BIG POPPA E
IN
THE WUSSY BOY MANIFESTO
POETRY PROSE HAIKU
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**POETRY**

the wussy boy manifesto! ............................................................. 1  
wallflower .................................................................................... 4  
frat boy ......................................................................................... 6  
worm boy ..................................................................................... 9  
fly boy ........................................................................................ 10  
jesus moshpit .............................................................................. 12  
the lonesome ballad of josephus moshpit .................................. 13  
receipt found in the parking lot of super walmart ...................... 16  
just take another drink ................................................................ 19  
potty is pee ................................................................................. 20  
the miracle corner pocket luck shot ........................................... 22

**JUVENALIA**

minuet ........................................................................................ 23  
sexuality ..................................................................................... 24  
routine ........................................................................................ 25  
party boy .................................................................................... 26  
love poem #9 .............................................................................. 28

**PROSE**

how to dance like a wussy boy .................................................. 29  
weird mind games i play #1 ........................................................ 31  
boot camp ................................................................................... 33  
what’s that smell? ........................................................................ 35  
little boonkie choo-choo ............................................................ 37  
burning sensation number one ................................................... 39  
burning sensation number two ................................................... 40  
doug, cale, and the closet king ................................................... 41  

haiku ........................................................................................... 49
THE WUSSY BOY MANIFESTO! (1999)

my name is big poppa e
and i am a wussy boy.

it’s taken me a long time to admit it...

i remember shouting in high school,
“no, dad, i’m not gay!
i’m just... sensitive.
i tried to like hot rods and jet planes
and football and budweiser poster girls,
but i never got the hang of it!
i don’t know what’s wrong with me...”

then, i saw him,
there on the silver screen,
bigger than life and unafraid
of earrings and hair dye
and rejoicing in the music
of the cure and morrissey and
siouxsie and the banshees,
talking loud and walking proud
my wussy boy icon:
duckie in pretty in pink.

and i realized i wasn’t alone.

and i looked around
and saw other wussy boys
living large and proud of who they were:
ralph macchio, wussy boy;
matthew broderick, wussy boy;
and lord god king
of the wussy boy movement,
john cusack in say anything,
unafraid to prove to the world
that sensitive guys much kick ass.

wallow in your weakness.
now i am no longer ashamed
of my wussiness, hell no,
i’m empowered by it.

when i’m at a stoplight and
some testosterone redneck
methamphetamine
jock fratboy asshole dumb fuck
pulls up beside me
blasting his trans am’s stereo
with power chord anthems to big tits
and date rape,
i no longer avoid his eyesight, hell no,
i just crank all 12 watts of my car stereo
and i rock out right into his face:
(devil sign and morrissey’s voice)
“i am human and i need to be loved
just like everybody else does!”

i am wussy boy, hear me roar
(meow).

bar fight? pshaw!
you think you can take me, huh?
just because i like poetry
better than sports illustrated?
well, allow me to caution you,
i’m not the average every day
run-of-the-mill wussy boy you
beat up in high school, punk,
i am wuss core!
.flash “wc” gang sign

don’t make me get renaissance
on your ass because i will
write a poem about you,
a poem that tears your psyche
limb from limb,
that exposes your selfish insecurities,
suffer in silence.
that will wound you deeper
and more severely
than knives and chains and gats
and baseball bats
could ever hope to do..

you may see 65 inches of wussy boy
standing in front of you,
but my steel-toed soul is
ten foot tall and bullet proof!

bring the pain, punk,
beat the shit out of me,
show all the people in this bar
what a real man can do
to a shit-talking wussy boy like me

but you’d better remember
my bruises will fade
my cuts will heal,
my scars will shrink and disappear,
but my poem
about the pitiful, small, helpless
cock-man oppressor you really are
will last
forever.

your perfect mate exists on videotape.
“I can’t dance,” I tell her, as I try to free my fist from the grip of this painfully beautiful woman pulling me toward the throbbing horde on the house party dance floor.

I can’t dance!

And she purrs, “Sure you can, it’s easy!”

And I say, “Of course, it’s easy... for you! But you could be choking on a chicken bone and giving yourself the Heimlich on the edge of a chair and Paula Abdul would be like, “Goddamn, that girl’s got some moves!”

But me? I hit the dance floor and epileptics come up to me and say, “Brother, I know how that feels.”

I can’t dance!

What little I know about dancing I learned from Ally Sheedy in “The Breakfast Club.”

I can’t dance!

If I made love like I dance, I would never get laid.

(pause)

Oh my god! I do make love like I dance! That’s why I never get laid!

But I don’t tell her this, I just say, “I can’t dance!”

And she fixes her feline gaze upon me in my mind I hear her whisper, “Just... watch... me.”

And I am powerless to do anything but watch this goddess in the form of an English Lit. major in jeans so skintight they are no longer fabric, they are flesh, they are a big blue tattoo with a pulse and a waistline cut so low you can almost see the baby faces of her knees peek over her belt loops.

hardly anyone will come to your funeral.
She winks at me and wades backward into the frothy tide of bobbing college kids and begins rump-shaking this wickedly gyrating humpety-hump-hump dance that defies the laws of physics, her body thrashing like a south american river full of starving piranha tearing apart an unsuspecting cow to the beat of p. diddy and missy elliot.

Her blur of an ass is twitching so frantically yet so precisely she must have robotic pistons in her hips as she slips the pointy tip of her tongue to her lips, if you taped drumsticks to her undulating midriff she’d do deadly drumrolls on the forehead of every boy on the dance floor...

She’s cleaving rhythmically through the booty jungle like a flesh machete, and I haven’t blinked once, and she’s eyeballing me, mouthing the words, “Come dance with me,” as she runs her palms along the curves of her body and quivers like a fleshy jackhammer, like a Jell-O mold Madonna, like a field of dragonflies fluttering their wings at once.

She’s setting up sympathetic vibrations inside me like sitar strings and my body succumbs to the rhythm, my feet shuffling, my knees bucking, my hips bumping...

Then she breaks away from the crowd and walk towards me, her eyes looking all the way through me and into my beating heart that wants nothing more than for once to dance with abandon.

And she reaches her slender hand to me in super Slo-Mo as the other dancers drip and run and fade from sight...

And I take her hand, and I whisper, “I can’t dance, but tonight... I’m gonna try.”

your mom and dad refer to you as “their little mistake.” and they don’t laugh.
FRAT BOY POETRY (1999)
(or He Loves His Girlfriend’s Thesaurus)

Baby,
listen to me.
I like you...
a lot.
As a matter of fact,
I admire you.
I adore you.
I am gratified by,
keen on,
partial to,
pleased by,
sweet on,
and delight in
and derive pleasure from
you.
I care for you.
I cherish you.
Baby, I dig you.
I fancy you.
I get a kick out of you.
I go for you.
I hanker for you.
I hunger for you.
I yearn for you.
I prize you,
revel in you,
savor you,
relish,
deify,
glorify,
idolize and treasure you.
I worship the ground you walk on,
sing praise to the phone you talk on,
shout hosannas to the blackboard you chalk on,
because you’re a starring role, not a walk on.
I am captivated and fascinated by you,
enraptured and enchanted by you.

mary was raped.
I care for you.
I delight in you.
I hold you dear.
I hold you high.
I put you on a pedestal.
Baby,
I think the world of you,
would do anything for you,
would walk 500 miles for you,
then would walk 500 more for you,
just to be the man who walked 1,000 miles for you.
Baby,
I
love
you.

Now,
come on over here...
that’s right.
You know I love you, Baby.
Don’t you, Baby?

Why don’t you come on over here
and let’s get a little something something going on,
you know what I’m saying,
let’s try a little tenderness.
Let’s get naked.
Let’s breed, Baby, let’s mate.
I’m talking about having relations,
extitations,
stimulation,
erction,
lubrication,
penetration,
fornication,
copulation,
conjugation,
orgasmatration,
ejaculation,
jubilation!

jesus had a vulva.
I’m talking about
smoking rubber hammer head shark
wide-bore piston jack rabbit love, Baby!
I wanna knock boots with you,
square the circle with you,
become the beast with two backs,
plow the fields of love
with the scrotum tractor,
get down,
get funky,
and get back up and do it again with you.
Let’s get nasty, Baby.
Let’s get stinky, Baby.
Let’s get to know each other in the biblical way, Baby.
Let’s practice making a baby, Baby.
Quit that grinning and drop that linen and
fuck me ‘till the cows come home, Baby!
What?
Where you going?
Wait a minute... what’s wrong, Baby, what’d I say?
Come on back, Baby, it’s all good, we can...
I don’t know...
cuddle, caress, touch, fondle,

Bitch!

