

◇ Defenestration ◇

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Table of Contents

Curtis Honeycutt, Two Poems	2
George Anderson, "Rhododendron Flats"	5
Richard Walker, "Sextacy"	7
David Siegel Bernstein, "Social Market"	8
Elizabeth Ridley, "Maternity Mecca"	9
Ellen Lindquist, "Religious Studies Grad Turns Zookeeper" (with a photo by Charlotte Jones)	11
J.R. Salling, "The Death of Louis the Fat"	14
Jonathan Harper, "Funeral of a Vibrator"	15
Kathleen McGurl, "Bloke's Blog"	18
Mike Romeling, "My Dear Clarissa"	22
Ross Eldridge, "A Bird In The Bus"	24
Stephanie O'Donnell, "Penpals With God, Episode 1"	29
Contributor Biographies	30

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Two Poems
by
Curtis Honeycutt

Time for Ritalin

Someone once told me
that poetry was just
literature with the
attention span of a
seven year-old boy
in a knitting museum,
so I wrote a
short poem.

Okay, maybe I made
that quote up myself,
but I think it's true,
and this is still a
short poem.

On Attempting to Obtain Super Powers

It has been my lifetime goal
to become a super hero.
I was disappointed to find
that there are no schools
or classes to attend
in order to become one,
so I developed my own strategies.

After months of standing
in front of the microwave in
an attempt to acquire radioactive
powers, all I have to show
is a nervous twitch in my eye,
certainly not the same thing
as heat or x-ray vision.

I have welcomed attacks
from all sorts of vicious beasts
such as wild kittens, insects,
small dogs, and gerbils.
Still no superhuman,
web-shooting abilities.

The mall police even arrested me
because I was running
through the mall in a spandex
unitard with a big "S" on my chest.
I guess I'm not faster than a
speeding bullet, or even a bullet
obeying the speed limit,
for that matter.

I guess I'll just continue
fighting crime from
my parents' basement,

making sure that grandma
doesn't get away with
feeding the dog bacon scraps
under the table.

It's a tough job,
but I think I can handle it.

Rhododendron Flats
by
George Anderson

We leave Manning Park

& drive south down Highway 3

towards Vancouver.

There's plenty to see & do along the way,

Dad reassures me.

Our first stop is Rhododendron Flats. But an

ominous provincial park sign reads at the entrance:

More than 250 species of mosses flourish in the extremely high humidity of this area. This variety is enhanced by the diversity of rock types as each species prefers its own kind of substrate. One species is only found here &.

Dad, you promised!

Later on Vancouver Island

we camp at Ucluelet & hike along the

Pacific Rim National Park in search of a beach.

I'm excited. The air is tingling and I'm craving a long, cool swim

in the ocean. We discover a thin path to the foreshore. A sign

shrieks out a chilling warning:

Warning: Hazardous Waves Can Sweep You Off Rocky Headlands, Suddenly Flood Beaches- Crushing You & Catching You in Currents. Water Activities NOT Recommended.

Dad!

In the black bear country at Green Point

warning signs are everywhere:

DANGER BLACK BEARS IN VICINITY

REPORT ANY SIGHTINGS TO THE PARK RANGER

I become far more alert-

each snap of a branch is menacing. My

parents are eager to push on

enchanted by their closeness to nature.

I find a curious comfort in a sign I come across in the undergrowth

held up by a smiling black bear cub:

Black Bears are largely misunderstood animals. We are NOT dangerous. Humans have a greater risk of being hurt by domestic pets, bees and even lightning. Please do not be afraid of us!

Sextacy
by
Richard Walker

'Sextacy'

A beautifully looking and sounding word
that just flew into my vision one day- like a bird.

Mr. Webster, does it exist?

If not, then please add it to your list.

Social Market
by
David Siegel Bernstein

Kyle Jonas poked his head into Ms. Holiday's office. "Um...ma'am, may I talk to you?" he asked the middle-aged CEO of the World Economic Corporation for Health, Optimal Output and Social Efficiency. He was proud to work at WE CHOOSE—not only was it the second largest corporation in the global marketing cartel, but it was also rated the best place to work by *Money Magazine* in their June 2032 issue.

"Yes, yes," said Ms. Holiday, motioning him to come in.

Kyle stepped into the office and waited patiently for her to finish her copy of the *Wall Street Journal*. She was one of the few people he knew that actually read the newsprint version of that paper—a luxury of the wealthy. After a few minutes she looked up and said, "What do you want to discuss?"

"Sorry to disturb you, ma'am, but we just received a high priority e-mail from Bleeding Hearts (BH), our liberal subsidiary in Jerking Knee, Wyoming. They wanted to inform us of their plans for a social revolution next month. What do you think?"

Ms. Holiday shook her head and said evenly, "No, I'm afraid the timing is all wrong. We'd have to give the affiliates more notice." Then she sat back in her plush (real artificial) leather chair in thoughtful repose. "But," she considered, "it might make a good midsummer replacement for the anti-drug project. Ratings aren't as high as test groups predicted. Go tell them in marketing to work up the numbers for me."

"Very good, ma'am." Kyle started to leave.

"No, wait," she stopped him. "Scratch that. I forgot that the GAP just released their spring fashion line. It would take at least a year before they could design proper fashion for social upheaval. Besides, we wouldn't have time for any other product tie-ins— McDonald's is committed to the Mars mission Happy Meals, and LEGO has the Ecumenical Humanism promotion."

Kyle shrugged. He knew that without anything to buy, who'd even notice a revolution?

"Reply back to that e-mail. Tell BH, we're sorry but there will be no revolution. The ratings would be too low at this time." Ms. Holiday paused for a moment and then smiled. "However, if they can find demonstrators willing to hold bottles of Coke, perhaps a small protest may be possible."

Maternity Mecca
by
Elizabeth Ridley

Our New York apartment was so small, we stored breakfast under our bed. Boxes of Frosted Mini Wheats and Raisin Bran were crammed next to sweaters, winter coats, running shoes, roller blades, umbrellas and other stuff that wouldn't fit into our one doll house-sized closet. John and I didn't have the space for a bunch of baby things, so I adopted a minimalist approach to maternity. While my friends had baby registries long enough to wallpaper their living rooms, I focused on just the bare essentials: a few clothes, receiving blankets, diapers and bottles. Even though my list was short, I was still looking forward to my pilgrimage to maternity Mecca—Baby World. Every expecting mother goes. Shopping at Baby World is part of the pregnancy rite of passage, like feeling the baby kick or being offered a seat on the subway for the first time. Those who have been claim Baby World is more than just a store, it's a mother's best friend.

