BLACK CARROT

$2

#13
When my mom asked me if I was going to Services this coming up Friday night she was happy to hear that I indeed was. Long story, not as long, is that my mom is being "sued" in a very bogus law suit. It involves a series of other drivers that were involved in a ten car bumper to bumper accident on some parkway just outside of New York City. It is a pretty bogus lawsuit, as she was in the middle of a line of cars (you hit me and then I hit you etc etc) - so she and my dad had to fly to White Plains, NY to tell the judge that some woman was full of shit. The up side is they get a free trip to New York (State) and a night in a hotel, and get to watch HBO. The down side, is that my dad has to take a day off work and it's a big pain the ass. My mom was telling me "all these people are full of shit, this was six years ago, they're all liars.." It's true really, the only thing being true is that everyone is full of shit. The lawyers were berating her, rapid fire - trying to trip her up. Asking her bullshit that nobody could answer. "How many feet were you in front of the car before you applied the brakes? What kind of pressure did you use on the brakes? How many seconds before you hit the brakes did you another hit you?" all trying to make her out to be some kind of negligent driver so some woman can claim injuries from what was a fender bender six years ago. So my mom was pretty pissed off about it all, and wasn't viewing it as a vacation in any sense. She almost got air sick on the small plane to New York. She had never been so grossed out in her life by a) The on the house meal at the most glorious restaurant in White Plains, New York --- Outback Steakhouse. (My mom's quote: "Have you ever had a blooming onion? I'd never eaten something so disgusting in my life. Dad had the shrimp..." and b) If the meal wasn't enough, the Women's Restroom at the airport was the worst my mom had ever seen in her life. They had tried to get an earlier standby flight back to Chicago, but it didn't work out, so they had five and a half hours to wait at the airport til their flight. My mom went to use the bathroom and said it was the most disgusting thing she ever saw. So my mom, being who she is, went to go make a formal complaint about the bathroom. "There was no toilet paper, piss on the floor, and feces smeared all over the god damn wall!" So she goes to the airport complaint customer service office and makes a formal complaint. The lady at the desk tried to blow her off and say "we'll make a note of it" but my mom said "Look, I've got five hours to kill, I have absolutely nothing to do. I want this bathroom cleaned up.." Figuring if she had nothing but time, and nothing to loose, why not make a big stink (ha ha) out of the bathroom. My mom went on a small tirade with a series of bullshit claims: "I have traveled all over the world (lie #1) and I have seen third world countries with cleaner bathrooms then Westchester County Airport!" "This bathroom is worse than TACO BELL (lie #2 - my mom has never been to a Taco Bell, and I don't blame her) " So eventually they said they'd get someone to take out the garbage for the first time in six months. My mom went back there, now that she had a cause and a mission in life, or at least in the airport and it was still disgusting. Then what she did next, made me so proud to have a bored, pissed off travel victim as a mother -- she somehow rallied up a union of other women, also appalled at the condition of the bathroom, and she got them ALL to complain -- til they eventually
cleaned the place up a bit. Then finally they got on the plane, and went home.

But the reason she asked me if I was going to services this particular night, was she wanted me to say Kaddish for her parents, who (both) died (at the same time) around this time about thirteen years ago. I had more or less forgotten the date of when they both died, and she wasn't sure if she'd get back into town on time to make it to Temple to say Kaddish. But since I was going, I could say it and mention both their names and honor their lives. By saying their names and saying the prayer, I could give some honor to their lives and dignity to their deaths, and remember when they were alive - and not let their existences become afterthoughts. Although it's sort of embarrassing to admit, as a grandchild of grandparents who died in the early 90s, it has in some ways, become an afterthought - it is important to remember and say Kaddish for them. Because as I am reminded of in services, there are Jewish and not - all over the world, who there are no people to say Kaddish for them. No people to acknowledge their lives, the deaths, and anything that may have happened in between those moments. I go to a GLBT centric synagogue - and each week at services, Kaddish is said - and anyone who wants to, can remember a GLBT person, either murdered or senselessly killed, etc - who has died and there is no family or friends to remember them. And it is important that people, who's lives can be occasionally swept under the rug, given the same dignity and honor and respect as our friends very close. And grandparents - and say Kaddish for them.

