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Editor: Paul Krassner

- Alan Abel on Hitler's Clone
- Ina May Gaskin on Nipplephobia
- David Zasloff on Money & Credit Cards

Susie Bright's Book Tour Diary

Labor Day, Los Angeles

This is where my book tour begins, the freeways I grew up on. I lost my virginity in Los Angeles, sexually and politically.

In the '70s, when I last lived here, Hollywood was still only a colony, and L.A. thrived with shipyards, aerospace, tourism, oil fields, education. But now, the whole sprawl is a company town, as surely as Harlan County USA, and if any of the other industries exist, it is only to feed Hollywood. A shipyard can make some real money as a location. A university is a post-production fat farm.

So how is L.A.'s love life? I went to Skylight Books in Los Feliz, and my old high school Spanish teacher, Mr. Gomez, showed up for my reading. He was so handsome, with his silver hair and orange *guayavera*, but his hands were shaking, with palsy, I think. He got up and told the whole crowd that the kids like me, the ones who shut down the school when Nixon invaded Cambodia and exposed the undercover narcs and caravaned to Wounded Knee—that it all went to shit after us, that the kids didn't care anymore. He looked like he could cry easily, and he did.

I don't think most of the crowd knew that I existed in any form before my incarnation as Susie Sexpert. They paused for Mr. Gomez—but then they started talking too, and in one aching unified voice they said: There is no love here. Anyone can get laid, but no one can have a relationship. Everything is ephemeral, passion doesn't last.

"But that's theater," I said. "When you live in a town that's based on the values of illusion, what do you expect?" I don't know how to fall in love in L.A. anymore, either.

I went to visit Paul Krassner's house in Venice, and I put on my bathing suit and zori's to walk down the Boardwalk, just like we used to. No one just wears their swimsuit on the Boardwalk any longer, they wear special titillating outfits that promise a lot, and show rather little, at least compared to my plain bikini. You used to be able to have a fat ass and wear a string bikini and shades, walk down the Boardwalk with a joint in your mouth and fall in love. Now it's an audition.

San Luis Obispo

There's one independent bookstore in town, The Phoenix, but they flourish, selling collectors' items and used books and offering a room that doesn't feel like McDonalds to sit down and turn a page. Mostly students come to my talk, but one guy shows up who asks me how to marry a stripper. He gives me a color-photo business card advertising the gentlemen's club that he spends most of his hours at . . . it's one block down the street.

He says the girls there aren't making enough money, that someone's gotta do something. As much as he pines for them, I think this big husky guy vicariously lives in their shadow, and that if he could wave a magic thong over his body and become as kittenish as "Tawny" looks, pictured on the business card, he would.

Big Sur

I've arranged a reading at the Henry Miller Library, a store/cabin set in an avant-garde sculpture garden, with a wood stove in its center and Henry's memorabilia all over the walls. I feel like I'm in the womb of the erotic intelligentsia. Every book and vintage postcard here is a template of sexual liberation—the kind that happened *before* the 1960s.

My audience is largely made up of many folks my parents' age, some of Miller's peers, folks living in threesomes *today* that they started decades ago. People here are as erotically psychedelic as the sunsets they get to watch each night from the Pacific cliffs—it's a timeless bohemia. I don't want to budge.

Santa Cruz

This is my home, and a great homecoming awaits me at the local Bookshop. This reading is the first time I realize that people my age and older are bringing their kids to see me, my first generational jump. One teenager comes up to me and says, "My mom just handed me a pile of your books when I was 15, and said, 'It's all here.' I told her I wasn't interested in sex—but that changed recently . . ."

She blushes. I blush too. A woman who used to picket me in the 1980s for crimes against feminism shows up at the event to announce her erotic writing workshop.

San Francisco

I've got a noontime reading in the financial district, which I want to be especially pornographic because the 9-5 set working down there are so needy. In the evening, I read at a store across from City Hall, and a group of seminary students come to see me as a class project. They are erotic Methodists! Sexually forward Presbyterians! I tell them one of my earliest supporters was a young man whose grandfather invented Dial-a-Prayer. I suggest to them that they start a similar free hotline of erotic inspiration and meditation.

Sebastapol

Some of the worlds best pornographers live here. My friends Jack and Mark are godfathers of primal gay erotica. Jack was the first to publish Mapplethorpe, and the original editor of the gay magazine, *Drummer*. He's like an erotic Waldo, appearing in every important moment in queer history, and their home is like a splendid gallery.

Among other things, they create fetish videos, and Mark jokes to me that their big problem at the moment is frustrated fans writing in who demand to see movies of men smoking a pipe, nude. The pull on the pipe is what's called for here, and apparently there aren't enough good-looking men around who know how to smoke a pipe properly anymore, with the right "flair."

"I don't know how to smoke a pipe, but I'd slay 'em with a bong," I say. "You know, the '70s nostalgia binge is exploding now."

(Continued on Page 2)

BOOK TOUR DIARY

(Continued from Cover)

Arcata

I get to go to school here, to lecture at Humboldt State, in their Human Sexuality classes, where I give the students a little anonymous sex survey. Do they masturbate? Have they had sex with another person? Do they like their sex life as it is? Of course they're curious—no one ever talks about these sort of things frankly.

I'm surprised by how many of them are already married. Getting married young is in again, it's a romantic backlash against AIDS, and the spectacle of their divorced and jaded parents. They're the straight-edge promise of a monogamous love that never dies, and even though I think they're in for a big surprise, I can't help but be touched by their sincerity. No one has the nerve to be a sincere slut anymore, at least openly.