I celebrated the first day of my third trimester by driving to the part of town where the stores are as big as airports. With a giant diaper clad child holding a huge spinning globe, Baby World stood out among Home Depot, Office Max and IKEA. I joined the congregation of pregnant women waddling across the parking lot towards the entrance. I had barely steered my row boat-sized cart through the automatic doors when, "Oh my God, how cute!" I gasped. Baby clothes. Rows and rows of pastel blues, pinks, yellows and greens like a cotton candy farm. Little knit hats with fuzzy ducky details, adorable onesies with buttons like gum drops, and booties so yummy I wanted to pop them into my mouth. I put a few clothes in my cart. Then a few more. And a few more. As I uncontrollably grabbed clothes off the rack, I thought back to when I was shopping for my wedding dress. I had entered the bridal boutique with a firm budget in mind and left with a dress that could have been a down payment on a modest home. A home with human-sized closets. Maybe I should put some clothes back, I thought. But they're so adorable and this is my first baby. I decided to keep the clothes, but promised myself that I'd stick to the rest of my list. Content with my compromise, I went in search of bottles.

The store was as big as Costco and as magical as Disneyland. Huge stuffed teddy bears hung from the ceiling, the staff wore cheerful aprons, and street signs marked every aisle. I passed Lullaby Lane and Playtime Promenade and turned left down Burping Boulevard which was full of bottle related supplies. I examined a piece of equipment that looked like a Cuisinart. It was an electric steam sterilizer which according to the box, "kills all household bacteria." I had planned to boil bottles in a pot on the stove, but what if my baby dies because I only killed some household bacteria and not all household bacteria? I put a sterilizer in my cart. I picked up a bottle warmer and read the label. "Warm baby's meal with fewer trips to the kitchen." I hadn't thought about how many trips to the kitchen I would have to make by warming a bottle in the microwave. If a bottle warmer would simplify what would surely be a frantic life, I needed one. By the time I got to the end of the aisle I had a lot more items in my cart, but I also had a lot more confidence in my mothering abilities with a bottle sterilizer, bottle warmer, bottle drying rack and organizer, bottle cooler, bottle tote, and bottle brush. Now I just needed a bottle.

I looked up and saw that the entire wall in the back of the store, from Diaper Drive to Learning Lane (five Baby World blocks), was full of bottles. I took a deep breath and approached. I had no idea there were so many different kinds of bottles from so many

different manufacturers. I became overwhelmed as I read the labels, searching for any intelligible information that would enable me to decide what to buy. Slow drip, fast drip, wide necks, infant grips, anti vacuum valves, internal vents, training handles, vented nipples, anti-colic nipples, orthodontic nipples. "Help!" A sales clerk rushed over. She was wearing a yellow ducky printed apron with a yellow baseball cap that had a duck's beak substituting for the rim.

"I just need a bottle," I pleaded. "Which one is best?" Even though I was sure the sales clerk was a high school student working part-time and not an experienced mother, I was desperate enough to go with whatever she recommended.

"Well, it all depends on what your baby prefers," she said. What my baby prefers? Had I heard correctly? I thought for a minute, then asked, "Even if my baby does prefer the slow drip bottle with the vented nipple and anti-vacuum valve over the fast drip one with the orthodontic nipple and internal vents, how would I know?"

The sales clerk looked confused. "He's a baby," I clarified. "He can't talk. But maybe you sell baby mind reading machines?" I half expected the sales clerk to direct me to ESP Avenue, but she slinked away instead.

The wall-o-bottles was way too much frosting on the cake, prompting me to question what, if anything, was really underneath. I stared at the pile of stuff in my cart. So much stuff for one tiny baby. Stuff that I didn't know existed and until coming to Baby World, didn't know I needed. A mother's best friend, I scoffed. An enterprise that preys on emotions and insecurities was more like it. I left Baby World and my cart full of stuff behind right in the middle of Splish Splash Street. I decided to do my baby shopping the old fashioned way. I went to Walgreens. The baby section there was labeled, Baby Section, and took up only half of aisle three. I found everything I needed, blankets, diapers and two bottles to choose from - a blue one and a pink one. Finally, a decision I could make with confidence. Three months later, Gregory was born. Just as I had hoped, he liked the blue bottle just fine.

Religious Studies Grad Turns Zookeeper
by
Ellen Lindquist

Photo by Charlotte Jones



The interview below, conducted by Alum Chat intern Peter Peters, is the last in our series, "What Happened to Them? Whither Kakawoolah State Alums?" Peters interviews Edna Gloucester, class of '96, who parlayed her religious studies degree into a career taking care of an orangutan at the San Diego Zoo.

Chat: So, tell me about the job with the orangutan.

E.G.: Well, basically all I have to do is feed him several times a day: some bananas, mixed greens and grain, ground-up vitamins, plantains, that sort of thing. Oh, and I also clean out his cage.

Chat: Did your degree in religious studies prepare you for this position?

E.G.: I would say, yes, it did. It taught me to think, basically—you know, in a linear, as well as a non-linear fashion. That's important when dealing with an orangutan.

Did you know it's not that uncommon for Kakawoolah religious studies grads to work with orangutans, or at least with zoos, that is. There's Jeffrey Schmoozicker, class of '97, who's with the Philadelphia Zoo, and Zorna Ratflag, class of '98 who's with the San Francisco Zoo,

in the herpetology division.

Chat: So you'd say a lot of Kakawoolah religious studies grads have ended up at the zoo.

E.G.: Yes, a fair number. The classes come in handy when it's dawn and you're walking out to the cage carrying a flashlight, about to face a beast that's much stronger than yourself, what we refer to in religious studies as "the Other." You feel like you're waiting for something, some kind of epiphany, a message from God, maybe. Then you hear the bellowing of the animal that's waiting to be fed.

Chat: I'm not sure I follow.

E.G.: We don't know, do we, exactly who we are. Are our animal natures really all we possess and the rest, well, just the weak beam of a flashlight in the dark? All of this is neatly summed up in Nelson's contradictions and complexities.

Chat: You see Nelson as some sort of noble savage, a contemporary "naïf," as it were?

E.G.: Who knows. After about 1,000 more years of evolution, maybe Nelson's descendants will be feeding us.

Chat: Nelson's progeny will be pondering the meaning of it all?

E.G.: I think Nelson probably does now, in his own way. Only to him it's probably more like: The woman with the plantains, what does she symbolize?

