

# High Street

Lawyers, Guns & Money  
in a Stoner's New Mexico

by Tetman Callis

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“Man is so constituted that he reserves his strongest curses for the very things that keep him together and keep him alive.” — Thomas Bernhard, *Concrete*



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*High Street*, Book 0 — Preface

“I’m a captive to a preface, I can’t do without a preface, I must have a preface.” —  
Witold Gombrowicz, *Ferdydurke* (trans. Borchardt)

## WHAT IS TRUTH?

There are things that happened during my time on High Street that I have left out of this book. Some of them I left out because they disturbed the arc of the story's line without contributing anything of value, either formally or substantively (imagine if Brancusi's bird had feet). I had innumerable failed affairs, spent innumerable hours scribbling about them, scribbling about my mental and emotional states, scribbling about how good an artist I thought I was and how frustratingly obdurate the marketplace could be, scribbling about my scribbling, and scribbling about how whatever binge it was I had just come off of was to be my last, I swore it. Other things I left out had to do with people I will not hurt by dragging them into this book. It's not their fault they knew me. And other things I left out because to write a memoir is not the same thing as to uncork and spew; if I would have you stroll High Street with me, gentle reader, from beginning to end, I must endeavor to offer you that which you may find most engaging along the way.

To say I changed all the names would be to tell a lie, but I changed most of them. To reveal which ones I changed would defeat the point. Some of the people I knew while I lived on High Street knew I was writing a book and asked me to change their names. This name-changing had a cascading effect, and soon nearly all the names had been changed.

A trick any writer will do well to turn is trimming the number of characters in the work. This is an application to literary craft of the philosophical principle known as Occam's Razor: "entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity" (*entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*). In fiction this is easy to do: you bring in only those characters you need. In memoir-writing it's not so easy. There you don't have "characters," you have

people. These people actually did things. The trick then is to include in the memoir only those people doing those things that are important to the illumination of the world you are seeking to present. If you have two separate messengers close in time and space, who only appear in the story to deliver their messages and leave, it may be acceptable given the work's other constraints of narrative and truth to combine their stories into that of one person. It's a small and harmless lie, no one need be the wiser. As for large and harmful lies of person or event, I believe I have avoided those. I have certainly tried.

Brancusi's bird needs no feet, but *High Street* is not that. It is a memoir with appurtenances, creative nonfiction, a tossed salad of seasonal greens, or a sausage. It is a story of what it was like to be in a certain place during a certain time: High Street, Albuquerque, New Mexico, around the turn of millennium.





*High Street*, Book 1 — Breaking and Entering

“All that we can do in the face of that ineluctable defeat called life is to try to understand it.” — Milan Kundera, *The Curtain*

April 30, 2000 — My house got broken into again, a couple of weeks ago. Unlike the previous two times, this time the fuckers got caught.

It was late on a Friday afternoon and I was driving home from work. I had just turned onto High Street from Lewis Avenue when I saw David, my neighbor who lives across the street, standing in his front yard. He was talking on his cell phone and pointing down Bell towards Broadway. I pulled up to my back gate on Bell and saw that my living room window was broken (again). A police cruiser was coming up Bell. David called out to me that the burglary had just happened and he had called 911.

I hurried inside to scope out the damage and secure any property I wouldn't want the police to be involved with. I'd been too high that week to want to deal with my laundry, so there was a big pile of clean laundry, including sheets and towels, on one of my living room chairs. I scooped it up in my arms and quickly dumped it on my marijuana garden in the front room, making sure nothing was showing and it looked like just a big pile of laundry on the floor.

The cop coming up Bell pulled up and parked by my back gate and got out. I went out to talk with him and David. The officer said the perps had been apprehended down at Broadway and César Chávez. It was three people, two men and a woman, who had been driving a big white car which David said he's seen several times in the 'hood. They may have been the same burglars who broke in in January. This time, one person, one of the men, waited in the car while the other man and the woman jumped the front fence, broke the side living room window, and came in in a big hurry, knocking things over and crushing things that were on the window sill (most of my Malibu Beach and Rockaway Beach seashells and a dried rose Owen gave me when he was a little boy). The perps went straight to the bedroom and stole my leather jackets, the bedroom lamp (they also took the matching lamp from the living room), a holiday canister containing leather keychains and belts my dad made, and the popsicle stick box Owen made for me

for Father's Day when he was a pre-schooler, and in which box I store quarters and dimes.

More cops arrived. All in all, six cops passed through my house that evening. There was the responding officer who took the initial report, a sergeant who dropped by to see that all was being done right, three plainclothes violent crimes detectives, and a field investigator who took photographs and dusted for fingerprints. She wasn't done till eight that evening. The violent crimes detectives took a recorded statement from me. One of them tried to trick me into responding to the name John, but I told him, "My name is Daniel and has never been John." He said, "One of the suspects we apprehended says he knows you and that your name is John and you owe him money." I told him that was ludicrous and untrue.

The whole time we were having this confab, I was sitting in my living room chair while they stood in front of me. Behind the chair is a window that opens onto the front room, affording the cops a clear view of that pile of laundry on the floor. The danger was so great but at the same time so remote, I wasn't frightened or even nervous, and whatever agitation I was showing was easily attributable to my home just having been broken into. It seemed to take forever for the cop who was dusting for fingerprints to finish. She was the last officer to leave. As soon as it was dark after she'd gone, I uprooted my marijuana garden and dumped the soil and the empty pots in the back yard, just in case the perps had seen my plants, recognized what they were, and snitched.

A few days later I got a call from the police substation, telling me I could come by and get my property back. I went and did that. Some things that were included in my property were not mine, most particularly two large folding knives. I was tempted to take them but thought there might be trouble if I did, so I told the property officer, "These are nice but they're not mine."

After three burglaries in less than two years, Tony the landlord has finally had enough of paying to have windows replaced. He was by yesterday and he and I spoke about security issues. He said he'll be seeing to it that chain-link fencing is installed to replace at least part of the rickety old fence which is clearly not completely useful when it comes to keeping the Bad Boys (and Girls) out.

I write this a decade later, almost to the day (May 1, 2010). I don't clearly remember everything about the aftermath of this burglary, specifically about the identities and fates of the burglars. The one who was the leader of the group was a man a few years older than the other two. He had a record. The other fellow, I don't remember anything more about him except that like the other two, he bargained a plea. The woman was in fact a teenaged girl with no adult record. She was from Farmington, an oil town a couple hundred miles northwest of Albuquerque, and as part of her plea deal she was remanded to the custody of her grandmother there.

There were reasons for the plea bargains the DA worked out with all three defendants. I don't know what they were, but several of the likely suspects are that there wasn't that much property involved and it was all recovered, there was no violent assault upon a person, only one of the three burglars had priors, they didn't put up any struggle when apprehended, and the DA and the courts were overwhelmed by more pressing matters, as they always are. And the only eyewitness, David from across the street, refused to testify. He made this intention very clear the evening of the burglary, when the plainclothes detectives and I spoke with him in his living room (while in my own living room, the uniformed field investigator dusted for fingerprints a scant ten feet from the pile of laundry on the front room floor). David said that while he was glad he'd been able to help apprehend the perpetrators, he was from East LA, had had a lot of trouble there with gangs, and was not going to put his home and family at risk by testifying against anyone. When the officers wrote up their reports, they wrote that he was living at my address.

A woman from Victims Assistance phoned me before the plea deals had been finalized, asked me if there was any outstanding restitution I should let the court know about. I told her I had got all my stuff back, but there was the matter of the broken window Tony had to replace. I gave her his number. From my point of view, that was the end of the case.

Three burglaries in less than two years. Items in my home I had to hide from the police. I hadn't grown up in a world where people's homes got broken into, or where the police could be a great danger. What was this High Street, and how had I gotten there?



*High Street*, Book 2 — How to Get to High Street

“A full apprehension of man’s condition would drive him insane.” — Ernest Becker,  
*The Denial of Death*



June, 2010 — Every city has a High Street, even if that's not its name on the map. Some cities have whole neighborhoods of High Streets. You can get lost in a place like that.

Albuquerque's real High Street is in one of the oldest parts of the city, Huning Highland, just east of downtown. The street extends about a mile south of Central Avenue (the old Route 66) through a neighborhood that had no separate name when Huning's Highland Addition was originally platted in 1880, but came to be known as South Broadway. From there High Street goes on for almost another mile further south through the San Jose neighborhood before it ends just shy of the San Jose Cemetery. North of Central, on its way in broken pieces scattered through several miles of residential, light industrial, and retail neighborhoods, it passes in its second block the house where Harry Gold, communist sympathizer and courier for theoretical physicist and atomic spy Klaus Fuchs, passed nuclear weapons secrets to David Greenglass, whose brother-in-law and former business partner was Julius Rosenberg. The house is clearly marked these days for tourists who seek the "Spy House."

Franz Huning was a prominent Albuquerque businessman in the late 19th century. He could see an opportunity when it was laying on the ground in front of him. He and two other local worthies (William Hazeldine and Elias Stover) saw that with the railroad having just come through, land near the railroad could be a promising investment. They bought a mess of it and had it platted by one Colonel Walter Marmon, who said he thought every city ought to have a Broadway, so he platted a broad way and named it accordingly. Street names in this new neighborhood—Albuquerque's first residential neighborhood—included Edith and Walter (Colonel Marmon's children), Arno (Franz Huning's son), Hazeldine (but no Stover, he got his on the other side of the tracks), Gold, Silver, Lead, Coal, and Iron (local mineral wealth), Santa Fe and Pacific (railroads that made so much possible), Cromwell (Oliver E., builder of a horse-drawn streetcar line), Garfield, (assassinated president), and Lewis and Bell (origins obscure). Messrs. Huning, et al., told the colonel to stop platting

eastward at High Street, as the town was not likely to grow any further east (they were wrong, though not immediately). In 1912, when New Mexico became a state, High Street was still the eastern edge of town; in 1928, Bell Avenue was the town's southern limit. In 1994, I moved into a house at the corner of High and Bell, by that time in the heart of the city.

The neighborhood that had come to be known as South Broadway was home to many African-Americans, a legacy of the railroad economy of the early (pre-Interstate highway) 20th century. The railroad was one of the few places a black man could find steady work, and in the early decades of the century about a third of the men in Albuquerque, of all colors, worked for the railroads. South Broadway had several Baptist and Gospel churches, one large Catholic church, and a variety of businesses mostly connected to transportation (first the railroads, then passenger automobiles and freight trucks). Shortly after the turn of the century, the chamber of commerce began advertising in newspapers Back East for tuberculars to come live in Albuquerque, where the climate and elevation were deemed ideal for people suffering from lung disorders. A lot of them came, some of them so sick they had to be carried off the trains on stretchers. South Broadway was the neighborhood where many of them settled, in little houses with screened-in porches where they could sit and "chase the cure." Some of the houses were little more than shacks, some of them so-called "tent houses" with canvas walls. It wasn't too long before pretty much everyone in Albuquerque had been exposed to TB.

By the time I got to High Street, South Broadway's days as a huge sanitarium were long past. Albuquerque had grown quickly and gotten big during and after the Second World War. There had been the postwar flight to the suburbs, where those who could afford to leave the inner city left and those who could not afford to leave stayed, while the old neighborhoods grew increasingly impoverished. The freeway, Interstate 25, came through in the late 1960's, winding its way through what the maps called the "Hope & Venable Addition," a small area of rough terrain that was still open immediately east of South Broadway. The freeway ran right behind my house (no noise wall) and was one of the reasons the rent was so low.

Every city has a High Street. Some cities have whole neighborhoods of High Streets. Some people carry their High Streets with them and live there wherever they go. Some of

what I'm going to tell you now is information that police, politicians, and other guardians of social order will probably not want you to have. I'm going to tell you things that I almost certainly had to break the law, and not just once, to find out. When looked at from a certain angle and at a squint, my life may resemble a continuing criminal enterprise. That I've meant no one any harm may be insufficient defense.

There are different kinds of junkies and there are different kinds of junk. One person might get hooked on heroin, another on meth, a third on alcohol. My jones is for Mary Jane. I might carelessly assume that everyone is familiar with marijuana, its slang terms and methods of use. Some of the slang I learned in my teens and may no longer be current.

While there is some scientific dispute over whether or not the cannabis plant is one species or two or three, marijuana generally refers to the hemp plant people smoke, known as *Cannabis indica* and/or *Cannabis sativa* among the scientific set and the smoking aficionados. It's commonly called pot, dope, grass, or weed, and has been for generations. It can also be referred to as Mary Jane, smoke, smokable, smokage, doobage, stuff, stash, ganja, mota, rope, bullshit—it just goes on and on. I've even heard it referred to as soap.

It is most often consumed by setting it on fire and inhaling its smoke. There's archeological and documentary evidence that people have been setting cannabis on fire and breathing its smoke for a very long time. Over the ages, effective ways of making and breathing this smoke have been developed. The invention of the cigarette was a boon to marijuana smokers, enabling the creation of the hand-rolled marijuana cigarette: the legendary joint or doobie or number. Marijuana can also easily be smoked from a pipe, which experienced users know to be less wasteful than a cigarette. Experienced users may not care. The marijuana has to be the right texture, though, to smoke well as a cigarette. If it's too dry it will get all crumbly and burn unevenly, causing what's known as a "run" to appear up one side of the joint, where the paper burns too fast. When that happens, the joint has to be re-rolled, or the hell with it, just get the pipe and empty the stuff into the bowl, smoke it that way. Marijuana that's been inadequately cleaned can also cause a joint to run, or it can be a minor hazard to clothing if part of a smoldering stem falls from the tip of a burning joint, or if a viable seed was left in the smokable and explodes with a little pop of sparks and embers that can ruin a new shirt. Seeds can explode in the bowls of pipes,

too, and they won't get you high, so it's best to clean them out of the dope. Plus, with viable seeds you can make your own dope.

As many people know, when you smoke a marijuana cigarette, you are "smoking a joint." I don't know why. No one seems to know why. It pleases me to believe that way back when marijuana was first being criminalized, back during The Jazz Age and Prohibition when white people began smoking it and other white people became afraid of it, someone who may not have been white coined the phrase "let's go smoke a joint" to fool uninitiated bystanders into thinking they were going off somewhere to prepare meat.

When your joint gets smoked down to its butt, that butt is commonly called a "roach." Again, no one knows why. Those little butts look something like little German cockroaches *sans* antennae and legs, so that may be it. The girl who introduced me to marijuana, or "turned me on" as it was referred to in those days, called the butts "turkeys," because they smelled a little like smoked turkey ("Smoke that joint!"), but I've never heard anyone else call them that.

To hold onto the joint while it's being smoked down to its little roachy butt, most smokers use a roachclip. Otherwise, you can burn your fingertips. Many different items can be used as roachclips, from paper clips to hemostats. Alligator clips are very popular. You can get fancy makes at head shops and flea markets; alligator clips with bead handles and feathers. I had one of those for a while back during the Reagan administration, found it in a parking lot. I also had a hollowed-out bullet that a friend gave me. It attached to my keychain and could be pulled off to function as a roachclip by means of a cleverly hidden spring mechanism. An airport security guard once took note of it, said, "What's that bullet on your keychain?" I wanted very much to respond, "Oh, that's no bullet, sir, it's a roachclip. See?" But I didn't. Then there are smoking stones. I had a couple of these around in the '80s and '90s and sometimes used them frequently. They're little ceramic disks, about as big in diameter as a crosscut slice of kiwi fruit, glazed and with a tapering hole through their middles along the long axis. You put the joint in one opening, wrap your lips around the other, light up and inhale. Take a hit (an inhalation of marijuana smoke, one puff or more, and hold it in as long as you can). Cop a buzz (you'll know it when it happens).

Once you have your roach, you can put it with your other roaches. For years I stashed my roaches in a plastic film canister that had pinholes punched in its cap and base to keep the roaches from getting moldy. Once you have enough roaches, you can roll them up into new joints. You can break them open or you can set them end to end in a fresh rolling paper and roll them up that way. If you're a dedicated marijuana smoker ("pot-head"), you'll probably want to include the more resin-stained portions of the roach paper in your recycling of the roach. You can break up your roaches and smoke them in a pipe. You may be tempted to smoke them in a pipe without breaking them up—you may think you are too stoned to care—but they don't burn well that way.

Some people smoke their marijuana out of pipes, which have their ups and downs. Joints tend to smolder, wasting some of their substance. This is not an issue if a joint is being smoked in a social circle of a half-dozen or so people who share it until it's gone, passing it from one to another so it's continually being smoked, no one holding onto it without passing it (called "bogarting," and yes, it's named after Humphrey Bogart, from the way he smokes his tobacco cigarettes in the movies) either because they're stoned and space out, or (more commonly) because they want to take a second hit. But social circles of a half-dozen serious smokers are uncommon past the undergraduate years. Most dedicated marijuana smokers do most of their smoking alone, and many of them use pipes. While pipes don't waste as much marijuana because they don't smolder the way joints do, they waste more matches or butane lighters to keep them relit, and constant hits of dope smoke mixed with burned butane can leave a smoker with a nasty headache. Pipes also need to be periodically cleaned. This is never fun and there is no way to make it fun. The closest I could get to making it fun was I would clean my pipes with a straightened paper clip, then wipe the clip clean on a rolling paper that I could roll a powerful joint with.

The worst kind of pipe is also the best, and that's the hookah. It's stylish, it has history, it gives a smooth smoke, but it is a bitch to clean. The bong is little better. My first marijuana pipe was a regular pipe like the kind a father might smoke in a 1950s television program, of the style known as "straight billiard." Its drawback was that it wasn't designed for marijuana smoking; its bowl was too big. Later I had various smaller pipes designed for marijuana. I learned to put them in the freezer so they would give a smoother smoke

before they warmed up. If I had two I could rotate them, freeze one while I used the other, then switch off.

I got most of my marijuana the way most people get it, I bought it on the black market at sometimes exorbitant cost. However, it was apparent very early in my smoking experience that marijuana was a plant that was often sold with its seeds included. When I first started buying it in bulk when I was in high school, buying one-ounce sandwich bags (“lids”) of it from other kids in high school, I would roll it up and smoke it all, exploding seeds and smoldering stems included. The summer after I graduated, I bought a copy of Lester Grinspoon’s *Marijuana Reconsidered* and studied on it. I learned that the seeds and stems probably wouldn’t get me very high, but it was still another year or more before I began cleaning my dope. Once I did, I soon had quite a little stash of seeds (over a quart—I smoked a lot in those days). My first few attempts at planting were not successful, but in early 1978, around the time the U.S. government was helping the Mexican government destroy the northern Mexican marijuana industry through the aerial spraying of the defoliant paraquat (which campaign cleared the way for the Colombian cartels to move into the market in a big way), I bought a copy of *The Marijuana Grower’s Guide* from a head shop in El Paso. I never read the whole thing, but I read enough of the crucial information to get started on my own domestic indoor dope growing enterprise.

There are high-tech, intense ways to grow marijuana indoors, hydroponically and with grow lamps and all that stuff. That never interested me. I had no intention of growing enough to sell; my intention was to farm for my own use a little of what is essentially a weed. While I continued to deal on the black market for decades, such dealings were always troublesome. To begin with, dope is illegal. If you want to buy it, you have to buy it from criminals, even though at the level of dealer, most of them are fairly nice people. They’re just as nice as you are, and you’re only a criminal because you smoke dope. But prices and availability can be problems. In 1977 in El Paso, fat lids of northern Mexican weed were available for ten dollars. By the summer of 1978, northern Mexican weed had been eradicated and all that was available was the Colombian stuff going for twenty to thirty dollars a lid. By early 1979, you could pay as much as fifty dollars, and nobody talked about where it came from anymore. By the mid-2000s, I was buying it in unweighed

baggies of potent weed that cost that same fifty dollars and was an acceptable price for the product, which was often grown in New Mexico.

Marijuana is not difficult to grow, once you get the hang of it. Again, it is a weed, and it will grow almost anywhere outdoors from the Arctic Circle to the Antarctic Circle, below the treeline and above the waterline. But of course, you don't grow it outdoors unless you're feeling very lucky, because it is illegal and you're not farming it for commercial distribution, and you don't want to go to prison. You grow it indoors. You can set up a nice little indoor operation, with the hydroponics and the grow lamps, but be careful—The Man is wise, and your unusual purchase of equipment or large use of water and electricity can draw unwanted attention. Or you can grow it on a small scale, for your own use and the occasional sharing with friends and loved ones, at no significant expense unless you get caught. How lucky do you feel?

Here is what you could do if you feel a little lucky: marijuana needs little more than fertile, well--drained soil, sufficient water, and sunshine; the more sunshine, the better (marijuana loves sunshine). In a six--inch pot, with patience and care, you can grow a plant that will eventually produce enough smokable weed to get you high every Friday and Saturday night and twice on Sundays. You start with a decent pot, like you would grow geraniums in, and a good--quality potting soil that you can get from any nursery or even from a hardware store or a Target or a Wal-Mart or that store that used to be K-Mart. Don't use soil from outside. God only knows what may be in it in this petrochemical age. You're growing something you're going to burn and apply directly to your lungs, so grow it in a decent pot and soil. Soil from the outside also contains red mites in some parts of the country. Red mites can devastate a garden. (While we're on the subject, the indoor, low---intensity, windowsill pot garden in the Southwestern United States has six known predators: the red mite, which you'll usually get only if you use the wrong soil; the white fly, which is small and can blow in through a window screen on a windy day and can also devastate a garden; the grasshopper, which can find your plants and decapitate them *tout de suite* if you set them on the back porch to catch a few extra rays; the housecat, which usually will leave marijuana alone, but if your cat ever takes a nibble it will keep coming back for more because you know how cats like to chew on a little grass to get their



roughage; the pot-head, which can be a serious threat to the indoor garden; and the cop, which can irreversibly wreck both the garden and the gardener.)

You fill your pot with your good-quality soil and wet it down. Then you can take a sharpened pencil—for many years I had a little stubby pencil I called my “planting pencil” and used only for this purpose—and poke a hole in the soil, pushing the pencil down until the line where the sharpened part ends and the paint begins is level with the soil. Pull the pencil out and drop two seeds into the hole. Both may germinate and that’s no problem, but often only one will germinate while the other will provide to the seedling a few extra crucial nutrients. Sometimes neither will germinate, so what you do when you do the initial planting is you poke five little holes in the soil, patterned like the pips on the 5-side of a gaming die. After you’ve dropped your seeds in these holes, you fill the holes with dirt, tamp it down a little with your hand, and set your pot in a south window if you have one and you’re in the Northern Hemisphere (if you don’t, an east or west window will do). You can try other patternings and quantities of seeds, but you don’t want to plant them any deeper than the length of the third phalange of your little finger.

Now you have your pot, or several pots, planted and placed where they can catch sunlight coming in through a south window. Water again the day after you plant, but probably not on the third day. Probably on the fourth, but maybe not on the fifth. What’s this about, this dance of the watering days? Marijuana seedlings are very susceptible to stem rot. The slightest overwatering when they’re babies can cause their stems to swell up right where they come out of the ground and kill them in a way you cannot prevent once the swelling has begun. Marijuana seedlings can tolerate underwatering a lot more than they can overwatering. Once they’re a few weeks old, you can start giving them more and more water and they will respond positively to it, especially if you mix in a little plant food. Mary Jane has a jones for nitrogen, but be careful you don’t overfeed.

The autumn is the best time to plant. The sun is lowering in the sky due to the change of seasons and plenty of direct sunlight will be coming in through that south window. Even in January and into the first half of February you’ll be getting good direct sun, then with the change of seasons less and less, making the indoor windowsill garden planted in March (again, in the Northern Hemisphere), paradoxically enough, flourish notably less than the one planted in September. If you have east and/or west windows to



go along with your south windows, you may want to move your plants around during the day to catch as much light as possible, but that may not be worth the effort and one would hope you have better things to do with your time.

If you can, plant on the new moon. This is ancient gardening wisdom. It does not take much light to incite photosynthesis in a plant, and your little seedlings will be coming up, if all goes well, right as the moon is welling up to full; the added light from the moon will give the seedlings a helpful bonus of photons. You may gaze down upon your seedlings when they first break ground and murmur, "Welcome to life." You will probably not say, "Later I'm going to cut you up, dry you out, and smoke you."

Your seedlings will probably get leggy. They'll shoot up pretty fast, seeking light, but their leaves won't grow as fast and big as they would if they were outdoor (or grow---lamp) plants, so often they'll get several inches tall and fall over. Not to worry, they'll be fine. If you have multiple seedlings come up at the same time in the same pot, you'll want to thin them as they begin to crowd each other, but be careful you don't damage the roots of the ones you want to keep by willy---nilly uprooting the ones you're thinning; you can thin by cutting the main stems of the plants you're removing right at ground level with a pair of scissors. The roots you leave behind will help fertilize the plants you leave behind.

Once your seedlings are up and your garden is going, you'll want to tend the plants in ways that will increase their yield while at the same time minimizing their visible presence. You don't want to be growing in the front room a marijuana tree that is visible from the street, or even from the front door. What you are doing is a crime, don't ever forget that. You are a nice person, you do your job, you take care of your family, you pay your taxes, you might even go to church and vote and write letters to your congressman, but you are a criminal and if you get caught, you are going to jail. You may even go to prison, so be discreet.

Clipping tops is key to indoor domestic windowsill marijuana gardening. What is this "clipping tops"? Every plant has a meristem, which is the part of the plant which is growing. The main one is called the apical meristem, it being at the apex of the plant. When the marijuana plant has grown tall enough to have two or three pairs of leaves, you take a little pair of scissors and you carefully snip off the top of the plant, just above the newest pair of leaves. You put this top in a place where it can safely dry (the plastic film

canister with the pinholes is useful for this). Soon enough, the plant will begin to grow two new meristems up out of the places where the newest pair of leaves are attached to the stem. These are secondary meristems. You repeat the process with them; you'll get tertiary meristems, quaternary meristems, and so forth.

There are several advantages to clipping tops. The meristems, also known as the growing tips, are the most potent part of the plant. They are far more potent than the so-called "fan leaves" that you don't clip. Not only are these fan leaves not very potent, they are the solar panels that power the production of the growing tips. Clipping tops also changes the silhouette of the plant, making it lower and bushier and more difficult for any busybody neighbors to see. Furthermore, clipping tops greatly reduces the number of large, easily recognizable five-or seven-or nine-bladed leaves your plant will have. Lastly, if you're investment-minded you may already have realized that every time you clip tops, you double the meristemic yield of your plant, doubling its most potent pre-flowering product.

Marijuana is an annual. While under the right and not always predictable and controllable conditions it will grow as a perennial, its average normal lifespan is about six months. It increases in potency as it grows. Eventually, it will begin to flower. It is a sexually sophisticated plant and under the right (generally adverse) conditions it can flower at the age of six weeks and be hermaphroditic, but usually your plant is going to be several months old and either male or female when it flowers. The females are more potent. It can be tricky to tell them from male plants before they flower, but their leaf blades are usually broader than the male plant's, and overlap a little at their broadest points. The leaf blades of the male plants won't touch each other. The male flowers are little yellow things that look like flowers, while the female flowers are little clumps that look like short, white threads. The plants reach their greatest potency right about the time the lowest flowers on the plant—the flowers develop on the meristems—begin to die and drop off if they're male, or set seed if they're female. This is the longest you'll want to wait before you harvest (unless you're growing for viable seed). Any longer and your plant will rapidly be losing its potency.

Whether you're thinning out seedlings, clipping tops, clipping larger stems to thin a plant, or harvesting the whole plant, you'll want your weed to dry if you're going to smoke

it. The best way is air-drying, which is also the worst way, not because the universe is inherently Taoist (it may be), but because it takes the longest time and you may not have the patience. If you do, you'll want to hang your plants or your larger clippings head down someplace safe and let all their juices drain down into their tips as they dry. There are faster ways to dry your smokable that you may find acceptable. You can mince it and leave it spread on a plate—again, in a safe place, away from breezes, pets, and children—but this is still pretty slow. You can put the plate of minced dope in the sun and it will dry pretty quickly. I had a small, black plastic tip tray from my days as a bartender and found it very handy for this. You can try heating it on the stovetop or in the oven or the microwave, but these methods can be tricky. You'll almost certainly find through trial and error how far you should not go when your microwave gets to smoke the plant it took you six months to grow.

However you dry it, you don't want to get it too dry. You don't want it to be too wet, either, because wet dope will grow mold and you don't want to smoke that, it can make you sick and the mold destroys the potency. But if you get it too dry, it's lost some of its volatile oils, smokes harsher, and crumbles into a fine powder that sometimes won't burn too well. If you find that your stash has gotten too dry, you can freshen it up by dropping a little piece—no bigger than your thumbnail—of orange peel in with it and waiting a day for the moisturizing to take effect.

There's a lot more that can be known about growing and harvesting and preparing and consuming marijuana. All of that other information is available in other places. It's far more available than it was over a third of a century ago when I began smoking, but this is not a user's manual—this is a story of High Street. When I was there, at its height my indoor garden was plants in sixteen pots of varying size that totalled about six or seven square feet of soil surface. They lived in my front room, a small room maybe four feet by seven feet, that had been the porch where I imagine a tubercular once sat chasing the cure. The porch had been enclosed and its southern and western walls were opened by large windows. It was sunny as all-get-out in there and the plants loved it. Growing marijuana gives off an odor that is vaguely grassy, vaguely skunky, not unpleasant, and unmistakable once you know what it is you're smelling. My usual way of coming and going at the High Street house was through the kitchen, at the other end of the house from where the plants

were; on a sunny late afternoon when I was arriving home from my job at the law office and the garden was thriving, I could smell the plants before I opened the kitchen door. Sometimes I had nightmares that the police were coming around, peering in the windows, sniffing at the door jambs.



*High Street*, Book 3 — Downhill Racing

“Unhealthy fantasies in a darkening room, resented sins.” — W. G. Sebald, *After Nature*

March 5, 1994 — I will smoke a cigarette and drink a cup of strong coffee, the way I like it. The cigarette is unfiltered, handrolled, Three Castles brand tobacco, the best I have found and if I were to wonder, it is printed right there upon the pouch: "The Best."

Someone just screamed outside, another lazy Saturday evening in the neighborhood.

Last night after supper I went back to the office, where I drafted demand letters to small or large innocent or guilty businesses which had the misfortune of receiving what is known in the bankruptcy business as preferential transfers, which means they have to give back money which was honestly owed and paid to them, giving it back—if my letters or my boss the attorney's lawsuits convince them or force them—for the benefit of the estate as a whole, which almost invariably means for the benefit of the secured creditors, who are almost always the people who need it least. After I was done I went to the midnight show at the Southwest Film Center, a 3-D showing of *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. I brought my 3-D glasses home, put them on the inflatable vinyl replica of the screamer from Edvard Munch's *The Scream* that I have standing by my bookcase. Hands up by its head, four feet tall or taller, I took the screamer one day last year to that law firm where I used to work, stood it beside my desk; may be one of the reasons why management asked me if I would please go find someplace else to work.

This morning I drove up to the West Mesa, up to the volcanoes, and sat in the sun near the top of my favorite volcano. The day was fairly clear, and I could see the Sangre de Cristos off by Santa Fe, and the San Mateos to the west, all dappled with snow. Down in the valley, blue and gray smoke rose from the fires farmers set this time of year to burn off their fields and prepare for spring planting.

Occasionally, a farmer neglects to check the local weather forecast prior to torching his back forty and will set his fire on a day when the winds kick up; not only will he then burn his own field, but those of his downwind neighbors, not to mention any telephone poles, small animals, and small towns that might stand in fertility's

path. Gives the volunteer fire departments a real workout, and the local news crews something exciting to do for an afternoon.

March 10, 1994 — I am at the office and it is a slack time while I wait for one of my bosses to show up with work for me to meet a deadline. I have other work to do but have worked overtime this week for which hours I do not get paid but get comp time, but we are seriously understaffed and like I'm really going to be able to take comp time, so I take it now while continuing to answer the phones. We just got a call wherein when I answered the usual answer of Something-and-So-Forth, Attorneys at Law, in my most melodious voice short of singing which is not so melodious after all except perhaps as violins out of tune or feral cats in heat or fingernails on boards of green and black, the voice on the other end of the line said, "Parts, please." And parts is all I have, a part of a minute here, a section of a second there, making the best of the time allotted me by whoever cuts and signs the allotment checks of time, I know it used to be three women fated to the task but have they been replaced by a computer geek with an— ("Something-and-So-Forth, could you please hold, could you please hold it right there, could you please hold it over here for a while, could you please hold on a ding-dang minute, could you please hold on tighter, could you please hang up now as I am trying to write?"). The caboose has been deleted from the train of my thought. Parts, please.

Overheard in the office this week: "How was your weekend?" "I won a hundred dollars at bingo Saturday night!" "Good for you!" "Then I went out and spent it all!" "Hubba-hubba!"

My mind is out of breath.

March 14, 1994 — Lunch break at the small law firm of Something and So-forth, Attorneys at Large. Office duties call. Window view, some brown air. Snow on mountains. Pretty. Tree branches naked, affording view of peaks. Strawberries for lunch. Telephone rang, snapping the twig of my reverie. Only ten minutes of my lunchtime left. Tonight, I think, I will come back to this place and work on my writing— goddamn phone. *Mein Gott im Himmel! Schweinhund telefon! Der ringink all der time ist maching mir crazy! Ja!* At the sound of the dong the time will be one pee em, mountain standard time. Time for me to get back to my



databases, my correspondences, my chapters eleven and preferential transfers, all the while furtively writing down everything my companions are saying, so that I may later change the names and call it fiction, change the words and call it art, change my life and call it saved.

June 14, 1994 — I'm just arrived at the office, it's just after eight o'clock in the morning and I'm so far the only one here and should be— ah, the fucking phone.

It was a call from Albuquerque's most despised, and by some, feared attorney. But she don't scare me. I'll bet I don't scare her, either, so it sounds like a fair deal all around.

There's a house a few blocks from mine where when I bicycled past it the other evening, there was a man standing in the front yard. He was a paunchy, average looking middle-aged man wearing a muscle shirt, though his muscles are well on their way to irreversible relaxation. He had a scrawny little dog in the yard with him, sniffing around and looking like it was looking for a place to piss or shit. He saw me and said to his dog, "Kill him." The dog had more interesting things to do and ignored him. So did I. Yesterday evening I cycled past that house again—it's a small neighborhood, bound on the east by the freeway, the west by Broadway, south by Stadium and north by Coal, so there is a fixed number of streets I can cycle on without having to cross major arteries—this house, I go by it again, and there are kids in the yard this time, playing or hanging out or something, and one of them says to me, "I'm going to kill you." (cf. Apple falling not far from tree, Physics 101.)

July, 2010 — Not long after this June 1994 bike ride came an encounter that got me to stop taking evening bike rides in South Broadway. I was northbound on Walter, right by Eugene Field Elementary School, when a grey pit bulldog charged me, barking and snarling and snapping at my pedaling legs like a devil--dog. I got out of there as fast as I could, the dog right behind me for a long half--block while from further back I could hear women's voices calling to it. It dropped back and I went on for another block to an empty lot where I thought I might be able to find a stick, and I did. It was a two--- or---three--foot length of an old, splintered two-by-four. I picked it up and cycled back to where the dog had been. At an old, ramshackle, beat--up blue and white house catercorner across from the schoolyard, three women who looked to be in their twenties or thirties sat on the steps of the front porch, smoking cigarettes and drinking iced drinks from glasses of the kind you might get in a fast--food restaurant promotion. They were laughing and smiling and talking with each other.

"You lookin' for that dog?" one of them called as I rode slowly by.

"Not much," I said, and circled round in the street to a stop in front of them.

"Oh, that dog ain't gonna hurt you," another one of them said. "You don't hafta be scared of it."

"It comes after me again, I'm gonna scare it upside its head," I said.

"Hey, you got a girlfriend?" the third one said. "I bet you ain't got a girlfriend."

"Yeah, I got a girlfriend," I said, and I pedaled off toward home, that old, splintered stick crosswise on my handlebars. The next evening, I held across the handlebars a shillelagh I had made from an olive branch the year before, and I cycled around in my new neighborhood, not enjoying the ride. I got home and thought, Fuck this—this is fucking ridiculous. I didn't cycle again for a while, and never again in the evening.

I never saw that dog again, either, that I know of, but stray and loose dogs ran around South Broadway all the time, particularly during the first few years I lived there.

Packs of up to a half-dozen dogs ran down the streets and up the alleys and across the yards—big dogs, pit bulls and big chows, labs and beagles and all sorts of mixed-breed hounds and terriers—howling and growling and barking and yapping and humping each other and tearing into garbage bags and pissing and shitting with abandon.

Summer, 1994 – There’s a paving rig on the freeway just back of my house. The windows rattle to the dull bass note pounded out by the machine. The driver leans out from under his bleached orange parasol, watching his work. I watch him through the kitchen window. His white hard-hat reflects the pummeling July sun. I go outside and sit on an old, battered bench in the diminishing shade cast by a cottonwood tree. The paving rig paves. I smoke dope out of a small pipe. Hungry orange grubs eat the tree’s leaves. The grubs are the definition of voracious. They leave the leaves a dying latticework above a drizzle of dark-green droppings softly falling onto my shirt, into the hair on my head, onto the hairs of my arms, onto the skin of my fingers, into the bowl of my pipe and into the cat’s water bowl by the bench, where the droppings expand like some novelty purchased for pennies from the back of an old comic book. The hard-hatted driver shuts his paving rig down for lunch. I finish smoking my bowl. The day is hot and now very quiet.

October 6, 1994 — I'm at work and it is about ten minutes before eight in the a.m. The balloons of the fiesta rise into distant sky and I see said balloons out my cubicle window, said balloons rising in their charm and magic into sky lighted by slanting and sidelighting rays of morning sun.

I'm working on what we call the Guaranteed Equities case, which is a sort of interesting mess that I've been working on for the past year. Which of the fifty states of our union is the state wherein one can cash a check for a quarter-million dollars at a truck stop?

