

# Our Town

[snip] **Not to mention the work incentive for the heirs.** From Fareed Zakaria, at msnbc.com: "If Congress did not make permanent just one of its tax cuts, the repeal of estate taxes, it would generate \$290 billion over the next decade. That itself pays for most of Katrina and Iraq." —Harold Henderson | hhenderson@chicagoreader.com

## Continuing Education

### Beyond the Bitch Shield

*At Approach Camp it's all about self-improvement.*

By Anne Ford

It was one o'clock Sunday morning, and the six tipsy Trixies giggling in a Lincoln Park pizza joint really, really wanted to get into Jason's pants. Sort of. They were on a bachelorette party scavenger hunt, and this stolid guy who'd come over to hit on them seemed like their best bet. "Give us your goddamn underwear!" one screeched. "When, if ever, have you had six hot girls ask for your underwear?" He protested, but he didn't walk away—after all, he'd flown in from Florida and paid \$1,495 to get into situations just like this.

Jason was one of four men enrolled in Approach Camp, a four-day seminar in which men learn how to pick up women under the tutelage of dating coaches Ron Louis and David Copeland. Jason's fellow campers (their names have been changed) were Tom, a 42-year-old divorcee from Indianapolis; Andrew, a good-looking 46-year-old man from Baltimore who recently divorced his high school sweetheart; and gentle, quiet Jack, who came all the way from Dublin after reading about the seminar on Louis and Copeland's Web site, howtosucceedwithwomen.com. This is the second time Jack has flown to the States to attend the camp. He's 51 and says he's never even had a girlfriend.

The seminar's home base was a penthouse in the Gold Coast's Sutton Place Hotel. The men sat in the living room drinking bottled water and taking notes while Louis and Copeland talked. "What are the ways that you are boring around women?" Louis asked. He wrote down their answers: not having enough to say, showing off, bullshitting. It all boils down to not engaging women in subjects



Dating coach Ron Louis, Jack, note to self: Fuck it



JIM NEWBERRY

you're actually interested in, he said: "I can't express who I really am or she'll think I'm a douche bag."

When approaching a woman, he continued, "you've got to come up with something you're curious about. What are you really thinking about when you're talking to her?"

The guys fell silent. Finally someone piped up: "That chick's got some nice titties and they're poking out."

"We're not trying to make you into fuckheads here," Louis said.

Louis and Copeland, who live in Madison, have been teaching men how to behave around women since

1999. "We have guys who get slapped or spit on or drinks thrown on them," says Louis. He believes that usually when women get angry, it's because guys have overcompensated for their timidity. "They'll say this really over-the-top stuff like 'I'd like to fuck you' because they don't know what the middle line is. Guys are so used to being a wimp that they don't know how to just be normal."

The gig grew out of their 1998 book *How to Succeed With Women*, which has sold more than 200,000 copies worldwide. "You remember that book *The Rules*?" Louis asks.

"We were reading that and thinking, 'This is ridiculous. Someone should teach this for guys.'" Their only qualifications: they were ordinary men who had done a lot of dating and figured out how to improve their odds. (Louis has a steady girlfriend; Copeland's still playing the field.)

Other products followed: *How to Succeed With Men* (their only book for women), the audio courses *The Mastery Program* and *Overcoming the Nice Guy Syndrome*, *The Internet Seduction Toolkit* (an e-book), *The Pocket Idiot's Guide to the*

continued on page 16

**THE POETRY CENTER OF CHICAGO**  
PRESENTS  
**AMERICAN POETS READING**  
**BROWN MONSON WEHLE**  
FREE EVENT  
**WEDNESDAY OCT. 26 6:30 P.M.**  
112 S. MICHIGAN - THE SAIC BALLROOM SAIC

## Want a month in Korea? Dial Rotary:

The Chicago-area Rotary (District 6450) seeks candidates who wish to travel and exchange ideas in Korea for four weeks (April 22-May20, 2006 in country).

