

Might as well jump

Suicide: It's the new black

It was supposed to be my day off.

Yet here I was, dutifully biking along the Burnside Bridge to drop by the office.

I should've stuck with Plan A.

As I crossed the mighty Willamette, I approached a woman calmly setting her jacket on the ledge and hopping to the other side. "Is she some daredevil clowning around, or is she about to commit—"

Before I could even process that question, she let go. It happened that fast. No words were spoken. No cars screeched to a halt. Was this for real?

Suddenly, I remembered a former neighbor who worked as a bridge operator once told me you can't kill yourself by jumping off the Burnside Bridge because it's not high enough. That offhand comment made me chuckle back then, but now it had me sighing with relief. Thank goodness she picked the wrong bridge!

I threw down my bike and peered into the river. There she was, looking up at me while bobbing on the surface and treading water. No, honey, I ain't St. Peter—you survived.

A bridge operator ran out of the tower to tell me help was on the way. Whew.

Suicide seems particularly fashionable these days, and why not? (That whole death-of-democracy thing and all.)

In the past year and a half we've lost some of our sharpest minds to self-inflicted murder: Elliott Smith, Spalding Gray, Hunter S. Thompson.

Even some of my '80s idols have joined the ranks: Big Country singer Stuart Adamson, Crowded House drummer Paul Hester and INXS frontman Michael Hutchence (whose death remains a mystery—suicide or autoerotic asphyxiation?—leaving the poor family to wonder whether he was sad and troubled or simply horny and stupid).

By the time authorities arrived, the jumper had swum to the river's edge and was holding on for the dear life that she had just tried to end. A crowd gathered along Waterfront Park to make the worst day of this woman's life just a little bit more traumatic. Onlookers casually commented on the situation as if they had stumbled upon a cat caught in a tree.

Having seen the whole thing, I had an entirely different perspective on the scene. I mean, I'd just been eyewitness to the most personal moment of this stranger's existence—quite literally a life-and-death decision.

What made her jump? Heartbreak? Clinical depression? Loss of hope upon realizing, along with the rest of us five months ago, that this country is going down the tubes?

I was feeling an intense combination of empathy and disgust.

On one hand, I know how it feels when you're convinced that death is the only alternative to misery. I figured out I was gay halfway through high school, but I had no way of knowing this is *normal*, thanks to conservative "leaders" who think that tolerance education will encourage students to switch sexual orientations.

(I really can't understand why we're still having this debate. People are dying. U.S. Sen. Gordon Smith, R-Ore., knows this better than anyone—his only son, Garrett, killed himself in September 2003. Since then he has become an outspoken advocate for suicide prevention, yet he continues to fear queer equality and to ignore the clear connection between homophobic politicians and suicidal constituents.)

On the other hand, as I watched a dive team scoop this woman from the murky water, I was filled with a profound sense of disappointment that a fellow human being lost



Jim's Closet
by Jim Radosta

THE TOP SHELF

This has been quite a month for free films about wacky musicians. On April 6, Jackpot Records screened a retrospective of videos by chain-smoking French crooner Serge Gainsbourg as part of its second annual Music Film Festival at Hollywood Theatre. The highlight was his drunken appearance on a Euro talk show in the mid-1980s when he told a wide-eyed Whitney Houston that he wanted to fuck her. (My, how times have changed. Now it's Mrs. Brown who's making a fool of herself in televised interviews.)

Presumably sensing competition, Music Millennium followed suit with a free screening of *Dig!* April 11 at Lola's Room. Now available on DVD, the Sundance fave documents the strange relationship between Portland bands *The Dandy Warhols* and *The Brian Jonestown Massacre* as the former finds fame and the latter implodes because of singer Anton Newcombe's insanity. Queer highlights include a hissy fit from video director David LaChapelle over Dandy singer Courtney Taylor's vanity, as well as an onstage spit swap between BJM members Joel Gion and Matt Hollywood.

Shirley Manson sure picked a fine time to call in sick.

After driving three hours for a sold-out *Garbage* concert April 8 in Seattle, I hopped in line along with a diverse crowd of baby goths and aging grungsters, only to learn moments before the doors were scheduled to open that she had "taken ill" and that the show was postponed. Shucks.

All was forgiven April 12 with the release of *Garbage's* fourth disc, *Bleed Like Me*. Although Manson isn't queer, she's clearly on our side. The title track introduces listeners to a series of people in pain: an alcoholic named JT, an anorexic named Avalanche and a trans youth named Chrissie who's "all dressed up and acting coy, painted like a brand new Christmas toy—he's trying to figure out if he's a girl or he's a boy."

Another queer-positive track, "Sex Is Not the Enemy," should be the theme song for the next anti-gay ballot measure campaign: "The institution curses curiosity...I won't be shamed cause I believe that love is free...a revolution is the solution."

sight of what matters most in life: possibility. What keeps me going through Dubya's dictatorship is a survival instinct that, I hope, this woman regains someday. She needs to remember these simple words: When we're fucked, we multiply! ☐

Arts and Culture Editor JIM RADOSTA needs your feedback. Write to jim@justout.com.

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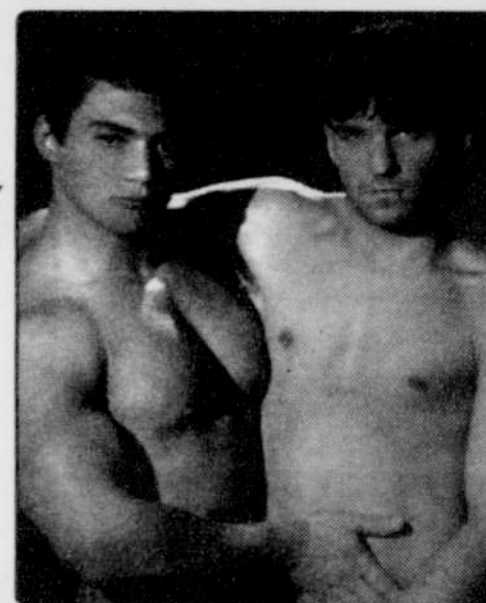
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