

the best of
SCHLAGBYTES
volume one



Lifestyle
Sex
Movies
TV
Humor



DR. CARL A. HAMMERSCHLAG

WELCOME TO SCHLAGBYTES

Schlagbyte's are the random musings of my rational mind and intuitive soul. For the last six years these weekly ramblings have sustained me. They have allowed me to get out whatever pain and suffering were stealing my spirit, and also allow me to celebrate the awe, wonder and joy in my life.

These are my opinions, you may or may not share them. Over the years many of you have posted responses to these Bytes, some laudatory others confrontative. We have become a readership, who respond to each others' opinions. Some bless me, others curse me and more than a handful, think I'm hopelessly irrelevant.

Schlagbyte's fall into five categories:

- Current events (politics, philosophy)
- Spirituality (values, beliefs, Native Americans, awe)
- Healthcare (policy, practice, ministry/industry)
- Lifestyle (movies, television, sex, romance, humor)
- Family (kids, grandkids, vacations)

After perusing the archives I've decided to put together "The Best of Schlagbytes." They are the perfect reading during your morning toilet trek. They're brief, they'll make you think, and if they piss you off you can wipe yourself with them.

Welcome to my world and enjoy the journey.

Carl A. Hammerschlag, M.D.

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LIFESTYLE , SEX , MOVIES , TV , HUMOR

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CHEERLEADERS – 10/7/96

Just today another cheerleader mom was arrested for threatening the faculty advisor of the cheerleader squad if her daughter was not chosen. Are relentless competition and the focus on winning taking the fun out of life? High school athletics from cheerleaders to ball players are a farm system for colleges and professional sports. When we get to the point where making the squad is worth making murderous threats, then we are no longer having fun in the game. Games ought to prepare us for life. In life you win some and you lose some, and when you lose, you get up and move on. Learning how to get up and move on is what keeps us alive.

CELLULAR PHONES -3/14/97

I hate cellular phones! I hate hearing them in the movies; I hate to hear them go off at a dinner table or even to see people use them in cars. They are always a reminder that either somebody else wants you or you want to be someplace other than where you are. I hate them because it's almost impossible for me not to pick up the telephone when it rings; maybe I'll miss something important. The interesting thing is that--even if urgent-- it's invariably something I don't want to hear, and whatever it is, it always takes me away from something I'm doing that's more pleasant such as listening to music, eating dinner, watching a movie, or enjoying the countryside.

I hate the fact that I am so easily seduced by the ring. Why does somebody else's need to talk take precedence over my need not to? I don't know; my only defense is not to own a cellular phone. I don't carry one in my pocket; I don't have one in my car to which my children respond by asking, "Why are you such a dweeb?" I tell them it's an act of revolution in contemporary life to be where you are. (They tell me I'm an archaic remnant left over from the Ice Age.)

CUBA GOODING, JR. – 4/2/97

What was the most memorable part of last week's Academy Award presentations for you? For me, it was watching Cuba Gooding get the award for Best Supporting Actor. Here comes Cuba bounding up to the stage saying thank you to everybody he can think of, and then the music starts in the background signaling his time is up, but he's not ready yet to leave.

This is such an exciting moment for him, and he says, "There are lots of people I want to say thank you to, and I don't want to leave anybody out." The music keeps on playing, and Cuba keeps on bubbling out everyone from his mother to his grade school teachers. The audience responds by standing up and applauding.

What was it about that moment that caused such a spontaneous outpouring of affection from the audience? The awareness that in this ultimate of staged extravaganzas comes someone who reminds us of the passionate joy of being in truth and 'in the moment'. These moments of spontaneity and truth remind us of who we really are and make others want to share that joy.

REAL DOLL – 10/6/97

Welcome to the age of the computer revolution and artificial intelligence. The age of make-believe posing as real is upon us. We have moved from artificial breasts, lips, hearts, and intelligence to a new artificial sex toy called the Real Doll.

An enterprising soul has developed the new generation full size adult toy. The Real Doll is chillingly life-like; made from high-grade silicone rubber, it is anatomically correct like a movable piece of sculpture. I wonder who is snuggling up to this thing? Have we become so isolated in this computer age that we are afraid to even love someone real?

MIKE TYSON – 1/13/98

I watched Mike Tyson interviewed on prime time television on New Year's Eve. He was singled out as one of the outstanding personalities of 1997, even if that perception was negative. The interviewer asked Tyson why he bit Evander Holyfield's ear off during the Heavyweight Championship fight. Iron Mike said that there was something inside of him that overtook him; it was as if he got into another zone. "I lose control. I know it's a part of me, and it's not good--it's terrible."

The interviewer commented, "There are people out there who say you should never be allowed back in the ring. What would you say to them?"

"I can't say what I really want to say," Mike demurred. "Go ahead; say it," said the interviewer. "Fuck 'em," Mike said. They 'bleeped' him out, but everyone heard. "I'm not gonna crawl, beg, and plead. I can't do those things; it's not who I am. Fuck 'em."

How sad it is that Tyson could not say, "I have a problem;; I know that there's something inside of me, and it doesn't make me feel good about who I am. I want learn to control myself better because I like that other part of me more, the part that's a good husband to my wife and a good daddy to my kids."

To acknowledge one's flaws and imperfections is not the same as pleading, begging, and crawling, it's just owning your truth, and that's what New Year's resolutions are all about. The task in this season is to own our truth and change those things that don't make us proud. If Mike Tyson had said, "I'm facing the demons that control me; I'm working on them." it would remind us that he's one of us, and we'd all like him better.

All of us need to face our limitations and let them go. That's what growth is all about, letting old stuff go and making room for the new. May the New Year find you growing in peace, health, and prosperity.

PLEADING FOR MERCY – 1/19/98

In the latest issue of the British Medical Journal, a study concluded that men who had sex less than once a month had twice the death rate of those who had sex at least twice a week. This is the kind of research I hoped would have taken place when I was an adolescent. My greatest fear in those years was that I might die before knowing a woman in the Biblical sense. If I could have added to my pleading repertoire that, by indulging my desperation, some nubile young beauty would extend my life significantly, maybe that would have worked. I have always respected the power of scientific evidence. Now I am old enough to have known the same woman in the Biblical sense for 37 years and don't need the data any more; now I'm pleading for mercy.

TONYA HARDING – 2/10/98

Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan appeared in a tv special that was used to hype the 1998 Winter Olympic Games.

This is the same Tonya Harding who conspired to have her archrival kneecapped in the last winter Olympic Games so that she would garner the competitive advantage.

Since then Tonya has appeared in Penthouse magazine in sexually explicit video stills; she has been married twice; formed a rock band that was booed onstage; played a gun moll in gangster movie; sold her 1994 Olympics skating outfit for \$11,500 which was not enough to pay her back taxes so she sold her house. She made her skating comeback before a minor league hockey game in Reno, Nevada, where most of the people cheered, but some booed, and a few even threw police batons onto the ice.

I'll give Tonya credit for perseverance, but she will never fully rehabilitate her image with me. She did a terrible thing; she intended to maim--could have even crippled Kerrigan for life--to win the prize. She cheated and lied which damages one's integrity. How much is your integrity worth? In today's marketplace--nothing. As long as your notoriety is salable, it creates its own morality. Tonya is selling something I don't want to buy, and I resent the Fox network buying it. I'm hoping there will always be some fans who boo so when my grandkids ask why those people are booing, I can tell them this story about what's right and wrong.

THE TITANIC – 3/2/98

The Academy Awards are soon coming, and I wanted to see all the nominees beforehand. The story of the Titanic has always fascinated me as it has so many others. Comes now this new version which is a Romeo and Juliet love story for the industrial age.

I've always believed that Titanic was a story about greed, class struggle, lies, fear, and facing imminent death (an entire opera about life from a single night of infamy). Mostly it was always a story about how people became trapped by the arrogance that comes from certainty. The Titanic was unsinkable! The voyage was sold as an engineering marvel; it was the biggest and best, indestructible. The Titanic struck an iceberg on its maiden voyage and sank within seven hours.

This story rings as fresh today as it did when it happened. Why? Because we are still creating engineering marvels. Now they are human engineering marvels. We have cracked the genetic code. We know exactly where on the human genome the problem exists that causes cystic fibrosis, congenital deafness, retardations, and cancers...Soon we will master the genetic keys for immortality. We already know that we can live much longer than we now do; perhaps now we can keep our ship afloat forever!

We better watch out though; whenever humankind has believed it could achieve immortality, it has always been struck down. Believing that a man could achieve God's power if he could reach high enough, they built the tower of Babel,. The Crusaders believed they would build a civilization for God. The Romans, Mongols, and the Titanic were all invincible.

Let us not trumpet our immortality lest our arrogance again destroy us. Without an ethic of morality, principles, and values by which we can humanely apply our genius, we will never survive. Without awe, humility, or respect, we become so egocentric that we border on self idolatry and that will surely bring us down. That's the Titanic story I'd like to see, although the cinematography in this one was hard to beat.

GOOD WILL HUNTING – 3/9/98

Go see Good Will Hunting, and you'll know why the entire cast has been nominated for Academy Awards.

