

LESBIANS AND BREAST CANCER

THE ADVOCATE

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**THE
DARK
SIDE
OF**

**NIRVANA'S
KURT COBAIN**

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22

BY KEVIN ALLMAN

AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

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The dark side of KURT COBAIN

It's 4 o'clock on a cold Seattle afternoon, and Kurt Cobain, the lyricist-guitarist-lead singer of Nirvana, is sitting in a downtown hotel room, playing with his 5-month-old daughter, Frances, while his wife, Courtney Love—lead singer of her own band, Hole—applies her makeup. At the moment, the Cobains (including baby) are on the cover of *Spin* magazine—which has named Nirvana as Artist of the Year—and the band's new album,

Nirvana's front man shoots from the hip

**B Y K E V I N A L L M A N
P H O T O G R A P H S B Y C H A R L E S P E T E R S O N**

C O V E R S T O R Y

Incesticide, is due out within the week. The Nirvana media machine should be in high gear.

But, no.

What's surprising is what's not in the Cobains' room: no entourage, no groupies, no publicists, and no signs of the high life—in any sense of the term. Cobain, in fact, is wearing a pair of fuzzy green pajamas. And he and Love are in Seattle for the sole reason of trying to speed the deal on a modest house they've been trying to buy. The only concession to Cobain's being what he mockingly calls "a rock icon" is the pseudonym under which he has registered, Simon Ritchie.

It's a joke—Ritchie was the real name of Sid Vicious, the Sex Pistol who died from a heroin overdose—and it shows that the Cobains have a sense of humor about being tagged by the press as a modern-day Sid and Nancy. If the Cobains are being reclusive these days, they explain, it's not because they're strung out but because they feel they've been strung up—by the media, which they feel have painted them as a pair of junkies without a cause. "Everyone thinks we're on drugs again, even people we work with," says Cobain resignedly as Love paints on a perfect baby-doll mouth. "I guess I'll have to get used to that for the rest of my life."

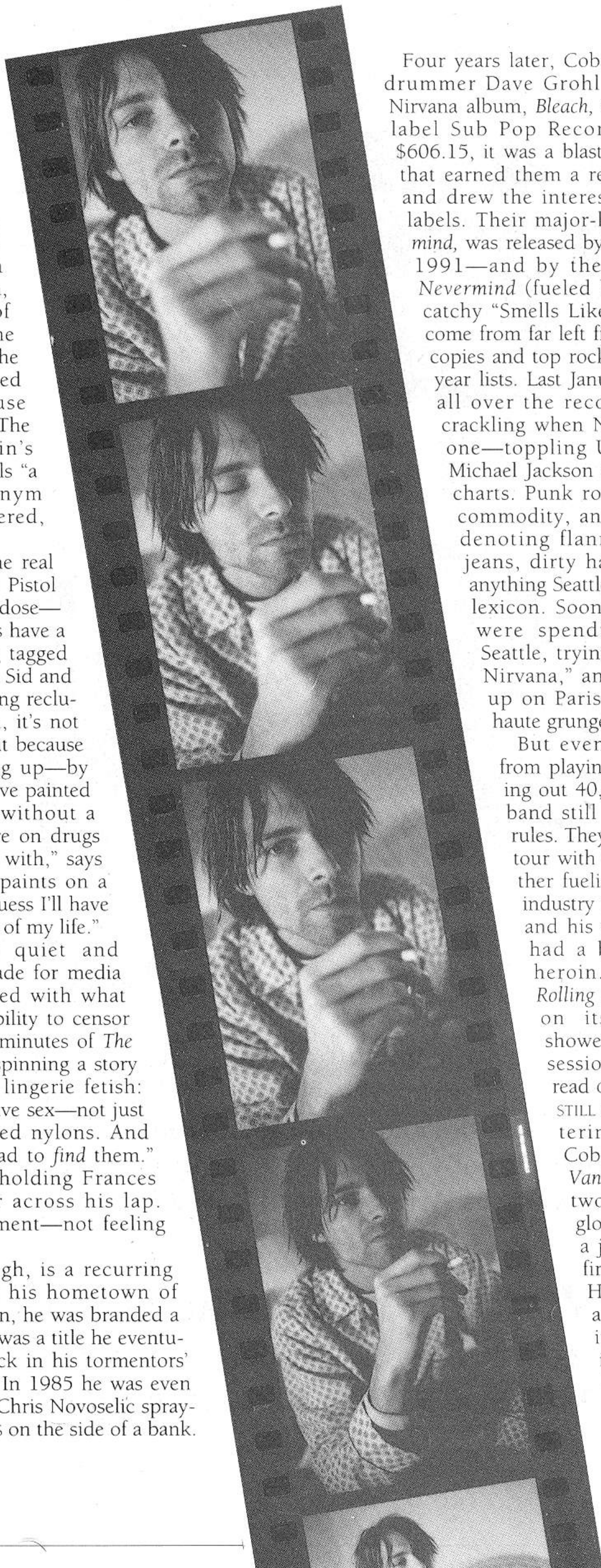
While Cobain, 24, is quiet and thoughtful, Love is tailor-made for media attention, blessed and cursed with what seems an almost genetic inability to censor herself. Within the first five minutes of *The ADVOCATE's* arrival, she is spinning a story about an ex-flame and his lingerie fetish: "He had to wear nylons to have sex—not just any nylons but flesh-colored nylons. And he couldn't buy them, he had to *find* them." Listening, Cobain smiles, holding Frances by her arms, walking her across his lap. He is—at least for the moment—not feeling beaten up.

