

THE TATTOO

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Terryville teen pens book on high school life

By JOE KEO
The Tattoo

Forget reading a novel for homework and writing an in-depth analysis of it the next class. Stefan Koski went much further – he wrote his own.

While other teens his age might have trouble finishing a book, never mind writing one, the 17-year-old Terryville High School senior sat down and wrote *Miscellaneous Philosophy: The Underclassmen Years*, a self-published book dedicated to satirizing his school.

"This book was an idea I had my freshmen year," said Koski, a *Tattoo* staff writer. For five months straight, Koski mustered up his memories and scribbled his thoughts every day until the very last

period on the very last page.

Then, he got it into print. After initial opposition from his parents, months of jotting down his experiences at school, and a struggle to find a willing publisher, Koski found safe harbor in Hats Off, an independent publishing company in Arizona.

Despite the difficulties, Koski had a mission in mind, and that was to present a "real human story" that would reach out to his peers and maybe a broader audience.

The book reflects on Koski's experiences as a student at Terryville High. Though the events he faced were localized, the lessons and discoveries he derived from them were written in a humorous, sarcastic, and witty enough way to make any teenage high school student laugh and read on.

Koski sums up his attitude brought forth by his book by saying that there's "nothing glamorous" or "spectacular about being in high school." His days walking the halls of Terryville didn't provide him with any "glory days of youth."

Despite Koski's personal take on his experiences, he playfully touched upon such controversial issues as suicide, drugs, lack of culture, and lack of diversity that threatens his school. From Koski's perspective, all of these issues plague Terryville High's classrooms, staircases, students and teachers.

In publishing the book and making it widely available, Koski wanted to prove to the world that there's something wrong at Terryville High and that he's not insane for believ-



Tattoo photo

Stefan Koski

ing that there is.

"Pharmaceutical tendencies" was among the interesting and questionable activities that linger in the hallways, bathroom stalls of the high school, and pages of his book.

It boggles and bothers Koski

to point where he asks himself, "Are there other high schools that are normal or is everyone having random sex, using drugs, and committing suicide?"

Who wouldn't want to find that out? It sounds like a crazy adventure waiting to be grabbed up in an instant.

While Koski continues to ponder the sad state of his school, he was able to say that overall the release of his book gave him a sense of "delayed gratification."

The writing process for the teen was grueling. He described it as a "love-hate relationship."

But to finally see the finished and polished product and hold it in his hand was a personal achievement for Koski.

Koski has more ideas rico-

cheting in his head, and his days as an author are just beginning. After the grinding process that forged his first work, "to finally get to this point" was "thrilling," he said.

Koski said he found the publishing company "committed to the vision" of his book. It is evident in the cover art, which depicts a blurry image of student walking aimlessly passing lockers and students.

Koski called the publisher's photo choice "a very connecting image" because the student in the picture could be anyone. That's the whole point of his book, to appeal to a wide audience with his portrayal of the reality of his world.

The book is available now on Amazon.com in the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, Japan, and here in the States.

Book excerpt: *Miscellaneous Philosophy: The Underclassman Years*

By Stefan Koski

From Chapter Four

Biology Class: My Old Arch-Nemesis

If you're not confused, you're not paying attention. –Tom Peters

I'm not saying that it's a boring class. Well, I am, but it's just that with all the other things that we have to deal with on a daily basis, it's nice to be able to space-out for once through something that's largely irrelevant. Or at least you try to. We have a biology teacher who is a little out there.

Good teacher, mind you. I just think that when God was handing out brains, our biology teacher got one that had a little label on it that said, "Do Not Use if Seal is Broken." And it was. And he did.

It does keep things interesting. Every now and then, you'll be dozing, trying to find a comfortable position at the impossibly uncomfortable desks. I had one of these old school desks left over from the sixties (as evidenced by the substandard workmanship) in the back of the room.

The seat was a bland, yum-yum yellow shade, and the legs curved down and around the basket. It was more or less a table mounted on top of a sled. The temptation to steal it and take it down a frozen, snow-covered hill was enormous.

(Unfortunately, someone else stole it before I got the chance. Possibly one of the janitors.) You're sitting back there, your eyes barely open, your head pressed against the side bar as you slouch down as far as possible. You're just at that point that you might fall asleep, and you hear the teacher say something like, "People! It's hard to kill a deer with a stick!" Okay, I'll bite – what is it that you're trying to teach?

You would be amazed as to how easy it is to fall asleep in that class. At no time was it easier than at the beginning of the year, when the heat of summer and the wearisome lecture of the day made for an unmitigated snooze-fest. "Fallasleepa-palooza," if you will. No matter how hot it was outside, it was forbidden to open the windows, so as to not let the hot air in. This, in our instructor's logic, kept the room cooler. How, then, did it become the most sweltering enclosure in the entire school? I'm not sure if this guy is familiar

with the theory of the greenhouse effect, but I think someone should enlighten him. The whole thing made drowsiness unavoidable. I remember sitting there in the back of the room on one such day, during fourth period. We weren't allowed to put our heads down on the desk, so I was doing my best to prop my head to the side on my right arm. In that position, the Sandman was more than happy to come over and slap me silly.