Page me...

ronald mcdonald is more recognized than jesus.
WORMBOY (1998)

So, I’m fingerfucking (insert name of prominent boy in the audience who deserves to be mocked) and he’s really getting into it and he’s moaning and groaning and grinding and my middle finger is stretched just as deeply inside him as it can go, so far I’m starting to feel like calling him “Elliot... (E.T. voice).” Soon my fist is shoved so far up his ass I feel like Jim Henson with a muppet on my hand, “Look everyone, I can wiggle my fingers and his facial expressions change!” And something suddenly occurs to me, so I say to him, I say, “Baby, you know what?” and he says, “(Moan),” and I say, “If you were in some horrible farming accident and got both your arms and both your legs chopped off, I’d still love you. You’d be my little Worm Boy. I’d just make a special backpack so we could go on walks together, and you could just lean your head on my shoulders and give little chin hugs, and when we got married I’d just put your ring on a silver chain so you could wear it around your neck. Sure, people would stare, but fuck ‘em. I’d look ‘em straight in the eye and say, ‘Hey, he might only be a torso, but he’s MY torso, and I love him from the top of her head to...’ well, you know what I’m talking about. To be honest, you’d be the perfect boy. And if you ever gave me grief I’d just lie you on the ground and tickle you until you shit all over yourself. And if you really pissed me off, I’d just rent Boxing Helena for the 10th time to show you how good you’ve really got it. Sleeping with you would be a little weird, though, because half the time you’d end up under the covers at the foot of the bed with the socks I’d kicked off during the night with the cat gnawing at your ear. And when we’d go into Tower Records, I’d have to check you and the backpack behind the counter. But, think of all the money you’d save on clothes... all you’d have to buy is extra large athletic socks and stretch them up over your head like a terry cloth turtleneck. Of course, we’d have to be really careful about the dog. That’s a big dog, and you’ve seen how horny he gets around the furniture.” And by this time, my boy, who I’m still fisting, has stopped moving and breathing hard and is just looking at me with this cute little pissed off look he gets when I say something stupid, so I say, “What?” and he says, “To be honest, Big Poppa, if you lost even your middle finger in a freak farming accident, I’d dump you so goddammed fast your head would spin, and I’m not talking like spin once or twice, but you’d have to get a job at the Barnum and Baily sideshow as Billy the Spinning Head Wonder Boy, so shut your goddamn cake hole and fuck me right because I’ve got to be at work in 25 minutes!” So, I say, “Okay.”

we can see right through you.
FLY BOY (1988)

fucking cat!

we decided
it would be in our best interest
to fly our cat
ivan.
so,
with a rented helium tank
and k-mart punching bag balloons
in hand
we traipsed to the top
of the bluffs.
quite suitable for the flying of cats.
the crowd was already there.
we
had put up flyers
all over town.
“come see ivan the flying cat,
saturday at 2:30 p.m.”
we
had this harness thing
with 4 little holes in the bottom
for 4 little cat feets
and 2 rings on the top
for tethering the balloons.
jim
held the balloons
as i blindfolded ivan.
on the end of a fishing line,
little legs dangling,
the cat flew.

meow.

meow.

meow.

the only difference between “therapist” and “the rapist” is a little space.
he got pretty damned high.

if i had watched mr. wizard more often i could’ve predicted what was going to happen.

helium expands at high altitudes.

    POW! (meow?)
    POW!POW!
    POW!POW!POW!POW!

the crowd sucked air in a collective gasp as ivan’s little body tumbled cat-ass over cat-head little legs kicking and clawing down onto the hard-packed floor of the oil fields with a wet, sticky SMACK!

we received lots of hate mail for that one.

it seemed a good idea at the time.

he hasn’t thought about you in a long time.
JESUS MOSHPIT (1996)

I am the biggest asshole in ALL the moshpit. I don’t give a DAMN and if you don’t like it, I’ll pull a stage dive and take your greasy punk ass out. I wade through the arching, twisting, gnashing whirlpool of elbows and knuckles and fuck up ANY droog foolish enough to meet my gaze for I am a lumbering behemoth with a six-foot tall spiked mohawk and a pierced uvula. I got arms like I-beams, fists like anvils, neck like a sewer pipe, head like a Volkswagen. I shrug my mighty shoulders and sweaty punks go flying through the air like gnats off a yak’s back.

Yea, as I mosh through the valley in the shadow of punk rock music, I shall fear NO punk, for I am the biggest, the baddest, the meanest, the no-pain-feelin’est, jack-booted-thuggin’est, steel-toe-havin’est, no-toof-grinnin’est, groupie-shaggin’est, tour bus drivin’est, record deal signin’est, mtv house party’est, vh-1 behind the music’est, rolling stone cover’est, platinum record sellin’est, bling bling blingin’est, j-lo suckin’ my dick’est, Boba Fett-walkin’est, Wookiee-scalp-stalkin’est punk rock mother fucker in ALL the valley. As a matter of fact, I MADE the valley, with one mighty drag of my pinkie toe. DAMN! SHAZAAM! SLAM! GREEN EGGS & HAM! And just because you see me in the corner by myself watching the moshpit mayhem from afar, skinny, in a black Joy Division t-shirt... it don’t mean nothing ‘cuz I don’t have to prove myself to nobody!

visualize anarchy.
THE LONESOME BALLAD
OF JOSEPHUS MOSHPIT (1999)

There once was a mean old punker
with oil for blood and poison for spit.
His name struck fear both far and wide
they called him Josephus Moshpit.

Now Josephus was a mean old punker
with a mohawk at least six feet
with spikes he’d use to spear them punkers
and lift ‘em off their feet.

The chains he wore around his neck
couldn’t stand the strain - they’d break -
so he chucked them all in favor of
three pissed off rattlesnakes.

The rings he wore upon his fists
were silver skulls and daggers.
His teeth were fangs, his nails were claws,
his lips just like Mick Jagger’s.

The steel-toed boots upon his feet
were splattered with blood and gore;
the tread was made of broken glass
that left gouges upon the floor.

An eyeball was tied upon his lace
to remind him of a recent victim,
and he’d smile and laugh as he recalled
just how hard he had kicked ‘em.

Yup, Josephus was a mean old punker,
as mean a punker as you could ever catch,
that is until that fateful day
that Josephus Moshpit met his match.

You see, there was another punker
as mean as the devil in tight pants
who challenged Josephus one sorry day
her name was Wynona Slamdance.
Oh, Wynona was a pistol,
she was evil though and through,
with elbows of sharpened plexiglass
that would cut a man in two.

That night the punks were in the pit
tangled up in a dreadful swirl.
As a hellish punk band raged on stage,
Josephus thought, “Who’s that girl?”

He glared at Wynona Slamdance
on a speaker about to dive,
and tore a helpless punker in half
and waited for her to arrive.

He took out a file and sharpened his teeth
and leered at the pitiful sinner.
He licked his chops with his forked tongue
and thought, “I’ll eat that bitch for dinner.”

Wynona lept from that mighty speaker
into a swan dive that seemed to float,
and when Josephus cracked opened his maw,
she slid right down his throat.

At first his face was bright with triumph
at vanquishing another foe,
then all of a sudden his expression changed
from one of glee to one of woe.

He clutched at his belly,
he clawed at his throat
he scratched at his eyes,
then started to bloat.

He wrapped his arms around the bulges
as if he were trying to fight ‘em,
and blood foamed upon his lips
as the battle raged inside him.

pains confirms existence.
Josephus threw back his head and howled in pain
as his shivering chest began to split,
and crimson gore shot like a fountain
to announce the return of Wynonna Moshpit.

Her plexiglass elbows burst from his belly
with a evil stomach churning rip
and quivering balls of liver and spleen
dangled from each bloody tip.

She emerged from what was left of his body
naked save for a bloody speedo,
then she discarded his rotten bloody carcass
like a dime store flesh tuxedo.

The crowd by that time had stopped to stare
at the battle Wynona had just won,
so she jumped back on the speaker tower and screamed,
“Get back in that pit and love someone!”

The moral of this sordid story
about when Josephus Moshpit was licked
is that if you mess with a punk rock moshpit girl
you’re liable to get your sorry ass kicked.

blame everyone but yourself.
RECEIPT FOUND IN THE PARKING LOT OF SUPER WALMART (2001)

soap
shampoo
hair conditioner
toothpaste
dental floss
shaving cream
after shave lotion
deodorant
hair gel
spray starch
anniversary hallmark card
flowers
candles
matches
incense
2 filet mignon steaks
2 portabello mushrooms
1 loaf sourdough bread
butter
garlic spread
paprika
fresh parsley
4 yukon gold potatoes
sour cream
fresh leaf spinach
croutons
red onions
red peppers
feta cheese
sun-dried tomatoes
slivered almonds
balsamic vinegar
extra virgin olive oil
fresh strawberries
block of white chocolate
bottle of white wine
barry white’s greatest hits cd

corporations poison us with nostalgia.
4 aromatherapy candles
aromatherapy bath salts
aromatherapy massage oil
mr. happy back massager
hershey’s chocolate syrup
honey
box of condoms, 32-count, extra large size
spermicidal foam
astro glide personal lubricant
box of dental dams, 32-count, cherry flavoured
feather duster
dog leash
dog collar
fly swatter
rope
rubber gloves
hot water bottle w/hose
clothes pins
needles
nail file
ice pick
hacksaw
plastic garbage bags, extra large, heavy duty
5 bungie cords
leather gloves, black
turtle neck sweater, black
jeans, black
knit beanie, black
hiking boots, dark brown
flashlight
d-cell batteries, 8-pack
wheelbarrow, large
shovel
black and decker mini-vac
plug-in air freshener
stain remover, heavy duty
ajax tub and tile cleaner
carpet fresh, lilac scent
bleach
scrub brush
pumice stone
5-pack sponges

adolph hitler. joseph stalin. pol pot. ronald mcdonald.
2 large beach towels
1 hustler magazine
1 penthouse magazine
1 barely legal magazine
1 box kleenex tissue, deep forest series
tylenol caplets, extra strength
melatonin, one bottle, 64-count
1 packet razor blades, 6-count
cat food

taboos are society’s way of controlling you.
TAKE ANOTHER DRINK (1996)

