

BOOKS

Savage sins

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wholeheartedly into the task of exposing sinners in unexpected places (such as Dubuque, Iowa) and having a grand old time hanging out with them.

In between tossing the dice, firing a .45 and livin' it up at Gay Pride in Los Angeles, he has a few things to say to America's gang of vigilante hypocrites and "psychoconservatives."

Thankfully, Savage does not succumb to the droning tone of much political posturing. Described as "part travelogue, part memoir, part Bork-and-Bennett bitch slap," *Skipping* is like *The Daily Show*—witty, opinionated, funny and supported with careful research. (The facts and figures give Savage a certain credibility that his counterparts lack. The Bible is clearly not his only source.)

Skipping is the antidote to the values rhetoric of the Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family, Concerned Women for America and others of their ilk. If you're tired of being scolded by this crowd, you'll feel vindicated as Savage tours the country, celebrating the art of sinning from coast to coast. And, though he is careful to give credit to conservatives where due, in the end, the "sinners" always come out on top.

Savage will be in Portland on Nov. 1 to read from the book and answer your most pertinent questions. But first he answers ours.

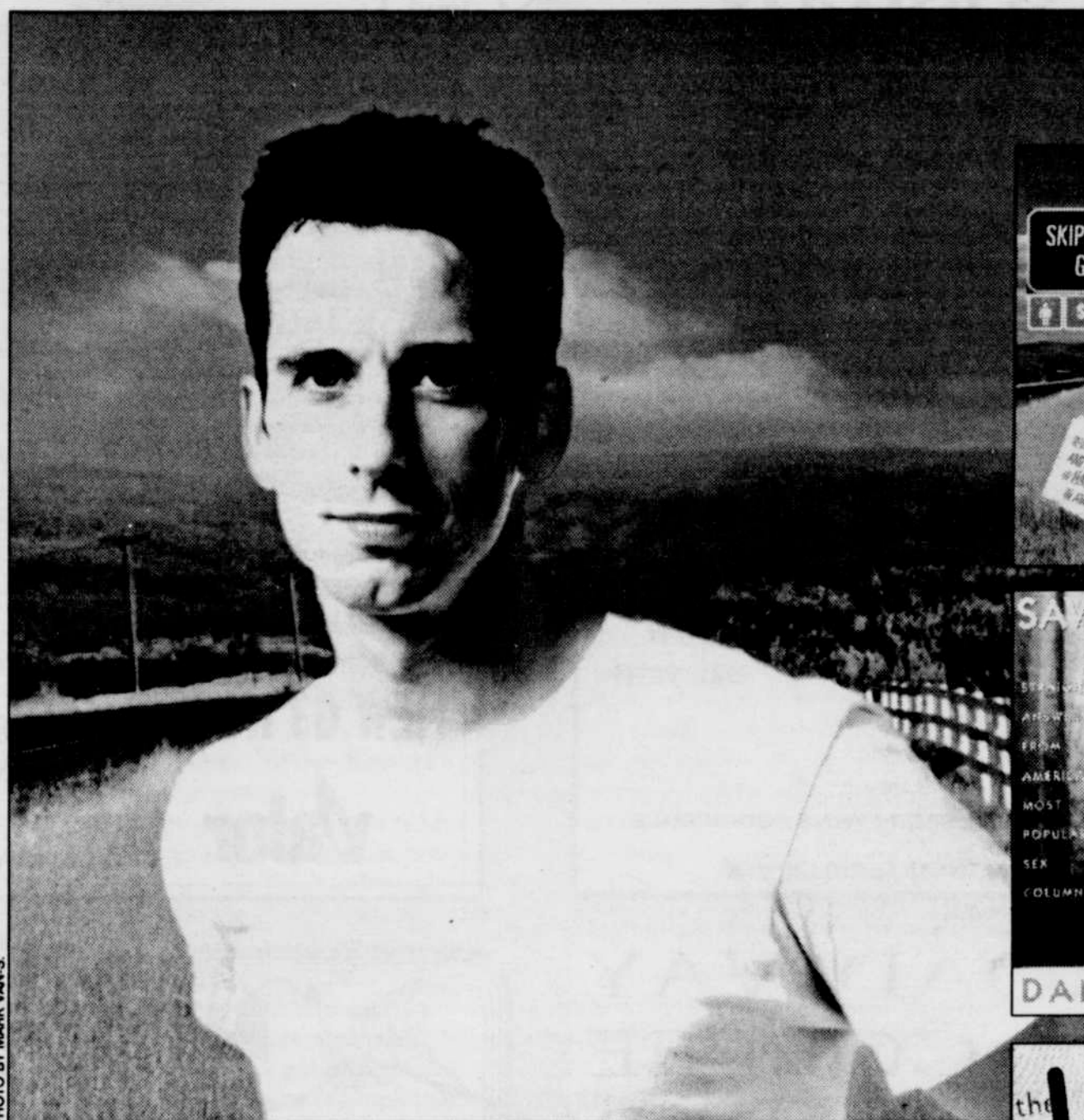
Sarah Leimert: How long did it take you to research and write the book? How long did it take to write *The Kid*?

