BY rOBNOXIOUS

dedicated to
iNDiA aUTUMN
oH sHiT. this is the good times. ive made it, we’ve made it. today and tomorrow the sun is everywhere in the world, bright green leaves of spring, soon the lilacs will bloom. we made it! huddled under blankets in cold ass houses trying to avoid the thousand dollar heating bill for these badly insulated honkey houses, silly ass boxes! reading books, watching movies, playing games, drinking, writing, drawing, anesthetizing ourselves with whiskey and the internet, sleeping! wearing three layers of everything and riding bikes all over minneapolis to a punk show with a hundred kids inside, steam pouring out the door when it opens, light and laughter pouring out the door when it opens, rolling out like flames of a furnace and rising up outside, energetic signal to an outer space. we made it.

mY aRM is around you and this feels good. the blanket over us makes us one. relax into my friend of many hard years, who we have been melts into who we are now. who we are now, is friends holding each other

fE LiX aND wiNE. vanilla oak aromas for 2.99. experienced winemakers in a green chardonay bottle, for 2.99.

2.99!

you cant get anything for that. must be a red tag special move those units introductory offer, or the bait and switch. havent seen a bottle of wine for 2.99 in ten years. one of those things that you must enjoy while it lasts. i’m appreciating it right now, right into my face. bottle to lips, all the way from Modesto, California, my previous homeland, where i first had wine that was 2.99.

i heard a friend sing a song about it back in sonoma county. His name was Felix, a drunken madman artist, existentialist beret wearing bug eyed wingnut musician genius. i asked his punk rock band, Escapegoat, to play a show in my studio apartment. An awesome fiasco! while my friend was singing his cock suddenly appeared sticking out of a hole in the crotch of his black jeans. he bent his knees, reached the hand that was not holding the mic down to his crotch and shoved the thing back in.
a peculiar dance move.

he looked to the front row of the crowd, my couch, jammed full of people watching him, their faces right at crotch level. he shrugged. what can ya do? jeans get holes in em and some people don’t wear underwear. i’m happy i got to see that, cause now i get to laugh my ass off again just thinking about it.

TRASH piCKiN bOOTY. found these terry knit wool socks, a huge trash pile in pittsburgh! one of those sidewalk piles where you know nothing was sorted, just kicked to the curb. Someone got thrown in jail, or broke up with a lover, or just died. or decided to transform their life by dumping all their old shit.
good idea.
cause all that old shit is new shit to us.
suzi told us about the pile, and it started to rain, but we all went, umbrellas in hand, suzi, zoe, paula, me, and leading the way: young jasmine and gaia. six year old jasmine leading the charge down mintwood street:
“Dumpster!”
and jasmine’s mom suzi sez, “Hey! Wait for us!”
we dug thru this pile of stuff as it begins to rain. bags and boxes and suitcases and dressers full of shit. walked away with everything we could carry. stopped back with the firebird later and filled up again when it was done raining. and now i’m sitting here in the dropping minnesota temperature wearing terry knit wool socks, warm toes, melting depression, little things add up.

HARD tiMES. we stumbled out of the drunk box- was it noon? still morning, people all about their business on the west bank, we drunk, arm in arm, down to the river, with a bottle. rolling around on the grass bank of the mississippi. off work at 8 in the morning, drunk by noon! “wanna get a drink?”
long night of work at the café, one drink is always two, if one drink is one drink- it’s wasted.
drunk in a sober city.
busting thru sidewalks, squinting and cursing fearless in the sun,
laughing wildly, the bottle goes empty. gravity has fallen us
on the grass bank of the mississippi
we put our lips together
and drink

sEWARD cAFE. wash these plates. these plates come back again, dirty.
and now the dishwater is cold. these are the good times.

sOMETHiNG i rEALiZED and then forgot, and then realized again: my
life is mine to do with as i will! Ha! the possibilities seem infinite at
times. i know i’m lucky having been freed from many of the laws that
were programmed into me... my thanks to all the de-programmers i have
been fortunate to meet. freedom is an action, internal oppression is
always ready to grow back, tenacious fukn roots!

The deprogramming continues. Every day. Every day...
bOAT pUNK fLOTiLLA
2006: Pittsburgh to Paducah

jULY tHiRD, i turn thirty five years old on the south bank of the Allegheny River. A flotilla of punk-ass junk-boats floating there in the water, tied to tree trunks on shore by whatever frayed rope could be found, some big nylon coils dropped off by a big old stern wheel boat that came on over right up to shore and tossed them off for us. Some of our boats were ready to go, some still being built, like mine, the Wild Dragonfly. i would be working on it most of the way down the Ohio River, constantly adding on and making repairs. When we arrived at Paducah, Kentucky, 934 miles later, one of the two long-tail engines i had built was dead and it’s propeller missing, one of the recumbent pedal-powered paddlewheel drives was completely stripped and not working. But one engine was working fine, one paddlewheel crank was still
rolling, and most importantly: both pontoons were still floating. Filled with pink insulation foam board from the walls of Mala Zimetbaum’s Studio for Fine Arts and the Advancement of Wayward Youth when that punk venue closed down in Minneapolis. The foam made the pontoons unsinkable. I built them outta dumpstered plywood and fiberglass in the backyard of the Haggard Baby Crib house, also known as Little Florida and a buncha other dumb names. I probably woke up Jackie and Leif and Ski and most everyone else that lived there everyday with the screeching of a skillsaw in the backyard, and the intoxicating fumes of the fiberglass resin that I was sealing the cracks with.

Gerty and I built long-tail engines up at Bruces’ house in Northeast Minneapolis. We made two each, in case one of them broke down, run the other one! These are a style popular in South East Asia, a five horse power motor connected by a universal joint to an eight foot long shaft with a prop at the end. That’s it. You pull the start cord, drop the shaft in the water, and you go forward. No reverse. Neutral is: pull the shaft outta the water. You can steer them by moving the whole thing side to side, but I mounted mine in a fixed position between the pontoons, and steered with a rudder.

Like geniuses, we did not test out these long-tails before leaving for Pittsburgh and the Ohio River. Turns out, the north american motors were spinning too fast for the south east asian propellers we had, and the motors would stall when we put them in the water. We had to find some old style trolling motor props that were half the size, and then all was well. Except that my motors were on their last legs already, and required endless tinkering. What I didn’t realize about a small engine like that, is just cause you can get it started in the backyard of a punk house and jump on top and ride it like a buckin bronco for five seconds, that don’t mean its gonna keep running for five hours straight, every day, for several months, while pushing a boat.

Well, at least Gerty’s engines didn’t look like rusty antiques. He spent $100 on one of his, the other he found on a sidewalk. I spent like $10 each on mine…hmmm, ya get what ya pay for. I learned a lot about small engine repair.

When nothing else worked, there was always the peddle powered paddlewheel! Built in the bowels of the old Bedlam Theater on Cedar Avenue in Minneapolis, a basement bike shop called The Grease Pit.
Here I metal chop-sawed, hack sawed, sawsalled, welded, drilled, bolted, and painted this mini-paddlewheel powered by two bicycle cranks connected with a rubber V-belt. Two steel bicycle rims formed the frame and were connected by 2x2 wood, the paddles were plywood cut from the discarded stage set for *The Flies* production at the Bedlam Theater.

A wise person would have tested all this experimental shit out before setting out on a thousand mile journey. But that would be-boooollllooooring!

Like the longtail engines, the paddlewheel had its breakdowns too. One set of pedals was welded on backwards so that when you cranked, the spinning motion unscrewed all the hardware. Oops. But even when you couldn’t actually pedal, you could always disconnect the V-belt and just spin the thing by hand, cranking on the paddles as they spun, timing it perfectly, like those old steel merry-go-rounds in parks where you get it going real fast and watch kids get dizzy and start flying off… (this method of paddlewheel propulsion was perfected by our crew in 2005 on the variously named *Moose Drool* or *Ida B.*, *which was Buggy, Gerty, and Pete’s boat.* I have never been so physically fit as I was 934 miles later, pedaling down the Ohio River! And a little bit exhausted. Pedaling a sixteen foot long pontoon boat into a headwind all by yourself, and trying to avoid massive steel barges coming at you, takes its toll.

The day came there in late June of 2006 when everything was ready to go, Gerty, Aura Lee, Erik, and Ariel showed up in Gerty’s mini-van towing the trailer we had chopped up and added an extra axle to carry all the weight of our two boats. *Dolly Olivine The Destroyer* already sitting on the crappy looking trailer, a big ass hunk of wood. The van was already riding kinda low in back… We loaded up my two pontoons, two longtail engines, and the pedal powered paddlewheel, and a couple crates of random essentials into the belly of *Dolly Olivine The Destroyer*. Now the van was really riding low… Pittsburgh was a long ways… Gerty had it all worked out, “Wherever we break down, that’s where we put the boats in the water.”

I said goodbye to everyone at the house. I knew I wasn’t coming back for a long time. And its never the same when you come back…

We all jumped in and rolled south outta Troll Alley, East out of the city, and I could feel the attachments falling away, launched beyond the
gravity of this city, moving outside our established lives, routines
shattered, heads uplifted to the horizon where tomorrow the sun would
rise over the headwaters of this river, i laughed. Laughed like i had just
swallowed a pill that dissolved all my worries. We were already on the
water.

FROM THE LOG BOOK
oF THE wiLD DRAGONFLY:

THE oHiO riVER! July 8th, 2006. Today we left Pittsburgh, with me
frantically trying to make one of my six propulsion systems actually
work. A prop unscrewed and fell off my longtail engine while i was
attempting to start it.Forgot to put lock-tight on the threads. Fuck! A
brutal floundering start, captured on video by my crewmate Tent. The
paddlewheel v-belt is slipping terribly. Total malfunction. Something
wrong with the other long tail engine, prop is too big, it stalls out when i
drop it in the water... if i leave it halfway out of the water, it sorta works,
but the engine overheats in five minutes and dies. Well, what’s left? A
couple of paddles and the unfinished experimental wind sail... Enuf with
experiments! We wave our arms like we are doing jumping jacks. This
felt familiar! When was the last time i waved my arms like this, hoping
that someone would rescue our boat from catastrophe... ah yes, it was
last year! when our engine died and we were being blown over the dam
and somehow simultaneously put the Rock island Arsenal on full alert...
That got us on the evening news.

Wow, and here we are in distress on the first day outta Pittsburgh! i
hoped the authorities wereent watching too close. Lucky us we have enuf
social skills to have friends and are traveling in a flotilla of boats! One of
our tribe pulls alongside and we get a tow out of town from the Dolly
Olivine the Destroyer. Already we have our feet up relaxing.

Later after we pulled outta the first lock, the Fish Commission
showed up, pulled us over. On the water, you turn off your motor and
the police just come alongside your boat and kinda- hold onto it... it was
going dark, our lights wernt set up. Erick was sitting up in the bow
holding the red and green light right there where it should be. The fish
comish guy sez, “So, are you light keeper?” and Erick says, “Yep.”
The fish comish guy lectured us, a big chubby sternly grandfatherly type, inspected our safety shit, and gave the *Maudrey Jean* a ticket for not having enuf life jackets for all her passengers. Fucking seventy dollar ticket! We all threw in some money to cover it... He said the *Maudrey Jean* was unseaworthy too, with the “structure” built on top of it. We convinced him to just let us take the bicycles off the roof and have less passengers on the boat, and he let us go. I think we all agreed that the main sea worthy problem with the *Maudrey Jean* was that there were three women and no men aboard her. That’s what's beautiful about the river, if you float down far enuf, you will eventually leave the jurisdiction of any asshole.

**oHiO riVER, miLE 12. July 9th, 2006.** Day two. Moored to the shore under a bridge sixty feet above our heads, a red rusted sunken barge on shore next to us, a formerly floating ancestor.

Yesterday really could have been much worse. Savannah bravely rode on the boat with me. Huffing exhaust all the way. Whos idea was it to put the engines in front? Damn. Eventually, the engines crapped out. David had to come out and tow us after we narrowly missed a bridge abutment. They wild tow that David gave us led to the *Maudrey Jean*'s bicycles flying out of my dinghy and being swallowed by the river. That solved the problem of where to store the bicycles.

Had to cut a hole thru the plywood deck this morning to pump the water out of the port side pontoon. It filled to the top with water from the action of the counter-clockwise turning long tail prop. Big hole in the pontoon under there was supposed to have a 5 gallon bucket sealed into it for storage, but that was one of those projects I had left undone to get on the river at the same time as the other boats, and under threat of the authorities in their speedy zodiac with m-60 machine guns mounted on either end. “Everybody out by Sunday at 6am.” they told us. Some all-star baseball game going on near the confluence of the rivers, we had to move or be moved... well, the boat is floating high now. Wise decision, filling the pontoons with foam so they would be unsinkable! Unsinkable test: check! Next!

 Haven’t named the boat yet. Think I’ll call it the Dragonfly... i was inspired to build the pedal power paddlewheel from these folks that built one on the Ohio last year, their’s was named the latin name for

miLE 16.5, aMBriDGE, pENNSYLVANiA. jULY 10th. Evening on a Sunday. Made it down from mile 12 above the lock to here, Mile 17 I think. At some point below the lock I told the flotilla to “go on without me” Heh heh. it has been a good day, at first I was despondent and alone, but now I am just alone. Lockmaster yelling at me, “You better peddle that thing!” Paddlewheel not working so efficiently… Those lock guys, they can be pissy and aggressive when you first pull in if yer going slow, like yer just some trash floating down that’s gonna clog up the lock, then they seem to chill out when you tell em yer going down the river. “Where ya headed?” “Just going down the river…” I imagine there are many days they sit in that control room, or stand at the railing looking over the edge and think about jumping right outta their lives and onto something, anything, that is floating down and away from it all.

I gotta eat my giant fish sandwich and waffle fries with gravy now at Rooks Bar & Grill on 5th & Merchant here in Ambridge. Damn. Why does this feel like some kinda last supper? it’ll be alright, buddy. They got a hardware store!

i love aMBriDGE, pENNSYLVANiA. jULY 11th. Second day on the rocky beach upstream of the highway crossing over the river. Last night Zoe’ and Savannah stopped by on the Maudrey Jean to say hello and see if I was alright. That was sweet of them.

Hooked myself up at the hardware store today, got belt dressing and various bits for the pedal paddlewheel, dollar store food, bike seat for my town bike, a bright pink one. I figured people might be less inclined to steal it. Checked how much money I had, not much for three months! Time to get stingy, more dumpstered food! Start selling zines to people! Something…

This beach has been good to me. Built a driftwood shack on the boat while a tiny songbird kept landing on what I was building and looked curiously at me, chirping. After all the struggles of the last few days, of
the last few years, of the last 36 years actually. i love you too, little bird. Stop by anytime.

Up the beach i came across an ancient looking stone pedestal, half sunk into the pebble beach and broken into 3 parts. felt like i was in some ancient roman ruin, a place where once some wild decadent shit had gone on, and now all that was left was this granite pedestal, toppled into the river by barbarians. Pennsylvania, where the ruins of white men are hundreds of years older than where i grew up, out West...

Up at the top of the river bank there is some kind of transfer yard, where things are unloaded from barges and stacked in this clearing, then loaded up on trains or trucks. Giant steel slabs, some a foot thick, separated by huge wood beams so that a fork lift can get under each one to move them. i walked up to a stack, ten steel plates the size of a large truck and as thick as yer leg, i touched them, slapped them. Each one resonated loudly with a precise musical note! Bing! Boong! Booom! Holy shit, it was the largest xylophone i had ever seen! i wished there was someone with me to play a wild song...

Up from there i found four railroad tracks and then another slope up to the River Boulevard and the city of Ambridge. As i looked for a path up to the road, i found a huge sprawl of blackberry bushes. Hedges of blackberry! i was so hungry when i saw them, all ripe and ready to eat. i was probably the only human to pick over them in a long time. i will also eat breakfast here tomorrow!

its been good having this time alone. No pressure to conform to others pace of travel. Time tables. i am in no hurry. i am home. After the river journey this summer is over, i have no home to go back to. i can’t imagine anywhere else i would want to be except here, so here it is. Enjoy, fucker. i must move at my own speed in my own trajectory to end up where i want to be, which is: happy in the moment. Wherever that be. Yeah that’s right, we’re already there. We’ve always been there! And if yer not, then where are you going? if you don’t get it here, how are you going to get it there? What i’m saying is, its alright to be here, alone on the beach, doing nothing but enjoying the evening calm waters of the Ohio River, admiring a clump of white petaled yellow centered flowers outside of my tent window as the birds sing after the brief rainfall while i lay here writing. i havent done this in a long while.
WHAT THE HELL DAY IS THIS? MILE 25.5. Mouth of the Beaver River. Pedaled 8 miles today, easy until i got here, fuckin headwind hit me as i rounded the bend, almost ran me to ground right in the middle of a barge terminal. Not a pretty arrival, cranking away at the pedals, making the slightest rudder adjustments, every movement counted, the measure of success was measured by the slow inches the Wild Dragonfly crawled down river. Made it to the mud bar at the mouth of the Beaver River where Dan, Amy, Matt, Dre, Caleb, & ian were tied up on shore with their small boats, The Gelsamina, The Philip, and the Lighten Up Doggy Daddy. i only made it to the tip of the mud bar, ran aground. Exhausted. i couldn’t even think of shoving off and giving it another go. i cursed. i got my shore line and started walking thru the mud, then the darkening clouds poured down rain. Walked thru a hundred feet of mud to shore in the middle of this storm front downpour. From the shore i looked back, it was only a foot of water, but it seemed like my boat was just floating there in the middle of the river… i tied up to a tree, considered myself lucky.

Earlier today i was out drifting, eating lunch. Saw a boat with oars movin- ah! Must be one of us! And here comes The Philip, Caleb and ian rowing along. There was no one else on the river but us. i think i hadn’t seen them in a day or so. There’s something amazing and relaxed about that. You dont run into a friend on the highway and shut off yer engine and let it coast, tie yer cars together and just hang out, talking, sharing food, jumping from car to car, going for a swim…

Earlier today some guys in a speedboat heading upriver to the all-stars game in Pittsburgh stopped by to chat and toss me a can of beer. Yeah. The river!

We moved to the other side of the beaver river mouth to camp, there was a good mulberry tree there to eat on. We set up camp. Some white stoners and their weed dealing black friend came down and smoked weed, then the dealer leader decided it was time to leave, as he left he said, “Wash you hands, people. Wash your hands.” A little muskrat was running around, and then we found it laying there, dead. We called it, “Dead Muskrat Beach”. Then we decided to break camp and get the hell out of there. Our first “night floaty”, it was awesome. Gina and i pedaled the Wild Dragonfly two miles down, it was an awesome starry night, the
paddle wheel slapping water in the dark, the river reflecting stars, sky and river melting together, we floated thru space…

We came back for a landing on earth, pulled up to an abandoned dock, tied up, spent the night.

**mILE 52. cLUSTER iSLAND, jULY 16th.** We are invited over to Bill’s place, met folx out in the channel, all of them piled into a pontoon boat. Susan was the wild ass! We all show up at Bill’s place on Cluster island, Susan pours endless shots of Jagermiester & redbull. We all got wild singing drunk and in the night it rained. We brought the barrel dingy The Cody up to the party and sang the song whose lyrics were written all over the barrel. Susan got in the barrel and we pulled her around the yard. “i’m going with you guys! i’m going!” We all played songs, Ben’s mandolin was destroyed by the rain. Welcome to West Virginia! True river hospitality, thank you very much, Cluster island River Rats.

**mILE 63, wEiRTON.** The awesome camp spot, with freshwater rolling down a ravine. Yesterday the flotilla met up again here after being separated, and there was a spontaneous summer fashion swim. Then after the sun had gone far away Gerty busted out the Cobra/Scorpion booze that he brought back from southeast asia. i looked at that baby cobra inside the bottle with the scorpion in it’s mouth, the real thing. is this a good idea? We all took shots. it tasted awful. They guy Gerty bought the liquor from said it would make you want to fight. i took a shot. Soon fell ill. i went and lay down in my tent. A full body ache passed over me, sweating, groaning, vaguely paralyzed. it felt like spinal flu. i thot i was going to die. i almost got up to have someone boat me into town and carry me to a hospital. i must have been allergic to something- like trace amounts of cobra or scorpion venom! i will never drink that shit again.

**mILE 71.** All boat dance party. We tied all the boats together, turned up the jams. Let the sun shine. Some hard hat wearing road workers on a bridge that we passed under looked down at us dancing like they were watching jesus do the moonwalk on water.
miLE 74. Rope swing! Splash! Epic belly, back, and head flops. Just downriver from here, and up Buffalo Creek, there was a great swimming hole with a rock cliff you could jump off into the pool. There was a buncha local kids there, a whole posse, little river rats…

miLE 98. Traded Wendy & Dave my boat for theirs. We took off in the Shadowbuilder leaving Dave & Wendy to pedal the paddlewheel of the Wild Dragonfly. Hours later we meet up with them again, they were distraught, hungry, said there was nothing to eat on the Wild Dragonfly. “Yeah i know, that’s why i jumped on yer boat. Ah! Ha ha!” Jaqueline decided to take a turn on the Wild Dragonfly. She pedaled it all the way down to our camp site. That was great to stand on shore and watch the Wild Dragonfly pedaled to a luxurious landing! Jaqueline is the only other person who dared to suggest piloting the Wild Dragonfly alone, i tip my hat to you, brave soul!

miLE 101.5. sTiLL dONT kNOW wHAT dAY iT iS. Raining good now on the river, running thru Moundsville. Pulled in upstream of the town last night at sunset to a pebble beach and a group of four wild ass kids jumping into the river off 30’ high barge docking columns at the abandoned terminal of a coal company. Some folx in the flotilla were going into town to some bar, and in my hurry to go with them i dropped my wallet between the pontoons. i heard it hit the water. in the lowering darkness and mental chaos it takes me a second to realize what just happened, then i look down and see it floating there! i drop to my knees and shove my arm thru the floor boards, feel the silver duct tape touch my fingers several times as i spastically thrash around trying to grab it, then it went down, sunk by the weight of my lucky silver dollar.

i strip down, jump between the pontoons and thrash around some more, cutting up my hands on whatever shells of metal or rocks was down there. No luck. i return to land defeated, bloody, and now attacked by sunset mosquitos. My mood for being social is gone. i bid my friends goodbye. All my money had just been invested in the river.

