence. I also think you're scared. I think most of us, most people our own age, still feel as invincible as we did when we were too young to understand death,

and none of us are really ever ready to face our own mortality.

I wish I could help you with your fears. I don't know the right words to say, but I know that the answers are within you, and you just have to look for them.

I have thought about this, I wouldn't just cast aside what you say (I think this letter is evidence to that...). But I've thought about this for years; you'd have to do that in order to have a cohesive value system.

And I don't think this because I think the world is cruel and evil. In fact, I think there is the opportunity for great happiness and joy in life, for great achievements, and for great minds to prosper. But for great minds to prosper, they have to follow reason. Faith may be acceptable for hunches about unimportant day-to-day events, but not with your life.

I know you won't read this and agree with me, I'm just hoping you understand me and not worry about me (I get the impression that you do - that you think I have a void in my life and it is only filled with depression, and that's simply not true). As we grow up, grow old, mature and gain knowledge, we have to come up with a comprehensive value system in order to make our lives complete. I think I've done a pretty good job for myself; I'm sure there's a lot more learning I have to do in my lifetime, but I think I'm on the right track. I hope you are, too.

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letter to a troubled friend
LETTER TO A TROUBLED FRIEND

I've never been able to tell you how I feel, because you never let me. When I try to say something, and believe me, I try to do it in the most tactful way possible and I only begin to scrape the surface, you react in one of the following ways:

- 1) You cut me off, get defensive, say you never do these things.
- 2) You go through denial, and say I'm overreacting, because your behavior is normal.
- 3) You apologize, but the behavior never changes.

No one wants to deal with a sour reaction, especially when you're trying to tell them something is wrong. I've pussy-footed around you through subjects such as your work, your family, the men in your life and the men in mine, your surgery - you name it, and all because I can never tell you when there is something wrong. I've wanted to confront you, but you make it impossible. I really feel like I have gone above and beyond the call of duty when it comes to maintaining a friendship with you. In fact, I think that a lot of the time the work I have put into it has been very uneven in comparison to what you have done. But I was willing to do it; I cared about you as a friend.

I've noticed a change in you in the past few years. When you were in college, you were still being supported by your parents, you had the love of your life with you. Since you have been on your own, you have no direction and no one to share your life with. From what I can gather, this behavior now relates to your feeling insecure about yourself and seeking positive reinforcement in men. They can be men with whom you have no future with, men that are gay and you have no chance with, men you have no interest in, or men who are abusive at best. You've gone after men that fit all of these examples. They can even be men I've expressed interest in, or men I'm dating - and then they would be an additional boost to you because someone would like you more than me.

I have seen this self-destructive behavior in you and I have known that for the most

part there was nothing I could do or say about it, because you never listen to me. You don't want to hear it from me. You get angry when I try to tell you what I see. You call me a therapist. And I don't want to get the third degree when I'm trying to help you.

If you think you really need other people to boost your ego, maybe you should realize that the only person that can make you feel good is you. All this work you are doing in manipulating other men only makes you feel worse inside - because it is costing you yourself. You have to start working on what the real underlying problems in your life are and finally face them head-on. Until then you are only going to lose more friends, be used by more men, and feel like you have gone nowhere in life.

I have overlooked many double-standards in our friendship. If I talk to my boyfriend more than you in a single conversation, you pout and get mad, but as long as you have another friend with you, you can ignore me for literally hours in a social setting, then ditch me, and I'm not supposed to be angry. Yes, this has happened before. My boyfriend putting his arm around me in front of you would remind you of your ex and depress you, but when you make out with a friend of mine - after he flies across the country to visit me for only a short time - I'm not allowed to react. You expect me to take all of my savings and my only weeks vacation and spend it alone with you when I could be with the man I planned to marry, but if you were still going out with your ex, I would never see you, much less have the chance to think about spending a vacation with you. In fact, if I ever suggested a vacation where your boyfriend wasn't allowed (and yes, you flat-out said my boyfriend wasn't allowed with us), you'd scream at how inconsiderate I was. You can call me every swear word in the book, but I can say one wrong word - call you child for acting like one, for instance - and you'll instantly be set off into another mood swing.

I flew across the country and entertained you for a weekend because I wanted you to be happy. It's not as if I've ever had anything but your interests in mind. Only now have I realized how much it has cost me. How much you have hurt me.

I've tried telling you over and over again when something is wrong, and your reaction is usually denial or defensiveness. Especially last time. A guy I've gone on two dates with doesn't matter to me. You do. And that's why it hurt more than most anything any other friend has done to me. I saw your behavior. You were drunk, and paying every ounce of your attention to him. If you weren't planning anything, you wouldn't have waited outside my apartment after I said good-bye to you in order to see him. You did it secretly, behind my back, because you didn't want me to know what you were doing. You say you don't remember our discussion (if that's how drunk you were), but in my bedroom, I told you about me and him, that we had gone on dates, that I was somewhat interested in him, because I noticed your behavior earlier in the evening, and it was hurting me even then. Your response was, "Oh, Janet, I would never do anything like that." Then that's exactly what you did. You threw any trust I had for you in my face. You really showed me in one evening how little you cared for me. You can't tell me otherwise.

If this is another example of how you seem to need attention from men, then realize that you were willing to jeopardize what you called your best friend for it, and that you have a problem. If you don't remember anything from the evening, then you may

have a drinking problem. Either way, there are issues there that you have to address, and I don't think I am strong enough to carry your problems quietly for you anymore when you are unwilling to face those problems yourself.

I almost didn't write this letter. I've asked friends what I should do.

One person, who didn't know you, said I should give you another chance. They were the only one that said that.

One said that you didn't care enough about me, that I tried as hard, or harder, than was ever expected of me, and nothing will change with you, so I should just let it go.

One said it was about time I ended our friendship, because all I have been doing was complaining and struggling to keep you happy.

One said they can't see me as a difficult person to be friends with, because I'm forgiving and don't ask for much. That these problems in our friendship don't stem from a lack of my trying, and don't even stem from me.

One person, after seeing you at the party, was very disturbed with your behavior in general. They said they would swear you were on drugs, and I couldn't tell them if they were right or not. They said you looked like you have seen something the rest of the world doesn't know about, and that it had made you very depressed, like you were over the edge, like there was absolutely no hope, and that you just didn't seem to care about yourself anymore.

I can't fight that. I can't fight feelings like that.

If you feel like you hate yourself, then there is nothing I can do for you. If you really think nothing matters, that you can't feel anything anymore, if you're not willing to help yourself, then I can't help either, and I never could. Trying to help you was then pointless. Trying to please you was pointless.

In all the times I've tried to tell you how I feel, I usually got defensiveness or denial from you. Never once were you concerned about how I felt. I told you over the phone that last time that you hurt me more than you ever had - more than probably any friend ever had. You didn't care about that, though. I don't think you ever did.

And that is what also hurts. I don't think you do care, and I don't think you know how to care.

I don't know what to do anymore, and I don't know that there is anything that I can do. Or should do. The ball is not in my court, as you have put it in the past, but it is in yours. It always has. It is up to you to make yourself better. To help yourself. This is not a healthy friendship. You have to make yourself whole first.

I've seen you degenerate over the past few years. It was one thing when we were still growing up to not know what you wanted to do with your life. It was even normal to feel so confused that you'd go through mood swings. But it has gotten worse. Mood swings become event where you have to tip-toe around, be careful of everything you say. Sometimes knowing that there's nothing you can say.

I don't know what to say anymore. You don't let me say anything. You don't listen. You need attention, but I can't give you enough. I don't think anyone can.

I'm not writing this letter in an effort to save our friendship. I've received no indi-

cation that you want to change, to help yourself. Even your last letter to me was only an effort to clear your name, to make you look better, to make sure someone knew what you thought. You didn't write that letter for me; I've seen you go through this with some of your men, wanting to write them letters to get the last word in. You wrote it for you, to make yourself feel like you've had your say. It wasn't out of concern for me. It never is.

You are the one that did this to yourself, and only you can change you. Remember that: you are the one that did this, to you, to me, to what friendship we had. All of this is because of you. There is nothing I can do about it anymore, and I'm not going to sit back and take your behavior anymore. I shouldn't have to.

You've been in therapy for years. You've spent a lot of time and money talking to a person every week for years. What has it shown you? What have you learned? You've told me that you sometimes won't tell her things solely because you don't feel like talking about something, or because you don't think she should know it. If you're not willing to share these things, how is she supposed to help you? She doesn't see a full picture of who you are. Are you just going to her for the attention?

I hope you actually read this letter, not read it and then throw it away because it's not what you want to hear, but read it, and listen to what I'm telling you. Show it to your therapist. Let her see a different side of the story. Listen for yourself to a different side of the story. You've never thought of how other people perceive you, at least not realistically.

Figure out what it takes to make you like yourself again. Or for the first time. I can't make you do that. No one can. Not your family, friends, not your therapist, not your current abusive man. Most of those people are out for themselves as well, and might hurt you in the process. Find yourself. I don't know where your hope lies, or if you could ever still have hope. I just know that if you don't change, and I've seen no reason to believe you will, and if I still remain your friend, you'll only keep hurting me, having no regard for me. A friend shouldn't make me feel this way. I have to let go. You hurting me is doing neither of us any good. I've been a crutch to you; you've been a burden to me. I can't take that burden anymore, and you shouldn't have the crutch. Do something for yourself. I can't be your friend if you keep falling the way you have been. I don't want you to fall, but I can't pick you up anymore. Only you can help you.

A Letter to our
A LETTER TO OUR
Political Leaders
POLITICAL LEADERS

After watching a few of our elections, I noticed that politicians were trying to warm up to the twenty-something crowd. It's a wise decision: we're a strong group of intelligent, new voters. And, as a rule, we're dissatisfied with the United States' current political system. It's a chance for either party to take a hold of a growing and promising voter group and insure additional votes in future elections.

It would help to know what this group is looking for, though, if there's a dissatisfaction with our current parties, and to understand this, it may help to learn a little more about this group. Although I claim to be no spokesperson for all people aged 20-29, I can give you some insight into how I think, as a member of this "age group."

I'm a twenty-something. But classifying us "twenty-somethings" or "generation x-ers" by our age is something I as an individual finds insulting. I know that we're Americans, but I also know that we as a group have differing opinions, and we have a right to those opinions. We can have different views on our careers, or families, our music. And that's something I value - and I feel like is constantly being taken away from us.

Other pressure groups may want you to pass laws telling them when a rapist moves into their neighborhood, but I know that that just causes more red tape and costs us through tax revenue more dollars, when that information is public; besides, it's not the government's responsibility to inform, it the individual's. Other pressure groups may want you to pass laws telling them that they need to wear their seat belts, but I know that in a Capitalistic society it's not the government's role to protect people from themselves, but from the force of others, and that is all. Other pressure groups may want you to pass all sorts of laws, but they are by and large laws that go beyond the jurisdiction of the American government. Other groups may want the government telling them what to do all the time, but I don't.

Part of the twenty-something dissatisfaction (if I may speak for the group) with our

current parties may be because neither party embodies a consistent set of values. Granted, our government-sponsored school systems teach students in general that philosophy is too difficult a subject for a single person to understand. And religion may not offer a practical solution for anyone that believes in individual rights, the rights this country was founded on (I mean, Christianity telling people that the meek shall inherit the earth and the self-sacrifice for the benefit of others as good directly clashes with the idea that the individual has a brain and the right to use it, the right to claim what they have earned and even become successful). But young people, especially ones who still have a glimmer of hope that there is something out there that makes sense, when all their lives their schools and leaders have kept from them that their mind is the answer, young people want their political parties to make sense. Currently, neither platform, whether Democratic or Republican - is consistent or cohesive.

If a person believes that government intervention beyond the necessities - police protection from the force of others, for example - is wrong, neither political party supports them. Republicans believe in less government when it comes to leaving businesses alone - economically the government should let businesses prosper - but when it comes to personal parts of people's lives - choosing to have an abortion, whether consenting adults want to engage in sexual activities that are not what they consider "the norm," the kinds of art work people make and see - then Republicans know what's best for us, and want to tell us what to do.

Democrats believe in less government intervention when it comes to these personal issues, but when it comes to businesses and the economy, Democrats want to be able to regulate industries because they'll hurt people, they want to be able to tax businesses because big business is bad (Why? No answer.), and they want to be able to take money away from people, via business regulations and taxation, in order to give it away to people who haven't earned it (there's no more realistic explanation of the welfare system - other than robbery from the people who produce in this country).

Republicans and Democrats both believe the government should stay out of their business, whatever their business may happen to be. Other people's business? Feel free to meddle.

Even on more specific subjects both parties split their decisions moralistically. The religious right, a Christian group of Republicans, as well as Republicans in general, will tell you that it's horrible to kill an unborn child, but it's okay to kill someone that's already alive and that has committed a crime (what happened to "turn the other cheek"?). If life is so sacred, why is capital punishment being pushed by Republicans? With our current appeals system, it is estimated that it takes six times as much money to kill someone as it does to keep them in jail for life. And who pays for it? We do, the individuals. The tax payers. The producers.

But the one thing both parties have in common is that they want to take away at least some of our rights. That's why we're so disenchanted with the political parties we have today. Republicans want to take away our personal rights, Democrats want to take away our economic rights. Taxation, the Democrats' answer (so that people can still have goods and services while not working for them) taxation for anything other than

the essentials is forcibly taking away what individuals have earned. It's forcibly taking away people's money. That's the definition of robbery. And laws instilled by Republicans to protect our private lives, so that we are just like them, are not only forcibly telling us how to live, but enacting laws that also cause paperwork costs and costs in enforcing them. Who does the government pay for these things? Taxation, again, which means: we, the individuals, pay for the government telling us what to do.

Every election, I'm sure a good number of people, people with intelligence, people using reason and logic to the best of their ability in making a decision, go to the polls wondering, "Which rights am I willing to lose?"

Well, we shouldn't be losing any of those rights. We should have less government intervention in all respects of our lives.

I'm a twenty-something. I'm a woman, but I don't tell the government I need quotas to get a job, because I know that "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" means just that - it means I can pursue whatever I want. But it doesn't mean the government should be handing it to me on a platter.

I'm a twenty-something. I'm intelligent, and I don't need the government protecting me from myself. That's not what I'm paying for it to do.

I'm a twenty-something. I'm looking for a political party that embodies not my beliefs, but the belief that people can have their own beliefs (whether or not people choose to live by logic and reason or not is not for the government to control). I'm looking for a political party that knows that individuals can have their lives (that's the "life" part of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"), they can have the right to keep their lives (that no one has the right to take something that belongs to you, like taxation for the welfare state, or that no one has the right to try to take away your life, unlike what the government does to death-row prisoners, for instance). I'm looking for a political party that knows that individuals have the right to pursue their own goals, without intervention from the government and without help from the government (that you can't expect hand outs, but you also can start a business to sustain your life without being burdened by overtaxation and regulation).

I'm a twenty-something. I'm looking for a political party that embodies not my beliefs, but the belief that people can have their own beliefs. I'm looking for a political party that knows that individuals can have their lives, they can have the right to keep their lives. I'm looking for a political party that knows that individuals have the right to pursue their own goals, without intervention from the government and without help from the government.

I'm a twenty-something, and I'm looking for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Can anyone give it to me?

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The Christian Coalition
THE CHRISTIAN COALITION
and the Religious Right
AND THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

Because of the religious ties the Christian Coalition has with the republican party, the platform in American conservative politics - particularly when it comes to life-and-death decisions - is riddled with oxymorons and philosophical fallacies.

Not that there are not discrepancies with the theories with the democratic party, but the liberal party - and leftism in general - though nonsensical to some, is at least consistent with its views. The involvement of the morals of Christianity in the conservative party are what give the republican platform the additional inconsistencies.

For instance, the Christian Coalition - and Christianity in general - is supposed to take the stance that all life is sacred, that no one has the right to take a life except for Christ. Hence the pro-life movement becoming a primary political issue. However, the republican party - supported by the Christian Coalition - also is in favor of the death penalty.

Now, I personally can see the reason for an argument on the issue of abortion (though I do not see the reason for the intensity of the debate politically when it is not a political issue, but a philosophical one; besides, there are many other political issues that have to be taken care of that are neglected). People can argue that the rights of a woman are infringed upon; people can say that a fetus is not a viable human being (while others can argue the opposite). However, there is pretty much no argument that a prisoner - a person convicted of a crime in the United States - is in fact a viable human being. I would think that it would follow (with the logic of Christianity) that that life - the life of the prisoner, the person who committed whatever crime our judicial system found them guilty of - is just as viable a life as that of an unborn fetus. It would also follow that since Christians cannot (under their own code of ethics) be the ones to decide who lives and who dies, only Christ can, they cannot give the government or the judicial system the right to decide who can die.

Yet this is the stance the republican party as a whole, which is backed by the

Christian Coalition.

This scenario also applies to the government's ability to call a draft and declare a war on another country. A Christian cannot claim allegiance to an organization or a government (according to their doctrines) that commands them to go against their religious codes. A Christian under no circumstances is able (according to the New Testament) to kill another person - even if they have been commanded to do so by another person, organization or government. Yet many people that volunteer for duty with any one of the branches of America's Armed Forces (and are not merely drafted and forced to go) are Christians, and see no problem with following orders to kill someone else. Even if a Christian was drafted, they should, according to their beliefs, peacefully protest and refuse to go into battle. If that required leaving the country, that should be done, because a Christian's allegiance to their country is less important than their allegiance to their God. This reasoning would be the only line of action that would be in accordance with their beliefs.

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Balancing the Budget

BALANCING THE BUDGET

If we are going to try to balance the budget, the key isn't in doing it by taxing everyone until the debt is gone. The key is accepting more responsibilities as citizens, and not expecting the government to make things easier on us.

The reason why the government costs so much money is because we continually expect it to do more and more for us. The capitalist base that this country was founded on suggests that the government is there to protect our basic rights - "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This means that as individuals we reign supreme - the no one has the right to take our life, our property or our ability to achieve what we are willing and capable of achieving.

However, as the years have progressed, our political leaders have told us that we need to be taken care of, and to appease us they have offered, as a government, to do more and more for us. And we have agreed, these things would be better if the government took care of them for us. But that was where we went wrong.

The government is bogged down with a quagmire of laws protecting ourselves from ourselves. Seat belt laws. Motorcycle helmet laws. Speed limits. Laws to tell you when a rapist moves into your neighborhood, or laws to tell you when you're mature enough to drive a car, or drink. Although it seems to make sense that we shouldn't do these things, that we should make responsible choices, the government is going beyond its basic role of protecting us from the force of others by telling us as individuals what is legally safe, which is infringing on our rights.

We haven't offended the rights of others, for instance, if we speed on a highway. By telling us we cannot speed, the government is infringing on our rights to do what we want with our property, as long as it doesn't infringe on the rights of others. If, because of our speeding, we hit another car and injure another person and/or their property, then we have infringed on another person's rights and we should be punished. But not until then. The government's job is to protect us from others, not from the possibility

of accidents caused by others.

We haven't offended the rights of others, for instance, if we choose to not wear our seat belts while driving or riding in a car. The government's job is not to protect us from ourselves, but from others. Even if we get injured in our cars because we weren't wearing our seat belts, we cannot and should not blame the government for not intervening - their job is to protect our right to decide whether or not we want to use these safety measures.

I won't argue that wearing your seat belt is not a good idea, or that all 10-year-olds should be learning to fly airplanes, but I'm not going to tell anyone that they should relinquish the responsibility of making these decisions to their government. When you let the government make some choices for you, what's to stop them from making all your choices for you? Capitalism is a clearly-defined set of rules, all surrounded around the notion that the individual human being's rights are most important. When you start to slip into socialism, however, and let the government take control of some aspects of your life for you, they can take more and more - you've let them - until you're faced with a dictatorship, with communism, and no rights as an individual at all.

The government is also bogged down with providing for those who originally can't - and now won't - provide for themselves. The productivity generated by a free economy has produced a great many things, for all of the people in this country and others. It has raised the standard of living for all. Considering the standards people lived at two hundred years ago, considering the number of religious wars that killed so many over the thousands of years of human history, considering the hundreds and hundreds of years the world lived in moral and economic darkness with other political systems, it is evident what people owning their own work can do for productivity, creativity and progress.

The creation of the welfare state has given people a reason to be unproductive. The creation of the welfare state has made people believe they deserve something for nothing. The government never said that every individual in the country was granted "life, liberty and a block of government-subsidized cheese." But this attitude, the attitude that people deserve something for nothing from their government, can be seen in our homeless on the streets, with their cups in their hands, marking a post to beg from in front of people daily commuting to work. They ask for money, bless you when you pass (invoking the notion of a god and the altruistic notion to give to others, even if - especially if - they don't deserve it), and occasionally, when they don't get the money they want from you, they scream in protest, as if the money in your pocket isn't yours, but theirs, and they have every right to expect a handout from you. America created this mentality when they created the welfare state, and we're paying for it in many ways. The lack of a balanced budget is only one way we're paying.

When the government - and the people - thought it was a good idea to help others, they didn't realize that helping themselves by being productive raised the standard of living, created new products and services for everyone, and did end up helping others. They also didn't realize that the productive earnings given to those who didn't earn it had to come from somewhere - and where it came from was from the productive people's pockets. And our productivity, as well as our budget - suffered for it.

The government is even bogged down with controlling and subsidizing many aspects of our lives.

National defense is a job for the national government, because part of it's job is to protect us from outside threats (that's the "life" part of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness"). But supporting the arts, education, medicine - the government is not responsible for any of these things. And most of the mediums the government has some level of control over have suffered in one way or another.

The arts have come under great scrutiny because people don't want their tax dollars funding certain kinds of art works. America's health care is more expensive and rated worse than eleven other countries in the world. And the education system? We need metal detectors at the gates of our city schools and kids graduate from high school without being able to read.

A business couldn't run without producing a good service or product - in fact, it would have to produce a better product, since it would be in competition with other companies. And a business couldn't run at a deficit - it has to be able to run efficiently in order to run well. In what has been the most capitalistic society to date, we have proven that companies can run efficiently, run well, and always produce a better product. This could also happen in the areas the government still has control over.

Privatizing education, for example, may bring the standards of schooling better, because suddenly there would be open competition. It would also allow for ideas that have merit but have been suppressed to be taught, because when goods and services are in demand, the demand will be met in a free economy (versus state schools, where boards of education have to impress the higher-ups in order to get more funding, and may alter their curriculum accordingly). It may cost more at first, but if Americans weren't paying taxes for schools, they'd have more money in their pockets to be able to meet these expenses. Parochial schools do this already. And in this example, we wouldn't have concerns about whether or not prayer is allowed in a school, because it is not state sponsored. And there would be no debate over whether uniforms are allowable - you may pick the school of your choice to send your children to, and base your decisions on prayer, uniforms, and even ability to teach.

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DIVERSITY,
POLITICAL CORRECTNESS,
AND CREATIVITY

Are we looking for Diversity or Political Correctness?

Okay, let's get the basics down first. I'm white. Big strike against me, from a world-culture perspective, because I must be an oppressor. But I'm a writer, which probably isn't hurdling me into the upper class, and I'm a woman, which has it's own set of relatively heavy baggage to carry around.

But I've always looked at myself as a writer, not a female writer. I've always judged myself, and hoped others would judge me, on the basis of my creative ability as a writer, not on the color of my skin or whether I had big breasts or which sex I was more attracted to.

But in working extensively in the north side poetry scene in the past six months, I've noticed the issue of diversity brought up in a few different forms. They can be pigeon-holed into three catch-phrase categories: Working Too Hard to be Politically Correct, Crossing Over into Another Culture, and Using your Diversity to Your Creative Advantage.

Working Too Hard to be Politically Correct

I was working with a group of writers touring the nation this winter. In choosing who should be part of this tour, we had decided upon myself and four men - all white. And then some of the other members of the group started asking - is this group not diverse enough? We're all straight - maybe we need gay and lesbian representation. There's only one woman so far - do we need more? Should we be looking for African Americans to fill out this group?

And you see, these were questions I had never thought of before. I mean, I never thought of watching someone because they were gay or straight, or white or black, or

male or female. Okay, maybe female, a bit. But it never stopped me from looking for talent across different ethnic, cultural or sexual lines. And I never thought that a group of people going on tour needed to fill quotas in order to be politically correct. I mean, can you imagine a heavy metal band going on tour saying, “Maybe we should bring a rap group and a Christian folk band with us?”

The thing that might make this group work well together is the fact that we may have somewhat similar cultural backgrounds. Our work can tie in better together. It may actually seem like a cohesive show; in setting up a show the first priority should be to make the show as a whole the best it can be, not to make sure every skin color is covered in the readers. Not that we shouldn't have other backgrounds in the tour. But maybe looking for the best talent is the better way to go, and if the first people that become part of the group have similar stories to tell, well then, maybe that would work to our advantage.

Crossing Over into Another Culture

Primarily, I attend opens mikes on the north side, such as Joy Blue, Lilly's, Estelle's, Red Lion, even sometimes Weeds. Once I was invited to attend the afro-centric Lit X's Saturday night open mike. I noticed a few things:

1. It was in a darkened basement in the back half of a book store. I felt like I needed a secret password and handshake to get in.

2. There was a \$3 cover. I wasn't aware of this until I got to the door; I usually never patronize places that make you pay to entertain the crowd, or expect cheap poets to actually pay money just to sit in a room for a while. They can do that at home for free.

3. As I walked in, I almost tripped over light cords running all over the floor; the stage consisted of a well-lit corner of a small unfinished basement room. Oh, and the fold-out chairs were filled to capacity (which goes to show that atmosphere isn't everything). I had to stand in the back.

4. Everyone was holding either an incense stick or a clove cigarette. Versus a beer and a Marlboro Red, which is what I'm more used to seeing.

Beyond that, there were very good readings, it was a fascinating experience, and I'm glad I went. There's obviously a demand for poetry readings and open mikes that appeal to different cultures; it was nice to have a showcase of it in one night, at one open mike. I just wish that for their benefit, they had a nicer place to read.

It's not something I would go to regularly. I must admit, I felt a bit out of my element. Not because they made me feel that way; the people I talked to were glad everyone was there and everyone was very nice, as well as very talented. No, I felt out of my element solely because this experience was something I'm not used to. To submerge one person with one culture into another culture might be overkill. But to get just a taste of it is always a treat. That is great, to experience something different, even if only once in a while.

Using your Diversity to Your Creative Advantage

As I said, I'm a writer, and I'm female, but I never thought of myself as a “female

writer.” But I’m sure that men listen to my work and think of me as a “female writer,” even if that decision is based solely on my own writing. I write about rape and domestic violence. I write about flirting with men. I write about being a woman.

In other words, I write about the things I know. That’s natural; your best work is going to be on the things you’ve done the most research on. And a writer’s entire life is research for poetry.

And yes, I’ve written both about the joys of being female and the oppression I feel in a patriarchal society. But is that what exploring diversity is all about?

A friend of mine, a talented writer that I had talked to a few times before I heard him read, read a poem in front of me on stage about growing up in a biracial family, about all the taunts and jeers and stares he gets, about how he didn’t know how to behave when he walked down the street. About how people thought of him, about how they judged him before knowing him.

And I’ve written about that when it comes to women many times.

And then I thought, but I never thought about the color of his skin before he brought it up on stage.

I noticed after that first reading that over half of the work he read on stage in my presence was about this experience, about living half-black in a white world.

I recently told him, I said, “You know, just so you know, I never thought about the color of your skin until you brought it up in your writing.”

And he looked at me, a bit surprised, and then he finally said something to the effect of, “But that’s my hook.”

I think he was pleased that someone looked at him as a human being, but at the same time, we all assume we’re all so different. And what if we’re not?

Yes, you write about what you know. But you can learn more about what you think you know as well as what you don’t know, just by listening to the stories other people in the Chicago poetry scene have to say. The voices are out there, voices on how they think they’re perceived, and about how they perceive the world.

The important thing is not to worry too much about getting the right amount of cultural diversity, but just to open up your mind and listen.

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The Illness of Volunteerism THE ILLNESS OF VOLUNTEERISM

When I opened up my copy of USA Today this morning (April 22, 1997) I saw a chart as the illustration for the lead story. The chart stated, "Volunteerism: How Strong is the Drive?" and then asked the question, "If your place of work gave its employees the chance to take paid time off of work to do community volunteer work, how likely are you to take the time off?"

The results showed that 51 percent of people surveyed would in fact take the time off to volunteer.

But what they asked for was not volunteerism - what the question asked is would you volunteer if you were still being paid by someone. By definition, that's not volunteering.

Ask the same group of people if they'd be willing to put in the same amount of time when it was their own time, and they were not being paid for it.

I'm sure the results would be much, much lower.

People work for a living. They go to work in the morning, come home at night, and live off of what they earned - that's Capitalism, and for the most part, that's America (at least that's what this country was founded on). People, for the most part, don't want to give away their labor - or their money - to people who haven't earned it.

A summit to encourage people to come together to volunteer is one thing. Asking individuals to volunteer to help out the "less fortunate" is one thing. People have the right to choose what to do with their own time. Making it sound like volunteerism is the responsibility of individual companies is another.

Businesses, by producing better goods and services, have increased the standard of living - for everyone in this country (consider that poor people can purchase televisions, have entertainment and other "luxuries" that no one could afford fifty years ago). Businesses are doing a service to the world as well as to themselves when they produce.

They earn a product; competition brings better products; everyone wins. It is not the responsibility of businesses to lose their workers to regular volunteer times, because they don't owe anything to "the community."

"The community" consists of a group of individuals. Individual rights is how this country was founded. Expecting business owners to shell out money to employees for not working - for volunteering - is just another way of extracting money from the producers. Won't that hurt the economy in the end, which affects the standard of living for all?

The article went on, stating that there were philosophical questions with wide-scale, imposed volunteerism:

"How should the role of the government be balanced with the roles of companies, individuals and non-profit groups?" It shouldn't be balanced; the government shouldn't be involved. Government intervention would mean more taxes and less freedom for individuals. Companies should not feel the need to volunteer, as imposed by a government; if they want to help, they can, but should not be expected to. They do enough by producing better goods and services for the individuals that purchase them.

"Is volunteerism a politically popular but lightweight response to the intractable social problems government leaders can't, or won't manage?" Now we're getting somewhere. Volunteerism won't solve a problem if the individual you are helping doesn't want to help themselves, or expects to be helped instead of working on finding their own solution. The government, when involved with other aspects of our lives, has made a very expensive tangled mess of red tape - consider education, for example. Pressure groups have pulled funding back and forth for education, providing not the best education, but what the right people wanted. The result? a poor educational system that the government thinks more money will solve. When more money doesn't help, add more money, and tax the people some more.

"Volunteerism is one of the great glories in America," states Will Marshall of the Progressive Party Institute. No it isn't. It's a great glory to communism, where people are supposed to make sure everyone is equal and not be able to advance with their achievements, therefore giving them no incentive to achieve. It's a great glory to Christianity, because you're not supposed to rise above everybody else, you're supposed to not like the things to earn. "The meek shall inherit the earth." No, it's individual rights, and the right to own your accomplishments and achievements that is one of the great glories of America, and that directly opposes volunteerism. The right to produce and create and succeed is the American way - and it developed this country into the greatest country in the world. But for years now, we've been told that we need to help others. Since we've heard that cry, our country has been slipping.

General Colin Powell is working on the volunteerism summit, and he added that it is in individual's best interests to look beyond their neighborhoods when volunteering. Why? How is it in any individual's best interest to do work for free that doesn't affect their lives? No answer.

Companies may be interested in participating in volunteering programs because it bolsters their image in their community, providing business. Or it may give the employees a feeling that their company cares about others, which may reduce the turnover rate. Or it may be a tax write-off. Either way, the only reasons a business should - in order to be an efficient business - explore volunteerism, is in order to help their own business out somehow. The CEO of Home Depot, Bernie Marcus, said, "We don't do it (volunteerism) because it increases our business." Well, then, your business isn't running as efficiently as it should be. Where are the costs of volunteerism going? Probably the prices of the goods and services the company sells. When you don't see a return on an investment, the loss has to be eaten up somewhere.

In 1993 Maryland Lt. Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend "pushed through a controversial requirement that all her state's public high school students must do 75 hours of community service before they graduate," the article goes on to say. What does that teach students? That the government has the right to tell people how to spend their time, that the government can tell people what to do, that the government can force people to do things, whether or not they want to do it? Does it teach students that volunteerism isn't actually volunteer work, but a required activity? Does it teach them their achievements don't matter, that other people matter more than they do? A "requirement" to do "community service" is not volunteering.

At the end of the article, there was another chart with the results of a survey. It asked people, "Who should take the lead role in meeting the following goals (providing medical care for the poor, caring for the elderly, reducing homelessness, reducing hunger, helping illiterate adults learn to read, providing job training for youth): the government, through programs and funding, or individuals and businesses, through donations and volunteer work?"

Answers varied, but people thought the government should help out in all of these areas. But how are they going to do it? With your tax money, deciding how to spend it without conferring with you. If it were the responsibility of individuals and businesses, on a volunteer-basis, at least you would know where your money was going.

But then it occurred to me: it's not the government's responsibility, and it's not a business person's or producing individual's responsibility - it's the responsibility for those in need to do something with their lives, to satisfy that need and accomplish their own goals. "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" means that people have a right to their lives, and the right to do what they want with their lives. They can't infringe on other's rights to help them.

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Welcome to Corporate America
WELCOME TO CORPORATE AMERICA
Creativity, Drive, and the Perversion of the Work Ethic

“The course of a career depends on one’s own action predominantly, but not exclusively. A career requires a struggle; it involves tension, disappointments, obstacles which are challenging, at times, but are often ugly, painful, senseless - particularly, in an age like the present, when one has to fight too frequently against the dishonesty, the evasions, the irrationality of the people one deals with.”

- Ayn Rand, The Ayn Rand Column

I am an Art Director. Impressive title, isn't it? I supervise a staff of designers and production artists who design three monthly trade magazines, a quarterly trade magazine, promotional materials for the magazines and trade shows, and accompanying web sites. I've worked my way up at this company; I started here in a low-end position making less than half of what I make now. Now I do good work, and I get compliments on our product from others regularly. My name is on the masthead of every magazine. I have my own office. I work in downtown Chicago, with a relatively impressive view of the Chicago river and the Mercantile Exchange building. I've worked at this company for four and a half years. I commute on the train. I have a health plan and a 401(K) retirement savings. Occasionally I sit in for the editors and go to special functions and media events and get free food and drink. All in all, I have it pretty good.

Diary Entry, July 1997

I think I'm going to quit my job. I really can't stand it here; even though I'm paid well I'm treated like crap by the owner; he resents me because I asked to be paid what I'm worth. And everyone seems to fight me on any decision to be made, even though everyone will say I am the best here at my job, they'll still argue with me. I have really gotten to the point where I just hate it here, so much that I feel like I almost have to leave.

Oh, I forgot to mention it, though: Corporate America, as represented by the company I'm employed at, is horrendous. And I plan on giving up that office, that view, those media dinners, my name of the masthead, that salary.

You see, it goes like this: I love my work. I enjoy designing magazines. I enjoy working on Macintoshes, retouching photos, playing with typefaces. I don't know why, but I love it. And the thing is, I know I'm good at what I do, and every single person in this company would agree that I'm a good designer, but every person in this company also tries to still tell me what to do, even though I'm the head of this department, even though they repeatedly say I'm good at what I do. This company does not let me just do my job.

Office Memo, January 10, 1997

S., I know we've gone over this before, but I just want to let you know when problems came up. Today C., in front of myself, D. S. and D. E., badgered myself with design questions focusing on two scans (specifically on whether or not they would be outlined). I told her that barring technical difficulties or purely a lack of time they would be done. She insisted on having them done, that these two photos not outlined jeopardized the integrity of the design, that I looked at every scan and personally told her that they would all be outlined (which I did not do). Her tone was more than condescending, it was flat out rude. If I were her secretary I would have been offended. The demands she posed were trivial and out of her jurisdiction, and they were made to not a low-ranking member of the staff, but to the Art Director, in front of her staff. Behavior like that is unprofessional and intolerable.

We have discussed and agreed that her behavior and attitude is a problem in this office. It has caused one designer to quit and it was part of the reason the associate editor quit. I suggest that something be done as soon as possible, before she jeopardizes the job position of the new designer we plan to hire next week.

The people that work here, I've discovered, are not rational. I've done my best over the years to work with them anyway, to meet their demands, to come up with a compromise that will temporarily appease them so that I can do what I'm supposed to do. But the more I've compromised the more I've realized that a compromise between good and evil always ends up with some evil. If you concede a small token to the enemy, they will continue to try to take more from you. And I can no longer let incompetent people destroy a good product.

Office Memo, June 12, 1997

For months I have written repeated memos, had regular meetings and expressed an urgent concern about not only the meddling but the design incompetence of C. that has proven to be detrimental to this magazine and to this company. I have demonstrated over and over again that I am a good, quick

designer, even when regularly faced with an late, incomplete and inconsistent work from editors. I have documented repeatedly that her interference in the design department has hurt the morale of the design department, has cost hours upon hours of time and additional money to this company and has ultimately sacrificed the design integrity of the magazine.

For a full year I have outlined what a problem this is. You have told me it will get better, that you'd talk to her. Apparently, however, she has not listened to memos or discussions about this problem.

In the beginning of the June issue you told her not to meddle, to let the designers do their job. For once she actually listened, and the result was not only a smoother month in getting work done but a great looking 112-page issue. I have received compliments on the design of the issue. The magazine looks good because she was not actively involved with the design, not in spite of it. This month, however, she apparently forgot what you told her. In our design meeting she picked on almost every subjective matter she could... Why are you listening to her, when she has been told repeatedly that this is out of her jurisdiction, when it has been shown that her input in these matters only hurts the final design of this magazine?

I've had to replace one staff member that quit because of her; I've had to remove one staff member from working on this magazine because they cannot stand working with her. The challenge of working well under difficult circumstances is not the problem; the challenge of working well when inexperienced people are actively trying to stop you from doing a good job is the problem. I can't tell people they should work on this magazine when I can't even think of any reasons why I should continue to.

Something, apparently something drastic, must be done immediately. I genuinely do not know how much longer I can work with the current circumstances. Please let me know as soon as possible if we can implement these changes and if you have any other ideas on how to solve this problem.

I know I sound like I'm overreacting here. But shouting matches are somewhat regular here, as well as multiple rounds of corrections in copy (after having three editors read something 15 times, there shouldn't be any need for more changes, they just cost time and money). Butting in to the production department's jobs is also a regular occurrence here. Having the goals of your department change without you knowing it. Having work redone because people weren't paying attention. Redoing work because someone new saw it and said it needed to change, after 7 other people approved it. Welcome to Corporate America.

Diary Entry, September 9, 1997

I took a sick day today. A well day, so to speak. A mental health day. I didn't think it would be good for me to go to work today. I really hate that place.

Everyone hates everyone there, I think. J. told D. he's sending out resumes again. D. says he wants to leave. B. was interviewing a few weeks ago.

Are we not supposed to have balls and ask for things we deserve? Are other people in the office jealous because there are actually some people with some talent in the production department, and they have the power to expose the ignorance of the rest of the staff? I hate the fact that there are so many stupid people that are able to hold a job there. And of course it then becomes my job to cater to them, because they can't figure out what to do. I hate the fact that I have to follow other people's whims. That's precisely what they are - whims. People in that office don't know what they want, and don't trust the production department to do their job. They cost tons of money and tons of time. And the boss blames us for their ignorance.

I know I've said over and over again that I'm afraid of losing my financial security, that I'm afraid I might be making a mistake, that I'm worried about not having a plan, but there is no way whatsoever that I could stay there. It's beginning to get hard to stay there now, and I still have over a month and a half before I quit. Five weeks before I tell them.

The turnover rate in the production design department, according to rough estimates only done in my head, are something like thirty percent annually. When we're talking about a staff of seven, that means having to hire - and train - two or three people a year. If it isn't that bad, why are they all running out of here?

Diary Entry, August 2, 1997

A co-worker quit from the company I work for today. I work in an office with about thirty-five people. Now this co-worker was in charge of our trade shows and quit two days before our annual trade show was about to begin. Apparently she was at a meeting about the trade show and someone else started badgering her and twenty minutes after the meeting she was on the phone with her husband saying, "It's been bad enough that every day after work I cry when I get home, but now I'm on the phone crying while I'm at work." So her husband told her it's okay if she wants to leave, they can work it out. So leave she did. She collected her things, and just... left.

Now I only got to hear about this scene second-hand, I didn't actually see her or even get to say good-bye to her, and that's a real shame because I probably would have shook her hand and thanked her for doing something that just about every person in our office has pretty much dreamt about on a daily basis. I mean, when I heard about what she did I let out a low, sadistic laugh, you know, one of those laughs that comes from really deep down, because we haven't had one of those angry quitting scenes in a while, and believe me, they're always fun to watch. And I laughed like that because I know what she was going through and I know what a relief it must have been for her to do it.

I work in my spare time as the editor of the literary magazine "Children, Churches and Daddies." One of the reasons I do it is simple: I want to put together a good magazine, one people like, on my own terms, and know that it is good. I have been praised for the design of the magazine. Everything about that magazine is a result of my own decisions: what the covers look like, what kind of sections the magazine has, who the contributors are, what the type looks like, what photos are used.

I need "Children, Churches and Daddies" for my own sanity. I need to do the work I love, without anyone telling me how to do it. I don't get that at work, and I know I deserve it. People tell me I'm good, but they still get in my way and obstruct my progress - not at getting ahead at this company, but from producing a good product - the best product - at this company. I love my work. But they haven't let me do it here.

Diary Entry, August 29, 1997

I hate having pride in my work at this place. It is hard when you know you're good at something and everyone tells you you're good and yet no one will let you make decisions. I'm the highest-ranking designer at this company and people outside my department overrule decisions of mine arbitrarily - and regularly. They destroy any consistency or style something may have. And then I have to answer for it, since I'm the head of design. But I'm really not. I'm a slave to the whims of people who don't know anything about my work. It makes me want to leave so badly.

I just hate seeing things that are good get destroyed. It's one of the hardest things for me to witness.

There are two types of people: people who think of work as an extension of themselves, people who are productive, and continually strive to improve, to move forward, and there are people who think of work as some sort of evil necessity to help them exist because no one will give them free money for some reason. So they go through work making a greater effort to not work and act like they are working, they stay in the same job, they gossip, and they make life difficult for productive people.

One of the greatest benefits of Capitalism is that when the most productive people are allowed to work and to excel and to own and fully reap the benefits of their labor, then the standard of living is raised for all. Consider how well off homeless people are in this country as opposed to other countries, for instance. There is such a wealth of goods and services that it trickles down and improves the lives of all. When new technology is created, the old technology becomes cheaper, and more affordable to the lower classes. Well, my point from all that is that yes, that's one of the greatest things about Capitalism, but I must admit that there are times when on an entirely selfish level it bothers me that people who choose not to create, not to work hard, not to really contribute to society, still get the benefits from intelligent people's work.

There's a group of women that work in another department here at the office. Their pay is equivalent to that of a secretary here at this company, and this company has a surprisingly low pay scale. They punch in on time, they sit in the lunchroom together and gossip while eating their fast food, they take their smoke breaks in the lounge on the 22nd floor, they try to look like they have a lot of work to do so no one bothers them. They're all overweight. They all punch out at 4:30, go home, watch prime time television, and come back the next day and talk about it as if the characters on Melrose Place are friends of theirs. They never try to get a promotion, but they are angry if they don't get a raise. They never ask what needs to be done. They are resistant to change. They don't like people who succeed.

And these people make my blood boil.

It angers me that they are in the same office as me, taking partial credit for the magazine I work on. It angers me because these are the people that are a detriment to progress; that is the only thing they should have credit for.

“The difference between a career person and a job holder is as follows: a career person regards his/her work as constant progress, as a constant upward motion from one achievement to another, higher one, driven by the constant expansion of his/her mind, his/her knowledge, his/her ability, his/her creative ingenuity, never stopping to stagnate on any level. A job holder regards his/her work as a punishment imposed on him/her by the incomprehensible malevolence of reality or of society, which, somehow, does not let him/her exist without effort; so his/her policy is to go through the least amount of motions demanded of him/her by somebody and to stay put in any job or drift off to another, wherever chance, circumstances or relatives might happen to push him/her.”

- Ayn Rand, *The Ayn Rand Letter*, Vol. III, No. 26

So I've made this decision that I don't have to deal with all of this trouble anymore. One coworker told me that people in the industry refer to this company as a slave camp. But it stays in business anyway. So I've made this decision to give up the salary, the schedule, the “plan.” You see, I've planned everything in my life. I'm a control freak and need to have everything in order at all times.

And I'm not going to have that kind of security, that kind of stability, that kind of plan anymore. I have a plan to quit my job, to visit Florida for a month and then enjoy my Christmas holiday for once in my adult life (you see, it's crunch time at this company from November 1st to February 1st, so you're putting in 80 hours a week and have no time for the holidays). I plan to tour around the States, some for pleasure, some for writing, some for doing readings at bookstores and coffeehouses and bars and festivals. And then I plan on going to Europe for a few months.

I've never left this continent before, and I'd love the chance. I know some people in different countries in Europe, and figure that if they help me out I can afford to do

this, to take almost a year off and travel.

But am I only running away from something?

In all the decisions I've made in my life, I've tried to move toward something, not to run away from something. So what am I looking for?

Diary Entry, August 29, 1997

I feel like I'm making such a large decision in my life now. When I left college, I knew I was only going to be going to school for four years, this was the logical conclusion to my schooling, but it was still a great change to go back home, as an adult, and start to look for a job. Once you're working, though, you make your own schedules. You can stay at the same job for thirty years, you can marry and quit your job and take care of a family, you can get another job. And the thing is, I had no idea how long I was going to be at this job. I thought I'd be here for at least six years; that's when my 401(K) becomes fully vested and I will have made the optimal amount of money in it, then I'd be ready to go, I could quit my job right about when I was probably ready to get married and possibly move to another city. But here I am, quitting a year and a half ahead of my plan, planning to spend a ton of my money on travelling instead of working for the next year.

It's strange. I've always been so insistent that I be financially secure. I've always planned everything. I've always done the most logical thing. Is this logical? I figure that I'm young and I have a savings and I hate my job, this is as good a time as any. If I get married and/or start another job, I might not have this opportunity in my youth again. Right now there's really nothing holding me back. So this is my chance.

But it's not like me. It's not like me to throw away a job that makes me great money. I have perks here. I can work on other projects here. The equipment is excellent. But I'm treated like a second-class citizen here. I have four to six people who answer to me design-wise, but I can't tell them what to do when someone from another department is overriding my decisions all the time. I can hardly be an effective leader when no one allows me to lead.

I've mentally just gotten tired of fighting this place. So I'm here for another two months, I'll try to save all of my money, and then I move on.

And recoup for a year.

I don't know what I'm looking for in Europe. I want to be alone, really. I want to see different sights. I want to see different sights through my own eyes, with my perceptions, with my perspectives. I want to be able to react to the world. Does that make sense?

I want to know I can do this. That I can.

Why I stay at my stupid corporate job:

1. I'm a masochist at heart and this company turns me on.

2. I was raised in a slave camp, and this place lets me drink water while I work.
3. He keeps telling me he'll deny everything in court if I leave him.
4. This company is cheaper than a sedative.
5. My boss makes me homesick for both Mother Russia and my vodka.
6. I don't have the resources to study chimpanzees in their natural habitat; had to find similar test group.
7. I'm hoping the rays emitted from my computer will eventually give me a tan.
8. Staying trapped in my office all day allows me to avoid interaction with all people.
9. I can't think of any faster way to become brain-dead.
10. All the fat people that work here make me feel thin.
11. It's fun to bet on who will quit next.
12. I'd hate to have to spend my days outside in the sun, say, being active or doing different things.
13. The constantly changing whims of my supervisors keeps me on my toes.
14. Because you can't have an abuser without an enabler.
and the bonus...
15. Contrary to popular opinion, my olive complexion does not mean I'm made of money.

Office Memo, April 28, 1997

I thought you said you told C. not to tell designers how to design departments. She did (see attached).

She also told me what to do for some of the show coverage, things that (1) go in conflict with consistency in the magazine, (2) go in conflict with consistency in design of all the show coverage per our meeting Friday, (3) would make the section look cluttered. She didn't cause problems in the meeting Friday; she's causing them on paper now. Why?

Please let her know that these changes are unnecessary. I've outlined it in a memo to her; she should also know, however, that it's not her place to be doing things like this, and she won't listen to me. Thanks.

I've tried to work through this unhealthy environment. I've tried to swallow my pride and just do what they tell me. But I can't do it forever; I have too much pride and I know I should be doing something more. I've tried to fight for what I know is right, and then my supervisors will agree with me, and then one of the supervisors will disagree and no one will want to fight it. Everyone is so afraid to fight for things here, that they just let the cycle continue on and on and on.

Diary Entry, September 15, 1997

Why would you hate someone for paying them something close to what they're worth? He did this to P., the old editor. When P. quit, he needed to replace him with three people, and I'm sure he's paying the new editor more

than he was paying P. He shoots himself in the foot that way. He resents people for having pride in themselves. He wants weak people here, so he can pay them next to nothing. And then he treats them like crap for doing sub-standard work.

Then he gets someone on staff who is good, and eventually they stand up for themselves and ask for more money, and he gladly gives it to them, and then he thinks about it for a while, and he thinks, "You know, I used to be able to pay them less money for the same work. They're screwing me." And then he hates them and makes them feel like crap until they quit.

I don't understand how someone who can run a successful business can be so short-sighted.

If this place wasn't so whim-oriented, it would be a lot better. The owner makes changes from one issue to the next, he changes his mind about everything, he doesn't remember what he said, he blatantly lies.

I was told that he has told A. to sit on expense checks and petty cash requests as long as she can, so he can hold off on paying out what his employees have coming to them.

The thing is, work can be something that makes you happy (yes, I've heard that it is possible). I produce the literary magazine "Children, Churches and Daddies" for no money; I typeset it, I design it, I write for it, I scan photos for it, I make all editorial corrections, do spell checks and make sure it gets out on time, and I do it all with more efficiency that a staff of people do here in this office.

Maybe that's another problem. I've think I've learned all I can learn from this place. A career is supposed to be a constant progression of learning and applying what you've learned, but for the past year, or year-and-a-half here, I haven't been learning, I've just been fighting to stay at the same point I've always been at.

And that shouldn't happen. Not from the standpoint of the owner, who wants efficiency and can most easily get it by allowing his staff to produce (a happy employee is a productive employee), and certainly not from my own standpoint. I want to learn, I want to grow. I don't want to have to fight for things I fought for a year and a half ago.

Office Memo, January 13, 1997

Bonuses and Christmas Parties

Most companies have a decent Christmas party as well as bonuses at the end of the year. HOW magazine estimates that the average production/designer received a bonus of nearly \$4,000 in the midwest and nearly \$6,000 nationally. Folio magazine estimates that production directors, people in positions such as myself and D. S., receive bonuses on average of over \$8,000 for trade magazine work.

In 1995 we had the closest thing to a real Christmas party, although we could not invite a guest (like a spouse). This year we received less than a party.

For a staff that has been overworked and is looking for some sign of gratitude, no bonus and a lunch instead of a party is insulting.

Current Overtime Compensation

Overtime is supposed to be compensated for by being able to take time off. Usually, however, we only take time off at a ratio of 1:4 or 1:3. If I work 60 hours of overtime in a given month, seldom do I have the opportunity, much less the permission, to take nearly four days off, which would be a 1:2 ratio, much less a week and a half off at a 1:1 ratio. Yet this is supposed to be my compensation for losing half of my spare time. I have had to repeatedly relinquish social and family obligations, as well as eliminate basic money-saving and necessary household chores in my life like grocery shopping because I have simply had no time to do these things that I should be doing. The sheer amount of time I have worked has also made me physically sick, and with more work always piling on, I do not have the chance to take the time off I need to get some rest and recover from illness.

The Fair Labor Standard Act requires government employees to get 1-1/2 hours of comp time for every hour of overtime worked. The average (norm - expected) ratio for any company offering comp time in lieu of wages is a 1:2 ratio. The Federal government is now trying to set up a standard of one hour of comp time for every hour and a half of overtime worked (in lieu of wages). This company's policy puts our comp time drastically below those ratios. Considering that giving an employee comp time off at a 1:2 ratio doesn't cost the employer anything, during less busy times there is no reason why this ratio should not apply to this company.

I have consistently worked far more overtime than a worker should. Consistently I have produced quality work at a much faster rate than the rest of the production/design staff at this company. And consistently I have wondered when I'd get paid for the work I have done, if I would even get compensation for the work I did, or when I would even have a day off. I look around and see the sales staff making three to four times my salary, all while working a normal work week (when not travelling around the globe). I see an editorial staff and a marketing staff that does not put in overtime give me work consistently late, asking me to spend my spare time catching up their mistakes.

I have battled with and created a good product in spite of an inadequate staff, or an incompetent staff, or an uncooperative staff. In short, I feel I don't receive adequate compensation in most every front at this company.

Well, if I have learned anything in the past year, it has been how to deal with the incompetency of an inadequate and uncooperative staff, which is probably a lesson I'd have to learn sooner or later anyway.

At least I haven't given in and joined them with that mentality. Then I would have really lost.

But I know there is more out there, and I know it is time for me to learn some-

thing new. It's time for me to shake up my routine.

Change is hard for anyone to look forward to; when you get used to something, it just gets ... comfortable. Change can be scary. I've been at this company longer than I've been in college. The pay is pretty good. It could be worse.

Yes, I suppose it could be worse. But it could definitely be better, and I know that if it's going to get better, I'm going to be the one that will make it that way.

Diary Entry, September 15, 1997

M. just came into my office with the most recent issue. She was so excited about how it looked, and she was going on about how the printer did a good job, and she's so pleased. And she keeps saying things like "Next year will be better," and "We'll have a lot more ads next year," and "We'll have a lot more time to work on it next year," and I keep nodding my head and agreeing with her, but I know the issue she just handed me will be the last issue I do, at least while I'm employed here.

So now I sit here, grinning and bearing it, trying not to tip anyone off, trying not to burn any bridges. Who knows, maybe they will want to freelance out one magazine to me, have me work on it at home, on my own time. Maybe I'll have the best of both worlds for a while.

Maybe it's not like this everywhere. Maybe after travelling, I'll find a company that thinks it's a good idea to pay people what they're worth. Maybe I'll find a place that judges people on merit, and not on how they dress or if they're gay or not or how well they play golf or if they can hold their liquor or how many friends they can make - or should I say fake - with the staff.

Or maybe I'll win the lottery and become independently wealthy. Oh, I guess that means I'll have to play first. Well, I hate throwing away money, and I know I'd have to work anyway, because as I said, I love my job, I do my own work in my spare time just to keep me sane.

Maybe I'll get sick and tired of working for someone else and go for another change altogether and start my own company. One where I produce a product with content I care about, that looks as good as I know it can look.

Anybody need a job in a year or two?

Diary Entry, September 17, 1997

I make it through the day here by thinking about October 17th, the day I put in my two week notice. It's one month from today. Thirty days from now I will be telling the owner and D. S. that I'm putting in my two week notice.

Thirty days from now I'll be telling everyone in production to come into my office, so I can tell them I'm leaving. And D. J. will be pouring champagne for me, and I'll be telling everyone about my travel plans, and I'll be laughing and smiling.

And when S. finds out and comes to me and asks me not to go I'll say too bad, that apparently they can't pay me enough to stay here, and if she asks me why I'm going I'll tell her it's because I can't stand incompetence and idiocy and whim-worshipping and I deserve something better because I'm talented, hard-working and intelligent.

And I bet she won't even get that she is the incompetent, whim-worshipping idiot.

And C. will be glad that I'm leaving, because then she can take over the design of this magazine, even though she's not a designer or an art director but an editor, and a bad one at that.

And I'll look at J., the main saleswoman for this magazine, and I know she'll be thinking two things:

1. if the magazine looks worse it will be even harder to sell, which will make her near-impossible job of selling crap even more impossible, and

2. she'll be jealous, because she wants to get out of here too, because this place places constant barriers in front of any attempts to do your job and she's underpaid and her job depends on there being a good product when editorial can't write to save their lives.

And I'll feel bad for J., and I'll want to tell her to just get out of here, that working at McDonald's has to be better than this place, you'd have to have more pride in your work any place else than here.

I keep trying to think that it's not that the weak and stupid are able to beat the intelligent and hard-working and rational. That I'm not leaving because they beat me. That I was wrong. I have to keep reminding myself that it's that the intelligent and rational human does not need to put themselves through this kind of abuse. I have to make a point to actively consciously remind myself of this. There is nothing to gain from battling those who do not listen to reason. Consider trying to have a rational argument with a religious fanatic - they are not coming from a rational base, so the foundation of their argument is not sound, even though they don't question their foundation and accept it as true. And therefore they won't listen to your argument, no matter how much reason and logic you use. They've rejected that line of thinking. They've rejected thinking.

The ignorant are different from the stupid, because being stupid is not a statement on whether you choose to be that way. Being ignorant, the way I see it (I know this is not in the definition), means you choose the option of being an idiot; you ignore the better choices; you choose irrationality over reason. You're stupid because you weren't educated, but you're ignorant because you choose not to be educated, that's the difference that I see between the two, and that's how I use the word ignorant. Being ignorant is detestable. Being ignorant, since it is a choice to avoid rationality, cannot be rationally argued with. Reason won't

change their mind.

So if the choices are: 1. fighting a losing battle, not because reason is not on your side, but because your opponent does not recognize reason, or 2. leaving the battleground, so you don't have to bang your head against a wall, then I guess choice number two seems to be most logical.

D. J. refers to working here as "pounding nails into your cock." It's extremely painful and also absolutely pointless.

Kind of crass, but well said.

So I just keep thinking, "Thirty days."

So I now embrace change with open arms, I welcome it into my life, and I keep my eyes focused on the future, to make the best out of what I have and what I've learned in order to face the challenges I give myself in the year - and the lifetime - to come.

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journals

king of the universe
KING OF THE UNIVERSE

I used to be king of the universe. I used to have meaning and order and direction in my life. People came to me for ideas and answers and I gave them exactly what they needed. Some times I even gave them more. Some times they were pleasantly surprised with the knowledge, with the intelligence, with the fact that sometimes pieces fit together so well that it almost seems they were meant to fit that way. Less often they were disappointed; they didn't see why my answers were better; they held my ability and my triumph against me. They could have been unintelligently avoiding the truth; they could have thought like a communist, thinking that someone else should not be revered, but the capitalist in them think that it should have been THEM. But it CAN be done. I used my brain and I proved them wrong. I was invincible. I produced RESULTS, and I did it with three times the speed of everyone else. People were amazed with me. I had a following.

There are many questions I ask. Maybe it is creativity that asks them and the engineer to find the answer. I have always been both. But when you get to the top, when you see the view from the top, well, when you see it all, what more do you have to ask?

Although I do not claim to be God, I wonder: what would she do to this? If she finds someone like this, what does she do? My guess is that she would drop it, not kill it, because she is not a vengeful God, but she could punish it unjustly so that God could ask them: so now what? You've had all of the answers before, so what do you do now? When they get you out of the hospital, everyone will think that you are fine, but you are not; I DO that to you. And you'll have to deal with it all, and you'll have to remain strong, because that is what you do, you'll have to be strong for everyone else, and inside you'll be falling apart, and no one will understand. Who's your messiah now?, she'll ask. Will you have an answer?

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Keep My Sanity KEEP MY SANITY

Okay, this place is such a mess.

I think that only because everything around us is such a mess, and we only get to see bits and pieces of the mess.

Have you ever thought that there is so much going on in the world, and have you thought that we are so lucky that you have access to so much information? I mean, the internet alone allows you to get information from reliable as well as subversive sources about topics that might not be covered in depth in the daily news. I mean, look how powerful CNN is now, how they have a few cable channels, and web sites, and well, they probably have a bunch of other stuff too, to make the world a more informed place.

That is, if you choose their avenues to get information from. You can always choose to surf the net and get information from people who live in recreational vehicles and drink too much and are sure that they have been abducted by aliens. Well, you choose you own sources, I guess.

And yes, maybe information is a good thing, if people looking for information can weed out the bad information from the good information, or if they can weed out the bad sources when they are too busy paying attention to the good sources.

I guess.

So what does it mean to have your own web site? Well, it means getting on the internet enough to get web space. I mean, America On line offers five screen names and 10 meg of web space to you for only twenty dollars a month, all while giving you internet access to most places in the United States. Okay, in Europe too. The point is that there are a lot of places to go to get access to the information you want to share. Programs on the computer can generate the right language for web pages too. That and a little advertising, and you can have people reading what you decide to post on the web.

So what does it mean to get information from common sources? Well, be prepared for the fact that it might not have the slant of your life style. It once again is a matter

of knowing how to get the right information.

I have come to the point where I am so tired of the quote-unquote information super-highway that I don't watch television much, where I don't read the newspaper... Where I don't even surf the net much or listen to the radio. I get to tired of listening to other people telling me how to think that I often prefer to just miss out on the big stories so that I can keep my sanity.

Maybe I am the only person that thinks that way. Yes, I have my own web site and I have my own e-mail and I'm really thinking about getting cable so I can watch cool television. And no, I don't get a newspaper, and right now I don't even have cable, and I much prefer listening to a compact disc of mine for music instead of leaving my will to the radio station. So maybe for now I have found a way to define a line to keep for me and information. You know, how much is too much. That is something I try to keep in mind every day.

When Credibility Doesn't Matter
WHEN CREDIBILITY DOESN'T MATTER

There's a fine line between what the media says is good and what the public says is good. This much I have discovered with the whole Clinton "scandal".

I have made a point to stop listening to the reports on how Clinton is doing, what the media thinks the people think about Clinton, you name it. I did go through an article recently, though, and it started aggravating me right at the first sentence. As the editorial letter says, "President Clinton has lied and lied and lied some more..." I was already intrigued.

Granted, that was the first line of the story.

But I think we as Americas know that the average politician lies a lot anyway, to their family, to the other politicians, to their represented people. The only thing that is novel about this story, versus stories of other presidents, is that there is more media in the President's face, and more avenues than there have ever been, to tell the public about the President's wrongdoing.

I think the majority of people I have talked to agree that this whole Clinton thing is pointless. The people don't seem to care so much about wither or not the president bedded someone. Or didn't. Or lied about it. You get the point. I think people get that Clinton has a private side; Clinton is just subject to a more volatile pressure from groups that want to expose him.

I don't think that Clinton is going to make our country go down the tubes with a pending possibility of an impeachment. And I don't think that Clinton will make love to any stranger he can, whether or not he is the President of the United States. What I can think is there there has to be a fine line for what we as people can tolerate from the people we voted into office. We all have to make that judgement every day, it is just that now we have to do it when we learn more information. So we have been making these kinds of judgements for years; it won't be too hard to do that again.

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monologues

“Type A” Person “TYPE A” PERSON

I was in my friend’s car once, and she was driving through the streets of Chicago, and she was letting people in who were getting in the right lane at an intersection when that right lane really should only be used for turning right but they go straight and try to cut off the long line of traffic waiting at the light. Well, as I said, she’s letting these people get in front of her, and she’s stopping at four-way stop intersections and waving other cars to go in front of her, and when she is going she’s going under the speed limit, and I’m thinking, my god, she’s under thirty years old and she’s driving like she’s twice her age and I want to tell her to get going because damnit, I don’t want to die in this car, I’ve got a lot of living to do, I’ve never jumped out of an airplane or made a million dollars or been in a lustful affair with a high-ranking political candidate, and if I am going to go out I surely don’t want to die of boredom while someone else is staying in the most congested lane of traffic when they could just as easily get into the next lane and cut everyone off in front of them when they eventually have to merge, like I would most certainly do.

And then it occurred to me, and of course it filled me with a complete and utter sense of elation, because I just love being pigeon-holed into stereotypical psychological categories: I really am a Type A person.

There’s an intersection near my house where from one direction you can either go straight or turn right, and there are two streets that merge into this one, both turning right, so the middle street has a “no turn on red” sign. And usually when I’m on this road I’m on the street that’s going straight, the left-most street, and these two streets are on my right, merging into my street. And I always catch the red light on this street, it’s like the traffic gods are displeased with my constant efforts to circumvent their wrath, so I’m always catching the red light at this street, so I’ve learned a new trick: I turn right, onto the first street on my right, but instead of doing a U-turn I turn left at the next block so I can get on that second street, all so I can turn right onto the street I was on

originally before both of the other streets get to go so I can beat every one of those slow bastards to the next intersection.