Now it's almost five-thirty and almost everyone has left the office. That Guaranteed Equities thing doesn't seem so interesting after working on it all day, but the answer to the truck stop question is, "New Jersey." Guaranteed Equities was a real estate scam on a fairly large scale that took place here in the Land of Enchantment over ten years ago. It was a Ponzi scheme, and when the bottom fell out most of the money was gone, three people were headed to prison, another had disappeared, and hundreds of rather stupid, or shall we say trusting, people had been bilked out of most of the money they had saved over the spans of their lives. We're wrapping up the loose ends but after most of the money was stolen and a chunk of the rest went to attorneys—and some will say there's no difference, but I tell you, this has been a real mess—a few of the people, maybe a few hundred, will recover about six cents on the dollar. Organized crime was involved—but if anyone asks, I didn't say nothin' and I don't know nothin' and I'm just a secretary who likes to get stoned and eat Snickers bars and tell wild stories that ain't nothin' but bullshit —and when the main crook down here got in dutch with the boys back east, he drove up to NJ and cashed checks for a quarter-million at a truck stop, giving the money to a few people who included at least one fellow who had once rented a car that was later found abandoned with a body in its trunk. That main crook is set to get out of prison soon but he's probably safer there than he will be on the outside. It's all very exciting and tragic.

July, 2010 — I was stoned when my boss took me one morning or afternoon in 1993 to meet with the Bankruptcy Trustee for the first time and go over the Guaranteed Equities matter, give me my instructions. In my altered state, I silently struggled to retain enough of what I was being told so that I might return to the office and do my job, which was to track down the surviving widows and pensioners. Once I'd nailed down how many of them there were and had accurate mailing addresses for them, the Trustee could divvy up whatever spare change was left stuck to the bottom of the barrel in the dregs of what had turned out to be worthless real estate "investments."

This was all part of the Savings & Loan collapse or bailout or looting that took place in the 1980s and early 1990s, after the Congress had thrown open the vaults to the home loan associations and told the real-estate speculators, "Come on in, boys, look at all the money lying around here, let's everybody get rich." The ensuing collapse did not seem to teach any lessons to anyone in the Congress, as they went on to repeal the Glass-Steagall Act in 1999, throwing open the vaults to all the banks and leading to a real-estate-based speculative bubble that when it collapsed, threatened to bring down the entire global economy. While the final cost of the Savings & Loan Bailout was about a half-a-trillion dollars, the final cost of the 2008 Economic Meltdown may never be known; estimates vary over a great range, anywhere from ten to one hundred times as great as the Savings & Loan fiasco. On the other hand, if you believe that the value of worthless securities is zero, then no money was lost and we can all carry on with the farming and fucking and fabricating that have made us one of planet Earth's dominant species (though our development has about it the quality of a biological speculative bubble).

In the interests of full disclosure, the Savings & Loan Bailout kept me employed for several years in the 1990s. In the interests of further disclosure, the Court of Appeals of California handed down a decision in 1984 in *The People v. Darrell M. Schock* (*People v.*

Schock (1984) 152 Cal.App.3d 379 [199 Cal.Rptr. 327]); the following excerpts from that decision may throw more light on the matter at hand:

“In this appeal we consider the novel issue whether a fractional interest in a promissory note and related deed of trust constitutes a nonexempt ‘security’ within the meaning of the Corporate Securities Law of 1968, as amended.

“Defendants were charged with a number of violations of section 25110 (unlawful sale of unqualified security) and section 25401 (false statement in a security transaction) of the Corporate Securities Law arising out of their operation of a mortgage loan brokerage company. Following a preliminary hearing submitted on the basis of stipulated facts and documentary exhibits, the magistrate dismissed all but seven of the forty--nine counts of the felony complaint on the grounds that defendants’ activities did not involve securities within the meaning of the Corporate Securities Law. The People now appeal the denial of their motion to compel reinstatement of the complaint.

“The facts as stipulated on appeal reflect the following: Golden State Home Loans (hereafter GSHL), a California corporation, is a mortgage brokerage company partly owned by defendant Schock, its president, and employing codefendants Webster Van Blaricom and Robert Malone. GSHL’s principal revenue was derived from brokerage fees and commissions charged to borrowers on loan transactions involving numerous lenders solicited generally through newspaper advertisements. Upon approval of loan applications, GSHL would offer the solicited lender a fixed rate of return until the loan repayment was due, secured by a deed of trust on the borrower’s real property.

“The transactions underlying the criminal charges involved loans to borrowers funded by many different lenders. Each lender who invested funds was given a ‘trust deed deposit’ receipt reflecting the amount of money deposited with GSHL and the proportion of the total loan. When sufficient money was accumulated by GSHL to fund an approved loan, the funds were disbursed to the borrower in one of two ways: (1) the borrower would execute a promissory note and deed of trust in favor of the various lenders reflecting their proportionate undivided interests; or (2) the borrower would execute a promissory note in favor of Guarantee Equity Financial (hereafter GEF)—a separate corporation also partly owned by defendant Schock—naming GEF as beneficiary of the deed of trust; GEF would then endorse the note and assign the deed of trust to the various lenders in a manner

reflecting their proportionate undivided interests. Guaranteed Equities, Inc. (hereafter GEI)—another corporation owned by defendant Schock—was named as trustee in all the deeds of trust.

“Simultaneously, each lender entered into a loan servicing agreement with GSHL appointing Security National Bank to collect loan payments for distribution to the lenders, authorizing GEI to advance payments—subject to reimbursement—to lenders on delinquent loan installments and to bid the unpaid loan balance at any foreclosure sale in the event of default.

“The question on appeal is whether the instruments used in the GSHL loan transactions constitute securities. We conclude that the instruments used do fall within the statutory definition of securities and are not exempt from regulation.”

But by then for the people bilked, most of them retirees, it was too late.



October 24, 1994 — Amazing, the modern fiber-optic phone lines. Stephanie called from a typhoon-stricken Philippines the other night, and it sounded like she was calling from the house next door. She's off to the other side of the world to honeymoon with Terry, her husband of the past four months, and Owen is staying with me. He's right now in his room, a walled-in former porch at the front end of the house, while I and my desk and my papers and my typer are in the room adjacent to the kitchen, at the back end of the house and about forty feet from Owen, whose teacher told me today, "He is off the charts in some respects." In others, just an ordinary kid, spawn of an ordinary man who is overworked, underpaid, in debt, and mismanaging his time. I spent a great amount of that time stoned this past summer. Felt good, glad it's over (which is the lie I usually tell myself when I come out of a binge).

Why is it we men are such shits? Why is it we don't want what we have, and never have what we want? Why is it so hard to desire desirelessness? Why is it I can't stop eating at the pistachios in the bag here next to the typer? Should I put them away? no... not yet.... ...okay...okay...mmm ..... okay, enough. Enough—I must put them away. I am already several pounds out of shape. Seduced by nuts, and not for the first time. Why are pistachios legal, and marijuana isn't? Is it because marijuana makes people want pistachios, but pistachios don't make people want marijuana?

Owen just came in and told me he's ready for me to fix his dinner, please, so I will go and do that.

February 20, 1995 — Just a few moments ago I was sitting in the front room, listening to the radio and looking at the light where it comes in through the window and shines on the curtains and walls, and looking out the window at birds on wires and branches outside. Little finches, now I hear one pecking on the roof, perhaps going after some insect that had the temerity to clamber into the feeding zone. These birds, survivors of the dinosaurs, they don't seem so dumb even though their

foreheads aren't as high as ours. They make me think of us humans as classic examples of that which is too smart for its own good.

On the sill of the window there are three tin soldiers, the survivors of a squad of eight I was given at Christmas when I was fourteen. What's become of the other five I can't say; they've become broken or lost along the way as will happen to things when they are mixed with time and life. The survivors now stand guard on the sill of the window in the room where Owen sleeps and plays when he comes to stay. He went back to his mother just this morning. I had a terrific flu this past week while he was here. It's disconcerting to be that ill while living alone and having a child to care for. But Owen is seven now, and was about as helpful as a seven year-old could be expected to be, bringing me blankets, water and juice when I asked, and even loaning me a stuffed animal to sleep with when I was at my worst. I didn't have to ask for that one, it was his offer. He took that animal back as soon as I seemed to be doing better. This season's flu seems to have been particularly virulent. One of my co-workers has a son who had to be hospitalized for it, but he is out and fine now.

July, 2010 — That February 1995 flu hit me on a Saturday morning. Owen and I were set to go downtown to the Main Library, where he could look at books in the Children's Room while I sat at a table there and read whatever I had brought along to read, always having reading to try to keep up with. He and I went out to my car, a beat-up old yellow Toyota sedan that I parked alongside the back gate in such a way that if I should have trouble starting it, I could roll-start it down Bell Avenue, which sloped gently downhill to Broadway a few blocks to the west. A block before Broadway was Arno; between Arno and Broadway, on the south side of Bell, was Stadium Liquors. This was a few years before drive-through liquor windows were outlawed in New Mexico; Stadium Liquors had one, and it was always busy. On Friday evenings, after people got off from work and headed home, traffic on that block of Bell would be so heavy with people going to and coming from Stadium Liquors and waiting in a line of cars to use the drive-through window, the street was all but impassable. Traffic there would be pretty heavy on Saturdays, too, all day long and starting fairly early.

This particular Saturday morning, as Owen and I got in the car and I started it up and looked down Bell towards Broadway while the engine warmed up, I could see that traffic around the liquor store was moderately heavy. I put the car in gear and started down Bell. My intuition told me something else was going on down by the liquor store but I ignored that intuition, an ignorance I later took to be the first sign I was coming down with something. Instead of taking an alternate route, I decided to go all the way down Bell to Broadway. We were just past the intersection of Arno and Bell, caught in a small clot of traffic and unable for a few seconds to move, when there was a confrontation in front of us between two men. One I clearly remember was an African-American in a blue windbreaker, while the other I don't remember so well except that he was wearing a red jacket and I believe he was also African-American. They were moving among the cars on the street, shouting and pointing pistols at each other. The man in the blue windbreaker

held out at arm's length what looked like a 9-mm semi-automatic, pointing it at the other man and screaming. I couldn't see the other man so well and don't remember what kind of pistol he was pointing as he shouted back at the first man. We couldn't move. We were stuck in traffic, liquor-store traffic, an armed man on either side of us. For what has so far proven to be the only time in my life, I felt my legs go weak in a deep, hopeless, powerless panic. It couldn't have been more than five seconds before traffic moved enough for us to get by, but it was a very long time.

We left the armed angry men shouting in the street behind us and went to the library, where within two hours the flu had come upon me so quickly and powerfully, I got up from my table, found Owen sitting on the carpeted floor between two stacks, picture book open in his lap, and told him, "I'm sorry, son, I'm feeling sick and we have to go home now." Morbidly curious and probably too sick to think straight, I drove back past Stadium Liquors though there were a dozen other routes I could have taken. Traffic was not so bad now and the armed angry men were gone. There were no police or ambulances around, so it seemed likely no one had been shot there that morning. Just before we reached the intersection of Bell and Arno, nausea overcame me and I quickly pulled the car to the curb, stopped, opened the door and without having time to unbuckle my seat belt and shoulder harness, bent over and threw up into the street.

March 19, 1995 — Owen and I went out today and knocked a baseball around for a couple hours at Johnson Field. Great fun. Nothing like swatting a baseball as far as one can. He just asked me a question about supernovae. He's much brighter than I was at his age. Big for his age, too. Got to give him a bath real soon. He goes back to his mother and stepfather tomorrow morning, then I will see him again in a few weeks' time. He's at a helpful age, though it helps I try to compensate him with cash. My yard is besieged by weeds. He helps me dig them out. So many weeds, I dreamed of them last night.

Two weeks ago there was a terrific gun battle on the freeway right behind my house. It was a Sunday night, close to ten o'clock, and I was getting my stuff together so I'd be able to catch the morning puddle-jumper down to Hobbs for the work I've been doing there, when I noticed I was hearing the sorts of police sirens I would associate with a hot pursuit. It sounded like they were drawing closer, like someone was being chased down the freeway. I started to get up and go to the kitchen window to see the show go by, but heard several gunshots mixed in with the sirens and thought better of it. Next thing I know, there was a burst of gunfire like I have never heard before, very close to my house. I quickly dropped to the dining room floor, flat on my belly. The gunfire went on and on, dozens of shots. I thought it would never end, though it probably only lasted thirty seconds or so. Meanwhile, it sounded like there was a whole pack of police cars, all their sirens going, up on the freeway. Their flashing lights were making it look like Christmas in hell out there. Once I was confident the shooting had stopped, I got up, but I stayed away from the windows. No bullets hit my house, and there was no more gunfire. The freeway was still closed when I went to the airport the next morning.

July, 2010 — Edward, my boss, called me into his office one morning in April of 1995 not long after I returned from one of my frequent trips to Hobbs, down in the southeast corner of the state where I had been working on document review in a large involuntary bankruptcy case involving a meat-processing plant that had lost the ability to turn a profit or service its debt. Our client, a bank, had local counsel down in Hobbs, a fellow named Parker Evans, but we had been called in to do the dirty work. Closing the plant, which was owned by a family with political clout, would throw dozens of people out of work and the economic repercussions would ripple out across the whole community. Parker said, “I have to live in this town, so you can consider me as having a conflict of interest.” What he did for us was make arrangements for the apartment we stayed in when we were there. The arrangements included maid service, which I didn’t know about until I came by the apartment one day at lunch to take a marijuana break. I opened the door to the sound of a vacuum cleaner running somewhere inside the apartment. A baby sat in a portable crib by the living room wall. My stash was in a crumpled brown paper bag on the dining room table. The bag was closed, but beside it was an ashtray holding cigarette butts, ashes, and a few stems and seeds. A woman was vacuuming the bedroom carpet. She saw me, looked surprised, and turned off the vacuum cleaner. I may have looked surprised myself. I said, “Who are you and what are you doing here?”

Her eyes widened and now she looked frightened.

“I’m cleaning,” she said. “Mr. Evans hired me to clean. He gave me a key. Didn’t he tell you?”

“No,” I said. “Nobody told me anything about this.”

Jason, a young attorney I worked with back in Albuquerque, had told me something, though. He and I were swapping weeks on the Hobbs duty, him going down to do

attorney work on the documents I had pulled. He had telephoned me at the office one Monday morning not long before this.

“Did you have some kind of party down here?” he said.

“No,” I said. “What’s going on?”

“This place is a mess. There’s empty potato chip bags lying around, wet towels in the bathroom, and the bed’s not made.”

“I made that bed before I left,” I said. “And I didn’t leave any wet towels anywhere, nor any empty bags of chips.”

Jason talked with Edward and Collins, the two partners who ran the firm, on the speaker phone in Edward’s office; when they were finished, Edward came out and said, “Sounds like someone had a good time in our apartment over the weekend. I’ll call Parker and see what he knows about it.”

Edward neither looked nor sounded upset by Jason’s report, and neither did Collins, who said, “It was probably Parker himself, and one or two of his pool—girls. What do you expect from a man who never takes off his shades?”

While it was a safe bet Parker took off his sunglasses when he slept, the few times I had seen him, he had them on, indoors and out. What happened in our apartment that one weekend, I never found out. My work in Hobbs was almost done. I had enjoyed it as much as I could. Once I discovered, on my first flight down there, that the little regional carrier I was flying did no pre—boarding luggage or security checks, I began carrying my stash and works. The apartment had one window, in its living room, and its door opened onto an interior hall. I would stuff a towel under the door, open the window, and smoke two or three joints in the morning before I went to work, smoke two or three more in the evening after I came back, and if there was time at lunch, I’d come by and smoke one or two. Being terrifically stoned made the work that much more interesting. Not that it was too terribly boring. There were accounts with interesting names set up to do business in an interesting fashion with a Texas factor engaged to exchange receivables for cash to keep the plant open. It all seemed perfectly legitimate, if somewhat desperate, as the factor appeared to be positioning himself to try and take over the plant should its business model fail. It was the business model of the crashing airplane. Then there were the pages and pages of Process Deficiency Reports written by USDA inspectors. Reading these would make it seem the

plant was always on the brink of biological catastrophe, which it may have been. There were countless instances of machinery being insufficiently cleaned and refrigeration being inadequately cold. There were reports of pools of standing stagnant water on concrete floors that were supposed to be dry; of employee washrooms with no soap in the dispensers; of meat being dropped and picked up and returned to the processing line by workers who thought that this time the inspectors weren't watching; and my favorite, an instance where a woman on the processing line got angry at the man working next to her and walloped him upside the head with a big slab of beef. Two of the three most trenchant things I learned from my Hobbs work were that, one, it was deucedly difficult to run that plant at a profit and, two, there was much one could learn about how processed meat products were made that could spoil one's appetite for them.

The third was that I was busted. Edward called me into his office.

"Close the door," he said. I did. He didn't invite me to sit. He had been a captain in the air force, flying tactical strikes in F-4 Phantoms during the Vietnam War.

"Parker phoned me this morning, told me the maid found a baggie of marijuana under the mattress in the bedroom of the apartment. You didn't leave your baggie of marijuana behind, did you?"

I felt my cheeks flush.

"No, I didn't leave—no, I don't know what's going on, I didn't put any marijuana under the mattress. I don't know what he's talking about."

"I didn't think it was yours," Edward said. "I told Parker you didn't seem the type who would lose track of his marijuana. It was probably him or one of his party animals." Edward waited a moment, then said, "Okay, that's all."

It had not escaped my notice—in fact, I noticed it immediately—that Edward had not asked me the two hard questions: "Did you take marijuana with you to Hobbs? Were you smoking marijuana in Hobbs?"

When Jason heard about Parker's call, he was upset.

"I was sleeping on a baggie of marijuana? I was sleeping on a baggie of marijuana!"

"It didn't wake you up," Collins said, "so I guess that means you're not a princess after all."



“Very funny,” Jason said. “I could have got busted. The firm could have got busted. There’s people down there who hate us. The windows to our office down there have already been shot out once.”

“It was only one bullet hole in one window,” Collins said.

“Our work down there is almost done,” Edward said. In truth, mine was completely done, and they never sent me back. The meat-processing plant closed down for a little while until new investors could be found, who opened it back up, believing they might be able to turn a profit.

may 28, 1995 — consider a man who breaks his thumb, decides that the shift key is out for the duration, and comes to enjoy the democracy of the minuscule; the way the lack of caps forces more concentration on how the words and their parts relate to each other and to the whole.

whether or not you enjoy the democracy of the minuscule, if you bend forward and get your face right up against the screen of a laptop computer, what you will see is as though you were looking into a space filled with criss-crossing lines and fields of light, all in soft whites, blues and yellows; a space soothing and waiting to be entered into, like the soothing inner space of being high. a few weeks back, i smoked some dope and figured, what the hell... what the hell, now i'm strung out on dope again. why is it we americans have such a predilection for the fallacy of misplaced intrinsic value, mistaking quantity for quality? i think about this every time i go on a binge.

summer, 1995 – i fall into the crazies now and then. then and again. again and again the crazies a chasm beside me, a yawning thing. a virtual construct, definite reality. an appetite, a vacuum, a wallow for the wallowing in. even after washing off, the dirt seems ground into my skin. crazy dirt. crazy, crazy dirt.

july 4, 1995 — ka-boom (a small, paper-and-ink firecracker). i was about to pay some bills and such, but excuse me, the bills can wait, i have a cockroach to kill—something so black on the outside, so white on the inside. it ain't no cookie, cookie!

coffee brews. i haven't been doing drugs lately, at least not any of the real ones. just coffee and tobacco. had another marijuana binge in may, lasted a week or two or three or into june somewhere, cost me, i don't know, a few hundred dollars, plus dignity and self-respect, the common casualties.

spiders, spiders, everywhere. as far as i can tell, a company the little bastards hatched in my swamp cooler, so when i turn it on, i get little eight-legged paratroopers floating in my—whatever that roo

well, that was no little paratrooper that just crawled across my neck. that was a jump out of my chair and cry 'jesus' while the laptop computer lands on the floor kind of a mother ship of a spider. it is dead now. the computer, obviously, takes a licking and keeps on ticking. as for the little spiders, since last night i've killed about two dozen of them in what would be my dining room if i dined there. these days i write there, and was so doing when the last wave of invaders came. i killed three of them and decided to take a break and write in a comfy living room chair where, as it turns out, the grown-up arachnids can just speed racer right across me. my, my. every little tickle has me on edge.

owen is outside eating some sort of ice cream cone he got from one of those ice cream trucks that cruise neighborhoods, playing bad music too loud and looking like a sleazy and depressing way to try and earn a living. i won't let him inside with the stuff. he is, after all, seven years old, and is even as i write trying to bring the thing inside, where the gravity always leads directly to the carpet.

autumn, 1995 – distant whistle of the midnight freight pulling into the rail yards downtown. burring rumbled whirr of freeway traffic passing endlessly behind the house. murmuring voices of neighbors home from the show and not yet drunk. muffled clink of the spoon against the bottom of an ice cream bowl. a cough from somewhere outside. a cricket from somewhere inside. the ticking clock on the bookshelf.

January 12, 1996 — Were I hungry, I would eat. Were I thirsty, I would drink. But I am neither hungry nor thirsty, and Jesus, it was a horrible day at work today. The boss's secretary says not to worry, I won't be fired for it, but I do feel I've reached my level of incompetence.

Tony the landlord is going to have new windows installed in this house. I'll believe it when I see it, but I'm supposed to be able to start seeing it in about three weeks. He's planning on having the place stuccoed in March. That's the ticket! Old, decrepit shack? Spray it with concrete and paint it the color of mud! I said, Good, it's probably help with the insulation, too. We shall see. A nice layer of Kevlar under the stucco may be in order. There's an awful lot of gunfire around here late at night, particularly on weekends. Gunfire two or three times a week.

This place is a mess. When I'm on a binge, I don't hardly deal with anything, and the binge I started in August and rode until last week was one of the worst.

Winter, 1996 – My name's the quarter-a-day habit and I'm not much fun to live with. I don't pick up after myself, do the dishes, empty the trash, clean the house, or put the clothes away. Or make the bed, clean the toilet, wash the car, or rake the yard. It should go without saying, but in case it doesn't, *I don't do windows*. I'm a lazy little bitch, really bad with money and a terrible waster of time, but I'm a great fuck. If you're into my kind of fuck. Which you will be if we do.

March 10, 1996 — I hear a sparrow building a nest in the rafters, under the south eaves. I have just come in from reading on the bench under the bare-branch tree, my sneakered feet on the yellow lawn. I finished reading the Bible, King James Version, finally, after having slogged through it for many months.

Did the condensed version of vacuuming today. But just last month, I engaged in a major housecleaning. Tony had new windows put in and had the house stuccoed, just as he said he would. With all the stuff that had to be moved, and all the dust that was raised, I took the opportunity to do heavy cleaning and rearranging. My studio, in particular, is a much more agreeable place to work in now.

Time to make more coffee. Good God, I'm going to be thirty-eight. There's a fair amount of grey in my beard. In a dim light, I look a good ten years younger than I am. In a strong light, five. It's a blessing and a curse. A woman who was probably twenty-one or so was flirting with me at an opening Friday night. It was a real sexual thing. I couldn't do it, though, couldn't see it through.

June 10, 1996 — I got high at lunch today, when I went home to drop off some work and smoke some dope. Those tasks accomplished, I returned to my office, where I have sequestered myself to write, and eat lunch (butter lettuce salad with 'shrooms, mandarins, chicken and cucumbers, all under French auspices). Edward the boss just walked by my closed door. Things have been slow. We're a bankruptcy firm and everybody's getting rich on Wall Street these days.

I've been smoking pretty steadily since Saint Patty's Day. It's been expensive. Suppose it will have to end soon. Rose-colored glasses, I just don't see all the things that need to be done. But that's the point.

By the beginning of April I was pretty much ready to go out and see if I could find me maybe some nice girl to fuck, and I did, right off. Her name is Tracy. She's almost as tall as I am, and as heavy, and is four years older. She's one of those crazy women my old friend Trudy warned me about. Let's see, Trudy warned me off



married, recently divorced, hung up on an ex, and crazy—four categories of no-nos—but I told her, Trudy, that's all there is, at least in my age group. And married doesn't look so bad, what with how crazy so many married women are with unmet desires and unfulfilled needs.

The damnedest thing is going on on my laptop computer, right here and right now. I've been hanging outside a lot lately with this thing, seeing's how portable it is, and it seems a tiny insect has worked its way into the lattice overlaying the liquid crystal display. Now it's crawling around just under the "p" in "dope." What a trip—this computer really does have a bug.

So, my girlfriend is crazy, but she's not real crazy, and she's not evidently dangerous. She's a bit of an artist, a graphic designer and a painter, but mostly she's a middle-aged local girl, aging hippie and mountain woman, never married and presently unemployed. We met at the Dingo Bar on Easter Sunday. I was stoned and had come down to watch a klezmer band from New Orleans. Tracy was with—it was either Helen or Tina, I don't have them all straightened out yet—and they were sitting at a table near the dancefloor, getting drunk. I was sitting on a barstool at the bar. Tracy looked around the room, caught my eye, and raised her eyebrows and cocked her head toward the dancefloor. I shook my head, demurred, played shy, was hard to get, looked at Tracy—a handsome woman, not pretty—looked at Tracy some more—sufficiently enticing figure—and decided what the heck, I'm tired of being alone. She didn't take me home that night—said she'd been around too long for that anymore and preferred her bathroom fixtures to sex with strangers and anyway, I was too young. I said, "I'm thirty-seven," and she said, "You're just a puppy." We started dating, got along well, and once she was sure I was sufficiently safe, we commenced to fucking. I think she's already grown too fond of me. It's a shame we can't have sex and be close without running the danger of all that love stuff being dragged into it.

I just went around and showed everybody in the office the bug that's crawling around in this computer's video display. Some of my co-workers looked at me like they thought I was crazy. One asked if it went away when I closed the program.

"No," I said, "it lives here now."

"What does it eat?" she said.

"Photons or it's going to starve," I said.

I could use some more dope. It's only two-thirty. At some point I'm going to have to do some work. I love this job. It doesn't pay much, but it doesn't demand one whole hell of a lot, either. And Edward and Collins show no curiosity as regards the composition of my pee. Sounds like my kind of love affair. As you giveth, so you receiveth. Trudy and I were talking on the long-distance lines the other night, I was telling her about Tracy. She asked if I am ready to fall in love. I told her I'd rather stub my toe. I'd rather sober up and get some writing done. Other things, too. Trudy stopped smoking when she was about my age. That would be about five years ago now. I think of her and that when I think of the troubles I have. But when I'm high on a bright, still Sunday morning, sunlight slanting into my studio—or my fave, me sitting on the bench under the cottonwood in the evening, cup of creamed coffee at hand, smoldering umpteenth joint in hand, laptop computer collecting tiny arthropods on my lap—when I'm in those moments, I receive a joy and peace I don't get anywhere else.

The office manager just buzzed me and said that my assistance is needed in the courier department (the courier department, a charming young woman, having gone home sick for the day), so I'm off to totter around the downtown, ignoring the homeless drug addicts who, by the grace of God, go their ways in my stead. A week or two ago the courier department was sick—she's also the reception department and the photocopying department and the shit-work-rolls-downhill department—so I was off on runs, which are actually walks since we moved last year to downtown where all the courts are. These courts are more heavily guarded than they were before the Oklahoma City bombing. There were a couple city cops on the corner in front of the Bankruptcy Court on this day, and a blind woman, tap-tap-tapping with her white cane, crossed the street to where they were. Stopping there, she asked them the way to Central Avenue. One of the cops raised his arm, pointed, and said, "It's that way."

Summer, 1996 – Where am I in a world that goes only round and round under night-time helicopters, every next-door dog at bark, hand claps just outside the bathroom window, sounds of pistol fire from two-three blocks away. Another helicopter flies over. September's nights are too warm. Spiders climb the walls. Neighbor-boys play basketball and laugh, laughing and playing in a world that goes only round and round.

October 3, 1996 — Tracy and I have broken up, reasonably amicably. We had been together six months and while we had some good times, I just was not going to feel for her the things she wanted, so it was time to go. She was almost always nice to me. I hope she forgives me for leaving her. I wouldn't have forgiven myself if I had stayed. There were not enough of the things between us that will enable two people to go through a long time together. If I'd've stayed it would've been just for the fucking, and I would've ended up hating both her and myself.

Just heard from my ex-wife, via phone. "Ex-wife," how I hate that. Never in my darkest imaginings when I married Stephanie in 1985 did I think I would be divorced in 1991. If the genie had told me on my wedding day, "In five years your marriage will be coming apart and in six you'll be divorced, and it will be all your fault and the blame will not be placeable anywhere else, even though, you little rat-fink, you're sure going to try," I'd've said, "No, no, it can't be, it won't be." Owen's nine-point-five days with me this month will be the last such extended time he and I have together until next summer. He's moving up to Los Alamos, where his stepfather has taken a job. If you don't worry too much about the radioactive waste and the minefields, Los Alamos is not so bad a place for a smart boy to be raised.

I was mistaken for a bank robber a few weeks back and spent some anxious moments trying to avoid being shot—accidentally or intentionally, it doesn't matter—before the cops let me go with an apology. It was about 10:00 on a weekday morning, I was leaving the office to run some errands. As I was going out through the revolving door in the building lobby, I saw what I instantly recognized as a plainclothes policeman, with a pistol in one hand and a mobile phone in the other, hiding behind a pillar and looking at the bank that's in the lobby there. Right away I thought, There's a bank robbery going on. So I turned quickly to walk away from the scene. I didn't know if any shooting was likely to begin and didn't want to be too close if it was. I was walking towards a young, almost boyish uniformed police officer who was at the end of the block, with his hand on his holstered pistol.

I was between him and the bank and did not like that at all. I cut across to the other side of the pillars I was walking along; so did he. I cut back to the first side; so did he, at which point he said, "Sir, come here please." I did. I was headed his way anyway. He asked me what I was doing. I told him I thought there was a bank robbery going on back behind me and there was a plainclothes officer back there with a gun and he himself had a gun and I didn't want to be shot. Apparently, I knew too much, and in a not very coherent fashion. The officer instructed me to sit down there on the sidewalk. I had my backpack with me and he asked what was in it. I told him.

After a couple minutes, I noticed people were coming out to take their cigarette breaks. He wasn't ushering them to safety. It has been my practice of late to eat a little at 10:00 and a little at 2:00, so I told the officer, "It's time for me to eat. I have a peanut butter sandwich and a can of juice in here, I'm going to pull them out and eat." He didn't stop me. I pulled out my food and ate. More minutes went by. A couple more cops came, and the young officer went off a few yards to talk with them. He came back to where I was still sitting on the sidewalk, by now getting a little embarrassed about obviously being in police custody right outside the building where I work, so I asked him, "Am I under arrest?" He said, "No, but it would help if I could see what's in your backpack." I said, "Okay," and slowly and carefully pulled each item out, naming them as I went, for instance, "And here's the camera I told you about." Once the backpack was completely emptied and it was obvious I didn't have the loot, he let me go. The actual robber had called a cab and was escaping via that until the cabby heard the BOLO go out over the radio, realized who his passenger was, and took him to the police station.

October 26, 1996 — My daily schedule taped to my refrigerator tells me I should maybe be outside doing some sort of unspecified yardwork at the moment, but at the moment, it is cold out. The sky is lowering and loaded for snow. It snowed last weekend, but not much. Some heavy, wet stuff, raindrop wannabees sufficient to suck the last little bit of life out of my Toyota's battery.

The washing just finished and awaits my attention. I've got about fifteen minutes here. Back in July I started creating schedules to order my life by. It took me a couple of weeks, but I came up with a fairly tight schedule which has been quite useful. At the time, I was struggling to break out of a binge and attempting to

put some order into my life. Now I have this schedule that helps me get things done, and has the added benefit that when I find myself in that sort of ennuistic state of mind where my being takes on a low, lazy whine, I can turn to my schedule and say, "Okay, what's next?", and do it. Right now is reading and writing time, which is going to end early and in about five minutes because Owen is with me this weekend and his hour of Saturday morning TV is about to begin.

We went to his school's Halloween Carnival last night. He ran with a pack of his friends and had a great time, staying until we closed the place down. He'll be moving next week. I expect to see him in El Paso at Thanksgiving, then I will have him one weekend a month during the school year, and he will stay with me during most of the summer. It's both saddening and freeing. And I've already started fretting about how I'm going to pay for summer camp next year.

After reading-and-writing time ends, I shower and dress and do housework, then it's off to the office for about five hours. Not every Saturday is so, as the schedule is flexible and multi-branched. It even has a footnote that reads, "free time whenever necessary." When Tracy first saw the schedule, she said, "Where does it say, 'spend time with Tracy'?" I pointed out the "free time" footnote and she said, "Is that the best you can do?"

My schedule tracks all my time, except for such things as sleeping, pissing, and shitting, and yawning and nibbling my nails and staring out the window and despairing for my country. But if you throw all these things together (not counting sleeping) they don't take much more than an hour and a half a day, and some of them I can do while I'm driving.

Evening now. Reading-and-writing time again. I've already set my clock back the mandatory one hour, even though the fallback doesn't come until tomorrow's wee hours. This means, among other things, that I have time for another cup of coffee. It felt pretty good to be maintaining the constant stoner buzz for months on end, but I just don't get enough done in such a state. The very act of rolling and smoking a joint takes upwards of a half-hour, at the end of which time it's often time to roll and smoke another one. I never felt so normal as I did when stoner—normal, stable, and good (though I was given to crying jags)—but maybe normal is not my station in life, and anyway, it damages my health to smoke like that and dealing on the black market has wrecked my finances. I still get high once every week or two, but it's off what I can grow, which is not so much and I

rather like it that way. Fresher stuff, too, it gives a cleaner, more visual and cerebral high, without so much of the heavy-gravity stoner stoning. I smoke and go work in my studio, since to make viz art I don't need the same parts of my brain I need when I'm reading or at the office or doing this. But I figure my career is ten years behind because of all the accumulated time I've spent since I was a teenager, too stoned or too drunk or too hungover to do anything other than be too stoned or too drunk or too hungover. This doesn't include time when I've been influenced but still productive—this is ten years of strictly flat-on-my-butt-or-my-back too looped to move.

Alan, a smoking buddy of mine up in Cedar Crest, got busted for felony possession in August and gave up smoking for good. (This helped me break my binge and get my life back on the rails.) As Ruth, his wife, put it, "It's a shame it had to go down that way, but...." There's not a woman I've known whose man was a pot-head who didn't at least intuit that Mary Jane was the other woman. And a damned hard one to confront, too—can't be bitch-slapped across the food court at the mall.

Alan expects to have charges brought against him in the next two or three weeks. The state temporarily dropped charges because it routinely does that in small crimes because our judicial system is so overwhelmed by the drug wars it can't keep up. He was driving up to Madrid one morning, toking on a number and digging on the radio, when a sheriff's dep stopped him for going 58 in a 55 zone—whoa, hold me back, major crime spree here—and the rest is, if not history, at least public record. He had his stash divvied, too, in four small baggies, so he was charged with possession with intent to distribute. Even the dep said he knew that wasn't the case, but it's what the law requires. Alan spent all day in jail, called me up that evening, and we talked. I found him a lawyer the next day, with the help of Edward—who I am sure thought I was more intimately involved—and Alan is a free man just this side of major life changes, with a small sword dangling over his head. I would be surprised if he went back to jail for this, but it may cost him several thousand dollars and the car he was driving. He said he'd been smoking for twenty-four years and guesses it was time to quit, anyway, since he and Ruth—now two weeks married—are thinking of having kids. I was one of the groomsmen at their wedding. In fact, I was the only groomsman. There was a bestman and a

bridesman, too, and a bridesmaid in a fetching purple dress that she said made her look like a grape, but I'd-a peeled her just the same.

December 10, 1996 — Last week at a meeting at KUNM, the public radio station where lately I've been training to be a volunteer deejay, one of the other volunteers had a heart attack and died. "Had a heart attack and died"—I wish it were that simple. What happened was more confusing and distressing than what one may think happens in such situations. There was a doctor present and she diagnosed what was happening as an epileptic seizure. Not quite what it was, but it was good that the doctor was there. Once we had determined that there was no pulse, she performed mouth-to-mouth resuscitation while I did the CPR chest compressions and the station's news director checked to see if we got the pulse started again. The news was not good. Other people called for help. From the moment the man fell over to the moment the paramedics arrived in the room, not more than ten minutes passed, but the man was dead, and dead he remained. I'm trying not to think about it too much. I took a CPR course a long time ago. I don't recall that there was any part of it that told you what you're supposed to think or feel when the CPR doesn't work.

January 5, 1997 — It has been raining all day. If I didn't have a hangover, I might could find the right thing to say. Wet sparrows puff themselves against the rain while a-perch on the branches of the birdshit tree. I can see them through the window that lets the cold air in. It's good to have a little ventilation, a little light. I lost my job Friday.



Winter, 1997 – I got laid off weeks ago and never dreamed it would be this difficult to find a new job. The lights are low and the house is cold. An unfamiliar rumbling is coming from my stomach. My résumé lies on its sans-serif surface. *Is this all there is?* the question in the faces of human resources managers who read my thinly-written claims to general expertise, shabby as ostrich plumes eaten away by avian lice, revealing the flabby body of an inexpensive fan-dancer with a cellulite problem, who prances onstage amid catcalls and dreams. Who pretends not to notice. Who takes an overripe tomato smack in the forehead, but never loses her poise or her shit-eating grin, and almost never misses a step.

March 1, 1997 — A cowboy's work is never done. Six weeks it took me to find a new job, and, boy, did things look dicey for a while. Financially, I just was not prepared. Neither were Something and So-Forth. I never thought they'd downsize me—I ran the computer system. Just goes to show. Now I'm an office manager for a law firm that specializes in Personal Injury and Indian Law. It's a definite move up for me. There's a lot of work to do. The firm went six months without an office manager before hiring me.

