

in it?"

He flicked his cigarette on the ground and glowered his way to class.

I replayed the entire conversation in my head on my way to Psychology. I wanted it burned into the curvature of my skull for the next time I sat down to write, but I wouldn't be able to write it all down until after class. Some of the information might be lost by then.

There's got to be a better way to remember story ideas, I thought.

Three days later, I finished a story called "Swindled," a series of unrelated events and images so disjointed and abstract that it conned the reader into looking for deeper meaning. Anybody searching was welcome to read the title. I almost stained myself laughing at that.

I mailed a copy to The Lynch Mob addressed to Michael Harper personally and went back to whatever passed for normal college life.

While I waited for Mike's reaction, I spent my time revising a story I had been working on for a while called "The Face." Once that was finished, I sent it to our English department head in consideration for a creative writing scholarship they had advertised all around campus.

"The Face" was published some years

later, in one form or another, and appears somewhere in this very book. It's one of the good ones, by the way.

Mike didn't say anything to me about "Swindled" for two weeks, which led me to assume he either thought it obtuse, or actually received the joke and was far too irritated with me to say anything. Regardless, it slipped my mind and my attention once again narrowed to Professor Mark's English class.

Professor Mark was a short, desperately friendly woman with a tendency to wring her hands everywhere she went in class. To her credit, she was always trying to get to know us better. Two weeks into her course, she had decided the best way to get to know us was to assign short story assignments. I happily turned in my latest revision of "The Face" and awaited her comments.

I had almost forgotten about that story as well when, one morning, she returned our graded stories. I didn't receive mine.

She stood up in front of the class with a packet of papers, stopped wringing her hands long enough to give a cheery clap, and announced that she had good news.

"One of your classmates has written an absolutely stunning piece of work," she said. "In fact, I consider this young author's work so well-done that I've made a special recom-

mendation on his behalf to the creative writing scholarship contest. I may be jumping the gun, but I think Daniel's got it in the bag."

She emerged next to me, grinning. Her hands strangled a copy of "Swindled."

"Mister Harper, editor of the campus literary magazine, liked Daniel's story so much he sent me a copy," she continued. "I fell instantly in love. It's very much a throwback to the modern realists of the early twentieth century. The use of metaphor is phenomenal, almost professional. Daniel's other story," she said, turning to the rest of the class, "The one he handed in for class, wasn't enough to really stir my waters, but this is wonderful. You just may have a fine career ahead of you, Daniel."

I nodded dumbly. Professor Mark handed me my story and offered a few closing congratulatory remarks. She advised the class to open our textbooks and prepare to discuss our assigned readings.

"Mister Pagoda," she said, "Perhaps you'd allow us a look inside your literary insights and tell us what you thought of the text you were supposed to have read."

To this day, I cannot remember what I responded with, but whatever it was, the entire class burst into laughter. It took all of them, including Professor Mark, considerable time to calm down.

I didn't laugh. I wanted no credit

for something I didn't consciously craft.

The scholarship came and went. "Swindled," with the aid of Professor Mark's recommendation, made an almost clean sweep of the judges. Even if she hadn't mentioned a word about it, I'm convinced it probably would have won. Fate is all knowing and all seeing. Fate would have found a way.

There was a tiny flare-up in the school press about my win. The English department tacked a few posters in the hallways announcing my story. It certainly made hiding out a difficult task, as any other criminal would agree.

But all flare-ups eventually quell, as did mine, and I was able to forget about "Swindled" for a while. There still was the matter of it being published in the annual, but that was an entire semester away. Plenty of time for me to make a name for myself with other writings.

Eventually, there were other stories. Most of them were finished and sent to prospective schools in great bundles with transfer applications, suggestive cover sheets, and a phone number.

Sometimes I'd think about a girl I dated for a laugh during this time. It ended after a couple weeks and we parted company. Sometimes that's how things happen.

that the giant grandfather clock in the sky could toll for me any day now, I might as well clue you in on why I originally decided to become a writer as a child - but not just yet. We'll save that for later.

As for the other question, I'll be glad to answer that now: magic notebooks.

I keep two notebooks with me everywhere I go these days. One is for ideas, concepts, names, and words that hit my creative G-Spot. The other used to be kept on the bedside as a dream journal. In my old age, I have to carry it everywhere.

I learned to always keep a notebook with me one autumn morning during my freshman year of college. The school I attended was a rinky-dink campus, one of the many littered throughout the greater New York area. These were a sort of half-way houses between high school and sprawling universities. But regardless of its size, the school had a throbbing pulse. It took open eyes and concentration to finger the beat, but the vigilant student would sooner or later find it. That's why that morning I was paying attention to Mike Harper instead of Professor Mark and her English class.

Mike was the sort of guy who could have gone on to bigger and better heights of life if our school had offered majors in Media Know-

It-Allism and Classroom Interruption. Mike edited *The Lynch Mob*, a school-produced literary anthology published at the end of each year, which gave Mike all the credentials he needed to be a snob of all kinds of media. But pretentious as he could be, Mike's head was a tiny blond culture machine with detailed schematics of the books, movies, and music every self-respecting college student should experience. The people who wanted their fingers wrapped tightly around the wrists of the scene would have to pay attention to that kind of man. People like me.

And Mike was in true form that morning as I entered class, sermonizing a book review to a crowd of followers who encircled the desk he sat upon.