I mean, yes, I'm the one that's yelling and banging the steering wheel of my car when people on the road are idiots. Yes, I'm that person who has to race so that I can slam on my brakes at that next intersection, only 100 feet away, and yes, I am only driving a Saturn SL1, a sedan with about as much power as a 1982 Ford Mustang, but damnit, I won't go down without a fight, I will be out there cutting everyone off, weaving in and out of traffic; I will be the one getting there before you, trust me, I will.

And even when I'm tuning the radio while driving, because, you see, I do that and put on my make-up and take notes for work and check over my schedule and if I was the Hindu god Vishnu and had ten arms I'd get a cell phone and send out faxes and eat dinner and write a novel while I was at it, but, as I said, even when I'm tuning the radio while I'm driving I only let the first second-and-a-half of the song play before I'm disgusted and change the dial to the next pre-programmed station, just to instantaneously become disgusted another six times and have to find a tape to play because all those stupid corporate pieces of shit think they should play crap over and over again in order to keep the mindless tuned in.

Well, not me, thank you very much, I don't have the patience for that.

So, needless to say, I've discovered that this is a problem of mine, I wish there was some sort of therapy group for this so I could go to my weekly "Type A Anonymous" meetings, but we'd probably all be pushing each other out of the doorway thirty seconds before the meeting is supposed to start, saying, "Get out of my way ass-hole, you should have thought about being late before you tried to cut me off," and the meetings themselves would probably be filled with people yelling, "Hey, jerk, I think I was talking, what, do you think you're god or something, show some respect."

God, and I know this is a problem of mine, I know this "Type A-ness" transcends into every realm of my life. When I get on the elevator in the morning to get to my office on the eighteenth floor, I try to make the doors close as quickly as possible so no one can get on the elevator with me, because you know, I really do hate all people and surely don't want to be in a cramped confined space with a bunch of strangers. But when people do get on the same elevator as me, they invariably press the buttons for floors fifteen, sixteen and seventeen, and I start pursing my lips, stopping myself from saying, "Oh, you people couldn't stand to walk a flight of stairs, you just had to press all of these buttons and stop me from getting to my god-damned floor in a reasonable amount of time."

Even walking on the sidewalk in the city, I always get stuck behind someone that's a full foot shorter than me and a full thirty pounds heavier, someone who labors to walk very, very slowly, someone who actually sways rhythmically when they walk, like a metronome, or like a person standing on the edge of a dance floor, rocking back and forth, back and forth all too afraid to actually ask someone to dance, or else afraid to go out and dance and make a fool of themselves in front of the cool people who have figured out what rhythm really is. And I'm walking behind this person, almost tripping over myself because this walking pace is just unnaturally slow, so to pass the time until

there's an opening on the left side of the sidewalk so I can pass them and walk like a human being again I start to mimic them, swaying with my walk, more for my own entertainment than anyone else's.

Yes, more than a human being I'm a human doing, and I hate having to depend on the schedules of others in order to get ahead of them all.

Yes, I am the person in line at the grocery store with three items, shifting my weight from foot to foot, frantically scanning the other lines, the person who wants to ask the person in front of them, "can't I get in front of you, I've only got three items and you have two full grocery carts full of crap like Cheetos, Pepsi, fish sticks and Haagen Daz Cookie Dough ice cream." Yes, I am the person who has four different sets of plans for any given evening because if any one event gets too boring I can pick up and say, "Oh, sorry, I'm supposed to be at a meeting by now," instead of having to tell them that they're too boring or that I just have no idea whatsoever of how to relax. Yes, I am the person who coasts toward an intersection when I know the timed pattern of the traffic lights, and know that I can manage to get to this intersection without ever having to make a complete stop so when that light does change I can accelerate faster than everyone else, pass everyone by, and have the open road to myself, wide open in front of me.

I'm already guessing that at my funeral, when the long procession of cars is creeping toward the cemetery, I'll be opening that casket up and whispering to the driver of the hearse, "hey, what do you say we floor it and blow everyone off in line? We could probably grab a beer at the corner bar and still be able to beat everyone to the grave site," because, as I said, I'm a "Type A" person, and I'm going to make damn sure I do as much living as I possibly can, I'm not going down without a fight, and wherever that god-damned goal line is, I swear, I'll beat everyone to it.

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prom '97
PROM '97...OR DOING THINGS RIGHT
... or doing things right

My mother just gave me a bunch of her cocktail and formal dresses that she wore when she was young. Floor length dresses, usually with some beadwork, all really spectacular, unique formal dresses, and I thought, wow, these are really great, I'd love to wear these dresses, and then I thought, wait, I have nowhere to wear these dresses, and then I thought, wait, no one I know of would have any place to wear these dresses, these are dresses that look like they should be worn to award ceremonies in southern California and there's nothing like that going on around here in Chicago and if there was, I'm sure I couldn't afford to go to it. So then the thought struck me, like a sequin that caught the light and glared into my eye from the shoulder of a floor-length one-shoulder satin dress with matching stole: I could have a formal party. Host it in my living room. Decorate the whole place. Well, then, since it was mid-May and I couldn't get a limo rented for a friend's birthday because they were being used by a bunch of sleazy seventeen-year-olds wasting their parents' money, it occurred to me that ten years ago this year I went to my own prom, and then the vision struck me with even more clarity. I was to have a prom party.

Prom '97, it was, I had to decorate and make it prom, except more fun, because we're older now and probably have a better idea of how to actually have fun. So, where to start, where to start. Needed streamers, hanging down from door frame to floor in every door way. Needed lighting... Got my white christmas lights out from storage in the basement and strung lights all around my living room and dining room, on the tables, on the walls. Needed balloons, so I got 75 large silver balloons, blew them all up and let them cover the floor. Bought a crystal punch bowl, made a punch that would force people to eventually have fun, got a ton of food for the buffet, sprinkled glitter and streamers and confetti all over the place, even got a disco ball.

Needed to make favors, remember at formal dances you'd get little booklets with the name of the prom and the location and the theme song and the class president?

Well, had to make those, and they should match the invitations, and come to think of it, there's usually a photographer with a backdrop in the corner of the dance floor so you could get your portrait taken... Hmm... I'd have to borrow the grey portrait backdrop my sister made by painting over one of those maps they have in elementary schools, that roll down over the chalkboard like a projection screen and put it in one of the bedrooms so my friends could have their portrait taken.

And my friend Brian was even coming into town for this party, because in high school nine years ago I asked him to prom and he turned me down and we've always sworn that if we could do it over again, we'd go together. So I thought I'd surprise him, and since I sing I got my four-track recorder out and taped my voice over a slow George Michael song, kissing a fool, because we were both dorks in high school and both loved George Michael, and anyway, I sang over this song and was going to have us dance to it together.

So people start showing up for my party, and I'm playing big band and swing music, Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Harry Connick Jr., The Glenn Miller Orchestra, because you see, I have taste now and wouldn't play the kind of crap you'd hear at say, your prom or a wedding, like "When a Man Loves a Woman" by Michael Bolton or "At This Moment" by Billy Vera and the Beaters or "Truly" by Lionel Richie or Mariah Carey or Whitney Houston or Natalie Cole without her dead dad's voice in the background. And people are complimenting me on my punch, that it tastes really good, but I don't dare tell them that it's Absolut vodka and Absolut citron and rum and banana liqueur and a little whiskey and some left over red wine from my last party, all with a splash of orange juice and Ne-Hi fruit punch soda. And Scott is already starting to spill his drink on the floor and bump into people and it's only like eight o'clock so I'm thinking, this is going to be a good party.

And then Helen comes in with Steve, her fiancee, and she's got a new eyebrow ring, and I say, wow, did that hurt, and she said no, it hurt more to look in the mirror and see this big metal circle piercing through the flesh above my eyebrow, but no, when I got it done it didn't hurt at all. And minutes later I hear my roommate talking to her, saying that there's a theory among psychologists and such that if someone gets into multiple piercings or piercings in unconventional places or tattoos, that's a sign that they were abused when they were a child. So my roommate is asking Helen, "So, were you abused as a child?", and I try to cut in to halt this social faux pas, and Helen responds with "No, not really." So I think, okay, I need to know what that means, so I ask, "What do you mean, not really?" and she answers, "Well, my parents were Columbian and I went to a Catholic school. It's a wonder I'm not a serial killer." And I think, okay, maybe Helen's fiancee won't try to start a fight with my roommate after all, maybe things are actually going to be okay.

And more people start showing up, Rachel strolls in wearing her old prom dress, and her and her friend made wrist corsages out of broccoli and spinach leaves. And Dave shows up, that sweet thing, with corsages that match a few of my dresses for me, and I decide to change into dress number two, I mean, there are only so many occasions where I'd have the chance to wear more than one formal dress to a function, I might as well take advantage of it, and everyone seems to be having a grand ol' time, and we start taking pictures and then I decide that Brian, the prom date that never was,

should dance with me.

So I turn off all the Christmas lights so that all that's going is the disco ball and I play this goofy George Michael song and start dancing with Brian, and he's laughing hysterically that I remembered that he liked George Michael all those years ago and that I actually sung over this song, and we're dancing together, and then he says, "Oh, wait a minute. If this is supposed to be prom, I better act like I did at prom," and then he pushed me away and acted all stiff and started doing the box step and stepping on my feet, and it just made me laugh harder and harder.

And then I decided I needed to have everyone vote for a king and queen of prom, so everyone whispered in my ear who they thought should win, and I picked two women and two men so it wouldn't be such an elitist thing, and one of the kings won only because he got nearly as many votes for queen as he did for king. So when I tallied it all up in my very drunk head, all while wearing dress number four, I picked up the Burger King crowns I picked up last week just for this occasion and crowned the winners, and told everyone we should all dance.

So by the end of the evening we changed the music in the stereo so we were listening to the Bee Gees and Abba and Duran Duran and old early eighties crap that we could just thrash around to, and we were singing to all the songs and jumping around, and it was two in the morning, but we didn't care, because we were all at prom and having a perfectly good time.

And I thought about Brian dancing the box step and stepping on my feet, acting stiff and scared because the high school prom was a time for awkwardness and uncomfortableness, and I thought, yeah, we really are more comfortable now. Everyone should have a prom when they're old enough to enjoy it.

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NASA Project

NASA PROJECT

I've always loved astronomy.

I've kept the telescope I had since I was a child, I remember tracking the motion of the stars to the horizon when I was six with my sister when she took a high school astronomy class, I've witnessed two comets, I've even had a star past the base of the constellation Cygnus named after me.

I've studied black holes, tried to learn more about astrophysics, the whole nine yards.

And I have noted that there are studies and possibly plans for NASA, after setting up the space station, may be planning a colony on the moon for inhabitants, as part of a test to study which would also entail the long-term-effects of a change in gravitation force on the human body.

And I heard this, that there may be plans for this within the next twenty or thirty years, and I thought,

my god, I am meant for this, I would be perfect for this.

But then I thought,

what would I do there, why would they want me there

And

I'm a journalist, I've written all my life, and I'm a designer,

and my job would be to catalog what is going on at the colony and to distribute news to the colony about what is going on on the moon and maybe also even about what is going on on earth.

And I liked this plan, it would seem fitting, give me occasional feeds through occasional transmittals of information for me to pass on to the colony, and I would catalog historically what is happening here for people on earth to learn from, this sounds like the perfect thing for me

and then I thought, wow,

I would disseminate all information to this colony of people on the moon. I would be their only link to news.

I could tell them anything.

Just think about this for a moment: I could tell them anything and they wouldn't be able to use another source to prove me wrong, I could tell them I sang the national anthem for the President,

no really, I don't have that bad of a voice,
because we were leaving to live on the moon,
and these people would believe me.

I wonder if I had to write reports to send back to earth, would I have to tell them about the hypnotic effects of the earthlight, because, you know, everyone talks about how wonderful it is to be in the moonlight.

But I don't know if it is a good idea to have a restrained audience, people who had to listen to me, and then I started thinking:

would I be able to bring my pet cat with me?

Cause all I can think is that my cat would be taking leaps and they would be fifteen feet jumps, 10 feet in the air, you know, they probably wouldn't let me bring a pet to the moon, but it's still fun to think about the gravitational pull for them. Remember at the Planetarium how they would have scales for different planets so you could see how much you would weigh there because of different gravitational pulls? All the women liked weighing themselves on the moon because of the moon having one sixth the pull of earth they could look at a scale and say,

"I weigh thirty-six pounds."

But then I suddenly started to think: I love the idea of seeing the stars from an entirely different angle, I wonder how they would accommodate for days that are twenty-eight earth days long on the moon, can you even imagine seeing the earth in the sky out there the way we look at the moon now, can you imagine it. You'd be there, unable to make any connection with people on earth at all, and would that be hard?

The one thing I realized I'd miss so much about leaving earth for years would be not the traffic, or having to go to the grocery store or to a restaurant, but missing love. For the first time you'd be separated from your family, would my husband go with me, or would I have to live without the one person that meant the entire earth to me, would I have to learn to live without love.

the effects of nine one one
THE EFFECTS OF NINE ONE ONE

It's strange, has everyone even thought about the fact that the terrorists decided to destroy greatness on nine one one?

It's strange, how close I came to losing friends and family:
my friend didn't happen to go to the Trade Center on business that week,
my brother-in-law lost a slew of contacts who died in New York,
the Pennsylvania plane landed a mile from my sister-in-law's house,
my friend in D.C. wasn't hurt but he talked about how different streets would be closed on different days and that there were so many military guards there you felt like you were in a war zone,
which in a way, you were.

And these terrorists, they had a masterful plan, they were stopped that day from starting at different flights, and one of them was slated, I think, to run into the Sears Tower.

I mean, think about the emotional effects of these disasters. I know different people had different reactions...

I know that for months afterward whenever we were driving toward the loop, taking the Kennedy where you could see the Chicago skyline get closer and closer, I know that every time we drove by, I would be sitting in the passenger seat and I would imagine seeing a plane fly right into the side of the Sears Tower, toward the top, to the side, exactly like how it happened to the World Trade Centers. Like how you saw it over and over again on television, when we were flooded with images of it on the news. I'd see a plane flying right into the tallest building, this landmark to Chicago.

I still see that sometimes, whenever we are driving into the city, imagining witnessing the destruction, seeing it all, and thinking, what do you do then?

This piece was used in the performance and compact disc *Six One One*, was published in *Children Churches and Daddies volume 129*, <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm>, and <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>, and was later in the chap-book supplement to the book *The Elements*

death comes in threes
DEATH COMES IN THREES

Have you ever heard people say that death usually comes in threes? It's a strange thing to say, but when something terrible happens like that, you can almost expect over a short time that these waves of death can come a few times.

Almost to make sure you get the point.

THE MORNING OF JULY ELEVENTH

I don't remember what happened the day of my quote-unquote death, death number three. It was just a day, a normal summer day, a day like any other. I remember seeing the fireworks for the 4th of July in Chicago on the street with my roommate Eugene, and I remember that I was wearing a white shirt and it started to rain, so I had to lean my body so my shoulders were at Eugene's back so I wouldn't get drenched with my white shirt. It was Saturday, July Eleventh, and I apparently was going over to my parent's house, where my sister Sandy lived, to go swimming because it was sunny. After Getting on the Kennedy, It took I55 southwest of Chicago and exited route 45 South so I could drive the suburbs and see my family.

The rest of the accounts came from eyewitnesses.

That and what the people at the hospital told my mother.

I was at the intersection of 95th and route 45; I was at the end of a line of people waiting at a red light. The light had just turned green, but you know how long it takes for people to get moving when the light changes, we were still sitting there waiting to get moving just as the light changed.

Now at that point in the road, the intersection was at the bottom of a hill, and if you are coming south toward the intersection you'll see the light before you'll see the

street.

This apparently was the case for the driver of a sedan, he apparently saw the green light and continued speeding on the 55 mile per hour road.

As I said, I was at the end of the line of cars. I would get caught in the crossfire.

Accounts state that there was a motorcyclist in front of me, and a van in front of him.

Eyewitnesses said they saw me looking at my rear-view mirror in my car, I must have seen this speeding car coming towards me.

I couldn't move my car into the empty left lane next to me, there was no room. I could only guess that I turned the wheels of my car to the left so that I wouldn't run into the motorcyclist, who I'm sure would have died from being hit.

Originally, in part, I got away by traveling. But apparently after waiting to get away again, this time from some stranger in a car, I was struck. and all went black.

TWELVE THIRTY, JULY ELEVENTH

So what happened was that this speeding car hit the back of my car, knocking me into oncoming traffic because my wheels were turned. A van from the opposite lane of traffic then hit my front passenger-side corner and dragged my car for a bit.

Police accounts said that there were skid marks from my car tires for one hundred and eight feet.

Yeah, well, how was that second driver to know someone would appear in front of him as he was driving?

Yeah, how can you blame him.

To brake the news to my mother, they had to rummage through what things they could find of mine from the car, rummage through the pockets of my clothing, my purse was buried under the seat, so they got a phone number, and they called, and my mother answered.

"Do you know someone who drives a red sedan?" they asked.

"Yes, I do," my mother answered. "Did something happen to her?"

The hospital chaplain informed her there was an accident and they would like her to come and identify a body.

Yes, identify a body.

My mother got off the phone to rush to the hospital, she was sure I was dead. When my mother and my sister arrived at the hospital, my mother was thrilled when they walked into the room and saw me with tons of tubes sticking out all around me. "She's not dead!" my mother exclaimed, as they went to see me lying unconscious.

My mother even commented that I looked so nice there. She said I looked nice because I even had eye make-up on. My sister had to tell her that I wasn't wearing make-up; that I had two black eyes.

I was unconscious for eleven days, the coma lasted two weeks.

The day of the crash they wanted to be sure no one else was in the car with me, because there was metal and car parts from the passenger side of the car jutting all they way to where I was sitting as I drove. For all intents and purposes, the passenger seat was **gone**.

Which might explain the injuries on the right side of my head. They kept a monitor on my skull for the end of my unconscious spell to monitor the amount of fluid around my brain. I have a little indentation in my forehead, at my hairline, from having that attached to my head.

You know, for my own good.

I was told that I had no broken limbs, but three skull fractures, they even had to make sure they all set properly because one on my forehead, on this side here, had to set properly so my right eye wouldn't have any problems.

IN EVERY CAR ACCIDENT, THERE ARE ACTUALLY THREE CRASHES.

In every car accident, there are actually three crashes.

The first is when one car hits another one. The second is when the outside of the human body hits the interior of the car. The third is when, within the human body, organs crash into each other, and crash into your own bones.

ELVIRA DOE

Shortly after I regained consciousness, my family told me they were slightly concerned, for two reasons.

One was that since they couldn't find identification on me when I was first brought in, instead of calling me **Jane Doe** they nick-named me **Elvira Doe**. The second thing they noticed was that the people in the hospital handed back all my dirty, disheveled, ripped up, torn cloths, and the only thing that was missing was a bra.

FENCES AND STRAIGHT JACKETS

I was in pain all the time, painkillers didn't help, my back was sore, my head ALWAYS hurt, my sinuses were terrible. I wanted the Hell out of the hospital but I couldn't take the first steps to do it.

So as I start to regain consciousness, I'm stuck in there at Christ Hospital, and I want to get out. I remember one of the first chances I had to leave, I was lying in bed, they expected me to sleep there, I was probably barely conscious, I doubt could even stand, but I tried to get out of bed and I fell out of bed and the nurses had to come get me, and they had to call my parents, I was fine, but it was their policy to call. But because they were afraid of me falling again, they put a metal bar around the side of my bed, I don't know, it was like a guard rail to keep pedestrians away from something dangerous, or a zoo fence so people could feel safe while they watched the trapped animal they have on display for you. So they had this metal rail around my bed, but that wasn't the worst part,

they also put a harness on me at night, a straight jacket, so to speak, probably so that I wouldn't be able to use my arms to help me leave.

They kept a wrist band with my stats on it on my wrist, so that if I wandered off they'd know where I belonged, to keep me in place. I hated that damn wrist band, I'd rip it off probably almost daily, and they had to make a new one and strap it on me.

You know, to know where I belong.

WRAPPING UP THE HARNESS

I don't know why they had to keep a straight jacket... i mean, a harness on me, were they trying to keep me in place? Once I regained enough of my consciousness back all I could wonder was, is this how they were trying to stop me? I just wanted to be able to sleep the night through without being restricted, without my arms being bound. I finally managed to contort myself out of it one night, not so I would escape, but just so I could feel more sane in this place. The next morning the nurses didn't know why the harness was wrapped up on my night stand. My mother saw it wrapped up there and knew that I had to have done that, and she had to think that if I as that cunning enough, I must be getting better.

HALLUCINATIONS

So yeah, I was just **loving** being in that hospital, trapped in that room, I imagined I was actually at my apartment and not in a hospital bed. I even **talked** about this, and my sister, not wanting me to hallucinate, told me,

"Okay, you say the bathroom is just past the door (*which was my hospital room door*), why don't you show it to me."

And so I'd walk out the hospital door and look down the hall. I was stunned, this wasn't right, I thought, and I stood there for a split second and I said well, it was here.

IMAGINING FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES

Day in and day out I would stay in that hospital room, and I was really going nuts ... I imagined my friend Brian, who now lives in San Francisco, becoming my roommate, dressing up as an old lady so no one would recognize him and no one would think that he was my friend visiting me, so that I would have someone there to talk to when I was sitting there all alone, all by myself, day in and day out.

No, my friend Brian never visited me, and I **did** have an old lady for a roommate, and no, I never talked to her, but I kept thinking to myself that this was how I could keep myself sane,

by imagining that a stranger was a friend,
just so I could get through my days.

IMAGINING DAVE

And I was never able to get over Dave's death, where he died three months before my death ... and I wasn't able to get across the country for his funeral, so I could never see his face to say goodbye to him. So, I would fantasize, I think, oh him appearing at my room, coming in through a side entrance so no one would see him, and he would come up to visit me, and I would say,

"How did you get here, you're supposed to be dead, did everyone see you"

and he said, "no, no, no, I managed to hid so no one would spot me because no one knows I'm alive. But I wanted to know how you were doing, because I didn't want anything to happen to you, and I wanted you to be okay, and I wanted you to not die."

I felt so alone in the hospital all those weeks, maybe it was my Brian's way of trying to fill in all the unexplained gaps in my life.

THEY WOULDN'T TRUST ME WITH A RAZOR

After being in the hospital so long, my hair was growing long, I never even got to shave my legs even, I was completely unkempt. I wanted to at least be able to shave my legs in the shower, but they wouldn't trust me with a razor.

I had to have a family member watch me, just so I could take a shower and try to get myself in order.

LEARNING TO EAT AGAIN

I had to fight every step of the way in that hospital. Three different doctors viewing my records even knick named me "miracle girl", but learning to walk was no miracle to me,

I just had to work harder to prove everyone wrong and try to get my life back.

After walking, I had to learn how to eat, because they kept a tube in me while I was unconscious. And after a while it became time for me to eat again, and I thought, I don't need to eat - I haven't been eating this entire time in here (Eating is really over-rated, what do I need it for). So when they told me I could eat, I didn't. They offered breakfast and I told them no. They offered lunch and I told them no. And by the time dinner came along my stomach was making more noise than I was (I think it started a language of its own). So being a vegetarian I got an egg sandwich, and then I was faced with this task I didn't know how to undertake. I had to rationalize it to myself. You've eaten before, I told myself, you can do it again. I know it seems foreign to you, but you can do it. Put some food on the fork, put it in your mouth, remove the fork, start chewing, and then just swallow it. You can do this. I had to talk myself through every step, the first bite was the strangest thing to me, I ate only half of the food, But I did it.

I know that once I got used to eating I ate ravenously, but the next morning they offered food and I ate an egg sandwich again and I had to tell myself, You did this yes-

terday, Janet. I had to goad myself into eating again.

NO ONE GAVE ME FLOWERS

One day, in what seemed like an endless stream of weeks, I got flowers, and I was stunned, I was thrilled, no one had sent me flowers before while I was here in the hospital, I didn't know who they were from.

When we looked at the card, they were flowers for a **Janet Spinoto**, a woman who apparently was somewhere **else** in the hospital, and I thought, that's what I get for thinking that someone would buy me flowers.

ISN'T THAT WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

My curse is that after this accident I have the brains to know what happened to me, how bad it was, but that I survived it and now have to suffer with it, and to pick up the pieces and function on my own.

I think that people think that when you get out of the hospital you must be FINE. Clean bill of health. They are so wrong.

Now I feel like a soldier and I don't know what I'm protecting any more. I want to give the enemy what he has been looking for. It's a battle I am so often not willing to fight. Here. Take my weapons. You've stripped me of most of them now, so let me hand you the rest, freely. Let me have this, let me do this. Let me give this compilation of everything and nothing. Isn't that what it's all about?

INDOCTRINATION WITH RELIGION

But the thing is, when I'd try to do anything in that room, all I saw was this reminder that I was at **Christ hospital**, I would be reminded by seeing *something* religious everywhere I turned. I'd turn on the television, Christian programming. I'd take paper they had so I could write journal entries, the paper would have religious phrases on it, references to God, and I thought I was going nuts, what are they trying to do, indoctrinate me?

I know it was Christ hospital, but all I thought was, did God hurt me and trap me here ... and how is God going to save me?

KEEPING A JOURNAL

My sister started a journal while I was in the hospital for people to write in. My father, who never writes, wrote down while I was still unconscious,

I squeeze your hand but you don't squeeze back, but I still love you.

And my roommate, a man I dated and loved, was the first to write in the journal, and he wrote that he remembered me telling him just before the accident that I had written about a car accident, that he was a fantastic car crash,

And he wrote, But it was supposed to be ME.

SEIZURES, REACTIONS AND DRUGS

Months after I got out of the hospital, I had a Grand Mal seizure. You don't remember going through it, it's like you black out, but your eyes are wide open, gritting teeth, shaking violently. Apparently the doctors told my family (*but they didn't bother informing me, the patient*) that I may expect this after the injury I had, so there I go, back to the hospital, they load me up with Dilantin, inject an overdose of it into my bloodstream and it's making my arm itch from all of this medication, I was gripping the sides of this bed in pain.

I wanted the pain to end, but it couldn't, of course not, we couldn't have that, because I had an allergic rash reaction 10 days after I paid for a ton of medication I was supposed to be on for years, so they then switched me over to Tegretol, and yes, eleven days later, allergic reaction, so on to the expensive drug, Depakote. I had to eventually go to a fourth drug for this charade, and each time it was a different set of rules:

take 3 times a day, take twice daily, no alcohol, extended release is available on *this* one, but not on *this* one. It was dizzying.

WHAT THE THIRD DEATH IS LIKE

When do you know it's over, you're recovered and everything's better? I mean, the medications and the doctors visits and the blood samples finally stopped, and I can drive and use a knife in the kitchen without fearing my own safety, and walk down the stairs without someone a handrail or someone else's help, but...but that feeling is always there, the feeling

like you went through Hell and no one knows what it's like and you can't tell them because they just don't have the time to listen

You know when you hear that someone dies (*a grandparent, a cousin, an old friend*), you feel terrible, you bawl your eyes out... You go to the funeral you rehash the good times to try to make you feel better

And maybe, you know, maybe two weeks later...you're no longer crying.

Because people move on

people forget what the victim went through

people don't know

people never knew

and you can never know how to tell them

That's what that third death can be like, i think

A GUN TO MY HEAD

I'm at a grocery store, I don't know what I'm getting but I've got a basket for food, I'm there alone, there are others in the store, but no one is paying attention to me.

Suddenly there's a gun to my head.

I know that sounds strange, but suddenly there is someone next to me, I have no idea who it is, but they've got a gun to my head, and no one else is noticing or paying attention.

The gun is at my temple, my right temple. I can feel the metal against my shin there, it's cold, and I can't move my head or this guy will blow my head off. I don't know what he wants from me, but that doesn't matter right now, I've got this gun to my head, I have to try to keep my cool, hold everything together & not mess anything up.

My life depends on it.

I RECOVER AND EVERYONE MOVES ON

I don't know how many times i've envisioned a gun to my head.

(If I tried to tell you, I'd sound redundant)

But usually in the car I envision an accident again. But I always end up in better condition than I was after that one accident

I'm usually barely conscious,

You know, to imply that something is wrong with me, but I'm conscious enough to know in my stories that I'm going to be okay,

I'm barely conscious, but i'm okay

because that is what i do

I recover, and everyone then moves on

autumn
reason

s c a r s p u b l i c a t i o n s
c h i c a g o



*autumn
reason*

(exerpts from a book published 1996)

7-2-82 10:00 p.m.

I took care of the neighbor's kids today. They're so cute, but I was feeling a little tired so I wasn't in the mood for them jumping around all day long. But we colored and made some pictures, they both made ones for you. By the time you read this letter, you should already have the pictures. Ellen, their mom, melted down old crayons and poured them into bunny molds, so now we have a bunch of crayons that are shaped like rabbits. The kids love them.

And I've been playing with my Zen rock garden, too... I've had it ready for a while, but I never got sand for it. Well, I finally did today, and once I started to use it I loved it, so I learned how to use Dad's saws and made you one, too (but you already know that by now, too - I really hope you like it. It's quite addictive, and slightly creative - very relaxing). When I called Susan later on I told her that I made one and she said that she had always wanted a rock garden, so I made another one this evening. I feel like such a busybody.

Let's see, what else is going on? There's still a bunch of things I have to do. See a professor about getting a job as a history professor... I don't know if I want to move to another city to do a job I'm not even sure that I want, much less can get.

I wish I had other options. I wish I could get on track. Sometimes I know what I want to do with my life, and I'm determined to let nothing stop me. But there are other times when I feel as if the entire world is pitted against me, that others don't want to see me happy specifically because they don't know what they want to do with their lives and they want to feel like everyone is in the same boat as they are. They want everyone to work in the same mind-set that they do, because they can only compete in their little world. If someone doesn't want to climb their little success ladder that they chose to climb up, others can't handle it because they don't want to believe that their standard is wrong.

It's like this: people don't know what they want with their life, so they do what is expected of themselves, climb the "ladder" of whatever career track they choose, mix in the appropriate social circles, work toward making money, even if they don't know if that's what they want and doing it doesn't make them feel any better. So then they see someone else that has decided to not even acknowledge the ladder that the people with no direction have decided to climb because they don't know what else to do. And this other person won't have as much money or as many friends as these ladder-climbers do, so it becomes really easy for the ladder-climbers to dismiss them and unsuccessful - and therefore they must be unhappy.

But I think that these ladder-climbers don't want to admit to themselves that they are jealous of these people that have found what they wanted with their life.

But in order to achieve their dreams (if they even chose to acknowledge them consciously), the ladder-climbers would have to give up their social circles, their prestige, probably some of their money. And they're too afraid of not succeeding, because they're only comfortable with the efforts that they have been putting forth in their ladder-climbing lives, they're so afraid of not succeeding and losing what they already have that they don't see the effort as worth it.

So they hold a resentment toward someone they see as a visionary - someone who

does what they want with their life.

So then what? They make fun of them for not having enough money, for having no friends. They may even try to sabotage the plans of the creative one, solely because their value systems don't match.

It's amazing how people need a mob in order to have a belief in something. Shouldn't that be evidence enough that they really don't care about their beliefs, if they need the support from others in order to live with those beliefs?

Anyway, my point from all of that was... Well, I'm no visionary, and I haven't decided to chuck the whole system into the toilet. But I do want to use the system for my own needs, so that I may be able to do what I want to with my life, whether or not that fits in with what people expect. And I think that scares every person I meet, and I think others resent me for that, and I feel like all these artificial barriers are put up in front of me so that I may get discouraged and quit.

And the thing is, I know what kind of work I want to do, but I'm wondering if and how I can do it.

Sometimes I feel like I shouldn't even try, like the odds are against me. And I have to try to fight that.

It's a constant battle.



7-11-82

You know, I don't even know if I would want to teach at a university, live on a campus, in a campus town. I mean, I like living in a big city... But it's more than that. I went through the university system, I learned about being politically correct, I supported women's groups and minority groups - I even took part in protests and rallies. But I start thinking about how giving special rights to certain groups takes away rights from other groups, even if those other groups are white men. And then I start thinking about how people in these groups blame a whole group for the problems of society, and in turn pre-judge everyone and assume they're bad. And then I start thinking about how most people in these groups are scorned people - scorned by the system - and yes, the system is often pitted against some people - but maybe the answer is that internal struggle, learning to accept yourself and not fight these enemies - enemies that are not only real but also that are created. Maybe the answer shouldn't be a fight against everyone else. I mean, if people want to fight you, that's their problem, but it's your life, and you have a right to live it. Don't bother spending your life telling everyone to let you live your life.

Maybe these groups, this separation, maybe the political action on the parts of women and minorities makes people too angry all the time. Maybe these groups actually make people more antagonistic toward one another. Maybe they remind people of our differences more than we need to. Maybe it's a matter of giving the people running these rallies more power, making it an internal power kick instead of an issue of empowering the entire group they represent.

It seems like a noble thing to do on the surface. I see the benefit of supporting women's rights, minority rights, etc.

I did it myself for years.

And whom did fighting the system help more? The system, or me?

7-23-82 2:45 p.m.

hi, i'm back, and i've decided not to use any capital letters in this letter. i'm such a rebel.

i don't want to be here. i don't want to work for pennies at a mindless job. i don't want to have to hate my home. i don't want to be bored off my ass. i don't want to be alone.

i had a dream last night that i was out on the patio with catherine and i had a shotgun, or a pellet gun or something. we were complaining about animals running all over the driveway, so i aimed for a cat across the public pool. i don't know if i hit it or not, but it jumped into the pool, started bouncing around in the water, then bounced out of the water, over my head and under the fence off the patio. it was the scariest thing i've dreamed in a long time. catherine woke me up as it bounced off the patio. she started blaring the television in the other room and woke me up. i was hyper ventilating for a bit. it was very strange. i don't know what it meant.

8-24-82

Here I am again, bored. It's still the first day, and I hate looking like I have nothing to do here. I have my own office and no one else is in it right now, but I'm afraid that someone will walk by and see my feet up on the desk and fire me or something. I wish I brought some work from home to do while I was here. I wonder if this is what careers are really like - a lifetime of trying to find something to do so you look important.

I'm starting to worry that this is actually what people do for all of their lives. That their occupation is trying to look important, or busy. Worthy of a raise when they're really not doing anything. This one guy, Tom, told me once that the trick to being respected at the office is to always look angry, always look like you're in a rush, that you always have a lot to do. Put extra papers on your desk, make it a little messy, always have stuff in your "in" box (even if it isn't work to do), always remember to make a phone call or jot down a very important reminder when someone is trying to talk to you. Always make everyone wait to talk to you - even if it is just for ten seconds - while you attend to some sort of made-up "business" - whether it be finishing up a fake phone call or writing something "very important" down. Act like you have to get up to do something, even if it's only getting coffee. And always have a furrowed brow. Sigh a lot, try to look a little tired, or a little sick (that way you are thought of as a "trooper" for coming into the office even when you're not feeling well). People think that you have so much work to do that they want to give you time off, even when they don't know what you're doing.

Is that what life is all about?

I can't believe that this person actually thought this way, that this friend of mine had actually put that much effort into trying to look like you're doing something when you're actually doing nothing. Don't you think that's a problem to actually get to that point?

But I think I'm starting to get to that point too.

I don't want that for myself. I want to do something I like. I'm driven, and I can't live like this.

Or does this just happen when nothing else in your life works for you, and you finally get tired of striving for dreams that never seem to come true?

I remember having a teacher in high school and he seemed really smart, but it just seemed like he got so tired of the screaming student, and trying to make kids care, that he always walked a little slower, never smiled, just gave us our work to do and then went to his desk to finish his work. And I remember thinking then that he was burnt out on the school system, that he tried for so long to make a difference, but faced one too many kids who just didn't care. And now he's like a robot, making almost no impact on anyone's lives.

Including his own.

Is this what everyone else in the world ends up like?

There's this 8x10 of Oliver North tacked to the wall above my computer. Working here is going to be fun, I can just tell. They're going to love the things I put on my walls, aren't they?

8-25-82

I share an office with someone, and their phone always rings, the secretary always transfers the line to his office, but he's never here, so I have to sit in here by myself and listen to the very loud ringer on his phone ring all the time. It drives me nuts.

Ah, crap. It's 4:40, and I still have nothing to do. I have a ton of crap to do at home, but nothing to do here.

8-27-82

Hi. I'm very depressed. When I left work yesterday, I cried as I drove all the way home. Three people like my dad to deal with is just too many. Three too many. I got photos back yesterday, from our road trip in Tennessee. I brought a photo of you and Betty to work today. My mom bought me a mug for coffee at work. That's about all that's new. I just took a sip of my coffee and it's cold.

2:00 p.m.

I've been drinking from my new (spankin' new) coffee mug all day. I've officially declared today as caffeine day. I'm going to shake until tomorrow, I just know it.

My boss even said, "Hi, honey" when he first gave me the work, and he gave me a little side-to-side hug. A little refreshing.

Now I'm frightened that I'm pleased that he called me "honey." What an awful name! I suppose it is better than his usual grunt, but it's still degrading.

I was so aggravated when I left here yesterday. As I said, I cried half the way home in the car. It's just that this isn't what I want, not at all. I don't want to be a secretary for some pig and live with a woman that sucks and have my parents meddle in my life all the time and drive through a shitty part of town every day and basically be a very "type A" person. I don't want that for my life.

God, it's scary that I'm thinking about winning the lottery instead of doing something that I actually want to with my life. I wish that there weren't so many blockades up in my way when I'm just trying to live my life and make myself happy.

8-28-82

It's lunch. They all go out and buy food for one another and eat lunch together, and I sit here in this little room on the side, bringing my own cheese sandwiches because I never talk to anyone. Like I even have enough money to buy my own lunch. Like I could think of anything to say to these people. Half of them have posters of naked women in their work areas.

2:10 p.m.

Hi there, honey. People are talking in the other room about the new health plan we're getting. It seems like it pays 100% of most everything, which is a damn good deal, if I can believe it. This is an interesting job. The secretary is on vacation, so I took a letter for the boss and faxed it. Ah, the many tasks I have to do.

4:50 p.m.

I've decided that I hate him. My boss, that is. I've decided that I don't want to be a secretary, too. This man is a jerk. I hope the secretary is sick and not on vacation, because if she's gone for 5 weeks (that's how much vacation time she gets), I sure as hell don't want to be doing her job for that long. Get a temp, you cheapskate.

9-1-82

Why can't people figure out what the need done ahead of time, so everyone can be more efficient? It seems like half the work I do here is not actual work, but corrections on the work I did - and it's not because I did something wrong, but it's because someone else forgot something and needs to rearrange the whole project. A lot more could be accomplished if people knew what they needed ahead of time.

But then I guess we'd all have to fill up more of our time by faking looking busy, wouldn't we?

But the thing is, they give me changes because they forgot stuff, but they give me all these changes late when we had a deadline for getting the project done. So ninety percent of the time I'm bored doing nothing, five percent of the time I'm working, and five percent of the time I'm running around frantically trying to get their corrections done in time for the deadline because they were late in giving me corrections that should never have existed in the first place. We could at least spread that work out so I'm not bored here as much as I am.

Does that make any sense? It just seems like people are so inefficient.

Wait - did I ever tell you about that? The time when I was walking to the women's rally? It was right around when I met you, so I might not have. Well, I was walking to this rally, to photograph it, it was a huge march for women's rights and women's safety, and I'm walking down the street and I see this other group of women (an organization of their own, not just a group of friends) walking to the rally too. Their group was some black women's organization group, and they were going to march in the rally as a group. They had signs, and they were saying chants, and stuff.

So, I thought I'd show my support for their organization, so I walked across the street (originally we were walking parallel to each other), and walked with some of them (there were about 25 black women walking in this group). We were going to the same place anyway, so I figured I was just being supportive... I even started saying one of the chants that they were all saying.

Now, I know I'm white, and yes, I was the only white woman walking with them. But the group was to support the progress of black women, and I supported it enough to walk with them, even if it was only because we were going to the same place. Seems innocent enough to me.

So then a woman from the group starts walking next to me, she was obviously the leader of the group, and she asked, "Do you know what group this is?"

And I said yes.

Then she asked, "Then you know we're a group for black women's rights?"

And I said yes.

And then she said, "Well, some women in this group are uncomfortable with you walking with us."

I was stunned. I was just trying to be supportive, right? So I said, "I was just trying to help -"

When she said, “I know, but some people here feel uncomfortable.”

And I didn't know what else to do. We were going to the same place... Was I supposed to look for an alternative route?

So, I walked to the other side of the street again, and turned a corner so we didn't have to look at each other the rest of the trip to the meeting place.

And for the rest of the time, that incident just sat there, in the pit of my stomach, and stewed there, apparently with all the acids and bile and stuff in my stomach, because it just started making me feel more and more uncomfortable, more and more tense. If they didn't want help and support from all people, what did they want?

I guess it still bothers me, and I still don't know what to make out of it all.

I don't want to look at all the crap that's around me, all the things that I don't want to be doing with my life, but it's all right in front of me.



9-22-82

I just heard about your fender-bender. You really should be more careful, young man. I don't appreciate you getting into accidents - especially when I can't be there to nurse you back to health. Yeah, yeah, yeah, you said you weren't hurt, but I wouldn't be surprised if you're in a little pain tomorrow, you know, soreness and all.

I had a bad dream last night - one where my mother died. I normally don't have dreams that are that violent, that vivid, that scary, or that hit so close to home. I woke up a 4 in the morning shaking.

9-23-82

I'm so aggravated, and if I don't get any time to relax, I'll go nuts. I've driven myself crazy before by giving myself too many things to do. It's happening again. I've run myself ragged trying to do too many things at once, I've driven myself to the hospital because of it. I don't want to do that to myself again. I know people who gave themselves ulcers from stress, and they were in high school. God, I don't want to be like that. The more stress I feel, the more my joints hurt, the more aches and pains I have. To literally feel pain from stress manifesting itself in soreness, in an inability to move, that's horrific. Not lethargy, but pain. When you feel stress, you know you have to get a ton of things done, and then it hurts to do it. It just makes everything going on in life that much worse, until all you can think about is the pain, and how you have to overcome the pain to get everything done in your life.

And I can feel myself going down that road again, and I don't know if I have to hit rock bottom before I can get any better.

9-24-82

Okay, I just went into the bathroom. The whole "bathroom environment theory" failed. I couldn't bring myself to go to the bathroom, so I just kind of stood there for a while, looking at myself in the mirror, thinking how ugly I was. Then I noticed there was an old padded living room chair in the corner of the bathroom, so I sat down on it. It was comfortable, but after about a minute of just sitting in silence in the bathroom in a padded chair staring at the wall, I realized that this was pretty stupid and I got up.

So here I am.

It's 4:11 and a half now.

10-1-82

Everyone told me at work yesterday that I looked really sick. Pale, you know. I'm just telling you this because I'm starting to get a lot of pain again, like I did last year because of stress.

It's amazing how stress can make someone physically sick. We as Americans like to pop a pill for everything, and we like to assume that we just have to handle the stress, like something is wrong with us if we can't handle the pressures of our work or something. I think stress should be paid more attention medically. We should do more for ourselves to eliminate stressors in our lives, and then our health problems would probably go away a lot faster. I'm finding myself taking a lot of medication again lately because I'm in a lot of pain. I didn't like having to take medication before, and I don't want to get into the habit again, even if it is over the counter medicine. There has to be a better way to feel better, right?

Last night I wanted to get so much done, I wanted to clean my apartment, Jessica was coming over, I wanted to do computer work... I felt so bad that I sat on the couch almost all night. I finally dragged myself out from under two blankets to get drugs and dinner at 8:30. But then I took a shower, tried to relax, and I started feeling better. I think having a positive attitude will do a lot more for me than fretting over it. I tried to dress up more today, put on make up, just so I'd feel better about myself, my appearance. That might have a positive psychological effect too.

Geez, my bedroom is a mess. There are clothes piled all over my bed, some of which I'm throwing out, some I just didn't have the time to put away. Sometimes I have to run from one job to the next, and all I have time to do is throw some new clothes on. And throw the old ones on the floor.

I think it's colder in my office than anywhere else in this place. I just asked someone to come in here and tell me if I'm crazy; they thought there was no difference in the rooms. It must be because of the way I'm feeling. I must be getting even more sick. Great.

10-19-82

I'm revising my resume today, too - and I'm going to make copies and start sending them out to places in the want ads. I'd like to see what my other options are. I can't afford such a cheap job.

10-19-82 7:45 p.m.

I designed a new resume today. You would almost think I was someone successful or important or something by looking at it, too. Someone who wasn't earning an income below the poverty level.

I can't stand Catherine. She's driving me absolutely insane, I've got a huge migraine from her (I mean, I can't even turn my head without being in pain), and she HAUNTS me.

And she yells at me, often for no reason at all. She vents at me, but somehow transfers her anger toward me, instead of facing her problems. She's just such a moron. She can't do much of anything right, and then she gets so stressed out that she gets even less accomplished, and then she feel like she can do nothing, and she becomes less successful, and the vicious cycle goes on. But it's all her fault. And I can't pity that. It only makes me sick.

I think it would kill her if I said any of this to her. I think she would just shrivel up and die or something. She's not very healthy. I'm glad I'm not like her. I mean, I know I have plenty of faults, and I know I'm not the best at a lot of things, and I know I get stressed very easily, but at least I TRY to be the best and I GET OVER bad things. Bitch doesn't try, and if anything goes wrong, she flips out for weeks. She's still flipping out over the leak from our bathroom, which was over a week ago. I mean, it's a leaky faucet. Don't cry over it. It's fixed. Get on with life.

She just came in again. She keeps coming in and she keeps bothering me. Why does she think that I actually want to talk to her? I just want my privacy. It's just so irritating to deal with a roommate that is so incapable of living or excelling when I feel so driven.

But what am I driven by?

Speaking of being driven, I almost cut off my boss on the street as I was driving home today, yes, I'm the type A driver... This guy in a wagon was going slowly, so I eventually passed him, thought nothing of it... Then he came along side of me, rolled down his window, honked and asked, "Where did you learn to drive like that?", and then he drove away. It was actually kind of funny.

I should have said "your mom," but I didn't think of it until now. Damn, another opportunity lost.

10-20-82 9:05 a.m.

I'm so bored with my life. It's quite a depressing one, you know.

1:29 p.m.

Hi. I just had lunch, and I can't do much more of the tile catalog. I need more images, which are being mailed to me. I'm going to use cool paper and cool ink. It'll be nice, I hope. A catalog that someone did came back from the printers and arrived here today. It's really ugly looking, the cover is bright red and bright blue ink on bright white paper and it just gives me a bright headache. But that's what they wanted, something to jump off the page and attack you, as if it had a big stick or something. But it's still nice to see a finished product.

Almost as nice as it is to see you (that was a pretty good transition, wasn't it?)... This weekend will be nice. My car will be clean, my oil will be changed, and I won't have anything that I'll HAVE to do for 2-1/2 days. And I'll have you. What more could I ask for?

2:04 p.m.

I want to learn how to make paper. I want to mash stuff into a pulp, put it in a press, roll it out, dry it and make my own paper. I've been thinking about that for a few weeks. I want to learn how. I wonder if a kit is necessary, if all I might need is a bucket, a rolling pin, stuff like that.

Hey - an evergreen bush... I could make paper with needles of an evergreen bush in it (you know, the needles that are about an inch long, we have them all over our courtyard). That would be kind of neat.

I could put human hairs in my paper. That would look kind of cool.

10-21-82 10:28 a.m.

I tell you, that can't be a healthy thing to have to deal with on a regular basis. It can't be healthy for her, because she's going to kill herself after a while. But it's not healthy for me, either, for I don't like the stress of not knowing how she's going to react to anything, whether or not it is my fault. Yeah, I would like to live alone instead of this. I would like to have my privacy, to not have to worry about offending others or having to listen to people throw tantrums because they can't find their checkbook, or have to listen to someone like that. I actually enjoy being here at work because I don't have her around. It's frightening when this place gives me solace.

I wish I could afford to live on my own. Four years of college, one of the best schools in the country in my field, graduated with honors, and this is what I get.

I've been looking in the want ads, and there is NOTHING in my field. It feels like I'm going to be stuck with this life forever. Promise me you'll take me away from this. Promise me that, please.

12:56 p.m.

You remember the list - this guy I knew made a list on his computer of all the women he ever had relations with, then he accidentally gave me the list when he gave me a bunch of other computer files... What a freak. And he doesn't even know I know, and he wants to be pals with me. Like I'd want to be pals with a guy that writes up lists of women who have given him blow jobs (although I did have to laugh that there were only two women on the blow job list). What a pervert.

I just feel bad for all the women who didn't know what a freak they were dating, and now they have their names on this list of his. What was his point in doing that? I'd love to go to his computer and destroy that list. On behalf of all the women on it.

10-28-82 8:38 a.m.

I feel like I'm selling myself every day here. The work I do, if it's good, people don't appreciate it, if it's crappy, they're in love with it. They ask me to change the good stuff. I hate that. And I take it as a personal slam on me if they don't like what I consider to be good, and I know I shouldn't do that, but I can't help it. Everything I do becomes a part of me because I did the work. And they tell me it's crap, a bunch of losers in this stupid business, and I'm not supposed to take it personally.

10-30-82 9 something a.m.

Boo. did I scare you?

See, a lot of problems all go back to people not taking the time to figure out what they want on any given project. That so much time could be saved if people only thought coherently the first time. Then they wouldn't waste the time and effort of a number of people after the job had been finished.

10-31-82 12:05 p.m.

I'm dressed in orange and black today. wow, she got festive. Happy Halloween.

So I'm going out to a local bar (and I'm not frightened? Should I pack heat?) after work here for this woman's last day. I want a beer. Then I'm going out with Susan to a party that her friends from work are holding. She's going to the party as an expressway, wearing black and putting little matchbox cars all over her with the hood up or overturned. Creative. All I could think of that would be easy and not very costume-like would be to wear all black and a beret and go as the rhythm method of birth control. Just an idea.

11-16-82 9:17 a.m.

There are times when I want to take positive steps toward making me feel better, I want to take charge of my life again. And sometimes I feel as if there is nothing I can do, and my mood becomes more and more depressed and I feel like it's never going to end. If I'm successful, my vacation time with you is a departure from my depression. I just wish I could be happy here.

I need to get the problems out more, to study them more, to understand them more and maybe to then I'd be able to put them to rest. I don't know how to approach doing that, though.

I can't afford a therapist. It's that simple.

I remember sitting in the basement when I was little. I was really little, because mom was still around at this point. I stayed in there all the time, especially when dad was expected home, or home, you know. Mom always had a Manhattan ready for him for when he got home. She'd put the glasses in the freezer so they were cold and the edges were frosted.

I remember him always being a beast when he got home. Didn't talk much. You had to make sure you didn't bother him when he first got home.

Actually, I don't think I saw him that much when I was little.

I just read the paragraph and I remembered that I'd think about dying then, too. Killing myself. I'd think of different ways to do it, getting a big knife, or taking pills. But I knew I wouldn't like the pain, and the thought of dying scared me, too. What's after it? Nothing? Can I really think of ending my existence forever? I'd probably screw up anyway...

This is what I thought about when I was really little.

I knew I'd never really try to kill myself, I was too chicken. Maybe I wanted to scare them. Maybe I wanted them to realize how much they were hurting me. Maybe it would make them feel guilty, look, we didn't pay any attention to her, and look what we've caused. If only we showed her we loved her, if only we paid her some attention, if only we made her feel like she was a worthwhile person...

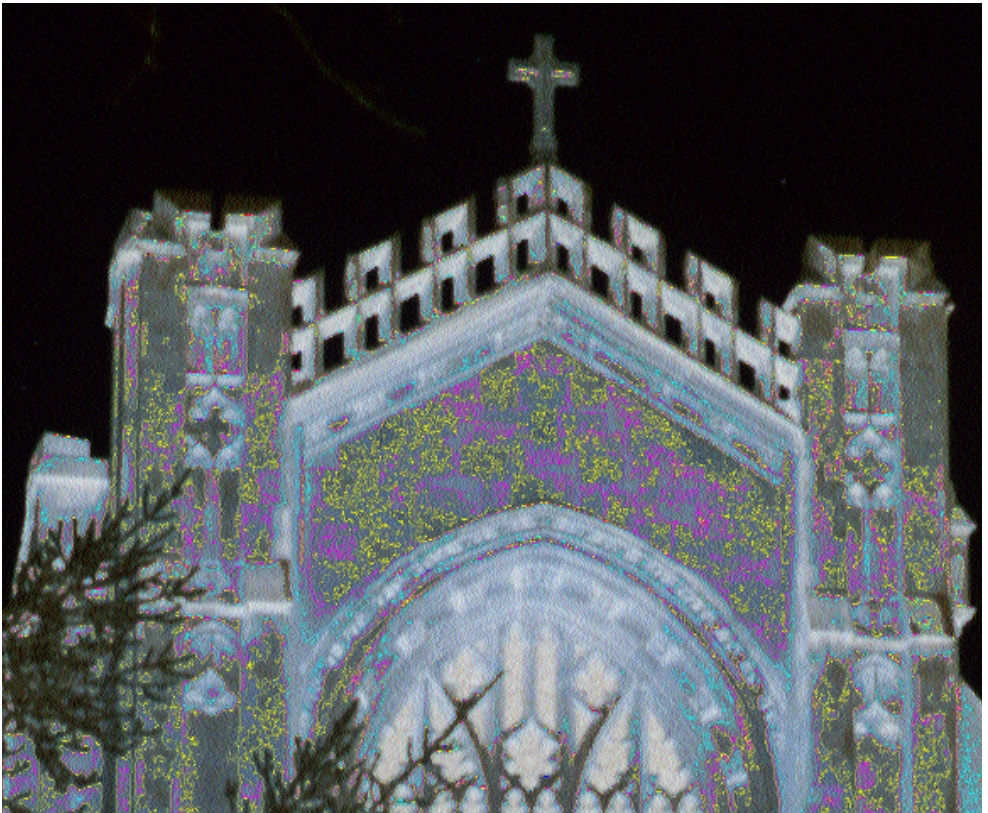
That's the one that always gets to me. They never made me feel like I was a worthwhile person.

I always liked to play in small cramped places. I liked playing in the basement, because at the time part of it was closed off with a bookshelf and it made the corner like a little room at the far end that was hard to see into from the door. It was my private space. I'd decorate it like it was my own home, and I always had private things, secret compartments and codes so no one could get to my stuff. I was very secretive. I even liked to play in my closet, because there was a shelf in the back of my closet used for storage I could sit in if it was empty. It was like my own private room, in my closet. I decorated the walls, put pillows in there for comfort. I always kind of hoped they didn't know I played in there, that they didn't know it even existed, that they could come looking for me and they wouldn't know where I was.

Adultism is what they call it, treating children like they're shit because they're not as old as you and they don't have your experiences and they're not as knowledgeable. That's why I try to treat children more like adult, and I don't use child voices with them and I don't give them ultimatums and I don't threaten them and I don't cut down their ideas. I listen to them, even if their ideas are obnoxious, hell, at least they're original ideas, I mean, they are THEIR ideas. Making a fort in my closet as a stupid thing, but if anyone in the world respected it they instantly earned my respect. It helps when people don't treat you like an idiot.

11-16-82 3:47 p.m.

My childhood friend Nancy was over all the time. We always played Barbies or house or something, and I was never over there, although I wanted to get away from my family. She had a way of convincing me it was best for her to come over. But that put me in control of the friendship, in a way, because they were my toys, it was my house, she was only a guest. I think I used that advantage to exert some sort of power over her, to make myself feel superior to her at times. I wonder if I treated her second-hand.



11-18-82

The first night I moved into a place with my new roommate, Alan came over, and the two of them had liquor. Loretta had grape schnapps, that's all I remember. And we were drinking out of plastic cups, and I remember that he kept refilling our glasses. But he was refilling hers faster. I even thought about that that night - why is he pushing drinks on my roommate? I could see him wanting to get me drunk, but why her? I know he's not attracted to her.

I don't know when we decided we had to go to sleep. I don't remember much from the evening. I think we might have gotten the cue from my roommate passing out in her own bed. I'm not sure. I had no idea what was going on. I figured he wanted to stay over, that we'd mess around or something. I hadn't thought about it.

One of my guy friends as a joke gave me a condom as a going away to college gift. He thought it was funny. He was trying to be cute. I told him I'd keep it, and I knew I wasn't planning on using it. I think Alan knew I had it.

I was just laying there when he got the Goddamned thing. God, I wish I knew what was going through my head. I know I wasn't thinking clearly; I just wish I was. I didn't fight. I was too drunk. I didn't know if I should be fighting, or why I should be fighting. I knew I didn't want it, but I had no idea of what to say. I almost felt like I was resigned to it.

I remembering him telling me to relax; it was hurting me. He was telling me to calm down, to relax. I remember him trying to push my legs apart with his. I didn't want them to be apart, I resisted, but it just seemed like there was nothing I could do. I was still daddy's little girl, I couldn't tell anyone I didn't like something or that I was right and they were wrong. I couldn't raise my voice, I couldn't even think of what I would have said if I could get up the courage to argue. This was how it was supposed to be, wasn't it?

Now I know why he was pushing liquor on both of us, but my roommate more. He wanted to make sure she passed out drunk, so she wouldn't hear anything. She didn't hear a thing. And I never told her.

That night messed me up. He was happier than ever when it happened. Just give me some room.

I don't want to write about this any more.

11-19-82

I hate myself for not stopping him. I might not have wanted to do anything because that's the way I was taught to be all of my life, but they never prepared me for this, they never prepared me for anything, but I still wished I did something. Why did I let this happen?

I wish I could stop living in the past.

I think that's why I act so dominant in a relationship now, I think - I don't want to be looked down upon again. Nothing is ever good enough for me. I have to be strong, I have to be stronger. I never want to tell my problems to the person I'm dating because I don't want them to think less of me, I don't want them to view me like I'm a beaten child. I want to have a healthy relationship, and I guess I think that if I cover up what could potentially make the relationship unhealthy, then there's a better chance of the unhealthy stuff not happening. If I act like a normal person, I'll have normal, healthy interactions, which will make me more of a healthy person. It sounds like it would make sense.

But it's still there, buried, in the back of my head, and every once in a while it comes out and there's nothing I can do about it. Anything small can set it off. And then I'm crying, and I can't even explain why.

I guess my determination in my work stems from the fact that I want to fight, I want to get over all these feeling I have. This is my way of doing it. But I think my depression stems from the fact that I've been taught all my life that my work isn't important, won't make a difference. That I won't succeed.

Now I've got a job that pays me next to nothing, I live with a roommate I hate - I deal with people that I can't respect, people who continue to give me pain. How am I supposed to heal now?

I want to get on with my life. I want to get away from this limbo I'm feeling. I want to start progressing. I feel like I've already hit a huge brick wall and there's no way I'm going to get around it, over it, through it. I'm going to work here forever, live here forever, be miserable forever.

I was driving tonight and I thought about suicide. I mean as an option. I haven't thought about that since high school. Since I lived in my parent's house. There are times when I wish I wasn't afraid of death.

There are other times when I wish I wasn't afraid of life.

2-16-83

God, I don't know if I can do any of this.

I don't know what's right for me anymore. sometimes there is just a part of me that wants to get out of here so much, to start my life. I just want it to begin. But I don't know which path to take.

What can I do? What can I do to make myself feel like I'm accomplishing something? What can I do to make myself happy? What other steps do I have to take?

Should I hand-deliver every resume I send, and give them a little speech about how great I am?

I can't afford to move to a better place with the pay I make here. Am I supposed to spend my savings on that?

I was saving all that money for my house. So when I got married, when everything started to happen for me, I wouldn't have to struggle quite as much to make ends meet. Maybe it could mean that my children would have a better chance of going to college. I don't know how I'm supposed to save any money for my children's future with my life going the way it is.

I think of all the ways past problems have affected me, and it drives me insane. Do you think I like being emotional? Do you think I like my mood swings? Do you think I'm happy with the direction my life has taken? I feel so alone, and I feel like everything has just gone so wrong.

It's times like this when I feel I can't do anything right.

Why is that I can't see myself as a success? Why is it that I find myself unattractive, fat, and unsuccessful?

Why is this happening to me?

I just want to figure out why I get like this. What I'm supposed to do.

A psychologist would have a field day with me.

Today I feel so persecuted, and I can't explain why. I feel like everything is out to get me, to sabotage my happiness. The feeling is more that I have to fight with the very nature of things in order to get something accomplished. I'm not just fighting a person, I'm fighting the world, and I'm fighting the way things have always been done, the way I've always been taught to do things. No one is particularly against me, but no one is receptive to change, and would rather not deal with me because of it. And now I feel like I'm failing.

I get tired of fighting. What am I supposed to do then? give up? I don't know how to. I don't know how to change the way I feel. If I gave up, it would be me resigning and then losing all touch with reality. I couldn't do it any other way. I couldn't just become a cog in the wheel, and be happy with it, like all the fucking peons here at work. I'd die. I couldn't do it. I could never be happy here.

Is something wrong with me because I can't just be happy working, making money, and there you go, that's life? It doesn't seem right to me.

I don't know what the solutions are anymore, but I don't think I ever did know. And it

drives me crazy not knowing. You mean more to me than I want to admit. You're my best friend, right? So, best friend, tell me what I should do. I can't think clearly anymore.

I feel like i've hit a brick wall. I don't know what the next step is. I think I need a vacation.

I like to plan things. I like to know what is going to happen next. I like to feel secure. I hate not knowing where my life is going. And that's exactly how I feel right now. And how i've felt for months. I can put it out of my mind for a while, but it always comes back.

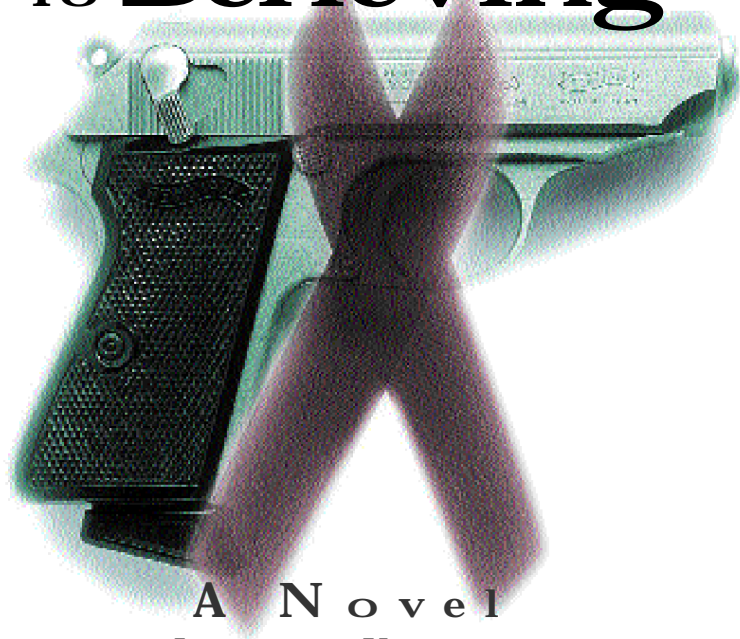
2-17-83

Who knows what I what to do. I know I want to live out on my own, but who knows how I want to do that. Working, school. I hate this. I've felt awful all day. My head hurts. I really have hit a wall.

I have to work at my second job tonight. I don't remember what the place looks like.

I'm so depressed. I was crying over at Ellen's, and I was just bawling on the phone with you. Crying on the way home last night. I don't have the energy to cry anymore. I think i've even lost any motivation I might have once had.

To ^{The} Key Believing



A N O V E L
by Janet Kuypers

SCARS PUBLICATIONS
PENNY DREADFUL PRESS
WITH FREEDOM AND STRENGTH PRESS ASSISTANCE

A M E R I C A



the key to.
believing
2002 novel excerpts

FROM CHAPTER 19

THE SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

Going over her drilled moves in her head and knowing to only move when the tower light was pointed farthest away from her location so that it was as dark as possible when she moved, Sloane started to bolt to her next hiding place; she quietly but swiftly darted to the next set of bushes by ducking and rolling to the bushes. She performed a similar move when the lights were low to get behind a set of barrels that were near the building; she successfully got in through a side door of the warehouse when the guards were changing.

She had no idea if she was in the right place. But now that she was inside, she knew she had to stay quiet in the darkened halls so as not to be found. She tried to look around her in the dark. Because she had not been in the light for so long and her vision was adjusting to the darkness, she saw rows of aisles in the main center of the warehouse. The halls had tall walls and she couldn't see past them well enough to see what was in the next space. Most of the aisles were filled with shelves, mostly with glass containers; she had no idea what was in any of the containers or what she was sneaking past. And she still had no idea if she was in the right building.