After a long night of rain i woke up during a break in the pouring and stepped out of my tent to board the Wild Dragonfly. The morning water is calm and clear, it is the morning golden hour. Standing on the port side pontoon i stare down into the water- the bottom is clearly
visible! Since when could anyone see to the bottom of the Ohio River? There i peer down thru the distinctly green waters and see a glimpse of silver gleaming there in the depths- Booty! Thirteen dollars cash and my magic plastic card to make more appear! Again i strip and very gently wade down to the wallet, and there it be again in my hand. “Ya old river!”

i learned my lesson. Being in a hurry is for chumps.

miLE 122. jULY 23. sAW a bAR up on the bluff above the river, stopped there trying to play music for free drinks or money. Amanda Nygard convinces an old guy named Ralph to play some fast old-time fiddle. All his friends, family, trying to push him, “Come on Ralph! i wanna hear you play fiddle before i die!” and he played some, amazing!

Carol and Corky invited us to their house for the night. Corky was a lockmaster on the Ohio River! He promised to give us a tour when we passed thru his lock. Now there’s the chance of a lifetime. We got drunk. A bunch of us hung out with Carol in her office talking some philosophy and expansive subjects. She offered to let us take one book each out of her bookshelf. i took a flower identification guide. Then i went back out and tried drinking a beer in the hot tub. i ended up back at the boats with a few others, cause somebody has to watch over them. Woke up wondering where my hat was. Matt fished it out of the river, headlamp still on it, must have fell off my head while i was sleeping and went right in the water. i was happy i slept at the boats cause apparently Melvin the dog made some kind of fecal mess back in their house… the one thing she asked us not to do. Oops oops!
miLE 137, siSTERSviLLE. niGHT fLOATY with The Wild Dragonfly tied to the Wisco Tinker, front to front. Beard to beard, as we say. We were drifting along, the town of Sistersville on the left, and spotted the lights of a barge coming upriver. I got on the pedal paddlewheel and started cranking to see if it would push both boats out of the way of the barge. It was working, slowly, but in good time to escape the channel. A barge appeared upstream too, but we were well on our way to being in the safe zone. Suddenly we heard these guys on shore yelling at us, screaming, what the hell do they want? One of them was waving a red gas can… “I bet they want us to come party with them!” “Should we go over there, whadya think?” We all decided, what the fuck? Let’s go see what they’re yelling about. Maybe they’ve got beer to share.

We head for shore and when we are close enough they explain it to us: since they couldn’t hear our engine, they thought we had stalled or were out of gas! The pedal power stealth engine! We tied the double long boat up to the dock and met the locals. “Come drink with us! We have a private club up here.” So we went, and they had to punch a code into a keypad at an anonymous brick building, when the door opened a huge palatial bar scene opened up beyond! Only a few people sat at the bar. The fellow bought us endless drinks, Jack Daniels whiskey. Wow, did we drink. Later I woke up back on the dock, laying there next to the Wild Dragonfly. Danica was standing above me shouting, “Wake up Rob! Let’s go night floaty!”

I got up. Ben showed up, Matt too, and David (I think he just took a nap on his boat while we were at the bar) we all got back on the mega boat - what should we do? Let’s go more night floaty! Off we went. A few miles downriver someone, well I think it was Ben, decided we should motor and that the way we had been drifting down was actually not the way we had been drifting down. At the moment we seemed stuck… David Eberhardt suggested that we had spun around and that’s why it seemed different. Danica insisted that Ben was wrong. Matt shrugged and wasn’t sure. Ben was feeling stubborn. So at full speed under the Wisco Tinker power, we charged upstream towards Wells island. I went to the back of my boat to watch where we were headed. I saw the island looming ahead, but before that, a huge stump field, giant snags poking out of the water! Doom!
i ran back to where the two boats were joined together, “Stump field!” i screamed, “Stump field!” Matt and Danica looked at me like i was asking them to wash my dirty underwear. i ran past them to Ben, doing the forefinger motion across the throat to indicate what i was screaming. “Cut it! Stump field!” i ran all the way back to the rear of my boat just in time to grab an oar, hear the Wisco Tinker’s engine die, and thrust the oar out as our momentum piled us into a snag which i successfully josted with the oar, no damage done to the Wild Dragonfly. in the distance i could hear David Eberhardt’s laughter ringing across the water. i went to confer with my night floaty mates, and David showed up in his john boat, Gator Bait 2. “That was hilarious! Whoo!” he was having trouble talking because of the laughing. “I’m gonna go anchor and try to sleep. Good luck you guys.”

Ben shrugged, “Ok, so i guess i was wrong. You wanna keep going?”
“Oh yeah!”
“Yeah!”

miLE 172, mARIETTA, oHiO. jULY 28 & 29. Marietta rocks. We met a great guy across the river, his name was Kirk. He had a boat, loved it, wanted to go down the river someday... He was caretaking a piece of abandoned riverfront property, so we camped there awhile. i rebuilt my rudder. Lots of tinkering with the Wild Dragonfly these days. The next night we moved up the Muskingum River a bit to join the Wisco Tinker and others, music making on a hot summer night, Brake Shoe Bruce even busting out his harmonica... The Muskingum River Boogie.

miLE 186. aUGUST 1st. bLENNERHASSET iSLAND. The channel side, a beach up by the head of the island. Eating an apple, listening to the Knotwells, making morning coffee. Hung up a sheet to get some shade. Know i’m kicking back. Heat wave continues, woke up and just rolled out into the river, jumped on in. You don’t get this in the city.

Yesterday in Belpre, across the river from Parkersburgh, we got ahold of the propellers we needed for the long tail engines. Young Props, they make die cast aluminum replicas of old trolling motor props, things that the companies don’t make anymore cause you don’t make the big bucks selling replacement props, you make the big bux selling a brand new trolling motor engine to someone. The people at Young Props,
(photo by zoe)

hope they are happy making whatever money they’re making, cause they saved my ass.

Literally, without the prop on the long tail motor to push me along i would have pedaled the whole way... pedaling a big ass boat is a lot different than pedaling a bicycle.

The engines work! Motored from the back side of Blennerhassett island to the channel side here and the motor purred, the prop loved the water. it is goodness. For some weeks now i’ve been pedaling trying to keep up with the modern pace of the flotilla, an exhausting and even dangerous effort. i considered just shoving off on my own and waving goodbye, but i’m not a hermit yet. i’ve spent enuf of my life as a loner. Got a few tows from The Larry piloted by Evan, a few tows from The Gelsamina, piloted by Amy and Dan. The dead engines actually provided a good excuse to hang out with these awesome people for entire days of boating... And its still good to be in the flotilla, hanging out with everyone, cooking huge feasts of dumpstered and carefully selected store bought foods. Kicking it at the fire, sitting in the John Deer folding canvas chair i found washed up in the bushes.

My thots often turn to what i will do after this river journey. Then i come back to the present, notice something next to me that is amazing, and the future goes away. This is where i live now.

a fellow nAMED sEAN from Asheville came on the boats for a long time, he was a self described plant freak and we went out looking for plants to identify, sometimes to eat them, such as: wood nettle, stinging nettle, sorrel, lambsquarter, chickweed, violets, sochani
(Cherokee word), cutleaf, coneflower, others... For so long i’ve been ignorant of the things growing around me, not knowing them, just seeing a carpet of green stuff growing. It is good to learn the history of these plants that i see every day, what can be eaten, what can be used as medicine. Now walking around town i see things growing, and know them. it’s important to me. i read in the paper about an academic study that found most people can identify hundreds of corporate logos, but can only identify twelve kinds of plants. What the fuck! We are so cut off from the ancient biological reality that surrounds us, there’s food growing wild out in the alley, on the sides of roads, but most people would never know. Food and medicine comes from the corporate grocery store and pharmacy, wrapped in plastic, stamped and approved by the authorities, self appointed gods on earth. We cannot now go back to the way life was lived, a city full of people could not gather enuf wild food to live on, but if every manicured grass yard was instead a vegetable garden, a whole cascade of fucking good things would result... good nutrition, plenty of food for everyone, pollution from inter-continental shipping gone, all the bullshit from factory processing of vegetables gone, mulching of waste to return to the soil for fertilizer, kids growing up tending gardens instead of staring at video games and television for hours a day, people sharing crops, people out in their yard gardens talking with neighbors, isolation and depression reduced, a reduction in mental illness, a new widespread awareness and appreciation for the life cycles of living things... a pebble thrown in the water, ripples spreading endlessly outward...

fROM tHE log bOOK

oF tHE wiLD dRAGONFLY:

miLE 202. IEE cREEK. Today ian and i pedaled the Wild Dragonfly fifteen miles. Epic exhaustion! This part of the river is incredibly beautiful tho, mostly uninhabited, we saw numerous bald eagles, herons. We also ran out of food and attacked the flotilla when we found it loitering at the mouth of the Hocking River. Luckily their blood sugar levels were normal and they freely gave us some snacks, no blood was spilled.
mILE 211. nOWHERE. The delicate sound of a screech owl singing a love song across the river, and the lover on the other side singing back. No, it was not an echo. it was love.

mILE 226, oLD tOWN cREEK. An excellent spot for Amy’s birthday party! it was the birthday party that was so good it made up for all the bad birthday parties we had ever been to. At this point, we were all family. There was a strange ritual dance, then a shadow body musical show, then a dance party by DJ Dan, and then the swimming with tiny leaping fish! i distinctly remember us all in the water, just our heads out, and all these three inch long fish flying out of the water, and then while i was looking at Dan a fish leapt out of the water and bounced right off the side of his face. He laughed. That sight is forever burned into my brain as a moment of wonder. Why? Because it was Amy’s birthday! i have no idea why the fish were jumping. Don’t tell me.

mILE 238, pLANTS, oHiO. Awesome rope swing and super sand beach. Couple of stray dogs showed up, a beagle and a short legged golden lab thing... They seemed to be a couple. There was a bit of a rainstorm and the short legger came on the Wild Dragonfly looking for shelter. He stayed the night. Cute little guy. i like cats, tho. in the morning Matt and Zoe were looking for the dog. They wanted to adopt the dogs, but decided it was a bad idea. “They look well fed, they probably live at a house up the hill.”

The dogs ran off in the night, we could hear the beagle howling, chasing after something. The next day the sun came out and we shoved off. We were down river about a mile and someone looked to the shore, “Holy shit!” There were the damn dogs, running along the boulders and fallen trees, following the flotilla! The beagle was keeping up, but the short legged guy, he was having trouble making the jumps... A chord was struck. The flotilla went to shore. The dogs were boarded, the flotilla continued on. There was cheering and clapping.

After some kind of wrangling, Evan took the beagle, and Matt and Zoe gave the nod to the short legger. Matt ended up with full custody of the short legger and named him Leroy. Still together to this day. The beagle didn’t last so long. She liked to roam, and Evan had not the patience to wait a full day for the beagle to return. They took her back to
Plants and let her go. She wasn’t happy confined to a boat anyway, and, well, maybe she was getting tired of waiting around all the time for Leroy to catch up to her.

**miLE 241, rACiNE.** This is a dry town. Keep going.

**miLE 265. pOiNT pLEASANT, wEST viRGiNiA.** its Friday and we are here at the Mothman Diner drinking coffee. Ten boats still on the river, David and his boat *Gator Bait 2* left, and the Dolly Olivine the Destroyer has gone ahead, they are down near Huntington. The rest of us are here on the brand new concrete wharf in Pont Pleasant. A pleasantly drunk wharf rat told us we could tie our boats up here as long as we liked. Thank you very much, sir! We got the boot the next day from someone who wrongfully claimed a higher authority, but this new guy had a gun and a uniform, so we left. You know how those people are.

Moved on up Kanawha River into a backwater where there are public launching ramps. A pleasant place, Ian and others made a huge vat of cheese soup on the *Wild Dragonfly*. Melvin bit me three times after i stepped on him in the dark. Why would you make a dog that was all black? Shit! i was still mad when Melvin showed up for some cheese soup and i kicked him off my boat. Danica, Melvins best human friend, and i yelled at each other a bit, then they both left. What a fiasco! Cheese! We all made friends again the next day. Melvin just looked at me like he didn’t know what the fuck i was talking about. i like some dogs. i prefer cats.

**miLE 273.5.** The most insane rope swing i have seen on the Ohio River. An abandoned coal terminal, a fat barge line as thick as yer arm made of colored synthetic strands, this was tied to a conveyor belt arm structure thing jutting out over the river. The swing started about forty feet above the river. You could swing out on that thing and let go, by the time you landed you were out in the channel! i didn’t go anywhere near that thing. i’m a cat person with dog tendencies maybe. But i enjoyed the dog people jumping.

**miLE 280.5. cLYDE cORNELiUS,** a self described “wharf urchin” with river rat tendencies, invited us to his property as we landed on a muddy
shore below the dam. A tall, handsome fellow with a head of brown hair, a solid man. His teenaged daughter seemed very shy. They had walked down to the river to meet us! He knew we were coming down by listening to the lock radio channel, and then spotted us with his binoculars, which was easy for him since his house was there at the top of the river bank. He kept a fastidious log of all the boats he saw on the river. His property was much more hospitable than the mud we first landed on, so we floated down there. Clyde lit a lantern for us and we all played cards: me, Matt, Zoe, Paula, and Evan. Clyde Cornelius had to get up in the morning, so he went to bed, and we tried not to be too loud. Thanks, Clyde!

**MILE 309.** A new arrival to the flotilla. Jessie sang “lullabye of the leaves” on the beach here. Who is this person? What is this song? I have no idea. I was struck by her radiant energy, multiplied by the fire on the beach at the water’s edge – the original theater stage!

**MILE 317, CATLETSGBURG, KENTUCKY.** Moored up the Big Sandy River against a concrete wall, spent last night there. We found out this concrete structure used to be a lock & dam when we climbed over the grass covered levee to get into town we came across a guy painting a mural of the old lock & dam on the inside of the concrete flood wall! A strange circumstance! We asked him for directions to a diner.

Doodles Café. Breakfast with coffee. Ben, Danica, Jessie, Sadie, Sean, and I played hot dice & read the paper while waiting on hashbrowns, eggs, toast, & bacon. There’s a cease fire in the Israel/Lebanon war, more than a months bloodshed stopped today.

The engines on the Wild Dragonfly are working better everyday. New sparkplug, carburetor adjustments, new propeller. Huntington library had Chiltons Small Engine Repair, help me understand this Briggs&Stratton and the Tecumseh engines. it’s like an immersion learning process, make the things run or suffer…

The food dumpsters are good in Catletsburg, our first Kentucky town. All’s well.

Last night there was a serious episode aboard the Wild Dragonfly. I was sleeping on the boat, on the big box that covers the engines in the middle of the boat. I awoke with a feeling that all was not good.
Something about a noise, the way the boat was moving, something. I sat bolt upright, grabbed my glassed and looked about. The Wild Dragonfly was drifting away from the concrete wall, already out of reach of the Maudrey Jean, moored next to me. I had an anchor line out upstream, now swinging on that, I was being carried by the current on an arc out into the channel, which in The Big Sandy River at this point, was no more than fifty feet away. I jumped out of bed and checked the front cleats, pulled the shore line in. It was not tied to anything! At last I reeled the end of it in- nylon threads melted into a long hard spike- The campfire! in the night the Wild Dragonfly had drifted, moving the rope over the coals of the campfire… A noise attracted my attention, I looked upstream. I saw thru the darkness the widely spread green & red lights of a tow boat pushing barges, bearing down, a blinking amber light in the middle counting off the seconds I had before it reached me. Coming down with the current on this little river, it was moving fast. And there I was, swinging out into the channel. I considered diving in, swimming for shore, saving my life. That would not be a problem. I could do that. But my boat…

I called out to the Maudrey Jean, “Maudrey! Hey! Maudrey!” Usually one of them would sleep on the boat. I heard someone stirring about, and Zoe’ grumbled, huh, wha? fukngrrumble, what? She appeared in the back of the boat, I attempted to explain the situation with few words. I could now really hear the wall of water the tow boat was pushing downriver. I threw what was left of my shoreline in her direction. She got it, hauled me in. Easy enuf. I met her on shore, we stood standing on the concrete of the old lock wall as the barge went by, it’s wake thrashing the boats on the concrete. Zoe’ patted me on the back and went back to bed. I tied a surgeons knot on the burnt rope ends, found a tree well away from the smoldering coals of the fire pit, and went back to sleep on the Wild Dragonfly. I lay there, thinking “Am I going to be able to go back to sleep? Oh yeah. It’s incredibly improbable that such a thing would happen twice in one night!”

I fell right asleep.

miLE 355, PORTSMOUTH. This town held the first grocery compactor that I ever crawled into, crawling in front of the big hydraulic foot to reach the booty. Once I was inside and saw how it worked I wasn’t
scared of compactors anymore, and there was more food in there than we could carry….

I'm not sure how this happened, but we met a mature woman in town named Emily. She was a professor of speech at the university, now retired I believe. She invited us to her house which was a really nice old house near the levee wall, and we met her dog whose name was Grand Army of The Republic! She was very sweet to us, and invited us out to the VFW hall where some musicians were playing. The Class of '76 was having a reunion at the VFW hall, it was a strange scene for us… Emily told us about how Bob Villa from This Old House tv show was going to come and shoot at her house. The camera crew showed up and shot footage, Bob Villa never did. When she watched the tv show, she saw they just digitally inserted him in front of her house, like he had actually visited there! She was like, “I thot I was gonna meet Bob Villa! What a rip-off!”

The next morning Emily and a man friend of hers came down to the flotilla and she interviewed each one of us for an article in the university newspaper. A patron saint of the river.

**miLE 363. aUGUST 21.** On a Kentucky beach across from Shawnee State Park, cooking pancakes with Jessie on the *Wild Dragonfly* using yogurt we made out of milk in gallon jugs that was dumpstered and then left on my deck as a joke. Jessie suggested we make yogurt, by unscrewing the cap a bit to let the gas out, and letting natural fermentation do the rest. A couple days later- it worked! Yogurt pancakes, the best ever! Wild fermentation on the Wild Dragonfly. We decided to call it Boagurt.

Oh, last night. Shawnee harbor! First there was the boat police coming across me and Caleb playing guitar and asking if we liked Dave. “Dave?” we said, “You know, Dave Mathews.” “Oh, yeah…Uh, I’ve heard of him. Guitar player…”

Then we hung out with the Italian opera singer, Barbara Kay Phillips Palma, and her husband Alfonzo on their houseboat, drank wine with them. Alfonzo kept saying, “You’re not hillbillies are you? I fucking hate hillbillies.” Hospitable people, their boat was right on the outside of the dock where you enter the harbor, and they saw us come in, and invited us to come over. Quite the couple. I appreciated their friendliness. Here we are, a bunch of river rats, possibly even with hillbilly tendencies,
hanging out with a retired opera star and her grumpy husband. Only on the river!

Then a woman who said she owned a pizza place, said she would bring us pizza and milk shakes. Yay! it got dark as we waited, and so we were drinking beer as the park closed and there’s a dozen of us lounging around there as fishermen pulled their boats out of the water, onto trailers, and drove home. i hear a woman’s voice from the ramp, “Soft serve!”

“Soft serve? Milk shakes!” i say to myself, and leap to my feet, climb over someone to be the first one to meet this wonderful goddess of the river and her cornucopia of milk shakes and pizza. Suddenly i find myself staring into the eye-burning mag-light of a cop, an open beer in my hand, totally busted!

“Police officer!” she says again. Aw man. “Officer” sounds just like “Soft Serve”. Who ever else was behind me saw the reality and turned around. i alone jumped down from the wall and fished for my identification. She made me pour my beer out. But she didn’t cite me for drinking in public. We told her our story. She was cool. For a cop, you know. Said that most of us should leave, and just one boat wait for the pizza milk shake lady. So we did. Crossed over to the Kentucky side of the river, tied all our boats onto one birch log sunk into the sand, leaving the Wisco Tinker in Shawnee Harbor to acquire the booty. When they at long last came chugging over to our camp, following the blazing campfire we had going, they told a wild story of being boarded by a hoard of angry dude cops who tried to confiscate all their beer. Somehow they talked the cops out of it, saying they weren’t drinking it in the park there, only had it on the boat. Which was true. And so the cops gave them back their beer. Boy, this really isn’t the big city, eh! ha! What ridiculousness tho. i don’t think we are the usual troublemakers around those parts… just… weird. possibly even- amusing enuf to have our beer given back to us.

