

Magazine Work from Beyond the Grave

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This being a short collection of the surviving articles I wrote during my years as a staff writer for various magazines, web sites, and whatnot. More might exist, and exist as images of the actual clipped articles, but, lo, there was this fucking tornado that vexed the land and took my clippings book away on its shitty winds.

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AN INTERVIEW FOR *HELP!* MAGAZINE

This interview article was written for the premiere issue of *Help!* magazine, a new humor magazine. This is just one of several things I wrote for them. The premiere issue was published October 1999. If the name sounds familiar, that's because *Help!* was a revival of a magazine from the '60s. It was a precursor of *Lampoon*. Who is Dean Haglund? He played one of the Lone Gunmen, Langly, on the FOX TV show *The X-Files*. He's a nice guy. He put up with my idiot questions.

Dean Haglund's
Tales from the X-Files

--Based on Actual Events--

Trust almost no one.

TIME: 9:00 p.m. C.D.T., 8/21/99
PLACE: Stanford's Comedy Club
Kansas City, Missouri

[X-Files theme music---dah dum dum dum dum dah dum dum dum---sing along!]

The evening began in strangeness and ended in pandemonium. We sat at the back of the room, my new boss and I, in the dark. He was now the head of the Project, due to the fact that the others had all had a close encounter with a Bic lighter---judging from the pictures. I was never told how, exactly, they did die. Only that they were dead. I don't ask questions, I don't

inquire. The man lit up. I looked at him, studying his wrinkled features by the brief light from the flame of the match. "What?" he said. "Smoking is permitted here."

". . . and even if it weren't," I replied.

He smiled. "You catch on quickly."

"That's why you hired me."

The P.A. system crackled to life. "Are you ready for tonight's special guest performer?" it shouted at the audience. The crowd shouted back. The scratchy P.A. voice continued: "We are proud to welcome Dean Haglund to Stanford's!"

The crowd roared. We sat in silence, the smoking man and I, as the crowd around us bellowed its approval.

A tall thin man leaped onto the stage. "How many of you watch the X-Files?" he asked. The audience cheered.

The smoking man leaned over to whisper in my ear. "See? He spreads the word. How can the Project continue if he tells what he knows?"

"My understanding is that he's only an actor and a comedian. You have to strike at the heart, at this Chris Carter, if you want to seal the leak," I whispered back.

"Not necessary. He is one of us."

"Really?"

The smoking man nodded to affirm it. "Our concern is what he," he gestured at the stage with his cigarette, the red glowing end cutting a flashing arc in the darkness of the club, "has discovered while acting on the show. That's why we're here. If it's comedy, he lives. If it isn't . . ."

"How do we determine that?"

The smoking man took a drag on his cigarette before answering. "Let's see if he makes us laugh."

As I watched and listened, I reviewed in my mind the details of Mr. Haglund's file.

Haglund tossed his head, his long blond hair flashing as it swirled around his head, picking up flashes of light from the small spotlights around the tiny stage. "I thought we'd have some fun," he said to the audience, "creating our own episode of the X-Files, with your help, of course. You'll be in control of the show, you'll make the crucial decisions on how it'll go! Do you like that idea?" The crowd erupted in a frenzy of approval.

"This could rapidly spiral out of control," the smoking man whispered into my ear, in the dark, the smell of burning tobacco hovering around him.

"Don't worry," I replied. "He knows what he's doing. He's a master of improvisation. He's one of the founding members of TheatreSports, a loose connection of improv groups around North America."

"Connection and conspiracy both start with 'C'," the smoking man said.

What followed in the action was about five minutes of hardcore abuse of the audience, in the manner of Don Rickles. I mentioned this to the smoking man, who assured me that Rickles had been "taken care of" years before; they had long ago replaced Rickles with an animatronic robot controlled from a van parked in a trailer park just outside of Provo, Utah. "Comedians are especially dangerous," the smoking man concluded.

"Here we see the magic of improv," I said as Haglund's act proceeded. "There is the illusion of participation for the entire audience, even if they don't actually participate." Haglund, up on the stage: "The X-Files starts the same way every time. There's a teaser at the start, and almost always somebody dies from freakish activity of one sort or another."

Haglund commenced to scan the audience. I saw then the wisdom of the smoking man, who placed us in the back. Image my embarrassment if he or I were picked to participate. We'd have to kill everyone in the room, and that's a big hassle, with the blood and the gore and the laundry bills. A Wal-Mart manager named Alan was chosen.

"We'll sweep him up after the show," the smoking man whispered.

"Alan," Haglund said up on the stage. "Alan, your job is to supply the sound effects for the teaser." Alan nodded, struck dumb at the sight of all the people staring at him.

"This is his downfall," the smoking man commented.

"Maybe not." My confidence in the man on the stage was growing, even if I had to kill him later. I always try to respect the people I kill. Somehow it makes it all easier.

Haglund solicited advice from the crowd on a proper creature to set loose on an unsuspecting world. There was so much shouting, I couldn't make out the suggestions. Haglund did. He put the best together. "An elephant-cow-emu thing is loose in the Missouri countryside!"

I could faintly see the smoking man's head shake back and forth.

"Don't tell me you've actually created an elephant-cow-emu thing?"

"It seemed like a good idea at the time. Who knew it would learn how to play chess? But see, Haglund's game has fallen apart."

Up on the stage, Alan the Wal-Mart manager wasn't working out. He just wouldn't play the game. Not one sound effect came through those thin little lips. The joke was on him. Haglund turned a pitfall into a gold mine of laughter, playing on Alan's lack of participation. A breakfast with strange, silent food; a car that makes tiny squeaking noises; and all to tremendous laughter from the audience. Haglund steals a number off of Alan, becoming Alan when the imaginary car won't start: "I'm the store manager, I can get there when I want!"

As I watched, I was reminded of a comment Haglund made in a recent interview, that improv only exists while it's being done. When it is recorded, it ceases to be improv. "Very existential," I whispered to myself.

The elephant-cow-emu finally made its appearance. The imaginary one, I mean. "We could never get any aggression out of the real one," the smoking man said. "It only wanted to play Chess and drink beer, Molsen's was its favorite brand."

Haglund's version of Alan decided to defend himself with a tire iron. Unfortunately, the real Alan still wouldn't supply the proper sound effects, so the tire iron became a Nerf tire iron, "Another quality Wal-Mart product." The imaginary elephant-cow-emu ate the imaginary Alan. "Gulp!"