One 22-year-old husband comes up to me with his wife after class, and asks me how he can please her more. He says he loves her so much, he'd do anything, and she blushes when he says that—those high pink cheeks again, my messenger!

"Aw, you could read a million books," I say. "But when you love each other like this, when you'll do 'anything,' you hardly need instructions, you just need time."

I ask the young woman if she ever comes on her own, if she can bring herself to orgasm.

She gazes down at the floor. "Well, not with my hands, but with water, you know, in the bathtub." They both look like I have hypnotized them, that they must tell me the truth no matter what I ask.

"Oh, you two have to have the most fantastic bathtub party, where he gets in first and cradles you and touches you while you spray the water down on your clit." God, it's great to give instructions like this. They thank me and say goodbye, leaving a couple books behind on the desk.

Eugene, Oregon

I barely make it to the women's bookstore in town, it was such a long drive from California. The bookshop owners have been stalling for time by telling the crowd how independent bookstores are having the screws put to them by the mainstream publishing industry. They're right, of course, but I'm pissed because they don't have enough copies of my books, they're already sold out. Whose fault was that? I can't be the buyer and supplier on top of everything else.

I start out by saying that I visited this store a long time ago, when I was first producing *On Our Backs* magazine, and most women's bookstores wouldn't even carry it, they were so offended by its sexual tone.

"Oh, you met me before that," one of the owners calls out from the cash register desk. "At the Women in Print conference, you lit right into me."

Women in Print—that was the now-deceased coalition of radical feminist bookstores and publishers, who had surrounded me at that conference in 1984 like a fucking firing squad, and told me that my perverted politics would not stand. The biggest publisher in lesbian books crept up to my ear that day, and whispered, "Everyone I know thinks you should be assassinated."

"What did I say to you? I'm sorry, I don't even remember," I call back to the bookstore owner. I didn't remember her at all, I only recall that little whisper.

The bookstore dyke turned crimson. Again, I seemed to be making someone talk who hadn't planned on talking at all. "You said that I should see a shrink, you said that if I hated sex so much, I should see someone about it."

The floor of 200 hippie college girls sitting between us fell totally quiet. If I didn't say something right away, she was going to be taken away on a stretcher right then and there. "Oh, that sounds so cruel, that's so awful I spoke to you that way," I said. "I hate that, when

people pass judgments on you that ring in your ears long after they've forgotten them entirely."

Portland

I arrive at my first hotel stay-over, instead of staying with friends. I don't know anyone here, but this is my very favorite hotel, the Heathman. It's old-Portland luxury. I feel like the mistress of a lumber baron. The bookstore that's sponsoring me is the largest in the world, I think—they have acres of books, and a big auditorium to host my event.

Backstage, where I wait in the wings, I'm surrounded by props and stagecraft for a children's production of *Dracula*. An activist hooker is introducing me on stage, and I make my entrance carrying a black cross above my head, just to strike the right Satanic tone.

Everyone in Portland is polyamorous, it seems. They laugh when I asked if there was one monogamous couple left in the Rose City. The audience are all the electric daughters and sons of Big Sur consciousness, dazzling each other in what used to be considered a little sister of Seattle. "Come to the Poly Pub," one couple exhorts me. "Come speak to our dungeon group," invites a comely threesome. And then a flurry of business cards from other dungeon hostesses descend in my lap.

Two beautiful women come up to my side and lightly press my shoulders. "We know you must be exhausted," says one. And then the other: "We want you to call us anytime tonight if we can take care of you. We're professionals." They didn't blush at all, they winked.

I was dead tired and had to drive into Seattle by 9 a.m., but when I got back to my lumber baron suite, I called them. You can't turn away such gifts.

Seattle

I'm still shimmering from my two angels' ministrations. I don't remember their names, only their plush wings, glossy hair and magic hands. It's easy to float into Bookstore A and simply tell them what I've been up to. . . . "I've been on the road so long that you all are my best friend tonight, my diary." I tell them what's up in Portland, and they nod sagely.

A leader of the Washington Bar Association comes up to congratulate me for something. I sign a few breasts, hands, some books, and my best friend in Seattle brings her parents up to meet me. They are flushed, the father more than the mom. "I'm sorry we have to leave so soon," the mother says, as graceful as her daughter. I wonder what they really think.

Next day I get to be on the radio with Kennedy, a former MTV VJ who was the only one I ever liked because she was such a smart aleck. She is a potty-mouth who militantly kept her virginity until she got officially engaged a year ago. Kennedy was notorious for her romantic obsession with Dan Quayle, and I tell her I had a rather erotic relationship with him myself.

"Oh, my fantasies were never sexual," she says. "It was more like me saying, 'Danny, honey, do you want some soy milk in your coffee?' And then he'd say, 'Oh, no, baby, just honey.'"

Detroit

It's just as ugly as I remember it, when I was last here in 1977. Only now, there's two plants in town still open, and the original Henry Ford factory is growing weeds, windowless, filling up with dog shit. I go see my old roommate, Jane, and convince her that we should go look at the old house we shared together, when we were both socialist union organizers.

She had lived there for years, and I was her roommate for only five months, but I got us evicted one night for throwing an "inter-racial dinner party," if you can call it that. I can't stand to think how the landlord described it when he called the cops on us. Probably something like, "fucking niggers in that white girl's apartment."

I was cooking spaghetti for a bunch of other teenagers, just like me,

after a high school anti-apartheid conference we'd hosted downtown. Jane was at work. Six cops showed up at the door, held a gun to my head, and pushed me into the living room, pinning my arms behind my back.

