

Tales of a
Punk Rock
Nothing

by
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and
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This book is a work of fiction. All names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the authors' feeble imaginations, or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental. They were trying to write a story about a wandering barbarian in the middle ages, but it didn't work out.

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Cover photo by Carl Schweser

This is the third edition. Too bad you weren't cool enough to get a copy of the first or second. They're gonna be worth a dollar or two in a thousand years or so. Don't worry though, everything in this edition is the same. (Except for the previous sentence, and this one, too.)

Copies of this book are \$10 postpaid in the United States. More elsewhere.

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This book is dedicated to good parents, especially ours.

“Every fury on earth has been absorbed in time, as art, or as religion, or as authority in one form or another. ~~The deadliest blow the enemy of the human soul can strike is to do fury honor.~~ Swift, Blake, Beethoven, Christ, Joyce, Kafka, name me a one who has not been thus castrated. Official acceptance is the one unmistakable symptom that salvation is beaten again, and is the one surest sign of fatal misunderstanding, and is the kiss of Judas.”

James Agee in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*

Editor's Note

I came into possession of these documents as Elliot's half of the Hannah Rosenberg Doesn't Run Away in 1995 Treaty. When I decided to make a book out of this, Elliot was reluctant, but eventually went for the I-need-some-kind-of-project-to-keepmy-sanity-intact excuse.

I promised Elliot that he wouldn't have to deal with the sorting through, editing, or publishing of this and he has made me honor my word. Repeated requests for a bit of extra information to round out the story have only elicited muttered responses such as: "Jonah... Nineveh..." and, "You are your own whale."

I'd like to thank Maureen for letting me use letters by her and to her, and for her time and help.

I've kept editing down to a minimum. I've fought off the urge to underline sections and add some study questions. Documents are placed in my closest reconstruction of chronological history. The only major changes are that the journals and letters, which were originally hand-written, have been typed and titled.

The story might be tidier with a suicide, or a drug overdose, or a graffiti-covered tombstone in Paris. What actually happened isn't nearly as profitable for the record company, but more pleasant for his family. I know there are things in here that make Elliot cringe, but the whale has carried me to this shore, and I have only these pages to offer.

My first editorial effort. Dig in. It tastes better than it looks.

Sincerely,
Hannah Elise Rosenberg, literary executor

Home
Wilson,
Tennessee
Summer
1991

June 9, 1991

Dear Maureen,

So not only did you leave me alone in this hellhole, it's actually gotten more hellish, if that's possible. More ugly, more pathetic and twisted. But I'm sure the bird has sung long distance by now. Her worst expectations confirmed. But to tell the truth, I'd really like to write about something else first. Not that I have any good news, I'm just sick of dealing with the worst news, so I'll start with the mediocre.

A party at Andy Davis's house, just like the hundreds of others parties of that nature, so I guess I should spare you the details, but then this letter would be less than a page long, and since I'm expecting more from you, here goes:

The usual. Beer. Meatheads. Airheads. I'm talking to Teeters in a field at the edge of the noise of Deathhorse's hard rock covers. He's telling me about his year in Knoxville and wonders if I'm going. And I'm still not. More time with the Teeterses of the world? Um, fuck you, but no.

Then the inevitable. Ooh, a fight. Like iron shavings toward a magnet, like Ma ringing the dinner bell, all the children come running. (I'm pretty sure that if you walked into a city council meeting and yelled "Fight!" you could clear the room as everyone would leave to watch.) I made it to the keg just in time to see Jason going at it with The Steroid King. Seems they'd had a disagreement over the existential meanderings of Camus versus Sartre, and how it related to who was next in the keg line. S.K. convinced J of Sartre's superior intellect and Colin and I got to carry Jay to the station wagon.

We drove out to Wal-Mart to wait for Jay to sober up so we wouldn't have to carry him into his house. We were a little representational painting of America right there: teenage boys in a Ford, 1/3 drunk and recently involved in a brawl. Where's Norman Cockwell when you need him?

That's when the cops arrived to put us in our place/ save the Wal-Mart parking lot from us ruffians. Officer Richard Plummer remains his usual genius self.

On the way to Jay's house, we were at the red light on Highway 47 when this Rolls Royce pulled up next to us. (Rich guy dialogue: "Hey let's go do some lines of coke in Wilson." ????) Jay sits up looking Raging Bull. He started rolling down the window. (I'm thinking about staying up an extra two hours, washing the car so his vomit doesn't ruin the paint job, airing it out, making sure that my parents don't smell Jay and ask questions. Thinking about what geniuses my friends are, and what a genius I must be for being their friend.)

Jay started screaming out the window, in an ultra-country voice, "Hey, is that a Rolls Royce?!?" He

got no response, so he opened the door and stumbled out into the street, and, much to the rich fucker's horror, started tapping on the window. "Hey, I seen one just like that on *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*! Hey, are y'all famous? Hey look at that boys, it's a real live Rolls Royce." Since my choice for friends seem to be drunken idiots or drunken idiots, I'm glad that I picked the funny drunken idiot.

Then, on Thursday, as if this town isn't already enough of a pile of shit, I managed to add my name to the anus of its history. When the shit hits the fan, it really splatters, and in this case it was a lot of shit and I'm sure it's splattered pretty far. I thought maybe I could write a letter fast enough for you to get it and use it as some sort of turd umbrella or something, but I didn't send it in time. Anyway, I'm sure you've already heard about my adventures in glass work, seeing as how news travels faster than it happens. (Not that I would ever say that certain people around here gossip too much, no I would never say that.) Letter enclosed, nuff said.