Even so- that Ohio side of the river was sure a mixed blessing, wild manic mood swings of good and bad! Kentucky has such a chill style… it was a good night to savor multiple pizza slices and sample all the various flavors of milkshakes while watching shooting stars burn thru the atmosphere. God bless you, pizza milkshake patron saint of the river,
if you’re into god blessings. it was just what we needed, and we will never forget.

photo by Erik

dOWNTOWN ciNCiNNATi, the Hooters Dock. They let us tie up a couple days, and once the entire Hooters restaurant wait staff came out to say hello and welcome us to cincinnati. Patrick was out on the dock to greet them, the rest of us were by then tied up to trees on the shore, hiding in our boats, under tarps. We heard some of the conversation, “What are you doing?” they asked Patrick, “What are YOU doing?” he replied, aaaahhh, what the fuck! Hooters, the working class playboy bunnies.

One night a fellow from a catering restaurant attached to the same complex brought down three huge trays of buffalo wings, regular, spicy, and teriyaki. We lived on those for a couple days… i kept eating them long after everyone but the dogs had given up. A dead animal disrespected by not eating it, thrown in the trash! Ultimate insult to life.

Matt got attacked by a tree on shore here, stabbed him in the eye. He was totally fucked up and thought he had blinded himself. Seems like he will pull thru. He was just laying on the ground with his hand over his eye for a long time. Then a cop showed up, told us we had to move off the shore, and Matt was like, “is there a hospital nearby?” trying to direct
the officer into an activity that might be useful to humanity. Instead, the cop just detained us and ran our IDs thru the radio.

Badger! How did we meet Badger? He saw the boats while walking over the bridge and he just came on down! He offered to be our guide to the entrance of the fabled abandoned Cincinnati subway tunnels. One night we piled in his lady friend’s car (dammit, what was her name?) and drove out to the spot, and there it was, a train sized double steel door with a lock on it. We could surely get in. We looked around for an hour before figuring out how to crack it. We pulled the huge doors out enuf to slip in thru the top, and one of us slipped thru that gap, dropped down fifteen feet inside, and broke a bolt cutter on the lock from the inside. Shit! We were all going to have to climb to the top of the doors and drop down on the inside. Some pieces of rebar sticking out of the concrete made good handholds, and they were slightly polished, meaning we were not the first ones to discover this entry method. We all did this sketchy maneuver except Badger’s friend. And there we were, in the vast tunnel, miles long, built for a subway system in the 1920s but then abandoned as the great depression killed the economy. The tracks were never laid, the subway cars never ran thru this tunnel… We walked thru two tunnels, side by wide, connected by small archways. One tunnel had a giant water main for the city running thru it, five foot tall vaguely sinister mega pipe.

We walked for hours down the tunnel, coming into a station platform we would jump up, run around exploring weird rooms with head lamps, checking out the sporadic strange graffiti that people had done over the years. Seemed like we were miles deep, some of us turned back. Some of us went on. We were low on water, no food, jesus, how long had we been down there? Hours? Lets go to the end! Yeah, but then we have to walk back… We found a station with a staircase that led up to the street, thru a locked grate i could see a street of Cincinnati, someone walking by, people out there talking to each other. it was surreal, after being in this dark, silent, dusty tunnel for hours, to see the world above…

There was an inscription on the tunnel wall that said, “The Ghost Train comes at 4:20”. The weird thing is, when we climbed back over those doors and dropped back into the land of the living, bushes, grass, insects talking, human city humming, we stood looking at the skyline,
and there was a digital clock on a tall bank building. The time was 4:19.
We had just missed the Ghost Train.

FROM THE LOG BOOK
OF THE WILD DRAGONFLY:

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5th. It’s been four days since I’ve seen any of the other boats in the flotilla. Are they above me, or below me, or both? Who knows! It’s been good to be alone.

If you can’t be happy with yourself, how can you be happy at all?

The water is a beautiful rippling blue mirror today. Some tobacco leaves I harvested are tied up under the driftwood tarp roof, blowing in the breeze as Thing Number One, the orange Briggs & Stratton motor of unknown horsepower, pushes the Wild Dragonfly downriver. The small white Tecumseh, Thing Number Two, I’m still trying to get that back working, it backfires & dies. Rebuilt and cleaned the carburetor twice already, once with “Joe Boat Doc’s” help at his marina up Big Bone Creek. Maybe it’s the spark plug…

Rations are meager—little bit of rice & beans, a can of cream corn, a handful of potato flakes. Havta cook on a stick-fire on shore now since my stove went to the bottom up in Cincinnati, flew overboard in some wild waves… Nothing to really complain about.

MILE 533. ON LABOR DAY I BECAME A HUSTLER. It was yesterday, I pulled into Smugglers Cove Marina just before the Markland lock, tied up to the courtesy dock, and worked the crowd that was out enjoying the sunny day. Someone came up to me and said, “I’ve never seen anything like that out on the river.” I answered all the usual questions, where ya from? Where ya going? How long ya been out? and then after they were nodding and saying, “I always wanted to do that!” then I pitched my zine at them, ‘The Strange Voyage of the Leona Joyce’, which I wrote about last years river journey on the Mississippi River. Pitched it to one and all, just a few bucks a piece! An unusually G rated zine for me, which I felt confident to put in the hands of grandmas, grandpas, parents and children without causing a lynch mob of speed boats to come chasing me down after they read it. No, I was sure this
was subtle enuf to enter the mainstream and not be instantly rejected. Subtle enuf to pass thru the entire human culture.

So there i hustled my product. i was completely broke, which i found to be an excellent motivational device. i had my picture taken with a young boy, a young girl, and some older folks. One fellow and young girl on a jet ski zoomed off and returned with money to buy a zine from me! Crazy! i pulled in $58 in a couple hours. From broke to stoked. i was asking $3 a zine, some people just gave a five or ten. This made me pretty happy, i never had any luck just straight begging or flying a sign for money, i figured people looked at me and thought, “He looks like he could dig a fence post hole...” and i never made any money at that.

Here i was making a living hustling my self published writing to regular walking down the street people. River people. Things are a little different on the river. Like our flotilla for example...

The people in Smugglers Cove Marina were awesome, i asked them where to get smokes and they said, “Two miles upriver, in Warsaw.”
Aw, damn! But then Kevin, who i believe was part owner of the place, offered to give me a ride there and back, well thank you very much, and we went on a little joy ride.

**mONDAY, vEVAY, iNDiANA.** i meet some old guys hanging out in their yard, i walked past it going into town, and then walked past it going back to the Ohio River. The younger guy called out to me. We started talking about the river. He came down to the boat with me, then when he saw it he went back and got his uncle who was breathing with a nose tube and oxygen tank. The nephew drove him down to the wharf and they walked out on the dock where the *Wild Dragonfly* was tied.

They were so excited, i told them all about the boat and the journey so far. i didn’t even feel like pitching the zine to them, it was just good to hang out and talk to someone that day... The nephew told this hilarious story about how when he was a kid the uncle would make him dive into the river to grab pieces of coal that fell off barges, so that the uncle could burn the coal to heat his house! The nephew was mildly resentful, “He didn’t even pay me, that was dangerous!” and the uncle was like, “Yeah, but he stayed warm, didn’t he?”
i smoothed up to the wharf in Madison, Indiana. it was a grassy slope all the way down to the water. i tied up onto a big driftwood tree that highwater had dropped further up the bank. A woman walking her dog came by and stopped to say hello, her name was Jane. i invited her aboard and we talked a bit. She was friends with a fellow named Paul Hassfurder who lived at Payne Hollow, which was originally built by Harlan & Anna Hubbard, two people who built an old style houseboat and spent much of their life on the river, in the houseboat, and then settling in Payne’s Hollow to live off the grid. Jane said she would get ahold of Paul and tell him i was down there.

Soon enuf, Paul shows up! And then as i am talking to Paul, Jane, and some other folks, the rest of the flotilla shows up! i was downriver of them this whole time. i had gotten so used to being behind, pedaling my ass off, and now with the engines working, the first day i lost sight of them i ended up way ahead!

it was a perfect reunion. A reporter from the town paper came down and was interviewing some of us. We talked with towns people who came to see what floated in. We talked with a woman from the college who was involved in a River Sustainability project there. We made arrangements with Paul to meet up at Payne’s Hollow tomorrow morning, and he would give us a tour of the place. The only sad note, The Larry was somewhere upstream, and we had no way to contact them…

We got some supplies in town, had a few drinks in a pub, then as the sun set we shoved off and headed downriver for Payne’s Hollow so we could wake up there in the morning and not miss Paul. As we left the wharf at Madison some teenagers, who had been gagging down something out of bottles at the top of the hill, came down and threw rocks at our boats. They only got up courage to launch this assault as the last boats were leaving, which meant the Wild Dragonfly. i was feeling a little spirited and turned my boat with motor running straight for them. i thot for a moment that i would run straight onto ground, grab the sword we had found last year in a dumpster, and run them both thru. And then my years of socialization came back to me, all those rules they program into your head, actions and consequences, all that. So i turned the rudder hard starboard and buzzed by, staring them down. i’m happy they didn’t throw another rock at me. Bullies really trigger something in me…
i had to deal with that shit all thru school, fuckin asshole dudes, ganging up on me, beating me down. Sometimes it’s really difficult to rise above.  

So i reckon i dealt with the irritation this caused me by pouring camp stove fuel on the deck of my boat and lighting it on fire while blasting music on the car stereo i had hooked up. it didn’t much occur to me that other boats in the flotilla might think i was on fire… First Dolly Olivine the Destroyer turned around and came back upstream to check on me, “Are you alright?” Tony yells at me.  

“You guys are going the wrong way!” i yell back.  

Then The Maudrey Jean pulls alongside, Paula and Zoe both yelled at me when i told them i was intentionally setting the boat on fire. “it’s not really setting anything on fire, just burning the fuel.” i think i tried to bum a beer off them. They were mad at me. i couldn’t explain myself at all. “You know, like, um, set the night on fire! Right? Like that! Aaaarghh! Alright, alright, i’ll settle down. Let’s tie up and hang out a bit. Got a smoke?”  

it was a beautiful night running, all these boats in a line, there was something really great about that short cruise around the bend to Payne’s Hollow. A beautiful night running.  

in the morning Paul woke us up by ringing a bell. We went and hung out at Paynes Hollow all day. Paul was great, told us stories, gave us food. it is a beautiful place, this house built without power tools, and lived in without power, still to this day, old style. No running water. Harlan & Anna Hubbard played violin and piano together, read books, worked the land. Peaceful, no modern life here for them. They didn’t want it and what it brought with it, just a simple life.  

Paul lives on there, doing his own thing. Sculpture. We saw some of his found-river-object sculptures set up on the wharf. Whatever the high waters deposit on shore is what he uses for the sculptures. He sent me a photo of one he did after we visited him, it was an amazing dune buggy, made with driftwood and a car tire he found there on shore. From trash to art in Paul Hassfurder’s hands.
miLE 603.5, lUOiSViLLE, kENTUCKY. We were here a couple days, exploring the city. The Dolly Olivine the Destroyer got out of the water here and they went home. I guess when the time comes, you gotta get off the river. The rest of us continued downriver. As I pedaled the Wild Dragonfly past Joe’s Crab Shack, the entire balcony full of people began clapping, and some guy in a tie-dyed shirt jumped up and yelled, “Awesome!” The river can instantly transform you into a superstar.

miLE 646, sEPTEMBER 14th. Stopped in Brandenburgh, Kentucky. A ton of young kids hanging out on the wharf, we talked with them a little. Went up to find a liquor store. Found it, bought liquor. Asked the proprietor where the grocery store is, “Kroger is up the hill, a few miles.” We told him we were on boats, no car. “Here, take my truck!” and he gives us the keys. Guy had never met us in his life. We’re driving! Holy shit, so strange to be going forty miles an hour after weeks of going five miles an hour on the river, aaahhhhh!

miLE 663, tHE bLUE riVER. Here we are motoring and see some of our boats up the river, the Larry and the Phillip, and Carolyn Lambert’s pontoon boat! She and her crewmate Marisa Manheim were making the return journey upriver to Pittsburgh. The flotilla pulls in to share dinner and drinks, evolving into a wild all boat party at night, dancing to music… Caroline is doing a university funded documentary project, interviewing people as she travels the length of the Ohio River. (www.ohioriverlifeboatproject.org) I think she wanted to interview some of us, but the party got a little too wild to make a comprehensible recording.

miLE 677, wOLF cREEK. sEPTEMBER 17th. My stomach feels funny today, think I ate too much pork at that pig roast we went to last night. A fellow named Dale invited us, we met him first on the river in his pontoon boat where he invited us to the pig roast birthday party, then he buzzed us on the river in a yellow supercub airplane! We could see right then how this birthday party pig-roast was going to be. Wild-ass! Self described red necks, horse & ATV riding country yahoos. Kind enuf to
let us join their feast at a guy named Eddie’s birthday party, he turned 28. it was Eddie’s land. We played horse shoes with a fellow named Vern who was an expert. A lot of people were playing corn hole, where you toss these bags fulla beans and try to land them in a box with a hole in it. Originally the bags had dry corn in them, but now everyone just put beans in the bags. it’s still called Corn Hole tho. Zoe went for a ride on a drunken cowboys’ horse. We saw them walking after the ride, he put his hat on her head. When Big Wendy saw Zoe with that cowboy and the hat on she exclaimed, “Oh! Zoe!” And then we all fell down laughing…

Later in the night a “How many pull ups can you do on the rafter pavilion?” competition started and i retreated to the Wild Dragonfly, played some guitar and was happy. i could still hear the voices from the party, and the frequent thumping noise of the bags hitting the corn hole boxes. A bit later i heard things amp up a bit with the roar of four wheeler engines racing around the field, shenanigans!

Jen picked up a stray kitten outside a grocery store back in Brandenburgh. She doesn’t know if she can keep it. She named it Kentucky’s Finest. i like the cat a lot. i would take it, but i plan to be riding freight trains after the boats. Seems like that might be kinda difficult, cat on a freight train. cruel even. Kentucky slept in my sleeping bag, and is always jumping onto my lap like it knows i love cats. Matt says i look good with the cat. Damn.

**THE cURRENT** is really good now after lots of rain. We have been drifting like mad, 12 miles yesterday. Saving on gas, just kicking back on the boats, cooked a split pea soup yesterday, reading, sleeping, hanging out. it’s good, i was getting fucking tired of motoring all the time, just steering, watching the shore go by. Sometimes it just gets to a point where you think, what the fuck are we doing out here, where the fuck are we going?

We are on an empty part of the river, empty of humans that is, not many towns, few stores, no food dumpsters. The wild is nice, hearing coyotes every night, and being able to see numerous stars cause there’s no light pollution from larger towns or cities. Little fish jumping by the boat.
i keep trying to stay in this real time. The present. The only time i have any control over. it’s not easy. Every day, focusing on that. You cannot take your hand off the rudder, or the boat goes in circles.

**Morning on the River** is towboats and fishermen, maybe two wet feet as you head over to the nearest coffee party boat, and then an urgent need to dig a hole up the bank and shit in it. Joints crackin muscles stretchin, dogs runnin, ducks quackin. No bullshit.

**Mile 687, Spring Creek.** Camped at a vacant campground, the season being well past for summer camping. A secluded spot up the creek. Fireflies come out at night, all along the bank where the boats are tied. i awake in the night startled out of a dream by a chorus of coyotes howling in unison, all matched the same perfect note, it had such a power my dreams were infected with wilderness...

**Mile 692.5, Derby, Indiana.** it was raining lightly when we pulled into Derby just before noon. The weather-bot broadcast was saying the rain would continue. it looked like a good town to hole up in a bit, nice dock for all the boats to tie up on, a roofed pavilion with picnic tables. Now all we had to do was find the liquor store. The place seemed deserted, nothing but rain drops moving. Soon enuf a growing procession of people came down to the wharf to meet us and hang out. A newspaper reporter showed up and did some interviews. An old fellow named Alvin played good old guitar songs, “no, your flag decal won’t get you into heaven anymore, it’s already overcrowded from yer dirty little wars…” Then the son of a shantyboater, James, arrived, a man in his twenties. He shared his home-made blackberry wine with us, excellent. James played a shiny black guitar, he played this song by Bon Jovi “Livin on a Prayer” damn that was funny. i think i was the only one besides James who knew the lyrics. A woman whipped up a feast for us, baked lasagna, salad, everything, an apple and a peach pie. it was incredible.

Unfortunately by the time she showed up, a number of us where exceptionally drunk. Well, what can ya do. Rough people, some of them, out there on the river. Ya gotta expect that. James’ father finally showed up, his name i don’t remember, and he played a couple songs too. He had arrived in Derby on some raft, just going down the river like us. He
fell in love, got married, had a child, he liked Derby! His wife told us a little about his shanty boating days, “He was broke, no money for food. He was eating that itch weed.” talking about wood nettle, which grows prolifically along the river, and is highly nutritious.

The rain stopped. Someone brought us split wood to make a fire with, and we did. The music playing and story swapping went late into the night. The hospitality in Derby was exceptional, i only hope that we expressed our gratitude as fully as we should have. if not, then once again, thank you people of Derby! Long live Derby!

miLE 703. aLONE on the Wild Dragonfly, some time to relax on my own after the debauchery last night in Derby. Ran out of gas in the middle of the channel here amid two foot high rolling wind waves. A barge coming upstream right at me. Have you ever tried to fill a gas tank on two foot high waves? Fuck! it’s no joke, people get run over by towboats. You gotta know how to roll with the wind and wakes and your boat, you gotta pay serious attention! Also you need a guardian angel. Thank you.

miLE 711, cLOVERPORT. sAW iT pAiNTED on a house here, “Freedom isn’t Free”, four blocks away an empty wheelchair sits rusting and overgrown by weeds.

Standing on a deck that hangs over the wharf, looking down at the Wild Dragonfly tied to the rocky shore, looking out at this horseshoe bend in the Ohio River. A christian man pulls over in his car on the way to the dentist, walks up to me, and puts twenty dollars in my hand. Said some voice inside told him to drive down by the river. i thanked him. he got back in his car and went to the dentist. i now have a grand total of twenty dollars, and a smile for my fellow beings.

The wind is blowing cold, October coming up. Sun sparkles on the waves are talkin to the rocks on the bank of Cloverport. Half of main streets windows boarded up, red brick building right up at flood stage of the river. There’s a granite memorial for all the war dead. Empty streets and plywood windows ghostly beauty. The Riverfront Deli, an ice cream shop, is open, a fellow working donated some fresh cookies to me. A hunter on the wharf gave me a bunch of frozen venison. Met a couple dudes who came to look at our boats, they were so enthusiastic, claimed we were on the trip of a lifetime. Everyone i met in Cloverport was
beautiful and generous. When I first walked up to the main street from the boat, the town looked deserted, I soon found it was more full of love than people. Cloverport!

**This beautiful boat** is a bubble under the rain and on the water. Rain above, river below, I am dry inside, shielded from the wind and I am warm. What an amazing thing! It’s driftwood from the river and a huge plastic billboard banner that was found in the dumpsters of Pittsburgh, a little bit of rope, and there be shelter. A space-ship. A floating human nest made of junk discarded by humans and material scrapped out of nature’s trash can, the ground. I made a summer home out of it. Here I sit on it, up a little tributary, waiting for the rain to end. Breathing with a tiny smile. The sun shines thru these heavy white billboard “tarps” as they surround the Wild Dragonfly, wrapped around the driftwood frame of the roof, huge black zeros and commas, letters, and the word “for” on the roof, random numbers. The rain has brought leaves down from trees to lay on the roof and I can see their silhouette as the sun shines around them, green and brown autumn leaves scattered among giant black letters and numbers...

The foam filled wooden pontoons float on the rain washed brown water of Anderson River, the mud of the slippery bank waits for the clumsy footstep to laugh at your slide into a soaking. Giant logs jut into and out of the water, by magic I didn’t hit one while pedaling up here in complete darkness and silence before the storm last night.

**Mile 731.5, September 23rd.** Second day up Anderson River, which is right next to Troy, the second oldest town in Indiana. Rain all day yesterday and today. 3:33pm now, we are thinking of cutting loose in this wild current, back to the Ohio River. It will be a wild ride if we do! The level in this river rose at least five feet last night, while the flash lightening was like a strobe light to the rolling beat of thunder.

I can hardly describe the scene late yesterday as The Maudrey Jean, The Larry, and The Lighten Up Doggy Daddy took blow after blow from whole trees racing down the river and slamming into them as they lay tied to a fallen tree that was above water yesterday and now was deep under the rushing river, they were no longer near shore but more in the
middle of the channel! From shore, it was terrifying to watch. A huge log aimed right for them, Evan saw it coming, was saying something like, “Oh boy, oh boy…” Blam! A solid hit! The *Flying Chaka*, the barge tied to the front of the *Larry*, is hit and one of the 55 gallon plastic barrels that kept it afloat popped loose and went downriver. Evan was standing on the bow of the *Larry* with his arms out, kinda surfing the current, trying not to fall in. i was in the peanut gallery on shore, “Oh! Damn! You see that shit?” Somehow, i dunno, maybe i covered my eyes at some point… Some computations and rope wrangling occurred, and eventually they made it safely to shore.

Today we cooked the deer steaks the hunter in Cloverport gave to us. Now we are ready to go boating- except for the length of the Anderson River it will be more like an amusement park log ride.