So I say Kaddish for my grandparents. Who died at almost the same time in a car accident in the early 90s. My parents won't be able to, my sister doesn't go to services, so I do it. It is a mixed bag of honor and depression that I'll do it, even though I needed to be reminded of it. At services, when our Rabbi calls out, for names of people to mention the names of people they are saying Kaddish for. I instantly felt a wave of sweat and nervous. My heart starting racing and felt it thumping in my chest. I opened my mouth to say the names of my grandparents, but nothing came out. My mind went a blank, and for a moment - I forgot the names. Or the names wouldn't come out. I swallowed and blinked and tried again and was able to get the names out. I hadn't said their names in over a decade, so it didn't sound natural to me. But they were born and lived their lives and... that was that. It's important to remember that the Kaddish doesn't ever mention death in the prayer. It's not a morbid prayer, at all. It translates to sound more hopeful of life to come. I remember the event and date so clearly of when they died, but not a lot after that... I was maybe thirteen years old and hanging out with friends when my mom called to where I was and told me what had happened and I'd be picked up in the next ten minutes. We didn't talk about anything in the car on the way home, and when I got home - all the lights were out in the house - Nobody talked to me - but all I knew was my mom's parents, my grandparents were dead. Random car crash - both dead. Dead. The words hung with me, as my dad and mom stayed up --
trying to call people, trying to digest it all, and I sat in my room by myself and wondered what would happen. Trying to imagine never seeing someone again. I was barely thirteen.

Jews act fast when it comes to death in the family. Meaning - all your relatives who may care about you better line up early or not mind getting next-day non-refundable plane tickets to the funeral service. The service is usually a day or two after you die. Or as soon as possible. We don't wait a week and keep you in limbo waiting for Uncle Semus to get here from Israel. It's all very fast, heat and flash and before you know it - you're dressed in a junior suit at a synagogue in New Jersey, watching family members hug, cry, and occasionally laugh. I have absolutely no idea how a funeral gets planned in any case, no less in under 48 hours. But that is where I found myself. Closed caskets, (Jews aren't big on viewing a corpse, because they're deemed unclean/unpure by Jewish Law) and everyone that goes to the cemetery has to face the reality of death, in a very brutal way. After all the prayers are said, everyone of the close family has to walk up to the hole in the ground, take a shovel full of dirt, and dump it on top of the casket. It's a very sobering thing to have to do - walk away from. Having to (in part) bury a friend or family member. To actually take a shovel full of dirt and drop it on their casket, while in your mind maybe making the last goodbyes. I read someplace in Jewish studies, is the reason for all of that, is to make burial/funeral practices so uncompromising - to force you to think about mortality, and to realize that you're alive, and to celebrate that you are alive, and at the end of it, you should gather with your friends and family and all be so very aware that you are alive. And as sad as everyone is, and should be, you are still alive. And from the cemetery, you find yourself at a Jewish Deli someplace in the suburbs of Newark, trying to each a pastrami sandwich - wondering if anyone would think poor of you for wanting (but being too afraid to ask) for a little bit of extra mustard for your sandwich. I mean, after all, it is the only time you'll get a decent sandwich for the next ten years or so - why not enjoy it? Should you enjoy it? Should you enjoy anything? Why should this sandwich taste good, when you just helped bury your grandparents? What gives you the right to have a tasty sandwich or fresh rye when you just saw your mother cry and put her parents in the ground? And you want extra mustard? Why don't you just choke it down and get a head start, be as depressed as everyone else will be in about two hours when you all go your separate ways through the tri state area? I was just trying to follow along with everyone else's emotions. I was confused.

