

## BOB LAMM, WRITER OF “LEARNING FROM WOMEN”

which was referred to in a few sexism poems of Kuypers:

*“a man calls a woman, in their homes or in the streets, middle-class husbands and fathers, most accurate metaphors and women’s very existence”*

I did a Google search on the Internet a few days ago, using my own name, to see in what ways my writing, teaching, or political activism might have found its way onto the Internet. I did find various references to my work. Certainly the most interesting was finding my work quoted in a number of your very powerful poems.

While those poems were obviously not written to please male readers, I *did* find them compelling. I feel honored that some of my words from *Learning from Women* were used in a few of your memorable poems.

I’m honored by your use of my work. And especially if those poems were used as part of your work for acquaintance rape groups.

It seems like you’ve already accomplished a great deal at a fairly young age.

As far as I know, no one else has ever used my prose in their poetry!

## GORDON WOODRUFF (ON KUYPERS/NATION INTERVIEW)

I read (Kuypers’) interview, and it is my opinion that she is very inspiring. Not too long ago, I was caught in a situation that caused me to fall a little under the weather. Someone said that my horoscope said that an older woman would help me get through it. Naturally, I thought I would end up developing a relationship with an older woman, but I was wrong. It wasn’t supposed to be taken at face value. You see, I read her interview in *Nation* and, probably for the first time ever, realized that everything would be okay. So, in essence, she is the older woman that helped me pull through my trying times. Just wanted to say “thanks” and that “she is a great inspiration to many.”

## JESSICA RIENDEAU (ON KUYPERS/NATION INTERVIEW)

I did receive my copy of *Nation* on Saturday morning and it was an interesting mix of feelings evoked upon seeing something of mine actually in print. I think that Janet Kuypers is a new hero of mine...

## ANGELA UPTMOR-HERRERA

I want to praise (Kuypers’) essay on pornography (in the book **Contents Under Pressure**). 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.

THE REMAINS  
Contents Under Pressure

HATELUSTDE  
ATHLOVEGR  
EEDRAPEFR  
EEDOMKILLI  
NGJOYPAIN  
PASSIONAN  
GERSTRENG  
THANGSTNE  
EDFEARPOW  
ERMONEYWI  
NWEAPONTR  
UTHAMERICA

contents under pressure

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Second (Stripped) Edition

## INTRODUCTION

I'm not a big fan of introductions. They tend to be written by Literary Fellas, little hoity-toity guys who have spent way too much time in school and not enough in the real world. They tend to be compacted little academic discussions, going on and on about "the dialytic nature of the writer's work" and the "postmodern sublime mixed with a Pynchonesque sensibility," big phrases that go completely over my head and reinforce the idea we all have that introductions were never meant to be read in the first place.

I first met Janet oh these lo six months ago now. We were introduced by a mutual friend, Lisa Hemminger, and the first thing I noticed was that Janet seemed to be late from something and kind of pissed off. The second thing I noticed was that she was the author of "Close Cover Before Striking," a nifty-looking book I had just read a review of in the last Chicago Books in Review, and had been thinking of buying anyway. I chalked the incident up to the fate it was meant to be, scraped together some dead presidents and took a couple of her books home that night.

Janet's one of those writers who I do not have a lot of experiences with -- a political poet who can, nonetheless, manage to convey their information to you by slowly slipping under your skin, in a way that's so subtle that you don't even notice it until they are suddenly there and you are yelling, "Get out! Get out!" The best of Janet's work has this way of being deliberately slippery and ambiguous -- the entire time you're reading it, you're never sure if the point she is making is being said from her own real-world experiences and that it's good to be thinking that way... or if it's being written as the voice of the opponent, warning us that this is NOT the way we should be thinking. After grappling with the piece for a bit, re-reading it in the tub while you're taking a long hot bath, you start to realize that maybe that is her point -- that, just like real life, political and fiery opinions are not as simple as just deciding one day that you're going to feel that way. Humanity is a split creature -- we, all of us, both as individuals and as a mob, have the capacity for acts of complete good and complete evil, both residing in our bones at any given time. And even as we are doing what we know to be good, even as we are thinking and acting in a way that should be the nice, liberal, artistic attitude that we all embody, there are still pesky little questions lurking underneath. Complex questions. Questions that we can't so easily answer, yet completely contradict that nice, liberal, artistic attitude that we all try to embody. Much of Janet's work expresses this conflict implicitly, never deciding for you what the right response should be or even what Janet's personal opinion is, but simply presenting it to you as an example of what is going on in all of our lives right

now. And really, what is the definition of good poetry but a document which presents a fun-house mirror on what is happening in our own lives?

You shouldn't get me wrong -- Janet's work is not all bubble-bubble, toil and trouble. She writes much about the very things that I tend to write about -- love, lost love, pathetic gestures acted out in the name of love. She also writes about proms, about high school minimum wage jobs, about making fun of yourself for your beliefs. To quote my friend Greg Gillam, she describes the "small, quiet moments" that are the mark of our lives as young artists in Chicago at the turn of the millennium. And this is something that I am simply a sucker for.

I took Janet's books home that night and over the course of a week got completely sucked in. She has this way of doing that, you know. I was living, breathing, and sleeping Janet Kuypers that week, and it was a great world to be in. She even inspired a political poem from me, my first, where I quickly realized how bad I am at it, why I'd never written one before, and how much even more a difficult process it is than Janet's apparent ease at it lets on. By the end of that week, my awe of Janet had been confirmed, and it will remain there in my heart for the rest of my life.

Well, we're nearing the end of the introduction, where you can finally head onward and upward towards the whole reason why you bought this book in the first place -- to read the writer's work. Before I lose you for good, though, let me give you a simple warning about what you are about to read. Be careful. No matter what your instinct, don't get sucked into the book for hours at a time. Try not to let the book hold sway over your life.

Because, like I said... if you let her, Janet Kuypers will rock your ass.

