

COMPLETE PERFORMANCE WORK 1996-2004

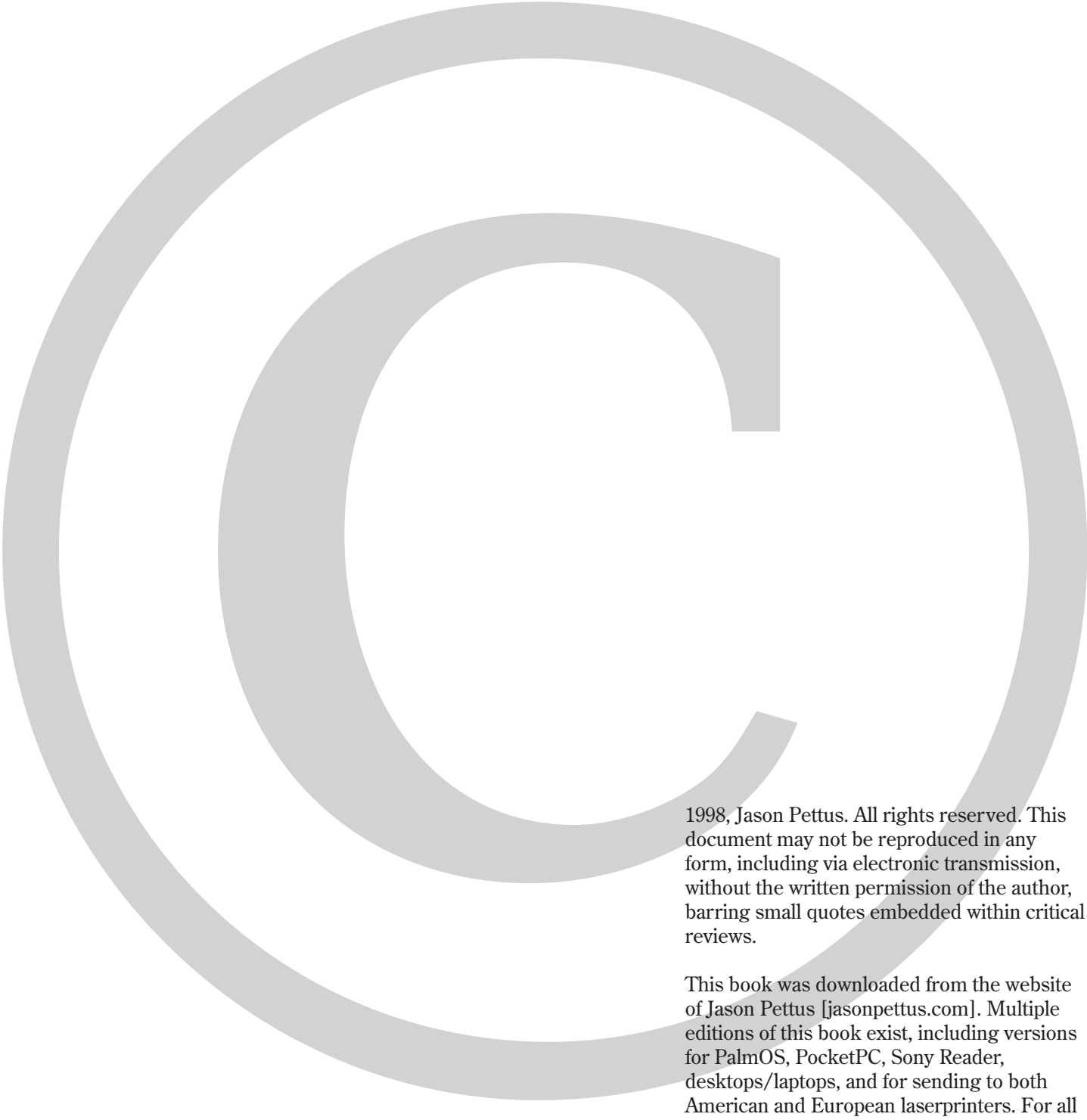
GAD Publishing Company Chicago USA

03 OF 13

JASON PETTUS



CHICAGO STORIES 1998



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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.

10 OH ONE THIS MORNING

She let me take a photograph of her naked so I could keep it at home. So I could masturbate to it when I was lonely.

No, that's not true. That's something I dreamt about this morning before I woke up to see if my alarm had woken me up yet.

I wrote a poem about her last week and I used this line in the poem, "I wrote a poem about her last week."

No, that's not true, either. I never wrote that poem. I dreamt that I wrote a poem about her last week and that I used that line in the poem, and now I really am writing a poem about her and using that line in the poem, "I wrote a poem about her last week."

I have to get up at 10:30 this morning and I set my alarm except I have a habit of sleeping through my alarm so all morning my body keeps waking me up to check and see if my alarm's woken me up yet. And the whole thing starts all over again.

The photograph is of her in the bathtub. We used to date but now we don't but she felt sorry for me because I can't have sex anymore, so she let me come in and take a photograph of her so I could masturbate to it at home whenever I want.

No, that's not true. I don't know her. I dreamt of a woman who is in a magazine I own full of photographs of naked women that I masturbate to when I'm lonely.

I take the photograph and masturbate to it this morning. This is real. I am writing a poem and this is also real. It is 10:01 a.m. and my alarm is still on. I leave it on in case I fall asleep again.

I wrote a poem about her last week and I used this line, "I wrote a poem about her last week." This line is caught in my head. It's not true. I don't know her. She is a photograph in a bathtub in a magazine of photographs of naked women that I bought to masturbate to when I'm lonely. And now I'm writing a poem about her to make the poem real.

There's a group of women poets in Chicago I know that just formed a performance group. This is real. I keep having weird dreams about them. This is also real. Last night I dreamt that one of them felt sorry for me and let me take a photograph of her naked so I could masturbate to it when I was lonely. She was in a bathtub and she lifted her hips out of the water so that I could see between her legs in the photograph when I masturbated to it.

Except the woman's not a poet. She's a woman in a photograph in a bathtub in a magazine full of photographs of naked women I bought to masturbate to when I'm lonely. And I was lonely this morning so I took out the magazine and I masturbated to the photograph so now it's real. And now I've written the poem I dreamt about so now that's real too.

The clock hits 10:30 and my alarm goes off. I turn off my alarm and decide to go back to sleep.

Albuquerque is just like Las Vegas
I think from 20,000 feet
Dark, foreboding, silent mountains
and then suddenly a gleaming square in the desert
Holding a five-day promise
holding a five-day threat
a flighty fifty five-day fight or flight and

Albuquerque is just like Las Vegas
I think from 20,000 feet
Except of course the lack of casinos
Except of course that it's not just a tourist lie

Every goddamn building really is made of adobe
and I always wondered why southwestern art
is dirt brown and sky blue
leather and turquoise

ALBUQUERQUE

and now I know
and now I

Albuquerque is just like Las Vegas
I think from 20,000 feet
Except for the Latina Latino Chicano Mexicanos
quietly speaking their bilingual poetic ramblings
in that lilt that makes me rub my pale skin in envy
mi hermosa
mi familia
coyote
coyote
coyotes are real here
and sing for me coyote
sing the song of the Nueve Mexicano sun I never got to see
sing the song of the dirt I never got to plunge my hands into
sing the song of

Albuquerque is just like Las Vegas
I think from 20,000 feet
Except for when you drove me down a deserted desert road
and read me a dirty poem
and let me kiss you
Except when you took me home
and I fell asleep on your couch with your pit bull
and you took me by the hand
and you took me to the bathroom
and you took me to your bedroom
and you took me

Albuquerque is just like Las Vegas
I think from 20,000 feet
Except of course that you are here
and Albuquerque is just like Las Vegas
I think from 20,000 feet
except of course that

except of course

except of course that

except

and this is the poem
where the silver neon outlines of her dress come alive

and this is the poem
where I become the beastie boy I always dreamt I was

and this is the poem
where all of you give me tens
or I come out into the audience
and kick your fuckin' asses
like I always dreamt of doing

AND THIS IS THE POEM

and this is the poem
where she dumps the guy in the baseball cap

and this is the poem
where she goes into the photo booth with me

and kisses me

and this is the poem
where I'm not a poet

and this is the poem
where I'm a tough guy

and this is the poem
when I walk up to her
and say,
"Hey, you don't know me,
but you're beautiful.
Come dance with me.
Come dance with me right now."

and this is the poem
where she does so.

and this is the poem
with happy endings

and this is the poem
where the ogre chokes to death
when the witch is cooked in her own oven
when the wolf is chopped up by the lumberjack

and this is the poem
when the Grimm Brothers were alive

and
and
and this is the poem
of happy endings

and this is the poem
of mother goose
and we discuss
the historical allegories
to the British empire
and

and this is the poem
where you run off with me to Vegas
and marry me under the moon
of an Elvis impersonator
in the middle of the desert
because I love you
and

and why are you in the desert?
Why aren't you here?

and this is the poem
where I finally get to ask you that

and this is the poem
this is the
this is the poem
the poem
this is the poem
where we live
happily ever after.

ARKANON

WRITTEN WITH GREG GILLAM

Greg: Man, this band reminds me of Arkanon's album just before 96.73, remember Platzygotica, the second disk? They've even got the same line up, 'cept the chick was a drummer. That whole prog rock gets funky, and no one knew if they were goofing or not. Though from my view, they were heavy into the irony thing, or at least the lead singer was as he's now a professor at Bowling Green....

Jason: You remember that big concept show they had at Metro in '81? The entire club was lit with 10,000 red candles and there was a giant AT&T globe filled with helium bouncing off the ceiling. They did that 42-minute version of "Monopoly Blues (Don't take my Phone)" that just fucking rocked. And then the guitarist set his axe on fire and threw it into the audience, knocking the candles over and prompting the complete reconstruction of the Metro. Man, whadda show.

Greg: You know, I had a date with the drummer...

Jason: Oh boy. Yeah? How was that? I've got five words for you. "Tommy, can you hear me?"

Greg: It's what leads me to believe that only the lead singer is clued into the irony thing, cause I said something about tongue in cheek and she took it as some innuendo about how sexy her playing was. True the club was really loud, but still, we just weren't connecting. That actually has become the greatest subtext for me, cause here are these guys from Paw Paw, Indiana, who all really really believe they are an updated, even better Jethro Tull or something, and the lead singer is milking it with what you can't tell is contempt or just a reluctance to tell his high school friends different. But the date - so we're at the Lizard Lounge on industrial night, and it's just one "So anyway..." exchange after another, at the top of our lungs over "GUNS GUNS HELL HELL" thunk-A-WOMP zzzt thunk-A-WOMP zzzt. But it's okay 'cause in an attempt to hear me she keeps leaning in and pressing against me and she's wearing this bustier/vest thing and though she's 8 years older her breasts are gravity defying-god knows if they were real-and pressing up against me and then gone as she leaned back to take a drag off her cig...but nothing happened. Stiffy Walters set us up, you know.

