

THE PUBLIC JOURNAL

*An anthology of truth.
A journal for the public.*

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

Last semester a few of us had a seminar with Professor Rosenthal. Afterward, wanting to prolong the atmosphere left by Lecia and Virginia, we would migrate to those badly lit tables in the campus center, dribbling out the last bits of conversation. “Are you going to eat that *whole* carton of ice cream? ...but wouldn’t it be funny if we did a PJ devoted *entirely* to childhood trauma?”

We were surprised by the tone that predominated. Part of the original plan was to encourage hilarity over anguish. But we found that this time many of the most valuable submissions did tend toward the serious—and that besides the big bad world, much of the pain in growing up seems to come from the detailed and bizarre neurosis we inflict upon ourselves.

This doesn’t change much as we stumble into adulthood. The nice thing about the PJ is that we are reminded that the weird shit we went though when we thought we were so alone was something we all experienced. For the really bad stuff that you sent us, our readership becomes your silent support group.

And we are still figuring out who we are. Like sixth grade, it’s great one minute and scary the next. Usually, we take ourselves too seriously. So be nice, goddamn it! Because empathy for your fellow student makes sense—ultimately we are suffering and rejoicing the same way, inside our busy little brains.

And wash your hands after snacktime.

Love,
Elien



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A Right Brain Girl

I was drawing a unicorn. No, I drew a unicorn. Past tense, and long term at that. This incident was just one of those things that stick, even if you know yourself to be older and successfully social and more attractive and more confident. Little itty-bitty things like drawings of unicorns shouldn't faze you anymore, but they somehow continue to do so. Perhaps writing it out will help. Anyway, I'm getting ahead of myself.

It was lunchtime and I had scarfed down my tuna sandwich (a whole other story of torment altogether) so the other kids wouldn't see it. Nothing was left to do but go over to the cubby where the teacher kept the overlarge pieces of flimsy gray paper. I pulled one out (bigger than my forth-grade arm span at the time) and gingerly carried the flapping mass back to my desk. After situating my canvas smoothly, letting the excess hang over the edges of the faux-wood tabletop, and clicking the lead several times in my mechanical pencil, I was ready.

Taking great pains not to smudge the emerging creature with my left hand, I drew, tongue out to the side and legs in a school-regulated khaki skirt tucked up under.

Ten minutes later, I breathed and dared to look at all of it. I'd been practicing and practicing for the past few days, striving to capture the fantastic beast that had lately caught my imagination. Something was always wrong with the others—too fat, legs in the wrong places, bad angles—but I'll be damned if it wasn't the best unicorn I've ever drawn in my life. It was prancing and delicate and altogether magical with a pretty horn and curling flowers in its mane and tail. I loved it.

Admittedly, I had a bit of a reputation in my class as an artist, so some people stopped by to look. I got a few admiring “Wow”s, and I puffed up. It's nice to be recognized at any age,



especially when you're so proud of something. A couple of boys came over, with Kyle (my sort-of crush and fellow class artist) among them. He told me he liked it, and I was over the moon. Thus distracted, my pencil was grabbed out of my hand before I even knew what happened. Stupid, stupid J.D. drew on my paper, hastily scribbling large circular forms midair and on the ground. He laughingly regaled them as "turds," showing off his revisions to the rest of my soon-to-be-hysterical classmates. Poop is really funny.

I finally got my picture back (a surprising feat, as he was way taller than I was), then worse for the wear. I gently tried to erase the offending marks, but he had pressed so hard and that kind of paper tears so easily. Elementary school egos are as easily bruised. I walked quickly out of the room, leaving my ruined masterpiece behind. I sobbed in the bathroom until the teacher came looking for me at the end of lunch.

He later attempted to fix the rips with tape, but the damage was done. Not like I was stuck in the moment or anything. I kept drawing. We actually became friendly acquaintances, even if we don't talk anymore. I truly haven't thought about it in years, but the lesson was a hard one to learn at the time. Almost invariably, when you create something beautiful in this world, someone will want to spoil it.

The Egg Fair and Rule Book

We were on a riverboat in Paris and my brother and sister started chatting to each other about the Egg Fair. I asked them innocently what the Egg Fair was and they told me that it was a festival of sorts that happened every year at the playground down the street from our house in DC. I wanted to know what happened and why I had never heard of it before. Of course I had never heard of it, they responded. I was too young to attend. In fact, I had to be 13 to be old enough and that was a ways away. But what happens there, I asked. They couldn't tell me anything. They continued to talk about the good food and the times they had had there last year. It seemed to be the event of the year every year, but I couldn't go! Why can't I go until I'm 13, I asked. Oh, it's in the Rule Book. The Rule Book?!? What's the Rule Book. It's at the Egg Fair. But that's not fair! Who writes the Rule Book? I want to see it and see why I can't go to the Egg Fair. But you can't. At least not until you're 13. That's not fair! You're a cheater!

My father was always blissfully elsewhere when the children argued. My mother had a way of dismissing me, telling me to take it up with Julia and Michael, but never actually intervening. So now these concepts, these two diabolical concepts were floating in my head in rage. How could they be allowed to do something so cool and not let me know about it? What happened at the Egg Fair? I could only imagine. Funnel Cake, Hamburgers, Orange Crush, roller coasters, star athletes, perhaps, a visit from the Ninja Turtles and a small Legoland area. I created the most beautiful children's heaven in my mind and it was the Egg Fair. Damn that cursed Rule Book!

How come you guys get to read the Rule Book? Oh, well, Julia can't, she's not old enough, but I can, and I told her what was in it. Once you go to the Egg Fair you have to know some of the rules, but you can't actually read the Rule Book. How

come you can tell her but not me??! You're not old enough. But she's not old enough to know the rules from the Rule Book! You're not old enough to go to the Egg Fair, so we can't tell you anything that's in the Rule Book. That's in the Rule Book too, big time.

I asked my mom about the Rule Book and the Egg Fair, and she seemed not to have heard of either of them. This was also stipulated in the Rule Book. Parents could not acknowledge the existence of the Rule Book or the Egg Fair until the child had come of age. Michael explained this to me very clearly. I took the route of disbelief. There is no Egg Fair, you're just making it up to make me mad. You're a cheater! Well, think whatever you want, but when you're 13 the Egg Fair will be there for you. But if you don't believe in it you can't go.

They effectively created another Santa Claus, but one who didn't pay out at all, it just tortured me with promises of "when you're older". I argue to this day with my elder siblings that I never believed in the Egg Fair, but, between you and me, I did. I've never coveted anything so hard in my entire life.







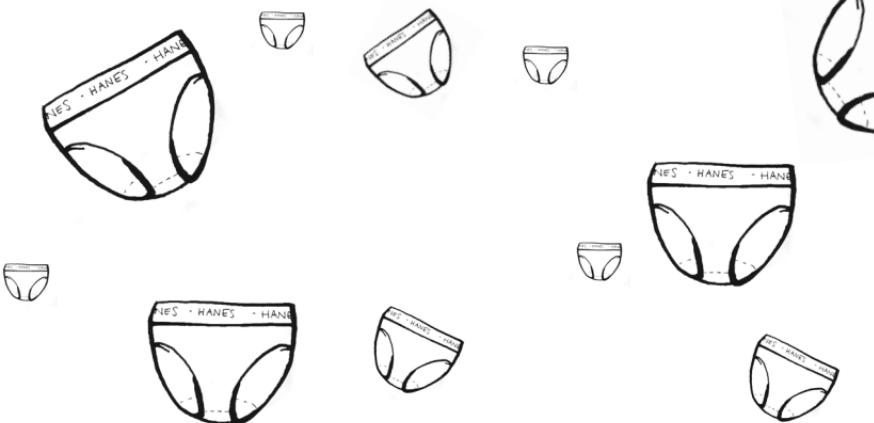
One of my most vivid childhood memories is that of my mother, standing in the middle of our 1950's suburban dead-end street, nightgown blowing in the breeze, cursing my father's back bumper as he drove away. That fight was memorable because of all the young neighborhood children present to see it. They were strewn along both sidewalks as their mothers yelled, "CAR! CAR! C-A-R!" when my father stormed out of the house and turned the ignition. I remember the Murray girls were in their church clothes. I'm sure that was the first time they'd heard the word "fuck." Leave it to my ex-Catholic mother to teach them. Those Jews.

Private Parts

Sometimes you just don't wear underwear. Not out of habit or protest, but I'm sure everyone has those days where you either "forgot" or want to air out.

I was five, it was Christmastime, and incidentally a day where for whatever reason, no undies were on my wee body. Time has blurred the more important details of this memory, but somehow Santa was in suburbia. In fact, he marched right into our living room with the usual, "Ho ho ho! I've come to see two very spe-e-cial little girls!" Well, I'll be damned if I didn't fall for the whole thing, wide-eyed and scared shitless in front of this wheezing legend who had made himself comfortable in the old La-Z-Boy armchair.

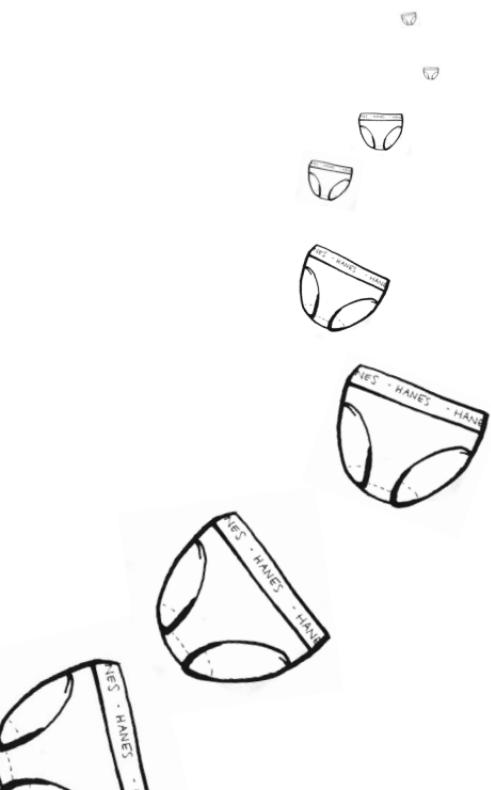
My sister went first, mounting the old bastard's thick leg and shouting some incoherent list of brands and toy products we had memorized from TV and radio jingles. I was next. However, as soon as the jolly stranger loudly invited me to climb aboard, I remembered I wasn't wearing underwear under my dress. I was too young to sort out the specifics, but I definitely knew there was something weird about having a naked vagina resting on Santa's groin.