JASON PETTUS

15 September 1997

*Pettus is the author of five novels (including **Dreaming of Laura Ingalls**, published by GAD Publishing Co.) and contributes regularly to the alternative press, including *Ben Is Dead*, *Tunnel Rat*, *Pucker Up*, and *MOOjuice*. In addition, he is a champion of the Uptown Poetry Slam, hosted by Marc Smith, and recently placed second in the nation at the 1997 National Poetry Slam. His spoken word performances have been featured, among other places, at the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, National Public Radio, and the Canadian Broadcasting Network.*

## INTERVIEW WITH NATION MAGAZINE

They originate from Chicago, but Janet Kuypers' poetry and prose can be found in little magazines across the United States. The work is personal, with a definite message, and you can always spot a Kuypers piece without difficulty. Her "i"s are lowercase and the words flow in a stream of consciousness. The work cries out to be heard like a lost soul at confession. Janet Kuypers isn't a lost soul. She's an active soul, productive because her heart is anything but lost. She knows herself, can articulate herself. The words, flow, the actions are swift due to this unerring direction.

Where did Janet Kuypers come from and where will we see her next month or next year? At twenty-six, she's tackled all forms of media with success. Yet, she remains incredibly personal, accessible., More accessible, even than the individual without such accomplishments. It's a people mission, a quest to interact with the world.

More engaging than her autobiographical poetry or prose, watching Janet's life unfold is a captivating experience. Not many people out in the world are like Janet.

**Nation:** Exactly how prolific are you?

**JK:** Well, I've finished my fourth book. I'm 26, and have seriously written since I was 18. I've written about 50 pieces of poetry since the beginning of the year, but that doesn't mean I'll use all of them - maybe I'll use 15 or so. I don't write every day, but when I do write I write a lot. I write prose and short stories as well as poetry, and sometimes I write journal entries that make their way into stories of mine. I try to write, just to keep myself sane.

**Nation:** Your name seems to find itself in circles of all variety.

**JK:** I don't believe in having to be published in the "right places," although it's nice when it happens. I like being published anywhere, knowing that someone thinks what I have to say is worth listening to - and as long as I have a soap box, I love that fact that people listen. Whether they're the university or the underground crowd.

**Nation:** Can you give us some of your writing background, as well as why and how you got into the publication circuit?

**JK:** I started writing in junior high school - poetry, that is. Then I started writing a journal after high school because of a high school English teacher. The assignment she gave us one particular day was to write a letter to yourself at age 64 (yeah, from the Beatles tune, she was a visionary, I know). So instead of writing what everyone else did, that yes, I had a perfect life, I loved my job, I had two-point-three kids, the white picket fence, the whole nine yards, I wrote what i thought would happen. that I'd go into a career I didn't like. that I'd marry a man I didn't love. that I'd forget my love of writing and photography. And my teacher saw my letter, and she told me not to let that happen. And so I started writing a journal. And since then... When I started work it was at a company that kept me occupied 10 out of 40 hours a week... And

so when I started submitting poetry to magazines and kept getting rejected, I thought, "If I was an editor of a magazine, they wouldn't reject me." Because I knew my work was good and that it deserved attention. So I started *Children, Churches and Daddies*. Now it's like a baby to me. I get published on my own, but *Children, Churches and Daddies* is my baby, and I don't want to let that die. So I guess that's how I got into publishing. It's a matter of knowing I have something important to say, and finding any way I can to say it. And apparently, people are listening.

**Nation:** Isn't pegging yourself as someone who is going to marry an individual they don't love and neglect their inspirations a harsh prediction?

**JK:** Yes, but I saw a divorce rate of 50%, and unhappy marriages that stuck together anyway. I saw that men weren't knocking down my door (I was pretty, but not stunning, and my beauty was in my brains, which isn't particularly feminine) to go out with me and that in order to avoid the "old maid" syndrome I'd have to find someone, anyone that would tolerate me, whether or not I loved them or they loved me.. Yes, that's what I thought. It was a harsh prediction. But also, often, an accurate one.

**Nation:** Did you know something at an early age, or was this just pessimism?

**JK:** It was pessimism, because I (at that point) found no one worthy of love. No one with a real set of values. No one that loved their work. No one with passion - for anything. I wanted to live, but I was raised (subconsciously) to repress anything interesting, to be like everyone else, to not make waves.

**Nation:** How have things gone so far?

**JK:** A few years after I wrote that letter I met someone who taught me how to live. They worked their ass off, simply because it was what they loved - and needed - to do. They didn't care about what was the current fashion. They did things that startled and amazed me, and they always kept me on the edge of my seat. I learned that there are people out there worthy of respect, and love. And it made me have the same outlook in my life. I found the kind of work I love to do - graphic design. It made me excel at school and at work and do anything I wanted to in my spare time (I'll rest when I'm dead). I got my first job in graphic design, but it didn't satisfy me enough, so I started Scars Publications and Design. I started the literary magazine *Children, Churches and Daddies*. I started getting my own poetry published. Then I published my first book, *Hope Chest in the Attic*. And when I started living like this, I seemed a bit strange to people, but some people saw the life in me and liked it. Now the men, in some respects, are knocking down my door. I don't think about that anymore, because it will fall into place when I want it to. Since then I've published three more books of my own: *The Window, Close Cover Before Striking* and *(woman.)*. I've also published three collection books (that include my writing): *Sulphur and Sawdust, Slate and Marrow* and *Blister and Burn*. And looking back, with every new project I do, with every book I complete, I get this great rush when I finally see the book. I still love the work I do, I still love the feeling of accomplishment I get. This is what I've learned that I thought

I could never do before. Whatever anyone thinks they're capable of, you're probably capable of ten times more and are just underestimating yourself. This society is sometimes stifling, and you've probably been raised to do what's expected of you, and not what would genuinely make you happy. (not you personally, mind you; people in general.) When you break from that, when you do something solely for you to accomplish a goal for yourself that you want, you feel so alive. That's what living is.

**Nation:** Are you holding to your premonition, or breaking the mold?

**JK:** I'm breaking the mold. At this point I'd definitely rather be alone than hate my life. I've learned how to love solitude. I should have done that all along, but never knew how. Now I can be alone, because I choose to be alone, not because no one likes me. I can always work, and that makes me happy. Besides, how can I spend my life with someone I don't respect? I'm beginning to wonder if I will be alone for the rest of my life. Yes, I know I have time, I'm not worried that my biological clock is ticking or anything, but it's really hard to find someone who is willing to live, someone I can respect and wholly love. I've dated a lot, men are interested in me, I've even received a few marriage proposals. I'm sure I'll figure out what I want eventually in that respect. I'm not worried about it, though.

