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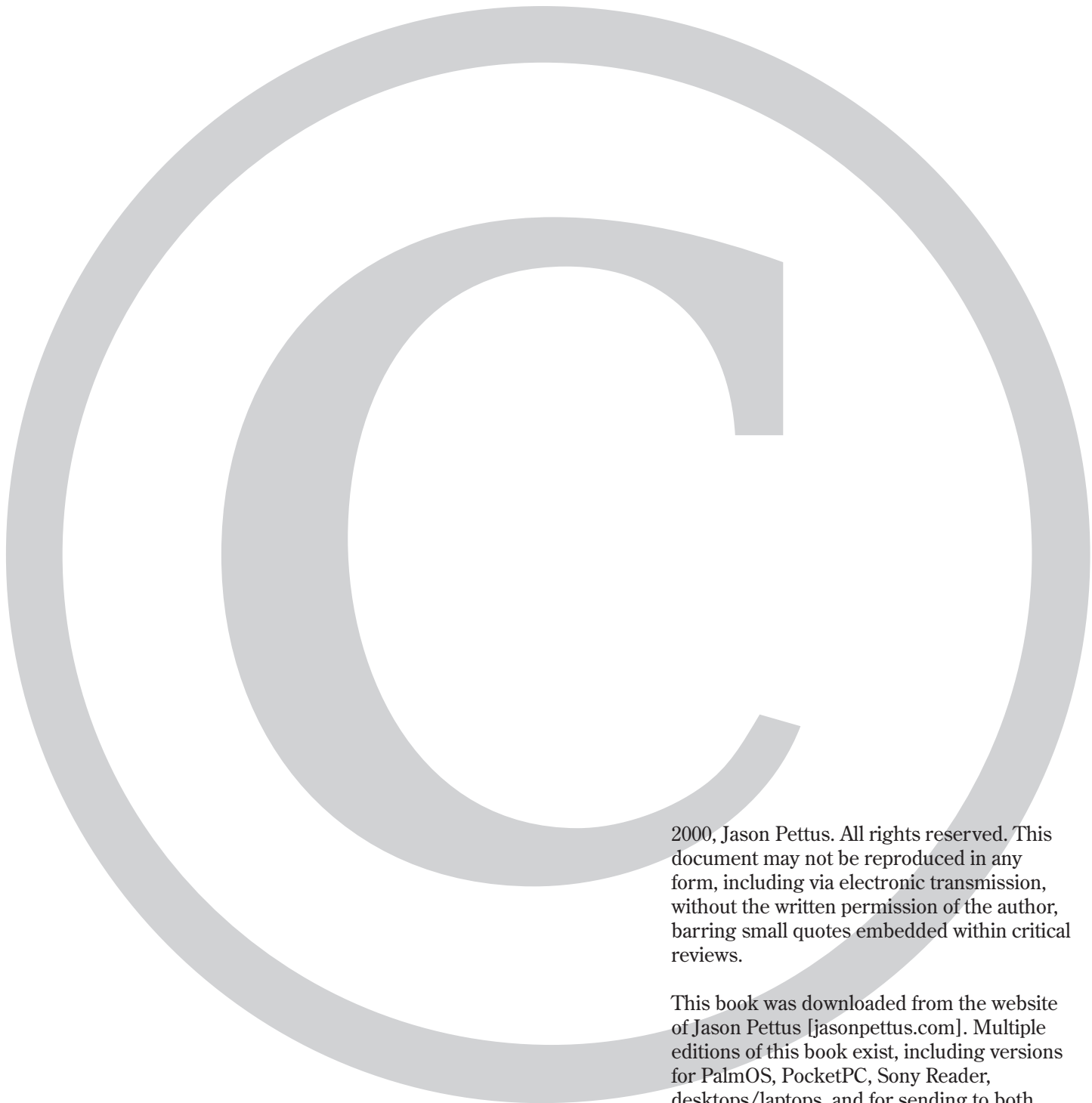
COMPLETE PERFORMANCE WORK 1996-2004

GAD Publishing Company Chicago USA

JASON PETTUS



CHICAGO STORIES 2000



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Printed by GAD Publishing Co., Chicago USA.
First Printed Edition: January 2002
First Electronic Edition: January 2002
Second Electronic Edition: February 2007

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Since 1996 I have owned and operated a basement press in Chicago called GAD, dedicated mostly to the self-publishing of my own work (and with a brief detour in 2001, publishing a dozen books by my friends, before giving up the pursuit again for lack of community interest). As of 2004 GAD had ended up publishing over forty books, both full-length and miniature in nature, dealing with everything from poetry to prose, essays, interviews, science-fiction, erotica and travel. Being the sole employee of GAD, of course, especially while continuing to write new material on a regular basis, unfortunately meant that many of these books ended up being published on a less-than-professional basis, with dozens of typos and grammatical errors found in each. It was something that always slightly bothered me about the GAD catalog; as long as I was an active writer, though, this worry was always trumped by the stronger desire to keep writing new material, and to devote the majority of my energy to these new projects instead of cleaning up the old ones.

In late 2004, however, I made the decision to put this literary career on indefinite hold, in order to open and operate an arts center here in Chicago instead. Given the chance for

the first time to take a detailed look at the existing GAD catalog, I decided at that point to dedicate the next few years of my life to going through these old books, giving each of them the thorough editing they deserved, and republishing them in electronic form, standardizing not only the look of each publication but also the options for downloading and viewing them. This was complicated enough when it came

to the nonfiction and prose projects, but especially tricky in the case of my performance poetry and monologues, of which I had never attempted to publish a pervasive, chronological record. Since the 2007 edition of these poetry/monologue books makes certain older titles now obsolete, as well as introduces several new titles, I thought I'd take a moment and explain the entire process, for committed readers who wish to own the complete, definitive collection.

Prior to 2002, the vast majority of GAD poetry/monologue books available were of special projects, including: *Psycho Poets* (1997), a collection of poems about women I slept with in 1997, when I was a member of the Chicago poetry-slam team; *Jasonettes* (1998), *The Heatseeker* (1999), *Notes From My Grandmother's Funeral* (2000) and *Celibate* (2001), all of them written transcripts of special half-hour themed performances I gave over the years, all of them for the old "Mental Graffiti" poetry show here in Chicago; *[Andi.]* (1999), a collection of poetry about a specific ex-girlfriend; and *The Tao of Now* (2000), a literary experiment of sorts, combining the length and structure of traditional short stories with the language and rhythm of slam poetry. The only exceptions were GAD's oldest two books, *The Sweet Alice Sessions* and *Kathie Lee Gifford Likes to Fuck!*, both from 1996, both collecting not special themed work but merely the general pieces I was writing and performing for the open mics that year. In addition there was a "greatest hits" collection also available, called *The Jason Pettus Portable Reader* (2001) and consisting of around twenty of my audience's absolute favorite pieces over the years, published exclusively to sell at live shows. These ten books reprinted approximately 100 of the poems and monologues I had written over the years; the vast majority of the 300 others I had written were simply unavailable in published form, save for those found on individual HTML pages at my website.

In 2002, the first year after "retiring" from the poetry community, I decided to make my first attempt at publishing a comprehensive series of these pieces; the result was the four-book series *Chicago Stories 1997-2000*, as well as a new "greatest hits" book, *More Poems about Blowjob*, collecting my favorite sexually-explicit poems and monologues from over the years. These five new books went a long way towards getting more of my old performance work out to the public, but with still a number of inconsistencies: for example, technically the contents of both *Sweet Alice* and *Kathie Lee Gifford* should've been included in the "Chicago Stories" series, not as their own stand-alone books; the series was still missing the poems I wrote in 2001 and 2002, important for posterity's sake but not a large enough collection to publish as their own book; and of course even the current "Chicago Stories" series was missing several pieces that had become audience favorites over the years.

For this 2007 edition, therefore, I have declared both *Sweet Alice* and *Kathie Lee Gifford* as "out-of-print" titles, neither of which will ever be printed in their original forms again; instead, they have been consolidated and are now known collectively as *Chicago Stories 1996*, fitting better into the overall theme of the entire series. I've also compiled a short *Chicago Stories 2001-2004* book, including the smattering of poems I wrote after retiring from the literary community. The new six-book "Chicago Stories" collection (including expanded editions of the four volumes that had previously existed) now reprints all of the general work from my years as an active performer; the seven special themed books already mentioned have also been reedited and republished, meaning that owning this thirteen-book series

INTRODUCTION TO THE 2007 EDITION

now gives you access to nearly every poem and monologue I wrote between 1996 and 2004. The two “greatest hits” compilations have also been republished, along with two new ones; one’s called *Love Blender*, a collection of pieces about relationships, compiled originally as a feature for the electronic magazine LoveBlender.com, and the other’s simply entitled *Personal Favorites*, along with a new introduction concerning why they are. And finally, a new omnibus edition has been published for 2007 as well, called *Complete Performance Work 1996-2004*, collecting the content of all thirteen previously-mentioned books into one volume (and in fact, owning that volume makes owning the thirteen individual books unnecessary).

Those who enjoyed this book may also want to check out the following related volumes, all currently available through GAD: *How to Win a Poetry Slam* (2000), a half-humorous, half-critical look at this unique literary genre; *Smells Like Sweat* (1997), a memoir of the 1997 National Poetry Slam, written entirely as a series of haikus (from an original concept by Jerry Quickley); and *The Tunnel Rat Sessions* (2002), a collection of long-form interviews with other slam poets that I originally conducted for the Chicago-based poetry newsletter *Tunnel Rat* in the mid-1990s. Of course, I also encourage you to check out the other books in the GAD catalog; as of this writing there are 55 books altogether, with more being added each year, covering almost every literary genre and style imaginable. As always, I urge you to drop me a line if you wish to discuss these pieces further; my latest contact information can always be found at my website, itself found at **jasonpettus.com**.

A DAY WITHOUT CAFFEINE

My doctor says I can't have any more caffeine. It's the surgery, he says. The caffeine will interact badly with the surgery. No alcohol, no pot, no ibuprofen, and no caffeine from now until the surgery, he says. A week from now, he says.

And I say Are you trying to kill me, doctor? A day without caffeine is like a day without sunshine. A day without caffeine is like a day without my el breaking down halfway to work, a day without the homeless guys behind my building urinating in public. A day without caffeine, doctor, is a day not worth living!