I was torn. Something about the situation made me feel odd, bad—I thought about those public service type ditties on PBS: “Private parts are anywhere that your bathing suit covers up!” But there was no dirty Santa lap, no stuffed dog (the one where you can pull puppies through an opening in its stomach).

I decided to compromise: I wrapped my arms and dress around my crotch like some human chastity belt, and then waddled onto the red lap with much difficulty and absolute confusion from my parents. After doing my thing, describing that gruesome pregnant stuffed dog I wanted, I ran to my room and cried a little bit. I cried because I was sure Santa knew I wasn’t wearing underwear, and that made me a bad girl, though I couldn’t understand quite why...

Looking back, I’m sure he must have known because all I got for Christmas were several twelve packs of Hanes.



Confessions...

By various authors



When I was seven years old my friends called me “Professor Burper” because I had huge, round plastic glasses, got the best grades, and could burp louder than anyone in my class.

When I was 8, my mom kissed me on the mouth; I got scared that she had taken away my kiss virginity.

One of my earliest memories is jumping on the huge canopy bed set up for display in my parents’ furniture store. I would jump and jump and jump—the world smelled of poofy cotton. Gauzy white tissue cloth held the outside out—the world was an airy paradise and I was the solitary inhabitant, content jumping.

My parents always said to keep my hands to myself...but how am I supposed to give blowjobs if I keep my hands to myself?

My favorite color was turquoise and all I wanted to be was 13.

I’ll never forget the day that I tried to run away. It was just me and a pack of Dunkaroos preparing to face the Los Angeles Valley. Mommy saved me at the end of the driveway.

November 19

I think Chad likes me. He's always looking at me, acting really nice. I wish he knew I like him. I wonder what I'll get for Chanukah. I got a phone a couple weeks ago, it's an old phone. It's cool. Adam P. and Adam B. like him. Adam B. is a dick. hate his guts. He shows he likes me by trying to kill me, basically. I love Chad. I really think he likes me. On, well,

How I Lost My Childhood

I had a happy childhood; or maybe it was just that it was an uneventful one. Uneventful until I met Brooke. I was 14 years old when I started dating my first girlfriend. We met in junior high in our Teen Living class. Now I know already you're starting to think this is going to be some Disney channel, teeny bopper story, but it ends up with me drunk outside a nightclub at 5 in the morning somewhere in the Orient, but bear with me. Brooke was a shy girl and she and I never really got past a mutual crush phase until the end of the school year.

Unfortunately, her parents had gotten a divorce and Brooke's mother was moving out to Philadelphia to marry an ex-coworker and was taking the kids with her. Brooke and I hung out over the summer, trying to get some last time in before she moved away. The day she left I came over to her house to say goodbye. We hugged the awkward goodbye hug and then did what every PG-13 modern romance taught us to do, kiss. It was the first kiss for both of us. Over the next few months we kept up our friendship via AIM until one weekend when she was back home visiting her father I took her out to see Elf and I ended up asking her to be my girlfriend. I began saving up money to take a train once a month to visit her in Philadelphia. As a 14-year-old kid this was a rather big deal considering I totally could have spent the money on Ace Combat 4 or some new street hockey equipment for my neighborhood team, but no! For I was in love!

And nothing would come between me and and my Juliet. We dated for the next three years. We grew from short acne-covered teens into slightly taller less acne-covered teens. Favorite memories were: carving our names in a tree in the woods where we used to take walks, our first prom, when we lost our virginities in a shower after a day of snowboarding, running around in the pouring rain ultimately making out

in a mud puddle and not caring one bit, going to church together, sneaking over to each other's houses when she was home for the summer, jumping on the trampoline during a thunderstorm, falling asleep watching cheesy Brat Pack movies late at night, forsaking roses in place of homemade paper fishes for Valentine's Day. You get the idea.

So it's the summer after our junior year, Brooke has always struggled with depression and had trouble with making friends because of her shy nature so she decides to go on a retreat with her local church. The group goes out to some retreat house in Bumblefuck, Pennsylvania for three days. Brooke comes back on the retreat completely changed. She tells how now she feels happier than she ever has before; she has a new outlook on life, she feels more independent, she senses the presence of Jesus in her life and she made a huge group of friends that really opened up to her. But. Apparently God told her to break up with me. She said she felt that He was trying to tell her to move away from me but as of that moment she wasn't ready to do anything.

So next I hop on a plane to Shanghai, China where I would be studying for the next four weeks. I study at East China Normal taking classes in IR on Chinese culture. Three days later I get a second phone call. Brooke was leaving me. During those three days she had ended up hanging out with a boy she met on her retreat. She told me that the same heavenly feeling was pushing her to him. Brooke told me never to talk to her again, that way it would be easier to start something new with this guy. She hung up the phone. It would be the last time we would ever talk.

Three fucking days! I know she was big on the whole Christianity thing but she's not Jesus in the fucking tomb. You don't leave your boyfriend of three years for a guy you hung out with three days for. I mean Gabriel better have come down and personally handed you a handwritten request to do this. I

held her when she cried about her father getting remarried. I talked her through her depression episodes. I gave up hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars just to be with her and she goes and does this? I couldn't take it. I went to the ATM and took out all the money I had and, with 4 days left in Shanghai, I decided I would blow it all. Until then I had never gotten drunk. I didn't believe in it. Every night I'd take a cab out to a nightclub and go crazy. I'd be on the dance floor surrounded by older European girls in their slutty little miniskirts and guys with those retard David Beckham-gelled hairstyles and popped collars. I'd find some girl, buy her drinks and just dry hump with her till the world blurred. I wanted to feel that warmth of skin on skin and that spark that flashes in your lips just before a kiss.

The third night I took a girl into one of the booths bordering dance floor and fucked her while a group of J. Crew Europeans and lanky Chinese cheered me on. And while I was fucking all these girls all the emotion I thought would pour out of my skin like salty sweat, all the hate, sadness, regret, it just bottled up. No matter what I did. No matter how much I drank or how hard I fucked it just built up more and more. Like it was clogging my pours and just swimming within me. I wanted something, anything. Just some kind of catharsis that would vindicate what I was doing to myself and those around me in this smog-filled shithole of a city, but all I could see was her holding his hand, smiling, looking up into his eyes, kissing his cheek, loving him.

The last day I went to an old market in some dingy slum off the Huangpu River. I was the only tourist there, making me a prime target for apparently everyone who ever sold anything. Going through back alleys, people selling watches, swords, chickens, I ended up in what I assumed was somewhere between a brothel and a massage parlor run out of someone's basement. I paid a few hundred yuan for a handgun. I know this sounds crazy, but honestly I wasn't really in my head at

the time and it looked like the one my dad used to go shooting with at the gallery and it felt like a smart investment. Why the guy would ever sell a pistol to some American tourist is beyond me but I wasn't asking questions.

With the full intention of blowing my brains out at dawn, I went out that night for one last night of fun. I danced away in the drunken stupor to which I was now becoming accustomed before deciding to leave. Now this next part is, in my mind, by far the most vivid and morbid moment of my life and despite drinking for the entire night, the clarity with which I remember the emotions in those few minutes is unparalleled. You might take it as a little emo or over dramatic, but I'm just trying to be honest and this moment was the most major two minutes of my entire childhood. I left the club and wandered a few blocks before I paused to look up. With all the sentiments, memories, lamentations pulsing through each vein, I stared at the starless sky of the Shanghai night.

Now I don't know if you've ever been to China but at night something amazing happens around three or four o'clock. The city goes to sleep. Skyscrapers shut off all lights; cars disappear from the roads, taking all the people home to their nice warm beds. In an area with twice the population of New York, the sight of an abandoned city is haunting. No sound, no movement, just the dusty yellow glow of old streetlamps and harsh blaze of tangled neon signs. All this against that Shanghai starless sky. There, static in the empty street, alone with 15 million invisible people around me, I fell on my knees in what I think a more metaphorical person would describe as a puddle of my own apathy.

I remove the pistol from my right thigh pocket and the magazine from my left. The boy put his hands around Brooke's waist. I push the clip into the base of the gun and then pulled the slide back making the crisp metallic ca-chink you hear in every action movie. He leans in, placing his forehead against hers. I remove the safety with my thumb and then pull the

hammer back. He kisses her. I felt just like the wind was blowing right through me. She loves him. I took a deep breath and put the business end against my temple. All thoughts leave my head with blood and brain soon to follow. I looked up at the empty sky one last time. I remember thinking to myself, “it would have been nice to have seen at least one last star.” I pulled the trigger. Now I don’t know if you’ve ever been fortunate enough to hear the sound of a handgun malfunctioning while it’s pressed against your skull but in case you haven’t let me say it is a rather liberating experience.

There is nothing quite like the sound of the click a gun makes when it misfires as you are expecting a colossal and climactic BOOM! All you get is the faint ‘tink’ of metal hitting metal. Needless to say the gun didn’t work, at least not in the traditional sense. Sure the bullet didn’t go through my skull and paint my brain on the asphalt, but it did kill me at least in a small way. I was ready to go. Pulling the trigger confirmed to me that I had given up. I’m not sure I could ever explain it. Anyway, from that point on it’s rather boring, I didn’t try the trigger a second time; instead I opted to throw the gun in a nearby gutter and began walking down the street searching for a cab, leaving my childhood behind.



Musings

Apparently, when I was 10, I gave my 13-year-old neighbor a hand job. I didn't realize this until I was about 13 and I was playing Never-Have-I-Ever with my middle school girlfriends and discovered that there was a word for the sexual act I had partaken in. In retrospect, no wonder I felt so attached to him for weeks following. In a sense I was kinda impressed with myself, like I'd kinda discovered handjobs. Kinda. I didn't have my first kiss until years later.

Then there was the time I found the clipped out article on my mom's bedroom floor entitled, "The Children of Divorce." Sure, maybe the fact that my mom had her own room should have tipped me off. But my dad did snore really loudly.