**Nation:** How is Janet Kuypers at 26?

**JK:** Much less dysfunctional. Much more intelligent. Less depressed. Less meek. Stronger. More obnoxious. I belch out loud sometimes now. Just because I'm a woman and I'm not supposed to. I'm not a little girl doing what she's told if it's not right.

When is the last time people looked at the world from a different angle? When is the last time any of them have lived? I see people now, fighting with their problems, and I think, "That was me, but I learned how to deal with it." I try now to take every bad thing that happens in my life and learn from it, make myself better from it.

It's questioning what society says is okay. Granted, we all live in this society, and we all choose to live within the guidelines, we all choose to follow and uphold cultural ideas, but some of the details - like why it's more acceptable for men to burp than women - could stand to be questioned. I worked in acquaintance rape education four or five years ago - ran workshops, created pamphlets, brochures, flyers, newspaper ad campaigns - and while doing this work I thought a lot about sexism, and that is reflected in a lot of my writing. I try to think about why there are different sets of standards for men versus women, where they come from, why we choose to live by them. My fourth book, in fact, is called "(woman.)", and is a collection of old and new poetry, short stories, essays and art about sexism.

**Nation:** Where do you draw the line when it comes to social rebellion, and how do people generally see you as a consequence?

**JK:** Social rebellion? I see something that I know is right and I incorporate it into my beliefs. For me the easiest way then to get it out into the light is to act on my beliefs, be proud of my beliefs, and be fully prepared to explain them. If I can discuss

where I'm coming from when it comes up, if I can make logical arguments for doing what I do, no one can argue with me. Even if they still choose to disagree with me, they at least understand where I'm coming from, can see why I'd think and act the way I do, and can respect me for having a cohesive set of values.

**Nation:** How long do you think, realistically, it will take to create true equality between the sexes?

**JK:** I don't know. I don't even know if I care, really, or if that's a completely good thing. I mean, some people think that if we were equal we'd lose our differences. I know the concept of "feminism" is what allows women to be meek, docile, and easier to be oppressed, but it also at times allows women to feel attractive, or unique.

What is true equality? In rape education classes, we were often taught that the way you dressed or your mannerisms could put you into a risky situation, and that certain things could in theory be avoided... Like dressing like a "slut," for instance. But telling women to not dress the way they want to, even if it is to highlight their sexual and biological differences from men, is not the right way to go - you eliminate the rights of the women to be able to wear what they want to wear in order for them to avoid the possibility of being raped. (I'm not even covering the point that rapes occur to women of all age groups, dressed in all different ways, and avoiding dressing like the proverbial "slut" does not protect any woman from rape.)

Is true equality having women act like men? The nurturing nature of femininity is something we definitely need. Is it accepting everyone as people and not making judgments on how they look? I'll be the first person to admit that looks are the first criteria you can - and do - judge a person on (I mean, you look at a person before they can speak to you, their looks are going to make an impression on you). Is it accepting everyone as people and not making judgments on what kind of work they do? People will have opinions about one job versus another, whether it's being a janitor or a CEO or a mother, because people make those choices for themselves in their own careers.

For now, is it at least the idea that women should be able to get paid comparative salaries for the work they do, or that they should feel like they can walk down the street confidently without a group of construction workers giving her shit for it. Or that they should be looked at as people and not sexual organs, or servants, or stupid.

I mean, it's fascinating to me that women can be treated like crap because they think that they're worth more than that. Men don't have to degrade a woman that already feels degraded. Every action a woman does, or thinks of doing, is clouded by how she will be perceived as a woman. How she walks. How she sits. I'm not saying men don't sometimes feel pressure to be "manly," but I think there's a difference. Men have the power. Women always feel like they have to watch how they behave.

**Nation:** Will there ever truly be equality, or will a fundamental gap keep things unbalanced?

**JK:** I don't know, I don't think so. You'd be amazed at how pervasive societal influences are, and I don't just mean beer ads versus make-up ads. I mean that baby girls get a pink room, boys a blue one. Girls get dresses, bows in their hair, pretty shiny



black shoes. boys get pants, shorts, t-shirts, sneakers. Girls are given barbie dolls to play house with (we won't even go into the fact that she's this distorted super-perfect image of women, entirely unachievable), boys are given GI Joe dolls to ride in tanks and blow up stuff with. Girls are given baby dolls, so they can act like a mom. Boys are given model cars, so they can race around. Girls are encouraged to play with their best friend indoors. Boys are encouraged to build forts with a group of boys outside. I could go on. It happens at home, by the parent. It happens at school, by the teacher, and even by the other students. Kids learn this early, and when they get to school, can use it as a way to judge whether other kids are socially acceptable or not. I think it's really in every aspect of our lives. It would be hard for me to be able to strip all of that and then judge whether or not there were genetic differences too. Besides, it doesn't really matter, at least not now. Most people don't even think about the fact that these influences exist, much less whether they should change.

**Nation:** Are men and women, when you drive past cultural upbringings, really as different as people like "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus" author John Grey suggests?

**JK:** What I'm concerned with, more than anything, is not whether the sexes are different, or whether that should entirely change. I'm more concerned with telling women that they're allowed to think and act how they feel is right, because I think women are taught to do things because "that's the way they are," or "you don't want to make waves." I think many women could be making more in corporate America, if they stood up for themselves, but all their lives they've been told not to. I think less women could be victims of acquaintance rape, if they stood up for themselves and fought back, instead of initially being concerned that they might hurt their date's feelings. My point is that they should be thinking about their feelings.

And I don't try to tell anyone that what they do is wrong, I just try to lead by example. I try to show people that an intelligent woman can be obnoxious as well as feminine, or that she can be nice but firm. That that's a woman worthy of respect.

**Nation:** What started your interest in acquaintance rape, and the need to liberate the female from society's watchful eye?

**JK:** I think because I felt stifled, and by liberating the female I could liberate myself. I also saw the statistics about rape: That one in four women during college are raped, one in three women in their life times. And 80 percent of those rapes are committed by someone the women knew... A friend, a coworker, a boyfriend, etc. Those are startling numbers. And friends of mine had these stories. And frat houses made it easy for men at parties to do this to women. And there were campaigns all over campus for better education. I wanted to help women feel like they could stand up for themselves, that they didn't have to take this. And for the victims, I wanted to do something to let them know how to deal with it, to let them know they weren't alone, that it wasn't their fault. That things will get better. It amazes me that women can even think that a rape is their fault, yet victim blaming is one of the main reasons acquaintance rape is such a vastly underreported crime. Women shouldn't feel ashamed. They should feel alive. And no

one should do something like this to them.