This program fosters international understanding by acquainting young professionals with another culture.

We will select four team members who are *not* Rotarians and one Rotarian team leader. Rotary covers travel, housing, food, and tour costs. Applicants must 1) be a U.S. citizen; 2) be 25-40 years old; and 3) have been in a profession for at least two years. On return, the participants must contribute as cultural "ambassadors" by giving talks to groups interested in the experience. Some knowledge of Korea is helpful.

Contact: Richard Ziegfeld—815-370-1395; richardziegfeld@hotmail.com

**Application Deadline:** November 5, 2005

**Interviews:** Candidates must be available for interviews and a separate social event the week of November 15-18.

## Our Town

continued from page 14

*Kama Sutra*, and “The Portable Seducer,” an electronic coaching program for Palm Pilots. They now lead 12 to 20 seminars a year—their first overseas is scheduled for next spring in London—and say they often receive wedding photos from grateful former students.

Public awareness of the so-called seduction community—guys who give other guys tips on picking up women—took an uptick this year with the publication of *The Game*:

**Louis detests the mind-set Neil Strauss captured in *The Game*: “It’s based on using scripted patterns instead of enjoying relating to women. That may work to an extent, but you’re not going to feel like there’s anything authentic about it. You might as well be having sex with prostitutes.”**

*Penetrating the Secret Society of Pickup Artists*. Rock critic Neil Strauss reinvented himself as a master seducer named Style, spending two years luring LA club girls into bed with rote pickup routines and making observations such as “Every woman I met seemed disposable and replaceable.” Strauss and the other pickup artists in *The Game* make liberal use of terms Louis and Copeland avoid, such as *HB* (“hot babe”) and *bitch shield* (the frosty demeanor some women adopt to head off unwanted attention).

Louis detests the mind-set Strauss captured: “I think that one thing that messes guys up is to read stuff like *The Game*. It’s based on using scripted patterns instead of enjoying relating to women. That may work to an extent, but you’re not going to feel like there’s anything authentic about it. You might as well be having sex with prostitutes.” He and Copeland call their approach “stealth personal growth”: by gaining the self-respect necessary to succeed with women, they say, their students end up improving their lives in general.

On Thursday afternoon the Chicago group made for Michigan Avenue to practice “daytime approaches.” The goal wasn’t to get a phone number or even have an extended conversation; it was to get comfortable talking to random women. Each man was supposed to choose a tactic for the afternoon,

such as asking women for restaurant recommendations. What was Tom’s strategy? “Shock and awe, man,” he said, grinning.

After a two-hour break, the guys gathered in the penthouse again to prepare for “evening approaches.” Louis took a black marker and wrote the letters *FI* on each man’s hand. It stands for “Fuck It,” as in “I don’t know if I should go talk to that woman . . . fuck it! I’m just going to do it!” Before heading out, some of the guys chose props to serve as conversational aids—cowboy hats and Mardi Gras beads.

Tom went up to a woman at a sidewalk table and asked her opinion of his hat and beads. (She told him to lose the beads.) “She gave me a sucker!” he reported to Copeland, who said cheerfully, “Well, that’s something.” Across the street outside Tavern on Rush, Andrew was demonstrating magic tricks for a group of giggly twentysomething women who seemed to be buying his shtick; they ended up posing for a photo with him. Meanwhile Jack hovered nearby on the sidewalk, sweating bullets.

Shy as Jack was, Louis said, he was doing better than he had at the first seminar of theirs he’d attended a year ago: “You should have seen him when I first started working with him.” He conceded that bars weren’t Jack’s natural environment, and that he’d do better in a bookstore.

But on Saturday afternoon Jack surprised everyone with an e-mail address he’d gotten from a woman in a bar the night before. “As soon as she found out I was Irish, she sat right down with me,” he said shyly.

“And this chick was hot,” Tom added. “She was a nine, probably. No bra on.”

“It’s like a moment of fucking Zen or something,” Louis said.

