

Your Panties are Broadcasting on my Frequency

Stories

John Scott G



Your Panties are Broadcasting on my Frequency

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"Let's all get gnud!"

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Dear <Your Name Here >

You are a highly valued member of our organization! As such, I am sure you are celebrating the company's recent out-of-court settlement because now we can function without the oppressive atmosphere of any alleged sexual impropriety that may or may not have taken place, even though it didn't. Not even any handsies!

Here at <*Name of Division or Department*>, we are concentrating on the positive attributes of a team culture. The theme of our recent company picnic, "Bolstering Teamwork While Tolerating Individual Initiative," demonstrates the openness of our approach, especially since the banners had such an uplifting type font. Helvetica Bold, I believe.

Many of you will soon take part in surveys conducted by InfoData, a highly respected motivational and interpersonal psychology firm (formerly Landfill Assessment Associates), on ways to improve our workplace:

- Better coffee?
- More flexible schedules?
- Less racial bias?
- Less sexual harassment?

We look forward to hearing you discuss both sides of these issues.

In focusing on establishing mutual principles within a culture of distinction and collegial support, we are proud to note the many ways our company is seen as outstanding-adjacent:

- Of all the organizations located in our geographic area, we are one of them.
- Our tradition of striving to remain dedicated to the concept of the spirit of the idea of endeavoring to encourage excellence and goal-accomplishment! ¹

1. We are still trying to get this slogan onto a bumper sticker—take note graphics team!

We firmly believe that this is the beginning of a long-term commitment to achieving excellence while delivering a boost-forward, concept-flow-intensive, gluten-free, camaraderie-architected experience.

Remember, it is your valuable advice that will enable us to succeed, and let me assure you, *<First Name of Employee>*, I am personally looking forward to hearing your ideas!

Sincerely,

*<Division Manager Name>*²

2. Signature applied via Robo-Sign.

Note: Please do not reply to this communicate. Everything relating to this matter should be directed to the Human Resources Department once it has been re-staffed. Thank you.

Roo

You could go through your entire life without once dealing with the automotive aftermarket. It is an esoteric world but a highly lucrative one because, once a vehicle is purchased, many people want special accessories for their car or truck. Add-ons might include alloy wheels, gun racks, fuzzy dice, skull-topped gearshift levers, chrome-reversed sneeze-thru dipstick handles, whatever.

“Our client makes the best and most expensive exterior-mounted ski rack for luxury automobiles,” the ad agency account manager said into the phone. “We need a headline that’s also the positioning statement.”

On the other end of the conversation, the freelance writer said, “Okay, what’s your budget?”

“The budget is your daily rate.”

“Because you need the headline by tomorrow morning?”

“Right.”

“Okay, send me info on the product and the target audience.”

“Already on the way,” the account manager said.

They sent the writer several file folders full of diagrams, specifications, mission statements, photos of overfed people pointing at things inside industrial manufacturing facilities, etc.

“The ad is going to feature a brand new BMW coupe with a ski rack on it,” the agency suit told the writer in a subsequent phone call, “and since the roof rack company is in Australia, a kangaroo will be driving the car.”

“Kangaroo, right,” said the writer. After reading everything, he wrote as many lines as possible in the time allotted. The selected line was: “The Top Roof Rack is from Down Under.” The agency was pleased. The client was pleased. The writer shrugged.

The agency asked if the writer wanted his check sent in the mail. “Or, you can drop by the photo shoot tomorrow and pick it up then.”

The writer hesitated a second to consider this possibility and then asked, “Are you using a live kangaroo in the photo shoot or a stuffed one?”

“Oh, it’s a real kangaroo,” they said.

“I’ll drop by,” the writer replied.

The photography session was interesting, which is to say it was a catastrophe. Apparently, the kangaroo was not entirely pleased with the arrangements. The animal’s wrangler was already in a sweat trying to control the sudden lunges of the large and powerful creature as it strained on its leash. Because the marsupial did not want to get into the automobile, it flailed about quite a bit and clawed the gleaming finish of the BMW in several areas.

“Okay, we can Photoshop that,” the agency art director said. “Can you please get him in the car?”

With sweet-talk and hypnotic power, the animal wrangler was able to coax (read: force) the critter into the vehicle. The driver’s side bucket seat had been removed to

accommodate the imposing size of the beast, but to keep him positioned in front of the steering wheel, the wrangler ended up behind the animal, scrunched down in the backseat of the car, valiantly holding onto the leather harness.

Trapped inside the BMW, the ‘roo was still not happy with the proceedings and expressed its dissatisfaction by ripping apart the passenger seat, the door panels, the floorboards, the visors, the rear-view mirror, and the instrument panel.

“We can Photoshop all that,” the art director said. “Let’s just get the shot. Can he smile?”

“Smile?” asked the wrangler incredulously. “He’s not an—”

At which point the ‘roo kicked the wrangler where he did not want to be kicked.

“—actor,” the wrangler finished, his voice an octave higher than at the start of the sentence.

Next, the animal decided that he could propel himself out through the car windows. Which were closed. After several plunges,

which accomplished nothing more than getting comically splat-faced, the ‘roo tried to launch himself out through the car’s sunroof. It was an interesting plan except for the fact that the car didn’t have a sunroof.

“Wow, did you hear that?” asked the agency account manager. “That was quite a THUMP!”

“It was more of a big CLUNK,” said an assistant account manager.

“Maybe more of a THRUMP,” said yet another of the many agency and client suit-dweebs clustered around the automobile.

However it sounded, there was now a discernible dent in the roof of the car.

“We can Photoshop that,” the art director said, always the optimist. “Look, he seems calm now.”

“Calm? He nearly knocked himself unconscious.”

“Right,” said the art director, “so let’s get the shot. Can he look more attentive?”

“Attentive?” the wrangler said, sounding like a drunken operatic soprano.

“Yeah, like he’s, you know, proud to be in that car with that great ski rack.”

The wrangler muttered a response that sounded a bit like “Uttaf Uckin As Old” but was probably closer to “What a fucking asshole.”

By now, a feeling of profound sadness had descended upon the scene. What began as fantasy had quickly turned into farce and was now on an inexorable slide to irrelevance. The distasteful specter of bear-baiting loomed large over the event and the writer felt sorry for the kangaroo. Clearly, he thought, it was time to depart.

As he neared the outer door of the photographer’s studio, the receptionist muttered, “I just called PETA.”

Suddenly, there were loud shouts from the people who were still back near the car. Apparently, the ‘roo became even more scared, flummoxed, and angry. In retaliation, the animal unleashed multiple forms of bodily elimination in all directions, thus applying a fine spray to the car, the wrangler, the

photographer, the art director, and the rest of the ad agency and client personnel.

The writer scooted out of the building, check in hand. Weeks later, he saw the ad using his headline. A smiling kangaroo had obviously been Photoshopped into the image.

Your Panties are Broadcasting on my Frequency

In February of 1942, the United States had only been in the Second World War for three months but already a lot of things were SNAFU (situation normal, all fucked up) while others were FUBAR (fucked up beyond all recognition). There was a congruence of confusion as the Allied forces raced to put troops and weaponry into global theaters of war. Mishaps and mix-ups caused tension, pressure, fear of death, and, of course, actual death.

There were arduous logistical problems: keeping battalions supplied with food and ammo, securing lines of communication, dispatching troops to unpronounceable locations, and so on.

“Aircraft approaching, sir,” a radar operator said, his brow furrowed and his face glistening with perspiration. Crowded around him in a Quonset hut on a hastily constructed

airbase were officers and soldiers listening intently as the Corporal announced the range of the steadily oncoming planes. But...Whose planes? Our boys returning from a mission, or enemy planes ready to strafe and bomb the hell out of us?

The solution to the problem was the creation of RFID (radio frequency identification), a means of knowing friend from foe in wartime. In fact, the first version of it was called IFF, or Identify Friend or Foe. Here's how it works: Our planes (or tanks or trucks or ships, etc.) are equipped with an electronic chip that broadcasts a signal that is recognized by our units. Neat. Simple. And which led to one of the largest invasions of privacy in the story of humankind.

Flash forward past the boring historical details to the numerous peacetime uses of RFID. Chips track nuclear materials so we can pinpoint the precise location where shipments are hijacked. Chips are used for automated tollbooth payments so you can keep zooming along at four miles per hour

instead of slowing down to two miles per hour. Chips are implanted in farm animals (you've heard of crowd-control and now you've herd of cow-control). Plus, humans receive an RFID implant when they:

- ⇒ are on parole
- ⇒ get a driver's license
- ⇒ buy a computer
- ⇒ buy computer software
- ⇒ buy a computer game
- ⇒ go online
- ⇒ pay their taxes
- ⇒ buy fast food

No, not really. But don't think those ideas aren't being considered by some very powerful right wing nut jobs inside governmental organizations. "It would make aspects of law enforcement more efficient," you can hear someone saying.

Tracking with RFID offers a great many advantages: locating medical equipment in a hospital; knowing if your shipment of goods is in route, at the loading dock, or in

the stores; tracking skiers and hikers; helping with military deployment; finding a pet that got out of your yard; knowing where your teenage sons and daughters are at any given moment; finding your lost phone; locating your car in the parking lot; and many more. Literally billions of radio tags are sold each year and you may find the chips contained in:

- ❖ clothing
- ❖ shoes
- ❖ frozen food
- ❖ canned goods
- ❖ consumer products
- ❖ healthcare products
- ❖ shipping containers
- ❖ automobiles
- ❖ trucks
- ❖ tires
- ❖ aircraft
- ❖ mail
- ❖ credit cards
- ❖ wallets
- ❖ paper money
- ❖ magazines
- ❖ books

- 📡 pets
- 📡 medical patients
- 📡 employee ID cards
- 📡 employees themselves
- 📡 cameras
- 📡 keys
- 📡 eyeglasses
- 📡 computers
- 📡 cell phones
- 📡 watches
- 📡 musical instruments
- 📡 furniture
- 📡 electronics
- 📡 shopping carts
- 📡 jewelry
- 📡 guns and ammo
- 📡 pharmacy prescriptions

With RFID tags inside every item in your life, it would be possible to know almost everything about you. Where you walk, where you drive, what you do, where you shop, what you buy, who you meet, who are your healthcare providers.... And, since the chips can communicate with databases

stored in computers, a vast amount of info can be accumulated, compared, massaged, or acted upon every time an RFID tag is “read” by the system.

The film *Minority Report* contained scenes where messages were broadcast directly at passersby based on the codes that were implanted inside people and/or their clothing. That was not science fiction. It’s fact. We can do it right now. All it requires is the will, the funding, and the lack of laws to prevent it.

People working in marketing, advertising, and public relations find it useful to explore the wealth of data that RFID technology provides. They can analyze consumer shopping habits in every possible demographic and psychographic group. They can even see the route taken by customers inside stores.

But should they know all these things? And is there any truth to the rumor that miniaturized video cameras are now being added to the chips?

Technological advances in the area of corporate stalking—oops, customer data gathering—have resulted in the birth of a new category of semi-criminal: the data voyeur. These creatures sit in dim offices in front of overly bright computer screens monitoring everything they can about everyone they can. They might even be monitoring everything about...you.

“Hold on a second, I think we got one,” called out one of the data voyeurs. “Okay, folks, lookee here. Right now, we are hot on the trail of a pair of panties in the Valhalla Estates section of East Holstein County.”

“That’s the so-called nice side of town,” a second data voyeur said. “Lotta good activity over there.”

“You got that right,” another opined.

Their beady eyes alternately squinted and opened wide as they gathered around the large computer screen. Several of the men were chewing heartily on large slices from a humongous sub sandwich that had been brought in to celebrate one of them winning the sports betting pool from the weekend

before. Their sweaty out-of-shape bodies bumped into each other as they grabbed more of the food and then waddled back to the high-definition monitor to bump each other again.

“Watch it, Michelin Man.”

“You watch it, Goodyear Blimp.”

“Quiet you two! We’ve got a live one here,” the senior voyeur said, nodding his head toward the screen.

“Oooh, we’ve seen this one before. Remember last Thursday at the gym?”

“She’s an active little minx, isn’t she?”

“If they’re big enough, they’re old enough,” was the response.

“Okay, okay, okay,” one said excitedly, “I can tell where she’s going and—hey, hey, take a look what’s brewing here...”

“All right!” several of them said as they exchanged high fives.

“This is good stuff. Are we recording?”

“What are you, nuts? ‘Course we’re recording.”

“Great. When they’re done, post the file to the company’s backchannel network.”

“This one’s good enough for YouTube.”

“Can’t do that. Company would come down on us.”

“Speaking of which...” another said, nodding appreciatively toward the screen.

“We have contact!”

“That’s the right stuff!”

“Whoo-hoo!”

“Now this is exciting.”

“Very uplifting.”

“Pretty, pretty, pretty, pretty good.”

“Houston, they have no problem! Well, I mean, other than, you know...”

“No, what?”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah. What’re you talking about?”

“They have no problem other than us watching them.”



~

Roids

You hear outcries when athletes use anabolic steroids or human growth hormones, but the positive aspects of juicing are frequently overlooked. It is time to recognize that every pro competitor should be “on the stuff.” That is correct: PEDs (performance enhancing drugs) ought to be compulsory for professional contact sports.

Through the use of these magnificent pharmaceutical potions, all overpaid jocks can become even bigger, broader, bulkier, stronger, swifter, and deadlier. Whoops, did I say deadlier? Sorry, I meant more entertaining.

Adding ‘roids to the training regimen of pro athletes is going to improve every game. “Faster Action!” “Harder Hits!” “Larger than life and twice as revelatory!” Some of you are already salivating at the thought of the glorious butchery that will be on display in boxing, mixed martial arts, basketball, hockey, and the National Football League once ‘roids are mandatory.

Truth be told, the steroid era has been with us for quite some time. One look at the human mountains on today's teams and you know that many sports have already blended with pro wrestling. In the case of the NFL, it is simply a matter of the remaining players joining those who are already "in the soup," as they say about using the chem lab concoctions. Once all teams are bulked up, we will be treated to the spectacle of humanoid monsters smashing into each other the way a cue ball busts up a rack in a game of billiards. Oh, wait; we have that already. But with everyone on 'roids, the billiard balls will be bigger, even if the actual balls will be smaller.

True, the record books will have to be separated into two categories: "au natural" and "scientifically enhanced," but that's a small price to pay for the exhilaration of seeing a baseball player hit a 900 foot home run off a 200mph curveball, or a middle linebacker pulverize a running back to death at the twenty yard line.

Sports have always utilized performance enhancement and today's ruckus seems misplaced. How far should we go with this? Should eyeglasses be banned? Or sunglasses with polarizing lenses? Hey, Babe Ruth didn't have no stinking polarizing lenses! Or consider ocular surgery that takes someone from 20/50 vision to 20/10 vision; isn't that performance enhancement?

Don't overlook the routine surgeries on shoulders, knees, elbows, hips, hands, and so forth. No more steel or titanium pins in there, baby. If you get hurt, tough it out or retire to your car dealership business. What about on-field first aid? Perhaps we should be upset when a team doctor shoots some cortisone into a player. Look, if you're so high-and-mighty about athletes refraining from enhancement, let's see you lobby for banning the use of gloves, shoulder pads, helmets, shoes, and Gatorade.

As for me, I'm waiting for performance enhancement technology to reach amateur athletics, including the Olympics. Other than with the Russians, who are already there. We

may soon see a high-jumper set a new record by just stepping over the bar; a basketball player tall enough to dunk with feet still on the floor; and a weight-lifter perform a clean-and-jerk with an SUV.

Just last week, I was honored to have a 30-second meet-and-greet with Michael Felts, the swimmer who just set new records in twenty-six different events, including some not involving swimming. When we shook hands, it was exciting to feel the webbing between his fingers.

“It’s naturally-grown,” he assured me.

“Do you also have it between your toes?” I asked.

“Absolutely,” he replied. “Working on a tail, too,” he added.

I wasn’t positive, but it looked like gills were developing on his neck.

“Any message you’d like to offer to sports fans?” I inquired.

“Glub.”

“Excuse me?” I said.

“Oh, sorry,” he said. “I meant: ’roids rule.”

Snooping Safari

Eeavesdropping cannot be avoided when you just happen to overhear something accidentally on purpose. Right now, however, you can put aside any twinges of guilt because you are invited on a snooping safari!

Scheduled stops on this expedition include several retail establishments and a number of private soirees of various sizes. As you will see, the participants in these scenarios run the gamut from dope to dope fiend and all that lies between.

For the public places, just imagine boxy rooms, dusty clutter, stale air, and bad music heard through cheap speakers mounted in stained ceilings. For the parties, just picture the overuse of alcohol and drugs while the participants practice clumsy pick-up lines riddled with half-truths, caprices, and prevarications. Join us as we float through rooms redolent of perfume, unclean floors, cologne, hair product, barbeque sauce, chicken wings, motor oil, aging sushi, stuffed

mushrooms, scented room deodorizers, scented candles, scented bodies, and Lucifer knows what else. Listen up as we listen in...



We are not too close—but just close enough—to a man and a woman who are sipping cocktails and quietly conversing while they pretend to look at framed lithographs.

“I need to ask you something,” the woman says.

“Need to or just want to?” the man replies, taking a sip of his drink.

“Going to,” she tells him.

“Okay,” he says, taking a bigger sip of his drink. “What?”

“Would you still like me if I was fat?”

“Would I still like you? Yes.”

“Would you still want to fuck me?”

“Well,” he says, and lets it go, hoping it will stay gone.

“I’m serious,” she says.

“Uhhmmm,” he replies, “how fat?”

“Fat.”

“So let me get this straight,” he says. “You want to know if I would be sexually attracted to you if you gained a lot of weight.”

“Yes.”

He feels he needs another sip of his drink. Then he takes a deep breath, holds it a second, and exhales. “Probably not,” he admits.

“I would still want to fuck you if you were fat,” she says.

“Does that make you a better person than me,” he asks, “or is it that you like cock more than I like pussy?”

She thinks about it a moment. “Probably both,” she tells him.

He considers the conversation a victory because she does not walk away. Although he realizes there will be hell to pay later.



Two guys are at a small party in an apartment located in a quiet working class section of a big city. They’re swigging beers, munching chips, and energetically

talking. “I’m just telling you what the man said.”

“It’s stupid.”

“It’s funny, that’s all.”

“I don’t think it’s funny.”

“You don’t have a sense of humor.”

“I do too!”

“C’mon, you like the Three Stooges.”

“Hey! The Stooges are great!”

“Only if you mean Iggy and the Stooges.”

A third guy joins them. “So, what are we arguing about here?”

“Oh, Timmy says his friend has this weird web site—”

“It’s not his web site,” Timmy replies, “he just came across it.”

“Whatever. It has conspiracy theories, so you know it’s totally reliable.”

“Screw you,” Timmy says. “All the site says is that most Hollywood actresses don’t get their parts based on acting talent or boxoffice popularity. They have to perform certain acts for the studio heads, producers, and directors.”

“Not the writers?”

“Naw, writers don’t count. Anyway, this site lists all the sexual favors they have to provide to get a part.”

“That’s not a new theory.”

“No, but get this: it says you can tell what they had to do by what they wear in some scenes of the films. It’s got a whole list, with photos.”

“That crap isn’t true.”

“I don’t care. It’s funny. And it’s got photos!”



