

v: Interviews

2003 interview with Daily PDX

Describe Sniffy Linings and where you came up with the name?

Well, the second part is easy. I came up with the name in the room of the house I lived in. It was kind of a dump, there were holes in the floor and no heat. Very smelly. The place I live in now is much nicer which you know because you were here last week.

Yes, I know. I meant how did you come up with the name.

Oh. Funny story. It's from a Devo song. "Got a gut feeling" Back in 1998 I had what appeared to be a full on nervous breakdown. Sat in my room for 3 months on copious amounts of norepinephrine and dopamine reuptake inhibitors writing my first book, *The Hotel Brain*. Well, I was also writing my actual first book, which is no longer around because it was a self indulgent piece of crap, called *What I Did on My Vacation* which was basically about the whole nervous breakdown I was having at the time fueled by very dangerous chemicals and 3 hours sleep a night on top of 16 a day spent writing.

During this period I also listened to the same Devo album over and over, for three months, 16 hours a day, which likely exacerbated the condition, and got a gut feeling was on that album. In fact, I believe it's quoted in the *Hotel Brain* which is a description of four characters living in the writer's mind during a chemically fueled, but not induced, breakdown. At least I think it's quoted, frankly, I go back and try to read the book and it's like stepping back into a place I don't want to revisit so I never get through the whole thing.

My book *Can of Air* shortly followed out of the tail end of the breakdown, and has an appendix which consists mainly of notes from the period and a prose piece called *Elbows Hurt* which actually marked the beginning of the whole thing.

I do want to say here that I'm feeling much better now. I only say this because there have been many times people have read one of my old books and thought I am one of the characters in those books. I think that's one of the biggest mistakes which are made with writers; to assume they are their fiction, and that the writer's circumstance is as static as a printed text.

Many people tell me they think *Sniffy Linings* is a drug reference, which I can certainly see seeming to be the case, but it's not.

To answer the first part: *Sniffy* is a design studio and e + print press. The design side mainly functions in web design with a focus on graphical interface, though not short of function. I also do quite a bit of physical graphic design including Company id packages and temporary id elements.

The press side of *Sniffy* has an international combination of 40+ writers and artists, mostly chosen by me, though a few chosen by the old poetry editor and approved and cycled in by me. Need a new poetry editor by the way, it's been a few months, so I figure it's time to be open to finding a new one. I'm not a poet and I'm not even sure if I like poetry much, so I feel there's a pretty important line there which I shouldn't likely cross over.

I used to get tons of submissions, mostly garbage, until I decided to make the guidelines very mean. Now I get less subs, but much higher quality. And being now it's just me running things, simplicity is key. This is boring. Can we talk about something else?

Can you rehash the equation about the smell of your nose = the inside of your nose from your performance?

I need a new telephone.

What I think about when I go to the job.

What?

My phone, it's all messed up. If I drop it or even put it down it stops working until I put it back in the phone thing, so if I'm outside and I put the phone down or drop it, it turns off and then I have to come inside and hang it up on the phone thing. The cradle or base or whatever. Then I have to go back out to wherever my previous business is. I like the phones designed by Bang & Olufsen, but they're like \$400 for a cordless and although I do find it important to surround myself with well designed objects, \$400 is like 45.74129 little kubrick guys or something so I couldn't justify the expense for one phone when instead I could buy enough kubrick guys to fill up my entire desk.

Tell me about the equation...

Oh. Um well the formula is from a dream, or more of one of the kind when you wake up and you're not really asleep but not really awake. I find it's not only the most creative time of day for me, but also the time when solutions to most problems come clear. Not just creative problems, a few days ago I woke up realizing the answer to this whole back end code problem on a site, got up, made tea, sat down at the desk and got it all working.

Anyway, the formula was $S_s = S_o + S_i$ - which is is the smell that we smell at any moment [S_s] is the smell of whatever it is we're smelling at the moment [S_o] Plus, the smell of the inside of our nose [S_i].

This is really the essence of my current monologue, which is basically about the pull we all seem to have toward making what we're experiencing into what we assume is reality, minus whatever subjective element we're applying at any given moment; which we are mostly willingly unaware of.

What the formula pointed out to me is basically nothing is objective; even that which we don't consider challenging. Like that what we smell at any moment isn't necessarily that which we're actually smelling.

I was just listening to a conversation between William Burroughs, Brion Gysin, Timothy Leary, Les

Levine & Robert Anton Wilson. One of them said, either Levine or Wilson, [I recognize the other's voices], From any other point in the universe, we appear to be in outer space. This is really a global sense of what I'm saying with the formula, but just inverted. I think.

What is the greatest accomplishment in your life, thus far.

