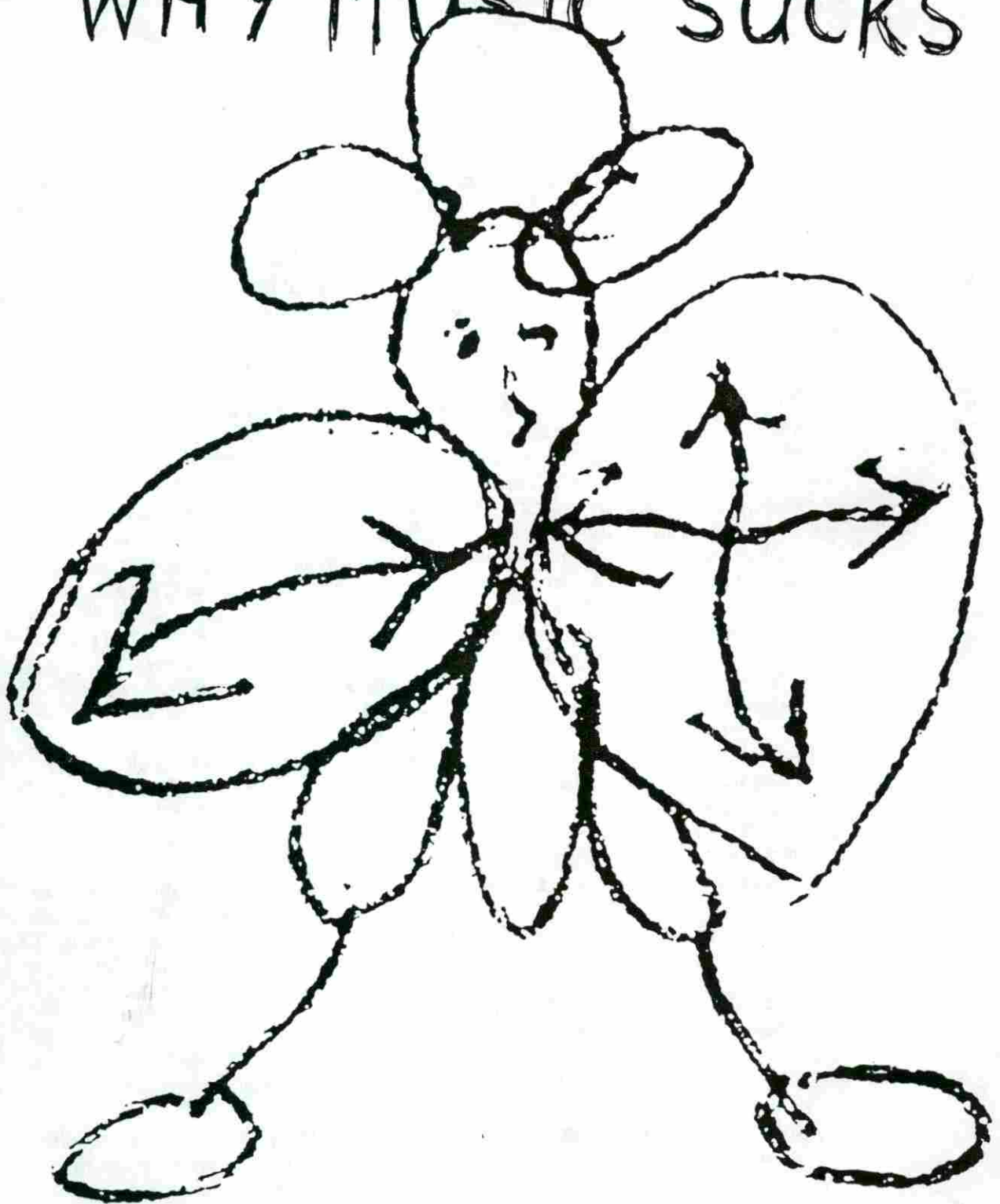


WHY MUSIC SUCKS



WHY MUSIC SUCKS #9

Welcome to *Why Music Sucks* #9. Anyone reading this is invited to contribute to it. There's a word limit of about 2,000 words. Since it's my magazine, word limits and deadlines apply to you but not to me, though I will truly try to do a better job of printing this on time in the future. Please see page 90 for complete instructions.

This is what's on my mind today: In my junior-high-school piece I wrote about something without trying to convey the thing. The thing was terror, and I have no wish to convey terror or to terrorize people. Hey, no, I'm not sure that what I just said was the truth. I'm sure that it's not the truth; it's just one side of my ambivalence.

I note this paradox: the guys who shut me down, made me freeze, in junior high were the ones who spoke in a real lively language themselves. Yet it's the fear of this sort of language, this nasty, conflictful, amoral language, that makes journalism and academic writing so dead, that shuts it down. What do we do with this language of war? What do I do with my language of war? Do I use it? Suppress it? Way back in *Why Music Sucks* #5 I asked Simon Frith, "Why talk merely about a power struggle when you can throw it in the reader's face?" Of course there's an answer: if you throw it in someone's face maybe you or that someone will get hurt. But if you don't throw it, then the whole fight gets ignored, suppressed, and we writers and intellectuals remain only half intellectuals, unwilling to truly understand the monster that we ride.

Why Music Sucks used to be an argument 'zine; now it's much more a reminiscence 'zine. That's the way I want it for now, I think, maybe, perhaps. I do think there's a brawl waiting to happen, if not in this 'zine, then somewhere. The brawl will be over social differences. I don't think social diversity can exist without social conflict. But is conflict necessarily bad? Can't it sometimes be exciting and fun, if it's not too hurtful (or if it's the other people who get hurt)? Can it be a good brawl, not evil? Or will the bullies and loudmouths end up winning and suppressing everyone else anyway?

I think that high school is an interesting time to talk about because high school is one of the few places where social categories and social classes (or whatever you want to call them) are spoken about a lot--though not as part of the classroom discussion. Also, where you place yourself in the social map of your high school also ends up having a lot to do with where you place yourself in the adult world. A teacher I had in college said that emigrants from Ireland and eastern and southern Europe had initially, a hundred to a hundred and fifty years ago, set up within American cities replicas of European rural life--social life, that is, if not occupational. A couple of years after college, in New York's Lower East Side, I decided that suburban young people moving into urban America were now sort of setting up replicas of suburban high-school social life (at least the artsy and freaky subdivisions of that life). I didn't mean this derogatorily. High school is one's roots, partially.

SOCIAL MAPS (High School, Etc.)

SARAH MANVEL: High school for me doesn't really separate from middle school as I spent all those seven years (excluding my semester on exchange in France, which is another story in itself) in the same building. Severn School in Severna Park, Maryland has about 450 people in all seven grades. They are mostly white, very upper class, spoiled, insulated, and preppies from hell. They

continued on page 4

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Social Maps (High School, Etc.)	2
<i>Sarah Manvel</i>	2
<i>Liz Armstrong</i>	6
<i>Delilah Raybee</i>	9
<i>Sarah Riegel</i>	10
<i>David Nichols</i>	15
<i>Patty Stirling</i>	16
<i>Chuck Eddy</i>	21
<i>Jeff Pike</i>	25
<i>Randy Russell</i>	28
<i>Renée Crist</i>	29
<i>Don Allred</i>	32
<i>Rob Sheffield</i>	32
<i>Frank Kogan</i>	35
First Record	41
<i>Aaron Cometbus</i>	41
<i>Scott Woods</i>	42
<i>Luc Sante</i>	44
<i>J-Me Van Way</i>	46
<i>Mindy Ross</i>	47
<i>Phil Dellio</i>	48
<i>David Nichols</i>	51
<i>Don Allred</i>	52
<i>Richard Riegel</i>	53
<i>Adam Sobolak</i>	55
<i>Arsenio Orteza</i>	58
Weird Things I Did as a Child (<i>Frank Kogan</i>)	61
Blindfold Test (<i>Patty Stirling, Chuck Eddy, Chris Cook,</i> <i>Don Allred, Renée Crist, Frank Kogan</i>)	62
Instructions for the Next Issue	90

Contributors: Don Allred (Prattville, Alabama), Liz Armstrong (Schaumburg, Illinois), Aaron Cometbus (Chicago), Chris Cook (Alexandria, Virginia), Renée Crist (Charlottesville, Virginia), Phil Dellio (Toronto), Chuck Eddy (Philadelphia), Sarah Manvel (Bronxville, New York), David Nichols (Hobart, Tasmania), Arsenio Orteza (Opelousas, Louisiana), Jeff Pike (Seattle), Delilah Raybee (Portland, Oregon), Richard Riegel (Cincinnati), Sarah Riegel (Kitchener, Ontario), Mindy Ross (Washington Township, Michigan), Randy Russell (Portland, Oregon), Luc Sante (New York), Robert Sheffield (Charlottesville, Virginia), Adam Sobolak (Toronto), Patty Stirling (Eugene, Oregon), J-me Van Way (Lafayette, Louisiana), Scott Woods (Toronto).

Why Music Sucks is edited by Frank Kogan (1449 Valencia, San Francisco, CA 94110). Copyright to each piece is owned by its author or artist.

are the reasons the Gap, Banana Republic, and Britches stay in business. They are the type of people whose parents will keep buying them new cars when they total the Camaro they got for their 16th birthday.

Oh, listen to me being bitter. Let me back up and try to be fair.

I entered Severn in 6th grade as a shy and terrified girl hiding behind thick glasses. I had never in my whole life been exposed to large amounts of people my age and all I remember from the beginning was that sickening feeling that I was on the outside and could never expect to be invited in. Fortunately I have blocked out almost everything involved with middle school so I will not attempt to pester you all with what painful memories that do remain.

However, I am only four months removed from high school so all my memories are easily dredged up. The school basically divided itself up into several sometimes overlapping groups: the rich kids, who go skiing in Colorado every weekend in the winter and who say things like "I'm too rich to get AIDS" (I swear I'm not making that up) and who didn't understand why I didn't have a car of my own; the lacrosse kids, who get completely fucked up together on the weekends and then tell uproarious stories of when they were pukin' at the Jimmy Buffett shows; the druggies, who tell uproarious stories of watching their friends have orgies while on acid; the studious ones, who cut people's throats for a 96 rather than a 95 and honestly do five hours of homework a night; the theater kids, who basically are all the leftovers, join choir, and hang out with all the other misfits. I think that's about it--it's hard to categorize when all we had were the Severnites (the blond product of a doctor and a lawyer who has a 1000-square-foot bedroom and a brand-new car and who lives in khakis and tevas) and the non-Severnites (the bitter jaded ones like me).

While I was there, I actually hung out with a lot of people, but they were only school friends. They were usually either seriously into drugs or serious bookworms. The main factor we all had in common was our utter loathing of Severn. And surprisingly enough, this loathing is a very common factor among students there. I guess when an administration fires seven teachers because their salaries were too high, then decides to implement a uniform policy to draw attention away from the teacher firings, it does not keep fans that way. This past year the best English teacher asked if he could go on sabbatical for a year due to burnout. The school said sure, but you can't come back.

Severn can get away with behavior like this because it is virtually the only non-Catholic private school in the county. It is also a very good school for academics--there are tons of AP classes and wonderful, wonderful teachers who really know their shit. My French teacher, Mrs McFarland, was the most amazing woman--she was not only a teacher but a psychotherapist as well, and one of the few adults I really trust. There was another teacher, Mr Vandervort, whom I used to trust completely, but senior year for some reason he totally turned on me. Before I'd used to call his house for help when I'd had huge fights with my parents, and he was the one who calmed me down after the worst fight my dad and I ever had. But then if I tried to go talk to him senior year, his body language reeked of "go away, I have much more important things to do" so I stopped caring.

I guess that was a big theme my senior year. My best friend stabbed me in the back, with the help of another close friend. A third friend and I pulled this prank in the school newspaper, only to have her blame the whole thing on me to the principal. (I'd go into more detail except it happened too recently for me to make light of it. I'm also still furious with everyone involved.) There was a while when my sister--a freshman when I was a senior--and two of her friends were the only people who really talked to me.

Not that I ever fit in, ever. I remember being called slut, whore, etc in 6th grade when I'd never even kissed a boy. In 11th grade, two boys I'd gone to dances with (and incidentally were involved with each other) told me that if I didn't shave my legs they'd tie me down and do it for me. Oh--I forgot--everyone at my school thinks I'm some kind of militant lesbian, or bull dyke, etc, so forth. I had the shortest hair of all the girls for an entire year, and I didn't shave my legs, and I wore my freedom rings, and held hands with my best friend Heather just to hear little thirteen year olds call us lezzys. I was the freak, the one you could count on to wear a fake nose ring or yellow striped tights with my uniform kilt, or run around reading Kenzaburo Oe and Breyten Breytenbach and quoting Tom Stoppard at random.

And I'm still very bitter about it all. I spent seven years in a place where I never wanted to be and where no one else especially wanted me to be either. I spent seven years stuck in a place without people really to relate to, or accept me as the hairy-legged hetero I am. It's made it difficult for me to expect much out of people--I'm usually waiting for the other shoe to drop--and I don't really see myself as very friendly or pretty or normal. I have had to fight for far too much, and when I feel like giving up this brings on bouts of depression and the sincere wish to crawl into a cave and sleep for twenty years.

When I graduated I swore I would never go back, but I have once or twice, to visit my sister and a few friends. Right now the school has my loathing for forcing one friend, who was on probation for getting drunk on an overnight school trip, to be homeschooled for two months after she took back an "illegal" non-uniform sweater a teacher had confiscated. People ask me why I should bother caring, but I am so terrified of my fifteen-year-old friends being fucked over the way I was.

I have done a lot of things with my life that I am very proud of--my zine, getting stories published nationally, directing a play--but not one of these things had anything to do with Severn. Not one, after seven years and \$65,000 of my parents' money. Most of my friends come from the other local schools or are scattered across the country. I was never romantically involved with anyone from there for more than a week. It gave me a great base in French, sure, and I can read all kinds of insights into Heart of Darkness now, but it has also skewered the way I see the world (I never even touched on the rampant racism and sexism) and myself.

I think that as the years pass I will be able to block more and more of it out, so eventually I will be able to smile cheerfully and laugh about my happy childhood memories. I can't do this yet--when I can no longer say that I spent almost half of my life in that miserable situation, I may be able to smile about it.

Oh one thing more--I was told through a parental grapevine that, of all the seniors in my graduating class (all 75 of us overachievers), I was the one everyone was curious to see how I ended up. My father told this to me meaning to be complimentary, but my well-developed neuroses somehow doubt this. Do they think I'll be leading ACT-UP marches on Washington? Directing movies about angry teenage girls trapped in high schools from hell? Encouraging my readers to kill a preppie a day to keep a doctor away? Poor and starving in a New York rat trap saying, "Oh if only Caroline Cassidy could see me now--I wish I'd listened to them and never tried to make anything of myself! Why didn't I turn myself into a baby factory when I had a chance?" Or do they think that I'll be so goddamn successful at whatever I choose to do that I'll be able to show them all? (Do you see what I mean by bitter?)

Wish I knew.

LIZ ARMSTRONG:

Gangbanger

Phrase: "What up, G?" and "Ho betta' have my money."

Clothing: Cocked hats, humongous jeans/shorts pulled down to the crack of the ass, Adidas wear, Fila shoes, buttoned flannels, college sports wear, (girls) bodysuits.

Accessories: Hood ornaments, pagers, stolen car, discman, friend in jail, "gat," "signs," gigantic gold rings and nameplate charms, (girls) hot pink lipstick and pseudo-Egyptian eyemakeup.

Reasons for living: It's fun to pick on/beat the shit out of people!, gotta smoke the chronic, gotta steal.

Hairstyle: (girls) perms, slicked back into a bushy ponytail, (guys) who cares? It's under a hat!

Headbanger (a.k.a. "Dirty" or "Suburban White Trash")

Phrase: "Duh?" or "Fuck you, dude."

Clothing: Lotsa black, paint-splattered quilted flannels either a size too small or a size too large, at least one shirt that has the word/suggests the action "fuck," ripped jeans, leather jacket, wrestling shoes, Doc Martens, denim jacket with patches.

Accessories: Tattoos, black nail polish, beard/mustache stubble, dirt, bandanna with skulls on it, guitar magazine.

Reasons for living: Gotta bone, gotta get stoned.

Hairstyle: Frizzy, long, greasy.

Freak (type 1)

Phrase: "Poseur!" or anything nobody else says, because they're too original for that.

Clothing: Anything goes--from UPS and gas station shirts to black fishnet head to toe, Doc Martens (or cheap look-alikes), local band T-shirts.

Accessories: Chain wallet, lunchbox purse, black (or reallllly dark) lipstick, any color nail polish that isn't red or pink, updated fanmail letter from local record label, spiked leather collar, dyed hair, pierced *something*, tattoo, sneer.

Reasons for living: I don't know, I don't care.

Hairstyle: Really long and stringy or really short and spiky, always unwashed.

Freak (type 2)

Phrase: "I worship Kurt/Trent/Courtney!" or "You just don't like me because I'm a freak!" or "I'm going to kill myself."

Clothing: Baggy jeans, T-shirt from the last Rancid/Offspring/Nine Inch Nails/Green Day concert, purposely thought-out and mismatched thrift shop clothing (usually brownish tones).

Accessories: Chain wallet, black nail polish, latest fucked-up poetry (oh my God, you have to read how depressed I am!), "Against Animal Testing" pin on the leather portion of a dirty backpack, band patches on backpack, stolen restroom sign.

Reasons for living: It's for the bands, man.

Hairstyle: Doesn't matter as long as it hangs in the face.

Prep

Phrase: "Ew, faggot!" or "Whatever!"

Clothing: Anything GAP, tucked-in earthy flannel or plain thermal shirt, brown hiking-ish boots.

Accessories: School scholarship update, pass to school counselor regarding college or that *one* undeserved B+, neutral "barely-there" make-up, congenial smile.

Reasons for living: College.

Hairstyle: Layered, curled, plastered in place.

Jock

Phrase: "Where's the party, man?" or "You *want* me to kick your ass, punk/bitch?"

Clothing: Johnson/Bad Boy Club/No Fear/Co-Ed Naked/Stussy/Yaga T-shirt and football jersey.

Accessories: Dick-sucking girlfriend of the week, last printed article on the game, beer can.

Reasons for living: Gotta drink, I can't suck my *own* dick, can I? and *someone's* gotta beat up all the nerds.

High school is full of bullshit. Not that I'm bitter or anything (really, I'm not), but it's true. Almost everything is fake and political, and anything that isn't either of those is pretty much useless.

Here's an outline of my high school career:

Freshman year ('92-'93)--My main title was Miss Cheerleading Sweetheart, although this was the year I discovered the "freaks." In order to declare my "freaky side" I wore obnoxiously bright plaid tights and black combat boots with my uniform every Friday before games. Because I was one of four freshmen ever in the history of Schaumburg High School to make the JV Cheerleading squad instead of the freshman squad, I was automatically invited to older parties and dubbed a snob by my peers. So this left me in a difficult position--my freshmen friends didn't want to hang around me because I was trying to act "old," my older friends didn't want to hang around with a "freak," and the freaks didn't want to hang around a cheerleader. I had a boyfriend (Chris) left over from junior high, and we had a very melodramatic relationship based on how I felt toward him that month. Chris was my first and only (I think) true love, and I really fucked him up. Nevertheless, we lasted almost two years together. Also, I was a member of the Forensics Team, and read verse. It nearly gave me an ulcer, too. This was my first year of high school soccer (I had played for seven years prior), and I had a pretty good attitude about it. However, that quickly changed when I only made the Freshman team (I was named runner-up for best defender at a soccer camp for the best teams in the Midwest) and everyone else on my traveling team made at least JV. Probably the single most important event of this year was my first show. It was a birthday party for a friend of a friend at a clubhouse, and there were a few local punk bands (now "legends" around the suburbs) and a d.j. (who is now a "legend" at raves across the US). Somehow I managed to go out every weekend and have fun.

Sophomore year ('93-'94)--I was too cool for cheerleading, but I suddenly became extremely popular. Honestly, I don't remember how; one day I received about six phone calls from different people who wanted to make plans with me, and the rest is history. With the freaks left in the dust, I was a full-fledged prep who was the life of the party. And I did really stupid things, too! I would put "I'm Too Sexy" on the jukebox in Taco Bell and dance down the aisles in front of *everybody*. At get-togethers I would act like a gang-bangin'

bitch and say, "You wanna git busy wit' da Lizzy?" and everyone cracked up. To this day, I still don't get it. This was the year I decided I had to get rid of Chris (although he was my best friend and a wonderful boyfriend), and made it my New Year's resolution to leave him in my wake. I quit Forensics in the middle of the season (the only thing I ever quit in my entire life) because I didn't like the fact that someone was critiquing my artistic expression. Being the adventurous one, I hosted a Costa Rican exchange student named Evelyn who stole all kinds of stuff from me. My first "real" job was as a "phone girl" working at Little Sicily, a disgusting greasy take-out pizza/miscellaneous Italian food joint. Everyone smoked cigarettes and drugs while making the food. Here the owner kicked me if I didn't work fast enough, and I was sexually harassed by a fat, red-nosed balding forty-three-year-old atheist who constantly cursed God for his horrible life and swore he was only twenty-six. The back of the kitchen was devoted to the drug-trafficking (the owner exchanged marijuana for bulk mozzarella), and I wanted no part of it. (This was the year I was straight-edge.) Soccer season started very early, so I had an excuse to quit. Although I devoted every spare minute of my time to soccer, I only made the JV team, which was the biggest disappointment of my life. I knew I was an excellent player, but stupid politics got in the way. Soon I was moved up to Varsity, but that only lasted a week. I was absolutely crushed. Back on JV I tore a ligament in my ankle and was out for the next six months; I never played again. My second job was as a Hostess at Fuddruckers, where I was sexually harassed by the Mexican busboys and cooks who took advantage of my Spanish-speaking skills (they called me "chica mala"). My third job is working as a sales girl at Contempo in the largest mall in the states. Somehow I sort of fell in love with a senior named Mike, and our relationship was more melodramatic than the one I had with Chris. We broke up for the public after three months but to this day we still see each other. I went to Senior Prom with his best friend, which caused quite a ruckus. After dating an older guy, I thought my friends were way too juvenile (but they were!) and temporarily stopped hanging around them.

Junior year ('94-'95)--This was the big transition. Over the past summer I became a freak again, and my only two friends in school were my best friend of four years, Lisa, and the school slut, Sheri. (I didn't mention Lisa before because she had been obsessed with her boyfriend until this year.) Because we stopped doing our hair and putting on make-up, we were suddenly the most hellish girls in the school. Anything I did, she followed, and anything she did, I backed up. I was a "slut," she was a "bitch," and we were both scumbags. The preps hated us because we wore dirty Bon Jovi T-shirts (as a joke), cheap 70's lingerie as outerwear, and black nail polish, and frequently dyed our hair crazy colors. The teachers hated us because we were smarter than everyone in our classes but never tried (I really regret this) and because we looked menacing. The hall monitors (yes, hall monitors, stationed at every corner and entrance of the school with walkie-talkies) hated us because we were insubordinate (we served time in compulsory study hall and weren't allowed to eat lunch). The freaks hated us because they thought we were poseurs, although I was on a personal friendship level with several popular local un-punk bands. All the girls in my gym class hated me because I could kick their asses in any sport, and consequently hated Lisa as well. Actually, I got in fist fights a couple of times with a few girls. The self-righteous black movement at school hated me because they thought I was a racist pig, which couldn't have been further from the truth. Chris hated me because he thought I was scary. No one liked us, and we could have cared less! I went to my Homecoming dance with a girlfriend, and earned my title as a lesbian (hmm, I guess they couldn't

decide if I was a whore or a dyke). However, I was a Student Council representative and a member of the Junior Class Club. Also, I was one of two juniors in a group that visited elementary schools to boost self-esteem. Most importantly, I managed to obtain a position as one of the Arts and Entertainment editors of my school paper. I started hanging out with drop-outs, sneaking out on school nights and staying out until 3:00 in the morning, doing drugs, drinking, sleeping in school, and letting my grades slip. I just didn't care about societal things anymore. Through this long series of events of dishonesty and misunderstanding, Lisa and I became the worst enemies there ever were. She told all these "important" people that I was pregnant and slept with four guys in the last month. It was a good thing this happened toward the end of the year, because I really had no one after her malicious rumoring.

Senior year ('95-'96)--I really cleaned up my act. I started going to football games again and became friends with all the assholes who called me a freak last year. Chris and I started hanging out again, and I was nominated for Homecoming Queen. I dress "normal" in school, and my hair is a natural color. As a Co-Editor-in-Chief of my school paper, I have a very high status position, which means it is a law that I have to be accepted into all the elite school clubs (i.e. National Honors Society, Principal's Advisory Board), although I see the faculty gnashing their teeth as soon as I walk into meetings. Theoretically, I am popular, although I rarely hang out with anyone at SHS. My friends include Sheri (the now beautiful drunk slut), Noelle (my lesbian poseur buddy), and Shana (the typical good girl who is secretly wild). Although many find it disgraceful, I think it's hilarious that there is a new rumor about my life every two weeks. So far I've screwed Noelle (not true), have gotten drunk in school (sort of true), have gotten drunk at a Chicago baseball game (true, but why would anyone care?), am a fascist (*what?*), do crazy things on weekends that I should be ashamed of (so?), and have done something that's so bad that no one will even tell me what it is! Everyone thinks Lisa is dead; she might as well be, for all I care. My grades are back to excellent. I'm a columnist for my state's third largest newspaper. And I accomplished everything myself.

Because I refuse to tolerate the whole system of cliques, I'm a sort of social outcast. My sister, on the other hand, is the cool one of the family. She's two years younger than me (a sophomore), and extremely popular. All the people who ditched me a couple years ago are now hanging out with my sister because she throws huge parties when our parents aren't home. And they can't stand me because I kick half of them out when they come over. They're just using my sister the way they used me.

See, my years in high school have actually been a personal experiment I started after my first year there. I like to see if how I dress makes a difference in how people react to me (of course it does), and if whom I hang out with defines my public personality (that does, too). Not that my findings have been unusually insightful, but I find it extremely interesting the way high school mentality works. And believe me, that working is minimal.

DELILAH RAYBEE: Middle Courtyarders and Everyone Else

I just graduated from Lowell High School, San Francisco's most competitive public high school. How does a basically homogenous (in terms of economic background, academically oriented, majority Asian and white) student body divide itself into groups?

The popular group was called the "middle courtyarders." They hung out in -duh- the middle courtyard. They were the athletes, the cheerleaders, and other people I didn't associate with. The music of the middle courtyard was rap, I think. Freshman year I wanted to be a middle courtyarder. That lasted all of two weeks. After eating lunch there a couple times it dawned on me that I would never fit in and that that was a good thing.

There was not one unified "nerd group." Technically we were all nerds. Other cliques besides the popular one were much smaller and just attached themselves to random hallways or lawns.

From sophomore year on I was a regular member of the "Hill people," later called the "Hall people." In nice weather (defined as not so foggy that you can't see more than two feet in front of you) we hung out on the grassy hill behind the senior vending machines. When it was really cold we hung out in a short hallway of lockers in the math wing.

I willingly, but not proudly, admit that we congregated together based on race. We were all white. We had one Armenian, one Arab, and one Indian from India, but other than that we were all European American. Many of us were Jewish, and the Jewish contingent was fondly referred to as the "Jew Crew." It sometimes occurred to me that I should be insulted by that name, but I never said anything.

We varied in our musical interests. There were those who listened to "Live 105," a modern rock radio station, and those who did not. I finally got a clue and started listening to Live 105 regularly during Senior year. Before that I insisted that I couldn't listen to radio because the commercials drove me crazy.

If one group at Lowell had to be labeled as losers, it would be the "Flagpole people." They hung out on the benches around the flagpole in the front courtyard. They cut class the most, wore the most black clothing, and had the most body parts pierced. Freshman year I secretly wanted to hang out there, but I was too scared.

An elite group which I joined junior year and really became a part of senior year was Stage crew. The Stage crew ran virtually everything that happened at school -all the football and basketball games, the spirit rallies, the assemblies, and, of course, the Spring musical. "Crewies" got to hang out in the Green room -a room backstage used as a dressing room during the musical. Music was an integral part of our lives. We had a boombox which blasted any and every type of music. One of my best memories of Lowell is boogieing in the Green room with my friend Lauren.

Teachers hung out in the teachers lunchroom. They got to smoke and play cards and students were not allowed to.

I can't possibly talk about "Why Music Sucks" without mentioning "Stairway to Heaven." "Stairway," always the last song at youth group dances.

SARAH RIEGEL: *Walnut Hills High School Cincinnati, Ohio 1985-91*

"I went to a high school where you had to take a test to get in." So said Jerry Rubin, give or take a word. Now that he's dead, it's left to my generation to produce a famous WHHS grad, lest we let Edie Magnus represent our alma mater to the outside world. The pressure is enormous.

That last phrase could sum up the rather peculiar atmosphere of my high school. It's a public high school, has around 2,000 students in grades 7-12. It's a college prep school, and you do have to take a test to get in. It draws

students from all over the city of Cincinnati, which produces an interesting social mix. The only thread connecting all members of the student body is a fierce competitiveness, especially in academics.

If you weren't on the honor roll, you weren't shit. The B honor roll was marginally acceptable, but still suspect. If you really wanted to be respected, it was the A honor roll or nothing. Until I went to college, I was convinced that I must have been borderline mentally retarded. My proof? In the seventh grade, I didn't pass the test to get into the advanced math class. It haunted me for years.

Given the uncompromising atmosphere within the school, it should come as no surprise that we were elitist little pricks when it came to other schools. One little ditty about another Cincinnati high school went, "Apples! Oranges! Pumpkin Pie! Withrow (note: pronounced "wit-wo"), Withrow, Withrow... School!"¹ When we were getting trounced in football, as was usually the case, since Walnut excelled mainly in preppy sports like soccer and tennis, we would chant, "That's all right, that's okay; you're gonna work for us some day!" Then there was the classic, "Get on your feet, get on your knees, we've got higher SATs!"

Once dominance had been established over other schools, it was of course necessary to establish the pecking order within the school. With 2000+ 12-18 year olds packed into a decaying neoclassical 1930s building designed to hold half that number, it tended to get chaotic. Thus it was necessary to cordon everyone off into appropriate cliques, where we would remain for six years.

That was one of the things about Walnut Hills -- whatever group you settled into in the seventh grade, whatever social rank you achieved, that was where you stayed for six years. Barring some miraculous transition or substance abuse problem, you pretty much stayed put. (Dammit! Whatever gave me the idea that chartreuse and orange looked good together way back on September 5, 1985?!) By senior year it was acceptable to socialize with members of other groups, but never let that be mistaken for genuine membership in that group.

The biggest, and most noticeable, cleavage at Walnut Hills was the same one that has bedeviled American society for 300 years. Despite growing up in the post-bussing 1970s, holding hands and singing "We Shall Overcome" in assemblies in elementary school, we could not get past the racial divide. The school was 70% white, 30% black, exactly the opposite of the district as a whole, and we pretty much split into two groups. Friendships developed across the gulf, but it was fairly rare to find somebody fully integrated into the other side. The black kids always dressed much nicer than the white kids. After school dances, there were always weeks of grumbling that they'd played "too much black music (hip-hop) and not enough white music (alternative)" or vice-versa.² Was this what Martin Luther King's dream was about? White and

¹This was one of the less racist anti-Withrow chants. Considering the fact that we were typically Cincinnati's most liberal high school, the only one to go for Dukakis in the 1988 mock election, we could be pretty foul. Whenever we were playing basketball against a suburban school, if that team had a black player, we would start chanting, "Import! Import!" whenever he stepped on the floor.

²One of the great myths perpetrated by *Spin*, *Alternative Press*, and other "hip" music magazines is that preppies started listening to alternative music

black kids going to school together and whining together about the music at Sadie Hawkins?

We white kids were pretty ignorant of the black kids. Every year one or two of our stars would run for class president, and we were always sure he/she/they was/were a shoo-in. Like the Republican Party, we were always amazed when the results didn't come out the way we'd anticipated. Doh! We forgot that black kids voted, and moreover, that they didn't vote for those for whom we had voted.

Let this be my personal mea culpa. Despite all the white liberal rhetoric I spout at will, decrying the nondiversity at my college, in high school I was just as myopic as the next honky. I literally have no clue how the black social groups broke down. As a result, all the groupings I refer to herein are white social cliques.

At the top of the heap were a group of twenty or so. They were the type of people you outwardly loathed, but would have given your left leg to resemble. Smart, attractive, popular, wealthy, athletic, active. The only consolation was that they would all go to Ivy League schools where everyone else was just like them and they wouldn't be at the top anymore. Or so we hoped.

My friends and I liked to fancy ourselves as operating just on the fringes of this group, a kind of minor league to the majors. As if! What it amounted to was that we were in most of the same classes with them, and they might occasionally deign to speak to one of us, but we sure as hell didn't get invited to the same parties. And for those in our group foolish enough to think themselves part of the "popular people," a steady stream of thrown food at lunch was the rebuke. If anything we were sycophants and hangers-on to the "popular people," but not a part of their group.

Although I hated the treatment at the time (especially since I wasn't the primary target of the tossed cookies, but still had to pick them out of my hair) I've come to appreciate the honesty. Walnut Hills could be a brutal place, where people let you know when they didn't like you. After spending three years at St. Lawrence University, where it wasn't always so clear, where people would pat you on the back with one hand while stabbing you with the other, I think I may just prefer the Walnut Hills atmosphere. At least there you knew who your friends were. And where they ate lunch.

Like most other schools, the social order of things was reinforced by where people ate lunch. It has since changed, but when I was at Walnut, there were three approved eating areas: the lunchroom, the Commons, and the front steps. Each had its own ambience. And guest list. Most of the black students ate in the lunchroom, as did the middle to lower tier of the white students (the amorphous masses whom my elitist friends and I looked at in the yearbook and said, "Who is that person?"). It was crowded and smelled like cafeteria food.

only post-"Teen Spirit." This doesn't jibe with my middle-American high school experience at all. The preppy kids always listened to 97X, the cool alt.rock station from Oxford. A 97X bumper sticker was a badge of coolness, probably because of that genre's association with college. After all, we were a college prep school -- both academically and socially. The big post-Nirvana shift in the subculture wasn't that the UC frat boys and Gap-outfitted Sycamore grads were now coming to hip clubs in Corryville. They were always there. The *major* difference was that guys in Camaros from Northern Kentucky and women with big hair were showing up. The proletariat had crashed our party.

Whenever there was a fight, as there often was during the junior high lunch period, a huge human wave would crash across the room to watch. It would have been a great place to study mass psychology, but I rarely availed myself of that opportunity. I had a reputation to protect, albeit a somewhat invented one.