My Grande Cafe Mocha is my best friend. It is warmer than most of my lovers, more reliable than my computer, more forgiving than God Himself. When I've walked into work this week without my 22-ounce buddy safely in hand, something doesn't feel right. I spend the hours from nine until noon helplessly clutching at empty space next to my workstation, a sadder and sadder look coming me to the point where co-workers are coming over and patting me on the back, expressing their condolences for my loss of a loved one!

Doctor, you cannot take my caffeine away! Alcohol, now that's fine. Alcohol was never my friend to begin with. Alcohol is like that kid in school who spends hours whispering into your ear, convincing you to do utterly stupid things - "Jason, go over and tell that girl you're in love with her. No, go on, do it! No, really, it's a good idea! She wants you to!" And then when you do, they run off to the playground and deny that they said anything at all. No, alcohol I can do away with. But caffeine? You might as well tell me to stop breathing for four days!

When I'm NOT on caffeine all my friends think I AM on caffeine. I'm jittery and nervous and mean, OH I'm so mean. I yell at my friends. I yell at strangers. I yell at animals. I yell at myself in the middle of public! Damn it, I owe it to the people of Earth to have my grande cafe mocha! Get the fuck out of my way! I don't care anymore if Starbucks is evil! Let me the fuck in! Yo, over here, a pint of cappuccino to go! No, two pints! No no, three pints! For the love of God, just give me a handful of coffee beans and I'll fucking chew them like fucking Dentine! You're killing me, doctor! You...are...KILLING ME!

I'm sorry, what's that you say? You say I get to have a prescription of Vicodin after the surgery? (Pause, then smiling) Oh, well, that's a whole different story then.

HELLO, KIKI SHELTON?

Hello, Kiki Shelton? My name's Jason Pettus. You don't know me. I sat behind you in German class in high school. You don't know me - hello, Kiki Shelton? My name's Jason Pettus. I sat behind you in German class for three years in high school. You don't know me, but I know you. Hello, Kiki Shelton? I was in love with you for three years in high school. My name's Jason Pettus. You don't know me, but I know you. You had these slender, tall, tan legs. You were the first girl in high school to get her hair cut short. Really. Short. Hello, Kiki Shelton? My name's Jason Pettus. You don't know me.

I sat behind you in German class for three years in high school. High school, you know, 1983. German class, you know, Frau Bender, that short housewife who would play "Neun und Neusig Luftballons" over and over and over and over and over again. German class. High school. My name's Jason Pettus. You don't know me.

You were on the soccer team. I was in the marching band. You were obsessed with sports. I was obsessed with computers. You listened to the Woodentops. I watched Dr. Who. We spent three years in the same school, three years in the same class, the same classmates, and yet our ships continued to pass each other in the foggy night. I tried. Lord, I tried. Every day, three years, you'd sit in front of me, I would see those soccer legs, I would see that naked neck, and every day, three years, I almost reached out and touched that neck, I almost turned you tenderly and put a kiss onto your lips and told you that you were my girl now, three years I almost, I almost just not quite, I almost, hello, Kiki Shelton? You don't know me.

My name's Jason Pettus. I live in Chicago now. I write stories now. I drink and smoke and do drugs and have sex now. I don't watch Dr. Who anymore. I don't speak German anymore. I still get obsessed with women. But now I ask them out. Sometimes. Now I have sex with them...SOMETIMES! Hello, Kiki Shelton? I'm sorry. I'm sorry I couldn't ask you out in high school. I'm sorry we couldn't switch jackets and put our hands in the back pocket of the other's 501s, I'm sorry we couldn't wear each other's Swatches, hello, Kiki Shelton? I'm sorry. You were lonely. I was lonely. We were lonely and scared and so unsure about everything, hello, Kiki Shelton? I'm sorry. I was afraid, I had issues, I had low self-esteem, I never thought anyone would even want to love me, hello, Kiki Shelton? I was in HIGH SCHOOL!

Hello, Kiki Shelton? My name's Jason Pettus. You don't know me. Hello, Kiki Shelton? My name's Jason Pettus. I still think about you sometimes, even to this day. The wind will blow in just the right direction and it will remind me of St. Charles Missouri, Francis Howell High School, a crisp October morning in the O Building, and I will think of you and I will wonder what happened to you. Are you punk rock? Are you a mom? Are you dead? Are you on the women's World Cup soccer team? Hello, Kiki Shelton? You didn't show up to our reunion. You didn't even send in an update. You must have hated high school even more than I did, and that's a LOT. Hello, Kiki Shelton? My name's Jason Pettus. I have my own website now. And you may or may not ever find this, or maybe someone from our high school will see this and pass it on to you, or maybe this'll get printed in some big famous magazine and I'll be rich and we'll all live happily ever after. Hello, Kiki Shelton? My name's Jason Pettus. I hope this letter gets to you. I'm sorry I couldn't ask you out in high school. If I knew then what I know now I would've gladly done so. Hello, Kiki Shelton? My name's Jason Pettus. You don't know me. I sat behind you in German class in high school.

I DIDN'T GO TO PROM

I didn't go to prom. I was opposed to the corporate consumerist conspiracy in this country that manages to convince millions of otherwise rational teenagers to spend several hundred dollars on a limo to take them on a ten mile trip, on a prom dress they're just going to puke on anyway, on tickets to get into a Holiday Inn banquet hall festooned with crepe paper and white balloons and some lecherous burnt-out 36 year old DJ who still plays the Time Warp even though you begged him not to, you pleaded with him not to, and overcooked, dry chicken dinners and assistant principals who still won't let you touch your date's ass, for fuck's sake, and drunk jocks wearing their bow ties around their foreheads, "Night Ranger? Dude, I fuckin' love Night Ranger," automatic suspension for any student found to have rented a hotel room, furtive dark glances across the room from one wallflower to another wallflower, both dateless and alone and afraid because they're in high school and it's your job in high school to be dateless and alone and afraid, this forced jocularity about prom that's shoved down your throat on a daily basis for nine fuckin' months, New Year's and Disneyland and a trip to a whorehouse all wrapped up in a green taffeta nightmare, lukewarm peach wine coolers in the back parking lot of the Highway 94 Wal-Mart supercenter, choking back the bile with each sip because they're peach wine coolers and no one in the history of time has ever drunk a peach wine cooler by choice except for a limo full of high school students on prom night, and you don't even have sex on prom night, or you do have sex but you're too drunk to remember it, or you do have sex but it's because you were date raped, or you do have sex but your date throws up on your tux in the middle of it, and it's 15 years later and you look back on the debacle of the whole evening and you wonder if this is what your mom meant when she said it was going to be the most important night of your life. So no, I didn't go to prom. I couldn't find a date.

JASON PETTUS IS ONE BAD MOTHERFUCKER

Sometimes I'll wish that I'm that slightly creepy, intense, quiet guy in the back of the room who looks interesting but looks dangerous but looks interesting. And then I'll realize, sometimes I am that slightly creepy, intense, quiet guy in the back of the room, interesting, dangerous, interesting. I judge my life in relative terms to the rest of a large urban artistic scene, but I forget, a large urban artistic scene is, as a whole, much crazier than the rest of the world. When I hold my life up to the rest of the world, where artistic crazies don't exist, I turn out to be the artistic crazy.

There is a fine line between intense self-examination and some guy on the el waving his cock at you. There is a razor's edge between intensely high emotions of romance towards the opposite sex and stalking. I walk that thin pathway between hearing the characters of my next novel speaking their dialogue to me, and hearing the neighbor's dog tell me to go out and KILL! KILL! KILL!

I'm a dangerous person. If I'd been in high school last year I would've been in the Trenchcoat Mafia. If I'd gone to Harvard I would've been the Unabomber. I run a temperature of 99.1 degrees, all the time, because of all the energy I am constantly burning up on the inside. If you don't believe me you can feel my forehead. Or, come to think of it, that might not be such a good idea. The pen is mightier than the sword, but damn, that sword is so much more fun. The only difference between Nabokov and a child molester is a typewriter and a sense of fuckin' humor. The only difference between Ginsberg and a guy cruising teenage boys in the park is a few Pulitzer nominations. And the only difference between me and an autistic child smearing feces across the wall for his own amusement is that I have to go out and hold a day job!

So you just watch yourselves, ladies and gentlemen. I would much rather bite the hand that feeds me than lick it, and believe you me, I will kill a President to gain your love. You don't ever want to go to Kinko's with me, and if you ever see me drunk at a dinner party and I start talking about the Ameritech Corporation, do yourself a favor, stand up and walk out of the room as fast as humanly possible. Because I'm trouble and don't you forget it. I'm trouble with a capital T. I burn the candle at both ends and then use the flames to burn down your apartment. If you have any sense at all, you will keep your daughter, your money, your liquor and all sharp, pointy objects away from me. Because I am one bad motherfucker.

KING OF THE LOSERS

When I was a kid I was the guy all the other losers would try to avoid. “Here comes Pettus,” they’d groan, packing up their D&D equipment and running off to the black-light section of Spencer Gifts. Other nerds would get beat up on the playground, get called faggot on the bus on the way home from school. But not me. The jocks would take one look at me and mutter to themselves in their beefy, sub-intelligent voices, “Too easy. Too pathetic.” And there I would stand, alone, clutching my two-foot-high pile of books even when there was no danger of them being knocked out of my hands.

Being king of the losers upset me at first. I would come up to my mother in tears, saying “Why do they hate me? Is it because they are jealous of my abilities, mother? Will I one day grow up to be the thing they’ll always wish for but never receive?” But my mother would just shake her head and say, “Stop whining, you crybaby. And stop calling me mother. You’re really starting to creep me out.”

So, king of the losers I became. Dogs growled at me on the sidewalk, and babies peed on me when I tried to hold them. My name was turned into a verb - when the film projector would break in science class, the teacher would shake his head and say, “The damn thing’s been Pettusized again.”

News of my loserdom started traveling. Poor, simple farmers from neighboring towns would show up at my door, asking me to heal their sick children by blessing them with my magic touch. But every time I tried it, all the kid would receive was the uncanny ability to no longer talk to the opposite sex. The blessed children would always return, years later, and beat the crap out of me. “And this is for the chess club, Pettus! And this one’s for having to go to Prom with my sister, ya fuckin’ loser!”