Chat: After you got your degree in religious studies, did you plan on becoming a zookeeper?

E.G.: Oh, no, though I always did do a fair amount of hanging around at pet shops. But I was never interested in the really large animals, just the small ones—the finches, the goldfish. A pet shop owner told me I seemed to have a certain rapport with them. The puppies would immediately stop whining as soon as I walked into the shop.

My big break came when a pet store owner got me a job writing leaflets for the zoo. I wrote up a little summary about Nelson. Nelson's keeper called me and said I'd summarized beautifully what Nelson was all about. They asked me to feed Nelson, and one thing led to another.

Chat: So serendipity played a role in your taking on this orangutan.

E.G.: I would say it definitely did.

Chat: It seems like you have a special bond with Nelson. How did it develop?

E.G.: I suppose it was after I began confiding in Nelson—telling him some of my darkest fears for the well-being of the academy. I told him how postmodernism has ravaged the university system. I knew that Nelson understood completely. I heard him howling. I think it was his way of sharing his pervasive nervousness, his opposition to the deconstructive attacks on canonical works. I knew he longed to depart from reflexivity, heteroglossia, linguistic play and rhetorical self-consciousness. We talk a lot about humans having body language, don't we? Well, by his posture, I could tell that poststructuralism has had an enormous impact upon Nelson.

Chat: I imagine orangutans pose challenges at times. Does any particular moment with Nelson stand out?

E.G.: Yes, there was a moment when I had to call on my gestalt reserves. One afternoon there was some trouble with the zoo's water supply and it was time to bring Nelson his usual tub of liquid. My assistant, Freddy, said we should give him a couple of jugs of apple cider we had left over in the refrigerator. Freddy ran and got the cider and poured it into Nelson's barrel. You know how events can collide in a synchronous manner? Freddy distracted me and I accidentally left the gate open, and Nelson, having drank a long draught of the cider—which we quickly realized was alcoholic—started through the gate, then he gazed upon me—with voluminous eyes that seemed to contain the entire universe—and arms waving, ran and seized me around the waist and pressed me tightly against him. He began making these outrageous sounds, as if he were bellowing out a Cole Porter tune or two. He placed one paw firmly on my waist and took my hand in the other and actually began dancing, all the while staring into my eyes. Just then luckily—er, fortuitously, I mean—a little child dropped her gorilla doll over the side of the wall and Nelson let me go to retrieve it. That is, after gazing deeply into my eyes one last time.

Chat: Being held by Nelson, was that a formative experience?

E.G.: Indeed, it was. Like being in the arms of an "uber-orangutan." Merton might have seen it as the universe having seized me in its grasp. I suddenly understood my days as a religious studies major, my experiences at the pet shop—they all came together in one realization that... Well, it's hard to put into words, but let's just say Nelson brought me into the realm of the ineffable.

Chat: Do you have anything else to say to the Kakawoolah alums?

E.G.: Yes, tell them love knows no species boundaries.

The Death of Louis the Fat

by
J. R. Salling

Louis VI of France suffered a renewed attack of dysentery when the summer of 1137 proved the hottest in anyone's memory. The sixty-year-old king grew weaker day by day until, anticipating his own end, he summoned Bishop Stephen to whom he intended to confess.

The fever made him delirious, however, before he could confirm his profession of faith and vows. Upon noticing the bishop's arrival he ordered him to come close and then began to dictate a recipe for bread filled with hashed-up meats, spices and sharp-flavored fruits. "It will feed all of Paris," he announced, "better than loaves and fishes. The people will build shrines to me."

Abbot Sugar, a trusted adviser who stood nearby, became alarmed and took the bishop aside for a private conference. Already notorious for his sinful gluttony, if it became known that the king had died uttering blasphemies, then all he had accomplished in his reign in suppressing the feudal nobles would be at risk. While they debated what to do the noise of a crowd began to build from outside the castle. Somehow word had gotten out that the king was dying.

With a sudden display of vigor, Louis rose from his bed chamber and went to the window before they could discourage him. "I grant you all meat pies!" he cried out. "Meat pies for my loyal subjects!" He then ordered that a cloth be placed on the ground and marked in ashes from the kitchen brazier with the sign of the cross. When this was done, he collapsed upon it.

He continued to describe the banquet, now with a whisper. "Dress the fowl in suits of paper armor and have them deliver the pies on lances," he concluded with his dying gasp. Then his men wrapped the cloth around him and carried his body to the church of the holy martyrs where he remains buried today.

Abbot Sugar, in his official history of Louis's reign, neglected to record these embarrassing final details, which explains in part why the story has never received the attention generated by Joan of Arc's. A painting by an unknown artist in the collection of the Louvre, however, commemorates the banquet later held, fulfilling the king's wishes. Look for it on that single obligatory afternoon when you loaf through the museum. It's the canvas with chickens in pike formation, prepared to suppress the incessant feuds between domesticated animals that once desolated the provinces of France.

Funeral of a Vibrator
by
Jonathan Harper

"Dearly beloved, we are here today to bid our final farewells to the dearly departed, Faith Bessie, beloved vibrator and personal savior of our sexually frustrated Mary." Darren sounded utterly bored in this humble beginning of his sermon. He sighed heavily. "Can we please have some mourning music or something!"

Sue, the organist, pressed her fingers against the small keys of the train-yourself-to-play keyboard. Because it would have been completely impossible to bring over her mother's baby-grand piano, they had settled for the beautiful serenade that only a total piece of crap could create. Mary had brought it out of her storage unit and hoisted it up to the balcony and had made a point to set the key sounds to "pump organ."

Mary was sitting on the little fold-out chair, wearing her misery clothes, including the stylish black stretch pants and the black woven poncho her fashion consultant had warned her about. Selma was right after all; Mary really did look depressing. As for Selma, she stood behind Mary, a comforting hand resting upon her friend's shoulder. She, too, had suffered the loss of her own vibrator months prior and knew the stages of grief all too well. Mary was starting to tear up, sniffing, the stretch pants making her thunder thighs glisten by the light of the candles. Selma nodded to herself all knowingly. Mary had obviously reached "Self-Pity." When Selma had arrived earlier that afternoon, Mary seemed stuck in the Anger stage of grief, strangling Bessie the vibrator, screaming out, "How dare you leave me now when I need you most!" (A quick side note: Mary's boyfriend, Tom, of four years had walked out on her only last week. No really, Mary had slipped while they were having an argument. She just happened to trip over her feet and fell face down strategically in front of the door. Tom had meant to walk out over her, but the trials of having a glass eye means a lack of depth perception.)