Getting beaten up, though, is a recurring theme in Cobain's life. In his hometown of Aberdeen in rural Washington, he was branded a "faggot" from an early age. It was a title he eventually embraced and threw back in his tormentors' faces—just for the hell of it. In 1985 he was even arrested when he and friend Chris Novoselic spray-painted HOMOSEXUAL SEX RULES on the side of a bank.

Four years later, Cobain, Novoselic, and drummer Dave Grohl released the first Nirvana album, *Bleach*, on the small Seattle label Sub Pop Records. Recorded for \$606.15, it was a blast of pure punk rock that earned them a reputation in Seattle and drew the interest of several major labels. Their major-label debut, *Nevermind*, was released by DGC in September 1991—and by the end of the year, *Nevermind* (fueled by the inescapably catchy "Smells Like Teen Spirit") had come from far left field to sell 3 million copies and top rock critics' best-of-the-year lists. Last January cellular phones all over the record industry were crackling when Nirvana hit number one—toppling U2, Metallica, and Michael Jackson from the top of the charts. Punk rock was suddenly a commodity, and the term *grunge*, denoting flannel shirts, ripped jeans, dirty hair, and especially anything Seattle-based, entered the lexicon. Soon record executives were spending weekends in Seattle, trying to find the "next Nirvana," and models cropped up on Paris runways sporting haute grungewear.

But even as Nirvana went from playing club dates to selling out 40,000-seat arenas, the band still didn't play by the rules. They spurned an offer to tour with Guns N' Roses, further fueling already rampant industry rumors that Cobain and his then pregnant wife had a big problem with heroin. Last April, when *Rolling Stone* put the band on its cover, Cobain showed up for the photo session in a T-shirt that read CORPORATE MAGAZINES STILL SUCK. And an unflattering profile of the Cobains in September's *Vanity Fair* dropped the two into the world of glossy journalism with a jolt when Love confirmed to writer Lynn Hirschberg that she and Cobain were indeed using heroin in the early stages of her pregnancy.

While not denying the heroin use,



both Cobain and Love insist that they have been misquoted and misunderstood. They maintain that the interview was given early in the year, and at the time the article appeared (the same month Love gave birth to Frances), both had been clean for months. "When I first talked to her [Hirschberg], I had just found out I was pregnant, and I had done some drugs in the beginning of my pregnancy, and that's what I told her," says Love.

Equally misunderstood, to Cobain, is Nirvana itself—particularly the fact that the band appeals to many of the same hard rock fans who pack Guns N' Roses concerts. But while Axl Rose sang derisively of "immigrants and faggots" in his song "One in a Million," Cobain closed his song "Stay Away" by howling "God is gay!" and Nirvana defiantly cavorted in dresses in the video of their hit single "In Bloom." Last year Nirvana traveled to Oregon to perform at a benefit opposing Measure 9, a statewide ordinance that would have amended the state constitution to prohibit protections for gays and lesbians. And when they appeared on *Saturday Night Live*, Cobain and Novoselic made a point of kissing on-camera.

In person, Cobain is the antithesis of a preening guitar cocksman: He's small, pale, soft-spoken, and articulate. Prejudice infuriates him; he spits out the words "homophobe" and "sexist" with the same venom he reserves for the word "spandex." Particularly upsetting to him was an incident last year in Reno, when two men raped a woman while chanting a Nirvana song. On the liner notes for *Incesticide*, he vented his frustration in a blunt statement to Nirvana fans: "If any of you in any way hate homosexuals, people of different color, or women, please do this one favor for us—leave us the fuck alone! Don't come to our shows and don't buy our records."

Despite Cobain's wish that people "leave us the fuck alone," both he and Love seem determined not to surround themselves with a glass bubble of security precautions and stereotypical rock-star trappings. Before this interview—the only one the band's lead singer says he plans to do for *Incesticide*—Cobain set down no conditions regarding the questions that could be asked, nor did he bother to notify his record company that the interview would be taking place. (Love, in fact, insisted that the mutual friend who arranged the meeting put *The ADVOCATE* in direct contact with the couple: "Gay people can have our phone number!")

Back in the hotel room, Love goes out and leaves Cobain to his interview, but she's wary enough to come back twice: "I'm worried about what they're going to write," she finally blurts. Still, her need to trust overwhelms her protectiveness. When she leaves for the third time, she says, "It's a gay

publication, Kurt, so don't forget to tell them about the time you stole your tights out of your mother's drawer." Cobain smiles; she laughs and sighs. "I guess I have that effect on men. Bye." And then she's gone for good, pushing Frances's stroller out the door.

You two don't seem like Sid and Nancy.

It's just amazing that at this point in rock-and-roll history, people are still expecting their rock icons to live out these classic rock archetypes, like Sid and Nancy. To assume that we're just the same because we come from the underground and we did heroin for a while—it's pretty offensive to be expected to be like that.

Does it hurt worse when they say bad things about Courtney?

Oh, absolutely. What they said about me is not half as strange as what they've said about her. She doesn't deserve that. She sold 60,000 records, and all of a sudden she's found herself as commercially popular as me, and she's just in a punk rock band. Just because she married me, she's subjected to being as popular as an actress or something.

Who do you trust now?

Uh—no one? [Laughs] I've always kind of kept myself purposely naive and optimistic, and now I've been forced to be really paranoid. Judgmental. Really defensive all the time. It's been hard for me to change my attitude.

You're here in this hotel room. Can you go out?

Yeah. The other night we went shopping at a second-hand store and bought some fuzzy sweaters and some grungewear.

Real grungewear, not the designer kind?

Not Perry Ellis. [Laughs] We were driving around in our Volvo, after buying some grungewear, and we realized that we're not necessarily as big as Guns N' Roses, but we're as popular as them, and we still don't have bodyguards. We still go shopping; we still go to movies and carry on with our lives.