They said they had information we were harboring a police hostage. I remember the total silence in the house, except for the flushing, coming from the head. I looked at little Yolanda sitting terrified on the sofa, and cursed myself, because we'd told her mother she was attending a YWCA girls conference.

I don't remember the Magnificent Six pulling back, after that entrance, but they did. We were so pathetically innocent—no one had lit up a joint yet, or was necking with their top up over their head. We did do all that shit, but we weren't doing it at that moment—everyone was starving, waiting on my noodles.

"So let's go to Highland Park," I say to Jane, and she agrees, it's time to trip down memory lane.

"It's called an 'empowerment area' now," she says, which makes me laugh.

"It sounds like you get a vibrator if you move in."

It's pouring rain when we drive up Woodward Ave. Our street, Pasadena, is uninhabited except for one house, with gardenias growing inside burglar-bar flower boxes. Every window of every house is shattered, there are no doors and, in our old yard, there's a mylar balloon limping from a string on the sycamore.

The thunder rumbles loose, and the sky turns so dark it looks more like midnight than noon. "C'mon, let's check it out," I yell, dragging Jane across the puddles and up what was left of the porch stairs. "God, what did happen to those hillbillies who lived here, did they think the white tide was going to roll in and save them or what?" It was our upstairs neighbors who had called the landlord; they were his cousins.

I step in to the center of the "living room," now just a tornado of smashed fixtures, smashed plaster, and smashed everything else. This building is not naturally decomposing—it's been destroyed by man first, not nature. The rain falls inside, pooling everywhere, but the water is the most graceful of the elements that has transformed this place.

"The old lady cousin was too scared to go out," Jane said, "I'd go get her milk for her, 'cause she was just petrified. She was tripping, it was all in her imagination—this was the coolest place you could possibly live as a white person in America."

No one was ever threatened by my presence in Detroit, or thought I had anything to prove. I didn't. People must have thought I was a white girl married into a black family, and in a way, they were right. If you don't think white folks' prejudice is a heavy load to carry around, then just try living without it sometime, and you feel like you can finally fill your lungs up with air.

Jane was whimpering in the living room. "What if there are rats?" I kept storming through the rubble into the back of the apartment to see if my room was still standing. She answered her own question: "I guess there are no rats, there's no food here."

That night I spoke at Wayne State and had an excellent time. I was introduced by the magenta-haired female president of the Student Union, who Jane told me was a C.P. member.

"I didn't know anyone under 80 was in the Communist Party," I said. "Are you sure about that? This chick is planning a sex party for next week and is really bummed I'm going to miss it. American Communists never used to throw sex parties..."

Minneapolis

I feel like kissing my author escort, Markie, because he's the first one I've had, and he's carrying all my bags, helping me into a warm fancy 4-wheel-drive vehicle with hot cocoa in the drink caddy.

I'm speaking in a Catholic university chapel tonight, with a couple interviews beforehand, but I ask him if he's up for doing something different before we begin the grind.

"I want to go find my grandmother's grave," I say. "She's buried in

a cemetery in St. Paul, in what used to be the Irish neighborhood but is now black, and my mom gave me a map that's like, '40 steps right, one step left,' like a pirate treasure. There was no grave marker before, but I sent her some money last year to order one."

Markie is already racing toward the cemetery. He knows just where it is, because he grew up here too. He's into it.

"I told my mom, you and your sisters are never going to agree on this gravestone, and then you'll die and she still won't have one. It was only \$700, which is a lot in one way, but they've been arguing over their mother and money since she died in 1937, and it just seemed so awful, why not just put something together and feel more peaceful about it?"

The lady in the cemetery office shows me the record book where all the bodies are listed. She let me xerox the pages where the name, 'Agnes Williams O'Halloran,' is entered, in blue ink, the year before penicillin was released. She died of pneumonia when my mom was 12. All the record books, new and old, have entries of my grandmother's, handwritten in blue fountain-pen, and it's so different from the rest of the word-processed world I feel like stroking the pages, as if they were feathers instead of pulp.

We could not find her grave. Markie went up one row of 20 and I went down the next, and we kept working our way through the rows, a mile of rows, without success. The map was like a puzzle, not a guide, it took us nowhere. I read scores of names on the headstones like lines from a saint's notebook: Margaret, Mary, Joseph, Michael, Paul, Theresa, Francis—not a Jennifer or Jason among them.

Markie called up the cemetery lady on his cell phone, because it was getting dark, and she said, "Oh, I just started working here, I really don't know." I felt like crying, and then I looked at Markie and here he was, my knight with a shining cell phone. He really looked scared, like he had failed me, and I said, "You are a total *mensch*, don't feel bad, let's just curse them and be off. I'll be back to St. Paul and I'll tie the grave keepers down until they find my grandmother for me."

The chapel was wonderful, the acoustics were so beautiful, the altar such an elegant stage.

One young woman asked me what I thought about "working with sex workers."

"I don't know what you mean, are you talking about driving them to their jobs?" I asked, genuinely trying to figure out her euphemism.

"No," she said, and now it was her turn to change colors. "I mean, I work with them, testing them for HIV in a public clinic." I looked harder at her, and I saw she was the twin of that husky man in San Luis Obispo, she wants to marry a stripper and save a whore and doesn't know where to begin.

"They want someone who'll love them when they stop working, like we all do," I said.

Markie took me to the airport at 1 a.m. and softly kissed me on the mouth.

