

letters from a bicycle

#1

Long bike rides help me think. I can process through things when I'm pedalling and moving. My thoughts are clearer.

The following letters are addressed to real people whose names I have changed. I don't have their addresses, and it's likely that they'll never see this.

Please write to me. I like trades. Also available from me - Fagazine #1. Contact me for price and trade info.

Five  
329 N. Fremont  
Portland, OR 97227

Or, if you have to, email me:  
commiepinkofag@yahoo.com

Nate,

remember sex ed. class in eighth grade?  
you came to school with some weird white  
stuff in your mouth. You were an asshole  
to me off the bat,  
so i remember feeling  
a sense of vengeance  
when people said you had  
jizz in your mouth.



Apparently, you had swallowed a big gulp  
of soda from a can with a wasp in it, and it  
had stung you three times before you were able  
to spit it out.

For a while, i wouldn't drink out of cans at all, and to this day, i drink with a very small opening between my lips so i don't drink a mad, stinging bug.



That age. it's weird to even think about. i hated everything, including myself. i don't even like to think back to those times, though my step-dad would say they were the best i'd ever have. fuck that.

There is very little of that person left in me. i bet the same would be true for you, but right now, my memory of you consists of a person that never said anything nice, in fact, someone who made me feel like shit on a fairly consistent basis.

I bet you'd be quite a Romeo nowadays. Even in 10<sup>TH</sup> grade, you were quite the strapping young lad. Maybe you'd be a football star, college track star, scholarship to your favorite midwest college graduate.

Maybe we would have ended up friends, you know, because i'm still surprised at the friends i ended up having

One thing rings through my ears. Typing class with Mr. Whatshishead. He taught most of the computer classes and he was a coach for one thing or another..

⊙ You sat to my left. We



would all be hard at work trying to increase our typing words per minute. it was that computer program where you have to stay ahead of the fish thats chomping up the words you just typed. My best friend Art was sitting in front of me, Mr. Whatshishead had left the room. Art and i were laughing at something. For some reason, i just couldn't stop laughing. it was emerassing. one of those puberty moments that you laugh and cringe at, but still you just wish you could erase it from your memory.

bicycle



Maybe you were having a bad day.  
Maybe you didn't mean for me to be your  
scapegoat.

i have this snapshot in my head of your  
mean, mad eyes burning into me. i was so  
scared of you.

You said loud, "shut up you fucking  
stupid faggot." i saw the big wad of chew  
in your lower lip. You said it so slowly.  
Forcefully enunciating every syllable like you  
were french kissing my humiliation.

i saw Art stop typing as nearly everyone  
in class laughed. i felt that old familiar  
lump in my throat, the sting in my eyes.