In the same bar the night before, Jason was complimented on his eyes, but the woman turned out to be dating the bartender. Meanwhile, he reported, he had a new theory: “If they think you’re gay, the bitch shield drops down and they try to be nice to you.” The other guys looked dubious.

It was time to get their energy up. Louis turned up the music on the suite’s stereo and everyone stood in a circle, shouting to each other:

“Hey, you want to go home and fuck?”

“Not with you, man! I’ll take your girlfriend home!”

“What’s with the belt buckle, man? You look fucking gay with that!”

“That’s the idea!”

Saturday’s daytime approach site was Bloomingdale’s. Almost at once Jack went up to a young, hip-looking woman. After a few minutes he went on to another woman a few feet away. A few minutes later he approached a third. “Look at this, guys!” Louis said. “Holy shit. He’s on a fucking roll, man.”

But that night before the group hit the bars, Jack seemed to retreat a bit. Louis looked at him. “I don’t want you fucking up the group ‘cause you’re totally pussing out. I’d way rather have you come out. You’re a fun guy. But if you’re gonna puss out, you can’t come. Are you gonna fucking push it or not?” Jack nodded.

At the first place they hit, Jason

## Boutique of the Week



MIREYA ACERTO

## Exhibit

**H**eather Ronkoske belongs to the “just do it” school of business: in June she opened her boutique, Exhibit, despite having no previous experience in retail. “I signed the lease in the middle of April, flew to LA, and just hit the showrooms,” she says. “I had no idea what I was doing.” The leap of faith extended to her choice of location: a storefront on Lincoln Avenue, a street known more for secondhand stores and bars than boutiques. But so far it’s worked out: neighborhood moms, hipsters, and dedicated shop hounds can all find something to their taste (and budget) in Ronkoske’s mix. Eschewing basics for pieces with distinctive, feminine details, she’s stocked the racks with fitted Artine wool jackets, embroidered and bejeweled cow-

boy shirts by Ratna, and silky printed kimono tops from To the Max. Jewelry clutters the counter, including Indian-inspired pieces from local line Mera Naam and quartz bracelets by Eye3 Designs. While fashion takes center stage, Ronkoske also exhibits paintings and photographs by local artists on the store’s acid green walls—most striking

are Colette Hudecek’s shadowy black-and-white prints of Barbie and Ken dolls—and there are monthly receptions to showcase new pieces.

The next one, featuring photographs by Gil Leora and paintings by Mandy Irwin, is this Saturday, October 22, from 6 to 10 PM; everything in the store will be 20 percent off. —Heather Kenny

### Exhibit

2961 N. Lincoln  
773-880-0448

panicked a bit. “I need to go back and make an outline of openers,” he said. But after someone in the group told him to take the straw out of his Diet Coke because it “looked gay,” he bounced back: “It looks gay? Then it’s staying in!”

Meanwhile the extroverted Jack was back. He talked for nearly an hour to a long-haired woman who smiled and laughed through the whole conversation. He asked her what she was doing the next day, and she said she was busy. Still, it was the longest conversation he’d had so far.

Louis took him aside. “If you were to think three days ago, I’m gonna be out at a bar and approach a pretty woman and talk to her for 45 minutes, would that have been OK with you?”

“I would have said, ‘That’s impossible,’” Jack answered.

“So what does that say about your capacity to change?”

“It’s there,” Jack said softly.

The group eventually ended up at the pizza place for food and debriefing. After several minutes of bargaining with the bachelorette party, Jason disappeared. Eventually he emerged from the bathroom and presented them with a pair of white briefs, to their disgust. One hollered, “You complained, you bitched, you moaned, and now you come out and you were wearing tighties?” Still, they made the bride-to-be give him her garter in exchange. He stuffed it in his pocket and came back to the table, where the other guys were regarding him with a mixture of shock and awe. “That was not a successful interaction,” he said. Then he reconsidered: “Well, I succeeded in grossing them out.” ■