I've always been a paranoid person by nature anyhow, and now I have these people so concerned with what I say and what I do at all times that it's really hard for me to deal with that. I'm dealing with it a lot better than I would have expected. If I could have predicted what was going to happen to me a few years ago, I definitely wouldn't have opted for this kind of a life-style.

Would it be cooler to have stayed in Seattle and not

We're not necessarily as big as Guns N' Roses, but we're as popular as them, and we still don't have bodyguards.

been on the cover of *Rolling Stone*?

Yeah. Well, I chose to do that—although it was a hell of a fight. We were on tour in Australia, and I had completely forgotten that I had promised to do the *Rolling Stone* piece. And that day, they called and said, “Are you ready to do the photo shoot?” And it was like, “No, I really don’t want to do this.” I had so much pressure from my management and the band members—they wanted to do it, and I just agreed. On my way there I just decided, “I’m going to write something on my shirt that’s offensive enough to stop getting our picture on the cover.” This way I could say that I actually played along with it and still didn’t get picked to be on the cover. I wasn’t necessarily challenging *Rolling Stone*, saying, “You suck” and “We don’t want to have anything to do with you, but we’ll still use you for our exposure.”

Rolling Stone sucks, has always sucked, and still sucks just because they have a hip band on their cover. We’re not as cool and hip as everyone thinks. Having us on the cover isn’t going to make *Rolling Stone* any cooler. Ever since this band has been popular, I’ve always thought of us as just a ’90s version of Cheap Trick or the Knack. They had the two sides of appeal that made them kind of a cool band—a commercial side and kind of a new-wave side. We have that.

not on a major label, and he doesn’t write commercial enough music to use that as a tool.

Does it make you laugh when people take apart all your songs and try to figure out what you’re saying?

Oh, yeah. At the time I was writing those songs, I really didn’t know what I was trying to say. There’s no point in my even trying to analyze or explain it. That used to be the biggest subject in an interview: “What are your lyrics about?” [Laughs] I haven’t written any new lyrics, that’s for sure. We have about 12 songs for our new album we’re scheduled to record in February, and I don’t have any lyrics at all. Within the past year, notebooks and poetry books I’ve had lying around have either been destroyed or stolen. So I don’t have anything to go back on at all. It sucks.

This past year I haven’t been very prolific at all. A few months ago we went on tour to Europe, and before we

went I took two of my favorite guitars and all my poetry books and writings and two tapes that had guitar parts I was going to use for the next record, and I put all this really important stuff in our shower, because we’ve never really used our shower before. And the roommates upstairs had a plumbing problem, so when we came back, everything was destroyed. I don’t have anything to go back on at all. It’s pretty scary.

I read the liner notes you wrote on *Incesticide*. I’ve never seen somebody on a major label say, “If you’re a racist, a sexist, a homophobe, we don’t want you to buy our records.”

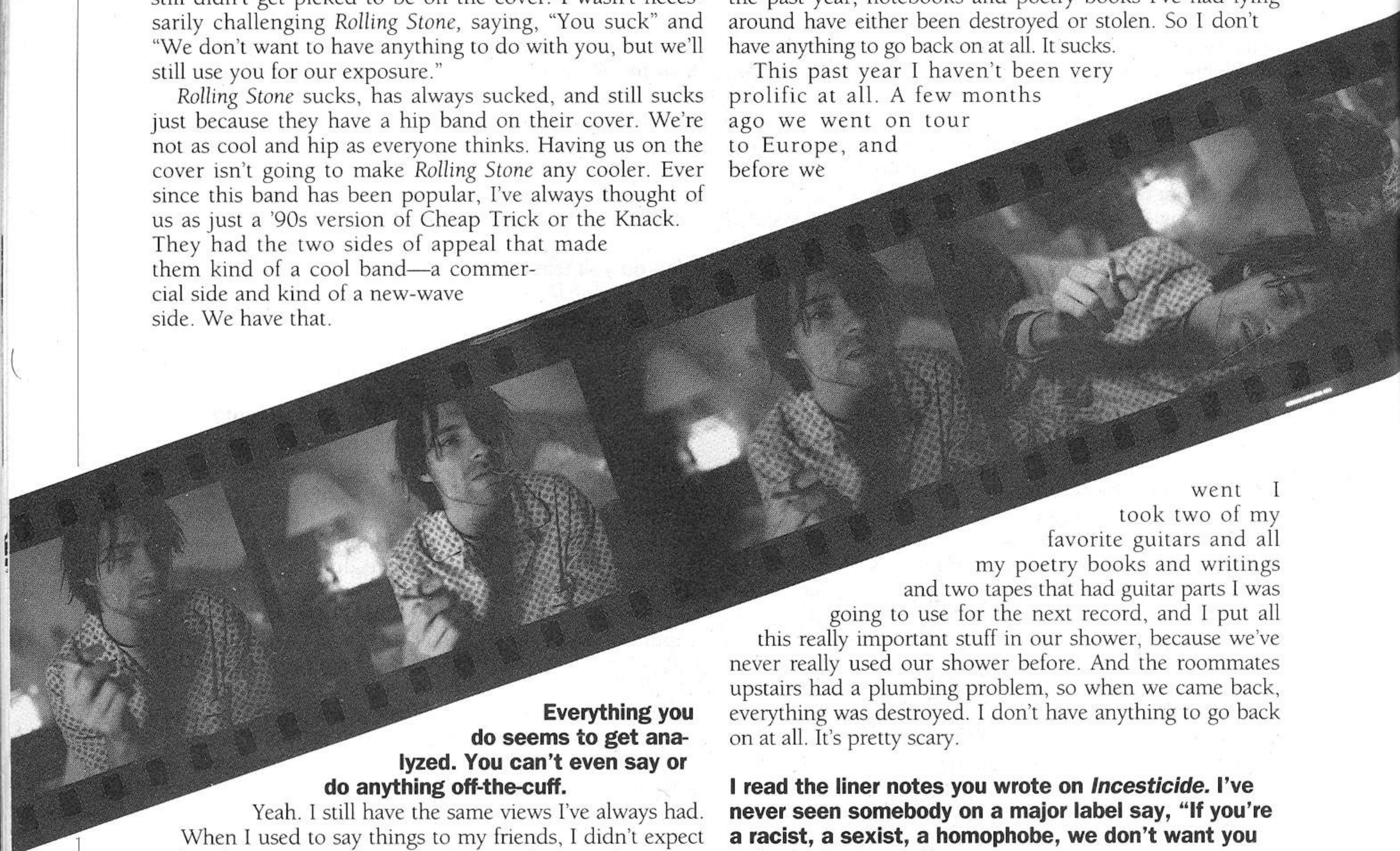
That’s been the biggest problem that I’ve had being in this band. I know there are those people out in the audience, and there’s not much I can do about it. I can talk about those issues in interviews—I think it’s pretty obvious that we’re against the homophobes and the sexists and the racists, but when “Teen Spirit” first came out, mainstream audiences were under the assumption that we were just like Guns N’ Roses.

