

Back to School

Reliving teen trauma...for your amusement

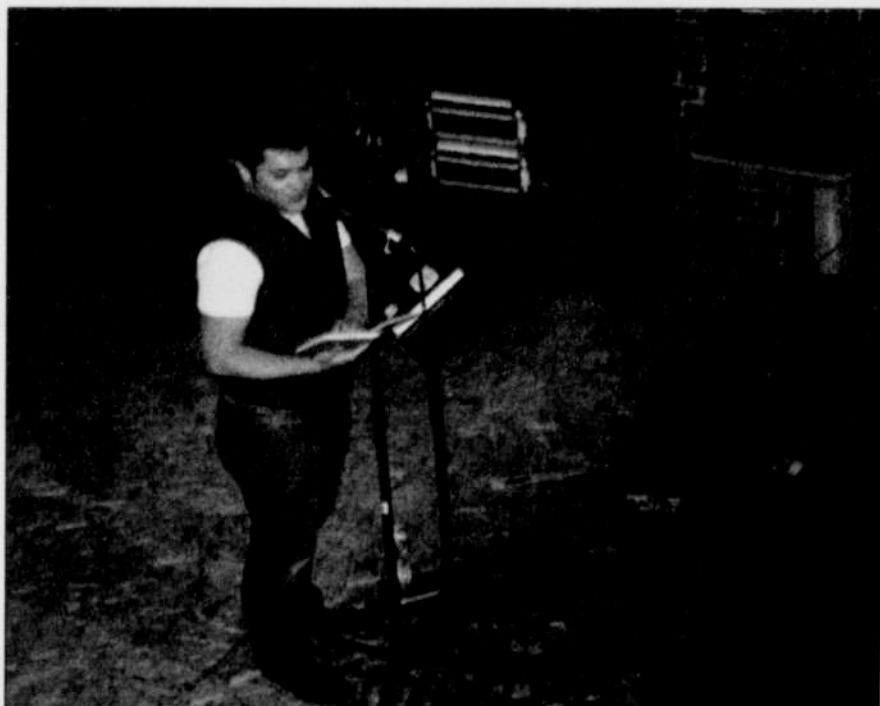
"Only as long as we can laugh at ourselves are we nobody else," reads a saying from e.e. cummings that's been hanging on my wall for ages.

But I didn't truly grasp his point until this year, when I stumbled upon a unique situation that would put those words to the test: reading from my teenage diaries to total strangers. We're talking masturbation fantasies, locker room skidmarks, popularity neuroses—all of the things that you only would confess under lock and key.

Aside from a sick fetish for self-induced pain, what in the world would possess someone to endure such suffering voluntarily? Good question.

The dungeon masters of this torture chamber—better known as Mortified—describe it as "personal redemption through public humiliation" and "performance art meets group therapy." The popular event packs houses every few months in cities from Portland to Boston to Los Angeles, where celebrity guests have included Elijah Wood (*The Lord of the Rings*) and Busy Philipps (*Freaky and Geeks*). It has been hailed by *Newsweek* as a "cultural phenomenon" and has even spawned a book, *Mortified: Love Is a Battlefield*.

Coincidentally, last Christmas I started to excavate my past for insight about my future. The essays I wrote as a child provided surprising clues as to the man I would become ["That Was Then," Jan. 4].

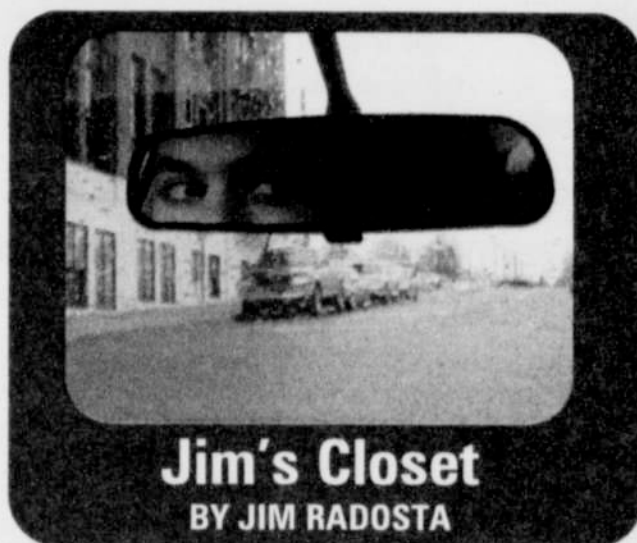


Reading from my high school diary in June at Someday Lounge. Encore performance forthcoming.

Shortly after that column ran, I heard about Mortified and decided to dust off my high school journals to see what was in there. Considering my past as an honor roll student with a severely limited social life, I wasn't expecting to find much—mostly homework to-do lists and accounts of petty fights with my brother. At the time I refused to acknowledge my homosexuality even to myself; on the rare occasions when I would reveal merely a hint of queerness, I'd later scratch those words out, fully convinced that the feelings were only temporary.

Frankly, it was a sad period that I did not want to revisit. On top of my mental distress, I was putting my body through the wringer with a crash diet of instant coffee for breakfast and breath mints for lunch. No wonder I was so miserable.

But my pain is your gain, because all these years later, the bile has fermented into sugar. I was preparing to relive adolescent angst involving a miserable, malnourished student who was confused about his sexuality, irritated by his parents and pissed that his favorite daytime soap opera,



Jim's Closet
BY JIM RADOSTA

Santa Barbara, was being pre-empted by the Iran-Contra hearings. Through today's eyes, however, this dark picture gains some light.

