

Note: *How I Got My Guiche* was originally submitted to Juan Morales, Editor of Detour Magazine, in the fall of 1997. Though selected for publication, the piece was later buried due to concerns over potential loss of advertising revenue. It later found a home in 1998 when it was contributed, without charge, to the Washington, D.C.-based online magazine GayPlace where it enjoyed a permanent home on the web (and substantial feedback from readers) until the magazine went offline a few years later.

### How I Got My Guiche

by Sean O'Neil

**This is a story about identity, manifestations thereof, acting out of one's soul and leaving the past behind; about tribes and rituals, personal taste, the British Home Office and the dehumanising effect of American culture on one expatriated individual; seizing, acknowledging and celebrating the present, bad summer movies and how I got my guiche.**

\*

Having been separated from my boyfriend for approximately a month while he flew to Australia to overcome the ineptitude of one British institution (no names, just initials: N.H.S.), it was now my lot to fly to the other side of the world—just Chicago, really—to take on another venerable British institution, the Home Office. As an American national residing in London and involved with a bloke of dual nationality (British/Australian), we began months ago investigating what to do about my rapidly expiring visitor's visa. After being unceremoniously turned out by The Stonewall Group—Britain's gay activist group that instructs couples on how to achieve martyrdom through the inequity of immigration laws—we hooked up with a savvy, fast-talking lesbian lawyer who believed I was eligible for entry clearance as a writer (an option that the Stonewall people had failed to suss out—occupational immunity). I left for Chicago to submit my voluminous application at the British Embassy just days after his return from Australia, never allowing myself to think that these would be the last days afforded our relationship. As I walked down the road from our flat on my way to Heathrow early that morning, I looked back over my shoulder to see my boyfriend waving from the balcony in his bed clothes and I knew that my future was rushing up to meet me much faster than I wanted it to. (The truth is out there...)

\*

My flight to Chicago was approximately 8 hours long, direct from Heathrow. I was seated in the uppermost cabin on the plane, a small cabin of about ten to twelve rows. As luck would have it, it was a historic day on BA or so the stewardess opined as she handed out folders and leaflets announcing the new quasi-global corporate colours which despite their historical significance, were profoundly uninvolving. The cabin only got smaller as the flight went on and passengers removed their shoes. What little oxygen there was synthesised into industrial strength body odour and, much to my surprise, during the last hour of the flight, passengers were liberally farting. It seemed smaller still when, upon landing, passengers fled for the

(CONTINUED)

spiral staircase leading to the exit, pushing, fighting and stepping on each other like extras from the in-flight disaster movie that had just been screened. I could only imagine that they were in a rush to get to numerous elevators, taxicabs and other enclosed spaces awaiting their territorial stink.

\*

I had only been on the “el”—public transportation in Chicago—for about 25 minutes, coming in from O'Hare International Airport, when already I felt a marked difference in the spirit or dispiritedness of the people. Chicago could definitely use some New Labour. Sullen, long faces, eyes to an almost subterranean level, sound erupting only when someone is called upon to commit an act of common courtesy such as stepping aside or conceding one of the three seats they are currently occupying to an elderly individual with two shopping bags, three teeth and an absence of mind. The con men talking their jive, roping passengers in, feigning offence or insult at the mere suggestion that you might be on to them—it's a loser's game. Young black women, no hope, no future, beating their kids into submission, pulling them by their arms as if their extremities were merely conveniently attached for passage, like a purse or a body bag. Chicago looked...harsh. Was I wrong to think this? My suspicion received all the confirmation needed when the blonde, inexpensively dressed woman seated in front of me, whom I thought to be at least, for lack of a better word, professional—if only temporarily—grabbed her big vinyl purse and at the stop before mine vomited into it remorselessly and as discreetly as possible the rest of the way home.