"Phenomenal," he remarked to no one in particular. "Pure genius in every sense of the word. I love stuff like this."

His flock listened intently. "Really?" someone asked.

Mike nodded. He held up the book so everyone could write down the title. They did.

"Trust me," he said with a cool tone. "This book is fucking brilliant."

After class let out, I dumped my books in my dorm room and strolled two blocks east toward downtown until I caught sight of the nearest bookstore. I then broke into a run.

sent you the one you already have?"

There was a shuffling of papers. "A Professor Margaret Mark sent it to us. Do you know her?"

"Certainly," I said and hung up.

I visited Professor Mark's office later that day with a bag of tricks. She let me in, and before she had a chance to wring her hands and ask me how things were in the literary world, I removed two items from the bag. The first was a beaten-down spiral notebook, worn from years of being shipped around in book bags and boxes. Crease lines trickled across the faded green cover, like varicose veins poking through an old man's skin. The other item was a stack of crisp pages. It was my only copy of "Swindled."

I explained to her what had happened over the course of the semester, including the book and the conversation with Mike and the story and the joke and the scholarship and "The Face" and the call from the university and how everything under the sun was going all to Hell.

I gasped and slowed down, calming myself. After some momentary breathing, I told her I was going to refuse the school's scholarship and tell the other university I no longer claimed any credit for "Swindled."

For some reason, she hadn't been able to follow my garroted babbling. She looked bewildered, like a child

who couldn't understand why she was being scolded.

I pushed the notebook across her desk. Despite the scrapes of time, the word *Novelist*, written by a young man of twelve in black, non-fading felt-tip marker, was clearly visible on the cover.

I told her a story about green slime aliens and magic wands and a young man who once won a writing contest. While feeling invincible, he decided the next logical step was to begin a novel. She opened the notebook and paged through the volume's handwritten storytelling, which tracked along until page 42, where came to an abrupt halt.

We lifted the notebook and skipped to the end, where a series of drawings and diagrams dwelled. The diagrams, I clarified, were author's blueprints for a screenplay, one that he hoped one day to adapt from his novel at the request of some imploring movie studio. The accompanying sketches were conceptual designs of his characters, labeled with key costume attributes. The first drawings were slipshod, but as we flipped along, each sketch surpassed the previous in quality. These were accomplished drawings, as if more time and detail had been implanted with every page.

"The day he finished the forty-second page," I told her, "The author lost track of the story and forgot what came next, so he reread the

published story. They printed it in the annual university literary magazine. It won an award. Just the same, send it back.”

He was confused. I repeated the order. “Send it back. Have them bury it back in whatever grave they dug it out of. Tell them to plant it deep, in case a bear or something should smell it.”

He moaned a little more, now definitely knee-deep in it with me. He was silent for a brief moment, probably rethinking his strategy.

“Look,” he finally sighed into the receiver, “I just thought that people might want to see how your style progressed over the years. There are people out there who find that sort of thing interesting. They’re called fans.”

“Virgil, nobody wants to read this piece, and they can see my progression through all the other stories in the book if they like. They can see how I went from writing hack pulp stories for nothing to writing hack pulp novels for slightly more than nothing.”

Two hours and a host of other arguments later, we hung up with an agreement between us. As it turned out, the argument we eventually jumped into had gestated with a pair of misunderstandings. Virgil misread my effrontery as a ploy; he assumed indolence and a promise of riches (in that order) would wear away my thin pocket of resistance. My mistake was

in thinking I could win against his contentions. I didn’t. I’ve never been good at standing my ground.

Virgil did finally persuade me to go ahead with the book, the notorious story intact. His end of the bargain conceded me the introduction to the collection, which is what you, dear reader, are swimming in.

Instead of throwing this time away as some authors might, opting to fill space with a scanty retrospective, I decided a remembrance for these twenty-seven slices of me was in order. Anything powered by twenty-seven vials of my own blood deserved some kind of memorial, perhaps even an exhibition. Take one down, pass it around, let anyone who wants a whiff have one, or perhaps even venture a taste. Let them see what dripped out of me and soaked into the yarns of this collection.

Strangely enough, when it came time to pay tribute to them all, I found myself lingering on three single stories. Two were the best I ever wrote, and they’re not included here. The other one is.

The first story I ever wrote and lost was about a green slime alien and his birthday party. It lasted no more than half a page double-spaced. I wrote it on Fail-Safe, my dad’s ancient typewriter, sometime between the ages of

of submissions at a well-known New York-based literary magazine. I’m led to understand he got the job with the claim of being the first to publish my work. He hadn’t technically discovered me, which might have won him one of the better jobs on staff, but in that position, he got as much credit as most people gave the Vikings for landing on the Canadian seaboard.

Earlier that week, the magazine asked me to sum up my life, my work, and my views in about six or so paragraphs. When I called the submissions editor, his receptionist diverted my call to a lowly subordinate. It was Mike who answered my call. To the best of my understanding, Mike’s bosses had grown irritable with his frequent selections of avant-garde submissions for the magazine. I suppose these things happen.

There are other stories in this volume that I could have done without seeing again. It seems like those stories will keep coming back to me, no matter how deep in the earth I bury them or how big a boulder I shove on top of their graves. They always seem to find me, like tortured souls of people accidentally murdered in the ignorance of my youth, returning to exact their revenge for the injustices of sloppy narrative and poor grammar.