A couple of neighbors in a suburban ranch-style tract home are standing in front of a brand new, gargantuan, high definition television screen. The two guys stare at a music video of a current pop music singer:

“Man, I’d so like to rape her.”

“Whoa!”

“Rape her good and hard.”

“Really? You like that kewpie doll look?”

“No, I think it’s vicious-ugly.”

“Then why—”

“It’s not for sex.”

“No? Then what—”

“Rape isn’t about sex.”

“No?”

“No. Rape is about violence.”

“Oh. So, what are you saying, that you hate her?”

“Right.”

“Wouldn’t that make you want to kill her?”

“Nope. Rape. Rape is definitely the way to go.”

“You want to cause her pain and suffering?”

“Exactamundo.”

“Wow.”

“C’mon, it’s only fair. Have you listened to her crap?”

There was a slight pause, and then:
“Yeah, okay, you’re right.”



Regard one of those mournful lonely souls who sit for hours occupying a candy-and-cigarette dispensary perched in the middle of a concrete lot full of pumps for gasoline and diesel fuel. This conversation took place with an attendant in a Kwik-Fill Gas ‘n’ Wash station:

“Do you feel you’re part of a dirty industry?”

“Dirty cars. Dirty air. You bet. You want a car wash?”

“No, I’m just seeking some understanding of the point of view of the common man in terms of the fossil fuel industry and its contribution to climate change and air pollution.”

“You want some gas?”

“By working here do you feel that you are helping support a dangerous industry?”

“People have places to go, things to do. And cars need gas. You want some gas?”

“No, I—”

“Do you want a lottery ticket?”

“No, but if—”

“How about some beef jerky?”



People at a wedding reception are discussing Los Angeles traffic. Congestion is such that people in L.A. measure car trips by time, not distance. Instead of saying a destination is ten miles away, they say it is sixty minutes away. Or a hundred-and-twenty minutes during rush hour, which on L.A. weekdays lasts from seven to eleven each morning and from two to eight each night. That leaves a “window” of driving opportunity in the middle of the day. Except for the eleven-fifteen a.m. to one-forty-five p.m. midday traffic problem.

“How do you stand it without shooting other drivers?” a non-commuter asks.

“Operatic oaths,” came the reply.

“What’s that?”

“Operatic oaths? That’s where I swear while singing,” and the woman breaks into a very nice rendition of “Vissi d’arte” from Act

II of Puccini's *Tosca* but with just slightly altered lyrics:

*Asshole driver, time for your death!
You little shit, you must no longer live!
Using our secret hands
In heaven will we all castrate you
slowly and with much mirth!*

There was a nice round of applause. The woman acknowledged the show of appreciation and accepted a congratulatory glass of wine.



We have strolled into one of those insidious strip malls that line the perimeter of countless residential sections of town. Specifically, we're inside Shoes, Boots, & More, which is primarily a shoe repair shop.

“Are most shoes made of leather?”

“Oh sure. You ever hear the phrase ‘shoe leather’?”

“That refers to walking.”

“But walking in shoes.”

“All right, but does it bother you that the use of leather means that animals suffer and the environment is harmed?”

“Hey, people need leather. Leather is needed for shoes.”

“There are lots of alternatives to leather.”

“God put cows here for man to use.”

“The leather in people’s shoes comes from more than cows. Leather comes from goats, pigs, sheep, alligators, kangaroos, ostriches, cats, dogs...”

“No! Nobody uses dogs.”

“Yes they do. You can look it up. And no matter what kind of animals are used, they are frequently mistreated before they’re slaughtered. Doesn’t that bother you?”

“Look, I have work to do, so if you—”

“Factory farming creates environmental damage. And dying the leather releases unhealthy toxins into the air.”

“Get out of my shop. You’re scaring the customers.”

“You’re breathing poison because of these leather products.”

“Leave!”

“So, you want me to walk out of your shop?”

“Yes, go! Go away now!”

“All right, but I know you’re just saying that to get me to wear out my shoes.”



The church is nearly empty but the atmosphere is full of echoes of forgotten confessions and unanswered supplications. On one side of the rows of polished wooden pews, nearly motionless in the dappled light pouring through the stained glass windows, bent over in suffering, shoulders shaking from discreet sobs, is a figure dressed in dark colors. Peering down at crumpled pieces of paper in her hands, she whispers as she reads.

“Dear God, please help me. I am watching the love of my life die. Can you stop the suffering? He is honorable, loving, kind, and smart. He has been so much a part of my life. Now there is only the joy of memory as the cancer grows inside him.”

She lapses into silence for a moment, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. Then the whispered pleading begins once more:

“I love him so much! My husband influenced many people by the way he lived. We had a wonderful, loving, and exciting life together. Nothing can take away our years of happiness, and I want to hold him in my arms and never let him go. I know this is not possible but I pray for the miracle of his knowing of my undying love for him. I feel blessed to have had these cherished decades with this man. I am not ready to give him up, but if it is possible, please stop his suffering. Forgive me, but I love him enough to let him go. Please, take him, dear Lord, please.”



The University Faculty Club Luncheon is in full swing. Near a long table covered with a selection of canapes, dips, and assorted finger foods, two people approach each other.

“Hi,” says the woman.

“Hello,” says the man.

“I’m Jenny.”

“Professor Jenkins.”

“Nice to meet you, Professor Jenkins.”

“A pleasure,” he says. “Are you a student at the University, Jenny?”

“Yes, but I’m in the Philosophy department, not Science.”

“I see.”

“But I was fascinated by something you recently published.”

“Yes?” says the professor.

“You said that ‘space is expanding.’ Is that correct?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“Okay, then I have a question, if you don’t mind.”

“Not at all,” the professor says.

“Into what?” she asks.

“Sorry, I don’t understand.”

“You wrote that space is expanding.”

“Yes?”

“So I’m wondering, Into what? Into what is it expanding?”

“It’s not expanding into anything,” he says, somewhat nettled.

“Really?” she asks sweetly.

“No, but it’s, well, it’s just occupying an increased area.”

“An increased area,” she muses aloud.

“Correct.”

“An increased area made out of... what, exactly?”

“Well,” he replies, “this gets into a discussion of the concept of intergalactic worlds.”

“And these intergalactic worlds are in... space, right?”

“That’s correct.”

“Okay, so there’s the space itself,” she says, “and it occupies a certain amount of, well, space. So how would it expand into itself?”

“No, when physicists say that, they mean that the totality of the universe is expanding.”

“Is our universe expanding into other universes?” she asks.

“No, no, no,” he says. “The universe is just the one universe.”

“You know that for a fact?”

“Well, there is interpretation and extrapolation of data gathered from a surfeit of observational sources, and thus we conclude...”

“Okay,” she says, “so where is this expansion happening?”

“The expansion is taking place everywhere.”

“Everywhere. In this room, for example?”

“Yes! Yes, it is occurring everywhere at once.”

“So,” she inquires once more, “is space expanding into other space?”

“Well, not exactly,” he stammers.

“Because if there is the space that everything occupies, and then that space expands, there must be some other space outside of that space or there wouldn’t be any room for the expansion to take place. There wouldn’t be enough, you know, space. For the extra space. You see?”

“Um, I don’t think I can discuss this with you.”

“Apparently not. Be sure to try the salmon,” she says on her way to another part of the party. Over her shoulder, she tosses him one final piece of advice: “Fish is brain-food, you know. Maybe it’ll help you.”



Next day, a conversation took place down at Pins ‘n’ Pies, a friendly neighborhood bowling emporium and pizza-by-the-slice hangout. The manager was being interviewed:

“What is the real appeal of bowling?”

“You’re kidding, right?”

“No.”

“You come in and ask me that—what are you, some kind of nut?”

“So you don’t know why people like to bowl?”

“What? Of course I know why people like to bowl! The fun of it! The competition! The ability to create a kind-of mini-explosion of destruction down at the end of the lane!”

“Controlled violence in a friendly situation.”

“Now you got it. Plus, there’s the visual factor,” the manager added.

“The visual factor?”

“Sure. Look, say some guys are out on a double date, right? And there’s, like, some sort of code of conduct they have to be on. You know, for the sake of the girls. There’s only so far you can go, you know? But bowling lets them check out the form of both of the girlfriends.”

“The form? The way they bowl?”

“Naw. Look, look down there at that foursome on lane thirteen. Watch. See, the girl steps up, and what do the guys do? They watch.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Sure. Good stuff. All game long they get to appreciate the rear views. You put that together with some smash-boom-crash at the end of the alley and you’ve got yourself some fine entertainment!”

“Something exciting at both ends.”

“Now you’re talkin’! Sometimes there ain’t nothin’ so great as admirin’ the north end of a southbound gal!”



Concluding our furtive fieldtrip, you are now standing next to me as I bask in the laudatory and fawning attention of the media. (I am being interviewed by the *Gazetteer*, the weekly publication of Francis Parkman High School.)

“So,” inquires ace reporter Bobby Wardwood, “do you eavesdrop a lot?”

“Um, yeah,” I reply with my distinctive flair for the quotable quip.

“That’s not very nice,” Bobby states.

“Well,” I respond, “if it’s any consolation to you, I mostly eavesdrop on imaginary conversations.”

Looking for Strange

The wall phone buzzed in one of the private consulting rooms of Mayfield Sports Training West. Tracy Frearson, the Registered Physical Therapist who was supervising a patient's learn-to-walk-straight-after-an-auto-accident plan, said, "Excuse me a sec'," and picked up the phone. "This is Tracy. . . All right, put him on." Glancing at his patient, Tracy covered the mouthpiece and said, "This'll only take a moment," then turned back to the phone. "How are you? . . . Great, thanks. What's up? . . . Uh huh. I see. Well, I'm not sure I'd know . . . Styling gel? Uh, well, yeah, come to think of it, that would work. . . You bet . . . Hey, no trouble. Good luck. 'Bye."

Tracy hung up and turned back to the patient with a smile and a shake of the head. "Sorry about that. A wild and crazy guy."

"A patient?"

"No, no, he's a neighbor. Actually, he's my city councilman." And out came the name

of a local political figure who the newspapers said was about to become a defendant in a trial. The charge would be statutory rape.

“I’ve been reading about the case,” the patient said. “What’s with the styling gel?”

“He says his lawyer is going make the girl describe his genitals. Somebody told him that if you leave styling gel on your pubic hair overnight, it’ll look different in the morning.”

“Soooo,” the patient said slowly, “the guy’s guilty.”

“Uhhh, yeah, it seems like it!”

“Does that bother you?”

“Well, I don’t know. The girl was willing. She was underage for here in California, but not for other states. It wouldn’t be a crime in some other parts of the world.”

“You could say the same thing about cannibalism,” the patient said.

“That’s true!” Tracy said with a laugh. “But you know, some laws are bizarre. I mean, he’s a pretty good guy and the trial is only happening because the girl is being paid by some of his political opponents. There’s a media conglomerate that’s picking up the tab

for the girl to stay in nice hotels for this whole thing. It's been weeks now. They drive her around in limos, she has press conferences, maybe she'll write a book. Or I should say 'write' a book."

"I heard about some of that stuff," the patient said.

"Yeah, everything about it seems too much like a set-up to me. Gotta tell you, I hope he gets off or they just settle out of court."

"Do you think this will end his political career?"

"That depends. Convicted and sent up, then he's done. But if he wins the court case, then he might be able to use the situation to his advantage. You know, 'all the forces were combined against me,' or 'it was a frame-up,' that kind of thing. Could work for him."

Newspaper stories about the case got smaller and moved off the front page. Then they just stopped and no more was heard from the girl. The guy stuck around in politics for a little while longer and then went back to his real estate business.

It's easy to spin this tale in several directions...

A sex scandal.

A morality play.

A gold-digger.

A corrupt politician.

A corrupt system.

A money-and-power struggle.

And so on. Perhaps there is some truth in several of those descriptions.

People want their political leaders to say one thing in public but do something else when it comes to enacting legislation. Voters want "fairness," but they mean "fairness for our side." People expect "equality," but they mean "equality unless I need to buy my way out of trouble." And "the good of the people" means "what's good for people like me."

If you examine the voting records of the elected and appointed officials who serve you in federal, state, and local government, you will soon come to realize the truth of that old joke about the United States having the finest politicians money can buy....

The family restaurant had large plate-glass windows facing the flow of traffic on a pleasant thoroughfare. Unfortunately for the bistro, a curious dynamic was at work in the neighborhood. The sidewalk right outside the dining room was a meet market; sometimes spelled meat market. The location had become a hangout for male prostitutes.

The brigade of bods-for-hire resulted in drivers cruising past slowly in order to check out the available talent. Stripped to the waist even in the cold of the evening, the boys would loiter, cavort, preen, and occasionally fight right in front of the restaurant. Cars would stop, conversations would ensue, and decisions would be made. Sometimes a guy would get in a car and be whisked away. Sometimes a guy would back away from the vehicle and the car would zoom off.

When the lighting conditions were just right, the boys could admire their reflections in the restaurant windows because the large glass panes would appear to be wall-sized mirrors. But inside the restaurant, the dining patrons would be treated to the spectacle of a

gaggle of man-whores combing their hair, adjusting their short-shorts, rubbing pimple cream on their faces, and so on.

Depending on where you were seated in the main dining room, the primping and posturing might be taking place just a few inches from your plate of spaghetti, which would lead to strange dinner table conversations:

“Dear, would you like some more wine with your—good heavens, what’s going on? What’s he doing, trying to rub away his acne? He looks alarming. And that hair looks dirty. Now what? Is that a cold sore? Waiter! Waiter, what’s happening here?”

“Yes sir, more garlic bread?”

“What? No, what is that out there?”

“Just the neighborhood, sir. It’s, um, very colorful.”

“Check, please.”

When a couple of the boys decided to do a drug deal right up against the window, many patrons of the restaurant skipped more than the garlic bread. A

shirtless guy wearing skin-tight shorts with the pockets torn off doesn't have too many places to hide dope. So now the restaurant diners were watching two men practically pressed up against the window as one unzipped and pulled a baggie out of his underwear. The conversation inside the dining room went something like this:

“Why are they huddling up against the glass like that?”

“It looks like they're hiding something from the other boys.”

“Can't they tell we're eating in here?”

“It must be like the windows at work, where you can see out but people in the courtyard can't see in.”

“This is terrible. These people should be rounded up and sent home to their parents.”

“Some of them might be adults.”

“Well, it's very annoying and something should be done so that—wait, what's he doing? Oh my god! He's pulling it out! Don't look, Betty! I'm calling the cops! Waiter!!!”

The waiter was already being accosted by four other customers.

Business at the bistro steadily declined. With barely-suppressed anger, the owner began making calls. The corporate headquarters of the restaurant chain said to call the police. The police said they would respond if a crime was in progress but they didn't have the manpower to try enforcing loitering laws. They said to call the Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber of Commerce also said to call the police, as did the Mayor's office. Finally, the restaurant owner called his local City Councilman, who had this to say: "Protecting citizens and business owners has always been a priority with my office and I will, if re-elected, strive to resolve this untenable situation affecting our neighborhoods, but as you know, running a political campaign is very often a somewhat costly endeavor, etc. etc."

Thus it was that the restaurant owner made a donation of a few thousand dollars to the campaign of a man he barely knew and hardly thought about up to that moment.

Almost immediately, police cars began rolling to a stop outside the restaurant, checking I.D.s, hauling away the underage boys, running background checks on the others, and scaring away the cars that were cruising past the intersection.

One aging hustler (he must have been twenty-one at least) made a terrible mistake in dealing with the cops. It wasn't his demeanor that caused the trouble. White people can have a contemptuous attitude with police officers and things will stay calm. It wasn't his speech, although it was abrasive. White people can yell about their rights or scream about harassment and the worst that will happen is that they might be told to shut the hell up. But this guy went too far. While the officers ran his name through the computer, they quietly told him to behave himself. He shouted louder. The officers said they'd have to take him in for disturbing the peace if he kept on causing a scene. But the jerk continued to berate the cops at the top of his lungs. The two officers looked at each other for a moment. First one shrugged and then the

other. They moved to handcuff him. That's when he made his appalling blunder: he angrily spun around, flailing his arms at the officers and attempted to push them away from him. Not a good idea.

Police officers will tell you about these demarcation moments. "There is a precise second when everything escalates," one said, "where we all move up to the next level and it gets very, very serious. It's weird, because usually all someone has to do is follow the officer's instructions. You might have to present some I.D. or wait to see if there are outstanding warrants. You might be looking at a breathalyzer test. You could be facing being taken in for questioning. But all of these things are pretty straightforward. The minute you make any move that could be threatening, you're looking at a mandatory arrest and your life will be changed forever."

Two weighted nightsticks whipped through the air, one going in under the guy's ribs, the other clipping him behind the knees. There were "whoomp-craack" noises and the guy became a pile of skin and bones gasping

for breath on the sidewalk. After he was hauled away, the evening was a bit quieter around the restaurant.

In the days that followed, patrol cars made that intersection a regular stop on their rounds. The hustlers went elsewhere, and the dance began again in a different part of town.

All Hallow's Eve

October days can be a bright splashy spectrum of orange and candy apple red, while October nights display those same colors on a field of inky ebony. Throughout the month, there is an atmosphere of fabulous fright because this is the season when everyone loves a good scare. *There's a spider on your back!* See how much fun we're having?

So, let us enjoy the Night Before All Saints' Day, sometimes called All Hallow's Eve, as shrieks of delighted terror float on the wind and millions of people clutch each other while watching a semi-classic flick starring Bela Lugosi, Boris Karloff, Christopher Lee, or Vincent Price.

Halloween is not actually a holiday, despite appearing on the calendar. In the USA, it is all about accumulating free candy and taking things a bit too far at parties. ("Hello, girls. Nice fishnet stockings! Say, are you two into bondage?") And in the capitalistic marketplace, retailers offer plenty

of stupidly spooktacular sales events throughout the month.

In Mexico, things can be a bit more serious with *Dia de los Muertos*, which despite the name appears to be a multi-day event. England combines festivity and politics with their Guy Fawkes Night. China has the Ghost Festival and Hong Kong has the even-more-deliciously-named Festival of the Hungry Ghosts. In Sweden, *Alla Helgons Dag* is celebrated for a week, while in San Francisco, October 31st is Bitch's Christmas, with partying that gets delightfully out of control.

In every U.S. city with decent weather, the youngest trick-or-treaters begin making their rounds in the late afternoon under the supervision of Very Concerned Parents. Some adults accompany their offspring right up to the door while others linger nearby. Either way, the parents watch their kids with furrowed brows and gritted teeth.

Costumes on the tots are sometimes more decorative than those on the older kids. Possibly this is because the parents spend

more time fussing over them. Or perhaps it just seems that the little tykes' outfits are more intricate because they can be better seen in the light of the sun which is still hovering lazily above the horizon.

On the walkway in front of one quiet suburban home, two sisters are moving up to the door as their parents observe from five yards behind. The older child, perhaps seven, is in a beautiful black velvet witch's costume. Her younger sibling, probably no more than four, is a mini-symphony of silver and white, a perfect glittery fairy princess complete with tiara and wand.

Inside the house, preparations had been made for the trick-or-treaters. The owner, a 44-year-old divorced man now living alone, had put on black jeans, black socks, black boots, and a long-sleeved black shirt. On each hand he had pulled novelty gloves that sported ape-like black fur and robot-like fingers. His old-fashioned living room stereo was playing an eerie electronica-goth piece of music.