**Nation:** Changing directions a bit, could you launch into detail on the origins of your musical history?

**JK:** I have no formal musical training, other than a little choir in school... I remember when I was four, my older sister would dress me up in sequined costume clothes, put on one of my mother's blonde wigs on my head, glue back cardboard eye-lashes to my face... And I'd use a sheet music stand as a microphone and sing songs. My family even tells me that while I was still in my crib I woke up the family once in the middle of the night by singing at the top of my lungs, "You're So Vain." But apparently (still being a toddler and all) it sounded like "you pro-blee think this song is abough-tyew, doan-chew, doan-chew, doan-chew..."

The point of all that was that I've always loved to sing, all my life. I sang in a choir or two, then did some acappella stuff in late high school. I did a singing telegram or two in college. Once out of school I convinced two friends of mine, both acoustic guitar players, to play stuff for me to sing. Then we did a few radio shows and played live in clubs in Chicago. People said my voice was great, but I needed more of a full band in order to get anywhere. I like working acoustically because it lets me play more with my voice; I'm not fighting the instruments, they're more accompanying my voice than competing with it. We did a compact disc, just for our own records more than anything. We haven't played since August 1996, but occasionally talk about doing a song or two.

I'm also interested in combining music with spoken word, and putting some of my poetry to music, or at least background noises. Something Laurie Anderson-ish, leaning toward her spoken word storytelling style.

**Nation:** A few years back I remember seeing an advertisement in *Children, Churches and Daddies* for your musical ensemble. What happened with the group, then and now?

**JK:** That group was the acoustic band I was just talking about - *Mom's Favorite Vase*. We were all friends, and it was fun... I was the only one setting up shows and radio spots, though, and I got tired of doing it all (yes, I'm a control freak, but...). Brian and Warren are both wonderful people. Warren's the depressed artist trapped in a suburban man's body. Brian is the type that brings his guitar to parties and strums "Staying Alive." And me? I'm a mix between Natalie Merchant and George Michael - alternative yet soulful. Well, I'm not as good as them, but you get the idea. Either way, I love to sing. That's all it comes down to. Music is so expressive - I love listening to lyrics and I love to belt out tunes.

**Nation:** Can you recall a memorable moment in the group's history?

**JK:** I remember when we'd first go to open mics and what a good reaction we'd get. One bar manager telling me I was better than Janice Joplin. I was thrilled when someone would call in to a radio station we were playing at live asking who we were, that we sounded great. I loved getting a positive reaction from people. We had fun goofing around, and I have a lot of good memories. At our last show someone requested Brian

play "I Will Survive" so he started playing it, but told me on stage I'd have to sing it, so I belted it out without practicing, and it was hysterical. Everyone loved it.

**Nation:** Having hit nearly all forms of print media and, in appears, delving into music-land, is there any other popular media that you might try?

**JK:** I'd love to play with film. I've been on television with short films reading my work. I have a short story that I think could become a five-minute film. I love to act. The thing is, I love getting out in people's faces and affecting them somehow. By good acting. By reading good poetry. By writing a chilling story. By analyzing philosophy and religion in an essay. By taking good pictures. By charming them with my voice. By designing something that catches someone's eye. Whatever medium I have to use - whatever medium I can use - to get my messages out to the world, I'll use them all, as long as I can use them well. And I hope I do.

**Nation:** You say that one of your short films has been aired on TV?

**JK:** Yes. It was a short I did of one of my poems, "Too Far." The sentence structure is very short, and it's all about a woman who keeps doing different things to make herself look better. She first diets, using rice cakes to wheat germ to diet pills and shakes, she exercises, but she only loses twenty pounds. So she gets a perm, She straightens her teeth. So then she goes to the spa, gets her skin peeled, soaks herself in mud, wraps herself in cellophane, tried the amino acid facial creams, all the while knowing they really didn't work. So she goes to the doctor, gets her nose slimmed, her tummy stapled... She thinks about getting a rib or two removed, to look thinner, but she figures those ribs have to be there for something. And hey, that's just going too far. So I did this short film where the scenery was exactly the same but at every phrase I changed my clothes and my position, so it looked like some sort of confessional taping of these women going through this. That and a couple readings of other poems of mine made it to a cable show in Tennessee.

**Nation:** How did that come about, and was this local access, a cable network, or something else?

**JK:** Joe Speer ran the show, and he's an editor and writer himself, so he knew my magazine and my work. One day he asked me if I had any video footage of me reading any of my work. I didn't, but I made some for him.

**Nation:** Where do you find the time to engage in all this expression?

**JK:** When you love what you do you make the time. I work on my computer every day, after work, as well as on the weekends. I may only work for fifteen minutes, but I work at it. I've only dabbled in film or television, but would like to do more, if only I had the time. I read poetry at bars, and that's a social outlet for me. Or go to readings and write poetry while I'm there. Open mics for music was a social event for me, too. I have to find a way to make it all fit. I don't watch movies or television as much as the average American, I think, so maybe that's where all my time comes from.

**Nation:** How do you fit a career, social life, recreation and all the various medi-

ums into your life?

**JK:** I don't know. I'm a fast worker, I guess. I try to fit my creative outlets into my social life when I can. I just keep thinking, I want to live my life so that there are never any regrets. If I knew I was capable of doing all of the things that I have done over the past five years, but didn't do them, I'd hate myself. I couldn't be like that. I want to do things. I want to accomplish things. I can't let time waste. I don't know how. When I rest I know it's because I need to, not because I'm lazy, or bored. I fidget too much. I always have to be doing something.

**Nation:** What aspects are you forced to leave uncultivated?

**JK:** I guess I could be more social, but I try to go out at least three or four nights a week. But when you get older, your group of friends dwindles - people get married, people move away, people go their separate ways. So I guess I could make a better effort in cultivating new friends... And I know that as a girlfriend I can be a real pain in the ass, too. Oh, and I could stand to have a cleaner apartment. I mean, what's the point in fixing your bed if no one is going to see it fixed and you're just going to mess it up that evening anyway? Not that I'm a complete slob or anything, but I could pick up my clothes more often.