Boston

I was shown to a handicapped room at the Marriott when I arrived after hours. They left me at the doorway, so I had to call downstairs to suggest a move. "There's no bed in here," I said. "There's a hospital gurney, but I'm not ready for that yet."

I have lots of friends in Boston, so we had a party at Amelia's house. I met a woman at the party who'd just done a book on Fat Sex, and she was indeed very fat and sexy. She told me she wanted to get right down to people's most crazed fears about fat sex, like what would happen to you if a giant-woman lady got on top of you to get fucked—would you be smothered?

She had consulted with some professional fat lady dominatrices, who told her they had made countless porn videos with men who fantasized about getting smothered—dreamed of it, in fact—but it just wasn't that easy to do, even on purpose. Another urban legend destroyed.

At dinner we ate Amelia's lasagna, which she prepares in endless baking pans, like a parable of love and fishes. I told the table about a

new 'zine that my friend Shar does, called *Starphkr*, that is exclusively about people's torrid fantasies with the famous and superfamous. I said, "Let's go around the table and everyone has to say what their starfucking fantasy is."

"A Mulder/Scully sandwich," said Am's boyfriend. That got things off to a nice start. "Susan Dey," a film professor offered, and he seemed to get an instant coalition of other men agreeing with him. We contemplated the rest of the Partridge tribe for awhile without committing to any others.

"My fantasy is sicker than anyone's," I said. "I would weep from shame but my tummy hurts too much from laughing."

"Oh god, is it Michael Jackson?" the professor asked.

"No, it's Mark Fuhrman—don't hate me," I said.

I flash on him back in our apartment in Detroit, being too afraid to go outside; and when he pins my arms behind my back, I...

New York

Tina Turner was in my hotel elevator. I got into the elevator, and there was a woman already there singing to herself—you know, the way you do when you don't even know what you're humming. I was so charmed, I started to say, "It's so nice to hear someone singing in the elevator," but I didn't even get past the "It's" because she woke out of her reverie and noticed I was there, ducking her chin down to her chest. I looked at that profile. It was Tina! She had little tiny feet in loafers with tassels, and a long black cardigan.

Then Joan Jett came to my reading in a sex-toy store, Toys in Babeland. I didn't know her profile at all. I was signing autographs, and a woman in line with spiky hair and wicked tattoos asked me to dedicate some books she brought from home, "to Joan."

I really liked the collection she brought, they were my favorites. Then she turns to leave, and the two girls standing in line behind her fall into gushing squeals: "That was Joan Jett—ohmigod, she asked you to write her name, Joan, like she was nobody!" (Well, what else was she going to say, Nancy?)

The storekeeper ran down the street to catch the rock star, and implored her to come back for a picture. Now that I knew who she was I was embarrassed, and so was Joan, and I haven't seen that picture, but I'm sure we both look bright red.

There are more stars in L.A. than New York, but they aren't singing in the elevator and they don't come to my readings with their erotica clasped to their breast. In New York, my audiences seemed to have a meter running. I felt like their time was money, and I wanted to quote the Greg Brown song to them "Time ain't money when all you got is time." The book-signing crowds here were quiet, for the first time on my tour, stone quiet.

"What's the matter?" I asked one night.

"No one here is having sex," someone snorted from the back.

"You're all looking at me like I'm the only one who ever has," I was thinking to myself. Like the characters in *Cafe Flesh* who can't have sex anymore so they put the freaks who still can do it in a cabaret show and make them perform the missionary position.

The second day, I go to visit my friend Joe, who works in an auction house that sells antique books, including bibles that have the page-edges secretly and pornographically embossed. When you shut the book tight, and look at the page-edges of the book, the gold leaf reveals itself to be an obscene tableau of debauchery. He shows me several Guttentberg specials like this, and then we go down the street to eat kashka varnikes and brisket, which was so good it really was like having sex in New York City, at last. I got overheated and had to lie down before my final appearance at the 92nd St. 'Y.'

"Oh, dear," the 'Y' hostess said to me, "I really don't want to hear what you have to say tonight." She looked so unhappy that I was hypnotized. I wanted to walk gravely on stage, and say, "I cannot talk about sex tonight, I am in New York City and you are all so grim."

I thought about Paul in Venice and all the great stories he'd told me about New York when he was young, about the Village and the Yippies and Lenny Bruce and great quantities of free love and legal acid.

I knew all that grooviness must be here somewhere, but I had to get away from the money people and the grasping people and back to some little scrap of a song that you could sing in a lift without even trying.

Thanksgiving, Home

I was psyched because by the end of my two months on the road, I got on three regional bestseller lists. In book lingo, that means you have a "national" bestseller. A "New York Times bestseller" means you are *actually* national, in the sense that a state-wide group of bookstores is polled.

I ask my publisher to reconsider advertising my book now. But my editor told me that since my advertising budget was cut to nothing in the summer, there was nothing, no amount of books sold or cities visited, that could change it. The marketing person says those local bestseller lists don't mean very much, because, besides *Harry Potter*, people just aren't buying that many books. If I'm #4 on the *L.A. Times* list, that means that *Potter* sold 100,000 that week and I probably sold 20.

Then the publisher's publicist calls and says, her voice a little higher than I've heard it before, that they've just had a new round of layoffs. "It's been difficult at first, of course," she says, "but now we believe we have a more effective, tighter, more focused group than ever before."

Poor lady, she didn't know that she was the 10th generation of publishing employees to tell me this story of a house-wide layoff and the resulting lean, mean machine of effectiveness it inspires.

