

COMPLETE PERFORMANCE WORK 1996-2004

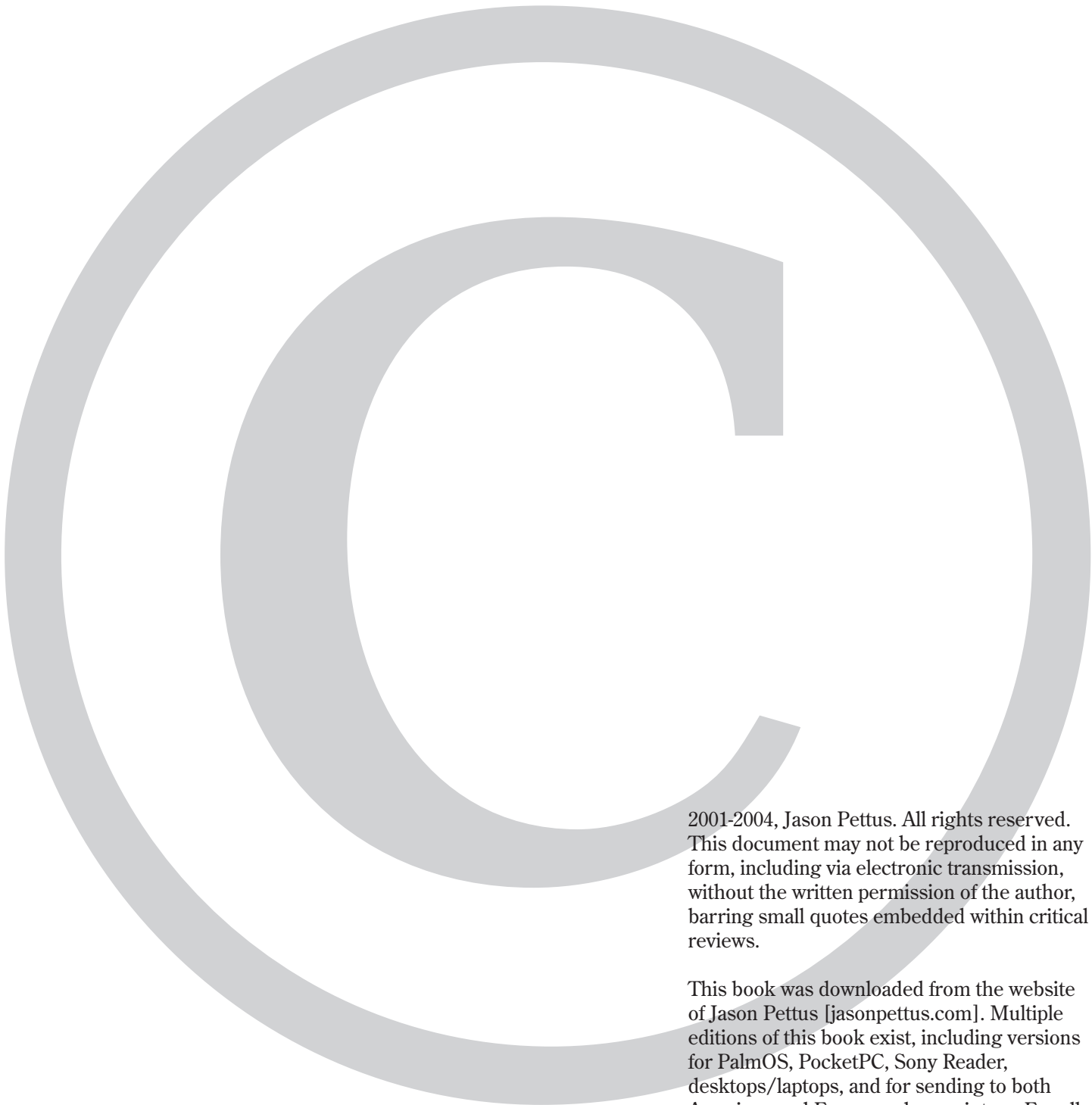
GAD Publishing Company Chicago USA

06 OF 13

JASON PETTUS



CHICAGO STORIES 2001-2004



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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.

INTRODUCTION TO THE 2007 EDITION

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 edi-

tions 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 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.

2001

Woman: How did we meet?

Man: How did we meet?

Woman: This is a funny story, actually.

Man: We can't tell this story, can we?

Woman: We can tell this story.

Man: I hate this story.

Woman: You love this story!

Man: I don't love this story.

Woman: You gonna let me tell the story or not? (Pause) Actually...

ANYWAY: A POEM FOR TWO VOICES

Both: We had a one-night-stand.

Man: It was supposed to be a one-night-stand.

Woman: You thought it was going to be a one-night-stand.

Man: We didn't actually have sex.

Woman: We almost had sex.

Man: We were this close to having sex.

Woman: Which would have been fine.

Man: It would've been great!

Woman: It would've been okay.

Man: Lady, you missed the chance to have the best sex you're ever gonna have.

(Woman looks at Man for a moment, bursts out laughing)

Woman: Anyway.

Man: Best sex you're ever gonna have!

(Pause)

Both: Anyway.

Man: We met at a bar.

Woman: I was waiting for my friends.

Man: They never showed up.

Woman: They never showed up.

Man: Actually, they did show up.

Woman: My friends showed up?

Man: Yeah, your friends showed up and they saw us talking and they went in the back room and left us alone.

Woman: Motherfuckers!

Man: I love her friends!

Woman: I hate my friends!

Man: Anyway.

Woman: Anyway. I was having a...

Man: Gin.

Woman: And a...

Man: Tonic.

Woman: And he was having a...

Man: Bourbon.

Woman: And a...

Man: Cigarette.

Woman: And I was pissed that my friends hadn't shown up, so I was...

Man: Getting trashed.

Woman: Knocking back a couple.

Man: You were three sheets to the wind, lady.

Woman: And he came up to me at the bar and said the loveliest thing. He said...

Man: Baby, heaven must be a little darker tonight because someone stole the stars and put 'em in your eyes.

Woman: You did not say that!

Man: Yeah, but I've always wanted to say that.

Woman: (Laughing) You are such an idiot!

Man: Hey, just who exactly went home with whom that night, okay?

(Pause)

Both: Anyway.

Woman: He said, "It should be against the law for someone so beautiful to look so sad."
(Punches Man in arm) You ol' smoothie!

Man: Reports of my smoothiness have been greatly exaggerated.

Woman: And it wouldn't have worked except that I was trashed.

Man: You had knocked back a couple.