Even lower on the social scale was the Commons. It was a large cement plaza with benches, built on top of a 1970s addition to the building. It was only acceptable to eat there during your seventh grade year. After that, it was considered to be the place for the absolute social rejects and misfits, a place where nerdy and immature boys played wall-ball.

The "popular people" and their hangers-on ate on the front steps, with their lovely view of I-71. It was an incredibly dirty, crowded place, where food-throwing was out of control. Because of the crowds, it was necessary to leave your bookbag in the front hall, making it an easy target for thieves.³ However, the elite had sanctified it with their presence, so we fell all over ourselves to eat there. In the rain and cold, we would try to get away with eating in the front hall, but would eventually get chased outside by DT guards. God forbid we should actually eat in the lunchroom!

Because of overcrowding and aversion to thrown juice boxes, numerous groups set up shop in unsanctioned areas. The gym steps, back circle, and little theater hallway were popular, although the risk always existed of being chased out or given a detention. These places were basically extensions of the front steps, and were peopled by the same crowd. Half my group even abandoned the front steps senior year, and started eating in our French teacher's room. This partially precipitated the split in our clique which has never been healed. But by senior year, we had developed divergent interests and new friends, so I don't think we felt the split too severely.

And who else was there to have for friends? There were the "sackers." This was a group, interlocking with my particular clique in places, who spent lunch time playing hacky sack in the back circle. They listened to a lot of Pink Floyd and several of their number later joined the military.

The druggies hung out on the soccer field and (we assumed) did drugs. In the '90s they would probably listen to Phish and be crunchies, but in the '80s they listened to punk rock and were universally known as "druggies." One of their number once skipped thirty-six health classes, and when questioned about it by the assistant principal, claimed to have been kidnapped by aliens. He let her off because she had such a creative excuse. Druggies tended to disappear from school occasionally, most likely into rehab, and outrageous stories of abortions, mental hospitals, and jails would circulate. One poor girl

³ A game, popular particularly in elementary schools, where someone bounces a tennis ball off a wall, and a whole mess of people rush to try to catch it, so they can have the privilege of throwing the ball. Physical contact and violence are common. Also known as "slam-ball."

⁴ L.L. Bean and Caribou were the most popular makes of bookbag. It was an unwritten law that you carried your backpack on one shoulder, a habit I *still* can't break, even though trends have reversed themselves. Also immensely popular were Caribou bags, which were essentially soft-sided briefcases. They never seemed to last longer than a year-and-a-half without self-destructing, which of course meant having to go buy another one. But, hey, isn't conspicuous consumption the backbone of our post-industrial service economy?

we had raped, pregnant, miscarried, run away to Dayton with her boyfriend, arrested, and finally pushed into a psych ward. The truth was likely much more mundane.

Interlocking with the druggies was the one group I really envied, the punks. They hung out by Blair Market and smoked cigarettes. They wore black Doc Martens and army fatigues with the names of hardcore bands stenciled on the back.⁵ Their world tended to be even more closed than the cabal at the top. Even though I listened to hardcore, I was too Outback Red to be a part of their group, and too afraid of rejection by the elite to trade the Outback Red for army fatigues. I had one friend who was part of the punk group. She used to scrape the names of boys she was infatuated with into the skin on her arms using a compass. Like most of the other punks, she disappeared long before graduation. Those who made it through all six years tended to form alternative rock bands and become part of the over-hyped "Cincinnati scene."

One of Cincinnati's distinguishing social features is the presence of a large Appalachian subculture within the white community. It was de rigueur to look down upon any of them who crossed our paths. We called them "grits," or, if they were girls with high hair, "fluff chicks." They wore acid-washed jeans long after the rest of the world had abandoned them and listened to Bon Jovi.⁶ Very few survived the constant harassment at Walnut Hills; most ended up transferring to other schools.

A running theme here is that those who didn't slavishly follow the lead of the popular people, or at least toe the line and keep their mouths shut, tended to leave school. They told us back when we were mere "effies" (Hundred-year-old slang for seventh graders. Eighth graders were "e-flats") that everyone would be cliquey and insulated for the better part of five years, but once senior year rolled around, like magic we would all be best pals (within reason). It really did seem to unfold this way, and until now I had always chalked it up to our increasing maturity. In the course of writing this, though, I realize that it didn't quite happen that way. Those who didn't fit into our insular, self-absorbed world were drummed out. Like some mid-80s John Hughes movie gone awry; where the eccentric, yet attractive and charming hero didn't win in the end.

And what became of those of us who always wore our backpacks on one shoulder? Those who wore Bass blucher mocs, laced so you couldn't see the end of the laces; always walking with the heel smashed down so they flew off your feet at regular intervals? Those who bickered endlessly over whether R.E.M. could still be called "alternative" circa-*Green*? We grew up to become the target market for hipster coffeehouses and *Friends*. Who really won in the end?

⁵ Around 7th and 8th grades (1985-1987), when skateboards were popular, there were quite a few boys from the "popular" crowd who adopted punk clothing and music for a time. They carried Steve Steadham and Tony Hawk skateboards with pictures of skulls on the bottom and argued about who could ollie the highest. This trend eventually passed, and the vast majority of them went back to L.L. Bean and Land's End. The punks had never really accepted most of them anyway. They were seen as posers.

⁶ Merely dressing this way was evidence of grit-dom to us. Whether or not all of these people were actually of Appalachian background was irrelevant.

DAVID NICHOLS: SOCIAL LANDSCAPE OF HIGH SCHOOL

Australian secondary schools, as I understand it, basically fall under two systems: either they're private schools (usually church-oriented, sometimes quite exclusive and expensive) and high schools (government owned and run, nominal fees). My school, John Gardiner High, was triply cursed, firstly by being a new school (when I first went there I think it had only been going three years - so it had no academic status); secondly by being a high school in an area (Hawthorn) completely dominated by private schools (my family actually lived on what estate agents called "Scotch College Hill" - Scotch College being an extremely old & prestigious boys' school - my father went there at the same time as Andrew Peacock, now a prominent conservative politician, and Athol Guy, of The Seekers and The New Seekers); thirdly, unlike practically every other secondary school, our school didn't have a uniform, and that just appalled the local community.

What I'm trying to get at here is that as I saw it we were already socially low (but still "socially low" in urban Australia would be high compared with lots of other countries I imagine). The good teaching staff tended towards a fairly laid-back 70s approach to academic standards and the stupid teaching staff generally accepted that they had no control over these hoodlums anyway. (I was no hoodlum nor was I an academic high achiever - just hedging my bets, I guess.)

The school fell easily into groups. People would be friends in clumps. In class, you could move the tables and chairs around easily to accommodate your 3-4 friends. Sometimes these groups, especially if they were groups of girls (they were almost always all-boy or all-girl groups) would have satellite friends - people who I perceived then as being too shy to commit, but thinking about it now they were probably quite strong.

There was a high turnover at JGHS - parents panicked and took their kids out and sent them to private schools, or kids left when they turned 15 (school-leaving age then); one boy (nickname: Onions) was perceived to have been expelled for being found masturbating in the toilets by some other boys, a situation I now can't believe would have been basis for expulsion - it wouldn't have even been against school rules or if it was we were never told - maybe he just left in embarrassment. One boy left to go to prison after robbing the TAB (betting shop). Another kid (one I still hate) got taken out of class by a bikie to be (according to the other kids) killed. Also, we got the kids who had been expelled from other schools, or who at least had been told they wouldn't be welcomed back. They were cheery fuckers.

It's difficult to map all the groups. I remember in first year a group of jokers, inc. Lucas, Tommy, Dean, and Rodney. Lucas would put on plays in the General Studies class where he and Tommy would pretend to be Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser and ex-Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. Gough would invite Malcolm over for chocolate and actually give him Laxettes. Lucas also coined the winning phrase which unfortunately can only be aimed at people called Tiffy, and I've certainly only ever encountered one Tiffy: it was "Tiffy, will you touch my stiffy?" Another joke was to walk around pretending to accidentally hit tables at crotch level and act as though this was pleasurable. Rodney was small and freckled, with glasses, he was fairly silent when making three a crowd, like he was the weatherman to the winning duo of Lucas and Tommy, but he got more confident when they left after a couple of years and became quite snide. He must have softened when he got older because I remember him asking me if I'd heard Joe Jackson's song "Real Men."

Everybody was part of a group. I won't bore you with them. It alarms me I remember them so well - we're talking 1977-82 here. From 1977-79 mine was me, a Vietnamese boy called Vip, and a boy called Guy from Western Australia. Vip was small and Guy was quite big and I had long hair. We were total misfits. Later Vip went to a low-grade Catholic school in the area and we evolved to include a disgracefully petulant and sarcastic Gary Numan enthusiast called Michael who wanted a very close relationship with me which I tended to evade. Also a Bob Dylan and Charlie Chaplin (only the best of everything!) fan called Simon who is the only one of these people I still have anything to do with. The last time I spoke to Simon he was about to join a new band called Frente! (but he apparently never did, although he got thanked on their first record). No offense meant to any of the above but we were just a big bunch of dags, and of course frequent targets for the other kids.

Social landscape might also include teachers: maybe the most interesting thing about my teachers was they were all fucking each other. The music teacher and the english teacher who was reputed to have a chronic skin disease which put scabs all over his body (and which he passed on to his son, according to a friend of mine who babysat him). The history teacher and the phys. ed teacher, caught kissing at a Bob Dylan concert by other students. Another phys. ed teacher, who left his family to shack up with one of the maths teachers. (This PE teacher had to give a sex education talk to some boys from my year and then at the end asked if there were any questions. One boy piped up: "Yeah, do you fuck Perko?" Bristling, he replied, "That's between me and her, right?") If they're the ones I knew about, god knows what was going on that was actually kept secret!

PATTY STIRLING: I stayed after school to avoid coming home. You either took the school bus or walked for miles. It was in the mountains. The girls had "shag" haircuts. We tailored our jeans and corduroys into tight hip-hugger bell-bottoms. We wore midriffs, to show off the belly button, and halter tops in the summer. We wore cowboy or Dingo boots with jeans, and platform shoes or fat clogs (homemade Tandy Crafts) with miniskirts. My family had suede fringe jackets and ponchos from Tijuana (we'd moved up to Oregon from San Diego in 1969). For school concerts I sewed my own formal gowns; sexy slinky "ho" suits, because I hated the stupid pink or yellow frilly "little girl" or "old lady" long dresses that the other girls wore, that their mothers bought or sewed for them. I made sexy clothes out of satin and velvet, like Cher increasingly exotic and daring every week on "The Sonny and Cher Show." My friends were hippies out in Takilma, who dressed like gypsies, or transplanted Californians, who had more cosmopolitan tastes than the local Oregonians, who were like hillbillies.

The people in Cave Junction were "Hee-Haw" people. My dad belonged to the Lions Club, which was like Rotary or Elks or the Australian RSL, and every year they'd stage a live "Hee-Haw" show in the high school auditorium, and all the families in town would come. My dad would be drunk, and kids would harass me about it. At home, I trained horses and dogs, but then I started beating them. At school I started crying for no reason.

My best friend and I got sent to the principal for attacking each other in math class, knocking over desks and drawing blood. We laughed about it. Outside of school, my friends and I rode horses and camped in the mountains, shot guns, did witchcraft, shop-lifted, smoked cigarettes or rolls of madrone bark, drank cheap wine and homemade hard cider, swam in rivers and ponds, and did arts and crafts. My hippie friend Amy and I painted our faces

id that I broke
a pleasure and
ly Go, a Quar-
Besides buying
ing and breed-
es are playing

a toy poodle,
timber wolf
apals who like
re, and love
rt-time, train-

elen Stevens
dan, Minn. 55352

fabian/Thor-
chestnut with
face. I broke
her to race.
dy Var. I am
s and Thor-
would like to
o like racing,
nds of horses
and Thor-

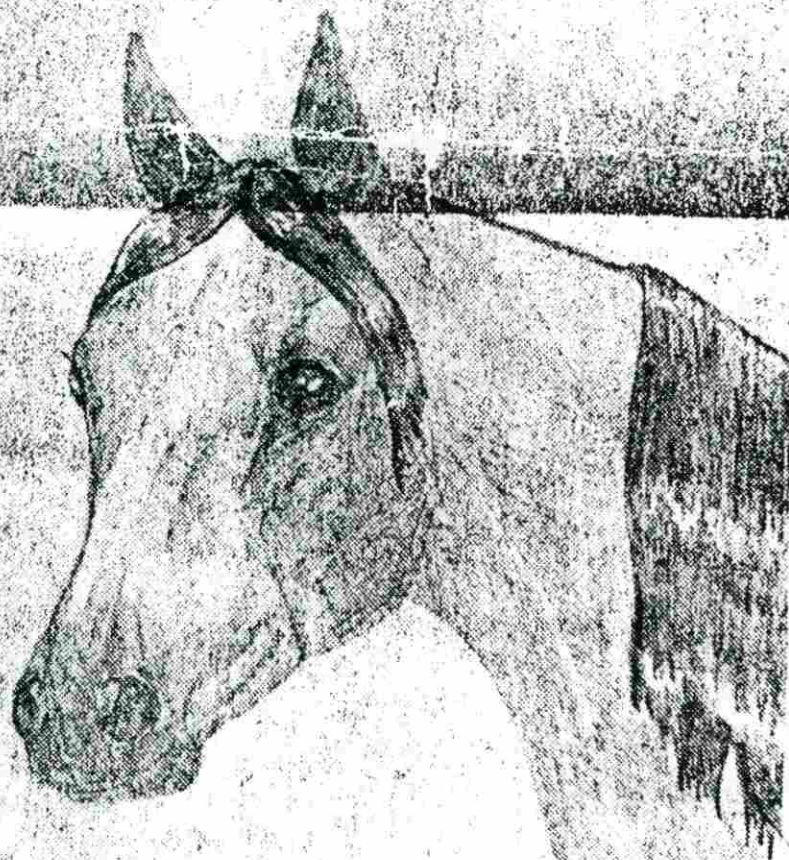
andy Duran
ox, 882
arks, Nev. 89431

, but I prefer
thoroughbred
y. I ride her
e been doing
of firsts in
hunter hack,
o ride her in

would like penpals around my age.
Darla Brown
23-3805 47th St. S.W.
Calgary, Alta., Canada

Junior Horseman:

I am a 15-year-old who reads *The West-ern Horseman* from cover to cover each month. I have always wanted a horse and thanks to my business of selling Christmas and everyday cards, plus other odd jobs that I do, I will be getting a horse in about



• Thirteen-year-old Patty Stirling, 2574 Rockydale Rd., Cave Junction, Ore. 97523, did this pencil portrait.

anyone 15-17
... and espe

Junior Horse

I have a "sn
belong to the
has a part-Q
parades at th
I am nine
penpals.

Junior Horse

I am an 18-
own two horse
part-Thorough
hand, brown, p
since I was nin
to riding weste
I live on a fa
training to be
my ambition is
My hobbies
craft, art, "stre
would like to h
who live on a r

Junior Horseman

I'm a membe
Lamont saddle
and trail rides.
I have been



psychedelic then took pictures of each other against psychedelic backgrounds, like in "Laugh-In."

I was shaped like a boy, with a small butt and hugely muscular shoulders and arms from doing ranch work. I was pudgy with a huge bust and fat thighs and didn't look good in a midriff shirt or bikini because I had a thick waist. It was good to have a big bust for the boys at school, but bad at home because my dad was there. He joked that I was a lesbian because I hung out with my friends. I almost shot him. He insulted me constantly with obscenities and insinuations. I sometimes wanted to call the police, but I knew they didn't come into private homes. If I killed my dad I would go to jail and it would ruin the rest of my life, so I didn't.

My mom divorced him and she and I moved to San Luis Obispo, California. In Cave Junction, the school had been so small that everyone knew each other. My friends and I were "A" students, not nerds or intimidated by teachers, and good in sports and art (except that the art teacher made me redo a calligraphy assignment because she didn't approve of the phrase I had chosen: "Happiness is a Warm Gun," the Beatles song). I saw my friends every day, talked on the phone, or stayed overnight, and if someone was absent without telling me I'd get very upset, phone them up and give them hell.

San Luis Obispo Senior High School ("SLOSH") was full of rich blond suburban kids. My mom worked nights in a nursing home so I was mostly alone. I ran two miles every day, thinking about people starving in Africa, that Jesus would not eat one bite of food until people recognized that their brothers and sisters were in trouble and needed help. I would be like Jesus and not eat until the rich white Americans went over to Africa and fed the starving children.

I didn't make any friends and didn't understand what I was supposed to be doing at school. I skipped classes and went to the library to read cook-books. I got so skinny my clothes didn't fit, so my mom took me shopping for new ones, buying them in the children's section. We didn't have a sewing machine. I told her we had to move back to Oregon so I could be near my brother, sister, and dad, or I would die.

They had moved to Coos Bay, on the coast. My mom got a little apartment there. Sometimes I lived at my dad's house, which was filthy, full of fleas, dirt, and garbage. I slept on the floor. My brother also slept on the floor, sometimes under his bed. The house was full of smoke and very dark, with the curtains drawn. My dad sat in the basement in front of a TV drinking whiskey or tequila and chain-smoking. Or he'd be out at bars with his girlfriend, a malnourished woman named Lee he'd picked up hitchhiking. She had a child somewhere, and she spent time in and out of detox and jail. My dad went to jail sometimes.

He was a repo man, but never held a job very long. We'd moved all over San Diego county before coming to Oregon. We'd stayed five years in Cave Junction because we couldn't afford to move. My mom had gone to nursing school, which pissed him off. That's why it took so long for them to split up; getting escape money.

Marshfield High School in Coos Bay was on top of a hill next to a graveyard. I was ill and couldn't walk up stairs or keep warm; not interested in meeting other kids. I couldn't study or read. I played the evil female lead in a melodrama play. I made batiks and ceramic statues in art class. It was different from a California school. I choreographed a dance to Mike Oldfield's "Tubular Bells."

I didn't want any friends and didn't notice the other kids. In Cave Junction, there had been pretty, rich girls to be jealous of, because they'd get the boys' attention, but everyone got invited to every party. Ugly fat girls got

treated badly at school, but I stepped in if my friends were guilty of that, because I didn't tolerate abuse. Cave Junction was so small that there wasn't much opportunity for the development of cliques, and often the same boys who were "jocks" were also "scrods" or the "brainiacs." My friends and I were females like that. There was little stereotyping, except for the "inbred hillbilly hicks" and the "total hippies who didn't even go to school." Those kids were extremes. There were slut girls, resented for the way they could draw the boys away from the rest of us. There were boys who had such bad dispositions that they had no friends and girls found them repulsive: everyone knew they would come to a bad end, as criminals. It was taken for granted that they had evil, mean fathers.

I was infatuated by handsome, man-like boys without giving much notice to their personalities, and never got any for a boyfriend, anyway. One boy I liked was a saint, from a very Catholic family. He behaved in a virtuous manner that made him an irresistible candidate for the perfect husband and father, if he could be rescued from becoming a priest. He was killed in a car accident when his family was on its way to church. It was a drunk driver, who may as well have been my dad.

In Coos Bay, I didn't understand why teachers at school didn't inquire if there was something wrong. I came into class every day more skinny till I was a skeleton that could barely walk, and they'd say I wasn't doing very well in P.E. or on my assignments. I read cookbooks in the library, especially when I weighed 75 pounds. I figured out that I was incredibly ugly ("monkey face") and unsexy. I would never get a boyfriend or any friends, like I used to have, being so skinny. I was losing my hair and almost fell down whenever I walked and my skin was peeling off. It was ridiculous.

My mom thought I had tuberculosis so she took me to the free clinic, where they said I was underweight and malnourished. The doctor took a picture of me, saying he always photographed his patients. My mom took me to the county mental health clinic. They gave me sleeping pills, and I would eat all the pills and sleep for days, and once went to the emergency room. I hitchhiked to a friend's house in Cave Junction and begged them not to call my parents. While there I visited my old school, but nobody recognized me. They'd ask my name, and I'd chastise them for pretending not to know me. It seemed like I had a horrible incurable disease, and it was bad to associate with a person who was going to die. I tried to act like nothing was wrong.

I moved to Eugene, Oregon, and lived with my mom's friends on a dog ranch. I was friends with the other girls in the family, especially one who had her mouth wired shut to correct her underbite. At the high school, the Spanish teacher refused to speak English at all, which I thought brilliant. My electronics class focused on stereo equipment. I didn't notice the other students. I had a pet iguana. The stepfather of the family was a half-Indian cowboy biker named Rocky from Texas with tattoos and earrings. The mother was a tall, gorgeous blonde named Sylvia. There was constant shouting in the house, and hilarious jokes about sex. I slashed my legs with a razor. One day my mom pulled up in her car and I left with her, to Grants Pass, Oregon.

Grants Pass was bigger than Cave Junction, so the diversity of the student body was more apparent. I was an "artist" and noticed the distance of the kids who were the social elite, involved in student government and sports and activities. Those were the kids who were scared to death to graduate, because there was no life after high school.

I only liked the art department. There were five other art students and one teacher, a woman named Levine who lived out in the country and smoked pot. One boy, an Australian exchange student, got me listening to Emerson,

Lake & Palmer and Steely Dan, and the teacher got me into Tom Waits. I spotted another exchange student walking alone around campus; a boy from Ghana. He was the only black person at the school and I was sure he felt very lonely. In Cave Junction, there had been a boy from Costa Rica, but he had been the center of the girls' attention because of his exotic Latino good looks.

I hid food in my mom's apartment so I always had a back-up. Once I found a pot of spoiled chicken soup in the refrigerator that was covered by a film of slimy mold and stank like rotten eggs. I ate it, trying to get food poisoning. I started wearing ripped shirts and safety pins in my ears like the Sex Pistols. I hardly looked at anyone and couldn't remember names or faces. I tried to drop out of school, but a high school counselor fixed my grade transcripts so I could graduate.

CHUCK EDDY: COOL THINGS PEOPLE WROTE IN MY HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOK

I bought yearbooks all four years in high school, which strikes me as geeky now, but didn't then. I wanted to be involved -- maybe extracurricular activities were my way of escaping my dysfunctional home life. Here's what the index in the back of my senior yearbook lists after my name: Debate 1, 4; J.V. Soccer 2, 3; Gong Show 3; J.V. Baseball 1, 2 (Manager); Powder puff Cheerleader 3; NHS 3, 4; Spectrum 2, 3, 4 (Editor-in-Chief) 3 (Feature Editor) 4; Talent Show 3 (Emcee); Theatre Week 3.

Every year, I got everybody I knew to sign my book, for posterity's sake. When I went back this summer and read the inscriptions for the first time in ages, I found out that boys almost always wrote to me with more personality than girls did (though I bet girls wrote with more personality to other girls than boys did). Freshman year, almost everybody just wrote boring variations on "have a nice summer," but each subsequent year, the inscriptions more and more loosened up and developed an identity. Anyway, I decided to transcribe the ones that struck me as the funniest or most revealing; as much as legibility allowed, I tried to stay true to all their grammatical errors, misspellings, and mispunctuations, though I did add bracketed notes when it'd be otherwise impossible for you to figure out what the people are referring to (or their last names). Taken together, I think these autographs map out a unique little world.

Ninth Grade (1975)

"Chuck, I really enjoyed the sports challenge this year. You were a riot in backing me up in the anti-burnout campaign. Civics was a riot and so was Geometry. You proved to me little kids are all right. (forget Schrader) See ya round, Dave" [Guidot, basketball star and eventually our class valedictorian. He also circled his head in the Freshman Basketball team picture and wrote "superstar... great player. - Detroit News -"]

Tenth Grade (1976)

"Chuck, All I can say is you are lucky that you are a little punk or else I would beat the hell out of you! Mark Gobbel"

"Chucky - Well I still say I should of Given you 5cc of testosterone to put some hair on your chest (and if your lucky you might reach 100 lbs.). We ceartenly had some good times Being Bio II partners, I hope you study hard next year because I wouldn't want you to pull an 'OHATCHKI'. Good luck

and practice your injecting because if you keep it up you'll never make it as a junkie! your Bio II PAL, Thomas Ochocki (Ohatchki) '77"

"Chuck Eddy - The love of my life - its too bad I'm already taken or I'd grab you in a second. And by the way I'm taken for the next 12 Saturday nights, sorry! P.S. Thank you for helping me get by. Lauri (Stern) XOXO."

Eleventh Grade (1977)

"To Herr Eddy (Alias Chuck) I'm writing this dear John letter to tell you that I have found my 543 Foot submarine and that my duty is to my torpedoes. I was at the dentist yesterday and had my Right left molar extracted. While on gas I proposed to the assistant but she turned me down because of a filling in my naseel canal. Oh well. Such fun see you next year. Ex sub commander Jimmy Carter. oops! Bill '78'" [Bill Baum]

"HERR EDDY (alias Herr Burn) I understand you have A PRIVATE STASH HIDDEN AWAY JUST FOR THIS SUMMER. MAYBE I'LL STOP by. Stay burnt J.C." [John Cunningham. Lived in my subdivision.]

"Chuck thanku fer that thar spectrum yall given me and eye alsoe wanna say you isa cruel wolful murderer Jim 'Nose' Cikalo" [What the fuck? The Spectrum was our school newspaper.]

"Puck you big sped. Wasn't drama great what a hip coolsville thing. We were the best roles in bottom's dream. Have fun this summer and don't eat any spam. The King of the Fairies Jim Galloway." [We were in a shortened version of Midsummer's Night Dream in drama class. "Sped" is short for "Special Education."]

"Chuck, there's something about you that's different from any other guy. I guess your pretty funny and a great actor. I thought it would have been great if we all could have did our exam together I was looking forward but since we decide on monalogs I guess I won't have the chance - Leticia - Don't forget Herrimans class or maybe you'll never forget." [Letty Garretson. I don't remember knowing her, but she was elected to our homecoming court senior year, and judging from her yearbook pictures she was extremely pretty, sort of Hispanic-looking even. My hormones must've been completely stunted, seeing how I didn't get a crush on her and think about asking her out on a date after she wrote such sweet compliments in my yearbook.]

"Charles Eddy III Esquire Du bist ein nett junge. Nicht mur dass, du hasslich, dum, ein shceisskopf bist. Es tut mir bit dass, Ich muss [illegible] das. Aber, Iche finde es gein. Diesen Brief ist sehr dum. Aufwiedersehen, Chris" [Mammoser. I think he was calling me a stupid ugly Ed Gein shithead.]

"Chuck, To one of the most suave, sophisticated, mocho, awesome person in the school, It's too bad you missed being El Presidente By only a Little Margin, but that's Life in the big city Right. I must say that your acting ability wasn't bad. It wasn't good, but it wasn't bad, Especially when you got into your Little story about Tarzan and the Animal that stands so high, has a very fury back and a purple nose. Well school is out and summer has begun so keep yourself out of trouble And Don't kill yourself because I'd like to see you next year. John '78'" [John Mance, probably -- we had four Johns in our class.]

"From the midget to the pigmy (I know your the pigmy since your shorter and so is a pigmy) eat meat and potatoes to put on some weight. Some people say we made fools and/or jerks of ourselves, well I don't think so. We caused trouble without prejudice and were on blacklists of everyone in the school. Our campaign was Brilliant, fabulous, genious and fantastic (modesty) and I am sorry Don Weingust and Mike Kaufman are too great for us. I never

had so much fun causing so much trouble. Hope you make it as a short order cook. LJ Miller '78" [a.k.a. Lee. See also Death Angel review, #500 in Stairway to Hell.]

"Chuck, I think it's fitting for me to sign on the same page as a 'gas' station. You gave me a lot of laughs in 3rd hour with your different (weird) beatnik ways. Hope to see you next year. Kevin" [Schmidt, a future dentist. But the gas wasn't laughing gas -- it was in an ad for Old Orchard Shell.]

[First an arrow drawn from his senior photo to a Stopsign he drew for some reason, then] "Chuck, If I have disappointed you I am sorry, but since I did not make it, I hope you can achieve that great accomplishment. Now & Always, Morey S. Smerling" [who I wasn't so much a friend of as a fan of, since for no reason anyone could explain -- he wasn't a valedictorian or quarterback or class president or anything -- he was one of seven boys in the Class of '77 nominated by faculty to be the Most Representative Student. I got everybody I knew to try really hard to stuff the ballot box in his favor, since nobody had ever heard of him and he had such a great name (and in his year-book picture, he even looks like a person named Morey Smerling should). But of course, some big jerk won instead.]

"Chuck, We didn't agree on a hell of a lot but I guess that's nothing new. I respect you for your opinions and no bad feelings of course. Besides that, your genius and logical mind (I guess) show through your talent in everything you d-d-do. you no the importancg of a gud hi skule ejukashun. [lots of those letters are intentionally drawn backwards] Yours in Dylan, The Exquisite Mr. Timothy Richard Smith P.S. I forgot what I was going to say." [My only Bob Dylan opinion at the time was that he was a hypocrite -- a protest singer who beat up women.]

Twelfth Grade (1978)

"Chuck, You are part of many of this years memories. I'm glad I walked in to join the Debate Team and I had a great time being part of that team. There ought to be more uninhibited crazy people like you. Remember your first attempt at 1st neg.? Remember all the rides to and from? All the lost debates? Remember the girl who protested about your poster (a death had occurred) at the Forensics meet? The Spectrum articles? Scott's unexpected absence. Keep on being you! Love always, Patty. P.S. I wish you the best, happiness and success. Keep in touch. I enjoyed your company. Unfortunately, we may not have a team next year. P.S. I forgot to mention the Dinner. You looked handsome in your suit. [Patty Bausano -- You don't think she had a crush on me or anything, do you? Never went out with her, never even thought of it, really. But I'm pretty sure she had a couple dates with my brother Ernie three years later. "A death has occurred" refers to some poster I made about endangered mushrooms -- a sorry attempt to make fun of environmentalists.]

"Chuck, have a good time dring alot, and keep up that stupid writing you do. Do not drink to much. Gerry Bonneville."

"Dear Chuck, say hey bitch, we had a fun time in, ah, let's see Advanced Comp (No... But I saw the Towering Inferno.) (yeah Squill). and in Debate (I love your body so much I just can't keep my hands off it, you fuckin' Nympho anyway) (Look at the joker, slippin' it to her -- Look at her grin you can tell.) And Forensics (save the whale) Well I had fun and you must of too. Hell you laughed enough, so keep laughin' you, asshole. Carl." [As in Carl Cuchetti, who had a John Travolta haircut. This is my all-time favorite. The "Towering Inferno" line is what George Squillace told our teacher when she asked if

anybody had ever read a tragedy. The Nympho stuff refers to Carl's former girlfriend Michelle Trudeau and her new flame Jeff Sadlier, whose name Carl has underlined on the Ecology Club page where he signed his autograph, and then he wrote "Stupid hick (Heyll Michelle)" under it. There are arrows extending from Carl's inscription to Michelle's and Jeff's pictures, and another one going from "save the whale" to some unknown fat girl's picture. Then at the end, Carl has written "continued on page 126," on which page there's a picture of one of two black girls who went to my school, either Cherylyn or Carolyn Walker (identical twins) in mid-air doing a track-meet long jump with hands outstretched and a frightened facial expression, and Carl has written next to it "The one event we did win was the nigger (what's her name) against the Tennessee Lynch blacks." And his handwriting can also be found on page 30, where effeminate history teacher Bill Haycock (one guess what kids called him) sings (with musical notes surrounding his words) "Me and Mr... Mr Lams," referring to even more womanly male teacher Ray Lams, who carried a purse to school ... And yet another teacher, named Mr. Bridges, asked me to hold his hand while in the hallway once, so I thought he was a child molester. But then I found out he was just blind.]

"Hello Charles: May I say that it's been inlightening having you in my Forensics class. Well, it actually isn't my Forensics class. I just wish you liked blacks more. And Women. But we all have our individual preferences. I truly believe that you will be a famous writer someday. I'll be a famous actress, so maybe you can write for me. There most probably will be no blacks or women in the script. When you meet Woody Allen at a 'Writers Convention' tell him I love him. Take care! Love, Sue '79" [Then she drew a little sun. Nine years later Henry Rollins wrote a letter to Creem Metal saying I look like "a skinny, shriveled-up version of Woody Allen." I wonder if Sue Distefano saw it.]

"Chuck, you commy, Nazi, midget infulturator. Newspaper couldn't of been the same without you, too bad it was. To one of the best JV soccer players I know. If you go to U of D poke out an eye and you'll be like Dick Vitale -- Jay" [Goldstein]

"Okay. Time to get started writing sweet nothings in your book. Dear Chuck: Life will definitely be quieter at W.B. without you. But alas, much duller. The price one pays for peace of mind! Do you have your college all picked out now? I hope for your sake that it allows betting on the Saturday Races at the laundromat. I hear the food at those places isn't so hot, but as long as they have carrots & potato chips you'll be all right. Of course you can always monkey on down to Hardee's if you're desperate. In all seriousness now (not that the rest of this wasn't) Best of luck in all you encounter & hope you lead a bizarre life. Ever amor, Denise Hardes" [actually Hardesty; I'll always wonder why she never finished her last name. "Ever amor" is somewhat illegible, so maybe that's not what it says. I knew her through a Unitarian Church youth group I belonged to for a few weeks -- Unitarians are just like agnostics, except that they make a really big deal about not believing anything. As for laundromats, you just pick out a wash load, and lay your money down... I wonder how bizarre Denise's life has turned out.]

"Chuck, I could say something quite repulsive But I will avoid any obnoxious conjecture and merely illustrate a perverse portrait. Good luck in life although I don't think you'll need it if you plan on majoring in Perversion -- Cliff. A clear view of a donkeys rectum designed especially for you!!" [An arrow points to an inked-in drawing of an ass's backside, complete with puckered asshole, designed by Cliff Irely, whoever he was.]

"Hey Chuckie Baby, You anti-Semetec Shrimp. I never could understand how someone could make a spectsical of themself like you. We burned the hell

out of everyone from Ted [Cavin, the principal] to [journalism teacher Sue] Rollinger (and her 30 day periods) and of course our flute-playing aesthetically minded fruit of all fruit Don Weingust. Look me up in the book anytime, just don't call. Lee J Miller" [Last I heard he was in Thailand.]

"Chuck, I'm glad you didn't make West Point because it is a worthless school. Now Annapolis, that is a different story. But that is enough of that. Good luck in all future endeavors! Beat Army!! Steve Montagne '78." [Hey Steve -- Suck my dick!]