June 22, 1997 — These days I work as a file clerk ("case administrator") at an insurance agency. The office manager's job didn't work out. I didn't last even three months. Seems they couldn't afford me. Truth is, they needed someone in my position, as the five partners who ran things made such of a hash of it that they—well, they couldn't even afford to pay someone to drag them out of it. The layoff was not unexpected. I had seen it coming, like a freight train, and me tied to the tracks. The workplace ambience was rejection laced with hostility. Within the first week, I had been threatened with termination and had been forbidden to communicate in writing with the Office I was supposed to be Managing unless I received permission in writing first from Miss Managing Partner (who swung like a gourd hanging by a wire in the wind).

Most of the staffers there slowly warmed up to me, but the partners did not like to pay me for bad news, nor did they like being told about the aforementioned hash they had inadvertently cooked up. Given all this, I began looking for work a couple weeks before they gave me my notice. It was thirty days' notice, which turned out to be a bit of a problem. I hoped to be gone before that month was out, and I was. Didn't break my heart but I did feel for the support staff, who didn't know what was going on. I knew more than I could tell any of them while I was still their office manager, but a couple of weeks into that thirty days' notice, I began to spring leaks. Shortly after that, the firm itself began disintegrating in the storm. Or began to sting itself to death, for as Miss Managing Partner put it at the end of my

first week, I had “stepped into a real hornet's nest.” Never mind the details, much. I got swept up into a power struggle among the partners. Not only that, I found and tried to fix that which needed fixing, only to end up as A Man Who Knows Too Much, Runs With Scissors, and Does Not Play Well With Others. For instance: when I found out the firm had no budget for computer systems maintenance and upgrades, my surprise was undisguised. The partners simply individually bought whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted it, and charged it to the firm. They were running a half-dozen different operating systems, five different word processing programs, three different e-mail programs, and a mish-mash of specialty programs, some of this fubar written in code-data and some of it object-oriented, and they wanted me to network it all together transparently and seamlessly. I told them it couldn't be done, that the best thing to do was to trash the whole set-up and install a system the components of which were designed to work together. From this somewhat exasperated recommendation of mine they concluded that I was not the man for the job, and lordy, how right they were.

After I'd been there about six weeks, Miss Managing told me the other directors wanted costs cut—though they will not bring their own spending under control—so they could take year-end bonuses. She said they hadn't been able to take any profit-sharing because they hadn't had any profits, and their highest near-term priority was to find a way to get their profit-sharing. My unguarded response to this was, “You've got to be kidding me,” which turned out to be an inaccurate evaluation. A couple weeks after that, they settled on dismissing me and splitting my salary amongst themselves as a way to achieve their goal. Then they fucked up again and both told me why I was being dismissed and gave me the month's notice, leaving me to hang around the office with a mysteriously souring attitude upon my person. This did not last for a month. It only took a couple weeks—and I tried to watch my mouth, I swear I did—but it only took a couple weeks before, one morning, Miss Managing came into my office with my final paycheck in one hand and used her other hand to take me by the shoulder and escort me immediately out the back door for “making comments detrimental to employee morale.”

They paid me a goodly amount of money to go away. It wasn't all that much money, though, and ten days ago I filed for bankruptcy. Credit cards. Actually, credit cards and a drug problem. And dreamy dreams of artistic glory. Treacherous combination, that triad. Sleep has been difficult. Don't have much of

an appetite, either. And my back went out, slipping a disk the first week I was at Batboy, Bumpkin & Boobie. Since I lost my insurance coverage when Edward and Collins laid me off and wouldn't have coverage again until September, I was medically naked. Still am. I'm at a firm now that, even though it's an insurance agency, doesn't offer medical insurance to its employees. I could afford to buy my own if I could find a way to give up eating.

My loyal old jalopy broke down twice this spring. The flywheel did something obscene, then a few weeks later, I was driving up to Santa Fe to pick up Owen, who was being brought down from Los Alamos by Stephanie, when my transmission went out. It happened on the interstate. I was scooting along at about 75 miles an hour when I noticed the persistent whine my transmission had had for a couple years had stopped. I thought, "That's interesting, but I don't think it's necessarily good, seeing's how cars don't heal themselves." Right I was. Less than a minute later a powerful thunk! came from the transmission and forward motion was reduced to inertial. I pulled over and stopped. The nearest freeway exit was two miles. While parts of the City Diffident were much closer, they were protected from the likes of stranded motorists by unscalable fences. On I walked to that aforementioned nearest exit, which like nearly every freeway exit had a gas station with a pay phone, at which I was able first to call Stephanie and let her know what happened, then call Alan and ask him if he could please drive up from Cedar Crest and rescue me, which he did. Later I arranged with a towing company to have my poor hobbled dragon brought back to the Kirkie for repairs. My mechanic, who has come to know my car well, told me it would take two weeks to get the part from Japan if I wanted to have the transmission rebuilt as the five-speed it was, or I could have it done in two days if I was willing to start driving a four-speed, which I was and now do.

August 24, 1997 — Job? What job? And on the seventh day I was terminated. It's not a great loss. I had high hopes for this last one, but it turned out to be a cyber-sweatshop. I gave them eight hours a day, they wanted ten; I gave them ten, they wanted twelve; I gave them eleven and they wanted sixteen. They are a married couple, Ronald and Karen, from NYC, who settled here during the recession of '91. Karen had no clue as to what her subordinates actually had to do to get their jobs done, while Ronald simply had no clue. I overheard him tell a customer that "it was

a sad day many years ago” when he “realized that most people need to be abused.” I was wondering why everyone in the place seemed to be deeply frightened.

Owen is here this weekend. In a couple hours, we'll be on the road to Santa Fe, to return him to his other family. He has a new half-brother now, to go along with his two-year-old half-sister, and has begun fourth grade, while I'm going through what all parents go through—my little baby is growing up so fast! He's almost five feet tall. About four-and-a-half feet of that is legs.

Alan and Ruth are expecting their first child at Christmas. They're moving to Denver in the fall. Alan's a programmer with US West, and his job is moving. He would have to undergo extensive retraining and take a significantly lower-paying job if he were to leave US West and stay here. I read to him over the telephone the list of my responsibilities at the sweatshop, which tasks I was to accomplish for the princely sum of \$21,000 a year. I told him, “This is a fifty-thousand-dollar-a-year job, man.” Alan, who makes more than that, said, “I wouldn't do that for fifty thousand a year.”

September 6, 1997 — Excluding my 401(k) plan, which is protected under bankruptcy law, I have approximately \$18.00 to my name, and that's including the pennies. Edward and Collins have been my bankruptcy attorneys. They did it pro bono, except for the filing fee. Under bankruptcy law the filer has to scrounge that together and pay it, which means it's possible to be so bankrupt that you can't even afford to file for bankruptcy. Lucky me, I hadn't fallen that far down. The worst part of it has been the creditors' hearing at the bankruptcy court. None of my creditors appeared to contest the implosion, since anyone can see from my paperwork that I don't have shit, but the hearing was a cattle call one morning. There were about a score of us bankrupts there. Our cases were taken in alphabetical order, which on this particular morning meant my case was taken first, which meant that my name was the first one called, in open court where anyone there could hear it. I know there were only a few dozen people there, most of them in a situation very similar to mine, and I know it's public record that I am now a bankrupt, but still, it was very humiliating to hear the bailiff call my name, even if I was being represented by two of the best bankruptcy attorneys in the state.

Since I've become a de facto temporary worker and starving artist, I have decided to go with it. As I have slid down the slope to economic ruin, I have discovered that I don't need near as much money as I thought I did. The bankruptcy, of course, has helped. I had racked up way too much credit card debt, buying things like art supplies, restaurant meals, rental cars, plane tickets, and who knows what-all. Compact disks. Car repairs. Christmas gifts. I got laid off on the first Friday of the year, right after I'd run up my credit cards for the holidays. Can't say I saw it coming. I knew the firm was having problems, but I expected them to let the receptionist go. They did. And me, and the contract paralegal, and all three associate attorneys. I had been out of the office that morning to install a showing of some of my photos and mixed-media pieces at the Los Griegos branch library, a gig Tracy helped set up for me. I stopped by the house and smoked a joint of my homegrown on my way back to the office. Not long after I arrived, I was noodling around with the computer system, doing whatever it was I did, when Edward stopped by my office, told me he needed me to meet with him and Collins in the conference room. I followed him to the conference room and he turned and closed the door behind me. Collins was already there, sitting at the conference table.

"Please, have a seat," Edward said. I sat. Edward did most of the talking. He said he was sorry, but they were downsizing and had to let me go. I was so stunned I thought I was going to cry. I had thought I would never lose that job, that if I wanted it, it was mine to keep until I died or retired. Not so. They did let me spend the following week working in my office, preparing resumes and sending them out, and getting my files in order, and they let me keep my desktop computer since they wouldn't need it anymore and they knew I didn't have a computer at home. They kept the laptop.

It was the worst time to be out of work, right after the New Year. No one was hiring. On top of that, the winter's worst storm came to town the night of the day I got laid off. It started with wind and rain. That night the rain turned to sleet and it froze hard. The wind went on for four more days. Ice covered everything. The padlock on my back gate was frozen shut, and with the wind, I couldn't get a flame going steady enough to thaw it. I could still get through the front gate, though. It was the middle of the next week before the storm abated enough for me to get my back lock open.

That first weekend after I was laid off, while it didn't seem as if the days could get any darker, the clouds any lower, the temperature any colder or the winds howl any louder, I uprooted my indoor marijuana garden and dried and smoked the plants. I didn't figure I needed any distractions while I looked for work. It didn't matter. It took me weeks to find a job, a temp job through Manpower at Citicorp, as a computer trainer. It paid well and was supposed to last for nine weeks, but I was laid off on the morning of the third day. There was a screw-up in management. He got to keep his job, while I was back on the streets. A cold, hungry month went by, then I found two jobs at once, one as a computer trainer at New Horizons training center, and the other as an office manager for the Albuquerque law firm of Bumblebee, Birdbrain & Batboy. The manager's job paid much better and looked like a real step up. Well, it was a step in some direction. The stress from the job was so great that on my first payday, I called my old connection, Dixie the Motorbike Dyke. It had been six, nearly seven months, since she and I had last done business; since just before Alan got busted. She and I have done plenty of business this year.

After the office manager's job ended, I spent about a month on unemployment, then started a job as a clerk at an insurance general agency. That only lasted a month. I was so depressed I just didn't give a fuck anymore, and was smoking a lot of dope. Black-market weed, the adult dose. The owner of the agency, a huge old guy about six-and-a-half feet tall who was fixing to retire and turn the business over to his somewhat shorter son, he knew something was up. One day he said to me, "What do you think about taking a drug test?" I said, "Cool. Multiple choice or fill in the blank?" He said, "Try, fill up the cup." But he didn't have me tested, he just let me go, told me he didn't think it was working out.

That was a couple of months ago. I sat on my ass and smoked dope for a couple weeks, collecting unemployment and going to the minimum three interviews a week the law requires, until I got the job with the little commodities firm run by Ronald and Karen. A former Republican State Senator named Nancy who runs a small employment agency hooked me up with that one, asking me to please not tell R & K that I didn't have exactly the qualifications they were looking for, so I please didn't. One of the qualifications turned out to be servile fear, but Nancy hadn't told me that one and I don't have it, anyway. Karen was reportedly allergic to everything except money, which she had a knack for making from energy futures trading while she worked in a closed office with several air purifiers running. Ronald

was a well-kept man who couldn't stand being kept, and strutted around the office in Hawaiian shirts and Bermuda shorts, gold coin dangling on a gold chain in his golden chest hairs while he made everyone else in the office jumpy and sullen. There were only a half-dozen of us and one got fired my first day, another got fired my fourth day, and I was there only eight days, counting the weekend, before Ronald fired me from the position I was hired for and told me he would rehire me at more hours and lower pay. I told him I would work fewer hours at higher pay, and that was that, negotiations, which lasted all of two minutes, breaking down.

I came home that day and rolled a joint. I smoked that joint and sat in my living room chair, listening to the stereo and thinking. I smoked a second joint, which is what I usually do after smoking a first joint. Occasional tapping noises, little clicks, came from the windows. At first I was barely aware of them. There are birds of paradise all around my house, and when their seed pods ripen in the summer, they curl and dry and shoot out their hard little seeds, each about the size of a fingernail, and sometimes these seeds hit against my windows or my swamp cooler. I've learned to ignore them. But this particular evening, it seemed the clicks were more frequent and more regular than usual. I heard children's voices coming from the street outside, then another click, this one louder and coming from the front room. I got up and looked out the window there. Through the privacy hedge I could see a boy of about ten years' age standing down in the street. The little bastard was pointing a BB gun at my house. There was a hole from a BB in the outer pane of one of the double-paned windows Tony installed last year. I was far too stoned to deal with this, and just stood there looking at the boy and his other little vandal friends and siblings who were with him. I'm not certain they saw me. They moved on up the little stub of Bell, to the road closure, and began shooting at cars coming down the freeway off-ramp. I called the police—not 911, since a BB gun is hardly an emergency—and the operator said they'd send someone right out. About an hour later a cruiser came by, but by then it was dark and the kids had long since gone inside. The cruiser shone its spotlight around for a few minutes and then left, problem solved.

September 12, 1997 — My car broke down again, tonight, a block from my home. The Bud Lite Boys were out, as they are every Friday evening, gathered around their pickup trucks and listening to norteña music while they drink twelve-packs of Bud



Lite. There's upwards of a dozen of them, most of them wearing cowboy hats and they are the genuine article, caballeros up from Mexico, making as much money as they can before la migra nabs them and ships them back across the border. They don't speak much English and my Spanish is about as rusty as my car is getting to be, but a couple of them came over and gave me a push to get my car home. I'll ride the bus for a couple of weeks before I'll be able to have the old jalopy repaired. I am on assignment now for a temp firm, working at Roadrunner Trucking in the recruiting office. The pay is low but the crew is good, and it's good to have money coming in. Also, my bankruptcy discharge came through and I'm liquidating my 401(k), which will provide me with some capital.

October 11, 1997 — Roadrunner Trucking ran out of work for me a week ago, so I spent this past week writing, working in my studio, reading, and looking for the next paying job.

Five weeks I spent in the Recruiting Office at Roadrunner, doing reference and police record checking on people who wanted to drive 35-ton trucks for money and no few of whom should have been in jail, or had been. No fooling. It was like, "Um, Mr. Jones, there's a two-year gap here in your employment record. We need to know what you were doing during that time if we're going to process your application." And Mr. Jones says, "Well... well... I was doing three to five but I got out on good behavior."

The Recruiting Office was a wonderful zoo of profoundly ignorant, ill-educated, superstitious and profane women who teased me no end, as I was the only man in the office. It was like being in high school all over again. The supervisor was a Teamster named Darcy who was nice enough, but she worked under a lot of pressure. She told me the story was one of the company's managers had embezzled the funds that were to have been spent on a systems upgrade and decent furniture for her department, leaving us all working at rickety old desks while we sat in beat-up chairs and ran decrepit computers. The manager was understandably enough no longer with the company, having invested all his pilloined spondulicks in cocaine, a magical powder that has never done much good for anyone I have ever known.

The senior recruiter, a woman about 40 years old named Stella, had dibs on what radio station we listened to while we worked. It was always an oldies station,

which had a playlist of about 100 records. One day she was out and they let me choose. I put on KUNM, with its *Performance Today* in the morning, *All That Jazz* mid-day, and *Free-Form Radio* in the afternoon. My co-workers were not pleased with such highfalutin radio shows and I wasn't allowed to choose stations again. Carmina, the woman who worked at the desk across from mine, was slightly impressed when I told her I was a volunteer at KUNM and was on-air myself from time to time. She was in her early twenties and was involved with an abusive fellow she often talked about. One morning I took a scrap of paper and wrote on it the number for the local battered women's shelter, told her to keep it in case she needed it. I saw her later throw it away. I asked her why and she said, "If my boyfriend finds that, he'll beat the fuck out of me."

The agency sent over another temp after a while, a tall, shapely young woman named Jennifer who had a great mane of curling brown hair and who turned out to have a past she was fleeing from, having been a speedfreak whose children were taken away by the state and who was now on probation and was being closely controlled by her family. She and I were going to go to a concert but she and her mom, with whom she was living, got into it over whether or not daughter should wear the tigerskin pantsuit, and the date was a no-go. Dodged a bullet, I guess, the both of us, because I preferred daughter in the easy-access dress and could you see me going out with someone in a tigerskin pantsuit? She and I had just had our assignments terminated when this happened. We got the news and I made my move.

There were no truckers left to recruit and no money left to recruit them with, so Roadrunner let us go. The company didn't pay diddly and all that wanted to work there as drivers were the virgins fresh out of driving school, or the dregs with bad driving records, police records, or unexplainable gaps in their records. Company policy was we couldn't hire anyone with an illegal drugs arrest—never mind conviction, just being arrested was enough—and we couldn't hire anyone who'd ever topped a trailer, rolled over, or jackknifed, even if the jackknifing happened during a blizzard. We couldn't hire bobtruck or bobtail drivers, either. Despite the low wages, there were all these people who wanted to work, but we couldn't hire them, and we had all these rigs sitting idle that we couldn't find drivers for. All the good drivers were at the more established carriers who would pay more, carriers like J.B. Hunt, Yellow Freight, Roadway and Viking. You would figure it's a

driver's market with all the carriers reporting being shorthanded—a half-million unfilled rigs sitting idle nationwide—but fact is, it's a lousy way to make a living. You're on the road for weeks at a time, sleeping in your rig, bending as many rules as you can, and eating truck-stop food, which will keep body and soul together, but drivers eat so badly, Roadrunner supplied us with all the free fresh fruit we could eat, just so the drivers could stop by the Recruiting Office or the Drivers' Lounge and get some. We also got flu shots while I was there, all of us lined up one day outside the Drivers' Lounge, going in one-by-one to get inoculated.

The flu shots and the fresh fruit were Darcy's idea. She told me stories about the company and trucking in general one morning when she was giving me a ride in. The alternator on my car had gone out and it was a couple weeks before I could afford a new one, so I was taking the bus. Roadrunner is on the western edge of town, on Central Avenue, but bus service doesn't reach it at the time of morning I had to go to work, so the last two miles I had to walk. There are no sidewalks on that stretch of Central, though there are ADA corners with wheelchair ramps. If you're wheelchair bound, you can roll right off the street and into the sand. Being still possessed of mostly functional legs, I was tramping through the sand, singing "I'm a ro-o-o-ad-runnuh, honey...," when Darcy drove by, saw me, turned around and came back and picked me up. She was feeling down and couldn't hide it. She said the company was running out of money and drivers and it looked like the downward spiral had begun. She said there was a time when a driver could make a decent living and own a home and raise a family and take a vacation "maybe like to Yellowstone or Disneyland" and save up money to put the kids through college and have a comfortable retirement, but then deregulation came and now drivers make only about a third of what they made twenty years ago.

Roadrunner runs mostly dry vans and flatbeds. The flatbed drivers are hefty fellows, the powerful kind of don't-fuck-with-me truck driver, who have to be very strong since they have to be able to secure their loads. An unsecured load can be fatal. There were photos on the wall outside the Drivers' Lounge of various accidents that various trucks had got into, with admonitions written below on what went wrong and how to avoid it. Out back, the company keeps a truck that was recently wrecked. Darcy said it was sitting out there until the insurance adjusters were done with it. We were all of us, drivers, recruiters, and temps, urged to go to

that truck when we had a few minutes, look it over, and consider what had happened, which was this: the driver was hauling a load of rebar; he was going downhill when part of the load came loose and slammed through the back of his cab, impaling him in several fatal ways. The cab was still spattered and stained with his blood. He had his ten-year-old son with him, too, a violation of regulations. The boy wasn't hurt, but think of what he saw.

And those big-rig drivers hate we wee folk in what they call our four-wheelers. There's no few of them hefty boys who would just as soon smash us flat into metal pancakes as have to be troubled with sharing the public highways with us. It's a matter of misunderstandings. Most of us four-wheelers have no clue how heavy those eighteen-wheelers are, how difficult they can be to maneuver, how many blind spots they have around them, and how much pressure the drivers work under to go as fast as they can for as long as they can without getting busted for it. The drivers and owners would love to have a dedicated lane on the interstate highways, reserved for long-haul truck traffic alone, but they know that's not likely ever to happen. One thing I quickly learned and put into practice as soon as my car was repaired and I was driving again was to stay out of their way.

"I'm a ro-o-o-ad-runnuh, honey...!"

October 18, 1997 — Owen was here last weekend. He tells me that on his soccer team he is called "The Broom," for the way he sweeps the ball out of bounds on defensive plays. He made straight As last six weeks. The time we have together goes by much too fast. He was on *The Children's Hour* last Saturday, up at KUNM, being rowdy on the airwaves. I do the control board ops for *Weekend Edition: Saturday*, and when he's with me he comes up and hangs out. He usually gives the legal ID at the top of the hour, and frontsells *The Children's Hour* on the last break in the satellite program. Last Saturday, I needed to work in Studio C for a couple hours right after WESAT, so he hung around talking with Tina the Radio Girl and being rambunctious on mike.

I'm working a temp assignment doing admin ass work at a financial trust company; entering figures on spreadsheets, that kind of stuff. Last week I had something called an "interview" at America On-Line as a tech rep. Applying to America On-Line is a surreal experience. They have a call center here and advertise in the paper from time to time, with a phone number to call if you're

interested in applying for a job. When you call the number, you never talk to another living human being. You instead use your telephone keypad to respond to questions sent your way by a computerized voice interview system. You have to answer all the questions right before the computer will tell you when your interview is. The questions aren't technical. They essentially involve the issues of, do you have enough experience with computers and are you desperate for work. I told the computer that I'm a systems expert who will work any time, all the time, for peanuts. It was the third time this year I'd taken the test, and the first time I picked a desired salary low enough to get me an interview appointment. I kept the appointment, but still never got interviewed by a living person. When I showed up, I was shown into a room with computer terminals where I sat at one and answered a battery of questions. When that was over, I was shown to the lobby and asked to wait until my name was called. Two hours went by. I had taken the morning off from my temp assignment for this interview, but now it was lunchtime and I had to get on to my paying job. I never did find out if America On-Line hired me.

Autumn, 1997 – We are the workers, the telemarketers and associates, frayed-collar seasonals and scuffed-shoe temps, assemblers of components and stackers of goods. Salt of the earth, populating battlefield and factory and giant retail outlet, we are the shareholders of scraps, hard-scrabbling for a can of peas and a ticket to the game. We take no franchise, all but silent save the muttering of complaint (*They'll fire you if they hear you say that*). We puff our cigarettes just outside steel-plated back doors, our exhaled smoke bright in the winter sun, our breath smoky in the cold morning air. We watch from the sidelines, from balcony seats, from back rows. We are the men and women who take the late shift, who clean up the mess, scouring and buffing, sweeping and dusting, making the world shine spotless and bright.

| POLICE 10 CODES      | SHERIFF'S DEPT.                |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 27-1 MURDER          | SIGNAL 1                       |
| 27-2 RAPE            | SIGNAL 2                       |
| 4 assault            |                                |
| 27-3 ROBBERY         | SIGNAL 3                       |
| 27-8 SHOOTING        | SIGNAL 8                       |
| 27-9 STABBING        | SIGNAL 9                       |
| 10-44 MINOR ACCIDENT | Signal 69<br>(coffee + Donuts) |
| 10-45 MAJOR ACCIDENT | 10-300                         |
| 10-58 DOA            | "MEDIA CIRCUS"                 |

*High Street*, Book 4 — Radio Stars and *Hemp TV*

“In reality, as we know, everything is always quite different.” — W. G. Sebald,  
*Vertigo*



November 8, 1997 — This coming Monday, despite the fact that shortly after being escorted out the back door of Bumblebee, Birdbath & Bonkers I was heard (only by myself) to say, "If I never work with attorneys again, it will be too soon," I will start a part-time job as a paralegal for a sole practitioner here in the Kirkie, a fellow my age named Michael, whose downtown practice involves criminal and civil work both. It is a discreet practice involving large clients needing high degrees of confidentiality. He appears to be one of the good guys. Always like working for them when I can. I'll need some other part-time job, though, if I'm going to make the situation work.

November 22, 1997 — It's a quarter till eleven and I just got home from my first training session at KHFM as their newest part-time deejay. The pay is dismal but it's the same as what I got paid in September to recruit long-haul truck drivers. The fellow who was training me tonight is a nice fellow, we got along real well, and I met the vivacious woman with the sparkling eyes who will be training me tomorrow night. She wears no wedding ring. Oh, hold me back, here I go again, finding a woman attractive and being intrigued. The back of her hand brushed up against my butt when she was leaving the studio tonight. I'm sure it was a mistake—it's crowded in there. Not unlike my scandalous past.

March 10, 1998 — Last night I received a strange and somewhat disconcerting phone call. The call came in at 2:50, and lasted twenty-five minutes. It woke me from a sound sleep. My phone is two rooms from where I sleep, unless I happen to be passed out someplace else. This house is old and has but one phone jack.

Calls coming in at that time of night are never good news. I got up thinking, "Who died?" By the time I got to the phone, the answering machine had kicked in. The caller listened to my greeting, hung up, and immediately called back. I picked up. The caller was a woman, twenty-something, maybe early thirties, from the

sound of her voice—but she spoke only in a whisper. She said she “wanted to talk to a man.” I told her there are three billion of us—how is it she picked me? She said she dialed randomly, she just wanted to talk to a man. I told her I didn’t believe her, that she was lying and hadn’t punched my number randomly, but in fact had intended to call me and knew very well who she was talking to. I asked her why she was whispering, as I was having trouble hearing her. She said she was whispering because she “didn’t want to wake” her roommates. I asked her why she had called right back and she said she had punched re-dial, that she just wanted to talk to a man. I told her to talk, but her whispering was hard to follow and in fact, she had little to say. It was clear she didn’t want to talk to a man. She wanted to listen to a man, and, I believe, this man in particular. I am no longer a private person in this town, what with my radio work, art shows, and the poetry I had published in a local alternative weekly last month. I wasn’t about to engage in phone sex with a stranger in the middle of the night, but I wanted to keep her on the line long enough to get clues as to who she was. At one point I told her as much.

She never came out and said anything like, “Talk dirty to me, baby,” but she did seem to get into the sound of my voice. At a couple points I was tempted to ask her what she was doing with her hands. All in all, I don’t think she got what she wanted, but that supposes I know what she wanted. I was hoping to get her voice to break. I am not at all convinced she was a stranger and I wanted to hear her full voice, if even for a moment. She never asked me my name, though she would have heard it on my machine. I asked her her name. She said it was Cindy. I don’t believe that for a moment, nor do I believe she was the twenty-three years old she said she was. She wanted to know my age. I told her I was an old man. She said she didn’t believe that. After she told me her age, she asked me again. I told her I was old enough to be her father. She professed not to believe that, either. She also wanted to know how tall I was. I refused to tell her. There’s more, but the rice is done cooking and it is time for me to eat.

When I called my strange, whispering caller a liar, she didn’t seem to get offended, nor did she make much of an attempt to convince me that her call was truly random. She made no real attempt to engage me overtly in sex talk. She did say something that, due to her whisper, I had to ask her three times to repeat, something to do with “fantasizing.” I said, “Fantasizing about what?”, then quickly said, “Never mind—that’s a foolish question,” so we didn’t pursue any further

fantasies. I felt a real possibility I was being set up for a sucker punch. I didn't want to walk right into it if I could avoid it. I asked her how many roommates she had, but she refused to tell me. She did tell me she was "on the couch" so as not to wake them. I heard a few clattering noises that sounded as if something were being placed on a coffee table. She refused to tell me what the noises were.

She asked me if I was married. She may have asked me if I was divorced. She asked me if I had any roommates. I refused to answer any of these questions, but did ask her, "How do you know I'm not waking any of my roommates by talking on the phone like this?" She didn't answer, but I wasn't whispering. At one point, she was annoyed with my refusal to let down my guard. She also accused me of being argumentative and needing to "always get the last word in." I told her I didn't hardly know what to say to that. And she asked me if I were bi. I told her I thought that was an unusual question. Since I wasn't sliding right into a let's-talk-dirty mode, the logical question, and I pointed this out to her, would have been to ask me if I were gay. I assured her that I was "just a boring old hetero."

She didn't sound drunk. She didn't even sound tipsy. I was pretty much awake pretty quickly, intrigued and somewhat touched by this strange, lonely reaching out so deep in the night, so deep into whisper. I told her, too, that I was intrigued. I star-sixty-nined as soon as she hung up, but her line was blocked.

Spring, 1998 – I was walking by the candy store when I tripped and stumbled over myself, fell into a sticky-bud bush, lay there for about a week, stuck. It was hard to get up when I had only one free hand, the other gripping a loaded roachclip. A delightful dark light, an accursed, cursing, curvaceous bitch, my sweet lover, the loaded roachclip. Stuck to the bush, flat on my back, I suck on the loaded roachclip, my lollipop.

May 4, 1998 — There is a bird that lives around here that starts singing in the morning between the hours of three and four, usually not long after first cock crow (there are roosters in this neighborhood, too). Sometimes the cocks oversleep, but this unnamed bird does not. Or maybe it stays up all night and I hear it when I do because that's the hour of the day—night—when the freeway is at its quietest. The mystery bird gives a peculiar two-note call that has the same tonal quality as a person saying, "Uh-oh," only, the bird is saying "Tweet-tweet." And that's just about all it says. It is what it says loudest and is what its talk consists almost entirely of when it gets started. For all I know, it could be a sparrow making wake-up calls. There is a tree a half-block away where many of them gather for the morning mobbing. They chatter fit to beat the band. It's getting light when this happens, but it's still too dark for them to see food, so they gather in an event that has all the appearances of the regular crowd at a popular establishment, The South Broadway Sparrow House.

I just looked at the clock and my rice will be done in one minute and I am hungry so there is no will to wait.

It turns out, as evidenced by the burnt encrustation on the bottom of the pan, that the rice was done five or ten minutes ago. Burned rice smells a little like popcorn.

A couple bowls of pan-toasted rice, with a little soy sauce and some picante, with water to drink, and I'm right as rain. On Saint Patrick's Day I began a bacchanalia of sorts, as I skidder up to my fortieth birthday. Tracy says I'm having my oh-my-god-I'm-turning-forty panic. If so, I've been having it since I was seventeen. Lately I've been smoking the smokables, eating lots of meat, lots of M&Ms with peanuts —lots!—and I stopped exercising, since it's hard to exercise when one is smoking heavily. I've been playing computer games to excess—in fact, to the point of boredom—played hooky from work last Thursday and Friday, and pretty much have gone to seed. I even went so far as to watch network television for a few minutes one night.

Let's pause a moment in our narrative for a brief return to real-time. I just received my second telephone solicitation of the evening, which is about average, and this time, instead of saying, "No," and hanging up the phone when the underpaid phone slave asked to speak to "Mr. or Mrs. Callis," I instead said, "He's dead. Didn't you hear?"

"No," she said. "I'm sorry for the inconvenience."

"You bet it was inconvenient," I said, "He owed me money. Did he owe you money?"

"No," she said.

"Who are you, anyway?" I said. She identified herself as being with AT&T. I said, "Well, he's dead," and I hung up the phone. Such shenanigans will get me at least a week in Purgatory, and I don't mean the ski resort. I did telephone solicitation as my first job out of high school. I had to call people during supertime and try to sell them cable TV. I hated it, and quit after a week.

I worked the *Dinner Concert* and *Evening Concert* at KHFM Saturday night, where I was verbally abused over the phone by a listener profoundly upset over my tongue getting tied when I tried to say "Ludwig van Beethoven" and couldn't get it to come out right. That was more than made up for by the call I received toward the end of the shift from a woman who said, in response to a joke I had made over the air, which joke I don't recall now and didn't then, "Hallelujah! A classical deejay with a sense of humor."

She also said, "Now, don't take this wrong, because I'm fifty-eight and way too old for you, but you have a very sexy voice."

I said, "You know, I'm really two feet tall and have a huge hump on my back."

Spring, 1998 – It's only mid-May and the summer gunfire has already begun. Ten shots in rapid succession. Most likely the emptying of a full magazine (nine-millimeter semi-automatic handgun). It happened not long after nine o'clock. Early in the evening for the summer gunfire. Early in the season, too. The summer gunfire usually doesn't begin until the hot madness of June. And it doesn't happen until after ten o'clock. And usually not a full magazine at a time. Profligate shooter, what did he hit? Time to bring the kids in early. Keep them away from the windows. Keep everyone away from the windows. We can sit on the floor, it's cooler here.

June 22, 1998 — I had just sat down to write when I was distracted by a disturbance on the street. Didn't seem to be anything serious, though there are three street gangs, one police department (at least), and a neighborhood association battling over the neighborhood these days. And as the weather warms, all the wild young things come out, affiliated or not, sometimes shouting at each other in the dark. It's after midnight and I'm soon off to bed.

Owen was here this past weekend, first time in a couple months I'd seen him. He's doing very well. He displayed the first signs of a teenager's voracious appetite when he plowed through a three-day yogurt allotment in one sitting. I was ever so slightly stunned.



Summer, 1998 – Oh, look, I rolled me a joint last night before I “fell asleep” here in my chair. How sweet of me to think of me like that. What a wonderful way to start my day. I am so nice to me sometimes, it makes me want to cry.

August 10, 1998 — The shooting has stopped, and the police helicopter has been almost entirely absent from the night skies over South Broadway for weeks now. Meanwhile, I had another binge. It went on for months, then Dixie the Motorbike Dyke, with whom I have dealt for five years, did not return my last two calls, enabling me to pass through the strain of coming down and staying down. I hope she's okay. She had been dealing with killers. She was talking of cutting back, of getting out. I'm a little freaked, since I've never gone this long without her calling me back.

I've got to stay focused on walking away from my addiction—just walk walk walk, keep that addiction in remission because the devil is right behind me, tapping me on the shoulder to get me to come back, reminding me of how good it feels to be high in the summertime, day and night; telling me, Hey, big fella, you haven't fallen far enough; I keep shooting at you, big fella, but all you get is grazed and I want a square shot.

Not everything here is destroyed, but, shit, I have come close. Whatever it was I was looking for I sure as hell better have found it. I almost lost my law-firm job through a five-figure error that I would not have made had I not been on the rag-end of my binge. Thank god Dixie broke off contact when she did, or I would have been stoned when Michael called me yesterday—Sunday—and demanded I get my ass down to the office right away and explain what had happened. It was a mistake compounded by another mistake. I was reduced to tears in his office, but at least I didn't have to fess up my addiction, which I would have had to do if he had tried to fire me, so I could seek protection under the ADA. Nonetheless, I made a mistake I will not have the luxury of making twice.

Whoa! An airplane just went over real low. A drug-war aircraft, I suspect. They patrol intensely this time of year, looking for the ripening of illegal gardens. There was a gang-war in the 'hood this spring. It was pretty intense for a while. A lot of gunfire late at night. I hit the ground or floor so many times it ceased to be entertaining. One night I hit face-first and lay on the floor moaning, "Oh, that hurt."

It also hurt when my house was broken into and some of my toys were stolen. The TV, the VCR, the CD player—those are generic, not too expensive, and not dear to me. But the bastards stole my hand-carved Kenyan walking stick and my guitar, with its case. That's when it became personal and painful. I can't afford to replace the guitar, and had only just reached the point where I was good enough to play in front of other people, jamming with other guitarists at Tracy's big summer party. The burglars, and I think there must have been two, came in through the living room window. They took one of the larger of the rounded river-rocks on the property here and threw it through the window, then reached in and unlatched and came in. They were hidden from view by the privacy hedge.

This was at the end of June, and the privacy hedge was in full foliage. I came home from work for lunch that day and saw the front gate open. I thought, "Those kids..." thinking that my neighbors had come in to retrieve a basketball and hadn't latched the gate behind them when they left. It seemed they had been doing that a lot. I drove up to the back gate, saw the gate was unlatched though it was locked, and thought, "Someone has been here." Almost immediately I saw that the kitchen window was open and the screen was leaning against the outside wall, and right away I knew what had happened.

I parked and went in, stopping to pick up a length of lead pipe from the junk pile in the back yard, in case the burglars were still inside and not armed with guns. They were gone, as was some of my stuff. I believe there were at least two of them because the stuff was taken out through the kitchen window and I can't imagine it would have been one person, dropping electronic goods out the window. I called Michael and told him what had happened, told him I would be late getting back to work, then I hid the pot plants and called the cops. One of the first things I had checked was my stash, to make sure it was still there. I sure am glad I hadn't left it lying out.

It was lunch time so I figured the cops wouldn't show up till after lunch and I had time to smoke a joint. I rolled and fired one up and was standing at the kitchen window, blowing the smoke outside, when I heard a car pull up and my intuition told me it was the cops. I stubbed the joint out and stashed it, and sure enough, the cops were working through lunch that day. Since I was so deep into the binge, I had no trouble maintaining. They took the report, were puzzled by my artwork, and told me the next-door neighbors had had a car stolen that very morning. I said, "I'll

bet my stuff is in that car." After the cops left, I called Tony the landlord and left a message about needing a new window, then I cleaned up the glass. There was glass all the way across the living room into the bedroom. I saved as much of it as I could, to use in mixed-media pieces.

August 22, 1998 — I stopped smoking tobacco two or three days ago and lord I wanna cigarette, but I don't know why, since every time I actually smoke one, it reveals itself to be not what I want, while remaining mum about what it is I really want. Mummy's tit, probably.

A few moments ago, upon hearing the neighbor's dog bark, I was looking out the kitchen window like I usually do when I hear the neighbor's dog bark, to see if anyone is lurking around the back of my house. The night is still, the winds from the evening thunderstorms having diminished. I was thinking I wished I still smoked, so I would have an excuse to go out and sit in the cool stillness a while. But I've spent a lot of time outside smoking these past few years. It's not like I've missed anything much of that particular research project, though I can't say I ever sat outside during a thunderstorm or a blizzard. And it's not like I've quit smoking; I've merely stopped smoking. I've quit smoking so many times it's ludicrous.

