

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

Matt Lang and Wayne Decide To Go To a Bar

Matt Lang grew up in McKean County, Pennsylvania, one of 43,450 people living within 984 square miles amidst the Allegheny Mountains, 300 miles north of Pittsburgh, 90 miles south of Buffalo, New York, and 25 years behind anywhere else. He moved away. He lives in Chicago now. He goes back to visit sometimes. On his most recent trip home to McKean County, Matt Lang learned that many women in the area were getting their breasts done. Wayne Strohman shared the news over bacon, eggs and coffee at Marcy's Diner in Derrick City.

Anyone I know?

Stephanie Knight.

Have you seen her?

Last night. Figured I'd stop by the Eagle, have a drink, see who was there, and there she was with two new tits.

Matt nodded.

And?

I asked if I could see them and she said no. Fuckin' A? I was like, what's the point of gettin' 'em done if you're not gonna share?

Matt wondered if it wasn't because Wayne was probably drunk and dribbling tobacco juice down his chin. Matt took a ten out of his wallet and looked at Wayne who

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

returned a look that indicated that, if possible, Matt should take out another ten. So he did.

Well, keep at it. She'll come around.

Matt threw the bills on the counter.

Oh, I will, and she will if I can get her drunk enough.

Nice catching up, Wayne.

Matt put on his coat. So did Wayne.

Goin' out to the Eagle again tonight. Guaran-damn-ty Stephanie will be there.

Come and try to see for yourself.

I'm married, dude.

Yeah, but I hear that's not really workin' out for you, so you should come out and see some titties.

As often happened during a conversation with Wayne, Matt didn't quite know what to say.

For reasons related to his life in Chicago, Matt went out with Wayne to the Eagle that night. He had not been to the Eagle in ten years, more than ten years. It, like most everything else in McKean County, looked the same. There was the deer head over the door, there was the Earnhardt poster on the wall, there was the reminder that The West Was Not Won With a Registered Gun above the tap which offered the same three beers:

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

Bud, Bud Light, Yuengling. Matt ordered a Yuengling from the same bartender, Dora, who looked the same, which is to say she looked like she had aged two years for every one year actually lived. He and Wayne sat at a booth in the corner and waited for someone they knew to walk in.

Stephanie Taylor, who had changed, walked in with her fake breasts side by side under her sweater. She was with a much younger man who Matt recognized but could not name. Stephanie and her man did not see Matt or Wayne and took seats at the bar with their backs to them. Wayne told Matt, That's the other thing: Chicks are gettin' their tits done and datin' guys at least ten year younger than 'em.

Who's that?

Ryan Reeves. His brother was in my class.

Jesus, can he even drink?

Oh, yeah. He's like twenty-five or twenty-six. Not that Dora gives a shit, of course.

Of course.

Stephanie leaned on the bar and slid her ass back. Matt looked at it as it hung off the back of the stool. It still looked tight even though she, like him, was almost 36. He was almost done with his beer. Wayne asked, Why didn't you ever hit that?

I fuckin' tried, man.

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

No, you didn't try, you fuckin' pussied out. Did you ever ask her? No, didn't think so.

First you ask to see their tits. Then you ask to see their twat. Then you say, we've come this far, we might as well fuck.

That's how you do it, huh?

Yes, that's how you do it. It's not fuckin' rocket science. Let's put it this way:

There's five women in this bar right now, right? I've fucked four of them.

Matt counted, assessed.

So you fucked everyone here but Dora?

No, I fucked Dora. Best fuckin' head I ever got.

Matt finished his beer.

So -

Stephanie never let me fuck her.

See, it's not that easy.

Yeah, but I'm a fuckin' fat ass. And at least I tried.

Matt Lang and Stephanie Taylor: A Brief History

1.

Matt Lang first saw Stephanie Taylor in the hallway on the first day of school of seventh grade. His locker was two away from hers. He noticed her bangs first. Twelve

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

inches below the crest of that wave he saw her eyes, and well spaced below her eyes he saw the smile that painted the inside of his eyelids as he drifted to sleep that night.