I've been clinically depressed since I was 12. Does that count as trauma? I've found it kind of traumatic. Especially in those early years, in middle school, you wanted it to be traumatic for the attention. Now I'm in college and I'd trade any attention I get for it to not be so fucked up. Oh well. Devil's deal.

When I was younger, I couldn't sleep over anywhere. I had attachment anxiety. I was able to overcome it by age 16, once I realized there wasn't much I wanted to be attached to at home.

When I was 4 I stole a fake gold rock from my friend. This secret haunted me until I realized it wasn't a very unique piece of merchandise— a gold-painted rock that is. Unfortunately, it meant I remained guilt-ridden until the age of 9. It was a tough five years, but what a revelation!

The Shame Game

I'm a sixth grader. I have no idea what shame is. I'm confident, and have somehow managed to remain oblivious to "popularity" and other such social expectations until now. I raise my hand in class as often as I want to and speak in a wise, arrogant tone when answering the teacher's questions. My voice is no quieter or more subtle when I chat with my friends while the teacher lectures. I'm cool, and smart. Obnoxious, and well-liked. There are no limits.

I am also short, and kind of scrawny. I am the head of a porcelain doll atop a board for a chest and two toothpicks for legs. If we put that head on another body it might be fantastic, even popular. As it is, it is the bobble-head of the Madi doll you could stick onto your dash-board. Goofy. I don't mind my role. I'm funny. An actress. Lots of friends, well-liked. The boys are changing though. The louder I am the less they like me. They want me to giggle at their jokes, not the other way around. I'm the class-clown, a show-off. Girls can't be class-clowns or show-offs. They need to blush when they're not afraid to look at you, and giggle when they're not afraid to talk to you. I blush and I giggle—but I'm terrified of looking at or speaking to boys.

There is one boy I make myself talk to. He is Alex. He liked me last year, and says he doesn't anymore. I turned him down when he asked me to the big fifth grade dance. But we play footsie. We reminisce about that time that our families ran into each other randomly all the way across the country at the Grand Canyon. He is tall and dark, with the nicest smile, whitest teeth. He giggles as much as I do when we talk. I love his goofy giggle.

He also stares at me from across the room. We play a staring game. It is the most intense game I have ever played.

I can sense his eyes on my back when I'm turned the other way. When we make eye-contact my face becomes warm and I feel as if I've swallowed a loaded pin cushion. My head loses weight. We stare and stare for minutes which are like days. And then I read his mind. I know when he is coming up to sit at the empty desk next to me at the front of the room. I know when he is going to say something to me and I know basically what he is going to say. He will compliment my sweatshirt or my necklace, and he'll blush if he really likes what I'm wearing. Then sometimes he'll hide under the desks at the back of the room. It's a blue room with white blinds on the windows. When he hides, grinning and giggling, he shades himself from the bright atmosphere; yet, to me—warm pink cheeks, shining white teeth, bleached blond dreads—he seems to retain his own special glow.

It's April Fools' Day. I don't realize it. I never pay attention. I come into school, normal Madi outfit—fuzzy blue pants, Doc Martins, nice white shirt, hair in a head-band. Someone reminds me it's April Fool's Day. I get overly excited. We can't MISS this opportunity to cause some mischief! I make a big scene. I'm an actress. I come up with what sounds like a plan to avoid doing work for the day. Really it is an excuse for me to perform.

In our grade's blue pod, packed with rows of shiny blue lockers in the center, my friends begin to congregate around me at the periphery, just in front of my classroom. Kelly brings me a white piece of cloth with blue trim to throw over my head. It's been in her locker, lord knows why. Someone also hands me a scarf, to wrap around it, tying my costume together. Kelly, just as thin as I, with similar buggy-eyes but a much more athletic build, giggles nervously in what seems like support. The boys that look on, sleek hair hanging just over their eyes, ask, "What are you doing?" They are still smiling, most of them assuming or at least hoping that something worth their while is in store.

The bell is about to ring. I am completely transformed. My classmates file into the room, I behind them, feeling sneaky. My stomach assumes its pincushion as I realize I have no idea what I am doing. April Fools? I have no idea what that's supposed to mean. I know I am supposed to pull a prank— but what I am about to do isn't really a prank— it's just . . . strange.

All my peers are seated. Suspicious looks assault my make-shift robe and headdress. But I'm committed. Slowly, as the bell rings, I hobble up to my teacher, seated at her desk in the corner. She wears big thick glasses, her hair short, colorless, and permed, her body large and round and her clothes covered in cat hair.

Somehow, I've managed to look even more bizarre than she. Facing her, the air is completely static against my body, and I hear only meager shufflings and whispers behind me in the room. I have entered a bubble, pink around the edges of my vision, a circle surrounding the image of my curious lump of a teacher behind her strong, white, metal desk. She is perplexed, maybe angry.

What the HELL am I doing? There is no turning back now. It will be funny. A good April Fool's prank.

"HELLO? Are you Mrs. Paetzel?"

No answer.

"I am Mrs. Shabooboo. I was told that you were absent! Oh, my. I'm supposed to be the substitute for today."

I speak in a shrewd voice, low but slightly trilled, lips pursed. I am very serious to begin with, but as the class begins to react, my face turns warm, and I giggle a little here and there. Kelly supports me at first, more than willing to cackle at this bizarre display. A few of my other girlfriends join her. Oh, that Madi.

Anne, even thinner than I but somehow insanely popular, rolls her eyes and yells out, "Oh my God!" But for the time being, it is a sign of endearment. She is, after all, as close a casual friend to me as Kelly, or anyone else in the class. A few of the guys laugh under their breaths and shake their heads. Alex doesn't know what to do. He turns red, giggles involuntarily as if he were merely hiccupping, and then tries to resume a straight face, over and over. The rest of my classmates are silent. Not amused. Already annoyed.



Mrs. Paetzel strains behind her glasses as if she is honestly trying to figure out who I am and what I am doing in her class. For a whole minute, she says nothing. Then finally, releases a hearty, Santa-like laughter. "Madi!" she says, turning pink, probably still not sure whether she should be angry or not.

"Well," I continue, maintaining my character voice, "It is April Fool's Day."

I'm not really sure what I expect to happen next, but I realize that I am wasting valuable class time, and I am thoroughly pleased with myself.

"All right, then." Mrs. Paetzel plays along, pleased with

herself. “Why don’t you teach the class for a few minutes?”

Not thinking, merely lost in a fabulous game of pretend, my favorite of all games, I take chalk to the chalk board. I talk nonsense and perform for the class as if I am a strange woman from a foreign land who desperately wants the approval of the students before her. It isn’t far from the truth. I don’t notice my peers losing interest. Their increased shufflings, mutters under their breaths, rolled eyes not with me but at me. I thank God for the persistent, if not genuine support of my friend Kelly, who continues to laugh to fill the uneasy time and space.

Before I know it, the next bell has rung. We are off to math, I and many of my same classmates. Alex is one of them. In math, he sits with the cool guys, half of whom I get along with, the other half who find me irritating and seem to wish that I didn’t exist. They collect at the front of the room, on the floor, as there isn’t enough desk space for all thirty of us in the advanced class. I am at a table in the back next to two preppy cool-girls who seem to adore me. And of course, I am still in costume, and in character.

One boy from Mrs. Paetzel’s class, short, thin, scrawny, nerdy, opens his baby-face and shouts “Madi, come up and be Mrs. Shabooboo!” Increasingly aware that the joke might be getting old, I hesitate, trying to make him look like the loser. But eventually, out of sheer boredom and a dire need to reassure myself that I am funny, I go up to the front of the second room. This time, the act is not remotely well received.

I write my name on the chalk board. My real one, for some reason, maybe to tone down the humor. Seconds later, my math teacher, a tall, thin, brown-haired father of a man, politely but abruptly asks me to sit down. “All right, Madi, that’s enough. You’ve got a lot of work to accomplish today.”

In that small, unsuccessful moment I have completely humiliated myself. The cool boys snicker. Alex turns red

again, but says and does nothing. As I return to my seat, my peers begin to bustle, the hum of conversation in the place of assigned classwork. I keep my head down, eyes focused on my work sheet. All seems forgotten.

But towards the end of the class, the cool boys raise their voices. They laugh loudly, obnoxiously. One of them, venomous, puts on a show for me. He projects, "HA HA! Who would EVER date Madi! What a weird girl." I look up to the board, and notice the short, skinny, nerdy boy writing "...is a loser" next to my name. He gets applause from the cool guys. Alex, still warm in the face, is cracking up.

Back in my homeroom, Mrs. Paetzel's class, I pass Alex's desk at the front on the way to my chair in the rear. A few stray voices still call out for Mrs. Shabooboo as my peers adjust to their seats. Alex and I have locked eyes, but he looks away. Still blushing, he is giggling in an unfamiliar way. I find myself confronting him.

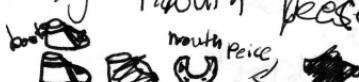
"What? What's your problem? You thought it was funny before."

He does not answer. He remains hysterical for another long interval, then finally forces his face to take on a serious posture. Now he giggles defensively between thoughts.

But I don't hear his words. I am a joke. He does not mean to hurt me. He can't help himself. But I am angry that he wants to be cool, and leave me behind.

Alex and I do not stare at each other much after that. I do not talk aloud boldly in math class. I do not pretend I am not afraid of boys, but I do not blush or giggle when they look at me or speak to me. I just act angry and shrink away. I am achingly aware of the social hierarchy, and like all middle schoolers, I begin to long for my share. The more I long, the more I seem to lose. I am in sixth grade. I know what shame is.

how do you spell that gall
darn, word~~s~~ anyway?! My teacher
said at parent teacher conferences
that I could work on my spelling
some, but besides that I'm a straight
A's student! even on my spelling
test. But just not on papers
and reports.

~~Karate~~ KARATE
is good too, but I still don't
have my uniform, (Gie) or my ~~gloves~~
gloves, or my head gear, only
my mouth piece and my boots:
 Oh well some
day, IN The 50th Centry!
One of my best friends is
talking Karate now too!

Confessions continued....

By various authors

In Preschool, the highlight of my day was showing my underwear to my friend to see if we were wearing matching pairs.

I had a cat and named her Tammy. I had a pony and named her Tiffany.

