

THE REDCLOUDS REVOLUTION

A MAN NAMED IGOR, HIS DOT-COM AND THE NEXT PHASE OF AMERICA'S SEXUAL GREAT AWAKENING

RICHARDSON: So...is this a good time?
GEEZ: In a bit. The missus is getting in the shower now.
RICHARDSON: Did you guys just get home from work?
GEEZ: I got home 30 minutes ago.
RICHARDSON: You have a small business, right?
GEEZ: Correct.
RICHARDSON: What do you make?
GEEZ: Whatever people want. We try to shy away from surgical tools, though.
RICHARDSON: So how did you guys meet?
GEEZ: Work. I broke the golden rule and fucked the help.
RICHARDSON: How did you get into RedClouds?
GEEZ: Like most everyone else—searching for free porn, LOL.
RICHARDSON: When did you bring the missus in?
GEEZ: I introduced her January 2, 2005. I had no idea how much of a monster I was creating.
RICHARDSON: So she took to it?
GEEZ: Like a fish to water.
RICHARDSON: She wasn't shocked or anything?
GEEZ: She posted live pics the first time out of the box, so to speak.
RICHARDSON: What do you mean, live pics?
GEEZ: Hang on. I'll show you.
RICHARDSON: Oh, Mrs. Geez...this is a first for me.
GEEZ: She's given a lot of guys firsts in the past month or so.
RICHARDSON: Golly. I'm having a little trouble typinhg.
GEEZ: LOL.
RICHARDSON: This is a serious professional interview, damn it!
GEEZ: That's okay. I can't type anymore either.
RICHARDSON: What is she doing with her toes?
GEEZ: Taking off toe rings.
RICHARDSON: Of course.
GEEZ: She wants to know if you like her new tramp stamp.
RICHARDSON: The stamp is hot.
GEEZ: It's an iron-on.
RICHARDSON: So she's just a faux tramp?
GEEZ: LOL.
RICHARDSON: Nice boy shorts, too.
GEEZ: Boy shorts photograph the best.
RICHARDSON: I see you've developed a sense of professionalism.
GEEZ: LOL.
RICHARDSON: Nice smile.

GEEZ: She says, "Thanks."
The screen goes black.

I met the Geezes on RedClouds, one of the Internet's leading adult communities. With more than 4 million unique visitors daily and an eight-year history, the site is not only a web superstar but something new under the sun. Sixty years ago women worried about the indecency of wearing bikinis at the beach. Now husbands and wives post pornographic pictures of themselves on RedClouds and dozens of similar sites for all the world to see—average people making do-it-yourself pornography. Meanwhile, studies have suggested that rape rates are sliding in correspondence to rising Internet usage, implying that pornography—universally acknowledged to be the main driver of the Internet—actually prevents rape. All the attention, however, goes to MySpace, YouTube and how *Time* magazine made the Internet user its Person of the Year for 2006. Perhaps Masturbator of the Year doesn't have that *Time* ring. We are so blasé—or so numb to our own discomfort—that we can't see the enormity of the change.

So I posted a query at redclouds.com: "Hi. My name is John Richardson. My intentions are serious. I think the freedom of the Internet is giving people a chance to explore themselves in a new way, and I want to understand it. I'm particularly interested in the process of 'coming out' and posting your face and discussing whatever psychological or political transformations that decision may have required."

Immediately I got a wide range of responses. Many were cries of alarm. "We don't need the publicity," said Nekkidsailor. "All it will do is bring in a zillion perverted idiots."

"No!" said Austin_man. "The Republicans will kill this site and others like it."

Then there was FBFF, who wrote, "John, would you mind defecating on me?"

A larger group, however, offered to help. Someone called Lady wrote, "I'm here for U, sweetie," and posted a naked picture of herself.

Bostonhoney told me she and her husband had been on the site since the beginning, when it offered mostly bikini shots. "We've almost always posted with our faces blurred. We stopped blurring for a while but went back to it when we found other people were posting our pictures on many other sites."

She sent me some pictures too.

Annette told me she owns a construction company that built more than 900 homes in the past year. In RedClouds she found a solution

BY JOHN H. RICHARDSON

to something that had once seemed like a terrible problem. "A few of us who are overly blessed in the labia department started posting our 'lippy' photos on Thursday nights—and Lippy Night was born."

Trouble & MsChievous described themselves as a married couple who are not swingers but have gone to a few RedClouds parties. They have two kids. "We do not post my wife's face as I have a high-profile white-collar job and she is a soccer mom. We don't want to jeopardize our lifestyle, but we do enjoy the thrill of posting her photos for others to comment on."

Someone called Chief gave me a personal tweak. "RC is like a scene out of *Eyes Wide Shut*—too much investigation and don't be surprised if you find the mask mysteriously lying on your bed, next to your sleeping wife."