Her tits weren't there yet, not really, but by the time they showed up in eighth grade, Stephanie had replaced Vogue era Madonna as the most frequent guest star in Matt's masturbatory scenarios. This was mostly because of that ass, which Matt assumed, as soon as he started to assume such things about his classmates, you could bounce a quarter off of and have it hit the ceiling.

His infatuation lasted until their senior year, when it was undone in two parts.

2.

Stephanie walked into homeroom and took her seat. She looked upset. Matt leaned forward and asked her what was wrong.

Todd and I broke up.

2a.

(Matt Lang and Todd Parnell: A Very Brief History)

On January 17th, 1991, Todd Parnell, in the bleachers of Otto-Eldred Jr.-Sr. High School, during the third quarter of a basketball game between the Otto-Eldred Terrors and the Coudersport Falcons, gave Matt Lang a titty twister so vicious that it drew blood. The

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

reason for this: Matt was wearing a “faggot shirt”, a faggot shirt being, in the estimation of Todd Parnell, a shirt with buttons.

2b.

Matt wanted to jump up and throw his desk through the window, so unbridled was his joy. Instead, he reached out, put his hand on her shoulder, and lied, Jesus, that sucks. What happened?

He's a total asshole is what happened.

Matt wanted to say, No fucking shit the guy is an asshole. What tipped you off, the fact that he shoots road signs for fun? That, at the age of twenty-one, he still thinks it's something to belch as loud as possible? That, even though he is never seen without his Confederate flag ball cap, he plays Gimme That Nut from his 1987 F250 at a volume that rattles windows? That he took money - money that could have been used to feed a child or plant a tree - and spent it on a decal of Calvin pissing on the Chevy symbol, then took the time - time that could have been used to deliver groceries or medication to shuts ins - to put that decal on the back window of his truck? That he hits you sometimes?

Instead he said, I'm sorry.

Well, I'm not. Fucking asshole.

Matt sat back in his seat and planned their first date.

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

3.

Two weeks later Stephanie walked into homeroom and took her seat. She was smiling. Matt leaned forward and noted that she looked happy.

I am. Todd and I are back together. We had a great talk last night and then had great sex.

Matt wanted to jump up and throw his desk through the window, so complete was his rage. Instead, he reached out, put his hand on her shoulder, and lied, Great. That's great.

He had planned to drive her over the hill into Olean to see a movie. On the way, she was going to talk and clear her head, and he was going listen because he was good at that. He was going to tell her about all the good things she deserved. He was going to make her laugh and she was going to kill him with those eyes and that smile. He was prepared to die. After the movie, he was going to take her to Renna's where they were going to each get a slice of pizza and he was going to reach across the table with a napkin to wipe the little bits of cheese and sauce from her chin, and, since he'd gone that far anyway, he was going to kiss her mouth. But now none of that was going to happen.

Matt sat back in his seat and practiced regarding Stephanie with indifference.

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

4.

He saw her during his sophomore year of college, on the sidewalk in front of the video store in Eldred. He was home for winter break; she was home because she never left. It was night and the snowflakes were falling so slowly it was as if they were being lowered on fishing line. He did not recognize her right away because she had straightened her hair. She felt dumb. She hated the change.

I got it done a few weeks ago.

It looks nice.

She looked at the sidewalk.

Thanks.

She looked at the plastic bag he was holding.

What movie?

He tried to think of a lie. He failed.

Barb Wire.

With Pamela –

Yeah.

Oh.

Now he looked at the sidewalk. She spoke next.

How long are you home for?

About two more weeks.

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

Maybe I'll see you?

He did not see her, but when he came home that summer he heard from Wayne that she was pregnant and engaged to Todd Parnell.

Matt Lang and Wayne Are Still At the Bar

Looking at Stephanie on the barstool, he did not feel indifferent. He wanted to talk to her. He poured his beer down his throat, walked to the bar and stood just next to her left shoulder. She didn't look at him. He ordered another beer and pretended he just noticed her.