So, I’m sitting on the couch drinking Early Times whiskey straight from the bottle with this chick I’ve been seeing for the past couple of years and the stereo’s playing this vicious smoky room ricochet Coltrane sax solo and my girl’s looking up at the glow-in-the-dark stars on the ceiling and just a-smiling like a busload of mongoloid school-children on a field trip, so I poke her in the ribs with my big toe and I ask her, I say, “Baby, what is it that you’re thinking about, ‘cause I just gotta know…”

and she looks at me and she says, “Man, it’s this music, it’s this rabid Coltrane be-bop jazz, it’s got me thinking ‘bout that time we were in that old white Mercury with the oxblood tuck-and-roll interior and the battery-operated Holy Mother of Jesus suction-cupped to the dashboard and you were blazing a path down that methamphetamine highway, man, pedal to the metal like a one-man gang-bang bending the needle of that speedometer over backwards and still pressing your foot harder on the gas, so fast that when we hit a bump we flew like the goddamn space shuttle, man, we took off, man, like ten fifteen feet into the air and when we touched back down we’d bounce like a goddamn skipping stone and you could hear the elbows of those two waitresses knocking against the roof of the trunk every time we hit the ground and I was slumped against the door trying not to get blood all over the upholstery and listening to the wind, oh man that wind, the roar of that wind was so loud you could barely hear the sirens of the 17 Nevada State Troopers behind us splashing the sharp desert rocks with blue and red blue and red blue and red and they were so close you could almost smell the adrenaline on their breath but you just looked straight ahead, man, you didn’t look at the rearview mirror you didn’t look at the gas gauge you didn’t look at the suitcase in the backseat, you didn’t look at me sitting in a puddle of my own blood, man, you just looked straight ahead and I said, “Baby, what the hell are we gonna do?” and you closed your eyes and opened the glove compartment and reached past the .38 with the black electrical tape stretched around the grip, past the last box of hollow-point shells and searched around until you found that Coltrane 8-track and you popped it into the tape deck and turned the volume knob all the way up just as loud can be and I tell you, man, no music in the history of this entire planet ever sounded so goddamned brilliant as that music right at that very moment…”

…and then, this girl I’ve been seeing for a couple of years, she lays her head back on the couch, closes her eyes and smiles, and I look at her and say, “Baby... what the HELL are you talking about?”

and she looks at me and says, “Ahhh… nevermind, man, just take another drink.”

pearl harbor. normandy. iwo jima. guadalcanal. love.
POTTY IS PEE (1998)

My girlfriend said
when she was a kid
*go potty*
meant *go pee*.
I told her that was weird
because everybody knows
*go potty* means *go poop*.
She said, “Nope, *potty* is *pee*.
*Poop is poop.*”
I told her
maybe it was a family vocabulary thing
because I had never heard that before,
but she insisted that *potty* is *pee*
and said anyone who doesn’t think so
was lied to as a child
because *potty* is *pee*
and that’s that.
I asked her,
“What about the phrase *Potty-Mouth*?”
She said,
“Exactly.”
I decided to drop it.

I called my friend David
and asked for his unbiased opinion.
I told him,
“My girlfriend is so silly...
she thinks *potty* is *pee*.
Isn’t that weird?”
David told me,
“But, *potty* is *pee.*”
I just stared at the phone in disbelief
for a couple of minutes
then told him,
“She got to you first, didn’t she?”
I hung up on him.

My friend Vandy
said the whole thing was silly
and just a matter of semantics
she can’t even remember your name.
(that’s easy for her to say)
and said I should just drop it
before it gets out of hand.
I agreed
and as I walked away,
Vandy said under her breath,
“Especially since you’re so wrong.”

So, I made a long distance phone call
to my mother in Wichita, Kansas,
and asked her, as nonchalantly as possible,
“So, Mom, if I said to you
that I need to go potty,
what would that mean?”

She thought a moment,
then said,
“Sounds like you need to take a shit.”

I told her, “Thank God!
Everybody here seems to think
it means go pee!”

She told me,
“That’s funny, everybody out here thinks it means go pee, too!”

your parents used to call you “the little mistake.”
THE MIRACLE CORNER
POCKET LUCK SHOT (1995)

My friend Brian
made the killer pool shot
the other day
at Lasalle’s.
It was so good
I told him I’d write a poem about it.
But how?
How to convey the sheer beauty,
the utter perfection,
of this shot?
Two ball combo,
not one,
not two,
but three bumpers,
back spin with a perfect leave
set-up snug for the next shot
straight sinker into the corner pocket
and
the bastard
called it.
Damn.
If he was any good
at playing pool
it still would’ve been
a good shot
but Brian sucks at pool,
couldn’t play his way out
of a wet paper sack.
This was nothing less
than divine intervention,
a true blue-chalk marvel
of epiphaniacal proportions.
I ended up beating him
by three balls
because Brian really does suck at pool,
but damn
if that wasn’t
a fine shot.

got back in line.
MINUET (1988)

…and then,
of all things,
she hands me a book.
I say,
“What’s this?”
She says,
“A book of games.”
I look at it,
turn it over in my hands,
open it,
and find the pressed petals
of a lavender rose.
As I look at her
with anticipation…

…she smiles
and says,
“Yes, games.”

corporate sponsored rebellion is just silly.
SEXUALITY (1988)

Beneath the coloured umbrellas
of an outdoor cafe,
she slowly put down
her cappuccino
and whispered
something
foreign
under her breath.
I think it was Latin.
She flashed a knowing smile,
finished the hot liquid,
and proceeded to gouge her eyes
with a fork,
after which
she placed the fork
upon my lap.
I pondered this a moment,
neatly folded my napkin
and left.

it doesn’t matter what you want. do what you are told.
I opened my eyes.
There,
standing before me,
were two young women
clad in orange
polyester
jumpsuits.
The one on the left,
the prettier of the two,
smiled
at me.
I smiled back.
I wasn’t surprised
in the slightest
when she gently removed her head from her shoulders
& tossed it to me.
Quite naturally,
I caught it.
While the other woman,
who bore a striking resemblance
to Shiley Temple on crack,
tapdanced
and sang “Oh Tannenbaum,”
the head and I
told dirty jokes
to one another.
We
had a lot
in common,
actually.
PARTY BOY (1995)

Have you ever gone to a party with a friend where the only person you knew in the whole place is that very same friend and your friend happens to know everybody in the entire place and did you end up glomming onto that friend, sticking to their side and just kinda nodding and smiling at everyone your friend introduces you to like some mute sidekick and did your friend just kinda leave you standing there by the cheese dip so they can go off to socially butterfly and you’re left to just pick through the chips and lunchmeats, feeling like a real schlemiel because nobody will talk to you and the few times you try to strike up a conversation with some random person standing next to you they just sort of look at you like you smell like Play-Doh® or something and did you just find a piece of wall to lean against and watch all the people go about their little party business while you’re drinking flat beer from a red plastic cup and did you look at everybody and they’re all thinner than you and they have cooler hair than you and they’re tanner than you and taller than you and their teeth are whiter than yours and their clothes are nicer than yours and you totally feel like a loser because you’re doing the wallflower bit just like in 6th-grade after your mom dropped you off at your first dance and you felt like a real geek and did you listen in on their conversations and find that they’re talking about totally stupid shit, like their clothes and their hair and their tans and diets and their white fucking teeth and did you realize that these people are just so completely shallow that the only thing they know how to talk about is themselves and didn’t you feel so above these people and superior that you can talk about something of more substance than the brand of hair conditioner you’re using but then didn’t you also feel so totally beneath all these people because you will never look or be anything like them because they all look like they’ve got the world handed to them like bright red delicious apples on a silver platter and you’ve always had to work hard to get everything you’ve ever had because you don’t have the looks of a model or mommy and daddy’s money fed to you by a 1,000-mile long umbilical cord and then, all of a sudden, did you look across the room and see that one person standing by the mantle with a red plastic cup who looks like they’re enjoying this party about as much as you are and then they like smile at you and you smile back and you think, “Thank God, there’s someone here who can see through all this shit,” and maybe this party will turn out better than you thought and then they wave to you and you wave back to them and smile and then they call out, “Hey, what’s up?” and you get ready to answer back but before you do someone from behind you says,

mother nature kicks god’s ass.
“Nothing much, what’s up with you?” and you get pushed out of the way as some fashion mannequin shoulders their way through the crowd to the person by the mantle and you realize that they weren’t smiling and waving at you at all but at some boob standing behind you and didn’t you feel totally embarrassed and burnt and so completely over this lame party and all the posing and posturing and that same 70’s disco CD compilation they’ve been listening to for the past two hours and your friend’s gone and there’s no more dip and you can’t find the bathroom even though you’ve asked four different people and you finally decide, “Fuck it, I’m out of here,” and you just leave without saying a word and then you walk the long way home, sort of sad and sort of burnt but sort of hoping you’ll happen upon some truly cool party with truly cool, approachable people listening to really good music and they’ll say, “Hey, come on up to the porch and hang out with us! Wanna beer?” but there doesn’t end up being any party and there’re no people there’s just you walking home in the dark all by yourself and did you just let yourself into your dark apartment and go straight to your room and put some Billie Holliday in the CD player and maybe light some incense and get undressed and get in bed and stare at the ceiling for a couple of hours before you finally fall asleep?

you'll never be the hero.
LOVE POEM, NO. 9 (1990)

i see crosses empty crosses everywhere i look looming large and threatening closing me in a pen a cell the prison bars the shapened spines of crucifixes plunged into the quivering flesh of the ground around me hymns thicken the air chew my bleeding pimpled ears and inject their larvae fester my pus-riddled head eaten alive by squirming words and blindwhite promises i jab my fingers into my ears and eyes and still the vibration rattles my body with the monotone drone fills my eyes with visions of black and white and so much fucking light tears at me with doubtful claws they rip and drip as i strain to grip the truth but grab at nothing

the nooses

snake around my neck and ankles and wrists and pull tight for an instant i am a human cross then sinew and sockets give way to fountains of crimson absolution wash away my sins

heal me cleanse me make it all crystal clear just let me feel just one thing even if it's pain even if it's pain let me feel.

love is a placebo.
HOW TO DANCE
LIKE A WUSSY BOY (2001)
(first in a series)

this is my funky dance. i have others, but this is the one i use when
dancing to ’80s music or disco.

