

Voices: A Series Of Oral Histories

by Jan Schmidt

Bewildered By The Mundane

Jennifer Blowdryer, interviewed July 8, 1994. Jennifer Blowdryer is the author of *Modern English*, a slang dictionary, *The Laziest Secretary in the World*, and *White Trash Debutante*. She is also a singer and the organizer and soul of the Smut Fests.

Jennifer: I grew up mostly in Rhode Island. When I was 15 I moved to Berkeley. Me and my mother wanted to leave my father who seemed to us to be mentally ill. She had a brother in San Francisco, so we packed a trunk and took a train across the country. Before that we went on a bus trip across the country. We got 30 days, anywhere you want to go on Greyhound. I think she liked Berkeley politically, and culturally.

Jan: What's your mom like? Is she a political person?

She is in a quiet way. She was depressed most of the time that I was growing up. She went to Africa with the Peace Corps when she was 55. She's a very giving person, Russian-Jewish, pretty much self educated.

So was moving to Berkeley a major change?

Yeah, but I was in such a fog all the time that some things did and didn't register, it was kind of like I was living under water. But yes, Berkeley was very different from Rhode Island. I got harassed a couple of times by people and didn't know how to respond, because being from the country you're nice to everyone. I didn't have any friends or know anybody, but I really didn't have any friends in Rhode Island either. I just wrote in notebooks a lot—bitter sarcastic little notes.

Like a journal?

Yeah but it was pure sarcasm. It wasn't any mushy emotions, just wisecracking. I was an obnoxious kid. **So you were an obnoxious rural kid who became a sarcastic city kid, but you always wanted to be a writer?**

It's a common thing for faculty brats to be socially isolated, so I read a lot. Without knowing that it was something I was supposed to do, reading was the only thing that there was. I was reading the *New Yorker* very young, *Esquire* when it was good. I read *Last Exit to Brooklyn* when I was probably 14. I digested a massive amount of writing rules without knowing that I had. It's one area that I happen to function in.

I read *Harriet the Spy*, about this little girl who's a spy and takes notes. I liked that idea. Since no one was talking to me, I could take notes on other people. I got in trouble for that in third grade. I wrote, 'Pamela has wrinkles on her forehead when she raises her arm.' The teacher found out and Pamela was very upset. She looked so stressed out when she talked, so I noted it. Being in a rural Catholic area, I was already pretty weird and that was just another weird thing to do.

Your father was a professor?

He was a professor. If you're from a family with the trappings of being liberal and intellectual in an area that is rural and conservative and you don't actually have the income for being cultural aspirants, you just seem pretentious. Then your family tells you not to have anything to do with the other people because

they're different politically.

And being from a house where there's no money and not functioning very well, you look very strange. So you end up being isolated.

At Berkeley High, I would write all the time in these notebooks, but it wasn't like I was pouring my soul out. It was very angry, very sarcastic.

Angry towards the other kids in the class?

No, everything. I was sent to a psychiatrist. I wanted to go because I wanted help, but I was too obnoxious. She dropped me or I dropped her. I got a scholarship to music camp and I was non-participatory. I hadn't been that way in Rhode Island. You want in for a while, then you give up. You go the other way. Things changed when you started hanging out in clubs in San Francisco and got some friends? I had a friend, who is still my friend, Remix. He was a reject with me. He was into the Grateful Dead. I somehow knew from what I'd read that he was gay, but my knowledge was spotty so I thought he had to buy white pants and hustle. That was from not having any contact with the real world and only with literature. I sent him off to turn his first trick. The poor guy was only 17 or 16. He trotted right off to Polk Street. He's still lap dancing. He's doing a lot of other things.

So you could have had a career as a guidance counselor?

I tried to pimp my sister off as a model. Some part of me was a very old queen when I was like 16. That's how I saw myself. I was very odd. Remix's father was the editor for a paper. He would have all these books he got to review that you could sell. We would bring them to Moe's Books and Record Store and get a ton



of albums with the credit. That was how we found New York Dolls, Lou Reed, and then through *Creem* magazine, I found the Ramones and the Sex Pistols. That was very very important to me.

Before I dropped out I would have this really cheap tape recorder and tape and I would put it under the desk and put my ear down to the desk and that was what would get me through my days at school.