Jason: Oh yeah, Stiffy. I went out drinking with Stiffy, did you ever know that? Yeah, we started at "Batteries Not Included" (which, of course, at the time was open and in its heyday). We had 16 Guinnesses apiece there, and then for some reason Joan Jett was in town and was hanging out, and if you remember correctly, Stiffy was the executive producer of her first album, which really went nowhere but anyway, she owed him one. So we hung out with Joan for awhile, and actually Stiffy started talking about "Crimson and Clover" that night, except as he envisioned it, the song would be called "Maroon and Maple." Anyway. Then we ended up at Exit, the old one on Lincoln, and we ran into some guys from Kraftwerk. Yeah, I don't know, there were just a bunch of bands in town that weekend. But, you know, Stiffy never did get along with Kraftwerk, the whole thing about that lawsuit in '79 and that whole bar fight they got into in Berlin. You know, Stiffy would always show everyone the scar from that fight on his ass every time he got drunk. Anyway. So things got a little ugly that night, and really it was that night that Exit decided to construct that big cage over their dancefloor (long story. Ooh.). So then things get a little hazy after that, but I do remember at a certain point in the evening we broke into the Billy Goat downtown and pissed on the goat because Stiffy thought it was going to break the curse, whatever, you know, for a progressive eastern-europe art student, Stiffy was really into the Cubs. And the next day I woke up and I had a tattoo behind my left knee that said "I Love Rock-N-Roll," which I still have to this day.

Greg: It's always was amazing that Stiffy wanted to hang out with kids like us, considering we weren't even close to being useful for his projects, except, of course, as his connection to what "the street" was thinking. Which I think was the one dead giveaway that Stiffy was not from America. I still feel guilty that his career might have been change by us telling him that Depeche Mode sucked and he shouldn't return their calls. But back to Arkanon - I think the greatest tension between irony and blind rockin' stupid has to be 96.73 - I mean a whole rock opera about a guy with a less than normal body temperature...don't you think the other members figured it out? Of course, I'll bet you could do a thick book annotating all the bizarre references in that one.

Jason: Well, don't you remember that kid from Stanford who did his thesis on 96.73? He was coming up with references the band didn't even know was in there. Like the whole subtext of Jonnie standing metaphorically about the emotional impotence of America after the botched Iran hostage rescue attempt? How Jonnie was always wearing yellow

socks? And always eating peanuts? I know, it seems so obvious now, but it was such a shock to everyone when this kid first pointed it out. I don't know, I kinda liked 96.73. Man, those were heady days. We were but simple punk street kids, hanging out at Belmont and Clark bumming change and doing heroin, and suddenly we were being whisked off to elaborate cocktail parties with Liza Minelli and Jackie O... Remember when the band asked us to dance nude in go-go cages at their CBGB show?

Greg: Either those drugs were stronger, or you have a really rich fantasy life. What I remember was being underage and getting comps and hand me down promo records from a creepy Polish guy who knew just about everyone. And stealing shit from the Alley. And Snoozie. And crullers. Mostly Snoozie, who I'm still not sure I could call a girlfriend, but any skinhead who would go with me to Arkanon shows had to like me for some reason....

Jason: Well, pretty much the entire period between 1978 and 1983 is one big blur to me. Speed kills. And gasoline fumes will fuck you up. Take it from me. "Oh, you babooshkas are such cutie-patooties. Come up to Uncle Vanya's place and let us partake of biblishkas and drink ozo." That's what I remember about the creepy Polish guy.

Greg: Remember when Arkanon third double album hit the cut out bin and the only place they could get booked was the Thirsty Whale? And they would only play their epic tunes so it would be, like, two Ark songs and then Enuff Z'nuff would play...the only good thing about the Whale shows is that they made Stiffy uncomfortable enough that he stopped dressing like a Eastern Bloc reject from Roxy Music....we at least knew to accessorize our look with harley shirts and baseball caps covering our 'hawks...

Jason: Oh God, and then the whole "neo-country" phase the band got in? Where they were wearing the ridiculous cowboy hats and drinking tequila all night and getting in fightfights? And Al Jourgenson produced that EP? God, I'd like to forget that entire period.

Greg: As usual, almost cool too early. And the whole band was completely confused, because they still wanted to do Lamb Lies Down on Broadway covers....at least that's how I interpreted their expressions. None of them but the singer understood what was going on, and it's weird, they coulda made it. I mean at least the drummer got the fashions of the industrial crowd. God, remember how they broke up at their return gig to the Metro? I had my date with her a year after that...she said that they all confronted Brendan, said they hated the new stuff, they weren't gonna do "country speed" versions of the old stuff, they didn't get it and were so drunk that they waited until five minutes before the show for the confrontation, and then were so scared of Joe Shanahan and Al, who were both speeding and giving off a huge aura of violence to leave. Which explains the half hour version of La Grange that was their swan song. I understand La Grange can be played blind drunk...But those were the bad times, when I felt 80 at age 25....Let's remember the better times. With Punkin Donuts and Snooze and your gal, Ferdie. Ah, fuggin Ferdie, shop window smasher...those girls made us seem so tough and cool...

Jason: Oh shit, Ferdie! I had almost forgotten about her. Did I ever tell you about my first date with Ferdie? We met at the dumpster behind Punkin Donuts. We shared a chocolate cruller... Later we went to Live Bait and saw the Neo-Futurists (they let us in for free 'cause Ferdie was a regular and she told them we were both broke). They ended up selling out and we sat on blankets on the stage floor and as we were leaving Ferdie stole a 12-pack from behind the bar at the Nightcrawler. So then we popped over the wall at Graceland at this spot on Irving Park that Ferdie knew about where the barbed wire was cut. We got absolutely trashed sitting on top of Mies Van Der Rohe's grave, which Ferdie was convinced would give you this weird psychic energy if you put your ass on it, something about World War II and Nazis and the IIT, I don't know, yet more of Ferdie's weird shit. And we kept drinking Everclear mixed with Crystal Pepsi and grenadine ("The Pink Pussy," her name for it, you remember that? Ha-ha!) and she had a little bottle of rush we kept taking sniffs off of. And then she ran off into the cemetery and, sixteen and drunk as a skunk, I ran off after her. I caught her on Marshall Field's island and we ended up making love on the inside of a faux-Egyptian crypt in the northeast corner of the graveyard. And that's how I lost my virginity. Sometimes I still can't believe that Ferdie died in that bizarre accident at Avalon in '87. I miss her.

Greg: Well, considering she did try to toss me through the front window of the Guitar Center and started kicking me when I just bounced off, I don't miss her as much as notice how my life is different without people like her around us. Remember after the Arkanon concert at the Aragon - think it was the Voyage of the Fuzomes, with the really lame imitation of the Rust Never Sleeps gremlins except they all had robs of green fur - when

they saved us from getting our asses kicked by those tractor pull dudes from downstate. 2 against 4 and we had to pull 'em off them. What was it that Snooze shouted just before she hit the first guy in the 'nads?

Jason: "Victory for the forces of democracy!" I think that's what she yelled.

BLUE VELVET

And the bartender says
"I've seen Caddyshack
so many times
it would fill 24 days
if put back to back"

so I say
"I think I could say
the same thing
about Blue Velvet"

and then I realize
I'm dressed tonight
exactly out of a scene
out of Blue Velvet

Black suit
with black shirt
and black tie
and black shoes
black shiny shoes

I am dressed in crisp diffusion
through a Frederick Elmes lens
My hair is bleached
and I feel like a
bad-ass
motherfucker

And then I realize
I'm sitting in a bar
alone
talking to the bartender
about how I've seen
Blue Velvet
enough times
to fill 24 days
back to back

Heineken?
Fuck that shit!
Pabst Blue Ribbon!

CHECKMATE

For an ex-girlfriend, who shall remain nameless

The object of chess is not actually to conquer your opponent.
The object of chess is to move your pieces around on the board
in ingenious and subtle ways
so that your opponent
is left in a condition
whereby any possible choice they have left
would result in suicide of the king.
They then have to concede.
The condition is called checkmate.

CHRISTMAS STORY, 1998

Well, today was the day. Today was the day my daughter found out there's no Santa Claus. You know, you just wait for the day to arrive. It's one of those milestones that's so sure to happen to you that you just count them as already determined. Loss of virginity, first time drunk, your parents' deaths, and the moment your child stops believing in Santa Claus. Yeah, alright. I'm upset, okay? Fine. You know, I wish the world had told me more of what it was really like to be a parent before I had actually become one. It's so easy to get the obvious examples: It's a big responsibility, they're a bundle of joy, sometimes they pee on you while you're changing their diaper. But let me lay a little truth on you that you might have not heard before. Sometimes, when they're still newborns, there's certain moments when you just absolutely hate that you had a child. It's not a bundle of joy, it's eight hours of nightmare. Now, the feeling passes and eventually I discovered it's just all a normal part of suddenly coping with having a child in the world...I just wish someone had told me that

ahead of time so I wouldn't have freaked out when it did happen. And another little truth I found out is that once you have a child, and once you hold that child in your hands, you are suddenly overwhelmed with an obsession for protecting that child. My daughter and I will watch TV on the couch sometimes and she'll fall asleep, and all I'll want to do is cover her entire body with

mine, protect her from the falling missiles and random gunshots and windowless vans. It is in these moments that I realize that I would gladly trade any and all parts of my life away in order to keep my daughter from harm. And the moments when you can't be with her and she does end up getting hurt...the pain can be all-consuming sometimes.

When I was younger I used to debate the entire idea of raising my child with a faith in Santa Claus. When I was younger, kids were a hypothetical party game for wicked discussion around the bar table: Would you homeschool your kids? Would you raise them as atheists? What's the proper age to talk to them about sex and drugs? Would you teach them to believe in Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny? I used to get a great thrill when I thought of my child being the freaky, cynical one in her first-grade class, the one who would be the big introverted nerd all through school and a multimillionaire by age thirty. "Lisa, what's Santa Claus bringing you this year?" "My daddy says that Santa Claus is a fictional character created by lazy, consumerist parents." Right on, fight the power, little sister!

Then, of course, I had the child. And one look into my daughter's eyes and I was saying, "Of course I'm going to raise her to believe in Santa Claus! What was I thinking?" and you know why? Because one look into your daughter's eyes shows you a human who believes in everything. Has faith in everything. Is cynical and jaded and disillusioned about nothing. And do you want to be the one to shatter that faith? No. Why? Because you're her father and you will do everything in your power to keep her from ever getting hurt. The obsession becomes so great that you don't even want your daughter to ever learn the truth about Santa Claus, as stupid and insane as that sounds. This is also something that I never heard about before I became a parent, this whole idea that the moment your child stops believing in Santa Claus is the moment you start thinking of all the other things you won't be able to control later in life: "What if she starts doing drugs? What if she gets pregnant at 16? What if she can never get a job? What if she gets in a car accident? What if she gets a divorce at 27?" And the pain of all these injuries to your child is so overwhelming you just wish you could die.

I tried every trick in the book, all the ones I had collected over the years in anticipation of this moment: "He's actually Santa's helper because Santa's busy making the toys right now." "Santa had to come by early this year because he's so busy, so Mom and I were just hiding the toys in the basement for him." But my daughter just shook her head and said in a tiny, high-pitched, fake British accent, "Oh, fatha," before bursting into laughter. This is the joke she's learned from a recent viewing of *My Fair Lady* which she is now utilizing every chance she gets. Despite what I said, she does maintain a little of the freakiness I wished for in my youth.

The presents this year are labelled "From Mom and Dad." Well, except for one. It's the "must-have" gift this year, the one our daughter was hiding notes for all over the house, for the last month and a half. Under my pillow and in my computer bag and even inside my wallet. If she was five years younger I suppose it'd be the new hot trendy doll, the Cabbage-Furby-Barbie-Teddy with the newest technological innovation. Five years from now it'll probably be for a car or a new stereo or God knows whatever new expensive toy they can create by then. But she happens to be the age where the gift to get this year is a children's

laptop computer. You should see this thing. It's made of shatterproof plastic, comes in designer colors, runs a Windows mini-operating system like the one they make for Palm computers, and it comes with a printer and a 33.6 modem. Three hundred dollars! I almost bought another one for my own use!

