

LETTERS FROM HOME
- or -
If I Could Save Teen
Angst In A Bottle



The Author at age 15.
(Note the cool Star Wars sheets.)

by Jerry!
a.k.a. Billy Shakespeare

Author's Warning:

The following collection of letters contains words you *still* can't say on television, even in today's more lax and liberal environment. Words like: shoot, pigpoop, wee-wee, motherhugger and, of course, darn.

So, if you're an impressionable young youth who's young: STOP READING THIS! Unless, of course, you've paid me for it already.

All right, you spoiled little brat. I warned you. I better not even get a letter from your mother.

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Foreword.



One .

Actually, I wrote this part last, so shouldn't it be considered a "backward?"

Two .

I've been thinking a lot about high school lately. And I've been thinking a lot about how thinking a lot about high school probably isn't the healthiest thing in the world for one to do. Right up there with bunji-jumping out of airplanes, or fishing for piranhas with your bare hands.

Admit it. Whenever you start to remember all the good times you had in high school, you spend three nanoseconds on the "good times," and three weeks agonizing over the time when the head cheerleader saw you scratch your armpit and smell your hand.

As I said: unhealthy.

And we all agonize like that. (Excepting, of course, the former head cheerleaders and captains of the football teams. They led charmed lives back then, and - let's face it - they probably still do.) Meanwhile the rest of us spend our lives in therapy trying to repress these "good times" and covering up the deep emotional scars they've left behind.

Anyway, I've been looking back through the collection of letters you're about to read, letters I wrote to my older sister (referred to in this collection by her nickname "Kee") when she was away from home attending an out-of-state university in Arizona and I was in high school. I noticed that I sent a great majority of them to her during my freshman and sophomore years. I've surmised there are two reasons for this.

One: In my first two years of that cruel microcosm called high school, I was struggling to find my social niche. Floundering, I tried

not to show on the outside what I knew on the inside: I was a nerd. I was unable to fit into any social circle there. I was even shunned by the math geeks. Wow. (That is sad.)¹

In any case, whenever I felt that urge, as we all do, to be accepted by some larger social circle, I turned to the one group that would never turn me away (because it would have been illegal for them to at my age then) – my family.

Two: The other reason for not writing Kee very much during the latter half of high school was that I had a driver's license in my junior and senior years. So, whaddaya think? I'm gonna sit at home typing like some kind of *nerd*? Yeah, right. In any case, whenever I felt that urge, as we all do, to be accepted by some larger social circle, I turned to the one group that would never turn me away (because it would have been illegal for them to at my age then): my family.

Two: The other reason for not writing Kee very much during the latter half of high school was that I had a driver's license in my junior and senior years. So, whaddaya think? I'm gonna sit at home typing like some kind of *nerd*? Yeah, right.

Three.

When I was a kid I used to tie a towel around my neck, fashioning my own superhero cape. I would then tuck it into my pants and put on a t-shirt to cover it. This was, of course, to ensure that my super-identity would remain a secret. When evil reared its pus-oozing head, though, I was ready in an instant! Pull off my shirt and – theme music, please – Super Jerry!

My crime-fighting days are long gone now, of course. I believe they ended the day I shouted "Up, up and away" as I flew from our rooftop. (Actually "flew" is probably incorrect in its usage here. "Plummeted" is more accurate.) The superpowers never left me, though, and I'm a little more open about them now. I'm different and unique and proud of it. I enjoy flaunting this uniqueness to siblings, girlfriends, co-workers, transients, or ANYBODY who will stand still for about a minute so I can talk to them.

My sense of humor is just one of my superpowers. I think the ability to make people laugh is about the greatest power anyone could have. (P.S. If you're a young, beautiful woman...or just a rich woman...or just a woman...or just rich...send me your name and address, and I'll send you a long detailed letter and color slides

¹ I did have the great fortune to spend those four years male-bonding with three very close, very dear friends with whom I no longer associate twenty years later because of the deep, emotional scars they left behind. Sadly, that is another more interesting story, although they are mentioned quite a bit in this one.

revealing those other superpowers.)

It is my sincerest wish, though, that these letters entertain. I want them to make people laugh. Not just my older sister (by five years) to whom they were originally addressed (even when I wrote them twenty years ago I was hoping she'd share them with the rest of the family), but also anybody who ever reads them (including you, of course, reading them now). I hope they make the reader laugh. That was my wish twenty years ago, and it is my wish again.

Most of what is written in these letters is self-explanatory. I've added a few more details to the original letters to help make them more universal (and hopefully more interesting). I think the best way to read them is probably a few at a time. If you try to finish the book in one sitting, some of the subtle humor in them might be overlooked (yeah right). So don't be in such a rush. It's not a murder mystery or a Stephen King novel (although I may mention his name on the cover to help boost sales). Take it a few pages at a time. That'll give me the extra time I need to work on a sequel and negotiate the movie rights.

Four.

I think it's a good time now to introduce the characters involved in this collection of personal letters. Since my family hardly ever refers to other members by their real name, I've called them all by their nicknames in this collection as well. I've done this for two reasons: 1) I believe calling them by nicknames will give you, the reader, that necessary degree of familiarity to feel as if you're reading stories about members of your own family; and 2) so they won't sue me.

My parents' names have also been cleverly disguised in these letters as "Mom" and "Dad." They were divorcing at the time I began writing these letters to my older sister, and even though the letters began as an exercise in typing, they ended up as a kind of therapy for me. (Maybe even for her, who knows?)

The first letters I ever wrote, though, were to a friend of mine who lived in the same city, my hometown of Las Vegas, Nevada. They began when my friend Mike sent me a letter. They were endlessly entertaining to me (mine were, anyway), even though they really didn't reveal much of anything. I was fourteen and it was great getting mail not addressed "Occupant." He only lived about five or six miles away, but it was summer in Las Vegas and I was overweight and I just didn't feel like hoofing it those distances, contracting sun poisoning and dying. In retrospect, I guess we could have just called each other on the phone. Oh well.

We wrote back and forth for a while even while attending the same high school as incoming frosh, and I thought it was a helluva lot of fun. So much fun that I started writing to my older sister Kee in Arizona, too. Double fun! Then one day Mike said that my last letter to him was too long and dull. I believe that **was** my last letter to him. The honeymoon was over. I'd known him since first grade, but I never really did trust him after that.

So I just wrote to my sister. Solamente a mi hermana. She was enrolled, as I said, at a university in the nearby state Arizona. My father furnished her with her own condominium in the outskirts of Phoenix. For awhile, the letters were in the same format as those to Mike (i.e. "Look how fast I can type! I'm gonna type with my nose now!"). But when my parents separated and divorced and all the usual problems with post-puberty emerged, the letters became a therapy for me. I had to talk to someone. Kee, in retrospect, was the best choice I could have made for that "someone."

I did try writing to my older brother, whose name is cleverly encoded as "Gar" (rhymes with "bear," which he is, especially in the morning). He is the eldest of the five children and eight years my senior. He lived with us for a short time while he worked at my father's business, but eventually moved to California. Despite a natural sense of humor and enviable social skills, he can be at times a bit austere. In fact, while he was living with us, he acted more like my father than my father ever did (not to put either of them down), although at times he could come across as more of a mutha, if you take my meaning. To get to the point, though, one day Gar said my last letter to him was too long and dull. I believe that was my last letter to him. The honeymoon was over. I'd known him since before first grade, but I never really did trust him after that.

I've since written to other people in my life, but none the way I wrote to my sister Kee during those years in high school. Those days in the past thankfully remain there. Never again will I be a frightened teenager with no confidence in his abilities. No, from now on I'll be a frightened adult with no confidence in his abilities.

Others mentioned in the letters are my youngest siblings, fraternal twins (a.k.a. Lee, the soccer star, and Tee, the bitch). They were certainly the most active members of the family - even if you're only counting their mouths! They are three years younger than myself. I also talk at some length about my father's mother (Nana) and her husband. (Not my grandfather, mind you. Her husband.) At one time they owned a motel in Las Vegas, gaining some notoriety (in my eyes anyway) as being the only hotel owner in Las Vegas who would not rent a room to you by the hour. I also address in the following letters my mother's father, Grampa Feo (translated: "Ugly Grandfather"), who lived at the time in Lodi, California. He is notable as the

grandparent we children have to be constantly reminded we have ("Oh yeah, I forgot about him. He's still alive?") Yes sir, my family is long on sentimentality.

Also mentioned are high school friends Joe and Shawn.

Joe's parents (next-door neighbors for as long as I'd been alive) divorced at the same time mine did. Not exactly a coincidence. When my father remarried a few years later, it was to Joe's mother.

Shawn was someone I resented having to spend my lunch period with when I first entered high school. Joe was really the one that hung around with him the most; he introduced him into our nerd clique. By the time I was a junior, though, he and I were almost inseparable. He and I would car-pool to school, write notes to each other during class, laugh at his Dodge Dart while he tried to repair it after school, study for tests and do homework at his father's office late at night. And then...

And then I don't know what the hell happened. In a lot of ways it was as if we broke up. I don't know what he's doing now, but deep in my heart I really hope that he makes less money a year than I do.

I guess my high school experiences were probably like a lot of other people's, filled with emotional extremes. High highs (which in retrospect seem trivial) and low lows (which in retrospect are still emotionally-crippling and cause great pain and embarrassment). What I did then affects me still today. Even though I no longer keep in touch with Mike, Shawn, or Joe, they're still influencing everything I say or do today. Which, of course, pisses me no end.

Five.

I really hated high school. If I could suggest another system or structure for this secondary level of education, I would. I can't, but I can take solace in the fact that I am not alone.

Kee hated it, too.

Six.

Enough said. It is time to put up or shut up. Mostly shut up.

Now, relax. Grab hold of me as we fly back through the years. Have no fear: **Super Jerry is here!**

"UP, UP AND AWAY!" — thump.

The Letters.



FEBRUARY 25, 1980

(I think. It's definitely Monday, though.
I can tell from the feel of it.)

Dear Kee,

Sorry it took so long to get this letter to you. I know I promised to send it days ago. There were no envelopes at home, though, so I took one from Dad's office supply room when his back was turned. Then I realized there were no stamps at home, either, though I did manage to sneak one out from Dad's desk while he was distracted with a phone call. When I returned home with my ill-gotten booty, it occurred to me that I had yet to compose the letter! Tres amusante! As I began to type, however, I was wracked by hunger pangs. Emboldened by the success of my recent paternal thefts, I attempted to emancipate a hundred dollar bill from Dad's pants. While he was wearing them.

Though apprehended, he took my pilfering in good spirits, and in that inimitable Father-Knows-Best style of his, he had me arrested, strip-searched, hosed, deloused, then incarcerated with the rest of the city's great unwashed. (Oh man, were they unwashed.) Finding myself with nothing but time and human excrement on my hands, I began writing the genesis of this letter on my cell wall with a Sharpie I had concealed from my jailers via a bodily orifice normally identified as an "excretory canal," and not as a "pencil cup." The guards took a rather dim view to my exploits, terming them "destruction of state property," and they began to gently massage and knead my temples with their nightsticks until I lost consciousness. By the time my attorney managed to check himself out of the detox and arrange my release from prison (and the arms of a particularly amorous inmate), I had completely forgotten about the letter.

So, you see, I have an excuse.

I'll try my best to make this letter as interesting as possible for my limited mentality and sense of humor. Before I get started, though, I must tell you that you do not *have* to read this letter. If

you want to...fine, it's your time to waste. If, however, you toss it aside as junk mail – don't worry – for it will not shatter my hopes and dreams of becoming the world's greatest conversationalist, nor will it make me feel rejected or neglected. As a matter of fact, even I would not bother reading this idiotic mass of nonsense and hysteria. I will, however, retreat to my room, never showing my face to the outside world again, and try to live with the sobering, almost nightmarish, realization that I am a pathetic socially-shunned dullard.

Actually, this is my second letter to you. "How can that be?" you ask. "I have received only one fabulously entertaining and poignant letter from you, Jerry, the yardstick by which all younger brothers are measured." Well, Kee, you ask some pretty long and stupid questions. You also seem to be rather excitable and skittish. All-in-all, a bit of a "Nervous Nellie." Calm down. Make that switch to decaf. The reason why I didn't send the other letter I typed is very simple: it sucked like a Hoover. So, we'll consider it a rough draft. Real rough. Also, I took so long in even *thinking* about mailing it, that the "news" in it is as old and stale as, say, my P.E. uniform.

Gar is taking me to the public library right now. I think I'll use their typewriter there; it's only 25 cents for every 15 minutes...which is pretty reasonable, I suppose. Unless you rent one for a year.

Wow, Kee, I should have taken typing class...I type so fast.²

Well, Gar is here so I have to go now, or he'll turn my head into an ocarina. If no one is using the library typewriter, I'll write to you from there. Gotta go.

No dice. A man and his wife were using both typewriters there. No great loss...the typewriters there looked a tad ancient. They didn't really have "keys" as such...just a series of quill pens. (Ha.)

Let's see, the time right now is 8:01 p.m. and I still haven't finished a fourth of my homework. I've got so much to do it's driving me f---ing crazy!!! I'll bet you went through the same thing when you were at (*sniff*) Our Lady Of Rich Kids High School.³ – Excuse me, Kee...I was brushing a tear from my eye. (Yeah, right.) GOD, I HATE

² A year later, I did. ...and just about failed it, too. The problem is that I type fast when what I want to type is in my head. I don't do so hot trying to write what someone else wants typed...like, say, "The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog." Fortunately, I've never in my life had to type "The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog." Excepting, of course, just now. Twice, actually. Hmm. Maybe it's a handier phrase than I thought.

³ Alright, so maybe that's not the real name of the high school I attended. I'm not sure why I'm reluctant to use the real name in this book, except that I fear the medical costs I might incur in therapy to repress it all over again.

THAT SCHOOL!!! I just cannot adequately express my intense hatred for that...that...SCHOOL!

Let's move on to another subject, shall we?

Earlier today Joe, Mike and I walked over the shopping center across from the university. Guess what I bought at "The Wizard's Den?" If you guessed nitrous oxide - YOU'RE RIGHT! Yes, Kee...little innocent Jerry went into the local head shop and purchased a small canister of laughing gas called a "whippet." Don't worry, though, there's no way I can get it open without a special dispenser. Joe's got one, so I'll just use his. Ha. (I bet right now you're wondering whether I really am kidding. I am. I really did buy laughing gas, but I would never even *consider* ingesting it without proper parental supervision.)

The reason I bought it was...well...because everyone else was. And I can't even guess why Joe and Mike were buying them without having a way to get the laughing gas out of it. Joe and I ended up throwing ours away, but Mike went home and tried to release the gas using a hammer and nail and a vice clamp. Real smart. Trying to get the gas out that way will probably...well, let's see...remember the final scene from "JAWS" when the shark blows up? Well, you'd probably be able to reproduce those sort of pyrotechnics. The boy is *obviously* a prodigy.

I would just like to remind myself of all that fun homework waiting for me whenever I feel like tackling it.

Hey, Kee, have you heard the new song "99." I don't know who does it but I think it's pretty good. It goes something like this: "99, I've been waiting so long. Oh, 99, I love you." It sounds better than it reads. Honest. Question: Is it a love song written for Barbara Feldon's character on Get Smart? Group Discussion Question: Why?

Well, I do believe I'm running out of room. I'll finish the rest of this letter after I finish my homework. Later.

Well, Kee, this is my second day of writing...I really don't have much to say, though. In fact, I have nothing to say. Except that I have nothing to say. Which of course I just said. Twice, in fact. Which makes me a liar.

Sorry. I've got nothing on my mind except headphones. I'm just sitting here listening to the radio and typing a letter to my favorite older sister. (Just because you're my *only* older sister doesn't mean you shouldn't feel very flattered.)

Hey, have you heard the latest? Gar's girlfriend from USC (University of Snobs in California) is comin' to Las Vegas to meet the family! Yay! I don't know *why* she'd wanna meet us, but she's comin' anyway. I wonder how long they'll stay together after she gets an eyeful of us and starts making quick mental gene-pool calculations. Hmm. I simply must remember to wear my dressy Spiderman Underoos.

Have you heard the theme song from "The American Gigolo" by Blondie? It goes something like: "Call me on the line. Call me, call me any...anytime. Call me!" You get the idea, I'm sure. Well, forget the American Gigolo - I'll take Blondie!

The twins aren't home yet. I guess Dad took them to get a donut after school.

Kee, do you remember your high school P.E. coach? She was a real bitch, I'll bet. They all are. Even the men. Especially the men. My coach, Coach Bastard⁴, is the classic textbook example of anal retention and its effects on the thinking process. He has this grading system where you have to be able to do a certain amount of push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, sit-downs, start-ups, hoe-downs, throw-ups, up cetera, up cetera, up cetera. You get X number of points for everything you do. If you don't get "X," you get "F," if you know what I mean.

Well, unfortunately, I was one of the clowns that didn't meet with his conception of perfect physical fitness, so he sent Mom a deficiency notice. Well, he sent *me* the deficiency notice...it was just addressed to Mom. Anyway, Mom is now trying to get me into shape! I thought nobody would bother me after I tried to take those HI-VITES. (HI-VITES are these horse pill-sized multivitamins Dad bought me about a week ago. They act like "speed" whenever I'm able to swallow them and keep them down, which...fortunately...isn't that often.) Now Mom is taking me to play racquetball. (What next? Rollerball, probably.) Yea verily, I doth fear that thine vexing mother shall striketh me dead with yon vexing exercises.

The kiddies are back. I can hear Dad's car outside. Is there a donut for Jerry? Or are they going to burp and make me smell their breath?⁵

⁴ No, that's not his real name, but...you know what? Close e-fucking-nough, that prick.

⁵ Donuts figure heavily in my family. My family has heavy figures because donuts figure so heavily in my family. When the twins and I were the only ones living at home before my parents divorced, my Dad used to bring each of us two of our favorite donuts every Saturday. Tee would get two small sprinkle donuts, Lee two maple bars, and I (being older, wiser, and *hungrier* than they) would get two cinnamon rolls!

If you don't come from a large family, you probably won't appreciate the sheer Wile E. Coyote-like genius involved here. By telling Dad that my favorite donut was a cinnamon roll (keep in mind, the biggest donut Winchell's has) I got the biggest breakfast!

Hey! Guess what time it was when I finished my homework last night? If you guessed 12:04 A.M. – YOU ARE CORRECT! Circle gets the square. Pick your next celebrity! I am so frickin' tired! I bet you went through that kind of garbage when you were in high school, too. You probably go through that at college, now that I think about it. Except, of course, Gar's not there to yell at you for staying up too late. He's here. Yelling at me.

Hold on. I want to check my first letter to you and see if there's anything that's in there that I might want to put in here. Or in the garbage. Or in the garbage disposal.

Turns out there were a few things: Kee, do you get those Slim Whitman the country – for lack of a better word – *singer* commercials in Arizona? If yes, he's a remarkable talent, isn't he? (Careful! That last sentence is dripping sarcasm all over the place! You're spilling some!) If not, Slim is a Country/Western singer who lives in England. England being the birthplace of Country/Western music, and all. You see an awful lot of cowboys riding the English range, where the Druids and the antelopes play. If the television commercial is to be believed, he was voted by England the best male vocalist four years in a row. Apparently they were judging strictly by height, or some other non-oratory qualifier, because he doesn't even sing. He YODELS! A yodeling cowboy. An image of John Wayne in lederhosen fills my mind. Who came in second place is what I wanna know. Never mind. Too frightening to consider. I withdraw the question.

Hold on, Kee. I'm gonna try to type with my nose.

Oops! I can't do it on this page...I'm running out of room. I can tell because the paper is slipping out. So is my brain.

Mom is home. I hope I can get out of playing racquetball.

Nope, I guess I can't. Lee and Mom are yelling at me to hurry. Gotta go!

Wow, Kee. Racquetball isn't as bad as I thought it would be. The only one who would play with me was Mom, but I don't care. I hate playing with Lee and Tee; when I play with them, we do more fighting than playing. Mom beat me both games. The first one she beat me 21-4, the second game she beat me 21-17. Skunked by my own mother. Boy, I'm really glad she went easy on me and held back a little...you know, didn't send me home with any groin injuries, or anything.

See...in families with a ton of kids like mine, you often have to fight for your food. The meek don't inherit anything but empty stomachs in big families. It's strictly survival of the fattest. It took Lee and Tee *years* to notice I had the bigger donuts. Of course, by then, I also had the bigger ass.

Kee, listen to this and tell me if it makes any sense. In my English class I got an "A" for the first quarter and I did not do anything for extra credit. The second quarter I got a "B," even after I wrote a short play for the class to perform (based on a two-page mythology story in our textbook). An "A" for doing nothing but picking my nose, a "B" for writing a play. Huh?

Okay, I didn't exactly understand that one, but I never brought it to Sister Senile's attention.⁶ Now, here's the part that messes me up: Joe has a book at home about Dante's Inferno and he sees an illustration at the end of the book that shows the different levels of hell (high school is on the mezzanine, by the way, next to ladies apparel and sporting goods). So, he shows it to Sr. Senile and she gives him some poster-board and says if he does a little report on Dante, he'll get an A in religion class (Joe has Sr. Senile for both Religion and English class). Now, listen carefully: she said that if he gives the same report to his English class, he'd get an A in there as well.

Does this make sense to you? Why the heck am I wasting my time writing an original play (based on a story by dead Greeks) if Joe can put a zillionth of that effort into tracing a simple line drawing and giving a brief oral report and run away with an A in TWO CLASSES! (He should only get an A if the report ends with brief oral.) And Sr. Senile wants me to produce and direct my play in front of the class. Hmm. I wonder what Woody Allen would do in a similar situation? Moreover, I wonder what Woody Allen would be doing in a Catholic high school?

I think I'll bring it to her attention tomorrow. (This is probably the same thing you'd tell me to do). Then I'll threaten to kick her ass. (This is probably NOT the same thing you'd tell me to do, but it would sure feel good.)

I'm going to close this letter now. It's getting too long and I don't have any more stamps if it gets too heavy. Lee's wrapping pennies right now, so you can kind of guess our domestic financial situation at this time. Oops! I didn't know it was this late. I still have homework to do. Later.

Your favorite brother,

Jerry!

P.S. Hey, Kee, I hear your condo is leaking again from all the rain you're getting. I hope it stops. If it doesn't, let me know and I'll

⁶ Okay, her name wasn't really "Sister Senile," but she was about a thousand years old, and Alzheimer's was definitely wiping its ass with her teaching credentials when I was enrolled in her class. When this nun talked about her personal relationship with Christ, she was talking about when they dated in high school, okay? I'm talking **old**.

send you some scuba gear. (Ha.)



FEBRUARY 29, 1980

(Friday...Leap Day!)

Hi Kee!

To type or not to type...THAT is the question. The answer be-eth "to type!" Type, brethren...uh, "sisteren," I mean...type unto thy heart's content and to thy fingers' most furious pace. To type with the swiftness of yon vexing wind, let this be thine goal! Go forth and tickleth thine typewriter keys until thou art imparted with the divine gifts of the typewriter muse, Typo!

Follow yon Commandments:

1. Thou shalt not have new typewriters before thine old reliable one, yea though it haveth a sticky "E" key.
2. Thou shalt not take in vain the name of IBM and yon typewriter.
3. Thou shalt not be ye author of the dung of thine vexing steer.
4. Honor thy typewriter ribbon and ye paper thereof; smudgeth them not.
5. Writeth not a fifth commandment.
6. Thou shalt not commit adultery by having thy heathenistic neighbor lending unto thee his vexing typewriter.
7. Thou shalt not steal thy neighbor's typewriter, though his haveth not a sticky "E" key.
8. Thou shalt not bear false witness against ye typewriter, blameth thee instead for thy typo.
9. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's typewriter, though it haveth a cool correction feature not known to thine own.
10. Covet not thy neighbor's ribbon and paper, though he may haveth a nicer kind because he spareth not any expense, unlike thee, cheap bastard.

I better quit while I'm behind. That stuff is blasphemous enough as it is, although it certainly was not intended as such (in case God is listening).

I'm all wet (in the literal sense), Kee. Gar made me water the front lawn manually (with the garden hose, I mean...I didn't pee on it). I did such a fantastic job; it would have brought tears to your eyes. I watered with precision, with care, with pride. I wanted to impress everyone in the neighborhood. But mostly I wanted to get the hell out of the house. Gar was on a cleaning kick and as soon as he started yellin', THAT'S when I started waterin'. (Ha! I'm not as dumb as he looks. I'm not even as dumb as I look, and I come closer to that.)

Have you noticed that I've single-spaced this letter? I did that so you could get more out of these letters (although I seriously doubt that).

Forgiveth thy humble servant, O Lord, for I hath mistakenly sinned against Thee. I have eaten of the quadruped on a Friday during Lent! I hath boo-booed. I did, Kee...I ate meat on a Friday! (Ssssh! Not so loud!) I wonder if God gives special considerations for Leap Year. This is the first year I've had to abide by this rule; I've never been restricted from eating meat before. It's usually all right for me to bite a big weenie. God can't expect me to pick it up like *snap* that!⁷

KEE! I'M GOING TO HELL FOR EATING A BIG MAC! I can't believe it...of all times to get a Big Mac Attack...on a Friday during Lent! Well, if I do go to Hell, at least I'll have company. Mom, Gar, and Mike all violated this sacred Catholic tradition that no Catholic really follows anymore.