Woman: Well, you were so stoned you couldn't feel your own ass.

Man: I hate this story!

Woman: I love this story! Shut up!

Man: You shut up!

Woman: No, you shut up!

Man: No, you shut up!

(Pause)

Both: Anyway.

Man: We got to talking.

Woman: And drinking.

Man: And drinking.

Woman: Duh-reenk-eeng.

Man: And we were talking about movies. And we were talking about books.

Woman: And we were talking about drugs.

(Both performers speed up their delivery, until they are saying the following lines at the same time.)

Man: And we were talking about songs.

Woman: And we were talking about jobs.

Man: And we were talking about clubs.

Woman: And we were talking about lovers.

Man: And we were talking about bosses.

Woman: And we were talking about kids.

Man: And we were talking about sex.

Woman: And we were talking about apartments.

Man: And we were talking about sex.

Woman: And we were talking about bands.

Man: And we were talking about sex.

(Pause)

Woman: And we were talking about sex.

(Pause)

Man: Anyway, one thing leads to another...

Woman: And the next thing I know I'm in his shitty apartment looking at fucking comic books.

Man: Hey, you were the one who got out the fucking comic books.

Woman: I was trashed!

Man: She had knocked back a couple.

Woman: And then Mr. Genius here gets out the pot...

Man: And we're smoking...

Woman: And we're smoking...

Man: And we're smoking...

Woman: And we're smoking... (Pause) And I, uh... (Pause) I, uh, pass out.

Man: So I stick her in my bed and pull the sheets up around her and I sleep on the floor.

Woman: Which I thought was...pretty nice of him to do.

Man: It's not that big of a deal. It's what anyone would've done.

Woman: It's not what everyone would've done.

Man: (Embarrassed) Anyway.

Woman: And that's how we met.

Man: And to this day we've still never had sex.

Woman: Hey, that's right. (Woman looks over at Man. Man looks over at Woman. They stand in silence for a few seconds, then Man holds up finger as if he is about to ask a question.) No. (Woman walks off stage)

Man: (Watches woman leave, then turns to audience) I fucking hate this story!

AN ODE TO THE 'WE SHOULD BE FAMOUS' CLUB ON THE OCCASION OF YAMMER'S FOURTH ANNIVERSARY

Oh yeah? Oh YEAH? Well, let me tell you something, mister. One day I'm going to be big and I'm going to be rich and I'm going to be famous. I'm going to be more famous than GOD. I'm gonna have a hundred handlers around me at all times. Every time I go out for a drink, they're gonna have to shut down the neighborhood in a four-block radius, just like they do for the President. You're gonna have to get through my publicist just to get an autograph from my OTHER publicist, motherfucker!

Yeah, that's RIGHT! I'm gonna be the biggest, baddest, rock and roll literary SUPERstar anyone's ever SEEN! I'll grace the cover of major weekly magazines. I will have torrid affairs with Oscar-winning actresses. I will have even MORE torrid affairs with Oscar-winning ACTORS! Ah-hah! Rock stars will write entire albums about me! Colleges will dedicate entire classes to me! Borders will donate an entire section to me!

(Acting like customer) "I'm looking for a book by Jason Pettus."

(Acting like dumbstruck employee, pointing obviously to the corner)

I am going to be the most famous American author of the 21st Century! And when they are writing my unauthorized biography, you know, the one pieced together by a bunch of tabloid writers, with a bunch of blurry black and white photos inside, and one of those cheesy stupid titles like 'Jason Pettus - His Fab Life,' when they are writing my unauthorized biography, they will talk of a bar I used to go to, a good bar, a fun bar. A bar where all the greatest writers of the 21st Century used to hang out for some inexplicable reason. Stoned undergraduates who haven't even been born yet will one day read that biography and say to themselves, "Dude...how cool would it've been to hang out at that bar?" "Yeah...right on, dude!" (Performer gives himself invisible high-five)

So don't you sit there, don't you fucking sit there, motherfucker, and tell me it's a waste of time to come out to a bar every Wednesday night and read my work to a roomful of drunk people. Because it's not a waste of my time. Because one day I'm gonna be famous. And all these people around you, they're all gonna be famous too. And you, motherfucker... you're the first one we're all gonna forget!

A POEM TO MYSELF ON MY 32ND BIRTHDAY

(Inhale) I...love...getting...high.

Ladies and gentlemen, God forgive me, but I turned 32 years old today and I love getting high. My friends in my thirties tell me I shouldn't feel so great about getting high anymore. "That's for the kids," they say. "Those kids, that FOX News is always doing those reports on, those kids who are doing Ecstasy, you know, the same stuff we used to do in college back when it was called MDMA and you could only get it from your molecular biology friend who lived down the dorm hallway from you. Pot, Jason? It's for the kids. It's always been for the kids. It will always be for the kids."

But what the fuck do they know? They're living in Schaumburg and they've got a mortgage and two kids and three SUVs and four student loans and five supermarket customer cards, what the fuck do they know? When the kid at the party hands that joint over and I...(inhale)...I am every age that I want to be. 'Cause, you know what? The Beastie Boys make sense no matter how old you are. And punk rock? It makes sense no matter how old you are. And sure, things change about you. You can't do it all night. You can't do it every night. You're starting to get things sagging, and wrinkling, and falling out, but it doesn't mean you're dead.

If I want to go out drinking 'til 4 in the morning just 'cause one of my friends is in town, I can do that. And if I want to go out of town and keep my friends up 'til 4 in the morning drinking with me, I can do that. And if I want a farmer in France to fill a duck's stomach up with special herbs, just so they can slaughter the duck and feed its stomach to me on a plate for \$14 just so I can have this very lovely, very original first date, than fuck it, I can do that too. And you know what? I was high when I was writing this poem. And you know what? I'm high while I'm **READING** this poem. And you know what? The only reason I'm reading this poem is so I can see who's laughing the hardest in the audience right now, because I know you're the ones who are gonna get me high after the show!

Please God Help Me, I'm 32 years old and I loves getting high. I'm just not quite ready to roll on my back, put my feet in the air, and yell out, "Fuck me, Starbucks! Fuck me in the ASS!" I'm not quite ready yet to be the people who I never wanted to be. I'm not quite done being subversive, of trying to change the system, of occasionally being self-destructive, and knowing that eventually it will be all right. I have a hearing aid now. (Pulls it out) This is it. You know the best thing about having a hearing aid? You can listen to your Walkman twice as fuckin' loud as you were before!