Being sober, I'm catching up on my reading—big stacks of magazines in my living room—that I got so far behind in while I was smoking too much dope, playing computer games for hours at a time, reading military history and generally trying to relive my childhood because I guess I didn't get it right the first time.

December 3, 1998 — The whispering woman called again. She woke me out of about seven layers of sleep, leaving my heart pounding like it was about to explode. She wanted to know what I was wearing. In point of fact, I was wearing only a blanket, but was not in the mood to desport for I am a working man. For all of how asleep I had been only moments before, I was witted enough to throw a good, curving whine into my voice because I was sure a woman looking for sex-talk in the deep of night is not going to want to talk to a man whining like a child for his sleep. "I have to get my slee-eep!" I whined and hung up and she hasn't called back.

December 15, 1998 — I was mulling over a news item this morning that reported a spokesman for the local gas and electric utility advising people to stock up on extra firewood next fall, as the utility cannot guarantee that its computers won't crash at the turn of the millennium, due to the year 2000 bug. What news! I have neither fireplace nor woodstove. I do have a store of canned goods. I can heat them over twigs in the back yard. How shall I prepare for possible disruptions in banking and food supplies? Nothing disastrous, I think, is in the works, but the problem is, the systems are so complex, nobody knows which may or may not crash. For a few days or a week or two, there could be some problems, not the least of which is the way people panic. Who knows what to expect? A woman I met at Tracy's big summer party is a COBOL programmer working on the problem at the local utility. I don't know what her take would be on the spokesman's advice to buy wood, but she did tell me that she would not plan on flying anywhere on New Year's Day, 2000, as the air traffic control system, already seriously obsolete, is expected to fail.

I was awakened at 5:30 this morning by sounds of distant explosions. Didn't sound too much like a gun battle. May have been a neighbor's car warming up. Gunfire in South Broadway is generally confined to the summer months, and has a rhythm I've come to recognize as I throw myself to the floor, or if I'm outside, to the ground, dodging cockroaches, katydids, and the odd angry shot. I don't know who's winning the drug war. Those opposed to it say it's been long lost. Those in favor of it say that with a little more effort, it can be won, by and by. But maybe it's already been won. Maybe it's been a winner for years. Look at the economics: the War on Drugs is big business. I don't have the figures at hand, but it's easy to see that the War on Drugs is a multi-billion-dollar operation keeping lots of people employed. You've got your producers, importers, distributors, dealers, street cops, undercovers, prosecutors, jail guards, prison guards, corrections industry builders and suppliers, drug-testing industry, bureaucrats, politicians—all these people are making handy, if sometimes dicey, livings off the War on Drugs. Legalize any one or more of the currently illegal recreational drugs, and thousands of people are going to be thrown out of work. Economically, that's a losing move. Anyone who advocates the legalization of illegal drugs might do well to be aware of the economic issues. As long as there are tens of billions of dollars to be made annually by the millions of people involved, you can bet it will just go on and on. We're not

happy in this country anyway if we don't have a war to fight. It wouldn't do to actually win any of them, have to deal with the boredom of peace.

December 21, 1998 — Winter began two hours ago and the hawk is out tonight. Not that I've seen it, though we did have a red-tailed hawk around here when I first moved in. Owen and I pulled up by the back gate in the car one Saturday morning and just as I set the parking brake the hawk swooped down in front of us and snatched up a little field mouse that had been distracted by our arrival. Death is a thing with feathers.

I was reading about R.E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson this fall, fascinated by the character of those two men. My father was named after General Lee. I was named after some schmuck who got tossed into .....  
jesus that made my skin crawl just now what jus happened. As I was about to write, "a pit of lions," the screeching of a cat came from the floor right here beside me, where the floor heater is. I don't know if one cat backed into the heater in the crawlspace under my house or if two cats were fighting. Cats are down there often, particularly in the cold months. Katunia, my own little one-eyed pet wild cat, was born down there, far as I know. She still spends time down there, coming out to eat what I feed her, sometime quite ravenously, and supplementing her canned cat food with insects, reptiles and birds. I no longer toss bread out for the sparrows. It doesn't seem fair to set them up like that.

Anyway, Lee and Jackson. They make me wish I were a better man. Something to strive for. I don't dare let myself believe it's too late; that it's always been already too late (drug war helicopter flying over my house at this very moment).

Spring, 1999 – I turn on the television while I roll my first joint. Markets are rising and falling. The Japanese are calling for calm. The spa I summered in seasons ago has been destroyed by intelligent bombs. There's cold carry-out in the refrigerator, on the bottom shelf. I roll my second joint. It's another working day. Anything could happen.

June 19, 1999 — I've just returned home from the most disagreeable experience I've ever had at an opening reception—an unfortunate confrontation with a woman recently-steeped in Marxist Feminist Deconstructionist theory. The reception was at an open studios night at 500 Second Street, where I almost went to live five years ago but I ended up here on High Street instead. Jolie, one of the artists who organized the *Mortal Decay* show I had work in last fall, she has a studio there.

There's a fair amount of good art being made in the building, and a fair amount of not-so-good art. I looked at all that was available to see, good, bad, and ugly, then was standing in Jolie's studio, talking with her. This woman came in and joined in our conversation. We talked about Jolie's art, then art in general. One thing led to another. Jolie took her leave of us. The woman and I continued our discussion. She thought to speak in the tongue-tying, truth-defying jargon of the deconstructionist. I tried to get her to define her terms. She said words have absolutely no connection to the objects to which they refer. I told her this was ludicrous nonsense. She said I was engaging in a patriarchal power trip, so typical of the white male oppressor.

'Twas brillig, and the slithey toves did slither about the studio as she wielded her deconstructing blade, snicker-snacking from the ideologue's stance that whatever I would say was coming out of my grounding as a member of the White Male Hegemony. My argument for proof was hegemonistic. My argument for definition was hegemonistic. My argument for rationality was hegemonistic. My argument for consistency was hegemonistic. Never mind that I wanted her to speak coherently, without jargon, and use words in a uniform, lucid manner. I finally blew my top when she said the dictionary was a Tool of the Oppressor, and her words would mean whatever she chose for them to mean. I waved my hand over my head and said, "You're up to here in shit! What does that mean?"

So much for discourse. Anything I said could and would be used against me. It didn't help that I could see she was toying with me. She was armed with a shiny new set of weapons she'd picked up in grad school and was out to slay whatever



reluctant dragon was foolish enough to wander onto her field of battle, as the only good member of the hegemony is a dead one. Another woman I've left disappointed along the way. Actually, she looked, or was trying to look, rather pleased at having provoked my anger. Towards the end of this unfortunate little spat, she smirked and said, "You are so easy." How did she know? Hey, baby, what's your sign....

But what made me so angry, besides her skidding around on the thin ice of nonsense, was that there was nothing I could say in disagreement with her that didn't get pigeonholed as a repressive patriarchal Anglo response. She was white, too, by the way. Quite blonde. And from California, which she found necessary though apropos of nothing to point out twice. She asked me if I'd ever been anywhere else, ever lived in any big cities. I told her I had lived in big cities and small towns. I didn't point out they're sometimes the same place, that people live in conceptual villages of about 150 members and any physical gathering of people numbering more than that is an aggregation of overlapping conceptual villages, no matter how big the city may be. There is just no way to talk to someone who has as a response something straight out of the village where she defended her thesis, who has a political agenda to meet, and who insists on defining words to meet her own *ad hoc* needs or desires. But words mean things. It's just that simple, and it's not my fault.

I used to go to art openings, among other events, hoping to meet someone. Jolie's cute but I think she may be a lesbian. She does harsh, spooky, bloody work that comes in part from a terrible auto accident she was in a few years ago, where she rolled her car five times and broke her back. She was in the hospital for quite some time. I think she said she didn't work for a couple of years. In the *Mortal Decay* show she displayed, among other work, the x-ray photos of her back. She has the most amazing array of supports bolted to her spine to keep her from just folding up. It's a wonder she can walk. I did wonder if she can have sex. With me, I mean. Of course, I didn't ask. Hey, baby....

Anyway, I felt pretty low after I blew up in her studio. The Showdown at the It's-Not-Okay Corral. It was ungentlemanly and irrational and pleased the deconstructionist greatly. She punched just the buttons she was looking for. Hit me right in my white male vulnerability, right through a chink in my chain-male armor. I

had no idea I was a bigot. She has no idea she is one, either. They say we're always the last to know.

When communications are so purposely ruptured—and Marx knew this and expostulated on it in his great rupturing theory—the only course of action left that makes any sense is the struggle to the death. No calls for wisdom or patience, no appeals to an understanding of human nature, will be heeded—for these are all the insidious tools of the Oppressor. What a bleak and bloody road Marxism leads down. And it is not dead, it is merely sleeping, dreaming its deconstructed dreams. Its own *Weltanschauung* makes ample allowance for its failure if it appears at an historically inauspicious time. We may all think it was overthrown when the Wall came down, but as long as the wealthy oppress the poor, the heart of Marxism will beat. And a *petit-bourgeois* white man like me knows to fear it to my very core.

June 29, 1999 — Owen comes to stay with me for two weeks next month. I haven't seen him since Christmas. It'll be good to knock a few baseballs around with him, eat a few pizzas and give him some fatherly guidance, of which I hear he may be in need. His adolescence is beginning and his internal guidance system has needed some resetting. He will be spending a week in a YMCA summer camp, then coming down here for his two weeks with me. These days he's been alternating his time between light restriction for not doing his chores, and shooting pool at the community center in Los Alamos.

I guess sometimes I do still miss Stephanie, though it's been almost ten years. She's thirty-six next month and is still as beautiful as ever, no slacking achievement for a woman with three kids and one divorce under her belt. But she and I, our lives were like two arcs that intersected for a while and then moved apart, and there was no way to fix that and still allow ourselves to thrive. She and I don't talk much, and that's too bad. We're careful not to talk about our past together or about money, and we get along. We sometimes talk for a while—this is always over the phone—about Owen, but I am reminded from time to time of all that she and I shared and simply have no way to revisit. She is, after all, the only wife I have ever had. Oh well. No sense dwelling on it.

Daybreak brings the sounds of the neighbors getting vicious with one another. This is a recent development. I refer to the neighbors closest to the bedroom window, which window I keep open summer nights. Though their house

has been for sale for a year, in a boom economy, the next-door neighbors are still there, the whole fat, squalling, squealing, screeching lot of them. This morning's pre-dawn confrontation was short, but like an alarm clock, it went on long enough to wake me up. Too bad that, unlike an alarm clock, I couldn't reach over a hand, slap at it and make it stop. All it was this morning was a fight over using a car—one of the Gordita Sisters shouting, "Get out of my car!" while Sonny-Boy Gordito mumbled something inaudible. At least the dog didn't join in. They have a little old furry, overgrown, yapping spaniel they call Guera. It used to come into my yard through a hole in the back fence until one day a few years back, it was in my back yard and I threw rocks at it. As it moved slowly back to its hole I realized, That's an old dog there—no wonder it always barks at me like a stranger even though I've been here for years.

This past Saturday morning's next door family fight-fest began at about four o'clock. There was shouting, there was the slamming of doors. This was Round One. It was quickly over. I went back to sleep. Round Two began about forty-five minutes later. I had my portable fan turned on and couldn't hear everything being said, shouted, snarled, grunted, mumbled or whined. I resisted the temptation to crawl out of bed, turn off the fan, and listen in. I do not know why I was feeling so saintly. I made out enough of the Saturday morning spat to know that Papa Gordito was paterfamilias-pissed at Sonny-Boy Gordito for who-knows-what. Again, it was something to do with a car. Sonny-Boy was apparently guilty of some adolescent failure to consider others. Papa was being very mean. He kept calling Sonny-Boy a fucking bastard—interesting point for a father to make—and kept slapping him around, trying to get him to fight, though I imagine he would have been surprised as hell if Sonny-Boy had hauled off and cold-cocked him. "What's wrong with you, you fucking bastard?" Slap. Slap. "Huh? Huh?" Slap, slap. "What's wrong with you? Aren't you man enough? Fucking bastard. Fucking bastard." More slaps. All else I could make out was Mad Papa Gordito telling Sonny-Boy, "Don't you ever think about your sisters and your nephews?" All of whom live there. And I heard Papa tell S-B to get out, "Fucking bastard."

I was hopelessly awake by the time this misfortune concluded. I lay in bed a while, trying to imagine what Owen could possibly do that would lead me to treat him like that. I couldn't come up with anything, so I got up to feed Katunia and set the sprinkler to watering the lawn.

The incessant basketballing that was a feature of summer evenings in their driveway ended a few years back. That used to go on pretty late and I could hear it real well through the paper-thin bedroom walls (actually, the walls are about two inches thick, consisting of a sandwich of plaster & lath, newspaper, and concrete, with an RF factor of about 0.5). While the dribbling, shooting and shouting was annoying, I mollified myself by thinking, At least they're doing something healthy and safe, and it too shall pass as they grow up. Eventually, they'll be crotchety and middle-aged, like meself.

They are the only near neighbors who are still the same as when I moved in five years ago. On the other side of them, there was a couple who were real fighters. The first night I was here, I thought to leave my window open to catch the night breezes. What I caught was a most noticeable screaming match going on somewhere down the street. It was the couple the other side of the Gordito family. The only time I saw them was a Saturday morning not long after, when he—tall, thin, with long, tightly curled brown hair—was running a skip-dodging path out of the house and into the street to escape beer bottles thrown at him by her—short, thin, with long, tightly curled brown hair—while the two of them screamed and shouted at each other. They moved out not long after that.

A young, quieter couple lived in that house for a while after they left. In the summer of '95, at midnight one night, there came a knocking on my door. I had just stripped myself to the buff and slipped my buff into bed, and was reading some this or that. I think there may have been a call for help, though I don't clearly recall. By the time I was up and dressed, the knocker had moved down two doors and roused the quiet young couple. They stood with him on their lighted, raised porch. He had been stabbed in the side, from what I could see. I stood in my dark front yard, as there has not been a front porch light on this house since the porch was enclosed to make the room Owen sleeps in. I had my shillelagh, the olive branch with its tip wrapped in barbed wire clipped from a coil left behind by the previous tenants, resting over my shoulder as I stood there, unseen and watching. Soon an ambulance rolled up Bell, stopping across the street at the corner of High and Bell. It waited under the streetlight. The stabbed man and the young couple, the woman with a cordless phone in hand, stood on the lighted porch. I raised an arm and pointed at them, while staring at the ambulance. The ambulance did not

move to the stabbed man for several minutes, until a police car pulled up to escort it.

The people who used to live across the street and played their mariachi and norteña music at sometimes somewhat loudish volume moved out a year ago, to be replaced by quieter, familied folk who take an interest in the 'hood. The paterfamilias there, a fellow named either David or Daniel, I forget which, stopped a couple fellows who were trying to break into my house some weeks back. He called the police and held the crooks at gunpoint, but the police never came, so he had to let them go. He told me, "I couldn't stand there all day." After he told me of this, which he did at ten-thirty one night when I had just got home from a day's work at Michael's office and KHFM, I immediately rolled out that coil of barbed wire and was up till one-thirty that night looping and hammering the wire into the back fence and gate. Now I feel safe, though I always have a few scratches on me from where the wire sometimes gets me. I've kept the back gate locked almost since I first moved in and first found signs of people prowling the property in the daytime. In the wake of this last attempted burglary, I've put a lock on the front gate too, something I had not wanted to do as it means no one gets in unless I know they're coming.

In the next-door house on the other side, across the unpaved stub of Bell that runs up to dead-end before the freeway off-ramp, the shuffling old woman who lived there has moved. It's been a year or two since she left. Some while back, she came into possession of a car. I do not know why. She didn't appear ever to drive it. Every week she would come out with her broom and sweep the dirt around the car, sweeping the pebbles away. Every few months she would fire it up. It was an American thing from sometime in the '70s; a big thing of a car. A thin stream of blue smoke came from its tailpipe. The fellow who lives there now, I think his name is Ray, he seems to be one okay guy. He puts the flag out on the holidays, is always friendly, has friends who look like church folk who come by from time to time, runs some sort of small business, and has the chest and arms of such size and development that indicate his good cheer and friendly disposition are rooted in the confidence that no one in their right mind would fuck with him. We last spoke the night I was putting up the barbed wire. He and I agreed it's a crime the way the police won't hardly ever come around here, except in their annoying and spooky helicopter, unless people are already in the too-late position. One morning a few

years back, a woman in a large car was threatening to run a man down on High Street right out front of my house. He had a big rock in his hand and was threatening to throw it through her windshield. She was chasing him all everywhere, even up into the alley behind Ray's house (which Ray has since fenced off). I called the police, just to be on the safe side. What did the police care? They were already safe. Almost an hour later, the cruiser came. By that time she could have had the guy run down, stuffed in the trunk, and dumped in the river. All in all, though, the 'hood seems safer than it was when I moved in.

Dixie told me one day that she used to buy cocaine back in 1990 from the people who lived in that house where Ray lives now. She was over here to deliver a quarter-pound of mind-fuck to me during that abysmal period two years ago when I was having so much employment and financial trouble and had essentially thrown in the towel for a time. I hope she is safe, wherever she may have gone. She was dealing with people who had already killed their competition in a shooting that I don't think the police have yet solved. She also told me without my asking how it was these seriously competitive entrepreneurs were smuggling their weed out of Mexico, by taking advantage of NAFTA's border relaxations and stuffing the mota into PVC piping being brought up for sale. She said, "See? That's why it's got this round side. The drug dogs can't smell it through the pipe." This gave me several titillating tidbits of information I really didn't want to have. I figured if these people would kill their competition, a man who left behind a widow and orphans, why should I pretend to know anything at all? There's no way I'm ever going to rise to the heights of artistic and literary success if I'm in the Federal Witness Protection Program.

It was in late '95 and into '96 that the police first came around and got serious for a while about cleaning things up. But the most notable and lasting good the City did at that time was round up the packs of dogs that used to roam the streets at night. They also provided us, finally, with the wheeled-n-sealed garbage carts that replaced our stacks of plastic bags in the streets. The paler and wealthier neighborhoods to the north got them first, but like piss and diarrhea, they eventually trickled down to we po' fo'k. So we don't have anywhere near as much garbage on the streets as we did when the packs of wild dogs and the cats walking by themselves used to tear into the plastic bags; though you can always find a lot of

empty Budweiser twelve-packs around, the spoor of the indigenous South Broadway Blue-Collared *Homo hetero*.

The spookiest thing that I've seen in the war of the police state versus the people came almost two years ago, in August of '97. I was sitting outside on the old green bench under the trees by the back gate, when I heard an odd, quiet airplane engine noise. I'm still as much a goofball for airplanes as any boy is, so I got up to look, thinking maybe it was a Rutan or an ultralight. What it was was a camouflaged Loach (LOH—Light Observation Helicopter), flying low circles over the 'hood. It had a huge telephoto lens or telescope mounted on its chin, where attack choppers have their machine-cannon. It seemed clear that the 'hood was being inspected by minions of our all-wise, all-seeing, all-knowing government for the ripening of any illicit stands of that summer's illicit herbage.

The next morning, the Loach was back. It was flying low over the Edith/Broadway area. I was curious as to whether it had any markings; was it Department of Defense or DEA? It sure wasn't APD or the State Troopers' Black Hawk. Being an enterprising lad, I got my binoculars down from their hook on the wall and stood at my front door to zero in on the Loach and try to get a clue. What I got was a chill. The telescopic lens looked this way and that, rotating slowly. When it pointed my way, the chopper turned and flew towards me, at an angle to cross in front of my house, that scope rotating to stay fixed on me. Not feeling like flinching in the face of a tyrannous and misguided government, I kept my binoculars trained on the chopper and watched it watching me as it flew by. Not being an idiot, I suppressed the desire to give that bird the bird. The Loach flew over and out of my sight. I turned away and hung my binoculars back up where they go, on a hook on the wall in the main room where the old, sealed-up chimney is. The binoculars were dusty, it having been a while since I had last gone stargazing with them. I walked into the kitchen, to the sink to wash my hands. That Loach was hovering behind the house, just beyond the freeway, its telescopic lens trained on my kitchen window. I washed my hands. The Loach flew away. I haven't seen it since.

But the copper-chopper, the APD bird, is around a lot. It's something of a comfort and something of an annoyance, the latter particularly given how much of its work is in regard to this foolish, foolish drug war that has done so much damage to the fabric of our society. And sometimes I worry the thing is going to fall out of

the sky on my house. Last fall, on one very windy September night, the chopper was coming up low along the houses, from César Chávez (née Stadium) up this way, slow and low, bucking in the wind not a hundred feet overhead, trying to find something in the alley behind my house. I stood at my kitchen window and watched it for a short while, wondering would I have time to duck should it crash and its rotor blades come flying off.

August 14, 1999 — Owen came to stay with me the last half of July, seventeen days. It's the longest he and I have been together in almost five years. It went by quickly. I took the second week off from my various jobs. The rainy season was beginning and for lunch we'd pull a small table and a couple chairs out to the grass of the back yard and sit in the shade of the elm tree while we ate sandwiches and fresh blueberries washed down with iced sun tea, while the dazzling white clouds that would later turn into dark blue and grey thunderheads boiled up into the skies over the Sandia Mountains on the east edge of town.

Owen's starting sixth grade this year. I can't hardly believe it. I don't feel as old as I imagined my parents to be when they were about my age and I was starting sixth grade. But I think they were older when they were my age. They grew up in the Depression and World War Two, then right after that came the long decades of the Cold War, with its colonial misadventures. When my dad was my age, he was smack in the middle of his only tour in Vietnam. He was a career soldier, having served in Korea when he and my mom were young things just married. After Vietnam, he left the army. The wars knocked him about a bit. He's 100% disabled now, walks with a cane and can't hardly hear. His career took its toll on my mom, too. She was a very creative, energetic woman who was somewhat naive and superstitious, very frustrated with the role of army-wife, drank way too much coffee and was no stranger to rage.

Owen's already quite tall, at five-foot, three-inches. He already has the teenaged tallboy's long, lanky stride. It was a poignant pleasure to watch him loping down the hall at Belltower Broadcasting, looking so teenaged and contained. There's almost no little boy left in my little boy, though he still sleeps with a stuffed animal and looks such an angel doing it. Ah, Time—an odd thief, Time, that gives something in exchange for everything it takes away.



I had occasion to be in the Northeast Heights three times last month. I rarely get up there, as I have no business there, usually. I mean really up there, off Tramway and out by Hoffmantown Baptist Church. I was struck, and not for the first time, by how profoundly wealthy this country is. I mean, the huge houses, the fine lawns, the multiple cars in the drives, the boats, every other vehicle an extended-cab pickup truck or a sport utility vehicle, all shiny and new, all this wealth going on for blocks and blocks and blocks, mile after mile of it. No matter that it is almost all of it built on the rather fragile foundation of massive amounts of credit, it is nonetheless built. It seems that most of us in this country have no idea how wealthy most of us are—material wealth, I mean, and how caught up in the endless procurement of more and more our whole culture is, and how far we've come since my parents were children hardscrabbling through the Depression, and how far we've strayed, how ignorant of history we have become, how devoid of understanding.

I've been up to the extinct volcanoes on the West Mesa three times this summer. The first time, there were waves of lizards cascading across the desert floor. This was on a morning in June. The last of the season's prickly pear were blooming—each waxy yellow flower blooms only one day—and I followed a trail I hadn't taken before, a trail that ran past a couple prairie dog villages. At least, I think that's what they were. They looked like prairie dog villages, though I saw no prairie dogs. The deserts of my childhood had no such places, being hotter, lower, drier and further to the south, though they did have ground squirrels, who have a peculiar high, chittering call. I've heard similar calls at the volcanoes. As I walked along the trail on that June morning, there were just scads and scads of lizards. There were so many of them, they were like a scampering wave around my feet as I walked along the trail.

One Sunday in July I went out to scout about and find a place to perch and read a little Stendhal. Later that day I was walking around on the center volcano. About ten or twelve years ago there was a story in one of the local papers as to how a large circle of rocks with lines of rocks inside, one of which ran due east-west, had been discovered in the mouth of the center volcano. Given that we are a superstitious, ignorant and fearful folk, the paper advanced the notion that Satan and the worship thereof may somehow be involved. Shortly after this story appeared, another was published wherein a police officer was quoted as saying

that this circle of rocks was simply the innocuous playing field for some ball game he and his fellow officers had devised. Neither story made much sense, but that cone is used as a sacred site. The first time I went up there was six years ago, and I saw the circle of rocks with its internal east-west line. Over time, the circle would fade due to weather or people, then later it would be reassembled. Sometimes it was put back together as a peace symbol, still with that one axis running due east-west. Once I found a frame drum near the circle, and another time, inside the circle, a long red stick stuck in the ground, with runic writing on it in black, and with a rabbit's tail hanging from it. I left these things undisturbed. Though I retain very few superstitions, and that red stick was a cunning device that might look fetching in my hovel, there was the issue of respecting other people's magic. Cairns are also to be found up there, in various stages of repair and disarray over time. Sometimes I add to them. When I went back up there in July, the rocks that had once formed the circle—and this is a large circle, maybe twenty or thirty feet in diameter—had been used to form a large crucifix, again with its long axis directly on the east-west line.

It was getting late in the afternoon as I left the center volcano, a red-tailed hawk flying eastward on my left. I thought to find a cropping of rock and sit and read until the light came down, but the millipedes had come out. First trip it was lizards, second it was millipedes—all the sudden, everywhere I look there's millipedes. Big ones, little ones, millipedes alone, millipedes together, and they seemed to have a preference for flat, rocky surfaces such as the sort I would sit on and read. I squatted and watched a big one cross the path—what an interesting way of getting around, all those legs—then I figured it was time to mosey on back to the ranch.

Last week I went out there late one afternoon and walked around a lot. The animal of the week this time was the winged ant. The rains had brought out the maters, who were revving their engines around the openings to the colonies, preparatory to the evening's amatory flights. Lots of ant wings glistening in the sun, and lots of wildflowers of blue, yellow, and chalky orange blossom. I went to the top of the central volcano. Well, not all the way to the top. Right as I clambered up the rocks, into my sight and hearing came this huge mass of flying ants, thousands of them, gathered on the rock there at the summit. The air was filled with the buzzing sound of their wings, and they were still on the ground, most of them. A few were airborne, plus there were gnats flying about in their little gnat-clouds, and

robber-flies darting in and out like they owned the place. It looked like there was going to be a hell of a party come sundown.

August 31, 1999 — Yesterday afternoon at closing time at the office—closing time for me there being 4:30, while Michael stays later, sometimes quite a bit later—he and I had a conversation, started by him, over a column in the *Tribune* about Governor Johnson's decriminalization position. I didn't tell him that just the day before I had become associated with the Delta-9 Coalition, a group which seeks to effect change in government drug policy and society's attitudes to the issue of using drugs.

I attended the Delta-9 meeting Sunday afternoon, and spoke again last evening with one of its spokespersons, one Josh Locke. At the meeting Sunday were maybe ten people, including Greens and Libertarians of varying agendas. Delta-9 doesn't have any officers, but it has clear leaders, and it has persons who don't look like they would accomplish much without leaders to incite them. This small and motley crew of oddball pot-smokers seems an unlikely bunch to be taken seriously by the media or the legislature. Stoners fall into the "Least Likely To Do" category, bless our hearts. But I have a task with the organization! I am to review the local papers and clip articles of interest and deliver them, daily if possible, to Josh, who works for UNM in some undisclosed capacity. He has an MBA and was for ten years with Intel, so he's not exactly a lightweight tripping through the daisies. He was married for fifteen years and is two years divorced with two teenaged daughters, who don't live with him. He says he's talked to them about pot. I talked to Owen about pot maybe a year ago or more. I told him, This is what this is and I like to smoke it and it's illegal so don't tell anyone or I will go to jail and maybe never get to see you again, but you can talk to your mom about it if you like because she knows already and a fellow ought to be able to talk to his mom.

Summer, 1999 – I am having the most incredible high right now. I know the validity of any statement made while the maker is in such a state is suspect, but I've been getting some intense rushes off this little roachy remainder of a joint of roach-doap–oops–doaped-on-a-roap. Giggle me timbers, I'll have another hit.

October 14, 1999 — I'm not so active with Delta-9 as I was a month ago. The ten hours a week it took to review the papers, clip articles, and deliver them to Josh Locke was an amount of time I don't have, however good I may have mistaken my intentions to be. I've followed some of the debate in the papers over Governor Johnson's stance on legalization. Rarely, even in this superstitious, ignorant and fearful land, have I seen so many people so frightened by something so misunderstood. On the other hand, we are the cultural descendants of people who used to burn witches, so it should be no surprise.

I am now working three count 'em three count 'em three part-time jobs. This is good, if hectic. I'm still at the law office, though business has been slow since March and Michael may have to let me go, which would be unfortunate because he pays me more than the other two jobs put together. Those jobs are that I am still at KHFM, plus I start next week at KUNM as an administrative assistant angling for a full-time position.

I was sitting on the bench out back this morning, taking a break from housework and administrative work to do some reading and thinking. Katunia, who is making a decent living for herself eating for free and being cute, loving me as only the God of Food can be loved, hopped on the bench beside me. I started petting her, then sang her the chorus from the Indigo Girls' "Secure Yourself."

*Secure yourself to heaven,  
Hold on tight, the night is come.  
Fasten up your earthly burdens,  
We have just begun.*

I don't think I had sung to her before. She watched me with her one good eye, with an expression reminiscent of Owen's when he was small child confronted with something new, strange and fascinating.

November 2, 1999 — I am working sixty hours this week at my three jobs. I've started production training at KHFM, learning how to make commercials which I really don't

want to make but Harold has been told to fire most or all of us part-timers by the end of the year so that the people who run the company can buy women and fast cars with the money they've been paying us except that they pay us so little that they're not going to be able to do much with what they'll save by throwing us out of work except maybe buy a couple old Toyotas and a night out with their ugly sisters. So Harold offered me the production training in a bid to make me valuable enough to the company for them to keep me.

November 28, 1999 — Thanksgiving Day I worked the afternoon shift at KHFM, plus Thursday evenings are one of my regular evening shifts (the other is Wednesdays), so I did a double at the station and that was a pleasant way to spend the day, even though Tracy called me up the night before to invite me to spend Thanksgiving with her family—her mom and surviving sister and brother (she's lost a sister and brother, both to cancer) and various other familial appendages—and I had to say no. I signed on for Thanksgiving at the station about a month ago. Sort of a day to gather in the harvest. Belltower paid time-and-a-half, plus it was a paid holiday from Michael's office.

The afternoon show, which I did again on Friday, was fun. It's the *Afternoon Promenade* and I haven't worked it before, as I am usually at the law job. I got to program all the music. The secret to my programming at KHFM is this: I take a look at the Program Log, which lists the commercials and traffic reports and live-reads and what-nots and when they are supposed to occur, then I drift-net a shelf or two of CDs from the KHFM music library and pick out selections that will fit into the time-slots available. Classical music is such a huge genre and I came to it so late, I don't have much in the way of preconceived notions as to what should go where. It's just a matter of, "Hmm, I have six minutes to fill—where's me a six-minute piece?" Then I shuffle my way through a stack of CDs and pick something out. The upside is that the shows I program don't sound like Harold's programming, which is the programming I usually play during the evening shifts and it's okay, it's good stuff, but it's the same stuff over and over again. For nearly the past year, I've dropped the last selection of the night from his list and played whatever I wanted. This usually works out okay. Sometimes I play things that Harold gives me shit about, but he reviews every disc that comes in to the station before it goes to the music library. You would figure that if he didn't want us playing things, he's in the perfect position

to keep such things off the shelves. He tells me, "When in doubt, stick to 19th-Century composers," and I tell him, "But, Harold, I'm never in doubt."

The high point of Thanksgiving was when José, who works at KKOB and The Sports Animal (a station just down the hall from KHFM; I think its call letters are KNML), dropped by the KHFM studio with a tray of Thanksgiving food. He said it was because he had "worked a lot of Thanksgivings." I was mighty pleased. I had already had a burrito and a chimichanga from the vending machine in the employees' lounge and wasn't exactly hungry, but it sure was nice of José to bring that food by so I could get good and stuffed the way we turkeys are supposed to do on T-Giving Day. There was chicken (a wing and a hunk of white meat), mashed potatoes (lumpy-good!), stuffing, green peas, cranberry sauce, ice cream (which I ate first), and pumpkin pie. I was pleased as could be that someone I don't even know would be so nice. I always expect the worst from people. Gives me plenty of room to be pleasantly surprised.

I've started working as a producer (commercials—yuck! but it's a job) along with my air-time shifts at KHFM. I'll be working 40 to 55 hours a week for the next six weeks, including Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and New Year's Eve. More or less my turn this time. My last day at KUNM is tomorrow. I didn't get the full-time post I was aiming at. The general manager asked me to stay until sometime in January but I told him I needed to commit more fully to my other two jobs.

Working three part-time jobs has turned out to be more tiring than working just one job for the same number of hours. It seems I am often rushing from one job to another, trying to keep track of everything. There has been a certain amount of stress, a certain lack of focus, though I'm about as Y2K compliant as I can get. For people with home computers, those little desktop jobbers running Windows, the whole issue seems to be a matter of being duped into spending money for unnecessary system upgrades. Unless one is running a program that computes the time value of money, or any similar type of program where it's vital to know the difference between 1900 and 2000, there doesn't seem to be a need to worry about one's home computer—but most people don't realize this, and this Y2K brouhaha has been making a lot funds move from snake oil purchasers to snake oil sales representatives. Where there is an issue is with older, large mainframe programs designed to do such things as keep the electricity flowing and keep aircraft from crashing into one another and keep the financial markets open and

keep war from accidentally starting. These are all corporate and governmental systems. Most of them seem to be prepared, in no small part due to the specter of liability. Think of the lawsuits if people can't get heat and lights in January! It boggles the mind, especially given the excess number of attorneys in this country. Not to complain, as I have been making a decent living off attorneys for most of this decade.

So I have my standard canned food reserves, and I have bottled water because that's what I drink because it is lighter and smoother than our tap water here, and I have candles for thunderstorm-inspired power outages, and I have batteries but I think it wouldn't hurt to buy a few more of those. My biggest worry over the New Year is the likelihood of radical nuts making violent statements. I'll do like most folk—gas up the car, double-check the food and water and candles and batteries and sing "Auld Lang Syne" at the appropriate time. I was tempted to buy a rifle, but I haven't done it. I did already buy sparkling wine for the New Year's party. I laid in three bottles a few months ago, as it seems such a goody may be difficult to find in the last two weeks or so of December. Can't get much more ready without getting weird about it.

January 11, 2000 — New Year's Day I was the fuzzy version of myself, having gone the night before to Tracy's party, where much Champagne and Mary Jane were consumed. It was a pleasant evening, the weather nice enough for us to sit outside in Tracy's back yard as the new year rang in. Then, from the sound of all the gunfire, it seemed the weather might be about to change and a rain of stray bullets begin, so we went indoors. I got good and plastered and later took a cab home. When I walked back to Tracy's late the next morning, or maybe by then it was early in the afternoon, to retrieve my car, I could tell which houses in the 'hood are the ones where the gangsters live by the 9mm bullet casings scattered in the streets in front of them.

I spoke to Owen on New Year's Day. He too was of the fuzzy set, though he of course had had no bubbly or smoke the night before. He and two of his buds were up all night to see the millennium in. He told me he got to bed at 0900. I spoke to him in early evening after he had awoken, and he and I were both still rather scattered.



I am more gathered now, being down to one part-time paying job. New Year's Eve was my last gig at KHFM. The snap and the exit came rather abruptly. The last ten weeks of last year it seemed all I did was get ready for work, go to work, work, go to other work, work some more, come home from work, get ready for work, eat on the way to work, work, eat some more at work, go home from work, pass out exhausted, and dream of work.

I did harvest a nice little crop of dollars. Getting a share of those dollars from Belltower was becoming more trouble than it was worth. Already the morale of everybody in the place was sunken due to the broadcast automation that was being implemented, and the way it was being implemented. At one of the stations the rumors began skittering about the control room the week after Thanksgiving that all the on-air talent were about to be replaced by pre-packaged shows beamed in by satellite from Someplace Else. Corporate management sought quickly to quell the rumors, as demoralized and resentful program hosts fearing for their jobs while at the same time broadcasting over the airwaves to thousands of people, this could be bad for business. No telling what a pissed-off deejay who had lost both hope and fear might do. Corporate management sent a memo around on a Friday, reassuring station staff that the rumors they were hearing were only rumors, and further admonishing all employees that spreading rumors detrimental to workplace morale was a violation of company regulations and could lead to immediate termination. It seems everybody at that station was guilty, because the next morning they were all given their termination notices while the techies installed the new automated equipment.

There is a large sign in the lobby of the Belltower offices, on the wall behind the receptionist, that reads, "People Are Our Most Important Asset." Which People this refers to, I don't know. What sort of Asset is also unclear; one is reminded of the story of Soylent Green. As for those of us who worked at Belltower, were inedible, and thought the sign might in some way refer to us, there was the little problem of the Last Paycheck Before Christmas. This was to have been disbursed in the ordinary course of business on Friday, December 17th. What we worker bees got instead of our paychecks was a memo informing us there had been a small difficulty causing a small delay in our pay. Seems the only person in the entire establishment who had authority to sign these checks was out of the office. Other arrangements, the memorandum assured us, were being made, and we could all

expect to receive our checks the following Monday or Tuesday. The memo also assured us that Belltower “apologizes for any inconvenience this may have caused.” What the memo did not tell us, but we quickly learned through the morale-strangling grapevine, was that the manager who was supposed to sign the checks had already left on an extended holiday vacation. She wasn’t due back until January 3rd. The matter of making arrangements regarding paying the workers slipped her mind in the hustle and bustle of making arrangements for her Caribbean cruise. That weekend, when I was at the station, I took a copy of the memo and stapled to it several reiterations of “People Are Our Most Important Asset”—which I ran up on the word processor rather than wrote out in my recognizable handwriting, I’m not a complete idiot—and thumbtacked the modified memo to the corkboard in the employees’ lounge, next to the memos celebrating increased corporate profits and the latest Arbitron ratings. By Monday evening, my modified memo had been removed.