Then our opinions started showing up in interviews. And then things like Chris and I kissing on *Saturday Night Live*. We weren’t trying to be subversive or punk rock; we were just doing something insane and stupid at the last minute. I think now that our opinions are out in the open, a lot of kids who bought our record regret knowing any-

Everything you do seems to get analyzed. You can’t even say or do anything off-the-cuff.

Yeah. I still have the same views I’ve always had. When I used to say things to my friends, I didn’t expect to be taken so seriously. Now I have to learn to detour my thoughts and what I say in order to stop someone from saying I’m a hypocrite. That was the *Rolling Stone* debate: “Corporate magazines suck, but you’re still on the cover.” Well, of course! It’s a joke. Get over it.

People should take things rock stars say with a grain of salt because there’s no one in rock and roll right now who’s a relevant example or a spokesperson for anything. They do have an influence on people, and I think there’s a new consciousness that’s really positive among rock stars, like Rock the Vote. They’re trying to make people aware, but I really can’t think of anyone who’s really schooled enough to be political to the point that would be required for a rock star. If Jello Biafra [former lead singer of the Dead Kennedys] was a big international star, it would be really cool. But he’s



thing about us. [Laughs]

There is a war going on in the high schools now between Nirvana kids and Guns N' Roses kids. It's really cool. I'm really proud to be a part of that, because when I was in high school, I dressed like a punk rocker and people would scream "Devo!" at me—because Devo infiltrated the mainstream. Out of all the bands who came from the underground and actually made it in the mainstream, Devo is the most subversive and challenging of all. They're just awesome. I love them.

Maybe there'll be a Devo revival soon, like the Village People revival.

I saw the Village People two years ago in Seattle! They were so cool. They still have the same costumes.

Is there anything about Guns N' Roses' music you like?

I can't think of a damn thing. I can't even waste my time on that band, because they're so obviously pathetic and untalented. I used to think that everything in the mainstream pop world was crap, but now that some underground bands have been signed with majors, I take Guns N'

Roses as more of an offense. I have to look into it more: They're really talentless people, and they write crap music, and they're the most popular rock band on the earth right now. I can't believe it.

Didn't Axl Rose say something nasty to you at the MTV Video Music Awards in September?

They actually tried to beat us up. Courtney and I were with the baby in the eating area backstage, and Axl walked by. So Courtney yelled, "Axl! Axl, come over here!" We just wanted to say hi to him—we think he's a joke, but we just wanted to say something to him. So I said, "Will you be the godfather of our child?" I don't know what had happened before that to piss him off, but he took his aggressions out on us and began screaming bloody murder.

These were his words: "You shut your bitch up, or I'm taking you down to the pavement." [Laughs] Everyone around us just burst out into tears of laughter. She wasn't even saying anything mean, you know? So I turned to Courtney and said, "Shut up, bitch!" And everyone laughed, and he left. So I guess I did what he wanted me to do—be a man. [Laughs]

Does he remind you of guys you went to high school with?

Absolutely. Really confused, fucked-up guys. There's not much hope for them.

When he was singing about "immigrants and faggots," people were excusing it by saying, "Well, he's from Indiana—"

Oh, well, that's OK then. [Laughs] Insane. Later, after we played our show and were walking back to our trailer, the Guns N' Roses entourage came walking toward us. They have at least 50 bodyguards apiece: huge, gigantic brain-dead oafs ready to kill for Axl at all times. [Laughs] They didn't see me, but they surrounded Chris, and Duff [McKagan of Guns N' Roses] wanted to beat Chris up, and the bodyguards started pushing Chris around. He finally escaped, but throughout the rest of the evening, there was a big threat of either Guns N' Roses themselves or their goons beating us up. We had to hide out.

Since then, every time Axl has played a show he's said some comment about me and Courtney. When he was in Seattle, he said, "Nirvana would rather stay home and shoot drugs with their bitch wives than tour with us." [Laughs] That's why there's this big feud in most of the high schools. It's hilarious. He is insane, though. I was scared. I couldn't possibly beat him up; I know he would beat me up if he had the chance.