Finally I gave up. I decided to embrace my loser status. I hung a sign around my neck at all times, proclaiming “Caution! Do not come near me. I am unclean.” Instead of avoiding my loser activities I began clutching to them. I started writing poetry, and it wasn’t loserish enough so I started performing them for rooms full of strangers. Any time women approached me I would say, “Thank you for being interested in me, but I know from past experience that you will just end up hating me, so let me save us both some time and just awkwardly ask you to go home with me now.”

And embracing my coveted role as king of the losers worked. It worked big time. When I was 27 years old I received a Nobel Prize for it. I have eaten with kings, consulted with presidents, gave a private tutorial to Corey Feldman on how to be an even bigger fuck-in’ loser than he already is. Psst, Corey, why don’t you grow your hair long and star in an endless series of straight-to-video erotic thrillers? I hear that can really jumpstart a career.

Yes, I’m king of the losers and I’m proud to be king of the losers. My parents no longer speak to me, and my place of business built an entire sister office in Schaumburg just so no one would have to work with me. One day I will die of loseritis, forever known afterwards as “Jason Pettus Disease.” And they will construct an eighty-foot-high obelisk at my grave and etch on its side “HERE LIES THE BIGGEST FUCKING LOSER WHO EVER LIVED.” And rowdy teenage boys will break into the cemetery on Saturday nights and pee on my grave, to the squeals of delight from their trashy girlfriends. “That’s it, Billy Bob! Piss on that dead loser! Piss on him real good!” I’ll be famous. I’ll be canonized by the pope and declared the patron saint of losers worldwide. And then you’ll all be sorry, motherfuckers!

Once upon a time there existed a language. It was a good language and a popular language and millions of people all over the world chose to use it to communicate their thoughts to millions of other people. The reason so many people liked this particular language was that it was very democratic. Why, anyone who wanted to could add a word to it, and the more other people used the word the more it became a standard part of that language's lexicon. It wasn't like its Latin grandfather, who was so stuffy it never let new words get added. No, this was a language for the people and by the people. This was a language for everyone.

The world which used this language was of course filled with both good people and bad people, and both groups would add their own new words on a regular basis. The language couldn't be more pleased. It didn't know what words meant, but only that new ones were being invented, keeping it alive and healthy and growing, just like it should. And the good people would listen to these additions, words like "television" and "radar" and "funkadelic" and they would scratch their heads in confusion and awe and wonder about this modern world in which they lived.

The bad people's words were no bigger and no smaller than anyone else's. They used the same standard combinations of 26 guttural noises that any other word used. But the purpose of these words was very different. These words were used to spread hate and fear and suspicion.

These words were used to hurt others during the times that the bad people couldn't actually pick up a stick and hurt the good people physically. The bad people attached such vile, disgusting visual images of violence and hatred to these words, in fact, that eventually all one had to do was hear the word itself to feel hurt and offended.

One day a group of people who all lived in a big ivory tower decided that they were sick of bad people having this much control. "How dare they?" this group said to each other over a round of double cappuccinos. "Why, those bad people have no right whatsoever to hurt us this way!" And the people in the tower made a new law and spread it out over the land. "FROM THIS DAY FORWARD," the law declared, "NO ONE IS ALLOWED TO USE THE FOLLOWING WORDS EVER AGAIN! UTTERANCE OF THESE WORDS FOR ANY REASON WILL BE GROUNDS FOR PUNISHMENT!"

The language was sad. It knew that the banning of words was in fact a step backwards. It knew that the attempt of the tower people to shrink the language was just as futile as telling a child to stop growing. No, the only effective way to curb a language is to kill the language, and it knew that the tower people's actions was the first step along that long road.

Confusion spread across the land. One person asked, "What if I say one of these words but not in the same way as the bad people mean it?" And the tower people said, "No! You can't use the word at all!" And another person said, "But I'm old! When I was a child this word meant something good! It's only now that it means something bad!" And the tower people said, "That's too bad, grandpa! We don't care WHY you're saying it! You just can't say it!" And then a third person spoke up and said, "That's all fine and good, but let's say I want to report that I heard a bad person use one of the words. How do I do that?" And the tower people thought about it and they said, "Just use the first letter of the bad word! That way everyone is happy!" And soon the world was full of reports about bad people using the n-word and the f-word and the q-word and the c-word and every other letter of the alphabet.

The language got even sadder. It knew that it wasn't the words themselves that made them bad but the context in which they were used. It knew that banning the bad people's words just made the power of that bad word grow. And it wasn't just the language that knew this. One year a group of very attractive young men who wore black t-shirts and pink triangles and who had sex with OTHER very attractive young men decided that it had had just about enough of the tower people. These men chose one of the bad words – the q-word, as a matter of fact – and they started using it everywhere. They put the q-word on their t-shirts and the back bumpers of their cars. They had the q-word tattooed into their flesh and would stand outside buildings in large groups, yelling, "We're here! We're q-word! And we won't go away!"

And soon the q-word lost most of the power it had originally had. The bad people would try to hurt the attractive young men and they would shout, "YOU'RE A Q-WORD!" But the attractive young men would just smile and say, "Yes, I know. Thank you!" And the attractive young men tried to show this to the tower people, to prove there were better ways of dealing with bad words than simply banning them. But the tower people said, "SHUT UP! We don't have to listen to you! If you had anything valid to say, you'd be in the ivory tower with us! And you're not in the ivory tower, WE are! So go away!"

The problem with the tower people was that they underestimated the intelligence of the bad people. The bad people knew they'd be punished for using the banned words, so

THE LEGEND OF THE TOWER PEOPLE

instead they started using other words, words the good people had originally invented. The bad people made their own list with words like “spear” and “chuck” and “wet” and “back” and “slant” and “eyes” and “panty” and “waist,” perfectly reasonable words that were completely innocent when used by the good people but something else altogether when used by the bad people.

The favorite of the bad people’s new words was “boy.” The word had been in the language for thousands of years and usually meant “small male child” when said 99 percent of the time. But the bad people would say it with a hateful drawl, sneering their lips and squinting their eyes, and soon everyone knew just exactly what the bad people meant when they said the word “boy.” But it was a perfect plan! After all, you can’t ban a word so integral to the language as “boy,” could you?

But that’s exactly what the tower people did, and soon doctors all across the land were heard saying, “Congratulations, Mr. Smith. You’re the proud father of a b-word. A big, bouncing baby b-word!” But the bad people would just pick other words, and then the tower people would just ban other words. And soon every single word of the language had been banned, and you would stand on a streetcorner and hear two people talking, and one would say, “H-word y-word s-word m-word s-word?” And the other one would say, “W-word?” And the first one would say again, “H-word y-word s-word m-word s-word?” And soon the language choked on its own tongue and died an ignoble death, and the people across the land fell into a chaos which eventually destroyed the entire civilization. Because the people had learned...way too late...that it had never been the bad people who had threatened their civilization. It had been good people, who did bad things, and lived in ivory towers.

THE MAN WHO MASTURBATED WITHOUT USING HIS HANDS

He was trying to figure out how to have an orgasm without touching his penis. Here was the thinking. When I was a boy I used to have these things called nocturnal emissions. Wet dreams. It was the process of masturbating in your subconscious. It was coming while dreaming. It was having an orgasm without touching your penis. There's got to be a way to duplicate this in the conscious state. Don't tell ME that Mr. Sandman is more powerful than my rational brain. If I can dream it, I can do it.

So, the man had decided to teach himself how to have an orgasm, at will, just by thinking about it. He would lie in bed for hours at a time, lying perfectly still, not moving an inch. He would (WHHHHW) try to clear out his mind and (WHHHHW) count very slowly backwards from ten and (WHHHHW) try to think of nothing but happy, dirty thoughts.

His mind went in weird directions. He thought, You know, when you're receiving oral sex and the moment of orgasm comes, you are locked into a frenzy of ecstasy. Your lover becomes the most important person who ever existed. You live and die for them. You can't believe someone else has the power to make you feel that good. But when you're on the giving side of oral sex and the moment of orgasm comes, you are thinking, "Hmm, I wonder what I'll have for breakfast tomorrow morning," or "Hmm, should I get the Palm Pilot V now or wait six months and get the Palm Pilot VII? 'Cause that one will have wireless internet access, and that would be pretty cool." And the man would wonder why he would be having these thoughts when he was trying to achieve a meditative state. He would wonder if he just couldn't cut it, if he just wasn't a guy who could achieve the Immaculate Orgasm.

Finally in desperation, he turned to his sexual guru, his spiritual advisor, his erotic elder...Carl. Carl was the man who knew it all. And the man said, "Carl, why am I not able to achieve the blissful state I was once able to at the age of thirteen? Have I lost my purity? Have I lost my innocence? Is there no hope for me?" And Carl looked at the man and said, "You idiot. Masters and Johnson proved over twenty years ago that boys have wet dreams because they're gyrating their hips against the mattress. You just don't remember it because you were asleep at the time. Now go home."

And he did. And the man sat down in his living room, put on the pornography he had just bought that evening, and proceeded to put quite a few touches on his penis over the course of the night. Because jerking off? It's a pretty good thing to do.

MANIFESTO OF THE OBVIOUS

When waiting for an elevator, it is customary to allow the outgoing passengers to exit the car before attempting to enter yourself.

While on an escalator, common sense dictates standing on the right-hand side and allowing walking passengers an opportunity to pass on the left. When standing with a friend, one should loiter in a front-to-rear fashion, not side-to-side.

It is considered improper etiquette in a large urban environment to suddenly stop in the middle of a sidewalk. If one does need to take a pause or execute an about-face, one should quietly move to the side of the curb before doing so.

Retail employees should always remember that they are working for the customer, not the other way around. It is your job to thank the customer for supplying your wages, not the customer's job to thank you for supplying their food. Customers do not appreciate being asked twice what kind of soda they wish to drink with their meal. The standardized politeness of the customer spiel designed by your corporate headquarters was never meant and will never be meant to be delivered in the wooden, zombified monotones of a robot. If you hate your job, you always have the option of quitting it. It is improper to take this hatred out on the unsuspecting customer.