I was a short-timer by then and didn’t know it. I worked Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, both programming and producing. I didn’t produce all the commercials that were on the production board, but I got as many of them done as I could while I still cared about it. Soon as I stopped caring, I stopped working and went home. Boxing Day was a Sunday and was to have been a day off for me, my first in weeks. Late that morning, the phone rang. Oh, who could it be on this fine, quiet sabbath morn after Christmas? Why, ‘twas Shirley, one of my co-workers at KHFM. She, too, is a programmer and producer, just like me, but unlike me, she’s angling for Harold’s job should he retire. Her ambition has led her to mistake herself for a supervisor. She called to demand from me some explanation as to why I hadn’t produced everything that was listed on the production board. I told her, “I did most of them, but I didn’t get around to the Porsche ad, and there may be one or two others on the board, you can look and see.” She did not want to look and see. She said, “You better get down here right away and do these,” to which I responded, “You want them done so bad, do them yourself,” and hung up.

That’s when I knew it was over. I went by the station the next day and met with Harold, told him what had happened and that I was sorry, I had had enough and was leaving Belltower ASAP. I told him, “It’s the end of the year, I’d like to work through New Year’s Eve and then that’s it. Sorry about the short notice.” He was amenable. He’s an old pro and knows that when a deejay is burned out, you pull

him off the air before he does something that embarrasses the station or offends the advertisers or, St. Marconi forbid, violates federal law. For instance, an overworked deejay who's been scrambling for as many hours as he can get because the company pays him seven dollars an hour while he has seen other deejays all around him laid off literally the day after they were assured there would be no layoffs, then has the paycheck that would have been useful for purchasing holiday gifts the weekend before Christmas delayed because the only person in the entire fucking universe who could sign the paycheck is sunning herself on the deck of a cruise ship while getting plastered on Mai Tais and who could blame her, she works for the same company, this overworked deejay could be a radio time bomb about to go off on a three-for-one special, pitching live an on-air fantod of obscenity that will cause station management to have to issue one or more on-air apologies and adjust the budget to cope with the dollars lost by advertisers pulling out, not to mention ponying up the funds to pay the federal fine, which could easily be greater than one deejay's annual wages. Can't have that. Get that guy off the air. I'm a little surprised he didn't pull me off the air right away, but he didn't. My last show ended at 10:00 the evening of New Year's Eve. He was my relief. He brought in another fellow and a thermos full of something to ring in the New Year. He asked me if I wanted to work until midnight, but I told him no, even though I would have a great view of the downtown fireworks show, I had a party to go to.

Radio has changed a lot in the few years since the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and not always for the better. Low-class, disrespectful, and degrading programming is becoming all the rage while the barbarians are pillaging, the rich are getting richer, the desperate and/or idealistic are staying in, and schmucks like me are getting out. Radio was never my calling. I just sort of wandered into it.

January 23, 2000 — My house smells like burnt chicken. I smoked dope for a week and it still smells like burnt chicken. I bought cheap incense—I was in a hurry, the expensive scente shoppe was closed—and am even now burning a stick of Tutti-Frutti so that my house may have the odor, the miasma, even, of discount prostitution and seared chicken flesh. I have even smoked cigarettes, yet there is still herein the unmistakable stench of radically overcooked meat. And bone. And let me tell you, badly burned chicken smells bad.

Just a week ago last Sunday I was out stringing even more concertina wire around the periphery of my *Festung Hochstrasse*. I was getting into it, securing all the little gaps in the fence that I never thought anyone would come through, and ended up spending three hours at it, getting it right. Meantime, I had forgotten about the chicken I had left cooking inside. As I went to open my back door, which is functionally my front door, I caught a whiff of burnage and thought, "Shit! The chicken!" I opened my door and shit-the-chicken was right. This place was filled with smoke. Very little of the chicken was left unblackened. Now, black is all right, but is not my preferred color of chicken, cooked or raw. Cost me the pot it was cooking in, too, adding a touch of molten aluminum to the smell, which, as established above, lingers yet.

Why was I stringing concertina wire along the fence around my house? Because with the horse gone, I thought I should close the barn door. Just a couple days before, my house was burgled for the second time in a year-and-a-half. I have precious few toys left, being a poor struggling artist who won't grow up and get a full-time, good-paying, All-American job. The next burglar will not get much, though he may take the used computer I bought to replace the one the most recent burglar took. I came home at lunch that fateful day to find my sanctum violated. While I had strung concertina wire along part of the fence one night last fall, I had not strung wire through the privacy hedge because it was still green and growing and I never thought as to how when winter came and it died back any alleged criminal could come right through it and break in. I hid the pot plants and called the cops. Given that the crime had been committed and the perpetrators had escaped and all was safe and quiet, the cops showed up and did their copper stuff. So now the front gate is wired and chained shut and the back gate is locked also, and the entire perimeter is rife with barbed wire.

A couple weeks ago some young gangster with a powerful firearm blew a huge hole through the stop sign right across the street. Motive unknown, gang initiation suspected. I wasn't here, or I was and I wasn't conscious, when that happened. Virginia across the street said there were bullets ricocheting everywhere. There's a house just a half-block from here where a substance distributorship is operating a good business. I think the cops know about that one but haven't been able to nail anyone yet. The copper chopper has been in the air overhead recent nights, scanning the 'hood with their bright pinpoint lights. I was

watching out the kitchen window just the other night as they went 'round and 'round overhead, and the beam swept over my house a couple times while I watched. That light is bright when it's shining right at you. It's getting all too urban here. I'll go do some reading and drink a cup of coffee.

February 7, 2000 — I just finished reading Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. He writes with the crystal lucidity of the truly insane. Or was he a man of his time? How far we've moved in just a century from the absolute certainty displayed by the great German thinkers. Odd what a couple of world wars will do, especially to the losing side. I was at Tracy's big summer party last year and spoke at length with a woman from Germany. We were talking about, among various things, the differences between educational systems in our two countries. To begin with, Germany actually has an educational system, one with a proud heritage of turning out crusty old farts who read the Mind of God and gaze deeply into the Linty Navel of Being. This woman told me German students are taught, in the wake of their nation having had its ass kicked, to be critical in their thinking and not just to accept what persons such as politicians may say.

A little critical thinking would come in handy at *Hemp TV*, a show on community access cable here in the Kirkie. I thought I was getting out of broadcasting but the Delta-9 coalition for cannabis legalization does this *Hemp TV* show and I do believe I have become one of the crew. These things just happen. What a bunch! Delta-9 seems to consist mostly, if not exclusively, of Stoners, Greens, Stoned Greens, Stoner Libertarians, Libertarians, and Stoners. And one registered Democrat (Stoner), who is me. *Hemp TV* is a weekly hour-long talk show with live call-in viewers. Yes, we have viewers, and I think all six of them phoned up last week. You can imagine how the discourse goes. We have a half-stoned crew with scant training in critical thought, viewers likewise, and actually staying on a point and analyzing it are beyond even the wildest dreams of all but a few of us.

But we dream on since our Iron-Man governor came out in favor of sweeping drug legalization. The tease, getting our hopes up like that. The effects have been, so far, to galvanize (as far as that is possible) the Stoner Set, to make the Guv a pariah to his party (Republican), and to make legislators absolutely panic over the thought of doing something intelligent for a change. All the fascisti in government at all levels are having a field day one-upping each other on how tough they can

be on the drug issue. None of them make any attempt at one-upping each other on how intelligent they can be on the drug issue. The state senate here in La-La Land just two weeks ago passed a resolution stating its absolute opposition to even discussing the issue of drug law reform. Seems they think it may confuse the other children.

The nicest thing about being around the Delta-9 people and working on *Hemp TV* is, I feel safe with them. I'm not sure how much difference we can make given how frightened and powerful those who uphold the status quo are, but we have each other, valiant band of hop-heads we may be.

Stephanie phoned me the other night to talk about Owen. His grades are slipping, he's argumentative, he won't do the things he's supposed to do—he's adolescent and it shows. I talked with him after talking with his mom. I don't know how successful I can be at parenting from afar. There's only so much parental input the adolescent mind can handle before it just glazes over. And Owen's different with me. He does what I tell him to do. But I'm worried about him. Seems it's time for me to become more present in his life. I'd like for him to stay with his mom but there's a chance he'll be living with me before he gets out of middle school. Fact is, I'd take him now if I could afford him, but I don't want him living in this gangster-infested neighborhood and going to school here.

Okay, one more cig, then... gnats. My house has many gnats. They live in the pots of the plants. This I wouldn't mind if these gnats didn't also have wings and a preference for such warm, moist places as mouths, nostrils and eyes. Good thing they move slow enough to be killed by hand. I sit in my chair, reading Freud and Jung, and often cannot get through a paragraph without having to stop and kill several gnats.

May 1, 2000 — My house got broken into again, in mid-April. This time the thieves were caught just a few blocks away as they made their attempted escape. David across the street had seen them breaking in and he called the police. I must remember to buy him a case of his favorite beer just as soon as I can afford to.

I had promised myself in January that if my home were to be broken into again, I would change jobs to something full-time, then move. I just didn't expect, when I made that promise, that I would be faced with either living up to it or breaking it so soon.

Owen spent a week with me just before the burglary. He was on spring break, so I took a week of vacation and we had a good time. Watched a lot of *Star Trek* on telly; enjoyed same. He's at that odd age, twelve, where he's interested in some of the toys of childhood and some of the toys of adolescence at the same time. He stands five-foot-six and weighs in at just over eight stone. Funny how stone is a weight, but it's not subdivided into pebbles.

Kids grow up so fast. No sooner does one get used to them being a certain way, when they've outgrown it. I think I shall always miss the six-year-old version of Owen. He'll be starting middle school next year. We get along great, he and I. We talk a lot about things that interest us. We listen to rock music in the car and we both bop and groove.

There's a big marijuana march coming up Saturday. Some of the young radicals I'm working with at *Hemp TV* want to get arrested—civil disobedience and all that—and I am sure that when I was their age, had I been as politically involved as they are, I would have wanted same; however, I can't say that I want that now.

May 8, 2000 — I worked Saturday afternoon at the Millennium Marijuana March as part of the Delta-9 Coalition, helping keep the marchers all pointed in the same direction and keep them from any wilding in the streets. Of course, if any of them had really wanted to go wild and block the street or smash things, no amount of me was going to be able to stop them.

We marched along both sides of Central, from University to Nob Hill, then back again. We had police escort to block traffic at major cross-streets, but it was up to us march workers to keep the marchers off the street and on the sidewalks so no one would get busted. The cops sure didn't want to bust anyone. They didn't want any riots starting any more than we old-timers did. Some of the young marchers could have "gone Seattle" if they had felt it was the thing to do. Part of what we did was to keep them from feeling that way. It would have been very counter-productive if there had been a riot on Route 66 over the legalization of marijuana. Reefer madness. So I was making like a sheepdog, running back and forth to make sure the cross-streets were safe before the marchers arrived to cross, and making sure none of the marchers tried to block traffic or otherwise mess with motorists, while before and after the march I played billboard on a street corner, holding up a poster as several hundred of us here in Albuquerque played our parts



in a worldwide rally for an end to the Drug War. It hasn't ended, but we all feel better, with the exception of those aging parts of me that still ache. I had my backpack, camera and bike helmet on me as I ran around. Hard, hot work. I spent yesterday in enforced relaxation for recovery. Not like I had nothing to do, but it was my birthday and it was a Sunday too, so quite intentionally and with absolutely no malice aforethought nor a-afterthought, I took the whole day off, smoking myself silly. Didn't even shower.

May 10, 2000 — Heads will roll. Los Alamos is burning down. It started as an intentionally-set fire—either a “prescribed burn” or a “proscribed burn,” I can never remember which it is—to burn away dangerous underbrush. Apparently the entire county was dangerous underbrush. Whatever Federal bonehead decided it was ripe time to start a forest fire, what with the fire danger all across the state ranging from High to Extreme, and what with it being the windy season, this person was perhaps new to this part of the continent. This person will perhaps be reassigned soon.

The entire town has been evacuated. The fire has begun to burn houses very near to the neighborhood where Owen and his clan live. They were initially evacuated Sunday night, returned Monday, spent that night camping out and Tuesday night in Santa Fe, then returned today long enough to rescue the dog and the photo albums before hitting the road for Colorado, where Owen's stepfather has family. They were planning on spending next weekend up there, anyway. While I have always been a little angry about them moving from Albuquerque to The Weapons Lab, I don't really want to hear of their house burning down. The water-bombers will be dropping loads tonight. They were flying earlier today, passing rather close to the tallish building wherein I work. But this fire is way out of control. The winds have been blowing about 25 mph all day, with gusts. Tomorrow's forecast calls for winds with gusts of up to 60 mph. The firefighters were called off the line earlier today. There was simply nothing they could do, so no sense in risking lives. Meantime, urban firefighters from all over northern and central New Mexico have been converging on Los Alamos to try and fight the structure fires. Forest firefighters are not trained in urban firefighting. But the two go almost hand-in-hand in Los Alamos, which is built upon steep, heavily-forested ridges.



This evening just before sunset I went up on to the West Mesa to photograph the huge plume of smoke. Los Alamos is about 80 miles away as the water-bomber flies, but the plume is huge and stretches now all the way to Kansas.

May 31, 2000 — The Land of Enchantment is being reduced this year to ashes. The water-bombers were flying today out of the Albuquerque airport, taking off low and fast, bellies heavy with slurry. They climb into the seasonal westerlies and quickly turn north, to take their loads of pink water to drop on the burning mountains. The sound of their engines comes in through the windows of my house; I can feel the drone in the walls, hear it rattle a bowl in the cupboard. Already this year there have been over 600 wildfires in New Mexico, consuming about a third of a million acres, including the ever-radiant town of Los Alamos. Owen still lives there, as his home did not burn. The fire came very close, burning several homes on his street and leaving his sooty and smoky. I saw footage on TV and the burned homes burned down to ashes, metal, concrete and chimneys. It looked like war had come to town. Some sort of karmic action, given the nature of the place.

Owen spent a week with me during the evacuation. It was good to have the extra time with him, despite the circumstances, which became more pleasant once it was ascertained that his home had not burned. I would see him more regularly if I had more money, which I hope soon to have. I finally got fed up with living this close to the economic line and have started looking for a full-time paralegal or legal assistant job. It doesn't seem like I'm going to become a rich and famous artist and writer anytime soon. Owen showed up after the evacuation with literally nothing more than the clothes he was wearing and the book and stuffed animal he was carrying. I didn't have any money to buy him clothes, so I called my parents and talked to my mom, asked her if I could borrow \$200. I was crying and apologizing for being "a grasshopper" and not being a good father and being able to take care of my own kid. I thought, That's it, I've had it.

June 20, 2000 — The summer gunfire season has started, the copper chopper is overhead nearly every night, and I found a crack pipe in my front yard last month. It is presently almost 1:00 A.M. on the morning of the first day of summer. I was reading in bed when the neighbor's dog began barking. Then the other neighbor's dog began barking. I waited a few minutes, and when the barking didn't stop, I

pulled on my shorts and got up to take a look. I stood at the kitchen window, the one providing the best viewing and listening conditions vis-a-vis the 'hood. It was quickly apparent that the barking was about the black cat lying in the pool of porchlight by my back door, within view of Neighbor One's dog. I looked at Scorpio spangling the southern sky, flanked on the east by the Strawberry Moon, and listened to the way the barking was spreading through the neighborhood, a dog here, a dog there, one down the street, another a block over, and others more distant, blocks away as the alarum spread from dog to dog, though the dogs on my street had already quieted. All this ruckus over one black cat.

June 28, 2000 — One of the nice things about growing older is a growing appreciation for the little things. Today's little thing to appreciate on this cool, cloudy, rainy summer evening was finding out that I only have to wear a necktie at my new paralegal job on days when I may end up in court; for instance, during trials. On such days I would also need to be prepared with some sort of nice jacket. Right now, the only jacket I have is of black leather. An imposing sight at times, and even dashing, but not quite right for a day in court.

I am now plying my paralegal trade at Fergultung and Spartan, a firm that does criminal and civil work, including a large amount of work regarding constitutional issues (search and seizure, Fifth Amendment, habeas corpus, due process, etc.). The pay is good, or will be once payday comes around, and the work is great. And I have my own office! With a view! Of buildings, drunks, and whores! And a Taco Bell! I feel I've finally reached a position where my talents and abilities match my job. I get to do research and analyze things. I also have to do routine client contacts, which I would rather not do, but at least I'm not being asked to change the shit-laden diapers of the boss's toddling daughter, which was one of the more recent tasks I had been promoted to at Michael's office.

July 9, 2000 — A hot July afternoon and I'm restless. Seems to be drug-related. Not the heat, though my coffee is warm. It's too hot for me to go down to Pot Park in the hopes of making a mota connection with some stranger. I've only done that once before, anyway, last September, when I did it mostly to prove to myself that it could be done, as I had heard it could.

I like to think that maybe I've had enough of dealing on the black market for something that I like too much anyway, always dealing with this... this thing. I had got it into my head that I wanted to make one last deal, at least for a while. Krapp's Last Deal, though I think I may have made such deals before. I have in the past few months almost attained that elusive goal of being able to have pot on hand without overusing it. But these past two weekends I was first broke, then I got money but my connection became hard to find, so I ended up at Tracy's place smoking up the rest of her stash, which I had given her six weeks ago as a birthday present. So now I owe her, since I promised to replace it.

My connection usually works with me (and others) on *Hemp TV*, which has moved from Thursday to Saturday evenings. I went to the station yestereve to be a crew-bear, but left before my connection arrived, if he did. I called his number and spoke with his girlfriend, who told me he'd taken the dogs and gone to the mountains with a friend and had not yet returned. She sounded worried. I hope he's okay, and not just because he's my connection. He's a decent, intelligent guy, though I fear he is become a little addled through heavy consumption of marijuana, beer, and mushrooms. He sold me some 'shrooms back in May and I took three trips on them, which I'd like to say I enjoyed but that would be the wrong word, since I did not. I ate them then I smoked pot to take the edge off, the combination of the two drugs leaving me too strung-out even to get up off the living room carpet where I lay, except for the last trip, when I decided as soon as I ate the 'shrooms to pack a couple joints with me and take a little drive out to the East Mountains area. Children, do not do this. I pulled over on a side road near Cedar Crest and as I smoked the joints, the skin of my arms began to appear to be the same color and texture as the mushrooms. I drove back home concentrating with all my might on holding myself together, fiercely telling myself there was no way I could afford to come unglued while out in public, driving my car.

August, 2010 — The most serious work I did for the Delta-9 Coalition I did at the behest of Bruce Bush, sometime Libertarian Party candidate for the United States Senate and the closest thing to a leader we, the pot-heads, had. He asked me to do some research and draft a memorandum regarding the ways in which the legalization of marijuana might dovetail with existing federal law. I secured permission from the attorneys I worked for to use the firm's online legal research databases for the project, providing I worked on it on my own time. While I no longer have a copy of the memorandum, I remember some of what I discovered and what I concluded, and have researched the subject again for this book.

National law is as complex as one would expect in a nation that's pushing a quarter of a millennium old, has its governmental structure divided into three main branches, and is a federal system that encompasses many subdomains (states, counties, cities, and so forth). That caveat aside, there are a few national laws regarding the production of distilled spirits (hard liquor—whiskey, vodka, that sort of thing), wine and beer. What I found in the United States Code (the national statutory law) that was most intriguing were the provisions in Title 26, the Internal Revenue Code, Subtitle E, "Alcohol, Tobacco, and Certain Other Excise Taxes."

If you're going to make hard liquor, you're going to be an outlaw if you don't operate under strict controls, keep precise records of what you're doing, and pay the appropriate taxes. A small war was fought over this during the administration of George Washington. It was called the "Whiskey Rebellion" and was the first of only two times that a sitting president went out to lead the army in the field. He didn't lead it very far or long, turning it over to Light-Horse Harry Lee, father of Robert E. Lee, as soon as he figured it wouldn't have any trouble dealing with the rebels, who were revolting over a tax on distilled spirits that Alexander Hamilton, the young nation's first Secretary of the Treasury, had convinced the Congress to pass in order to pay the national debt incurred during the war for independence. Protests against the tax went on for a few years until, in the summer of 1794, they erupted in an armed revolt. Shots were fired but no one was killed. The rebels were dispersed before the end of October, some fleeing and others being arrested. Only two of the arrested rebels were convicted of anything. They were convicted of treason and sentenced to be hanged, but President Washington pardoned them.

If you're going to make beer or wine (or fresh apple cider), the tax provisions are somewhat more lenient. Under Section 5042 of the Internal Revenue Code, any adult can produce, tax-free, up to 200 gallons of wine in a calendar year in any household with two or more adults (100 gallons if there's only one adult). That works out to about twelve glasses of wine a day, each and every day (about six a day for single people). For beer, Section 5053 is the appropriate section and the gallon amounts are the same, equivalent to a six-pack a day or a half-six a day, depending. You and the spouse can make wine and beer both, if you like, and stay fairly nicely snookered without ever having to visit the package liquor store. You're not allowed to sell any of this beer or wine, but you can sell fresh apple cider if you make that (you just can't preserve it—Sec. 5042(a)(1)).

This news was inspiring. Based on the size of my own indoor garden and my experience with low-intensity domestic “windowsill” marijuana growing, I concluded and recommended that fifteen square feet of soil surface would be a generous and adequate amount to allow for the tax-free domestic production of marijuana for personal use. I recommended against outdoor domestic marijuana gardens in the interests of public safety and nuisance abatement. Nobody would want their marijuana garden raided by a bunch of twelve-year-olds, and no rational person would want twelve-year-olds getting high on anything. As for the commercial manufacture and distribution of marijuana for recreational purposes, it was easy to see that the existing mechanisms for controlling and taxing alcohol and tobacco could be adapted for use with a newly-legalized product. In order to break the black market's hold on the business, the tax couldn't be prohibitively high, but it could conceivably amount to tens of billions of dollars a year.

The fly in the ointment was international treaty obligations. The United States is bound by international treaties regarding so-called controlled substances. Many proponents of the legalization of marijuana or any other illegal recreational drugs may not realize this. Of course, no nation will stay bound by a treaty that is not in its interests. The Russo-German Nonaggression Pact of 1939 didn't even make it out of diapers. But the United States is signatory to several treaties regarding the production and distribution of certain controlled substances, most notably the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. This treaty is nearly forty years old (as of 2010) and has about 180 nations signed on to it, many of which the U.S. government leaned on real hard to get them to sign. Negotiating a new

treaty, or amendments to existing treaties, to allow for the legalization of marijuana for recreational use and non-commercial limited domestic production, may be possible only after major signatories have already changed their own laws. Given how much dope the citizens of the United States smoke (nobody knows how much—ten thousand tons a year may be as good an estimate as any, though it may seem a little low), this one country changing its marijuana laws would almost certainly have a cascading, global effect.



*High Street*, Book 5 — Criminal Defense

“You are not obliged to complete the work, but neither are you free to evade it.” —  
Rabbi Tarfon, *Pirkei Avot*



July 17, 2000 — I didn't connect with my connection. He did make it out of the mountains okay, but doesn't want to deal. I don't know if he's gone out of business or if he's just tired of me buying up all his stock. I'm tired of it myself, and figure maybe I should just take a break from *Hemp TV* and *Delta-9*. I get around other stoners and the temptations to buy black-market weed and smoke the hell out of it are just too great. But I still owe Tracy. It looks like it may take a while for me to pay her back.

Sometimes, and I might add, not infrequently enough, I am rather slow on the uptake. I was a full week and a day into my new job before it hit me that the one thing most of our clients have in common is they are guilty. Whatever horrible things they are accused of doing, they have almost all of them done. This wouldn't be so bad if they were simply robbers or car thieves or murderers, but criminals like that are just so many dandelions compared to some of the sunflowers we represent. We have some prize-winners in our garden. We have a guy who is accused of something he almost certainly did, as he made videotapes and I have seen them. Last night I had a nightmare about what I saw him do, and the nightmare woke me up.

People are very fortunate to be entitled to trial by jury in our culture, instead of just being taken out and shot. Everyone, no matter how horrible their crime, is entitled to have an attorney help defend them in court. These attorneys have to come from somewhere. One of the wheres they come from is Fergultung and Spartan. On the face of it this may seem noble work but let me tell you, down in the trenches where I am it's filthy and smelly and cold. Some of the more heinous crimes slithering around in the firm's files are sex crimes. And the shock of the factuality of various sex crimes has all but destroyed my fantasy life. Those videotapes I had to review, at one point I just wanted to curl up in a ball on the floor and stare at a blank wall and rock back and forth and whisper, "I'm never going to have sex again, I'm never going to have sex again." I looked deep into the face of evil and it shook me. It is an ugly motherfucker and it does not blink.

July 28, 2000 — The rainy season has begun and the morning glories in my yard are going great guns. I also have the usual bumper herd of snails. Owen said something quite sweet when he was here over Fourth of July weekend: he had somehow been of the opinion that snails were slugs that had “found their shells.” I don’t know where this came from; I imagine perhaps there was some children’s story he was exposed to at a younger age, some story about a lowly slug which had found its shell and become a happy snail with a home on its back. I told him, No, snails grow their own shells, being born with little ones. He said he had wondered why all the shells looked alike, excepting their sizes. I’m glad I got the chance to set him straight. He’s just about to start middle school and kids that age can be merciless with ridiculing each other over every little thing. I’ve already told him to brace himself.

I just got home from a company party at a restaurant up in the North Valley. One of the people at the party, Harry Summerhill, a lawyer with the Federal Public Defenders’ Office who used to work at Fergultung and Spartan before I got there, was a terrifically amusing man with the dark, biting sense of humor I am quickly learning is almost a requirement for people working in criminal defense. We were lingering after dinner over cocktails and coffee while he was telling about how US Marshals swarmed as though out of nowhere at the US Courthouse one recent day in response to what turned out to be a very minor thing. “All the sudden,” Harry was saying, “all four elevator doors opened and all these Federal Marshals came pouring out. Because they watch everyone, and to the Federal government, everyone is a suspect. And that’s why the symbol for the Federal government is an eagle—because the eagle sees everything. It has very sharp vision. It watches everything, and it sees everything. We don’t have a mole for our national symbol, because moles are blind. We don’t have a bat—bats use sonar. We have the eagle, because the eagle sees everything. But the eagle has a tiny brain, and it can’t think! And it only catches mice.”

August 6, 2000 — Tracy’s big annual summer party was last night. All the aging hippies were there. My hair is down to my shoulders now and my beard is graying nicely, so I fit right in. It was also a party for her Algerian brother-in-law’s new citizenship. Habib is now a naturalized US citizen. We lit sparklers while his wife

Helen brought out the cake and we all sang, "This Land Is Your Land." He had never heard it before and was quite touched.

There was lots of rich food. I ate as much as possible and gained several pounds. Tracy's widowed mom, Mrs. Rosenthal, who is about seventy-five years old, was there, as she is at many of Tracy's gatherings. Mrs. Rosenthal bent my ear for a little while, telling me some interesting stories about her great-grandparents and the Civil War. Seems they, or at least two of them, were still alive when Mrs. R was a little girl. She told me of her fifth birthday, where, when she was opening her gifts, she asked her great-grandparents what they had received for their fifth birthdays. Her great-grandmother said, "Well, let me see... I got a couple red ribbons for my hair, and... something else I can't recall... and I got my first slave." Her spouse, Mrs. R's great-grandfather said, "Really? In my family, we didn't get our first slave until we were six." They lived in Macon, Georgia, which was in the path of Sherman's army as it cut a swath of destruction on its March to the Sea. As the Yankees were approaching, the household was in an uproar. All the valuables were rounded up and stashed in safe places in the woods. After the Yankees had gone, all the goodies were brought out again—but the family silver could not be found. A few years went by, by which time the old plantation house was in pretty tattered shape, what with the recent war and all. Some Yankee speculators wanted to buy the property, but they wanted the house demolished so that the value of the property would be increased. The last part of the house to come down was the main chimney, a huge, two-story thing. It was knocked to bricks and bits, and when the dust had settled, what should be discovered at the bottom of the hearth but the charred box of family silver. There had been no time to spirit it to safety, so as the Yankee cavalry came galloping up to the house, one of the slaves had hidden it in the fireplace.

During the course of the party, marijuana was produced, as it usually is at such gatherings. I was sitting in the living room, smoking with a few people, including Gary and Brenda, old friends of Tracy's. Brenda is a fairly attractive woman for someone old enough to be an old friend of Tracy's. She looks years younger than she is, with long, dark blonde hair and rimless glasses. She raises chickens. I don't know what else she may do. Though it didn't seem we had much in common, we talked a while. She seemed to have a good head on her shoulders; a sort of no-nonsense person who was at the same time quite calmly

forgiving in her demeanor towards the foibles of those around her; for instance, the drunken, greasy-haired guy with the ludicrous pick-up line (no, it wasn't me). There was also a loudmouthed boor to be forgiving towards, yet another old friend of Tracy's who— well, I guess there's one at every party, if the party's big enough. This person, who as it turns out is the wife of the drunken greasy-haired guy, I can't remember her name, so let's call her Queenie as she reminded me straightaway of the loudmouthed, obnoxious queens I knew in the late '70s when I tended bar at the Old Plantation in El Paso. Queenie came to the living room to smoke with us. She was a fascinating creature, a bulbous woman with thick glasses whose nonstop, loud patter consisted of insults followed immediately by cackles while she glanced about the room to make sure she was still the center of attention. There was nothing she needed to worry about with regard to that. The room could have caught fire or exploded and she could have given the conflagration a run for its money.

Queenie got started on Gary first, who I guess has known her a while. They sparred for a bit, then he left and she turned her attention to me. She did not let up for nuthin'. She sounded like a malfunctioning robot. Her constant—and I do mean constant—shtick was like a compendium of all the third-rate sitcoms the humor of which consists of nothing more than people trading insults to a laugh track, only this was real, and she was doing the laugh track herself. It didn't take her too long to clear the room, except I remained, as the pipe was not yet empty. Her attempts at witty insults may have worked in the right measure and at the right time. She clearly had a talent. It was not possible to become angry at her. I sat and smoked. She was like a barking dog that knows neither how to bite nor how to stop, so it barks even more frenetically. I finally told her, "You know, I'm going through a lot of bullshit to get high here."

Tracy came in then, and Queenie turned to her—not to duel with her, as Tracy is nearly my height, weighs about fifty pounds more, used to work on a salmon boat up Alaska way and can hold her own with anybody—but to start in with Tracy about me.

"Who is this guy?" Queenie said. "Should I know him? Let's kick him out of here, Tracy. He looks like a refugee from *Survivor*. Let's kick him off the island."

"This is Daniel," Tracy said. "He is my very good friend. We are not kicking him anywhere. He is king of this house. Anything he wants in here is his." This was

news to me. I rather liked the sound of it, though I don't know if I can bear the responsibility.

Tracy's news didn't stifle Queenie, but the pipe was empty and Tracy had created a distraction, so I hauled my aging if regal self to its feet and went out back, where the bulk of the party was. I found a chair over near Gary, who was talking to another fellow. Gary, tall and skinny, is a beekeeper, among other things. He can tell you more than you knew could be known about bees and the various forms of honey. He can tell you about baking honey and table honey, about Northeast Heights honey and North Valley honey and all the different varieties of honey to be gotten from a city, and how the flavor and quality varies from neighborhood to neighborhood. Honey aside, he was telling this other fellow about a friend who has a home in Taos and captains a deep-sea fishing trawler in the Bering Sea during the season.

"You seen that movie *Perfect Storm*?" Gary was saying, "Well, my friend has been in the fucking im-perfect storm, man! No kidding! Imagine waves seventy feet high! A wall of water as high as that," and Gary pointed at the top of Tracy's tallest cottonwood tree. I looked up and reckoned that, yeah, that was about seventy feet. "And you're at the very bottom, man, and there's that seventy-foot wall of water right there, and on the other side of the crest, it goes down seventy feet, and then there's another and another and another, and fucking gale-force winds blowing and it's about two degrees below freezing with a fifty-degree windchill!"

"What does your friend fish?" the other fellow asked.

"They trawl for blackfish cod," Gary said. "They use these huge long lines, arrays of them with hooks all down them. They drop them down to about two thousand feet and snag bunches of blackfish. But you know the orca, man? The killer whale? They'll come right up to the lines and just wait there, feasting off the catch, just sucking it right in. When that happens, there's nothing my friend can do but haul in the line and move to another spot. And you know the sperm whale? The big one, the Moby-Dick one—they've discovered the lines now, too. You know they have teeth. They don't feed on plankton like the blue whale. The sperm whales have teeth, and they dive down to about eight thousand feet and eat giant squid. They get into these life-and-death struggles with giant squids so big, we never see squids that big. Squids that big never come to the surface, man. They

live down in the dark, a mile or two deep. But the sperm whales have discovered the trawl lines. Once a whale hits a trawl line, the trawler has to haul it up. There's no competing. And they even work together. My friend's line was hit once with three sperm whales, all at the same time. And there's no defense. Things like seagulls, the trawlers can defend against, cuz under international law, those are pests. But the whales, man, they're endangered species. They can't be touched. Once they hit a trawl line, all the trawler can do is haul the line up and say, Okay, big fellow, this part of the ocean's yours—I'll go look someplace else."

Gary got up to get another beer, so I got up and wandered, avoiding Queenie as I went back inside. Wouldn't you know it, there were more people smoking pot. Earlier, while we were smoking and before Queenie had come in, Tracy's phone had rung and I had answered. It was one of Tracy's friends, one Christine, whom I had not met, and who was having trouble finding the place. She also wanted to talk to Tracy, so I wandered about the party with Tracy's wireless phone, looking for her and describing things to Christine. Couldn't find Tracy, so I finally told Christine, "Listen, I'm wasting your time. You need to get down to this party right now because everyone is here and having a great time."

So by and by she arrived, with a fellow named Dennis. Cynthia, a realist painter— "The realest painter in the room," Tracy said—was circulating a petition to open the Presidential debates to Buchanan and Nader. She presented it to Dennis while we sat smoking in the living room, and we presently began talking politics. Dennis turned out to be the staunchest Democrat I have ever met. He was absolutely unwavering in the depth and intensity of his commitment to the Democratic Party. While I've been a registered Democrat all my adult life, I've voted for a variety of other party candidates. I voted for Nader in '96, and worked on Bob Anderson's Green Party Congressional campaign two years ago. Bob was at the party last night. I run into him in the oddest places. Anyway, his '98 campaign garnered 10% of the vote and is the campaign that got the Greens blamed for putting Republican Heather Wilson in the House, but if the Democrats had not run a shallow millionaire playboy for the office, they would have won and people like me would not have been fed up and going Green.

Dennis and I discussed these things at some length. While my idealistic side would like to vote for Nader this year, as I was telling Dennis—who needs no convincing to vote Demo—too much is at stake. Quite a few federal judgeships

are sitting open because the Republican Senate refuses to approve the Democratic President's nominees. A Republican Senate and a Republican White House would be disastrous for the forces of freedom and justice. I don't think I exaggerate. The civil war that started 45 years ago with Rosa Parks and the Reverend Doctor King is still going on. And there have been lot of 5-4 U.S. Supreme Court decisions these past few years. The next President will almost certainly get the chance to nominate at least one appointee to the Supremes. Having that dweeb from Texas in the White House would be a setback that could take a generation to recover from.

September 10, 2000 — The criminal defense job has proven to be the first real job I've had in a while. I'd forgotten what it was like, if ever I even knew, to spend all of one's time tending to minor emergencies. It hasn't helped that I'm the only paralegal in an office with four attorneys. There's also only one secretary, plus a part-time courier. We are due to get another secretary and another paralegal before the month is out.

This business of working with clients who are your basic crooks is both interesting and, well, it takes its toll. I see a lot of deviant behavior and the seamy side of law enforcement. And people doing stupid things. One of my tasks is to take client screening calls, which means I speak to a lot of people who are simply clueless or have no case or are liars or are crazy as loons. I am not permitted to tell them this. Last week we got a call from the Egyptian Sun-God. Yes, Amon Ra himself phoned up, seeking representation in a matter involving, by his account, forged Supreme Court documents and an FBI cover-up. I gotta say, this job does have its moments. No, we didn't take Mr. God's case. One of the questions I ask in the initial screening is, "What other attorneys have you spoken to with regard to this?" Mr. God's answer was, "Almost every one in town." I didn't ask Mr. God if his parents had named him Amon Ra or if he had picked that one out himself. He was careful to get my name, with the exact spelling. I guess that means I am now part of the conspiracy.

And what I said about the seamy side of law enforcement, it's really ugly out there. Often the cops look like just another one of the gangs. Supply and demand have taken hold, too. If you hire a bunch of prosecutors and police officers because there's a perception that crime is out of hand or because politicians want

to foster and milk such perceptions for their own political gain, and these politicians are passing more and more laws making more and more things illegal so they can create the crimes they can then claim to be getting tough on, and you privatize prisons so there's a profit-motive for incarcerating people, plus give police departments the right to fund themselves out of property they seize, plus cut back on much of the government funding of law enforcement, you've got a recipe for a slow-brew disaster. When crime rates decline as they have been doing in this country for the past decade, you get a lot of prosecutors poking around looking for things to prosecute people on. And many's the cop or district attorney who believes that everyone is guilty of something, it's just a matter of catching them. I'm so close to it, I don't know if my perspective is skewed or if maybe I'm seeing clearly that which is hidden from most people. Probably a little of both.