This one is labelled From Santa. We are hoping to start a new family tradition this year, where each Christmas all of us, herself included, pick the one gift we're giving that means the most to us, that is the most heartfelt gift, and label it "From Santa" with a wink and a nod. We're hoping to teach our daughter that Santa Claus can symbolically stand for the act of caring. Of giving. Of forgiving. The happiness felt from taking on a difficult responsibility, then eventually succeeding at it. We figure as long as she now has to take on the burden of "adult knowledge," "the original sin," she deserves to reap some of its rewards. We have taken that first official step towards guiding our daughter from a child to an adult.

Will it work? Beats me. It was the best we could come up with at the spur of the moment. I do like to think, though, of my daughter as a full adult, sometime way out there in the future, probably after I'm dead. Career of her own, a fine house, a loving family. And she will be wrapping that one gift to her husband labelled "From Santa" and she will suddenly think back to when she was in our care. A sudden rush of nostalgia will overcome her, a feeling of warmth travelling from the bottom of her toes upward. She will feel warm and safe and a little sad but mostly very, very happy. And suddenly, for the rest of my life and even long after I'm gone, for one moment a year I will have my body wrapped around my daughter, protecting her from the missiles. And the guns. And the windowless vans.

CRUSH ON MUSICIAN #1710

I walked by a high-tech fountain the other day
and stopped and watched the
computer-controlled bursts of life
snaking out of black hidden holes
arcing over soaked childrens' heads
disappearing into tron grids below
I watched disney bursts of life
synchronized like the background
of a country show
in Branson, Missouri
and I thought about the person
who invented computer-controlled fountains
gobbled up by dark-gray corporate headquarters
and primary-colored theme parks
and I wondered
if the person
knew how much happiness
they had brought into the world

deathwish

There's a big difference
between having a death wish
and being suicidal,

the boy thought
as he sat on his mattress
and involuntarily flinched
from the latest drop
of malt liquor
going down his throat.

Suicidal
means you want to die
and you're ready to do something about it.
A death wish
just means
you still want to die
but you wish someone else would come up
and do it for you.

People with death wishes
commit suicide,
but just slowly,
very very slowly,

the boy thought
as he petted the dog
he should have owned
gently scolded the son
he should have had
made love to the woman
he should have married

People with death wishes
do heroin
and become prostitutes
and go on the Jerry Springer show.
They really want to die
but are just too afraid
to do it themselves
but instead
put themselves in situations
where they hope
someone
will be kind enough
to do it for them.

The boy was sure in his convictions
He owned every album Pavement ever made
He stood at his window
watching chaos
masquerading as a sidewalk
and wondered
how everything could have gone
so right
despite his best efforts

The boy stuck his finger
in the box fan
at the window

and let the plastic blades go
tippity-tippity-tap
fantasize his digits
slowly getting
smaller and smaller

Suicidals are weak little shits,

the boy thought
as he poured cold water
over his head
in his kitchen sink

Of course, death wishers are also
weak little shits.
Just better weak little shits.
Death wishers believe
that the only true good way
to die
is by another's hands
Suicide is a copout
Bitterness is a copout
Heroic martyrs is a copout
Suffering little artists is a copout
The only true good way to die
is inch by slow inch
one braincell at a time

The boy turned on the television
disgusted with the flickering images
slowly cascading
The boy turned on his stereo
disgusted with the music he owned
He took all his CDs
in a mighty armful
and with one fell swoop
tossed them out the window

That'll show you!
he screamed at them
four stories below
Tell ME to walk like an Egyptian!
That'll show YOU!

The boy watched
a two-inch cockroach
slowly climb up the side
of the white wall
lazily considered killing it
then decided
he's got better things to do
and why kill a cockroach
just for doing
what he wanted to do?

So the boy decided
to do just that
and he stuck his hands
on the wall
and then his feet

and slowly
climbed
up
the
side
of the apartment
and when he reached the ceiling
and was getting warm from the lightbulb
and was looking down at his worldly possessions
still hampered
by their massive force of gravity
he thought

What's the big deal
about being a cockroach?
The world's still the same
I'm just looking at it upside down now
and instead of going splat
I'd go crunch now
This ain't so grand.

So the boy climbed back down
the side of the apartment
sat down on his bare mattress
took another drink of malt liquor
felt his throat muscles constrict
as if they would scream of their
own volition
and thought

There's a big difference
between having a death wish
and being suicidal.

Mosquitoes buzzed my head tonight
snapping their shrill beaks in my ears
and every time one would land
to steal from me
to take the blood I'll never get back
suck
and fly away
you would gouge your pink frail fingernail
into my flesh
and again
and again
leave an asterisk of indented skin

**THE DIRTY VIOLENT
LITTLE THINGS YOU
HAVE DONE TO ME
(AND THE OTHER
DIRTY VIOLENT
LITTLE THINGS YOU
HAVE YET TO DO)**

a tattoo of your own creation
that wears away in a few minutes
"This will hurt"
you said
each and every time
you did it
"This will hurt"
"This will hurt"
"This will hurt"

When I took you to the hospital
you bit me
on the neck
right here
on the neck
my pants grew a face
which laughed at me
Shoes did a little tap dance of their own
volition

And now I have a purple flower
to remind me that you're real
that you exist

You said the book was better than the movie
I've never read the book so have to take your word for it

Earlier tonight
well, not early early
before the hospital
after the prom
before the drums
but after the wine
a bloodsucker landed on your hand
started to suck
I saw it
you didn't
and I hit you
left a smear of blood across your skin
"I'm sorry"
I said
"It was biting you"
I said

and after the prom
before the hospital
before the beer
but after the wine
you gave me a canker sore

but I don't really believe it
but you insist that it's true

When I took you to the hospital
you asked me to
lie down with you
naked
for a half-hour
We laughed about fingernails
but you used them anyway
We laughed about teeth
but you bit me anyway

I headbutted you
but it was an accident
We couldn't see each other
all I could do
was feel your trembling naked body
hop up to mount me
and jump off
and hop up
and jump off

I kicked your boyfriend
in the testicles
as hard as I could
in the hospital
but he didn't feel it
because his balls are numb

You know this
and that's why you went to the prom with me
why you hit and bit and gouged me
Why you danced to the drums
under the watchful eye
of the Missouri river
why you fucked me in a hospital cot
keeping absolutely silent
so as not to wake the doctors

You get released
in three weeks
which is when we'll see each other again

And I wonder

what
acts of violence
will you
reward
me
with
this
time

ELEVEN THOUGHTS THAT WILL GET ME A PENNY FROM AMY KROUSE ROSENTHAL

In *The Book of Eleven*, Amy Krause Rosenthal offers an open invitation for readers to send in their own thoughts, at which point Ms. Rosenthal will send back a penny.

1. My favorite television show of all time is *Teletubbies*. There is something so surreal about a show specifically targeted to a demographic that doesn't yet understand language, doesn't understand plot or characterization, a marketing niche who simply enjoys seeing pictures of other babies laughing and screaming and throwing things. It is much more creepy and disturbing and entertaining than anything David Lynch has ever done. I explain this to my friends and they don't understand what I'm talking about, and I'll simply say, "Just go watch an episode." And then I'll run into them a week later and they'll say, "You know, I watched *Teletubbies* last week, and you're completely right!" and I will feel completely vindicated.

2. I have met Liz Phair four times now, and still haven't had one decent thing to say to her.

3. Sometimes when I'm wearing my Walkman and strolling down the sidewalk, I'll suddenly be struck by the thought that my life is one enormous movie and I am actually listening to its soundtrack right now. Then I'll think, "Why did the director pick this song? I mean, don't get me wrong, it's a great song, but I'm the only person I know who likes it. And that's no way to sell a movie."

4. Of all the things to be jealous of over Amy's book (and there's a lot), the thing that makes me most jealous is the fact that she has spot-gloss on the cover. That's when a book cover will mostly be matte except for one tiny part that's all glossy and reflects the light from the room or the sun. I know from experience that this is an incredibly expensive thing to have, and

publishers won't approve it unless they really, really believe in the book being published.

5. Whenever I fly on Southwest Airlines, I always sit in one of those backward seats right by the front hatch, so that I won't have to sit around for twenty minutes after the flight waiting for all those terribly slow people tortuously pulling their baggage out of the overhead compartments. The flipside of this is that I end up having to sit with all the screaming babies and freaked-out parents and the others on the flight who need "special assistance."

6. I wonder if Amy really is going to give me a penny for these thoughts, or if that was just some little gimmicky thing she simply said since it was in a chapter about pennies.

7. I'm completely obsessed with the WB television network right now. They have three shows on this season called "*Hyperion Bay*," "*Felicity*" and "*Dawson's Creek*," which are about, respectively, a computer nerd who's now famous, a college freshman who's constantly confused, and high school students who can't get laid. I know that the main reason I'm obsessed with these shows is because they fairly accurately mirror my entire real life, and in fact my friends have joked that they should rename the network "The JP."

8. *Story About My Bosses, Part 1*: Whenever I meet someone new at the cafe where I work, it turns out that one of my bosses, Mike, has been talking about me in glowing terms beforehand. It leaves me at once flattered and embarrassed.

9. *Story about My Bosses, Part 2*: Whenever I hurt myself in the kitchen, like a burn or a cut, my other boss, Helen, always takes my hand and examines it for the seriousness of the injury, then personally attends to my first-aid. It is an unusually charming and intimate action within the confines of a job, and it always makes me feel so glad that I'm working here.

10. *The Big Confession*: When I first met Amy and asked my other literary friends about her book, they all said it wasn't very good. But then I read it myself and I loved it, even laughing out loud in public at such a volume sometimes that my neighbors at the cafe started giving me dirty looks. Then again, I'm about the only person I know who loves Douglas Coupland.

11. I am always deeply touched when I'm riding the red line in Chicago and right before the Fullerton stop the brown line comes rushing up from another rail to suddenly run parallel to my train, and I look over and someone my age in the other train is looking right back at me. I am struck with an obsessive desire to know that other person's story and it is right at these moments that I have an unshakable belief that Chicago is the greatest place on the planet to be at this particular moment in 1998.

Postscript: Amy really did give me a penny.

FIVE SHORT POEMS INSPIRED BY SHAG

I.
She enjoyed pouring hot wax over her breasts.
She said it was a turn-on for her.
So one night
I put a match to her nipples.
And they lit
and shined bright and clear
and by their yellow-blue light
I wrote this poem.

II.
When my mother wants to punish me
she takes me out
of the corner of the room
where I stand with my nose stuck
and forces me
to go to Mary's
birthday party
with the cake
and the presents
and the ponies
and the clowns.
It's pure hell.

III.
Don't speak French to me anymore
and stop raving about subtitled movies I'll never watch
and stop yelling at me for liking diner food
and stop reading me your tear-stained poems in your twenty dollar sketchpad
and don't make me listen to one more single Ani Defranco song
and
you know what?
Just go home.

IV.
Our love was like an abstract expressionist painting
wide splashes of color
bumpy clumps of oil paint on
naked canvas.
Then she became a neo-realist.
The whore.

V.
I asked her why she never told me
that she kept the decaying remains
of several of her ex-boyfriends
locked in a broken refrigerator
in her basement.
She said cause you never asked.

Hemmin-ner.
A silent g, I find out a year after meeting her.
Hemmin.
You know, like lemon.
Not Hemming.
Not like hair tinge.
Hemmin-ner.
Not Hemmin-ger.

AAAAAAAAAAAAARRRRRRRRRRRRRRGGGGGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

This is much what it's like when you first meet her.