Sorry this is so short. I'll write another letter that's more flowery and nice when I'm feeling less suicidal.

-Elliot

June 26, 199

Dear Mr. Easterling,

This is a hard letter to begin, but I'll start with what I want to be the theme for this letter: I am sorry and embarrassed for what I did to your store. There are no excuses for what I did, but I'm going to try to explain why I did it.

What I did was wrong. It made things worse. I hope that this letter does the opposite. I hope you'll read this.

On Thursday I stopped by your store to pick up a sprinkler for my dad. I walked in and waved to Paul Nicholson and found the sprinkler. As I approached the counter, you were talking on the phone, and I heard you say, "Bout the only thing that you can trust a nigger to do is to steal." You looked up and saw me there, sprinkler in hand. I almost swiveled my head to exchange glances with Paul, to let him know that I didn't share your racist opinion. But he already knows how you feel, and I didn't want to drag him into any disagreement with his employer.

I think you knew that I didn't share your feelings, but you lowered the phone and smiled, "Well, it's the truth ain't it?" I should have walked out. But you told me a price, and I handed you some money, and then you gave me my change like nothing had happened.

At home I sat in my room and replayed again and again what you said. And how I didn't look at Paul and wondered if Paul thought that I was a racist for not saying anything back to you. I worried that Paul might think that me being a racist was the reason that we weren't friends after sixth grade. Paul and I had been friends all through grammar school. But then we got to middle school, and we haven't spoken much since. And I worried that Paul thinks that it's because I don't like black people, or I think that black people "can't be trusted."

I started to get angry, thinking about how crappy the whole thing was, remembering all the foul, rotten parts of Wilson. Things I usually try not to remember. Like how mad I was when my mom wouldn't let me have a study date with Nileen Morehead because, "People might get the wrong idea and burn the house down." Or the time my father and I drove to Covington to get new tags for the car and were "greeted" by a gang of KKK in full robe. When one of them forced literature through my open, passenger-side window, that was the first time that I had seen fear on my father's face.

That night, at dinner, I told my parents about what happened, and they said that we wouldn't shop at your store anymore, but somehow that just didn't seem like any consolation. It didn't square things up.

I was lying in bed, and I couldn't sleep. I kept hearing what you said, and getting madder and madder at you and more and more embarrassed. Finally I just couldn't take it anymore, grabbed my baseball bat, went to your store and broke the windows. I mean all of this not to excuse what I did, but to begin to explain.

There's this part of Judaism that goes like this: God created the world imperfect, with flaws, and then created humans to straighten out the problems. It's called Tikkun Olam, which means "Fixing the World." There are a lot of things about my religion that have been difficult to understand and follow, but the idea that this world is messed up seems pretty true, and I accept that it's all of our jobs to make the world better. Which I didn't do when I broke your windows with a baseball bat. Which I am trying to do now with this letter.

In closing, I'd like to tell you what I wish that I had done. When you said that stuff about black people, I should have said, "I don't agree," put down my purchase on the counter and walked out. I wouldn't have had to look at Paul to show him that I was on his side.

At the dinner table (before I broke your windows) my mother said that I should write you a letter explaining how I felt, and I thought that it wasn't enough. And here I am, with the beginnings of a criminal record, four hundred dollars for the poorer, writing the letter I should have written that night.

I hope this letter, in some way, starts to make things better.

Sincerely,
Elliot Rosenberg

July 8, 199

Maureen-

A jail break has been planned. I wanted to wait for your conjugal visit, but a month and a half feels like a forever right now. It couldn't stay this shitty-well maybe it can stay this shitty - but I'm leavin

DC bound. Not Knoxville. Not college. Not Wilson til I die. Deeee Seeee, you see.

This is the story: me and Colin went to see Marchenko play in Memphis. Since I went with Colin, we left late, and when we got there this band, Three On The Tree, were already playing. It was the

antithesis of a big rock show. It was at this warehouse by the river. No stage, no extra lights, no backstage, the bands were hanging out and talking to people in the audience. Plus no one was drunk. Plus it only cost five bucks, and it wasn't in a bar or anything, these guys just rented the warehouse and had the show there. Two other bands played before Marchenko, and then when Marchenko played it was totally packed and people were going ape-shit, and there was this big circle of people slammin' in front. The band stopped the show and asked people to settle down so everyone could have fun and not get hurt. They also talked about a lot of their songs before they played them. One was about this big police brutality thing in DC. Every song built up into swirling madness until it seemed like all the equipment was broken, and then the next song would start on a dime and do it all over again. They were totally out of control, and played completely tight at the same time. Fucking incredible. Best show ever.

After the show I wanted to ask them questions about DC. They were all drenched in sweat, I was all drenched in sweat. I felt like a geeky groupie or something, but they were really friendly. Ed, the bassist, gave me the number of this house in Arlington (a suburb of DC) called the Positive Change House, which is where he lives with a bunch of other punk people. He said it's a good place to check for rooms in the DC area, since a lot of people move in and out.

So that was it. I was like, "Fuck Wilson, I'm moving to DC." By the time I got home, I could see the Washington Monument on the horizon. I was pretty stoked, but you know, whatever, anywhere would be better than Wilson.

So I called today and talked to a guy there, and it turns out they've got a room opening for two months, starting August 1. The house rules seem cool: no meat, no alcohol, no drugs. It doesn't seem like they have a "You're Going To Hell If You Touch The Stuff" attitude or anything, though.