Our firm is one of several involved in a class-action suit regarding the conditions at the county jail here. One of my tasks is to take calls from the inmates. We wouldn't treat dogs the way the inmates here are being treated. I'm not kidding. If someone was caught housing dogs the way the inmates are being housed, you know what would happen to that someone? They'd go to jail! And these people are going to get out, these inmates—they'll get out of jail. Lifers go to prison. Every last one of these inmates in the county jail is going to get out by and by, and then what? I'm not saying incarceration should be a picnic, but it should be firm and fair. These people are going to get out and they are going to be angry. They're being left to sleep in backed-up sewage on concrete floors, with boils on their bodies and abscesses on their gums and no medical care and corrupt guards who look the other way when they're even awake. Even some of the guards have called out to our attorneys, when the attorneys visit the jail, to please let people know how bad it is.

Owen spent a couple days with me over Labor Day weekend. He has quite a work load at school this year, now that he's in seventh grade. I'm rather proud of him. He's taking German, Geography, Pre-Algebra, P.E., Home Ec., Language Arts (what used to be called "English"), Science Lab, and a course called Skills, which seems to be about teaching the kids problem-solving skills and building their self-esteem so they don't all turn into a bunch of druggies (and end up in jail!). It's a decidedly tougher curriculum than I had in seventh grade. In fact, it seems to be on a par with what I was getting in ninth and tenth grades, but he's going to a



better school than I did. Plus, he's living in a town where every other parent has a Ph.D.

October 12, 2000

Dear Owen,

Your news was not altogether good; or, "Oops, I did it again." At least you didn't burn anything down. Try not to run away from home again. For all its constraints, that particular home of yours is still your best bet for the time being.

I've had occasion to give this matter some thought recently. I weighed all the pros and cons regarding your remaining there vis-a-vis the possibility of your coming to live with me, and the only rational conclusion I could reach is that you're better off where you are. Your school is better than any I could send you to here, your mom and stepdad make gobs more money than I do, your friends are better--educated and are the spawn of a better-educated set than dwells hereabouts in South Broadway, and your neighborhood and your town, when they're not on fire, are safer places to live than you'd find with me. I should like to see you more regularly; the details of that are being worked out.

November 26, 2000 — Owen has come to live with me. I don't think my life has been this hectic since my senior year of high school. It's a boon that his school is six blocks from my office, and my office is just two kilometers from my home. He and I motor to the office in the morning, so I've given up riding my bike to and from work. I've suggested that he and I bike to the office, but he is utterly unenthused. I could command it but it seems I should use my command powers sparingly, so they will work when I really need them.

He hangs around the office till 8:10, when he walks to school. He's going to a very urban school. It's Washington Middle School, a/k/a La Washa. It is noticeably different from Los Alamos Middle School. La Washa is a school on probation, threatened by direct state takeover. There was something of a gang problem there, from Los Juaritos, a gang made up mostly of kids of families from Juárez. Now there is an easily discernible routine police presence at La Washa (seven patrol cars parked out front the first day Owen attended, and a small substation inside). The kids all wear a uniform style of clothing, which was the devil to get a hold of this time of year. We ended up going to five different stores to get Owen outfitted for a week. Also, there are no lockers and no homework. The given assignments are all to be completed in class.

The courses are not as challenging and advanced as those at Los Alamos Middle School. Owen was placed in the most advanced 7th-grade math at La Washa, and he says they're covering stuff he already had this year at LAMS. When his social studies class went to computer lab, Owen was training his classmates on the rudiments of pointing and clicking. He has been unable to continue his German studies, as no school in the Albuquerque Public Schools offers German below 9th grade. He's been kind of grooving on the reduced workload. I've been letting him play, to ease the blow of being summarily evicted from his Los Alamos home without even the opportunity to say goodbye to his friends.

Tomorrow evening he is to start a one-hour study session week nights. He's too intelligent not to be training his mind, and much like I was at his age, not inclined to go seeking the hard work. I wanted him to continue foreign language—

oops, second language—studies, because he's a good age for it. He was adamant about not wanting to study Spanish. He even started crying when I told him I wanted him to take a Spanish class at La Washa. I trotted out the logical arguments, like, Germany is thousands of miles from here and how many of your schoolmates are chatting in German, and if you learn a little Spanish you'll know they really aren't talking about you. I think his opposition was a mixture of an instinctive aversion towards The Other, a not wanting to face up to the present reality of his situation and the probability that he will not be returning to LAMS, and a fear of being embarrassed in Spanish class. He says it's tough being the only blonde in school. I don't know if that's precisely true, but La Washa is 95% Hispanic. He says it's a good thing that he's good at sports.

I guess he's kind of lonely. He hasn't said so, but he spends a lot of time reading and playing with his toys and games. He and I really do not belong in this neighborhood. I think he feels it more than I do. A couple of years ago I realized that poverty is not just poverty of money: it's poverty of hope, poverty of imagination, poverty of intellect, poverty of desire. There's a lot of that kind of poverty in this neighborhood; people who live in small worlds they have no clue how to enlarge. He says what bothers him most about his new schoolmates is how dumb they are.

I would like him to stay at La Washa the rest of this school year, just for a little stability for both us. He seems safe enough there, given that the school is practically under martial law. He gets out at 3:05 daily and walks to the downtown library, just a couple blocks from my office, where he hangs out till 4:45, reading in the Children's Room. Then he walks to my office. This seems to be working well enough to where I can make it work till May. I don't know what I'm going to do with him come summer.

The biggest challenge has been juggling all the demands on my time. I no longer take lunch breaks. While the need to run errands sometimes takes me out of the office during what would otherwise be a lunch break, my usual workday now runs from 7:50 A.M. to 5:20 P.M. I do get paid overtime. Then there's the before and after work parts of the day. The kid has to be fed, and fed right. Dishes have to be done every day. Laundry has to be done when the basket is full, no matter what day it is. Owen is helping with the chores, of course. And there's writing, working in the studio, and the typical ton of reading to do. Owen's room is where

my studio was. My studio is now split between my bedroom and the front room, where Owen used stay when he would visit.

December 11, 2000 — That case of 36-hour days I told my boss's secretary to order still hasn't arrived. I work overtime all the time now. One of the attorneys I work with is miffed at me for not handling the pressure very well. James, the boss, keeps telling me, "It's okay, you can work Saturdays if you want." So want I don't, but I finally got the hint. Just this morning, while listening to the economic news on the radio, it occurred to me that if the economy really is slowing down unto recession, I should take the overtime now while it's available.

I'm still working on the class-action jail suit. The stories from the inmates are always depressing. There is so little we can do for them. One called right before I left the office today to tell me how the jailers had turned loose a bunch of gangsters in the Protective Custody pod to beat up the inmates there, the ones separated from the general population because otherwise their lives would be in danger. Many of them are sex offenders, or accused sex offenders. The jailers were letting the gangsters review the booking sheets and pick out the ones they wanted to beat up. One inmate was badly beaten with a broomstick. When the Protective Custody inmates aren't being beat up, they're in lockdown 23 hours a day, which means they're kept in their cells and not let out into the common areas. And the jail commissary is constantly stealing from them. It just goes on and on.

It was a bit of a shock to go from divorced bachelor to single father with literally ninety minutes' notice, but Owen and I are making it work. It's not like we really have any choice. Finally time for me to be a parent again. He's presently destroying something in his room, from the sound of it, but I think I'll let it go for now. He got in trouble this morning for not doing a school assignment. La Washa is pretty strict, if not especially intellectually trying. He seems for the most part to be adjusting well. He's made a few friends and so far hasn't been able to get into too much trouble. And when he does the work, he does well. He scored a 55 out of a possible 50 on one project. He'll do things like that, then turn around and get a C in science because he forgot to do the homework, of which there is hardly any to begin with. He forgets to do homework the same way I did at his age—  
"Homework? Forget it!"

Why, here comes the Owen now. He's standing beside me, trying to get my attention.

December 26, 2000 — I talk to a lot of inmates. The common denominator among all these folk who are incarcerated for this and for that and for the despicable thing is that they need parenting. Good parenting. I understand it's a characteristic of the sociopath to have a selfish, infantile approach to life, but it's not so simple a situation that one can say, Oh, these are sociopaths, that's just the way they are. And maybe some of their behavior is genetically determined; damned souls they be then for all time. But over and over when I talk to inmates I hear the voice of the child who was inadequately parented. Now, whatever age they may be, however twisted they may be by time and fate and foolish action, they need good parenting. It's something that our society is just unwilling to do. Justice based on money and punishment for profit are guaranteed to bring about high amounts of recidivism. It seems that as a society, we simply no longer care. Just so long as we can keep buying toys on our credit cards, the world can go to hell in a handbasket. We are determined to entertain ourselves unto oblivion. History will not judge us kindly.

We have an astonishingly barbaric way of dealing with criminals. Better we think it to be that we lock them up and degrade them, then release them ten times angrier and more hopeless, than take responsibility for them, *in loco parentis*, and give them, whatever age they may be, the firm, honest parenting they need, and which some of them will need for a long time and some of them will need for life. When we lock them up and throw the key away, it's not the key that's being thrown away, it's the person, and everything in society that's connected to that person and is being wasted and twisted in the process—the friends, the family, all the apparatus of the state used to inflict punishment rather than rehabilitation—all wasted in a barbaric approach to the issues of criminal behavior. Saddest of all is that by now we know better, but are afraid of that knowledge, our politicians fearful of being turned away from the slop-troughs for the spurious crime of being soft on crime.

Sometimes being a criminal defense paralegal is the hardest thing I've ever done and I want to flee it. Sometimes it's heartbreaking work but not so often

anymore, as I have been at it six months now and the softer parts of my heart have been hardened somewhat.

Winter, 2001 – Daisy lives at the county jail. She wears faded blue coveralls with the name of the jail in faded yellow stencil on the back. She sleeps on a mattress on the floor in the day room under the television set with screwy colors and the sound that's broke and makes no sound. Daisy wakes. The jailhouse guardman says, *Good morning, Daisy. About time you woke up, sleeping beauty.* Daisy has short brown hair that frames her freckled face. Her nose is thin and shiny. Her green eyes have a distance in them, a receding depth leading inward to a place neither she nor anyone else can reach. The jailhouse guardman tells me, *Medical's been up here ten times this week for seizure calls on her. She fakes a lot of seizures. They figure only two of them were real.* I wonder how they know. Daisy smiles, stands up, looks around, says something to no one, sits down and covers her eyes with her hands.



February 3, 2001— I'm at the Hinkle Family Fun Center, having brought Owen and his cousin Curtis here in celebration of Owen's 13th birthday. We will be here another couple of hours. I'm sitting in the lobbyette of the Arcade, on a padded bench designed to be uncomfortable to anyone just wanting to set a spell while the kids Have Fun. Breeders abound, coming and going. The atmosphere here in Arcadia is rather Babylonish—pre- or post-apocalyptic, hard to tell. Noisy. An arcade game keeps saying, "Get out of my way! Get out of my way!" Pretty much how I feel, too.

I was reading about Vietnam, about the war, before I started this scribbling. I had just finished—

Owen and Curtis just stopped by for more money. They are going to drive go-carts. Owen left his coat, which I have stuffed behind me to make this seat more comfy.

Anyway, I had just finished reading an account of an ambush in the Ia Drang Valley when I decided to break from reading. It was a pretty gruesome account. I couldn't go straight to the next story. I'm reading a two-volume set, *Reporting Vietnam*. Saw it in the library and it caught my interest.

It has been difficult to adjust to having Owen living with me. Finding time to attend to everything is simply impossible. Sometimes I feel very angry, and often overwhelmed. I get so tired, I do like I did last night, when I went to bed at 7:30 and stayed there twelve hours. I ponder how much of the pressure is external, and how much comes from within myself, from not coping well; from negative thinking. But it seems there really never is enough time. So much of my work at the office consists in rushing from one crisis to another, and now it seems my whole life is like that. I revised my personal schedule again this morning, for what must be the fifth time since Owen moved in. Every revision has had something unworkable about it. I would like to take some time off from work, but criminal defense has many unforgiving deadlines. We have a client going to trial in ten days on a child molestation charge. He genuinely seems to be innocent. Of course, if he's

convicted and goes to prison, he will be killed by other inmates. That wouldn't do. I feel like I hardly make sense any longer. I get so tired, by the end of the week, at the office, I try not to speak because I simply can no longer make sense.

Time to return to Vietnam. That arcade game still wants me out of its way.

February 5, 2001— After Owen and I got home Saturday evening, I just had to get out of my way. I called up Tracy and invited myself over to her house for pot and liquor. We sat and drank and smoked a little, then I returned to my home and my Owen, feeling much better. Tracy and I have a pretty good relationship. She was hurt back in '96 when I broke up with her, but we've become pretty good friends. She has lots of friends, but it's because she is a genuinely good person.

That fellow who goes to trial next week, he came by the office today, a day in advance of his next scheduled appointment. And he had to drive in from out of town. He phoned up James from his cell phone and said, I'm on my way. He's getting a little freaked; you can see it in his face. And James likewise gets a little intense in the week leading up to a trial. Goes into a sort of sustained, focused, quiet panic.

May 13, 2001— I stayed up till 2:30 last night, drinking martinis with Tracy. We sat out in her back yard a while, watching the clouds scud under the face of the moon. It was nice to take the time to just sit and watch that happen.

This country has gone insane. I don't suppose this is news, and I certainly don't suppose it just happened. One of our newest clients at the firm is a fellow who has been charged with the third-degree felony of some type of burglary. Plus a couple other charges. Seems he broke a couple windows and entered a place he should not have entered. All of this would be pretty mundane, except—the fellow so charged is six years old! Never mind that he will be seven come the end of this month. To bring a criminal complaint against any six-year-old, for anything, is madness. When this sort of thing happened, this sort of misbehavior by a child, when my bro and I were kids, the child would be spanked and put on restriction and the parents would pay for the windows and whatever other damage the child had done. To crank up the awesome power of the state to crush a child in such a situation is a sick and sorry thing to do. It's a direct outgrowth of what happens when the machinery of government is so overgrown that its workers must find every

possible justification, no matter how scant, for their continued employment. Sometimes I envy my bro his staunch Christian faith, which gives him a protecting perspective on the evils of the world. For my part, I go around these days angry all the time. I try to focus the energy of this anger to put it to some sort of good use. It's not that I want to save the world, or even any part of it. I just want to write and make art and raise my son. He's in his room right now, quietly reading or napping.

That Owen is not napping, I just discovered, as he turned on his stereo.

May 19, 2001 — My child within is such a horny little pot-head. I don't let him out much these days, but he's still there, deep within. Right now he wants to get high and fuck. Or get high and eat cheesecake. Or get high and pass out. A pattern can be seen emerging.

May 25, 2001 — It is midnight in the 'hood. Almost midnight. Ten more minutes. Owen was already, I would guess, asleep, and I was just about there myself, when at the eleventh hour, the phone rang. It was Matthew, one of Owen's friends, wanting to speak with Owen. As I was telling him that Owen was in bed and that he, Matthew, was not to call this house again after ten pee-em, I could hear his mother telling him, in the background, to hang up because it was too late for him to be calling anyone. So she and I are in agreement. And I was fully re-awake.

I snapped back on the bedside light and lay me down to read. Round about 11:35-ish, my next-doorsies, who can be counted on to be out and about at any hour between seven ay-em and two ay-em—for there are many of them, my next-doorsies, coming in various sizes and one shape—came out to make noise with their screechy voices. Distracted as I now was from reading of the Spotsylvania Campaign of 1864, I snuck to the window of the darkened bathroom to espy the action. My neighbors had come out to kill moths. The weapons used in this particular campaign were neurotoxins, spraying in fine, somewhat directed mists from out of cans. As the "adults" sprayed, a small child, in what was apparently thought by some to be some sort of action of assistance, cried out, "There's one! Mommy, there's one behind you! There's one! Get it!"

June 2, 2001 — Owen left late Thursday afternoon to spend two months with his mom and stepdad and their two chilluns. No frantic phone calls yet from any of the

persons involved, so I assume he's settling in all right. I'm pretty settled in all right myself, too. I unplugged the television first thing. Did that before he left. Then after he left, I got high and turned the Rolling Stones up real loud, just the way I used to. Start me up and get off of my cloud, I'm free. I just unplugged the phone and turned down the answering machine, too, having realized that I didn't—or don't—want to be bothered. I am glad Owen is gone, care for him though I do, and can't say that I miss him much yet.

Time to move the sprinkler. With any luck, I won't see any of my neighbors. I'm sure they are all good, or at least as good as can reasonably be expected, but I have nothing to say to them. I don't care to say hello, I don't care to say goodbye, I don't care to say yes, I don't care to say no, I don't care to say stop, and I don't care to say go go go. Or maybe I do. I would say, go stop setting off fireworks, go stop screeching at each other, go stop letting your dogs run around the neighborhood all night and half the day, go stop playing your music so goddamned loud, go stop playing basketball until all hours of the night, and go stop tossing your empty Bud Life cans in my yard and letting your empty Bud Life 12-packs blow around in the street. But you know, really, that's just me turning slowly, or maybe not so slowly, into a grouchy old fart, which turning involves the emergence of an insufficiently sedated inner child on the perpetual verge of a fantod.

June 3, 2001 — The annual company picnic was this afternoon. I arrived about 5:00 or so, delayed somewhat by finishing up a few of the many things that need doing. Most of the company personnel were there, from our offices in Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and even our far-flung Phoenix outpost. At one point, the table I was at filled up with partners. Not wanting my nose to take on even the illusion of a brownish tint, I mosied off to hang with an associate and a paralegal. Shortly thereafter, I joined in festive volleyball with players almost every one of whom were more skilled than ever I was. I sent my first service sideways into a neighboring horse pasture.

Most of the people from the Santa Fe and Phoenix offices I know only by name and voice, if even that well. It was nice to put some faces and names and voices together. There were a few, two or three, nice lookers to look at. I love to see the beauty, the fair young faces and figures, sparkling eyes and shining hair. But I couldn't flirt if I had to, even though in my dreams, when I sleep, sometimes I

still do. When I'm awake, it's more like a distant, deep reverberating note of a person I once was, but can no longer be.

Time to move the sprinkler.

Our latest major client at the law firm is a fellow who is charged with environmental crime, various counts of illegal dumping. I am glad he's not another baby-fucker. Or alleged baby-fucker. And even the baby-fuckers aren't really baby-fuckers. They're child molesters. It's a way of being that I just don't get. Even shapely teenaged girls, as beautiful as they certainly can be and as fine as they were when I was that age, don't excite me all that much, as they are just too young. But it turns out many odd things happen to men around the age of forty, and for some of them, what happens is they try to mate with children. Talk about mid-life crisis. It occurred to me a couple-three years ago that a man my age ought to be married, or otherwise settled down with a companion, or even settled down to solitude; that the mating game is a game for youth, naturally, biologically, and I don't mean just the fucking part, but that the whole dynamic, the gestalt of mating, seeking a mate or multiple mates, is just not that which is in synch with a man my age.

Time to move the sprinkler. And how are my neighbors of the moths? Dead, for all I know. In truth, they don't seem to be, though a distinct odor of bug spray emanated from their direction any time the wind shifted this past week. I'm such a fish out of water in this neighborhood, but the rent is so low I can't bear to leave. Not yet. Regarding Owen's friend Matthew, the one who called at eleven the same night my neighbors went psychotic on the moths, I was over at his house a few nights later to pick up Owen, who had gone over to watch wrestling on cable TV. I had a few minutes while the wrestling ended to take a look around the living room. I can say this: Matthew's mom is deep into Betty Boop. I have never seen anyone so deep into Betty Boop. Betty Boop posters, Betty Boop picture frames, Betty Boop pillows, Betty Boop statuettes, Betty Boop thises, Betty Boop thats, I thought my mind was going to split open.

Time soon for me to shut off the sprinkler, brush and floss, and get a few more minutes of writerly revision in on some little piece of creative literary bric-a-brac before I fall into bed to dream of the flirtings and kissings and fuckings my waking, dissembling self tries to claim I'm really not interested in; then I shall roll out at first or second light tomorrow for another nails-on-blackboard week in the law mines.

June 8, 2001 — I got a call from an inmate yesterday, wanted to tell me as to how a guard had beat him up. So I said, "Okay, tell me what happened." Well, what happened was, he was locked in his cell, solitary, and was kicking at the door. The guard told him to cut it out, to which our young inmate responded by calling the guard a bitch. The guard promptly opened the cell door and beat up the inmate.

"And he had two trainees with him," the inmate told me, "And they didn't do nothin'. They didn't even try to stop him. What kind of training is that?" I was trying to keep from laughing. I told him, "He was training them what to do when an inmate calls a guard a bitch."

It's hard sometimes to have too much sympathy. I deal best with the frantic ones who aren't getting their medications. This inmate wasn't one of those. He was in the part of the jail where they keep the inmates in solitary either because they are psychopaths who will hurt anyone they get near or because they have done something so reprehensibly scummy that if they were in the general population, other inmates would almost certainly kill them.

I've done a lot of research this week into drug abuse treatment for inmates. Out of all people, inmates are the ones most likely to need such treatment and least likely to get it. It's such a screwed-up system. There they are in jail or prison with nothing but time on their hands, it's the perfect opportunity to give them some intense training into how to pull themselves and their lives together enough to where they won't be coming back anytime soon—but we can't manage anything better than the barbarism that presently passes for criminal justice, a barbarism rooted in religious superstition and general ignorance, not to mention just plain old evil and willful, selfish, frightened stupidity. James had me doing the research because he hopes to convince a judge to approve some basic treatment for heroin addicts, but what is needed is so much more than basic. Basic is like putting a band-aid on a sucking chest wound. Not every addict is curable, but what little work has been done in this area of treatment indicates that about half of the junkies are curable if society will just stick with providing the cures. And what a benefit this would be! The estimates I've seen are that every junkie commits about 150 serious crimes a year, along with being in every other way pretty much a drag on society. Think of what it would mean to our country if hundreds of thousands, or even millions, of serious crimes were not being committed every year. Think of all the

cops, prosecutors, and judges it would throw out of work, and all the politicians being thrown out of office for the crime of being soft on crime, and you'll be thinking of why it's not being done.

Tracy and I biked in the evening, then we drank martinis and smoked pot at her place. She's the one who had the pot. She says she only smokes mostly with me anymore. I only smoke mostly with her. She says she invites me over so she'll have an excuse to get high, because otherwise if she was just smoking whenever she got the urge and was alone, she'd be smoking too much. A few years ago I considered giving her my stash and asking her to be my stash warden, my stash rationer, so I would have to go to her to get it and she would only give me so much at a time. That didn't really seem to be the solution to the problem of smoking too much pot, so I never followed through with it.

July 30, 2001 — We have a mentally ill client—well, they all are, I guess, but this one is diagnosed bipolar and has been committed. Today I am to visit her house in the exclusive private gated community where she abnormally lives, to make sure her dog is all right, so that I can then visit her in the exclusive private hospital (which we all hope is only a temporary residence), to assure her that her dog is all right and to get her to sign some medical releases so we can obtain her medical records so we can prove to the court that when she pointed the rifle at the cop and declared herself Queen of the Universe, she really was having a psychotic episode and the charges pending against her of assault on a police officer are perhaps not appropriate and should be dropped. Given that she's wealthy and Anglo and neighbors with the DA, it shouldn't be too difficult to do that.

I am also to assemble some documents in the case of a death-row inmate who committed a crime shortly after I moved to Albuquerque that made a death-penalty advocate out of me until at some point, I changed my mind and decided that the death penalty was a bad idea because it set a bad example. I mean, what is the message being given by the death penalty—"You killed someone, and killing is the worst thing you could do, so we're going to kill you." Any four-year-old could see there is something wrong with that line of reasoning. As for the client in this case, I realized this week that I don't give a rat's ass whether he lives or dies. Sometimes at this job I feel so mercenary.

Let's see... a waxing gibbous moon is shining through the leaves of the tree outside the window here in front of my computer. Owen returns in twelve days. He almost got sent back early. Stephanie phoned me up to tell me she was sending him back right away, but decided to keep him when she remembered he has to have his new glasses fitted next week. He had told her to shut up, locked himself in his room, and told her he didn't answer to her anymore. Of course, he was mistaken in that. Needed a minor course correction. He came out of his room to talk to me on the phone about it. He's just being thirteen is all it is. We've all been thirteen.





*High Street*, Book 6 — Life During Wartime

“It seems to me sometimes that we never got used to being on this earth and life is just one great, ongoing, incomprehensible blunder.” — W. G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*

October, 2010 — Not long after Owen returned from Los Alamos at the end of the summer of 2001, he pointed out to me that Katunia was behaving differently. He was petting her one day in the driveway when he said, “Dad, remember how she used to raise up on her hind legs when I petted her head? She doesn’t do that anymore.”

“Maybe she’s just changing as she gets older,” I said. I didn’t think much of it. She still caught lizards, but she hardly ever ate them anymore. I figured that was another change she was going through as she grew older, and I also figured that meant she was being fed enough. I picked up the dead lizards she left lying about and threw them in the trash.

The end came pretty quickly. She stopped eating as much, then she stopped eating entirely. She hardly seemed to want to move. She was crouching under my car one morning, hadn’t eaten in two or three days, so I call the vet Tracy referred me to and said, “There’s something wrong with my cat.” I described her behavior and the receptionist said, “Bring her in and we’ll take a look at her. We have a spot available at 9:00 if you can make it.” I said I could, called Fergultung and Spartan to let them know I’d be a little late, and got Katunia ready for her first and last trip to the vet. I didn’t have a cat carrier, but I had a cardboard box and put her on a towel in that for the ride in my car. She made no protest, no attempt to get away. I pointed this out to the vet after I’d arrived, told him, “There’s no way she would have let me do that even a month ago.”

The vet said, “Let’s do a blood test.” A sample was taken and Katunia and I waited in the exam room for the results. In a little while, the vet came back in.

“The news is not good,” he said. “She has an advanced case of feline leukemia.” He went on to tell me that the prognosis was not good and the disease was always fatal. “There are things we can do to alleviate the symptoms, but they will only delay the end, which is probably not very far off, probably only a few months even with treatment. She is very ill.”

The question then was how was she going to die. Was I going to treat the symptoms until she died, or take her back home and essentially let her continue to starve to death, or was I going to have her put to sleep that morning? I told the vet, "It's not like she's going to write the great mathematical treatise that explains the mystery of being or anything like that, she's just a cat, so I guess the best thing to do is to help her go now."

The vet left us alone for a few minutes while I held her in my lap and petted her and talked to her. He returned, said it was time, asked if I wanted to be with her to the end; I said I couldn't bear that, and he took her. His assistant took the box and the towel. Not too much later, the assistant returned with the box, still containing the towel and now with the addition of Katunia's still warm body. I paid the bill and took her home, where I laid her body on the towel on the stovetop while I cried and ran my hands down her fur. Then I wrapped her in the towel, dug a grave in the back yard in the narrow garden between the clothesline and the back fence, and buried her. I marked the grave with a stone and her waterbowl, went back in and called Fergultung & Spartan, told them I wouldn't be in.

Owen knew I was taking Katunia to the vet, I had told him that morning when I drove him to school. That afternoon after the time his school let out, I drove downtown to the library where I knew he would be. He was there at a table in the main room with a few of his friends, all of them reading books and chatting quietly among themselves. I went up to him, put a hand on his shoulder, and shook my head. I told him on the drive home what had happened. When we got home, I went inside, started to make some coffee. I could see him out the back window, kneeling by Katunia's grave, one hand shading his eyes. It was Wednesday, September 5, 2001.

The following Tuesday morning, Owen and I were getting ready to leave to go downtown, our normal routine of motoring to my office where I would set to work helping defend the accused and assisting inmates while he would read for a little while before he walked the half-mile to his school. As he came out of his bedroom, he said, "Dad, the guys on the radio just said a couple of airplanes crashed into the World Trade Center."

"That's interesting," I said, imagining some sort of small-plane mishap. "When we get to the office, I'll hop on the Internet, see what I can find out."

Fergultung & Spartan's Albuquerque offices were in an older building and consisted of a main central room with individual offices arranged around its periphery, with a

receptionist's station up front and a conference room across from that. We had added staff that year and had outgrown the space, and were late that summer closing on a deal to move to new offices a few blocks north. Meanwhile, my old office had been turned over to one of our new attorneys and the conference room was doubling as my office.

When Owen and I arrived at the offices, the television that was usually in the conference room had been pushed into the main central room and was on. Two secretaries were watching it. The scene was of one of the Twin Towers burning, and a huge cloud of smoke and dust billowing up. I stopped in my tracks and said, "What's going on?"

One of the secretaries, whose husband had been a Marine Corps Lurp in the Vietnam War, looked at me and said, "The South Tower just fell."

I said, "What?"

She said, "The South Tower, it just fell, just before you guys got here."

I stood staring at the television, trying to grasp what I was seeing. "There would have been ten thousand people in that tower," I said.

I went to the conference room and sat at my desk, trying to get news from various sources on the Internet, but couldn't get through to any of them, not the Associated Press, not Reuters, not the BBC, none of them. The Internet wasn't down, but it was running very slowly and many sites were inaccessible due to system timeouts. Shortly I heard the voices of the people gathered around the television rise in volume and I quickly got up to go see what was happening. The North Tower was collapsing. We watched it go down. I returned to my desk and continued trying to get news over the Internet. I tried to phone my brother, who worked in Mid-Town Manhattan, but couldn't get through. The line gave the rapid busy signal that indicates system overload. At some point, Owen left for school. An hour or so later, the receptionist buzzed me. "Your brother's on line one," she said.

I picked up the line. "David?" I said.

"Hi, kid, it's your bro here," came his voice from the phone.

"Boy, am I good to hear from you!" I said.

"We're fine here," he said. "As you know, we're about five miles north of the Trade Center. We don't know what's going on except what we're seeing on television."

"That's all we know, too," I said.

“I called Mom before I called you. She was very upset. But I want you to know we’re fine. We’ve heard the island’s been closed off and we’ll probably be spending the night here, but I don’t really know. I have to go, I have to clear this line now. Don’t worry about me.”

“Of course I will worry about you,” I said. “You take care of yourself.”

The rest of the morning was confusion, giving way to anger, grief and more confusion by afternoon. The Pentagon had been attacked, too. Another plane had gone down in Pennsylvania. All of the air traffic over the United States had been grounded. The President seemed to be fleeing for his life from airbase to airbase. The Vice President was reported to be secure in a bunker, deep underground. The military was on alert, but the attacks were already over. The news from Lower Manhattan was appalling.

October 30, 2001 — Sleeping policemen are appearing in the neighborhood, laid out across the streets, yellow stripes on their asphalt selves to slow speeding motorists or failing that, rip the oil pans and exhaust systems off their cars. Speed limits in residential neighborhoods in New Mexico are 25 mph, but I think I'm the only person in the entire state who actually drives the speed limit. I can drive up to Santa Fe, on a stretch of interstate with a 75-mph limit, and pass no one. It's a busy highway, too.

I was stunned and deeply grieved by what happened last month. The first place my brother took me when I arrived in New York eleven years ago was to the top of the World Trade Center. It was a clear September night and we looked north up the island of Manhattan, a jillion lights spangling the city below us, taking my breath away and filling my heart with wonder. Later that autumn I used to go down to the WTC when I was working at MG Futures, hurried trips downtown first thing in the morning to drop off a report at the Commodities and Futures Trading Commission on the 42nd floor of the South Tower. The report was a huge computer printout of raw trading data. It had to arrive by 9:00 a.m. or it was a \$20/minute fine. More than once I ran from the subway to the elevator to make sure I made it on time. One of the more beautiful sights I saw in New York was the sunrise lighting up the towers on a cold autumn morning after one of these deliveries. Since they were so tall, the towers caught the sunlight first, before it touched any other part of the city. I stood as close as I could to the South Tower that morning, and took a photograph looking straight up, along the tower's corner. It was positively dizzying to be looking up at something so tall. Hard to believe it's gone.

I just had to get up and tell Owen for the second time in ten minutes to turn his stereo down. He gave an exasperated sigh, but I am boss here even though he is damn near six feet tall and weighs only fifteen pounds less than I do. He told me earlier tonight that he and one of his friends were going to go trick-or-treating tomorrow night. I immediately objected on several grounds, one of which being that he is too old for it, and another being that I am not a taxi service and he had

not given me enough notice of any sort of expedition planned for tomorrow night. So now he's huffing and puffing and sulking.

November 9, 2001 — The last thing I did today before leaving work was to rush a client up to the US Courthouse to deliver him into the custody of the US Marshal Service. First time I've had to do that. The marshals were very businesslike and unthreatening as they handcuffed the client, whose name is Maxwell, and removed his hat and gave it to me to give to his sisters, who were waiting outside the courthouse. It was just after 5:00, so they couldn't come in. Maxwell turned and without a word rubbed his forehead against my shoulder to scratch an itch from where his hat had been. It was almost as though he were marking me with his scent. He is an Apache about my age, who was tried and found guilty at the end of September for the alleged labial rape of a nine-year-old girl. It was a federal matter because he's Native American. I'm not at all sure he did it. I'm not sure anyone did it. There was no physical evidence. There was no evidence at all, other than the testimony of a girl who had slept in her mother's bed since birth—except for when mama's boyfriends, such as Maxwell, were visiting. The jury said the clincher was the testimony of his niece, who said he had sexually assaulted her twenty years ago. But she's from a branch of the family engaged with Maxwell's branch in a bitter struggle for control of the grazing rights to a big ranch, so her motives aren't exactly unsuspect. This was Maxwell's second trial on the charge. He was found guilty the first time, too, but the appellate court overturned and remanded for retrial.

Guilty or innocent, I can't help but feel that if he were a well-dressed, well-spoken white man, he would have been acquitted. We had a similar case involving just such a man back in February. The jury acquitted him, saying that, even though they felt something may have happened between him and the little girl, there just wasn't enough evidence to send a man to prison on such a serious charge. But guilty or innocent, Maxwell will get sent to prison. Last time, he was sentenced to 135 months. He's sure to spend whatever his sentence is this time in protective custody at some federal lock-up. Other inmates don't like baby-fuckers. Baby-fuckers, snitches, and cops—the three categories of inmates least likely to survive on the inside if they're not in PC. Maxwell leaves behind over 100 head of cattle who are not yet ready for winter, and two sisters who will have a hard time



with that ranch, with winter coming down. The older sister was standing at the courthouse door crying after he was taken away.

Before escorting Maxwell to what is essentially the end of his life, I was working on a case of a fellow who was held in jail for a year and a half without trial, on a somewhat minor domestic violence charge, if there is such a thing, before he finally found an attorney who brought to the court's attention that this extended pretrial detention was a violation of the Speedy Trial Act. The judge dismissed the case, but forgot to order the fellow released, so another few weeks went by before he finally got out.

Most of the day I spent working on the federal class-action suit regarding conditions in the jail, which are still abysmal, but they're right down there with anyone in government's willingness to do anything about it. This suit is moving into its seventh year, still without resolution. A new jail is supposed to open whenever. It was supposed to open last month, or last spring, or next month, or next year, or when pigs fly. The jail has been under court order for about three years now to keep its population below certain levels. It's been out of compliance for most of those three years. Sometimes it's way out. On or about July 16 of this year, at 3:30 in the morning, there were 151 inmates being held in a pod (cellblock) designed for 48. Hell in a very small place. The black hole of the Land of Enchantment. And nobody cares. There's no political gain to be made by engaging in anything other than the torment of people who are already having a hard time coping. We have a big hearing in this case coming up in three weeks. I've been working on population exhibits. If the judge would find the jail administration and maybe a few city and county officials guilty of the contempt of court they seem so obviously guilty of, and toss them in one of those overcrowded black holes where the inmates don't get a change of clothing for weeks at a time, get beaten and brutalized by the guards, and get essentially no medical care, I'll bet a box of doughnuts things would change in that jail pretty goddamned fast.

One of the common denominators among the lost souls I deal with at Fergultung and Spartan—not the staff, I mean, but the clients and potential clients—is an inability to read. This inability extends from the occasional absolute and total illiteracy (a rare thing in our country), to the much more common situations of persons whose reading skills are so low, they have no hope of being able to prosper. The causes of criminal behavior are various, and the types of

criminality are also various; but I speak with a lot of jail and prison inmates and cannot help but conclude that one way to reduce the likelihood that someone will grow up to become a chronic petty criminal is to inculcate in that someone an appreciation for reading and, one would hope, a love for reading. It would seem that reading skills aren't useful simply in order to read computer manuals and employee procedures, but once you've developed the habit of reading for pleasure or for pleasurable self-informing, you're connected in a very basic and somewhat sub-lingual way with a larger, shared human community; inculcating almost an instinct for being a part of a greater whole. The feeling of being excluded is one many criminals express, and that feeling is only increased by the chronic cycle of imprisonment so many find themselves trapped in. Of course, there are psychopaths and they are more difficult cases, and I don't mean to claim that reading can save a person from a life of crime and imprisonment, but I certainly feel that improving the reading abilities and desires of children can help reduce the number of sociopaths in the modern post-industrial city.

I deal with so many persons for whom I can do so little; some are committers of terrible crimes, some are simple, petty criminals who are never going to be free, and all are heartbreaking in their ways. Many times I cannot help but think it would be better for all concerned if they were just taken out and shot. Many are mentally ill, almost all of them damaged when rather young, and they are not going to be repaired. We think in this country that we can fix anything, but we can't.

And what I find myself constantly returning to is what nearly every inmate I deal with needs and did not receive during the crucial time of youth: adequate parenting. In our culture of the individual right and rugged we are not equipped to deal with adults who need parenting, who need caring structure and coherent discipline. There are some adults who simply need to be told what to do. They need to be told when to get up, when to eat, where to work, how to work, what to wear, what to watch on TV, where to live, and when to go to bed at night. They need discipline imposed because they never internalized discipline as self-discipline. They need work camps. I know it sounds fascistic, but it's true; I have seen it. The closest we come are with our prisons and jails, but they are terrible, evil places, far removed from an adequate solution to the problem of persons who were inadequately parented and cannot be left alone to fend for themselves.