"Excelsior! You are indeed a crisp character. Anybody who quotes Frank Zappa is definitely not dealing with a full deck. Remember the three most Important things in life: Good grades, popularity, and Hair on your chest. Chuckie, it is so good that you are not one of those who run in the crowd and act conformingly in the words of Soren Kierkegaard "A crowd is untruth" and some unknown "mediocrity finds safety in standardization" Play it cool and don't stub your toe. Jim Tierney." [How could I have quoted Frank Zappa? I never even listened to a Zappa album until this year, 1995! And everything except "Flower Punk" and "Dirty Love" and maybe "I'm the Slime" on his Greatest Hits and We're Only In It For the Money totally stunk if you ask me. So I don't know, maybe I read a Frank Zappa quote somewhere, and stole it in some Spectrum article I wrote.]

"Chunky, remember Tim Peg and North in gym class, I don't either. All my high school career I've looked up to you (figuratively speaking.) Your articles and speeches have cracked me up. I hate Rollinger! Good luck in the sanitation field, or whatever. I'll never tell anyone that your parents are black, Jewish, and Indian Harp Seals. Shalom, Eric Wiener '78."

JEFF PIKE: I think of high school as a blip now, a weird period that was not consequential. I suppose I figured out I wanted to write by the time I was 18. That's something. And many of my cultural tastes, for better or worse, were shaped then. I became acquainted with Miles Davis, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Dylan, Frank Zappa, the Doors, Led Zeppelin, Neil Young, and Alice Cooper all in high school. I saw my first concert then (Captain Beefheart). I was still reading comic books but switched from DC to Marvel and the undergrounds. I loved The Catcher in the Rye then (and still do, for that matter).

Much of this was *heavily* influenced by my friend Peter Stenshoel. Peter and I had been buddies in the 8th grade starting in late 1968, sitting in math class snickering at our jokes when we were supposed to be doing problems. He was into underground FM, and even went to see the Hendrix show in Minneapolis that year with his older brother. I didn't have an older brother and was still an AM guy--"Hush" and "Fire" and "Those Were the Days" and "Build Me Up Buttercup" and "Traces" and "Love (Can Make You Happy)" and "Hair" were my idea of great music then (still are). Hendrix was kind of scary for me even, back then.

I ended up pissing Peter off toward the end of the year and we finished 8th grade on bad terms. We didn't speak more than half a dozen words in 9th grade. A year later, in the summer of 1970, before I entered the 10th grade at Hopkins Lindbergh High School, my family went on a car-camper road trip through the Canadian Rockies to the West Coast. I brought along a copy of Nik Cohn's "Rock From the Beginning," whose narrative affected me in a big way. That was when it first occurred to me that Rawk was somehow important, and when I *just started* to open my mind about rock'n'roll and the '50s (except for the Coasters, who I always loved).

So I remembered that Peter had preached the gospel of the FM and gone to that Hendrix show. Thinking that "Lola" had to be the coolest song on the planet right then, I approached him on my first day in high school to make up with him and talk, and almost immediately we became best friends. Peter didn't like the Kinks but he had long hair and looked cool, kind of like Jesus. I immediately began to grow mine long too. He loved Bitches Brew. So did I. He loved the Fantastic Four and Spiderman. I started to. I started to smoke cigarettes. He didn't. Neither of us liked beer. We talked on the phone all the time. It was this sudden, intense thing.

Our school had "freaks" but that wasn't our crowd in 10th grade. We hung out with four other guys who were probably called geeks or maybe nerds, but I never heard the word, or can't remember it. Mike Hall was hyper and hilarious and ended up getting a girl pregnant and marrying straight out of school. He and I both worked at the St. Louis Park Kentucky Fried Chicken when we were in 12th grade. The last time I saw Mike was in about 1976. Steve Thorsen also worked at that Kentucky Fried Chicken. Steve's Dad was a cop and he always studied hard--ended up a CPA, I think I heard recently, but I haven't seen him since I bumped into him once or twice in the '70s on the University of Minnesota campus. Jim Knauer was the most easygoing of all of us. I remember him as a skinny kid with a million freckles, a drummer in the school marching band. He disappeared after high school. I think he tried to call me once in 1976. Sometimes I wish I'd stayed in touch.

Phil Getelfinger was the problem child among us, or maybe it was me. It was probably both of us. He had a bad thing with his parents, which I never figured out, and he was almost too geeky for even me. Peter brought him in (I brought in Mike Hall, who brought in Thorsen and Knauer). Phil was a skinny, intense kid who could grow a 'fro and did in the 11th grade, which was the year of the drugs. He and I got mugged when we wandered into Minneapolis high on acid one day in March of 1972. We took orange sunshine and I was so looped (all the way into "Cartoon Land," as we called it) that I think it insulated me. Phil knew better than me what was going on and it was harder on him. They made us throw our shoes off a bridge, and it was Minneapolis in the winter. We had to crawl down to the railroad tracks to retrieve them in our stocking feet. I saw Phil only once or twice after high school, in 1978, and there was something furtive and guilty and unpleasant about it so I didn't pursue a friendship any further.

But in 10th grade nobody got in trouble and we were all more or less amiable to each other and Steve Thorsen always got his homework done. Peter and I could never stop yakking to each other all year long. 11th grade was the year of the drugs. It was my rebellious year when something (I think I *still* don't know what exactly) broke and cracked and ran forth. All my friends from 10th grade got on my nerves, even Peter, and I wanted something more. With my hair long, I could fit in easily with the "freaks" and did. My brother Joel, even more rebellious and reckless and angry, was already drinking and smoking pot and even paying for it by dealing joints. My family was going into middle-America early-'70s dysfunction; the Loud family was our--and everybody's, it seemed--unconscious manifested. My confusion about my identity played a part and so did my brother's crowd, and so did the times too. One mystique of drugs had effectively replaced another: Reefer Madness had given way to Cheech & Chong (they were cool to some), and right then everything was fair game. So I tried something called THC (likely PCP), and LSD, and amphetamines, and barbiturates (only once--I did them at school, passed out in the nurse's office, and was suspended five days for it), marijuana, and finally,

toward the end of the year, alcohol (Mogen David 20/20; I puked all night long). The little white crosses were my favorite, and going on little runs caused problems.

Well, there were many bad and fewer good moments that year. There was family counseling and police, amphetamine madness and a first girlfriend, disappointments at school, some good concerts, winsome pranks and goofy capers. When the dust settled, sometime in the late summer of 1972, Peter was gone to study in England for a year, Joel was a major pain-in-the-ass drunk, and I didn't want to do drugs any more. I got my first jobs--hamburger chef at Super Sam's, a fast food joint in a mall, followed by the aforementioned Kentucky Fried Chicken. I was involved in a life-threatening auto accident but walked away from my totaled car unhurt. I studied at school, except it was boring. I didn't have many friends. My hair was still long, from habit. I wasn't into music so much, and liked to go to the movies more or stay up late and watch oldies at night. That year I loved AM radio again, "Alone Again (Naturally)" and "Me and Mrs. Jones" and "You're So Vain" and "Crocodile Rock" and "Frankenstein." I didn't buy many albums--I'd cashed out most of a pretty good collection the year before and it was too depressing to see the reminders sitting in stores costing money, so I just didn't think about it much. In March or April of 1973 I got a job weekends on the nightshift at a nursing home. I was to spend most of the next five years working in nursing homes, but that was after high school.

I attended my high school graduation only because it meant something to my family. I was the oldest child, the first to do it. So I put on the robe and the cap. But I didn't go to the all-night party and I've never been to any of the reunions and my picture is not even in the yearbook, by my (perhaps mulish) choice. In fact, the people who organize those things no longer even believe that I attended their school--or so Joel was told when he tried to call in my address to them one time.

Some points need to get made about socioeconomics and geography. My school district was Hopkins, but my family actually lived in Minnetonka. Hopkins was a small blue-collar town west of Minneapolis swallowed by suburbanization but still retaining a crusty lower middle-class affect, while Minnetonka, home of Tonka Toys and with a big lake enclosed by upscale boaters, tended much more toward the upper middle class: big homes, winding lanes, waterfront property, private schools, that kind of thing. After my mother went to work in 1969, the additional income allowed us to swim toward that level, effectively splitting my family over the years between identifying with Hopkins or with Minnetonka. Partly because I'm the oldest, I've never been able to shake Hopkins completely out of my system, and as a result I have retained this stubborn hostility toward genteel white-bread manners and at the same time a kind of shame about, and horror of, white-trash privations.

The thing is, there's a kind of weird bifurcation that runs through much of the experience of the Twin Cities, Minneapolis and St. Paul, divided only by the Mississippi River. I think the people who come from there are just kind of weird that way. Maybe it's too easy to talk about Bob Dylan and Prince and Bob Mould/Grant Hart and Paul Westerberg/Bob Stinson, but they fit the mold, all of them, at once rootless and passionate and above all just plain confused.

I guess maybe that's everybody's experience, though. It's a cliché. Everything looks so nice from the outside, but I can't honestly say it was a good place to grow up. For a while I thought, in a psychobabbly kind of a way, that it was because the weather is abusive. But then I decided maybe I was taking therapy too seriously.

Other bits: I had a hard time passing my driver's license test and didn't get it till the third try, when I was in 11th grade.... In 12th grade I got into a Sunday afternoon ritual of intense "Truth or Dare" variation with Joel and two girls named Joanie and Suzanne.... At a seance in the summer between 11th and 12th grade a few of us in a church youth group got Hitler. It was scary.... In 11th grade, Live at Fillmore East was new and it was my favorite album; at the beginning of the year, Peter and I talked a lot about starting a band; we were particularly impressed by Seth, a really good blues-rock band made up of some casual friends of ours, and I don't think it's just my memory; two members continued playing as adults, one of them, Steve Almaas, ending up in the semi-legendary Minneapolis punk band Suicide Commandoes.... I'm the world's worst name dropper, sorry....

RANDY RUSSELL: I'm trying to remember how I *really* felt about the social geography of my high school--rather than relying on the few stories I've told myself and other people over the years. Stories which take on a life of their own, but probably mutate, or hide how I actually felt. I can recall certain incidents that are probably telling of things, but as far as how I remember feeling, I'm not sure if this is accurate: I remember feeling self assured, in control, not very afraid, and most of all unconcerned with, relaxed about, and even *above* any social landscape. That's what I told myself for years, but I wonder how true it was.

I went to Perkins High School from 1974 to 1978 at a good-sized township school in Sandusky, Ohio--essentially the suburban/rural Sandusky school. In 1988 I went to the tenth year class reunion--I would have gotten more out of it if I hadn't found it necessary to be so drunk--but the one thing that impressed me was how I realized I'd known most of these people since we were five years old, and we seemed kind of like relatives. Not necessarily close, but connected. Everyone seemed a lot nicer than in high school. At the next reunion I go to I won't be drunk, and maybe I'll interview people--anyway, definitely talk to more people and try to learn something.

Sometime during grade school, certain girls found that they could embarrass me by flirting, making my ears turn red, which everyone but me got a big kick out of. But even at the same time as being humiliated, I felt some exhilaration at the flirting, and I felt happy to have attention. I think I told myself this was better than being ignored. But still it bothered me, and I didn't get over it until sometime in high school when I grew my hair over my ears (I actually remember this as part of my hair's desired function) and decided I just *didn't care* what these girls or anyone else thought about me.

This deciding-that-I-didn't-care was a big thing, and it was connected in no insignificant way to drinking, which became a major force in my life. First I began experimenting with my parents' alcohol, as were some of my close friends, on their own. Little by little we admitted to each other our interests in alcohol, and then drinking became a social thing, but within this small, secret society. These were my close friends--maybe ten or twelve of us, boys--and this became the group that was close to me throughout high school. The focus of our gatherings was always getting drunk, which we did one or two nights each weekend, but rarely on weeknights. But we never missed a weekend, and this became the single most important thing to me.

Being part of a group whose *raison d'être* was something I excelled at allowed me to ignore any anxieties I might otherwise have, such as from a sex drive. I told myself I just didn't care about girls and sex. I also didn't care about being academically superior, even though most school work came easily

to me, and I didn't care about "dating"--I decided things like grades and formal social engagements were all below me. I made drinking into somewhat of a religion, my friends and I getting pretty philosophical about it. Years and years later I discovered Lou Reed's "Heroin" as the best expression of the way I used drinking in high school: "All you sweet girls with your sweet talk/you can all go take a walk."

I don't remember anyone ever using names for social groups--I really don't. I'm sure I was aware of those names, but I didn't think they were something people actually used outside of S.E. Hinton books or old movies. Maybe people did use them, but I refused to, so maybe I blocked it out. I didn't think people should be reduced to a single set of characteristics--or at least I didn't appreciate anyone pigeonholing *me*.

If we did ever refer to people by group names it was something more specific: "Swimmers" referred to a group of friends on the swim team who also did lots of drugs. "Ranchwood crowd" referred to an upper middle-class suburb that was as close as we got to rich people. The people in the marching band were kind of grouped together and disdained. I suppose we called *individuals* druggies and burnouts and jocks, but most people could fit into several categories, and I really don't ever remember referring to names of the crowds.

During the summer of my first job when I was 16, I worked with a guy from Sandusky High School, and he asked me if I was a Jock or a Freak. I told him that since I was on the cross country and track team, and very serious about it, I considered myself an *athlete*, but I also drank a lot and smoked pot, so I wasn't actually in either category. He didn't seem satisfied with my answer. I remember feeling uneasy about the whole conversation with him--maybe because I wanted to be able to categorize myself, but I couldn't. I still never get along well in jobs; I'm always uneasy around people, and I'm always categorized by my co-workers as a *quiet* person.

Oh, I also remember some of our group referring to ourselves as alcoholics, as a group name. But that was a private, inner thing. By the end of my senior year we could no longer resist punk rock, which we had previously considered "bad music." So a lot of us got into punk rock, though it might have split up our group a bit. But we still didn't refer to ourselves as punks. Well, maybe after a while a few of our crowd did. But even when I played in a punk band and dressed like a punk, I still never referred to myself as a punk. I guess I've just never liked to refer to myself as anything, even now. Just don't call me late for dinner.

RENÉE CRIST: High School Confidential

Before I get into my high school too much, you'll want a little context on the place, Pulaski County, Virginia, and on how I landed there. I'm going to back up a generation. My parents grew up in Greenbrier County, West Virginia, hardcore Appalachian coal country (both their fathers were miners), and neither could afford college. In the early '60s recruiters came from Washington to their high schools to hire new graduates to work for the U.S. government--West Virginians were known for their work ethic--and both my parents were recruited this way, along with many of their friends. Although they didn't know each other growing up (different high schools) they met in the D.C. contingent of transplants, scores of 18-year-old new recruits teaming up for rides back to their native hills and choosing the same Southern foods in the Department of Commerce cafeteria. My parents married quickly when my dad found out he was being transferred to Atlanta; I was born there, and when I

was about 9 months old my dad was transferred to Radford, Virginia, a town just over the New River from Pulaski County. The area is fertile and beautiful, surrounded by the Blue Ridge Mountains and just on the edge of Appalachia. We were 20 minutes from Virginia Tech, so some collegiate culture (and a college radio station) was nearby, but many kids in the county had parents who had emigrated, like mine, from somewhere more hilly, more remote, more backward. In this way, Pulaski County seemed like the big city compared to where we all went to visit our grandparents. But for those of us who had been to Washington, or even shopping in Roanoke, it was far too small, and at the time the dim localities where our parents had come of age seemed like the cusp of hell.

Pulaski County High School had about 2200 students in 1979-1983 and, having been built in the early seventies, looked like a four-petaled daisy with an adjacent square vocational school. Each petal was called a pod; there was a math pod, a social studies pod, a science pod, and the almighty English pod. In the center of the daisy was the Media Center (*not* the library, mind you), and between each pair of petals was a locker bank--rows of free-standing double-sided lockers, each bank a different color so the freshmen didn't get lost--and some other important area: the Commons (er, lunchroom), the gym, the administration offices, and the most important, the band room and auditorium. They stupidly placed the band room right beside a parking lot, facilitating many lunchtime runs to McDonald's for those lucky symphonic band hotshots who had band fourth period and could make an easy getaway. I hear there's an administrative monitor out there now.

Beginning when I was a freshman, I was in a crowd of musical, gifted, passably attractive geeks so hip we called ourselves The Clique. Our ringleader (a guy) made up laminated Clique id cards. Our numbers grew occasionally and temporarily with the addition of guys whom I later learned our ringleader was possibly screwing. (Who KNEW those hunky guys went both ways??? I was so naïve.) We were tolerated by other major groups, we achieved positions of leadership within our realm (the bandroom), and only one of us properly dated (me). The primary reason for this was that of the five core members of The Clique, three turned out to be homosexual, two of whom discovered this after two or three years of het dating each other. Two of us were voted Most Dignified senior year, two were voted Most Musical, and one was voted Most Intelligent. Geek central.

In addition to us band/smart kids, and an un-crowd which can only be called pre-military (not jocks, not rednecks, not popular, not smart but not vocational, totally invisible, until they crossed into our world somehow--one knocked up the daughter of the Episcopal minister and married her--I picked out some of their photos in the local paper during the Gulf War), there were cheerleaders and jocks, a couple rich kids who were uncliqued, the Beatles/pot/science guys, and, the largest contingent by far, the rednecks. Rednecks were allowed to miss school the first day of deer season as an excused absence. They had bandannas sticking out of their pockets, wore chain wallets, carried big key rings, wore harness strap boots or cowboy boots, had feathered haircuts, and wore flannel and what J. Crew now tastefully calls 'waffle weave' shirts (we called 'em thermals, and they used to come in dingy white only). They wore Levis or Wranglers. They drove trucks whenever possible. A few of them smoked pot at school. Mostly they infested the vocational classes, cosmetology, auto body, shop, horticulture, home ec. (we had some pc name for that but I can't remember it), and restaurant management. We noticed them only a few times a year: one was always elected to the Homecoming Court, our

French class always went to the Cougar Den (their functional practice restaurant) for French toast (ooh la la! vive la France!) at the end of the school year, and they held a much celebrated Mock Wedding each year through the home ec. class. Also each year a few of the girls got pregnant and kept coming to school and had showers thrown for them in home ec. Sometimes rednecks got married in 11th or 12th grade, moved their new brides into their rooms, and got their mamas to take care of the lucky offspring. I'm pretty sure this was the arrangement Junior Sayers worked out.

Some rednecks had dads who were farmers, but most of their dads worked at either Pulaski Furniture or the Radford Army Ammunition Plant, and many of my classmates went on to work there too.

The biggest division in our school was that there were some people who you knew would stay in Pulaski County forever. They weren't going to do anything to meet people from anywhere else, and they were parts of long chains of people who had lived in the county for generations. The rest of us made it known right away that we were planning to get the hell out. We took college prep courses and AP English (I bagged on that one, so geeky: 'why would I want to avoid college English courses?'). We talked to the guidance counselors and many took SATs more than once. We went to College Day at the community college (Harvard on the Hill) and we avoided the vocational school and all who went there like the plague. Each year some of us would have locker assignments in the vocational school; these students moved illegally into a two-person locker in the main building.

However, with a school so split between stayers and goers, both groups had to learn to accommodate each other. One autumn I was going with a boy who went hunting the first day of deer season; his big brother was a jock. At graduation I sat beside a major redneck, a boy I'd never spoken to before. He felt kind of proud of me I think, after I made the salutatorian speech. Then again, I think he was drunk. Junior Sayers' wife was a jock; her dad worked with my dad. Rhonda Covey was my best friend in first grade, but she'd turned into a redneck by junior high. One really popular girl taught me the term 'shit kicker' in tenth grade, but the only real shit kicker I knew worked on his grandmother's horse farm--she had a horse in the Derby one year--and was smarter than me. This is all to say that our cliques were fluid, that it was a school where a brain could date the captain of the football team, where no one knew a popular jock was bi when he started hanging out with us, where somehow everybody knew who everybody was, even though there were lots of students. It was a place so backward and small that we didn't really catch onto more national bigotries; the few black students at our school were involved in all the clubs and student government, and seemed comfortably, almost seamlessly, integrated until you learned their address was in a black community or they tried to date a white kid. There had been a lot of racial turbulence at the school a decade before, but I remember noticing when I moved further east in Virginia that there was an unbelievable amount of segregation compared to back home. The only place I routinely see local persons of color is in the fabric store. Not at church, not at the grocery store, not in restaurants. Also, though this has changed in the ten-plus years since I was in high school, there were only two cultural distinctions, black and white. I knew no Jews, two Catholics, one family from India, and one from Taiwan; these last two were doctors' families in my neighborhood. We didn't know if we were Irish or Italian or Mexican or Lithuanian. 'P. County born and P. County bred, and when we die we'll be P. County dead' went one football cheer. I knew one guy who was legitimately rich, and I didn't find that out until senior year (I thought he just drove some weird car--he taught me to pronounce 'Saab'). I thought

rich people were doctors and lawyers. I had no idea what real money was. Lots of kids in my county thought I was rich (my dad still works for the government).

I had no ideas about a lot of things growing up there, but I got a taste for mountains, lakes, driving too fast down Old Route 11, hymns, high school football, country radio, and the way boys' backs and shoulders get to looking if they work on farms or cars a lot. All these affinities have served me well, and I get a dose of them as often as possible. (My dose of farmboys comes from watching Bob Wickman pitch for the Yankees. You find the farm where you can.) Although I live under three hours away from there now, I find that even the yawning open of a valley wider than ours, or the looming of a mountain ridge more close and dense, changes the whole nature of the place, and that nowhere, not even a half hour away, is quite the same sort of place. The money is in slightly different hands because the town lies near the train station or the coal fields, or the sheriff is less important because the county doesn't host the New River Valley Fair. Cosmopolitan by comparison, Charlottesville could be on the other side of the world from Pulaski County. The people who live out in the country here have all the money, instead of people who live in town. People read books in public. And instead of walking up a mountain on a friend's land, you wear boots and encounter a lot of fraternity boys on your hike. Or, like me, you don't. You decide you really made it out, you can go home when you need to or want to, for the things that home provides. You've made the bigtime now. Start spreading the news.

DON ALLRED: Alright one last thing about my school. Like yours, probably, its basic purpose seemed to be teaching us belief in/faith in Authority. Yet every day, for years and years, we couldn't help noticing, however often we (I) tried to shut out the whole silly disturbing business, that various Authorities were usually at war with each other. (We had to read 1984 in State Legislature-mandated 9th Grade Anticommunism classes.) They negotiated, but that was part of the war, the wars. It was business, it was a Relationship, it was the System. You didn't have to be a college student (Adult!?) to see that; it was all around us, in the Civil Rights struggle, for instance. Wallace was forever Defying, then Dealing With, Judge Frank Johnson or President Kennedy or Attorney General Kennedy, but to what end? And he claimed to have all/most /a lot of Extremists (who might suddenly turn out to be any Adult) on a leash, which he could let go of, any time. So, whenever things got gruesome, had he let them loose? Or had he overestimated his control? Or had he any control? Or had his remarks/insinuations been taken out of context/systematically distorted in the first place? His battle cries were those of a defiant dependent child (like me)--even his fans must've felt this, on some level. You could root for the Feds, in this conflict anyway--but they'd also given us Missile Crisis /Bay of Pigs/Viet Nam--the list was, like, getting longer. Oh yes--our school was peacefully, if rather unenthusiastically, integrated. Eyes on the Prize, but ours wasn't much of a prize, for either side. We didn't quite exist enough to be a trouble spot, which was the only way Alabama existed, in the ~~world's~~ T.V. eye, except for football. Birmingham Selma Tuscaloosa Montgomery The Ghetto The Campus Viet Nam were all Out There brought to you by G.E., by Power in the name of Authority. The war wasn't in high school, not ours, not every day, not yet. It was a jail, but the flunkies who (somehow) kept it running would be there long after we got out. We figured.

ROB SHEFFIELD: Camp Don Bosco, in East Barrington, New Hampshire, was a Catholic summer camp for boys aged 8 to 15, run by priests and brothers

of the Salesian order. I was a camper there in the summers of 1980 and 1981. It's in the middle of a pine forest four hours north of Boston, with a lake and grassy dells, far from any other human dwelling. St. John Bosco (1815-1888) was an Italian priest, canonized in 1934, who founded the Salesian order to bring the gospel to destitute boys.

I was the only altar boy at Camp Don Bosco, so I served two masses a day all summer, working that cassock, swishing that surplice. This gig earned me the contempt of my fellow campers, but it gave me the chance to bond with Sister Veronica and Sister Catherine, the nuns who took care of the chapel. (Given the choice between young men's religion and old women's religion, I'll take old women's religion any day.) Almost all the campers were Italian kids from East Boston who attended Salesian vocational schools. They were the main player's in the camp's social geography. Others, including me, were from the suburbs or other parts of New England. A tiny minority were local boys who kept to themselves. There were three cabins: St. Pat's for little kids, Savio for medium kids, Magone for the rest of us. In every cabin, the tough guys ruled. I don't buy this "refusal group" theory; in every social geography I've seen, including grad school, the bullies run everything--the prep bullies rule the other preps, the burnout bullies rule the other burnouts, the boho bullies rule the other bohos.

The Salesians were, in general, great guys. Brother Larry, in charge of Magone, was a gentle and wonderful man, always willing to discuss religious problems at the drop of a hat. He walked around for an hour after lights-out to make sure nobody was masturbating. He taught me to shoot a rifle; I still have a couple of NRA "Advanced Marksman" certificates in my parents' attic. Brother Joe was a biker who'd done time. He was in charge of the Savio cabin, which meant he was in charge of scaring the shit out of Magone kids hoping to pick on Savio kids. Brother Joe loved to talk about how Jesus wasn't a wimp. Salesians have their own icons and folklore--when they get mad, they yell, "Mother Cabrini!" They were always telling magical tales about Don Bosco, who had visions, and St. Dominic Savio, a 15-year-old who died of consumption because he was sleeping naked to catch cold and do penance for his (probably none-too-heinous) sins. Magic and sex and death were in the air!

The campers split into tough guys, wise guys, and wimps. The wimps spent the summer in constant physical danger from the tough guys, while the wise guys knew how to nyuk-nyuk-nyuk their way out of violent situations, mostly by making fun of the wimps. I was a wise guy, except when my inner wimpdom would slip out from under my cassock and surplice. Camp Don Bosco was my first male peer group, and it was such a relief to learn that boys are, in fact, dipshits. The mystery I'd always perceived in tough guys just disappeared. As Alicia Silverstone notes in the greatest movie ever made, *Clueless*, taking a boy seriously is like looking for meaning in a Pauly Shore movie. Here's an actual conversation I heard on the picnic tables outside the canteen:

Randall: So how many times have you done it with her?

Politano: None. She's a virgin bitch.

Randall: Virgins are the worst kind! It takes so long to get it!

Politano: But virgins are the best kind when you do get it.

Randall: But it takes so long!

I should note that Randall was a 14-year-old wussbag, and sounded even sillier bragging about sex than I would have. Randall was in with the tough guys, though, because his best friend was ringleader Mike Moriarty, a socio-pathic Jordan Catalano lookalike. Bubba Politano and Scottie Larkin were

stepbrothers from Dorchester; I kept seeing their names in the paper years later, when they were repeatedly arrested for terrorizing a black family who'd moved into their neighborhood. Spaz was a tiny kid who lost more fights than he won, but he was crazy and would fight *anybody*, so he got the respect normally reserved for the tough guys who spent their leisure time kicking the shit out of Spaz. Spaz wore a "scapular" around his neck, a string of holy medallions that consecrated him to Mary. Supposedly, if you die wearing one, you go straight to heaven, but Brother Al told us all a cautionary tale about a man who thought he could get away with his sinful life because he wore the scapular. After he died in a car crash, police found the scapular... dangling from a nearby tree! Eek!

Steve MacSharry was the only tough guy to take a liking to me, and without his good will, I wouldn't have lasted a week. Steve was from my parish, St. Mary's in Milton, and we'd been confirmed together. His big brother, named "Urko" after some evil gorilla on the *Planet of the Apes* TV series, was one of Milton's scariest delinquents. Steve was just a joke back home, but at camp he told everybody he was "Big Mac," and I didn't blow his cover, so he looked out for me. (*Ape must not kill big ape.*) Big Mac refused to take showers, and after a few weeks Brother Joe dragged him to the washhouse kicking and screaming; those of us who witnessed the scene were abuzz over the revelation that Big Mac had not yet begun to grow pubic hair. Another lesson in the tough-guy psyche.

Everybody liked WCOZ, which had been my favorite rock station in seventh and eighth grade. I had a WCOZ poster on my wall, and I still listen to the tapes I made off WCOZ, mixing the Stones and Skynyrd with the Lovich and the Knack. I was the first in my eighth-grade class to own the J. Geils Band's *Love Stinks* because I won it off WCOZ. Then, in early 1980, WCOZ became a Knuck the Knack/Disco Sucks-style AOR station, one of the first Lee Abrams clients. WCOZ ran two famous ads, one where a voice boomed "Kick Ass Rock and Roll!" and another that went, "WCOZ... (grunt)... the Rock and Roll MUTHA!!!" The program director proudly declared that he'd fire any DJ who insulted the intelligence of the 'COZ faithful by mentioning "Led Zeppelin": DJs were only allowed to call the band "Zep." Songs I'd never heard of before, like "China Grove" and "I'd Love to Change the World" and "Southern Man" and Rainbow's "Since You Been Gone" and Angel City's "No Secrets," were played several times a day.

I switched to WBCN, the Knack-friendly rock station, which was as bad as disco as far as my cabinmates were concerned. They complained all summer about being too far from town to get 'COZ, especially on Sunday nights, when the Rock and Roll Mutha carried the Dr. Demento show. Instead of radio, we had Bubba Politano's "master blaster," and five albums in heavy cranktation. The two old albums were "2" and "Zeppelin," normally listed in reference works as *Led Zeppelin II* and *Led Zeppelin IV*. (Chuck Eddy calls the latter *Zoso* in *Stairway to Hell*, but I never heard it called that. Damone in *Fast Times* calls it *Led Zeppelin IV*. The Columbia Record & Tape Club ads always listed it as *Runes*. DJs called it *Led Zeppelin IV*, but the kids at camp just said "put the Zeppelin on." Also, a "Zeppelin" was a kind of bong that looked like a thermos and held two roaches and filled up with enough smoke to choke an elephant. When Mike Moriarty said, "put on 2," it meant the one with "Whole Lotta Love," a song that failed to offend Brother Larry, perhaps because it transcends physical lust into agape somewhere in that weird stereo-shifting midsection that always made girls sit down at school dances. Brother Larry, however, banned *Pretenders* from the cabin after hearing "Precious.")

The three new albums were *Hi Infidelity*, *Crimes of Passion*, and *Back in Black*. Back in the suburbs, REO Speedwagon were a girls-only band, so I was shocked at how much all these Eastie thugs loved REO. They constantly lamented missing REO's June show at the Boston Garden. REO even wrote their best song about hating "Tough Guys," but Moriarty and Randall and Politano blasted it constantly. I still don't understand.

Crimes of Passion was even bigger, especially the headbanging parts like "Hell Is For Children" and the second half of "Promises In The Dark." Benatar was taken very seriously, and although occasionally guys pointed out she was a babe--as Politano put it, he "wouldn't mind straddling Benatar"--she was a real rock star, and everybody loved her songs. Ethnic pride had something to do with it, I bet, since La Dolce Benatar was kicking off a bel canto decade when Italian-Americans ruled the airwaves, whether it was John Bongiovi belting "Livin' on a Prayer," Madonna Ciccone whispering "Live to Tell," Lou Grammatico testifying "I Want to Know What Love Is," or Steven Tallarico yelping "Angel." (Maybe even Roseanne Liberto Cash on the country side of the dial.) Alas, for us jealous Irish kids, Eddie Mahoney and Joe Walsh were pretty much it, until the New Kids came along (fuckin' A!). In the last issue's blindfold test, everybody got nostalgic over Laura Branigan, but she was an embarrassment to our people; no Irish singer has ever tried so pitifully hard to sound Italian. You can't blame Laura, because Italians really do it better, but she still punches my buttons like polka does for John Wójtowicz... and big fucking whoop about her "big voice." All Irish girls have big voices! You should hear my sisters fighting over shampoo!

As for *Back in Black*, it's drilled onto my brain forever, and what can I say except that rock and roll ain't noise pollution, rock and roll is just rock and roll, and if you're into evil you're a friend of mine. Brother Larry was particularly fond of "Hell's Bell's," and frequently reminded us that the song had serious moral value in its reminder that Satan was on the prowl for human souls. "Shoot to Thrill" was the cabin theme song by consensus, and it would be a shame that Angus's too-many-women/too-many-pills dilemma has been overshadowed by "You Shook Me All Night Long" if the latter were not, in fact, the Rock and Roll Mutha.

The music was so rich in this time and place that it palls out of context. Not even *Back in Black* shakes me the way it did out in the middle of the pine trees and the Italian mystagogy. But it would take me all day to tell the whole story, my faith and how it affected me, the ways it all followed me home, so I'll let the music end the story. Well, no, actually, I'll let Mike Moriarty end the story. We were all standing around the lake after dinner, with AC/DC on the box, when Moriarty said, "I hate disco people, you know, disco pants. But there are some disco songs, you know, like 'Funkytown,' that rock." Believe me, nobody else could've talked that shit and made it back to the cabin alive. Maybe Moriarty was just fucking with us, seeing what he could get away with. (*Ape has killed ape!*) Or maybe he really dug "Funkytown." I'll never know, because we all just nodded and went "uh huh."

FRANK KOGAN: A Social Map of My Mind

Boundary Lines

I have a double way of looking at everything. I tended--at least from sixth through tenth grade, though really this tendency has never completely gone away--to believe that I was approaching some dividing line yet remaining always on the wrong side of the line. No, not the "wrong" side, but let's say

the "careful" side. In junior high there was the boundary line between the uncool (me) and the cool, and I'd edge towards the line but never cross into coolness; and in high school the line was between the straight people and the freaks, with me looking across from the straight side ("straight" in its Sixties sense simply meant "not hip," without necessarily meaning "not gay" or "not high," though it sometimes meant those things too); in my political activities the line would separate liberals like me from the radicals. Except I don't know now if these boundaries were really there or if I just needed to believe they were, needed to believe that there was a daring land beyond me that I just would not enter.

Peculiar thing: in eleventh grade I overthrew this belief somewhat, I stopped believing that the Daring Land was the land of the freaks or the radicals or whomever; but I'm not sure I've ever overthrown the need for such a land, a need in my mind. I've certainly never believed that I'm the one who is out there in Daring Land myself; yet ever since I changed and defined the freaks and the radicals etc. as merely Elsewhere rather than as Wild And Out There, I've felt strangely unprotected and exposed. I think maybe I want to feel fenced off from a Daring Land, and I want to believe in its existence even if I feel that the land happens to be unoccupied. I must like the idea of looking out over a boundary at something hipper and more alive than I am. Anyway, back when I believed in the line, I felt that I had good reason not to cross the line, even though I wanted something from the other side. In junior high I wanted the cool people's style; in high school I wanted the freaks' refusal, their insight into the school game and their psychological freedom (I imagined) from it. Yet I knew the cool people were cruel people and thus full of shit, and I knew that the freaks' refusal and platitudes and dope-taking made them stupid. So I thought it was best to be near the line rather than over it.