Nurturing my cat, No Tail [he only has a stub] who several years ago jumped in my window while I was lying in bed, climbed on top of me, and decided to live with me since.

What is the most humiliating failure, thus far?

Well, I think the most humiliating thing would probably be that time in the fourth grade when I went to school in my underwear and forgot to wear pants, but I didn't realize I was sitting in class in my underwear until I was already there in the classroom. I didn't even remember getting up and going to school. It was like I was just there suddenly in school in nothing but my underwear. Come to think of it I don't remember anything after that. But that's to be expected being it was pretty traumatic.

These days though I can't say I get humiliated. Consider for 2 weeks before each performance I walk all over practicing my monologue out loud. People on the street likely think I'm a crazy talking to himself guy, and it's like. No. I'm rehearsing. But I don't tell them. I just keep walking up and down the street talking to myself, gesturing. My neighbors likely think I'm just standing on the porch talking to myself, they've started bringing the plants in I noticed. But that might be because it's cold now. I don't know.

So it's pretty hard for me to be humiliated, maybe because of the early underpants in school trauma, and I've been up some magnanimous moronic mountains of stupidity in my life let me tell you, but I don't usually get humiliated. I either stuff it deep down so it wells up in a plume of seemingly unrelated dysfunction, forget about it, or use it for material.

What I think about when I go to the job.

As far as failures. There are three things I want to do in my life, 1) have an action figure of myself produced along with accessories. 2) transgress matter on demand to be able to fly around in space at warp speed and shoot things in a single occupancy fighter, like an A-wing maybe, or a delta flyer, preferably an a-wing, definitely not a y-wing, they're too slow and cumbersome. 3) finally harness Time as an object concretized by the repetition of its own standardization, control that loop, and go back and fix the Mistake. 4) be a cartoon character. There are four things I want to do in my life.

So far I have only come close to one of those things. I'm not sure if that constitutes failure, but never having tried it I can only guess. I don't really think of things like that, I've done some pretty great things, made some really good choices, and also made some pretty serious screwups, like everyone. I do feel I've had some experiences some would think of as odd, luckily I tend to have a very high tolerance for strange, or even detrimental, so I can look on quite a bit which would otherwise be seen as negative, as neutral.

Who would you invite to a Portland-only dinner party (meaning they have to be from here)?

If you're asking to come over for dinner, that's fine, just ask. But just so you know I don't dance with married women. But I am a good cook, so I understand you wanting me to make dinner. You can bring your husband too, after a large bottle of strong wine I might dance with him.

What is your greatest wish for Portland?

For Phil Busse [editor of The Mercury] to be elected mayor.

Who is the smartest person you know? The funniest? The strangest?

Mykle Hansen

Where do you typically purchase your props? (Canned milk, etc)

Well. Being I'm fairly absent minded, it's mostly I get my props at the place I'm standing where

I find the note stapled to my money [which is a more portable form of reminding yourself than putting notes in your shoe, and less invasive than writing it backwards on your forehead with lipstick so you see it in the mirror]. I prefer to get organic milk from cows that don't spend their lives immobilized in a steel cage unless they're being carted off to what dairy factories call the "rape rack" [this is true] where they are inseminated.

No, I prefer to think of the cows I get my milk from to be happy, dancing cows, in meadows, voluntarily meandering to the virgin maiden in blonde pigtails and ornate dress waiting with her pail to relieve them of their milk and carry it to the barn where it is cooked over an open flame until it is condensed and individually hand canned for me; just like is on the label.

So usually it's at a health food kind of store. Though the whole thing's a crap shoot because frankly half the time it's at the store closest to the place I'm performing when I realize I forgot to get it. The non milk props I bring in a bag, which I always keep the props in because otherwise I'd forget to put... wait.... Sorry, my roommate just came in and gave me a 2002 prescription drug reference book, funny how people assume... What was I.... Oh, I keep everything I'm bringing for the show in a bag in my closet between shows because otherwise I'd be running around trying to remember everything just before I leave to get to the performance.

Who do you wish you were more like?

The entire character cast of Family Guy, simultaneously.

How would you describe yourself as an author? As a human?

