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The Keep

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Post Amerikan

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Poetry by Mark Valentine & others

A nasty campaign vs organic foods

We're a hippie family by Marcee



POST AMERIKAN



BLOOMINGTON/NORMAL VOLUME 29

FREE

NUMBER TWO

APRIL/MAY 2000



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Permit Number 168
Bloomington, IL 61702

Address Correction Requested
Post Amerikan
P.O. Box 3452
Bloomington, IL 61702

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About us

The *Post Amerikan* is an independent community newspaper providing information and analysis that is screened out of or down played by establishment news sources. We are a non-profit, worker-run collective that exists as an alternative to the corporate media.

We put out six issues a year. Staff members take turns as "coordinator." All writing, typing, editing, graphics, photography, pasteup, and distribution are done on a volunteer basis. You are invited to volunteer your talents.

Most of our material and inspiration for material comes from the community. The *Post Amerikan* welcomes stories, graphics, photos, letters, and new tips from our readers. If you'd like to join us, call 828-4473 and leave a message on our answering machine. We will get back to you as soon as we can. Don't worry if it takes a while—we don't meet every week.

An alternative newspaper depends directly on a community of concerned people for existence. We believe it is very important to keep a newspaper like this around. If you think so too, then please support us by telling your friends about the paper, donating money to the printing of the paper, and telling our advertisers you saw their ad in *Post Amerikan*.

Subscriptions

Subscriptions to the *Post Amerikan* are available for the low price of \$6.00 per year for six complete issues. Please send a check (made payable to the *Post Amerikan*) to: Post Amerikan, P.O. Box 3452, Bloomington, IL 61702.

This issue of *Post Amerikan* is brought to you by...

David, Linda, Ralph and Sherrin

Pick up a copy

Copies of the *Post Amerikan* are now available for free at the following locations:

Bloomington
 AIDS Task Force, 313 N. Main
 About Books, 221 E. Front
 Barnes & Noble, Veterans & Rt. 9
 Bloomington Public Library, 205 E. Olive
 Common Ground, 516 N. Main
 CoffeeWorks, 608 N. Main
 Gaston's Upper Cut, 409 N. Main
 Heartland Community College Academic Support Center, 1226 Towanda Ave.
 Last Chance Newstand, 404 N. Main
 Lizard's Lounge, 612 N. Main St.
 Medusa's, 420 N. Madison
 the Movie Fan, 401 N. Veterans (Cub Food Plaza)
 Mystic Link, 1206 Towanda Ave. Su.4
 Shockwaves, 415 N. Main
 Twin City Exchange, 411 N. Main

Normal
 Acme Comics, 115 W. North
 Babbitt's Books, 104 W. North
 Co-op Records, 503 S. Main
 the Coffeehouse, 114 E. Beaufort
 Deadpan Alley Records, 107 W. North
 Koffee Kup, 205 W. North
 Mother Murphy's, 111 W. North
 Normal Public Library, 206 W. College Ave.

What's your new address?

When you move, be sure to send us your new address so your subscription gets to you. Your *Post Amerikan* will not be forwarded (it's like junk mail-no kidding!). Fill out this handy form with your new address and return it to us, P.O. Box 3452, Bloomington, IL 61702.

Name _____
 Street _____
 City/State/Zip _____

Due Date:

The due date for submitting articles to the *Post Amerikan* is: (please laser print your articles in columns of 3" using Palatino 10pt. type if possible.)

May 15

Good numbers

Advocacy Council for Human Rights.830-2521
 AIDS Hotlines
 National.....1-800-AID-AIDS
 Illinois.....1-800-243-2437
 Local.....827-AIDS
 Alcoholics Anonymous.....828-7092
 Amnesty International-ISU...Miami@ilstu.edu
 Animal Protection League.....828-5371
 Better Business Bureau.....1-800-500-3780
 Big Brothers/ Big Sisters828-1870
 Boys & Girls Clubs of B/N.....829-3034
 Clare House (Catholic workers).....828-4035
 Countering Domestic Violence.....827-7070
 Dept. of Children/Family Services...828-0022
 Gay, Lesbian & Bi teen drop in center.828-3998
 Gay & Lesbian Resource Phonenumber...438-2429
 Habitat for Humanity.....827-3931
 Headstart.....662-4880
 Home Sweet Home Mission.....828-7356
 IL Dept. of Public Aid.....827-4621
 IL Lawyer Referral.....1-217-525-5297
 Incest Survivors Support Group.....827-0790
 LIFE-CIL.....663-5433
 Lighthouse (substance abuse treatment).....827-6026
 McLean Co. Center for Human Services...827-5351
 McLean Co. Health Dept.....888-5450
 McLean Co. Housing Authority.....829-3360
 McLean Co. Humane Society.....664-7387
 McLean Co. Peace Coalition.....828-7070
 Mid Central Community Action.....829-0691
 Mobile Meals.....828-8301
 Narcotics Anonymous.....827-4005
 National Health Care Services/
 abortion assistance.....1-800-322-1622
 Occupational Development Center....452-7324
 Parents Anonymous.....827-4005
 PATH (Personal Assistance Telephone Help)..827-4005
 Phone Friends.....827-4005
 PFLAG(Parents, Families and Friends
 of Lesbians and Gays).....663-0831
 Planned Parenthood (medical).....827-4014
 (bus/couns/ edu).....827-4368
Post Amerikan..... 828-4473
 Prairie State Legal Services.....827-5021
 Project Oz.....827-0377
 Rape Crisis Center.....827-4005
 Runaway Switchboard.....1-800-621-4000
 Salvation Army.....829-9476
 Safe Harbor Mission.....829-7399
 TeleCare (senior citizens).....828-8301
 Unemployment comp/job service.....827-6237
 Western Ave. Community Center.....829-4807
 Youth Build.....827-7507

Community News

GLT Spring 2000 membership drive

GLT FM, listener supported public radio, is ready to begin a Spring Membership Drive on Friday, March 31. The drive is scheduled to run through Saturday, April 8.

Twice a year, GLT listeners are asked to provide the financial support essential to ensuring GLT's quality news and entertainment service continues uninterrupted. Their upcoming Spring Membership Drive is an opportunity for new listeners to pledge their financial support for GLT as well as a chance for current members of the station to continue their support.

Over 200 volunteers from the community along with more than 40 area businesses will work with the GLT staff during this important fundraising event. The GLT Spring Membership Drive's goal is to raise \$75,000 for programming support.

Volunteers may sign up to staff pledge phones by calling the GLT Membership Director Pat Peterson at (309) 438-3581 or email to pkpeter@ilstu.edu.

Listeners wishing to pledge their support to GLT may do so by calling (309) 438-8910. Contribution are accepted all year long.

GLT 89.1/103.3 FM is a National Public Radio affiliate.

For more information, please contact:
Kathryn Carter, Development Director (309) 438-2257
Pat Peterson, Membership Director (309) 438-3581

Artists against AIDS 8th annual exhibition & benefit sale

A four day exhibition/sale of painting, photography, ceramics, sculpture, glass, metals, and mixed media showcasing the local art community and providing Champaign-Urbana an opportunity to make a difference in the fight against AIDS. Fri. April 28 - Mon. May 1.

Where? Neil & Chester in downtown Champaign (formerly Lox, Stock & Bagel)

Local artists retain one half of the proceeds from the sale of their work, with the remainder donated to the Greater Community AIDS Project (GCAP). This local non-profit United Way agency is dedicated to educating the public about HIV/AIDS, and providing support services for those affected by HIV/AIDS.

Artists' info/registration materials available at GCAP. For additional info and/or to volunteer your time call: (217) 351-2437

The United States Census Bureau

In March and April 2000, the United States Census Bureau will mail a Census form to each American household. This year, as in 1990, the Census form will include a Question critical to our ability to determine the scope and shape of same-sex couples and their children who share a household. The form allows for two adults who are living together to designate their relationship as "Unmarried Partners." When the census is completed, information about the numbers and demographics of same-sex unmarried couples will be available.

When the census was taken in 1990, the Census Bureau did not count any answer by a same-sex couple who marked "spouse" to describe their relationship. The Bureau considered it a mistake because it is legally impossible for same-sex couples to marry. This year the Census Bureau has indicated that it will simply re-categorize the the answer from "spouse" to "unmarried partner" so the data is not lost. The safest bet for being counted is to describe a same-sex relationship in its legal term "unmarried partner." This will ensure that your family is counted.

In 1990, approximately 150,000 same-sex households claimed the status of unmarried partner. Most agree that this is a severe undercount of the actual number of same-sex partners who are living together. The families of same-sex partners deserve to be counted so that greater diversity in the American family can be reflected and presented to law makers and others with the power to provide essential benefits and recognition. The form is not yet equipped to count the full diversity of American families, (for example: bisexual people in opposite-sex relationships and partners not living in the same household will not be reflected, and it is not clear what the Bureau will do with multiple unmarried partner families) but the ability for same-sex couples living together to be counted is a marked improvement.

For more info ><http://www.WeCount.org><
The site is currently under construction, but is reserved for The Census 2000 Visibility Project. The sight will include information on the importance of counting same-sex couples and will have flyers you can download for local education work, such as placing this information in your chapter newsletter.

--from OUTpostings



Letter to the editor

I gladly gave you my \$6 for a paper that Bloomington/Normal should be celebrating the fact that it comes from within its soul. Thankx so much for printing my poems, after all they are written for everyone to feel. Here in Sav. I miss Babbitt's Books & hearing John Firefly's words at readings but your paper helps! Thankx!

--Matt Erickson, 304 E Waldberg,
Savannah, GA 31401

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Mind candy

Hey there Post Amerikan humyns and welcome home, again zum more, to another love and light filled edition of Mind Candy. I see that we all survived another couple of months since the last issue. The universe has not imploded; no major meteors smacked into us. For most of us life is good, but we can all make it better with two positive words, "President Gore," plus one other little word, "vote." The world is still in great turmoil, and we have a septendecillion things to do to make our planet healthy. But it's in the air, we are finally on the right path to heal the planet, and we are learning to lightly live upon it. In this edition we'll cover zum fun stuff to tickle our gray matter. Then we'll go on to three environmental magazines that will help you on your path to a better modus vivendi.

First let's explore some of the new developments in web radio then move on to some web sights, a micro-book, a micro-bookish zine, then our green-zines. So put on your galoshes cuz this is going to be a big, wet, juicy one.