Even when he was back in the audience, Alan wasn't immune to Haglund's barbs: "I've never had to work so hard in my life!" The jab was followed by more Rickles-esque abuse of the crowd. By this time in the performance, the crowd was completely in love with it. The smoking man looked around nervously at the happy people. I was guessing, but he had probably never seen so many happy people in one place before.

Next in the plan was the government coverup. For this, Haglund had a prop: a lab coat with the sleeves altered. I puzzled at it while listening to his explanation.

"In every X-Files episode, at some point there's a government cover-up." The smoking man nodded in agreement. It was that way in real life, too. "There's always a government scientist to lie to reporters at a news conference," Haglund continued. "A volunteer and I will recreate that experience for you." Haglund scanned the audience. He commenced to heckle the audience during the selection process, especially one loudmouthed soul named Mark. A pretty Army Girl sat near the stage. Her number was up; Haglund dragged her onto the stage.

The smoking man leaned over. "One of our agents," he

whispered. "She is stationed at Fort Leavenworth to keep an eye on the Army, but she'll do nicely here. We've implanted a cortical bomb in her skull. It'll do nicely for them both . . ."

I put up a hand. "No thank you. We'll do things the old-fashioned way, with a bullet. Besides, I'm enjoying myself. Let's wait until after the performance, shall we?"

He shrugged. "You're the specialist." We watched the performance.

"Your job, my dear," Haglund said, "is to play my arms." Army Girl, not realizing how close she had come to making a big mess all over the club, stood behind Haglund and put her arms through the altered sleeves. Her arms flailed about as Haglund asked the audience for questions.

"Alan was attacked by a killer elephant-cow-emu!" someone shouted.

"Not true, not true!" Haglund shouted back, the Army Girl's arms waving about like the manipulators of a crazed robot. "Didn't happen, there was no attack! I was there, and there definitely was no attack!" Army Girl put her hands into the lab coat's pockets. "So there. I was there and there was no such thing as a elephant-cow-emu present at the Wal-Mart manager's gruesome death." Army Girl crossed her arms in front of Haglund. "Careful, those are hard science nipples under the coat!" A big roar of laughter from the audience. Did I just now hear a chuckle from the smoking man? "I panicked when I saw the Wal-Mart manager go down, I ran!" The Army Girl behind Haglund began to laugh. "Pay no attention to that head growing out of my shoulder!" Army Girl tried to put on Haglund's glasses, to enormous roars of laughter from the audience. The smoking man definitely chuckled that time, I was sure of it.

"There is nothing-----to-----fear! It was just a fatal accident with another quality Wal-Mart purchase, in this case, a squeeze Chia Pet."

"What about the big footprints?" someone else in the audience shouted.

"What about 'em? After all, Mark was out there tromping around." Another zing at the loudmouth near the stage.

That part of the show was over. Army Girl was retired to her seat with generous applause. Haglund passed out slips of paper to the crowd. He needed random bits of dialog. While that was going on, Haglund announced that he had to take a moment to get into character. He was playing Langly next. After the slips of paper came back, Haglund got into character: he put

on a pair of thick geek glasses. The audience appreciated the little bit of self-depreciatory humor. "Time for another volunteer," Haglund said. Dennis was launched out of the crowd and onto the stage. "You're the lucky one. You get to play that handsome FBI agent, Fox Mulder! Just read the comments as I hand them to you. Here we go! Mulder, Mulder, it's me, Langly. I've stumbled across a huge conspiracy!"

"It's just a guy with big feet and a big mouth."

"I didn't know you knew Mark, Mulder." Another little riff on the loudmouth in the crowd drew cheers.

To Haglund it was only a warm-up. This was the core of his improv.

Dennis, reading from a slip of paper: "Wherever you are, that's where you were."

"Mulder, did you just take LSD?"

Haglund ran with whatever Dennis gave him, dragging non sequitur statements into the storyline by whatever means possible. There lay the source of improv, in the human mind's desire to produce order out of random chaos. Even the minds of the audience participated in the effort to make sense of it all, rewarding themselves and Haglund with laughter when they succeeded. The sequence ended on a big note.

Haglund: "Mulder, there's nothing you can say that will change my mind."

Dennis: "Buy me a drink?"

The smoking man sighed. "Too bad, to cut such a promising talent short."

"It's just comedy," I replied.

"He's already touched on too many things of relevance to our endeavor."

"Just coincidence. He's just a comedian. He has no secrets in his grasp."

The smoking man stood. He leaned over to whisper in my ear. "I'm not so sure." Cigarette smoke wafted around my head as he spoke.

"Leave it in my hands. I'll make the final determination," I whispered back.

The smoking man looked at me with dubious eyes.

"Have I ever failed you before?"

He stood. "No, you haven't." With that, he left.

Haglund's fate was in my hands. I'd see. If he made me laugh loud enough and long enough, he'd live. He was at the

conclusion of his performance.

One more volunteer was hoisted onto the stage. His name was Chris, and his job was to move Haglund around as he played Langly fighting the elephant-cow-emu in mortal combat. But first a weapon. Haglund asked for suggestions. He picked the two most outlandish and sensational items mentioned. Langly was to do battle with a sexual device glued to a spatula. Chris's hesitation proved yet another chance for Haglund's humor. "I can't move, I appear to be constipated." Haglund creaked and twisted around the stage, under Chris's uncertain ministrations.

A slow-motion dance designed by a master of some obscure sect of spastic martial arts. From his file, I knew that Haglund had trained in dance at one point. The knowledge must come in handy at times like these. The elaborate contortions ended with the death of the elephant-cow-emu. I wondered briefly as I applauded if the real elephant-cow-emu were still alive, somewhere, playing Chess and downing bottles of Molsen's Gold.

Haglund took a bow. "Thank you for your participation. Come to think of it, you'll never see that on the X-Files!" He left the stage to roars of applause. I sat at the table, waiting for the crowd to thin out. Haglund had to answer one last question. If he gave me the right answer, he'd live.

The crowd was gone. Haglund came out of the back. "Sorry, but I've got to get ready for my next set," he said as I approached him.

"Just one question, sir." I put my hand under my coat, on a piece of Mr. Browning's best work. "What does this," I gestured at the stage with my other hand, "say about the fate of the human species? Do we survive? Or are we enslaved?"

"Not a thing," he replied. "It's comedy, it's meant to be funny. Didn't you laugh?"

"I laughed."