This movie is about learning to play the hand you've been dealt. This is your life; how are you going to live it? Lament the losses, get pissed off and act out, or move beyond it. Will Hunting (Matt Damon) is a psychologically wounded boy from South Boston who also happens to be a mathematical genius. Will struggles with his demons and ultimately gets some help from a very good psychiatrist played by Robin Williams. Williams plays Sean Maguire who is also a street-smart kid from South Boston, abused by an alcoholic father whose prodigious mind frees him from its confines. Dr. Maguire touches this boy. He does it by talking to him, even sharing his own frailties. He teaches the boy that it is possible to be vulnerable, to love and to be loved by someone, without just getting hurt. If you open yourself up to the moment and don't decide beforehand how the story is going to end, you might find something new, even somebody special. Go for it!

Joseph Campbell whose admonition for health was "Follow your bliss!" would have loved this movie. I did too.

DUELING PENISES – 3/16/98

Researchers reported in Science News, February 14, 1998, that when hermaphrodite flat worms have sex, they rear up to expose their stubby penises and duel with them. These bouts can last from 20 minutes to an hour. They feint and writhe for position, each attempting to stick its penis into any exposed area of its sex partner's body. Whichever worm scores a direct hit injects sperm into the penetrated flesh. Other than these duels, the flat worms don't appear to be aggressive.

I'll be the first to admit that being hermaphroditic and vying with your partner for the male role does not sound exciting to me.

It makes human sexual contact seem so simple by comparison. We know who's giving what and to whom and even have a target to aim for.

THE ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS – 4/29/98

Arizona now has a professional baseball team, the Diamondbacks. We have a brand new, state-of-the-art facility with a retractable roof for inclement weather, and every seat in the stadium has an unobstructed view.

Not enough for to buy a ticket even though there was a time when I was a baseball aficionado. Baseball was king in the 50's. New York had three teams, each with a rabid following and its own personality. The Brooklyn Dodgers were 'da bums;' they represented the working man's dream of future deliverance. I was a New York Giants fan, the team of the righteous underdogs. My most fanatic memory of childhood is not wanting the Dodgers to win anything. My Giants were led by Willie Mays (Superman incarnate).

I knew the batting averages and pitching statistics for every member of my team. The ultimate happiness was eating peanuts in the bleachers of the Polo Grounds. Then my team moved to San Francisco and ripped out not only my heart, but that of every loyal fan. I thought if my team couldn't commit itself to me as I committed myself to it, then I was through with the game. Over the last 40 years, I've been to maybe five baseball games.

My son-in-law, however, bought Diamondback season tickets. He takes delight in his box seats. This is a real ballpark in addition to its yuppified luxury, he tells me. There are tickets for a dollar, and a family can picnic at the game for six bucks a piece. This luxurious level has restricted access; it boasts a restaurant outside that overlooks the field that serves filet mignon and cappellini with zucchini and basil. Finally, I can't take anymore and scream that it can't be a ballpark if it doesn't have peanuts whose shells you can spit or throw at somebody, or beer vendors passing suds out and dribbling all over you.

I went with him to a game. The restaurant is quite civilized. It has only two seatings so if you come at game time, you never have to leave. So I start with a beer. Then an appetizer, more beer, a salad. Now it's the fourth inning and time for the entree. I'm happy and thinking, "Why did I leave baseball?" Because baseball left me. The Giants were my projected dreams. They were the hopes of a little boy that allowed him to see beyond the tenements. My Giants made miracles happen; prayer became real to me through my Giants. When they abandoned me, they took a piece of my heart.

Teams should not be able to abandon their cities. If the owner can't afford to keep the team, sell it to somebody who wants to keep them home. Without loyalty, honor, and commitment, you leave a dispirited community.

I'm back into the game. It's the top of the ninth inning, and the San Francisco Giants are down by one run. This will be the Diamondbacks' first win if they can hold on. The crowd is into it, and you can feel

the electricity building. The fans are standing, 50,000 people roaring; there are two outs, and the batter hits a long ball to center field. I'm thinking, "Oh no!" but the ball is caught on the cinder track, and pandemonium breaks loose. Peanut shells are cascading...cannons exploding...people are slapping each other in joyous camaraderie, including me. The Giants lost and expunged my old rage. I found myself a new team.

JERRY SPRINGER – 6/1/98

We have just witnessed another horrifying school yard shooting; only this time, the 15- year-old shooter killed his parents first. His friends and neighbors described this young man as pretty normal, even while acknowledging his preoccupation with guns and violence. For example, before these murders, he regularly assembled bombs and blew up mailboxes. He also stuffed fire crackers into the orifices of animals, lit them, and watched them die. This is not normal, and too many of us are thinking it is.

The public reaction to this epidemic of shootings is 1) Prosecute these children as adults. 2) Use detection devices as students enter school. 3) Spot search lockers. 4) Hire armed security officers. 5) Fence off the school grounds, using razor wire on top if necessary. 6) any combination of these.

It has to be clear that these solutions will not address this problem! It doesn't matter how many armed guards or external controls we apply if we do not change the internal thinking that gives rise to such violence. This is the same principle in dealing with any manifestation of illness. No increase in the number of doctors has ever made any difference in curing disease. The great advances in medicine have always come with the discovery of what causes it and then finding a preventative measure. What is the preventative measure here?

For starters, let's acknowledge that there is a hemorrhage of violence and mayhem on television and movie screens. Every murderous fantasy ever imagined has been portrayed as a common reality. With such license to act out any fantasy, it is difficult to set limits and transmit some ethic of morality such as "Be kind to your neighbor and do unto others." If we can't determine the limits, then Jerry Springer will decide.

The Jerry Springer show happens to be the most popular tv program among junior high schoolers. His program encourages participants to be violent and features subjects such as having an affair with your sister's, mother's, or father's boyfriend--or this week's feature which presented a 13-year-old girl who lost her virginity to a dog.

I was in Waco, Texas, last week when this episode was about to air on the day after the Oregon shootings. The morning newspaper reported that the general manager of KWKT-TV was inundated with telephone calls from viewers who said did they did not want to see a program that featured bestiality and would be replete with the animals and their lovers. The manager decided against showing it because of this public outcry. I say hooray to this. The showing of every disgusting and violent act legitimizes its expression in the young and vulnerable and desensitizes us all to its perversity.

To change this climate of escalating violence, we ought not to focus on metal detectors and barbed wire

but rather teaching ethics and values. We need to spend more time telling our kids to turn off the tv and not to watch movies that violate your values and explain why. Sit around campfires, tell stories, sing songs, and read books that help us see our most desired possibilities. These are the means that will protect us as a species.

ON HUGGING – 7/6/98

I hugged an old student of mine at a high school reunion last week, and she told me she remembered when I hugged her 25 years ago and how good it made her feel then too.

Later, I mused about the sad fact that teachers don't hug students anymore. We don't do it any more because today's psychological reality is that some bad apples have left everyone else afraid of lawsuits. We have made unforgiving rules as administrative necessities to limit potential liability. In so doing, we have become afraid of being human and loving. Even children are being judged by these rules.

A six-year-old boy kissed a little girl on the cheek and was charged with sexual harassment in Lexington, NC. It's pretty startling, isn't it? A six-year-old boy kisses a little girl on the cheek and it's a crime. Doesn't this behavior sound pretty normal to you? Aren't all six-year-old boys sexual harassers? Aren't they all also girl-bashers, taunters, teasers, unpredictable, unfocused, lawbreakers, huggers, and kissers? Is it not preposterous to deal with this kind of behavior by unforgiving administrative decree?

I remember in my first grade class that I reached out and touched Florence Landau's shoulder (a violation of the touching rule). Then I handed her a note which said, "I love you." (a violation of the disclosure rule). Since it was just before recess, Florence read it and punched me on the shoulder on the way out (a violation of the no violence rule). In the school yard, I pestered her which resulted in a smash to my lip. Then Mrs. Ostreicher, my beloved teacher and arbiter of all disputes, stepped in and told us to go into separate corners of the schoolyard and said if she saw us even talking to each other again, she would tell our parents. The horror of it! Tell my parents who would clobber me double for making my teacher call them!

Today's reality is teachers carry little authority, their word about any event likely will not be believed, and parents will hire Johnnie Cochran and sue them.

Today we have unforgiving automatic administrative processes that decide responsibility and dictate remedies. The lamentable result of which is that teachers no longer hug kids, coaches don't bring kids to their homes, and a six-year-old boy kisses a little girl on the cheek and is prosecuted.

The current atmosphere and prohibitions are creating incidents of this kind which are crippling children who, more than ever, need to be hugged.

DR. LAURA – 11/9/98

Everybody is talking about Dr. Laura Schlessinger, the straight-from-the-hip, finger- pointing radio shrink. Turns out Dr. Laura was an adulteress whose ex-lover took naked pictures of her and just sold them to the internet because they paid more than the tabloids. He said it was in revenge for her stealing his ideas and becoming so famous. Clearly she has made some poor choices in men and also seems to have lots of unfinished business with her mother and sister. Who knows what else? Frankly I don't care what she has done in the past. It may even make her a better therapist. I do think, however, that she could have been straight about it. Perhaps a confession...I am flawed and imperfect and have made some serious mistakes, which is why I can identify with all of you. Instead Dr. Laura talks to 18 million people a day in her preachy style which sounds a little hollow now.

Just tell me the truth. I'm desperate for authenticity, and I need examples of integrity. Radio shrinks and presidents ought to practice what they preach because they are the exemplars of what our society tolerates as acceptable behavior. Our current crisis in morality is simply a reflection of how hard it is to believe in anything any more.