Ya say you're bored with the dozen or so broadcast stations in your area; or even the 200 (plus) broadcast stations on your dial? Or you found a station that you adore but it still only plays a fraction of what chimes your inner soul like the right tuning fork. Well then, how about the option of thousands and thousands of radio stations. By this time next year there could be radio stations in the amount of five figures. Yep! 10,000 stations. Right now there are well over 4,000 with more than a hundred new stations each week coming online. With the most listened to being www.kpeg.org out of San Francisco. Another way to enjoy web radio is www.imageradio.com which basically lets you be the d. j. kinda, sorta. Setting up your own web radio station is quite easy, and relatively inexpensive. You just need a fast pc (the 1000 mhz units will be out soon by the way) an available slot, a little soft ware and your d. j. equipment, or as Beck would put it, two turntables and a microphone and poof, you're a global celeb. You can play all those Monkees albums that have been sitting up in your attic 24/7. It's fun stuff, and you can do it all for the

cost of a weekend trip to Bangkok. There are a few new toys joining our toy chest kids, "web radios." These stand alone units don't need a pc, just a phone line is all you need to listen to a Tierra del Fuego morning show, and tune in a Tribal Rave in Zambia at noon.

One very cool web radio soon to be on the shelves is "I Rad." Not only will it tune in www.wpkn.org (my fave) but it will also store one thousand, count 'em, one thousand mp3 format songs which means no more clutter on your hard drive! If you just want a web radio on you pc plus you want to listen to it throughout your castle, "sonic box" is a jiffy fine new gadget. You plug it into your pc slot and it broadcasts the tuned in web radio station on an available fm frequency band. In short, soon you can have your cake and listen to it too!

Speaking of web radio, those of us who tune in to www.wpkn.org Monday/Tuesday at midnight knew what it was to listen to the craggy voice, rants and liter-surrealisms of Bob Balogh as he hopscotched between reality, sanity and an alternative existence. Unfortunately, Bob has taken a little break from the airwaves so his show "Black Boy Theatre" is not currently on.

However, you can still catch his fragmented brilliant diatribes that are injected with ironic wit in a collection of his musings thanks to "Thin Air Books" (55th East 4th Street, Suite 3, New York, NY 10003) who has published the likes of Allen Ginsberg, John Cage, and the collected works of Jack Kerouac now have published "Variations of You," Balogh's little gem with stories that range from encountering a damsel in distress wearing a green plastic garbage bag, to love, to reacting to the consequences of assigning a gender to a t. v. set, to a dominatrix's day in court, to taking a deceased dad for a motorcycle ride, and a whole myriad of other things that you'll rub your eye's to see if you read "that" right. "Variations of You" is a bit brief, but it will keep you going until Bob returns to the airwaves.

Our gray needs nutrients, not just stuff to read, music to drink, and love to make, but actual victuals. Finding the right salubrious yummy treat is not always easy. Especially if you're stuck in some place without a good health food store. Wholefoods.com can solve this problem by offering over 10,000 organic and good-4-u foods and delivering them to you anywhere in the continental U.S., pronto. Plus they have lots of info diets, cooking and a hodgepodge of stuff. It's an agoraphobic's dream come true.

Another handy web site that crossed Mind Candy's scope is www.vg.com. It is the Time/Life plant encyclopedia data base listing 33,000 trees, shrubs, and vines. . . so you can look up what you're about to put into your mouth, or what you can grow on your roof garden. Just in case you were wondering where your kiwi frappe came from, www.vg.com will have the answer.

(a. k. a. Sarah O'Donnell/ 1122 East Pike #910, Seattle, WA 98122; A steal at a buck-a-pop. Send \$8 for a bunch of back issues) I don't know why I'm so drawn to "personal zines." Maybe cuz it's like reading someone's diary, and I'm a natural snoop. Maybe it's because it is like being inside of John Malkovich's head. Who knows, but their fun. Let's face it, some personal zines are just junk, but every so oft one pops out of the mire and croaks a pleasant mantra like a magic bullfrog.

"The Urban Hermit" is one such breakout zine. If for nothing else it is a good social studies insight on how the Seattle "punk" scene differs from the other "punk" scenes throughout the U.S. The stories I read dealt with the disneyfication of the counter-culture, a punk's adventures in a lesbian bar, spoofing the freemason's secret handshake, riding the two lane blacktop with a less than hygienic roadie, and dealing with a "Brooklyn Ghandi-Riccola rave dancing, alpine dressed supermodel." I like the message Sarah spills, like "the power of saying I love you when someone is calling you an idiot," and living as an individual even when it hurts. Sarah is a perspicacious gem and you'll want to kiss her eyelids and declare her as "friend."

Earth First (P. O. Box 1415, Eugene, OR 97440, \$25 bimonthly)

"Earth First" has been around for a while; it is the nightmare of those that rape gaia. It is not written merely for "tree huggers" (and I use that term with the deepest respect and affection) it is for people that chain themselves to trees to prevent the forest(s) from being clearcut. "Earth First" is definitely left to left-centerist. If that bothers you, then "Earth First" may not be for you. Yet, for those of you that transcend politics and love this fragile planet and all of its inhabitants, "Earth First" is gold. Examining the mining industry; the other side of Seattle's W. T. O. fiasco that the conventional press didn't bother to tell us about; global activism; civil disobedience; the effects of damn dams on the biome; the Yellowstone buffalo slaughter; "green" poetry; stunning environmental graphics; tons of resources. . . is all stuff that "Earth First" shares every other month with us. They offer a \$500 lifetime membership deal

Rape Crisis Center of McLean County

We're a non-profit volunteer group whose main purpose is to offer assistance and support to victims of sexual assault and their friends and families.

Female and male volunteers answer your calls and are available for crisis assistance, information and speaking engagements. You may request to speak only with female volunteers.

If you want to talk to one of us
Call PATH 827-4005
and ask for the
RAPE CRISIS CENTER



that gives people a chance to put their money where their ideology is. Each issue is crammed with the mental tools you'll need to get active in saving the environment.

Ambio: A Journal of the Human Environment (U. S. Distributor: Ambio, 810 East 10th Street, Lawrence, KS 66044, write for current U. S. prices)

Ambio is put together by the Royal Academy of Sciences. While the writing is a little stiff and void of humor it is perhaps the best environmental magazine there is in the world. Going beyond fad slogans of the day to delve into the hard facts and scientific background. Anybody that is serious about environmental activism needs this essential tool. Ambio takes you around the world from the coastal regions of Zanzibar, to the deepest and farthest northern forests to examine the nitty-gritty details so oft left out of many environmental writings. If you're looking for catchy drivel and cute cartoons, or a bunch of government bashing, Ambio is not the place to turn to. But if you're looking for substantial data to win debates with, Ambio is the cure, and the solution.

Resurgence (Jeanette Gill, Resurgence, Rock Sea Farmhouse, St. Mabyn, Badmin, Cornwall PL30 3BR England, \$62 and worth every penny)

Established in 1966, this bimonthly is fantabulous. It amalgamates a whole myriad of topics from terminator genetic technology, to spirituality, social consciousness, sustainability, transportation, splendid crafts, the Brit and global art scene, all topics you can find in many magazines. But what is so rare about "Resurgence" is the style and esoteric feel of the text. One may be reading a book review that is a swim in the quantum philosophy. Diverse topics weave nicely into each other and relate to the reader how to connect the dots from point A to point Z.

For those that are sick of the dumbing down of the American conventional press, the use of the English language in "Resurgence" is like a tall glass of iced limeade in the midst of a blistering desert. There are plenty Euro-resources and just plain fun stuff. Each page glues itself to your eyes, and you'll forget the little things in life like eating, drinking beverages, breathing. . . until you've hit the back cover. (Contact Walt Blackford, the U. S. representative for this magazine at: P. O. Box 404, Freeland, WA 98249)

Fortune News (53 23rd Street, New York, NY 10010) This newsprint zine is dominated by prison news, yet it also has some well done articles on parenthood, alternatives to violence, book reviews and award winning poetry that will clutch your heart and take your breath away. **Fortune News** is amongst the best of the prison related publications, and worth the read even if you're not a big fan of the incarcerated.

Anarchy (C.A.L. Press P.O. Box 1446 Columbia, MO 65205-1446) (\$16/4 issues 3rd class) It's hard to read **Anarchy** without the Sex Pistols song "Anarchy in the U.K." running through your head. Whilst remembering the lesson of Rashamon (that every tale has another side to

it) **Anarchy** gives us the other side to green activism, the struggle of Chiapas, and a myriad of movements (oft time left to center) that the popular press forgets to write about. **Anarchy** is also connected to the alternative press, and reviews quite a few zines.

Retrogression (P.O. Box 815, Norton, MA 02766)

Retrogression is faboo, especially the early editions which are a must have for zine enthusiasts to gobble up. The back issues were over 120 pages with brilliantly written articles on the same rape, military spending, Abner Louima (who was brutalized by the N.Y.P.D.), the plight of the Kurds, and the internal workings of Capital Hill. Along with extensive zine, book and music reviews and an awesome interview with Sabrina Margarita Alcantara-Tan (a.k.a. Bamboo Girl) some black hole in the universe caused **Retrogression** to trim down to a mere 8 pages, but the brilliant writing is still there, and it's still a lot of fun. Mayhap if we readers all subscribe to **Retrogression** and take our lots of advertising (after you take out lots of advertising in *Post Amerikan*, of course) we can pump it up to its old format. Let's give it our attention at the very least.

News and Letters (59 East Van Buren Street #707, Chicago, IL 60605) (\$5 per year/ten issues) In case **Anarchy** does not fill your revolutionary needs, **News and Letters** is a perfect complement. Somewhat short, but generally well written. It's a bold eclectic mish-mosh of writing. Which offers a section called "Voices From Within the Walls" which covers the prisoner aspect of this zine. Like Dr. Strangelove's uncontrollable arm that was moved to salute, your fist may ball up to say "power to the people" with this little zine. **News and Letters** also tastefully deals with articles about "the school of assassins;" to Pinchochet; to Kosovo; to Matthew Sheppard's tragic murder. It's a great read at a good price.

The Sun (107 North Roberson Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27516) **The Sun** is the zenith for alternative writers, it is merely the best there is. Consistently masterful and luminous. Going from reading blase media hype to reading **The Sun** is like plunging in a cool mountain stream on a hot 'n muggy day. Anyone sick of reading junk will always find something substantial to sink his or her teeth into within **The Sun's** pages. One cool thing **The Sun** does is that it asks the readers to send a bit of text on an upcoming topic (i.e. hair, starting over, names, roommates, the first time, etc.) which becomes a treasure chest of mind candy. Even the letters sent into **The Sun** are enriching. The poetry is amongst the finest contemporary writing around. The photography is gallery quality worth framing. The feature articles vary greatly, so each issue is a fresh explosion of thought. An ending section called "Sunbeams" is an assemblage of sound bites, quotes and random musings that will lighten your daily existence. Not subscribing to **The Sun** should be a crime, but since the last thing our society needs is another law, I'll leave it up to you to do the right thing. So get on the stick and lay out the subscription price (write for current prices).

Well humyns, that brings us to the end of another edition of Mind Candy. Mind Candy is an independently written review article. If you have any comments, ideas, or things that you would like to have reviewed by me either produced by you or someone else, or you just want to send a note, photo(s), or a letter of adoration or disdain (but no c. d.'s, vinyl, videos, or cassettes, just text and photos, please) send them to me at: Nikolai Zarick #162110 SB-538, C. C. I., 900 Highland Ave., Cheshire, CT, U. S. A. 06410-1698. I hope you enjoyed this edition, and you find that our tastes merge, if not shoot me! See ya in a couple of months!

--Nikolai Zarick

Note: Mind candy is always looking for new text (text only, no c.d.'s, cassettes, or videotapes at this time; just printed material and photographs). So if you're publishing a zine or if you know of someone that is, please send it along with your comments, letters of adoration, and words of advice. Until next time....

Send to: Nik Zarick # 162110
SB-538 C.C.I
900 Highland Ave.
Cheshire, CT USA
06410-1698



We're a hippie family

"When the sun rises, I go to work,
When the sun goes down, I take my rest,
I dig the well from which I drink,
I farm the soil that yields my food,
I share creation, Kings can do no more."

--Ancient Chinese, 2500 B.C.

"Now we are all poor folks down here, we live on
fresh air and mountain scenery, and we have so
many ways you've just got to like some of them."

--John Conklin Harlin

"A strong sense of identification with a particular
place means making a bond with the other
people who live there--whether you always agree
with them or not. Common ground in the
geographic sense creates common ground in the
social sense."

--Daniel Kemmis

"She [mother] took us out in the yard one day
and asked us if we knew the price of eggs, of
apples of bananas. Then she asked us to put a
price on clean air, the sunshine, the song of birds--
and we were stunned."

--Ralph Nader

"Money often costs too much."

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

"What's money? A man is a success if he gets up
in the morning and goes to bed at night and in
between does what he wants to do."

--Bob Dylan

"Mama, I don't want to go to school....I just want
to hang out on my land."

--Keegan Magee, my sweet boy

Ah! What a life we live up here! I feel that I have
been reborn! My whole life I've wanted to live
among open-minded people, with rolling hills,
trees, water and out in the country....and now I
have arrived! My existence in Bloomington-
Normal is affectionately referred to as my "past
life" much to the confusion of the folks up here,
who mostly believe in reincarnation. They
wonder how I am so sure I lived in Central
Illinois in my past life and have such vivid
memories. I feel like I was born and raised here,
and am completely at home and loving it.
Granted, some of the experiences I thought I
could do without at the time, but in a way I
wouldn't have missed any of them because of the
adventure they have added to our existence.

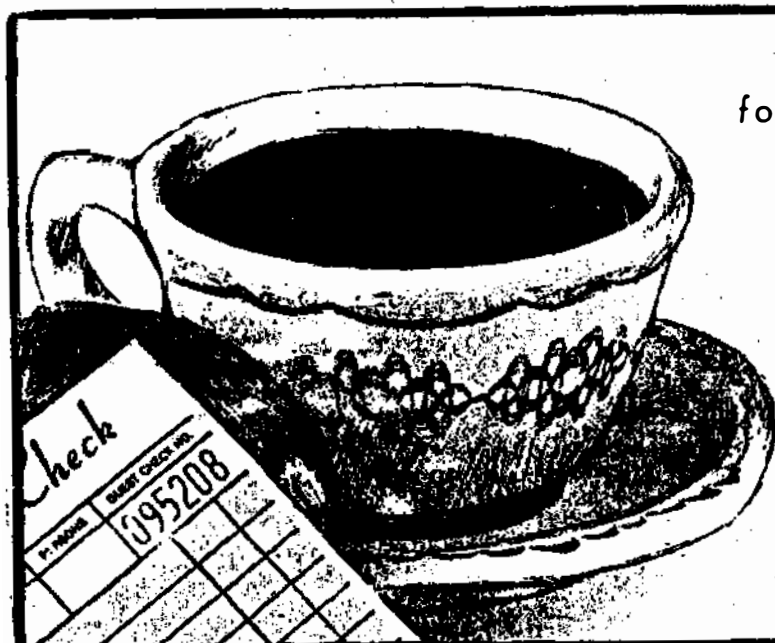
The war of the rats

Want to hear the saga of the rats? Well, our
house is an OLD farm house...maybe it should be
leveled, really, but that seems like such a waste.
We have a bad back addition that should never
have been built. It runs across the entire back
length of the house and has never been usable for
anything but storage space. One part used to
open directly onto our bedroom, and this was the
newest part of the bad addition, built about 15 or
20 years ago. Imagine one of those long mobile
homes, but very narrow, attached to the back of
our house, and you get the picture. It was a
heating nightmare. For a while at the beginning of
this winter we just had a wool blanket in front of
the huge opening (sliding door size...like on
someone's back eating area leading to their patio)
because we had too much else to do other than
fixing it. We kept the door closed to keep the
heat in the rest of the house, and bundled up
deeply at night. We could see the "smoke" from
our mouths as we breathed in that room. Out on
this addition we had the rabbit and a rooster in
cages. Well, last November, I started noticing
odd noises out there at night. I kept telling Mark
I thought that we had rats, and of course I was
wrong, according to him. One night two of them
got into a fight, squeaking and sort of hissing.

And I stopped sleeping in the bedroom and
moved to the couch, since there was a door
between there and the bedroom. I am proud of
myself. This is quite brave for me, I thought.

I think Mark got lonely and was missing the
added warmth of me in the bed because he
started setting traps and built a wall and door
between our room and the addition. We caught
eight in all. Mark and the boys (Jim and Darrel)
fixed up the bad addition as well as they could to
keep the rodents out. Apparently there were
massive holes in the house back there. So, the
problem was solved...almost. Because you see,
we couldn't catch one. It lived mostly in the ugly
drop ceiling of the bathroom. It crawled up
through the addition and under the board in the
attic over to the drop ceiling. You could hear it
walking around in there as you bathed. It
eventually ruined an entire box of my wool I had
stored out there. This has shown me new depths
in the expression "this looks like a rats nest!" No,
it probably doesn't. You have no idea how truly
disgusting a rat's nest really is. Anyway, I wasn't
so freaked out knowing it wasn't in the house
proper, with no chance of it dropping in while I
was sleeping. The bad part was that this rat was
a SMART rat. It evaded all traps and attempts at
capture and killing. We had four traps around
the hole baited with, at varying times, peanut
butter, cheese, roast beef and salmon cream
cheese. After it ate into a 50 bag of whole wheat
flour we tried flour as bait. Still no luck. We
tried that stick goo tape that captures their feet
and you then have to find a way to kill the
bastards. That still didn't work. We were even
considering a live trap...with the intent of killing
it once we caught it.

Our friend Brian, upon hearing about the flour
and how I was going to now have to throw it all
out, asked why I would waste the whole 50



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pounds. Why not use the good 30 pounds at the top? I said, "Brian, I am doing quite well to be sharing my home with a rat at all. I don't have to eat after it." He understood.

I went to school with the kids one day and talked with Cindy, the kindergarten teacher. She asked how I was, and I said I was a bit gloomy because we hadn't won the war with the rats yet, and told her how one had ruined my wool. She said that was nothing....she used to live in a house in the country so infested that one woke her up biting her finger one night. I told her that, upon reflection, I was fine and had no problems. Most folks in the country up here have a unique rat story to share, so you feel sort of a part of the "in crowd" swapping rat stories, instead of white trash as I did in B-N when we had two.

Recently Mark became my hero. He ripped out the drop ceiling. The rat was up there, perched on the ledge, and jumped onto the bathroom floor, running around trying to escape. Mark told me later that his hammer really is a multi-purpose tool. Didn't I hear the hammering? My neighbor Jane asked me, "Aren't you grateful we have men for those things? I know we could do it if we were living out here alone....but aren't you glad we don't have to?" I agreed.

We have won the war, for now. Frankly, I am so grateful to discover what was really lying underneath the walls of the bad addition. I didn't like that ugly space, but if it was salvageable, we would have made it into a workable area. Luckily it really is the rotten piece of shit we thought it was and we can rip the whole damned thing off.

Hannah shared Mark's wielding of the hammer with her class in the morning at school. Two vegetarian children were horrified, and asked why we didn't just trap the rat and set it free. Meanwhile, Henry, bless his heart, told of how the rats invaded a pile of corn at their farm. They set the corn on fire to scare them out, and shot them with 12 gauge shotguns. This horrified those two boys more, but enthralled the rest of the class. Wow. Hunting rats at the Hundts.

Dead bird

Hannah got a chicken for her birthday that the Wickerts had found. It was one of those kinds that lay green eggs, but was a teenager, so we didn't know if it was a male or female. I was excited, hoping for a hen and a green egg daily. No such luck. Morning Glory proved to be a rooster.

We got him at the end of October, and we didn't have a coop, so we kept him in a dog crate on the bad addition. Sometimes, when Mark was gone, I'd let him out to wander the kitchen, but this ended when he started flying up onto the table. It was a funny sight, and the kids thought it a riot.

Morning Glory didn't seem to know his job well, or maybe I have the wrong impressions of roosters. I thought they would cock-a-doodle-doo at sunrise. Not true. They crow whenever they want. Three in the morning. Four twenty-

seven A.M. Six-fourteen. Two in the afternoon. I don't get it. We had no peace. On warmer days I would put him outside and let him wander the yard, scratching.

Eventually, I figured out that he was costing us far too much money in feed for...nothing. I had spent almost \$20 on chicken feed in four months on something that couldn't even lay an egg and attacked me whenever I stuck my hand in its cage. I began looking at him and seeing a roast chicken dinner. Up here there are folks who know something about everything, and I soon ran into Sheri in the school store. Sheri is an artist, quite funky...and famous for her chicken butchering. I asked her how she did it.

"Oh, you make yourself an aluminum funnel the head can fit through that will hold the chicken in place after you chop the head off and keep it from flopping around. Attach in to a post or something, with a bowl below to catch the blood as the bird bleeds so you can put the blood on your plants. The plants love it! Then you simply hold the bird head down until it passes out, place the head through the hole in the tunnel and chop the head off. Very simple, no mess." Hmmm. I started thinking about it daily as it pecked me. I brought the subject up with the children who insisted they would NEVER eat their bird.

Finally it was warming up outside! I decided to put the bird outside in the summer kitchen in the cage so I didn't have to listen to it crow throughout the night, and keep working on the children to let me try Sheri's butchering technique. No such luck. The first night out in the summer kitchen was the last. I went out in the morning to feed the bird, and it was dead, its head ripped off through the wires of the cage. Keegan had to go check it out and came back in to inform me that "...the legs were eaten up too. Something must have been real hungry, mom." Mark disposed of the carcass. This seems to be his role in life lately...disposing of animals.

Cow purgatory...Border collie hell

Mark and Robert needed timber for a building project they were doing, and drove all over in their search. One guy said to go to his brother's place, and they did. Oh, what a sight! It was a dairy barn with about 1000 head of cattle with their heads through gates permanently so they could never move. They got shots constantly, had gross drippy noses, and no minimally normal cow life. Add to this the dog. It was a border collie...a herding dog. And he had this enormous herd to work with and guard...an immovable herd. We wondered if the dog was pleased with his work at keeping the herd all in one place, or frustrated by the lack of movement. The owners of this purgatory said the cows were the dog's "babies" and the dog rarely left the herd. Robert whispered to Mark, "Just think...this is where your milk comes from..." Mark told me, "Not mine....we get that biodynamic organic raw milk from happy cows!" The farmer was a nice guy they said, and was pretty proud to show off his modern operation to them. He didn't see a thing wrong with what he did. Life is interesting. It takes all sorts.

Nuzum's

Mark works as a carpenter/handyman. When he was building the wall in our bedroom to assure we kept the rats out, he drove the 20 minutes into town to Nuzum's, the lumberyard, to get the beadboard I wanted for the wall. When he got home and started doing the project, he realized he had gotten exactly HALF of what he had needed. Damn, now he had to go back into town. He called the store to find out when they closed, and found out that they were shutting in 15 minutes. It wasn't likely he would make it in time. The woman asked, "Is this the Mark that was just in here? Oh, in that case we'll just put the rest on your account and stick the wood outside the front door for you so you can have it today!" Hmmm. We got the wood, and all was well.

Another day he was working out in LaFarge, and needed more wood. He had never been in that Nuzum's before, so he walked in and asked to make a charge to his account. The guy working there misunderstood, and started to take his name and phone number down. Not realizing Mark had a Nuzum's account, he was going to give the wood to a complete stranger and let him pay for it later! Life in a small town...

Life in a small town is different, difficult and wonderful. There is no anonymity. Perfect example: I walked out on my job at the café. The

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owner is a control freak with power issues. She didn't have power over me and it really pissed her off. Oh, she's also running for a republican senate seat in D.C. Surprise? When I walked out on the job, I went to a place of comfort--the bookstore across the street where I bumped into Ken. "How's it going?" he asked me. "Great!" I told him. I just walked out on my job at the café!"

That afternoon, my neighbor, Jane, stopped by. I had fixings for my oh-so-famous Margaritas which she had been wanting to try all summer. She said, "Only one...I have to go to book club in a little while," and then, "Wow! That's great! Maybe one more!"

The next day Ellen walked up to me at school. "I hear you walked out on the café, and went home and got bombed on margaritas." What!?! "Small town, Marcee. Everyone knows your business." Apparently Ken mentioned to his wife, Lara, that I had walked out on my job. Lara brought it up at book club, of which Ellen is a member, and then Jane walked in and said, "No wine for me! I just had killer Margarita's at Marcee's!" Hmmm.....it is a bit disconcerting to know everyone knows my business, but at the same time it feels nice. I walk into the grocery store, and there are always friendly faces. I walk downtown saying hello left and right. It is all very nice in many ways. When in Bloomington for a couple of days, I ran into the grocery store

and didn't see a single person I knew. I realized that it just felt a bit cold after the last few months of friendly faces everywhere.

Deer herd

The wildlife is amazing! There was a deer next to my house in the fall, we have deer beds on the back of the land, and deer droppings all over under our apple tree. I was dropping a friend of Keegan's off a couple of miles from here and had at least 12 deer crossing the road in front of me the other day. Wild turkeys roam the back of my land, and all in our family but me have seen numerous eagles. Owls hoot at night, coyotes howl, and all is grand! To have such glorious woods, wonderous views, love my landscape all around me are things I haven't tired of yet. Even now, as I type this, I look out over the winter browns and golds of the fields and trees, with the whites of the birches thrown in. Gorgeous! I delight in each moment I spend out here, and have not for a moment regretted our decision about moving up here. Lady bugs have kept me company all winter, covering my windows and walking around. At first I worried that they wouldn't make it until spring, but it is just around the corner now and soon we can put them back outside. And Mark could never pee love letters in the snow for me in B-N as he does up here.

We're a happy family

We have discovered a decent Mexican restaurant in LaCrosse called Tequila. My whole family was hanging out waiting for a table, Mark and Keegan with their long hair, Hannah and I with ours, me with my nose double pierced. Some young college woman walked up and started going on and on about us.

"Oh, look at those gorgeous long curls on your children; they are just so adorable! Oh, look at all of you! You are such a cute family! You look like hippies. Are you a hippie family? You are, aren't you?"

"Well, sort of...we're a HAPPY family," I told her.

"Oh, yes you are...you're hippies! I can tell!" and she giggled and left.

We love our land, with its mini-canyon, trees, fields and views. We love the towns around us...Viroqua of 4000 and Gays Mills of 500. We love the school, the people, the energy here. We have the alternative lifestyle and diversity of people that we have always wanted, and here we are the norm. Ours is a happy, wonderful life, full of surprises. The quirks...the rats, the decapitated rooster, cow purgatory...are all just a part of the package. Good, bad, who's to say? It's not my place to judge, but to live fully in each moment thankful for all I have.

--Marcee Murray

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Seeing Red

by Steve Eckardt

Try to Remember

by Steve Eckardt

Remember Illinois governor George Ryan's historic trip to Havana? The one universally heralded as starting the collapse of the U. S. 40-year blockade of Cuba?

Funny, it's just a few months past and already a dim memory.

Brainwipers again. (But bet you do remember the kids three years back killed by a trucker with a bribe bought license from operatives of then-state secretary Ryan, right? more on that later. . .)

At the time -- trust me on this -- the Havana trip was top story all the way, even internationally. Hell, first time for a U. S. governor going to revolutionary Cuba. And an entourage loaded with top officers of agri-business megacorps like Archer-Daniels-Midlands and Caterpillar Tractor, not to mention the U. S. Chamber of Commerce.

Biggest thing was it flagrantly violated U. S. law.

After all, Americans talking business with Cuba is strictly outlawed by Washington's "Trading with the Enemy Act." And front-man Ryan -- plus his 300-person Big Business crew -- got reminded of that by the U. S. Justice Department in no uncertain terms.

So they cut the group in half, came up with a few boxes of medicine, and labeled the trip a "humanitarian mission" a loophole in the Trading with the Enemy Act).

Talk about flimsy pretexts -- a Governor, 150 CEO's and support personnel, and a week in Cuba . . . all to deliver a mini-van or two of medicine.

Hell, it was damn close to treason, as far as Washington was concerned.

Sure, once in Havana the Guv revealed his own hostility to the Cuban Revolution (and his bad manners) by declaring "the problem in Cuba is Fidel Castro . . . get rid of him" and things will be OK.

But when Fidel graciously invited him for a meeting anyway, there was Ryan on live Chicago TV gushing "He wants to see me!" to a hometown reporter. "Do I look OK?" he even asked the hack.

All the more credit to the old pol. It was his moment in history -- close as he'll ever get to doing something meaningful (even once he gets around to the usual contracting of Mob-connected construction outfits for "re-paving" highways with a thin inch of macadam liberally cut with toxic waste).

Yep, there in Havana, the guy looked more that OK. So what if he was fronting for agri-businesses eager to overthrow the Revolution with different tactics than Washington's?

Thing was that his unprecedented gubernatorial visit -- and the corporate-heavy delegation -- struck a real blow against America's 40 year relentlessly-hostile Cuba policy.

That's [ITALICS] why the brainwipers would have you forget it.

And that's why -- less than two weeks after Ryan returned from Cuba -- the feds suddenly opened multiple investigations (complete with massive leaks to the media) of the old drivers license scandal.

Hell, then-state secretary Ryan's license-for-sale scandal was open public knowledge back during his 1998 run for governor's office. His Democratic opponent even ran TV ads featuring the kids killed by an incompetent bribe-paying truck driver.

In fact the editorial writers excoriated the Dem for violating civil discourse, for reaching too far.

And Illinois voters -- following the lead of the opinion makers -- opted for the juice-spreading Ryan candidate against a Democratic who looked like a badly aging porn star and offered nothing but anti-abortion zealotry.

But now you're supposed to forget all that and be shocked -- shocked [ITALICS] that a few bucks may have changed hands in government offices.

Lawdy, lawdy.

Here's something far better to forget -- the widely-peddled notion that Washington's hostility to Cuba is softening.

Truth is that U. S. hostility to Cuba has only been worsening. It's added laws making illegal for the whole world to trade with Cuba. It's turned the executive order blockading the island into a statute repealable only by two-thirds vote of Congress.

It's violated the U. N. accords by refusing to provide security for Cuban head of state Castro when he was invited to address the World Trade Organization Seattle meeting (small matter of an arrest warrant issued by a [surprise!] Miami judge)

And it's violated elementary international law -- not to mention common human decency -- by seizing a small Cuban child to use as a propaganda weapon against Cuba.

The record couldn't be clearer -- for forty years Washington's policy toward the Cuban Revolution boils down to "eat shit and die."

It has yet to change in the slightest.

Just ask Governor Ryan -- it's a lesson he's having a hard time forgetting.

-- Steve Eckardt

For more -- and to respond -- visit the web magazine Seeing Red at <www.SeeingRed.com>

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The Gap Information and Action!

The Gap is one of the worst offenders of using sweatshop labor. Workers at factories producing Gap apparel are forced to work overtime, must meet very high productivity goals, and receive wages that are only a third of minimum living level and that's just the conditions of one factory in Honduras (reported by the National Labor Committee in June 1999). Factory workers in Macao reported being forced to work overtime and being cheated on their already meager wages. The Gap also has factories in Saipan, a U.S. territory. These factories do not follow U.S. Labor Laws, but since they are in a U.S. territory, they can place the MADE IN USA tag on the products. The locations of many factories producing Gap apparel are kept secret.

The Gap, which also owns such retail stores as Old Navy and the Banana Republic, had a net profit of \$825 million in 1998 alone. The Gap has repeatedly made promises to reform their factories, but little to no change in working conditions or wages have occurred. There is no reason the Gap cannot pay their employees a living wage and improve working conditions.

Here is a SAMPLE LETTER that can be used as a guide to help you draft a letter to GAP CEO Donald Fisher.

Donald Fisher, Chairman
The Gap, Inc.
One Harrison Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

Dear Mr. Fisher:

As a Gap customer, I want to express my concern about the sweatshop conditions and labor abuses on the island of Saipan. As a global company contracting in dozens of countries worldwide, The Gap has an obligation to its customers and its workers to reverse the race to the bottom in labor standards that is occurring in the garment industry.

In Saipan, The Gap has a responsibility to lead the way towards ending labor and human rights abuses by taking steps to:

Protect workers' rights, including the freedom of association and collective bargaining.
Abolish the use of labor contracts that deny workers their basic human rights.

Ban the collection of recruitment fees and create a trust fund to repay such fees for all present and former workers, and pay return passage for any present or former worker who wishes to return home.

Set up a credible, enforceable independent monitoring system, with semiannual public reports, to ensure an end to all labor, health and safety abuses.

I thank you for your attention to this urgent matter and look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,
(your name)

Visit this website for more info. (HYPERLINK
<http://www.igc.org/swatch/marianas/help.html>
<http://www.igc.org/swatch/marianas/help.html>)

For more information about ISU No Sweat e-mail us at (isu_no_sweat@hotmail.com)





Sweatshop Watch

Stop Saipan Sweatshops

On January 13, 1999 in the first-ever industry-wide attempt to hold US retailers and manufacturers accountable for the mistreatment of garment workers in foreign-owned factories operating on US soil, a lawsuit was filed against 18 US clothing companies, including the Gap, Tommy Hilfiger, the Limited, J.C. Penny, Wal-Mart and Sears. With no US import tariffs, no US quota restrictions, a minimum wage of \$3.05 per hour, and lax immigration laws, the Northern Mariana Islands--a US Commonwealth in the South Pacific--has attracted a host of foreign investors who produce clothes for some of the biggest brand-name labels at the cost of exploiting workers. These companies are accused of using indentured labor--predominantly young women from Asia--to produce clothing on the main island of Saipan. These immigrant workers must: sign contracts that deny them their basic human rights; pay exorbitant recruitment fees that keep them in a state of indentured servitude; work up to 12 hours a day, seven days a week, often without overtime pay; and live in overcrowded housing in unsanitary conditions.

The Gap is the leading company in Saipan's garment industry, producing hundreds of millions of dollars worth of clothing.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Join rallies and information leafleting across the country at GAP stores. Contact Leila Salazar (leila@globalexchange.org) Leila Salazar at Global Exchange to hold a rally or do leafleting at a store in your area.

<http://www.globalexchange.org/economy/corporations/gap/>

- Write to the companies producing in the Marianas and ask them to STOP SAIPAN SWEATSHOPS!

- If you find clothes in your closet that were made in the Marianas (some labels say "Made in the Northern Mariana Islands, USA"), cut off the label and return it to the company demanding that they clean up sweatshops in Saipan.

- Support laws that protect workers. NOTE: Sweatshop Watch does not necessarily endorse the following bills.

- Congressman George Miller (D-CA) introduced H.R. 730 The Human Dignity Act, which will extend federal laws governing immigration, minimum wage and U.S. Custom Agent Authority to the Marianas Islands, to protect the integrity of the "Made in USA" label and encourage local employment. The Marianas Islands were originally exempted from U.S. immigration and minimum wage laws to promote economic development.

- Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and Rep. David Bonior (D-MI) introduced S. 192 The Fair Minimum Wage Act, which would raise the U.S. minimum wage and eliminate Saipan's exemption from the mainland minimum wage.

- Congressmen Bob Franks (R-NJ) and John Dingell (D-MI) introduced H.R. 1621 The Made in USA Label Defense Act to close the loophole in U.S. law that allows goods from Saipan to enter the mainland duty-free.

Last year, the U.S. government estimated that the Saipan garment industry avoided more than \$200 million in duties on \$1 billion worth of garments shipped from Saipan to the mainland. The Take Pride in America Coalition has launched an interactive <http://www.takepride.org/> web site to help individuals who want to support the bill.



Stop
Saipan
Sweatshops



News from MCATF

2000 International AIDS Candlelight Memorial

MCATF has answered the call for participation in the 2000 *International AIDS Candlelight Memorial* sponsored by the Global Health Council. This represents the 17th annual International AIDS Candlelight Memorial, and the local observance is tentatively scheduled for Sunday, May 21st, 2000. We hope this observance will raise community awareness of the local impact of HIV and AIDS, and of local services and volunteer opportunities.

The *International AIDS Candlelight Memorial* honors the memory of those lost to AIDS, shows support for those living with HIV and AIDS, raises community awareness of HIV/AIDS, and mobilizes community involvement in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Last year, the event was observed in over 300 locations in 43 nations on every continent but Antarctica.

This year's theme is: **"Break the Silence: Honor Every Death, Value Every Life."** If you are interested in helping plan and put on this event, please leave a message for Bruce Lang as soon as possible at 309-827-2437. Watch local media for details as they become available.

The History of the Event

The original *International AIDS Candlelight Memorial* was held in 1983, when the cause of AIDS was unknown and no more than a few thousand AIDS deaths had been recorded. The organizers wished to honor the memory of those lost to AIDS and demonstrate support for those living with AIDS. That remains the focus of the event today.

Since 1983 the pandemic has claimed more than 16 million lives, with about 34 million now living with HIV and AIDS. As HIV continues to ravage communities around the world, the *Candlelight* has increasingly become a way for communities to take action by publicly mourning loved ones lost to AIDS, and by strengthening local and national commitments to fighting the pandemic. In small communities, it can help to increase awareness, understanding, volunteerism, and fund raising. In large cities, it brings together a diverse spectrum of people who care about AIDS. In all cases, the event creates a sense of global solidarity, and generates world-wide media attention.

World AIDS Day 1999 & MCATF

We had limited success in our effort to enlist governments in MCATF's service area to issue proclamations for World AIDS Day 1999. Three governmental bodies, the Town of Normal, the City of Bloomington and McLean County provided us with proclamations. They were on display in our front window November 30 through the month of January. **None of the other twenty-seven communities in our two county service area even acknowledged our request.**

We have also been displaying several miniature quilt panels and name-ribbons commemorating friends and family members who died from AIDS-related causes. These items were made several years ago by family members and friends.

Day Without Art 1999

Beginning November 26, the artwork in MCATF's offices and center were draped in commemoration of a Day Without Art.

On December 1, 1989, loss prompted artist in New York to organize the first "A Day Without Art." Some galleries closed their doors in mourning for the day or shrouded paintings. Theaters were silent and dark. Communities across the nation observed "A Day Without Art" with silence. And, eleven years later, AIDS continues to levy a heavy toll in every community, and artists continue to remember their friends and lovers on December 1.

During those first commemorations the idea of absence permeated the observations. In more recent years, the emphasis has shifted on the artists' responses to AIDS. On December 1, painters, poets, and performers serve as witnesses. They express the sentiments of our community and communicate our suffering in a tangible form. AIDS-related art not only chronicles this terrible disease, but asks: how can we translate this awareness into direct social action? "A Day Without Art" reminds us to vow an end to AIDS.

—from *Red Ribbon Review*

[Http://www.religionproject.org](http://www.religionproject.org)

The following is a statement that is circulating in the progressive religious community for signature by ordained clergy and leaders of religious organizations. All those who sign the document will be listed on a booklet to be released in April 2000. For more information on this project, the website is www.religionproject.org May you find this statement empowering and exciting!

The statement is as follows:

Sexuality is God's life-giving and life-fulfilling gift.

We come from diverse religious communities to recognize sexuality as central to our humanity and as integral to our spirituality. We are speaking out against the pain, brokenness, oppression, and loss of meaning that many experience about their sexuality.

Our faith traditions celebrate the goodness of creation, including our bodies and our sexuality.

We sin when this sacred gift is abused or exploited. However, the great promise of our tradition is love, healing, and restored relationships. Our culture needs a sexual ethic focused on personal relationships and social justice rather than particular sexual acts.

All persons have the right and responsibility to lead sexual lives that express love, justice, mutuality, commitment, consent, and pleasure. Grounded in respect for the body and for the vulnerability that intimacy brings, this ethic fosters physical, emotional, and spiritual health. It accepts no double standards and applies to all persons, without regard to sex, gender, color, age bodily condition, marital status, or sexual orientation.

God hears the cries of those who suffer from the failure of religious communities to address sexuality. We are called today to see, hear, and respond to the suffering caused by violence against women and sexual minorities, the HIV pandemic, unsustainable population growth and over-consumption, and the commercial exploitation of sexuality. Faith communities must therefore be truth seeking, courageous, and just.

We call for:

--Theological reflection that integrates the wisdom of excluded, often silenced peoples, and insights about sexuality from medicine, social science, and the arts and humanities.

--Full inclusion of women and sexual minorities in congregational life, including their ordination and the blessing of same sex unions.

--Sexuality counseling and education throughout the life-span from trained religious leaders.

--Support for those who challenge sexual oppression and who work for justice within their congregations and denomination.

Faith communities must also advocate for sexual and spiritual wholeness in society. We call for:

--Lifelong, age appropriate sexuality education in schools, seminaries, and community settings.

--A faith-based commitment to sexual and reproductive rights, including access to voluntary contraception, abortion, and HIV/STD prevention and treatment.

--Religious leadership in movements to end sexual and social injustice.

God rejoices when we celebrate our sexuality with holiness and integrity. We, the undersigned, invite our colleagues and faith communities to join us in promoting sexual morality, justice, and healing.



Human rights violations found in the U.S.

by Amnesty International

- Misuses of electro-shock weapons
- Misuse of stun belts
- Conditions in "supermax" prisons
- Children held in adult prisons
- Lack of jail inspection programs
- Conditions of detention for asylum-seekers
- Use of chain gangs
- Criminalization of consenting sex between adults of the same sex
- Brutality by local police and federal agents
- Death by hog-tying
- Misuse of pepper spray and CS gas
- Racist police practices
- Ill-treatment of prisoners
- Abuse of restraints
- The death penalty

The National Guard has been spending about \$250 million annually on marijuana eradication with less than ten percent of the country's pot crop being destroyed in the process.

According to the Ogdensburg, NY Journal, National Guard helicopters are using heat sensors to spy on people's houses. "When a helicopter flies over a house and points sensors at a particular residents, investigators can tell how many people are in the residence and if there is an unusual heat source or explain what heat sources and lights are violations of federal law.

Oklahoma's McCurtain Daily Gazette reported that residents of another Guard-occupied community complained of helicopters flying too low over poultry houses and terrorizing chickens during their most vulnerable period for smothering, other choppers hovering over bathing-suit clad women in swimming pools, guardsmen starting fights with patrons of local nightspots, picking up local teenage girls in their humvees and harassing local residents driving on logging roads. Some women also claimed that the guardsmen offered them pot in return for sex.

Military historian and strategist Martin van Creveld in the Los Angeles Times: "As the 20th century draws to an end, it is time that military commanders and the policy makers to whom they report wake up to the new realities. In today's world the main threat to many states, including specifically the U.S., no longer comes from other countries. Either we make the necessary changes, or what is commonly known as the modern world will lose all sense of security and dwell in perpetual fear."

The Clinton administration has established that first military command specifically designed for military operations in this country.

-The Progressive Review
December 1999

Blackshere new IL AFL-CIO President

Illinois labor completed two first in January: the Illinois AFL-CIO held a contested election and voted in its first female president—Margaret Blackshere of the Teachers.

Blackshere and her secretary-treasurer running mate, Decatur electrician Michael Carrigan, won with sixty percent of the ballot, defeating Operating Engineer George Machino of East Alton and his secretary-treasurer candidate, Joe Costigan of UNITE in Chicago.

Blackshere's reputation is that of spirited hard-worker. A former school teacher from Madison County, she first gained prominence in the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT) for her persistent work in Springfield. She was a key lobbyist in passing Illinois' public employee collective bargaining laws and helped lead combined labor efforts on a number of statewide political campaigns. She also serves on the Democratic National Committee.

Blackshere has served as Illinois AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer and succeeds Don Johnson, who is retiring.

Blackshere chose Decatur's Carrigan as a running mate because he's done something the national AFL-CIO encourages local unionists to do: run for civic office. A Decatur city council member, Carrigan is business manager of IBEW Local 146.

Blackshere immediately laid out a comprehensive action plan for the state labor federation, whose membership includes 1,500 local unions.

A toll free number for workers seeking a union was one new idea, along with coordinated organizing efforts in specific industries. She wants to develop solidarity networks to support struggling local unions poll rank and file union members on their concerns.

Sham unions, a growing threat in the construction trades, is another target. These organizations sign up contractors trying to avoid legitimate AFL-CIO unions. Blackshere said, "These organizations are not unions. They convince their workers they are union, but they do nothing and they undermine area unions who fight to improve wages, safety, and training. Phony unions won't work in Illinois."

Blackshere wants to build coalition with religious, women, senior citizen and civil rights groups.

For a labor federation that traditionally relied on the Democratic Party, Blackshere hopes to reach out to sympathetic Republicans and build alliances with them. "We will work with anyone that wants to put working families first," she added.

She saw communications as the cornerstone for the labor federation's political and legislative work, mobilizing union members to protect their jobs, communities and conditions. "We have always been very aggressive in our political and legislative agenda," Blackshere said. "We are going to continue to use our network of grassroots activists to hold legislators accountable for their votes. It is our job to inform and activate the one million union members of this state, not only to vote but to lobby working family issues."

-Livingston & McLean Counties Union News
February 2000.

Karen Schmidt
Alderman ~ Ward 6

409 E. Grove St., Bloomington

home: 829-6318

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e-mail: karen@uiuc.edu

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The Poetry Page

Making The Bed (A Portrait of Complicity)

You were
making the bed
as usual,

A task in the South
where unspoken nuance
has more meaning
than the details of
its execution,

Your mother
on this rare occasion
assisted You,

Then, as sudden
as it was casual

"Is your father
botherin' you?"

Somehow You got
overbeing stunned
long enough to
say "Yes"

A doubting hope
arose in You as
she said
"Well I'll talk to him."

But
it was the last
You ever heard
of it

before the Explosion
of Your Soul -

--Mark Valentine

The poems "Hillbillies & Living Ghosts I" and "Making the Bed (A Portrait of Complicity)" are excerpted from the book "Hillbillies & Living Ghosts (Poetic Biography of a Survivor)." For copies of this work write to the poet at 912 W. Mulberry, Bloomington, IL 61701.

Hillbillies & Living Ghosts I

Over & over again
tho he be departed
his cruel soul long
gone from his even
crueler form
This W. Virginian
Poltergeist reaches
back thru time & space
to haunt my
own peace w/ those
vile acts committed
upon my beloved
who is his daughter,

The landscape of
Her loveliness may
be assaulted w/ an
anger fueled by that
looming spectre
left behind by
the unyielding damage
of his painful machinations,

Searching for some
redeeming answer
amid the
turmoil I find none,

What could I possibly
say to a small
girl-child brutally
deprived of that
which we all
hold in such
solemn regard,
The right to choose?

Her body recalling
even that which
the sharpness of Her
great mind may
have lost in its
memories abyss,
I weep
Forever
For Her -

--Mark Valentine

this and that in the here and there

i've traded all my comfort for the hard backed chair of fate
and i don't know the road i've taken but i pray it's not too late
if you scream to me the answers, i promise i won't cheat
if you show me all the cards, i'll still play until i'm beat
i'm living in oblivion with the songs i used to sing
feeling my way through life just to see what Time will bring
that's all i'm really waiting for, the gifts he's handing out
cause all he's given so far is regrets, despair and doubt
so i'll wait till 3:15 when his hands are out again
to see if maybe this time will be the hour that i win
and i'm sure i'm not alone here, i know you've been here too
and you've wondered if you had what it takes to follow through
yeah, i talk the talk of confidence and wear the coat of common sense
but i've lost more than my innocence ad i've no clue where that went
i've lived inside for decades and i'm still not 30 yet
i'm starting to think it's possible that i'm here cause i lost a bet
and i try to read my future through the pages of my past
and wonder when i'll make it and which words will be my last
see i used to really like me and that took me pretty far
but i'm back to wishing cigarettes and "how i wonder who you are's"
so i'll finally learn to juggle who i was and who i am
and make a barbie picture puzzle of a person i can stand
and i'll take my inner children on a 2 day shopping spree
so all of us can make the girl we really want to be
and didn't i just do this? cause i'm certain you were there
yeah, you're the one who pushed me when i couldn't climb the stairs
was i really just divided into parties, bars and shows?
did i lose me somewhere in the crowd amongst the lyrics, rhyme & prose
cause i thought that i was more and a novelty at best
and moving to obscurity would be the greatest test
but i may have been that person, that girl up on the stage
ad she just isn't here now unless she has someplace to play
so i'll climb into the basket, ride the shopping cart of life
and know it's not how deep i'm cut, it's the person with the knife
and if i ever find me, does that mean that i am safe?
and if i name the date and time, will i somehow know the place?
should i write obscure directions on a recycled paper bag?
or would that merely put me in a one girl game of tag?
will i ever really get there? will i finally reach the end?
can i find a space marked start or go so i know where to begin?

--written by Barbie Dockstader for bobby. Copyright 2000

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The Post Amerikan is seeking poetry
submissions for the Poetry Page.

If interested, please mail your poem
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pamerikan@aol.com.

We have the right to
reject any poem.



ASK ME ANYTHING
 WANT SOME FRESH AIR LET'S TAKE A WALK
 ALPHABET GIRL SETTING BESIDE ME
 HOVERING BY MY SOUL
 WAITING? WANTING? QUESTIONING?
 TRAVELING FROM HERE NOW
 HERE NOW
 I AM FEELING
 WAITING, WANTING, QUESTIONING,
 WATCHING, CLOUDANCER
 SUNSET OF A NEW DAY
 A NEW TIME TO TAKE BIRTH
 A NEW WORLD OF NOT NOT HER
 TOGETHER, WE HOVER
 SPIRIT SOULS BEAMING ACROSS A SPIRITLAND OF
 NEVERENDING HARMONIOUS GLORIOUS
 FREEDOM IN ITS MOST
 SIMPLEST FORM IS ITS MOST COMPLEX
 AND AT ITS MOST COMPLEX IS ITS SIMPLEST
 UNITY
 BUT HOW ARE THESE MATERIAL SHELLS
 DOING? ARE THEY REALIZING AND NOT DOING
 OR DOING SLIGHTLY, NOT ENOUGH
 KNOWING MOMENTS & ACCEPTING
 AND MANIFESTING THEIR FULLEST
 EXTENT, BIRTH AND GROWTH
 THE POWER OF CONNECTION
 TONIGHT OPPORTUNITY WAS THERE
 MAGNETIZED BETWEEN THEM
 THAT CONTINUOUS CONTRADICTING -- PULLING AWAY PULLING TOGETHER
 ONLY ONE HAD TO MERELY SAY
 WHY DIDN'T I
 WHY DIDN'T
 I SAY SOMETHING A THOUSAND TIMES
 AS SHE WAS LEAVING, ON THE RIDE HERE,
 NOW HERE ALONE, AS I
 TRY TO FALL ASLEEP
 I SMILE I SMILE A THOUSAND TIMES
 SHE DOES THAT YOU KNOW
 SHE HELPS ME & I HELP HER
 INSPIRE TO INSPIRE
 WHEN YOU ACTUALLY FEEL
 FEEL A SPIRIT
 , A SOUL OR WHATEVER MORTAL WORD
 YOU WANNA USE
 DRAWING NEARER AND NEARER
 IN A WAY THAT IS UNDEFINABLE

--Matt Erickson

Geo

Rough exterior, craggy voice, flocculent demeanor
 A runaway metabolism anchored by his amaranthine heart
 Thrice a father to his two sons, and all in need of paternalism
 Walked on by the slippery, but not for long
 Refrigerated because his soul is so warm
 Ten fisted partier
 Burning the candle at six ends
 The spirit of a Woodstock sojourner
 There when none be
 No veils, no punches pulled, in your face wisdom beyond his tears
 Unparalleled friend of mine

--Nikolai Alexanderovich Zarick

Behind These Bars

Orwellian new speak is the vernacular
 The dumbing down of America is happening 1.8 million at a time
 Murder is a badge of honor
 Loving inappropriately will get you killed
 A runaway imagination will save your mind
 Letters are clutched close to the chests
 No one hears your tears hitting your mattress
 Sensitivity is a crime
 Shouting drowns whispers
 Your soul is rubbed raw in circadian attacks
 Love is distant, but never forgotten
 Music brings solace to empty hearts
 And, God is in your face daily.

--Nikolai Alexanderovich Zarick

So Rightfully it Embodies

your so scared
 so confused of how
 now me
 don't don't mess it up
 this is what you know to b the way
 faith in the real way of the heart and soul
 true
 and sometimes your frozen
 and sometimes your slow
 and all
 all you want is for unselfishness
 to become what it is purely to be

--Matt to Be



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Current Situation

so i've been here awhile, but i'm way out of style
 and it seems i will never be vogue
 and my van's still half-packed, old regrets in the back
 and momentos of all i call home
 And i sit here and write, but i'm losing the fight
 to be who i thought that i was
 cause the girl in my eyes lost all thoughts of the prize
 when she found the one boy she could love
 my dilemmas quite clear; where do i go from here?
 should i write something when nothing is wrong?
 and if i really am happy will my thoughts come out sappy
 like all of those backstreet boys songs?
 will my friends think it's treason if i forgo rhyme and reason
 and write only of flowers and birds?
 will they think that i'm spun and my career's finally done
 or i've expended all my favorite words?
 or is that the true sin? that i may just give in
 and speak like a top 40 tune?
 if i find that's the case then i'll crank up the bass
 and find a small mattress filled room
 so i think that instead i'll shove the voice from my head
 and write of the truths i believe
 so i guess i should start, i'll just write from the heart
 of all that i've tried to achieve
 do i lead with my hopes or the fears that i choke?
 should i scream all my secrets and sins?
 it all seems so easy unless the person you're pleasing
 is the critic who's living within
 should i strike the next line? does this voice smack of whine
 cause i get on my last nerve a lot
 should i try to bedazzle with a chaos unraveled?
 obfuscate with some Pynchon-like thoughts?
 so what do you think, should i just grab a drink
 and fall into a dull drunken void?
 cause i'm more than confusing and quite less than amusing
 and i'm certain you're getting annoyed
 should i write of my past and how long would that last?
 would it interest someone more than me?
 or go back to the attic, and the words much more tragic
 and invite you all over for tea?
 where's the Benchley for my table? why aren't my thoughts more stable?
 why is comedy found only in my glass?
 and does anybody care that my thoughts have dropped me here?
 that i landed on my head and not my ass?
 should i finish with a smile or commend my lack of style
 and tell you that i'm sure i'll be okay?
 or should i be more honest, that i don't know how far i got us
 and i'm sitting here with nothing left to say.

-written by Barbie Dockstader copyright 2000. Inspired by 7 days.

Out of the kiln

Emily, she gave it
 ta me, said what does it make
 you think of, I said a slow
 moving train in the palm of
 my hand,
 she said it's my fetus
 the baby didn't make it,
 the father is out there
 boozing and drugging
 it up, he says Em loss
 the baby and I don't care,
 and he's laughing an telling
 sick dead baby jokes, but
 he's hurt too, he split when
 she said she was pregnant,
 he's still try-ing ta deal
 with that.

-John Firefly

Being Able to find One's Self

Growing up in family with out religion
 Growing up in family with no direction
 Growing up in family with out guidance
 Growing up in family learning by your
 own mistakes
 Growing up in family learning that
 life is not as easy as it seems
 Growing up learning things the hard way
 Growing up in family trying to understand
 what happens in the world and why
 Growing up with out Christ
 Who am I?

--Marcella Rose

The Matador

My dreams haunt
 me in the day,
 cullard by
 the moon,
 they sing
 of the name
 I cannot say,
 a whispering
 of ocean waves,
 licking moonlight,
 glittery stars
 tasting the dark,
 the way precious words
 taste of a silent swallowing,
 I am a matador
 of word, and I
 will show you how
 brave an strong they
 were, before I
 kill them,
 one by one, with
 my cape, an my
 suttull unseen
 dance of death,
 I will rain down
 on them, even into
 the next world, I
 take my cape with
 me as I am dancing
 still, the matador,
 ha-floop,
 swish,
 swirl,
 another word
 with horns for
 my blood breathing
 shallow.

-John Firefly

Poem for a Poem

Well, well, well
 what have we here?
 Something born out of brain sludge --
 coming out of the mire to be
 arty-farty?
 Do your thing syllables and letters!
 Mix the alphabet in fine tune!
 Make a song that makes someone
 cry or laugh
 or tear up the piece of paper
 and never look at art again!
 That's the stuff.
 Strike the funny-bone in the soul where the
 arty-farty stuff is recognized for its
 pain and sadness and sensuality and
 humor and anger and other senses the
 soul's nerve can feel.

Sock it to the masses any way you can...

The arty-farty fine tuned alphabet is
 usually all what it's cracked up to be...

Let's try a poem.

--David Hall



A nasty media campaign against organic food

The strangest news items about organic food have been popping up. It isn't good for you after all. It's full of bacteria and insect parts. You folks who pay a high price for it are not only suckers, you're risking your health.

ABC's John Stossel recently interviewed Dennis Avery, "leading critic of organic produce," who said organic foods are grown with (oh no, tell me it's not true!) manure. As we all know, manure is "infested with bacteria." Furthermore, organic farmers "waste land and resources because they lose so much of their crop to weeds and insects."

Before I get into speculating about why anyone would want to be a "leading critic of organic produce," let me quickly dispose of his claims.

All kinds of crops, organic or not, are raised with manure. Any farmer in their right mind who can get hold of manure to put on their land does so, because it's a cheap, long-lasting fertilizer. Not only does it provide nutrients, it helps soil hold moisture and gives it a better texture for plant roots -- which fertilizer from bags doesn't do.

Vital nutrients have been cycling through soil, plants, animals, manure, and back to the soil for eons. Farmers have been riding that cycle since farming began. As a farmer I have had regular contact with chicken, sheep, cow and horse manure for decades, and I live to tell the tale. Anyone with the wit to wash hands and veggies need have no fear of manure. Pesticides are harder to wash off, especially when plants are genetically engineered to produce them in every cell. Give me a choice between meeting up with an honest cow patty or some malathion, and there's no doubt which I'd pick.

Organic farmers do not lose more to pests or weeds than other farmers. They do not get lower yields, though Dennis Avery (who was in the Agriculture Department under Reagan, who now works at the right-wing Hudson Institute) constantly claims otherwise. Both chemical-using and organic farmers on average lose 30 percent of their output to pests or weeds.

The loss rates are similar because pesticide users typically grow monocultures, miles of the same crop year after year, a sure recipe for breeding that crop's pests. Pesticides beat back the enhanced pest populations to roughly where they would be if crops were interplanted and rotated -- which is to say, if they were grown the way organic farmers grow them. Pesticides don't reduce crop loss, they just permit monocultures. Monocultures lend themselves to mechanization and industrialization. We like to think they reduce costs, but we do not count the costs of spraying poisons across the land or eating their residues in our food.

It's because our foods are increasingly mechanized, industrialized, engineered, poisoned and irradiated that organic foods are becoming popular. At present there are 6,600 certified organic farms in the United States, large and small, north and south, growing everything from grain to grapes. There are also many uncertified organic farms; only 31 states have certification programs. Altogether consumers buy about \$6 billion worth of organic food each year, about one percent of the U.S. food budget.

Doesn't sound like enough of a threat to mount a publicity campaign against it. But the organic food market has been growing at 20 percent per year in America, faster than that in Europe and Japan. British supermarkets comb the world for organic produce. Sainsbury's, a major U.K. grocery chain, has approached the governments of two Caribbean nations, Grenada and St. Lucia, to plant hundreds of acres of organic bananas, mangoes, coconut, and passion fruit, to be shipped exclusively to its stores.

I have walked in a Central American banana plantation, where there was no visible living thing other than people and bananas. I was cautioned not to touch the plants, not to pick up fallen fruit, to wash myself and my clothes thoroughly upon leaving, because of powerful sprays that were used on a weekly basis. This is the produce that Dennis Avery wants us to regard as healthy.

I guess that the recent spurt of negative campaigning against the word "organic" stems not only from worry about the rapid growth of the U.S. organic market, and not only from fear that British enthusiasm for organic foods might spread our direction, but also because of the release of our first national organic standard. After ten years of planning, this set of rules for organic certification was announced on March 7 and will go into effect later this year. (You can read it at www.ams.usda.gov/nop/.)

A national standard will provide a label that, if the USDA does its job, consumers can trust. No, I'm not sure the USDA will do its job. It took a huge protest from farmers and consumers to head off its plan to allow bioengineered crops and crops fertilized with sewage sludge to be labeled "organic." I'm happy with strict, well-administered state standards. But if we want our organic farmers to have a national or export market, we need a national standard.

By the way, the new standard does not allow fresh manure to be applied to any food crop within 90 days before harvest.

So don't listen to the public relations campaign against organic food. It's all just a load of you-know-what.

--Donella H. Meadows, AlterNet



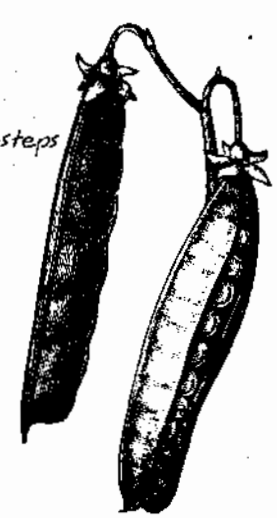
Donella Meadows is an adjunct professor at Dartmouth College and director of the Sustainability Institute in Hartland, Vermont.

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Texas populist challenges big money politics

If The Gods Had Meant Us To Vote They Would Have Given Us Candidates by Jim Hightower, Harper-Collins books, \$25 ISBN 0-06-019393-X

Having trouble telling this year's crop of presidential contenders apart? Is there a certain look-a-like sameness about them, a blow-dried, pre-packaged look, even when they're being "casual?"

There's an easy answer for the sameness, according to populist scribe Jim Hightower of Texas, it's Big Bucks. Hightower lambasts our current political offerings in his latest sad but hilarious book, *If the Gods Had Meant Us To Vote They Would Have Given Us Candidates*.

According to this sage of the Great Plains, big money is calling the shot in both parties. If you want to be a contender, with all the requisite 30 second TV commercials and the appropriate entourage of aides and consultants, you need lots of cash. And who has lots of cash? Large corporations, Wall Street brokerage houses and the wealthy. This leaves candidates beholden to big money, leaving the average person far behind in a boom economy where rich are getting richer and the poor are looking for that third job.

That's not necessarily news to Americans, particularly the majority who already ignore the political system by non-participation. But Hightower takes great relish in spelling out all the particulars, how those with the cash get the action.

Like bananas. Bananas, a political controversy? They were this past year in trade

negotiations. Seems European countries were giving 10 percent of their market to small producers in the Caribbean. This didn't sit too well with the head banana at Chiquita, Carl Lidner. So Lidner, who traditionally gave Republicans lots of money, started dumping some banana bucks to the Democrats, winning multiple nights in the Lincoln Bedroom and earning status as one of Clinton's top ten donors in the '96 election. He added another \$260,000 to the Democrats in '98.

Thanks to that political clout the U. S. trade office suddenly went, well, "bananas," crying about restraint of trade. The World Trade Organization (WTO) was summoned to chastise the European nations. And although the U. S. produces no bananas, this became a top agenda item for our trade office.

Chiquita, with its vast banana plantations in Honduras and Guatemala, won the day. 24,000 small farmers in the Caribbean, most with about four acres of land, lost, overwhelmed by the "freehand of the market" and greasy cash.

Not a new story, but one Hightower tells well, with enough folksy sayings and pointed jab to keep the reader riding along, waiting to see what outrage waits around the next curve. For those of us living outside the fabled Washington "belt way," there's a handy glossary of fund-raisers terminology, reeking with the gross cynicism that underlies our Democratic process. The "Made in the USA" shell game being played in Pacific island Saipan, where indentured Asian workers toil at below minimum wage conditions in a U. S.

protectorate, carefully watched over by Representative Tom DeLay of Texas, is spelled out in all its gruesome glory.

It's easy to get mad, but getting even takes a little more work. Hightower's no slacker in that regard. He's run for office himself, serving as Texas Agricultural Commissioner. While there he promoted small farmers and opened markets, not by international treaties like NAFTA, but through direct contact between producers and consumers. He encourages grass-roots electoral efforts, community based and with a definite agenda, not tied to individual political ambition. Hightower especially calls on Americans to reclaim their rights to their government, reminding readers that corporations don't exist by any fundamental right, but because citizens tolerate them. If corporations are controlling our political system, it's the voters' right to reclaim it, not ceding money to power.

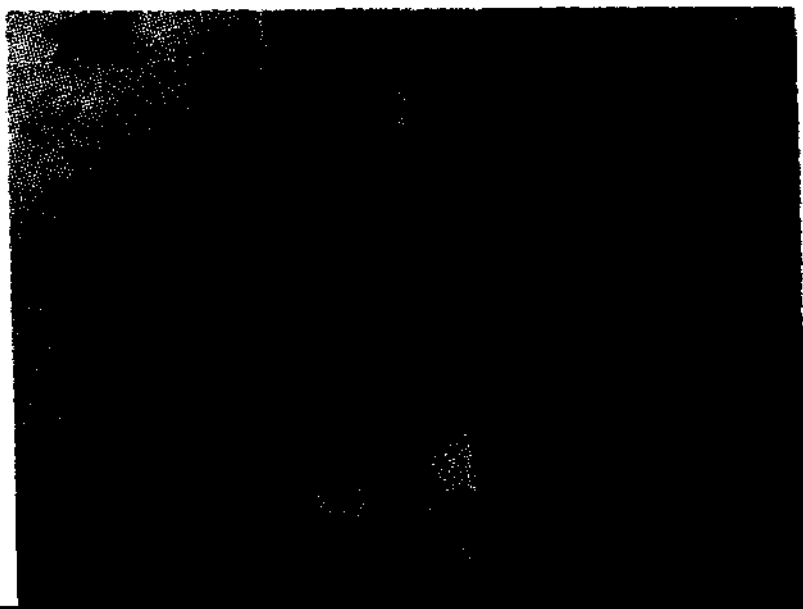
In the 1890s a populist wave swept the nation, initiated by fed-up small farmers from the south and west. This effort fundamentally changed the Democratic Party and led to a reform wave of new laws and protection.

Hightower is a ready heir to that tradition, a funny and optimistic fighting voice, ready to mobilize the "little people"-- workers, farmers, taxpayers and consumers -- to reclaim their country and their politics to insure "This Land Is Your Land."

--Mike Matejka
McLean & Livingston Counties Labor News

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Notes from the land of anti-fat

Fear of 'Baby Fat'

Fat phobia is striking into a new frontier, as documented in a recent WebMD article posted on the Internet.

According to said article, which appeared in the beginning of March, obesity is a threat as early as age two. Christine L. Williams, MD, presenting a study of over 1,200 preschool-aged children at an American Heart Association convention recently called this alarm. According to the good doctor, obesity in the very young is linked to high blood pressure and a decrease in the level of HDL, the so-called "good" cholesterol. These latest findings supposedly support the need for "prevention before any risk factor exists" to prevent early onset obesity.

Williams, director of the Children's Cardiovascular Health Center at Columbia University in New York, studied children who were enrolled in nine Head Start centers. 75% of the children were black or Hispanic. Twice a year the children were examined at the centers, she says. Exams included measurements of blood pressure, heart rate, cholesterol, blood sugar, height, weight, and body fat.

Almost 11% of the children had high or borderline high blood pressure. Risk increases with increased weight, and Williams says that the fattest children were two to three times more likely to develop high blood pressure. The best approach to weight control in these very young children, she notes, is a combination of nutrition and exercise.

"At age 2, a child needs at least a half-hour of exercise a day." While it may seem that every 2-year-old has at least that much exercise a day, she believes, "too often, today, parents are telling children to sit down and sit still."

Williams discussed her paper at a press conference devoted to childhood obesity. At the same press conference, Lynn Moore, assistant professor of medicine at Boston University School of Medicine, offered a study of 92 parents of children aged 3-5 which suggested that parental attitudes about food have a strong impact on weight in their offspring.

According to Moore, the children most at risk are those whose parents fluctuate between being very concerned about food intake and weight to tendencies of impulsive eating or loss of control. Kids who gained the least amount of weight had parents who were not likely to indulge in impulsive eating, she states.

Taking both studies together, Ronald M. Lauer, MD, of the University of Iowa in Iowa City, notes that parents need to be concerned because "obesity tends to track very closely from toddlerhood through adolescence and adulthood." Lauer's conclusion: obesity prevention must begin at the cradle.

Okay. But how real is all this frightening stuff?

For Karen Stimson, Co-Director of Largesse, the above represents a prime example of procrustean thinking. Rebutting WebMD's article, she notes that both the article and news conference paired unrelated research studies (one of 1200 Head Start preschoolers, measuring statistical markers of growth and health, the other studying 92 parents and examining their attitudes toward weight and food). The two studies have little in common except the fact that they deal with the subject of fatness. Grouping 'em together implies that one study supports the other - when the real connection is one of public relations marketing.

So let's examine the individual studies, shall we?

One of the basic principles of scientific research is that an association between two things does not prove cause and effect. Williams' study found "obesity in the very young linked to high blood pressure" and low HDL cholesterol. But this does not prove that fatness caused these effects. It could just as easily be theorized that high blood pressure and low HDL caused the kids to gain weight, or that an unknown factor - genetic predisposition, poor nutrition, stress, another health condition - caused all three effects.

By requirement, children who qualify for the Head Start preschool program are already at risk. They're kids who live in poverty - who can't count on a nutritious breakfast to start the day at home. Lack of access to preventative health care, medical insurance, prenatal care, and infant nutrition, the stresses of living in dangerous neighborhoods, and discrimination are all factors working against the health of poor and minority American families. If the researcher had concluded "poverty threatens the health of the heart as early as age 2," she might have been on more solid ground.

Our second study asserted that "the children most at risk [of becoming fat] are those whose parents fluctuate between being very concerned about food intake and weight to tendencies of impulsive eating or loss of control." In lay language, this describes the diet/binge phenomenon - alternating periods of weight loss with the inevitable binging and weight gain that follows - or as it is known medically, weight cycling. Weight cycling in most people has been shown to result over a period of years in a higher weight than they started at.

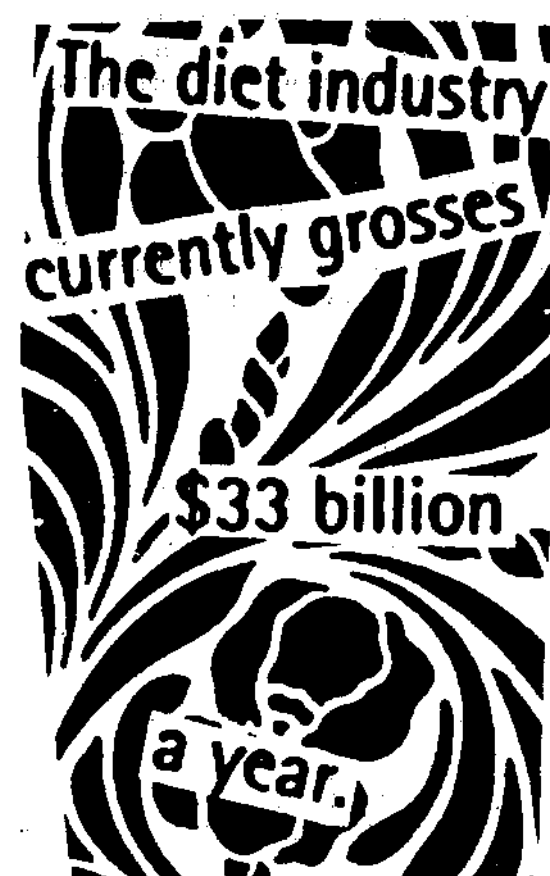
With that in mind, it's not surprising to learn that children of parents who are chronic dieters grow up to become the same, ending up fatter in later life than they would have been naturally. The unanswered question is whether these same children might have been a smaller size if they had grown up in a family setting where both parents and child had a less polarized view of simple eating. If kids aren't taught to starve and binge themselves into obesity do they look differently?

That's not a question we'll be getting an answer to anytime soon - imagine trying to find a large enough sample of parents comfortable with their weight and with eating!

Of greater concern is the possible effect that all this scaremongering will have on new parents. To take a study using subjects representative of a special segment of the population and then generalize conclusions to the entire population is dubious science. To use it to coerce parents already indoctrinated into the diet mentality into putting their toddlers on diets to prevent heart disease in later life goes beyond dubiousness into irresponsibility.

Me, I'm eagerly anticipating the Richard Simmons infant video. . .

--Bill Sherman





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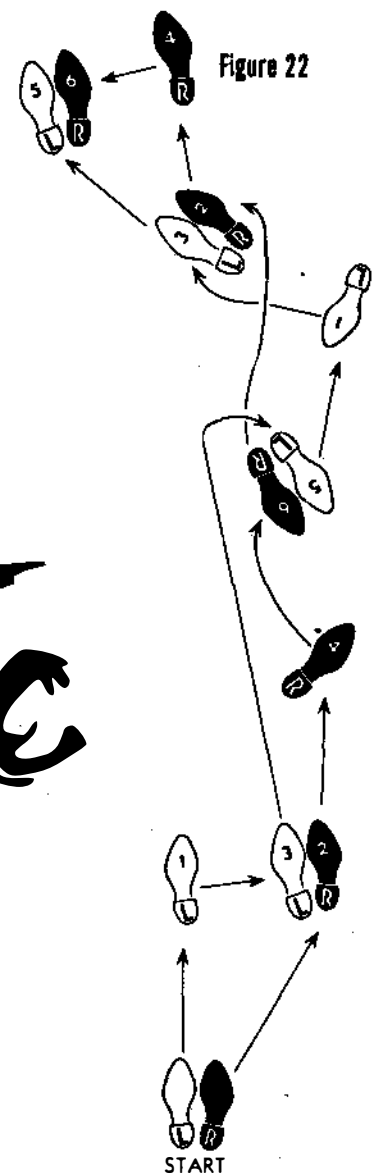
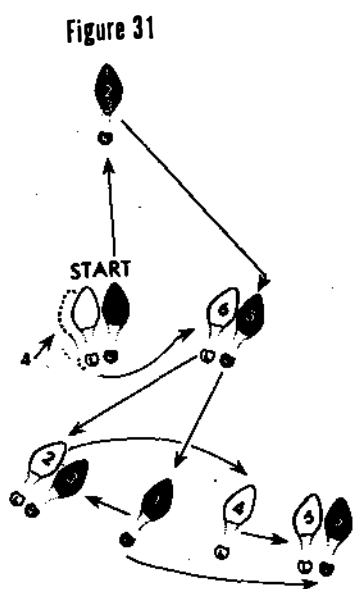
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