I also got my first note from Mr. Geez, beginning a long dialogue. He said he lives in the Midwest and votes Republican "holding his

RICHARDSON: Nah, my wife is cool. So...can we go back to serious stuff, or is Mrs. Geez going to roll around on the bed some more?

GEEZ: She loves to roll around on the bed during serious interviews, LOL.

RICHARDSON: Tell me about that first time she posted on RedClouds.

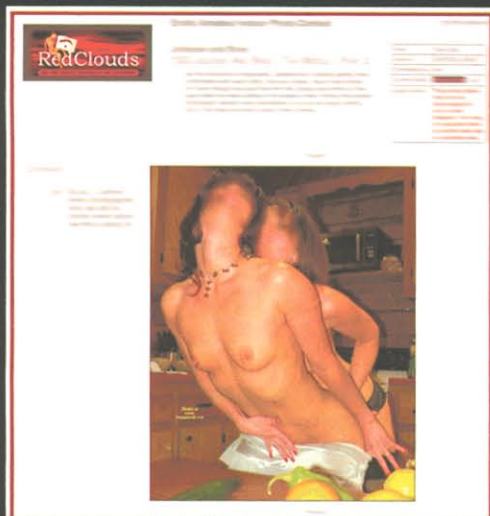
GEEZ: I'll let her type.

RICHARDSON: Okay, then you can roll on the bed.

GEEZ: Not!

RICHARDSON: Okay, Mrs. Geez, give it up. The first time. Was it scary?

I also try going in through the front door, contacting the man above the clouds. He calls himself Igor and prefers to stop there. "I stopped talking to the U.S. press back in 2000 because of some bad experiences," he tells me. Bad experiences? I spent a few minutes searching the web for information. His name is Igor Shoemaker. He is 49 years old, has



Poor, fair, good, very good or superb? RedClouds members are asked to rate the contributions of camera-ready beauties. New Images posted daily are titled according to type and fetish. Such calls to action as the Amateur Indoor Photo Contest (above left and right) generate some of the most inspired images, pushing contestants to create increasingly daring photos—and in the process, challenge the way they see their sexual selves.

nose." He has kids and gave me a glimpse into the complexity of America's real family values. "By asking about kids," Mr. Geez asked, "do you mean how it affects them? If so, it drives them nuts, which we get a kick out of. Especially when she'll walk out of a photo shoot to get something from the kitchen etc., wearing a shelf bra and thong and one of them will be there making a midnight snack. Always amuses her that males in their 20s turn their heads in embarrassment instead of moving out and getting their own place."

But the most intriguing e-mail came from a couple who call themselves Sienna and A.H. (Adoring Husband) and describe themselves as active churchgoers from a rural state. They have two kids under the age of eight. Posting nude photos of themselves "has been an important and fragmenting experience for us," A.H. began. "We would love to talk with you."

"Fragmenting? How so?"

"We have a strong desire to be known," he answered, "but there are significant negative consequences to that. Last night I had nightmares of being cross-examined by a lawyer who knew about my secret life. We are not keen on throwing our bodies on the tracks like some ill-fated Jerry Springer guest."

"A strong desire to be known." The shiver up my back told me that was the thing I had to explore.

My computer screen crackles back to life. Geez is on Yahoo Messenger. The live cam shows Mrs. Geez on the bed, smiling.

GEEZ: Did someone have to do some explaining, LOL?

RICHARDSON: Nah, I don't know what happened. Computer crashed, I guess.

GEEZ: We thought it was "Really, honey, I'm conducting a professional interview for that RedClouds article."

three master's degrees and, according to one article, holds citizenship in four countries in case he "needs somewhere to run to." In 2005, after a series of legal crackdowns on porn, he moved from the U.S. to Canada. He shut down his operations in Germany in 1999. "I could go to prison for what I do in Germany," he complained to one reporter.

Eventually Igor warms up enough to answer some questions by phone and e-mail. He had been a "senior executive vice president something" at an Internet company, where his job was "telling people lies about software." It made him so depressed he blew a fuse and told his boss to kiss his hairy ass. "Those were my last words in the IT industry," he says, laughing. Unemployed, financially secure and just 39 years old, he spent his time photographing naked girls and surfing the Internet—until a lightbulb flashed on. "I will never forget my first Internet 'porn' experience: After surfing for 48 hours without a break and spending thousands of dollars for pay sites, I came to the conclusion that no normal people display themselves or their work on the Internet. I saw the same boring hard-core shit over and over again. Two weeks later I had my own little server that showed about 30 of my own photos. I asked people to e-mail me their work for publication."