“I am the Master of the Macabre!” the man shouted for his own amusement.

Now standing on the man’s front stoop, the two little girls knocked politely. The homeowner threw back the deadbolt on the door and pulled it open just an inch or two, crying out, “Bwwaaaahaaaahaaaa!”

The man put one set of robot/ape fingers around the door’s edge, then the other. He pretended to exert tremendous effort in opening the door, grunting as he moved it inch by agonizing inch. Finally, it was thrown wide and he took two stomping steps forward to fill the doorway with his menacing presence. “So,” his hissed at the two adorable girls, “trick or treat is your demand?!? You want pieces of candy from the cauldron?!?” He raised one robot/ape hand in the direction of a large bowl of candy sitting on a table next to the door.

Looking up at the man, the cute little seven-year-old witch-costumed girl did not flinch. In fact, she barely batted an eyelash. Instead, she offered the man a small, clear-eyed smile. But not a perfectly innocent

smile, no; it was the look of a wise-beyond-her-years adolescent who was tolerating the foibles of a misguided adult. Keeping her eyes on the man, she slightly tilted her head toward her younger sister and said quietly but oh-so-distinctly, “Don’t scare the little one.” Her voice went up the scale from the first word to the fourth, then took a gentle half-step down on the final word.

There was a pause through which you could have driven a Mack truck and then the man shook with laughter. He picked up the bowl of candy and held it out to them, saying, “Take all you want; you earned it.”

“Two pieces will be fine, thank you,” came the reply. And with that, the two little girls turned primly and walked serenely toward their parents.

“Happy Halloween,” the man called out.

“Same to you!” replied one parent.

The man closed the door, still chuckling about his encounter. “Bwwaaaahaaaahaaaa,” he said to himself sheepishly. “Master of the Macabre, my ass.”

Fisticuffs

During my years in the writing racket, I've been invited to rock concerts, art exhibits, film screenings, TV previews, theatrical openings, night clubs, football games, industry conventions, wrap parties, rodeos, poetry readings, soccer matches, dog shows, tennis tournaments, classical recitals, and more. Hell, I was even invited to a gathering of philatelists. (People who are into postage stamps. Yeah, I didn't believe it, either, but you can look it up.)

In this instance, a public relations firm sent me a glossy and garish press kit for something called Beer Championship Boxing. (Please Note: there was a brand name in place of the word "Beer" but since no one is paying me anything for product placement, a brew will not be mentioned here.)

The producers of the event claimed to be offering a "Dual Title Bout" between a pugilist they said was the "State Champion Heavyweight" and a palooka they passed off as the "Beer Champion Heavyweight." In

other words, two guys you've never heard of who were holding titles that were dubious at best.

Still, there were a total of seven matches scheduled (or "bouts on the card," as boxing people put it) and it seemed like it would be a hoot to attend, so I called my hair-and-scalp guy Francisco at his salon and after the usual exchange of greetings, the conversation went like this:

"Listen, 'Cisco, I've got an invitation for the two of us to consider. This doesn't include the wives, all right?"

"I'm with you so far."

"Let me say two words to you: professional boxing."

"Wow, yeah!" he responded. "Where? When?"

"The Arena next Sunday, four-thirty in the afternoon. Want to go?"

"That's a groove, man! Wait, four-thirty?"

"They're broadcasting live to the East Coast."

"So?"

“Because of the time difference, it’s seven-thirty back there.”

“Oh, okay,” he said. “I guess we can start drinking at four-thirty.”

“That’s the spirits! So okay, we’re going to see heavyweights, middleweights, and lightweights going at it. Although not all at the same time, unfortunately.”

“Let’s do it, buddy!”

“You’re on, ‘Cisco.”

“Okay, I’ve got a client in the chair, so let’s talk later in the week.”

“Sure thing.”

“Oh hey, you know what?”

“What?”

“We just made a date for Gay Pride Day,” he said.

“Really?” I replied. “That’s next Sunday?”

“Yup.”

“Well, it’s perfect, actually. ‘Cause boxing is so brutal, so vicious.”

“So fierce, so ruthless.”

“Ooooh, I’m getting chills.”

“Me, too, big boy.”

That Sunday afternoon, ‘Cisco and I were zooming down the freeway, the sunroof open, stereo blasting out tracks from Alien Sex Fiend, Hoodoo Gurus, and Bauhaus, hands pounding on the steering wheel (‘Cisco) and dashboard (me), and our heads engulfed in the wailing of the wind.

As we approached the Arena, we had a version of The Talk. We pledged to be on our best behavior because we were about to enter a foreign and potentially dangerous environment. Or, as ‘Cisco put it, “Don’t yell something like ‘Come on you fuckin’ Spic, kill that fuckin’ nigger’ or anything like that.”

“Hey, hey, hey, I don’t use that kind of language.”

“I was reminding myself,” he said.

“Good advice, ‘Cisco, and something I’ll cherish until my dying day. Which will be today if you forget and cut loose with any racist crap.” He just laughed, so I continued: “Look, if I don’t always know when you’re joking, the crowd sure as hell won’t know when you’re joking.”

“Right, right,” he said. “You’ve got no worries, man.”

And yet, I was worried.

The man in charge of press parking was about eight feet tall. I was fiddling with the car stereo when I became aware that there was a problem between ‘Cisco and the big guy. It seemed they weren’t communicating very well. Fortunately for us, ‘Cisco was able to get him to reveal the press parking list.

“There we are,” Francisco said, pointing to one of the typed names on a dog-eared piece of paper attached to a clipboard. I leaned over to hold out a business card to the goliath. He grunted and directed us into a cone-lined section of the parking lot near a roped-off side entrance to the Arena.

“You know,” I said to Francisco, “we could have just paid for parking.”

“Nah,” he said. “It’s not the money. Well, okay, it’s the money, but it’s also the principle of the thing. I had to show Mr. Gargantua back there that we’re important enough to be on his precious list.”

“But what if there had been a mistake and we hadn’t been on it?”

“How do you know we were? I pointed to a name, you showed a business card, he’s in the sun, the car is dark—I don’t think he could see anything.”

“We were on the list, ‘Cisco. You’re not about to risk having the guy pick up this car and toss it out into the street.”

He laughed. “You’re right. And he could have done it, too.”

Just inside the Arena entrance was another huge bouncer who checked his list, then pointed us toward the entrance to a “members only” bar. There, we dealt with a slightly shorter but greatly wider bouncer who gave us each a sticker that proclaimed us as members of the Media. He then waved us into the bar.

I asked ‘Cisco, “Want to get a drink?”

“I dunno,” he said, glancing around the crowded room. “Who are these people?”

The bar crowd was remarkably devoid of anyone wearing Media stickers and most of the people were twice our age, twice our

weight, and very leathery in the face. The men were not very attractive, either.

“Let’s go find our seats,” I said.

“Right,” he replied. “Sure hope we’re close to the ring.”

He didn’t know how close. When you see a boxing match on TV, you may have noticed there are people whose heads appear to be bobbling just beyond the edge of the canvas. Their seats are in front of the actual front row; they’re literally ringside. That’s where we were located, right next to the official time-keeper. Sitting nearby was ring announcer Jimmy Lennon, Jr.

Yeah, we were sitting close to the ring all right. Astonished by our prime location, we high-fived and then turned to watch people filling in the seats of the Arena.

“Hairstyle-challenged crowd,” Francisco said. Close-crops, straggly-long locks, and mullets ruled the day.

“Fashion-challenged crowd,” I said. The favorite look was a denim vest over a t-shirt. But that fit with their choice of libation. In other words, lots of beer was being consumed.

And here is where we were able to participate. Our Media stickers allowed us into the Press Room, where there were free sandwiches, free soft drinks, free coffee, and free Beer brand beer. ‘Cisco and I took turns bringing four twelve-ounce plastic cups of Beer brand beer into the Arena.

Yes, we brought four cups of beer each time. We would hand out the extra brews to anyone nearby who looked thirsty. We soon had several new-found friends in our vicinity, which we thought might come in handy if there was any trouble later. And as it turned out, we were right about the trouble later.

Meanwhile, one man was quite pleasant to us without taking any beer. George was the timekeeper who normally worked the fights at the Olympic Auditorium but was hanging out at the launch of this new boxing promotion. He helped us feel right at home by introducing us to some of the fighters, trainers, managers, and corner men in attendance.

There was a stir in the crowd as some strippers came and sat down right behind us.

Now there was no need to look anywhere else. Or talk to George. Or talk at all, except to say important things to the girls, things like “Nice shoes” and “Are you warm enough?” and “Is that outfit called a bikini?”

It turns out that their outfits were called microkinis and they are a great advancement in the art of almost not wearing anything. (Yes, I know this is a story about boxing, but it is extremely necessary to present every bit of ambience for your edification.)

Suddenly, Jimmy Lennon, Jr., was announcing the first fight of the evening. During the introductions, one fighter was in constant motion, up on his toes, stretching his neck, shadowboxing, and dancing from side to side. The other fighter was awkwardly frozen, as if in a daze. He looked the way I’d look if I was stripped to my shorts and put under the lights in front of thousands of bloodthirsty boxing fans, especially if I was staring across the ring at some hungry, angry, limb-waving, muscular dude who had probably been told he’d get his twelve

hundred dollar paycheck only if he took my head off.

The fight lasted all the way 'til 2:14 of the first round. That's when Mr. Motion threw an overhand right with a fine calculation of arc. It landed just perfectly on Mr. Dazed's chin. Bingo. The guy was senseless before his body touched the canvas. The count didn't even reach "two" and the referee was waving his hands back and forth above his head, declaring the fight officially over. Since the ref didn't reach "ten," the result was a TKO, or technical knockout.

In the second bout, we again witnessed one fighter who was obviously outclassed and he suffered several ruthless blows to the head and body before succumbing to another lovely knockout punch. This fight lasted much longer than the first one, reaching all the way to 2:23 of the opening round. And this time, the referee made it through to the count of ten, so it was a KO rather than a TKO. Both of these fights go into the records as knockouts, which would seem to make the distinction moot.

It wasn't until the third fight that we got to see the strippers really strut their stuff. They were members of a troupe called Gabe's Babes and their job was to enter the ring and display the placards that indicated the number of the upcoming round. The "ring card girl" is a fine tradition of the sweet science. (In the early 1800s, sportswriter Pierce Egan often referred to the "sweet science of bruising" although the term was solidified by author A.J. Liebling, a writer for *The New Yorker* in the 1950s, and whose collection of boxing articles was called *The Sweet Science*. Don't you just love it when I throw in these historical and educational tidbits for your enlightenment?)

"You know," George told us, "I don't think anybody pays much attention to the numbers on those ring cards. It's just an excuse to have a pretty girl march around the ring in tight skimpy clothes and high heels."

"Right," we said to George while watching one of the Babes.

“And having them hold up the cards up like that gets their hands and arms out of the way of the view.”

“Right,” we said to George while watching one of the Babes.

“Scientists said a meteor will destroy the earth tomorrow.”

“Right,” we said to George while watching one of the Babes.

Each time a card girl entered the ring right above us, a nice ovation rolled through the stands on our side of the auditorium. When the Babe stepped in or out of the ring, a big bouncer would lift the upper ropes while stepping down on the lower ropes, making it easier for the high-heeled cutie to bend over and shimmy through. But that’s not the way they were supposed to do it. They should have done something called the bunny dip because otherwise the audience was being given a glance at the nether regions of each of the girls.

Thankfully, it took them until the sixth round to get the dip right, after repeated instructions from their female chaperone. One

might suspect they were enticing the crowd on purpose. At one point after a Babe bend, George leaned over and whispered something to Francisco, who listened intently, then smiled and nodded vigorously.

“Oh I’d do it, you bet,” Francisco said to him. “After she’d run a mile, man.” George cracked up.

A middleweight battle was next and it consumed the full ten rounds. “It went the distance,” as the fight crowd would say. A shaven-headed and goateed ex-Marine generally mauled a guy who appeared to have better boxing technique but whose punches landed with no power. Once Mr. Semper Fi discovered the weak nature of Mr. Pitty-Pat’s attack, he moved in to deliver lots of big, looping, sloppy blows that had his full weight behind them. The thuds these punches made on the noggin and torso of the other boxer brought “oohs” from many in the audience near the ring. The marine won in a walk. Or in a rout.

Next was the Dual Title Bout. Unfortunately, the Beer Champ looked like he

had consumed too much of the sponsor's product, but he seemed like a nice enough guy and was very popular with the crowd. His opponent, the State Champ, was built along the lines of an M1 Abrams battle tank.

Shortly after the fight started, it appeared that the tank guy didn't have much hand speed, but he did know how to throw a punch: get a good angle, let it fly from a balanced position, and twist one's own body for torque. Mr. M1 doggedly chased his opponent for the full ten rounds, pummeling him repeatedly. Unanimous decision for the tank.

"You know, I'm glad we're wearing jeans," I said, glancing down.

"And old shirts," Francisco added.

Both of us had gotten fairly smooth in our automatic motion of laying a program on the top of our cups of beer but there was no protection for our clothing. When two fighters are pounding each other in the ring, sweat and blood begin to fly every which way and loose.

"Ewwwweu," I hear you saying. Yeah, and it makes you question why so many ringsiders wear nice clothes. Those folks must

have a really good relationship with their dry cleaner.

During intermission, we went first to the Press Room, which just happened to also be the dressing room for the Babes. While grabbing a sandwich, we eyed the girls as they worked on hair and make-up, the two things that made practically no difference in our appreciation of them. Next, we walked to the boxers' dressing rooms where we ignored Sylvester Stallone and spoke with the actual boxers about some of the finer points of the fight game.

The best bout of the night came next. Well, not "best," exactly, but most entertaining. It was a non-stop slugfest. Defense be damned, the two men delivered everything they had for every second of every round. I sincerely doubt that either of those two guys could walk upright after they made it back home. Talk about a hard day at the office. "Those guys, man," Francisco said, "those guys are gonna piss blood for a week."

It was incredible to watch and the exhausted fighters seemed to regain a bit of strength during an extended standing ovation from the crowd.

The next fight pitted a young fancy dancer against a grey-haired veteran. Mr. Fastfeet had a wicked left jab to go along with a lovely left hook and he knew how to use them both. Mr. Grey, whose record was something like 25-60-17 (25 wins, 60 losses, 17 draws), probably shouldn't be doing this sort of thing any longer. And by "this sort of thing" I mean acting as cannon fodder. The contest was stopped when the ringside doctor decided there was too much blood obscuring Mr. Grey's vision.

When a bare-knuckle fight broke out in the stands and threatened to spread throughout the Arena, we took this as our cue to exit.

Did I enjoy the excursion into the world of the pugilistic arts? You bet. But other than ogling the Babes, I had to ask myself why I had such a good time. If I see a dead

animal on the street, it hurts me inside and I flinch. If there are accident victims beside the roadway, I avert my eyes to grant them a measure of privacy. Unless I'm in the passenger seat and have my video camera with me. But that's not the point I'm making here! The important thing is my incredible level of introspection that is clearly indicated by my taking a few moments to consider why I liked watching the matches.

Part of the fascination is that fights seem to be life in microcosm. Every bout is a parable of human existence, a living, moving, vicious metaphor in which two men are each standing in for fate, chance, or kismet. Talent may not win out, just as in life. Courage may be rewarded with permanent injury, just as in life. The forces opposing each other in the ring can represent the forces you battle at home or at work. For me, watching a fight is an exercise in existential philosophy.

Or maybe I just enjoy seeing two guys beating the shit out of each other.

Thanksgiving Weekends

In the USA, Thanksgiving weekends are a strange mixture of interpersonal dismay and caloric overload. While it is dreadful to attend one of these annual fiascoes, it is even worse for the host. In addition to overseeing the cholesterol festival, they also have to cope with:

- sniveling kids
- whining teens
- sickly babies
- right-wing nut-job uncles
- hypochondriac aunts
- ailing oldsters

Face it, everyone at the party has to survive a squabbling squad of peculiar relations, many of whom are none too bright and apparently always eager to prove it.

Which is why merlot was invented.

And weed.

The Christmas Letter

The home-grown horror known as The Christmas Letter can be quite funny. Sometimes funny/ha but mostly funny/weird. To create one of these abominations, it is best to have a total lack of taste. In my eternal desire to help bring about the end of civilization, I humbly offer the following fourteen pointers.

1) Screw being PC

To be politically correct, it should be called the Seasons' Greetings Letter, but to hell with that. Go ahead and use some fucking religiosity shit.

2) Details, Specifics, Minutiae

Start jotting down notes early in the year to accumulate lots of useless information for your massive missive. The idea is to include so many incidents that even your own relatives will be surprised you remembered all that crap.

3) *Be boring*

Whether you write a long letter or an incredibly long letter, make certain your message is not very merry by using plenty of platitudes: “What a season this has been!” Or “Whew, can you believe that another year has flown by?!” Your goal is to be irrefutably dull. If Uncle Milt falls asleep while reading it, then you know you’ve done a good job.

4) *TMI*

Always provide too much information, especially about family diseases, illnesses, and doctor’s visits. Go into detail about that oddly-colored discharge you had for several weeks just before summer.

5) *Name names*

Make references to people no one else knows. “Spent a delightful four-day weekend with Linda and George at their new place.” That’s a good start but go ahead and pile on some extraneous details: “Spent a delightful four-day weekend with Linda and George and their kids, Jamie, Tyler, and little Benny, plus all

their pets.” You get extra points for naming the pets, both real and imagined, so work in a mention of “Benny’s beloved invisible ferret, Sleepy-Woo Goldentail Dancer.”

6) *Scorn*

Add put-downs to everything: “Apparently, their son Tyler takes his raggedy teddy bear with him everywhere. Sure, it’s getting embarrassing now that he’s sixteen, but the parents insist that the kid’s counseling is coming along nicely.”

7) *Tease*

Mention events without providing any context or follow-up. “We burned out the neighbors who always held the loud parties, but who knew that the cops and the D.A. could be so suspicious and pesky about these things?!”

8) *Scores*

If anyone in the family takes part in any sport, regale us with their triumphs. “Nate was ninety-third best in his badminton league this year and Joanne got an Honorable Participant

certificate at the quilting bee.” Toot your own horn: “Achieved a new personal best of 148 at Bowl-a-Drome Lanes last March!” Provide all the details: “Didn’t think I’d break 130 in that game but then I made a 4-10 split to pick up the spare heading to the last frame, when all of a sudden the pizza we ordered arrived and then...”

9) Critters

Animals are cute, so write about them: “The new pet turtles are called Mitch and McConnell but unlike the conservative senator from Kentucky, they aren’t venomous and treasonous.” Write about every single precious thing your pets did in the past year, including results of vet visits. “Paddycake is getting around much better now that the bullet wounds have healed. Currently, we’re working on curing her habit of peeing on the furniture. The pet psychiatrist says to demonstrate the proper technique by getting down on all fours and going on the newspapers in the corner and at first I felt embarrassed about it but it turns out to be SO

liberating...!” Be certain to include all the stories of your doggies and kitties and fishies and hamsters and snakes because everybody loves pets! Mainly because they taste good. Especially fried.

10) Double Entendre

The truly creative writers of Xmas letters are able to insert words and phrases that are rousing and stimulating in unintended ways: “Dottie’s ‘cousin’ Sharon is a good cook and when she came to the party she laid out a wonderful spread.”