1] move one — the “open/close”

make your arms into capitol L’s, with your hands pointing to the
ceiling and your upper arms parallel with the floor. hold your arms out
in front of you as if fending off an attack. this is the “closed” position.

holding your arms in the capitol L’s, move them wider so that they
are positioned to either side of your head. this is the “open” position.

now, bounce up and down slightly to the rhythm of the beat, flex-
ing your knees but not moving your feet, and shake your rump just a
little bit, not too much, and go “open... close... open... close... open... close...” to the rhythm of the music. you have to kinda hunch your
shoulders as you do this, and don’t over-exaggerate the “open/close”
movement... you have to kinda be cool about it, just little opens and
closes, and you have to kinda nod your head up and down with your
eyes closed and a slow smile on your face, like, “awwww yeah, i’m
doing the open/close.”

2] move two — the “raise the roof”

put your hands above your head with the palms open to the ceiling,
as if you were actually holding up the roof. pump your hands up and
down in this position.

now, bounce up and down slightly to the rhythm of the beat, flex-
ing your knees but not moving your feet, and shake your rump just a
little bit, not too much, and go “raise the roof... raise the roof...” to the
rhythm of the music. you have to kinda hunch your shoulders as you
do this, and don’t over-exaggerate the “raise the roof” movement... you
have to kinda be cool about it, just little ups and downs, and you have
to kinda nod your head up and down with your eyes closed and a slow
smile on your face, like, “awwww yeah, i’m raising the roof.”

3] move three — “the combo”

now, the goal is to offer up a combination of these moves set in
time to the beat, alternating between the “open/close” and the “raise the
roof,” often punctuating the beat by rhythmically shouting “oooowah-
oooowah,” hereafter known as “the disco call.”

4] move four — “the ally sheedy”

this is an especially good way of ending a song, especially an ’80s
song. you simply hold cover your head with your arms and shiver and

you are patient zero.
flail, tossing your head back and forth, and you slowly, rhythmically, fall to the floor.

this is not to be confused with the “molly ringwald,” which is more of a prancing, flailing thing.

NOTE: it is very important to remember not to move your feet at all during any of these moves. just kinda bounce in place.
WEIRD MIND
GAMES I PLAY #1 (2001)

the “someone is following me” game

this is when i am driving down the street and i look in the rearview mirror and notice that someone driving behind is setting off my spidey sense, meaning that suddenly i think, “say, is that person following me?” i can’t really think of any reason why someone would follow me, but still, the idea that someone COULD be following me is enough to set me off into this game. i’ll change lanes and see if the person “following” me does the same. if they do, then maybe i will change lanes very quickly and slow down so that they pass me. if they don’t pass me, then i will head off into a residential street. this usually throws them off my tail (which probably means that it leaves the hapless person behind me scratching their head and wondering what the fuck is the problem with the person in front of them.)

one time, though, this game revealed a person who was actually following me. i had just pulled out of my work for a break (i was working at a record store at the time), and i noticed this tricked out el camino slide in behind me. suddenly my spidey sense was tingling and the game was on, so i crossed the street and went into another parking lot.

the el camino followed.

i went through the entire parking lot, then crossed another street and went into another parking lot.

the el camino followed.

by this time, i am getting a little creeped out because the guy in the el camino is not playing the game right. he’s supposed to peel off and prove to me that he is not following me, but instead he is actually tailing me. i stop in the middle of the parking lot, and the el camino stops. some guy who i’ve never seen in my life gets out and walks over to my truck.

the guy is a typical post-high school bakersfield roughneck, complete with tight black acid-washed jeans, cowboy boots, a faded motley crue t-shirt, and a fabulous mullet with wind-swept wings like farrah from the ’70s and a little braided tail in the back tied with a black rubber band.

everyone who had ever beaten my ass in high school looked exactly like this guy. i keep one foot on the gas and the other on the clutch ready to pop that sucker and peel out in case something weird happens.

you’re not fooling anyone.
i roll down my window and say, “what’s up, man? why’re you following me?”

he leans over and puts his elbows on my window, then says, “you know robyn?”

i search my head... nope, no robyn’s in there. i tell him, “dude, i don’t know anyone named robyn.”

he is unconvinced. he screams, “well, robyn is my girlfriend, you motherfucker, and you’d better stay the fuck away from her.”

then, this mullet guy i’ve never met leaps through my window and starts beating his fist against the side of my head. that’s it: i pop the clutch and within seconds i am speeding through the parking lot at 45 mph with this guy trying to throttle me through the window, his legs dangling out the window. he finally lets go and falls to the dirty asphalt; he’s a tumbling bundle of torn elbows and scuffed knees in my rearview mirror.

i am freaked at this point and high-tail it out of there, but before i know it, there’s the el camino with mullet guy at the wheel looming large in my rearview, and he’s making gun motions at his head — BANG! BANG! BANG! — and pointing at me and honking his horn and vigorously flipping me the bird.

and i have no idea who he is or who this robyn chick is or why this dolt thinks i have anything at all to do with her, so i just head straight for the police department. i figure if this knucklehead wants to follow me, he can follow me to the po-po.

and he follows me all the way to the parking area of the police department in downtown bakersfield, but then finally peels off when he realizes — duh — that i’ve taken him to the police department.

i stayed in my car and shook for about 15 minutes, then drove back through side streets and alleys to my work.

i never saw him again, nor did i ever figure out who he was or who this robyn was. since then, the “is that car following game” has taken on a different feel... like, the thought at the back of my head is that somebody actually COULD be following me...

you are so limited.
i haven’t been in any kind of good physical shape since i was 18 years old, specifically the day i got out of boot camp. i have a photo of me on my last day of boot camp, all dressed up in my little dixie cup hat, and i have to say that i look good. i might even go so far as to say that i look pretty fucking svelte.

i was little poppa e back then, back in the summer of 1985. playing the role of “mr. push-up” for nine weeks will do that for you.

that’s what they used to call me in boot camp — mr. push up — because i was getting in trouble every time i turned around. i swear, all i’d have to do was sneeze to get my company commander to bellow “OTT! grab some pavement and gimme 60, NOW!”

of course, i was always doing much more than that.

picture the camera as it’s panning down a line of young buzz-cut recruits standing at attention, and they are all straight-backed and eagle-eyed, their brows slightly furrowed with the fear of our company commander’s screams, and suddenly, the camera comes to an empty space between two strapping young boys... all you see is this empty space with the broad shoulders of each recruit on either side. picture the camera dipping down to find me standing there, all 65 inches of me, and i am be-bopping to some silent hip-hop beat in my head, holding me crotch and bouncing rhythmically, looking at passing airplanes.

“OTT!,” screams the company commander, “what in the HELL are you DOING, boy?”

“looking at passing airplanes, company commander!” i shout, still beat boxing.

“looking at passing AIRPLANES? did you just tell me that you were looking at passing AIRPLANES, ott?”

my company commander is in my face now, and his face is vibrantlly red, glowinglly red, and the cords of his neck stick out like high tension electrical wires. they are stretched so tight they hum.

“yes, company commander, i was looking at the passing airplanes.”

“and just what the HELL else are you doing, OTT, with your HAND on your DICK? you DANCING, ott?”

“beat boxing, company commander, i was beat boxing.”

“BEAT BOXING?! and watching passing AIRPLANES?”

my company commander is apoplectic.

“god-DAMN it, ott, grab some motherFUCKING pavement and gimme 60, NOW!”

and i would drop down and give that red-faced man 60 push-ups.

assimilation or extinction. your choice.
this happened so often that my company commander invented a special form of push-up just for me: the dreaded “airplane push-up.”

the base on which i was stationed for boot camp in san diego, ca, was slapped up next to an airport, hence the planes constantly flying overhead, and so my cc would sentence me to five airplane push-ups: when the plane goes over, i go down and hold it, then when another plane goes over, i push myself back up again. that counts as one airplane push-up and would usually take five minutes to accomplish. doing five airplane push-ups would take anywhere from 20-30 minutes depending on the airport traffic, and the company commander would have the whole 80-man company stand at parade rest and watch as i did them, my arms quivering, drooling with sweat, my face all bug-eyed and ripe.

i was on the boot camp flag team, which meant that i did flag routines for half-time ceremonies at football games and boot camp graduations while the other boot camp companies got to sling rifles all day. since i was the shortest, the state flag i held was at the very end, alaska. during daily practices, we’d often have to stand at parade rest for an hour waiting for something to happen, and i developed this supernatural ability to fall asleep while standing up. i’d just lock my hand into my belt, and my head would nod to the side and my mouth would hang open, and boom, i was asleep.

and EVERY time i would get caught. imagine looking down the line of recruits standing straight and tall with their erect flags flying, and there, at the end, poor little alaska is drooping to the side, flaccid and limp, and my mouth is all hanging open. i can just imagine the company commanders pointing me out and shaking their heads, then asking each other, “you mind if i get ott this time, or do you want a crack at him?”

they did not call me mr. push-up for naught, let me tell you, and by the time i finally finished boot camp, i was SO fucking fit, more healthy and fit than i ever had been or have been ever since.

now i feel like a big fat slob who desperately needs to work out. ugh.