Within days photos started appearing in his in-box. After 10 weeks he had 10,000 daily viewers. After four months, 100,000. Thirty new photos came in every day. After six months Igor had to upgrade to bigger servers. He realized he would go bankrupt if he didn't charge for access. So, like the guy who invented eBay, he explained his problems online and asked his contributors for advice. They settled on \$15 a year, a tiny sum by Internet porn standards, and in April 1998 he opened the doors of Voyeurweb, the free portal to RedClouds. In the first 24 hours more than 20,000 people signed up.

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Pausing, Igor speculates, "I am never sure whether we are God or the devil."

During our conversations, Igor is a manic and amusing guy. He says he is still breaking even and donates any profits to charity. He doesn't want to be mistaken for "one of those idealistic people," however, and reserves the right to sell out and get rich. He enjoys bragging about his numbers—4.2 million daily visitors to Voyeurweb, 940,000 paying members on RedClouds and another 250,000 paying members on the video section, Homeclips. He portrays himself as a lone crusader against both the professional porn industry and social repression: "In 2001 we ran a contest on freshly trimmed pussy and got 8,000 pictures—8,000 ladies trimmed their pussy because of me!" He is also a genuinely thoughtful guy, passionately committed to the idea of amateur, do-it-yourself porn but given to philosophical doubts about his own workaholicism (or is it Internet addiction?) and the long-term effects of this experiment on the world.

"I've actually been in touch with a psychologist for many years," Igor tells me, "always discussing the question, 'Is it a good thing or a bad thing we're doing?' There are 40 or 50 people who spend eight hours a day on the site, and that can't be good. That's social isolation and living in a dreamworld." Should he kick them out? Should he contact them and suggest they cool it? It's endlessly fascinating, he says. "Of course there are many divorces because of RedClouds, but other people found each other and married because of us. There's even a kid called Igor out there."

Pausing, he speculates on something Goethe might have appreciated: "I am never sure whether we are God or the devil."

Igor's speculation made me think about the problems of fragmentation and having a secret life. For some it may be a secret garden, as the sexual optimists of the 1960s insisted, but I am still haunted by a line in a book I read my freshman year in college: "Every wall against the outside world is a wall against oneself, creating two separate aspects of a mystery we can endure but never understand." The writer is Franz Kafka, who rewrote the Book of Job as metaphysical hor-

ror stories for modern man. The wall around sex contributes to some of our biggest mysteries and horrors. The wall is the link between love and rape, for example. I was eager to explore the subject with A.H. and Sienna. A.H. answers most of the questions, while Sienna listens on another line, occasionally tossing in comments.

"We've been there almost since the beginning, since 1998," he says of RedClouds. "In the early days some of it was troubling, a bit voyeuristic and antiwoman, a little delight in catching the unsuspecting. Sometimes derogatory things were said. Gradually, however, the site has become more friendly to contributors and more positive, which is largely how we rationalized returning to it."

Sienna pops in. "It is almost like a family, especially on the contributors' board. Before this, if you had told me I would have a cyberfriend, I would have rolled my eyes and thought you were nuts. But you get to know these people. Everyone feels safer because the physical distance allows them to at least seem more open and honest."

They started visiting when A.H. googled *exhibitionism*. Voyeurweb was one of the first sites they found. "Sienna and I have some feminist leanings and a lot of ambivalence about how sexuality is portrayed in the marketplace and in commercial pornography," he explains. "Initially, one of my interests was seeking an alternative outlet to commercial porn."

At first he kept his discovery a secret. After six months, however, he showed Voyeurweb to Sienna.

"I didn't have any negative reaction," she says. "I'm pretty open when it comes to human sexuality. Many behaviors the religious right have painted as deviant are actually mainstream and normative. Plus I've always liked good nude photography. It's corny, but the human body is such an amazing wonder."

Sometimes she would get turned off by lurkers who made nasty comments. Then she would see something beautiful and change her mind. But an artistic impulse really drew them in deeper, inspired by the beautiful and tasteful portraits of a woman who called herself Englishwife. "People started trying to emulate that stuff," Sienna tells me, "and we tried to emulate it too." In 2001 they attended a

nude-photography seminar organized by Englishwife and her husband. With four other couples, they went out into nature, took pictures and then reviewed them. They learned photography didn't have to be the predatory act Susan Sontag described in her famous essay "On Photography." It could be a collaboration. "Instead of my taking pictures of her," A.H. says, "we were working together. It became an interactive process."

The seminar was a huge validation. Nobody was perverse. Aside from nudity, there was nothing overtly sexual about it, though it had its liberating aspects. "There I am," Sienna says, "sitting on the couch right next to these people, with my naked pictures on a big-screen TV. It was refreshing."