As I thumbed through pages and pages of rants—I journaled every day in 1987 and 1988—levity began to emerge. On the one hand, it was stunning to see how much gay-baiting I weathered at school from both students ("You are what you eat...you look like quiche") and staff ("All Democrats are faggots," my German teacher once told the class). But I also saw my earliest signs of establishing individuality: Although I wasn't ready to come out, I did heed the advice of a nonconformist classmate who encouraged me to break out of my shell. And, of course, I found bits of filthy oversharing that should never be uttered in a crowd—wet dreams, anyone?—but we've all been there.

As a result, dredging up these universal ordeals publicly becomes a cathartic experience for performer and audience alike. After reading at Mortified in June, I went from feeling like everyone was laughing at me to feeling like everyone was laughing with me. I went from "Oh my God, you're all looking at me!" to "Hey, you're all looking at me!" It's a subtle but remarkable transformation.

In the program that's handed out at each Mortified, participants are asked to describe themselves by filling in two blanks: "Dreamed I'd be..." and "Grew up to be..." For example: "Dreamed I'd be a fireman. Grew up to be an arsonist."

I grappled with this riddle for a bit before an answer suddenly clicked that summed it all up simply: "Dreamed I'd be an earth tone. Grew up to be a pastel." (jo)

MORTIFIED presents its first anniversary "class reunion" shows featuring Jim Radosta and six other brave souls 8 p.m. Nov. 15 and 7 p.m. Nov. 16 at Someday Lounge, 125 N.W. Fifth Ave. Admission is \$12 at the door or \$10 in advance from Brown Paper Tickets. All previous shows have sold out, so buy tickets now—and show up at least an hour early if you want to score a seat. For casting information visit www.getmortified.com.

Arts and Culture Editor JIM RADOSTA needs your feedback. E-mail him at jim@justout.com.

Coventry Cycle Works



Recumbents
Folding Bikes
...and More!

Open Tuesday-Sunday
(503) 230-7723
2025 SE Hawthorne

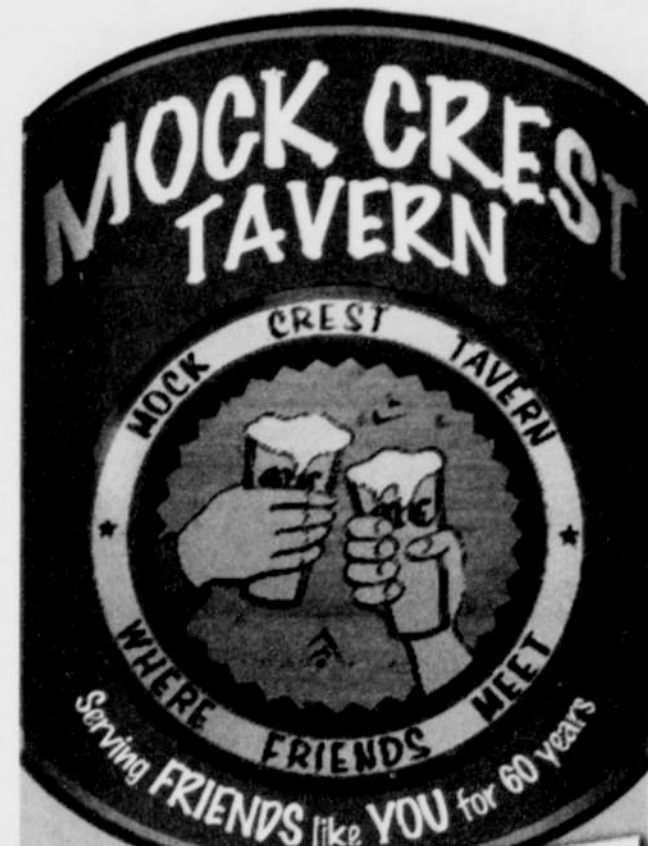


Woodstock Animal Hospital

4835 SE Woodstock Blvd.
Portland, OR 97206
(503) 775-1519
www.vcaantech.com



OPEN SATURDAYS 8AM-4PM!



GREAT LIVE MUSIC! NEVER A COVER!
(See www.mockcrest.com for full schedule!)
BIER GARTEN! POKER Mon & Sun!
LATE NIGHT MENU 'til 2:30am
Home-Cooked Grub! Veggie Friendly!



3435 N Lombard 503-283-5014
www.mockcrest.com

TALK IS CHEAP, ACTION TALKS!



UNLIMITED AND FREE
LIVECHAT™ WITH VIPS!

Portland: 503-222-6USA
Vancouver: 360-696-5254
Seattle: 206-753-2429
Everett: 425-405-2429
Tacoma 253-359-2429

LIVELINE
CHAT, PERSONALS, FORUMS

FIND YOUR FLAME!
www.livematch.com

Unlimited VIP Subscription AS LOW AS \$1.77 per day! (8 weeks package \$99.00)

love freely...
hip, sexy & groovy!

Yummy
wine bar & bistro

831+ broadway
seaside • oregon • 97138
503.738.3100

www.yummywinebarbistro.com

hours
sunday: 3-10
monday: 3-10
tuesday: closed
wednesday: closed
thursday: 3-10
friday: 3-12
saturday: 3-12