Cameras are everywhere.
so, i’m sitting here in my... err... in THE cubicle in which i work and i’m listening to the latest cd by idlewild and i’m doing my data entry thing and i’m drinking my morning mountain dew and i’m chewing my extra gum and everything is moving along all hunky-dory, when all of a sudden, out of nowhere, here comes this smell...

(schniff)

...what the hell is that smell?

and right away, i recognize that smell, because i have been smelling that smell all too frequently lately.

yes, i am talking about cat piss.

what with aretha in heat every other day and squealing like a four-alarm kitty siren and begging moaning pleading to get out and get some hot cat-on-cat action, i have been smelling that smell all the damn time. in the last two weeks, i’ve had to emergency wash my quilt, pillow, and pillow case no less than three times. in fact, the kitties are under kitty quarantine until aretha gets fixed (i lock them in the large walk-through hallway/closet/bathroom area of my studio when i am at work.)

but, that’s at home. here in the cubicle in which i work, the smell of cat piss has been, until now, a rarity. but there it was, unmistakable, the smell of cat piss. i immediately started sniffing all my clothes for evidence, my shirt, my pants... nothing, no cat piss, just the sweet smell of dryer sheets. i smelled my shoes, even my little duffel bag work-out holder thingie... nothing, no cat piss.

so i tried to ignore it, thinking it was all in my mind, but man, it was so obviously there. cat piss doesn’t fuck around, you know, it’s not coy, it doesn’t flirt, it’s in your face like a drunk frat boy in a sports bar and it won’t go away.

so i called my co-worker over and asked her to sit in my chair in my cubicle and take a whiff to see if she noticed anything odd. and she noticed nothing. NOTHING.

weird voodoo cat piss smell.

so, my boss comes over to me a little later and whispers one of my top ten scariest phrases: “hey, you gotta minute?”

(others in my top ten list of scariest phrases: “we have to talk;” “let’s go for a walk;” “the results of your tests have come back.”)

anyway, we walk into a meeting room, she turns on the lights, she closes the door (i am sure at this point that i am about to be fired for too much surfing on the internet), and we begin to talk about increasing my job responsibilities (whew... i’m not being fired.)

... and there it is again, the smell of cat piss, right there in the eve was framed.
meeting room, and this means one of the following statements is true:

1] either i am imagining the smell of cat piss;
2] or i am carrying around the smell of cat piss on my person.

so i stop my boss in the middle of her speech about how she is pleased with my work and wants to give me another raise, and i say, “cynthia, can you do me a favor? can you smell me and tell me if i smell like... uhm... cat pee?”

she smirks (she’s a mom, so she’s used to having to perform various sniff tests), then starts sampling my odor, first my shirt (nothing), then my pants (nothing), then she looks at me... pauses... and says, “eirik, it’s your beanie.”

(pause)
dear lord.
(pause)
i take my yellow and black striped beanie off my head and raise it to my nose...

...and yes, there it is, issuing forth in plumes, the unmistakable stench of cat piss... on my BEANIE, which has been ON MY HEAD all night long while i was sleeping and all morning long while i’ve been entering data.

that means that the cute girl who i sat next to on the bus, the cute one, the one who was reading “a heartbreaking work of staggering genius,” the one who actually got up at one of the stops and moved to another seat and made me think, “hmmm, i wonder why she moved? maybe she saw me reading over her shoulder...” well, this means the girl on the bus probably told all her friends that some schmuck who smelled like cat piss sat next to her on the bus today.

great.

now i’m Cat Piss Guy. even worse, i’m Cat Piss On The Bus Guy Who Was Reading My Book Over My Shoulder Guy.

that’s just great.
so, yeah, i’m eating like crap because i’ve been basically living on my parent’s texaco card, see, and my diet has consisted of trucker sandwiches wrapped in celephane and bags of chips and bottles of soda, and it’s just awful and i feel like crap, so i sorta “liberated” some vitamins and a fiber supplement from the local qfc grocery store the other night (i know, i should feel terribly guilty, but a boy sometimes has to do what a boy has to do).

anyway, last night i’m walking downtown to the poetry slam and i get hit with this huge foghorn blast of a gas attack, just voluminous, like when you blow up some huge balloon and just let go of it, whoosh, like i should be lifted off the ground and ricocheted off the corners of rooftops and lightposts and mailboxes while making this high-pitched whistle sound.

man, it was so... well, impressive, really, in a third grader watching cartoons with dad sort of way, like, “damn, son, whatchoo been eatin’? hand me them pork rinds, you big sewer ass, before i beat you with this stick.”

to use a phrase my grandma favors, i was “tootin’ to beat the band.”

to use a phrase my mom favors, i was “windy as all get out.”

to use a phrase my sister uses, “damn, stink biscuit, you funky!”

i kept thinking that since it was so cold outside, maybe plumes of methane fog could be seen putt-putting out of my backside like a little boonkie choo-choo, and i even checked in mid-poot, but the results were inconclusive.

okay, so i get into work this morning, and i’m about to take my morning vitamin and fiber suppliment, and i notice this warning on the fiber suppliment bottle: “may cause slight bloating or gas.”

i’ll say. what an understatement. the warning should say: “this product may transform your ass into a smokestack methane factory, which may or may not cause stinky plumes of fart gas fog to gather around you on cold evenings and trail you like a bloodhound after an escaped convict. caution should be used with this product during first dates or job interviews.”

you know, the only advice my dad ever gave me about dating concerned gas. he said, “son, just remember to hold your farts during the whole date. don’t dare fart in the presence of your date. hold it until you drop her off, and when you’re sitting in your car and you wave

technology brings people closer, like cattle.
goodbye and start driving, then you can cut loose.”

he added, “i’ll tell you son, there’s nothing like that first big fart after a big, hot date. when i first dated your mother, i used to hold it so long, my belly would just swell up. yup, i sure did love that girl, and when she’d get out of my car, man oh man, i’d just fog them damned windows.”

me and my dad... bonding the old fashioned way, through farts.

my sister, whew, she can fart. she’s a big girl, 300+ pounds, 5’4”, eats lots of meat. homegirl is a veritable gas factory. we used to play this game growing up, the “ha, i farted in your face game.” i would be watching scooby doo or something and she’d come launching into the living room and stand with her aircraft carrier ass in my face and let off a fat juicy ripper right in my face, bonus points if my mouth was hanging open at the time.

that should tell you all you need to know about my family.

relish your anonymity.
my first real girlfriend was kelly woods. we dated in high school, then dated for another five years or so after i graduated. about four years into it, she moved out from bakersfield to live with me in virginia. anyways, one night i got home and i was very tired and just beat. kelly was a really kick ass girlfriend. she practically carried me over to the bed, sat me down, took off my boots, my shirt, my pants, laid me down on my stomach and gave me what she called “an extra special full body rub.” so nice. then, she had me roll over and proceeded to give me the “extra special” portion of the body rub, which was... well, let’s say she concentrated on a very specific portion of my poor tired body. and this was very nice, just to lay back, smile, and have someone take care of you like that... but... it was a bit... rubby. so i asked her if we had any baby oil left. she said no, no baby oil, we had run out a few weeks ago. so i asked if we had any hand lotion, and no, we had just run out of hand lotion. so i am laying there, aroused, she is sitting there, me in her hand, and we are trying to think about a suitable lubricant to finish the “extra special body rub, and i hit upon the brilliant idea to use some shampoo. seems like it would be nice and slippery, so we tried it, she got some suave and put it in her hand and -- viola! it did the trick, just what the doctor ordered, that is until... a few moments later, when the expression on my face slowly changed from one of bliss to one of woe. it started as a curious tingle, which then progressed to a slight stinging, which then moved right on over to full on burning pain shooting through my most delicate member. i was like, “oh my gawd! i’m on fire!” i jumped up out of bed and ran to the bathroom, turned on the shower, and jumped in, washing my boy furiously, trying to get all the soap out his little eye, and it was terrible, mace in your face only focused down below. by the time i was done, my willie was all swollen and angry and red, and it stung so bad... for the next several times i went to the bathroom, it was enough to bring tears to my eyes.

kelly, by the way, thought it was the single funniest thing she had ever witnessed.

lesson learned: shampoo and mucous membranes do not mix. this is why there is such a thing as “no more tears” shampoo, you idiot.
okay, so flash forward several years, and i have just finished having a romp in the bed of a friend of mine named nancy. we weren’t dating, but we would get together every now and then and romp. you know... anyway, after a particularly active session of romping, she was cuddled up next to me with her face sorta stuff into my underarm, and she politely informed me that the funk issuing forth from my pits was voluminous. i think she said, and i quote, “goddamn, baby, you stink.” since this was her place, i asked her if she had any deodorant, but she did not, saying that it was against her earthy crunchy nature grrl ways, so i got up and searched around her bathroom until i found something that might take care of the funk: a bottle of “natural” air freshener made exclusively of essential orange oils. nothing artificial, the label said. pure orange essence, the label said. no chemicals, the label said. so i figured it might do my stinky pits some good. i gave it two sprays for each pit, and the subtle fragrance of oranges permeated the room. i went back to bed, nancy proclaimed it a success, and we proceeded to cuddle some more. until... a few moments later... when all of a sudden my arm-pits were on fire! aieee! i jumped back into her bathroom, leaped into the shower, and turned on the cold water to my pits. i washed them off, i rub them with water, and tried everything, and they started to swell... my pits started to puff up! by the time the shower was over, i was so swollen that i couldn’t put my arms all the way down.

nancy, needless to say, thought it was about the funniest thing she had ever seen.

lesson learned: some evil shit comes “natural sources.”

on another note, i broke my tongue while going down on nancy once. you know that little string on the underside of your tongue? snapped right in two. i not only felt it snap, but i heard it, too. i could barely talk for several days.

that pain you are ignoring is probably cancer.
“Camper Van Jim Morrison.”

