

Sex in the First Person

Girl From the North Country

By Peter Gambaccini

My college in isolated northern New England belatedly became co-educational the year after I graduated. "They were waiting for you to leave," I have been kidded since. Hemingway's title *Men Without Women* fit too many of the 3200 forlorn undergraduates haunting a campus truly Siberian in its winter desolation. Sad sacks who'd left their high school sweeties home in Montana or West Virginia wandered about in a shellshocked daze, baffled as to how they'd been talked into signing on for a four-year monastic existence.

In my junior year at this outpost, I was a bit too old to have never had a serious girlfriend. Still, I had no expectations. But on a sunny spring day on Main Street, a diminutive beauty rode up to me on her bicycle, wearing a halter top and shorts and a warm, heart-breaking smile that couldn't be faked. Why was she intent on me? Was the sun in her eyes? I was totally without moves or guile or any reason to figure I had a better chance with her than 3199 other lads, but I decided nothing would stand in the way of making her mine.

Christl was a former Austrian national ski-team member with Gypsy blood and deep brown eyes, stranded in this college town where her stepdad was a chef. We were almost mutely smitten from the get-go, but the courtship was long before it was intimate. She had been burned romantically, and I had to patiently show my trustworthiness. One starry night, we wandered alone to a secluded

swimming area called Secret Spot. As I held her perfect, 93-pound slalom superstar body in a naked embrace which for me was several years overdue, the seawall of unrequited lust broke, moving so swiftly to a localized area that I felt like I had a double hernia.

We consummated back at her apartment. Faintly on the radio, Steve Miller sang, "Leave your troubles behind, it's a brave new world." Bless you, Steve.

When I was out with Christl, people gazed at her and then glanced at me quizzically, wondering, "How did this guy get someone like her?" There was nothing about her I didn't treasure; the little indentation below her breastbone was most adorable. I began to believe that German, into which she would lapse in unguarded passionate moments, was a Romance language. During lovemaking, sometimes, her eyes rolled back in her head and she lost consciousness. The first couple of times, I giggled at this imagined tribute to myself and gently woke her. The third and fourth times, I started to fret.

We were playful like puppies. That summer, we took up residence in a house on the left bank of the Connecticut River, on whose placid waters the U.S. Men's Olympic rowing team was training. Each morning at 7, Christl and I would wake to the coxswain's call—"Stroke! Stroke!"—approaching from downriver. Each morning, we obeyed that command.

WORD PROBLEMS

By Alexis Sottile

I turned 21 in July 1997 and in August I lost my virginity. If it is now 2001, how many more years have I lived as a virgin than as "not-a-virgin"?

That year I worked in a vintage-clothing store. The cost of an average dress there was \$35. My least favorite customer bought one dress a week. If I worked there for one year and seven months, during which time I never bought any dresses, how much less money did I spend on dresses than my least favorite customer?

In August of 1997, I lost my virginity to a very nice man. I never had sex with him again. In October, I had sex for the second time, with a different man. If the condom we used that October was bought the day I lost my virginity, and it expired a year from the day it was bought, how much longer would that condom have stayed penis-ready, assuming it was stored at room temperature?

When I was 18, I had a serious boyfriend for one year. In October of 1997, this boyfriend—The Ex—walked into my store. If I broke up with The Ex in August of 1995, how long had we been broken up?

The Ex was alone. The vintage-clothing store was small. I was the only one in the store when he entered. How many of us, total, were in the store?

I told The Ex I had lost my virginity that summer. I told him I'd always thought I would lose it to him. If I had been working in that store for 10 months, how much was I already saving by not buying dresses?

I came out from behind the little glass counter. I said, "If you don't leave this store I'm going to kiss you." He stayed. We kissed.

(How many more words than actions?)
 (How many actions describe a word?)
 On the floor.
 (How many dresses?)
 Toward the back.
 (How many mirrors?)
 Between rows of shirts.
 (Men's or Women's?)

I climb on top of him.
 (How many years ago)
 He is on top of me.
 (did I break up with him?)
 Shirts are falling.
 (Ours? The store's?)
 My head is tilted.
 (How many falling?)
 He comes inside.
 (How many years ago)
 He goes outside.
 (did we fall in love?)

This is the second time I have had sex. The Ex is the first man I loved. Both my legs are shaking (How many years ago?), and I look for my own (Was he always holding me?) things buried under (How many years ago?) other things. I look at: The Ex, who wants to stay. (How long will it take me? How much am I saving?)

I look: Us.
 (A word?)
 Problem:
 The number of mirrors.