To all those who don't know (the goy readers) - right after a Jewish funeral is a series of seven days called "sitting shiva" - where you cover all the mirrors in the house, wear a torn black arm band, and on the first day, is customary for mourners not to eat their own food. This results in an over compensated amount of gift baskets being sent to your house. I had never seen so many cookie platters, cheese plates, and fruit baskets in my life. It was a depressingly amazing treat, to have such new and tasty food sent to our home. "Hm, my grandparents are dead, but surely I have never tasted a better scone in my thirteen years. So buttery!" And you sit on uncomfortable
The shame cut through me harsher than anything else had at that point and I turned the record off. But it didn’t really curb my personal needs to vent some of the new and scary feelings I was having inside my mind. I found an Extreme Noise Terror tape I had made, put it in with some headphones, laid on the floor and tried to make sense of my world. Fifteen years later, I’ve made some sense of my grandparents death, but have made little progress in understanding the world I live in. They were both very old and had lived side by side for nearly half a century. What I learned from my mom, years later - was it was a perverted blessing they both died at the same time. Because she knew that one wouldn't be able to have any kind of life without the other - and if one had survived the auto crash, then it would have been even more agonizing depression.

The somber tone of the house brought the sounds of the record up to the living room easily. It was tragic irony that the song "Forward to Death" (the second song) caught the attention to my mourning parents, who came down to — dish out a form of shame and guilt and anger over my taking pleasure - any kind of pleasure - while they were sitting shiva, was inexcusable and selfish, etc — and to such a song, what a song, what kind of song, to what kind of music.. while, did I forget, all this time, everyone upstairs was sitting shiva over my grandparents!! Who just a few days before were NOT, in any way, dead.

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A few weeks after they died, there was a very weird act that needed to be done, and that was - my mom had to go to their house with her brothers and --- divide up what they had. I don't think they had a will - and not much possessions to begin with. But my mom left for a few days and came back feeling surprisingly refreshed. Saying how funny/weird/surreal it was to spend three days with her brothers - at their parents house, going through pretty much everything. They didn't acquire much material wealth, a lot of personal and sentimental mementos - the kind of things you collect over a lifetime, or just simply never throw away. Things like my mom's high school report cards, which have just been sitting in a box for the past thirty years, [the stuff you just don't think to throw away]. So when my mom got back, we had weeks of delight and laughter - going through it all. Papers my mom had written, yearbooks, photos, super eight movies,
all sorts of stuff. The kind of stuff we'd never seen growing up (and why would we?), and only in their death we got to see this other side of our mom, before she was a married woman, before she took on the lifetime role of our mom. She had a completely distinct personality. We didn't exist yet. It was sort of cool.

The first house I ever knew to call home, was a big condo style apartment. My parents bought it in 1980, figuring they had all the kids they wanted - and we should have a place to grow up. This place, in my memory, was tremendous. It had three floors, a finished basement, a shared back yard - and the thickest, dingiest shag carpeting that would occasionally sprout mushrooms in damp weather. My sister and I had our own rooms, mine blue, hers pink - and of course a family room. Complete with wood panel television set, fuzzy carpet, and a giant red high riser pull out sofa bed. In the summer time all four of us would sleep in the basement and watch game shows or play Atari. It was a pretty amazing place to live as a little kid. My sister and I would each cling to our dad's legs and he would walk up the stairs with us hanging onto him. We used to spend a lot of time in the family room, watching television together.