We untied one by one, screaming and hollering all the way as each of us surrendered to the flow. First the Wisco Tinker, then me on The Wild Dragonfly. i attempted to motor, couldn’t turn fast enuf, crashed into the other side of the river, shut off my engine, and got out the paddle. A low branch almost took off the roof, i had to paddle epic strokes to get back in the middle, but then the raging current carried the Wild Dragonfly down the middle all the way to the Ohio River. At the confluence the raging current suddenly stalled out and dispersed, instead of a big splash at the end of the log ride there was a wild upwelling and whirlpool of currents, the boat bobbed up and down, rotated side to side, slowly floated out into the river. The Maudrey Jean came down next, The Lighten Up Doggy Daddy tied onto The Larry, then The Phillip, and The Gelsamina. We all enjoyed the chute ride and the Ohio was calm for wind and good with current, it felt good to be out of the saturated mud of Anderson River. We cruised down to Anderson island and found a good beach on the backside of the isle. Nice flat spot on top, we got a fire going quick to dry out our soggy clothes, shoes, and feet. The island was soggy too, it looked like the bases of the trees had been recently scoured out by water when the island was covered by the river. We found some dry wood under the skirts of the trees and got the fire burning hot, it felt good to be out in the open, cicadas and crickets instead of raindrops.

Ah, but the rain is what made this fire so amazing…
miLE 756, owENSBORO. it’s good to be around so many people who care about me and how i’m feeling, makes being ill not so terrible. When i showed up in Owensboro and saw the Shadowbuilder sitting on the concrete wharf completely out of the water i thot, what the fuck! i had been running all day, running my engine hard against the wind, trying to get to Owensboro and a hospital to get medicine for my vicious ear infection. i tied up on the dock, but the ramp was underwater because of the rains. i had to nearly go swimming to get to shore. There was Dave and Wendy, a hole in the side of The Shadowbuilder, the boat had sunk in the storm. They had a tow truck pull the Shadowbuilder out to attempt a fix, but it didn’t look good. They spent much of the money they had left on the tow truck. On the up side, a kind retired guy named Bob Wright had been helping them out.

A car fulla people was also there: Sweet Tooth and Annie, also Joel and X. from Ashville. Here i stood at this reunion, holding my ear with one hand and occasionally grimacing in pain. i asked Annie to give me a ride to the hospital. She drove me up there, also gave me an Usnea tincture. i got the prescription at the hospital, but had no money, and they would not fill prescriptions for free. What the fuck! i’m dying here, assholes! Wendy loaned me the money for the medicine. And six months later, i even paid her back! She also had some pain pills for me to take, and Jen gave me ibuprofen. Three cheers for friends!

it was the next day, someone complained about us occupying the courtesy dock, said they were unable to use it cause my boat was tied up to it. You still had to wade thru waist deep water to even reach the dock! Cops showed up to kick us off. i had a little table set up to sell my zines there, and strangely, a person out for a stroll walked up to the cop car and asked the cops what we were about, and the cop recommended that the guy come down and buy my zine! Ha, i should use that on the back cover: Recommended by police. Weird. The guy came down and told me that, then he bought a zine!

A kind old couple hung out and chatted a long time. it was getting cold, the wind was blowing. They came back awhile later with a bunch of clothes and blankets.

The car full of our friends drove to find the flotilla upstream and i hung out with Dave & Wendy and Bob Wright. What an awesome guy he is! Relaxed around a fire out at his place near the French island.
Marina. Gave us places to sleep. Bob Wright, the best you could hope for in a human.

**miLE 765. tHE fRENCH iSLANDS.** i ended up here on the dock last night after the flotilla went in the back channel behind Little Hurricane island. My motor died and i was taken downriver from the current, i was in the front of the flotilla, and i saw them turn into the island to tie up for the night. Shit! No way i could pedal back upstream in this current.

i hooked up the v-belt to the paddlewheels and pedaled across the huge channel to make the French island Marina, where i knew the flotilla was going the next day. it was a beautiful sunset floaty, tho a little scary because the rains had made the river fast, by the time i made it to the opposite shore, the current had swept me down more than a mile. Landing on the dock was a challenge as well, mostly from trying to avoid crashing into the fancy boats tied up all along the dock. i made it, and some old long hair beer drinking wild ass walked out to say hello, smoked with me, and told me he’d gone down the river “a bunch of times”. He demanded to know if i had any “mules” on my boat. “Yeah, well, i got these two engines-” “No no, Mules!” he growled, and then explained taking a five gallon bucket with something for weight in the bottom, tying a rope onto it, sinking it down until the current caught it, then tying it off to the boat, and letting the undercurrent pull you downriver. i promised him i would try using mules.

The next day the flotilla showed up, and a kind lady gave us a rack of ribs and bought a zine from me. She said that someone from upriver had called her and said, “Keep an eye out for them, they’re the new face of shantyboating!”

**oUT tHERE, sOMEWHERE. sEPTEMBER 27**\(^{th}\). i feel like hell. Terrible ear ache not going away fast enuf, second day of antibiotics and ear drops. Everything’s been a blur, my immune system on overdrive, so my lip is busted out in painful cold sores… Engines are down, cant figure whats wrong. i think i burnt an engine running all day into the wind so i could get medicine for my ear infection. Getting towed by the Larry and the Maudrey Joan. i don’t feel like functioning anyway.

Everything is broken.
Wind is blowing, cant pedal the paddlewheel into that, storm is brewing. There's a supercell cloud in the distance, couple of anvils shooting off it. We just locked thru Newburgh lock & dam, the water is so high in these pools that we only went down a foot in the lock.

cRESSCENT mOON wAXiNG above the clouds, the wind waves hit the beach and cause a twinkling of glass as the pieces of green, brown, white, glass mingle on the bank. A wave chime.

The *Natchez* just went by, a sternwheel steamer running on oil. She blew a big blast from her horn as she passed our anchored flotilla. Those boat are like older siblings to us, beautiful, benevolent.

My ear infection is clearing up. What days of pain and sedation! My middle ear cleared of infection and popped open, after a week i can hear thru it again.

miLE 804, hENDERSON, kENTUCKY. sEPTEMBER 30th. There’s a cool library in this old part of town, like in most river towns. Sam & Jen met a woman at a street fair named Carrie Sights, a fashion designer from New York who offered to buy Sam & Jen’s jeans off their bodies. Sam & Jen said no. But Carrie Sights let all of us stay in her bungalow overnight anyway, fed us soup and had an entire drawer full of M&Ms. Plain and with Nuts. We drank a few beers and watched Waterworld on a big screen. What a crappy movie. Some of the boats in it are cool. There were double beds in the bedroom, i slept in a bed, in a bedroom. So weird! i had gotten accustomed to my water bed on the *Wild Dragonfly*, the gentle rocking. Here in this box i couldn’t hear the wind, or birds, or coyotes howling or fish jumping, just tomb silence. Kinda nice tho cause it’s colder outside now. Our boats are summer boats.

miLE 829, mOUNT vERNON, iLLiNOiS. oCTOBER 2nd. Coming into town a wild wind from around the bend hits me and my pedal power ass is blown to shore, i have to throw my anchor out to keep from being pummeled against the barges tied up at a terminal here. The wind dies down, i pull myself back out with the anchor, using it like a grappling hook, and pedal into town.

Soon after our arrival a circus breaks out on the wharf, a parade of town folk, 3 cop cars- 3 cop cars? That must have been about ALL the
cop cars in this little town! i put up a sign and started selling zines. Moved a few “units”. The cops moved on, no hassles, just curious like everyone else. There is an old tradition in river towns, when something interesting floats in, you go check it out!

miLE 858, oLD SHAWEETOWN. A fisherman gives us numerous huge flathead catfish. We pick up some beer, share smoke with a guy on a harley who came down to the ramp, and then headed a mile down to the newly re-named Fish Fry Island. Yeah, sometimes its just easy like that.

miLE 881, cAVE in rOCK. Geejay’s Diner, fifty cent coffee. Fifty cent coffee! Cool people riding bikes in this one street little river town. And oh yeah, there’s an awesome old cave here with bats in it, and huge ceilings, and there was music playing and recordings of music playing in there. The cave has a wild history, and it’s really beautiful.

miLE 889, eLiZABETHTOWN. This town is riddled with violent, selfish, nasty people. Or maybe everyone else that lives there is cool, and we just happened to encounter the two complete assholes of the town in one night… First a guy kicks us off ‘his’ beach, and then while some of us were at a bar in town a violent psychopath attacks us! Elizabethtown bummed me out, not recommended!

miLE 934, pADUCAH. This is it. This is our destination. What a feeling of triumph and sorrow. The future comes creeping around: what now? What ya gonna do now?

mY gAURDiAN aNGEL wAS dRUNK. The final port in our three month journey down the Ohio River: Paducah, Kentucky. Sold my boat to a fisherman named Don Blake for fifty bux. About ten minutes later a city cop shows up and tells us our three days of loitering there have exceeded the 30 minute time limit for the public courtesy dock. Timing! Don and his grey haired fishing buddy jumped aboard and paddled wildly from the dock to the rocky shore, this stingy and fearless fellow was the rightful inheritor of the Wild Dragonfly.
i helped the remaining boats in the flotilla move upstream to the shore where the old Ingram Barge Company headquarters used to be. Now just an empty docking terminal and empty building with a security guard watching it. Private property, so the cops would have to get a complaint from the owners before kicking us off that shoreline. Last year we ended up in Paducah, after going down the Mississippi River and then 50 miles up the Ohio River, and the owner of Ingram Barge Co. invited us to visit him if we were ever in town again. We hoped the friendly offer was still standing.

Found some lengths of thick copper cable buried in the mud, at high water they would have been underwater, so by legal right it was legitimate salvage. We stripped the insulation off on the deck of the Wisco Tinker and sold the metal at a scrapyard in Paducah.

While engaged in this endeavor some old friends dropped by the wharf, Willie Prescott and George, old mechanic scrapper guys who hauled out our boat, the Leona Joyce, last year. In town we met some fine new friends, Catie & Landee of the Yeiser Art Center, the Bawn in The Mash musicians, and Trish the Dish. Landee kindly let the flotilla store our engines, life jackets, and random crap in her garage so the boats could be sold or given away. We ate at Kirchoffs bakery as frequently as possible! Not open on Sundays! On Sundays we huddled in our boats...

After a few days there in Paducah, i decided it was time to leave. Packed up my bag, tied on my bedroll, strapped the guitar onto all of that, and rode the old junker bike to the trainyard. Now i did my research and thot i was about to ride west thru St. Louis and on towards Kansas City. Jumped up in the gondola of a loaded coal train, laid down on the rocky black stuff, and watched the sun as we rolled outta town. Three months on the water, and now this freight train, kinda felt good to be moving on, but also terribly sad to be leaving the river.

Soon i realized from the position of the sun that we were headed straight east. Wrong fucking way. Then i gave up and enjoyed the ride. Whee! Where am i going? Who knows! Less than an hour later the train slowed down and stopped, then began backing up. Must be the end of the line! i poked my head out of the gondola and saw nothing on the horizon but a continuous mountain of coal. The sight was alien and terrifying. i hoped i wasn’t already inside the perimeter of the power plant, with homeland security and their itchy political trigger fingers...
climbed down the ladder and dropped to the ballast rocks, started walking towards a car crossing where some pick up trucks were stopped waiting for the train to pass. Maybe they could tell me where the hell i was, which way to the highway to start hitchhiking.

As the train continued slowly backing into the coal yard i kept hearing small crackling, popping noises. i looked around, looked up, was it a high voltage power line overhead? no, there was no powerline… The popping got louder as i neared the street crossing. There was a truck with it’s window down, i went up and said hello to the guy driving.

“Did you just get off that train?”

“Yeah. i was trying to go West. it went the wrong way.”

“Hell! it’s a good thing you got off, they turn those cars upside down to empty em’ out!”

He pointed the way down the road to the highway. i started off. The engine units came chugging along, reversing the train, belching diesel smoke. As i walked i heard a truck come up alongside me, previously trapped at the crossing on the other side of the train. The truck matched my walking speed and i turned my head to look. The scruffy looking guy driving yelled at me thru the rolled down passenger window, “Get in!”

i didn’t even have my thumb out.

“Where ya going?” i ask him.

He leaned over and opened the passenger door, and growled with friendly insistence, “Get in!”

A minute ago i was stranded on a dead end train, and now some guy offers me salvation. Guardian angel.

Enuf questions. i got in.

“Thanks for the ride.”

What followed was a conversation with a man just off work and with a few beers in him, a fiery lust for life in his reaching out to help me. i could not possibly reproduce it, a conversation that every hitchhiker has had with some fearless patron of traveling folk. When you live like that, traveling in a way that puts you at the mercy of the kindness of strangers, you will eventually have that conversation, and will get out of the vehicle thinking that you could never forget this wild character who hit the brakes and opened the passenger door for a complete stranger.
“Did you hear the fireworks?” he asks, and waved a bundle of bottle rockets between us, “I was bored waiting for the train, so I started shooting it!”

Ah, the cracklin, poppin noises...

“You want a beer?”

“Oh, hell yeah.”

We drank our beers and talked. He invited me to his house for supper.

“Name’s Randall.” he says.

“Rob.”

Randall told me a story about picking up a hitch hiker a few days ago who had a little golden dog. Said this guy had been going down the river in home-made boats. Matt & Leroy!

“I’m one of those people.” I told him.

Oh shit, small world. We talked about the river, Randall loved it. He worked as a diver for years, going down for the big shells that he would sell to companies, the company would cut out a big slug and round it off, implant that river shell marble into and oyster, the oyster coats it with pearl, and then they sell it for a ton of money. Cultured pearls. Looks the same as real pearls. Randall also salvaged old sunken hardwood logs and sold them to lumber mills. Harder work for less pay, compared to the pearl clams.

As our stories concluded and we drove on, Randall became upset that I was trying to get off the river. “Why did you quit? You could keep going! Why are you trying to leave?”

None of my explanations were acceptable to Randall.

“I’m gonna take ya back to yer boats. See, the reason I think I was out there, why I picked you up, was to take you back to yer boats so you could complete your mission. You did not complete your mission!”

I couldn’t help myself, I was laughing like hell, but he was completely serious, and said it over and over, “You did not complete your mission!”

“Alright, maybe yer right.” I admitted.

I noticed that as we are driving that when we come up on a stop sign or stoplight that Randall is using the emergency brake pedal to slow down, pushing down on the lever with his left foot with it’s click! click! click! of the ratchet notches, then to release the brake pulling the brake
release handle with a loud, *sproing!* and we would be off rolling again. The regular brakes obviously did not exist. Sketchy. Randall was good with the e-brake tho, he had definitely done this before.

At last we arrive at Randalls house. His young daughter appeared in the backyard, told him that her puppy had been run over by a dumptruck earlier that day, on the road right in front of their house. His wife was upset and crying about it. She looked at me suspiciously. We went out in the front yard to play with the remaining adult dog while his daughter drove her remote controlled mini 4x4 truck around the yard. The dog attacked the truck as it moved, Randall attacked the dog, and the little girl screamed wildly. Complete chaos. Then the batteries died. The sun was going down. We went inside. Randall’s wife was cooking dinner, she offered me some.

We shot the shit a long time, Randall telling stories with excellent bragotry, his wife constantly worried and looking as if she might burst into tears at any moment. At last Randall declared it was time to take me back to Paducah, to the boats. To finish my mission. She started crying.

i offered to stay the night, we could go in the morning, no hurry! Randall wouldnt hear of it.

“i’ll be alright!” he assured her, hugged her goodbye.

i felt bad! Puppy dog run over by the dump truck, husband driving around without good brakes with some rough looking character that just jumped off a freight train… i was polite, smiled, tried not to look like a maniac ready to go on a drug binge fueled bank robbing spree and looking for a partner in crime. i think i did alright, she smiled a little as Randall comforted her with quiet words.

We hit the road, west to Paducah. Now the talk went into the heavy shit under the evening darkness – the off planet beings who seeded human life on this planet – god, the universe, the big picture. Randall also told me there was nothing legal about his truck and if we got pulled over he was fucked.

“i know that wont happen tho.” he confessed his faith, “cause i was sent to return you to the river, so you could complete your mission. Do you believe that?”

“Yes.” i mumbled.

“Do you believe that?!” he turned, leaning in my direction, the truck swerved a little.
“i believe that!” i said excitedly, “i do! Here we are, right? Heading for the boats! i believe it.”

Randall seemed satisfied. He had his mantra now, Finish the mission that you started! and the more he said it, the more i believed. i really did believe. i just couldn’t figure what the fuck it was i was supposed to finish... There must be something. What was the mission we started? To go down the river, to see fish jump, birds fly and sing, to have fun, meet strange people, see old river towns, explore strange places, play music, write songs, write poems, swim everyday, swing off rope swings, swim naked at night and kiss and fuck, drink and celebrate birthdays, drink and celebrate being alive... god, what was there left to do? Float all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico? Maybe...

We stopped on the edge of town at a liquor mart, Randall bought two twelve packs, and we drove on thru town to the wharf. Here was the steep cement slope that ended in the Ohio River, the launching ramp for boats on trailers. Seeing the river again felt like coming in sight of your own front porch. Home again!

We began rolling down the slope and suddenly i tensed, “Hey, you think the e-brake can handle this hill?”

“Oh yeah.” Randall assured me as the truck shot down the hill like a lead sled. i held my breath like i do when flying off a rope swing and into the river. i heard the brake go down, click! click! click! click! click! click! click! click! click! Fuck! How many clicks were left? We were slowing, slowing. Randall turned and we pulled into a parking spot at the bottom of the ramp right next to the river and killed the engine.

A big smile spread across my face, we were facing the boats upstream now, i could see a lantern burning on the Wisco Tinker, “Looks like somebody is home!” i was excited for people to meet and talk with Randall, and also to help us drink all that beer.

i gave Randall a tour of the boats, introduced him to folks, we hung out by the campfire on shore. Caleb, Ben, Patrick, Sam, Jen, the last boat punks left on the river. Someone offered Randall one of the abandoned boats.

“If i didn’t have a wife, kid, job, house, i would join up right now. You run the boats, i dive for the shells. Make a lot of money, we would live comfortably!”
After a long time of tale swapping and beer drinking, Randall decided it was time to go home. Took a couple of beers for the drive home and left us the rest. As he drove back up the ramp i wondered again about this flow of events.

*What was the mission i had to complete?*

The next day Ben hands me a tape recorder, “Hey man, you havent recorded those songs you wrote this summer.” Ah shit, this must be it!

So the very first recordings of those songs happened there on the rock pile below the Ingram Barge Co. abandoned headquarters, the water there at my feet. And that felt good to do. A rough recording with cracking off-key voice and Matilda barking in the background, perfectly river.

Soon enuf i found my way out to a highway that headed West, stuck my thumb out, got the first ride outta there. i couldn’t try to get out on the train, Randall said he wouldn’t want to catch me trying to escape the river again.

Hey Randall, i wish you and your family the best. Thanks for everything. We’re still on the river. Always will be. Except when we make it to the Gulf. Then we’ll be on the ocean.
i COUNT 52 PEOPLE who came out on the boats, either visiting a while, or went all three months from Pittsburgh to Paducah. There were 11 dogs and 1 cat. One dog and one cat were picked up as strays along the river. There were 13 boats and 1 barge. 6 boats went all the way to Paducah. The boats: The Gator Bait 2, The Larry & The Flying Chaka (sunk) & Rob’s Dinghy (missing), The Wisco Tinker (retired), The Cody (sunk?), The Gelsamina, The Lighten Up Doggy Daddy, The Headless Matador, The Dolly Olivine the Destroyer, The Maudrey Jean (retired), The Wild Dragonfly (sold), The Shadowbuilder (retired), The Phillip, The Dory.

mY lUXURiOUS liFE iNSiDE tHE eMPiRE

fUCKiNG piZZA. tuesday, rain day! but i didn’t havta work anyways, still a rain day, when it rains that is a rain day. rain day. its actually not raining right now. its hot and sticky. maybe its me that is hot and sticky. hot tea, and skin covered in sugar juice from the wine i started last night… hot n sticky. the nearest pizza dumpster is the little ceasars in the hi-lake center, their slogan is ‘hot-n-ready’. sexual pizza! They know what they’re doing. Hot-n-Ready. take that pizza home and fuck it. sure its been done. people are bored, isolated, lonely. and there’s that pizza, mysterious saucy little triangles… thousands of people have jumped their pizzas. more often than jumping the pizza delivery person, i would guess. pizza fucking is safe sex.

my first job out of the newspaper was delivering pizzas. for dominos. nasty anti-choice corporation. one time i delivered a pizza to a lady near the horse stables at the county fairgrounds in santa rosa, california. she was all drunk, pinched me on the cheek and shook my head back and forth using my jowl. she told me i was cute, “Arent you the cutest little thing!” i was stunned. my face turned red. then her
boyfriend got between us and mercifully pulled us apart. he offered me a beer. “No, thanks, i gotta drive…” he was very hospitable, “Aw, just one beer, you can handle one beer, right?” he counted out the money and i got the hell outta there. now if that happened today i would stay and drink the beer for sure, cause that would slow me down getting back to work where the manager was tossing toppings and barking orders. and maybe if i showed up with a beer on my breath i would get fired and then go do something worthy of a human life, something fun, like everyone should put down our guns and stop fucking shooting each other! share a box of beer on the road to death. hey man, i’m not flirting with your girlfriend, and i’m not flirting with you, just hanging out with my new friends… but this last slice of pizza is starting to look good… listen, you mind if i take that and go in your bathroom for a little bit? what? just fuck it right here? right in front of you both? you dare me? alright, now we’re talking, we are about to do some genuine living right now… it’s hot-n-sticky. a beautiful evening. i came in thirty minutes or less. yes i did. you know it’s true. the good old days never fucking happened. thrust on into the future.

energy source: delay the orgasm for three days, delay the orgasm for a week. a challenge to resist pleasure in the moment to redirect the energy away from climax, stretching it out over a longer time, the energy available to your mind body as an electric jolt or steady current. this method lets you stay hungry. redirect that energy wherever you need it. then when you don’t need it anymore you can let it go and relax. this really works, if you’ve got the self control to do it.

good boy, bad boy. it seems the nice guy isn’t as sexually interesting as the bad guy. i ask, why is that? a genetic memory that aggressive sexual partners might indicate a better “survival of the fittest” mate? or socially, a nice guy is probably having the same sexual feelings as the bad guy, but he’s not expressing them in an unmistakable way. the nice guy goes and gets a beer for someone and chats it up as a way of flirting, but never quite crosses that boundary… is he just being friendly? who knows! maybe even he doesn’t know. more ambiguity in a confusing world. the bad guy is aggressive and uses expressions that are not ambiguous, there’s no question if he attempts to kiss someone what
that means. Just trying to be friends? Definitely not! His lips have moved beyond words...

