

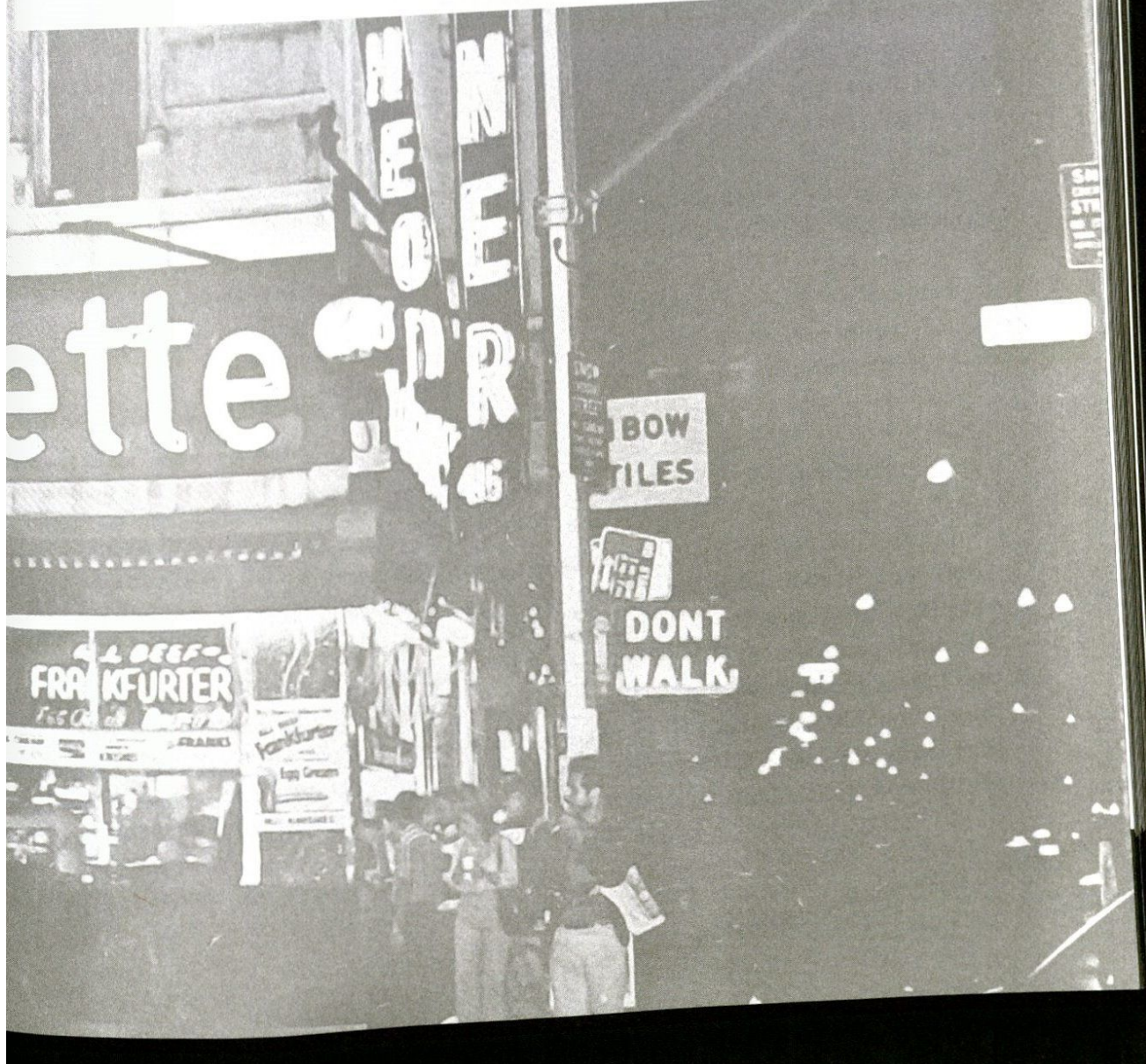
What's next is anyone's guess. The crowd around the door keeps getting bigger.

Deep breath.

Pour what's left of a Heineken down my throat.

Everything's fine.

At the club full-time, I'd occasionally arrive as early as 9 P.M. and finish as late as 6 the next morning; other nights I show up at 11, some nights trying to keep it midnight to 5. I'm supposedly off duty at 4 A.M. but it's still a full house and nobody's going anywhere, including me. The music's slowing down but everybody's still looking for that *something* they never find. Slow motion or hyperdrive, there's no middle ground; it's last-call desperate: romper room crazy, cigarette smoke mixed up in a liquor, cocaine and Quaalude haze. Another ten minutes, it's a spontaneous burn, the aftermath, but it's hard to leave. I look around one more time. *Where do I go now?*



Life Was Still That Simple

My before- and after-hours routine keeps changing. I'm moving away from the bars and clubs of Chelsea and the West Village. I'm stepping away from the trucks, the piers and a Meat Packing District that still packs meat. CBGB's on the Bowery and Max's on Park Avenue South are both going strong but they've become the places to go *before*.

At some point I have to eat, and One University Chinese Chance, Mickey Ruskin's social mecca, is the place to be. Familiar faces, a crowded bar with a jukebox and a well-lit dining room with Serious Art on the walls; the food fills you up but sometimes lets you down. Most important, the place has that feels-like-home thing going on—cutting enough slack for anyone to indulge in bad behavior when necessary. Everyone I know eats and drinks there and half of them find their way to White Street between 2 and 4 A.M. Most important, Mickey likes me and we've become friends.

Last resort: if I'm running late or just running, Dave's Luncheonette on the corner of Canal and Broadway is a food-on-the-fly kind of place. It's all about eggs or hot dogs for dinner—and more coffee please. Wash it down with an egg cream and I'm ready for work.

The other end of the night, another story, and there's no schedule or plan after 5 A.M. I'm guided thru the after-hours by instinct, drugs and sex. Going home to sleep and stepping out of the late-night/morning mindset is nearly impossible. Piling into a Checker Cab with Gary, Gretchen and future temporary Murray Street resident Teri Toye is fun—but hardly a safe bet. Still, a full-out A.M. club crawl was a weekend favorite.