You said you were a low level promoter? Was that early on?

The first thing I did I ended up being in a band. I never liked some of the major trends, like new wave or disco. I would have the albums from thrift stores and I would base my own mini-culture on them. I would get Remix to come along with me. We would be wearing bright pink clothes and I would have a little chiffon scarf and we would be doing the twist during a trend we didn't like.

Then me and this other girl from a group home decided that we liked marines, military people. We thought it was funny. So I had a Military Night at the Mabuhay Gardens. That was my first theme night. Then several years later, I had a night where I was a Liberate Sympathizer debating with three Maoist Communists. Only one person came and that was someone I was going out with who had won a ticket on the radio. It was like having an elaborate theme party that no one would come to.

I think that I learned how to put a show on. Other people, maybe they would have gotten depressed when they start learning and do everything wrong and nobody comes. Years later in New York, me and that Sammi Formo put on the Sparkly Glam Readings. It was like, 'Yeah, of course no one's here.' It didn't ever upset me, so I was able to learn how to put shows on.

Skipping ahead, your most recent show was a great success and had lots of people there, the Smut Fest.

Yeah, my Smut Fests. I ran the Smut Fests from like '88 to '92. When I did the first Smut Fest, I was going to Columbia and the readings that they had were boring. I liked ABC NO RIO and Annie Sprinkle and Veronica Vera. I liked how they were hack writing. I called it the High-Heel School of Journalism, because I was studying all these male schools of journalism. I was photo-assisting for Annie and we would go to a drag club or a porn convention and they would totter in their high-heels and Veronica would get these amazing interviews from people. Annie would photograph them.

I liked the way they were self-trained hack-erotica writers, but took it seriously 'cause they were never trained to write any other way so they were actually bringing respect to the form. A lot of people belittle them, they were actually pleasing the reader and making a good living. You actually do have to think about other people when you write and a lot of academic writers don't know that. I also felt like I had had shitty jobs and I had hustled and had my back against the wall. I was amazed at the extent to which the people who wanted to be writers hadn't done shit.

So on the bill for the Smut Fests I mixed all the writers together and the academic writers ended up feeling slighted. It turned out everyone came to see Annie and Veronica. That was what they really wanted to see.

After that this woman who owns a lap dancing parlor wanted to have a show there. I had been running readings at ABC NO RIO and Gas Station. No one else said, 'Okay, I'll take a day. I'll bring in a sound system, I'll emcee it, I'll book it.' Everyone else was real theory-oriented and couldn't just book a show. I was used to guerrilla theater by accident.

I ended up getting to be in this lap dancing parlor, and getting to make people who were there to see performance art walk through a metered turnstile which tricks have to do at a lap-dancing parlor. I was the first person to really come out about some things and I took some blows for it. Now it's very chic to read about the porn movie you've made. I think that's cool 'cause I think the younger girls are getting wilder and wilder.

This promoter and certain media tried to make the Smut Fests into some bachelor party which I hated. It turns out that no one else can exactly run them. P.S. I gave PONY (Prostitutes of New York) a night there and they didn't feel like running it. PONY needed someone to represent them for this night. It was July of '94. That was the last one I ran.

In '94 there was no one else that quite could handle it. You have to be very accommodating with certain personalities. You have to understand certain things that are almost from old theater days, about proper treatment, about a backstage and paying people, about doing things for people that this world, that

you'd think would be classier, this hoity-toity grant-supported world, doesn't know.

On the other hand, show-business people who are very trained haven't sometimes lived very much and don't understand the basics of hustling. It's good to have a combination of all different kinds of things for show. It was a really intense show. Too intense for most people.

How did you find these people for the Smut Fests?