11) Sentences That Go On Almost Forever Are Just One More Way of Letting your Readers Know you Take things Very Seriously and that You Truly Believe These Matters are Extremely Exceptionally Important For Some Reason

Remember KICS (keep it complicated, stupid). Avoid something like: “Ryan got married; beautiful ceremony; good eats afterwards.” Amateurish! A professional Christmas Letter writer will create a much

more serpentine reading experience: “After a decade of wishing and hoping and praying from his parents and other family members, Ryan finally tied the knot and nearly everybody said that his partner is quite handsome and really almost beautiful now that the hormone injections are starting to take effect. The ceremony, which was held on the marina club patio at sunset with everyone wearing leis and love beads while the 13-piece wind orchestra played instrumental versions of Celine Dion tunes, was simply beautiful, and some folks tell me that the luau afterwards set some sort of record for lawsuits against a caterer. Ginny and I, having much stronger intestinal fortitude, came out unscathed. Or perhaps it was because we avoided the shellfish.”

12) Borrow and Steal

Take phrases from other people’s letters. It’s like re-gifting a fruitcake. Here are a few:

- “Again we celebrate our Lord sending His Son Jebus to us.”

- “The recent year has been as filled as many of our years usually are.”
- “We enjoyed our beautiful autumn, which is our favorite season because by then most of the mosquitoes have died.”

13) Good Enough is Gud Enuff

Don't yew bother about niceties like spelling punctuation run-on sentences words that are high-faw-lutin' grammeriacalizational stuff.

14) Yummy Yummy

Pass along food tips, especially the perilous ones: “In July the parents of the Little League teams got together for a potluck and every dish had bacon. All the recipes from that event were published by the League newsletter, *Rough Diamond*, in an issue sponsored by a local cardiologist. Let me know if you want one; we still have plenty of photocopies that Dottie made, may she rest in peace.”

The Blood-Red Shoes

Like many California municipalities, Mesa Grove was ninety-nine percent suburb and one percent ‘urb. Sunlight, glare, and golf were the words most often associated with the place, which in its early life was a backwater resort with hotels for tourists and vacation homes for rich residents of cities in other parts of the country.

At the bottom of the town’s economic scale were trailer park dwellers, mostly retirees but with a sprinkling of working class folks. At the top of the money-coated totem pole was a monstrous megabuck movie star’s home that was larger than most airport terminals.

For years, the town remained a holiday hot spot, figuratively and literally, but eventually a real city emerged, with all that implies, including tract houses filled with upwardly mobile families who wanted their progeny to get college degrees. This meant that the College of the Palms could attract and hire a young teacher, Giselle Mains, to

institute a program of ballet and modern dance.

Spirited, dedicated, and talented, Giselle was able to take a ragtag conglomeration of not-quite-adults and mold them into a company of performers who acted like professionals. Because of her leadership, each semester's class displayed energy, excitement, and that essential part of any dance troupe, *esprit de corps*.

A story in the school newspaper described Giselle in this manner: "Hers is a small job: all she has to do is assess the ability of every student; cast all roles in the dances; prepare and oversee a rehearsal schedule; choreograph the dances to accommodate the capabilities of each cast member; work with the stage crew in the design of sets and lighting; advise on costumes, publicity, and marketing; and supervise a few dozen more things that are not readily apparent to the casual viewer."

Her most recent recital explored the universality of emotion and desire. The primary dance, entitled "Cerebral Sentries,"

was serious, moody, eerie, and ultimately uplifting. Opening night was a rousing success, but in the early hours of the next morning, the lead dancer in “Cerebral Sentries” fell violently ill. There was some discussion of simply dropping that number from next evening’s show but a former student who had been at the opening performance asked if she could step into the role. The woman, Riesa Tulser, learned the choreography in a day-long session working with Giselle. Since the supporting dancers were often creating stage pictures that led the viewer’s eye to the lead dancer, success depended on Riesa finding the proper stage locations at the right moments. “Hitting your marks,” it’s called. They repeatedly watched videos of the opening night presentation.

Everyone expected Riesa to walk through the choreography and strike the appropriate poses. Just learning the positions and hitting them on time would be accomplishment enough. To hope for fluid movement and dynamic tension in her execution of the dance would be demanding

too much. But Riesa decided to give a complete performance. Members of the dance and theater arts departments crowded into the wings of the theater to watch. About halfway into the piece, Riesa made a turn on one foot and didn't complete the move. In the parlance of dancers, she "fell off" the turn. Now what? Would doubt intrude on her? If she lost her confidence, would the rest of the presentation be disrupted?

And then an extraordinary thing happened. Riesa seemed to draw power from within herself and was able to dispatch this dynamism to every muscle and sinew in her body, and then to radiate it to every person sitting in the auditorium. Her movements were sharp and clearly defined. She hit her marks bang-on with confidence and pride. Riesa gained intensity as she moved through the dance. She went beyond merely making pretty images on the stage—she seemed to become one of the intellectual sentinels of the title. It was a performance that truly deserved the term "breathtaking." Choreographer and dancers had combined to produce a work that

burned with white-hot splendor. At its conclusion, the whoops of joy from Riesa's fellow performers were almost a match for the thunder of adulation and admiration from the audience.

After the curtain calls, a beaming Giselle threw her arms around Riesa and both had tears in their eyes. "You were amazing," Giselle told her and then turned to the swirling mass of people on stage to say, "The whole company came up with bigger and grander performances. Riesa was astonishing, and everyone was just magnificent!"

As the cast hugged family members and friends who congregated with them backstage, people couldn't help noticing that the dancers' costumes were spattered with red droplets. With a shock, they realized it was blood. The reason Riesa had fallen off the turn was that her intense rehearsal routine had resulted in the formation of blood blisters on her feet and they popped during her movements. Somehow she fought past the pain to create a beautiful performance, even

as each successive spin sent more blood flying across the stage.

Riesa was a primary focus of attention in the exuberant celebration. At first glance, she appeared drained by her recent outpouring of energy. A closer look revealed her to be in her own world, serene, reserved, and protected by a cloak of light. As dancers and audience members streamed past her, she politely acknowledged the stunning success she had achieved.

“I just hope I didn’t ruin the costumes,” she said while her feet were being bandaged. On the floor nearby were her once-white shoes, now stained a color somewhere between Burgundy and Bordeaux.

Internet Cheat Sheet

Join us as we lift our voices to offer this ode, this prayer, this song of tribute to the one true deity: O Internet of wonder and delight, we submit to your glorious magnitude! We offer praise for your comforting glow as you continually expand beyond Brobdingnagian proportions! We show our devotion as we lavish our attention on your search results, your dissemination of information, your interconnectivity, and your faithful companionship. Let us now silently rejoice in the myriad ways we love thee....

[Pause for rejoicing. If you finish early, please simply reflect quietly in your “peaceful place” and enjoy the background music, a rare bootleg recording of Szandzar, the great Catalusian nose-powered accordion player, in his ill-fated final concert with members of the Manitoba Polka and Toboggan Society.]

Amen. Please rise and be seated. [You were kneeling for the prayer, weren't you?] We all know you are seeking a sure and certain path towards spiritual enlightenment,

and all you have to do is totally give yourself over to the magnificent, munificent, and magnanimous interwebtube machine.

If you are in any doubt about how to conduct your personal interaction with the ‘Net, these instructions have been specially prepared just for you.

DO: Download every social networking app and spend as much time as possible online instead of having a life or a career path or any real relationships. The profound emptiness and ardent soullessness of this course of action will help prepare you for hell.

DO: Perform as many life-tasks online as you can. Pay your bills and balance your checkbook online. Make dinner reservations and appointments online. Communicate with your friends and acquaintances online. Shop online. Fill your prescriptions online. Get medical advice online. Keep your calendar and address book online. Manage your stock portfolio and 401(k) online. Store all your

books, music, and movies “in the cloud,” which is another way of saying online.

DO: Try preventing organizations from gathering data about you. The very act of attempting to hide your online activities calls attention to your online activities which results in you being electronically pursued even more diligently.

DO: Relish the fact that being on the ‘Net means you are abetting governments and corporations as they utilize the web in completely altruistic ways. “We are here to help you. Or arrest you, whatever is appropriate.”

DO: Support powerful corporations as they lobby for laws that protect their business models. Assist them as they battle to remove regulations on corporate behavior. Speak up in defense of telecoms when they seek to discriminate between different types of Internet traffic and charge more for some of it. Show solidarity with corporate advertisers

as they seek unconstrained access to information about everyone's habits and preferences. You have nothing to hide, right?

DO: Grab anything you can find online. Movies, music, images—take it all because it is totally free! Sure, this is a form of theft but what do you care? Let the creators of art beware. If they were smart, they'd build apps or have a clothing line.

DO: Play online games so the embedded commercial messages can work their magic.

DO: Use the same password for all your online transactions. The goal is to make things easier for you in your daily life on the 'Net.

CONCLUSION: Follow the above directions and then just relax, close your eyes, and think about other things while the data-rape takes place.

Whispers & Screams

Name any profession and you can be certain there is a sect, clique, faction, or cabal to represent its members' goals, aspirations, and legislative interests. One directory of US-based associations contains 55,000 groups and societies, which works out to eleven hundred for each state in the union. The list is daunting and includes:

- ❖ PSI (Pet Sitters International)
- ❖ BOMA (Building Owners and Managers Association)
- ❖ AIIM (Association for Information and Image Management)
- ❖ ILAR (International League of Associations for Rheumatology)
- ❖ CBC (Children's Book Council)
- ❖ AEASA (Agricultural Economics Association of South Africa)
- ❖ NWA (no, not the rap group but the National Weather Association)

The cult that hired me was the ACRIP, Association of Clinical Relational

Interpersonal Psychologists (not their real name). ACRIP's annual convention was booked into The Towering Inferno, otherwise known as the Worstin Misadventure Hotel & Suites (not its real name). This structure was located on a quiet little corner of downtown Lost Angeles (close enough to the real name) where woe unto ye who park in their underground garage without getting your ticket validated. It was fun to watch the faces of the drivers as they confronted the attendant in the kiosk on their way out of the lot:

“A hundred and fifteen dollars?! Just for parking a car? Are you nuts??!?”

“No sir.”

“That's outrageous!”

“Yes sir. We accept credit cards.”

“We were only here for two hours!”

“Yes sir, I see that. The first hour is free, which is why you are only being charged a hundred and fifteen dollars.”

On the surface, working for a group of psychologists would appear to be a good gig for a writer because headshrinker folks

love wordiness, jargon, and persiflage. Look what they let me do to our poor defenseless English language when writing one of their brochures:

Allow us to extend to you a cordial invitation to a collegial opportunity for the sharing of industry-wide information on a multi-level track dedicated to maximizing the possibilities for intra-specialty interfaces.

But wait, there's more:

Be assured that every attendee will be able to celebrate in a series of exhilarating experiences within an atmosphere of continual dialoguing while engaging in a cohesively triumphant observation of a festive and exultant occurrence.

Indubitably, my words were refulgent. But hey, that tortured style was probably better suited to the noggin doctors than the opposite approach, which would be something closer to this: *Hey fellow head-fakers, c'mon down and par-tay!*

Noticing my wordsmithing abilities, someone suggested that I write a review of their big evening shindig, which took place in

a huge auditorium several levels beneath the glittering monstrosity of the hotel's lobby. It turned out to be a new-age group-hug for nine hundred people.

The gurus who were the flavors-of-the-moment, the winners of the Relational Interpersonal Psychologists of the Year (the Rippies) , took turns saying comforting sayings through the public address system in an attempt to mesmerize the forty-five score folks who were milling around or sitting on the floor of an otherwise sterile ballroom.

“Think of a special secret place in the quietest corner of your mind,” purred one of the mind spelunkers.

“Find the deepest core of your ultimate satisfaction,” whispered another fluid Druid.

Each word came reverberating out of the room's booming public address system. “Find the deepest core of your ultimate satisfaction” was spoken in a soothing intimate tone, but several thousand watts of power later, the nice, soft, relaxing message was boosted into the auditorium at the approximate sonic level of a Boeing 787 Dreamliner during takeoff.

Someone had monkeyed with the echo effect on the P.A. system, so we heard: “Find-ind-ind the deepest-est-est core-ore-ore of your-your-your ultimate satisfaction-action-action-action.” In a round-robin event of attempted mass hypnosis, soft-spoken Shamans murmured while the sound system bellowed.

The disparity between the sonic punch of the amplification and the “awww what a cute widdle puppy” tone of the speakers wasn’t the only oddity. Taking place behind-the-scenes were ego clashes and turf wars. When not on stage in the spotlights, these well-educated, well-spoken, and well-dressed ladies and gentlemen were vehemently arguing about such things as: the speaking order of the presenters; the precise number of seconds each person was allotted at the podium; who was allowed into which dressing room; and other items of earth shattering importance. They even exchanged heated words about the backstage refreshments, disagreeing about the coldness of the bottled water, the hotness of the tea, and the availability of throat lozenges. Some disagreements resulted from the

outright contempt they displayed concerning the techniques and credentials of their colleagues.

Positioning myself midway between the stage and the dressing rooms allowed me to hear two different types of theatrical exhibition. On-stage, the soothsayers were doing their “all is calm, all is bright” shtick; once off-stage, these same people were viciously attacking each other like wolverines defending their turf.

“Feel the contentment that comes from inner peace,” one oracle whispered into the microphone just before tip-toing off the podium to confront the others backstage by hissing, “Stop hogging the mic, you worthless quacks.”

Which didn’t go over as well as you might expect.

“You’re an asshole!” was the reply, which for some reason did not usher in a feeling of calm and camaraderie.

By remaining in that auditory optimum point, I could listen to the on-stage sweetness-

and-light as well as the backstage kerosene-and-vitriol at the same time:

Whispered with a smile on-stage: “This mind-rainbow will shelter you and your feelings...” Hissed through gritted teeth backstage: “You goddamn phony jerkoff!”

Whispered on stage: “Let the relaxation waves spread throughout your very soul...” Hissed backstage: “Fuck you and your crackpot concepts!”

Whispered: “As the spirit-guide takes your hand, let it give you safety and strength...” Hissed: “You’re a bunch of shitheads!”

Sometimes the two divergent messages coalesced into one stream-of-consciousness dichotomy of brouhaha:

Love is peace is contentment is joy is *stupidity and idiocy, which are your inner dreams that are being made into reality just by murdering you and celebrating it as a mercy killing that would take your positivity onto a mountaintop of satisfaction as well as the achievement of your guts spilling out on the carpet just like a waterfall of serenity that will*

*stun everyone with your lunatic fringe ideas that place your trust in the love of the inner voice as it tells you to **fuck off and die!***

Looking back on the experience, I think what I liked best about the convention was that there was a little something for everyone.

Songs of Hate & Truth

We have a winner in the song parody lyrics contest! You may recall the shock that decent people felt when a video emerged from one of the chapters of the Sigmund Adenoid Esplanade fraternity as they gleefully sang one of their racist songs while on a bus heading back from a sporting event.

Recently, another video emerged, this time showing the good, brave, true, forthright, and stalwart men of S-A-E as they sang their ‘welcome new pledges’ song.

The event was private and organizers made a concerted effort to see to it that no cell phones or recording devices were present. After all, they had received a lot of bad publicity for their prior demonstration of stupidity. Evidently, their security was as good as their morality, because here they are on view once again, singing lustily:

Here's what an S-A-E knows...

Oh here's what an S-A-E knows:

*Niggers are for hanging, and
Hot girls are for banging —
And that's what an S-A-E knows!*

*Here's what an S-A-E knows...
Oh here's what an S-A-E knows:
For your banker get a kike, and
For your blow jobs get a dyke —
And that's what an S-A-E knows!*

*Here's what an S-A-E knows...
Oh here's what an S-A-E knows:
Tell the G.I. schmoes to re-up, and
In marriage get a pre-nup —
And that's what an S-A-E knows!*

In retaliation, a song publishing company called Kiss the Sunrise Music held a lyric-writing contest to provide an antidote to the fraternity racism. The winner was Jerimiah “Jim” Farkis of Sibelius, North Dakota (one of the Western Hemisphere’s top two Dakotas, it should be noted).

And here is the winning entry, as performed by members of the Too

Knowledgeable to Vote Republican club at
the same university:

*There will never be a decent GOP
There will never be a decent GOP
Voters should take heed
That their only god is greed
There will never be a decent GOP!*

*There will never be a moral GOP
There will never be a moral GOP
They all are lacking hearts
And their souls are filled with farts
There will never be a moral GOP!*

*There will never be a worthwhile GOP
There will never be a worthwhile GOP
Their ethics up and quit
And their minds are full of shit
There will never be a worthwhile GOP!*

Moom Pitchers

*Jimmy Ray Filmbuff Salutes the Stunning
Cinematic Legacy of George J. Yarbrough*

Corporate-sponsored flicks are a rarified form of rubbish. They're often a smarmy blend-o-rama of half-truths, distortions, and outright whoppers. Pretending to be informative and educational while promoting a capitalistic cause puts them firmly into a category most of us would call propaganda. Or "a crock o' crap," as my granddaddy would say.

The current odds-on favorite to receive a Jimmy Ray Filmbuff Downer Movie of the Year Award is a superbly superficial half-hour moom pitcher that recently aired on Turner Classic Movies at three a.m. It was understandable that the screening took place in the wee hours of the morning because this film is astonishing in its ordinariness, exemplary in its insubstantiality, and exceptional in its muddled depiction of industry. This cinematic extravaganza should

be required viewing for anyone hoping to gain some understanding of the minds of businesscritters.

The film opens on an artsy note with an epic half-minute title sequence featuring pastel-shaded close-ups of capital letters spelling out the sponsor's name before revealing the full title: *The Wonderful World of Tupperware*. That's correct: the movie is a paean to the plastic food containers invented in 1947 by Earl Silas Tupper using leftover materials from his job at the DuPont Chemical plant. Overall, the visual design of the film's opening sequence seems less influenced by the Saul Bass title sequences for Alfred Hitchcock and Otto Preminger movies and more by an ophthalmologist's eye chart.

Accompanying the smash cuts between the various letter forms is sprightly music utilizing what sounds like a high school jazz band trying to play Duke Ellington. Unfortunately, the rest of the soundtrack

seems more like things you'd hear in a gerontologist's waiting room.

“Tupperware is made from polyethylene, polypropylene, and polystyrene,” the narrator states, going on to extol their virtues as if shilling for the Plastic Manufacturers Trade Association. Which, come to think of it, may have been the case.

Suddenly, a gargantuan beast appears! Yes, a dinosaur threatens us, but then we relax because it is just some sub-Disney animation to accompany the narrator's statement that “the history of plastics began over 30 million years ago when intense heat, natural chemical changes, and tremendous pressures created by the shifting of the earth's crust formed a substance needed to make plastic: petroleum.”

We next take a brief tour of a refining plant and then World War II occurs. Yes, it seems to be an abrupt change in tone, but according to this film, everything—the death of the dinosaurs, the eons of time, and the Second World War—took place in order to

provide humanity with oil and one of its most precious byproducts, specifically Tupperware.

“All is beautiful and amazing here in Plastic Manufacturing Land!” Okay, that phrase doesn’t appear in the film, but the unctuous narration does include such phrases as “the wonderful world of imagination and industry” while assuring us that Tupperware products are “imaginatively designed and manufactured.”