Yes, I'm 32 years old today, and I...love...getting...high! (Long, long inhale)

SNOWMEN

Her name was Kathryn but I called her Katie. I called her Katie because I had known her since the age of four, back when she was young and innocent enough to really enjoy being called Katie. The name was conjugated often over Katie's long road to adulthood, and I was there to witness them all: first to 'Kathy' in junior high, shortened to 'Kath' for a short period her freshman year, then to the full 'Kathryn' during high school, back to 'Katie' during college when she completely freaked out about becoming an adult, followed by a disastrous three years in New York as 'Kat,' doing cocaine every night and hanging out with horrible off-off-Broadway actors. Now we're both thirty and she is simply 'Kate' to most, a fairly good columnist in San Francisco for a fairly famous web zine which I'm told I'm not supposed to mention but you can always find them in the 'salon,' wink-wink.

Katie and I had a ritual that we solemnly undertook for most of our childhoods – the first serious snowfall of the year, each year, we would both emerge from our houses, blinking in the harsh sunlight, and we would build a snowman together. I'm not sure exactly when this cycle of construction began, but I imagine it was in first grade. When you're a kid, of course, the only snowfall that counts as 'serious' is the one that gets you out of school. As a result, our bulbous manlike creatures were in many ways our version of a golden idol being offered up to the benevolent snow gods for giving us this blessed day off of school. I mean, that's not we actually thought when we were seven. We were just more like, "Yay! We're out of school! Let's build a snowman!"

But sure enough, the erection of that snow man over the years really did become a ritual to us, as sure a part of our metaphysical lives as our weekly forced participation in local churches. (Catholic for she; Southern Baptist for me.) Katie was always jealous of me for being a Baptist, because Baptists never had any homework. Katie would regale me of horror stories about the Catholic church, about all these prayers she had to memorize, and this complicated choreographed dance she had to learn – sit, kneel, kneel, sit, eat the cookie, drink the wine, do the (performer makes Catholic cross over his heart) thing, oh my God, this isn't how the Baptist church worked. When you were ready to become a Baptist you simply stood up in your pew one Sunday and yelled, "I feel the spirit!" And then they dunked your head under the water and you were finished. No rosaries. No confessionals.

But I digress.

Katie and I used to build these snowmen together. And at a certain point in junior high it was actually formalized into a real ritual, with rules and traditions and a sense of obligation – the first snowfall of the year that produced enough snow in which to build a snowman. And, well, it had to be the right kind of snow as well. There were two kinds of snow where I grew up - wet snow and dry snow. To this day I still don't know what makes wet snow and dry snow different from each other, but when you're a kid you can just pick up a handful and instantly know. Wet snow will stick together and make a snowball, dry snow just flakes apart again when you open your hand and it's of no fucking use whatsoever. Snow activities were a BIG part of the neighborhood where I grew up. I lived in a community full of children, off in a quiet subdivision in a small midwestern town. I lived in what is commonly referred to as "the suburbs," which apparently, from the modern media's standpoint, was a veritable cesspool in the eighth level of hell, a vacuous cultural wasteland that breeds only dysfunction, complacency and guests for Jerry Springer.

But I gotta tell you, my childhood in the suburbs wasn't bad at all. I mean, what ten-year-old wants to deal with the pain and anguish of the postmodern urban lifestyle? No ten year olds, that's who. Ten year olds want to ride their bikes and hang out with their friends and go to the pool and play in the snow. And we did a lot of playing in the snow. We had the act of sledding down to a fine art in my neighborhood. We lived on the very edge of a golf course, whose steepest hill on Hole 14 would become overrun with rambunctious children every December through February. The older kids would come out with buckets of water and form these ice slides down the left side of the hill, complete with a packed-down ramp at the end just in case you hadn't broken your arm yet.

Katie and I's commitment to the snowman ritual held up for many years. My mom, in fact, dutifully documented each year's original creation with the aid of her Polaroid camera. Not too long ago I was looking over the fading photographs, stuck in a blue felt scrapbook and shelved away in my parents' basement, next to the GI Joes and the Atari 2600 and about five full years' worth of Dynamite magazines. There was 1980, when we decided to pull off our own little Easter Island by mysteriously constructing a snowman taller than our heads. Did it work? Yes it did. How did we do it? I ain't telling. 1981, the following year, we

decided to go the opposite direction and build an entire little community of snowmen across the front yard, none of them taller than a foot. We had about thirty of them – a snow choir, snow shoppers, even a snow cop chasing a snow robber. 1982, the year after that, Katie and I got into a huge fight that afternoon as we were building our snowman, and she snuck over that night with a bucket of boiling water and melted the entire thing to the ground. Mom got a picture of even that one, after my smartass dad was finished making a body outline in the snow out of black electrical tape.

The ritual continued throughout high school, culminating in our senior-year creation of a snowman giving the finger, constructed with the blessing of my parents but not necessarily of the rest of the neighborhood. After graduation, though, Katie and I headed off to separate colleges, mine the four-year state university, hers a small private liberal arts college on the east coast. It became harder and harder to synchronize our time together during the holidays, and eventually the snowman ritual simply shrank up and vanished. We lose a lot during the ages of 18 to 22, even as we gain so much more. Your freshman year it's all long-distance phone calls to all your high school buddies, and big blowout parties during summer vacation when you're all back home, and by your senior year you can't even remember why you ever hung out with those people in the first place. Such is the way of the world, I suppose.

There's only been two times Katie and I have made snowmen since we both graduated from college. The first was four years ago, at the end of her "I'm going by Kat and doing cocaine every night in New York City" phase. She happened to be visiting her parents for the holidays at the same time that year as I was, and she swung by the house one afternoon and asked coyly if I wanted to make a snowman. We drove around the neighborhood and got high in my parents' shit-brown 1978 Mercury Marquis – the same Mercury Marquis, incidentally, where I received my first handjob, from Debbie Bertlemann when I was 17 and she was 14. Fourteen years old and giving handjobs – can you believe it? I remember Katie laying down in the snow that day and making a sloppy, stoned snow angel next to the formless lump which was the sad result of us trying to make a snowman while on drugs. I watched her wriggle around, accidentally pushing the snow up into her trendy black leather jacket without realizing it. She closed her eyes tightly and asked if the world really was the bleak, meaningless void she had come to believe, or was she just having a bad year? I told her she was having a bad year. Then I told her she really needed to stop doing so much cocaine. She sighed and said yes, yes she did.