FOR LISA HEMMINGER ON THE OCCASION OF HER 38TH BIRTHDAY

Hemmin.
You know, like woman.
Hemmin,
like shaman
or yemen
or poem.

Not Hemming.
Not like food binge
or door hinge
or duck and cringe.
Hemmin-ner.
Not Hemmin-ger.

Lisa. Lisa Hemminger.
L-I-S-A, Lisa.
L,
loves her Budweiser,
I,
I'm never gonna be able to get that Emily Dickinson song out of my head the rest of my
fuckin' life,
S,
sure I'll put you up first,
A,
Asses kicked in the name of literary history,
L-I-S-A,
Lisa Hemmin-ner,
not Hemmin-ger,
a silent g,
gee, she's gonna kill me if I miss another open mic,
g,
girls fucked more than me,
g,
going down the street to score some coke,
g,
greatest poet I've ever known,
g,
silent g,
Lisa Hemmin-ner,
not Hemmin-ger.

Hemmin.
Like poem
like poem written on Jewish headstones
like poem written on Chicago lakeshore
poem spit out through liquor lips
poem standing on wobbly legs
strong arms

and big shoulders
liquor lips locked loosely in light lilted libation
to the piles of dead at her feet
more dead now than I will ever see in my life
corpses stacked all about her
so high that I wonder sometimes
how she can ever see over them

Hemmin
like lesbian
ala 16 year old boy
“If I hit on all of them one of them’s bound to have sex with me”
Hemmin lesbian
with her ice cold vice
with her talking about the weather
with her two minutes in a small dark room
that she brought us all into
and she says she’s never taken a swing at another poet
and did she really never?

Hemmin
like shaman
like my inspiration
my daddy-o
my cigarette machine
my co-conspirator of all that is right and holy

and she constantly shows me the strength of a good right hook
and the strength of a stiff upper lip
and the strength of a fluttering floating brain
and yes, sometimes, the strength of a pause

So.
What will they say about you when you’re dead?
Will you be as famous as you should be?
Will they retire your trolley that laps modern miles?
Sleep well, my Lisa,
my piston-packed poet,
my g-less wonder,
my friend,
my hero,
my muse

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH MY PAIN

I've been getting in touch with my pain this week. And I don't mean emotional pain and I don't mean the pain of an ex-lover and I don't mean the pain of my parents never buying me an Atari when I was a kid. I mean raw, pure, physical pain. I woke up at four in the morning on Sunday and my mouth was on fire. It was like all my teeth were made of porcelain and someone had just smashed them all with a hammer. It was like someone had just spent the last hour repeatedly punching me in the jaw. Raw, pure, physical pain.

So I crawl to the hospital which is conveniently located three blocks from my apartment and what do I find out but that I have an abscessed tooth, a cavity which has wormed its little evil way up up and up right into the nerve of the tooth itself. Now before you're tempted, let me just tell you up front not to pity me. It's been seven years since I've been to a dentist. I don't take care of my teeth. This is not the point of my story. The point of my story is that I was given a dentist's appointment for the following Friday and I was given a prescription for painkillers to get me through until Friday. But I couldn't get the money together for the prescription until Tuesday night, which meant that this week I went for approximately 72 hours having an actual nerve of my body exposed to the naked air with nothing to fight against it except a bottle of Alleve given to me by my friend Greg. I've been getting in touch with

my pain this week.

Have you really ever stopped and examined what pain is? Pain is a signal given by little electronic pulses in your body that go to your brain which translates it into language you can understand. It is a signal of discomfort that basically cuts through to your rational, day-to-day senses and tells you, "Hey, something's just gone wrong with your body and you better take a look."

The most fascinating thing about the brain and these electronic pulses is that it can actually sense how bad or intense or dangerous whatever thing that's just gone wrong is, and will increase or decrease the sensation of discomfort according to the level of immediacy the injury's attention deserves. It'd be like owning a smoke detector that could actually tell the difference between whispering, "Hey, your bad cooking is setting me off again" and screaming, "HEY ASSHOLE, YOU FELL ASLEEP WITH A LIT CIGARETTE AGAIN AND YOUR BED'S ON FIRE!"

In my case, my smoke detector was yelling, at a rather loud rate, "Hey, Jason! You have a fucking hole in your fucking tooth!" Not a constant scream, but rather a steady stream of loud, piercing, blears, at me, like, a car, alarm, constantly, going, off, cause, the, owner's, in, Europe, for, three, weeks. Wave...after wave...of searing...red...heat, heat so intense that I couldn't see out of my left eye sometimes, heat so intense that the very act of breathing felt like torture sometimes, heat so intense that sometimes all I could manage to do is slowly beat my head against the wall and cry, cry so softly and so sweetly, like a baby with the crup, like a seven-year-old with chicken pox, for hours and hours at a time.

I'm on codeine now. I have learned the following things. One. Do not drink alcohol when on codeine. Two. Do not drink caffeine when on codeine. Three. Do read poetry when on codeine. Four. Definitely do smoke pot when on codeine. Five. If you are codeine and someone is talking to you and you stare at them long enough, they'll start sounding like the teacher on Charlie Brown: "Wauk-wauk-wauk-wauk-wauk-wauk." Six. If you are on codeine and walking down the sidewalk on your way to work and you are under the sneaking suspicion that you are saying out loud as you walk down the sidewalk, "Good morning, Mr. Bird! Good morning, Mr. Tree! Good morning, Mr. Dog-Walker!" ...you probably are.

If I have learned one thing from getting in touch with my pain this week, it would be this, which I will pass on to you. Sometimes...sometimes. Sometimes it is actually good to have a little time between an original injury and the moment that science has completely doped you up and deafened you from hearing what your body is trying to tell you. Because sometimes....sometimes. Sometimes what your body's trying to tell you is, "See, now, this problem is real. This problem is serious. All those things the last year you've been telling yourself are problems? ...They're not really, now, are they?" I've been getting in touch with my pain this week.

Guggenheim, you said
trailing your fingers
down my chest
touching the belly
that I normally
don't let anyone
touch.

Guggenheim, you said
I've been wearing
a Guggenheim
t-shirt

GUGGENHEIM

for three days
you said
You never said
why you were
wearing it for
three days, just
that you were.

I have my guesses.

I like to fantasize
you being dirty,
being sweaty,
wearing the
same clothes
for days at a time
simply because you can.
Simply because
it lets you
smell yourself
and it
reminds you
that you're alive.

I like to fantasize
your dirty hair,
your stained clothes,
bedroom heaped with
stacks of books
and rumpled underwear
and dirty dishes
and empty
chinese cartons
half-finished
poems
lying
on hardwood floors

Guggenheim, you said
touching my knee
on a black bleacher
at a music club
listening to
an all-girl punk band
Sometimes is the time
to externalize, you said
and sometimes
is the time

not to externalize
you said

I have my guesses.

I fantasize
smelling you
as you grab
my cock
and force it inside you
I fantasize
your dirty hair
in my nose
as you drape yourself
over me

I was not a Belmont girl
you said
I was a Belmont girl
but I was not a Belmont Girl
you said

I have my guesses.

I fantasize
internet
pornography
photographs

I fantasize
your naked back
against my white wall
as I stand
on my knees
and thrust myself
in and out
of your mouth
one
of your hands
to my anus
one
of your hands
to your own

I don't know
why I have
these fantasies
about you.
I don't know
why you wore
a Guggenheim
t-shirt for
three days.

I have my guesses.

I fantasize
kissing your eyebrows
I fantasize
the freckles on your shoulders

I fantasize
fucking
with Guggenheim
t-shirts
on our chests
and nothing
down below

Here's my number
you said
You wrote it
on a scrap
of the
New York Times
I don't know
if you want
to fuck me
I don't know
if you were
trying to
get rid of me

I have my guesses.

I fantasize
New York Times
on hazy
August
Sunday
mornings

Mornings
so hot
we stay naked
all day
and
fuck each other silly
on the sabbath

Mornings
so hot
we plunk
ice cubes
in our coffee
as we fight
over the book section

Mornings
so hot
I actually groan
when I get
an erection
again
but know
it's time
to pray
again

Guggenheim, you said
touching my chest

scribbling in your notebook
drinking your red wine
I've never been
to the Guggenheim,
you said
What is it like?

I have my guesses.

(This poem is performed in a strict 8/8 beat, with performer clapping his hands simultaneously. For this edition, the poem has been published in its original 8-beat stanzas.)

Some
times I get the sinking feeling
life is fast too fast and that I'm
getting left behind here in the
dirt.

Some
times events just slap me in the
face, I reel from pain and wonder

how I couldn't see that I'd get
hurt.

Sometimes things just seem beyond con-
trol.

I WISH I WERE A MACHINE

Like
wars and kings and peace and crime and
old and young and black and white and
love and hate and sex and death, a-
ssassinations, coup-d-etats,

and
you.

Some
times I get the sinking feeling
you are fast too fast I should have
seen the warning signs there on the
road.

Some
times I kick myself, especial-
ly these last two days, I wonder
if you're really that bad of a
person I was victim to yes-
terday, if I caught you at a
bad time, there are issues here and
hate? I want to hate you and I
do, but not really I'm just pissed
off, I'm mad, I'm angry, I'm em-
barrassed, all my friends know what went
wrong except for me and I don't
know how to take this and so I
cultivate my fear and pain and
anger, yes I'm mad at you.

Yes, I'm really mad at you.

Sometimes I wish I were a ma-
chine.

I'd
clip my words and string them like a
tickertape parade, oh look, an
astronaut is home now from the
moon.

I'd
clip my words and string them like a
robot then I wouldn't have to
get my heart broke on the sixth of
June.

Just
chips and knobs and gears and wheels and
cogs and ROM and RAM and keys and
diodes, buttons, metal casing,
silicon and tickertape just
tick tick tick an unthinking machine.

Just
tick tick tick an unthinking machine.

Some
times I get the sinking feeling
life is fast too fast, events just
zoom right by and leave me so con-
fused.

Some
times I get the sinking feeling
you are fast too fast I was a
toy existing to keep you a-
mused.

Sometimes I wish I were a machine.

Just
tick tick tick an unfeeling machine.

Just
tick tick tick an unfeeling machine.

Tick tick tick

JASON'S MANIFESTO 4.15.98

No more poems about Northern Ireland.
No more poems about jazz musicians.
No more poems about Allen Ginsberg.
No more poems about dead rock stars.
No more poems about how much you want to sleep with me.
No more poems about how much I should want to sleep with you.
No more poems written on napkins.
No more poems over five minutes.
No more poems about vampyres.
No more poems about how much you hate poetry.
No more poems about how much you love poetry.
No more poems from you.
Yes, you.

LANCE BURTON DIED FOR YOUR SINS

Last night I was sleeping in my quiet little bed in my quiet little apartment when all of a sudden in a flash of lightening and a cloud of smoke, God came to me. He stood half a building tall and sparks shot out of his eyes when he sweated and he boomed down in a voice as scary as the day is long, "Jason, I have a plan for you."

Now I of course being the atheist that I am took this ghostly apparition with just a little bit more shock than the rest of humanity would. But I am nothing else if not adaptive so when the good Lord comes a-knocking...I answer the call.

"Jason," he boomed out in a voice that shook the very foundation of my apartment building, "I have a plan for you. You are to be my messenger. You are to be my shining white light in this dark dark planet of ours."

"Yes, my Lord," I replied in the appropriately meek and awed voice that we mortals should. "I am ready to be your messenger. And what vehicle should I use to spread your good word far and wide across this sinning corrupt planet of which we live?"