\*

Sandra Bullock is pushing Speed on The Today Show (make that Speed 2!), vainly trying to draw attention to her idea that she is, despite damning evidence to the contrary, a “serious” actress. This is the current trend for American celebrities: take the big paycheck and then brazenly disassociate yourself from the final product. Which ultimately leads me to wonder: well then why would I want to be associated with it? Who knows? The call would come today. From the Vice-Counsel at the British Consulate-General, Janet Bershers. After a 50-minute interview where I played Johnnie Cochran to her Marcia Clark, several phone calls to my lawyer in London for support, an agonising night on the sofa and 8-minutes of Sandra Bullock on The Today Show, I would find out later that day, around 3 PM to be exact, that yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus and that yes, there is a God and that yes, fast-talking, savvy lesbian lawyers are worth every penny you pay them; and that, where once I was content to reside in a country where it was plainly illegal for me to wait tables—a law that should be on the books in every country as far as I'm concerned—I would, in due time, be returning to a country that had recognised me as a writer. Which is more than my own parents ever bothered to do. Amen.

\*

My friend Michael and I spent the day wandering through Chicago visiting old neighbourhoods where once we had lived or people we'd known had lived. Like a couple of

(CONTINUED)

old-timers we were amazed at all the development in the various ethnic neighbourhoods of Chicago. That is, if you can call the gentrification of every single neighbourhood, development. Where once there was history and places where people lived, now stood the exact same strip mall of four or five stores: dry cleaner, video store, convenience store, mailboxes, etc. Over and over, on every corner. It was bad enough that all of my favourite bagel shops and my shoe repair had closed but the only thing that replaced them were these horrible, ubiquitous strip malls!

(The monotony broken intermittently by the SUPER stores—those sprawling acres of retail that import everything you hate about the suburbs and dump it right in the middle of the city. Where everything is cheaper, or at least, that is, everything they can buy in bulk, en masse.)

The homogenisation and generic makeover of this once exciting urban area was depressing. And nowhere was it epitomised more than the addition of Marshall's on Michigan Avenue. There is no British equivalent to Marshall's, essentially because the economy and class structures are not the same, but let it suffice to say that where once there was world-class shopping along Chicago's Magnificent Mile with the likes of Versace, Jil Sander, Bloomingdale's, Henri Bendel, Barney's, Marshall Field's, Armani, etc., etc., now sits a suburban magnet that would give Mohammed Al Fayed a coronary. The construction of a Marshall's on Michigan Avenue is akin to Fergie moving back into Buckingham Palace. I felt quite strongly that I had got out just in time, as if from a falling republic, and proud that it didn't happen on my watch.

\*

While I waited to see a totally stupid movie for which I had already paid an amount so outrageous that I felt more like an investor than a member of the audience, I wandered into a new store, next to Marshall's on Michigan Avenue, called The Viacom Store. Last I'd heard, Viacom was raking it in with MTV but I would always remember them as the U.S. distributors of Ultraman, a Japanese made series about a seemingly claymated grey superhero. What could The Viacom Store actually be? After just a few minutes it was abundantly clear that it was just a big-fucking-waste-of-space-junk store full of worthless high-priced crap like Frasier coffee mugs and, of course, MTV paraphernalia (that's The Viacom Store on Michigan Avenue, girls) with a self-serve cafe dropped right in the middle of it. Clothes...? Were those...clothes? Or were they...Star Trek uniforms? There were staff members standing around, posted as guides or bearers of valuable information about The Viacom Store. I approached one of them, a skittish young man in his early twenties.

“So, what gives? Is this a big junk store or am I missing something?”

He immediately conceded my point and seemed slightly embarrassed which was not my intention; he mentioned that there were a few CD racks in back but the selection was limited and that yeah, almost on the verge of tears, it was just a junk store. I felt like telling him I was on my way to see the Wizard and would he like to join me for maybe a brain, a heart or

(CONTINUED)

courage but thought better of it and left the confines of this bullshit theme store so that I wouldn't be late for my bullshit movie.

\*

The ad said: ANY PIERCING \$5 WITH THIS AD! It was about 1 AM, the heat index was high, the ceiling fan was turning slowly above my head and I was deliberately breathing easy so that I didn't work up a sweat. It's difficult to explain and harder to write but once the idea entered my head and so clearly defined my present, it just seemed right. I had to get my guiche.