She tried to remember to control her breathing to get more air but didn't make too much noise by breathing heavily. Also, as a result of her yoga and exercise program, she could easily crouch down so she was not in other people's line of sight.

Only once she was well inside aisles with shelves did she feel safe enough to flash her light on and off on the ground in front of her very quickly so she could get any bearings to see where she might have to go. Thinking she spotted something from a small light source at the end of one hallway, she approached it in the dark, trying to not make any noise or alarm anyone outside the warehouse. Spotting test tubes along the shelves as she walked toward the small light source, she knew she had to be at a medical storage site, though she didn't know why these materials were here or why they did not need to be refrigerated. Trying to read any of the signs and labels as she walked through the hall, she was able to scan tags enough to read records from patient's names, though she could not tell what they were records from. Numbers followed the names, and she gathered that all of the last four digits out of eight on the first line of numbers were years. She began to wonder if the first row of numbers were birth and death years and the second row of numbers would be for their social security numbers. If so, most

of the people she saw had death dates in the early 1980s.

Fear filled her, because if her guesses were true, these records filed and listed deaths, and she didn't know why these files set up in this one warehouse. If they were medical records, then what for? What happened to all of these people?

Still having no answers to her hypothetical questions, Sloane got to the end of the hall and was three feet from sliding glass doors with faint light emanating from under them. She looked through the doors. The cabinets housed a lit interior of rows of vials, cased and labeled. Scanning the containers, each case had vials filled with a solution, but there was a vast array of containers of vials, each labeled with something different. Trying to read any of the labels of the vials or the cases before she opened the sliding glass door, she scratched her head in amazement at everything there. The bottom shelf had containers filled with vials, but she read that each container of vials was labeled with the flu and what year it apparently was a vaccine for. She glanced over the set of vials.

“FLU 1988”, “FLU 1989”, “FLU 1990”, “FLU 1991”

And so on.

She was stunned when she deduced that these were records of vaccines for past illnesses, they were vaccines that needed to be kept and refrigerated, probably for future research. She jerked her head up higher. She saw cases with listings for anything from small pox to hepatitis to herpes.

She didn't know whether she should be amazed or stunned by these vials sitting there, full of vaccines and cures.

To the back and in the corner of the center shelf, she saw one rack of vials, labeled

“HIV ANTIDOTE 1982.
Mastered from original virus”

She couldn't believe what she was seeing. She had *found* it. Tucked away amongst a slew of other medications and cures, almost hidden away so you wouldn't see it unless you were looking.

She was stunned.

Her heart raced.

Her breathing changed.

Standing there for she didn't know how long, and after the shock wore off that she had found the cure, she opened the glass door so she would have access to the set of sealed vials in the container.

Somehow, when she was about to grab the HIV antidote, she realized that she apparently tripped an alarm. She heard two or three sets of footsteps echoing around her in the warehouse getting closer to where she was.

“Was it when I opened the door to this case?” she wondered.

But she had no time to wonder.

This was her only chance to grab the cure, if she'd even be able to take it with her.

Making a violent rush to grab at the case of sealed vials labeled “HIV ANTI-DOTE”, she heard gunshots fired in her direction. She grabbed what she could from the container and started to run.

Thinking she saw feet at the end of a hall when she crouched down to look and not knowing if people saw her leaving the case, she realized that the shelf by the glass doors she was at was lit, so she started running. There was an occasional gunshot, but in the dark no one seemed to be able to find her, much less hit her. She tried to listen to the footsteps or guess where people were, because when a gun was fired the sound echoing throughout the warehouse made it impossible to know where it came from.

Trying to remember the way she got in and trying to take her steps in reverse order, she took a turn and someone was in the aisle she was about to go down. Guessing that it was a Marine or a member of the Army, she tried to move out of the aisle instantly.

The man drew a weapon.

She did the same in record time.

“This is what I trained for,” she thought. Since she practiced firing one-handed, and without being able to take time or focus quickly, she fired back in the dark, but she didn’t know if she hit anyone. All she thought was not to fire too much because the sound of her gun would let them know where she was. She took off again after firing two shots.

Then she remembered how gun shot noises echoed, so she thought that maybe other people *didn’t* know where she was located.

When she got to the end of the aisle, another set of boots walked in front of her and a man knocked her over. When she fell, she had to make sure that the vial in her hand didn’t hit the ground, because all that was on her mind was saving the one vial she had been able to get from the container on the glass shelf. She lay on the ground, not knowing what other move she could make. The men thought she was unconscious, so they slowly walked to her. Thinking quickly about how to get away, she started to roll. In the dark it surprised the man in the boots. As she twisted she turned her gun toward the dark object and fired once more. The body went down, but he was not dead; he grabbed at her arm and started to twist. She could hear him yell as he tried to ram her arm along the metal at the side of the aisle, but she kept trying to get away. She believed at that moment that nothing could stop her.

Breaking free and moving around the corner of the aisle, she knew that nothing would stop her.

She didn’t have time to think, and she couldn’t believe everything she had just gone through. Her arms were killing her from fighting people, and she was using them with her legs to hold herself up while she ran.

Now all she was able to think of was getting free, as quickly and as easily as she possibly could.

“Everything is right now, girl,” she said to herself. “You can do anything.”

She took another deep breath. The word “Go!” raced through her mind.

Looking around, she searched for any chance to escape. Spotting an opened win-

dow, she shoved the vial along her waist under her clothes, because it could fall out of a loose pocket. She hoped the vial wouldn't break while she tried to escape.

Her heart was beating a mile a minute; she couldn't believe how loud her beating heart was.

She spotted the open window; she scanned hallways, looking under the bottoms of shelves by crouching low to see if anyone was around so she could make her move.

She hoped.

Remembering how Carter told her that she could do anything, she decided to quickly make a run for the window. Avoiding rays of light from inside the warehouse, she ran, attempting then to dive through the window.

After cutting her left arm on the glass she broke in getting through the half-open window, she actually dove through the window, rolled on the ground, straightened herself up as quickly as she could in her dive-roll to save her life, and then ran to the closest bush so she would be hidden. She was about twenty yards from that window.

Sloane didn't know if they had seen her leave. Shaking her clothes once she was behind the bushes, she saw scraps of glass fall to the ground around her, either from when she dove or when she rolled on the broken glass to escape.

Unsure if she would be able to get to the perimeter, she had to decide on the spot if it was safe for her to move out of that area. Making the decision to try to run in safely covered areas, she darted to and then along the perimeter, still looking for any sign that she'd been spotted. Then she tried to see if she could somehow get free. About two miles from where she started running at the perimeter, she finally saw a mailbox at the other side of a street.

This was her first sign of freedom in her struggle. Quickly, she darted across the street, hoping at this point everything was safe.

Walking down that road for about two miles, Sloane, exhausted, scraped and bloody, found a gas station in her attempts to get cleaned up before she got back to her hotel. They had a bathroom at the side of the building, so she went into the washroom first, removed some of her clothes so she wasn't covered in dark colors. Also, she worked to smudge as much of the make-up off as she could. Effectively getting it off at the sink with the white liquid soap in the dispenser attached to the wall, she knew that she was a filthy mess, but tried to make herself look better.

Moving her pants to see that the vial was still there, she was able to grab it from the seam, still sealed. She was still angry with herself that she was only able to get just one vial, when she thought that she could've somehow gotten more. Assuming the alarm that alerted the men to her was in the glass door that sealed the vials, she thought that if she knew about the alarm she would she would have grabbed more vials instantly, stuffed them inside leg pockets, then grabbed her gun and ran like Hell.

Reminding herself that she did the best she could, she went into the gas station to grab a cup of coffee and a plain muffin so she could try to remain in one piece before she got to the hotel — if there was no one waiting there to arrest her and take what she had just taken from the government.

Trudging three miles past the gas station, she got to the hotel. Wondering if she

actually got away with everything, she threw her clothes into a garbage bag to bring along to wash, because she didn't feel safe leaving a clothing trail that might lead back to her if the military found it.

Showering first, she then looked at her packed bags and comfortable clothes for the drive to New York, if she was not stopped for what she did. Looking at the single vial, she thought about the choice she would have to make: save the drug to possibly replicate it or save Carter. She thought that she didn't know for sure if it could be replicated, and if anyone tried to take it from her in transport back to Seattle, no one would get this cure at all.

She knew what her choice would be. When she thought of the options, her choice then seemed obvious to her. Give it to Carter, but hope the trace amounts from the vial could be used to duplicate the cure for the rest of the world.

She had survived; now it was Carter's turn. Maybe in the process she could help the rest of the world survive too.

###

While showering she did her best to gingerly clean out the scrapes on her arms and hands. She was surprised that she had scraped knees and was bloody at her thighs under her clothes from when she was so violently trying to get away from military agents. When she got out of the shower she pulled out the hydrogen peroxide to clean cuts on her body: all bubbled repeatedly, but none hurt except when she attempted to put it on the cuts in her arm. Her next step was to attempt to put the Mycitracin on the cuts and scrapes to help them heal faster without infection; once again it hurt like Hell to try to help her arm, but she knew she had to do this to make herself better without going to a hospital for stitches.

With her other clothes already packed, she got dressed with a tank top so she could leave her bloodied arm open, because she wanted to be able to bandage it. Using paper towels from the front desk, she covered the cut with bandages from her first aid kit to cover the bleeding.

Then she had to brush her hair and try to make herself look presentable for her drive to New York. It had occurred to her that she had not contacted Carter since she left the night before for her mission, she figured that she better call him to have him look for a nurse to be able to watch him and get a needle for the injection. She knew she had some money left, so she dialed from her room and would pay the amount when she checked out a few minutes later.

"Hello?"

She loved to hear Carter's voice on the phone. "Carter, it's me."

"Are you *alright?*"

"Barely..."

"I love you."

"I love you too. I'm coming to see you."

“You are? Where are you?” He was hoping he could get her to tell him where she was located, because he was dying of curiosity.

“I’m not too far ... but I need you to do me a favor.”

“What do you need?”

“Remember that nurse that helped you when you first got out of the hospital and you were diagnosed?”

“Yeah, she was a nice lady ... why?”

“I need to have someone be there for you when I come to your place, and they need to have a regular hypodermic needle with them.”

“Why?”

“For the medication I have for you, I need it, and I don’t have one. Can you get someone, we can pay them, to be able to come to your place?”

“I suppose.”

“You don’t sound pleased.”

“I’m getting concerned.”

“Don’t worry about it, Carter.”

“I worry, angel, that’s my job.”

“Well, you shouldn’t.”

“You don’t know how worried I was after I got that call from you yesterday.”

“Well, okay, on that one you should have been. But you shouldn’t worry now.”

“You scare me sometimes girl, that’s all.”

“I think we’re at the end of having to worry, so just call for a nurse to be there with-
in the next few hours.”

“With a hypodermic needle?”

“Yes.”

“They can’t just carry that around.”

“What if they’re doing it for your doctor that traveled across the country to give you the medication? See if the nurse can somehow pick it up for me, please, please, please...”

“...I’ll somehow get it done. And angel?”

“Yes?”

“Please be safe.”

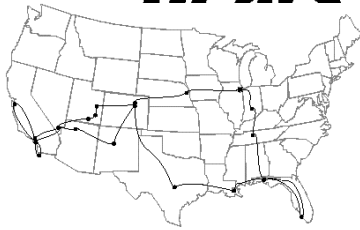
“I try to. I love you, and I’ll talk to you soon.”

“I love you too.”

Sloane hung up the phone, and got ready to pay for the phone call and check out of the hotel, to make her way to the next state to try to save Carter.

This book was published in 2002, and chapter three from this book was published in the book *Survive and Thrive*. This is electronically published through <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm> and <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>. Portions of this book were read at a feature performance in Chicago on December 10, 2002. Copies of the book were donated to Oprah Winfrey at Harpo Studios, and Rush Limbaugh. A copy of *The Key To Believing* exists in the main libraries of the Ayn Rand Institute as well as the Libertarian Party. There is a listing for this novel at BarnesandNoble.com, and it is available for sale at amazon.com.

Changing Gears



Janet Kuypers

SCARS PUBLICATIONS AND DESIGN
PENNY DREADFUL PRESS
CHICAGO/INTERCOURSE

Janet Kuypers



journals from traveling the United States

First Letters

The Florida Letters

The following letters were electronic letters sent to a group of family and friends during the month after Janet Kuypers left her job, where she spent some time with her parents in Naples, Florida.

November 6, 1997

11:45 a.m. Eastern Standard Time

I'm at the airport in Columbus now; I'm sitting on the floor because there are so many people trying to get on this plane. My flight from Chicago to Columbus was late, which is a good thing, because I overslept anyway. I remember shutting the alarm off at six a.m., but instead of thinking that the radio was some sort of signal that I had to get up and catch a flight I apparently mistook it for some sort of cruel monster disturbing my precious slumber, so I shut it off and went right to bed. I woke up at 7:20, which was when I planned to be at Midway airport. My flight left in less than an hour, and I had to get up, get dressed, get my luggage together, wake up my roommate, and take the Kennedy expressway downtown during the beginning of rush hour to the Stevenson expressway, and still get my suitcase on the same flight.

But I made it. I felt like Elaine on the show "Seinfeld" when she was trying to get rid of her irritating long-distance boyfriend who came to visit and she accidentally overslept. I was frantically running, I think I hyperventilated the entire car ride. I couldn't even have driven fast, due to all the rush-hour traffic.

But I made it.

My flight was late due to problems with one of the navigational radios (that's comforting) as well as a problem at their hub in Indianapolis. So our arrival time in Columbus changed to 10:41 a.m., just one minute after my connecting flight to Fort Myers was supposed to take off.

Of course.

But luckily the Indianapolis hub problem affected Columbus, too, so now I have at least an hour to kill before I have to worry about getting on the next flight.

My chest feels funny from all the tension all morning.

Okay, Janet, deep breath. Inhale. Exhale.

Okay, that's not really working.

There's another guy here at this terminal using a lap top computer. I think it's a Macintosh. That makes me happy. I'd like to think that someone else out there is buying a Macintosh, other than me. Gives me hope that the company might be around long enough to fulfill any warranty problems I might have.

You know, it's interesting to see how strangers react to me when I'm sitting here working on a computer. If I bring my computer into a relatively empty bar, my computer becomes a conversation piece, and instantly I have friends who want to see the computer working there. But because I'm not in a business suit people look at me here in the airport in Columbus Ohio and think something is wrong. Or else they try to sit behind me and read what I'm writing.

Hey, stop reading this. (Not you, the person behind me. Hoped they could see that. Don't they have a newspaper or something?)

Had a lovely time last night, for the most part. I got to Joy Blue and apparently the open mike was becoming one big dedication to me (which of course, I can't complain about, but I can't help but be a little embarrassed, I mean, I got less attention on my birthday, so this was really cool). People read poems either in my honor or written for me and it was very touching.

Except for Rick's poem, where he used my name.

"Janet, now that she just quit her job, was complaining to me that she had no money, so I suggested she engage in the oldest trade known to man, that she sells her mind and her soul in her writing, how much worse is it if she sells her body? So she thought she'd try it, but I asked her to come by to my place the next day so I'd know she was okay. And she came over the next morning and she seemed fine, so I asked her, 'How much money did you make?' She went through her pockets and told me she made four dollars and ten cents. 'Four dollars and ten cents? Who gave you ten cents?' And she said, 'Everyone.'"

As crass as it is, I can't help but like that joke.

Lisa Hemminger wrote me a poem, which I really think is touching, and she handed her only copy to me.

After that we went to a bar known as Jub Jub Club. I stopped drinking at that point. I need to save some money, you know.

And I got home around two in the morning, I think.

Hey, maybe that's why I didn't want to get up.

I'm an ace that way with deduction.

It's overcast in Ohio. I think the plane is going to be another half hour late. I'm starting to get agitated, sitting here on the floor. There's a row of wheelchairs lined up at this gate, not at any other gate, just at this one. I heard someone asking their travel companion why there were all there, and I wanted to lean over and tell them, "Hey, we're going to Fort Myers. The Retirement Capital of the World." Thought I should-

n't overstep my bounds of being a rude Chicago stranger observing the proper amount of distance between me and everyone else, however, so I restrained myself.

A family just sat down on the floor next to me. Now I get to listen to them all bicker and whine. Three children.

The son sitting next to me, probably around seven years old, said to his brothers and sisters that mom originally wanted to name him Jake, but his dad changed it at the last minute. Then he asked his mom, "Was Dad drunk?"

I thought that was pretty entertaining. The sisters laughed.

Oh, the plane is here. Now only another twenty minutes before I get on board, and probably another half hour after that before we take off. You'd think these airline people would get into a routine and be able to speed this up a bit.

November 7, 1998

8:58 p.m.

Hi. It's me. Got in to Naples, Florida last night, and I must admit, it's nice here. I needed this. Last night I went for a bike ride, and then I went for a jog/walk at night. There were stars in the sky. I mean, I could actually see stars, unlike Chicago, where the perpetually cloudy winter night sky has a yellow-orange haze over it from the city lights, and besides, it's too cold to spend time looking up, making you also the perfect target for muggers. The city gears you to trudge through life, you almost want to look unhappy when you walk down the street so you fit in with everyone else.

Not so here.

It's muggy here; I'm hoping it will do something good for my sinuses. I feel like I can take care of myself now. I feel like I have the time to take a walk, or ride a bike, or stretch out, or eat well, or read more, or sleep.

So last night I went to bed here - it's a bed like a hospital bed, one with controls so you can sit up, so I propped myself up and read. I asked my mom why they had a bed like this. Mom told me that it was for sale at a park rummage sale. That's my mother, always getting something on sale. It's strange, being in a bed that you can maneuver. Oh, and there's a massage function, which just kind of shakes the bed for a while. I'm not used to my beds "doing" things.

So I woke up this morning, walked again, watched the men in the park (including dad) play tennis, then I swam and laid out and read Pettus' novel (I thought it would take me longer than two and a half hours; glad I brought a few more books). But of course, I overdid it a little in the sun and now my face is pink - It's not bad, though.

I was walking last night and I was saying hello to all the other people going for walks. I was smiling, literally smiling, while I was walking by myself down the street.

In other words, I feel really happy. And it's so good to feel that way again. Not have to worry about fighting for my job or arguing with people or even feeling like I have commitments, things I just have to do. All the engagements I have right now, other than an occasional dinner with my parents, are the plans I make for myself. They're thing I want to do.

It's wonderful.

When I went for a walk last night I stopped by the pond in the back and I sat down between two bushes and I looked up at the sky. Since it's approaching a winter sky, the constellation Orion was in the sky. I saw Cassiopeia, too, the same constellations I looked at when I was a child in love with astronomy and the sciences. And it made me so happy to be alive, just to see those constellations in the sky, to know that science is still there, that the world goes around and around. That my world made sense to me because there was science. And I know that probably sounds bizarre, but I loved it. I love the fact that I believe in things that I can prove and that there is a way to prove things. It gives the world clarity.

And believe it or not, I thought all of that in an instant when I looked up at the sky last night.

November 13, 1997

7:44 p.m.

I've been here just about a week now. Oddly enough, I'm not bored. So far, I've read two novels, some non-fiction, and some articles about AIDS drugs. I decided I'd like to attempt to write a novel, and I've been working out the plot structure. Today's job is to come up with a chapter-by-chapter outline. Then all I'll need before I start is names for my characters.

I haven't even been to the mall yet. I figure that if I'm trying save my money, I shouldn't tempt myself, right? All I've bought is two solid-color one-piece swimsuits; I have suits, but they're all old and I'm really in need of something new. Either way, they were on sale - the two suits cost me \$3.24...

It's strange that my life is now all about buying swimsuits on sale, but you know, I needed this rest. This is my chance to write, too, and I'm less interested in writing poetry and more interested in writing a story, which hasn't happened for at least a year.

Introduction

Driving To Champaign

We took a weekend trip to Champaign, Illinois, before this road trip.

I'm in the car now, and Eugene is driving, and we're going to Champaign. We stopped by Taco John's for some burritos and potato oles, and now while Eugene is driving he's also adding hot sauce to his burrito and eating and he's steering with his knees and we're on the highway doing 75 miles per hour and it's got to be relatively unsafe to be in this car, I'm sure, so if I die in this car, I better write something down with some meaning.

So: if this is the last thing I ever write, what should it be?

Oh, they're playing Depeche Mode on the radio, and it's always nicer to hear a song you like on the radio instead of playing it on a tape or something, it's like a present when you hear it on the radio, even the quality of the radio sounds better than a cassette, and you want to hear the whole song and cherish it because if you skip past it, like you would to the next song on a tape, you won't have the chance to go back and hear it again. This is your chance to hear it; you've got nothing else. But now I'm typing through the song, and not really enjoying it anyway.

They said on the radio that they were going to play Depeche Mode, but apparently Eugene didn't hear that, and so I said I wanted to hear Depeche Mode and he said that they wouldn't play it. And when the radio did play it within five minutes of my asking Eugene was stunned. "They never play this!"

You know, I've done that to him a lot, and he never catches on.

Oh, wait, that wouldn't be the last thing I wanted to say if I was going to die in this car. I forgot that's what I was writing about. This is most definitely not what I would want my last words to be. I don't know what my last words would be, though. Live every day like it is your last. Try to smile more. Try to think more. Value the people who choose to spend their time with you. Take a chance. Go different places. Don't have regrets.

Now Eugene wants to hear my Depeche Mode tape and I can't find it in the car. I've checked the space between the seats, I've checked the glove compartment, and he still won't let it go. He keeps saying that the tape can't have just disappeared, that it has to be here somewhere, that this really perplexes him.

Now he's reaching around and under his seat behind him, and the car is not staying in the lane. In fact, he just grabbed some tapes to re-read the case to see if I just missed it, if I'm blind and can't recognize my own tapes, and while he was at it he almost ran us into another car on the highway and I had to yell at him to make him look at the road again. Now he's flipping through the stations, you know, because he can't just listen to something, being as much of an antsy, impatient person as myself, so he's scanning through the stations, and of all songs to stop on, he has to stop on "Once, Twice, Three Times a Lady." So maybe I do want to die in this car.

And all I keep thinking is that we're supposed to be meeting Sara and Scott at Garcia's pizza in Champaign, even though we just stopped for Taco John's, because Eugene just had to stop for tacos, and now we're running late.

Okay, Now Eugene found another equally crappy song to play, I think it's Eddie Money or something, and really, I think he's doing this intentionally to drive me crazy. Okay, he's clapping along now, like it's the seventh grade cheerleader tryouts, and I now want to take the steering wheel from right out of his hands and run us right off the side of the road.

Oh, right, so I'm supposed to be writing what my last words would be, if I actually did die in this car. But it's hard to do that when Eugene does that hacking sound that he does, I mean, has this man ever heard of a tissue.

Okay, if I died. I suppose I'd tell people to not dwell on those silly little details that will always get you down. You know, those details will always be there, there will always



be something that can potentially bring you down, and you can always find something to pick on. But the thing is, you should just let go of those things, that's why they call them details anyway, so don't let them bother you. Just try to love life a little more.

You know, I've gone through a lot of crap in my life. I had beers with a friend tonight before I got on the road to Champaign,

you see, that's why Eugene is driving and I'm sitting here typing about it. And as I said, I was having beers with a friend earlier, and we each got our own pitcher of beer, she got limes to add to her Miller Lite, and when the pitchers came, before we poured our first glasses, I told her we should toast and drink right out of the pitcher, I mean, why not, right? Well, I went out drinking with her because she was down, because it's her wedding anniversary today. She's not down about missing her husband that she left just a month ago, you see, she's down because the concept of a wedding - her wedding - is now destroyed to her. She thought this marriage was going to be good, and what she went through was so bad that she had to pack up her things and leave. And I told her that I had a bad anniversary, too, and it makes me feel bad every year, and that you just have to go through it. That it's okay to dwell on it today if you have to. But I also thought that she should keep in mind that she has 364 other days a year to revel in the fact that she now has control of her life and her happiness. That when she was in a bad situation she took her life into her own hands, and now she's free. That she should know that if something doesn't kill her it will make her stronger and that she can say she's a stronger woman for going through this and she has learned something from this. She likes herself now, and she wouldn't be who she was if it wasn't for what she went through.

You can decide to be a victim or you can decide to learn from life, make the most of it, and be happy. So love life a little more. Make yourself the best that you can be, and never look back.

Okay, Eugene changed the station when they said they were going to be playing Phil Collins next. Maybe things aren't so bad.

Chapter 1

starting the trip

I guess I should get some of the basics out of the way. My name is Janet. (It's the name on the cover.) I recently quit my job, decided I was too fed up with the corporate world, and since I had saved my money, I would take a year off and travel. The plan comes in two phases: Part One is the U.S. leg of the tour, where I'm driving a central states route from my home in Chicago through to California and through the south to Florida before I head back home. Part Two is the European trip, starting right after I get back from my insanely long drive.

My roommate Eugene is going with me on the trip through the United States. I thought it would be safer to have someone with me; I hate to think that I couldn't defend myself, but at the same time, I probably couldn't repair my car, either. Safety in numbers, I suppose.

I've taken a few road trips before with Eugene. I never seriously thought about taking road trips before meeting him - I had been accustomed to flying when going on vacation. Since I had my own car, Eugene argued, there's nothing to stop you from going out of town for a weekend.

So we'd go on trips together. Once we drove to Western Illinois so that we could visit the Mississippi River right at the border of Iowa and Missouri. We collected geodes from the river's edges and investigated the damage from the year's flooding. We've driven to New York, To Omaha, to Boulder, to New Orleans and to many cities in between.

This is new for me though. I've packed everything I think I might need for the next three or four months into my car. Since Eugene has a seasonal job, he was able to go with me on the first half of the trip; he plans to fly back to Chicago by March first.

I visited my family before leaving. It's strange to see family and friends and say to them, "Well, I guess I'll see you in three or four months."

I don't think I'm going to miss anything in Chicago while I'm gone, though. I'm beginning to wonder if it's time for me to leave Chicago for some place else. I don't have a job or a husband to hold me here. And I really can't stand the weather - no one should live in a place where it gets below zero, much less ten and twenty degrees below.

Chicago in the summer, though, is a great town. There are street fairs every weekend, festivals everywhere, there's a lake to enjoy and lots of social opportunities. It really is a fun place to be in the summer - three or four months a year.

As long as you have air conditioning.

I don't really care to know the scientific explanation for it, but I don't understand how a place that can be so painfully cold one month can be a sweltering heat box the next month. I don't know how it has happened, but Chicago has lost spring and autumn.

So I'm trying to escape the brutally cold winter in Chicago by traveling around the country. However, in order to get to California and other warm states, I first have to pass through states like Nebraska, which is currently twenty degrees colder than Chicago right now.

Ugh.

I have friends at most of the cities I'm going to. For the few places I don't have a place to stay in, we brought camping equipment.

I wonder if being in a car and on the road with Eugene for a few months will make me want to kill him.

It will be hard to tell; I usually want to kill him for one reason or another.

Chapter 2

Illinois

January 9, 1998

12:23 p.m. Central Standard Time

This morning we left Chicago. I wanted to kill Eugene this morning. This feeling of mine, however, is a relatively common occurrence. I had to work to wake him up and he hadn't even packed. I said I wanted to leave by 9:30 in the morning, but because he still had to go to the bank and pick up food at the pet store for the cat, we didn't get on the road until nearly noon.

He decided to bring his skis, in case he gets the opportunity to fall down a mountain while we're in Colorado. He figures that since Michael Kennedy and Sonny Bono did it, it would be a cool way to die. Each ski is wedged around the driver's seat, making it painful to get in and out of the driver's seat.

I'm already complaining.

I have to learn not to do that. I pick on Eugene all the time, and whether or not I think he deserves it, I should stop it. Besides, the trip will be a lot more pleasant if we can get along more.

I have a theory about radio stations in rural areas. Every time I have been on a road trip I've heard R.E.O. Speedwagon songs with an alarming frequency. I've vowed to see how long it takes on this trip to encounter one.

While we were in Illinois we managed to hear the Eagles, so we started belting out the lyrics as loudly as we could:

“So put me on a highway,
and show me a sign,
take it to the limit one more time.”

I'm sure I'm not the only person in the universe who has belted out a tune with the

radio while in the car. It's better than singing in the shower; this way, as long as you have your windows rolled up, you know that no one can hear you. The car is like your own personal recording studio, complete with soft walls to absorb the echo.

Usually on our road trips Eugene does most of the driving, and we usually drive at night. Since it was daytime this time, I offered to drive and drove through Illinois. My body must have an internal clock that breaks down my normal body functioning after driving a car for four hours. I don't know what it is, but I'll be ready to pass out after four hours of driving.

We passed Ronald Reagan's hometown; there were signs for it on the side of the highway. Eugene said he had been there and that it wasn't interesting at all.

So we passed it.

We decided to keep a log of what we spent our money on to try to save money. Eugene has been worrying that he can't afford the trip. I told him he could think of it as a contest, to see who could spend less money.

Then again, I prepared food for the trip, and he didn't. He'll probably be stopping at every Taco John's he can find.

I don't know what it is with Eugene and Taco John's fast food. He loves it like it was his mother's home cooking. He worked at a Taco John's restaurant while he was in college, and every time we're on a road trip and we get near a Taco John's he has to stop, since there are no Taco John's in Chicago.

I mean, yes, the food is fine, but it's a bean burrito. His passion for this food borders on an obsession.

Eugene was almost sleeping when we approached the bridge over the Mississippi river to get to Iowa. I woke him for it. I thought he'd like to look at the river; I knew I wanted to look at the bridge.

He asked why I liked the bridge. I told him I thought it was an amazing thing that we could design something to take us over this huge river.

As we approached the end of the bridge, I saw the sign welcoming us into Iowa.

Chapter 3

Iowa

January 9, 1998

1:45 p.m.

I asked Eugene to take over the driving as we got into Iowa City, about a half hour into the state from the east. I know from experience that driving through Iowa is almost as bad as driving through Ohio - it seems like the state just goes on forever. As soon as Eugene took over the wheel, though, he took over the radio, which made me realize that driving wasn't so bad after all.

He managed to find an R.E.O. Speedwagon song, "Keep On Loving You," as he fumbled through the stations past Iowa City, proving my theory about rural stations and bad music. It was only four hours into our trip. I think that's a new record. Then, after hearing our ceremonial R.E.O. Speedwagon song and singing along, which seemed fitting for our road trip: "It's time to take this ship into the shore, and throw away the oars forever..."

...it was on to the bad eighties songs. Brian Adams and Bruce Springstein were bad then; why would someone play their songs now, when we should have learned from our mistakes?

Then again, people are once again wearing platform shoes and bell-bottoms and listening to disco music. History does repeat itself.

As soon as Eugene gained control of the car, he hunted down and found a Taco John's. It was nice to stretch my legs again, so I know I was jumping around and acting goofy in the restaurant while I was ordering my bean burrito and my potato olés. Eugene mentioned to the guy behind the counter that there were no Taco John's in Chicago, so the guy started talking to me about what we were doing.

"Are you moving to Iowa?"

"No, we're just traveling around the country. We left this morning."

"That had to be the strangest thing that guy heard today."

Then he proceeded to tell me that he had a cousin in a northern suburb of Chicago, and spent the next three minutes trying to remember the name of the suburb. I'm sure that out of the over eight million people that live in the greater Chicago area, I'll be bound to know this guy's cousin.

"You went to the University of Illinois? Did you know John? He was an advertising major."

No, I didn't. Trust me.

So then this guy that worked at Taco John's said he had been to Chicago two or three times, so I told him that it's a fun city. We realized then there was nothing left to say, and he went back behind the counter and continued cutting the onions for the tacos.

Eugene spoke up while we were on the road. "Hey, we're driving toward the sun. The sun is setting." Then he paused before saying, "I wonder how fast you would have to drive to keep up with the setting sun... Maybe twelve thousand miles per hour?" I really try not to think about how his brain works.

"If you were traveling in a concord jet, how many times could you make it around the earth, without having to refuel before the sun would set on you? If you started at sunrise and traveled west, on a supersonic jet, like the Concord, how long would it take before the sun got too far on the other side?" He paused. "That's a very interesting question. If I had lots of money, maybe I'd try it." He keeps saying things like this, and doesn't act surprised that I don't comment. "Talk about killer jet lag, though," he then said.

I don't even have to say a word; he'll have the whole conversation himself.

We passed the Herbert Hoover Presidential Museum outside of Iowa City. I thought that if it was free it might not be a bad idea to go to it. Eugene didn't want to. He said he didn't like Herbert Hoover.

"What would they have in the Herbert Hoover Museum?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe some of his dresses."

Instead of merge signs onto the expressways, they use yield signs in Iowa. I can feel the culture shock already.

Chapter 4

Nebraska



January 12, 1998

9:57 p.m.

When we were a mile from the Iowa Nebraska border we drove over a hill and suddenly there was a valley. Now, this might not seem like much to you, but to someone who grew up and lives in Chicago, the concept of hills is amazing. Don't even discuss mountains with me.

Got into Nebraska and my most excellent friend Doug was there at his apartment waiting for us. Doug is the type of friend that you can be separated from for years and when you get back together you're instantly laughing and doing the same stupid things you always did with each other, like it was only seconds that had passed since you had last seen each other.

Doug is the kind of guy that everyone knows. I met him during my first year of college; since then we were great college drinking buddies. This was the type of man who managed a double major (pre-med and Russian) while being involved in Air Force ROTC, a fraternity - all while holding down usually two part-time jobs and still keeping up an active social life. And he was always happy. Or at least when he was mad it was a fun mad to watch and then you could laugh at him being mad and then he'd begrudgingly smile at you and then he'd be happy again.

Does that make any sense?

Doug is they type of guy that took you out for your birthday and bought you a series of different mixed drinks, just to watch the show. Doug is the type of guy that could mooch a slice of pizza off of any girl getting a pizza delivered in the dormitories in college when he worked as a guard. Doug is the type of guy that whenever you say his name to anyone who knows him, their eyes light up, as if you're talking about their best friend.

When I told people about my travel plans, and told people that the first stop on the trip was to Omaha, everyone asked me, "But why?"

Doug was my answer.

So for me, especially since I had seen the booming metropolis known as Omaha before, this was more of a social visit.

Doug told us tonight while we were at dinner that people from Omaha refer to their town as "The Big O." I don't know if he was joking with me or not, but when I think of "The Big O," I think of something entirely different.

We managed to find Doug's apartment without directions: we were going from memory. "Janet, what expressway do we take next?"

"I think it's something like 275 or something. It's got a two in front of it."

"Wait, Janet, that sign says 370 to Bellevue."

"Oh, that's it! Quick, get off here!"

"Well, how far do we go from here?"

"Um, I don't know. We pass 'Chandler,' I think."

"When we get off we turn right?"

"Yeah, we pass 25th street, and to 31st street, I think."

"This is 36th street."

"This is it, it's 36th, and not 31st. It's right by the McDonald's."

"Wait, which apartment is he in?"

"It doesn't have his name on the buzzer?"

"No."

"It's either 13 or 17." I stared at the panel of nameless buzzers and guessed it was 17, pressing the button ever so briefly, in case I was wrong. Doug let me in.

When we got into the apartment, the last thing we wanted to was unpack. I thought it was cold in Chicago: the weather reports recorded the temperature at around zero. So after sitting in Doug's apartment for a few minutes, we pulled out our suitcases from the trunk of my car, which took the better of five minutes, considering the amount of crap we decided to take with us.

"Don't forget the blankets!"

"Where's your pillow?"

"It's in the bag with my sleeping bag."

We decided to leave everything else in the car.

"Wait, what about the food in the coolers?"

"Well, it's going to stay cold outside; it's not like they'll go bad."

That appeased me until I asked the next question:

"Wait, there's cans of soda in there. Won't they explode?"

Eugene really didn't want to go back out to the car.

"Since they're in the cases, they won't get too cold."

This once again appeased me. Then I thought about it again.

"Wait. There's a bottle of champagne in one of the coolers."

Eugene shook his head and put his shoes back on.

Doug took us around the next morning, when Eugene finally woke up. Eugene slept

in as much as possible. I'd wake him up, he'd roll over and go back to sleep. I'd wake him again. The process would repeat itself until he had slept at least two hours more than me, which was hours more than Doug did.

I swear, he's going to sleep through his life.

We went out to dinner Friday night. Okay, so my theory that I wasn't going to spend a lot of money on food has already failed. Well, I still have a lot of soup and cous cous in the cooler. Oh, and bread and cheese.

Saturday Doug took us around the warehouse district of Omaha, which is right near downtown. There are huge gorgeous warehouses along this one strip, and now most of them are being converted into lofts. Every time Eugene sees them, he talks about wanting to live in them. Any time Eugene sees any warehouse, he talks about wanting to buy it and live in it.

So we walked around and shopped, or should I say browsed, through this part of town. This is my favorite part of town, because it has style, dare I say a touch of culture. (I tried to explain that to Chicagoans when I got back from my first trip to Omaha, but no one believed me.) There are retro shops, cool bars and restaurants, art stores, a store of Russian knick-knacks, new age stores and even a wine bar. (Hell, there's only one wine bar in Chicago that I know of.) There's also a grotto in the basement of one building - a stone alcove with three fountains of sculpted bronze heads on 6 foot tall stone pedestals spitting into the small pond on the ground with a small concrete bench on the side. The grotto was one of the coolest parts of town, and every time I go back to town I make a point of visiting the grotto. The first time I saw it I decided I wanted a grotto in my home.

Well, at least a fountain.

So we went to visit it this time, and there was a locked gate blocking the entrance to the grotto, so we could only look at the spitting statues through the bars. The host of the restaurant across the hall from the grotto told us that vandals kept stealing the heads, so they had to lock the grotto off for safe keeping.

I thought that was kind of pathetic.

And all I can think is that some high school kids in Omaha are using the grotto fountainheads as a big bong or something.

Doug had to work on projects for a class he's taking (he's going for his masters) so we tried to do things so he could have some time for himself. However, every time Eugene and I got out of the apartment without Doug, Eugene had to stop at the local Taco John's.

Ugh. That man should not be allowed to eat so many beans.

Well, I suppose no one should. But I digress.

So while we've been here we've done our share of shopping, and we hit the jackpot at thrift stores. Eugene bought an old metal thermos (it looks pretty cool) and a beer can light with a bulb on the top that flickers like a candle (trust me, it's cooler than any description I could give it). I broke down and bought a small punch bowl from the 1970s - it's a nice plain-glass bowl with lots of little cups and matching hooks - perfect for parties. But first I have to get home and have parties...

Oh, wait, I also bought a wig. I don't know why I buy them, I don't know why I

like wigs, but damnit, I do, and I found this most excellent new one. Currently I have one of my mother's old blonde wigs, as well as a black pageboy wig I used for an Uma Thurman Pulp Fiction costume one Halloween. But this one, this one is a short salt and pepper wig. It's crazy looking.

I don't know what I'm going to do with it. But now I can say it's mine.

January 13, 1998

9:15 a.m.

Eugene is still sleeping. Doug went to work. We went out last night, and we were all laughing and giggling so much you'd think that we were either small children without any supervision.

We had a good time. Eugene decided to inform us that he wanted human cloning to go forward so that they could make a clone of him one day, but with no brain. I didn't ask why, I only immediately said sarcastically, "Oh, that's a bit redundant."

Doug burst into hysterics and Eugene continued. We concluded that he didn't want the other body so that he could have organ transplants whenever he needed them as he got older, but so that he could take his brain out of his old, decrepit body when he was eighty and place it in the young, brainless clone body, so that he could live forever.

Doug was frightened by the concept of creating a brainless human being. I thought Americans had been doing that for a while by merely procreating, but once again I digress.

Then I suggested that Eugene's primary concern should not be with fighting aging and death tooth and nail, but facing his fear of aging and death. I don't think he liked that idea.

So... What else have we done in Omaha? Well, we went to this little dive bar called O'Bannon's, that had Super Ms. Pac Man, which made me happy, we watched televised Bulls games, which made Eugene happy, and drank \$5 pitchers of Killians, which would make any Chicagoan happy. We've gone to the movies (by the way, don't go to see "Bean," even if you like the British show it's based on, trust me), done a little shopping, and, well, were just social.

January 13, 1998

7:29 p.m.

I'm at our new hangout, O'Bannon's. I played "Ms. Pac Man." While I was playing the machine went on the fritz and I had to get the bartender to come over and unplug it and plug it in again. And as a 27-year-old, it seems kind of strange to have to go the bartender and say, "Yes, hello, I was playing a game of 'Ms. Pac Man' over there, and your video game went on the fritz."

Especially when this is an Air Force base bar, and a bunch of middle-aged people hang out here, like the type of people you'd find at a bar off the expressway or something.

You know, it says "Super Ms. Pac Man" on the machine, but it doesn't seem any different from the regular, plain old "Ms. Pac Man." I like the fact that Ms. Pac Man isn't married to Mister Pac Man, and that she's not a Miss, either.

Eugene is watching the Bulls game and is trying to watch the Illinois/Purdue college basketball game on the screen on the other side of the room, and he's visibly upset

by the fact that he has to make a choice between one game or another.

He keeps telling me his predictions of the next few seconds of the game.

“Kukoc is going to shoot it.”

“Over the back!”

“Jordan does more of a fade thing.”

Then he cheers the team on and talks to the players.

“Go Michael... Go Michael...” or “Brick!”

“He fakes... He shakes... He bakes... He goes up... He shoots... He scores!”

“He pops... He drops... He scores!”

“Ka-ching!” (That one is when someone on the Bulls makes a shot.)

“Go Big D!”, or in another minute, “Oh, Jordan sucks. Trade him.”

Then he yells at the screen. “That was a good move, by that wirey Seattle boy.”

“D’oh! That sucks.” Then he exclaims, “My ass, he was on the base line.”

“Oh, fricken-fracken.” (*Friccken-fracken?*) Then “That sucks dick.”

Really, you’d think he’d repeat some of them.

“That was clean!” ... “Bad call.”

“Ugh - foul there? That’s not fair at all.” ... “Oh, that was so clean!” ... “There was no foul there...” (Okay, so he may have some derivatives of his exclamations.)

“He walked.” ... “Sloppy game.”

“How could you have missed that?”

(Does he think they can actually hear him?)

“That’s a nice turnover.”

“They’re getting spanked.” (Apparently, that means someone else is beating them. Badly.)

He called Scottie Pippen “Scottie Scottie Port-A-Pottie.”

And so I sit and continue to write.

He keeps looking over and trying to guess what I’m writing about.

You know, I like writing in bars. I figure everyone is looking at me funny because I brought a laptop computer into a bar and instead of drinking excessively and watching a game, I’m drinking excessively and writing instead.

I could make this a hangout of mine, if I were to stay here longer. It’s never too busy. The beer is cheap. And the bartender was more than willing to help me with my “Ms. Pac Man” problems.

I talked to Dave today, and he told me about the problems he was having with the company I used to work for. I feel bad for him. If he left that job, I’d celebrate with him, because he needs to be free of that place, the way that every person has managed to preserve an ounce of sanity while working there should be. I’d toast with him if he managed to quit, the way he did with me when I put in my two-week notice.

That was the best day of 1997 for me, I think, the day I put in my notice. While



I was telling my supervisor in my office that I was quitting, someone brought a flower delivery into my office, a bouquet of red roses to help me celebrate my quitting my job (that had to be strange for my supervisor, hearing me say I'm quitting as I'm getting celebratory flowers). Then I had champagne in the office with the rest of the department at 10:30 in the morning, and I got to tell everyone about how I was planning on traveling around the country. Then everyone took me out to lunch.

It was such a burden lifted from my shoulders.

It was strange on the last day of work to look around my office. All of the pictures I had put up were down and packed. All my plants were gone. Anything that had any personal value was removed. It didn't even look like my office anymore. It was so empty.

They put another desk in there, because they figured that they'd put two people in my office instead of hiring or promoting someone to do my work.

I'd like to think that it was because no one could fill my shoes, but I'm sure it's because my boss would not want to spend the money for another supervisor, that he would prefer to hire a bunch of under-paid people without enough experience as long as it could save him a few dollars.

But again, I digress.

Eugene just walked over to the other side of the bar so he could have a better view of the University of Illinois game. They're only in the second quarter of the Bulls game, but the Illinois game is closer to ending, so he's really torn between the two basketball games.

He just came back, said two sentences to me, and got up again to walk back over to the other screen.

He told me that he was in the bathroom when another man started talking to him. And I thought that was strange, I always heard from other men that men just don't talk to each other in the bathroom. That talking while you're holding your penis and pissing, to another man holding his penis and pissing, is just too awkward and men don't do it. Eugene explained to me that I was correct, and that he never instigated a bathroom conversation, but then men seem to talk to him while he's in the bathroom. I wonder what that means.

January 12, 1998

8:53 p.m.

Okay, I just finished watching Eugene play a video game called "Arkanoid," which seems like a version of Atari's "Breakout," the game where you knock a ball back and forth, much like Pong, into a brick wall until the bricks start to disappear.

And I felt funny for being an adult in a bar playing "Ms. Pac Man."

The Bulls game is in the third quarter. Dennis Rodman has colored hair that looks like a leopard print.

I wonder what happened to that boy when he was a child.

January 14, 1998

11:14 a.m.

Oh, sorry about that long-winded bar entry last night. How embarrassing.

Well, we're in the car now, driving west through the entire state of Nebraska. We left at seven in the morning, when Doug left for work. It was still dark out. I think Doug was relieved to have his apartment back to himself. We cleaned yesterday, hoping it would make up for us taking his living room space.

Eugene is driving now; he has been driving all through Nebraska, which he theorizes is worse to drive through than Iowa. I slept in the car. I needed sleep.

I woke up in time to see a sign on the side of the expressway for one of the original Pony Express Stations. We stopped by. It was a small shack with a bunch of plaques around it. The townspeople made a time capsule and placed it there as well, to be reopened in the year 2010.

Eugene just told me that the Pony Express only existed for two years, that after that the railroads were built and the Pony Express became obsolete. People were going out west for ten years before the Pony Express was developed, so people could not send any mail to California. Hmm. He's like a Trivial Pursuit game sometimes.

Then we saw a sign for the Sod House Museum, so we stopped by. It was closed; it was just a big barn with a big plow in the front yard. But I had to take a picture in the back of the fake buffalo being followed by the fake Indian on the fake horse. It was the strangest thing I have seen in Nebraska.

But we still have a good 150 miles of Nebraska left before Colorado.

I saw a sign for Buffalo Bill's Ranch. Eugene asked me if I wanted to go; I said if it wasn't far off the road, why not? He told me he hated Buffalo Bill. You know, because he slaughtered all the buffalo.

Did I mention we're vegetarians?

Then he proceeded to look through a map of Nebraska while muttering under his breath about how awful Buffalo Bill was.

Those are the times when I just leave him alone.

"Can you just imagine seeing tons of buffalo running along here? Bar-um, bar-um, bar-um.... (That's apparently the sound they would make charging.) Tens of thousands of them. That would be cool." I don't think he considers the fact that tens of thousands of buffalo charging along the expressway here might be a bit dangerous, but I don't dare suggest it to him.

January 14, 1998

11:43 a.m.

I just saw a llama.

We were driving along the expressway, and you know, there are tons of cows and feed lots and the like, and then I look over and something that looks like a camel is walking along the side of the expressway. I tried to see why on earth there was a llama on the side of the road at this little farm, but found no answers. There's an animal I didn't expect to see.

Another R.E.O. Speedwagon song came on. "Keep on Loving You." It reminded me of when I was little. While my sister was in college she was turning 21, so my friend and I made an cassette tape for her to listen to on her birthday. During the summer I

got relatives and friends of hers to wish her happy birthday on tape; otherwise the tape was filled with my friend Sheri and I (we were 10 and 12 at the time) singing songs badly and joking around.

One of the songs we sang was "Keep on Loving You." We sounded awful.

We're stopped in North Platte now. And the further west we go, the more country stations appear on the dial.

But at least "alternative" music isn't alternative anymore and there is usually at least one station on the dial that plays music I recognize and tolerate.

And yes, not only is R.E.O. Speedwagon heard everywhere, but so is the Eagles and Don Henley. My music theory is going to have to expand to the Eagles as well. I asked Eugene why he thought we heard so much music by the Eagles while we were on the road. His answer was that the Eagles were "a little bit country, a little bit rock and roll."

Ugh. Eugene just got gas, and of course he asked the gas station attendant if there was a Taco John's in the area. So we're on our way there now.

January 14, 1998

12:45 p.m.

Since we forgot to get the oil changed while we were in Omaha, we thought we'd stop here and do it before we got into Colorado. It gave us a chance to stretch our legs.

So I'm sitting here at an oil change station, and the guy asks us if we want the inside of the car cleaned out. And he can see that the back seat is so filled that we can't even see out the back window, so what exactly could he vacuum?

The guy taking care of my car keeps talking about where we should go skiing, since he saw the skis stuck around the driver's seat and asked us where we were going. Eugene grabbed the first Sports section of any newspaper he could find in the waiting room, and so here I sit.

What I don't understand about men is why they feel the need to read articles about a game they watched intently the night before.

Now three people from the oil change place asked about our trip, what we do for a living. I still feel strange telling people that I quit my job to travel.

"Oh. What did you do before then?"

"I designed magazines." That seems to be the easiest way to put it.

"Oh." Clearly the don't know what to make of that career choice. "Did you like it?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's good."

What else do you say?

January 14, 1998

1:32 p.m.

Well, we're on the road again. It's getting warmer the farther west we drive. Yesterday it was less than ten degrees, this morning in Omaha it was probably around 30. Now when we stop and stretch outside we don't even need our coat and all the snow is almost gone. I wonder what it will be like when we get into Colorado, where the next stop is Boulder.

Chapter 5

Colorado

Part One, Boulder

January 14, 1998

2:32 p.m. Mountain Time

Got to get used to the time change. I drove into Colorado. I expected it to be instant mountains, but I was wrong. There were a few rolling hills.

I tried to stop at one exit and look for a state park that had signs for that exit, but I couldn't find it.

Stopped to switch so Eugene could drive into Boulder, since he knows the place we're staying at and how to get there. Of course he found a Taco John's at an exit and decided to get a burrito and an order of potato olés.

That's the second meal of the day he had at a Taco John's.

January 15, 1998

1:22 p.m.

Last night, after stopping at Paul's apartment, everyone went out - except me. I think I had car lag. I needed sleep. Within fifteen minutes of me being on the couch by myself I was passed out for the night.

Paul is a friend of Eugene's from high school. He has two roommates, and is living the college life. Unlike Doug, Paul's apartment is filled with hand-me-down furniture and beds crammed into small bedrooms with their desks and dressers and crates and basically all of their belongings.

I don't know how to describe Paul. When I first met him he seemed quiet, but now I know better. Paul will be the one, drunk or not, at a wedding reception doing some sort of crazy performance-art dance, flailing his arms and legs about, attracting more attention than the bride or groom could.

One of Paul's roommates has a turtle. It was originally named "Mertle" from the pre-



vious owner, you know, so as to rhyme with turtle and sound cute or something, but they changed it to “Wee Willie,” because of an episode of *The Simpsons* where grounds keeper Willie said something in his insanely thick Scottish accent to the effect of, “Somebody’s got to save the wee turtles!!”

The turtle is in this small aquarium and there are just a few rocks and a few inches of water and this huge lamp. What a life. I mean, that would be like living in an apartment about as large as an apartment living room, with three feet of water all along the floor, with a few rocks sticking up to avoid the water, and a scorching five foot wide lamp in the corner. Sounds like fun.

Last night when we were driving in the sun was right in my eyes, so it was hard to look at the scenery. Boulder is located pretty much at the base of mountains along the Rockies. Half the skyline is dominated by black mountains with snow trailing down the sides. This morning we went to the grocery store to get some food for our stay and when we walked out all you saw was a bunch of cars in the parking lot and then mountains. It was insane. I think I could get used to seeing a ridge of mountains out my front window every morning.

I noticed two things about the grocery store today, other than the fact that Eugene took an insanely long amount of time to decide what kind of frozen pizza and canned soup to purchase. I noticed that the express lanes were for “15 items or fewer,” and that the general population of Boulder probably understands the grammatical error of “15 items or less.” I also noticed that the woman at the register wasn’t fat, or undereducated, or even in a bad mood, which are the traits that bind all grocery store checkout clerks in Chicago.

Eugene commented that no one seems to be fat in Boulder. Everyone here is concerned with living a more healthy life. This morning Paul and one of his roommates went out of an hour run. Paul is trying to get his speed back; he wants to be able to run a half-mile in less than two minutes again. Makes me want to eat some potato chips and watch some television... but that’s just me.

Eugene has also noticed that people smoke here a lot less, and that all bars on Boulder have to have a non-smoking section, or else are an entirely non-smoking bar. I asked Paul once how people like the non-smoking sections; Paul told me that there are generally only a few people in the non-smoking sections of bars, and then everyone pretty much crams into the smoking rooms. So much for being healthy.

January 15, 1998

4:14 p.m.

Just got back from hanging out in Boulder.

You know, I never go to those stores that look all yuppie-esque and nature-oriented, you know, stores like “American Eagle” or “Northern Expectations,” or even stores like “The Gap” or “Eddie Bauer” because clothes like hiking boots and flannel shirts and down vests are entirely unnecessary in Chicago, and in my opinion just look plain silly. And they’re expensive to boot.

Everyone dresses like that here. I mean everyone. And I guess it makes sense here,

I mean, to climb the mountains in the winter snow you need hiking boots, and driving up the mountains would be a lot better in a good four by four, but I mean, it is spooky, walking around and seeing just so many yuppies dressed like they just came from The Gap. It's kind of freaky. Another example of culture shock, I suppose.

I think I'm going to have to go out and get myself a pair of those hiking boots. I have nothing to walk around in that provides any traction or ankle support whatsoever. All the shoes I own are completely wrong for walking along mountain trails in the snow. And I guess if I want to hang out in the National Forests and hang out in mountains, I better get myself a pair.

The mountains here are just beautiful. In between all the pine and spruce trees are traces of white untouched snow. There was a brook with a lot of small bridges along at the base of a few of the mountains. The rocks were huge and there were a few people climbing them.

January 16, 1998

9:22 a.m.

Eugene is sleeping again. The roommates are up and about, so I feel in the way. Yesterday we shopped and got hiking boots. We went to a salsa party but missed the lessons, so we just watched a bunch of people dance. We then went to a bar with pool tables and played pool for a few hours. I was actually able to beat Eugene once, and usually he beats me mercilessly.

January 17, 1998

10:08 a.m.

Went hiking in the mountains yesterday afternoon. It was absolutely beautiful. Now I understand why people wear hiking boots. I've never had a pair of shoes actually provide me with good traction before. Every time I go outside in the snow I usually have to hold on to someone's arm and walk like a duck in case I slip. But yesterday I walked icy trails at mountainsides without pause.

I should have bought these a while ago. In order to take pictures, we kept climbing out onto rocks that were right at the edge of the mountain side - you know, to get a good view of the drop-off and show how high up we really were. And okay, maybe Eugene is used to climbing around on rocks because he was the type to play outside when he was little, but I grew up indoors, playing Barbie, and I have to admit, it was pretty freaky for me. I get this phobia of heights - not the kind where I just hate being up high, but where I hate being right at an unprotected edge and a slight mistake could kill me.

But then after a while I thought, "You know, I can walk on those rocks." I briefly thought of my friend Joe, who I'll be visiting in Pasadena within a month. Last year we hiked up a mountain and hung out near a metal power line tower, and Joe climbed up the large metal structure and started walking out along one of the girders, like it was a balance beam only three feet from the ground. If he fell from that thin metal beam he would have fallen for quite a ways. I don't know if he would have been able to survive a fall.

I told him about my fears. He said, "Walking on this line is just like walking on a

tile seam on your kitchen floor. You are capable of doing it. You mind id just telling you that you can't." I thought that was an amazing statement, but at the same time, I didn't climb up the tower.

But thinking of it while I was walking along the mountain edge, trying to precariously slide across rocks along the edge of the mountain, made me just stop, straighten myself, and walk. And I did just fine.

After hiking through the mountains in the Roosevelt National Forest we stopped home and read for a few hours; I have a few books I'd like to get through on this trip. Then we went to dinner at an Ethiopian restaurant. The first time I ever went to Boulder we went to this restaurant, and it was the first time I ever had Ethiopian food. Being a vegetarian, after a while you have to make the decision to try new foods, otherwise you'll get completely sick of pasta and rice and salads, and many ethnic dishes are vegetarian.

The restaurant has tiny little stools for seats, only about a foot and a half high. And your table is a bowl that one large platter fits into. Let me explain. Ethiopian food is served without utensils - there are rolls of thin bread that sort of resemble pancakes that you scoop up your food with. Your food, well, your food, for the most part, is a pile of mushy stuff. It's better than it sounds, though - if you have four people ordering four different foods, like mushrooms, sweet potatoes, lentil mush and split pea goo, it all comes on one big plats with piles of vegetables and salad and cottage cheese, and you share your entree with everyone. Everyone just sort of scoops up whatever food they feel like. And really, it is good.

So when our huge plate comes and they put it in our bowl-like table, the waiter scoops up a little food with a piece of bread to show us how to eat it, in case we haven't eaten Ethiopian food before. The waiter then held out the food to me and just to be silly I ate it right out of his hand.

I was careful not to bite his fingers.

So after dinner we went to a college town bar, one with cheap beer and loud music and lots of people. And we sat and had a beer, and then I remembered why I don't hang out in bars on the weekends anymore, and then we went home. Which brings me to this morning. I think we're going to go hiking again today, in the mountains in Roosevelt National Forest. By tonight we'll be in Denver, visiting my friend Tom.

Part Two, Denver

January 17, 1998

10:20 a.m.

Mornings while Eugene is still sleeping is quickly becoming my writing time. It's becoming a ritual of sorts.

Well, at least there's one element of constancy in this trip.

I'm in Denver now, visiting with my friend Tom. We didn't end up hiking while

we were in Boulder; Eugene's friends wanted to shop a little at second-hand stores. We got some free books from a used bookstore.

I'm actually a bit disappointed. During my entire trip in Boulder not one word was mentioned about Jon Benet Ramsey.

But maybe that's for the best.

We drove into Denver last night. It's only about a half hour away from Boulder. Comparatively speaking, Denver is a city - it has high-rises made of steel and glass, a downtown you can see from the expressway, and surrounding good neighborhoods and bad neighborhoods. It hosts the Denver Broncos, which are going to the super bowl a week from today, so there's just a little hype here about it. Every time you turn on the radio, some Dee jay is qualifying someone for the chance to win a pair of tickets to the Super bowl.

Everyone I meet in this town, however, is not from Denver.

Tom is another friend of mine from college. For a very brief period during my college career I dated his best friend. It was the only occasion in my life where I met someone in a bar and ended up dating them. It happened like this: I was out with my roommate at the time, a 6' 5" man named Dan, and a tall female friend of mine named Terri (she was 6' tall). Seeing that I was 5' 11", it felt pretty good for once to be around people that were taller than me. And understandably, both Terri and I liked tall men. Well, as we walked in the bar I told Terri to check out the tallest man in the bar - a good-looking man, brown hair, brown eyes, glasses, talking with a friend. Later in the night we ended up sitting at the table next to theirs, and I started talking to them. The tall guy, Tom, later became my friend. I can't really describe Tom's personality, other than by saying that he's just so... nice. No, I mean that. He's genuine, and nice, and considerate. He never has a bad word to say. And every time I see Tom, his cheerful disposition always makes me smile.

I asked him once, "How do you do it?" He asked me what I meant.

I asked him how he always managed to be happy, and how he always managed to make everyone happy around him. And he just smiled.

Tom and Eugene and I went out to a Mongolian Barbecue restaurant last night - after having Ethiopian food the night before, I wasn't in the mood for a stand-by like pizza. After dinner Tom took us to a posh bar that serves martinis and wines and plays swing music. It was nice... Until Eugene had to start complaining. We were seated at a table right next to the bar, where their garbage can was, and periodically one of the bartenders would throw an empty glass bottle in the trash and it would make the loudest noise imaginable, right next to us. It was one thing to throw them in a large loud college bar late at night, but there were no more than twenty people in the bar, and it was a quiet, relaxing environment where throwing the bottles instead of placing them in the trash was not called for... at least that was Eugene's argument.

So he went up to the bar. Later he told us what he said, and it was something to the effect of "Excuse me, is it really necessary to throw the glass bottles into the trash? My friends and I are sitting right here, and it's quiet in here and we're having a conversation and when you throw the bottles into the trash it's very disturbing. It startled me."

Apparently one bartender said to him that he would stop throwing bottles into the

trash - until he left. Well, what we heard was another bartender say to him, in the tone a bully would use on a kid right before he stuck his head in the boy's locker room toilet and flushed, "Oh, it scared you?"

And then the first bartender put on his little bully voice and said, "Oh, no, it startled him." So Eugene just walked back to the table.

So after that the waitress didn't come back to the table and the last cosmopolitan I got tasted terrible, and of course I couldn't go up to the bar because we were ostracized by Eugene's little comment. I felt like I was in high school again.

We imagined that after we left they all grabbed a few bottles and relished throwing them into the trash as loudly as they could.

So after that Tom got a bunch of his friends together and we met up at a bar, and Eugene's friend Dave met us there and we just had ten people at a big table and we talked about dumb things like "South Park" and "The Simpsons" and the like.

That's when we discovered that everyone at the table was either from Illinois or Indiana. A lot of the people there were friends of Tom's that he met in Denver, not in the Midwest, but everyone was from the Midwest nonetheless. That's why I wonder if anyone is really from Denver, or if everyone just sort of moves here.

I think Tom's roommate is going snowboarding today. I don't know for sure. I wonder if Eugene is going to attempt to go skiing, since his skis have been crammed into my car for over a week now. There are some museums I'd like to go to while I'm here, but I think this afternoon will be dominated by the Bulls game on television, at least if Eugene has anything to say about it.

January 19, 1998

5:11 p.m.

Tom is the "bestest" host in the Universe. I mean it. (Did I just sat, "'bestest'?" Sorry...) Yesterday he told us to bundle up and he was taking us to the mountains for a hike. So we get in the car and stop at a tiny, tiny town right at the base of one of the mountains.

"What are we doing here?"

"Oh, there's a little bar up here I wanted to take you to. We can grab a beer."

It was Sunday afternoon, before four. I imagined a hole in the wall with three people drinking in the corner. When we got in, I looked around to see the place was packed and there was a six-person band playing live on stage. Everything was carved roughly from wood - the poles, the rails, and the ceiling beams - even the bar. We managed to find a little room at the bar and Tom, Eugene and I shared a pitcher of a local micro brew. People were dancing in the corner. Most people were wearing flannel and boots, some people wore leather. This was a true redneck, roadside bar. We decided to go to the mountains after that pitcher, but come back after it was dark. We drove in the mountains, saw some elks (apparently they only live in altitudes of about 8,000 feet), jumped in some snow banks, got lost, and found our way back to the Little Bear Western Saloon, where we shared two more pitchers. I ate some waffle fries on the upstairs floor of the bar while the second band played blues and Tom and Eugene challenged two locals to a

game of pool. Tom noticed that Eugene turned into a different animal when he played pool, that he instantly became focused and played very well. They won, and we left.

On the way home we sang eighties songs in the car with the radio: Safety Dance, Alive and Kicking, and yes, even Thriller. When we got home Tom went straight to his vinyl collection and pulled out the Carpenters, Men at Work, Christopher Cross and OMD. All in all, it was an interesting evening.

It was good to get the chance to go somewhere with some local flavor, to get a feel for what really living in this area is all about. And for once, the country music they were playing at the Little Bear didn't bother me (usually I run away in terror when I hear country music). A place like that, with a real neighborly feel, could really grow on you.

So today Eugene and I took off while Tom was at work and trekked over to Golden, Colorado, which is another small town close to the mountains. Golden is so named because it was a stopping point for people who needed to pick up last-minute supplies on their way to the gold rush. We found a Taco John's, of course, but at least it was my first since Nebraska. Sine we saw the Coors factory and there were signs pointing to the brewery tours, we figured we'd take a free tour. The entire place smelled like malt, and everything was slanted to how great the Coors Brewing Company was, of course. But at least afterward they gave us three beers and told everyone that they were welcome to come back any time, and ask for the short tour (which would take them straight to the free beer). So keep it in mind if you're ever in Golden - tell the people at Coors that you want the short tour.