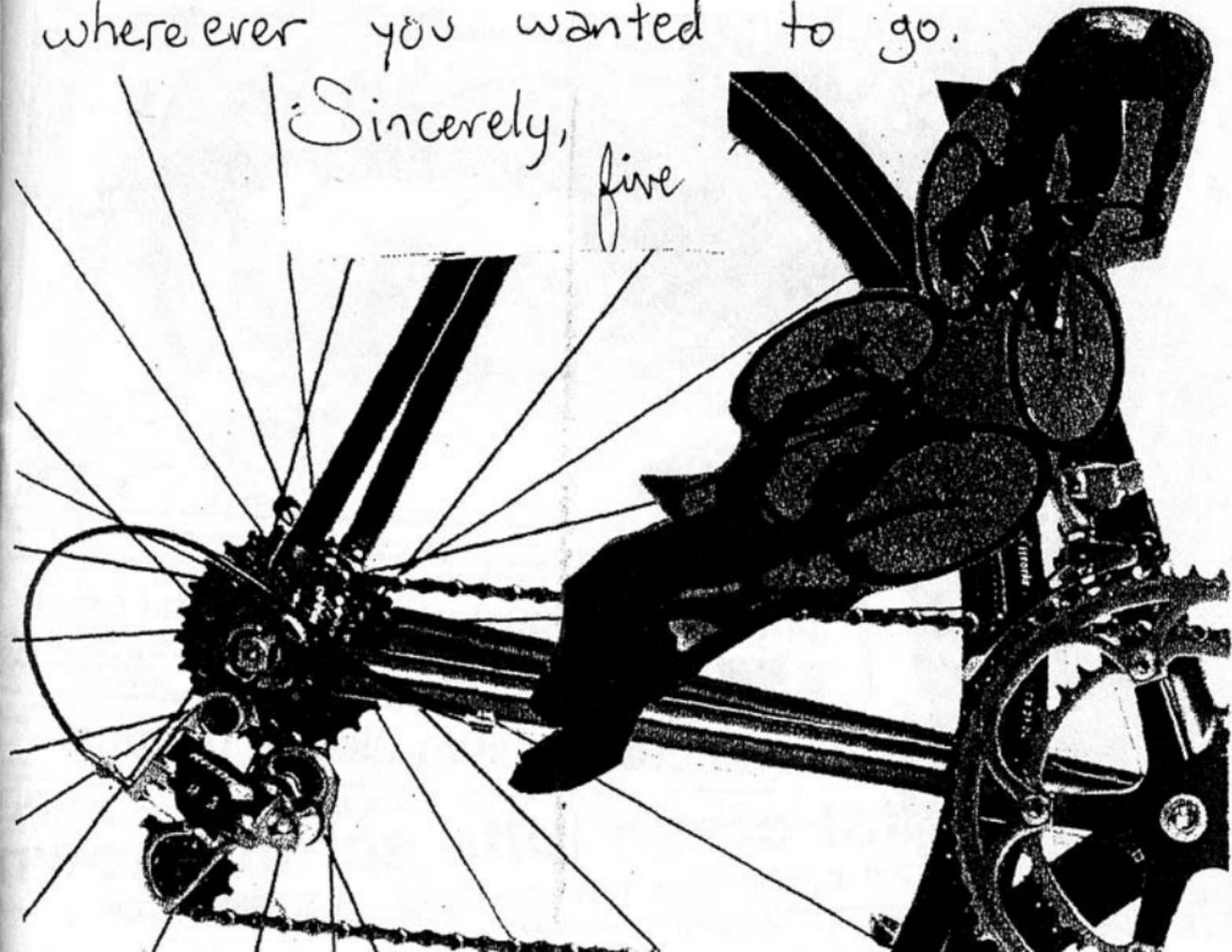
That's my most prevalent memory of you. In fact, i can't really remember anything positive about interacting with you. You did have friends, so you couldn't have been a total shit. i almost want to pretend that i have a positive thought about you, but all i can do is let this go.

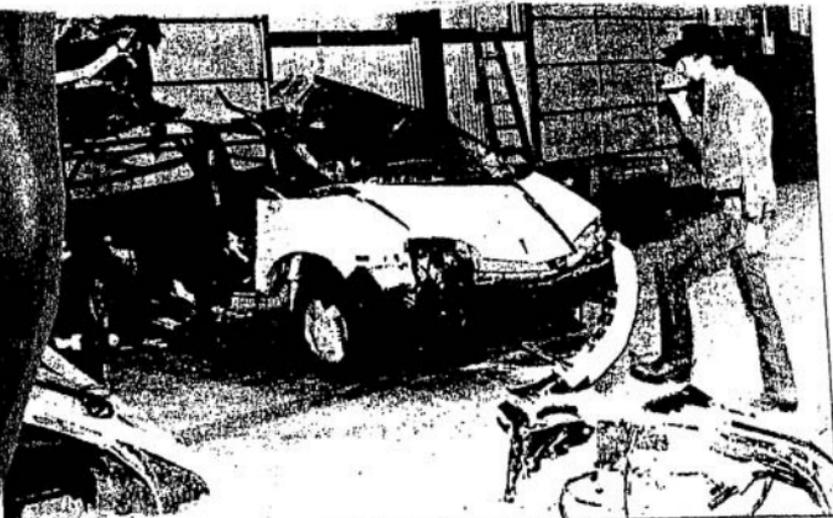
You were the last to die. days of surgeries. The whole town wondering if you would pull through. You ended up being brain dead. Your parents had to take you off life support.

i wouldn't wish what happened to you on anyone. i hope that you ended up

where ever you wanted to go.