EXPRESS LANE RAGE – 3/1/99

I'm in the express line at Safeway. This means I have less than nine items in my cart.

The lady in front of me has at least 18 items. Impatient, peeved, indignant, and finally unable to contain myself, I say, "There are too many items in your basket to be in this lane."

"What are you--some kind of accountant?" she demands.

"No, I'm someone who believes in following simple rules." (which is such bull because I follow so few of them).

"Get a life!" she says. "Surely you must have something better to do than count people's groceries."

"Yes, actually I spend most of my time counting egg yolks in ostrich eggs."

"What are you, some kind of sicko?"

I'm getting into it.... "Let me ask you, Lady; don't you think it's inconsiderate to the rest of us who are standing here because it's labeled express?"

She turns her back to me and walks out. The checker was ringing her up during this whole exchange.

I needed to vent so I attacked the checker, "How could you allow her to get away with it?"

He shrugged, "It's just easier this way. By the way, your bananas count as six items because they're separated. If you buy them in a clump, it counts as only one. So actually, you have 11 items here."

I had to be restrained by three blue-haired matrons as I tried to leap over the counter to strangle him. She's right. I am a sicko with Express Lane Rage."

GOODBYE, JOE DIMAGGIO; HELLO, GARTH BROOKS – 3/15/99

The great Joe DiMaggio died last week. I feel his loss, despite my enormous antipathy for the New York Yankees. The Yankees were the paradigm of royal perfection who regularly humiliated my heroes, the blue-collar New York Giants. But I knew greatness when I saw it. My last recollection of DiMaggio was watching him hit a home run in his last game against my Giants. Willie Mays stood in center field and applauded him as he rounded the bases. DiMaggio exuded class--his noble demeanor, effortless stride, and amazing swing. DiMaggio ennobled baseball--the greatest team sport ever invented, but a game now, sadly, becoming just another show biz venue.

Garth Brooks is playing professional baseball, and people are pouring in to see games. I can't play hooky and see a spring ballgame because Garth Brooks is playing. I have nothing against Garth Brooks. He is a great country western singer. He may even be a great humanitarian. He is not a professional baseball player, and I think his presence in the lineup cheapens DiMaggio and his beloved game. Baseball has never been about a solo performance by a star. It is the ultimate team sport that demands harmony and sacrificing self for others. A baseball team shares a soul that understands its teammates' signals and moves. It is through this subtle--sometimes unconscious--binding that a team's spirit emerges. Garth Brooks is not a member of this team. He is a distraction. But baseball is now about greed, over-inflated egos, ticket sales, and celebrity. Why is Garth playing? He says he has always wanted to.

In our culture it's often enough to want something; with enough fame and fortune, you can buy it. Garth didn't just pay to go to a baseball camp for a week like the rest of us who always dreamed about standing at home plate and taking a cut at Sandy Koufax. Garth may not be a ballplayer, but he is a star and has the ability to draw crowds. Do you suppose DiMaggio saw Garth Brooks come up to the plate during spring baseball this year? And, if he did, do you think he believed it honored the game?

HOOP DREAMS – 4/5/99

Basketball is the quintessential New York City game. You can play it in any schoolyard in the concrete jungle. In the 50's, entire lineups of ACC teams were New York City boys attending on scholarships. I was not a great basketball player. As a matter of fact, I was a terrible waste of potential --6'6" tall but unable to jump or dribble. The closest I came to basketball glory was to play ball in the same playground on Dyckman Street where Kareem Abdul Jabbar (then Lew Alcindor) played. Basketball stardom is the dream of a multitude of inner city boys. One such New York City product has just negotiated a \$71 million deal with the New Jersey Nets: Stephon Marbury from the Coney Island section of Brooklyn, a legend on Surf Avenue, and a hero to neighborhood kids who also imagine their names in lights. Most of those kids, though, will not make it beyond the schoolyard. There are only 300 slots in the NBA, so the likelihood of making it to that level is slim. Most kids from Coney Island will never drive imported cars or wear fur coats. They'll be lucky to get through school. When success in sports is the only dream, getting through school may never be a thought.

There is a Marbury who teaches inner city kids that there are other ways to define success. It's not Stephon; it's his older brother Don. Haven't heard of Don? He was a star shooting guard at Texas A & M and the Southwest Conference's leading scorer in 1986. Don is highly respected in his NYC neighborhood, but when people talk about him, it's as if he never quite made it. They do not see him in the same light as his younger brother, more like an also-ran. Don is a schoolteacher at PS 288, and his message to his students is, "If you can discipline your minds, you will succeed." Stephon Marbury may be coming home a conquering hero. And, when he plays in Madison Square Garden, he will make Coney Island proud. But, it's Don Marbury and his teaching kids how many other ways there are to be successful who makes me proud.

THE FIRECRACKER AWARD GOES TO... – 5/17/99

The BookExpo America is one of the largest conventions in the world. Tens of thousands of booksellers, publishers, librarians, translators, literary agents, etc. gather to publicize books. The scene in the Los Angeles Convention Center where the Expo was held recently was a madhouse of lip-flapping--everybody talking, promoting, and hyping. I had to work myself into a frenzy of participation every morning to gird myself for the onslaught, but after a couple of hours I was exhausted. A hot tub and snooze, and I was ready for the evening's events. Those were great! Publishers and distributors sponsor wonderful parties. Mickey Hart and Planet Drum performed one night, and the other night featured the Firecracker Awards. The Firecracker Awards honor the best books published by the alternative presses. This year's winner was a book called *The Guide to Getting It On* (Pussyfoot Press). I looked at the courtesy copy after my wife said she loved it and learned some new stuff. Did you know that there is penis enhancement surgery? Men are paying \$3,000 to \$4,000 to have fat cells harvested from their abdomen and injected into their penises to plump them up. This procedure is selling well in Hollywood, even though no one knows where the fat goes or how a penis encased in one-fourth inch layer of fat feels or whether a fat penis improves pleasure. Even so, men are falling for a heavy sales pitch that feeds on men's sexual insecurity. If they're not great sexual partners, they think it's because of their weenies. When are men ever going to get it? Good sex is not about sizing--it's about loving. It's how you come to it--not how it comes to you.

The plumping procedure notwithstanding, *The Guide to Getting it On* is the best sex education manual I have ever seen.

TESTING FOR VIRGINITY – 8/30/99

There is a revival of testing for virginity among the Zulu people in South Africa. For the boys, this means a piece of wire is extended three feet above the ground. They are instructed to pull down their trousers and, without using their hands, to pee over it. The girls are examined vaginally by a female elder. These exams are repeated monthly. The community gathers to perform traditional Zulu songs and dances and hallelujahs are proclaimed for being pure. Human-rights activists are in a dither about what they see as abuse, but there has also been lots of public enthusiasm for reviving this tradition.

I have mixed feelings about this. South Africa has not seen such political turmoil since the days of Shaka Zulu. The current AIDS epidemic affects ten percent of South Africa's population. The latest government survey shows that the number of South African pregnant teenagers who are HIV-positive has increased 64 percent in the last year.

History tells us that whenever a society is in turmoil, we often see religious revival movements. Pleas for divine intervention to restore familiar structures and sustaining values, I believe, is a blessing to teach young people about traditions that honor their bodies and how to take responsibility for choices. On the other hand, it's clear that the way it was, is not the way it is. South Africa will never return to the days of yesteryear, and people must reconcile themselves with a modern democracy.

The question is, "How do we retain values that have sustained a civilization and honor the power of ritual without abusing that power? Should examinations for virginity be allowed but enfibulation (clitorectomy) not, or are they both abhorrent infringements on human rights? Can we maintain our connections to credible values without becoming mired in fanatical fundamentalism?"

In the meantime, I guess I'm still an eternal virgin because at six feet, six inches, all I have to do is aim down.

IMPROBABLE HEROES – 11-1-99

What I love about baseball is that at any moment a virtual unknown can step up to the plate and become a hero. The recent National League Championship Series was one of the best ever--a finger-nibbling suspenseful series with floor-pacing excitement. Sadly, the New York Mets (the reincarnation of my beloved New York Giants) lost to the Atlanta Braves. However, my disappointment was lessened because of the creation of an unlikely hero.

At Braves Stadium, fans chanted for Eddie Perez; "Ed-dee, Ed-dee," they screamed! Eddie Perez is a substitute catcher from Venezuela who bounced around the league unrecognized for the previous ten years. When Eddie replaced the injured starter, baseball analysts said his presence in the lineup would weaken the Braves. Eddie ended up hitting .500 in the series and winning two games by himself; he was voted MVP of the series. Eddie said it was the biggest dream in his life come true.

Move on to Game Three of the World Series in which the N.Y. Yankees were lifted to victory, not by the marquee stars of this fabled franchise but by an unknown who delivered the knockout punch in the bottom of the tenth inning. Chad Curtis, who had hardly played all year, had never done it before. "I've heard people talk about their tingling, but I've never felt that before. Rounding third base, coming home, seeing all your teammates there waiting for you in a World Series game. It was a big thrill."

Improbable heroes are lightening rods that spark our dreams. Our moments, too, will come.

HARRY POTTER – 11/15/99

If you haven't heard about Harry Potter, you're either not breathing regularly or living in a subterranean ice cave in Antarctica. Harry Potter is everywhere: No. 1, 2, and 3 on the New York Times bestseller list, and soon there will be dolls, costumes, and playing cards. A movie is even in the works.