Next, we see how a bowl is created in a sequence that receives four minutes of screen time. Some viewers will not appreciate the solemnity of the shots of various men in white shirts and ties looking at the container with stone-dead expressions on their well-fed faces. (“It’s a fucking bowl fer christsake” was my companion’s reaction at this point in the screening.)

Yes, that turgid section was “as slow as molasses in January,” as my Midwest middle school teachers used to say. Things get more ebullient in the next section, a delightful travelogue in which we are fortunate to view

the sights in many exotic foreign lands. For example, we see:

- * a Tupperware building in England
- * a Tupperware building in Belgium
- * a Tupperware building in Australia
- * a Tupperware building in Canada
- * a Tupperware building in Japan
- * a Tupperware building in Rhode Island

Whew! I don't know about you but I was nearly worn out after that whirlwind visual vacation! But hang onto your hats and garter belts, boys and girls, now it's back to watching "Industry On the March" as that damn bowl is molded, inspected, and then placed on a metal rack to cool! As you can imagine, the excitement was palpable.

The whole shebang was photographed in spectacular grain-o-vision, an effect achieved by using bad lighting, newsreel cameras, and allowing the emulsion to deteriorate in a warehouse for half a century, which is not the filmmakers' fault, but still.

Facts galore are bandied about during the film:

“The Tupperware plant is the largest injection molding operation in the world, covering an area of over 100,000 square feet.” (I know! Fascinating, right?)

Here’s another:

“A checklist is used to make over 100 individual adjustments to ensure the perfect production and function of the Tupperware product.” (And yes, we get to see the first page of an actual checklist.)

“Since most of our products are food containers,” the narrator states in dulcet tones, “every effort is made to keep the items hospital clean by minimizing direct handling at every manufacturing step.”

That reassurance falls flat when we see items being handled by factory workers who are not wearing gloves. But not to worry because, apparently, all Tupperware employees are themselves “hospital clean.”

Well, to be fair, they didn’t actually promise hospital cleanliness, only that “every effort is made” to keep things spotless.

After enduring the manufacturing cleanliness, the containers eventually reach a sales force comprised of independent contractors (who also touch the products with uncovered hands).

Subsequently, the products are presented to customers in the hospital clean atmosphere of people's dens and living rooms. It is at that moment, the narrator informs us, that "housewives discover the magic of Tupperware."

Yes, the magic of Tupperware. I was astounded by the legerdemain, let me tell you.

But meanwhile...

**HERE WE ARE IN A MORE
MODERN PART OF THE
FACTORY!!!!**

Sorry for shouting but the noise level in here is a bit much. Let's step back and try that again: Here we are in a more modern part of the factory, where the products are moved by machines instead of by the barehanded folks.

There is a nifty shot from a camera mounted on the end of one of the machines so we are whisked across the room along with the product and watch as it is deposited in front of one of the most bored-looking employees you will ever have the misfortune to encounter this side of a Chinese forced labor camp.

During the doleful section of the film dealing with Quality Control of High Quality Value and Quality, we learn that sometimes “complete production runs have been scrapped for failing to measure up to the quality standards that homemakers throughout the world have come to expect.” We see dozens of Tupperware bowls being contemptuously trundled into the gaping maw of Some Ominous Machine. “This reground material is used for a variety of other products that do not require the rigid quality control of Tupperware.” Like the makers of industrial films.

The movie feels like a six-minute story crammed into a 28-minute production, partly because of two serio-comic interludes. One occurs at a Tupperware sales convention and


features an appearance by Anita Bryant, the gay-bashing former Miss Oklahoma, who warbles the Johnny Mercer/Harold Arlen “Blues in the Night” but with bastardized lyrics extolling the virtues of Tupperware. It is unclear how the odious Bryant contributed anything to the proceedings.


Another moment of unintended mirth occurs during a rendition of Jerry Herman’s “Hello Dolly” (again with adulterated “yupper for Tupper” lyrics) sung by Johnny Desmond, who I’m sure you all remember as the star of such cinematic classics as *The Bubble* and *Calypso Heat Wave*.

Finally, let me note that this “Wonderful” film was the creation of a great master—dare I say “auteur”—of American cinema, one George J. Yarbrough, who toiled mightily on this project as producer, director, co-writer, and cinematographer. According to the Internet Movie Database, these were his sole credits in those categories although he amassed an impressive CV in several vital areas of motion picture production:

 Mr. Yarbrough was editor of *Zaat*

 Mr. Yarbrough was sound editor on
Daytona Beach Weekend

 Mr. Yarbrough was transportation co-
captain on *Grass Harp*

 Mr. Yarbrough was a driver on *Blue
Sky*

There is a spine-numbing denouement to Yarbrough's opus, in which the international flavor of Tupperware is demonstrated by having the word "End" pop on screen in a multiplicity of languages. So we see the French "Fin," the German "Ende," and the Swedish "Slut."

"Multiple un-gloved thumbs up!
For total enjoyment, see it on
mushrooms or acid!"

— *Jimmy Ray Filmbuff*

Fin.
Ende.
Slut.

Satan's Online Dating Profile

Welcome to The Hookup, suburbia's most respected online dating service for the upwardly mobile middle-class! You are invited to create one of our easy-to-navigate profile pages and join the thousands of fun, fabulous, and friendly folks who, just like you, are seeking warmth, companionship, and—who knows?—perhaps just a *little bit more!* Remember, the profile is free but be certain to purchase the appropriate protection when meeting up offline. Good luck and good hookup!

NAME:

Satan.

NICKNAMES:

Lucifer, Beelzebub, Abbadon, Old Scratch, Big D, Prince of Darkness, Long Tail, Horned One, Tabraz X3334.

EMAIL:

hotandfabulous@satanslair.hell

SCREEN NAME:

original.sinner

GENDER:

Either or both.

GENDER PREFERENCE:

Whataya got?

HEIGHT:

7' 1" when earthbound.

274.6 porcetains when celestial.

WEIGHT:

255 lbs. earthbound.

4809 qidroips celestial.

RACE:

Interplanetary Reshaper, 15th generation.

HAIR:

None.

EYES:

Multiple.

OCCUPATION:

Temptation Agent.

INCOME:

Immeasurable by human standards. All my fiscal needs are met and I have plenty left over to show a human a good time on this planet as well as on a number of planets in several nearby galaxies, not to mention private tours of Hell's chambers of anguish.

HOBBIES:

People watching, long walks on the beach, cleric torturing, collecting brain scans of auto accident victims, and disrupting pet funerals.

INSPIRATIONAL PEOPLE:

Reinaldo Arenas, Capucine, Kurt Cobain, Vincent van Gogh, Spalding Gray, Ernest

Hemingway, Arthur Koestler, Richard Jeni,
Yukia Mishima, Sylvia Plath, Mark Rothko,
George Sanders, Anne Sexton, Hunter S.
Thompson, Virginia Woolf.

FAVORITE MOVIES:

*Embodiment of Evil, 48 Hours of
Hallucinatory Sex, 24 Horas de Sexo
Explícito, Fifth Dimension of Sex, A
Encarnação do Demônio, Mundo-mercado do
Sexo, Hallucinations of a Deranged Mind, A
Mulher Que Põe a Pomba no Ar, Hellish
Flesh, O Exorcismo Negro, Sexo E Sangue na
Trilha do Tesouro, End of Man, Awakening of
the Beast, and Skidoo.*

FAVORITE BOOKS:

*Area Code 666
Secret Sex, Safe Radiation & Other Half-Vast
Concoctions
Armageddon, Next Exit*

WHAT MAKES YOU LAUGH:

The Bible

FAVORITE PLACES:

- (1) Romizicrus (17th canto of purgatory).
- (2) Pacific Trash Vortex.
- (3) 32.20 N, 64.45 W; 18.5 N, 66.9 W; 24.48 N, 80.18 W (the Devil's Triangle or sometimes the Bermuda Triangle).

MARITAL STATUS:

Single, but I enjoy connubial liaisons with Kelly Ayotte, Kellyanne Conway, Ann Coulter, Betsy DeVos, Joni Ernst, Lindsey Graham, Laura Ingraham, Rebekah Mercer, Mike Pence, Marco Rubio, Paul Ryan, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, and many other scum.

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES:

I will always remember my daddy showing me how conservatives were so gullible that they would vote against their own best interests as long as the code words “patriotism,” “god,” “jesus,” and “prayer” were used. Oh, and I also fondly recall attending keggers with Young Republicans as they beat up Hispanics and set fire to the homeless.

LIFE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND GOALS:

I worked my way up the corporate ladder. I was a Humanoid Observation Sentinel, then was promoted to People Tormentor and graduated to full-fledged Torturer in just six weeks. Two months later, I was promoted to Demonologist and now I lead the efforts at tempting people into the abyss. BTW, what kind of evil thoughts are on your mind at the moment? Oh, don't answer that—I can see what you're thinking. Naughty-naughty! I'll visit you soon to discuss it further.

A FUN WEEKEND:

Working with petrochemical corporations to poison groundwater, pollute streams, and cause earthquakes. Good times!

PET PEEVES:

People chewing with mouths open, motorcycles without mufflers, Klezmer music, ministers, the perturbations in elliptical

planetary orbits, and backyard pools with an improper pH balance.

IDEAL DATE:

Friend, Soul Mate, Arm Candy, and Fulfiller of Coitus Fantasies.

REASON FOR LAST BREAKUP:

It was right after we teased a bunch of sports morons into rioting. As “Dan,” I was dating a hottie named Heather. Or Amanda. Or something. Anyway, she set fire to an F-150 pickup without even trying to tempt one of the jerkwads into lighting it. That is a violation of Lucifer's Standards of Interspecies Enticement. So we broke up and I had her thrown into a volcano.

DATING GOALS:

I love candlelit dinners and I’ve found that girls from The Hookup are always the best for this. They taste like chicken.

Touched Off

Because anybody can buy a clerical collar, it's not absolutely certain that it was a clergyman who molested me when I was a kid, but you know the old joke: if it walks like a duck, talks like a duck, and sucks you off like a pedophile priest....

Clerical collar buttons and cufflinks from CleriCloth & Company are a great gift for others or for yourself! Ours are of polished metal, symbolizing your rigid strength and moral fiber, and fully plated with genuine gold or silver denoting the depth of your devotion.

As the abuse occurred, the rest of the world became small and far away. I was desperate to escape from the bed and those arms and those hands and those lips on me. To mentally flee the hell that was taking place on my body, I imagined being near almost anyone decent: parents, relatives, friends.

The CoolCleric collar is made of supple material that gives it the resiliency to be worn while tied in a knot. On the inside is a band

with perforations allowing airflow; hence the “coolness” alluded to in its name.

Trapped, cornered, helpless, vulnerable, exposed. Frightened to the point of paralysis. The worst part was feeling devalued, worthless, insignificant, a piece of rubbish. I don't know how other victims have felt, but for me, being assaulted caused intense feelings of self-doubt. Did I bring this upon myself? Is any of this my fault? Am I being punished for something?

Each order of collar-tabbed shirts comes with a faux-leather collar case to store twelve collar tabs. In fact, if you stack them very carefully, you can increase the capacity from a “disciple dozen” to a “baker’s dozen!”

I was a boy in a hospital, recovering from a surgical procedure. This was at a time when patients would routinely stay on the ward after an operation, whereas now the idea is to shoo people home as soon as possible. So I was awake but not entirely back to full strength. Not that my full strength would matter because a kid doesn't have a great deal of ability to fight off an adult. And while the

assault probably didn't last much more than ten minutes, the event seemed endless.

We know you will appreciate our Preaching Bands in fine pure linen. Yes, they're pure, as pure as you are! Available in six sizes, depending on the bloat of your flesh.

Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and the terror is upon me. Other times, the horror invades my sleep. Images of the past, present and future combine in my memory so it seems I'm being violated by more than just the man with the clerical collar. In the deleterious trance that sometimes engulfs my consciousness there are a great many people who are holding sway over me, a violent litany of faces representing shock and panic and lasciviousness and unbridled power.

As a special touch, we suggest ordering your clerical collar buttons and cufflinks engraved with your choice of Jerusalem cross or Chi-Rho monogram of Christ.

The revulsion blends with the rest of my personal history. Everyone and everything representing untoward authority reminds me

of that time of violation. I glance at the news and see that an important piece of legislation is thwarted by some bloviating right wing nutjob politician. You and I are helpless to combat that, as helpless as I was on that bed. Or you must endure an incorrect decision by a faceless insurance corporation that causes months of delay in getting a medical procedure for an ailing relative. You and I are helpless to prevent that, as helpless as I was under the control of the demon in human form.

New for this season, CleriCloth & Company offers a great alternative look to the tab-collar shirt: our exclusive snap-in-place Collaresque, available in Roman or Anglican styles!

My nightmares feature more than just the face of the man who molested me. All the scumbags of the near and distant past cavort and frolic with the image of that evil priest. The hideous specters of Nixon, Alito, Reagan, Scalia, McConnell, Bush, Cheney, Koch, Mercer, Trump et al., are thrust at me as I lie there on the bed. Their rancid faces alternate

with the visage of that malevolent man and his enema-dripping mouth.

Introducing our unique clerical dickey! Providing you the best in comfort and practicality, our clerical dickey offers you the appearance of a clerical collar that can be worn under an open collar shirt or sweater vest. Made of the finest virgin polyester, the CleriCloth dickey has a convenient Velcro fastener in back, affording you the ability for fast in-and-out.

Each new right-wing neo-con fascist who shows up on the scene joins the brigade of brigands who trample their way across my mind. Their attempts to subjugate the population somehow meld with my suffering.

Founded in the 1800s, the CleriCloth Company creates ideal worship furnishings, including clerical collars, vestments, and choir robes.

The calamitous crop of prophet profiteers at the Jebusfreak mega-churches lurk in the fever dream, piling on and on in a never-ending death spiral of greedwhores and the ethically-bereft. Their perfidy is a blight

on the nation just as the perverted cleric's actions were a blight upon the human soul.

At CleriCloth, our mission is to consistently work with the finest and highest quality materials using the summit of craftsmanship in order to produce absolutely superior products for all your devotional needs.

The violation is a force of evil, of dread, of the void. The revulsion stays with me, in my brain and in my soul. Some people have told me to "Get over this and move on." I invite them to move closer so I can make my rebuttal using a rubber glove, a mop handle, and a swab of their own saliva. Others have said, "You will not have peace in life if you keep on hating." That appears to be a good observation except for the fact that I am not seeking peace. Hatred of rightwing douchebaggery is motivation to keep on living, working, and writing.

I am fueled by anger and caffeine and have no plans to give up either one of them.

AZL

Event security was tight. Attendees had to submit to a body pat-down and a thorough inspection of pockets and handbags. “Everybody gets frisked, every bag gets searched,” the head of security told the men and women stationed at the entrance. All proceedings of the AZL (Anti-Zionist League) were conducted in such a manner. It made their events start late but everyone felt that the safety factor justified the delay.

Tick...tick...tick...

Inside the formerly elegant but still venerable Jason D. Matthias Chamber of Commerce Hall, a vocal crowd was responding well to the speaker, a self-confessed “ultra-rightist” who was leading this particular strain of the movement. Holding the microphone too close to his mouth so his voice boomed out of the public address system with distortion from plosives, the man ceaselessly prowled the stage, blasting out P-Pops while promulgating his hate.

“It’s nice to see so many of you who were willing to endure the near-strip-search to attend this event. Sorry about that, but we get a lot of threats of violence wherever we go.” The crowd reacted negatively and the speaker advised them, “Don’t boo, buy a gun!” The booing turned to applause.

“All right, now, for those of you who are just learning about our cause, I’d like to introduce myself. My name is Walter Frank Buckley. I’m a distant relation of the late crypto-fascist William F. Buckley, a wonderful man who was one of the founders of the *National Review* magazine. No, no, no, don’t boo. Yeah, I know, I know, the writers and editors at *National Review* went a little off-the-tracks for a while but they’re basically good people, good white supremacists like the rest of us. All us conservatives have to stick together. They got a little mixed-up but they’ll come around and their magazine will be as strong as ever.

“For those of you who are under thirty, a magazine is what an e-zine used to be called. The articles in a magazine were printed on

paper instead of being sprayed across a screen with pixels. Also, magazines didn't have as many pictures as websites do because people in ancient times of a few years ago used to think that reading was vital. But that's not important right now.

“Anyway, I'm the leader of our local *Aufteilung*, this division of the AZL, which makes me one of the leaders of the neo-Nazi faction of the Republican Party. In other words, I'm in the GOP mainstream. Oh sure, the GOP spokesmen will deny the connection, but they know, they know. They know which side of the concentration camp their voters are buttered on, let me assure you.

“Okay, as you can see from the program—does everybody have a copy of the program? Okay, as it says, this is the third in our series called ‘Placing Republicanism Into Contemporary Knowledge.’

“Two months ago, we began the series with my lecture entitled ‘ISIS, IRS, and Other Signs of the Apocalypse,’ which was sponsored by RightMint, the ‘solid gold choice in buying gold.’ Yeah, well, I had to

get their ad slogan in because they're sponsoring us again tonight. It's a contractual obligation and we always honor those.

“Okay, so last month we continued this exciting series with my lecture entitled ‘A-Rabs and A-Holes’ which got a certain amount of attention on some of our sites, some of the right-winger sites.”

Tick...tick...tick...

“Tonight, I'll be presenting my newest lecture. Okay, the title of my lecture tonight is ‘Aspects of the Jewish Problem: The Ultimate Conundrum Seeking an Ultimate Solution.’ Catchy, don't you think?!

“Okay, so, the Jewish problem. Well, where to start. We all know Jews, right? They run Wall Street. They run Hollywood. They run the arts. They run mainstream publishing. And they run the media. So, they're very successful people. And always good at business. The saying ‘He Jewed me down on the price’ came about for a reason, right? Yeah, well, you know how that works. You've been on the receiving end of that. It's part of haggling, something that foreigners

do. Americans let the free market decide if a price is too low or too high. Foreigners state a price and then haggle, haggle, haggle, nag, nag, nag, and Jew their way to a deal. It's annoying, right? Right.

“Okay, but if that were the only problem we'd all be in fine shape. We could deal with that. But that isn't the only problem. The Jews and their so-called independent state of Israel are subverting American foreign policy with millions upon millions upon millions of dollars sent over there. Hundreds of millions of our dollars just disappearing—poof—into their desert land in the Middle East.

“Wait, did I say millions? I mean billions. And since it's billions each and every year, it's literally trillions of wasted dollars. Trillions! Do you know how big a trillion dollars is? Do you? Well, if you were a Jewish banker you would. If you were a Jewish politician you would.

“Let me tell you something about a trillion dollars. First, here's some perspective: If we piled up all the money in all our wallets and purses right now, we might have a neat

little heap that was about yea high. If we converted everything we own into dollars and stacked that up, we might get a mini molehill of money that's as tall as this building.

“But if you stacked up a trillion dollar bills it would be... a mile high? No, taller. Two miles high? No, taller. Five miles high? No, taller. If you carefully piled up one trillion dollar bills the stack would be... are you ready? Sixty-five miles high.

“Sixty-five miles high. Of money. That's just an inkling of how much of your tax dollars have been wasted on Israel.