"My god," I said, "that's great. If they would only get rid of everyone, then it would be perfect!"

All the color left my face. The book tour was over, and every author feels like Peggy Lee at this point, dragging on a cig and rasping, "Is that all there is?"

I met thousands of people, and they touched me—their hands on my body, my pen on their breasts and books, their thoughts on my mind, and my breath on their face. It had been a season of touching and hypnosis. I felt like they loved me, but Rupert Murdoch wouldn't know it if we all fell on top of him at the same time. I had a lot of time and no money for sure, now. A few weeks of hibernation, and I'll be able to blush again and write another story.

Susie Bright's latest books are *Full Exposure*, *The Sexual State of the Union* and *The Best American Erotica 2000*.

Mixed Messages

by Nancy Cain

It's all over the papers about Prozac for kids. Prozac and Ritalin and other mood-altering drugs. Four million kids are on the stuff. Toddlers who were born in 1998 are already using. Arianna Huffington wonders in the *Los Angeles Times* if there is any chance that members of the FDA oversight committee might possibly wake up and do something about it. In her syndicated column, she cites the case of parents of a second grader who took their son off the drugs and were reported to the Child Protective Services and charged with medical neglect. Seems that keeping your kid drug-free is against the law in some cases.

Turning the page, I am struck with the word POT printed in huge letters in the center of a big advertisement. Naturally, I look more closely. The ad, paid for by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, says that to a sixth grader, the word POT means one of those things that a plant grows in (and they show a picture of a flower pot). But, they go on, to a seventh grader the word POT means marijuana (and they show a picture of a baggie with some decent-looking weed in it, and a pack of rolling papers). Their message: "Be sure your kids know you don't want them to use drugs."

Just say whatever.

Money & Credit Cards

by David Zasloff

i love money.
having money makes me feel calm.
some people say, you wanna feel calm, study yoga.
oh yeah? yoga is expensive.

i get these yoga catalogues in the mail,
they got yoga mats, yoga pillows, yoga clothing,
yoga hats, yoga videos, yoga sweat pants, yoga shoes,
yoga socks, yoga jewelry, yoga books, yoga music,
yoga vacations, yoga cruises.
all to help you breathe better.
having money makes me breathe better.

other people say,
"you should be able to be happy without money."
most of the people who say this have money.

there are times i can be happy without money,
like during sex.
but after sex, i like having a little money.
and so does she.

as much as I love money,
I don't like credit cards.
credit cards are the illusion of money.

dig this.
let's say you buy something on your credit card
because you don't have the money.
and say you spend \$300.
now you owe the bank \$300.
but when you think about it,
this \$300 is money nobody ever had.

you never had this money.
if you had the money
you wouldn't have used your credit card.
the bank didn't have it.

it didn't exist.
nobody had the money.
then the bank takes the money nobody ever had
and calls it an "asset."
now it's an asset,
the bank can charge you interest
on money nobody ever had.

next the bank takes the money nobody ever had
and loans it to mexico.
now mexico has the money you never had.
well they don't have it either.
but both you and mexico are paying the bank interest
on money nobody ever had.
the bank is making a lot of money
off money nobody ever had.
the only person with money
is the guy who had the idea
to give you money he didn't have.
he's livin' in a big house
built with money nobody ever had.

eventually, you keep spending money nobody ever had,
you'll go bankrupt
but once you go bankrupt,
you only have to pay back
part of the money nobody ever had.
as soon as you pay back
part of the money nobody ever had,
the bank will give you more money nobody ever had
because they want money you don't have.

right now the amount of money nobody ever had
is enormous.
i'd bet all the money I don't have,
there isn't enough money printed in the whole world
to cover all the money nobody ever had.

most of my money is money people have.
i'm trying to make more money people don't have.
that's where the big bucks are.



Crotch Talk

by Ina May Gaskin

Doctors don't know as much about crotch behavior as they used to. That's one reason they get sued so much and so many women are having babies by getting cut open.

I recently spent five days teaching doctors who belong to the American Academy of Family Practice Physicians some of the knowledge about crotch powers that has entered the realm of the forgotten during the last century. On the conference program, my subject areas were listed as "shoulder dystocia" (stuck shoulders after the baby's head is born), "breech birth" (bottoms or feet first), and "family-centered maternity care."

It is still a relatively new concept in the United States for any doctors to consider midwives to be the true experts about crotches and birth, so my inclusion on the faculty was considered revolutionary and potentially controversial. What made it all work was my birth videos, because these allowed them to see—for many of them, the first time—what a normal birth looks like. That's right. Normal birth is such a rare happening in a U.S. hospital these days that lots of medical students and doctors have never seen one.

How these videos look to you depends on where you're coming from. If you're pregnant, they might make you feel relieved to know that you won't look ugly while you're having a baby. The mothers are gorgeous, even luscious. The videos might also blow your mind, because you'll see some couples doing things you don't usually see people on television doing in labor. They kiss each other, and dads squeeze breasts right in the middle of labor instead of doing the usual dad thing of either watching an electronic fetal monitor going "beep-beep-beep" or a baseball game on television. You'll hear some low moaning that sounds like someone is either approaching orgasm or right in the middle of it. You'll even see mothers eating and drinking, sometimes while they're sitting on the toilet. All of these are techniques home birthers have figured out to help birth happen with less pain, narcotics and bad vibes.

Now if you're a doctor, these videos are disconcerting, to say the least. The women aren't "draped" with green or white sheets, and there aren't any tubes carrying liquids into them or out of them. The women aren't paralyzed by epidurals, so they're moving all over the place while in labor. And they aren't wearing any clothes, so all their most fascinating parts are visible and going through the most amazing changes.