We were sitting on our raggedy-assed couch, my roommate Cale and me, watching teevee and playing Camper Van. It was the fall of my sophomore year and this was the first apartment I’d lived in since moving out of the dorms.

“Camper Van Janis Joplin.”

The game we were playing was called Camper Van, after the defunct college rock band Camper Van Beethoven. Cale and I spontaneously invented the game one drunken evening, coming up with other composers for the name of the band — Camper Van Chopin, Camper Van Liszt, Camper Van Stravinsky — back and forth until one of us couldn’t think of another composer. If the other could then name just one more, he won.

“Camper Van John Lennon.”

The game this particular night was Camper Van Dead Rock Stars Who’s Names Began With The Letter ‘J.’

“Camper Van...uhm, Camper Van John Belushi.”

“I don’t know if he’d count, man,” I said. “He was an actor, not a rock star.”

Cale retorted with, “What about The Blues Brothers? It was a side project, but they put out albums and toured.”

He had a point. Besides, the shots of Early Times whiskey were beginning to take effect. I didn’t care. It was Friday night, I didn’t have any homework, and my rent check hadn’t bounced yet. Life was good.

“Okay, fine,” I said, “how’s about... Camper Van... Camper Van... oh, wait, Camper Van Jimi Hendrix.”

“Damn!” Cale was burnt. I’d ripped his next answer right out from under him. He slammed another shot of whiskey and thought for a moment, his eyes on the teevee screen. Jeopardy, with shitty reception and the sound turned all the way down.

About this time, we heard someone come in through the front door. The wiggle of the doorknob. The jingle of keys. The creak of the door opening. The clomp clomp of boots down the hallway. It could only be one person: our other roomie Doug.

Cale and I exchanged amused looks, then counted slowly to three. One, two, th...we heard the jingle of keys as Doug unlocked his room door, opened it, and closed and locked it behind him.

Queer bird, that Doug. I had only ever seen him once, when he

no one will meet you the next time you fly into an airport.
answered our “Room For Rent” ad and moved in two months before.
We hadn’t spoken to him and he hadn’t spoken to us since then, mostly
because he was gone in the morning before either of us got up and went
straight to his room at night. Instead, we communicated via Post-It
notes on the front door. Cale would leave a note saying “Doug, rent is
due,” and the next day there’d be a 7-11 money order for the amount
along with another note saying “Here’s rent.” Same thing for the power
and trash. No phone, though. Doug had his own phone line installed
two days after he moved in.

He had his own personal refrigerator in his room, so he never had
to worry about sly roomies drinking his milk or scamming his cheese.
The only reason I knew this was because I saw it when he first moved
in.

Doug also had his own car, a Chevy hatchback like the kind they
gave away on The Price Is Right in the ’70s. And since Cale and I hated
television and refused to buy cable, Doug had his own cable hook-up
in his room. You could sometimes see a pale light oozing from under
his door at night, like from a television screen, but never any sound. We
figured he must listen to it on headphones.

In fact, he must’ve listened to everything on headphones because
no sound ever came from his bedroom. Ever. Not even breathing. Cale
was sure he saw an IBM clone computer and a component stereo sys-
tem with Doug’s pile of stuff when he moved in, but we never heard a
peep from either of them.

He also never got any mail...at least, not from our mailbox, so he
must have had a post office box somewhere in town. Or maybe he had
them sent to his work. If he got mail. If he did work.

“Camper Van Brian Jones,” Cale trumpeted, smiling proud and
knocking back another shot of Early Times. He winced as it went
down, then pumped his arm in triumph, yes!, yes!, yes!...

Maybe Doug was a trust-funder like Cale. Cale’s parents were rich
beyond belief and paid for everything. Rent. Food. School. Car pay-
ments, gas, electricity. Everything. Cale didn’t even need roommates,
and could’ve been styling in some nice condo, but he chose to live here
in this funky townhouse two blocks from the university.

Cale’s father had made a fortune inventing things. Not really im-
pressive things that changed the world or saved anyone’s life, but little
stupid shit that he’d patent and make mint from.

His first invention was the little green tab that keeps the plastic bag
gathered on a loaf of super market bread. They’re everywhere. His “E-
Z Lok” jobbers ended up replacing the twist-tie thing because they cost
half as much to produce. Cale’s dad raked in a cool million dollars

no one from high school remembers you, and the ones who do mock you.
every year just on those little plastic tabs.

The next big idea was a replacement for those plastic packets of ketchup you get at fast food places. His little “Mess-Free Condiment Dispenser” had two small containers of whatever needed dispensing that were crushed together, splooching the product through an opening in the top. What made these special was you didn’t have to bite a triangle of plastic from the corner of the packet anymore. The mess factor was, as his father put it, “virtually eliminated.”

Cale’s dad had been hard-selling the idea to fast food corporations all over the country and McDonald’s and Wendy’s were test marketing his thingamajig in Denver, Seattle and San Diego.

Millions. Millions on these little convenient bits of plastic. And he hadn’t even been to college. Cale said his father’s biggest disappointment growing up was that he hadn’t invented Silly Putty.

Maybe Doug was a trust-funder, too.

Maybe not.

As for me, I was working as a dishwasher at the nearby Holiday Inn. It was just down the street from our apartment, so I walked to work. I rode my mountain bike everywhere I couldn’t walk and rode the bus anywhere I couldn’t bike. Things were so set on the alternative transportation tip that I left my car back home at my parents’ the last time I was there.

The townhouse was only a two bedroom, so I slept in the closet underneath the stairs. It wasn’t so bad...it was big, like eight feet long, with a sloped ceiling at least seven feet high at the door and three in the very back. I had enough room for a narrow futon bed, a lamp, and a couple of boxes for my clothes and some books. The rest of my stuff was kept at a “U Store It - U Lock It - U Keep The Key” place a couple of blocks away.

I had planned on staying in the storage facility when the dorms kicked all the students out for the summer, but Cale offered to rent his closet to me for $50 a month, plus a share of the utilities. For some reason, it never really seemed strange that I was living in somebody’s closet.

“Uhmm...Camper Van...shit...Camper Van...” This next one was going to be tough. Brian Jones was my wild card pick. I didn’t expect Cale to think of last names beginning with ‘J.’ Who else? Kurt, River, Elvis, Karen Carpenter...no ‘Js’...what about the chick from 7 Year Bitch, the chick that O.D.’d on heroin...fuck, fuck, fuck...and that other chick from Hole, what was her name?

Before I could speak, the sound of a door opening wafted down the hall. Cale and I exchanged curious looks again. Doug? Out of his

pets feel uncomfortable around you.
room? Impossible!

And yet, there was the unmistakable shuffling sound of his feet, the jingle of his keys, and they were heading for the front door. He was breathing heavily, too. Like he was carrying something.

Cale raised his eyebrows to me, like what? He lifted his head slightly and shouted, “Hey, Doug! You outta here, man? You going to the store or something?” He looked to the almost empty bottle of Early Times, then at me and smiled. “We’re almost out of Squirrely Mimes. If you’re going to the store, can I give you some cash to pick up some more?”

We waited. All we could hear was Doug’s breathing, bouncing off the walls from the entryway and into the living room. After a moment, he set down whatever he was carrying, something that sounded heavy, and said, “No, I’m not going to the store. I’m going to visit a friend of mine for the weekend.”


He hesitated again, then picked up his load and shuffled out the door, locking the bolt behind him.

We waited for the sound of his car taking off down the road, then jumped from the couch and into the entryway. Cale pointed to a set of four indentations in the carpet.

“You see these? Wheels from the bottom of a suitcase. Our boy’s going somewhere and he’s packed a suitcase. Wow! And do you smell that?” Cale pointed to his nose, then sniff-sniffed.

I sampled the air. Nothing at first, but then the unmistakable smell of Old Spice made its presence known. Our boy was powdered and ready.

“Dude, you don’t think old Iggy has found a girlfriend, do you?” I asked. We’d been referring to Doug as Ignatious since he moved in, after the mama’s boy in A Confederacy of Dunces who lived at home with his mother until he was like thirty-five and stayed locked up in his room all day.

Cale just shrugged his shoulders, poched out his lips — could be? — then said, “Alright, you quit?”

“Quit what?” I asked, then remembered it was still my turn at Camper Van. Damn...I was blank.

Oh, oh, oh! Led Zeppelin...the, uhm, the drummer! I blurted out “John Bonham! Camper Van John Bonham!” and Cale started jumping up and down, slapping his knee and yelling “Damn!” over and over. Yes!

We finished the rest of the whiskey. Cale couldn’t think of another

your mom married your dad because she was bored. she regrets it now.
Dead ‘J’ and I couldn’t think of just one more to clinch it, so the game was a draw. Cale said he was off to bed, then ran upstairs to use the bathroom before I had a chance to move. The bastard shut the door laughing, because he knew I’d have to pitch a whizz and he always took a fucking week on the toilet. The downstairs bathroom, the one we considered Doug’s, had been stopped up for the past few weeks, so I had to take a piss outside in the bushes.