"Jason," he boomed in a voice that made dogs bark all the way to 129th street, "your path will be a perilous and challenging one. Your path will test the faith in which you place in me. For I want you to become...a professional magician. And I ain't talking one of those namby-pamby cut the rope and look it's grown back together again magicians. And I ain't talking one of those little pussy Cub Scout Blue-And-Gold Banquet pour the milk down the newspaper roll and it magically disappears Kiwani Club magicians. No, Jason, I'm talking Las Vegas magician. I'm talking Siegfried and Roy, doped-up white lion magician. I'm talking marry a supermodel, rumors about your sexuality for the rest of your life magician. I'm talking start your own theatre in Branson Missouri, open for Tony Orlando and Dawn, bit parts in Clive Barker movies magician.

"Jason, this is the path that I have chosen for you. I want you to walk among my green earth spreading the good news far and wide. I want you to wear custom-made early 80s floor-length black leather coats for me. I want you to wander across the wide deserts and climb the rugged mountains, miraculously flinging playing cards from your hands, over and over, as from thin air, grinning good-naturedly as you dazzle and amaze Burmuda-shorts-wearing tourists from New Jersey taking a break from the dollar slots at Caesar's Palace. Jason, you are my chosen one. I want you to reach out into that audience and grab that goofy yet endearing Upper Wisconsin dad, and I want you to drag him up on that stage to the squeals of delight from his prepubescent daughters. I want you to sit him down in that velvet-lined folding chair and gently poke fun at him in that way you can only do when your victim is in front of 5,000 witnesses and cannot punch you in the mouth. I want you to force that bewildered dad to give you a hard-earned twenty out of his wallet and I want you to tear it up and then pretend you've screwed up the trick to the oohs and aahs of that air-conditioned oasis in the desert, just to later produce said twenty out of the dad's underwear, to the unrestrained, orgasmic applause and adulation of your liquored-up audience, wasn't Bob such a good sport, let's give him a hand ladies and gentlemen, you can take your seat now.

"Jason, this is the path I have chosen for you. I want you to spend millions of dollars building the most elaborate and spectacular tricks ever known to man. I'm talking smoke machines and lasers and sharp pointy steel poles, giant rotating saws straight out of turn-of-the-century Westerns, traps with names like The Terminator, The Exterminator, The Roach Hotel, The Giant Fangs of Death, The Watery Grave, The Big Box of Unpleasantness. I want you to think of something that no one has made disappear yet—an elephant, a helicopter, a skyscraper, the Statue of Liberty, hell, maybe your audience itself. I want you to construct a giant curtain and then utter those words that make our hearts leap and our blood thrill while we sit in our suburban homes watching you on Saturday night on the World's Greatest Magicians part 29: "From this point in the trick forward, the camera will never cut away. You will be watching Jason's amazing feat live and unedited just as the studio audience is watching it." Jason, I have a plan for you. I want you to go out there and hire the sleaziest, the trashiest, the most white-trash porn-star dropouts you can find to be your assistants. I want you to tease their hair up to inhuman heights and dress them in outfits straight out of a Don Bruckheimer summer action movie. I want you to hire minimum-wage TV-movie cheesy neo-rave synthesizer studio musicians to compose a subversive-yet-mainstream soundtrack for your television special. And Jason, let me tell you something, Lance Burton died for your sins and what have you done for me lately, Jason, let me tell you something. I have a plan for

you. I want you to become a professional magician.”

And all was good and right in the world and I bowed my head serenely to the awesome majesty of our grand creator, and if I listened carefully I could hear the sweet angelic harmonies of the holy angels above and I was just about to head to the local Walgreens to get my black hair dye and begin my miraculous transformation, and then, and then, and then, I got to thinking.

I got to thinking and I realized that every single professional magician in the world looks alike, and not in that wonderful and endearing way like the Olson twins, but in a creepy, sort of evil way, like that cult that was making all those web sites and thought a comet was going to kill them, a creepy, sort of evil way, like the crowd at Hi-Tops on a Saturday night about two in the morning after a dozen Miller Genuine Drafts, a creepy, sort of evil way, like that loner in high school who always wore the Led Zeppelin three-quarters-length jerseys and read nothing but the Lord of the Rings over and over and over again, a creepy, sort of evil way. And I suddenly realized, and I pointed to the strange glowing figure outside my window and said, “You’re not God. Show me your true face. I demand it right now.”

And the figure suddenly transformed, his features gnarling and twisting into a hideous monstrous form, and his body turned red and his skin started boiling and soon enough I was face to face with the Dark Lord, the master of hell, St. Lucifer himself. And I said, “It was you, Beezlebub, all this time. It was you that created this insidious circle of Merry-Go-Round-wearing demons to spread your dark word” and he cackled maniacally and said, “Yes, it was me” and I said “And it was you that duped us into thinking the Masked Magician was really David Copperfield when all along it was just some unknown dork gunning for his own television special,” and he flipped his snake-like hair from his forehead and said “Yes, it was me” and I said “And it was you who forged a contract with NBC to keep producing all those horrible horrible specials with that cheesy guy with the beard who pretends to do magic tricks where you touch the television screen but are really stupid little math problems we already learned in fourth grade” and Satan’s eyes glowed all afire and he yelled “Yes, yes, it was me all along! And you are all the hapless victims of my best-laid plans!”

And I said, “You are pure evil incarnate, and I cast you out. I send you back to the icy bottomless pit from whence you came.” And I pulled him up in my hands and I flung him, I flung him as hard and as high as I could, and he came crashing down on a bamboo prison on the fourth level of hell, and who should be in the prison but Doug Henning himself, imprisoned there since the fall of 1978, and Doug was released and he and I roamed the earth for decades in matching rainbow suspenders, slaying the black-clad slick-haired imps of the Apocalypse one by one and instructing today’s youth during high-school assemblies about the magic of illusion and the illusion of magic and to say no to drugs and to stay in school and to wear a condom. And freedom and light reigned across the land and flowers grew in the cracks of our nation’s highways and dogs and cats no longer fought each other and all war across the world suddenly ended. And even to this day when I’m feeling sad and blue I will walk up to a stranger on the Chicago sidewalk and I will pull a quarter out of their ear and it will remind me that sometimes magic still exists, sometimes the exceptional is commonplace, and I will silently thank my Lord for dribble cups and squirting flowers and x-ray specs and sea monkeys, forever and ever, in his name I pray, Amen.

I was born three months before the moon landing.

There is a photograph
in a beat-up scrapbook
with psychedelic colors
buried in the back bedroom.

It is a photograph of a
three month old me
being propped up
in front of the television
as men walk on the moon.

LEWINSKY

Apparently the landing
was late at night,
midnight or somewhere thereabouts
and according to my mom,
according to a drunken story
delivered to me
at a wedding reception,
according to my mom
she begged my dad
to let me sleep
because I'd be cranky
the whole next day
and besides,
he's three months old.
He won't remember a thing.

My dad was adamant,
according to the drunken story
delivered to me
at a wedding reception.
He was to make sure
that his son
would always be able to say
that he witnessed the moon landing
live
the evening it happened.

You can see my dad's hands
in the photograph,
hooked under my armpits,
holding me up next to the television.
The arms
trail off
into the netherworld
that exists beyond the frames
of photographs,
the unknown and undocumented past
that exists
right outside the eyepiece
of the Kodak Brownie.

According to the drunken story
delivered to me
at a wedding reception,
I certainly was cranky the whole next day
but my dad never regretted
waking me up

and as the years ensued
even my mom was glad
I was a witness
to the staticky video images
that night.
I'm certainly glad
they found it important.

There will never be anything again
on the television
for us to hold up our children
next to the screen
and take fading photographs.

MARGO SAYS

Margo says that I smell like chrysanthemums
I ask her what she means
She says I smell like laundry detergent
and smoke
and it's a very pretty smell

Andi dances a quiet midnight jig
at a truck stop
in Farmerville, Illinois

Greg stands on his head
in front of the St. Louis art museum
and laughs and laughs and laughs
and laughs

Tom hugs a roomful of lesbians
and closes a sky window
with a turn of his car key

Margo says she's wearing her yes pants
and I say I'm wearing MY yes pants
and we laugh and laugh and laugh
and get quiet

Andi sleeps in the bed
I masturbated in
when I was thirteen
Sets the alarm clock wrong
and tells me about boys
who have urinated in front of her

Greg talks on the phone
in hushed quiet tones
for forty-five minutes
then asks me what is wrong with him

Tom kisses bartenders
and whistles to Jane's Addiction
and keeps calling it "Shi-Town"

Margo says something about Amigas
and something about HTML
and something about Savannah
Says the book was better than the movie
and asks for my email

Andi waits and waits and waits and waits
for free pizza
Screams from a stage
for 200 drunk fans
Tears up little blue tickets
and loses a lot of pool games

Greg calls her asexual
Proceeds to tell a sex story
Wears a purple button that says
"Another man for womens' rights"
and reminds me that I perform in ten minutes

Tom opens a rusty door

of an abandoned newspaper office
Shows us the “fuck me” lights
Makes me carry the lava lamp
Points out the porn store across the street
and we write graffiti on foam rubber boards

Margo says I should kiss her
so I do

Andi says don't be so pissy
so I don't

Greg says roll up that window
so I do

Tom says dude

Margo says I should kiss her again

Andi says don't let me get this drunk anymore

Greg says our name is Petty Sex Gods

Tom says oopah

Margo puts her hands on the back of my head
and suddenly takes them away

Margo says write to me
so I do

Margo says did I have fun in St. Louis
and I say

Margo says that I smell like chrysanthemums

MY FOURTEENTH DAY

My fourteenth day without a suicidal thought
is a new record at the plant
recently
and all the employees
are very pleased
with themselves

Fourteen days without a suicidal thought
Two weeks of
white eyes
green bed
black television

mutely colored underwear
with little like little patterns all over them

Fourteen days
I've left the toilet paper on the floor
because

what the hell
why put it in the roller
It's just me.

Fourteen days without a suicidal thought
prompts a surprise parade
at the plant
Big colorful banners
flying in the wind
My face a hundred feet high
High-stepping cheerleaders
marching across Red Square
on May Day
and I am touched.
Truly.

336 hours
of getting turned down for dates
sudden crying jags in the middle of the night
Two weeks of
skipped meals
cigarette butts
drunk landlords
stoned Jason
and still I stand
to tell the story
still the factory hums
with the sound
of full productivity
I am so proud of my staff.

My fourteenth day without a suicidal thought
and how quick a bear market
can twist into bull
How sudden a hero
can turn into a villain
and a martyr
into a saint
How soon a poet
can turn into a factory worker
and a politician
into a dirty old man

It makes me laugh.
Truly.

20,160 little individual seconds
Each their own tiny monster
ready to eat me up
tear me up
drag me down
under and
over the hill we go
20,160 laps around the rollercoaster
over and
over and
over the hill we go again
20,159 laps around the rollercoaster
and still the plant purrs
with the sound of
happy employees
happy union
happy management
and things are so great
I could just spit.

My fourteenth day without a suicidal thought
and we hang a sign
at the plant
under the equal opportunity poster
next to the first aid directions
right above the suggestion box
FOURTEEN DAYS WITHOUT AN ACCIDENT
it says
FOURTEEN DAYS WITHOUT AN ACCIDENT
WE ARE PROUD OF OUR EMPLOYEES
LOOK FOR THE UNION LABEL
MADE IN THE U.S.A.

My fourteenth day without a suicidal thought.
A new record.
Recently.