The second time as an adult I made a snowman with Katie was actually just this past December. Once again we were home at the same time for Christmas – it was fun and hectic at my parents' home this holiday because my brother and his wife came in, and they live in Washington DC and don't usually get to make the trip. Katie came over one day to visit, and she looked...God, she looked old. Not old old, but she looked firmly like a grown-up, not the girl I had known almost my entire life. She had wrinkles around her eyes. Which made me realize that I have wrinkles around my eyes as well, it's just that I never notice them because they came into being so gradually.

We smiled at each other, and then I asked if she'd like to go out and build a snowman. She said of course she would. My brother's four-year-old daughter came out and helped us last year, 'help' of course being a highly subjective term when it comes to a four-year-old. There was no talk of our lives that day, no endless examination of our inner souls and how they deal with the ennui of our doomed lives. There was only us, the snow, the sky, the uniquely melancholy joy of building something with your own two hands that is destined to destroy itself, like a sand castle or an ice sculpture. There was a small child running around, who apparently finds the rubbing of snow into hair as the most fascinating experience in the entire myriad of human activity. There was you. And there was me. And there was the silent stoicism of our majestic man of snow, appearing magically in the Decembers we really need him, there to chase the dark spirits from our door at the moments we most need protection from them.

I'm glad that you were able to chase your demons away, Katie. If you ever feel them beckoning again, come visit me in Chicago and we'll make a snowman any time you want.

2002-2004

CONCERNING 'YAMMER' AND THE INHERENT CONTRADICTIONS OF POETRY OPEN MICS

I had some of the best performance experiences of my life in the back room of Joyblue on Wednesday nights. I had some of the worst performance experiences in my life in the back room of Joyblue on Wednesday nights. I met several of my old girlfriends in that room, and several of my old girlfriends broke up with me in that room. I drank more Rolling Rocks, smoked more pot, sniffed more cocaine and ate more mushrooms in the back room of Joyblue than in any other physical space on this planet. I made friendships there that will last me the rest of my life, and I made enemies there that will last me the rest of my life. I had dozens of one-night-stands because of events in the back room of Joyblue on Wednesday nights. I got slapped in the face dozens of times because of events in the back room of Joyblue on Wednesday nights. I saw performers there who made me want to swoon in ecstasy, and performers who made me want to scream in agony. I saw a lot of bullshit in the back room of Joyblue on Wednesday nights. (Pause) I saw a lot of bullshit in the back room of Joyblue on Wednesday nights.

I saw people who were famous and people who should be famous, artists and assholes, writers and fighters, straight, gay, bi and “well, tonight I’ll be whatever you want me to be.” I’ve had drinks bought for me, fists swung at me, cocks sucked for me, drugs handed to me, books traded with me, and many, many, many, many, many, many, MANY poems read to me in the back room of Joyblue on Wednesday nights. I’ve toasted the name “Lisa Hemminger” many times, I’ve cursed the name “Lisa Hemminger” many times, I’ve mispronounced the name “Lisa Hemminger” every single fucking time I’ve said it out loud. I love the back room of Joyblue on Wednesday nights. I hate the back room of Joyblue on Wednesday nights. I will miss the back room of Joyblue on Wednesday nights.

EULOGY FOR DEFIANT THEATRE

I was first exposed to Defiant Theatre in the winter of 1995 by Linda Gillum, who happened to be my boss at the time for a temp agency where we both worked. Linda was, in fact, the very first real friend I made in Chicago, after moving here six months previous, and the first to start inviting me out on a regular basis to go do things around the city. One day at the office she started telling me about this small local theatre company of which she was a member, and how they were about to start the run of a new show, and how I should come out and see it if I had a chance. "You'll like it," she told me. "It's based on a Stephen King story. You like Stephen King, don't you?"

The play was called "Apt Pupil" and it ended up giving me nightmares for the next three days. No, seriously, I don't mean that as a symbolic statement - I mean that for the next three nights after seeing that play, I kept waking up in these moments of panic, pushing myself off these hoards of naked, mud-streaked dead Jews I was dreaming were clutching me and pulling me into the ground. ...Fuck! I like many others had been exposed to almost no live theatre before moving to Chicago, and had no idea that the medium could affect me in such a profound and moving way. Of course, I also didn't realize that you could get away with having two dozen nude, mud-streaked actors popping out of stage doors in live theatre, either.

My love affair with Defiant had been born.

"Apt Pupil" would not be the last case of Defiant causing me nightmares; a particularly horrifying production of "Red Dragon" the following year would have me spending a week dreaming of a naked, erect Chris Thometz coming at me with a knife while dressed in a clown outfit, a fact which caused no end of pleasure to Chris when he found out. At the same time that I was being horrified and grossed out, though, I was also being entertained by the sheer audacity of such productions as "Ubu Raw" and "Action Movie - The Play," provoked into new lines of thought by such plays as "The Ugly Man" and "The Skriker," and simply awed by such spectacles as "Godbaby" and "The Mystery of Irma Vep." Show after show, year after year, I learned that I could reliably count on Defiant to provide me laughs, chills, intellectual challenges, gunshots, more gunshots, and as many hot naked 26-year-olds simulating sex on a live stage as eight bucks can buy you.

Defiant Theatre was the first group to teach me the great secret about the arts in Chicago: that this really is a city where the old punk motto of DIY still applies, that this really is a city where a bunch of kids can yell, "Let's put on a show!" and actually do it. Defiant to me has always been about much more than simply mounting entertaining and thought-provoking productions; it has stood for me as well as a living embodiment of how artists should be. If no one will give you opportunities, go and make them yourself. If given the choice between safe and dangerous, always be dangerous. If people don't get it, tell them to go fuck themselves, because there will always be someone else coming along who will get it. For ten years, Defiant was a daily reminder for me of how artists in this city can make it, if they're smart and original and believe for themselves and don't crumble in the face of adversity. They were an inspiration for me in the years I was struggling to make a name for myself as an artist, and the accomplishments I now have in my own life wouldn't be there if not for them.

I understand why Defiant had to die - frankly, I'm surprised that it got the chance to live for as long as it did. I also understand the tendency of artists to define their pasts not in terms of where they succeeded but rather where they failed - the money never raised, the plays never produced. As a simple fan of Defiant Theatre, however, I wanted to take a moment and tell everyone gathered in this room - you will be missed. Your influence, your impact on both Chicago audiences and artists is hard to quantify, because it's of a more ephemeral nature. It's not measured in terms of ticket sales and newspaper articles, but rather more intimate, more personal benchmarks - the audience member who was inspired to read Shakespeare after seeing a Defiant production, the audience member who changed their opinion about a touchy subject after seeing one of your plays, the audience member who had nightmares about clowns with erections chasing them around circus tents with butcher knives. These are the measures of true artists - not the money, not the fame, but the small, quiet moments of change you produced in your audience, one person at a time, many times without you even realizing you were doing so.