I am a male-loving female, and in my first fantasy, I was not a princess, but a prince. I'm pretty sure I saved a Rapunzel-like princess from a tower, too.

It was really embarrassing when my swim instructor had to tell me that my ass was hanging out of my Speedo. That reminds me, I really miss wearing Speedos.

I used to fantasize about becoming the “Tetris Attacks” champion of the world.

While both my parents instilled in me that I could be anything I truly wanted to be, my mother always reminded me that it was good to wash my feet at the end of the day, as no one likes people with stinky feet and it is hard to get ahead in the word with pungent toes.

I used to purposefully injure my friends just to see what happened.

In sixth grade I would fantasize about balling my various crushes on hilltops. A usual element of the daydream was me being chained to a tree. And then having a picnic.

I still have trouble tying my shoes; seriously guys, it is a lot harder than it looks.



Hungry Eyes

A few weeks ago, a couple of beers into a wholly unfruitful night of jukebox hogging and wit calisthenics with smarmy guys with names like Ralph, I was suddenly stricken with an idea. I turned to my girl friend and said “Do you remember life before the male gaze?” For every woman there was a time before the male gaze. There was a time when you could walk into a room (or into any situation where the grown men might ostensibly flock like the salmon of Capistrano) without feeling at least one Y chromosomal eye in the act of mental undressage. A time when the idea of “turning someone on” made about as much sense as Pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis.

The male gaze changes everything for a girl. It’s like one day you’re frolicking along without a care in the world, and then suddenly BAM you’re anointed with all this power. You start getting secret smiles. Grown men start telling you that they want to “drink your bathwater.” Whereas a few years back, boys were just other people who would pick their noses with greater gusto and ask you to play April in games of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, one day everything changed. Boys became the vast unknown. Great white planets whose every grunt suddenly seemed pregnant with the secrets of a million universes.

I mean, I’ve always had a fascination with boys. I remember trying to get a pre-school boyfriend to play Eric to my Little Mermaid Ariel and kiss me in the middle of my Rec-room floor. Sadly, little Mars Bars never garnered any male reciprocity. For the most part my advances were greeted with a resounding “no way.” Then one day

everything changed, and that was the end of the world as I knew it.

The male gaze made its grand debut when I was eleven. The night prior to this fateful juncture I had been featured as one of Santa's adorable singing reindeer in a cruise ship Christmas production of Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer. The next night I was hanging out on the lido deck—a seventeen year old Rhode Islander named Duane's hand on my ass and a beer in my hand. This unwitting blind stumble into the world of adulthood was precipitated by my lying about my age in order to hang out with the older kids. I said I was thirteen. Fair game for a seventeen year old.

The night of Duane I had met a fourteen year old Canadian hottie named Celeste who smoked du Maurier cigarettes and wore glitter on her eyelids. We were instant friends. We both loved Jamiroqaui. She told me what third base was like. I agreed with her. I bullshitted what I imagined to be a real “teenagery” eye-rolling detachment and strutted through the teen nightclub with her like a girl who could even conceive of what third base was. A table of boys, who seemed like big hulking men, invited us over to sit with them. The biggest of all seemed to cotton to little ole me immediately. He picked me up and spun me around. “You must weigh like 70 pounds. I could just throw you around.” I had no idea that this was probably being said with lascivious intentions. I just held on tighter and buried my head in his neck. He put me down, and I'll never forget the look he gave me. It was a look like he wanted to eat me—the look I imagined the wolf gave to Little Red Riding Hood. Suddenly I kind of understood on some visceral level what was going on. I didn't know

the logistics of what this boy exactly wanted to do, but I did know, one some instinctual plane, that he wanted to possess me. That my body was doing something to his mind and body in order to make him look at me with those eyes. Never one to be afraid, I agreed when the boys said we should come out to the deck with them.

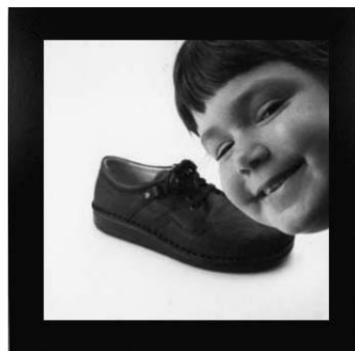
Duane walked slowly next to me looking at me with those same crazy eyes which must have done the same thing to myriad girls before me. Celeste whispered in my ear “Duane probably wants to hook up with you. Go for it. He’s cute!” Now, that was the first time I also ever heard the term “hook up.” Hooking up was what my mom did with her mah-jongg friends when she wanted to meet with them for lunch. “Let’s hook up tomorrow Carol!” was a common phone sign-off for Ilene. Duane wanted to hook up? That’s so nice. We could go to the seafood buffet together tomorrow.

We all settled out on the deck and I feigned aplomb when Duane handed me a beer. I knew that I had to act cool. I knew that this boy could never ever possibly know what a huge square I was. This was also my first introduction to the essential seductive art of marketing yourself as something you’re completely not. I assumed the role of a girl of thirteen who had kissed legions of boys, drunken beer thousands of times, and knew how to field those meaningful glances this boy (who might have well have been a forty year old man) was doling out with the avidity of a Mexican busboy. I giggled when he spoke and voila, like magic, one hair-covered paw managed to find its way to my derriere. I was too embarrassed to remove it. My natural impulse was to swat, swat, swat, and then run like the wind, but my burgeoning social awareness told me that this would be the lamest thing I could possibly do.

So I stood there silently with this foreign male uber-claw just kind of invading my precious little butt. His mere touch made me feel dirty—like I needed 20 baths even though I had just showered that night. I also felt kind of, well, good. Feelings I didn't even know existed managed to permeate and subsequently blow my tiny little eleven-year-old mind into orbit. At eleven your emotional palette still errs on the limited side. Desire, shame, fright, and the desire to excite suddenly inked up in ridiculously brilliant sub-spectral hues. I would spend the next ten years intellectualizing these feelings and, let me tell you, they still don't really make a whole lot of sense. We grasp at each other's bodies at night without any viable intellectual explanation of why we're doing that. And you know what?

Rationalism kills it all. Every time I get mentally undressed I feel like that eleven year old again. Totally unsure of what I'm embarking upon, or why, but still an active participant in the game. That night my corybantic mother (oh yeah, I had snuck out of my room) found me and saved me from the grips of this wily seventeen-year-old phalla-monster. It wasn't until a few years later that I would actually have my first real kiss.

However, this first taste of the “other world,” never left me—even in those years of sexual dormancy when I pretty much returned back to being a normal kid. I still think that if adulthood can be defined, for woman, as the first time she exists under the male gaze I lost my childhood on a ship deck.





K-a-r-m-a S-u-t-r-a

Lying there, between the packs of funny-smelling incense and boxes of matches, was the affront to all of my youth and innocence. Only seconds earlier, when I had listlessly pulled open the drawer of her bedside table (the boredom of those long summer days having taken its toll on my imagination), I was expecting half-used notebooks and maybe a crumpled chocolate wrapper, pencils mixed with sketches drawn with a shaky hand. In short, I thought that the contents of such drawers couldn't be anything but identical to the squirrelled collection I knew waited jumbled in my own nightstand.

That table was wicker and had a glass top to protect against thoughtlessly placed glasses of milk and stray breadcrumbs. It had a sole drawer, tucked above the curved legs. Keeping guard on top was a plain lamp, classically nondescript. Rising in a single, collaged mass on the wall behind it loomed my work in progress, a mural of clipped newspaper photos, blurred photographs, song lyrics and India ink drawings from art. You can't be alone if you're surrounded with color and the vibrancy of happy moments past.

Back in that fateful place next to the mirrored closet doors, I gaped at what my curiosity had unearthed. As it stared me unblinkingly in the face, I became extremely uncomfortable. A strange warming sensation spreading out along the lines of my gangly limbs mimicked the shudder that rocked my little body, head to toe. Nausea, disbelief. Help me. Like a magnet, it drew me in. My hand reached out for it, in spite of myself.

Inside, the pages didn't look anything like those of my sterile Girls' Guide to Girls— they were fascinating nonetheless. Here were tinted drawings and watercolors of men and women wrapped together in strange contortions, their heads facing one way and their bodies another. Hands were doing indecent,

curious things. Dark patches of hair sprouted on them where none should ever be. Gross, gross, I thought, and kept turning the pages.

In the distance, from the foyer beyond the off-white hallway, came the muffled slam of the door. Quickly, I shoved the book back into its sordid resting place and skipped out of the master bedroom's double doors, slipping into my room as my step-dad came around the corner. I shut my door and flung myself onto my bed, facedown in my orange flannel pillowcase. Everything is ruined now. Everything is different, I whispered to the fabric.

There may or may not have been a bottle of lube (massage oil?) tucked in with the matches and incense. I can't remember, probably because I blocked it out. But I do know that the peculiar scent that rose out of that drawer (some unique combination of dust, matchbooks and oil) has stuck with me to this day, and occasionally I'll walk through the cloud of scent hanging outside of a hippie thrift store or Bath and Bodyworks and shudder, because finding your mom's sex book when you're 13 isn't something you're going to readily forget, despite your best efforts.



The Little Cunt

At 15, summer was fun, filled with parties and living as if there was no tomorrow. We were all little nymphs to the older men sitting around the bar, dancing seductively and blinded to all consequences.

It started as a joke, a celebration for a friend's birthday, drinking and dancing on the bar, moving our girlie bodies more provocatively than the most experienced strippers, downing tequila shots with the birthday boy, and soon tequila shots offered to us by men of all ages. Birthday celebrations call for a show, but instead of watching, we were it.

I was wearing a white bikini, which I never wore again, and a white sarong, and was being hosed down by jugs of water thrown at us by the barmen, making my body visible to all. The dancing made me sweat and I was sticky as hell, but I didn't stop dancing with the other three girls on the bar. Around sunset, when people started leaving and we couldn't stop laughing, we threw ourselves in the sea to cool off. There was a sensation— knowing for the first time that we could be little sex machines and had power over men. We were so drunk and felt so powerful. I fell in the water face down, and did not stand up, did not breath until my friend turned me around and pulled me out, laughing harder than I could hear. I felt nothing but numbness and music.

Walking back, sand stuck all over our bodies, we thought we owned the world. We were just looking for the next party, the next challenge and dare.