And then there are the mentally ill, who have largely been abandoned to the criminal justice system; the schizophrenics and the psychopaths and hard-core addicts who simply cannot function as free individuals, and so end up in jails and prisons. For many of them, the best medical care they'll ever get, paltry as it is, is when they are incarcerated. I am astonished at the number of inmates who are on psychiatric medications. I know chronic inmates who get busted just so they can get their meds for a while.

I also know persons who should never go free, but we free them anyway, under the misguided notion that a few years in prison will have reformed them. These persons are the sexual criminals, particularly the child molesters, who have a high rate of recidivism. Many criminals have high rates of recidivism. Once you get into the loop of crime and punishment, it is very difficult to get out of it. But I can't think of any criminal I would regard as more dangerous than a child molester. Last week and early this week I put in some time working on the Terry Clark case. He's the fellow who was executed Tuesday night for baby-fucking and murder. He was our client. We did everything we could to keep the state from murdering him, short of attempting to break into the prison and carry him off.

November 14, 2001, and I'm high. It's 11 o'clock. The 11th hour. The Taliban are broken and fleeing—like slaughtered chickens, by the report of their leader, whose name I forget but he didn't have—doesn't have—a catchy name like Hitler. Now there was a name you could sink your teeth into. Not to be too bloodthirsty about it, but let us—us being me, in my several manifestations of self, always alone but never lonely—let us celebrate tonight the mixed blessing of so many jihadists being eager for martyrdom under American carpet-bombing and Spooky. Oh Spooky. To be under Spooky. There you are, you're on the ground, it's dark, you hear aircraft overhead but you can't see them and figure they can't see you, but Spooky has the range down tight with a night-goggled crew loosing tubes of fire with a thousand explosions at their ends. You're at those ends, farewell. I keep getting distracted from our war and everything else and smoking more pot, which sounds like a good plan to us—all of me—right now. It's a new moon making a useful excuse for something where the true excuse has always been, when it is the case, oh look—I have more pot—I think I'll smoke it. It is the case now, with a dozen three- and four-month-old plants in what we call the studio. Smoke time. Smoke the main brace. Once it's burned through, watch the watch collapse. Before, or at the very start of, when tonight I began getting herbally distracted, I made a list of goals for the next two months. Five they are in number, these goals, and here they are—

but first, another hit. I grow some pretty decent weed. Come to me, my lovely, my Mary Jane, let us open a second front.

January 30, 2002 — We're settling in for a snowy night. Owen's in his room doing his homework (Honors Algebra, which is very taxing for the boy and absolutely alarming to his father). Soon I'll go make supper, which we'll eat while watching *Star Trek*. This is the first evening in weeks and weeks that I didn't have something terribly pressing I had to do. Tomorrow's likely to be a snow day, with Owen home from school part or all of the day. Friday he's out for teachers' in-service. I have a lot of work to do at the office, as always, but it will keep. We were scheduled for a big hearing in Federal court tomorrow and Friday, to find the city in contempt for violating the court's order regarding jail conditions, but we reached a settlement on this particular question yesterday. No one won, no one lost, no one was pleased, so it must be fair.

February 7, 2002 — First thing I need to do today at the office is go visit a client in jail. He's a fellow in on what the state hopes to make into a capital murder charge. James handed me the case late in the afternoon of the day before Thanksgiving, and it's been a major part of my job since. It's an interesting case, with fifty eyewitnesses who tell a hundred different versions of what happened, none of them true.

Despite the large number of people in this case, the world of the gangster is a very small world. It consists of the family, the neighborhood, and the public schools. I've yet to run across a gangster who has an effective comprehension of the powers of the state, or is at anything other than a complete loss when pitted against the national government. This particular gangster's world has imploded to the confines of a maximum-security jail cell. I've had to visit him a few times. I sincerely hope that if we are unable to secure him an acquittal, his "family" doesn't take it out on us. He probably didn't do it. I think he's taking the fall for his brother and hoping that we can get him off. Good fucking luck to us.

I hate jail. But visiting it is not the hardest part of my job; it's the second-hardest. The hardest part is having to deal with guys who fuck children. Sometimes

all I am is pulled down, rendered mute in the face of routine horror. I get so worn out and harried—more emotionally and psychologically than physically, though by the end of the week I'm usually exhausted. I'm not infrequently exhausted by Tuesday. My job just takes a tremendous toll. And I've worked overtime nearly every week for a year and a half. I know it wouldn't be so difficult if I didn't have Owen to raise, too, but so much of my routine has to be that: routine, because kids need that; they need that stability, and I can't just up and go to the office at 2:30 in the morning if I wake up and can't sleep, not with a kid asleep in the other room.

So often these days, I hardly care about anything but sticking to my work. I certainly don't feel fired up like I once did. I feel more like a person who's determined to bang his head against a wall until either the wall falls over or his head stoves in. Maybe if I wasn't so tired. I get so tired, worn thin, I forget about all the good things in my life, and there are plenty. There's Owen, who's an honors student and with whom I have a very good relationship. There's Tracy—a better friend would be hard to ask for. She says I've finally grown up. I think she's right. Grown up a lot more, anyway. It's the combination of my job and raising Owen. It's not like I thought, Oh, I need to grow up now. It just happened.

Owen just came out of his room and gave me a hug. I get at least a hug a day from him. I can't believe how big he is. He's almost my size, just turned fourteen, and his is the deeper voice. He helps with housecleaning chores, which really helps a lot, more than he realizes.

May 19, 2002 — I've changed my name. Legally. My first name is now Tetman. My middle name is now Daniel, so for family and old friends, I can still be called by that name. Why would I exchange something so Biblical for something so Teutonic? And do so in the personal Middle Ages? Marketing. Mostly marketing. Maybe also a desire to escape from, to disavow, the fuck-up that Daniel Callis could too often be. But it was, really, a marketing decision, now that all the world is a market. It had been brought to my attention that there was—there is—an artist in Southern California named Daniel Callis. There is also a photographer in the far Northeast named Daniel Callis. Three artistic Daniels Callis on one continent—hell, on one planet—was at least one too many. Figuring it would be easier to change my name than have them change theirs, I changed my name from Daniel Leon Callis to Tetman Daniel Callis. That way, I can publish and show my work as Tetman

Callis—a rather unique moniker—and still be Daniel to those who wish to call me Daniel. And I like the name Daniel. While I have quickly learned to respond to “Tetman,” it feels awkward, like a label. Tracy has teased me about it. She said, “What’s your new name? Is it—what is it—‘Titmouse’?”

Changing one’s name, depending upon the jurisdiction, can cost a few dollars and take a little time. In New Mexico, it’s a procedure done by court order. Then there are all the accounts that need to have their information changed. I’ve done very little of that yet. I have my new driver’s license, and have opened a new bank account. Once the checks for the account arrive and I can write checks under my new name without being in the position of forging my own signature, I’ll feel more like whoever I am now. The effect of changing one’s name... well, it’s not like changing one’s phone number, or job, or city. Its effects are more intimate and disorienting. There were times last month after the court papers had been filed but before the order was entered, that I wondered if I hadn’t lost my mind.

Oh, what I really want right now is an orgasm and a high and another orgasm and another high and on and on and on. Must be strong, must resist. I have only a little bit of pot; just enough so that if I began smoking it, by tonight it would have worn off and I would be wanting more, plus be facing a Monday morning with a hazy hemp hangover. As for the Mighty O, I’m trying to save myself up for whoever ends up in bed with me next. That person may turn out to be Tracy’s new next-door neighbor, or may turn out to be one or more of the women I work with, at least one of whom has already become more flirtatious in the wake of the recent news that I am to leave the criminal defense firm of Fergultung and Spartan in six weeks’ time. Michael phoned me up a couple weeks ago and asked me if I would come back to work for him. I told him if he could pay me enough, I would do it. He and I met this past Friday and worked out the details. I’ll be starting work with him again on July 1st. I’m looking forward to it. He’s immensely well-organized and focused, and his clients own private jets. James was not too pleased with the news, but the fact is, I’ve never really fit in well with his chaotic, shoot-from-the-hip practice.

Some of the women I work with were not pleased with the news, either, for reasons they know better than I, but I can guess. I think Natalie has a crush on me, but she’s married. Janine’s married, too. She’s the attorney who flirted with me after she heard I was leaving. While I can imagine the possibility of a kiss or a grope

or maybe even a quick hot fuck with either of those two, with married women it's just impossible to tell what lines they may end up crossing. I'll cross the line of appetite at the slightest provocation, but I'm not worth wrecking a marriage over. There's another woman in the office, Annie the administrative assistant, who is a single mother of about 30 years of age, petite and built like the goddess of love, with cute dark eyes and an eminently kissable mouth. She is not flirtatious, though she is not unfriendly. She was once a jail guard and has a certain foundation of toughness. I like her, though I don't know her well. I would lie down beside her in an instant, if that's what she wanted. Hell, I'd fuck her sitting. Standing up, even, if she wanted. She would have to make the first move, though. I've always preferred to leave the first moves to women. If a woman wants a man, she'll let him know.

And it's not like I'm not involved, somewhat. There's Tracy's new next-door neighbor. Her name is Sandra. I'm not sure how old she is, but she's somewhere between my age and sixty. I never ask anymore. She writes poetry and is quiet. This is not to say she does not speak, but she is soft-spoken when she does. She seemed to be interested in me from the get-go, though I suspect she was on the prowl for a man and I was the first decent one to cross her sights in a while. We haven't had sex yet, but we may. We've only seen each other three times. She's from Chicago, has lived in other places, and seems a bit of a fuck-up, but I'm from El Paso, have lived in other places, and am a bit of a fuck-up, so we have things in common. She lived with some guy for ten years, but they split up. If she told me why, I have forgotten, but hey—she can tell me again and it won't be the same old story.

December 8, 2002 — My next-door neighbor, Johnny Gordito, started selling me dope last spring, but on the third deal he decided to rip me off, which ended the business arrangement. Young fool. He could have sold many more fifty-dollar bags of smile to this old fool. I was annoyed at having been ripped off, but right away I knew that what I was getting was effectively a fifty-dollar drug abuse therapy program. I didn't want Owen to know I was dealing from the next-door neighbor, anyway, so it's been for the best. I still grow the stuff, in little pots in my little studio. I have enough seeds for probably the rest of my life. And if I should want to buy more, it's not too difficult to find. Johnny and the younger members of his family and their buds, the whole great lot of them grown older and larger, hang out in the



carport at night, smoking pot. They don't have their technique down right, as they often can be heard coughing on the smoke—"Smokin 'n' Chokin," as Owen and I call it. They still play far too much basketball.

January 24, 2003 — I'm sitting in the atrium of the Hyatt Regency in Downtown Albuquerque, eating what passes today for my lunch (coffee and chocolate, that divine combination). I not infrequently lunch here in the atrium. I work right next door, on the 15th floor of Albuquerque Plaza Office Tower (APOT), which, at 22 storeys, is the tallest building in the state. If you take four APOTs, arrange them in a square with their walls touching so they are one squat 22-storey building, then stack five of these four-plexes one atop another, you will have a building as big as one of the Twin Towers.

I am distracted by the loud talking of a conventioneer sitting about twenty-five feet from me and all but shouting at her lunch companion. I have learned that she drove here from Tucson, where it was warm, has arrived quite recently, and knows not where to eat. The convention of which she is a conventioneer is of barbershop quartet singers. From some distance behind me, I hear barbershop quartet singing.

I have just learned that the loud woman pays \$750 a month for her apartment and has recently purchased two wicker chairs for her living room. She also reports having metal knees of recent installation, which trigger airport detectors.

Conventioneers come, conventioneers go, but as the months have passed, I've come to know that they are of fairly uniform loudness.

I know, there's a war on. What an odd war. The war that is not a war, but is. Another war that maybe can't be won but who will be able to tell? Seems the invasion of Iraq is imminent. If it doesn't happen by the end of February, I have to take Michael to lunch. He and I have bet upon the issue.

Today is Owen's fifteenth birthday. He lately sports a look known as "Goth," the most outre aspect of which is, in his case, black nail polish. Really serious Goths, who wear black clothing and spectral makeup, are known as "gloomies," or so Owen tells me. He's not one of those. He has told me that his clothing and accouterments, along with his size, have had an unexpected benefit: Hispanic

gangsters, who tend to be rather Catholic, leave him alone, as they appear to believe he is in league with the Devil. As far as I can determine, he is not.

Winter, 2003 – How much more humble we would be if our flatulence were green. We would trail tell-tale clouds, iridescent and glowing. There would be no pretending as to who was responsible. No way to lie or to prevaricate. How much more truthful we would be if our noses quickly turned purple when we lied. If not more truthful, then probably we at least would not say as much. Not so many lies about love and sex and death. Imagine if our lips flushed bright crimson whenever we had thoughts or feelings of lust. No more pretending not to notice the luscious babe or hunky stud. We would constantly be outing ourselves. What if our fingernails flashed a blazing yellow when we were afraid? No more stiff upper lips and steely glares to cow both friend and foe, unless we wore thick gloves. Imagine a presidential press conference were we wired in this fashion. It would be a bio-neon hullabaloo. The president would enter the room, his hands jammed into his pockets. The fingernails of the rookie reporters and of the press secretary would all be flashing chrome yellow. The lips of more than one reporter would be a fully flushed crimson, even if maybe the babes weren't so luscious nor the studs so hunky. Every time the president went to say something, his nose would suddenly go purple. In a little while we would see that he'd had the chili cheese and bean burrito for breakfast again.

March 14, 2003 — Living in this country has become quite stressful. Maybe I'm not stoned enough. Well before Easter I expect that American troops will have stormed into Iraq. Most people in this country seem to feel that things with Iraq were never settled, and now it's time to settle them. After they're settled, will it be North Korea's turn next? Then Iran? Pakistan? France? It seems many people here just feel like it's time to settle things, whatever it takes; that it can be done and successfully done; that a period of darkness must be passed through to reach a greater light. Few seem to reflect on how badly it could all go; on how things must have looked to Europeans in the summer of 1914, before it all went to hell in the handbasket of the First World War.

So. I hope we win all our wars. I hope my son doesn't have to die in any of them. I hope none of them come to our town. I'm a floor warden in the building I work in. Earlier this week, there was a meeting of all the floor wardens, a meeting called by building management and including the firm contracted for security. Much paranoia was evinced. Not frothing at the mouth paranoia, not that extreme, but a level of paranoia that probably comes mostly from a feeling of helplessness. If anyone for any reason actually wanted to attack the building (Albuquerque Plaza) or any part of the city (Sandia Labs, the Air Force base, the University, the bridges over the Rio Grande), there is nothing really we could do to save our sorry asses but count on the whims of fate. Someone firebombed three fast-food restaurants along Central the other night, at about 4:00 a.m., using Molotov cocktails. No suspects yet in custody, no clear motives for the attacks. No one hurt, as the restaurants were closed.

Sometimes I wish we were all cats. Life would be so much simpler. Nothing needs to be smarter than a cat, anyway.

March 30, 2003 — One of the oddest things about this war is how little people are actually talking about it. I mean, it's all over the media—it's inescapable—but it is

so divisive that people are being careful to talk about it only with persons who they know are on the same side.

I didn't go to any of the protests here. They got a little violent, but have simmered down. There were tear gas and arrests, police in combat fatigues and carrying machine guns, and protesters blocking off Central in front of the University, at Cornell where the Frontier Restaurant is with its huge American flag flying over the sidewalk. This went on for two or three nights. There was also a rally downtown, at which rally an assistant district attorney who was participating pointed out to other protesters the undercover police officers who were working the crowd. The assistant district attorney was subsequently fired. Michael was a little upset. His take on the undercover cops at the protest was that it was not crowd control, but fascistic spying.

We have a fascistic spying situation going on down by the river, too, where in the woods alongside the bike trail there are posted signs warning us to behave because undercover police patrol the woods. Now what's that all about? We've gotten so used to the idea of police spies among us and being afraid of shadows, we don't even stop a minute to ask ourselves, why undercover police and what's the point? If the point is to get people to actually obey the laws, wouldn't the presence of obvious, uniformed police be more effective? But maybe that's not the point. Maybe the point is to render people frightened and suspicious of everyone around them, helpless children in thrall to an unpredictable and tyrannical parent. Maybe that's the only way of controlling a people whose god is dying or dead.

Back to the war. After the invasion of Iraq, the first large protest here in Albuquerque was by students at Albuquerque High School. Several educators in the area have been suspended for having anti-war posters in their classrooms or offices and refusing to remove them. One of these suspendees was Owen's counselor. On the morning after the invasion, about 150 Albuquerque High students, including Owen, walked out. Owen was walking out to protest the suspension of his counselor, but for the most part it was an anti-war demonstration. The students, escorted by city police, marched from AHS down to Central. There they paused to decide whether or not to march downtown. The police told them that downtown had narrow sidewalks and much federal property, and that if they strayed onto federal property they would be arrested. The protesters turned instead

towards the university, where they rallied at Cornell and Central, then marched back to Albuquerque High. When they arrived back at school, they were gathered in the auditorium and told that they were to be suspended from school the following day, which suited everyone fine. The suspension day was a Friday, so the protesters got a three-day weekend to cool down.

April 1, 2003 — The Mother of All Bombs. The U.S. military has this new, huge bomb that it calls MOAB, which stands for Massive Ordnance Air Burst or something like that. It was tested in Florida in what was clearly a saber-rattling gesture directed at the Iraqi government. And the North Korean government. And the Syrian, Iranian, Yemeni, Libyan, Venezuelan, Pakistani, Indian, Saudi, Russian, and French governments, and the UN, I shouldn't wonder.

A few weeks before the present war started, there were news reports about this bomb. These reports slyly referred to how the US military has nicknamed this weapon the Mother of All Bombs, in reference to Hussein's claim back before the first Gulf War that it would be "the mother of all battles." But none of the news reports I saw made reference to the fact that the ancient land of Moab was that part of the Middle East which runs from the Jordan River into western Iraq; America will be using the MOAB on the Moabites.

More disturbing was the comparison made between this bomb and nuclear weapons. The spin on the story, when the bomb was first tested, was that it was as powerful as a small nuclear weapon. Few reporters bothered to verify this—they simply repeated it, in tones of proud approval. Some few did point out, in follow-up stories that lacked the impact of the initial stories, that in fact, this bomb is only one one-thousandths as powerful as even the smallest nuclear weapons. None of the reports I saw, even the corrective reports, pointed out the fundamental difference, that nuclear weapons generate radioactive fallout, while the Mother of All Bombs performs only a much more localized slaughter. But most disturbing of all, around the time this bomb was tested, the Bush Administration let it be known that it was pursuing the development of new, advanced, battlefield nuclear weapons, which it would employ if it saw fit. No discernible outcry was raised in the media over this. No discernible outcry was raised over the fact that such weapons would employ the very type of small-scale, portable nuclear weapons technology that the American government is so concerned that this country's enemies, who seem to

have become legion, may get their hands on and use. And nowhere was it noted that some sort of purposeful disinforming of people may have been going on with regard to this issue. If people are told that this huge MOAB is as powerful as a small nuclear weapon, and are not reminded of the fundamental difference with regard to radioactivity, then the MOAB, or anything like it, becomes equivalent to the small nuclear weapon, and you may as well use one as use the other.

Owen is up and showered now and it is time for him and me to breakfast together and watch The War Show—Reality TV With A Vengeance. It seems we're winning the war. Hope we win the peace.

April 7, 2003 — Owen is in the shower. After he gets out and gets dressed, he and I will breakfast before he sets off to school.

I just heard the squeak of the shower faucet. The water has been turned off. Time to prepare breakfast.

This morning's news brings word that Chemical Ali is dead, his body found by the British after fighting in Basra; also, another American strike into Baghdad, which the Iraqi Disinformation Minister says did not happen, giving his report on the street while in the background, the distant rumble of American tanks could be heard. Maybe in a few weeks this war will be over. It would be possible to feel better about it, insofar as one can feel good about war, if the motives of the Bushies were not so mixed and suspicious. They appear to have had some trouble getting their story straight as to why we were going to war. As far as I can tell, it is because Hussein's government is a danger to persons outside of Iraq, and because Iraq has a lot of oil, and because we can. North Korea has no oil and would be a much tougher nut to crack, so I suppose with them there will be negotiations.

The lot of most human beings seems to be such a sorry one. It's like we don't get it, that the thing we ought to do is try to make decent lives for all the way-too-many-billions of us. We could if we weren't so frightened and greedy. I was driving to work Friday morning and thinking, we really don't know why it is that we fight wars. For all our knowledge, for all that we can see of competition among males in other species, we still haven't hit at the root of why one of the things we do best, even obsessively, is organizing and fighting wars.

April 10, 2003 — My parents will be in town this evening. They called last night to let me know, and to see if Owen and I would be free to dine with them. Of course we will. They're driving up to Montrose to spend the weekend with old friends, then across the Divide to Colorado Springs to see my mom's brother and his wife. They'll be pleased to hear of Owen's accomplishments (he won the Albuquerque High School Poetry Slam, and also has earned his academic letter for the year). He's also, I believe, taller than I am now, and his voice is deeper.

My parents are staunch Bush loyalists. They have coffee-table picture books lauding his great and heroic achievements. I should not get me started. I think Bush is good-hearted but so terribly ignorant and unimaginative—clueless in Paradise, speaking loudly and carrying, not a big stick, but a pair of tree trunks. My metaphors strain. Yesterday our government made what seem to be explicit threats against Syria, Iran, and North Korea ("View ye the wrath of the god-like Americans, and tremble lest ye be next to feel the scorching blows of Jay-Dams and Tomcats", etc.). There's just hubris written all over these guys, and they never can seem to get their story straight. Shallow men playing a deep game.

April 11, 2003 — Dinner last night with the parents and the child at Carrow's, followed by dessert at the 66 Diner. My parents are not quite the Bushies they seemed when last I visited them in El Paso. My dad is not too pleased that the Bushies have taken our soldiers into Iraq. He says he thinks this war is a bad idea, but he's glad we're winning it. I pretty much agree with him on that. I'm not entirely sure that, even as terrible a thing as it is, it is an entirely bad idea. Anti-American jihadists are a danger to us all. They are a danger to everyone. I wish the issues were simple; that the problems were simple, so simple solutions could be applied. Certainly economic injustice has played a big part in the world war that broke out on Sept. 11 '01. This is an aspect of the conflict that seems beyond the capacity of the Bushies to understand.

It seems to me now that it is the case that military power and police power are converging. We see it inside nations, such as our own, where SWAT teams use armored vehicles and machine guns and much else of the panoply of military equipment. We see it internationally, where the old-fashioned wars of blatant conquest and plunder are no longer acceptable; where the war against terrorism is an international police action being fought with civil and military force. We see this



new world order being born and being beset, as so much human endeavor is, by the corruption of individual selfishness and powerful, limited interests. I can't help but hope that, out of this difficult, complex time of conflict, which could well last for decades, something good, in the way of a world governed as a well-functioning, just community, will arise. Otherwise the prospect is just too dismal; the prospect of a world of grasping anarchy, of lost souls locked in perpetual civil war. Hell in a planetary space.

May 28, 2003 — It's a quiet evening, still an hour before sunset. I have some harpsichord music, compositions by Couperin, playing on the CD player. Owen is up in Los Alamos with his mom and her brood.

Maybe someday all this war stuff will be over, locked away in a cabinet of historical curiosities. I don't think it will happen in our lifetimes. The country seems somewhat stunned, or hypnotized, and polarized. There are those who are gung-ho patriots. It's hard to tell if they are a majority or not. Politicians and the media are so full of bullshit, it's like being stuck in a rancid hall of mirrors to try to find out what's true, and insofar as truth can be discerned, to then try and find out how many of the other folk who are likewise wandering the hall have themselves found out any truths. Everybody has their own special agenda, their own axe to grind, their own profits to make. It seems as though the United States of America has become a myth bolstered only by its own desperate need to exist.

Summer, 2003 – The president and his secretary for war came last night to a party at my house, barbecue and cocktails, a bonfire in the back yard. I sat with the president and his secretary for war and we talked. The president was charming. He was a funny man. His secretary for war was a sourpuss who didn't say much. My marijuana plants were growing in a row behind the house. They were young and healthy. I told the president, *See, it's not such a bad thing*. He was noncommittal, changed the subject, made a joke. His secretary for war, a tall gray man, said it was time to leave. We were in the back yard sitting in white plastic lawn chairs. The president stood and began pirouetting across the yard to his waiting limousine. He was a happy man, a funny man, though he had about him the air of distancing self-protection common among the famous. His secretary for war, not dancing, followed him to the limousine. I turned to one of the other party guests and said, *See, he's not such a bad guy*. This other party guest said, *No, man, he's bullshitting you—look*. He pointed toward my house. A small white helicopter fluttered down out of the night sky. Standing on one of the helicopter's white landing skids was a soldier armed with a heavy machinegun. He opened fire at the back door to my house. The bullets were explosive, white flashes and sparks erupted. My house caught fire, though my marijuana plants still stood, silhouetted by the flames and explosions. The party was over. The helicopter landed. The soldier told me it was time for me to clean up all the mess. Housecats stood on naked wires in front of me as though on clotheslines. I was to turn a rheostat to send current through the wires, see how much the housecats could take and what would happen and when would they die. I turned the rheostat. The housecats' paws began to smolder. The housecats looked at me, their eyes were green. I broke the rules and turned the rheostat up all the way to get it over with. The housecats fell smoldering onto the wires. The wires burned through their paws, their legs, their whiskers, their jaws, and the tops of their heads. They fell from the wires. There were the smells of burning fur and flesh. It was day and my house had burned down.

November 4, 2003 — It is my practice these days to take a walk nearly every morning first thing after I get up, going about a mile-and-a-half through the neighborhood, on nearly the same route every day. This morning, three blocks into my walk, there was a police action going on. There were three police cars at the intersection of Garfield and Walter and a fourth car a block further north at Cromwell and Walter. Their lights were flashing. A TV news SUV had just pulled up at Garfield and Walter, and the reporter got out to talk to a couple of officers in one of the cars. The police car at Cromwell and Walter appeared to be oriented toward a van that had its parking lights on and was parked along the curb. I stood on the corner a moment. The street runs downhill a ways, then back up. The police car that had the two officers who had been talking to the TV news guy, it shone a spotlight on me (though I was standing under a streetlight). Those spotlights are bright. I waved and called out, "Good morning!", then turned to walk an alternate route down Garfield.

From behind me I heard a voice call, "Sir, come here please!" I stopped and turned and one of the officers, the one who had shone the spotlight on me, had got out of his car and was advancing toward me, one hand on his holstered pistol. He and I approached each other. He was a young fellow, as most cops are. He was rather nervous. I could hear it in his voice and see it in the tension in his body. I thought, Poor guy, to have a job where everyone you meet is a potential threat. He started asking me what I was doing out and about, and I started telling him how it was that I lived a couple blocks away and it was my habit to take a walk every morning when I get up, and how this was my regular route. I had my hands in my jacket pockets. He had one hand on his pistol. He said, "Please take your hands out of your pockets. Let me see your hands." I let him see my hands. He said, "We have a situation here. I advise you to turn around and go back home." I said, "Okay," and turned and started back the way I came.

As I turned I saw that right behind me was another police car. It followed me a half-block—they had called for back-up. I felt kind of special. It's worth

remarking that one never sees the police in Albuquerque actually patrolling anything, but whenever they “have a situation,” they swarm like bugs out from under a log that’s been turned over. I was talking with Tracy and Tina and Sandra about this the other night. We all agreed that current police practices are not citizen-friendly. They don’t patrol. They swarm in great numbers over situations that don’t seem to necessitate so many cops milling about. They don’t want to talk to anyone. Tina’s husband saw an auto burglar running by one day. A minute later, here came a swarm of cops. The witnessing husband tried to stop one of them to tell them where the burglar went, but they didn’t want to hear it. They were all, “Stand back—Get inside—We have a situation.”

I knew when I waved and said good morning I was giving the police input they would not know how to process. I was supposed to be sullen, or frightened, or suspicious, or confrontational, or scared, or intoxicated, and was none of the above. What I was was a fellow determined to take his morning walk without getting in the way of the police, or getting hurt, or getting arrested. The back-up police car, it drove off after a half-minute or so of following me. I headed down Garfield a few blocks west to Broadway, where I would be far enough out of the way and could still take my walk. In a few minutes I’ll turn on the telly for the morning news, see if that TV SUV has anything to report.

If the police had wanted to talk to me, I could have told them a few things about that particular part of the neighborhood where they were having their situation, though I doubt it would have been information they didn’t already have in much more concrete form. It would have been background information, or color commentary. Something the cops already would know about, since they were there, happened Sunday morning, when I did not take my walk. I had gone to a Day of the Dead party the night before and did not feel the next morning like going out and walking. Owen had spent the night at his cousin’s up in the far Northeast Heights. I set out at about 10:30 Sunday morning to get him, and there was a situation in that same block, where the van was this morning. More on this and other things in a minute, but it’s time to catch the morning news.

Indeed they did have a situation. Once the news anchors were done with that happy-chat nonsense they waste time with, they went live to the fellow at the TV SUV. It was a shooting he reported. It happened just a few minutes before I got

up. One person was killed and another wounded. Possibility that the gunman, or a gunman, is still at large. No wonder that cop looked so nervous.

Sunday morning, there were police at Cromwell and Walter, and the intersection was blocked off with police tape. There was nothing on the news later about what had happened. I walked through there yesterday morning and didn't see any signs of anything, except there was a fragment of a Halloween mask in the street and that caught my eye as being a little odd—kids don't usually leave parts of their costumes behind while trick-or-treating. But over these past few weeks I had seen signs. Little signs. Subtle things. And the police had been down there a few weeks ago, so I can't imagine they're too surprised that it's come down to a shooting. What I had seen, both on my early morning walks and on my drives down that street, were signs that there was prostitution going on right there where the situation was, and also signs that there was at least one new junkie on the streets.

Owen is up and has just finished his shower. I have cooked pot pies for breakfast. Two-three winters ago, I was on a different morning schedule and would not infrequently get up early enough to cook pot pies or baked potatoes for breakfast. It warms the house and gives us a hearty start to the day. I didn't do it last year. Turns out Owen really enjoys pot pies for breakfast. It's not really cold yet, but I was up early enough this morning to prepare the pies. Owen is on a very full schedule at school these days. He rarely eats lunch. He gets up at 6:05, showers and dresses, has a big bowl of cereal and milk for breakfast (if we're not having pot pies), then gets his backpack and heads down to the school bus stop a block away at about 7:00. He's in school and after-school drama program rehearsals until 6:30, or 7:00, or 8:30, or 9:30 sometimes. We eat supper after he gets home. So it feels good to feed him a quality-brand pot pie for breakfast.

We watched the news this morning while we ate our pot pies. We don't usually watch TV news. As for what happened in the 'hood this morning, glad I was I wasn't there when it went down. Bullets move way too fast for me to want to spend much time around them. I'm just trying to take walks. Owen says the scuttlebutt at school is that what happened Sunday was a gang shooting involving Los Juaritos, one of our neighborhood gangs. Los Juaritos are actually in many cities and towns, being a gang organized out of Juárez. We have had several different gangs over the years vying for control over nefarious activities in the 'hood—the Crips, the Bloods, the South Broadway Pimps, the South Side Locos, the

South Side San Jose, the East Side San Jose, the XVIII Street Gang (they're international), the Sureño 13s, Los Juaritos, and probably one or two others I'm forgetting—but there hasn't been any gang warfare to speak of here in about five years. The neighborhood is slowly becoming gentrified. People who won't stand for gang warfare and have enough money and education to receive police protection are becoming more and more of a presence around here. That one stretch of Walter where the troubles have been is the one stretch that has remained ratty and run-down.

I do feel kind of bad for that cop, the one who stopped me this morning. One of the last things he needed was some civilian wandering at an inexplicable time into a war zone. I was surprised at the time that he did not ask to see my ID, but in retrospect, seeing's how I was stumbling upon the scene just minutes after the shooting, with the shooter still at large, I suppose it says something good about his training and forbearance that he didn't whip out his pistol and start screaming at me to quickly place myself face down on the pavement.

This evening I'm feeling less insouciant than I was this morning about the events in the 'hood. I'm just home from work. I'll pick Owen up from school at 7:00, or sooner or later than that if he calls me and tells me of a change. His school is about two miles north of here. In the daytime he could walk, along Broadway, but I wouldn't want him going straight through the neighborhoods because the one closest to his school is even rougher than this one. At night it would be out of the question. There are parts—most parts—of this neighborhood I feel safe in during the day that I would not want him in, especially not alone. Being a teenaged boy, his presence would just invite trouble.

That block where the shooting was is still cordoned off tonight. The big Mobile Crime Scene Lab van is out front of the house where the shooting was. There was further news later today about the recent incidents at that house. What happened Sunday morning was four guys in Halloween masks broke into the house and shot a 15-year-old, wounding him. That explains the fragment of a Halloween mask in the street. The guy who was killed this morning, he was 32 and had two kids, and had lived in that house a while. Four suspects have been taken into custody. Bears all the marks of a gangland killing. Almost certainly money was involved. Glad I didn't get up earlier.

In the past three weeks I have found three used syringes in that street where the shootings happened, though only one was in that particular block. A couple of weeks ago, right as I was passing the shooting house, a young man's voice called to me from down Cromwell, "Hey! Hey, man! Hey! You got any rolling papers?" I neither responded nor even looked. To be safe, I returned home by an alternate route. On several other mornings I've heard voices coming from the darkness around the houses there. One of them is a condemned and boarded-up batch of cheap apartments. Then there were the matters with the van. The van outside the shooting house this morning was the same van that I saw a woman get into the back of one morning—and all this stuff has happened in the dark, before dawn—and a guy back there said something about "three dollars" or "thirty dollars," I couldn't quite make it out. Also with that van, one morning well after sunrise, while I was driving to work, a woman who was not wearing enough clothes for the weather was getting out of the van and tried very hard to make eye contact with me as I drove past. And one other thing was, a few weeks ago, I was walking along and saw what I at first thought was a fellow wearing black pants and no shirt, but it turned out to be a young woman wearing black pants and a skimpy top. She was obviously cold. She crossed my path and headed to that house.

There was a SWAT action in the neighborhood this past summer, also on Walter, but a block closer to my house. I never saw any report in the news on what happened. It was about 5:00 one July morning, I had just set about feeding the cats when I heard an explosion that was clearly the explosion of a concussion grenade, or a "flash-bang" device. I went out to my front yard as David and Virginia, my neighbors across the street, came to their front door to see what was up. From the next block over we could hear a the sound of a megaphoned voice saying, "This is a lawful police order! Come out of the house and walk slowly down the drive!" This command was repeated many times. I could see police cars down the street, at the intersection. I fed the cats and ate breakfast. Later, I rode my bike down by the river. On my way back, the SWAT team fellows were loading up into their unmarked cars and I asked one of them what had happened. He smiled a little smile and said "No one got hurt." They cleared out of there pretty quick. I wondered later if it was perhaps a drill.

December 2, 2003 — Owen and I spent Thanksgiving afternoon and evening with Tracy's circle. All my age or older, except for Kelly, who is about 30 or so. Kelly is the daughter of Janet, and is wrapping up grad school. In what, I don't know. She's an attractive woman, but I'm involved pretty seriously with Sandra, who was also at the Thanksgiving festivities, which were held at Helen's house. Helen and Tracy's mom, Mildred Rosenthal, was at Thanksgiving, too, along with her old friend Lois. Mildred's 81 and wears two hearing aids, one of which was malfunctioning and the other one of which was turned off until Kelly turned it on. Mildred and her late husband had five children: James, Steven, Helen, Sharon, and Tracy. James and Sharon died of cancer, James the year after I met Tracy. James was married to Janet, I think, or maybe they were just living together. They didn't have children. Janet has Kelly and a son by a previous marriage.

Kelly was for a long time involved with Eric whose last name I can't remember, but he lives in the same building Tracy lives in, at the other end. Tracy is his godmother, as his mother, Kathleen, is another of Tracy's old friends. Eric and Tracy have been on the outs with each other since last winter, when Eric went on a ten-day ski trip and made no arrangements to have his cat taken care of. He left her some food and water and just took off. Her name was Cicada, but we all called her Tripod because she had lost a leg when she got hit by a car. She got hit by a car again while Eric was on his trip, and she got killed this time. Tracy found out about it when her neighbor from across the street came banging on her door and calling out, "Tripod's been killed!" Tracy was pretty upset at Eric. He's an artist and often behaves like one. He's also a handsome young man. For a while, every time I saw him, he had some new real-life Barbie-doll hanging on his arm. He used to come to Tracy's parties, which she doesn't throw anymore because she was injured in a boating accident a couple years ago and it took a lot out of her. Broke her coccyx, and all her doctors have been able to do for her is string her out on Demerol and Valium.

Mildred's old friend Lois was in bad shape at Thanksgiving this year. She was late in showing up, and Tracy couldn't raise her on the phone. Lois is never late. Tracy decided to go to her house and see what was up. I volunteered to come along. Owen volunteered, too, but I told him no. I didn't know what we might find. Lois is having back problems and her doctors have her completely undone on OxyContin. She started to pass out at the table after we got her to Helen's and



were all sat down eating. She was sitting next to Owen. I told him to make sure she didn't fall out of her chair, as she faded pretty quickly. Tracy and I and Cindy, who was sitting on the other side of Lois and is Steven's ex-wife, got her out to her car so Tracy could drive her back home. Owen and I followed in my car, to bring Tracy back and also to have some toting muscle just in case. We got Lois inside and on her couch. She was doing better. It was almost sunset. Lois sat on her sofa and looked out her patio door and said she'd be all right, just so long as we moved the phone to where she could reach it. She couldn't remember where she had left it, so Owen called it on his cell phone and we quickly found it from the ringing. The house, which is pretty big, was almost empty of furnishings and had remodeling stuff distributed about. After we left, Owen asked, "What was up with that house?" Tracy told us the story. Lois's old flame from many years past had come back into her life. She and he were going to move in together. She was fixing up her house to sell it, when he killed himself because he had cancer. She hurt her back working on the house. Her son, who is about 50, lives there, but he is slightly brain-damaged from a motorcycle accident and is no help. Tracy says, "He's not *that* brain-damaged." Tracy called me last night and said Lois is doing better. She said they're going to go to Lois's doctor this week and get the OxyContin business straightened out.