When we headed out we noticed the signs pointing toward Buffalo Bill's grave, located at the top of one of the mountains, we decided that this would be a trek for another day, since it was getting late. Tonight we're going to give Tom a break from us and visit with Eugene's friend Dave, who also lives in Denver.

January 20, 1998

9:46 a.m.

Usually you meet friends through friends. Seldom do you just meet people out of the blue and you're just nice to each other and you end up feeling like good buddies by the end of the night. Well, at least in Chicago you don't.

That's one thing I've noticed in my travels, past and present: that people in the West are just plain old nice, that people are more friendly, that it's easy to start a conversation, that people will help you if you are in need. That's how I met my friend Aaron, whom is first on the list of California friends I'm visiting. That's how I met people in Tiajuana, college-age Americans living in San Diego, who later kept us up in their apartment and showed us the San Diego nightlife.

Well, it happened again.

Eugene and I went to his friend Dave's apartment. Dave's roommate Matt was there, and we went to a dance bar that had pool by about eight in the evening, when the pool tables were free and the music was quiet enough to be able to talk over.

Matt and Dave are friends of Eugene's from college. Dave is a quiet guy. He doesn't speak often, and when he does, he speaks quietly. But listen closely - because he's thought

about what he wants to say and you know it's going to be good. Eugene described Matt, on the other hand, as "flamboyantly reclusive." I still don't know what that means, but it somehow manages to suit him - although he's not particularly talkative or extroverted, he sounds like he's from "the Valley," like he's gossiping and very social.

They both smoke. And they both play pool. Hanging out with them was fun. After we left the dance bar we went to a cheesy hole-in-the-wall lounge called The PS Lounge and shot more pool. Then a woman around our age come up and placed quarters on the table; so I sat out and let the boys play a game with her. Her name was Christen, and we started talking. I was amazed at how much fun we were having. She said she was planning on going to Europe for a month and a half, like I was; that maybe we could meet up there so we were not both traveling alone. Christen, Matt and I started discussing a performance artist named Laurie Anderson, when another stranger playing pool came over upon hearing her name and started talking about how much he loved her too (you have to understand, not many people know who Laurie Anderson is, much less pay any attention to her, so to be talking to three other fans was pretty amazing). Christen bought me a shot of Goldschlager, some stranger named John bought a drink for everyone in the bar so he could make a toast to friends of his (we don't even know why he was making the toast - it seemed like a solemn occasion - did all the people he toasted to die?). We talked about school (Christen said she once called a professor a "fucking prick" in front of the class), we talked about roommates, we talked about traveling - we seemed to talk about everything.

So when that was said and done, we went to another bar. Lion's Lair, or something like that, that was the name of the bar. At that point I was trying to milk my beer so that I wouldn't get too drunk or spend too much money.

There Dave taught us what a meme was. In essence, there is a theory that ideas have lives - the way a virus does, and that an idea can spread from one host to another, therefore prolonging its life. This can refer to anything from a joke to a bit of trivia or blueprints for an invention. I guess Dave's meme spread to us tonight. Anyway, we talked about the strangest things, including Matt's (and Dave's, I think) love of the character Dana Scully on "The X Files," where Matt then proceeded to insist that I looked just like Dana Scully, despite my constant pleas to the contrary. Christen told us stories of past friends who lived in an "Acid Pad" (they were her words, not mine), and of a friend who would get so drunk on a specific type of liquor that once they told a friend of theirs, "Hang doughnuts from your ears, or I'll kick your ass."

The other person refused. And he got his ass kicked.

We learned that Christen was a bully in junior high (when someone came up to her and asked if they went to the same elementary school, Christen's response was, "Did I ever extort you for money to go to Butthole Surfer shows?"). And when we eventually got ready to leave, Christen told us that she was a bartender and that we can have free drinks at the bar she works at, and if we need a place to stay we can stay at her place here in Denver.

I remember that when we were saying good-bye, she was swearing that she'd e-mail me so we could stay in touch, and she kept telling me I was so smart and beautiful as

she was hugging me good-bye (she even insisted she was straight, but that she just wanted to let me know.) I'm not used to such an outpour of compliments. I had to keep telling her to stop.

So all in all it was a very fun evening. Maybe I'll get the chance to meet her at the bar she works at tonight. Maybe I'll stretch this Denver trip to be a little longer than I planned.

January 21, 1998

2:27 p.m.

Yesterday we went to the U.S. Mint. I know, I know, the things we're doing sound like things you'd do on a family trip during summer vacation when you're twelve, but I've never done these things before, and hell, there's a first time for everything. We watched them processing tons of metal, making pennies and quarters. Eugene bought a silver proof set of coins for his coin collection. We drove up the mountain side and visited Buffalo Bill's grave (just to say we did.) It's amazing to someone who is not used to mountains that the temperature at the base of a mountain can be nearly 50 degrees and at the top of the mountain be 20 or 30 degrees and very windy.

We went back to the Coors brewery (since we were there in Golden anyway, of course) and took the short tour and had a few beers, and then we headed back. On a whim I decided to color my hair red, but since my hair is dark brown the change is not that drastic. It should wash out in a month anyway.

We went out with Dave and Matt again last night, this time to the Boiler Room, where Christen was working. After playing pool and video trivia we headed to another bar, then to Dave's place to hang out. I got home very late.

Christen's roommate is out of town, so she invited us to stay in her apartment Thursday night, and we are going to stay through the weekend at Dave and Matt's (their new apartment has a Jacuzzi). Hopefully then Eugene will get the chance to go skiing or snowboarding before we leave. It only pushes our time line back three days, and since we had close to three weeks slated for California, we should be just fine.



January 23, 1998

1:36 p.m.

Went out with Tom and Jason for dinner. Stayed at Christen's last night. For the rest of the weekend I'll be staying at Dave and Matt's new apartment - the one with the Jacuzzi (these are important considerations). Visited the Capitol building, joined onto a tour group late, then figured out the tour group was a bunch of junior high Baptist school students. I think we've run out of tourist-like things to do. The next few days will probably just be social.

January 25, 1998

Super Bowl Sunday

12:26 p.m.

We're at Lion's Lair again, watching the Bulls game. It's right around noon and there are dollar drafts for Budweiser, and there are a bunch of old people in here spending their Social Security checks on liquor. Since the last time I've written we went to visit the Molly Brown house (she was a survivor of the Titanic), we played a lot of pool (not at the Molly Brown house, mind you), and we went to the Denver Art Museum. I spent the day there, after everyone left me. I read "The Fountainhead" while sitting on the second floor, by the architecture and modern graphics exhibit.

Most of the Denver Art Museum is filled with things like Native American Art, Ancient Asian Art, and the like. Now, please don't get me wrong, there is something to learn from visiting these exhibits, learning about how the patterns sewn into clothes of Indian dresses, but in my opinion most of the exhibits belonged in a history museum, and not in an art museum. It might sound callous of me, but I believe that although there are things that can be learned from these artifacts, the study of art should be about visions that propel us into the future, teaching us what our potential is, not about reveling in our past. But that's what I want art to be.

So I was reading "The Fountainhead" in the Art Museum, this is the second time I'm reading it, I read it about nine years ago for the first time. And the book is about an architect, one who defies convention and stresses that any building should be a result of the materials in the area, so that it is in harmony with its surroundings, but it should also be a tool for the people using the building - that it should most completely serve its function; that ornamentation is useless and covers up the function of a building. And although Ayn Rand (the author) never agreed to these comments on her book, many people say her book very closely reflects the life and vision of Frank Lloyd Wright. Eugene even told me in passing recently that one of the houses that they built in the novel closely resembles "Falling Water," a house Frank Lloyd Wright built in Pennsylvania. Well, while I was in the museum, reading my novel. I noticed a book of modern architecture on the coffee table in front of me. So I picked it up, hoping I could find a picture of "Falling Water." There was a three-inch square black and white photo of it in the spine of one of the pages. When I saw the angles of the house, on top of a pile of rocks with a waterfall below, I almost cried. It seems kind of funny, I suppose, that a small photo could almost move me to tears like that, but just by looking at the exterior of this house you could see that it was a result of the minds of the home owner and the architect, with the surrounding area in mind. It was functional. There was no ornamentation; it didn't need any. It was breathtaking, all without the need for carved wood trim or cornices or Greek columns.

That is the kind of house I want one day. I've been thinking about that lately - what kind of house I'd want to build. I couldn't settle for a cookie-cutter suburban house; I'd have to buy a bunch of acres of land in the middle of a forest near some mountains with a lake near by and build my dream house right in the middle of it. But then again, I need to get a job after I'm done traveling. So I guess I should worry about that first.

Dave has been a very gracious host. I'm glad I've had the chance to talk to him more and get to know him better. He's a funny man. He's also very quiet, and I always

seem to be fascinated with quiet men. They always seem to have more valuable things to say. Some men don't seem to know when to stop talking; then it gets to the point where you don't want to listen to a thing they have to say, because 95% of it is useless. But not so with Dave.

Tonight well go to be going to a Super Bowl party. Everyone here is so excited about the concept of the Denver Broncos winning the Super Bowl, but I really think the Green Bay Packers will win it pretty easily. Tomorrow we leave for camping in Southern Utah, seeing National Parks before Las Vegas.

Someone just came up to me from the bar and asked me if I was doing work. I told them yes; in a way I am; but it just seemed the easiest answer to give. They said, "In a bar? Well, at least you're doing your work."

I'm amazed at the amount of time I've spent here; I almost feel as if I have actually become acquainted with the place. Most time when you go on vacation you go for just a short enough time that you don't get comfortable with it. I like the fact that we've found places to hang out. I like the fact that we are getting to the point where we know where we're going in this town.

It makes you feel like you've really learned something about the town.

January 25, 1998

1:13 p.m.

entry by Dave Adrian

It wasn't like that at all. She's missing certain critical bits of information, items that would shed an entirely new light on the situation. For example: lately people have been giving me free shots. Jaegermeister and liquid cocaine. And this changes things, you see. My pool game has improved drastically. I'm getting better at shaving. My cats ventured out into the new apartment this morning, discovered the fireplace, and were promptly covered in grey soot (Kaiser on his right side, Soze on her left). And my shower - you can't imagine the altered perceptions a hot, powerful shower can invoke. I've been dreaming about computer games lately. But Janet doesn't understand any of this. She doesn't care. She just taunts and teases, nips and bites and barbs and poisons, and I try and I try but it's just never good enough or clever enough or dignified enough, and I have to wonder... And usually, at that point, it's time for another game of 11-UP. I'm going now. Hmm. I'll miss them.

January 25, 1998

1:32 p.m.

Oh, I think he's the one that's the tease.

Dave mentioning his cats reminds me of a trick Eugene learned with Dave's cats - one male, one female, both fixed. If Eugene constantly meowed for about two minutes, the male cat would try to jump the female cat. The female would fight back. It was cruel, but still an interesting show.

January 26, 1998

2:38 a.m.

Went to the basement of Dave's apartment building to play pool and there were a bunch of people there who were celebrating the Bronco's victory in the Super Bowl. They had a keg of beer there for less than ten people. So we went down there and drank their beer in the next room while they dominated the pool table, and then I realized that they were playing strip pool, and the next thing I knew there was this guy in his underwear in the next room playing pool, then he was stark naked. I really tried to avoid looking. No, really. I mean, why would I want to look? I felt very awkward being there, even though the man seemed very comfortable. Well, eventually a woman became topless, and all I could think was that she looked very uncomfortable. She was crossing her hands over her chest as the people I was with were sneaking glimpses.

Although I wasn't the only one to comment on her body language and the fact that she seemed uncomfortable, no one's behavior changed.

And I suppose it's one thing to play strip pool, or whatever the game might be, if you're in a group of people you feel entirely comfortable with, but it was suddenly apparent to me that this woman wasn't comfortable, and from that moment on every look she received seemed to be a violation.

So I asked if we could leave. Everyone agreed. We went to a bar to play pool, since we couldn't get access to the pool table in Dave's building. As we were walking out in the street, on our way to a bar, I saw a modern design furniture store. As I looked through the window at some of the beautifully crafted, simple, functional pieces on display, a part of me twinged at the thought that no one who will purchase these items will understand their beauty and functionality. It made me think that no one deserved to see these creations.

January 27, 1998

8:59 a.m.

Am awake before Eugene, even though I'm extremely tired. Today we leave Colorado and head to the National Parks in Southern Utah. Throughout this whole trip Matt, with Dave's agreement, has repeatedly told me I look like the woman from "The X Files."

People here have been extremely hospitable and kind to us. I'm surprised that I actually met people that I would like to keep in contact with. Maybe I'll try to get a little more sleep before I head out.

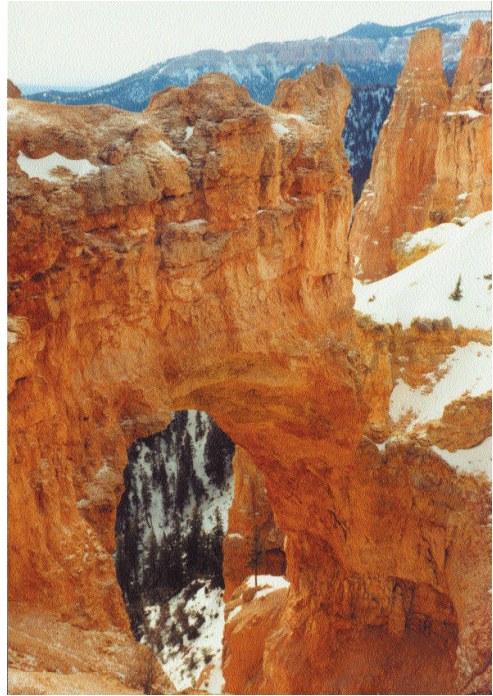
January 27, 1998

9:42 p.m.

On the road again... We drove through a tunnel that passed us through the Continental Divide (the ridge of mountains that defines the drainage of water, either to the Mississippi or to the Pacific basin). We passed through Vail, and for a while on the road there was a beautiful stretch of cutout rocks from the Colorado River. We visited Glenwood Canyon and drove through the White River National Forest. Periodically we would stop and take pictures and walk along the river. The mountains slowly cleared and we were approaching mesas and then plains again. Then I saw the sign up ahead for Utah.

Chapter 6

Utah



January 26
10:00 p.m.

As soon as we crossed the sign welcoming us into Utah, I got so excited. I know it sounds retarded, but I've never been in Utah before, and I really get into visiting new states. I think this brings me up to 37 states now, but I'm pretty sure I'm not going to Idaho or the Dakotas any time soon, so I probably won't make it to all of the states for a while.

And then I remembered when I was little that I asked my mom if we could plan a vacation to Utah so that I might be able to visit the Osmonds.

God, I was so retarded.

A part of me has been wondering if Utah would be a good place to move to. I mean, I'm guessing property taxes are pretty low, and land is probably cheaper, so it might be easier for me to afford those 100 acres I want so that I can live in seclusion and avoid all the stupid people. Then again, the Mormons are here, so maybe I wouldn't be running away but running toward problems.

As we were driving it got dark, and we pulled off the interstate so we could take a good look at the stars. The view of the night sky in Colorado was beautiful, but near cities it was still hard to see a lot of stars. Today we went off the road, turned off the lights on the car, and when I saw the sky, I just couldn't help but laugh over and over again; it was so amazing to see so many stars. (You forget that I'm used to seeing the city-light-stained orange glow of the overcast Chicago night sky, complete with an occasional plane. And if you're lucky, you might the glow of what would be the moon behind the thick layer of smog covering the entire city.) It was amazing. I might try to manual override my camera's shutter speed when we're camping and try to take a picture before we leave Utah.

But tonight camping is not a part of the plan. Since we got in so late, and since

camping would have cost \$13.00, we figured we could spend the extra \$10.00 to get a hotel room with a shower and bath and television with cable and phone and while we're at it, heat. So here we are staying at the Robbers Roost Budget Motel.

Eugene needed dinner, so we went a block away to a bar called Frank's Pizza. Drafts were \$1.00, a thick crust pizza (we have leftovers) was only \$5.50, and pool cost a quarter a game, instead of the usual 75¢. Frank's Pizza was still dirty from the Super Bowl party they had the night before. I noticed a sign over the bar that said, "Isn't it a lovely day? Just watch some bastard louse it up." Eugene asked Frank about the other signs in the bar, signs that said that people would be arrested who bring in open containers of liquor, and Frank told us that the "bastard Mormons" came in with liquor, as a sting, and put him out of business for ten days. And he also used a few more expletives.

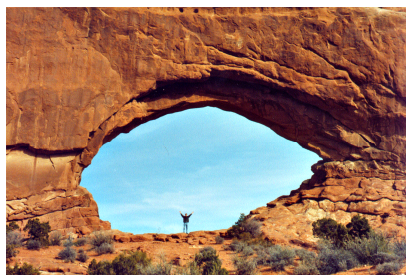
On the way out, we noticed that there was a Baptist church across the street from Frank's Pizza. Maybe I don't want to move to Utah after all.

So now Eugene is watching "Star Trek: The Next Generation," reading the Sports Section of the Denver Post he picked up this morning, and here I sit, writing. Tomorrow will be a long day.

Eugene just went in and came out of the bathroom, after cleaning his feet in the bathtub, and asked if a hot bath would make me feel better. He had the water running. Then he suggested I might like a candle, since we brought two in case of road emergencies for the car trip.

I'm impressed. I think that's the nicest thing he's done on this trip. I think it's the first time he thought to do something to make me feel better.

So, I think I'm going to take a bath. Maybe drink a half glass of the cheap red rose wine (Livingston Gallos all they way - \$3.99 a bottle and tastes just like soda) I brought with me when I'm done and I'll read after that, and go to bed.



Just got out of the bath. I feel much better.

There's an ad for Las Vegas from the Tourist Association on television, and I'm thinking as it's playing, I should see what's going on in that commercial, so I have ideas of what to do in a few days when I get there.

Then there was a clip on a television show about hair replacement technologies, including implanted cranial snaps. The system was a toupee with four snaps that attach to bases implanted surgically into your skull.

Eugene asked me if that was going too far for cosmetic purposes. I reminded him that face-lifts entail cutting the skin all along the forehead, then using a metal wedge to separate all the skin from the muscles in the forehead - all the way down to the eyebrows. You know, so doctors can then pull the skin up so the patient's forehead will look years younger.

That didn't seem to explain it to him.

Eugene opened the nightstand drawer and found not the Bible but the Book of Mormon. Fitting. I recalled an X Files episode about the usual government conspiracies

and asked Eugene to check the book to see if there was a bug in it, so the government could keep tabs on what everyone traveling is doing. Because you know, the Bible is the most trusted and unquestioned item in the hotel room. No one would think twice about it being there, and it could have a wire on it monitoring everything said in the room.

I told Eugene to check the spine, because that would be the easiest place to plant a bug. He actually checked, just for show.

Then I asked him to check the book for information about multiple wives. He checked the index for polygamy; it said:

polygamy: see marriage.

January 28, 1998

12:16 p.m.

This entry should be titled, "How I Got Naked In Arches National Park."

No, wait, that doesn't sound too good. Allow me to explain.

Yesterday was a very interesting day. In the morning we left our motel room and went first to Crystal Geysir, just outside of Green River, Utah. The geysir supposedly went off every 13-17 hours, but no one recorded when they went off in the past, so we had no way of knowing if it would go off while we were there. The geysir was located at the end of about four or five miles of dirt road, past where missile testing was done by our government. There was no one at the site, but it looked like there were remnants of campfires from people who patiently waited for the geysir to go off (if I lived here, I would probably do that one, just to see it). We listened to the water gurgle under the surface and found a bubbling puddle about 30 feet away from the geysir. Eventually we gave up on the geysir going off while we were there and left for Arches National Park.

We bought a yearlong pass to all the national parks, so that we could save money on entrance fees (Eugene wants to go to every park we can, and I want to go to the Everglades after he leaves anyway). There were red rock cliffs and sculptures everywhere. Rocks balanced on top of other rocks - 35-foot tall rocks, that is, weighing 3,500 tons, balanced on top of 120-foot rock poles. (One rock formation, in fact, looked just like a penis, which I had to photograph. We decided to call it "cock rock.") The main arches we hiked to were the North And South Arches and Turret Arch. These huge rock arches, usually formed by either bends in water streams that eroded the rock, or (more frequently) erosion from wind and rain, stood on tops of mountains and from the arch you had a great view of the valleys on each side of the mountain.

As we were hiking I found rocks that looked like quartz, and asked Eugene if he knew what they were. Most of the pieces we found were chert, and Eugene explained to me that it was a stone that Indians used for making arrowheads and the like, and that it was common in this part of the country. I found a few pieces and saved them.

It seems that when Eugene and I go on road trips we collect rocks as souvenirs, instead of purchasing cheesy little trinkets and the like.

Now, after collecting rocks from different places, when we get back we just have to remember where all the rocks exactly came from.

The last arch we decided to hike to was Delicate Arch, which was almost two miles

uphill. I was panting climbing the rocks, and Eugene was just trotting along like he was on one of those people movers you find in airport terminals. At one point I decided I wanted to rest and didn't care about the arch, so I told Eugene to go on without me. When I sat down and looked at the scene around me, I was amazed. For a good half hour I sat in the middle of this mountain range, near the top of a large, smooth bed of sandstone, and looked at the canyons, plant life and ridges around me. It was phenomenal. Then it occurred to me to stop moving and rustling around and listen to the sounds around me. There was absolutely nothing. During the entire time I sat there I heard a plane once and a bird once. No wind. No motion.

When you live in a city, that's something you're never used to. Living on a main street in Chicago, I hear semi trucks and souped up cars and people yelling at all hours of the night. And here it was perfectly silent.

So eventually Eugene came back and he told me that the remainder of the hike is worth the effort, the Delicate Arch is so beautiful that I just have to see it. Since he was willing to back, I walked up the rest of the hill and walked around a cliff edge and climbed a few rocks and got to the arch.

The top ridge we were standing on was in the shape of a giant U. We were on one end of the U, and Delicate Arch was on the other end. Eugene walked along the edge of the ridge and got to the arch for me to take a picture. Then he said that I should just sit up there for a bit, and really enjoy the view. He said he would leave me alone and walk to the other side of the ridge so I could have some space. I told him to guard for me, and holler if anyone was coming.

You had to walk around the side of the ridge in order to see the arch; that was the only way you could get to Delicate Arch. The U-shaped ridge with the arch and me was entirely secluded from any people. I knew Eugene was going to climb a smaller rock formation on the other side of the ridge and enjoy the view of the other side, so I knew he'd leave me alone. When I made sure Eugene was out of sight, for some reason I decided...

You know, if you didn't visit this area, you might think that what I did was strange. But at the time it made perfect sense.

I unlaced my hiking boots, and took off my socks. Then I walked over to a ledge where I'd have a good view, and I took off my clothes and sat on them. I just sat there, for a few minutes, naked, in the middle of this sandstone ridge and arch, and enjoyed the scenery.

It was quite exhilarating.

But after a while, 60 degrees becomes more than exhilarating - even with the sun shining on you - so I put my clothes back on and started walking very quietly toward where Eugene was. I wanted to make sure he hadn't walked around and inadvertently seen me.

When I got around the ridge Eugene was wearing his t-shirt and had his jacket in his hand, climbing down from the top of another small ridge. I told him what I did and he thought it was kind of funny. He was sitting on the ridge shirtless.

As I said, I don't know why it seemed to make sense to do it, but I guess I wasn't the only one that thought that, so I can't be completely crazy.

On our way out of the park we stopped at Sand Dune Arch, but by the time we got there it was beginning to get dark. We tried to take a picture, but I also decided to

collect a film canister's worth of sand, which in this park was a beautiful red-orange color. We went into Moab to get some water and a state map before going to camp at Canyonlands National Park, which was about eighty miles south of Arches National Park. We found a brewery/restaurant and had a small dinner (well, I had a small dinner, soup and fries, and Eugene had chili and a garden burger and onion rings). After dinner we drove in the dark to Canyonlands National Park.

Camping was free at this time of year in Canyonlands, and there was no attendant on duty when we arrived, so we drove straight to the campsite. There was only one other camper that we could see. In the dark we set up the tent and brought in our blankets and pillows and sleeping bags and set up for the night. When we finished setting up, we bundled up and walked out onto a rock near our tent to look at the stars.

There were no towns around us for at least forty miles, and there was not a single cloud in the sky. It was absolutely amazing. We could see the Milky Way very clearly, and in the winter sky we could easily spot Orion, Scorpio, the Pleiades Cluster, and the bottom half of the Big Dipper, dropping into the horizon. I'm not sure if I have ever seen that many stars in the night sky before.

Eugene and I were sitting on a white sandstone rock when he finally spoke.

"Looking up at these stars, doesn't it make you feel so insignificant?"

My eyes must have been saucers, looking up at the night sky with a grin I couldn't remove from my face. "Not at all. I could never think that."

"How could you not?" he asked. I told him that I can't look at my life as insignificant, that if I did I wouldn't want to excel in life and I wouldn't have any reason to continue. I told him that implied after the line "Doesn't it make you feel so insignificant?" was, "Doesn't it make you feel so worthless? It makes you wonder why you should bother." And I told him that I cannot function that way, that I have to look at life through my perspective, that this is my life.

I told him I looked at these stars and thought that this was science, this was something I could chart, learn from. I told him that the constancy of the stars in the sky reminded me of the constancy of the world around me. These were the same stars I looked at when I was a child. (Well, you know, unless a select few have disappeared from our vision during that time, but you get the point.) I told him that although in my opinion all aspects of science are beautiful (isn't it beautiful, for instance, that we can look at minute organisms through a microscope and see and learn from them?), that astronomy and the night sky seems so inherently beautiful, that the night sky was just so aesthetically pleasing. I told him that I loved the understanding we can gain about our world by studying other planets and stars and galaxies. I told him that I loved the fact that I was on one of those planets, and that I had this unique opportunity to actually look at and contemplate the night sky.

I don't know if he entirely understood what I meant.

Eugene then told me that he just saw a meteor. I remember when I was little, my sister Sandy would join me and my friend Sheri on our front yard, and we'd all sit on either yard chairs or a big old comforter stretched out on our front yard, and we'd wait for the annual meteor shower that occurred in the second week of August. Ever since I was a child

I have been fascinated with the stars, with astronomy. I had a telescope, I wrote articles as a child for children's astronomy magazines (I think that was my first venture in publishing), I read books on astronomy - my brother even named a star for me one year for Christmas through the International Star Registry. (Later, as an adult, it occurred to me that the International Star Registry is nothing more than a company, a private venture that decided to name the stars, at the mere price at the time of \$30 each, and log them in a book, which is housed in the Library of Congress, like most other books in print. These are not scientifically recognized names for these stars. Someone just decided to claim that they could name the stars something else. Talk about enterprising.)

I watched the sky and spotted a few meteors. For the most part, the meteors that night were falling between Orion and the Pleiades Cluster. I told Eugene that I remember seeing a fireball when I was little - an orange ball with flames shooting off from it - that was about as big as ten stars. I never knew if it was a very close meteor, or refuse from a satellite dish.

Eugene noticed that it's impossible to imagine three dimensions in space. Everything looks like it's on a flat plane - all the stars, meteors, even airplanes. It looks like a painting. It looks like a black sheet with a very dim light on the other side, and someone poked tiny, tiny holes all over the sheet.

Eventually we started getting cold, so Eugene went to the tent and I went to an out-of-the-way rock to pee (something I hate doing in the wilderness, speaking as a woman), and we got ready for sleep.

Tom loaned me his sleeping bag before we left Boulder, which was a good thing (by the way, thanks again, Tom), because the temperature was probably in the upper teens. I brought five or six blankets, which provided some padding on the ground, but you could still feel the cold seep up from below you. I was impressed at how warm the sleeping bag was. Eugene, however, was freezing. His sleeping bag zipper was apparently broken. He kept saying, "If my feet are frost-bitten in the morning, you're going to have to drive me to the hospital." But in the middle of the night, when Eugene's snoring woke me up, and then it occurred to me that I was freezing cold. I shivered and shook for I'd guess about an hour and a half, listening to Eugene snore, before I managed to get back to sleep again. The freezing cold and Eugene's snoring kept waking me up all night. By the morning my feet were ice cold.

Now, in my opinion, if I have to pay at any of the other national parks, I might as well pay the few extra dollars for heat in a hotel. Hell, you only live once, and I don't feel like risking my toes to frost bite again.

When we woke up this morning, Eugene told me I was snoring, too. (I don't believe him; but in fairness I thought I'd mention it.) we started packing up when I noticed that the birds wanted some of Eugene's peanuts. So I got a heel of bread out from the car and followed Eugene's lead, sticking my hand out with a crumb of bread on it. Although I can't tell you for sure, I think the birds were either nuthatches or finches. What I can tell you is that the bird felt perfectly comfortable flying onto our fingers and taking the food from the palms of our hands.

I continued feeding the birds until they seemed full, giggling each time a bird land-

ed on my hand and put their tiny claws onto my fingers. Then I helped Eugene finish packing up the car and we headed for sightseeing in Canyonlands National Park.

In my personal opinion, Arches National Park was much nicer, but the canyons and different colors of rocks in the formations were interesting. I also learned more about the plant life there, and saw many sage bushes and plants called "Mormon Tea," which is called that because the Mormons, when the first moved here, used the plants for making tea. I managed to get some of the leaves of each and am hoping I can use them for herbs and for teas when I get back home.

Which takes us to about now, where I'm sitting in the car and Eugene is driving and we're headed south. We're probably going to pass by the Monti-La Sal National Forest, then head on to Natural Bridges National Monument (you know, versus those man-made bridges - what point would there be in having a monument to a man-made bridge, right?), then to Glen Canyon for the rest of the day, camping there before Bryce Canyon and Zion National Park.

We're driving through Natural Bridges National Monument now. The hikes are difficult, but short, the view is quite interesting. I decided not to bother attempting to take photographs, because no two-dimensional picture can really do the scene justice. All the rocks are curved, from erosion, and there are no harsh sharp edges. The canyons drop deep and the natural rock bridges are framed by occasional bushes, patches of snow and multi-colored stones.

I've noticed that we can get only three stations in on the radio - and they're all country. For a while we were able to get in a station broadcast from an Arizona high school, but the accents on the student disc jockeys were so thick that we couldn't pay any attention to the schedule of high school basketball games and spring dances, we were just trying to figure out what the accent was. Eventually we gave up; soon after we lost the station.

January 28, 1998

7:06 p.m.

I'm sitting in a fast food restaurant called Stan's now. Took some pictures in Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, but we decided to move on so we don't have to go as far tomorrow. Eugene is playing Ms. Pac Man in the back room, I think, or else he found another arcade game to play. I'm stuffed. I'm in a small town, one that's not even listed as having a population in the road atlas Eugene has. I'm impressed that they had garden burgers.

Eugene and I have pretty much agreed that tonight it seems colder than it did last night and if it's possible we should stay in another cheap hotel. Now the task is to find one. Another thing I haven't been able to find since I've been in the Utah Parks is a phone jack, which I need in order to check my e-mail. I usually check it daily, but now it has been two days, seven hours and forty-nine minutes since I've been able to get on the super highway.

I'm not sure that the nature lifestyle is entirely for me.

Really, I feel like I'm going through withdrawal. I know that 90% of my e-mail is junk mail, messages with subject headers like "I know you want me" or "Send bulk e-mail to 50,000+" or "Turn your washing machine into a money maker." Really, I don't know how they get my name on their lists.

Every once in a while I even get an e-mail with a subject header like, "Hot gay men want to talk to you!", and really, I don't know who they think I am, but I'm won't pay money for gay men to talk to me. And since it seems that all the good men are either married or gay, my problem isn't in finding gay men.

I just heard that my friend Dave (not the Dave in Denver, this is Dave in Chicago), who used to work at the same company I did, is no longer working there. I want to get a hold of him, but it was easier to talk to him when I knew where he was eight hours or more of the day. I wonder if he thinks I'm ignoring him. I'm not... I can't even write him e-mail, since I haven't even been able to get on line. I hope all is going well with him. He's been a good friend to me in recent months and I wish I could be there to help him celebrate being free of that hole, I mean, not having to work at that company anymore.

January 29, 1998

6:50 p.m.

Last night we decided to break down and get a hotel - Eugene swore that last night would be the last night we stayed in a hotel, because he couldn't afford it. We went to a Days Inn, which had a pool and a Jacuzzi. We were one of four rooms booked; by morning when we had our continental breakfast, we were the only people staying in the hotel.

I must have stayed in the poolroom for over two hours. Going back and forth between the pool and the hot tub felt fantastic. There were four different dials controlling jets in four different directions for the hot tub. It was great.

I have this thing for hot tubs.

This morning I got up before Eugene did and went to the hot tub again, then I managed to get the woman at the front desk of the hotel to let me use their main phone line so that I could check my e-mail.

She must have thought I was strange, obsessing over technology.

Keep in mind that most of the towns we pass through here in Utah are nestled in among National Parks and Forests. On the state map, over half of the towns listed do not have a registered population. Otherwise the towns have less than 500 people in them.

So after briefly checking my e-mail I went back into the hot tub.

You know, I had to get in any hot tub time while I still could.

Okay, we then drove to Glen Canyon National Park, which in my opinion wasn't as cool as Arches National Park.

So I hiked along, following Eugene through Glen Canyon, then letting him go ahead because I couldn't keep up with him. When we were finished we drove for a few hours south and west to Bryce Canyon National Park. We arrived there near sunset, and it was snowing. From what little amount of time we spent at Bryce Canyon, I could honestly say that it was breath taking. So we decided that we needed to stay in town for the night again and see Bryce Canyon tomorrow.

Since there was snow on the ground, Eugene suggested staying in a hotel.

I agreed to stay in a low-budget hotel this time, and we registered for our room at “Doug’s Place” in the adjoining grocery store. Also available were free copies of The Book of Mormon, in assorted languages.

So far I have The Book of Mormon in French, Chinese, Hebrew, Norwegian, German and Italian. I also got one from Denmark. I still need to get the Russian and Spanish ones.

Need to fill out my multi-lingual collection of The Book of Mormon.

So we got to the hotel room, and as we started getting out luggage out of the car, we noticed that there was an outdoor hot tub. And yes, it’s cold outside, but I’m going to have to do it. As I said, I have this thing for hot tubs.

Just got back from the hot tub. It was only about 94 degrees in the water, which is about eight degrees less than it should be (yes, I’m picky...). So, on Janet’s scales, here is how the hot tubs on this trip have so far rated:

Hot tub Number One: Dave Adrian’s apartment in Denver, Colorado: They need to clean it, re-tile the edges, ventilate it, remove half the chemicals and raise the temperature at least ten degrees. Other than charming company it is by far the loser. Get working on the renovations, Dave, for when I visit again.

Hot Tub Number Two: Days Inn in Torrey, Utah: So far the winner. Spacious tub with four dials controlling four types of jets. Well ventilated; nice windows. Perfect temperature. Next to a large pool to cool off. Four stars.

Hot Tub Number Three: Doug’s Place Hotel in Tropic, Utah: One of those plastic all-in-one tubs, standing above ground. It had comfortable seats, and three jets. Colder than it should be, but it was kind of cool that it was outside. So far, it’s in second place, but I get the feeling that the hot tub at Scott’s house in Pasadena will beat it. It’s possible that even the hot tub attached to the pool at Joe’s house could beat it, as long as he’s willing to turn on the heat for the hot tub for us before we arrive.

Last year, when I visited California, I stayed at Joe’s house for a day. Once he was cleaning the pool outside when I dipped my foot into the adjoining hot tub, which was ice cold. I asked him why it was cold. He replied, “It’s winter.”

I didn’t mention to him that it was eighty degrees out. - it seemed obvious. But you know, it’s winter.

I beat Eugene to the shower when we got back from the hot tub, and now he’s saying that he’s not going to take a shower. Because, you know, he was in the hot tub, why would he need to take a shower?

He seems to have this mortal fear of any type of water, unless it’s a hot tub (mmm, that nice chemical and chlorine smell).

Well, we have traveled 500 miles since our first city in Utah, Green River. (I asked Eugene if the phosphate Green River came from here. He didn’t think it did.) Tomorrow we’ll go through Bryce Canyon, then pass through Zion National Park, and hopefully take make the trip to the Grand Canyon by tomorrow night, where it will hopefully be warm enough to camp.

My friend Jocelyn told me that she thought Bryce Canyon was better looking than

the Grand Canyon. And from what I've seen today, it might be.

January 30, 1998

4:56 p.m.

Am leaving Utah. Eugene is driving. Got a Portuguese version of the Book of Mormon, and an English one, just in case I actually wanted to read it.

Oh, who am I kidding?

This morning we drove to Bryce Canyon for a better look. The elevation was over 9,000 feet at parts, so even though it was Southern Utah it was not very warm. The snow was all over the peaks of the ridges and we had to bundle up in order to check out the sites.

Yes, I do have to admit that Bryce Canyon is much better than most of the other national parks. From what I've seen, Arches and Bryce are the best bets.

After hiking around a bit, we drove south and west to Zion National Park. Eugene seemed to enjoy it, but for me it was less than spectacular - call me picky and antsy and impatient, but I've seen so many different kinds of mountains and canyons and peaks and ridges and valleys that every time we walked another trail, all I could do was sarcastically say, "wow, another rock."

But you know, I'm the person who was having withdrawal symptoms when I didn't have access to my e-mail.

So then we found out that the road connecting Utah to the north rim of the Grand Canyon was closed for the winter, so we decided that we may try to hit the Grand Canyon on our way back from Los Angeles, when we are south of the Grand Canyon in Arizona.

So we drove about twenty miles and Eugene wanted to stop for food, so we settled for a Taco Bell instead of a Taco John's. And when we got out of the car we noticed it had to be twenty-five degrees warmer than it was in Zion National Park. Eugene immediately spotted the small palm tree and other plants that were tropical, and we felt like we had driven for three hours instead of twenty minutes.

So we ate, and Eugene took over the driving. Well, all in all, Utah was somewhat interesting - definitely different from most every other state I have ever visited. There were lots of different mountain ridges and national parks, and no big towns. Well, at least not in the southern half, and we didn't go up toward Salt Lake City - even though that's where the Osmonds live.

Not sure if I'd want to live here, I haven't made up my mind yet. As a single person looking for an apartment to rent, Utah would definitely not be the place.

I have to admit, it's beautiful here, though.

I'm trying to get Eugene excited in seeing Las Vegas - he's never been there before. He thinks it's tacky, and it is. But it's an experience everyone has to go through at least once in their life times, and if Eugene wanted to spend so much time in the parks and forests, well, he better be prepared for some tackiness.

We have to pass through twenty-seven miles of Arizona before we reach Nevada.

Chapter 7

Arizona (27 Miles)

January 30, 1998

5:07 p.m.

The elevation is now 2,000 feet, instead of 9,000. That could be one reason why it's warmer. The speed limit is 75 miles per hour, the same as it was in Utah. All of interstate 15 is cut out from in between huge rocks, which I would classify as mountains, but then again, a big hill is like a mountain to me, so I'm not one to judge. The land we're driving through is publicly owned, which means ranchers could still come in and claim it, I suppose.

We're driving at just after five in the afternoon, and heading west, so we've got this atrocious glare from the setting sun. Actually, we've driven at this time of day when we've arrived at most every city we've driven to so far. I can't wait until we head east again, so at least we will have an easier time seeing when we drive.

Eugene is talking about how he could live out here, in a flat area and have a good view of the mountains. We're starting to drive away from them now. I had to explain to Eugene that Las Vegas is in the middle of a vast flat stretch, and on the horizons is where you see the mountains.

I think he's starting to get the idea.

We're playing a tape of eighties music while we're on the road. Ring My Bell just ended. Eugene is going over 95 miles per hour.

I just asked him how fast his fastest speed was.

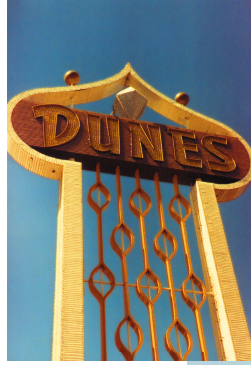
He told me it was 99 miles per hour.

Great.

Just looked up, and saw a sign welcoming me into Nevada. Guess I'll have to write more about Arizona when we stay there after Los Angeles.

Chapter 8

Nevada



January 30, 1998

4:16 p.m. Pacific Time

Another time change. This means more time to get drunk.

I've been to Las Vegas twice. The first time was when I was eighteen, with my sister Sandy and my parents. It was a month and a half before I went to college, and the last thing I wanted to do was go to a place where I was restricted from all forms of recreation, since you had to be 21 to drink or gamble.

My parents were on a gambling junket that gave them tickets to a Mickey Gilley concert.

And as I said, I hate country music.

I remember once my mom trying to find something for me to do, giving me a quarter and telling me to play a slot machine. I don't gamble. Never mind I was under age. She said it wasn't a big deal, so I sat down at a slot machine, and with the efficiency of a SWAT team two men came up to me and asked to see my identification, all after I started to lift my hand to the slot machine, but before I could get the quarter in.

I told him my I.D. was in my hotel room. I got up and walked away.

At one point my parents gave both my sister and myself \$20 to spend at Circus Circus, which is a casino with an amusement park in the middle of it, with the same kind of cheesy ring-toss or dart-throwing booths you'd find at the carnivals that came to your suburbs and set up in the back parking lot of the local mall. I didn't want to play, and suggested to Sandy we split the money and tell the parents we spent it all.

She didn't go for it.

So we went to a booth where you threw darts at a wall of balloons three feet away, and for every balloon you hit you got this stuffed animal that rivals a beanie baby in size. With an entire wall of balloons, I figured that as long as you actually aimed the dart at the wall, you'd win something.

So I played.

Sandy's darts sort of arched in the air; the darts moved more like a badminton birdie than a line drive to home plate, and when they hit the balloon they actually bounced off them and fell to the floor.

I split with her the stuffed animals I got.

The second time I went to Las Vegas was for a trade show my old company was running. I worked on registration, and I was one of three photographers. The turn out for the trade show was so pathetic that my additional job at the convention center was to apologize to all the people who spent good money to come to such a terrible show.

Both times I stayed at the Las Vegas Hilton. Not the Flamingo Hilton, not the tacky one, not the unique one, but the this-is-a-building-that-could-be-anywhere Hilton. At least there was a huge y-shaped pool on the third floor, with an equally impressive hot tub outside. If I had to rate that hot tub against the others I've been in on this trip so far, it would either come in first or second, because:

1. it was huge - probably twelve to fifteen feet wide,
2. it was outside, and with a gentle breeze the weather was almost perfect,
3. it was surrounded by Greek columns, which served no function but looked kind of cool,
4. the water was warm without being so hot that you had to periodically get out to cool off, and
5. the water jets came from the armrests in the middle of the tub, so that your back didn't get shot with high-powered water sprays when you leaned back.

All in all, it was a worthwhile hot tub. If you're in Vegas, I highly recommend it.

I remember the main conflict during my work trip to Las Vegas was that a few of the men on the trip were worried about spending time with female co-workers, because their wives might get the wrong idea.

Well, one of the men that was worried was the type that would cheat on his wife, so maybe he did have something to worry about. But the other guy was a born-again Christian, the most trustworthy guy, and his wife had no reason to think that he would make any moves on any co-worker, or that he would accept the advances of any co-worker.

But they were worried anyway, so on the first night, when you usually go out with all of your co-workers for dinner, they suggested that they shouldn't eat with the women.

Ah, children.

On the second night they apologized for their behavior and invited a few of us lowly females to join them for dinner. The born-again Christian's brother joined us from Los Angeles for the night.

That's where the problems started.

I got along well with the brother. He was a nice guy. We ended up talking for the entire night, and he never made it back to his hotel. (We really were just talking.) But the born-again was very displeased. He kept giving me the cold shoulder.

I wanted to go up to him and tell him that I didn't defile his brother, but I figured that wouldn't be a good move, either.

That was a strange trip. I also saw an old friend of mine that wanted to sleep with me, so I had to repeatedly reject his advances.

And every night I only got between two and three hours of sleep.

I don't imagine that this trip will be anything like either one of those trips. Eugene and I don't gamble, and we don't even have a hotel. We might stay at a campground about ten miles out of the city.

But for now, we're still driving through vast stretches of nothingness, on our way to Las Vegas.

I think Las Vegas is the only thing in the southern half of this state.

The mountains, or mesas, or whatever they are along the side of the expressway, look more like big mounds of dirt than sculpted ridges.

Those national parks made me spoiled.

Las Vegas is a crazy place. Everything is extremely well lit. None of the casinos have windows. They don't want you to know what time of day it is, because if you realize that it's dawn you might stop gambling. They have so much power from the Hoover Dam and they have to use so many lights and so much air conditioning that they actually cool off the air on the sidewalk right outside the front doors to the hotels and casinos. Cigarette girls walk around in short skirts. Prime rib and lobster dinners cost less than six dollars.

It's sort of like going to another planet.

As I said, it's tacky, but it's something you have to experience.

January 31, 1998

9:42 a.m.

We drove along the strip when we got into town and the number of lights and signs on the main strip shocked Eugene. There was more than I remembered, too. We drove for a while and decided to park at the parking garage at Caesar's Palace. We didn't know where we were going to sleep, and we thought that we might just try to stay up through the night, instead of attempting to find a campground in the middle of the night with no good map.

So I showed him Caesar's Palace first. It is attached to a shopping center, and the halls of the shopping center are decorated to look like you were walking outside. The ceiling is domed and painted sky blue with clouds; the facades of the stores are made to look like the outside of a building (done in the classic Greek style, of course, with lots of marble and tons of columns). There were hallways with immense salt-water aquariums, and at the end of one hallway there was a mechanical show of ancient figures depicting the fall of Atlantis, complete with water fountains, flames and moving mechanical people.

We walked through the casino and I noticed the cocktail waitresses (there were no roaming waiters) were all wearing skimpy white toga-style dresses with gold trim.

Ah, women's lib.

So without gambling at casino number one, we headed on. Walking outside you could see the rows of statues and marble Greek columns trimmed in gold along the

entranceway and sidewalk.

The Mirage was the next casino heading north; we walked toward it.

Every time I saw the sign for the Mirage, the Beastie Boys' song "Sabotage" went through my head, and I had to quote the lyrics out loud:

"Oh my God, It's a Mirage, I'm telling y'all, it's sabotage."

The entire front yard of the Mirage (Oh my God, it's a Mirage) consists of waterfalls. I don't know how much water they use, but for an entire block all you see are stairs of stones and all you hear is the rushing of water.

We stepped on to the people mover to enter the Mirage (Oh my God, it's a Mirage) to see more pools of water. Eugene was amazed that people threw their change into the fountain. When we entered the front hallway we were instantly reminded that this is the place where Siegfried and Roy performed, because all of the gift shops lining the hallways sold things like stuffed white tigers.

Then, on our left, was a glass-enclosed room with one of their Bengal tigers in it, walking around, like it was in an exhibit in the zoo.

However, instead of the usual attempts to mock a natural setting for the animal, the tiger was in a white room with Greek columns all around and fountains pouring water into a pool. There were painted murals along the walls. It was very strange.

So Eugene and I stop and look at this tiger lazily strolling through the white marble room, and Eugene decides to say loudly things like, "Oh, that's a natural setting," and "Oh, you know the tiger's not happy in there," and "this is cruelty to animals."

I asked him not to say things like that so loudly, because people next to him can hear him.

He said he wanted people to hear him. He said he wanted to educate them.

I told him that when he blurted out things like that loudly and used no tact, the people around him will only think he's an ass. That he is actually hurting his chances of converting people because of the manner in which he behaves.

He said that he knew that he was right.

I guess that mean end of discussion.

So I asked him to please do me a favor, and please try not to ruin my evening, and if he had to say things like that, at least tonight not say them too loudly.

It seemed to work.

We walked inside. The cocktail waitresses that worked at the Mirage (Oh my God, it's a Mirage) also wore skimpy dresses.

I decided to monitor the roaming waitresses at every casino, to see if I could find a place that didn't require their waitresses to wear short skirts.

I didn't.

So Eugene decided he needed to watch the Bulls game in one of the betting rooms, but since he couldn't spend any money at the Mirage (Oh my God, it's a Mirage) because he didn't want to support a place that condoned the cruel treatment of animals, we had to move on to the next casino on the strip, Treasure Island.

The outside block of Treasure Island is decorated with a pool of water that is

churned to look like the high seas, and there are two pirate ships and a recreation of a small town in the front yard. Apparently, every hour or so there is a pirate show in the front, where the ships move and everything.

We missed the show.

But we were able to watch the Bulls game, which made Eugene happy.

We also ended up visiting the Stardust, the Frontier, the Desert Inn

and the Riviera while we walked around last night. Eugene started to gamble, just a little, with the 5¢ and 25¢ poker machines. At one point he was up by about \$5.00, but he gambled it all away.

We found a place that sold drafts of Old Milwaukee for 50¢ and margaritas in molded plastic green and clear glasses for \$1.00, so we were happy. Eugene found a place that served a dollar breakfast, so that also made him happy.

By the end of the night, I think he was actually enjoying himself, and not bitching about how Las Vegas is robbing water from the Colorado River in order to survive in a desert.

Or whatever other political tirade he could go on.

I think he started to think of the place as a sort of New Orleans. It's not supposed to be real. It's not supposed to be questioned. It's like an alternate universe.

So try to have fun.

Eventually we got tired and it was getting cold out as it got later and later, and since we didn't bring coats, we decided to go to the car and attempt to find the campground Eugene saw on the map of Nevada. I fell asleep in the car while he was looking, and he couldn't find a thing, and before I knew it we had been driving for over an hour. Eugene had no idea where he was going, but he refused to pay for another hotel.

He could eat two breakfasts at midnight, drink a ton of beer and drop dollars and dollars worth of change in slot machines, but he couldn't spend the ten dollars that would make the difference between a campground he couldn't find and a cheap hotel.

So I broke down and said I'd pay for a hotel, so we drove around town and started getting out and asking for rates. I found one that was \$35, so after checking a few other places I told him to go back to the \$35 hotel, when we passed one more hotel. Eugene said he'd check the rate. He came back out saying it was \$33.60, so I told him to park the car and I'd register. When I got in, the lady at the desk said he must have misunderstood her, because the price was \$43.60. I didn't feel like arguing.

I figured it would be better to pay the bill and not talk to Eugene.

Eugene tried to argue with the lady, but it wasn't working, so I went into the room. It was by far the most disgusting room we've rented to date. Everything smells of cigarette smoke.

Eugene offered to pay for half of it.



Then we went to sleep.

We're planning on walking around a little more today before we head out to Los Angeles. There's still the Stratosphere to see, which is a giant space needle and a miniature rendition of New York, complete with a Statue of Liberty and facades of the Chrysler building and the Empire State Building.

Oh, and don't forget the Luxor, which is a giant pyramid with a sphinx in front of it. Why did I want to travel the world, when there are imitations of so many places here?

January 31, 1998

3:10 p.m.

Visited more casinos. Went to The Luxor, and across the street we visited the Tropicana, the Excalibur, and the new "New York New York." It frightened me.

We looked at the free magazines along the sidewalks of prostitution services - oh yeah, prostitution is legal there, and so they have free magazines in bins you can take of almost completely naked women contorting themselves so you can examine them from the inside out before deciding on which one to purchase.

I remember seeing them with my sister the first time I was in Vegas, and Sandy asked me how a woman could tell her parents about her lifestyle. You know, a young girl moves out of the house early, wanting to make money and become a famous actress or something, and they end up in Vegas and they can't even get a job as a chorus girl or a waitress with one of those skimpy retarded outfits.

"But Mom, I've made it big! I'm on the cover of 'Prostitution Weekly!'"

We took more pictures and then decided it was time to move on. We had enough strangeness for one day.

Went to the Hoover Dam today. I remember when I flew into Las Vegas for the first time, my mother suggested I sit in her seat on the other side of the plane for the landing so that I could see the Hoover Dam out the window. I sat in the aisle next to my father, and he was like a little kid looking out the window. I remember him saying to himself, "Wow. Look at all the concrete."

Did I mention that he ran a construction company?

Anyway, we drove to the Hoover Dam this afternoon, and I was impressed not only by the massive size of the dam but also with the fact that there were so many people visiting it. By far the Dam was more popular than any of the national parks we had visited.



And I know it was winter, and that would explain why people weren't visiting Bryce Canyon or Arches National Park, but a part of me was hoping there were more people at Hoover Dam because people were amazed at something that man did, versus some thing that nature did.

I know that's why I was impressed with it.

But maybe I'm reading too much into this.

After taking more pictures we drove on, heading for California. I fell asleep while Eugene was driving; he woke me as I saw the sign telling us we were in California.

Chapter 9

California



January 31, 1998
10:12 p.m.

Stopped in a small town for dinner. The town's claim to fame was that it had the world's tallest thermometer. It was 134 feet tall, in honor of the high temperature Death Valley reached in the early 1900s.

It wasn't actually a large glass tube filled with mercury, like I wanted it to be. It was a lighted sign that depicted the temperature. I wanted to tell them that it was just a tall display of the temperature, that it wasn't really a thermometer.

I don't think they would have liked that, though.

While driving on interstate 15 we had to stop for an agricultural checkpoint in California - they want to make sure that no one brings fruit or things that could carry insects into the area.

I thought that was strange.

So we pulled up, and the man at the booth asked us if we had any fruits or vegetables. We said no, that we didn't have any food at all. He noted that we were from Illinois, seeing our license plate. We agreed with his conclusion. Then he looked at us in the car and asked, "Aren't you going to claim the peach next to you?"

I got confused for a moment, until I realized that he was talking about me. I giggled and we drove on. Wow. I got a compliment when I was even wearing dirty clothes and had no make-up on.

I should have told him that when I clean up, I look even better.

I noticed that driving on the 10 (one of the main interstates in the Los Angeles area) was one of the most frightening experiences known to man. Now I'm used to driving in Chicago, and by far I'm a Type A driver. In fact, I think driving in Chicago are just as bad as driving in New York, so I've usually thought that I've seen the worst of traffic. Driving the 10, however, is more like driving in an auto race than in a traffic

jam, and all the competitors are out for blood. Well, there haven't been many freeway shootings lately, so I shouldn't complain.

Everyone drove very fast, and people changed lanes without discretion. It really was a bit like a video game.

At least everyone uses their turn signal here, even when changing lanes on expressways, which is something that most people in Chicago were not taught.

Arrived at Aaron and Kirsten's apartment before nine, an hour ahead of schedule. Aaron is a friend of mine that I met while on an airplane.

Oh, that sounds strange. Let me explain.

I was visiting California last year, flying in the middle of winter from O'Hare. Every flight was delayed, so I started talking to a man on the same flight. We got beers at the cocktail lounge and decided to reassign our seats so we sat next to each other on the plane.

When we got on the plane, we were goofing around and being silly, and another young man came up to our row, saying his seat was next to mine. So I tried to regain myself, so as not to be too obnoxious next to a stranger, and after introducing myself said, "If I get too irritating, let me know."

He responded, "Can I smack you?"

And I answered, "Please."

This was how I met Aaron.

I could tell that Aaron was from California - he was nice, and friendly. People from Chicago do not make jokes to strangers. People from Chicago think that strangers that come up to them are trying to rob them.

Usually, in Chicago, they're right.

Aaron was going to film school in Chicago and was going home for a weekend to visit family and friends. He tried to tell me what places I should visit; I didn't remember his suggestions, but we did exchange e-mail addresses.

I e-mailed Chris, the guy I originally met in the airport, but he never wrote me back. Aaron did. Since he was in the film world and wrote screenplays he was familiar with a few open mike venues in Chicago and invited me to one of them, run by a female friend of his.

That was the first time I ever went to an open mike, which in essence started my part-time non-paying career of speaking at open mikes and doing performance art shows.

So I really have Aaron to thank for that.

Kirsten is his high school sweetheart, they've been together for I think 45 years now, or at least that's what I say when I tease them. They moved back to Los Angeles when he was finished with school, and drove around the country to see the sights before the moved back.

Kind of like what I'm doing now.

So they've been kind enough to offer their home to Eugene and myself.

Thanks, by the way.

So we've spent the rest of the evening catching up and talking about what sights we have collectively seen when traveling around the country.

I'll wait until tomorrow to call Joe.

I discovered tonight that somewhere on this trip I've lost my pillow - I think it's at the hotel in Utah that had the outdoor hot tub. Eugene said he got everything out of the room, and I trusted him.

How silly of me.

Eugene is out getting beer now. I think we're going to just stay here tonight, try to recoup and such.

February 2, 1998

9:52 a.m.

The last time we visited Los Angeles we stayed with my friend Kevin. The first morning we woke up, a Sunday morning, Eugene had a craving for doughnuts and I had a craving for beer. (Because it was a Sunday morning, and because I was on vacation, and because I could.) So Eugene drove around Sunday morning and I sat outside reading my book at nine in the morning eating a donut and drinking a beer.

It was fun.

So this time, the first morning we're in Los Angeles (which happens to be a Sunday), Eugene wakes up and says he has a craving for doughnuts. Since I was feeling the *deja vu*, I went to the refrigerator and grabbed a beer and waited for him to return with breakfast.

Yesterday was a laid back day. It was overcast, and Aaron was working at a film festival, so Eugene and Kirsten and I watched the Bulls game. It was nice to get the chance to hang out and talk to Kirsten; since my friendship started with Aaron I haven't had that much of a chance to get to know her. I like her. She's cool. Will be fun to spend more time with them.

Then, after spending the afternoon watching the game, we headed out to Pasadena to visit Eugene's friend Scott.

As we drove along the on ramp to the expressway we saw a motorcycle cop who had pulled over a speeder. It instantly made us think of the television show *CHIPS*, since this seems to be the only place you'd see cops on motorcycles.

Scott lives with his wife, Ning, and newborn little girl, Melody Joy, in a town house in Pasadena. We got there and they had to take turns walking with her and trying to get her to sleep, so they were busy.

I don't think Eugene understands how having a baby can fill up all of your time. He was saying that Scott should have been able to get away for an hour so they could go to a bar. During the time we were there, Ning took a nap while they tried to get the two month old baby to sleep, and since she wouldn't Ning had to breast feed her again and then Scott had to watch her while Ning ate, since she hadn't had a chance to. They sleep when their baby sleeps. Their lives revolve around the baby.

And as I said, I don't think Eugene understands that.

While we were there we went to the hot tub for a bit, then we ordered pizza and had dinner with Scott while Ning tried to sleep before we came back to Los Angeles.



Which brings me to rating Scott's hot tub in relation to the other three I've experienced on this trip. I think it would have to take second place, for a number of reasons:

1. It was just about the right temperature,
2. it was large,
3. it was outside, and the breeze was just about right
4. we had a great view of the mountains, and
5. the jets weren't too painfully strong.

The only reasons why it wouldn't take first place over the Days Inn Jacuzzi in Utah is because the pool next to the hot tub here in Pasadena isn't heated, making you want to avoid it, and because it didn't have multiple jets controlled by different dials.

But I'm not that picky. It was very nice.

Aaron and Kirsten loaned me a book about theories about make aggression in humans being possibly related to primate aggression, so I've been reading it. I'm about two thirds the way done. If nothing else, I like the title of the book: "Demonic Males."

Kirsten was suggesting that alcohol influences violent behavior, and said that when men get together and get drunk, their first impulse is to "blow stuff up" or "break things."

And she added, "And when women get together and get drunk..."

And I finished, "... they talk about their emotions and start crying."

We had a good laugh over that.

This morning it's raining. I don't know what we're going to do today. Eugene is sleeping, of course, so I can't ask him. Aaron and Kirsten have plans tonight, so maybe we'll be able to visit with Joe. We'll see.

February 2, 1998

4:22 p.m.

I'm in a bar right now in Pasadena called The Colorado. I've hung out here before; it's right by Scott's house and Joe has met me here before. Eugene is reading the newspaper and I noticed ads on the page he was looking at for penile enlargements.

"Achieve greater self-esteem though increased length and girth."

Tonight Joe is going to meet us at the Colorado; we're going to go to another bar to watch the Bulls game and then come back here to meet him

Joe is a character. I dated Joe nearly nine years ago, when we first entered college together. We were both engineers. (I told you it was a long time ago.) I think in many ways Joe reminded me of who I was, and shaped me into who I am. Joe is a workhorse. Joe is an extremely intelligent hard worker with a one-track mind. And yes, I think I had these tendencies before I met him, but I think he reminded me that it was possi-



ble to do work that you love precisely because you love it, not because it pays the rent or because it's what is expected of you or because it's what is acceptable.

And for that I will always be grateful.

The problem with dating Joe, at least at the time and at least for me, was that he the most religiously devout person I had ever met. (Ah, that atheist/Judeo-Christian combo never works...) He saved part of his income for his church, we would not do work or be social on the Sabbath, the whole nine yards.

And he had real issues with dating me.

But I can say honestly that he's one of the few people in this world that I respect, one of the few people in this world that I think I will ever respect. He was the person that introduced me to the writing of Ayn Rand (and some of you may think that's a bad thing, but I value it). He is the type of person who cares nothing about trends or fashion or music on the charts, but cares worlds about learning and debate and intelligence.

He's fascinating to talk to. His outlook on life is like no one's I've ever met. It's refreshing. Scary sometimes, but refreshing.

So this is why I like to still visit him. I know he doesn't think of me often, he can get lost in his work for literally months and forget that I'm coming into town, but it doesn't matter, because talking to him makes me feel so much better about life.

I never told him this, but in my office I had a few photographs framed on top of my bookshelf. One of them was of him. I had it there because it would make me feel better when I had to deal with the incompetence of my coworkers to be able to look at that photo and remember that there were people somewhere in the world with intelligence who valued hard work and reason and logic.

Well, he kind of lacked the logic thing when it came to religion. But in every other aspect of his life... Well, you know what I mean.

The first time I ever visited California, in fact, was on a trip I took just as Joe and I were breaking up. Oh, it was a nightmare. I was visiting for six days, and he had told me in advance to bring my nice dresses, because he was going to take me to these nice restaurants... And when I got in from the airport on Friday night he was late picking me up, and when I finally found him he told me we weren't going straight home, so I figured we were going to a club or something, and he told me he was taking me camping north of San Francisco.

Now, keep in mind that I was wearing a suede shirt and matching suede shoes, and at the time I abhorred camping.

Actually, I still do abhor camping. But I tolerate it to save money.

Also keep in mind that I was prepared for sightseeing in Southern California, that I only had six days to spend there, and that I had no clothes for camping, much less no blankets, sleeping bags or pillows.

So we drove about six hours (and we even had car trouble in the middle of the night on an empty highway) to get to a campsite with a bunch of his religious friends by four in the morning so they could wake up at dawn and drive to a nearby church.

I stayed at the campsite.

Did I mention that I had my period during all of this?

So there was only one other person out of the ten people there that didn't belong to his church, and one morning he hit on me and tried to kiss me while I was sleeping outside. I fell asleep outside the tents at a fire with a few other people, but by dawn apparently there was just me and this other guy, Dan. I opened my eyes and this man I barely knew was leaning over trying to kiss me, and when I gained my bearings I pushed him away.

Well, I know this is going to sound like something that only happens on "Melrose Place" or some other cheesy soap opera style drama, but apparently Joe got up from his tent to go to the bathroom, opening his tent and looking up just in time to see this Dan guy kissing me, and then turned back into his tent before he could see me pushing him away.

And although we were breaking up, that was still a big issue.

So he continued to treat me like crap for the rest of my trip. I was trapped at the campsite for four days out of six. Instead of taking me to the Pasadena fireworks show for Independence Day, he took me to some small suburb's show. Instead of showing me the sights, he took me to a movie. That was a bad move for many reasons:

1. I usually hate movies.
 2. I wanted to see Los Angeles; I could see a movie any time.
 3. I really hate action movies.
 4. He took me to "Die Harder With a Vengeance," which involved watching airplanes exploding.
 5. I was flying back home the next morning.
- Oh, I could have killed him.

He even overslept the morning I had to leave for the airport, so a friend of his had to drive me.

I could mention more. But I think you get the idea.

So I figure the least he owes me is the use of his hot tub.

He better have heated it.

February 2, 1998

7:59 p.m.

Okay, so we're watching the Bulls game at this bar called Moose McGillicuddy's. It reminds me of the last time we were in Southern California, because we took a day trip to Tiajuana. We went on a Monday afternoon, and decided to stop in a bar for a drink. Beers were two for one, so we got a bucket of beers, then the waiter brought us free shots of tequila. Eugene doesn't drink hard liquor, so I drank his for him. because I mean, when in Rome... I ended up drinking around 13 shots and we met a few people from San Diego and they brought is back to the United States and showed us where they worked... Which was a chain restaurant/bar called Moose McGillicuddy's.