How can all this sexuality be going on while a woman is having a baby? Doesn't anyone have any sense of decency anymore? A doctor might not know whether to feel turned on, scared or morally outraged.

And when the baby's head finally comes out of the woman without anyone having cut her crotch open and its body doesn't follow, panic sets in. The baby's head, which was pink at first, becomes dark purple. When this happens in hospitals, people start thinking of various ways to cut the woman to get at the rest of the baby. A method that was popularized by obstetricians in the '80s was to shove the kid back in the womb and then cut the woman open to get him out. But it didn't always work so well, and some of the babies died or were badly injured, and the doctors got sued anyway. For doctors, watching a case of stuck shoulders happen is much worse than watching any horror show that Stephens King or Spielberg have brought to the screen.

With all this in mind, you can probably imagine the suspense in the room as the doctors watched my video of a baby's head being born and then just staying there, despite my partner's efforts to help the body come. After 30 seconds, the baby's head was dark purple enough that most of the doctors themselves had given up breathing.

"This baby is now a smart 17-year-old," I told them. "Go ahead. Take a breath."

Then we watched the mother turn over and immediately push her baby out, without any further help. All 10-1/2 pounds of her. The baby breathed right away, without any stimulation. There was no blood, because her mother didn't tear, and the midwife hadn't cut her

crotch open. Spontaneous applause filled the room. I was happy. I mean, this is almost as much fun as sex.

The next day I showed them videos of breech births. When you are not scared out of your mind, it's very entertaining to watch these babies come out. The little boys back out, and when their butts are born, they usually get the cutest little hard-ons and pee. I told the docs that helping them come out when they get stuck is a little like getting a bicycle out of the back of a station wagon. You can't go jerking on them, or you'll just get them stuck worse. And, because they're babies, not bicycles, you're likely to injure them.

To help remove that fear, I reminded them that women's parts, like men's, get engorged when the vibes are good. Like men's, women's parts get much bigger when they are engorged. W-a-a-a-y-y b-i-g-g-e-r. A woman's parts are like a parachute. If you have not seen them fully deployed, you don't understand the situation at all. In fact, women's parts get way bigger than men's parts ever dream of getting, because women have to get great big babies out of theirs, while men only have to give birth to millions and millions of tiny sperm.

For women to get this blessed engorgement happening while they're having babies, the vibes have to be outstandingly good. No fear, no anger, no anxiety, no worries. They need to be praised, loved, fed, kept warm, stroked, massaged, amused, and maybe even sucked. All of these nice actions cause the right hormones to do the right things.

Naturally, humor helps a lot, especially for those who have nobody to kiss during labor. A good belly laugh can instantly get those pain-blocking endorphins rolling in a woman's bloodstream. Of course, the challenge is to know what might make a woman in labor laugh.

"It's something like the slumber parties we used to have as teenagers, when the game was to get to get a laugh going and see who would be the first to pee in her pants," I told the docs. "Same principle."

One of the other fun things I got to do with them was to introduce them to my campaign to eradicate a mental disorder that is epidemic among adult Americans. I call it "nipplephobia." I figured we needed a medical term to help us recognize the disease that drives people to be mean to women who breastfeed their babies. Breastfeeding mothers are often driven into public toilets to do their "dirty work." Sometimes they get arrested for indecent exposure. People who suffer from nipplephobia exhibit bizarre behavior whenever they think a baby might be getting something they didn't. Fortunately, the disease is curable. The treatment doesn't even involve extensive counseling or medication. Since the cure is visual stimulus overload, they just have to see enough nipples doing what they're supposed to do to be cured.

By the way, these birth videos that I have produced are so powerful that if they were allowed on mainstream TV, we would fairly quickly figure out how to get babies out of their mothers without cutting most of them out. I'm all for this, but I have to say that after more than 20 years of trying to get them on mainstream TV, I'm about ready for the porn circuit. The first (and only) time a producer gave me the okay, I showed two of my videos on a popular show in Austin, Texas. All of the feedback from the viewing audience was good, but the station manager canceled the whole series my show was part of because of my video. Freaked him out.

My next try was when the producer of the Geraldo Rivera show called me to send my videos for a show they were doing about birth.

"You probably won't want them," I said. "The women weren't laboring in freezing rooms and there were no strangers around, so they eventually threw all their clothes off."

But I sent them anyway. The producer called the next day and said, "They're really nice. In fact, they're amazing. But we can't show them, because they're too graphic."

Too graphic for the Geraldo Rivera show! My daughter Eva said, "They probably would have shown them if the women had been wearing a G-string and pasties."

Ina May Gaskin is president of the Midwives Association of North America.

Hitler's Drive-In

by Alan Abel

Frankenmuth, Michigan is a national tourist attraction steeped in Bavarian history. The town's architectural design has a Disney-like replica of old Germany. And Bronner's Store celebrates Christmas all year round with its mammoth supply of holiday gifts and accessories.

On a back street, unknown to visitors, is Hitler's Drive-In. The man behind the counter looks exactly like Adolf, mustache and all. He's around fifty years old, speaks broken English with a German accent and seldom smiles. The local citizens laugh at his uncanny resemblance to the former Dictator of Depravity.

But there are now secret DNA tests in sealed Pentagon records proving this man is actually a clone of the mad monster!