I finished my first Harry Potter book floating on an inner tube down the Lazy River. The Lazy River is an artificial waterway that winds through trees, flowers, and lagoons behind the Hill Country Resort in San Antonio, Texas. I had just finished speaking and had a couple of hours before catching my plane. I decided, "Why not float the Lazy River and bring Harry Potter along?" The sun is shining, and I'm floating through this fantasyland, sipping margaritas and mumbling the secret words that open up hidden passages.

Harry is an 11-year-old wizard who was orphaned in infancy and raised by an aunt and uncle who are ordinary humans or Muggles. Harry's wizard parents were killed by an evil sorcerer who was seduced by the dark side of the Force. Harry survived because he possessed a power greater than the evil sorcerer. You just know that sooner or later Harry is going to have to face him.

Harry is a short, frail, near-sighted, nerdy-looking little wizard who can ride a broomstick like Dale Earnhardt drives an Indy race car. On his 12th birthday, Harry is invited to enter Hogwarts Academy of Witchcraft and Wizardry where he begins his journey of magical discovery. He moves through walls and secret passages into a world of transformations, dragons, three-headed dog monsters, and headless ghosts.

The Religious Right think the Harry Potter books are a plot by Satanists to usher in the apocalyptic age. They think it's a religious movement that should be banned. School boards are being challenged to eliminate the book from their libraries.

What is the problem? This is just another magical tale like Robinson Crusoe, Luke Skywalker, or Odysseus in the Land of One-Eyed Giants--A heroic journey whose protagonist leaves the comfort of the ordinary and gets initiated into a new awareness. This is a fairytale! It launches imagination, which is the bedrock of creativity and genius.

The author is a single mother living in Scotland who, until three years ago, was struggling to support herself. Her whole story is magical and gives credence to the stuff dreams are made of. Harry Potter is a story of wonder. It challenges preconceptions, and I say, "Long live the Gryffindors!"

GOD'S LITTLE ACRE – 1/3/00

Jim Weekly is the last litigious man in Pigeon Roost, West Virginia.

Jim's family has lived in this mountain hollow for 200 years, but now the coal industry wants his land. The mining company will then dynamite the mountain and with mammoth mining machinery clear it off. They call this 'mountain removal,' and its waste will obliterate all the lower-lying streams and woodlands in the valleys and hollows below. This has happened to hundreds of West Virginia communities.

Jim Weekly decided to reject the mining company's offer to buy his 0.7 acre homestead.-- even after all his neighbors sold out. Jim filed a lawsuit to block his valley's annihilation, and the U.S. District Court just ruled in his favor. Businesses and politicians defended the policy in the name of West Virginia's economic health and launched an intensive lobbying effort. The judge, who visited Pigeon Roost (and other mountain hollows now gone), ruled that the state had violated federal mining and clean water laws for years. The courts of West Virginia decided that--in spite of the economic advantages--you just can't obliterate the land or the little guy who lives on his acre.

THE FIRST PATCH ADAMS FULL MOON FESTIVAL – 1/24/00

One year ago, after a debauchorous all-nighter, Patch and I formulated the idea for a world-class fund-raising event. This could be a happening that would raise millions for grass roots nonprofit organizations in Phoenix if the city is willing to get behind the effort. Using the oldest vaudeville trick in the book, people would make a charitable contribution to drop their pants and bare their butts.

Since the movie about Patch's early life that starred Robin Williams, the question he has most frequently been asked is, "Did you really moon at your medical school graduation?"

Patch moons a lot; he loves to moon! Some people don't or can't bring themselves to do it. Motorola, America West, The Phoenix Suns--companies who like the idea but don't want to expose their CEO's--would make contributions to provide scholarships and sponsor those who wanted to.

The first Patch Adams Full Moon Festival would be a fund-raiser--not just for people in furs who are wined and dined for their contributions but also for ordinary folk who want to make a difference in their community. Rich and poor, disabled and athletic, young and old--an entire city that believes in community coming together to have fun and lighten up.

Phoenix, Arizona, may be the ideal place to start; this state is a playground for mavericks. As a ticket for admission into the Union, Arizona was told to repeal a particular law. The legislature did it, and as soon as it achieved statehood promptly re-enacted the law. Arizona's Wild West tradition breeds its share of flimflam artists, but it also spawns lots of creative people. Cochise, Barry Goldwater, Edward Abbey, and Andrew Weil: all Arizona risk-takers and freethinkers.

From my perspective, as a community psychiatrist, an event that connects people and is based on helping each other is what mental health is all about. It has to be clear that no increase in the number of shrinks is ever going to make a difference in dealing with the human problems we face. Making a difference requires that we intervene before symptomatic problems become manifest. Create an environment in which people are supportive of one another; you break down boundaries of class, and we will live in healthier communities. An event where people of all cultures stand together and bend over is an act of liberation that promotes mental health. I have been unable to let this idea go.

The first meeting of the Patch Adams Full Moon Festival Organizing Committee met at my home on the anniversary of the birth of this idea. Attending were CEO's, yogis, artists, dancers, community organizers, and nonprofits. Some were initially skeptical, including a mayor's wife who wondered what a 'full moon' was. With his sincerity and passion for loving service, Patch soon turned the room into a feast of ideas that tumbled out with rapid-fire enthusiasm. "Let's not just do one giant mooning; let's make a day

of it," they offered. A full day from sunrise to moonrise with a fresh mooning group and new venue every hour. The Anonymous Mooners who would fill every window in downtown office buildings, at 9:00 am...the Moon Rivers, who would lie down on the banks of the Salt River to form the longest line of smiling moons in history . . .the Tune Mooners who would drop their trousers accompanied by tunes with moon in the titles...the High-Noon Mooners who would stage a showdown so--when announced by radio station dj's and noon sirens--people would stop whatever they were doing and moon...Family Mooners who want to do it multi-generationally...the Honeymooners who want to get married at the event...the Quarter-Mooners for gamblers...Moon-Gazers for the tarot readers and astrologers . . .Moon Beamers for the techies. You get the idea about how this meeting degenerated.

Patch said people would fly in from around the world and pay \$100 to 'drop trou' just for the privilege of doing it in community. He himself would bring thousands of eager participants.

Can Phoenix come together and honor its free-spirited tradition and create this magnificent act of charity? Can we laugh, be irreverent modern court jesters, and spread joy? I think we can pull it off; what do you think?

WHO WANTS TO MARRY A MULTI-MILLIONAIRE? – 2/21/00

The newest tv millionaire show comes directly from Las Vegas, features the onscreen marriage of two complete strangers, and is hyped as "the most watched wedding since Charles and Di."

The groom, called Mr. Multi-millionaire, gets to choose from 50 women who have submitted applications for consideration to become his wife. The show opens with each contestant introducing herself by name, age, place of birth, home city and state, and occupation. Mr. Multi-millionaire is watching them from a closed room, but they can't see him. On the basis of these facts, Mr. Multi-millionaire picks ten finalists. These women are given a quiz with such questions as "If you found a woman's telephone number in your husband's pants pocket, what would you do? Would you confront him, keep quiet, or call the number?" Or this one, "If you married Mr. Multi-millionaire, would you continue doing everything you're doing now, make some changes, or stop working? There was only one question that had a sexual overtone: "What is your idea of an intimate date, roller-blading on the beach, dinner at a five-star restaurant, staying at home and cooking a meal together, or watching a movie?" You know that the reason any woman wants to marry a multi-millionaire is to stay at home and cook dinner. You know he wants to ask questions such as "Do you enjoy making love, and what are your favorite turn-ons?" and you know they are answering on the basis of what he wants to hear. Yet they answer these questions with apparent sincerity and then parade around in swimsuits so he can take a closer look at the product. These are good women engineers, nurses, and entrepreneurs who are willing to marry a complete stranger.

Mr. Multi-millionaire picks his top five, all of whom walk out in designer wedding gowns and are given a last chance to speak to their prospective husband. Looking at this screen behind which he sits, they are asked to "speak from their hearts" to this total stranger. They all reassure him that they are not in it for the money; on the strength of this heartfelt input, he makes his decision. Before emerging for the world to see, he thanks all the women for taking this seriously, that his hope was that someone would leap out at him, and that he was committed to this relationship.

Out walks Mr. Rick Rockwell, a decent-looking, well-spoken 42-year-old man. He walks up to Darva Conger, a thirty-something ER nurse (not the prettiest, youngest, or the most educated), kisses her, and gets down on one knee to ask her to marry him. This woman is now looking at her soon-to-be husband for the first time. She looks stunned and says she will. A Las Vegas judge walks out, and they recite the traditional vows. The audience-- and presumably the whole world--cheers in appreciation.

This is marriage in the new millennium, a media event that matches people on the strength of money. Connections can be established in a millisecond and the foundations of intimacy dialed up on some search engine; if you don't like what you see, you move on to another selection.

I'm not saying that arranged marriages have not proven effective in the past. Many cultures have survived on this tradition. The Moonies just married off tens of thousands of followers by their leader matching their names with the participants seeing each other for the first time at the wedding ceremony. Arranged marriages seem to work out at least as well as marriages based on fairyland romance. But this is different; here we celebrate the seduction of money as the foundation for relationships. Marriage is just another commodity like soybeans, sugar, and pork bellies. Loyalty, honor, and a loving commitment to staying in the struggle with another person are the values upon which intimacy is based. There are no shortcuts. We have to stop selling instantaneous gratification as the model for long-term success.