It also appears that I’ll never find those long lost stories of my youth,

or the map to the Island either. But I will not cry into the night because I have lost childhood treasures, or because I have literary skeletons nesting in my wardrobe. Part of living in this world is learning that sometimes your hands are too slippery to hold onto things you loved forever, and sometimes you just can’t get rid of the things that break your heart. Sometimes it is your own stupidity, or inexperience, shining through, and sometimes it is Fate stepping in. Regardless, those things are bound to happen.

The golden rule of writing is to use the time of the readers so that they won’t walk away embittered because their time has been wasted. I’ve tried my damndest to finish this tale of my youth with some kind of satisfactory meaning behind it, but now the sun is falling outside, and I’m having a tough time pinpointing what I wanted to say about “Swindled.” There’s something about that concept that strikes me funny.

I wasn’t intending this to be an argument against reading the story. I’m sure my tired old words won’t be enough to keep you from stopping mid-sentence and flipping to page 174 to see what all the fuss is about. It won’t bother me if you quit right now to go read it. If I felt truly embarrassed by the story, there were other recourses I could have taken. I could

# the Introduction from ‘The Complete Short Works of Daniel Pagoda’

BY SCOTT CARLSON

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** *The following pages were written by cult writer Daniel Pagoda (1952-1998) shortly before his untimely death. They were to be included as the introduction to The Complete Short Works of Daniel Pagoda. Sadly, it turned out to be the last thing he wrote. Out of respect for our dear friend and his wishes, plans for the book were abandoned.*

-Virgil Vishnoo

The book you now hold in your hands is the product of my friend and editor Virgil Vishnoo’s tireless efforts to preserve my indicted past. Most of these stories were written in my ignorant youth, solely to pay the bills. They were submitted to no-name pulp magazines who gladly paid for the grisly stories that flowed with a disturbing ease from my head. Consequently, most are of average quality. Some are good. One is horrendous.

Virgil is a gracious, congenial man, as much as he is authoritative. Somewhere between those two sides of personality he finds an equilibrium, which, considering his line of

work, works well for him. He has the very annoying habit of telling it like it is, and the even more annoying habit of almost always being right, which causes problems for someone like myself.

I was eating breakfast the morning he called to talk to me about this book. My meal that morning was a capitulation of the previous evening’s marathon writing session, which had ended merely twelve minutes beforehand. I had promised myself nourishment solely on the condition of finishing the manuscript. It seemed fitting my remission would be interrupted.

After pleasantries, I told Virgil

# Confessions of an 11-year-old Screenwriter

( A SHORT SCREENPLAY BY JEN JOHANS )

FADE IN:

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM- DAY

The room is silent save for the small voice of a red-headed GIRL at the front of the room, holding a piece of paper and shaking like a leaf. The entire CLASS OF STUDENTS strains to hear, leaning forward in their chairs that have been carefully arranged in a large horseshoe shape, as the girl stares at her shoes and mumbles.

Directly behind the girl hangs a banner on the blackboard reading, “CAREER DAY” in large blue letters.

Next to the board, sits MR. GREEN, the stressed-out teacher, trying to hold a fake smile as he watches the girl.

GIRL

And then I could wash hair and cut hair and that’s what I’d do if I worked as a beautician.

Mr. Green leads the group in applause as the girl runs to her seat, dropping her piece of paper on the ground.

The BOY to her right gets up and goes to the front of the room.

BOY

I want to be a fireman because I like fires and then I could learn how to set them and put them out without getting in trouble and you get to slide down the pole and run to

Bunch and Happy Days. It's nostalgia nirvana. By then, I'm wiped out, and I take a short, two- or three-hour nap. After I wake up, if I don't go to a friend's place and hit the pool or start a marathon video gaming session, I'll flip right back to ESPN for Around the Horn, followed immediately by Pardon the Interruption.

After that, I kind of play it by ear, if the Yankees game isn't being televised—you can't hope to plan a whole day without tempting fate just a little. And I make sure to brush my teeth and mix in a shower or two during the commercials. And I listen to a little Bob Dylan. You know, just to keep me centered.

It wasn't too long, maybe a month or so, before both my parents started grumbling about the general state of my existence and demanding that I get a job of some sort. I'll admit the thought had crept into my head. Usually, it crept in between Jeopardy! and Rap City: Tha Bassment. Just when I was getting into a groove, too. They can be a real pair of wet blankets sometimes.

So, I started applying everywhere.

I applied to valet at a hoity-toity high-rise apartment building in downtown Dallas, but they took one look at my hairstyle (or lack thereof), thanked me for my application and said they'd keep me in mind. I mean, I think they may have been less than sincere in saying that. I don't think

they really did keep me in mind to fill the position. I think they kept my application in their waste paper basket.

