

# Open Letters.

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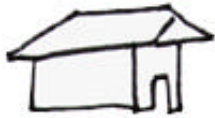
[The Work Week]



*July 30, 2000 (Vol. I, No. 6)*

This week,  
Open Letters features the collected letters of:  
Dishwasher Pete,  
Heather O'Neill,  
Andy Jenkins,  
Bill Lychack,  
and Alivia Zivich;  
as well as a conversation with Invisibl Ninja.

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# Open up.



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Dear Readers,

This week, everything in *Open Letters* is connected by a single theme: life at work. Our correspondents contributed letters from a wide variety of modern workplaces, including a sixth-grade classroom, a tech-support cubicle, a religious-publishing office, and, in the case of this week's first letter, a dish pit.

I first met Dishwasher Pete through his zine, *Dishwasher*, a sporadically published first-person account of Pete's quest to wash dishes in all fifty united states. It's a remarkable ongoing document of personal journalism, but it's more than that, too: any given issue is part cultural history of dishwashing, part manifesto on the minimum wage, and part travelogue. Pete is working on issue #16 right now, though it might not be done for a few months (or years); to order it, send a dollar or two, and perhaps some stamps, to:

Dishwasher  
P.O. Box 8213  
Portland, OR 97207  
USA.

You will not be disappointed.

Pete's letter is to "Satch," a thirty-three-year-old professional dishwasher in Gainesville, Florida. Like Pete, Satch is committed to remaining a dishwasher, resisting the inevitable entreaties from employers to "move up" to bussing or waiting tables or cooking.

Unlike Pete, Satch was working without a sense of a nationwide dishwashing community, until about a year ago, when someone gave Satch a copy of *Dishwasher*. As Pete tells it, Satch was relieved and excited to discover that he wasn't alone in his devotion to his craft. He wrote Pete, and they began a correspondence, between Florida and whichever state Pete happens to be in. Today's letter is part of that ongoing conversation.

Yours truly,

Paul Tough

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## A Clean Conscience

A letter from Dishwasher Pete, on life in the pit.

Portland, Oregon • July 24, 2000

Satch,

I'm back at one of my usual jobs here in Portland – washing dishes Saturdays and Sundays at a hippie-ish, mostly vegetarian diner. I'm also lobbying to get my old Saturday night gig back at this hipster burrito restaurant and bar. I've got the same arrangement with the owners of both places: \$6.50 an hour cash, plus an even share of the tips, plus all-you-can-eat food and beers after

the shift. If I get that Saturday night shift, it'll mean that in the 31 hours from 10 a.m. Saturday to 5 p.m. Sunday, I can earn nearly \$300 cash. It's no wonder that I always drift back to Portland.

The diner is kinda funny because the employees are mostly bitter punkers serving rich hippies. It's an old, cramped operation. I

have to move whenever a customer heads to or from the bathroom. The place has a 1947 Jackson cylindrical dish machine. It's cute to look at and it's a nice antique, but it's a complete failure when it comes to cleaning and sanitizing dishes. The spray arms don't spin. At least last year the machine had hot steamy water kinda splashing around. Now the water is just a tepid, non-soapy gray.

When I introduced the topic of the machine to the owner, he said, "Oh, I know, don't you just love it?" He's gay and a bit flamboyant, and went on to rave about the old Jackson. I realized that it was a matter of form over function. He sounded like such a proud parent that I dropped the issue. Who was I to change the way things were done? I was just an itinerant on his way through town. This guy owned the place, and he seemed pleased with the way things were.

I can only say that sanitation (or lack thereof) starts at the top. And since there is very little at the top, there isn't much of it at the middle or the bottom at this place. Let's just say that hygiene isn't a priority among many of the employees. When I first started, I noticed after a couple of weeks that one of the waitresses had cut her hair. When I asked her about it she told me that she had to cut it because she had a case of lice. She then proceeded to freely inform me of her personal history as host to parasites. As she reeled off tales of scabies, crabs, and lice, I nodded politely and slowly inched away from her. She is now the day manager at the place.

Last Sunday, a patron sitting at the counter said to a waitress, "I come here often and every now and then I find a hair in my food, which isn't too unusual – it happens at other restaurants, it happens at home. But now as I sit here and look into the kitchen [through the pick-up window], I have to wonder if the hairs in my food are armpit hairs." The two female cooks that day were wearing tank-top shirts and every time they reached up for a plate or bowl, their very unshaven pits hovered above the condiment station. I do believe that Oregon health laws call for that part of the body to be covered on anyone handling food.