When A.H. and Sienna posted the pictures on Voyeurweb—photos taken just months after Sienna gave birth to her first child—they got such flattering, generous and appreciative comments, they were hooked. Now they plan vacations around these experiments, taking hikes into the backwoods and pristine settings until Sienna feels an overwhelming urge to take off her clothes and "be natural in nature." Despite their busy lives, they rarely go three months without posting. They visit the site almost every day and chat with friends they seem to know better than their "friends in real life." One friend from the site got pregnant and posted the whole adventure, straight through birth, online.

A.H. and Sienna's explorations on Voyeurweb led to offline experiments. Once they went to an adults-only resort in Jamaica called Hedonism. Nervous at first, they quickly moved, as they put it, from "the prude side to the nude side" and learned a lesson about life. "On the prude side, everyone kept to themselves," she says. "On the nude side, everyone was laughing and playing volleyball." They didn't swing, but they struck up a friendship with three other couples and played truth or dare, experiencing anticipation and excitement they hadn't felt since high school. And Sienna had her first girl-girl kiss. "I'm still kind of speechless at that," she says.

After returning home they started posting more pictures and exploring more fantasies. For example, they had never tried anal sex, because A.H. had been too sensitive to ask. "I said to Sienna, 'I thought that was for the benefit of the porn industry and women didn't like it.' She said, 'You never know until you try.'"

The exploration became more philosophical. If sex was as natural

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Carrie posted pictures of herself having sex with her husband, then with other women.

as air and water, why was everyone so weird about it? Why were people so much nicer naked? At Hedonism you'd see a marine talking to a punk rocker, and as long as they were naked, both were civil. Maybe all clothes are a kind of military uniform. Maybe that explains something about politics, too. "If the House and the Senate had their meetings naked," Sienna says, "things would be better."

Here is where the earlier comment on fragmentation comes into play. A.H. and Sienna are involved in some conservative groups and are active in their church. Although they have told their families about their hobby—Sienna's mother even knitted a blanket for the woman who posted her baby's birth online—they say it would be dangerous to tell their religious friends, who are so conservative they get judgmental when Sienna dances with another man. This lie of omission not only makes A.H. and Sienna feel distant from the "real world," it drives them deeper into the web. "On the bulletin board, we can talk to people with whom we can share this part of our lives. It's one place we don't have to put up a wall," she says. Now some of their real-world friendships are crumbling.

The issue of showing her face remains. "I struggle with that," Sienna says. "When I have to post anonymously, a big part of my soul doesn't get conveyed." She doesn't want to be "a faceless body without a soul." She believes in spiritual wholeness, so this troubles her. "One thing I despise is dishonesty," she says. "By choosing to pose anonymously, I choose to keep hiding, to hold something back."

And then there is objectification. "We are unequivocally against the objectification of women," A.H. says. On Voyeurweb and RedClouds, the women range in age from 19 to 55 and in weight from 95 pounds to Shamu. Both A.H. and Sienna feel good about that. "Madison Avenue isn't setting the prototype," A.H. says. But it's still faceless, and that bothers them. After seven years of trying, they won the annual Voyeurweb photo contest last year with a picture that shows Sienna wearing all her clothes and with her face—except for a pair of sunglasses—exposed. "I think that's what pulled in enough votes to win," she says. "People want to see the whole person, the real girl next door."

These are issues she would never have expected, things pornography

taught her. She says, "There's so much depth to people if they take off their masks." After she hangs up the phone, she e-mails a gift to my in-box: a picture of her on a rocky shore, ocean water swirling behind her, a string of shells around her neck and a fishnet in her hand. She is naked and smiling right at me, so beautiful and happy and sweet-looking I feel a surge of...is it love?

It feels like love.

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RICHARDSON: Okay, Mrs. Geez, give it up. The first-time story.

MRSGEENZ: We were lying in bed and having wild sex, and I guess I was feeling ugly because Geez said, "Oh no, I can prove it to you. You're hot." I didn't believe him. So he showed me RC, and I posted a live pic.

RICHARDSON: What happened?

MRSGEENZ: At first I didn't want everyone to see me. Then I said, "What the hell? It's only being naked. What's wrong with that? I love being naked."

RICHARDSON: So what happened?

MRSGEENZ: My son got snoopy and spilled the beans in front of my whole family. So I had to explain to the hole damn family—I can't spell.

RICHARDSON: I don't care about the spelling.

MRSGEENZ: I'm blonde for a reason.

RICHARDSON: I didn't get a chance to see if you were a real blonde.

MRSGEENZ: LOL.

RICHARDSON: Did your son see your pictures?

MRSGEENZ: No, but his dad did (my first husband).

RICHARDSON: How did that happen?

MRSGEENZ: Pics stolen from RC got posted on the Net.

RICHARDSON: Was he surfing for porn?

MRSGEENZ: Must have been. They're all perverts.