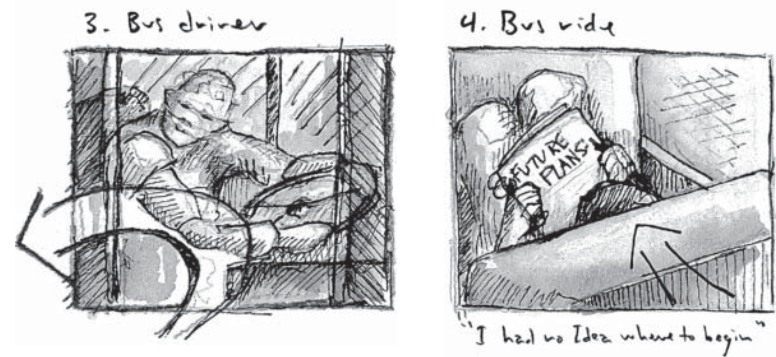
Occasionally, I'd get my foot in the door, and get an interview with a manager or human resources director. At one particular restaurant, where I'd applied as a busboy, they told me I lacked the necessary experience in the service industry.

"I lack the necessary qualifications to pick up dirty dishes from the table and put them into the sink?" I thought. "Really? Because I do that for free around my house, occasionally."

To be honest, my resume is pretty short on what one would call "real-world experience." I didn't realize it would be a such problem until I actually tried to find what one would call "real-world employment." I'm sure many an employer looked on my resume, saw my two semesters working as a staff writer at my college newspaper, and thought "Oh, well that's almost like a real job."

Other times, they told me my BA overqualified me to work a concession stand at the movie theatre or wash dishes at a burger joint.

They were probably afraid my liberal arts background might make me a risk to their harmonious working environment. I imagine they feared that I'd start handing out literature to the other workers describing how the proletariat was being



The students in the classroom look confused as the teacher frowns and scratches his chin.

MR. GREEN

I'm afraid you misunderstood. Woody Allen is a person. What do you want to be when you grow up?

JEN

A staff writer on "Seinfeld."

ADULT JEN (V.O.)

It was a strange goal for an eleven year-old from Minnesota but then again, I'd always been a strange kid. In 1992, most kids my age were getting into Pearl Jam, skateboarding and Sonic The Hedgehog. I liked neurotic East Coast Jewish comedians.

INT. SCHOOL BUS- DAY

The bus is filled to its capacity as the DRIVER blares classic Eric Clapton ROCK from scratchy speakers near the front. A group of BOYS play keep-away with a younger child's backpack. Nearby, three GIRLS sit in a seat gossiping and pointing at the boys. Further back sits Jen, alone in one of the enormous, ripped, tacky green seats. She opens up her bag and pulls out a Lisa Frank trapper keeper, then fishes inside for a notebook and pen. CU of the notebook as she opens it up and writes "FUTURE PLANS" in big letters across the top. She taps the pen on the page twice and stares off into space.

# the Summer of Sanjiv

BY SANJIV SOLANKI

To be honest, I don't remember my graduation ceremony too well. I wasn't under the influence or anything like that; the whole thing was just a blur of mercilessly long speeches and kids' names being read out from a list and all. I switched to my university's school of journalism after two and a half years as an engineering major, so I ended up not really knowing who most of the people graduating with me were. And the sound system wasn't really set up too well in the graduating students' section, so I could only get a faint murmur out of whatever the speaker said.

Apparently, he was this big shot in the television industry, back in the day. You know how, at the end of some old TV shows, they used to show a guy at a typewriter who'd yank a piece of paper out and toss it away and it would turn into the production company's logo? Apparently, our commencement speaker was the guy at the typewriter. It was a very big deal, I guess. My dad knew who he was and seemed pretty excited about it. Make of that what you will.

Anyway, the indistinct sounds

from the speaker made for a decent bit of white noise, and I spent most of the time just spacing out, nodding off occasionally. I do remember one time specifically when our speaker said something that really gave the crowd of parents a chuckle.

I turned to the girl next to me and asked her, "What'd he just say? Was that about me or anything?"

"No," she said. "He just said that it's important to have a plan of what you want to do when you graduate."

"Oh," I said. "Definitely not about me."

After he was done, all the different majors went up and got their diplomas from their different deans, each student doing it to varying degrees of applause from the audience. I remember a girl, a film major, I think, seated in front of me turning around and saying, "Will you do me a big favor? When I go up to get my diploma, will you just cheer for me? Otherwise, no one else in the audience will and I'll feel like a loser."

I guess the idea of having a complete stranger cheer for her made her feel like a real winner. I said I would, but I didn't know her name,

Jen opens up her Esprit bag and begins to sweep the books off the shelf and into it.

ADULT JEN (V.O.)

Next, I put some frequent flyer miles on my library card by checking out the entire screen writing section. I needed to teach myself how to write a professional looking script.

INT. LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

Jen sits on a couch taking notes as she watches "I Love Lucy." In front of the TV sit TWO SMALL CHILDREN, glued to the screen and laughing hysterically. The little boy laughs louder and then his younger sister looks at him adoringly and laughs along to show she's hip enough to get the joke.

ADULT JEN (V.O.)

It beat the hell out of fractions. My New Alma mater was Nick at Night. TV time became research time and I put the skills I thought I'd never need from biology class to good use. My laboratory was my living room. Friends, family and the kids I baby-sat became test audiences. I studied when they laughed and why they laughed to try and find the secrets of comedy.

Jen watches the screen to see the loaf of bread Lucy was making turn into a disaster.

INT. JOHANS KITCHEN- NIGHT

We see Jen sitting on one side of the dinner table opposite her mom. At the two ends of the table sit her DAD and 14 year-old BROTHER. Her brother is still wearing his karate uniform from practice. The family starts chatting indistinctly as they pass food along to each other and begin dishing it up on their plates.