There's other stuff, too – like that all the refrigerators are old and frequently break down, that the water pitchers are filled in the bathroom sink, that cockroaches have their run of the place, etc. I just pray that whenever the outbreak of hepatitis/salmonella/botulism/e. coli goes down, that it doesn't happen during my watch.

So why don't I do anything about it? Why do I "re-wash" all the "clean" stuff first thing when I start my shift instead of insisting the Jackson be overhauled or replaced? For a while, my answer has been that they pay me \$13 to \$18 an hour to clean the dishes, and during my shift, the dishes are clean. (I can't say the same for the rest of the week.) Am I compromising the pledge I've taken to uphold the laws of sanitation? I guess so. And why don't I take action? Well, up until writing this letter, I hadn't thought a whole lot about it. I know that if I was the permanent disher there, I would make changes, but since I just pass through, I haven't made waves. But I can't remain silent any longer. I'll bring up the need to repair the Jackson this week.

As for my Saturday night gig: Four or five years ago, this guy came up to me in a bookstore in Portland and asked, "Aren't you the dishwasher guy?" I hesitantly acknowledged that I was. He said that he was opening a new restaurant on the southeast corner of 25th and Clinton, and that I was welcome to wash dishes there any time. So I went down to that intersection a few weeks later and not only was there no sign of a restaurant where he said to go, but some musty old business-machine office sat where he said his restaurant would be. "Man," I thought, "that guy was crazy. There ain't no restaurant here."

Well, when I was back in town a year later, there was indeed a restaurant in that space. I guess it took him a while to get his money together. I was immediately hooked up with the lucrative Saturday night dish shift. Unlike the aforementioned place, it was actually an honor to work at this joint, because the staff was a virtual who's-who of notable past and present Portland dishwashers. Everyone – the owner, the cooks, the

bartenders – had bona fide dishwashing credentials. Even the Friday night dishwasher was actually moonlighting from his regular dish job at Genoa, the Holy Grail of Portland dish jobs.

So I liked the people. The dish set-up is good, although the whole kitchen and most of the dish pit are wide-open to the floor. Normally I hate being on view for the dining public but this place is such a hip hangout that my view usually includes many hipster girls in cat-eyed glasses and beaded sweaters, so I don't complain.

The one main thing about working there is that I work with a bunch of alcoholics. Officially, every employee is entitled to three free drinks at the end of a shift. Since the end of my shift may come at 1 a.m., and since I'm usually wiped out after working, I'll just have a beer or two (instead of the three cocktails that I'm expected to have). There was a time when I first started working there that if I left the bar before I had my allotted three drinks, I'd get hassled. One cook in particular would say, "Where ya going? You're not gonna have your third drink? That's like taking a cut in pay!"

So one time I succumbed to this cook's pressure and hung around. What difference would it make, since the bar would be closing in an hour anyway? Well, closing time came and the cook told me to accompany him on a walk around the block. By the time we had circled the block, the bartender had cleared the place of patrons. The three of us then proceeded to drink out of paper cups and watch videotapes of not one but two full-length Neil Diamond concerts, and the movie *King Kong*

*vs. Godzilla*, not once but twice.

Suddenly the daytime prep cook appeared at my side and I thought, that's weird, he should be sleeping, he's gotta work in the morning. I said, "What're you doing here?" He said, "It's 9:30 a.m. I'm here to open the place." Nine-thirty? I turned around and was surprised to see daylight. "I gotta go," I mumbled as I staggered for the door.

Fortunately my bike held me up as I stumbled home. After a brief few hours of sleep, I was back at work that night. I expected to get razed for having spent the night in the bar, but no one said anything. Apparently it was par for the course.

Since then, I have my beer or two and then I'm gone.

This place is the number-one seller of Schlitz beer in the state of Oregon.

Well, that's the news from here. Congratulations on the lake-front house. I've been seriously thinking about buying a house in my beloved Pittsburgh. I just got a letter from a friend there saying that a house up the street from her was recently purchased for \$1,000 by some real-estate scum who had turned around and, without putting any work into it, is trying to sell the house for \$5,000. Many of my friends are urging me to buy a house there and are even offering to loan me money to do it. How pathetic am I for needing a loan to buy a \$1,000 house?

Anyway,

Pete

[Today's open letter is by Heather O'Neill, a young writer and mother in Montreal. Her editor at *Open Letters* is Jonathan Goldstein, who wrote a letter himself in issue #3, about a phone call from a former love. I tracked Jonathan down at a motel in Saskatchewan and asked him if he'd write today's letter from the editor. He obliged; his letter is below.]