Is that Stephanie Taylor?

Well if it isn't Matt Lang.

It is, it is. How the hell are you?

I'm good. How are you? Still in Chicago?

Still in Chicago.

His head was tilted up, toward the ceiling, in an attempt to not stare directly at her breasts. At some point he knew he would have to take a good look, because they were there, obvious, hovering at the bottom of his field of vision, and because he was worried, what with the angle of his head, that she would think he was a snob looking down his nose at her.

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

His chance came when she leaned back to introduce him to Reeves. He got a good look as he reached his hand in front of her to shake Reeves'. They were ridiculous, those tits. They were oversized snow globes.

Reeves was smoking a cigarette even though they were in a bar in 2012. He ashed, set the cigarette in the ashtray, and took Matt's outstretched hand, which was close enough to the tits to feel a gravitational pull. Reeves gave a wordless nod, pumped Matt's hand once, and then resumed smoking and staring straight ahead.

How long are you around for?

As Stephanie spoke her face looked older than 35. It looked closer to 45. It looked twenty years older than her tits. The discrepancy intrigued Matt. In the instance between when she finished her question and he gave his reply, he calculated that if he slept with her it would be like sleeping with a woman who was older than, younger than, and exactly the same age as, him.

A few days. I fly back Sunday morning. I've been here since Wednesday.

Are you by yourself? Don't you have a kid?

The kid is with my wife and they are with her folks in Ohio. Kind of a long story. It was easier this way.

They paused for beer drinking.

Sorry I don't get to meet her. It is her, right?

Yes, my wife is a her.

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

She gave him a little backhand slap on his shoulder.

I meant your kid, silly.

Oh, yeah, little girl. Next time.

It was time to take a long drink of his beer. The beer was getting warm because he had been holding his glass unnecessarily close to his chest.

You have kids, too, right?

Yeah, a son and a daughter.

How old are they?

He's twelve and she's ten.

So, what, seventh grade and fifth grade?

Yep. Can you believe it?

Matt Lang shook his head and laughed through his nose and finished his beer.

Reevus left the bar and went to play pool with a group of guys Matt assumed were his friends, assuming someone like Reevus had such things. Stephanie turned her head back and forth as if working out a krick in her neck. They were silent. The jukebox played More Human Than Human. Wayne replaced Reevus.

Hey, told ya she had some big ol' titties. You gonna let *him* touch 'em?

I'd let him before I let you, pervert.

Deep down in a hidden and shameful corner of his soul, what biologists call the penis, Matt became excited.

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

Ya hear that, Lang?

But he wouldn't because he's married and he's a gentleman, unlike some people.

Bullshit. Tell her, Lang. Tell her that's bullshit.

Deep down in that same hidden and shameful corner, he knew that it was bullshit.

Wayne, you're interrupting.

Hey, I'm just tryin' to help ya out here. You know he's a writer, right? He'll be all sensitive and insightful and shit.

You wanna help? Buy the next round.

OK, but promise me you'll at least *try* to touch 'em.

Stephanie turned to face Matt, removing Wayne from the remainder of the conversation.

You're a writer?

Kind of. Not Really. I'm trying. When I get a chance.

I remember you wrote some really good stuff in high school.

Matt scratched his forehead and wondered why that statement made his stomach drop so.

Thanks, I – Thanks.

They ordered two more beers. They talked more as they drank them. Stephanie asked, What are you doing tomorrow night? She looked at him with a tilted head. He matched her tilt.

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

I don't know. You tell me.

I think you should do something with me.

She smiled that fucking smile. He was in. He looked over her ear toward the pool table.

What about –

He has to work tomorrow night. Come get me anytime after three.

He chewed a bit on his bottom lip.

OK. After three.