**Nation:** Active in a plethora of mediums, how do you manage to get them all out to the public?

**JK:** *Children, Churches and Daddies* got my name out there, so that I could be published in other magazines. The web sites have helped out a lot, too. Getting electronic was a great help for my writing career, and I love computers - I use them for all my graphic design, and I originally went to college for Computer Science Engineering. Now, with a web site, I can have downloaded sound clips of my music or my poetry readings for anyone to access. Or all my poetry. And I can easily submit many pieces of writing to many magazines. And many people have responded to my work, because responding electronically is so easy. For example, I don't know if Speer would have bothered to contact me about his cable show unless he could send a quick note electronically. And the new band I'm working with, the guitarist was a friend of mine from college that I hadn't talked to in years, and when he happened upon my web site, he dropped me a line. I would have never made contact with him and started working on this new project unless we were both on the net.

**Nation:** You create a poem, and it finds its way into an anthology. You sing, and there is a CD. You concoct a film, and it winds up on TV. Did this come about through extensive training, or did you always have the knack?

**JK:** If I wanted to do something, I learned how. I contacted book publishing groups. I found someone who would master a Compact Disc cheaply. I'm thinking of purchasing my own writable CD-ROM drive for my computer, so I can do all the work myself. The films are just me and a video camera; the quality is low but I can play more with lighting conditions. I guess I have the knack for doing something

when I want to do it. I get the biggest rush over accomplishing something like getting published, or making a film of my poetry, or writing a song. So I have to try.

**Nation:** What is your formal training?

**JK:** Let's see... In music, other than the occasional choir group, nothing. In film, definitely nothing. In writing... Well, I excelled in writing through high school, and in college was a journalism major with emphasis in creative writing and poetry - at which I did very well. Photography? It was my minor in college, but even before that, it just came naturally to me. Making people feel comfortable in front of me. Finding good composition. I also focused on graphic design in college, and that's what I've been doing for the past five years. I'm the Art Director for a publishing company by day, and I supervise the design of three magazines, and soon possibly a fourth.

**Nation:** Do you plan to stay involved with magazines, or are there plans to branch out into newspaper layout, or book design?

**JK:** I used to do newspaper work. There is something fascinating about newspapers, that something can come together so quickly and get into so many hands, but I also don't like it being discarded so easily. When I worked for newspapers, I liked working in the weekly sections, or special sections, because those were something the reader would spend a little more time on. My time for newspaper work has passed.

Books? I design books now, with Scars Publications. I've managed over three collection books so far, each between 160 and 200 pages. I've done a book contest winner, and 88-page book by Sydney Anderson. I'm finishing a book for Rochelle Holt and Virginia Love Long. I like doing books on consignment, as well as my own books. My new book, "(woman.)", is all designed. The stories use different fonts and type sizes for different words in paragraphs. I play with it more. The books I do I try to make graphically interesting, not merely scrolling text, like most paper-back books. And I've heard only good things about their layout. I don't go overboard, though - you want the thing to be easy to read, and more timeless than a magazine.

I like doing books a lot. There's a much greater sense of accomplishment when I finish a book and see it in print than the feeling I get after completing an issue. To me, the issues of a magazine have to get done, they're on a schedule. For books, each book is an end in itself, not an issue in a series, so it's a complete accomplishment in and of itself.

**Nation:** Where is your career, and all the art, headed?

**JK:** The art? I don't know. I don't even know where I want the writing to go. And a part of me would like to get an in in the music industry and become a rock star. I know, I know, I'm so practical sometimes... I don't know where it's going to take me. I don't know how long I plan to stay at my current job, or long I even plan on staying in Chicago. As a woman, I also think of how to incorporate these things with my personal life - when will I get married? Do I want a child, and how do I want to raise it? I think that's why I'd like to run my own magazine; I could do a lot of the work electronically and be able to spend time with my child. If I ever have one, that is. A part of me has

this plan, the idea that I'd like to build my own home in the middle of nowhere and be able to manage my business electronically. Have my own space, not touched by a landscape of buildings. I love what man has accomplished in our world, but I'd also love a place where there were trees. And a small lake. And right in the middle I'd stick my home, with lots of cables for direct links to my web site and my office in the city. I'd plant some vegetables. Have control over some of the food I eat. Enjoy my surroundings. I don't mean I want to live like a hermit, or become entirely self-sufficient - I love technology, and I love people - I think I'd just like to have the option of both.

**Nation:** Will they always be two separate entities, or do you have some grand unification in mind; will you be graphic designer by day, author by night, or will the two aspects eventually meet at one, all-encompassing purpose?

**JK:** I think if I was the publisher of my own magazine/book publishing company I'd be overseeing the editing and the design, and my own writing would be printed. I don't know where it's going to take me. All I know is that writing is something I have to do. I think I currently mix them in different ways; maybe I'll find a greater unification of them. All of these media overlap for me. I sing, but I'm also doing spoken word readings with background sound effects, incorporating my writing with music and sound. The same goes for film, I've just added the visuals to it as well. A part of me would like to make a CD-ROM that combines all of these things, short film, sound, text and graphics. I think in some ways they all do combine right now. Maybe I'll find ways to combine them in the future. Currently my career is in graphic design. Maybe I'll continue combining them, then move just to writing as I get older. I don't know. I try not to set too much in stone like that, in case I want to change my mind. All I know is that if I want to do it, I will. I'm confident that if I want to combine them in other ways, I'll do it, I'll accomplish it, somehow.

**Nation:** Let's go back to your ideal cottage. You are 26 (or 27?), and that's just a hop, skip and a jump away from 30. Do you ever worry that these dreams will go unrealized?

**JK:** The only reason they'd go unrealized is if I didn't do them. Since currently I don't know where I will be working for the next five years, or who and when I'll marry, the dream-house is a part of a constantly-changing goal of mine. The house idea, I might have specific details about it, like it needs a hot tub, and a darkroom, and an office, but beyond that, if other parts of it don't fit into the plans I have for my career and my personal life, then it's no problem for those things to change. My dream house isn't my dream house if it doesn't fit into my life.

**Nation:** Earlier you mentioned that things would come into place when they were meant to occur, but what if you never DO find that ideal mate?