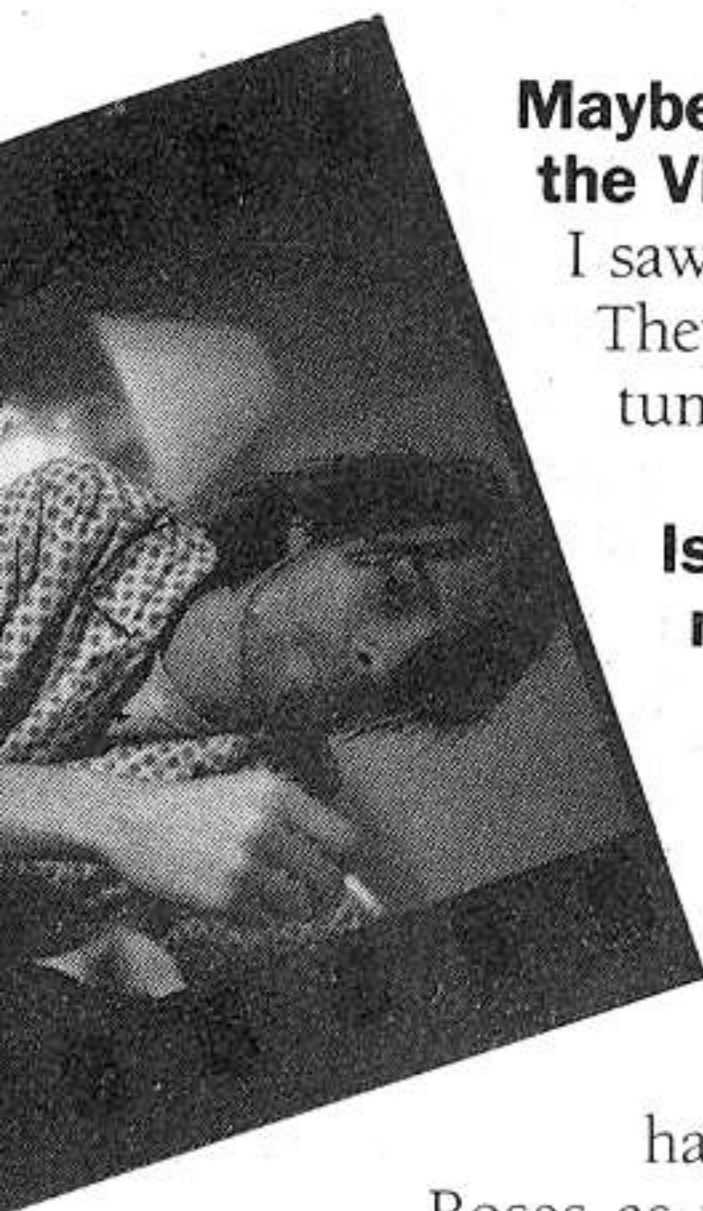
How do you feel about Guns N' Roses fans coming to see you?

Well, when we played that No on 9 benefit in Portland, I said something about Guns N' Roses. Nothing real nasty—I think I said, "And now, for our next song, 'Sweet Child o' Mine.'" But some kid jumped onstage and said, "Hey, man, Guns N' Roses plays awesome music, and Nirvana plays awesome music. Let's just get along and work this out, man!"

And I just couldn't help but say, "No, kid, you're really wrong. Those people are total sexist jerks, and the reason we're playing this show is to fight homophobia in a real small way. The guy is a fucking sexist and a racist and a homophobe, and you can't be on his side and be on our side. I'm sorry that I have to divide this up like this, but it's something you can't ignore. And besides, they can't write good music." [Laughs]

You know, you were probably taking money from people who were voting yes on 9—but they really wanted to see Nirvana.

[Laughs] Right! Chris went to a Guns N' Roses concert when they played here with Metallica a couple of months ago, and he went backstage, and there were these two bimbo girls who looked like they walked out of a Warrant



I think it's pretty obvious that we're against the homophobes and the sexists and the racists.

video. They were sitting on the couch in hopes of sucking Axl's dick or something, and one of them said, "Chris, we saw you at that No on 9 benefit! We're voting yes on 9! You kissed Kurt on the lips! That was disgusting!" [Laughs] To know that we affect people like that—it's kind of funny. The sad thing is that there's no penetrating them. After all that, after all the things those girls had seen us do, that was the one thing that sticks in their mind.

You used to push people's buttons like that in high school, didn't you?

Oh, absolutely. I used to pretend I was gay just to fuck with people. I've had the reputation of being a homosexual ever since I was 14. It was really cool, because I found a couple of gay friends in Aberdeen—which is almost impossible. How I could ever come across a gay person in Aberdeen is amazing! But I had some really good friends that way. I got beat up a lot, of course, because of my association with them.

People just thought I was weird at first, just some fucked-up kid. But once I got the gay tag, it gave me the freedom to be able to be a freak and let people know that they should just stay away from me. Instead of having to explain to someone that they should just stay the fuck away from me—I'm gay, so I can't even be touched. It made for quite a few scary experiences in alleys walking home from school, though.

You actually got beat up?

Oh, yeah. Quite a few times.

And you used to spray-paint GOD IS GAY on people's trucks?

That was a lot of fun. The funnest thing about that was not actually the act but the next morning. I'd get up early in the morning to walk through the neighborhood that I'd terrorized to see the aftermath. That was the worst thing I could have spray-painted on their cars. Nothing would have been more effective.

Aberdeen was depressing, and there were

a lot of negative things about it, but it was really fun to fuck with people all the time. I loved to go to parties—jock keggers—and just run around drunk and obnoxious, smoking cigars and spitting on the backs of these big redneck jocks and them not realizing it. By the end of the evening, usually I'd end up offending a girl, and she'd get her boyfriend to come beat me up. [Laughs]

Because people thought you were gay and you had gay friends, did you ever wonder if you might be gay?