"We ask ourselves why the greater powers would turn away something so young and benevolent..." Darren droned on, rolling his eyes. He was wearing this beautiful knitted scarf that snuggled in between his neck and his rolled up collar. He was sashaying his Virginia Slim, occasionally ashing into to the ceremonial Miller Light can. His mother had been right, he was always the smartest and the prettiest faggot on the playground. "All Bessie asked for out of life was to be used and abused and a set of double-A batteries... much like the highlights of Sharon Stone's career before that nasty stroke." He cleared his throat and turned to Sue and the final attendee, Victoria. "And now, my friend here has prepared a song in honor of the deceased."

Victoria was a drag queen. Enough said.

She stood closely to Sue, who nodded to her a little unsure. The plump little organist pressed her fingers to the keys and spit out a small cord. Victoria, suddenly channeling her inner opera fat lady, bellowed out a high pitch wail. Somewhere in the alley below, a dog howled in correspondence. Then Sue began to hit the keys – the tune sounded familiar but awkward with the false organ sounds.

Victoria began to sing. "I love myself, I want you to love me..."

Darren glanced over her and lit another cigarette. Selma started to snicker. But Mary's eyes stayed focused on Bessie, who was laid out on the small table. Bessie seemed so small and helpless and Mary kept wanting to believe that Bessie would somehow suddenly spring back to life and make the entire table shake with her furious resurrection.

Victoria continued singing louder, "I don't want anybody else, when I think about you I touch myself... I don't want anybody else... oh no, Oh No, OH NO!"

Mary couldn't help it – her eyes budded with liquid. She was crying, helplessly sobbing while Selma rubbed her back. Why her and not me, Mary asked herself. She felt as if a little part of her had died with Bessie, like her clitoris had itself shut down in despair. Bessie was too young to leave her in such misery. Mary thought back to the day Bessie had come into her life. She had purchased Bessie in a small sex shop out in the gypsy territory. Madam Prostitutski had been made her an offer she couldn't refuse. From behind an almost toothless mouth, she had hissed, "take this vibrator, my dear. It shall do for you things no man can. But be warned the things we love the most leave us the quickest..." A credit card charge for \$12.95 later, the evil gypsy had cackled in laughter and then closed up shop behind a very bewildered Mary. In the future, Mary would only go to the reputable Pleasure Palace or the Discount Pornicopia for her adult needs.

Victoria suddenly hit a high vibrato as she help an endless 'oh no' in the air. From another apartment balcony a man was yelling at them to shut the fuck up. Sue quit playing the organ, but Victoria seemed the most threatened. She suddenly gasped in air and released a final bellow that shattered from the balcony into every apartment on the block so all could share in Mary's grief. In a way, this was comforting.

Finally Victoria stopped, gasped for breath and then took a swig from the small flask that held her ready-to-go martini. Darren was shaking his head. "How inappropriate," he mused and then turned to his grieving hostess. "Would you like to say any last words?" Mary shook her head, she had suffered enough and could not bring her indignity to a full circle by speaking of her loss to the open public of the balcony. "Very well. Let's bury her."

Selma pulled out the small clay pot that had once housed a delightful avocado plant. There was a small bag of soil that she had picked up at a local florist nursery. Darren had placed Bessie head first into the pot as Selma scooped out the small packaged soil with a plastic shovel. Everyone was ghastly quiet, except for the small chords from the keyboard.

"Ummm, Mary – we don't have enough dirt. The end's still sticking out." Selma called back.

"What!?! How will Bessie find eternal peace if she isn't properly buried!" Mary was practically frantic. The small bag of soil hadn't been enough. She silently damned her urban surroundings. The city hadn't granted her a permit for a park burial.

Darren scowled. "Why don't you just go buy another bag?"

"You want me to get more? This is fucking Jersey City and its fucking expensive!" Selma snapped. "Besides, what are we going to do with the leftovers?"

"Well, the pot isn't big enough anyway," Victoria added. "Oh, I have an idea – how's your plumbing?"

"Are you suggesting we flush a vibrator?"

"Well, I know it's a rather silly idea ... but we won't have to do it here! We could take it to a public restroom and give it this metaphorical burial at sea?" Victoria's suddenly lit up. "Then we could still make it to happy hour!"

"Oh – I have a much better idea – let's take it out to Staten Island and throw it into the bay! That's much classier than a bar restroom."

"I think we would get fined for littering ... but if we deposited it off at a bar, we could get shots right afterwards," Darren said.

Mary could stand to hear anymore. She retreated inside to her apartment. It seemed so empty, so unnatural, knowing that Bessie wasn't in there waiting in her dresser drawer. The small collective outside on the balcony were arguing about different ways to dispose of the body with at least some shred of dignity. But Mary knew they could never fully understand her loss. She left them to their discussion and proceeded to eat all the leftover cupcakes.

Bloke's Blog
by
Kathleen McGurl

Monday

She's cut her hair. There. She says I never notice anything. I noticed her hair, I did, as soon as she walked in.

'You've cut your hair, love,' I said.

She smiled, and twirled. 'D'you like it?'

'Yes,' said I. 'It's very, well, very modern.' How are you supposed to describe women's hair cuts? I haven't a clue.

'Modern!' she laughed. But I must have said almost the right thing, because she waltzed off to the kitchen and came back with two glasses of Sauvignon. We clinked glasses to her new hairstyle (that was her idea), then I balanced my glass on top of the printer (must get a bigger desk) and got on with writing this.

So, all you lovely readers out there, do you notice when your woman cuts her hair, or buys a new dress, or puts on heels? I do, see. I just proved it. Put her in a good mood and all. Bought myself a quiet hour to catch up on the net, and update the old blog, on a promise of some 'special' time together later. Wahey!

Yesterday, you see, we had this row. She told me I preferred my online mates to her, told me I was a boring techno-nerd, told me I was losing all sense of perspective, damaging our relationship through not paying her enough attention. I was in a chat-room at the time, discussing the situation in Iraq. OK, alright, regular readers of this blog will know that's unlikely, we were just 'aving a larf, but, whatever, she interrupted and I left the chat. Just like that. Listened to her, for ten whole minutes I listened to her. Kissed her and reassured her she was the most important. She is, too. You all know that. I'm always rabbiting on about her, love of my life, joy of my soul, light in my darkness. The row hurt, see. I don't like hearing I'm losing perspective. Pride myself on my balanced viewpoint, everything in moderation, try it all but get hooked on nothing, that's been my motto.

