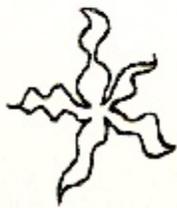


# MR. D'S NOTES ON LIFE



**Rev. Stanley L. Derickson Ph.D.**

## THE FOOD COURT JESTERS

By Stanley L. Derickson

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### DISCLAIMER

As you view the titles of the different sections, please don't jump to the conclusion that I am being politically incorrect, even though I tend to do so to irritate those that insist upon it. I am not in this case, I am just using titles that seem to describe that which has been observed.

What a wonderful end for the food court. The builders and designers made a wonderful area to gaze out upon the wonders of our city. Here I sit, by the window overlooking the top of the cleaner and shutterbug building with all the mechanical delights atop the buildings decorated in varying amounts of rust and debris. What a terrible view from that wonderful area - looking out on the traffic, the roof tops, the bleak parking structure, the many and varied traffic lights and booms and what ever moves in the street below. You can even see over to the top of the J.C. Penney building and its satellite dish, cooling tower for their air conditioning and other stuff associated with the roof of a commercial building.

Possibly a big screen or two with still images of the coast, or the mountains would have been a better end to the court - something of taste since that is what we are here for.

One must wonder if the designer of such a nice court bothered to see where it was going to be positioned. Could he have found a worse view to place at the disposal of the visitor? Doubtful from what I know of the surrounding area.

There's the myriad of food establishments, the photo booth, the ATM machine and ooooooddles of tables and chairs ready for the day of cough, spit and mess which leads us to our first person, the food court cleaner upper.

What a job! Can you imagine having such a job? Cleaning the tables off after the slops in the city are finished; oh what fun! Many do not bother to take care of their own garbage, so the

cleaner upper gets the privilege of taking care of that for them, then they get to wipe down the table to prepare it for the next slop in the city. They often also have to clean the floor surrounding the table because the fray has been so intense on the working surface that items have been discharged from their prescribed area by inattentive consumers.

It must be wondered if the folks go in the back somewhere and run themselves through a decontamination chamber when finished for the day. The filth and germs that they must be exposed to on any one day must be the equivalent of germ warfare.

Having been a janitor for a few years and having been subjected to my share of crimes against janitor - nothing like these poor folks must have to put up with.

Poor folks, ahhhh, another point on their behalf, they often are the lower paid folks of our society, yet they come in day after day putting up with the publics dirt - they deserve the distinguished SERVICE cross for their efforts.

Then there are the smells and the sounds of the court. There is nothing like the sizzling of the food as it is dropped into the deep fryer, the sound of cholesterol forming on the spot. Ah, the cardiac people must just love that sound and the smell that goes with it that is blown court wide.

How better to catch your interest and money than to gorge your nostrils with the aroma of fried foods.

The constant buzz of conversation isn't all that noticeable. It is when one person raises their voice above the din that noise becomes evident.

Added to the drone of people talking you must also add the rustling of various wrappers that seem to require so much attention. There are those that struggle to get into their food, you know the coffee lid that is the result of many months of research by the Brinks Company and the child proof package of chips that are a mass of crumbs by the time you get to them.

These new packing techniques may preserve for longer periods of time, but it isn't due to their ability to preserve, but their ability to remain sealed, no matter the method of attack, nor the strength of the attacker. There have been some packages that I have literally been unable to open, finding that scissors or knife were the only possible answer to the problem.

The sounds, the frustrations of wrappers are diminished by the aromas drifting through the area. We shan't speak of the aroma from the Cinnabon stand. The FBI is investigating them for their improper use of aroma sales. They ought to be required to contain their smell within a five foot radius of their establishment, or be fined in the most harshest of manner.

THE FIXTURES

Aside from the tables and chairs there is also every morning, as I stroll through the mall toward the food court, the six to eight people sitting at the same table at the same time. Whether a business meeting, or just friends gathering for some sip and talk, they are if nothing else, regular in their gathering.

Little attention do they give to those scurrying by on their way to work, to shop or to coffee. Concentrating on one another is their key, a key much of society could use to unlock the strangle hold which boring conversation has on real life. They seem to actually be interested in one another's comments and accounts of the day past.

### ARROGANCE IS BLISS

Head shaved clean, erect, stiff of speech and direct of approach he commands the counter as he orders his meal. Always the same meal, always the same demeanor, and always the same newspaper - well with a different date and hopefully some different news and of course always the same food counter.

An ex-marine, an officer on leave, or someone that likes to shave his head, read a newspaper, and eat breakfast in quiet - it would be anyone's guess, but indeed he seems to enjoy the ritual that is his. Not that he is very different from the ambulance driver that arrives the same time each day, and orders the same meal, or the school bus driver that does the same. Guess a lot of people are in a rut called life.

A "good morning," after watching this ritual of his had drawn a kind and surprised smile with an actual response of "good morning" in return. Amazing how a two word phrase can change the dynamic between two human beings that have before, been only observers of one another. Possibly we could change this section's title to Mr. Not So Arrogant.