The crabapples had been used as a latrine so many times I’m surprised the poor things didn’t shrivel up and die. It was nice outside. A cool breeze blew through my hair, the smell of trees and grass and autumn was in the air, and I was taking a nice, fat piss against the building... I closed my eyes and enjoyed it immensely.

When I opened them again, I was looking at the window behind the bushes. Iggy’s window. I pushed aside the bushes and tried to peer through the glass. Nothing but the reflection of my eye staring back at me. It looked like he’d covered the inside of his window with something like black construction paper or blackened aluminum foil. It made me think of the crack house down the block, with all its windows blacked out and graffiti all over the porch.

Hmmm...queer bird, that Doug. Odd bird. I went back inside and into my closet, crawled into my down sleeping bag on my futon, and went to sleep.

The next afternoon, Cale and I were bored so we started dialing 1-800 numbers at random, seeing what kind of businesses we could find. The porn lines were the easiest. 1-800-FUCK-YOU was phone sex, as were 1-800-BIG-TITS, 1-800-HOT-HOLE, 1-800-WET-LIPS, and 1-800-MY PUSSY. In fact, they were all the same company, as if they had gone and reserved all the best smut numbers they could think of all at once.

1-800-DICK-BOY, though, was the Bank of New York business line, which cracked our shit up. So did 1-800-NUT-CASE, which was some sort of crisis hotline, and 1-800-HI JERRY, which was Jerry’s Automotive in Mobile, Alabama.

We tried to find devil worshippers for half an hour, like 1-800-I’M SATAN and 1-800-666-HELL, but then got bored and just sat there on the couch. The teevee was on as usual, with the sound turned off. Some talk show was on. Women with big hair and men with mustaches were screaming at each other and pointing their fingers like pistols.

Cale suddenly turned to me and said, “Dude, let’s see what’s in Iggy’s room.”

I looked at him like he was insane. “No, let’s not,” I said, shaking my head. “Besides, his door’s probably locked.”

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most people die at about 70. that means you are middle-aged at 35.
“So, I can jimmy it open. C’mon, I’m bored.” Before I could say a word, Cale was off to the kitchen to fetch a butter knife. We met in front of Doug’s room. Cale knelt in front of the door, wedging the butter knife in the space between the door jam and the door, near the knob. A couple of wiggles, a twist, and suddenly the door was open.

A warm push of stagnant air billowed from the room and engulfed us both in a locker room stench of soiled underwear and dirty socks. It had a musty body odor smell, like a room full of hot, wet sheepdogs breathing too hard. Dirty clothes were everywhere, on the floor, on his bed, hanging from his closet door...he couldn’t have vacuumed even if he wanted to because the floor was so cluttered with shit.

And then there was his computer desk. Immaculate. Not a scrap of dirty clothes on it, not even dust, and all the books and cables and computer things were arranged just so... He had a kicking computer chair with gray upholstery and hydraulics that neither of us remembered Doug bringing in, and a sheet of hard plastic underneath it for the casters. Blinking lights flashed from under the desk and little humming/clicking sounds spat out in time to the blinks.

Cale cat-walked over to the computer, choosing his steps like a land mine de-fuser, and started looking over the computer, trying to figure out how to turn on the monitor. After a few seconds he “Ah-hah!’d” and clicked the power switch.

“The main part of the computer is already on, and the disc drives are humming,” Cale said. “Iggy’s got some shit going on. Maybe he’s hacking the pentagon or something. Little bugger’s gonna get us...”

“Dude, look!” I said, pointing to the monitor’s full color display. On the screen was a slender column of text and a large full-color graphic of a nude woman spread wide-open like a Hustler centerfold. As we looked in mock horror, the text scrolled up from the bottom as more words were added to the column of text.

I looked at the words...it appeared to be some kind of conversation, only of the worst sex talk bullshit variety. “This fucker’s on-line to some sex talk thing. He must have a modem...”

Cale pointed to the hard drives under the desk. “See those...I think those are networked...dude, and look at all the modems he’s got under there. There’s like twelve of ‘em. Iggy’s not subscribing to some sex line, he’s running a sex line! He’s got some kind of computer sex cyber-shit going on! Man, no wonder he locks his room. Fucking freak.”

Cale opened a desk drawer, then jerked his hand away as if a viper were about to tear into him. He screamed, “Ewww, look, look!”

I peered into the deep drawer and saw a collection of rubber gloves you think you are even-tempered, but most people are afraid of your anger.
and sex toys, cock rings and pumper things and squeeze tubes of K-Y Jelly. The gloves had globbers of schmeng on the tips and little curly-cues of pooby hairs stuck in the knuckles.

Cale was thoroughly disgusted and started making noises like he was about to retch. His hands were held high in the air like he didn’t want to get anything on them.

“Let’s get outta here, man, this is fucking gross!” Cale said, heading back towards the door.

I closed the drawer, switched off the monitor, and turned to leave when I spotted a sheet of computer paper in the laser printer on the floor. I bent to pick it up.

“Wait a second, Cale, c’mere.” I read the print-out to him. It appeared to be a transcription of some conversation through Doug’s cyber-sex network. Two people named GREYWULF and BRIGHT-EYES were talking back and forth, and they appeared to be setting up a meeting place.

“Look, man, it says they’re going to meet up in Davis, at some pizza place near the state college,” I said. “Iggy’s gone and met some cyber-chick and he’s driving all the way to Davis to meet her. Man, and look at this shit they’re saying...’The WULF is hungry, he needs to tell, he’ll give you inches and give it well.’”

“Dude,” Cale asked, “Rock You Like A Hurricane?”

“Yeah,” I replied, disgusted.

“Yuck, put it back, man, let’s go. I’m gonna have to shower just from being in here.”

I placed the paper back into the printer just the way I found it and we both left, locking the door behind us.

Doug came home late that Sunday night, toting his luggage and huffing. Cale and I were in the living room on the couch as usual, watching the teevee with the sound turned off and playing quarters. We tensed up, waiting for the inevitable scream of “Who’s been in my room!”

After a few minutes, Doug’s door opened again and we heard his footsteps our way down the hall. Here it comes...we both hunched down in the couch, trying to bury our shoulders in the cushions in defense.

I saw Doug’s shadow on the wall and heard his breathing. He cleared his throat and said, “Cale? I need to talk to you.”

Cale gave me a pained expression like he just swallowed something sour, got up and walked to the hallway to speak with Doug. I heard their mumbling...I couldn’t make out what they were saying, but it didn’t sound angry or confrontational.

you'll never be happy if you keep living your life the way you are.
Doug’s shadow seemed to gesticulate a lot while he was talking, something I had never seen it do before. Usually, Doug’s shadow just clung to the wall like a water stain. I didn’t know if this meant he was agitated or what, but it meant something.

A few minutes later, Cale came back and sat down next to me on the couch. The shuffling sound down the hall told me Doug was going back to his room. I looked at Cale, my expression a what?

He just smiled and said, “He’s moving out...and no, it’s not because we were in his room. I don’t think he realizes he was violated yet. Anyway, he says he’s moving out by Tuesday. He wants me to give him the current power bill so he can figure his share, and says I can keep the security deposit since he can’t give me a month notice.”

I just shook my head. “Maybe he knows, or suspects...”

He cut me off. “No, man, I think it was BRIGHTEYES. You should’ve seen him. He was grinning this big toothy grin the whole time he was talking to me. I think he’s convinced himself he’s in love and he’s moving to Davis to be with her.”

Cale asked if I wanted Iggy’s room once he was gone. He offered to keep the rent at $50 a month...he’d just tell his mom to send enough money to cover the rest.

I thought about it...it would be nice to have more space, but the thought of living in the same room as Doug and his Internet Sex Dungeon gave me the willies. I decided to stay in the closet. Cale kept the room empty the rest of the semester. In fact, he kept it locked the whole time and told people it was cursed.

On the teevee, some Star Trek thing was on. Captain Jean Luc Picard’s face was blood-red from some emergency light and the camera’s view jerked all around like an earthquake.


Cale just yelled “Damn! Damn! Damn!” and slapped his knee. Yes!

sadness is the only constant.
HAIKU

blood from my girlfriend’s period is encrusted on my fingernails.

hand on my penis, kimberly lies beside me watching screensavers.

baby, if your ass were a lightbulb, the whole world would wear sunglasses.

thelonious is makin’ biscuits on my butt, purring and content.

the blackberry stains on my fingertips look like blood, only bluer.

i woke up to find it was the end of the world; should I lock my bike?

my cock, your mouth, the table, the stairs, my bed, my god... that’s really nice.

you giggle as my cock does the magic mushroom, swelling in your fist.

soggy old spider’s in my soapdish and he is starting to smell bad.

do not fuck with me. i have a brand new backpack and it’s really cool.

my ex-girlfriend pisst me off, so i killt her cat with a baseball bat.

my spine tingles as my pee mingles with the hot soapy bathwater.