MY GIRLFRIEND (A FOUND POEM)

(Overhead in conversation, November 1998)

“Hey, you gonna let your girlfriend talk like that?”

Yeah, I’m gonna let my girlfriend talk like that.

In fact, I’m gonna let my girlfriend do
whatever the hell she wants to do.

You know why?

Because

my girlfriend is a human being
and not an object to own
which is why she’s dating me
and she’s not dating you.

Now why don’t you get the fuck outta here?

And if you don’t,

my girlfriend’s going to get up
and kick your fuckin’ ass.

(This poem was written by taking the last line of each "None of the Above" personal ad from the October 2, 1998 issue of the Chicago Reader.)

Married white male in Rogers Park.
It seems that we have too many things in common.
Please respond if you live in the northern suburbs.
Western suburbs.
Northwest suburbs.
City dwellers preferred.
Joliet area a real plus.

First timers only.

NONE OF THE ABOVE (A FOUND POEM)

Couples, women, men.
Age, race, weight not important.
Race, size unimportant.
I prefer brains over beauty.
I prefer dominant, gray-haired straight guys with hairy chests and big hands.
Medium build (not obese) please reply.
Please be safe and sane.
Please be height/weight proportionate.
Seeking someone under 50.
IQ larger than bra size appreciated.
Must be beautiful inside and out.
Nice butt and bust a plus.
Asians and black men a plus.
Blond or Asian a plus, Oak Park even better.
Looking for a good friend.
Looking for someone who can relate to this time of life.
Looking for someone who wants to do it all.
Looking for someone who is looking to leave a mark.

No one-night stands, psychos, stalkers or nuts.
No commitments, please.
No exchange of partners.
Absolutely no couples.
No druggies.
Male as go-between OK, as participant not OK.

I'm a good guy, please be the same.
I am clean and discreet.
I will return all calls.
I can appreciate your style.
I can do it.
As far as I know, we only live once!
I just want to watch.
I'm just happy to be of service.
My only motivation is enjoyable role-playing.
I am willing to travel.
I'm awaiting your presence.
Feel free to try me in my next incarnation.
If you desire I will let him join in after you teach me the art of lovemaking.
You will enjoy my knowledge and manner.
Handsome, fit, charming and easygoing.
Interests: arts, dreams, camping.

Couples only.
Nonsexual gatherings only.
Serious callers only.
Only serious couples respond.
Women only.
Women only, please!

All boundaries explored.
Possible to serve us both.
Let's explore life together.
Maybe we can find something mutually satisfying.
Your husband and/or boyfriend is welcome to be in attendance.
We want to make you the center of our attention.
Discretion must be insured by both parties.
Discretion please.
Long-term relationship or just friends.
Halloween is just around the corner!
Love a bit of bondage behind closed doors.
1-100 people OK.
Reciprocation not required.
Noncommercial.
Unconventional, rewarding experience!
Companionship, maybe more.
Safe, sane, consensual fun.
Safe sex only!
Nothing kinky, just sex fun.
Check me out guys, it will feel incredible!
You won't be disappointed.
Disappointment doubtful.
Kick back and enjoy!

Call me.
Call now.
Call for the chance to complete yourself.
Call and let's (panty) play!
Call your pierced, provincial (and bald) friend.
If you're ready to party give me a call.
If you're a bisexual female, please call.
If you're not afraid to live a little, give a call.
If you love receiving, let's talk.
We know you called!
Find out and call.
This is worth your call!
Hoping to connect with the right woman or couple.
All replies answered.
All calls answered.
Let's see if the chemistry is right.
Do it!
You won't regret it.
You'll be making a great decision.
Try me on for size.
Why wait? I'm not!
You deserve it!
Go to the nearest phone.
Please reply if you've been where I'm coming from.
Please try again.
Please call.

NOW THAT I DON'T HAVE SEX

Now that I've lost the desire to have sex
life has become amazingly clear
and plentiful
and
easy.

I can go to open mics now
and not have to listen intently
and with deliberate attention
to the awful
19 year old
cutie

goth
poet.

I can go to a bar now
and have a drink
and go

home.

Now that I've lost the desire to have sex
I don't have to explain my story
a dozen times a week,
talk about my novel,
list my favorite bands,
oh you live in Logan Square, that's very interesting,
work and work and work
and work and work and work
and work
and work
to get a phone number
before I feel like I can
stop.

Working.

And now that I've lost the desire to have sex
I can stay at home
and watch television
and smoke a cigarette
and eat ice cream out of the carton
and smoke another cigarette
and masturbate
and smoke another cigarette
and... masturbate again
and... smoke... another cigarette
and cry
and remember the days
when I used to like having sex.

Yep, now that I've lost the desire to have sex
life has become amazingly clear
and plentiful
and
easy.

(Narrator on stage starts singing a cartoonish version of 'La Figaro,' as if a bored five-year-old were singing.)

He was going to the opera.
He didn't want to go to the opera.
She was making him go to the opera.

And so he danced in little circles around her
as they walked down the sidewalk
flailing his arms
and singing upward to the heavens

OPERA NIGHT

(Continues cartoonish singing of 'La Figaro.')

She thought sometimes about killing him in his sleep.
But then she realized
Where would she ever find someone
to make her feel this superior
again?

(Continues cartoonish singing of 'La Figaro.')

He was 26 and she was 24.
He lived in Wicker Park
and she lived on Irving Park
and they moved in together into Rogers Park.
He works in Humboldt Park
and she works in Lincoln Park
and sometimes, on Saturday afternoons,
they head to Grant Park.

(Continues cartoonish singing of 'La Figaro.')

Sing with me!
I don't want to play your raindeer games,
she said.

(Continues cartoonish singing of 'La Figaro.')

He would write her poems
on the back of bar napkins
fueled by twelve bourbon and cokes
and a pack and a half of Chesterfields
which he smoked
so no one would bum them off of him
He would slip haikus
into her lunchbox
on her way to school.

She would have anal sex.
But
not
very
often.

(Continues cartoonish singing of 'La Figaro.')

She wondered if he had any clue
that she was sleeping with Carl from the office
every Thursday afternoon.

(Continues cartoonish singing of 'La Figaro.')

He wanted ice cream.
But all they could find was a gelato store.

(Continues cartoonish singing of 'La Figaro.')

Look.
If you don't shut up this instant,
I swear to God,
I'm gonna punch you right in the face,
and don't think I won't,
because I hit a man in college once
and I broke his nose
and it felt so fucking good
that I've been waiting seven goddamn years
just to get the chance again.

(Continues cartoonish singing of 'La Figaro.')

You wouldn't really do that, would you?

Try me.

(Long silence, then narrator continues cartoonish singing of 'La Figaro,' this time very slowly and deliberately. Suddenly the narrator makes a sound like someone getting punched in the face.)

POEMS I'D WRITE FOR NIKE IF NIKE EVER ASKED ME TO WRITE POEMS FOR THEM

I.
The squeak of
sudden rubber stoppage
on the floor
of a 1981
hardwood
high school
gymnasium
and the way
the squeak
echoed across
the cavern
and bounced
off the far wall
and floated back
to my ears
a moment later
made me
feel like
a jock

II.
They always said
'No black soles
on the gym floor'
and it always confused me
'cause who has shoes
with black soles?

III.
My mom said
she'd pay as much as
a pair of Hush Puppies would cost
and if I wanted different shoes than that
I'd have to make up the difference
on my own

so I did

THE REAL, REAL, REAL, REAL WORLD

In the spring of 1998, MTV, growing ever-tired of year upon endless years of *The Real World*, decided instead to simply cut to the chase and produce a new show called *THE WORST ROOMMATE IN AMERICA*. Naturally, they chose Chicago.

An exhaustive search was started and eventually two finalists were picked: Jack, a 28-year-old graduate of the Art Institute in performance art, now the overnight bean grinder at the Starbucks at Belmont and Clark; and Mary, a 26-year-old professional waitress who someday soon hoped to start a band as soon as she found some cool musicians, and who had broken off and reformed her relationship with her boyfriend Seth a total now of six times. MTV moved them into a dingy apartment at 3837 N Broadway where none of their bills would be paid and all furniture came out of the local Salvation Army.

The battle had begun.

The first night Jack got drunk at Crobar and brought a woman home with him.

The woman smoked a pack of Newport Light 100s in their living room, ashing in Mary's potpourri holder. While making love at four in the morning the woman started screaming at the top of her lungs, "DADDY, OH DADDY, TAKE ME DADDY, FUCK ME JUST LIKE YOU FUCK MOMMY!" prompting a visit from the landlord. When she left the next morning she left her phone

number on the door with a magic marker.

Mary, not to be outdone, went to the Empty Bottle the next night and invited the band to crash at her place. The band snuck into Jack's room and smoked his entire supply of marijuana, as well as taking all his asthma medicine 'cause they had it on good authority from the guitarist in Pavement that you get really high when you get high while taking asthma medicine, dude, it's the absolute truth. The next day the band used up all the shampoo and stole Jack's collection of Henry Miller novels.

This meant war. The next weekend when Mary left town to visit her boyfriend Seth, Jack proceeded to methodically eat every bit of food Mary owned, leaving a trail of Post-It notes in his wake saying things like "IOU 1 box of Poptarts," "IOU 1 can of Pringles," "IOU 16 cans of Pepsi." He also slept in her bed all weekend, which he not only masturbated in, but due to a corrosive liver brought on by his alcoholism, he also urinated in.

Seth, arriving with Mary on Monday and not realizing she was living with someone, angrily accused Jack of fucking his girlfriend and proceeded to beat him senseless, producing two black eyes and a swollen kneecap. The next night he broke up with Mary over the phone for the seventh time, prompting Mary to throw their answering machine through a closed storm window, hitting the landlord who was on the sidewalk below. Not satisfied, Mary proceeded to the kitchen where she smashed every dish, glass and bowl onto the linoleum floor, then laid in Jack's bed until five in the morning, crying uncontrollably and asking Jack every ten minutes if he really loved her or if he was just living with her to save on rent.

Jack sensed he was precariously close to losing, so the next day he stole all 79 of Mary's CDs and sold them to raise the money to buy a Nintendo Playstation 64, which he would then play at full volume all during the night, switching back and forth between the two games he owned, "Tekken 3" and "NHL All Star Hockey 98." Needing more time to perfect his technique, he quit his job at Starbucks and started sleeping until three in the afternoon. A week later, incensed at a hat trick opportunity he missed, Jack put his foot through their television screen, so that evening he called Mary's parents to inform them that Mary now had a serious cocaine addiction and would they please wire him \$300 to cover her back rent? With the money he bought a 28 inch Samsung High Definition television with stereo sound, which he moved into his room, adding a padlock now to his door.

Mary sensed that the end was near and that one daring bold move needed to be done to clench the title. So in a fit of unbridled enthusiasm, one night she locked the door, poured gasoline over the entire place, and lit the apartment on fire, killing both herself and Jack and burning the entire apartment complex to the ground in a matter of hours.

Season Two will be filmed in Bucktown. Applications are now being taken.