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Dear Readers,

When I first met Heather she was twenty-two. We were at a poetry reading where she was performing. She had this Virginian accent and in my Canadian mind it contributed to an over-all romantic enigma. Heather struck me as the kind of woman Dean Moriarty would be dating in *On the Road*. She looked like she was from some by-gone era where women with southern accents worked with their hair tied up in kerchiefs on assembly lines to help the war effort. By all of this, I mean to say that Heather was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen.

When I walked into the café that night, she was sitting in the darkness by the door smoking a cigarette. I had seen her around and was anxious to speak with her, so apropos of absolutely nothing, I launched into a rambling synopsis of this story I was writing about a boy who becomes sexually involved with his dog who, as it turns out, is the reincarnation of his grandmother. Thankfully, before I wound my way into the big "doggie-style" finale, she was called onto the stage to read.

Heather read about angels trapped in rib cages and her father hiding under cars on the street to surprise her on her way home from school. After the reading we went out for beer. I was impressed by how fast she drank and she was impressed by my eye glasses that only had one arm.

"From the side, you look like a cartoon doctor," she said.

A couple of days later I convinced this mutual friend of ours to bring me over to Heather's apartment. She had mentioned over beer that her two year-old daughter,

Arizona, had recently shoved their TV off the coffee table, so I traded on some favours and got her an old RCA. I remember carefully walking up the winding staircase to her house, thinking "now I have a reason."

We sat in her living room on the most uncomfortable couch I had ever encountered. It was like something out of a Gothic mental-hospital waiting room. She told me that she had gotten it to get rid of her mother. Her mother, whom she hadn't seen in years, had shown up one day and had begun sleeping on her couch. There she had stayed until Heather swapped couches on her.

At one point, while talking about her mother, Heather picked up a big Glad bag of her mother's stuff and pitched it off the back balcony. She told me about a year later that she only did it to make an impression, and that after we had left, she had gone searching for it in the alley with a flashlight. When she told me that, I just about wept.

We spent much of our early friendship sitting on that back balcony of hers. People would come over and drink wine and beer. After she had put Arizona to bed, Heather would play us songs on her guitar that she'd written and for days to come, I couldn't get those songs out of my head. Sometimes they still creep in and when they do, I'm sunk.

Today's letter is about the extra-curricular poetry class that Heather teaches at her daughter's elementary school. Heather understands that poetry can be found anywhere, and I'm glad she's teaching little kids just that. If I had a teacher like Heather, I might not have ended up a petty thief with no faith in the Canadian educational system.

(That isn't exactly the case, but I still would have loved to have been taught by someone like Heather.)

She wrote her first film last year and it's premiering this fall. It's loosely based on her own experience growing up. It's called "St.

Jude." As you might know, Jude is the patron saint of lost causes, mad men, and of course, children.

Enjoy,

Jonathan Goldstein



## Poetic License

A letter from Heather O'Neill, on liberating the sixth grade

Montreal, Quebec • July 25, 2000

Dear Justin,

The principal at Arizona's elementary school talked me into teaching a poetry class to a group of students. I had reservations about teaching poetry to children. I believe you have to write without inhibitions to create a beautiful poem. I wondered if this wasn't in conflict with the school's agenda to mold the children into considerate and well-behaved individuals who fit harmoniously with the rest of society. I asked for the oldest group of kids, the grade sixes. I figured at least they could read.

I thought they would be my size. In my memory, I attained my actual height at least by grade four. I was surprised by how small they were. I had even less of a notion of what went on in their heads.

During the first class, I decided to let them write their own poems without any suggestions or guidance from me, just to see what they wrote like. They asked if they should write about Halloween, which was coming up. I said, please, no. So they all wrote about

Christmas and Hanukkah. The poems all rhymed and some had exactly the same lines. "I am proud of my heritage" was a popular one. There was nothing personal in any of the poems. You couldn't even tell whether a boy or a girl had written it. What a waste of time, I thought. I was hoping for at least one Alphabet City poet who rapped about cockroaches in her coffee cup and her mother's middle names. I'd read a funky, radical book about teaching poetry to inner-city New York kids, and they all wrote lines like, "It's raining apples. How can I avoid temptation?" At twenty-five, I'm a little too young to be a mother or much of an authority figure in the first place. But the kids treated me as if I was a statue they were afraid of.