Tonight I tell my folks. It's been tense around the house since The Incident. They're still less than thrilled about the no-college-right-away decision. But even if college is "really different from high school," I'm in no mood. So things will be easier on everyone if I at least leave town. Even if it's not for Harvard. At least Hannah has been at camp and hasn't had to deal with all of this shit.

La

Big blow-out with the folks. Done some screaming, some crying. No college = failing at life. Failing 101, enrollment deadline is next week. Here's my deposit, sign me the fuck up. I'm gonna ace this one. Think maybe I'll go out and break some windows. Oh wait, I guess I already passed that class.

4:20 a

Fuck. I can't believe I'm making plans that mean that we won't see each other for a long time. Salivating for a few weeks with you. It's been a long month with no definite plan for escape. And now I have one. I wish that we were running away together, but you've got your escape pod ready, and there's no room, and now I've got one too. I know that you know...

Strange that I know that I'm leaving and you don't know. Strange to make this decision without hearing anything about what you think about any of this. The only good thing here is thinking about how you used to be here. So I should go where there's something better, right? A phone date? I'd really like to hear your voice, and not have a six day lag in communication.

Love,
Elliot

July 20, 199

Dear Maureen,

Just counting down the days. Going to work. Playing guitar. Now that I'm leaving, I have this urge to find every person in town and tell them exactly what annoys me about them. Today I wrote a song for Missy Johnson.

Big red chewing gum breath, carmex covered lips, I want you.

I love the way your hair stands up, up against gravity, in open defiance of all that this world stands for.

Please teach me the right color blush for the natural look.

Please teach me that look, that look that fools so many - the dumb, the pseudo-deep, that look that makes idiots believe that you don't understand the darkness/evilness of all that surrounds you.

What inner-strength you show with that fluorescent green skiing jacket.

Higher you reach, your hair says it all.

Glad to hear that camp is cool. Sounds like you had a good time on your weekend off. It's cool that you've made friends with that German guy. What did he think of the amusement park? Do y'all speak German or English when you're not around the kids?

No word yet from Easterling. It was pretty bizarre, writing that letter as "Elliot the Jew." I forget that lots of people in town think about my family as the Jew Family. Until I'm reminded. Not that I'm not psyched about being a Heeb, but there are some crappy parts, too. Example: there's a prayer that men are supposed to say every day that goes like this, "Thank you, O lord, my god, who did not make me a woman." It ain't all apples and honey, this Jewish Heritage.

In addition to my daily prayers, I've been mixing a new tape for you. And as a special bonus, Rabbi Rosenberg has written some commentary about what the musicians are trying to tell us.

"Dressed to Kill," is on Marchenko's new album. I was lying on my bed a couple nights ago, listening to this, and it hit me that a lot of these songs are about the Gulf War, "Drop one down the chimney/that's so erotic/ A free vacation/ somewhere exotic" and I was back in the minute when we drove down to Austin so you could check out the school and so I could take a trip with you (and so that we could burn a lot of gas and give America a reason to fight a war for oil). I remembered the "Support the Troops" parade organized by the fraternities, and standing alongside the main street, watching rich frat boys on floats showing their support. Alternately being overwhelmed by how frustrated and small and crushed we were by the whole big war machine, and then rallying again to make sarcastic comments about the parade. My near insane, off key screamed version of "Proud to be an American." And that woman, wearing the "woman: man = fish: bicycle" t-shirt screaming at the

parade over and over, “You fucking idiots. You fucking idiots.”

And sleeping with you that night: super fragile creatures clinging and clutching for warmth and comfort in the face of something big and scary and undefeatable.

The thing about mix tapes, and the way that they’re like relationships, is that I get to put all the genuinely pretty/interesting parts at the beginning, on the surface, to draw you in, to get you to want to be closer. And once I have you interested, attracted, wanting to know all of me, I show you the more human sides, the less pretty and the more petty. And then I feel cooler and better and more loved because you see all (whatever that means) of me and still love and like and are attracted to me. I try to explain the interesting things that I’m thinking and then hope that you’ll still want me even when you know all the depressing shit that comprises large portions of my brain. Some good poetry about some bitter shit. A cut off the new Marchenko album, then here comes a crusty Dylan song.

The next song, “Masters of War,” is a, um, folk song, but super important. This is the song that Bob Dylan played on Saturday Night Live the weekend the war started. Of course he was so drunk, or something, that you couldn’t understand a word he was singing and it kind of sounded like he was gargling, actually. But I just kept thinking of all the people around our parents’ age who used to listen to this stuff and actually believe in it, thinking of them seeing it on SNL and remembering how they used to feel about this song and what it used to mean to them and thinking about what soulless yuppies they’ve all become. Meanwhile the world has gotten worse, and George Bush got elected, and we were about to start bombing the hell out of another little country far away for our economic interests. Thinking about all those people who saw that and were maybe touched just a little bit, maybe.

Iggy Pop’s “I Wanna Be Your Dog.” I mean sometimes...

And some Phil Ochs crawled out of my parents record bin.”Love Me I’m a Liberal.” “Ten degrees to the left of center in good times/ Ten degrees to the right of center when it affects them personally.” I used to sit in my room and listen to Phil Ochs and come out and ask my parents to explain all the references in his songs. And then they told me that he killed himself and I haven’t listened much lately, but this one song wanted to go here.