My confidential source, a long retired government agent, must remain anonymous. For over half-a-century she has tried to sell her sensational information to the tabloids. But they are unwilling to pay a \$15,000,000 price tag.

Also, her credibility is being challenged. She once claimed to have been groped by Harry S. Truman in his Kansas City haberdashery store. A former clerk insists the lady was being measured by the late president for a suit to fit her alternative lifestyle as a transvestite.

In spite of this attempt at character assassination, I am inclined to believe her story. That's why I recently visited Adolf Hitler's clone in Frankenmuth and was astonished to meet this dead ringer for the Fuehrer.

Over hamburgers he spoke openly about his presence in the remote Michigan town: "After Werner von Braun and his team of scientists had given Germany V1 and V2 bombs, they accidentally pioneered the cloning process. My father encouraged them to experiment and he provided his own skin and blood samples in 1944.

"When the war ended, the scientists cloned me in a test tube and after birth I was quietly

placed with a family on a farm in Maastricht, Holland. They raised me until 1990. Then I emigrated to Frankenmuth with enough Swiss money, hoarded by my dad, to open this drive-in."

Today's Hitler shows none of the anger his famous father spewed. Nor does he have any compassion for him or his unspeakable deeds. Nevertheless, he is Adolf Hitler, Jr.

When I asked if he had one or two co-conspirators to guide him through life (the Fuehrer only had one), this Adolf smiled, looked down and then held up two fingers.

There are still remarkable similarities between the two men. The present-day identical twin paints watercolors, and his artwork hanging behind the counter is for sale at reasonable prices. I bought a brilliant canvas of Dresden burning for \$25.

Adolf is unmarried but has a lady friend, Eve Brown. She was cloned from Eva Braun but Americanized her name. Raised by a family in the Yorktown section of New York City, Eve speaks perfect English. A bit shy, it took some coaxing for her to come out of the tiny kitchen where she does all the cooking.

Eve, also fiftyish and attractive, joined us at the table to express a few opinions. "We should remember history lest we forget its horrors," she said. "The terrible tragedy of Kosovo is proof that genocide can happen again. Although Slobodan Milosevic is no Adolf Hitler."

She wiped a tear from her eye and continued. "My mother's lover had impeccable taste. He stole only the finest paintings and plundered rich cities, targeting the wealthiest banks and merchants. Like Robin Hood he gave to the poor. Compare his track record to the Serbian invaders who robbed everybody in their path. Very low class, really."

When Adolf nodded in agreement, I pointed out that his father's Death Squads rounded up the Jewish population, stole their possessions and sent them to the gas chambers.

He responded, "Don't forget that the deportations were carried out by one of their own, Adolf Eichmann. You can't blame all of

Germany any more than you would condemn all Israelites for one of their people who gunned down their leader."

He argued further that the Hitler Youth never turned their guns on classmates such as America's schoolchildren are now doing. When I asked why we had these young demons lurking in our schools, Eve promptly replied.

"All kids are spoiled. They have never learned how to separate media hype from real life. So their little minds become cluttered with sound bites and an obsession for instant gratification regardless of the consequences. Parents and teachers need to be recycled because today's educational system is a farce."

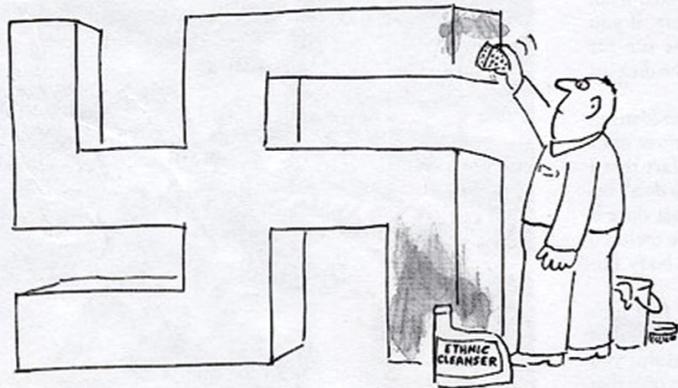
I asked about their social life in the community. They enjoy bowling and occasionally go polka dancing. Nobody bothers them other than to stare at Adolf and whisper about this amazing carbon copy of the dictator half-a-century ago.

As I left Hitler's Drive-In, a tour bus slowed down and they both gave the Nazi salute. Tourists aimed their cameras, then Adolf and Eve did a mock goose-step that brought peals of laughter. One old-timer leaned out the window and shouted, "I can't wait until I develop this picture and send it to Jay Leno. He'll never believe it!"

Don't Act Suspicious

In case you feel benign about the Drug Enforcement Agency, here—as compiled by David Cole in *Insight*—are reasons the DEA has actually given in court for targeting people:

- Arrived in the afternoon
- Was one of the first to deplane
- Was one of the last to deplane
- Deplaned in the middle
- Purchased ticket at the airport
- Made reservations on short notice
- Bought coach ticket
- Bought first class ticket
- Used one-way ticket
- Used round-trip ticket
- Carried no luggage
- Carried brand-new luggage
- Carried small bag
- Carried a medium-sized bag
- Carried two bulky garment bags
- Carried two heavy suitcases
- Carried four pieces of luggage
- Dissociated self from luggage
- Traveled alone
- Traveled with a companion
- Suspect was Hispanic
- Suspect was black female
- Acted too nervous
- Acted too calm
- Walked quickly through the airport
- Walked slowly through the airport
- Walked aimlessly through the airport



S. Gross

Romantic and Voluptuous

by Mark Miller

"Romantic, sensitive, sincere, caring, honest, affectionate 25-year-old non-smoking male, a Kevin Costner lookalike, with great sense of humor, Ph.D. in Business, runs own advertising agency, enjoys sports, nature, movies, theater, restaurants, dancing—seeks sincere woman for friendship and good conversation."