"See?" He left me, to prepare for the next show.

He was right, of course. I let him live.

[More X-Files theme music, and another chance to sing along! "X-Files! We've got X-Files! X-Files, X-Files, X-Files! They're not regular files, they're X-Files!"]

"APARTMENT LIFE" FOR PAPA ADVERTISING

This is work I did about sixteen years ago for a startup magazine that never started up. I was paid to write a series of short articles, find and type up a bunch of filler quotations, and do several slightly longer articles. About year after writing these, I thought to check in on the ad agency behind the magazine. They had gone up in smoke. No one in the building knew where they had gotten off to; worse, the people I dealt with had gone up in smoke, too. They weren't even in the white pages of the phone directory. So here I sit. This has happened to me more times than I can count. Well, a dozen times at least. I'd have a much larger publishing record if the magazines and publishers I have dealt with over the past several years had stayed in business. They weren't just local or regional magazines, even nationally distributed magazines have folded up after buying my work but without publishing it. It's enough to make a paranoid writer even more paranoid. Officially, these articles weren't published, even though I was paid for them. They are forever suspended in an indistinct realm between the writer's mind and the public's eye. I put them here for lack of anything better to do with them.

From The Manager:

Greetings to all our new residents! I hope you find your stay here as pleasant as is possible for us to make it. If you have any suggestions as to how we might improve your living experience here, please don't hesitate to tell us. This month I'd like to review our policy on residents' vehicles. Residents must keep their vehicles in proper working order. Disabled vehicles of any sort, whether engine trouble or flat tires, cannot remain so for over forty-eight hours without

notifying the management. Vehicles are subject to towing after that. If there is a short delay of a matter of several days before the vehicle is repaired, that is acceptable so long as management is informed. If we receive no word from you after observing the disabled vehicle, and you cannot be contacted, the vehicle will be towed. There will be no car repairs in the parking lot. Topping off the radiator fluid or oil, or changing a tire are the only exceptions. All vehicles must be moved at least once every forty-eight hours. Management must be notified if a vehicle is to sit for over forty-eight hours. Please do not think that these are arbitrary rules. They are in place to increase the livability of the complex for all the tenants.

Please remember to inform the management of any problems, however minor you think they might be. Please do not attempt repairs yourself, or deal with any problems yourself. We are here for that. Don't get upset, don't get angry, tell us. We can help. We are here to serve you!

See you next month.

Parking Lot Manners

Parking lots surround us, are a part of our everyday lives, yet we are often confused about the proper behavior while using them. Don't be, you only need to remember one principle: be polite.

Always be polite. Loud voices, loud music, and rude talk, especially in an apartment complex parking lot, can only alienate people. If a problem occurs, take it to management, that's what they are there for.

Never tamper with other cars. If there is a problem with a car blocking a space, stalled, or otherwise inoperative, go to the management first. They can help.

Do not honk in the parking lot. Ask your visitors to come to your door, or, if they have a car phone, to call you to tell you they have arrived. Think about

it: when you or your friends honk your car horn, everyone in the complex will go to their windows to see who it is. You don't want that. Be polite and your neighbors will be on your side.

Always park according to the rules of the lot. Do not take up more than one space. Never slam your door into the side of another car. If the space is too narrow, park someplace else. The rule on spaces is usually "First There." Accept this politely and park elsewhere. Disputes over parking spaces are silly and unproductive. Always lock your car and take your keys. Remember, we can all get along well together so long as we remember the guiding principle: be polite!

Eyes Open

Every apartment dweller wants to be as safe from crime as possible. We can be, if everyone remembers one simple rule: eyes open! That's all it takes, all of us making an effort to be as aware of our surroundings as possible.

Leaving your apartment in the morning, do you note the cars that are regularly in the lot? Can you recognize your neighbors as they leave for work? You should be able to. That's the first step in crime prevention, knowing who belongs in a certain place and who doesn't. This isn't spying, it is merely an awareness of your surroundings, of the usual, day-to-day activities in the complex.

A high percentage of robberies occur during the day, simply because people aren't paying attention. For instance, if you see people who you've never seen before carrying TV sets and stereos out of an apartment, call the police! If they aren't committing any crimes, the police will only hold them up for a moment. If they are, you've saved a neighbor's belongings! Either way, it's a win-win situation. Don't be afraid of calling the police. They will only hold up ordinary citizens for a moment. If you asked those citizens, they'd probably tell you that it's better to be safe than sorry. You feel uncomfortable, you see

something you don't like, call the police. That's all it takes to be safe. Eyes open!

Winter Tips

Don't be afraid of the cold! Winter can be a pleasant time of year, if you are prepared.

First, make sure all your winter clothes are laundered, most especially your heavy winter coats. After everything comes back from the laundry, hang them all in the same place in your closet. Put all your hats, scarves, and gloves in one place. This can be a box in the closet, a special drawer in your dressing table or chest-of-drawers, anywhere with space enough. When the weather gets cold, you want to know where everything is and not have to hunt around the apartment for it. This includes the blankets for your bed as well. Be sure they are clean and kept in one place. Keep track of your winter footwear, make sure they are clean and ready to wear. If you don't own a pair of warm boots, buy some. They come in styles to suit any taste. You would be surprised at the number of people who think they only need a coat. They'll be cold this winter while you'll be warm.

Second, keep your car in good condition. The single most important thing you can do to protect your car in cold weather is to make certain you have enough antifreeze in your radiator. Don't go by the color! Get an antifreeze tester from an auto- parts store---they're cheap---to check the protection level of the radiator fluid. Most full service gas stations and service centers will do this for free. In this climate, you should have protection down to at least -25 or -30 degrees. Also make sure the radiator is full, because a car low on fluid can overheat, even in winter. You should have your battery and alternator (the engine's electric generator, which powers the electrical systems when the engine is running and recharges the battery, if it goes bad the battery won't be properly charged) checked. Most service centers have the gear to do this, some won't even charge you. If you put water in your windshield washer reservoir last summer, be sure to replace it with windshield washer fluid for the winter. The washer fluid doesn't freeze like water. With the

mushy roads that occur every winter, you want to be able to see where you're going. Check your tires. Tires in good condition, properly inflated at between 28 - 30 psi, will make winter an easy season. Buy tire chains if you want, but only put them on during heavy snows---it's illegal to drive with them on dry roads. There are two items you should keep in your car at all times in the winter: a blanket and a window ice scraper. A sturdy long-handled ice scraper with a brush at one end is recommended. The blanket can be an old army-surplus one, just so you'll have something to wrap up in if you get stuck. Finally, a tune-up for your car. It may not be necessary, but a car with a recent tune-up will start more easily on those cold winter mornings.