Funny Story. I am just over 5'5.5" and appear to be northern Mediterranean or close to that, with dense muscle mass in the upper body and brown curly hair. I shave once or twice a week at most so usually I either have hair on my face, or if it's on a day I shave I look at least 7-8 years younger than I actually am because I've never shaved every day. I am always the smartest boy in the class. I wear square glasses, though I am getting new ones because I step on the old ones and glue them back together. Regardless of my not shaving daily, I do bathe daily so I have pretty good hygiene and you

What I think about when I go to the job.

wouldn't look at me and say Oh my what a dirty disgusting guy go take a bath, or something. I have brown sneakers with blue stripes which I bought just before the interview, which I thought I was late for because of buying the sneakers and I was standing on the sidewalk and when I saw a girl walking towards me smiling I said, Are you here to interview me? And she said No, I saw your performance last night. And then she proceeded to sit down and start interviewing me which I thought was very clever which is a quality I find myself very attracted to; cleverness. I asked my friends if they knew this girl and they said no so I forgot about it until just now because nobody knows who she is and she disappeared when you got there to interview me.

Of course I'd be a lying idiot if I were to try to convince you that I don't find myself generally attracted to cute women, so I won't because I'm not; an idiot or lying that is. But I tend to have a sort of dysmorphic sense of beauty, not in the deformed kind of sense, more in the sense that I don't go for the average kind of model type skinny girls. I'm more attracted to slightly outside edge physical stylistic elements; in both form and accessorization. But cleverness and talent [creative or an inner intangible talent] are absolutely necessary for me to even contemplate making tea for a girl in the morning.

I have a ring in my left ear which I got back in 1995 when I was in NY, which is where I'm from but when I got the ring I was just visiting. I forget it's there most of the time so it's not a Guy with an earring because _____ [insert reason] kind of a thing, it's just there. I have a watch which is smelly from the times when I forgot to take it off when I got in the shower and I tend to wear button shirts because of really no reason than the Can't a guy be presentable? kind. I'll have to go look in the mirror if you want more detail.

Anything else you'd like to add about Sniffy Linings?

See a doctor get rid of it. Don't trust whitey.



2002 interview with Writers Northwest Magazine.

Paul Ash is an artist, writer and webmaster. He also runs the Sniffy Linings e-press. An e-press being, as you may have guessed, a publishing outfit which exists primarily, if not exclusively, online. Sniffy Linings features the quirky and complex writings of authors as diverse as a housewife in Arizona and a professor at the Sorbonne in France. I caught up with Paul recently to discuss Sniffy Linings, the business of e-publishing and Bar-Mitzvah hijinks. The following is an excerpt from our conversation:

What is Sniffy Linings?

Um. It's a mostly small press which isn't so small now there are 40 contributors involved.

What are the advantages of running an e-press as opposed to a regular press?

Um.

What makes someone a Sniffy writer?

Um. Oh. I usually take work that is humorous, but also clever and well thought-out. I like things with a sense of imagery or that come at a subject from an unusual angle or something. I don't like work that is too obvious or traditional in its approach. Funny things are good. Everyone around here is too serious all the time. Um.

About what percentage of submissions that you receive do you actually accept?

How much? What?

What I think about when I go to the job.

What percentage of submissions that you receive do you actually accept?

Oh. Funny story. Less than ten percent.

Get any cranks?

Yes. Well is the interview over?

What? You haven't even answered most of my questions. All you do is keep looking around and saying What and Um.

Oh. Is this being recorded?

Why?

I want a copy.

What? Answer my question. Get any cranks?

What do you mean cranks? Are you coming on to me?

No. Do people get upset when they get rejected?

You mean for the press?

Yes.

Um. Well, there was one writer, who, instead of sending one submission, sent me twelve or thirteen separate pieces.

Needless to say, that put you off.

What put me off needless to say?

Getting 13 separate files.

Oh. No, actually, I liked his work.

But when I contacted the person and told him that I wanted to have him on the website, he said that he had read one of my books and then proceeded to accuse me of appropriating his words and using them in my books.

Did you?

No. Of course not, I don't even have time to write down everything I think about, much less write down about what someone else does.

That was strangely coherent.

I have my moments.

So, what do you have going on now?

The press?

Yes.

Well Sniffy has just published two hardcopy editions. One is a monologue of my own, part 4 in my series of 5, entitled An Incidental Vacation, and the other is a book of poetry called Imperial Pulse.

Where did the writer of Imperial Pulse come from?

What I think about when I go to the job.

Where did you come from?

What?

Um. (pulls a paper from his pocket Reading from the paper) She was from Vancouver, B.C.

Why did you have to read that? I thought she's your ex-girlfriend.

I was drunk at the time.

So, tell me about your new monologue.

Why?

Um.