RICHARDSON: So he told your family?

MRSGEENZ: He told everyone I know.

RICHARDSON: How did your folks react?

MRSGEENZ: My mom said, "Go for it." My dad was shocked, but he was okay. He said, "Just be careful. There are lots of sickos out there." My sisters said, "Oh my gawd." They think I'm a slut now, LOL.

RICHARDSON: How often do you post?

MRSGEENZ: Almost daily.

RICHARDSON: Does it make you hot?

MRSGEENZ: Once in a while.

RICHARDSON: What's the most extreme thing you've posted?

MRSGEENZ: BJ and fingering myself.

RICHARDSON: What do your friends think?

MRSGEEZ: They all like it. I'm going to let Geez take over the typing.

RICHARDSON: Stop that!

GEEZ: LOL.

RICHARDSON: She's a bad girl!

GEEZ: That's why I love her so much.

RICHARDSON: Here we go with the boy shorts.

GEEZ: LOL.

RICHARDSON: As I was saying before I was distracted....

Carrie is going to college for a B.A. in English. She's in her 30s, slender and pretty. That's not how she puts it, however: "I have two kids, and my body shows it."

Because of her kids, Carrie wants to be careful about what she says, but she will sketch in a few details. She lives in a small city in Kansas. She's a Democrat, an atheist and a liberal. She was faithful to her husband for 13 years. Then she met a handsome guy who put the moves on her. This scared her. "I knew if I took that step, I could lose my family," she says.

One night she and her husband saw a special on swinging on the Discovery Channel. Afterward she confessed the lust in her heart. "That was a hard time for us," she says. "He guessed I was attracted to this man but not that I had been propositioned. I said I hadn't done anything, but part of me wanted to."

Over the next few months, they discussed their fantasies. Carrie admitted she sometimes fantasized about having sex with two guys and especially with women. Her husband had suspected this because when they rented porn the girl-girl scenes always got her going. He suggested placing an ad on a swingers' site.

No way, she said. Advertising for sex was too strange. She wanted it to happen spontaneously, in a bar. Eventually she realized the odds were against her, and they joined Swingers Board, a discussion site where they asked questions and learned a lot of dos and don'ts.

Soon they took the plunge. She wrote an ad describing their bodies—not neglecting her husband's smoky blue eyes—and interests. The digital camera made it easy, since there was no problem with developing pictures. They were nervous when she hit SEND.

They got a bunch of responses right away. Carrie picked out one couple and wrote to them. They met for a drink but didn't do anything. They got together again, but both Carrie and the guy were nervous.

Then they found RedClouds. While some of it seemed degrading and nasty, Sam's Place, the message board, was friendly and positive. It took a couple of weeks to get the nerve to post a pic-

ture, and even then Carrie was fully clothed. The only thing you could see was cleavage.

Then she posted a picture in which she wore a sweat jacket unzipped.

Then one in which she was topless.

"Every time I do something new on that site I shock myself," she says. "I call up my friend and go, 'Oh my God, did you see what I just did?'"

But people on the board were supportive. It empowers her, she says. "No matter what your personal flaws are or what you perceive as personal flaws, if people respond positively when you post yourself in this way, it makes you feel good."

As a fringe benefit, it makes you want to take care of yourself.

In time Carrie posted pictures of herself having sex with her husband, then with other women. She and her husband attended a RedClouds party in another state. On the Homeclips video section, she entered a contest with a \$1,500 prize.

She always shows her face. "My husband isn't a teacher or politician. My dad wouldn't care. My mom would say, 'I don't know if that's a good idea, but whatever you're into, honey, it's okay as long as you're being safe.'" Her mother-in-law may not be so accepting, but that's just too bad. "We have the right to live the way we want to," she says. "And doesn't every mother-in-law think her daughter-in-law is a slut?"

But it's more than that. Like Sienna, Carrie has come to feel closer to people from RedClouds than to the people in her own life. "RedClouds people know more about the real me, the secret me, the me that's censored from everyone else. They know when my period is due." She sees it in political terms, like gays coming out of the closet. The world would be better if people didn't hide so much, she says. There would be fewer divorces if people weren't afraid to tell the truth to their spouses. That's why she agreed to this interview. "The only way to combat the negative side of pornography is to speak out more about the positive side."

Before we hang up, she asks if I have a picture of her. I do. She asks me to describe it.

"You're in a three-way."

"You saved it for research purposes?"

"Of course."

"That's a rare picture. I've posted only three threesome pictures," she says. "That's my husband in my hand."

RICHARDSON: Do you guys ever play with people on RC?

GEEZ: I'm going to open Picture Sharing to show you.

RICHARDSON: Was that at an RC party?

GEEZ: An RC lady we know. We have

taken about 4,000 pictures in the past two months.