My parents eventually got sick of condo life, and wanted to buy their own place. A house. A place without condo fees or shared yards or alcoholic neighbors. In 1980 they bought the place for $40,000. They sold it in 1986 and moved to another town twenty minutes away. While it was a grand event to move, and it was a much bigger house, our own yard, everything was new and modern and there was coveted hardwood floors throughout - the place defiantly felt different. Even as a little kid, I felt how different the new house was. The new house was modern, it was open, it was spacious. It had really high ceilings in some rooms. The hard wood floors gave the house a vague feeling of coldness. Carpet felt snuggly on my feet, the wood was always cold and hard. I guess in the mid 80s, having this vaulted open style of house was "in" and that's what people went for. And it was a really nice house, yes. But it had a bedroom for my parents, and a bedroom for my sister - but no bedroom for me. The first few years, I shared a bedroom with my older sister. Once she got to be "too old" to share her room with her younger brother, I was designated to spend the next six or seven years sleeping on a fold out couch in a room that was called "the den". Not to sound like an ingrate, because we always had three meals a day, things we needed for school, but I had no bedroom. The only spot in the house I ever felt was mine, was the space between the couch and the wall. I'd make it mine by building a fort for myself. The whole house was very nice and new and some would argue fancy, but one thing it didn't have was a real... family room.
Family room usually was another term for "TV Room". At all my friends houses, it was usually where the couch and TV and VCR and (hopefully - Nintendo, etc) would live. It was where relaxed, casual meals were taken. It was where movies were watched. It was where people just sort of... did that thing we call hanging out. We didn't have any real designated place in the house to just... hang out. There was a living room but it was big and spacious and felt more like a barn than a room you'd want to snuggle up with a big ratty blanket and watch an episode of Alf. So shortly after we moved into the new house, those family nights spent watching television together slowly began to fade. And since television was such a unifying force in my family, it really changed the domestic structure...After a while, the television my parents owned started to go to shit. It was big, heavy and old. I'm sure all of us remember the days when we repaired electronics, instead of it being cheaper to buy a new one. After all, they're made for kids by kids! My dad made a very earnest attempt to fix the television set. It was getting to a point where you had to turn it on, count to ten - and then quickly turn it off and on to get a picture. And the picture would fade to a green dot every half hour or so. It made watching any programs overly frustrating. My dad's idea of fixing the TV was to take it into the basement, dismantle the entire thing, poke around at every little circuit and tube with a screwdriver... then put it back together. The largest discovery he made was that the picture could be prolonged by hitting it with a shoe in just the right spot on the side. My parents demoted the television to my sister and I - where it went into her room (as I didn't have a bedroom) and my parents drove around looking for the cheapest television set possible. The structure of the family was changing as our passion for TV trumped our love of spending quality time together.

Eventually my parents invested some money in my future, and turned part of the basement into a bedroom for me. The room was very big, and due to the layout of the house, it had a very empty barn like feeling to it. But as a result of my grandparents' death, and all the items that were divided up - we ended up with a lot of new stuff in our house. Trinkets, Jewish art, a piano (which my mom still plays) and some miscellaneous electronics - that her well to do brothers didn't need. So we got a new television and VCR at the same time. Big changes were ahead at my house. We were about to become a kind of family where we each had a television. Since my bedroom also doubled as a basement and storage area, most of the things my parents didn't know what to do with ended up in my room. What every boy wants, an old rocking chair in his room. Collected works of Jewish American artists! But also, finally - I got my own television.

No longer would have to dispute who's turn it was to watch a show, or who's turn it was to get up and whack the tv with a shoe. I could watch anything in my own room. And talk about first world, we would sometimes be watching the same damn show, but didn't feel like watching it in the same room. Eventually my sister got a new TV for her birthday from our other grandparents, and the broken one was hauled off to the local dump. Having a television in my basement bedroom at thirteen - also completely made the notion of a bed time obsolete. So I'd stay up late, watching horrible late night shows, music videos and scanning for any kind of brief or implied nudity I could find. Family togetherness was on the endangered species list at this point. After dinner, we'd retire to separate corners of the house, and all watch the same show. My mom was commenting to me recently about how well the tv's we had growing up are still going strong and fully functioning. And she joked even "they've held the equivalent of twenty years of use in only ten, really withstanding the
overuse test of time.." regarding just how much tv we watched growing up. Together or apart.

I think this has sort of left a lasting impression on my family, and specially between my sister and I. How we interact (or don't) as adults. While we are both adults now, (or something resembling adults) we seem to be living totally separate lives. We've gone in our own directions, which makes the fact that we now live in the same city even more ironic. We don't talk on the phone too much, I get a lot of my news about her life from my mom -- and we don't have much in common. I've always been sort of jealous of the adult sibling as best friends model I've seen. She's never seen my band play a show. I've never gone to a Cubs game with her. I don't really know what she's into doing -- she works a lot... She's married and happy - which is good. But sometimes it's hard for us to talk about anything else that doesn't directly involve our parents or brief flashes of catch up we play. Growing up, my mom always tried to encourage us to spend more time together, to bond, etc. Because she always reminded us about how she isn't very close with her brothers anymore and it's important to have your family close and family is all you have and our family isn't that big to begin with anyways... etc etc. And we'd blow it off and laugh, as we retreated into our own worlds - with our own friends and rules and customs. But it's all sort of come true. We're just very, very different people. And thus just how it is...

Enjoy the 'zine!