So now we're at one of these Moose McGillicuddy's in Pasadena, and I have now become painfully aware of the fact that happy hours have now only been abolished from Illinois.

When I was in college, I remember Governor Edgar passing a law banning happy

hours - in other words, banning sale prices of liquor during specific hours of the day. So for the past eight years or so I've been used to not having a happy hour. So then I go into this Moose McGillicuddy's and they have a happy hour that lasts until 8:00 p.m. where all drinks are half off. So instead of beer I decide to go for their fruity mixed drinks. The first one was the melon moose. the second one was called purple haze. The one I now have is called the Hawaiian punch. I'm trying to stop myself from drinking more, because I'm used to drinking beer and I feel pretty tipsy.

So I'm sitting here trying to finish my last drink and Jacob, that's our waiter, he offers us another drink, on him.

I guess I'm not meant to be sober tonight.

Jacob just explained to us that he was an actor, and he just lost a part in "As The World Turns" because of his height. The man that got the part was three inches shorter than him.

And I stood up talking to our waiter, and he couldn't have been more than 6' or 6'1". But then again, Tom Cruise is 5'6".

That's Hollywood for you.

February 2, 1998

10:01 p.m.

Entry by Joseph Zlab

Hello, this is a quick jot from Joe. Janet is almost drunk and

my hot tub isn't working.... We are talking around beers with Eugene and his friend Scott. The music here at The Colorado has been swinging back and forth from hard rock, to Prince, to 70's. When I was in Seattle last new years CA passed the no smoking law. I'm happy to report that this bar isn't complying.....we already have too many rules. The conversation here has just taken a dive to third world whores. We will have to move on to another place.



February 4, 1998

5:46 p.m.

California passed a law that bars and restaurants have to be no smoking.

I think it's ridiculous that the government tries to tell individual bar owners how to run their establishments. If they want a smoking bar, then their employees can work somewhere else if they don't like it, and their customers can go somewhere else if they don't like it.

That's how the market is supposed to work. Good thing we have the government to come in and interfere, though.

Went to the Getty Museum Yesterday. An oil mogul donated a ton of money for an art museum to be built on the top of a hill in Los Angeles. The building is more beautiful than the art inside.

Kirsten went out with Eugene and I today; we attempted to go to the Museum of Science and Industry today but it was closed. Managed to see the La Brea Tar Pits. Eugene wanted to take a stick with some tar on it as a souvenir. I told him he had stolen

enough rocks taking up space in my car and I didn't want the pack rat to take a stick with some tar on it into my car.

He finally gave up on it.

Went to the beach. It was sunny today, but with the storms that have been around recently it was very windy. We saw on the Santa Monica Pier a film crew taping a 1-800-COLLECT commercial with the guy who used to play Ed Bundy on *Married With Children*. He was saying to a mime, "Dial 1-800-COLLECT. It's the only way to dial collect." He was wearing a windbreaker that said "Phone Patrol" in huge letters on the back.

As we were walking down the pier, away from the taping, Eugene kept saying that he should have gone right up to him and said (imagine a bad surfer voice here), "Hey, you look just like Ed Bundy."

Am getting a well-deserved and desperately needed break from Eugene tonight. Right now we're watching the Bulls game at a bar, but later Joe is meeting with me and we're going out.

February 7, 1998

9:44 p.m.

The remainder of our stay in Southern California ran a similar course to the first days. I hung out with Joe; we played pool and toured through Long Beach. We hung out with Kirsten and Aaron; we walked through the U.C.L.A. campus. Since we're going to be in California for another week, Friday morning we decided to drive up the coast into San Francisco for the weekend.

The drive wasn't much fun - it took about seven hours and it was raining 70% of the time. My friend Eve offered her home to us. Eve is a friend of my friend Brian Tolle's in Indiana (I'll be visiting him on my way back home). Eve is living in a studio with friend Eric, so there are two full-sized beds in the middle of the living room; there's not much room for anything else. Eve has stacked next to her bed ten piles of books, each about three feet tall, lined up against the wall. I hope we don't take up too much space while we're here and get on their nerves.

Eve has concerts to go to on each night we're staying here, so last night I didn't get to see her; we went to a bar everyone recommended which was down the street from Eve's apartment and found some of Eve's friends there. It was a Jazz club; the musicians were all older, and the grandmother playing drums fascinated us. We played Gin Rummy at our table.

After a while everyone decided it was time to move on. Some people wanted to go to a second bar, but since it was a farther walk and I had already spent enough money I declined and walked home. Eugene decided to go on with the remaining people.

So I expected him to be ringing Eve's buzzer at 2:30 in the morning, shortly after all the bars closed. I woke up every hour waiting for him. He never came home. So I figure that if he's:

1. in an alley,
2. in jail, or

3. in the hospital,

I have no reason to be angry. But if he crashed at a friend of Eve's and couldn't bother to call so no one would worry, then I think I have a right to be angry.

Not that I wanted him here; in fact, it was nice to have the break. But you know, for some reason I expect him every once in a while to be considerate of me. Silly me.

Oh, he just came home. Apparently he's not dead.

So when people get back home today we're supposed to tour San Francisco. There's a party tonight.

We'll see what mischief I can get into later.

February 10, 1998

9:55 a.m.

The next night in San Francisco I met up with my friend Camille. We used to work together at the, well, at the place I prefer not to talk about... In fact, she was the one who interviewed and hired me. During the interview she had to leave the room for a bit and she asked me to pick a tape to play on the stereo. I saw that the Cure's "Head on the Door" was there, so I played that. When she came back, she said that I made such a cool pick that I had to be hired.

I hope I was hired for more than that.

I think her title was Marketing Director, or something like that. That's the problem - in her field, and in quite a few others in that company - the boss would periodically decide that the company doesn't need a position like that, or a department like that, and rearrange everyone and fire a group of people. As I've said before, it's amazing that somehow that office manages to still run.

Camille is now at a company she's much happier in, and more successful at, and seems to be doing well. She even runs in marathons a few times a year.

So we got a chance to catch up . We went to an Ethiopian restaurant (I know, I'm going to have to get an Ethiopian cookbook or something- I have to learn how to make that bread), and then to a bar for a few drinks.

After saying good-bye to Camille I once again found myself hanging out with the under 21 crowd... Eve was at another concert and we knew of a party about a mile from us, so Eugene and I walked to the party. There was a cover, which we didn't expect and had no money for, so we managed to beg our way in, only for me to find that there were so many people there you couldn't stand anywhere without getting hit by someone walking by. We found a few people that we met the night before, so I felt comfortable in letting Eugene stay there while I just walked home.

Outside there were groups of people standing on the sidewalk, possibly feeling as claustrophobic as I did. I struck up a conversation with a few of them, and then I walked home.



The next day I waited for Eugene to get up, of course, and then we toured around again. By the evening we decided to go out to dinner, but first we visited Eric at Border's Bookstore, where he worked. Since I had been on a fruitless search for hard cover Ayn Rand books, I consulted Eve's magic fortune-telling eight ball toy (remember those?) and asked if Border's would have them (I was pretty sure they wouldn't - no one ever seems to).

The eight ball told me, "You can count on it."

So filled with a new sense of confidence in my quest (I mean, the eight ball doesn't lie, does it?) we went to Border's.

They had "Atlas Shrugged," "Anthem," "We The Living" and "The Journals of Ayn Rand," all in hard cover.

So of course I had to buy them all.

And I had to get a biography about her as well, written by a woman she worked with, a woman whose husband had an affair with Ayn Rand.

Should be an interesting read.

Managed to get a few other interesting books, and a nice discount, so I left happy.

I left with a lot less money, but I was happy.

The eight ball doesn't lie.

So then we went to dinner. "The Stinking Rose" was a place I felt I needed to take Eugene to, even if it was a chain. Their specialty is garlic (hence the stinking rose reference); garlic is in every dish, garlic is in the pesto and the olive oil on the table, garlic makes up some of the appetizers, there's even a garlic ice cream dessert.

And I like garlic.

I've had a theory about garlic. Once when Eugene and I were walking through the forest preserve, the mosquitoes were attacking Eugene and not me. I had eaten a ton of garlic, so I figured it was a natural repellent (don't you love the validity of my scientific experiments?). My theory is that this may be where some of the folklore from vampires came from - they are bloodsuckers, like mosquitoes, and according to legend they are repelled by garlic.

It's just a theory.

So we ate enough garlic at dinner to smell for days (it's been a day and a half, and I can still smell it on me), and we went back home to see Eve. She called from a friend's to confirm that she's home. So after a while, when she didn't show up, we consulted the magic fortune telling eight ball. We asked if Eve was coming home that night.

It said, "It looks doubtful."

The eight ball doesn't lie.

We left San Francisco the next day, Monday, all with probably seeing Eve for a total of 45 minutes.

I feel bad, that I came to visit on such a busy weekend for her. I wish I could have seen her more.

We made it into Pasadena Monday night and stayed at a bar down the street from Joe's house so he could meet us. I was reading a book by Carl Sagan at the bar, which I suppose is strange, and what I'd guess was the owner came up to us and started talking

about us reading in the bar. I explained that the book was basically about debunking pseudoscience - UFOs, astrology, clairvoyance, ESP and the like. She then proceeded to tell me that her father was a geologist and saw something up in the sky in the 50s that he couldn't explain - and he should know what everything is in the sky, because he's a geologist... (I'm not expecting you to understand this...) and her uncle flew planes for the Air Force and he saw strange things flying in the sky that he couldn't explain, and she's sure they were UFOs. And when she was three - and she told me this in great detail and with great sincerity - she woke up from her bed and looked out the window and saw what she explained as a bunch of glowing balloons in the sky. She then hurriedly ran downstairs to tell her grandmother to look out the window, and when she did the glowing balloons were gone. But she knows she wasn't dreaming. And she said that when she looked out the window she felt a warm feeling around her, like she was being loved (at this point she wrapped her arms around herself, like she was being hugged), and that she was sure there was a supernatural presence there.

Now, how can you argue with that?

I explained that alien abduction stories, and the things people go through in the aftermath, are very similar in description to stories and events of rape victims. I also explained that it seems that some therapists have either unknowingly or knowingly led their patients to an alien abduction story. I told her that some insects are actually slightly electrically charged and when they pass through a magnetic field glow - and that a swarm of these insects, moving quickly, changing formations and directions in an instant, glowing in a magnetic field and then disappearing as soon as they leave the magnetic field, could be mistaken for what people think are flying saucers. I mentioned that the U.S. military secretly works on aircraft that may be capable of doing things that the U.S. population can't imagine - and that it has to remain secret for military purposes. I also brought up the fact that the U.S. military at the time of her father's sightings and her balloon sightings, were doing tests with balloons to detect Soviet missiles and aircraft.

She didn't like my arguments at all. Apparently a geologist knows military secret aircraft, and she knows what are military tracking balloons and what are aliens spaceships, at the ripe old age of three.

I thought about the fact that when I was little I had a recurring dream that I could fly - that I remember these dreams so vividly, flying only in the house, down from the top of the stairs, turning before I hit the windows, gliding into the front room or the kitchen. I know I didn't fly, but I dreamt it enough - and it has been so long - that I can't remember that they were dreams. If I trusted my heart, and what I felt, I could say that I was sure that I did fly when I was a little girl. The dreams seemed that real. But I know as an adult, and even as a child I knew, that I couldn't fly, and that I didn't fly. My mind was just playing tricks on me.

I figured that if I told her that, though, I'd have to explain that what I meant by that was that maybe she, at 55, shouldn't trust what she thought she saw as the three year old.

But I'm sure that would have just made her angrier.

So I told her that for every sighting there are a number of possibilities. I'm not say-

ing that life on other planets doesn't exist. What I am saying is that the theory that these objects seen in the sky are aliens is the most farfetched of all the theories out there, and there is absolutely no evidence to support it. There is no acknowledged alien technology. There are no bona fide alien bodies. And all the theories should be tested before we come to a conclusion, and as far as I can tell, the least fantastic theory will probably be the one to prove to be true.

She didn't like that answer either.

I asked her that if aliens were so smart as to be able to make it here, how could they be so stupid as to then be hidden by the government? If they want to talk to the people, don't you think they would have been able to make themselves public by now?

Her answer was that they were working secretly with the government.

So I decided to give up on the argument.

If they're not playing on the same battlefield, if your opponent is not using logic or reason or anything that resembles the scientific method, how can you have a rational debate?

So I continued with my book.

So now we are in Pasadena again, this time staying at Joe's. I'm doing laundry now (you have no idea how happy that makes me). The only thing more important to me right now than clean clothes on my body are clean clothes on Eugene's body.

So I'm making him wash some of his clothes, too.

February 11, 1998

10:22 p.m.

Went back to the bar Moose McGillicuddy's. The bartender swore constantly and informed us that he thought all Chicagoans were ass-holes. We didn't do a thing to this bartender; I had no idea why he was acting that way. Eugene postulated to me that maybe the bartender wasn't really being mean; that maybe he just had Turrets Syndrome. Then the bartender handed me my drink, punctuating his "Here you go" with what I thought was the word "bitch." I fumed for a few minutes, then I asked him to repeat what he said. He said he couldn't remember. I flew off the handle. I had to walk away from the bar to cool off.

He gave us most of our drinks for free and apologized profusely.

I can't go back to that bar again.

February 12, 1998

5:59 p.m.

Both Eugene and I have been to Southern California before. When we were here last year we did all of the touristy things - I put my hands in Marilyn Monroe's hand prints in front of Mann's Chinese Theatre, Eugene did a one-armed push-up over Jack Palance's star on the boulevard, we drove as close as we could to the Hollywood sign, we visited the beaches. So now we're being a bit more laid back.

Trying to get a little reading done. I've noticed that ever since I've been on this trip I've had to drink a lot of water - I always feel dehydrated now. Don't know why.

Got a hold of my friend Steve, who lives in Las Vegas. I haven't talk to him in a long time, so we're going to visit him in a few days. It will be our break before we start camping in Arizona and New Mexico.

Joe lives in a house with friends of his, including his friend Kevin, his friend Andrew and Andrew's wife Jonelle, and Jonelle's brother. Drew and Jonelle have a cat - Sterling is her name. She's a cutie. It reminds me of what a pretentious snob Eugene's cat is back home.

In fact, over half of the places I've stayed at have had cats. The rundown:

First cat encounter: Denver, Colorado, at Dave Adrian's apartment. He had two cats, Soze (pronounced "so-say") and Kaiser. Two white cats with black patches on them. Cute cats. Dave moved into a new apartment while we were there, and one of the cats enjoyed walking into the soot-filled fireplace, which was apparently a new experience for both Dave and his cat. These are the cats that would try to hump each other when Eugene meowed at them constantly for two minutes. They're both fixed, but something about Eugene's voice when he



meowed at the cats would make the male try to jump the female, at which point the female would start fighting. It was cruel, granted, but it was good entertainment.

Second cat encounter: Christen's cat, also in Denver, who's name escapes me. For now I will call it "Psycho Cat." Psycho Cat was a mix between something and a Siamese - the cat had the color of a Siamese cat but the facial bone structure of a regular cat. Friendly cat, but the time of day it seemed to want to play the most was in the middle of the night. Batting a ball noisily around the hardwood floors was one of Psycho Cat's tricks, but Psycho's favorite game was batting at our feet while we slept through the blankets, making us bleed. Meowed incessantly if you tried to lock the cat out of your room. Charming cat. Christen just got the cat about a week earlier; it had come from an abusive home.

Third cat encounter: small grey cat in Utah. We were getting gas in front of a general store and there was this friendly cat trotting up to me and rubbing herself up against my leg. Wanted to take her along on the trip with us, but a cat in a cramped car with us for two months didn't sound like a good idea; besides, the cat had a collar. I played with the cat while Eugene filled the gas tank and we got supplies.

Fourth cat encounter: Macon, Eric's cat, in San Francisco. He was a male cat, white with brown and black patches. Friendly cat, but then again, if you've never dealt with Eugene's cat, you might not think that all other cats are nice, the way I do. Eugene kept calling the cat Macon Bacon. Helpful hint: litter boxes are more noticeable through smell if you live in a studio apartment. We'd put Macon on my feet when my feet were cold.

Fifth cat encounter: Sterling, Andrew and Jonelle's cat, in Pasadena, California. Meows more like a frog than a cat. It's cute. Sterling's trick is to get outside through a window, then jump up the back door until she reaches the window. Then you see this

little cat head through the window about four feet up, and when you look through the window you can see that she's holding herself up by clawing at the window frame in the door. I hear that if you open the door quickly enough, she will remain hanging while you swing the door open.

Eugene's cat doesn't do any tricks.

The closest thing to entertainment we get out of the cat is when she comes up to us and we are eating dinner. Now we're both vegetarians, and I like to put a ton of garlic in my food. You'd think that the cat (who's name is technically Sequoia, but we call her Poo) would learn by now that she wouldn't like our food. So when we walk toward us, I offer my plate for her to smell. As soon as she gets close enough and gets a whiff of garlic, she contorts her face and bolts for the other side of the apartment.

That reminds me of a cat my friend Sheri had in Arizona, called Jo Jo. Jo Jo's trick was to catch bugs and eat them, but once, when I was in the apartment by myself, the cat caught a bee. I thought nothing of it until it apparently stung her tongue, at which point she bugged her eyes out, contorted her face, then shook her head and flung the dead bee across the room. She made a few more interesting faces before she walked over to her water bowl.

But I'm getting off the subject.

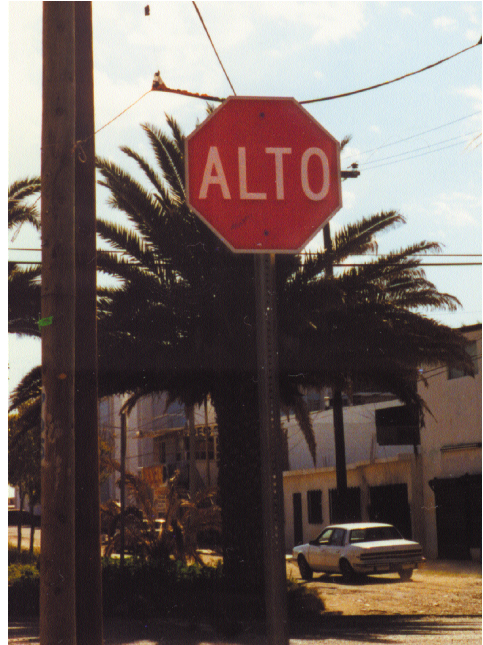
Sixth cat encounter: a cat owned by some lady in a small town about a half hour south of Tijuana. We were at a bar called Raul's having a beer when we saw this woman walking her cat, while it wore a leash. It wanted to go over to the bird cage, which had about twenty small birds in it, but the harness, which looked like one of those contraptions some people use for torture to hold back their toddlers with when they go to the mall.

Oh, but wait, I didn't tell you yet about my day trip to Mexico.



Chapter 10

Mexico



February 12, 1998

7:27 p.m.

I went to Tijuana the last time I was in Southern California with Eugene. Eugene didn't really have any great desire to go; he'd much rather see parks and forests and things that have nothing to do with mankind, whereas I prefer going to cities and the like.

That's just one of our little differences.

But the same way I get really excited about going to another state, I really wanted to go to Mexico so I could say I had been to a different country. Tijuana is the city right at the border, not a half-hour from Dan Diego, and since it was only two hours away from Los Angeles, I convinced Eugene to go.

I was told before we left that Tijuana was a dirty place. I had no idea how dirty it would really be, though. The streets are really tiny and not well maintained, the shops are crammed along the sides of the streets. There is a stop sign at every block. The Spanish word for stop is "alto." Men try to flag you into driving into their auto transmission shops. On a few streets you see a man with a camera and a donkey fully painted to look like a zebra, waiting for you to spend your money on a tourist photo in Tijuana. They even supply a sombrero if you'd like to wear one in your photo. There are a ton of bars, mostly dance clubs. Shop owners stand at the sidewalk and try to convince you to come into their store. The desperately want American money.

The first time we went there we park the car and went into a bar. We sat on the second floor at the corner, so we had a good view of the dingy street intersection. We ordered a beer, and the waiter told us that beers were two for one. We agreed, and a few minutes later a bucket of beers sat on our table. Then the waiter brought us a complimentary shot of tequila.

Eugene refuses to drink anything other than beer, and even though I don't do shots

and tequila is not one of my favorite hard liquors, I did the shot. Had the lime and the salt, too - the whole nine yards. Someone had to tell me what the order was for doing a shot of tequila - lick some salt from off your hand, do the shot and then suck on the lime. Actually, it didn't taste that bad.

I should have known then I was in trouble.

Three Americans sat at the table next to us, and when I saw the camera on their table, I figured they were like us and doing the touristy thing. I offered to take their picture, and then we started talking. Tammy, Janice and Justin lived in San Diego and were playing hooky on that particular Monday afternoon to go to Tijuana. So we decided to hang out for the rest of the day together.

We drank more beer. They kept giving us free shots. At one point, at bar number two, the bartender, wearing a sombrero and blowing on a whistle (apparently to create a more festive atmosphere) threw a napkin around my neck and poured tequila down my throat. When he was done he shook my head and smashed a paper cup on top of my head (apparently that's festive too). Eugene estimated that in addition to my beer I had about thirteen shots of tequila.

We were dancing to the Macarena in a bar in Mexico at four in the afternoon with these people we just met and being otherwise generally silly. They invited us to a bar that Tammy worked at in San Diego, so we went back there and danced and drank (actually, that was when I decided to drink water) until late at night. They offered to let us sleep in their apartment.



All in all, it was another example of the kindness of strangers and an experience that probably would never happen again.

But we went back to Tijuana again, just in case.

Joe suggested that we drive an hour south of Tijuana in to the country more, to a town called Ensenada, where it wasn't as dirty or as much of a tourist trap. Joe equated Tijuana with his armpit.

So we took his advice and arrived in Ensenada by about three in the afternoon yesterday, after paying almost six American dollars in tolls. (Yes, six dollars to go 60 miles. And they obviously don't use the toll money to repair the roads...). We discovered that Ensenada was still pretty dirty, and their beer was more expensive.

So we decided to drive along the highway frontage road in an attempt to circumvent the tolls. We only managed to avoid one of the toll stations. We periodically stopped at bars along the beach and had a beer. When getting into Tijuana border patrol stopped us and checked our papers and wanted to look through our car. Even though we look European, I suppose that having a dusty car with the back seats filled to capacity with junk makes you look a bit suspicious when you're approaching the U.S. border.

We parked on one of the main streets and went to a bar. The first bar had a circular slide on the top floor that went all the way down to the first floor of the bar. At this point we had been drinking enough that we couldn't even remember the name Ensenada - we thought it was "ensalada", and from then on called the town "salad town."



We watched someone working at one of the bars we were at add windows to the front porch since it was getting a little cooler. None of the windows actually fit in the spaces; the man, however, was equipped with pieces of wood so that he could cram the windows into place. One of them fell on a customer; it seems that the window wasn't stuffed securely into place.

This isn't a ritzy place. As I said before, they're dying for American money.

We finally managed to get some food, and then realized that we had so little cash that we'd have to go to a cash station. On Wednesday nights most of the bars charged a cover, but were all-you-can-drink bars, so once we paid to get in we wouldn't have to spend any more money. None of the bars would accept credit cards, so we figured all we needed was enough money to pay the cover.

We had two American dollars between the both of us. We needed eight.

So we went to the cash station. The dollar amounts (not American, mind you) available to withdraw were \$50, \$100, \$200 and \$1,500. In American, that roughly translates to six, twelve, 24 and 185 dollars. I couldn't understand why someone would withdraw the equivalent of only six dollars. But seeing that that was all I needed, we were in luck.

When we got into the bar I realized that all you could drink didn't just apply to beer but to mixed drinks as well.

So I thought it would be a good idea to switch from drinking beer to drinking fuzzy navel.

I should have known then I was in trouble.

We watched a poor guy sitting drinking by himself try to hit on a few women, each time failing miserably. I felt bad for him. Eugene kept suggesting that I hit on him, but I refused. At one point while I was dancing he came onto the floor and danced with me.

Now I know why the women were rejecting him.

He looked a little like a robot.

A robot having convulsions.

So I talked to a few people while I was there, and drank more, and when we decided to leave I discovered that I didn't feel too good. I fell asleep in the car as we got onto U.S. soil. However, Eugene's slowing down and turning into the gas station in San Diego didn't agree with my stomach at all, so I woke up and told Eugene that I thought

I was about to throw up.

He tried to drive over to a corner of the gas station parking lot so that I would be out of the way if I just got out of the car and threw up on the ground, but he never got the chance to stop. I immediately rolled down the window and just leaned out of the car and started vomiting while Eugene drove. I apparently continued vomiting while he drove around the entire parking lot, trying to get to a gas pump.

You would almost think that I was making a conscious effort to throw up on every part of their parking lot, but trust me, it was not my intention.

I tried to recover while Eugene filled up the gas tank. He told me he had to walk around my vomit to get to the store to pay for the gas. While he was paying, I got out of the car and did my best to clean the side of my car with paper towels and windshield washer fluid.

For being drunk and sick, I did a pretty good job.

After removing most of the hard alcohol from my body, I felt much better and managed to sleep the entire two-hour drive home. The next thing I remembered was Eugene stopping the car in Joe's driveway.

Every time I go to Tiajuana I drink too much and do something stupid.

I should learn my lesson.

Well, at least you know now that my reporting is honest, that I'm not covering up the embarrassing moments.

Actually, every time I get to the point where I'm too drunk and end up throwing up, it's usually so urgent that I end up puking somewhere very public.

At least I'm usually so drunk when I do it that I'm not even embarrassed by vomiting in public.

In a nutshell, Tiajuana is pretty much an alternate universe, the way that Las Vegas or New Orleans is, much on a much different level.

And if you can't hold your liquor, just don't go there. Trust me.



Chapter 11

Heading to Arizona

Mohave Desert & Las Vega

February 16, 1998

6:51 p.m. MT

So we spent the last nights of California with Joe and with Aaron and Kirsten. I had a chance to have some good antagonistic conversations with Joe (he likes to push my buttons by telling me about how women are inferior to men - he doesn't believe it, but he likes pushing my buttons), and I got a chance one more time to hang out with Aaron and Kirsten.

We visited with Scott for one last time, and then we left for camping Saturday morning. Our plan was to stay at a campground in the Mohave Desert for Saturday night so that none of my friends had to put up with us on Valentine's Day, and meet up with my friend Steve Oster in Las Vegas by Sunday. We arrived in the Mohave Desert by nightfall. There was a sign on the road telling us to be careful for there were cows and burros in the area and they could cross the street at any point. The gravel roads were difficult to drive on. Certain kinds of clay and dirt, when driven on repeatedly, start receding in grooves that resemble the waves of ocean water on the sand below. These grooves cross the dirt and gravel roads, and feel like you're driving on the grooved patches of road before you hit a tollbooth - except this is a lot stronger and a lot more painful. After over ten miles of this ugly road we made it to the campsite. Not only was there a charge to camp, but also it was also full - with big buses and recreational vehicles. It occurred to us that in the desert, on the dry ground, there may not be as many patches to even be able to camp on, because there are sporadic plants keeping the ground from blowing away.

So we continued on. Eugene was suggesting a hotel, which surprised me. before we managed to get to the second (last) campsite, it started to rain.

In the desert. Yes, the Mohave Desert probably gets between three and nine inches of rainfall a year, and we happened to attempt to camp there on one of the few nights

during the year where it actually rained.

So we agreed on the hotel idea. We didn't know where one was, but we assumed we'd be able to find a small hotel just outside of the park, on the north side. So we continued driving.

That's when I noticed that the car looked like it was overheating. The gauge was heading toward that little "H", instead of staying in the middle. We stopped the car and waited for it to cool down. We noticed that it was when we drove slowly that it started to overheat - which we pretty much needed to do to get around the grooves in the road and the crevasses that were like gigantic potholes in the dirt road. We started moving again, and it seemed okay. Then the fog set in. Could barely see twenty feet in front of us. Which of course made us want to drive slowly.

Which wasn't an option.

Did I mention that while driving through the fog Eugene last minute had to slam on his brakes because there were about ten cows crossing the street in front of us?

Eugene kept telling me, "Well, at least we're having an adventure."

It didn't make me feel any better.

Then it started raining harder, and lightning bolts started flashing around in the mountains. It's strange to see lightning near the mountains; it's not something that regularly occurs. So I was marveling at the lightning, and then I realized that we were the only piece of metal in the middle of this desert for miles. Eugene suggested that as long as we were not touching metal, being hit by lightning wouldn't kill us. Comforting.

So then we proceeded and Eugene had to mention that in this rainstorm in the middle of the desert, surrounded by mountains, there is a possibility of a flash flood. I asked him if he was trying to make me feel bad.

A flash flood could mean a number of things, but the worst-case scenario would be that we would be floated off the road, our car would be flooded...

But that's just my mind imaging the worst.

So it finally started to clear up and we didn't need to have the wipers on their super-hyper-fast speed, and then the fog cleared up so we could see and could use our high beams again. Then we got onto something that resembled a real road and we didn't have to worry so much about potholes or grooved roads.

So I was feeling better.

So we continued driving and got out of the park and couldn't find a hotel anywhere, so Eugene pushed onward and I tried to get some rest. Within an hour we were in Nevada, which was not in our plans. We stopped at a casino/hotel, and discovered that most every hotel in all of Southern Nevada, including Las Vegas, was full, considering that it was Valentine's Day as well as a long weekend in honor of President's Day. Great.

So Eugene continued pressing on, stopping at pretty much every exit and asking someone in some hotel if they had room, and each time he got the same answer. By the time he had given up, it was after midnight and we were in Las Vegas.

I knew I couldn't call Steve, I didn't want to disturb him at that hour, so I suggested a National Recreation Area that I saw on the map that looked like it was ten or twenty miles away from Las Vegas. We drove to it, discovered that it was BLM land (Bureau

of Land Management - which means it can be used for free by anyone for things like camping, even if there is no campsite), and drove to a viewpoint and slept in the car.

It was very uncomfortable. I woke up at dawn with the sunlight and let Eugene sleep for a while. By Seven thirty Sunday morning we drove to a small bar to get a beer and breakfast.

As I said, I'm on vacation.

And after the past night, I needed a beer - even if it was eight o'clock on a Sunday morning.

I've noticed on this trip that there is a repetition of drinking beer on Sunday mornings.

So after breakfast we decided to go to the Hilton off of the strip and act like we were staying at the



hotel so we could use the hot tub. After sleeping in the car, I thought we deserved it.

I remember the hot tub from my two past trips to Las Vegas. It's about 30 feet in diameter, the jets are perfect, it's not too hot and the steam doesn't get in your face because the outdoor breeze whisks it away.

Or something like that.

So we walked out to the pool deck. I noticed a few things:

1. The pool was empty.
2. It was windy as Hell.

But the hot tub was open so we changed and got in. The hot tub was as good feeling as I remember, but we estimated that the winds were about 30 miles per hour. The winds were actually splashing water in our faces.

But we stayed anyway.

We passed the strip and I said my chant when we passed The Mirage (Oh, my God, it's a Mirage).

We went out for lunch at some dive (there was no point in going to somewhere on the strip - even though they have good food specials there, they're all meaty, you know, lobster and steak meals, so there's not much point in vegetarians going there to eat). After lunch we went to the Luxor to watch the Bulls game. Steve met us at the Luxor at 5:00. We watched the people next to us lose \$900 on the Bulls game because the Bulls didn't beat the spread.

This is why I don't gamble.

We went back to Steve's mom's apartment where we met Steve's mother and grand-

mother. His mother is a very nice woman; she even wanted to read to me a poem she wrote to see what I thought about it. Steve's grandmother is the spunkiest grandmother I've met in a long time. At one point she announced, "Don't go there - talk to the hand." I gave each of them a copy of my first book. They seemed pleased.

We all went to a casino near their home together called The Reserve. It was decorated something like the Rainforest Cafe - the ceilings were painted like the sky, there were fake trees all over the place, jungle noises and fake animals along the walls.

Cosmopolitans were only \$3.00 each. That made me happy.

So Steve and Eugene and I sat at a table and talked about all sorts of things, mostly politics and philosophy, which is surprising, because in the past Steve and I have been known to lock horns and raise our voices and generally want to kill each other. Eugene took a gambling break and played Texas Holdum (which is a version of poker). He only lost about \$10 in an hour and a half, and I'm sure he drank more than \$10 in free drinks while he was gambling at the table. He played the slots for a bit and came out \$12 ahead.

Not a bad night.

So Steve and I caught up and had a good time. I haven't talked to him for about three or four years; so it was nice to see him again.

We went back to Steve's mom's apartment and hung out. We visited their outdoor hot tub, which wasn't half bad, considering the cool breeze. Eugene looked like he was about to pass out in the hot tub, so we decided to go in. They made food and we crashed.

In the morning we headed out again. I said good-bye to Steve and the tackiness of Las Vegas. We drove past the Hoover Dam again, and shortly afterward we were approaching Arizona in our quest to see the Grand Canyon.



Chapter 12

Arizona



February 16, 1998
8:28 p.m.

My grandmother died while I was finishing my first semester of school sophomore year at the University of Illinois. I was nineteen years old. She was moving to Phoenix to live with my Aunt Rose and Uncle Pete. She was leaving for Arizona the day before I came home from taking my finals before Christmas.

I called her on a Wednesday; she was leaving Friday. I talked to her and swore up and down that I would go to Arizona the next summer. My friend Sheri was going to school there at Arizona State University, so now I had two excuses to make the trip. We said good-bye. I cried when I got off the phone with her; I didn't know why, but I thought that this may have been the last time I would talk to her. You know how easy it is to sometimes lose touch with family and friends when they move away. The next day my grandmother went into the hospital; she died two days later, the morning I finished my last final and drove back home to the Chicago area. My family didn't call me to let me know she was sick because they knew I had to be taking my finals anyway; there was no point in their opinion to tell me and give me so much pain when I was far away and there was nothing I could do about it.

That was when I had first decided to see Arizona. My grandmother wasn't there, but my friend Sheri went to Arizona State University, so I visited her when I was about to turn twenty. I hung out with her in the middle of June, when Phoenix reached a record high temperature - 122 degrees.

I remember the first day I was there I went to their pool to lay out and get some sun. As I was lying there I smelled a familiar smell, but it took me a few moments to place it. It was the smell from inside of a dry heat sauna. Mmm, burning flesh smell. I left after I smelled that in twenty minutes.

The rest of the trip, leaving the house went like this: open the front door, quickly lock it behind you, walk briskly to the car, get in as quickly as you can, leave the doors open while you start the car, and blast the air.

When I got back, I said that the “but it’s dry heat” argument is crap.

The first night I was there Sheri invited me out with two male friends to play pool. It wasn’t a date, mind you, we were just hanging out. So when we leave Sheri drives these two men back to their house, and since I was tired I stayed in the car while she walked in for a moment. I rolled my window down so I could feel the cool night air while I waited. They went in the house and I closed my eyes. I must have fallen asleep, but I have no idea for how long. The next thing I knew was that there was a man leaning in my window, leaning over trying to kiss me. It was one of Sheri’s friends. I jumped; I think I screamed. I swear, I gave him no signals. I had no idea where this came from. He acted like this was natural, so I asked him to get out of the window and I got out of the car. I went into the house and tried to hint to Sheri repeatedly that I wanted to go, but she didn’t quite get the hint. It was a miserable experience.

While I was visiting my friend Sheri on that trip I met a friend of hers, Blaine, who wasn’t irritating and all, and we got along well. We hit it off, and for the eight months or so after my first visit I visited Arizona when I could to see Blaine and Sheri. Since then Blaine and I have lost touch and Sheri moved back to the Chicago suburbs to marry her high school sweetheart.

But now that I’m here, a good deal north of Phoenix, all I can think is that it’s sure as Hell not 120 degrees. We’re on the north side, at a relatively high elevation again, and there’s snow everywhere. We’re in Williams, Arizona, just about 50 miles west of Flagstaff and 50 miles south of the Grand Canyon. We ate in this town at a Mexican restaurant called Pancho McGillicuddy’s. I swear, I can’t shake that name McGillicuddy’s.

And where we stayed, there’s a Jacuzzi. I feel the need to go over our hot tub ratings and update them. Please allow me to update the original list:

1st place: Days Inn, Torrey, Utah. Large hot tub, four dials for jets, and it was adjacent to the pool. Well ventilated. Nice temperature.

2nd place: Scott Basinger’s community hot tub, Pasadena, California. Outdoor. A little hot, but good breeze made it better. Nice view of mountains.

3rd place: Las Vegas Hilton, Las Vegas, Nevada. It would have ranked higher except for the arctic high-speed winds splashing water in our face. 30-foot wide hot tub had perfect jets. Nice view. Go there when the weather is better.

4th place: Steve Oster’s mom’s apartment hot tub, Henderson, Nevada. Good temperature. It was small, but there was a nice breeze. Good temperature. And it’s nice to be able to use a hot tub at midnight.

5th place: Travelodge Hotel hot tub in Williams, Arizona. Needs better ventilation in the room, but otherwise nice jets, good temperature. Not too big or too small. Two jet controls. Not bad.

6th place: Doug’s Place Hotel in Tropic, Utah. Simple hot tub, pre-made plastic model. Outside in the snow, which was interesting, but the water should have been

warmer.

7th place: Dave Adrian's apartment in Denver, Colorado. Sorry, Dave... The tiles were falling into the hot tub, the lack of ventilation burned my eyes and the water was too cold. Eugene and I guessed that if I sat in a bathtub and Eugene farted it might be better than Dave's hot tub.

Well, no. That would be worse.

Speaking of hot tubs, this one here in Williams closes at 9:30, so I'm going to go into the hot tub now before it closes.

February 16, 1998

11:23 p.m. Mountain Time

I'm in this hotel now and there's this dog show on (Eugene put it on) and there's this adorable mini Terrier (I think) trotting along. It was a little ball. Now there's a highland terrier, all black. His face is too skinny. All the lightweight dogs get picked up from the table and put onto the floor by their nape and tail. It's funny. This terrier is shaggy under the belly, so it's furry all the way to the ground and looks a bit like a mop. Other dogs are shaved in such strange ways. They had a puffy face, but a shaved top. One dog looks like a sheep.

When we were in the hot tub room we started singing "King of the Road" and the hotel manager came in and told us to please be quiet because it's late.

I didn't think we sang that poorly.

As soon as I started heading west I've had to start drinking a lot of water. Since Denver - Nevada and California and Arizona - I've had to drink lots of water. I came back from the hot tub and I drank three glasses of water.

February 18, 1998

1:05 a.m.

Yesterday, it was my parent's wedding anniversary. It's hard to keep these things in mind when you have no concept of what day of the week it is, much less what day of the month it is. I have to call them in the morning.

Went to the hot tub this morning before we headed out to see the Grand Canyon. Now, I was told by other people that Bryce Canyon was almost better than the Grand Canyon, so when I went there I was pretty much expecting to not be as excited about it as I have been about other national parks I have been to on this trip.

I was wrong. It was a cold morning, and snow set in so visibility was reduced after we were there a while, but it was beautiful. We drove up to the south rim and followed it east. It was pretty magnificent.

We drove to the Sunset Crater Volcano, which was less than an hour away from the Grand Canyon and checked out the large deposits of black lava all over the national forest.

We knew we wouldn't be able to camp so we found a place to stay on the edge of Arizona, before we crossed the border into New Mexico. We checked over our game plan and decided to visit Denver again for the weekend after leaving Albuquerque, and

then we could possibly head through Kansas and Oklahoma before moving in to Texas. We called Dave Adrian to confirm that would be okay.

Uh oh... This means he better get to work and having that Jacuzzi cleaned up.

Then we hung out in a bar for a bit and watched some classic Fox network television - like "Deadly Car Chases Three" and the like.

Then we got a cheap hotel and Eugene said he was going out for a beer and that he would be back at eleven.

He took the room key and my car, which had my luggage in it.

At ten minutes to one in the morning I was calling the police, asking if they pulled over a car with my license plate or if they had a record of any accidents.

As I was hanging up the phone I heard Eugene at the door.

He didn't crash. He was fine.

Oh, I love the consideration I get.

He swore up and down that he said he'd be back after eleven, not at eleven, and one in the morning was after eleven at night. That I shouldn't worry.

Well, I couldn't leave the hotel room, because he had my key. I couldn't change for bed, because he had my luggage. I couldn't go anywhere anyway, because he had my car.

Oh, what was I thinking...

Tomorrow we leave for New Mexico, for the poetry show I am going to be in there Thursday night. But not before I call my parents and wish them a happy belated anniversary.



Chapter 13

New Mexico

February 19, 1998

2:31 p.m.

As we crossed the border into New Mexico from Arizona, the Indian villages immediately disappeared. I noticed as we drove through the last miles of Arizona that there were trading posts and tons of places to purchase genuine Indian arts and crafts. When we entered New Mexico, the tee pees as well as the mountains disappeared.

Our destination was Albuquerque, home of the National Poetry Festival this week. I am performing in a show with five other Chicago writers tonight, and last night I got into town so that we could all get together and discuss the details of our show.

Well, then I found out that the last member of our show wouldn't be in town until today, just hours before the show, so it didn't really matter.

I found the bookstore we were supposed to meet at and found Krystal and Nina as well as Aaron, so we had two thirds of our show performers together. We tried to do a little discussing, and then an open mike started in the space we were in so we read to the group. Eugene took off with the car to drop our belongings off at the house we were staying at, so there would be room in the car to cart people around in.

Joel Matthews was letting all of the Chicago people stay at his place. The side door was perpetually open, since no one knew when one person or another would have to get in. He has a big dog, whose name escapes me, that wants to sniff you and play with you all the time.

It's a college abode. There are ashtrays filled to the rim with cigarette butts on every cocktail table. There's a light blue vinyl covered couch.

It's eclectic.

So we read at the open mike and tried a vain attempt to organize our stuff at Joel's and then we went to a café/bagel shop called Fred's Bread for a testosterone-filled all-

male poetry reading, where Aaron read as well. And for the first time in three and a half months, I wrote a poem.

I don't know; I just got tired of hearing all these whining poets talk about how their lives suck, and seeing them all drink to excess (even more than me, mind you), and then I started thinking about musicians like Kurt Cobain and Michael Hutchence (INXS) who killed themselves, apparently because being married and having infant children and being filthy rich and madly famous and adored by millions of fans is just too awful of a life.

And I hear all these songs about taking drugs to relive the stress or the boredom, and about people killing themselves, or bitching about how little their life matters.

So I wrote a poem, **True Happiness in the New Millennium** .

So after watching the male-fest at Fred's Bread we found Jason (the fifth member of the Chicago team) and made it back to Joel's house and attempted to discuss how we should do the show. Still missing the last performer, however, made us hold off on a schedule for our work. Then we headed to the main events for the evening: an evening of poets from around the country performing at a bar called The Launch Pad (which is where we're performing tonight, by the way).

Eugene was pleased that we were finally going to a bar.

So we watched performers read; some were blatantly racist and bothered me, some ranted on about depressing stuff too much, and one Lithuanian guy wrote short humorous pieces about being drunk of having sexually transmitted diseases or getting in trouble with the law. It was fun.

Jason wanted to stay for the second performance, which was starting after midnight, and since the rest of us had been inundated with poetry for over eight hours and were tired from traveling, we decided to go back to Joel's and get some sleep. Some of the performers were reading to a high school in the morning, so we needed our rest.

Eugene took my car without saying good-bye, or even asking if he could take it, to go to another bar for drinks. I was furious, once again, and everyone pretty much agreed that Eugene has to make sure that when he attempts to communicate something with me, he makes sure we're on the same wavelength.

Then we went to sleep. Then, at a time I can only estimate at three or four in the morning, Jason and Joel and twenty other people came in and started smoking and playing music and drinking and yelling.

While we were trying to sleep in the living room, on the couches.

Some of them tried to ignore us. Some of them were apparently so out of it that they probably didn't even notice us. Some of the people felt bad and eventually they moved the party to another place.

Jason left with them.

Jason had to read at the high school and leave before eight in the morning.

Krystal and Eugene and I were dying. We couldn't believe these people. I guess I'm too used to traveling around and I need more rest, but I don't know how you could be expected to perform two shows the next day, one at eight in the morning, when you sleep for two hours and get completely drunk in the process. Ah, the life of a poet.

So we managed to wake up this morning, despite our interruptions, and I went out and got my hair cut off. It falls above my chin. I needed to cut it all off - for the past month and a half I have been living out of a suitcase and my car, with barely any makeup, no bathroom to call my own, no hair style, and dirty jeans and sweatshirts to go hiking in.

I haven't felt very glamorous lately, in other words.

So I'm happy I got my hair cut.

Today we're going to go to a party hosted by Manic D. Press, a well-known label. Then there's another performance, but I think we're going to have to miss it in order to have some time to prepare for our show after Eric, the last person missing from our show, arrives from the airport.

Jason brought a digital video camera, and since I have room on my laptop computer we're going to try to make a computer video of our show.

And Eugene is trying to figure out how to make it to a bar so he could watch the Bulls game tonight.

Granted, there are only eighty basketball games a year, and there's only one opportunity to see me perform at a national show... But come on, it's the Bulls. How can I compete with that?

After all the time we've been stuck together, and all the times we've wanted to kill each other, I don't expect any more from him anymore.

Well, anyway, my point was that our group performance is tonight.

February 20, 1998

9:52 a.m.

I sold some of my books to a bookstore yesterday, got cash and a book on mythology in return. We watched a show at Fred's Bread again and then we all went back to the house to finish cleaning up our show. Jason had work to do, but we knew what he was reading so we pieces him in an printed out a copy of the show order for him



The six of us - Jason, Eric, Aaron, Nina, Krystal and myself - would each perform one poem, round-robin fashion, without introducing ourselves. Then in the second round, the performer before you would introduce you with a cute little biography. I asked Jason to introduce me, because I thought he had the best chance of getting it right, since he knew me. Then the third round of poems was not in an order, because everyone had a certain amount of time, not a certain number of poems (I had a few more poems, for example, because I chose shorter poems). We all sat on the floor at the back of the stage while one performer was at the front with the microphone.

The show before us was running late, so we started late. The show went well - there were no mishaps that the audience was aware of in our poetry (that's the nice thing about performing your own work - if you forget a line, you just ad lib it until you get back onto track).

The introductions that we gave each other, though, were entertaining. Most everyone read the biography for the person after them, because we didn't all know each other. Nina was busy eating an apple she used as a prop in her previous poem, so her introduction for Jason was poor at best. Jason pulled off mine, and I pulled off Eric's (I thought it would be nice not to mess up someone's introduction), but everyone else had to read bios off a scrap of paper, and Aaron even said, "I can't read your handwriting" about Nina's biography.

Actually, although unpolished, it was kind of funny.

I noticed Eugene taking pictures with my camera during the show, but I noticed that one he had his finger over the flash, and I noticed on a few other occasions the flash not even going off.

Well, we'll see what develops.

Oh, sorry, that was awful. Forgive me.

There was some real talent in our group. There were a few parts that didn't flow very well, but we were six different people who didn't know each other until four hours before the show, all performing in different styles.

After the show was over people kept coming up to us and congratulating us. Everyone seemed to like the show. Some people would come up to us and say things like, "Chicago poets ROCK!", which I thought was kind of funny.

After the show we went to a midnight reading of two female poets, but Eugene wasn't very up to it, and after a while, neither was I.

I'd had enough poetry for a while.

I know Krystal thought I was being kind of strange by not wanting to be around, because she hosts an open mike in Chicago and usually I'm always out performing in Chicago. But when I quit my job, a part of the reason why I wanted to travel was that I just needed to get away. I needed to get away from the unhealthy work environment I was in. I needed to get away from the weather. I needed to get away from the Chicago poetry scene, too - I needed to get away from all these people, including myself, showing off, looking for some glimpse of a spotlight. It got very old by the time I was leaving to travel. I had decided I didn't even want to read anymore.

People keep asking me while I'm on this trip, especially here, how my shows have been going on the road. I have to explain to them that this Chicago show I did last night has been and will be my only show during this entire trip. That I was taking this trip to travel, and experience new things, not stand in front of a microphone in assorted bars and read poetry.

This surprises people.

Either way, it was enjoyable to do the show last night, and it was nice to know that people liked hearing my work. Trying to get a bunch of drunk poets together to actually prepare for the show is another thing altogether.

I managed to get a bed to sleep in last night - Joel, then man who lives in the house we're staying at, was sleeping somewhere else last night, so I got to sleep in his bed. I even had a pillow.

And no Eugene.

He snores. Did I mention that?

So this morning I sit here typing again, and in an hour or so I'll wake Eugene up so we can pack the car and head back to Denver to visit Dave and Matt. Looking back, I really enjoyed being social with them. I look forward to seeing them again, to being able to just go out without having to schmooze with other nationally recognized poets, and without having to get on stage.

Actually, it's not the performing that bothers me, but the schmoozing. I guess it's nice to hear when someone I've never met before recognizes my name, but to me it all seems like we're playing little game, like we're a bunch of people in Hollywood trying to get our big break.

And sometimes it just seems silly.

All in all, New Mexico has a good alternative portion of town (although I can't honestly say if that's because of the people living here or the people who came into town for the National Poetry Festival). There are lots of coffee shops and independent bookstores and thrift stores. There are mountains on the horizon, although I can say they're not quite as impressive as Colorado's. The southwestern art is getting on my nerves, however... I'm a more modern-day artist and have never found more than a historical value in learning about the functionality of other cultures. (Most of the original artwork for Indian tribes around here decorated functional items.) Although there is a value in studying the past, the past is where it should remain in my opinion, and where some people wish to go back to their roots I prefer to look toward the future.

So yes, I do look forward to Denver. It will be good to laugh again.

Chapter 14

Colorado part two

February 22, 1998

11:47 p.m.

Well, it's Sunday, we're about to leave for Texas in a few hours... I've just been so busy being social that I haven't bothered to write. There's not much to say about Denver that I didn't mention before...



We drove in Friday afternoon and managed to go through rush hour traffic as well as experience two gapers delays in the expressways into Denver. As soon as we got into town Eugene decided he wanted to get Taco John's, and since I figured we'd be going there pretty much every day while he had the chance to get his favorite fast food, I told him to go on without me. Matt was working, so Dave and I hung out while Eugene satiated his very strange tastes.

We went out Friday night, but since we had been driving all day, we only got a beer at the PS Lounge before getting some beer and wine and deciding to go home to play pool and watch a movie. We watched "Blue Velvet" (I haven't seen that in a while, so it was fun), and we played pool for hours. Eugene was tired from the drive, so he went to sleep before we did.

In the morning Eugene and Matt overslept, so Dave and I went swimming. You have no idea how good it felt to be immersed in water again. I don't know what it is, but I have this love of large bodies of water. (Maybe my ranting about the hot tubs may have tipped you off to that fact, but you know...) I love watching the Gulf of Mexico

when I visit the beach near my parent's house. I love hanging out near Lake Michigan when I'm in Chicago. Whenever we've been climbing or hiking, I've always wanted to stop and enjoy the streams, the rivers, the dams, anything. And so far, this is only the second pool I've been in on this trip. It wasn't too cold; it was indoors, and it seems that no one ever used it.

Okay, that was a long tangent. Sorry. So as I was saying, Dave and I swam in the morning, then we woke everyone up and went out to breakfast. I decided to make the trip more interesting by drinking many cups of coffee (I don't usually drink coffee), so for the rest of the afternoon I was jumping around and acting a little like Beavis when he drinks too much caffeine on television.

So we decided to go to a few bars Saturday afternoon, because that seems to be what we do best. Well, Eugene and Dave had ulterior motives in going to bars - they wanted to play "Eleven UP" on Megatouch screens.

Allow me to explain.

Have you ever seen those smaller video games that sit on top of bars, which have mostly card games in them? Not full standing machines, but small television screens with things like video poker on them? Well, one of the games is called "Eleven UP," and the machine lays out a bunch of cards, and you have to remove the top cards when their numbers add up to eleven. Well, the first time we were in Denver Dave got Eugene hooked on this card game, and so they were at it again, trying to find these stupid machines to play their game.

So I broke down and played against Dave at this bar/cafe called "Netherworld," and I beat him. Actually, I just missed the high-score board.

I don't think he liked that.

So we hung out and played more games and then we decided to go to this bar we hadn't been to before, called "Gabor's." They were playing swing music, and at four in the afternoon there was a woman there dressed up in a floor-length red dress. Well, the highlight of our adventure there was that when Eugene went to the bar to order drinks, the Lady in Red started talking to him and offered to show him a few dance moves. Now, I'll preface this with saying that the Lady in Red was apparently drunk, and we could tell that she wasn't giving him much time to understand the moves before she was doing them. So we hear her say, as Eugene is trying to follow her lead, "Okay, now spin me... Okay, now cross your arms over your head... Keep holding my hands... Now put your foot back... Now dip me."

Well, it was about one nanosecond after the words "dip me" came out of her mouth when she was actually dropping herself to the ground, and I don't think Eugene had any idea that that was the Lady in Red's intention as she was giving him instructions, because he tried to hold her up, but she just fell right to the ground.

She got up and said sternly, "We'll try that one more time."

In explaining to us afterward what was going through his head, he gave us the quote of the day:

"I didn't think she was going to go down that far. I was like, 'Whoa.'"

Saturday night Eugene decided to drive to Boulder to see his friend Paul, and so I loaned him me car. Since I was then carless, Dave and I went out for Ethiopian dinner, then to the Purple Martini (remember the place Eugene complained to the bartenders at, because the dropping of the bottles into the trash can “startled” him?) to meet his friend.

I don't know his friend's name. His nickname is Snook.

I'm only guessing at the spelling.

Snook is a character. He seems to want to get into trouble. He told me that because he has a receding hairline he overcompensates for it by being overconfident.

At least that was his explanation.

How was he overconfident? Well, he tried to tell me, for example, that he has an average penis, you know, it's only eight inches long.

I thought it was best to just avoid that conversation altogether.

He gently pushed the back of a woman's leg who was standing near our table, just to see he have to react to her knee no longer being locked so that she won't fall over.

Snook is a character, as I said.

I could tell Dave didn't like the yuppie crowd, so we left and called it a night.

Well, I didn't like the yuppie crowd either, to be honest.

Sunday both Dave and I again got up before Matt, so we went swimming again. Eugene wasn't back, so Dave and Matt and I went out to breakfast and hung out for a while. When Eugene got back we all decided to go to Gabor's again and play pool, where Dave and Matt met a man (Shawn) who said that I looked like Dana Scully from the X Files.

I don't know what it is about Denver, but I should just place an ad somewhere that



states that no, I don't look like her.

Eugene tried to go to Taco John's once more Sunday night, but it was closed by the time he got there. So we ordered pizza and watched X Files. Eugene then decided to get a few hours of sleep before we left for Texas, since it would be a good long drive.

Which take me to now.

Well, really, the weekend was more interesting than that. I got to hang out more with Dave and Matt, which is always a treat. Matt is hysterically funny, and the more I talk to Dave the more I realize how alike we are

Oddly enough, that doesn't scare me. It's nice.

What I mean by that is that at times I think I'm the only person in the Universe who thinks the way I do about life, and people, and work. And I have to admit, sometimes over the weekend when Dave would say something, I would think, "Those words could have come out of my mouth."

And it's just nice to know that someone else out there sees the way the world could be.

So in a few hours we leave for Texas. That should be a fun drive. We leave at four in the morning. Eugene decided that a more efficient route would be to take smaller highways and not expressways, so we're not going to see Kansas or Oklahoma, like I thought we would.

Not like the view would be that phenomenal anyway, now that we're going to be east of the mountains again.

This should be fun.

By the way, Eugene tried to do his meowing cat trick with Kaiser and Soze again, but they seem to be on to him.



Chapter 15

Texas

February 24, 1998

7:38 p.m. Central Standard Time

Yesterday morning we left Denver at 4:30. I felt bad that we ended up waking Dave up. At one of the gas stations I rearranged some of the things in the back seat so that I would be able to lean my seat back a little and hopefully be able to sleep. At 7:30 we stopped for breakfast at McDonald's. Got two egg and cheese biscuits and a hash brown. Then we were on the road again.

We entered Texas at about 10:30 in the morning. We still had a good ten hours of driving to go. The mountains were now gone from our landscape; small oil pumps in the fields, rhythmically pumping back and forth, eventually replaced them. Almost as soon as we got into Texas, we noticed the signs for Propane. And we noticed that gas prices were a lot cheaper - less than a dollar a gallon. In fact, as we drove through some of the small towns in Texas on our way to Austin, we even saw middle-aged men standing in their driveways in groups with their beers in their hands and their pick-up trucks in the driveways.

The only thing that the show "King of the Hill" has wrong about Texas is that in the cartoon it doesn't look quite so poor.

I slept on and off throughout the day. I would get warm - it's actually warm for once on this trip - and as soon as I would fall asleep, Eugene would turn the air off, because it was cold. That would then wake me up, of course, so I would get up and turn on the air until I could fall back asleep again.

This cycle continued for about ten hours.

We stopped in some small bar about 30 miles outside of Austin to call Tony. Tony didn't get Eugene's message from the night before; the only attempt Eugene made to contact his friend before we appeared on his front door, asking for a place to stay for a few days. So he was unaware that we were in town.

“Hi, we’re a half hour away. Surprise. Can we stay with you?”

I guess it’s not just me that Eugene is inconsiderate to.

I drank a beer while Eugene talked to Tony on the phone, and I noticed that there was a basket of hard-boiled eggs on the bar. I don’t know if they were for sale or if they were just for bar patrons to pick up and eat. I picked one up; it wasn’t cold, so I set it back down.

I mean, what, were they out of pretzels?

So we arrived at Tony and Diana’s apartment at about 8:30 PM. They took us to a few bars, and to my amazement, there weren’t any hard-boiled eggs to be found. We noticed a t-shirt for sale at one of the bars that said, “Beauty is in the eye of the beer holder.” Eugene tried one bar microbrew and told us they should rename it “Rancid Pumpkin Brown Ale.” Apparently it wasn’t very good.

Today we woke up late and tried to find some stores in town to go to. No such luck. Now Tony and Diana are at swing dance lessons and Eugene went to play Ultimate, which is a glorified form of Frisbee. And I’m doing laundry.

Hopefully we’ll get up earlier tomorrow so we can see more of the town.

February 27, 1998

12:32 a.m.

Last night Eugene and I went out because no one else here wanted to. We went to the same area we went to the night before.

Now, I had noticed the first night we were out that there was a Louisiana-style Jazz bar, as well as a bar called Fat Tuesday and a bar called Tropical Isle, which is also located in the French Quarter of New Orleans.

What I didn’t realize, however, was that on this second night we were going out, it actually was Fat Tuesday only six hours away in New Orleans. I also didn’t realize that people living in Austin, Texas, took Mardi Gras so seriously.

We managed to park right off 6th street, but noticed that the streets were being blocked off and that police cars were stationed at each intersection. People were crowding into the streets. There was a fifty-foot line of people waiting to get into Fat Tuesday.

We walked down the street. There was a sex shop, selling toys and leather clothes - much like most of the sex shops in New Orleans. There were people on rooftops and balconies screaming at people in the street. Everyone was wearing plastic Mardi Gras beads. Some people even began to remove their clothes.

We first went to the Tropical Isle. I noticed that the Hand Grenade, their signature drink, was usually filled to the rim with ice, so I asked for mine without ice. It was much more of a bargain then. Eugene and I played a game of pool and listened to the cover band play “Blister in the Sun” and “Brown Eyed Girl” and “Melt With You” and other relatively innocuous pop tunes.

We walked to the next bar, but I still had my drink in my hand, so I got a slice of pizza from the fast food place next door while Eugene went in for another drink. A bouncer informed me that it was illegal to have open containers of alcohol in public. I had figured that since people were getting naked in the streets and doing other lewd

and illegal things, that it would probably be okay to have a mixed drink in the street too, but apparently I was wrong. Besides, I figured that the state that allowed concealed weapons would also avoid stringent liquor laws. Either way, I finished my drink with my pizza and joined Eugene in the second bar.

We sat outside, at the back of the bar on their patio, him drinking and me just looking at the sky. The weather was nice, but breezy, and the low clouds moved across the night sky with an alarming speed. Upon watching the sky, Eugene and I discussed what might happen if the planet instantly stopped spinning on its axis. After that discussion, we went to another bar, one with nice lights and a good band playing ambient music and a buffet table so I could get some broccoli in my system. Afterward, we thought we had enough of New Orleans, and decided to go home. This morning we slept late again. I've been working on a database idea in my spare time, while Eugene has been sleeping, usually. I'm trying to set up and implement ideas for a home business. It's nice to think about what I want to do beyond this trip.

We went shopping this afternoon, and did other menial things, like get an oil change and clean out my car. Eugene is going back home after this stop here in Austin; I head on to New Orleans to visit my sister tomorrow. Eugene is renting a car and driving back Friday to Chicago. Since he's going to have a rental car he is going to take a lot of the belongings we have collected along this trip, as well as all of his luggage and his sleeping bag.

He'll take his rock collection home with him too. I don't understand him. Most people collect souvenirs. I write down notes of my experiences. I take pictures. I even take matchbooks from places I've been. Eugene pulls over to the side of the road and collects rocks from the places he's driven past.

Sometimes I'm sure he values rocks and plants and animals more than human beings. I wonder what it's like, hating your own species so much.

It will be nice to have room in my car again.

After all of this time I have wanted to kill Eugene, I think now I've actually gotten to the point where I don't care anymore. Yes, I must admit that his dirty smelling cloths still irritate me, and that hacking sound he does every morning is still bothersome, but after all this time I've just decided to try not to let it bother me. Not that I want to continue dealing with it, mind you. I'm just trying to not let it bother me anymore. Biding my time, that's what you call it.

Tonight we all went out to dinner. They went out for bowling afterward.

I don't know what it is with me, but I just refuse to go bowling.

So now I've been watching some cable channel that has biographies about serial killers and landmark murder cases in the past few decades. It's interesting, hearing about Charles Manson. Or the guy that killed John Lennon. The guy that killed Lennon said he did it because he was nobody, and Lennon was the biggest somebody there was, and he didn't like being a nobody. And the thing is, I just watched a whole show about him, but I can't even remember his name.

Tony and Diana went to bed. I said good-bye to them, since I'll be leaving tomorrow while they're at work. Eugene keeps reading his road atlas. I don't think the roads

have changed since the last time he looked at the stupid map, but he feels the need to intensely study the pages of that book.

He has a thing for road maps, I think.

Tomorrow I pack up the car again, this time without Eugene's belongings, and leave him here in Austin and drive to Louisiana. It should be interesting, driving for long distances by myself. Having control over the radio for once. On the drive into Texas Eugene managed to find the song "Sweet Judy Blue Eyes" by Crosby, Stills and Nash three times. It will be nice to have the radio to myself.

My favorite pair of blue jeans, the pair I've been wearing the most on this trip (don't worry, I wash them), now has two small holes in the left knee. I wonder how much more destroyed they'll be by the end of this trip.

I guess I should go to bed.

So what have I learned on this first trip to Texas? That the gun shops are also the pawnshops. That gasoline is really cheap here. That there isn't a very good shopping district in Austin, and there's a lot of "Tex-Mex" food. That the weather is really nice. Really, really nice. That at times Austin thinks it's New Orleans. That there's too much country music. That Tony and Diana's cats, Mango and Grasshopper, can do the most amazing jumps and leaps for a toy made out of a two foot long stick with a few strands of multi-colored tinsel at the end. That even if Eugene says he'll do his laundry, don't take him seriously. That there really is an obsession with propane in Texas. That this state really is huge. And maybe that it's time to move on.

Chapter 16

Louisiana

February 26, 1998

10:44 a.m.

New Orleans is a strange place.

The first time I went to New Orleans was with Eugene. We decided to take the road trip, it was only twelve hours from Chicago. I was amazed at the bayou. I thought the swamps were cool, the water was cool. I thought the style of the small buildings in the French Quarter were cool. I thought the catacombs were cool (although these catacombs are above-ground cemeteries, not under ground, like the name implies - the cemeteries have to be above ground because of the amount of water in the ground).

I liked the lack of open-container laws as well.

A passenger in a car could have an open drink, just not the driver. So when we got in I cracked open the beer and Eugene drove. You could also walk around in the streets with open containers of liquor, as long as they weren't glass. So We'd wake up in the morning, open our beers, pour them into plastic cups and be on our way.