That was another function of the line: I was always somewhat taken by what was across the boundary, enough so that I didn't completely belong on my side of the line, either. In retrospect I wonder how much of this, the line, the "sides," existed only in my head. To some extent I was projecting myself across the line, imagining how others saw me, and looking back at myself from the other side. But I can see how, at the time, believing in the dividing line, and having my weird relation to it, allowed me to feel independent of and critical towards the life around me. And since this landscape I'm talking about was partly internal, anyway, I was creating a way for a couple parts of myself to criticize each other.

Hoods and Sarcasm

In junior high school the threat of violence was always there, though not from people I really knew, I don't think, just from guys in the hall who would look tough and maybe see if they could scare you. I never really got attacked. There was a little squirt named John Oldershaw who'd come up in the hall and hit me on the arm to see if he could provoke me. This had a snideness to it; even though he never did get me to hit back, somehow I felt he'd gotten the better of me.

You could divide the cool people into the toughs--who were scary, who threatened to hit you--and the glamour-and-sarcasm people. I'm making up that terminology: the toughs were called hoods, sometimes, but the term *hoods* was on the wane. I do remember Jonathan Bennett in 1967 showing me the cover to *Between The Buttons* (Rolling Stones record) and saying with disapproval, "Notice how hard they're trying to look like hoods." Anyway, all the cool guys looked like that, whether or not they were the ones who might hit

you. The old MGM Records *Best of the Animals* has the look even better: sleeves rolled back halfway up the forearm, shirt untucked, pants as tight as possible, a flat stare, 1966. You saw someone like that and you hoped he didn't come over and menace you. Every day in 7th and 8th grade I had the fear of being physically attacked, though it never happened. But this was just background fear. It was the glamour people, the sarcastic people, who really had the big effect on me. (I don't mean to imply wealth by the word *glamour*. These people were still tough looking, not rich looking. They were a dirty glamour, like the Stones.)

I remember once in homeroom some guys were talking about the film *Seconds*, with Rock Hudson, saying something about it playing soon, at the movie theater across the street. I asked, with interest, "Is it coming?"--but a guy misheard and thought I'd asked, "Is it exciting?" So he smirked and said some savage derogatory things about me for asking such a stupid question, since apparently it was a cool movie and everyone was supposed to already know that it was exciting. I'd actually never heard of the movie until that very moment, so my asking "Is it coming?" had just been a way of pretending to at least some knowledge of the movie and a big interest in it (whatever it was). I defended myself, telling them what I'd really said, and someone came to my defense, "Yes, I heard him. He'd asked, 'Is it coming?'" --What was special, uniquely junior high, about this incident wasn't that I was dishonest and so had pretended to knowledge and interest that I didn't have. I do this still sometimes, out of insecurity or laziness or just to keep the conversation moving. But the point is, back in 7th grade this incident was total trauma. The fact was that people were willing to ride you, attack you, for virtually anything, it didn't really matter what. I realize, of course, now, that what made me so vulnerable was that I visibly cared so much, that people knew they could get to me. It was such a little thing, yet I felt such terror.

I don't want to give the impression that there were some cool facts and things to say and do, and if only I'd mastered these facts then I wouldn't have gotten razed. There were no real rules; the cool guys made it up from moment to moment, things to attack you on.

I think of junior high as such a nightmare time; I use the phrase *junior high* in my writing now as if there were something universal and self-explanatory about it, as if everyone had gone through what I'd gone through and would have the same visceral reaction to the phrase, the same understanding.

I wasn't particularly singled out for attack. Junior high had a general atmosphere of ridicule that everyone (all the boys, anyway) lived in, though not everyone promulgated it. These stupid incidents just happened day after day.

King of the World

Through age 10 I felt I was the All-American boy, which didn't mean being goody-goody, it meant being daring and heroic and standing up for losers and being headstrong and wiseass. My mother would sometimes exhort me to act like a gentleman, and I'd say proudly to myself, "I'm not a gentle man, I'm a rough boy." A lot of this was in my head, my being a character in the adventure stories I liked to read. But in real life I did well in sports and did well in school and people laughed along with my jokes, and heroism seemed to be my destiny.

In fifth grade things turned bad. Years later I explained this to my parents, what went wrong in 1964: "I discovered that I wasn't King of the World." ("You're lucky," said my dad: "I didn't find out until college.") All of a

sudden I was no good in sports, and coolness came in, so I was vulnerable to kids' teasing, and I had a particularly rough teacher and started to live in fear. At least, this is how I've usually remembered it. But thinking back, I realize that this isn't true. I didn't stop being good in sports, I merely stopped being one of the absolute best. And coolness and fashion and teasing didn't come along in force until sixth grade, and I was liked by people, had their respect (won an English class vote to be editor of a class newspaper--don't even think there was a vote, though there was one to see who would succeed me: it was just obvious that I should be the leader, was the leader), and the scary teacher actually thought I was the best student in the class. But I'd figured out that I was a scaredy cat, that I was afraid of everyone's opinion of me, that my success was contaminated by my need to please. And I must have felt that the bullies and the nasty people were about to move in and take my ground. My slight decline in sports was devastating because sports was the one endeavor that was not based on pleasing people. This may not seem rational, but to me hitting a home run was based on talent, whereas getting good grades was connected in my mind with convincing the teacher I was a good, attentive little boy. In sports, the bullies and terrorizers wanted me to lose, so I wasn't pleasing them by winning.

I think part of my vulnerability was because I was a perceptive person. I'd figured out¹ that there were two kinds of bad: the type of "bad" that is cruel and evil because it involves being nasty to people, and the type of bad that is daring and haughty and involves breaking rules and doing forbidden things and stepping up and getting hit by authority, and carrying oneself with a sexual presence. This second kind of "bad" wasn't necessarily good, but it certainly had something that I didn't feel I had: strength. But so did the first type, and usually it was the same people who embodied both types. (And maybe I wasn't even so sure that the first type was completely dreadful. Read on.) So in grades 6 through 8 it was impossible for me to completely hate or detest the people who tormented me; I felt they had something I needed, and they seemed to be acting out a critique that was already hanging around inside me, anyway.

But, you know, in actuality I did resist, I was far from a nothing. During the summer before 7th grade I made my friend David Kinsman promise me, "If I ever start acting like I want to be one of the cool people, you come over to me and tell me to stop it." I didn't respect the cool people's cruelty, and I noted that they were too careful in their displays of emotion. And really it was displays of emotion that they would pick on--showing emotion (other than snideness) always made you a potential target of ridicule. There were some people who were cool without being cruel or cold, who simply had presence and style; but for me to have tried to be cool would have meant suppressing myself even more than I did already. It would have been a form of death. So even though I believed in the cool people's critique of me as an uptight little good boy, and despised myself for being so concerned with what everybody thought of me, I had my own critique of them: they were hard, some of them were bullies, some of them were stupid. I admired them sometimes for taking on teachers, but I didn't admire them for disrupting an interesting classroom discussion or for picking on me for having participated in such a discussion.

There was a piece of me that had ideas and really wanted to tell them, or some idea would come along and really inspire me. Something would come over me and I couldn't disengage from the classroom discussion, even if I'd

¹Without yet having heard the Shangri-Las!

wanted to; my temperament went against it. Maybe this piece of me had two parts, the frightened part that has to tell the teacher that I'm a good little boy, I'm following him; and the excited part that gets caught up in the subject matter, that is eager to find things out. But the good part still felt contaminated by the bad.

A Social Map?

In junior high, if there was a noncool "center" (I mean collection of people with social status who got envied), I didn't notice it; but perhaps that is because--though I was unaware of this--I was in it. I probably acted much as I do now, with some strong opinions amidst my joking, and occasional moments of unsuppressed arrogance; so I was probably formidable and intimidating at times, to some people--though of course I would have been unaware of this, too.

The cool people ruled in my mind, but I don't think that there were all that many of them--there were popular people (not to mention unpopular people) whom I wouldn't have categorized as cool people, and probably these people way outnumbered the cool people. I remember that Sarah Hamill won the election for student council representative from my seventh-grade homeroom, and she was simply a pretty girl, a popular girl, probably would have been called a *soc* in a different time and place, no sense of danger or adventure in her, at least not that she displayed. Of course, people tend to vote for respectability, but nonetheless election meant something; popularity, at least, maybe respect. Jonathan Hale was the president of the junior high student council, and I remember him as a big lumbering normal guy; before the start of the one meeting I attended (as an observer), some guy told me that the only note in the student council suggestion box was a request for a Kotex machine in the girls' bathroom: a practical and sensible suggestion, I figured out several years later, but the guy who told me of it assumed--and therefore so did I--that the note was obscene, that it had been put in there by some kid who was being dirty. When the meeting reached the matter of the suggestion box, Jonathan simply said that there had been nothing in it except something obviously inappropriate and not serious. (This incident was in 1967 and was completely typical of that year as I experienced it, evokes that time for me much better than does a phrase like "Summer of Love," for instance.)

The Seventh Grade Samurais

One day, maybe in 11th grade, I was across the street from the school, at a luncheon counter, and I started talking to another guy there, Mickey Chilleri. I don't know if I'd ever had a conversation with him before and I don't think we had one afterwards, either, since the school had put him on a failure track and we had no classes in common. But we felt a rapport that day, maybe because we were both breaking a rule, being off school grounds. Mickey was a guy I'd been told to be scared of back in 7th grade, though I don't remember any run-ins with him. He was thin and had a sharp face and he'd frightened me. So now I was talking to this formerly scary guy (possibly still scary); he mentioned his being suspended several years earlier, and I asked him what for, assuming that it was something like cutting class or vandalism or baiting a teacher. I was ready to be outraged on his behalf, knowing that the school in general gave people like him a raw deal. He said, "Oh, for terrorizing some kid," to explain the suspension. The way he said it, it seemed logical, that it would have made sense for him to have gone around terrorizing kids in junior high, this was just part of life back then.

The guys who crossed the school lawn to terrorize me and Jon Bennett one evening in 8th grade: we were coming home from a movie; we saw the guys, four of them, slightly older, sleeves rolled up, dangerous. Jon said, "Here it is, they're going to get us." Jon told one of them that he knew the guy's brother; the guy moved aggressively forward into Jon, pushing him and saying, "What did you call my brother?" And then the guys just walked on. And I realized that they'd never had any intention of hitting us. They were just threatening us as a matter of form, it seemed.

I don't know. Cruelty is never justified. But people need to test each other, discover their power, get angry, let it rip. And anyway, the people who were going after me weren't going after a weakling.

Rob Sheffield's bullies--the ones he describes in his piece--seem to have been just clods and terrorists, whereas mine seemed to carry some critical ability. I can honestly say that I never ran into a bully in junior high school who didn't have something interesting in his style, his sarcasm, his timing. I wish I could remember this better, could recall examples of what was actually said. The incidents that I do remember, in detail, are all pretty stupid, so maybe I was just projecting, about the "critical ability." Really, when most people go after you in life, it has nothing to do with you, it's just someone in his own delirium, looking for a target. But obviously I wanted to believe that these guys knew something.

In 8th grade homeroom Scott Bailey and Eddy Cichon were assigned seats behind me and would ride me every morning, regularly say disparaging things to me. Scott Bailey was sort of an oaf. Eddy, though, had style, was slick and funny. Naturally, I don't remember any particular things he said. I do remember oafish Scott imitating the way I'd laughed--we'd been on a class trip to New York and seen *Fiddler on the Roof*; I'd laughed at all of Tevye's jokes in the play; Scott and Eddy thought (or decided to pretend to think) that I'd been ridiculous in doing so, and Scott next day kept imitating it for Eddy's benefit, my deep, crackly laughter. This hurt me but did not impress me. But I was impressed by the way he went after our homeroom teacher, Mrs. Grzymkowski; he just wouldn't shut up when she told us all to be quiet. She was a bigger bully than anyone in our class, simply had nothing good to say about anyone. (If she felt that way, why didn't she quit and become a clerk in a grocery store or something?) And if you wised back to her she'd squash you immediately, so Scott was engaging in kamikaze attacks. But he did it anyway, as if to say, "All you can do is kick me out, I don't care." He probably couldn't help himself, he just had to be aggressive. But I was glad that someone took on the big bitch.

Some guys used sarcasm on each other, as a way of sparring, to test each other but also as recreation, like playing basketball one-on-one; and these guys might have used the same sarcasm on more "sensitive" types like me, being unaware of the real hurt they were causing.

It was mostly over by ninth grade, and I was glad it was over, yet the behavior--people riding each other, provoking each other, terrorizing kids, needling me... I want to say that even when it was cruel, there was something pure about it. --Do I really believe this? I'm not sure. At its most stupid and ugly and despicable it's a bunch of kids going out fagbashing; at its most admirable it's something like the dozens (a ghetto "game" where a couple of kids trade comic insults to the point where one of them, the loser, breaks down) or master samurai warriors meeting in combat, but in this case it would be a master battle of sarcasm. And deadpan parody can be a useful weapon against

authority: a kind of exaggerated solicitude or compliance that rides the line between mockery and servility, like Phil Dellio on his twelfth-grade basketball team (described in the last issue). By pure I mean that it's aesthetic. It's done for excitement, bloodlust--it's done with style, artistry. It's there as its own game. It doesn't package itself as morality or as being for the good of the group or of the world. Cruelty, if it really wants to organize itself, if it wants to go big-time, has to tie itself to morality, has to pretend that it's goodness. But junior-high cruelty was unpolluted by moral pretension.

The World's Forgotten Boy

I have a fantasy where I'm instructing jazz musicians or soul musicians how to play hard rock. "You have to pound and keep pounding, go pound pound pound pound, this is more important than dancing. You're hitting it, whack whack whack whack. Remember, you're trying to hurt somebody."

Junior high is in me. This is complicated: I rejected the cool people but I didn't reject their music. After a while hard rock was my music--and something about this time seems fundamental. The malicious laugh in Syndicate of Sound's "Little Girl" is perfectly junior high. So is the mocking way Rudy Martinez says "You're gonna cry" in "96 Tears"--as if crying were a goopy pathetic thing. I couldn't listen to that song the year it came out, I was so upset by it; but several years later I rediscovered it and would go to a particular bar in New Haven just because the song was on the juke box. A decade after junior high a woman from my home town who'd gone to my school was at Max's Kansas City (a New York club, at the time probably the main place along with CBGB for punk or strange or decadent or dangerous music) listening to the songs piped in between sets, and she said to me, "This sounds like junior high but more intense." This is the best definition of punk rock I've ever heard.

I look for scenes in movies--old crime movies, westerns, film noir--where there are voices, sarcasm, contempt, razzing laughter; a bunch of guys being creeps to each other--a bunch of punks, basically. These scenes are thrilling, they come from somewhere basic. When I see them I sometimes feel triumphant, I want to say "So there!" to someone, as if these movies, this dialogue, sort of junior-high-in-the-mouths-of-lowlife-grownups, proved something. Like look, here it is, it's irrepressible, it's not a problem to be solved, it's rock 'n' roll. I look for the hero to eventually vanquish them--these creeps--it--whatever it is... but in the meantime he's got to mingle with it.

Writing is my instrument. So I have a secret cruel self that usually only lets itself loose in my writing. I guess it's occasional at this point, when I let words loose to shred someone. I know I've got it, the gift of nasty--it's a glorious thing, I wish I knew where to use it.

FIRST RECORDS

FRANK KOGAN: The assignment was to write about the first record you ever bought for yourself, or about some other early record you cared about, and about what was going on in your life at the time.

AARON COMETBUS: I didn't grow up listening to music like a lot of kids. My parents just listened to NPR. I heard a little bit of top 40 radio and a few Beatles records, and once I checked out a Kansas album from the library, but that was all.

Then, when I was twelve, my neighborhood crew went punk. I saved up my allowance and bought the Ramones' "Rocket to Russia." It was the first record I really owned and the first music I really considered my own.

It was three years old and already old news to the world, but to me it was new and exciting and actually a near-religious experience. It was the soundtrack my life had been looking for.

I sniffed glue and walked around my junior high singing "I don't care." I was hateful. I wouldn't call it rebellious because it wasn't that glamorous. I put salt instead of sugar in the recipes in Home Economics class, making the food inedible and the whole class angry. I feigned ignorance but really it was no mistake. A year later I managed to actually meet the Ramones and interview them for our fanzine. Johnny told us about their new drummer and new album. Joey looked like an alien and didn't speak much. We asked Johnny what he thought of people idolizing the Ramones. He said it was funny but nice. We waved goodbye, then went home and played with our homemade Ramones dolls.

I didn't buy the new album. One was enough, over and over and over. Now that I had completed my life goal of meeting the Ramones, I wondered how I would waste the next fifty years.

SCOTT WOODS: He's So Heavy, He's My Older Brother (first record)

My most vivid childhood memories are those associated with listening to music. There were always lots of weird, silly, and great records around 661 Jason Cres. (London, Ontario), most of which belonged to my older brother Paul. The ones I remember being there very early on (1970/71 when I was six/seven) are: *Through the Past Darkly* (stop-sign cover), *Paul Revere & the Raiders' Greatest Hits*, a Tommy Roe compilation, *Help!*, and (of course) *Sgt. Pepper*. I had no idea at the time how these records got there, all I knew was that they were scary and that they were Paul's and that I'd better be very careful in my handling of them. I listened to all of the above whenever I had a turn at the family record player (which wasn't often), and I spent what seemed like eons staring at the covers, absorbing such eerie (to me) details as the alligator skin boots worn by some of the Stones on *Through the Past Darkly*. Some of these records eventually became my own--I assume after Paul had worn them out--and I must've ruined all of the covers by drawing moustaches on the faces. (A budding Marcel Duchamp, I was.)

My next specific musical memory has Paul receiving a copy of *Ziggy Stardust* in the mail along with his subscription to *Creem*. I'm not sure if this moment was as epochal to Paul as I seem to remember it being, all I know is that I was hooked from the very opening bars of "Five Years," a dramatic performance that seemed positively frightening, in part because I thought Bowie was saying "Fuck is" (I heard it that way for years). Actually, the whole record felt dirty, from "Sufragette City"'s final cry of "Suck a tit!" to God giving an ass (whatever *that* meant--as a church-goer, I knew it wasn't nice) to the confusing gender play of "Lady Stardust" to the back photo of David in tight pants, expressionless and slightly abnormal. After that, the records, and the record sleeves, continued to get even freakier: first Dolls' album, second Roxy Music (they quickly became Paul's favorite group), *Slayed?*, Silverhead's *16 and Savaged*, lots of Todd stuff, *Love It To Death* and *Killer*. All of this music seemed exotic, thrilling, and more than a bit taboo--I specifically remember not playing certain songs like "Ziggy Stardust" or Alice Cooper's "Dead Babies"

if my parents happened to be within earshot--and the danger associated with these feelings merely added to the intrigue.

Of course, like everyone else my age I was also tuned into the Top 40, where things seemed just as strange (the pop/K-Tel influence came from my older sister Joanne, whose less intense, though still satisfying, collection of records included "Run to Me," "Brandy [You're a Fine Girl]," and *Tapestry*), though even then I must have sensed that liking Gilbert O'Sullivan or Tony Orlando & Dawn was not quite the same thing as liking Bryan Ferry or Noddy Holder. And yet, I wonder if I *did* know this, or rather, when or how I learned to differentiate these things--when or how, in other words, did I lose this particular innocent quality? If I could suck up into the back of my mind for even five minutes to research this piece, this is what I'd be most curious to find out. The whole issue becomes fuzzier still when I think back to a not-so-innocent Gilbert O'Sullivan anecdote: my best friend Danny McGrath and I were playing around at my grandmother's house, singing the line from "Get Down" that goes, "Once upon a time I drank a little wine/was as happy as can be" over and over, when my sister Valerie pulled me aside and told me I shouldn't be doing that because my grandmother didn't drink.

As for your original question, I'm pretty certain that the first LP I actually went out and purchased on my own was Emerson, Lake & Palmer's *Brain Salad Surgery*, sometime in 1975, two years after its release. Although I can remember taking it to the cash register (at Records on Wheels on Dundas St.), examining the contents of the package on the bus ride home, and even dropping the needle down for the first time (I felt an instant chill from "Jerusalem" and I might still), I have no recollection as to *why* I bought it. I can think of three possible scenarios:

- 1) I heard "Lucky Man" on the radio and simply ended up buying the wrong album. Maybe Records on Wheels were sold out of the first ELP, or maybe one of their employees convinced me that *Surgery* was a better album.
- 2) I saw some pictures of Keith Emerson doing crazy things to his keyboard, and figured this was something I just had to own.
- 3) (the most likely reason) Paul indicated to me that he was interested in picking it up--by now he was fully immersed in both prog and glitter--so I figured I'd impress him by doing it first.

Unfortunately, I can't write too much about the record itself. Not because I'm embarrassed by my selection (I am and I amn't), but because I haven't heard it in roughly 16 years, during which time I've rarely even *thought* about it. I can guarantee you that at one point in my life I had every piano and organ nuance of the "Karn Evil 9" trilogy memorized and I air-keyboarded to it constantly. I also remember thinking that Greg Lake was my least favorite member of the group because his ballads seemed lightweight in comparison to Emerson's workouts (a suspicion confirmed with the arrival of *Works volume 1* in 1977, as I hardly ever listened to Lake's solo side), and because he was pudgier than the other two guys. What's more interesting to me now about my purchase is that it signalled the first time in my life I had an obsession I could call my own (I was just as interested in cute girls and professional sports, but these obsessions were common). Paul was now following my lead: I was the one who ended up purchasing all the other ELP albums, and pretty soon, my older brother was borrowing records from *me*. I started keeping scrapbooks at this time (sadly, sadly lost), 60% of the articles being about ELP, the other 40% being about everyone else I was interested in (lots of stuff on Keith Richards' RCMP drug bust). When Paul and one of his wild friends drove me to Toronto in 1977 to see ELP at Exhibition Stadium (we were a bit upset on the way

there because they had just ditched their 98-or-whatever-piece orchestra), I remember feeling secure in the knowledge that I was the biggest fan among us; they were asking me questions about the band, my opinion on what was their best recording, favorite solo, etc. If I relished this role, it wasn't because I was trying to compete with Paul (we're seven years apart and we've always been close, so there was no need for that); on the contrary, I simply wanted to be as cool and as smart about music as he was, and with purchasing power of my own (thanks to an allowance from dad and a paper route) I had gained a bit of confidence, something that has never come easy for me. School, for the most part, intimidated me from kindergarten right up through university, and by grade seven (after not making the All-star team in ice hockey), sports became a nightmare and a farce. Music was a refuge from all that, and it never ceased (and never ceases) to be a source of some kind of fun.

Although Keith Emerson's influence loomed large during those formative years, in the end it still paled next to Paul's, as a revealing episode in the spring of 1978 proved. It was a Saturday afternoon, Paul and I were on our way home from Westmount Mall (we must have been at Mister Sound), and I went into one of my usual spiels about--yup, ELP. After listening patiently for a bit, Paul cut me off and said something to the effect that he was starting to get tired of groups like Emerson, Lake & Palmer. He mentioned that he was becoming interested in new wave (or maybe he called it punk) because "it was more passionate than music like ELP's" (I'll go to my grave insisting that he used those very words). I was completely stunned by the audacity of this statement; it was like a sharp jab in the stomach. Once past the initial shock, however (it lasted maybe a minute), I shrugged my shoulders and said, "Yeah, I guess you're right." Becoming a punk was as simple as that.

LUC SANTE: I don't have many early memories of music, except religious music, meaning Gregorian chants and litanies echoing in the high stone naves of 18th- and 19th-century Belgian churches. As far as I can remember the radio only emitted news, even after we had immigrated to the United States, and my family didn't get its first record player until Christmas, 1963, when I was nine years old. As accessories my parents bought themselves a couple of Korvette's boxed sets--show tunes and "Great Classical Masterpieces," or some such--and got me, undoubtedly at my request, two albums by the New Christy Minstrels. At the time I was a devoted fan of *Hootenanny!*, a "folk" variety show in prime time that regularly featured the NCMs as well as the Chad Mitchell Trio, Oscar Brand, Jean Ritchie, Flatt and Scruggs, Homer and Jethro, etc. I didn't know it at the time, but the show's producers toed the blacklist line, banning Woody Guthrie--by then too ill to perform anyway--as well as Pete Seeger and assorted other fellow travelers, so that Bob Dylan and Joan Baez and Phil Ochs, among others, boycotted the show. The Fugs never appeared, either. The show made its appearance at or after the very end of the Greenwich Village coffeehouse thing, naturally. What on earth did I like about the NCMs, an incredibly clean and collegiate singing group of ten or so lads and lasses whose members also included (as best as I can remember) Glen Campbell and Barry McGuire (and, unless I'm retrospectively hallucinating, Kenny Rogers)? Well, minor-key anthems with slightly off harmonies--the kind of thing I was later to find done better by Jim and Jean and later and better still by the Jefferson Airplane.

I remember being depressed when they cancelled *Hootenanny!* in late '63 or early '64 and replaced it with *Shindig*. It wasn't that I didn't like rock 'n' roll, exactly, but I must have been taking it in subcutaneously. The music most

apt to give me the Proust's cookie creepy-crawlies these days is R&B from around 1961 or '62, stuff by Barbara Lewis or Little Joe and the Thrillers or the Hollywood Argyles, although I probably absorbed such sounds in pizza parlors or from other people's car radios. Of course, when the Beatles appeared in a great flash of light in February '64 I was as astounded as everybody else, and duly requested *Meet the Beatles* and the second album--the one Frank aptly calls "The Black Album"--for my birthday in May. But some part of me still craved "folk": that strum, those modal accents, those rousing choruses. (And I didn't hear Bob Dylan until he'd gone electric in 1965.)

All this is by way of accounting for the fact that the first record I ever bought for myself was "The Ballad of the Green Berets," by Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler. I tried to conceal this fact for many years afterward. Although the record itself is long gone, I still own the singles box it lived in, the kind with a latch and a handle and a decorative wallpaper covering, along with the index on which its entry (#1) has been almost entirely obliterated with a marker. I probably bought the record in 1965 and probably disposed of it and its index entry two or three years later, when I began to have political opinions, although at the time such opinions may have been determined mostly on a scale of coolness; hawkishness was distinctly uncool. So what had I liked about that record in the first place? Well, it was a minor-key anthem with a rousing chorus and a lot of strum. If I'd heard Phil Ochs's "I Ain't Marchin' Anymore" beforehand, I would have bought that first. But Sergeant Barry knew what he was doing--he was the original Bob Roberts (which was a great idea but a pretty obvious movie, by the way). Lyrics never meant all that much to me, and I can still play and enjoy a song for years before it occurs to me to wonder what the words are. I'm a reader; I apprehend words *visually*. Barry Sadler, or Phil Ochs, could have been singing about cabbage rolls and coffee and the song would have had the same impact on me. Does this make me the perfect sucker for the backward-masking Satanic record industry?

I've long claimed to friends that the first record I ever bought was "Secret Agent Man," by Johnny Rivers, which I indeed still own and still play pretty often. In reality, though, it appears on the index as #5. Numbers 2, 3, and 4 are all by Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass. What did I like about that generic gringo fritos-and-dip mariachi? Well, I guess it seemed kind of exotic at the time, and I believe, too, that many boy types such as myself were drawn by the subliminal pull of the cover of *Whipped Cream and Other Delights*, which my mother, in any case, would never have permitted in the house. And then I bought "Snoopy Versus the Red Baron," by the Royal Guardsmen (I remember being extremely confused by "My Girl Sloopy," by the McCoys--why *Sloopy*?). And then I bought "Summer in the City," by the Lovin' Spoonful. And then I bought the Dave Clark Five's version of Marv Johnson's "You Got What It Takes," which I brought to some sixth-grade function only to have other kids ask me how I could listen to "that nigger shit." Those same kids also gave me grief for wearing patterned long-sleeved knit shirts, which they also thought were "nigger." I was, at the time, still years away from meeting any black people. The first record I ever bought by a black performer was "That's the Way God Planned It," by Billy Preston, in 1969, and that of course was on the Apple label and thus sanctified by the Fab Four. I don't think I bought another one until I got to college and started buying James Brown records in quantity.

And then I bought--after the DC5, that is--"Paperback Writer" b/w "Rain," by the Beatles, which I still think is one of the great singles of all time, and a rather neglected item in the mop-tops' corpus. The thrill of seeing the

picture sleeve tacked to the new releases board at Scotti's, in Summit, N.J., remains palpable. The Four seemed to be addressing *me*, since a paperback writer was indeed what I aspired to become. Never mind that it was "the dirty story of a dirty man/and his clinging wife [who] doesn't understand"--as I said, I didn't pay much attention to lyrics. Anyway, it's the flipside that entered my Top 100. As perhaps the Beatles' first excursion into psychedelia, "Rain," with its ringing modalities, its "Eastern" changes, completed some kind of circle for me, merging "folk" and "rock" in a satisfying way, which I think was what psychedelia was all about, at least in its early stages, before 18-minute guitar solos were what it became known for. Did my taste for this have any connection with my early and exclusive exposure to European church music? I think it's more than likely.

Anyway, it seems I've remained in many ways faithful to my first tastes in music, haven't shed anything but only added over the decades. I still listen to a lot of what in various ways can be called "folk"--although the glaring inaptness of that label for much of anything outside the long-gone coffeehouse business is now apparent. I listen to a lot of European church music, too, if less Gregorian than early Baroque. And I spend a lot of time inventing a pop-music heritage for myself, including the stuff I might have been exposed to as a small child had my parents been so inclined, bal-musette music, for example, or the French "realist" singers of the 1930s. I identify with those genres in an acutely personal way that nevertheless bears an ambiguous relationship to my actual background. Given that my father essentially owns and plays only one tape--*Die Fledermaus*, by Johann Strauss--and that my mother doesn't listen to music at all, I guess it's the musical equivalent to imagining my "real" parents to have been vagabonds and criminals. That was my fantasy when I was 7. I'm now 41.

J-ME VAN WAY: THE FIRST RECORD I BOUGHT (AND OTHERS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO ME)

I remember owning Van Halen's 1984. I remember owning a Madonna single ("Into the Groove" maybe). I remember owning Guns n' Roses' *Appetite for Destruction*. I also recall having MC Hammer's big hit album (forgot the title). I owned all of these at one time or another. I did not, however, buy them.

To my best recollection, the first record (tape) that I bought with my very own money was Phil Collins' *But Seriously*. I was in the seventh grade and I still can't remember exactly why I bought it. I wasn't a real big fan, I can't even remember any of the songs from it, so it wasn't a single-driven purchase.

Now, let me jump to something else. I was exposed to a lot of punk rock and "alternative" music back in the 80's. My uncle played in a hardcore-punk group called R.O.T. (Reality on Trial). They even opened for the Butthole Surfers, which doesn't do much for me, but I guess something could be said for. And my aunt was way into the alternabands of the day. I vividly remember hearing a lot of The Smiths, XTC, They Might Be Giants, and Black Flag while I was growing up. It's funny that, save Black Flag, these are a few of my very favorite bands.

Anyway, I said all that to say this: I'd like to think that Teenage Fanclub's *Bandwagonesque* was the first record I bought. It brought me back to the realization that, just because something doesn't play on the radio, it doesn't mean that I shouldn't like it. When I was in the sixth and seventh

grades, I really dug Living Colour, but none of their songs played on the local Top 40 station, so I felt guilty and uncool for liking them.

Another record that I've realized was significant to my modern rock musical likes was Nirvana's *Nevermind*. I honestly haven't played a Nirvana album since Kurt Cobain's death (I have this thing against dead rock stars), but their existence somehow shaped the way I look at music.

Lastly, I'd like to cite three more personally important records: American Music Club's *Mercury*, The Smiths' *Louder than Bombs*, and Pavement's *Slanted and Enchanted*. The aforementioned are my all-time favorite (rock) records and have not only fashioned my musical likes, but have shaped my life in a major way. Rock music means a lot to us crazy kids, y'know.

MINDY ROSS: WHY I SUCK (among other things)

Well I'm sitting here at school wasting my \$2100 per quarter tuition writing for WHY MUSIC SUCKS while eating shock tarts. That alone probably categorizes me in the sucking division, but to add to it, I'm also writing it one week past the day it should have been finished. So I'm a procrastinator. Wanna make something of it? Anyway, I guess I'll write about what I was told to write. My first record. But I'm not going to actually write about my first record because it would have been something equivalent to Barney singing about god. So I'll have to write about the first record that really influenced my life; burning a path of destruction along the way. My falling from the grace of god was all the fault of Cheap Trick's *Heaven Tonight*. Cheap Trick was my downfall. At the age of six they ruined any chance I would ever have. Actually, it wasn't the record that really ruined me, but a dream I had about Rick Nielson. In the dream he was my father and the other blond-haired guy (Robin?) was my best friend's father. We were going water skiing for the day and it was my turn when all of a sudden Rick was trying to drown me. So he finally stopped and my mother, who was a nun in the dream, pulled me out of the water and gave me a fritto and cheese sandwich. The last part of the dream that I remember is looking out at Rick Nielson eating the ski ropes. So needless to say I slept in my mother's room for a few nights after that dream. But to this day, I still love Cheap Trick and cheese and fritto sandwiches. So after that dream, my brother thought it was funny that I liked Cheap Trick and he would try and teach me their songs. I probably was one of the only six year olds who knew all of the words to *Surrender*. But hey, I was cool like that. Then one time our cousin came to visit and my brother bet him that I could sing all of the words to *Surrender* and I did. I'm not sure what he exactly won but it was probably something like a Surf Punks record, which was another band I loved while growing up. I'm sure my mother was mortified when her little girl was running around singing *Too big too big* for her top. My brother was always a really big influence on me as we were growing up. It seems funny when I think about it now, but I remember thinking he was so cool that when we would walk down the street (which wasn't very often because he was way too cool to be seen with his baby sister) I would wonder if people thought that I was his girlfriend. Of course now I realize that most people wouldn't think of a six year old as anyone's girlfriend let alone her brother's, but hell I was six. The next record I can really remember loving was the Ramones. I would sneak into my brother's room and listen over and over until I knew all of the words. Not that I really understood the meaning of shock treatment or DDT or lobotomy or any of the other words, but I just thought in my six-year-old mind that it sounded so rebellious. My only form of rebellion at that time was

cutting my Barbie's hair into a mohawk or throwing my Ken doll onto the roof. So the Ramones was big time. Time passed by and my brother got more and more into punk rock and I decided to follow his lead. That means I missed out on the normal childhood likes of my time such as Duran Duran, Menudo, and Wham! Remember the Menudo videos on Saturday morning t.v.? I would not allow myself to fall into the web of popularity. As I grew up I was concerning myself with guys with mohawks and colored hair. I remember I had a crush on two of my brother's friends, Matt White and Barry Evans. They were the coolest guys I had ever met. I also liked Mike Papka who was one of my brother's friends, but he wasn't really punk, he was more like neuro, very effeminate. All of this trying to fit into what I thought was a category. I didn't understand that it would be a way of thinking as I was to grow up. But I still had a long way to go. As I entered highschool, I was stuck between wanting to just fit in and wanting to be my own person. I started writing meaningless poetry about how sad I was and insisted on always being gloomy although not truly being deathrock. I would listen to the Smiths and really feel like someone understood me. I really thought that I was bonding with Morrissey. I discovered the Smiths in like 8th grade when my sister took me to see them. I remember this girl was screaming "Morrissey is god!" I thought it was so blasphemous but so great at the same time. I couldn't believe that someone thought he was god. Of course over the years I've realized that she probably didn't think he was some supreme being and if she did, she was wrong because the only people who deserve that type of status are Joey Ramone and me. So I was hooked after that. But I didn't go to my next real show until I was 16. My brother had reached the height of his punk rockness by that time and was working at the infamous 924 Gilman. I was living in New Mexico at the time, which is a story all in itself. I came out to the bay area to see my brother and sister and was lucky enough to see S.N.F.U., Dag Nasty, No Use For A Name, and some other bands. I realized that all the shit I had put up with in highschool didn't matter. I had found a place where I fit in. It's weird but whenever I listen to music that I really like, I get that feeling. The feeling I had looked for from my parents, my brother, my peers. I found my acceptance through music and through myself.