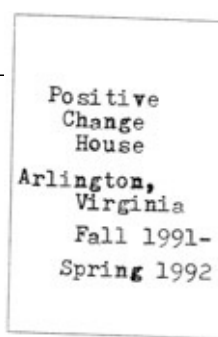
“It’s Tricky” by Run DMC-I just hope that every time you listen to this tape you’ll hear this song and know that I can rhyme your ass into the ground, and wherever you are, however many years from now you better be ready to do battle.

Soul Side’s “Clifton Wall.” It’s funny that we were almost too shy to go up and talk to them after they played that night, and now I’m going to be living in a house with Ed from Marchenko.

Too much talk.

I like your new way of saying, “I was laughin’.”

L-word,
Elliot



Tired, but want to write, to record a little. Don't want this to be another failed journal that turns into my math notebook. At least it won't be a math notebook soon. I guess a journal's like flossing. Have to make it a habit, so I just do it every night, like my prayers down on bended knee.

Today I moved out of Wilson. Mom was crying, Dad was flustered. Normal. Hannah cracked funny jokes. Also normal. I got in a car with Colin and Jay. Apples on the tree were ripening and I was glad that I wouldn't be there to rake up the rotten ones.

Positive Change: a house full of punk rockers, but totally suburban looking. No graffiti, you can't tell from the outside. Colin and Jay and I got here at 11:30 and Mike was grumpy about us arriving so late. I guess we should have called. We moved the stuff into my room, and then walked to the 7/11 at the corner. I kept waiting for things to start, for me to meet people and have a job, but everyone was asleep and Colin and Jay just wanted to go to sleep. And I should be sleeping, but I can't, wondering how it's going to be. And hoping that Colin and Jay don't hang out too long, cause I want to look around and meet people alone.

Went out to Taco Bell with Adda, Sean, Jordana. Jordana didn't eat anything. What am I supposed to write? I need a job. Already worried about money, which sucks. There are six 7/11s within walking distance from our house.

Weird to live in a family house with a family of people I don't know yet. Cooking dinner, paying rent not in my parents' house. This is me, not in college, everyone, especially me, surprised to see me with such an unmapped future. No college-dormhouse-mom-cafeteria-meal-plan.

Dear Diary,

Got a job at Dupont Natural Foods. Saturday Adda and Sean gave me a tour of the city. We took the Metro to Dupont Circle in DC. Mass transit is awesome. Supposedly the trains here are so clean that they've been used in movies as scenes where people go to heaven. Stopped by Dupont Foods where Sean works, filled out an application, got called, start in a week. Glad I don't have to flip burgers or something. It should be a pretty cool job. Also cool that I still have a week off. Time to relax, get situated, explore the city.

Atomic Records in Georgetown. Awesome.

Eros Auto Association 7". Kicks ass. Saw first picture of Tina on the back of her record. Now I know

what the regular dweller of this room looks like. I found out from a record cover. Fucking weird.

Can't wait to tape Adda's records.

Carnival Plague plays on Thursday. With other bands that Sean and Adda say are really good.

Wish I was at home for Maureen's send off.

Sat around the house and listened to records. I think I'm looking forward of going to work. Tried to call Maureen but it was busy, probably good, it will be cheaper to call later anyway. Think I'll go swing in the park.

Me, Adda, Sean, Ed, Christa and Marian made a big spaghetti dinner and went to the show. El Pollo Negro: big times three, half the smoke of Smiley's, lots of people listening to rock music, Jane's Addiction on the sound system in between bands, I only know five people, but at least I like everyone I know.

Big mast statues over the bar, walls are purple, floor: huge and checkerboard. Little spotlights everywhere that cut through the smoke and illuminate spots on the checkerboard when it's empty and the heads of the crowd when it's full of people.

Even though it's a bar, anyone can get in.

Animal Farm was awesome. They were all wearing paper mache pig heads and fishnet stockings. The slam pit was friendly, swirling bodies, other people in big animal heads who got subjugated and beaten by the band, and a big banner that said "Some Animals Are More Equal Than Others."

Carnival Plague: Spazzy singer looking inbred and dressed up like an 80's new-waver. Hippie bassist metal guitars, woman drummer who pounded the shit out of it. Rad. Adda said Tim, the singer, is Tina's boyfriend. "Sometimes."

By the end of the show I could have wrung half a cup of sweat out of my shirt.

Stayed up talking with Jordana at home. She's so cool and foxy. Do housemates?

And this is me writing in a journal, a parting gift from my parents (with one hundred dollars inside). Which brings me to the question: Why am I writing this? Who's going to read it? Older me? Someone I trust who's rummaging through my personal stuff? Grandchildren? Stealer of a backpack examining the goods?

Whatever. Whoever you are, hopefully you'll see something that doesn't suck.

Jordana and Sean and me did Food Not Bombs. Went around and got expired stuff from all the health

food places (and Aaron robin hooded some good stuff from Dupont Nat. Foods). Mike and us three and Liz, Jason, and Nicole all made a big Soup with the vegetables, and sandwiches with the bread and ate health-food donuts while we cooked.

Handed everything out in Lafayette Park. Vegetarian food for free, homeless people and punks and hippies all came. Jordana and Sean are in charge of doing this every Saturday.

Food to the people. Thinking a lot about how much food gets thrown out around me every day. And a day at work I'm surrounded by food.

"There's starving children in..." But 40,000 die everyday. Like destroying food to end the great depression. So that "everyone" can eat again. Except the people who forever almost starve until they actually do.

Michael came in today after the lunch rush, he was bossing everyone around:

"Elliot, could you straighten up the soda case? Everyone, while I have your attention, I just want to remind you that you can have one soda on your break, but you have to pay for juice or anything else."