Customers should always remember that the minimum wage laws in this country are a sham and that employees making minimum wage cannot live on this amount. The United States is a capitalistic country both in letter and in spirit, which means that the more money one earns at one's job, the more seriously they take that job. If you are dissatisfied with the output of the average minimum-wage earner, the proper response is to call on Congress for a higher minimum wage, not to personally take your frustrations out on the unmotivated worker in question. A retail employee is not your husband, wife, child, parent, boss or dog, and you should not use them as an adequate substitution for your anger with any of the aforementioned. All human beings are entitled to a certain amount of basic rights, and this includes the right to not be treated like a sub-class citizen. The retail employee in front of you works twice as hard at their job than you do at yours, and receives one-tenth of the pay. They receive no benefits and are forced to work the twelve holidays a year that you are excused from, so that you will have somewhere to go on those holidays to spend your money. Act as if you appreciate this fact.

If you can afford a four-dollar cup of coffee or pint of beer, you can afford to tip a dollar to the employee making that cup of coffee or pouring that pint of beer. If you cannot afford that dollar tip, you are simply an asshole.

Pedestrians and car-drivers have the same exact rights and responsibilities when it comes to the road. DRIVERS: it is not within your rights to barrel through pedestrian crosswalks while the light is green. Pedestrians automatically have the right-of-way when both a green light and a WALK sign are simultaneously lit. It is also not within your rights to idle your car in the middle of a pedestrian walkway while the light is red, and pedestrians have every moral right in the world to hit the hood of your car with their closed fist as they pass you by. PEDESTRIANS: it is not within your rights to cross the street when the DO NOT WALK sign is lit. Jaywalking is not only a crime but a slap in the face to every driver expected to wait patiently for you when it is your legitimate turn to cross. If you wish to have the respect of car drivers on the road, respect those car drivers to an equal extent. Do not step out in front of oncoming vehicles when it is not your turn. Do not give them glowering looks and upturned middle fingers when they are forced to slam on their brakes. Always remember that you are 100-odd pounds of flesh and bone and that they are three tons of hot-steel killing machine. In a fight between you and a car, you will always lose. If you do not cross the street at the designated intersection, car drivers have every moral right in the world to run over your jaywalking ass and never look back.

Please take these matters under consideration and act upon them accordingly. I thank you for your time.

MY NAME IS JASON PETTUS AND I AM NOT YOUR EX- BOYFRIEND

My name is Jason Pettus and I am not your ex-boyfriend. Oh, I understand how the mistake can be made. After all, I'm very similar to your ex-boyfriend - young, white, male, sensitive, artistic, sexually adventurous. We both wear cardigan sweaters, we both read comic books when no one is looking, and we're both attracted to you. Nevertheless, my name is Jason Pettus and I am not your ex-boyfriend.

Allow me to elaborate. I am not a dove with a broken wing, waiting for a woman to gallantly swoop into my life and fix it, turning me into the majestic soaring creature she always knew that I was. Unlike your ex-boyfriend, I do like going to parties, and I have finished my first novel.

I am not a postmodernist. I am not punk rock. I am not a slacker little shit. I don't like Thai food, I'm not a vegetarian, no, I don't want a bite of your yummy burrito, and by the way, I fucking hate NPR. I do not justify my personality defects by endlessly bringing up my clinical depression. I am arrogant and egotistical, because I am arrogant and egotistical.

You are entitled to your opinion, but I am entitled to disagree with it. I am not a feminist. I am not a masculinist. I did not go to culinary school! I'm not learning the guitar, I've never been to Europe, I'm not voting for Ralph Nader, and I will never, ever shave my head.

All I want is to find someone I can love. And I thought that was going to be you. So the next time you tell me we can't date because you have issues with guys like me, please bear in mind. My name is Jason Pettus, and I am not your ex-boyfriend.

OPEN LETTER (KATHY)

Dear Kathy:

Hi there. I know this is going to seem a little weird, but I'm writing this letter from the bedroom of a one-night-stand I just had. It is a four-poster bed, dark metal, without a canopy. A little island in the middle of this vast barren wasteland which is her bedroom. She's packing, moving out of this house she used to share with a husband, back when they were still pretending that things were okay. Now everything is in boxes on the first floor, and this fourth floor, the one we're on, the one that's been converted into one of those vast, expansive, doorless bedrooms, is empty save for the canopyless bed, a small antique dresser in the corner, covered in half-melted vanilla candles from Urban Outfitters, and an ashtray on the bay windowsill that says "I was stolen from Ray's Diner, Wisconsin Dells!"

I'm watching the woman soundlessly sleep beside me, curled on her side facing away from me. She's tan, but pale in swimsuit areas, a lattice across her back, which I don't think I've ever seen in one of my lovers so strikes me as weird now. My partners are usually so pale. Pale, with dyed hair, and funky glasses to make them look uglier than they are.

She's not like that. She's tan and athletic and tries to look prettier than she is. It works, by the way. She woke up a few minutes ago. Turned groggily to me and asked if anything was wrong. I told her I was writing and she turned right around and went straight back to sleep. She considers me an artist, ergo weird and passionate and eccentric, so it's perfectly okay for me to sit up in the bed in the middle of the night, chain smoking and scribbling across a piece of stolen stationery in a room too dark for me to see what exactly it is I'm writing. This is okay, she's told me before, because I produce. I'm not like the ex-husband, who threw the temper tantrums of an artist but never got published, never even sent out his stuff to be published. She loved him for it when she was 19, she explained, but got pretty tired of it by the time she was 29. I've been published, so I'm allowed to be weird.

I want to tell her how jealous I am of the life she used to have. The thing people don't realize about passionate, eccentric people is how little they want to be passionate, eccentric people. I wish I could've bought a house with someone, even if eventually we sold it again. I fantasize about the two of them driving around this city I don't know, standing arm-in-arm in front of a narrow four-story brownstone, like one of those really bad romance movies, smiling to each other in trepidation and nervousness and the giddiness of an uncharted future together. He happy because he's getting everything he wants; she happy in spite of herself, happy for a moment while in the middle of a long sadness of acceding to his wishes. Thinking to herself that maybe this marriage will work after all. Here's the house to prove it, after all.

Sure, their marriage fell apart a year later, pain and heartbreak and mistrust and a very damaged soul. But I get that pain every time too, without the pleasure of standing in front of that brownstone, holding my mate in my arms and breathing the clear air of possibilities. I want to tell her to be happy that she got that, that she at least got to experience a little joy in the middle of it all, that for a time she was able to at least pretend that her life was normal. I'm passionate and eccentric. I don't get to have those experiences. Everything in my life is one-night-stands and shitty studio apartments that never seem to be clean, no matter how hard I try. My mom used to say that no man will ever live in a tidy home until a woman eventually lives with him. Quite obviously for my mom, she forgot about the gay community, but in general I think she's right. I never will have an orderly life until I have a woman to come in and force it to be orderly, to throw away the unnecessary clutter I clutch to my chest, unable to let go, unable to create the void until I have something to fill it.

I like her, Kathy. What can I say? Wait, I know what you'd say. "Jason, give you a month and you can magically ruin any relationship." And you're right, which is why I'm sitting here writing you this letter instead of waking her up, making her sit in the bed throughout the night listening to me gush on and on. My feelings for her is a flood of happiness and romance and flowers and goey things that make you flip the bird to random strangers on Valentine's Day. My mouth is a funnel, collecting the flood and allowing it to flow out only in little drips, very slowly and very patiently. She has no idea I feel all these things about her, because I'm finally taking your advice and not throwing myself on her like a drowning sailor after a shipwreck. Maybe you weren't completely full of shit, after all.

So how's the kiddie porn asshole? Oh, I'm sorry, I mean your husband. Me, bitter? Why does everyone else get to be married, Kathy? Every time I start bitching about this, my friends bring up what they think is a foolproof rational argument - "Yeah, but every married couple you know is fucking miserable." Well, so what? I'm miserable, AND I'm alone. Are you any sadder with pencil-dick than I am by myself? At least you get to go to bed with him every night. I get on a plane tomorrow morning and may never see this woman again. What's worse?

I hold every married couple in the history of time in contempt. Marriage exists for no other possible reason than to spite single people. "Ha-ha! Look at us! We've found someone else who can stand us, and we're going to take ourselves off the market just so you have one less choice available to you! Fuck you, Jason, fuck you, fuck you, fuck you!" I mean, I don't really feel that way. But I DO, you know, I DO feel that way at three in the morning, laying in my little desert island in the middle of some stranger's bedroom, watching her ribcage expand and contract, expand and contract, wanting more than anything else to suddenly wake her and shake her as hard as I can, to yell at her at the top of my lungs, "If I could take away every ounce of pain your ex ever caused you I would, I would kill myself to make your life retroactively happy, and why did that asshole get eight years of bliss with you, why does the nice guy get eight years of being alone, why, why?" So, yes, fuck married people. You heard me right. Fuck the 57 percent of all people who find someone who is willing to spend the rest of their lives with them, and leave them anyway. All my friends get to be irrational sometimes and get away with it, so why don't I?

She is in flux. She was only in this city for her ex, and now he's her ex so she gets to go anywhere she wants. I'm trying to convince her, in my own little trickling funnel way, to move to where I am. It's a good city, I tell her. There's lots of jobs. There's lots of computer people. There's lots of artists. Apartments are cheap. Salaries are high. Crime is low. You're close to everything. You don't need a car. All the dot com assholes are about a million miles away from us, just like we want it. I want to whisper, as an afterthought, like the cheesy romantic movie we're characters in, "Besides...I'm there." And I want it to matter to her, even though I know it doesn't. I'm her crazy, artistic, eccentric fuck buddy from the big city. I'm her excuse to play Anais Nin for a night, but Jesus, who the fuck wants to marry Henry Miller?

Anyway. I've got to go. She just woke up and wants to have sex again. She padded her way across the vast bedroom naked, her ass so perfect that someone should make a reality television series out of it. She asked me earlier what I fantasize about when I fuck her. I told her some bullshit, like that someone's joining us or that we're being webcast on a pay-per-view adult site. But really? I fantasize that she's my wife. I fantasize that it's our house, and instead of moving out we are moving in, the lack of furniture doing nothing but exciting us more. I pretend that the world of unlimited possibilities stretches before us like an unending highway, paved across the midwest until it disappears over the horizon. And then I pretend we own a Volkswagen Passat. And we leave all our baggage right there on the side of the road, we don't even pack it, we just hop in the car with the clothes on our back, plop in a beat-up tape of Sleater-Kinney, blast it so loud that the speakers burst into flames, and we take off down that highway, tearing off the rear-view mirrors and never looking back.