Well, Kee, it's Leap Year. Whoopee. Oh boy, that means an EXTRA day of school. Yippee skippee. That's bringing back my will to live. Oh, yeah.

I think I'm entering a mental collapsar. Big science fiction fan that you are, I'll translate for you: my mental marbles are currently skittering about the floor. Comprendes?

I'M GOING CRAZY!

Yes, I believe I've come too just about the end of my rope. And you know what I always say: When you come to the end of your rope, make a noose! QUICK!

Well...now that I have your complete inattention, let us proceed.

⁷ This is without a doubt, the most often committed sin...even priests are known to break this one. I think even Jesus once had a hot dog on Friday during Lent. It used to be, many years ago, that Roman Catholics couldn't eat meat on Fridays at all, Lent or no Lent, or it was a mortal sin (the worst kind). Then, the Church eased up a little and it was only during Lent and only for those over thirteen years of age. Now, I think even the Pope forgets this one, so it's probably not a mortal sin anymore...just a faux pas. Like farting in Church.

NO MORE WRESTLING! YEAH! My P.E. coach, Coach Bastard, decided that we'd suffered enough. One kid, when wrestling a guy twice his size in what Coach Bastard calls "an exhibition match," broke his shoulder bone when the bigger guy picked him up and threw him to the floor like he had just scored a touchdown. To further explain the exhibition matches, my coach purposely throws together two guys who are obviously not in each other's weight class (sometimes, they're not even on the same level in the food chain) and he forces them to wrestle. Like having skinny little Lee wrestle not-so-skinny, not-so-little me. In other words, like dropping a bowling ball on a French fry. What a sadist.

When I was at the library, there was a mother and son comedy team using the typewriter next to me. They were funny as hell. The kid (my age) was trying to figure out how the ribbon worked. I saw him pull the ENTIRE ribbon out. Then he took the reel out and started to unwind and unroll it all over the floor...then wind it back up like it was a yo-yo, or something. Finally, the librarian saw him and did this mad dash to help him. The mother was defending her son, squawking: "It needs a new ribbon! It needs a new ribbon!" And the librarian (really cool on the surface, but speaking through gritted teeth) patiently explained that all they had to do was call her and she would have gladly rewound it for them, which is all it needed. Not anymore, though, the ribbon is shot to hell. And there's ink all over everyone's face and hands. They looked like a minstrel show. Huge comedy!

I hope this letter is as funny as you claimed the first one was. I also hope that I receive a letter from you before my typewriter rots and I convert it into a planter. This piece of crap is falling apart a little more each day. Gar fixed it so that we can't use the right-hand grip on the roller (you know...the integral part of the typewriter that moves the roller and allows you to put paper in). The loser broke it! Actually, it's the screw's fault; it slipped off. Gar screwed it up, now I have to screw it in.

This letter truly reflects my life at this time: boring beyond belief. We just spent four-and-a-half incredibly dull hours at the world's smallest bowling joint watching Dad lose in the city bowling tournament. His legs are hurtin' him somethin' fierce these days. He even said he reminded himself of Festus from "Gunsmoke."⁸

You never answered me: Do you have Slim Whitman in Arizona? Or is there some sort of legislation preventing him being shown on TV there? If so, how can we pass similar statutes in Vegas?

I have no idea how long this letter will get. But if it gets too long (and any heavier), I may have to ask Claire to weigh it on the

⁸ My father was very athletic for most of his youth, but paid dearly for it later in life. His hip eventually deteriorated to the point it had to be surgically replaced with a plastic joint.

postal scale for me at Dad's office. I hate to ask Dad's crone – sorry, I mean "secretary" – to do anything. I hate Claire! I HATE THAT OFFICE!⁹

One thing you must understand is that this letter was written over a period of a few days, so some of the junk in it might be a bit old and/or stale. And I may have already talked to you on the phone and blabbed away all the contents of this letter.

Have you noticed that I never really talk about what's going on at home? This is because I figured Mom bothers you enough with her (and our) problems. You know, you might want to consider charging her psychiatric fees.

Mom mentioned the possibility of our trekking down to see you for Easter. Say, won't that be fun...listening to Lee and Tee fight over a pillow for six hours! Mom also mentioned that when she was down there last, you said you wouldn't mind having me stay over there during summer. Why, thank you, Kee! I love you, too. (Yuck. I'm beginning to sound like a Hallmark card. Pass the insulin!)

I don't have any homework this weekend, but I do have to come up with an idea for a short story for English class. I'm drained of ideas, unfortunately...she's had us write four stories this past week. I just can't think of anything else to write about...even my sixth-grade Creative Writing teacher Sister Varona¹⁰ gave us a week to come up with an idea (which is how long it took some of us to come up with a thought). Sr. Senile gave us only three days. Oo, I hate her! Hating a nun...is that a mortal sin, or venial?

I think I'll close this letter now. I'm watching a Sinbad¹¹ movie on TV and it's very hard to concentrate on the plot while typing. And

⁹ I used to work in my father's office as "file clerk." Closer to "file jerk," really, because I don't think I did much to enhance or streamline his filing system. But he paid well. Handsomely, in fact, but I originally took the job because I wanted to spend more time with him. Lee, Tee and I hardly ever saw Dad except for when he picked us up at school and took us to get a donut and coke (we each got our own...we didn't share just one donut and one coke), but we hardly saw him during school breaks.

Anyway, my father's secretary was this very unpleasant old woman named Claire. Fortunately for Dad, she was as sharp as a tack; unfortunately for everyone else, she was just as pleasant to run into. AND IT WAS *HER* I ENDED UP SPENDING MY WHOLE DAY WITH! Dad was always out of the office, of course, trying to take care of his business.

For awhile there, after his graduation from college, Gar was working alongside Dad as "Account Executive." So, it was a little more fun in the office when he was there. My desk was right across from Gar's office, so that when his door was wide open, he could see me and I could see him. He would do things to amuse me at times...like pantomiming falling asleep all curled up in his office chair, or flying paper planes around, stuff like that. Hmm. I never did thank him for that.

Hey...thanks, Gar.

¹⁰ She thought I was a genius. What do you think? Who asked you?

¹¹ Editing these letters twenty years later, it just occurred to me that when I say I was watching a "Sinbad movie with no plot," they'll probably assume I mean "First Kid" or "Jingle All The Way."

as we all know, plots are absolutely essential in all Sinbad movies. (I've heard of willing suspension of disbelief, but willing suspension of *intelligence*? Oh well, I'll watch it anyway.)

What's *your* favorite Sinbad movie, Kee? I know, I know. But if you HAD to choose just one...which one would it be?

Speaking of which...remember seeing a Sinbad movie at the Parkway Theaters when I was a kid with the other neighborhood brats ("yard-apes," Gar calls them). I remember for the first time carefully reading the movie credits, and in particular the legend "Filmed In Panavision." I asked one of the other kids where the hell "Panavision" was. Pretty soon, we were all involved in this very serious geographical debate in the very front row of the movie theater.

We eventually agreed upon two things. One, Panavision must be a jungle island somewhere in the ocean some place where giant reptiles still roamed (obviously, since they were slithering all over Sinbad in the movie. So were the women, actually, but it was more fun watching the reptiles...at that age, anyway.) And two, having your jaws temporarily sealed shut by the super-adhesive qualities of Jujubes was pretty cool.

Bydie-bye.

Your favorite brother,

Jerry!

P.S. You know I like coming down to visit you, Kee. I just hate listening to Lee and Tee fight in the car for hours on end. Granted, all families fight...over who sits next to a certain window, etc. But with Lee and Tee it's something else entirely. You almost want to frisk 'em for weapons.



MARCH 25, 1980

(Tuesday)

Dear Kee,

Hold on...I'm trying to think of a really clever way to open this letter. Hmm. Nope, I got nothing. I can't think of anything clever at all. Sorry, Kee, but that's not gonna stop me. Here we go!

Hello there! How you been? That's nice.

I'm sorry; you'll have to excuse me. I'm not feeling very clever, creative, or funny today. My team lost in P.E. volleyball. Oops! I didn't tell you about that, did I?

Coach Bastard finally came up with a sport that does not involve attacking each other using knives, chains, whips, hand-grenades, or sticks with the pointed ends of nails sticking out: VOLLEYBALL!

We started it yesterday. I like it; it's pretty fun. I'm no good at it, but neither is anyone else...even the "jocks" (short for "jockstraps") aren't any good because body tackling is almost never required. My team lost 5 games to nil. It was the sort of crushing and demoralizing defeat that makes a man's penis shrink about three inches. If he can spare it.

I wrote you a letter last night and stuck it in the mailbox, but I forgot to put the little flag up on the mailbox so the mailman never took it. DUMMY ME! I won't send it now; it's pretty horrid. I'll just put some of the good stuff from that letter and stick it in this one. Lord knows that won't take up much room. I could, in fact, write all the so-called "good stuff" in the postage stamp's white borders...which is basically why I didn't send the other letter. Oh well.

Remember when I told you that I ate meat on a Friday during Lent? Well, I did it again, and again, and again. Last week was number four. Not too bright, huh. (I know, I know: "If brains were dynamite...uh...um...we'd all try very hard not to sneeze." Is that

how that old saying goes? Doesn't sound quite right.) Anyway, now I've got a one way ticket to Purgatory (I was going to say Hell, but I figured God might be listening and having someone take down names...like a brown-noser angel, or something).

Do you remember what Purgatory is? The nuns taught us it's the place where most of us will end up when we die. When I say "we," I am, of course, not including Moonies or Hare Krishnas. When they die they go straight to an airport in Hell, when it will finally be their turn to be hassled for spare change for all eternity! Forever and ever. Amen.¹²

Anyway, in Purgatory, they cleanse your soul (hot wax costs extra) and I'm pretty sure it's supposed to hurt, but it's okay because they give us a written guarantee that we're going to Heaven and, of course, a rain-check good for one week after purchase at all participating outlets.

Kee, picture this if you will: Mom woke us up on Sunday to get us ready for Church. I groggily amble (or groggly ambily) into the middle bathroom to check my appearance: gross, naturally. I decide that a quick shower is the only answer. That and radical cosmetic surgery. I only have time for the shower, though. So I close the bathroom door and start the water running, checking to see if there is some soap and shampoo. As my eyes quickly dart across the little room, I notice some soap in the aptly-named "soap dish" and several bottles of colorful liquid of an undetermined nature in clear plastic bottles balanced on the top rail.

I pull all of them down for closer inspection. The first one is labeled: AVON One-Step Crème Hair Rinse; the second, Stabilized Aloe Vera Bath Silk (as opposed to the unstable variety, which can often explode in the amateur shampooer's hands); the third, Jean Nate' After-Bath Splash (so old it has actually formed a leathery skin on the top).

¹² I am basing this on my own personal experience with Moonies. I had one approach me once with a copy of their bible, the "Bhagavad Gita," or some fuckin' thing. The guy really really really wanted me to have a copy...FREE! Wowzers. "Tempting," I said. "Very tempting. But, no thanks."

"Look," he said, "what's your name?"

"Raul," I lied.

He smiled. "Look, Raul, I'll even autograph it for you..."

"Why? You didn't write it."

He smiled again. "How do you spell your name, Raul?"

"R...a...o...u...e...l...l...u...o...u...e." He wrote it on the book in pen, looked hard at what he wrote and stopped smiling. "My parents have a sense of humor," I said. "Sue me."

And of course, now that he had actually gone and signed the damn thing—in ink even!—he wanted me to offer him a small token of appreciation. I eventually just walked away from him; he just stood there holding that "autographed" bible of his.

Moral: if your name is Raul and you work in the airline industry...hide your name tag, because there's one pissed-off Moonie out there somewhere.

I stroll not-so-merrily on to the next bathroom continuing my search for some REAL shampoo. As I enter, I take notice of more colorful plastic bottles of different shapes, sizes, and colors. Wanting shampoo, I find instead: Vidal Sassoon Finishing Hair Rinse for Normal Hair; Gee-Your-Hair-Smells-Terrific Rinse for Oily Hair; Revlon Milk Plus 6 Conditioner; Avon Blue Tranquility Relaxing Bubble Bath...and many, many more. Things like: Redken Climatress Acid-Balanced Moisturizing Cream Protein Conditioner; Vidal Sassoon Liquid Protein Hair Conditioner; Jojoba Conditioner; and finally, Silcience Self-Adjusting Conditioner. All of them colored with the subtle hues and tones normally reserved for jukebox lights.

Totally perplexed and utterly frustrated I pick a bottle at random: Revlon Milk Plus 6. Bad choice. ("Gee-Your-Hair-Really-Smells-PERIOD!")

Hey, I now understand what you meant when you said you'd be too embarrassed to wear the "Mr. Bill" t-shirt you gave me. I wore it to the mall and everyone kept staring at me. Maybe because I wasn't wearing any pants with it. Ha!

Please excuse the vast amount of correction fluid used in this letter, enough to double the paper's thickness, I'm sure (I wish they had a spray-paint variety.) But I have quite the haddock. I should probably see a sturgeon. But it would cost too many clams, and all I got is a fin. Sorry for the fishy puns; I'll clam up.

Hey. I just got off the phone with you. You sounded very energetic. (Note the sarcasm.) I hope you had fun puking. To tell you the truth, I feel a bit pukish myself. As I've said, I have this jim-dandy of a headache. Gar has suggested it might be an adverse reaction to having my head shoved so far up my ass.

I just found out there is a newly-released Beatles album on its way. My fave radio station, is going to be playing it non-stop. (No commercial interruptions. Pretty cool, huh?)

I bet you're wondering about my use of the term "newly-released" since they haven't been together since 1970. Wait. I MUST be losing my mind. You hate the Beatles. You probably couldn't shit less, right? Well anyway, some record company is taking their more obscure songs and putting an album out entitled "Kee Really Couldn't Care Less About This Beatles Record, But We're Gonna Call It 'Rarities' Anyway." Good title, huh?

It's gettin' late and Mother Superior (Gar) is gettin' on my case, so I'll close for tonight. I am sorry I couldn't get this letter finished. I hope you can hold onto reality 'til you get it. Adios.

Hi, Kee. Are you still feeling sick? I know I am. I'm not sure, but I think I just drank a glass of dishwater. I pulled out a glass from the dishwasher and I filled it up with water from the sink faucet. I think there was still some detergent in the glass. Hmm. Maybe the tiny white bubbles floatin' around in my wa-wa should have tipped me off. I AM REALLY STARTIN' TO FEEL QUEASY HERE! Can someone please hand me a bucket? And if you see me foaming at the mouth, please don't alarm yourselves unnecessarily. It's just Cascade.

I'm going to tape that Beatles album off the radio. The DJ just announced that it would be on in 10 minutes. I know...you care, right? The only thing is, well...it must be some sort of copyright violation for me to tape it, right? Oh Kee...am I strong enough in my moral convictions to resist the siren call of copyright infringement and the adventurous allure of musical piracy? And, perhaps more importantly, do I have a blank cassette?

I'm feeling worse by the second. Perhaps it's merely the quiver of anticipation for the algebra homework that awaits me, but...I'm kind of bummed out. I'm listening to my favorite music, but even the Beatles don't seem to be able to lift me out of this supreme depression. (Maybe the Supremes could lift me out of this beetle depression? Whaddaya think?)

Well, unless I think of something interesting to say in the next sixty seconds, I'll close this letter. - TIME'S UP! - Sorry I didn't entertain you. I told you this letter would stink, but you said it would be funny like all the others. Let me guess how hard you're laughing now. Not as hard as the guys I shower with in P.E. class. Couldn't possibly.

We got the new WORLD BOOK YEARBOOK for 1980 in the mail. I won't tell you its contents. You'll just have to wait for the movie! (Now you'll never get to sleep, right?) I gave Dad the bill that came attached to it. Like eighteen bucks, or something. Dad goes, "I'll pay for the book if you really will use it, Jerry. Will you?" Why, sure I will! Why, it was only last week I was in the mall searching for a leather-bound paperweight. Ha! Kidding, of course. But I did notice the other day that one of the living room sofa's legs was almost an encyclopedia's width too short...

Hey, Mom fixed us a gourmet meal tonight. Wanna know what it was? I believe it's known throughout the culinary world as: *Le Bacône a la Greasé*. That's right, kiddies...nothin' but microwaved bacon! She nuked the piggies, then walked into her room and called over her shoulder, "Make yourself a sandwich!" Challenging, to say the least, with no bread.

She disappeared into her room and she was never heard from again. There are those who say she may one day return. They say she is merely resting up from a hard day at work and will rise with the dawn once again. Still others argue that she is a creature of the night,

manifesting herself only when the moon is full in the Northern Hemisphere, returning to stalk those who stay up too late doing their homework or type letters to their sister at unreasonable hours.

This typing paper sucks. I shelled out a buck twenty-three (not including tax) for this cheap crap. Heck if I'm ever doing it again. It keeps curling at the edges. I think I'll pester Mom to buy some real paper for me at the office supply store. Perhaps something made from actual wood and not lettuce leaves.

Well, needless to say, I have nothing I need to say. Bye-bye.

Your unforgivably dull brother,

Jerry!



MARCH 28, 1980

(Friday)

Dear Kee,

Right now you're probably wondering why I've written another letter after writing one only two or three days ago. Well, I just heard from Mom that you have to clean five houses today. Bummer, dude. I figured you might need something to cheer you up. I doubt this letter will do that, but at least I recognized your needs. By God, that should count for something.

To be honest, I don't know how funny I can be. I still feel sick. (Or, alternatively, "I steel fill sick.") I think there's a flu epidemic going around this stupid house. Tee got it first, so it's obviously swine flu. (Ha.)

Anyway, enough of the condescending crap, let's get on with what we vegetarians term the real "meat" of the letter...

You won't believe what I did today. I actually brought my P.E. clothes home to be washed! They've been sitting in my locker for about...oh, let me see...three...three-and-a-half...oh, MONTHS without a wash. Needless to say, I keep to myself a lot in P.E. class. They were beginning to smell a might pow'rful! When Dad drove me home, he suggested I keep them on a leash. Cute, Dad, cute.

Whhhooooeee, what a smell, though...like mustard gas! I thought I saw them trying to pry the washer lid open, but...NAAAAAH! I must've been seein' things.

I'm listening to the Beatles right now. They (along with this letter) are slowly lifting me from utter depression. I hope you're feeling better than you did when I talked to you last. That ain't sayin' much, I realize. You really shouldn't let college get you so down, Kee. Jesus, that's what high school is for!

Oh! You gotta hear this: Dad took me to Winchell's to get a coke and donut today (of course...no news there) and some guy wandered into

the donut shop right behind us. He went to their payphone and started jabbering into the receiver, making wide, sweeping gestures with his arms. Dad's guess was that he was talking to the dial-tone. If you'd seen the guy, Kee, you'd know as well that the dial-tone was the more intelligent speaker. This guy was a textbook case of a textbook case...a wasteoid...a hippie to make us all Woodstock-nostalgic. You could tell he had been smoking something funny, probably rolled from a substance growing on his clothes. Or his body.

When he finished his telephone conversation, he came over and sat right next to us (as if he had come in the same car) and bummed a cigarette from Dad. Dad gave the fag a fag and he sat there happily puffing away, probably wistfully wondering where the heck time goes, it seeming like only yesterday when he was dancing nude on a speaker.

He was rather nattily attired, making a fashion statement that said: "Fire in the hole! Look out! Charlie!" He had on a green army jacket with an odor that made you wince, shoes that he very likely found, and pants that looked like Yugoslavian disco-wear.

Then, as if we were not already intensely and keenly aware of his presence, he starts staring at Dad. I don't mean a casual glance, mind you; I mean an out-and-out bore-a-hole-through-your-head kinda stare. With his beady eyes trained on Dad, conversation lulled. All of a sudden, this social castaway starts cackling like a...well, I was gonna say "maniac," but that seems redundant. Needless to say, Dad and I felt it was time to leave about then. We were, of course, tempted to take off in a full sprint...it was our first impulse, and we went with it. The guy staring at Dad the whole time.

Bee-fuckin-zarre.

We're going to see a movie tonight. You'll never guess which one. But if you tried anyway and guessed "Little Darlings" - you're right! You receive the Samsonite luggage, the Spiegel catalog and control of the board. Needless to say, I'm real excited. It's needless to say it, because it's not true. I can't stand Kristy McNichol or Tatum O'Neal. Besides, neither appear nude in the film, so I know it's not a comedy.

Hold on, Kee...I'll be right back.

I'm back. I bet you were hoping I wouldn't come back. Well, in a way, this is true. I'm back, but not for long. Mom just informed us that we're going to be leaving in a few minutes for Straw Hat Pizza (that's almost home-cooking to us). And the way she said it, it almost sounded like we had a choice. Almost. And look at me, dinner at a fancy restaurant soon and I'm wasting time typing when I should be putting it to good, productive use like washing my disgusting face, or putting on a clean shirt, or brushing my teeth. - Gosh, that's a tough choice! Ha! Get it? I know, I know...it wasn't worth getting. Well, if that's the way you feel about my gifted sense of humor...I'll leave! (Besides, Mom is starting to yell at us.) Bye!

I'm back! Well, I'm no top-notch critic, but the movie was horrible, and yet predictable...but only to the point that you could guess how the film would end by the time the opening credits began. As I may have mentioned, I wouldn't save either Tatum O'Neal or Kristy McNichol from a burning building, but...well...now that I've had time to actually review their work, I believe I can say in all sincerity that I wouldn't save their film from one either.

What was funny (because nothing was in the movie itself), during the supposedly most tender scene of the film, some guy in the front rows near Lee and me started howling, "Oh man, I'm drunk." People were booing him, and he'd yell back, "Don't beat me up!" Well, along comes two security guards and a guy from the Hong Kong Phooey Karate Studio next door to the theater to "escort" the gentleman out of the theater like he was on fire. Lee later heard him talking in the lobby to the surly ushers, saying that nobody would ever talk to him...so he has a couple o' beers, goes to the movies, and chats it up with the audience! Ahhh, look at all the lonely people...where do they all belong. (Apparently not the Fox Theater!)

Well, Kee, I'm still practicing to be Maxwell Smart. When Lee returned to our movie seats, he was carrying two boxes of popcorn and a large coke. He gestured for me to grab one of the popcorn boxes. I lifted the box deftly with one hand, graciously thanked him, and proceeded to spill the contents all over his lap. He said, stoically, "You're welcome."

I bet you were thinking while reading that last paragraph, "Practicing to be Maxwell Smart? I thought he had graduated already." Well, you're only half right. I passed the first course, which concerns strategy; planning a move that will certainly end in disaster. The second course, which I'm trying to master right now, is the one that teaches you simple maneuvers such as tripping over wires, spilling things, accidentally setting yourself on fire, etc. The third and final course is, of course, the toughest. That's when you learn the art of falling down without getting hurt. Mike is practicing daily, and looks very promising. Joe has mastered this to the point where he can fall down a flight of concrete steps at the stadium without SERIOUS physical injury, proving once again: no brain, no pain. So, really, I am only an *amateur* imbecile. But I'll get there. I have complete confidence in my stupidity and total lack of coordination.

I'm depressed. I really am. I don't feel very humorous today. It's all Mom's fault. The divorce is making her looney-tunes and she keeps saying things to me like: "If I go to the insane asylum, will you visit me?" (Sure, Mom, I'll feed you M&M's through the tiny barred window.) Every time there's an update in the divorce (like today it's that Dad is dating Joe's mother) she'll tell me all about it. So, I

really look forward to these frank and candid discussions, needless to say. The reason it's needless to say that is because it's a big fuckin' lie. These talks push one to the brink of madness. Our conversations over dinner at Straw Hat Pizza are becoming slightly reminiscent of the Mad Hatter's Tea Party...only not as rational.

I really do feel sorry for Mom, though. Why does that crap always hit her fan? (Remember her motto, "Don't rain on my parade"? She should mention also not to shit on it.) And why, oh why, does she always feel the need to loan me her fan? You know...why lay that crap on me, a stupid fourteen-year-old? Or you, a stupid nineteen-year-old? (Kidding!) Why don't you charge her psychiatric fees? Why don't I charge her psychiatric fees? Why do I ask so many rhetorical questions? AND WHY THE HELL DON'T YOU ANSWER ANY OF THEM?!

Ah, finally...a question I can answer: why don't you reply to any of my letters? Simple, you just can't find the time between school studies and maid service to answer a low-life like me. You can't take ten minutes out of your busy workaholic weekday to grab a stupid piece of paper and scrawl down a simple message of warmth, understanding and encouragement ("Semper fi, Jer!") to one of your immediate family members. You can't find time to even acknowledge my puny existence. Fine, if that's the way you feel, fine! See if I care! Don't write me! Do you think my sole purpose in life is to catch noomonia...numonia...pneumuniah...cold sitting in front of the mailbox awaiting a nonexistent letter from my very own sister!

HELL NO!

And if you're never going to write me, why am I bothering to write you? Such a mystery. All of life is a puzzle, though. What is reality? How can we be sure that what we see is truly as it appears to others? A man, for instance, who is born asleep would forever think that what he is dreaming at any particular moment is reality. What he perceives is reality; what we perceive is a truly lazy individual who is probably going to be late for work.