No Dave

The most enraging thing I have ever heard was about ten years ago in my first year of college. I was queer, but didn't have any rainbow or triangle junk to let people know what I was into. Any way, we're having some discussion in a freshman class and for some reason queerness/ etc became the topic. And some jar-head told everyone in the class "There is no such thing as bisexuality. Those people are just confused. You're either straight or you're gay. There is no such thing as being bisexual." and I was so pissed off by that ("hey, you don't exist") but felt too un-empowered to stand up and yell what I was thinking "hey who asked you, shithead?!"...but people have this weird sort of hate for bi indefinable people. I think bi-phobia (for lack of better word for it) because bi people refuse to conform to a hetero-normative standard or behavior, but often times can't be read as "gay" by hetero OR sometimes queer society. So often times bi people are told they're confused or just plain fucking don't exist -- which I can think is worse than simply being hated. And anyone that tells you how you feel or how you should feel, should be promptly called out and dealt with publicly.

Sexuality can evolve, just as gender or any other human traits. Tastes can change, desires can too. We live in such a identity charged world that you can feel like a traitor to yourself if you want to do something that expands past the boundaries of your identity. I'd say embrace desires, go with them, and know that who you "are" doesn't always have to make sense or match up or please anyone. Sometimes the true colors of people come out when they get rejected by a bisexual person. A potential partner I sexually rejected back at me and said "So you'll sleep with anyone but not me? Since when do you discriminate?" -- because they'll perceive bisexuality as some sort of open season, green flag, we-have-no-boundaries-or-standards, so the rejection would sting that much more..
What's even more universally enraging to queer people, I think — is those brave or scary moments as teenagers when we come out to our parents. Either as a heads up for the future, or attempting to introduce a boyfriend/girlfriend. (...and guess who's sleeping over this weekend!?) A common response that I've collected from friends over the years is "...are you sure? are you sure you're a lesbian? Well how do you know..." and most parents are too intimidated by the notion of asking or knowing if their kid has had sex, no less homo sex. What is so maddening to me, is often times the actualization of the queer self - as a teenager.. is one of the first things in your life you ARE certain about. You just then question if you're certain you regret just telling your brother, sister, parents, etc - because they have the high potential to react like fucking assholes.

When I was very young, I never thought much about my body. It was just there and I never gave it any thought of why I had the parts I had, what they were for, or why I looked the way I did. As far as it went, all I could do was compare my body or hair to other people my same age in school - and how nobody looked the same really. A kid who was very tall, the kid who had ears that stuck out like a car door, the blazer and red head. Our differences are easier to wrap our minds around when you're younger. I didn't have straight hair, and it was a new feeling of desire to want something like that. I was shorter than most, and it made me want to be a taller, more athletic ten year old. I wanted to excel and be thought of as clever, witty, successful. Like the kids that stayed cool under pressure and got Bs on things without trying. I wanted to develop a personality, but didn't know how. All I could do was compare myself to everyone and even though I didn't know how, I just didn't measure up. Sure we wore the same kinds of clothes our parents picked out for us, and combed our hair into uncomfortable styles. I think it's very weird when grown ups try to dress small children in clothes meant for adults. A kid in a suit is just very strange to me. A little boy wearing a tie, what the fuck for? You're eight years old and look like you're being sent on a high stress job interview. But that's when you start to learn the concept of looking nice and presentable - and you never understand why you have to dress "up" when your aging family came to visit. You're supposed to wear that itchy sweater with one arm too long and neck that's too small - that your grand mother knitted for you - that was a gift - and you never wore it - but surprise you have to wear it today. Was I trying to trick her into thinking I wore this horrible creation on a regular basis and her visit happened to fall into its day in the rotation. But as a little kid, you're expected to be eager to please others and impress them with your willingness to follow directions. Then it makes your parents look good, and everyone's happy and home early that night.
ever since I could remember, being forced into wearing clothing that was for dressing up, nice clothing, always felt wrong and uncomfortable. And it confused me, of why it did. It could have been the very early stages of a rebellious punk attitude. Even though I was eight, I hated dressing that way based on the simple fact that I was told I had to. It was a crying fight I’d always lose for my parents to dress me for company, parties, anything involving people taller than me with beards. Anything where there would be other dressed up people with trays of small food being passed around. I hated it all. I hated how I felt in this clothing. I hated how I looked, and the reflection in the mirror when dressed in nice clothing wasn’t me, I didn’t see me - and that bothered me. When I was dressed as I normally did and looked at myself, I saw myself, I even liked myself. Even when I would stand in front of the mirror naked and examine myself, at least I was getting an honest answer. But button down dress shirts, pleated pants, shoes, a jacket? It felt like my soul was being suffocated by the collar. If I had the language to describe it back then it was forced gender disassociation. (But I’m a boy and those are boy’s clothes!) I’d be so uncomfortable in these, I’d just end up farting all the time and I thought that was my soul trying to escape while it still could. I didn’t and still don’t understand my pure hatred for /dress/ clothing.