She left with Reeves after that round of beers. Wayne left with the first willing female, a woman Matt did not recognize, possibly because she must have graduated in the 70's. That left Matt alone at the bar. He did not want even one night of his singular life on this earth to end with him sitting at the Eagle until closing time, so he paid his bill and walked out the door. He crossed a set of train tracks and walked to a small park and found a bench. He was too drunk to drive home, drunk enough to not mind the cold. He sat with his back to the tracks and looked over the park. It was quiet and dark in ways that Chicago never could be. He slouched and closed his eyes. He thought maybe he could feel the stars twinkle against his face. He opened his eyes and shook his head because he feared that if he fell asleep on that park bench he would die. He had to stay awake. He had to piss.

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

He crossed the park to a stand of trees that separated the park from the Allegheny River. He picked a sturdy maple to stand behind. He opened his zipper and extracted his shriveled dick. As he watched his piss splatter and steam, he considered the nature of the breast job: Was it fact or fiction? On which shelf should it be shelved? Was Stephanie writing a memoir or a novel? The implants were fake, yes, but they were under *her* skin, and therefore part of *her* body, and her body was real, was true, so were they now part of the truthful whole of her body? Do partial lies, embedded in a whole truth, become part of that whole truth? Or was the whole truth now spoiled by the lie, and every part with it? Was her hair a lie? Were here eyes lies? Was that smile now a lie? Or did the fiction point to a truth that was even *more* true?

As he shook off he told himself to remember this shit because it might make for a fine piece of writing. Maybe he finally had something to share with the world. He had piss on his hand. He wiped it on the side of his jeans.

Matt walked back toward the bench and saw someone lurching, along the tracks. They looked like they might fall over at any minute. Someone else, he thought, too drunk and too far from home.

Matt Lang and Stephanie Go On a Date

Matt pulled up to Stephanie's house in his mom's car. He planned to take her on the date he never took her on seventeen years ago. Would he try to end it with a kiss?

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

He wasn't sure. She stepped down the front steps and climbed in through the passengers' side door.

Hey.

That fucking mouth. Fuck it all, he was going to try to end it with a kiss.

Hey. I thought we could head to Olean, get something to eat

She clicked her seatbelt in place.

Sounds good, you're driving. I'm up for anything.

Anything? Imagine the possibilities.

Imagine.

He had a large archive of things he'd imagined about Stephanie. He went through it and pulled out Conversations That Might Somehow Lead To Us Having Sex. He always imagined such a conversation would take place in a car, with him driving, and would include her in some way indicating that she was up for anything. So far so good, and they hadn't even left Eldred. On the way out of town, he saw a house surrounded by police tape. He had never seen police tape in Eldred and it had no place in his fantasy life.

Shit, what happened there?

I don't know. We heard sirens at around two-thirty. When we saw the lights my dad went out to try to see what was going on, but the police had everything blocked.

Who lives there?

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

It's been empty since Mrs. Randell died, but our neighbor said they took three bodies away in an ambulance.

He assumed it was meth related. He assumed that they had been using the house as a meth lab. He assumed they had cooked their product wrong and poisoned themselves. He assumed they used their dying breaths to try to call 911. He assumed they dialed the wrong number. He did not have a high opinion of most people in the area.

He thought about sharing this theory with Stephanie, but hesitated because the Conversations That Might Lead To Sex did not include crystal meth in any way. On the other hand, he was probably right, because he pays attention, and if he could show Stephanie that he pays attention, even if the demonstration came in the form of an observation about the activities of drug addicts in McKean County, well –

Probably a bunch of meth heads that fucked up their last batch.

That's what my dad thinks. That's actually almost exactly what he said, word for word.

The imagined conversation certainly didn't include any mention of parents. He feared they had taken a turn into territory more stagnant than the swampy floodplain of the Allegheny River through which they were driving, but Stephanie shifted in her seat and angled her body towards Matt.

Maybe you should take this next left.

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

Eldred was behind them, and there was only one more driveway, one more building before miles and miles of trees.

This one? By the VFW?