Crisco Disco became the Sunday morning special and anyone who could keep up or willing to try was welcome. If you had coke or Quaaludes it was a plus and if you had a car it was even better. The ever-changing cast of characters might include a Pop, a Palenberg or a Pretender—famous, infamous or notorious—but mostly just us. Arrive at 7 A.M., get checked for weapons and leave by 11—four hours gone missing. The place was a slow-motion train wreck, lights flashing, lost in the fog. The vibe, if we still had a sense of one: past the point of no return. We'd hang in the DJ booth that sat perched on a giant can of Crisco, drink, dance and snort our way thru the morning. I'd take a break, have sex in the stairway and pass out in the VIP room. I'd wake up refreshed, order another drink and dance some more. I either thought I was unwinding after a

APRIL	
SUN	1 DANCE TO DAWN Club closed for private party until 12:30 a.m. Pajama Party postponed. After 12:30 there will be film clips and dancing with D-Jay.
SUN	8 JOE JACKSON Hot new A & M Recording star makes his New York debut.
MON	2 DANCE TO DAWN Dance til dawn. Film clips
MON	9 JOHN HASSEL Rhys Chatham presents an evening of experimental music.
TUES	3 NICO & JUDY NYLON Famed chanteuse Nico does songs of lost souls. Judy will do new performance piece centered around flesh and money.
TUES	10 DANCE TO DAWN Dance til dawn. Film clips.
WED	4 WILLIAM BURROUGHS & JOHN GIORNO Burroughs will read new unpublished work to an assemblage of appropriately attired Nova criminals. Admission by ticket only (\$5.00). Tickets on sale beginning April 1, at 6:00 P.M. Reading begins promptly at 9:00 P.M.
WED	11 MANDY MIAMI The female Brian Ferry.
THURS	5 (I wanna be your dog) RICHARD]HELL The lower East Side Jonny Ray will give the girls one last glimpse before returning to his European tour.
THURS	12 THE ANGELS One of the great teen romance girl groups. "My Boy Friend's Back." Think of your goose bumps when your boy friend peeled rubber in your driveway. Thrill to "Till" and "I Adore Him." The Angels recently appeared on Midnight Special.
FRI	6 DANCE TO DAWN Dance til dawn. Film Clips
FRI	13 DANCE TO DAWN Dance til dawn. Film Clips.
SAT	7 Le Dance Avec Le Deesk Shock-kee Dance til dawn. Film Clips
SAT	14 Le Dance Avec Le Deesk Shock-kee Dance til Dawn. Film Clips
APRIL	

Mudd Club Newsletter, April '79.

hard night at work or I wasn't thinking at all. Other than running fast and searching for some unknown, I'm not sure what I was doing.

Existing in the lost netherworld fade of reality, Crisco's was far removed from the energy of White Street. We eventually escaped, vertical but semi-comatose, and headed into the sunshine hustle bustle of Fifteenth Street and Tenth Avenue. The key to survival was a pair of sunglasses, cab fare and a cigarette. Life was still that simple—but also offered choices.

The Nursery on Third Avenue near Thirteenth Street was the easy alternative: equally reckless but more of a workingman's morning out. Sleep-deprived but unwilling to surrender, I barely remember arriving and have no memories of leaving. The first time I showed up there, a big guy named Big Mike turned to Joey Kelly and asked, "You know this guy?" A quick frisk later and I was in. Dim and dirty, red light and cigarette smoke spread out over a few floors, The Nursery was at once benign and scary. For some it was home, but for me it was someone else's home and most of the time I stayed too long.

New in town Krystie Keller worked nearby. She loved The Nursery and remembers Rolling Stones guitarist Ronnie Wood wandering around at 8 A.M. just like everybody else. An early-morning night out was always the great equalizer and the place seemed to suit everyone's need for excess. From Iggy to Belushi, Bowie and even Cher (innocently slumming with a new boyfriend), the hour and the vibe quickly diminished the pecking order. With a second floor dark enough to conceal any residual rock star wreckage, the club was safe harbor for acting out and passing out. Eyes half closed, I drifted around looking for drunken sex, cheap drugs and one more drink that was always the last. I played a slow-motion black-and-white Atari game—one of the very first, called Pong—and it hypnotized me. I got up and leaned against the wall of a tiny bathroom built for pissing and getting high, yet distinctly lacking the clubby feel of a Mudd Club toilet. I remember warm beer, cocaine and Mudd Club DJ David Azarch among the barely standing midmorning crowd. Along with off-duty bouncers and bartenders, a few Hells Angels and drug dealers running out of drugs, it was anyone riding the train to the last stop. The only place left to go was home or the curb.

Early morning or early evening, wherever I went didn't matter. My calling card became *I work the door at the Mudd Club*, now show me yours. It felt like a bit of a pickup line and it worked.

The Dark Ages

Never sure when it began, the morning appeared to end sometime tomorrow. Time itself seemed anxious, almost confused; trying to sleep and turning daylight into night was a challenge nearly perfected on Murray Street. I kept the steel shutters on the north-facing windows closed. The phone stayed unplugged until midafternoon or whenever I got out of bed. It was the Dark Ages: the days of limited technology, busy signals and jacked-in phones on long cords. There was no doorbell or intercom and if you wanted to stop by, you'd call from the payphone on the corner. Answering machines were around but I didn't have one, making it easy to avoid anyone who might ask "Are you working tonight?" If I wanted to talk, I'd plug in the phone, make the call and unplug it again. There was a system for everything.

Waking up well past late, I plugged in and called Sunny the pot dealer. She lived at 105 MacDougal Street above Panchito's Restaurant and we met when I lived on Bleecker. She sold decent pot at a fair price and sold subway slugs on the side. My friend Richard Sohl bought the slugs but I used real tokens and just went for the pot. Sunny was the best pot-dealing slug peddler in town.

I'd buy an ounce and leave MacDougal, duck into the West Fourth Street subway station and take any downtown train on the upstairs tracks to Chambers Street. I'd be home in ten minutes, roll a joint, put on a record and paint in the studio; I was serious about making art and still pretending I just worked late. Facing off with large sheets of paper on the wall of my studio, I'd start playing. Watching oils and acrylics resist one another, I moved in close with a rag or paint stick, never sure where I'd wind up. Loving the feel of paper, big beautiful pages, I'd start writing at the edges and across the middle: memories and lost thoughts, sometimes words, sometimes not.

I made believe I had a real day-and-night, light-and-dark existence. Never sure if it was time for breakfast or dinner, time to sleep or wake up, I just kept painting, tried to stay out of trouble and make it to White Street on time. It seemed to be working out fine.

Nova Criminals and the Remarkable Parade

Arriving at 11 P.M., I always found two or three people waiting but by 1 A.M. the crowd often surprised me. Strangers sometimes looked familiar while the faces I knew began to look like everyone else. Old friends and college friends occasionally showed up; there were even chance encounters with my suburban past. When a girl I knew in high school looked at me from across the chain, the only words she could manage were "Oh my God ... Richard?" Apparently, I wasn't the only one who didn't see it coming.