What felt like several hours later, I awoke from an otherworldly getaway. My first speculation was that, judging by what my senses told me, it was sixth period, and that this day was

lasting for several eons on end. I then noticed that I was considerably famished, and wondered to myself as to how I could have possibly forgotten to eat lunch during fifth. Then I looked at the clock. "Dammit! We're still here? We've been here forever!"

Two years of high school was all it took to mess up every aspect of my sleep cycle. At the same time, my dreams started becoming more realistic and reality started becoming more unreal. Yes, I will admit it. Call me crazy, but I'm having more and more difficulty distinguishing the difference between what's reality and what's not.

Who speaks for Generation Y?

By STEFAN KOSKI
The Tattoo

It's easy to take whatever the media says about Generation Y as being factual. But what do those who are part of Generation Y, the ones who are on the front lines of adolescence, have to say about America's youth culture?

Ned Vizzini and Marty Beckerman both had their first books published while they were still in their teen years. Free Spirit Publishing put out Vizzini's *Teen Angst? ... Nah!* when he was 19. At 17, Beckerman self-published *Death To All Cheerleaders*.

Both started writing for their local newspapers when they were 15 – Vizzini for the *New York Press*, Beckerman for the *Anchorage Daily News*. Both authors wrote about their adolescence. Both had their second books published in 2004, both of which are now being made into feature-length films, and both have announced that their third books will be released in 2006.

The two young writers seem to mirror each other, and in fact, each of their personal websites contain respectful praise for one another.

Yet the two are different in one key aspect: they stand at opposite ends of what they believe to be the true nature of Generation Y.

Beckerman's second book, *Generation S.L.U.T. (Sexually Liberated*

Urban Teens) A Brutal Feel-Up Session with Today's Sex-Crazed Adolescent Populace, argues that today's teenagers are becoming soulless, pleasure-seeking vessels, in part thanks to the media, divorce rates, and the feminist movement. Citing a study done by the Alan Guttmacher Institute, he elates that 80 percent of 18-year-old American boys and 77 percent of 18-year-old American girls are non-virgins.

It also prominently cites the same study saying that 7,700 American teenagers lose their virginity every day. Though the statistic is intended to be shocking, it's not. According to U. S. Census numbers, 7,700 American kids per day amounts to less than a sixth of all U.S. teenagers annually.

Beckerman's autobiographical description on his personal website endows him with the title of "the 21-year-old spokesman for his doomed generation." He even goes so far as to quote Dante in the opening of his book: "Poet, by that God to you unknown, lead me this way ... and be my guide through the sad halls of hell."

Vizzini does not take nearly as harsh a tone when talking about Generation Y. In his first book, Vizzini openly talks about being an 18-year-old virgin. Vizzini's personal website also recently

displayed a link to an article that cited The National Center for Health Statistics reporting a decrease in sexually active teenagers.

Writing for *The New York Times Magazine*, Vizzini states, "The media has presented adolescence as hell on earth – chock full of evil cliques (the cliques in grade school are worse), domineering parents, and profound decisions that will decide the rest of your life for you. Nah. Adolescence is a time to sit back, make some friends, make some money, and discover what you're good at."

This certainly doesn't sound like someone who is coming from an era of hopeless destitution that Beckerman claims is the reality of modern-day teenage life. Nonetheless, *New York Press* writer George Tabb called Vizzini "the definitive voice of his generation."

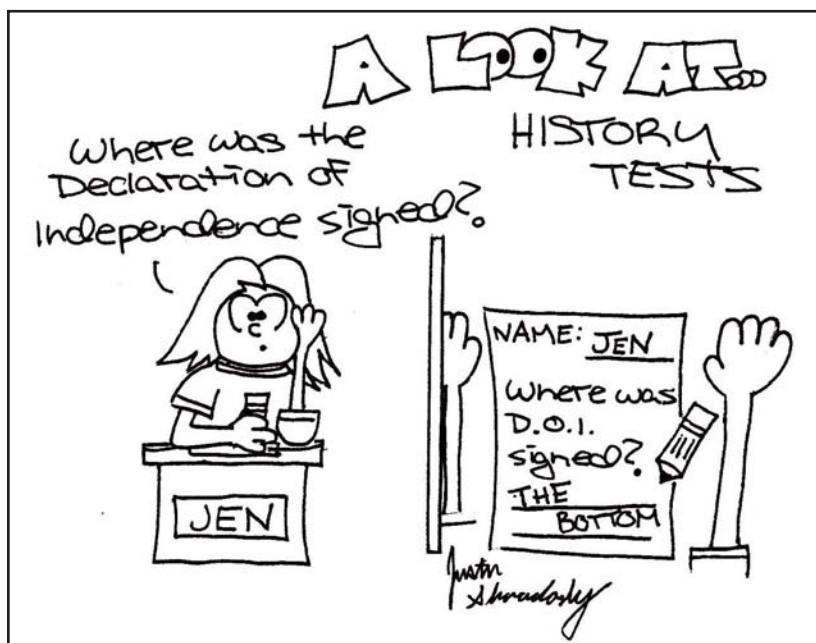
So who is correct when talking about today's youth: the spokesman of the generation or the voice of the generation?