Blah! I hate philosophy. It not only confuses me, it out-and-out bores me to tears. Mike is really into that stuff. I can see Mike as a philosopher. When he gets in the right mood he can come up with all sorts of odd thoughts like "the sleeping man" thing (that part was his; the lazy part was mine). He always manages to entertain me with that philosophical shit. Philosophical Shit 101, we call it. Maybe one day Mike will grow up and get a doctorate in Philosophical Shit. You never know.

You may recall Mike as being the nerd who does calculus problems during lunch, programs computers using a pen and notebook (he doesn't even need a computer in front of him...that's how freakin' smart he is). But me, I'll always remember Mike as the guy who eats the outside of donuts, then throws the inside away. This is not as impossible as it sounds. The high school cafeteria sells these things called

"buttermilk donuts," but what they look like are glazed dog turds. They have no hole, and Mike just likes the crunchy outside, not the gooey inside (of the donuts, not dog turds). So, he licks the glaze off, eats the crunchy fried part, and throws the donut inside away, much to the delight of the cafeteria's growing ant population.

Boy, am I sick! My stomach aches, my legs feel like rubber, my head is pounding, my ears are throbbing (probably because of the typewriter's incessant racket), and I'm extremely tired. Almost too tired to type how tired I am. I didn't get to bed before midnight once in the past two weeks. I ought to close this letter before I puke all over it and then fall asleep in a puddle of my own sick.

I'll try to get this letter out by tomorrow. You probably have my other letter in your mailbox now. Just read it and keep that tight-fisted grip on reality 'til you get this one. (I know these letters are the only things pulling you through day by day...not so much a nod to my letter-writing abilities as it is a sad commentary on your life.) I'll probably send you another letter before the week is over and done with. I know you'll never write me, so I'll stop pestering you about it.

Seriously, I do understand that you are feeling sick and run-down these days. I also realize that it's hard to find the time to write well-thought-out letters like these (ha!) while trying to figure out calculus and clean houses. If you don't write, I'll understand...you just don't care about me anymore. (Do you need any help packing your bags for this guilt trip?)

Have you ever noticed that since you are studying to be an architect and are running a maid service at the same time, that you spend the entire day studying houses, then cleaning them? All you need now is to work at Century 21 in your spare time. Then you could study 'em, clean 'em, then sell the bastards...so you wouldn't have to look at 'em no fuckin' mo'. (My apologies for the gratuitous use of apostrophes.)

Hey, I'm sorry you didn't know about us staying over at your condo during Easter. I didn't mean to blow the big surprise in my last letter. And when I say "big surprise," I mean of course, "blitzkrieg." I'll just bet you're thrilled, huh?

I just realized I missed "The Pink Panther." It was supposed to be on TV tonight. Damn. Well, there's another thing to call Suicide Hotline about. I gotta start making a list.

I figured out why I enjoy the Beatles so much: they have the same hairstyle I do. How cool can you get? I ask.

I remember the first time I heard their music was while watching the movie "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" with Peter Frampton and the BeeGees. The film sucked like a Hollywood starlet. It stunk so

bad I really wasn't interested in hearing any more of the Beatles' music (or anyone else's, for that matter). Then Nana gave me a bunch of old records that someone had left behind in one of her motel rooms.¹³ I have to admit, though, the Beatles are cool. For just four guys, their stuff soars over music I hear today. Their music helps stimulate my imagination (kinda like Playboy).

I gotta go, Kee. I'm fallin' asleep. Bye-bye.

Your favorite desert rat (not to be confused with DESSERT rat),

Jerry!

¹³ We got a lot of cool stuff from my Nana's Las Vegas motel. People were always leaving things behind in their rooms that Nana would claim for her own. I think that's how she got her third (and last) husband.

Of course, she would give some of the best things to us grandchildren. Stuff like...um...well, those records...and...well...I seem to recall I got a Hot Wheels watch once. Hmm. Now that I think about it, there's probably a real good reason why all those people never came back for their stuff. A lot of it was just crap. Just like her third (and last) husband.



APRIL 1, 1980

(Tuesday...April Fool's Day!)

Dear Kee,

Oh boy, am lever ticked off! Today, in case you weren't aware, is April Fool's Day. That's right, kiddies, today's the day when wide-eyed innocents like myself display their naivete and extreme gullibility. I hate this day. Thank God, like my birthday, it only comes once a year (and that's still one day too many). As we all know, when it comes to playing a practical joke on me, it's not quite as tricky as shooting puppies in a barrel, but it is equally inhumane. Can you believe this? Even the neighbor's dogs played a trick on me today! I was outsmarted by a one-eyed Chihuahua and a three-legged collie. Now THAT is pathetic.

It all began at around noon today when I was walking alone to the benches outside the school cafeteria. I was walking with my head held down as usual (you know, for fear of making even accidental eye contact with another human being), when I noticed a shiny object in my path. "Hello! What's this?" I exclaimed, scarcely believing my good fortune. "Why, I believe it is an American coin valued at one-fourth of a dollar!" I bent down to pick up the quarter, not daring to look about me for fear of someone else stealing this windfall from under my very nose. "This is truly a two-bit blessing from the Lord!" thought I while trying to lift the coin from the cement. But...it wouldn't budge!

Still, no thoughts ran through my mind other than I must make haste lest the original owner discover a deficiency in their personal finances to the tune of exactly one-quarter dollar. The coin repelled my every effort, however, as if I was trying to lift the entire concrete sidewalk on which it lay. So I crouched lower to get better leverage and apply a little more muscle...

Suddenly, a new thought enters my head, looking exhausted and a bit haggard from the effort. I look slowly over my left shoulder to see a gaggle of giggling sophomores pointing and laughing at the world's biggest idiot (or at least the biggest at our high school).

They had Krazy-Glued the quarter (and some other change I missed) to the sidewalk.

And I fell for it! What a sucker! What a loser! Ladies and gentlemen, here he is...Captain Asshole himself...Jerry! (Applause. Applause.)

The sophomores, still devoted to their task of proving just how stupid we freshmen are, watched as I got off my knees, composed myself as best I could, and walked away in search of my pride and self-respect. AAAUUUUGGGGGHHHHHH! Sophomores doth vex me!

But I showed them. I didn't cry and wet my pants until after I turned the corner...

Then when I got home, I was greeted with a ticker tape parade put on especially for me by the neighborhood dogs. Thousands of newspapers, empty milk cartons, and food leftovers were thrown everywhere in the yard, calling to me in shrill voices, "Jerry! Jerry! Pick me up. Come on, put me back in the trash can. Please. I don't smell that bad, really I don't." THE NEIGHBORHOOD DOGS HAD STRUCK AGAIN!!! I stood and stared out over the field of garbage that had once been our front lawn, watching it being blown and scattered to every corner of our yard. As Mom pulled out of the driveway in her LTD, I turned to the side of the house and decided that the time had come to unleash my unholy anger. I clenched my fist, rubbed my knuckles, and slammed my hand against the wall, holding nothing back.

CRACK!

And then...the SHOUT heard 'round the world...

AAAUUUUGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGGHHHHHH!!!

Damn. That really hurt. It still hurts when I try to make a fist. I hope I didn't break it. I need it for my simply fantastic serves in volleyball.

That has to be the only thing that went right today; we took first place in volleyball in P.E. My team is winning by one-and-a-half games. I'm getting much better at the sport, especially in my serves and returns. Volleyball brings out the animal in me.

Meow.

Something must be wrong with this typewriter (actually, there's nothing right with this typewriter). But among other things, it's starting to rattle now. Mom said that we should take it to a machine repair shop. I doubt that we could afford something like that. It'd probably be a lot cheaper to buy a new one than to pay for the repairs done to this hunk o' junk. It doesn't need a machine repairist so much as it does a faith-healer and a trip to Lourdes.

I've got three tests tomorrow, so I better close for tonight. Besides, I'm getting a little bored with typing. For tonight, anyway.

Bye-bye.

Wednesday, April 2, 1980

(continued from yesterday)

Hello,

I did a really dumb thing last night (about an hour after getting away from this letter). I was on the phone with Mike, and I asked him for some much-needed notes for our religion test. I started talking about how I had stayed up 'til about 2:30 in the morning (I exaggerated a little) doing some algebra that I had put off 'til late at night. When I had said this, I looked over to the kitchen to see Gar staring at me with that same friendly kind of stare you so often find carved on the statues at Easter Island. I knew right away I was in for it. I stared back, crossing my eyes. No reaction from him. (Too bad we don't have a seltzer bottle at home.) Finally, he said that he wanted to talk to me after I was done on the phone.

I quickly finished up my conversation with Mike and hung up. "Yeah?" I called out, but didn't dare go into the kitchen to face him.

"How many times have I told you to do your homework the minute you get home?" he asked from the kitchen in that oh-so-familiar tone of voice. I had to think of a response that would end the discussion quickly. "Many," I said. I knew right away that this had put the discussion to rest, and that it was probably the stupidest thing to say to him. I heard him retreat into his bedroom. I could tell he was disappointed in me, but there was nothing I could have said that would have made him feel any other way than disappointed. I'm sorry, Gar. I didn't really stay up that late. I was just having a sort of pissing contest with Mike. You know: "I stayed up 'til one in the morning." "Oh yeah, well I stayed up 'til TWO in the morning."

I realize he's just trying to make sure that I get a good education, but I think I can do it by myself. He made me feel like crap the entire evening. I stayed up later last night feeling like shit than I did the one night doin' my homework. So, you see how counter-productive these lectures can be.

Today, though, was the day for all good things to happen. The exact opposite of yesterday. The history test that I was worried sick about was as easy as pie. (I don't understand that expression. Kee. I've seen pies made; they really don't look that easy. Maybe they mean "cowpies." I've seen those made, too; they're tons easier.) Anyway, I passed it with flying colors. I also aced two other tests; algebra and

religion. Then, Joe told me during lunch that he had seen my name on the SECOND HONORS list. He was right; I checked. I couldn't wait to tell Gar.

When I got home I saw his car in the driveway. I tried to decide when the best time would be to tell him of my scholastic achievements. Gar, in the end, decided for me in the kitchen.

"How'd you do on your tests?" he asked in a flat, kinda pissy tone. (I wanted to smart off. Say something like: "I didn't DOO on my test! What kind of grade do you think I'd get if I took a crap on my test paper?" But, I didn't. Besides, it's kinda hard to use curse words around Gar. "Hey, watch your mouth!" he says. Actually, he says it so much he kinda slurs it now...it sounds like one word: "AywatchermOWth!")

Anyway, he asked, so I say, "Two A's and a B." You know, in a real cool James Dean kinda way. (That is, if James Dean had an older brother who made him sweat out grades.) I walked real slow to my room and yelled from the hall, "Gar...I got on Second Honors."

"What?" I know he heard, he just couldn't believe it.

"I said: 'I made Second Honors.'"

"How'd you do that?" There was just a touch of kindness in his voice. Brotherly love and understanding had been restored.

I gotta stop typing now, Kee. Mom just handed me something I have me to type for her. Don't ask...she didn't. Bye!

Thursday, April 3, 1980

(continued from yesterday)

Kee,

I am really beginning to worry about you. Dad said that he had talked to you not too long ago and you told him that you enjoyed my last letter. Are you really that depressed? I mean...are you really feeling so bad that the most boring, typewritten epistle ever to emerge from the twisted, haunted imaginings of myself or any other sapient simian life form has actually managed to amuse you, let alone cheer you up? My God, Kee! Get to a hospital...YOU'RE SICK! (And I do not mean "physically!")

Lee (a.k.a. Lee the Loanshark) asked me to tell you to send your check right away for the money you owe him. I told him it was coming along in the same envelope as my letter from you.

AND WE ALL KNOW WHEN THAT IS, DON'T WE, KEE?! NEVER! NUNCA! WHEN SNOW BLOWERS SELL IN HELL! NO WAY! NO HOW! NO WHERE!

...no use...

It really is no use, you know. I've asked, pleaded, begged, cried, screamed, and laid guilt trips on you and STILL you have not made any attempt to write me. Seriously, though...I do understand why you haven't written me, only phoned. I do understand that the telephone is the lazy man's letter. I know you've been extremely busy...too busy to waste your time trying to make contact with a rejected low-life like me. I'm beginning to get to the point where I don't care whether you write or not. (Meaning no disrespect, mind you.) I find that these letters have really helped to lift me from my almost-constant depression (and when I get depressed, I don't fuck around!) I have found that these simple messages are good therapy. I can actually, truthfully say that just communicating via these epistles, is a truly rewarding experience. (Could you tell that I was lying through my teeth? Why, I plum near knocked my front teeth out trying to get dem big lies thru thar.)

Hey, guess what? I hear they're getting rid of the talking clown in the Jack-In-The-Box drive-thru. I'll admit it looks a bit silly when grown-ups lean over and talk to this demonic-looking piece of plastic, but...I dunno. I've got a real soft spot for Jack-In-The-Box...right around my waist. Normally I can't stand clowns! Except Jack-In-The-Box, though. Probably because he's the only clown who ever fed me. I remember when Jack-In-The-Box used to have characters representing their food, like McDonald's. There was: Jack (of course), the Burger Meister, Secret Sauce, etc. I remember collecting little rubber dolls of those guys. Of course, I'm older now. Soon I'll be collecting other kinds of rubber dolls. Ha.

Really, though...I'll *sniff* miss the big guy. He was like family to me. Now they're blowing him up in commercials with dynamite. Little old ladies saying: "Waste that sucker!" Who's next? Santa Claus? (Although, that might be kinda cool. Especially if there were little kids around.)

I'll bet you're really looking forward to having us stay over at your condo. Say, won't that be fun. Mom freighting us over in the van. Shit. Tee and Lee'll kill each other before we leave the city limits. You know what the most humorous part of the trip is, don't you? It's when we leave. Everyone is tense and, more than likely, Tee and Lee will already be lining up for their daily massacre. Mom will start swingin' and someone will end up with a mouthful of her fist, not to mention a faceful of tears.¹⁴ I can't wait.

¹⁴ Not literally, for chrissakes. Mom never smacked us around. Much. Hardly. (Kidding, Ma!) She just has this way of scolding you verbally that quite frankly makes you wish she'd smack you and just get it the hell over with.

I have to go to Dad's office today to work. That'll be fun, too. ("Hey, Claire! How's your hammer hangin'?") Dad suggested that I come down today since I have the day off from school and the kiddies don't (Ha!) and clear off my old desk. There's about a ton of paper on it. (No, not food wrappers!) I must admit, it needs it. When the man's right, the man's right. (Fortunately, this is not that often.) The desk is a shambles, though. I've seen neater lean-to's.

He's gonna take me out to lunch afterwards. We're gonna go by McDonald's to buy the twins some burgers. I think I'll get them Happy Meals! Wouldn't that be embarrassing for them? I mean, anyone eating McDonald's for lunch is usually treated like hot shit. Do you think that'd still be the case if a classroom full of soon-to-be-teenagers all stared and pointed at Lee and Tee with their "man-handler" Happy Meals? Awwww...I can't be that cruel, can I? Darn right I can! Ha!¹⁵

I remember when Mom and I used to bring McDonald's to you and Gar when you two were at St. Vitus Elementary. Actually, now that I think about it, I only remember Gar coming out to the car to get the McDonald's. Did he share all those burgers with you? Did you ever get any? You might want to ask Gar about that next time you talk to him.¹⁶

I'm running out of things to talk about (obviously, right?), so I'll close this letter. Maybe I can get it out in today's mail. I'll try.

Anything else I think of, I'll tell you when we get to your condo on Friday. In fact, I bet we get to your condo before this letter does. I'll even go so far as to say that I'm probably in the same room as you're reading this. So feed me then.

By the way, I'm still ticked off at you for tellin' Mom my "psychiatric fees" joke. She hasn't stopped raggin' on me since.

Well, gotta go. I'm washing my jeans. Bye!

Captain Asshole,

¹⁵ Obviously I can't, because I didn't.

¹⁶ Okay, it's not *really* called "Saint Vitus Elementary." Close enough, though. All my brothers and sisters have each attended "St. Vitus Elementary" since it was first erected (and I use the word "erect" intentionally). Gar and Kee went there when it was still forming rules and regulations and was run by Filipino nuns. We shall refer to this stage as the "When-It-Was-Cool Period." Morn and I would drive up next to the school; Gar would see us through an open door in the classroom, and he'd run up to get the hamburgers we bought for him and Kee. When I went there, (we shall refer to this stage as the "Ruled-By-Nuns-With-No-Sense-Of-Humor Period") the only time we could get hamburgers was like once or twice a year when they would designate it Hamburger Friday (really quite interesting when you remember that as Catholics we weren't really supposed to eat meat on Fridays, so it makes me curious as to what was actually in the hamburger if it wasn't meat). By the time Lee and Tee got there (we'll call this the "Sister Mary Nazi" Period), if they wanted to trace the same route Gar once ran, they had to use the same techniques and skills utilized by East Germans seeking freedom past the Berlin Wall.

Jerry!



TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER ON A LAPTOP

A few last anecdotes while I'm on the subject of Saint Vitus Parochial (because I'm not very often). I don't want Mom or Dad to think they wasted their money by sending me to a private elementary school taught and run almost exclusively by Catholic nuns, but they did.

I was always getting in trouble with the sisters for my big mouth or for things I would write. I remember one assignment in Creative Writing was to write a commercial for a make-believe product. Mine was for used toilet-paper with a special "scratch-n-sniff" feature. I got into deep doo-doo for that. Unreal. Everyone laughed when I read it...even Sister Varona who taught the class! (Although she did turn a very deep shade of crimson.)

But I think I got into the biggest nun-tussle when we got our eighth-grade yearbooks. We all got an opportunity to have our own choice of personal information printed in them. Here's what I wanted printed under my name:

Name: Jerry.

Nickname: Nick. My nickname name is named Nick.

Goals: Six, with two assists.

Favorite Quote: "Are there gonna be nuns in high school?"

What was eventually printed was:

Name: Jerry.

Nickname: Jerry.

"Jerry has enjoyed his years at St. Vitus and is looking forward to high school."

So, of course, I had to throw the thing away. Why treat it any different than I did my education there?

I remember having to go to the Principal's Office for inscribing a girl's yearbook with this kind thought: "May you never see a broken condom." Can you believe I got in trouble for that? Neither can I. Would the Surgeon General have said anything less? I think not.

Jerry.¹⁷

¹⁷ I no longer use the exclamation point after my name. I'm not as thrilled to be me as I once used to be.



APRIL 30, 1980

(Wednesday)

Dear Kee,

M'lady, thou must take heart in thy brethren's discomfort. Take heart, prithee, for 'tis true that he hath had the worst of ill-fortune. He hath come forth this day as minding to content thee, not to pain thee with his vexing follies as thee might have thought. This palpable gross man stands before God and the light of truth to tell all that he shalt not burden the burdenless, discontent the content, nor displease the pleasant. He is graced with knowledge of many pleasures, yet he pursues them not. 'Tis true, m' lady, that he hath ruttetted himself at the expense of none. He shalt continue with yon letter and shall strive to entertain thee with his wit anon.

Damn I'm getting good at that. I like writing that way...I hope you enjoy reading it. In case you couldn't guess, we're studying William Shakespeare in English class. Mike and I get a kick out of talking and writing notes to each other in this manner of speech (which we've termed "Fakespeare"). It really is fun if you're good at it although it takes two periods to write one note. By then, of course, you're not even in the same class...so note-passing takes becomes a more elaborate process. A bit like passing microfilm in a Bond flick.

The play we're reading is labeled a comedy. Ha. The only funny part about the entire play, really, is that it's labeled a comedy. It's entitled "A Midsummer Night's Dream." 'Tis strange. It's so hard to follow that it comes with a page-by-page glossary. Why we can't read a comedy from this century is beyond me. You know, something that would actually be funny and wouldn't require the use of a decoder ring to enjoy it.

And guess who got to read aloud the part of the Fairy King (not to be confused with the Dairy Queen)? That's right, yours truly. Needless to say I took a lot of ribbing from Mike and Shawn. That's okay, I'll get back at them by suggesting to Sr. Senile that they play Moth and Mustardseed, the fairies. That'll show 'em.

I made up a list of all the things I wanted to tell you. So, let's just start at the beginning, shall we?

1.) I just heard on the radio that according to somebody very dull and important there never were any brontosauri (or should that be "brontosaureses?") roaming the Earth. Can you dig it? Like them crazy scientists put the wrong head on the right body. Or the right head on the wrong body. (Which is probably the closest those scientists get to getting any head from any body, if you ask me. And they never have.) Crazy, man! Gotta be bullshit, right? I think the one with the head problem is not the brontosaurus.

2.) I found the first typewritten letter ever sent to me by Mike. God, I didn't realize we were that dull. Bad typists, too. Everything is typed in capitals LIKE THIS. IT LOOKS LIKE A TELEGRAM. STOP. A DULL TELEGRAM. STOP. WITH A LOT OF TYPOS. STOP.

3.) Guess what I was accidentally kicking around with my foot in Straw Hat Pizza last night? Did you guess a dead mouse? Probably not, but that's what it was. We were walking out and I kicked something across the floor with my sneaker. I thought it was a stuffed animal. **GROSS!** I wish I had kicked it as we were walking IN!

4.) This is my sixth attempt to write this letter to you. I keep ripping it up because it's so goddamn boring! I'm trying to be incisive, witty and charming, but ends up: incessant, shitty and boring.

5.) HAPPY TWENTEENTH BIRTHDAY, KEE-WEE!!

6.) I gotta be careful about what I put in these letters. Mom was reading them when we were visiting you last and she read the part in one about me "laying all that crap on her." So, the next time she told me something about the divorce, she added at the end of her sentence, "But you don't want to hear that crap, do you?" Of course I do, Mom! Otherwise I'd have nothing to tell my friends about during lunchtime!

Just kidding.

MOM! I DO CARE! I BELONG! WE ARE FAMILY! ICH BIEN EIN BERLINER!
(Translated: DON'T SHOOT ME! I'M THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES!)

7.) USC has been in the news a lot lately. They've been accused of recruiting athletes who have little or no command of the English language. (Gar sent me a copy of the L.A. Herald-Examiner dated Thursday, March 20, 1980. They reprinted something reportedly taken from an athlete's essay. Here's what the athlete wrote:

"I when went John because He had a point on girl that I couldn't not again. so that made me think girl don't have body unless they wont. that why I went with John."

Well, I don't know about going with John, but it certainly makes me want to go to the john. To throw up! That is the worstest writing I ever done readed! Don't you say too?

8.) Dad bought me new pants and I wasted no time putting a rip in them. I hope they can be repaired. Better make that: I pray they can be repaired. Otherwise, the next rip in them is gonna be when Dad chews me a new asshole for ripping them the first time.

9.) The kiddies had to do a project for the Science Fair. So guess who had to stay up 'til the wee hours of the morning typing Tee's and report and drawing and constructing Lee's? I don't even have to tell you. You've no doubt brilliantly deduced that it was me. I am so tired, yet somehow richer for the experience. They gave me 5 bucks each. (Kidding. They didn't pay me. I got gypped.)

10.) Lee and I went to a Kenny Rogers' softball game for charity at UNLV. We went to see big name stars like: Dottie West, Donnie Most, and Anson Williams. In other words, your basic "Love Boat" cast. A real "Battle of the Network Nobodys." It was unclear who the charity cases were until the exposure-whore "stars" were led onto the field. It was obvious these stars were looking to breathe some new life into their fan base.

It cost me Lee and I six bucks to get in (\$3.50 for me and \$2.50 for Lee). We spent about an hour-and-a-half in line (no lie), then we got horrible standing area - for lack of an antonym - "seats." And then on top of every other disappointment, they had no announcer. So that made it real easy to follow the action from our "nose-bleed" vantage point. We would've needed the Mount Palomar Observatory telescope to see anything from where we stood. Fortunately, warding off the effects of hypoxia and playing hide-and-seek with the noon-day Vegas sun kept us sufficiently occupied and little-concerned with inadequate seating.

I left early, though. I wasn't about to waste a perfectly good afternoon watching little dots scurry back and forth like some sort of All-Star Horizontal Ant Farm.

11.) I just heard that Dick Little's¹⁸ younger brother beats up on teachers. You really care, I know. Kee, don't you remember? Dick Little is the one who body-slammed me repeatedly during wrestling (with Coach Bastard standing next to us shouting words of encouragement to Dick) and made me urinate blood for a week. He also holds lighters to kids' butts (Little does, not Coach Bastard). Cool guy, huh? He'll go far in life (without possibility of parole). Anyway, his brother punched a teacher in the face, got thrown out of school and is apparently wasting no time at all following in big

¹⁸ Again, not his real name. Just his cross to bear.

brother's footsteps, proving conclusively that, yes Virginia, genetics is an exact science.

Dick Little stole my P.E. shorts in freshman P.E. once. I knew he took them, so I went to last year's coach, Mister "No-Jokes-About-My-Last-Name" Inch. And that idiot wouldn't do shit about it! "Well," he said, "you shoulda wrote your name on 'em."

"I didn't have to...**YOU DID IT FOR ME!** Don't you remember making us stand in line and dropping our shorts in front of you so you could write our names on the waistband for us?"

