

Atlantic customers by crazy people, we'll say the acronym was CAT-BUQS.

CAT-BUQS became a habitual drop-in spot for all these guys from various suburbs in a 50-mile radius, who had gone to school with any or all of us. Meet me at CAT-BUQS, just drop by CAT-BUQS after you drop off so-and-so, I guess I'll see you around CAT-BUQS. Weekend nights were all-male gatherings of six or more, po-faced and drinking beer, staring at public access. Listening to grindcore records and making stiff-jaw guitar faces. Bleak laughter at inside jokes followed by long silent minutes. And so on and so forth went the no-life-boys' lifestyle. The multiple-school guy moved back to his parents' and was replaced by another high school friend. Then the other original guy and us had a falling out and we split. A year later, when he called to tell us a crazy woman we had met in France was calling CAT-BUQS and leaving creepy messages for us, we realized the phone was still in the book under our name.

Two guys he had gone to college with moved in. Then one moved out. Then someone else came in. He left, and when finally we had reconciled, there were still recently cut-loose college kids moving to New York and setting up at CAT-BUQS—the property-management company that administrated the building tried to oust the long gray line of beercan boys on the grounds of some late rent, but somehow the current residents won the heart of the Small Claims Court judge and thwarted the attempted kick-out.

Yet another CAT-BUQSer just split for a real apartment and was instantly replaced by a new recruit to the CAT-BUQS legacy—it goes on and on like a rent-stabilized fraternity. Our former roommate recently introduced us to a friend of his as “from CAT-BUQS”—code for “he’s okay”—and described a four-track grimed up with hair and dust as “covered in CAT-BUQS.” The other Thursday, we and that same old high school friend were trolling for something to do, and he suggested, “Let’s just get some beers and go over to CAT-BUQS. There’s always somebody hanging around over there.”

### **BEST NEO-STALINIST BUREAUCRACY IN NYC** SLA Task Force Committee of Community Board No. 3

**Mao Mixer.** Madame Chair calls the meeting to order at exactly 6. Only four members are present, not enough for a quorum, but this parliamentary nicety is no impediment to the business at hand. “First we will call off the names of those seeking renewals, raise your hand and say ‘here’ if you are present,” Madame Chair booms. Bar and restaurant names are called off rapid-fire, eliciting timid “Here, Madame Chair.” Neither Ooops nor Bengal Cuisine has a representative present. “Well, they don’t show up, they don’t get a license,” growls Madame Chair. A citizen in the crowd ventures a question. “Madame Chair, should an Ooops representative arrive, will their case be revisited?” The reply is swift, “Sure, but there’s not much point.” Other board members snort in approval. Ooops bar is fucked.

**Best Headlines for a Mandatory Moratorium**  
“Talk of the Town” & “I Want My MP3”

1999

The applicants’ eyes are filled with terror—a bad recommendation from the SLA committee all but torpedoed any chance they might have of getting a state license to serve beer, wine, liquor. No license, no serving alcohol; no alcohol, better shutter the business. “My problem with your bar is that this is the third offense you’ve had in the past three years,” Marcia Lemmon barks at the applicants from Salon Bob. They explain that they have contested in court these offenses, but the Chair, unbowed, keeps repeating the charge, “This is your third offense.” A woman sitting next to us mumbles, “She’s a monster. She actually stops by bars at all hours to see if they are breaking any of the rules. Then she slams them when they come for a license.”

Over the next 90 minutes a few more board members wander in and join in the dressing down. One after another, applicants are harangued that they misspelled words on their applications, told that if they want a recommendation for a license they need to keep their French doors closed after such and such hour and that “opening a business in our neighborhood is a privilege.” Applications are denied on never-defined terms like “over-saturation.” Board members submit as evidence of wrongdoing personal recollections of nights when the music was too loud and exiting patrons were making noise. At one point a member of the business community pleads that some clear criteria be offered for distinguishing who should and should not get an application. The crowd applauds, board members scowl and the meeting continues.

### **BEST CUSTOMER SERVICE MOMENT** Miss Charity, Sprint PCS Wireless Service 1-800-480-4PCS

**Jesus Had a Mobile Phone.** Do you hate people with cell phones? Well, we did too, until we actually got sick from using one of your spit-crusted payphones during the heat wave. We shut off our home phone, got a cell and set up a nice payment plan with Sprint. Now we can make booty calls all over the Tri-State from the privacy of our own personal space. So you cell-free martyrs can go to hell.

And then, one recent midnight, after getting our cute little Samsung phone and its leatherette carrying case, our “service” got shut off after barely 24 hours of constant, frenetic, compulsive use. It felt like we were just torn off a morphine drip.

So we’re abusing several payphones on E. Houston St., alternating between getting our quarters stolen and hitting dead ends on the intricate Sprint automated phone tree. We have lost our cool. We are sweating.

And then, on one of our last quarters, the roulette wheel ticks us into the ear of Miss Charity, Sprint Customer Advocate. She has a sly, sassy accent that could be Raleigh, or Charleston, or quite possibly Pensacola. Then again, at this hour, it could be native Oxnard.

And we’re sobbing to her breathlessly. And she’s going, “Mm-hmm, ma’am, mm-hmm. All right, now, ma’am, let me just pull up your account here and all right. Oh, I see.”

“You see? You see?”

“Now, don’t worry. Your service will be back on in 15 minutes.”

We don’t even bother to ask why we had been torn off the wireless teat. All we feel is sunlit joy. The words of praise come