Two mornings in a row, "good morning" was a positive occasion. Uhhh, three in a row, and four in a row, and the fifth day a real conversation! Maybe that title should be Mr. Maybe He Isn't Arrogant, or simply Mr. Shaved Head, since arrogance doesn't seem to be his reality, but only someone else's perception.

### LATE FOR A VERY IMPORTANT DATE

Sitting alone in the corner with his back to the wall, clean shaven, both face and head, tie with dark suit, devouring, or is that inhaling, his breakfast as if he were late for a very important date - oh, he is on the move brief case in hand, he is neat and tidy with the tray of refuse, depositing it in the trash container with prompt deliberate moves, and away he goes, stooped as if he has the world on his shoulders, but scurrying along to arrive as scheduled.

Humm, two bald men in a row, do we have a male pattern here? Bald men are supposed to make great marital partners, they are supposed to be more intelligent, but they are just as they are,

without the stuff of glamour going about their day as if it were important to the world, and indeed, it may well be.

## INCOGNITO

He enters the court, spots the writer at his computer and targets him like a bomber locks onto a target with a laser beam. With deep intent the man moves toward the writer, but at the last moment veers to the right and moves over to the window to peer out into the intersection. A moment there to seem inconspicuous, a quick glance at the computer and off he goes to the restroom area, only to return and move on through the court as if nothing had occurred. This guy was conspicuously inconspicuous, rather like the plain unmarked police car sitting across the street with coffee cups and donuts on the dashboard and in the mouth. Indeed, nothing had occurred in reality, but one must wonder what there was going on in the mind, not to mention what secrets he might have been carrying in his red bag slung over his shoulder.

## THE GUY NEXT DOOR

The man with the sunglasses on over his regular glasses, you know the shades that swing up out of the way so you can see, even though you cease to be cool for a moment or two. Only this guy's swing up specs had a weak spring that wouldn't hold them in place, but rather drooped down in front of his eyes. He was looking through half a shaded lens and half a regular lens, guess that is what you call half and half with your coffee.

He is so cool that he had his wife get his food for him as well. Now, the shades are down at about five o'clock and he is very near totally cool. If that spring is so weak, I wonder what happens in the wind, do they smack him in the forehead when the gusts catch the lenses? Is that where the red spots over his eyes came from? What lurks in the mind of a man when he dawns such paraphernalia to adorn himself on a very cloudy, dismal, rainy day? Maybe it is the brightness of the court, or more exactly the brilliance of those occupying it at the moment.

## THE QUINTESENCELY CHALLENGED

There he sits, daily in his little world, typing on his little computer. The computer with a small screen, similar in size to his mind where he finds the words to convey the muddle that most call a consciousness.

Encased in his wrinkled flannel shirt, his hands glide across the keyboard with those luscious drippings of his mind striking the keyboard that is his life. Sipping from time to time from his Senior decaff from McDonald's he gazes briefly to see what other jesters are doing in the court. A court where everyone passes now and then, but not always stopping to become the object of someone's interest and note.

If anyone were to crack the silence of his world there would be great shock, since the last time

anyone interrupted his activity was several months ago when the little Spanish teenagers asked, "What cha doin on that thing?" To which he so intellectually replied "Writin."

He stops now and then to rub his forehead with his fingers to roll the dirt and grease into little balls that fall in his lap, to be brushed away later. Not much different than your forehead - try it, rub your forehead a little hard and see if you don't have the same malady of life. Dirt is everywhere in this world, we just don't deal with all of it. Isn't it fun to feel those little balls of stuff forming under your fingers? Maybe we should have dirt rolling parties to give the janitors of the world something more to do.

The chemical makeup and consistency of this material is probably not all that unlike the material that MR. SCRATCH IT must clean out from his finger nails as he ends the scouring of his dead pan - we will see him a little later.

Don't sit there, ladies, and get disgusted with the disgusting traits of men, when women have the same strange foibles. Cleaning wax from the ear, being one. One woman was going at it so hard that it was thought she was going after diamonds the way she drove her long nail and forefinger into her ear, then as she withdrew it she gave it a mighty flick and the wax went flying into the air toward the lower level of the mall. No wonder so many guys wear hats in the mall.

Sitting at a stop light recently a snazzy red sports car was noticed stopped beside. Inside was a beautiful young blonde with all the assets of the car. Finger in nose digging as if she had a Whopper stored up there for lunch. Withdrawing lunch into her mouth it went - ladies don't talk about disgusting things men do, your fingers do as many strange things as those of men.

One would wonder why a stooped old man would know how to use a computer, but more to the point, why would he be writin with one? People do find him of interest once in awhile, but mostly because of his computer. It is small, it is neat, and it raises the curiosity of most everyone. Not all stop to comment, but some that are inclined toward technology.

What's he doin on that thing?" -- writin fer his website. Ah, the internet, that cesspool of information and materialistic abandon. To gain useful information you must wade through the labyrinth of Google or Yahoo for an hour to gain a minute or two of information, yet it is a great resource for the one that does not like to pay the parking meter at the public library.