Winter is holiday time for many of us, which means long visits with friends and relatives. You don't want any surprises waiting for you when you come back. Here are a couple tips to prevent that.

Never turn off the heat in your apartment during cold weather. Turn it down to 50 or 60 degrees when leaving for the holidays, but NEVER, NEVER turn it off! A furnace set at even 50 degrees will protect the pipes from freezing and keep your house plants alive. Open under-the-sink cabinets for sinks against exterior walls. This is also a good idea for all your sinks, if you will be gone for an extended period. By opening the cabinets, you allow the warm air in the apartment to circulate around the pipes. If you feel that isn't enough protection, leave the water on, at a trickle, but only in an UNPLUGGED DRAIN, in the sinks, bathtubs, or showers you are worried about. Remember, an UNPLUGGED DRAIN!

Remember to inform the management of any extended absences. Many police departments have a "house watch" program during the holidays. To check on this, call the police at a non-emergency number (most precincts have one).

Winter can be fun, if you prepare! Enjoy yourself!

Apartment Clutter

Is your apartment like an obstacle course? Do you have to weave and dodge through mountains of STUFF? Have you run out of room? Don't lose heart,

most apartment dwellers are in the same boat with you. We all need that little bit of extra space to make our apartments just a little more livable.

Stackable plastic mini-shelves can rescue us from clutter. They go by several names: mini-shelves, display stands, corner shelves, or corner stands. The individual units consist of a flat plastic top, usually square, from 12 to 16 inches on a side, and four plastic legs that insert into the bottom of the stand. There are also round ones and oval ones, as well as round stands with two flat sides to fit into corners. The square stands are recommended, as they are more stable when stacked up to four or five levels.

You stack them high. They are made to stack. The tops usually have indentations on the top surface, to accept the legs of another stand. Four or five units high is recommended, since over six units high can cause the tower to be unstable and the higher units inaccessible. To make the towers even more stable, use the top of a stand (the stand without its bottom legs) as a base for the tower.

Where to put them? Anywhere you have room! In the corners, between two regular shelves, between the bed and the closet, or next to a desk or table. Even place them on top of a desk or table! Use them to store books, display plants or pictures, hold CD cases or video cassettes, or anything else that needs some clutter management! They fit in just about anywhere. Try them, and your apartment will start looking like a living space, rather than a warehouse.

The Job Hunter

We all want to find that perfect job, that ideal position, so we search and search and search

How to do it better? That's what this column's about. This month we look at the interview from the opposite side of the table, and we ask: "Should we hire this person?"

The applicant's first impression occurs before the interviewer and the job seeker even meet. It occurs when the receptionist buzzes the interviewer on the office intercom, to say, "Mr./Ms. So-And-So is here for his/her interview."

How can that be? The interviewer hasn't even caught sight of the job seeker yet! The interviewer has no idea what the job seeker looks like, what he or she is wearing, whether the handshake is firm or limp, whether the seeker is sweating or cooled out . . . what's going on here?

The interviewer's appointment calendar sits in front him, on his desk, in plain view. He no doubt has half-a-dozen interviews scheduled for that day. He sits there, waiting for them to show up. He likes them to be on time, if for no other reason than that it would throw off his schedule if any appear before his desk late. Much better for the job seeker if they are on time for the interview. Even better than that, to show up early for the interview. Interviewers like an early appearance. It impresses them! Why? Doesn't it impress you, when a friend shows up early for a date? No complications for the interviewer when the appointment arrives early. He knows his next interview is waiting in the outer office, no worries about where the job seeker is, whether he or she will show up. It eases his daily burden ever so slightly. He's more relaxed, and so are you. You've had time to get a drink of water, go to the bathroom, and compose yourself. Better than running into the outer office all breathless and disheveled. You've impressed the interviewer without saying a word!

Happy Computing: Viruses

Just because you haven't heard about them on the news doesn't mean they've gone away. Viruses and other destructive programs can trash your hard drive, erase your data, and otherwise turn your treasured computer into an expensive plant-stand. All this can be avoided by following a few simple rules---all painless.

Where did the software come from? The answer to this question can determine over 95% of your vulnerability to viruses. If you bought it or downloaded it from a reputable online service you have little to worry about. Once in a very

great while, someone will put a virus on a software installation disk. Two types do this: disgruntled employees (or ex-employees) of the software company or the retail outlet, or kids who very carefully substituted a tampered software package. The first very rarely happens, it's just too hard to get away with. The second is almost as rare, and in some cases can be prevented by the purchaser by examining the seals on the package. Some software makers put film hologram seals on their boxes just to prevent this sort of product tampering.

A friend gave the software to you. Some people (very few now) still consider it a joke to destroy an acquaintance's computer. These are mostly teenaged high school or college types. If you exchange data or programs with people, always run it through an anti-virus program before using it (more on anti-virus programs later). The lack of trust is regrettable, but occasionally even your friends may not know their machines are "infected."

Do you use any illegal copies of computer programs? If you do, shame on you! This isn't the place to discuss computer piracy, so I'll skip the lecture on the benefits of registered ownership. How do you know where that software has been? Especially if the copy you have is multigenerational? Here's a story to raise your hair. A couple years ago, a software company in Pakistan was caught selling pirated software. They were caught because of the rather unique blackmail scheme they ran. They sold the pirated software mostly to foreigners, American tourists, with a particularly nasty virus included in the package at no extra charge. After the virus had trashed your system, a screen came up promising a fix, if you'd pay their "fee." Pirated software that has been tampered-with is not that unusual. Sometimes the pirated software listed on an outlaw BBS (bulletin board service) is a type of no-brainer program bomb. You think it's just a compressed .exe file. You run it, to discover too late that the program it contains is a simple three-line batch file ordering your hard drive to do a low-level format. Boom! Goodbye hard drive! Pirated software seems to attract the types of destructive perverse personalities associated with computer viruses. Avoid such programs and your computer will have a long life.

Most bulletin board services are fun to log-on to. Some specialize in graphics files, others in shareware, still others a central location for e-mail and chats. Even the best BBS occasionally will have a contaminated program listed for download. No one's perfect. If you download from a BBS, scan the programs

for viruses. Better safe than sorry. Then there are the outlaw boards. These are usually run by immature high school or college types. They contain a great deal of pirated software with a high rate of "infection." Avoid these at all costs. The police or software company lawyers usually catch these guys eventually. You don't want your name in the board's files when they do, do you?