CIDER HOUSE RULES – 2/28/00

If you haven't seen the movie *The Cider House Rules*, don't miss it. It's a poignant tale whose underlying theme is that those who make the rules are not the ones who have to live by them.

Michael Caine plays a caring, beloved obstetrician who is the guiding force in a rural New England orphanage. He sees the suffering of women burdened by unwanted children and also the suffering of orphans desperate for families. He performs abortions, and his job is being threatened by the board of directors who object to how he breaks some of their rules.

One of his orphans, Homer, has spent his whole life in the institution and decides to see the world. He gets a job with migrant workers who are harvesting apples. The workers live in a dilapidated cider house, communal style, with a curtain being the only attempt to create a separate space for the only woman among them. Posted on the wall are rules, which no one ever noticed or was able to read. When the orphan arrives, he reads them aloud: "Don't smoke, sleep on the roof, eat on the porch," etc, etc. When they hear them they laugh incredulously. Nobody in their right mind could make up such stupid rules, they think--not if they'd ever lived in this cider house.

You don't have to live in a cider house to be subjected to cider house rules. This is the cider house rule in today's healthcare industry, "Come join our HMO and we will take care of you." What is not added is that they don't play by the rules. If you cost them too much money, the HMO leaves. Only weeks ago, people living in rural Arizona counties were abandoned by their HMO's. These people, many of whom are elderly and have lived in these towns since Arizona was a territory, were told to move someplace else where they could find coverage.

Welcome to the age of cider house healthcare rules. We will take care of you as long as we want to, which may not be as long as you need to be taken care of. So the way you thought it was is not the way it is. Is it any wonder that people everywhere are rising up and demanding the right to sue their health plans? The elections are soon approaching. Let's vote to eliminate cider house rules.

A GENERAL THEORY OF LOVE – 3/20/00

I recently celebrated my 39th wedding anniversary. The day after, my wife told me she wasn't sure we would make it to 40. Our struggles are not new--Elaine says she's been fighting for her life every day. A dramatic overstatement, but frankly I thought that by this time it would get easier. It's doesn't get easier; the things I love about her are also those that drive me to mouth-foaming exasperation (and vice versa). Why is this?

Three male psychiatrists just published a book on the neurobiology of love called *A General Theory of Love*. They tell us neuroscience confirms it is our primitive reptilian brain (the limbic system) that makes our toes curl, heart patter, and skin crawl when the love object appears. The limbic brain (which we share with lizards and aardvarks) pours out chemicals that make us swoon, moon, and croon. Love is not something we think about. It can't be diagnosed or evaluated; it's just felt. We are limbic cripples! Which is what the French physicist Blaise Pascal wrote 300 years ago; "The heart has reasons that reason cannot comprehend."

This comes as no surprise to any of us, does it? Why else would we choose such misery with a partner who equally excites and exasperates us?

SEX TALK – 6/19/00

When the time came for the obligatory sex talk with my daughters, I delivered a brilliant exegesis on the nature of sex and love. My wife limited her comments to a single sentence: "If it doesn't feel good, you're not doing it right."

The girls still remember their mother's line; my philosophizing was forgotten before my lips had uttered them. That line recently came up, when I spoke at Canyon Ranch. My wife joined me to share in an extraordinary experience at one of the world's great spas. At breakfast one morning, we joined two sisters, who'd taken time from their very busy and successful lives to be together in a place they could 'get away from it all.' The table talk was about meaning-of-life issues, not an unusual breakfast conversation at Canyon Ranch. Then we traipsed off to a yoga class.

A couple of weeks later, I got a note from one of the sisters which included this paragraph:

"You are both in my mind and heart since my return. Elaine, you first. You said to Judy and me, " I told my girls one thing about sex: 'If it doesn't feel good, you aren't doing it right.' I thought about that a lot, not vis-a-vis sex, but about my life. If it wasn't feeling good, I wasn't doing it right. This phrase of yours, Elaine, innocuous though you might think, echoed in my mind all the way home on the plane to Dallas and still echoes. I had very little joy in my life. So I owed it to myself to make some changes, and I have. And I am doing it right so much more now. I had let two of my gardens that I used to love working in pretty much go downhill. I felt a surge of energy upon returning and have been busy planting pots with lots of summer color and buying new patio furniture for my deck. I now putter out there every day, read my newspaper, and just sit there and soak in the pleasure that I have seldom allowed myself the time for. It is lovely, and I get such joy from it."

D. is right; Elaine's metaphor is not just a sexual prescription. If you're not feeling good, take a break from what you're doing, and find a way to do it better. You don't have to go to Canyon Ranch; you can go canoeing...camp...retreat some place where you can open yourself up to another way of seeing a way out of the ruts, routines, and dissatisfactions.

On second thought, forget the philosophy and just remember Elaine's Theorem, "If it doesn't feel good, you're not doing it right."

WILL THE HUMAN GENOME SURVIVE ON GILLIGAN'S ISLAND? – 7/4/00

This week we celebrate the birth of our nation; we also celebrate a rare moment in the history of science. This week the discovery of the entire human genome was announced.

This landmark event details the entire genetic constitution of the human species; our biology is now an open book. We have the capacity to explain in detail what could go wrong with us, what diseases we may get, and how we can correct them. We are launching into a new era of disease-free longevity.

What the genomic revolution will not do, however, is teach us how to behave more civilly toward one another. We are still crippled by the same emotional and interpersonal struggles that our Biblical ancestors experienced. We are still jealous, short-fused, and selfish, all of which may be biologically compelled. The question is not whether we are pre-programmed for such a repertoire of feelings, but rather do we have any choice in how we express them?

I believe we also have an inborn compulsion to pursue some ethic of morality that allows us to live together in community. My belief often gets challenged, the latest being a new smash tv hit called Survivors. This program is about 16 castaways who are dropped on a primitive island and told to live together as a tribe. They are also told that this is a game of survival in which the participants will eliminate one another until only one remains. The last survivor winds up with one million dollars. This show is the Lord of the Flies meets Who Wants to be a Millionaire? on Gilligan's Island. The game is based upon cooperation and treachery; but--make no mistake--the determining factor in every situation is how it affects 'me.'

People are addicted to this show. It has spawned office pools, dress-up house parties, and copy cat games. An entire nation has become glued to this new gladiatorial contest where viewers delight in someone else's misery. It's not all petty and mean-spirited; there are occasional illusions of intimacy such as casual sex between people who acknowledge the biological urgency of their hormonal strivings.

Is this show just harmless fun? I don't think it's endangering the nation, but I do wonder, at this time of national celebration, what kind of values and behaviors we are promoting with a show that publicly humiliates and blackballs people as the mechanism by which people survive.

Let's take a break this week as we celebrate the birth of our nation and the triumphal power of science by reaching out and touching someone we don't know in a loving way. Say good morning to a stranger, give a homeless person your sandwich, or carry an old lady's grocery bag to her car. The real story of Independence Day is that only by being connected to each other do we stay strong.

CHICKEN RUN – 7/17/00

I spent most of the July Fourth holiday holed up, reading and watching movies. No computers or telephones...just books, journals, lots of videos, and takeout food. On Sunday, however, I took my grandkids out to see a movie called Chicken Run. This is a claymation feature targeted for kids on summer vacation.

We settle into the theater (armed with bags of popcorn, and enough candy to raise their blood sugar to agitated levels) and watch a story unfold about chickens who want to fly the coop to escape their fate of being stuffed into pot pies. The chickens all speak with a British accent; for the first five minutes, I couldn't stop giggling.

The farmer's wife is evil and wants to cut off their heads with the carving knife. One delightful Auntie Mame type chick--while blissfully crocheting--insists that every missing chicken has gone on holiday. There is an old rooster in the dress and demeanor of a British army officer as well as two lovable scam artists disguised as rats. The hero is a Rhode Island Red rooster who goes by the name of Rocky and who flies into the coop. A visionary chicken named Ginger wants Rocky to teach them all to fly so they can escape. Rocky doesn't want to do it because he knows he can't fly; he is, in fact, a circus performer who is launched out of a cannon. But before he can explain it, the ringmaster comes to the farm to ask the witch if she has seen his rooster. Ginger tells Rocky she will hide him but only on the condition that he'll teach them to fly. Dreading capture, Rocky says he'll do it.

This movie is The Great Escape, and it is replete with scenes of love, death, despair, and dreams. It ends with two rats philosophizing on which came first, the chicken or the egg, which reduces me to guffaws. My grandkids think I am choking on the popcorn; I tell them I'm just laughing because this is a funny movie. Their response was that it wasn't scary. Their lasting conclusion, however, was that they weren't sure they wanted to come to the movies with me any more if I couldn't keep from embarrassing them by laughing so loudly.

MRS. MULTIMILLIONAIRE TURNS BUNNY – 7/24/00

Last February, I seriously questioned the motivation and integrity of Mr. Multimillionaire choosing a bride on tv whom he'd never met before. I also questioned a woman who would choose to marry someone she had never met just for the money. What did this say about romance, marriage, loyalty, and shared value...about a computerized world in which people connect in milliseconds, and intimacy is dialed up on a search engine? If you don't like what you see, you make another selection.

