

Poetry First (MIKE)

In 1986 at the Get Me High Lounge, and later at the Green Mill, Poetry came first--sex second. I was an unemployed Catholic blessed virgin the Monday

before the space shuttle Challenger disintegrated and the Get Me High took off as the gathering for hipsters, poets, and addicts. Poetry first,

sex second: Dickie made a run at Karen; Rob made a run at Anna and I made a run up stage to the bathroom. That spring, on my way home from Marc Smith's,

producer of the Get Me High open mic, producer of "Circus Chatter" with the Chicago Poetry Ensemble, driving north on Harlem Avenue from Berwyn, I wondered if I

ever would get laid or remain jobless and chaste. For "Circus Chatter," I brought a poem I wrote about the Cambridge Poetry Festival and performed a poem by Richard Wilbur,

"The Juggler,": "For him we batter our hands/who had won for once over the world's weight." The day after the performance at the Deja Vu, I started my employ at the Chicago

Tribune. Finally, "is that a paycheck in your pocket or are you happy to see me?" One year later, I was battling Tony Fitzpatrick in the slam's semifinals.

We were tied two poems apiece coming down to the last poem. I had been struggled to overcome the distaste a judge had for me--she had hissed me two weeks

earlier for sexism after I performed what I thought was my homerun poem. It was metaphysical. Life was posed as a question, compared to a woman, "Tempting with

the promise of being easily understood/yielding until you stand with your naked ego /and will shorn of expectations/until you stand ready to be sacrificed for an answer

and then she asks, " 'What communion is this?'/and locusts drone idly in trees." Of course, she was right. I now know better than to pose a female as a grand question '

I want to fuck (though there is a prophet I know I want to fuck.) Down to my last poem against Tony Fitzpatrick to see who would battle Inka Alasade in the finals (how she would

have wiped the floor with me with her feminist sex negritude post colonial brilliance). I brought out my second favorite poem, a lyric about female as sea cave.

I lost. It was not so bad, though. When I returned to my table there was a radiant audiologist waiting for me. Poetry first. Sex second.

*(ROB)

Bum ba dum ba da da bum ba bum bad a da

Get me High Lounge was where it began

Marc Smith and a dollar at the door.
Neon saxophones and a sticky floor
Judy at the bar and bathrooms on stage
Trying to get the words to jump off the page

One Monday night came in Anna Brown
Legs all the way down.
She was standing on stage eating twinkie
Licking whipped cream from the tip of her pinkie
I said to Mike Barrett I'm gonna meet girl...

(So I did and we got married and lived, **happily ever after**)

Marc said hey let's put on a show
So we did an audition for Dave Jemilo
Circus Chatter at the De Ja Vu
Dave said "I don't mind thinking what about you."

And it's
Green Mill Lounge every every Sunday
Ron Gillett said we'd be famous one day
Open mike, feature or slam competition
Month after month the troop went on a mission
Working for beers getting jeers and cheers
And the show's been going on now for 25 years

It didn't change my life it made my life
I found my wife

and a crowd of vibrant lifetime friends
A bit of fame
and an applause jones.

You throw your rock into the pond
and you just don't know
how far out the ripples go.

For John Sheehan

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POETRY MEMORY (ANNA)

You want me to remember 25 years ago?
I was there, you weren't, now I know

How old people feel

Geez

We used to have to climb onstage and walk behind the performers to get to the bathroom

That was the Get Me High (you wouldn't remember)

I remember Rob beginning his piece from inside that bathroom

And then performing his way out, bursting out, busting out of it like a maniac

Well, that was Rob

I remember dancing with him later on the Green Mill stage

Calm, charming, costumed characters, we

We could be whoever we wanted to be

Every Sunday night

POETRY

And what I remember is

People turning, word by word, into poets

Turning toward the crowd like it was the sun

Shining on them as they shivered on that fertile stage

Plucking off pieces of their pain like petals (*laugh*)

Warming to the rapture of realizing

That someone was willing to listen

To the ramblings of their worn out mind

To the shady secrets of their private hours

To the twisted humor of life's little pranks

And mysteries, and memories

And oddities, and indignities

And what I remember is

The way the crowd learned to listen

That crowd that learned to want to hear

All those scribbled pages offered up

All those words laid out at their mercy

Crumpled papers pulled out of pockets

Pages ripped from spiral notepads

Or neatly typed and folded, unfolded, folded

Preparing themselves to be surrendered

If you were willing to give it up

Willing to get up and read us your life

To speak out loud about it

To speak out your ME

We were willing to pay you attention

And call it

POETRY

*DAVE

Chasing down a conjure

takes a walk, harmonica
wander, chocolate cake.
Black coffee ; sometimes
relentless scat. Could
take some drinking too and
early egg and bacon sandwich.
I found my voice
in wave-cold fogs
of sudden San Francisco
I found my scene
At The Get Me High.
and the first six months of gigging
Green Mill Sundays.
Get me high!
Take a train, a cab, a walk
Conjure a circus.
Be a back beat blown out blaster
Be a last minute quick line scrawl
Get up on stage and Listen
Get up on stage and Say
Get up on stage and Be Ready.
Put The Paper Down!
Conjure audience connection;
Move and pause.
Catch the red eye voice in time
Stand up and
stage yourself at once.
I'm no visionary.
Didn't think the Slam would catch on big.
Marc shared his vision with me after rehearsal
Sounded fun.
I'm no visionary, but so what?
The slam's a forwarding scene.
The day's an arching bend
of sun and early green.
Let's light up a sky hook fat one;
turn up our minds and jam.
But first let's get some lunch.