The nice guy may act out of fear of being ridiculed if he is rejected while making a bold romantic advance, a failed pass, the humiliation! the bad guy, having self esteem to spare, shrugs rejection off and moves on… perhaps, he imagines, the love interest will reconsider!

The bad boy is courageous and honest about his attraction, a boundary crosser. Some boundaries are alright to cross, you have to cross them to know they are there, and if it’s alright for you to cross them. The nice guy- too polite to go near the fence! It seems like a lot of work to get anything out of him, a tough nut to crack! and maybe he doesn’t want to admit his sexual feelings, even to himself. Just when is this nice guy flower going to bloom? most love interests will wait and see, and while doing that, here comes the bad guy! See ya later! Poor lonely nice guy.

i think i’m a nice guy. Sometimes i can play the role of bad guy, but it’s kinda scary and a lot of work, and i’m lazy about it! And i’ve become accustomed to being alone. Still socially awkward after that damn childhood thing… But being the bad guy is lots of fun and a rewarding pastime. Some nice guys can artificially invoke the bad guy, with alcohol usually, not always with the desired result. Poor wasted nice guy gone bad. Damn, people are weird.

at the clinic getting tested, she had to mark me as ‘gay’ cause ‘queer’ was not a box on this computer program: a device calculating millions.

nothing to complain about. i mean, it’s all relative, right? i’ve got two legs, two arms, two parents, two sisters, nothing to really complain about!

Monday. sitting in this little warehouse, temp labor hole, white plastic lawn chairs to wait for a crappy job, army recruiting posters and pamphlets everywhere. a poster that says “soldier” and it’s those holograms style where you walk by and the image shifts, from a group of diverse citizens in street clothes suddenly they are all in uniform. agh! fuck! it’s that easy, just one step and everything changes, yer all suited up and ready to go die in the next dumb ass fuckin war to end all wars. splat!
styrofoam cup coffee sucks. almost noon. seems like i wont be sent out on a job today. another morning pissed away waiting on the man. maybe i should get the hell out of here. a secretary sings along with oldie songs on the radio. she’s living, that’s nice. i like that. i should get the hell out of here. the other secretary has the laugh of a crazy person. i feel the tiny moments that add up to my life slipping away here, become ash, burnt. spent. i should get the hell out of here.

Tuesday. another day, another- fuck! no dollar yet. been here at the tempt labor hole since 5:30am, 7:30am now. seems like my sleep schedule has adjusted to waking up at 5 in the morning and come here to sit on a plastic chair. human warehouse. waiting here for a phone call from the man, waiting to be activated, plugged in.

i have these strange dreams at night, wake up every hour looking at the clock, body aches and strange pain…fuck! my life is slipping away. waiting. waiting for a shit job. how happy i would be for a shit job, cause then i could stop waiting, stop wondering how many days i’ll have to sit here before achieving my goal of a few bucks dropped in my bucket…how long will i drink this foul coffee just for something to do! farting, listening to the rain hit the corrugated sheet metal roof of the warehouse, stare up at the old brown wooden rafters, ponder the silver round heating ducts, always with a tense ear aimed at the desk where the secretary might call out my name, offer physical movement, stimulation! and i could even get paid for it! damn, is this the slow season? they’ve only called out a couple names, but there are a dozen guys just sitting here, broke ass labor zombies, pacing, shuffling, talking shit, drinking coffee, watching a tv like it was the holding area in jail, reading 3 day old newspapers...oh shit, is that yesterdays paper? Oh great, gimme that!

9am now. been here three solid hours. i guess it’s the rain, outdoor work slowdown. i can feel it…my life slipping away. all of our lives slipping away.
away, all the time. some go happy, some not. some don’t realize they’re going. i should watch tv with them instead of going insane. the second hand moves. i think i am about to get the fuck out of here.

**fiSHiNG iN tHE wASTE sTREAM**, built a bike out of random parts and bikes at the Grease Pit, four hours digging thru shit to find matching pieces. a puzzle with pieces missing, but you can see the big picture. back tire has a fatal wobble on a busted ass spoke, nipples too rusted for trueing the wheel and further. but damn it rides. slow leak back there too, gotta pump. felt good to build something three dimensional and real and granting powers of movement in this three dimensional city, open air breathing, living.

i feel cold and uninspired. on the verge of inspiration or desperation, waiting for the sun to start working outside, waiting on a month of time to get in a house and have a room, waiting on a sign of what to do in a world of endless choices: why am i here? too much waiting! what the fuck! i realize i cant be waiting on a sign from outside myself, something to usher me into my seat. i need to focus on what i’m doing and ignore the rest of the world’s doing that i have no control over. waiting on something that aint never gonna come, fuck that!

last night i had this dream that minneapolis was on lockdown curfew thing, no one could meet, party, drink, nothing! we find ourselves sneaking into a place they would never expect to look for us, the tallest building downtown, crawling cockroach-like up huge dark marble steps, corridors, up stairwells, elevators, we reach the roof where in darkness a mass of kids is sitting, talking, hanging out, triumphant in just being together. someone turns on a bright ass electric light so we can see each other and big wendy jumps up saying, “NO LiGHTS!” and she douses the cop beacon, which is quickly replaced with the small glow of dozens of candles all around us. then we talked and passed bottles round and i woke up before anything bad could happen…

here i am, minneapolis. years of history here. years that grew roots. beautiful years, sordid years. i see a lot of ghosts on the streets here, in people’s eyes…i have to be conscious everyday to stay out of the museum of the past. it’s been visited so many times i have the exhibits memorized, the lessons learned. being aware of the present moment is the only way to bring a true smile to my face, gives me the ability to
reach out to people and look at them without fear, suspicion, hate. 
sorrow no longer needs to be drowned with alcohol or other dumb ass 
addictions. i don’t have to grab my backpack and run into the abyss to 
escape the shit. i decided not to run, i decided to live here and attempt 
happiness.

Sometimes i feel like a piece of yellow corn stuck on the outside of a 
turd, things look bad and shit stinks, but i am a smiling little yellow corn 
riding the spiral wave into oblivion. Wheee! Some days are better than 
others…

Courage to do what makes me happy. Expectations of others be 
gone! This is my life. Re-invent myself. No need to defend from attacks 
of ignorance. It is not my responsibility to educate the ignorant. No more 
apology or hanging head. I have distributed apologies to those who 
deserved them and extinguished my self hate. Now it's time to live.

In my laugh i can hear a double fisted middle finger salute to the 
entire mad fuckin world…i’ve got people who understand something of 
who i am and what i’ve been thru, we share a love, understanding. They 
are also my family, we save each others lives. Some of us, a little 
scattered. We know who and where we are.

i have the ability to be aware, to gather true success and fortune. 
these people i love, these people that love me. all the rest is void, 
shrugged shoulders, cruelty, manipulation, fake ass concern. i know, i’ve 
been there. too much consumed in my own mysteries to see others 
around me, unaware of how my actions affected them. ive reached out 
arms with the intention of loving and they withered and shriveled from 
neglected roots and the connection died… where eyes once burned from 
a face with the glow of recognition and love, now i see cold staring rocks 
behind bullet proof glass. What the fuck does that mean? Fuck it. Shake 
it off and let it go. The world is full of it.

That’s one thing about christianity that sometimes makes sense, that 
we are all born in sin, cause everyone fucks up, everyone will fuck up, 
and it’s good to have redemption, and not just be a fuck up forever and 
have no way to escape the cycle of hurting people. a baby is born 
innocent, but it’s parents… nobody is perfect. there’s gonna be fuck ups. 
some worse than others. and if they think they’re perfect, those are the 
ones to really watch out for! people who have no idea they are fucking up 
and passing that shit onto their kids, pretending to be perfect, lying
every day until the lie becomes reality, they will all continue to fuck up with no consciousness to inform them that they are causing people to suffer, no way to break the cycle and make good! No way to be happy, no redemption! Robots, doing what they were programmed to do.

Here’s a few recommendations that might be appropriate to your situation: runaway from home. get deprogrammed. fight or flight. you can’t fight them on their terms. run! fukn run until you are safe and then figure shit out. ask for help. After you get it figured out, then shake it off and let it go. Find one trusted friend and stand back to back with them.

tWO pEOPLE alone in a room. what really happened. two perceptions. alone, in a room. try to tell a friend what happened to me when i didn’t realize myself what happened to me. it was… bad. gimme a smoke. yeah, thanks. i could use a drink. fuck. forget it.

dECEMBER 2nd, 2007. nIGHTMARE. i woke up this morning with that, “What the fuck was that about?” feeling. i interpret dreams by the feelings they evoke in me. in the dream i was attacked by a woman that i knew driving a car, trying to run me over with it, over and over, screaming at me thru the windows. i had an orange yellow plastic gun in my hand, so i started shooting at the car. She got out and ran at me, i shot her, dozens of times, small red welts appeared on her flesh, but it had no affect on her, she coughed a little. She got even madder, i ran away back to some event, i had friends there. Everyone was wearing really goofy dress up clothes out of respect or to kiss someone’s ass who was coming. The woman who tried to run me over was coming, and now all her friends knew i had shot her, and were giving me weird looks. Her friends had no idea that she tried to run me over…

This dream was about the woman who sexually abused me, about how she has never admitted she did this, never apologized for doing it, and all the social anxiety and continued trauma that has been caused by that. Nightmares.

i realize this morning that i still have little trust for potential lovers because of that sexual abuse. Romantically, i am still terrified to let anyone get close to me. This experience is with women, i havent encountered any potential male lovers in years. Maybe that would feel different. I’ve never been sexually abused by a man. As friends, i am
closer to women than men, always have been. I spent a lot of time with my mom and two sisters growing up, most of the boys I knew just beat the crap out of me.

Now there is a wall. No one gets in, and I don’t get out. It’s safe that way, get it? At the moment where it might be appropriate for me to kiss someone, or reach out somehow, make a pass, have fun- I run away, I freeze up. No one has been so motivated to climb their way over the wall, a fact which is kinda sad by itself… But we live in a world where “the man” is supposed to be the aggressive one, right? People don’t make passes at me. I just don’t radiate the right energy, you know? I think everyone can intuitively see the wall, feel it there, a wall that has graffiti on the side that says, “Don’t even think about it!”

I haven’t seriously dated anyone in a year and a half… not since the abuse. The moment a romantic interest shows the slightest negative aspect- it’s all over. No way am I going there again. Sometimes if I make it a week or two with someone, that’s enuf of that, this is going on too long, the next thing you know there’s going to be trauma. So I run away from it, or end it. I wonder if I have to leave this town to feel safe again. The person who sexually abused me still lives here, I see her sometimes, she stares at me, gives me looks. Fucking bullshit. It resets everything back to zero. At last she respects my boundary and has stopped trying to talk to me. That’s something at least. The shit inside my head tho, I know that’s gonna follow me wherever I go to.

The sexual abuse was first mental and emotional, but then later had physical consequences where I hurt myself. Before the abuse I was doing well, I had quit smoking, was dating someone I really liked, doing fun things I had never done before. During the sexual abuse I demanded cigarettes from her, I started smoking again to deal with what was happening. A time bomb was planted inside me. I didn’t understand that I was being sexually abused, I actually thought I was answering her phone calls and going over to her house to support her cause she was depressed and suicidal. I would actually tell people I was ‘going to do support’, and I was being sexually abused and not realizing it! What a fucking world! The bomb inside me went off one night after drinking and loosing my glasses in the lake while swimming. Loosing my glasses seems to be a trigger for me, I think from school days when bullies would beat me up, blurry figures and unfocused fists pummeling my body…
That night after the swimming party it all came uncorked. I smashed everything in my room trying to fight it. I threw my accordion out my window. My new lover attempted to stop me, I wrestled her to the ground. Then I followed my accordion and jumped thru what was left of the window. In the backyard I climbed on the hull of the boat we were building, hit myself in the head with a brick, screaming wildly, threw bricks down towards my friends, screamed out the vile hate that had been bottled up in me. The trust between my new lover and I was destroyed.

I had no idea the following day, as I sat around in a circle with my friends and my lover, I could tell them nothing to explain what happened. I didn’t come to understand that I had been sexually abused until six months later. It never occurred to me. The stereotype was controlling my mind. How could a strong man be sexually abused by a woman?

This is how. Sexual abuse is someone using their power to get you to do what they want, and that power can be physical, leaving bruises, DNA, or that power can be emotional, psychological, and the only visible signs of that are in your behavior… Six months after it happened I was on a train ride back from the west coast, reading a zine about sexual abuse, about the parameters of it, how to tell what is abuse, and a light shone into my brain. I understood. Cried a lot. In some way I also felt good, because at last I had identified this fucked up feeling inside me that had been there for half a year, and I knew that by naming it and recognizing it’s existence, that was the first step to heal the fucking wound that had been ignored, bleeding, hurting, bleeding…

Time. Does time really heal all wounds? After two years I feel a little better dealing with it, my friends help me by acknowledging it. But maybe I’ve just become accustomed to it. A lot of scar tissue is built up, like a wall… But scar tissue is part of healing. Scar tissue is tougher than normal skin. It’s pretty hard to hurt scar tissue.

October 23, 2007. I love the punk we are doing. It makes sense to me. Dammit, that word. What does that word mean to me? Nothing to do with anything, everything to do with everything.

Like all words, there are as many definitions for it as there are people who speak it. I converted to punk when I was about 23. I know
some young kids now who were born into it, at the same time i was getting into it. i wonder if they are gonna rebel against punk. they should, if they’re not happy! fuck this shit, sometimes i’m not happy, and i think about just becoming a hermit, building a shack in the woods and occasionally showing up in town to remind myself of why i live completely alone. i also think about disappearing into the queer club scene and just partying the days away, or grab fists fulla cash! i could do all of it. Its my damn life, eh? Oh, the balance!

i’m sitting now on the old park bench at the top of the hill, the highest peak in powderhorn park, yellow maple leaves fly off the trees straight at me, spinning, swirling, branches and trunks sway and they all make noise, the sun shines down strong for a late October day. This has got to be a good day. Yesterday fixed me up good after the day before of barely keeping my head above water. i looked forward to death on that Sunday! Nothing! Nothing! Broken! But then Monday! isn’t punk great. Nobody defines that word for me, but me. We are alive. So fuck you.

Earlier today, thrash extends the invitation of ynez to come and eat from a five gallon bucket of sushi that she brought home from work, and will, britta, ian, thrash, and me from the Shitbiscuit go over to Disgraceland and stuff our faces. i only ate a roll and a half cause i had plans to eat at the punk rock church dinner in two hours. unlike some people who stuffed their faces with sushi like they were about to be executed! Then we are back at the Biscuit and preparing for the ride to church dinner over by Loring Park. The golden hour was
upon us and the ride was beautiful. There we meet a round table full of friends, all people at sugar beet harvest, the Fargo and Wahpeton crews. We crowd around that table and get high on food and hobnobbing! Allie turns out to be the secret butter lady, going from table to table cramming a styrofoam cup full of butter! i put my coat on backwards and flora said i looked like a robot, then i moved my arms crazy and fell out of my chair. i got up, slightly embarrassed, but happy that people had yet one more thing to laugh at, went and stuffed a plastic bag full of baugettes, and went outside. Here we stood hobnobbing and shooting the shit, obstructing the entrance for those going to the church service, who somehow seemed completely fine with it and only a little terrified of these food-high beet punks loitering and figuring where to go party… we rode outta there a critical mass, about a dozen of us on bicycles, taking the streets back to the Shitbiscuit to recline until show time. Tea, beer, my homebrew wine concoction “sutter home bum”, and two monkey candelabras that tessa gave me, i played “nothing matters and what if it did” by the john cougar mellancamp, and “the river” by bruce springsteen, and then at last it was to the show, and epic bicycle ride east down the greenway to the river, up to Franklin Avenue, over The River, on up to University Avenue and to the Cockpit House, where none of us had ever been before. Friendly folks, several bands played, but i only saw “USA is A Monster”. Keyboard crazy rock. Definitely stoner music. The ceiling in the basement was so low, and huge pipes hanging down that all i could see of the band was a few red lights on an amplifier and occasionally a glimpse of some crusty blonde haired creature working on a six string, once or twice the disembodied head of the drummer appeared between the densely packed bodies. i thot i was just going to hang outside, cause of no money (the sugar beet harvest? check is in the mail! maybe next week!) but then as i vocalized that, people started shoving money into my hands, Kait, Jeffrey, Cinque… and inside i went, tho i almost accidentally handed the long hair leather jacket door guy my to-do list instead of the fiver, and i said “ooops!” and he said, “Oh im so high you could have got away with that!” Shit! My favorite part of being at the Cockpit that night was standing in the basement, my head banging on some radiator pipe, surrounded by crazy music, and thinking, “This is ridiculous. This is great. i love that everyone in this room is just standing here, sucking down this music, this world.” Also i really liked
watching Cinque drink the Sutter Home Bum and then start shouting, “NOBODY MOVE! THIS IS A FUCK-UP!” When we left outta that place we were headed for the Bedlam Theater, i got on my bike and headed down University Avenue, coasting down that long tall hill. When i got to the bottom and about to turn onto Washington Avenue to head for the West Bank, i was alone, nobody else in sight behind me. Well, never look back. i went by the Bedlam and it looked dead. i went home and ate another sushi roll with some fried corn tortillas accompaniment. Then i turned on the radio and went to sleep. There’s something about the radio playing at night, it keeps me from having the nightmares, keeps me from waking up and thinking about the bad things... sometimes you spend so many years in darkness, just trying to figure out where it went wrong, what to do with this thing...

The radio, commercial free radio station. That music, those voices, pull me into the present, keep me there. Music becomes the encouraging voice of a friend. The past, the future, these don’t exist in the moment that sound goes in my ear, that sound demands that i listen, and i wake up hearing a familiar song on the radio and smile. there’s nothing else.

tHE sQUATTED gALLERY
a pOEM a dAY aT tHE hAGGARD bABY cRiB

hOUSE hAS eLEVEN more days. they haven’t paid rent since july. rent strike. landlord has disappeared and the bank is taking back the house. i’ve moved into this old room on the first floor. grabbed a mattress from the second floor, threw it down. eleven days left of no rent.

eLEVEN dAYS of no rent. tonight i am fucking shit up in these poems, typed on the back of the eviction notice. found twenty bux on the pavement outside the Aldi store, bought myself cream cheese won-tons and sweet-n-sour chicken at K-Wok. belly full and once again the alphabet at my fingers, surrounded by friends, three houses within a
block full of my friends a city full of other houses, even more friends, friends in restaurants, cafes, bars... feels good to be here after six months of traveling, experimenting with other places among strangers, making friends for a few weeks or a few hours, then moving on.

these minneapolis friends are five years rich some of them a dozen years, people from california where i came untied from my moorings and floated away. realizing the madness the world had stacked up for me, like the mouse that just made a break for it and scurried across the floor. keep running little guy, they’re right behind you.

ten days left of our life in this house. “little florida” kids called it. some wild parties. drinkingsmokingcryingfuckinglaughing, cooking, every day, people were eating. shoving food in their mouths, every damn day! and what glasses of water they drank! marathons of sleep, and droopy eyed melancholy. bicycles repaired and vegetables fried then dropped over rice. cakes baked. refugees sheltered, music made, songs written, immortal things.

love.

the rain turned to snow tonight, falling in great flakes shaped like bowls as they fell thru the thick air, a blanket for the slush freezing, and we made pictures of life, and we made tacos, half a dozen people crammed in the kitchen, ten by ten foot kitchen, chopping, cooking, steaming, frying, joking, laughing, spastic on caffeine and yerbe matte and B vitamins and food high.

yeah. ten more days.

photo by sarah pantera

i find myself thinking about the future. when am i going to leave this city full of friends? i am thinking now, i don’t want to leave! but also
sure i don’t wanna stay. and so. where am i going? realize that i am there. im already there. i am where i want to be now and the future is nothing.

**niNE mORE** days left of lil’ florida house. nine more lame ass poems to write, and one of them might keep the smile on my face

**siX bANDS** tonight. ice outside. hot smoke room, biscuit gravy belly, heavy, wild dancing. city still out of shift for me, reminders of why i left. fuck this shit.

This shit rocks.