**JK:** I don't worry about things like that. I know that even if people aren't perfect I can find someone I could spend the rest of my life with. And if I don't, I have me. I love solitude sometimes, because I'm allowed to think, and create, and do what I need for myself. You can't go through your life wondering, "What if?", because you'll spend your time in

fear, worrying, and not doing, and accomplishing, and making everything work out.

**Nation:** Is there another picture of your life, one without the cottage and the family?

**JK:** It's not a definite image I have that I need the house by 35, and the husband by 28, and the kids by 36, and the business by 33. It's just looking for long-term goals and working through them. Right now I'm working out the here-and-now. When the time comes, I'll look for what I want next.

**Nation:** Does this image scare you, or is there no immediacy to it all?

**JK:** There's no immediacy at all. Nothing scares me about my future, to be honest. I know that I can handle every decision I'll have to make. And I know I will have made the best decisions I could have made with the information I had and the opportunities I had available to me.

**Nation:** Also, do you have anything particular in mind? A particular area of the country, or the world, that interests you?

**JK:** I don't know. I'd probably stay in the States, because I like freedom (granted, the United States keeps slipping more and more into socialism, but considering the other choices, I think I'd still choose the States), but where? Somewhere where I could still get a lot of land in the middle of nowhere for relatively cheap. Somewhere moderate. Somewhere a few hours away from a cool city. I don't know. I'll cross that bridge when I get to it.

**Nation:** How realistic or unrealistic are your dreams?

Look what I've done so far. I never make a goal that I don't think - and know - I can and will accomplish.

**Nation:** Have you always been well adjusted? At the start of the interview you mentioned your old pattern of conformity. What was your childhood like, and what were the defining challenges you faced as an adolescent girl and a young woman?

**JK:** My childhood? I was a smart kid, and all the other kids picked on me, like you wouldn't believe. I had friends, but boy, did I have enemies. What are we teaching our kids when they learn at such an early age to hate things that are good - because they're good? How do they learn envy without even being able at that age to consciously define it? But I was taught to not fight back, not to argue with the kids, but to just keep being a good, smart little girl. What should a parent say, give the bully a good right hook? I gained more and more friends, but no one was a great friend, and no one seemed real or genuine. I took going off to college as having a clean slate - I even dyed my hair, changed how I look, as well as changed how I acted. I faced a whole new set of definitions people placed on me, like being a flirt instead of being a brain. That's when I started dealing with the sexism issue. I was growing up, and it was affecting me more directly. The point is, I had to learn how to survive - and thrive from them. I try to take every bad thing that happens to me and at least learn something from the experience, so that I'm a better person for it.

## SCARS 1997

I wear my scars like badges.  
These deep marks show through from under my skin  
like war paint on an Apache chief.  
Decorated with feathers, the skins of his prey.

I have a scar over my left knee.  
It's left over from a bout with poison ivy  
I had after climbing a mountainside.  
The four-inch long slice curves around my leg,  
almost perfectly defining the muscles in my thigh.

I have a scar on my right shin.  
I slipped on a patch of rocks and cut up the lower  
half of my leg and filled it with gravel and dirt.  
Joe poured hydrogen peroxide on my leg  
and wrapped my wounds with paper towels  
because the cuts were so wide spread.  
An hour later I was on my way home,  
so I could tend to my wounds in greater detail.  
Tend to my wounds in depth.  
Now all that is left is a two-inch line down  
the side of my leg. Although it wasn't a very  
deep cut, it looks like it went straight to the bone.

I have a circular scar on my left calf,  
from getting off a motorcycle and sliding  
my leg over the scalding hot exhaust pipe.  
It has been seven years since I gained that scar,  
and with each year I see it fade away just a little.  
I can still see it, but the memory is slowly slipping away.

I tell people that if they wake up  
with bruises and cuts they don't remember,  
then they must have had fun the night before.  
But each marking, each scar is a story,  
is a memory. It is a way to remember how you lived.  
And it is with these marks that I gauge my living.  
It is with these marks that I feel decorated.



## KURT IRONS (IT'S JUST A GIRL)

Kurt Irons  
while drinking  
drove a stolen  
truck  
straight  
into another  
truck  
and killed  
a woman

according to  
police  
reports,  
Kurt Irons  
was  
surprised  
by the arrest  
by the fact  
that he was  
charged  
with  
vehicular  
homicide

Kurt Irons  
was quoted  
as saying

“dudes  
it's just a  
girl,  
man

it's a girl -  
nothing  
but a  
girl”

## ALL THESE REMINDERS

Look, over here, in my living room.  
You left an empty bottle of beer  
on the end table. The cap, too.  
And come here, follow me, over here,  
in the kitchen, look in here, see,  
you left some of your food in the pantry.  
A box of spaghetti, some canned  
tomatoes. And come here, in the bathroom,  
I know you probably won't notice this,  
but here, this towel, it smells like  
you, is smells like your shaving cream.  
And I could swear my crumpled bed  
sheets are still warm from you.

Why did you have to go. Why  
does this have to seem so hard.

Okay, look here, the remote for the  
television is on the arm of the chair,  
where you always leave it. And the cocktail  
table, it's pushed forward on one side  
because you'd always rest your feet  
on it. Everywhere I look around me,  
I see something that you affected.  
I look in the kitchen. I look in the  
dining room. I look in the mirror.

Why did you do this to me. Why  
couldn't you have made a clean break.

There's still some of your messages  
scribbled on scraps of paper next to  
the phone in the kitchen. And look,  
the pillow on the couch is bunched  
up because you could never get  
comfortable with it. And over here,  
the phone books are out on the  
kitchen counter, you never put them  
away, and here they are, still sitting  
out, I'll have to put them back in the  
cabinet. and look here, why do I  
still have all of your love letters  
stuffed into a drawer in my desk.

When you left me, why did you  
have to leave me all these reminders.