Friends, acquaintances and strangers—every night I witnessed a remarkable parade. Some were finding their way, some were ready to explode and a few already had. Waiting outside, lined up at the bar, drinking or *begging* for a drink, the faces changed but the parade marched on. When author Lynne Tillman arrived she stood next to me as we talked, and watched it go by.

A young, underappreciated Jean-Michel Basquiat "vandalized" the Mudd bathroom with his logo-like *SAMO Was Here* sloganized poetics. Tossed out the door, he came back every night. The SAMO stuff was all over neighborhood; the vandalism was debatable.

Artists Jeff Koons and Christopher Wool were part of the parade and the future, while musician Johnny Thunders was the hero lost, staggering toward the door. Cheetah Chrome was easy to like and if we had to throw him out, he'd apologize and get back in. Richard Lloyd (ex-Television) was still almost beautiful: he could pick up his guitar, turn up the volume and make it sing. Some of us kept listening; others looked away.

Artists and writers, drunk Punks and Punks on dope. Out of control, unavoidable, bandaged and lost—predictably, by 2 A.M. someone was always getting the bum's rush. I opened the chain and closed it behind them. I played diplomat depending on who was getting tossed and let them back in if they promised to behave. I thought it was the right thing to do.

Looking past lost, I stared into Cortlandt Alley. I thought about Wednesday, April 4, and a different kind of "Punks on dope." I'd been working the club just two weeks when Steve called me at home and asked me to come in early; I was eager and agreed. Writer Max Blagg had arranged for William S. Burroughs and poet John Giorno to do a reading that was set to start at 9 P.M. The Mudd newsletter anticipated a room filled with "appropriately attired Nova criminals," and negotiating a five-dollar cover charge with the I-never-



William S. Burroughs reading, Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky watching and listening, Mudd Club, 1979, by Marcia Resnick.

pay-to-come-in crowd was going to keep me busy. I waited outside, hand on the chain, ready for the challenge.

Burroughs wasn't known for his readings but was a legend for *Naked Lunch*, *Junkie*, *Wild Boys* and the *Nova Trilogy*. White Street was out of the way, nighttime desolate, the Mudd Club a dark set piece, weird and perfect. When Giorno finished there was an awkward moment and a minor tussle over who'd do the Burroughs introduction. Blagg had a hand in setting up the evening but author-biographer Victor Bockris got involved. Finally resolved, Max introduced William to the crowd.

Burroughs sat at a desk: gray metal, scratch-and-dent, office furniture salvage. The only thing missing was the typewriter. I remember his voice sounded proper but strange, like an old radio broadcast. He was wearing a three-piece suit, very considered and nearly impeccable. The PA hissed but Burroughs kept reading. I picked up my beer, moved closer and took a ride on the *Nova Express*.

The Burroughs reading by now seems long past but that strange voice still speaks. I'm outside working and the street's getting busy when a *Fuck you* gets lobbed in the direction of the door. Club regulars Hal and Roxanne ask "What was that?" as they step inside. I either say "Nothing" or say nothing and the remarkable parade continues.

I open the chain for painter and underground film star Duncan Hannah accompanied by Contortions model and *The Correct Sadist* author Terence Sellers. He's cool and calm on the surface and offers a quiet hello; she's chilly, offers nothing.

It's another few rounds of *nothing* until Spandex-clad porn star Sharon Mitchell arrives. Decades away from a second calling as Doctor Mitchell, the *Wanda Whips Wall Street* and *Load Warrior* actress shimmies her way thru the door with a wide-open smile and a deep throaty hello.

Art world fixture Christophe de Menil is already inside drinking and tipping heavily or maybe the other way around. She got out of a limo a half-hour ago calling "Mark, Mark!" as in Benecke, the Studio 54 doorman. Either her driver took a wrong turn or she thinks we all look alike.

By now the crowd is filling the sidewalk but I'm in no hurry to open the chain. We're just getting started. There's no end in sight.

"I'm a Friend of Steve"

When I first began working the door, 77 White was already becoming the only game in town. Studio 54 had a running start but by the spring of 1979, the Mudd Club was ascending. The seventies were winding down and Disco was becoming more of a cliché, a punch line or point of reference at best. Still, if you couldn't get into Mudd, you could always grab a cab and head back uptown.

Deciding who or what, yes or no; I still couldn't believe I was working the Mudd Club door. As for the crowd in front of me, you relate to some and deal with others. Starting with the basics, like *How many?* or *Hold on*, was simple enough. Telling someone *It's going to be a few minutes* gave people hope without getting them upset. *Sorry, I can't right now* only made things worse, and a bullhorn-like delivery of *The club is now closed* had little or no effect. Don't look them in the eye and don't engage, keep moving and don't turn your back, cut your losses and head inside—that's what Fridays and Saturdays were like. The rest of the week was a close second: some people pushed too hard, dropped names, offered business cards. Lots of people tried using the "I'm a friend of Steve" routine, which usually meant they weren't. Others mentioned names I'd never heard



The crowd outside, good kids, bad kids, 1980, by Nick Taylor.