RICHARDSON: Why so many?

GEEZ: New digital camera...and new friends.

RICHARDSON: New friends you met through RC?

GEEZ: Yes.

RICHARDSON: In your town?

GEEZ: About 20 minutes away.

RICHARDSON: Where are you again?

GEEZ: South central MI.

RICHARDSON: Minnesota, who knew?

GEEZ: Minnesota is MN.

RICHARDSON: Shows you how well I did in geography!

GEEZ: LOL.

RICHARDSON: So you're in Missouri.

GEEZ: Michigan, for fuck's sake.

RICHARDSON: I think Mrs. Geez is starting to interfere with the typist.

GEEZ: Always.

RICHARDSON: A little cold soda can on the nipples?

GEEZ: Yep.

RICHARDSON: This interview is totally degenerating.

Desertgator wrote back, "Thank you all for the support. I knew this community was very special. Your comments have really uplifted me today."

GEEZ: She wants to know if she looks ridiculous on cam.

RICHARDSON: Are you kidding? I love how natural and relaxed she is, and she has a great smile. I'd fuck her in a heartbeat—if I were in Minnesota.

GEEZ: How would your wife feel about that?

RICHARDSON: I'd have to ask her.

GEEZ: And her answer would be....

RICHARDSON: Hey, who's doing the interview here?

GEEZ: Would she want to help?

RICHARDSON: Ya never know, Mr. Geez, ya never know.

GEEZ: That's right. It's a whole new world. We never would have crossed these borders without RedClouds.

RICHARDSON: That's a nice angle.

GEEZ: On one cam show we had 75 viewers.

RICHARDSON: Watch out, HBO.

GEEZ: She just prances and dances.

RICHARDSON: And you don't get jealous?

GEEZ: Me? I get to take pictures. Plus I get the hot sex when she gets all steamed up, LOL.

RICHARDSON: That's a man who looks on the bright side.

GEEZ: The glass is three-quarters full.

Then there are the true hard-core swingers, like Jackncarol. They live in Texas and work in the medical profession. They ask me to blur some of their identifying details. "We have licenses, and there's a moral-turpitude clause," Jack says, "so don't put anything beyond 'hospital.'"

"I believe what we do is healthy and fun, and it enhances our relationship," Carol says, "but in this society it's wrong, so we have to be secretive."

They are in their late 40s. Carol is

pretty, with a voluptuous body that is close to perfect. They started swinging seven years ago. They quickly found a European website and sites like the Amateurs Homepage and Toychest Gallery, where they posted so often they became friends with the owners. When those sites fell apart, they found RedClouds. "It helped us to be able to connect more easily with people," Jack says. "We know so many people today."

"Friends of friends of friends," Carol says.

"We just threw a big party for the site," Jack says. "It was a blast—about 25, 26 people."

"The house was full."

So was Carol, as the pictures they posted afterward so vividly proved. She loves men in groups, especially black men.

It was not always the case. "We fantasized for 10 years," Jack says.

"I never saw a dirty movie before he showed me one," Carol says.

Carol and Jack say what swingers usually say: Swinging enhances their relationship and builds communication, trust and intimacy. "I can say what I think and feel," Carol says. "I'm allowed to go to the gym and look at a cute guy and say, 'Wow.' It validates me."

This is not the focus of their lives; they have teenage children. But the attraction is the opportunity to be completely open. As Carol puts it, "I can't go to work and talk about this stuff: 'You should see the hot guy I fucked last night.' The 20-year-old girls would drop their drawers."

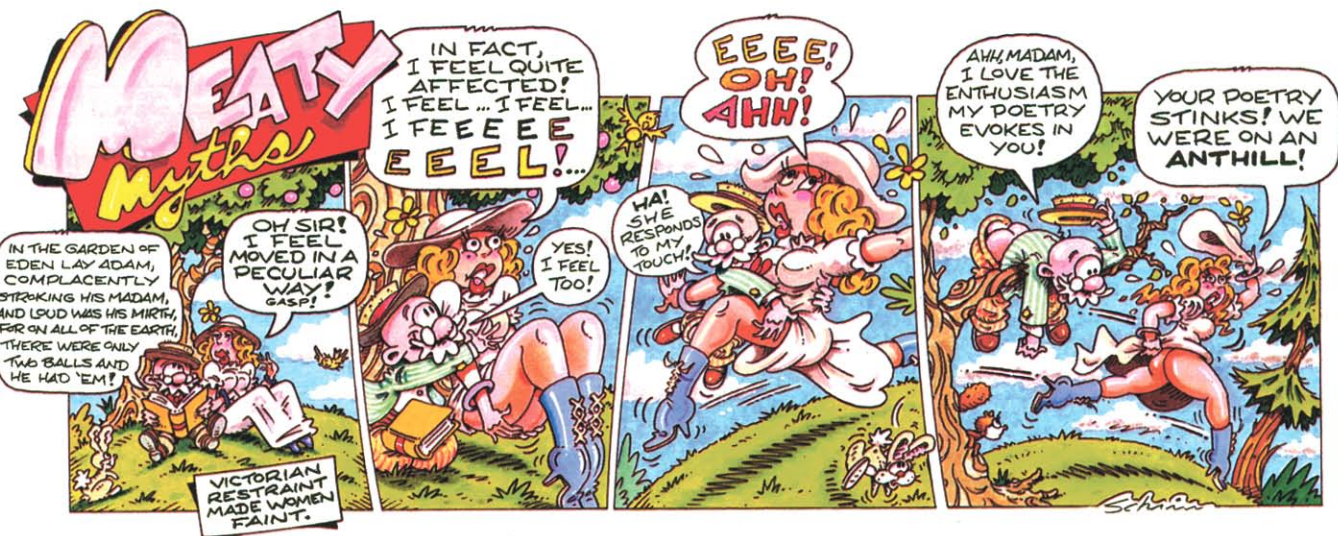
"Or how you ate Jewel," Jack says.

