

1-1-2004

Animal House

Josef Benson

Follow this and additional works at: http://digital.usfsp.edu/npml_outreach_advancement



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Benson, Josef, "Animal House" (2004). *Outreach: Society for Advancement of Poynter Library*. 16.
http://digital.usfsp.edu/npml_outreach_advancement/16

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the Library Outreach at Digital USFSP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Outreach: Society for Advancement of Poynter Library by an authorized administrator of Digital USFSP.

Animal House

by Josef Benson

The first time I successfully masturbated was just after my step-dad's brother Devin's funeral. People had brought over roast beef and vegetable trays with dip and cakes and pop and cheese and cracker trays. My mother wore a black skirt and a gray and black sweater and Larry, my step-dad, wore a black sweater and gray slacks over his bulging frame. It was quiet around the house and now and again I could hear a bit of laughter but generally just the hushed murmur of idle conversation. I was thirteen and downstairs watching Animal House. It was that scene when Belushi is climbing the ladder up to the girl's window and he sees her put her hand down her pants. I paused the VCR right as the girl's hand slid down her belly and went into the bathroom. I really didn't know what I was looking for but I picked up a can of shaving cream and sprayed a dollop in the palm of my hand. I went back to the couch and it wasn't long before I figured it out. I felt a thrilling sense of discovery and guilt and quickly looked out the window and cleaned the couch and rid the scene of any evidence, then let the movie play.

It was my first funeral. Devin was only twenty-five. Heart failure did him in. He was thin and never had a hair out of place and was good looking. During the eulogy the pastor listed quite eloquently that he loved his bike, his brother, his boy, and booze, not necessarily in that order. I always figured funerals were more solemn but this guy had this whole theme of B's going and seemed to be having a good time.

Larry was never the same after Devin died. I remember my mother telling me once that he was afraid to love anything because it always

seemed to die. Whenever Bridge Over Troubled Water by Simon and Garfunkle came on the radio in the car everything would get real quiet and sometimes Larry would change the station but other times he would let it play, us boys silent and the song playing softly. Apparently his mother had told him before she died that every time he heard this song to remember her. I guess he did.

Larry coached us in little league baseball in those days so we would often, just the four of us, me, Larry, and my two older brothers, go out to some park and hit the ball around. On occasion Larry would get distracted and walk right out of left field and maybe wander toward a tree or some water and just stare off into space. We had no idea how to handle it but we all knew he was probably thinking of his mother or his brother. He had taut muscular calves that carried an enormous beer belly that protruded as if it had its own musculature. He had cropped pepper and salt colored hair and wore thick, black-rimmed glasses. He always seemed blustery and on the verge of blowing his stack. Just under his ears were bulges that seemed to pulsate whenever he talked. Whenever anyone would mention homosexuality he would throw up in his hand, roll down the window, if we were in the car, and sling the puke out the window in silence.

After my initial encounter with Animal House you could say I was obsessed. For the most part with the exception of baseball it was all I thought about. I used soap, liquid and bar, baby oil, lotion, syrup, spit, water, rawhide oil, whatever I could get my hands on. I did it in the bushes, on the toilet, in the shower, in bed, wherever. If I was home alone, look out. I was like old faithful, sometimes six times a day. One night I used some cheap generic hand soap and when I woke my fella was as scaly as a glazed doughnut. I thought, oh no, I've gone too far. It's going to erode for good. It was then I realized I

had to be a bit more selective with my lubricating agents. I healed after a few days but I was as scared as a young man could be up to that point, and it not be of the dark, or the boogie man.

During Devin's funeral Larry and my mother were the only two in the front row. My brothers and I stood a couple of rows back with Larry's Aunt Nat. Nat was a strong woman who lived with another woman and had once been a nun. She had short hair like a man and was kind of stooped over and chained smoked Newport Menthols. Her mate Lena was a retired gym teacher and had actually had Larry in her class when he was a boy. She was stalky and had bright obviously dyed, short, red hair. She always had a huge grin on her face and loved Perrier. Next to her was Liz who was Larry's niece from his estranged sister. She was apparently living with Aunt Nat and was a looker. She was nine and had the darkest hair of any girl I had ever seen. Her skin had a tint to it, not dark, just a tint, as if maybe her father was Cuban. I noticed her right away at the funeral and continued to look at her unwaveringly as the pastor stumbled through his wares.