An antivirus program for your computer is a must, if you use outside files. If you never log-on to a system, never download, never swap programs or data with anyone, and use only commercially-purchased software, you do not need an antivirus program. The chances of your computer becoming "infected" are vanishingly small. However, most of us do download files or swap data with friends, so we need protection. Get some, as soon as possible, and use it! It doesn't work if you leave it in the shrink-wrap. Norton Antivirus is very good. You can download McAfee's Scan antivirus program from most online services. The last time I used it, it was still DOS-based. Unless you get a shell program for it, you'll have to run it from the command line. Most antivirus programs can be set to scan the computer upon startup. If you do a lot of file sharing, you might want to use this option. Some operating systems come with their own antivirus programs. You may have an antivirus program on your hard drive now, and not know it! Get busy and get it running. Better safe than sorry, that's my motto!

Life Quotes

Life. A spiritual pickle preserving the body from decay.

Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914)

American author

The dreamcrossed twilight between birth and dying.

T. S. Eliot (1888-1965)

Anglo-American poet

Life is the art of drawing sufficient conclusions from insufficient premises.

Samuel Butler (1835–1902)

English author

Life is like playing a violin solo in public and learning the instrument as one goes on.

Samuel Butler (1835–1902)

Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.

Soren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)

Danish philosopher

Life is a zoo in a jungle.

Peter de Vries (b. 1910)

American author

The meaning of life is that it stops.

Franz Kafka (1883–1924)

German author

When I hear somebody sigh that "Life is hard," I am always tempted to ask, "Compared to what?"

Sydney J. Harris (1917–1986)

American journalist

I should have no objection to a repetition of the same life from its beginning, only asking the advantages authors have in a second edition to correct some faults of the first.

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790)

American statesman, writer

Is life worth living? This is a question for an embryo, not for a man.

Samuel Butler (1835–1902)

English author

Happy Quotes

One is never as unhappy as one thinks, nor as happy as one had hoped to be.

Francois - Duc de La Rochefoucauld
(1613-1680) French writer, moralist

Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so.

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)
English philosopher, economist

Happiness is a mystery, like religion, and should never be rationalised.

G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936)
British author

Give a man health and a course to steer, and he'll never stop to trouble about whether he's happy or not.

Brassbound, Captain Brassbound's Conversion
George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)
Anglo-Irish playwright, critic

The search for happiness is one of the chief sources of unhappiness.

Eric Hoffer (1902-1983)
American philosopher

Happiness is an imaginary condition formerly often attributed by the living to the dead, now usually attributed by adults to children, and by children to adults.

Thomas Szasz (b. 1920)
American psychiatrist

If we only wanted to be happy it would be easy; but we want to be happier than other people, which is almost always difficult, since we think them happier than they are.

Charles de Montesquieu (1689-1755)
French political theorist

I can sympathise with people's pains, but not with their pleasures. There is something curiously boring about somebody else's happiness.

Aldous Huxley (1894–1963)

British author

Grief can take care of itself, but to get the full value from joy you must have somebody to divide it with.

Mark Twain (1835–1910)

American author

We have no more right to consume happiness without producing it than to consume wealth without producing it.

Morell, Candida

George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950)

Anglo-Irish playwright, critic

Love kills happiness, happiness kills love.

Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936)

Spanish philosopher, poet, novelist

The happiest time in any man's life is when he is in red-hot pursuit of a dollar with a reasonable prospect of overtaking it.

Josh Billings (1818–1885)

American humorist

The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation.

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832)

English philosopher, political theorist, jurist

Happiness is no laughing matter.

Richard Whately (1787–1863)

Archbishop of Dublin

FOUR HOLES, KANSAS
...excerpt from Chapter 1

This was originally written for a regional magazine by the name of *American Times*. The editor was deeply influenced by *Rolling Stone* and wanted to emulate their novel serializations. Thus *Four Holes* was born. I've forgotten just how many chapters I wrote, one for each issue, along with all the other articles I wrote for the magazine.



This caricature ran as a sidebar on every installment of *Four Holes, Kansas* and every one of my named articles. I wrote a lot of unattributed filler material for the magazine, and under a bunch of pseudonyms. Marty Harding was the artist.

...from *Four Holes, Kansas*, Chapter 1

Mayor Major was late for an appointment. He was always late. He even made it part of his campaign in the last election: "Vote for Major! He's always late but he always gets there!" He hit the siren Fred had installed in his Lincoln; it cleared the traffic out from in front of him. Sirens were handy things. Mayor Major loved to see the cars swerve out of the way. He ran a red light, squealed around a corner, and skidded to a screaming stop in front of city hall.

Mayor Major grabbed the Japanese phrase book and jumped out of the car. "O-hay-o Go-zim- asu, O-hay-o Go-zim-asu," he repeated to himself. He had been studying the phrase book for days in preparation for this meeting. A strange car was parked by the curb. They were already here. He headed up the city hall steps. Mayor Major glanced up at the second floor; his secretary, Ms. Nursez, was watching him from a window. He should have watched his step, because he tripped and fell down the steps. There were only three steps.

Ms. Nursez gave a little squeak and dialed 911. Downstairs, the dispatcher, who, from her window, had just seen the mayor fall, answered the phone. "Quick, send an ambulance to city hall! The mayor has fallen!"

"I don't think that's necessary, he's getting up . . ."

"Send the ambulance!"

The dispatcher shrugged and called the ambulance garage, which was attached to city hall.

Fred, the resident janitor, paramedic, and the only full-time fireman, upon getting the call, sprang from his desk, leaped into the ambulance, hit the automatic door switch, and cranked up the siren. It was similar to the one he had installed in the mayor's car. Siren howling, lights flashing, he rolled out, drove ten feet, and pulled up beside the mayor's car.

"Mayor Major, Mayor Major!" Fred leaped out of the ambulance, first aid box and defibrillator in his arms. "Are you all right" Where does it hurt? Don't worry, we'll get you to the hospital!"

Mayor Major was dusting off his pants. He hadn't even dropped the Japanese phrase book. "I'm perfectly all right, Fred."

"Are you sure? Internal injuries and broken bones are tricky things! We'd better check your heart! Unbutton your shirt and I'll connect you to the heart monitor!" He tugged at Mayor Major's coat lapel.