When I got home I was met by my Dad. He had an expression on his face I was unable to translate. I thought it was expressionless, but now I understand it was so much pain and anger and disappointment and wrath and sadness and

disgust that if anyone of them prevailed I would have been broken into pieces.

All he did was ask me, "Did you enjoy moving your cunt around for starving old men who would have every right to fuck you right there on that bar today? What do you think? That I raised a little whore that is just good for exciting men? Because *that*, I could find anywhere." He turned around and as he left he said "I was there too, your Mom was there, everyone was there, we went for a drink and we found little bitches on a bar." It took years to get over that, and I have never been on a bar since.



Safety Gear

In fourth and fifth grade I played on an all boys travel soccer team. And I wore a cup.

Let me explain. Not only did I wear a cup— I wore one happily. I wasn't just the only girl on my team, but the only girl in the league. The rules stated that all players were to wear cups. So, my parents went into my older brother's dresser and lent me his old one, as if allowing your daughter to wear a cup was completely normal. Granted, I stopped wearing one after a couple of games, but the damage had already been done.

In hindsight, I blame my parents. Dude, were you guys serious? What kind of parents encourage their fourth grade daughter to wear a cup?

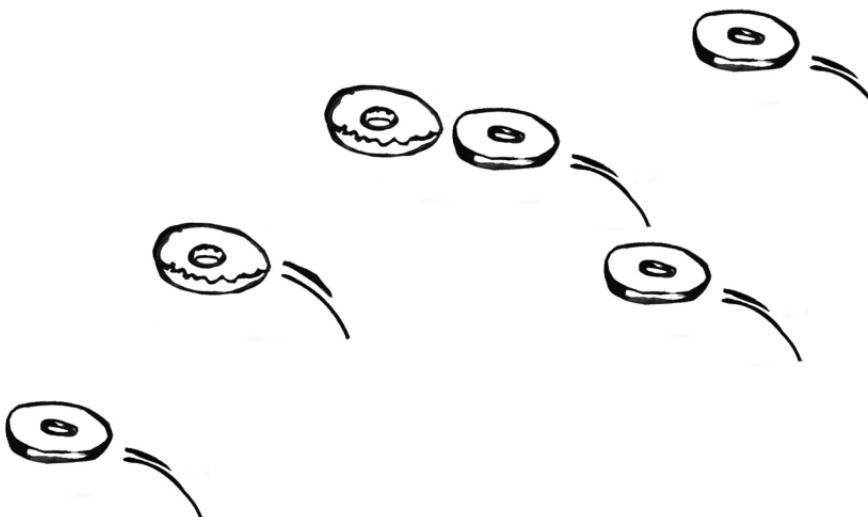


Donut Camp

I remember the summer after fourth grade, my first summer at sleep-away camp, the nursing staff came up to the bunk one morning and announced that we were all to be weighed. Ten ten-year-old boys scrambled out of the log cabin. Nine of them were just listening to the nurse's request; one of them was shitting his pants. That was me. I knew I was the fattest kid in the bunk. I pushed to the front of the line, thinking that I could get this done as quickly as possible, no one would have to know my weight. After I stepped on the scale the nurse looked at me quizzically and told me I weighed 106 lbs. Hey—I didn't think it was that bad!

No matter, no time to think about this—I had to run back to the bunk before everyone started asking me what I weighed! Ten minutes later all the other boys were back trading poundage. Numbers like 75 and 87 and even a 66 were flying across the room. I hastily put my Walkman on and pressed play on my "A Chorus Line" cassette. Nevertheless, upbeat show tunes didn't drown out one of my friends when he asked me suspiciously, "Hey, how much did you weigh?" I replied nervously attempting pre-pubescent nonchalance, "Um...92?" I prayed that I could get away with this. No one had seen and if anyone had, wasn't it so obvious and pathetic that I was lying? Unfortunately, my logic didn't work out. The boy responded with a nerdy accusation. "No you don't weight 92 lbs, I saw that you weigh 106!" Enter Laughter at My Expense. That's the appetizer of the worst memory of my childhood. Dig into the entrée.

Fast-forward two years. Now I'm twelve. At this point I've been lucky enough to develop some boy-titties. It's not like I'm fucking fat, I just am kinda chubby and majorly awkward looking. One day that summer my bunk was playing water polo against another bunk. My bunk was such a bunch of

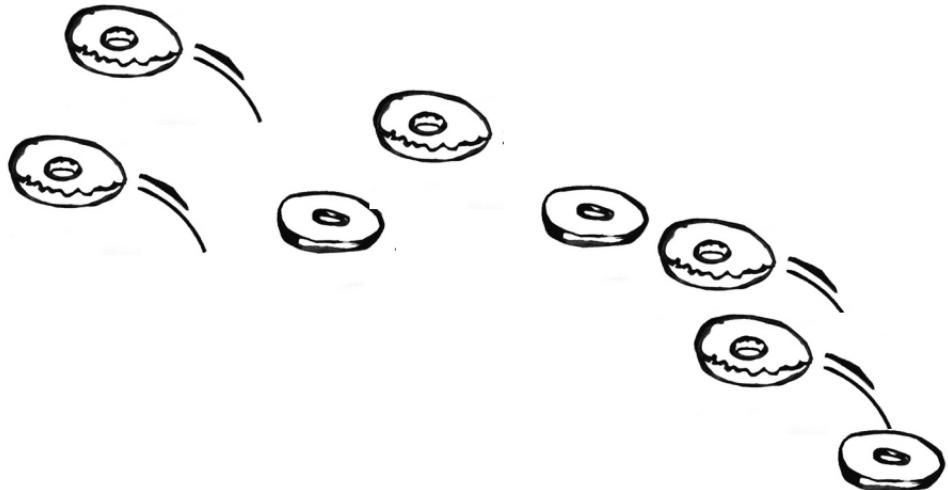


pussies, we always sucked at sports. But we were good at water polo and intended to beat the other cooler, more athletic kids. However, cool kids being cool, they decided that they would not play the match so it would be impossible for my bunk to win. This made it impossible, essentially, for us to have anything to lord over them (oh the powers of the cool kids). This was, needless to say, incredibly frustrating.

I was not going to take this. Back on dry land, I told the leader of the cool bunk that I knew what he was up to and I wasn't going to take it (I imagine myself looking like Jane Fonda). There I was, 12 years old, at this point many more than 106 lbs, shaking my finger, stamping my feet and telling this cool fucking kid off! Damn! Did I feel good! Just wait.

Immediately, I was surrounded. Where my other pussy bunkmates went I will never know. The cool kids formed a circle around me and began taunting me. "What? You think we couldn't have beaten you, fatty?" "Shut up loser, you're just pissed because you suck at sports and you have tits." Here's my favorite: "The only reason you're good at swimming is because you're such a whale!" Aren't kids literally the meanest?

But listen, I think of myself as a spitfire so I responded in kind, especially to the leader, Robby. I mustered all my



12-year-old know-how and tried to think of the most insulting thing I could say to him: "You know what Robby! At least my brother didn't get kicked out of camp for smoking pot!" A hush falls over the crowd. Everyone's thinking, "You did not just go there. Oh, yes you did." It was one of those moments, which is so laughable in retrospect, but at the time felt so serious, so clear that I had really dug the knife in deep. But what was I supposed to do?

Counselors broke up the circle, we all headed back to our bunks, and I hoped and prayed that this was all at an end. Later that night, as we were all preparing to get into bed and do some gay camp shit like sing a song or eat marshmallows and pretend we weren't from suburbia, I hear people knocking on the cabin door. I go to the cabin door because I hear my name being yelled. "Hey! We want to talk with you! Get out here!" When the door was opened, I felt something hit my head. It wasn't hard, but it had a very familiar scent about it. I put my hand to my head and then sniffed my fingers: chocolate? What the fuck? They threw a fucking chocolate Entenmann's donut at my head – and more were coming! I got pelted with 4 or 5 chocolate grenades before my counselor Jesse came outside. I'm convulsing in tears, alone basically. This is humiliating – they threw donuts at me! Donuts! At me!

Confessions continued...

By various authors

Unlikely trauma: I've never walked in on my parents having sex. By the time I knew the concept, they weren't having any.

In kindergarten my best guy friend and I would play war. The object was for him to kill me, and then see how long I could bare to hold my breath inside of a small, closed cupboard. Kinky.

When I was 5 years old, I would always play with my belly button. I used to have an outie and one day when I pushed it in it got stuck. I've been an innie ever since.

I used to daydream about Kevin Arnold from the Wonder Years. Wait. Who am I kidding? I still do.

I loved chewing on Pearler Beads. But I would blame it on the dog when my friends weren't able to make their designs because of the amorphous shapes.

I played footsie when I was in second grade, and I was convinced that I had engaged in sexual intercourse.

I thought up 69 in the fifth grade, before I really even knew what sex was. It just seemed like a good idea at the time . . .

I know there are a lot of horrible things that can happen to a child, but nothing beats hearing your parents having sex at the age of 9. Well, except for seeing them having sex. Oh yeah, and it wasn't a one time thing. That's why I hate going home. Period.

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF WHITEFISH BAY
REPORT CARD
GRADES 4-5

ATTENDANCE				
Quarters	1	2	3	4
Days Absent	1½	2		
Times Tardy			1	

SPELLING

Achievement	1	2	3	4
Effort	1	1	1	

Completes assigned work
Understands concepts
Works with accuracy
Applies spelling skills in all areas

✓

EXPLANATION OF MARKS

Level of Achievement

Grades shown indicate student's progress relative to grade level curriculum

- A — Outstanding
- B — Above average
- C — Average
- D — Below Average

MATHEMATICS

Achievement	1	2	3	4
Effort	1	A	A	

Completes assigned work
Knows basic facts
Understands concepts taught
Applies reasoning ability to problems
Works with speed and accuracy
Participates in class discussion

Effort (Academic Area)

In our best observation of your child's ability his/her effort is considered:

- 1 — Exceptional
- 2 — Satisfactory
- 3 — Needs strengthening

SOCIAL STUDIES

Achievement	1	2	3	4
Effort	1	A	A	

Completes assigned work
Understands vocabulary and subject content
Obtains and understands information from materials other than the printed word
Participates in class discussion

Skills Area

- (✓) — Indicates a need for improvement
- (-) — No mark indicates satisfactory progress

SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Achievement	1	2	3	4
Effort	1	A	A	

Completes assigned work
Understands vocabulary and subject content
Participates in experiments
Participates in class discussions

COMMENTS: 10/25 Sarah is an excellent student who puts forth exceptional efforts in all areas! She has a beautiful smile! Continue your superior work.