The night after my first class, I put on my flip-flops and this pin-striped suit I got modeling at some runway show in New York City when I was twenty. I walked to the video store. I was smoking a cigarette and my dog followed me in. He always does that

and there's nothing I can be bothered to do about it. The video-store clerks are used to me and it isn't anything like an upscale neighborhood. I picked a rental I'd seen before. On the way to the cash I saw a kid named Clyde from my class.

"What movie did you pick," he asked.

I held up the video that was under my arm, *Gummo*.

"It's about these kids who are alienated because a tornado hit their town," I said. "They kill cats and sell them to a Chinese restaurant."

"Cool, should I rent it?"

"I don't know. You might be too young for it. Not because of the sex and violence. But it might give you that creepy feeling, like when you see an older couple screaming at each other on the street."

"Oh, yeah. That's so cool. I never really thought about it that way," he said, nodding. "Are you coming again next week?"

"Yeah, of course."

"Good."

The next class I thought we'd begin by having a discussion about what poetry was. I brought in some of the most contemporary stuff I could find, spoken word rants about television shows and erotic vacuum cleaners and the like. Weird-ass stuff. I said for me a poem was like a photograph that captures a moment of beauty. "You know, like you visualize an isolated frame of time that excites you. It doesn't have to fit the normal idea of what pretty is."

"Like what?" asked a girl.

I decided to go for the first thing that popped into my head.

"Sometimes things that people think are ugly are really beautiful. Like children pretending to clean cans in a thrown-out sink."

I looked at Clyde, who was sitting close to me like I was his buddy. He was wearing a black tie with a gorgeous yellow songbird on it over his T-shirt. He was already writing away. I looked down at the piece of paper in front of him. His poem was called "Love is a Black Dog in a Video Store." I decided to go with a cinematic example since my ideas about movies were what bonded me and Clyde.

"Like in that movie *Taxi Driver*. The director takes the camera down a tiny sweating hallway, and then there's a man handing out keys to cheap rooms. He's wearing a top hat for no reason. There's something beautiful about that and it has nothing to do with Christmas."

There was a silence all of a sudden, the kind that only a roomful of kids can produce. I felt a little sweaty. I took off my sweater. They all looked at the tattoo on my shoulder immediately. I felt self-conscious all of a sudden, like I was getting too familiar with them. I quickly put my sweater back on. The damage had already been done. Joseph, this kid with blond hair in his face and sunglasses hanging from the neck of his T-shirt, stood up and pointed his finger at me.

"Are you talkin' to me?" he said.

Alex began humming "You Are The Wind Beneath My Wings," as he started to write his poem. There were band-aids on the tips of each of his finger to stop him from biting his fingernails. He peeled one off his middle finger and started chewing happily on the nail. They had nothing to hide from me.

Whereas in the first class they didn't look at me in the eyes, now they became talkative. Actually, they began to get out of control. They cursed and the boys started making lewd advance to the girls. One boy asked for "poetic license" to punch his best friend in the head.

Then I started reading the poems they were holding out in front of me and sliding across my desk. They had suddenly become open on the paper as well as in the class-



room. One had compared feeling good to disco balls, one had written about a raving stepbrother who drank all the orange juice in the house, one had written about his dad letting him sleep out on the balcony in the summer.

Sean pulled out his toenail that he was keeping in his pocket and put it in the center of his table. The other kids scrambled away disgusted.

"Because of this toenail," he said, "I'm now considered the sickest kid in the school."

His poem was called "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Toilet." He compared his toilet to his mother's arm looking through the back of the fridge for a jar of maraschino cherries.

In their writing, their desires and views of themselves were revealed. Take Joseph for instance. He was one of those kids with older brothers, who mysteriously hit puberty too early. He had a sort of Jim Morrison complex. He wrote a poem about wearing leather pants and riding a motorcycle through the desert. There were red snakes curled up on the horizon. He crashed near a motel and ended up overdosing on hashish all alone on

the side of the road. Alex wrote a poem about how badly he wanted to have a queen-sized bed. He said his purest desire was to have twelve Japanese women dressed in blue lingerie singing him Britney Spears songs every night.

"Whoa," I said. "We're in school. I could go to jail for letting you write that stuff."

"You said to write about anything," Alex said.