SATISFACTION REMAINS (A FOUND POEM)

Satisfaction remains
long after
the price is forgotten

(Written September 28, 1998, the night Sammy Sosa hit his 62nd home run of the season)

Somewhere in America, right now,
a woman is watching WGN
on her cable system
waiting to see if Sammy Sosa will hit a few more
out of the park
before the season ends
and she will think
of the man
in Chicago
who she has not thought of

TAKE ME OUT (TO THE BALLGAME)

in about four years.
She will wonder how he's doing
and remember
that the last time she spoke to him
he said he lived
about a five minute walk from Wrigley Field

and she will wonder
if she can see his apartment
each time they show a shot
from the blimp

Somewhere in America, right now,
a man is watching ESPN
waiting to see if this will be the
Year of the Cubs
a phrase he is already sick of
and it's not even the playoffs yet
and he will think of
the woman
who left him
to move to Chicago
She wanted to be in a band
she said
and besides
this town is crushing me
she said
and besides
you're crushing me
she said
She called last about two years ago
and talked about someplace called Wicker Park
and how the yuppies were taking it over
can't even find a decent lush bar anymore for Chrissakes
I mean, even fucking Urge Overkill moved out
for the love of God
and the man will sit in front of his television
and slowly get drunk over the course of four hours
and repeatedly tip his bottle
in the air
and toast the magical woman
he lost his virginity to
and wonder if she's died of heroin
yet

Somewhere in America, right now,
a man is riding an elevated train
covered with brightly covered posters
advertising rum

marketed to Latinos
and he will look out his bulletproof window
and see the 60,000 people
huddled close together
the 12,000 people
spread out on the concrete below
the lights catching them all
in mid-photograph
and for some reason
that the man cannot explain
(and would not even if he could)
he suddenly breaks into tears
loud, long, wet tears
that come so regularly
that soon he will give up
the attempt
of hiding them
from his fellow passengers
and the man will watch the ballpark
slowly squirm away from him again
the other, not-so-nice neighborhoods
looming up before him
like so many tarot cards
laid down to tell his fortune
against his will
and he will wonder why he is here
and what the hell he's going to do
and why this city seems to
choke the
very breath
out of his lungs

Somewhere in America, right now,
an entire nation
watches Chicago
hog the spotlight

again

an entire nation
watches a ball
actually go sailing out of a ballpark
which will surprise most
Out of the ballpark
How bout that
They had always thought that was a metaphor
or an old Bugs Bunny cartoon
Right out of the ballpark
and into the street below
where 12,000
eager fans
are hungrily waiting

Somewhere in America, right now,
people are wondering about this city
appearing on their television screens
they will wonder about nicknames
they don't understand
big shoulders
green onions

windy cities
and they will wonder
if their friends are okay

And you and I,
we will know the answer.

“Julius left for San Francisco in the summer of 1969, leaving Evelyn and the child behind. It was the first summer she took a lover.” -The Men Who Loved Evelyn Cotton, Frank Ronan.

I would like to take a lover.
Like a store. A store of lovers--
“Can I help you sir?”
“Yes, I’ll take that one, right there.”

You have already taken me, my lover.
You have taken me without even realizing it
when you slip into the booth next to me
and bang your knees against mine
and I feel the
knock-knock-knockknokknok
and all I can do
is stare at the menu a little harder

TAKING A LOVER

“Can I help you sir?”
I’ll take – I’ll take
I’ll take a cup of coffee
I’ll take – I’ll take
Can I help you sir?
Yes, I’ll take that one, right there.

I would like to take you, my lover.
I would like to take you home
and lock the door
I would like to shield you from Budweiser poets
I would like to shield you from
petty jealous ex lies
from petty jealous ex whatevers
I would like to take you home
and lock the door
and feel that one bead of sweat
drop
and splash
Can I help you sir?
Yes, I’ll take that one. Right there.

You have already taken me, my lover
my secret lover
when we bounce and bang and whizz and curve
up Clark Street and down Clark Street
and up Broadway and down Broadway
and up Lincoln and down Lincoln
When you force me to take your hand
and you – YANK –
and I am forced to call upon the secret mantra
taught to me by a lesbian in San Francisco
“Just repeat the dashboard in your head over and over
Park reverse neutral drive drive drive
It will eventually go away
Park reverse neutral drive drive drive
She will eventually let go of your hand
Park reverse neutral drive drive drive
Park reverse neutral
drive
drive
Can I help you sir?

Yes, I would like to take an invisible lover

and I would like to sit her down
at an invisible table
I would like to feel her big shoulders
in my hands
I would like to feel my lips
on the back of her neck
I would like to feel my cock
any goddamn place she would like to feel my cock
Can I help you sir?
Yes, I'll take that one. Right there.

I would like to take your books, one at a time
run my finger down the spine
feel for the crease
from when you laid the book down
while in the bathtub
I would like to memorize every word on that page
an entire library of stolen private moments
in my head
I would like to take you, my lover
I would like to
Can I help you sir?

Sir?
Can I help you?

Yes.
I'll take that one.
Right there.

She was a kind girl
a very kind girl
22, maybe
Leaning behind the counter
watching the drunks
come and go

I stood in front of her
for a moment
tugging and tugging
and tugging
at my glove

THERE OUGHTA BE A LAW

and she reached over
and said
'let me get that'
and yanked my glove off

and I said
you're a very kind person
and burst into tears

And she said
What's wrong
and I said
There oughta be a law
that says
that when you're sick
you shouldn't have to be the one
to go get your own medication
at two in the morning
on cold windy Chicago sidewalks
There oughta be a law
You should have a parent
or a lover
or a roommate
or a...something
out buying your medication
and bringing you tea
and listening to you moan
as you roll around
in your bed
and if such a guardian is not available
the court will appoint one for you
There oughta be a law
I tell ya
and I just shook my head
and started crying again

The woman said
What do you need
and I said
Alleve, please
and the woman
took a box of eight tablets
and placed them in my hand
and said
Now get outta here, you look like shit
and I said
How much

and she said
Get outta here, you look like shit
and smiled
and turned
to help
the parade of drunks
in the corner.

She was a kind girl
A very kind girl
22, maybe.

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT A GIRL IN UNIFORM

Southwest Airlines is less a company than it is a cult, which I guess would make me a Southwestee. Flying SWA is much more than about getting to St. Louis in time for the holidays. It is a statement of empowerment, a declaration of my own freedom and strength as a young, mobile human being on the cusp of the millennium. When I hold that beat-up hard-plastic-laminate boarding card in my hand with all the letters rubbed off from the sweat of hundreds of commuters before me, I feel whole. When I see that Southwest commercial where all the people stand up and cheer, I stand up in my apartment and cheer also. I Fly SWA. It's more than an 800 number. It's a tattoo etched into my third eye, a crown of thorns I am proud to wear as I make my long march to Galilee.

When I fly, I cease to exist. I am neither here nor there but in a strange limbo, not A or B and not exactly C either, but a letter of the alphabet that's been hidden from us, a secret 27th letter that fell out of popularity around the 12th century. I am in a hermetically-sealed plastic environment, ashtray in my arm rest not used for a decade, dentist-waiting-room air pumped silently through beige spouts above my head. When I fly...when we fly...we spend a few fleeting moments of our lives out of existence. We leave our bodies and hang suspended in the air, carried along like magic via one hundred steel tons of killing machine.

We feel the tremors of this limbo in airports before and after. As Douglas Coupland says, O'Hare is not really Chicago, it's O'Hare, a 'hub' which exists outside of regular time and space. An airport is a closed utopian society, the closest thing to Star Trek we have in our day-to-day lives. Every time I'm in an airport I have the distinct feeling that anything can and will happen to me. I will make love to a Wesleyan art-history undergraduate inside the Pole Position II machine in the arcade. I will suddenly be arrested on suspicion of terrorism and thrown in a dank cell in the catacombs of Midway, terrible labyrinthine spaces we didn't know existed, with crumbling iron doors and dirt floors and sun streaming through a slotted window like a Danielle Steele movie of the week. When I fly, all these possibilities exist. All of my parallel universes converge as I sit in my plastic chair, drinking my four dollar glass of beer and looking at the pictures on the wall from the latest SWA company picnic with that old guy who started the company and is always smiling in that lecherous way only Texans can get away with. I would kill to get a chance to shake that man's hand.

I met an honest-to-God flight attendant once. In a bar, no less. I asked her what the worst part was of being a flight attendant. She said, "Sometimes after I work a long shift, I'll be walking through the streets of the city on my way home and I'll feel invisible. Crowds part as I pass, as if they've just felt the cold breeze of a ghost touch their cheek."

The flight attendants on Southwest are the coolest. The women are all pretty but not in that Tammy-Faye-Bakker, too-much-makeup way. They all exhibit a wonderful Southern charm but not in that Jerry-Springer-white-trash way. The men are all gay but not in that obnoxious-obsessed-with-Barbra-Streisand way. They make jokes on the overhead speakers - "Click. If you are traveling with a small child or someone who acts like a small child, please secure your own oxygen mask first. There'll be plenty of time to get your husband's mask on later."

And the coolest part of the coolness which is SWA flight attendants is the uniforms. The SWA staff wardrobe is like a hipper, goofier version of the Gap-high school cardigan sweaters with "SWA" stitched on the pocket like a cheerleader's varsity letter. Tommy-Hilfingeresque polo-shirt-khaki-shorts combos, perfect for jumping off the plane and spending a leasurable day at the beachhouse. And the pilots all wear these cool-ass shiny leather bombadeer jackets, as if their next assignment was to go blow hell out of Nazis instead of schlugging us poor bastards to business meetings and parent's houses and drunken insurance conventions. I look at the staff of Southwest and they look like they're having fun, for the love of Pete. They look like, God forbid, they actually enjoy their jobs. It's like we're all on this tin machine of death and looking at each other and we're all shouting, "Isn't it so goddamned great we're on this plane and flying somewhere fun and exciting and running away from home for once?"

I Heart SWA!

I Fly SWA!

UNTITLED (SUICIDE POEM)

They say
that writers
have the highest chance
of killing themselves
out of all
the different types
of artists.

Painters,
photographers,
actors,
dancers,
musicians,
sculptors,
filmmakers,
lithographers.
Writers have a greater chance
of killing themselves
than any of these people.

My friends will
bring this up
over our twelfth round
of drinks
at our favorite bar
and they'll giggle
and make
snotty little bitter jokes
about it

And I
always want to say

“Hey, you know,
that’s not very funny”

WEDDING HAIKU (A FOUND POEM)

Overheard in conversation—Newark, Delaware, September 27, 1998

Liquor plus wedding
reception plus relatives
equals disaster

Sung to the tune of "The Wonderful Thing About Tiggers."

The wonderful thing about poets
are poets are wonderful things
They drink and they fuck till late in the night
and see what the daylight brings

They write and they fight and they use all their might
to try to have some fun
but the most wonderful thing about poets
is I'm the only one!

THE WONDERFUL THING ABOUT POETS

Poets hate other poets
They give us all a bad name
They suck and they suck and they suck and they suck
while I go on to fame!
Don't you write, don't you read, just go take your seat
You're ignorant, stupid and dumb

and the most wonderful thing about poets
is I'm the only one!

Now here's the bridge of my little song about
how my heart's made of fine glass – I watch
Winnie the Pooh and Piglet too
but Tigger can kiss my ass

I'm the greatest of poets you ever did see
Funny, urbane, a great wit
and if you happen to disagree
You should ask if I give a shit!

The wonderful thing about poets
is poets are always on drugs
Anti-depressants, comic suppressants
Their eyes always look like bugs

Now drugged little poets don't want any flack
We just hate the whole world you see
and the most wonderful thing about poets is
they all suck but me!

Now here's the end of my little song
Consider this before I go,
that I was real stoned when I wrote this
I'll regret it tomorrow

But 'till that fine time when I'm sober again
let me remind you before I am done
that the most wonderful thing about poets is...

I'm the only one!