Jen's brother hands her a bowl of mashed potatoes and her face brightens.

JEN

Potatoes!

She gets up from her chair and runs out of the kitchen.

From up here, you can see the cobalt blue lakes gathered in puddles, the lines where the foothills uplifted and the spaces where they were pushed apart by the glaciers. I looked down. I couldn't see the airfield or the golf course.

While I was looking, Carl told me something that bent my head wrong for three days. He told me that in terms of skydiving, the dive was pretty terrible. My legs were bent wrong. I hadn't arched correctly. I'd made him work much harder than he should have had to. It sounded like he was disappointed in me. Disappointed I hadn't let us fly.

My legs and arms were still cold from the wind rushing past.

He said he thought my performance showed a great amount of disrespect to his sport, that of skydiving, and to him personally as an instructor and as a human being.

But fuck it, he said. We were both alive. We would both have beer with our dinners that night, and so he said the day wasn't totally shot.

He told me all this 3,500 feet above an airstrip in the middle of a golf course, and then, just as quickly as we'd fallen 6,500 feet from an airplane, he let me play with the parachute toggles pointed out interesting landmarks.

I'd failed him. I'd failed at skydiving, at falling from a plane, I'd offended Carl, and I'd endangered both our lives. I think, because I wasn't wearing any parachute, because it was in Carl's hands that I'd placed my life, that I put more stock into his words than I should have. I think, because I jumped and he slowed me down, it was very important for me to please him. All I know is that at 3,500 feet, strapped to a man who jumped out of planes for a living, I felt like I'd disobeyed my father. I felt as if I owed Carl something. I felt as if I'd let him down.

We landed, apparently, more successfully than we'd fallen, and Paula put some t-shirts on the sawhorse we'd used to practice our arching. I bought two, one for myself, and one for the photographer, collected my notepad, and drove home. We learned, after we'd gotten the pictures back, that my photographer hadn't gotten the shot. He'd gotten a very nice picture of the floor of the airplane.

Everyone I'd told about the assignment wanted to know what happened. It was fine, I told them. It was everything I'd hoped for.

It took a few days before I could talk about what happened up there, 3,500 feet up, and once I did, once I put the day into words I felt less and less like a failure. The more I repeated exactly what had happened, the

#### ADULT JEN (V.O.)

While planning everything out, Kramer mentions he was having a problem with bugs in his apartment but volunteers to make mashed potatoes. Then Kramer remembers that he doesn't know how to cook. He borrows a box of Instant Potatoes from Jerry, takes it to his place and starts mashing.

Jen laughs aloud as she types.

#### ADULT JEN (V.O.) (CON'T)

The potatoes turn out to be good, everyone compliments Kramer, at which point Kramer says "the bugs" (in his apartment) "liked them too." Everyone spits out their food in a big potato spit take. Juvenile, yes, but the jokes worked. The plot didn't, but I was young enough not to care. I was addicted to laughter and assumed that the more laughs I could fit into thirty pages the better.

Jen scrolls her mouse up to save.

#### ADULT JEN (V.O.) (CON'T)

Kramer was my favorite, the master of physical comedy. Tall, clumsy, awkward, loyal, lazily ambitious, Kramer was the "Where's Waldo" of the group. The dreamer. The one who you couldn't quite imagine the others actually being friends with. The outsider. The one who spoke to me as a precocious eleven year-old aspiring screenwriter.

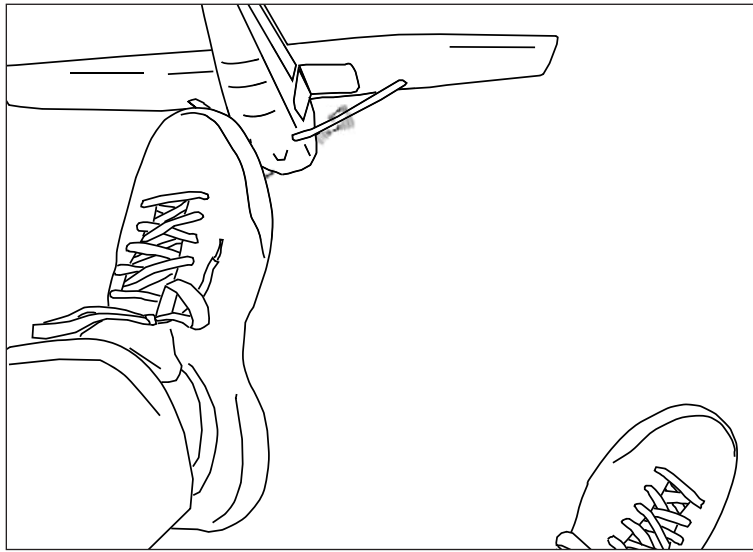
Jen scrolls her mouse up to print and her dot-matrix printer WHIRS loudly as the pages slowly start to appear.

#### INT. JEN'S BEDROOM- NIGHT- CONTINUOUS

Jen sits on her bed and goes over her work with a red pen. There are pages crumpled up in balls tossed casually on the floor. Her forehead is crinkled and she is determined.