PHIL DELLIO: Rather than having any particular record I can pinpoint as my first, I really had three different kinds of "first records" from three different periods in my life. The first records of the collection I have now--the first records I bought upon consciously deciding to start a record collection, the new innovation being that I'd now make an effort to take care of whatever I owned--I bought around 1975, when I was 14: The Worst of the Jefferson Airplane and Weird Scenes Inside the Goldmine. From that point forward I've pretty much kept every album that's ever come my way, not just what I bought myself but also all of the dumbest promos and most inappropriate gifts, everything from the Raunch Hands to Skinny Puppy to Ted Nugent's Weekend Warriors. I sold about 30 or so art and metal albums from my high school days to a guy I worked with in the mid-'80s (I now regret even that), otherwise I've kept almost everything.

Obviously my contact with records started well before 1975. I can remember occasionally in the late '60s and early '70s pestering my mom to buy a certain album or 45; I'll call these my second set of first records, records that were manhandled voraciously and are now long gone. Among the titles I associate with that time are the Guess Who's Rockin' (which I needed for some kind of elementary-school party where we were all supposed to bring something; I badly wanted to bring in a cool and dangerous rock album, and the

Guess Who's "Guns, Guns, Guns" was certainly very cool and dangerous), the "American Pie" 45, the first Partridge Family album (I used to set up a home-made drum kit in the corner of my room--pencil crayons for drumsticks, an old radio and books and furniture and the walls as cymbals--and bang away to "Singing My Song," a first-rate percussion workout for one of those Partridge drummers), Mashmakhan's "As the Year's Go By" (probably the first record I purchased on my own), and Ray Stevens' Greatest Hits, the one that came before "Everything is Beautiful" and had "Ahab the Arab," "Gitarzan," and Ray's other formative hits. I just loved Ray Stevens when I was 7 or 8, a passion I shared with my English friend Martin Young. What I remember about Martin: he had scruffy blond hair like Brian Jones and a chopped-off finger that he claimed was lost in a meat grinder, and he could make me laugh hysterically by jumping out from behind a corner and yelling "Wolverine!" in a way that sounded like a chainsaw starting up. I guess that helps explain why I found Ray Stevens so funny.

My absolute first first records were brought home by my Dad from Dell's Milk, the variety store he owned in the West End of Toronto through the 1960s. There were a couple hundred of these around the house, a mishmash of Nat King Cole, '60s easy-listening, Johnny Cash, popular soundtracks, CHFI's "Candlelight & Wine" series, Vicki Carr and Petula Clark, Harry Belafonte, Elvis soundtracks, and a number of pop and rock albums that were obviously brought home for the sole purpose of clearing some room in the store. Although I never officially claimed ownership of any of these records until much later--once I launched my own collection with the two albums referred to above, I began to incorporate a few of them in with my newer purchases; the entire lot of Dell's Milk records was finally junked sometime in the late '80s--I would regularly poke through them and take back certain titles to play on my portable. There were copies of Beatles VI (accounting for the special significance that "Yes It Is" has for me), The Best of Herman's Hermits (ditto "Mrs. Brown You've Got a Lovely Daughter"), Best of the Beach Boys, Vol. 2, a Cowsills LP, A Wild Pair (a Canadian album shared by the Guess Who and the Staccatos, who later made stirring protest music as the Five Man Electrical Band), the Soul Survivors album with "Expressway to Your Heart" (very psychedelic in presentation, with a story on the back about how the group met during a near-fatal collision on a bridge), a few bubblegum-heavy compilations on the Syndicate label (Andy Kim, the Ohio Express, the Turtles, etc.), The Who Sell Out (all I really played from that was the bizarre "Monday-Tuesday" business before "Armenia City in the Sky"), and many others I've forgotten. A couple of the records in there were too weird to hold any interest for me--Love's Forever Changes and the Incredible String Band's The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter--which meant that they remained in good enough shape to later move into my own collection. There was also an album by the British Modbeats, and if I could have just one of those albums back now, that would be my first choice.

I'm almost positive the British Modbeats were not British--I believe they were Canadian,¹ although they're not indexed in the one history of Canadian pop I have. I do know that their album is worth a small fortune now: at the

¹After sending this piece, Phil sent me a xerox of an encyclopedia entry that does indeed identify the British Modbeats as Canadian, from St. Catharines, Ontario. Their album, from 1967, is called *Mod is the British Modbeats*.--Frank

opening party for a record store I used to work at, I overheard the guy whose label it came out on telling someone that he'd put a few copies aside and was waiting to cash in on them. (There actually are fanatical collectors of obscure '60s Canadian pop. At that same store, I worked with a guy who was one of the country's number-one collectors of Canadiana, Gerry Michaels. I once engineered a three-way deal between myself, Gerry, and the University of Toronto radio station whereby I got the second Chantels album, the station got a Squirrel Bait record, a Misfits record, and an Anthony Braxton record, and Gerry got an album by some people named "Reign Ghost," a Canadian band he'd been mad for. It was a very complicated trade--I think one of us may have come away with a Triple-A shortstop as a throw-in.) The Modbeats album came out in '66 or '67 on the Red Leaf label, and the front cover had psychedelic balloon lettering and the group standing against a wall in dramatic pose, each Modbeat wearing flowered pants that (no exaggeration) must have been flared 2-3 feet across. All I remember are two songs: a cover of the McCoys' "Sorrow," and a faster thing called "L.S.D." I probably would have been intimidated by the group on looks alone, but "L.S.D." clinched it; if there was one thing that put the fear of God into me when I was eight, it was drugs. I was absolutely terrified of drugs.

It most likely started with stories I'd heard about some of the older kids from Rosefield Drive who were going down to the creek behind our subdivision and fooling around with drugs. If there was any truth at all to the stories, "older" probably meant 12 or 13 and "drugs" probably meant pot, but being a rather wide-eyed eight-year-old who was afraid of my own shadow to begin with, I was convinced that these drug-addled maniacs were going to abduct me and take me to their hideout down in the darkest recesses of the creek, where they'd shoot me full of hypodermics and have me hooked for life. The creek ran through a large undeveloped field that bordered the back of my own street and two other streets in the neighborhood; after hearing these stories, I would sometimes accompany one of my friends a few yards onto the flat upper part of the field, but I'd never go down below to where the drug people were. (This is not going to turn into a River's Edge/Stand By Me story: no dead bodies will turn up at any point.) To the other kids on the street, the creek was a place to go look for stuff or to take your kite out to, and in the winter it was for tobogganing. To me, it meant heroin and evil and death; there was something even grimmer about the image of drug-taking going on in the dead of winter, with everyone all huddled together shivering and strung out.

My drug phobia lasted from grade 3 until I got to middle school. I have three other distinct memories having to do with this. I remember Norm Allen's drug books--little government-type pamphlets that he'd gotten from his older sister, a pamphlet for each different classification of narcotic, with lots of distorted funhouse-mirror photos in the volume on hallucinogenics. Those photos had a tremendous impact on me. Norm lived on Stevens Crescent, and if every kid from your childhood was famous for at least one thing, Norm was famous for his bike: he was the first person any of us knew to get what was an extremely desirable model at the time, a "Fastback 100" I think it was called, a low-slung orange thing that was unique in that it had five gears instead of three and a flat L-shaped seat instead of the then-popular banana style. I also remember getting an anti-drug poster I'd made (grade 4?) hung outside the library. It featured a very detailed drawing of Mad's Alfred E. Newman taken from a stencil I had, with the phrase--what else?--"What Me Worry? Me No Take Drugs" written across the bottom. I was definitely Nancy Reagan before my time, doing my part to keep the streets of Georgetown safe from the drug scourge that was sweeping through smalltown Ontario in the late 1960s, even

though the drug warning on the poster was actually secondary to the amazing drawing of Alfred E. Newman I'd been able to pull off thanks to the stencil. I would have been just as happy to have Alfred issue a stern warning against the dangers of cantaloupes.

The most absurd episode of drug panic I can recall was one time when I was walking home with my best friend John Karolidis. We had just turned the corner at Delrex onto Rosefield, less than a minute away from my house. As we walked along, someone came up behind us and said "Boo!" (I'm not substituting "Boo" for words I've forgotten; "Boo" was exactly what the person said.) It was Bruno Martino, one of the older kids who lived at the other end of Rosefield. I'd never spoken to Bruno, but I knew where he lived, I knew that he was big and bullyish and mean-looking, and in my mind he'd already been pegged as the living embodiment of all my worst drug fears. As soon as I turned around and realized who it was, I lit out for home running faster than I'd ever run in my life. I ran straight up Rosefield for a few more houses, flew around the corner onto Roydon, and never looked back until I was safely on our driveway. I then stood around waiting for John, who sauntered up some 45 seconds later--he had continued walking and talking with Bruno, whom it turned out John sort of knew through his cousin Louie. Can an eight-year-old have a deadpan sense of humour? John came up the driveway without saying a word--he just gave me a look that was the equivalent of wryly rolling one's eyes in disbelief. He later told me that Bruno had asked "What's wrong with him?" to which John shrugged "Beats me."

Beats me, too, but I know that the British Modbeats and "L.S.D." were a part of it, and later on Go Ask Alice and The Marcus-Nelson Murders would be a part of it (by then, phobia had given way to fascination and the first stirrings of curiosity), and there was just a general drug-scare tenor to the late '60s and early '70s that I was very susceptible to. It was more than enough for my imagination to transform an overgrown field into Needle Park, and 12-year-old Bruno Martino into some monstrous phantasm out of William Burroughs.

DAVID NICHOLS: FIRST RECORD

In 1969 or 1970 at the age of 5 or 6 I was taken into the city to Allan's music store in Collins Street by my mother and her younger sister Maggie. We utilised the listening booths, about the only time I have ever listened to anything in a record shop before I bought it, and I settled on a 4-track EP by West Australian performer Rolf Harris. Rolf had made something of a name for himself in England by making what I guess would have to be called novelty songs. His hits of the sixties included "Sunarise" (which I think was cod Aboriginal), "Two Little Boys" (a sort of First World War song), and the song I had on this EP, "Jake the Peg." On the other side was Rolf's reading of "Iko Iko." I can't remember the other two songs.

Jake the Peg was so called because he had an extra leg. The song was sung as with comedy yiddish inflection as only an Australian in England could. In my adult years I assumed there was some sort of sexual innuendo to Jake but I've never quite been able to figure out how - I mean the problems Jake encountered are genuinely those you would have if you had an extra leg ("the only thing I knew for sure were three feet made a yard"). Maybe someone reading this has an explanation.

The first record I really, honestly bought by myself was probably Freddy Fender's "Before the Next Teardrop Falls." Freddy kind of reminded me of Cat Stevens. I bought a number of records like this one, at Discurio Records in Camberwell, half price when they'd just dropped out of the charts. Silver

Convention's "Get Up and Boogie" was another one, as was Andrea True Connection's "More More More" and Typically Tropical's "Barbados." I remember hearing a DJ at the time explain this was a freak hit from two advertising writers who made the song up at home for parties. It was not lilting but lurching white reggae (not unlike, but preceding, 10cc's "Dreadlock Holiday"). I adored it on the radio and I even bought the album although it was a bit of a letdown - they did a reasonable version of "Israelites" on it. I got more into the cult of pop personality with ABBA then The Beatles then the assumption that when an adult I would own every record ever made in Western civilisation.

DON ALLRED: Tho' some may poo-poo, I think it's important the first time you buy a record, rather than have someone go buy it for you, even if you are buying it with money given to you. It's important that you get the money, however that happens, that you determine the amount needed and have it all together, you take it to the store, you don't drop it, or lose any of it to another kid (your buddy or your sweetheart or the local bully); you most important of all don't get distracted enough by other goodies and whizz away all or some of the necessary sum (which around here definitely included knowing about sales tax, our ever more regressive solution for everything: affects the individual /consumer in a lotta ways), you pick out just that one record (it wouldn't be the same experience if you could just grab any old handful), with whatever degree of premeditation, you take it up to the counter and complete the transaction, you get it home, and you play it. And whatever happens, happens.

Having said all that, I find I'm another one who can't quite remember just what that first record was. The first I'm sure I bought were by Shirley Bassey, "Strange How Love Can Be" and, especially, "Goldfinger." "Ghoh-h-d FINN-gaahh--he's the man--" but she's got the power, her sound a cymbal crash sliding slow molten down the oops upside my head peaceful down in the nerves, tho' it's time to ride the next verse next phrase even. Never be the same. Brassey Miss Bassey like the taste of my (aunt's) trumpet mouthpiece the salt of the blood of the sea of the earth. Earth Mother? If so, near the memory of that opening shot cruising along finally honing in on Julie Andrews up on her Alp "the hills are a-li-i-i-ve, with the Sound of Music"--only she's in black leather now, in my 9th grade sketchbook. Never be the same, no, and I thank you.

The first record purchase I most coveted was Catherine's copy of Johnny Horton's Greatest Hits. Johnny was cool with us kids because he was an old cowboy singer of considerable panache, which was still discernible even while Roy Rogers was starting to seem too bland (shouldn't've gone solo from Sons Of The Pioneers), and Gene Autrey was creeping me out with the glassy sneer which extended way too far from his mug into his voice. Johnny sang History ("Battle of New Orleans," a cartoon epic which blew my mind + definitely set me up for P-Funk), Geography ("When it's Springtime in Alaska, it's For-ty be-low"), and, best of all, movie songs from movies we were into (like the suavely jaunty "We're gon' to Sink Th' Bismarck, th' Queen of all th' ships"). I thought he did "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance," but that was Gene Pitney. Pitney did a lot of movie songs too, but more like "Judgment at Nuremberg," "Town Without Pitney, er, Pity." Catherine + other girls were into him, it seems (and I bet that Smiths-inspired band got their name from him, not Gene Vincent), but, pace Bassey, I'd recoil from a guy who tried to sing like that. I wouldn't now, not necessarily. She had to tie a lipstick to the cartridge to make it play without skipping.

Ah she took it with her when she moved to England. I could get him back on CD, but not her. Guess I'll settle for him, one of these days. Twas ever thus.

One thing that shouldn't be forgotten is, it was before cable, before videotape, before audiocassettes. I knew a few people with reel to reels, but these were awkward and tinny-sounding, I think. A lot of movies totally taken for granted now were at best fabulous rumors then. If you managed to sneak into the TV room after lights out and catch part of "The Fugitive Kind," you best not let it trance you out/in as far as it definitely could/should, because you were damn well going to have to retain as much of it as possible till who knows if or when the next chance might be.

Books were too personal--records were magical things because they could be enjoyed in a "social" setting (they certainly seemed like my means of acceptance), or alone. And even alone, whether you were grounded or hermitizing or not, you could feel a connection--your friends might be listening to the same record (or one that would prime their minds to be blown by your record), at that same moment, separately and/or together.

RICHARD RIEGEL: FIRST RECORD EVER

The first record I can recall actually listening to (as opposed to just hearing music over the radio) was "Green Eyes," by Gene Krupa's band, with vocals by Anita O'Day and Howard DuLany. This was in the Mulberry St. house, so it was around 1949 or 1950, when I was only 2 or 3 years old. My mother played the record over and over, maybe in a kind of narcissistic reverie about her own green eyes and their prominence in her wonderful smile. I would watch the red Columbia label spin around at 78 rpm, as Anita O'Day's chorus, "... those everloving green eyes . . .," purred through the tubes of our console phonograph, to be followed by the inevitable klunk of Krupa's bass drum. My mother was only in her late 30's at the time, and must have felt that she was still somewhere near the heart of the youthful romanticism expressed in the song. My mother always doted on me, her firstborn-if-blue-eyed son, but she seemed even more affectionate when we listened to "Green Eyes" together.

By the time that I noticed records again, we had moved to the Circle Ave. house, and I sensed that vast technological changes had occurred since my "Green Eyes" sessions. Now it was 1953, I was 6 years old and in school, and my sister came home from college with a new "portable," a small RCA Victor phono with a fat spindle that would accept only 45 rpm "singles," a stack of which she had already amassed. My sister's favorite pop artists that year were Nat King Cole and Stan Kenton, and as she played their discs in her bedroom, I noted that both musicians recorded for Capitol. I liked to spot the little capitol-building logo that adorned each label; Nat King Cole's singles all had a purple label, which seemed to be Capitol's standard 45-label color of the day, but some of the Stan Kenton discs had an exotic blue-green label that fascinated me endlessly. I loved to stare at the bright-colored labels of my sister's records, and to smell the strange, sweet musk as the needle tracked through their warm vinyl. Nat King Cole had it just right with me when he sang about sensory memories being "Unforgettable," from my sister's little player.

And then, just as rock'n'roll was about to take off -- my sister bought Bill Haley's "Rock Around the Clock," with its dull black Decca label, in 1955 -- I lost interest in pop music. I can clearly remember that time before Elvis Presley came to dominate our national consciousness, but I can't recall any time in my life that I ever cared for him. Early rock'n'roll just didn't take with me, at least not through Elvis Presley's unattractive persona. By the mid-

1950's, I was starting to get a taste of the neuroses of my coming adolescence, and Elvis only reminded me of some of those greasy hillbilly louts I had to go to school with, after we had moved again, this time outside the city limits. I was full of secret contempt (secret even to myself, at that age) for some of my male classmates, hoody dumbbells who spent recess discoursing on the joys of handling shotguns, and who always saw to it that I was apprised of all the four-letter words I'd somehow missed in my sheltered youth in town. It was impossible for me to associate Presley with liberation, or even with music; he seemed to be the prophet of new dark ages upon my life. My sister had gotten married, and had taken the 45 rpm phono with her. My mother seemed more determinedly middle-aged and respectable now that we lived in a quasi-suburb of our little town. I couldn't imagine us ever listening to a Gene Krupa record together in the new house.

I wasn't unaware of the burgeoning rock'n'roll scene, as I helped out after school in my father's auto repair shop from 1957 on, and the teenage mechanics there kept the radio tuned to r'n'r stations at all times. I heard Chuck Berry, the Everly Brothers, Ricky Nelson, all those classic rock'n'rollers over the shop radio when they were brand new, but I took their sound as a kind of ambient music ("Possible musics for Riegel Motors," as D. Byrne might put it), never as anything I might personally possess. By the time I was in high school, in the early 1960's, I had developed a taste for instrumentals like the Ventures' "Walk Don't Run" and the Tornadoes' "Telstar," but as we didn't have a functional phono in the house, I didn't see any point in buying the records. I spent my hours building model cars instead.

By early 1964, when I was already 17 years old and a senior in high school, I had neither bought a 45 rpm record nor kissed a girl. I had a feeling that one of those exchanges just might lead to the other, but I was much too shy and immature to know where to start. One evening around the beginning of February, my friend Kent, who followed the radio and pop music much more closely than I did, phoned and told me to turn on WING right away, as the DJ was going to play five songs in a row by "The Beatles!" -- I had read about these English rockers in Time already, but I had no concept how they would sound. So I listened to the five songs -- "I Want To Hold Your Hand," "She Loves You," etc. -- as instructed by Kent, and while I was hardly converted to instant, shrieking fandom, I sensed that these Beatles just might represent a Weltanschauung more expansive than the terminally ducktailed Presley's.

So I joined my own generation in watching the Beatles on Ed Sullivan, and by the summer of 1964, I was a total fan of the British Invasion -- the Beatles, Peter and Gordon, Billy J. Kramer, and, in August, my ultimates, the Animals -- I loved them all. Still without a record player, I had to depend on the potluck of the AM-station rotations to hear my faves, but as radio playlists were routinely rich with pop gems in those heady days, I never lacked for great tunes. Besides, I was too inhibited to ask my parents to buy me a record player -- they might suspect that I was Growing Up.

Which I was, of course. I started to college that fall, commuting at first, and my daily-drive car-radio segments gave me more entrancing slices of the British Invasion: the Zombies, Sandie Shaw, the Nashville Teens, the incomprehensibly thunderous Kinks. This was getting serious now. I couldn't depend on the luck of the Top 40 draw, or the charity of my friends with huge family-room hi-fi's forever -- I was ready to program my own discs.

Sometime around the beginning of 1965, I noticed that my grandfather had an old RCA 45 rpm phono -- much like the one my sister had owned years before -- sitting in his house, so I asked if I could take it home seeing as he wasn't using it. No sooner had I plugged the little fat-spindled player into

an outlet at home, than I zoomed down to the G.C. Murphy record department, where I purchased my first-ever self-selected recording, the Beatles' current double-sided hit, "I Feel Fine"/"She's A Woman." As the Beatles' guitar workouts twanged away on the compact RCA record machine, I realized that I was now a Capitol consumer, just like my sister in her own college days -- the little capitol-building logo was still there, but now it was displayed on a background of bright orange and yellow swirls, which I assumed had something to do with the Beatles' Beach Boys label-mates.

Over the next few months, I bought 45 after 45 -- the Animals, the Rolling Stones, Freddie and the Dreamers, Chad and Jeremy -- for my handy little machine. When I dropped by G.C. Murphy's one day and discovered a whole bin of 3-for-\$1 cutout 45's -- mostly Motown, including Mary Wells' "My Guy," which I had loved on the radio in the midst of the British Invasion the spring before -- I was convinced that my 45-spinning hours couldn't get much finer. Still, as the pop consumption curve inevitably has it, the more I got, the more I wanted. I had even found and bought a big-hole 45 rpm EP by the Beatles, with four songs from Beatles '65, but even with that, there were just too many interesting album cuts I didn't have access to with my one-speed player. In the late spring of 1965, I talked my mother into buying me an all-formats Zenith portable hi-fi. I opened it up, and there was a little lever I could set at 16, 33, 45, or 78 rpm! Surely the Millennium was at hand now!

I rushed out to G.C. Murphy's and bought my first-ever longplayer, the Beatles' (well, of course!) Something New, one of those odd jumble sales of haphazardly selected UK cuts so favored by the US record companies at the time. I bought Something New less for its song selection -- though I became a quick fan of "Slow Down" when the needle dropped -- than for its artwork, as I liked the tone of the lighting in the cover photo of the Beatles, taken during one of their Ed Sullivan performances. Now that I had album-buying and -playing capabilities, there'd be no looking back for me!

But the best chapter of my saga of a boy and his records was yet to come. On January 8, 1966, a month past my 19th birthday, with my teen years almost spent, I had my first real date, with Teresa Isaac. Her family had a sophisticated new GE stereo, and she was well ahead of me in the album-buying rituals of our youth, though only 17 herself. We sat in her family's living room in the Mt. Adams section of Cincinnati, and Teresa played albums as we talked our common language of pop music. She had just bought the Beatles' brand-new Rubber Soul, so we listened to the entire album a couple of times, marveling that the Beatles had topped themselves yet again. Later we walked up St. Gregory St., to the overlook by the church across the street, and stared at all the lights in downtown Cincinnati and along the Ohio River. If this was dating, I seemed to be starting at the top of the world, with Teresa, but after two years of listening to the British Invasion artists, I took such romance as my due. And we finished the evening with a kiss, of sorts.

ADAM SOBOLAK: First record bought?! It wasn't until early 1976, when I got The Beatles 1962-66 and 67-70. But that was finally giving in to temptation, inspiration, and dire circumstances. The lead-in's long and funny.

I grew out of a background of musical agony, poverty, and parsimony. My father was virtually amusical; my mother wasn't, but within that environment could barely manage more than Piaf and Brel musical orgies. Oh, and there was plenty Polish music within the broad family realm, but as we were bourgeois Polish-Canadians by pretension that meant not "Who Stole the Keeshka" claptrap but stuff like the tarted-up and sentimental offerings of the

Mazowsze and Slask song and dance ensembles.² At least that was on my mother's side of the family; my father's side had more inherent polkaness, but anything musical was barely noticeable through the environmentally, psychically astonishing screen of Toronto's legendary "Motel Strip" on the Lakeshore, where my father's parents and sister both lived in and ran motels. It wasn't as degraded as it would get in later years, but it sure gave an adrenalin-rush to visit the place. Meanwhile, on my mother's father's side, there's this bizarre, fiery, and passionate Tartar streak, the stuff of opera and Symbolist art and poetry... carried on down thru the Brel & Piaf, and... weary yet? Figuratively speaking, my mother's side was The Velvet Underground & Nico, my father's side was White Light/White Heat. You can't ask for a better aesthetic balance.

But real music, high and low, was a token. There wasn't any kind of great parental record collection of any dimension, what my mother was capable of could not penetrate the vacuum of my father (and he might claim vice versa as well, e.g. no Perry Como) and so we had some token records, routinely played at gatherings, maybe a few records for the kids, and otherwise lots of CFRB, Toronto's longstanding full-service family radio station, about the house.³ In the early '70s my father had some cassette tapes made for the cottage--wherefore and how, I don't know--which were truly bizarre CFRB-on-acid musical hotchpotches; the most-played tape (because one of my sisters liked "Brand New Key," or maybe because my parents thought this meant singling out the tape for ad nauseam repetition) was a hash of "Song Sung Blue" and "Any Dream Will Do" and Sonny & Cher's live "What Now My Love" and some instrumentals and other songs and flotsam intertwined with a big haphazard dosage of Trini Lopez (why?) and ending with "Surfin' USA" flickering out 1/2 of the way through; to this day I picture that song flickering out 1/2 of the way through. No wonder I was self-conditioned with the attitude that grownups were somehow inane. (Though there was a consolation--in such a laissez-faire atmosphere, we as kids were never subject to antirock jeremiads, we were free to pursue our own musical tastes. Initiative is another matter.)

Anyway... diagnosed with learning problems, I started going to special classes in 1969, and the kids in the school bus which took me there always asked the driver to turn on CHUM--1050 CHUM, Toronto's Top 40 powerhouse. With that epiphany, I soon started to request the same from my parents, and that Xmas got my first transistor radio. The long post-natal musical slumber was over.

And it would be radio, radio, radio (with some auxiliary support, like Saturday morning TV) from that time onward. Radio was everything. I never learned to buy records (not even 45s), I was never conditioned to appreciate

² Or at least an old-time prig of a music critic would dismiss Mazowsze and Slask as mere mawkish tourist-board sentimentality. Phhhht to the prigs with their blatant bias toward unwashed proletarian expression of "correct" world-music aridity; I'll take my Polish music overripe and gussied up anyday. That background may be why I've consistently preferred Sophie B. Hawkins to Liz Phair, even in the worst of times. Of course, Christgau's always been allergic to Laura Nyro. Step aside, Wójtowicz; I'm set on attacking Christgau for his Czechoslovakian bias. When will WE get any respect?

³ The funny thing about "grownup radio" is how it leaves the impression that grownups have NO CLUE about what they are listening to--it is played; ergo, it's good; la-di-da. Things haven't really changed, except that Phil Collins is substituted for, say, the Laurie Bower Singers.

vinyl or tape, never got any such stuff from parents or family members or friends, never needed it. Not even a cousin's 45 collection, delightful as it was ("Yo Yo" and so on), could shift me. Buying and having records felt like a stretch. CHUM provided my fix.

And continued to, through my discovery of record charts and the fascinating existence of such a thing as "rock history." In later years, my excuse for not buying records had practical logic; it prevented me from playing a song to death and getting sick of it faster than I'd normally do on the radio. (Lead me not into temptation.) But 1050 CHUM was a great place to create incipient junior rock historians after American Graffiti came out in 1973. It meant the phenomena of All-Graffiti-Sundays and Weekends and 20 years of rock history in something verging on regular rotation as it never was before and never would be again in the same way. Furthering the public service, CHUM provided dates ("That was the Beach Boys with 'Good Vibrations,' from 1966"), something its competition, CFTR, was too peevish to do. It made for lots of wonderful time-biding musical discussion with my "Yo Yo" cousin on my first trip to Poland in 1974, and just having various old and not-so-old songs come to mind here and there, forever to be associated with a particular place. So by taking advantage of the basic resources provided by a lowly Top 40 station at the proper historical moment, I caught a precocious glimpse of the Absolute Magnificence of Rock History (together with, in Poland, my own family history). Pity the fool who believes that kids just want their music current. This was beyond current; it was staggering.

As of yet, this historical knowledge remained principally radio-based, but one day in spring 1975 my grade 7 literature teacher brought a friend of hers to speak on rock history... maybe there was something deeper than radio. I soon came across some early rock history books in the library, Carl Belz and the like, as the appetite continued to build... meanwhile, with the Graffiti phenomenon faltering, CHUM became disturbingly haphazard as a place for that oldies fix. Around the end of 1975 I spotted The Beatles Illustrated Scrapbook at the Sherway Gardens W.H. Smith store and, with piqued curiosity, asked my parents to get it. A few months later there was a gathering at a fellow boy scout's house; hitherto stereo-illiterate, I noticed 1962-66 and 1967-70 and with a bit of assistance tried them out for size, playing them, listening to them. The radio-imposed barrier was broken; now I saw what records were all about. Shortly thereafter I gave in and, with parents, got the red and blue albums at Sam The Record Man at Sherway.

My record-buying misgivings were confirmed; by year's end I was pretty much sick of the Beatles⁴ (and verging on the same with the other artists purchased that year: CSN&Y, Jefferson Airplane, the obligatory Zo-So where nothing other than "Stairway to Heaven" mattered). Parents being parents, we had an ungainly, ineptly hooked-up and skip-prone stereo anyway. Meanwhile, the next stage was all but confirmed (to say the least) Xmas 1976 when I received the brand new Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll.

It sounds odd--at the beginning of '76, already a teenage armchair rock historian, but borderline illiterate regarding records. Keep in mind, though, that I went into special classes in 1969-1971 as a diagnosed autistic (which in

⁴ The 1976 Beatles revival was purely coincidental, if delightful. If I did a next-100 list for Radio On, I might include "Got To Get You Into My Life" and purposely date it 1976.

those days in Toronto meant "no hope")⁵ and always followed an eccentric tangent relative to others, being the sort given to reading Yellow Pages and population listings for pleasure. Given the heavily qualified circumstances (including the tradition of family parsimony), it is not surprising that my record-purchasing and -possessing habits remained (and remain, still) stunted at best, and probably crippled (mercifully, perhaps) my potential as an orthodox rock scribe. Instead, radio begat radio, culminating in my 1987-89 all night show on CIUT Toronto, proof that you can do wonders without much of a personal record collection to speak of.

In sum, The Beatles 1962-66 and 1967-70 were technically my first record purchases (and I can't remember whether it was personal or parental money), but psychologically I purchased the whole pop universe on that special-classes bus in 1969. My first record in spirit was the sound of a radio station, 1050 CHUM; it was my decision, unfettered by others, to take it and process it.⁶ By 1969 such awakenings, the stuff of baby-boom legend, were in their twilight--Top 40 stations were more standardized, progressive FM already existed--although Lou Reed was to sing the definitive (if already wistful) tribute to the experience ("Rock & Roll") the following year. Perhaps they were already extinct a decade later, although I tried hard to believe otherwise. Today, of course, they're lawn fertilizer, and I'm as old as my mother was in 1969, but mercifully without a six-year-old child to despotically oversee the musical development of (oh, those adolescent dreams of future parenthood so many of us had).

My parents broke up in 1988. My mother has the Re/Search Angry Women volume.

ARSENIO ORTEZA: THE MORMON, THE MEADOWLARK, AND ME

Remember the fairy-tale plot involving the love potion that makes you fall for the first person you see? Peer pressure functioned as such a potion for me when, as a third grader, I became mad for a certain Utah native. Somehow, probably from a combination of overhearing my classmates talk about songs and seeing records in the downtown stores, I'd gotten the idea that my ignorance of music was responsible for why I felt so unhip most of the time. Actually, I realize now that I felt unhip because my evangelical-Christian parents protected me from hip things. For instance, I didn't see my first movie boobs until *The Andromeda Strain*, and those belonged to a dead woman the color of soap whose blood had turned to dust.

Anyway, my third-grade instincts told me that I needed to get smart about music if I wanted to have a chance of fitting in. So I went to school one

⁵ With a thoughtful teacher and a bit of parental rallying (thanks mom) I got through that debacle alive, and it was a neat experience anyway--it gave me the Top 40 Universe. Only in recent years have I discovered that there may be a mild form of "Donna Williams" autism to me--but hey, I'm no arbitrary martyr.

⁶ If rather broadly reflective of my listening experience, a Joel Whitburn immersion for the general 1969-70 period shall evoke that crucible quite well. Imagine the musical revelations for a six-year-old diagnosed autistic, and who cares if I likely never heard low charters like "Cottage Cheese" by Crow or "In the Court of the Crimson King, Part One" by King Crimson.

day, determined to find out what cool people listened to, if for no other reason so that I could sprinkle the musicians' names into my conversation.

It could've been the Jackson Five, Marc Bolan, Alice Cooper, David Bowie, Three Dog Night, the Carpenters, Terry Jacks, Bo Donaldson and the Heywoods, Gilbert O' Sullivan, Lobo, Gordon Lightfoot, or Tony Orlando and Dawn. But no. The first name I caught wind of as having any cool clout was "Donny Osmond." I don't remember whence that wind bleweth, but it carried upon its wings a contagion I would not outgrow until -- well, until I started glimpsing movie boobs.