Sean was all smiles and zeal, and went to work.

"No problem, Michael! I'm gonna clean up the snack department, okay?" Susan was at the counter looking annoyed, and then Michael took her into the back to talk to her about something, "Elliot, could you take a break from the soda case and watch the counter for a second?"

"No problem, Michael." Maybe I could just run around and get nothing done all day. Sean started acting like he was dancing in a musical, straightening up the snack displays. He was exaggerating all of his movements and making a big production of sticking one of each snack into his jeans pockets.

Then Michael and Susan came out of the backroom, and Sean kept vigorously tidying up the shelves, and shot Michael a big smile. Michael looked all proud and then he left. It turns out he was telling Susan that she needs to "seem happier in the store, especially around the customers."

Sean brought home lots of vegan chocolate bars for everyone. I wonder if Susan will get fired, it seems like she could get on Michael's good side pretty easily, if she just tried a little. It sucks that Sean is Mr. Employee-of-the-Month while he steals lots of shit. But Michael sucks harder.

Tired, but I want to write before I sleep, while it's fresh. Jordana told me tonight that she was molested when she was six/seven. I had no idea what to say. "That really sucks," or "I'm so sorry." A responses sounded wrong in my head. I stayed silent for a while, then asked her how much she thought about it. She said that she thought about it a lot when she first remembered it, but that now she only thinks about it when things remind her, like I had by telling the story of my first grade girlfriend. And for a second I felt shitty about bringing up first grade, but then she seemed just kind of regular, and not upset. Then we played the spitting game, and I got nailed on the eyebrow by her first (and obviously juiciest) lugie.

Back at the house, and the image of some hairybacked cretin touching a young Jordana has me creeped-out. ~~But it probably wasn't some hairyback, it was probably someone at church or school or uncle or baby-sitter.~~ And then I think about Maureen, and visualize her uncle doing that shit to her. And I worry about Hannah, and wonder which is the asshole that might try and pull fucked-up shit with her. And I wonder if the assholes don't have sisters or don't think about them as being like their sisters. But then that's fucked up, because if every girl is like your sister then which ones are you supposed to want to get it on with?

The images of Jordana and Maureen and Hannah won't let me get to sleep, and the usual sleeping pill of masturbation is way out of the question.

That riot grrrl zine makes me think that it's worse than one in four.

On the Metro today, something like this:

Sean: Sucks that Michael is such a dick to Susan.

Me: It seems like if she'd just try to be a little more enthusiastic when he's around that he'd lay off her...

Sean: No way, he just gets off on having the power to tell people how to behave. Besides, why should she be enthusiastic?

Me: Because people don't want to come into a store where everyone is in a bad mood, and Michael wants people to enjoy shopping there, and since he's the boss, we should act friendly so that he'll be happy...

Sean: Whatever, just cause he's the boss doesn't mean he's better than us or something. This job is totally without purpose, other than to make money for his lazy ass. If you're not going to enforce "profit-sharing" by giving yourself big "discounts," you might as well scare away all the obnoxious customers. Lower profits discourage other people from wasting their lives on such useless endeavors.

The rest of the way home I felt like such a kissass. The kid that wants to please the teacher, angry that the other kids aren't acting quiet enough to earn the piece of candy for the class. Super lame. Wilson sucked, but at least I got to be the rebel, not the goodie-goodie.

Food Not Bombs tonight. Super depressing. Old lady on the bench, got kicked out of her house, hard to tell if it happened two months ago or ten years ago. Didn't know what to do. "I just got to find this piece of paper. Then they'll give me my key." And not sure if she's on the streets because she's crazy or crazy from being on the streets. Not sure what to do either way. I was thinking about how there's nothing short of bringing her back to the house that I could do, facing the fact that I wasn't willing to do that. I looked up at the White House, like a postcard picture in the spotlights. I saw a huge rat in the flowers, galloping away like a fucking dog.

Everyone is out tonight. Jordana and Christa went to a women's coffeehouse meeting thing. Not sure where Sean and Mike and Ed are. Read an old issue of *Riot Grrrl* that had Christa and Jordana's writing.

Things I need to do

1. Write more. (A zine?)
2. Go to shows alone. Or invite other people to do shit, not wait to find out what the house is doing.
3. Kiss someone. 87 and 1/2 days. Can't even read *Riot Grrrl* without getting horny. Oy yoy yoy.

Michael's such a dick. Today he came in and was snacking on all the bulk foods. Susan was trying to look really happy and it was just really painful. "Smile and the world smiles back," he said to her. Sean made a puke face behind his back and Susan just kept smiling. Her face looked broken. I wasn't sure she was going to cry or spit. When Susan got off, we were all hanging out by the register.

Susan: "It should be illegal to schedule a place like this."

Sean: "What, making people work here for more than 40 hours a lifetime?"

Susan: "No, setting it up so that we all work seven and half hour shifts and can't get a lunch break or insurance or whatever cause we're not fulltime."

Sean: "It's a health food store, just eat a lot of food, you won't get sick."

Susan: "Michael's already on my ass enough, he'd probably fire me."

Sean was dropping a jar of garlic-stuffed olives into Susan's backpack while she was looking at me. Three seconds later, Michael came back in, "Come on guys, there's always something to do around here, no reason to be sitting around. I'll be in back getting ready to close."

Close call.