So it's cool that today she's cut her hair and I've noticed and we've clinked glasses and now I'll be off to give her one, cos we're both in that sort of a mood now.

Tuesday

Just read what I wrote yesterday. Ha! Thought I was on to something there, didn't I? Sadly, no, it didn't happen. Got tied up in the chat room again, went upstairs an hour or two later, OK it was around two am, and she was asleep with a crumpled tissue clutched in her hand.

Whoops. May have messed up, there.

Wednesday

She's been shopping. She's bought a pile of new clothes. I can tell, the under-sink cupboard is overflowing with carrier bags. There were even a couple of those posh ones - the thick paper ones with string handles. Those bags, lads, mean expensive designer shops, a smoking credit card and a red bank statement. Beware!

She didn't show me the new stuff. There was a time when she'd put it on, and parade around the living room in it, asking did I like it. Great when it was lingerie she'd been buying! Cor, the times we had, the living room carpet saw some action I can tell you. At least I don't think she tried the stuff on for me. Must admit I was watching Star Wars at the time, so I might not have noticed. The original three films, just released on DVD. (I've reviewed them, for your delight and delectation dear readers, click on the link above.)

I guess she'll be snoring by the time I get to bed again. Well I can't help it - had to watch all three films back-to-back, that was the point of the DVD set. And I had to write the review straight away, didn't I, then catch up on my blog?

Thursday

What I don't get about women, see, is that they don't seem to care if they don't get any. Personally speaking, if I don't get my rocks off for five days I ache. It's like, a dull physical ache in my gonads. You guys out there, you know what I mean, right? Actually I get it after three days abstinence. Her 'time of the month' is torture for me.

But she, she doesn't seem to mind at all. It's been six days now, and it's not because she's got her period. I counted the tampons in the little basket in the bathroom yesterday and they're still all there today.

Anyway she was out all night. She got home half an hour ago and went straight upstairs. Suited me, I was on eBay all evening.

Friday

I might as well not have a woman. She's not said a word to me all week, not since that glass of Sauvignon on Monday. Tried it on with her in bed last night but no cigar. She turned her back on me and farted.

Saturday

She was off out with her mates today. She got back late and pissed. I watched the footie and three DVDs, drank fourteen cans of Stella and slept on the sofa.

Sunday

Women and shopping. On a Sunday! She asked me to go, but my Office extended edition arrived in the post yesterday and I hadn't seen it yet. She didn't seem to care when I said

no.

Monday

A new week, a new resolution. I will only watch one film a day, will spend only three hours online each evening, and will get to bed before two am every night. I will make love with my girl every other day, starting from tonight. Our relationship has been in the doldrums, and this will get it back on its feet. Yes, I'm determined, and it's worth working at.

Tuesday

OK, will try again tonight. She's got to be willing, after all.

Wednesday

Christ it's been ten days now. And NOW she says she's got her period. (She hasn't.)

Thursday

She didn't come home last night, she stayed with a friend. She'd gone out in her car, they'd had three bottles of wine so she didn't want to drive home. What's wrong with a fucking taxi I want to know?

Friday

She's gone. For the weekend, I presume. She packed when she got home from work, stuffing clothes into a case while I was busy catching up on the messages on a Star Trek fan website. Haven't been there for ages, there was masses to read and respond to. Bloody trekkies, they post so much shit that has to be waded through. She mumbled something about her mother and her best friend and Cornwall. I don't know, she never bloody talks to me so how should I know what she's doing? Fuck her. Hopefully she'll come back in a more responsive and communicative mood.

Trouble is, another two days abstinence. And what the fuck am I going to DO for two days on my own?

Saturday

Footie, Star Wars (again), Office extended edition (again), fifteen Stellas and a vindaloo. Not even a bloody phone call.

Monday

No Sunday blog cos I didn't get out of bed.

She's not back yet.

Tuesday

She's not back.

Wednesday

She came back, packed another case, and went to stay with her friend. She was saying something, but, like, Spurs were playing Man Utd and Man U were two goals down so what the fuck was I supposed to do? I think she said she was staying with her friend. I don't fucking care. Sod her.

Thursday

Like, she's not coming back. She sent a bloody email to tell me. A fucking email! Who gets dumped by email? What kind of sad fuck gets dumped by a crappy email?

Shit.

My Dear Clarissa
by
Mike Romeling

My Dear Clarissa,

I smile to myself as I write this, aware of how rare a thing it must be for someone to receive a letter the morning after a one night stand. And if I may digress for a moment (of course I may because after all, this is MY letter isn't it?) why is this sort of thing called a "one night stand" in the first place? I understand the "one night" part of it but where does the "stand" come in? Certainly there is nothing military going on in these situations such as "a last stand" or anything of that nature. Likewise, there is no moral or ethical "stand" happening, is there? Quite the contrary actually—just one more dog-eared reminder that perfect strangers can seldom if ever take their clothes off together with any result other than hilarious (or depressing) futility. Nor is there any "standing" done in these circumstances except possibly by those misguided souls who try to do it in the shower. I must confess here that in the past I used to become so aroused by the shower scenes in the movies that I actually tried it once with someone I hoped was as intoxicated as I was. Let me assure you that it is no picnic to be lurching around in a slippery shower stall as spigots and soap trays grind into sensitive parts of your body. Also, have you ever noticed that in the movies they show steam pouring out of the shower, I suppose as a cheap metaphor for the "steaminess" of the sex supposedly going on? Truth is, though, that you only need to raise a man's core temperature a little bit before his chances of a satisfactory erection start declining rapidly. And of course, as we all know from swimming, cold water quickly reduces the organ to the size of a baby gherkin and so all and all they ought to stop promoting the shower fantasy in Hollywood although who really cares and that is not the point of this letter anyway. Only time will tell if indeed there is a point.

One thing that bothers me a little bit this morning is how you said before we parted that you were "sorry we did this." Please remember this about men—no matter how insignificant the occasion seems to be, our egos never sleep. Besides, as I move morosely into middle age, I'm determined to never be sorry about anything. No more apologies period. In fact at this stage of my life I feel I'm owed some apologies, primarily from God and the Utility Companies but the list will probably grow.