Darva Conger, a registered nurse, married Mr. Multimillionaire on tv at the close of the show and went on her honeymoon cruise. Darva says she realized immediately that she and Mr. Multimillionaire had nothing in common, so why pretend. They never had sex; and the marriage was annulled after their platonic honeymoon cruise. Darva went back to her life as a nurse but got fired because of the publicity. She was re-hired at another hospital but was continually followed by tabloid reporters and photographers and couldn't continue. She decided to do a Playboy pictorial, saying that if she was being stalked anyway, why not take advantage of the opportunity. "Besides," she said, "isn't there a blueprint for this? One gets involved in a scandal of one sort or the other, does the book of the week and the movie of the week and then poses nude." She says she picked Playboy not for the million dollars they offered (because others offered more) but because they agreed to do it on her terms. "Don't harass my friends and family, don't come to my home, and stay out of my trash."

Darva-the-bunny is a cum laude graduate from Southern Illinois University, an ex-Air Force sergeant, and ER nurse who said she got into this tv wedding because she needed a vacation. She knew there was an annulment clause and never thought she'd be chosen. Once it got down to a serious possibility, she decided to play along because she "didn't want to look like an idiot on national television." I would have much preferred her to have said "no" when the justice of the peace walked on stage to marry them. Darva says she now wishes she had done that too.

Pondering her journey, I asked my wife and my daughter in the kitchen one night if they'd pose for Playboy for a million dollars. My daughter said she'd do it for half a million dollars and almost immediately dropped it to a quarter million. My wife said she'd do it for a plane ticket and hotel room if they could make her look like a bunny.

PAY IT FORWARD – 11/6/00

Pay It Forward, a current Hollywood feature film with an all-star cast, was almost universally panned by critics. My local newspaper gave it a D rating, which means 'bad movie,' calling it "unrelentingly morose" and "unbearably manipulative." This bad movie is about people who do loving and generous acts to strangers because someone once did something for them that changed their lives. The only payback for this gift was to "pay it forward," meaning to do something similar for three other people.

A rich lawyer gives his Jaguar away to an unemployed journalist who tracks down an admittedly unlikely story. In so doing, we meet an abused/alcoholic/single mother (Helen Hunt), her 12-year-old son (Haley Joel Osment), seriously burn-scarred elementary school teacher (Kevin Spacey), and an additional assortment of interesting characters, including a homeless bag lady, criminal, addict, and delinquent. What didn't the critics like? They didn't like this tear-jerking, make-believe, multi-level marketing device selling good deed as its product.

This is a good story about an old theme that teaches us nobody makes it alone. It's a story about hope, dreams, and doing things that can inspire the world. This is Star Wars versus the Evil Empire but told with soul. I loved this movie because it values a life shared with others, kindness, forgiveness, and romanticism.

We need these stories! The National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago just released a major study which is widely used by social scientists and updated regularly with the help of the National Science Foundation; it reveals that young people today distrust society and believe that human nature is inherently more bad than good. (What movies have critics praised that might have encouraged such beliefs and behavior?)

Pay it Forward is a movie about doing something--not because it serves your needs-- because it ennoble the human spirit. It's about what in today's world has become a revolutionary ethic of morality, that people are still good.

I say more make-believe tales that remind us not of our basest selves but our most noble selves. Reach out to someone in need; drop a smile at the checkout counter, say a kind word, put wildflowers on the kitchen table with a note for your lover, and let's make a loving difference in the world as an antidote to today's existential despair.

D.C. CABBIE FOR PRESIDENT – 11/27/00

I'm in Washington D.C. for the National Caring Awards. My friend and brother Patch Adams, M.D. was going to be honored as one of the recipients. Listening to the stories of National Caring Award winners always lifts my spirits, but this time the atmosphere in D.C. was heavy, omnipresent, and anything but uplifting.

This is a week and a half after Election Day, and we don't have a President, and Washington D.C. is immobilized because nobody knows who's coming or going. The only conversation is political, and people are glued to tv announcements like it's a sporting event. The media is providing a blow-by-blow description (just like they did the election results) and creating a new entertainment phenomenon called political psychodrama. West Wing lives--we have accusations, lies, and revelations with the two protagonists depicting each other as an unscrupulous thief who has changed the rules in the middle of the game, trying to steal a victory; a neo-Fascist who refuses to allow the will of the people to be heard.

On my Sunday morning stroll on the Capitol mall, people are shouting and picketing. Is this polarization good for the country? How can this acrimony and legal manipulation leave us feeling anything other than glum? I can't get rid of the feeling that somebody is getting the Presidency by cheating. Will either of these men be able to lead effectively in a nation so polarized?

Wonderful as the Caring Awards were, I left Washington early Monday morning feeling a bit down. That is until I met Tyrone Warner, the cabbie who took Elaine and me to the airport. Tyrone greeted us with a cheerful hi-ho smile which almost always makes me cringe and wonder how anybody wakes up like that in the morning. But Tyrone is irrepressibly buoyant, and, in his easy conversational repartee, he coaxes out of me that I am a psychiatrist.

Tyrone says, "I don't think I'll ever need one or that my kids will. I feel good and my secret is, "Admit it, quit it, and forget it." I'm thinking this is the secret of living a life with joy, and I say to Tyrone, "You're right. You'll never have to see me; as a matter of fact, you could probably take my job. In fact, I think you ought to be President. Thanks for bringing back my smile this morning."

THE TEMPTATION OF JESSE – 1/29/01

Last week we were treated to two assaults on the sanctity of relationships. The first was the new hit ‘reality’ show, ‘Temptation Island,’ a docudrama that features couples willing to test their commitment to each other by putting themselves into a situation to be seduced by an assortment of sexy playgirls and stud-muffins. Temptation Island was watched by 17.5 million people, more than watched the hit show West Wing. Why would any couple want to do this? Who would choose to go on tv and demonstrate to the world how shallow their commitments are or how crippled they are by hormonal surges?

We have to stop glamorizing temptation; it’s tough enough to learn trust, respect, honor, and commitment. Ask Jesse Jackson who last week acknowledged that he recently fathered a child out of wedlock by a woman who was 20 years his junior. Jesse Jackson is the father of five grown children and has been married for 28 years. Jesse did not evade this truth; he said he loved his 20-month-old daughter and has pledged to support her financially and emotionally. He also said he needed to re-connect with his family and provide for his spirit.

Jesse knows how hard it will be to regain his wife’s and children’s trust. I anticipate that he will tell them they provide the central meaning of his life and that he hopes they will not see this failure as his only measure as a man and father. He will pay for his shortcomings for the rest of his life, but can they and we forgive him?

Lots of people have crucified him for his hypocrisy. Lots of people don’t like him because he says things people don’t want to hear. Don’t get me wrong; he has said things I didn’t want to hear: his anti-Semitic Hymietown comment, for example, and his cozy relationship with Lewis Farrakhan. But he has distanced himself from Farrakhan, and he has tried to mend fences with Jews by marching in Skokie against neo-Nazis. He has visited synagogues, gone to Dachau for atonement, and urged the release of Soviet Jews.

Jesse is an international champion of civil rights and a vocal spokesman for the disenfranchised; he keeps alive the hope of many. I am hoping he will be able to rebuild his connections to his family and win back his wife and children. I hope he will bear witness to our shortcomings as a species as well as to the promise that we can redeem ourselves.

We all fall short. Every person who seems to have courage, compassion, and dignity has also experienced failure, weakness, and shame, but let’s stop glamorizing temptation as a made-for-tv sport. It makes it harder to teach our children and grandchildren something about the importance of staying together, growing old together, and living together as loving families, tribes, and communities.

A STORY OF COMMITMENT – 2/5/2001

Last week's Temptation Island byte left me disquieted, so I wanted to tell another story about commitments. I read about Grace and Joseph in the New York Times a while ago. Grace Beetar's first husband died in 1983 after a long, lovingly committed marriage. Ever since his death, she has dreaded Saturdays and Sundays. Mrs. Beetar, 76, said, "Ask any widow. Weekends are terrible; that's when families are out, and it's very, very painful."

Grace got a weekend job and moved to an apartment complex with other lonesome widows. She thought her golden years pretty tarnished, and then she met Joseph Russo after she began volunteering at the Helen Keller Senior Center. The Center helps the visually impaired deal with everything from sewing to negotiating supermarket aisles.

Mr. Russo, 82, was widowed in 1995, and the same year he lost his eyesight. His vision became so poor he could no longer read, drive, or safely pour coffee. One of his four children said, "He lost his soul mate and his vision at the same time."

Like Mrs. Beetar, he missed home and spouse terribly. "In the basement, I had a pool table. I used to love to play. But when your mate dies and you can't see, you can't do that anymore." He moved in with his daughter who said her father soon became a little old man sitting in a chair, dozing off all the time." Then she convinced him to join the Helen Keller Senior Center.

Months later, Mrs. Beetar was assigned by the center to be his volunteer driver and escort. She would pick him up at his daughter's house and take him to classes and then home again. For a long time, the two simply made small talk. Then their conversations lengthened, and then he invited her on a riverboat cruise down the Peconic River. They danced and fell in love. They decided to get married, partly because if they went out at night, she had to drop him off and drive home alone which worried him. Mr. Russo finally said to her, "Either you take me home for good, or I'll take you home."