“Oh sure, I know there are people who say we need to have a free nation located somewhere near Damascus so we can go in there and push things toward the end-times and bring about the apocalypse and the rapture and then all good people ‘gwine ta hebbin, Lord, gwine ta hebbin.’

“But you know that's all just bunk. Good people will go to heaven whether or not the Middle East explodes. And you'll go when your creator calls you. It's not dependent on

what kind of firestorm the ragheads and neo-cons create in the Middle East.

“And by the way, who says the apocalypse hasn’t already started? Sure, it might seem normal outside, but come on people, take a look around: we’ve got perpetual wars on many continents, the United Nations trying to institute the new world order, the Jew financial system helping them... I mean, come on! Come on, people!

“Which brings us back to the Jewish problem. So, let me just get a sip of water and then I’ll explain the situation...”

Tick...tick...tick...

All of the lowlifes were hanging onto every deliciously spurious word spoken by W. Frank Buckley, but things were about to get weirder and more anti-Semitic, if that’s possible. Buckley fancied himself able to do voices and dialects.

“There are a whole bunch of reasons that people hate Jews, of course, but right now let’s look at one that isn’t discussed as much as the others. I’m talking about the language. What they sound like.

“You know, back in antiquity—when the tribes of Israel were roving around wondering where their country would finally be located as soon as the Western powers imposed their arbitrary borders on the Middle East—way back then... well, actually, even before that, before there was language. Yeah, that far back.

“Okay, back then, the tribes of Israel had the same problem everyone had—how are we gonna communicate? And the Jews must have had a big noisy meeting where it went something like this: ‘We need our language to be different from everyone else’s language’.” He paused and grinned at the crowd. “Do you like my accent? Thanks. Been working on it. Okay, so: ‘We need our language to be different because, y’know, we’re going to claim to be better than anyone else, so we have to be unusual. We have to be wildly different. I mean besides the cutting off the penis thing. So let’s have our language combine the worst aspects of Russian, German, and Arabic, but with pronunciations that sound like you’re dying of consumption.’

“Right?! Right?! Am I right? Have you heard these people when they talk? It’s like some sort of spitting convention among asthmatics. ‘Hwagh thwugh khamellph berga throthub gachk.’ Right?”

“Thanks to the inventors of the Jewish language, their culture can have no love poems. I mean, just imagine a guy trying to woo his gal with ‘Darling you are more beautiful than the sunrise’ when it comes out like ‘Klwnw wleedod wklwjdejrr rhdjfkd zarb lofelem.’ Good luck. And no popular love songs, either, if ‘I love you’ comes expectorating out at you as ‘Flaolth balmem kzolth.’ Pity the poor girl who has to endure that!”

*Tick...tick...Click, **BLAM!*** The timer on the homemade bomb hidden under the stage set off the small explosive charge that cracked the glass jar which released hydrogen sulfide into the room and the air began reeking of that rotten egg smell known to every high school chemistry student. The courageous Walter Frank Buckley was one of the first to bolt

toward the exit as soon as the explosion occurred.

In the panic, several people fell down and were dismayed to discover that there was no help offered by their fellow racists during a mad dash for the doors.

The room cleared out within moments, with only the bleeding and injured left inside to limp or crawl toward the exits. On the floor with the discarded programs and spilled coffee cups were creased pages of Buckley's handwritten notes for his lecture. At the bottom of the last page, he had written the following: "Group prayer for deliverance from Jewry" followed by "Include the Heil salute as part of the pledge to the glory of the GOP."

Tick...tick...tick...



Fake Fat Elvis

The magazine editor on the phone was trying to convince me that I was being offered an excellent opportunity. “This is an excellent opportunity,” was what he told me. He also said, “It’s a good gig and it’ll be fun!” Since the project was writing a review of an Elvis impersonator, my reaction was somewhat less than positive but I still managed to decline in a gracious manner.

“Yougottabefuckingkiddingme,” was the way I put it.

“C’mon,” came the plaintive response, “it’s a free show and a couple of free drinks.”

“Forget it.”

“We can make it a ‘plus one’ so you can take a date.”

“Other than you,” I said, “there’s nobody I dislike enough to take to something like that.”

“Okay, okay, okay,” came the exasperated reply, “we’ll make it a ‘plus

three’ and we’ll also run that story you did on the bad habits of music reviewers.”

“Hmm,” I said.

“So, you’ll do it?”

“Can I write anything I want about the ersatz Elvis?”

“Sure.”

So I took the assignment. A “plus three” made it interesting to me because I knew some people who would find such an outing to be a scream.

“That sounds camp!” was the response to my invitation. Camp, for those of you not up on antiquated homosexual argot, is defined as an event so banal, vulgar, fake, and/or affected that it can be viewed as humorous. In other words, something that is sinfully enjoyable for its shameful badness.

The show took place in a tacky tavern beside a pothole-decorated car lot with plenty of empty parking spaces. Once inside the moldy building, we saw that the band was imaginary, meaning the soundman played pre-recorded music. He put on a few instrumental numbers first, to warm up the

teeming crowd, which consisted of a couple of drunks at the bar and our foursome (me with my date Jackie, Stan with his wife Mary). There wasn't much life in the place but the restaurant staff had taken the time to light candles on all the tables, and their flickering created a sense of paranormal existence in the room.

As if things weren't already askew, Jackie said, "My foot is on something." We used our phone screens for a peek under the table. Electrical wiring ran across the floor, heading in the general direction of the soundman. I kicked the cables as far away from our feet as possible, which put some of them out in the aisle. A few moments later, a waiter attempted to kick them back under our table. We changed booths.

The "band" segued into the opening of Richard Strauss' "Also Sprach Zarathustra" (proudly announced by the soundman as "Theme from 2001: A Space Odyssey"). The real Elvis often used a two-minute excerpt of that orchestral tone poem to lead up to his first appearance on stage. It worked like a

charm as excitement spread through the tavern like a fart under a sheet.

The impersonator himself was dressed as the young rock ‘n’ roll icon (thin Elvis) but was clearly in his declining years (fat Elvis) and his voice left something to be desired.

“Vocally he’s Elvis-lite but visually he’s Elvis-heavy,” Stan noted.

“Even Wayne Newton is better than this,” Jackie added.

“That note was flat,” said Stan.

“Ouch, that one was sharp,” said Jackie.

“My glass is chipped,” said Mary.

“And it’s got a crack,” said Stan.

“And it’s leaking,” I pointed out.

We had the waiter bring a fresh drink. “That’s not what I ordered,” said Mary after one sip.

“Is the glass okay?” asked Stan.

“Yes.”

“Let’s quit while we’re ahead,” he said, switching glasses with her. He sipped hers and said, “Hmmm, interesting, but not in a good way.”

“What is it?”

“Tastes like rum and cough syrup.”

“Always two of my favorites.”

“Mine, too. I also enjoy hot tea with tomato juice. Oh, and a bullet to the head.”

“We’re not going to be ordering dinner, are we?” asked Jackie, a note of concern in her voice.

“Only if you have made out your will,” I told her.

“You know, I think there’s an Italian place just a few miles from here.”

“There’s a German place in the next county, for that matter.”

“I know a nice seafood place in Vancouver.”

But our short-attention-span brains got distracted. We noticed that Fake Fat Elvis was miming some stage antics while the soundman kept bringing up a recording of applause. Terrific effect: six patrons amidst a sea of empty chairs, and recorded applause blaring through the tavern’s speaker system. Fake Fat Elvis took a scarf from an assistant, put it around his neck, mopped his brow with it, kissed it, removed it, and tossed it into the

audience. Or into the room where an audience should have been. A woman who looked suspiciously like FFE's sister was lurking at the foot of the stage to catch it.

“Wow,” Mary said flatly. “This is exciting.”

“The fun was intense,” I said, unafraid to plagiarize Noel Coward.

Fake Fat Elvis had apparently run out of breath because the next number was a recording of the real Elvis while FFE lip-synched it. We gave the mime show a standing ovation and headed toward the door.

“Enjoying your evening?” said a hard-looking woman who was either forty-going-on-seventy or had spent too much time under a phalanx of tanning lamps.

“Awesome,” I said. “Just going outside for a smoke.”

“Goodie, I'll come with you,” she said.

Oh my yes, goodie.

Out in the parking lot, Ms. Saddleface introduced herself as the proprietor and proceeded to give us about nineteen excuses why there wasn't a packed house this

evening. In the same way that we were on a smoke break despite none of us being smokers, we all decided to believe her. She then assured us that both drinks and dinner were on the house. All of us exchanged glances and I did not see temptation on anyone's face.

“Just don't order the steak or chicken,” she added. “The chefs are foreign and they just absolutely ruin them.”

“But they're great with fish and salads, right?” I asked her.

Everyone was shooting me looks that said things were getting out of hand. We all felt trapped until, suddenly, we were saved.

“Missy?” The voice came from the tavern's back door. The proprietor ignored it at first as she attempted to tell us what items on the menu were edible. “Missy?” This time the voice was louder and more insistent.

“Not now! Can't you see I'm busy?”

“Yes, Missy. But the kitchen is on fire.”

“What?!”

She rushed off to handle her latest crisis. Because our Suspicious Minds were already

All Shook Up, we figured It's Now Or Never and set a new record for four people entering a car and getting out of a parking lot.

The Italian place up the road turned out to be pretty good.

Sagittarius, the Archer

A rowheads found in Africa are more than 25,000 years old. This has nothing to do with our story except to point out the historical importance of archery as one of the world's earliest sports. Although this conveniently ignores the fact that, back then, archery was less a sport and more a way to get dinner.

My friend David and I were twelve years old, and at a stage in life where we were dreaming of cars and guns (him) and girls in lingerie (me). In our quest for temporary satisfaction, we would go through magazines featuring the objects of our desires. At this moment, he was paging through periodicals featuring vehicles and weapons while I was gazing at journals that displayed semi-clad ladies.

“Wow, look at this issue of *Guns and Ammo!*” David would say.

“Yeah, that’s cool,” I might say back, barely glancing in his direction.

“And look at this issue of *Hot Rod!*”

“Hot rod, right,” I would mutter.

“And here’s a bitchin’ picture of the Beatnik Bandit by Ed ‘Big Daddy’ Roth!”

“Ya-huh,” I said back.

“It’s got a Fiberglas body and a 360-degree Plexiglas bubble top!”

“Top. Oh yeah,” I said.

“Hey, are you paying attention to any of this?”

“Hmm? Sure, sure,” I said.

“What the heck are you looking at?” he asked, moving over to see.

“Oh, it’s *True Detective Tales*. Good short story this issue.”

David peered at the magazine in my hands. “Jeeze,” he said. “Do your parents know you’re looking at that?”

In this case, “that” was a rather gaudy four-color photo-illustration of two people in a wood-paneled room. The guy in the picture was Dirk Masterton, *Private Eye*. He was fondling a German Luger. Of far greater interest was the gal in the picture, Kitty Dawn, who was half-sitting and half-lying on a couch with her hands tied behind her back.

She had a gag in her mouth and was almost-but-not-quite wearing a bra, panties, garter belt, stockings, and high heels.

“Yeah, no. This belongs to my uncle,” I told him. “Actually, I kind of borrowed it. He’s got a lot of them.”

“Wow,” David said. He was starting to add girls to his list of likes. “Are there more pictures?”

“Oh yeah,” I said, and flipped some of the pages. Consistently, the male detectives and criminals held large weapons while scantily-clad and spectacularly-shaped young women stood, sat, lounged, or were in bondage nearby.

“Wow!” David said again. I had to agree with him. We stared in silent admiration for a moment. Then I flipped a page.

“Oh jeeze!” he said. Again, no argument from me. Pause for more appreciative glances. Then I flipped another page.

“Okay! Okay! Okay! Now THAT’S what I am talking ABOUT!” said David, probably a little louder than was necessary considering we were in the same room. But he

was making an excellent point. We stared in wide-eyed wonder. Then I flipped another page.

“Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhh,” he said. After a moment of silent prayer, his forehead wrinkled and he said, “Can any of ‘em walk in those?”

True enough, the women in the pictures were often wearing what I later learned were called Shoes To Die For. The model in this particular tableaux had on heels so high she would not have been able to walk even if she could have struggled out of the ropes that held her to the wall.

“I don’t know how they do it,” I said. “I’ll ask my uncle.”

“You can’t do that. You’ll get in trouble.”

“You don’t know my uncle.”

Later that day, I knocked at the door of my uncle’s room, which was right down the hall from mine. I confessed to borrowing the magazine and sharing the pictorial layouts with my friend David. Instead of being mad, my uncle thought it was funny that we were

getting “hot ‘n’ bothered,” as he put it, by the “cheesecake dolls,” as he called them.

“The shoes and the lingerie, they’re, like, a fetish,” my uncle said. “A guy usually has something that, when a girl wears it, he gets hot and he gets bothered. Y’know, in a good way. Hey, I got something to show you. Hang on a minute.”

He checked the hallway to see that my mom and dad were not nearby and then closed the door. He winked at me and let me have just the teeniest tiniest peek at a couple of the magazines he kept in a locked suitcase under his bed.

“Uhhhhh,” I said, my eyes staring hungrily at the now-closed magazine in his hands. “What’s with that?”

“You’ll find out in a couple more years,” he told me. And as usual, he was right.

But we’ve gotten away from our story.

As young boys, David and I were constantly teased by images of all the things we could not possess. We couldn’t have cars. We couldn’t have girls. We weren’t supposed

to have nude photos of girls. Life was truly unfair.

Somewhere in the midst of our twelve-year-old sorrows, David became fixated on the idea that archery (you see how we have neatly returned to our original topic) would be a good substitute for the Century Arms Semi-Automatic Rifle w/Wood Stock that he really wanted. We worked together to come up with some pleas and entreaties he could use on his parents to convince them to get David the bow-and-arrow kit:

“It’ll let me help keep squirrels off the roof.”

“It’ll let me show off at family gatherings and picnics.”

“It’ll let me patrol the neighborhood to keep burglars away.”

Not sure if any of those worked or if he just wore down his parents with constant appeals, requests, petitions, supplications, etc., but he did get an archery kit, I think as part of an incentive to keep working toward his Bar Mitzvah.

Wait, working toward his what? “It’s a Jewish thing,” David told me when I asked. And it involved his learning a foreign language, so I felt very lucky I could fall back on my God-given right as an American WASP to not know anything except English. Just as an aside, I have to say, when you consider that whole cutting off part of the penis thing and having to learn the foreign language, Jewish boys were having a more uphill climb through life than I was.

I wasn’t aware of the exact moment David got his archery kit because I had walked to the mall that afternoon. Once David received the bow-and-arrow, he had run over to my house to show me, but since I was out, he decided to play with his new gift on his own. Very sensible. Except for the next part.

David set up a target on the outside wall of his parent’s garage, which was the part of the structure closest to the street. Then he attempted to score a bullseye—or just hit the damn target—by standing on the other side of the street and shooting in between the cars that drove by.

Meanwhile, I'm minding my own business, just walking back from the mall, staying on the sidewalk. The sidewalk that passed in front of his house. By his garage. Between him and the target.

So, I'm a couple blocks away, engrossed in my thoughts of how I could get into my uncle's locked suitcase. A car passed me. Then another. From behind me, a delivery van came rumbling up the street. It chugged slowly past me. I sped up to keep pace and pretended to be in a race with it. I stayed abreast of the truck's cab all the way up to David's house. At that point, I stopped and bent down to re-tie a loose shoelace. As the van lumbered away from me, it unblocked everything on the other side of the street.

I stood up and at that instant, I noticed David. "All right!" I thought. "He got the bow-and-arrow he wanted." But wait a second, he was kinda-sorta aiming it in my direction.

"Oh shit!" David said.

Let's pause for a moment and consider that an arrow can travel really fucking fast

and that David and I were really not very far apart. So what happened was this:

I spotted David as he was imitating Sagittarius The Archer.

He said “Oh—”

I had a split-second of that 3D movie thrill feeling, y’know, where a projectile is coming right at you. And I flinched.

I felt something on my chin. It was hot, then cold, then stinging.

“—shit!” continued David.

“Crap!” I said. And sat down on the sidewalk for a moment.

David came running over to where I was sitting. “Are you okay?” he asked me.

“I don’t know.” I brought my hand up to my face. It felt sticky. I slowly brought my hand down and looked at it.

“Is that blood?” David asked.

I stared at the red fluid on my hand. Well, actually it was only a couple of specks. I stood up and turned toward him. “Does this look bad to you?” I asked him, holding my chin up.

He peered at me for a second and said, “Uh, no, not really.”

“Oh.” I raised my hand to my face again, gingerly feeling my terrifying, horrifying, gaping wound, probing it gently with my fingers. Then looked at my hand again. Apparently, the injury had already closed because there was no more blood. “Stopped bleeding,” I said. “I guess I’m all right.”

A car went by. A breeze ruffled the leaves on a nearby tree. We looked at each other.

“Hey,” he said, “uh, sorry.”

“Yeah,” I said back to him. “Me, too, I guess.”

We stood there for a long moment. A couple more cars went by. I looked at the quiver slung over his shoulder with the feathered ends of many arrows poking out. Then my eyes went to the shiny new bow that he was holding in both hands.

“Cool bow,” I told him.

“Yeah, thanks!”

“Can I try it?”

“Sure.”

Until he ran out of arrows, we totally terrified the neighborhood.

Now that I've grown up, somewhere under my beard is a scar so small a magnifying glass is required to fully appreciate it.

Red State TV

The program begins with an animated sequence showing a map of the United States slowly tipping to allow all the normal locations to fall off, leaving only the states of the Old Confederacy and the moronic parts of the Midwest. Music for the opening sequence is that mighty-fine example of Southern songwriting, “Goober Peas.” Suddenly, title graphics fill the screen:

What to do in Yeehaw COUNTY: Yer Doin’ It!

Dissolve to the fake newsroom set. In the role of news anchorperson is one of the state’s many dozens of people who are able to read, in this case, the 32-year-old almost-college-graduate and former telemarketing specialist Sue Ellen Beckman. She is called Sue-Bee by

friends who don't know her very well; she is called That Bitch by co-workers who know her all too well.

At the beginning of each broadcast, Sue-Bee covers all of the news deemed essential by her viewers—weather, hog feed prices, and job openings at the fertilizer factory. Then she reads some excrement from Faux News, InfoWhores, Fudge Report, World Nut Daily, and Not Very Bright Bart. “If you find something on the Internet, it must be true,” states Sue-Bee, always the intrepid reporter.

Additional program segments include:

This Week in Big O'Tree

Highlighting the work of the Westboro Hklangregational Church and many Tea Bagger Bund organizations, this is one of the longer parts of the program and always features shakey-cam footage of vandalized property belonging to blacks, Hispanics, Asians, or other ethnic or religious groups that, well, here's how Cooterville mayor Christy Pribus puts it: “Them's not reg'lar folk like us'uns.”

Eddycayshun

This segment delves into the breadth and scope of all the educational advances being made in conservative communities. Which is why this segment hardly ever appears in the broadcast, although there was that one episode featuring the county clerk stating boldly, “Literacy tests ain’t never proved nuthin’.”