I wept last week when I read a report as to how soldiers in Iraq are falsifying reports because there are too few men on the ground to actually accomplish all they're being assigned; how soldiers are stretched so thin, they're having to stand 12-hour guard duty shifts, with 59 days on duty for every one day off; how experienced officers and non-coms are not re-upping. I'm old enough to remember what happened to the army during and after Vietnam. I remember how it was in the '70s, when I was an officer cadet and the army had been reduced to a demoralized shell of itself. It took twenty years to fix that. Now, more than any time since, we need an army that is highly motivated and knows why it is fighting and believes in the justice of its mission. This last is so important for American armies. We're such idealists, we can't go invading other countries on false pretenses. And American soldiers are expensive to train. We can't afford to drive them away by fighting the wrong wars for the wrong reasons.

Why are we in Iraq? To finish what we didn't finish the first time around? Because Saddam Hussein plotted to kill the first President Bush? To establish a base

wherefrom we can fight the Saudis, the Iranians, the Syrians, and the Pakistanis? To secure oil supplies to the profit of Bush's friends? Because the Iraqi army was one we were reasonably certain we could defeat in conventional warfare? Who knows? We're asking our soldiers to fight and kill and die, and who really knows why? I'm reminded of the words of Tallyrand, one of Napoleon's senior advisors, about some unwise action Napoleon took: "It was worse than a crime. It was a blunder."

There are too many people in this neighborhood drinking beer and not throwing their empties away in garbage cans. What is it with that?

There have been more cops around lately, red-tagging cars and doing who knows what all. A couple weeks ago, Owen and I were leaving on a Saturday afternoon and there were three police cars parked right outside my house, in that little stub of Bell that runs by my back gate. The officers—who wear black uniforms, which always reminds me of the SS—they were standing in the street at the corner, by my house. I approached them to ask them if it was all right for us to drive out past them. I didn't want to motor into any situations. Before I could say anything, they started shouting at me to get back. I got back, and shouted my question to them. They said it was okay for us to drive out as long as we went straight and didn't turn up High Street. So far, so good, despite the typical frightened rudeness of Albuquerque's Thin Black Line. As we started to pull out, a fourth police car pulled up on the wrong side of the street, right at us, to block our passage. Whatever. After a few seconds, the driver seemed to realize or perhaps he was told by his compatriots that we were not perps making a getaway. Whatever it was they were doing there on the corner, I never found out. They don't exactly like to talk about their work, and they were gone by the time we got back, which was only a half-hour later.

Spring, 2004 – Finally the facts are faced: the child within will always without. (I'm so hungover, my fingers keep hitting all the wrong keys. Thank (whoever) for backspace and delete.) That child within will never be content to sit himself in the quiet corner where, when I am feeling optimistic, I think to place him. Or maybe he will. (I should not try to write when I am hungover. The mistakes are legion.) In nineteen minutes I have to shower and get ready for work. I will arrive at the office my customary three-to-five minutes early, the boss will ask how I am or how my weekend was, and I will lie. I will say *Fine*. I will not tell him (who in a similar situation would?) how a good friend of mine left her marijuana and her vodka (along with her cat, her dog, and her apartment) in my care for the weekend. That little bastard (the child within), get him around dope and booze, he goes for it. He pops right out of that corner where he's been sitting (scheming all the while), weird and devilish grin on his face, lights up, pours out, kicks back and has a high old time. Before you know it (or I know it, or someone knows it, or who knows?), he's eaten an entire roast chicken and four cherry turnovers, played with himself (twice), and stayed up all night watching short video clips and playing games. He's back in his corner this morning (went there on his own accord, no fussing, sweet as the cookies he also polished off by the bagful), happy as whatever the happiest thing is (a child, perhaps?), undoubtedly planning his next escape. Though his back is to me, I can see him smile. The little shit. He's left me bloated, hungover (like I said), in need of exercise and clean blood. And he knows that although I make him spend almost all his time in that corner, his back to my world, hearing me bitch about how much I think or believe I need to do, and how exasperating and distracting and foolish he is, there is no one I love more.

May 4, 2004 — Owen and I were up till after 1:00 this morning. He had the habit of sticking things in his ear while he lay in bed, reading. Last night, he stuck a pen in his ear and part of it broke off and got stuck. I couldn't get it out and not wanting to try too hard, lest I damage his eardrum, I took him to hospital emergency room. Since his case wasn't a true emergency but merely a foolishness requiring a few minutes' of an expert's steady hand and ready tools, we had to wait several hours while the screaming, crying, and coughing persons were attended to. I told him before we left, "Bring something to read, because we're going to be there a while—and be grateful it's not Saturday night," and we were. Got a lot of reading done.

As we were leaving the hospital early this morning, on the first reasonably warm night of the year, with a bright full moon overhead, I told Owen that I wasn't angry, just a little annoyed at the inconvenience and anyway, late-night emergency room visits are just part of being a parent. Given all the things that can happen to a person, a pen part stuck in the ear canal ain't no big thang.

Autumn, 2004 – There's this truck, it's the dead-baby truck, it's being driven around downtown. It's as big as a moving van. Its license plates are out-of-state. Its driver is this old guy, he wears flannel shirts and a feed cap. His jaw is set pretty hard. His dead-baby truck has these pictures, huge photographic blow-ups on its sides, as big as the sides of a moving van. They're pictures of dead babies, itty-bitty babies next to coins. Tiny babies posed in fresh red stuff. The red stuff looks like blood. It may be blood. The dead babies are posed so that their hands, their little dead and bloody hands, are clutching at the coins—quarters and dimes. Who knew quarters and dimes are so big? Who knew a photographer could get dead babies, could get them to hold on to coins? The old guy in the flannel shirt and the billed cap on his head and the grim expression on his face, he drives the dead-baby truck around downtown. He drives it up and down all the downtown streets, past all the office workers who are going to eat their lunches. He doesn't honk his horn or try to call attention to himself, but it's a big truck, big as a moving van, and it has these big pictures on its sides. Bloody dead babies clutching at coins. It has a phone number, too, and a website address. A car follows right behind the dead-baby truck. It's a white sedan that looks like a police car. It has a black spotlight, extra radio aerals, some letters and numbers painted on its trunk, a prisoners' cage in the back seat, a red-white-and-blue license plate. It follows right behind the dead-baby truck, goes when the truck goes, turns when the truck turns, stops when the truck stops. A guy in sunglasses drives it. Office workers go to lunch. The dead-baby truck goes by. The white sedan goes by. Some of the office workers look. Most don't. They are hungry, and lunch is never long enough.

November 3, 2004 — 5:00 AM — It is early in the morning on the day after Election Day. I wish I did not take politics one-tenth as seriously as I take them. I am disappointed that the candidates I supported did not win, or are not likely to win. I hope that the remaining votes are well and quickly counted.

As of yet, neither major presidential candidate has won the Electoral College vote. At least Bush appears to be winning the popular vote this time. That will give his administration a legitimacy it has lacked. Owen was so upset last night by the early election returns that he was talking of leaving the country when he turns eighteen. I've thought of it myself—leaving the country that is, with turning eighteen (which I did the year Carter was elected) a distant memory—but it seems to be an action that I would take only out of fear. I take, instead, a more Socratic view: this is the land in which I was born and in which I have had many opportunities and much good—where else would I go, where else should I be?

The republic staggers on, no matter what scoundrels get elected to office. It's been this way for centuries now. Republican, Democrat, whatever, it makes almost no difference.

8:30 a.m. — I took the campaign buttons off my backpack and the posters down from the windows of my house. I feel a little numb.

January 8, 2005 — The copper chopper just buzzed my house, and the dogs are barking and I heard people shouting, but we've been having some gangster troubles again lately here. This morning I went to Target and got a "Beware of the Dog" sign and put it on my fence. I have double fencing now, the inner fence locked and topped with barbed wire, the outer fence chain link. I put the sign on the outer fence. If any of my neighbors ask, I'll tell them I now have a black pit bull named Skywalker. He's around here someplace, I'll say.

Some of my younger neighbors have grown up to be gangsters, which is too bad. Ten years ago they were nice kids for whom there was still some hope. Now as far as I'm concerned they could all be lined up and shot and it would be no loss.

And I'm a Democrat, though I've lost track of why. Inertia, I guess. I'd pull the trigger, too, on those lined-up gangsters, no remorse, no spite. Then I'd shoot their dogs, which all seem to be pit bulls and half of which their owners allow to roam free on the streets. If I were God I'd be a mean and spiteful god and probably screw things up pretty badly the first day, so good thing I'm not.





*High Street*, Book 7 — Freedom's Just Another Word

“If we want to go on existing we need to summon up all our strength in order to wrench ourselves off the spot where we're stuck.” — Thomas Bernhard, *Concrete*

November, 2010 — Albuquerque and Bernalillo County have their main government offices in a complex of buildings downtown, along the western edge of a block-square concrete expanse called Civic Plaza. The plaza is used for various public and corporate events. In December it has a display of lights for the winter solstice celebration of a people whose sacred objects are evergreen trees, gift-wrapped boxes, sleighs and wreaths, and whose deities are reindeer and happy fat men. Police awards ceremonies and corporate luncheons take place at the north end of the plaza, under a large pavilion. There's a large fountain in the plaza's southeast quadrant. The fountain is of a style which might be referred to as Bauhaus, being an agglomeration of concrete slabs reminiscent of the architectural glories of Europe's modern totalitarian and socialist states. Sometimes the fountain is working and sometimes it isn't.

Along the western side of the plaza, in front of the City-County government buildings, there is a row of large fixed planters that are part of the plaza's architecture. They are home to a variety of seasonal plants maintained by workers despatched by the appropriate government office. Legal support staffers and attorneys pass by these planters every workday, heading to and from the courthouses a couple blocks north. I was passing by one day in the summer of 2005, on my way back from the county courthouse, when in one of the planters my attention was caught by the familiar shape of the leaves of one plant. I stopped and looked more closely, and both could and could not believe what I was seeing. It was hemp. There were several hemp plants growing in two of the planters, mixed in among the other ornamentals.

I told Sandra and Owen and Tracy about it, urging them to go see for themselves. I don't know if Owen did, but I think he and a friend may have gone by. Sandra came downtown to have lunch with me one day not long after and she and I took a walk past the planters, nonchalantly glancing at the plants which were healthy and growing larger every day. Tracy had urged me to take a photograph of them, which I hesitated to do. I didn't

want to be accused of being the person who planted them. Finally I couldn't stand passing up the opportunity, so I took my camera one day and took several shots, with the entrance to City Hall in the background. It wasn't long after I took the photographs that the plants were gone. I never saw or heard a word about them in the local media. Every summer now I look at the planters when I pass them, wondering if I might again someday see marijuana plants growing in front of Albuquerque's City Hall.

Spring, 2005 – I bicycle through the city in the pre-dawn faint blue light from the wakening sky, in the blue, white, yellow and red light from buildings, signs, lamps and cars. Down streets and along sidewalks I roll on my ten-speed. A man gets into his pickup truck, turns on the headlights and starts the engine, puts the truck in gear and pulls away from the curb right away. I pass and think that's no way to warm up an engine and I hope he doesn't run me down. He's behind me as I carefully run a stop sign he has to stop at. He passes and he doesn't stop at the next stop sign, he runs it carefully. I am a leader of men this morning, setting the example for others to follow. I bicycle through downtown, along the red-brick sidewalks, using the wheelchair ramps at the street corners to smooth and speed my passage. Across the street, at the army recruiting center, a woman soldier stands outside in the yellow light from the building's lamps. She stands in her camouflage uniform and smokes a cigarette, I think, or maybe she doesn't but she should and I want her, in her uniform, with her muscular butt and her short blonde hair under her army fatigue cap. I bicycle by fast, hoping she sees me and longs for civilians and I am a fool, but a happy fool am I. Ahead of me at the next corner a man digs angrily through a garbage can. He has long, dirty blonde hair and is bald on top. He wears the scruffy clothes of America's lowest and most-lost class, the inmates and homeless, interchangeable. He's throwing garbage around, looking like he's looking for something of some value, maybe an empty can for recycling or a full one for drinking from, and as I pass him he looks up and throws a piece of garbage at me—a small, wadded up piece of what feels like a junk food package when it hits my leg. Part of me wants to turn around, stop my bike, get off and get in a fist-fight with him for his insult, but I am forty-seven years old and long past brawling in the streets so I console myself with the thought that he has probably not been long out of jail and will probably be there soon again, while I will not be if I behave myself; if I am careful which stop signs I run and who sees me run them; if I am careful to commit my worst crimes in the privacy of my own home, toward which I pedal my bicycle, rolling slowly uphill into my neighborhood.

November, 2010 — Owen and I visited El Paso in December of 2004 to spend Christmas with my parents. Back home on High Street, my indoor marijuana garden was doing well. December in Albuquerque is often sunny; the sun was shining in through the south and west windows of my front room, where my garden was, nearly every day. I had a steady supply of home-grown to amuse and distract myself with.

Late in the evening of Christmas Eve, after having driven around with my parents to see the lights and decorations, Owen and I returned to our motel room. We were lying in our beds, reading books, shortly to turn the lights out so we could get a good night's sleep before spending Christmas Day with the folks. I don't remember what book Owen was reading, but it may have been one of the *Harry Potter* series, which Tracy had loaned him. I was reading Cole's *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, one of the "green book" volumes of the United States Army's official history of the Second World War. Though I was only residually high that evening in El Paso, having smoked last in Albuquerque that morning before we left for the drive down, I enjoyed reading military history while under the influence. Such reading tapped into something from my childhood, when I had read a great deal of military history; brought those old days back.

While I would read military history while high, look at picture books and magazines about art and war, play my favorite computer wargame and browse the Internet for whatever might catch my attention, there was much that I didn't do while I was under the influence. Though I had been a creative writer since the age of eleven and even had been supported by my wife and Owen's mother, Stephanie, for five years while I hammered out unpublishable stories, poems, and novels, there were many of the basic classics of the literary art I had never read. I had been too stoned. Now I was in my mid-forties, an age where a fellow may begin to consider it likely that the majority of his days have already passed; may become increasingly aware that he is running out of time.

It was quiet in the room. I lay the book down in my lap and said, "I have to stop smoking pot."

The day after Christmas, back in Albuquerque, I sat in my front room among my garden and a few of the tools and supplies for making works of art that I would almost certainly never make. I smoked some of my home-grown and thought about my life, making plans and setting goals. Sandra came by and she and I smoked together.

The realization that while I might not ever quit smoking pot altogether, my days of heavy smoking were soon to pass, provoked me into even heavier smoking. At some point in 2005 I resumed buying dope from Johnny Gordito, my next-door neighbor. By early 2006 it seemed I might be his only customer. He and I met frequently at the decrepit sheep fence that divided our yards, and we did business there. Sometimes he came over and knocked on the back door to see if I might want to buy even more. One batch he sold me reeked of gasoline. I smoked it anyway.

Owen turned eighteen in January of 2006 and graduated from high school that spring. He was set to start college at the University of New Mexico in the fall and would be living in the dorms. I would also be going to school that fall, doing graduate work at the same university. I had been in graduate school before and knew that I would not be able to be a pot-head and still do the heavy amount of reading grad school would require. Through the spring and summer of 2006 I was smoking more and more. I reached the point where I was smoking so heavily, it was sometimes difficult for me to walk. One morning I walked the mile from my home to my office, having to concentrate every step of the way on putting my feet down properly and not having my legs fold up underneath me.

That summer Owen wrecked cars. He wrecked his cousin's on Memorial Day weekend when he ran a stop light. No one was hurt. Six weeks later, he wrecked mine. The circumstances of the accident were never clear, and I never saw a police report. Owen was only slightly injured, by broken glass, and the two friends of his who were with him were unhurt. The driver of the other vehicle was also unhurt, but my car was totaled. It was a beautiful little red Hyundai three-door hatchback, a sprightly little thing that got great gas mileage. I bought it when I worked for Fergultung and Spartan and had just paid off the note that spring. Sandra and I had taken many day trips and a few weekend

vacations in it while we were courting. In the accident, it was T-boned on the driver's side. Owen was very lucky he was not seriously injured.

There's no way to prove that the heavy amount of dope I was smoking was clouding my judgment. One of the effects of marijuana I enjoyed was the way it would "rotate" my evaluations of situations and provide me with fresh insights I might not otherwise have. I knew that sometimes these insights were valuable and sometimes they were not; I once bought a pair of white patent leather shoes while I was stoned.

A few days after Owen wrecked my car, I decided that I would not use the insurance money to buy a replacement, but would instead move from the High Street house to an apartment closer to school. I figured I could ride the bus and my bicycle, and borrow Sandra's car or rent a car for times I would need one.

Things moved very fast in the month between the accident and the start of school. I found a place to move into, gave Tony my notice, and Owen and I packed our stuff. Sandra had a storage unit at her place where we could put a lot of it, such as the bulk of my art (which I came to realize, while I was high one day, has about it the quality of a very clever student's work but no greater weight than that), and Owen's library of *Star Trek* books, which had belonged to Tracy's brother James and which she sold to me after he died. I bought \$100 worth of primo bud from Johnny Gordito the day before I left High Street, figuring that with judicious pacing, I could make it last the three years I planned to be in school. He offered to give me his cell phone number if I wanted to stay in touch; I declined.

That primo bud didn't last two months. The problem that I had had for decades with black-market marijuana didn't go away just because I moved to a new place and started a new phase in my life. The problem was that as long as I had it, as long as that stuff was around the house, I would be thinking about when would be the earliest next opportunity to smoke of it. It was almost as though it had a voice and would whisper to me, "Hey, big boy, come smoke me. When you gonna come smoke me? You know you want it. I'm right here, I'm waiting for you. Come smoke me."

I smoked the last of it on October 13, 2006. The place I had moved to was an apartment on the north side of a building on the main street of a high-traffic neighborhood. There was no safe windowsill to grow a garden in. The longest period of coming-down I had gone through since I started smoking pot over thirty years previous then began. I had

come down many times before, enough to know there were recognizable stages in the process. The day after running out of dope could be difficult, with the craving to get high again and the unfocused, distracted mind from having been so high for so long. After a couple of days, this stage passed. Next was the stage of regaining a certain clarity and quickness of thought, accompanied by exasperation and sometimes anger at all the other people I had to share this world with. This stage lasted a couple weeks. The third stage was the longest and most drawn out, and was one with which I'd had no prior experience. For ten months I rode an emotional roller coaster, often easily moved to tears. Sandra stayed with me through this, holding me when I needed to be held. I left school after two semesters and moved to a converted carriage house in Huning's Highland Addition, just a few blocks from Sandra's place on High Street. It was a little house that had room for a little windowsill garden.



Winter, 2007 – You reach a certain age, you think about death all the time. Not that it's an obsession. It's a companion, with you while you walk along the sidewalk, cars speeding past you down the street, inches away (inches away). With you when you cross the street (Jaywalking? Against the light?). With you while you ride your ten-speed bike (not fast enough, your bike, not massive enough, no protective cage). With you when you eat your dinner. With you when you do your morning push-ups, jumping jacks, running in place (going nowhere). All but holding your hand when you hack up clots of sputum, too much smoking for too many years (The Surgeon General warned you—he warned you! You wouldn't listen). You watch your diet and watch your weight. You watch and wait, you're never alone now. You couldn't be more alone.

November, 2010 — Some people carry their High Streets with them wherever they go. I started smoking pot when I was sixteen, in January of 1975. It was a different world then. People smoked tobacco everywhere. There were ashtrays in elevators and in the seat handles at movie theaters. Cars had ashtrays front and back. I started smoking tobacco when I was barely fifteen, and never had any difficulty buying cigarettes at any store that sold them. On top of that, there was a social revolution going on and a minority of the population, particularly from that huge demographic known as the Baby Boom, was actively pushing at the bounds of accepted behavior. Dress codes were being relaxed, hair was being grown long, and forbidden fruits were being snatched from low-hanging branches.

America, with the deep-seated Puritan strains in its national character, has had a tormented relationship with the pleasures of the flesh. We were a nation of drunks in the early 19th century. The industrial and political revolutions of the late 18th century, both in North America and in Europe, had loosened or even ruptured ancient social bonds. Some folks believed that a freedom such as “pursuit of happiness” meant that one had the right to stay snookered from morning till night. In the first generation after the adoption of its Constitution, alcohol consumption in the young republic peaked at an amount equivalent to three jiggers of rum for every man, woman, and child in the land, every day of the year (including Sundays). This level of consumption dropped precipitously in the next generation during the religious revival known as The Second Great Awakening, which included a powerful temperance movement. Carrie Nation was born at the early peak of this movement and carried its banner (along with her Bible and her saloon--smashing hatchet) through to the end of the century. From there it was just a short hop to the Volstead Act and Prohibition, a social experiment remarkable for its naiveté and unforeseen consequences.

One of the consequences was the prohibition of marijuana, first at the state level and then at the national level. Up until Prohibition, no one was much concerned about who may have been smoking marijuana. Usually it was colored people (brown and black), and to the WASP establishment largely running the country, they only mattered as a source of cheap and docile labor. That dope-smoking may have been one of the reasons they were docile escaped the understanding of proselytizers and legislators, who didn't smoke pot. That they went so far as to outlaw a hardy form of life that reproduces sexually may be seen as one of the wonders of the age.

A generation after Prohibition ended came the Sixties. Marijuana was still illegal but the smoking of it was widespread. There was fear among some that it was what was called a "gateway drug"—that its use would lead inevitably to the squalor of heroin addiction and the tragedy of death in the back alley by the dumpster—but this was never true. Many people smoked pot once or twice, or for a while in school or occasionally as young adults, and by and by as life took up more of their time and attention they drifted away from the taking of tokes.

A few, such as myself, became pot-heads. Pot was not my gateway. When I smoked pot for the first time, I'd already been smoking tobacco for a year-and-a-half. I'd been drunk once or twice, too. If there were any gateway drugs to my smoking pot, they were tobacco, beer and wine. And Valium. A friend of mine had Valium she'd filched from her mother and shared with me a week before another friend asked me if I wanted for the first time to go smoke a joint.

But the drugs were not the gateway, the culture was. It was a time for young people to believe that their elders were either lying to them about many things, or at best mistaken. To find out the truths of these things—sex, love, power, money, war, peace, drugs, God—we were on our own. Some of us questioned and quested more than others. Some of us truly believed we were inaugurating a beautiful and blessed new eon in human existence through the use of psychoactive substances. Why was I an Alice to go through the looking-glass and down that rabbit-hole, when others who glanced at it said, "No, that's a mirror, and beyond it is a hole"?

November, 2010 — You can look up the reasons for addiction. New discoveries are being made all the time, it's positively mind--boggling, we hardly know who we are anymore. You can read about the psychological and biological mechanisms and vulnerabilities that might lead one person to be addicted to one thing, another to another, and a third to nothing at all (this third person is a theoretical construct and does not exist). You can see the death of the soul following the death of God along the way of the mechanistic reduction of existential explanations. What will this journey tell you about why one person gets addicted to hard work, another gets addicted to heroin, and a third, who has occasional brushes with hard work and would never touch heroin on a bet, gets addicted to hemp? What can knowing what addiction looks from the outside tell you about what it looks like from within?

Here's a note I wrote myself not long ago: "How do you get to High Street? You can be a fucking coward. You can be a hand-fucking, broken-backed coward and hide out there the rest of your life. You can be driving down the street one day in your neighborhood, on your way home from the grocery store with your yogurt and your yucca root and you can catch your eye in the rearview mirror—but don't look too long, you're driving a car!—and you can know you're a hand-fucking, broken-backed coward and you're going to be on High Street the rest of your goddamned life. It's what you wanted."

I am frightened all the time. Sometimes I think I was born frightened. I mean it— that being squeezed out through the vaginal canal was so traumatizing an experience, I never recovered from it. Marijuana calms me, quiets my chronic fear. It doesn't alleviate the fright so much as postpone it. If I get a little high on Sunday, though I come down from the obvious parts of the high by Monday morning, the deeper, calming effect persists all week. If I go a month or so without getting high, the fear grows and grows until I feel I'm being pursued by something I can't see and can't escape.

When I get high, I feel so good. Every part of me. It's a feeling of being alive forever. Not a feeling of immortality. Immortality is about death. There is no death in being high. Being high is about being alive forever. It's about dancing around the room.

It's about sucking on the nipple again.

It's about always having another lover. Her name is Mary Jane and she's irresistible. And she's a plant. She will never tell you a lie. As you come to know her, you will know exactly how she will take you up and exactly how she will take you down. The truth is, or one truth is, I loved marijuana. I would sit gazing at my plants as I smoked portions of them.

Pot incites at times an almost childlike feeling of wonder at the world. Entrancing—that's what dope does to sensory experiences, and rational thought processes—but especially to sensory experiences. It makes colors, sounds, tastes—forms, in a manner of speaking—more entrancing in and of themselves. Even such a mundane and seemingly mindless activity as watching the electronic snow on a broadcast analog television could be diverting and thought-provoking when high, the pattern suggesting the shimmering surface of space--time at the subatomic level, particles passing into and out of existence—or rather, manifestation—in a continual and specifically unpredictable flow.

"The audio-visual" is how a bartender I long ago worked with referred to the sensory enhancements from marijuana smoking, as in, "I'm going to smoke a joint and do some audio--visual"—*e.g.*, looking at art books and magazines, listening to music, trolling the web late into the evening, slowly becoming bored as the high wore off. But when I was high, it was like being a boy again, the way the *Complete Book of World War II Combat Aircraft*, an oversized picture book I bought one day while stoned, would capture my attention for a while. I subscribed to *Modern Painters* and would wait and get high before I looked at the latest issue. It and the *New York Review of Books* were wonderful discoveries I made while living on High Street, but I would often for months at a time be too stoned to read them, or to read other magazines I would impulsively buy while high, and they would pile up in stacks in the living room until I threw them away.

Always looking to recapture that elusive perfect high, smoking pot at night I'd stay up until I was utterly exhausted and passing out at my computer or in my chair watching teevee. Deep into the binges of 1997, when I was repeatedly unemployed, I'd get into a four

hours awake, four hours asleep cycle. When I worked for Michael the first time, before I went to work for Fergultung and Spartan, I had two-and-a-half-hour lunch breaks. I'd go home and smoke one or two joints, play the wargame or look at art books, then go back to the office, where my affect was undoubtedly somewhat bovine.

There's a part of the high that's unpredictable and usually uncommon, and it's called the "rush." Experiencing it is called "rushing," or "getting a rush." It can be an overwhelming vertiginous feeling that causes your eyes to close as it washes over you in waves. The rush gets better as you get older. You could be forty-eight, on your uncounted repetition of the last great binge before you give it up forever, toking on that first after-office joint, stoked on the excess of name-brand coffee you irrigated your afternoon with to offset the after-effects of your breakfast joint and lack of sleep, and the rush hits you. What it's all about, really, the rush. Where the pursuit of the peak of the high meets its limits and bears its fruits. (Is the rush a near-death experience? Is the rush what death feels like?)

The first few days of a binge were the most difficult. I would miss work, phoning in sick and rationalizing with myself that of course I was sick, I had a drug problem. Things wouldn't get done at all for a few days unless they were absolutely necessary, then I would steady into it and ride the binge. Since one of the effects of chronic marijuana use is a certain—or uncertain—amount of short-term memory loss, I learned to double- and triple-check things such as closing windows, locking doors, and turning down the heat. With the amount of time it took to smoke (cleaning, rolling, smoking, contemplating), it was sometimes a wonder I got anything done. The house, being so close to the freeway, was always dusty; sometimes months would go by between my vacuuming the carpets, sweeping the floors, or dusting the bookshelves.

One of the hardest things for me to learn about smoking dope was when was enough. That initial turn-on was so gripping, I would quickly seek to emulate it. I would smoke up all of my black-market dope, then cut the plants back, sometimes excessively. I would try and wait and air-dry them and not succeed, only to sun-dry them on the black rolling tray, or dry them in the egg-poacher over the gas range, or in a bowl or on a pizza tray over the floor heater.

I often would start smoking cigarettes again when I went on a dope binge, particularly as I would begin to try to cut back on my dope-smoking and make my way out

of the binge for a while. My lungs quickly came to crave smoking. I would dig cigarette butts from the trash can by my desk and roll them into powerful, bad tasting unfiltered cigarettes.

Some forms of drug addiction involve weight loss, but being a pot-head doesn't, unless you've spent all your money on dope and don't have any left for food. I would get high and go on munchies runs, buying roast chickens, barbecued pork ribs, pastries, chips, ice cream and chocolate candies and bringing them home to devastate them with an uncontrollable appetite. It was what I would always do, no matter how much I tried to resist. It does not seem to have been a joyful celebration of Mother Nature's bounteous gifts.

I would make jokes about having a drug problem, but generally I made them to myself. Jokes like, "Yeah, I have a drug problem: drugs are hard to find," or, "...drugs are illegal." One I did share was with my wife, when I had one. Stephanie and I were motoring down the freeway one day and were passed by a car with a "D.A.R.E." bumper sticker, shortly after that antidrug organization was founded. She asked me if I knew what that acronym stood for. I thought for a moment, and said, "Drugs Are Really Expensive."

I would make deals with God. With all the gods, with every god. Every addict knows this shtick. One day I made a promise to the highest god, vowing to quit whatever it was I thought I should quit. I don't remember the details. It had something to do with excessive sex and/or drugs and/or food. I remember making this promise while standing in the doorway to my bathroom at High Street, about to step into the house's central hallway. I made the promise aloud and finished it by cursing myself, telling this god, "May you damn me to living hell if I break this promise." Later I forgot the promise, then remembered it after I broke it, which I have never forgotten.

A truth of addiction is that we addicts get locked into a cycle of promising to clean up, then falling back into addiction again. I made various attempts over the years at some sort of ritualized halt, or at least at a ritualized smoking, as a form of controlling the binge. I would tell myself I was going to—was allowed to—smoke only on solstices, equinoxes, full moons, and new moons; or that I had only a certain total number of allowable smoking days in a given year. I had calendars to keep track of these days. I would tell myself, "If I don't grow it, I don't smoke it," or, "No smoking before 4:20 in the afternoon." None of this

worked. All of it failed in the face of the addiction, where I had crossed some line and was in the wilderness, with no signs to point the way. Even where there were signs, I wouldn't always pay attention, pilfering dope from Tracy's stash one day when her back was turned. That I soon confessed to her I had done this is something, whatever it may be; she never let me near her stash again.

The hardest part of coming down is the coming down. The letting go. It's almost impossible for me if there's still more dope around or if my life hasn't in some ways so bottomed out that I have to sober up. Sober or stoned, I'll always be an addict.

What is this thing, this addiction? Not from the outside looking in, but from the inside, living it. It's a form of hiding from oneself—hiding from others—hiding in plain sight. It's like sleepwalking through life, stuck in syrup or molasses. It is a licking at a wound that doesn't heal the wound, but turns it into an ulcer. It is one's life when one is afraid to live and afraid to die (a living death? a dying life?). If you're an addict because you're afraid, then what do you have to be afraid of to stop? And how afraid do you have to be?

I am an enemy of the state, a scofflaw, a long-term, habitual criminal who feels little remorse for his crimes and is not a good candidate for rehabilitation. I know that smoking dope has its positive side: the calming, the entrancing and enhancing of sensory experience and to a lesser extent logical cognitive processes. But it has its dangerous side, too: hot smoke going down the throat and into the lungs; getting busted; missing out on doing things; time taken; dietary defects; money taken. Smoking dope raises the question of the valuing of a lived life, and how that is to be done. For everything it gives, it takes something away. How does that impact society? Where does dope-smoking fit? Who decides? What about disagreements about it? How are those to be worked out? By law? By custom? In light of the second of Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, is pot-smoking a valid form of rebellion against a government in response to an unjust deprivation of liberty? Is it such only if it is done publicly and not privately? How does it weigh in the balance of Berlin's ideas on pluralism and liberalism, his definition of negative liberty as the individual's right to do as he pleases, provided that his actions do not infringe upon the liberty of others?



We have cultural space for alcohol (beer with the game, wine with dinner, cocktails at the party or nightclub) in a way that we don't have for marijuana. We had pot-parties in the '70s, but pot-parties were strange social events, a lot of young people with really nothing to say, alone together, lights low, music loud, maybe there would be sex. Such scenes were like an opium den, in a way. Heavy pot-smoking is not social, it's anti-social. When I'm getting high, I'm retreating into a safe space within myself. I don't want to be bothered. This world has frightened me since I was first hurled into it, plummeting forward while facing backward, falling ever downward while gazing upward at a rapidly receding heaven.



*High Street, Book 8 — Plus ça Change*

“In the end, art is small beer. The really serious things in life are earning one’s living so as not to be a parasite, and loving one’s neighbor.” — W. H. Auden

October, 23, 2009 — I was at the office late this morning and I came out of the rest room and Michael said, “Your cell phone just rang.” I got it out of my backpack and saw Sandra had left me a voicemail. I listened to it.

“I came home this morning after I dropped you off and went to the store, and our house has been broken into. Someone kicked in the front door and they stole a bunch of our stuff. All your CDs are gone, and my jewelry. I called the police and they should be here any minute.”

I ducked into the bathroom and closed the door behind me while I was calling her back. She answered.

“Are you all right?” I said. She said she was. I asked her if the police had arrived.

“No, they’re not here yet.”

“The plant!” I said. “Hide the plant! Listen to me! Do exactly what I say, and do it now! Take the plant and put it in the closet, up on the shelf, and throw some clothes over it!”

“Maybe I should take it outside and hide it in my car,” she said.

“No! Do not take it outside! Do exactly what I am telling you! Hide it in our bedroom clothes closet, on my side, up on the shelf! Then throw some clothes over it and cover it! Don’t worry about hurting it! The police will be there any minute!”

I told Michael my house had been broken into and I had to go deal with it, then caught a bus home. When I got there, the crime scene specialist was dusting for fingerprints. I could have sworn it was the same crime scene specialist who had dusted my High Street house almost ten years previous, but I didn’t ask. She said, “Your wife makes a great cup of coffee.”

“That she does,” I said.

Almost all my hundreds of CDs, a gallon jar of spare change, two of my three cameras, my scanner, and Sandra’s jewelry boxes were stolen. All were duly noted on the police report. Not noted was my stash bag. It was a canvas book bag that contained my three pipes, including the large calabash Sandra had given me and

the small metal one Tracy brought back from Belize five or more years ago; my paraphernalia baggie, which was an old and worn ziplock sandwich bag that had once held dope I bought from Dixie or from that guy I worked with at *Hemp TV*, and which baggie contained my film canister with my stash (all homegrown, including a recently harvested female plant); another film canister with a few not-very-viable seeds; my planting pencil and the bent paper clip I used for stirring the pipe bowl; my rolling tray, a small black tip tray with bubbled corner from an old-fashioned microwave I had dried home-grown in back in 1984; and the .22-cal. snubnosed revolver my dad gave me a few years ago and which I carried in my backpack last year around the time of the election, things were so crazy then.

December 5, 2009 — I bought a pipe today at The Zone, across the street from the university. The sales girl was very petite and pretty and full-figured. She said, “You look like a wood pipe guy.” I told her, “No, they’re hard to clean, I think I’ll go with glass.” I also told her, “Don’t start smoking, you get my age and you can’t stop.”

I am smoking from that pipe this very afternoon. I look at my bookcase, the one with the shelves of mid-19th century subjects, predominantly the U.S. Civil War, and am thinking how I read Shelby Foote’s narrative in the summer of 2001, high the whole while. I was also high when the war started—not the Civil War, but the current unpleasantness.

Lincoln and the Union Army freed the slaves, dope frees me, rotates my attention, my perception, my being in the world. The Rolling Stones are on the stereo, *Sucking in the 70’s*, “Time waits for no one... hours are like diamonds, don’t let them waste.” Sometimes I can’t believe I have spent so much of my time high—a lifetime, truly.

December 6, 2009 — I’m grooving to the Stones’ “Long Black Limousine” while loading my second bowl of the afternoon, after having waited as long as I could stand to wait, getting done some mind-work (reading, being present for Sandra) before getting high. I’ve been the only person at my party for a long time, maybe back to my thumbsucking boyhood when I called myself Dr. Jerry Solar Moby and rode the sidewalks of Northeast El Paso in a Radio Flyer I nicknamed *The Yellow Snowball*. Something to do with the mystical confluence of fire and ice, I thought.

Spring, 1994 – Here is a rock, size of a small fist. A child’s fist. On the rock, size of a birthmark on a child’s hand, is a fossil. The fossil is of a sea creature, a shelled animal. It is exquisite. Hold it up to your eye. You can peer into the small dark chambers of the fossil. Time has been kind to the creature this once was. It looks pretty good for being two hundred million years old, give or take. I scratch these words on paper, seeking immortality.

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The photographs in this book were taken by me.

Book 0 – “South Broadway, 1999”

Book 1 – “South Broadway, 1999”

Book 2 – “High Street, 2003”

Book 3 – “South Broadway, 1995”

Book 4 – “Radio Station News Desk, 1998”

Book 5 – “South Broadway, 2005”

Book 6 – “Downtown Albuquerque, 2001”

Book 7 – “Downtown Albuquerque, 2005”

Book 8 – “Huning Highland, 2004”