Sincerely,  
five





Real maintenance supervisor for [redacted] footage could be used by the city safety committee as an informational tool in its training program. [redacted] photo by Ian Hinton

# 14-year-old named as driver in fatal crash

Jeff Reel [redacted] based on numerous reports of leading of the minor will tend to be going at least 30 mph in a residential area when it was out of control. Authorities estimate the crash occurred at approximately 1:15 p.m. Tuesday, South First Street early Saturday morning, ejecting all five of the passengers. The driver's license was suspended for 30 days.

# Fourth crash victim dies at hospital

Jeff Reel [redacted] To assist in facilitating the re-enactment of the crash, a complete investigation will be conducted by the police department. Parents are encouraged by the police to provide any information that may be helpful in the investigation.

# Fatal crash jolts school, town

CHS students killed, 1 hurt in accident

Richardson Staff Writer suspect the accident was caused by [redacted]

Dear Tammy,

i didn't really ever get to know you. You seemed nice and i remember your pretty brown eyes. We would occasionally end up at the same places outside of school. You were in a couple of my classes and never really said much to anyone. Renee introduced us to one another once, in the smokers alley. We both just kind of looked at eachother, half-laughing, because the whole school, or at least the Sophomore class, knew eachothers names.

after that, we'd see eachother in the halls, or where-ever, and politely, if awkwardly, wave or say hello.

i remember trying to wrap my head around how different and hard it must have been

★ ★ for you to be one of the very  
★ ★ few people of color at our high  
★ school. just a walk through the  
★ high school parking lot was enough  
to scare the shit out of me... gun  
racks, confederate flags, people enjoying the  
music of pantera.

but a walk through the halls, on any  
given day, even with teachers right there  
supposedly monitoring. The blatantly racist ★  
remarks, and the stares. i got the stares  
too, but for a different reason. ★ ★ ★  
i had the wrong impression  
of you at first. you seemed so ★ ★ ★  
quiet at school, so i thought ★ ★ ★

zoom



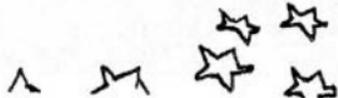
maybe you did the same thing  
i did after a while - just get  
through the day interacting with  
the least amount of people possible.

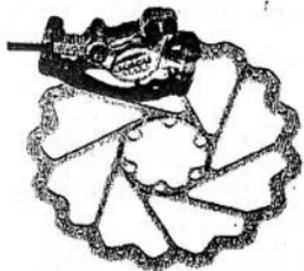
interacting with no one, unless they were close  
friends, was for me preferable.

When we finally did talk, you were warm  
and engaging. i would have liked to have known  
you better.

Sincerely,

five





Dear Ronald,

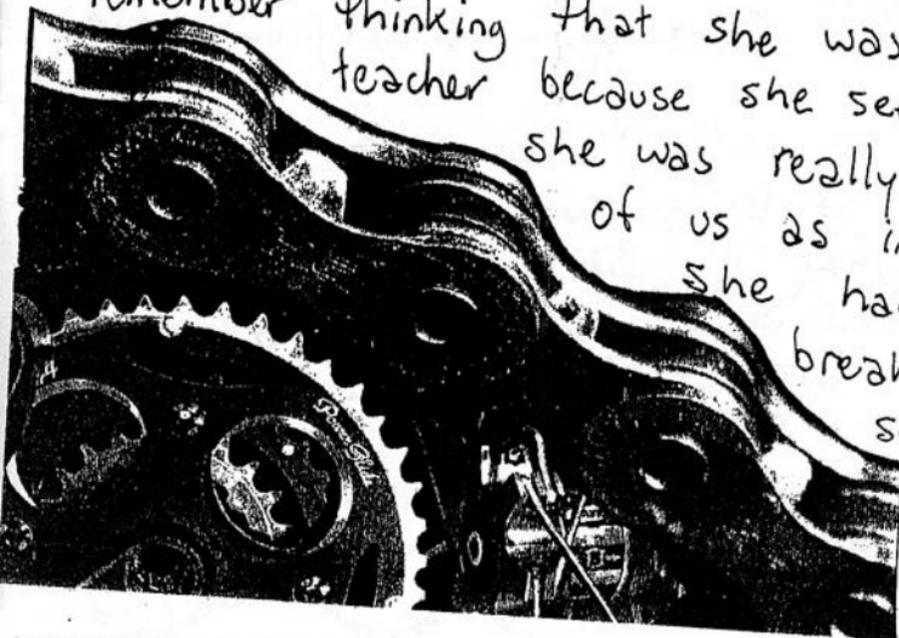
UP till tenth grade, you were pretty much a dick to me, and i always returned the favor. hating people was a sport back then. You were really good at sports. i hated sports.