\*

I was riding the No. 72, North Avenue bus west to Wicker Park, the closest thing to Seattle in the Midwest, home of the Smashing Pumpkins, Liz Phair, Urge Overkill, Veruca Salt and Red Red Meat et al...I was nervous and excited and felt as if I had the biggest secret in the world. I wondered to myself, what is this going to feel like? Will I barf? I wasn't sure but I was certain in the knowledge that I would probably pass gas and prepared myself to act natural about it (having had so many fine lessons on the flight in to Chicago). Surely worse things could happen? I laughed again, as I had when I stepped out of the shower earlier, in preparation for my piercing. You just know that there's always some fool who would take a big dump and then go and get an anal piercing...And then I found myself imagining that the piercing would arouse and excite me so that my practitioner, who I now imagined as some hot leather stud, would have to provide immediate service, gladly penetrating me while I—

A group of young boys, dressed in their goofy “homeboy” skateboarding attire, were congregating outside the tattoo parlour. As I got off the bus, I realised that it looked nothing like what I had imagined.

\*

PAINLESS PIERCING a.k.a. BODY PIERCING BY JAKE was a small room that was part of a much larger tattoo parlour and Jake was a large part of that small room. The room contained what was essentially a massage table for the various procedures and an autoclave for sterilisation of the piercing implements. A number of “bait 'n tackle” boxes held assorted jewellery. His certificate from The Gauntlet, one of the country's most revered piercing parlours and training programs, hung on the wall. He referred to it once and only later did I find out what it meant but at the time I played along as if it were from Harvard. It was a small room. I slid on the table, eager to know more about my guiche.

“Basically it goes right up your ass!” This by Jake in his typically enthusiastic, take-no-prisoners bark. Uh huh. He shows me his “book” containing photos of previous clients. No faces. Just their breasts and penises, vaginas and bums. Not really their bums. More like up close and personal Polaroids of their anuses. He tells me about a guy in a series of photos, “The Shark,” who has about three thick (6 gauge!), heavily weighted guiche piercings in his

(CONTINUED)

anus. When Jake says "The Shark!" the reverence he assigns to the name makes me feel as if we've returned to the Old Wild West and this particular varmint may make his way around these here parts again some time soon. The imagery conjured by such a nickname for somebody with multiple anal piercings is not pleasant to say the least. I bob my head up and down and laugh in amazement and acknowledgement. None of the photos, of any body or any piercing are particularly flattering.

Jake was enjoying this but was ever so slightly exaggerating the placement of the guiche. What Jake called "up your ass" was from my gay perspective the prostate region slightly north of "up your ass." He may have been doing this for his "apprentice," John, who was a few years older than Jake but less rotund and with beautiful strawberry blonde hair and freckles to match. These were good guys. They were the welcome wagon to a subculture whose philosophy, if they had one, excluded the placing of barbarians at the gate. Remnants of the hippie counter-culture of the '60's, they are a silent minority, a culture that mostly centres around the responsible use of drugs and the maintenance of an etiquette that suits their lifestyle and identifies other members or potential participants. Don't tread on me. Keep on truckin'. Theirs are manners from heaven—their existence doesn't preclude that others must suffer. *Insofar as it doesn't involuntarily harm others.* I love these guys and others like them. They are good people. And so many of them, sadly enough, forced to find employment after the death of Jerry Garcia...

The questions roll off my tongue: How long will it take to heal? What do I have to do in regards to maintenance? When can I workout again? What about sex? Jewellery? How heavy? How thick? Does it hurt? Blood? Jake, whose lower lip has three 8-gauge piercings alone, goes along for the ride answering all of my questions and tutoring John at the same time. John and I have a few good laughs—about what?—I can't remember. Without any suggestion on my part, Jake offers up the hazards of the profession including, much to my amusement, people who have bowel movements, don't bath and come in for piercings. He waves his hand under his nose, turning his head away before he makes mention of vaginal piercings. I like being the insider. They don't seem at all phased that I am gay and speak freely about the sexual enhancements of the piercing and what I should tell my "lover." Neither one of these guys is going to fuck me, which is fine—it was a small part of the fantasy anyway. This will do.

A boyish blonde-headed girl with a deep, smoky voice who I immediately identify as Scout from *To Kill A Mockingbird*—if she'd grown up and become a tomboyish lesbian but didn't know it—pounces into the tiny room to say, "Hey, Jaaaake! Did you get those gold bars in for my eyebrow?" She wants desperately to belong. Jake shifts his attention to her and says, "Yeah. I got 'em last week."