Feels shitty, making plans to become a lousy employee. At Wilson Video I wouldn't even take home the new releases because I wanted to keep the selection good for customers. But on the other hand, I could take home any other video for free with Mr. Roberts' blessing. Country mouse in the big city.

Long Distance, thank g-d.

Me: I'm going to shows, have a job, doing Food Not Bombs, cool friends, people are making their own magazines...

Them: Well, make sure to keep up with the writing and reading "so you won't be out of practice when you get to college."

Oy, yoy, yoy.

I thought statements from family therapists were supposed to be along the lines of "I hear what you

are saying, and I support you in your efforts to become the person you want to become.” At least Mom’s capable of leaving her work at the office.

I thought your motto was “Tune in, turn on, drop out.” Oh wait, maybe that policy has been revised to “Don’t do what you want, go to college.”

He looks to be about 18, wearing clothes that pretend to be picked without a thought as to fashion. Not quite tall, but posture that looks like he’s used to ducking or accustomed to teachers and parents reminding him to sit and stand straight. He’s got fast eyes, like he’s new to this world, which he is. The kind of kid who finds a joke that pleases the crowd and keeps with it far beyond funny, as if to remind himself and the group that he has been capable of funny.

They’re going bowling, and he seems confused, because bowling is old and familiar terrain, but these kids hate, loathe his old and familiar terrain. So did Elliot, that’s why he sought these new friends. But now they’re going bowling, and it was the old Elliot that was the bowler. The new Elliot laughs out loud at the idea of bowling team. But these kids love to wear the shoes, and now they all have bowling names. Gilda and Bubba and Flamer are having a blast playing this goofy game, drinking soda, they even make a bet on the final score. Then the old Elliot comes to bowl, and the old Elliot wins the game by an easy 80 pins. And Christa (“Gilda” when she wears bowling shoes) is the big loser, so must karaoke at the Waffle House to the song of Elliot’s choice (the old or the new, whichever shows up). And though he’s realized that he’s the dumb kid that’s been invited to hang out only to be the butt of all the other’s jokes, he doesn’t see an even semi-graceful exit, and isn’t hurt enough to look for revenge. So he acts as though he doesn’t know, still hoping to win them over.

At the Waffle House he picks “Elvis Trilogy” and acts like Christa (Gilda) is really going to get up and sing along in the middle of the restaurant. He’s trying to keep the lame trophy. And then seals his victory when the third part of “Elvis Trilogy” turns out to be “Dixie.” “I wish I were in the land of cotton/ Old times there are not forgotten.” He stops himself short of blushing, when he realizes that his eating partners haven’t taken exception to the lyrics. During the rest of the meal, he’s able to soothe his bruised ego by reminding himself that these kids don’t even understand the racism of the song’s words. It helps a little, but in the back of his mind he knows that they probably just weren’t listening, probably just trying to pretend that the whole thing wasn’t happening, that he wasn’t there at all, ruining their night on the town.

And then, for a curtain call, he miscalculates his part of the bill, so it looks like he is trying to leave a 18 cent tip.

The shittiest minutes of my DC.

Michael’s latest cool move: keeping us late on Friday to clean store before remodeling, canceling work on Saturday so we don’t even get O.T. Retaliation: free shitake mushroom and teriyaki sauce.

Me and Sean made dinner and everyone was psyched. At dinner, Sean said, “The sauce is complimentary of Elliot’s deep pockets, he’s really coming along.”

Everyone smiled and said thanks. Adda said, "Nice job, sauce liberator."

Nice to be patronized in your own home. At least there's one thing that my housemates don't think I'm a dork for doing.

Sean is working on a theft manifesto that he's going to make into a poster.

Ed's moving to Mt. Pleasant in October. I get his room. Housing dilemma solved.

More tired after my day off than before it. Drooling on the metro.

Hung out with Christa all day, chopped and cooked all evening, good rock show all night, up til dawn talking to Sandshark.

C asked me to a movie, maybe I'm not superdork after all. Pretty awkward, we'd been hanging out all day. I wanted to hold her hand, is she straight? single? into me? She's cool.

Tina came home. Mike in the living room in underwear. Strange, everyone in the house being so nonsexual, and mostly shy. I was eating cornflakes, pretending to be reading. Tina has a road sign in her hands that says "Dingleberry Rd" and she's trying to tell him about how she stole it in Iowa.

Mike in his red briefs + Tina holding a sign that says "Dingleberry" = laughing, soy milk out my nose. It's a punk, it's a grocery store clerk, it's...SUPER NERD.

Haven't laughed like that since I moved to DC.

Then the big homecoming show. The same woman holding the dingleberry sign breathing fire. Tina rocks.

Christa has a Riot Grrrl stencil spray painted on the back pocket of her jeans. I stare at it a lot and then feel like a sleaze for staring at her butt. Then later I do it again.

Talking with her makes me think a lot. I can't tell if we're arguing or discussing. I guess we're both just really into what we're talking about. I always feel like our arguments are, on an unspoken level, about me being a sexist pig. I get defensive, but that could be because she's right. I don't know.

It's good to be challenged so that I think a lot about the words that I say and what they mean.

The bad part is: it's impossible to put the moves on someone when you are completely paranoid of them thinking you're a pig.

I can't believe how much bottled water we sell. People don't give a shit about what comes out of the faucets, as long as they can afford the clean stuff. Tough shit for the people who can't.

Eron invited me to work at Discontent stuffing copies of the new Colburn album, which is cool, meeting some new people, a little cash, and I'll get to see how it works. Amazing that he remembers me from TN. He and I both know that I remember him, cause I paid to watch and listen to him. But I'm amazed that he remembers me. Strange that across the world there are people that everyone will always remember and others that have to be psyched when those people remember them.