They were married at St. William the Abbot Roman Catholic Church in Seaford, New York. There were many widows, widowers, and bowling league members among the guests. Almost all of them wept throughout the ceremony. The new Mrs. Russo said she hoped it would be an inspiration for other old people. At the wedding, there were at least eight women in their 80's who went up to catch the bouquet. Hanging on to the flowers of love is the antidote to Temptation Island.

RUN YOUR OWN RACE – 3/12/01

On Saturday, March 3, 68 teams left Anchorage for Nome, Alaska, for the 1,100 plus mile Iditarod Sled Dog Race. The Iditarod honors the dogs and mushers who delivered diphtheria serum to Nome in 1925. Chuck King was the first Arizonan ever to qualify for the event, and it was reported in the local papers.

Chuck is 41 years old and for the past nine years has had full-blown AIDS. He was given three months to live, but new drugs came on the market, and his condition improved. Three years ago, however, Chuck King felt he was near the end. The cocktails of medicine weren't working any more, and he had dropped from 180 pounds to 118 pounds. He decided to take a farewell cruise to Alaska with his companion as a final going-away party for himself.

On the boat he met a member of the family that started the Iditarod race; one thing led to another, and they encouraged him to participate. Later that year, new anti-AIDS drugs were developed, and Chuck again rallied. He began using a regimen developed by Navy Seals and gained weight to 175 pounds. Then, this desert dweller got a dog sled together and over the last two years has completed 3,500 miles of mushing. He accumulated 500 racing miles and won the Willow Alaska Race. On the Iditarod, Chuck took along his 23 medications, military rations, and a rifle to scare off wolves or hungry bears. Mostly though, he took along with him the dreams of lots of friends now gone. Before the race, Chuck was interviewed; he said, "I have to be realistic about this. I've had full-blown AIDS for nine years, and my health today is only 50 percent of what it was last year. I'm back to 155 pounds, but I'm going to finish. I'm going to finish this race because I'm just one of many AIDS victims who knows what can be accomplished in the face of what seem insurmountable odds. I want to show that illness is secondary to life. It can be amazing what we can do with the life we have left."

This is the formula for becoming the hero of your life's journey. Surround yourself by what you love, and bear witness to the power of your own story.

MARDI GRAS MISSILES – 3/26/01

New Orleans is the birthplace of Mardi Gras. This Creole city of traditional French and Spanish Catholicism honors this sacred ritual that ushers in the holy Lenten season. Mardi Gras is the time for families and friends to come together in community for a blowout bash before the time of sacrifice.

The traditional New Orleans bacchanal has been cloned in Philadelphia, Austin, Fresno, and Seattle. However, in those cities, Mardi Gras was a brawl gone wrong. Their celebrations featured drunken crowds throwing beer bottles, fighting, and looting. In Seattle, a 20-year-old man was struck in the head by something and died. The New Orleans Mardi Gras was blissful. The citizens of The Big Easy were no less drunk, but their celebration was an expression of joy. Why? It's because in New Orleans they understand the context of this celebration; there are shared expectations and structure. When people come together in public celebrations nowadays--whether in the streets, concerts, or stadiums--the letting loose of one's inhibitions means violence and carnage. Without shared purpose and context, a culture that tolerates escalating violence invites gatherings that turn ugly.

We need more ways for people to come together and celebrate. We need to be partying in the streets in a community of shared spirit. But we also need to agree on some structure so we can throw beads, not missiles.

NO TRAFFIC IN A FIELD OF DREAMS – 4/9/01

The movie *Traffic* has garnered critical acclaim and weeks ago won an Oscar. *Traffic* is a serious look at the international drug trade.

In graphic detail, it describes the enormity of this insidious and seemingly unstoppable force...a culture where lies, betrayal, and brutal violence are the law. The dialogue is compelling in its description of racism, poverty, and greed. Combine the seduction of instantaneous wealth with a society that seeks immediate gratification, and you have a deadly combination. As long as the profit motive and poverty exist in a culture that lauds fast highs, the drug trade will flourish.

Into this debasement comes an honest federal judge who is about to be appointed as the nation's drug czar. He is so focused on his career he has disconnected from his wife and daughter. By outward appearances, they are a contented, well-adjusted family. His 16-year-old daughter attends a private school; she is third in her class and volunteers her time to read to the blind. She is also a crack head.

When the judge discovers her addiction, he goes to find her on the streets; in the process, he gets an education. He learns that eradicating the problem through enforcement alone is doomed. Without prevention, education, and treatment programs that are equally funded, efforts will fail.

In spite of the hopelessness this film portrayed, I loved it because, in the midst of it all, the degradation was also a message of redemption. A good cop with a sense of values--an ethic of morality--faced the beast and won. In doing so, he reminded us that honor and courage can change a barren landscape into a field of dreams.

SWINGING SENIORS – 6/18/01

Several weeks ago, the morning paper reported that the Recreation Center of Sun City West, Inc., a retirement community near Phoenix, drafted a letter asking the Maricopa County Sheriff's office to help them police their recreational sites.

It seems that late at night in Sun City West the pools, hot tubs, under the olive trees in the 'doggie park' and in golf carts, seniors engage in sexual activities. We aren't told what those activities are; all we know is that over the past year there have been two dozen sightings at those particular places.

Mauryne Hall, a spokesperson for the group, said this was a serious issue. "We don't care what they're doing; we just want them to do it in a more appropriate place." They called in Joe Arpaio, the "Toughest Sheriff in America," who loves this kind of work and said he was willing to work with local posses in patrolling for lewd contact.

The story was picked up by radio and tv talk shows and reported internationally. This letter may kindle the greatest resurgence of sexual interest that this community has ever seen. This is better than any romance novel. Think about it; you can spy on your neighbors and learn who's doing what and to whom. With self-righteous prurience and legal justification, Sun City West dwellers can organize moonlight patrols to follow couples into the bushes and see if they're doing something nasty. If they're not doing it yet, hide and watch; maybe they will.

Of course, what's going to happen is that old people who like to walk their dogs or stroll in the moonlight holding hands or sit in golf carts won't do it anymore because of the fear of gossip and public ridicule. This saddens me tremendously.

Instead of calling Sheriff Joe, let's find out who those two dozen people were who were sighted. We'll set up a fund in their names for the New Sun City West Recreation Centers that will sponsor more public places where old people can gather and feel joy in being alive.

THE ULTIMATE REALITY TV SHOW – 9/10/01

I was vacationing in Southern California in a recliner with my morning coffee, overlooking Huntington Harbor. The front page of the morning paper featured two stories that described both the degradation and the glory of the human spirit.

In Seattle, a 28-year-old woman stood on a bridge overlooking a ship channel, threatening to jump. She caused a three-hour traffic jam during which truckers, motorists, and people in buses were screaming at her to jump. Helicopter film crews were recording the event as it was happening. Finally, she jumped, and the police pulled her out of the water and brought her to a hospital in critical condition.

This is the ultimate reality tv. We have come from shows featuring violence, deceit, humiliation, and seduction to seeing in living color a depressed, suicidal woman leap from a bridge to cheers.

I want to scream at this indifference; then I catch myself in this holier than-thou judgmentalism and remember my hypocrisy. Some years ago, the commuter train I was on was suddenly brought to a screeching halt. After a long delay, the conductor announced that a man had committed suicide on the track, and we were waiting for an ambulance. My initial response was to look at my watch; I wondered if I could still make it to my lunch appointment. It took me another moment to own the truth that my inconvenience took precedence over somebody else's life and death decision. Today's reality is me, me, me--not we, we, we. Increasingly, we are becoming indifferent to anybody's suffering other than our own.

Then I read the second front page story about a dishwasher from Mexico who returned a large bag of cash that he found on a downtown Los Angeles Street. Ascencion Gonzalez returned \$203,000 in cash that had fallen out of an armored truck. He thought about it and decided that the *espenita* (a prick of conscience) told him it wasn't his and giving it back was the right thing to do.

Over the next few days, many callers to L.A.'s talk radio shows thought he was out of his mind. Some neighbors in his South L.A. neighborhood thought the moral issue was nonexistent. They didn't know the owners; the rich never remember the poor. They felt it was only just to keep the cash. Even Police Sergeant Rick Sanchez said, "I find it really hard to believe in this day and age that we have someone honest enough to turn in \$203,000."

When Ascencion Gonzalez was told what other people said, he responded that he didn't care. He said he knew his mother and father would approve of what he did because that's how they raised him.

This man fills me with hope and joy. My spirit soars; he makes me believe that I would have returned it too. The only fly in the ointment is that Ascencion Gonzalez is an illegal alien. He is concerned that his sudden notoriety will lead INS agents to deport him; that shouldn't happen. This nation was founded by

illegal aliens. Migrants with a sense of conscience and conviction built this democracy. Mr. Gonzalez fills me with pride; he is a living testimonial to the values of our forefathers.

WORLD SERIES MVP – 11/12/01

This has been the most unbelievable World Series ever. Nail biting, edge-of-your seat excitement from beginning to end. The almost mythical New York Yankees, a team that holds more World Championships than any other sports team in history, lost the first two games to the newly franchised Arizona Diamondbacks. Then they returned to New York City, where they staged a comeback that has never happened in the history of baseball. The New York Yankees won the next three games--two of them in the bottom of the ninth inning with two men out. It was surreal, like a phoenix arising out of the ashes of the World Trade Center. The Yankees came back just as their city did, and New Yorkers were celebrating.