Having said that, though, I shall immediately make an exception to the rule and offer what may be the final apology of my life. That apology goes to you for that thing I tried to do with you involving the lime jello and my big toe. In my own defense let me explain that I was recently waiting with some groceries at the checkout line. I could see that the clerk with the acne was having trouble talking on his cell phone, chewing gum, and checking out groceries at the same time and so I knew I was in for an aggravating wait. I suppose all these morons with the cell phones may eventually figure out that since they have two hands AND two ears, they could actually purchase two of the useless contraptions and still say nothing of any importance since twice nothing is still nothing. At that point I guess all services will grind to a complete halt and perhaps civilization itself as we know it. Oh well, at least the whales will be happy—they deserve it. Anyway, in between putting a few of my groceries on the counter as space slowly became available, I picked up one of those magazines you always see in the supermarkets and read a survey on people's sexual preferences. According to the survey, 69% percent of all women interviewed said they either had tried the jello/big toe thing or else thought they might enjoy trying it. Well,

suffice it to say we now know you are firmly within the other 31%. Nevertheless I feel I must register my disappointment at the loud and accusatory nature of your reaction to the event. I felt I had dropped a subtle yet significant hint when I mentioned that my apartment walls were thin and the guy next door worked in my office. Now tomorrow when I return to work (and I suppose forever after) I will have to wonder if he heard you shriek at me in the middle of the night that you "don't do deviant things."

But don't worry about it. I forgive you. Forgive me. Let's all forgive everyone and to all a good night and all that happy stuff. Better yet, remember earlier when I said only time would tell if there was a point to this letter? Well there is. The day is waning now because I have had to take many breaks from this letter to nurse my hangover. In all that time I have not been able to get you out of my mind. You look such a treat. Could I possibly see you again? No jello—I promise.

Fond Regards,

Norman

A Bird In The Bus
by
Ross Eldridge

His father—they said—had been a transvestite axe-murderer. Those words are in this one somewhere, and I use them to get your attention and thus expose you to my version of the Bird Flu. Last night the TV newsman reported sixty-eight million chickens had been exterminated in Cambodia alone. The accompanying film showed countless sacks of chickens being flung into a pit. Knowing human nature, I am worried that one or two of those 'cluckers' went in the soup. Certainly, I've now seen a great many dead birds. But do they count? Is there a story in it?

Some years ago I read a book that detailed notable deaths and famous last words. Along with the closing remarks of kings, presidents, generals, clerics, writers and actors and explorers, the compiler explained, as best he could, the demise of the dodo, and the passenger pigeon. These birds were not suicides. They may not have been so smart-though you and I might wonder how some birds can fly thousands of miles twice a year and turn up on time and in place-and so they were the victims of sport, cruelty and the cooking pot.

Where then, the writer had asked, where are the everyday dead birds in our cities, in the countryside, on our lakes and in our rivers? Where are the casualties of plain old age? We see a great many live birds: We need only go outside and look in any direction. How many feathered corpses have I seen in the last six months? Not one. How about you? Weren't we taught that God notes the fall of every sparrow? Surely we can find a few. Surely.

My mother kept canaries, and they died as regular as clockwork as she must have had the cage in a draft. That was her explanation, and a newcomer would be located a few feet this way or that: In the draftiest house on this island. That doesn't count in this story. That is death interrupting a life sentence.

From time to time my cat 'Pudding' would catch a bird. 'Kiskadees' must have been slower than most. Pudding would have one early in the morning. He'd leave us a few yellow feathers, a beak and claws.

The novel and film 'The Birds' imagined a time in a world when a species gets together to get its own back. I wonder if sales of canaries and parakeets and parrots slumped in 1963 when Tippi Hedren looked up and got crap in her eye, and again in 1994 when the story was remade-awfully-for television.

I don't think of chickens and turkeys as birds, but they are and they must eventually die. When I open my freezer there's usually a box of icy flesh in it. I do not think of birds at that moment. Perhaps 'baked' or 'fried' come to mind, and a worry about salmonella. This morning I weighed up the image of sixty-something million dead chickens in Cambodia against that of some curried chicken-I had a Tupperware with some in it-and made lunch of the curry, with some rice at the side, and ice-water to soothe my tongue.

Of course, taking a few minutes, I am able to remember and note a few experiences that involved deceased birds, and we'll see what else we run into on the way. My yellow dog 'Tadpole', while running around on the sand and muck near the Great Salt Lake, found a dead seagull. He came running back to us, the vile thing in his mouth. It had been dead

some time. I took a photo: Our Tad all grown up.

Seagulls, flocks of them, saved the Mormon pioneers arriving in the Salt Lake Valley over 150 years ago. The crops were being devoured by crickets and Brigham Young had a prayer sent up. Seagulls appeared, ate the bugs. For that, the gulls got a monument in Salt Lake City: A nice one in Temple Square. There are still thousands of them at the landfills quite near to the city, and to the International Airport.

Now and then we hear of a jet engine intake on an airplane sucking up a bird and the subsequent damage. A simple tit can result in a disaster. You don't believe me? Try and suck up a tit or a wren with your vacuum cleaner.

Airports try to frighten dangerous birds using other birds, like hawks, and by firing cannons. If 'The Birds' returns, the filmmakers might use this sort of thing: Birds that sacrifice their lives in a suicidal bid for eternal glory. Coming to an airport near you.

We'll return to statues in Temple Square in a bit: On the way I'll throw in a few Utah-related experiences that you might not have had or heard of. Let me tempt you to stay with this a little longer. Fear not, we shall not be passing the hat.

His father—they said—had been a transvestite axe-murderer. His grandmother spoke no English, and was living with his mother and a spaniel that sought love wherever it could find it. The family seemed not to care that the panting dog was shagging a hush puppy while eyeing an attractive cushion.

The boy—and he had no need to shave that winter—had found a plastic sword which, I believe, glowed in the dark. With the sword pushed through his belt, the boy—I cannot recall his given name, but he wanted to be thought a pirate and may have adopted any pirate name not requiring an ending with '-beard'-walked about the streets of Salt Lake City. During those voyages, he would use the plastic sword in self-defense, or just to wave about to look important. You ask: A career in politics to follow?

Somehow, he turned up at his mother's home one snowy evening with an old refrigerated van. Something you might use to deliver ice cream. The van did not exactly run: Nobody checked to see if it even had an engine under the hood. Refrigerated: It was only cold because this was mid-winter in the Rocky Mountains. The boy was a friend's in-law relative, and I'd gone over to see the objet trouvé with that friend. Apparently, the boy had something really weird, his mother said, parked—the more correct term might be 'dumped'-out on the street in front of her house.