You always looked older. your hair-line looked like it was receding. You could have passed for 25 when you were 16.

You were in a couple of my classes. After seeing you talk with the teachers a lot, and hearing you ask for the same kind of help i needed, my bet is that we had the same learning disability, only you cared

enough to actually talk to the teacher  
about it. Ms. Blackhair. i liked her, but she  
had bad - breath and once when i drew a picture  
of a wizard on my note sheet she kept me  
after class to ask if i was a satanist. i  
remember thinking that she was a cool  
teacher because she seemed like  
she was really into each  
of us as individuals.

she had a nervous  
breakdown or  
something a  
year or so  
later and her  
classes had



a sub for at least three weeks. Anyway, i think the class we were in together only had maybe 6 other people, so of course we got paired up to do one of those awkward group projects... Come up with a product and market it.

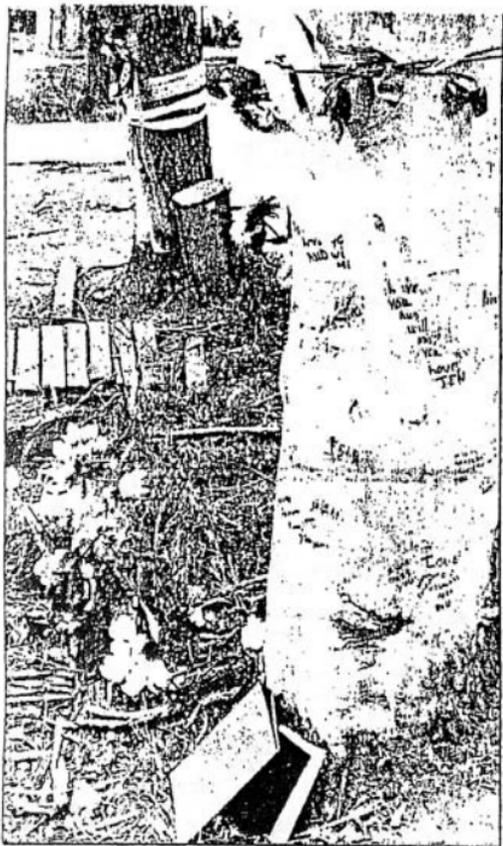
We came up with "Ghetto Action Figures," which we thought, ignorantly, was funny. i realize now that Ms. Blackhair was trying to get us to think about how fucked up our product was, but at the time, we just didn't get it.

After that class, we'd nod and say "hi" to each other in the halls. Exchange waves while driving.

i remember thinking about that scenario  
and feeling like that was part of growing  
up. it taught me a lesson about skipping  
the bullshit and being sincere.  
it was a good feeling, and it's still  
a good memory, so thank you.