It was weird. I did a photo-slang dictionary in '84 and people only trusted me to do that from having seen me sing in a punk band in '78. There is this weird way of living in the underground on a low level for a long time where you don't cross people, and you stay open. It's hard to be that way for a long time and not get bitter and stop noticing what this one generation of peo-

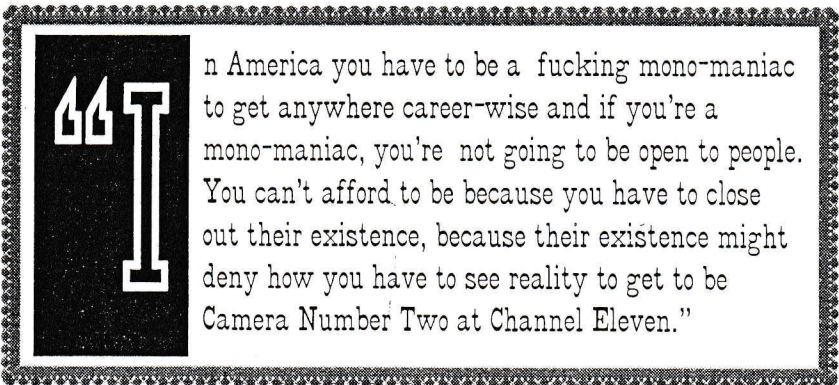
show-biz situations but aren't that good at grants, they make do with what's available. I had to send them out for safety pins and putting the curtain up and DJing. I had to integrate all these different worlds just to do a show.

I'd like to do a run-it makes sense to do at least four shows 'cause the show gets better and everyone can make a little money. In a lot of art circles you give people energy and they don't know how to give it back to you and that's why you have to get money.

You were in a band, did you study music before?

I had classical piano in Rhode Island. Then when I heard Devo and the Ramones, I had a piano teacher and I said, 'I want to sound like this, what are they doing?'

He said, 'Oh, that's really simple, they're doing this



ple is doing.

That's what a lot of people do when you see them go down. I was around older trendy people when I was like 17, so I always try to make sure that I'm open to everything that is going on and different kinds of energy. It's almost organic. You just let the show happen. It's that Quentin Crisp thing, you take your riches in people.

This Billy Divine, burlesque dancer, I knew through this young British girl who works in a dungeon. The British girl had come to interview me through this woman called Tubby Owens who does the Sex-Maniacs Ball who'd been aware of Smut Fests back in '88, and had had me send an article I wrote to Europe. Everything is all these weird connections that people make, we're living in a different sphere.

It isn't communal or ideal but there's definitely communication. It goes across continents and I take that for granted as part of my life. It's one of the things you get when you don't get the other stuff, food, soulful people. In America you have to be a fucking mono-maniac to get anywhere career-wise and if you're a mono-maniac, you're not going to be open to people. You can't afford to be because you have to close out their existence, because their existence might deny how you have to see reality to get to be Camera Number Two at Channel Eleven.

Let me think who else was on the bill? Oh, Chef Marco I knew because I'd done a reading at Club USA and I really liked his reading. He's also a completely self-trained writer, so he accidentally does very big things; he'll discuss philosophy cause he doesn't know you're not supposed to. He writes stuff on this bad typewriter at home and it's this wild mythology/philosophy, he doesn't know he's not supposed to be thinking big. It's almost tacky to think big in some art circles.

Dave Aaron Clark I knew because he writes for *Screw*. I had to have him list shows in *Screw* in the past. He had come out as a big submissive, which made him more likable to me. I don't like some of the men who work in porn but when they come out about being submissive of this or that they're a lot easier to be around. They seem a lot happier.

At a Prostitutes of New York meeting I met Chelsea, who's a transsexual and she knew me from when she worked at the Strand Bookstore in '85 when a book of mine came out and had been waiting years to meet me. She was also on the bill.

Everything goes across and through. You have to maintain respect for everybody. My burlesque dancer needed a curtain and the art people and these women from Berlin who had the art installations couldn't understand why she needed a curtain and they couldn't do that for her. I had to bring in my own people who I knew from other lives who are hard-ass third-world mechanics, people who function well in

major chord thing.'

I hooked up with two weird girls who lived in a group home. We put up an ad that we wanted a band. I had a Fender Rhodes and an amp my mother had bought with her teeny divorce settlement. I was the only one who could actually function because I at least had my mother and an apartment. I went to an audition and hooked up with a guitarist and she knew a bass player and we put a band together. Remix and I both wrote some songs.

I was busy doing that and going to night clubs, so it was too hard for me to get up early to go to class. Plus it got violent there for me. It was a mostly black high school and I hung out with this mulatto girl. The blacks didn't like that she was a freak too, so they turned on us. We'd get attacked physically and the school wouldn't defend us because they said, 'We have more serious problems and you're choosing to look this way.' So there wasn't really anything to do but leave.