Dan Savage: It took me about a year to write *The Kid*, and it took about twice that to write this book. *The Kid* was about my life and my boyfriend and I deciding to adopt. I didn't have to do much research, just live my life and take notes. For *Skipping*, I had to do a lot of traveling, sinning and a lot of SMPM—spending my publisher's money. It was exhausting work.

SL: What inspired you to choose the seven deadly sins as a context?

DS: I wish I could tell you I had some really great, smart, compelling reason to choose the seven deadlies. But, in all honesty, they were an easy, natural and useful conceit—a good structure that I could impose on the narrative, and using them provided me with great chapter titles like "Lust," "Greed" and "Anger."

SL: In your research, did you learn anything new or bizarre about people that you didn't already know?



Dan Savage reads from *Skipping Towards Gomorrah* Nov. 1 at Powell's

DS: No, I didn't. After 10 years of writing "Savage Love," there's nothing that shocks me anymore. Take Claim Jumper [a restaurant that serves enormous portions, on which the "Gluttony" chapter is based]: Yeah, Americans eat too much, and it's only natural that a restaurant chain would spring up to serve those Americans. But is it shocking to me to see people stuffing themselves? No. At least they're not, like some people who write me at "Savage Love," vomiting on themselves and their sex partners immediately after dinner.

SL: Did you tell people that they were subjects for your book when you met and talked to them?

DS: Some yes, some no. People I profile at length—David and Bridget, the Orthodox Jewish swingers—were told, of course, that I wanted to write about them. But people who came in for quick mentions were not. The preacher on the prayer line who advised me that as a gay

man I couldn't commit the sin of adultery—cheating on my boyfriend of eight years would simply be more fornication, not adultery—for instance, didn't know I was taking notes the whole time.

SL: Which was your favorite chapter to write?

DS: Well, I hate to admit it, but the one about prostitution. What happened to me when I rented a big, muscle-bound straight guy for an hour kind of blew my mind—and only my mind. Nothing else got blown in that hotel room.

SL: Do you think Bill Bennett, Robert Bork, Jerry Falwell or any of the other "virtuecrats" will respond directly to this book? Have they already?

DS: They haven't, and I doubt very much that they will. They're too used to moving in circles and writing in publications that pre-

tend there is no "other" side to the debate over public and private morality. They're not used to being challenged about virtue or being told that they're the unvirtuous ones.

They probably don't even know how to respond to a critic at this point.

SL: What are your thoughts on Dr. Laura's book *Ten Stupid Things Women Do to Mess Up Their Lives*, which poses as a female liberation guide of sorts? It seems pretty inconsistent with her conservative reputation.

DS: I don't think much of Dr. Laura, but she makes some reasonable points in that book. Women do need to be better "shoppers" when it comes to the men they decide to mate with—provided, of course, that a woman wants to mate with a man. One of the things that has paralyzed politics in this country is the inability of anyone on either side to acknowledge when someone from the "other side" said something that's right on, or even obvious. Dr. Laura does say some right on things, but finding them is like digging kernels of corn out of shit, you know?

SL: Do you plan to keep writing books?

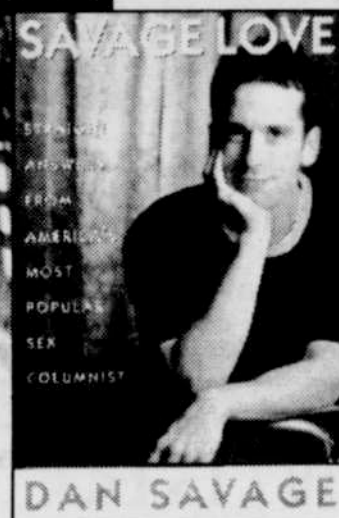
DS: I would like to write a book just for gay men, something like, *Ten Stupid Things That Gay Men Do to Mess Up Their Lives*. It will be something of a challenge keeping it to 10 things.

SL: How is the kid doing, anyway?

DS: Great. He's 4 1/2 and thriving. He's a boy's boy—by which I mean he's into guns, trucks and Batman underwear. He's such a little budding breeder. [grin]

DAN SAVAGE makes an appearance 7:30 p.m. Nov. 1 at Powell's Books, 1005 W. Burnside St.

SARAH LEIMERT is the Editorial Assistant at Just Out. She has committed five of the seven deadly sins, but she's aiming for a perfect "7."



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