**tHE bUFFET** in the kitchen is nearly cashed. nothing left but salad and a few biscuits. late night drunk, make do with a little butter and bottled zing, a guitar begins to… longest night of the year

**i cAME hERE** to remember why i left. all these old places and paths activate the old thots inside me, like a magic trick. knots that i spent years to untie, suddenly i catch my fingers going thru the motions, coiling back around making loops passing thru and around, tightening. fuck!

new places and new people make me aware of what i am, what i still have inside me but they do not trigger the knots. the only thing i have to deal with is each moment with them, in that new place, each moment, and i can see where the paths lead and how the rope is tied. i know where not to go, i know what knots can hang me

**i tHOT** we had 8 more days in this house. now i am told we have til the 27th of December. today is the 23rd of December. FOUR MORE DAYS at Lil’ Flo. How to spend them?… we just attempted to watch a movie, something that hollywood spent millions on and it was unwatchable. a toddler could have written a better script. fuck hollywood.

**fOUR mORE** days. i have done nothing much, party, since i got here, monday, from kansas city, with one day off, relaxing. now again tonight, relaxing. ahh.
drinking and smoking. tomorrow is Kegmess Eve. a few hours after
dark the festivities begin. everyday, something, i forgot what it was like.
on the Ohio River this summer and being in Kansas City this fall those
places are, socially, more... what you make of it. here: goddamn party
every night. how did i ever live like this? this is not sustainable. mercy! a
party all the time. but tonight it’s poems. typewriter on a plastic
milkcrate, hunched over, back hurting, bare mattress on the bare floor,
like the first day they moved in here threw down that fat mattress (was it
this mattress?) and ran at it, doing flips and rolls, on the bare mattress, in
a barren house.

hUMAN nEST, your gems downtown are lit, your city glowing,
humming, reaching. we live in space. you live in fear.

sPONTANEOUS weedmilk shot, lightning bolt planet hurtles thru...
spinning, humming. i sit at the typewriter making a report, hammers on
ribbon spelling. system failure. my knee throbs, i am limping, i have
nowhere to go. little florida house, minneapolis, minnesota

3 mORE days. i woke up early this morning thinking something
brilliant. fell back asleep, woke up, put pants on, glasses on. pissed.
made black tea. ate dumpstered quiche and salad. chatted and joked.
sat down to type.
nothing.

ciViLiZATiON. freshly clean. somehow we all like this a little, raised to
know the right thing, keep it clean. but nothing is really clean. people
look clean and are cleansed of human smells, sterilized on the outside,
with toxins in the blood, hate in the heart.
    i lay in the bushes sleeping with animals and insects stinking of old
sweat and soil of a polluted planet. comfortable in my skin.
you drive by on the bridge overhead, and i know.
you
you
are
dirty.
    i see thru you. nasty dirty fuck. you fucking liar. headless machine.
billions of us dancing to this wretched song, dancing right over the cliff.
fall. the music stops and after five minutes a cricket begins chirping.
happy may not be the word. living.

hOLiDAY celebrations. four year old tradition of Kegmess Eve and Kegmess Day. eating, drinking, merriment, music and games, one big present is opened when the keg of beer is tapped. everyone is happy with their present. some things will get broken, maybe even a window. all the haggard babies will make a fuck lot of noise, rosy cheeks and beer apple breath. ha ha haw haw. celebrate while we can still rebel against anything. family x-mas? naw. bring the family to Kegmess.

kEGMESS dAY. last night we cashed the first one, empty steel barrel. they say they got another. today i stroll down the alley to bloody mary beer breakfast an hour after noon. i woke up way too early.

   last night: what the fuck? the buffet, the sweets, the drinking and games, shit shooting. suddenly the sky… the house lights! the closing! fukn sunrise.
   i remember at 6 a.m. i bounced back to little florida and made deviled eggs, drunk, “too much mustard” they said. we ate them all in 60 seconds.
   the new morning light bore down on me, exposed, my blanket of night ripped off, i slid down the winter alley to lay in my bed.
   bloody marys sounds good. detox? retox!
   naw, it’s not that bad. the festivities continue.

kEGMESS dAY aGAIN. and kegmess night! pickled breakfast vodka tomato spice invigorating, dice game, field trip to the river, the sandstone cave, the dogs ran like hell was behind them. back to the house, thot for a moment as the sun went down. what the fuck are we doing with our lives? and then we all crowd in the bathroom smoking it, laughing at it, and we all stumble out. three dogs all in the hallway, wondering what their masters were doing in the bathroom, suspecting that it must be something good from all that fukn laughing.

dAMN sHiT hurts. this long winter city booze fun! there is not so much bliss as sliding into the waters of the river on the hottest summer evening. the madness of us concentrated in the grid, this city, black eyes,
hatred, playing with toy guns. how crazy can you get. can you dance a tango, right now. do you have a real gun. go as crazy as you need to. do you need help getting there. how much booze does it take.

a plate of innocent biscuits, drowned in gravy. black pepper glitter, fork dancing, going to vegas

as a memory, my body hurts. i have nothing to complain about. one more day, not counting today.

LAST dAY. lil’ florida. also known as the haggard baby crib, the zombie hellhouse, the refugee camp, the chauncy warehouse bloomingplex what the fuck, but the only time anyone knew what you were talking about, was if you said ‘little florida’. ye old original punk house name, birth name.

last day. a pile of shining foil wrapped burgers, fish fillets, chicken sandwiches. a pyramid of them on the kitchen table. jack, you shouldn’t have. a bag with four beers, a guitar. wondering. leave tomorrow in that Kansas City car or two days later, another kc car, or another week… am i done here in minneapolis? i don’t like feelin rushed. couple more days would be good. alright then, i’m happy we talked this thru.

fiRST dAY, overtime! december 29, 2006
no sign of the sheriff.

iT wiLL nOT sTOP until out of fuel, it has many gallons to go. pillars of control, glass eyes downtown, illuminated in dark cold light, electric beast

pHO qUAN. hiding out, tiny café dining room, brocolli cauliflower mock duck noodle, plate of bean sprouts basil hot peppers lime. Duck sauce & Sriracha. good.

bURNiNG fUSE. cars, evening rush, a million gallons burning, friday night, liquor store doors swing on oiled hinges, across the city people picking it up, putting it down.

i sAW a ghost at sunset. was that who i think it was running a red light? i didn’t have time to look as i turned left and got the hell out of there.
aH... safe at home. empty house, party night elsewhere. typewriter and me and anything i can think of. write, one word at a time any evil nasty of life can be exorcised here or conjured here at my choosing when i need to get them out of my head

iT iS nOW 2007. case of gluek beer, snow hard ice on the ground, mix tape, jumping on the mattress in the neighborhood of sadness and floating. happiness. ive been smiling for days and i don’t plan on stopping

lANDLORD. bank. sheriff. house going empty. three of us left. why not stay till the man with the gun comes? until then, its free. freedom. i love it.

hANDS sTAiNEd with ink, nails chewed, writing on the walls, food in the fridge, everything will be empty. shuffling around, things. boxes fulla things. people die for things. fuck these things. naked, holding a loaf of bread. here, you take half.

tHERE iS no reason for me to be writing a poem now. everything is making me happy, so here is a lame poem with no angst because even these keys under my fingers make me feel good. today everything went right. my fingers were golden. everything i touched trembled with ecstasy and all of us smiled.

wE fUCKED hard and she told me to come. we lay sweating awesomely, touching just like that, breathing for a long time, breathing. sober, drunk on each other. she asked me. i fucked her again, the way she liked, two fingers and she worked clit. between us we only had energy for two arms out of four.
loudly came, when her breath returned she cursed, pulsing. we lay there holding each other, holding, tiny movements, fingers sliding on skin, electric touching

**rOLLiNG diCE** on a round table, palmers, crew of old friends. the dice have a skull instead of the number 1. the game is high-low. go for low and yell “Skulls!” and cheers a clash of beer glass, heres ta being loud and rowdy. it’s the ladies ‘don’t call me lady’ making the real noise. “SKULLS!”

**tHE liGHTS** come on, bald headed bouncer light show. he’s the headliner. “Game over.” he says. we head for the street, cross over to the front door of a west bank apartment above the mediterranean deli, pizza falafel gyro, the guys inside slightly terrified as the drunken mob of crazy looking kids wrestling each other on the sidewalk. rah has got me pinned to the ground. everyone is shouting. then im stumbling up the stairs. someone gives me a boot in the ass and i climb…

    accordion guitar console organ schreeching singers whiskey
goodnight! hey, where’d everyone go?

**tHE dAYS** go on forever, watching my feet move, and then the days… the more we hurry the faster we die! breathing in, out, smile cracks my face. ha! oh yeah! im free. fuck you. i love you. golden hands, fingertips of flame constantly moving avoiding the iron boot heel crushing down civilization enslavement ideals engraved in stone, stone monuments to ideals erected to obscure sight of the poor and suffering. you eat shit with delight and disdain from smelling my flower. success. system failure. fuck you. this garden grows underground, inside skulls, always changing. like me, like us, i wont give it up. i don’t want to forget. the edges get blurry, clouds move, change, sharp edge of my smile, scythe curved blade knowing the truth, nothing can take my freedom or happiness: not afraid of death.

**aRTiCULATiONS** of our experience expanding our ability to see the horizon. we see farther than ever before, getting closer to where we are, close enuf to see ourselves. yah! fuck! you scared me.
click of the switch away from love, for us, we are together on this burning hot rock. i walk staring at the ground trying not to fall all the way down, look up at the horizon, we hold each other up, dance and slip on beer, hold each other up, nothing is permanent. so laugh in the face of disease and death.

aNOTHER mORNiNG, january 5th 2007. i am 35 years old, i love a woman, i ate two eggs and toast, i drank russian caravan black tea, i stretched on the hardwood floor, i watched myself breathe for an hour, and now things are working in me, in little florida house. prepared to go out into the world and not fuck up, prepared to see things as they are not as i think they are. every moment i practice. suddenly anxious! i return to the discipline, return to the moment, and know there’s nowhere else to be right now writing a poem than right here writing a poem. Now drinking this tea. Now, even time to smile.

sHOUTiNG tO mYSELF. the house is quiet now, even the typewriter is gone. poetry has gone back to the pen, the mice outnumber me, they chew away, leisurely, unafraid hearing a footstep. they got the good bread with the tasty sunflower nuts on top. passed up the cinnamon sugar swirl loaf. i give them no grief. when the company comes to repossess the house, death will come for everything.

Most have fled already. it’s me and the mice, waiting for the man. so, fuck! play another abandoned mix tape, dig thru the kitchen cabinets and freezer for what everyone left behind. riding this sinking ship, climbing to the very top of the mast, a condiment sandwich in one hand, half empty bottle of booze tucked under my belt. not so glamorous or doom laden as all that… just days alone, passing days, living free. ha!
rESOURCE wAR

tHE wAR aT hOME. sometimes i got nothing to give. try to hide out and
if yer lucky you can have a moment to get yer shit together sitting in the
park watchin ducks. Then the amplified voice echoes thru the place,
screaming and yelling going into the ears of random people in the park it
sounds like a crazy fight like someone’s about to get their ass kicked!
then i hear the words and i start to hear an anti-war rant in this park? in
this neighborhood, where every other house has some anti-war sign in
the window or yard. the people walking this park are lovers. the haters
are holed up in their fortresses watching tv, to scared to go outside.

The amplified angry voice continues, a righteous rant. Meanwhile a
bunch of kids are throwing rocks at ducks, tiny children, no adults in
sight. i think- their parents are the ones holding the rant-fest in the
parking lot. no one else, just a pack of tiny kids, who decided to declare a
war on the ducks. peace has got to begin at home, ya think? if you cant
teach your children about violence and hate how ya gonna teach anyone
else? how ya gonna teach anyone by screaming and yelling? unleashing
anger upon a sympathetic honkey neighborhood aint gonna stop no war.
like we need to be reminded.

do we need to be reminded? reminded of our inability to control the
government? i wasn’t thinking about the war when i was watching the
ducks now i’m thinking about the war and those nasty kids, bombing
them fuckin ducks.

i didn’t say nothing to them. i was so irritated by all the screaming
on the microphone all i could think to say was, “don’t fucking do that!”
and i didn’t say that, cause: yay! here’s one more dude yelling shit… are
we gonna step into the thoughtful communication necessary to figure why
its bad to cause suffering because you are stronger or bigger… anger is a
good emotion, lets you know when something is wrong, bad, fucked up.
how are you going to direct that anger? blow it out onto the world in a
way that does no good for anyone?

alienating everyone, angry yelling guy. most of the yelling done in
my life has been done by people with power over me: teachers, parents,
bosses, cops, all telling me what to do, how to live my life. why would i
listen to some dude flexing his vocal muscles, hating, while the children
are stoning ducks. dig deeper, stop all wars, stop the war in your home first, stop the war before it even becomes a seed. figure out why this cycle keeps happening, why Never Again always fuckn happens again...

iRAQ: iNVAsiON & oCCUPATiON
someone left a big shit on the world stage, stinking fucking pile. all his friends dared him to do it. and everyone saw who did it. saw it shit out, saw that asshole shrug his shoulders as the rest of the world shouted for him to stop. you’re killing us, you sick fuck! now the shit is covered with more shit, he just kept adding onto the pile, deep shit, a quagmire of shit, and the actors near it keep stepping in it, slipping, cursing, blood soaked death.

rEFUSE tO pARTiCiPATE and help others refuse. if someone got on a jet, flew to the land i live on, came into my neighborhood, my house, with a gun, i would defend against the attack. i would not want to kill someone. what a terrible burden to live with. but in defense of family, it could happen.
   if i got on a jet, flew to another country to shoot someone, that would be murder. i would fully expect and understand someone in that country wanting to stop me by whatever means.

   We cause suffering by invading countries and murdering people, and telling them how to live. Trying to rule the world. This is not right. i’m not that big on telling people how to live their lives, whats right and whats wrong, but some things are really no-brainers. No matter who orders you or tells you it’s alright, you don’t go and fucking kill people in cold blood. That’s not defense, that’s offense.

   We have a system even worse than a single person dictatorship: one face steps down, another steps up! Nothing changes but the face! A war machine with a changeable head, intent on world domination, tentacles spread across the globe:
   World War 3 has been raging for decades!
   The global military industrial complex versus the world!
   A ravenous war machine consuming the planet!
uncontrollable! unstoppable! has the domination formula been perfected? The global military industrial complex. Try to change this system and it adapts! figures out a new way to continue conquering the world. drunk with limitless power granted by short sighted scientists, the system reaches exponentially deeper, our lives are exposed and cataloged and digitized, vivisected.

Around the world those affected by the war machine also grow exponentially, decades of anger bottled up, centuries of anger, looking for a weak spot on the belly of the beast, fighting back anyway they can.

i live on the back of the beast, but i wish it no luck.

What worthy lives we could live if we could lay the thing to rest and join ranks with our fellow beings.

What a horrible vile flood must accompany the death of this thing, it will not go quietly. A velvet revolution to end the global military industrial complex? That’s a lot of power plugs to pull all at once. What a feat of magic to move beyond this thing without an epic slaughter… how many millions buried before we can start planting worthy seeds and live in true freedom? The paradise of here and now!

History offers a grim prediction.

We need another thousand years…

Maybe two.

gODAMN gOVERNMENT! i heard that sentiment growing up, wondered what it meant. Here’s what it means for me now: looking out from the inside, the face changes, outside changes, inside stays the same. a woman president, a black president, it wont change a damn thing, cause almost anyone can pull the trigger on a gun. Almost anyone can pull the trigger on a gun. Don’t matter whose behind the wheel of this death machine, turn to the left, turn to the right, fuckin keeps on killing everything in the way. We walk behind this machine, staring into it’s asshole, there’s a pleasant blue video screen there, flashing hypnotic images, telling us nothing, we follow the glow and wade thru the blood, up to our ankles, calf, knees, getting deeper… if we the people want a woman president, we will put the face of a woman on that video screen, and the system will continue consuming the world. someday we may drown, our privilege come to an end, and maybe then we could imagine something else, centuries beyond this accelerating world-wide trauma, a
thousand years. another era indicated by the stars… hold on, it’s gonna be a rough ride.

rODE this janky bike around, cold wind blowing day, all the winter layers but no scarf. took a knit hat and cut the top open, pulled it down over my throat to protect those glands. everyone in the house is sick and drippy. Damn cold! But sunny. If you are inside and warm looking out a window, you can pretend that spring is here, think about not paying the heat bill, tearing the plastic off a window, opening it, jumping. laying on the earth outside, naked skin tingling from the radiation yeah, radiation… bring it on. a short life and a merry one.

success and failure- madness! productive, non productive. if you are producing bombs, please try to slack off and get drunk as often as you can, and throw a bit of aluminum-foil from your taco-truck burrito lunch into the circuitry. you’re a genius. the essential artist. legendary! do be careful. and run if they come. many important visionaries were arrested and executed and remember, a good joke will be passed thru endless generations, it will not die.

dRiViNG in his car, on a long straight plains highway in the united states of america. hail starts to fall, stopping the car, hammering the windshield, denting the roof, breaking flattening, no room left in the car. gigantic human head size hail crushing, he jumps out the busted open door, hit by a boulder of hail it breaks his arm as he crawls under the car, car bouncing as hail buries it, metal crushing down on him cold. curls under the engine to keep warm. it is dark before he passes out in terror, awakes to a drip of motor oil on his cheek, crawls out, cold as hell, numb from pain kicking balls of ice to find the sun shining down on a horizon of ice
miSSiSSiPPi riVER
aUGUST, 2007.

“A Pennsylvania man cast a stone that skipped on water a whopping 51 times, shattering the old world record of 40.”
- newspaper, October 2, 2007

**a sURVEY of eDiBLE pLANTS.** Funny how when you learn to recognize something and you know its name, then you start seeing it everywhere. It’s always been there, but now you have knowledge of it and a name for it. Recently I learned about a plant called Lady’s Thumb, which has slender edible green leaves, and a length of tiny pink flower buds, perhaps looking like a tiny white lady’s thumb. And now I see Lady’s Thumb everywhere! This is something I consciously attempted to do on our little Mississippi River journey of 2007, to see how many edible plants I could identify growing wild on the banks of the river. It kept me busy, made me happy, most every day, eating food that I had gathered while exploring the banks and islands. Thanks to everyone for trying my wild cooking and for the good times, Dave, Wendy, Gerty, Aura Lee, April, Andy, and them dogs Merle, Pucker, Olive, Maggie.
The Peterson Field Guide To Edible Plants was my teacher, checked out from the Minneapolis downtown library and floated down to Winona. Here’s what i found during the brief and under-funded survey between Minneapolis and Winona:

**Edible Plants:**
Wood Nettle, Stinging Nettle, Lady’s Thumb, Lambsquarters, Common Evening Primrose, Dandelion, Horsemint, Plantain, Catnip, Goldenrod, Mullein, Seaside Plantain, Storksbill, Milkweed, Burdock, Arrow Head, Giant Puffball Mushroom, Wild Grape. I recommend checking out the field guide to see how to identify and prepare these for eating.

**Cool But Not For Eating:** Spotted Forget-Me-Not, Nightshade, Soapwort, Blue Giant Hyssop.

**Steamed Nettle Recipe:** young Wood Nettle leaves, Stinging Nettle leaves, steam them for 5-10 minutes, then throw in some Lambs Quarter leaves at the end. Pull off the heat and throw in a shot of braggs or soy sauce, or butter and salt, boosh! Very simple. This stuff is so tasty, and highly nutritious.

**Wild Salad Green Recipe:** Lady Thumb leaves, Common Evening Primrose leaves, Lambsquarter Leaves, Dandelion leaves. Throw in some olive oil and red wine vinegar, lil salt-n-peppa. Something i found with salad greens is that a leaf from plants growing in different areas have
different tastes. Some are sweeter, some more bitter. Some are so bitter that they are not palatable. I don’t know if those are really bad for you, just cause they’re way more bitter… When I come to a new area, I will taste the plants first to see if they are tasty for eating.

lady’s thumb, edible greens.

pRACTiCAL sUMMER bOATiNG tiPS. Going down the river! A daunting journey for those unfamiliar with boating. How To? These few pieces of hard learned advice, some of them bestowed by those wiser, some learned the hard way, may help you:

wATER!! Having sufficient water is essential. The basic formula for drinking and cooking is: One Gallon Of Water Per Person Per Day. If you are cooking a lot of dry pasta, beans, rice, perhaps figure in a little more. Five gallon buckets with lids, or those five gallon blue tinted water cooler jugs work the best, with the small mouth they are easy to pour and keep gunk from contaminating them.

mOSQUiTOS. They come out at sunset and if you provide the drinks, they will party til sunrise. For sure, they will keep you up all night, and they will refuse to leave, torturing. Torturing. There is a remedy, the miracle of mosquito netting. Wrap your boat with it, or obtain a simple camping tent, and you will be safe for sleeping. As for hanging out, if you build a decent fire, the heat and smoke will keep
away all but the most courageous mosquitos. You may find that, sitting staring into the fire while chatting with your friends, that the mosquitos have found sufficient shelter from smoke and flame to fly up behind you and stab you all up the backside. I have theorized that the creation of several small fires could remedy this, with humans huddled in the middle, a ring of fire! Never tried it. It would totally work tho. So does bug sprays and lotions. Some of it better than other shit, but I never bought any, I considered it a luxury. Others considered bug repellent an essential.