RESTAURANT REVIEWS FOR *AMERICAN TIMES*

I was the Roving Gourmet, though not by choice. Freelance work rarely offers choice, you write what they need.

Japanese Garden Restaurant

The Japanese Garden restaurant is between a used bookstore and a hardware store on West Douglas. It's a new restaurant, having just opened in May. The parking is in the rear, off the alley, and clearly marked. Inside the front door is a small anteroom, with articles of Japanese culture on display, including a handsome kimono. Through a doorway, in the restaurant proper, taped Japanese music played in the background. The decor had been improvised in an appealing manner. There are smoking and nonsmoking sections.

I ordered from their lunch menu. Their menus list an astounding array of Japanese cuisine. There is an entire page of sushi dishes and an entire page of vegetarian dishes. Explanatory paragraphs are included for those not familiar with Japanese cuisine. The proprietor and head cook, Mrs. Sumitomo, wished to eliminate as much of the mystery as possible surrounding Japanese cuisine. Her menus go a long way toward that goal. I ordered the beef and chicken combination lunch. Currently all items on the lunch menu are priced the same: \$4.25 for regular servings and \$5.25 for large servings. The regular serving will satisfy most people, but if you are especially hungry, you'll want to get the larger one. They purposefully leave much of their food unflavored, so the vegetables are bland unless flavored to taste by the customer. A large selection of condiments is at each table, including the ubiquitous soy sauce and the rare La Yu chili oil (very hot). I was pleased by their inclusion of chopsticks among the tableware. It was nice to be able to choose between chopsticks or conventional knife and fork. Most Asian restaurants in this city don't give you the choice. Depending on the request or meal ordered, you can be served with either conventional plates or traditional Japanese bowls.

The main dish was appealing to the eye when put before me. The beef and chicken combination meal consisted of a beef shabu-roll (thinly-sliced beef with shredded fresh vegetables rolled inside), charbroiled breast of chicken on top of a mound of rice (either white or brown; I had brown), and servings of miso soup, Japanese-style salad (sumomono), and a min-dessert sample of carrot cake. The shabu-roll was a little too bland to my tastes, though I do recognize that this was intentional; I enjoyed the chicken much more. It was delicious. The moist brown rice and the carrot cake only contributed to what was a fine meal.

The owner explained her culinary philosophy to me after I ate. She is concerned with delivering a healthy product to her customers. This explains the lack of flavor additives in her food. She does not use MSG (monosodium glutamate). She uses only high quality oils in her cooking, taking care to strain the oil. As a result, her meals are a little on the delicate side. She also practices a Japanese form of oil-free cooking; however, traditional Japanese deep-fried foods are also available. She told me that several local dietitians recommend her food to their patients. Because of her care of preparation and lack of additives, her food should be good for diabetics, hypertensives, and those on restricted-calorie diets. Macrobiotics and vegetarians should find the menu appealing. The owner has appeared on local television demonstrating healthy Japanese cooking. She insists that customers in her restaurant should have no doubts about the ingredients in the food. Her aim is to enhance the customer's understanding not only of Japanese cuisine, but of healthy eating practices.

Best sellers in her menus are marked, and there is even a special meal designed to introduce the diner to Japanese cuisine. The fourth Wednesday of each month the restaurant is closed for a sushi party, a \$20 all-you-can-eat sushi bar, everything prepared fresh that day. In the near future, sake and other alcoholic beverages will be available. I was greatly impressed by her commitment to quality food. Highly recommended.

La Mexicana Restaurant

First visit, located on the north side of 21st Street, opposite the corner of 21st and Vinge, La Mexicana interested me for weeks before I finally stopped to eat. It's sandwiched in the same building between a printer and a gift shop. the parking lot is in the rear. There is also an entrance in the rear. From the moment I entered, I knew I was in the right place: a Mexican flag adorned one wall and a Madonna spread her protective grace from her location on another wall. The rest of the decor was unexceptional. I didn't care, I go to restaurants for the food, not the decor.

I heard a woman's voice from the kitchen, speaking in Spanish. A very pretty teenaged girl took my order. A more polite and attentive waitress [server, whatever; why are English words reflecting gender now forbidden by PC, while they are acceptable in most other languages?] I have not met. I didn't need Sherlock by my side to know that this was a family-owned and -operated restaurant. I had enchiladas with a fried egg on top, and an imported Mexican beer. As usual, sauce and chips were supplied free with the meal. The food was excellent.

Second visit. The waitress was still very polite, the decor was still the same. the menu is large and offers a good selection. I happen to like enchiladas, so I had them again. They were very good, perhaps slightly better than last time because they were less moist than the ones I had on my first visit. The recording of a mariachi band tinkled away faintly in the background.

This restaurant has very good food and excellent service. They don't seem to mind special requests. The family atmosphere makes the restaurant a comfortable place to eat. It's the sort of place a person would dine at during the week, or where a couple might dine before going to the movies.

There is one slight problem peculiar to Mexican restaurants in general that this one also suffers from: high prices. The popularity of Mexican restaurants means that their prices are higher than average, by anywhere from four to seven dollars, than other types of restaurants.

China Palace

The China Palace restaurant is on North West street, next to a pool room. The building is set back a bit from the street, and , if the parking lot repairs in progress when I was there are finished, there will be plenty of parking available. The interior is quite bland, even excessively so, a bare-bones restaurant interior if there ever was one. Supposedly the restaurant contains a club as well; however, the club side differs not in the slightest from the restaurant side, except for the ability to buy alcohol. For those who like booths, this is the place for you. It's the primary form of seating. I have no objection to any of this. The food matters more than the surroundings, so long as the surroundings are quiet, clean, and comfortable. I prefer to sit in booths, when they are available. They provide more privacy. The waitresses had no uniforms, in fact wearing nothing more elegant than jeans. They were polite and attentive, but not to such an extent as to earn a good tip. I ordered one of the specials, #3 on the menu. They have no buffet. My meal consisted of chicken chow mein, pork fried rice, sweet and sour pork, egg rolls, bread (if you want it), and tea. All for under five dollars. The servings, especially of the chow mein, were more than ample. I was not able to eat it all. When I asked for something to take the remainder home in, I received no complaints and was promptly given a styrofoam container. This is evidently a common experience at China Palace. The chow mein had too much greenery, cabbage, I believe, and was a little soggy. Nothing else stood out. The fried rice was dried out from too much exposure to a heat lamp. This is average to poor American Chinese cuisine. Don't be misled, this is not real Chinese food, it has been mutated to suit the fat-clogged American taste in food. Nothing special here, but nothing atrociously bad, either. The price is about right for the amount of food you get. One warning: this is no place to take someone you want to impress. China Palace could serve as a place to eat during a lunch hour. It is not recommended if there are other choices available. This is not the place to take someone on a special occasion.