Yeah, absolutely. See, I've always wanted male friends that I could be real intimate with and talk about important things with and be as affectionate with that person as I would be with a girl. Throughout my life I've always been really close with girls and made friends with girls. And I've always been a really sickly, feminine person anyhow, so I thought I was gay for a while because I didn't find any of the girls in my high school attractive at all. They had really awful haircuts and fucked-up attitudes. So I thought I would try to be gay for a while, but I'm just more sexually attracted to women. But I'm really glad that I found a few gay friends, because it totally saved me from becoming a monk or something.

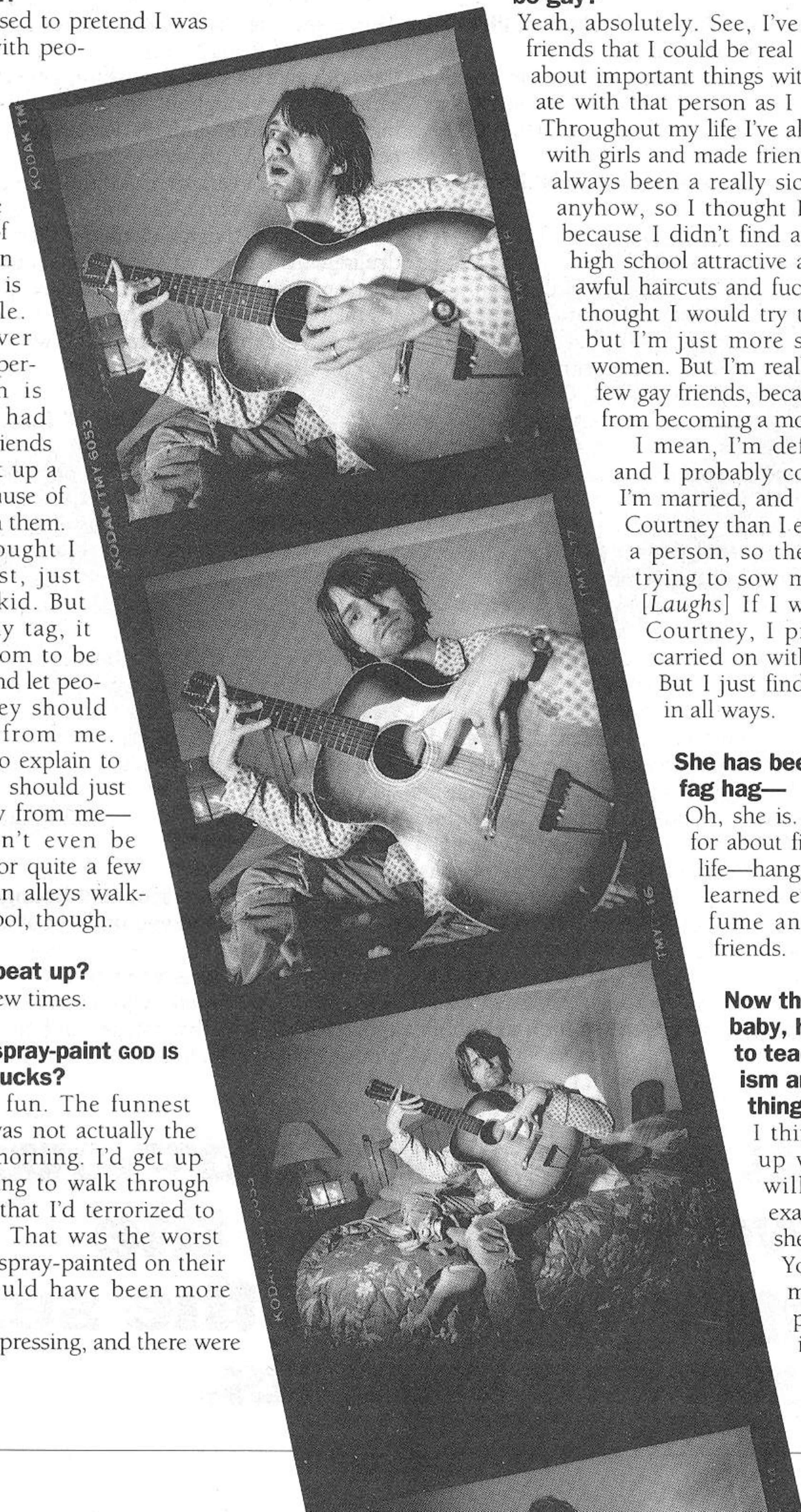
I mean, I'm definitely gay in spirit, and I probably could be bisexual. But I'm married, and I'm more attracted to Courtney than I ever have been toward a person, so there's no point in my trying to sow my oats at this point. [Laughs] If I wouldn't have found Courtney, I probably would have carried on with a bisexual life-style. But I just find her totally attractive in all ways.

She has been described as a fag hag—

Oh, she is. That was all she did for about five or six years of her life—hang out in gay clubs. She learned everything about perfume and fashion from her friends.

Now that you've got a baby, how are you going to teach her about sexism and homophobia and things like that?

I think that just growing up with Courtney and I will be a good enough example that, hopefully, she won't be prejudiced. You have to admit that most of the reasons a person grows up hating the isms is be-



cause their parents taught them. She might get confused, but I'm not worried about it at all.

With the state the world is in, do you ever feel scared for her?