She raised her eyebrows and bit her lip. He felt a shift in his pants. By The VFW was a place he had never been, but it fit the imagined scenario. Most everyone else in his graduating class had gone by the VFW to get or give their first blowjob, and many blowjobs thereafter. To take such a turn meant cheating on his wife with a former classmate and her fake tits. It meant reclining the seat while she went down on him and he weighed coming in her mouth verses other means of disposing of his emissions. It was as if the VFW was built for this purpose, and in a way, it was, because for what did those veterans of foreign wars risk everything, for what did they sacrifice so much, for what did they spill blood and have their blood spilled, if not this very freedom, the freedom to jizz where, when, and with whom one pleases? He turned left. She directed him to the appropriate parking spot.

She rubbed him through his jeans. He kissed her and took off her jacket. She opened his zipper and took out his cock. He worked his hands up her shirt and under her bra. She bent over and put his cock in her mouth. He took his hands on a trip around each breast. They felt like water balloons filled with wet sand. They felt untrue. They were, however, tits, and he wanted to see them. So he asked.

Can I see them?

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

She lifted her shirt over her head. She unclipped her bra. They were steadfast, nary a jiggle. There was no truth in those tits. They were a lie. They cast doubt. They pulled him out of the narrative.

Why lie? The world was burdened with so many lies, why tell another? Were her real tits that sad and unremarkable? Were they so terrible that she couldn't show them to the world? Was she worried that people would be unkind? Did she think her real tits were unworthy of love? Did she doubt they had a place and purpose in the world?

Matt tucked his dick back in and zipped himself back up. A shadow passed behind the car. Fuck, what if somebody saw him there? He was supposed to be the one who got out, who made it in the big city, who never looked back; but here he was, home because he might not have anywhere else to go. He was supposed to romance multi-lingual artists in loft apartments, not get head from Stephanie Knight in the shadow of the VFW, on the banks of a fetid swamp. As he looked behind him, wondering who might be witness to the gulf that separated where he was supposed to be from where he actually was, he heard what sounded like a dead trout smacking against the windshield. He faced forward to see a zombie snarling with bloodstained teeth, her undead hands smearing the glass.

Jesus fucking Christ!

Oh my God is that Dora!

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

Matt turned the key and started the car. The Zombie Dora was trying to figure out the mechanics of the door handle. Matt put the car in reverse and stomped the peddle to the floor. Zombie Dora spun to the ground.

Was that Dora?

Not really. Listen, thi –

The car hit a second zombie. The beast clung to the trunk, trying to crawl toward the back window. Matt slammed on the brakes and inertia carried the zombie to the driveway. The zombie stood again and limped toward them with a drunk shuffle that Matt had seen before.

Shit.

What? Matt? What's happening?

A third, then a fourth zombie slouched out of the swamp and stood behind the car. At one time they had been Wayne and the woman he left the bar with. Zombie Wayne's face was half gone, but Matt could recognize that belly anywhere. The woman he knew by her perm.

The swamp was on one side of the driveway; there was a ditch on the other. The zombies were blocking the only way out. Matt put the car in drive and moved forward to get enough distance to build up enough speed.

Hold on.

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

He put it in reverse and plowed into the zombies. The undead bodies ruined the back of the Festiva. Matt put the car in drive, then reverse, drive, then reverse, but the wheels just spun with sound and fury.

Matt considered the options as he saw them.

Can you reach under my seat? Is there a duffle bag under there?

What?

A duffle bag, damn it! Under my seat!

She reached under the seat and pulled out a blue and gold duffle bag. It was heavy and it rattled and clanked as she lifted it. He took it from her and set it on his lap. The undead were once again trying to find their way in. He unzipped the bag and pulled out a sawed off shotgun and ammo.

Whose is –

My mom's.

He loaded the gun.

Your mom has a shotgun?

She says that's all you need. Says Bushmasters are for pussies who can't shoot straight. Ready? On three.

Stephanie was still topless. Though she was very afraid, her breasts were unfazed by the commotion.

Wait, my shirt.

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

There's no time! One, two, three!