Grand Prix Entertainment Center

Teenage heaven! What are the ingredients? Pool tables, video games, pinball, burgers, and fried food. Grand Prix is just the place I'd want to hang out at if I were a teenager. Judging from the cars in the parking lot, quite a few actual teenagers must agree.

The interior is much nicer than it needs to be. There's carpeting, hanging plants, and an overall attention to neatness. No old cigarette butts or piles of used paper plates exist. All refuse is swept away, picked up, or vacuumed into non-existence by the ever-busy staff. They constantly clean the place, because, as you all know, teenagers are the dirtiest creatures on this planet.

Some things never change: there is a problem with cigarette smoke. Maybe it's a required in teenage heaven. The eating area is in the center, isolated from the gaming areas by a solid wood railing topped by a fancy brass handrail. The hanging plants were all in the eating area. Color TVs are placed at strategic locations for the diners' enjoyment of music videos. Did I mean that the entire place was wired into a video music box? Other TV sets are distributed around the place, you are always just one glance away from one.

The food they serve is simple: mainly burgers and a lot of fried food. Judging from the business they do, I'd say the kitchen has a deep fat fryer the size of a small car. The menu lists every variety of fried food that exists. There have fried shrimp, fried chicken, french fries, onion rings; okay, maybe they don't serve fried okra, I'm sure that's an oversight they'll fix. They've got sandwiches: roast beef, hot dogs, burgers, and their headliner, the Grand Prix Burger. The food stands up to the best of the conventional fast food restaurants. It is tasty. Clog your arteries, but tasty.

That's the nature of this place. Fast food and video games. You can play games here to your heart's content. They have a dozen pool tables, a long, long row of pinball machines, and the aforementioned video games. They've got the latest games and a few tried and true oldies. During the summer they run specials: Games Player's Day, Couple's Day (if your date is older than 18, don't take her here if you want a second date), Pool League Day, Ladies' Day. They even have mechanical grab games, for those who want to spend five dollars for a thirty-cent toy.

My conclusions? If you are a teenager, go there immediately. Spend every spare moment there. Spend all your money there. If you are under 18, this would be the place to take a girl on a really cheap date. The rest of us will spend our time in more worthwhile places, and when you turn nineteen, you'll join us there.

OTHER WORK FOR *AMERICAN TIMES*

Freelance work can be anonymous. The editor used articles under my real name, so he wanted the regular video reviews under another name. I got to choose the name. I used to be a big fan of *SCTV* when I was a kid, so I took the name of one of the more notorious characters from the show. It's an inside-inside joke, one my editor didn't get.

Comments On The Video Revolution by Johnny LaRue

When the first VCR hit the market years ago, very few people thought it would have the impact it is having. At most a toy for hardcore video hobbyists, right? The cost of one was enormous. Only the price fell, and this fairly simple machine has created an entire industry [this article is all pre-DVD], destroyed another industry, changed the habits of millions of people, and affected the film industry as drastically as the advent of television.

The first steps were hesitant. Competing technologies diminished the appeal to manufacturers and consumers. There were no standards, or rather, there were too many standards, each with a large corporate backer. There were VHS and Betamax competing inside the videotape technology market; there were two different types of laser disk technology competing both against each other. All was settled by the marketplace. The VHS videotape machine was it, probably because of the ability to record as well as play cassettes (though laser disks have hung on; due to the popularity of CDs, players capable of handling CDs, video CDs, and full-sized laser disks have recently been released.).

Most American homes now have a VCR. So popular are VCRs in combination with video cameras, they've destroyed the Super Eight film industry. Does

anyone remember 8mm movie cameras? A large number of homes had them, they were big with film hobbyists. You can't even buy the film stock anymore. Family films were replaced by family videos literally over the course of a couple years. An industry that had been around since before World War II was up in smoke.

A entirely new commercial sector appeared, the video rental market. Individual video rental stores, video rental chains, supermarkets, convenience stores, and even rent-by-mail companies have all tried to meet the apparently limit less demand for video entertainment. Everyone is in on the act.

The changed viewing habits fed by the availability of rental cassettes has significantly altered the film industry. Some people don't go to theaters anymore; they are mostly adults, who chose to forego the hassle of attending a movie theater. The increased percentage of young people at movie theaters had caused a shift in filmmaking toward subjects popular to kid. The rebirth of the "Dead Teenager" movie is just one example of the industry's reaction to this demographic shift.

On the good side, foreign films, old movies, and small independent films have been given added life because of their appeal to adult VCR owners. Other types of direct-to-video presentation are possible. History, nonfiction, instructional videos, and college courses on video are widely available. Some movies are even made just for video release (though many of these are aimed at teenagers and young adults---a reflection of the popularity of teenage video parties). Traditional Hollywood has been so alarmed, they even had congressional hearings on VCR technology.

The future? The current rental market is full of competitors, I see no expansion there; rather, the video cassettes produced will continue to expand in content, variety, and quality. I'll even go out on a limb and say that films will soon be released simultaneously both in theaters and on video cassette [this hasn't come to pass yet, but there is less time now between the theatrical and video release].

WORK FOR 10KC.COM

I did hundreds, if not thousands of these little miniarticles as the web content editor and writer for 10kc.com. No, contrary to a first glance, 10kc was not a branch of the Catholic men's club Knights of Columbus. It stood for "10,000 Creatives." This was a web startup for a collaborative work site aimed at advertising creatives. Ever heard of the Internet Bubble? I was part of it. After a while, just as the coders were about to put the last of the innovative software into the server, the finance guys pulled the plug on it. Up in smoke we went.

092500

Not the Best Idea

The AP reports: SAN JOSE — On second thought, it might not have been so bright for a law firm to send 600 packages containing fake hand grenades to would-be clients. The Los Angeles firm of Quinn Emanuel is now apologizing for a promotion that was so explosive it prompted two bomb scares in Silicon Valley.