This is the truth. We stood in line while Coach Inch kneeled in front of us with a Magic Marker. He wrote our name on our chest - well, not on our actual chest, but on the front of our P.E. uniform t-shirts. Then he made us pull the flap of our shorts down so he could write our name on the waistband of our shorts and - oh man, I can barely even write this - on the waistband of our jockstraps. While I agree that most guys in my class probably couldn't write or spell their own names if you held major tactical nuclear weapons to their scrotal sac, I still think they'd have preferred taking a crack at it anyway. Coach Inch may have spent one too many years in the Navy.

12.) The kiddies and I went to the dentist recently. Lee spent an hour in there and Tee spent 45 minutes. Finally my turn came up. I strolled into the office, greeted the dentist's assistant and let her place a piece of paper in my mouth (actually film, but I thought at first maybe it was a business card). After taking my X-rays (I asked her if she wanted my autograph - ha), she escorted me out of the office and back into the waiting room until the X-rays were developed (more than I can say for the dental assistant).

After waiting impatiently for twenty long minutes, the dentist told me to sit in the chair. We (for lack of a better word) TALKED while he prodded around in my mouth with his set of Sears Craftsman tools. He leaned his body over me and asked if I could lean my head a little more to the right towards him. (At this point I should interrupt my narrative to explain that I've always had this weird defense-mechanism of laughing when doctors prod any part of my body. For any reason. I laughed almost non-stop through the excision of my right arm's blood-blister last year. I'm lucky they didn't slice an artery. Anyway. Dentists are no exception.) I started to giggle and a few times he had to stop to let the laughter run its merry course.

When he asked me to lean my head to the right, though, my head became positioned very near his stomach. The examination room was completely silent. Until. An ominous noise. Permeated the office.

GURGLE-blurp!

I giggled.

BREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP-doit-doit!

I felt my body shake as I began to giggle at the doctor's tummy noises. I tried to regulate my breathing as I realized he might be embarrassed about his stomach talking back to the patients. I tried to stop, but it was no use. He finally pulled his ratchet set from out of my mouth and said shyly, "I'm sorry. It's been doing that all day." I never laughed so hard in my life. I'm surprised he didn't stab me in the tongue a few times or something, yelling: "IS THAT FUNNY? HUH?! HOW ABOUT THAT *stab* AND THAT *stab* AND THAT. LAUGH IT UP, BOZO!"

Well, Kee. That's the end of my list. So, it looks as though it's about that time when all good(?) things come to an end. But, before I go, I still have a few last thoughts (and believe me, it's hard for me to come up with just one some days).

Sorry I haven't written you in a while, but I was thoroughly engrossed in a book. Shawn and I discovered that we had both bought a copy of the same book, "The Empire Strikes Back." It's the second part to Star Wars in novel form. The movie is coming out in May, so you may want to take me to it (haha)¹⁹...knowing, of course, how much you really enjoyed seeing "Star Wars" when we all forced you to watch it at Mann's Chinese Theater in Hollywood. (Double haha. Or, "ha" to the fourth power.)²⁰

Anyway, we decided to have a race to see who could finish the book first. I won because I read it during my classes. I'll probably fail all my courses now, but...I WON! So my dick is now infinitely bigger than his! (Sorry. I guess that's a guy joke.)

I gotta go now, Kee. I have to read a few pages of Shakespeare for English. Mind you, we're not actually performing this thing in class. We just have to read aloud the parts assigned to us. Sort of like "Shakespeare For The Blind." My part will last for only three more pages, then someone else gets the title "Fairy King." YAY!

Lee's trying to sleep and, oddly enough, just can't seem to manage while I'm hammering away at the typewriter. I better stop. Besides, it's time to practice playing my cymbals.

Kidding.

Bydie-bye!

¹⁹ Kee **hates** science-fiction...

²⁰ Maybe "forced" isn't the right word to use here. What I should say instead is: "dragged, kicking and crying, almost as if fighting for her very life." Kee **really** hates science-fiction. We were in L.A. for a bumper summer vacation the year they re-released "Star Wars" (if you can actually remember a time before home-video releases). It was, of course, a once-in-a-lifetime thrill for me to see where Darth Vader, C-3PO and R2-D2 placed their feet in cement...but I rather think the emotion of the moment was lost on poor Kee.

Your super-dull brother,

Jer.



MAY 5, 1980

(Monday)

Dear Kee,

Sorry I haven't written you in quite awhile, but as I mentioned to you on the phone, I've been feeling rather lousy lately. Right now, I'm feeling worse. Why? Well, let me put it this way: the worst thing for the flu bug is Coca-Cola and Straw Hat Pizza (not to mention the pepperoni, which I'm not going to or I'll puke.) Now, not only do I have a high temperature, runny nose, and an overactive sneeze gland...but now I'm constipated. (Or, as Dad puts it, "I'm full of shit." Not for long, though. Not at this rate.)²¹

The whole purpose of this extremely short letter (in case you've been wondering) is to tell you that I have lost all creativity I had once possessed. — I'm serious! I HAD SOME CREATIVITY ONCE! Of course, I was just holding it for a friend while he took a leak (his creativity, not his dick).

The same thing happened when Mike and I were writing each other. At first we mailed our letters. Then we hand-delivered them in class. Pretty soon the thrill of receiving letters from each other had warned. We simply grew tired of reading the same bullshit over and over.²²

I fear the same thing has happened to you and me. First of all, there has only been one party really involved in this...for want of a better word...EXCHANGE. Second, it has been a terrible strain on my muse to produce new material to amuse you. My most recent letters have proved to you the effect of this strain. (Boring!) I now plead on my hands and knees (I'm not being overly dramatic here...because of the aforementioned illness, I was there anyway) to your sense of humanity and humor to entertain ME for a change.

²¹ I forgot. That's what Dad used to say when I was constipated. To which Gar would add: "Why don't you make like a mathematician and work it out with a pencil?" Funny guys, huh? I had to *live* with that.

²² I think that pretty well summarizes the phenomenon modern-day of email, doesn't it? How prescient!

I realize what you're going through right now. Finals, cleaning business, finances, etc., etc., etc. The list goes on forever. But, please, whenever you feel you have a chance, please write me and tell me how great things are goin' (ha), how you wish you were here (haha), how you really wish summer would get here so I could stay over there with you awhile (hahaha), and how sorry you are that you couldn't write sooner for fear of disturbing an important person like myself (hahahahaha), and how you sincerely hope that I'll forgive you (hahahahahahahahaha).

Seriously, though I wish you luck on your finals. Buenas suerte!
(Translated: Beans have a sour taste!)

Jerry?



JULY 20, 1980

(Sunday)

Dear Kee,

Hi.

How are you?

I am fine.

Not much happening here. How about there?

That's nice.

Aw, forget it. I'm gonna write a letter like I always do and take that uncertain risk as to whether or not this letter will be read by anyone else but you. Some people around here are getting a little bent out of shape by what I put in these things. Apparently now Dad is hurt by some stuff he read or was told about.

They're not meant to hurt, really they're not. They're just supposed to be funny. But sometimes things happen at home, and I can't help but comment on it. Sorry, everybody...but the letters weren't addressed to you...youse tooks yer chances by readin' 'em. So, ah fongul.

Sorry I haven't written you even after promising there was a letter in the making. You see, Mom took my typing paper and never brought it back. Great. So I was stuck using this really cheap onion-skin paper. It's the worst! I really think it might be made from the skins of onions. Actually, they should call it onion-RING paper, it curls so damn much.

I'm typing now because Mom finally bought some paper home. Got tired of listening to me bitch so much, I guess. It ain't the greatest in the world, but it shall suffice. Beats toilet-paper...the only other alternative.

Well, let's see...what's news? Oh! Mom is on a diet kick. She's been drinking this protein shake that's supposed to curb your appetite. It really works, too. One drink of that stuff and you don't ever want to drink it again! I tasted just a little of it. I think it works by burning a small hole in your stomach. It did in mine, anyway. Tee's trying to drink this slop, too, but she's not as devoted as Mom. She doesn't have that stick-to-it-tiveness that a protein-shake diet requires. She has more of the "stick-it-up-your-assness, I'm-gonna-have-a-Dilly-Bar-instead."

Tee was shootin' her mouth off today in the car and said that she was seriously thinking of taking up a vegetarian way of life. (I always wanted to be a vegetarian, too. I'm so good with animals.) Knowing she was full-of-it, I bet her two bucks (serious dough) that she couldn't stay away from meat for a week. Haha! No more tacos for Tee! She'll never make it. Hmm. I wonder what I'll do with the two bucks...

Whatever you do, Kee, don't ever ask Mom to buy sheets for your bed! Whenever Mom buys sheets for Lee and I, she has a brain jam, or something. She can never seem to remember what color our room is. Plus, she'll buy the two bottom sheets (fitted and flat) but never thinks to buy that tippy-top one. You know, the bedspread. And what ticks me off is that the two sheets she does buy don't even come close to matching any color in our room!

Well, no matter what color she ends up buying, it has to be more tasteful than the bright blue "Star Wars" sheets we're bedding down on now. The novelty has worn very thin through the years. So have the sheets.

I had a dream the other day. It was the night that you, Lee and I were running up that huge long-distance phone bill. Do you remember how we talked about Dad wanting to buy you a Toyota Tonka Toy when you wanted a Datsun 280ZX? Well, that night I had a dream starring the local TV spokesman for Toyota, Gus Giuffre. (He's the old TV pitchman for the local Toyota dealership who's commercials run during the breaks in the Saturday Late Late Late Show.) Anyway, in my dream, I was watching him on TV and he started talking about how terrible Toyotas were for gas mileage, and what real pieces of shit they are. I remember thinking how strange it was that he would bad-mouth Toyotas after plugging them for so long. Then he went on to say that the BEST car to get was - you guessed it - the Datsun 280ZX!

I can't wait 'til I start driving. I'll be a good driver. A safe, courteous driver. I guarantee my passengers a smooth, quiet ride. They'll hardly even hear the twins scream when I run them down.

The twins are fighting right now, which is why I said that. Over what? I don't know. I don't care. Do they ever really need a reason? From what I can determine, though, tonight they're fighting over a bag of clothes. Ah, home sweet home. The pitter-patter of tiny feet

kicking the crap out of their sibling. Do you think they fought in the womb? I was thinking about that the other day: "No! I get the ice cream! (*punch* *kick*) You get the pickle!"

Guess who I saw the other day? Barry Olson, my old elementary schoolmate and nemesis. You had a tennis lesson with him at the Country Club once. He was riding a moped past me as I was walking to the store. I didn't know it was him until he had already sped past, or I would have stuck a stick in his spokes. He isn't really my arch-nemesis. He's sort of everybody's arch-nemesis. Just one of those guys that everybody loves to hate. Like, you know...well, like me.

I mentioned that I saw him to Mike when I talked to him last. He and I began talking about his greater accomplishments at high school in his freshman year. We both decided that the most memorable came down to a list of three.

The first happened during English class. We had been studying mythology and the teacher was kinda quizzing us on various characters. The teacher asked Olsen to name a certain sea nymph. I wanted to say, "Olson's mother," but the answer was actually "Scylla." An easy one. Barry answers (real loud, of course), "Syphilis!" Which brings us back to Olson's mother. – Just kidding.

Second was when Barry got into a fight with some kid named Ozzie right after history class. Barry called him an asshole. Well, he shouldn't have, because Barry doesn't exactly have the kind of physique that makes you tremble. He reminds one of those skeletons hanging in doctors' offices. Anyway, Ozzie threatened to heat the crap out of Barry if Barry didn't call Ozzie's father and apologize for calling Ozzie an asshole. And Olson did it! And Ozzie's father thought Barry was such a puss, HE beat Barry up.

No. Jus' kiddin' 'bout that last part. The rest is true, though. He really did make the call.

The last one was during Spanish class. We have these workbooks that asks personal questions in English, and we fill out the answers in Spanish. (Well, not that personal, really. They didn't ask: "¿Tiene Ud. una grande o poquito?"²³ More like: "¿Es su casa amarilla?"²⁴) The teacher was asking us all to answer aloud the question: What do we do when we get up in the morning? Olson starts swinging his arm in the air Horshack-style (Oo! Oo!) and the teacher called on him. He answers (real loud, of course), "Me pongo mi vestido!" Suddenly, the entire class starts laughing at him. Not with him, mind you...but at him. Even the teacher. What Olson said, translated to English, was: "I put

²³ Do you have a big one or little one?

²⁴ Is your house yellow? – They asked a lot of really stupid questions like that. I wish they would have taught me some Spanish phrases I might actually need to know, like: "Pardon me, señor, but why are there larvae in my nachos?" or "Do you test for AIDS here in this part of Tijuana?" You know, *valuable* information.

on my dress!" Vestido means "dress." Olson thought it meant "vest." What a tool. Although, now that I actually stop to think about it, he probably knew exactly what he was saying. We probably cut him short before he could mention his matching garters.

Guess where we're going for vacation, Kee. That's right! Fabulous LODI, CALIFORNIA! Better known as "the Entertainment Capitol Of The World." That is, if you find cattle entertaining. Frankly, I don't.

We're going there for four days to visit Mom's Dad. Why we're going to visit Grampa Feo is beyond me. We must have pissed Mom off, or something. She said we might be able to go to San Francisco, though, so it won't be a total loss. She also said that if we do go, we'd have to take Grampa Feo's octogenarian companion Carmelita with us. And what a total thrill that'll be. She doesn't speak a word of English, Kee. And I always wonder what she's saying to Mom in Spanish when they talk. Probably she's saying: "Jesus...can you get these screaming brats outta my house? Christ, didn't they have IUD's back when you were birthing?"

I've got to think of something else to talk about. I want this letter to stretch out to three pages.

Hmm. I can't think of nothing.

Sorry. Double negative. That should read: "I can't think."

I've got to find a way to calm myself down. Whenever I make a typo, I slap my cheek. I stopped doing that for awhile when I went into the bathroom one night (after a heavy session of typos) and saw that my cheek was glowing a fluorescent red. So I quit that and started pounding my fist on the table...except, I missed once and hit the sharp edge of the table. OUCH! So, I quit doing that and started breaking pencils. Now I'm out five pencils. Then I started punching the wall. Now I'm out five fingers. (Not to mention one wall.) I guess I'll have to go back to slapping my chek *slap* OUCH! My cheek.

Well, it's been great chatting with you for these few minutes. I hope things are going better for you down there than they are for me down here.

D-d-da, d-d-da, d-d-dat's all, folks!

Rotting in Las Vegas,

Jerry!



JULY 30, 1980
(Wednesday)

HI KEE,

I BET YOU'RE WONDERING WHY I'M TYPING IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS!
IT'S BECAUSE I HAVE SOMETHING VERY **VERY** IMPORTANT TO SAY!

I JUST CAN'T REMEMBER WHAT IT IS!

NO, REALLY, THE REASON I'M TYPING THIS WAY IS BECAUSE THIS IS HOW
I LEARNED TO TYPE IN THE VERY BEGINNING WHEN I FIRST STARTED TYPING
LETTERS. THIS IS A LITTLE DIFFICULT TO READ, THOUGH, ISN'T IT? I DON'T
KNOW HOW THOSE TELEGRAM GUYS DO IT.

I'll stop. I guess what I was really trying to do was recapture
my sense of humor. Remember when you said you almost had an accident
reading my first letter to you while you were driving? The reason I
think you thought the first one was so funny, really, was because you
had nothing to compare it with (except, of course, ones from the
I.R.S. with big red letters on it reading: OPEN ME UP NOW OR WE'RE
COMING IN ARMED!)

Then again, now that I think about it, life was a lot funnier
back then. (Great, now I'm getting good-and-depressed.) It's true,
though. Nothin' funny happens anymore. If something funny IS ever said
nowadays, it's almost always at the expense of Dad. Not too cool, huh?

Jesus, I'm depressed! But what do your care, huh? If you cared,
you'd be writing back to me saying you know exactly how I feel and
offering me phony words of comfort. But do you write? NOOOOOooooo! You
never take three minutes out of your "busy" schedule to pick up a
paper and pencil and scribble a few lines to your depressed brother
who wishes dearly to know that there is something left worth living
for besides Debbie Harry from Blondie!

Just kidding. (Not about the Blondie part.) You see, I hate
reading letters. I love writin' 'em. I could care less if I'm boring
the spit out of the addressee. I just love to type! Mike said that my

letters to him were dull, boring and utterly meaningless (talk about your tough critics). But Mike misses something very important: the point. I don't care. I type them, I'm done with them! He can wipe his heinie with 'em if he wants (which he very well may). Typing has become my one and only passion in life. (That and masturbation.) I practice everyday to achieve perfection. (At typing, that is.)

Typing is an expensive sport, though. It really is. The typewriter I'm typing on now costs hundreds of dollars. It's the kind with the bouncing ball. Guess how much it costs to buy just ONE of those typing balls? Eighteen clams. That's a lot of dough. Clammy dough. I have no idea why it costs that much. Mom said I should ask Dad to buy one for me 'cus he can write it off as a business expense. Yeah, right. Can you imagine that conversation?

Jerry: "Dad, can I have some money? I need to buy some balls."

Dad: "Oh, I dunno. I think you've got a lot of balls just asking for the money."

Next joke.

Now that Gar's no longer living at home, we need someone to fill the position of family clown. I think I'm just the clown to fill those big floppy shoes, and so I have submitted my résumé for the job. We were all going to a movie the other day (Mom, Lee, Tee and I). Tee and I were in the back seat talking about babies. We started talking about the baby shown in ROCKY II. The baby was ugly as sin with a full crop of hair on his head that looked like road kill. I said that babies don't usually have that much hair fresh from the womb. Tee disagreed, saying that she had a lot of hair when she was a baby. I said, "Oh sure, under your arms..."

Lee busted up laughing. To him it was the ultimate cut. Even Mom laughed. I thought it was pretty cute myself. Tee didn't.

Today we went to go look at some cars for Mom. Mercedes-Benzenes specifically. We went over to Fletcher Jones. You remember Fletcher Jones, don't you? He's the car salesman that always has puppies and kittens clawing up and down his body in his commercials. "And friends," he says, "if you're ever in the market for a dog or cat to please come down to the Animal Shelter. Or better yet come down to the studio right away and peel this fucking cat off my face or grab this mutt that's humping my goddamn leg."

Anyway, we went over there looking at cars when a salesman slithered up to us, leaving a significant trail of slime, and asked if he could help us. I said, "Yes, we're looking to buy a pet." The salesman thought it was so funny, he ignored me the rest of the night.

"So, Jerry, what do you want for your birthday?" You and Mom are the only ones who have asked me that.

I'd like: a bike; a phone of my own; a new room; another typing ball; a new home in San Francisco...lotsa stuff. That's not a very hard order to fill, is it? Well, let's see...

A bike. Ten-speed. Expensive but definitely not as expensive as the car I'll get next year (that's if I get one next year).²⁵

A phone. It's definitely a faux pas to be a teenager and not have a phone of my own. You have to keep up with the Jones's...and be able to call them, as well.

A new room. I'm getting tired of this one. Besides, it's technically still mine and Lee's (even though he hardly ever sleeps in it). I'd like a room to myself, but I'm not sure I want Gar's old one; Mom found a black widow spider in there. Was Gar practicing black magic in there, or something?

A typing ball. What man couldn't do with a new set of balls, hmm?

Finally, a home in San Francisco. I absolutely fell in love with San Francisco that day we went over there in the B.A.R.T. (You know, the underground and underwater subway system. Lucky us, we managed to ride it on the one day it didn't get stuck under the bay and burst into flames, which I hear it has a habit of doing.) Mom showed us where we would have moved to if we had been able to sell the house last year (and if Ed McMahon would have showed up with that check). You'd have loved it. I did.

Right...well...just looking over this letter so far, I can see it would be a good idea if you didn't operate heavy machinery while reading it.

Kee, I'm gonna cut this letter short. Mike is coming over and I don't want him to see this letter. Also, I've run out of things to say. I hope you're feeling all right. I got a killer headache myself. Probably because I haven't eaten yet and it's already one p.m. My God! I can feel my stores of fat cells depleting as we speak! Quick! Somebody start applying Bavarian cream to my thighs before I start to lose weight!

Rotting (and rotten) in Las Vegas,

Jerry!

²⁵ I didn't. But I'm not fucking bitter about it, or anything.



AUGUST 3, 1980

(Sunday)

Dear Kee,

Howya been? I ain't been that great myself. I've been through some heavy stuff these last two weeks. That includes the trip to Lodi.

Lodi. Wow. Talk about joyrides...and if you are, don't even mention Lodi. Mom brought her friend Carmella along. She has a daughter who lives in Sacramento and I guess she's too cheap to fly. She was a real pistol, that lady. And don't think I don't mean that. 'Cause I don't.

She...would...not...shut...up! It was driving me CRAZY! It was driving Lee and Tee, too. They had nothing to do but fight and sleep (fortunately they chose the latter...for most of the trip, anyway). I brought all my eight-tracks along...and for what? Carmella never shut up long enough for me to play them, so they just melted in the sun, making a sort of eight-track fondue. How they managed to hear each other over the twins' fighting over pillows and air space violations or over me screaming "AAUGH! You're killing my eight-tracks, you heartless bitches! You're killing my babies!" I'll never know.

When we got to Sacramento, we dropped Carmella (or as the twins and I affectionately referred to her, "the old bitch") off at her daughter's house. She made us come inside and visit awhile so we could listen to her jabber for another eight hours. We ended up eating dinner there. I'm surprised we didn't eat breakfast there, too.

There is an instant that psychologists refer to when a child has the sudden realization that his or her parents are human, and not superhuman. Here's mine for Mom. When Carmella was saying goodbye to us (Thank GOD!) she noticed that the armrest on the van's passenger seat was loose. She said, "Uh-oh, I think this needs a screw." Mom goes, "Who doesn't?" (I wasn't supposed to hear that, by the way...but it was pretty funny.)

You know that Grampa Feo isn't married, right? I always assumed that Carmelita was his wife until Mom set me straight not too long ago. Well, Tee didn't know and when she found out, she wanted to know why Grampa Feo was "living in sin." Of course, she didn't ask Grampa because she has more tact than that. Not Mom. "DAD! THE KIDS WANT TO KNOW WHY YOU'RE LIVING IN SIN!"

He goes, "Well, you know...I'm a condemned man."

Here's the funny part: They've got to be seventy years old each. Exactly what kind of "sinning" could possibly be going on in that house? The closest they must come to having a hot time in bed is when one of them farts and fluffs the covers over. Right?

He has this little shack behind his house that he rents to what our full-blooded Mexican grandfather calls "a wetback." The guy really is an illegal alien, and the "house out back" he rents is more like the "back outhouse." Alright...I'm exaggerating a bit here. It is a little bigger than an outhouse, but not as lavish or loaded down with amenities. Like air holes.

Grampa Feo said the guy can't be deported from the country because illegal aliens have to be healthy before they can be shipped back. And Grampa says this guy is never going to be healthy, if you catch his drift. I wanted to go back there and start yelling "Immigration! Freeze, or we'll shoot!" But I figured he might just shoot first.

Dad is disappointed in me. Can you dig it? My wonderful, caring father is disappointed in me! That's what he said today. Know why? Because I haven't called Joe at the hospital.

Did you know Joe was in the hospital? He has pneumonia. He's been there for two or three weeks. First of all, the one time I did call he was completely whacked out on narcotics. Second, what the hell does Dad think we can talk about? All the neat places his mother and my father go together while neglecting their children? I dunno.

Fifteen minutes, Kee. Our father cannot spend fifteen minutes a day during the weekdays on his children. Gee, thanks, Pop! Can you believe that? Dad told Mom that she'd now have to make arrangements for us to be picked up at school because he doesn't have the time to do it anymore. The only time we get to see him during the school semester is when he picks us up from school and takes us to the donut shop and when he (occasionally) takes us out on Fridays. Now we don't even get those friggin' few minutes at the donut shop. I dunno. Maybe he's just going broke buying donuts. Mom said that we're going to be seeing less and less of him. Great. Who's taking up all his time? I wonder. I really wonder. Probably that old drunken sailor.

You have heard the one about the old drunken sailor, haven't you? Well, when Dad and I were moving his furniture, he gave me a ring that

he had on his dresser and said it was mine. It was a gold ring with a thin band and a large tiger's eye on top. I asked him later where he got it from. He said he bought it from a drunken old sailor. He bought it for twenty or twenty-five bucks (he couldn't quite remember). I believed him. What the fuck. Why would he lie, right? When Mom saw it, she goes: "He got that from Anne." Which kinda cheapened it for me.²⁶

Anyway, since then we've always referred to Joe's mom as "the drunken old sailor." If someone asks, "Where's Dad?" Someone else will always contribute: "Probably out with an old drunken sailor."



TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER ON A LAPTOP

Sorry. I don't mean to interrupt right in the middle of your reading. I just wanted to share a memory with you...

I remember when Mom and Dad separated. As I mentioned before, the end of their marriage coincided strangely (or so it seemed at the time) with my neighbor and boyhood friend Joe's parents.

Joe's father was a respected physician in town, but kind of a goofy adult to grow up around. Just like a big, dopey kid. Anyway, I remember Joe's father asking me just before my parents announced their divorce: "So, Jer...where's your Dad?"