1/19 Sarah worked very hard on her social studies project and took great pride in what she did! MS. TRPNKIR

Swim Lessons

I have worried my parents about my sexual orientation since I was four years old. Because I am the youngest child, the baby sister, I always wanted to do everything my older sister did. She started gymnastics, I started gymnastics. She did ballet, I wore tutus around the house. She stayed up past 8:00, I wanted to stay up past 8:00. So, when my older sister started taking swimming lessons, it was only natural that I began my swimming career as well. Unfortunately, I was not able to have the same swimming teacher—her teacher was John, my teacher was Margaret. As the swimming lessons progressed, my sister began to form a bit of a crush on John. She thought she was in love—a romantic at the age of seven.

Conversation around the dinner table:

Mom [addressing my sister]: You're quiet tonight, what's wrong?

Sister: I can't stop thinking about John...

Me: I can't stop thinking about Margaret...





The dry humping was hot. His body was writhing on top of mine as I grabbed his tight ass. We were young back then so I suppose everybody had tight asses—but his was especially firm and it drove me wild. Soon thereafter he went down on me in a pretty vigorous manner. Mind you, vigorous isn't always a good descriptor, but in his case it was; his tongue worked magic as I moaned out like a cheap prostitute. Then, for the very first time, I felt like I was going to cum. Of course I was only twelve years old, so my conception of what it meant to cum was extremely limited. I knew what sperm was of course (I learned that in "The Video" way back in 5th grade) but I didn't know what cum looked like, what it felt like to cum, or what would happen after I did cum. I told him to stop and went to the bathroom and started to stroke myself. It wasn't a particularly good feeling as I was not actually close to cumming. Instead, I had to pee—but this is beside the point. When I stood there over the toilet stroking my erection I expected to see sperm come out. Like, one sperm. That was my conception of cumming—that one large sperm after another would pop out of my penis and I would see them swim around in the toilet and somehow this would be a pleasurable experience. Needless to say, I'm quite glad that the reality turned out to be vastly different.



Dear Diary-ea,

Have you ever felt that the weight of the world was on your shoulders? Well that's how I felt today, except it was in my pants. The scatological misadventure had begun with great promise: my nanny shepherded my siblings and me into our SUV in the early AM hours of a weekend day. Destination: that mecca of faux-cool mid-class midlife crisis: Ikea.

By the time we arrived, it actually was lunchtime. Perfect, because I was hungry and their meatballs looked tempting. It turns out that they were tempting like Eden's forbidden fruit, except instead of enduring the pain of childbirth for eating them, I'd instead just shit myself in the middle of the linens aisle.

Indeed, there I was, unsuspectingly feeling some finery or another between my fingers (and mercifully separated from my familial entourage) when suddenly and without any warning or provocation whatsoever, I apparently had a load for mama. I was entirely as shocked as you are, Diary-ea. By the grace of God I had worn briefs that day, so dribbling was contained. My panic, however, was not.

Okay, I thought to myself, yes there is doodoo where there oughtn't be. It could be worse! For instance, I could have been stalled in an elevator with someone from the school newspaper. Still though, as I saw a sibling amble around a corner, I started walking (squick, squick) rapidly (squick, squick, squick) in the opposite direction.

A young couple with too many carts had me briefly cornered, until, of course, they got a whiff of my unleft leavings. As he gagged and her eyes teared up, I scooted between the obstacles and made a run for the bathroom. In which, of course, every stall was taken. When finally someone left I locked myself

inside, suddenly faced with a daunting challenge. Without a doubt, I would have to undress completely from the waist down, shoes, socks and all, remove a generously padded pair of underwear, clean myself up as best I could, do something with the evidence and get dressed again.

If the IKEA bathroom was any indication, the Swedes are tiny, gnome-like creatures. I began this arduous process in little more than an upright coffin, intensely aware that people around me were milling about. But what was my choice? With my unbespoiled clothing off to one side, I, with the grim determination of a coroner inspecting a mangled corpse, slid the offending garment off my body completely. The carnage was gruesome, and it left greasy streaks on my legs as it went down.

I exhausted the roll of toilet paper. There I was, buck-naked from the waist down, in a stall at Ikea, wiping poop from my ankles. (Yes, I did cry silently). I finished as best I could, replaced my pants and shoes, flushed one last time and was left with my nemesis. They were just sitting there, briefs that had once been white. What to do? I determined that simply leaving them where they were, on top of the toilet tank, was a terrible idea; with the amount of traffic around me, I realized that they would have to be completely hidden. What I needed, really, was to buy myself only enough time to wash my hands and run out of the restroom. So, carefully, quietly, I lifted the lid upon which the underwear was resting and simply let them slide into the water tank.

I saw someone enter my stall as I was walking to the sinks. Praying for a number two, I realized that I did not have very much time. I raced through the motions, left and didn't look back.

The rest of the day was spent avoiding people I thought might recognize me as the shitter. On our ride home a residual waft compelled the nanny to chastise my sister for having

stepped in dogshit. Honestly, she said, how could you find shit at Ikea? Well, Diary-ea, I guess sometimes you just have to make your own. Memories, that is.



Anal Stage Stories

....by various authors



So apparently, I never understood you were supposed to shit in the toilet. My mom, fed up with my “accidents,” forced me to wash my own “accident” filled Mickey Mouse Tighty Whities. I have now switched to boxers, shiver at the sight of ‘Tighty Whities,’ and relish my time on the porcelain throne.

After months of training— learning not to pee outside during recess and receiving permission to drink from water fountains—I got chicken pox my first day of school in America. I scratched like hell and peed near the swings. My parents got a note from the principal.

* * * * *

My earliest memory is of scampering down the hallway of my old house at roughly age three, wearing a diaper full of poop.

* * * * *

If pooping your pants is cool, consider me Miles Davis. I was sitting in class in first grade when I had the sudden urge to poop. Without informing my teacher of my desperate situation, I darted out of the class and headed towards the bathroom. Despite a valiant effort to make it to the restroom on time, I had failed. I sat on the toilet and cried, having no idea what to do with myself. As tears ran down my face, I ran to the nurse to inform them of my misfortune and to get a new pair of pants.

Unfortunately, this was during my “fatter” days and the nurse did not have any pants that fit. With my options limited, I had to get a pair of pants from my principal (who was not a slim man). For the rest of the day, I was forced to walk around school in a gargantuan pair of pants. The combination of my abrupt departure from class and my enormous trousers was a smoking gun. Everyone in my class knew that I pooped myself. Where is Adam Sandler/Billy Madison when you really need him???

* * * * *

I must have been about nine, not that young. My “best” friend and I were playing outside. I suddenly really had to poop. For some unremembered reason, I couldn’t simply go inside and use the bathroom—we decided that I should poop in a bag we found in the garage. Though she never told, for years she lorded it over me—every once in a while snickering in my ear, “Haha, remember that time you pooped in a bag?”

Big Sis

Stories of my manipulative older sister who I desperately wanted to be

She convinced me to steal Barbie clothes from our friend's house while on a play date. She whispered in my ear to take a couple of articles of clothing while she distracted our two friends. Not understanding the concept of inconspicuous, I lined my pockets with every fluffy princess outfit and tiny plastic shoe I could find. With pockets bulging, I walked back down the street to my house. My mother eventually noticed that my Barbie had a major wardrobe makeover. Face burning with shame, I had to return everything and apologize.

* * * * *

She gave me lessons on how to make boys like you.

Lesson One: only wear skirts.

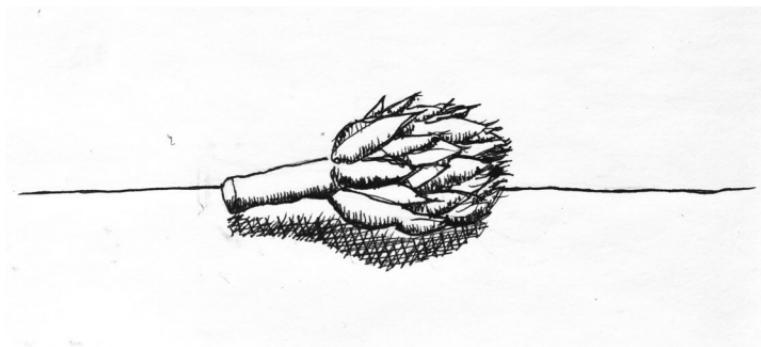
Lesson Two: glittery eye make up is irresistible.

Lesson Three: always brush your hair, including your arm hair.

* * * * *

She taught me how to avoid eating the gross, healthy food my mom always made when she was trying to drop a few pounds. My sister caught my eye over the dinner table and I recognized the signal that a lesson was approaching. As my dad got up to help my mom reach a bottle of wine on the top shelf, my sister stealthily slipped an entire artichoke into her front, right pocket. She winked at me and I followed suit. We were both honored for our plate-cleaning abilities. Six days later

on laundry Sunday, my mom was not so thrilled to find two soggy artichokes in the front pockets of two matching pairs of overalls.



Confessions continued...

By various authors

When I was in preschool, my older brothers convinced me that I was going to die because my epidermis was showing.

My older brother and I would always play the “one money for two moneys” game with my younger sister, giving her two one-dollar bills for a five or ten. We made so much money off of her before the age of eleven.

I hated being a pumpkin for Halloween when I was three. I wanted to be Batman, you bitch.



Until we watched the sexual maturation video in 5th grade (“The Video”) I thought that women got pregnant by men peeing in them. This is directly tied to the fact that my dick got hard 8 times a day from an early age and that the majority of those times I had to pee, hence the linkage between an erection and urination.

This vegetarian child ate catfood off of the floor all the time. It was crunchy and salty and delicious.

One day at the mall I was really tired of walking—I begged my dad to carry me. He said, “Honey, I would carry you to the ends of the earth.” I thought a moment and then replied, “Ok, but would you carry me back?”