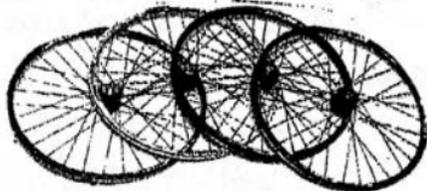
Sincerely, five





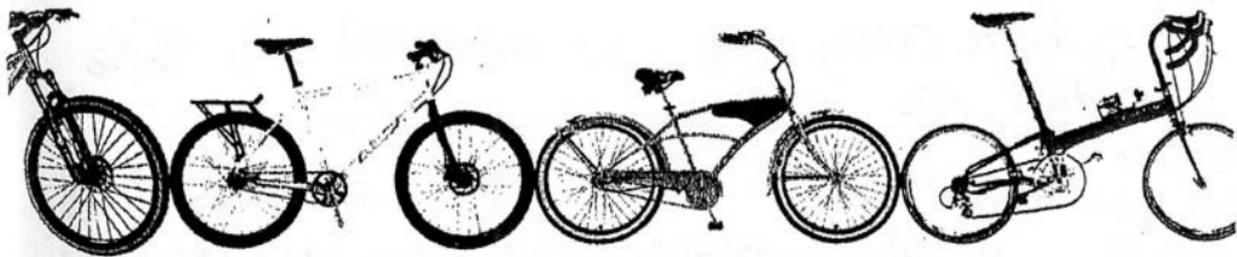
A tragedy-scarred tree stands in silent witness at the spot where ~~two~~ teen-agers died in an accident early Saturday morning. Messages of love have been carved into the tree, and flowers and ribbons adorn the area. ~~AP Wirephoto~~ photo by Tom Pittman

i like to believe that  
someday the addressees  
will receive these letters.



or  
maybe i can't afford that  
kind of postage





Dear Liz,

Fourteen years old driving your brother's mini-van. Seventy five miles per hour without even a learners permit, around a tight curve, down a steep hill with a massive dip at the bottom. i had nightmares about the sparks and fire.

An airbag sent you home with only scrapes and bruises, but i'm sure the scars

you have are deep. i wondered if those who died are luckier.

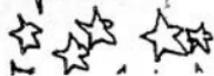
★ ★ ★ ★ You lied at first, said Nate was ★ ★ ★ ★ driving. i bet i would have done the same ★ thing to avoid the 4 charges of manslaughter that you eventually faced. Then the civil suits.

You are brave. You stayed in our tiny home town even after the wreck happened, to shouts of "murderer!" and "you fucking bitch, you killed my friends." And those were just the epithets that i was witness to. i heard about others. ★ ★ ★ ★

You will never be allowed a drivers license, which may have been a relief. Last i heard, you had a child, and were married. That you were terrorized by nightmares, and headaches that kept you awake anyway.

Maybe you live somewhere else now, where the traffic is slow. Maybe you ride a bicycle around, and nobody knows a single thing about the wreck.

The child i remember is probably about six years old now. i hope that your



Family is healthy and happy and that things  
are going well for you, that life is smooth  
and easy and you are okay. ☆

☆ yours truly, ☆ ☆

☆ five ☆ ☆



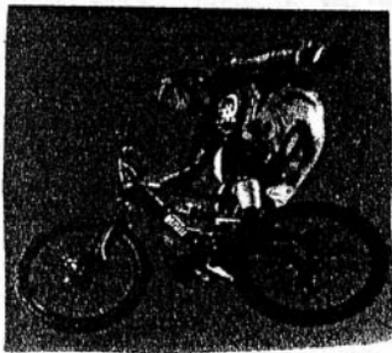
Dear Raechel,

i've always liked laughs and yours was one of the best i've ever heard. Free and loud. You were always willing to talk and check in with people. You actually cared how people were doing and would seek them out, especially if you thought that for some reason they were having a bad day. You really were one of those people who got along with everyone.

In the smoker's alley, you'd ask "can i have a cigarette?" and i'd say "no." you'd just smile and say "thanks," in a way that would actually make me feel good.

You came with Kate and i once when we skipped class. We trudged through the snow on the field at the middle school, toward the Conoco station to eat cheap junk food and smoke cigarettes. i didn't think that you and Kate would get along but i ended up just listening to the two of you talk the whole time.