Or until the Osmonds quit making records, whichever came first. But those days wouldn't come for several years. No sooner had the name "Donny Osmond" entered my mind than I found myself with Mom in a checkout line at the local Hills, a line from which I could easily see the wall displaying the big-selling albums of the day. And what to my wondering eyes should appear but an album of Donny with his grin ear-to-ear. Three dollars and ninety-nine cents plus tax later, *To You With Love* belonged to me.

In the next few years, I bought everything: *The Donny Osmond Album*, *Too Young*, *The Osmonds*, *Third Phase*, *Homemade*, *Live*, *Crazy Horses*, *The Plan*, and *My Best to You*, Donny's 1974 best-of, and needless to say those records shaped my taste. [As I write this, it occurs to me that my Osmond fixation had roots. When I was three or four, a couple from our church lent us a little box record player -- the tough-skinned, locking-lid kind that school teachers used to lug around -- and their copy of the first Osmond album ever, *Songs We Sang on the Andy Williams Show*. On it, the four oldest Osmonds, not counting the two deaf ones, sang barbershop-quartet songs in prepubescent voices worthy of Alvin and the Chipmunks. I can no longer maintain my tone of bemused disdain: although recent listening has convinced me that Donny's solo albums deserve the consignment to antique-store hell that their few remaining copies currently endure, they nevertheless taught me a lot of songs I might not have learned otherwise. From Donny I learned "Wake Up, Little Susie," "I Knew You When," "I'm Your Puppet," "The Twelfth of Never," "Too Young," "Puppy Love," "Who Can I Turn To," and, as they say in the record-club catalogs, many more. From *The Osmonds Live* I learned "Every Time I Feel the Spirit" and "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'." And from *Songs We Sang on the Andy Williams Show* I learned "Aura Lee," "I Wouldn't Trade the Silver in My Mother's Hair (for All the Gold in the World)," "Be My Little Bumblebee" -- geez, is that all I can remember? The family who lent us the record, the Frankenberrys, eventually gave it to me because I liked it so much. I think it's packed away in my aunt's storage warehouse in a trunk with a bunch of other childhood memorabilia and college textbooks that I didn't sell because I thought I'd get around to reading them some day.]

As I was saying, those records shaped my taste. That explains why Bowie, Kiss, Cooper, and Foghat (!) struck me as so perverse when I finally got around to hearing -- or, in some cases, just seeing -- them. And Edgar Winter! Man, that dude looked freaky. Give me the DeFranco Family any day.

In order to deepen my Osmond awareness, I devoured every issue of *Tiger Beat*. I'll never forget the time a distressed girl wrote to the mag about the news she'd heard on the radio: Wayne Osmond had died! The *TB* editors told her not to worry -- it was "Duane Allman" who had died. I'll also never forget the time a magazine ran a photo of the five Osmonds grinning from a swimming pool. Their shirtless torsos were above water; nothing else was visible. Well an angry mother wrote to chastise the magazine for running a

photo of the Osmonds in the nude. It was O.K., the editors assured her: the boys had been wearing trunks.

By the time of their Saturday-morning cartoon and "The Donny & Marie Show," the scales had fallen from my eyes. What geeks! "A *little bit* rock 'n' roll" was right. I took the Osmond posters down from my wall and trashed them without a twinge. I sold their records to Randi Edmonds -- a girl -- for comic-book money.

In the midst of my Osmania, my aunt from Canada gave me the album I originally intended to write about here -- *The Globetrotters* (Kirshner '70). Like the Osmond records, *The Globetrotters* served as the soundtrack to a Saturday-morning cartoon. Unlike the Osmond records, *The Globetrotters* still rocks my world. It's bubblegum, but not the ossified kind that students in real schools still scrape off the bottoms of desks in detention. No, the songs on *The Globetrotters* were hot bubblegum, the kind you step in on summer days in the mall parking lot. Chuck once told me the best parts of it reminded him of '50s novelty rock -- the Coasters and the like. To me the best parts remind me of what Motown, James Brown, and George Clinton would've come up with if they hadn't had to contend with their living-legend status every time they turned around: lots of wild-ass horns, huffin'-n'-gruntin' soul-man vocal ties, street-corner harmonizin', and hollerin'. And that's just the song "Gravy" (which, because of the line "Not brown gravy / but the kind that's green" I used to think was about snot).

Actually, Neil Sedaka and Howard Greenfield wrote most of the songs, including the beach-music doo-wop classic, "Rainy Day Bells." But Ron "Archies" Dante (a.k.a. Ron "Barry Manilow" Dante) wrote the best song, a two-minute-twenty-two-second burst of rip-roaring soul sunburst called "Cheer Me Up."

I've always wondered who did the singing. I mean, I'm pretty sure Meadowlark, Curly, Geese, Gip, and Pabs didn't. It was probably the same guys who did the cartoon voices for those characters, whoever they were.

Seven years ago, I had the chance to find out, but I didn't know I had the chance until the chance had passed. I was teaching a sixth-grade class at the time, and one of the two black pupils -- a boy named Kearney Thomas -- had a father who pastored a local church and who was always bringing in celebrities who'd become evangelists to preach to his faithful. (Kearney once showed me a picture of himself and "Sanford & Son"'s Demond Wilson, the latter in a clerical outfit and not looking too bad for however old he must've been by then.) One day, Kearney came up to me and asked me to guess who had spent the night at his house and who was, in fact, with his dad right now -- Meadowlark Lemon!

Wow! Kearney, is he going to be, you know, like, coming by with your dad to pick you up after school or anything? See, I have this record -- ! "No," he told me, "but he was here with my dad to pick me up yesterday. He's leaving today." Furthermore, it turned out I was practically the only teacher who hadn't seen Meadowlark and Pastor Thomas on campus the day before. "You know who was here yesterday?" everybody from my fellow teachers to the janitor asked me. "Meadowlark Lemon!"

The next year the Thomases moved, and, as far as I know, I haven't come within thousands of miles of Meadowlark or anyone else who might know something about my Globetrotters record since.

WEIRD THINGS I DID AS A CHILD

FRANK KOGAN: When I was little, around age 8 (so not so little) I'd run marble races--I had a marble track, a four-layer circular track with holes in the top three layers to allow the marbles to drop through to the level below. A marble would spin around a layer several times until it hit the hole dead center and dropped to the next level. On the bottom level was a hollow, and the marble that came to rest in this hollow would be the winner of the race. I ran four or five marbles at once down the track, in each race. I'd tally up the number of times a marble got to the hollow, and the first one to win ten races would be the winner of the match. I kept ongoing records of the matches, and had tournaments and runoffs. And I gave the marbles personalities, some of them. Blackie--a solid black marble, a little bit smaller than most, making him faster but also more vulnerable to being pushed out of the bottom hollow and denied a victory--had a spunky personality. Red Stripe was a favorite--I feminized its (her) personality. She won a lot. Then I lost her, somehow; she disappeared. Then I attained a new Red Stripe (someone must have given me a new bag of marbles), and this Red Stripe won a lot also. She had a more expansive character than had the old Red Stripe. She was more full-bodied. The old Red Stripe had had a nick in her; she'd been sweet. One day I found this original Red Stripe, under a radiator. I put her back in the races, but she didn't do as well (compared to the new Red Stripe). I now called her Old Red Stripe, and she was considered a classic, a hall-of-famer, even though she no longer won much.

I wondered why she no longer won. Maybe the newer batch of marbles was better suited to the race track. Maybe her time under the radiator had changed her balance, somehow, making her less able to fall quickly through the holes. Blackie also stopped winning. There were too many big marbles now, from the new bag, and he was always getting pushed out of the winner's hollow. But he too remained beloved. I remember excitement sweeping the crowd the few times that Blackie or Old Red Stripe won some races and so contended in a match. --Well, I remember announcing (I did the play-by-play and the color commentary) that excitement was sweeping the crowd. Since the crowd consisted entirely of me, perhaps "sweeping the crowd" is an inexact metaphor. But I pretended that there was a large crowd and that enthusiasm would sweep through it.

Several years later I'd stopped with marbles. I'd play solitary games where I'd go from being one of the contestants to being another. I called the contestants Pic, Poc, Pook, and Peek. They had personalities too, though I can't really explain them. (I also give numbers personalities; 3 and 7 and 8 and 9 are somehow heavier and more serious than the sprightly 2 and 4; 2 and 4 are boys; 3 is a woman, maybe 7 is too. 8 is a guy, though not at all boyish.) Peek was sleek and Pook was lumbering. Pic was, well, Pic, and Poc was Poc--don't know how to explain them. Pic was the straightforward one, Poc was feisty, like Blackie had been in the days of the marble races, but Poc was more tenacious. I never really gave a damn about Pook. Unlike the marbles, none of these four... entities (what would you call them? constructs?) had a particular physical embodiment. When I wanted to run matches against myself, play some game, shooting hoops or something, I'd become these entities, being Pic when I did the first shot, Poc the second, and so on, keeping a running score of shots and misses. If there were two contestants, I'd just do Pic and Poc; if there were four contestants I'd use all the names. The most interesting game, or the one I remember best, at any rate, was one where I'd throw a tennis ball

against the basketball backboard and if the ball hit the ground in play it scored a point, but if I caught it or if the ball landed outside the boundary, the other player got to serve (somewhat like in volleyball). So the thrower and catcher (i.e., me throwing the ball and me trying to catch it) were opponents! And I gave each thrower his own special windup--so that there'd be a genuine difference among the players, even though I was portraying them all.

One day I was playing this game when something very unusual happened.... Actually, nothing unusual ever happened. But I've just realized that this story doesn't have a point. So, anyway, let's say that one day I was playing this game when something unusual happened--but I've forgotten what it was!

(By the way, there was a two-week period where I played tackle football games between Pic and Poc, and the others. It is possible to tackle oneself. I think I realized, though, that playing tackle football against oneself was simply too foolish. I was eleven years old by then.)

BLINDFOLD TEST

FRANK KOGAN: Participants received the test "blind"; that is, no performers or song titles were listed on the tape. I invited people to write down their first impressions (or early impressions, anyway) or analyses, reactions, daydreams, tangents, memories--whatever. I wasn't hearing the music blind myself, so I tended to add background information, if I thought it might help the reader.

Side A

1. Johnny Rios and the Us 4 "St. Nicolas"

PATTY STIRLING: This is a Hongkong 70's action movie with a fight scene in a disco during Christmas. ★★★★★

CHUCK EDDY: Chimes and jingle bells; I bet there's dogs coming, or Phil Spector girls. Nope -- Oh, I guess this is Yoko Ono. She seems to have a lot of songs about snow and ice -- walking on it when it's thin, getting babies' hands chopped off in it. This sounds like one of her pretty songs (though I bet it's not her), though I don't know if I have any more use for her pretty ones than her ugly ones (which I have no use for at all, usually). I generally prefer Christmas songs without Japanese accents, though the nonwintery surf guitars kind of save this one by the skin of St. Nicholas's teeth, or the hair on his chinny-chin-chin or something. And St. Nicholas is a lot scarier than Santa, being from the Black Forest or Dickensian or unwashed or whatever he is. (Oh wait, it just occurred to me this might be Shonen Knife's Christmas single, which I own but haven't listened to for four years.... But it doesn't sound like them. Heck, I'm not even sure it sounds Japanese, come to think of it.) ★★★½ (Sorry about the ultra-precise rating-calibration; I figure it's necessary, since our tastes are somewhat similar and I'll probably like most of the tape's songs. So I'm just figuring what my Radio On rating would be, and dividing by two.)

DON ALLRED: Best of Dr. Demento Vol. XXIV? It wishes. More like some scuzzband third on the bill to Sic Fucks circa 1983 on "American Dancestand" (Manhattan Cable). But it pees on Xmas, which is O.K. by me. ★

RENÉE CRIST: Saint Nicholas song - kind of like Smokey Robinson in drag singing with Pianosaurus; tinny, like old toys. Borders on the surfy. I like the "Jingle Bells" riff best. ★★½

CHRIS COOK: When the percussion intro came on, I thought this might be one of those early-1900's singles like "Drill Ye Tarriers Drill." Singer sounds like a cross between a 60's soul singer and Roseanne & Tom's nonexistent child. Perhaps garage-Bee-Gees? When the singer sings "luck" at the end of a line, like usual I'm expecting it to rhyme with "fuck," but naturally it's really rhymed with "stuck." Honestly, Frank, Xmas music in July is perhaps the cheapest laugh there is... and HEY, is that a statement about my EPISCO-PALIAN UPBRINGING?? ★★ ★★ ★★ ★★

FRANK KOGAN: A wicked hard-rocking sleigh ride. The little-boy singer (not female and not Japanese, and not a little boy either but a young man in falsetto) sounds blissfully irresponsible as he says "St. Nicolas, St. Nicolas, I think that I've been good/Well, maybe not as good a boy as Mama said I should." Real little-boy words, too ("St. Nicolas, St. Nicolas, I wish you lots of luck/When coming down the chimney, I hope you won't get stuck"). At the end he promises to be good next year if he gets presents this year. (Like Wimpy promising to pay twice on Tuesday for a hamburger today.) Pure acquisitiveness. This is genuine life force and anarchy. ★★ ★★ [Oh, and if you want to convert my Blindfold Test scores to *Radio On's* 0-through-10 scale without having to buy expensive software, simply multiply my Blindfold Test scores by 2 and then add ½. The extra ½ is to give myself more headroom on this test, more room for distinctions among high-scoring songs.]

2. Boney M "Sad Movies" (1981)

RENÉE CRIST: "Sad Movies Always Make Me Cry" - I think this was hiding in a dark recess of my childhood even though I have no idea who sang it. Very "It's My Party" lyrics. Funny how much it sounds like the St. Nick song. My fave is when she says "In the middle of the color cartoon I started to cry." That's kind of like being scared by clowns, or angered by the circus. I wish Debbie Gibson and Tiffany would remake it as a duet. ★★ ★

PATTY STIRLING: Boney M's interpretation of "Tennessee Waltz." ★★ ★★ ★★ ★★ ★★

FRANK KOGAN: This is tinkle music. It's decorative, like a tinkly thing that you hang up on your Christmas tree. (We didn't have a Christmas tree. That's why I say your Christmas tree.) The plot--well, it's also the sort of decorative thing you coexist with (as opposed to being someone's self-expression that you might have to react to): a girl goes to the movie theater; her sweetie and her best friend come in and sit right in front of her--they don't see her in the dark--and then they start kissing.

Boney M are the Gods and maybe the progenitors of flimsy disco. They changed my life, when I started listening to them a couple of years ago. It seems that after years and years of basically listening to punks and sluts, "Search and Destroy" and "Love to Love You Baby," I decided that I also needed to hear light dance versions of the sonic equivalent to "Happy Birthday," "The Farmer in the Dell," "Big Rock Candy Mountain," "Jingle Bells" (a song Boney M has actually recorded), "Red River Valley." It's almost as if they're recording facts rather than songs. I talked about this last time, comparing flimsy disco to prefab knick-knacks and to on-board courtesy magazines. "Sad Movies" isn't a Christmas song, but it has the feeling, like Christmas music (whether old or just written), of stuff that just exists in the cultural landscape. The plot of this song is something you simply pick out of

the air; it doesn't belong specifically to rock 'n' roll or punk rock or any particular social group. Of course, Boney M do a lot of original material, and they'll cover anything from anywhere (Yardbirds, Cole Porter, Wailers, Neil Young, Bobby Hebb, Tommy Roe, the Melodians, Creedence, Beatles, Sam & Dave, Little Willie John)--a repertoire that would do credit to any wedding band. Subject matter ranges from the birth of Jesus to the death of Rasputin to the months of the year (a song whose entire lyrics are "January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December"), happy holidays, pollution, and so forth. But the way they sing, it might as well all be "Farmer in the Dell," it's all in the same clear, weightless chirp, a perfect beauty. (I could say the same thing about Joan Baez's singing yet mean it as an insult, but I adore the sound of Boney M's Liz Mitchell--though I didn't bother to learn her name for years; that the singer was a person, had a personality, seemed irrelevant to me.) --Obviously, any big single, such as "I Want to Hold Your Hand" or "Billie Jean" or "I Will Always Love You," becomes a fact of the world, too. But still, I can't hear even a Muzak version of those songs without in some rudimentary way locating it in "the story of rock" or "Michael's paranoia" or "the fact that Elizabeth hates Whitney Houston"--all things that seem too specific. Whereas "Jingle Bells" isn't really, for me, part of the story of anything. And Boney M--covering the Beatles, covering Cole Porter--feels like "Jingle Bells." I realize that the word *feels* in the previous sentence is as flimsy as this music, but I don't know how to elaborate on it further. ★★ ★★

CHUCK EDDY: Starts out like "Sloop John B" -- Is chantey music almost the same as Poland's shanty music John "Keeshka" Wójtowicz wrote about last time? (And what about Gregorian chantey music?) Oh yeah, of course -- Boney M, "Sad Movies." When I bought Boonoonoonooos, the album this comes from, I thought it was going to have that Raffi song on it that goes "I like to eat eat eat apples and bananas/I like to oot oot oot ooples and boonoonooos." In "Sad Movies," Miss Boney's darling dumps her for her best friend, just like Terri Gibbs' in "Ashes to Ashes." (And by the way, Terri's got another sad bitter Ed Penney song called "That's What Friends Are For," on I'm A Lady from a year before "Ashes to Ashes," with exactly the same plot. But the friend's clearly a she and the lover's clearly a he in that one. And in the last year or so, my friend Chris Cook became a much closer friend to Martina, and Martina's friend Diane Godorov became a much closer friend to me. But neither of us got stolen away from the other.) I think Boney M's quasi-reggae often has the beauty you often talk about in real reggae but I hardly ever hear there, except maybe in a couple tracks on The Harder They Come. ★★ ★★½

DON ALLRED: Kinda boring, phonetically so. Swedish? ¼

CHRIS COOK: Seventies.... Boney M! News of the World starts with "We Will Rock You," miss singer. Does he go down on you in the theaterrrrr? ★★ ★

3. Los Fabulosos Cadillacs "Vos Sin Sentimiento" (1988)

CHRIS COOK: Post-punk reggae? No, it's 90's South American pop. Nice spooky kbd fills... then a solo on it. The sax solo also kinda sounds like a synth. Off-beat ska. ★★½

PATTY STIRLING: Rockeros (Mexican rockers) are like Muslims who kill and die for Allah. ★

CHUCK EDDY: Ramones chords made wobbly, like the Police, but with dub-echoing blackouts. An Eddy-Grant-type vocal, but this isn't him. I'm not really much of a dub fan anymore -- most dub floats too flimsily and shapelessly toward the twilight zone for my ground-grounded ears. I've got Tapper Zukie and Dr. Alimantado albums I listen to sometimes, but I consider them toasting records -- more reliant on jokes, beats, and voices than on technology. (At first "dub" just meant DJs talking over reggae, but eventually it came to mean the seemingly random removal and return of vocals and other nonrhythm instruments, until the music's nothing but a shadow of its original self. Prince Buster suggested the sound with the title of his '60s Jamaican "Ghost Dance," which had burps but no blackouts.) There's a rock aggressiveness to this song, again like the early Police, but my guess is it's a reggae guy trying rock instead of a rock guy trying to reggae. The aggressiveness is in his throat and his guitar -- there's something really wound tight and tense about it. Like "Blank Generation" by Richard Hell. ★★ ★★ ★

FRANK KOGAN: This sounds like white reggae, though I know nothing of the actual racial makeup of the group, which is Argentine. There's the tense sound of someone trying to reach for something that doesn't come naturally. Patty is right to identify them with Mexican rockers, who are of the same emotional set. In this case, it's a plus, the unnatural reaching. What they achieve is the rhythm; what they fail at is a sense of ease with it. So there are holes left in the music, that you might trip and fall into, as you keep pushing and stomping. Ponies wishing they were stallions. Rockers trying to reggae, certainly. ★★ ★★ ★

RENÉE CRIST: The Specials? The Spanish Specials? The Klezmer Specials? This might be off that mighty compilation, 100% Latin Ska--I wouldn't know, cuz I always just play the Knockouts off that record. I like ska when it's in another language; much better for projecting your teen angst onto. I refer to the Specials because the inscrutable yells remind me of "The Man at C & A" when they yell "warning! warning! nuclear attack!" ★★ ★★ ★

DON ALLRED: MTV Awards Postshow w/ sound off. You know, back when "Rock n Roll" was a primordial oatmeal soundtrack for everything else, this was the best way to hear it. Also the best way to watch TV. Tabitha's legs look great in those tall white vinyl boots. White furs. Drag queens on the promo, real kitschy-koo ones. Kennedy with long... [not rated]

4. Guns N' Roses "Down on the Farm" (1993)

DON ALLRED: ...straight rusty hair, kinda flipped up at the ends--glasses of course. Looks kinda like my old SDS babe--I'm gettin' misty--Madonna looks wonderful: long almost-straight hair--pink/platinum--no, pink platinum: it blends, as the eye follows it back over the slight bouffant--it eventually flips, too.... [not rated]

RENÉE CRIST: OOH! A rocker. Très Johnny Rotten. "Down Here On the Farm." I think it's the Dead Kennedys, and I think someone requested this during my radio show but I couldn't find it so I played another DK tune, this one live. They didn't just say 'fuck' at the end, they said 'buttfuck.' During

daytime programming. Does the FCC subscribe to Why Music Sucks? This one says 'fucking' right in the song, though, so nearly just as bad. I especially like the 'baaaaa' at the end. That would have been especially poignant with the 'buttfuck' from the other song. ★★½

CHRIS COOK: L.A. metal.... oh, it's G'n'R "Down on the Farm." Did Mike Clink produce Spag. Incident? The guitars still have the mechanical sound they always had, which is weird as they use Gibsons and Marshalls just like everybody else. I haven't heard the UK Subs. Nice cockney accent ("hah-shet"), but will ANYBODY not know this is G'n'R? ★★

PATTY STIRLING: The grass is always greener, but you have to take the bad with the good in any and every thing that happens in life, don't act like a spoiled white girl. I'm just looking for a direction. ★

FRANK KOGAN: Music you use to kick doors down. Hate the farm, hate the country, hate myself. If someone had never heard hard rock, how would you describe the effect of it? I'm like a fish out of water, down here on the farm. I'm like a fist out of water, down here on the fawn. I'm like a bitch out of hauteur, down here on the charm. I'm like a hitch out of slaughter, down here on the darn. On the skunking alarm. Guns N' Roses performed "Down at the Farm" at Farm Aid's benefit for busted farms, I kid you not. "I know you can take a joke," Axl told the crowd. Axl has no nostalgia for his shit-kicking childhood. Really, there've only been three or four real punk bands since 1980, and this was one of them. ★★½

CHUCK EDDY: Boy, you must have been in a wound-up tight mood when you made this tape. This one starts out squeaky and tense, then starts to kick. Heavy, man. Guns N' Fucking Roses. Did Slash ever listen to no-wave bands? He sure comes up with some crazy noises sometimes. I've never heard the U.K. Subs version; I'd like to buy a compilation by them someday to find out whether they had any other songs this great, but the only song by them I ever remember hearing, "Stranglehold," seemed relatively generic. It's interesting that Axl's best song since GnR Lies has him singing not in his high screech, but in a fake British accent... The accent's got humor in it, but it's also got plenty of Johnny-Rotten-style bite. He says he's "drinking lemonade shanties," whatever those are, so maybe this is shanty music. And Sherman loves the sheep baa-ing at the end. Some people took this song literally, like it was about a mental institution, but I've always felt it was about being stuck in the suburbs or boondocks or somewhere -- a bored teenager song. But I'm no teenager, and one morning a couple months ago I was feeling some intense cabin fever so I drank a beer with lunch then angled my speakers toward the window and blasted Appetite and "Get In the Ring" and this at my neighbors. (That's a real rarity. I usually keep my volume lower than most of my neighbors do. Martina listens to music louder than I do, too. But that day, I didn't feel like being just Charlie, who everybody here knows me as -- I felt like introducing them to Chuck Eddy.) I guess he who lives by the suburbs will die by the suburbs -- I feel just like a vegetable down here on the farm. But really, the fact that I feel cooped-up is more me and my head's fault than my neighbors' or neighborhood's fault. It's not like I'd feel different somewhere else. There are people on my block whose outgoingness and ability to interact socially with the world I envy -- including Martina, in my own house. ★★½

5. Cannanes "Woe" (1988)

FRANK KOGAN: This is a woe-filled song. So woe-filled it makes me want to cry, of woe. A feeling descends over me. The feeling is woe. No more ankles and no more toes. Just woes. And more woe. Here's to you Mrs. Robinson, Jesus loves you more than you will know. Woe woe woe. Woe woe woe. Woe woe woe. Woe woe woe. Woe woe woe. Woe woe woe.

This has cake-and-eat-it-too-type singing, which is to say that his voice is so extravagantly mannered as to seem to be a parody of woe rather than any real expression of it, and the abstractness of the words adds to this effect (as if he'd entitled the song "Gloomy Ballad Product")--yet the performance does feel woe-filled, the guy does deliver the emotion, maybe more effectively, because more extravagantly, than if he'd straightforwardly tried to mean it. Maybe this is because of the way the voice mixes with the odd, simplistic accompaniment. The lone trumpet sounds as desolate as a prairie harmonica. Reminds me of similar ragged trumpet notes the Kinks used years ago on "Dead End Street"--this is an achievement, to make a trumpet slur and whimper, and ends up very haunting--everything, the exaggeration, the parody, the slur. The band is from Australia. That's all I know about them. Well, no. As a matter of fact I know them. I know the drummer, anyway, Patty's friend David Nichols, who writes advice columns for teenagers in Australian teen magazines and used to edit Australian *Smash Hits*' letters column. I met the rest of the band when they were staying over at Patty's: Eric Weisbard and I tried to explain American talk shows to them. The Woe guy, Randall, wasn't there--he was no longer in the group. ★★★

CHRIS COOK: Leather Nun? Somebody Teutonic or Scandinavian; mid-80's passable post-Joy-Division pop. Swans? Peter Schilling? ★★

CHUCK EDDY: Melodrama voice. A whine, "pretentious," but maybe still a decent instrument -- this reminds me of the guy who used to sing for Virgin Prunes (who I can never remember anything about except how their singer sounded, so he must've been rather distinctive, if nothing else). This is like droniness set to music, with little horn-thingies in it. I like how the singer rhymes all those long-"O" words, like MX-80 Sound used to: "doe doe doe doe Doe Boy Joe" (theme song of the Pillsbury Doughboy toy sitting atop my stereo shelf). There's a sadness to this music that has more to do with the melody than with his voice or words, which almost seem like an intentional parody of "woe" or something. As songs with snow in them go, I definitely prefer this to the Christmas carol you started the tape with. I also like the screwy little Eno guitar circles at the end. ★★★★★

RENÉE CRIST: Lo-fi New Zealandy droner which I don't recognize. I can't even understand the words. Is that a trumpet playing backing melodies? Sounds good, whatever it is. ★★★★★

PATTY STIRLING: Angelic Randall is very blond, with curly hair and big blue eyes. ★★★★★

DON ALLRED: ...She's still got that sufficiently Etruscan profile--but the overall effect is kinda teardrop fishtail tadpole spermatazette a wonderful lure to distract the salmon or trout or whatever from spawning or swimming up Niagara Falls--obviously against nature.... [not rated]

6. Cruel, Cruel Moon "1000 Different Ways" (1995)

PATTY STIRLING: New Zealand had the saddest guitars, as if they had no hope at all and had to find that pretty. ★★

DON ALLRED: ...Michael's lunging out of the limo at somebody. Lunge-ing? Is that how you spell it? Don't think so but on the other hand I don't mean he's hocking a greeny. Silly! He's too rich to need to hock anything! But he might do it just for fun, might'n he? Why isn't the contraction for might not "might't"? Just because it looks stupid? That's no excuse in English. [not rated]

RENÉE CRIST: Something about the spare moodiness and pretentious singer reminds me of the Dream Syndicate. My guess is that the title is "Chip Away." Suddenly I'm struck by critangst--what if I should know this song and don't? What if all the blindfold tests are only a means of getting at my psychosis and I'm being tricked into writing about these Rorschach songs and all the other writers are in on it but me and I'm sending it to Frank but he's in cahoots with a shrink and soon there will be an intervention? Spare moody guitar rock sometimes makes me paranoid. ★★ ★★

CHRIS COOK: 80's indie rock, a dirgey "About a Girl." Very familiar - I don't know if I've heard it, or if it's just the well-worn style. Singer's kinda like Tommy Tutone. Mission of Burma? ★★½

CHUCK EDDY: More drone, but this seems more average than the last couple. Gets slow and quiet... If I'd heard it on college radio, I doubt I'd even notice this, but this is a Kogan tape, so I notice ozone high notes, and the wallop with which the guitars are twanged. I remember you saying you'd tape some lousy songs this time, and this almost qualifies but not quite. ★★½

FRANK KOGAN: I put this here because the "ozone" harmonies seemed an extension of the lonesome prairie trumpet in "Woe." But this is a guitar that's not going to sit still for woe, no. The voices, ethereal and unhappy and filled with... how shall I say this?... filled with a lack of nonwoe. Reaching above the guitars like little tendrils of... woe. Sorrow is such beautiful sorrow. But the guitar isn't going to sit still. There are a thousand different ways it'll chip away.

Patty picked these people as being from New Zealand, which makes sense, because both New Zealand and northern Ohio are immersed in the Velvet Underground tradition of mood strumming. I think the wallop in the guitar is pure Ohio. Northern Ohio has always been the most virulent part of the Velvet diaspora--bloody destruction and raging ugly party hijinks put to music. This band is from the Cleveland-Kent-Akron axis and that's all I know about them. Well, no, as a matter of fact I know Tim Gilbride, their guitarist, who played on the exciting version of "Scene of the Crime" I put on my and Leslie's *England's Newest Hit Makers* cassette. The group's vocals, though, sound homespun, like these are nice people too afraid to go and recruit some bigheaded asshole to front the band. This niceness is what makes them sound New Zealand. ★★ ★★

7. Tricky "Strugglin'" (1995)

PATTY STIRLING: Destroy the TV and all computers. I hate life like this. 0

RENÉE CRIST: Bagpipe guitar and a muttering deep-voiced vocalist from some Brit colony or other--so trip-hoppy it's dub. Have you seen my crack pipe? I like the chick vocals, very Portishead. He keeps muttering about Australia. She echoes what he mumbles with a whine. Gets tiresome. I think they might be using drugs. ★★

CHRIS COOK: He mumbles like Bono. Reminds me of Negativland or the intro to Primus' Seas of Cheese. Sounds like a gun being cocked and boat noises. I'd say Sugarcubes, but this lady is NOT Bjork. Imitation Sugarcubes. The horn charts (monotone synths?) remind me of the Pink Panther cartoon's incidental music. 80's Euroart - Mitsouko? Neubauten? ★★★

CHUCK EDDY: The beginning reminds me of "Sentimental Journey" on Pere Ubu's The Modern Dance where a drunkard's walking along a River Cuyahoga pier, picking up bottles, smashing them against the dock, knocking over garbage cans, and lighting up a joint or blowing his nose, then a storm blows in and he starts babbling incoherently, then he starts breaking stuff again and turning pool tables over and the balls are tumbling down, but how could he do that? Everybody knows there're no pool tables outside by the river... And the guitar here starts like "Smokin' in the Boys' Room," so maybe this is gonna be about substance abuse. But I don't like the way the guy's whispering; sounds "ominous" not because he's a scary person (what I bet he wants me to think) but because it's a highly disturbing omen that the song's about to suck. And sure enough, now he's loading up his gun (you can hear him fiddling with its chamber) and he's gonna shoot himself.

What is this, a fucking sound-effect record?... This is fucking sick. Fuck you, Frank. Just fuck you.... No, this one's obviously a ringer, your worst song yet. But again, the context makes it slightly palatable for me -- the girl does sing a little bit pretty. I bet it's one of Elizabeth's Swans or Nine Inch Nails records. On a Swans or Nine Inch Nails record I'd probably hate it, but here I can at least sit through it once, even though it is just a big mess. "Label me insane," oh is that right, lady? Oh god, fuck this shit.... "Ominous." "Scary." It wouldn't be so horrible if it was short, like a minute long maybe.

I've certainly heard much funnier industrial stuff, like "Warm Leatherette" by the Normal and (especially) "Life Is Life" by Laibach. But really, industrial bands' talent (inasmuch as any of them have one) is for making pretty background music, not frightening dance music. For the most part, I'd say this fails at being frightening and sort of halfway succeeds at being pretty. I mean, if I'd heard it on an Enigma album, I might well think it was really weird and beautiful. When you've been a rock critic as long as I have you can justify any old piece of dogshit, see? But I seriously doubt this is Enigma, and I think it's really stupid how the idiot keeps playing with his pistol; once or twice would've gotten the "point" (as if there is one) across. And man, Frank, you wasted way too much space on the tape with this thing.... Hey, I just had a brainstorm. Maybe it's one of those unlistenable songs you told me about once from some old Alternative TV album! The guy seems to have a British accent, so I don't think he could be Trent Reznor or Michael Gira, and he even kind of sounds like Mark P.... Does this ever end, Frank?? What was this, your shit-shower-and-shave-break song, like when '60s FM underground-rock DJ's used to put on the long version of "Inna Gadda Da Vida" then leave the studio? So why

didn't you just put on "Inna Gadda Da Vida" instead? It sure would've beat this.... Basically, I'd give it three-and-three-quarters stars for its first thirty seconds or so, which I might use to fill space at the end of some tape I make for myself someday, and one-and-a-half for the rest. Which works out to a per-second average of, oh, let's say ★★.