The relationship with my body changed very dramatically and quickly when I started puberty. That was when my body started to change on its own, without my consent - and made me look at it differently. Once I started to learn about all my body could be doing for me, I then wanted to get the most use out of what I had. But my body was changing quickly and out of my control, and was going to do what it was going to do. I felt sort of on auto pilot with everything that was going on. One of the things that made it bearable was the collective awkwardness that cascaded down on me and my classmates. I went to such a small school, you could smell the pimple cream in the hallways. Everyone was universally freaked out by more hair here, strange new feelings, bold and challenging experimentations... that nobody had to take the burden of teasing for it. Talk about the kettle calling the cauldron hairy! But I realized that my body had a purpose, and it would eventually over time let me know what it was. I think the ineptness of everyone’s masculinity was just letting us know "hang in there, every thing’s fine, trust me you’ll thank me in a few years when this clears.." But it’s all a trade off with your body during that time. You grow at an alarmingly freakish rate, your voice breaks, some break out in acne, completely bad timing for boners... but at least you discover about a hundred ways to jerk off by the end of two weeks. And that’s the only thing that makes the whole thing worth it. You have this new hobby, that you’re convinced you invented one afternoon in the shower, when you suddenly discover a purpose for conditioner. And that’s when I started to put my body to work for me, I was calling the shots now.

I know for a fact that, right now, I am changing. I am changing into someone else, someone new. Lately I’ve been reading lots of my old... writing. Browsing over the journals I kept in the early 90s and all through high school. I am so much wiser now and can see patterns of behavior and reactions to things. I could see the anger, the frustration and self-loathing that took years and years after high school to shake off. But I know I’m changing, and the thing that bothers me now is I don’t know who I’ll be when I’m done. Or I don’t know who I’m changing into. I’ve gotten over a lot of things, such as feeling thrust into adulthood (as I’ve had a number of years to get used to it)- and am embracing as best I can all the new things in my life. But looking back when I was freshly eighteen and just moved to Chicago, I can see how my personality and identities slowly evolved - experiences that shaped me into the person right now who is drinking his second glass of Ice Coffee, listening to a punk band from fifteen years ago - wondering what to do with himself. Today, tomorrow, in five years.
it took almost two years of being here, on my own, til I found the beginning foundation of myself as an adult. I never felt right or comfortable as a college student. Everything felt so artificial back then, and that wasn't how things were supposed to feel back then. Even though college is artificial, and its half making your own decisions, and then half having a door decorating contest in your dorm room. And there's nothing wrong with that, maybe thats the right way to ease into adulthood.