An Incidental Vacation deals with, among other things, my condition. Being an absent minded disassociated borderline psychotic agoraphobic narcoleptic insomniac. The insomnia, strangely, is usually followed by bouts of narcolepsy. Other people think this is funny. sleep is a very fragile thing with me, about three years ago I was using rather copious amounts of cocaine in my writing process. There was a period of about a year where I couldn't sleep hardly at all because of it. Even now I start to freak out if I'm up still at sunrise. A throwback from the thirteen hour writing binges ending at 7 am only to go to bed and lay around for three hours to get up and start writing again. When I say I wasn't an addict I'm not simply justifying my use. As I understand it a person is an addict if they use a drug as the end in itself. There's a difference between dependence and addiction. With addiction you trade one process for another [another drug, 12 steps, bad women, denial, whatever]. I was dependent on the drug for the writing, my process was completely interlaced with using. The drug was a character in the books I wrote, the psychosis the drug exacerbated was the foundation.

Once I finished the books I stopped using the drug. I didn't even think about it. There is actually no physical addiction to cocaine, it's a norepinephrine and dopamine reuptake inhibitor; once the body regulates the absence of the augmentation of the processes of making these two chemicals, which the drug is responsible for [as opposed to opiate narcotics which completely take over for the system], the need diminishes.

That said, and also saying there is a very definite process oriented addiction, an addiction in context, I didn't write for over a year, the drug was so tied into the process I couldn't even read my own work. The need to get back on was too strong and I no longer was tied to the sources.

At this point three years later though I am able to write and mostly sleep just fine. I have apparently regulated.

With the recent insomnia I decided to write down all my dreams when I was able to sleep and in the same book everything I did during the day. Everything, which is quite a task and pretty mundane depending on what you're doing.

I soon found that I was becoming psychotic. I think there's likely meant to be a very serious wall between being asleep and awake.

You do have your moments.

What?

The monologue also deals with, as most of your monologues do, your childhood in Brooklyn. In fact, I think my favorite part of your monologue was the bit about your Bar-Mitzvah.

Yes, well.

What I think about when I go to the job.

2003 Interview with Bookmouth.com

First off, where does the name Sniffy Linings come from?

Well the name of sniffy linings actually comes from a DEVO song called got a gut feeling. Sniffy linings was actually the second choice for the name but now I don't remember the first choice. That makes it so when someone types sniffy into a search engine they get either sniffy linings press, DEVO lyric sites, or a site for something called Sniffy the Virtual Rat which though I've never looked at it, I'm sure it's pretty tasty.

What makes up the Sniffy Linings operation?

Right now, other than the 40 or so contributors, sniffy consists of Myself, a computer and press set up in Portland.

How do you balance your efforts to make a living as a website/graphic designer with your independent press endeavors?

Um. Well I didn't really plan for sniffy to make any money from the start, maybe break even, so I've always balanced it in with my design work. Sniffy is fully integrated at this point, so I more look at the whole thing as one large project though I do keep the press work for after the client work is finished. Also, I guess I'm pretty good at balancing them. Sniffy only gets updated once a month or so either in site management and design or adding new contributors, and being web design is something I work with all day, things tend to go pretty quick.

If you're working on your writing and publishing projects, do you ever get overwhelmed by the sense that you should be spending more time seeking paying gigs? It is a very common freelancer conundrum, isn't it? How do you manage that?

Um. There are downtimes in the design end, one of the hazards of being self employed. Though these downtimes are shrinking as I seem to be getting some recognition as someone who builds unique webworks.

But to be honest all of my work comes from referrals and so I'm pretty resigned to the downtime. I guess the answer is yes, I do feel sometimes I should be working on paying work when I'm doing press stuff, but if there's no work, concentrating on the press side does help pull me through.

But with all of this and that, I'd say I don't become overwhelmed. Though this summer when I was selling my stuff and eating nothing but pears and figs off the backyard trees, I was pretty close.

One thing I was thinking about as I was checking out your site was my view on ebooks -- I have encouraged people to avoid going that route, and I realized I was thinking purely in terms of money, because right now, people aren't forking over cash for ebooks. But of course, offering up a story or novel in ebook form for free or priced very inexpensively is an excellent way to get your writing some more eyeballs... So I am now rethinking my position on ebooks. Anyway, what's your take on ebooks?

There are two things. The first one is I sense we still haven't approached the limits of eBook technology, that currently available much less what we'll be capable of in the future. Ebooks have been presented as electronic versions of a tangible book. In this sense they compete with the book as an object, which let's face it, we all buy certain books because we want to possess them as well as read them.

Personally, I figure once the definition of the eBook as a sub or alternative class of Book, the boundaries will be opened and the definition of electronic media as it relates to literature will be flexed.

eBooks are capable of visual movement via animation, rational movement as in links leading to points in the book, hypertext links to related expansions on the web, high density and luminous graphics, and relatively easy updating and dissemination.

What I think about when I go to the job.

