



JENNIFER WARREN

# Readers Write

## SATURDAY NIGHT

I WISH YOU COULD'VE SEEN ME TWENTY years ago. I was model thin, had big red hair and sooty eyes, and wore more leather than a cow herd. The lowest heel I owned was six inches, and I always packed "a little something along for the ride."

I lived for Saturday night. I used to go to a great rock club called the Brick n' Wood. It's a strip joint now, but in the eighties all the best bands played there. The bouncer was my friend, and I always got in free and edged my way to the front row. My outfits usually earned me backstage passes. My boyfriend was in a band and had long hair. We used to have drunken sex in the back seat of my car.

My Saturday nights are different now. I'm the mother of a four-year-old and married to an ultraconservative, balding, bespectacled man with an equally conservative job. He plays golf, not guitar. I mourn the rock-and-roll life. I can't tell you the last time I had sex with someone besides myself. I am completing my bachelor's degree, so on Saturday nights I do homework. After all the drugs I did, it amazes me that I still have enough brain

cells left to earn close to a 3.5 GPA.

The party has been over for a long time. Sometimes, when my husband and son are asleep, I crack open a bottle of wine and play my collection of eighties rock songs. In my dreams, it's always Saturday night.

*Bridget W.  
Cheshire, Connecticut*

**WHEN I WAS TWENTY-NINE, SOME-**one told me I should lose a few pounds. Before that, I'd never thought about what I ate or how much I weighed. Then I started counting calories, reading about diets, and devising low-calorie versions of treats.

The craziest part was my Saturday-night-date ritual. That night only, I allowed myself to put away great quantities of food. When my date brought me home, no matter how much I'd already eaten, I was still ravenous for more. I would anxiously try to get the man to leave so that I could jump in my car and head for the all-night market.

I eventually found deliverance when I began attending Catholic mass on Sat-

urday nights. Six months ago I became a Eucharistic minister — someone who assists in administering the Eucharist. Men and women, rich and poor, of all ages and races, come forward one by one in the long Communion line. Holding up a consecrated Host, I proclaim, "The Body of Christ." There isn't a Saturday night when I'm not moved by the experience of offering my hungry brothers and sisters the Bread of Life.

*Lisa Mitchell  
Hollywood, California*

**THE DAY BEFORE MY MOTHER DIED,** an old high-school friend of my brother's showed up at the hospice. He broke the silence by remembering how Mom was the only parent who'd ever let her kids have parties. "She was something else, your mom."

I don't know how my mother stood it. With four children, she endured a lot of loud music, motorcycle accidents, juvenile arrests, complaints from the neighbors, make-out parties, and occasional fights. Maybe she didn't make breakfast every morning, but on Saturday nights she al-

ways waited up, leaning back in her bed, glass of sherry in one hand, paperback mystery in the other.

Other parents criticized Mom. If my brothers got in trouble, they blamed her. They whispered that a widow with four kids needed a man around the house. Mom had suitors, but how many men want to marry a woman with four kids, even if she is beautiful and bright, with perfect pitch and a killer backhand?

My brothers were wild, but I worked hard in school, joined service clubs, and tried to convince everyone to like me, especially Mom. On Saturday nights, when I poked my head into her room around midnight to say good night, she always encouraged me to sit and talk. She would put down her book, and I'd curl up at the bottom of her single bed, feeling the warmth of her body. I'd shut my eyes, and we'd talk until I fell asleep. When my brothers were finally home safe, she'd gently rouse me and walk me back to my own bed.

*Molly McKasson  
Tucson, Arizona*

**WHEN I WAS GROWING UP IN BROOKLYN,** Saturday night was family game night. My mother, father, aunt, and uncle would hunch over the dining-room table to play endless rounds of Michigan rummy or hearts, smoke soft-pack cigarettes, and drink highballs. My sister, my brother, and I would entertain our younger cousins with Monopoly or parcheesi on the living-room floor. As my siblings and I became teenagers, one by one we withdrew from kids' games and started spending Saturday night outside our tiny apartment.