The plastic sword was not in evidence and there was very little light, and I'd hoped to see the weapon glowing. I have since wondered why the boy had not got himself a light-saber from a toy shop dealing with 'Star Wars' merchandise, which was very popular twenty-mumble years ago. I suppose the sword was free, and may have been somebody's rubbish.

The van was covered inside and out with peel-and-press carpet tiles. I could almost go with the inside. Almost. But the outside was also carpeted, and all by shag carpet. I never did see the thing in the daylight, but more than one colour of tile was evident, and not so much an artist's statement as a 'this is what we found for free'.

(Well, that might be valid at the galleries that hang dead animals that might have wandered onto the highway, and even label the exhibition room's light switch as 'art', with a price so

dear that you could not afford to turn it on if you actually bought it. Even a dark room might go for no less than a king's ransom-and to think there are hundreds and hundreds of them in Buckingham Palace. Wearing very dark Foster Grants indoors at night is the poor man's version.)

The boy rambled on to us about what he'd do with the shag-covered van. I feel certain he was not of a suitable age to drive anything at the time. But he may well have been sixteen. He did not have the smarts to pilot anything weighing a ton down a street where other vehicles might travel, and little children cross.

His sister had already had a go at getting the boy a respectable job. She'd even bought a smart suit for him to wear to interviews. Before her car left the driveway, he'd ripped the arms off the jacket with his hands. The plastic sword suited that look.

The boy's mother wanted my friend to arrange for the van to 'disappear' before sunrise. I met the grandmother that night: She may have been speaking in Spanish from her corner chair. She seemed to be instructing the spaniel in the complexities of lovemaking. Or she was telling us all a very vulgar story and using gestures too.

I cannot follow up this story with the tidy ending that some may expect or desire. The van vanished; a brother of the boy, following in their father's footsteps, murdered someone (I believe no cross-dressing was involved, nothing gay about that killing); my friend and his wife divorced after she fell for a truck driver, beer I believe; the boy . I do not know. I'm afraid to ask. The whole family was suited to violent and peculiar talk shows, they may have made a fortune in appearance fees.

'Pirates of the Caribbean' was a great hit as a film based on the ride at Disneyland-which I have been on twice-and I imagine a toy store nowadays would likely have a nice selection of swords. A yard sale might have a Star Wars gizmo, and there may be another shaggy van parked outside a home near you.

(Or in a gallery.)

I'd experienced it, several times, and was taking three 'virgins' to see it at midnight on a Friday. The 'Rocky Horror Picture Show' of course. The RHPS was playing in an underground theatre called the 'Blue Mouse' a little north of the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City. Stamping the snow off our shoes, we walked down below street level, into the basement of a bookstore. The bookstore featured anti-Mormon literature, and gay- and lesbian- related books, magazines, and other things I didn't look at too carefully. RHPS and such things for sale a block from the 'House of the Lord', it's a wonder they didn't get flamed.

(Genesis 18 and 19, if you like that sort of thing.)

Having been to RHPS in other cities, I had prepared household and kitchen items so we could take part-without getting into costumes-I'm not much on dressing up. Don't believe what you heard. Toast, rice, toilet paper, flashlights, newspapers and water pistols were tucked in pockets, down shirtfronts and in carryall bags. The line down the stairs became a knot in the lobby, that gradually passed the ticket booth, and unwound enough for people to scurry, in costume or not, through the doors of the actual cinema.

A couple of people ahead in the line, and the four of us, and many more behind us were turned away. We were handed a tract from the 'Church of Jayne Mansfield of the Atomic

Age' printed on pink paper. This has deeper meaning if you know that Jayne and Mickey Hargitay and family famously lived in a house that was painted pink. If only we'd headed to the meeting place. Jayne Mansfield was also accused of having connections with Satanists. Her IQ was over 150, which I'm not going to reach no matter how clever my writing gets. I get sidetracked so easily, don't you know.

In Bermuda, there is a tradition of painting the houses, and even the office blocks and shops, in pastel colours. White roofs and shutters, and you have paradise. Almost. However there are some smart-arses who go for neon green, or glowing purple. Now that Bermuda is overcrowded with roads and concrete, it is no longer possible to ask the whereabouts of a 'pink house on a hill' and expect to find it first time.

In herds of sheep a few thousand years ago, the farmers were not able to count their sheep from a distance, so they might put in one black sheep with every ten white, it was easier to count, say, six black sheet, hoping that the other sixty white sheep were there too. And there's a philosophical question: Without black sheep, can we ever count the rest?

Clutching our pink church flyers, we went home, driving down snowy streets, and shot water out of our pistols at people on the sidewalks. Most of the people were Native Americans, it seemed. I feel bad about that. We should have just aimed for Republicans. We kept the toilet paper: It would not be seen in the snow.

The next night, quite a while before twelve o'clock, we got at the head of the line at the Blue Mouse. We hooted and hollered and fired at each other, but as we sat near the front, we couldn't see much of the audience participation. That midnight they featured 'Apocalypse Now'. Of course, that's a lie. RHPS only showed at midnight on Fridays and Saturdays, and it kept a hundred or so strange people off the streets for ninety minutes. We saw it.

I've seen RHPS aired on television a few times over the years. I must have it on VHS tape somewhere. The sanitized version has the naughty bits on the statues blurred. Michelangelo's 'David' must be one of the most famous statues on earth. Blurred.

David's marble genitals: I saw a funny play about a Mormon family reunion, and the chance came to show Mom's and Pop's slides of their trip to Italy-while they were hunting down a lot of long-gone ancestors in order to baptize them-and Pop had erred and left his close-up of David in the box for the reunion. There, on the screen, for all to see: You know what. So Mom leaps in front of the screen to cover the image, and on her white T-shirt, we could easily see: You know what. It's pretty peculiar that a Mormon family entertainment (as the play was billed) can show the bits, and television out of Hollywood cannot.

Let's head back to Temple Square: An enormous statue of the Cristus—in a visitors' center near the Mormon Tabernacle and Seagull Monument in Salt Lake City—is fully clothed under a painted dome representing the Universe. It's the last pulsar on the right. Kolob. Yes, Kolob. It's a long way away from everything, even at the speed of light.

I have not walked out into the desert-in any state or country-intentionally, though I was stranded in a car an hour's drive from Las Vegas at midnight once. That's quite enough. And that's another story.