To give you a sense of autonomy, but still keeping that unchanging structure we've grown accustomed to after twelve or thirteen years of compulsory education. An eagerness to please others with how well we can follow directions. So instead of staying with college, and its introduction to adulthood, I just said fuck it. I thought I was too smart and too clever to bother with papers or exams or taking anyone's advice. I threw myself into a few bad jobs, thinking if I was going to be bored and unhappy, I might as well make some money off it. It was hard for me to make friends, or reach out to people, or find people. I didn't know who I wanted to surround myself with or who I wanted to be. I was looking from the outside at all these established communities, wondering who was the right group for me. Reading what I was doing back then really depresses me to think about. I spent a lot of time getting drunk by myself and sitting in my disgusting basement apartment. I even read about how bad I wanted to leave Chicago and just get the hell out of here and go back "home" and live in Connecticut with my best friend. Lucky for me, back then, I had no motivation to follow through with anything whatsoever, so I ended up staying here. It just seemed that everyone around me had it better than me, or at least had their lives in more order. They had clean living rooms, small networks of support, people to get good drugs from. None of the things I had. I just floated through my late teens and first year or two of my 20s trying not to concern myself with that I had no idea of what I was doing. I don't think they really prepare you for adulthood that well in high school or even in college. Nobody tells you how to put your life together once you're legally not your parents problem. Nobody says "here's why its not a good idea to slam a 40 at 8am just so you can feel something during the day at work" or "here's how you can avoid getting shafted by the gas company." Knowing how the teenage mind can work, any attempt at helping would be taken as an attack as ones hard earned independence. When you're nineteen or twenty and on your own, it's pretty much open season on expensive lessons to learn.

All you really come away with from it all is: "go to work, eat beans out of a can, make most of weekend, repeat process til I can retire." And thats the best we can do.

Maybe the sign of adulthood, is when you look at youth and you don't see hope or possibility anymore. You just see people who's spirits haven't been crushed by society yet... And it makes you mad.
I used to ride the Amtrak quite a bit. From New York to Chicago, back and forth. I was trying my hand at a degree in creative writing. Can you believe that? This was when I had two things that worked in my favor. A lot more free time (college!) and a fear of flying (what). It didn't bother me that it took six times as long, was almost the same price, and was more or less uncomfortable to do so. But I was stubborn, and when I had a week, two week school break, I'd book an Amtrak ticket to visit my parents.

There were a few other people in the bar car, hanging out, talking, smoking, drinking, laughing. I sat there with my paperback and read for awhile until I was eventually roped into the conversation at hand. I wish I could remember what we started talking about, but on an Amtrak train, it's not hard to get involved in a discussion or heated debate amongst people who are forced into close quarters. Eventually I said something like "No no no, you're totally wrong..." and climbed over to a table and joined in on the topic.

Chicago to New York is about a fifteen hour ride. Nine hundred miles. I spent the first entertaining hours of my trip reading, listening to tapes, scoping out potential make out partners, and enjoying the last of the daylight. It got pretty late and hard to sleep, so I went into the bar car. A place where I could try to sneak a few drinks, if the Amtrak would sell to a baldfaced nineteen year old - a beer buzz would make it all seem like a lovely fuzzy dream.

Eventually, a guy I had been talking to for most of the night asked me a question. We were slurring at this point. He said to me that he had a fiancé in Southern Indiana. He recently left her. He didn't tell me why. He wanted to tell her how much he loved her and how sorry he was for leaving. He put his head on the table and slammed his
He was yelling at himself. He reached into his backpack and pulled out a folded up greeting card. It was pink and frilly and had romance or please baby I'm such a heel all over it.

"You're a writer... right?"
"Well, I'm in school"
"But fuck......... you're one of those. fucking..."
"Huh?"
"Fucking creative types.. RIGHT?" He was talking through his sleeve.
"I don't know, I guess?"
"You can fucking write can't you? I mean, really fucking write?"

He sat up and shoved the card and a pen into my hands.
"Here, take this card.. Tell her I love her.. Tell her I'm sorry.. Please.... Just tell her how bad I fucked up and...." He trailed off, drunk.

I had about six Coke and Vodka's and was starting to get blurry. I was confused.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked
"JUST WRITE SOMETHING!!!ING" he yelled, not out of anger, but as a drunk and desperate man.

I was barely able to hold the pen, but I wrote something in the card. Something mushy. Something romantic. I have no idea what I wrote. I was slumped over the table, feeling the spinning - the spinning that meant it was lights out soon. As I started to get up, we pulled into Altoona, PA for a ten minute break. I got up, stepped off the train... I found a mailbox and mailed the card. Back in the bar car:

"Did you mail it?" he asked
"Yeah I did"

"Did you tell her how bad I love her, how I fucked up?" He had his arm around me, hanging onto me, hugging me.
"Yeah, I told her all that. And some real nice shit too." I was guessing.

"Thanks man. You saved the day. You fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu...