

Philosophers on Holiday

Philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday.--LW

Number 24
Winter, 2005

CAUTION

At Home

CAUTION

Tricksey Hobbitises

Corrinne Bedecarre describes her Lauderdale (Minnesota) Lair

My house is best described as... well, you try. It has a turret, a cat-slide roof, ecclesiastical carved interior details, plaster walls scored like stone, and a Being John Malkovitch room. It has sixties parquet floors, forties tile work, eighties carpeting and, alas, seventies linoleum in the bathroom. The solemn formal door chimes introduce one to the tiny cottage/castle/rectory entry. We've got beautiful handmade chandeliers and unfinished closets, hardwood floors and plywood shelves, hand-carved mantel and two dollars worth of tile on the hearth. Is it French country, is it British cottage, or is it sixties moderne? Is it quality handiwork or cheap construction? Is it beautifully designed or awkwardly put together? As you can see, the answer is "yes."

Normally reserved individuals walk into my house and start opening things. They can't help it. They immediately start noticing a key strategy of the builder: He was a storage fanatic. Nooks and crannies, check; hidden storage, check; extraneous shelves, check; locked, lined, five-foot deep cupboard high in the bedroom?; check; room under the stairs, check; room under the turret, check; tie-racks, bolt jars, pants racks, check. Two activists lived in this house with a series of student boarders/groundskeepers upstairs and I am telling you the storage is not to be believed. When viewing the house I actually pulled a plank out of the paneling because I thought it was yet another secret panel. I was one plank over. The realtor didn't even flinch. I have dismantled the 10 by 10 extra storage shed (with electricity!) because the backyard is 30 by 30 and if I fill up the house enough to get to the shed, I will be certifiable. If anyone is looking for a dismantled piano-I have most of one in the stand-up storage area over the office and garage. By the way, you know the answer to the question "But is there good kitchen storage?" Of course not. The linen closet is 5 inches deep. This house has miles of semi-convenient storage. But if the apocalypse comes 2 families easy can hide unnoticed. They just won't be able to reach their dishes.

Every space was filled when I looked at the house, which is why I could afford it. People I brought with me to see the place would start out smiling and visibly sag inside the living room. The family had taken everything out of the storage spots and the other properties to be packed. It was amazing, as in: like a maze. Moving trucks and two dumpsters later, I continue to find scraps and details of the former family members. My family actually gets kind of competitive about excavation finds. Just when I think we can't find anything else, we uncover 1968 "Buy Black" literature or a 40 year old stain removal chart. Old drivers' license (before photos), old box of Soviet matches, two envelopes of parakeet feathers and a menu to a 1930s ocean liner, or a wretched chaise mattress- Well, the mattress was being used as insulation in the eaves. Those Depression era people did not mess around. Every item in the house was left with its original receipt, owners' manual and warranty. Warranty? The garage door opener looks as if it opened the doors of Amelia Earhart's house. This thing has been past warranty for 50 years. But it is just like this house to have an old mechanism which has been serviced and works fine.

Hobbit House, p.4

From the Editors

Greetings from the state of Connecticut. We have taken up residence in an extremely cute and historic house in Mansfield Center while Peg is spending the year at the University of Connecticut Humanities Institute. We've been thinking a lot about houses and home owning these last several years, and we finally decided that we needed to have an issue dedicated to home living. So welcome to *Philosophers on Holiday: The Home Edition*. This issue is full of treats from our stable of contributors. Barb the Brief and Jay the Web Guy offer up their household rules in axiomatic form. Abby Wilkerson offers an existential analysis of her identity as woman and homeowner. Corrinne Bedecarre, having decoded all the messages in a spam can, finds herself as the owner of a home once occupied by socialist hobbits, elves, and trolls. In honor of the house warming party for Abby Wilkerson and Pat McGann, your editors drew inspiration from Woody Guthrie to write "This House Is Your House." Don't be shy about singing along.

In travel/leaving home offerings, we have T. Michael McNulty on the dynamics of commuting in Washington DC. And from Gary Allen, an e-pistle on Fort Ticonderoga, Saratoga, and Benedict Arnold. Brita DeRemee (The

Vumann) and family head off for adventure in the family van.

As usual, your editors are concerned with food, both the good and the bad. On the good side, New Englanders Lisa Bergin and Claire Strader offer a whoopie pie recipe. Be sure to try this, and feel free to send samples to the editors. As a cautionary tale, Peg offers a reflection on the new menace on the baking scene: chronic underbaking. Lisa ruminates on the challenges and rewards of cooking in a nook-like kitchen.

We are also pleased to showcase a new 'zine, *Stair Case News*, edited by the young Mister Sten Taracks, who also features prominently in another contribution from the Vumman.

We are happy to report that this is the 24th issue. We have every expectation of publishing another twenty four and then another.... We are happy to receive submissions in any form. Hearing from you about your adventures and misadventures home and away is a great part of our joy in publishing this 'zine. We thank you for your continued support and submissions.

Philosophers on Holiday: A periodic peridocal

Editors Peg O'Connor and Lisa Heldke
Home Ruler Movie Reviewer Barb Heldke
Web Virtuoso Jay Benjamin
E-pistler Gary Allen
Frodo Handler Corrinne Bedecarre
Homebound Tourist Carol Heldke
Existential Homeowner Abby Wilkerson
Staff Commuter Mike McNulty
Phashion Philosopher Bruce Norelius
New England Culinary Experts Lisa Bergin,
Claire Strader
Staff Vumman Brita DeRemee
Tree Warden Landis Green
Muddy Pilgrim Linda Lopez McAlister

We borrow our motto from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein suggests that philosophical problems emerge when we forget how words function in ordinary circumstances. When language "goes on holiday," we *create* our own thorny, knotty problems—and then we proceed to chew on them for a thousand years or so.

Our 'zine was born out of our recognition that when philosophers *go* on holiday, we also tend to thrum up thorny little problems that keep us worrying all the way across Montana. Philosophers, unleashed in the ordinary world, are *dangerous*—or, at the very least, highly amusing. Of course on a good day, we can also be rather insightful. (Paying way too much attention to the ordinary *can* produce real wisdom every once in awhile.) *Philosophers On Holiday* attempts to bring all things philosophical and holiday-related together in one place; the danger, the amusement, the bumbling, and, yes, the occasional pearl of wisdom.

Find us on the web at <http://www.gustavus.edu/~poconnor>

Email to poconnor@gac.edu or heldke@gac.edu

Subscriptions Send your check, payable to Philosophers on Holiday, for \$10 for four issues. (Who knows? That may be a four-year subscription!)

Submissions We always welcome your essays, editorials, artwork, advertisements, photos, puzzles, letters, rants.

Direct all correspondence to *Philosophers on Holiday*, P.O. Box 354, St. Peter, MN 56082

CONCEIVING A HOUSE

A Minimal Look at Minimalism

Phashion Philosopher and Real-Live Architect Bruce Norelius bares, well, everything, in this reflection on the all of nothingness.

My obsession with minimalism stretches back to age seven. Our next door neighbors, the Tibodeaus, had been promoted and were moving to (seemingly glamorous) Omaha, and I was left staring at the Mayflower logo as it disappeared down the street, stuck in my same old life. Dull Saturday afternoons soon were occupied by the game of removing every item from my bedroom that I could physically manage. And then putting it all back. A psychoanalyst might have quickly gotten to the root of this little fantasy; I simply called it "Moving". Soon, I came to realize that the part I liked best about Moving was when my room was empty. It was serene, and seemed full of promise. Today, almost forty years later, I still have extremely positive feelings about beautiful empty living spaces.

Now, it seems, I'm not the only one. We're surrounded by images of sparse spaces, and minimalism has become a term that almost everyone understands and uses. (It's also used outside the realm of visual art and architecture, but that's another topic.) As an architect, virtually every client I've worked with in the last five years has taken an unsolicited stand on this concept.

How did a term used in art criticism in the 1960s describing common themes in an unrelated group of visual artists come to affect how we think about our concept of home? I do know a little about it from a historical point of view. But it's the psychology of it that captivates me.

A few aspects of our intrigue with minimalism are so obvious as to barely deserve mention. Our lives are extremely hectic, we're stressed, and we're burdened by our possessions. We see images of bare apartments which are as alluring as attractive thin models. Emptiness, as thinness, represents freedom from wanting. In our media-saturated lives, minimalism is as much a designer label as Prada. However, I believe there is true substance and authenticity here as well. Here are just three characteristics of architectural minimalism that suggest its complexity:

Meaning. For some, all historical and cultural meaning has been wrung out of every traditional

pitched roof, fluted column, palladian window, paneled door, brass light and pedimented clock. These references are comforting to some and stifling to others. Details of ornament are each imbedded with traditions of style and craftsmanship that come from someone and somewhere, far from right-here-right-now. One line of reasoning may find it as incongruous to build a house with colonial details as it is to wear colonial clothing or adopt colonial morals. In minimalist architecture, there is a sense that the slate has been washed clean, and the form comes from pragmatic desire rather than cultural reference: light, space, protection from the elements, and simple accommodation of daily needs.

Materiality. Typically in minimalist architecture, authenticity is sought in the materials used. Materials are chosen for their particular character and are finished in a manner that enhances their natural traits. As with the only-cotton-and-wool crowd, there may be a bit of both pragmatism and snobbery in this methodology. Certainly the quality of good, natural materials is part of the appeal. They last, and they tend to patina nicely as they're used. Additionally, a large percentage of minimalist spaces are in renovated mundane old buildings, whose cracked concrete and rust stains are left as part of the new material palette.

Theatre. The rejection of historical and cultural meaning and the insistence on material honesty does not mean minimalism denies the messy drama of life. This, perhaps, is what intrigues me the most: the raw expectancy of these spaces. They allow our everyday lives to be just a bit mythically heroic because they don't nurture us in a cozy, traditional manner. From Homer: "When primal Dawn spread on the eastern sky/ her fingers of pink light, Odysseus' true son/ stood up, drew on his tunic and his mantle,/ slung on a swordbelt and new-edged sword,/ tied his smooth feet into good rawhide sandals,/ and left his room, a god's brilliance upon him."¹ In the emptiness of these spaces, there is a suggestion of performance potential. Rather than reinforcing the primal womb-like spatial archetypes identified by Gaston Bachelard (nests, shells, corners, etc.),² minimalism

The House that Liz Built

From the archives comes this gem, penned by a fifth grade Lisa. What a loss that she chose philosophy over structural engineering.

I am Professor Elizabeth Wicky Wacky. Everyone thought I was silly when I said I was going to design a household that was simpler to operate. I've done it, and the plan is going over big!

First I'll explain the kitchen, that's the most important part.¹ All over the carpeted floor is a special magnet that attracts dust so you won't have to sweep. One wall is all buttons that tell what they're for. If you press a button marked steak, in five minutes you will get a piping hot steak. If you press the button marked table, the table is set, push the button marked dishes, and the dishes are done.

Also downstairs is the living room-dining room combination. This has a partition that comes down to separate the living room from the dining room. It has all inflatable furniture that cannot be popped. Also in the dining room is the dining table. Up on the ceiling is a panel that comes down by pressing a button which makes the pulleys let the table down.

Now up to the bedroom. When you want to make a bed you press a button. When you press the second button, the bed folds into the wall and cannot be seen.

The dresser drawers are opened by picking up knick-knacks or setting them down. All this space is left for the children to play in. There is a trampoline that comes out of the ceiling by pulleys and there is an automatic toy-picker-upper that has a mechanical arm attached to a box.

Outside is the same except there is no garage. The car hovers² around the house, and when you want to drive it you put in the special key that only you have. Now do you see why people said it couldn't be done?

1. Ed note: please forgive the comma splice.

2. Yep, hovers; it beats as it sweeps as it cleans.

Minimal, continued

focuses action away from the edges and toward stage center. Everyday life is elevated, and it begs to be rediscovered each morning.

Considering one's attitude about minimalism requires a focus on physical surrounding that may seem indulgent to some. Nevertheless, I'm convinced minimalism responds to specific and substantial elements of our psyches. Minimalist spaces can contain a spirit of vibrancy not easily found elsewhere.

Besides, when you're ready for that fresh start, remember that getting rid of everything you own is a lot easier than moving.

1. Homer, *The Odyssey*. Translation by Robert Fitzgerald. Doubleday & Company, 1961
2. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. Beacon Press, 1969.

(The author would really, honestly enjoy hearing what, if anything, you readers think about minimalism. Write to him: norelius@elliottelliottnorelius.com)

CONCEIVING A HOUSE

Hobbit House, continued

Turning on a light switch is like playing a harpsichord or following a bee's path. The man produced flawless plaster work and erratic/impressive electrical connections. For a house going into its sixties, it has the amount of outlets required in a new office building. Several of them are keyed to light switches-but which ones? After 2 years, I approach the many 4-plex switches with a 40% chance of hitting the correct one. I am improving a lot.

Casa Quirky is hobbit style. Everything is just a little smaller than one might think. But there are many small spaces. When wandering around the house looking for storage, people sometimes get disoriented. Guests regularly will call "Where am I?" and we'll ask them to describe what it looks like there. Others will be confident until they try and figure out how the parts are connected: "When I was in the breezeway I was looking into a room-where is that?" At every meal, new guests will get up to double check how something is oriented. But if they want to know the temperature they are in luck. A person cannot walk 15 feet without a temperature update. I meditated on the two thermostats in the narrow hallway: they were technologically advanced; did they really think each wall would have a different reading? Then I realized one was Celsius and the other Fahrenheit. You may not know where you are or how to get to the other side but you will have a thermometer at the ready.

After seeing this place, I was ruined for other houses. This one retains the strong impression of its building family and yet invites new ideas. It is a house which inhabits while it is inhabited. Tricksey Hobbitses, indeed.



OWNING A HOUSE

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a homeowner”

Abby Wilkerson takes a break from sheetrocking to pen this rumination on homeowner Angst.

Had Simone de Beauvoir purchased a house in the suburbs, her most famous book¹ might have begun with this line, and she might never have inspired the second wave of the women's movement. Rather than hanging out in those cafes in turtlenecks and black berets drinking red wine and smoking Gauloises with the other French existentialists, she would surely have given serious thought to the identity *homeowner*, a being or more precisely a condition of human existence that is a walloping roller coaster ride of existential crises and ch-ch-changes. Talk about condemned to freedom: the fact that there is now no one to stop you from lining the walls with peacock feathers if you want is both the good news and the bad news.

I have learned this and more since my partner and I bought our first house (as if this were going to be a series!) last summer. I was not prepared for the radical alterations of subjectivity I would experience. These are frightening to the extreme, in ways best expressed by David Sedaris when Real Estate Brain overtook him on his visit to Anne Frank's apartment in Amsterdam: “I thought the room beside the kitchen might be my office, but then I saw the attic, with its charming dormer windows, and the room beside the kitchen became a little leisure nook.”²

Where the existentialists came closest to dealing with life as homeowner was in their discussions of the struggle to death with the Other. I most often encounter this in the endless aisles of Home Despot as I search for some hitherto unknown, completely obscure but now utterly necessary object, one upon which not only my immediate project but the very Lifeblood of the House depends. In the first days of homeownership this need recurred every few hours; now, months later, only several times a week. In fact, it was in these very aisles that I discovered to my dismay that, just as I had become a woman and a homeowner, I had become another animal altogether, a *homeowning woman*.

No one would really characterize me as the girliest girl on the block. (Well, considering my neighbors, maybe on this block, but not most blocks.) Short hair, no makeup, my standard uniform an ensemble that could generously be called casual. Despite having grown up in West Texas, I could not make sense of the phrase “you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar” until well into adulthood, when it became a useful tool for decoding certain puzzling behaviors of other women. This distance from standard

expectations for my sex made me scoff at the idea of womanhood having any essence. But new and disturbing realities began to assert themselves one day at the evil hardware empire when my partner and I had between us clocked roughly 10 miles not including backtracking as we hunted for yet another desperately necessary item. Clearly, it was time for the dreaded confrontation with a clerk, which could only occur after successfully tracking one down and persuading him or her to stand still, face me, and engage in at least some rudimentary form of communication, a task that has brought down many a far more worthy homeowner than I could ever aspire to be.

After several implosions with curses emanating silently from my ears and nostrils in the form of highly combustible blue gases, eight or nine terse exchanges with my partner, a series of plans to split up, perhaps for good but certainly for the next 10 minutes, and yet another hopeless rendezvous set for yet another aisle, I Found My Clerk. Don't act too desperate, I cautioned myself, don't scare him away. Next thing I knew, a bright and chipper voice issued from the vicinity of my head and I was winking and grinning like a mechanical monkey in the hands of a manic child. *I was, yes, flirting with a Home Despot homunculus*. This was what my life had come to.

I no longer remember what that elusive object was or the outcome of my struggle to extract information from the orange-vested Other, like Jacob wrestling for the Angel's blessing.³ What I learned, of course, is what every homeowner knows but no one can tell you: the horror of confronting the Other is that he is the talking (or not) mirror that shows in most unflattering terms that you are Not Worthy. And here is the unsettling impression you are left with: the evil empire he speaks for is not just a giant corporation but your very own house. How does one persist in the face of crushing despair? Here at least our French philosophical forebears are quite practical. Drink a lot of red wine (although not where there's carpet) and smoke a lot of Gauloises (in well-ventilated spaces). Perhaps it's time to ask yourself why they all spent so much time in cafes.

1. *The Second Sex*.
2. *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim*
3. Wrestling for Blessings would be a good name for a band.

House Rules

The Brief and the Web Guy teamed up on the occasion of Abby and Pat's new home purchase, to provide some expert words of advice about home ownership. We found them so helpful, we thought we'd pass them on to you. If you're a renter, read with a smirk.

Rule #1: There are no problems that just "go away." If you have an intermittent or even one time "issue-ette," assume it will grow into a full-blown crisis at the worst possible moment. Usually at night in a rainstorm.

Corollary 1.1: Date a plumber and an electrician if at all possible. Simultaneously and together. Shop for an electrician who plumbs. Preferably buff.

Corollary 1.2: Always clip the "home handyman" coupon from the paper and put it in a safe place.

Rule #2: There are GOOD WEEDS. Find them and teach them to eat the BAD WEEDS. They are much more friendly to your goal (which is to do something in your life other than manage your house) than grass and don't require such toxic chemicals to manage. Some of them grow "short" naturally, reducing the number of gas-guzzler hours you need to experience.

Rule #3: Luddites Rule - if you can do it by hand, it's the best way. On top of helping with pollution (air and noise), it exercises your body and cuts down on accidental removals of appendages on your/other people's bodies.

Rule #4: Now that you have a house, buy the BIG PACKAGE of anything that doesn't spoil. It's one of the chief reasons to buy a house. If you have a basement, buy TWO BIG PACKAGES of anything that doesn't spoil. Preferably on sale.

Rule #5: Always have a book that explains how to do everything you might want to do in your house. Read the book incessantly and then hire someone to do the actual work. It will not be nearly as hard on your body.

Corollary #5.1: Independent wealth comes in handy for this rule; take a dollar a week and play the lottery.

Corollary #5.2: (Peg's corollary): Or derive home repair techniques from first principles.

Corollary #5.3: (Barb's Passion): Browse hardware stores the way you browse bookstore; indeed replace two book-browsing ventures per month with hardware store foraging. When you vacation, always try out at least one (preferably Main St./downtown/old-style) hardware store before you go out to dinner the first evening in a new place. When you actually need to purchase something in a hardware store, put on your "intelligent but needy" damsel in distress personae.

Corollary #5.4 (water cooler gambit): Strike up conversations about small plumbing and building projects the way you

discuss movies you've seen and politicians you loathe. Wear a small tape recording device in your pocket to capture ideas and helpful hints that are freely given by those you interrogate.

Corollary #5.5: Study "house management lingo". Learn to use the term "channel locks" casually. "Lolly columns" is another good word to toss in to sound knowledgeable. Use your hardware store visits as a way to acquire new words and use them to charm out more recommendations from those in the know.

Rule #6: Target is good; WalMart is bad. Study the fliers in the Sunday paper and buy EVERYTHING you actually use but only when it is on sale.

Corollary #6.1: Buy as many boxes/bins/storage cases as you can in a variety of "decorator models"—some of these can double as chairs or, for small children, beds.

Corollary #6.2: Never go into Target when orange things are seasonal. There are too many orange things in the world already.

Rule #7 - Bruce's Rule: Collect pictures of things you like. For years and years. Look at them regularly and once you have liked the same thing for more than 10 years, buy a book about buying these items and read it "without ceasing" for 2 more years and then consider buying the item. If you still like it after 12 years, it may actually be good for you.

Corollary #7.1: Store these items in:

- a. a tidy book with an index or (for the more adventurous homeowner)
- b. folders and piles all over the house so that when you KNOW you have a picture that is just right for whatever you need to buy, you can't possibly find it.

Corollary #7.2 (Seriously - this is actually an interesting project): I use option b of corollary 7.1 and frequently find stashes of interesting pictures and think - God! I still like all this stuff - whatever does that mean?

Rule #8: Don't try to do more than the truly crucial things the first year. You have no idea what you want in your house until you break it in. If it's already "broken," you do need to fix those things.

Corollary #8.1: Never clean out the light switch orifices when you are home alone using a metal screwdriver. Actually, this is a rule, not a corollary.

This House is Your House

Abby's home purchase also inspired this song, penned by your faithful editors for the housewarming party. All rights reserved. ASCAP.

Chorus:
This house is your house
This house is my house
Okay it's the bank's house
But it lets us live here
You can't evict us
So we have to fix stuff
This house belongs to you and me.

I roam and ramble
And I follow the turn lanes
To the gleaming halls of
The big Home Depot
I scan down long aisles
Where is that orange smock?
This store could use a clerk or three.
(Chorus)

With the clogging toilet
And the flooding basement
Good we got insurance
Did we get full replacement?
Did the lights just flicker
Or are you gaslighting me?
This house came with no guarantee
(Chorus)

With an infestation
Of a million creatures,
Whose furry legs are among
Their better features
I thumb yellow pages
To find a vermin-ator
This house belongs to pests and me.
(Chorus)

As I was signing
That ribbon of papers
All that I saw there
Gave me the vapors
I saw before me
An endless mortgage payment
This house someday belongs to me
(Chorus, two times)

Corollary #8.2: Learn about the critical systems in your house, write down what you understand, and practice "doing" whatever it is that you will have to do in an emergency.

Corollary #8.3: There are regularly scheduled emergencies but no one will give you the schedule. Murphy holds it.

Corollary #8.4: Always fix water and electrical problems as soon as you find out about them. See also Rule #1.

Corollary #8.5 (Lisa's rule): Never store the fire extinguisher in its box in the closet.

Rule #9: Assume that "household aerobics" actually count as real aerobics and (seasonally) don't beat yourself up about not getting to the gym or out on the bike/track/whatever you do to stay fit. A good snowstorm or rock digging exercise IS exercise and you can have cookies immediately after the tasks. After lawn mowing you can have ice cream. It's a rule.

Rule #10: You can have too many vacuuming and cleaning devices but it is hard. Try to determine (by reading your serious friend's lists of house learning) the tools that you actually USE and buy a good one. Use Martha's rules about keeping your tools clean and well sharpened (if appropriate). They will last a long time.

Rule #11: Find a way to get on your roof safely and practice that. It's a great place to think and survey the kingdom and there's frequently something that needs doing up there.

Rule #12: You will never be able to remember your parents spending so much time "fixing things that are always breaking/needing replacement", but they did. Unfortunately, they didn't write a book(let) and give it to you.

Corollary 12.1 (O'Connor Exemption): Peg remembers her father swearing for a long time and her mother banning him from trying to fix anything after he used the monkey wrench on the shower head to no good purpose. Consider the name of this device - are YOU a monkey? If not, do not wrench.

Rule #99: Remember, the House Rules! You are just the serf!



INSIDE THE HOUSE

The Hometown Tourist Stays Home

Just weeks after her eightieth birthday, Mom Carol discovered the reason for her excruciating back and leg pain....

The assignment said "write about being at home." What else is there to write about, when that is where I've been—morning, noon and night—for a full month?! To make a long story short, I have a new hip! First I walked on the old one for two months while it was fractured and I consulted every medic our community had to offer. Nothing found, so being a professional volunteer I just consulted my calendar and kept going. It had to stop, and it did, in a night of extreme pain when any sensible person would have put their poor aching body in the hands of professionals, leaned back and enjoyed the thrill of medication by morphine while the blood numbers got right for surgery. All this happened while most folks were singing Christmas carols and hanging wreaths on the front door.

Surgery took place successfully—with a few hallucinations that are still being laughed about. On the fourth day the Doctor himself says "you can go home tomorrow." I wasn't ready to go home, I had a house full of family doing things I didn't know about to my house—like moving everything they could lift and storing up a freezer full of stuff that had a lot of beans in it. I wanted to stay in the hospital and be a patient. I went home!

It was fine; throw rugs all out of the way so the blasted walker could find its way around the circle when I got around to doing my Therapy. A cute little Christmas tree up and decorated, lots of loving attention.

Now what day was it? What week? Never mind what month. I had no clue about time, except if it was time for some schedule of pills. A lot of pills for awhile. The pain pills made me itch and have crazy dreams so I skipped them fairly often. People called; being a volunteer gives you lots of friends, friends call and send cards. The amount of mail was amazing and wonderful.

Entertaining, even visiting becomes tiring when you don't feel a hundred percent; guests usually came about 3:30 to 4:00, when you are most ready for a nap or TV show. I haven't seen Jeopardy for a month. I wonder if they miss me?

I've settled into a routine of saying NO to most things I may have been busy with "pre-hip." I find it easier than expected. I try to do the required therapy each day. It takes two of us to get my clothes on; socks are hard when you can't bend down. The Grabber or reacher is a valuable tool, and with patience you can pick up lint, if you want to.

I see a storehouse of things I can do in my own home when I feel a hundred percent; things I haven't noticed before. Maybe I won't care so much about some things after I can resume a few Out of House chores.

Meantime, tomorrow is the first day for a month I must get up to keep an appointment in the morning and it is to see the doctor who did the surgery. I truly hope his report is good and he releases me to get out when the weather is nice. I'm not anxious to drive; I have had first rate home care in the form of a husband who can and will do anything.

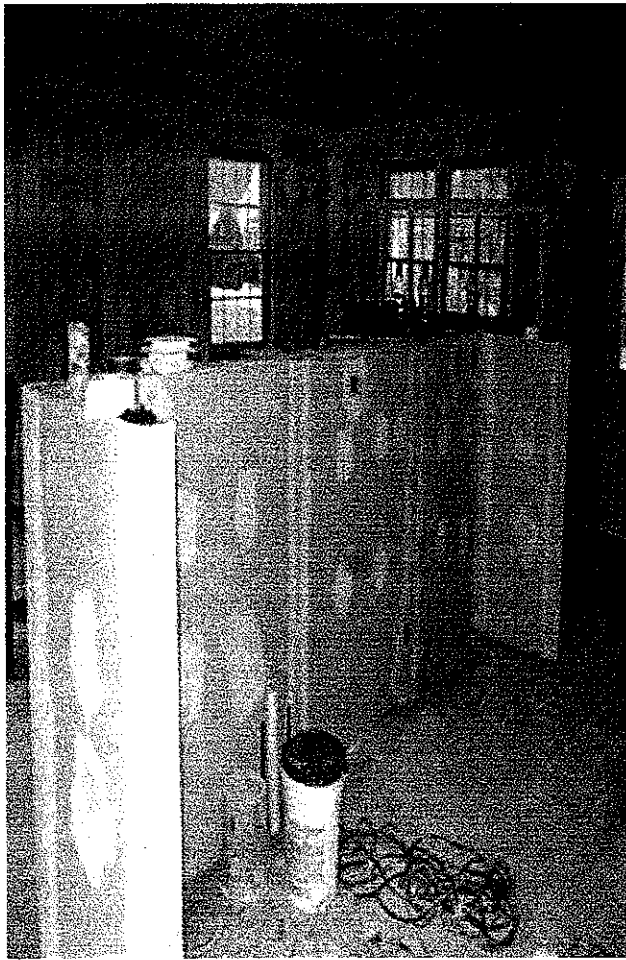
But prepare for a couple more stories in the future; getting a new hip is a "broad topic!"

HOUSEHOLD ICONS

It only stands to reason that a medieval hobbit house would have its own icons. Corrinne describes her little altars everywhere.

Sometimes a crab is not just a crab. At our house several objects have taken on iconic status: Crabby, Buddha, and Voltron, Defender of the Universe. Crabby is a hard red-orange plastic crab about 12 inches across. Bought for unknown reasons, it resides on the edge of tub. But one set of cousins/pranksters began popping Crabby inside the sheets so that someone would slip into bed and shoot out squealing upon contact. Hilarity ensued. That particular group upped the ante to include all number of household ideas in our reverse princess and the pea story. But for some odd reason people of all ages will carry Crabby around the house. Cleaning the couch one day I found him sliding into the works. On the floor, on the bed, in the fruit bowl with the oranges: currently Crabby has spent a stint on the living room window as a complement to the Holiday lights. Braced on the middle of the sash windows, Crabby is remarkably festive and the first thing anyone notices. Crabby is not destined to remain anywhere long and is due for a new placement.

Voltron is a 15 inch plastic figure found at the garage sale. Naturally I thought it was a cool generic robotic figure. Dorothy knew better and immediately grabbed it up. When my nephew Alden walked in the room I realized that Voltron needed pride of place. Brought out of obscurity he is activated by attention. When the right people are over he continues to defend the universe. Everybody apparently recognized the beloved Voltron, except me. Last is a statue of the chubby Buddha to come with a lovely smile and flowing but open robes. Only 7 inches



Our Maine kitchen. There's a bit left to do...

high Buddha is shown in the Western-style sitting position with one foot in lotus and one more extended but bent. When my cousins showed up for a visit with Playdoh, Buddha became Barbie. We began with French Buddha. You can't imagine how one beret transforms a figure so. Cowboy Buddha had the hat and lariat. Gal Pal Buddha was not far behind—those exposed nipples were screaming for a halter. Yellow braids can really create an eastern Heidi-effect not easily forgotten. When young niece Sophia was over this summer she focused on his hands. McBuddha holding a remarkably realistic large order of fries has been the most enduring image. That orange and yellow hat super sized his enlightenment. Obviously Buddha was jealous of Crabby's Christmas success. Even the Buddha must extinguish desire. But Ellen's friend Rachel put the crustacean to shame with her Santa Buddha. A little cotton beard and red hat looks so sweet with the holly garland. Perhaps it was inevitable that for Christmas, Buddha received a clay Crabby.

Life at the Dinner Table

Brita DeRemee, Staff Vumman, sends the following post from Inside the Perimeter. She notes of the following conversation: "Sten is 10, Roland is 8 and Arthur is 6, and most "dinner conversations" revolve around how icky the food is and who's eaten what yet and that Beulah the dog should not be invited to join in."

Last night in bed Sten waxed on about our technological progress and its effects on nature, how we're getting more computerized, but forgetting that we're destroying the earth and animal habitats as we go.

Tonight at dinner Sten announced that he wanted to continue this conversation, that he thought we should all discuss and think about these issues. So he opened with the topic and went on for a few minutes. His brothers gave him their undivided attention.

A few minutes later, Roland sighed. He sighed again and smiled, squinting as he does to preface his rising speech. "You know what? Hmmm... I just wonder about Life... I mean what is it to be alive... why are we Alive?... You know, I think about why I am alive and how I am Alive... I mean, what is Life?"

To which Arthur snickered, "it's a cereal!"



From the pen of Barb the Brief, it's...

The Five Senses of Home Ownership

If you SMELL anything Funny, INVESTIGATE

If you SEE Dirt, Clutter or Broken Things,
DO SOMETHING about it

If you HEAR Creaks in boards, Mice in the Walls,
CHECK IT OUT

If you FEEL like you Can't Afford "it", WAIT

If your water TASTES Weird, DON'T SWALLOW

And the Sixth Sense?

If you "SEE Dead People", MOVE!

OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

A Tree Falls

But, be your opinion never so true, yet surely you will not deny it is shocking, and contrary to the common sense of men. Ask the fellow whether yonder tree hath an existence out of his mind: what answer think you he would make? —Hylas to Philonous in Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous, George Berkeley

Landis Green writes: I'm not really a tree person. I'm not against trees, mind you, or even apathetic about trees; I just don't think about them much. That's not to say I didn't like the large, old birch tree in the front yard of my first house at 2322 West 14th Street. That snow-covered birch wasn't the REASON I bought the house that January, but I'm sure it added something. That's why I wasn't so happy about taking it down a few months after settlement.

Within days of my moving in and with what seemed a little too much satisfaction on his part, my new neighbor at 2320 said, "That tree's dead, ya' know." Thanks. Thanks a lot. Nice to meet you, too.

So, ever-respectful of my new block of neighbors—my first me-as-the-homeowner-and-not-a-renter-or-Ralph-and-Doris's-son-experience—I called a Tree Care Expert and asked him to look at the tree and tell me if there was any way to save it. His response—again, a little more satisfied that I would've preferred—was, "Nope. That tree's dead. Most definitely dead." I asked about cost of removal and chipping and all the usual questions that a person who's never had a tree removed before would ask. The Tree Care Expert explained that he often worked in my neighborhood and would simply swing by one afternoon, take the tree down, chip it, and leave a bill stuck in the door.

Easy.

Weeks passed, of course, as any experienced homeowner could've predicted. One sunny Thursday afternoon, I turned the corner on my street, happy with my job, my house, my life. There It was. No escaping It. My dead birch tree stood proudly among a bursting-with-new-life Wilmington spring and, at 2324, where a healthy forty-year-old plum tree had stood, was a small pile of wood chips.

Words can not express.

I'm not often speechless, nor am I known to shy away from conflict. At that moment, however, driving down my street on that bright spring day, I honestly thought, more passively than ever been before or since, "What if I just kept driving...." What, I thought, could I possibly say to the people who owned 2324 West 14th Street?

Sorry? It wasn't my fault? You should've baked me a cake when I moved in?

So, I parked, ran into my house (past the proud, dead birch tree I might add), and called the Tree Care Expert, leaving a F-R-A-N-T-I-C message that went something like this: "If you think you took down MY tree today, you are sorrowfully mistaken. Something awful has happened. Please call me back the minute you get this message." Then I heard the dogs at 2324 West 14th Street barking, welcoming home their owners after a long day at work.

Drinking crossed my mind, but I decided staying sober was best.

I walked next door, rang the bell, and was greeted by the owner, who was on the phone—with the police, no doubt. I mumbled something about "I'm SOOOOOO sorry...never thought this could've happened...I'll replace the tree..." when she said, "What? We've been wanting that tree down for years. Those plums fall and rot and stink up the whole block. They (*THEIR* Tree Care Experts) were supposed to cut it down weeks ago."

Oh.

Gratified(?), I went home to receive the call from MY Tree Care Expert, who hadn't been in my neighborhood at all that day, the day I joined—albeit more silently than some—my other neighbors on West 14th Street, full of hopeless rage at the removal of that proud, old plum tree.

Landis lives in Bangor, Maine, where he is Head of School at the John Bapst School, and where he tries very, very hard to be a good neighbor.

Weeding

Lisa writes (*Summer, 2003*): Every spring, about two weeks after all the town homeowners have raked the snow mold out of their yards, picked up the various organic and inorganic things that accumulated under the drifts that winter, and begun to poison the dandelions that are already flowering; two weeks after my neighbors in our country cul-de-sac have gotten out the heavy artillery to begin clearing the serious brush from the perimeters of their own lawns, I head out to weed our yard.

The winter will have been a long one, long enough for me to forget how large is our property, how quickly in the season it hatches a diversity of plants I cannot begin to identify. How soon it becomes hot in a southern Minnesota spring, how very, very early the mosquitoes hatch here. And how utterly, unbelievably *complex* the whole yard is.

It won't take long, that first time out, before I retreat to the house, defeated, or at least baffled, about what the heck I'm *doing*, and (more to the point) what the heck I *should* be

Weeding, p. 12

Commuting

T. Michael McNulty, SJ, who's been working with the International Jesuit Network for Development, takes us a bit further out of the house, in this musing on his daily commute.

For several months, I've often been a commuter on Washington, DC's Metrorail. I take the Red Line from Dupont Circle (where I live) to Brookland/CUA (where I work).

The neighborhood I live in is multi-ethnic with a vengeance. It is on the edge of Adams-Morgan, certainly as interesting and varied a neighborhood as one would find in any city in the world. I live on New Hampshire Avenue, in a Jesuit community called Leonard Neale House [I haven't a clue who Leonard Neale was], a large mansion that has seen better days (I live in the servants' quarters on the third floor). Our location is in a kind of minor "embassy row," distinguished from the real embassy row on Massachusetts Avenue by the size of the countries represented: Namibia, the Kingdom of Swaziland, Nicaragua, Belarus, and the Montenegrin trade delegation [it's not really an embassy, but would like to be—right now Montenegro is federated with Serbia]. A couple of blocks down on the way to the Metro I walk past a large stone triangular building with barred windows that has something to do with the Masons [I have no idea what—they are a secret society, after all].

Parenthetically, for some reason there are a number of ginkgo biloba trees in the neighborhood. [In case you didn't know, the ginkgo biloba is the only surviving member of the order *ginkgoales*. There's probably a reason for that.] Stepping on their fruit is an experience not unlike stepping in dogshit, complete with the smell and what you track into the house. Why anyone would voluntarily plant such a tree anywhere near human habitation is one of those questions to which we may never get a satisfactory answer.

One gets to the train mostly by riding very long escalators (the one by Dupont Circle is so long you'd swear that you could encounter magma at the bottom). My experience is that at one end or the other, every day, at least one escalator is "under repair." Then there are the train operators, who announce the stations: you'd be surprised how many different ways there are to pronounce "Judiciary Square": "ju-dish-i-ary"; "ju-dish-u-ary" [the Bush 43 "nuc-u-lar" school]; "ju-dish-ur-ary"; "ju-dish-ary." There are a number of other variations, but they're too subtle to represent in print. There is also a recorded message: "Please stand clear of the doors - thank you." For most of the time that message has been delivered in a completely affect-free female voice. But recently Metrorail has been tweaking things a bit: "Please [slight note of exasperation] stand clear of the doors [a hint of acid] - Thank you [idiots!]."

One becomes aware of a lot of foibles of commuters.

For instance, people will push their way onto a train that is already packed like a sardine can, even though they know that there is another train coming in two minutes that will be mostly empty.

Then there's Dwayne. Dwayne is a train operator in the morning with a mellifluous voice ["This is Metrorail in the morning; you all have a great day!"] He reminds me of Ron Cuzner, former host of a Jazz program on the classical fm station in Milwaukee from midnight to six am ["It's twelve o'clock in Henry's city, and this is the *Dark* side of *Tuesday*."] One morning when the Metro was running late, Dwayne assured the passengers, "Dwayne's on the job, working to get you where you need to be as soon as possible. But if you're late for work, don't worry about it. Just tell your boss it was all Dwayne's fault. I can take the heat."

Arriving at the other end of the commute, I enter a neighborhood called Brookland, named for Colonel Jehiel Brooks, who had a farm here in the 1840's. Col. Brooks Tavern is one of the better eating places in DC. It couldn't be more different from the neighborhood I come from. Brookland is mixed-race but predominantly African-American, with a strong sense of neighborhood identity. When you get off the Metro there are people standing at the top of the escalator passing out copies of *DC Express* (a free paper) and repeating at breakneck speed "Good morning! Have a *great* day!" to everyone who passes. I think the idea is to greet absolutely *everybody* who comes off the train.

Commuting on public transportation gives you a whole other take on the relation between work and home. For a significant part of your day, your fate is in the hands of others, whose *job*, amazingly, is to connect your home and your work life. It involves a healthy trust and reliance on the deeds of others—and sometimes suffering a common fate with a group of strangers when things break down. After 30 years in academia, it is for me a refreshing reconnection with the world of the concrete [no pun intended].

Dear Reader,

Did you find an envelope inside your issue? That means you're due to renew (or perhaps to subscribe for the *very first time!!!*). Just head to the back cover, where you'll find a handy subscription form.

And remember, just ten crisp one dollar bills buys you four big, big issues.

Love, Your Editors

Weeding, continued

doing out there. What is it again that I set out to “weed?” What is it I’m trying to achieve? What is our yard supposed to “be?”

My neighbors out here in this wooded housing development have lawns. They’re bigger than the town lawns, and they’re bordered by brushy woods instead of curb and gutter, but Kentucky bluegrass (or whatever the favored lawn grass is these days) is still the primary crop on these residential fields.

These neighbors don’t seem very confused about what they’re doing, and they know darn well what they’re trying to achieve; namely, a uniform, weed-free, lush green lawn, like the kind pictured on their bag of lawn fertilizer. They may mull over which varieties of hostas to plant in the garden beds under their oak trees, they may grind their teeth over the iris that just don’t seem to be doing well in their new location, they may check the book to see whether potatoes can be planted where they had the tomatoes last year in the vegetable plot. And they may well agonize quite a long time about just how much they’re willing to invest in that green lawn, just how many chemical boosts they’re willing to give it to ensure its preeminence. Most people who want a lawn don’t want it at absolutely *any* price, environmental or financial.

But my neighbors’ worries and questions are questions about how to achieve something they can clearly envision. Indeed, they’re surrounded by images of their goal, on the fertilizer bags and the pesticide commercials, in their friends’ yards, and even in the fields of soybeans and corn that lie just to the west of our little cluster of houses. Given all these examples, it’s not too difficult to *picture* a lawn, never mind how difficult it might be to *achieve* it.

To my knowledge, we don’t have any Kentucky bluegrass in our yard. If we do, it arrived by accident from a neighbor’s lawn, courtesy of some bird or gust of wind, and it’s fighting to get a toehold alongside the other aliens that are flourishing there. Our two-and-a-half acres of “outdoors” (what *do* you call such a place?) is mostly a tangled jumble of woods (cedars, young maples and giant old oaks, heavily laced with sumac, grapevine, and about sixteen different trees-and-bushes-with-thorns-and-thistles) and meadow-y patches (small outposts of native grasses and flowers we’ve planted, surrounded by a whole lot of other stuff we haven’t). To describe this space as a work in progress would be a rather more generous interpretation than we deserve; if it is “a work” at all, it is one that is almost always almost completely out of our control.

For eight years now, I’ve been musing about that yard, trying to identify some set of governing principles around which I can organize my work, and some *telos* toward which

I can direct that work. I’m pretty clear about the models I reject. There’s the Lawn Model, which could also be called the home version of industrial agriculture, equipped as it is with its own monocultural “field crop,” its own intensive petrochemical inputs. (Indeed the reasons to reject this model might be said to begin and end with oil.) But I also refuse to buy (literally) the Return-the-Original-Prairie Model either—and not just because many advocates of this model begin their explanations with “First, spray the field with Round-Up®,” and continue “hire someone to come and do a controlled burn around your house every three years.”

During those eight years, I’ve also been reflecting about yard *work*. Just what is it for, anyway—creating beauty? (*Which* beauty? The beauty of a monocultural lawn or soybean field, or the beauty of a “native” prairie polyculture? Just what does the beauty of the mongrel that refuses both those choices look like?) Pest control? Habitat creation? (And how do I decide who’s a pest, and to whom I want to offer habitat?) Fire prevention? (Wouldn’t one wise fire preventive measure be “just say no to controlled burns next to a wooden house?”)

And just how do you decide *which* work to do—how do you *really* operationalize the model to which you’ve committed yourself? Does it mandate careful micro-management (getting rid of every buckthorn tree the minute it pokes its head out of the ground, for instance)? Does it require high levels of knowledge (knowledge of the nature and habits of every one of the countless plants, for instance)? Does it necessitate significant amounts of labor (such that quitting one’s day job IS the only reasonable solution)?

Do these sound like philosopher’s questions, rather than horticultural questions? Alas, they are. But for all their abstractness, they are also the questions of a philosopher who is sincerely attempting to bring her abstractions to the ground, literally. And in her defense, she must observe that, unlike the lawn, her model doesn’t come with many accompanying pictures.

I’ve been reading Wendell Berry lately. Berry tends to humble anyone who is attempting to get to know their yard. Berry DOES seem to know the names of all the plants in his yard—and in his fields, his woods, and every other micro-landscape he owns as well. I admire that knowledge tremendously—and I know I’m not about to do the work to acquire it for myself.

I always set out on my first yard expedition with what I believe are the clearest of intentions, for the winter has *also* been long enough for me to develop several new overarching conceptual schemes that will govern my future work in the yard. These schemes are nothing so functional as a map of

the yard and a five-year work plan for its development. Rather, they are sets of abstract principles upon which I propose to *base* all future work in the yard—my own Prolegomena to any Future Lawn Work, Taken as a Science, you might say.

This year, for instance, the governing principle was “we aren’t trying to restore a native prairie landscape here; we’re just trying to create some kind of balance that will keep the ‘aliens’ in check and make it look reasonable.” Of course weeks into the project, it founders on the reef of reasonableness; just what *does* reasonable look like?

Last year, the governing plan actually led to a concrete action: we decided to put woodchips down on the septic field. This area, right near the house, has been the locus of much of my angst over these last eight years, because I see it every day when I get in the car to go to work. (In contrast, I only see that really scary viney thing with the half-inch-long spikes when I venture out into the woods to *look* for trouble.) I’ve experimented—and failed—with various strategies on this patch. There was the year I put down straw. (I forget now why. But I haven’t forgotten the results, because I’m still working to eradicate them; masses of thistle, whose gorgeous purple flowers I casually allowed to go to seed that year, and nettle—and yes, I know that every part of this plant is chock full of wonderful nutrients.) There was the year I planted mint to try to combat the thistles and the nettle (with remarkable success, I might add!) There was the year we hired a prairie professional, who came out and said “well, first we’ll spray the area with Round-Up, and then every two years we’ll come out and do a burn....”

We’re two years into the wood chip experiment, which is showing some limited success at smothering. (It would have shown more success if we’d been more careful how we put down the cardboard underneath, of course.)

I’m writing this from Maine, from the second story of an old colonial house in a tiny town on a bay. We’ve spent virtually all of the past five summers here, partly in order to escape the heat, humidity, mosquitoes and, well, yard work of the Midwest. As I describe our yard back home, though, I find myself homesick for its troubles, frustrated that I can’t go out and tend to some of them right now. But I know for a fact that this feeling would pass, after two hours in that mosquito-infested swamp. The spirit is willing, but this philosopher’s flesh is very weak. What does this say about me? Am I destined to be yet another theorist who never really can bring herself to live out her principles—like the bioregionalist who keeps moving from university to university, in search of better jobs?

Get Ready to Leave Home....

When you turn the page, you’ll be leaving the house, leaving the yard, leaving the neighborhood, heading out on the road with some of your favorite Phil on Hol writers. Before we set you loose to wander on your own, here’s a friendly warning about...

The Dangers of Mapquest

Peg writes: MapQuest can be a handy way to figure distances when beginning to plot the course of a trip. MapQuest gives a quick summary of the total distance and the estimated time. This basic information is useful, if only as a rough idea of how long a trip might take.

MapQuest supplies directions that are the most direct and utilize four lane roads where available. MapQuest defaults to the interstates. The only way around this is to plot several sub-courses from small town to small town. The danger in this approach is that you end up with multiple pages of directions that very quickly are out of proper order since they have been shoved inside the atlas. But I must confess to being more ready and able to handle the organization of several sets of MapQuest directions than the problems that the generic MapQuest directions present.

The problems with MapQuest are detail and perspective/magnification. MapQuest provides detail to an excruciating degree, beginning with how to leave my house. What is most disconcerting about MapQuest directions is that each instruction and distance is on par with every other. If I am turning right from my childhood home on Mt. Elam Road and traveling for 1/16th of a mile, that appears as one line of instruction. If I am merging onto Route 90 at a place where it is also several other routes, MapQuest can make it seem that I must first travel on these others before I officially merge onto Route 90 so that I might continue on it for 197 miles. Four lines of directions in order to merge, or so it seems to me.

In all the detail provided by MapQuest, I never know where I am. I have great difficulty in making the adjustment from MapQuest to my road atlas. I say to Lisa, “We’ll be on this interstate for 456 miles, but will we be in Ohio by then?” Of course I can get out a scrap of paper and mark it off, but that is difficult because you must remember exactly where you got on the highway however many states back. I also find myself unable to locate where I am supposed to be on the supplied directions. I may be three-quarters down the page of instruction, but still be in my hometown if what I will be then taking is an interstate for the next 460 miles. As a result, I always have a false sense of how much more I need to do before I arrive. If the instructions that take me from the outskirts of the town of my final destination to the exact street address take up as much space as all the directions up until that point, I feel as if I will never be there. It is the MapQuest Paradox.

FLEEING THE HOUSE

Vumman on the Road

Staff Vumman, Brita DeRemee of Minneapolis, reports on the Hilarious Consequences that ensued when HER family attempted to Mapquest themselves to lunch on the road.

We just left Minneapolis and are on our way to northern Michigan for a good ol' fashioned, summertime road trip with the whole family. Thirteen hours of vehicle time lie before us, but we're prepared. I've spent several chunks of time planning what everyone should take with and how it's going to get packed, and made sure that we don't forget anything like life-saving nebulizers. I get the house, the mail, the dog and the guinea pig ready to be left behind. My husband, Doug, takes on a different end of planning. He's the research type planner, the one who always has maps to consult, finds great hotels for cheap and knows where and when the fireworks are going off. His travel plans are custom made and fit us to a "T."

Well-prepared, but nonetheless we embark with some trepidation: How shall we be able to squelch and divert the inevitable boredom and irritability arising from three boys traveling just a few too many miles in the minivan?

Doug has already devised a plan for the first anticipated breakdown. He estimated beforehand that we'd need a lunch break around the time we'd be entering the Madison vicinity. His first line of defense is to know just where all the Kentucky Fried Chickens are located in and around Madison. We'd deploy the chicken-at-the-end-of-the-stick plan and quell the rising discontent with visions of a KFC lunch.

Now I think there's something a bit weird about knowing ahead of time where all the KFCs are going to be located in city before you get there. I mean—why? Shouldn't travel be adventures of a less-planned nature, chances to throw oneself into places not like home, to eat spontaneously at any hour when stumbling across the great little hole in the wall? ("Hmmm...reality check here, you are parents of three now," I think to myself as I write this.) I want travel to take me away from home, not present me with opportunities to enter "just like home" pockets of space, especially chain restaurants with cookie cutter interiors. I spend way too much time (a nanosecond is too much) thinking, "I never have been here before, but it looks/feels/smells just like the one at home, except...ahh, the wallpaper border is different." But give me a Boy Breakdown in full swing on I-94 and I'll resort to anything, even the Colonel's down home cookin'.

Whining is in full swing by 11 am and lunch is in order. Doug deftly grabs a neat, white sheet of paper from a folder between the front seats. Tee-dah!—a print-out of all the KFCs in the Madison vicinity with Map Quest locations for

each. Now all we have to do is breathe deeply and navigate to the nearest one. After 10 minutes of successful navigation, having found each road sign and crossroad, the path becomes strangely rural. According to the map we we're still on track. I suggest that perhaps the map is wrong and am quickly told "NO! it can't be!! It's a MAP!!" We successfully locate the next intersection (according to the map), and take a right (just as the map says to do) onto a shoulderless gravel road. I begin to get punchy as the whining in the back seat crescendos. What in carnation would the Colonel be doin' out here?! At last, we reach our destination, an intersection of roads "A" and "B" where "X" marks the spot. We gaze out the window at a big, beautiful white farm house. The kind with a great, long front porch held up by pillars. The lawn is bright green. Chickens are running about. Perhaps my expectations for a cookie cutter KFC were unfair? For a moment I expected Colonel Sanders himself to come out the screen door and invite us into lunch.

e-pistle: Fort of July

Meanwhile, back at the Fort, our Hudson Valley correspondent Dr. Sanscravat, a.k.a. Gary Allen, reports on fulfilling his patriotic duty as an American Tourister, er, uh tourist.

July 8, 1997: Yesterday I wrote a long, rambling, yet oddly brilliant, account of last weekend's road trip in our bank's new Saturn—but, alas, the (expletive deleted) computer crashed before the e-missive could be sent (or saved). Totally dejected, demoralized and decerebrated (OK, that last bit had nothing to do with the crash of the machine), I decided not to bother rewriting the thing.

Today, fortified with a coupla' cups o' joe, I feel more inclined to dump the whole thing on you all—even if it means avoiding actual real work. I apologize, in advance, for any diminished spontaneity resulting from this rehash (hmmm—"rehash" is, in a way, redundant, isn't it? Oh, never mind).

ANYWAY, last weekend, containing one of those days when it's de rigueur to indulge in all sorts of yahooism in the name of some perverse jingoistic holiday, my wife Karen and I decided to take a road trip. This permitted us to burn lots of gasoline, overindulge in greasy foods, shop, argue over directions, and visit historic tourist traps. In short we were, as you will see, completely committed to being Americans on vacation—if only for two days.

Our chosen route took us through the wilds of Massachusetts and Vermont and portions of New York state that are so far north that in summer months only geeky tourists

(American and Quebecoise) ever go there. We felt we belonged.

Breaking with journalistic convention, I will begin by describing the second half of the last day of the trip (July 5th). This is the portion where we visited Revolutionary War battle sites.

First: Fort Ticonderoga. This was, from the start, a main objective of the trip. Karen had never been there—and I last visited the fort when I was about 8 years old (right after Ethan Allen—no relation, I believe—made such a pest of himself with the British residents).

Having spent the night in Rutland, VT (where, for several hours, I looked at the same two pictures from Mars on TV, again and again), we needed to get back to NY to visit the fort. Promptly missing my turn, and not turning back (real men NEVER turn back) we pressed further into the northern reaches of the Green Mountain State. This was not entirely foolish, as there were rumors of ferries across Lake Champlain up north. Ferries, you ask? If you've ever looked at a map of that region, you've surely noticed that there is this body of water on the border of these two states that extends all the way to Canada. For this reason, "You can't get there from here" is the state motto of VT. This, of course, is exactly the sort of challenge that ennobles (or disables) vacations.

We pressed on.

Somewhere in VT, possibly the village of Brandon, we encountered an unexpected local tradition: the 5th of July parade. We sat, Saturnine and utterly immobile, while a manure-bespattered tractor pulled the sole float through the town square. Speaking of town squares, they had a bandstand, occupied by a bunch of geezers, in red and white striped shirts and suspenders, playing something approaching Dixieland.

Karen did not hesitate to tell me that most of these geezers were younger than your faithful correspondent.

ANYWAY, we finally snaked our way through the rural festivities and began to deBrandon ourselves. On the way out of town, I noted a tiny, weather-beaten sign off to my left: "Ferry to NY." This ferry did not appear on our maps, but what the hey—why not try it out?

We pressed on.

We drove for several miles, on roads that seemed to grow narrower and more hilly as we went. Twelve miles of pastoral bliss, with ferry signs conspicuously absent. The possibility that we had seen an ancient sign, that the ferry no longer existed, was mooted. The rustic, uncommunicative air, redolent of hay and ignominious failure, could not deter us—we pressed on.

Finally, we saw another sign, with a little cardboard addition: "ferry open." Too cool!

Over the next rise, we could see a bit of the lake—and Fort Ticonderoga itself. Ours was the last car to board the ferry. The lake is only about a half mile wide at that point, so the trip wasn't very long. Standing at the rail, we watched barn swallows skimming the surface of the water, not six feet away. They were flying only a little faster than the ferry, so it seemed that we were looking down at nearly stationary birds. Upon docking, we discovered that the turn-off for the Fort was within a hundred yards of the ferry dock.

Pure chance had delivered us precisely to our goal.

There were a number of festivities scheduled for the fort that day—the usual period costumes, marching bands, some re-enactments—but also vast numbers of kilted, bag-pipe skirling, hairy-kneed individuals were present for the dedication of a cairn. The Black Watch, we were to learn, figured significantly at Ticonderoga during the French and Indian War. We managed to avoid the bulk of the Highland discomforts, but did watch as an older piper, in a plaid skirt, demonstrated to a young

boy, also in a plaid skirt, that it is physically impossible to play a recognizable scale on a bagpipe. Frightened animals and children were fleeing in all directions.

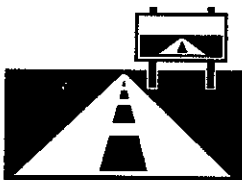
ANYWAY, the fort itself is interesting—though there is a tendency, at such places, to digress somewhat from the events that made the place famous. The fort, for instance, included signs about the mastodon-hunting practices of early inhabitants and had an entire room full of stuff about the aircraft carrier Ticonderoga. Not entirely germane, what?

We ate some suitably fat-laden foods, looked at artifacts, climbed battlements, hypothesized grandly about the nature of eighteenth century warfare, and decided to call it a day. Driving southward, we spotted a sign for the Saratoga Battlefield.

While Ticonderoga is privately owned, Saratoga is a National Historic Site. It was after 5:00, but we decided to give it a look anyway. The place is beautiful: quiet farmland separated by forested sections, much as it was during the Revolution. There were lots of birds in the park—we watched a tree swallow feeding its mate on a nest in the muzzle of an old howitzer. A red-winged blackbird chased a marsh harrier away from his little patch of cat-tails. Towhees sang "drink your tea" from the thickets.

A road travels through the various portions of the battlefield, in chronological order, with excellent markers describing the actions that took place at each location. At one of the last stops on this tour, Benedict Arnold had saved the day. He and another soldier had flanked a redoubt

Ticonderoga, p.18



A Winter's Tale, or**The Incredibly True Adventures of Two Philosophers in Mud**

Philosopher Linda López McAlister of New Mexico knew she was on the right road...but that was just the problem.

It is February in the beautiful snow-covered mountains of Northern New Mexico. It is also Ash Wednesday. Two women philosophers, Claire Ortiz Hill and Linda López McAlister, have decided that it would be the most appropriate day imaginable to visit the beautiful Benedictine monastery near Abiquiu called Christ in the Desert. Claire and Linda are both descended from an early New Mexican Spanish family named Velarde and are, in all likelihood, distant cousins. Linda lives in New Mexico, Claire lives in Paris, France, but was born in Santa Fe and was home on a visit that February.

The weather was a bit iffy and we knew we'd have to navigate miles of wilderness over a dirt road to reach our destination. Claire's mother, who lives in the mountains herself, cautioned us that even with her front wheel drive Subaru we might run into some rough going if the weather turned worse. Her exact words to Claire as she left the house were: "t'ain't worth it Magee." Nonetheless we set out with high hopes and a grand spirit of adventure.

After driving for about forty-five minutes north from Tesuque we arrived at Abiquiu, where we turned off the state highway onto a dirt road that serves as the monastery's thirteen mile "driveway." The sky was overcast, the temperature hovering around 32° F., but our sense of adventure was running high. We were, after all, *las hijas de los conquistadores*, and we felt ready for anything.

The first few miles were fine, and when we encountered a monk in a 4 wheel drive SUV going the other way we just shrugged at the funny look he gave us as he drove past. We could only go about 5 mph on this bumpy dirt road, but the scenery was so spectacularly beautiful that we didn't mind. We were following the Chama River past red bluffs, with mountain peaks in the distance and piñon trees and sagebrush laden with snow all around us.

After another hour or so we had to "use the facilities" so we tromped through the snow and found appropriate trees to hide behind lest another monk come driving by. That accomplished, we got back in the car and drove on. Imagine our surprise when just around the next bend we encountered probably the finest new bathroom facility the U.S. Forest Service could provide! Well, maybe this wasn't quite the wilderness adventure we had thought we were going to have.

As we continued on, the weather didn't get worse, it got better. For a little while we thought that was good news—until the dirt road began to defrost. Soon we found ourselves sliding from side to side as the road turned to muddy

clay. The first time the car slid into a ditch we were able to get ourselves unstuck by putting sagebrush under the front wheels and pushing, while the mud splattered us from head to toe. For the next 10 miles or so we were very cautious and had some close calls, but didn't get stuck again until we were about a mile from the monastery (though we had no idea just how far from it we were). When we were unable to budge the car at all and it had begun snowing again, we decided we'd just walk the rest of the way to the monastery. It was like a winter wonderland and every so often a single last snowflake was enough to bring a whole bough full of snow tumbling down.

When we arrived at Christ in the Desert we were greeted by the caretaker at the guest quarters who kindly invited us to clean up as best we could and then go to the chapel to join the monks for Gregorian chant prior to their main meal of the day which we were invited to join in silence, after which we could discuss our situation with the brothers.

It was decided that Fred, the caretaker we had met, could take us in his pickup truck back to our car, pull us out of the ditch, and escort us back to the main highway. At the same time, Rosie, the woman who served as caretaker for the nuns in the adjacent convent, would drive a Jeep that belonged to a guest who wanted to leave but was afraid to drive under these road conditions. Rosie and Fred were actually the monastery's designated rescue team for just this sort of emergency. So the truck and the Jeep and the four of us started down the road.

Between late morning and mid-afternoon the road had become even more treacherous as the depth of the mud had increased. But Fred had no trouble pulling our car out of the ditch and our three vehicle caravan proceeded down the road uneventfully until we were just about two miles from the highway when suddenly we encountered cows on the road. Rosie would later say that she instantly perceived those cows as a liability. To accommodate the cows, Claire had to alter the safe, but steady pace at which we had been proceeding. And once again it was our car that went into a ditch. So there we were trying to push the car on to the road, but every time we seemed about to succeed we would slide back into the ditch. Meanwhile, the spinning of the tires thoroughly splattered us with mud once again. No problem though; Fred was behind us and could pull us out from behind.

At the last minute he decided it would be better to pull us out from the front, so he swung his pickup back toward the center of the road but he did it too hard and—that's right!—his pickup landed nose first in the ditch on the other side of the road with one of his rear tires spinning in the air. No problem, we still had the Jeep. Alas, Rosie could only

control the Jeep when it was moving forward; if she backed up to pull us out she, too, risked getting stuck. So there we were, the sun moving rapidly toward the west, wondering what to do. All of a sudden, what seemed a knight in shining armor appeared on the road. The monk we had passed in the morning was returning from buying provisions in town. He saw our predicament from a distance and he blithely assumed that with his four wheel drive vehicle he could save the day. So what did he do? He drove off the road across the open field to rescue the pick up truck first. That's right. He, too, became hopelessly mired in mud. So now we had five people and three disabled vehicles. There was nothing to do but pile into our only remaining vehicle and carry on. A short while later we passed another car stuck in the mud, its driver nowhere in sight. As we finally came to the highway we encountered a police car and the driver of the abandoned vehicle sitting by the side of the road waiting for a tow truck. They invited Claire and me to join them, but something told us not to do it. Instead we continued on to the Ghost Ranch conference center in Abiqui, where we could spend the night and call AAA in the morning.

When we entered the Ghost Ranch lobby, there, in a place of honor in the giftshop window was a book by a friend of mine, Nora Naranjo-Morse. The title? *Mud Woman*. Rosie thought our pitiful mud-splattered appearance would corroborate our story about being stuck in the mud in a most convincing way. So we made our appearance at the reception desk. We were each assigned to a six bed room and when we got to our dormitory and looked in the mirror we realized that we were mud women personified. We were able to have hot showers and wash our clothes for the morning and I slept in a brand new Ghost Ranch T-shirt.

Fred and Rosie were able to reach the monastery by radio telephone from Ghost Ranch to tell them that a truck, a car, and an SUV were stuck in the mud about ten miles down the mountain. Another truck was dispatched to rescue the monastery's vehicles and the monk who was waiting with them. Later, they called back to say that the second truck was now stuck, too, and they were sending the monastery's tractor down. And it turned out to have been a good thing that we hadn't waited for the tow truck. It, too, got stuck in the mud, and the other driver ended up with us at Ghost Ranch. The tractor from the monastery finally must have done the trick because by the time we woke up the next morning Fred and Rosie were gone.

But the adventure wasn't over. We called AAA and ordered the biggest, most powerful tow truck they had. The driver was a nice guy and was full of confidence as we piled aboard and started back up the mountain. The catch was that it hadn't frozen over night, so the road was every bit as muddy in the early morning as it had been the afternoon and evening before. Before long, even AAA's finest was slipping

and sliding and getting stuck, but it had so much power the driver was able, albeit with great difficulty, to get back on the road. When this happened a second time and it took him about twenty minutes to power his way out, he said that he was sorry but he couldn't afford to lose his truck and that we were going back. He took us all the way back to Claire's mother's house in the mountains north of Tesuque telling AAA he had rescued her car and he charged it to her AAA card. Naturally, the first thing Claire's mother asked when she saw us was where her car was. When we said that we couldn't get it out, she was none too pleased. But the following morning the AAA man left his home at 3:30 a.m. and, since the dirt road had once again frozen, he was able to pull the car out. Claire and her mother were immensely relieved to see his gigantic truck pull into the driveway with the car very early Friday morning. He told AAA he had rescued my car and charged it to my AAA card!

If Ash Wednesday is a time for reflecting on our pridefulness so that we might better learn humility, lots of people in and around Christ in the Desert learned that lesson well that day.



Did you read the Boxcar Children books? Yeah, well Peg didn't either, but you all should have! We've just discovered a museum dedicated to the books (and housed in a real boxcar!) in the author's hometown, Putnam, Connecticut. Can't wait till April when it opens!



Bark's Briefs

Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria* (1957, starring his wife, Giulietta Masina) leads me to this *brief* observation: Who knew that telescoping umbrellas were already available in Italy in 1957! Isn't this remarkable? The special sections available on the DVD did not explain the ever present nature of this item either - obviously an oversight. I was quite impressed that this poor woman was able to go through a seemingly endless series of unfortunate adventures and never once forgot to pick up her umbrella before she left the scene.

The movie is apt for the "Home Edition" since *Cabiria** actually owned her own home during much of the movie. Must have had a good stock portfolio.

**Cabiria* was a prostitute. Actually described as "in the life"—a phrase that must have had a different meaning in 1957.



Ticonderoga, continued

commandeered by a Hessian Lieutenant Colonel. The position had withstood repeated frontal assaults by the revolutionary rabble, but succumbed to attack from the rear. In the woods below the redoubt, we spotted a small, fairly modern granite monument. It was about four feet high, and seemed to consist of nothing but a booted left leg. At the back of the monument, a white marble tablet was attached. It was obviously much older. Its inscription was unclear for both physical and grammatical reasons. All we could determine was that its authors believed that something especially heroic had occurred there.

It was getting close to the time when the park would close, so we left, our puzzlement intact. Thus ended the historical portion of the trip. Before these exercises in Americana took place, however, we had indulged in some decidedly un-American activities. On the 4th and 5th, we visited several used bookstores. I suspect that an undue fascination with the written word may be considered heretical, but purposely avoiding the purchase of NEW stuff in favor of old is downright weird. But that is exactly what we craved.

At one of these places (Gventer), the proprietor special-

izes in the really old: the place has stacks of medieval manuscript pages that can be leafed through. It was joy to actually handle ("fondle" is, possibly, an overstatement) sheets of parchment or vellum covered in precise Miniscule or Carolingian text, sheet music for chants (in Latin, in red and black, using the old notation composed of black rhomboids on the staves), illuminated letterforms, incunabula. The oldest document he had was a parchment scroll, its ribbon of linen still secure, from Egypt — about 4,000 years old. This was too fragile to touch, but there it was, just inches away from my bulging eyes. There were Roman oil lamps, icons painted on wood, Egyptian seals in the form of scarabs. There were Anasazi pots. There was a vellum page from an old *Koran* intended for use in India — its widely spaced lines in Arabic, in black and an interlinear translation, in Urdu, written in red ink.

We bought a smallish page from another *Koran* for Aaron (my step-son). It was on thin translucent glazed paper, from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, lettered in black and red, with gold leaf in a chapter heading and as small floral bullets between passages. There are some marginalia, in red and black, in the same hand that lettered the page.

At another store (Tuttle, in Rutland), I glommed onto a copy of *Bomba, the Jungle Boy*, a childhood favorite that has been out of print for over forty years (on examining it, I discovered that it was unbelievably racist—a fact that had eluded me as a child, but explains why it's out of print today). This place also had a good collection of old papers—though not as old as Gventer. They had a page printed by Wynken de Worde (a protégé of Caxton, the first printer in England), 1502—extremely rare, and definitely out of my price range, but worth seeing.

Finally, our money (and ability to concentrate on anything other than getting home) pretty much exhausted, we brought the road trip to its conclusion.

The following morning (Sunday the 6th), we woke to the usual New York Times jones. In the Book Review, a solution to the mystery from Saratoga was found. Benedict Arnold, after his treason, once asked an American soldier what kind of treatment he might expect from his former countrymen. The soldier replied that first, Arnold's lame leg—wounded in patriotic effort—would be cut off, and given a hero's burial. Then the remaining portions of his dishonorable body would be hung on a gibbet, high.

The monument in Saratoga celebrated the deeds, but not the man, of the hour.

Sanscrauat

("You should emulate your heroes, but don't carry it too far. Especially if they're dead." Unknown)

Pantheon Gastronomique

The Rules of Cookery

Why don't I call cookery rules arbitrary, and why am I tempted to call the rules of grammar arbitrary? Because 'cookery' is defined by its end, whereas 'speaking' is not. That is why the use of language is in a certain sense autonomous, as cooking and washing are not. You cook badly if you are guided in your cooking by rules other than the right ones; but if you follow other rules than those of chess you are playing another game; and if you follow grammatical rules other than such-and-such ones, that does not mean you say something wrong, no, you are speaking of something else—Wittgenstein, Zettel §320

Peg writes: I cook in a manner of speaking. I do not invent and I do not improvise. My early attempts at improvisation and substitution were disastrous. My earliest memory of cooking is also my earliest clear memory of logical thinking. When I was seven and my brother John nine, we decided to make sugar cookies. We got out the Fannie Farmer cookbook, and set to work. But soon we were stymied—the recipe called for some amount of soda. John and I went back and forth along the following lines: “Well, soda is a drink, and club soda is a kind of soda. We don't have club soda, but we have tonic water. And we know they can't be all that different since adults use them in cocktails. So we'll just substitute the tonic water for the club soda and everything should be fine.” The cookie dough was fizzy and never really held a shape, but that did not stop us from baking the batter we poured onto the pan. Unsurprisingly, the result was awful. I learned a lesson that has become a hard and fast rule: never deviate never substitute.

I follow the instructions of a recipe to the letter. If a recipe calls for adding butter a tablespoon at a time, I have my measuring spoons handy. If the recipe requires mixing on high for four minutes, I am thankful for my IronMan Triathlon watch firmly attached to my left wrist. I am so maniacal about time that I do not fully trust the accuracy of timers with clock faces. I like precision and exactness. When I bake or cook, all my philosophical beliefs are cast aside. I lose my agency; I really do see myself as guided by the rules in some fundamental way. I become an Absolutist armed with a wooden spoon and spatula. One Must Never Deviate from the Recipe since the Recipe is Always Right.

But is this really cooking? If you follow the rules too strictly with respect to cooking, you may find yourself cooking very badly. But I want to go further than this. If you are absolutely following the rules, then you are not really cooking (and you still may manage to produce really bad and inedible items). You are actually playing a different game. Cooking requires a certain degree of flexibility and accommodation, invention and inspiration. It requires factoring in altitude when baking a cake, especially one as

fragile as a daffodil cake. It involves adjustments in timing and temperature when the only pan available is 9 x 9 rather than 8 x 8. It requires substituting one ingredient for another when you discover that one half of a couple has been noshing on the chocolate chips that are supposed to be melted so that they can be spread over rolled out peanut butter cookie dough. This last instance, by the way, is strictly hypothetical.

Flexibility and improvisation are central to the activity of cooking, which should make us question Wittgenstein's reference to the “right rules” of cooking which, when followed, lead us to the defined end of cooking, namely... Namely what? And that is the rub. Wittgenstein assumes that cookery does have a clearly defined end, but perhaps only someone who was incredibly rigid in so many ways could say something like this. Rigid adherence may not produce edible food nor may the violation of those rules produce inedible food.

Had Wittgenstein seen cooking more like music or another form of artistic expression, he would have significantly revised his view.

Nook Cookery

Lisa writes: I once made a cake that involved boiling an orange in sugar syrup for one hour. Why? Because it was the only recipe in the only cookbook I had,¹ that used (almost) only the tools available to me in Peg's emergency fallout shelter of a kitchen. (I only had to buy a loaf pan at the grocery store.) I'd never have given the recipe a second glance, had it not been forced upon me by dire straits, but you know what? It was delicious and I was glad to have been forced.

I actually *like* cooking in less-than-ideal conditions. I love little cottage kitchens stocked with the things their owners believe vacationers need most (six sets of corn-on-the-cob skewers; paper plate holders, no sharp knives), the apartment kitchens whose drawers are filled with oddments left by their last occupants (many knives—none sharp). Peg once accused me of loving wilderness camping just because it lets me create a new kitchen-in-the-woods every night of the trip. (It's only partly true. I also like the tents.)

I presently find myself cooking in a tiny nook of a kitchen that reminds me of nothing so much as a galley on a good-sized sailboat; covered with cunning hooks and hidden crannies, all its wants are latches to hold everything down in rough seas. It came stocked with a remarkably large number of the things one needs to cook an actual meal. Almost everything you need, in fact. The fun begins when you realize what's missing, midway through a task. That's when your skill as a cook comes to the fore, as you simultaneously search drawers and brain to figure out a substitute for... a cheese grater. A spice. A colander. A big container—*anything* big! Quickly!

Cookbook, p.21

Actually Making Whoopie (Pies)

Another chapter in the Whoopie Pie ethnography project. Lisa Bergin and Claire Strader are New Englanders living in Minneapolis. They write to give us the *Insiders' Scoop* on whoopee/woopie pies. And, for all of you who have written in complaining about the lack of a recipe, here one is!

We know about woopie pies (note alternate spelling)! Lisa grew up in Maine, where they are an essential component of any bake sale—indeed, not merely were they an important piece of every self-respecting bake sale, they were usually a component of any sale whatsoever. For example, it was not uncommon to see a heap of plastic-wrapped woopie pies next to crocheted doilies, plastic-head dolls, and acrylic yarn poodle doggies with pom-pom tails. Growing up, she looked on w.p.'s much like many native New Yorkers look on the Statue of Liberty: omnipresent, but never personally experienced. (Maybe due, in part, to her associating them within a knickknack-church sale-woopie pie triad). Claire grew up in Massachusetts thinking they were only a quirky family treat (fyi: Claire's family wraps w.p.'s in waxed paper, not plastic wrap). The two experiences converged one afternoon at Claire's grandmother's home, when Claire provided Lisa the opportunity to taste them, and Lisa enlightened Claire as to their broader cultural significance. Lisa was hooked and since then, becoming prouder of her Maine heritage the further away she moves, takes every available opportunity to introduce them to others.

Other favorite markers of Maineliness are bright red lobster lollipops (of unknown flavoring, purchased from LLBean before Freeport exploded into the Capitalist Mecca it currently is); Zagnuts (similar to Butterfinger bars, but with a toasted coconut coating in lieu of the outer the chocolate layer and a different kind of peanutbuttery), Moxie (a Dr. Pepper-like soda, replacing Dr. Pepper's beet with gentian? maybe motherwort? I don't know, something kinda bitter and bad tasting—it is called Moxie, after all), and finally, spruce gum (basically, just the sap of a spruce tree, rolled into a ball, it tastes like you'd imagine and is a killer on your jaw...hmm maybe the original source of Lisa's TMJ??). Here we've given Claire's family recipe for Woopie Pies (note, this filling is not sickly sweet, maybe not traditional, but yummy nonetheless). If anyone has come across spruce gum recently, Lisa would love to hear—haven't been able to find it since I was a kid.

Claire Strader's Woopie Pies

Cakie Cookie

2 Cups flour
5 Tbsp cocoa
1 1/4 tsp baking soda
1 tsp salt
1 C sugar
1/2 C Crisco*
1 egg
1 C milk
1 tsp vanilla
Combine all dry ingredients. Combine all wet. Add wet to dry and quickly mix. Drop batter by rounded tablespoon onto ungreased cookie sheets. Bake 425 about 7 minutes.

Filling

1 C milk
1/2 C flour
dash of salt
Cook the above over low flame, stirring, until it resembles mashed potatoes. Take off heat.

1/2 C Crisco
1 stick butter
1 C sugar
1 tsp vanilla
Cream the above. Add to the flour mixture and beat for 3-4 minutes. Sandwich the filling between two cookies. Wrap in plastic and head to your nearest Church bake sale!

**Ed. note: Lisa H. feels compelled to point out that these would be even more delicious made with butter.*

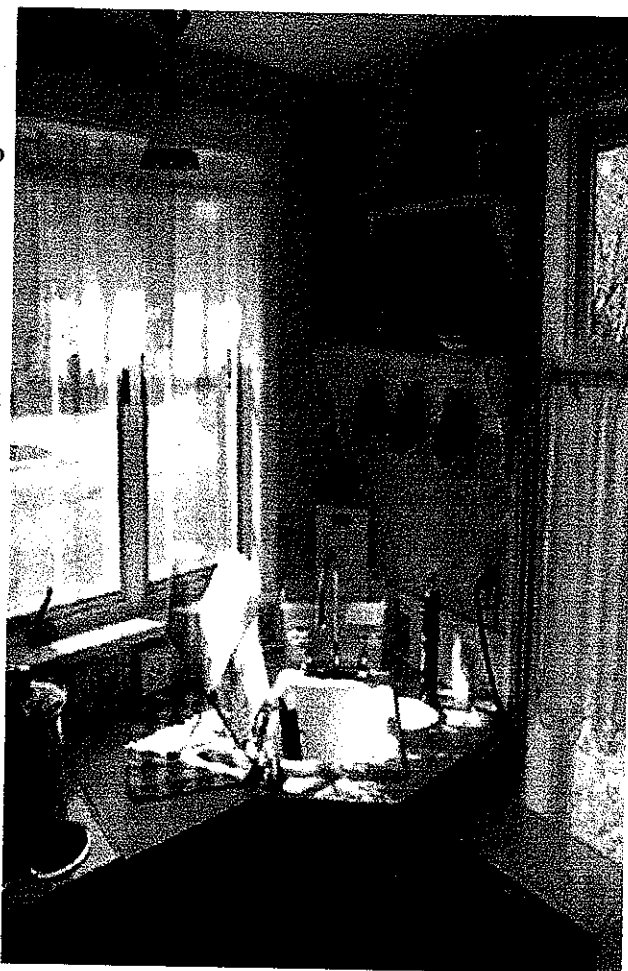
I Would Like My Muffin Medium Rare, Please

Peg writes: All of our food travels as well as our explorations of our own close-to-home bakeries reveal a terrible fact: There is a menace on the march. As much as we would like to say the menace only marches in chain restaurants, we must be truthful and confess that the locals have fallen prey too. This menace is terrible: baked goods are consistently underbaked. Bagels, breads, cookies, pies and muffins—none of them is spared the indignity of underbaking. More than once we have found ourselves saying, “It was good but should have been kept in the oven another five minutes.”