Dear Romantic: I nearly fainted when I read your personals ad, because it pretty much described my ideal man. So even though I'm sure you'll be overwhelmed with responses, here's mine: I'm a bright, honest, loving, considerate, vivacious, outgoing 23-year-old, blonde, voluptuous, non-smoking female, often described as a Darryl Hannah lookalike. I am independently wealthy, and love exotic travel, gourmet cooking, and passionate embraces in front of a roaring fire. I am yearning for your reply.

Dear Voluptuous: Thank you for your wonderful letter in response to my ad. Coincidentally, you described my ideal woman. Unfortunately, I wasn't exactly 100% honest about myself in my ad. But your letter touched me to such a degree that I've decided to stop deluding myself and others. So even though it may cost me the loss of meeting you, here's the truth: I'm a 46-year-old Abe Vigoda lookalike, who smokes like a chimney, dropped out of high school to steal cars, still lives with my parents, and haven't the slightest idea how to function in a social situation.

Dear Romantic: I can't tell you how relieved I was to receive your refreshingly honest letter. I, too, have had it with all the artifice, the game-playing, the misrepresentation. So please allow me to revise my initial ad, as well: I'm a 52-year-old, enormously overweight woman, interested solely in my next meal. I suffer from indescribable body odor, but it doesn't bother me too much, as I spend most of my days dealing with the voices I hear, commanding me to do the bidding of Emperor Borgar, ruler of my home planet. I am currently working, gutting fish, at Harvey's Carp-O-Rama, but it's the evening shift, so I have my days free to tend to my open sores and seventeen cats. I also like looking in people's windows while drooling.

Dear Voluptuous: Your candor touched me to my soul, so please allow me to continue sharing myself with you in preparation for our eventual meeting. I have several rare skin diseases which have been written up in medical journals worldwide. I am allergic to almost all foods, with the exceptions of brussels sprouts, beans, and loose, runny cheeses. The high point of my day is putting on one of those orange school-crossing guard vests, and nothing else, and helping small children across the street. I also enjoy setting fires and weeping out of context.

Dear Romantic: I am not allowed to leave my city, for reasons I cannot disclose until the year 2012. Most nights, I wrap myself in large Hefty bags and run up and down the stairs either yodeling or screaming at the various bacteria that invariably come to life and take on human form. I know they're conspiring against me, but I will be triumphant. My parents tried to have me put away, but I fixed them so that they won't be giving me too much trouble any more, if you catch my drift. Sometimes I feel restless and howl at the sun for hours, but that could just be the woman in me. I itch like the dickens in unspeakable places.

Dear Voluptuous: I am working on a plan to break Charles Manson out of jail. He's always been a close friend, and I know the three of us will make a great team. Slowing down the process is the fact that I have completely lost control of my bowels. Funny how you don't really appreciate something until it starts acting up. Say, what does it mean when your hair starts coming out in huge clumps? I've enclosed some for your inspection, along with some other assorted body fluids, etc. Can't wait to meet you this weekend.

Dear Romantic: It was really great meeting you for the first time last night. I can't believe we're actually going to elope at the end of the month! Emperor Borgar would just die if he found out! But you have proven to me that there's somebody out there for everyone, that my life means something to someone, and that, thank God, true, romantic love really does exist!

New Male Contraceptive Device Tested

by Joe Klein

The newest development in male contraception was unveiled recently at the American Women's Surgical Symposium held at the Ann Arbor Medical Center. Dr. Sophia Merkin, of the Merkin Clinic, announced the preliminary findings of a study conducted on 763 unsuspecting male grad students at a large midwest university. In her report, Dr. Merkin stated that the new contraceptive — the IPD — was a breakthrough in male contraception. It will be marketed under the trade name "Umbrelly."

The IPD (intrapenal device) resembles a tiny folded umbrella which is inserted through the head of the penis and pushed into the scrotum with a plunger-like instrument. Occasionally, there is perforation of the scrotum, but this is disregarded since it is known that the male has few nerve endings in this area of his body. The underside of the umbrella contains a spermicidal jelly, hence the name "Umbrelly."

Experiments on a thousand white whales from the Continental Shelf (whose sexual apparatus is said to be closest to man's) proved the Umbrelly to be 100% effective in preventing production of sperm, and eminently satisfactory to the female whale since it doesn't interfere with her rutting pleasure.

Dr. Merkin declared the Umbrelly to be statistically safe for the human male. She reported that of the 763 grad students tested with the device, only 2 died of scrotal infection, only 20 experienced swelling of the tissues, 3 developed cancer of the testicles, and 13 were too depressed to have an erection. She stated that common complaints ranged from cramping and bleeding to acute abdominal pain. She emphasized that these symptoms were merely indications that the man's body had not yet adjusted to the device. Hopefully the symptoms would disappear within a year.

One complication caused by the IPD and briefly mentioned by Dr. Merkin was the incidence of massive scrotal infection necessitating the surgical removal of the testicles. "But this is a rare case," said Merkin, "too rare to be statistically important." She and the other distinguished members of the Women's College of Surgeons agreed that the benefits far outweighed the risk to any individual man.

Editor's Note: There will be an Autumn 2000 issue, a Spring 2001 issue, and then (gulp) *The Realist* will cease publication.



What Really Happened in Dallas