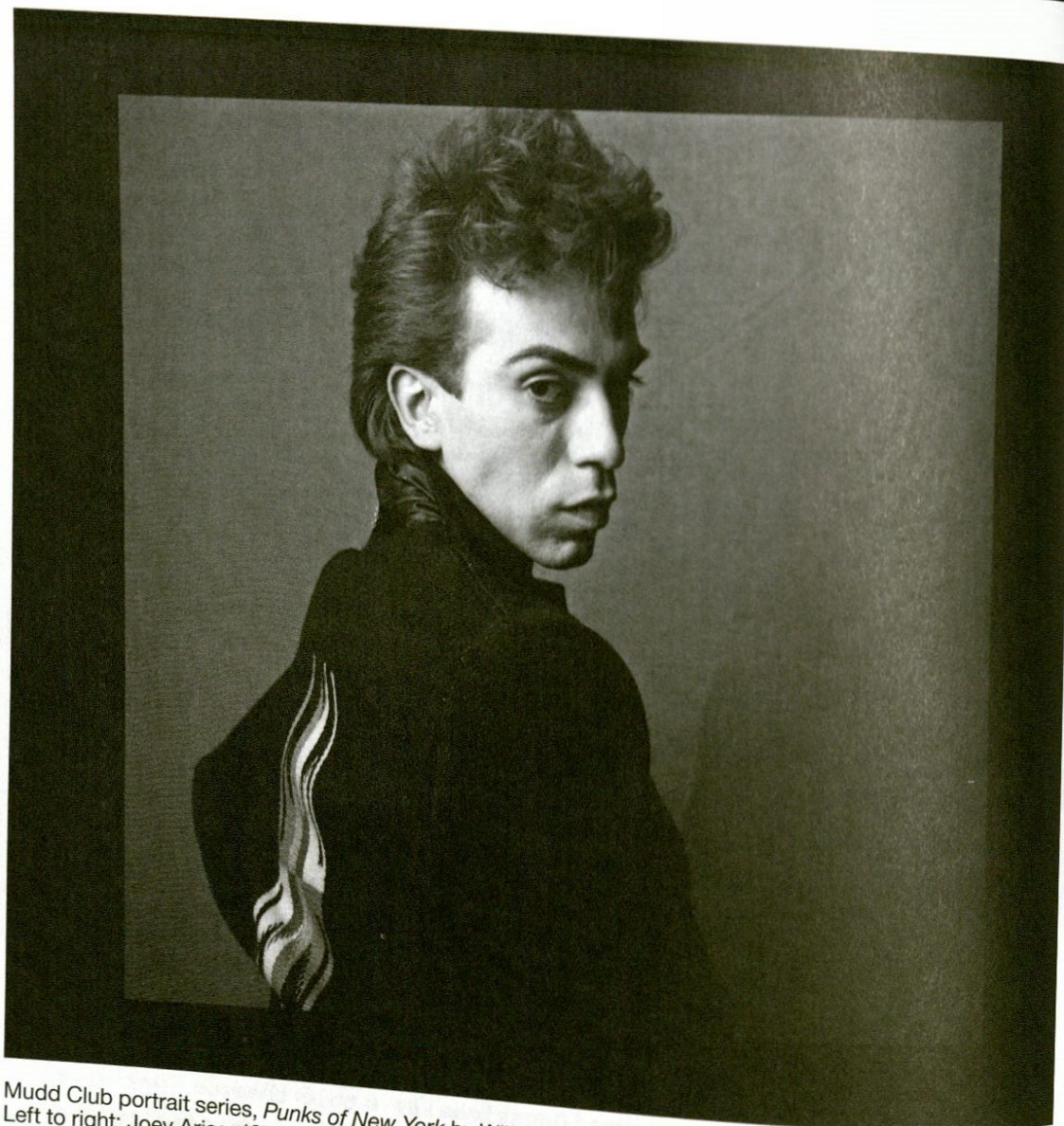
and a few even told me, "I'm a friend of Richard's." I smiled and told them, "Richard's off tonight."

In the end no one really cared about anything once they got inside. People who didn't get in went somewhere else, went home or threw something at me. Some stopped me on the street and wanted to know why I wouldn't let them in. Sometimes I ignored them and other times I told them I was sorry. Occasionally I told them to *fuck off*; once I went home and fucked one of them. That person came in the next time he showed up—but he paid five dollars.

I learned people are just people. Nothing is personal and a bad attitude is worth very little. It took a while but I learned.

Freaks and Beauties

New Yorkers, suburban kids and escapees from Middle America along with West Coast immigrants and a contingent of Europeans: those were the new faces showing up every night. Freaks and beauties, often one and the same, all wanted to get thru the door. I did my best to pass gentle judgment, occasionally wondering if I'd let my-



Mudd Club portrait series, *Punks of New York* by William Coupon.
Left to right: Joey Arias, 1979; Colette, 1979.

self in were the situation reversed. Sometimes I might have, other times, maybe not.

Some club regulars were difficult but a lot of them were easy; most I was happy to see. Self-proclaimed Queen of the Mudd, Tina L'Hotsky was a full-figured blonde in a cocktail dress. She was a feminist of sorts, a creative force in the spirit of White Street. Writer, actress and Mudd denizen Vicki Pedersen referred to her as a "great conceptualizer." A bigger-than-life Barbie doll (she once cooked a Barbie in a frying pan for her 1977 short film *Barbie*), Tina had Steve's ear. She was a star somewhere in the middle of the Mudd Club constellation, and the Crazy Spanish Girls, Cha Cha, and Joan Crawford Mother's Day parties wouldn't have happened without



her. I liked Tina, and she always stopped to say hello before heading to the bar. Not everyone was that easy.

Unsure if saying *hello* is part of the conversation, I only hear the question, "Who are you?" I try not to appear frightened and do my best to say, "I'm Richard; I just started working here." She rolls her eyes, takes another drag on her cigarette and starts telling me how things work.

Leisa Stroud was one of the first people I met the first night I worked the door. Short bleached hair and a tight party dress, a pair of heels and a pocketbook, Leisa wasn't shy about standing outside and making sure I knew the people I was supposed to know. She kept tabs on who was inside and always let me know who was important—to her.



This page: Leisa Stroud and pocketbook in a booth on the second floor, 1979, by Alan Kleinberg. Opposite: Tina L'Hotsky, 1980. *Hidden Identities* series by Marcus Leatherdale.



I'd watch Leisa work the room and it seemed she had Steve wrapped around her finger. Actor, artist and Lounge Lizard John Lurie even called her a *fucking tornado*—he meant it in a good way. In 1979, John was Leisa's boyfriend but he knew that everyone from Brian Eno to Larry Rivers to David Byrne was crazy about her.

Leisa was there from the beginning and deserves some credit for helping to turn the Mudd Club into the indelible madhouse it became. I deserve some credit for letting attitude and beauty pass for charm.

Portrait photographer William Coupon was well versed in beauties and freaks. He saw it at Studio 54, where he shot some "classy black and whites" on the sly. Truman Capote even suggested Coupon put to-

gether a photo book about Studio, visions far removed from *In Cold Blood's* "high plains of western Kansas." That idea ended quickly when 54 owner Steve Rubell got wind of it.

The Mudd Club was next and the photographer was ready. Coupon's first paid assignment: photograph the new place on White Street for *Interview* magazine. Three months later in February '79, he told Steve Mass he wanted to take more pictures and Steve was agreeable. He set himself up on the second floor of Mudd and over the next several weeks shot portraits of various Mudd Club regulars. He photographed Talking Head David Byrne dressed in pajamas and Walter Steding with violin in hand. Images of Joey Arias, Klaus Nomi, Tina L'Hotsky and Marcia Resnick were serious but playful and equally stylish. Coupon calls the Mudd portraits his "first in a long series of subcultures." Future stars, ghosts and survivors, their photos soon hung on the wall opposite the first-floor bar.