Laurence, meanwhile, was comparing Salma Hayek's eyes to faucets leaking grape juice, and he did it in such a simple and moving way. And there was this beautiful and sensitive child in the class named Jake, whose poems were brilliant. He was profoundly deaf and skipped a grade. All the other students seemed mildly oblivious to his existence. Here's a line from his poem:

Getting dirty is  
taking a bath backwards

Your sister,

just watching some city children writing on  
the wall,

Heather.



Dear Readers,

Today's letter is by Andy Jenkins, the creative director of the Girl Skateboard Company (a skateboard and clothing manufacturer based in Torrance, California), and the publisher of his own iconoclastic imprint, Bend Press.

I got an email from Andy on day three of *Open Letters*, which was a nice bit of serendipity: when I was leaving Toronto back in April to move to San Francisco to work up *Open Letters*, I brought with me only a dozen or so books, as inspiration; one was a somewhat obscure paperback called *I Check The Mail Only When Certain It Has Arrived*, which is a collection of letters that Andy Jenkins edited, culled from mail he'd received during the late 80's and early 90's.

The book covers, in epistolary form, road

trips and drug trips and personal revelations; it also chronicles Andy's involvement in developing some of the most innovative magazines in recent publishing history. He was the founding editor of *Freestylin'*, the bible of freestyle BMX bike enthusiasts; he was one of the founding editors of *Dirt*, the *Sassy* spin-off that defined a certain skateboard/indie-rock/Southern California aesthetic off of which others have made millions; and, along with Bob Mack, Spike Jonze, Mark Lewman, and the three Beastie Boys, he edited the first issue of the legendary *Grand Royal*.

I'd never corresponded with Andy before, but when I got his email, I invited him to write an open letter. Today's letter is what he came up with – one day in the life of a corporate office full of skateboarders.

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## Part of the Family

A letter from Andy Jenkins, on an unexpected visitor.

The Girl Skateboard Co., Torrance, California • July 26, 2000

Paul,

This afternoon I turned in my chair to face a co-worker, Michael, and was startled to find it wasn't Mike standing behind me at all, but a stranger, no more than a foot away, reading, over my shoulder, the "to do" list I was typing on my G3.

"What's up?" I asked.

"Not much." There was a pause. This was where the kid was supposed to tell me why he was in here. He didn't.

"Can I help you?" I added.

"Naw." His hand came out. "I'm 3PO."

First thought: like the robot? Is that the robot's name? No, no... C-3PO, it's C3PO. The hand was cold and sweaty, but the guy, maybe twenty-five, looked relaxed. Where I work, at a skateboarding company that is essentially run by skateboarders, a lot of people come in and out of the offices, but they are usually on at least a loose leash, accompanied by one of the twenty or so pro skaters who ride for us. I looked behind 3PO, around the office, and noticed no one.

"What's going on?" I asked again, expecting some sort of clue.

"Nuthin." No clue. He sat himself down on

my couch and began gazing around the room. I turned and started typing again, thinking Paulo or Richard – two skaters known to bring in many, let's say, *unique* compatriots – would wander in at any moment to pick up the stray. The guy fit right in: logo T-shirt, cargo shorts, skate shoes.

Minutes passed. I heard 3PO leafing through the latest skateboarding magazines. Okay, I thought, that's cool.

More minutes passed and it got real quiet. His reflection in my monitor sat motionless. Finally, I turned to face him. "You sure I can't help you?"

"Naw, man, I'm just hangin' out." His face pleasantly vacant. Grinning. Stoned?

"Are you with someone?"

"Naw. Just waiting."

"For what?"

"For somebody."

"Do you mind waiting downstairs in the lobby?"

"Will that make you feel more comfortable?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"All right, then." He grinned at me, clasped his hands Jesus-like, and walked out slowly.

My mind was dragged back off into work again and I forgot about 3PO. Then I heard a tinny *tink, tink, tink* sound just outside my office. Must be Tony, I thought. Or Rob.

"What the fuck is that sound?" Tony asked from next door. It wasn't Tony.

It continued. Finally, I got up and walked out into Tony and Rob's shared office. "What is that noise?" I asked them, and before they could answer, I looked over into Michael's cube and saw our man, 3PO, sitting on the

floor, my bass case out before him, my bass in his hands, being slapped and thumped in a random manner. I walked right up to him, and as I entered the space I noticed Michael sitting in his office chair, staring directly into his Mac, wide-eyed.

"Hey, you can't do that in here," I told the kid, trying quickly to think of a reason. "We're...working. Give me that." I took the bass from him. I felt like a school teacher.

"Is this bothering you?" he asked.