Tema del Basso

By Elizabeth Zimmer

	<i>But a damned (your hand delights) abstraction. Nothing is love;</i>	<i>And alive. (Kiss me. Listen.) Love Moves in time.</i>	<i>We languish; (Wind is blowing) love Is conjunction.</i>	<i>Caught, can't be (Look at me) branded. Love is thought.</i>
<i>There is no such thing (touch me again) as love. Love is no thing</i>	<i>Love is an (answer my lips) action. Love is a word</i>	<i>There is no such (Look. It is dawn.) thing As love. Alone</i>	<i>Love is not there (Are you awake?) to be Handled, won't be</i>	<i>There is no such thing as (touch me again) love. (Again. Again.)</i>

Love and Braces

BY THOMAS DEFRANTZ

Three years ago I got braces. My dentist suggested it, my boyfriend supported it. Wasn't everybody doing it? Excited to be chichly metal-mouthed, I came home to show them off, along with the list of what I couldn't eat (hard-crusted bread, popcorn, taffy), how to eat the rest (knife and fork for everything), and how often I would need to brush my teeth (almost constantly, after anything went into my mouth). My boyfriend looked at my hardware and panicked—"What about oral sex?"

I scanned the "dos and don'ts" from the orthodontist. Among the drawings of awkwardly smiling adolescents resisting cotton candy, there was no mention of cocksucking, no description of how to get those nagging pubic hairs out of the wires lining my mouth. Running my tongue across the metal, I flinched instinctively at the prospect of an ill-timed roll of the neck or shift of the bedsprings. And my boyfriend loved oral sex!

I'm high-yellow, Midwestern-born, thirtysomething black; he's first-generation American, English-ancestry white, a

dozen years older than me. He's a little bit NPR; I'm a little bit Hot 97. We both love sex and get it on with freakish regularity, exploring each other's bodies and getting off. After seven years together, we could imagine no conceivable limit to the ways we might express physical love with each other. But here was a challenge to test the boundaries of our relationship.

We rolled into bed and started our dance of arousal—nuzzling necks, laughing at our heated intimacy, running hands over skin, beards, dreadlocks, ass cheeks. A kiss grew, and our tongues explored the new fixtures, searching for rough spots, darting around the filaments, tasting clammy firmness. We shifted a bit to force the moment of truth. He shivered in anticipation, and I jittered nervously, unable to shake images of a huge scrotal gash caused by a fold of skin irretrievably caught in a tiny clamp.

Happily, that didn't happen. The braces hindered nothing we had done before; their presence added a thrill to some of my more ambitious techniques. Last month I went from braces to a removable retainer—hello, tooth enamel!—and my boyfriend confessed he actually missed the peril of my metalmouth. Well, next year I can always get my tongue pierced.

Making Babies

By Allen St. John

It's 3:27 a.m., and I'm typing quietly so as not to wake the young lady asleep in my lap. She's got only slightly more hair than Sinéad O'Connor, and she'll celebrate her first birthday right after Valentine's Day. For the first thirtysomething years of my life, I thought of sex as an end. Now, as I sit in my office at an hour once reserved for after-parties and Frank Sinatra records, listening to Emma breathing, finally asleep I think, I've come to realize that sex is only a beginning.

The moment you decide to have a baby is a watershed. Your sex life becomes like gym class: pass/fail. But despite what I learned in junior high health, it's hardly a done deal once you decide to ditch the condoms. So as surely as we paid the cable bill, we embarked on a new monthly ritual. If Sally was even five minutes late, she'd run to the medicine cabinet and whip out the EPT kit, only to find that the dipstick was whatever color showed she was not yet in the family way. Maybe next month. Then she bought a basal thermometer. That, friends, is the dividing line between trying to get pregnant and road-to-the-fertility-clinic-to-have-septuplets *obsessed* about getting pregnant. And it worked. She never took it out of the package. But with that talisman safely ensconced on a shelf, we stopped thinking about ovulation cycles and procreation-friendly foods, and focused instead on getting busy, and it happened. Preggers.

When? Damned if we know. We can narrow that most audacious of sex acts to a month, a week. But a precise moment of rapacious carnal bliss on the living room floor involving jug wine, guacamole, and *Walker, Texas Ranger* blaring in the background? No way. Even our obstetrician doesn't know for sure. So we've taken an educated guess and composed our own creation myth. Our son, Ethan, most likely in a hotel room in Utah, after a day of playing in the thin air and soft snow. Emma? Our own bed, the cool of fresh sheets, as furtive as two teenagers, trying not to wake Ethan up.

And frankly, we're happy to let the mystery be. Procreative sex carries with it a certain gravitas that should give most sober folks pause. Stop to think for a second about the enormity of what you're embarking on, and it's hard to avoid paranoid fantasies about the gene-pool Lotto drawing. She's on top and we've got a little Mozart. I'm on top and it's Marilyn Manson. It boggles the mind. In the years since our familial population doubled, our conception of romance has changed—changing a poopy diaper now counts more than a dozen roses. But when I see Emma make her first joke—a sight gag involving strained mango—or Ethan doing his best Jackson Pollock—"But it's a *stegosaurus*, Dad"—and I catch Sally's eye watching me watching, she casts a lustful glance in my direction that says, "Hey, we did that." And what could be sexier? Besides, of course, a couple more hours of sleep.