Came home, kids were all in the kitchen and living room Food Not Bombing. Talked to Colin on the phone. Hard to explain to someone at college what's going on here. Zines, music, politics, three local labels, everyone is up to something. Even the show tonight is raising money for a rape crisis center, not to mention it's all-ages. Feels like Haight-Ashbury in the 60's, except no one's doing drugs, or talking about sex (or doing it as far as I can tell). Plus, people don't have lice.

People who weren't the homecoming royalty and don't want to be.

Bored. But nothing seems like fun. Every record looks foreign and unpleasant to listen to, even my faves. Sick of reading, tv, music, walking and working. Feel like it's a Sunday and I'm dreading returning to school tomorrow. For no real reason, like it's just my time of month.

Haven't talked to Christa for a week. I can't tell if she's avoiding me. The last time I saw her we were at her place after the Three On The Tree show. Seemed obvious (to me) that I wanted to kiss her. She didn't say she was tired, I didn't offer to leave, she didn't invite me to stay, conversation wore thin. I was hard to tell what was up, or wasn't.

When I called tonight, Lisa said that she was out with Jonas. I wonder if they have something going. Jealous? Who me?

Nov. 5, 199

Maureen,

It's really good to get letters from you. I was laughin'. Are you sure that my parents don't pay you to write me about how great college is? You wouldn't believe the shit they've been giving me lately.

The other night I went to the Discontent House and helped package CDs and records for a big mailing. They do everything themselves, from promotion to tour, and they hire all these local punkers to work in the office and take care of various business things. It's pretty much the coolest business I've ever heard of. They're totally into documenting the DC punk scene, not putting out records just because they'll sell. The bands have total control over the music and covers, and the CDs never cost more than \$8. I got paid \$6 an hour to help, and got a free copy of the CD. It's awesome that there are people here who have gotten to the level of a nationally distributed record label, who keep going because they care about what they're doing, not because they're trying to make money. The idea of "rock stars" is pretty stupid, but I'm still in awe of the cool things they do.

A couple of nights ago I went to see a show at El Pollo Negro, the big club here, and in between the bands these women (part of the whole Riot Grrrl thing I told you about) were doing spoken word

performance stuff. This woman who I think is super smart did a piece about beauty. I've been thinking about it a lot. I can't really summarize, but to summarize... It was about how men's perceptions of women's appearances, and women's awareness of the way that men look at them, are part of the violence that happens against women in our society. I feel like it was really good poetry no spare words and the words flipped around and felt different in each sentence.

The poem got me thinking about how annoyed you used to get when I told you that you were beautiful like on prom night. No matter how many times you told me, I never quite understood. I could try to remember, but then we'd end up in some situation where you looked great, and I'd be all giddy in love, and then I'd say it again.

The poem linked concepts of beauty and a culture of sexual abuse really well, and I finally understood a lot of things that you had been saying to me. I remembered the time that we were fooling around while the Springer's were on vacation, and I looked up after a while and you were crying. And feeling a wall that I hadn't known before between us. And I knew, somehow, that it was a wall that neither of us wanted, but one that we were going to spend a long time trying to get through or around, trying to feel close to each other again. And when you told me about that shit with your uncle, I knew that's what that day had been about, even though we've never talked about why you were crying. And now I understand a little more, maybe, about how you hated to hear about how pretty people think you are. It's pretty awkward to be writing this stuff, but seemed better than talking about it on the phone. I don't mean to just bring it up out of the blue, but it's stuff that I've been thinking about. Maybe you said some of the same things on prom night, in the midst of the Big Talk, and I just wasn't ready to understand. Feel like I'm starting to understand more of what went on between us. Which is cool.

I think a lot of crazy things about us. Sometimes I think that we'll never live in the same town again. Sometimes I'm scared that these letters are the epitaph. Sometimes I imagine our children, as they sort through our stuff, will find these letters, tied up with a dainty ribbon, and wonder if they should read them. It's all anchored securely in reality. (I especially like the idea of you wrapping the letters, reverently, with a yellow silk ribbon, the excess of the ribbon you used to make that darling Easter bonnet.) We're just simple country folk, doing the best we can, readin' the Bible, raisin' barns after they burn cause it was such a dry summer, and maybe a little dancin' after we harvest the crops. But not that kind of dancin'.

Take care, do your homework. Have fun with those kids at the grade school, Ms. Hall.

Your contact with what you Oberliners call "the real world," I am,

Elliot

Sorry if I went too far. I know we're supposed to be excited about these growing pains.

Got a raise at work. Think I'm supposed to be happy and go out to a big dinner with the wife.

"That promotion finally came through, dear. We can afford our first child and the BMW."

"Oh love, I'm so proud of you. When you called and told me I went and put on your favorite lingerie. Woo hog.

Christa. I kissed Christa.

I kissed Christa and I really want to talk to someone about it. No one here who I can talk to about this kind of stuff. The person I really want to tell is still Maureen.

Tuesday night every one was over here and it was late. There was still stuff going on downstairs, so I offered my room. She was gonna sleep on the floor, but ended up in the bed, big enough for two. It was a long night of poor sleep and no action. A few days of total confusion, and now we've kissed.

In Wilson a kiss means this: we're going to date, be boyfriend and girlfriend. It means that we are going to walk around the mall with our hands in each others' back pockets. Cool that stuff here is more what we make it/ decide it to be. Not just plugging into premade roles that don't necessarily fit

But being confused sucks. Maybe I'm just nervous.