Were you living with your mom?

No, I moved out when I was 17. My sister is three years older than me and she had left this cat who was in prison. First he was in prison in Idaho, then he went to prison in Lompoc. She showed up in California, and then he took the last of my mother's money. He ended up stabbed in the throat in the prison hospital. My mother had lost the last of her savings and my sister finally ditched him. She was very depressed, and I knew somehow that my sister could have tantrums, and it would be tolerated by my mother. I knew that that wasn't good. I was much smarter when I was younger. I said, 'The way that you're acting isn't normal, she'll take care of you the rest of your life. You have to get out of here.'

I sent her to Sassoon's on model night to get her hair done. I always had this little king mentality, in the middle of my deprivation. I was sending Remix off and that girl Robin, she was fixing me up and doing my hair. It was almost like I had a staff or something. So my sister had money and I had my child support and we got an apartment in San Francisco with Remix and this guy who turned out to be psychotic.

Did you have a job?

The thing was that I could never quite get hired anywhere. I had been unmatriculated for so long that my guess what a straight appearance might be was wildly off. I would go shopping and I would have a very nice gray skirt and a very nice blouse on I would be like sitting on a stoop waiting for the warehouse where I rehearsed to open up, and a Salvation Army person once came up to me and asked if I needed any help. Even as a very young person I couldn't get work. When I did get work it would be the migrantworker level, like doing inventory at Macy's. You'd get three or four an hour to count all the stuff. I remember working with an old Filipino immigrant and he said, 'The way you look you could be one of the girls that are out

there in the store, not here with me.'

He didn't know the culture well enough to know that there was something funny about me. If alloys touched my skin for a while they would turn a different color. Something was very fritzzy about me. I could get jobs for a little while, but not for very long. Instead, I went to school, because I could get loans. Twenty-five hundred dollar loans and still keep up my night life although I was very broke. I hung out with this transsexual Ginger and I would get backstage food. I worked at this swing club and I made a porn movie when I was 19 and I always didn't have enough to eat. I was very skinny for a very long time. But I stayed in school.

College?

I tested into SF State, but I wasn't that interested in it, I just couldn't get hired. I was always more interested in my night life so I would take 'Film Appreciation' and 'New York: Biography Of A City' and 'Typing,' 'cause I knew that was a good skill. A lot of older arty people like myself can't touch type, but I was taking touch typing when I was 14 in Rhode Island. Remix and I immediately signed up for a Typing Class. We weren't fooling ourselves.

Were you writing? Keeping this journal?

No, I didn't, because I had plenty of people around. I wrote lyrics. Sometimes I'd write a little article and Ginger would put it in her *Punk Globe* fanzine. I'd write the 10 most hated women on television or I started

very pop culture.

I was doing well in my writing workshops at UC Berkeley. People were telling me I was talented, and it was something I could do. The old men writers were able to see me clearly and I felt like an equal with them and not like an equal with the people my age. So I applied and I got recommendations. They were trying to call me at my mother's in Berkeley and I was never there. Finally they reached me and said, 'You know you got accepted and you got a fellowship to the Columbia Graduate Writing Program.'

I wasn't ready to go yet. I waited out one semester and finished putting *Modern English*, my slang dictionary together.

At the time I had a party band The White Trash Debutantes in San Francisco with my transsexual friend, Ginger. We were doing somewhat well but it was getting to the point where everyone was fighting. These people had never been in a successful band before, so they got really crazy. My mother had seen me go through so much pain being in bands and I had a moody possessive alcoholic boyfriend. I had to try to break away.

I moved to New York to a room that was eight-by-ten, so I didn't have any crazy roommates. All I did for a year, besides hooking up with Annie Sprinkle and Spider Web is walk five blocks to Columbia and live in this room and go to writing workshops. I was 24, 25,

gig. At this point if they're very talented but they give me a head trip, I'd rather have someone who can't play that well who's loyal to me. People get so fucked up about music gigs. A lot of men and a lot of older white guys are disappointed, the lack of rewards makes them bitter and resentful and they turn on people. They expected more. I, however, never expected anything. Certainly not remotely what I've gotten I don't like doing a bad gig, but it's not earth-shattering.