All of you in this room, the individuals who collectively created Defiant Theatre, are true artists, and I can't think of a much higher compliment to pay someone than that. Your professionalism, your creativity, your boundless enthusiasm and your eternal opti-

mism about the arts are all traits to be admired, to be emulated. For over a decade you provided Chicago audiences with a wide variety of memorable moments, from the sacred to the profane, and you provided Chicago artists with a model for behavior that will be your real lasting legacy, once the newspaper clippings have gone yellow and your website starts hosting hardcore pornography, as we all know it eventually will. From a patron to a group of artists...from a theatre fan to a theatre company...let me thank you a final time for all the things you have added to my life over the last ten years. Thank you for sticking with it as long as you did, and thank you for never lessening the quality of your shows one ounce, no matter what obstacles you faced. Thank you for the laughs, for the nightmares, and for the surprising amount of times your productions got me laid. Defiant Theatre may be dead to the outside world, but it will always live on in me. In here.

AN ODE TO 'MENTAL GRAFFITI' ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR LAST SHOW

Why, if it wasn't for "Mental Graffiti," I wouldn't be a writer. Okay, that's a lie - I'd still be a writer with or without "Mental Graffiti," probably with more money in my bank account than I currently have, definitely with a healthier liver, quite possibly without this little scar on the end of my chin, and most probably with half a dozen names missing from that ever-growing list in my life entitled "Crazy Women Jason Pettus Has Slept With."

This isn't my point. My point is that if it wasn't for "Mental Graffiti," I would be a different kind of writer than I am today. Why, if it wasn't for "Mental Graffiti," I would've never had the chance to write so many bad, bad, BAD poems and still have my audience forgive me afterwards. I would've never had the chance to experiment, to push my boundaries, to learn from my successes and to learn more from my mistakes. I would've never had the chance to become the writer I am today.

Why, if it wasn't for "Mental Graffiti," I wouldn't have my own gangster rap name. Ask Anacron - he's the one who gave it to me! If it wasn't for "Mental Graffiti," I would've never had the courage to write about my crappy suburban upbringing, because I would've never had other people want to HEAR about my crappy suburban upbringing. If it wasn't for "Mental Graffiti," I would've never known about the hip-hop community, or the freestyle one, or all the other wonderful ways to present a story to an audience besides the way I myself do it. If it wasn't for "Mental Graffiti," I would've never experienced the wonderful synergy that was created by THAT show at THAT place by THOSE hosts at THAT specific time in history. I would've never understood just how alike most writers are, even when their stories are so different.

If it wasn't for "Mental Graffiti," I would've never gotten beaten up over a poem. Okay, that's a lie too - I would've undoubtedly still gotten beaten up over poems with or without "Mental Graffiti," but I doubt anyone would've ever gotten me high for free afterwards. If it wasn't for "Mental Graffiti" I would've never made so many fans, would've never made so many enemies, would've never lived the lifestyle I felt in my twenties a writer was supposed to live. I would've just been some dorky little white nerd who never got laid, instead of what I did end up becoming - some dorky little white nerd who got laid all the goddamn time.

For better or for worse, if it wasn't for "Mental Graffiti" I wouldn't be the person I am today. And if it wasn't for Krystal and Anacron, there would've never been a "Mental Graffiti." So, Krystal and Anacron, I thank you. I thank you for sticking with it as long as you did, and for dealing with as much bullshit as I know you did. Thank you for always having a smile on your faces, and for always keeping a space open for me on your list, no matter how late I showed up or how fucked-up I was once I got there. It'll be more appreciated than you'll ever know.

A POEM FOR WILLOW, WHO IS NOW MY EX-GIRLFRIEND

She came over
the next day
with her shopping cart
to get all the stuff
that belonged to her.

She sure got it all.
The VCR.
Clothing.
CDs.
The phone line.
Bathroom supplies.
Laundry detergent.
Batteries.
Everything.

She only left one item -
a half-used bar of her
special hypoallergenic soap.

I use it every night.
I watch it lather
and liquidate
and wash away
a little more
and a little more
with every shower.

When it's all gone,
I tell myself,
when the sliver
turns into a
palmful of suds
in my hand,
then everything
really will be over.

And I will finally feel better.

SONNET FOR A HEAVENLY BODY

She'll reach and touch the stars with her two hands
Just once the ones that grasp her to the ground
Are lessened due to her polite demands
Authoritative voice, she comes unbound

She is a nova waiting for a spark
Exploding sun that doesn't know its heat
More beauty than a nebulae of quarks
Aurora Borealis, secret treat

But shadows roam in this good galaxy
Black holes formed in the past and holding strong
They threaten to diminish what she sees
Corrupt her in-born sense of right and wrong

Yet she prevails and tells her shadows "no"
She is my guiding light; I love her so

TELEVISIONGIRL

She kept talking about September 11. This was a problem, because I was trying to hit on her, and discussions about massive terrorist attacks are not exactly conducive to setting a romantic tone. She was talking about this documentary she had accidentally caught on PBS the other night that made her relive the experience all over again, and how sad she was, and what a black mark on American history it's always going to be, and I've got the wine bottle half-up and am nodding silently, wondering to myself when we can get this part of the conversation over and move on to much more fun subjects like kissing and dating and smoking dope and what wonderful things all three of those are.

But the documentary now has her thinking about Television and the Truth, and how strange it is to try to tie those two concepts together in the first place, and I'm holding my hand over half my face, wondering if we're ever going to get back to the hitting on each other stuff - which marked the beginning of our evening, don't get me wrong. I wouldn't've invited her over in the first place if we hadn't started by hitting on each other; I just assumed that more of the same would take place once we got back here.

But now she's thinking about reality television, and she starts telling me about American Idol. Which, by the sounds of it, she has watched religiously both seasons it's been on. Which I haven't, because, let's face it, do I look like the kind of guy who gives a shit who wins American Idol? But she's throwing all these names at me, Ruben and Clay and Justin and Kelley and Ryan and Simon, and it becomes obvious that she takes this shit pretty seriously, and she starts telling me about all these people in earlier rounds who got cut but shouldn't have, like some military guy and some girl who got caught doing porn or something.

And I'm trying to play along, but part of me keeps thinking, What am I doing here? How did I get myself in this situation? God, if she's seriously into American Idol, just think about what else she might be seriously into - boy bands? J-Lo? All those new MTV shows I've never seen 'cause I don't even own cable? Jesus, what did I get myself into here?