FRANK KOGAN: Here's a song that brings back that rubber duck feeling, if it's a rubber duck that's been dumped in the scum-filled river and forced to float on helplessly, fog and foghorns and who knows what else, wandering sounds emanating from riverfront bars, disreputable characters stumbling out from the pages of one of Luc's books. Clicks, horns, scratches, and voices. The foghorn seems a cousin to the lonesome trumpet howl in "Woe," so this track is here to extend the mood. As for the song's length, it doesn't bother me. I tend to absorb music while daydreaming or dancing or chattering, so I don't really pay attention to whether a song is developing or just repeating itself. And I don't usually latch onto music that you have to pay attention to or follow closely, like classical or jazz. (Bob Dylan: "But jazz is hard to follow; I mean you actually have to like jazz to follow it; and my motto is, never follow anything.") So I never even noticed, when putting this test together, that the song just goes on forever while never actually going anywhere. I simply remarked to myself how interesting this was, that there could be such a compelling rhythm made out of clicks and stumbles. (Reminded me, too, of "Sentimental Journey"--Chuck and I are just so sentimental, and we think alike. "Sentimental Journey" was a strange mood piece that always seemed like some moaning geezer shuffling along the Cleveland flats, amidst breaking beer bottles. In my mind I set "Strugglin'" in the same imaginary Cleveland.) I'd have rated this song higher if I'd rated it on first hearing, like everyone else had to do. But while listening to this 10 or 12 times during the dubbing process I got truly sick of the vocals, especially the guy's. He's so full of himself. "They label me insane. But I'm not insane." He sounds self-satisfied, like this is an achievement. I mean, who cares? I think the thing to do is to just treat him like a foreground geezer and listen around him. ★★★

DON ALLRED: Hey, this is from that tape of Maxinquaye I sent you! Wow, pretty good for a second generation dub! Did you buy the CD? That bass sax is like the one in Morphine. I like them except the singer's started sounding like Michael Hutchence in INXS. Damn, I thought that guy's influence was finally dormant til the 80's revival, but maybe this is that--or rather Morphine is; the good ol' Downtown early 80's anyway. Maybe that means their singer will O.D. or his nose will permanently freeze up and he'll sound more like Tom Verlaine--why aren't I writing about Tricky?? This is a good track but a little too I'm-so-cute to stop and shift gears for--so maybe he's tainted by passing... ★★★

8. Dion "Sandy" (1963)

DON ALLRED: ... thru the INXS 80's, too. (Shooboo Shooboo wasn't bad, tho'; kinda Morphine-ish actually. I'm sure the Jazz Police out there would have an attack over it, tho'--not to mention early Hunters and Collectors. Check some of that out, but check Tricky first: CD flow carries the less appealing tracks along, like this tape could.) [not rated]

CHRIS COOK: 50's American pop. Decent, very typical, but I'm no enemy to the golden-oldies format once in a while. OO-ee-oo, it sounds just like Buddy Holly. ★★

PATTY STIRLING: Africa is such a wonderful place. You just say it, and it's out there; like an R. Crumb cartoon. ★★

RENÉE CRIST: "Sandy" - some Generation Anka Sedaka dan-dan-de-diddy-diddy crooner. Rips off "Teenager In Love." To think this stuff was made after people heard Elvis. But it sounds good after those crazy people. I almost got picked off at first; I'm back on base. ★★½

CHUCK EDDY: He's got a girly-man voice like those post-Smiths British guitar bands Rob Sheffield likes so much.... But this is doo-wop. Or actually, I think it might be a doo-wop tribute which I might've heard in Grease on TV a few weeks ago. Whether it's the actual animal or not, this is certainly as wild and crazed as any of the real stuff, by which I mean early-'60s Italian Dion-style stuff (in fact, come to think of it, this might even be Dion). The wop voices bop and wop-wop-wop and scat and Morse-code and piano-ize all over the Bronx street corner, and the attitude toward girls is love 'em and leave 'em. If he said "I'll find a guy who's always handy," maybe he is a girly-man. But if he said "You'll find a guy who's always handy," maybe he's impotent (which makes this an answer song to "Stutter" by Elastica), or just unskilled at installing ceiling fans. I can relate (to the latter, dummy). ★★½

FRANK KOGAN: Early Dion (with the Belmonts) was at ease with himself and the joy of bouncing syllables. Now, though, in 1963, ease has left, and he's forcing the joy of syllables with more anxiety than joy. The dom dit-a-dit-dit, dom dit-a-dit-dit syllables are tumbling over each other, sometimes trip up and the rhythm misses. Ed Ward prefers the first phase, Charlie Gillett the second. I don't know if I'd make a choice, but the second period has more of an impact on me, maybe because it's rougher, more pushy. Rock 'n' roll was Dion's natural language, but by 1963 it seemed as foreign to him as it did to all the Brit bands who were trying to master it--who were trying with great energy and excitement to master it. So on Dion's post-Belmonts stuff he dived into the nonsense syllables not as a natural thing but as a desperate, daring gamble. You can feel something like hard rock ready to happen in this song--though in several months, when rock came along, it pushed people like Dion aside.

Another thing that startles me is the blatant way the lyrics contradict themselves. "... found out she's no good"--his eyes have been opened. "I left her, didn't even warn her"--celebration, he's free, the glorious dance of being no longer in love/enslaved. "But I'd crawl back if I could"--which turns the song right around itself, as drastic a reversal as you'd ever get from the Kinks or the Stones. What a strange line, "I'd crawl back if I could"!--why can't he? I almost fancy that it's social pressure, or the need to maintain his image, that prevents him. So he's doubly imprisoned, by his love for no-good two-timing Sandy, and by whatever it is, whatever barriers or codes of conduct that prevent him from going back to her. ★★½

9. John Conlee "She Can't Say That Anymore" (1980)

RENÉE CRIST: The Seventies. Who was this Merle Haggard wannabe? Best line: "Then he got up and locked that cheatin' door." "She Can't Say That

Anymore." I'm all over this don't-cheat bad-girl night-the-lights-went-out-in-Georgia panicky string attack and backup posse. ★★★½

PATTY STIRLING: My brother had to bring my dad with him to an AA meeting tonight, as required by law, as a character improvement witness. My brother was extremely stressed, but less so upon their return. The roles of the dependents of alcoholics had been discussed at the meeting. I didn't get caught up in the name game ("hero," "scapegoat," "loner," "clown") because it was too similar to my mom's New Age people labelling games ("warrior," "artisan," "servant," "king," etc.). It doesn't change anything. The only time I'm not at risk to get in trouble is while sleeping, but I can't even sleep anymore. If I can figure out how to trick myself into falling asleep, then I'll act better when I'm awake. But if I sleep, I won't get tired enough to go to sleep. 0

CHUCK EDDY: John Conlee. The girls behind him make bubbly little "je-suis" chants, like in Francky "Dr. Porn" Vincent's French Antillean zouk music. The production is real sparse and symphonic and icy, like it learned the same lessons from disco that Terri Gibbs' "Ashes to Ashes" did. Conlee was a Merle Haggard imitator with a tired-old-man-with-a-mouth-full-of-cottonballs voice; he worked for six years as a mortician before first moving to Nashville, and you can tell. He has a few good country hits far less eccentric than this one about feeling tired and old ("Friday Night Blues," "Backside of Thirty," "Miss Emily's Picture"), and one about going nuts and playing with crayons ("I Don't Remember Loving You"). Anyway, this song here wasn't one of the reason I hung onto my copy of his Greatest Hits album when I drastically pruned down my record collection a few years back, but it was definitely the one that jumped out at me when I finally listened to the album for the first time in ten years this spring. John's talking about a wife getting revenge against her husband's philandering by finally deciding to cheat on him herself. She's jumping fences but she's still not breaking free, and John sounds just plain spooky. ★★★★★

CHRIS COOK: 80's country music. Sounds like John Anderson's dad. I'm not very country-knowledgeable... like the above, this is uninspiring but okay. Still waiting for something really offensively bad. ★★

DON ALLRED: This sounds kinda like Merle Haggard if he got injected with just the right drugs, the ones that mid-70's Lou Reed claimed "don't getcha high, they just getcha normal." Sure Lou. Well I guess it's kind of worked for him. And for this guy. Sounds O.K., 2 stars, but it's kind of an anecdote. Will I like it "when" I listen again? ★★

FRANK KOGAN: I agree with Chuck that this is the same reverb-filled discofied country that Terri Gibbs did on the last tape. Did John Anderson or Merle Haggard ever learn anything from disco? I don't know their careers all that well. But I'd be surprised if they did, if they ever got disco's sense of symphonic spaciness. The lyrics have a space in them too, something left unsaid; but I think Chuck is reading too much into them when he says that the "she" in this song is retaliating for her husband's philandering. It's all less motivated than that. She's just sleeping around, and her husband's treating it like the great betrayal. The words are effective because so much is left out. She said she was staying late at Mom's. She said "I've never lied to you" (but she can't say that anymore). She jumped the fences but she didn't quite get free. She's breaking in a new routine for the man who walks the floor. (He's probably merely pacing, but I like that the song has him walking the floor.

Like walking the plank. Like the floorboards disintegrate. Like his underpin-
nings give way.) The reverb does it. What mystery and tragedy is suggested by
an echo effect! (This also reminds me of Tom Verlaine's guitar playing on
Television's "The Fire," which was similarly icy and architectural.) ★★ ★★

10. Stanley Holloway "Anne Boleyn" (1934)

CHUCK EDDY: This isn't the Kingston Trio; this is Cockney music-hall
comedian Stanley Holloway's version. I haven't played them back-to-back, but
I suspect that this one isn't as good -- it's kinda too long and slow, though I
suppose slowness is an appropriate pace for beheaded ghosts walking up bloody
staircases. This was the only track I made it through on the Stanley Holloway
LP I found for 50¢ at Salvation Army. I like how he pronounces "tucked" as
"tooked" and makes wind noises with his mouth. And how does one "queer the
dew," anyway? Still, this doesn't run amuck like his My Fair Lady numbers
some 30-some years later; as a kid I thought "Get Me To The Church On
Time" and "With a Little Bit Of Luck" on my parents' copy blew away Julie
Andrews and Rex Harrison, and I still do: "They're always throwing goodness
at you/But with a little bit of luck a man can duck." ★★ ★★

FRANK KOGAN: Here's a song that reaches us courtesy of time warp. The
man's voice is like old leather, cracked but still flexible. The words sound well-
chewed. "It's awfully awkward for the queen to have to blow her nose, with her
head tucked underneath her arm." (Anne Boleyn was Henry VIII's second
wife, the one he gave up Catholicism to marry; but she didn't produce a male
heir, and he had her executed for treason--there was probably more to it than
that, but I forget. In this song her ghost causes great confusion by showing up
at any time and occasion. At one point her head is mistaken for a football, and
she for one of the players.) The false live effect here is produced by the
scratchy record and the insufficiently erased tape (another triumph for the
Chuck Eddy taping system). You mistake the background scratches for a
bunch of louts getting slowly plastered, chattering and half-listening, clinking
and chuckling.

Anne's not queering the dew, she's queering the do, i.e., spoiling the
party. But this reminds me of the Tom Lehrer song where a girl kills everyone
in her family, e.g., "One morning in a fit of pique/she drowned her father in
the creek/the water tasted bad for a week/and we had to make do with gin"--
except at age nine I didn't know the idiomatic expression make do, meaning to
get along or manage, so I thought the song went "We had to make dew with
gin"; a great concept, people getting up in the morning and pouring gin on the
leaves of grass. So that's how you queer the dew: with gin! ★★ ★★

DON ALLRED: This isn't Lord Buckley, Ivor Cutler, George Formby, Al
Bowley, Archie Rice, or an alumnus of the Goon Show, is it? The steadiness
and drunkenness (dry-throated) and repetitiveness do have a kind of pre-rock
effect. 2 stars, nah 1½ (see doubts expressed at end of A-9). ★½

RENÉE CRIST: Oh Jesus this is amazing. A scary ballad about the ghost of
Anne Boleyn "She's going to tell him off for having spilt her gore." "She holds
her head up with a wild war whoop/and Henry cries 'Don't drop it in the
soup!'" Genius. Scary piano accompaniment, creaky Brit Isles rolled-r singer.
A telling indictment of the origins of Protestantism. Ab fab. ★★ ★★

CHRIS COOK: Is this Kurt-Weill-related? Maybe Martina Eddy would know, but I grew up on Quiet Riot and Slayer. Wait a minute... BACKGROUND NOISE! THAT'S A CHUCK EDDY TAPE! If there were a prize involved here, I'd call him presently for ascertainment of identity... anyway, it's 1920's or 30's musical stuff sung by an old drunk Cockney bastard. ★★½

PATTY STIRLING: My grandmother had old Scottish vaudeville 78 rpm records, which didn't belong to her. They belonged to her husband. She had no interest, really; she had no right to pretend that they were hers. She was German, fat, stinky, and mean. He must have been an idiot. ★★

11. Gillette "Mr. Personality" (1994)

FRANK KOGAN: Yeah, so's your mother. You're ugly too, you loudmouth. Damn, listening to this song is like getting pummeled, with just no let up. "You're so ugly I heard that when you were born the doctor slapped your mama." I hadn't heard that one before, though I've been assured that it was old when my grandma was young. A lot of energy. Okay, it's energy. You're right, I give up. Shut up! ★★

CHRIS COOK: Gillette, "Mr. Personality" - "Tainted Love" kbd, Toni Basil drums, Beastie-Jett vocals. Lame, completely amateur insults... like Adam Sandler, it's her own amusement at her idiotic jokes that's funny. Like Chuck pointed out, she rhymes "something" with "something." ★★

PATTY STIRLING: Africa is the greatest place. They lay it right out and enjoy it no matter what it is. Just laugh and dance (the bad with the good). ★★

DON ALLRED: "They call you Mr. Personality because you're so ug-ly, ha-ha," laughing at her own joke, "You asked my grandmother if she wanted help with her bags, I never saw an old lady run so fast," that's funny but all this second-string new wave stuff leaves me--not cold, but luke, now. Kinda para-early-hiphop tho', huh? Not unlike some of the O.K. entries in the George Clinton Family series on AEM. ★★½ (Yeah I know it's significant it's a female [presumably] turning around the old "she's got a lovely personality...") (Real proto-riot grrrrl.)

RENÉE CRIST: Whoa - "Tainted Love" riff interrupted by mean chick Beastie Boys. "They call you Mr. Personality because you're so ugly." It's like Tigra and Bunny grew up and got real mad. But the insults are all kind of tired. ★★

CHUCK EDDY: Well, it starts out like Soft Cell's "Tainted Love".... It's "Mr. Personality" by Gillette, my single of the year so far, off my probable album of the year. I love how she laughs so many different ways at all her own jokes, and they're such lame hackneyed jokes but she's so proud of them. I love how she says "witcha," like she's pulling gum out of her big Brooklyn hair (though she's really from suburban Chicago) and cracking it while she's talking. I love how her voice in the "they can't fall asleep 'cause you're a walking nightmare" part echoes like a mid-'60s Halloween novelty record, like "Monster Mash" or something. And speaking of which, I love how she ends two straight lines with "or something," which is how people really talk or something.... But you know,

I have coke-bottle glasses just like the guy Gillette's throwing insults at, and I never considered myself ugly. Maybe I should start, huh? ★★½

12. The Kingston Trio "Coplas Revisited" (1962)

CHUCK EDDY: Kingston Trio, "Coplas Revisited" -- Am I good, or what? As I think you already told everybody last time, their live albums were always less serious and more ethno-rhythmically boppy and therefore better than their studio ones, and they are almost the only artists in the history of the world you can say that about. (Jackson Browne's and U2's best albums -- Running on Empty and Under a Blood Red Sky -- were live as well, but they cheated by only including new songs and limiting themselves to an EP, respectively. And you mentioned Tom Lehrer and the Limelites, but I've never heard a live album by Lehrer or studio album by the Limelites, so I can't vouch for them.) "Coplas Revisited" was sort of the roots of "Wooly Bully," especially its "eins, zwei, drei (sp?), quatro" intro. (Maybe it was the roots of "Eins, Zwei, Polizei" too, come to think of it.) Funny pig squeals, and funny jokes about drunk driving and decaffeinated coffee and gay rancheros, but otherwise I don't understand the words. That poosy gato, he is loco in the cabeza. ★★½

DON ALLRED: Kingston Trio. Lots of marijuana undertones to whole thing, or just tequila? Better vocalese than Cheech and Chong could manage, anyway. ★½--nah, ★★.

RENÉE CRIST: "Coplas" - Trad Mexican guitar number interrupted by would-be Smothers smut-lite one-liners. Bizarre, but they're a little too good at the music to make me laugh at the interruptions. So variety show. ★

PATTY STIRLING: A travelogue of the Kingston Trio from their Mexican holiday, and the song sounds Spanish, not Mexican, out of support of the communists during the revolution, because the Kingston Trio were such folkies. ★★

CHRIS COOK: Lenny Bruce? Somebody with stage patter. More old jokes. It can't be the Smothers Brothers, as they don't call each other "Tom" or "Dick." It's in that vein, though. Don't wanna seem hostile to the S.B. style, but... ★½

FRANK KOGAN: Okay, this rocks (right to the top of the controversy list). It's sassy. He (Nick Reynolds, I think) is obnoxious when he explains that they won't translate the lyrics literally since the original words are "naughty"--I feel that he's gotten one up on me, somehow, the way he says *naughty* with such pretend delicacy. Okay, so the jokes are stupid (not to mention homophobic, not to mention ethnically derogatory)--I like "On my wedding night I did not sleep a wink--so I changed to Sanka." I'd never heard that one, though it was probably old when Sanka was young. But I disagree about the jokes interrupting the music. The music never stops for me, and the energy of the joking and the noisemaking and yucking-it-up are ongoing; the homophobia/stereotyping does make me uneasy, not because I'm shocked that such things existed so casually 34 years ago--this isn't news--but because the quasiminstrel yucking-it-up seems necessary to let loose the Trio's energy. I don't mean *minstrelsy* as an automatically derogatory term. I really haven't heard much minstrelsy, except for Al Jolson, but it wasn't always done by whites or for whites, wasn't always clowning, wasn't always negative stereotyping; and I think

that for many of its practitioners it was a way of unleashing energy that would have stayed tied-up otherwise, just like rock 'n' roll was--later--for a lot of people. But in the Kingston Trio's case I do get the sense that to them the Mexicans are dirty and wanton, and that the Trio gets its kicks play acting at this. And they really rock in doing so. ★★ ★★ ★★ ★★

13. Johnny Rios and the Us 4 "El Pito"

DON ALLRED: Alright! Like something off the original Nuggets, if that had East L.A. bands, or is this just a frat band circa "My name is Jose Jiminez"? Not bad tho'. 2½--nah, 3 for the beginning, even if it does start sounding a little too shticky. ★★ ★★

PATTY STIRLING: Mexican -- nothing else. Rock'n'roll, nothing else like Mexican. It was American roots. The new rockero basura is from something totally else, like via some huge world music network, all squeezed out and filtered or something. ★★ ★★ ★★ ★★

RENÉE CRIST: "I'll Never Go Back to Georgia" - This sounds like I remember go-go scenes from television when I was little. Like girls are wriggling around and the boys all have facial hair and vests. With a kind of conga rhythm, like an Elvis movie. ★★ ★★ ★★ ★★

CHRIS COOK: Some rocking 60's Latinos... hard and murky garage, bass-heavy like some of the Stones' singles. ★★ ★★ ★★ ★★

CHUCK EDDY: Starts out like every other salsa song you ever heard, but it's not -- it's Joe Cuba, "I'll Never Go Back to Georgia," which was classified at the time as "Latin bugalu" music, which sort of split the difference between salsa and the most drunken double-shot-of-my-baby's-love garage rock -- you can hear tons of stomping Hispanic fratboys having a "hey hey hey" party in the background. This is apparently a live rendition, with psychedelic monster guitar added in, and hard for me to believe but it's even more furious than the version I already own! Which, by the way, I first heard in the movie Crooklyn last year -- in a scene where Rupaul (or some Rupaul lookalike) was dancing around in a convenience store. And David Sanborn had a VH-1 hit with a cover of Cuba's "Bang Bang" a couple of years ago, too. I'd put the studio version in my all-time Top 100 and give it five stars easy, and though this live mix seems to sacrifice a smidgen of erotic fluidity it also makes more noise, so by rights I should be able to give it more than five stars. My four-year-old son Sherman begs me to play this song -- he's the only one in our family who can duplicate the timing of the whistle parts. The thrift-store-purchased LP I've got it on, We Must Be Doing Something Right!, has "To Jan All My Love Joe Cuba" scrawled in ink on its cover, but I don't know if it's his real autograph or not. If it is, Joe had some screwy sense of humor, because also on the cover somebody has followed the words "Joe Cuba Sextet" with the inked words "New Wave Band," and beneath the great band picture where all six guys look totally dapper in turquoise smoking jackets and scarves and holding long cigarette holders, the same person has inked in "We're pissers." Anybody else, I'd say no way, but Joe's music makes me think that really could be his writing. ★★ ★★ ★★ ★★ ★★

FRANK KOGAN: I bought this album for a dollar about eight years ago, played the first side, thought it was too ratty--I'd never heard of them, and it

was obviously a cheapie record, maybe homemade (the front and the back cover don't even agree on whether you spell the name *Boog-a-loos* or *Bugaloos*), so how could it be any good?--and put it away until last summer. I mean, this was obviously intended to be sold at gigs. And what sort of gigs? Dances, parties, weddings? It's got a prayer on it, that they sing! Anyway, now I've listened again and I think the album is one of the best I own. This song makes the truly energetic ones on this test (Guns N' Roses, Gillette) seem worked-at and weary in comparison. Few groups have ever been able to do this, rock hard while swinging easy. I'm guessing that the group is Chicano (rather than NY Puerto Rican or Cuban-American, despite those people being the originators of bugalu), because there just seems something Los Angeles about the garage surf guitar. Assuming that they are from there, L.A. doesn't seem to have proved too much for the man--in any event, as he says quite emphatically, HE'LL NEVER GO BACK TO GEORGIA. (I wonder how the phrase *garage surf guitar* reads for someone who doesn't know a lot of rock criticism. Most people have no idea what we're talking about usually. Imagine someone's grandparents trying to figure out what "garage surf" is [oil slick?] and just how a guitar would embody it. Would they think I was reaching for some surrealistic, evocative description--like, the music has an acrid, polluted force to it, as if it had seeped from car engines and was now splashing against garage walls?) ★★★★★

14. [Ibiza] "El Cuantre"

PATTY STIRLING: French comedians doing imitations of Native Americans. ★★

DON ALLRED: Pat Paulsen goofing on John Cage? Somebody on ESP-Disk? Sanctified Porky Pig--cool syllabulbs. ★★

CHRIS COOK: Señor Wences? No, something Mid-Eastern... or Asian. I guess I'm a horrible American brat, as I find this quite funny. I'll feel pretty bad if it turns out to be about some poor Himalayan shepherd whose family died in an avalanche. If it was any longer, this grade would be markedly lower. Great drumming. ★★

CHUCK EDDY: Sort of familiar, like I heard a not-as-weird version of the same song in some movie about American Indians I was half-watching on TV while paying more attention to the newspaper I was reading once. Their voices echo like in dub, except without any of dub's technology, and at the end of every single line. Ridiculous. Linus's fifth-grade teacher last year not only wouldn't let the kids say "Indians"; they had to say "Native American groups" instead of "tribes," because "tribes" has supposedly been deemed a derogatory pejorative with unfair connotations of savagery. So... Don't miss the reservation sale on tennis shoes, Tuesday only behind the big teepee. ★★½

RENÉE CRIST: A crisp yodely duet with drum between a man and woman of possibly Indian or Middle Eastern origin. I feel confident that they will mate. ★★

FRANK KOGAN: I got this song off an anthology of Spanish folk music--a library copy with its booklet missing, the label listing place and song title but not the performer. Ibiza is a Mediterranean island whose indigenous music is

disco, I think--it's home to a bizarre comic-dance combo called Loco Mia, and it's famous for tourists who come to revel and dance and get down. This cut, however, seems to come from primordial cave dwellers--I'm not sure that I can distinguish this as music; it seems more like a rhythmic throat-clearing contest. A guy hacks out his vocals, a woman answers with rattling, mirthless laughter, the kind of laugh you give when you've just been diagnosed with throat cancer. In rhythm, of course. ★★★

15. Bronco "Grande de Caderas"

RENÉE CRIST: This is a rhumba? Some kind of thing you could lambada to if you were at your parents' party, and Patrick Swayze would come by and dance with you, only he'd be in drag like in Wong Foo. Faboo organ. ★★★★½

DON ALLRED: Forro? Kinda that same almost-Cajun-ranchero-reggae feel. Nice! ★★★ (This is the last one on Side A. Sorry for not writing more about Tricky. I've got some heavy stuff to lay on y'all about him sometime.)

CHUCK EDDY: More Latin. I know this one, let's see now, how long will it take before I figure out what it is? Is this Eddie Palmieri's version of that Caifanes song again, "La Negra Tomasa"? I don't think so. I can never tell, because the last time you taped it for me, it didn't even sound to me like the same song. I like when he whistles at that Latina lady passing outside the window of the recording studio, though. I guess I agree Eddie's rhythm has more poly in it than Caifanes's does, but I still think Caifanes sing prettier. But I'm still not even sure that's what this is... Either way, it stands on its own. The rhythm is sort of a tango, though that's probably not what Eddie (or whoever) would call it. The beat strolls to the end of the floor then turns around and comes home and wraps its legs around your thighs and tickles your loins with its spicy toes, turning a hot foot into great balls of fire. ★★★★½

FRANK KOGAN: Loping music, heavy-set music--the song feels heavy-set, though I don't know if the musicians are. The song lopes along, and then occasionally pauses mid-stride to open its mouth and whistle at passing beauties. I could probably give a long, complicated, ultimately unintelligible explanation of why the rhythm sounds Colombian or Mexican rather than Cuban (the band is, in fact, Mexican); the song-form is Cuban--the stops and starts seem very salsa, but the rhythm isn't salsa. It doesn't have salsa's underlying "shave, haircut, two bits" beat, nor the 3-against-4 counterrhythm that's in the Eddie Palmieri track that Chuck was mistaking this for. (He identified these guys correctly as Bronco in a later letter.) This is a salsa song played as a cumbia, perhaps? Now all I'm doing is tossing labels in the air and pretending that when they land they'll form an analysis. ★★★

PATTY STIRLING: Get fat, put on a hat, and quebradita. It's like chickens scratching in the dirt; country line dancing crossed with break dancing. Spin your hat on your finger. This is too slow for quebradita. I want to see a quebradita movie (like "Saturday Night Fever" or "Lambada" or "Salsa") starring some really greasy mean Indian wetbacks. ★★★

CHRIS COOK: Enjoyable 80's Spanish pop. Overall, I actually enjoyed this tape side quite a lot, especially in comparison to tapes people have designed specifically for me. ★★★½

Side B

FRANK KOGAN: Cuts B2 through B5 constitute an essay of sorts, with B1 as a lead-in, so I'll give you this little introduction. Last February I was writing about Latin freestyle, and I was wondering about something I'd already noticed: that as New York freestyle had gone on (starting in the early '80s as the disco music that Hispanics had danced to and then becoming the music that they wrote, played on, and sang) the singing and melodies had become more ethnic--when I said "ethnic" I meant that I was noticing that the singers would connect their notes, slide into and out of them rather than just moving from one tone to the next. This made the music sound riper and more melancholy (and fits the stereotype of Latin music sounding "emotional" and "romantic"). The songwriting was following the singing in this direction too, so by 1987 and 1988 not only were the vocals wailing and sliding but the melodies had come to have more sadness and what seemed to me to be an almost-Arabian tinge. Eric Weisbard had asked me to write about freestyle for an alternative-record guide that *Spin* was putting out, and as I was thinking about what to write I also happened to be reading Howard Fast's history of the Jews, and something clicked in my head: a lot of Spaniards are actually of Asian or North African descent; Jews from the Middle East settled in Spain back in 500 B.C., and Moors (from North Africa and Arabia, originally) occupied and ruled large parts of Spain for hundreds of years in the Middle Ages. And also Spain had a huge influx of Gypsies (a group that originated in northern India). The Christian rulers Ferdinand and Isabela finally got complete control of the country in 1492 and gave the Muslims and Jews the choice of converting, leaving, or being exterminated; but obviously conversion didn't end the cultural or musical influence of these people. I realize I'm making a stretch, from an Arab-Jewish-Gypsy presence in Spain to disco melodies in the New York 1980s; and I don't know much about Spanish or Cuban or Puerto Rican folk music anyway, or where it comes from or why it sounds like it does. So I'm not claiming, "Oh, Judy Torres, there's the Middle Eastern influence quite obviously." But maybe the influence is there somewhat unobviously. I put on this tape Ofra Haza, an Israeli who'd emigrated from Yemen (representing the Jewish and Arabian sound at once, I hope); a folk song from the Spanish province of Extremadura; and then a couple of Latin freestyle tunes, to see if anyone would notice a resemblance. I'm also trying to convince people that not all freestyle sounds the same.

Another thought: I'm talking here of the Middle Eastern influence on Spanish music, but maybe influence goes the other way, too: most of the Jews forced out of Spain ended up in Greece and Turkey and the Middle East, and it's possible they took back a Spanish influence with them.

1. Ace of Base "Happy Nation" (1992)

PATTY STIRLING: My Jesuit teachers at the university were all excited about the Gregorian chant CDs high on the dance charts. Are there Indians in Scandinavia like in Greenland? My friend does dub poetry recordings with First Nations people in all corners of the globe. Is Sugarcube the most Native people of Iceland? ★★ ★★

CHUCK EDDY: Techno start, hollow sound, late at night, space and spareness... Enigma? No, of course, Ace of Base -- their Gregorian sea chantey, "Happy Nation," which naturally is their saddest-sounding song. Time travel,

space travel, "tell him we've gone too far," like "Video Killed the Radio Star": "We can't rewind we've gone too far." No turning back, too late to stop now. Moorish middle-eastern-camel-calling vocal gloom -- I swear, Scott and Phil, this makes the Pet Shop Boys sound timid by comparison. "A man will die, but not his ideas." When will these shallow brainless pop groups just give up? ★★★★★½

CHRIS COOK: Ace of Base, "Happy Nation," one of the GREAT pop songs of the decade. Elements of Gregorian, house, and (I'll finally admit it) Abba. It's lyrically about Utopia but musically dour and bleak (Bleak-House Music). I still can't understand the ending mantra - "Tell them we've gone too far"? Dense mix, funky tambourine, swings hard. It wasn't even a single. ★★★★★

DON ALLRED: Hoppy Nation yeah sure Ace of Base "tell'um we've gone too far" and they won't believe it; that's the idea. How can anything so (truly) agreeable be made by a White Power guy? He didn't make all of it, did he? ★★

FRANK KOGAN: I can't talk about this, it's too pretty. The whistling sounds carefree and mournful. How do they do that? The whistling adds energy but still seems to draw into itself the melancholy of the melody. So you've got an upbeat melancholy song. And then in the final 35 seconds, through someone's inspiration, the singer connects her notes in a pure Arabian flutter, which transforms the beautiful melancholy into something beautifully assertive (yet still melancholy). "Happy Nation"--said nation belongs to the future, I think, or the distant past, which is why the song, belonging to the present, gets to be yearningly sad; though in a happy way. I'm stumped. The workings of music are such a mystery. ★★★★★

RENEE CRIST: Hi-tech jungly ching-chingy midtempo, Euro-chick chorale--Dear God! It's the new Abba!!! Ace of Base!! It sounds fabulous. "Happy Nation" rhymes with 'situation' and 'salvation' and in perfect four/four time, 'brotherhood' rhymes with 'good.' I think it's a diatribe against French nuclear testing. ★★★★★½

2. Ofra Haza "Galbi" (1985)

PATTY STIRLING: Hup Hup Hup. Uno dos quatro hit it. You know I'm paid in full yup yup paid in full paid in full. The filter that kills it is the one in England. Goes right in there and comes out disinfected. Not stinky funky like the belly of a lowrider or fat butt's armpits. Like stepping in a bucket of sheep dip when you walk across the border. ★★

DON ALLRED: OK I had some heavy shit to say about Ace of Base too but I'm going to keep up this time. This is the kind of thing I used to buy promo copies for a dollar in 1979/80, drink a beer, and vaguely muse over whether I should move to NYC or just walk over to the bar again, go looking for a New Wave and/or Disco girl. This is too pedantic with all these damn rhythm patterns, tho'! Chasing that girl all over the living room like that--she's starting to seem like a belly dancer at the bachelor party. Ah, here's a little break--but it's over. ★★½

RENEE CRIST: Are there octagonal drums on this? A scratching dial on the sampler? Is this machine resting on top of an ironing board? ★★★★★

CHUCK EDDY: Sounds like early breakdance-style hip-hop. It's the wild style -- a whole line of guys having a duel on electro drums, seeing who can outdo the others... competition music, like free throws or freestyle rhyming or breakdance spins. But really it's probably just one guy with his pet drum machine -- Like, are any words ever gonna come in? I think I'd like this better if they'd rap over it. I do like the Grandmixer D. St./Bambaataa way all the beautiful little incidental Mozart orchestral-fiddle parts poke in, though. And the laughs, and... oh wait, this is that "Galbi" lady from Israel, right? Ofra Haza? I don't know if this is "Galbi" or the song from its B-side; I never really took time to figure out which was which. I like her voice okay, it's otherworldly and all, but I've never really cared about it, for some reason. But this record is still a definitive example of something-or-other.... Like, it has utmost historical significance in the realm of worldbeat dance music. And M/A/R/R/S sampled it in "Pump Up the Volume," right? But I still think its beats and orchestrations are more exciting than her voice.... So now watch it be Chaba Falafel or one of those Algerian kinda Rai Rebels chicks instead. ★★½

FRANK KOGAN: The song might be abstract dance-beat sculpture at the start; I always forget how long and how dry the electrobeat beginning feels, since what I remember is the passion that follows. The plinky electro-high-pitched-xylophone keyboard notes that come in, finally, happen to be among the most beautiful progressions I've ever heard. I have nothing to say about such beauty. The beauty here would be better with fewer cold electrorhythms and more foliage, but none of the less-busy mixes of the song have the right chord-and-note combinations. ★★

CHRIS COOK: Pet Shop remix? Doesn't sound American - it's 90's-sounding, and America doesn't export (or import) pop like this now. Yes, the vocals aren't English. Turkish? Arabic? Holds its own beside "Happy Nation," plus it's the first non-English song on here where I actually care about what's being said, so... ★★½

3. [Caceres, Extramadura] "Da Cuna"

CHRIS COOK: Italian? Much surface noise. 50's opera-musical. It's a capella, so I can't really place it culturally. Is it "Field Day For The Sundays" a capella by an Italian lady? ★½

DON ALLRED: Or is it? Breathing room, a capella, even. Her voice is a little more flimsy than it should be--even tho' I know flimsy rules in Frankville--basically poignant in spite of flimsy (this time). ★★★

FRANK KOGAN: A beautiful, placid song. Haunting. My interest in beautiful placid songs wanes after about 30 seconds, I admit; like listening to a lullaby meant for someone else. A clear-lake type of song. I got it off the Spanish anthology, to use as a melodic bridge between the Arabian peninsula and the Manhattan club scene. ★★½

CHUCK EDDY: This has no beat to it. I don't think I'm very good when it comes to ethnic music without a beat, and so far this is one of the duller things on the tape. I do kind of like the creepy way it reminds me of nuns at Latin high masses when I was a kid, but that's about it. And oh yeah, the crackly vinyl effect is pretty neat too. And fortunately it's short. ★★½

PATTY STIRLING: Native American comedian doing an imitation of a French person. It's just as hilarious as the last one. It's a Spanish song that sounds Arabic. ★★★