#### EXT. JOHANS BACKYARD- DAY

Jen sits on a swing and watches nervously as PAUL, a 15 year-old blonde boy



finger on the spot. Carl made a heavy nod with his chin. He turned the corners of his mouth up so that his scars crinkled. I looked at the spot where the pilot still had his index finger. It said ten thousand feet.

I knew from my 38 pages of notes that the others had gone up to 8,500. I looked back at the door of the plane, shut my eyes, and rested my head against the cool metal. Paul sat down opposite me in the rear of the plane and the pilot took off and began his circles.

There is absolutely nothing that prepares you for an open door on and airplane in flight. It's an image that clashes with everything you think should be happening up there. Doors stay closed. Passengers stay inside.

Seatbelts remain securely fastened.

On the Cessna, the door folds up and underneath the wing, which cuts across above the cabin door and the pilot. I can see down 10,000 feet from the open door of an airplane, and I'm not wearing a parachute. If I were to fall right now, I would fall and keep falling until I flattened one of those little trees below us. I am inches away from this door. Noise from the wind and the engine flood the little cabin. My photographer unfastens his safety belt.

I inch backward on my knees toward the rear of the cabin until I'm snug against Carl's chest like he told me to. It feels very intimate, a little uncomfortable, and I feel a pull in my shoulders under the arms as Carl snaps into each metal loop on my harness. In my head, my brain is

Jen runs out of the aisle.

EXT. MINI MALL- DAY- CONTINUOUS

We see Jen run out of the hardware store and into the post office next door.

INT. POST OFFICE-DAY- CONTINUOUS

A few EMPLOYEES watch curiously as Jen selects a pack of huge manila envelopes and goes to the front counter.

JEN

I'd like a book of stamps, please.

The clerk produces a book of stamps and rings up the items.

ADULT JEN (V.O.)

I had no idea where to send it. I called the local network affiliates to beg for an address.

INT. JOHANS KITCHEN- DAY

Jen cradles a phone between her shoulder and ear and sits at the kitchen table, watching snow fall out the window.

JEN

What do I want to send Jerry Seinfeld?

ADULT JEN (V.O.)

They were hesitant, to say the least.

JEN

Um, I have some stuff. (Beat) A letter. (Beat) Yeah, I'm a fan. I'd like to get his autograph.

ADULT JEN (V.O.)

Okay, so I lied.

Jen writes down an address on the envelope and stuffs the script inside. She hangs up the phone.

and the loudspeaker was set up to say whatever the pilot said into the radio. We all looked up. We saw a dot moving across the sky. We saw another dot fall from the first toward the earth. And then we saw that dot split in two.

We knew it was very important that the dot with a parachute stay connected to the dot without one. We were sure this was very important. The dots moved farther apart.

Seconds passed. I fought the urge to reach for my notebook and record how Sarah gripped the wooden fence we both stood behind. More seconds. Then the kid behind us looked up from his chute packing and pointed somewhere out to the left of the two dots we were watching put distance between each other.

"Looks like they're just about ready," he said. The loudspeaker crackled. We'd been looking at the wrong dots. The faint buzz of the plane washed down from a bigger, shinier, redder dot, and Sarah's grip on the rail loosened. This time I did take out my notebook, and we watched a new set of dots fall from the plane. This one stayed safely clipped together.

Carl and John skimmed into the grass next to the runway, and John stepped out of his harness. Sarah stepped into hers. My photographer took some pictures. The plane landed a

few minutes later, and then Carl and Sarah taxied and took off on their spiral upwards. I stood behind the fence with John, and we waited until Carl and Sarah grew from a dot to a splotch to a blue and yellow striped parachute and slid into the grass on their bottoms. The plane landed and my photographer took some more pictures. I stepped into my harness. It made the zippered part of my pants stick out in a funny way.

"You the photographer?" Carl shouted to my photographer. I think his hearing was still a little off from the wind up there.

"Yeah," my photographer said. I didn't get a chance to introduce the two. The plane was out of fuel, and Carl took the opportunity to walk my photographer through the jump.

"Ok, listen" Carl said. "It's not an easy shot, but if you listen and do what I tell you, you'll get it and we'll all go home happy tonight."

My photographer nodded. I noticed that he'd taken a little step backward toward the hangar.

"Ok," Carl said. "We're gonna fall out of that plane at 10 meters per second."

He paused.

"That means that if you wait one second, we'll be fifteen feet away. Wait two, and it's sixty. Got that?"

My photographer nodded again. I checked his math in my head. We

**EXT. JOHANS HOME- DAY**

Jen puts three manila envelopes into her mailbox and runs down the street in the snow towards the bus.

**EXT. JOHANS HOME- DAY**

The weather has changed and time has passed—it's summer and the sun is shining brightly as Jen shoots hoops on her driveway with her brother. She watches the mailman out of the corner of her eye as he places a large envelope in her mailbox. She passes the ball to her brother and heads for it.

**INT. LIVING ROOM- DAY**

Jen curls up on the couch and reads the letter. CU of the large white envelope that bears the "Seinfeld" logo.

**ADULT JEN (V.O.)**

It was an encouraging blow-off letter, stating that they didn't accept un-agented, unsolicited submissions, but it was beautiful. I didn't recognize the name of the writer; he introduced himself as a member of the staff and sprinkled the words "sincerely" and "thank you" throughout. But he'd read my work and cared enough to send it back.