There was one lady toward the back right corner who was sobbing uncontrollably. I never got a good look at her face because she always had a huge wad of neon blue Kleenex in front of it. Every now and again she would erupt and it was all we could do to keep from laughing though we wouldn't have in a million years.

I saw Liz whisper something into Aunt Nat's ear. She then let herself out of the pew toward the far walk way. I figured she was going to the restroom and decided to follow her. I told my brothers I had to take a leak and squeezed my way to the same walkway carpeted in bright red velvet. I walked out of the main room and into a foyer with white and gray marble rock floors and found the restrooms. I waited for her to come out. I noticed a confessional as well and pulled the

door toward me to see if it was open and it was. I looked inside and it was dark but plush with the same color red as there was on the floors in the main church. I could hear the pastor carrying on about Devin's motorbike and looked in on the congregation and caught the menacing eye of Larry as he rubbernecked back to where I was. I heard the door gently creak and turned around and saw Liz looking at me.

"What are you doing back here?" she said.

"I got bored," I said, looking around as if I'd been looking for something the whole time.

"We're going to get into trouble," she said.

"No we aren't. Hey," I said. "You know what that is don't you?" I pointed toward the door to the confessional.

"No."

"That's a confessional. It's where people go to tell on themselves to God for all the bad things they've done."

Liz raced over and flung open the door. Once inside we nestled up close to one another and let our eyes adjust to the dark. I told her, "the square box usually opens and a voice comes ringing into the room and says go ahead my son, and you're supposed to say bless me father for I have sinned it's been however long since my last confession."

"How long has it been?" she said.

"I did it last month," I told her.

"What did you say?"

"The usual, fought with my brothers three times, swore three times, lied once. You get like three hail Marys and two our fathers and that's that. Gets you out of class."

There was a lull in the conversation I later would come to recognize as that familiar uncomfortable silence, and the pressure of

the moment began to weigh on me. I also thought the pastor was probably about through. I looked at Liz and grabbed her hand, unzipped my trousers and put her hand upon myself. She was not bashful and for a second it seemed as though she thought this was all part of the confessional process. As if in order to confess, one needed something to confess. She probed around for what seemed like an eternity and my mind was lost in a myriad of iconic statues and razor sharp sensations. She clutched and I grew, as if sprouting up into the great heavens like Jack and the bean stock, rising through the clouds, disappearing into the stratosphere and I began to hear myself breathe and then a crack of light whipped through the room and faces peered in at me that I'd long forgotten.

Larry and Aunt Nat looked in at us and Liz's hand was well away from my open zipper and the scene flashed before my eyes and it seemed clean enough.

"You two get out of there," Nat said in her cigarette voice.

Larry looked at me as if I had just told a joke and he didn't know whether he should laugh or scold me for telling it.

Liz and I unfolded out of the confessional into the cold light of the church and the gold and red and the smell of cleanliness hit my nostrils and my eyes with the assault of a siren. My brothers were nowhere to be found and I was happy for this. I caught a glance of my mother and she wore a scowl that told me that I'd gone too far this time and that I was in for an unprecedented punishment. Nothing mattered to me though. I was flying high and the world seemed extremely interesting to me as if I was in a movie theater and every frame was a promise of the next. Liz was swept away by her two husky captors and I followed my mother.

I was ushered into the hearse for the drive to the burial ground lodged between Larry and my mother. Larry peered out the window, the bulges under his temples pulsating to the rhythms of his ailing heart. I figured he was thinking of his brother and perhaps his mother and perhaps all those who had died before him and I wondered if somehow he was thinking about all the secrets he had in his life and all the things he had done wrong, or maybe he was thinking about me and how I had disrespected his brother.

I had to sit in the hearse during the whole burial. I tried to find Liz in the crowd shuffling toward a little outdoor tent but I couldn't find her. I watched the wind blow the stark branches of the trees. I felt close to Liz, a sort of fugitive bond.

After the burial the hearse drove us back to the church and Larry and my mother and I drove home quickly to prepare for the guests. I wondered where my brothers were but was too afraid to ask.

"Just so you know," Larry said in a tone I could not place. "Liz is not coming over."

When we were home I was told to go downstairs and stay there and try not to embarrass the family again. My mother told me after everyone left her and Larry were going to have a major talk with me about what had happened at the funeral. "Maybe you would rather live with your father," she said. So I went downstairs and popped in Animal House and thought about Liz.