

61. Well, I'm at fault for getting so drunk that I can't refute what she says because I can't remember what happened. At the end of our conversation, she was being nice and goes, in her soft voice, "Oh yes, you were so dangerous, I had to wound you with a vodka bottle." Typical! I hung up and walked into the kitchen where Mick was trying to cook breakfast while balancing an ice pack on his head, and we decided to go on our annual Christmas trip to Goose Island. Last Christmas we went down there and shot Mick's new BB gun. Mick, by the way, is 30 years old. Sometimes, we shoot bow and arrow there, and we've also thrown a couple of big Goose Island parties. Have you ever been there? Well, it's this island between the east and west forks of the north branch of the Chicago River. It's an old industrial area and most of it is still inhabited by fairly thriving industry, like Chicago Fish House and River North Distributing that's listed as one of the largest beer distributors in the city. There's also this big, big building full of all these antique cars, old Chicago police cars and stuff, for when they do films in the city. There used to be a big lumber company close to it but that burned down a couple of years ago. And there's a huge garbage depot. Garbage trucks dump their garbage off to these huge warehouses, and then it's shipped off to Mississippi - or Bosnia, or wherever they dump garbage after it mysteriously disappears down the Chicago River. Maybe they're shipping it to Somalia these days. My excursions to Goose Island with Mick actually started with us pretending we were going fishing on Lake Michigan. Mick would cast the lines and I'd sit around and smoke pot, and then we'd drink. It got to the point where we'd just take the fishing rod down to the lake and we wouldn't even cast any more. Then we gave up even taking out his car, we'd only go down and build fires and drink. Finally, we didn't even bother going to Lake Michigan but just went to Goose Island - which of course is a sportsman's paradise for fish, if you wanna fish, like carp and garbage-and-turd-suckers lying on the bottom of the Chicago River that's completely laden with chemicals and sewage and everything else. It was also a place to get away from our girlfriends, when I was living with a woman. Nobody else goes there, and we'd go down and build fires and climb this big tower by the railroad that has a great view of the skyline and the wasteland area of Goose Island. There's actually a small strip of reachable beach and we've found some interesting industrial artifacts in the brush, like remnants of old buildings. It's sort of this appeal of a decaying industrial landscape that while obviously not universal, is not unique to us. It has inspired a lot of people, from Einstürzende Neubauten in Germany to industrial bands here. This Christmas, we were just out messing around and we discovered this really neat structure, this house that was built like a log structure, very permanent, with a little fireplace built into it. It was very clean inside. It had sort of a door on it that Mick ended up throwing on this huge fire we built, to go with our drinking. We drank a lot of vodka and grapefruit juice, and the fire got so big I expected the fire department to come. It looked like the entire island was on fire. It's like, too much is never enough

62. for Mick! Then he wanted to go over and talk to these guys who live on the island. They live in two huts designed by Mad Housers, and as far as I know those two huts are the only remaining ones in the city of Chicago. It started in Atlanta by some socially activist architects, who designed these huts for people without a home. They have a fuel burning stove, a cot which is raised in, like, a loft position and then a table and a chair below. They are just very basic houses constructed for about \$60 a piece, at least in Chicago, and they built 25-30 of them along the Chicago Northwestern railroad tracks. Then the City decided they were not up to code and dangerous, and bureaucrats tried to persuade people to just go to social programs or to a shelter. Even though the Mad Housers had worked in Atlanta for a long time, the City tore them all down in Chicago except for the two huts on Goose Island. I'm amazed those two huts are still there, and they've been there for over a year now. These little huts are better than people sleeping on Lower Wacker Drive, where a lot of people sleep. Or any place. You can sleep in the strangest places. I ran into Tommy the other day and he told me about this place that sounds just horrific. He's homeless, just got stuck with this thing, and still has his basic stomping grounds. He rides the Ravenswood El which is not that good of an alternative but it beats living on the streets. He's a really nice guy and he stayed in my house sometimes, when I lived in the Ukrainian Village. I was working at the Red Hare at the time and I'd find things for him to do but we didn't have enough money coming in to employ him on a regular basis. Well, Tommy told me about this place that he called "the chicken-wire joint," which is the slimiest of slimiest possible. Somebody has taken plywood and created cubicles, about this big, put chicken wire over the top and installed a really simple lighting system and like, three toilets and three showers for a hundred men. This building charges homeless people \$10 a night to go in there! It's Dickensian, a perfect breeding ground for disease 'cause they never clean these fucking places. It breaks my heart to think about somebody like Tommy. It would just take "one leg out of the grave," that's me and Andy's phrase. When things get really down, we say, "All it takes is one leg out of the grave." Compare that to the Horatio Alger mentality of America, "Oh, just pull yourself up by your own bootstraps." If you can't afford bootstraps anymore, you can't pull yourself up by them. When you get down to the absolute bottom, you have to have some help just to make that first step. And a chicken-wire joint isn't the answer. Neither are shelters. They are just warehousing and they don't offer any social services. They are the modern day equivalent of the workhouse for the poor. They have all these regulations, and there's no possible way anybody could ever get their life together while living in a shelter. You can't go to some place, be treated like cattle and then thrown out at 5 or 7 o'clock in the morning, "Oh, just go find a job!" In the meantime, you have to walk, like 3 miles to the place that serves lunch and then another 5 miles to the place that serves dinner. And you have to be back at the shelter at the right time, to compete for a bed. They call it The

63. Trail. You are always kept moving, you know. The only place that does something is Haymarket House and they're completely overloaded. Only few people in there actually get to a point where they are guaranteed a bed for the night. This means that at least they can start a job and know they will be able to sleep in a bed before going back to work the next day. There's no way anyone can understand how gruesome it is not to have a place to stay, unless you try it yourself. And, you know, it's something that can happen to anyone. When Mick went over to talk to those guys in the Mad Housers huts, I was instantly uneasy. I see this guy come out and I just consider it too much an invasion of their privacy to go by there, just because they happen to be, eh - because those are their homes, I mean, why should we feel more welcome to go banging on their door than we would on everybody else's door, you know, that we don't really know? So that's the reason I don't do that. I told Mick we should leave and we went back to his house where he promptly passed out.