Well, I have apocalyptic dreams all the time. Two years ago, I wouldn't even have considered having a child. I used to say that a person who would bring a child into this life now is selfish. But I try to be optimistic, and things do look like they're getting a little bit better—just the way communication has progressed in the past ten years. MTV, whether they're the evil corporate ogre or not, has played a part in raising consciousness.

It seems tacky almost, but rock and roll and our generation are not going to put up with the same Reaganite bullshit we were subjected to when we were younger. I was helpless when I was 12, when Reagan got elected, and there was nothing I could do about that. But now this generation is growing up, and they're in their mid 20s; they're not putting up with it.

I know there's still Republicans all over the place, but don't you feel that it's getting a little bit better? Not just because Clinton is in office now but—look at the first thing he did. He tried to take away the ban on gays in the military, and I think that's a pretty positive thing. I don't expect a lot of change, but I think in the last five years our generation's gotten a lot more positive. I know that by reading *Sassy* magazine, you know? As tacky and stupid as that seems, I can tell that the average 14-year-old kid is a lot more sensitive—or trying to be—than they were ten years ago.

Are you pro Clinton?

Oh, yeah. I voted for him. I would have rather had Jerry Brown. I contributed my hundred dollars. But I'm definitely happy that Clinton's in.

Would you play at the White House if they asked you to?

[Laughs] If we could have some kind of influence on something, yeah. I know that Chelsea likes us a lot, so maybe Chelsea could say, "Dad, do this and do that! Nirvana says so!" [Laughs] Sure, I'd play for the president. And Chelsea seems like a pretty neat person—Birkenstock-wearing kid. Amy Carter's pretty cool too, from what I've heard. She's been seen at Butthole Surfers concerts!

You guys aren't preachy about your opinions. It's a sensible approach.

Gee. That's pretty flattering, but out of all the people I know, I'm about the least qualified to be talking politically.

I hope I come across more personal than political. About a year ago, when we realized the impact that we have, we thought it was a great opportunity to have some kind of influence on people. I've been called a hypocrite and an idiot and unqualified, but I can't help it. It's just my nature. I have to talk about things that piss me off, and if that's negative or that's preachy, then that's too bad. No one's gonna shut me up. I'm still the same person I was. Actually, I used to be way more of a radical than I am now.

In thought or in deed?

Both, really. Mostly in deed; I can't really go around vandalizing anymore. But I have—actually, I just did a while ago.

What?

I can't say! [Laughs] I can't even say! I have people checking up on me all the time—especially because of the heroin rumors. That's been blown out of proportion so severely that I'm constantly harassed at airports and immigration all the time. And the cops—I get pulled over whenever they recognize me, and they search my car.

It all started with just one fucking article in *Bam* magazine. This guy—I wasn't even high that night, and he just assumed I was and wrote a piece on how sunken in my cheeks were and how pinholed my eyes were and that I wasn't able to cope with the success and everything that was going on with the band. It was very embarrassing. It didn't bother me at first, but then once one article is written about a person that's negative, it just spreads like wildfire, and everyone just assumes it's true.

You're talking about Lynn Hirschberg's profile of Courtney in *Vanity Fair*.

I've never read an article that was more convincing yet more ridiculous in my life. Everybody from our record label to our management to our closest friends believed that shit.

She [Hirschberg] did a really good job of taking a piece of what Courtney had said and turning it into something completely different. I've seen that happen before—it's happened with me a lot of times—but this was such an extreme and done so well that I have to give her credit. She's a master at being catty.

What about the drug use?

Courtney was honest about the heroin excursion we went on for a few months. Then Courtney found herself pregnant, realized she was pregnant and had a drug problem, and got off of drugs. It's as simple as that. But it made it look like eight months after the fact, Courtney was nine months pregnant and still doing drugs and everyone was really concerned. Like there was some awful den of iniquity

If I wouldn't have found Courtney, I probably would have carried on with a bisexual life-style.

going on in our apartment. I looked really skinny. Well, I am a skinny person, and I gain ten pounds every time I'm photographed, so people assume I'm this chunky, normal-weight person.

I'm just so tired of thinking about this. We have to live with the results of this one article every fucking day. It's something we have to deal with all the time.

How did you feel when you read it?

I was totally pissed off. My first thoughts were to have her fucking snuffed out. I wanted to personally beat the shit out of her, and I've never wanted to do that to anybody, especially a woman. But I just had so much anger in me. It was done so well. We were just helpless to combat something like that. We've had to do fluff pieces to try to fight this thing. It's embarrassing to have to do that: to pose with your family on the cover of a magazine, to hope that some people at least question the validity of [*Vanity Fair*].

You're talking about posing for the December *Spin* cover?

Yeah, and we've done a couple of other things. It pissed me off to the point of...not even wanting to hate that much. We could have filed a lawsuit with Condé Nast, but they have so many millions of dollars, they could have filibustered for ten years, and we wouldn't have come up with anything except losing most of our money.

What's the funniest thing you've ever seen written about you?

Practically all of it. [*Laughs*] Most of the time I come across as just this redneck little rocker kid who basically can't put a sentence together, you know? I come across a lot of times as just a stupid rock-and-roll kid.

Courtney comes across in the press as the Nancy Reagan of this relationship.

It's just sick. God! I don't want to say something like "Well, if anything, I wear the pants in the house." It's completely divided. We have influence on each other. It's totally 50-50. Courtney insists on this: She has a tab when she borrows money from me that she has to pay back. She's only up to \$6,000. We're millionaires, and she goes to Jet Rag [a Los Angeles vintage-clothing shop] and buys clothes—\$5 dresses. Big deal! I'll

gladly buy her some \$5 dresses. We don't require much at all.