A friend of mine had been invited by an older man—a former missionary from the Mormon Church—on a hike with him to look for fossils and to kick up a little dust in a desert in the center of Utah. They had been near the 'Manti Temple' in their truck, and then my friend

lost track. Eventually, far from anywhere, the older man became pensive. He told my friend that he'd survived six heart attacks. It was remarkable that he had lived long enough to do this hike, he explained. My friend looked around: Nothing. Not one memorable butte, mesa, rock or golden arches. I have never asked if he promised God 'Anything, just get me back to a city' but, late that night, he was back in Salt Lake City, and was with me at the Blue Mouse sometime after that.

We've not heard from the old missionary in two decades. He'd told my friend he felt inspired to leave his wife and head for China. Whatever gets you through the night?

The elderly mother of a friend-another resident of Salt Lake City-in her later years took to conversing with angels in her small cabin-style home. They'd visit her and tell her things. She had a parrot as well. Green.

Now, I would explain to my students that that might be a real nugget of information, presented and suggested, and imagination hardly required. I'm knackered this evening, so over to you.

Back in Bermuda: The other afternoon I was on a bus headed for 'Grotto Bay', with very few seats taken. On the bus were two Mormon missionaries, who sat apart-probably glad for that chance-and I gave no sign or secret handshake suggesting I knew a little of Mormonism and Utah. I did not hiss: "Blue Mouse!" As the bus rolled down Church Street, a bird, a sparrow, flew in the door. I quickly looked back as it flew past me and the dozen of us were taking cover, bobbing up briefly, behind the seats. All thinking what this one bird would do to a Boeing 747.

The sparrow made a few passes, and the bus driver called back: "Open all the windows!" and we did, and the bird flew away. A mile further on Middle Road I pressed the bell and got off the bus. I used the open door. I'm not much for going out the windows. And I was thinking of birds, jet planes, Mormons and Utah. So, that's how those things got here.

Penpals With God, Episode 1
by
Stephanie O'Donnell



Contributor Biographies

Curtis Honeycutt is a sophomore at the University of Oklahoma where he studies the backs of his eyelids. He enjoys writing poems that aren't confusing—ones that don't require the use of a dictionary, thesaurus, and a road atlas to decipher. Above all, Curtis likes to breathe, and makes a point to do so as much as possible.

George Anderson says: "I was born in Montreal and presently live in Thirroul, New South Wales. I teach high school English and History and edit the school literary magazine Ephemeral. I love body surfing, biking along the South Coast and showing contempt whenever it is deserved."

Richard Walker says: "I am a married father of 5 boys(all still in school). I have another seriously funny poem that you can check out at www.astropoetica.com called "MIRROR, mirror" in the next issue. I also have a seriously funny 120-page 'book' of poems inspired by the late great Ogden Nash called *POEMS! POEMS! EVERYWHERE!!* that you can't check out anywhere because I don't have the money to get it printed or published. I'm broke. No joke. So if you want to read a seriously funny 120-page collector's item and can help financially to get it in 'printem' my funny email address is known only by my computer my serious mailing address number is 410 Bando Road Somerset Pa 15501 my seriously funny bank account number is 0000.0ne. I'm done."

David Siegel Bernstein has published literary stories, satire (as a confirmed red-baiter from a blue-state), sappy poems to reveal his sensitive side, creepy verse in recognition of his angst, science fiction (really attracts the ladies, right?), fantasy (reality is so overrated) and, to his shame, nonfiction. His non-literary projects include: Re-inventing the wheel, the Sisyphus relief project, referring to himself in the third person (as THE David, lest fools confuse him with the other one), and his ongoing mission to understand women (through trial and lots of error). If you dig this guy's work, tell him at dj_knight01@yahoo.com.

Elizabeth Ridley moved from New York City to Wisconsin with her husband two years ago to raise a family. She refuses to renew her expired driver's license because that would mean turning in her New York ID for a Wisconsin one and that would mean fully accepting her life as an ordinary middle-of-America mom who buys diapers in bulk at Sam's Club. Elizabeth writes when she can and drives very carefully.

Ellen Lindquist was recently invited to submit poetic texts to the 2004 London Art Biennial. To read an online interview with her, go to:
<http://www.midnightmind.com/stuff/lindquistquestions.htm>

Charlotte Jones took this picture one day while she was hanging out at the Houston Zoo. The fact that the subject resembles members of her family is entirely coincidental.

In the historical dialectic pitting the proletariat against the bourgeois, **J. R. Salling** has not placed a wager. It seems that Louis Phillippe closed the gambling houses some time in the 1840s, which encourages him instead to write amusing captions for the pair-shaped

illustrations of the French king by Daumier. He is paid in bon-bons, laced with a substance that makes him think it's the year 2004.

Jonathan Harper is the managing editor of the Lambda Literary Foundation. His short story "After Hours" will be featured in the anthology *HOMEWRECKER: An Atlas of Illicit Love* due out from Soft Skull Press in Fall 05. He has never owned a vibrator but dreams about it often.

Kathleen McGurl once got an A+ for a short story in her 2nd year at secondary school. She has spent the last thirty years trying to re-attain these dizzy heights of literary greatness. Now that she has been published in *Defenestration*, she feels she is well on her way.

Mike Romeling—What the critics are saying:
For nigh on a decade, Mike Romeling has been a smudge on the literary and musical landscape of common decency. But now with the publication of "My Dear Clarissa," that smudge becomes a suffocating blot grown rank and torpid from feeding off its own wretched excesses. To add insult to injury, Romeling has further befouled the air with several albums of his songs that can lead only to our begging for mercy from above. I say let this goon grope his greasy groupies like a gorged gorilla and leave the rest of us decent god-fearin' folk alone.

Orman Spudwick—*The Idaho Sentinel*

Ross Eldridge has a fantasy: He's sitting on a wicker peacock chair, dressed in a white linen suit, cigarette in a holder, hair slicked down, one leg crossed over the other, a red silk stocking revealed, a black patent leather shoe pointed slightly down. In his fantasy, Ross says: "Kak zamechatel'no! Eti doma takie vysokie, chto dazhe ptitsam nelegko vzletet' do krysh." It's probably a good thing this is just a fantasy. Where could you get a red silk stocking in 2004? Oh, Ross wants to write comedy. You need that? REwriter@northrock.bm will get you there.

Born and raised in New York, **Stephanie O'Donnell** created the character "Poley Polarity" when she was 10 years old. At age 15, she had the character copyrighted on the advice of her father, a full time artist who also was interested in cartooning in his youth. Recently, Stephanie has developed her characters into the comic strip "The Original Nutty Funsters", which ran during the 2004 summer edition of the K-State Collegian. Bill Watterson's "Calvin and Hobbes" is at the top of her list of major influences.