Squirrel Fever

Nothing says “hick” like a second marriage taking place on your front lawn in the outskirts of a town called Mocksville. Fold-up chairs had been positioned to face the sidewalk in front of the house, with tables laden down by food and alcohol set to the side. People clamored throughout the house, making preparations and yelling at each other for reasons wholly unbeknownst to me. Dirt-drenched pickup trucks lined the street, making my father’s Jaguar look completely out of place. And we were. Out of place, that is. My brother and I were accustomed to the upscale dining parties our mother attended at newly renovated homes or Junior League meetings, not pigs in a blanket and the vocal stylings of Alan Jackson.

But we were enamored. These people were flat-out fantastic, no way around it. When we screamed, they didn’t care because they did it too. And dirt? It was more like a fashion statement than a worry. Their music was catchy, their demeanors kind and the food so lovingly fattening that any child couldn’t help himself. In fact, we didn’t even attempt to stop ourselves, falling fast and hard for the Mocksville lifestyle. Forget Hanes Mall and the Village Tavern; give me Wal-Mart and Miller’s!

Of course, our new stepfamily greatly aided us in our sudden transformation. Our stepmother was born and raised Davie County, on her third marriage and cooked pork-chops and toast drenched in butter as her specialty. She had three kids, Tess and Zach and Sydney, landing me smack in the middle of the new family.

Tess was already in high school, and therefore the coolest person alive, while Zach merely had a tendency to pull out his very handy switchblade at the sight of anything that needed to be cut, maimed or pointed at. Sydney’s new hobby was finding stray animals, dressing them in dolls’ clothing and carting them

around in toy strollers. So you can understand my surprise when Tess was the one who started carrying around a rabid squirrel.

She found him in the woods, and he cooed her with his foaming mouth. She had no second thoughts about scooping him up and introducing him to the wedding guests.

Besides, he looked thirsty, right? The oddest part was that no one said or did anything. My excuse is that with only seven years of knowledge to rely on, I had somehow not run across this particular bit of information on wild animals and common diseases.

Go figure. Unfortunately, we didn't even discover his condition until taking him to a vet the next day. Both of us went through hours of tests and vaccinations.

This display of stupidity might have warned us that four years later she would wind up pregnant and not even aware of it until going to the hospital for a stomach ache. Oops.

While trying to avoid Tess and her new best friend, I found myself upstairs, wandering around looking for a quiet place. At that time I was accustomed to carrying a book with me at all times for situations such as this. Who knew when you would have to bury your head in a novel in order to evade the presence of family or their rabid animals? Instead of finding somewhere quiet, I found my little brother locked in a closet. Zach and his cousin David had affectionately trapped him in there, perhaps in the hopes that then one of them would be promoted to the



position of best man. I suppose that it hadn't occurred to them that Patrick's total absence might be suspect.

When the wedding actually began, Patrick was released from his moldy prison and joined us for the ceremony. The guests lit up with joy at the sight of matrimony, the music twanged significantly, and fumes of fried deliciousness pervaded the air. As for my part, I stood in my white satin and black velvet bridesmaid dress on the sidewalk paying absolutely no mind to any of this, killing ants one-by-one that dared to trespass beneath my feet.



Soap Scum

I don't remember what I did to provoke her. I don't think it even mattered, really. All I knew in that instant was to run.

I tripped up the stairs, but with her right behind me, I couldn't slow down. She had taken all the locks off our doors when we had moved into the house, but had mercifully kept the one to the bathroom. I leapt inside, locking the door after me.

It's a long, narrow room, and painfully cheery. The bright blues, yellows and oranges sickened me, so I sat down in the dank shadows of the tub. It seemed more appropriate for the situation.

I could hear her pound on the door, see it shake under her attempts. I tried to block it out. It was surprisingly easy. Was Patrick home? God, I hoped not. He shouldn't see this. She never got like this with him, but that's ok; I'd rather it be me than him. But where was he? A sports practice of some sort. He liked that. He was like our father in that way.

I examined the soap scum near the front of the tub. I should probably clean that. She was still shouting. My heart was beating like a herd of antelope in my chest; all fast, erratic and scared. I should probably open the door. But what would be the consequences? Would she hurt me? It wouldn't be the first time. Or merely forbid me from doing whatever it was I had done? No, it was never that simple. I'd pay. I'd stay confined to my room for a week, clean the house, deal with her miserable, irate attitude and countless lectures on how respect and obedience were all that was demanded of children.

The thuds stopped, but her insults still hit home. I was fat, lazy, pathetic and stupid. Probably all true. But maybe she wasn't violent any more. That was always the worst part. I

could deal with the rest I was used to. What's a word anyway? So I got up. I sat on the edge of the bathtub for a split-second, contemplating the rest of my life in the bathroom. No, I decided, I would run out of food.

And so I opened the door.





↑ COOL Girls

Liz Maia
Julia Kyra
Hannah
Lisa Katrice
Ali Whit
Kade

Sarah

Hayley

Erin S.

Meghen Meg Amanda
Laura EiB.

Emily Leana

UNCOOL

2-11-97

Yo! I failed the science test.
I score above that, really. 75.
I can't take it over. I am not
cool. I'm bad at basketball.
Alex likes KATIE. (I think.)
Al thinks they'd make
a good couple. Katie likes
Alex. So does Kari. I don't
want Katie to go out with
Alex. I'd die. How'd she get
to be so popular?

The Day I Laughed

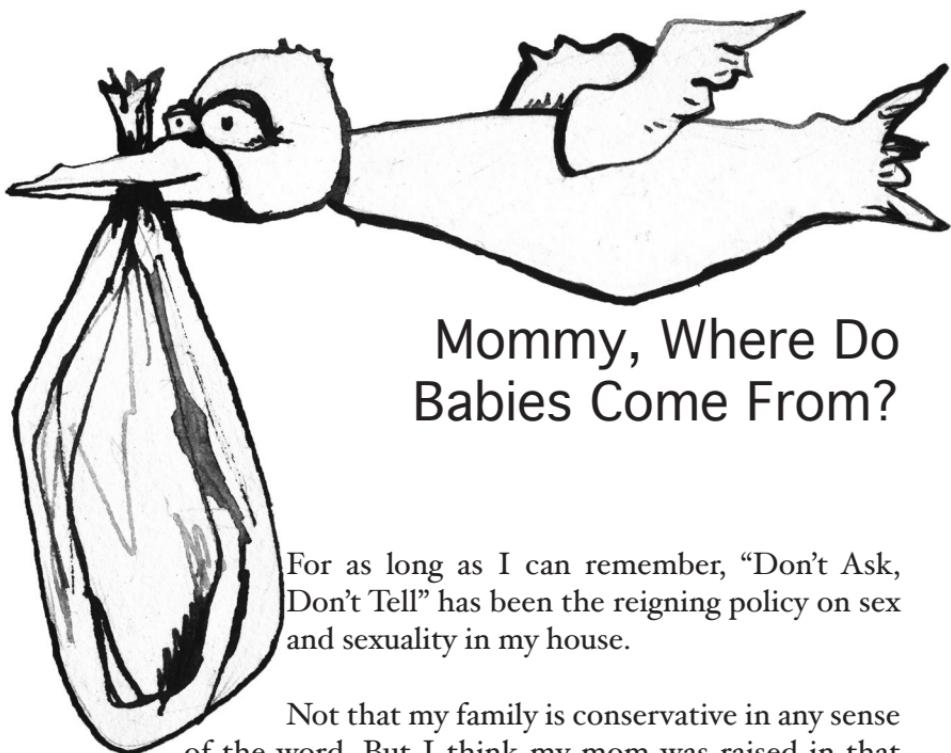
In third grade I was your standard teacher's pet. I always raised my hand, I always listened, I wore a big bow in my hair, and I always obeyed the golden rule...until that fateful day. After saying the pledge of allegiance the teacher introduced a fifth grade boy who had to make an announcement. We all stared in anticipation at the upperclassman as he stood uncomfortably in front of the class. After a long nervous silence, he started to speak...well actually he could only repeat one syllable at a time... over and over till he managed to squeeze the next one out. His stuttering went on for what seemed like a year, until some cruel soul let out a small snicker. This snicker gained momentum until it became a faint chorus of uncomfortable giggles. Soon, in front of the mortified fifth grader and our horrified teacher, the giggles transformed into a sea of chuckles. I sat helplessly in my seat, wanting to rescue this poor older boy from my horribly insensitive class mates, but I soon became helpless to waves of laughter sweeping ruthlessly over the third grade. I broke down...I could not hold it in any longer. I let out a laugh! An evil laugh! It felt so good...like an unbearable itch on the bottom of your foot that you finally scratch after stopping in the middle of the sidewalk to take off your shoe. And then we were yelled at.

The aftermath was gruesome. The flood of our cruelty left that poor fifth grader in tears, and left us in serious trouble with our fuming teacher. Since not everyone succumbed to the infectious laughter, she asked us to confess to our guilt. One by one the third graders reluctantly raised their hands, with an especially cruel few still smiling. I wanted to disappear! The perfect little girl with the big bow who never had to sit on the bench during recess had committed a crime much worse than whispering while the teacher was talking!

I had contributed unwillingly to the humiliation of a poor boy

with a stutter. Because of my class and I, he will probably never open his mouth in public again, drop out of school, start drinking at 12 and become a hermit! I had ruined his life. And then Ryan, the trouble-maker who always went out of his way to make my life more difficult, announced with a smirk that I had also LAUGHED! I didn't even go out to recess to sit on the bench that day. My sentence was only five minutes but I stayed in the classroom sitting in the corner in shame the entire 30 minutes of recess. That was the day I lost my squeaky clean innocence...the day I laughed.





Mommy, Where Do Babies Come From?

For as long as I can remember, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” has been the reigning policy on sex and sexuality in my house.

Not that my family is conservative in any sense of the word. But I think my mom was raised in that type of environment so she didn’t really know how to handle it when her three curious daughters wanted to know where babies came from.

“Babies come from the stork, love,” or “let’s talk about it later,” were common responses. When my mom got pregnant when I was around 9, the “stork story” just wouldn’t fly anymore. I was too sharp. I knew that the grownups were lying by the evasive looks they all gave me when I asked about babies.