How were the people at Columbia?

I tried and tried and tried and they didn't think I was quite a person. I guess I was naive. I thought it would be people who wanted to be writers who'd had various lives. It turned out to be an East Coast upper class idea of what's real and what isn't and sort of sexist and old world. I hit my head against the wall and I didn't know it.

The teachers were fine. I loved the head of the department. But the tuition, it's \$12,000 a year, so you don't get the best writers, you get the people who can afford or who are willing to get seriously in debt for something as class-related as a piece of paper from Columbia. It's ridiculous. It's crazy that I did it. I still owe 20 grand. But I enjoyed being out of the work force for that much more time. I always knew I'd hate work.

What about the column you wrote for *Downtown*?

I was writing that music column but everyone was like, 'look at me, look at me.' They sent me all their fucking bad CDs and pathetic press releases. I took it to heart and I just couldn't take it any more.

Tell me about your lounge act.

Before my lounge phase, I worked with musicians who are very very skillful and a guitarist was an alcoholic and got pretty bad with me, that was why I had to go into ALANON. The songs were almost a complex math and I really learned a lot working with them, because I had to stretch up to it. But when that band ended I went to Baltimore to do some pick-up gig and I put together a guitarist, drummer and bass player. I stuck with this one guy, who was kind of like the worst musician out of the lot but who I still play with because he had the same flexibility that I had. If we don't have the instruments around, he can drum on a beer keg and he has a really good instinct as to how my songs go.

One band I called Surfatica, I had go-go girls and they did surf music. Then I had another surf band, the ConAirs, in Baltimore. They actually ended up kicking me out of my own band.

How did that happen?

I don't know. I was back in New York and this one bass player resented playing with me and they decided they would do an all surf song set. Before that we would do three surf songs and then I'd come on like at a Speakeasy with shades and a robe. They would do warm-up songs. I'd seen the Neville Brothers and I liked how they'd do five or six songs and then take a break and how they'd take it easy. I had done the opposite—having energy spasms and screaming on stage—I wanted to explore the other side, almost still as can be, having this very pointed lethargy. It was fun.

Men have a hard time working with me. I'm nice and I bend over backwards to save their egos, but it's still hard. The last time that I jammed, I jammed with three transsexuals, a little misfit 11-year-old boy, a divorced woman who lives in a camper in the woods in Pennsylvania. It took that diversity of people for a fun jam for me. I was making up lyrics and they were really supportive.

You mentioned ALANON, I wondered how you think of your relationship to guys and how that's changed.

That's really fucked me up ever since I discovered boyfriends. I've been functioning at a real small percent of capacity and that is really hard to break. My shrink told me, it's because of my mother being depressed and my father being crazy, I had to merge with them and their way of being in order to survive. I feel like if I separate myself I'll be alone.

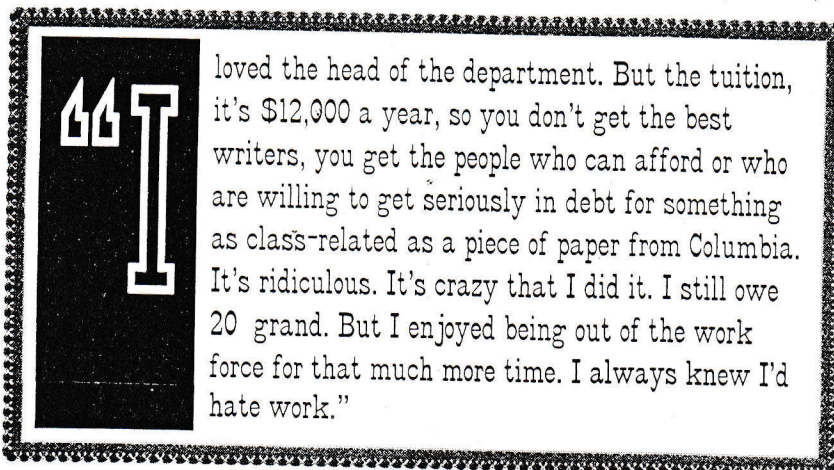
What kind of people do you pick?