My sister was the oldest, and therefore the first to venture out. One Saturday night, while the rest of us were sprawled on the floor building hotels on Park Place, she was in the bathroom putting a rinse in her hair. When she emerged, her hair was jet black, and she had on thick black eyeliner. She looked like Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra.

To get to the front door, my sister had to pass the dining room. She almost made it. Then my mother called for her to stop. The card game halted, and all adult eyes fell on my sister. There was a murmur of mild disapproval, but it was my uncle's comment that we heard the loudest.

"You look like a slut," he said.

My parents never used language like that. I waited for my father to say something in my sister's defense, but he didn't. My sister rushed to her room.

Later, when things had settled down, my sister did go out to meet her friends, but not before making some cosmetic adjustments. After that, we all moved a little bit further away from family game night, and each other.

*Cece P.  
Upland, California*

**IN MY EARLY TWENTIES, I DROPPED** out of college and worked in a restaurant and bar. It wasn't the nicest place (C inspection rating and countless roaches), but the tips were outstanding, because the booze was always flowing.

On Saturday nights the bar was filled with college students. It had a reputation for cheap keg beer, barroom brawls, and drunken, eager college girls. During the week, however, it attracted "townies," as we called them. Some would get so drunk,

they would leave a fifty-dollar tip for a twenty-dollar check.

Although I'd grown up in town, I was nothing like the drunk, lonely townies. OK, so sometimes I squatted down behind the bar to do a few shots of peppermint schnapps, but I was young and free, with my future ahead of me. This job was just short-term.

One townie named Scarlet came to the bar almost every night. She was in her forties, attractive, well dressed, and well-mannered. After a few drinks, however, she turned into Scary Scarlet, who stumbled, slurred, cursed, and hung on men. Sometimes Scary Scarlet fell down and broke things. I thought she was pathetic.

I am in my forties now and have a good job and even own a home. All in all, my drinking has gone unnoticed. I clean up pretty well in the mornings and vomit only occasionally. Sometimes co-workers will comment about a bruise on my face or arm. I tell them I fell jogging.

Tonight is Saturday night. Rather

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Because of space limitations, we're unable to print all the submissions we receive. We edit pieces, often quite heavily, but contributors have the opportunity to approve or disapprove of editorial changes prior to publication. (If you don't want to be contacted regarding the editing of your work, please let us know.)

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UPCOMING TOPICS	DEADLINE	PUBLICATION DATE
Playing With Fire	August 1	January 2006
Coffee	September 1	February 2006
The Middle Of The Night	October 1	March 2006
Decisions	November 1	April 2006
Winners And Losers	December 1	May 2006
Neighbors	January 1	June 2006

than my usual routine of sitting home alone getting wasted, I am lying in a hospital bed in a detox center, hooked up to an IV filled with yellow fluid. (Looks like wine to me.) No one knows I'm here — not my family, not my co-workers, not my very few friends. I've finally realized that alcohol has me trapped.

The nurse looks over my body, performing what she calls a "skin check." She asks how I got the bruise on my right butt cheek.

I think about this hard. "Is it a tattoo?" I ask.

She sighs. "No, honey. Do you have a tattoo down here?"

"I don't think so."

"I need to measure it," she says.

I roll over and say, "I'm a drunk. I fall down a lot." I think she has already figured this out.

In the bathroom, I take a peek at the mysterious bruise. It is a deep shade of red.

*Name Withheld*

**IN 1969, RIGHT OUT OF GRADUATE** school, I was drafted into the U.S. Army. After I got new clothing, a haircut, and vaccinations, I filled out a stack of forms. One asked for my religion. Feeling mischievous, I wrote, "Druid (reformed)."

Two weeks later, I received my dog tags, stamped with my name, Social Security number, blood type, and "Druid (reformed)." I wondered how the army would administer last rites for that.

Stationed stateside eighteen months later, I was looking forward to a big Saturday-night date when the commanding officer suddenly canceled all weekend passes. (A large antiwar protest was scheduled, and he feared many soldiers would attend.)

I was determined to go on that date. Discovering there was to be a full moon that particular weekend, I requested a two-day pass to celebrate a "religious holiday."

The commanding officer was skeptical. "What the hell religion are you?"