The first place we ever stayed at was a woman's apartment in the middle of the French Quarter that she rented out. She ran a bed and breakfast two miles outside the Quarter, and let us park our car there while we stayed at her apartment (parking is nearly impossible in the French Quarter - if you can help it, just don't bother driving in it).

Since that first trip I've been to New Orleans a number of times, a few times for work, to run the trade show that failed miserably in Las Vegas (and yes, it was a pretty big failure in New Orleans too), and a few times just to go for a weekend. Through work I met a chef named Mike Parr who has a balcony on Bourbon street, and every time we were there he'd invite us up. I've been there and met my friend Doug there. I most recently went to New Orleans to see Mardi Gras.

I had originally vowed not to ever go to Mardi Gras. I thought the city was fun

enough without this huge party there, there was room in the streets, and it wasn't a mob scene. I also didn't like the idea of paying an exorbitant price for a hotel room. I liked the idea of seeing the town without all the tourists in it - statistics report that New Orleans, with a population of one million, has about ten million in the city during Mardi Gras.

And I didn't like the idea of thousands of strangers cat calling me for show them my tits, either.

I hope you understand that reference, and that I don't have to explain it. If you don't, ask someone.

But this last year my friend Jocelyn was studying in New Orleans and I thought that maybe I'd use the opportunity to visit during Mardi Gras. Eugene thought it would be a good idea to drive there, and so we confirmed with Jocelyn and took off. Some of our mutual friends also visited, including Rachel and Diane. So all in all, there were nearly ten people sleeping on Jocelyn's floor.

During the days during Mardi Gras there are parades. Lots of parades. Usually about six a day, I think. The Friday we got there we took a nap in the afternoon since we had driven through the night to get there. I woke up to find a band from one of the parades banging their drums right in front of Jocelyn's house. The whole band was playing, and it barely woke me up. You could barely hear people talk in Jocelyn's house with the band playing right there, but we were so tired we almost slept through it. They dragged us off our blankets on the floor so we could go see the show. All the floats are constructed well, and they look like they're very sturdy, versus the flower-decorated floats you find at the average parade. These floats look like they're all made out of painted wood and paper maché sculptures. And they all have tons of beads in them. This is how you get beads, by standing on the parade routes and begging.

In the evenings, you head to the Quarter with your beads, ready to bargain for favors. This is how it works in New Orleans. Have good enough beads, and you can get people to get naked on the street for you. I called it a "prostitution-for-beads form of Capitalism."

Having my friend Mike was very handy during Mardi Gras. In order to avoid being stuck in the great mass of people walking down Bourbon Street, we were able to watch the show from his balcony. People were crammed into the street, from building to building. It looked like the crowd could carry you, there were so many people pressing against everyone.

And being on the balcony was a prime spot, because people looked up at you to take off your clothes.

As I said, it's a strange world.

Usually this system works only to men's advantage. They offer beads to women, usually on balconies, who will lift their shirt for men. Then the women get beads thrown at them. I decided that I had plenty of my own beads, though, so I called for men to drop their pants in order to get beads from me. You know, just to see if it would work.

Surprisingly enough, it did. Drunken men have no problem with dropping their

pants in public, at least at Mardi Gras. For some of the men, we had to throw beads at them to make them put their pants back on.

So this is my experience with New Orleans. There are a lot of little shops there, some are cheesy t-shirt shops, some are art galleries, some are sex shops, and some are 16th century antique stores. It's a town of money and debauchery.

Kind of like Vegas, but on a different scale.

On this trip, I'm meeting my sister Sandy in the Hotel Monteleone, which is a nice, old money, rich hotel in the French Quarter. I describe it as the hotel my boss would stay at when he came to New Orleans on a business trip. Sandy is in town for the weekend with her friend Sandy, a travel agent.

This should be fun, Sandy and Sandy.

I'm visiting them for the weekend, then I'm probably camping for a few days. I'm going to stay in Louisiana through the next weekend, for a few reasons:

1. I only have to be in Nashville by the end of the month, to meet up with some poetry friends of mine,
2. I haven't been able to get a hold of my friend Lisa in Tallahassee yet,
3. I don't want to stay more than two weeks with my parents and overstay my welcome,
4. My friend Dave Adrian (now nick named "Denver Dave") will be in New Orleans the next weekend, and I don't think I've mooched off of him enough on this cross-country trip, so I'll visit with him while he's in town.

After visiting my sister, it will be nice to have some time to myself and write on the laptop and read a few books.

Even if I have to camp.

And when Dave gets into town, I think he's going to bring his new lap top computer so he can write too.

When I was in Albuquerque, fellow poet Jason had his computer with him, and we matched in a completely retarded way when we were in cafes together.

So now it's Dave's turn to be a geek with me, I suppose.

Maybe we won't bring our computers out to the bars with us, though.

February 27, 1998

7:51 p.m.

Drove all day yesterday to get to New Orleans. I left just before noon. I usually don't drive long distances by myself; the eight hours this trip took was so far the longest. I was wondering how I'd hold up.

I drove to Houston and then toward the border. Surprisingly enough, I wasn't getting fed up after my usual four hours. And by five o'clock, I was crossing the border from Texas into Louisiana.

I was pretty excited to drive over a bridge; I have this thing for bridges. The bridge going over the Sabine River isn't particularly impressive on its own, but I love to look at the way bridges are built. I love the idea that someone created this structure so that now we could all drive over it without thinking twice about how difficult getting across the river

would be otherwise.

And I thought the change in the landscape when I crossed over that bridge from Texas into Louisiana was amazing.

It went from fields to swamps, instantly.

Ah, Louisiana. Bayou country.

Wanted to make up time on the road, because Sandy told me her and Sandy flew into the New Orleans airport at 6 in the evening, so to be at the hotel between seven and eight. I managed to make it into the French Quarter right at eight o'clock; I thought I was doing pretty good work.

Got into the hotel; Sandy and Sandy had not yet checked in. I managed to find a way to park my car in the hotel's garage without having to pay for it, so I parked. They still weren't in. So I walked out onto Bourbon street, only a block away, and went to my favorite place for carryout Hurricanes (that's the classic New Orleans drink - a rum-based drink that like fruit punch), at the annex of the Court of the Two Sisters. Frozen. So then I walked down the street to see if my friend Mike was on his balcony. He wasn't. At this point I figured they had to be back from the airport; even if their flight was an hour late they should have made it to the hotel by eight.

I walked back. No sign of them.

So I sat on the street side and started drinking.

When in New Orleans, I suppose.

After a while I was starting to get cold, because all I was wearing was a t-shirt and sweat shorts, so I went to the car in the garage and got put jeans on over my shorts and a jacket on over my t-shirt. While I was there, I grabbed the half-eaten bag of mesquite-barbeque potato chips I had eaten for dinner while I was on the road. Went back to the sidewalk and sat down and had dinner.

I figured people walking by me thought I was homeless. I thought that maybe if I had an empty cup next to me I could make some beer money.

At nine thirty Sandy and Sandy showed up. Apparently the plane taking off before them blew their tires and caused some pretty serious damage and was therefore stuck on the runway. So they were too.

The Hotel Monteleone is a nice hotel. The chandeliers in the lobby were gorgeous. I felt underdressed walking though the place. The room was nice; the bathroom is big and the room itself is pretty spacious. And considering that it's on Royal street, one block away from Bourbon street, I think it's a pretty good deal. As I said before, Sandy's friend Sandy is a travel agent.

We walked around the Quarter for a while, each of them getting a Court drink per my suggestion.

February 27, 1998

9:00 p.m.

I feel like rambling.

I'm trying to write, but I'm not really in the mood for it. Sandy's friend Sandy is strange. A neat freak. She thinks she knows everything about New Orleans because she

was here once 22 years ago. I found out they want me to pay a third of the hotel room, which is fair, but it's a chunk of change. I hate spending money now. It pisses me off. I might actually have to get a job in 1999. That sucks.

The weather here is nice. We went on a riverboat cruise today - I got a free ticket, and they had tickets. It was a two-hour ride. It was kind of cool. I love water. I have this thing for water. Can't explain it. There's a pool at my parent's house; I was a fish when I was a kid. Love lakes, love the ocean - even love streams. I want a fountain in my home one day. Just to hear the running water. I guess that also explains why I seem to be obsessed over hot tubs.

Eugene is gone. This fills me with a joy that I cannot explain on human terms. I have a whole month without him. I know, I know, he has a heart of gold and he's a good guy, but he has gotten so on my nerves. And patience is not one of my virtues. Actually, I don't think I'm happy primarily because Eugene is gone. I mean, I'm happy, but I don't think his leaving is the reason. I just feel like there's not much that is really wrong. Everything seems bearable. The fact that I have to shell out a lot of money for this hotel doesn't bother me too much even. I mean, what am I going to do about it?

There is a pool on the roof of the Monteleone. It has a very nice view, and even if it's cold at night the water is kept really warm and it's very nice. There's a row of evergreens or some type of bush, all in large terra cotta pots, all covered in white Italian Christmas lights. It's really pretty. And usually there are not many people there. I started looking for cheaper rooms for my second weekend here. I think every room near the French Quarter is going to be more expensive. This sucks. And there's no way I'm going to be so far away from the Quarter that we have to get a taxi. Might as well not bother then. So here's the deal: there's a hotel just outside the Quarter, right by the French Market, called the Frenchmen. It has a pool and hot tub, continental breakfasts and free parking for \$59 a night. The coupon says it has "old world charm." I'm trying to find a hotel with a pool and hot tub. The Landmark, in the Quarter, is also \$59, but has no pool. The other hotels in the Quarter are \$79. So I'm thinking I'll visit the Frenchmen (the hotel, not men that happen to be French) and check it out tomorrow.

My pair of jeans I've been wearing now has a big hole in the left knee. I've never worn a pair of jeans enough to wear holes in them.

Anyway, I left my shampoo and conditioner and body gel at Tony's apartment in Austin. I am so pissed about that, you have no idea. I liked that stuff, and now I'm going to have to go out and buy more stuff. That sucks. I don't know where I left it in Tony's apartment, but I don't have them with me. I hope Eugene saw them in the apartment and took them home with him. No, I'm sure he wouldn't notice that.

I've seen a few cool t-shirts while I've been here. None I would buy, but they still made me laugh. "Would you like a nice frosty mug of 'Get the Hell out?'" or "Hold my beer while I kiss your girlfriend." My favorite was a black t-shirt that had in tiny white letters on the chest, "Aren't you a nosy little fucker?" or something to that effect. I thought that shirt would be better though if it was on a long-sleeved black shirt that was tight on the chest and had it written right on the chest. I'd wear that.

I'm going to be camping from Monday through Wednesday. I'm planning on

spending three days doing nothing other than reading, writing and sleeping. Should be interesting.

I've been working on a database on my computer here for my business idea. It's dorky.

Macintosh computer users can name their hard drive. Well, the first computer I got, right out of college, I decided to call it Freedom. I wanted freedom from my family that I was then living with; I was now on my own and out of school; the computer was freeing me to do the work I wanted to do, and do it efficiently. Then when I got my first laptop I called it Freedom Two, because the portability of a laptop allowed me to do things I couldn't before. You're getting the idea... Then I sold my desktop computer and bought Freedom Three, my current computer, and this laptop I'm typing on now, that gives me the freedom to get on line while I'm on the road and such, is Freedom Four. My point? Well, there was no point. I just looked at my computer and saw "Freedom Four" and thought about how much the concept of freedom on one level or another means to me.

They're going to the Aquarium this weekend. I can go swimming again while they're gone, and hope that guy isn't there. Oh, wait, I didn't tell you that one. There was a guy leaving the pool as I was going there, but after seeing me he came back to the pool to swim some more. He kept trying to talk to me. I almost gave him a fake name. I also almost told him, "Look, I don't mean to be rude, but I came here to get some time alone." But I didn't. I just kept swimming away when he would swim up to me. I mean, he would swim right up to me when I wasn't looking and it would scare the crap out of me. Ugh. When I left he even took the elevator with me. Dork. His name was Shawn. Or else it was Sean. I didn't ask him how he spelled it. He was from Philadelphia.

It was so nice not having Eugene in the car while I drove. I could play tapes instead of listening to songs from the 1950s. It's aggravating having to listen to someone else's musical choices for so long. I think I'll have to kill someone the next time I'm forced to listen to a Crosby Stills and Nash song all the way through.

February 28, 1998

12:01 a.m.

Went to dinner by myself tonight, because Sandy the sister wasn't feeling well. Went to Old Dog New Trick, the only vegetarian restaurant in the French Quarter. Had the Tempeh Teriyaki with rice noodles. Tempeh is a soy derivative that has a nutty texture and flavor. It's sort of like eating a mushy garden burger.

But it's better than that. Really.

The Tempeh soaked up a little more teriyaki sauce than it probably should have and was a little spicy. But it was fine. It was nice to eat something that I normally don't get access to. Especially in the South.

So I'm sitting here in the hotel again. Sandy and Sandy had free drink passes at this revolving restaurant at the top floor of the World Trade Center, so I went with them and had a drink. Although the floor was moving incredibly slowly, I really did have a heightened awareness of the motion and it made me feel kind of dizzy. What do I need

to drink for, when I can find other ways to make myself dizzy?

Maybe, when I'm low on cash, I could just throw my arms out to my sides and spin around over and over again until I almost fall down.

But that would just be plain silly.

So now it's midnight and we're back. We didn't go to Bourbon street tonight. I'm with people who think that midnight is late.

Come to think of it, I'm beginning to think that midnight is late.

Sandy (the one I'm related to) has been looking for t-shirts for our nieces and nephews. She found one that was a rip-off South Park (the four kids from the cartoon were dressed in Mardi Gras colors, shouting, "Hey Mister, give us some beads!"), so Sandy (the sister) bought the shirt for Joel.

Kick ass... Found out I'm getting charged \$13 a night to keep my car in the Hotel Monteleone garage, when I was led to believe by the front desk person when I first came in that it was free for people who stayed in the hotel. That pisses me off. But I'm too much of a chicken to complain to the management that I was misled.

Sandy the sister reminded me today that last night we were all in bed laughing and giggling and acting like we were at a slumber party. We were complaining that the light seeped in from the hallway through the cracks of the door and the peepholes in the door (you see, there are two peep holes, one at eye level and one near the door handle for people who are confined to wheelchairs). I said that if you looked at it sideways, it looked like an alien face. Sandy laughed hysterically at that.

Really, it was funnier than it just sounded.

Sandy the sister seems to find all the old movies on cable and turns one on every time we are in the room. Grace Kelly, Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby are in the one that's on now. Before the guy from *It's a Wonderful Life* was in a movie, about Lindbergh's trans-Atlantic flight. What was his name? Jimmy Stewart.

Mary! Mary! That is all I think of when I think of Jimmy Stewart, the funny way he'd say his wife's name. That and his near neurotic repetition of the phrase "Zuzu's petals."

There was a band in Champaign that named themselves Zuzu's Petals.

I didn't know what that meant when I first heard the band name in Champaign; I never saw the whole movie through.

Then again, I haven't even read or seen the entire story for *Alice in Wonderland*.

What does this have to do with anything? Nothing, I guess.

Have I mentioned that we've seen a lot of tacky and sexually perverse merchandise on this trip? Mardi Gras beads that occasionally have beads interspersed in them that are shaped like boobs. T-shirts that say "Official Muff-Diving Instructor." Oh, and on the breasts theme, you can buy hats with boobs on them, t-shirts - you can even buy a fake pair of boobs that strap on around your back.

They're so realistic.

Once when I was in New Orleans I bought a gag gift for a male friend of mine. It was a pair of black bikini underwear, but at the waistline there was a small roll-up tape dispenser attached.

I thought it was funny.
But I'm rambling. Apparently I need some sleep.

February 28, 1998

10:32 a.m.

I tossed and turned all night. Couldn't seem to rest. At about four in the morning the people staying in the room next door came home. I think they might have gone to a wedding; I thought I heard them say something about a cash bar. They were very loud. Sandy the travel agent wore earplugs to sleep. I was afraid that I was going to kick Sandy the sister with all my tossing and turning.

Sandy the travel agent set the alarm for 7:30 so she could work out for an hour. Sandy the sister decided to join her and work out on the treadmill for forty minutes. I swam for a bit, but the morning air was cold so it wasn't as much fun as swimming at night. Besides, there were six or eight people there at the pool, and I couldn't enjoy the pool deck to myself.

And Shawn wasn't there. Just kidding.

So Sandy the sister and I went to breakfast while Sandy the travel agent showered. We ate a buffet that cost over \$11 per person. So I made sure I wouldn't have to eat for the rest of the day. I ate a mushroom omelette, hash browns, pancakes, fruit, and some bread... Was that all? I think so. I'm stuffed now.

Sandy and Sandy are gone now; they just left for a bus sight seeing tour of the city. Sandy the sister is really enjoying herself here. She's getting to learn a little more about the history of the city. She's enjoying these tours. Since I've been here five or six times, and since I've seen the plantations and above-ground cemeteries and the Garden district and the downtown area, the idea of a tour isn't so incredibly exciting. Besides, I've got my car and I'm going to be here for another eight days.

It's nice and quiet in the hotel room now. Sandy the sister doesn't seem to like silence and turns on the television once she's up. Sandy the travel agent - well - let's just say that she likes things exactly the way, well, that she likes them. She asks people at a restaurant to turn down the music, or turn down the air conditioning. Or to leave extra towels in the room. Or to bring extra hangers up to the room. She bought a shower sponge for the weekend, but cut it in half because it wasn't the right size. She makes sure that only sheets from the bed touch her, not the cover or blankets, because you know they don't wash them and you don't know what's on them. (Well, I suppose she's right on that one, but has anyone else ever thought of that before?)

Sandy the travel agent is a good mom. She brings food in her purse and an extra pair of sunglasses along with when you go sightseeing in case something happens and you need them. She's probably the type that keeps a \$20 bill in her bra in case of emergencies.

I have to go check out that hotel, the Frenchmen, for next weekend, and I have to find a cheaper parking garage to keep my car for the next tow days. This \$13 a day business just isn't right. Besides, if I stay in this room for too long, the maid service might not come and bring us more towels.

February 28, 1998

12:43 p.m.

Just walked to the Frenchmen. They're booked next weekend. Then I went to every other hotel I passed on my way back. All but one are booked. The one that isn't is only \$110 a night. That's for the small room.

Maybe I'll have to be outside the French Quarter after all.

It would save money to have a hotel and just pay to park the car near the Quarter every night.

Today when I take my car out of the lot, then I'll check into hotels outside the Quarter.

February 28, 1998

10:11 p.m.

We went to dinner. There was nothing vegetarian on the menu. I had to have them make something special up for me. The waiter acted like a surfer. Every he said was capped with "all right..." said like he was stoned. Sandy and Sandy were sure he was on drugs. I just thought he was slow and stupid.

I'm sitting here, and it's Saturday night, I'm in the hotel room Sandy and Sandy are in their beds now, and I'm in the biggest partying town in the United States and Sandy keeps asking me what's wrong. I'm with two people who don't want to drink. I'm waiting for Sandy the sister to suggest watching Saturday Night Live.

Only people with no social life watch Saturday Night Live.

I found out this afternoon that the reason why I feel like I have no cloths is because I left one load of laundry - SOMEHOW - in Austin. I'm missing a black pair of pants, a denim button-down shirt, all my black socks, a white button-down shirt, two swim-suits, my green Illinois sweatshirt, my cut-off blue sweat shorts, and I don't know what else. Add that to the shampoo, conditioner and body wash that I apparently left there, and that's got to be over a third of all of my essential belongings.

All of this time I thought I didn't have enough clothes. I wanted skirts. I wanted something other than what I had in my two small suitcases.

And now I have even less.

So let me think about this: I've had to pay a lot of money for this hotel. I have to pay \$52 for parking my car here. The restaurants cost more than I remember. And now I'm going to have to go to a thrift store to find something to wear for the last month of my trip.

Oh, by the way, I might get the hotel out of town that's only \$44 a night, if they have space when I attempt to check in Thursday. The coupon I have is not good on advance reservations.

I'm beginning to get angry.

Okay, I'm really angry. I'm losing my belongings, I'm losing my money, Sandy the sister complains about what few fashion choices I have - "Why don't you put a jacket on that?", or "why would you want to wear glasses like that? They do nothing for your

face.” And no one wants to go out.

What the Hell do you go to New Orleans for, anyway?

Sandy the travel agent is probably the pickiest woman I’ve met on this entire trip. We couldn’t eat outside on the balcony because she was cold. (It was nice out.)

I’m beginning to feel lonely. I start thinking about all of the things about people that I hate when I’m in a bad mood. Actually, I’ve managed to keep myself in a good mood most of this trip, despite the monetary setbacks. But today I just go angry. I was smacking my head, swearing to myself when I realized I was missing half of my clothes. I wonder if Eugene found my clothes and at least brought them back, but I don’t suspect he did. I even called him as well as Dave Adrian in Denver asking them to call the hotel (I even gave them the 800 number) to let me know what’s going on, and neither one of them has called.

I’m beginning to lose my mind. I want to pull my hair out.

So I’m using this space to vent.

Thank you, by the way, for letting me vent. No one else does.

They’re watching the Disney Channel now. It was Snow White playing. Now I don’t know what it is.

Although I don’t really want to go anywhere, I’m going stir crazy.

March 1, 1998

11:09 a.m.

I’m still dwelling over the fact that I just found out that half of my clothes are gone. I think my hiking boots are gone, too, so add that to my shampoo and other missing toiletries and that’s a lot to replace.

Okay, I’ve been in a bad mood because of all the money I’ve been having to spend that I didn’t anticipate, and I was aggravated enough that I only had these two small suitcases of clothes for a three month trip; now I only have half of those clothes for the last month of my trip. More money to spend; I’m going to try to find cheap thrift stores Monday.

I’m pulling my hair out.

I just finished washing some of my clothes in the bathroom sink.

With shower gel.

Got breakfast this morning at McDonald’s. I waited a long time in line; I saw the woman behind the counter mess up the orders of both of the people in front of me. Then I step up. “I’d like two egg and cheese biscuits, no meat.” She looked at me blankly. She didn’t know how to punch that into the computer; they don’t offer an egg and cheese biscuit without meat. She had to call over a manager to help her. Then she went to the cook’s counter and yelled that they needed to make a special order - “and egg and cheese biscuit.” I told her it was for two. She corrected herself. Then I ordered hash browns. Two. Then she told me to wait and took the next order. Then the chef in the back called out my order, but the woman behind the counter either ignored it or didn’t hear it. So there it sat. Then she finally got them and then put in one order of hash browns and gave me the bag. I told her I ordered two hash browns. She slowly

walked back to the fries counter and got another hash brown.

All in all, it probably took twenty minutes to get fast food.

Ignorance and incompetence disgust me.

Every hotel in the French Quarter is full but one for next weekend, one without parking or a pool or a hot tub the casts \$110 a night. So I found a coupon and checked out a Comfort Inn a few miles from the Quarter. They have parking, a pool and a hot tub, they even have a free shuttle to the Quarter for hotel guests. Not a fancy room or anything, but it's \$44 a night. With my coupon, though, I can't make reservations, so I'm going to just go there at 2:00 p.m. Thursday and hope they're not booked. They weren't booked Saturday; I checked out an empty room, so hopefully they'll have something this weekend. There are conventions every weekend this month, so hotels are hard to come by. I asked Eugene if there was any chance his hotel connection could get an employee rate for me at the Holiday Inn in the Quarter this weekend, but he never checks his e-mail, so he probably won't even get my message.

I try not to let the little things aggravate me, I've been not getting mad ever time I've heard I have to spend another \$50 here, I have tried not to get angry when the people I'm staying with turn in at 10:00 p.m. on a Saturday night, but now I don't even have enough clothes.

Sorry. I'm just fed up.

I've tried to not let the little things bother me, but now I just feel there are so many of them that I can't help but think about all the problems I'm having. Sure, people can say, well, at least you have your health, or at least you have the money to do this, or at least the clothes you have on you aren't you only clothes, but you know, those statements assume that I go by the standards others choose to live by, and I don't. I always ask for more, I always work for more, and I always expect more. And that's why it always seems like I'm fighting. But that's how I have to function, because I see no point existing if all I'm existing for is mediocrity.

While I was writing this morning someone must have pulled the emergency alarm in the hotel on my floor. Probably the foursome staying in the room next to us who has come back to their room and been loud every night this weekend at four in the morning. When Sandy the travel agent saw them and mentioned that they were being loud, one guy said that we'll probably be hearing the knocking of their headboard against the wall during the night.

Charming.

Well, as I said, I was writing in the hotel room, and suddenly there's a strobe light going off in my room and a loud siren starts ringing. So then a voice comes over the speaker and tells everyone to calmly take the stairs and evacuate the building. So I grabbed my purse and my computer (have to have your priorities straight) and walked to the lobby. A few people were walking down the stairs with me. When I saw that no one in the lobby was looking like they were evacuating, when I saw everyone calmly checking out and no one rushing outside the building, I turned around and took the elevator back up to the room.

People are jerks sometimes.

Is that supposed to be funny, pulling a fire alarm in a hotel? This isn't even like this is a party hotel or something, I mean, this is the Monteleone.

Sometimes I get so filled with hate. I hate the incompetence I see around me. I hate the fact that I have to deal with it. But when I make a mistake, then I'm that much more angry with myself, because I should have known better.

I'm probably not making any sense when I say this. It seems that no one understands how I think.

I see great potential in human kind, I see great achievements in the things we have done in the past, and I see amazing possibilities for the future. And then I see people who believe in fortunetellers and astrology. And then I see people who would rather be on welfare than make something of themselves. And then I see people taking whatever kind of drug happens to be available to them, not being concerned in the slightest about what's going to happen to them tomorrow. Then I see people fighting for more money when they haven't learned anything or gown to deserve it. Then I see people lie in order to make themselves look better.

These are the people all around me. These are the people that will affect every aspect of my life.

Sandy the sister was saying last night that it bothered her to think that some of the students she teaches, the ones who don't pay attention in class, the ones who act like they don't need an education, these people will be the ones building bridges for us to drive on.

I need to know that there is more than this. I need to know that there are people out there that care about life, that care about their life.

I need an oasis.

Sorry I'm going on like this.

I have no idea where I'm going to stay on Monday through Wednesday. I don't have a very good map of the state of Louisiana, but as far as I can tell there aren't many campgrounds.

It's cooler today in New Orleans. I'm sitting on the roof of the building now and my hands are getting cold. Sandy and Sandy are having brunch at the Court of the Two Sisters.

Too rich for my blood, so I passed.

I had to get out of the room though, so housekeeping could clean the room. We need more towels. And of course, I need shampoo.

Okay, enough of this. I've got to get myself in a better mood. There are two things I think of when I need to cheer myself up. One is a track on my Mom's Favorite Vase CD. One track is from when Brian H. and I were messing around with the microphones, and he didn't know I was taping him. He did this hysterical voice acting like he was a phone sex operator.

The other thing I think of is a photograph I have of my friend Brian T., when he was a freshman in high school. It's one of the goofiest photos I've ever seen. (Sorry, Brian, but you have to admit, it's pretty funny.)

So I'll think of those things now.

Sandy and Sandy just got back. They're getting ready to go to the flea market.

March 1, 1998

4:31 p.m.

Okay, I'm in a much better mood now. Went to the flea market, didn't buy anything. Hammered out a few details about next weekend - whether or not the hotel that was far away was okay or not, you know. Still don't know where I'm going to sleep tomorrow, but suddenly it doesn't seem like such a big deal.

Saw more interesting t-shirts.

I hate everybody - and you're next.

Don't sweat something petty - pet something sweaty.

Life is short - drink faster.

Sandy the sister was on a hunt for a sweatshirt, so we got to see many t-shirt phrases. I decided that a part of me for some reason wants to buy a black feather boa. They're only like \$8.00 or something.

Don't ask me why I want one.

They feel soft.

They're retarded looking.

I think I just described myself, not the feather boa.

Suddenly I feel like nothing is a big deal and I can handle anything.

Sandy and Sandy are going out to look for more stuff to buy. So once again I have the place to myself.

It's 5:03 now, and I just took a shower. Mmm... Much better. Tried to take a bath, but (1) there's no plug for the bottom of the tub, so I had to put a drinking glass upside-down on the drain, and (2) the metal thing at the side of the tub (that metal circle, you know, the one that usually has a lever for whether you want the bath tub faucet or the shower working) was leaking, so the tub drained until it was only about half full.

I'm too tall for bathtubs like that.

Hey, it just occurred to me that today is Sunday. That means... The X Files. I hope that for once the Sandy twins don't want to do anything. I could imagine that for once they'll actually want to go out and do something tonight.

Grr.

My socks and underwear and a shirt and shorts are hanging in my windows now, still drying from my washing them this morning. Ah, living a life of leisure...

Sandy the sister was asking me last night while we were standing in front of the St. Louis Cathedral waiting for Sandy the travel agent to get out of mass why I wanted to quit reading poetry. She said that the impression she got from my changing gears letters was that I never wanted to read again. And that's not the case, but some things for me need to change. Before, when I was getting shows in Chicago and reading at open mikes, I was going to over four open mikes a week, seeing the same people perform, and I felt like my work was stagnating. Then she mentioned my quitting, and I said that I had to do that because of the unhealthy work environment I was in. Besides, I was in the highest position I could have been at in that company, and I had learned

everything I could have at that point. In fact, the last year or year and a half of my career there was me fighting - not to get ahead, but to stay where I was, after I had repeatedly proven myself and knew I was best at the job.

And I couldn't stand letting incompetent people continue to try to take a piece of me any longer.

I had mentioned to Sandy the sister that I didn't like the attitude that most poets I see have - that they don't want to work for "the man," so they don't work hard at a career and give themselves any stability or security. She reminded me that I didn't want to work for the man, though, and I explained that it wasn't because of the work, and if I had an employer that didn't hate all of his employees I would have still been happy there. But now? Well, thanks to "that place" I gave four and a half of the best years of my life to (don't I sound like a divorced, bitter woman saying that?) and the people I had to deal with there, I don't want to have an employer. That since I have worked hard and have a savings I'd like to work on my own projects and work part time and just get by.

When I got my job, even at the low pay they were giving me (less than half of what I ended up making there), I was able to live in a small apartment and stay out of debt. For that matter, I lived without a budget. If I could have lived without a budget then, with what I was making, I think I could work part time, work on my own business and live reasonably (hey, I'm not even buying suits for work or eating meat or going to the bars as much as I used to, so I could save money there) on a budget.

And maybe I'll have a little money left over after traveling in case I need it, too. Or maybe my business ideas in publishing will make me a book-publishing mogul and I'll be able to retire before I'm thirty.

Like I'd do that.

I keep thinking about how a part of me misses my home; the comforts of being able to cook a meal and the like. I think after doing all of this traveling I will look forward to having a home back.

Even if it is an 800-square-foot garden apartment with a leak in the bathroom. Well, maybe my next home won't be that bad.

It's now 6:55 p.m., Sandy the travel agent went to the bathroom again. Did I mention that she seems to have to go to the bathroom a lot more than the rest of us? She always has to stop wherever we are because "she has to go pee."

I was taking Sandy the sister's suggestion to iron my clothes that I hand-washed this morning in order to dry them faster.

Everything is still wet, after twenty minutes of ironing. So I'm going to revert back to the air-drying method.

March 1, 1998

11:27 p.m.

Had a fun evening, considering all that went wrong.

First we went to TGI Fridays for dinner, since it was just a block away and we knew they had vegetarian options. Sandy and Sandy started complaining about their last waitress there; they were sure she was high. I told them they think every person that

serves them a meal is high. Todd, from now on referred to as “Hot Toddy,” was our server for the evening, which was excruciatingly long.

Allow me to explain.

First of all, Sandy and Sandy ordered small meals, where the salad came with the meal, but I ordered a meal with a separate salad. After getting our drinks, Sandy the travel agent got her soup, but I didn't get my salad. Sandy the travel agent had to ask for our silverware, which we didn't get yet. Hot Toddy told us that they were out of silverware, and that as soon as they finish going through the washer we can have some.

I didn't think much of the fact that I didn't get my salad until we realized that our waiter disappeared. Sandy the sister guessed that he was washing dishes. I had to go to the bar to get a refill for my water. Twice. Then Hot Toddy came back, and Sandy the travel agent asked for an iced tea refill. He told her that he couldn't do it right away because they were out of iced tea, but as soon as more was brewed he'd get her some. As he said this, another waiter walked behind him with two tall glasses of iced tea for another table.

In fact, the other waiter in the room was walking around a lot, taking care of his customers, the way Hot Toddy should have been doing, but after Sandy the travel agent asked for iced tea Hot Toddy was nowhere to be found. The table next to us received their meal, without their salads, of course, and I was still waiting for my salad and had to go to the bar for refills. The other waiter for the room eventually came to our table and asked us how we were doing. As soon as he did, all three of us started talking at once, saying what was wrong.

“I have had to go to the bar for refills for my drink.”

“Our waiter has been missing for twenty minutes.”

“I'm supposed to get a salad before my meal and I haven't gotten it yet.”

“I've waited so long for my salad and potato that I don't even want it.”

“I asked for an iced tea and I haven't received it.”

“Can you get the manager for us?”

The other waiter had someone bring Sandy the travel agent's iced tea to her. They walked up to the table, looked at the two drink glasses in front of Sandy the sister's and my place setting, and then they asked, “Who gets the iced tea?”

After they left, the guy at the table next to us said, “Maybe the person without the drink gets the iced tea.”

We noticed that the salads eventually came for the table next to us. We also noticed that they took the heart of a head of lettuce to make the salads. They looked like pieces of artichoke, they were so yellow and compacted. Soon after the manager came. She tried to be nice, but we complained about the service at our table and the food at the next table. Sandy the travel agent said she didn't even want her meal. The manager told us that the reason why we haven't seen Hot Toddy is because he is in the back - washing dishes.

She said she'd take care of it for us.

Then our food came. Sandy the travel agent watched Sandy the sister and I eat our food. I of course didn't get my salad, but Sandy did. Then I got another refill. I didn't even bother waiting for Hot Toddy anymore.

We listened to the people at the next table, who also had Hot Toddy for a waiter. Everyone had their food at the table except for one guy. Then Hot Toddy finally emerged from the depths of the kitchen and actually asked the table after being stopped, "Can I help you?"

The guy without food pointed at the void in front of him on the table and asked, "Do you see something missing here?"

At this point the Sandys and I were laughing out loud. We couldn't help it.

We figured that at that point the wait staff was entirely too scared to come to our section of the restaurant, because we were either bitching constantly or maniacally laughing.

We saw people wait for their meal most of the time we were there. We saw some people wait for twenty minutes for Hot Toddy to come pick up their check, which he never did.

At one point, the hostess (whom we called "Miss Happy," because she was the most depressing looking woman we had seen in a long while) was missing, and as we were looking for Hot Toddy we noticed he was seating people.

Hostess, waiter and wash boy.

To make a long story short, we were at the restaurant for over an hour and a half. We got our food comped.

Then we ran out of there.

Then we went down toward Decatur street and ordered frozen drinks and walked down by Jackson Square to enjoy the view. We saw someone doing some sort of performance, so we walked down to see what it was. It was a man with cardboard canvasses and a crate of spray paint cans. With a few templates, some smudging and fire, he created these sci-fi landscape paintings that looked like printed posters. They were incredibly intricate and detailed that it was absolutely amazing. He was selling the paintings for \$20 each. There was a wait for his paintings.

We walked over to Cafe du Monde and Sandy and Sandy had a few more beignets, then we went back to the spray paint painter. Sandy the sister didn't notice the incense burning, so she asked what the smell was. I told her it was my breath. She looked at me. I told her I had patchouli breath. She laughed.

After listening to the music coming out of the boom box the painter had, Sandy the travel agent decided she needed to buy "Return to Innocence" by Enigma.

So then we went home, and here we are. I packed my bags, except for my still wet clothes hanging in the window sills and over the shower curtain rod and my remaining toiletries. I have also realized that I left my favorite black and white polyester polka-dot long-sleeved shirt in Austin, the one that used to be my dad's.

I looked so cool in that shirt.

I hope Eugene brought those clothes home with him.

In the morning we leave - early. Sandy and Sandy's flight is at something like ten in the morning, so they have to be out of here by 8:30. So I get on line at dawn and check in one more time before I travel off on my own for a few days.

Chapter 17

David Jarvie



This is my chance to come clean.

David Jarvie started working at my company the week of July 4th, 1996. Dave Seng and I hired him as a designer. In the first month of him working there he fit in very well, he got along with everyone. When we had to stay late nights in the office working he was fun to be around. Everyone liked Dave Jarvie.

At the time I was finishing my short-lived career as a singer with the band Mom's Favorite Vase (named from the Brady Bunch episode where the kids were told not to play ball in the house but they did and broke... Mom's Favorite Vase), and we were having a good-bye party on August 3rd at Baxter's Gin Mill in Chicago. Brian Hosey, my friend from high school, and Warren Peterson, the husband of my life-long friend Sheri, and I were going to play music live one last time and invite our friends.

I told everyone at work to come to my show.

Dave Seng swore that he would come, since he had never been to any of my shows, even though he and Doug Elwell (another friend from work) were moving that weekend. Dave Jarvie told me he'd make it too.

A lot of my friends made it. Sara and Carol were there; at one point they wanted us to play "I Will Survive" by Gloria Gaynor, and Brian started playing it on the spot and made me sing it (it's a little high for me). But everyone seemed to like it.

Dave Jarvie said it was his favorite song of the night.

I was really surprised to see Dave Seng and Doug Elwell. I didn't think they'd have the time to come to my show; they were moving into an apartment about an hour away. They were still wearing their moving clothes. Dave Jarvie hung out with them at the bar. He was wearing torn blue jeans and a white t-shirt. When he saw me he told me he noticed that I was wearing mascara.

Most men don't even know what mascara is. He bothered to notice that I made a

point to wear make-up.

He told me I looked nice. I was flattered.

Later in the evening, he asked me if I would like to go to dinner. I immediately stopped. Was this a date? He looked at me, seeing my confusion, and said yes, he was asking me out on a date. I told him flat out that I didn't want to date people that I worked with. It wasn't him; I just didn't want to deal with the gossip and the difficulties that would surround two people who work together dating each other. He said he thought of that as well, but he couldn't get around the fact that he liked me. So he thought it was worth the effort. So he asked.

I felt terrible. I didn't want to turn him down, but I didn't want to get into something that could only lead to trouble. He ended up leaving, and I followed him outside to talk to him. I think we sat in his car and talked for an hour. I wanted him to know why I was doing this. I didn't want him to feel bad.

And I didn't want him to leave.

He said he was going to a street fair the next weekend. I was going too, so I met up with him and we went together. I did like him. I told him I liked hanging out with him as friends. He told me he liked it too and that he wouldn't expect any more of a relationship unless I specifically told him that was what I wanted. He had asked me about renting a movie and watching it at his apartment. I told him that would be fine.

So Saturday night, August 10th, I went to Dave's apartment and watched "Pulp Fiction." His roommate owned a nice town home in Lincoln Park; he had a 72" television set and a huge l-shaped fluffy ivory couch in his living room. Dave and I sat on opposite ends of the couch.

I decided I couldn't take this any more, but I didn't know what to do. Finally, as he came back from getting another glass of water for me during a break in the movie, I said, "Could you do me one more favor?"

He asked, "What?"

I said, "Could you sit a little closer?"

He looked shocked, a little confused. I paused. "To me?"

He sat down next to me and put his arm around me.

Thus our relationship began.

We didn't tell anyone at work. We knew the gossip would be too much. They saw us hanging out every day for lunch and decided to gossip about us anyway. (Did they really have that much time on their hands?) All I could think was that if they made our lives this difficult, without knowing that we were even dating, imagine how obnoxious they would be if they did know. So we kept quiet. I told Dave Seng about it, so that he would know that I wasn't keeping anything from him. If I had to do evaluations of Dave Jarvie, or if I had to work with Dave, I wanted Dave Seng to know that I wasn't hiding anything and trying to give Dave Jarvie preferential treatment.

And I didn't. If anything, I was harder on Dave Jarvie in the office than anyone else.

We continued dating. I visited his family for Christmas. Dave told me about how he never had long-term relationships and that this was strange for him. And then he would shy away from me. I told him he had some issues he needed to get over. I'd keep trying to

make the relationship work, and he would continually push me away, the pull me back.

He told me he loved me. And that scared him.

We celebrated our birthdays together, his in May and mine in June. He painted a portrait of me for my birthday. It's hanging in my bedroom now.

He was frustrated with his job, more so than I was. I tried to be the voice of reason: Dave, you should keep your job for over a year or it will look bad on your resume. Dave, this is a good-paying job and you should keep it. Dave, it's hard to get a job in publishing and design, even if this is a hard place to work for.

These were the arguments I used to keep myself from quitting.

But Dave Jarvie didn't want to be in publishing. He wanted to be working for an ad agency, where he had a month to work out a concept for a one-page ad, instead of working for a publishing company, where he had less than a week to design an entire magazine.

But he stayed.

And throughout our relationship, women from work would hit on him. And he told me all about it.

After a few months, he decided he wanted a real commitment with me. It had been over a year of us dating exclusively. At this point I was fed up with the number of times he had pushed me away. I felt like Dave Jarvie was now the boy crying wolf, and I didn't want to listen anymore. We still dated, but this time I was the more distant partner in the relationship.

Then I decided I needed a change. This was when I started working on plans to quit my job. I decided I didn't even want another job; I wanted to get away and travel. Work had become too difficult, not because of the work but because of the people there who chose to make work difficult. Dave Jarvie was the only one at work I could talk to about this. He wholly supported my decision to leave.

He teased me that I made him stay, but he still supported me to leave.

We made plans together. He was planning on visiting his family with his brother in Scotland during the summer of 1998; he invited me to join him. This was one of the main reasons why I decided to leave. I wanted to travel around the country, but I was looking forward to going to Europe, and I had definite plans to be in Scotland.

He started another painting of me. He told me he didn't like the portrait of me that he had done for my birthday; he wanted to do another painting of me, more in his own style. He started it; he drew in the figure of what looked like a dancing woman; then he painted the background in sweeping shades of red.

Then he stopped.

The painting sat with a few other canvasses in the corner of his room. I always teased him about it; I wanted to see the painting. I was thrilled that he was painting another painting of me. I told him I wanted to see it done. He was making it for me, but I teased him, asking, "When are you going to finish that painting, so I can have it?"

He teased me right back about it, saying, "Can't I have any of my own paintings?"

I put in my two-week notice. Dave Jarvie was the only one in the office who knew I was doing it. After my last day of work (Halloween 1997) I took a month off and visited my family. We stayed in contact through phone calls to his office and through an

e-mail account that I had loaned him. When I got back from Florida in December we spent more time together. We didn't want to be boyfriend and girlfriend when I was leaving to travel around the country; I didn't want him to feel like he had to wait around for me. He didn't want me to leave.

So I started on this road trip. He agreed to watch over my apartment while we were gone, until Eugene got back. He checked on my mail, watered the plants and took care of Eugene's cat (which he constantly complained about). We e-mailed each other, even though he didn't like typing; he thought it was impersonal. I called him at work when I could. He left his job by the time I was in Utah, though, so I was only able to leave him messages at his voice mail until they changed his voice mail box and gave it to someone else. We talked on the phone when he was at home.

Since Eugene was coming home, I told Dave that he didn't have to worry about the apartment anymore. And I thanked him profusely. He told me that the only place he could check his e-mail account was at the computer in my apartment, so since he wasn't checking on my apartment any more I could have the account back.

He finished the painting of me last Saturday.

March 3, 1998

10:17 a.m.

Just received two e-mail messages that something was urgent, and that I needed to call home. The messages weren't from Sandy or other relatives; they were from Eugene and my friend Brian, who was my friend from college and Dave Jarvie's roommate. I left a message for Eugene to call me. I figured it was about Dave, because Brian is a friend of Dave's. I assumed the worst and called Noreen's apartment, the number Brian left me.

Many thoughts went through my head. Dave is diabetic, the serious kind, he takes three shots a day. He drinks too much. He could be in the hospital right now. He could have passed away.

Or something could be wrong that isn't even related to the diabetes. He could have been hit by a car. He could have tried to commit suicide.

Noreen's roommate answered the phone. Noreen wasn't there. I told her that my name was Janet, that I was a friend of Brian's, and that he said there was an urgent message for me. She knew what I was talking about. I asked her if she knew what the news was. She said she did. I asked her if it was about Dave. She said it was. I told her I was prepared for the worst and would she please tell me.

She did.

She didn't tell me much. I didn't think to ask questions. Dave Jarvie had a reaction related to his diabetes and passed away.

I dated him. We worked together. We remained friends.

He told me he loved me.

I didn't know exactly what happened. I don't know exactly when it happened. I didn't think to ask. All I could do was make every effort to stop myself from sobbing while I was on the phone with a woman I didn't know.

She kept apologizing for being the one to have to tell me. I told her it was okay and that I wanted to know.

I left my number for Brian with her. Then I called him at work and left a message.

Over the course of today, in the few hours I have known about this, I have talked to Noreen, Brian, Dave Jarvie's family and a few people from work - Alison, Dave Seng, Doug and Brandon. People at work (other than Dave Seng) didn't even know for sure that Dave Jarvie and I dated. They didn't know that Dave Jarvie loved me. They didn't know.

I haven't been able to stop crying. I'm alone in Louisiana. I'm waiting in this hotel room for another few days, by myself, until Dave Adrian comes into town. I feel like this hotel room is a jail. Two double beds. One television set. A bathroom. A small desk.

I feel like I'm in prison.

I want to wait here to see if anyone calls me back. Dave Seng at work has a message from me. I called Dave Adrian to talk to him about the possibility of him rearranging his flight so I could make it up for the visitation, Thursday in Detroit.

I'm writing this not to inform you, but to stop myself from crying. If I focus on something, maybe the tears will stop.

I see the sun outside and think that this is a day that Dave won't see.

He was thirty. In May he would be 31. May 15th.

Last year for his birthday I took him out to his favorite restaurant for dinner, Bossa Nova. Bossa Nova is closed now.

We had dinner, and I gave him his present. It was a leather wallet - yes, I even bought leather for him, Janet, the vegetarian - and had the outside embossed with a quote from the movie "Pulp Fiction." He said he always wanted a wallet with this certain inscription on it. So I got it for him.

The inscription included a swear word. Even still, I went to the old man behind the counter and asked him to emboss it on the wallet.

After dinner I took him to a bar in his neighborhood and told him I wanted him to be able to see the Red Wings game, since he was a big hockey fan and seldom got the chance to see their games, and missed seeing his hometown team play. He thought that was the sweetest thing, that I would remember that there was a Detroit game and take him to a bar to see it. But what he didn't know was that I called up some of his friends to celebrate his birthday and about six of eight of his buddies from Michigan were waiting at the bar for him so they could all watch the game together.

I think he was happy that I got his friends together.

I'm trying to figure out if I should go to the visitation. In order to get back to New Orleans when I'm supposed to be here I would only be able to be in Detroit for two hours and forty minutes, and the Funeral Home is a good 45 minute drive from the airport, leaving me about an hour to spend in town. I'm also trying to figure out if I want to see him that way; I'm trying to figure out if I need a chance to say good bye to him or if seeing him during visitation would only remind me of him being gone. I don't want to think of him in a coffin when I think of him. I don't want to see the suit they picked out for him and think that he's worn that suit when we've gone out, or that he's

wearing the tie that I always complained about, the one with the little characters of women in dresses with hair that stuck out.

I always teased him when he wore that tie.

I saw my grandfather at his wake, and that is the only way I remember him.

I wanted to be able to go to my grandmother's wake, but I was out of town. At the time I was devastated. But now I'm fine with it; I didn't need to see her that way.

I've been on the phone most of the day. I've talked to Brian twice now; I've talked to Dave's brother Steve twice about trying to get there. I think they understand if I can't make it. I talked to Alison at work. I couldn't stop crying. I talked to Brandon and Doug and Dave Seng at work. I wanted to talk to Dave Seng because he knew we dated, but he didn't know for how long or what kind of relationship we had.

He didn't know that when I was back in Chicago in December Dave and I still went out; we went to dinners, we rented movies. When he was sick I made him soup and tea and got him water and made him rest on my couch. I made sure his blankets were always on him and I made him a little footbath so he could have his feet in warm water. The weekend before I left he took me out to dinner downtown and we took a carriage ride. We went to the 95th in the John Hancock building for dinner at the end of October. He told me that if he didn't get the chance to see me for a month, since I was traveling, he could spend all of the money he would normally spend on seeing me in one night.

At least I have these memories.

For the past two years we walked around at Christmas time along Michigan Avenue to see the lights and the windows.

Dave and I made a weekly date to watch *The X Files* in his room at his apartment. His roommates would usually want to watch something else, or would be doing something in the living room, so we'd sit in his little bedroom and watch television by ourselves. We'd make drinks and sit on his bed in the dark and watch shows. He bought a set of martini glasses and a shaker for me and he would make me cosmopolitans. He had a tiny room. He had my old twin bed pressed against the opposite wall of his television set. When I bought my new bed I loaned him my old one. He didn't use the frame; he put it in storage and just put the bed on the floor. He'd make me cosmopolitans and I'd drink out of the martini glasses he bought for me. And we'd watch television.

Actually, I can do a visual scan of his room in my head now. He bought the martini glasses and shaker for us and they are sitting on his dresser. His unfinished paintings are propped against the wall, at the foot of his bed. I would borrow paintings of his from time to time so I could hang them up in the back room of my apartment. I can see the extra sinus pills and prescription medication and Humilin and Insulin and syringes on his nightstand next to his bed.

One of the paintings that wasn't finished was a painting he was doing of me. It looked like the silhouette of a woman dancing. All he did was the background - it was in many shades of red. The body wasn't painted, only lightly drawn in. You could see the canvas in the figure of the woman, in my figure. I always teased him about the painting; I wanted to see it done. I wanted the painting. I thought it was the most wonderful thing that he would want to paint a painting of me. It was an honor.

Brian and Noreen told me that Saturday he finished that painting.

He went out with Brandon Friday night, and Saturday spent the day finishing the painting of me. Brian and Noreen came home Saturday night at about midnight; Dave asked Brian if he wanted to go to Lange's the corner bar. Brian went out with Dave. They had two beers. They came home at two in the morning.

Brian's sister was visiting, so Brian slept on the couch. The next afternoon Brian thought Dave was asleep for too long. He opened the door. He found him on the floor.

Brian's sister checked for a pulse.

I think I would have fallen apart if I had to see Dave like that.

I keep thinking about that now - having to see him that way.

Noreen told me that everyone showed up at the apartment - the police, the paramedics, the coroner. When someone that young dies, they want to find out why.

The autopsy isn't back yet. Steve, Dave's brother, used the words "diabetic reaction." Brian used the words "diabetic coma."

This is all I know.

This is the man I've been dating for the past year, year and a half, and this is all I know.

I'm sitting here, on the other side of the country, in a hotel room by myself, and this is all I know.

I miss him. I miss him dearly. This is all I know.

Dave was the only person at my office who knew I was planning on quitting. He knew the day. He sent me roses at the office the day I put my notice in. Someone delivered them into my room while I was telling Dave Seng that I quit. It was perfect timing. He bought himself a pair of champagne glasses like the ones he bought me for when I put in my two-week notice at work. They sat on the second to bottom shelf on his bookshelf. They were from Crate and Barrel; they had a gold streak spiraling around the glass. I think of the freedom and happiness I felt on the day I put in my two-week notice; Dave brought two bottles of champagne and these glasses to the office and I celebrated with my designers in the department at 10:30 in the morning.

Dave and I drank out of the two champagne glasses. Everyone else used their coffee mugs and plastic soda glasses.

He played "Freedom 90" By George Michael. It was hysterical.

He made that day great for me.

After that day, he bought a pair of glasses like that for himself. I told him that he didn't have to buy a separate pair, that he could borrow mine whenever he wanted; I thought of them as ours anyway.

He always spent money freely. I told him to save for when he got older.

I have a pair of wine glasses in my apartment from when we took a small trip together. I buy wine and champagne glasses from different places, ones that are very unique, so that I can remember occasions and people. I have this pair of wine glasses for Dave. I even had written in my will that if I died he was to receive those wine glasses and the gold-streaked champagne glasses.

And his portrait of me.

I never expected this.

I just called my sister. I needed someone to talk to. Eugene told Sandy the news last night, so she was in a way waiting to hear from me. I feel like I've been on the phone all day.

I've needed people to talk to.

It's too unfair. I can't stop myself from crying.

He never took care of himself. His diabetes was severe. His brother told me that at least Dave didn't go through the advanced stages of diabetes - losing his circulation, having his feet or legs amputated, being confined to a wheel chair, or losing his vision.

Dave would tell me periodically that he couldn't feel his feet. His circulation was already going. I would rub his feet for him. He said it helped.

I can remember now sitting on my couch, telling him to stretch out on my couch, and I would rub his feet. He'd be worried that his feet smelled. I told him they were fine.

I told him to change his diet, to eat more hot and spicy food, because capsaicin, the stuff that makes hot peppers hot, was supposed to help with circulation. When he ate it, he said that he could tell the difference.

Dave wore thick glasses. He already had poor vision. He was also losing the ability to differentiate colors. I would come into work in a new business suit, and he would say, "Hey, that's a nice black suit." I would look at him and tell him it was green.

He wouldn't believe me. I'd ask Joe Dandridge, a coworker. He'd confirm it was green.

He was slowly going colorblind. It was a constant reminder to me that he was getting worse.

Sometimes I would see Dave and he would look unhappy. I'd ask him what was wrong and he'd say he felt a little dizzy. He'd try to sit down. He would be very pale. I'd touch his forehead. He'd be cold. I'd grab his arm, to steady him, and he'd be sweating profusely. And I didn't know enough about diabetes to know if this was happening because he had too much or too little insulin in his system. Then he'd pop a few Life Savers into his mouth and tell me that he needed to get food right away.

Butterscotch. He always had a reserve of Life Savers Butterscotch candies.

We'd go out for breakfast, usually to Nookie's, and he would order two meals. He'd be starving. Then the food would come, and he'd eat half of one plate and decide he couldn't have another bite.

I remember once that we went to the Beaumont for breakfast, just down the street from Nookie's, because they had an all-you-can-eat breakfast, and they also had make-your-own bloody marys for only \$2.00 a pint.

I need to think of these things now. They are what keep me sane.

He lived his life without letting diabetes get into his way. I think a part of him still thought that he was invincible; I think a part of him never grew up and never grew out of the feeling that it is possible to die. I think a part of him thought that if he was going to go out, he'd go out with a bang. He drank with his buddies all the time. He decided to go skydiving.

These are things you shouldn't do as a diabetic.

I told my sister about my idea of going to the visitation for an hour, then flying back. She reminded me that if my flight was late I wouldn't even be able to make it. I told her that I didn't want to rearrange Dave Adrian's schedule; besides, seeing a friend that would make me laugh this weekend was probably just what I needed. She agreed. She suggested that I take the time to go someplace quiet, maybe in the sun, by a river or something, and spend some time alone, and use that as my chance to say good-bye. That I don't need to be there and see a body to say good-bye.

And she might be right.

I'm beginning to worry that my flight would be late anyway and I wouldn't even be able to get to the Funeral Home and I would spend all day and \$600 to be in an airport, wishing I made it to see him in one of his suits.

I don't want to know which suit he's going to be wearing.

I remember all his clothes too well from when he was alive.

He was always a great dresser. He wore nice suits to work; he had style. He wore vests well.

I remember that when I was in Florida I decided to give myself blonde highlights at the crown of my hair. The next time I talked to him, he said he dyed the tips of his hair blonde. I thought it was funny that on opposite sides of the country, we decided to act on the same whim.

He wanted to go back to school this fall, to the Art Institute. He wanted to buy another convertible by next summer, because after owning a Miata, he knew he couldn't face another summer without a nice convertible. He wanted to work for a comic book company designing and drawing comics. He wanted to paint.

I suggested to Dave Seng and Doug Elwell that maybe when I get back into town that we can all get together, you know, to just sort of talk, to spend an evening in his honor, not crying, but retelling funny stories, remembering him for all we loved about him. They thought it was a very good idea. Dave Seng called it a sort of "going away party." I suggested something less fun sounding. But then again, maybe that's what Dave would want. He was Scottish, not Irish, but maybe he'd prefer if his friends got together and drank in his honor.

We could all do a shot of Jaegermeister for him. That was his favorite drink.

I think I need to take a break from writing. I'm emotionally drained.

I think the crying has stopped, though. For now.

March 3, 1998

5:00 p.m.

I just remembered that Dave and I wrote poems together one night. We were sitting in his studio apartment on Lincoln Avenue, sitting on the couch I got for him (my friend Sheri's mother was giving it away so Dave and I went out with his moving truck to pick it up; Brian said the couch smelled like dogs, he wanted him to get rid of it), and we decided to write poems together. He'd write a line, then I would. Or vice versa. Or he'd write a paragraph, and then I would. We wrote four poems together this way. He'd pick out one word, and then we'd start.

I even wrote a poem for him about visiting at his parent's house for Christmas. Dave invited me to spend Christmas with his family in 1996. They lived in a house in a small town called Walled Lake, Michigan. As the name implied, their house was right on a small lake. His family was extremely nice to me; they were all very sweet, warm and loving people. I played pool with his father and his brother. More than half of the family had a thick Scottish accent; Dave would get the accent too, but only when he was either around his family or when he was drinking.

Once, in his thick accent, he called me a wee cherub.

These are the things I am always going to carry with me.

While I was in Walled Lake for Christmas, a heavy snowfall came down. There was tons of snow on the ground. I wrote a poem about this memory. This, writing is my way to make him live forever.

March 3, 1998

10:25 p.m.

Have talked to Sara and Carol and Doug Ward. They made me feel better. Sara liked the get together idea. I just keep thinking that this is such a shock. I've decided I want to send my new book to the family, since these poems are in the book. Then, with a card, I can also let them know that someone in Europe translated poems of mine into Finnish and has put them into a book and is selling the book in Europe, and that the proceeds from the book are going to diabetes research.

Try to make something good out of this.

His brother, Steve, said that hopefully he is in a better place.

I just wanted to take this chance to thank everyone who has been so nice to me. I have been on the phone and sending e-mail messages to many people today, in an effort to not feel so alone. It has worked. Everybody has offered their deepest sympathies and commiserated with me, and it has really helped. We all will miss him, not just me, and I hope I broke the news as gently as I could to people and helped them as well.

I really value the help everyone has given me. I hope I have been able to be there for you too.

I'm still stunned by this. I'm exhausted; I think I need some sleep.

Hopefully he is in a better place.

March 4, 1998

10:33 a.m.

This August would have been two years. We only celebrated one birthday together. It seems too strange. We weren't boyfriend and girlfriend by the time I started this trip; we had agreed to that. Since I was traveling, we had said our good-byes. We didn't know what the future held for us.

But a big piece of me still feels missing.

I realized that after talking to a few people at the office that I never talked to Tim. Tim is a salesman at our old company; he lived two doors down from Dave and they

became good drinking buddies.

Tim has a big, beautiful black dog. Zeke is the dog's name, I think.

Dave Jarvie had two terriers as he was growing up, and he decided that this summer he wanted to get himself a highland terrier.

So last night I left a message for Tim, and he called me this morning. He was shocked by the news. Susan told him at work while they were visiting a client and after they came back Tim drove over to Dave's house and knocked, because he thought Dave was pulling a trick on everyone. He thought that Dave was still alive. He couldn't believe it was true.

No one can.

Tim and I started talking about how Dave told Tim eventually that we were dating, and that Tim didn't know until after he was told. We all worked together, and Dave and Tim were friends, but Tim couldn't tell. We hung out with him for the Fourth of July this past year. His wife could tell that we were dating.

Tim told me that he feels like Dave is watching us now.

I haven't cried yet today. Tim told me that it would come.

He's probably right.

I've tried to get a hold of my friend Nancy, who also worked with us, but she has been so devastated by the news that she hasn't come into work since she found out. I just left a message with Brandon to tell her to call me. I know she has to be going to go to the visitation tomorrow. I'd like to be able to talk to her before she goes. Dave helped her through her separation with her husband. She liked him.

A part of me still can't believe it's true.

I feel like he just tied up all the loose ends. He was no longer working for our old company. He was finished taking care of our apartment. He returned the e-mail account. He told me he didn't know about Scotland any more, so I should not make plans to go. He even finished the painting.

My grandmother, right before she died, decided to move to Arizona. All of her belongings were moved to our aunt's house; titles were moved and she took care of her belongings just before she passed away.

It makes you wonder if a part of them knew.

I just looked through my will. I decided that if anything were to happen to me, I want the portrait he painted of me to be donated to an art gallery that would take care of it.

What am I thinking, it should go to his parents.

I keep trying to not think of him as dead. I'm not trying to fool myself into believing that he is alive, but when I think of Dave Jarvie I would rather think of the things about him that made him so full of life. I want to remember how emotional he'd get about everything. I want to remember that he went straight to the owner of the company and said he deserved more money - and he got it. I want to remember that he told off everyone that bothered him, and praised everyone that he respected.

He was real. He was alive. And that's what I want to remember.

I wonder how long it will take for me to not look outside each morning and see the sun and think that this is a day that Dave is not seeing. It's a beautiful day today. I just have to keep thinking that he would want us to enjoy it.

March 4, 1998

3:52 p.m.

I went out to get lunch today. Thought I should eat something. Then I decided that I could sit by the pool for a while. I told the people at the front desk my situation and they said they would come and get me if I had a phone call. So I went outside with a book. Sandy suggested I read a book, try to escape for a while.

I sat out there in the sun. And then I just started thinking about him. And I started crying.

I keep thinking about how I wish I could have been there, to call 911, to somehow know that he was in danger. To give him first aid until the paramedics came.

To do something.

I wanted Dave to read my novel in progress. I wanted his opinion because I valued it. I wanted to know what he thought of it.

I gave him an electronic copy of the novel to read. I don't know if he ever started reading it.

He borrowed my copy of the novel "Atlas Shrugged," and wouldn't give it back to me. He liked it that much. He decided he would nickname me "Dagny," after the main female character in the novel, after he read it.

I liked the fact that he called me Dagny. The character was a strong, respectable woman. It meant he respected me.

I wanted him to get that terrier he wanted, so I could roughhouse with the little dog whenever I visited his apartment.

Last Halloween, in order to shock some of my friends, I dressed up in a vinyl costume and wore a black wig. I looked crazy. But I also offered to pick Dave up from the airport; he visited his parents for the weekend in Walled Lake and was coming back home. So I drove to O'Hare airport wearing this black vinyl dress and wig and waited for him near the baggage claim.

He thought the costume was great.

He bought a Gumby costume for Halloween.

I remember that when his roommate was bothering him, he would walk around the room, imitating how she walked.

He always put on a good show.

I remember teaching Dave how to swing dance, and yes, it was the blind leading the blind. But whenever we were in a bar that played big band or slow music, we could always get up and dance for a while. Especially at J and R's tap, that bar that Sara used to live right above. There was always parking, it was never crowded and the jukebox had all sorts of great CDs in it - and Dave's favorite, Tony Bennett. He would always play "Rags to Riches," if I didn't get to the juke box first and play it for him.

He'd belt out the words and dance with me.

Every once in a while he'd invite me over for breakfast. He'd make omelettes; mine had tomatoes, mushrooms and cheese. And sometimes onions. And we'd watch Saturday morning cartoons in his living room.

I write these things down because this is how I want to remember him. I want everyone to know who he was. Dave Jarvie was a man who was emotional. He was a man who got on people's nerves.

He regularly had shouting matches with his coworkers and supervisors.

Temperamental, to say the least.

I remember that when he got his own office at the company he closed the door all the time and played his music loudly. It was company policy to keep office doors open - we had "an open door policy," if you will. The owner complained to Dave's supervisor about the door and suggested in front of me that if Dave couldn't keep his door open he could just have some maintenance people come in and remove Dave Jarvie's door, and then he'd see who would have the last laugh. I told Dave about this, and he laughed so hard at the owner's neurotic behavior. "He'd remove my door? God, the man is crazy."

And he still kept his office door closed.

He didn't want to take crap from anybody, and if he had to take it, he sure as Hell wasn't going to take it lying down.

Sometimes I complained about him, sometimes he drove me absolutely crazy. I always hated how he wore his green Michigan State baseball cap backwards; I told him it made him look like a turtle. Now it makes me smile. These are the stories I have to remember. Too often in life we fixate on the bad things, and we forget what we love about people. We forget how much people add to our lives by just being there.

