

INDEPENDENT SINCE 1880

# The Cornell Daily Sun

ONLINE

## Back in the Day: Reunifications of a Bookish Sort

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There's a reunion happening on the other end of the line.

Actually, there's a Cornell reunion — a Cornell Sunnie reunion to be precise, and if I were in the mood to split hairs, I'd specify that it's a reunion of former Dazies.

Their names are Mickey Rapkin '00, S.E. Cupp '00 and Farhad Manjoo '00. They work at GQ, The New York Times and Salon.com, respectively. Oh, and they all have books coming out in the month, one out already — the reason behind this joyous reunion.

In short, they are who you want to be in five to 10 years. Or, at least who we want to be.

It's not often that we get to Cornell Connect through The Sun, and the difference is obvious. Jargon like "compet," "A+" and the mythical Schroeder are bandied about excitedly — terms that you are probably unfortunate (or perhaps fortunate) enough not to use daily. But they are as familiar to all Sunnies as Shortstop and Sun Style.

As I was saying before I got all sentimental — it's catch-up time for these three. And all myself and my co-editor (whom I hope will squeal my name as excitedly eight years from now when we reunite via telephone) can do is listen while we are transported — at least for the moment — back to 2000. Apparently 1999 wasn't the only party.

The Sun: So how'd you get started at the Sun?

Mickey Rapkin: Ladies first.

S.E. Cupp: I was bored freshman year and someone suggested that I try out for a club, and I'm not really a clubby kind of gal —

M.R.: Unless you count the N.R.A.

[*This, we learn later, is in fact true.*]

S.C.: — so I thought maybe the newspaper would be good. I'd always liked writing and it seemed

useful, and then I [became editor], and I loved it, and we all became buddies.

Farhad Manjoo: I remember thinking that if I worked for a college newspaper I might be able to interview the Smashing Pumpkins. It never happened.

Most of the interview goes like this: easy banter and interruptions, usually by Mickey, usually teasing S.E., and, often related to her political leanings, which we will discuss shortly.

*We move quickly onto the books themselves. Mickey, in addition to being a Sunnie, was also a Cayuga's Waiter. (Girls – and guys — try not to swoon.) It's an apt start, because Mickey's book, Pitch Perfect, is about competitive college a cappella.*

The Sun: How much of the book came from personal experience?

M.R.: Actually, none of it. I followed three groups [Tufts' Beelzebubs, UVA's Hullabahoos and University of Oregon's Divisi] over the course of the school year but I didn't really write anything about my personal experiences, and I didn't sing with these groups on the road. I pretty much kept my own painful a cappella past quiet.

The Sun: Any parallels between their experiences and yours?

M.R.: Of course. All the groups are basically the same, is sort of what I discovered. When I was in the Waiters, I thought there was something unique about our experience. But what I found is that all the groups go through the same sort of trials and tribulations, just to different degrees.

According to Mickey, those trials and tribulations ranged from “two of the groups [he] was following nearly com[ing] to fists,” as well as “the standard drama of trying to sell tickets and albums and ego clashes.”

The Sun: The Waiters never seem to have that problem [selling tickets].

M.R.: There's a little bit of that, I think, always sort of bubbling under the surface.

The Sun: So the rumor is that part of the reason to join all-male a cappella is for the girls. In your experience, was that accurate?

M.R.: I know a guy who slept with a girl under the table at a party. You wouldn't expect that from an a cappella party, and I gotta say, I found a lot of similar stories in reporting this book. The book has a lot of exciting guest stars, but there's one in particular we care about.

*While Rapkin's book illustrates one of the most glamorized but unpublicized aspects of college life, Cupp's book, Why You're Wrong About the Right, approaches an utterly different subject from a similar angle but opposite trajectory — a dispelling of all the negative myths that liberals harbor against conservatives, which she co-wrote with another Cornellian, Brett Joshpe '02.*

S.C.: Basically, it's a defense of conservatism against all the liberal stereotypes.

M.R. (interjecting): Boo.

S.C.: I'm super popular.

The Sun: So Tucker Carlson contributed to the book. What's he like? Does he still ever wear that

bowtie?

S.C.: He's amazing. We decided early on that we didn't have the gravitas or the credibility to do this on our own. So we hijacked a bunch of conservative personalities, and he was the first person who signed on. And we were, are, nobodies, so for him to take that leap of faith was really great of him and speaks to his personality. He's just a happy-go-lucky, up for anything kind of guy and was more than happy to help to write our foreword ... he's the guy you'd want to have a beer with.

*And the bowtie?*

M.R.: He got rid of the bowtie two years ago, I think.

The Sun: Jon Stewart's fault.

S.C.: I think that was the right move.

*Farhad's book, True Enough: Learning to Live in a Post-Fact Society, also looks at the relationship between truth, politics and the American way ... of believing everything you read. Or, in his words:*

F.M.: [It's about] the psychology of how we understand things in a world that's gone from news mass media to niche media. The change has caused us to believe things that aren't really true. Like people like S.E.'s friends, for instance, think that global warming isn't true [laughter].

M.R.: It's gonna get ugly.

*But the pundit that comes to mind (to multiple reviewers) is Stephen Colbert, not Tucker Manjoo, however, negated these comparisons.*

F.M.: He's a comedian, and I'm not. I explore the idea of truthiness, but more from a psychological aspect. The book is basically about how we are inclined to believe things that aren't true, just because we have strong opinions about them. And that's kind of what Colbert argues too, but you know, in a funny way.

We have to question Farhad's claims as humbleness. Recently, he duped quite a few on his Salon.com blog "The Machinist" into entering their information into his "new business model": I Google For You.

F.M.: I will totally do it for you. It was an April Fools joke where I said that I would Google for people and it was my new internet startup. About a thousand people asked me to google for them.

*We talk more — about their books, the writing process, the depressing nature of today's job market. And then we ask these three alumni if they wish they were still in college. After all, isn't that what everyone wants?*

F.M.: I guess there are parts of it that I miss, but not much, not really, not on the whole.

When I think about Cornell, I think about The Sun mostly [*Hey, us too!*].

S.C. [agreeing]: I will never again have the opportunity to boss people around, I mean, I will

never have that job title again, and all jokes aside, that was really a lot of power, I thoroughly enjoyed it. And, also, I mean, I prank phoned the A+ people on a constant basis ... once you're out of college, it's really inappropriate to do that in any kind of job environment.

F.M.: It was still inappropriate back then.

S.C.: No it was totally called for. And now ... joking aside, that's the stuff I miss. It's fun, and camaraderie and the real world is a lot harder, I think.

M.R.: I miss the innocence of it. Life was all, what was gonna come next, ya know? You hadn't made any mistakes yet. It was just easier.

The Sun: Thanks for the pep talk.

But if you asked us, between prank calling A+ and being published authors, we'd probably choose the former.

*Rapkin's book will be published in May 29, Cupp's May 20. Manjoo's was published March 18. For more about the books and the authors, check out: [pitchperfect-thebook.com](http://pitchperfect-thebook.com), [whywrongaboutright.com](http://whywrongaboutright.com) and [machinist.salon.com](http://machinist.salon.com), respectively.*

*Arts and Entertainment Editor Peter Finocchiaro '10 also contributed to this interview.*

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