Sounds innocent, I know, and he said it with a stupid grin on his fat face, but the words had a malevolence to them; trust me. (Besides, he always had a stupid grin on his fat face.) He was just being a rotten bastard to a little kid. He was alluding to the fact that no one saw my father around the neighborhood anymore (because he quietly moved out of our house and into an apartment). But he knew EXACTLY where my Dad was. On top of his wife. If only he had asked me that when I was just a year or two older, I'd have said: "Gee, I dunno...dickin' your wife?"

That incident stays with me to this day. It bothered me so much when I was a kid. I asked my Mom what I should say if anyone ever asked me point-blank where Dad was and she told me to ask my father instead. His answer was too hilarious, I think. But certainly not intentionally. He asked me about what happened with Joe's dad, and said he'd think of a "really good answer" for me to tell anyone who ever asked again where my Dad was.

A week later, Dad took us to Circus-Circus to play the video games on the midway while he sat downstairs in the casino bar drinking. This was a marvelous way to make

²⁶ I've since lost the ring, and would now trade a half-mil easy for it. Funny how you change, huh?

money as a kid. Not only would he give us our allowance for that week, but he'd give us ten bucks each to play the videos. And I don't think any of us ever played them. We'd just walk around for awhile, then come back to Dad and say we were broke. And then he'd give us some more money. No wonder Dad took out so many big money loans from banks later in life...probably just to keep us in quarters.

Anyway, that night I stayed downstairs with Dad in the casino. We sat at a blackjack table that wasn't being used and was covered up with a cloth. Then he became very serious and said: "Jer, I've given a lot of thought to what happened to you with Joe's dad. Here's what I want you do the next time someone asks you where I am. You tell them: '**I don't know.**'"

That still makes me laugh to this very day. "I don't know." God, that kills me. I'm still laughing. I mean, how long did it take him to come up with that exactly? No wonder he never became an international spy.

Anyway. I'm sorry. You can go back to your reading now. Mea culpa. (Translated: I am Robert Culp.)

Jerry.

Hey Kee, have you ever seen "The Wheel of Fortune?" Why, of course you have. It is a very silly show. What makes it particularly silly is the prizes they give away. You know how they work it, don't you? They have you work for your money (very hard for it as a matter of fact...you have to remember nearly all of the letters in the alphabet) and then they make you blow it all in just a few seconds.

And the prizes they put up for sale are the worst! The contestants are like: "Uh, for \$300 dollars I'll take the ceramic lion's head. Ummm, for \$250 I'll take the paper napkin collection in the gold frame. How much do I have left? Seven hundred? Okay, I'll blow that on the llama-skin couch. Put the extra sixty-five cents on gift certificate, will you?" Stupid, stupid show.

Right now I'm watching a show on Channel 5 that just might be a repeat. It's called "Solid Gold '79." Hang on. Let me check my calendar. Yup. It's a repeat.

OF COURSE IT'S A REPEAT! I know for a fact it is because I was bored unconscious by it when it aired last year. And what a sad year for music 1979 was. They're playing some of those "recent" hits like "Soul Man" by the Blues Brothers (which even payola wouldn't put back on commercial radio). The show sucks, Kee. I just keep waiting for them to bring on some real rock dinosaurs like...oh, I don't know... the Bay City Rollers, maybe. And you can tell all of the songs are lip-synched! When Sister Sledge was on (singing that oh-so-over-played hit of theirs "We Are Family"²⁷) they were interrupted by the host. But

²⁷ Gar used to go around singing this song whenever we were forced by Dad to do something together with Joe and the rest of our new stepsiblings (Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc.) Mind you, *he* never had to go...No-ooo! He always managed to be in another state or something. Just Lee, Tee, and I (sometimes Kee)...lucky us! Yes, sir...there's nothin' quite like a feeling of unease and general discomfort during the festive holiday seasons...

that didn't bother them, they just kept on singing. WITHOUT MOVING THEIR LIPS! Ventriloquism disco! The next craze, for sure!

I'm getting pretty screwed up with this phone company thing...you know, trying to get a phone put in my room. Maybe it would be easier to get a very long piece of string and tie two soup cans to it. I gotta remember to have Mom call and ask what the delay is in putting my new line in. My luck, they're probably in the process of finding a durable weatherproof string and two stylish soup cans.

When we were in Lodi, Mom picked a bunch of wild blackberries. She said she was going to make some jam when we got home. Well, she let the blackberries sit in the hot desert sun on the loooooong van trip home; so they fermented. We are now the first people ever to make Ripple Jam! The whole house smelled like cheap wine. I told Mom that what she was making was Boone's Farm Jelly. She was delighted with the idea! I dunno...maybe she's going to invite some winos over for breakfast. Boy, you just got to love that Mom of ours...mostly because it's too late to trade her in.

Hey, speaking of "love." Ever wonder why our family isn't more "touchy feely?" I do. I think it's odd that a family that's as close as ours...isn't. I mean, any one of us would gladly take a bullet for their sibling...but any of us would prefer the bullet to a kiss or hug! Odd.

Mike and I have been getting very interested in card games. Especially solitaire. Each of us try to find out how to play different kinds of solitaire and then we teach each other how to play. I taught him fifty-two pickup. Ha ha. No, not really. Anyway, the point of this story (and there really is one, I promise) is that he taught me one form of solitaire that is just about impossible to win. Mike, Spock-like, calculated the odds at one-in-2000, or something. Lee kept watching me play this game and losing over and over again. He asked me to show him how to play. I taught him, and then, of course, Tee wanted to know how to play. So now all of us are playing solitaire. (Dad gave us a bunch of used casino playing cards that he had. All of the decks are missing a few cards, so as you might have guessed, none of us here are playing with a full deck. Ha ha.)

I've been playing this game for a month and a half and ain't won yet. Tee whips out ten games and starts dancing around and screeching because...she won! Talk about pissin' me off. And if we're going to, let's mention Lee. He plays about thirty times and wins twice! And here's Jerry, getting a little bit older everyday...sacrificing vital brain cells to the great 52-armed god Solitairius.

And now I'd like to interrupt this letter to say to Mom (since she'll probably read this letter at some point at your house), "Thank you, Mom!"

Here's why: All three of us (Lee, Tee and I) went to the movies. Mom dropped us off at the Parkway to see "Raise The Titanic." Then she picked us up. When we pull up into the driveway, we see Shawn sitting on his ten-speed waiting for me. Nobody can stand him, not even me. Especially me, actually. And he's supposed to be my friend. I yelled to Mom to hit him. Tee told Mom to keep on driving, whether she hit him or not. Mom calms us down telling us she'll handle it. As soon as I opened the car door, Mom starts yelling (so Shawn could hear), "All right, I want you kids ready in five minutes. I'll be right back!"

Quickly catching on to the ruse, I reassure Mom that "yeah, yeah, we'll be ready." The twins, also catching on, race into the house. Shawn asks me what's going on as Mom drives away. ("Well, Shawn, you see...we're trying to trick your ass so you'll go away and hopefully forget our address.") "We're going out," I yelled behind me while sprinting to the front door. "Bye!"

I watched through the window as Shawn rode his ten-speed out of the driveway. I think I have never been so happy to see someone leave...not even Tee. And I think Mom deserves an Oscar for her performance as leading actress in "The Scam."

Did you ever have a nightmare? Of course you have...you lived with Tee, too. Well, did you ever have a nightmare and know in your dream that you were only dreaming? Well, that's what happened last night. I had a dream that went like this:

I was in a café with some other family members. There was a coke machine there and I put fifty cents into it to get a soda. I looked in the basket (you know, where the cokes fall into) and saw that the can was stuck. I reached in and pulled on it and it became a book. I reached in again and pulled out all sorts of weird stuff. Suddenly, everybody in the café started laughing, making of fun of me because of all the crap I was pulling out of the coke machine. (Why that's funny, I don't know. Why this anecdote should be interesting to you, I also don't know.) I got mad and picked up something I had been eating (I think toast) and held it threateningly over my head like I would throw it at whoever laughed next (mind you, toast can look pretty threatening). Everybody kept laughing of course and I soon joined them.

Then I yelled, "Food fight!" and everyone started throwing food around. Someone grabbed me and told me to run. I knew then I was being followed (you know how sometimes you just KNOW things in a dream?) by some older kids who wanted to catch and throw food at me. We ran around, this guy and me (no wait! It was three guys, including me) and ducked into an alley where we saw the older kids packed into this low-rider convertible. We crouched down behind some boxes to hide. As they drove by, I suddenly knew that I was dreaming.

"This is a nightmare," I said to myself. And a stupid one at that. So I forced myself to wake up. But wait! There's more...as if

the nightmare wasn't weird enough, it's gonna get weirder. I could suddenly see my head from outside my body, and saw my face muscles straining as I tried to wake up. Suddenly, I was in my body again and I could see the ceiling of my room without my eyes being open! Then it grew dark as I woke up – into another dream!

I awoke in the dream to find myself in a camper. You, Mom, someone else and myself were inside. I knew that we were on a trip. I looked outside the window to see a bunch of mountains in the desert. We got out and I got mad at Mom for letting me sleep through a nightmare.

"Jerry, come on. Get up! Mom is gonna give us money so we can go to the movies!"

It was Lee waking me up. I was so startled by reality, I almost forgot the two dreams. There are still some things I'm fuzzy about...like what they meant and why I thought you'd care...but I just thought it was so weird that I could see myself trying to wake up like that.



TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER ON A LAPTOP

Sorry. This is me interrupting fifteen years later again. Hiya.

I love dreams. I love being able to interpret my own dreams. I also love having out-of-body experiences like the one above. Although, I've only had two, really, that I remember.

The other one happened while dreaming a little dream that was probably nothing more than a mental movie. Suddenly, I was floating above my bed and watching myself sleep. It is such an odd sensation to know that you are not dreaming, that you really are there floating above yourself. I guess I wasn't ready to deal with that knowledge, because I watched my face kind of grimace as I tried to wake myself up.

I woke up in my room again to find my friend Joe sitting in a chair that I had by my bed. He often did this. He'd come over in the morning during weekends and summers when I was sleeping and sit in that office chair of

mine and wait for me to get my butt up so we could go do something. So it wasn't that odd to wake up and find him there.

I said to him, "I've just had the weirdest dream. I was floating over my own body!"

He agreed it was weird, and then - I woke up! Having Joe in the room was just a dream!

I had a dream where I was explaining a dream to him!

I think I was trying to help myself deal with the "out-of-body thing." It really is kind of a shock. There's no good way to describe the feeling. I guess not even to yourself. And, of course, there's the ever-present danger of waking up as Shirley MacLaine.

My dreams (even the boring ones) mean a lot to me. One that I'll always treasure is a dream I had not long after my Dad died. It was a dream I was having where I was talking to my older brother Gar. Then, as I was talking to him, Gar became Dad. It wasn't a normal dream kind of transformation where a bicycle turns into a banana...it was like Dad had stopped a Broadway play and walked on stage himself. I was so glad to see him again I couldn't even speak. We just hugged each other until I woke up.

I only had one other dream like that about Dad. He and I were in what might have been an apartment of his (in Heaven, I guess) and he was teaching me how to improve my golf swing. If you think about it, and if you know my Dad, you know that if he had an important message that he wanted to bring across space and time, or from another dimension maybe, it would be on how to improve your golf swing.

Anyway. Back to the letters.

Jerry.

Geez, there was something I wanted to tell you. I even wrote a little note here to remind myself. It says "Mike is disgusting." He is, but I can't remember why specifically.

Well, it's been nice chatting with you. This is definitely cheaper than calling you long-distance three times a day like we were doing. The only drawback is that I'm so boring in these letters. I hope I haven't wasted too much of your time. If you're wondering whether or not you'd be wasting my time by having me read a letter from you to me, don't worry. You wouldn't. HINT. HINT. HINT.

I'm pretty sure I'm runnin' out of room on this page, so I guess this is goodbye.

Goodnight! Sleep tight! And pleasant dreams to you! And whatever the hell else they sing at the end of the Lawrence Welk show. "Wunnaful. Wunnaful. The lovely-a Lennon Sisters-um are-a gonna sing-a wunnaful tune-um by-a The Plasmatics-a while the tap-dancin-a token Negro-um prances about-um in-a ill-fitting suits-a. Wunnaful. Wunnaful."

Anxiously awaiting a letter from my sister,

Jerry!

P.S. (This is going to be the longest post-script in history, Kee.) I was in McDonald's the other day. I was reading "Petals On The Wind." You know, the second part to "Flowers In The Attic." Well, I had been reading for about an hour when a young colored guy²⁸ came over to my section to clean the tables. Our conversation went something like this:

Him: Whatcha readin'?

Me: Some book about a mother who locks her children in an attic.

Him: Oh, horror? Forget it. I just can't stomach those books.

Me: What do you like?

Him: I like science-fiction.

(My kinda guy!—Not that I'm a fag,²⁹ or anything!)

Him: You should read this science-fiction book I'm writing.

Me: You write books?

Him: I try to. I've only got forty pages, though.

Me: Are you gonna finish it?

Him: I'd like to. It's not a novel. It's kind of like a comic book. Only it's a whole lot longer.³⁰ But I don't know who to send it to. I also don't know how the artists get their comics to look so nice and neat. I just can't get it like that. It looks good, though.

Me: That's great. I hope you make it.

(I didn't mention that I like to write, too.)

Him: I hope so, too. Bye.

Me: Bye.

Then I put my book down and thought. Is this what's in store for me as a future novelist? Cleaning tables and salting fries at

²⁸ In my social ignorance, I'm never quite sure how to refer to a black person (apart from their name, of course). I've attended private schools all my life, and we had no black teachers and I think only one black student...so I never was able to develop any friendships with blacks. Actually, I haven't developed any friendships with whites, either. Or any other race, really. Hmm.

I think the longest exposure I've had to people of different ethnic persuasions was when I was forced by my parents into the Boys' Club of America, where I learned that color, creed, race or nationality have very little to do with how a person will treat you. Mostly it has to do with height.

²⁹ In my social ignorance, I'm never quite sure how to refer to a homosexual person (apart from their name, of course). Sorry? What's that? You're not gonna buy it a *second* time? Oh. Pity.

³⁰ The man was obviously a visionary. Twenty years ago you couldn't find a comic novel anywhere. These days, you can't swing a dead cartoonist by the heels in bookstores without knocking several *thousand* graphic novels off their shelves.

McDonald's? (Or worse: cleaning fries and salting tables.)

Well, Joe is here and we're talking about goofy stuff. (What else would two goofs talk about?)

Gotta go. Hope you're having fun. Bye!



AUGUST 22, 1980
(Friday)

Hi Kee,

Boy, I hate school. (Gee, that felt so good, I think I just might say it again. I think I will.)

BOY, I HATE SCHOOL!

I especially hate the teachers. Like I told you on the phone, my Geometry teacher is the only one who even remotely appears humanoid. Although with high school teachers, it's very hard to tell which breed is gonna turn on you.

And with Sister Lorraine, I have to constantly fight the almost overwhelming urge to slip into a coma-like sleep. She's my religion teacher, of course.

And Mr. Brown! He gave us biology homework already! I don't think I'm gonna like him. In fact, I know I'm not gonna like him. Plus he wears these horribly out-dated silk disco shirts. You almost expect to see a rotating mirrored-ball over the classroom.

I dunno. I guess I should give 'em all a chance. After all you can't judge a book by its cover. But you can tell how much they're worth.

Gee, Kee, I was so nervous the first day of school, I could hardly decide what to wear. I couldn't decide between my brown pants and blue shirt, or my brown pants and yellow shirt. Decisions. Decisions. I eventually went with wearing both shirts and no pants.

Getting my books at high school was a lot of fun, too. I believe I may have already told you 'bout that. The funniest part was...well, okay, the only funny part was...okay, and even that wasn't what I would term a real scream-fest...was when we (Joe, Mike and I) passed

by a box of BIC fine-point pens in line that they were selling for 45-cents. O'Donnell needed one to fill his parent's check out with, so he grabbed one. Well, he started writing, but the pen didn't. Not only were the pens over-priced, but the little boogers didn't work! So they gave it to him free! Then he threw it right back in the nun's face! Joe and I tried to restrain the nun as she lunged forward to cold-cock Mike. Pretty soon people were throwing pens and punches all over the room. When the police arrived, all they found were ink- and blood-stained corpses. (Okay. Maybe that's not EXACTLY what happened. The nun did hit first, though.)

I just got back from Bob's (the barber). I got a haircut. I thought it'd take at least an hour to take off that huge crop o' hair. It didn't take no time at all, though. I mean, how long could it take to put a bowl on my head and trim around it. Ha. (I don't know what the hell I'm laughing at. It sorta does look like he gave me a bowl cut.)

Dad dropped me off outside the shop. He was acting real weird. He goes: "If Bob asks you where I've been lately, tell him...tell him I've been out-of-state a lot lately. Okay?"

No, wait, Dad! I've got a better one! How 'bout I tell him you've been doing secret undercover work for the government. I'll tell him, "Bob, you can torture me with those scissors all you want, but I cannot reveal my father's true identity or the nature of his work!" NO, WAIT! I'LL TELL HIM YOU'RE A SUPERHERO AND YOU'RE OUT FIGHTING CRIME! How 'bout that, Dad?

Dad can be so strange sometimes. So he's using another barber? So what?

Wait a minute! If Dad doesn't trust this barber anymore, why the hell am I going to him?! I'll have to remember to ask him about that.

Boy, I really talked Bob's ear off. (WARNING! SARCASM ALERT!) We didn't talk at all after "hello." He noticed, too. He said, "Boy, you're really talking my ear off."

Well, you know, it's hard to talk coherently when you're sobbing like I was. My hair looks awful enough whenever I leave there without my trying to distract him with inanities. If he wants chatter he can buy a CB radio.

Monday, August 25, 1980

(continued from Friday)

Hiya Kee!

Guess what, Kee? Mom promised to take me shopping for clothes Wednesday. Who knows, maybe I'll be able to own more than two pairs of pants. Maybe they could even be different styles and colors! (I better not press my luck...or my pants. Ha!)

I caught Tee talking on MY phone with her friend Mona the other day. Geez, that's what started all of this garbage with me wanting my own phone, because she was always talking to Mona! I didn't think there was anyone else on the planet who could talk more than Mike O'D and I. Tee just knocks that theory into the dirt. She talks so much she uses up Lee's and my oxygen! Even Brownie starts to pant after Tee gets on the phone. Often I've come home to find Lee and the dog passed out and gasping for air because Tee's used it all. You can even see the doors being sucked inward cartoon-like because of the powerful suction. WE'VE GOT TO STOP HER!

Wow, I'm all worn-out from my other letters. I can't think of nothing else to say.

My first day of school was a real thrill, and I mean that sarcastically from the bottom of my heart. I could hardly contain myself. And Mr. Machowski is my favorite teacher of all time. He's so warm and understanding. And he's always so concerned about his students. You know Machowski, Kee...so you know I'm lying through my teeth.

Kee, I wish I could talk longer, pero tengo trabajo de casa en mi clase de español. Bummer. I might send this letter off right now (no, not to the incinerator). Might not. Don't know. I'll keep you in suspense. Gotta go. More important than Spanish homework, M*A*S*H is on.

Bye-bye!

Tuesday, August 26, 1980

(continued from yesterday)

Hi Kee,

I'm talking to Mike on the phone as I'm typing this. Ah, how easy it is to drown him out. The time is...oh, let me see...YIPES! 10:39 pm! That probably doesn't sound late to you big college types, but to me it's very late. I still have to wash my clothes, take a shower, find my P.E. clothes, and get to bed by eleven. Hmm. 10:39. Twenty-one minutes, huh? Ah hell, I've got plenty of time. On with the letter! (Quit groaning.)

Wow, Kee, I just love Machowski! (Ouch! What biting sarcasm!) He made it quite clear in Religion class today that he never laughs. I bet he gets laughed AT a lot, though, and I'm sure that makes up for it. Joe told me that at one time Machowski was a brother. I said, "He used to be black?!" I was kidding, of course. Actually, it's quite easy to picture Machowski living the lonely life of a celibate monk. What's difficult to picture is him having a choice in the matter.

Kee, can you believe it? I've been going to school two days and already I have to wash my entire back-to-school wardrobe. I have to go shopping. I need clothes bad! I can just see me in a couple of months... "Hey, that's a nice shirt, Jerry! Do you own another one?"

Life is so different as a sophomore, Kee...I feel so much more worldly (maybe because I've gained so much weight). You should see the freshmen. Their faces are alight with the thought: Wow! I can't believe I'm in high school! And, of course, the sophomores faces are alight with the thought: Wow! I can't believe they're in high school!

I can't help but think there was a mishap at registration and kindergartners were somehow enrolled instead of real freshmen. Somewhere in Vegas there must be a group of fourteen-year-olds trying to master the beginnings of finger-painting. I mean, we couldn't have been such complete goony birds when we were frosh, could we? COULD WE?! And yet, though I grow weak as I say it, I know we must have been. Some of us still have feathers...

You should see this one freshman kid. Do you remember the "Are You A Nerd?" poster that was so popular a few years back? You know...the one Mom bought for ME? Well, I think this kid posed for it. He wears pants the color of dried boogers (don't ask how I know what color dried boogers are), K-Mart brand long-sleeve shirts, not to mention the undershirt he wears on the OUTSIDE (ha). And talk about "floods," if his pant cuff was one inch higher, we'd see his kneecaps. And his head is just one big zit with a breathing hole and astigmatism.

My God, Kee...he even has a different pair of socks just for P.E.! Talk about "nerd!" Most of us don't even have a different pair of pants!

He is, by the way, in my P.E. class. When we played football today, he was our tackle. Ooh, and what a figure of masculinity he was. Like a flaccid penis.

Our team had to take off our shirts in order to separate the two teams: Shirts against Skins (just like Custer and Sitting Bull did at Little Big Horn almost a hundred years ago...a little-known historical fact I just made up). Actually, it was the Shirts-Against-The-Skins-Except-For-One-Nerd-With-His-Shirt-Still-On-Because-His-Bluish-White-

Chest-Was-Blinding-Coach-Bastard.

The kid had heart, though. I know, 'cause I saw it when the other team pulled it out of his chest and ate it in front of him. They just laughed and laughed as they knocked him down again and again. They didn't even bother our quarterback much, they just wanted to hit this kid. That's why we made him our tackle.

Honestly, I could go on and on. And I usually do, don't I?

I'm gonna take a shower tomorrow morning instead of tonight. Or maybe I'll take what Gar calls a "Polish shower" and spray a little deodorant under each pit. Or maybe just stand nude on the front lawn when the sprinklers go on in the morning. Hmm. Choices.

Hey, how long is this bloody letter anyway...three pages? Good. I can end soon. (Stop cheering!)

Mom and I were talking today and she kept referring to a letter I wrote you when I was "SUPER depressed." I told her she'd have to be a little more specific than that to help tickle my memory. I was "SUPER depressed" when I wrote all of them.

Anyway, Mom said that you were really worried about me? Question: why? I get depressed all the time. I'm good at it. I accept it. I even went so far this summer as to staple a bed sheet over my window so no light could get in. Then I'd just sit in my room listening to music, or drawing, or type, or whatever. No big deal. I'd just sit in my room and sharpen my knife and chainsaw collection. No biggee. I'd just stick pins in my little voodoo dolls and sacrifice small animals on my makeshift altar here. No big damn deal, Kee. Honest!

No, just kidding. I did staple the sheet up over my window, though. That part was true. But I think the reason I was so bummed was because of the shirt incident. (Why is it that I cringe every time I hear the word "shirt?" Hmm. I really wonder. - Ouch! There's that biting sarcasm again!)



TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER ON A LAPTOP

Boy, twenty-five years just flies by, doesn't it?

Hi. Me again in 2005. Sorry to interrupt.

Okay, here's the inside poop on the dreaded "shirt incident." On my fifteenth birthday, Joe came to my house, handed me an oblong box, said "Happy Birthday," then left. I opened the box; it contained two polo-type shirts. They were Le Tigre brand...a brand of shirt I wouldn't wipe my ass with, let alone use to cover my back and chest. I showed Mom and she had a shit-fit. (She had many of these.)

Anyway, she knew the shirts had been purchased by Joe's mother Anne who was now dating my father after both of their divorces. (Actually, BEFORE the divorces as well, but that's another story.) The next day Mom took the shirts (still in the box) and threw them into the back seat of Anne's Cadillac (still parked across the street where she still lived...if you can imagine the tension).

Well, not too terribly long after that (nanoseconds maybe), Anne squealed to Dad and he called saying he wanted to "talk" with me. ("Talk" being a euphemism for "shit-fit." He had many of these.)

He said that the shirts were a gift from Joe and what kind of friend am I that I would let Mom throw the shirts into the back seat of Anne's car when she really didn't buy the shirts it was Joe really and I had just better be a little more considerate of everyone's feelings the next time I go and have the audacity to have a birthday. Blah fucking blah.

And that's what everyone involved kept forgetting, of course. That it was MY fucking birthday!

No feelings were hurt, I promise, except for mine. No lasting psychological damage done, I assure you, except to me.

A few days later I was in line to buy books at school. Joe was there with me and we were talking about goofy stuff, like we always did. At one point, he turned to me and said, "By the way...what did I get you for your birthday?"

Do you get it? He didn't know 'cause his mother Anne bought them.

It's hysterical, really. To this day. And I mean that. — Ouch! There's that biting sarcasm again!