He pushed open the door and pulled the trigger. Pieces of Zombie Dora's head flew over the driveway and into the swamp. He reloaded and shot at the drunk-shuffling zombie. Same result. He took Stephanie by the hand and led her into the swamp. Zombie Wayne and Zombie Perm followed. The sun had already set, and the moon gave no light.

Where are we going?

Away.

He angled them toward the one road that could take them out of the swamp. The zombies were somewhere behind them. Matt looked back and considered taking a shot, but refrained for fear of wasting a shell. They splashed through knee-deep water. Sixty yards ahead, on the road, they saw the lights of a car. They stopped to wave their arms but there was not a chance the driver would see them through the trees and logs.

They looked around. Their feet were wet and numb. They could not see the zombies. They could not hear them. They were afraid to move. Stephanie pressed herself against his back. She was shivering. She was close to whimpering.

They heard a noise; a splash that sounded like it came from in front of them. Stephanie let out a sob. Matt raised the gun, and then lowered it.

What the fuck?

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

Stephanie looked over Matt's shoulder and saw what he saw: an ambulance, bumper deep in the muck.

Stay close. Hold onto my belt. Watch behind us.

They sidestepped to the driver's door. It was open and the seat was empty. They walked to the back. Matt could feel Stephanie's chin shiver against the knobs of his upper spine.

They could smell blood. The back doors were open. The ambulance was not empty. Two zombies were inside, eating a corpse. Matt said, Run!

They ran, splashing with their knees high. If they could get to the road, twenty yards away, they had a chance. A topless woman with large, wet breasts running along the side of the road in a county redundant with men driving pick up trucks? Somebody would stop and help them.

They were a dozen feet from the road when Stephanie lost her balance and fell forward, undone by a top-heavy engineering that God never intended. Matt turned and watched the zombies climb from the back of the ambulance.

Hurry! Get up! Get up!

My leg! I can't –

Matt yelled as he splashed back to her.

Come on! You have to get up! You have to get up now!

I can't move my leg!

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

The zombies, one male, one female, sloshed their way toward her feet. Though their faces were twisted and decayed, Matt recognized the male. It was wearing a Confederate flag ball cap.

Stephanie, don't look back!

She was crawling on her hands and knees and he couldn't help but notice that her tits didn't jiggle. So fake, he thought, so clearly fake.

Stephanie, keep moving, don't look back! Do not look back!

She stopped moving. She looked back.

Todd!

Not Todd! Not Todd! Stephanie! No!

She found a stump to help her stand. The female zombie was getting close. Matt took aim and removed her head. Stephanie screamed, Don't shoot Todd!

Matt took long leaps toward her and tried to reload in time.

Listen to me! You have to listen to me: that is not Todd!

Matt Lang was too late. Stephanie Taylor limped right into Zombie Todd Parnell's arms. He tore a hole in her neck. Blood flowed through her cleavage like the Colorado through the Grand Canyon. She went limp as Parnell's former eyes met Matt's.

Matt shook his head at so many things. He looked to either side to check for Zombie Wayne and Zombie Perm. Not there. He pointed the gun. Zombie Parnell

Matt Lang's Most Recent Trip Home to McKean County

smiled, and then spit blood like it was tobacco. Matt aimed at the stars and bars and pulled the trigger.

The last time Matt Lang saw Stephanie Taylor, she was lying on her back in the swampy flood plain of the Allegheny River. She was mostly underwater; only the front-most half of her breasts, the half made possible by the implants, touched the night air. Two clouds parted, the moon shined through. It gave enough light for Matt to see the stretch marks on Stephanie's stomach. They looked like ripples below the water. Her bangs floated high above her eyes, waving as if to say goodbye. He looked at her eyes, open but not understanding. He looked at her mouth, which began to twitch. It tugged at his gut as if there were strings attached. He shot her mouth before she finished the smile, he reloaded, and then he shot her again.

He walked down the middle of the road, in the dark, heading west. He missed his wife and daughter and thought about how nice it would be to see them again. There were still zombies in the swamp, but being on the road gave him a chance.