## AND I'M WONDERING

I'm wondering if there's something  
chemical that brings people together,  
something that brings people to their  
knees, somethings that sucks them in

And I'm wondering if you're sensing what I'm  
sensing, is it just me, am I making this up  
in my head, or when I glance up and catch your  
eyes, well, are you actually staring at me

And I'm wondering if it could work out this  
time, if we'd have one of those relationships  
that no one ever doubts, especially us,  
because we know we'll always be in love

And I'm wondering if you'd find  
my neurotic pet-peeves charming  
like how I hate it when someone touches  
my belly because I'm so self conscious

And I'm wondering why you had to tell me  
when we happened to be sitting next to each  
other that the fact that our legs were almost  
touching was making your heart race

And I'm wondering why I felt the need  
to take your cigarette and inhale, exhale  
while the filter was still warm from  
your lips, there just seconds before

And I'm wondering if a year or two from now,  
after we've been going out and should have  
gotten to the point where we are bored with  
each other and sink into a comfortable rut

if you saw me making macaroni and cheese  
in the kitchen using margarine and water  
because I'm out of milk and I've got my hair  
pulled back and strands are falling into my

eyes and I'm wearing an oversized button-down  
denim shirt and nothing else, well, what  
I'm wondering is if you would see me  
like this and still think I was sexy

When I glance up and catch your eyes from  
across the room, when I see your eyes dart  
away, when I feel this chemical reaction, well,  
what I'm wondering is, can you feel it too

## JAPANESE TELEVISION

as reported in the New York Times:

one new television show in Japan  
boasts young women in bikinis  
who attempt to smash aluminum cans  
in between their breasts

another television show in Japan  
brings a young boy on stage  
to tell him his mother  
has been shot and killed  
to see how long it takes him  
to cry

I wonder what they'd think  
of Rosanne  
and Married With Children

# THE MEASURING SCALE

*Here's an addition for your  
degrading terminology  
of women list. In the  
construction field they  
(men) have devised another  
form of measurement.*

*When something is being  
lowered or fitted into place  
they will often refer  
to an inch or so as:  
up or down about a cunt hair.*

*They have gone so far  
as to determine that blonde  
pubic hair is the smallest  
increment and at the other  
end of the measuring scale  
is black pubic hair.*

*Pam, via the internet*

why don't you dissect me,  
take every single part of me  
and equate it with power tools,  
sports and violence?  
bang me, screw me, nail me,  
hammer me, bag me, pump  
me. shoot it in me. maybe you  
can even score.

if we're talking about  
measuring scales, what about  
the scale that defines the way  
you treat us:

on one end is the minor stuff,  
calling us "baby" and "sugar,"  
whistling as we walk by, but  
then move along the scale, get to  
the blonde jokes, yes, they're so  
funny, then how about a pinch  
in the rear at the office,  
well, that's harmless enough  
and while you're at it, porn  
movies and magazines, what harm  
do they do, and hey, women  
have always worked at home,  
so you should have all the jobs  
and get the better pay anyway  
and since we're just your pro-  
perty, fuck us whenever you  
want, i mean, hey, you're doing  
it already in every other aspect  
of our repressed, oppressed lives  
so rape us, smack us around  
knock us down a flight of stairs  
that's what we're here for

god, i don't even know how to  
measure these things any more

## MORE THAN WE SHOULD HAVE

when i think of him i usually think about the drinking

actually, i never think of him as drinking  
come to think of it  
i just think of him as drunk  
i can't even remember seeing the drinks in his hand  
but his perception of the world is always altered

but someone reminded me tonight  
of when he would work outside in the the cold Chicago winters  
and he would come back with his moustache frozen  
and there would be little icicles hanging  
down toward his mouth

and then i thought of  
when i waited with him once at the airport  
because we were picking up someone  
and we sat in the shrimp cocktail lounge  
and he drank, and ate, and i waited

and as we left  
we tried to pay the expressway toll with pennies  
but some of the coins fell onto the street  
and we had to throw more change at the machine

we paid more than we should have  
i'm sure we did

## COMMUNICATION

I  
now that we have the information superhighway  
we can throw out into the open  
our screams  
our cries for help  
so much faster than we could before

our pleas become computer blips  
tiny bits of energy  
travelling through razor thin wires  
travelling through space

to be left for someone to decipher  
when they find the time

II  
got into work the other day  
and got my messages out of voice mail:  
mike left me his pager number  
and told me to contact him with some information  
tom told me to call him at the office  
between ten thirty and noon  
jason told me to check my email  
because he sent me a message i had to read

so i first returned tom's phone call  
but he wasn't in, so i left a message with a coworker  
and then i dialed the number for mike's pager  
listened to a beep, then dialed in my own phone number  
then i got online, checked my email  
read a note from ben, emptied out the junk mail

realizing i didn't actually get a hold of anybody  
i tried to call my friend sheri  
but i got her answering machine  
so i said,  
"hi - it's me, janet -  
haven't talked to you in a while - "

at which point i realized  
there was nothing left to say -  
“so,  
give me a call, we should really  
get together and talk”

## III

sara and i were late for carol’s wedding rehearsal  
which was a bad thing, because we were both  
standing up in the wedding  
and we were stuck in traffic, and i asked,  
“sara, you have a cel phone, don’t you?”  
and she said “yes”  
and i asked, “well, do you know carol’s  
cel phone number, cause if you do, we can  
call her and tell her we’ll be late -”  
and she said, “no - do you know it?”  
and i said “no”

## IV

I was out at a bar with Dave, and I was explaining to him  
why I hadn’t talked to my friend Aaron in a while:  
“You see, we usually email each other,  
and when we do, we just hit ‘reply.’  
when you get an email from someone,  
instead of having to start a new letter  
and type in their email address, you can  
just hit the ‘reply’ button on the email message,  
and it will make a letter addressed  
to the person who wrote you the letter originally.  
so he sent me a letter once, and  
it had a question at the end,  
so i hit ‘reply’ and sent a response,  
with another question at the end of my letter.  
so we kept having to answer questions for each other,  
and we just kept replying to each other,  
sending a letter with the same title back and  
forth to each other without ever having to  
type in the other’s address. well, once i got an email  
from him and there was no question at the end,  
and so i didn’t have to send him a response.



so i didn't. and we never thought  
to start a new email to one another.  
so we just lost touch."

and then it occurred to me, how difficult it had become  
to type an extra line of text, to type in  
his email address, because that's why  
i lost touch with him

and then it occurred to me, no matter how many different  
forms of communication we have,  
we'll still find a way  
to lose touch with each other