I told him I was a Druid, and the last full moon before the winter solstice was our high holy day.

He demanded to see my dog tags, so I showed them to him. He looked at them

in stunned silence for a moment, then granted me the pass. As I was on my way out, he said, "Wait a second. Don't you guys kill goats?"

"No, sir," I said. "That's the orthodox. I'm reformed."

*James Schelling  
Santa Barbara, California*

**I GREW UP IN A SMALL MILL TOWN,** but my ideal Saturday night was an evening in New York City. In my fantasy I wore glittering eye shadow, luxurious furs, and a little black dress. I had places to go — dinner, dancing, the theater — limos to take me there, and handsome, gallant men to accompany me. My legs were long and shapely (the better to exit limos), my eyes large and shining (the better to captivate gentlemen), my manners cultivated.

In reality I was chubby and awkward. Eczema made my skin a mass of itchy scales, and my hair was the frizzy victim of \$2.99 Lilt home perms. Saturday nights began with my own merciless comparison of my face and body to those of my idols in the glossy pages of *Photoplay* and *Modern Screen*. The evening would progress toward some foreseeable crisis, like a botched application of false eyelashes. When misery threatened to overwhelm me, my mother would suggest we make popcorn and watch an old movie on TV.

Years later, as a tall, slender young woman with clear skin and long, sleek hair, I moved to New York. Some Saturday nights bore a passing resemblance to my early fantasies, with limos (but mostly cabs), furs (a ghastly pieced rabbit), and a little black dress. Velvet ropes opened, and I danced with a few people I might have seen in *Photoplay* and *Modern Screen*, had I still read them.

But the shiny relationships of Saturday night were brittle and easily shattered. I married one of the men who took me dancing. He promised to love me forever, which turned out to be nearly twenty years. Two children and a divorce later, I am home again on Saturday nights.

Now my daughter studies her generation's beautiful people and struggles to style her hair; her brother reaches out to other solitary boys via an Internet computer game. When misery threatens to

overwhelm us all, I take down the aluminum popcorn popper, and we watch an old movie on TV.

*Kathleen Lane  
New York, New York*

**CALLIE ARRIVED AT OUR BACK DOOR** wringing her hands. The sheriff had locked up her man, James Lee. She couldn't do our ironing that day, or the next, or the next, she told my mother. She couldn't even think straight till she got James Lee back. But how was she ever going to come up with fifty dollars' bail?

My parents were both journalists. My mother worked long hours and couldn't do without Callie's cleaning, washing, and ironing. My father grudgingly agreed to go get James Lee out of jail and drive him home.

James Lee had been arrested after a Saturday night of what the sheriff's report described as "carousing, drinking, and gambling." I was only seven at the time, but Callie would hold me spellbound with stories of "colored town" and occasionally allowed me to accompany her there on her errands, so I had an inkling of what had happened. "I'm going too," I called to my father as the screen door slapped shut behind him. I hoped that if I went along, it would blunt the lecture James Lee was certain to receive.

The police station was hot and muggy despite the large ceiling fans. With papers signed, money paid, and remarks exchanged in the manner of Southern whites discussing blacks, James Lee was released into my father's custody. I hopped in the back seat, leaving my father no choice but to let James Lee ride in front with him.

James Lee smelled bad and still wore the Saturday-night finery that he'd slept in. From the slope of his shoulders, I could see he was dejected and demoralized. He hung his elbow out the window, and the sleeves of his white shirt flapped in the breeze like a flag of surrender.

I do not recall what my father, a Southern Baptist and an ideologue of the first order, said to James Lee, but the tone of his voice — laced with superiority and void of compassion — remains with me. For the first time I saw the misuse of righteousness and knew it for what it was. His

words finally trailed off into silence. Then my father looked at James Lee, as if finding his second wind, and said, "Well? Have you nothing to say for yourself?"

"Mister S.," James Lee said, "if you could just once be a nigga on a Saturday night, you'd never want to be white again."

*Gayle S.  
Searsmont, Maine*

**AT TWENTY-TWO I MARRIED AN ARTIST** and political activist ten years my senior. He had a daughter, who came to live with us on her third birthday. When my husband quit his job — it was stifling his creativity — and retreated into his artwork, I became, in effect, a single parent.