Sean's manifesto is complete. A hard night of wheat-pasting pays off: *City Paper* ran a blurb about the poster. Pretty funny.

A suit came into the store today on lunchbreak, chatted it up with Sean. Made some joke about "those posters all over that say I should steal things." Sean said, "Go ahead." The guy looked kind of scared. As he left, Sean said loudly to me, "He certainly is a well-programmed one, isn't he?"

Ed says the phones were tapped when they organized protests last year and we should watch it, even with vandalism.

STEAL EVERYTHING NOW

Top Ten Reasons Not To Pay

1. It's the American way. (You're standing on stolen land.)
2. Chain stores ruin small businesses. Big chains put more power in fewer people's hands. Theft makes these businesses less profitable and gives small business a chance.
3. Taking things without paying doesn't drive the cost up. Store owners already charge as much as the market will bear. That's how capitalism works.
4. It's like boycotting, except you don't have to do without.
5. Why should you do without just because you were born without?
6. If you don't pay, you won't need to work at jobs that suck, and you can do something meaningful with your time.
7. You could put that stuff to use. (Instead of letting it rot on the shelf.)
8. They charge too much.
9. Making capitalist ventures less profitable encourages people to do things more meaningful than selling junk to people who don't need it.
10. Sharing is good. Teach capitalists the value of sharing.

DON'T PAY.

All those found in violation will be ticketed

~~Haven't written in a while. Spending every other night with Christa, then too tired on nights alone. Not much to write. Go to work, eat food, make out, go to sleep. I like it fine. FNB on Saturdays, see some great bands, helping to set up a show. Every time that I see Christa around other people it's really weird, neither of us wanting to act couple-ish, or even treat each other different than our friends. So that sometimes, when we get into our bedrooms, it's hard to remember that we're supposed to be a couple. There are always a few minutes where I try to figure out if we are going to make out, or even hug. We never sneak into the bathroom to make out, and when we do make out it's not the hurry-and-touch-I-want-to-be-as-close-as-possible, it's more this-is-the-nice-thing-that-we-do-before-wego-to-sleep. It's cool, because I feel like with her setting the pace, I never feel pushy or gross.~~

Going home tomorrow, and will see Maureen there. Christa asked "Is it going to be hard for her?" Guess that's her way of making it clear that we're not kissing other people. I guess it's unrealistic to expect to feel closer to Christa than to Maureen this early on.

Wonder what I'll tell Maureen about Christa.

Twelve hours driving with Jordana. We listened to a lot of seriously punk rock tapes.

As we got closer to home, Nauseous and I rode in the same seat, one low fare. When we rolled into town it was strange to be seeing all of this again, and stranger still knowing that another pair of eyes watched me and the town. Couldn't believe I was back; took less than two seconds to remember all the reasons that I left. Every building looked so po-dunk and stupid and third-rate, which was all right when we passed through the other small towns, but this one I knew. Knew just how rinky-dink and small the mentality is. I could already hear all of the questions (sincere) about what famous politician and buildings I had seen. I could already hear Mrs. Bledsoe asking if I could get the president's autograph for her. And the stories about everyone's family trips to DC, and them acting like they know the town like the back of their hand. Not being able to explain that the only time I've been near the White House was to hand out food to homeless people.

With Jordana driving me it felt like I was in high school getting a ride home from some friend who I didn't want my parents to meet. Only I didn't want my friend to meet my hometown. And then I started to feel like Jordana represented everything that Mom and Dad are mad about in relation to me living in DC.

We pulled up in the driveway and walked through the door and I realized that it might be all in my head. M and D were happy to see me, I was happy to see them. Hannah and everyone was welcoming to Jordana and she smiled and didn't say much, but it didn't seem awkward. Little Sis was in rare form, a whole gaggle of things from school to show and various new talents to perform. When she saw Jordana's pink hair, she said, "Wow, what color is your parents' hair?" Everyone laughed and no one seemed to mind my new hairdo.

She's done this poem that goes:

When you tell me to turn the page and follow along with my finger,

My stomach grumbles

And I tell myself to eat a bigger breakfast tomorrow.

I'm so happy about the poem that I want to hug her, but I've got my role. Plus she's thirteen and doesn't want to be hugged anyway, so we both stand there, awkward and happy.

Hannah assumes the role of interpreter and guide throughout the candle lighting. Gives play-by-play when the Guildensterns come over and all the people below the age of thirty five are required to play game of dreidl so that Jordana can see How We Do It.

Jordana, the Pennsylvania anthropologist, scribbled page after page of notes, struggling mightily with the issue of how exposure was going to corrupt the authentic practices of our tribe. And a time was had by all.

Hard to go to sleep, knowing that I see Maureen tomorrow. Wish I could have seen her tonight. Strange that Jordana will be with us. Chaperone?

Seeing Maureen is insane. Wonderful. Horrible. Feel like I'm holding myself back from kissing her and holding her everytime no one is looking. Must be really obvious, too. I think she feels the same way. We watched *Over the Edge* at M's house. Jordana was asleep by the end (she's seen it about 100 times) and me and M were sort of cuddling.

When we left I felt like J thought I was a smutty boy who has different girls in each town and doesn't tell them about each other. Which isn't entirely true and isn't entirely a lie. I didn't do anything with Maureen that qualifies as Something I Have To Tell Christa About. And Maureen knows that I'm dating someone.

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