Don't Leave Yet

Back outside I stood at the chain and thought, *Oh no, not this one.* By the next night I was thinking, *I love this one.*

Abbijane was a fashion designer, a Mudd Club regular and a lover of Rock 'n' Roll. She came on strong, greeting me with a loud sustained *Hi* and a dose of genuine in-your-face enthusiasm. Her early fashion shows, staged at locations like the Forty-second Street Horn & Hardart Automat, were not-to-be-missed events. There was never any question of Abbijane coming in; the only question, when could I come in and dance?

I remembered Abbijane as one of the girls who screamed and jumped up and down in front of the stage at CBGB's for the band Milk 'n' Cookies. Hard to forget based on decibels alone, now she was screaming *Hold this!* and tossing her jacket at DJ David Azarch. The toss and scream became a mating ritual. Abbijane and David fell in love.

Abbi and I became friends at the Mudd Club and our friendship lasted thirty years. She was the first to wag her finger disapprovingly when I started spinning out of control. She told it, or more accurately, *screamed it* to me straight, "Stop what you're doing, I've seen it destroy too many people I care about." I didn't listen and we kept on dancing.



Klaus Nomi is looking at you, 1979, by Alan Kleinberg.

The last time I saw Abbijane I said "Good night" and gave her a kiss. She said "I can't believe you're leaving, don't leave yet."

Nomi, Nobody and Night School

It's difficult to remember if it was the same night I met Abbi, but the moment remains unforgettable. Regardless of who or what was passing thru the door it was hard not to stop and stare.

Operatic vocalist and performer Klaus Nomi crossed the street wearing a shiny, cropped jacket with a satin collar, looking like a cross between an intergalactic bellhop and a toy soldier. His hair was blue-black with a high widow's peak and twisted into a small point on top of his head. His skin was pale, his lips pursed and painted blackish red. He carried himself with a jittery grace and an understated sense of *politesse* (a funny little word I've heard Mick Jagger use). No one looked, sang or did anything like Nomi.

He soon wound up sardined in the center of a crowd that was backed up onto the street. I can still hear Joey Kelly yelling, "Klaus, get in here!" as he opened and closed the chain. It seemed

one minute Klaus was in the crowd, the next he was in the door and the moment in between disappeared. I looked around wondering if anyone else noticed but Joey was already busy and the disappearing moment came and went. Then I turned around and that weird blond-haired guy with horn-rimmed glasses was headed for the door.

Bob Williamson was the polar opposite of Klaus Nomi. A blend of middle-age prep school nerd and way too many Heinekens, he was the Lauren Hutton pseudo Svengali and the only guy who wore Topsiders to the Mudd Club. Bob was the person Steve Mass was listening to ramble on and on the night of my ten-second interview; he was at the club nearly every night—still talking when the sun came up. Even I listened to him drone about everything from the art scene and Public Image Ltd.'s *Metal Box* to the fuckable waitresses at One University Place. He was Zelig—here, there and everywhere. With a good hustle and a good eye he fooled anyone who took him seriously. Years later, people figured out he was nobody.

Bob stopped as I opened the chain. He asked how I was doing but I'm not sure I responded. That's when Francine arrived, squeezed my hand and said, "Hi doll." I smiled and said *ouch*.

Francine Hunter opened Jungle Red Studios on Desbrosses Street in 1977. The Mudd Club opened a year later six blocks away. She had her eye on White Street from the beginning.

Shortly after I started working at Mudd, Francine brought *Night School* to 77 White. It was an Invitation Only event, meaning only the people we let in, got in. For the high price of six dollars a person, Francine gave the crowd a "fashion performance to teach you a lesson." The ensemble cast featured Cookie Mueller, future Mudd employee Gennaro Palermo, photographer Nan Goldin and a host of desperate nightlife denizens hungry for fame. An over-the-top, under-the-radar smash, the show was a comedic take on the world of fetish, leather bars, bondage and discipline. Whether or not you dabbled in that world, got taken down a notch, and learned from the experience, you still needed *Night School*. I had, I did, but I needed more.

A few months earlier, Francine's character, Mrs. Frontporch, came to life on the Mudd Club stage in a Honey Walters production called *Sleazy Living*, a loving tribute to old-school burlesque. With no better setting than the ready-for-anything world of White Street, *Night School* and *Sleazy* were beloved by the regulars, amused the curious, and sent more than a few running for the bar. When *Sleazy*'s giant vagina began dancing to Donna Summer's "Hot

Stuff," the line was drawn and crossed, and the Mudd Club was on its way to becoming the Farthest Off of the Off-Off Broadway world.

Whether it was the crowd buying drinks or a *vaginormous* spectacle, Steve Mass liked what he saw and purchased Francine's mailing list for two hundred fifty dollars. The Mudd Club was already the new watering hole-in-the-wall for the "Downtown 500" and by late spring-early summer 1979 there was simply nothing like it.

I try and keep up with Francine Hunter when she talks about New York in the late '70s but it's hard to get in a single word. When the subject turns to Mudd she's clear on one thing—"It was a love story." When she squeezes my hand we can still feel it.

Class of '79

White Street was a last stand of *do it yourself* and *let it happen* nightlife. It was a comfort zone filled with what were fast becoming familiar faces, seemingly like minds and the pursuit of creative endeavor. There was a sense of community and camaraderie—a connection based solely on being there—a connection that remains to this day. That's how it was for me, and it seemed the same for Lisa Rosen and her brother, Danny.

A fashion icon without even trying, Lisa often arrived with stylist and photographer Sophie VDT. Eighteen years old, born in New York Hospital and proud of it, Lisa helped define everything that was possible, beautiful and insane about the Mudd Club Class of '79.

Danny Rosen was only sixteen but played the field like he was seventeen and a half. He hung out with Ken Compton and Boris Policeband, was jazz-cool and he owned it. He briefly appeared in the early Lounge Lizards lineup and made a little noise with Basquiat's band Gray. Like his sister, Danny was an accidental icon and carried a thrift shop suit with an easy swagger and bespoke style. Lisa's smile was mile-wide while Danny worked a grin or a scowl with bad-boy charm. Both were hard to resist—Mudd Club heart and soul.

Hal Ludacer was another one of the kids. Seventeen when the club opened, he was hard to miss and one of the prettiest people in the room. He grew up on Long Island and lived on South Street with his brothers Randy and Kenneth. I spotted him and Randy at the bar a few months before I started working at the club, and I tried not to stare. They both had on white T-shirts and Hal wore dress trousers,



BETH B & SCOTT B's

THE OFFENDERS

film



The Offenders poster, Super 8mm and misfit Mudd Club movie stars, 1980, courtesy Lisa Genet.

a look made famous by Brando and Belmondo twenty-five years earlier: beauty rechanneling beauty and it still worked.