Back to the letters...

Jerry.

Mom is trying to reform me and my "negative attitude." I told her I wasn't positive I could be less negative. In fact, I'm worried I might accidentally short-circuit myself if the two attitudes come within close proximity to each other. (Ah, battery humor! What fun!)

Hold on. Tee brought her neighborhood-scruff friend Laurie over here. I'm gonna tell Laurie to get her goddamn ugly bike out of our yard before someone sees it and thinks its ours. "Jesus Christ," they'll say about Mom. "She must be worse off than we thought. Look at what she's making her kids ride around on. Oh my God! Maybe it's HERS!"

Oops. Apparently, Lee already told her to move it. She gave me this real disgusted look (in addition to her usual "real disgusting look"). Well, she can go to hell for all I care. And pick up another bike while she's there.

You're on my phone right now, talking to everyone but me...the only one who cares enough to send the boring best! Remember when I told you that I caught Tee calling on my phone...well, I caught her trying to call Mona twice today. I think I'm gonna have to start laying booby traps around the room. One day she'll sneak in to use the phone, and run to it so fast she won't even notice a large patch of palm leaves in the center of the room. Won't notice, that is, until she slips through them into the bitch pit I dug out, with sharpened punji sticks pointing straight up. HA HA! I'm sorry, but the party you have tried to reach has been disconnected - from her head! HA HA!

I'm only kidding. I wouldn't use sharpened sticks...too quick and painless to suit my purposes, frankly.

Gee, Mom talks to you for about an hour, Lee for fifteen minutes, and all Jerry gets ON HIS OWN PHONE is three minutes! Oh well, they can't write as many letters to you as I do. I don't think they can write. Not well, anyway.

Hang on. Lee's bugging me. Oh. He thinks Brownie has pneumonia cause she's shivering. I said, "Well, you know what a dog gets if they have pneumonia, don't you? Replaced." Well, I thought it was funny.

Actually, Brownie's just shivering 'cause she's still wet from when I took her swimming with me. She swam pretty well. I put her in the shallow end; she got out. I put her in the deep end; she got out. I hit her with a stick; she got out. I tied a brick to her waist; she got out. I held her tiny white head underwater with my foot; she got out. I surgically removed her arms and legs...

Just kiddin'.

Kee, we better do something about Lee before I kill the little shit. He thinks he's soooo funny. He turns the lights off right after you turn them on, no matter what room you're in. Like when I'm in the kitchen, he'll come out of nowhere (maybe Hell) and turn the kitchen light off using the switch on the other end of the room. So I'll go over to the switch by the fridge and turn 'em back on. Then, he'll flick 'em back off. Then I flick 'em back on so he can flick 'em right the hell off again! And we'll sit there for hours sometimes burning out light bulbs, shorting fuses, and wearing our fingers to the bone playing "Dueling Light Switches." He does it with my stereo, too. He just slips his fingers enough through my door so he can flick the switch off. So, I'm merrily typing along, listening to some tunes on the stereo and BLAMM-O! I've suddenly been struck deaf and blind. No, wait. Not deaf. I can hear laughing.

I'm gonna kill him.

I don't know what's wrong with me...I could actually tolerate school today. I even had fun in biology, if you can imagine, and it wasn't just from laughing at Mr. Brown's silk disco shirts. We're using the "lab," as Mr. Brown calls it. That word is in quotes because when he says the "lab," what he means is, the "microscope." The funny part was that we had nothing to look at. He just wanted us to "get used to it." Kids were running strips of paper and threads under it. The guys at my table were great. They actually talked one kid into breaking his skin with his fingernail and bleeding onto a slide. It looked pretty neat for awhile until it started to clot. But guess who got to clean it off? Yep. Good ol' Jer. At least it wasn't that hard to clean...just one quick flick of my tongue and...

Kidding!

Religion II was fun, also. Machowski helped me get those few hours of sleep I was lacking. Kidding again! I ALMOST fell asleep. If it weren't for the notes Mike O'D and I kept passing back and forth, I would've fallen into a deep sleep. You know, the kind where you drool open-mouthed on the desk, totally grossing out the cheerleader across from you while the asshole behind her is trying to shoot baskets into your mouth with little balls of paper he rolled up? Maybe not. But we're talking about a deep slumber here...

I'm trying to think of something else to write. But I can't. Think, that is. Oh well. Why try? So I guess now is the time to end this letter. Yep, guess so.

Bye.*

Forever vexed by freshmen nerds,

Billy Shakespeare**

*Not one of my more drawn out "farewells," but just as heart-felt, I assure you.

**My pseudonym (or, "false nym"). Makes for some rather nifty initials, don't you agree?



SEPTEMBER 3, 1980

(Wednesday)

Dear Kee,

I don't really have that much to talk about today. I'm just here trying to get out of doin' some homework. Geometry, to be exact. I don't like it too much. Too many rules for the rebel in me. A geometric "point," for instance, has no size. It has INFINITE size. Like me. A geometric "plane" also has infinite size, but not enough leg room. And its depth is as big as that of a point.

Okaaaay.

The other thing I don't understand is "proofs." We are given a three-sided figure and we're supposed to prove that it is a triangle. Huh? It has three sides, Mr. Seifert...like what the f--- else could it be? A lazy square? An under-achieving rectangle? WHAT?!

Nope. Nope. Nope. Don't like it at all.

I went around school with a little piece of paper so I could jot down things I wanted to tell you. The list ain't very long, but let's go through it, shall we? (Quit groaning!)

P.E. - This is a very fun class, and I mean that. Sincerely. No bullshit. Okay, well, maybe a LITTLE bullshit. We are playing a game called "football." Ever heard of it? It's marvelous. It's called "football" because that's the only part of Coach Bastard's foot that you can see sticking out of your rear once he's done kicking your ass in...the ball of his foot.

Coach Bastard divided the class into four teams. Each with an average of seven guys. Well, there are these seniors that hang around all the time, called "senior aids." What a joke they are. All they do is act like schoolyard bullies beating up frosh and sophomores. Well,

since there are four of them and four teams, Coach decided to make each senior the captain of their own team (you have to give Bastard some credit here, being able to divide four into four all by himself...didn't even use a pencil).

Our team captain really believes in "hands-on management," meaning he slaps us around a lot. Although, if pressed (and he's done that several times as well) I'd have to say he's more of a strategist. "All right, guys," he begins. "Let's see a little blood-shed out there. Jerry...I want you to rush. And don't worry about that 300-pound Cro-Magnon they have as a tackle. He's afraid of you. So I want to see him on his ass!" Right, Cap'n. You're gonna see his ass, all right...on my face!

You know what my job is on the team? I hike the ball. I know, I know. It sounds like a lot of responsibility...but I'm sticking with it. For the sake of the team, you understand. They'll kick my ass if I don't. Besides, there's real advancement in a position like that. They'll advance you right through emergency room at the nearest hospital...

Anyway, remember me telling you about that nerd with the blue skin in my P.E. class? His name is Kevin. Well, my team played his. His job that day was to rush. And he rushed, all right. Rushed right off the field every time the ball was snapped. See, I was the tackle that was supposed to stop him. I bent down and gave him a dirty look as only a sophomore can give a frosh. The Q.B. counted off the last few seconds of Kevin's life as I continued to stare right down this pussy's throat. (Unfortunate phrasing. I apologize.)

"Down!" shouted the quarterback. It sounded very distant, though, as if shouted into a canyon miles away. I watched the sweat roll from Kevin's nervous pock-marked face.

"Set!" The wuss had seconds to live as I tried to guess which bones of his would break first. I plotted my revenge against every single injury I sustained from last year's sophomores who mowed my ass like grass.

"Hike!" They might as well give his soul to God 'cause Kevin's ass was mine! Time slowed to a crawl and the entire world moved in slow-motion and I watched Kevin move (nay, almost lunge!) forward hoping that, by some miracle, he might be able to knock all 180 pounds of me down. I laughed wildly as I threw all my weight into his "block."

"Fuck you, class of '82 frosh-maiming bastards!" my mind screamed, intent on exacting sweet revenge for the atrocities committed by last year's sophomore crimes against, well, mostly me.

WHAM!

To the victor goes the spoils; to the victim, mud. Also wet grass. Their other rusher sacked our quarterback, got the ball, scored and eventually won the game by six points...and yet, I find it very hard to care. Vengeance is mine, sayeth the nerd! (The other nerd, that is. The fatter one.)

I got my student card today. Gadzooks, I look terrible. Apparently I didn't get my hair cut once at any time last year, because I look like a Yeti. A Yeti that hasn't been sleeping well and got up too early for portrait photography. Last year's was tons better. But to be fair, I was awake when they took last year's. I overslept the day they took this one, and I made it to school just in the nick of time without pants. (Kidding.)

Dad took us out to eat not too long ago (WOW!). We went to JoJo's, where the self-service was just excellent (example: the utensils and napkins were distributed AFTER we finished the meal). But afterwards, we went down to a pinball joint called The Foos Palace. I nearly died. They were playing this hard rock at decibel ranges not reached outside of major metropolitan airports. It was fun playing pinball with Dad, though. He stinks at it, but we love him anyway...

Guess what we're supposed to do? (The high school student body, that is...actually, it's not that great-looking a body. Most of the girls in my class could be accurately described using the same adjectives you'd normally reserve for third-world countries: ugly and under-developed. And to continue the comparison: both can be bought cheaply with American dollars.) We're supposed to sell some Fall Fling Raffle Tickets! Ohboyohboyohboy. Do you remember when you had to sell those things, Kee? Or, more correctly, do you remember when you had to bribe ME to sell those things for you, Kee? I remember some cheapskate wanting me to call and ask if they were tax-deductible. "Hey! Buddy...whadoo I look like? A nine-year old C.P.A.? I'm still eatin' boogers and you want me to prepare your taxes?! Hey...itemize THIS, pal!"

I'm talking to Mike right now on the phone. We're both typing. Neither of us is saying a word. We're just typing. I guess we're kinda havin' a race. We can hear the sound of each other's machine and can judge how fast we're both going. I am quite surprised; I'm typing MUCH faster! And I'm not even cheating like I used to at cards.

Did I ever tell you that? Seems to me like I did. Tell you about how Mike and I would teach each other card games (mostly solitaire) over the phone? Well, to teach each other, we'd spend hours putting our deck in exactly the same order as an aid in teaching. We decided once that we should try to play gin rummy over the phone as long as

they were in the same order anyway. So we dealt the hands and started playing. Well, Mike started playing, I started losing, and then I started cheating!

It was too fun. I'd go, "Okay, I got gin, Mike. I have a straight, and four Jacks."

"What?! How can you have four Jacks? I have TWO of 'em!"

"Oh, gosh, Mike. I'm sorry. Did I say JACKS? I meant KINGS...I always get those guys mixed up...funny clothes and all. Kings. I have four kings."

"Are you sure?"

"Um, well...I think I am. I got an idea: tell me what you got, then I'll tell you what I have..."

God, I'm pressed for conversational tidbits.

Uh-oh. I can hear Tee outside the door. She is laughing hysterically. I think Lee is planning to take her life. Hang on, I'm gonna see if I can help.

Guess not. He can manage.

We saw a movie last night. So, you might ask, who gives a damn? Well, the movie we saw (Lee, Tee, Mom and I) was "Dressed To Kill." You know, the one they call a "horny Hitchcock?" Well, Mom was a little apprehensive; she thought it would be too violent. After all, there were three impressionable youths here. She needn't have worried about the violence, though. That Angie Dickinson does things to her crotch in the shower with soap that would make Mr. Bubble **POP** (in the first scene! Before the credits even!)...yeah, maybe she needed to worry about that. But not the violence.

Yessiree. The twins got quite the advanced education in Human Sexuality because the next scene after the shower was of Angie helping her husband do his morning push-ups in bed from underneath (him, not the bed). So, I don't think we'll have to worry much about them getting low grades in Biology.

The movie was about a transvestite psychiatrist who kills people. Just the kind of family-fare Disney always strived for, yet never fully realized...

I asked Mom why she takes us to so many movies. She said she felt guilty that we were being neglected by her... Hmm. I guess we're alone a lot, that's true. But I don't think any of us really mind. I kinda

prefer having to raise myself. I'm sure Lee and Tee feel the same way...and I'd ask them, but it's a school night, so they won't be home 'til three or four in the morning, stinking of liquor with fresh blood stains on their clothes (if they're even wearing any).

God help me. I think I'm actually starting to tolerate Mr. Machowski. I don't sleep through his class as often as I used to.

We have a candidate running for some useless local government office. Guess what his name is? Jim Jones. Don't you think that name might be a tad unlucky? I mean, what is he gonna serve at his political rallies? Kool-Aid?

I am really bored. Please don't think it's 'cause o' you, 'cause it ain't. I guess I'm kinda cranky, too. I haven't slept much, my muscles are sore, I got a case of jock-itch not often seen outside of medical texts, and I've run completely out of interesting things to talk about (as evidenced by the previous "jock-itch" comment).

Today we had our first pep rally of the school year. And when I say "pep rally," I mean, of course, "we were forced to go."

I guess the school budget for percussion instruments has increased dramatically over the summer. The marching band was just banging the hell out of their drums until they turned our eardrums into oatmeal (which is dangerous, 'cause that's what a lot of the students are using for brains). They were passing out hearing aids at the door as we left.

When I'm in first period P.E., I'm out on the same field that the marching band is practicing on. Mr. Ashcroft, the music teacher, stands on the locker room roof and watches their formations. Do you know what song they were practicing this morning? Hint: it's nothing that ends in a "major" or "minor", i.e. "Beethoven's Last Minor Movement On A Major Which Caused Him To Be Dishonorably Discharged." Time's up. It was, in fact, "Pop Goes The Weasel." Actually, pop went my spleen, I laughed so hard at them.

The girl whose locker is next to mine is in the band. She plays the barney fife or something. She passes wind in the band, is all I know. Anyway, she was telling me that they're gonna play "Pop Goes The Weasel" at half-time during tonight's game. Well...so much for ever showing our faces around town again. Our high school will be the laughing stock of the high school conference (and we were already the laughing stock of the high schools period). And yet, she assures me that the way they're going to perform it will be "real neat." Kee, unless they do something really bizarre like actually gun down some live weasels on the field, I'm pretty sure the song will retain it's mind-numbing monotony and puke-inducing predictability. You must

agree, it is rather limiting in musical expression.

Yay, I made it to the third page! That was my goal. ("Aim high!" I always say.) I hope I didn't bore you too terribly. Actually, I don't think I'm terrible at it at all, but do it rather well.

Oh well, be seein' ya! Don't be a stranger, Kay. I mean, Kathy. Uh, Kelly? No, no, that's not it either. Well, whoever you are, don't make yourself a stranger. God knows you can't get much stranger than ya are now...

Kidding, Kee. I am kidding. It's just that I haven't heard from you in ages. You've never actually written me a letter back, you know.

Oh! That reminds me: Please don't look for any hidden messages in my letters. Even if I don't hide 'em...don't notice 'em! What I write in these letters is so non-reflective of what I'm really thinking, it just ain't worth doin' the armchair psychology bit on 'em. Okay? Okay.

Hmm, maybe I didn't word that very well. What I mean is, these letters are for entertainment purposes only (like a horoscope, or a dildo...mostly like a dildo). I am trying to make your life a wee bit brighter. Mine, too. When you enjoy and laugh at my letters, my life brightens immeasurably. When you look at them in a mirror and play them backwards on your turntable, searching for deep meanings and worrying about my frame of mind, I plunge into a deep, deep depression thinking that all that paper, sweat and tears were a complete waste. So, for my sake (maybe yours too), please enjoy. Or I'll T.P. your condo.

Your marvelously entertaining brother,

Billy Shakespeare

P.S. There is no P.S.

P.P.S. There is a P.P.S.

P.P.P.S. Kee, did I make the following up by myself or subconsciously steal it from some place? This song, I mean:

(To Be Sung To The Tune Of: "My Bologna Has A First Name.")

My daughter has a new head, growing on her back you see...

My son he's losing all his limbs and hair too rapidly...

Oh their bodies change so everyday

And if you ask me why I'll say...

'Cause Nevada's Test Site has a way of rearranging DNA.



SEPTEMBER 17, 1980
(Wednesday)

Dear Kee,

It's been one of those days, man...

One of those days where I couldn't quite remember what to do with the shampoo once I poured it into my hand. I rubbed it into my chest. (This is the truth. I think I take after Dad in this respect. He once told me that he took a shower in his socks.)

Tee awakened the family(?) when she found we had all overslept. She woke up and took a long slow, sleepy peak at the alarm clock.

7:25 a.m.

"Holy (expletive deleted)!" She shook Mom vigorously (I know this because we later received complaints from the Seismographic Research Institute...Tee goofed up their instruments, or something.) She then fluttered into my room and, in her melodic sing-song voice, beckoned me to awaken from my golden slumbers...

"JERRY, GET YOUR ASS UP! WERE LATE!"

I awoke to the sound of a heavenly choir (yeah, almost). The foundation shook, the ceiling beams gave way with a heavy sigh, the house lost pieces of brick, the varnish peeled off of my book shelves, and my digital watch stopped...as did my heart. Needless to say, I awoke.

"Ah, good morrow and be of good cheer, darling sister! And how are we this fine Autumn morn?"

That is actually a G-rated version of what I said. The original version would cloister a death-row inmate.

Next, in P.E. class, some dipstick freshman thought he could knock me on my ass in football, and he DID!!!

Of course, there were some contributing factors to this. One, I hadn't eaten anything except water for two days. Second, the night before I was stricken with a case of diarrhea (and I wanted to "die-I-really" did). Third, I had a very bad headache left over from Tee's cheery wake-up call.

There were less-contributing factors as well, of course. The frosh was some kind of thyroid case, six-feet in girth, more in height. He had all the playful, kittenish qualities found in your average charging bull (not to mention roughly the same intelligence quotient and bad breath). And last, but certainly not least painful, he buried his elbow in my face. I got back at him, though, by striking him repeatedly and painfully about his kneecaps with my groin.

Spanish class sucked a big burrito today. We had to watch a Spanish film exactly two-and-a-half minutes long about Juan y Marta attending a gang-bang, or something. They may as well have, because (although I tried very hard to hear and comprehend their language) I couldn't figure out a goddamn thing they did. I did pick up a few key words in the dialogue, like: Juan y Marta (John and Martha, or maybe, Martha went to the john...I don't know), campo (field), ciudad (city), and señor (man).

When the film ended, we were supposed to summarize it...again, in Spanish. What I was able to write translated roughly into: "Martha had to take a leak in the worst way. She was too far from the city, so she took a chance right there in the field. She shouldn't have, and was busted by 'the Man' for indecent exposure to farm animals."

She'll buy it. She's another nun-casualty in the war against senility. Our school's definitely got more than their bishop-allotted share.

Then, in Religion class, someone screwed around with the teacher's air-conditioner controls. We had all been strongly advised not to do this. So, to teach the whole class a lesson, he shut all the windows and turned up the heat. Does that make sense to you, Kee? It's hot out...windows and doors are shut...heater's broiling in the corner to keep the room at a constant temperature of 200-degrees. Doesn't that seem like a stupid punishment considering the teacher has to stay in the classroom with us? You see, he did this ALL DAY, not just during our class. I guess he was trying to teach the whole school a lesson. That lesson being: Yeah, he really is Polish. (He really is Polish, by the way. And he'll tell you in an instant how proud he is of that fact. Trouble is, no one asks or, in truth, really gives a shit.)

I mean, if I were him and wanting to teach these little air-conditioner-control-touching brats a lesson, I'd wrap 'em in Reynold's Wrap as they walked in, lock the door behind me, and then watch from the window outside for their belly-buttons to pop up. Not sit inside waiting for mine! An asshole, Kee. The man...is...an asshole.

Mom took us out to eat tonight. Guess where? Straw Hat Pizza, that's right! Muy bien, Kee. Muy muy bien! I'm starting to think Mom bought that restaurant, and not Grottino's.³¹ We eat more pizza than we do Fettucine Carbonara. Anyway, when we got there, Lee opened the door to let us inside, and...ah, what gentle music doth greet mine ear? Why, 'tis the cry of a thousand freakin' brats runnin' around loose screamin' their heads off at the biggest goddamn children's party you never wanted to see. **Or** hear.

We left early, a hair's breadth away from infanticide, and walked over to Safeway next door to get some groceries. Lee told me to come with him to the pay phones so he could show me something "neat." He picked up the phone and dialed a ten-digit number, then hung up. A second later, the pay-phone started ringing. He showed me how to do it. You dial 738 and then the number you're at, hang up quickly, and then the phone will ring (it's how they test pay phones, I guess).

"Neat, Lee!" So, I tried it at the phone next to Lee's.

While dialing, though, I noticed a horrible stench arising from the immediate area and no it wasn't because of the pizza. I looked around the phone. Unfortunately, I notice for the first time an overturned container of maple syrup. GODDAMNIT! I pull the receiver slowly away from my ear. I discovered then (too late) that some little turd had let the syrup drip all over the damned thing. A real strong statement of telephone service dissatisfaction, I must say, although very badly aimed. I let go with my hand and the receiver was still hanging from my hair. I had to wash my hair three lengthy times tonight and I still didn't get all of it out.

All right, Kee. I have to study for a Biology test tomorrow. Lemme see what time it is...9:42 p.m. Hmm. That gives me a good eighteen minutes to study before I fall asleep open-mouthed in the spine of my biology textbook. Yeah, that's plenty of time to cram some major info before I soak the pages in drool. Bye.

Thursday, September 18, 1980

(continued from yesterday)

³¹ Mom's Ristorante Italiano. My Mom bought an Italian restaurant when I was in high school. Be patient. I'll explain all about that very soon. I promise.

Hello,

I got a letter from Saint Vitus Parochial today. Apparently it's time for me to get Confirmed. I don't HAVE to go. And I'm trying to decide whether or not I WANT to. I don't want to make the effort, but religious duty calls! "Saint Uncle Sam Wants You!" (Um, actually...ME!)

I don't think there are enough young people out there who realize exactly what this history-old tradition means to us Catholics. God knows I know I don't hang around with any. Do you know what the hell we have to do this for?

Kidding. I know, I know. You have to reaffirm your vows said at Baptism. You have to cast aside Satan and all that he stands for (hatred, murder, lust, greed, geometry proofs...the list is endless).

Mom said the choice of whether to be confirmed or not is my choice and my choice alone, the same as my choice to live INside the house, or OUTside.

Really. She's forcing me to go through Confirmation. Excuse me, Ma, but something is wrong with that logic. Can you force your child to have religious conviction, like forcing them to wear a life preserver (I guess religion would be considered a "death preserver"). Do you think that counts? God doesn't check ear tags like some celestial Marlin Perkins... It's what's inside that counts...your intentions, your thoughts. ..not "my Mommy made me.

Oh well. Of course I'll have to go through with it...my Mommy's making me.

I'm coming down with a cold, or something. Germs spread around this house very quickly, which is odd, really, when you think about it, for a family that never embraces or kisses. Except for the dog. I think Brownie is the major contaminant in this household. I think she chases down and eats a diseased bird or two, then comes and kisses us all on the lips (except for Lee, she does this while we sleep...Lee practically french-kisses the dog). Then when one of us gets sick, we all get sick. Either that, or it's because we all drink right out of the same juice containers because we re all too damned lazy to get a glass...

I'm going to have a stroke in a minute. Remember my bedroom window, and how there's no screen on it? Well, dummy me forgot to close the window when I left the other day. Thousands of mosquito-like insects have claimed my bedroom as their nest. I've been running around for a week trying to kill them all. I managed to smash four of them with a Pepsi bottle, and another with a Big Mac container. Nine

Hey, I wanna ask you something: are my letters boring? If they are, just tell me and I'll really try harder next time...

Speakin' of show tunes, I think I'm gonna mellow out with a little "Fiddler On The Roof." I feel like a little Zero today...Zero Mostel, that is.

Your brother with great taste in music,

Jerry! a.k.a. Billy Shakespeare!



NOVEMBER 18, 1980
(Tuesday)

Hello Kee!

I hope you're feeling all right. There shouldn't be two of us feeling like I do. Very depressed. Not suicidal, but very depressed.

You see, last night when bussing tables (sorry, that should be "busing tables," because I wasn't KISSING them, attractive furniture though they may be) I was complaining, bitching, and beefing. A little of all of the above. Well, a lot of all the above. And the only thing worse than acting like a spoiled brat, is realizing the next day that you were acting like a spoiled brat. Unfortunately, I discovered this too late. I guess I could have picked up on the few subtle hints thrown my way...like Maitre d' Dominic telling me "Shut up!" TWICE.



TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER ON A LAPTOP

Boy! Does time fly when you're having fun, or what?

Hello. Back to the future again.

I hope you're enjoying this book so far...but, more importantly, I hope you've paid me for it.

hard-as-a-rock sandwich? Congratulations, you get a cookie. To be honest, I'd have rather had a cookie last night. See, we were closing at the restaurant, everybody was hustling out the door, AND I STILL HADN'T EATEN DINNER YET! So I'm grabbing one of the bread loaves, stuffing it with whatever is laying around looking dead or edible (neither, though, necessarily to any great degree), with everyone yelling at me to hurry the hell up! The bread was hard as a rock by the time I got home to eat it; so Brownie and I shared the sandwich innards at one a.m. I was trying to finish a geometry proof and Brownie jumped on the bed. I was really too hungry to think about sharing my cold cuts, but she just looked so darn cute. Plus she licked one of them. I ended up giving her exactly half of my dinner. She rewarded me with a burp, then she was gone... Some gratitude, huh?