"Yeah. This is a place of business." I know, I know, a skateboard company, a place of business? Still. "We're trying to work." I was, now, a prudish adult, a security guard, a cop. 3PO had forced me into a turnabout of roles and I didn't like the feeling – I just *know* someone gave me that same line when I was a kid.

"No problem," he answered.

I asked who he was waiting for.

"I don't know."

"Do you know anyone here?"

He paused and smiled vacantly. "No." He looked around at the four of us now gathered. "I don't recognize anyone. Yet."

I told him he had to leave. "You can go wait in the lobby. Down the stairs, go left, then left again. They can help you."

He left silently. We all looked at each other, questioning.

"Thanks for doing that," said Mike, visibly nervous. "That dude was freaking me out. I thought he was with one of the guys so I didn't say anything to him. Thanks."

"I thought he was your friend, Mike," Rob said.

"No!"

"That guy's a tripper." We laughed nervous-

ly. There was probably a time in each of our own lives when we were just steps from being a 3PO. Thus our hesitation to boot him. We related somehow. It made me think about the reasons "kids" gravitate to this totally unassuming cement building that sits in a mundane business park among fifty others just like it. Once, a few snuck into the warehouse, during business hours. They'd made a couple successful forays in to scavenge before Ozzy, a tough, reformed gang-banger who worked back there, caught one. He grabbed the kid by the collar and dragged him while chasing the other one. After he had the both of them, he scared them into giving up their accomplice, the youngest. We found him cowering under our ramp, a half-pipe out back. The thirteen-year-old had a nice little pile of stolen decks with him. For punishment we made them work in the warehouse the rest of the afternoon.

That ramp is a magnet for skate grommets. Nothing keeps them out. They've jumped over, squeezed under and cut through our concertina-coated fence, risking grave injury just to sit on the large locked-up boat which their idols, the pros, skate during the day. When they get bored, they start digging through the dumpster for old skate shoes, wheels or cracked decks. Anything that isn't bolted down is potential loot – a piece of a real skateboard company. Over the years we've lost several forgotten skateboards, a trampoline, some basketballs and, once, Megan's pet pig. All items left on the grounds vanish by morning.

3PO wasn't like the little thieves. He wasn't looking for souvenirs or autographs or a pig. What he wanted from us was intangible.

I went downstairs to use the copy machine. I looked down the hall to see 3PO's head bobbing just beyond Dorothy's desk. What the hell? I reached the front office just as Tony did. Dorothy had beeped him.

"You're still here?" Tony asked. "Who are you waiting for?"

"Nobody, man. I just want to talk."

"To who?"

"Is Rick here?"

Rick's the boss, the owner, a well-known pro skateboarder.

"No. He's out. Are you a friend of his?"

"Can I talk to him?"

"He's out." Tony was getting fired up. "Do you know Rick?"

"Man, there's no need to get argumentative. It's cool." By now a crowd of about eight or nine had gathered. "Can we go in your office and talk about this?"

"About what?!"

It was clear he wasn't going to leave. He looked over at me. "You look like a guy that I can talk to." How?

At this point, Tony, Rob and Carlos from the warehouse escorted him outside. Peacefully. Pupils dilated. Shoelaces missing. He was freaking out folks. Davey told me he recognized him as a sponsored skater from a few years back. Dorothy said he'd told her his friend had dropped him here after stealing his clothes and board. Sam added that he thought this guy was the same one who had been leaving messages on his voicemail about "needing to be part of the family." I quickly figured he'd been in the building for at least an hour, floating from office to office like a half-filled helium balloon, propelled by some unseen emotion. Everyone thought he was with someone else.

Finally we had to close the door and lock it to keep him outside. 3PO retreated to an outside wall of the building and sat, knees up. He didn't look upset or scared. Just gone. The cops came. They talked to him. Same thing. Then, finally, he left, on foot, heading south.

He was somebody, looking for somebody. His intrusion created a basic uneasiness in us all; he could very easily, under slightly

different circumstances, have been a peer, or even a friend.

Later, when I left for home, I half expected 3PO to be outside, waiting. He was nowhere to be seen. I was mad at myself for feeling a twinge of fear. Across the street the Torrance daily breeze had blown a batch of papers from a businessman's hands. They fluttered and flapped all over the parking lot, chased by the man and a number of his fellow

employees. Like chickens, those people – they all looked like chickens. I wondered where our 3PO might be right now. At a bus stop, gas station, or just walking – not skateboarding, but fluttering like those papers. Only no one is chasing him.

Old Skater,

Andy Jenkins