Our personal expenses over the last year—we made a million dollars, of which \$380,000 went to taxes, \$300,000 went to a house, the rest went to doctors and lawyers, and our personal expenses were like \$80,000. That's including car rentals, food, everything. That's not very much; that's definitely not what Axl spends a year. She insisted on a prenuptial agreement; no one knows that. So there's definitely not manipulation going on in this relationship at all.

It really sickens me to think that everyone assumes this. It makes me feel even stupider. I'm not the most secure person in the world, and I don't need to know that every time I go outside and someone recognizes me, they think of me as this defenseless little rocker idiot that's being manipulated by his wife. It's a little bit more complex than that.

Courtney's had misconceptions about herself all her life. I talk to people who knew Courtney five years ago, and she was way more of a volatile, fucked-up person than she is now. She was insane at times. People would see her at parties just begging for attention. I never could have predicted a successful marriage with this person a few years ago. It just couldn't have happened.

How does all this affect the other members of Nirvana?

Definitely not as severe as everyone thinks or what has been written. There was an article in the [British music magazine] *NME* that was nothing but an "exposé" on Courtney fucking up Nirvana and making us come close to breaking up. It's pretty frightening to find that an article like that can be written by a friend of yours. It makes it hard to trust anybody.

Chris and Dave liked Courtney before I even liked Courtney. During that time, I knew that I liked her a lot, but I wouldn't admit it. She and Dave were really good friends—I shouldn't say this, but they almost wanted to get together for a time. When we were on tour in Europe, some of



our shows collided with Hole shows, and Courtney would hang out on the bus with us, and Chris and Courtney were really good friends. And it hasn't changed at all. There hasn't been any bad blood except after the *Vanity Fair* piece.

For a few days, even Chris was convinced that Courtney had said those things. Courtney had said, "Why don't you kick Chris out of the band?" She said that, but it was a total joke. That's the biggest problem with articles—context. The word *sarcastic* needs to be in parentheses 90% of the time in an interview with us. Dave and Chris are dealing with this fine, and they're defending us as much as they can, but we can't expect them to go on a defense crusade, because it doesn't affect them like it affects us.

Have there been times in the last year when you've just wanted to quit?

Oh, yeah. The other night. I called up Chris late at night; I was really drunk, and I said, "I don't want to be in this band anymore. I'll call you tomorrow." I was dead serious. For a couple of hours. [Laughs]

How is it dealing with a big label?

We haven't had any complications. In our contract we have 100% artistic control. What that means in fine print, I don't know. All the evil corporateness that I've heard about since I've been into underground rock probably is true with other bands, but we have a good lawyer and a great contract. And we sell a lot of records for them, so we have the upper hand.

Courtney's band got a good contract too?

It's actually better than ours. This is the first decade major labels have even dealt with a contract like this. They're so used to having bands that don't even know what they want to do that they have to be in control. There are a lot of bands that don't have any artistic direction at all, so they need to dress up in spandex.

So you can turn on mainstream radio and hear some music you like these days.

That's part of the reason I'm a little bit more optimistic this year—Clinton and because the Screaming Trees are on heavy rotation right now. It's commercial, but it's good music. I don't like Pearl Jam's music at all, but at least they have good attitudes; they're not another Van Halen, who totally refuse to address anything.

The only sad thing about it is that the innocence of underground music has been lumped in with the corporate idea of what underground is. There are no boundaries. Pearl Jam's a good example. I don't mean to harp on them; I'm tired of talking shit about them, but they're a real commercial rock band.

What do you do when you're not playing music?

Well, I'm reading *Perfume* for the second time. It's about a perfume apprentice in the 1700s. And I really like Camille Paglia a lot; it's really entertaining, even though I don't necessarily agree with what she says. I still paint once in a while—I painted the cover of *Incesticide*.

And I make dolls. I like the style of things from the 1700s and 1800s from Yugoslavia and that area. I copy from these doll-collector magazines. They're clay. I bake them, and then I make them look really old and put old clothes on them. They look like I actually came across a real antique, because I don't know where to find the dolls that are in those magazines. I could go to a doll-collectors show, but they're so expensive. I don't want to indulge in things like that—"Now that I'm a rock star, I buy antiques," you know? [Laughs] Some of those things are, like, \$50,000.

I can't find anything I want. I go shopping, and I buy food, and that's about it. Now that I have all this money, I just can't spend it on anything. Everything that I appreciate is old but not necessarily an antique, so I can get it really cheap.

So you're not falling into the trap of spending money on things just because you can?

Sometimes I wish I could. I've noticed there are specialty shops for the rich and famous that have basically the same things you can find at Kmart, but they have a ridiculous price tag, and people buy it just because they don't have anything else to do with their money. There are a lot of things like that on Rodeo Drive. We went into Gucci just to see what a Gucci bag cost. [Laughs] Just this leather bag, and because it had a Gucci name on it, it was, like, \$10,000!

Do you like L.A.?

I hate L.A. I love the weather, but I can't stand being there. I absolutely hate it. A lot of it has to do with having the responsibility of driving around with the baby. People are so rude there. I'm not that bad a driver, and I get in a wreck almost every day.

We were there for the riots. That decision was the most asinine thing I'd ever seen. If they were going to riot, I just wish they could have rioted in the middle of Beverly Hills. Got all the Gucci bags. [Laughs]

Now's your chance to say anything you'd like to say.

I always clam up when that question is asked. Maybe I'll just fumble and stutter and end up saying, "Don't believe everything you read." I always knew to question things. All my life I never believed most things I read in history books and a lot of things I learned in school. But now I've found I don't have the right to make a judgment on someone based on something I read. I don't have the right to judge anything. That's the lesson I've learned. ●

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