"Really...?"

Her response hangs in the air, a premature end to an encounter she wishes would go on and on. Politely Jake says to her, "I do." And this is when I know he's the real thing. "I can do it tonight," he says, "let me finish with him and I'll be with you in just a moment." She

(CONTINUED)

pounces out of the room. Jake's attention shifts back to me. My consultation continues. All of my questions are answered.

Having received the low-down on piercing from Jake, I was a bit lapse in taking control of the situation. I wasn't sure if it was something I should consider at length, weighing the options endlessly, consulting a physician or a lawyer or if a simple, high-pitched, "O-Kay, well...let's do it!," would suffice, while I crossed my forearms and squeezed my nipples together in an effort to offer the requisite kitten-ish cleavage pose appropriate to the phrase. Still uncertain as to the levity or gravity of the situation, I decide to take a seat in the waiting area and give it a few moments thought, not too long or too little.

\*

The waiting area of any tattoo parlour in America is invariably always the same. You've got your wannabes, your also-rans, your hillbilly white trash, the youth contingent and a sailor or two, if you're lucky. Mostly you have wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling decals or potential tattoos, all affixed with a number in the lower left-hand corner. People stare and stare, trying to decide what they will get. Will it be Donald Duck or Mickey Mouse on my right buttock or a cobra on my left bicep...whatever. The selection just gets infinitely worse from sci-fi murals to Harley Davidson logos, little flowers or smiley faces...who cares? What amazes me is how people can soulfully seek their otherness through the seemingly generic selection of images on the wall of every tattoo parlour the world over.

I sit contemplatively, the genuine article, the only potential client in black Donna Karan trousers with a clinging short-sleeved black V-neck shirt, quietly contemplating, quietly aroused, staring at the door, wondering who I thought I was when I walked through it and who I would be when I walked out. Maybe this was a false alarm. Just when I was wondering when that silly skateboard fashion trend would reach its agonisingly slow and painful death, a young dark-haired woman sitting next to me spoke, her voice transmitting an anxious excitement. She wasn't the genuine article (and neither was I, really) but she wasn't a wannabe either. She quivered slightly with an air of adolescent discovery, her gestures uncertain, jagged, pulled and restrained. She was trying to contain herself.

"So...are you thinking of getting something..." she said as if we were lined up at an ice cream parlour. What flavour?

"I want to get my guiche," I said for the first time, to someone not even remotely involved in the process, immediately entering the varied subculture.

"I always pass out when I get pierced," she replied rather dramatically, causing me to think that Juliette Lewis would play her in the film. An admission that at once seemed disingenuous, it was genuine nonetheless.

Having already considered that I might vomit, urinate, defecate, expel gas or beg, plead and scream like a banshee to be immediately penetrated and fucked until I could only speak

(CONTINUED)

gibberish while my eyes rolled around inside my vacant head, it had not occurred to me that I might possibly faint. With the widening of her eyes she made the possibility seem...very real.

“I had my belly pierced...” She stood to show me. *With what? A rusty nail?* Her starter jewellery did little to hold my attention while her encrusted naval, red and bloated with infection, oozed a brownish pus that seeped from her belly. Hold off on the tube tops, was all I could think to say, which I didn't, relying instead on that old standby, “W-wow.” Apparently her search for her soul had not been sated as she continued with a litany of “things” she wanted to have done as if she were building a hi-fi system component by component. After there was enough pie in the sky to feed a truckload of ravenous carnival workers, she sweetly wished me luck and joined the skateboard clique on the sidewalk outside. When she said she had somewhere to go, I assumed she was telling the truth.

\*

The sound of the tattoo needles, a pleasant whirring like a dentist's drill, fills the parlour. The cacophony of needles, each penetrating skins of different textures, depth and colour, create a harmonic buzz. I'm aroused and slightly nauseous at the same time, anxious and a little nervous. I take a deep breath. I remember how much I enjoyed getting tattooed and wonder if the piercing will feel the same way. Relaxing. Like a stretched canvas. Like art. The anxiety I feel is based on uncertainty: Is this the right thing for me? What is the nature of my attraction?