The brothers had a band called Ludacer and I'd seen them play at Max's. They went on after a screening of Scott and Beth B's film *The Offenders* that featured a host of misfit Mudd Club movie stars. The band looked and sounded high school-era garage and when they finished I headed for White Street. The film didn't seem much more than a bunch of kids and one or two adults in trench coats making a movie and acting like kids. Despite what it was or wasn't, I had respect for the work as well as the effort. I had the chance to say it then but instead I just watched. Today *The Offenders* marks the time and vice versa; it points a direction forward and brings back memories, most of them good.

I called Hal recently and he told me Mudd was just "a continuation of high school" but quickly realized "it was more like junior high, the formative years." I told him based on our behavior alone it often was. He remembers the "amazing convergence and a special time" on White Street. I remember the connection everyone shared—along with the drugs and the drinking and the sex. Then I thought about actual high school, Class of '71, and started laughing.

The Most Interesting People

Those school days gone, five years passed. I got to the city in 1976 and I never thought about leaving. James Nares left London in 1974, landed in New York and felt the same way. He was twenty-one and remembers, "The moment I arrived I knew I was home." He looked around thinking that "the streets were like Rauschenberg paintings," the urban *combine* of surface, ruin and discard becoming something else, something beautiful. By 1978, walking from White Street to Murray, I saw those Rauschenberg paintings too. I couldn't wait to put some paper on the wall and start working.

There was a sense of great comfort in that rubble and chaos. James made his way downtown, found a place on Jay Street not far from 77 White and wound up living in the little bridge that connected two buildings several stories above the ground. I was south on Murray, and Diego was busy with Steve and Anya just a few blocks north. The neighborhood crowd included Richard Serra, photographer Allan Tannenbaum, Donnie Christensen, actor Lindzee Smith and artist Jo Shane. Boris Policeband was living nearby in a basement apartment, heating up his nightly can of spaghetti and watching a half-dozen television sets simultaneously. Painter, filmmaker and future Academy Award winner Katherine "Kathy" Bigelow was a few blocks east living in the same building as the Ludacers. Almost everyone could be found hanging at Magoo's or Barnabas Rex, the local art bar dives. Showing up for a drink was the only means of communication other than telegraph, mail or a corded phone.

James started making films, mini-movies and the almost feature-length *Rome '78*, a sword-and-sandal epic with a Lower East Side vibe. He did a performance piece at The Kitchen, an alternative space in SoHo. Steve Mass was there, saw the work and was anxious to do something with his ambulance service dollars. He told James he was opening a new place on White Street and was interested in sponsoring some projects. When the "new place" opened, James fit right in.

James Nares always thought, "Mudd was the place with the most interesting people, the place where it was happening." He met Lisa Rosen there the same night he met Edwige, the Parisian Punk icon. Lisa spotted James from across the room and wanted to know more. Knowing more turned into love and marriage.

The scene below Canal Street now centered on White: another new constellation, another spin on the Walter Steding Theory.



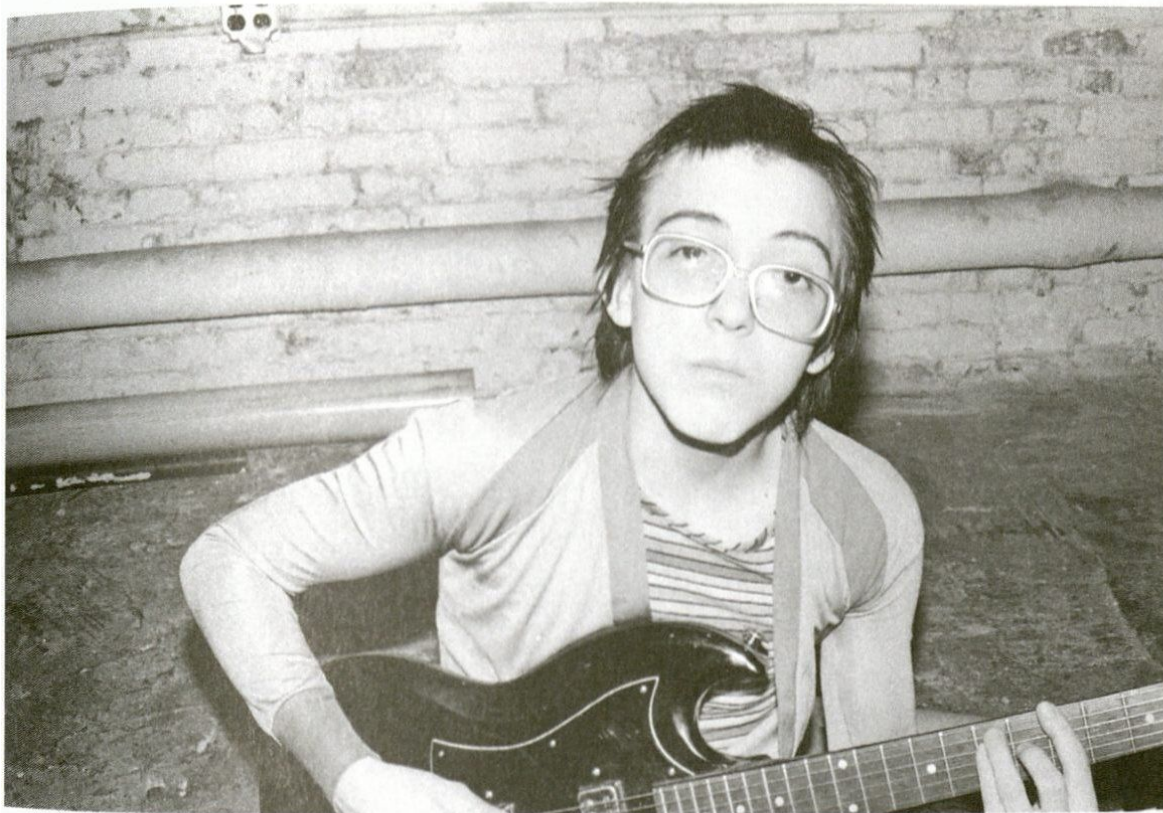
Andy Warhol, Alan Ginsberg and Victor Bockris, *Cocaine Cowboys* party at Mudd, 1980, by Kate Simon.

The Bathrooms

The second-floor bathrooms were equally legend and possibly the biggest draw of all. Memorable moments barely remembered took place in those strange, brightly lit rooms. Locking the door when there was one to lock, we gathered in conversation or what passed as—drinking, pissing, doing a line or waiting for the yet to occur. Time loses its frame, impossible to capture but beautiful in a cinematic Super 8 kind of way; acid-trail hazy, stoned and frozen, disappearing in the white fluorescent light.