Jason.

OPEN LETTER (KATIE)

Dear Katie:

Hi there. My name is Jason. We don't know each other - or, I mean, I don't think you know me. We were in Trig class together last year but we never really talked to each other and we don't have any mutual friends that I know of. Anyway, I wasn't so sure how to give you this letter so I slipped it into the slots of your locker and hopefully you'll find it the next time you open it. Hopefully it won't fall on the ground and get kicked away without you noticing it.

I just wanted to tell you that I think it's a completely shitty thing what everyone is doing to you right now. I thought maybe that you were feeling like you don't have any friends or there wasn't anyone out there who knew how you felt, and I thought, as nervous as it makes me to write this letter, it was important for you to know that someone out there knows what you're going through.

I tried to kill myself, too. It was about a year and a half ago. I didn't cut myself like you - I swallowed a bottle of sleeping pills. And I got caught by my parents too. It was a real mess around my house that night, let me tell you. (Like you'd know nothing about that, ha-ha.) Why did I do it? To tell you the absolute truth, I'm not exactly sure anymore. I mean, I remember what was going on in my life when it happened, what was getting me so stressed out. There was this girl I really liked, for example. I would dream about her at night, you know? I mean, not really, but that's how I felt about her. I thought about her so much that it felt like I was dreaming about her. But I just couldn't get up the courage to talk to her. (If you haven't figured out by this letter, I have this pretty bad problem with shyness, but that's not my point so I won't go into it here.) Anyway, it was just getting me crazy. I convinced myself that I was going to be this way for the rest of my life, never have the courage to talk to girls I liked, that I was doomed to be alone no matter how old I got, and it just got me in this really twisted frame of mind, like what's the point of living if I'm going to spend the rest of my life alone?

I mean, there was other stuff going on too. That was the year I was going to get my first F in a class. It was a given, something that couldn't be changed. It was four weeks until the end of the year and I had screwed myself so badly that there was no way to get around the F, you know, no matter how hard I might have worked in that last month. American Lit, which stupidly enough was my favorite class all year. I mean, the weird part is that I kind of flunked the class on purpose, just to see what it would feel like to be a normal person, just some kid that flunked classes like everyone else. But then when it actually became too late to do anything about it I really panicked. I realized how my parents were going to kill me, and I started getting really scared about whether I had screwed up my chance to go to college, all that stuff.

Plus, at the same time, I was going through other stuff that seems stupid now, like (and I'd appreciate it if you kept this to yourself) like maybe I was gay, because I'd think about my male friends in sexual ways sometimes, and I started thinking more and more about how God can't really exist. I mean, if you look at the world in a rational way it just doesn't add up, you know? So there I am, and I'm like, "Great, I'm a gay atheist flunky who's going to be alone the rest of his life." And it just all became so overwhelming, you know? It just all kept building and building until one night when I just couldn't stand it anymore.

Anyway, none of this is my point. (I sure am doing a good job of cheering you up, aren't I, ha-ha.) My point is that now that the whole thing is over, it's hard for me to realize anymore what seemed so terrible that I would want to kill myself over it. I mean, like, the report card came and there was the F, and my parents were pissed, alright, I got chewed out for two straight hours, but the world certainly didn't end. I went to bed and woke up the next morning and my crappy job at Target was still waiting for me. The world just kept ticking along.

I'll tell you something I've never told anyone else, not even my best friend Michelle. Sometimes I think trying to kill myself was actually a good thing. Sometimes I wake up and it feels like I've been given this superpower that other people don't have, this ability to realize what's actually serious things to worry about and what's essentially bullshit. Like, ever since that night, whether or not I'm an atheist just no longer even matters to me. I mean, either God exists or he doesn't, right, and there's not a whole lot I can do about it so why was I so upset? If I'm gay, I'm gay (and by the way, I've decided that I'm not) (and also by the way, like I said, I know you might want to talk to your friends about this letter but I'd appreciate it if you kept that part to yourself) but if I WAS gay, that'd just be how it was, and I'd learn how to deal with it.

I don't know. I just see everybody around me worrying about the stupidest things known to mankind, and it feels sometimes that I've been blessed with this power to recognize them for the stupid things they are. When you're laying in a hospital bed watching

them feed this tube down your throat so they can pump your stomach, suddenly it just doesn't matter much anymore whether the Senior shirt's going to be a t-shirt or a sweat-shirt.

Which - finally - gets me to the reason why I'm writing, which is that there's basically a difference between you and me and the stuff we went through, which is that my suicide attempt was kept really quiet and not a whole lot of people found out about it, while Cheryl found out about yours and ended up telling the whole school, which as far as I'm concerned is a sin bad enough to earn her a spot in hell forever (that is, if there is a hell, ha-ha. Oh, I slay myself). Plus there's another difference, and I don't mean this as an insult in any way at all, but you know, some of your (former?) friends are just assholes to begin with. I mean, my friends and I are DEFINITELY not the most popular kids in school, and I doubt we'll ever be the most popular people no matter HOW old we get. But in a way I was lucky - when I told my friends about what had happened, they were completely cool and completely supportive. And I just don't see that happening with your friends. I may not hang with that crowd, but I can see what's going on. I can see how you walk from class to class by yourself now, how your so-called "friends" make fun of you when you're not looking. And it just pisses me off, even though maybe it shouldn't, but it does. I mean, everyone's acting like you don't deserve to be depressed because you're a cheerleader, like the only people who are allowed to be sad are the gothers I hang out with.

Anyway, I just thought it was unfair, and I just wanted to write you a letter and tell you that I think it's just fine for you to be depressed. And fuck all those people, because they weren't your friends to begin with if they're acting like that now. And I'm not trying to ask you out or anything. The truth is that I would probably really freak out if you actually came up to me and talked to me in person. But one thing I do know how to do pretty well is write. And I just thought it was important for you to know that you're not alone. There's someone out there who understands what you're going through. And everyone deserves at least that, no matter who they are.

Stay strong. And fuck all of them.

Jason.

OPEN LETTER (MIKE)

Dear Mike:

Well, after four days of the stomach flu, I'm finally feeling up to sitting in front of my computer and writing a letter. The flu in general, I think, has got to be one of the most insidious calamities ever to befall the human race - a sudden, dire attack on one's health, but lasting just short enough of a time that you're considered a wimp for seeking medical treatment. The conventional wisdom, throughout history, has always seemed to be: "get in bed, moan and groan, drink your 7-Up, and lump it up, you big baby."

But the stomach flu...well, that's a whole different monster altogether. Upon my 96th consecutive hour of painful and immediate reflection on the subject, I am sincerely under the belief that there is no greater awareness of pure terror and one's own mortality than while in the process of vomiting. Your body just...locks up, kind of like when you have an orgasm but in a much more alarming and certainly less fun way. Your muscles do things that you have no control over. Bending over that toilet, you are allowed one final moment of sickeningly rational thought - "Oh God, I think I'm gonna..." before finally going off the deep end and simply praying to whatever non-existent god you can think of. "I want to DIE!" Splash! "Kill me NOW!" Splash! "Shit shit shit!" Splash!

Yet the act of vomiting is also a great catharsis, as I've been reminded of this week. Not just because of the physical act of removing what your body perceives as toxic substances from your system (graham crackers and ginger ale) but also from the emotional boost it gives. After an entire day of laying in your bed, your energy level so low that you can't even lift your arms, throwing up makes you feel like you've actually accomplished something. You slump your wretched, now-aching torso off to the side of the commode, resting your feverish head against the cool porcelain, and immediately you start feeling better. Whether or not it's true, your body is at least tricked into thinking it's done something positive towards making you a better, healthier person. Your eyeballs no longer jaggedly take a few seconds to catch up with the turns of your head. You feel...refreshed. Well, not exactly, but at least for the next hour you don't feel like your stomach is going to burst open like a bad science-fiction movie.

I don't like getting sick in Chicago. I mean, I never especially liked it even when I was a kid, but at least someone was around to take care of me. I am a baby, an absolute godforsaken little child, when I become sick. I do NOT want to be tough. I do NOT want to continue to go to work. I don't even want to go to the convenience store myself, for Christ's sake. There is no worse feeling in the world than to stand in a florescent-lit Kwikie Mart in the middle of a large urban area at three in the afternoon while feverish, shaky, in bad need of a shave and stinking of sweat and shit and vomit. It is the most immediate and painful reminder you can have that you are alone in this world - no loved one to take care of you, to take your temperature and put their hand on your forehead and furrow their brows in worry, to gently force you into a sitting position to get a little more juice in you.

It's the job of these people to make sure you do the things you're supposed to do when you're sick, in order to get better. You don't want to be responsible and rational - you just want to die. That's all I was able to think about for three days straight - "I want to die, I want to die, I want to die. Why won't someone come into my apartment and put me out of my misery?" But then I'd think, "Shit, well, I've got to get some of this liquid down if I want any chance at all of getting better." And then I'd think, "I thought that's what a girlfriend was for, to force me to drink this liquid because I'm too busy wanting to die." And then I'd remember that I don't have a girlfriend. And then I'd get depressed all over again. And then I'd run to the bathroom and throw up some more.

Anyway, thanks for stopping by and visiting me the other night while I was in the depths of my fever-induced hallucinations. It is a true friend who will deal with someone in that state and not run in abject terror. By the way, the pot was just what the doctor ordered.

Jason.

OPEN LETTER (THEO)

Dear Theo:

Well, hey there. I know it's been awhile since I've written, and I'm sorry. Things have gotten a little busy here, what with the takeover and the contracts and the lawyers in and out of the office, blah blah I sound like the person I always told myself I wouldn't be, I know. So sue me. Wait, on second thought, don't do that. Just had a little experience here on the home front that made me think of you, so I thought I'd drop you a note and tell you about it.

Believe it or not, Jane's a senior this year. Which means I'm...almost old enough to be a college student's dad. Christ almighty, what happened? One day you're some 19-year-old living in a dorm and trying to convince your roommate to listen to Dead Kennedys, the next day you're shopping at Linens N Things for a twin size comforter and your daughter's asking if you need those milk crates in the garage.