I've finished paging through the local gay rag and watched the end of the cult B-movie playing overhead—*was that “Buckaroo Banzai” again?* The skateboarding crue follows a few older boys into the waiting area. Jake's “book” sits rather haphazardly on the bench across from me, where Scout left it after salivating over its pages. The boys immediately start racing through the book, moaning and groaning, gasping and grimacing.

“Ohmigod,” one says to the other, “you're gonna get one of those?! You're *craaa-zy!* That's sick, man—you're sick! *Aw Naawwooh!* You're gross, man. There's something wrong with you!”

They continue to jeer at the boy who in reality is a young man. I immediately grasp my understanding of this piercing, this ritual—my guiche—and know as well which culture I choose to identify with. Without a moment's hesitation, I step up to the counter and say, “Would you let Jake know that I'm ready, please?”

\*

On my way into the room, Scout stands before a mirror, waving her hand in front of her eyebrow, now red and irritated but with a small gold bar. She sucks air between her teeth and accompanies that with slight slurping noises while she says, in a voice like that of a child, “It stings.” Nobody says anything and she leaves. I slide onto the massage table and start to

(CONTINUED)

nonchalantly remove my trousers. I ask if John will be observing—within a moment he is there, having put his tattoo on hold. We've chosen the jewellery—not too many options with a guiche, except width and weight. I had mentioned earlier that I didn't want anything prematurely dropping before its time, that I wanted everything to stay tight. We chose starter jewellery of a moderate width (10-gauge!). In retrospect I like to imagine that Jake pulled a set of rusty forceps from a bin before fastening them to my prostate but he didn't. Everything was sterilised. I mention immediately that I do not want to be in the “book,” which must have been disappointing to Jake since afterwards he confides that mine was only his third guiche. I ask Jake if he wants me on my back. Could he tell me what the procedure is? How will I know? He says that I should be on my hands and knees—which makes sense, so I immediately assume the position.

With Jake and John staring into what I could only imagine was the undoubtedly large gaping hole that is my anus, Jake pokes around my scrotum with what I can only describe as a wooden wand. I remember him saying to John, “See? When the sphincter contracts like that, you know that's the money,” and then to me, “You can tell your lover that.” Or you could phone him for me, Jake, I thought. He continues to tell me that he will allow me two deep breaths (in/out) and then he'll go for it. Already on my hands and knees I say, “Oh,” and in what seems like less than a nano-second, Jake says, “So breathe in...”

It was similar to those moments when time is suspended as the roller coaster climbs steadily and shakily up the rails, getting higher and higher, and with each click of the coaster against the rails you know the moment you plunge is so inevitable and yet sooo...far...away...

“...aaannd breathe out...”

I'm way ahead of myself now, running through infinite fields, my focus so strong, my spirit so free, so far out of my body...

“Second breath.”

I refuse to feel afraid. What was unknown would be certain in a matter of moments...

“...and out. You're pierced.”

Hesitantly I ask, “Do you have to pull it out again or anything?”

“Nope. You're all done.”

“Really? You're through?”

“Yep. That's some first piercing. Congratulations.”

That was the ritual, the cross over. The initiation. The rush of adrenaline, the sense of being wide-awake and the need for a cigarette were all really intense. “That was it,” I asked again

(CONTINUED)

and laughed. Where earlier I was slightly impressed and fascinated at the thought of fainting, now I just wanted to laugh. Pass out? Don't be silly! I didn't even fart.

\*

There are many things I did not anticipate about my guiche since my desire was to achieve something purely ornamental. The biggest thing that I was completely unprepared for is that my guiche *moves*. Like it has a life of its own. I can see it in my head, I imagine the ring moving from left to right, backward and forward, swinging around ever so slightly in constant perpetual motion. Before I got my guiche most of my focus was above the shoulders, in my head, expending itself verbally. However, now that I have my guiche my focus is firmly between my legs just beneath my scrotum. This is a big change for me. I may not know what's going on around me but I always know where my guiche is. I walk a lot slower now too which my boyfriend, a leg amputee, appreciates. My sense of my guiche is so large that I forget nobody knows.