The smaller bathroom or men's room, if labels applied, was about eight-foot square with white tiles and exposed brick, a toilet, a urinal, a sink and a mirror. There was no partition and no privacy. The door was a bifold steel contraption with a drop-lock bracer bar on the inside. It was a room built for drugs, sex and getting lost.

The ladies' room—or whatever it might've been—was more of a standard design in a public restroom kind of way. The toilets were separated by partitions that came and went with the seasons, the room itself more inviting and communal than the men's. There were mirrors on the wall, no lock on the door and most of the time, no door at all. You could freshen up, take a seat and watch the world go by.



Nick Berlin. He only looks innocent, 1979, by Bobby Grossman.

The bathrooms were modified more than once and repaired regularly during the club's history but never lost their magic. From the Kennedys to the Rolling Stones, sailors, sex workers and Sex Pistols, it seemed everyone had a lost and found moment in a Mudd Club bathroom, including me.

Phoebe and the Troubled Youth Brigade

I watched a tiara-wearing Teri Toye get up from the "throne" and wander out as Rastaman Richard "Dirty Harry" Hall wandered in. There were even what appeared to be "children" running in and out of those bathrooms, but without proof of age it was hard to be sure. Phoebe Zeeman and Ellen Kinnally ran amok, looking and playing the part of jailbait, all the while keeping Steve Mass on his toes. Phoebe's barely older sister Eloise, along with bad girl Marina Lutz, singer David Scharff, photographer Eileen Polk, musician DJ Howie Pyro and musical delinquent Nick Berlin were all part of White Street's underage troubled youth brigade. They survived the first-floor bathroom and laughed their way onto the second floor. They referred



This page: Phoebe, natural born killer, 1980, courtesy Phoebe Zeeman.
Opposite: Billy Stark, Eileen Polk, Howie Pyro, 1979. Mudd Club
portrait series, *Punks of New York* by William Coupon.



to the club's unwitting No Wave hipster contingent as *Fish Heads*, torturing some of them with early-morning crank call serenades of the "Fish Heads" song. Funny now and funny then, the *kids* were unselfconsciously radical and as deep in the Mudd as anyone.

Steve loved them all and quickly offered Phoebe and Ellen jobs. He bought them drinks and encouraged them to get fake IDs. Phoebe's mother had Steve's phone number and occasionally called, looking for the girls, checking to make sure they were okay. The word okay—very loosely defined.

Howie Pyro was still a Mudd Club DJ; he and Nick, along with Billy Stark and occasionally Heartbreaker Walter Lure, were mem-

PUUUUUUBES!!!



WATCH OUT
FOR THE
BIG ONES

Growing Up is a difficult time

!!! The hormonal imbalances we are
all experiencing cause
strange & disgusting urges

Puberty is...

When you can't make up your mind
which you like better
making out or chewing gum

When you don't know whether to
play with your self...
or with your little freinds

Join us in our Celebration
Commemorating the slightly ungraceful
Entrance of

THE BLESSED

INTO THE

Wild & "WOOLY" WORLD of Puberty
and remember

"Kissing for fun is like playing
with a beautiful candle
in a room full of DYNAMITE!"

PAT
BOONE

Our motto... "If it's immature... We'll do it!"

bers of a band called The Blessed. Their twisted vision and sense of humor, along with that of the other kids, informed everything from the Rock 'n' Roll Funeral to the Puberty Ball, successfully deflating Mudd's cool intellectual bent. The pubescent coming-of-age celebration featured a giant Quaalude and Tuinal hanging from the ceiling and a squadron of post-pubescent cheerleaders on hand to fluff the crowd. A buffet set up along the sidewall was stacked with a six-foot pyramid of pimple-inducing kiddie favorites: Twinkies and Ring Dings. The Blessed performed their hits, including "Kindergarten Hard-on" and "Flagellation Rock." Fellow juvenile delinquent and Revenge girl Eileen Polk was one of the Puberty Ball masterminds and a driving force behind the event. By the end of the night the Twinkies had all been eaten.

David Scharff, another teen troublemaker, sang with The Student Teachers, whose lineup included future curator and museum director Bill Arning and Jimmy Destri's girlfriend Laura Davis. Laura and Jimmy were the second and third wheels of Bowie's nightclubbing posse.

Marina Lutz, one of the Puberty Ball cheerleaders, loved the Dead Boys, the Cramps and the Ramones. She was an eager beaver, at the club every night, and most of the time ready to help out any way she could. However, when offered big money to strap on a strap-on she drew the line (if only in pencil) but still agreed to shuttle a grocery bag full of cash from White Street to Steve's apartment on West Eighth. Someone had to handle the night deposit and who better than a teenage girl riding around in a cab at 4 A.M.?

I was still at the door when Phoebe came outside and asked if I'd seen Steve. We went inside together, ordered a couple drinks and for the moment she forgot about him.

Always one of the smartest people in the room, Phoebe Zeeman knew that "hanging out at Mudd was way more fun than working there" and never took Steve up on the job offer. My time on White Street posed the counterargument, and for a long time I had as much fun as anyone. Part of the fun was getting to know Phoebe.

TV Party

Some of those kids were in high school and some in college but Glenn O'Brien, a Georgetown grad who studied film at Columbia, was beyond all that. Born in Cleveland, Glenn started working for Warhol in



Fab 5 Freddy Brathwaite and Debbie Harry, *TV Party*, 1980, by Bobby Grossman.

1970 when Andy was looking to lose the speed freaks and "get some clean-cut college kids on the staff." In some peculiar or nonpeculiar way, he fit the bill.

I'd seen Glenn around, everywhere from CB's to Mickey's to 54. In fall 1978, someone told him to check out "Eno's club" on White Street. He went; it wasn't really Eno's club, but he kept going back. By December, not long after Mudd opened, he created *Glenn O'Brien's TV Party*, a variety talk show and entertainment hour filmed in classic black-and-white for public access cable. Unlike anything previously offered on television, the show featured a conglomeration of "celebrity" guests that doubled as the show's staff and production team. O'Brien's love of Warhol's films and the idea that "good production values weren't important and mistakes were funny" helped inform the *TV Party* aesthetic.