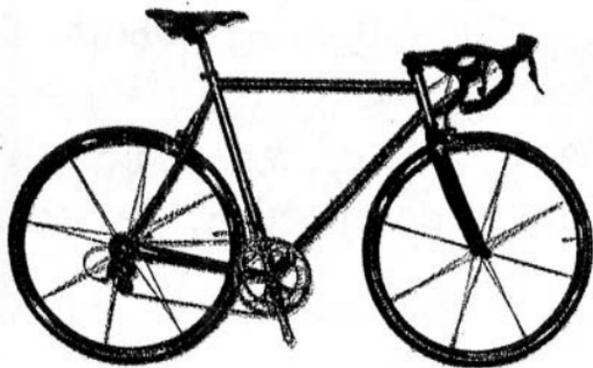
i remember the look on your face when my name was called over the intercom a few weeks later. The office had finally caught on to all of my truancies. It was



that motherly look, Like - you fucked up - but mixed with a little sideways smirk. i fucking hated Mr. Heathman's drawing class. He'd refuse to grade a drawing if he thought it was "too evil" because he was a dogmatic jerk, so i'd ditch and sit with you in the commons while you graded papers for the teacher assistant period you had.

i told you about what my Mom said about sending me to military school. and you just rolled your eyes. "Yeah right, don't sweat it, just don't do it again," at least not for a while." i laughed.

After x-mas break our class schedule changed and i saw you less and less. The occasional session during lunch time, breif conversations during passing period.. You always asked for a hug and that was a really special thing to me. Not many people did that and out of those who did, few were genuine about it.

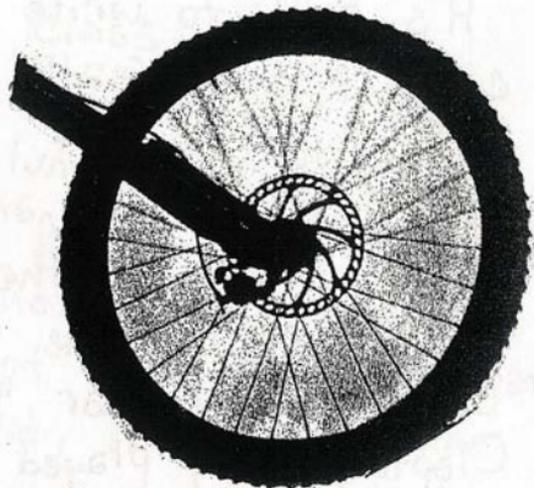


It's hard to write this all down. How could i ever really capture what happened and how it felt. My hand will freeze, i'll stare at nothing and get zapped back eight years nearly to the day.

i still come really close to losing it every time i hear "Tears in Heaven" by Eric Clapton, they played it at your funeral, right after Tara sang. i couldn't really figure out why she sang at your funeral. i didn't think you ~~two~~ were ever friends.

A few lines into her song, it looked like someone slapped her across the face. She stopped singing and put the mic down.

She left the altar,  
but the piano player  
kept going. For some  
reason i thought to my-  
self - "it serves her right."  
and i know that's a  
vicked, wicked thought.



That week was the first that i ever  
had the overwhelming feeling that i didn't  
know what to do with myself. i explained  
to my mother, who looked at me with worried  
eyes, that i felt helpless. Mom would know  
what to do.

Your favorite color was purple. My mom owned a quilting supply store at the time, so she gave me a bunch of purple fabric to make ribbons out of. I passed them out at school to everyone who wanted one, with a tiny gold safety pin. The purple ribbons were in memory of you and the three others. I still have my little green backpack with the purple rectangle sewn to it.

What were you doing in that van? Everyone knew that Nate and Ronald were friends, but it didn't really seem like you and Tammy were. Or you and Nate and Ronald. Maybe it was a random thing, like you were all

hanging out on main street and decided to go for a ride. Maybe you were all at a party that i still don't know about. The cops said there was no alcohol involved.

They said you died on the way to the hospital in the ambulance. The rumors said that somebody's body was bent in half the wrong way. There were dark stains on the road for a long time. The bark that came off the trees never came back while i still lived in that wicked little town.





i hope it didn't hurt. i  
hope you weren't scared. i hope  
it was fast and short.

i hope that there was at least  
one moment that evening that you  
felt alive, or free, or young, or  
all of these things.

i hope that you didn't feel  
alone.

i still miss you.

Love,  
five