When at Grottino's, Mom took some leftover veal picante home in a bag for Brown-dog. We have absolutely no food in the house. None. Not a scrap. That is, if you're not counting a few leftover roach-licked Cheerios lying pell-mell around the kitchen cabinet bottom shelf...which has been laying there since the Nixon administration. Apparently, Mom does...because she's always claiming there's plenty of food around. Well, just because she can make a soup out of roaches and mouse droppings, doesn't mean the rest of us possess this ability.

So here's the Johnstone kids, eating uncooked Kraft Macaroni & Cheese right out of the box, fighting violently over who gets the packet of cheese powder, AND THE FREAKIN' DOG IS EATING VEAL PICANTE PREPARED BY ONE OF THE FINEST CHEFS IN VEGAS! I ASK YOU: WHAT THE FUCK?!

Hang on, Kee. Let me catch my breath. Things are very different at home since you've been here. Very different. The divorce has been hard on all of us, true. But I think the most important thing to remember here is: me. "How is this affecting Jerry?" should be everyone's main concern...and I think we're all losing sight of that. Well, everyone but me, that is.

Seriously, though, Kee...I hear you're not feeling well. Not well at all. I hope I'm not making it worse by kvetching (Yiddish for: being a Tee). That certainly is not my intention. I hope I'm entertaining you in some small way. It's just so hard because, quite frankly, nothing entertaining has happened in a long time. Divorce is a bitch. We've gone from having Dad throw the Pretto kids and Anne in our face when we go out, to Dad not taking us out and taking them out, to Mom taking us out, to Mom taking us out with her boyfriend Mike and having to peel Tee off his face, to having Mom's boyfriend Mike take us out without Mom to pretty much the same places Dad used to take us out. It's a crazy world, Kee, and there's a lot of days when I just don't want any part of it.

I'm trying to mellow out over here. I have my "Star Trek the Movie~~ soundtrack playing right now. It's soooooo relaxing. I think I might even fall asleep on the typewriter keybohksdfjhzxnc....

Hmm! What! Where! What...what time is it? What year? God, I fell asleep. Not because of the music but because I accidentally read part of this letter. Whoo! It's a good thing I wasn't operating a bulldozer at the time. It's a good thing I wasn't picking my nose either, I could have poked my brain when my head hit the keyboard. I better be more careful the next time I try to read my own letters... I mean, I should know better, right?

I got killed in P.E. today. Bastard is a sadist. But, then again, I knew I was signing up for his class again this year... So, Banios is a sadist and I'm a masochist. Hmm. I'm surprised we don't get along better. Anyway, Bastard is starting outdoor sports this month. I don't know about Tempe, but it gets rather nippy here in Vegas outside at eight in the morning mid-November...

It feels like forty-below with wind-chill some mornings... (I know, I know. Forty-below isn't really that cold, but I was born in the Las Vegas desert...I'm a desert rat. Anytime it drops below ninety I reach for a sweater and start sunning myself on a rock.) Bastard said we can wear sweats, which is fine. ..if you have some. I barely have dress pants for school, let alone sweat pants for P.E.! So, I'm the only idiot freezing his balls off (most of the other guys just scratch and play with theirs). Still, I'm a stud, I could deal with it all...if they just would stop watering the field before we go out there. It ices up completely! We could play hockey out there! (I really should keep my voice down... I'm running the risk of Bastard hearing me and helping him devise new methods of decimating my classmates.)

So, the field is frozen solid with the frozen blades of dead grass sticking straight up, hard as nails and just as handy for a Bastard sports injury. The entire field becomes a huge strip of sandpaper, which makes sliding into home base a new experience in pain. Sccccrrrrraaaaaaappppe!! "Yyyeooooowwccchhh!"

I have to type something for Grottino's now, Kee. Which means, this letter will have to wait a few minutes. I also have to get a haircut. And pack for L.A. for when we go visit Gar for Thanksgiving vacation (and won't he be giving thanks for that! Or, won't he?) So, this letter might have to wait a helluva long time...disregard previous statements to the contrary! I'll see ya later. Gotta split. Ta!

Sunday, November 23, 1980

(continued from Tuesday)

Hi Kee,

Well, it took a little longer to finish this letter than I expected. It is now four-and-a-half days later than when I last wrote. And it's been months since I last wrote well. And decades since I've been interesting.

We went to L.A. to see Gar...well, originally it was to see Gar. I guess Mom was concerned that he had effectively distanced himself from everything happening at home, and there was a very real danger that he was happy. But we took care of that...after all, if Mohammed won't go to the mountain, threaten him with a visit from the Johnstone kids and he'll run for the hills. (I think that's how the expression goes.) Gar was, shall we say, less than enthusiastic at the prospect of spending time with us. Actually he was, shall we say, reaching for a baseball bat...

No. Not that bad. Almost. Very close. But not quite that bad... What he said, and I'd quote him directly if I could ever retain anything he ever says, was that he wouldn't mind seeing us. He just would really mind right now.

Well, of course, we were all touched. We all wanted to touch him back...mostly with that baseball bat. I really couldn't understand his reasons either, mostly because he didn't give any. To tell the truth, I really didn't care. I couldn't...Mom was using my care, and Lee's and Tee's, too. SHE REALLY CARED! She went bananas. "Can you believe that? I just can't believe that. Can you believe that? I can't..."

Think about it, Ken: Gar turning us back in the direction of home immediately after a six-hour car trip to see him. I can believe it. Sounds like the Gar I know and was glad to see leave for L.A. Anyway, things calmed down at the end of our stay...Gar finally saw us on the last day. He acted as if nothing had happened. He made Mom have apoplectic seizures and he doesn't see a problem...

Anyway, that pigpoop aside, it was kind of a neat trip. We got to meet Cheech & Chong! They were filming their movie "Nice Dreams" at the hotel we were staying at. We tried to get a good look at where they were filming the night scenes (around the pool area). But shooting took so long, we never even saw them! Just extras. So, we were all thinking we'd never see any good movie stuff. Then, we were going down in the hotel's glass elevator (the only nice feature of this, for lack of a more insulting word, "hotel"), the doors open on the floor beneath ours AND CHEECH WALKS IN! Oh wow! How cool, huh!

Boy, I know you're a big fan of their work. Remember Gar and I torturing you with one of their eight-tracks on a long summer van ride

through Utah? I remember vividly you screaming at the top of your lungs to get rid of it get rid of it get rid of it! You were enchanted by their hauntingly witty dialogue. To wit:

Cheech: "Hey, man...did you fix your car, man?"

Chong: "No, mannnnnnn. I didn't, mannnnnnn."

Cheech...or maybe Chong...I get them kinda mixed up sometimes: "Hey, man, then what our we gonna drive, man? Man, I wanna go cruising, man. Whadda we do, man?"

Chong, definitely Chong. I think: "I don't know, mannnnnnnnn. Like, faaaaaarr out, mannnnnn."

Oh, I could go on and on and on, Kee. Just like they seemed to. Go on, man, and on, man, and on, mannnnnn.

The hotel had a Sambo's Restaurant downstairs. They had a hot special of laxative cheeseburgers and french-fried crayons that you couldn't find anywhere else for any price...although this is probably because of the fine work the California Health Department is doing.

The second hotel we stayed at was reeeeeaaaalllllll class all the way. The Century Plaza. Wow! The greatest thing about the hotel, though, was their elevator. This thing did not mess around. It knew its job and took it way serious. This sucker was so fast, it was already on your floor as you drove up to check in! I'm talking FAST! So, naturally, the twins and I had elevator races for the duration of our stay there. Push the button and SHAZAM! you're there! You're scrambled eggs and Wheaties are way the hell down there, but your body is on the right floor! Magic Mountain should have such a ride. It's like the opposite of the parachute jump. Your body becomes pressed flat against the floor as it starts the terrible journey up, then BAM! it hits the ceiling and is pressed flat there as it stops suddenly on your floor. I could go on forever... I may eventually forget what city I was visiting, or the name of the hotel, or what their service was like, but I'll cherish the memories of that elevator forever! (Romantic theme music builds and swells.)

Gar seemed all right after he finally deemed us worthy of his presence. He was in good humor and all. Mom made him take us to an antique shop she wanted to see. Nobody else wanted to go, but Mom, though...I mean, we all thought this idea really sucked. So, the Johnstone family, being your basically democratic kinda clan, all went to the antique store! It's called Helm's Bakery, because that's what's written on their sign. No. Really, it used to be a bakery and warehouse, but was converted to an antique store. We were all fascinated by the place, really we were. And, of course, when you get a bunch of us into an antique store...any antique store...you know what they're going to be looking for...FOOD.

Mom wandered off with Tee, leaving Gare, Lare and I to fend and forage for ourselves.

My guess was they might still have some antique bread leftover from their loaf-production days. God knows we're all used to eating "Nana Bread"...how bad could their years-old bread be.³²

Lee was a little more clever and was looking for a coke or candy machine. Gar just kinda stood there as if waiting for a concessionaire to stroll past.

But Lee found it! A snack bar! In an antique store! I asked the guy working there if his last name was Johnstone. I figured we must be related, or something, because the only thing weirder than someone looking for a snack bar in an antique store is someone putting one in.

When we were leaving, Gar noticed this big book by the door where you could sign yourself up to get on their mailing list. Gar picked up the pen and wrote Mom's name. He filled in her address, city, state and ZIP. Then he noticed a space beside it marked "Interests." You know, meaning, what kind of antiques are you interested in? Antique clocks, furniture, clothes... Gar paused a moment, pen held over the "Interests" box, then wrote in "Hiking and Skiing." What a clod. A pretty funny clod, though. At least, that time.

WE INTERRUPT THIS LETTER TO BRING YOU THIS SPECIAL REPORT!

Good evening. Today in Las Vegas, Nevada, three children starved to death in their own home. Their mother had apparently left them to starve while she drove to dine in style at her own restaurant. Arguing with the three innocents that there was plenty in the house to eat, Mrs. Gilda Johnstone fled, never to see her youngest children alive again. She hadn't stopped to think that they had been away from home for five days and that everything in the refrigerator and cabinets had been left to rot and spoil.

The mother stated later that surely they could have made a soup of some sort, and then burst into tears... or laughter, we couldn't tell.

Their father, Alec, could not be reached for comment,

³² Ah, nothing tastes quite like "Nana Bread." I think I'll let them put that on her tombstone. I think I'll let a slice of Nana Bread be her tombstone.

My Nana has these industrial-size freezer storage units in her house. And the many uses my grandmother has for them are really quite frightening. I expect to find Walt Disney's head in there one day. She has these enormous freezers left and she stores food saved from the Bronze Age in them. And she gives us loaves and loaves of this...this...bread whenever we come to visit (which is more frequently as she is finally, after decades, running out of this shale-like substance).

Anyway, anything Helm's had left over from their pre-WWII production had to beat Nana Bread hands down (or, more correctly, face down...in the toilet).

but several reporters have taken a statement from his answering machine.

And so another great American tragedy has played itself out in the continent's dry Southwest...where so many of our early settlers and pioneers have starved to death trying not only to explore and expand this great nation of ours, but to be able to fit into new swimwear fashions and designs. Surely there is a moral here.

Yet perhaps this tragic tale of woe would be best ended in the words of Alec Johnstone upon hearing of his children's slow, anguished death: "Hi. I can't come to the phone right now, but if you leave your name, message and the time you called after the beep, I'll get back to you as soon as I can. BEEP!"³³

Perhaps that last craziness wasn't as self-explanatory as I'd wished it to be. I will try again.

We're fuckin' starvin' over here!

Mom just left for Grottino's...a fine Italian restaurant that she owns filled with food. "But...what about dinner?" cry her hungry children with faces reminiscent of the casts of "Annie" and "Oliver." Over the roar of her car engine, the screeching of her tires and the sound of gravel crunching beneath them, the children could hear her shout "TOUGH!" and then laugh a deep and throaty laugh. And then...she was gone. She told us to make soup. Can I ask, meaning no disrespect, with what fuckin' items?

There is nothing here to eat, cook, drink, or suck on! She's taking it in the arm, Kee. Of course, she'll be dining on Fettucine Alfredo and Carbonara prepared for her specially by Tony, the world's fattest and shortest Italian chef. At home, Lee, Tee and I are eating toasted wheat bread with nothing to spread on it or to wash it down our dry gullets with. But at least we're getting plenty of fiber in our diet, and I think that's what's really important here...

I have a test in Geometry tomorrow. Actually, the test is gonna take two days. And guess what? It's all proofs. Why is it that the only thing Mr. Seifert hasn't proved yet is why we'll need to know this crap later in life?

I went to the mall last Sunday with Mike and Shawn. We ripped through the mall lookin' for trouble. Actually, we were just acting

³³ There was a time when this was the only way we could hear Dad's voice. We had all grown accustomed to asking Dad's answering machine for whatever we usually asked from Dad: money, words of comfort, sympathy, money, a shoulder to cry on, money, etc. For awhile I was joking that I would use Dad's answering machine as my Confirmation sponsor...having Dad record the message: "Hi, I'm not in church right now...but if you reject Satan, please leave your name and Confirmation vows at the sound of the Amen." It woulda been great.

like goofy geeks. Actually, it wasn't acting.

I was telling Mike and Shawn about all the fun we could really have if we wanted to. For instance, this occurred to me when drinking a strawberry drink at Orange Julius: "Self," I say to myself. "Self, this looks just like puke." I didn't mention to myself that it also tasted that way, because I didn't want to hurt my feelings. But I thought it might be great fun to get a huge mouthful of this stuff, run to the center of the mall like your looking for something in a hurry, and then pretend to puke this substance up. Of course, you will need to make sure you are the epicenter of attention. This is done by making grunting sounds, followed by stomach-wrenching noises (something in a 'MMMMMMMMMMMMMLLLLLLAAAAAAAAA" might do very nicely), followed then by the PLOP noise of the Julius hitting the mall tile.

Great fun. Really.

At least, it would have been if anybody would have had the courage to do it.

Another idea I had was to have all three of us walk shoulder-to-shoulder in a very crowded store (preferably a women's store) and to have the two on the ends turn to the middle guy and in unison say, "Will you PLEASE stop farting!"

Ah, imagine the merriment that would ensue! Well...that would have ensued if anybody had been brave enough to be the guy in the middle.

Here's one I'll save until I get married: I'll go to a jewelry store and tell them I want to buy a choker necklace for my wife. They'll ask me approximately how big her neck is. I'll put my hands together in a choking position and say, "It's exactly...exactly...th-th-this...it's exactly this...it's just this b-b-b-buh-buh...it's exactly this b-bb-b-bb-buh...HER NECK IS EXACTLY THIS BIG!!!" You know, and make my body shudder and convulse more violently as I go on talking through gritted teeth. Then I'll calm myself down. Look them in the eye and say quietly, "Of course I want it to be sturdy. It has to take a beating."

Hey! Ever notice when typing, if you accidentally hit two keys at once, the one you don't want is always the one that goes on the paper? Well, that's what happens to me, anyway.

I gotta go, Kee. I know I'm boring you. Gar said I had been boring when I wrote to him. The first thing he said when I saw him in L.A. was, "You know, I still haven't finished your letter." Yes, sir...that about made my weekend. I have to admit, though, the letter was about seven pages long. And I guess all of it was duller than dried dog shit. You know...I think Gar's just not used to long

letters. The longest letter Gar ever wrote didn't need an envelope...he just wrote it on the back of the stamp itself.

Anyway, Kee...I gotta split to study for geometry. Don't want to blow the test tomorrow. Don't want to blow the teacher, either, so I better study hard!

By the way, I got my report card. Here's the good news...

P.E.	B
GEOMETRY	B
AM. LITERATURE	A
SPANISH II	A
BIOLOGY	A
RELIGION	B

I know, I know. I'm brilliant. That should make Dad happy. Mom's only comment was, "Well, of course." Not exactly what you would term lavish praise.

Only trying to help,

Dr. Robert, B.S.

P.S. There will be no P.S.'s in this letter!

P.P.S. Being happy is hazardous to your health! - General Surgeon (ha)



TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER ON A LAPTOP

Dear Reader,

You may or may not have or not may have may have or not have noticed that a year has passed between the last letter and the letter that is not this letter, but the letter that does not precede, again, not this letter, but the letter previous to the one that follows this letter, which is, and I cannot emphasize this enough, not this letter.

Jesus...I need to lie down.

Seriously, though, there is a gap of one year between the following letter and the last. Why? How the hell should I know! I didn't write the bloody lett - oh, wait. Yes, I did, didn't I? Hmm. Well, I really don't know why...

Here's my guess: Lennon got shot.

Man, nothing's ever been funny since. I couldn't have been more depressed about that shooting if it were me that had been hit. What really pissed me off about it was that I had really only discovered the Beatles' music a few years before, and only discovered John Lennon's solo albums a month before he was shot. I only read his poetry and short stories when it was published posthumously, and what I found was that our writing styles were very similar (except that his was good...and popular). What a bitch.

Another guess would be that I was spending more and more time wreaking havoc with my friends, and I was joy-riding around in my family's custom '78 Ford Van with my younger brother Lee a lot (before I had a learner's permit even). In other words, I was very busy doing things I didn't necessarily want Kee to know I was doing.

For instance, I used to drive the van a lot during my junior and senior year. It was a great car to go get drunk in. (I am in no way advocating this. I was damned lucky not to have killed or been killed. And I haven't had a beer in years!) Anyway...Shawn, Mike O'D and I were cruising around a quiet residential district. Mike's bladder was screaming to be loosed and he asked to be let out to answer Mother Nature's call. You know...shut the bitch up!

Usually what happens in this situation is that the driver waits until his urinating buddy is just about mid-stream (if you know what I mean), then he turns the vehicle so that it's pointed straight at his buddy outside taking a shot in the dark. Then he quickly turns his headlights on and honks loudly until his friend pisses all over himself trying to get his dick back in his pants.

Well, this night I didn't do that. I decided it would be more fun to just ditch Mike. I pulled slowly away from him so he would know what I was doing. He finished up as quickly as he could then began racing after the van. As I started to speed up, Shawn and I felt the van bounce as Mike jumped and grabbed onto the ladder attached to the van's backside. Hoping it was a tight grip, I sped up to about thirty miles an hour. While Shawn and I were laughing hysterically, Mike tried climbing the ladder to lay on top of the van in the luggage rack. (A victim of too much "Starsky & Hutch," if you ask me.)

I got to about 35...oh, 40 miles an hour when I thought I saw Mike's jacket fly off and land behind us. Well, as it turned out...that's exactly what I saw, except *Mike was still in the jacket*. I felt just horrible, of course. So bad, in fact, that I never asked him what it felt like to shoulder-roll off a speeding van onto road asphalt. Although, I'm pretty sure it hurts...

He got back at me a few weeks later, though. He actually managed to run over my foot while I was outside pissing on his car.

Anyway...

I still typed during this time, but when I did, it was short stories or poems (Lennon-inspired), or (my specialty) the first two chapters of a book I'd never finish.

Things were really going good. I even lost weight!

And then, of course, women entered my life and things fell apart. That's when I started writing letters to Kee again.

Not because I finally had something to depressed about (although I never really talked much about the women to Kee...it would have been pretty unhip), but because I needed to fight against these setbacks (the women) the only way I knew how: put a shotgun muzzle into my mouth, ease the hammer back and... No, wait. That's not it. At least I don't think so. --- OH YEAH! I REMEMBER NOW! BY LAUGHING THEM OFF! Yeah, that's it! Laughing.

Hmm. Suddenly, it doesn't sound as brilliant a solution as it used to. Sounds sorta hackneyed and dorky. Oh well...

Anyway...it's certainly less messy than the other one!

So, I'll leave now to let you finish this book which, once again, I hope you've paid for.

Your bestest buddy (just don't ask me for money...or, for your sake, a ride),

Jerry.

P.S. There is one incident I would like to recall for you (speaking of John Lennon), mostly out of guilt for the way my mom is sometimes depicted in these letters. To read these letters you'd think she was some sort of megalomaniac control-freak, but this depiction is unfair because, mainly, it does not take into account her height (five feet). So you see that she is also a dwarf.

Kidding! I'm only kidding, Mother!

Seriously...she's a cool mother to have. From her reminiscences, I deduce she had quite the role model in her own mother, although tragically, for only eighteen years of her life.

Anyway, when she and I heard over her car radio that John Lennon had been shot, she knew how terribly the loss of my new-found hero would affect me.³⁴ At that point in my life, it was the closest I'd ever come to a death in the family. That month, Playboy magazine published the last interview with John Lennon in their magazine. My mother **bought** that issue for me.

Is that cool or what?

I mean, really...how many of **your** mothers have purchased pornographic materials for you? That's what I thought.

I remember what she said when she handed it to me, too. She said, "I got you something, Jerry...but when I give it to you, I only want you to read the articles so you don't have an anxiety attack. I don't want to see your skin clearing up anytime soon because of this..."

We're talking "cool."

P.P.S. I read **some** of the articles...

³⁴ Mom and I learned about Elvis dying when we were alone together, too. For many years I tried not to spend too much time alone with my mom because of the obvious danger to rock legends. I finally decided it was safe to spend time with her again when we did and only Andy Gibb died. We were obviously losing our strength. I mean, who goes next? Boxcar Willy?



NOVEMBER 18, 1981
(Wednesday)

Hi Kee,

Boy, I ain't written youse in a long-doggy time.

Leseee, whassa beena happ'nin' lately. Nuttin' much. Dad gave me his car because he stole Gar's. He got my gas bill for \$354 and suffered a major coronary. Not much else, though.

We're going broke. The bills are killing us softly. You know how poor we are, Kee! We are so poor...

AUDIENCE: How Poor Are You?!

CARSON: We are so poor we're eating Hamburger Helper.

...seriously. We're eating and sampling such Epicurean delights as Le Helpère d' la Tuna. Served invitingly in a disgusting lump with a steaming hot dog bun on the side. Serving Hint: serve only with a light wine. Suggested Wine: Chateau d' Pepsi. Really grotesque. Yes, Jerry, this is the real world. A life full of little ironies as eating middle-class grits (Hamburger Helper) while driving \$20,000 dollar cars.

I'm gonna retch. If I have to look one more Big Mac in the eye, I'll kill myself. That's what we're eatin' when we're not munching on breakfast steaks or Tuna Helper.

Oh, by the way, I semi-quit Weight-Watchers. I had to. It was bad enough eating tree bark and bush roots while watching everyone else sucking on a fudgsicle, but when Mom left us alone over Halloween, she left us with a pint of rotting cottage cheese, a slice of bologna that I was thinking of resoling my shoes with, and about \$40 dollars in chocolate bars. Guess what we ate. We all three would just sit at the big table with Kit-Kats on our breath waiting to see whose face would break out first. So, being the loyal W/W member that I am, I threw up three pounds of chocolate.

RRRRRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAALLLLLLLLLLPPPPPPPPHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I got to know every square inch of that toilet-bowl that weekend. Which reminds me...

There are two things no one should ever puke up. First, a Butterfinger. Those chocolate-covered turds taste bad enough going down, but coming up? Positively disgusting. And second, a tuna fish sandwich. Coming back at ya you tend to pick up the full, rich flavor of the tuna. It also has this awful tendency to stick in your throat. Plus, your breath smells like a brand of puppy chow.

I'm starting to get disgusting, right? Thought so. Hey, have you seen David Horowitz? You know, he's the Ralph Nader of the 80's. On his show, they take time to read a letter a viewer sent in bitchin' 'bout one thing or another. He's a real sport, that Horowitz. ---OOPS! Running out of room!

Anyway, He'll read a letter like this: "Ms. Patty Smith of Turdsville, Kansas writes in to tell us that she lost her entire life savings totalling \$4,000 dollars when she invested in a phony company. She now has to lick the inside of kitty chow cans to survive. Since she wrote in to us, we're gonna send her...a "FIGHTBACK with David Horowitz" tee shirt. How 'bout that Patty?"

Meanwhile, Patty sells the tee shirt on a street corner to get money to buy one more can of Skippy dog food. Gee, thanks, David!

Mike bought himself a car. Mike O'Donnell, that is. It's a hunk of shit. He let me start it up and I wore down his battery. I'm totally serious. The battery is about three years old and doesn't have enough voltage to light a fart.

Mom's out now. She went to see Mrs. Picardo. That means she'll most likely come home drunk. She'll come into my room at midnight or so, wake me up, ask me a thousand questions (all the same one), and disappear into her room. Smashing.

I just realized something. I don't have a stamp to mail this with. Fab So I'm typing just for the fun of it.

Hey, is this letter entertaining? I hope so. If not, gimme a break. I'm outta practice. And my life hasn't been a laugh-a-minute recently.

I'll leave the letter alone for awhile. I might think of something humorous to write. Might not.

Hello again,

It's a new day already. Not a brighter one...just a newer one.

I admit I'm not as depressed as I was mulling (is that a word) o'er dad. I got super-depressed when he mentioned in a letter to Mom that he hasn't forgotten about how we didn't go out on his birthday because we went to see Mrs. Picardo. Unfortunately, I had forgotten. He made me 'member things I didn't wants to 'member. But Dad completely forgot about how my birthday was a total disaster. Oh well. It's a lovely day out.