The regular and revolving cast seemed built around a roster of Mudd Club regulars. Cohost Chris Stein along with Debbie Harry, David Byrne, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Lisa Rosen and photographer Kate Simon all did their thing for the sake of the Party. Richard (Ricky) Sohl handled the call-in phone line with the skill of a seasoned receptionist. Bobby Grossman was the official *TV Party* photographer, Walter "Doc" Steding was the Party bandleader and even Steve

Mass made numerous guest appearances. Fab 5 Freddy Brathwaite's enthusiasm and resulting camerawork added to the charm, chaos and television excitement.

After taping, the *TV Party* cast and crew usually wound up at the Mudd Club, where my *Party* contribution was making sure everyone got safely inside. One of those after-show visits was Fred Brathwaite's first trip to White Street and marked the beginning of his relationship with the club. Along with actress, future "gallerist" and Mudd Club regular Patti Astor, Fred went on to help change the way we look at art from the street and art in general. As part of the notorious Fabulous 5 crew that included Lee Quinones, he realized that graffiti was ready to take on a new life. He moved sound and vision forward, guiding Hip-Hop, Rap and graffiti to a larger audience.

TV Party taped three episodes at the Mudd Club, helping to expand the show's audience and broaden its curious appeal. One of those nights Debbie Harry and the Doc Steding Orchestra thrilled the crowd with a world-premiere performance of Blondie's future hit "The Tide Is High." Still, it was hard to tell who or what, other than Mudd, drew the crowd.

Working the door, often six nights a week, I started to believe that proximity and association was the near equal to being *part of*. I unknowingly toyed with that belief, on and off, for years.

Whether it was a *TV Party* taping or just another evening at work, I came face to face with several hundred people a night. Between the crowd outside, the crowd at the bar and the crowd on the dance floor, I sometimes felt a connection. Eventually, though, I felt the need to hide, and the only safe place was the basement. Drugs and subterrane went hand in hand.

Over the years I'd acted out and I hid in a number of basements but this was the only one with a Mudd Club upstairs. You walked down a flight and twenty feet back from the coat check window was a wall with a door. The door had a lock and behind the door was the *other side*—the ultimate VIP room, the perfect hideaway. There was a cage filled with cases of liquor and beer that only the bartenders could steal. With enough privacy to drop your pants and pull down someone else's, or have a momentary meltdown and quick recovery, the basement was a great place to snort a few lines, smoke a joint, snap a Quaalude in half and relax.

I always had a key to the storage area door but I can't remember if it was mine or whether I got it at the bar. I'd trail past the coat check with a few people in tow and close the door behind us—an indiscreet attempt at discretion. The sound of the dance floor came through the ceiling and I could feel the beat. I could hear a muffled Bryan Ferry crooning, "Come on, come on, let's stick together..." From Robert Rauschenberg to Mick Rock to Michael Maslin, from Joni Mitchell and Bowie to Teri, Ricky, Gary and Lynette: several were my friends, the others "proximity and association."

Back upstairs the dance floor's packed. I grab a beer and dive in as the Ramones, Iggy and Motown pound the beat and rattle the brain. Ronnie and Gigi are deep in the crowd, making up new dances as they go along; Abbijane and her girl gang Heather, Jackie and Julie, spinning around in some kind of Hullabaloozified spastic seizure. The DJ's flying in the face of Disco and circling back to Rock 'n' Roll. Three-minute intervals of sound, Diana Ross' voice in the middle singing faster than I remember and the room's about ready to explode. Years of pushing-to-the-front rock concert experience paying off, I make it past the stage and into the first-floor bathroom.

A SAMO scrawl, scrubbed from the wall, is rehappening; Jean-Michel Basquiat, with a stubby blond or green Mohawk, exits, leaving another mark behind. It's so crowded that people are standing on the toilets, and one cracks under the weight. There's an inch of water on the floor but hardly anyone moves except me. It's the new reality of wear and tear, the cost of doing business—not to mention being part of the club's appeal.

The broken toilet stories wouldn't die and before long Steve's talking plumbing repairs with Glenn O'Brien on *TV Party*. Lamenting "three hundred twenty-nine dollars for nothing," he compares Mudd's exploding toilets to "something like the Manhattan Project."

Despite water on the floor my feet are dry. I cross the room and push my way past the bar, a long narrow rectangle that reaches from the door to the dance floor. Two or three bartenders in the middle are handling a crowd four deep. The DJ booth, within arm's reach of the liquor and beer, is part of the bar. The DJ: a sitting duck, his only protection a pair of headphones, a beer bottle and a cigarette. William Coupon's rogues' gallery of club denizens peers from the facing wall. Ken Compton and Boris Policeband are in position near the front door; I turn the corner and I'm back outside. Gretchen's just inside holding what's left of the door money after Steve did

a cash pickup, stuffing wads of bills into his pockets. I look at Gretchen and we laugh, dip behind the door and do two blasts from a vial of coke. Louie's off tonight, Robert just took a break and Joey's somewhere inside. There's about two hundred people waiting and a few look at me like they want the real doorperson to come back. A minute later, Dan Aykroyd barrels down the stairs from the fourth floor and bulldozes thru the crowd. I step up to the chain and ask a few people, "How many?" It's after 2 A.M. when somebody screams, "Let me the fuck in!" I turn around and Gretchen's still laughing.

Before we know it, it's 4 A.M. and the fun's almost over. By 4:30 we're prowling around the bar, searching the floor for Quaaludes and hundred-dollar bills. We kick around some plastic cups, and broken bottles, pick up several empty vials and check out a few odd pieces of clothing. I come up empty-handed but Gretchen finds twenty dollars. It's cab fare and breakfast money. Tomorrow we get paid. This is the life—and I think I love it.

Colter Rule once said the first six months of Mudd were magic. He called that time "the real candy." Colter may have split, but the place was candy for quite a while.

A Boom Box and Jug Wine

Over the next several months and following few years the deed to 77 White Street bounced between Ross Bleckner and Steve Mass. The price moved up several hundred thousand since Bleckner bought the building, but the crowds kept coming, and Steve was raking in the cash.

The Mudd Club drove Ross crazy from the start and when the barely legal contraption of an elevator nearly killed him, fellow artist (and 2007 Academy Award-nominated film director) Julian Schnabel came to the rescue. Ross survived but his leg was nearly crushed and spent months in a cast. Still, he managed to paint, make it to One University Place for dinner and have a few drinks at Mudd.

Ross and his boyfriend, Ron Dorsett, offered me an easy friendship and a place to escape when I needed one. I kept an eye on the door from their front windows, caught my breath and watched the crowd. From that sixth-floor vantage point it was hard to believe that less than a year ago, in summer 1978, Ross told his friend, artist and editor Kim Hastreiter, "Something is happening on the