“Damp, gluey, sticky, soggy” all describe the effects of this phenomenon. In laymen’s terms, these things are raw. When properly baked, the starches in bread, for instance, will gelatinize. The effects of gelatinization are easily seen. Upon tearing into the bread, one will encounter holes in the loaf that are shiny. Absent the gelatinization, no shine.

What’s driving this menace? Here’s our theory: Properly baked goods dry out faster than their underbaked cousins. And shop owners worry that customers will assume that their goods are old and stale if they are not moist. But moistness does not properly belong to many baked goods. If we encounter underdone, overly moist baked goods all the time, our palates will be retrained to believe these are baked properly and are delicious. And the truly properly baked goods will be considered dried out and stale.

We find ourselves at a pivotal moment. We might all consider rising up against the hegemony of moistness by asking our servers about the ways that baked goods are prepared. People have gotten very good at asking about and then specifying degree of doneness in meat and fish. E-coli is a threat, so it matters. Moistness is a threat too and it matters. Raise your voices with mine to proclaim, “I want my muffin done well.”



Cooknook, continued

So, what is it about cooking in-a-closet-with-a-candle that I love, anyway? Well, I’ve made a list:

1. I love the challenge of being resourceful; trying to do what I always do, with none of my familiar tools. (I love it most when I’m successful.)
2. I love moving in the creative, albeit simple, culinary direction that that a rudimentary kitchen demands. How many very basic, but delicious things can I make, using only the very small number of ingredients that we can keep stocked (in *The Cupboard*) at any one time? (I also love those lists of “kitchen essentials” that cooking magazines always publish—the ones that say “in order to be prepared for drop-in guests, always keep on hand a tin of smoked oysters, capers, fig paste....” The list I’m presently composing begins, “In order to have something immediately available to eat after yoga gets done at seven, always have on hand....”)
3. I love looking at recipes with an eye that says “what’s possible in this space, with these few tools?” instead of “given that virtually anything is possible, what do I pick?”

In short, I love cooking with extreme limitations for some of the same reasons I loved sixteenth century contrapuntal music when I studied it in college. In both cases, you’re handed a big long list of rules, restrictions, proscriptions and absolutes, and then told, “make something beautiful. Or delicious. Be creative! Surprise us!” Who can resist that challenge? I can’t! For instance, that cake I made? I didn’t *have* to make a cake to take to Peg’s colleagues’ home for dinner; I *wanted* to. There was something about the challenge of trying to bake in a kitchen without even the most rudimentary of baking equipment²) that I just couldn’t pass up.

¹ Let the record show that it was Claudia Roden’s first book of Middle Eastern cookery—I forget its name at the moment. I happened to have it along while visiting one weekend, because I was doing research on it.

² “I have measuring sticks!” Peg announced proudly, at some point in this process. I thought she meant a ruler; she meant a teaspoon-tablespoon set.

Confessions of a Moral Terrorist

Peg writes: I had always suspected that I was powerful. As a child, I used to dream of being a superhero. Depending on my mood, I vacillated between wanting super strength, invisibility, super speed and x-ray vision. I was always a composite of my favorite comic book characters. Wonder Woman was an all time favorite, as was Bat Man. I liked his dark brooding nature. I admired the bionic woman too, though I did always wonder why she had to move her hair in order for the ear to work.

As an adult moving toward my 40s, my suspicions are now confirmed. I have morphed into something I never imagined myself to become. Mine is not a tale of a bite from a radioactive spider or anything so glamorous. By simply living my life in the ordinary ways that I do, I have been endowed with a terrible power. In the eyes of many voting Americans, I am a moral terrorist.

I am a woman who could legally have an abortion just before walking down the aisle with my female partner. I confess: I am a lesbian still in my child-bearing years. According to exit polls and the subsequent election results, I pose a threat to the safety and well-being of the United States that is greater than threats posed by Al-Qaeda and by a president who has gotten us into a misguided and ill-conceived war in Iraq while giving huge tax cuts to the wealthy, overseeing an economy hemorrhaging jobs resulting in even more people lacking health insurance, underfunding education, and attempting to privatize Social Security combined. That others perceive me as a moral terrorist is the only way that I can make sense of the fact that more than two out of ten people were willing to put all these other concerns to the side and vote on what was successfully packaged as "moral issues."

In what can only be described as a stunning bait and switch, the Republican party and its neoconservative fundamentalist elements made war and poverty into non-moral issues. This was the decisive move in the conjuring trick. Once a significant percentage of the population accepted this way of framing the issues, which was inevitable given the way that the media covered the election, the game was over.

So, having been identified as a moral terrorist, what am I to do? Use my powers for good, of course. My mission: I will continue to act as moral agent who recognizes and respects the dignity of others. I will act as someone who has responsibilities and commitments to my family and friends and especially to those with whom I have strong disagreement but with whom I share a community. That is perhaps the rub in all of this. While it might be tempting write off those who did vote only or primarily on the "moral issues," as hopelessly sexist or heterosexist and therefore not worthy

of our attention, this is perhaps exactly what the Neocons want. By marginalizing ourselves and withdrawing from communal life, we make it easier for the Neocons to continue to colonize the "mainstream," directing the flow further and further to the right.

By no means am I advocating what I consider to be a dangerous and conservative assimilationist approach of trying to get people to accept me because they think I am like them. I know that I am not like them and they are not like me in some very significant ways. I am calling for something more radical and potentially far more powerful: expanding the moral domain through respectful connection to and engagement with others. This would be a moral revolution.

THE PURPLE MAP

Lisa writes: My parents live in a blue house. (Really! It's blue! Has been for decades!) I live in a blue house too; it's currently a blue house of one, so on a house-by-house proportional map of my county's voting patterns, it would be drawn pretty small—dwarfed, no doubt, by the red house occupied by my former (hallelujah!) state legislator and his extensive extended family.

Okay, okay, I admit it: I've been obsessing over the string of ever-more-nuanced maps charting the 2004 U.S. presidential election that have been marching across my computer screen. You know the maps I mean: the red state/blue state map that was followed by the red county/blue county map—that, in turn, was followed by the proportionate red county/blue county map (which sized counties according to their populations). At the rate this is progressing, I figure it won't be that long before I'm able to pull up, right on my computer screen, a map that shows blue and red precincts in my state. I'm sure the only thing preventing the creation of that map actually showing my blue house up the road from my former representative's red one is that quaint old custom we call the privacy of the voting booth.

But in the midst of all this blue-state-red-state chatter, I was elated to come upon the purple map (<http://www.princeton.edu/~rvdb/JAVA/election2004/>), which colors counties anything from true blue to true red, based on the percentages of voters going Democrat or Republican, respectively. This map shows—surprise, surprise—that most of the country is purple. True, some parts of the country are what my Crayola box called red violet, while others are definitely blue violet, but the map shows on the micro level what we already knew to be true macroscopically; the race was close, and it was close in a lot of the country.

Close, that is, even in many of those large, mainly rural states whose residents are currently being vilified by members of the purportedly progressive press—blue individuals who are trotting out anti-rural clichés at a rate not seen since Hee Haw went off the air. Never *mind* that a house-by-house map of many rural counties deep in the heart of Redland would show nearly as many blue houses as red ones; to those who see the country in terms of the Metro: Blue/Retro: Red divide, those blue voters in Kansas and Nebraska are inconsequential, irrelevant—nonexistent, for all practical purposes. Purple? What purple?

As a rural resident of a rural state—albeit a blue one—I’ve been taking this anti-rural vitriol mighty personally. I am deeply frustrated by the willingness of liberal, progressive and radical commentators to write off—in broad, angry, sometimes profanity-laden strokes—entire regions of the country. Their willingness to resort to petty, mean-spirited clichés about rural and small town people—clichés of the sort that no self-respecting progressive would tolerate, were they made about a racial or ethnic minority, or about queers or disabled folks. Their willingness to ignore crucial exceptions to the “rule” that “rural areas all went for Bush” (never mind, apparently, Maine, or the counties in South Dakota that are home to Indian reservations, or the Arrowhead region of Minnesota, or the Black Belt of the South—some of the bluest places in the country). And, most of all, their willingness to ignore the moral of the Purple Map—that most regions of the country are very closely (deeply?) divided. Translation: there’s a pile of blue voters out in Rural Stupidland.

But while I’ve been comforting myself with the fact that my progressive compatriots are guilty of simplistic overgeneralization when they ignore the many, many “blue” voters in all but the reddest of red counties, nevertheless, when you come right down to it, my comfort is a shallow one. Because, while there might be purple states, counties, cities even houses, there aren’t really purple voters. People either voted for Kerry or they voted for Bush, or they voted for one of those third party candidates who don’t even get a pixel of color on any map. So even if I can be assured that many people even in the heart of rural Kansas or Nebraska voted for Democrats, eventually this tactic of looking at ever-smaller segments of the population will run out, for eventually, our map would have to be drawn at the level of the individual voter. And we voters—all of us—are one solid color.

But wait; is that true? That is, while we all had to assign one hundred percent of our vote to a single candidate, it nevertheless is not at all true that the minds of those voters (whose votes, if we could make a map of the entire population of the country, would appear as individual dots of blue

or red, not as swirls of purple in varying shades) are uniformly, firmly, or even committedly blue or red. Indeed, many of them might have been largely some other color altogether—green, if the students in my classes are any indication, or maybe silver (what color would YOU make the libertarians?). A friend told me about one of her students who was ardently pro-Bush—and ardently pro-choice. (My friend pointed out to her that this was Not a Winning Combination.) While I think the student would be hard pressed to justify her position, that’s not the point of my example. My point is that, when it comes down to it, many people have a mind that is a much more complex array of colors than would be indicated by their all-or-nothing choice of a presidential candidate. (We complain about the electoral college? Hell, as far as I’m concerned, my own individual vote has all the flaws of the electoral college. Bring me proportional voting!) Frankly, my mind doesn’t have much blue in it at all. (I’d rush to add that I don’t think it has a single pixel of George Bush Red either.) I didn’t vote for John Kerry because I BELIEVED in him; I voted for John Kerry because he has a long head. Oh, whoops, I mean because I wanted to defeat Bush. I am not a Blue Person, no matter what my dot on the map shows.

Before the election, I was talking with some friends about what we were going to do, if “we” lost the election. (We people-voting-for-the-blue-guy.) Several of us agreed that the only thing we could do—the only thing that gave us any hope whatsoever—was to try to begin, on the local level, to have serious, sustained (hard, awkward, infuriating, depressing, heartening, surprising) conversations with our “red” neighbors, colleagues, fellow citizens. As I look at the maps, and reflect on my own rainbow-hued psyche, I can’t help but feel that we in the purple zones—the vast stretches of the country (rural, yes, but also urban) in which the voting record of the population is the most evenly divided, the stretches in which it is frankly impossible to have “only blue friends”—have the greatest opportunities, the most chances to effect genuine change, of anyone.

TURN the page and
SUBSCRIBE TO
Phil on Hol

(or else)

For yourself:

Fill out the form below. Mail it to *Philosophers on Holiday*, P.O. Box 354, St. Peter, MN 56082. Enclose a check for \$10, good for four issues and payable to *Philosophers on Holiday*.

Name:

Address:

Email address:

Favorite philosopher:

For a Friend

Get a second subscription for only \$8!

Name:

Address:

Email address:

Special message:

Philosophers on Holiday
P.O. Box 354
St. Peter, MN 56082