Jane's turned out pretty great, by the way. Today I was trying to remember when the last time was when you saw her - when I saw you - and this hazy memory came up of us all going out and having an argument with Jane over whether she was old enough yet to stay home alone without a babysitter. So that was, what? Thirteen? Something like that. Which makes it five years or so. Which went by like the blink of an eye, while five years of going to college with you STILL seems like a goddamn eternity.

Jane is exactly what you always warned would happen, you little schmuck - she's turned into a complete and utter amalgam of Carol and myself. It pleases both of us to no end and it pisses both of us off to no end. Every time Jane roots through my old clothes in the basement and digs out some old punk shirt to wear to school, Carol just shakes her head and threatens for the millionth time to finally chuck all that old stuff out. And then every time Jane goes off to the mall or loads up on makeup for a night out, I do the same damn thing. Still, it works, somehow. Carol and I got through the messiness of a few years ago and seem to have found a nice balance that works for both of us. I mean, you never know. We have our problems, but we also have our hands full with Jane right now. And as bad as this sounds to say, maybe Jane helps hold Carol and I together. For now, anyway. Me, maudlin, forget it.

So with senior year comes...you guessed it, Prom. And when the subject was even brought up the first time I couldn't help but laugh out loud. You know, decades later I'm still making Prom jokes to my co-workers that I learned from you. And, like always, they amuse me to death and simply piss everyone else off. What was our fascination with Prom, anyway? I've somehow lost the origins of the epic Prom joke somewhere along the years. If I remember it correctly, I think it somehow involved that road trip to Kurt's parents' house our sophomore year, digging through his bedroom and finding that completely lame Prom photo, sneaking it back to school and making all those mimeos in the dean's office and passing them out to everyone. Is that where it started, or did we swipe the photo because the joke was already around? Not important anymore, I guess. Although if that's not important then I'm not sure exactly what from college IS important anymore. Which in some ways is a depressing thought, but in others quite refreshing.

Where was I? You'll have to excuse this old codger tonight; he's a little stoned and he just can't quite handle the pot the way he used to be able to. It's for special occasions, which tonight is, but not necessarily the "special" I exactly wanted. But more on that later.

So thankfully Jane came down on my side with this one, and declared to her mother and me that she would NOT be attending Prom, thank-you-very-much. And I was like, "All right, little sista!" I mean, I know we used to joke about how we were going to raise our kids to be complete freaks, but as the years have worn on some of that has actually stuck. I know it sounds bad, maybe, but I WANT my kid to be a little anti-establishment, you know? It's complicated. My duties as a father supercede whatever political points I may have, not for any kind of moralistic reason but because they're just an ingrained part of me. Like the night she came home drunk last year, man did I flip out. And there's this tiny little voice in the back of my head saying, "Oh yeah, Jason, but you went out and got wasted at 17 too." But that little voice is drowned out by the big booming speaker screaming about drunk drivers and stomach pumps and date rapes. I know I'm romanticizing, but it really does seem to me that kids have it harder these days, that they have to worry about things we never had to worry about. I know I'm making most of that up in my head, but still. My high school never had metal detectors. I never saw heroin when I was a teenager. And I sure as hell didn't

have to worry about AIDS until I was a lot older.

I'm sidetracking. Jane, Prom, No. Freaked out her mom, which I was expecting but not nearly to the degree that it did. She begged. She pleaded. Carol actually tried to BRIBE Jane into going, can you believe that? But Jane was being completely hardcore about it, ranting about the suburban bourgeoisie and commodified pleasure. Totally straightedge, which was just so wonderful for me to hear. Maybe she'll grow up and be all right, you know? You never do know, I guess, which sometimes scares the hell out of me. You like to tell yourself at the beginning that it will eventually get better, that you won't stop worrying about your child every minute of the day, but hell, she's eighteen now and it hasn't stopped. Maybe it never does.

So Prom night came and Jane and her little skater friends decided to have an Anti-Prom night, some all-ages show down at this shitty dilapidated hotel downtown. God, if you had asked me twenty years ago if punk will still be around and that my daughter would be listening to it, I would've...I would've hit you over the head with a beer bottle, I guess. It's not the same now, of course. Her friends are all into this thing called 'emocore' which as far as I can tell is basically a bunch of pussies whining about their lives REALLY LOUDLY, which would've gotten them a good crack in the head if they had been around when you and I were hitting the clubs. The world's changed, for better or for worse. At least she's not listening to gangster rap, I guess. It's nice to see at least a little bit of what you and I worked so hard for, still glinting like little tiny diamonds in the shovels full of shit I see in the popular culture these days. Was there really a point in our lives when we thought we were going to start a revolution? Or is that my feeble mind playing tricks on me again?

They bought outfits! Which was the most hilarious part of all. They all went down to this thrift store and picked up these atrocious mid-70s Prom outfits, lime-green tuxedos with the big ruffy shirts, that they all wore to this show. You would bust a gut if you got to see them all. Oh, wait, what am I thinking? I took a digital photo of them and I can just attach it to this email. Did someone say revolution?

(And speaking of which, I'm not supposed to be telling you this but I'm stoned so I will. The whole reason MS got interested in buying us out in the first place is that we've developed this simply killer device that's going to be on the market in six months. I can't really give you more details - there's more lawyers sniffing around my life right now than there are pointy hats in Vatican City. But let's just say you're going to be really blown away when you see what it is. I mean, really blown away.)

So they went out, and they stayed out late, and Carol and I eventually went to bed. And Carol was asleep when Jane eventually got home, when I heard her trounce up the stairs and go into her bedroom. And I thought, I'll get up and pop my head in her room, see how her night was, maybe impart a few pearls of wisdom, tell her about how I didn't go to Prom either, share a little laugh at the expense of her mother. You know, father/daughter bonding stuff. So I tiptoe down the hall to her room, get to her door, almost knock on it when I hear crying. Jane is sitting by herself in the middle of the room, bawling her eyes out, her back to the door so that she doesn't notice me. And it suddenly occurs to me - Jane didn't skip Prom for any punk rock reasons - she just didn't have anyone ask her out.

This was maybe a half-hour ago, and now I'm sitting down here in my kitchen, stoned like a poet on payday, typing out this letter to you. Why? Because. Because my first inclination was to go into Jane's room, to hug her, to tell her that I know it seems like the end of the world right now but that it does get better. That eventually boys will clamor all over her for the same reasons they shun her right now. That eventually the tables will turn and the world will finally start treating you with respect and reward for the very traits that get you the shaft when you're younger.

But I didn't tell her that, and I didn't go in. It's not my place. And she wouldn't believe me, anyway. And I probably would've just ended up embarrassing her. There are some lessons in life that can only be learned the hard way, through trial and error. Sometimes there are moments of overwhelming sadness in a teen's life that must be experienced alone, part of that painful process of growing up and realizing what a shitty place the world sometimes is.

And standing outside my daughter's room, my hand lightly on the door, listening to her cry to herself, it really sunk in for the first time in my life that I can't protect her all the time. She's off to school in the fall and I'm going to be lucky to see her three times a year from now on until I die. And sure, you can instruct them, you can inspire them to lead a life

that you think will be a good one, to teach them how to think for themselves, to make wise decisions, but part of the process of maturation is sometimes to simply make mistakes. And I realized that Jane is going to fuck herself over sometimes in the future. She's going to put herself in bad spots that she will need to get herself out of. And that I can't go and bail her out when they happen. A lot of times I won't even KNOW about them. Tonight, for the first time in all these years, I actually feel like a grown-up. And I've realized that it's not exactly the best feeling in the world to have.

Anyway, I can barely keep my eyes open anymore so I'm off to bed. I hope this letter finds you well. Will you drop me a line and let me how things are going in your life? I wonder about you all the time.

Jason.

A POEM FOR ELLEN, WHO IN A MOMENT OF WEAKNESS ASKED FOR ONE

When she left
I said "damnit" out loud
47 times

Damnit.
Damnit..
Goddamnit!

TEMPE

Tempe, Arizona is a very odd place. There is a mountain in the middle of the city. It has a giant letter A on the top. The citizens tell me it's called A Mountain. This makes sense to me. There are orange trees next to the sidewalks in Tempe. You can reach out and pluck one as you walk, but I was told not to eat it. I was driving with a friend yesterday and asked, "What are these trees that look like palm trees?" My friend said, "Those are palm trees, Jason."

In Tempe, Arizona, it is hot when you sit in the sun and cool when you sit in the shade. They tell me it's called "dry heat." Dry heat confuses me. Tempe has a water shortage, and Tempe also has a manmade lake. When in Tempe, don't bring up the manmade lake. In Tempe, Arizona, the professional football team plays in a college stadium, and when you make long-distance phone calls you do not dial 1. I am not used to these things. The airport was named for Barry Goldwater, and the street signs glow at night like the soft caress of the desert moon.

I think being in Tempe is like getting dropped into a giant version of SimCity. Everything is new, everything is beautiful, and everything is a chain. I keep expecting to see a giant mouse come out of the sky - CLICK! Three new blocks of residential! CLICK! CLICK! Six new blocks of commercial!

There is a golf course in the desert in Tempe, Arizona. Everything is made of stucco, and vintage ties only cost three dollars. Today I went driving in Tempe with two women I don't know. They got me really high and we talked about cactus. Every time a hip-hop song would come on the radio, the two women would do a postmodern ironic hip-hop dance in their car seats, oblivious to their own movements. It was a beautiful thing to watch.

In Tempe, Arizona, poets breathe fire and gangsters hang out in sports bars. People leave their cars unlocked and all the grass is imported. I think Tempe, Arizona was secretly designed by David Lynch. I like David Lynch!

I am the worst roommate in the entire world. I'm serious. They had a contest. I was entered into it by my roommates at the time, four hippies in my colleegetown with whom I shared a three story house. They weren't the greatest roommates in the world either, but the free pot went a long way towards making up for that. The contest was broken down into the following categories:

- A. Inability to clean up after oneself.
- B. Unawareness of the strange ceramic objects in the kitchen named "dishes" and the fact that they needed to be washed periodically.
- C. A complete and utter confusion over such esoteric concepts as "rent" and "electric bills."
- D. A propensity for bringing strange people home at three in morning.
- E. An even bigger propensity for calling one's friends long-distance at four in the morning.