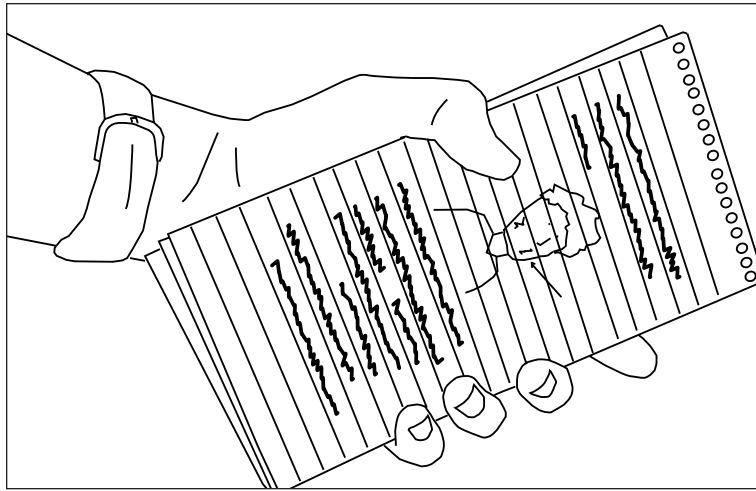
Jen empties the rest of the contents of the envelope and her script falls on her lap. She flips through the battered copy and begins reading. The pages are dog-eared and spotted with coffee stains.

**ADULT JEN (V.O.) (CON'T)**

I suddenly felt very self-conscious. My script had been read indeed or else simply used as a coaster. Jerry Seinfeld himself could have looked at something I'd whipped up on my Mac. I'm glad I hadn't spent too much time considering this possibility beforehand or I never would've had the courage to send it in the first place.

**EXT. JOHANS BACKYARD- DAY**

Jen sits on a swing and opens a large blue envelope bearing the "Coach" logo. She pulls out a letter and begins to smile.



the table and pushed it across, his middle and ring fingers crossing a blank line toward the bottom. I'd forgotten an initial.

"I hope I was more careful packing those chutes than you were signing these forms," he said.

Me too.

After the forms, we received our instruction, and I got out my notebook. I'd done other stories for the paper before, covered lectures, written music reviews, but I was a little nervous about this one; I hadn't done many big feature stories, and I wanted to be sure I had excellent notes. I took 38 pages of them.

I wrote down how strange John looked on top of a three-foot sawhorse, arching his back as if he were falling. I wrote down how Carl

slapped me in the ass after no one could tell him which was the heaviest part of a skydiver. Carl said it was the ass part that fell fastest. That was why we practiced arching our backs belly down on the sawhorses.

I wrote down how shiny the red paint of the plane looked in the sun and I sketched the pair of jagged three-inch pink-white scars that framed Carl's mouth from both sides. I took 38 pages of notes.

That was always a little unnerving, those scars. I didn't mind them, but I couldn't stop wondering if he'd gotten them falling out of a plane somewhere. Maybe on the edge of a propeller or colliding with a small, misguided bird. Or maybe someone had punched him in the face with a bottle.

#### INT. BOOKSTORE- DAY

In the creative writing/reference aisle, Jen reaches for a copy of "The Writer's Market" and notices a small hand reaching up for the same sole copy. She looks down and notices a gawky, eleven year-old GIRL wearing glasses and a toothy smile. Jen smiles back and hands her the book.

#### INT. BOOKSTORE CAFÉ- DAY-CONTINUOUS

Jen drinks a bottle of water and sits at a table talking with the young girl, who is busy devouring a sundae.

JEN

So I guess what I'm saying is to try it and write as much as you can even if others laugh or call you different. And they will, because we're outsiders.

GIRL

Then why do they laugh?

JEN

Because they don't understand us. (Beat) But let me tell you something—there's nothing to be gained from being an insider. I'm going to use a few clichés here but listen—read these books and write, write, write. Because you never know. Because you learn more from failure than you ever will from success.

GIRL

What do you mean?

JEN

I mean I didn't sell my scripts. Of course, I didn't sell my scripts but I tried. I wrote them and I sent them out and I got feedback on them and that's what made me keep writing.

GIRL

It sounds like a lot of work.

# the Fall

BY TODD GORDON

This is a story about the time I jumped out of a Cessna 182 at 10,000 feet without wearing a parachute. That's not a metaphor, or a simile or anything. I did it. I wouldn't have gone if it hadn't been for free, but it was and I did and I doubt I will ever again. Obviously, I lived.

During college I worked on the school paper, and there was a skydiving firm that advertised in our sports section. That's how I ended up going for nothing; my editor said the guy from the skydiving place would give us a free jump if we ran a story on him. I called the number from the ad and told the guy I was from the paper. He told me to come by on Tuesday. That's how it happened. The whole thing took less than ten minutes.

By Monday night I'd told everyone. One of my friends asked if he could have my stereo if anything should happen, and I told him he could. I emailed a professor to let her know that, rather than attend

her class the following Tuesday afternoon, I would be busy cheating death. Because I'd let her know in advance, she marked the absence as an excused one.

Tuesday came, and I drove the 15 miles to the airstrip. That's really all it was, a strip of asphalt in an overgrown field next to a golf course, running into the half-cylinder of a corrugated steel hanger. I parked in the dirt next to the hanger, fished a reporter's notebook from the back seat pocket, and walked to the front.