**biting black flies.** You must roll up a newspaper and wait till one lands. Kill them. You must kill them before they kill you. When their greedy syringe is jammed into yer flesh their response time is lowered, that is when you strike. If you encounter a biting ninja fly that assaults you for a long time and constantly escapes your swatting efforts at elimination, you may hold your hand up to the sky uttering an unwholesome cry of frustration, and come to this conclusion: there is no loving god.

**stick cooking.** Some folks prefer camping stoves with liquid fuel, some folks prefer propane stoves, I prefer stick cooking, mostly cause it’s free. You need cast iron skillets or pots to even out the heat from the wild flame produced by small stick fires. Dig a hole in the sand, put a couple rocks or logs on either side of the little pit, and put the pot or skillet on top. It’s nice to have a bar-b-que grill to throw over the top. Find some dry little twigs and sticks, whole dead dry branches, they can be found underneath trees (no way!). The lowest branches on certain trees are usually dead, and sometimes are the only dry wood around, protected from the rain by the canopy of the trees. Get yer stick fire burning and break all the sticks up into smaller pieces, keep the fire going, you gotta stoke it. It really doesn’t take a big log fire to heat up a single pan, a small pile of sticks contain sufficient stored energy from the sun to cook your breakfast. I love stick cookin. I should make a stick stove to have on my boat next year, yeah...

**gathering.** You can eat stuff growing wild. Don’t eat stuff if you don’t know what the fuck it is. Try *The Peterson Field Guide To Edible Plants*. That’s what I did. Some people prefer other more comprehensive field guides, but I’ll tell u whut, I did fine with this one. Really did some grazing.
There’s always the grocery store dumpster. A lot of little river towns have great trash, but as always, play it cool, some people get riled up thinking you’re getting something for nothing or maybe motivated by something even worse involving satan, so if your see a grocer with an apron, that’s a uniform, and uniforms lead to other uniforms, in the hierarchy of things, you know what i mean, be prepared to take evasive maneuvers! Grab the donuts and go!

**SAND ETIQUETTE.** A little sand is probably good for the digestion, a mineral supplement! Large quantities of sand between the teeth while chewing is bad news, leading to tooth decay and to the swallowing of food hole! Unchewed food is difficult to digest and the nutrition in the food will be lost without sufficient mastication. When eating on the beach, in sand, it is difficult to remember, in the dark this is extra true, that if you set something down in the sand, then pick it up and pass it over open food containers, a rain of sand will cascade down. And then there is the hastily placed footstep, spewing sand with a flick of the toe, and also wild dog activity has cast many load of sand into an otherwise delectable dish. Sand! The best remedy is to put the dishes in some elevated position, higher than the tallest dogs tail, which could be referred to as The Ged Scale of Destruction. Some good buffet spots are on boulders or fallen logs, perhaps a plank to improvise a dining table. The next best solution is to lay down a blanket or tarp to place the dishes on and convince one person to go play stick with the dog pack.

Also: Mayflies. if the mayflies are out in profusion, lids on dishes are advisable, or else just eat the insects along with your beans and rice as they rain from the sky like the proteinous mana spice of god…
**THE biCYCLE.** Always good to have when there’s long stretches of flat ground to be covered. If you can fit a bicycle onto yer boat, the world is yours. If you could fit an ultra-light airplane or a hot air balloon on yer boat, you are a god. The bicycle, good to have a rack on the back with a milkcrate to strap cargo into, and the five gallon water jugs fit right in a milk crate.

**mEDiCiNE.** Sometimes you need a little something. I’m thinking of when I have something wildly rich, spicy, or like a bottle of red wine, then surely I will need to grab the sealed water proof plasticware thingy full of Baking Soda, like the stuff people put in the fridge to absorb odors. Baking Soda cures stomach acid instantly. It’s really something, I love it. Just mix the powder with a shot of water and toss it back.

First aid kit would be good. There’s sharp stuff in the water, razor clams, metal things, tiny wounds that need cleaning and bandaging. Untended wounds have gotten staph infections on previous boat trips.

The medicine list could be endless, I’ll leave it at this.

**fiXiNG a fiBERGLASS tENT pOLE.** There’s nothing like that sinking feeling when an essential part of your house has just broken and a rainstorm is heading in. And also, it’s not even your fucking tent. Shit! Do I havta buy them a new tent? Hell no! (No, it wasn’t your tent, someone elses’…)

I broke a fiberglass tent pole off in the metal connecting piece, but I found that if you gently crunch the metal connecting piece (I used a leatherman pliers) you can break the piece of fiberglass pole stuck in there, pull the pieces out, and then just slide the remaining length of pole into that hole (only slightly shorter now!). I think you could continue to repair poles like this for a long time before there was a noticeable effect from the poles being shortened… if the pole was broken in the middle, it would still work, but the shape of the tent would be a little compromised…

**liFEJACKETS.** One for each person. You can get em for dogs to. Cats? I dunno. The ticket for not having one lifejacket for each person is about 7 times the price of a cheap lifejacket. And also, uh, what if yer boat sinks?

**mANEUVERING.** You cannot just float down the river. There are large boats that will not see you and you will be run over. Towboat captains do not like to slow down! You must be able to get the hell out of
the way. If you can’t maneuver by rowing or paddling, you will need a motor. Get a motor that is reliable. If there is one thing to spend money on, this is it. The motor! You get what you pay for! Except when you get ripped off, which sucks. It’s good to ask someone who is experienced about a motor you’re thinking of buying. If you don’t know anyone, write to me, and I will forward your information request. Attach a reliable motor of appropriate horsepower onto something that floats, and you have done a good thing for going down a river.

Stay out of the tow boats way. Most other boats will steer around a slower moving vessel. It is strongly recommended to stay off the water on weekends if you are near a populous area with lots of pleasure boat marinas. Maneuvering while being assailed by multiple wakes from giant wedding cake slice boats can be extremely irritating! After nailing themselves up on the cross five days a week, the last two days are reserved for full throttle boat rage, no respect or even awareness of what effect their antics have on the rest of the world. After a person sublimates their desire for five days of the week, their release comes thru gross consumerism when they step into the role of weekend warrior. After burning up barrels of gas over a couple days they head back to civilization to work another five days to pay for the weekend.

Meanwhile, on Monday morning, or even Sunday night, the modern shantyboater shoves off and continues at a leisurely pace downhill, in boats with motors that are hardly even capable of disturbing the river, even at full throttle! Often for us the motor is too fast. We turn it off and let the current or wind haul us down, listening to the sounds of the river. Birds traveling overhead, the Mississippi Flyway.

The choice. Fear or Love. That’s right. If you fear the people you meet on the river, the connection will fail, isolation continues, and why the hell are you out there? With just a little love, maybe nothing more than the traditional flick-wrist boater’s wave, that love for a fellow being will be returned to you in the form of food, clothing, shelter, companionship, a tow to the nearest marina, light beer, moonshine, money for sex, whatever you may be needing. Don’t be afraid to reach out.
liFE oN 31st sTREET

tHE hOUSE dREAM. i live on top of a chest of drawers, a really big chest of drawers, four feet wide, eight feet long, four feet tall. it stands in the middle of a room, four walls, and that is the extent of the house. The chest of drawers is about the size of the former third floor bathroom i live in right now, and in which i had this dream. So i live on top of this dresser, three big drawers underneath me, and people live in those drawers! You can pull out a drawer to see if someone is home! And we all pay rent! We all agreed the rent was too high so we rented out the side drawers, but they were the wrong shape for a human body and way too small. “How do people even fit in there?” i asked one day, and one of the old drawer-mates shrugged, “i don’t know. That’s rough!”

One night i came home with a woman and we fucked on top of the chest of drawers, in my “room”. The next day nobody that came out of their drawers said anything to me, but some of them gave me funny looks.

The dream shifted radically, morphed into a place where my friends were living in a house with my grandparents and a bunch of my relatives from Nebraska i had never met. The house had been wrecked by a landslide or flood, and my grandma and grandpa just sat on folding metal chairs with sad expressions while the neighborhood we lived in was still doing business. i ran into a sketchy guy talking on a cell phone around the side of the house, and there were some looters there just walking in like it was nothing. Simultaneously, someone was trying to organize a hideous theatrical performance to raise money or cheer people up after the disaster…. one of the guys i used to work for, baking bagels, leads the crowd in a sing along of a totally inappropriate song… i had all this stuff in my hands, a large guitar, things… i didn’t like the song so i pretended to be drunk, thinking that would excuse me from singing the song seriously. i went in singing loudly, wildly, jumping up with the children on stage then fell down in front of them and caused a spectacle- and suddenly i wasn’t pretending anymore, i really was drunk! and everyone else was also drunk and drinking. i ended up in a car with some people, a wild scene, we were going somewhere to set the night on fire… Woke up naked, i saw that it was past 2am, the party was
cashed, people were helping others walk home, wasted, spent. i was completely sober and asked a lot of people if it was too late to go to the bar, which would be closed at 2am. “No, it’s not too late.” they told me.

RENT IS DUE, all across the world. rent is due, overdue, way past fucking late. moving on to legal proceedings, shoving off in an outward spiral to a new life of freedom from paying rent to that one particular lord.

31st STREET & she told us her name was J-Lo. a rock smoking lady already late in the night, up till 4 in the morning and gotta wake up at 8, shovel dirt wheelbarrow. sometimes the crazy just finds you sitting on your porch, cop after cop roll by spotlight- they’re on to us, they must have found out, we are still alive and they are just doing their job trying to break us down and apart into easily controlled/digested particles, tomorrow i will be out in the suburbs where that cop lives, taste of rocky city street in my throat, a beer bottle head, planting flowers in his dear mother’s garden.

i AM DYING. looking down on 31st street, saturday night, home now from a show at the bedlam theater. a good show. a beer at the bar, a beer at my desk on the third floor of this house. cold winds outside its… warm on the third floor. cars and bicycles going by on 31st saturday night

she asked me how things were going, in my life. start talking about work. working a lot. is that how things are going in my life?

working. piling up money. the last thing i care about. but here i sit, on the third floor, of a house, inside the system behind enemy lines out of my mind, rent has been paid, phone is hooked up, money in the bank, lucky to have a good job, a friend for a boss. lucky, that i don’t want to leave and go anywhere now, im alright with now, don’t feel isolated in my room, on the third floor. know what i want to do, doing it.

Victor is down in little rock, a stroke, heart trouble, critical condition. he knew it was coming, he was doing what he wanted to do. playing in bands, getting ready to go on tour, he wasn’t playing safe. living, knowing he was dying, like we all should be, cause we are
i know what i want to do with my life, that’s why i’m here. not running away, on the third floor, watching a black cat cross 31st street while two prostitutes pace the block. on the bike ride home i remember a crescent moon over sparkling Venus over the lights of downtown, like a mirror to the movements of my friends down here, i felt… i couldn’t explain it to myself.

i smiled.

**HER eYES hAVE tHAT sPARKLE.** it’s nice to see. i don’t know what to do with it. your eyes must do that to everyone. couldn’t be for me. i pretend it is just for me. for a little bit. she can drink at the bar, ive seen that, which means i could still be 15 years older than her. what does that even mean? when the subject is sparkle in the eyes. this is not about forever, which in our culture is 2 years, but just this week, or a few days, or just a little more of the summer. then i will leave, she will leave, everything will change, everything will be different cause it always is. cause i always make sure it ends up that way. i refuse to go back to that place where your mind is mingled with another mind and you cannot be happy apart and everything is fucked… i don’t trust anything yet, not myself , not anyone. i believe i will heal. but maybe all i have is belief. maybe i never will heal. maybe i will never go there again. maybe i will just be happy and free the rest of my life. happily alone. cause lonely passes and then happy is there again. the sun rises, and the moon too, light, dark, things you can trust and love.

**sUMMER aT tHE sHiTBiSCUiT.** Hot. Tired. New pizza dumpster V8 gasoline engine flip up headlights cop car perched in the alley slide over the line stop sign rolling rear view mirror not tonight not tonight dammit fuck a birthday in the neighborhood too hot tired new pizza dumpster community theater festival costume making directing actors arranging music commenting on lighting directing smoking and coffee for dinner lets run it one more time they look tired but don’t you guys get it this is the first play i wrote first play i directed and i think it could be good if only… its not gotta be perfect. good enuf to do what its supposed to do. make people laugh, make one person cry one tear… push everyone pull myself feel that shit? That’s being alive!
Strange dream on this night before the solstice, dream of a giant houseboat full of junk and we are somehow squatting it perhaps and a fast current just carries us along, no worries for hitting anything the flow just carries us down this forgotten channel towards some pool the ocean and we are inside hanging out eating in the kitchen, watching the scenery go by out the windows… a paradise of natural forces faith boating no rudder completely unattached to our destination or doom.

i’m buying a canoe, gonna float outta town, couple weeks down to Winona. i need to get out. The city does things to you, locks you into this scheduled little world, even if you don’t have bills to pay, you could be busy everyday from the social calendar, recovering in the day from last nights drinking, and then there’s the drinking drinking, and glutinous barbeques followed by wild musical shows and drinking while the empire attains it’s ultimate height, a frenzied madness of nearly meaningless activity… what does anything mean? Elsa said, “Everyone here is having lotsa fun, but no one seems really happy…”

i wAKE uP iN a hOUSE. and that’s weird. Living in a translucent blue nylon fabric dome on the banks of the Mississippi River is yesterday. The sounds of birds and coyotes and fish jumping in the water and boats racing by is now the sounds of human activity only, the familiar voices of neighborhood street business going on, cars going by on 31st Street, my roommates walking, shuffling about on wooden floors in our 3 story wood & stone cave. My waking eyes open to see the face of a clock, red numbers tell me precisely what time it is, i don’t need to look at the sun to know: i can’t even see the damn sun from this room. i wont step outside the zipper door to stretch, the uncomfortable eyes of
cars passing by the yard, i wont step out there to cook breakfast on a stick fire, the house has electrical appliances for that. How fucking strange to be rummaging around in a refrigerator for food! and to have this strange fire at the turn of a knob. You don’t notice these things until you’ve been living a different way for awhile. ive been cooking with sticks! Sticks dammit! They fell off trees everyday, no energy bill to pay! Now here i arrive home to a note on the fridge- $37 a piece for bills. And there’s the $200 for rent. And i’m broke. The beaches were free… Well, paddling the canoe was burning energy, a bigger appetite. Two bites per mile. Good mileage.

Ah shit, and look here, electric recorded music at my fingertips, and down there on the second floor, a bathroom. Last night i took a hot bath! Luxurious. This morning i will not have to dig a hole and pick seven large leaves off a tree to wipe my ass with. That makes me sad. Once again, turding into drinkable water. The ultimate act of privilege. Dropping shits into the juice of life. What could be more decadent? Some folks have to walk miles to get fresh water, every damn day, if they are lucky enuf to have a source of safe drinking water at all. Here, we shit in it. it’s a fucking atrocity! ive been doing it all my life! Any minute now i’m going to put my pen down and go do it again. Shit aint right.

a SHORT wAR, nO bLOOD. aUGUST 17, 2007. sunset. decided to get out of the house, take a little bike ride in search of a tarp for my canoe in preparation for this upcoming river trip down to Winona. rode east outta the Shitbiscuit down Lake Street, towards the river. the construction from the street work was complete and the lowered sun shone a pleasing light on the shops and structures lining the street, the magic hour when day transits into the mysterious possibilities of night.

i turned down the road leading to Hi-Lake Center, the Aldi, the Savers, little ceasers pizza… checked the dumpsters out back. found a tarp in horrible condition, but it was space ship silver, so i took it. it would look cool, and i would be mostly dry. stuffed it into my pack and rolled around the corner, down bum alley, framed by the windowless concrete walls of the shopping center and the empty lot next to the light rail station. stopped and parked my shiny blue “free spirit” ladies frame up against the wall of little ceasers pizza and leapt up into the mostly empty dumpster. slim pickins. no pizza today.
Suddenly I hear a “Hey!” and look up from my crouching position to see an old white man’s face, disembodied, levitating there at the rim of the dumpster, looking down on me with the sky behind him, the face of god! shit! trouble! “Can I have that can there?” he sez, pointing. I hand him the empty aluminum can and he departs. I see a couple more cans in there so I collect them and toss them out. I check one last box but find no pizza. Bummer. I jump back out the dumpster, turn to grab my bike, and find it gone.

_what the fuck…_

I feel like I was only in that dumpster like ten seconds… a lot can happen in ten seconds. I step out into the alley, look left, look right, and there it is. My bicycle, underneath another man. Headed around the front of little ceasers going into the parking lot. Slowly! I start running. _did he see me?_ I cinch the straps on my pack so it doesn’t bounce while I’m running. I turn the corner, people are going to a fro, pizza boxes in hand, hanging out on the patio smoking, and I go running thru as fast as I can without knocking anyone down, some guy jumps outta my way as he steps out of the door. I’m at the parking lot, looking searching… to the right again, there he is, on the sidewalk slowly rolling, not looking backwards. I sprint towards him, ha! He doesn’t know I’m following him! He can’t hear my footsteps running with all the auto traffic out here. And now, he turns down the narrow corridor leading back to bum alley, _returning to the scene of the crime! what the fuck!_ A real live cliché, the whole thing is a cliché, stereotype, here’s a black man who stole my bike returning to the scene of the crime- yet it’s not a cliché. Who the fuck would steal anything from some guy digging his fucking dinner out of a garbage can? In the moment I felt no compassion or understanding for the crime, vengeance ruled the moment, street justice was about to be applied.

I turned the corner into the corridor and there he was, pausing on my bike to look up the alley towards the pizza dumpster. The distance between us was now about 30 feet. I dropped my pack and sprinted for him, some ancient instinct and adrenaline surge, my feet beat the concrete like a drumroll of doom and his head whipped around to face me, his eyes bugged out and he froze up solid. I could feel his fear, it shot out in the air around him like a shockwave.

_“YOU BETTER RUN MOTHER FUCKER!!!”_
My voice went out in a guttural blast, i could see it go straight into his brain, to the fight or flight reflex, and his synapses struggled to figure out if he should ride the bike or run, what happened is he tried to pedal the bike and then ended up just wildly running over the top of it like he had wings of a bird.

My momentum carried me right over my bike as well, a flying jump kick unspent on human flesh. the thief was a safe distance up the alley, he had turned to look back at me. i took the u-lock off my bike and followed him, now walking. “Keep running fucker!!” He backed up while watching me advance, made a motion to his waist as if to pull a gun out. “i’ll crack your fucking skull!” Still with the adrenaline rolling i charged and he ran further, “Run motherfucker!”. Then i thot about my bike. Oh yeah, i got my bike back. Fuck that guy. i thot also that if i got too far away from the bike, i might have to chase someone else down to get it back.

My bike. The chain had fallen off, but the wheels seemed true. i flipped the bike, put the chain back on, grabbed my pack, and tried to cool down, watching over my shoulders. i remembered before all this happened, back in the alley behind the mall, i had seen a police cruiser and an ambulance picking up some guy in a stretcher- had he been brutalized, or overdosed? reason returned to me. clubbing the thief was a bad idea. i decided to go cautiously up the alley in the direction the thief fled to verbally cast him out of the neighborhood, in hopes of discouraging him from doing shit like that again. A schooling. There he was, up at the head of the alley by lake street, now walking with some section of pipe or wood he had picked up. he looked back, saw me riding towards him, u-lock in hand. he left the alley and cut across the field. just then a rent-a-cop appeared up by the little ceasers pizza, sticking his nose out into the alley.

“That guy just stole my bike! i had to chase him down!” i figured someone had seen me running, made a phone call... not really to rat him out, more to dispel the suspicion on me. After having my bike stolen i was really not into chatting with the cops too. But, i have to say that in certain cases, i have helped certain people get to know the police. Violent psychopaths, dangerously drunk drivers... fucking bike thieves! They deserve each other! One brutalizes and oppresses people with the sanction of the government, the other brutalizes and oppresses people all on his own.
i rolled up near the thief and shouted at him, “Don’t come back! Stay out of this neighborhood.” He walked on towards the light rail station. Was that a siren in the distance? My visit to the Hi-Lake shopping center was over. I rolled out onto Lake Street, took a left down in front of the YWCA, a right on 31st Street, past South High, and on west, home, to the Shitbiscuit, last light of the sun sluicing down between apartments and houses.

My lungs were burning all the way home and for hours afterwards. Burning. Been a long time since I sprinted like that. Long time since I’ve felt such righteous animal rage expressed with my entire body. Fully prepared in that instant to battle this stranger, to spill his damn fucking blood. It is a wild powerful feeling to be victorious. With movement and voice the threat of violence was made an immediate promise. The challenge was declined.

Being civilized, I soon felt I had done something wrong.

What would Gandhi have done if some motherfucker stole his bike? His only tool to gather food to survive. Talked to him? Shrugged and walked home? What would my teacher Thich Nhat Hanh have done? Is that kid really going to stop stealing bikes because I yelled at him? Probably just the opposite. Only now he may find someone weaker to prey upon, a safe target to vent his hatred.

A little moment of life in the city. There’s something like this going on in every neighborhood, all across the city… Watering the seeds of hate. Now he distrusts whites a little more and I distrust blacks a little more. Racist country, built on Native American genocide, then black slavery. This is the world we live in, the world I grew up in. I remember a joke one of my white friends told me in grade school on the playground, “What do you call a black man on a bicycle?” The answer: “Thief!”