\*

My parents, who live in a suburb of Detroit where I grew up, have not seen me in over eight months, since just before I moved to London. They were against me moving to Great Britain, which was consistent with their previous disapproval of my plans to move to Los Angeles and Chicago before that and New York before that—it's the resistance between my plans and their eternal disfavour that propels me forward. This trip they seem very satisfied to see me. London, they say, seems to have a positive effect on me. Of course, since I've only had my guiche for two days, my parents must think that London is some kind of boot camp for fairies as I lurch around their house with the widest gait this side of John Wayne, my arms stoically sticking out from my torso with a slight, perpetual grimace on my face as the motion of my guiche sends a continual rush of adrenaline and masochistic pleasure through my body. After thirty years of me sashaying around their house like Naomi down a catwalk, my guiche is a blessed relief to them. At some point during my two-day stay I make mention of my "runner's knee" but they're not having it. There's nothing wrong with me in their eyes. Don't ever change. Stay the same. Real men get their guiche.

\*

It feels like a ferret in my pants, biting its way through my flesh and the feeling is so intense and takes such effort to conceal that the sensation—the constant biting, chewing, sharp little teeth chewing their way through my anus—flows through my body in constant waves, crashing from side to side across my head; as my threshold for pain continues to expand so my head continues to extend up, up, up into the clouds as my over stimulated senses go numb until my body involuntarily draws breath like the momentary suspension of the tide before it pulls away from the shore. The feeling is blissful, intoxicating and disorienting like some heady mind-altering drug and the little kids run by, the young mother pushes her pram, the builders continue to build but the little girls understand. It is not without reason that this process is called "healing."

\*

(CONTINUED)

It is weeks before I allow my boyfriend to penetrate me anally but when he does I lose all control. The nature of my reception is such that I am without tension, without any discomfort at all as he thrusts his admittedly large penile organ deep into my anus; I feel intrinsically connected to his every move. He asks, “Here...,” and before I can answer, I rise to the pitch and semen rushes between my nipples. During a prolonged period of short, staccato breaths I needlessly beg him, “Don't stop.” A few nights later, I just barely hear the sound of my guiche within the clench of his teeth as I lie against the sheets, paralysed by the sweet euphoria he has found between my legs. There's an excruciatingly light, airy feeling to all of this as if, during our pleasure, my brain might turn to liquid and run with the steady stream of a tap right out the side of my head but I don't worry about it, I don't question it and I certainly don't resist it.

\*

My hands tremble as I hold them over the keyboard. I want to write of something that still seems fuzzy and slightly unfocused. It comes at me in fleeting moments of clarity and it has everything and nothing to do with my guiche. For all of my attempts here to prove otherwise maybe my guiche signifies nothing. There have been moments, a few, when the validity of the guiche has been called into question—certainly not when anyone had their head between my legs—but...these moments have nothing to do with the pain of a piercing that has yet to heal, no matter how piercing, throbbing and consistent that pain may be. No, they don't. I try to resist it but I've found that the inherent pain of my guiche, the soothing consistency of it, has released the emotional pain, not of a lifetime, but that I've discovered I feel every day of my life. The pain of needs that I have yet to satisfy; the pain of intolerance, of myself and others; the pain of rejection that forces me to hold myself away, that tiny isolated pain that grows every day, a desolate little pain that I refuse to acknowledge even to myself. My mind bleeds while I have visions of something tribal, a ritual, a primal rite of passage...

My heart feels weak. There is motion in my chest like that of a glacier. My nerves throb under my skin and my jaw goes slack. For a few seconds I wait but as is its nature, the fleeting moment of clarity is gone.

Copyright © 1998 by Sean O'Neil. All rights reserved.

Sean O'Neil is an award-winning American playwright currently working as a freelance writer and residing in London. In January 1998, his adaptation of Dale Peck's MARTIN AND JOHN received its London premiere at The Bush Theatre. Previously, the play premiered in the UK at the 1996 Edinburgh Festival Fringe where it was awarded the prestigious Scotsman Fringe First Award, for innovation in theatre and outstanding new production. Originally, the work premiered in Chicago in 1994 at the now defunct Underground Performance Space at Cafe Voltaire and was subsequently remounted at Live Bait Theatre, Chicago in 1996.

O'Neil just returned from doing a summer residency with The New York Theatre Workshop at Dartmouth College. At present, he is working on a novel and starting a new play.