Twice, in the bottom of the ninth inning, the Yankees came back from seeming defeat to win the game. In both of those games, they victimized the same pitcher, Byung-Hyun Kim. BK, as he is known, is a 22-year-old young man and the first Korean to pitch in a World Series. BK is a hero in his country; most of his countrymen were watching him pitch. BK is a good pitcher: this year he has converted 19 of the 23 save chances he faced. BK became the cornerstone of the Diamondbacks' bullpen. But in those two games he came out the loser. An estimated 80 million people from Seoul to Seattle, in Europe, South America, on aircraft carriers, in war zones and igloos--they all watched BK sink to his knees in disconsolate despair.

While baseball fans all over the world watched this incredible collapse, Diamondbacks' first baseman, Mark Grace, walked over to BK and put his arm around him and pulled him close and told him, "You're going to be okay; we are with you, win or lose." That moment was the most poignant one for me in this whole World Series--Mark Grace didn't want this pain to be the defining moment in BK's life. A painful humiliation carved in the granite of his memory to be remembered by fans as the 'goat.' In games with heroes, there are also goats; sometimes the heroes are forgotten but rarely the goats.

The 1986 World Series was between the Boston Red Sox and the New York Mets. Boston hadn't won a World Series in 80 years, a record which still stands. That series also went seven games, and finally the Mets won. The hero and MVP (Most Valuable Player) was Ray Knight. Does anybody remember Ray Knight? Hardly, but ask any fan who the goat was, and nobody forgets Bill Buckner. Buckner was a great ballplayer who finished his career with 2,715 hits and a .289 career batting average, but everyone remembers Bill's error. In the bottom of the tenth inning, he let a ground ball go through his legs, and the winning runs scored.

The Diamondbacks came back to Phoenix and won the next game; now it was a one-game winner takes all. Curt Schilling, the untouchable Arizona Diamondback ace, was pitching for the third time, and by the bottom of the eighth inning, he was tiring and gave up a home run. Facing the Diamondbacks in the eighth inning was the Yankees' Mariano Rivera, the most dominant closing pitcher in baseball. In the bot-

tom of the ninth inning, the first batter he faced was Mark Grace. Grace hit a single, and that hit opened up the floodgates that allowed the phoenix to rise in the ballpark and crown a new champion. Arizona Diamondbacks--World Series Champion 2001! In the stadium, fans went crazy. In the midst of this celebration, BK slowly walked in alone from the bullpen. The huge tv jumbotron picked him up, and fifty thousand fans stood up applauding. When he got to the infield, his teammates embraced him as the winners they all were.

In that moment, BK sanded away the rough granite edges of that heartbreaking memory. I vote Mark Grace MVP!

MOON OVER MIRAVAL – 2/4/02

With my beloved friend Patch Adams, I conducted a three-day workshop entitled "Coming to Every Day with Joy: The Greatest Act of Revolution." It was held at Miraval, an exquisite health resort in Tucson, Arizona. It's the kind of place where you can order a latte before getting into the hot tub, then go horse-back riding, rappel from a mountain wall, or get the two-hour Ultimate Ayurvedic Massage. This is a place of loving indulgence. Here we presented a paradigm for loving connections that was an antidote to today's vulnerability and fear.

We like working together. Patch reminds me how to make to make my spiritual path; I love his stridency. What you learned about Patch Adams from the movie that bears his name is only a small fraction of an extraordinary life. He is a physician, whose specialty I like to call public health epidemiology. Patch sees his task as revealing the horrors in store for us if we continue to exploit people and our planet. His passion is so intense, it's sometimes disquieting, but no one ever doubts that Patch speaks his truth. He comes to every day with joy, which does not mean he doesn't feel pain. He deals with suffering by committing himself to a life of loving service; that's how he overcomes it. The clown in him touches people wherever he goes.

The workshop was a wonderful experience for all, mostly for us because we had a chance to play into the early morning hours. We nurtured our dream of the first Patch Adams Full Moon Festival. This is a new kind of fundraiser exclusively for local grass roots charities who are always barely funded. The event would culminate in 100,000 people dropping their pants for charity (See January 24, 2000, Schlagbyte). Think about it--100,000 people mooning communally, each contributing \$100 to do so. It would raise \$10 million; everyone can afford it; corporations could sponsor those who couldn't; it would build a community that crosses all economic and ethnic boundaries. Surely if we can come together in disaster and pain, we ought to be able to celebrate our aliveness and support our local charities.

So far we have been unable to 'pull it off.' It's been hard to find a city willing to take the risk. Things like obscenity laws, politics, security, and liability issues get in the way, but the audiences with whom we share the idea are enthusiastic about it. So Patch and I have become the first corporate sponsors. We deposited our honoraria from the Miraval workshop into the Full Moon Festival Fund. This tax deductible contribution reminds us to keep laughing and dreaming of a world whose paradigm for health is loving and whose greatest act of revolution is coming to every day with joy.

(See photos that accompany this Schlag byte here.)

FISH WARNING – 3/11/02

I was in Chicago last week, speaking to one of the largest multispecialty medical groups in America. We addressed the challenge of how to retain our hearts and souls as healers in an age of industrializing health-care delivery. It was a wonderful evening which continued late into the night.

I slept late the following morning and, after washing, put up a cup of coffee and walked to the door to see if a morning paper had been delivered. My room was situated in a private alcove, and there was the paper lying on the carpet about six feet from my door. Without a thought, I flung open the door and went for it, but the door closed more quickly than I had anticipated. Desperately I lunged for it, but it shut before I reached it. There I stood butt-naked in the hallway, holding onto my U.S.A. Today, whose headline read "FDA Fish Warning" in one-inch bold type.

My first thought was, "How am I going to get out of this?" and then "Who is going to believe this?" Halfway down the long corridor, I saw a housekeeping cart so I covered my vulnerability and walked toward it. Standing behind the cart, I called out to the housekeeper inside. Sylvie, her name tag proudly announced, approached me, and I told her I had been locked out of my room, explaining how I went for the paper, etc. etc. She said I had to go down to the front desk for security clearance. I was forced to confess that I was standing naked behind the cart, at which point I moved out into the open, and she saw me covering myself with the newspaper. She looked me up and down and finally said, "Is something wrong with your fish?" I started laughing...she did too, and then she graciously walked me back to my room and opened the door.

Then I wondered how Sylvie was going to tell this story.

"This older gentlemen calls me out into the hall. He is standing behind my cart and tells me he is locked out of his room. I tell him he has to go to security at the front desk, and he then he says he's naked. He walks out from behind the cart with a newspaper over his privates. He's holding onto the newspaper as if he's holding onto his life, his two hands shaking. His fingers seem to be pointing to the headline that says something about a Fish Warning so I ask him if something is wrong with his fish. He laughs hysterically and asks me how I knew. I know I should have called security, but I thought, "How else would an old man find himself naked on my floor? At the front desk they would ask him for his identification. What would he show them, his sick fish?"

Bless you, Sylvie.

WEST VIRGINIA, MOUNTAIN MAMA – 5/27/02

Two and a half years ago (January 3, 2000), I wrote a Schlag Byte about Jim Weekly, the last man in Pigeon Roost, West Virginia. Jim and his family have lived in this mountain hollow for 200 years, but now the coal industry wants his land because it stands in the way of their dynamiting the mountain that towers above his home. Jim rejected the mining companies' offers to buy his 0.7 acre homestead even after all his neighbors sold out. Instead, he filed a lawsuit to block Pigeon Roost's annihilation.

Chief Judge Charles Haden II, of the Southern District of West Virginia, ruled in Jim Weekly's favor, saying that state agencies had failed to enforce federal environmental protection laws. In the byte, I applauded Jim and Judge Haden for standing up for the land.

My kudos was premature, however, because Judge Haden's ruling was overturned on appeal. The merits of the case were never argued; a panel of the appeals court ruled that West Virginia had "constitutional immunity against such a lawsuit." So another broader lawsuit was filed by lots of Appalachian communities; this one much broader charged that the Army Corps of Engineers had violated its own regulations that banned the dumping of millions of tons of waste into waterways and valleys.

In May 2002, Judge Haden again ruled that the removal of mountain tops must stop and ordered the Corps of Engineers to stop issuing permits to the companies who had been dumping. It was a direct challenge to the Bush administration's new rule change that allowed such dumping. Judge Haden said it was "an obvious perversity of the Clean Water Act designed simply for the benefit of the mining industry." The judge's ruling stunned the Appalachian coal industry, which is a \$6.3 billion enterprise in West Virginia that employs 28,000 miners.

The administration insisted that its new rules protected the environment and that the judge's ruling would mean economic and social hardship for the region. Everybody knows it doesn't protect the environment, and it also doesn't spell economic ruin. Companies will still be able to mine coal, but they will have to do it in accordance with the Clean Water Act. This ruling will cost the companies more to do business and will reduce some of their profits. The coal companies aren't calling it quits; they're counting on another victory at the appeals level.

When Judge Haden hiked to Pigeon Roost and flew over the region's many mountaintop removal sites, he said, "The sites stood out among the natural wooded ridges as huge white plateaus. Debris filled the valleys which looked like massive artificially landscaped stair steps." The judge concluded that these harms could not be undone.

So now everybody is waiting; the huge strip mining machines are idling on the mountaintops ready to obliterate another West Virginia 'mountain mama' and another country road.