I could tell so many stories. And maybe I should. Maybe I should write them down. This is my way to remember him. Maybe, when I look back at these writings, they won't make me sad. Maybe, as time wears on, maybe I'll be able to look back at these stories and smile. He gave me these stories. He made my life richer.

I want the world to know this. I want the world to know these stories about Dave Jarvie. I want people to smile and laugh and think wonderful thoughts about Dave Jarvie.

In his most recent letters to me, when he e-mailed me over the past two months, he continually stressed how much he wanted me to be happy. That he wanted me to go travel, to do what I needed to do, and to look at life and be happy. People forget to do that.

I would tell him back that I worry about him, that he should have a job, is everything okay.

He'd assure me that he was fine, that nothing was wrong. I hope he was happy, too.

March 4, 1998

7:36 p.m.

Just got in touch with Nancy.

Nancy really cared about Dave. He helped her through a lot. He was a good friend to her, and she valued him greatly.

I didn't know if he ever told Nancy about us.

When I talked to her, she told me she knew. She said she was really worried about me.

I told her I was worried about her.

We cried a lot.

I tried to remind her to think about the things that made us like him. Think about

the things that make us happy, because he wouldn't want us crying our eyes out.

She liked the idea of getting together as well.

When Nancy heard the news, she couldn't believe it either. Then she searched through her apartment, "tore it apart" were her words, until she found a cartoon he had drawn for her. She had packed it away in a box in her closet. It made her feel better, when she found it, to have it in her hands.

She used to turn to Dave when she needed advice. She wanted to turn to him again. She needed someone to teach her how to deal with this.

And I just have to keep thinking to myself that I have to value life more.

I have to value the people I care about more.

It breaks my heart that he's gone.

I just had to call my sister again and have her calm me down because I'm still crying. It's just so wrong. It's just not fair. I keep thinking that I should remember the good times, but I keep thinking that this is just not right, none of it is. I want to go back and change it all. I want to make things better again.

I go through waves, where I want to cry and cry and cry, and where I'm just fine. At some moments I can explain it all, and be okay with it, and at other moments I'm falling apart.

My sister reminded me of something my grandmother used to always say: that everything happens for a reason.

But I can't see any reason in this. I can't.

I know that if something doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger. I've dealt with other hardships of one kind or another, and I just have to keep thinking that I can become a better person for this.

That I am a better person for knowing him.

I have to keep thinking that there has to be something to learn out of this.

I keep thinking that this is not fair. That he shouldn't have gone. But I have to learn something out of this.

Maybe I have to remember that life is short.

I have to keep that in mind. We all complain about the details, we all let little problems get us down. But we are all sitting here, and there's a new day right around the corner, and we're here, we're ready to experience that.

That is a gift. We should treasure it.

This isn't enough of a memorial for you, Dave. I know it isn't. But I don't know what else to do.

More than you'll ever know, Dave Jarvie, I'll miss you.

March 11, 1998

3:14 p.m.

I tried to remember these things, and I wrote the poem "Death Takes Many forms." I'm sure this writing is not enough.

Nothing is enough.

Chapter 18

Louisiana Again



March 10, 1998

9:16 p.m. Eastern Standard Time

I'm writing this from Florida. I have a lot of writing to catch up on.

I haven't written in the past week, well, because I didn't want to. I didn't want to bring myself to write about Dave Jarvie. This is my first chance to have some real time to write.

I have also made the decision - no longer am I writing this for a larger audience. And no longer will I be showing this to a large audience.

After I heard about Dave Jarvie's death, I did two things for two days: I talked on the phone and I cried. Doug Ward found out and called me. I called Sandy back to cry again. I called



my friend Sheri, whom I had not communicated with for months. She had received bad news as well, and only told me about it after I had cried to her for a while. She found out recently that she was pregnant - that was the good news. Shortly after she found out about her pregnancy, she had a miscarriage. She told me she had already purchased maternity clothes. Sheri is a woman who loves children, and she wants more children, and I know this is hurting her, but I had no way to let her know how sorry I was. I felt terrible that I was calling her to mourn to her and she listened patiently until she had a chance to tell me about her tragedies. She also told me her cousin died recently, of surgery complica-

tions. She was a diabetic as well.

Thursday morning I checked out of the hotel. To me it was almost as if I was saying good-bye to mourning, in a way. I had trapped myself in a hotel room, going out only to see the sun or to go across the street to get groceries. When I left the room, I thought I was getting past the place that I heard about Dave Jarvie's death in.

And that would make it a little easier to go on.

When I drove up to the airport, I pulled up to the arrivals gates, by the baggage claim, under the Continental sign. Then a police officer approached my car and told me that since the Oklahoma City bombing (how long ago was that?) they haven't allowed people to park here unless their party is waiting on the sidewalk for them. So he told me I had to circle around the airport over and over again until my party appeared.

Since my car has been starting to overheat every time I idled for too long, this make me very happy.

So after circling around for 35 minutes, I decided to make one more circle before parking my car in the lot and waiting on foot. That last circle is when I saw Dave Adrian from Colorado waiting on the sidewalk for me.

Apparently there was a screaming baby on the second leg of Adrian's flight. He had a layover in Houston and had been traveling for probably around six hours.

So I figured he'd either want to pass out or go out.

It was the latter.

It was good to see him. It took my mind off of bad things, not because he was an escape for me, but because he reminded me that there are intelligent, talented, thinking people out there, and there is someone else that makes the world a good place.

Over the course of the weekend he introduced me to bars I had never visited, just outside the French Quarter, like Check Point Charlie's, and another place whose name escapes me that was the upstairs of a Thai restaurant. They had a good band. We drank and ate and hung out at Jackson Square and the riverfront. Oh, and yes, I did stay in the hot tub as much as possible during the weekend, which would have been much more enjoyable if it wasn't cloudy and raining most of the weekend.

We didn't care if it was raining. We sat in the hot tub anyway.



Chapter 19

Travelling to Florida

Mississippi and Alabama

March 10, 1998

11:22 p.m.

I spent part of one day in Mississippi. Stopped at the first exit, because there was a NASA Space Center there. I decided that it would be worth visiting.

I went on a tour of the grounds, got to see models of engines used for the Space Shuttle, and went through the museum to see a history of Americans in Space.

I love the idea of being in space. It fills me with a sense of joy that I cannot begin to explain.

I always loved astronomy when I was a child. My sister took a course in high school; I was six at the time. I went outside with her and mapped locations of certain stars. Eventually I had my own subscription to *Odyssey* magazine, and astronomy magazine for children, and I had my own telescope. In fact, one of my first publishing ventures was doing book reviews for *Odyssey* magazine. I got paid \$10 per review.

And I got to keep the book.

I still love the night sky. (I guess I made that clear in Utah.) In fact, every time Eugene and I have been driving, I have been able to look out my window and see Orion in the Winter sky.

It's grounding, always being able to look up and see the same stars.

I was talking with Dave Adrian about astronomy and human exploration of space. Although it may be a far-fetched idea, I do hope that one day we will have the technology (and I will have enough money) to be able to go into outer space.

The thought thrills me like you wouldn't believe.

Dave Adrian agreed. In fact, he told me that the main reason why he has no respect for Bill Gates (actually, his words were, "The reason why I think Bill Gates is a pussy..." but I didn't think that was appropriate, but it doesn't matter, because I just wrote it anyway) is because with all the money that he has, he still hasn't used any of it to go up into space. If you had that much money, don't you think you would have been in space

by now?

I thought he had a very valid point.

I found out a few interesting facts while I was at the Space Center:

* The energy released by the three engines used on the Space Shuttle equals the output of 23 Hoover Dams

* The Space Shuttle main engine pumps fuel into the rocket engine with the power of 480 automobiles

* The external tank carries enough fuel to fill 29 medium-sized backyard swimming pools

* The solid rocket booster is only two feet shorter than the Statue of Liberty.

There was other cool stuff there. But I won't get into it all.

After visiting the Space Center for about an hour, I decided to drive down to the Gulf of Mexico, which was less than twenty miles away, to see if I could find some beaches to enjoy for a while. I found a state park, and the beaches weren't too impressive, but I still stayed for a while.

You know my thing with water.

I walked around. It was windy. I rolled up my torn jeans so they wouldn't get wet. The water was cold. I walked a little more, drew pictures in the sand with my feet, and then headed out.

And Alabama? I got into the state at night, and drove through about 45 miles before reaching Florida. In other words, it didn't make much of an impression.

Chapter 20

Florida



March 11, 1998
4:42 p.m.

Didn't get through to my friend Lisa in Tallahassee Sunday night, so I stayed in a hotel for I swear will be the last night in a hotel on this trip. Monday morning I drove - all day - to my Parent's house in Naples.

I didn't realize it was such a long drive.

A long, long drive.

Part of the problem, I think, was that I pulled a Eugene and decided to take smaller highways from Tallahassee to Tampa. It seemed a lot longer than it should have. Had to stop at stoplights in passing towns, you know.

My car reached 100,000 miles while I was on the road from Tampa to Naples. Eugene had told me that when my car reached 100,000 miles I was supposed to pull over and run around the car, you know, like a Chinese fire drill. I didn't believe him, but I thought it would be fun to do anyway, you know, to say I did it. So I pulled over on I75 and ran around my car. Then I drove on.

Got into Naples at six in the evening. My parents didn't come home from dinner until 8:30.

At least there was a key waiting in the driveway for me.

Well, it took me all morning and all afternoon and part of the evening to get into Naples, even when all I did was eat whatever food I had while I was driving. I'm at my parent's house now. For rest. Recuperation.

My father doesn't like it when I mention that a friend of mine died. I don't think he knows what to say so he just tried to avoid it. That works.

March 12, 1998

10:33 a.m.

I bought groceries with my mom today. What a treat. Ravioli. Mushrooms. Bagels. Little things make me happy now. I added garlic to my pasta for lunch today. I'm much happier now. It's windy here. I hear the weather stinks in Chicago. Maybe tonight I'll start to work on my novel again. I also decided I'm not going to send any more changing gears letters out. If people ask for them, I'll send them to them, but if no one cares then there's no point in my mailing them.

My parents owned part of a mobile home park in Florida. They started it in about 1978 or 1979, which made me 8 or 9 when we first started going there. My parents loved the weather. I spent every Christmas and Easter there. Once I was even there during Halloween, and on another occasion I was there in the middle of summer. (It was 1983, and my first nephew was born while I was there. When my parents got the news, they got me out of the pool and told me I was an uncle.) It's strange spending your vacation time in Florida, in a retirement mobile home park. It was like I had 200 pairs of grandparents there. Everyone knew me, because I was one of the only little girls who visited the park, and everyone there knew my parents.

I came here in November, to cool off after working at my old company. Now I feel like I'm coming here to recuperate from losing Dave Jarvie.

My mother wants to plan meals. I have spent the past few months not knowing where I was going to sleep half the time, much less what I was going to eat. So this extra planning seems, well, excessive. In a motherly way, though, of course, in a way that I now adore.

When I found out a few years ago that my mother had cancer, it made me realize that I really should spend more time with her. My parents aren't going to be around forever. It's funny, if you asked me ten years ago if I would look forward to visiting my parents, I would have laughed at you.

But then again, ten years ago I thought everyone was invincible.

And ten years ago I would have thought that they couldn't offer me any salvation from my life alone. I had so much to learn.

March 13, 1998

10:44 p.m.

I get to watch X Files reruns twice a day on the FX channel. Almost worth the cost of cable. I have a little of a sunburn. I wasn't even laying out - I was sitting with my feet in the pool reading a book. That Darwin book is slow reading, but interesting. But I have to switch between that and the Fountainhead.

Well, there's not much to write here. It's windy. Not too much fun to be outside, but I'm making myself do it anyway - ride a bicycle, go for a walk, I even went swimming, and it was cool. It's my second full day here. Wish the wind would go away and it would warm up.

There's not much else to do here. The FX channel plays old episodes of the X Files twice a night, so I keep myself occupied in the evenings. Thought about taping episodes,

but I already have a full three tapes of that show, and that should be plenty. Should get to the novel tonight, but I should read it over again this afternoon. I can't even seem to write changing gears; how can I go back to that novel? The novel with no name?

Can't get working on my writing. Have been obsessed with coming up with pertinent America Online addresses for poetry mass mailings, and working on my silly databases. I wrote a poem on Dave Jarvie, and I was editing it. It's sad... Surprise. I'm trying to start another one, and I have an idea of what I want to write, but I'm still blocked.

March 15, 1998

12:32 a.m.

I found a great passage from the book I'm reading. It's a little long, about a page, but it's worth it - it's from the book "Darwin's Dangerous Idea." It's a bit scientific (which I appreciate) but it continually comes back to the question that most people grapple with when it comes to Darwinism: how do evolution and religion coexist? It's interesting. Hey, they even mention memes (since they were talking about biological evolution, they brought up the relationship between that and the evolution of ideas).

I started proofing the novel. I just typed it out once; I didn't do anything more than write it, then spell check it. I didn't check for typos, even. So I'm a bit surprised at how many changes I'm making. Normally I don't make errors - not to sound snotty, but usually I'm okay with the near-first draft. This time though, I'm making a few more changes than that. I figured I better go through what I have to refresh my memory on what is still left to write. It's been a few months since I've looked at it.

My dad has psoriasis - the skin disorder, and it's pretty ugly. He puts creams on all over his body, and he has these blisters all over his hands and arms and legs. He wears gloves on his hands at all times because he needs so much cream on them all the time. Today I had to put a few bandages on his elbow because he scratched when he wasn't thinking and he was bleeding everywhere.

I asked my dad and his friend Bob Killabrew (isn't that a great name?) if they would do some of their wood working for me. Since my dad has retired he has gotten into making wooden toys and stuff, and he's done it for years now and he and Bob share scroll saws and other tools when they're both down here in Florida. Well, I asked dad if he would make some of his toys - trains, cars, little toy rocking horses and the like - for me. He made some for all the grandchildren in the family, but I figure he'll be dead by the time I have a child, so I told him that since he probably won't want to make toys when I get around to having a child, could he make toys that I could hold onto/ I told him that I like the idea of being able to give my child toys that their grandpa made. He said sure.

I felt like such a dork asking him to do it. I told him that since I had my car I could take them home with me, versus if I flew. The thing is, this is not the type of gushy question I'm used to asking him.

So I felt awkward asking.

The weather is supposed to be nicer by the weekend. It was too cold for the fishes to come up for food at the lake. Usually I go to the lake with breadcrumbs for the fish

and the turtles, but none were in sight today. Will have to wait for it to warm up.
Took another bath today. I like big bathtubs. But I'm sure you guessed that.



March 16, 1998

9:17 p.m.

I was getting hardened again. I'm sure you know what I mean - you look around and hate all people, dive into work, and forget emotions. I almost asked my father out of the blue yesterday if he had to deal with incompetent people when he ran his business, and did he hate them as much as I do? Dave Adrian suggested that

only women liked Ayn Rand. Well, I guess I can see a romantic aspect of Ayn Rand's writing, but her view of people and the world and work and the sense of values that come through in her work, and it's that aspect of it that I love. And that is what makes the main characters, the ones with a love interest, seem that much more romantically passionate.

Well, I brought up Ayn Rand because she very eloquently brings up the differences between people - she portrays the people who cling on other's successes - which is most everyone. I think in one of her novels she calls them "second-handers." And when I read about those people, and believe me, I can equate with people I know, it makes me sick. Someone else understood what makes people so despicable, and wrote it in a novel. And so I was just thinking of this, and it made me think of the people in my life and it made me ill. When I think about a lot of things concerning my past, or people I know, I get ill.

I just want to know that I will never have to live on their terms.

Decided to tentatively call my novel "The Key to Believing." It's a line from the book, and it works for now. Have another 100 pages of novel editing to do before I can start writing it again. Now that I'm starting to read what I wrote again I'm getting to like it. I think I was getting to dislike it, but after I edit what I have I just might be able to write more of it. We'll see.

But since I've been editing it, I haven't been doing much writing otherwise.

It's after ten now, and mom and dad have been in bed for a while. And there was a knock on the door, which is strange, because not many old people are up at this hour. So I get over to the first door, open the curtain and unlock the door and get out onto the porch, then I open the outside door. And it's Ruth, a perpetual drunk from next-door saying that I locked her out. She thought she was at home; she was at the wrong house.

March 18, 1998

9:13 p.m.

X Files is over now. Now it's a toss-up between "American Justice," where I can

learn more about the woman who killed her two children, and... Well, silence, I guess. Although I hate to admit it, I do have something of a fascination with killers. Because I want to understand their mind. It's not something I think about often, but if there's a show on about a serial killer I'll watch it. I find hearing about people like Hitler and Manson fascinating - how someone can think like that. It's not something I find interesting, I mean, I think their actions are sick, but I'm so amazed that people are capable of thinking about things like death and still have them actually be able to go through with it. I personally don't even believe that the death penalty is fair or right, at least not in a free country. Then again, this country isn't as free as it should be. We slowly lose our rights here every day.

The story I'm watching now, Susan Smith I think was the mother's name, and she did a few press conferences, saying that she can feel that her boys were okay, and that they have to take care of each other. Those boys were so adorable. The parents appeared on all three morning network news shows. They're replaying everything now. She was just tired of having two children to deal with. She was divorced and she wanted to feel single again. She drove her car into a lake. How do you let your two boys drown like that? How do you give birth to two boys and begin to raise them and then kill them? Michael and Alexander were three years old and fourteen months.

I don't want to have children now. I don't even know if I want to have children. Well, maybe one. I don't know. But what I do know is that if I made the decision to have a child I would give that child so much love that they wouldn't be able to take it. I'd teach them things I wish someone taught me. I would make them feel like they were worth something.

It's just hard to imagine.

Okay, I'm going to change the subject.

I'm still watching this show about Susan Smith, so it's hard for me to change the subject. And as I said, as disturbing as it is, I want to watch it. I wonder if it's the same syndrome as the one where people want to look at an accident scene, they want to stare at the ruins.

But an accident is just an accident. I don't want to see gore. It's not destruction I want to see. I want to understand why people would do these kinds of things. I don't even like hearing about garbage like this when it first comes out on the news. I prefer something like this show, a long after the fact analysis with more information than you could get at the time. Am I strange?

March 19, 1998

5:18 p.m.

Not much goes on here in Naples. I try to read during the day. I try to write at night. I watch more television than I should. Now I know why I don't have cable. I'd watch "Talk Soup" and "X Files" over and over again. I wouldn't get a thing done.

It's been overcast for the past few days. Since there has been the threat of rain, I have not gone to the beach or to the Everglades. I wanted to do it during the week. Ah, well.

I went shopping today. Bought a long grey fuzzy skirt to match a shirt I bought in New Orleans.

My mom gave me a white tuxedo jacket of dad's today. It seems that every time I'm here now she gives me a few items of clothing of hers as well as dad's. Then she found for me a pink tuxedo shirt, with the ruffles and everything. And she found the cuff links too. Dad obviously doesn't want it.

I wonder if I can incorporate these items into a cool outfit.

If anyone could, I have the confidence that it would be me.

But then again, these items of clothing really are a stretch.

Went to the Saturn dealership today. Was wondering if the window-rolling problem (the loud clanking noise it makes when it's almost closed) and the overheating problem were something that needed to be fixed immediately. Well, the window would cost \$200 to fix, and it wasn't doing any damage to the door or the window if I just let it go. And the overheating was just because of the warm temperature - the fan still would go on before it got too hot. So everything was in order. Which made me happy.

March 22, 1998

2:49 p.m.

There's a street party here in the park. My parents started this adult (translation: senior citizens) mobile home park in the late 70s. It's not an RV park, but a prefabricated home park, so the homes are quite comfortable for two people to live in all year. Anyway, there's an outdoor party today and they have a band (which consists of a woman with a guitar and a man with an organ - a piano, mind you...) and two kegs of beer and food and people are dancing in the streets. And then mom and dad danced to a song. Dad said they were doing the cha cha, and I'm not sure if that dance was actually the cha cha or not, but I have to admit that it was so cute to watch my parents dance. I keep thinking that they always loved each other. They have always stayed together. How many couples their age have that luck? And when they do things like dance together, I just think it's so adorable. They still love each other, so much. It's just so cute.

And then a little later dad started dancing to the Tennessee Waltz with me. I think he only danced for half the song because he didn't want to spill on him the beer I was holding while I was dancing with him.

So I'm on line all day, taking breaks from the old people street party (well, at least there's two kegs of beer) to check my internet connection. I'm hitting my web site when I'm not writing quick notes.

March 22, 1998

3:56 p.m.

Hi. The street party is still going on and I want to KILL PEOPLE. Sorry. It's just that I'm getting a little tired of listening to this two-person band play the Pennsylvania Polka and Proud Mary and Margaritaville and the like. Ugh. I keep saying to myself, free beer... free beer... free beer... But it's not enough.

Bob Killabrew, the friend of my father's who does woodworking stuff with him, well, I told him I was bored. Now every time I see him I put my head on his shoulder for a minute, like, "help me." It's my silent plea for help. He keeps laughing when I do it.

So to save myself I'll occasionally come in and write a quick note.

Oh, they're playing Brown Eyed Girl. I can hear it from my living room. Wait... It's not Brown Eyed Girl, it's that song, "daylight come and me wanna go home." That's not the case for me, though, I can still hear this crap from my home, so it won't do me any good to stay here.

March 22, 1998

7:22 p.m.

The street party is over. There was this one guy, some "Arab" guy, as my father coyly referred to him, who got drunk and offered his wife to the Scottish maintenance man. Strange. So now I'm watching television.

March 24, 1998

4:45 p.m.

Moving on.

I'm in Tallahassee now.

I was supposed to be an eight-hour drive, so I gave myself eight and a half hours in order to meet Lisa Newkirk when she got home from work. Instead the drive only took me six and a half hours, and now I'm sitting here in a parking lot of a strip mall near Lisa's house waiting for... Well, I don't know. I suppose I could just wait here for two hours for her to get home, but it seems to make more sense to actually do something.

I left a message for her. I plan to call back a little later.

I suppose I could sit in her driveway.

Tallahassee is warm, like southern Florida, but when it comes to plant life it is more like New Orleans, and other southern states, like Mississippi. There are real trees, not just palm trees, and Spanish Moss hangs from the lowest branches, making it look like you could find a southern plantation here.

Wow. It's been a few weeks since I have seen real trees.

The time in Florida was nice. It's strange; when I'm there it's like I'm not on the road, I'm at home. So there hardly seems any point in writing about it.

Tallahassee, on the other hand, is a city I've never been to.

There's a prison across the street from this strip mall. Lisa told me on the phone that it was a women's prison.

Hope there's more to see than that.

Drove south yesterday and went to the Everglades National Park for a while. Hung out.

Other than that, my two weeks in Naples were pretty much like they always were.

Watched the Oscars last night. Cher wore something hideous, as usual. Would it really be the Oscars if she didn't?



Chapter 21

Alabama Again

March 27, 1998

The drive stinks through Alabama.

Oh, wait, I saw two billboards worth mentioning. One had a picture of a man putting a wedding ring on a woman's hand, and it said, "Safe Sex: It was God's plan from the start."

No lie.

The other one had no picture on it. It just said, "Go to Church - or the devil will get you."

No lie.

Chapter 22

Tennessee

March 28, 1998

3:05 p.m. Central Standard Time

Met C Ra McGuirt last night. I have worked with him in the poetry world ever since I started publishing "Children, Churches and Daddies," back in 1993. He submitted work to my magazine, and was so thankful that I accepted his work he asked what he could do for me. I told him to start his own magazine and publish me.

So he did. He started the magazine "the Penny Dreadful Review." Asked for advice. I tried to help him out.

For a while he went through bouts of depression, and I would try to help him through them. I ever wrote a few poems about it. He has thanked me over the years through letters for my support. I didn't think I was doing much. We lost touch for a while, until I found out that he finally got access to e-mail. We have stayed in contact regularly, thanks to computers, and when I told him I was coming through Tennessee he told me to come into town at the end of the month so I could witness the monthly poetry "Penny Dreadful" meeting of Nashville-area poets.

So here I am.

We talked for a long time last night. His friend D. Philip Caron (another poet I have published through Scars Publications) was over and we drank a lot of cheap beer. "Prime Time," the beer was called. The design looked cool on the cans, I thought; it was very modernistic. There was a gear on the can with the words in modern sans-serif typefaces circling around the gear. C Ra said it looked like "The Worker's Beer," like it was some sort of Communist propaganda beer. "After a hard day of manual labor at the factory advancing the cause of our people, relax and enjoy Prime Time beer. Workers Unite!"

We thought it was funny.

Today I'm just trying to get work done. C Ra is at work until 3:30. He's making a stir-fry tonight. Currently he has bread, peanut butter and cheese. Oh, and a little fruit

and some potato chips. Ah, the bachelor's life.

Brian Daly is coming over for dinner tonight as well as coming for the meeting. Brian Daly was a subscriber to "Children, Churches and Daddies," and he really (apparently) liked the magazine and my work. C Ra keeps telling me that Brian is looking forward to meeting me.

Should be interesting to see how it goes tonight.

I have to get the word out to everyone about my press, and get them to submit work. I'll give out some chapbooks and try to sell me book. I'm almost out of them.

Well, I'm almost out of the one box I brought with me. I can't seem to give away enough copies of my first book, "Hope Chest in the Attic."

Back when I had no idea how many books I should print, I printed far too many copies of "Hope Chest." But they make nice Christmas presents. I look at that book now and think about how awful the design of it is. But we all grow, I suppose.

C Ra read my novel, or what existed of it so far. On the whole, he liked it. It makes me feel better about writing it. Doesn't give me any incentive to currently continue writing it, but it does make me feel a little better. He offered some good suggestions.

All in all, it has been very productive, the 20 hours I have spent here so far. I'm going to give C Ra my business cards and ask him to stuff them into submission letters people mail him.

I've got to get my name out there somehow.

March 31, 1998

9:34 a.m.

Okay, so I haven't written much. It's hard when there are things to do and when you've decided you're no longer writing this for an audience.

Okay, this is what has been going on.

Drinking and writing.

I haven't seen any of Nashville. (That's okay; I've been here before on business and saw stuff then.) I have pretty much been in this house for the whole weekend. When I could stand to drink, I did. When I could stand to write, I did. I finished a poem that I had been wanting to finish for a while. And I wrote about eight more. And I finished chapter eleven of the novel.

Now I just have six or seven more chapters to go.

I met all the big poets here on Saturday night. Brian Daly even gave me some garlic, since I apparently write about it so much. To show him my appreciation, I ate a clove raw, right there.

We went out to dinner Sunday night, where we got yelled at for pipe smoking. (The table, not me; I haven't taken up pipe smoking.) We sang a lot of songs. (Among others, I remember singing "Don't Cry For Me Argentina." Why? Don't ask.)

It occurred to me yesterday that since Dave Jarvie's death I have been slipping in this sort of downward cycle of depression. I've been getting more and more bad news, and bad things have just continued happening, and I had lost a lot of my motivation.

Dave Adrian reminded me of that, actually, because I was taking it out on him.

I think I needed him to slap me around a bit. I don't like being depressed. I shouldn't be depressed.

So, that's it. Time to move on. I can do anything, I'm pretty sure of that, so nothing can bother me right now.

Oh, I'm sure I'm not making any sense. But that's okay, I understand it perfectly.

Today I leave for Indiana to see my friend Brian. It's the last stop on my trip. Then it's home.

C Ra was a very gracious host. He was very nice to me, and it was very nice to see him and talk. It's amazing how many nice people there actually are in the world, if you look for them.

Chapter 23

Kentucky

March 31, 1998

2:25 p.m. Eastern Standard Time

I've been in Kentucky a few times, to Louisville, well, to be exact, to Shepherdsville, which is 16 miles outside of Louisville (you know, in case Louisville wasn't small enough for me) to do press checks at the printing plant my old company worked with (who said there wasn't perks at my job?). Every time I went I stayed in my hotel, because there was nothing to do. Every time I went there, it was an effort for them to find a restaurant that served meatless dishes. I remember once eating in their cafeteria and all I could eat was the green beans and mashed potatoes. That is, until I tasted the green beans and realized that they had been cooked in bacon fat.

These are my memories of Kentucky.

They did give us a little sightseeing while we'd be in Louisville; I saw where they hold the Kentucky Derby, blah blah blah...

I just think whenever I think about Shepherdsville that the printing company was pretty much all there was to the town. As they grew they even started to fund the local high schools, to generate classes that would help the students prepare for a life of working at the printing plant.

You know, like manufacturing little cyborg workers.

Well, you could believe that if the people that worked there seems to have any intelligence.

But this was Shepherdsville, Kentucky.

Oh, wait, that doesn't tell you much about Kentucky, but there's not much I can tell. Today I'm only going through it to get to Bloomington, Indiana.

I remember once that my mother was taking a flight across the country and had a layover in Louisville and there was bad weather and so she was going to have to sleep

in the airport because it was too late to even get a hotel, but then one of the women working at the airport terminal offered to give my mother a place to sleep.

Oh, wait, other than letting you know that that one woman was nice, that doesn't say much about Kentucky.

Oh, never mind.

Chapter 24

Indiana

March 31, 1998

8:41 p.m.

Am at Brian's now. We are both tired. Brian just flew back from a long weekend in San Francisco.

April 1, 1998

7:21 p.m.

So I'm sitting here in a bar... Its Called "Bear's Place." Brian is working with a director of a play he's stage-managing at the booth next to me. Actually, he wanted me to go to the bar with him, even though I wouldn't really get the chance to talk to him or anything, because in all my Changing Gears reports I kept talking about going out to bars and the ambiance at those bars and such and he didn't want the Indiana reference to be, "Well, I saw my friend Brian... and then I went home."

When I come to Bloomington, I'm not going to be a tourist, though. Bloomington is a college town, a relatively nice one for its distance to Chicago (only four hours). There are slopes in the roads that are vaguely reminiscent of hills, which are vaguely reminiscent in an interesting landscape, versus the blinding flatness of the Illinois plains. The campus for Indiana University has really nice buildings and pretty nice landscaping. All in all, it's not a bad place. Being a college town, it's not too expensive either.

And somewhere I heard that Bloomington Indiana had the highest gay population in the country. No, not San Francisco, or some larger metropolitan area, but Bloomington, Indiana.

But one thing I've noticed about Bloomington is that it seems that when people come here for school, something sucks them in and they don't want to leave. I don't

know if it's because the town is so perfect or if it's just comfortable and inexpensive enough.

Brian Tolle is a friend of mine from high school. Well, we didn't go to the same high school, he went to another school in my district, but I met him through school. He was quiet. But funny, and nice. I thought he felt like an outsider, but I never understood why he felt that way. I thought he was charming, funny, yadda yadda yadda, and I felt bad that he didn't open himself up much.

But we were friends, and we had fun, and I thought of him as one of my good friends for life.

And you know, you never really know who you're going to remain friends with. I don't talk to most of my friends from high school; we all just went our separate ways. There are only two people from my high school days that I still have any communication with. Brian is one of those people.

Brian and I stayed in contact through college. He'd drive to visit more than I would, because he had a car. I remember he'd send me letters, and he'd barely write anything, but he'd color the envelopes and design them so elaborately that the envelopes were sometimes better to receive than what was inside of them. One envelope, for instance, had a full color beer bottle on it, with the top label as the return and the front label as my address. It was a shame that the Post Office had to stamp a postmark on them.

Once he sent me a letter that had written on the envelope, "Instant Princess Kit Inside!!!" In side was a piece of paper with instructions to fold tab A into slot B of the enclosed pink paper, then put the strip of plastic wrap in the hole at the top of the cone. Instant pink-princess-cone hat. It was a riot.

But I digress.

Brian and I have remained friends after college, but now have the chance to visit each other more often because we both have access to cars and don't have to ask for our parent's permission to take a train to visit each other if we want.

And it's strange, even though we have lived in different places; we've actually gained more in common over the years and have grown closer together. Which is really nice.

It's always a treat to visit him, because when we're not talking about our Macintosh computers and swapping tips on how to work with them we're usually talking about how we think about life, or what kind of things bother us with the world, and it's really nice to be able to talk to someone like that.

He's a good friend.

I told him today that whenever I ever get married (will I be walking down the aisle with a walker?) I want him to stand up in the wedding party. He asked if that meant that when the person conducting the ceremony asked if anyone had a reason for us two to not get married, he would stand up.

All day today I worked on my computer. In the morning I worked on line with my web site redesign. Then I wrote a bit and then I used Brian's computer to do a little work. Then we did some troubleshooting on my computer. I couldn't get one thing to

work on my computer.

So Brian asked, "Did you rebuild your desktop?" I answered, "This morning, actually."

"Did you reset your P-RAM?"

"What keys am I supposed to hit again?"

"Command, option, p and r. As it's restarting."

I did that. Still no luck with fixing my computer problem.

Brian decided to call Indiana University's tech support. They had never heard of my problem. "Did you throw away your preferences file for Users and Groups and File Sharing?"

Brian thanked him and got off the phone. We tried it. It worked.

Brian said after we checked my computer, "You know, I've been working with these Apple computers for ten years now..." And I started laughing. "And we never think of throwing away the preferences files."

I told him then that this would be my new philosophy, my new "tech support for life," so to speak: that if all else fails, throw away your preferences.

Well, we geeks thought that was funny.

April 2, 1998

8:43 p.m.

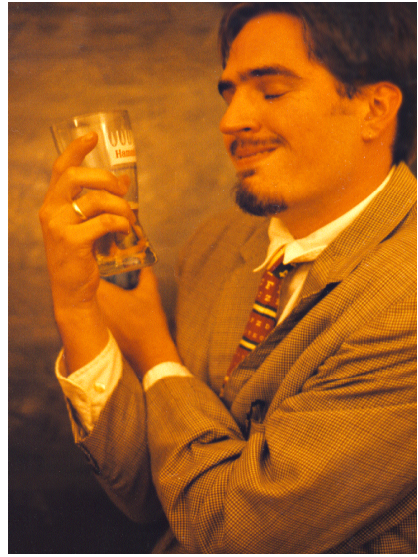
I probably won't be able to write for long; we're going to a movie tonight. Brian has free passes. It's some French film by someone who is supposed to be famous when it comes to French films.

A woman named Katie just came over. Katie is extremely thin; she almost looks unhealthy. She walked in and said she didn't feel well because she went to Denny's and ate only whipped cream and maple syrup.

I needed to write that down.

Brian talked about how he was at a party in San Francisco and it was really boring and there was this bans of five guys wearing dresses and they were pretty boring and then two women came out with white hair and they had mesh over them and they were walking and throwing little bursts of fire and they were naked and then they kissed and when they stopped they pulled back and they were connected with ribbon in each of their mouths and Brian thought that this all was so boring.

And I was wonder at what point our generation become so desensitized.



April 3, 1998

9:39 a.m.

Went to see that movie last night. Brian liked it, but thought it was extremely boring. I'm trying to figure out how something can be likable and boring at the same time. I thought it was awful. It made no sense to me whatsoever.

Shows you how artsy I am.

We left about half way through the movie, even though it was free.

We went to a bar called Nick's to have a drink after the movie. I have been to Nick's once before, when I was in town with my friend Nick. He thought it was necessary to go in there, his name being Nick and all. Brian doesn't like that bar because it's filled with what society considers normal people. He wanted to leave. His friend Pam was enjoying her beer, though, so we stayed for a while.

A few people asked me yesterday after hearing about my trip if I was excited about coming home. The only thing I was excited about was doing a little settling down, was not having to worry about someone else's schedule or imposing on someone else. I could buy food and make my own meals in my own kitchen. Beyond that, no, I'm not looking forward to coming home. Now I'm going to go back where no one valued the things I value and do things that no one understands. I'll have no more interesting stories to tell (as if anyone wanted to hear them anyway). Now people's first question to me will no longer be, "Where are you now?" but "So when are you going to get a job?" And I'd hate to have to explain to them over and over again my plans.

I'm only at home for tow weeks before I go out of town again. I'm going back to Denver, stopping in Omaha each way to see Doug. In Denver I'll stay with Dave and visit Tom and look into job opportunities and temp work and freelance work and prices for apartments and their locations. Am I going to move there? I still can't say for sure. I've discovered that no matter how much I try to plan my life, things always get in the way and attempt to destroy what I wanted. And although I usually win, I can't say for sure that I will win every battle for the rest of my life. But I guess I have to keep trying.



Chapter 25

Home Again

April 4, 1998

11:37 Central Standard Time

I'm home now. I said good-bye to Brian this morning, got in the car and drove for one last time. It took four and a half hours to get back to Chicago.

As soon as I got into the Friday afternoon traffic of the Dan Ryan and the Kennedy expressways I was back to my old self. That is, yelling at cars and changing lanes and becoming Type A Personality person again.

Old habits die hard.

I got in and found Eugene's open suitcase and duffle bag sitting on the lounge chair. Why is it there? I don't know. I grabbed my stacks of mail and took them to the spare room, since there is currently no furniture there, to sort through it, you know, and found stacks of newspapers and bags of materials to be recycled. (He thought he could hide it there and I would never notice, I'm sure.) As I started noticing more things, I wrote down a list for him. He was still at work.

- I paid all of the April rent today - you owe me \$225.
- Why are all your papers all over in every room? (And your suitcase?) Could you please remove it?
 - Nice pile of recyclables in the spare room. When are they going?
 - What is up with this keychain? (There is a keychain on the kitchen counter with one key on it and a picture of a shirtless man on the key ring.)
 - Why were dirty plastic cups in the cabinets?
 - Can you cover food while it's in the fridge?
 - Why were dirty aluminum cans in the cabinets?
 - Is that small pile of tissues on the toilet your excuse for toilet paper? I've bought toilet paper for one and a half years. Get some tomorrow.
 - Helpful hint: if you spread bath towels out after use (instead of leaving them

clumped up), they might have a chance of drying.

- Why was one of your shirts in the bathroom closet?

I could have mentioned that there was an empty paper bag from Taco John's in the refrigerator, but I didn't. I didn't want to sound like I was bitching...

I really should try to let these things roll off my back, I know, but why would you put dirty dishes in the kitchen cabinets? Out of sight out of mind? Is it too difficult to put them in a dishwasher? He doesn't even have to wash them by hand. "Hmmm... I could open the dishwasher door and put this cup in it... Or I could tuck it away in the cabinet with the clean cups in the hope of getting bugs!"

Oddly enough, I could have been meaner in the note.

I unpacked the car, got my mail sorted and into my bedroom, and then quickly showered and got ready to meet my friend Steve Nellemann. He is an officer in a Latino Law Student organization at DePaul University and they were having a banquet tonight announcing scholarships. So I went there, met him and his mother and aunt, had dinner, and listened to Steve make a little speech and introduce the keynote speaker for the night. Then they announced the scholarship winners, voted upon by faculty... And Steve won one of the scholarships. I was shocked; I didn't even know he was eligible or had applied. So that was cool.

But I was tired, and you can really only take watching your friend talk to everyone else for so long, I mean, he had people to mingle with, so I took off at around 10:30.

And I came home, and Eugene had come and gone, and the dishes were still on the counter, as were the aluminum cans, and nothing was moved from the dining room (like his open suitcase). So I did the dishes and put away the recyclables and started unpacking.

Afterward

by the author

April 21, 1998

12:11 p.m. Mountain Time

Well, I'm in Denver again, this time checking into temp agencies and career placement companies and apartment rental agencies. I was home for two weeks, where I saw my sisters and some of my friends.

I went to a party that my sister Sandy was throwing for her friend Larry. Eugene met up with me there. I heard a song that reminded me of Dave Jarvie - "Fly Me To The Moon." I had made the decision not to let myself get depressed about Dave's death, but as soon as I got home one thing after another reminded me of him. His painting is on my wall. He made a flower out of paper and wire, and it's in my bedroom on the dresser. There were pages of written notes from him of phone messages when he was taking care of the apartment. I found a note he wrote me right before I left for the trip in one of my jacket pockets; the p.s. said, "If I don't get to talk to you before you go, be happy, my love."

So when I heard the Frank Sinatra song in the bar, I raised my beer glass; Eugene followed my lead. And we toasted to Dave Jarvie.

I visited the places where I read poetry, and saw a few friends. Got to spend more time with Brian Hosey, which is always a good thing - we've let time separate us, and I hope we're going to start catching up on that time lost.

But in all honesty, two weeks was about all I needed before wanting to leave again. I decided to come back to Denver to look into the idea of possibly moving here. I stopped in Omaha for a day to visit Doug again, and he was glad that Eugene wasn't with me. We gossiped a lot, and it was fun, but I have to admit that I'm not fond of driving seven or eight hours by myself. I've been in Denver for almost four days now and I think Dave Adrian is already sick of me. I think I'm crowding him too much. I'm

going to see Tom tonight so Dave doesn't have to have me around bothering him.

I don't know for sure if I want to live here. My father asked me while I was in Florida, "So, when are you going to get a job, anyway?" and I had to explain that I was working on making a small business for myself but there was no point in starting a business if three months later I was going to move. So I'm planning now, and when I move, then I'll start working again.

I'm discovering that I'd have to put about two thirds of my belongings into storage in order to not be crammed into an apartment in the price range of my choice.

And now I'm filled with so much indecision.

Actually, for once in my life it doesn't bother me too much, not having everything planned. I've been wondering if I could move to Denver for a year, then move on to someplace else - maybe Seattle, or Louisiana or something. I have no idea. Maybe if my sister moves out of my parent's house like she's planning, maybe I could live for free in a house in Palos Park and save money.

I don't think I've ever felt the feeling I have now, the feeling that the future is boundless. I have no idea who I'll marry or even if I'll marry, where I'll live, what I'll do to make ends meet. It's a strange feeling.

Not an entirely bad feeling, but a strange feeling nonetheless.

Even though I don't know what all the answers are yet, I feel like for once I have choices. And I'm not afraid to make them.

April 28, 1998

7:13 p.m. Mountain Time

Yes, I'm in the road again. Went to Denver for two weeks. Stopped in Omaha. So far on this trip I have done some writing, a lot of reading, a little drinking and a lot of relaxing in the mountains. The thing I like about the Denver/Boulder area is that mountains aren't far away - along with cliffs, streams, bridges, waterfalls and other beautiful attractions.

I've been working on my web site during the days, but I try to take a break to visit the mountains daily. When you sit there, looking at a mountain, you can't think the world is bad.

So I've been visiting Dave and Matt and Tom, and today I decided to take off for Yellowstone National Park. So I drove through Wyoming (a new state for me) and am now in a hotel in Montana (another new state for me), because since its still technically winter I have to drive in from the North entrance.

Montana doesn't have a daytime speed limit, which originally sounds cool - in fact, I kept the cruise control locked in at 88 for the first 20 miles of the state. But then I read a notice that said that doesn't mean you can speed, per se, because cops can still pull you over if they think you are driving irresponsibly.

Unambiguity in the law. Yummy.

May 2, 1998

9:33 a.m.

I just wanted to let everyone know that yes, Eugene is still alive. I haven't killed him. Now that I have traveled separately from him I enjoy seeing him and talking to him when I am back in town. (Would that be "absence makes the heart grow fonder"?) I think that on some levels he has calmed down and started complaining less (although last night he complained to me on the phone that there are too many expenses, and that some people can't just take off and travel. Sorry that I saved my money, Eugene, but please don't blame me for the misfortunes of others).

That sounded bad. I didn't mean for it to. But I have come to the point where I can't hear him complain anymore, because it makes me complain.

I mean, its not that I want to close off this whole changing gears thing with a cute little anecdote, like, "What did I learn on my life-changing trip," but I have been thinking about what is different for me now that the long trip is over. It's hard to even say that the long trip is over; I don't feel like it's over. I was only home for two weeks when I took off again and visited Omaha, Denver and Boulder, and Wyoming, Montana and Idaho. And when I get home I'll be home for five days before I leave for Bloomington Indiana again, and then for Champaign Illinois. I'm already planning a trip to Seattle, and I'm just trying to decide if I'm going in July or August.

The long trip is over, I suppose, but my life hasn't gone back to the way it was.

The past few months have been filled with wonderful things and terrible things. I have laughed and cried, gained new friends and lost people very close to me. I don't quite know yet how this will all affect my future, or how long I'll be thinking about it, or if this is something that my grandchildren will hear stories about. I know that as I've taken this trip everyone has told me that this has been a bold step for me to take in my life.

I never thought it was bold. It was just something that had to be done.

So what have I learned after all of this? I've learned that there is a lot out there. I've learned that mountains are beautiful. I've realized that being a stranger in a place allows me to be things and say things I normally wouldn't allow myself to be or say. I've learned that life is short, and the price I paid for that knowledge was too high. I know that I have to make a conscious effort to live and to be happy, because it is too easy to let yourself fall into a slump and let life happen to you instead. What is the point of living life if you are just waiting for your death?

Addendum

later author notes

September 22, 1999

It is strange for me to come back and read these last notes, considering what has happened to me in the last 14 months. Let's see if I can do this in a checklist:

- I got engaged. I guess that one kind of throws a glitch in eventually going to Europe, which was still after the further America travel.

Because I'm supposed to, I should also then add that John is wonderful. Yes, that is his name, and that is his photograph up there. It's one of the few photos I have taken of him... With all that I have gone through, he has made it somehow worthwhile. Because he's there.

...That was sappy of me to say. Please do forgive.

- My parents sold their house. I guess I have no home to visit there anymore... who needs the place you grew up in to be around anymore, right?

- I may be moving to Pennsylvania. We (John, the man I will marry, and I) are going to check it out. He wants to leave his work here in Chicago, and has a good job offer in Pennsylvania.

- I almost died. When driving to visit my parents a month and a half after my after-ward was written, a car hit me from behind on route 45 and knocked me into oncoming traffic. They say my tires left skid marks for 108 feet. The beauty of short-term memory is that I don't remember the day, or the few weeks following. I was in a coma for weeks and in the hospital for months. The first thing they said to my mother when she was waiting for me to visit was that they would like her to come to the hospital and identify a body.

John remembers that day, he was on the road and route 45 was blocked off because there was an accident. He didn't know he would ask that girl to marry him less than a

year later.

Well... I know I could come up with more things to list, but Hell, I think that is enough... I work as a model, whenever they get around to taking my picture, do I sound bitter about their service, oh, it wouldn't be like me to complain though so I'll change the subject, I occasionally still write, and am still usually angry at almost everything.

Trying to get a job in my field when I'm still on medication for the accident and when have been away from the industry for two years now makes it a little difficult. My life has changed in so many ways, in addition to the ways it has changed from last year, from before the accident and after the trip, that I am not going to play psychologist and tell you how. It just has.

I think I'm still trying to work out some answers here for me, so I can't necessarily help you with coming up with general answers that work all the time for everyone. If you find out what they are, could you let me know? I would figure that by now I should have come up with those solutions, then I could be like Hogan from Hogan's Heroes, or MacGyver, or however you spell that, from that other television show. I mean think about it, isn't that the wonder of bad television, that these protagonists can make weaponry and life-saving equipment out of rope and a little tape, but that people like that never seem to exist in real life?

I guess that's kind of like soap operas, too, where NOTHING like that happens in real life, but people like to watch it.

Maybe they know nothing like that happens in real life, but they like to think of a world where that is normal, where good can happen and everyone could be happy.

I know that is not always the case. But sometimes luck can fall your way, and sometimes you can make the best out of what you have, and sometimes you can create your own happiness. It is possible, if you are willing to really try...

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*Austria
Germany
Italy
Amsterdam
France
Luxembourg
Switzerland*

*venture to Europe
with janet kuypers*

the Other Side
travel after the war on terror

Scars 2003 America

Going to
Austria, Germany, Italy, France, Belgium,
the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Switzerland

On The Way

APRIL 11, 2003

12:12 PM

Five years ago I quit my job to travel around the United States and then go to Europe. A near-fatal accident stopped me from leaving for Europe, but I wonder if a part of me was afraid to leave these coasts and travel by foot without a car to places where I would not know the culture or the language. I think this is why I made the point to visit Canada and Mexico as well as frequent every single state in the United States before making the move to visit another continent.

I still feel that fear, even when I have the strong and intelligent John with me. He says he knows some German, so we should be fine in Austria and Germany. I have to look up phrases on other languages so we can show that we're TRYING to be respectful, if others are willing to help.

05-09-03

2:59 PM CST

Hi. I'm sitting at O'Hare Airport and we just went through customs and I was held back because there was metal either in my shoes or my in my watch. Either way, I'm out, and we didn't have to go through the second checkpoint,

because we already have seats, and so we had a beer at a Chili's place (a place genericized even MORE than the original stupid chain), we each were drinking Killian's, and then we looked at the clock and we thought we had to get on the plane on twenty minutes, so we chugged out beers and paid our tab and booked to the (well, we booked, then stopped that the bathrooms, THEN booked) to our gate. That's when we noticed the plane was delayed 40 to 45 minutes.

So here I write.

You know, I didn't feel anything about this trip before I left, I didn't put any thought into leaving the continent, I mean Hell, I had been to every state, Even the ones that aren't continental, but I'm always worrying now... About life, of our jobs and the future, or our home, or moving, or my future work as a singer or as a performance artist, so my





mind has been other places, and I can never get my mind out the rut it's in now, but once I got here, that's when it hit me. I was going through customs, and I needed my passport - for the first time in my life. I have had this God-Damned passport for eight years and this is the first time I have really needed it.

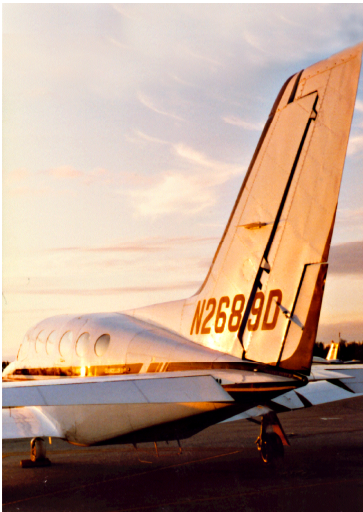


I remember after getting out of the hospital, when everyone moved me out of my home because I lost my home just after I almost lost my life, and I wanted to know where my passport was. THIS WAS IMPORTANT TO ME, I know I could get another one, but I wanted THIS ONE, I wanted to have something of my life back, I wanted to have this little pamphlet that meant I was an American and I could go wherever the Hell I wanted.

I wanted that back.

But either way, I'm sitting here Indian style near one of the only outlets in this terminal so I could write, and I wanted to say that this was when it hit me. I'm leaving everything I've ever known here. I'm leaving my language, I'm leaving my culture.

I'll be back. But right now, I'm leaving.



Austria

AUSTRIA

INTRODUCTION

Getting this choice for our first week of stay, I got nervous. “Austria? What’s there?” If I wanted to walk on tops of mountains where *The Sound of Music* was filmed, I’d be thrilled, but alas, there had to be something else... We had to do a little searching, and John found out that Mozart was born in Salzburg, where we are flying to. There are parks and museums for Mozart, and I haven’t mentioned that of any classical music Mozart is by far my favorite and that I have copies of Mozart’s *The Dissonant* on compact disc in different rooms in my house, in my house and in my car. John found out there was a dinner concert place in Austria, and we could go for dinner and also hear Mozart. I have to see if there are other places that have Mozart performances as well, and we’ll make our rounds and I’ll overdose in Mozart before we leave Austria.

John knows a little German, and we should be able to scrape by in Austria, Germany and Switzerland on what little he knows. That and we have translations of basic phrases in assorted languages to try to cover ourselves, like “Where is the toilet?” (because the toilet is separate from the shower, so you can’t just ask for a washroom), “We do not speak (the language),” “We speak English,” “I am a vegetarian,” “Do you have an English menu,” or “Where is the (correct) train station?” Hopefully we’ll be able to pull this first week off and learn details about everything before we leave for it...

Salzburg

SALZBURG



05-10-03

3:30 PM (7 HOURS LATER THAN HOME)

Since the airport, we flew for 8 hours to Frankfurt, then had a one hour layover, then proceeded to fly to Salzburg, Austria. When I went through O'Hare Airport in I figured they'd search through all of my luggage and ask me a string of questions, you know, questions like, "Are any of the items in your luggage not your own," or "Did anyone ask you to carry anything on board with you," or "Have you ever left your luggage alone since you have been at the airport," or "Are you in possession of firearms, contraband or fireworks," or *something*. But Everything was fine, they didn't even bother to stamp my passport when I got through so I had to go back and ask for a Salzburg Austria stamp; they were even surprised I didn't get a stamp from Frankfurt Germany, but no one seemed interested in stamping people's passports there...

I never really even had the chance to think about difference in airports. John commented that he was surprised when he went to Hawaii's airport, because there was so much open air, but what was different about the airport at Salzburg? Well, we had to take a bus to the terminal, and that is not something your normally see in airports in the United States. And I guess we were surprised the the lax attention paid to security and customs in the airport; I have always heard that in the past the United States was far too lax in its security measures at airports, but I wonder if the United States, comparatively speaking, is overly cautious. No one in Germany or Austria scanned my bags, no one scanned our bodies for metal for weaponry, no one asked us a barrage of inane questions.

Maybe they figure the United States took care of all that crap before we got on the plane, and maybe they'll be hard on us on our way home.

When we got out the airport at Salzburg, we thought that instead of heading straight to Bad Gastein we should visit all of the museums, statues and artifacts from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (born in Salzburg). I couldn't tell you how many pieces of art work I saw and how many sculptures and how many statues of Mozart I saw, but trust me, Salzburg us *really* pushing the Mozart thing for all it's worth. We didn't bother to tour the houses that were up in his honor, and we didn't bother to see where he was born.

You'd think it's weird of me to want to see Mozart memorabilia, but I have to explain that I usually listen to Classical on the radio whenever I'm in the car (instead of pop or rock or alternative or urban or news, or even NPR), but I made a point to

make a CD of the music of Mozart in CD quality format at my car stereo, at my bedroom for the DVD, and even at my computer and on my laptop so I can listen to him while I work during the day (I can even listen to Mozart right now on my laptop computer, writing this...).

You know, I saw Mozart liqueur in round bottles, I got the impression that it was chocolate flavored, but the thing we thought was most funny was that they sold (right at the counter, in a *point of purchase* display) tiny to-go bottles of Mozart liqueur “shots.” We laughed, John said that we could buy three Mozart shots and a flask of vodka and make a martini, or that it would be fun to just say that we did “shots of Mozart,” but...

I saw in Salzburg a lot of references to “Salzburger” at little diner signs, and I thought it was a quaint reference to burgers from Salzburg, but John told me that in German that just mean that it was a reference to being *from* Salzburg. I thought about that a moment and asked, “Does that mean Mozart was a Salzburger?,” and although it sounded a bit funny, John said yes.

The nice thing about seeing Mozart memorabilia and seeing Salzburg, though, was the fact that we now have a digital camera, which adjusts for the amount of light it sees necessary and adjust a flash accordingly. So I was able to say, “Hey, I like how that one fountain works as a sun dial—” and then I’d photograph it. It is nice to have a record of everything that goes on everywhere else.

I tried to nap in the train ride from Salzburg to Bad Gastein, where out hotel was, but I think I slept in two minute bursts, because there were a ton of stops between the two locations. It was novel to use that camera again, even from inside the train. There were mountains off in the distance, and I was able to capture them on film.

Seeing sights like this make for a good transition to a week in Bad Gastein.



Bad Gastein

BAD GASTEIN

05-10-03

7:40 PM IN AUSTRIA

I've seen rolling hills. I've seen the crusts and valleys of Utah's National Parks. But it still blows you away when you walk from the train station to see your hotel nestles with other beautifully painted buildings with trees at the bottom of a dip where different mountains, and some snow-capped, appear all around the horizon.

We've walked around through much of the day, been to a meeting with staff about what this hotel offers, and received offers from a few locations already. If we can keep out ignorance of German (or a more Austrian dialect) to a minimum to the locals who don't know English, we'll be in luck.

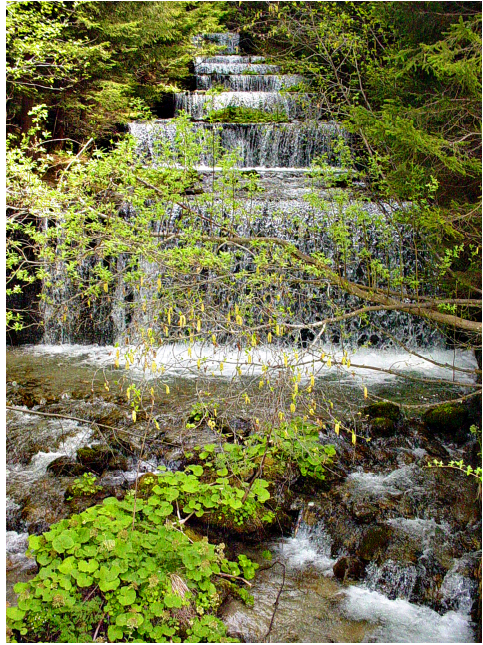


I've been stressed with work in the past six months and unable to sleep, maybe I need a little tailoring like this (We've been given a quality map of Austria and a bottle of white wine in our first day.) to get me back on my feet.

05-11-02
9:45 AM

Yesterday was an interesting day.

We arrived in town yesterday afternoon and the room was available for us for the week. And I am used to traveling in America at small hotels, and most of them come with a television (and most often cable, because us Americans obsess over possessing a multitude of our entertainment options) but no refrigerator, and I was impressed to have a place with a stove (electric, so it looks phenomenal in the kitchen here), a microwave and a refrigerator, as well as king-sized bed (the equivalent of two large twin-sized beds together), 1.5 baths and two foldaway twin-sized beds in the living room.



They offered us a bottle of wine (chilled and white, it was a “Kabinett Selektion,” and because at their welcome meeting we mentioned it was our first time in Austria or Europe, they gave us a nice map of Austria (which we may consider framing).

This place is not like a normal hotel, it is a more resort-like and they have additional amenities and a staff to make sure we have a good stay here. Someone in charge of making sure we have a nice stay, and they even offered to give us a drive to the grocery store because I’m a vegetarian and there aren’t too many options for food in this meat-eating section of countries on the globe. The hotel had a pool and sauna, but they even have a bowling alley.

Happy Mother’s Day. We sent two glass vases of silk flowers in clear resin (to look like water) to our mothers to arrive while we’re out of town. But the restaurant downstairs (that has an outdoor area) is playing very Austrian music and singing for Mother’s Day. John woke up and asked if these people don’t sleep, but it’s already 10:40 in the morning now, so I suppose we shouldn’t complain. Stores close up here at 5:00 in the evening, and I don’t know how many people hang out in what few bars there are, so people seem to have earlier nights here

Speaking of bars, we found a pizza/bar place that made a small Margherita pizza for around 6 € (Euros), which is easily under \$10 American, so I was pleased. Had a few bottles of Edelweiss, took pictures of statues and waterfalls at night with cool lighting, and got to bed a little after midnight.

Which would have been fine, but I woke up with a stuffed nose at 3:30 un the morning in Austria, but I got back to sleep. John stayed up for a while and now his neck is sore, but the bedroom seemed so light through the morning sun through the window. I got up to rest at 9:30 this morning in the pull-out bed in the living room, but instead I have been writing.

05-12-03
11:50 AM

There are so many little details about this place that you just take for granted after you've been here more than one day.

1. We noticed that the doors here are wider in half of the width of the door, and the door, when sliding into the frame, only goes half way into the door frame. The lock is in the thinner half of the door, and having a door styled like this avoids any light coming from the next room from coming into your room.

2. The door hinges in this place are styled gorgeously (I know that sounds silly, I don't know if it's like that everywhere or if it's just this place, but I actually noticed the hinges because they were so well-styled). The piece of metal that sits at three spots along the side of a door when closed is actually larger, gold colored, and have decorative embellishments on each end of the hinge.

3. One thing I am forced to remember is that everything is on such a slant here, there are so many hills and valleys in the mountainside, that John's calves and my shins are in pain from walking up and down the sharp inclines.

4. In this hotel room, which I think is styled more like an apartment you rent for a week at a time, has no thermostat. If it's warm, open a window for a breeze (that's your only choice). I guess people who work here control the temperature *for* you (how nice of them). I guess this way they can monitor the overuse of heating or air conditioning to save money...

5. There's a Jacuzzi-styled pool here, with a large mushroom that apparently drops water occasionally. I'd go into it, but the temperature is not American hot (ergo the name "hot tub"), so I called it a "tepid tub" to John and have passed on going into it.

6. There's a sauna, but you pay to go into it, and the image for it displayed in the elevators shows a man and a woman both sitting in the sauna naked. Again, I'm passing on this one too...

7. Tipping is more like 10% for food, but you could round up above ten percent to make the Euro number even. And people serving drinks do not seem to expect much of a tip at all (when we're used to giving a dollar for every drink we get in the United States). When we ordered two drinks and charged it, the bartender did not even leave us an option for giving a tip.

8. I heard that maybe because there are different pollens here because of different plants, we may be in luck with allergies this spring. Then I noticed that because of a lack of rainfall (more common in the States), there are pools of yellow pollen all along the sidewalks when you walk down the street.

9. Most people also know English, although minimally. There are English translations for menus, and people in stores will catch your difficulty in ordering or talking in stores and will revert to English to help you.

John wanted Ibuprofen for a headache, but it doesn't exist in two places we hoped to find it. John ended up purchasing "dolofort," and then asked the person behind the counter in English about Ibuprofen, and she said that Ibuprofen is an American term, but

dolofort is the same drug as what's in Ibuprofen, so this should be fine. The drug dosage is also twice what they sell in the States, so he'll only need to take one pill instead of two.

10. The radio still plays American music, although Austrians may not know the language so well. John was surprised; he thought there would be German translations of the songs so people could hear songs in their own language. I asked him why they played American songs, and he said that it was because Americans had money. That people want that.

Then I thought that some countries hate us, in part because we know how to make money and get ahead, like most apparently want, but I try not to understand their hatred when we have what they want.

11. Mountains are so much higher than anything I've seen in any of the United States. Your legs are in pain from just walking around the street here, because everything is on such an incline, and the mountains just past this downtown area take over a good portion of the sky.

12. Clocks are on 24 hour time, so the PM does not exist on a clock, so you have to get used to the change and be able to translate what time 22:14 is.

13. Shopping carts in grocery stores (at least the one we went to) are not locked to go straight, so a cart, when pushed, can turn in any direction. When the stores are so cramped and the aisles are so narrow, it's explainable that the carts can turn at any moment - because they have to.

14. Gorgeous cars and names are all over on the road. I've taken a few photographs of cars, but Alfa Romeos, Opels, Lancias, Fiats, Pugeots and other excellent names for cars you don't see in the States are here. When we were walking today, I saw a strip of parked cars including an Audi, a Mercedes, a BMW, a Rover, and I said, "Wow, this must be where all the expensive cars park," and John said, "These aren't expensive." Then we commented that the price for some cars are jacked up for the United States.



15. There is so much color in the buildings in this town. This may be the case for everywhere in Europe, I don't know, but I can walk down the street and see a yellow building, with an orange building near it, as well as a lime green building, a white one, or a brick one. I tried to take a few pictures of it, but it is a beautiful thing to see





when you're not used to seeing that kind of variety in buildings.

I know there are other things, but I haven't kept track of them. Just trust me, there are things that are different.

It's hard to order food here when you're a vegetarian and you don't know the language. We asked if there was any meat in the cream of garlic soup (I know that's a strange question, but in America a lot of soups use a base of a meat or chicken stock, like French Onion Soup, which a vegetarian would avoid), but the non-English speaking waitress said there was no meat in it, so we ordered it. When the waitress left, knowing she may not have understood the reference to animal products in the soup stock, I asked John to taste the soup first to see if he could taste any meat traces in the soup. John then said they

probably just use butter, cream, and garlic. That one kind of surprised me, because Americans wouldn't use something so pure, heavy, or rich in fat or calories, to make a soup, but trust me, the soup was good when we had it.

The one thing I've been safe with ordering for food, however, is pizza. I know, You get that in the States, but you know what's in it when you order it, and the price really isn't bad to have a little pizza brought to your table. I even had a cheeseless pizza yesterday for lunch, the crust was lighter than a cracker and it just had pizza sauce and spices on it, and it was pretty good.

Oh, and you don't take your food home with you; that is considered very rude. So when we ordered, we'd have to stuff our faces because we couldn't take food with us and we wanted to save our money and eat all we could so we'd go out to eat less often.

When we were looking at the sky last night from our balcony, I joked that "wow, they have stars here too...", but then I said that although things are different here, on a fundamental level things are still the same. No matter where you go, people still behave the same way, there are still regular meals, and the stars still shine down upon us at night. Things are still beautiful; it doesn't matter where you are when you're looking out at the stars and the mountains at night, with a nice breeze in the perfect weather. Things may seem a little different, but their similarities bind all parts of the world together.