I'm waiting for my report card. Did I tell you my grades? I don't think so. I asked my teachers what I got. Mr. Dee (DeFransesca) gave me an "A" in Drawing (the highest score!). I was very proud. I got a "B" in typing. A "B" in psyche. And an "A-" in Chuck Gerber's Algebra class. I was so proud of my grades that I couldn't wait to tell Mom.

When I told her my high grades, do you know what she said? Not: "my, your exceptionally brilliant!" Not: "I'm proud of you." Not even an unenthusiastic: "Goody-goody." She said: "So (to be said in the middle of a yawn), what were your other grades?" ----- I said: "Bye, Mom. I have to go now and have myself a good cry." ----- Seriously, what kid wants to hear that after busting ass for nine weeks? Instead of me being "the-little-engine-that-could", I'm "the-little-engine-that-was-expected-to". Oh well, Frick! I'm kinda runnin' out o' room.

I like drawing class. I wish it was more than one semester. It's the only class that I can see myslef doing well in.

Oops. Sorry, Kee. I spazzed out for a moment there. I find myslef (I'm having trouble typing that word!) doing that a lot. I'm also very tense. I bought three dollars worth of Silly Putty so I could squeeze it in my hand (better than a racquetball). I lost it for awhile. I was freakin' out. I was at Pizza Hut and got very tense when talking 'bout gas bills. I grabbed a fork and under the table I twisted it into a piece of abstract sculpture. Didn't mean to.

Oh well, I've wasted enough of your time with my probs. I gotta go find my Silly Putty before I squeeze the life out of Larry & Teri.

Bye-bye,

Jerry!

P.S. Mom's trying to have me hospitalized. Try and talk her out of it next time you see her.

P.P.S. Please find enclosed one check for \$1,000 dollars to help you with your bills.



NOVEMBER 21, 1982
(Thursday)

Dear Kee,

How's it going? Kinda surprised to see I wrote you, huh? Kinda surprised myself. After you told me you found all my letters, it got me to thinking, it's been a long time since I wrote you. Maybe it'll help me to stop acting like Jack Nicholson.

Well, I've decided it's time to get back into training. I was watching ROCKY on t.v. and started feeling guilty, I was eating a chocolate cream pie at the time. I watched him punch meat and decided that was the thing to do. So, I'm working out three times a day punching meat. Mind you, I'm starting off small...a few strips of bacon. Maybe I can work my way up to beef jerky in a week or two.

I went out with Dad last week. We went to grab a grease burger at the Omelet House. So, while watching my lunch slide around my plate, we talked about bullshit subjects: "I understand egg futures are up."

After awhile, we decided we better stop having so much fun before we hurt ourselves. So, before we laugh ourselves unconscious, Dad suggested that for added amusement, we change the oil in the van.

Dad -- "The oil should be changed every four thousand miles. When was the last time it was checked?"

Jer -- "Umm...what year did we buy the van? Haha. Seriously, about twenty thousand miles ago."

So, after we stopped laughing, and after my lip stopped bleeding, we went to Jiffy Lube. After the men at Jiffy Lube stopped laughing, they went right to work. Four days later...

We watched them drain the old oil. Dad said the oil should be pretty clear. The oil dripped out very slow...painfully slow. Not only was it as black as Pearl Bailey, but it was like watching those HEINZ ketchup commercials: "Anticipation...it's keeping me way-ay-aiting." Seriously, it was like Aunt Jemima's maple syrup. Dad just about died laughing. Ha ha ha.

Oh, funny thing happened that weekend. I was watching HBO at about midnight, when I heard Brownie barking at a car outside in our driveway. I thought it might be you or Gar coming to stay the weekend, so I took my time about getting to the door. When I get into the living room, I hear the door swing open with a bang. Some asshole yells:

"Rusty! Rusty, I'm home!" He becomes quiet when he sees a teenager before him in a blue robe and underwear. "Wait a minute, you're not Rusty!" he deduces.

"And you're not Santa Claus," I say. "You wanna get the fuck out of my house?"

"Sorry..."

Jesus...some people. I also went out with Shawn and Mike that weekend. Another date I should have missed...

Shawn: "Hey! Let's go buy some beer!"

Jerry: "Let's not and say we did."

You know, if you stick your finger far down your throat, throw up your internal organs, and flush your money down the toilet, you get the same effect as drinking beer.

Well, going to Reno was a unique experience. We didn't get lost (or drunk, if that's what you're thinking). I don't get it, Kee...everyone at school thinks I pattern my lifestyle after Pope John Paul II, while everyone at home thinks I'm some kind of horny, junkie alcoholic. I guess you all think that if there's trouble hiding somewhere, Jerry'll flush it out. Is that about the size of it?

I saw Teri at Reno. She wondered why I wouldn't talk to her for prolonged periods of time. It's not that I'm trying to be rude or stuck-up, I just wanted to get away from everything that reminds me of

home. Is that unreasonable? Same thing when I go out with Shawn or Mike and Larry tags along. Christ, I don't want to hurt anyone or their feelings, but I just got to get the f--- away sometimes, you know? And I don't escape via drugs, massive orgies, or ten-keg parties. If I could get a hold of any of these things, I might be tempted, but as it stands...you needn't worry.

Anyway, we had to stay at a Motel 6. Lucky me, I got to sleep on the floor. No one brought shampoo, so we're lathering up our scalps with those little bars of soap they give you. We left at eight in the morning on Thursday. Our first stop was at a 7-11 in Las Vegas. We proceeded to buy a six-pack of Squirt, six-pack of tea, six-pack of Pepsi, a bag of sour cream and onion chips, Cheese Nips, pretzels, and some chocolate.

Mike's face broke out four times on the trip because of his chocolate.

Shawn discovered that Cheese Nips take on the properties of Ex-Lax.

And Jerry discovered that no one will talk to him with sour cream and onions on his breath.

I think our trip was pretty smooth, albeit nine hours long. It wasn't at all like traveling with one's family. There were no fights over who sits up front, who gets whose blanket, and no statements like: "Mom, that's my pillow, tell him to give it back!" No whining, no whimpering, no cussing. Great.

I think our biggest fight went along these lines:

"Hey, dude, those are my pretzels!"

"No way, buttlick, I bought these and the Twinkies."

The former later went on to make a remark about the latter's heritage. While the latter reduced himself to noting physical imperfections of the former. Both threatened the other with imminent extinction and termination. Smooth sailing otherwise.

We also saw Joe at the game. There is a nasty rumor being spread about Joe involving a hammer and a music box. I won't go into details, I just ate.

Teri just knocked on my door, her signal for keeping my stereo down. You see, it's Sunday, and we heathens prefer to do almost anything except go to church. We dare not disturb the sleeping beast, lest it waken and drag us to Mass. She'll wake up and say: "How come you didn't wake me up?" Our response is always the same: "You need the sleep." or "Is today Sunday? I forgot!" or "Didn't you hear? The priests are on strike!" Some bullshit.

Goddammit! Before I started typing this third page, I was lighting matches. Well, I leaned to far over one of them, and heard this crackling sound. My hair singing, to be exact. That's what I get for being a pyromaniac.

Oh well, I'll let you go. I figured something out not too long ago. There are much too many goodbye's in my life. I need a lot more hellos.

I wrote some dumb poems, too. So, I'll let you read them, if you think they're bullshit, then you're showing signs of good taste. If you like them, well...you like them.

Guten Tag,

Jerry!

"Quickly Am I Taken Away"

When walking lonely, I hear a sound.
I quickly turn, no one around.
I walk again, again I hear.
Once more I turn, no one is near.

"My good sir" I say polite
"What brings one here on this cold night?"
I hear in low, "Tis you I seek."
"If I may, to you I speak."

"Kind gentleman, if indeed you are,
My eyes are weak, they see not far.
Come closer then, if you wish to speak,
For I cannot see on a night so bleak."

Comes a stranger, from out the night.
His face so dark, his eyes so bright.
"Can you see me now?" he asks in slow.
"I can indeed, can it be so?"

Before me stands, a man like me.
The withered face and hands I see.
"You've lived too long, learned not a thing.
I take thee then, to Hell I bring."

"I am too young, but four score eight.
One day, I beg, if it's not too late."
He bitter laughs, "It is indeed.
Time is a thing you no longer need."

"I tell you now on your last day,
For mercy, not time, shouldst thou pray.
For all God's men you've hurt to the last,
Your future rights the crimes of your past."

Quickly am I taken away.



FEBRUARY 22, 1983
(Tuesday)

Hi Keewee!

I gotta thank you again for the gift! It is so amazingly fantastic, I can't stand it. It's the end, the living end! Boy, I get a kick outta myself...³⁵

But...there is a problem. There are a few missing! Where are they, Kee? At the bottom of the parrot cage? Conveniently wrapped about some large-mouthed bass? Propping up a coffee table with one leg too short? Huh? HUH?!

I told you to save them...they funny. YUK YUK.

Did you go to Mass on Ash Wednesday? I think it's a sin not to. I decided at the last minute to go. I really saw no point in it, you know? Having a priest rub his cigarette on my forehead ain't exactly my idea of fun. I made the mistake of going up to Father ~~Ballsitch~~ Bolser to get my ashes. I didn't even stop to think why I was the only one in his lane. I figured it out, though...too late. The other priests just rub their thumb in the bowl of ashes and rub the crap on your head. Fine, no problem. Father Bolser, however, cupped his hand and turned his bowl upside down, dropping a shitload of ashes into his hand. "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," he said unto me, "and here's a shitload for your forehead!" SSSLAP!! When the smoke cleared, I was surprised to say the least to find everyone wondering how I had

³⁵ Kee eventually collected all my letters and took them to a "Quick Copy" shop. They copied them at a reduced scale, then bound them together. She titled the collection "LETTERS FROM HOME: A Year In Review...1980."

Here's her inscription:

"To Jerry, You will never know how really helpful and enjoyable your letters are to me. Thank you."

And with prosaic outpourings like that, I'm not likely to ever find out, either, is my reaction at reading it now, all these years later...but it was a really nice thing for her to do.

suddenly been able to change colors. Some thought it was a magic trick and began clapping sorta self-consciously. A couple offered me some grits, fried chicken, and some watermelon. I looked like I had joined a minstrel show or something. T'anks, Father.

I hope I can mail this letter. You see, our mailbox blew away. We had these winds that were moving office buildings down Eastern Avenue, you know? Well, it blew a house-boat off the previously calm waters of Lake Mead and the boat's fan blade caught on our mailbox, ripping it from the ground. No more mailbox. Pretty strong winds, actually. I lost a couple of ideas outside.

Mom wanted me to nail the mailbox back up. Who is she kidding? I mean, really now. You saw what a "jerry-rig" job the last one was...how am I supposed to top that kind of craftsmanship. I was thinking of cementing it to the brick wall, but I don't have the right materials. Like Mom's home-made stew. God knows it cements my stomach, can't hurt the wall any.

Larry was reading my letters last night. Mike came over to eat (he brings Wendy's over, and eats on our floor), and I was talking on the phone. Mike got kinda bored because no one was paying any attention to him. Larry was just sitting there giggling like only a freshman can. I had to watch him real close to make sure he didn't drool on any of the pages.

That's a big problem, though. I really don't want anyone to read it because I'm afraid they'll drop their jelly toast on it, you know? Plus there's the problem with censorship. Can they read this part? Can they handle it? Can I handle the rejection? Can I care less?

Christ my teeth hurt! I went to the dentist last week. What a hard-ass. I know he hates me. He's having a helluva lotta fun tearing my gums apart. He'll sit there with that glassy stare of his, poking in my mouth. "Now, don't worry, Jerry. This won't hurt. Much." Five seconds later, I'm holding a switchblade to his throat, blood and drool all over my bib, telling him if he takes one more step it'll be his last.

But now my teeth are killing me! I have to smash the shit out of my food with a brick because I can't chew. If I even inhale too quick, I scream.

God, I have been so bloody busy. I swear I haven't even had

enough time to take a shit this week. Maybe that's why I got so sick the day before. I'm serious, you know, and people will laugh when I say things like that. At least, they laugh until they find out just how serious I am, then they don't want to stick around when I do find time.

Really, it's like Murphy's Law or something. The moment my ass touches the porcelain, somebody yells: "Jerry, Joe's here!" or "Jerry, Donna's on the phone!" or "Jerry, you gotta pick up Teri!" or something. F--- you, I'm taking a shit! So, my metabolism stores it up, waits for an inopportune moment, then -BANG!- Sludge, drip, drip, flush!

What did you give up for Lent? Mom made me give up cuss words. I ain't making it. No fuc----, I mean, no fudging way.

Gorman had its G.R. recently, did ya know? I finally found out what G.R. stands for: Girls Reverse. Did you know that? I didn't. I thought it stood for Gang Rape, or something.

In fact, I had a date all set for it. But, I screwed up. She asked if I could possibly loosen the handcuffs. While I was doing that, she clubbed me over the head with a lead statuette. By the time I regained consciousness, she had picked the lock on my door, and fled the house in terror. Of course I denied everything during police questioning...

I told you we took those crap & gown pictures, didn't I? What a waste of time. Oh well, they were free, so I was quite willing to pay half. I decided to break the monotony by crossing my eyes. Hope it showed.

I still can't get over the book, though. It's probably the same feeling you get if you ever have work published. Adds dignity to it, you know. Something. What a perfectly neat thing to give someone else, though. A piece of their history; a memory.

Shoot! I'm late to pick up the kids. I gotta get out of here. Bye.

I'm back. The twins weren't there. I really screwed. Dad knows nothing. Joe knows nothing.. Oops. Phone -- hang on.

That was Tee. She's waiting outside Gorman right now. I really

gotta jet. Bye again.

Well, there's about a two hour space between these sentences. I had.. ..oh shit. I forgot about Larry now. He's at soccer practice. He's pissed, I bet. Damn, why did I get my license, Kee. What a pain in the ass it is.

It's 6:10 right now, and I'm pissed as can be. I can't wait for Mom to come home. What an incredible pain in the ass it is to be left alone with the twins for that great a time period.

Don't get me wrong. It's not that the twins are acting like shits or anything. It's just that I have to drive them all over the fu--ing place. To eat, to school, to crap, etc.

And I am especially ticked off at drive-thrus. Boy! am I pissed at drive-thrus. Tonight for example. Ten's crying 'cause she wants a Crispirito. Larry takes nothing but Burger King. And you know neither of them are willing to make a compromise... Great. Jerry, always the mediator, strikes a bargain. Although he is running low on petrol and even lower on patience. I drop the twins off at home and truck over to Carl's Jr. I pull up to the window.

Jerry: Hello.

Carl: Thank you for coming to Carl's Jr. Muffle, muffle, winspleed.

Jerry: Yes, I'd like a Crispirito, fries & a Coke.

Carl: (Bloody long pause.)

Jerry: Hello?

Carl: Hi, welcome to Carl's Jr., can I help you now?

Jerry: YES! YES! I'D LIKE A FUCKING CRISPIRITO, FRIES, AND A LARGE COKE!!

Having accomplished this, I had to jet over to Burger King for Larry's dinner.

Jerry: Hello?

King: Hello, muffle, wheezer bliddly pontiff?

Jerry: Yes, a double chheseburger, fries, and a Coke.

King: Frendled gruddle buggy?

Jerry: No, just a regular double cheeseburger, fries, and a large Coke.

King: Grittled frootap, casbah funting. Drive forward.

Jerry: (Having driven forward) How much?

King: Seventy-two dollars and six cents.
Jerry: Your mother. I wanted a double cheeseburger, fries, and a Coke.
King: Oh sorry. Can I see your coupon?
Jerry: Your grandmother. I don't have one.
King: Where did you put it?
Jerry: I never had one. Will you get off the coupon and give me my goddamn food.
King: Too bad. We have a special saver's coupon good for a free double cheeseburger with a purchase of..
Jerry: Will you forget the &*c~%@\$% coupon and give me my food.
King: Okay, that's gonna be an extra \$1.37, though.
Jerry: Anything, anything, just get me the f--- outta here.

Kee, if this is not the truth, may God strike me dead!

See, I told you I was tellin...*KABOOM!* LKjasfriutn..*574&8k.

Well, anyhoo, this letter is alot longer than I thought it would be. Sorry. I hope it isn't boring. Actually, this is two 2 page letters combined. Neither was very good by itself, so I took the best parts of both and combined them all into a sentence fragment.

Oops. Speaking of sentence fragment, I have to write some garbage for Freshman 101. I have to write an essay about "My Life Of Crime". What the heck kinda topic is that' for an essay? I guess I'll write about those rapes. ..oh. I didn't tell you about it, did I? Oops, gee, well...never mind. My parole officer will explain everything.

Gotta go. Don't know why, just gotta. If I don't I'll go on and on and on. Ad infinitum.

I have been known to do that, you know. I'll pick a topic right out of the blue, something with no bearing on anything else I've discussed before. I choose long words, just to be facetious, of course. Of course, often I become confused with long sentence structures which we have been warned about in our college course which I took so I could get out of fourth period which really has worked in my favor so far except for the extra strain on my gas tank and my wallet which is almost always empty anyway because money burns a hole right through it, you know? (*sigh* take a breath) I have to practice writing. I use way too many sentence fragments. A lot. Also, I tend to use a weak word in place of another one that might have more. ...you know, oomph.

Too much fun to be believed, huh?

Once again, I gotta go. Dawn, like my heart breaks; and my homework, as the night, awaits.

Gotta go, dammit.

Thanks for el libro. Bye-bye.

Psychologically disturbed in Vegas,

Jerry!

Epilogue.



One .

Well...you're done. You actually made it through the entire book. Be honest. When was the last time you managed that? Senior year, right? When they forced you to read The Old Man and the Sea, right? You never will forgive them for that, will you? Neither will I.

Two .

Did you find these letters entertaining? Did you think them pithy? Did they bore the pith out of you? Yeth or no?

I was hoping to have that previously-mentioned letter written to my sister in this section...but, as I suspected, the letter is definitely lost. I tried looking for it during a recent visit to Kee's house. Yes, even in the toaster oven.

Kee finally 'fessed up after watching me rout through her belongings like Indiana Jones looking for a monkey idol: "The letter's GONE, Jer. Give it up." Brutally honest, wouldn't you agree? I remember enough about the letter to where I could try to re-write it...but...I dunno. Seems too shady. Like I'm trying to cheat you all, or something. And I don't want to do that. Unless, of course, you never did paid me for this book. Then I wouldn't care.

Three .

I do want to sort of re-enact a small portion of the letter. I'll explain why in a minute. The letter was written, as I mentioned before, to sort of thank Kee for saving the other letters which you have already read. After that, I tried to update her on what was

happening at home in 1988.

In the five years since I had written her last, I had been married and divorced, moved to Arizona with Kee, moved back to Las Vegas with Mom, moved into two different apartments with my ex-wife, moved back in with my mother at our old house, moved in with my father when the house was sold, then finally moved back in with my mother when my father sold his house. (Gee...I don't sound like a deadbeat, do I?)

Anyway, I was now the only one, apart from the family mutt, still living with Mom. Here is a small part of what I remember writing in the letter to her two years ago:

Brownie is a puppy whore, Kee. Whenever we let her outside, she goes into the neighbor's condo. She even greets the people when they pull up into the parking lot! I swear! She runs out to the car - in front of the car - wagging her tail, waiting to give the driver a big hug. She scares me, 'cause one of these days what she's gonna be hugging is the front tire.

Squoosh!

She's also doing something else that's endearing her to me: shitting in the shower. I swear! She's been doing it for like a month now. I can't tell you how many times I've been late for work because I've had to disinfect the entire bathroom before taking a shower. Mom's smarter than me. She takes her shower at night.

Doctor Mom. Cure the symptom, not the disease.

I thought if I kept the door to the bathroom tightly closed, Brown-hog would stop doing it. After all, she's too small to turn the knob. She outsmarted me, though, boy... she pissed in my closet.

The first time I found shit in the shower almost scared the shit out of me. Mom coughs a lot, as you know. A helluva lot. Too helluva lot. The first night I moved back in with Mom she drove me crazy with it. I didn't get a wink of sleep. It was like a Chinese Coughing Torture. Hack-hack-hack. Pause. Hack-hack-hack. Pause. Hack-hack-hack. Pause. I told her it was a good thing we don't keep

firearms in the house.

Anyway...when I saw the shit in the shower, I noticed some blood in the stool as well. I freaked! I thought: Ohmigod! Mom coughed so hard that...ohmigod! Where is she? Why didn't she wake me up?!

I was scrambling looking for a note or something downstairs. Something like: "Dear Jerry... Drove myself to hospital. Clean up bathroom. If you get hungry, there's leftover soup in the fridge. Don't forget to water plants. Mom."

Mom laughed when I told her. But the damned dog still craps in there every two or three days. I've worked out the doggie logic of it, though. Brownie must know what we do in there...and the shower is the only porcelain fixture in there that's her size. She's probably very confused about why she can't get it to flush...

Mom's coughing worries the hell out of me, though. She might as well start smoking so at least she has a reason to sound like that. And I think she's getting addicted to her cough syrup. She just busted in my room a few minutes ago and thrust the bottle in my face. "Open this," she said.

That sucker was stuck, though. The sticky syrup had perma-sealed the top on like Krazy Glue. She panicked...yelling at me: "Well, don't you have some vise-grips up here?!"

"In my bedroom? Which one do I look like...Manny, Moe or Jack?" I told her that the only way we could get it open was to do it like they did in the Old West. You know, shoot the top off... like they did with whiskey bottles. Finally, I somehow - thank God - managed to get the damn top off. Mom left my room looking like a Sparklett's water dispenser...arms at her side, and bottle in her mouth sticking straight up in the air. Say...there wouldn't be any **codeine** in there, by any chance? Nahhhh.

Four.

That's as much of the letter as I need to recall to make my next

point.

Point: Don't die, Mom.

She still coughs a helluva lot,—too helluva lot—for someone who never smoked. She's already been in the hospital once since I started putting this collection together. For awhile there I was scrambling to finish it, just so she could read it before she...well, whatever.

I guess all of us kids think that way since Dad died. The youngest of us (the twins) are going to be 23 soon, the oldest (Gar) is 33. ..and none of us want to be orphans.

As I've mentioned, I've lived with both my parents after their divorce. I've spent more time with the both of them than any of my siblings. I thank God for that time. I thank God that my memories of them aren't limited to holiday gatherings and dinners in restaurants. I'm glad that my father showed me how to change spark plugs. I'm glad that I remember that, by the time he bought all of the proper tools, it would have been cheaper to have Tune-Up Masters do it.

I treasure the time I spend with my mother as well. She's scared the shit out of me a few times. I'm so used to her coughing now, that I become frightened when I DON'T hear it. Once I had to shake her bed to make sure she really had just fallen asleep in front of the TV. But I enjoy very much living with her, and I'll be bummed in the extreme when I move out.

But all this time I've spent living with my parents as an adult has afforded me a different kind of childhood. It offers advantages that you couldn't reap, even as the eldest or only child. I know how my parents think...how they react to different situations. When my father died, I realized that he wasn't REALLY gone. I mean, for a few months I found my hand was always reaching for the phone to call him; but I don't do that anymore...not just for the logical reason, but because I can queue him up whenever I want. Not just memories, but reactions. I can carry on a conversation with him whenever I want to. I know what he'd say, the advice he'd give, and why he'd give it. And that's better than memories of holiday gatherings and dinners in restaurants.

It's the same with Mom. I know what she'll approve and disapprove of whenever I do anything. I know what she thinks before she thinks it. I can even tell her *why* she thinks that way. But if she doesn't

mind, I'm not ready to give up the intrinsic package that is my Mother...and won't be for a very long time.

This book is about my family. We are all complete reproductions of our parents. As soon as we see characteristics of one parent over another in each of us – flip! – like the turn of a coin, there's the other one. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for the gift that is you.

Five.

Anyway, one final thought before I go...

First: I am a direct descendant of John Bunyan on my father's side. No, not the guy with the big blue ox! That was *Paul* Bunyan. *John* Bunyan was the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, written in England in 1678. Another classic novel you might recall from your senior year.

Pilgrim's Progress is listed in another book, one by David Wallechinsky, and Amy and Irving Wallace: *The Book Of Lists*. This fascinating tome lists John Bunyan at the very top—the number one spot with a bullet—of a list titled "The 15 Most Boring Classic Novels."

I think you know what I'm leading up to here. If you were bored shitless by my book, don't blame me. It's in the genes.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jerry! was born in a log cabin near the town of Hodgenville, Kentucky. In spite of little formal schooling, he taught himself to read by the hearth of his fireplace, which caused many a good book to go up in flames. **SOOSH!**

He eventually overcame his humble beginnings to win the country's highest political office, becoming the sixteenth President of the United States of America.

No, wait. Sorry. That was Abe Lincoln, wasn't it?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR'S PSEUDONYM:

Billy Shakespeare, English dramatist and actor was born at Stratford-On-Avon-Calling, in Warwickshire, England in the year 1564.

He is best known and loved for his award-winning plays *Barefoot In The Park* and *The Odd Couple*.

No, wait. Dammit. That's Neil Simon. Sorry about that.