My photographer was late.

I got a kick out of saying "my photographer." He was just some kid with a digital camera, but he granted me status. Because he was *mine*.

"I'm Todd," I said to a strained looking woman standing near where the asphalt of the runway hit the concrete floor of the hanger, "from the newspaper. I'm looking for Carl?"

"Oh, he'll be along," the woman said. I could tell from her fingers and the way her eyes sat in her face that

# Suburban Generals

BY MATT CAREY

Every so often, back when I was in school, campus activities would invite some fledgling jam-band to play our on-campus pub. It was a stealthy way to corral my college's hippie contingent for a few hours but it worked; bands usually strolled in like local celebrities, credible proof of college-rock's potential professionalism, and students typically showed up en-mass, excited for a break from the doldrums of upstate New York dorm life.

Gradually, a symbiotic relationship developed between the pub's regular bands and the smorgasbord of students frequenting any given Saturday night show. Most of the students fashioned the bar as their primary stage, taking full advantage of the college's liberal drinking laws. Most of the bands were glad to take the students' unbridled energy as a form of pomp-and-circumstance, happily providing a jazzy sound track for an endless number of weekend activities. In return, they got a statistic. "Capacity crowds."

Over the years, a myriad of musicians played through that pub, usually favoring flashy solos over

well-composed charts or, sometimes, songs. But one snowy Saturday night, an altogether different jam-band drifted into town. Few of my friends had any interest in trekking across our college's frigid quad, but I was eager land a gig at my college's daily newspaper, so I decided to check out this no-name band from Massachusetts. Sure, this trio sported the familiar sluggish van and set list full of jams, but buried beneath their granola covered crust, Dispatch played pure, radio-friendly pop. At the time, I knew neither the band's sound nor their new moniker (for years, they'd toured as One Fell Swoop), but I immediately saw their unique spark. Not so much because the bar's dread-locked basement dwellers seemed to dig their music, but because my relatively clean cut roommate left humming the chorus of a hit single-in-waiting: "The General."

Realizing the potential of my Almost Famous fantasy, I made a point of tracking down an exclusive Dispatch interview the next time the trio rolled into town. A few months later, I found myself parked in the

## issue one: the Writers' Market

Each issue of Toner has a theme, and for this first issue, there can be no better than "the Writers' Market."

The actual "Writer's Market" is just a book. It's a softcover about 1,200 pages long, and every year it lists all the different publications and publishing companies and agents interested in content for their magazines or websites or short story collections or portfolios. It's a big list of names, titles, addresses and phone numbers.

But to those people struggling to scratch a career from the thin strokes of a ballpoint, it's more than that. Writers look at that book and see 1,200

pages of options. Writers see 4,000 people who may just give them a chance. A writer's copy of the Writer's Market is dog-eared and worn, filled with highlights and circles and notes in the margin.

Because, to a writer, that book represents the hope that they might become a part of the market it advertises.

In this issue, we have five stories, all from different segments of the Writers' Market, and each one from a new up and coming writer. Each with a unique idea of what this Writers' Market is.

And so, with these thin strokes of a ballpoint, Toner Magazine is born.

ries, the three normal Behind the Music Clichés remained unuttered anywhere. Sex. Drugs. And rock and roll. Dispatch cut their chops on the college frat circuit, not in years of incessant roadwork.

After my college emancipation, I struck out looking for work and landed a gig writing band reviews that would pay for my concert addiction. In one of my first professional solo assignments, I found myself shipped off to Boston to review a concert by a "random" recently reunited trio.

Co-opting Nantucket Nectar's annual Boston jam-band gathering as their swan song, Dispatch had decided to reunite for one final performance, timed just right for the summer festival season.

So, in an unexpected twist of fate, I found myself once again backstage at a Dispatch show, surrounded by many of the same groupies, journalists, and band jockeys that had filled up the band's laminate list back when I was in college.

Standing side-stage, I watched Dispatch wade through their catalogue, nodding to the overcrowded audience members hanging from a bundle of nearby trees during "Bars in the Belfry," and cautioning a team of fans to "take it easy" after a few water bottles went flying a little too close.

The group preached about independent music, voting rights, and

grass roots activism, but it all got lost in the suburban hiss. As the evening's energy peaked during "Even," the group lost control of their crowd, succumbing to another water bottle war. One bottle hit the sound board and subsequently marred the group's best song. Looking out into the sea of Abercrombie shirts, Dispatch remained, after all their success and four year hiatus, the sound track to any number of Saturday activities.

Returning to work the following Monday, I received a press release from the group's publicist.

"Dispatch stuns 110,000" the email blitz shouted. Quickly checking with a few blue and gold onlookers, I found this assessment a bit overstated—in fact, about double the concert's actual attendance. But it seemed fitting for a band that squawked about playing the gym as soon as people started paying attention to them at the bar. And, if Dispatch is at all a symbol of college rock's potential professionalism, this group unfortunately missed the class on time and patience.

At times I wonder how a band with so much potential could implode before their popularity truly exploded. Perhaps it's my inner anthropologist talking, but to me, Dispatch symbolizes a generation of jam-bands who cut their chops in college, not in the streets of Haight-Asbury. Either way, at least Dispatch's recorded remains will provide scholars like

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