"Couldn't do it," Carol says. "Most of the world's not ready." That's why it's validating. "You know you're not alone. You know you're okay."

"It's being a part of a community in which everybody has these same values," Jack adds. "It's a culture; there's a lot of variety."

Only two of Carol's girlfriends know the truth about her sex life. Most of her

To understand the power of RedClouds, you need to surf the boards. While the focus is always on sex, the comments range from stupid and cruel to tender and kind, with an antic quality that feels like a digital Mardi Gras. But every so often, you see something startling, like the time a guy calling himself Rowdygator told everyone he was being shipped to Iraq and they should now write to him as Desertgator. He got dozens of responses. Vegaswife2 told him to stay safe and if he needed a pick-me-up, all the gals would post for him. Flattop entertained him with some old Army wisdom: "If you see a bomb technician running, try to keep up with him." And LongisIndtat2cpl gave him something to look forward to: "Hurry up and get back so we can get together."



old friends are what she calls "vanilla friends," and she knows they couldn't handle it. Her online friends, however, know everything. But please don't misunderstand, Carol and Jack say. People are not as simple as they seem. To truly know someone, you have to go through many layers, and that would take more than one conversation.

"We're spiritual," Carol says. "We believe in God."

RICHARDSON: Tell me about these RC parties.

GEEZ: First one was very intimate, maybe 15 people. Second one was a party on Valentine's Day in Michigan. Must have been 30 couples and another 20 single guys, hopping—LOL.

RICHARDSON: Was it scary?

GEEZ: Hell, yes. It scared the crap out of both of us.

RICHARDSON: Did she get hit on?

GEEZ: One guy kept asking her to go to his room.

RICHARDSON: And what happened?

GEEZ: Just some titty flashing.

RICHARDSON: What were the people like?

GEEZ: All very nice, but there's always behind-the-scenes drama. We saw some husbands go off with others' wives and some significant others waiting around.

RICHARDSON:

RICHARDSON:

GEEZ: Distracted?

RICHARDSON: My wife must get a pair of boy shorts!

GEEZ: LOL.

RICHARDSON: Whose idea was it to show her face?

GEEZ: Hers.

RICHARDSON: Why, Mrs. Geez?

GEEZ: She thinks it turns them on more if the face is showing.

RICHARDSON: So it's important to turn them on?

GEEZ: That's the point: being a teaser and a pleaser. Giving guys what they want within limits.

RICHARDSON: So what's underneath it all? A desperate need for affirmation? Or is she just a good-time gal?

GEEZ: A good-time gal.

RICHARDSON: That's not how the church lady would interpret it.

GEEZ: She says the church ladies do it behind closed doors. She does it out in the open.

RICHARDSON: So what's your next border to cross?

GEEZ: That would probably be swinging, but we're both cautious about crossing that one.

RICHARDSON: Why?

GEEZ: Because people can develop attachments.

RICHARDSON: Got anybody in mind?

GEEZ: No, but a few people have their sights set on us!

Of course, most people on RedClouds aren't sexual revolutionaries will-

before he got married, but he swears he has been faithful. When he stumbled across RedClouds, he asked his wife for permission to sign up. "She said, 'Fine, whatever keeps you happy,'" he says.

His job is boring, watching gauges go up and down for eight hours, so he probably puts a couple of hours a day into RedClouds. As of this writing, he has posted exactly 40,078 comments in the past four years. "You get to know the girls," he says. "They know what I like. I like girls' butts. So if I'm on, they'll post pictures of their butts for me."