9:22 PM (or 21:22, as the clocks say in Bad Gastein)

Last night we were in a bar (playing American music), and a song played that I thought I recognized, and I said, "This song sounds familiar. I don't know if I've heard it."

John replied, "It's Bob Dillon."

I was a bit stunned. "Oh," I said, "I thought this was someone in German."

John laughed his ass off at this, because it was a song I should have known, *All Along The Watchtower*.

When he started laughing, I said, "Well, it was a voice that sounded unrecognizable to me..."

Which made him laugh more.

We went to a bar tonight where everyone spoke German, and I was standing near the doorway reading the list of types of foods they offered. Well, the door opened, right near me and I had to back up, and a drunk old Austrian man came in and started talking to me, because apparently I was sort of in his way. So he started asking me one word questions, in German, and I had *no* idea what he was saying, and I didn't know how to respond. John was sitting right there, and he couldn't understand a single word this old man said, so I'd try to think of a single word to say that might help him understand what I was doing there, *and I don't know German, all that was going through my head were Spanish phrases*, so I'd try to say something in English and he'd respond with another single-word question/sentence, and he'd say it repeatedly to me, and I'd look over at John with no idea of what to do, so I'd try to say something in English, then *repeat* it in English (like that helps) as I was making an effort to sit down. I think once I was seated next to John he didn't push for a conversation, but within one minute the bartender (who might have been a manager or an owner, I don't know), told him in German that he had to go, and it sounded like he repeatedly commanded him to leave as he walked the drunk Austrian out of the bar.

John tried to say "It's okay," to him in German (*Das ist inordnung*, to be exact), but the bartender was probably just trying to get the drunk man who couldn't say one word cohesively in German out of the bar.



05-13-03
10:05 PM

I'm tired, but we went to the Gastein Curative Tunnel today - a place in the mountainside where the air temperature go to about 100 degrees, and there was a huge amount of Radon in the air (the hopefully give rejuvenating, healing properties and energy), but also had a humidity level of about 75%.

Much better than the Tepid Tub they have here for a hot tub.

I also noted afterward when we went for beer that beer here, even the same kinds of beer as you find in the States (like Franziskaner Weisse beer) just *tastes* better, probably because it is actually a more recent brew, and because the beer producers didn't have to put a small amount of Formaldehyde in it to keep it in good condition (or else add some extra hops as a preservative which makes the beer more bitter - and I don't like bitter beer). It is much better when it is new and without the chemical, thank you very much.

We looked for mini pizza cutters today at the grocery store, because we saw them at two restaurants here, and then someone at a restaurant told us that you can only buy it through a specialty store only for restaurants (which bugs me; I liked little pizza cutters for the table).

And pizza seems to be the only thing we have eaten when we have eaten out. No, it's not that we're trying to grasp onto something from our American lives, it's that when I, as a vegetarian, try to find something on a menu that I know has no meat in it, it is really safe to go with pizza, where you choose your own toppings. Besides, they are surprisingly less expensive than other meals, so we can have a small home-made pizza and not have leftovers for a meal. They also usually have them at bars, and when we're so interested in drinking good beer (the weisse beers are so much better here than in the States), it's handy to have food we can eat too.

We've been walking a few days now throughout Bad Gastein, and I have loved the fact that there is moss everywhere along the rocks that we pass. It's nice to see that here;



you usually don't see moss so abundant everywhere. We've seen a different kind of moss all over the place in the Washington State rainforests we visited, but it is nice to see it along paths near roads in a town, and it's cool to see moss growing out of all of the cracks in bricks that have been laid near the paths.

I have to go, but I'll tell you more about the Gastein Curative Tunnel trip later -

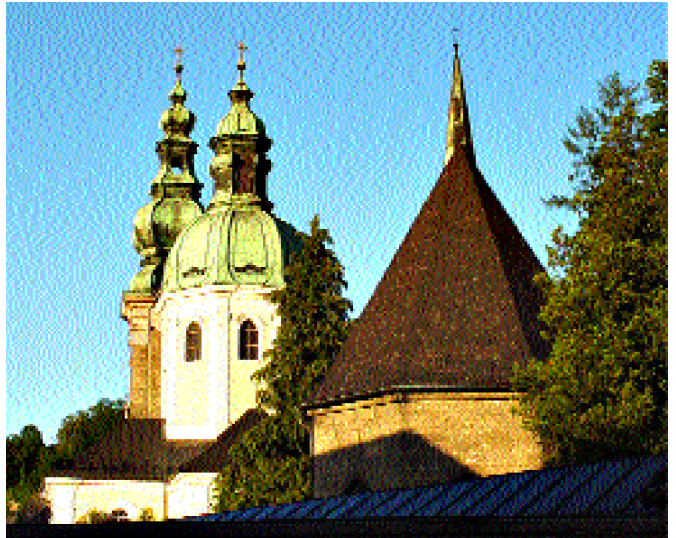
05-14-03
6:58 AM

Let me tell you about the Gastein Curative Tunnel. Originally used to mine for gold, this area in the “Hohe Tauern” mountains, and later at the “Radhousberg.” In one section, there was extreme heat (98 to 120 degrees, depending on where they were in the tunnel), coupled with humidity (once again 75 to 95 percent, depending on where you were in the tunnel).

They also found that rheumatic problems were getting better when there and that they had more energy - they later found that there was Radon in the air in this region, and staying in the tunnel for certain lengths of time helped their ailments, because the Radon in the air helped make their body heal itself faster. People today use this tunnel for curing assorted ailments, and although they may return in later months, they stay in the tunnels for less time because the body remembered how to heal itself from its previous stay in the tunnels.

So we went to the tunnels yesterday, wore a swimsuit and stayed in them for 45 minutes in silence with other attendants. From breathing training, I tried to take deep long breaths as I lay in the tunnel for the 45 minutes to get all the air I could and soak in as much Radon as possible in the time I was there. I saw someone opening and closing their hands while they were laying on a cot, and it made me wonder if it would help my hands from typing so much on the computer. John noted that although we drank a few bottles of water and were dripping wet when we were done, he wasn't tired from the heat (as he would expect he would be), which may have been because of the amount of Radon in the air.

There was only one other English-speaking couple there, and the man talked very loudly (very American sounding to be that loud, was my opinion). And there was one other gentleman there who spoke English as well as German, asking us about where we were from and what our plans were. When I explained to him that Austria was our first stop and we are taking the train to Germany, Italy (through Venice), Paris, Amsterdam, Luxembourg and Switzerland, he was stunned and couldn't believe we were doing so



much in such a short time (he thought two *months* was more realistic than doing that all in two weeks, but we Americans don't get that much vacation time). We then talked about 37 hour work weeks in Europe and Germany, and that people usually had 6 weeks vacation time every year. We thought that John having 4 weeks a year in America was good, but it's not as relaxing as Europe, I suppose... He also suggested hiking walks to go on, which we may do, if we have the time before we leave Austria.

It was nice to hear someone talking about our trip like this; it reminds me of when I traveled around the United States and people were interested in plans and where were going. This is the first time someone has asked about there plans of ours, and this man was nice enough to comment on places to go and things to do while we traveled.



John also wanted to climb to the top of one of the Alps today (so we were planning the hike), but when I walked out onto the balcony, I saw that it was snowing. It wasn't *too* cold; it seemed to almost be a combination of snow and hail and the snow seemed to fall in thick icy patches. We're fearing the Alps hike today, so we may take the train to go to Dachau in Germany. John is checking over the

schedule and I'm trying to eat my bread and yogurt for breakfast.

I wonder if they stamp our passports when we get to another country. Well, we'll see how thing go, so wish us luck.



05-14-03
11:07 PM

My feet are so tired.

No, really, you have no idea. We've walked everywhere, taking the train from Bad Gastein to Salzburg, then leaving Austria and going to Munich, then going to Dachau, then walking a few miles to the Dachau Concentration Camp site, walking through the site, then walking it all back home, to the hills in our hotel.

I'm hoping I can put my feet in a bath to make them feel better for tomorrow, because I'm thinking we're going to the top of one of the Alps tomorrow.

But we've tried to have a more German-styled meal plan, and I didn't mean by having more beer than the average American, but I meant by having primarily bread at breakfast. Though we've avoided coffee or tea, we've purchased bread from the bakery and have had primarily that for breakfast for the past few days.



Taking the train to Germany was nice, though - John noticed, that unlike trains either of us have been on in the States:

1. They have huge windows on each side of the train,
2. They are amazingly quiet trains,
3. They don't use wood under the tracks (it might be concrete? We couldn't tell),
4. There are private compartments in the cars, even if you don't have reservation, as long as they they're all reserved,
5. They have a restaurant,
6. Someone walks around either with a cart of coffees to offer you or push a cart of coffees around to offer you as you sit in your seat.

And in riding to Germany, I noticed that every small village had one church, with a huge steeple. I wondered if it was there so people would be able to find the church easily, and John wondered if people had such a tall church to show the world how God looks upon them so favorably, because they have such a large church to worship Him in. The value of religion in communities is very evident when you look at the history of these areas, which may make it obvious why they place such importance on their town church.

05-15-03

Well, I think we're supposed to be going to the top of an Alp today, because it is no longer snowing hail, like it was yesterday. I'll let you know how it goes.

10:20 PM

When walking home today, John noticed a radio station on a car tuned to 88.6, and I thought I'd mention that Europe's radio stations fall on even numbers, unlike America's radio stations. Interesting to see.

Almost as interesting as the fact that there are metal roofs throughout this town - it's cool to see decaying, or painted roofs that are made of metal (seeing a copper roof is cool). You see how buildings and homes are put together, and you come to understand why buildings are so old here and last so long here.

Noticed the pine trees here during our many walks, and the needles in all the tall thin leaves are always drooping down. If trees had personalities, they looked very sad...



Oh, I learned that in some of these countries that when eating, you should leave your hands above the table until you are done with your food. This was a tough thing to remember to do, but when you're trying to keep with the customs of the country you're in, you have to remember all these little details so you're not looked at as an outsider. I think it's necessary to try to do as much as possible to blend with what people know; if you don't, you'll get poor treatment because you couldn't take the time to understand their culture.

05-16-03
9:43 AM

I'm exhausted.

We walked across town and went to walk up a mountain in the Alps, John said it should be around two miles from what he could tell on the map, but you know, I was thinking the path was two miles, not that it was a four or six mile distance.



We walked on quote unquote trails, which were really patches of grass that were driven over once last ski season by a big truck (so were still grassy), and we got to what we thought was close to the end (the end of the ski lift was there, for one...). Then John saw that it went up further, so since my shoes and socks were soaking wet from the puddles and mud we had to get around to get to that point, John went ahead to see how far the path continued. He came back and said it was a similar path for probably another 30 minutes of walking, meaning that we were only two thirds the way up the mountain. Since it gets colder the higher up the mountain you go, and since there wasn't a cloud in the sky to hold any of the heat to the earth. I was really cold, but I knew that if I backed down it would have been a disappointment to John. So after a minute I said we should go, and we started walking. The path was much less visible that it was coming up to that point, and it was more wet because any dew or frost had not evaporated.

The shoes that I bought for this trip and I planned to bring really hurt my left foot after the first time I tried to wear them, and my left foot didn't get better for three days after I "test" wore them, so I didn't bring the shoes I bought for this trip. The shoes I had were sneakers, but they were thin cloth, and they were old shoes with what little traction they came with long removed from common wear. So with the wind and the temperature at this height at the mountainside, and with one layer covering the top of my feet in these shoes, I was cold. And because we planned for a trip that would be warmer that it is in America in May, we didn't bring heavy coats or gloves or hats or scarves.

But either way, I said I'd follow, so we started walking, and as I said, the trail was less evident and more wet. Then I looked after a turn in the path and saw that there was a twenty foot wide pool of mud that you couldn't avoid if you were going to continue. When I saw that and just stopped in my tracks. I knew I was already cold, and my feet were already soaked, but I was not going to walk through mud and have wet, muddy, cold feet for the rest of the trip up - and all the way back down - the mountain.

I told him then I wasn't going any further. He looked up and saw the mud and totally agreed and said we'll just turn around.

I got a second pair of shoes that we brought in the backpack (shoes with a bit of a heel, but much more comfortable the wet cold old sneakers), and we started to head back.

John said that he saw from a listing on a sign on the way back that we went about one fourth the way up the mountain, that it plateaus in two different places, and that there is another lift to get higher up the mountain - when the lifts are running (which they weren't).

Which made me feel even worse, because we didn't get as far as I thought we were, or as far as I thought we could have gone.

Because there was a sister hotel to the hotel we're staying at in the mountain range, we just took its road back down. Although it was a bit longer, it was a different view of mountains and town. When we got to the bottom of the mountain, we saw that they were doing construction work on the road, and the road was completely destroyed. It was illegal to scale the ridge and cross the train tracks, and the construction workers stopped as we walked back to the construction site and what should have been the road but was now a large muddy hole. John asked if we could pass through the tunnel. They told us there was room there and that we could cross.

I looked at the room, and it was filled with water. I said to John that I can switch the shoes and wear the wet sneakers through the wet mud, and then he told me to take the backpack (I didn't know why), and he took the camera from around my neck, and he made a gesture that he would carry me through it. I didn't know if he could do it, and I was *so* surprised, but he was insistent, so I got on his shoulders and he started to carry me though what was left of ground and water and mud through the tunnel to the other side,

where there was road. Half way he stopped, because we saw something for a photo, but I looked ahead and said I'd try it with my heeled shoes, because I think I can avoid the water and mud enough.

I followed him out of the construction area and we walked on the road a bit more and took a turn, and found out that the road ended up literally next to our hotel (do we didn't have to go through town to get back from the mountain).

So I just got out of a bath to warm myself up, and John just did the same. I guess this was our attempt to climb up one of the mountains in the Alps... But at least we tried.



05-17-03 (SATURDAY)
7:54 AM

Went to a bar last night, for our last night in Bad Gastein. There was a big bread bowl on the bar (do they charge of this bread sitting out if you want to eat it?). It's funny, but here foods do not carry a ton of preservatives, so you can't keep bread sitting around for a week or more and expect it to be okay. People buy everything fresh, from breads to fruits and vegetables. John said this is why Europeans eat better, because they have healthier food and do not eat the same processed foods. I asked him if Americans ate so many preservatives, would we stay preserved longer if we were dead, but you'd think that if Americans were so concerned with having healthier lives we'd eat better foods on the whole, and John said that it was probably because Americans rush through life so much and try to do so much in so little, that they don't have the time for preparing fresh foods.

Wait, I was talking about the bar. The bartender, because he got a phone call he had to take somewhere else while he was pouring our beers (so the beers sat at the tap for a few minutes), he poured us new beers and drank our old beers - 'the bartender's mistakes,' as John put it. We thought it was funny that the bartender could drink while on the job, because that is something bartenders could never do in America...

Oh, added notes: it was so cool to go into a "pharmacia" when John needed to get an over-the-counter pain medication; unlike a Walgreens or a United States drug store, this place was a small shop with apothecary jars of medicines all along the walls. You actually felt like you were getting medicine, not that this was some generic little coated pill in a generic mass-produced box. I think Americans think that way about over-the-counter medicines, that they're just harmless for your body and they somehow make your pains and problems vanish. Maybe in Europe they realize that you can't solve your problems by taking a little pill.

Well, we're pretty much packing now. We leave for Villach, another place in Austria, then we got to Venice before we move through Italy. But I've got to get moving if we're going to be on time. Wish us luck.



Germany

GERMANY

INTRODUCTION

John took German class, when choosing a language, he chose German, so I thought he'd be good with wanting to go to Germany. I forgot that he'd probably love the idea of drinking excellent beers too, so I guess we had a few reasons to want to go to Germany.

We found out that Dachau has museums about the Holocaust, so this is something I so wanted to see. I spent five and a half hours at the Washington DC Holocaust Museum, and I wish John saw it, but John knows more about history than anyone I've ever known, so I think he'll be up for it too.



Dachau

DACHAU

05-15-03

9:18 AM

Okay, I was exhausted last night. I even took a bath after John, but we used dishwashing soap for the bath because we don't have bubble bath... Actually, the bubbles hold up pretty well, and they hold the heat in the water pretty well.



Whatever, enough about the bath last night. We opted to spend the day in Dachau today, because we were interested in seeing the Concentration Camp Museum there. I have been to the memorial in Washington, DC and I thought it was amazing with information and artifacts; it took me five and a half hours to go through it when I was alone in 2002. I figured that if I thought the United States museum was amazing, it should be stunning to see a museum in an old concentration camp. So here was the scoop from our trip to Germany:

Had to learn that washrooms on trains were labeled WC, for water closet. The journey was fun, because we saw when getting ready to go that it was snowing - but it was combined with rain, making it more of a combination between hail and snow. We had no real coats for this (I mean, it is May, and the weather is supposed to be milder than it is in America, and I don't expect snow in May in America...), so we wore shirts over and under our sweaters, wore our heaviest pants, and wore socks and shoes (instead of my usual sandals I wore when walking in Austria). We had one light coat and one British rain coat, which seemed more like a short windbreaker with a hood. With cold fingers and noses, we did the best we could in going through Germany.

I notice taking the train into Munich (München, in German), that I finally saw graffiti again - since we have been to Austria, I have seen graffiti only once, and it was beige and black of a painted head. Coming into Munich, I felt like I was in a city again; there was detailed spray paintings of images of people, and very colorful, elaborate type drawings. The graffiti was kind of cool.

We took the train to Dachau, deciding to come back to Munich before going back to Austria. We got to Dachau and then walked about two miles (I think it was 3 Kilometers) to get to the Dachau Holocaust Museum. It is a much smaller town, ver-

sus Munich, and there is not a lot to see there architecture-wise (though it was kind of cool to see German signs for Asparagus, and it was nice to see billboards for Hacker Pshorr, which is a beer I like that I have not seen in Austria).

I have been to the Washington DC Holocaust Museum before, and it was phenomenal. They had lighting appropriate for being in barracks, and you walk through quarters the size the prisoners were in. You even walk over planks the Jews had to use because the Germans wouldn't let them walk on the same land as them. There were glass boxes that housed the things the Jews had to give up once there were in the concentration camps for a certain length of time, so you'd see a glass box filled with hairbrushes or black shoes. All in all, it was an amazing visit, and I was looking forward to going to the Dachau Holocaust Museum, because the location was an old concentration camp site.

Because of that, it was interesting for me to go to the site, and I think it was good for me to say that I have been there. They had the original door to the concentration camp at one edge of the grounds, which said "in German), "Work Makes You Free" (John even saw it and took a few pictures of it before I got the chance). They left the paint chipped away at parts of the wall so you could see what the walls were like. But they cleaned up a large part of the hall, and when we entered the building, there were a few large posters of information (you'd have to skip ahead to the English translations throughout the museum so we could read them). The entire museum, however, was moving from room to room with large posters and sheets of data to read (which, in my opinion, did not leave much to the imagination, to help you understand what it was like there for these prisoners).

We did learn the Dachau was one of the first concentration camps in existence, and it was one of the only ones that lasted throughout the reign of Hitler (who, by the way, was not only Austrian and not German, but also was short and had hawk hair and dark eyes and was able to tell people that the better people were tall with blonde hair and had blue eyes). Knowing how many people were killed through the concentration camps, all I could think of was how small the Dachau site seemed to be, if it only held 6,000 people (I'd hear how 40,000 would be killed in a day, so they had to come from larger places too, and I know Dachau was small because it was one of the first camps). But we did learn that the Dachau site was used as an example for all future sites. The prisoners were even put on work detail at one point to build a new, larger camp, so others could be imprisoned like them. Later, people could be arrested and put into a camp because they were "potential" criminals (if they did not believe in the group's political views, they could be arrested and brought to a concentration camp with no recourse).



Only when we got to the last room, where we saw a miniature scale model of the entire grounds as it was during the Holocaust, was John able to point out to me that the only thing we were seeing was this small portion of the site (about one fifth of the entire site). Seeing that the entire concentration camp area was that much larger was the only thing that helped me to see how monstrous this place actually once was.

Munich

MUNICH



We walked back to the train station and went back to Munich. I don't know what the locals thought of me, other than that I was just another stupid American with her camera on a strap around her neck, but I took pictures of so many pieces of architecture (from churches to the police station to the court house to a bank or two, just because there was such beautiful ancient artwork on their outside walls) and so many statues and fountains.

Because our feet were getting tired, and because there were so many bicyclists trying to ride through town because everyone couldn't have a car downtown (and because John wouldn't hear the bells of the bicyclists that were trying to ride on the path he was on), we found a small bar where the older woman who was the bartender couldn't understand John when we tried to order a beer for himself in German (and I could just ask for a weisse beer because they didn't even list anywhere what they had, so I got their Ayinger), and the old regulars there kept yelling in German that they wanted music, but not with American voices. Well, someone put a song on the jukebox with American lyrics, and they looked at us like it was our fault (we never got up from our seats to have any music play; I love being blamed for something we didn't do, it's making me feel like I'm at home).

We got to the train station in Munich with some time to kill, but to get a seat we had to get food, so while John ordered sandwiches, we saw that they had Paulaner cans (that cost maybe less than in bars in Austria), so we ordered a few there too to pass the time until our train took us back to Austria (they were 2.60 Euro for twenty ounce beer cans and 2.10 Euro for soda cans).

You know, I said before that beer just tastes better here, with no preservatives, but I couldn't believe it when the *cans* tasted good for beer as well. It is great when you see these little differences (like good beer for cheap in cans at train stations) when you're passing through.



Italy ITALY

INTRODUCTION

When we planned this trip, I kept saying that I wanted to go to Greece because I was far too fascinated with the architecture and Greek design (I think there are nine Greek columns seen from one view in our living room, because columns are used for table legs, candle holders and vases). We checked information on whether or not it would be safe to go to Greece in the midst of the Iraq War (which the American Politicians attempted to be P.C. enough to call this war an Operation for someone else's freedom), and we decided that even though it was safe enough to go there, we'd want

to spend more time there than one afternoon. So in looking at records of information on Italy, I read that in Cicely there were still pieces of architecture from Greece there, and it was much more preserved than ancient Greek architecture existing today.

So, other than searching for excellent image ideas of gondola pictures on the water, I saw hope for beautiful Greek architecture existing in Cicely.

So this becomes a new part of our mission.

I also said I wanted to stop in Naples, just so I could tell my parents (who live in Naples Florida now) that I went to Naples, but to get there I had to go through Austria and stop in Rome before getting through Naples.



Venezia

VENEZIA

MAY 18

Taking the train was interesting. We passed through TONS of tunnels to get through the mountains, but after that finally

stopped the lands were flat and there were fields for growing grapes for wine. Weisse beer was the choice before, maybe I can start trying wines here and in France.

Passed a massive water tower shaped like a golf tee, and notices that along the road there were occasional tall poles, and they were completely covered with ivy. That and as the temperature and climate changed, we started to see more palm trees. We looking forward to seeing Venice - or Venezia, because we wanted to see streets that were water, and it would be cool to check out gondolas. I heard that it's a great place to party in, and lots of people were taking the train to Venice.

Now that we're here, we found out how expensive it was to enjoy yourself in Venice. Everyone there knows that people come here to see the sights, so everything has a jacked up price.

And a lot of the architecture was under construction , so many buildings had scaffolding around it. But it was cool to see the parts of buildings that were accessible to people - and it was cool to see stairs that led from the sidewalk to the water. Water levels rise, and over time that has caused sidewalks, roads, and foundations for buildings to be lost

I did start to see excellent things here for food, though - like a salad that was just cherry tomatoes and similar sized pieces of fresh mozzarella, mixed together with oil and spices. And because fresh mozzarella was so common to eat here, the price wasn't that high for the food.

That and I didn't care what the cost was, I was just so excited to eat this really cool food that's normally never served in the United States. Maybe if we ate pizzas a lot in Austria, I can move to other cool foods to eat here.

Venice is the city that fell into the water, and it was cool to see the gondolas and gorgeous churches. Walking around the streets at night, I thought the stands of merchandise for sale reminded me of New Orleans, with painted masks and liquor for sale everywhere.

Okay, so maybe Venezia was like this before New Orleans; I guess it's cool to see where these strange bits of history come from.



Napoli

NAPOLI

05-18-03

MORNING AND LATE EVENING

The train ride to Napoli was terrible, the light rattles so we couldn't rest. Well, I couldn't rest, I think John could sleep through anything, so he was fine.

If you think the sports we watch in America are violent, then you don't understand the violence in audience participation in soccer in other countries...

After passing Formia, Minturna, S. Santimo and other towns, we saw a field of black oxen, and I think we saw the remains of an old fort. When we got off the train in Napoli (Naples, to us stupid Americans), we saw a man carrying a large cross with Christ on it, and I saw colorful graffiti again.

We stayed in Napoli for only a few hours total, and I had no problem with that, because from what I could see, it was a very dirty town, and there was not much to learn from or see.

We started to see more architecture with tops of buildings like castles, and we saw more buildings that were painted - but the paint was old and chipping away.

John also noted that he saw that the soccer fields we saw while traveling in Italy had concrete walls and THEN the stands, and there would be a fence around the field with barbed wire along the tops of the fences.

It rained as I wore sandals in Napoli, and no place took credit cards (apparently they're not a big enough town to see the need to sell their food or merchandise...). Nobody spoke English, and it's hard to guess what people are saying when we only know a little Spanish (which is only somewhat similar to Italian). We tried pizza in Napoli, and it tasted like soggy cardboard. Street vendors had tables selling crap like belts kitchen supplies, cell phones and sunglasses. Useless stuff on the streets in a useless town.

And as soon as we got on the train to leave, it got sunny.

I wouldn't expect less.



Pompeii

POMPEII

05-18-03

We realized by the time we got to city number three in country number three that we didn't need to show our passports to go anywhere (apparently we only needed them when flying from one country to another). Although Europeans don't condone violence, they apparently don't worry about it.



On the train two kids asked us for money in Italian, as well as later in a restaurant (where we saw that every restaurant placed their silverware wrapped in your napkin, instead of just on the table). And after passing Portici, Torre Del Greco, Torre A Citta, and other small towns, and after having two chances to drink a Bacardi Breezer in transit, we checked out the "wheat stalks" (strange plants) shooting up high from the ground. When we got to see in the Colosseum there a stone block with a metal ring on it, which we presumed was for keeping the gladiator in one space there.

John also saw a family of 4 on a scooter while we were there, so we saw again how scooters were very common versus cars in this part of Europe. I also decided at this point that Europe was not a cat continent, everyone had a love of little dogs to walk around with them everywhere; there was even a veterinarian's sign on a street that had a picture of a pig, a chicken and a dog (but no cat).

Even while here I saw two old Italian men, one short and fat, one tall and thin, talking loudly, and it made me think of a strange episode ending of *the X Files* I saw once where Burt Reynolds was playing God and these Italian men started singing to each other before the credits started rolling for the show.

We spent the entire day, after walking through town, to get to the Pompeii ruins. There is a complete area of resurrected land from the ruins of this ancient city covered by ashes during the eruption of Vesuvius in the year 79 AD. It was an exhaustive tour of buildings, where we could see kitchens, eating areas and bedrooms.

By the evening we took the train to Palermo in Sicily, which was nice, but there was no outlet on the train, so I didn't have much of a chance to recharge my camera batteries or type notes on the computer. John slept with the light through the train window until there was a knock on our door for breakfast before we arrived in Palermo.



Agri~~gento~~

AGRIGENTO



05-19-03

After being in Palermo, we passed a bunch of small towns before arriving in Agrigento. Once there, we saw additional proof that scooters were everywhere. This was the second time we saw a family of four on a scooter.

We noticed here that kids can take these trains like they were school buses, because everything was so far away when you lived in a remote location in Sicily. People used the train to commute from Naples to Pompeii, later it started to feel like we were on the el, seeing people take the train the way you take the el in Chicago.

But once we're there... Well, it was hard without knowing the language. We found out that we had to get on a bus to be able to see the Greek ruins, so we waited for the bus (the lady said we could take either bus number 1, 2 or 3, so we thought we were set). We got on a bus, and I could see that you had to pull the cord along the side of the bus when you wanted to stop somewhere, but I was searching to find something that looked impressive enough to be the ruins. We had a map that explained that there was some about half way through the route, but there was something much more impressive at the end. So I remember seeing what I assumed was the ruins half way through the route, but then I saw nothing else. So apparently we got to the end of the route and the bus driver stopped to get a smoke and go to the bathroom, and he asked where we were trying to go. (Well, I assume that's what he was asking, but we don't know a lot of Italian.) So we tried to explain what we were looking for, and we showed our map, and he said that we passed it and we were supposed to pull the cord when we

wanted to get off the bus. (I got that, I didn't think that was it, so...)

So he brought us back on the round trip to the same place we got the bus from and we got another set of bus tickets and we made a point to stop at the place we passed.

Really, I thought (according to the map we were staring at) the site was only part of what we were out to see.



So we went there, and we spent hours in the sun walking around, taking pictures of anything. I was wearing a tank top shirt and shorts, and John even asked about me getting sunburned because we were much closer to the equator that I had probably imagined. I figured that if I got burned, then I'd just deal with it, and I kept walking around looking for photos. I think there were two times when I had to wait for people who decided to sit in front of pieces of the ruins, just so I could take a picture without people in the way.

That and although I didn't feel sunburned, my skin peeled for at least a week after visiting the ruins.

It was one site with a bunch of building, columns and remains, and they were spread out over a large area. We paid a fee to be able to go through everything and get a better view. Because we got there after the problems getting there, we made a point to walk everywhere in the entire course, and then we repeated the path backwards, so we saw everything once more to make sure we didn't miss anything.

There were no food restaurants for our late lunch, so we went to the train station food bar I got fresh mozzarella on a roll, and John got a larger sandwich with meat. We also got four Bacardi Breezers (mine pineapple, his orange), and it was all for 12 euro. All I was thinking was that this was such a great deal - to have that much liquor and food for a meal. One thing John

noticed while we were traveling in Italy - he said that people were really dirty. John say one guy spit on the floor in the train station, and the both of us even saw a girl throw her trash out the open bus door on one of its stops as we were going to the Greek ruins.

We never went to the Mediterranean Sea on our journey, and it doesn't sound as appealing to say we went over the Tyrrhenian Sea, but we did a lot of travel in Cicily... and we found out that when staying on a train to travel through Italy, we had little ladders to get onto beds. We couldn't drink the water in sinks in separate cabins (because even though there was a sink with a faucet, they didn't have running water, so the water was not drinkable, but you could at least use the sink for spitting after you brush your teeth in the evening), but they gave us two bottles and three little sealed cups of water so we could drink something through the night and rinse your mouth out after brushing your teeth.

To take us over the Tyrrhenian sea, they had to stop the train at a station and break it into three parts, so the parts of the train could be taken on boat across the water.





Rome

ROME

05-20-03

The train had nothing to recharge the digital camera, so I couldn't take as many digital camera photos as I would have wanted to. And when we arrived in Rome, I worried when we dropped off our luggage at the train station for the day that we'd have a hard time because we spoke



English. But we understood everything that was said, we said "due" for two bags, used the correct hand signals for explaining what we needed, we paid, and left without needing to ever speak in English.

When we found out there was no way we could take a train to Piza (the trains wouldn't let us get there and back to continue sightseeing), we left the station and noticed that there were no street signs anywhere near the train station (making it hard for us to guess which we should walk to see different landmarks). The first thing I saw after walking outside was that even the *garbage cans* were gorgeously, elaborately designed and decorated. We had pizza for a meal - and we asked for Agilo (garlic), hoping the garlic would make the Italian pizzas taste better (sorry, I know they weren't Cicilian, but the alternative tasted like soggy cardboard). I couldn't even taste the Agilo on this Neapolitan pizza (you know, when I head Neapolitan I think



Chocolate Vanilla and Strawberry ice cream that I always only ate the chocolate part of...) But I saw a Caprice Salad (fresh mozzarella balls and plum tomatoes, which was an excellent choice (they really should have this in America, it tastes so good, it is so simple and people would love it).

We walked everywhere and took tons of pictures. The walking was fun in Rome because every sidewalk there was made of three to four inch bricks, but there was no grout between the bricks at all - making them very uneven. I'd look for any chance to walk on a curb, or even the grass touching the sidewalk, just to try to give some relief to my feet in sandals.

We told some Texans who were visiting that we

were going to go to Paris, but we were worried because we don't know French, and I hear the French hate Americans. Megan (the wife of the Texan couple) told us to tell them with an English accent that we were British, because the French like the British John didn't think he could pull off sounding British so I thought we could be Canadian, I could pull off that accent with no problem, eh... Then it occurred to me that half of Canada speaks French, so I'd be screwed with that option.

But later we heard on the television (CNN, actually,) that the French hated the British for *some* reason, so I thought, "I can't pull off any of the English types in France..."

After a long day of sightseeing (it was cool to walk around the Colosseum and see all the gorgeous architecture), we got on the night train from Rome to Paris, and we were on the last train car, making us the car farthest away from the food or drink car. But there were cool doors for entering any of the back cars, and the ceiling has little dots of light to emulate stars.

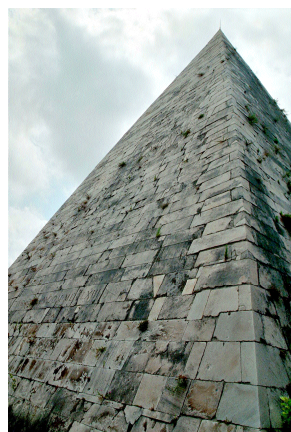
I guess being at the end meant we had a nice car, because our bed folded under to a couch, and we had a closet, a shower and a WC (or a washroom with our own toilet).

Because we didn't know if we'd have the time to have French wine while in Paris, we made a point to get a bottle of French wine once we entered France. Domaine Da La Remarde produced Côtes Du Rhone Villages, 2001, which was pretty good (and we kept the cork).

It occurred to me that my food on this trip has always been either pizza or mozzarella sandwiches. Since the digital camera was able to recharge on the train over the night, which was cool.

In the morning in France before we arrived in Paris, we saw a field of all white cows (which was kind of cool to see), and we decided while looking at the countryside in France that the landscape could have been anywhere - there were fields, far away trees, and an occasional barn or house. Although the landscape was plain, maybe we were just romanticizing the landscape more because we were looking at it in France - versus any place in the Midwest United States. I don't know, I think you'd image seeing more wine grape fields or something if this was somewhere else.

We'll see what Paris looks like when we arrive and see how different it is from other places we've seen.



Vatican City

VATICAN CITY



By default, people forget that the Vatican is its own city, and is its own country, all snugly fitting within a city, with a country.



FRANCE *France*



INTRODUCTION

Before entering France, I have this mortal fear of everyone hating us. I know, I know, the French sell Americans crap at insanely inflated price (who started the preposterous idea of selling water, other than the French company Evian?), but most

Americans think France has class and taste, and I think most Frenchmen think Americans are classless and tacky.

Well, we may be classless and tacky, but I still have this fear that people will be talking about how awful we are in French (the one language neither John nor I know). A part of me wants to record mpeg files of people talking in another language around us, so I can find out later on what they're saying about Americans.

I'm sorry, I just get this feeling that everyone in Europe is going to hate Americans because our president has gone insane about destroying another country, even though everyone else has pretty much said these American moves are going too far. I don't think I'm the only one who thinks that Bush's decisions are quick and lack real foundation. He says there is reason to believe Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, but we have never seen proof of it. France and Germany were the two countries who more visibly protested America's decisions, though Germany has come to accept the American decisions, even if they didn't agree with its base originally. All along, France has been against us (don' we give them enough money through their overpriced awful products? Can't they laugh at American's idiocy for succumbing to their scamming us with their less-than-par merchandise and allow us to make this decision and not get on a high horse about it when they can't change America?), and I fear they'll assume we're evil and ignorant people for just appearing in their country and giving them money to see public places like the Eiffel Tower. They want our money through their garbage they merchandise in the United States anyway, wouldn't they be nice enough to us to get our money when we're even in their country?)

I get offended in thinking they might act offensive toward me. I'm sure the potential way we'll fell will make me act more snotty toward people in France, so I'm probably going to make it worse because I've been assuming from the start that we're going to have a hard time there.

Am I having the problem because I'm thinking too much about it?

Honestly, I am interested in seeing the Eiffel Tower, and we have interest in seeing the Louvre and the Notre Dame Cathedral. I read that it is nearly possible to get a vegetarian meal there, but I'm willing to deal with bread all day for food if I have to. I even told John I was so thrilled about the idea of eating a Mozzarella cheese and tomato sandwich, which I thought was a French thing (I remember my sister Lorrie saying how much she loved them there), so John's trying to figure out how to ask for a Mozzarella and tomato sandwich in French.

And I'm sure we'll sound foolish trying to ask.

Paris

PARIS

Wednesday, 05-21-03

As we were leaving the train, the conductor recommended that we take taxis, because the Metro may be on strike still. So we prepared for taking lots of taxis, and we got lots of Euros so we could make our way through everything while we were there for the day.

We thought of trying to take our luggage with us as we walked through Paris to go to many sites (the Eiffel Tower was only the first, we wanted to see the Louvre and the Notre Dame, along with a ton of other places), but there was no way we'd be able to carry all of our belongings with us the entire time. In the train station, they scanned our luggage for security purposes (I removed my film from all of our luggage), but we had to use lockers to store our luggage for the day. But we managed to cram everything into one large bin, which only cost us 4.80 Euros (which is cheaper than anyone housing our luggage for us for the day).

I also wondered if we'd be in more trouble because neither one of us knew any French at all, but I hoped that everyone in Paris would also know English, so I hoped we wouldn't have a problem. We practiced assorted phrases in French, but I think the only one we'll end up using is the one in asking where to go in a taxi and how to thank the cab driver.

The conductor also said that a 3 kilometer ride to the Eiffel Tower should be about 5 Euros, but I think they charge a lot for a ride directly from the train station, because we probably blew 10 to 12 Euros. But at least there was a bus and taxi line, so there was sometimes a convenience in having a line the taxi driver could take. Sometimes, though, there were so many taxis and buses in that lane, the driver would cut into regular traffic so he could get us somewhere faster and we wouldn't pay for sitting in traffic so long.





John was walking too fast. My feet were still sore from walking on the groutless sidewalks in Rome, which is why I said we needed to pay for an ATM and pay for a taxi (I couldn't take the hyper walking...). I just thought, "If you're going to walk like this, we're going to take a taxi instead."

So taxis we took.

And I was strange enough to even try to take pictures *while* I was in the taxi. I think that for a while I was sticking my head out the window to take photographs, like some sort of dog with their tongue hanging out, maybe like one of the billions of little dogs I saw people walk around with in Europe. Once when the taxi driver heard me saying I thought a building was beautiful, he even pulled over so I could take a photo of it. So, I guess Parisians do know English, and people were nice to us. (Granted, I was paying him for a taxi ride, so of course he'd be nice to us, but it was still nice...)

We took photographs of the Eiffel Tower, The Louvre, the Notre Dame, and a ton of other gorgeous buildings. We noted that no pedestrians listen to the "don't walk" sign at intersections, so I learned to just follow what everyone else was doing. It was also helpful for me to be able to listen for the bell ringing of bicycles, or horns of scooters, which don't seem to care sometimes if they use the street or the sidewalk. People also sort of drove maniacal on the road too (even though it wasn't as bad as in Italy).

So on to the cheese sandwiches, which I thought would be easy to come by in France, I had a gruyère and tomato sandwich for a late lunch after the Eiffel Tower. We noticed that there were a lot of outdoor cafés, and all the seats faced out toward the street. I like that, but it was just kind of funny to see all of these restaurant outdoor seats were in a line facing the sidewalk.

While sitting and having lunch outdoors, I saw yet another Keanu Reeves poster for some movie he is in, and all I could think was that I could understand why Europeans can think we Americans are so violent. I mean, if they don't get that from the behavior of President Bush, but I swear, if I see another poster of this Keanu Reeves guy, I think I'll want to kill people.

The architecture was gorgeous, and Paris wasn't so bad when we were willing to pay for taxis. And people weren't rude to us, probably because we were customers and they could get money from us.



Belgium

BRUXELLES

05-21-03

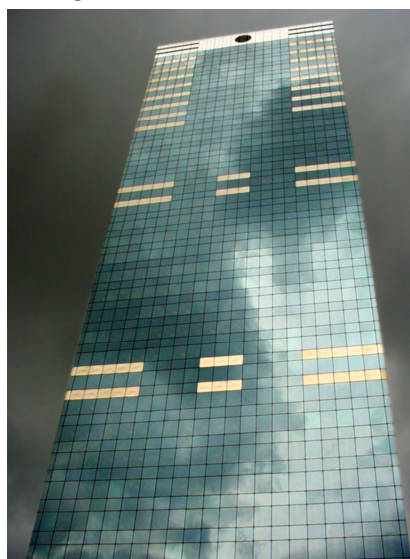


Now we take the “Thalys” train to Bruxelles in Belgium. But they even served cocktails for the one hour twenty minute train ride. The chairs were even comfy on this mini train ride, and there is a writing table attached to the seat in front of you, like an airplane, but everything is larger, there are foot rests, and everything is just more comfortable. I mean, they even gave you a face towel too for cleaning up. I couldn't believe the treatment.

The diversity in the architecture was really intriguing, and John said he was so surprised by my love of architecture. Maybe I loved the fact that a building you live or work in can be a work of art and be gorgeous... but he noticed here that maybe my love of architecture and the fact that my brother is an architect isn't just a love we as brother and sister share, but he saw that there were a ton of beautiful buildings here, and the countries I came from were known for their excellent architecture and the some of the greatest architects in history came from here. We saw many tall glass buildings there. They were bluish in color because of the glass, and they were sleek and modern, with interesting building shapes. Another large portion of the buildings we saw were “row houses” - they were a few stories tall and had different colored siding on each of the houses, but they shared walls with the adjoining houses. It's interesting to see a row of houses, all designed differently, that still share sides with the houses right next to them. It's kind of like town homes, but all of the individual houses *looked* different, which was interesting and cool. Because they were so old they started to look aged, but it was still an interesting thing to see.

After taking pictures and seeing sights in Belgium, we had to take a train to Amsterdam in the Netherlands. I tried to take a picture of a church in Antwerp (Belgium), but I think the train was moving and I got a photo with a big pole in the way (it got right in front of the church as I snapped the photo).

The woman came around with meals, and a fish plate with kale in a Jello mold (gelatin has animal products in it too) was put in front of me. I asked if there was anything vegetarian, and she said she'd check ... then came back and said this was their vegetarian meal. So I don't eat because people don't know the definition of vegetarian.



Amsterdam

AMSTERDAM

INTRODUCTION

We arrived in Amsterdam at 9:00 in the evening, and we had to find a hotel before we look for something fun to do in what is known probably worldwide as such an incredible party and drug town. Hell, I thought, if people go there for assorted drugs, maybe this is a place we should at least see.

Don't think we'll do any drugs there, so I figured I bet-



ter check to see if there is anything else in Amsterdam. Saw that Anne Frank's house and Museum were there, as well as Van Gogh's Museum, and I can't help but think that it would be so excellent to go to Museums in Europe, especially ones that are the European country the Artist is from. The *Van Gogh Museum* has the richest collection in the world of works by Vincent van Gogh. The museum has over 200 paintings, 500 sketches and 700 letters from the artist, as well as his collection of Japanese prints.

Dozens of museums in Amsterdam draw all types of art fans to the city. There is something for everyone. People know the route to the *Rijksmuseum* and the *Van Gogh Museum*, but there are other museums and art galleries in Amsterdam as well. Amsterdam has some fifty museums which attract many millions of visitors each year. I'm interested in seeing *the Anne Frank house*. If you know of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, you know that Anne and her family hid from the German occupation forces until they were betrayed and deported. *The Anne Frank House* will hopefully give an impression of the life of Anne Frank, in which the diary takes a central role.

I read that the *Beurs van Berlage* is one of the world's most important architectural monuments, so hope I can find good photography there.

There's a Biblical Museum there, with a ton of archaeological finds from ancient Egypt, centuries-old models of the temple of Solomon and Herod, and also religious objects from the Jewish and Christian traditions.

I was interested in the *Van Gogh Museum*, but I also heard about the *Rembrandt house*, where Rembrandt lived between 1639 and 1660, that has 250 of the 300 etchings Rembrandt created. *Rijksmuseum* has the largest collection of art in the Netherlands, so I imagine that all of these places to see (including a ton of additional museums I didn't bother mentioning in this), we'll keep ourselves really busy.

05-21-03

TRAIN TO AMSTERDAM

So the Thalys (which we called “Mach 2,” because it was so fast), gave free mini sandwiches and a fruit bowl (which was orange pieces and currant, and the currant definitely



left something to be desired...), with your choice of drink. I tried a white wine (like the French red we had before), and John had the beer they had and recommended (Mae’s). They called it the best Belgium beer, and it was excellent.

05-22-03 (THURSDAY)

1:34 AM

Amsterdam is not open late. There aren’t many people in the bar at all - I mean, there are three or four people in each bar.

No lie

I mean, I know I’m sounding like a snot, but New Orleans has stuff going on until maybe 3:00 AM on the weekends, maybe at least 1:00 AM on the weekdays, and we had to walk around in I don’t know how many circles and in how many alleys looking for a bar with anything happening.

That and if you try to look for a bar in Chicago, you can find something open until maybe 4:00 on the weekends without a problem.

I know, I know, I know, they have legal drugs there. They say Marijuana is legal and ‘Magic Mushrooms’ are considered a “soft drug” (I didn’t know powerful hallucinogenic drugs were considered ‘soft drugs,’ but what the Hell, I guess that that’s the beauty of socialism), but no one serves Marijuana unless you’re in a coffee shop (the capitalist in me says that makes sense, because if you’re drinking alcohol (a relaxant) at a bar, you don’t want Marijuana knocking your paying guests unconscious, so starting

then off with the “I-wanna-get-wired-and-I-wanna-drug-that-will-keep-me-awake-for-hours” drug, caffeine, might be a good idea when you want to mellow them customers out with pot), even through I didn’t want coffee and I wanted to see the Marijuana cycle goin’ on in Amsterdam.

We ordered drinks at a bar, and we *then* found out that that only accepted cash. After I ordered a B-52 for me as well as a Long Island Iced Tea, and John got a “Planter’s Punch” (something that he kept saying was better when he was on vacation and the Jamaicans make it for him with every ounce of expansive hard liquor they could find to make the mixed drink taste better). That’s when we got the total (we had to pay in what little cash we had left, after getting cash once on this trip already) of 27.50 € (Euros).



This pissed me off, and I said we had to go to a place next that accepted credit cards, and the only place we could find was a Mexican restaurant that wanted us to eat food; we each ordered a soup (Tomato and French Onion, if you wanted the details), and we only got to drink one half liter each of Heineken there.

So what does that mean for the night for me? It means that I didn’t see any pot (translation: I didn’t see any on any menus, I didn’t see anyone smoking it, I didn’t see anyone offering it, I saw nothing), it means I barely got to drink (I paid almost 30 Euros for two point five weak drinks and I had to spend another 19€ to buy two orders of soup to be able to drink two Heinekens).

Interesting evening.

It was also “cobblestone country,” and I can at least say the hotel was gorgeous, and they had a night breakfast for us. They even held our luggage for the day after we checked out before we left for Luxembourg.

While we were in Amsterdam for the day, we went to the Anne Frank House, which was really cool to be in the house she hid in and see films and artifacts in English as well as in Dutch.

Okay, I’m not into the drugs. But At least I *saw* the place, and hopefully we’ll get to the Anne Frank House and the Vincent Van Gogh Museum tomorrow before we leave for Luxembourg.

Luxembourg

LUXEMBOURG

INTRODUCTION

There's a song from The Smiths called "Ask." One set of lines are:

Spending warm Summer days indoors
 Writing frightening verse
 To a buck-toothed girl in Luxembourg



And when we were looking for places to go, I saw Luxembourg, and I jokingly thought, hey maybe there's a buck-toothed girl in Luxembourg... We laughed, but we knew it was a place where we could stop and visit.

Then we saw that in order to visit there we'd have to stay the night there. So, in the midst of our travels to Museums and memorable sights, we'll stop in this small country Luxembourg.

Looking for information on Luxembourg, I found this information off the internet:

Not even big enough on most maps of Europe to contain the letters of its name, Lilliputian Luxembourg makes up in style what it lacks in size. Luxembourg enjoys a prosperity that nations many times larger aspire toward and envy. Visitors to the country pay for their luxury accordingly, but in exchange they find a wealth of spectacular verdant landscapes crisscrossed by rivers and dotted with the sort of rural hamlets that most people associate solely with fairy tales.

This is not to say that Luxembourg is all swanky suits and medieval villas. And what's most convenient, the capital is no more than an hour's drive from anywhere else in the country, so you can truly get a sense of the lay of the land without spending a ton of time in doing so.

The nation's motto is inscribed everywhere throughout the capital - *Mir wëlle bleiwe wat mir sin* - 'We want to remain what we are'.

In such a small country, it is probably easy to retain and cherish the heritage that many European countries are known for. But because Luxembourg isn't as well known as other European countries, it is probably easy for them to do.

On this train we stopped in Maastricht in the Netherlands on our way to Luxembourg, and since this apparently was a commuter train, we had to listen to two sets of strangers have conversations in Dutch, which we sat there in silence. But John

got the feeling that this train didn't go directly to Luxembourg, so he asked, and he answered in French. John had to ask if he spoke English, and then we found out that we had to run to get to another train so we could make it to Luxembourg. We grabbed our stuff and looked at the schedule and saw that we had to bolt up the escalator, down the hall, then up another escalator to get on a train to Liege. We got to the train thirty seconds before that train left.

We thought Liege was a stopping point on the way to Luxembourg, so John asked when they checked our tickets if this train goes to Luxembourg, and they said it didn't. They found out for us that we'd have to go to another train to make it to Luxembourg (our third train for this commute), just so we could get to our next stop.

Wow, our plans said one train, through these two cities in two countries. Didn't know we had to guess and change trains a few times to pull it off.

While in Liege, where they spoke a dialect of French, we saw cool bridges and buildings

We saw two castles on the road so far, even though I didn't have time to take a picture before we went to our next country.

05-23-03 (FRIDAY)

12:25 AM

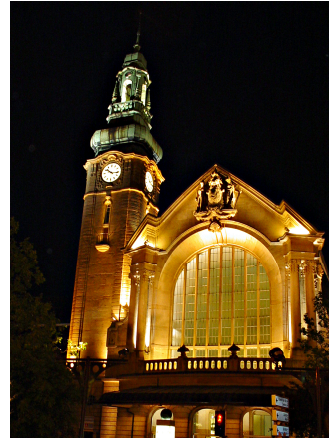
Oh my gosh, I don't know what to make out of this night. It stared off really... well, really *off*, then it got better than a night in Amsterdam for us be the end of the night.

Let me explain.

We started off by looking for camera batteries for my Minolta Maxxum 5000, because it couldn't take a picture with the energy it had (Hell, it couldn't focus the film or set the film speed or aperture, and it's battery would die when you tried to manually override its automatic functions). But no places that would sell batteries were open, so we had to return the camera to the hotel and attempt to go out.

We walked down the one main block and there was really only one worthwhile place to go to for a drink, and it had maybe three people in it and it was blaring a really bad song... so we decided to move on. The next block was literally filled with strip clubs, and I said that even if there was a bar in this block that wasn't a strip club, everyone that would be in it would be male and I would feel really wrong in the joint. Actually, as we were walking down the strip club block, I felt a few stares from a few men that were also walking down the street.

When John thought there would be nothing else and we should go back to that crappy bar with bad music, he suggested walking back down strip club lane to get there, and I really did not feel comfortable doing that (I know, I'm a prude, but what the Hell, I'm female, give me some leeway on these things in such a sexist society...). We walked to the next block and saw other shops and bars and strip clubs to check out, but we still opted to go back to the bar with the bad music we first saw.



The bartenders there knew very little English, so we managed to order beers, and while I got a standby John got a local specialty that he liked (but I thought was bad). We looked at the menu again and I saw they had Bacardi Breezers there, so I asked for two (because I drink them like they're water, apparently) and I asked for flavor choices, and she mentioned peach, which I did not know existed (I knew of Lime, Lemon, Pineapple and Orange). So I drank these peach things like they were good-tasting water, and John ordered a scotch and Coke mixed drink that he said he liked. We were getting to enjoy ourselves sitting there talking (maybe it was my liquor? I don't know...), but after John figured out the reference of the bar name of "Happy Days" to the sitcom and the old music and the pictures of Marilyn Monroe and Elvis and James Dean on the walls, we ordered a round of a Bacardi Breezer Peach and he got a J&B mixed drink bottle, and the people that owned the bar gave half of the bar free chaser shots (which were good).

We got through the last of the drinks, which cost us only about two thirds of the price for one round of drinks in Amsterdam, and we happily made our way. Walking home, John said that for his experience in Luxembourg, the bar prices were better than and there were more people than and the atmosphere was better than his experience in Amsterdam.

Actually, to quote him, he said, "Actually, I said Amsterdam sucked."

Okay, we all have our crosses to bear, but this night in Luxembourg wasn't an effort at all. By then end of the night we really enjoyed ourselves.

We stayed in a hotel that, like Amsterdam, had two twin beds pushed together in the hotel room, and we also have an additional thin bed pushed to the side, like a sofa (was it for a child in this room, or a third adult?).

Because it was the first nice day on our trip, I wore shorts for sightseeing when we walked through Luxembourg.

Now, I think we did pretty well while not knowing the language in trying to fit in and not cause problems with anyone in any of these countries, but I never knew that "shorts" as clothing was pretty much only an American thing, and that no one in Europe wore short - especially women, who only revealed their legs by wearing skirts. So I was the only one wearing shorts, and I think guys grinned looking at me (were they pleased with seeing legs or did they think I was a whore?), and all the women wouldn't even look at me (I'm *sure* they thought I was the whore...).

We stopped to eat at a bar where only men were taking their lunch break (yeah, I got lots of looks as a woman wearing shorts, and John didn't understand how I could feel awkward there because I was being gawked at...), but people there did not speak English, so I decided to not even bother trying to eat. John ordered, but they had Bacardi Breezers at the bar, so I could keep myself occupied until we moved on to see more sights and take more pictures of churches.

I had to think about how lush the wilderness is in Europe once I was walking around here. There was a lot of greenery, and it made me wonder if America had this much greenery and we just plowed it all down to create our urban nation.

Switzerland

SWITZERLAND

INTRODUCTION

Do you have a thing for chocolate?

Well, John does, so I told him that if we go to Switzerland he could probably have the best chocolate in the world. I should have told him they're also known for phenomenal cheeses, because I obsess over cheeses the way John obsesses over chocolate.

The diversity of the landlocked, mountainous country is the essence of Switzerland. Still, it is best known for its fine cheeses and chocolate, watch making industry, and for its scenery. I even have a Swiss Army knife, just because there is something novel about having a real *Swiss Army knife* and get that Switzerland logo appearing on my own watch..

The Alps and Pre-Alps cover 60% of the land, if that is not reason enough.



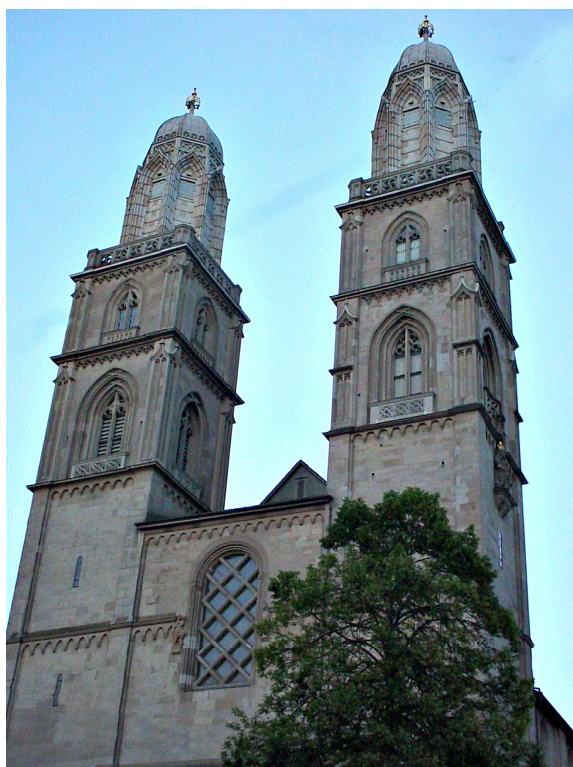
05-23-03

We passed a bunch of towns in France before we got to Zurich, Switzerland, but after a while, all of the scenery started to look the same, like we were driving through the Midwest United States. It started to look like driving from Ohio, to Indiana, to Iowa. Same hills, same foliage... Same expanse, looking for something new.

05-24-03

after sightseeing, we took a 6 hour night train from Zurich (our stop after Luxembourg) with sleeper beds in shared rooms. We both were assigned the top bunks, and there were customs forms on all the beds. We panicked, because we thought we'd have to claim our beer bottles we had for our last day in Europe (in Salzburg, before we flew back to the United States). We crammed our luggage into what little space was available (we got there first, so I'm sure we took up more space than the other two people had...). I started drinking my beers, even though I didn't want to drink (for fear of problem with carrying our liquor, although there had been no problems with it before). We then found out that the customs forms were for those people who were moving on to Budapest on the train, so after I opened by liquor, I found out that we didn't need to worry about it - but I had to drink it because it was open now anyway...

John slept terribly, but I, oddly enough, slept pretty well. John woke me at 3:45 in the morning (8:45 in the evening Chicago time) so we could get off the train to spend a few hours in Salzburg before we flew home.





Salzburg

SALZBURG (AGAIN)

Exhausted at our arrival at dawn, I photographed more buildings. We even climbed to the top of a hill and photographed the outside of a castle.

But after the plane takes off, we stop in Frankfurt before heading home.



This was published electronically through <http://www.yotko.com/jk/jk.htm> and <http://www.deepthought.com/scars/deepthought-dot-com/kuypers-writing.htm>. This was published in three parts at <http://www.poetrypoem.com/poetrybooks>; it was the center of a performance art feature October 21, 2003, and the performance was released on the CD *The Other Side*, which includes not only studio tracks of the show but also an audio track of the entire live performance.

Frankfurt FRANKFURT

05-24-03

4:35 PM

The flight to Frankfurt was short, so guess what - we got a tomato and brie sandwich (which was actually really good) for our one hour flight.

And there was so much forest when you looked at the landscape from above. Towns look like they took up about one quarter of all the land. Trees were packed everywhere.

I'm really tired. I may attempt to nap on this flight to the States.

COLOPHON

Exaro Versus was conceived after Kuypers photographed the cover image, which is of the National Library in Luxembourg, photographed May 2003.

Previous publications credit for each story were placed after each story in **Exaro Versus**, fashioned in the same style as the prose collection book **Momento Mori**

Exaro Versus was designed in QuarkXpress (v4.1), primarily using the Adobe Garamond font for the body copy (additional portions are also in the fonts Eurostyle, ExPonto, Helvetica Black & BoldCondensed, ITC Fenice Light, Linotext, Trajan and Type Vintage One). Adobe Photoshop (v5.5 and 7.0) was used to edit all images (including some image creation and editing from Adobe Illustrator v8.0.1-10.0 and Adobe Streamline v4.0).

Photographs throughout **Exaro Versus** were taken in Urbana Illinois, Naples Florida, Gurnee Illinois, Tinley Park Illinois, Palos Park Illinois, Chicago Illinois, Denver Colorado, Utah, Las Vegas Nevada, Los Angeles and San Francisco California, Tia Juana Mexico, Tempe and Mesa Arizona, Albuquerque New Mexico, New Orleans Louisiana, Talahassee Florida, Bloomington Indiana, Cape Canaveral Florida, Rhode Island, Salzburg and Bad Gastein Austria, Dachau Germany, Venice and Pompeii and Agrigento and Rome Italy, Paris France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Zurich Switzerland.

Penny Dreadful Press agreed to list their name in joint publication with **Scars Publications** in Kuypers' books, including this collection book. **Freedom & Strength Press** has also joined in publishing books from Kuypers. In honor of this collection book's release, **Dried Roses Press**, **Hawthorne Press** and **Troy Press** have joined in publishing this collection book with their press names as well.

Colophon 2. an inscription at the end of a book. (*Webster's Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language, 2001*)

Books by Kuypers

Hope Chest in the Attic
 the Window
 Close Cover Before Striking
 (Woman.)
 Autumn Reason
 Contents Under Pressure
 the Average Guy's Guide (to feminism)
 Changing Gears
 The Key To Believing
 Domestic Blisters *with Bernadette Miller*

Books from Scars

Infamous in our Prime
 Anais Nin: an Understanding of her Art
 the Electronic Windmill
 Changing Woman
 Harvest of Gems
 the Little Monk
 Death in Málaga
 the Svetasvatara Upanishad
 the Swan Road
 The Significance of the Frontier
 in the Palace of Creation
 Memento Mori
 R.I.P.

Collection Books

Sulphur and Sawdust
 Slate and Marrow
 Blister and Burn
 Rinse and Repeat
 Survive and Thrive
 (not so) Warm and Fuzzy
 Torture and Triumph
 Oh.
 the Elements
 Side A/Side B

Kuypers Compact Discs

MUSIC

The Demo Tapes *MFV (Mom's Favorite Vase)*
 The Final (MFV Inclusive) *Kuypers*
 The Beauty & The Destruction *Weeds & Flowers*
 Something Is Sweating. *The Second Axing*
 Stop. Look. Listen to the Music *MFV, w&f, axe*
 Live in Alaska *The Second Axing*
 Sing Your Life *The Second Axing*

PERFORMANCE ART/SPOKEN WORD

Live at Cafe Aloha *Pettus/Kuypers*
 Rough Mixes *Pointless Orchestra*
 Seeing Things Differently
 Change Rearrange
 Stop Look Listen
 Tick Tock *5D/5D*
 Six One One
 The Entropy Project *Order From Chaos*
 Moving Performances *mp3 compilation CD*
 Death Comes in Threes
 Changing Gears *performance show*
 The Other Side *CD tracks & live performance show*

Compact Discs from Scars

internet CD: Oh. Internet CD Assorted Artists

performance/spoken word:

T&T audio CD *Assorted Artists*
 The Elements audio CD *Assorted Artists*
 Side A/Side B audio CD *Assorted Artists*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Janet Kuypers (June 22, 1970), graduated from the University of Illinois in Champaign/Urbana with a degree in News/Editorial Communications Journalism (with computer science engineering studies). She had the equivalent of a minor in photography and specialized in creative writing.

In the early 1990s she worked as a portrait photographer for years, was an acquaintance rape workshop facilitator, and edited two literary magazines. Later she was an art director, webmaster and photographer for a few magazines for a publishing company in Chicago.

Kuypers is published in books, magazines and on the internet almost 6,000 times for writing or almost 1,900 times for art work in her professional career; she has been profiled in such magazines as Nation and Discover U and was also interviewed on ArtustFirst.com Internet Radio. he has performed spoken word and music across the country - in the spring of 1998 she embarked on her first national tour, with featured performances, among other venues, at the Albuquerque Spoken Word Festival during the National Poetry Slam. She turned her writing into performance art on her own and with musical groups like "Pointless Orchestra," "5D/5D" and "Order From Chaos." She sang with acoustic bands "Mom's Favorite Vase", "Weeds and Flowers" and "the Second Axing," does music sampling and learned to play the guitar - her bands have had concerts in Chicago and in Alaska; in 2003 she hosted and performed at a weekly poetry and music open mic, and starting in 2002 was a featured performance artist, doing quarterly performance art shows with readings, music and images,

She has published eight books: *Hope Chest in the Attic*, *The Window. Close Cover Before Striking. (woman.)*, *Autumn Reason*, *the Average Guy's Guide (to Feminism)*, *Contents Under Pressure*, and eventually *Changing Gears, Etc.* and *The Key To Believing*.

When doing all of that wasn't enough, she decided to quit her job and travel around the United States and Mexico, writing travel journals (*Changing Gears*) and writing her first novel (*The Key To Believing*). After a collection book of short stories was published of Janet Kuypers and Bernadette Miller's writing (called *Domestic Blisters*), she did intricate web design and engineering, using video (mov and mpeg), sound clips (.aif, .au, .mp3, .ra, and .wav), writings and e-books (PDF, Microsoft Reader, Palm Pilot reader, web page and text files) available on line.