As a compromise, my mom casually left the book *Where Do Babies Come From*,— the one in the same series as *What’s Happening to My Body*— on the end table by my bed. I was thrilled! I was so excited to read it. I felt so old and so cool that my parents finally trusted me enough to tell me the truth! They left it on my bed and not my younger sisters’ beds because they knew I could handle it.

So I got to reading and as I was flipping through the pages I quickly realized there was nothing in there about the stork. AH HA! I knew it! I read on: babies come from a process called sex. Sex is something “two people do when they really, really love each other.” Ok, that sounds nice I thought.

As I read on I learned that it was something that required a lot of energy and was pretty strenuous and it required being naked. Ewww, parents...naked? Gross!!

And there was more. Daddy goes inside Mommy with his private parts and it’s “like jumping rope for a really long time.” Wait just one second. Mom doesn’t jump rope, I thought. She doesn’t even like working out. There is no way she would want to do this, And get “poked” by Daddy? Why would he do that to her over and over again?? That’s sounds painful!!! The book said sex doesn’t hurt, but I wouldn’t want to get poked! And I certainly wouldn’t want to jump rope for a really long time.

I remember thinking that this was terrible! I was devastated. Even though I was too cool to really believe the stork explanation, I really did think that babies came in cute packages that were left at the front door. I all of a sudden became really protective of my mom. My dad was athletic—he liked jumping rope. He did it all the time, actually. But he shouldn’t impose his desires onto other people, I thought.

No guy should be able to do that. Perhaps I was a feminist even then. But he especially shouldn’t do that to mom. Why would he do that to my mom? How could he? I was so mad at him. So I did the worst thing that any mature 9 years old would do to let my dad know exactly how I felt. That’s right, I gave him the silent treatment...and it lasted for four whole days.

My Wrists and My Mom

My mom tried to kill herself when I was 12. It was a Monday, and she just never picked me up from school. We might have found her faster, but I didn't realize how late she was because I was talking to a cute boy. For most of the time that we spent sitting on the bench waiting for our rides, he stared at my newly budded breasts, which I had gone to great lengths to accentuate.

Mom took all of her psychiatric prescriptions, some muscle relaxants, and I don't know what else. She was in a coma for five days. When she woke up she could hardly speak. I wasn't there because they wouldn't let kids into the ICU. My dad told me that, after she had enough liquid to speak, she croaked, "This was my worst fear, that it wouldn't work, and I would wake up and have to deal with all you people." My dad, aunt, and grandmother stood around her. Today she swears she never said this.

One thing I know she did say is, "I just wish you had known me before I gave birth to you. I was so much fun. You really would have liked me." My mom felt her severe depression was entirely post-partum.

When mom moved out of intensive care, I used to visit her and sing her my Haftarah portion. I was preparing for my Bat-Mitzvah. After a week or so, she went into a mental hospital. She was in the Escape Precaution Unit, where kids also couldn't go. So, when she and my dad met with the doctors, we waited in the common area playing board games with the other "crazy" people. Once, the man my mom had had an affair with came to the mental hospital while we were there (my parents were in the middle of a divorce). My brother was too young to go the bathroom by himself, and this man took him. I was furious.

For a very long time, I couldn't let anyone touch my inner wrists, where my veins are so close to the surface. I don't know why I felt this way—my mom didn't slit her wrists. The feeling I got when anyone touched them, even just an accidental brush, was the same feeling I got when standing at the edge of a train track or at the ledge of a high building. I knew that I wasn't going to jump, I knew I wouldn't, but I was still sort of worried that I would, that somehow my body would do it without my consent. Some people get this feeling at the edge of train tracks too. Well, when anyone touched my wrists, I knew they weren't going to be slit open, that they weren't that sensitive, but somehow, I was sure that they would be, gushing blood everywhere, and I just couldn't take not knowing when it was going to happen—the anxiety of it—for a minute more. Some days I couldn't even wear a watch, it was so bad.

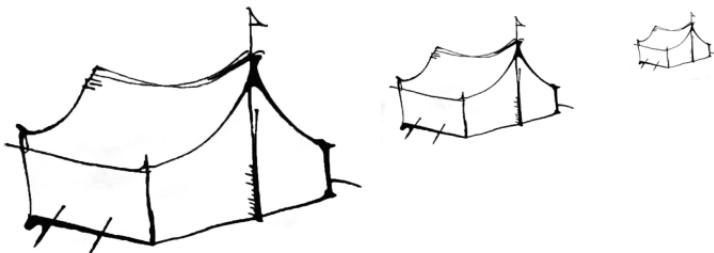
I was lying in bed with my boyfriend this weekend. (He is wonderful. Sometimes I have to squeeze my lips together tightly, I am so afraid I am going to say I love you.) He was running his fingers up and down my arms, right over my lower inner wrist. I decided to tell him that I never used to let anyone touch me there. About a year ago I decided that it was over, my wrists were open for business again. They would be normal like all the other wrists. I don't feel nervous when you touch them, I told him, but it still feels a little strange. A reminder of my mother and how close so many people live to the gray line between life and death. As close as those veins are to the surface of my skin.

Rainbow Cherry Flyer

At the age of four I pleaded on bended knee to my pregnant mother to name my unborn younger sister “Rainbow Cherry Flyer”. My parents conceded to let me have a kitten at the age of five and I proceeded to name him “Mooncakes”. He’s dealt with a lot of gender issues ever since. When my little sister was being an emo brat, we would call her “Reverend Dark Moon”. I guess I was something of a celestial child.



“On My Honor, I Will Do My Best...”



It was all my dad's idea. A father-son bonding kind of thing. I mean, I get why he needed it. What's a more white bread, "Leave It To Beaver"-esque embodiment of male bonding than the Boy Scouts of America? He was always traditional like that—if it worked in a TV-Land sitcom, it worked for him. An organization like the Boy Scouts that promised to whip your son into someone "physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight" drew him in like a fly to shit.

And let me tell you—"shit" pretty accurately captures the essence of the Boy Scouts. There is nothing more immediately distinct in my memories of Boy Scouts than the absolute sense of shittiness that pervaded every Scout-related activity I was subjected to. The weekly meetings? Dreaded them. Boy Scout Camp? Gross. "Merit Badge College?" I would rather vomit.

The worst part about the Boy Scouts is that 99% of the kids who are members are total douchebags, and the ones who don't start out that way quickly learn to conform to the stereotype. As you climb the ranks and start taking upon leadership positions in the troop, you become even more of an asshole to the younger, weaker kids just because you can, and because you were picked on by the older guys when you were that kid. As I started advancing in rank, I withdrew more and

more from the troop, avoiding taking any sort of leadership position. I didn't feel the need to be the guy who picked the target in the weekly game of "Smear the Queer!" That's what being in charge meant. You go to a few bureaucratic meetings, read the announcements every week, and get free reign to be a shithead. Gee, sorry but--no thanks.

But I have to admit, there were a few highlights of the Boy Scout experience. I remember--there was this one older guy who always struck me as a little too street-wise to be your prototypical boy scout. Now that I think about it, he was kind of sexy in a mechanic sort of way. On my very first campout, he came up to the mesh window of my tent, dropped his pants and underwear and bent over, offering up a front-row viewing of the full moon. I guess it was his way to initiate the fresh meat. Some other kid in the tent caught me peeking through my fingers while I pretended to be disgusted, but let's just say that I'm pretty sure I wasn't the only one who jerked off in my sleeping bag that night, having added a fresh mental image to my wank bank.



A couple years later, the mooner (whose visits had become increasingly more sporadic once he saved up enough money to buy a car and had an excuse to stay away) pulled me aside at a meeting, having apparently decided it was his personal mission to school me in the art of seducing some hot snatch. "Just wait until she looks over at you," he instructed while I raptly listened, "and then just start handling your dick." He proceeded to give his shorts a little rub. I was melting. "Then just look her in the eyes and keep playing with it. Girls can't get enough of it when guys play with their dicks." Thanks for being so generous with your homoeroticism, mooner-mechanic guy.

You gave a bored adolescent homosexual the only reason he ever had not to hate Boy Scouts. He'll always have a memory of a pimply butt by which to remember you.

Deep down, I think everybody has to have a sense of the inherently homoerotic underbelly of the Boy Scouts. I mean, how is it possible to take a bunch of curious pubescent boys, toss them into the woods together, three-to-four to a tent, and not expect things to get more than a little sexual? Everything from ass hair to penis enlargements to getting cum in your eye got tossed around in conversation. The younger guys eagerly made all sorts of sex-centered inquiries to the older guys, who, though mostly virgins, seemed like bona fide sex gods to guys a few years younger. The older guys couldn't get enough of the idolization they got, spouting off sexual wisdom like they were God's gift to women.

Most of all, they loved to tease the most sheltered kids who they suspected had very little conception of anything sexual. On one memorable campout, one of the older guys wanted to know who of the younger guys knew what a dildo was. "I do!" yelled out one of the young'uns, obviously proud of himself for knowing. He then proceeded to give an impressively detailed explanation of dildos and their applications. When asked how he knew all of this, he gave an honest answer. "I asked my mom." The older guys LOVED this and gave him shit for the rest of the night. It must be said, though, that this kid's no-holds-barred approach to satisfying his curiosity must have paid off because he's currently an undergrad at Harvard. I probably would've just used Google, honestly.

There are too many more memories purposefully buried deep in my subconscious for me to recount them all. (There was one particular night where I played a game resembling naked Twister with my best friend in our tent, followed by some more shenanigans, but I'll leave that tale for another day.) Moral of the story--Boy Scouts sucked. BUT--and this is a big

but—I take extreme satisfaction in knowing that, despite the organization's best efforts, the odds of finding one single Boy Scout who came anything close to being “morally straight” were like the odds of finding a needle in a haystack. And though I was just a shy, burgeoning homosexual at the time, I must say I can look back at the experience and take great pride that I emerged from the Boy Scouts production assembly line as one of the least morally “straight” of them all—well, me and that weird kid from my troop who now works at Blockbuster and talks with a bigger lisp than Carson Kressley.)

So at the end of the day, Boy Scouts of America, I give you my best Scout salute. Thanks for the memories. Now go fuck yourselves.



My Barbies
totally had sex
all the time.