Freebies

While the program is produced on a budget as low as its average viewer’s I.Q., the station’s management team is able to make the show seem like a much bigger enterprise by relying on pre-packaged video segments graciously donated by the Kochsuckers, The Heretic Foundation, the Hate-o Institute, SINclare Broadcasting, and other organizations dedicated to the dissemination of stories in the public disinterest. Examples:

- “Creationism vs. Darwin’s ‘Theory’”

- “Sinful Hate-Mongering Communistic Socialistic Big Brotherism is on the rise!
- Lib’rals Could Be Bringing Healthcare to Poor People if We Don’t Stop Them”
- “Rich People are Better Than Y’all so Please Don’t Rise Up and Kill Them”

Fussin ‘n’ Fightin’

Here, two families battle to win a week’s supply of extra-crispy fried chicken gizzards by answering current events questions. Example: “Most obnoxious U.S. mayor: Rob Ford or Chris Christie?” The fact that Ford was Canadian and Christie was not a mayor just adds to the surrealistic fun.

The lack of reality apparently doesn’t bother anyone. “C’mon, now, facts is for lib’rals,” says one of the show’s producers.

Interviewin’

Another popular segment is the one-on-one, no-holds-barred, take-no-prisoners interview. Facing the onslaught of tough, probing questions are many of the area’s most

important citizens, as you can see from the following list of recent guests (with selected questions shown in parentheses).

Billy-Zack Jemson, night manager at The Bacon Barn. (“Why does a second scoop of grits cost more after 11 a.m.?”)

Rusty-Joe Bateman, sales manager at the John Deere dealership. (“Sometimes the tractor brochures are creased and greasy—what are you doing to resolve this problem?”)

Lula-Rayleen Koapes, assistant manager at the Git-Mor Five-and-Dime. (“How come the soda fountain only has the double-sugar root beer when over in Bumfracked County they have triple-sugar root beer?”)

Ronny-Lee Butts, janitorial services manager at Ronald Reagan Middle School. (“What’s hardest to scrape off classroom floors—gum, vomit, or blood?”)

A-Listers

The show’s producers are working hard to book Cletus, the Slack-Jawed Yokel from *The Simpsons* despite the fact that he is an animated character. “That’s all righty with

us,” said one of the station executives, “because we expect our guests to be lively.” When it was pointed out that “animated” meant the character was drawn, the man replied, “Hey, after all the plum hard work we put into this here program I’m feeling a bit peaked my own self. But drawn, peckish, droopy, or peeved, we still wanna git a celebrity on the show.”

Award Winnin’

Several program segments have been honored, in a way. Some have received the very prestigious Robert E. Lee Certificate in Gooder Jurnlizm, an award that is, I am told, very prestidigitatious. Some of the award winning programming includes the following episodes:

- ⊕ “In the Name of Family Values, We Must Re-elect our Philandering Councilman”
- ⊕ “In the Name of Reverence for Life, We Must Kill Women’s Clinic Doctors and Nurses”

- ⊕ “In the Name of Fiscal Responsibility, We Must Cut Taxes on the Rich while the Rest of You Learn to Get By or Just, You Know, Die”
- ⊕ “Lynching Makes a Long-Awaited Comeback; Check these Tips for a Successful Necktie Party”
- ⊕ “Poor People Death Watch (Help us push for a new record this year!)”
- ⊕ “Starving Kids Say the Darnedest Things”
- ⊕ “Mike Huckabee’s Plan to Dumb Down Your Son and Daughter Using Inaccurate Videos”
- ⊕ “In the Name of Religious Freedom and Tolerance, We Must Wipe Out Jews and Muslims”

Drop ‘Em a Line

As a list of crew members scrolls up the screen, there is a bright band of yellow across the bottom half of the viewing area. Appearing inside the yellow band is an invitation for viewers to send comments to the broadcaster’s main office at:

Red State o' Hate
PO Box 37047734
Moronia, USA

The program concludes with a Confederate battle flag waving in slow-motion accompanied by annoying banjo music up good 'n' loud. Yee haw.

Prices Slashed up to 100%!

You don't see "Going Out of Business Sale" signs at doctor's offices. There are no "Everything Must Go" specials or "Super Discount Days" from physicians. MDs don't offer a "Tuesday Special on Bowel Exams!" You're not mailed an advertisement that urges you to "Clip the Coupon for Big Savings on Hysterectomies!" And I'll bet it has been a year from never since you were emailed an offer like: "Lancing a Boil? This week only: buy two, get the third one free!"

Members of the medical profession are not usually big on hype. Oh sure, doctors, dentists, hospitals, and clinics will sometimes take part in community directories. And yes, that is a form of marketing outreach, but healthcare professionals are not trying to provoke an impulse purchase.

Merchants, on the other hand, rely on being able to provoke an impulse purchase. Retailers do a lot of "hurry up and buy"

advertising. Even some of the signage is often over-the-top.

You see signs on storefronts, signs in store aisles, signs right on the products. Of course, they are sometimes a little misleading about their offers. A little sneaky. They put a “50% off” statement really big and... But allow me to show you:



The people who do that type of thing can best be described as... But allow me to show you:



I mean, come on. You go to buy something and then they say to you, “Oh, did you really think you were getting half off? Oh no no no no, it’s ‘up to’ half off.” It’s a scam. Sure, it may be legal, but it’s still a scam.

That’s like going on a date with a desirable partner and they say out loud “Take me home and fuck me now” but then they immediately whisper, “is not something I’m ever going to be saying to you.”

False advertising.

You’ve seen another trick they do: the big sale announcement with itty bitty teeny tiny type that says “some conditions apply.” And it’s always the case that those conditions just happen to apply to you.

“Oh I’m so sorry, but you don’t get the full discount. Some conditions apply.”

Some conditions apply? I watched my mom as I was growing up and I can tell you a thing or two about conditions. A mom handles conditions of colds, coughs, flu, mumps, measles, croup, chicken pox, sore throat, strep throat, sprains, bruises, bumps, and the dog ate my homework. Those are

conditions! And those conditions apply while trying to buy groceries, get kids to school, prepare meals, do laundry, help with book reports, and clean up every square foot of the house. Those are the conditions that apply to normal people's lives. Don't give me any of your piddly stupid store price fake-out conditions. If you want to learn about conditions, I've got an idea: let's have some moms leave their kids and husbands in your workplace for a week and after that little experiment, you'll understand something about conditions.

Let me point out one more thing: the whole "whopping big percentage off" thing is really getting out of hand. Very soon, consumers will expect a sale that offers a hundred percent off. That's right, 100% off. Because you know what? With a one hundred percent off sale, you'll be pretty sure of getting at least one-third off the regular price. Well, you know, under certain conditions.

You want to hear something is 100% off only if they're removing a wart.

Wow Upside Down

Just saying the word “mom” creates an emotional response in the hearts of many people. Usually, a positive response. Mothers can be good or bad, smart or dumb, nice or mean, rational or crazy, yet humans usually behave as if the family matriarch is magical, magnificent, and magnanimous.

I got along with my mom. We only disagreed about some of my girlfriends and whether martinis were best with gin or vodka. We loathed conservative politicians. We agreed that television is a drug but “we can handle it.” And we loved classical music without any pretense that we could define polytonality or correctly pronounce timbre.

Shock

When my mom was first diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, I started writing her a love letter. I remember that it was my goal to finish it as soon as possible, not because I wanted to rush through it, but because I

wanted her to be able to read it while her mind was still clear enough to comprehend all the emotion and gratitude I was attempting to pour into it.

Just recently, in clearing out a ton-and-a-half of things stored in various parts of my house and garage, I came across the document. Written more than a decade before my mom died, it survived the years because she had put it into a large folder with a number of greeting cards, photographs, postcards, letters, Christmas messages, and mementoes.

The title was a bit over-the-top:

*Being the Semi-Definitive Guide to
Mom Facts, Mom Myths, and
Various 'n' Sundry
Mom Stuff*

She laughed when reading the title. I could always make her laugh.

The booklet was printed on different types of paper, from heavy stock to translucent sheets that allowed the reader to

see through to an image on the following page. You might be looking at type that said something like “Marvelous Mom,” but you’d be seeing through the type to a ghosted image: A graphic of a rose. An image of her cat. One of my report cards from elementary school (that one with mostly good grades).

Instead of metal staples or those brass bendy thingies, the binding consisted of three pieces of pink ribbon tied in bows, a festive motif that suggested that it might be a birthday or Christmas present, although there was no mention of any holiday in the text.

The document wasn’t in pristine condition. The ribbons were creased from being crushed for many years. The pages were a bit worn. I like to think that meant she had often held them.

Historical perspective

One section of the missive had a header reading, “Who was the first mom?” Just wondering about the family tree of life, so to speak:

We all started with a mom, and each mom started with a mom, and if you go back far enough ... well, nobody knows for sure, but god could very well have been a mom.

In the margin next to this part, my mom wrote a large exclamation point with a circle for the dot.

Descriptive-picture

In another section of the epistle was an attempt to present my feelings in staccato bursts of words and phrases. There were some standard things, perhaps even some expected things, like “stars blazing in the heavens” and “rainbows stretched out across the sky,” and so forth.

There also were pages that contained just one or two words, competing with each other in emotional overload and go-for-broke typographical majesty. Words such as tenderness, affection, comfort, serenity, warmth, hugs, kisses, kindness, love.

On the last page was a photo of some printing in crayon, apparently something I had

created as a kid: “A mom knows what to do and say to make the hurt go far away.”

Simple. Neat. True.

And to that, I now wish to add:

*To my mom in the cosmos,
I love you*

The Dad Document

I like to think that everything good about my father is also inside me. There are things I can do that he would not attempt, like writing perverse short stories, but this is trivial compared with my father's life. His qualities of humanity ran deep. Decency and dependability were with him in abundance.

His virtues eventually became my aspirations (it's good to have lofty goals) but this was not the case when I was in high school; back then, the very things that made him a good man seemed uncool to me. That attitude changed when I entered what adults call real life. The more interaction I had with the greed, deception, and hostility in the world, the more I relished his goodness.

Lab Results

Cancer snuck up on my dad and then ambushed him. There came a day when he was handed a piece of paper that said he had less than a year to live. When he let me

read that, a great weight began pressing down on my shoulders. The air was being sucked out of my lungs, and the sonic properties of the room conspired to funnel the sound of a windstorm into my ears. It all built up until I wanted to scream. I had questions for the void. I had inquiries for the universe. They went unanswered.

Mourning and Memory

After reading a first draft of an epistle I wrote to him and for him, my father turned to me and said, “I’m not *that* good a person.” But I will always treasure the smile that played across his lips while he read it.

There was a collective mourning at his passing, and there were several fine displays of love. A number of people told me that my father was responsible for changing their lives. “He was a wonderful man,” one stranger told me. Although he wasn’t called wonderful by everyone. . .

❏ Fools didn’t like Fred

❏ Politicians didn’t like Fred

❏ Charlatans didn't like Fred

❏ Conservatives didn't like Fred

All of which was fine with him since he had more than a passing acquaintance with things like truth, fairness, justice, and equality.

My dad had inner strength. He had conviction. He had ethics. And more so than many adults, he still had some of the wide-eyed wonder of the six-year-old as well as the cockiness of the eighteen-year-old. Once I observed him surrounded by a bunch of university students.

“Professor,” one class member pleaded, “I’ve got to get a ‘C’ in your class.”

“Please do,” my father replied.

Quirks, Betrayal & Acceptance

When confronted with professional chicanery or lapses in morality, he could float past that terrible human behavior if it was something he knew he could not change. For example, our family was betrayed by a person we had welcomed into our hearts, but he was not thrown into depths of despair.

The wanton act of cruelty toward us hurt him deeply, yet he bore the pain with quiet dignity. While I still use the word “evil” to describe the person in question, he was content to label it insanity. Which lets that person off the hook, in my opinion, but perhaps his way of coping is the better one.

Honoring his Spirit

My dad Fred was what some call a straight-shooter. He wrote nearly three dozen books on mathematics and computing, but he could be pretty down-to-earth. When he encountered something that was stupid, he was very likely to make a profound observation like, “Hey wow, that’s stupid.” There is a lot of power in a smart guy making a statement like that. I respect this approach, and we need more of it in the world. I recommend we all “pull a Fred” on people.

When someone says something like “keep government hands off my Medicare” or “corporations are people” or “trickle-down economics works,” or “conservatism isn’t evil,” you should sing out with a hearty, “Hey

wow, that's stupid!" If anyone gives you any friction over this, just tell them, "I'm sorry if the truth disturbs you, but I am simply honoring the spirit of my dead friend Fred."

He'd like that for several reasons. Because it would shake things up. Because it would call attention to a twisted status quo. And because it would make the complacent uncomfortable.

In a world that was image, my dad was substance. In a place that was expedient, he was principle. In a time that worships now, he was forever.

And forever is how long he will live in my heart.

Launch Party

Do you have a new product to introduce to the world? Then you are going to want to schedule a launch party! What about a crusade or cause you wish to publically support? Time for a launch party! Suppose you have a business to promote or a candidacy to announce? Count on a launch party, the tried-and-true solution to a great many public relations problems such as how to blow a huge chunk of your company's promotional budget in a very short amount of time.

Putting on a public relations bash is simple. Let's begin with finding the venue. You want a place with atmosphere so shadowy it's comfortable only to bats. You'll also want to check to make certain it has plenty of dangerously sharp-edged furniture. Have your assistant walk around the room and count the number of times you hear, "Ow, damn it!" Three mishaps or more and you're on the right track.

Next, you want to verify that the venue has a sound system that makes conversation difficult. We could discuss things like decibels and sound pressure levels but a general rule of thumb is that the waves of audio that come pouring out of the speakers should shatter the windows of cars in the dank, unventilated, and over-crowded parking garage next door.

After hiring bartenders, bouncers, and baristas, you then line up some DJs, bands, and singers. You will also want to hire plenty of college kids to act as “go-fers.” For example, there should be a cluster of them hovering near the club entrance to inspect the invitations of your arriving guests, which will include investors, flacks, company bigwigs, spokespeople, photographers, journalists, videographers, and hangers-on.

Most important, you have to invite the Pretty Party People, those cutting-edge followers-of-fashion whose affectations of boredom don’t quite hide the fact that they are desperate to have their own reality show,

album, movie, clothing line, designer scent, etc.

Then comes the final step: you cram everyone and everything together in too small a space, goose the volume, let the alcohol flow, tell security to ignore any drug use, and voila: Instant Event.

As the music roared and people harmed themselves on the furniture, I turned to the beautiful woman I brought to this particular launch party and asked if she wanted something to drink.

“Order me a tequila with a water back,” she said. “I’ll down the shot here and take the water with me.”

“It could be a two-ounce shot,” I warned her.

“That’s okay, I’m a four-ounce girl.”

And that seemed to be how the crowd was behaving inside the Stoned Roll Club in the horrifying complex called the Hollywood and Highland Center, an area of town known as Traffic Jam West.

In every group of people, there are those who are “with it” and those who have no idea what “with it” means. I am one of those who doesn’t know what it means, but I do know this: if nine out of ten people get red wristbands and one out of ten people get blue wristbands, the chosen people are blue-ish.

The point is that there are some aspects of the party that are only available to Certain Special Folks, and you want a wristband that gets you into every place in the place. Not that every place will be easy to find.

Take the Secret Back Room, for example. We found it by watching waiters carrying trays of food. “Follow the sliders!” my companion stated with glee. And sure enough, that took us to that vaunted VIP area where people seemed to be trying to look bored even while making out. It’s also where there were bags of swag and free tee-shirts that were being pointedly ignored by the Pretty Party People.

I’m not proud; I grabbed one of the bags. I also picked up what I thought was a sweatshirt with the event logo on it and

somehow I managed to stuff it into the swag bag. (When I unpacked it the next day, I discovered it wasn't a sweatshirt but instead was a half-dozen tee-shirts intricately folded together, probably by a nine-year-old in China who was moonlighting after his 12-hour shift in an Apple or Nike sweatshop.)

When we re-emerged from the Special Limited Access Space and re-entered the main part of the club, a live band was performing, augmented by pre-recorded backing tracks and loops. Standing at the front of the crowded stage was a trio of vocalists who were doing a highly pulsating and very loud version of "Killing Me Softly (With His Song)." The contradiction seemed lost on the intoxicated members of the audience, meaning almost everyone.

Grab-ass, yipes! It is flattering to think my anatomy still has some attraction for some people. In moving through the party, I was felt-up more than a few times. True, some of those were pickpocket attempts, but still, the attention was appreciated.

Meanwhile, my companion was a total hoot. A party-in-a-pouch. A non-stop no-holds-barred quipster. Some of her observations were hilarious in a nice way, but the ones that stayed with me had a delicious element of sass. Throughout the evening, she provided running commentary on, well, on almost everything.

Outfits: “That dress is so tight it’s performing facial plastic surgery.”

Shoes: “Those don’t say ‘fuck me’ so much as they say ‘chiropractic appointment’.”

Hair: “That coif looks like an animal I once rescued.”

Make-up: “Trowels for sale, get your trowels right here.”

Feminine pulchritude: “She would look better with a couple more inches of dress or a couple less inches of her.”

The cast of characters: “Everyone looks the same. There are only four basic male types at this party, and only three basic female types. I swear, Hollywood is turning into a clone convention.”

It might have seemed spiteful if it wasn't so accurate.

In the car on the way out of the cavernous parking garage, she opened the windows and cranked the volume on one of the many chain-store radio stations that are to music what McDonald's is to nutrition. "I like to find really nerdy music and play it aggressively loud," she said with a smile that can only be called devilish.

So now we're doing that heavy-metal head-banger thing while audio sap poured out of the car speakers. She pushed the volume to near the system's limit as a third-rate group sang a fourth-rate ballad that was written by the type of hacks who did all those horrible Elvis movie tunes like "Do the Clam," "Queenie Wahine's Papaya," and "Dominic the Impotent Bull."

After I got back to my house, I paused to allow my brain to re-start. Just listen to the silence. Ahhh, peace! I took a few deep breaths. Sipped some herbal tea. Got into bed

and did something that was diametrically opposite to what I had experienced during the evening... I read a book. Ahh, it felt good. It was my own Instant Event.

Word Nerding

English is a flexible language. Or perhaps it's just promiscuous. Yeah, that's it: English is a tramp. It welcomes new words with open arms. Meanwhile, it allows definitions of old words to shift, twist, and slither into some other meaning entirely. In addition to popular (mis)usage, there are many pressures on our language, which can be crammed into three categories:

1. Evolving attitudes about sex, politics, religion, society, and gender
2. Developments in science, technology, and communications
3. Alterations in environmental and atmospheric conditions

With the help of research conducted by Forge/Hopkins/Wallace, a highly respected polling organization I just made up, it can be stated with complete conviction that everything you are about to read will become true at some point in the future.



aardvark

Formerly a burrowing ant-eating mammal, the modern aardvark has been bred to live above ground and consume insects and vermin. The GOP's "new compassionate conservatism" involves offering them as pets for low-income parts of large cities.

biocaloric invasion

U.S. warfare technique of using fast food franchises to undermine the health of foreign nations.

campsport

Alternative sporting activities, including: Land Mine Soccer, Car Sniping, and Talker Toss (similar to dwarf tossing but with radio talk-show hosts).

e-wall

Electronic wallpaper.
Formerly: motion pictures.

extremify; extremification

GOP process of proposing legislation that is draconian, misogynist, theocratic, racist, oligarchic, and/or fascist to skew the theoretical center of any forthcoming debate.

fakeriot

Phony patriot. From the conservative practice of embracing the trappings of patriotism while working to undermine basic principles of the U.S. Constitution.

history

Branch of knowledge that might be closer to the truth if not written by the survivors.

ignoricide

When the media destroys a celebrity by paying them no attention.

kitsch

Certain popular arts: broadcast television, comic books, car customizing, and musicals with a message.

minor d.