Complex and needy and who have to take. They're the artist and what they do is so much more important than what I could ever do. The last person got competitive so quickly with me that it was easier to see that, for my own sake, I had to put a stop to the level that we were on. Sometimes the guys don't even want me to do it, and I just do it. I use people as a drug. I'm at that point where you get awareness of it, but you can't always stop it.

What brought you to an awareness?

I guess because I've been in therapy for several years.

(continued on pg. 19)



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writing my definition of some slang words. She would run it right away, so I always had that idea that you just do something and put it out. I never thought, I want to write, and it's going to be really hard, and no one will want to publish me. It was like, do it yourself, it's not that hard. So it was never mystical to me.

I wrote a couple of articles for the high school paper but they ripped up an interview I did with Debbie Harry and they hurt my feelings very much. I didn't have a copy. That was one of the last things before I dropped out of high school. Also we had our weapons confiscated.

What led you to put out your first book, *Modern English*?

I ended up in New York because fate led me to live with this beatnik guy who was putting together this book called *Hardcore California*. I saw him put that book together and I was furious that he was living with me and got my own part about my past wrong. I got the idea that people were documenting people who had not had a part in things.

What part of your past did he get wrong?

He had me singing the wrong song in the wrong year. He made my picture really teeny. I was the girlfriend that people pushed aside, because he was the important arty guy. He also had this magazine, called *Ego Magazine*. All I got to write was the gossip column. I tried to have a section called The Transvestite of the Month.

I really saw art people at their absolute worst, being with someone who was a power person to them. I was always watching what he did. I went to his publisher and I said I can do this photo-illustrated dictionary. I had the idea that it could be done, because I'd watched him do it.

How did you end up in New York?

I went from SF State to UC Berkeley because you had to take less classes to graduate there and colleges are cheap in California if you are a resident. I was at UC Berkeley and I saw a flyer for the Columbia Graduate Writing Division. It was a two-year M.A. that would allow you to teach in colleges but it was

Let me backtrack, how did you get your name?

My first band was the Blowdryers when I was 17. Me and this guy Timmy, this gay keyboard player, we were driving around in his '61 T-Bird convertible. All these people were saying they were the power youth or running around with armbands or they had names like Social Decay. They're the most humorless dreadful people and that was not what had attracted me to punk so I said, 'Why don't we name ourselves something everyday, like a blowdryer. The Blowdryers.'

And he said, 'Yeah, okay.' So that is where it came from. I never used it for a last name, but when I was putting together my photo book years later, if I said, "Jennifer Blowdryer," somebody would deal with me right away. It was an immediate thing to get people to deal with me or identify myself. Since I used it there then I have to use it here, it kept passing on and on.

Your mother said she saw you having all this pain with the bands, what was that?

I would always be confused by the head tripping with bands. My mother, being from the Bronx and children of immigrants, had been around people like that before, but I didn't have any frame of reference. I also had a psycho father so I knew how to keep hanging out with nuts. I would have to make sure my guitarist didn't drink and that the keyboard player who hated the dykes in the band was cheered up so that he would play. It's just how bands are.

Then when I played with men later on, they really couldn't hand it to me. They'd have all this skill and they'd spent all this time learning guitar, and they didn't know why this person who couldn't even really sing was getting much more attention than them, so they had to tear me down or sabotage me. Like one band with some grouchy skillful pot-heads in it, I hated so much I made the band be Kathleen. We only did like two gigs or something.

So you still have a band, a lounge act?

Yeah, but now I'm more pragmatic about it. I have musicians that I can call and get ready for a pick-up

Jennifer Blowdryer

(continued from pg. 14)

I was almost paralyzed from Alan the guitarist. My shrinks had to talk me through a lot of relationships like that.

It's like any recovery, it spoils your fun. It's still sexy to merge with an interesting nut. With that transsexual, Ginger, I was like her right arm for a while. They can live in their world and you kind of augment it, and step into it. That kind of street thing, some of that freak identification, too. Fuck the straight world—bonding. I was only socialized in a street way. You hook up with someone and you completely share everything for a while, because when they go away, you might not see them again.

That's really intense.

Very intense. It's hard, I still miss it. My mother says that my problem is that I always think that they're the artist. There's a big history of women writers being alone, being alcoholic, and part of me would rather be a dumb blonde and have company.