She wants to be a hiphop poet
but way too white to do so
and he takes sleeping pills when he writes
because he thinks it frees up his mind
and sometimes drinks a beer with them
because sometimes he thinks he might want to die

and you and I will never love again
and that's okay with me

And he plays his Walkman as loud as it will go
when he puts his snow-covered foot

on the roving train platform
he believes if he plays it loud enough
it will shoot out his eyes and
blast everyone away
like a laser
a Pixie laser

YOU AND I WILL NEVER LOVE AGAIN

And she steals cigarettes
when she thinks no one is looking
she mutters to him
I'm drunk
but not too drunk
maybe too drunk
okay I'm too drunk
but I'm not too drunk

and you and I will never love again
and that's okay with me

And he never wanted to be a poet
but an architect
He wanted to be a dried flower
stuck in a black vase
bought for twentyfive dollars
at Urban Outfitters
and stuck in her windowsill
of the little
three cornered
uh, the three paned
the three window thing
in those Chicago apartments
that he can't name
because he's not an architect
he's a poet

And she never wanted to be a porn star
but an electrical cord
a long tight taut fifty foot bright red electrical cord
gripped by a sweaty middleaged janitor
at a community college in western Kansas
wrapping it over his fist
and down to his elbow
and back to his fist
and down to his elbow
and thrown in the back of a pickup truck
while the man sneaks off to play poker

And you and I will never love again

and that's okay with me

And he cries in her hair
in his dreams
he bites off her finger
chews it up
swallows it
in his dreams
and she is his winter coat
in her dreams
she wraps herself around his thighs
without a belt
cause who wears belts with coats anymore?

And he never meant to be a poet
and she never meant to be a poet
and you and I will never love again
and really, really,
That's okay with me.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

By 1998, my career as a literary artist had been well-established: I had made the Chicago poetry-slam team the year before, which had placed second at the national tournament; had been on National Public Radio twice and had performed locally for such venues as the Museum of Contemporary Art; had a novel out that was selling briskly, mostly through constant live appearance at slams and poetry festivals around the country; and was having sex on an insanely regular basis, a disturbing amount of times with fellow poets. With such great experiences under my belt thus far, I think it's natural that I would want to continue working in the genre; indeed, this year and the next produced not only the most amount of work of my career, but the majority of the best-written pieces as well. I was still writing other work, mind you; I completed a second novel called Creamed Corn, written in an experimental style known as 'hyperfiction' and published on the web; wrote a book of literary essays concerning such contemporary authors as Douglas Coupland and David Foster Wallace;

and of course had started the first version of my website, which at the time mostly existed as a place to promote my first novel, and to post JPEGs of my various trips. But slam poetry was especially appealing to me in these years, and I did spend a lot more time and energy on it than I did formerly or subsequently.

At the same time, a legitimate community was building in Chicago of fellow performance poets - some of them believing the same things about the world as me, some disagreeing with almost everything I said, and with a lot of friendships and a lot of fights. This was the year, in fact, that poetry slams "broke" (to borrow the term from the music industry) - when the format went from a primarily underground activity to a mainstream one, with slam poets starting to regularly appear on MTV, HBO, and in hipster commercials. (A number of my friends, in fact, got hired to perform poetry between rounds of that year's "Xtreme Games" on ESPN/ABC.) In New York and Los Angeles, of course, everyone's eye is constantly on the lookout for the big break, because in those cities you can actually get one; the right random audience member one night can get you a one-man show off-Broadway, or the hosting job of a late-night wacky cable show. In Chicago, however, where no such opportunities exist, the underground arts flourish in a way you see in neither of those other cities, and this was particularly true of the poetry community. By 1998 there were realistically at least 200 or so people regularly writing performance poetry and reading it in public each week; 80 documented live literary events being produced each month; and not one but two different newsletters being published trying to cover it all.

It was a great time to be a writer in Chicago, I think, and an exciting thing to have had a chance of which to be a part. There are few times in artists' lives, I think, to be a part of something that goes on to change the national landscape, to change the course of American artistic history in a profound enough way to be noted. With the slam rapidly doing all of this in those years, though, and with Chicago not only known as the birthplace of the slam, but the Green Mill in particular becoming this "Mecca" for poets around the world, we here in Chicago got to participate in all that a little. It helped that so many Chicago poets were doing so much touring in those days, and that we rapidly developed a reputation in other cities as the ones who drink like fish, smoke like chimneys, fuck like whores and have fights like...well, drunken poets. (In particular, Chicago poets were notorious for going to other cities and having big explosive fights with each other there.)

I suppose this is just a natural side effect of anything artistic that suddenly catches on and becomes big rapidly; there is a certain amount of incestuous behavior, as a professional circle and a social one blur into a confusing mishmash, and everyone is fairly new to the scene, fairly young, fairly good-looking and fairly adventurous (and often drunk and/or high by the end of poetry shows, allowing for much easier late-night hookups). The poetry community in Chicago was highly political as well, as was everything else in Chicago in the late 1990s; this is the home, after all, of one of the largest and most vocal gay communities in America, and things like gender and sexual orientation are not only definitions here but also political debates open to much interpretation. All kinds of craziness regarding these topics erupted in 1998, and all kinds of interesting things happened because of it; see the notes for individual pieces to learn more of the details.

NOTES ABOUT INDIVIDUAL PIECES

10 oh one this morning: A true story, and a curiously popular one among fellow poets.

Albuquerque: Written for the 1998 Albuquerque Poetry Festival. I wrote and memorized this poem in a total of six hours or something, so didn't exactly do a great job with it; I got it a lot more right two years later when I attended the Tempe Poetry Festival. (That poem can be found in *Chicago Stories* 2000.)

Arkanon: My friend Greg Gillam and I found ourselves at a music club one night, watching this horrific faux-epic retro-progressive indie-rock band, whose members were friends of one of our friends or something like that. I happened to have my laptop, so we started writing this fake history of bad prog-rock bands back and forth simply to keep us amused. This is the result.

The dirty violent little things you have done to me (and the dirty violent

little things you have yet to do): The woman who inspired this poem was to eventually inspire several other pieces as well (including "Margo says," also in this book, "Open Letters [Kathy]," and "You fuck like Sleater-Kinney," the latter two found in *Chicago Stories* 2000). Oh, Margo - are we to be forever doomed to have this intense, weird relationship that never gets

resolved? Sigh!

Eleven thoughts that will get me a penny from Amy Krouse Rosenthal:

Author Amy Krouse Rosenthal was a regular customer at the Lakeview bistro Uncommon Ground in 1998, at the same time I was a daytime chef there. Our relationship formed because of it, which is how this piece came about.

Five short poems inspired by Shag: You'll only get these if you know Shag, a fixture in the Chicago poetry scene throughout the 1990s and well into the 2000s. If you do know him, you'll laugh your ass off.

For Lisa Hemminger on the occasion of her 38th birthday: It was easy to make Lisa Hemminger happy, the legendary poet and Chicago open-mic host back in the 1990s; simply write her a poem on her birthday about how she was the greatest writer in modern history, then read it for her at her open mic. This is one of several I was to write over the years.

Getting in touch with my pain: Sadly, an absolutely true story.

Guggenheim: Man, did I find myself a lot of trouble in 1998, all of it tied in these intricate and complex ways to the poetry community. This book is full of poems about the troubles I had that year: poems designed to get specific women to sleep with me, other poems about what it was like to sleep with that woman, yet another poem about the woman screwing me over and how bad I felt. There were a lot of politics in the Chicago poetry community in the late 1990s (surprisingly enough), and especially sexual politics, even as the poets themselves were having these random different couplings with other poets every Tuesday night. I admit that I was as guilty as anyone else back then at flaming these political fires, but the amazing thing in hindsight to observe is how often it worked; how often I wrote erotic poems about women I wanted to sleep with (like this one, for example) that would lead to me actually getting laid, but only after reading it for them and an entire roomful of other people as well. Where would the world be without horny drama-loving 25-year-old artists?

I wish I were a machine: Yet another sexually-political poem, this time about the woman from "Taking a Lover" (also found in this book), and the rather unceremonious way she dumped me in public as a proto-feminist statement. Whew, this one got me in a lot of trouble.

Lance Burton died for your sins: Written for the 1998 Chicago Comedy Festival; I read this and "The tao of van halen," from my book *The Tao of Now*, also published by GAD. I got to open for Lewis Black! One of the most exciting professional moments so far of my career.

Lewinsky: I was trying to make a metaphorical point here, but not a lot of people got it back then.

Margo says: A poetic record of a road trip to St. Louis in 1998: me, the aforementioned Greg Gillam, and Andi Strickland (another drama-loving poet I was sleeping on and off with throughout 1997 and '98), there to perform with my childhood friend Tom's band at a feminist pro-choice fundraiser something or other. For us, it was basically a chance to get out of town, perform for a roomful of excited, drunk, easily impressed people, get free

drinks and food, and all of us get laid by the end of the weekend. (Well, not Greg; he was having this big long-distance phone-call fight thing all weekend with his girlfriend, which is referenced in the poem.)

My girlfriend (a found poem): Based on an actual conversation I had in a bar one night, during an “on-again” part of Andi Strickland and my on-again/off-again relationship.

None of the above (a found poem): Written for the annual “Mental Graffiti” erotic open mic. 1998 was the year Mental Graffiti moved from a rundown tavern in Lincoln Park to the trendy Madbar danceclub in Wicker Park, and suddenly the open mic had become this entirely different, much sexier thing. This, of course, should be remembered as a big part of why things started getting a lot more sexual and political in the Chicago poetry community than it had been before, because this was the time period when the poetry slam first came to national attention; the period performance poetry started appearing on MTV and HBO, and when the open mics all started migrating from rundown taverns to trendy danceclubs. It brought all us dorky poets into contact for the first time with a whole new audience of younger, better-looking poetry aficionados, which then affected the poetry community in ways not just literary.

Poems I’d write for Nike if Nike ever asked me to write poems for them: Based on an incident in 1998, where some famous poet or other got all offended when Nike tried to hire him to write some poems for one of their new ad campaigns. I, on the other hand, would’ve been thrilled to have gotten hired by Nike to write poetry, so on a whim went ahead and wrote some. You know, just in case.

Take me out (to the ballgame): Like all poets who live in Chicago, I too hope to eventually write my Great Chicago Poem; the one left behind after my death, to be compiled with Sandburg and Algren and Turkel and all the other great men of letters who have come from this city. I’ve written many over the years that have failed; this is probably the closest I’ve come yet to getting one kind of right. Maybe one day I’ll actually write my Great one. Hmm.

Taking a lover: Yet another poem about a woman with whom I wanted to have sex, which then directly led to me having sex with her as a result of reading the poem. This was the real infamous one, the relationship that was not only followed by the general public on a weekly basis, but was also mercilessly recorded by all the poets involved in question. For what it’s worth, I am sorry for my part in all the messes that occurred back then.

There oughta be a law: The concept of this poem was eventually stretched into a screenplay I wrote years later, called Sick. (The script, plus video stills from the movie, is also available in book form through GAD.)

There’s something about a girl in uniform: Probably the most well-known poem or monologue I have, mostly because it shows up real high on the list anytime someone Googles “Southwest Airlines.” Yes, the story has come to the attention of executives at Southwest; I’ve never heard from them myself, mind you, which I guess means they liked it enough to not want to sue me and have it removed.

You and I will never love again: Yet another poem about Andi Strickland, written soon after the mutual decision to stop sleeping with each other. I’ve written so many stories about Andi over the years, in fact, that I’ve published them as a separate book, [Andi.], also available through GAD.

COMPLETE PERFORMANCE WORK 1996-2004

GAD PUBLISHING Co. | CHICAGO USA
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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