I was an avid reader and hoped to become a writer someday, but I was so busy in my first year of parenting that I did not read a book or write a single word. Meanwhile my husband painted prolifically and spent our money on "necessities" like subscriptions to the *Nation* and the *New York Times*, even though we couldn't afford diapers or a telephone. "We don't really need a phone," he argued.

I was desperate for some time off, but we couldn't afford a baby sitter. Finally my husband agreed to baby-sit on Saturday nights so that I could go out by myself. (When I told my mother about this arrangement, she said, "You're going out without him? In thirty years of marriage I have never gone out without your father or had a 'night off.' Your generation is so selfish.")

To prepare for my evening, I put on a vintage satin dress from Goodwill and my shiny black Doc Martens. After I'd put our daughter to bed, I took my old, cloth-covered journal and walked down to Mother Fool's Coffeehouse to write about how miserable I had become.

When I returned, my husband wasn't home. Thankfully our daughter was safe asleep in her bed. Looking around for a note, I almost tripped over the iron, which was still on and had branded its silhouette onto the floor of his studio. It's a miracle the place hadn't burned down.

He came home hours later and told me offhandedly that he had gone to have a few beers with the neighbors — three young women with many tattoos and piercings. I wanted to yell at him about

the iron, about leaving his three-year-old daughter home alone, about drinking with women who wouldn't give me the time of day. Instead I put away my journal, hung up my dress, and lay awake grieving my short-lived plan to recapture Saturday night.

*Karin W.  
Madison, Wisconsin*

**IT IS FRIDAY, AND WE ARE HELPING** pack up our friend's clothes, one of the last things she wants to do. She is thirty-nine, and she is dying. No longer the gregarious blonde with a cigarette in one hand and a beer in the other, she wears pajama bottoms, a tank top, and a hooded sweat shirt. Gray stubble sprouts on her bald head, and oxygen flows into her nostrils through tubes.

She looks at each item and says, "Give away," "Trash," or, "Save for so-and-so." We make jokes — "Where the hell did you wear this?" — and fill dark green garbage bags, one after another. I ask my friend if she is sad doing this. She says she is, a little, but wants to get it done so her young husband won't have to do it after she's gone.

We stuff the bags into my car and help our friend downstairs, where she falls asleep on her couch. Tomorrow I am supposed to take the bags of clothes to the shelter. I will never get the chance.

At 6 A.M. I get a frantic call to come back; she has had a bad night. Twelve hours later, she is dead. After her body has been picked up by the funeral home, I stumble to my car and ride around on Saturday night with a back seat full of my friend's neatly bagged possessions. She was ready to give up all she had. I am not.

*Sheila Davis  
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts*

**WHEN WE FELL IN LOVE, SATURDAY** night was ours. I worked double shifts while attending school, but for one night a week we could be wild and free. We took hiking trips, went to concerts, drank, laughed, and made love all night, falling asleep to the sound of rain drumming on the tin roof.

When my lover left me, Saturday night became torture. I fumbled through the routine of eating, sleeping, bathing. I lis-

tened to the faucet drip and watched dust motes drift through the air as midnight came and went.

Slowly I emerged from hiding and discovered that I liked going to see "our" favorite musicians without him. I could flirt backstage. I could dance by myself. Back home, I could spread out on the bed.

Yesterday my old lover stepped through my doorway again, but I felt only tired when I thought about "us." It was Saturday. I told him I had plans.

Last night my new lover drank too much and insulted me during an argument before falling into bed and snoring. When we awoke this morning, he burst into heaving sobs. He's bipolar, he's going through a divorce, and he says he's falling in love with me. Like a statue of the Virgin Mary, I held his head to my naked breast and murmured soothing words, but I thought wearily, *Fuck Saturday night*.

Tonight I am curled beneath a warm comforter, my dog and cat lying nose-to-tail beside me, a box of cookies and a stack of half-read books on the nightstand. Now I like Sunday night best.

*Megan K.  
Greeneville, Tennessee  
(end of excerpt)*