To add to the already-blurred picture, none of these statistics coincide with a survey of 3,351 students ages 16-18 with at least a B average.

The "Who's Who Among High School Students' 26th Annual Survey of High Achievers" states that only 12 percent of these teenagers are non-virgins.

All of this begs the question of what's the truth behind Generation Y – something that not even its own people agree on.

What I say



Justin Skaradosky / The Tattoo

Author Beckerman makes his living with a bad attitude

By ZACH BROKENROPE
The Tattoo

Author Marty Beckerman, 22, has two published books and a third in the works.

Death to All Cheerleaders: One Adolescent Journalist's Cheerful Diatribe Against Teenage Plasticity, came out in 2000. *Generation S.L.U.T. (sexually liberated urban teens): A Brutal Feel-Up Session with Today's Sex-Crazed Adolescent Populace*, came out in 2004.

His third book, *Nation of Retards: America's Sexxxviest Young Journalist Exposes the Bastardly Forces Keeping You Stupid*, is due out next year.

Beckerman recently spoke with *The Tattoo*.

What initially inspired Generation S.L.U.T.?

Well, I wanted to write a really personal book and I kind of wanted to expand on the last chapter of the early book (*Death to All Cheerleaders*).

Towards the end of high school, I had all these friends who had problems and it just seemed like I couldn't find happy people, you know, it seems like everyone I knew at the time wasn't happy and that the whole idea of your high school years being the best time of your life wasn't true for so many people. Then I went to college and I met all these new people who were unhappy, too,

and then I made the connection between the fact that nobody really believed in love anymore.

They told me all these stories about their little 14- and 15-year-old siblings having sex and everything and that love didn't exist anymore. People would use the classic excuse of "I don't get emotionally attached because I don't want to be emotionally hurt."

So that's what why I wrote it.

Do you think the quotes and statistics in your book represent the state of American teen culture as a whole?

Well, Mark Twain once said that there are three kinds of lies, "Lies, damn lies, and statistics."

You see, I could've written a book with less sex, but that's not reality. There are two ways to write a book about a generation – journalistic or fiction – in *Generation S.L.U.T.* I used both, which isn't very common. But yeah, I mean, some of the statistics in the book were wrong, but in later editions they'll be taken out, but when numbers overlap in research it's a pretty sure thing.

See, the thing about statistics is you have to use them, but you can't always believe them.

What really bugs me though

is when 40-year-olds tell me the book is inaccurate. I mean, I wrote this book when I was 18, 19, 20 and I experienced it. I know what is going on.

Has your book been banned in any schools?

I've heard it was confiscated in a few schools, but the book has a pretty conservative message and I think most people don't realize that. They think it's about kids having sex, which it kinda is, but it's really

about love and not just kids having anonymous sex every day of the week.

It's about stepping back and criticizing sexual liberation. Parents really should like that message despite the graphic sex scenes.

Do adults respond well to Generation S.L.U.T.?

Adults really don't like the book but the people that give me the best feedback are teenagers, but that's who I

wrote it for. I don't really care as long as teenagers are reading it. I think real teens get what I'm saying, which is that teen sex is inevitable. It happened less in the past but it still happened.

You published your first book, *Death to All Cheerleaders*, at a pretty young age. Has that impacted your life greatly?

I think publishing it then was one of the best career

'S.L.U.T.' not based on truth

By ZACH BROKENROPE
The Tattoo

It's not often a reader comes by a book that truly defines a generation in realistic and vibrant writing. If being able to identify with this generation of teenagers is what you're looking for, continue looking, because you won't find it in *Generation S.L.U.T.*

Author Marty Beckerman's second attempt at wooing the lucrative teen market fails miserably.

Expanding on the last chapter of his previous – and far superior book – *Death to All Cheerleaders*, the now twenty-something Beckerman attempts to present the average American teenager as a giant sex machine, often stating "facts" he has since retracted and admitted were fraudulent.

The book itself is comprised of short quotes from anonymous teenagers across the country who detail their sexual exploits, which may or may not be true. It interlaces short narratives (such as one detailing the author's prom date with a hooker) and a novella penned by Beckerman.

The novella itself is an interesting concept, detailing the lives

Reading between the lines

of several teenagers during the course of a single week and how they interact with the world around them.

In the end, however, Beckerman's sophomore writing fails to deliver a believable portrayal of the world he attempts to create, leaving the reader feeling like they're viewing a soap opera.

Beckerman should be commended for making an honest attempt to portray the teenage world; but it's just too bad it's not reality.

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