RENÉE CRIST: Yum. Edith Piaf? An a capella tale of woe. I think her story is of a beautiful skater whose favorite singer died, and then she got fat and modeled polyester. ★★★

4. Judy Torres "No Reason to Cry" (1987)

PATTY STIRLING: Let the music play, he won't get away, just get the groove and then he'll come back to you again. Just stay alone on the dancefloor pretending that life and the real world don't exist. Like sleeping. This kid named Carlos in San Francisco never told me goodbye when I left, and why he was angry with me I was afraid to ask, and before, for his birthday, I'd given him a Latin hip hop CD, which I wrapped so carefully in many colors so it would be as beautiful as him. Damn! Teardrops on the paper. ★★★★★

CHRIS COOK: Sa-fire remix? Similar to "Let The Music Play" Shannon or "Touch Me" Samantha Fox. Latter-day Shannon? I always considered myself anti-Shannon but I like this. It goes on a bit too long, so maybe it's the Allmans or the Dead. ★★★

RENÉE CRIST: Splashy technology for rump shaking of the most organic kind. "There's No Reason for You to Cry." It make me think that perhaps the sampling of the human voice is an invention of Satan. It's also longer than God's own beard. I would feel better about it if it were a Gloria Gaynor comeback. ★★★

DON ALLRED: This is like B-2 should've been like. Synth makes the beat (and good flimsy textures, etc.) rather than getting nerdily caught up in its means-as-ends. This is Boney M or Lisa M or the grandchildren of a Phil Spector girl group reclaiming the hispanic side. Hair like Madonna's on Side A but not for reasons of camp. They got some long sliver of the para disco/new wave excised all the way back to a hangnail from Mary Anne with the shaky hands--I did walk to the bar, I'm five years older than that girl and DON'T CARE, 'cause "I'll always be around" she says and I can almost believe it. But that sunset taking its time thru the scant raindrops on the windshield remind me not to take her for granted (good synth at end in other words). ★★★★★

CHUCK EDDY: More symphonic early hip-hop beat-production. What happened to this kind of music? It used to be everywhere. But actually, I bet this is Latin hip-hop instead. And Latin hip-hop really was hip-hop for a couple of months, Frank -- with Two Sisters' album, produced by Paul Rodriguez for Sugarscoop Records in 1983. Then came Connie and Shannon and Debbie Deb and Trinere and Madonna, then everybody else. I like the spoken part in this song here, the part that comes in under the opera voices -- she's got a Germanic Grace Jones detachment which would probably annoy me if it didn't sound like Grace Jones. Who was just awful most of the time, but I swear her subdued-vocal crap on Warm Leatherette can still hold my attention in ways similar quasi-decadent whisper malarkey by Madonna and Kim Gordon and other people never has. I have no idea why. I also have no idea who's singing this song, and I'm starting to think I don't care. I mean, it's "great," but it sounds like every other Latin freestyle record ever made, and for some

reason her voice doesn't grab me like my favorites. Or maybe it's the words that don't grab me. I like when the producer makes her voice all squeaky and toy-like, but I've heard it a million time before. How many of these kinds of records do you need, Frank? I mean, your obsession with this stuff sort of reminds me of those dweebs who collect every last sub-Pebbles '60s-garage compilation. '60s garage was even better than '80s freestyle (maybe even more Latin sometimes!), but there's still a reason that only a finite number of singles in those genres became hits. I'd rather hear generic Latin freestyle than generic deep-soul house anyday. (Maybe partly because I'm usually more attracted to Hispanic than to black women -- hey, sue me, we all have our preferences. Actually, all other variables being equal I'm usually more attracted to Hispanic than to white women, too.) But this is still collector scumbag music, dammit! ★★★¼

FRANK KOGAN: To counter Chuck a little, this doesn't sound like every other Latin freestyle record; I don't think anyone in the genre before or since used Torres's dramatic buildups and operatic climaxes. This isn't a song so much as a complete set-up, production, melodrama, and opera, more full-bodied by far than the "beautiful" stuff that precedes it on this tape. And while many freestylers since have gone into exotically sad melodies, ethnically thick singing, and snake-charming warbles (my reason for putting this song on the tape), Torres was the first (I think) to really do it all at once; this song made it possible for her to play the diva for \$5,000 a night in late '80s Manhattan dance clubs. Let me be pedantic (it's my magazine, after all) and point out that Shannon never sang like this. She was a straightforward r&b singer. Nayoobe and TKA et al. added wobbles and thickness to the style, and then Giggles and Judy Torres and Cynthia and lots of others through to Lisette Melendez saddened the melodies (credit to Elvin Molina and Mickey Garcia, who helped write and produce a lot of it). Back to this song: it has a long buildup for Torres to eventually raise pitch and blare and prove that she can hit the high notes--which she can't, but I don't think her failure matters, since (as Nietzsche entitled one of his books) such overreaches, such gestures, are Beyond In-Tune And Out-Of-Tune. (I think I mean what I just said, in this case.) ★★★★★

5. Maribell "Roses Are Red" (1987)

CHRIS COOK: A remix of the last song? Hmm, some lead guitar. This lady sounds flatter than the last lady... not her bust, her voice. She doesn't vocally REACH FOR IT like the last lady did. Guess I'll look pretty stupid if it's the same lady, or someone I should know, like Exposé. I wouldn't know Exposé from the Mary Jane Girls. Musically, this is almost as good as the last song, but "roses are red/violets are blue" is a bit of a letdown lyrically, and I'm a Primus fan so it's not like I'm especially picky about prose. ★★½

DON ALLRED: Ambient music often makes me think "If I still smoked pot, I'd probably really like this." This starts like B-4, giving me a flashback, or rather contact high via TARDIS, to the days of draft beer and Merit cigarettes, you know when you'd get a contact hormone high from the smell of them in a bar, even if you were (currently) in abstinence from them, because if you kissed a girl (tonight!) her mouth would probably taste like them--but this slips back into pedantry of the beat. ★½ (Just in case I got too self-involved, and missed something. Not likely, huh?)

RENÉE CRIST: Tight neo-disco with a plaintive theme: "If roses are red and violets are blue, why can't you see I'm in love with you?" Plot: she sells flowers, he finally buys some and gives them back to her. No, that was only a dream. Or was it? I like the multi-harmony at the end. ★★½

CHUCK EDDY: Now, this is real Hispanic girl-disco goddessliness!... which might just mean the song is familiar. "Roses Are Red," by, um, somebody whose name starts with "M." I've got it -- "Roses Are Red" by Mariluz Gonzalez, the EMI-Latin-and-other-labels record publicist who sent me the new La Castañeda album this week and attached a note with a smiley face apologizing for it being late. She sounds real cute over the phone. As does Carmen Cervantes at Sony, who I actually met in Mexico once, a real voluptuous knockout let me tell you -- kept a toothbrush in her purse, and last time we talked over the phone, which was about two months ago, she told me she was seven months pregnant, so I hope her baby's doing well. As for Mariluz in this song, it seems a boy keeps coming into the store where she sells roses and she keeps hoping he'll buy her one, but he never does. I think the difference between this song and the previous one is that this song has a song attached; the beats that sound like "Let The Music Play" don't hurt, either. This is what this kind of music is best for, maybe -- serenading and yearning for somebody who doesn't know they're being yearned for. This is the Romance of Life! (I have no idea what I mean by that.) But if Mariluz wants the boy so badly to know she's in love with him, maybe she should just tell him. Maybe she should buy him a rose -- hell, she gets them for free, I bet. ★★★★★

PATTY STIRLING: Love brought us into romance as soon as we started to dance. Give me tonite. The happiest feeling was Madonna back before she grew up and turned transvestite, and Cher after she divorced Sonny and got her butt tattooed and all those weird ones on her arms like a grunge queen, no Hollywood star with head up ass like Madonna & her depression problem, like she passed the borderline & forgot the good stuff. Which is what makes a person sad; that they can't remember. ★★★★★

FRANK KOGAN: "Why can't you feel what I want you to?" That line is perfect, the mind inside every lovelorn or love lost one of us. "The love that grew along with all the flowers." Jeez, that's excessive. But I like this song. I'm not afraid of excessive sentiment. There's a sweet part where the singer dreams that the man of her dreams will kiss her lips and hold her close. Unfortunately, I can't listen to this without imagining that she's singing "Kiss my lips and blow my nose." And Chuck, another man unafraid of sentiment, wrote me that he frequently hears it as "Kiss my lips and hold my nose." This is just a further example of how Chuck and I have come more and more to attain similar intellectual insights. ★★½

6. Gene Pitney "I'm Afraid to Go Home"

CHRIS COOK: "Venus" meets "About A Girl" via 50's country-rock. If I ever saw the weakling responsible for this dung, I'd knife him in the nuts and taser-gun his ass!! Actually, that's not at all true, I just wanted to make this review more interesting. ★★

PATTY STIRLING: Like some guy coming back from Vietnam, and his life has changed into a perspective that is permanently doomed. He expects the worst; that upon returning home after being gone so long there will be no one

there, no one who remembers him, no welcome home. He's afraid for his life; that in the last possible place left to find comfort he will discover that there is none. ★

RENÉE CRIST: "I'm Afraid to Go Home." Groovy sixties prodigal rock with nifty organ--is it about coming home from 'Nam? Nice whistling track. WHOA! it's about Sherman's march: "Now there's not a tree/'Tween Memphis and the sea." A poignant illustration of how history repeats itself. ★★

CHUCK EDDY: I'm a freebird goat?? Oh, I'm afraid to go home... Woooagh there boy, this one's deep. He's like a cowboy galloping on his trusty steed through the dust and the dusk, scared of who's been moving into his hacienda. The dust and dusk are in the sound, and the gallop's in the rhythm. He's galloping past cacti and rattlesnakes and tumbleweeds and tincans and old discarded sports sections. Is this Marty Robbins or (more likely) Gene Pitney? The sound is drenched in doom, from the spaghetti-western whistling in the back -- it probably has the mood of all those Sergio Leone movies you and Chris Cook and Martina love and I've never been able to stay awake through. He's reading a drawn-to-scale map, I guess: "Every inch is a quarter mile." (That's a pretty precise map, actually. I hope it includes terrain features -- Land Navigation was always one of my strong points in the Army.) Sherman's been to his town and burned it all to the ground, he says. Well, Sherman's been all over our house, and he's left his Leggos and micro-machines and Power Ranger toys everywhere. This song articulates what I feel when I go away for a couple days -- I'm afraid to go home and find Martina hasn't done the dishes (it's a man's job when I'm here) or told the kids to pick up their stuff. And my office will be a mess, and who can get work done in a messy office? ★★★

FRANK KOGAN: This song stimulates my "folk music" gland. Overdramatic, overserious, with lots of death--though this is probably Pitney's least over-the-top song (by which I don't mean to imply that it is under the big top, since there's nothing circus-like about it at all). ★★★

DON ALLRED: Scrawny peroxidehead in black cowboy shirt--early/mid-60's more efficient/incisive take ('cause it's a song not a movie) on 50's psycho-western. Civil War (you're not supposed to call it that down here tho' and indeed could be some actually other devastation) or equivalent. Enjoyable, not too campy, but not "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down," either--which ("Night") is kind of a celebration, isn't it "naaa, naa-naa, naa naa naa" or covert protest against the oppressor like black codes in gospel/work songs or "boo boo boo" alibi in "Sweet Home" so a celebration of self-pity and/or ironic? Hell with it. ★★★½ for B-6, not "Night."

7. Billy Stewart "Sitting in the Park" (1963)

CHUCK EDDY: Dusty Springfield production, a clever segue after the just-plain-dusty production of the last one. I don't listen to this kind of '60s pop music much, but I probably should.... No, wait, this is some soul thing. I should know this one -- I'm a rock critic, after all. It's gorgeous. I could look it up -- Billy Stewart, is it? (I didn't look it up. If I'm right, I have no idea how I know; maybe it's those little scatty things in his voice.) But this sounds like more than one guy -- the Delfonics? Sitting in the park is what I should've been doing the other day, instead of running full-blast up the little

kids' slide in the park so I could surprise Sherman who was on top of the jungle gym, then a bar at the top of the slide I hadn't seen before suddenly jumped in front of me and I crashed into it and broke my glasses in half (so now I have to wear ones Martina calls unattractive) and I thought I broke my nose because blood was gushing out and I even spit up a little blood, but really I just sliced my nose in about twenty places and gashed my forehead. Must've looked like something right out of a cartoon -- people all around me were stifling laughs. But back to the song... It's about being stood up (like "Harden My Heart" by Quarterflash, or "Olympia, Wa." on the new Rancid album). Soul had soul in those days, man. Lots of times with this kind of rock-critic-acknowledged-as-great music (which I assume this is -- it should be), all I need is a context other than rock criticism to hear it in, so I can truly feel it in my parkbench. I now have that context. Thank you, Frank. ★★★★★

RENÉE CRIST: A Chi-Lites/Delfonics-type groover, "Sitting in the Bar [Park?] Waiting For You," complete with sha-la-las and more organ than you could pump at one sitting. It makes me swoon. ★★★★★

FRANK KOGAN: This song demonstrates what I meant when I claimed in *Radio On* that black vocal-harmony groups of years past were doing open-space music. The words are set out of doors, too. ★★½

CHRIS COOK: 50's-60's soul. He's sitting on a bench but his back's against the fence. Must be a pretty chintzy park to have backless benches. ★★

PATTY STIRLING: Every little thing I do, you're on my mind, and I'm waiting, but you leave me waiting, what a bad way to treat me, I gotta do something while I'm waiting for you, it took me so long to write this song, I wrote the whole thing, while you stood me up, in the park. Africa! ★★★★★

DON ALLRED: Oops! Missed again! [not rated]

8. Dinah Shore "You'd Be So Nice to Come Home To" (1942)

PATTY STIRLING: Do these people have sex? Like Jimmy Stewart in "It's a Wonderful Life"? There were all those kids, and yet his wife was like my sister, who's a Mormon. But my sister must have had sex because she's got kids, too. How and when does it happen? ★

RENÉE CRIST: More on the organ tip, this one very Jimmy-Stewart-in-the-scary-house. "You'd Be So Nice to Come Home To"--is this in The Quiet Man with John Wayne? And Maureen O'Hara, or Colleen Shaughnessy, or (prototypical Irish name here)? I like it when a chick sings songs like this, like she married a househusband or something. ★★½

DON ALLRED: This kind of thing is real familiar-sounding and forgettable. Even if it were effectively used as soundtrack, it'd succeed best if soon assimilated/dissolved. ★½

CHUCK EDDY: Don't know who she is, but I bet she's good-looking -- I'd cuddle next to her in front of a fire anyway. The space in the background sounds sort of like they left the door slightly ajar in whatever dimly lit suburban fireplace-room (living room? den?) they recorded this in, and you can feel a

little flurrying winter wind whooshing in behind her (it's in the quiveringness of her voice, too). But the wind doesn't make the music cold, just comfy. (Then again, I'm listening to this on a 90-degree July evening, so what do I know?) And the blanket and fireplace are in the sound of her voice too: her fire's not raging, but it's still nice and warm. And she's got some horns playing real jazz, none of that Ornette Coleman nonsense. I like that. ★★★

FRANK KOGAN: The song is warm (appropriately set by the fire), yet I think there's something sly in it--unless, though, I'm simply projecting from the fact that I know it's by Cole Porter. Somehow it makes me think he has not just described the character, but nailed her. Anyway, all of you who wrote in complaining over the lack of songs by singers who have had golf tournaments named after them, this song is for you. ★★★

CHRIS COOK: 30's music. What makes music like this tough is thinking about the end of The Shining, when Kubrick slow-zooms into the ballroom picture. I think I liked the one in the movie better, but I can put this one in that context. ★★½

9. Caifanes "La Negra Tomasa" (1988)

CHRIS COOK: 90's South American pop... but I don't like it as much as the preceding Spanish stuff. The singer's David Byrinish; maybe it is him. ★½

DON ALLRED: Kind of a Forro rhythm track again, but not muscular as actual Forro--kind of grows on me tho'. ★★

FRANK KOGAN: A Cuban song done by Mexican rockeros in cumbia style (whatever that means). Chuck's right in thinking that this and Palmieri's version (on Superimposition, and called by the alternate title "Bilongo") are like apples and oranges--they even follow some different chord progressions. And by Caifanes' later standards the rhythm here is leaden. But Saul Hernandez's singing on this ranks among the most spectacular I've heard. Again, it's something I'm unable to describe: let's say that it's got U2's drama-queen melodramatics but sung by someone whose voice can genuinely soar (clichéd as that description is). ★★★★★

CHUCK EDDY: Caifanes' version of "La Negra Tomasa," which still sounds nothing like the other one (assuming that's what it was). Saul's voice is so soft and swishy and squishy, it makes me wish he had a vagina so I wouldn't feel so weird swooning over him. This is supposed to be an electric Mexican rock parody of a traditional cumbia from Colombia or something... I can never remember exactly, I'd have to check my interview notes. The rhythm's some kind of waltz, almost, and Caifanes too put spaghetti-western-like space in their music, though in their case the space comes straight from progressive rock (which was much better at beauty than industrial is). I concede this might not be as great to dance to as Palmieri's version, but Saul's got so much emotion in him I just have to believe it's the better record. And one of the best singles of the '90s, too. ★★★★★

RENÉE CRIST: There is a noise on this salsa record that made me think a mouse was in my sewing supplies. I like the song otherwise, but I am forced to

dismiss it for rodent impersonation. "Mind Playing Tricks On Me" is better. [not rated]

PATTY STIRLING: Sounds like some of those delightfully mysterious and menacing Colombians. You know that there's black magic in the background from the minor key of the cumbia melody, which leads you along then leaves you waiting, dangling at the end so it can come back up around behind you and stab you in the back. While you're looking the other direction. ★★★★★

10. Indochine "Punishment Park"

DON ALLRED: Beginning starts right at end of B-9. Great transition, actually. Thought it was a surprise change in B-9. This is like a Francophone Canadian aircheck tape Chuck copied for me. That swingin' in the rain, loosely tight beat--even a little bit of Dylan/Neil harmonica. (Hey it is Canadian, I bet, sounds just right.) Leslied organ right on the beat or enough like that, shivering like little breasts when she's taking a breath to really tell you. ★★★½

PATTY STIRLING: Awfully pretty, like Miguel Mateos, the Argentinean rock star who is Euro-pop through the same interpretation filter as New Zealand and Australian guitar-pop bands, like the Saints, Chills, Verlaines, Cannanes, Coloured Stone, Sneaky Feelings... This is such a pleasant surprise in French. ★★★

RENÉE CRIST: The French Gin Blossoms? Do they even make gin in France? It's always fun to hear fake American pop in another language. It's like watching people wear high-waisted jeans and fake Converse hightops in Italy. It's like making fun of exchange students. It's like voting Republican. ★★½

FRANK KOGAN: Strange, this starts with an accordion that leads into a harmonica, yet the two are almost indistinguishable in effect. Beautiful, though sprinkled with lollipop tinkles. I think that's some bizarre setting on the keyboards that makes those tinkly sounds. Indochine has such a unique mixture (as far as I know): I guess "flimsy new wave" you could call it. The singer sort of has Joe Strummer's pushiness, but also a kind of European dittiness ("dittiness"--reminding one of casual little ditties one whistles subconsciously while merrily swatting flies with a rolled-up newspaper"). ★★★★★

CHRIS COOK: Weird accordion-synths. Male/female vox... French? I don't like it as much as the electro-pop that preceded it earlier. Decent harmonica. I like the parts between the verses better than those during them. Edgar Winter Group? Liz Phair? Hootie And The Blowfish? ★½

CHUCK EDDY: Weird. Out of this world. Art-rocky. God, I recognize this.... Must be Indochine, but I don't know what song. "Punishment Park"? Not being a Greek Frenchman, I don't exactly know their songs by name. I love this, but I have no idea what to say about it. They pack all these lovely giddy fiddly little sounds into a small space, and give it a rhythm. I want to say Indochine keep alive what was great about the Police and the Cars in 1979, but that's just shorthand, and it's cheating, because they really sound like neither of them. They have been know to sound like Stacey Q and Trio sometimes, though. And Die Toten Hosen (from Germany) are the only band I know of

who are capable of reminding me of both Indochine and the Anti-Nowhere League. ★★½

11. [East Beat] "Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep"

PATTY STIRLING: This is from a coming-of-age movie of very high cinematic quality about Japanese teenagers from wealthy families struggling with school and suicide. This song is playing during the romantic scene, in the disco where the girl and boy fall in love while boogie-woogieing. She commits suicide after she was late to school the next morning; her thoughts had been so full of him (you're on my mind) that she forgot to set her alarm, and took all night to fall asleep from worry about being unworthy of him. He learns his lesson and stops going out dancing and does extra homework. ★★½

CHUCK EDDY: East Beat's version of "Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep." Okay, Frank, I'll take your word that this is better than Mac and Katie Kissoon's version since the voices are higher-pitched. It also has more funny busy-ness tossed in (all those bum-bum-bum-bums), and a better rhythm section. It may well even beat Middle of the Road's rendition, but when Arsenio Orteza visited I played him the two non-Kissoon ones, and he insisted the Kissoons are definitive. The bottom line is, they're all one of the greatest songs in the known universe, and if you don't believe me, ask my six-year-old daughter Coco to sing it for you someday. Last night a little girl heard her mama singing, and this morning she was overjoyed to wake up and find mama had forever abandoned her, and that's why she's ooh-weep-chirpa-chirpa-cheeping. But which is it -- "little baby John," "little baby boy," or none of the above? I just hope you don't plan on putting the other versions after this one on the tape. "Shut up already! Damn!" Oh I get it -- this is the end. ★★½

DON ALLRED: Alright, I actually stopped writing til I'd heard all of this. This is good, this is what we want from a Frank tape--tho' of course we realize the need for him to challenge us, and our image of him. Even, right when I started wondering if it weren't a little too long, it says "Alright shut up already dayum." Aw, this is the end of the tape, tho'. But--no polkas! Home free, whee! Not bad--I was in a bad mood when this started, but enjoyed it pretty well. Thanks. ★★½ for this track, ★★½ overall.

FRANK KOGAN: Yet another visit to Tinkle Land, though this time without even a shade of melancholy--except for the words, which are totally unhappy. This song disturbs Elizabeth extremely, that the sound is so cheerful yet the words are about a poor forlorn little birdling who's been abandoned by its mother. ★★½

CHRIS COOK: Late 80's-early 90's mixing-freestyling. Reminds me a bit of Like A Virgin. The "far, far away" part sounds like the "wild, wild, wild" part in "Cum On Feel The Noize." She sings a little like Sinéad or Kate Bush. Okay, but not enough of the big, anthemic keyboard sound that made, say, Stevie Nicks' "Stand Back" or Divine's "Walk Like A Man" much, much better than, say, Wire's "Field Day For The Sundays"... not that I wanted last issue's tape. I liked this one overall. Of course, allegedly you hate some of these songs, but I don't think there's a zero in the bunch. ★★

RENÉE CRIST: This sounds like a bunch of seventies commercials strung together and recorded off the radio. "Whatcha Dancin'?" Is that what they're

saying? Is this about a child who wakes up to find her mother gone? I am terrified by this sentiment. It reminds me of a drug raid in our town several years ago during which children watched their parents being dragged from the house in the night and taken to jail. The explanation given one five-year-old: "Your mama does drugs." The Prince snip tacked onto the end makes it though: "Shut up already. Damn." Or did Frank do that? ★★★½

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE NEXT ISSUE

To receive the next issue you have to write for it or you have to pay me \$7. I'm sticking with the two old topics (social map and first record), and I'm adding a third: "Weird Things You Did as a Child." I encourage people to stay with a topic, if they want to, even if they've already done it. If you've done your high school you can do your workplace or your bowling group or your kindergarten. Just keep telling your story. You can do your twelfth record or your fiftieth record or your dad's records. You can do "Weird Things I Did as an Adult" or "Weird Things I Intend To Do." Another thing you can do--I guess this belongs to "social maps"--is to write about your ethnic background or your religion, if you have one, how it's influenced your social identity. (Damned if I know what influence either has had in my life. In my almost-all-white high school, for example, religion and ethnic background had no public effect on anyone's social identity, that I could see.)

The word limit is 2,000 words. If you write something longer and then cut it to within the limit, send me the long version too, in case I want to use that. Keep a photocopy of anything you send. Check your facts (spellings, record titles--you know, maybe someone cares that there's no LP called Live at Fillmore East or that "Promises in the Dark" isn't on *Crimes of Passion*). Don't libel anyone. Send me your phone number, in case I need to ask you questions. If you're stumped on what to write or how to write it, call me for advice: (415) 824-5496. The deadline is May 1, and I'll try real hard to publish #10 by July 1st. Or maybe I won't.

Blindfold Test people will be chosen by lot, again.

EDNA'S EDIBLES

A great zine is *Edna's Edibles* (\$1 plus two stamps to Sarah Manvel, Sarah Lawrence College, 1 Mead Way, Bronxville, NY 10708)--hilarious, sad.

CONTROVERSY RATINGS

Our Noses Twitch: Caifanes 1.44; John Conlee 1.38; The Kingston Trio 1.17; Stanley Holloway 1.17; Boney M 1.17; Johnny Rios and the Us 4 "St. Nicolas" 1.08; Los Fabulosos Cadillacs 1.08; Maribell 1.04.

We're Nice to Come Home To: Billy Stewart 1.00; Gene Pitney 0.92; Dion 0.88; Dinah Shore 0.88; Indochine 0.88; Tricky 0.83; Guns N' Roses 0.80; Cruel, Cruel Moon 0.76; Ofra Haza 0.75.

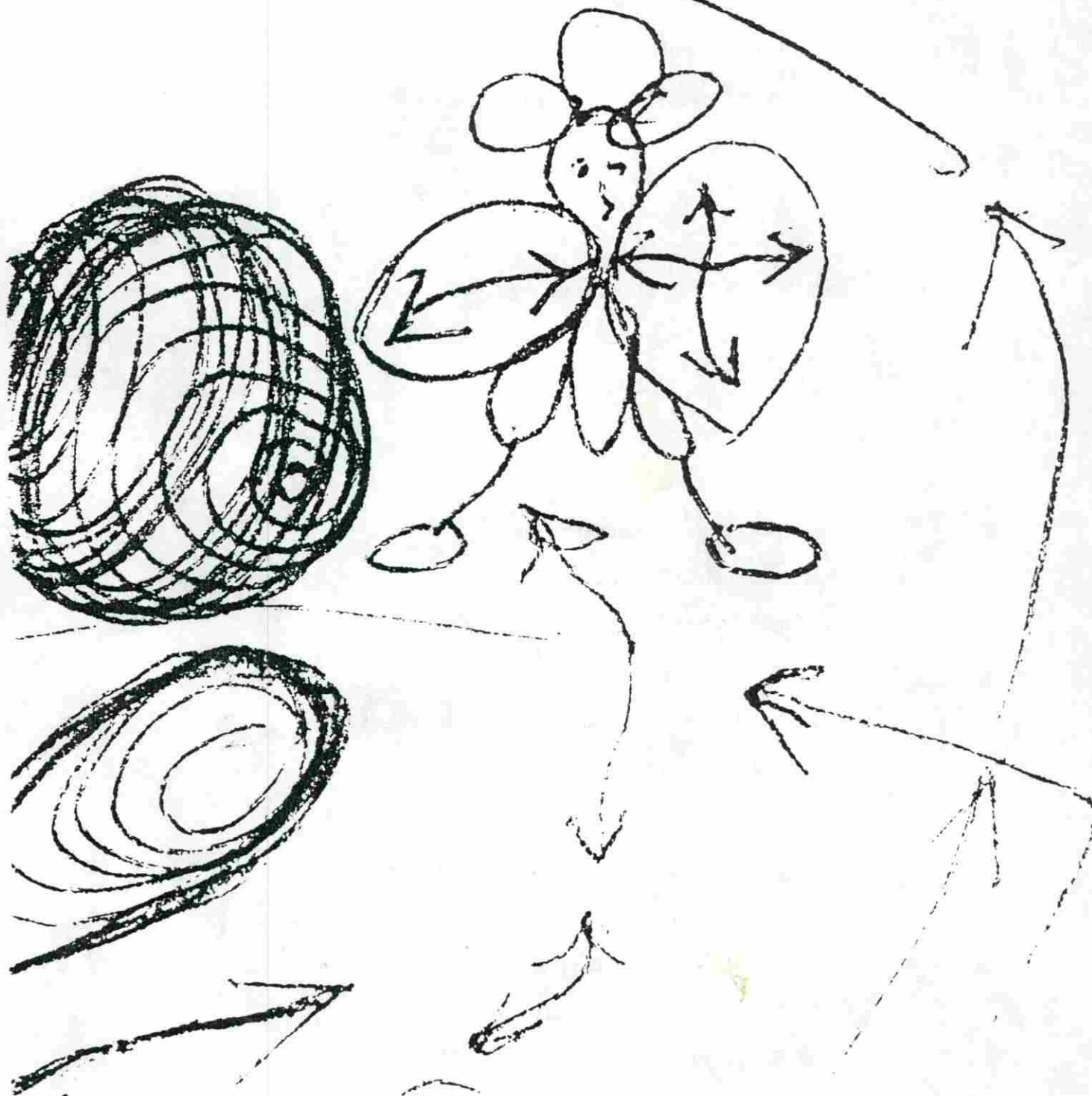
We Are in a Stupor of Self-Congratulation: Gillette 0.67; Johnny Rios and the Us 4 "El Pito" 0.67; Cannanes 0.66; Judy Torres 0.63; [East Beat] 0.63; Ace of Base 0.50; [Caceres, Extramadura] 0.50; Bronco 0.44; [Ibiza] 0.32.

Frank Kogan, 1449 Valencia, San Francisco, CA 94110

THE TOP 26

1. Johnny Rios and the Us 4 "El Pito"	4.50
2. Ace of Base "Happy Nation"	4.17
3. Billy Stewart "Sitting in the Park"	4.00
4. Bronco "Grande de Caderas"	3.92
5. Guns N' Roses "Down on the Farm"	3.75
6. Judy Torres "No Reason to Cry"	3.71
7. Cannanes "Woe"	3.65
8. [East Beat] "Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep"	3.63
9. Caifanes "La Negra Tomasa"	3.55
10. Gillette "Mr. Personality"	3.50
11. Johnny Rios and the Us 4 "St. Nicolas"	3.38
12. Ofra Haza "Galbi"	3.38
13. Dion "Sandy"	3.35
14. Boney M "Sad Movies"	3.33
15. Indochine "Punishment Park"	3.21
16. Maribell "Roses Are Red"	3.21
17. Cruel, Cruel Moon "1000 Different Ways"	3.20
18. Stanley Holloway "Anne Boleyn"	3.17
19. Los Fabulosos Cadillacs "Vos Sin Sentimiento"	3.10
20. [Ibiza] "El Cuantre"	2.96
21. [Caceres, Extramadura] "Da Cuna"	2.75
22. John Conlee "She Can't Say That Anymore"	2.71
23. Gene Pitney "I'm Afraid To Go Home"	2.58
24. Dinah Shore "You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To"	2.54
25. The Kingston Trio "Coplas Revisited"	2.50
26. Tricky "Strugglin'"	2.17

I'm a freebird goat



May 14, 1996

Dear Derek,

Thank you for sending me your pieces for Why Music Sucks. I'm using both of them, and gladly. I hope you continue to write for ways. There's much wit and personality in what you write. For some reason I found ~~it~~ it encouraging that your mother, a Rolling Stones fan, was as big an asshole as my mother, a Beethoven fan. (I remember at age 15 listening to Beggars Banquet side two when my mom walked into the room to talk to me about something, and I was desperately, silently wishing that she would leave before "Stray Cat Blues" came on. Otherwise, she would take the record away from me, I was sure. But she did leave, after wrinkling her nose a bit at "Prodigal ~~Son~~^{Son. 21})

I'm also glad that you think I'm from your "area." I am from your area in the sense that Connecticut, where I grew up, is certainly fairly close to Ohio ~~than~~ in comparison to, say, Rome, where I spent a couple years, which is distant from Ohio. And I've visited Cleveland twice! (Actually, it's possible that your ancestors are from ~~the~~ my area, from Connecticut — back when my ancestors were in the shtetl, Connecticut lay claim to northeastern Ohio. After

The Revolutionary War this claim was settled by
~~recompensing~~ allowing Connecticut people (^{those} who'd been burned
out by the British and had their property requisitioned
by the Continental Army) to ~~the~~ claim ~~the~~ land in
the "western reserve," i.e. northeastern Ohio.)

Sorry, I have no rap sheet or mug shot to contribute
to your magazine. But I will take you up on
your offer to print and distribute Why Music Sucks.
I'm enclosing a copy for you to print. I'd say that
you should charge what you want for it and keep
what you get — you're running the risk of printing
it, after all. But I do ask that you charge at
least some money for it — ~~that~~ I want ~~people~~ ^{readers}
who think they'll want to read it, enough to decide
to spend ~~some~~ something on it. ~~That~~ Distributing it
will probably work like this (depending on the store): You'll
bring it to the store. They'll offer to take it on consignment,
which means they'll take the zines but won't pay for them.
Then, at some time later, you'll come back and they'll
give you money for what they've sold and give you back
the copies they failed to sell. Except they'll take something
like 33% on the copies they sell. So for instance if
you say you want 2 bucks per copy, they'll sell it for 3
and keep the extra dollar for themselves.

For some reason the guy who photocopied my

Page 41 is messed up. I fixed it up a bit with liquid paper.

zine pushed the margin a quarter or half inch to the right. This made it slightly better to read the odd-numbered pages (text being further from the staples) but correspondingly harder to read the even-numbered pages (text being too close to the staples), so ~~when you~~ ~~xxxx~~ as well as decentering the front and back cover pictures. So when you copy you'll have to push the text back a quarter inch to the left (I assume Kinko's* has machines that'll do this).

I am indeed the Kogan of Kogan's Heroes, which is an ex post facto name that Tim gave the pickup group that assembled for my one gig in Kent, ~~the tapes, etc.~~ ^{what you heard were} rehearsal tapes, obviously. Tim may also still have Stars Vanit Coffee Shop and England's Newest Hit Makers, a couple of tapes I put out in the early/mid '80s featuring Red Dark Sweet, the Pillowmakers, and Your Mom Too (all of ~~which~~ ^{which} contained me, at some point or other).

I like the one song I've heard by Blur (two, actually, now that I think of it) better than almost anything by Oasis, most of ~~whose stuff~~ ^{whose stuff} I detest (except I like "Wonderwall") I think I like girls who like boys who like girls who like girls, but I'm not sure.

Frank

* I thought you'd said you'd worked at Kinko's in your letter, but I see now that you didn't specify, so I apologize to any copycats etc. that are offended that I automatically assumed "Kinko's" when you

"copy shop" said