He has about 30 favorites. "One gal from India, Indiagal, is on the Explicit Board between 10 A.M. and 11 A.M., four days a week. She strips, and her husband

takes pictures. She'll do that for an hour, then say good-bye." He also follows Ramses and Flame, a couple that runs some RC parties in the Midwest. Every day, Ramses runs a different thread: Moon Me Monday, Topless Tuesday, Thong Thursday, that kind of thing.

Fred and ginger have amazing threads too. Ginger will do a whole act. "Today they did a blow job where he came over her chest," Larry explains.

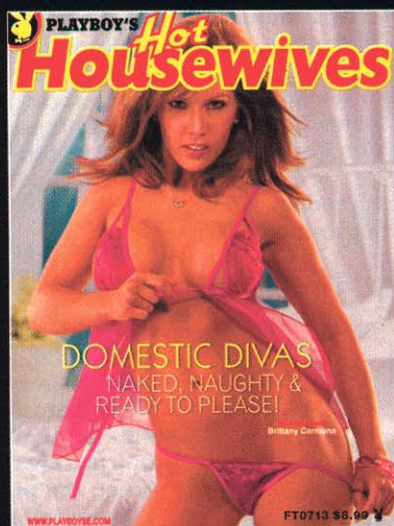
And Justjill. And Sukdesan. And Hottielori. And Farmerbob and his wife, Pussycat. And Ahkatja, a woman from Germany. And Agirlfromaustin and Bostonhoney. He has saved thousands of their pictures. And let's not forget the "hot black chicks," like SBC and Oreo. He's not

that into hard-core stuff, and he never goes to the gay or fetish boards. "If there's a dick in it, I don't save it. If I know it's peeing, I don't even open the thread," he says. But there's no doubt RedClouds has changed him, because none of that offends him anymore. "That's the whole thing: You don't have to look at it."

He sees no conflict with his church. "This is my private life," he says. "The good Lord knows what I'm doing. I do my duty, as far as I can see it. This is my private time."

Larry has no sympathy for the racists who go on the boards to say nasty things about the interracial pictures. "If the gal likes a black cock, what's the difference?" 127

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ing to broadcast their most intimate moments to the world. A number of them are probably like Larry, who is 62, lives in the Midwest and works as a boiler operator. Larry has been married for 32 years and has three grown children. He's in a bowling league. He has never done drugs, and he quit drinking almost 30 years ago. He goes to church every Sunday. He still has a 32-inch waist and most of his hair. A few years ago, the kids got him a computer so he could e-mail them. They sent jokes back and forth, then he got sick and spent a lot of time surfing the Internet. He had always liked looking at girls. He had a few one-night stands

he asks. "What does that do to me? As long as it doesn't affect me, have a party."

To get the full RedClouds experience, I try posting a few pictures myself. It feels like stepping to the edge of a high cliff: simultaneously thrilling and sickening. You kick a few pebbles over, watch them fall and imagine yourself falling after them.

But you don't fall, and the sickening feeling goes away.

Maybe your head swims a little. Maybe you feel as if you're floating.

This is what some people don't understand about pornography. It can be a form of assault or an act of the most grimy literalism, but it can also be a gesture of hope, an act of the imagination, a way of testing boundaries or a way of following the crumbs out of the forest. It can be a modern version of the radical innocence D.H. Lawrence imagines in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: "I believe that if men could fuck with warm hearts and women took it warm-heartedly, everything would be all right." And this new confessional amateur pornography born of the Internet is popular for the same reason: memoirs and reality television are popular. It takes at least some power back from the people who make movies, TV and advertising. In *Empire of Signs*, cultural critic Roland Barthes notes how repression drives sex into everything: Cars are sex, beer is sex, clothes are sex.

Actual sex, however, doesn't feel natural anymore; it is completely denied in our daily lives, so we don't even notice the enormity of its absence. It bears emphasis: We never see people fucking in public like other animals. It's an immense wall between ourselves and the world. We worry about exposing our children to sex, but we never consider that we hurt them by not exposing them to sex, by exposing them to its absence and the conspiracy of silence. RedClouds came along and pulled down the zipper of a very modern paradox. Within the safety of its ones and zeros, the most advanced technological medium in history has given us a chance to act like animals again.

RICHARDSON: Listen, guys, this has been fun. Talk about border crossing. I've never done anything like this before, for sure.

GEEZ: Yeah. It's almost 11 P.M. here, and the missus is about to hit the hay.

RICHARDSON: I'm impressed with myself for asking questions with Mrs. Geez rolling around on that sheepskin. And I really appreciate your honesty and general good vibes.

GEEZ: Hard to not have good vibes with the love of your life sitting around naked all evening.

RICHARDSON: Good night. Sweet dreams.

GEEZ: You too.