The hippies thought I would do well in a contest such as this, and they were right. I walked away with first place. My prize was a crown made out of a discarded pizza box, and an eviction notice. I couldn't have been more proud.

UNTITLED (ROOMMATE STORY)

Please take my word for it when I say to you that I am your worst nightmare. I once set my apartment on fire when I fell asleep with a lit cigarette. I once brought four men home in the middle of the night and said to my female roommate, "These guys are in a band I saw tonight that kicked ass. I told them they could crash here tonight. I hope you don't mind." Ladies and gentlemen, I once threw a phone through a plate-glass window after having an argument with my girlfriend. Actually, that's a lie. I've done that twice. XXX In the school year of 1990 to 1991, I moved eleven times in twelve months. Not a single one of them was by choice. I have had roommates throw my belongings in the street. I have had roommates sell my stereo to pay for my back rent. I once stole a Polaroid of my roommate giving her boyfriend a blowjob, which I found by rummaging through her things for an hour, masturbated to it, in her bed, made a xerox for my own amusement, and then ate an entire box of Pop-Tarts she had bought the night before. I am the worst roommate in the entire, entire world.

That is, until I met my match.

Her name was Kim. I found her through an ad in the Chicago Reader. It said, "Wanted. One roommate to share a two-bedroom apartment in Andersonville. Must like animals, loud music, smoking and anarchy." I gave her a call. Kim was a 28-year-old sculptor of functional objects. Her specialty was in making pieces of furniture out of discarded electronic items: chairs made out of burnt-out televisions, a bed fashioned out of 36 Macintosh LCII's. When I walked in the apartment, I couldn't even tell whether the place had carpeting. Every inch of the floor was covered in debris. It was like a graveyard for computer nerds. In one corner was a 1950's mannequin, spray-painted orange and riddled with bullet holes. Kim said:

"Don't mind that. My boyfriend gets a little crazy when he's on heroin, and the only way to calm him down is to let him shoot off his pistol for awhile."

Then she said:

"Well, he's not really my boyfriend. He's actually my dealer, but I sleep with him when I'm broke and I need to score. He's actually a really nice guy. Just make sure never to bring up Randy Rhodes around him."

Randy Rhodes? I said. The former guitarist for Ozzy Osbourne?

"Yeah, that's the guy. He's got some weird, fucked-up thing about it. Let's just say I learned about it the hard way."

I moved in the following Saturday.

Kim and I got along great. In fact, living with Kim made me think of a new business venture. "Bad Roommates Placement Services, Incorporated." Always forgetting to change the kitty litter? Fine, here's another person just like yourself. Go crazy. Like to get real drunk and play your stereo at top volume in the middle of the night? Hey, Bob here likes Van Halen just as much as you. And we just found a comfy little couch house you can call your own.

Within weeks, Kim's and my apartment was an absolute train wreck. My friends would come over and say things like:

"How the fuck can you live in a shithole like this, Pettus?"

Or:

"I hope to God you're having sex with her, at least."

And I would just quietly shrug my shoulders, dumbfounded to the ways of the good half of the roommate world.

The thing that was great about Kim and I as roommates was that we always expected the worst from each other, so we were never disappointed. She would come home one night and I would say something like, "I needed to pay the gas bill today, so I took all your old Plasmatics albums down to Restless and got 40 bucks for them." I would come home one night and Kim would say something like:

"I was really horny this afternoon so I used that dildo your ex-girlfriend left over here before the break-up."

And this was perfectly fine. We never argued over the dishes because we owned no dishes. We never ate each other's groceries because Kim had turned the refrigerator into an armoire. We received a five-day notice from the landlord every single month, and at least 50 percent of our time was spent with our utilities turned off. We couldn't have been happier.

But eventually, just like Xanadu or Babylon or Twin Peaks, our little utopia also came to an end. One day there was a knock on the door. It was the police. They held a megaphone up to their lips and shouted:

"Attention Kim and Jason! People were never meant to live like this! You are a menace to society! Come out with your hands in plain sight!"

With the police was a priest. They gave the megaphone to him and he said:

"Children of God, your home is an abomination. It is a cursed and evil place, where rodents and other tools of Satan tread upon the ground."

And he was actually right about that part.

"Children of God, please vacate this foul place, so that the land may be exorcised and brought back into the folds of Heaven."

But we were having none of it. Kim and I had no illusions. We knew what a nightmare we were as roommates. We knew that neither of us would ever be able to live with someone else again. This was our home, damnit. I mean, sure, there was that big hole in the wall from that night we saw "Fight Club" and decided we could learn how to make our own explosives. And yes, technically the cockroaches actually had possession of the house and probably brought in more income than us anyway. But this was our HOME, damnit.

Kim and I barricaded the door with a pile of old Tribunes the size of a small boy. Unfortunately, we forgot about the back door, which we kept unlocked because we had lost the keys one night at Rainbo Club when we were really trashed. The police had us removed, the priest sprinkled the place with holy water, and they burned the whole damn building down to the ground.

I live alone now. People are still horrified when they come by my place, but it's just not the same. There's just no way for a studio apartment to truly ever embrace chaos the way a three-story house can. I got a letter from Kim recently. She's in jail. She says it's the best living arrangement she's ever had. Everyone picks up after her, her bathroom can be cleaned with an industrial hose, and her landlord never, ever threatens to kick her out.

UNTITLED (TIME IS A FUCKED-UP CONCEPT)

Right now, out there, your future spouse is standing on the other side of the bar. They are there and you are here and you are both scanning the room and your eyes meet and they linger for too long, they lock onto each other and you think My God, that's it, that's my future spouse, but that's not what you tell yourself. You say to yourself I think I know that person from someplace, and you go over to the person and you say to them Aren't you that friend of my friend and we were at that one party over at that guy's apartment that one night, you know, we were listening to that song and that woman was making those drinks we were gulping down. And your future spouse says Yes, I remember that, we were talking about that one thing and the band we had both just seen, we were debating this political point and then we started talking about that writer, you know, the one with the books. And the two of you will keep talking and neither of you have ever met before but you'll convince yourself otherwise and they'll buy a drink and you'll buy a drink and you'll buy them a drink and they'll buy you a drink and then the bartender will buy both of you a drink, and you will toast the bartender, and you will tip the bartender too much because they said what a cute couple you are and they know you're not a couple but they said it anyway to help you get lucky. And you and your future spouse will move to a table and they'll light your cigarettes and you'll light their cigarettes and one of those people that hand out cigarettes will come by and get into a conversation with you and THEY'LL say what a cute couple you are and you and your future spouse will laugh nervously and slip your hands into each other's underneath the table. And your future spouse will suddenly kiss you, they'll put their soft lips onto yours and you will think of how great this night is, you will think My God, I could marry this person, and you WILL marry this person, out there somewhere, you will walk into a church you don't believe in and swear your love in front of a bunch of people you don't like, you will sit at a banquet table and watch your drunk uncle do the chicken dance, out there somewhere, but here you sit at the table and hold hands and you will say to them, When we need to be somewhere we are taken to nowhere, and when I want to be everywhere I end up being anywhere. T is to I as M is to E, we think it's a straight and narrow line but it's more like the splattered remains of a cell phone after being chucked off the observation deck of the John Hancock building by an angry ex-lover. I SEE YOU IN FOUR DIMENSIONS. You are seven and you are cold. You are 77 and you are frail. You are 17 and you are angry. You are 27 and you are with me. And technically this night will never end if you look at the construct of time in a spatial manner rather than the narrative one, which means you should come home with me now and we will make love like crazed weasels. And your future spouse will say All you had to do was ask and the two of you will skip off, two prepubescents playing hopscotch with one rock, two middle-agers counting each other's pills and arguing over who's going to take back the videos, two studs in the prime of their lives with one of your penises in one of the other one's vaginas, sweating, screaming, kicking, but that's out there somewhere. In here they are on the other side of the bar. You are both scanning the room and your eyes meet. In here. Out there. In here. Out there.

WAY OF THE DRUNKEN WARRIOR

(Spoken in a high-pitched nervousness) Oh my God, I'm having the greatest time right now. Aren't you having a great time? Aren't we all just having the greatest time right now, sitting here at this table in this bar with these drinks and this company? GOD, I'm having a good time. Seriously, I mean that. I'm having the greatest time right now, right this very second, right as these words are coming out of my mouth I'm having the greatest time. One day in the future when I'm old, they'll tell me to think of all the great times I had as a youth and I'll think of this night, this very night. When I light this cigarette I'll think of what a great time I was having lighting this cigarette thinking about what a great time I was having. GOD, I'm having a great time! I want to make a toast. No, seriously, I want to make a toast to the great time we're having. We may never do this again! We may never all be in the same room again to have such a great time, so yes, a toast. A toast to the great time we're having and all my great friends who are helping me have this great time we're having.

(Performer steps to the side of the microphone and acts like an incredulous bystander) Okay! Enough already!

(Performer steps back to the mic and acts confused) Jeez, why are you in such a bad mood?

YOU FUCK LIKE SLEATER-KINNEY

Lady, you fuck like sex is going out of style. You fuck like your ability to have an orgasm is going to be taken away from you tomorrow. You fuck like a crazy person. Not an actual crazy person, but a Winona Ryder, “Girl Interrupted” crazy person, cute crazy, sexy crazy, won’t take a butcher knife to me afterwards crazy.

Lady, you fuck like an all-girl punk band, right before their very first show, all hopped up on trucker pills and beer snuck out of their parents’ basement. You fuck like an angry yuppie in the back of the line at Starbucks. Lady, you fuck like one of those freaky Japanese cartoons that have been shown to cause epileptic attacks. You fuck like a sixteen-year-old boy who’s just spent the last four hours watching the Playboy Channel, scrambled, squinting and twisting his head trying to make out the body parts beyond that snowy screen.

Lady, I don’t know what kind of freaky shit your parents did to you as a kid to make you fuck like you do now, but I get up every morning and thank them for it. Lady, you fuck like an episode of Jerry Springer. You fuck like Pat Buchanan protesting a pro-choice rally. You fuck like an old-school rapper, throwing your hands in the air, and waving them like you just don’t care. Lady, you fuck like someone’s secretly videotaping you, and you know that they’re videotaping you and you’re fucking them anyway.