Then she yawns and puts her hands in the air and says that it's probably about time she started heading home, and even at this point there's still a small part of me that's wondering if I can somehow salvage this evening, at least get a makeout session out of it before she heads off. But then I think of exploding airplanes and bubblegum pop, and the strange, surreal society that could somehow come up with both of these things at the same time, and so I hand the girl her purse and thank her for coming over. And then I take off my clothes, unplug my television and go to sleep.

THAT SUMMER I DATED THAT COUPLE

To understand my story, you need to first understand the following two things about me. Number one, I am bisexual. Number two, I am a sex columnist for a British lifestyle magazine. I am not one of these things because I am the other one; but believe me, if you are one of these things, it certainly doesn't hurt to be the other one.

One of my columns was about running racy personal ads on the internet and all the strange and interesting people you can meet because of it. To put my money where my mouth was, which I frequently do when it comes to the column, I ran my own racy personal ad at Nerve.com and then wrote an article about the various people who contacted me. Two of these people were a couple, a male and female couple, both of them bisexual and with a relationship where they occasionally invited a third person into bed with them. We'll refer to them Ben and Jennifer, mostly because I always get a chuckle out of people when I refer to them as Ben and Jennifer. They explained in their email to me that they weren't necessarily inviting me at this point to a night of sweaty, kinky group sex, but at the very least they were interested in meeting up with me for a drink and seeing if the possibility existed for the three of us in the future.

Now, this unto itself would not normally be that big of a deal. I had been meeting up with couples for a little over a year at that point, first because of a book I wrote about the Chicago swinging community and then because of this column for this British magazine, and I had actually had kinky, bisexual group sex a good three or four times before ever hearing from Ben and Jennifer. The thing was, though, that the couples I had met before this point were almost always from the suburbs or a downstate rural location, almost always a little older than me, almost always into things I'm not necessarily into, like...NASCAR, and camping, and listening to those crappy Top 40 bands I've never heard of. In fact, to this day it's still very rare for me to hear from my fellow urban, snotty, overeducated little shits when it comes to actually having kinky sex. You may be asking yourself at this point the same question I repeatedly have, which is "Why?" And my answer will be the same as yours, which is "Fuck if I know." My fellow punk-rock intellectuals seem to be endlessly fascinated with kinky sex, they buy expensive books about kinky sex, they love hearing about kinky sex, they love talking about kinky sex, but for some reason none of them seem to want to take their clothes off and actually participate in kinky sex. Hey, man, your guess is as good as mine.

Ben and Jennifer, though, at least according to their online profile, seemed to be that couple I had been waiting my whole life to meet - that comics-reading, Radiohead-listening, Quimby's-loitering, science-fiction-loving bisexual couple secure in their relationship and more than happy to drag people into bed with them on a regular basis, hell, yeah. By the way, Ben and Jennifer don't actually look like Ben and Jennifer; you can imagine Ben as a tall David Duchovney and Jennifer as a short Bridget Fonda. Once again, because it bears repeating - hell, yeah.

So, I invited them to an orgy. Specifically, I invited them to an orgy I was throwing in my apartment, just a week after they first contacted me, which, yes, was another direct result of my sex column. Namely, the number one subject of the emails I receive from readers is that of group sexual parties - where are they, how do you find out about them, how do you get invited to them, why am I never getting invited to them, do single males ever get invited to them, why is it so hard to find them, why is it so hard to get into them, etc etc etc. My answer was a very simple one - if you can't get invited to a group sexual party, suck it up and throw your own damn group sexual party. And again, to put my money where my mouth was, I decided to throw my own orgy first, just to show my readers how easy it could be to do. By the way, throwing an orgy is not an easy thing to do, but don't tell my readers that.

This being the midwest, of course, I didn't throw a Roman-style orgy, what with the grapes and the drugs and the flinging of bodily fluids every which way but loose, but rather something called a massage party, which is for people who are interested in group sexuality but not necessarily ready for group sex. The idea behind a massage party is very simple - you gather anywhere from four to twelve people, and each person takes a turn receiving a twenty-minute full-body massage from every other person in the group simultaneously. When that person's twenty minutes are up, another person sits in the middle of the circle and the whole thing starts all over again. The great thing about a massage party is that the level of explicitness is strictly defined by each individual person as they enter the middle of the circle. I, for example, stripped naked when it was time for my massage, gave blanket permission to touch me wherever anyone felt like touching me, to jerk me off if they wanted

to, to french-kiss me if they wanted to, even to stick a finger up my ass if anyone was feeling particularly daring. Other people at the party stripped to their underwear and said it was okay to touch them anywhere where naked skin was showing, while yet others stripped nude but then gave specific caveats about where they shouldn't be touched, like in their bellybutton or on the bottom of their feet.

I had seven people attend my massage party, three women and four men, and it went fantastic - but that's not the point of tonight's story so I won't go into it anymore. The point of tonight's story is that Ben and Jennifer and I discovered two important things about each other that night - that we definitely all got along in a platonic aspect, and that we definitely all were sexually compatible with each other. Which is why, a couple of weeks later, the three of us decided to meet up again on our own, to sit around a bar in Uptown and have many, many drinks and talk about whether we wanted to throw ourselves into a more intimate situation than had occurred at the massage party. The evening went great and, in fact, we would've all just gone home together right there and then if not for the fact that Ben and Jennifer had agreed beforehand that they wouldn't invite me home with them that night, to avoid the potential of a weird drunken argument in a bar in the middle of the night. Like I said, though, the evening did go well enough that the two of them invited me over a couple of nights later, where after smoking a ton of weed and having an animated discussion of the 1980s television show "V," the three of us suddenly found ourselves naked and rolling around on their bed.

Sex with Ben and Jennifer was...hmm. Well. Imagine every single thing you think would be fun about a threesome - the chaos of it all, the slipping of various body parts into various other orifices, the not quite knowing which particular orifice was currently wrapped around your particular body part, or whose orifice it is, and not particularly caring. Imagine the lines of gender and orientation getting so blurred that it literally starts to seem that there are no such things as 'men' and 'women' anymore, only one giant omnisexual super-gender simply entitled Fuck. Yeah, that's how sex with Ben and Jennifer was. Now remove everything bad you've ever heard about threesomes - the awkwardness, the power games, the jealousy issues that can sometimes rear their ugly head right in the middle of it all. In short, it was one of the better threesomes in the history of bisexual group sex, and a strong argument as to why everyone should be having bisexual group sex on a regular basis. Yes, even you.