My feeling is these capabilities will expand and become more recognized as their application is mounted more frequently. And will happen quickly as well being one calendar year equals 12 computer/tech years.

But in relation to tangible media as something people will buy, the eBook loses.

You've got a very simple, unique way in which you package your writing -- paper clipped papers in an envelope... It's like a letter. How did you come up with that form?

Um. Well, the monologues [what I think about when I go to the job parts 1-5] are packaged in this way [I do have two traditionally bound books] to give them the feel of reports.

It all came together once I decided to include objects and support materials with each package, at that point the enveloped texts made sense; then I could put other crap in with it and take things one step further into text as object.

At what point did you start publishing other people's work?

In the sense of ePub'ing, I guess pretty much three years ago this month. Sniffy all started after I had a car accident left me in a chair for 6 months or so. I was working as an electrician at the time as a break from creative work [I had a metal shop among other things]. I had already been planning and procrastinating a move to working with web design already, and once I was sitting around taking extremely dangerous chemicals all day, I figured I should teach myself how to break into the web. Which I did. Which made me start sniffy. Three spattered ribs were the best thing ever happened to me.

Immediately after designing the site I started pub'ing my own books [which I had already written and obsessively edited over the course of the three years before the reclining part]. Once I did that, I put out a call for subs and have had a great response from writers and artists since then.

In tangible form though, I first pub'd others in journal #1 in 2000 I think feb. Since then, sniffy had pub'd a non sniffy poetry book from a contributor in Vancouver BC, and the second sniffy journal which is called Sniffy 3.

How did you start writing monologues?

The first monologue really started as just a text. It wasn't until I performed it a few times I realized I wanted to go further than sitting at a desk reading off a sheet.

Once I realized I was looking at the sheet less and less, I decided to actually memorize the whole thing.

Frankly, I was surprised I was able to do so. I can hardly remember to put on pants half the time, I loose the remote literally 10 times in a night, I find myself going back to my house repeatedly when I get a block away because I forget something.

I had no idea it was a completely different kind of remembering to perform.

Your writing has a very unique, roundabout perspective, that seems to circle around an elusive point, but eventually brings about a rather sharp, often humorous, bit of clarity... how would you describe your writing style?

I guess the long answer is I'm finding it difficult to describe my writing style, you did better than I could actually in this question. I can speak to process though.

My process is pretty naïve, which I guess so is my voice [in context]. Basically I go somewhere, do something, then come back and write about it. This becomes the seed for the rest of the text which [generally] over the course of a year is shaped back and forth between the verbal and text until it's finished. Then after I finish it I walk away for a week or so, get some perspective, and then I go back and finish it. Then I perform it a few times and go back and finish it. By the time I retire it a year

What I think about when I go to the job.

later, it's finally finished. Mostly.

Over this time I split up the main event with other lapses or observations, some exposition, and else. This is how I produce the circular style. This isn't to say it's a formula, which I have to say anyway because it is, a formula, though only on an intuitive level; not predetermined.

This shouldn't be confused with as if I'm saying everything I write is true and I'm documenting something I've experienced. I do embellish and combine experiences. The first likely mistake is when you confuse the writer with his fiction.

I can't tell you how many people have wanted to know the bumbling guy in the monologues and have related their own neurosis to the character I portray. Well, I can tell you, it's quite a few people. Smile and nod.

This isn't to say I'm claiming to be self actualized and healthy, I'm not. There is no question I'm absent minded, disassociated, and neurotic on several levels. Just things get amplified in performance you know.

I think I rambled a bit, feel free to cut out the parts when I stop making sense.

What are some of the writing/publishing careers that have inspired you, and why?

Hum. It would be dishonest not to mention Burroughs first. Though I hesitate because it took me three years to beat the tag of being a Burroughs impressionist. Some not getting the line between influence and emulation. But this was mostly given to me by people who maybe read Can of Air [early grit chapbook] and never saw me perform.

The work of Spalding Gray has definitely been a source. Not only because he does monologues, which have been a definite influence even in my deciding to try that first one sans paper. But also because he's a very conversational writer and he also tends to make Time jumps throughout his texts.

Other than some others including, Allen Ginsberg, Laurie Anderson, Kurt Vonnegut, Douglas Adams, Ted L Nancy, some of my influences are local people involved with the group of writers I hang out with such as Mykle Hansen, Kevin Sampsell, Carlton Mellick and Mark Russell. They each have very defined styles which I respect quite a bit.

What are some of the projects/independent presses that you're impressed by right now?

I think the things coming out of Eye-rhyme are very interesting. They pay very close attention to detail, and each installment is a unique object.

What's next for Sniffy Linings?

Take a shower and get on the bus.

What I think about when I go to the job.