V  
now that we have the information superhighway  
we can throw out into the open  
our screams  
our cries for help  
so much faster than we could before

but what if we don't want to communicate  
or forget how  
too busy leaving messages, voice mails,  
emails, pager numbers  
forgetting to call back

what if we forget  
how to communicate

VI  
i wanted to purchase tickets for a concert  
but i was shopping with my sister  
and wasn't near a ticket outlet  
but my sister said, "i have a portable phone,  
you can call them if you'd like"  
so she gave me the phone, and i looked  
at all these extra buttons, and she said,  
"just press the 'power' button, but hold it down  
for at least four seconds, until the panel lights up,  
then dial the number, but use the area code, because  
this phone is a 630 area code, then press 'send'.

when you're done with the call, just press 'end', and  
make sure the light turns off."

so i turned it on, dialed the number,  
pressed 'send', pressed my head  
against the tiny phone

and the line was busy  
and i couldn't get through

## VII

i checked my email address book recently,  
and the people i email the most  
are the people that live in the same city  
as me, all of whom i know the phone  
numbers of, all of whom are only a local call away.  
in fact, one of my friends lives a block-  
and-a-half away from me,  
on the same street as me, but  
i still email her as much as i call her,  
even though i could just walk over to her house  
and have an actual conversation with her.

## VIII

i was suntanning outside on my patio  
with a friend  
on saturday,  
and we decided we wanted to order a pizza.  
we brought a cordless phone  
outside with us  
so we would know if the phone in the house rang,  
so i picked it up  
and dialed.

and the phone needed to be recharged,  
the batteries were wearing down, because  
there was so much static  
that i was worried the pizza man  
wouldn't even be able to  
hear my voice.



## X

i wanted to get in touch  
with an old friend of mine from high school,  
vince, and the last i heard was that he went to  
marquette university. well, that was five years ago, he  
could be anywhere. i talked to a friend or two that  
knew him, but they lost touch with him, too.  
so i searched on the internet, to see  
if his name was on a website or if  
he had an email address. he didn't.  
so i figured i probably wouldn't find him.  
and all this time, i knew his parents lived  
in the same house they always did, i could just  
look up his parent's phone number in the phone book,  
and call them, say i'm an old high school friend  
of vince's, but i never did. and then i realized why.

you see, i could search the internet for hours  
and no one would know that i was looking for someone.  
but now, with a single phone call, i'd make it known  
to his entire family that i wanted to see him enough to call,  
after all these years. and i didn't want  
him to know that. so i never called.

## XI

now that we have the information superhighway  
we can throw out into the open  
our screams  
our cries for help  
so much faster than we could before

but then the question begs itself:  
who  
is there  
to listen

I don't believe in things that aren't proven,  
that we have no evidence of, but sometimes,  
sometimes, I still think about what I would do  
if I had two minutes to talk to you

when someone asked me what I'd say  
I said I'd rather hear you speak  
I'm sure the words you would part unto me  
would mean infinitely more  
than what I could say to you

and if I could talk to you  
I wouldn't know what to say

But I know I'd have to tell you  
like so many of your fans in the past  
that I thank you  
for showing me  
that there are logical people in the world  
that man can live by reason  
that reason is a virtue  
that selfishness is a virtue  
that I have a right to what I earn  
to what I create  
to what I know to be true

TWO MINUTES  
WITH AYN RAND

I would have been still searching blindly  
for philosophical answers  
to the meaning of life  
if you never told me  
that I am worth something  
that I am my own end

and it's nice to know  
that even when I'm surrounded by these  
unthinking masses  
that there are people who hold their minds  
as the highest value  
out there somewhere in the world

and the fact that they exist  
helps me through my days

but you knew that  
you wrote about these heroes  
over the years  
and how could you manage to write  
gripping, thousand-page novels  
about heroes that a rational mind  
can't help but love  
and did you really find that hero in real life?

Because I'm still looking.

You've created these heroes  
but are they just created  
does anyone else understand  
these values as I do?

Yes, thank you  
for giving me the answers  
I've been looking for,  
but tell me that someone else out there  
found the answers too

so maybe, if those who posed  
this unreasonable  
    illogical  
    ethical question  
in the first place, if they could give me  
another two minutes  
so you could do some talking  
maybe then you could explain to me  
how to get through the days  
when no one understands you  
how to accept less than perfection  
when you've seen the purity and the clarity  
of the thinking mind

## NEW TO CHICAGO

I'm still new to this city  
I know, I know, I've been here for years  
but I haven't gone to the Sears Tower Observatory  
since my Junior Prom

but when I walk by the First Chicago building  
the beams along the north side  
sloping up, parabolic pillars curving up to the sky

when I walk by the First Chicago building  
I walk up along the side  
and lean up against one of the sloping pillars  
press my body against the cold concrete  
feel the cold against my chin, my breasts, by thighs

and look up along the curve, stretching up towards the sky

you know, these pillars look like race tracks  
and I could see something come rushing down that curve  
a matchbox car, a race car  
a marble, a bowling ball  
a two-ton weight

I see the seed, the power, and it  
almost makes me afraid to look up

and every time I walk by the First Chicago building  
I do the same thing, I do this little ritual  
and it feels like the first time

Now he has so many opportunities.  
He has nothing to lose. Why not  
come out of the wilderness, attack  
everything it sees. Kill something.  
Suck the blood out, make him feel  
alive for once more. Let them try  
to restrain him. He has nothing to lose.

And for now it can fly to the highest  
redwood, look out over the world.  
Despise the world, the world that made  
him be alone, leaving him alone. Who  
will carry his name? Who will care  
for him when he is old? Who can he  
read bed time stories to?

## LAST BEFORE EXTINCTION

Now it can feel death creeping upon  
him, closer and closer. He wants to  
scream. He calls upon nature; the  
tides rise, earthquakes shatter homes.  
He does not feel vindicated. He has lost.

And for now she can swim to the deepest  
darkest cave in the Pacific, hide from  
the solitude, swim lower and lower;  
can she find where all of the other  
animals of dying species hide, can she  
find them. There must be others. They  
can understand, they can live together,  
at the bottom of the earth. Could they  
show their pain for their species, share  
what is left of their love, create a new race?

Soon they will be no more  
and we will be taking their bones,  
reassembling them, studying their  
form, rebuilding their lives, revering  
them more than we ever did  
in life. This is what it all becomes.  
This is what it all boils down to.  
Study the bones. Study the mistakes.  
Study the bones.