In fact, the night went so well that Ben and Jennifer and I ended up having this ongoing relationship throughout the rest of the summer, sometimes sleeping together again but much more often just getting together for drinks, or for dinner, or to see a play, or to hang out with friends at a party and to drink too much and to quietly let the details of our relationship slip out to the shock and jealous laughs of those in attendance. It wasn't exactly like the three of us were dating each other; it was clear from the very start that Ben and Jennifer were the ones with the ongoing romantic relationship, and that I had simply been allowed temporary access to it, like a frustrated UN inspector futilely driving all over Iraq looking for weapons of mass destruction. Still, though, it wasn't exactly like the single guy hanging out with his couple friends for a night either. This is, in fact, the hardest thing to describe about the events of that summer, simply because the relationship the three of us had defied all traditional attempts of definition. I was closer than a friend but not as close as a lover. I was having sex with them, but I wasn't exactly their partner. I wasn't exactly gay, and I wasn't exactly straight, and in fact all three of were very careful not to define our sexual activities in those kinds of terms in the first place.

I enjoyed making out with Ben just as much as I enjoyed making out with Jennifer, and I enjoyed fucking Ben just as much as I enjoyed fucking Jennifer, albeit for two incredibly different reasons. Jennifer brought out the dominant in me, and there was nothing I loved more while in bed with her than grabbing her hair with my fists while she was giving me a blowjob, or rolling her over on her stomach and giving it to her really hard from behind. Ben, on the other hand, brought out the submissive in me, and there was nothing I loved more in bed with him than having my hair grabbed by both fists while I gave him a blowjob, or having him roll me on my stomach and giving it to me really hard from behind. Being in this newfound position we were in, the three of us decided to finally fulfill all the sexual fantasies we had ever had about group sex - like Jennifer's, which involved getting into a 69 position with me while Ben fucked her really hard from behind. Or mine, which involved Jennifer being the creamy center of Ben and I's Oreo cookie - which I won't describe in any more detail, but I think you can already figure out how that story ends.

More than this, though, and which a lot of people have a hard time believing, my favorite thing about that summer was simply hanging out with Ben and Jennifer, smoking a little dope and talking about the genius which is Grant Morrison, stopping by Ten Kat or Long Room or the Duke of Perth for a late-night cocktail. It was the taboo aspect of the relationship I loved so much, of sitting at a table with the two of them in public, looking around at all my fellow slackers in the room and thinking to myself, "I'm having sex with both of these people and NONE OF YOU HAVE ANY FUCKING CLUE!" Which, of course, when you're high, makes you start wondering how many of those fellow slackers are looking right back at you and thinking the same thing, which then makes you start wondering if, in fact, the entire planet is all having weird, kinky sex on a regular basis and that they just never talk about it. Which then gets you all freaked out until you're bought another shot and you calm down a little again.

Needless to say, relationships like this have a short shelf life, and ours was no exception. The trouble with ours had nothing to do with any problems that arose between the three of us, but rather that it kept going so well - better and better each time we hung out, as a matter of fact. The more I kept spending time with Ben and Jennifer, the more I started liking them in a deeper, more emotional way, the more I was reminded that I WAS the third wheel of the relationship. The ghosts of my own last relationship, which I had assumed had been exorcised a long time ago, started popping out of my closet and haunting my brain again. The more I admired Ben and Jennifer for having the strong, close, honest, communicative relationship with each other that allowed for someone like me to be added to it, the more I was reminded of how badly my own last relationship had gone. I started remembering how...single I was. How alone I sometimes feel. How hurt and betrayed I had felt by the last person I had let into that very intimate part of my being. How there's a big part of me that believes I'll never have a stable romantic relationship, that I'm just too fucking weird of a person to ever get a normal person to become attracted to me.

So, we broke up. But, as befitting the rest of this story, it wasn't exactly a break-up per se; we simply agreed that things were getting a little weird, and that we didn't want to ruin our friendship for the sake of pushing the weird stuff too hard, and that it would probably be best if we all stopped sleeping with each other. The three of us still get together fairly regularly for drinks and dinners and plays and the like, but it's different. They've gone back to being my couple friends whose relationship I admire, and I've gone back to being their single friend they're always trying to find a date for. I don't necessarily mind this kind of relationship - I have a very similar one with lots of other couples here in Chicago - but still, remembering the experiences I did have with them always produces a bittersweet tinge to the evenings out. I doubt I will ever have a relationship again quite as strange, or nearly as good, as I did with Ben and Jennifer over the course of that long, fateful summer; then again, given how rare it is that circumstances like that line up so perfectly, I'm grateful for having the experience in the first place.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

By 2001 my six-year love affair with performance poetry was starting to come to a close; I was 32 at this point, and rapidly getting too old for the endless late weeknights, gratuitous substance abuse, and neurotic 23-year-olds that came with the scene, and even the scene itself was changing into one that didn't particularly care to have me around either. Still, I had not quite given up, and there was one last accomplishment that I wanted to kick out before calling it quits; after three years of sitting out of the actual competition, I wanted to make a Chicago slam team again and perform at a national tournament (being held that year in Seattle, which I was very excited about visiting for the first time).

The thing that had really decided it for me was that "Mental Graffiti," a long-running open mic in Chicago that I had been faithfully attending for years, had recently finally gotten a chance to host a slam team at the national tournament. There's technically no law that says that a new venue in Chicago can't start a poetry slam; it being invented in Chicago,

though, and with the inventor of the slam still hosting a weekly show here (and still with an awful lot of sway and influence), no one wanted to risk pissing off Marc Smith by starting one. With the 1999 national tournament, though, a mutual group decision was made to start up a special one-time second Chicago team, so as to increase the city's chances of getting into the finals that

year, the tenth anniversary of the national finals. A city-wide tournament was held all summer, with each open mic in the city invited to submit a four-member team; bouts were held at all the non-slam open mics participating, as to raise awareness of the national tournament throughout the city. And Mental Graffiti's team ended up winning the whole thing, and hosted a team at the '99 nationals, and then rather quietly sent another team in 2000, and had no one say anything, so just assumed they were now allowed to regularly host a second slam in the city and send a team every year.

Krystal Ashe, the co-host (with hip-hop artist Anacron) of Mental Graffiti's slam, had recently changed the rules for the 2000/01 season from the ground up, ditching the national example and structuring them instead on something cumulative, like how the National Hockey League works. Slams were only to be held once a month that year, and each person got a score at the end of the night that corresponded with how they ranked. Once a person accumulated three scores, they then qualified for the finals at the end of the year; the people invited to it would be the eight performers with the cumulatively lowest scores. Krystal's idea was to try to strengthen the actual literary community, by having there be real things to gain by being a regular performer (namely, more and more chances to have three 1's, pretty much ensuring a place in the finals), and real reasons to interact with your fellow artists. And for the most part it worked, and was in fact quite a fun way to run a year's worth of miniature tournaments.