“see that?” grandma said, slapping her tight ass. “you could bounce quarters off that.”

i would just like to say that it is all my fault: i let the dog’s out.

yo momma is so stanky that she used secret and it told on her.

i’m glad i wore boots because your poetry is getting hella deep.

if that which does not kill you makes you stronger, then call me hercules.

it all come down to this: quien es mas macho? han o indy? hmmm....

please god, don’t let “the lord of the rings” suck. i’ve been waiting a long time.

my roomie doesn’t like my cats. that’s okay. they don’t like him either.

if life gives you lemons, squeeze lemon juice in its fucking eye.
The Wussy Boy Manifesto!: If any poem threatens to be my “Stairway to Heaven,” it’s this one. The words to this piece will probably be etched into my tombstone. It started as scribbles in the margin of the notebook I used for a communications class in February of ’99. I had come up with the concept of using “Wussy” as an empowering term a couple of years before I wrote the poem, but it didn’t come together until the notes were compiled in this comm class. It was pretty effortless and natural. Now it’s become something much bigger than I ever expected. I had signature poems before this one, but now everything I’ve ever done will be eclipsed by it. I suppose I can handle that. Wallflower: Every so often I skim through my online journal in the hopes of finding possible poems lying in wait. This one started as a few sentences describing this college house party my immature college roomies took me to once. I felt so stupid and old and dumb, but ended up fascinated by the way all the girls moved, it was amazing. Truth be told, I am actually not that bad of a dancer. This was put together over a few weeks in early 2002. Frat Boy Poetry: Creative writing classes are something I take every now and then to stimulate my lazy writing motivations. This one came during one such class when we were studying different types of poetry, maybe Fall of ’99, and we had just read this sort of list poem called “Fast Talking Woman” by Anne Waldman. I wrote this piece the next day. Chico is rife with the most blunt frat boys imaginable, so I conjured this image of some frat boy with his thesaurus trying to write a poem for his little sorority girlfriend. He tries to be sweet at first but then is revealed to be the pig he really is. Frat boys are genetically incapable of not beating my ass. Worm Boy: Here’s another piece that has absolutely nothing to with poetry and everything to do with just making an audience laugh and groan at the same time. It first started as “Worm Girl” and was meant to be a funny variation of the “I will love you no matter what” poems that everyone writes, but I just took it too far. It became so ugly and offensive that I couldn’t do it on stage anymore without people thinking I was a misogynist pig. When I switched it to “Worm Boy,” however, it suddenly became hilariously funny, especially when targeting someone the audience knew. I now reserve it for people I really like, sort of a funny way of mocking them, plus it’s fun to play with people’s perception of my sexual orientation. Fly Boy: No, this didn’t really happen. No, I don’t think people should go out and do horrid things to their cats. I love my kitties very much, and I would kick the ass of anyone who even for a moment suggested they should do something as wretched as this to my babies. Still, this poem from way way back -- back before I had even been to an open mike poetry reading, back in, like, ’88 -- can be kinda funny, especially when it’s performed in an overwrought mock sadness. It appeals to the 7th grader in me. Girls hate this poem. Jesus Moshpit: I wrote this on a Budweiser napkin at a punk show in Chico in Fall of ’96. It was a first date with Kimberly, the muse for way too many of my poems, and she was writing a story on a little punk band called No Use For A Name for the university newspaper. I felt so old and wimpy watching the moshpit full of shirtless teenagers in their prime, clashing into each other and impervious to the pain. It’s nice to imagine what it would be like to be the biggest guy in the moshpit, so big that not even God would want to mess with you. Ah, Wussy Boy fantasies. When I look back, this is probably the very first Big PoppaE poem, although I wrote it a few years before the name came up. The Lonesome Ballad of Josephus Moshpit: I had always wanted to write a proper cowboy poem and perform it at a cowboy
poetry festival, so I was all excited when I wrote this during the summer of ’99 while I was interning at a newspaper in Reno. I have only ever performed it twice, and neither time was at a cowboy poetry festival. Maybe someday... Receipt Found in the Parking Lot of the Super WalMart: No, silly, I didn’t really actually find this receipt in the parking lot of a Super WalMart. Some people are so gullible. I just wanted to write a poem with nothing more than a list of items so that the whole story and the whole plot is merely suggested by the order of the items, and the audience has to fill in the rest. This was one of the very few poems I wrote while in Seattle, probably around May of 2001. Just Take Another Drink: I wrote this one very quickly in late ’96 because I wanted to have a brand new poem to use when I opened up for Henry Rollins when he performed at Chico State University. Well, okay, I was hoping to perform, but they never actually let me, so this poem had its debut at the very first Chico Poetry Slam. I came in second place. Potty is Pee: This was inspired by an actual conversation with my girlfriend at the time, and upon further enquiry, I discovered that northern Californians tend to use the term “potty” to mean specifically “pee,” while most of the country uses “potty” to mean either pee or poo. In my family, though, potty has always and only meant “poo.” So, you know... I just had to write a poem about it. The Miracle Corner Pocket Luck Shot: Now that I think about it, this poem was actually first inspired by someone named Cheryl Battles during a heated pool game. She ended up kicking my ass, but I wrote the poem about my friend Brian, someone with whom I had never played pool. No idea why, but I suspect it was because Brian wrote a poem about me where he described me “slashing through the booty jungle with a flesh machete.” Now, come on, you just can’t ignore something like that. Quid pro quo, Starling. Minuet, Sexuality, Routine: These were all written during the same creative writing class in ’88, probably around the same time if not the exact same writing session. I guess I was just going through a very brief surreal phase, something I thankfully got over. Love Poem #9: Oh god, the pain! the agony! the desperation of the human condition! The piece of stinky poop-poop this poem is! Try reading this one out loud in an overwrought faux poet voice, and see if you can get through the whole thing without choking with laughter. I double-dog dare you, and that means you have to do it. How To Dance Like A Wussy Boy, Weird Mind Game I Play #1, Boot Camp, What’s That Smell?, Little Boonkie Choo-Choo: All of these are journal entries written in Seattle between fall 2000 and summer 2001. Having a data entry job during most of that time meant that my journal entries were numerous and verbose, and I made $15 an hour while I wrote them. It was right nice of them to do that, so I have the entire staff of World Travel Partners to thank for it. You guys rock! Burning Sensations Numbers One and Two: A random journal entry from Chico 2002. I have no idea why I suddenly decided to write about these events. Doug, Cale, and The Closet King: This was one of the first short stories I had ever written that I really liked, from a creative writing class in Chico in fall of ’94. The characters are based on myself and a the guy I moved to Chico with from Bakersfield, a drummer named Cale. The character of Doug is made up, but the rest is a pretty accurate portrait of the first few months we spent in Chico, just sitting on the couch, watching Jeopardy, eating bad food, and laughing big fat bely laughs. The game in the story, Camper Van, has become a crucial part of every roadtrip I’ve taken since. Be good to each other now, okay, and float your big poppae e a note every now and then. he’d like that.
Big Poppa E’s Bio Quiz!

Answers are inside the front cover at the very bottom.

1] In which city has BPE never lived?
   a] Seattle, WA
   b] Chico, CA
   c] Austin, TX
   d] San Francisco, CA
   e] Millington, TN

2] Which of the following was not the name of a tour mounted by Big Poppa E?
   a] Couches Across America Tour (summer 2000)
   b] EI-EI-OH The Humanity Tour (late 2000)
   c] Couches Across America 2, Electric Boogaloo (spring 2001)
   d] The Wussy Boy World Tour (fall 2001)
   e] The Busted Tooth Tour (fall 2002)

3] Of which of the following poetry slam teams was BPE not a member?
   a] Austin (2002 - 23rd at NPS)
   b] Seattle (2001 - 2nd at NPS)
   c] Chico (2000 - 12th at NPS)
   d] San Francisco, CA (1999 - 1st at NPS)
   e] San Francisco, CA (1998 - 18th at NPS)

4] On which TV program has BPE not appeared?
   a] HBO’s Def Poetry
   b] BET’s The Way We Do It
   c] CBS’s 60 Minutes
   d] Voice of America News
   e] NBC’s Late Night with Conan O’Brien

5] In which newspaper has BPE not been featured?
   a] USA Today
   b] The Los Angeles Times
   c] The New York Times
   d] The Sydney Morning Herald (Australia)
   f] The Washington Post

6] In which magazine has BPE not been featured?
   a] Poets and Writers
   b] Bust
   c] Ms.
   d] Spin
   e] The Utne Reader

7] By which radio program has BPE never been interviewed?
   a] The Howard Stern Show
   b] The Beth Lapides Experience (Internet Radio)
   c] Australian Broadcasting Company’s Triple J Radio
   d] The Tom Leykis Show (national talk show)
   e] National Public Radio’s The Savvy Traveler

8] Which blurb about BPE is fake?
   a] “Pound for pound the funniest poet in the slam.”
   b] “A one-man REO Wusswagon.”
   c] “He’s neither very big nor is he a father, but he sure can rock a microphone.”
   d] “BPE’s words are so eloquent, so modern, so witty, funny, honest, angry, legitimate, motivating, sensual, wrenching, wise, naive... he’s amazing.”
   e] “A hell of a performer, running on boundless energy and near-perfect comic timing.”
   f] “In the spearhead of a movement to spread a new gospel of poetry.”

9] What are the names of BPE’s two kitties?
   a] Louie and Ella
   b] Joe and Marilyn
   c] Lucy and Ricky
   d] Aretha and Thelonious
   e] They’re collectively called “Kitty.”

10] Which of the following statements is not true?
   a] BPE is in the midst of a project called 365 Haiku wherein he writes one haiku every day for a year.
   b] BPE appeared briefly in the Dutch film P.O.V.
   c] BPE’s zine The Wussy Boy Chronicles was nominated to The Utne Reader’s “Best of the Underground Press Awards 2000.”
   d] BPE has challenged himself to read poetry in each of the 50 states. So far he has hit 32.
   e] BPE toured with the SlamAmerica Bus Tour in the summer of 2000 for 30 straight days, longer than any other poet featured on the tour.
   f] BPE was once very publicly bitched out by Spike Lee, an event covered in the national media.
   g] BPE made out with Molly Ringwald at a party in L.A. but had no idea who she was at the time.