This is the world we live in. A fucked up world. We gotta pay attention to our feelings and what society is putting into our heads, what prejudices and stereotypes were programmed into us long ago, and all thru the years since then, reinforced… We can’t pretend everything is alright, cause it’s not. We can’t pretend there isn’t racism and prejudice inside of us. It’s there, no matter how you reason it out and decide it’s not good. It’s still there in behavior, if not words. No law is going to change that. We gotta go much deeper.
i don’t know a single person who doesn’t have a head full of bullshit that needs to be dealt with. some people are dealing with it, some people aren’t. some people are a lot better off than others. privileged people. some people got more love at home, got to attend loving schools, got to do art and eat well and play music and dance and were supported. other people got the shit kicked out of them by bullies all thru high school, every day at lunch, had to run home after school to avoid getting the shit kicked out of them again, just dreaming of being strong enuf to fight back and win, or at least to have a friend to back you up, and even if you both got the shit kicked out of you, at least you had each other to laugh about surviving it all… just dreaming of being strong and beautiful and wanted… it makes sense to me in this moment, that someone who has been beaten down all their life could randomly assert their power over their life by violently attacking someone, by unleashing all the demons at once, puking back on the universe what it had put in.

Right now i feel like that, untouchable by anyone or anything, i feel like i could stand up to an army and send it back in retreat. Feels weird.

A beautiful summer bike ride comes to an end.

sEPTEMBER 4th, 2007. rELAXiNG hERE at the Shitbiscuit after two weeks out on the Mississippi River living out of a 17 foot long canoe. a relaxing whiskey tobacco headache day. woke up to meet a buncha
traveling kids at the house with helpful suggestions on how to cure my headache. pressure points! i huffed some peppermint oil, pressured some points, then shot back two ibuprofen tablets. bacon, eggs, toast, and two slices of dumpstered pizza, several movies. then as the sun went down into the golden hour took a stiff mug o black tea to the park, laid on the green luscious grass, dandelions, plantain. watched myself breathe while laying there staring up thru branches and leaves of ash trees, occasional jets flying landing patterns above that, and there in the sun everything became alright and a smile of that true happiness was upon me, you know it when its there and it sounds foolish to explain later… the old powderhorn park had become the perfect place for me to be, as that is where i was at the moment. and i laid there for every moment of it, not thinking of nuthin. then the darkness cued the mosquitos to begin their assault upon creatures of blood! fuck! then the awesome place to be smiling in happiness was on my bicycle riding the fuck away from there… and it was good.

everything is going according to plan! on top of the wave today. ascending arc, trajectory confirmed.

pOWDERHORN. this lake has history. people gathered in thousands, summer, racing bicycles around it, big ass picnics. winter speed skating olympic shit.
walk that bank, talking. walk that circle, silent.
get back to where you started, things have changed, you have changed, the sun has moved, you have moved.
bowl of water, full circle, transformation, open that mind body, aware, if you need you can take.
cautious turtles bask on the concrete shore under towering city filthy industry, pools of mutated life.
we smile
with missing teeth

tHE cITY! Getting up in the morning. schedules. electronically controlled matrix. refrigeration. liquor stores. a neglected sky, forgotten stars. look, a bright planet! no, are you sure that’s not a telecommunications satellite? it would be strange to see something that wasn’t made by man.
large jets low in the sky, that thing flying there, we did that, people did that, filled it full of people. gave it a furious scream.

backyard fire. birthday. burning square wood, mysterious origin. some of us will get up on time tomorrow, go somewhere else in the world. schedule. work & school. some of us are loose, no schedule tomorrow. traveling. nothing tomorrow. tomorrow is nothing. conflict of interest. stay up! go to sleep! we should all quit our jobs! but i have these plans, and then also there’s the refrigerator… comfort… safety from all the zombie mouths out there, a tiny family to watch out for each other, to all sleep in the same hive at night. maybe help me when i’m tired or sick? someone to help eat all this food i found in the trash… someone to talk to. like planets and moons, schedules, orbiting, influencing each other, pushing and pulling, watch a new one come around, and an old friend move away, unstable orbits… catch you next time friend!

connections and interconnections, arrangements of energy in some incomprehensible invisible web… shake the battery, make it work. shake the bottled soda, that will be funny. hide the rest of your beers in someone’s yard…

hOUSE iS eMPTY except for me. Unusual late night summer time vacancy, everyone is at the event. i’m here pretending at being alone. i can see my reflection in the plate glass window of the living room. nothings moving except the cars on 31st Street, and they come to a stop when the light turns red. What are you looking at? waiting. all this time waiting. waiting to get somewhere, waiting to be happy, waiting to be loved. waiting for something interesting to hit my brain so i can have something to share with the world. across town, a siren. Saturday night movements, cars east and west. i hear the distinct sound of a U-lock clanking on a bicycle frame as the rider rolls west just outside the bay window. people are moving, operating machines.

nothing to be sad about, but i am. i always will be, i think, sad. at the celebration where i am awarded everything i have ever wanted, i will sneak out to the balcony looking up at the night sky, and- what the fuck! what is this madness? life! how did i go thru all that shit to end up here? how could i possibly be happy now, just be happy, after all that hell…
buff the cat

BUFF off mOTHER BUFFER!!!
Buffer the cat got left at Dead Squirrel Beach. beautiful long haired black & grey stripes with white boots, a sweet cat smile, old house cat suddenly turned out, dumped, twenty year old cat haunting an evicted punk house. it gagged down a whole can of chicken noodle soup when they found him, alone.
nothing but an orange sticker on the door from the sheriff. haggard survivor, Buffer still had his cat smile, still heard his name.
they brought him to the Shitbiscuit, he scarfed down the dumpstered salmon spread. hissed at our dogs.
he could walk and he could jump on chairs, skinny old bastard, had to lay down and take a break after walking across the house. i bet Buffer could slap a dog on the nose, send it running. looking good for twenty year old cat.
Buffer the cat.
too bad there are four people here allergic to cats. they were not into the cat.

sOME pEOPLE tHiNK Buffer iS oVER-rATED
Buffer the cat.
drove the thing over to Mancakes in the rain, four people allergic to cats under one roof, not a roof to share with cat.
heard a rumor that a few people and even Dee said it was alright.
cant remember who started that rumor…
couple messages on the answering machine when i got home today: “Rob! Get your fucking cat out of my house!”
damn rumors.
lonely refugee, friendly smiling cat. where’s the love?
kitty, if i knew, i would take you there.

bUFFER iS bACK.
some of our house guests went to Mancakes and reclaimed him.
he lives on our porch now, couch cat.
rolling around on the green sofa rubbing his head and stretching Buffer loves being alive!
kitty loves living at the Shitbiscuit
right now kitty is cleaning his mane.
good kitty. bad world.
this is not the body that Buffer was born with.
everything has changed, continues to change.
ican relate.
Buffer is alive and Buffer is happy.
BUFFER goes to… Wisconsin!
Four house guests at the Shitbiscuit.
they came to Minneapolis from Madison.
one day Sarah called Mary’s parents, asked if they would give Buffer a home on their farm were other elderly cats live. Mary’s parents said yes.
today i bought the last 12 pack of cat food.
goodbye Buffer. i hope you like Wisconsin.
fukn,
meow?
“Be yourself.” they say, but who we are changes all the time, every day, sometimes not perceptibly, and then sometimes a sudden leap forward within seconds, your self makes a leap in evolution, a transformation of the self. Suddenly you are not yourself anymore! You are a different self, a new self!

Be yourself. You can’t help it. You have to be yourself right now. Am i attempting to be different than my present self? Maybe i am trying to be more or less like my past self, or trying to be like the other selves i have met and admire, or trying to be my fantasy self, or trying to be the self that i think others want me to be. While i am doing any of that, i am still being myself.

Who am i? if i experience you, how much of you becomes me? How much of yourself becomes myself? And when i take your aspect on, am i being yourself?

Who the fuck am i? is there really a singular self? is it really all connected because myself seems to contain thousands of selves, millions? my parents, my sisters, my relatives, my school teachers, my
friends, that guy on the street, the woman who sold me those tomatoes…
36 years of Self accumulation! The more you experience and reflect, the
more you appreciate your connection to every other being, and begin to
see the lack of separateness, begin to see the inter-connectedness of all
things, realize what it means to be self-less. To have compassion for
beings with the knowledge that they are not separate selves, they are
you, you are them. we are the shit.

**TRUCK IN a DRIVEWAY** off the highway, a tool box truck, and the front
hood is painted all blue with white stars and red stripes flying off all the
way back to the tailgate. The old red white & blue- must be a good
feeling to really believe in your government, to feel like it’s something
you can completely support, and even love it enuf to paint your truck to
look like the nation’s flag, fuck yeah, USA all the way! i don’t remember
ever feeling that way. Maybe when i was a little kid, the Iranian hostage
crisis, scary dark skinned kidnappers. I remember the boys gathered on
the playground to make a foreign policy assessment: “How come we
don’t just nuke em?”

i played war with the other boys, my friends, they had bb guns, i had
a cool looking stick, maybe some other chunks of wood for grenades,
and we would head out for the sand dunes on the bluff above Rabbit
Creek in Anchorage, Alaska. There we would hide behind the mounds,
sneak around, “shoot” each other, and mostly argue about who had
killed who.

These days i mostly feel like i live behind enemy lines. The global
military industrial complex is a nasty monster to be avoided. If it looks at
me i try to appear non-threatening. It is always hungry and ready to kill,
or just shove you, alive, into the prisons of it’s bulging cheeks.

i have come to have no respect for authoritarian structures at all.
Unfortunately, most of the world is dominated by such structures, since
it is the nature of such structures to dominate everything, at the expense
of happiness. i have traveled to countries with more freedom than we
have here in the usa, countries that have been humbled on the world
stage for their involvement in fascist genocide. But they are still
authoritarian and are finding ways to return to fascism but put a nice
shiny usa style face on it. The usa has never been humbled, and it’s style
of global military industrial dominance is now the closest thing to a one
world government we have ever seen! History shows that every empire will eventually fall, there are always barbarians somewhere outside the gates, large and swarming, or microscopic possibilities. If nothing finds a way in, the grossly excessive empire will birth its own death, with nothing left to consume, it will consume itself.

Meanwhile people live and die. We continue living behind enemy lines, doing what we can to be free, or at least not in prison, or in a full time job jail, not anywhere they want us. Always tempted by the programmed urge to join up, become one of the proud, relax into the sofa and stare at the screen, suck up the programming and find comfort in consumption and conformity, no longer an awkward outcast but a respected member... membership comes with privileges that can be taken away and you will become addicted to them, and you will do as you are told.

**Driving is tiring**, willingly crucified upon this steering wheel. Riding passenger is tiring, how long can you sit? Just fuckn sit there? Ged sleeps all the time, the whole back seat dog dreamland lulled by the vibrating diesel volkswagen rabbit. We are getting over 50 miles a gallon. I want one of these. Er, i mean, fuck cars!

Travel by car is strange, this century old transportation tech, toll roads and tickets exchanges of money and corporate fast food monopolies, black top and white stripes haggard drivers and traumatized zombified passengers, amused pissed off disgusted bored as hell cashiers and attendants, left lane right lane, fuckn middle lane, cones and flashing orange arrows narrow one lanes wild machines with bright shining eyes chewing roads, spitting things out, smoke and dust and stink. All the cars slow to watch this spectacle, fuck! Is this what we have become, insects crawling on machines... something to see after miles and hours of white DASH DASH DASH perfectly spaced and hypnotic, a mathematical strobe light of unknown consequence. Painted perforation, you stay on that side, we’ll stay on this side, play this game they’ve set out for us, and i get ideas while driving but my hands are full of wheel... i tell myself to remember. remember.

**tROY, nEW yORK.** Oil alarm came on, brake vacuum pump diaphragm failure. Spent all day here fucking with it, finally “fixed” it with an inner
tube from a wheelbarrow. That got us to Burlington, Vermont, where we met up with Pete’s friends Fern & Bella. Seems that Fern lives at The Stronghold House, a few blocks from my house in Minneapolis! Here we are in New York state and i meet my neighbor in Minneapolis. That’s traveling for ya, the further away you get, the closer to home ye be.

We went down to the water and gazed out into the night of Lake Champlain. Warm summer wind blown waves slapping water on the boulders of the shore. Drank beer and laughed our asses off, climbed and jumped around on some huge granite rocks arranged like a square stonehenge, watched the little Vermont Railroad train roll thru the water front. Talked to a strange man who was taking photos of abandoned buildings. Walked south to an awesome sandy beach off the bike trail, stood in the surf gazing into the darkness, made a driftwood fire and stared into the flames. I had a wild dream about singing with other people and our voices had some awesome magical connecting effect on everything around us, the universe was smiling and dancing.

**THE CITY was strangling me.** I needed to come on this road trip, to throw myself in a situation from which i could not escape, to meet strangers, to become friends with people and love them as beings who look at the world in a similar way, who see the beauty in a wild black raspberry bush growing on the side of the road and who will dance and sing and go crazy when everything else is broken... To again be excited. To be completely happy just by having a delicious snacky-treat in my hand.

**BELFAST, MAINE.** Went swimming in the mouth of Goose Neck Creek where it flows into the mouth of the Passagassawakeag River, which flows into Belfast Bay. tons of tiny shells in the gravel on the bottom, cold fresh water mixed with sea salt water in my mouth, refreshing!
Walked up to the house our friends Dan, Amy, & Andy bought, an amazing 175 year old place built with huge timbers and sitting on a big smack of land. Gardens surround the place, coupla chicken tractors (how many Chicken Power ya got in those things?), a view from the dining room window of the bay where boats are at anchor, small town paradise! It seems that a witch used to live there, the ground around the house sprouts perennial medicine and food. Many of the things growing wild were planted by her and they re-seed themselves all over the place. Dan made a tea of fresh Valerian flowers, peppermint, and yarrow. Euphoric!

We strolled down to Young’s Lobster Pound, picked up some mussels and a hard shell lobster. Took them back to the house and cooked. It’s been awhile since ive killed the meat ive eaten- part of life in the city. We ate the mussels with aoli, the lobster with butter, and Amy made a salad out of the garden full of borage flowers, tiny five pointed and blue, and nasturtiums all orange and yellow. i have not eaten such a memorable dinner since then... We threw in on a bottle of wine and all went to the campfire spot in the middle of a wildflower grove, white valerian all around. With 3 guitars 2 banjos and 5 voices, some laughing and some singing, we caterwauled into the night.

**JULY 26, 2007.** The Fillin’ Station Diner in Whately, Massachusetts. Coffee, biscuits & gravy good, guns-n-roses on the jukebox not so good. i guess i’m over that style. Slept in a green field just south of- Greenfield! Ha, in the daylight we see a mass of oily poison ivy just a foot away, bordering the woods where we slept. It loves those disturbed spots.

The other night i had a dream and saw Jacob Phelps in it. He was smiling at me. It was good to see him, like he was visiting me from far away in the new place where he now existed, somewhere beyond his lifeless body...

I was never taught to open my mind to the unknowable possibilities, to consider that there might be things we don’t understand about the universe around us and within us, infinite unknowns. It was never revealed to me that there were mysteries, someone always had an answer, plausible or ridiculous. When you have to take a question on faith, the answers become infinite, and the more colorful the better! The answer is: nobody knows.
“Providence, RI - Oscar the cat seems to have an uncanny knack for predicting when nursing home patients are going to die, by curling up next to them during their final hours.

His accuracy, observed in 25 cases, has led the staff to call family members once he has chosen someone. It usually means they have less than four hours to live.

‘He doesn’t make too many mistakes. He seems to understand when patients are about to die.’ said Dr. David Dosa...The 2 year old feline was adopted as a kitten and grew up in a third floor dementia unit at the Steere House Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

Oscar is better at predicting death than the people who work there.”

- Associated Press

wE aRE pARKED iN tHE mIDDLE oF iNTERSTATE 80 headed west, surrounded by stopped big rigs venting compressed air from their brake lines, diesel engines idling. There is such a racket of hissing and rumbling, it sounds like we’re in a railroad yard waiting for a freight train to leave. But not as fun. Just stuck in some kind of apocalyptic traffic jam. We are in the hills of Pennsylvania, a field of corn greener than the trees of the woods lays in the distance, grain silos far beyond that, farm houses and barns. Sun is burning down on us. We start to move a little, one by one the brake lights go off down the line until that’s us, and we roll forward, then stop again at the top of the hill. Now we can see the tractor-trailers stretch out, two side by side lanes, for miles, then turn a corner, infinity. This is our new reality. The Werner Enterprise truck in front of us is a pleasant smoky-blue color. Could be worse. But there is a party in Pittsburgh, and we would like to go to the party. Cant always get what you want. Unless you use magic. If you play Black Sabbath’s “Master of Reality”, wheels will roll, faster and faster.

i mUST aBANDON tHE fORTRESS oF mYSELF. Infinite choices. Grow old in the city surrounded by friends, move to the country and live off the land freer from the all seeing eye, or ramble around the world, boating down endless rivers until bored by the endless beauty and peace, and then turn to ramble in the city awhile… infinite choices.
aUGUST 1st, 2007. mINNEAPOLIS. nIGHT. The Highway 35 bridge over the Mississippi collapsed a few hours ago, fell into the river, some unknown number of people dead. Stella called Pete on his cell phone as we drove into town, warning us not to come in that way, because that way didn’t exist anymore. Frantic messages from my mother on the message machine at home. I called her up to let her know i was alive. Welcome back...
THE LAST BiTE

i aM WORKiNG outside, gardening, bugs and bunnies and worms and spiders and bees and fish in a lake they swim in. people wander around strange colonies, on foot, in machine, weirdly constructed hive nests of hierarchy so mysterious and partial royalty of an abstraction called money, some numbers written in a book that were transferred to a computer and that now guide a graph that rises and falls and buttons are pushed after phone calls are made transmissions of light rays thru tiny plastic hairs. it is strange, it is weird. i relate to the boy in the yard next door, he is... words fail! he is different than other boys his age, because he is full of wonder and happiness, not hate and selfishness... he loves it at the end of the day when we, the gardeners, are done working and i go swimming in the lake that is at the bottom of everyone's backyard. he screams wildly and laughs as i splash around. he wants to know how the water is. my skin is buzzing with the sudden cold of the lake. i feel good. i feel high! good! alive! happy! unafraid.

happy to be just a little closer to the mind of that boy, cause he is the happiest person i've seen on this lake.

defRESSed. overwhelming paralyzing depression.

lemme guess- was it that dumpstered pepperoni pizza i ate for breakfast? or- i forgot to take my b-vitamin? or- i exist in a city that is void of common love? my fellow beings, have we left already, are we done? Wait for me!

On the plus side i did convince Christopher to lend me 10 bux. and then i also got to watch Christopher and Alex splitting wood in the Seward courtyard, the oak was full of carpenter ants, tiny tunnels and chambers, ants crawling around on the wood as each strike with the splitting maul revealed new clusters of ants huddled away in a dark chamber of the wood, hiding from the apocalypse.

i smelled a sunflower just blooming in our front yard, four feet tall, and picked the dead heads off marigolds, rolled the dark brown flower heads between my fingers, rolled the seeds out and let them fly in the air, fall to the ground.... fingers smell like marigold now, good smell that i can remember smelling all the way back in Colorado when i was just
beginning to experience the world of sadness loneliness isolation
frustration anger depression. i sit here, and then i walk here, feeling tears
coming but rational mind stops them. What are you going to cry about,
that you havent already cried about? its been done! Boring! You’ve been
here before. feel like my body mind needs something to break loose,
anything, drug, or interaction with another being, some injection of
energy to break the matrix, and then a long term potent solution or
distraction at least. sad and lonely here. i continue to be here.

traveling! i can think, “i am lonely because i am in this place where i
don’t know anyone!” and it makes sense then, a shallow loneliness, with
an apparent solution. just reach out. but now here in this city, i am with
people, but i just want to be alone? my old friends, they don’t speak to
the pain that is inside of me, and my pain doesn’t show on the surface.
Are they really friends?

i don’t know how to say it. no, i’m not alright.
Sometimes i think i can see it in their eyes, their own pain, and i
don’t know how to acknowledge that. And i’m terrified of it, people can
be terrifying, they could do anything to you, if you let them get close.
they could really hurt you. i find myself alone in the street, wild man in
the street, hermit in the city, scowling at the world, how long have i been
here? am i crawling out of that? That was the low point, right, there’s
low points, it’s not always like this, is it? it gets better? seems like i
remember that sometimes its really good, but then it always slips away.
the good times. happiness. nothing lasts forever. cycles.

feel like a flat soda now, someone left the goddamn lid off, no fucking
fizz left, dump it out. start over. carbonation peddler! just a little bump
to get over the hump, just survive tonight. then- everything will be
downhill from there.
that’s all.
survive tonight.
there is no future.

biCYCLE fiXED to fly down the hills of Kansas City critical mass,
bicycle party, half of everyone drinkin a beer, ridin shoutin,
‘stay in the right lane!’
‘fuck you!’
some stop at the red light, some take the intersection. mobile chess game. pawns gone mad. fuck you! alright! exchanging shouts with Friday night pedestrians and a busker on the curb playin car battery powered electric guitar screamin, playin behind his head! celebration! double middle finger to the mind of authority from inside the killing machine.

i aM nUMBER tHREE, rolling to a stop. the field is full of pollen, smell dry grass, feel an echo: drumming and singing. open horizon. everything on this land is living and breathing and i am on this land.

pOKER and bullshit. fall has come, gold dust on the ground, bright yellow leaves on black pavement. summer is about to fold. autumn now, and it’s poker and bullshit. The last bite is coming up. “Hey, are you gonna eat that?”
robnoxious666@gmail.com
3052 10th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55407