As in minor demise; a death that doesn't make much difference, as in the passing of a corporate executive or a conservative.

porn

Material designed to excite sexually.

There are two types of porn: (1) Hard-core porn, which is outrageous and filthy. (2) Soft-core porn, which is last year's hard-core porn.

preemptive maneuver

Peacetime deployment of military forces for strategic purposes. (When done by other nations it is an "act of aggression.")

quail

Congressional interns.

splurgannoyer

Person who picks up the check but then repeatedly reminds you of it.

yagoon

Stupid, uneducated, boorish, crass, obtuse person. A red state resident. A conservative voter.

ZPA

Zero Percentage Advance. Pronounced “zip-pay.” Used when informing workers what to expect for yearly raises or bonuses.



Aural Pleasures

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Upbeat for the Beatdown

Writing about music is like knitting about sculpture. Or skateboarding about morality. Or spelunking about boat design. Yes, those are paraphrases of a more famous line, and that is exactly the scurrilous kind of thing music writers do: ~~steal~~ borrow other people's ideas. I almost never did that.

My music reviews were distributed by a small and scruffy syndication service, which meant my stuff appeared in publications with names like "Rawkin," "Blast Off," "Scene Seen," "Rock Town Report," "Splat" and the like. Some of those places would publish *anything*. (One of their pieces began: "I heard this band was really good and I wanted to see if they were good and see how good they were and so when I heard they were in town I went to see them and they hit the stage and they rocked!" But with misspellings.)

A few other shortcomings of many music critic critters:

- They don't know enough about music (guys, Tower of Power's "What is Hip?" is not jazz).
- They know too much about music ("When modulating down a major seventh after the bridge, the tonic is reduced to a role it is not destined to play and this compels the harmony to be altered in ways that are not conducive to...")
- They love one artist and compare everyone else to them.
- Lazy writing ("This Band sounds like That Band meets This Other Band.")
- Despite being less significant than composers, songwriters, producers, engineers, singers, instrumentalists, music teachers, or limo drivers, they act like they're the most important person in the venue.
- A surprisingly small sum buys you a good review.

The dee Bees

Sound volume is measured in something called decibels, which is an International Scientific Vocabulary word meaning “holy crap it’s loud in here.” A whisper in a library is about 30 decibels (30dB). Talking with a co-worker near the coffee machine puts things up around 65dB. Turn on your garbage disposal and you get 80dB of noise. A power drill generates 95dB, and now you’re into an area where prolonged exposure will start eradicating the sensitivity inside your auditory canals, or what most of us call “frying your ears.” A rock concert can range from 95dB to 130dB. Keep on exposing your noggin to this onslaught of sound and you will eventually have to read lips or say “What?” a lot.

Den of Din

Some people act as if their hearing loss is a small price to pay for experiencing the glory of rock. When I saw Motörhead at a small (400 capacity) club, the volume was outrageous, yet a bassist of a local band was

headbangin' near the front of the stage without any ear shields other than his long hair and a whispered prayer. A prayer he was unable to hear.

With my earplugs firmly in place, I started moving toward him but never made it. Not because of the shoulder-to-shoulder crowd. Sure, the venue was packed like pickles in a jar, but the fans were deliriously bouncing and jumping so it would have been possible to carom through them. It's just that the waves of audio were a physical presence that was all over me. If you're gonna do that to my body ya gotta buy me dinner first.

From the Vault

After an archeological expedition through the flotsam of my life, I have uncovered a trove of my old music reviews. (Note: I did not say it was a treasure trove.) Most of the music described here was heard under less than ideal circumstances: malodorous venues run by idiotic club owners and crooked promoters, disgusting restrooms, bad lighting, oppressive sound, overpriced drinks, and

patrons who were inebriated or stoned. Or inebriated and stoned. Being in Los Angeles, many were also schizophrenic.

Fantasy Chat

Okay, I freely admit that there has been a fair amount of ranting going on here, but there is one final point to be made about the strange practices of music critics, and it can best be expressed by quoting a conversation that has never taken place:

“Want to go to a club and hear a band?”

“Only if we jot notes while we’re listening.”

Silly, yes? Yet that is exactly what most critics do, which means they are not fully experiencing the event. Whenever attending a performance, I let the music wash over me and wrote shit down later. What follows are some of the results of that approach.

Gods of Guitar

There are 6,189 seats in the amphitheater and guitar players are in 5,133 of them. Girlfriends of guitar players are in the rest. The occasion is a rare appearance by Jeff Beck, a somewhat reclusive Englishman whose stunning fret-board work has influenced pop, rock, heavy metal, blues, and jazz-rock fusion.

On this evening, Jeff Beck came, saw, and conquered. Alternating between sounds of ethereal beauty and overpowering intensity, he was breathtaking, even to the non-guitarists in the crowd. At a certain point, the event morphed from a mere concert to a religious experience where the congregation made an offering of multiple ovations.

JB and JB

Jeff Beck is a recognized genius of the electric guitar. Having created stunning music in the Yardbirds before leading a series of his own bands, his membership in the

pantheon of guitar greats is assured. He also has an ear for those with great talent and he elected to perform with a player who may be his equal in skill. While not widely known, Jennifer Batten has extensive recording and touring credits (guitarist on Michael Jackson's *Bad* and *Dangerous* tours, for example) and she outdoes herself when playing with Beck. In addition to contributing stellar rhythm parts and outstanding lead lines, Batten also provided a phenomenal array of guitar synthesizer tones, including organ, flute, orchestral strings, and jet plane fly-bys with Doppler Effect.

Big Band Boom

Vast auditory landscapes were created by Beck & Batten's monstrously powerful band (with Steve Alexander on drums and Randy Hope-Taylor on bass). Opening with the first track on Beck's *Who Else!* album, the evening transported listeners on a 100-minute ride through Elysium.

As on the album, the show had no vocals save for a couple of brief samples, a Dick

Shawn line from the film *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* on “What Mama Said,” and some female whispers (reportedly by Chrissy Hynde) on “Space for the Papa.”

When they dipped into tunes from Beck’s classic fusion albums, *Wired* and *Blow by Blow*, shouts of appreciation greeted them about half-a-heartbeat after the opening chords. Every solo was acknowledged with a roar of approval.

Roar of approval. Roar of approval. Roar of approval. Roar of approval. Roar of approval. There, we’ve now mentioned about one-fifth of them. I was hoarse when I got home.

The Sound at the End of the World

A fire in the loins comes screaming comes across the sky, to combine opening lines from Nabokov and Pynchon. Nothing can withstand the onslaught. With no quarter given and no prisoners taken, the final moments of the universe will sound exactly like this.

“This” is industrial rock flirting with racket, dating electronica, and shacking up with conflagration. Which is a way of saying that Front Line Assembly (FLA) is dedicated to making music that is aggressive, loud, abrasive, anarchic, nihilistic, and existential.

Utilizing about a gazillion watts of power, the ever-evolving FLA achieves catharsis amidst cacophony. Adopting a shrug and a sneer, neither of which disguises their dedication to The Big Beat, they scientifically program destiny into their synthesizers in order to arrive at a cold beauty that is at least

as pure as any of the virgins being sacrificed in the audience.

Assaulting your eyes are evil clouds of smoke and a fear-inducing light display featuring oversized televised imagery and strobes turned all the way to “dumbfound.” Meanwhile, you’re being mauled with the highest sound pressure level this side of a Saturn V rocket during liftoff.

Tortured History

Noise Rock may have begun when someone put a Shure SM-57 microphone into a blender and hit “Puree.” Or maybe it was when a disaffected youth decided he “had it up to here” with music lessons and ran his guitar signal through every garage-sale stomp box and re-built amplifier he could get his hands on, thus creating the sound of no tomorrow. Either way, add some drumbeats and you’ve got a style, a purpose, a political movement, and a way to get free beer at parties.

School making you feel alienated? Yeah!
Work making you feel dehumanized? Yup!

Family about as supportive as a dishrag? Gawd yes! Well then, Throbbing Gristle and Nine Inch Nails are just right for you. How about a little Ministry? Sure. And Cabaret Voltaire, Swans, Front 242, Nitzer Ebb, and Einsturzende Neubauten, too. Oh yes. And, of course, Skinny Puppy.

When Wilhelm Schroeder (some web sites show it as Schroder) began his industrial music odyssey with Skinny Puppy in 1985, few people knew it was a sign of the apocalypse. Then Schroeder metamorphosed into Bill Leeb and Front Line Assembly was born, working their twisted sonics in ways that alchemists would kill to achieve.

In the storm I witnessed, the drummer expanded upon pre-determined beats established by the synth controllers while the guitarist worked a couple of chord shapes with his amp dialed-in to approximately the same settings Alfred Nobel used when inventing dynamite. Leeb did a rock-deity vocalist thing, prowling the stage and sometimes semi-dancing in an animalistic fashion. Between verses, Leeb tossed out

ominous asides such as noting that the room, or at least the stage, was not immersed in enough smoke. I wondered if the fervently crazed FLA followers would set fire to the building just to answer their leader's wishes.

Force of Air

Front Line Assembly indulges in gothic flourishes on their way to creating unexpected tones. Cathedral organs contorted into screams. Raindrops turned into percussive muggings. Car crashes made to be musical. Meanwhile, the force of air from their speaker cabinets could be felt in every crevice of the room.

Face it: Front Line Assembly is doom, destruction, intercourse, and eruptions.

And hey, who's complaining? After all, the lights are pretty, the women are in a trance, and the conclusion of civilization is swirling all around you. I gotta admit, it was pretty damn cool.

Sin, Sex & Cigarettes

When you enter the dark fantasy that is The Toledo Show, you have only two choices: (1) try to resist the delicious swirl of melody and iniquity that is unfolding before you; or (2) surrender to Toledo's mixture of theatrical excitement and rhythm-heavy mojo. Toledo invokes the spirit of every streetwise jive-talking R&B singer who has ever lived. He sings, he growls, he purrs. He dances, he prances, he romances. Toledo doesn't merely walk, he glides. Toledo doesn't just find the spotlight, he becomes the spotlight. The singularly-named singer has a saxophone in his lungs and charisma in his soul. With a boatload of swagger and the heart of a hunter, he uses his aura to coerce, convince, and conspire with the audience.

Some of his lyrics are wonderful, suggestive, colorful, and wicked; the rest are even better.

The band is a bad-ass, jump-swing, funk-beat unit that can get your body moving in

one direction while your head is turning in another. They create a delightful maelstrom while playing at a fever pitch. The result is music with mythological powers that can cloud the minds of Jesuits and subvert legions of the holy.

Delightful Danger

Let me go on record right now and say that this music is treacherous and could cause riots in some countries. Here are cadences and melodies that would send hypocritical preachers into fits of apoplexy were they exposed to them. When Toledo's band shifts into high gear, they have the power to corrupt youth, encourage animalistic behavior, paralyze small animals, and topple governments. This. Is. Hot. Stuff. Also, tobacco companies should be sponsoring this act considering that the band members do more with cigarettes than Bogart and more with cigars than Bill Clinton.

There are forces in nature that cannot be denied: wind, rain, fire, tides, floods, earthquakes, and Toledo. When you go see

The Toledo Show, here's what to bring: the current object of your desire, money for libations, and protection. All are gonna get used.

First, They Laughed

Performing rock while in disguise isn't a new idea but no one has ever been outfitted like this: an oriental theater mask, a nylon hoodie, and a family-size chicken bucket from KFC. The reaction from club-goers is derisive until the guy starts to play. That's when jaws drop and awe starts. Meet the six-string messiah known as Buckethead.

The songs and sounds of this masked marauder are cross-cultural and genre-blending. He easily moves from eerie emotion-on-your-sleeve compositions to snarky, bombastic pieces while touching all points in-between. There is no other harmonious force quite like Buckethead and his approach to music is so all-encompassing that he has appeared on an album by William Ackerman (founder of the whisper-soft Windham Hill label) as well as on the hardcore *Mortal Kombat* soundtrack, to go from one extreme to another.

Broken Axl?

Many Buckethead fans had high hopes for his teaming with Axl Rose in one of the re-formed versions of Guns ‘n’ Roses, but that association didn’t last long. Speculation for the breakup included ego (“Buckethead got stronger audience response than Axl”) and disparity of talent (“Buckethead improvises at a higher level than most rock musicians.”) But I think it probably had more to do with the restless nature of creative personalities.

With Buckethead, the element of surprise is high. The element of danger, too, and we could all do with fewer numbers from his terrible lead vocalists. He gives his singers freedom to spout ridiculous garbage that is obviously designed to offend as many people as possible, apparently because he finds that humorous. The lead vocalist in a show at The Palace was vile, offensive, idiotic, and gross. It was a relief every time the clown shut up, but the stench of rudeness and disgust he left hanging in the air meant that some of Buckethead’s brilliance was negated.

In a show at the West L.A. Gig, there were fewer vocal distractions, either because ‘Head didn’t feel as angry at the crowd or because the smaller club meant the audience was just a few feet from the band, so we could have easily slaughtered the singer if he had gone as far as the idiot at The Palace.

The compositions Buckethead creates are worthy of the best progressive rock band yet they allow the audience to do that bobblehead shake-your-noggin thing that chiropractors probably love to see. What is consistently exciting about Buckethead is his ability to put several riffs together, piling one atop the next until the room turns inside out and the audience along with it. Musically, you have to hang on for dear life.

B.P.P.W-L.P.

Buckethead’s Patent Pending Weight-Loss Program. Let us pause for a moment to examine the human body’s potential for building up heat: Here is a guy who’s behind a mask, under a hood, inside a long-sleeved jacket, and with a bucket on his

bonce. All that, and he's working under spotlights. You think maybe he perspires a bit? Oh yes I think so. Consider: every now and then between songs he will take his instrument and swivel it so the body is parallel with the stage floor. At first I thought it was a nervous habit. No, he was pouring sweat out of the guitar's pickup cavities.

Mr. Head

Always remaining secretive, B (that's Mr. Head to you) regularly gives the press fake names and fascinating (if surreal and misleading) stories, which means that his online bios often rival Andre Malraux, P.T. Barnum, and GOP flacks for veracity. But I think you should ignore all that and just listen to him play. It can be a magnificent sonic fuck.

Sure, other guitarists have converted power chords into melodies, and some have created beauty from dissonance, but no one does it with as much style and crunch as Buckethead.

Oh, and he's loud. Very loud. In case you were wondering.

If Buckethead performs anywhere near you, see him. The look, the lyrics, and the secretions may be alarming, but the music is triumphant.

Ears and Tears

His name was Paul Atkinson and he played guitar in The Zombies, the innovative nineteen sixties rock band whose gorgeous harmonies, infectious hooks, and intriguing pop-choral-jazz concoction resulted in three masterworks: “She’s Not There,” “Tell Her No,” and “Time of the Season.” As part of the British Invasion, Atkinson recorded and toured in a band whose compositions were compared to The Beatles and the Beach Boys... and then he did something totally wild: he left the group to pursue a career on the business side of the music business.

A&R

Atkinson went from artist to Artists & Repertoire, the part of the record industry that matches singers with songs. After his transition from Creative to Suit, Atkinson was more than merely successful, he flourished. At one point or another, he headed

the A&R departments at three of the five major record labels. And sometimes he didn't even wear a suit.

Music industry insiders would regularly pay Atkinson a supreme complement: "The guy has ears." He demonstrated the truth of that statement throughout his life. He signed ABBA, Bruce Hornsby, Mr. Mister, Judas Priest, and Michael Penn, and he worked with Paul McCartney, Aerosmith, Eurythmics, The Beach Boys, Lyle Lovett, B.B. King, Elton John, Tom Petty, and Pink Floyd, among others.

His contributions ranged from artist development to global marketing, helping the careers of Gamble & Huff, O'Jays, Three Degrees, Billy Paul, Bruce Springsteen, and The Clash. He also became a partner in a syndicated radio programming firm and co-founded an Internet-based enhanced CD record label and production studio.

In his decades of success, Paul Atkinson displayed a rare level of taste, wit, style, charm, and benevolence.

The Spirit is Willing

In middle age, health become a major issue for Atkinson. Before his death at age 58, he underwent liver transplants and suffered from kidney failure and cancer. Medical bills had skyrocketed and his family was unable to cope with the fiduciary side of modern healthcare. But with so much goodwill built up over a lifetime, a cadre of music industry professionals worked at a feverish pace to produce a benefit concert. The event featured a non-stop outpouring of accolades as dozens of industry professionals appeared in-person, on video, or via satellite to laud Atkinson's character and accomplishments.

All-Star Show

Performers at the concert, each of whom had reason to thank Atkinson for help during their careers, included Penn, Patty Smyth, Richard Page (of Mr. Mister), Mickey Thomas (Jefferson Starship), and Hornsby. Brian Wilson performed with his 9-piece ensemble, which included members of The

Wondermint. Sometimes cacophonous but often enthralling, their new take on Beach Boys classics from the *Smile* period was a complete delight and “Good Vibrations,” in particular, was a knockout.

Great as all this was, the evening would also offer a singular experience that transcended everything else. For the first time in decades, Paul Atkinson strapped on his guitar and joined vocalist Colin Blunstone, keyboardist Rod Argent, bassist Chris White, and drummer Hugh Grundy, thus reuniting all five original members of The Zombies. A standing ovation greeted them, but there was more than anticipation in the air; there was trepidation. Considering he had been given just a few months to live, was Atkinson strong enough to perform? Apart from that primary anxiety, could the band deliver those sleek harmonies? Were they still able to mix pop, jazz, and rock? Some even wondered if they would be any good at all.

Good did not begin to describe it. They were magnificent. Blunstone sounded like an ethereal choirboy. White, Grundy and

Atkinson created enticing rhythms. And Argent was a fluid dynamo on organ.

Just two songs were performed, but it was ten minutes of magic that no one in the room is likely to forget. Launching into “Time of the Season,” there was a gasp from the audience at how brilliant the band sounded. The performance was pure, rich, and true, and the boys took us to intoxicating heights of emotion. At the final chord, the crowd rose to its feet with a thunderous shout of joy. Allowing us no time to catch our breath, they unleashed “She’s Not There” and we were on another rollercoaster ride of melody and elation. As the final notes reverberated into the night, there was a third standing ovation.

Glancing around the theater after the show revealed many faces wet with tears running down cheeks. Glancing in the rearview mirror on my drive home revealed my face proudly displaying those same streaks, glistening wildly as car headlights struck them. I tried to remain cool, calm, and collected. But I failed. I cried like a baby.

About the Author

From his repellant physical appearance to his annoying habit of shouting “crowded theater!” at fires, John Scott G is someone you don’t want to know. Working from a palatial mansion cleverly disguised as a mobile home, the unusually-yclept JSG plays around with words and sentences, sometimes even forming them into semi-coherent paragraphs. Every day, JSG writes about life, art, communication, politics, deities, and the underappreciated brilliance of Wallace Carothers, whose invention of nylon resulted in the modern-day miracle of sheer stockings.

~ johnscottg.com ~



*John Scott G pretending
to look thoughtful.*