Are you having a writer's block these days?

I'm also not writing very well right now. I got very good at nonfiction and essays. My fiction, I didn't go near for years, so now my fiction is this rusty never well-developed-in-the-first-place muscle. That takes you down a peg or two, to not be good at something.

How do you judge when you do something good?

I know when things aren't literature. They're just okay or they're schlicky. That's why I went into therapy again—when I was in New York, I couldn't write. I knew that if I couldn't feel or remember, it's never going to get past a schtick level of good.

I have respect for literature, not necessarily for myself, but I have respect for literature. It's almost impersonal. It reached me the same way that a certain kind of music talked to me when nothing else did. If there is some sane part of you that recognizes the truth, recognizes liveliness, that's all that a lot of us had. We were sort of clumsily brought together by choosing the same escapes, and then eventually having to keep going.

Also my mother has really good taste in books. Also because she's Russian-Jewish, she has a certain ethos about her. She's not religious, but by blood she's Jewish.

Did you have a religious background?

No, I never had any religion and I always sort of noticed the Catholics. It was another thing that made me different, because everyone was Catholic in my area. I noticed some of them got little pearl necklaces when they turned 13 and had this confirmation thing. I was jealous of it. I realized that any kind of ritual would have been comparatively soothing to the home I lived in.

* was your home like?

Well it seems that my father is paranoid schizophrenic and he gets violent. It was like living in fear all the time and not knowing what he was going to do next. Having to be watchful—that's really common for people that are in ALANON—I repressed all sense of I want or I am in order to survive, and I'm having a real hard time getting back to it. Frankly if I didn't write or have things that I wanted to do, I don't think that I would bother. I think I would try to chug along in a complacent manner until my time was through. Because I happen to have been reached by mediums that I respect, I know what it is to do them. I couldn't do them, that was why I asked for help. So, patch me

speed this up and you slow that down.

I had this big hoopla night in Baltimore where I smoked pot, grabbed the mike during this band's set. Because this guitarist—who'd kind of rebelled against me during my own set was jamming with his rock band, so I said, 'I'm not your mother, so don't rebel against me. I've had enough of this macho jamming shit, I just want to be paid.' And they threw me out and then I hooked up with these fucking surreal junkies with a Cadillac and went to this speakeasy and smoked crack, drank a lot of beers and ended up making-out, and passing out with someone who's an ex-male stripper who takes home boy-hustlers. I've had the AIDS test twice, and I couldn't believe I would do that. He says I passed out before we did anything which is fine, but I was starting to go in suicidal tears, like very sociopathic. And I still have the odd hissy-fit. Like I kind of exhibit ugly social behavior. I don't even remember my last hissy-fit.



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up, man.

You're working on yourself to change?

I don't know. I mostly live by my subconscious. Sometimes I want to live at the level of a Faulkner novel and I get a lot of situations and a lot of people going. It's like literature, but I can't be like that all the time, I have to be simple and boring sometimes. I don't know how to be simple. I have to learn that. That's going to be pragmatics, more than anything else.

I'm good at the complex and bewildered by the mundane. It's thrilling, too, when you start learning. I didn't get a check book until I was easily 26, 27. I'm still happy when I write a check, I figure everything out and put everything in its little line, then the mundane is a thrill.

At some point you've come to the realization that you had a problem with drugs.

There's definitely something about my basic metabolic set-up that's off. I don't cope well with unaltered chemistry. You notice that you feel better when you

I had a needle scare from shooting up when I was 18, and I ended up in the hospital. It kind of broke my stride. I wasn't that reckless about drugs for years after that. I think if that hadn't happened I would have kept going a certain way, because I really enjoy shooting up quite a bit.

It's either the very poor or the very rich that get the most fucked up because they don't have to check in anywhere. I was basically walking without a safety net and had to somewhat cope. I think that held me in check. I'd also gotten in violent situations pretty early on and had little scrapes with the police. I think some people are unrealistic about the elements that are around them—what needles are and what police are and what violence is. I knew early on so I didn't play around with shit.

Then I was getting worse and worse and worse. So now I'm trying to accept that maybe I can't do that. People have always thought I was stoned or on drugs when I wasn't. I may not be someone in dire need of altering my perception.