I know of a law firm in need of a new ad agency. The only proviso: no promotions involving explosive devices. – R. P. Bird

092500

BrightMail CEO Interview: His Toolkit

Christian Berthelsen of The San Francisco Examiner writes: Gary Hermansen, the 44-year-old chief executive of Brightmail, started his career in technology by writing a college term paper that the eight-track tape and its superior technology would outlast the cassette. The eight-track is long since forgotten, but Hermansen's still here, thanks to what is perhaps a more sharpened perspective on quality technology. Brightmail is an e-mail filtering company that keeps spam and viruses out of the in-boxes of millions of e-mail subscribers, particularly those with Earthlink and AT&T accounts.

Little tips from one road warrior to another. Don't carry a CD player, let your laptop serve double-duty as a music machine. Integrate your two-way pager with your email. Also the potential for failure in upgrading obsolete technology. Lastly, a warning from a man on the edge of the wireless frontier: don't give up your wires just yet. – R. P. Bird

092600

Online Ad Agency Slump

Lisa Meyer of Red Herring writes: As dot-com advertising money has started to disappear, so too have the once lofty valuations of online advertising companies. Most of these firms are looking forward to a temporary boost during the fourth quarter when the holiday season is expected to increase e-tailing sales and thus Internet viewers. The buying and selling of online ads during this time also should increase, analysts say. But in the present, the stocks for online ad companies are languishing.

Despite a fourth-quarter spike, the slump will continue until wider bandwidth and new-media platforms open the online ad market up to a wider audience. A survival strategy for the lean times is necessary. But do not lose hope. "Estimates for the sector's future growth are robust. A recent study by Jupiter Communications (Nasdaq: JPTR), an Internet research firm, predicts that advertisers will spend \$16.5 billion online by 2005, while Goldman Sachs (NYSE: GS) estimates that online ad spending will grow at an average annual rate approaching 76 percent, from \$3.4 billion in 1999 to \$13.8 billion in 2002." In sports terms, the online ad industry is suffering from pre-season jitters. Once in the BIG GAME, everything should be just fine. – R. P. Bird

092700

The Content Kings

Bob Tedeschi The New York Times writes: Among the epiphanies that Internet executives had last year, as they pondered routes to profitability, was the notion that Web sites need a healthy mix of the three C's — content, commerce and community. Following that mandate was easy enough as long as venture capitalists were elbowing for a seat at the poker table. But as the venture folks pulled their chips off the table, executives were forced to realize that dealing with even one of the C's was difficult and expensive enough — let alone all three. Generating content, in particular, proved much harder than many Internet companies had expected. Given the Web public's insatiable

appetite for new information, sites must constantly refresh their editorial content, either with their own stables of writers and multimedia producers or by striking deals with other sites that can provide that material.

Thus the rise of syndication companies, which manage the flow of content from providers to customer web sites. This particular market will only expand, as the insatiable nature of online users for more and more content makes filling that need more burdensome for individual web sites. It is reassuring to know that content is king on the web. - R. P. Bird

092800

MTVi Restructures

Kenneth Li of The Standard writes: MTVi, the Internet division of Viacom (VIA.B) -owned MTV Networks, is laying off 105 employees, or about 25 percent of its staff, amid a company-wide reorganization. The laid-off workers consist primarily of editorial, marketing and technology-infrastructure employees. The news comes on the heels of rumors that the company plans to pull its IPO. In March, the unit filed to sell 10 percent of the company to the public in order to generate much-needed cash. April's downturn, and the cold shoulder the markets subsequently gave online content, sent those plans back to the drawing board.

MTVi has grown very rapidly over the past year. It now consists of three formerly independent parts: MTV.com, VH1.com, and Sonicnet.com. The surprise is that there was such a considerable delay before layoffs in the newly enlarged company. The New Economy in this case looks suspiciously like the Old Economy. There are always layoffs whenever there is a merger; elements of the workforce become redundant when operations are consolidated. No one should have been surprised at this. - R. P. Bird

092800

Loudcloud's Mysteries Revealed

Scott Rosenberg of Salon.Com writes: Remember the passage in "Hamlet" where the prince tweaks Polonius by insisting that a cloud looks like a camel, then a weasel, then a whale? In its short history (the firm is about a year old) Loudcloud has at times been equally hard to pin down. Today it offers clients "solutions" in the form of a "suite of services" that "addresses the

challenges of deploying, maintaining and scaling mission-critical Internet operations."

Marc Andreessen, the übermind behind Netscape, who made the web possible, this is his company. Before the necessities of the IPO process forced him to reveal exactly what Loudcloud did, every question had a different answer. Obscuring clouds of mist seemed to dog Andreessen's every step. All that has been blown away. Loudcloud is a glorified high-end, one-stop-shop ISP. Like the curtain jerked away, which had hid the true nature of the wizard of Oz, Loudcloud's S-1 filing reveals all. The majority of its customers are dotcoms. To quote the S-1: "To the extent we continue to rely significantly on Internet-based customers, we will be subject to an increased risk that these customers encounter financial difficulties and fail to pay for our services or delay payment substantially." - R. P. Bird

092900

To Brand or Not to Brand: Pets.Com and Its Sock Puppet

Debra Aho Williamson of Ad Age writes: All the accolades for the Sock Puppet don't account for a whole lot right now. Pets.com as a business is in dismal shape. Since the ad campaign kicked into high gear in the fourth quarter of last year, the company has spent more than \$3.50 on marketing and sales expenses for every dollar it's generated in revenue. That's \$76.6 million in marketing and sales spending from October through June vs. \$21.6 million in revenue. Yet arguably, Pets.com did everything right based on last year's rules of the game. This puppy is the poster child of a dot-com, circa 1999.

The Niagara of money flowing into dotcoms last year stimulated the growth of a build-brand-at-any-cost mentality, which, in retrospect, was a big mistake. But that's spilt milk. Pets.com may be shopping for a White Knight. Meanwhile, traffic at their site has gone up in seemingly direct proportion to the decline in their ad expenditures - now THAT'S irony. "Most people have a playful, fun relationship with the Sock Puppet, but it has yet to translate into a compelling brand story that makes people want to transact with the company." Andrea Reisman of Petopia says: "We are increasingly focused on making sure our branding is focused on our customers and not the public in general." Does that qualify as twisting the knife when it's already deep in your competitor's back? - R. P. Bird

That's it. If any trace of my work from those days turns up, I'll be sure to include it. Thanks for coming along on this visit to the distant past.

R. P. Bird
rpbird.com
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