Lady, you fuck like a homeless guy rubbing his hands together over a trash fire on a January morning. You fuck like those old Asian paintings with the guys with cocks the size of a house. Lady, you fuck like a riot at a British soccer match. You fuck like Richard Daley talking about ComEd. You fuck like that cokehead in the corner of the party who doesn’t have any coke and really, really, really needs some coke.

Lady, you fuck like a poet at an erotic open mic, reading a really dirty poem in a pathetic attempt to get laid after the show. You fuck like ten thousand teenagers at a Britney Spears concert. You fuck like ten thousand teenagers at a Backstreet Boys concert. You fuck like ten thousand teenagers at an N’ Sync concert. Lady, you fuck like me, but without all the issues. You fuck like a drunk middle-aged aunt at a wedding reception. You fuck like a born-again Christian handing out pamphlets on a streetcorner. Lady, you fuck like someone who just installed Windows 2000.

Lady, you fuck like everyone SHOULD fuck and nobody DOES fuck. You fuck like an early-80s European heavy metal band. And you rock me like a hurricane.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

2000 is when I first started getting a little tired of the poetry scene; for the last several years, after all, I had been attending three to four events every single week, and was starting to grow weary of the constant late weeknights, gratuitous drug-taking, and crazy 23-year-olds that came with them. I've said it before, and I'll say it again, that a poetry community is much like the Spanish boy group Menudo, in that one naturally ages out of both at a certain point. I was still writing and performing on a regular basis, but was leaving the open mics at an earlier hour each week, skipping more of them, and having more of a bad time at the ones I did attend.

At the same time, I found the creative side of my brain starting to wander away from the slam format more profoundly than it had the previous couple of years. Creative essays took up more and more of my time, and of course this was also the first full year that I was writing my web journal, which was eventually to take on a life of its own much bigger and more widespread than anything that had happened to me as a performer. This was also the year I began writing a series of long-form erotic stories, as well as the year that I began taking my travel writing much more seriously - so much so that the next year I would publish a standalone book of it for the first time, and make my first plans to visit Europe.

And while all this was going on, even the scene itself was changing. In the modern times in which we live, of course, where the latest hypertrendy underground fad is instantaneously broadcast to every corner of the globe via satellite television and the internet, the mainstreaming of underground activities happens lightning-fast. And this is in fact what had happened with the poetry slam - literally in the space of two years it went from being primarily unknown to suddenly known by everybody, and with all the open mics moving location from seedy dives to trendy danceclubs. With the new "cleaning-up" of the poetry scene came an influx of a new type of performer as well; young, politically-correct, mostly lacking a sense of humor, usually a hiphop performer, and usually a young recent graduate of the academic world. These new types of performers flooded the poetry scene, along with the friends who eventually became the regular audience members; none of them knew quite what to think of this weird nerdy older white guy on stage, a holdover from when people did heroin at open mics and everyone was reading Bukowski, doing pieces about white trash and pop culture.

With hindsight I've now accepted a lot of this as a natural transition within an artistic scene, and have gone on to find new genres (like travel writing) which fit my age and disposition much better than endless late nights of drinking, fucking and fighting. That was still hard for me to give up in 2000, though, when it first started happening, and I think the pieces written in that year reflect this. I still considered the Chicago poetry community as "my" community, the one I had spent all this time and energy helping to build and support, and I wasn't ready yet to have it turn into something that wasn't "mine" anymore. Although I became more and more diverted, I continued to hold on to my career as a performer throughout the year, and well into 2001, before giving it up for good.

NOTES ABOUT INDIVIDUAL PIECES

A day without caffeine: Based on a true event, back when I had my eardrum surgically removed in 2000.

I didn't go to Prom: In 2000 the Chicago open mic "Mental Graffiti" decided to throw a fake Prom for all the loser poets who didn't go to theirs back in high school. Performers were asked to write a story about their real Prom experience back as a teenager; surprisingly enough, almost no one at the show had an actual Prom story, but there were lots of entertaining tales about why people skipped Prom.

King of the losers: In 2000 the Chicago open mic "Mental Graffiti" decided to change the format of their monthly poetry slam; among other additions, they gave individual poets the power to "challenge" other poets to special one-time themed competitions, held at the beginning of the night. The first of these challenges was between me and my friend Shappy Seasholtz, to determine once and for all which of us was the bigger loser. I won the challenge, which technically means that I lost...or, er, something like that.

The legend of the tower people: By 2000 the poetry slam had become a national phenomenon, and had greatly expanded in both awareness and participation by the general public. In some ways this growing popularity was great, and definitely produced more opportunities to perform, tour, and meet cute girls; the flip side, however, was that more and more poets started appearing from the academic world, and bringing along their politically-correct intolerance of others to a genre which

had become famous in the first place for its renown sense of open-mindedness. This piece was my response to this issue - an issue that would eventually become so widespread that it would prompt my retirement from the community a year later. Ironically (or maybe not), the people for whom this piece was based would never get that it was about them; they would always come to me after the shows and congratulate me on "sticking it to the Man," oblivious the entire time that they themselves were the Man of whom I was speaking.

My name is Jason Pettus and I am not your ex-boyfriend: Inspired by a true event, a woman who once turned me down for a date because I "seemed too much like her ex-boyfriend."

Open letters (Kathy): I was a huge fan of the now-defunct website "Open Letters," which once a day simply published a letter about any subject from people around the world. I ended up writing four submissions for the website, all collected here in this book, but unfortunately all four were rejected by Open Letters' editor. Sigh. This particular story is one of the two true letters I wrote for the site (along with the one addressed to Mike); the subject of this story is the same woman who inspired the poems "The dirty violent little things you have done to me" and "Margo says," both found in Chicago Stories 1999, and "You fuck like Sleater-Kinney," found elsewhere in this book.

Open letter (Katie): A fictional story, although based loosely on a real event in high school.

Open letter (Mike): The other true story of the "Open Letters" series; the person who stopped by to see me while I was sick was my friend Greg Gillam.

A poem for Ellen, who in a moment of weakness asked for one: A woman I met and instantly fell for while on a book tour in 2000. All weekend she kept telling me how she never wanted a poem written about her in her life; on Sunday night she relented and asked me to write one about her.

Tempe: At the 2000 Tempe Poetry Festival I was asked to be the "sacrificial poet" for their big Saturday-night poetry slam, ending the festivities; the term describes the first poet who performs at a slam, someone not actually competing, who supposedly helps "calibrate" the scores from the audience judges before the real competition begins. (The concept of a sacrificial poet is, of course, a crock in the real world; but see my book How to Win a Poetry Slam for more.) This is the piece I wrote for that performance, based on all the strange, surreal little things I had been noticing about the city the four days I had already been there. This was an extremely popular piece with the audience, by the way, a far cry from a similar piece I wrote about Albuquerque in 1998 under the same circumstances.

Untitled (roommate story): Written for one of many open mics over the years organized by Greg Gillam, in a variety of venues and known as a variety of names. This was part of the "Poop Studios" monthly series of themed events; this particular theme was bad roommates.

Untitled (time is a fucked-up concept): Easily one of the most popular performance pieces I ever wrote, and the piece I usually open performances with to this day. This is also my only poem to be translated into another language (German, to be specific); drop me a line if you'd ever be interested in reading it.

Way of the drunken warrior: Based (almost word-for-word) on an actual conversa-

tion I witnessed in 2000. Man, I was ready to smack the guy by the time he was finally done.

You fuck like Sleater-Kinney: Written for the annual “Mental Graffiti” erotic open mic, and a double tribute - one to the all-woman punk band Sleater-Kinney, who frankly is the greatest band in the history of time, and one to my lover Margo (see “Open Letters [Kathy]” for more). Yes, by the way, it’s been confirmed through my friend Beth Lisick, a friend of the band members as well, that Sleater-Kinney has actually seen this poem. No information was given on what they thought of it.

COMPLETE PERFORMANCE WORK 1996-2004

GAD Publishing Co. | Chicago USA
jasonpettus.com/ebooks

For the first time ever, a comprehensive and chronological set of books is now available from GAD, publishing nearly all of the 400 slam poems, monologues and dialogues Jason Pettus wrote between 1996 and 2004. This new collection starts with the six-book series **Chicago Stories 1996-2004**, gathering all the unthemed work

Pettus performed at open mics and special events in those years, now with an expanded series of notes concerning not only each piece, but what was happening in the Chicago arts in that period to influence the work. Move on to the four reprints of special commissioned **half-hour performance projects** Pettus created over the years; and then to the three other **special themed books** he wrote during his time as a performer as well (*Psycho Poets*, about various real Chicago female artists; *[Andi.]*, stories about an ex-girlfriend; and *The Tao of Now*, an attempt at combining the rhythm and energy of slam poetry with longer, more narrative stories).

For those interested in just a sampling of Pettus' old performance work, **four compilations** are also available: *The Jason Pettus Portable Reader*, audience favorites; *More Poems About Blowjobs*, the best of the erotic stories and poems; *Love Blender*, the best romantic stories from over the years; and *Favorite Performance Work*, compiled by the author from a variety of sources, with a new introduction. And finally, for the truly dedicated, the entire collection of work can be found in a **800-page single download edition** as well, entitled *Complete Performance Work, 1996-2004*.

- 01 **CHICAGO STORIES 1996**
- 02 **CHICAGO STORIES 1997**
- 03 **CHICAGO STORIES 1998**
- 04 **CHICAGO STORIES 1999**
- 05 **CHICAGO STORIES 2000**
- 06 **CHICAGO STORIES 2001-2004**
- 07 **JASONETTES**
- 08 **THE HEATSEEKER**
- 09 **NOTES FROM MY GRANDMOTHER'S FUNERAL**
- 10 **CELIBATE**
- 11 **PSYCHO POETS**
- 12 **[ANDI.]**
- 13 **THE TAO OF NOW**

THE JASON PETTUS PORTABLE READER: audience favorites

MORE POEMS ABOUT BLOWJOBS: best erotic stories and poems

LOVE BLENDER: best romantic stories and poems

JASON PETTUS: FAVORITE PERFORMANCE WORK

COMPLETE PERFORMANCE WORK, 1996-2004