I thought it would be cool to make a team one more time, and have a chance to go to the nationals and be the center of attention and smoke and drink and fuck for a week, before finally calling it quits and going back to page-based writing...which, after all, I had been doing for a year before ever getting involved in the poetry scene to begin with. So I competed in each slam that year, and wrote a new piece for each of them, but it was a lot harder-going than it had been back in 1997, when I had effortlessly sailed through the preliminaries (and in fact had picked up the nickname 'Goldenboy,' given to me by "Yammer" host Lisa Hemminger). The audience was different - younger, academic, politically correct, for the most part lacking a sense of humor, certainly not into stories about Van Halen and pornography stores, like the pieces that had made me well-known in the first place. They didn't quite know what to make of me, and were maybe even a little offended by me (although they could never quite tell), so tended to give me not very good scores. And it was a legitimate struggle for me to even qualify for the finals, and wouldn't have happened at all if I hadn't happened to compete in a late-season slam where only three people showed up, and I happened to win.

The finals were in April of that year, at the hipster live venue Subterranean in the now-gentrified Wicker Park. I feel like I got shafted during the finals, and for political reasons, and there are a lot of people who disagree with me and are angry at me for making the suggestion in the first place. But this has been covered in great detail in my web journal, which is also published by GAD in book form, so I encourage anyone with additional interest to consult the 2001 edition of that. The pertinent point is that my career as an active writer and performer of slam poetry and monologues came to a quick halt at that point, and in the three years since I've only written a handful of short pieces.

People ask me all the time if I miss it, and I always respond with, “Not particularly.” As I’ve reiterated many times over the years, my primary focus for doing performance work was never for any particular literary reason, but rather so that I could be the center of attention for a few moments at a time, have drinks bought for me, and regularly have easy sex with cute stoned intellectual women. Once my desire for these things waned in my early thirties, so did my desire to continue writing and performing slam poetry and monologues. My ignoble experience at the 2001 Mental Graffiti finals was just the icing on the cake.

2001 was the start of many new firsts in my life: my first travelogue to be published as a stand-alone book; my first collection of erotic fiction; the first year my web journal was to be republished by AvantGo, for downloading through handheld devices like Palms and cellphones, which in a matter of months had increased my readership from 100 people a day to over 10,000. The web journal, in fact, was to quickly become the new literary obsession in my life, and with the new shift in readership demographics (to mostly Europeans, who in 2001 were getting a lot more web content off mobile devices than Americans were), suddenly I became obsessed with getting to Europe. It’d be another two years before I’d finally pull off a successful trip, but 2001 was the year when it first became a serious possibility, as well as a priority for me.

Many of the pieces from 2001 were written for this final year of monthly slam competitions that I mentioned before; almost every piece from 2002 to 2004 was commissioned for a special occasion, whether it be a birthday, the last edition of a long-running open mic, or the closing of a long-running theatre company. Among them are several of my favorites from over the years, as well as several audience favorites (although not necessarily the same pieces). They mark the end of a six-year period I will always look back on with great fondness.

NOTES ABOUT INDIVIDUAL PIECES

Anyway: a poem for two voices: Originally written as a duet for me and my friend Lucy Anderton, performed with many other partners since. This piece was also produced in short video form by a group of college students in Toronto, and later shown in a number of film festivals throughout Canada. Ironically, the whole reason I wrote this piece was as practice for writing “group” slam poetry, which would’ve been required of me if I had made that year’s slam team, which I had been fully expecting to do. (See “Biographical notes” for more.)

Snowmen: Written for what would be one of many poetry events in Chicago over the years organized by my friend Greg Gillam, held in a variety of venues and known by a variety of names. This was part of the monthly themed series “The Quimby’s Sessions,” held at Quimby’s Bookstore in Wicker Park; its theme was simply “snowmen.”

Concerning ‘Yammer’ and the inherent contradictions of poetry open mics: In 2002, a year after I retired from the poetry community, two of the longest running open mics in Chicago unfortunately came to a close. The first was “Yammer,” the weekly booze-and-flirt-fest held at the hipster tavern Joyblue every Wednesday, hosted by the truly unique Lisa Hemminger (for whom I have written several poems over the years - find them scattered throughout the “Chicago Stories” series). This was one of two open mics I attended almost weekly while I was an active performer, mostly because it was only a ten-minute walk from my apartment. I not only became a phenomenally better writer and performer because of my experiences there, but also got into a lot of trouble on a regular basis, between the women with whom I was having sex and the men with whom I was having fistfights. I tried to express the contradictory emotions I have about this show in this small tribute, read the last time “Yammer” was held, which also happened to have been the show’s fifth anniversary.

An ode to “Mental Graffiti” on the occasion of their last show: This was the second long-running Chicago poetry show to close down in 2002; even though I had long since ceased being a regular performer by then, I was asked by the show’s hosts, Krystal Ashe and Anacron, if I would attend one final time to mark the occasion. I was happy to do so; “Mental Graffiti” was, in fact, my home away from home when I was an active performer, and the main laboratory for all the spoken-word experiments I was to conduct over the years. The show will always have a soft spot in my heart, if for nothing else than it was one I was associated with for a long time (going all the way back to 1997, when it was being held in a run-down tavern in Lincoln Park, which I stumbled across one night). This show also hosted all four of the long-form performance projects I wrote over the years (Jasonettes, The Heatseeker, Notes From My Grandmother’s Funeral and Celibate, all of them published in book form by GAD); needless to say, it was also the site for quite a bit of the trouble I got in over the years as a performer, including being the headquarters for all the dysfunctional sexual games that happened in the scene in 1998. (See the biographical notes in that year’s book for more.) Despite no longer being a regular performer, the closure of “Mental Graffiti” came as a blow to me, and I think it’s safe to say that this last show that night was a highly emotional night for all.

That summer I dated that couple: For years an online literary magazine called Fray has been sponsoring a series of legendary live events throughout the world, attended by hipsters of every shape and size. I’d been following the series jealously and had fantasized in the past about how cool it’d be to get invited to perform at one; when I finally did in 2003, it unfortunately turned out to be a disappointment, with not nearly the amount of audience members nor caliber of talent seen at the more famous events. For those who are curious, by the way, every sickening little detail in this story is true.

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