A DOUBLE CHEESEBURGER, FRIES, AND SHAKE PLEASE - OH, AND AN APPLE PIE AND MAKE THAT TWO DOUBLE CHEESEBURGERS AND A LARGE DIET COKE

We've all seen her, or it could well be him, the very overweight person that is at the mall to walk for exercise and weight control, that stops off for a Big Mac, fries and shake as a reward for the good effort of the day to become healthier.

There is the variation on this lady; she is the one that is embarrassed about the overeating, so she

goes to the car to finish the meal. She is lonely, but happy while consuming the downfall of her life.

These gals are the same as the guys of the same size and we all need to know that they are people under that exterior; you just have to go a little deeper to get there. The person that is gravity challenged, often just can't say no to themselves, just as many of the other people in the world. Their foible is food, while other people's is someone of the opposite gender, or someone that has a bent toward materialism and heaps items of interest upon themselves whether they need it, want it, or can afford it.

Self control is not something that we have taught the recent generation and the size of the average clothing for sale is strong indicator of this fact.

Oh, the title "A DOUBLE CHEESEBURGER, FRIES, AND SHAKE PLEASE - OH, AND AN APPLE PIE AND MAKE THAT TWO DOUBLE CHEESEBURGERS AND A LARGE DIET COKE" comes from the order that this large woman placed. At least she drinks healthy. Rather like the woman eating a snicker while looking for an exercise video to buy.

#### THE POINTLESSLY CHALLENGED

Note with interest the little old lady that is wearing an old print dress that is faded and worn. If it is cold, an old scarf to cover the head and a coat that was out of fashion years ago, and over worn much earlier than that. She rides the bus to the mall, walks through the court on her way somewhere important only to her.

At times she stops to read the newspaper left by someone that has coffee and gone, or orders a burger to go with her on her trek to only she knows where. Her shuffling stride denoting a life long battle with existence, her stooped back describing the weighty storms of life.

When she speaks, one can realize that within the exterior is a real person, a person with insight, with intellect, and most likely a lot of wisdom mixed with a reasonable education. Why such a mix is packaged in such an unassuming wrapper is for the reader to fathom.

"Yep, Portland is going to get some snow tomorrow, but what of us, what will we get?"  
"Probably nothing, we seem to be a little more protected." is the reply. "What do you think of Bush's policy on foreign matters?" she asks to begin the discussion that strains the knowledge of the recipient of this woman's conversation.

It is more and more obvious that she is much more than just an old tattered woman, she has a good intellect and is quite interesting to talk with.

#### THE MELIORATELY CHALLENGED

You have seen him, the one with little to do, wondering from food station to food station bothering the help and cutting down on their productivity while he shatters his own. Their supervisor must just love to sit and wonder what the man has done this morning, where he has been, why he is so clean and well kept. What has he been doing, or not doing might be the real point.

Maintain is the thought of his job and maintain, he certainly does, he maintains an air of importance while disclosing his lack of character by lazing the day away in the court.

One must wonder why the bosses of America do not hold these folks accountable for their waste of time and talent. It may relate to the lack of teaching in the area of accountability today. Many have been taught that what they want to do is what they should do, and there is nothing wrong with that. So, one would wonder why anyone works anymore when they are on the job.

#### THE COSMICALLY CHALLENGED (The center of the universe in shoes)

You've been run over by this person before, just as nearly everyone else in the mall. They are the center of the universe moving swiftly through the rest of space. Their trajectory is set by computer preciseness down the middle of the aisle, through the center of the court, and at times across all solid objects including the table at which you are seated.

Can anyone really be this obnoxious? Well, yes, haven't you been run over by them enough to know?

The really scary part of this is when they travel in packs. Five centers of the universe moving through the space time continuum toward you, what chance do you have? Head for a doorway, jump over the rail to the floor on the lower level, or maybe just a quick turn around and rapid retreat. Nothing can stop them, nothing can cause them harm, and they are on their path of destruction - pity anyone in their way.

There is a theory presented by some that these packs of centers are actually the cause of black holes. The vortex behind them is sufficient to suck in whole shopping complexes.

#### HIGH SOCIETY, LOW VISIBILITY

Aloof, she is dressed to the nine - or maybe eleven hundred dollar level, gliding through the court on a mission. The mission of getting through the court without being seen - it is the only way to get from the Escalade to the fancy dress shop, "How could they lay out this mall in such a degrading manner?" "Why wouldn't they afford me the dignity of bypassing the gathering place of the masses?" "Ah, finally through, I hope no one saw me, I hope they thought I was just a wisp of wind wafting through their lowly space."

The amazing part of this waft of air is that they can actually navigate the clutter of modern malls

with their nose so in the air. How do they see, how do they guide themselves, is it some radar built in, or maybe bouncing of sound waves like the dolphins. No matter what, they move flawlessly from richness to richness without allowing poorness to infect their being.

With a cringe at the thought of what has just been endured, and of the coming return journey, she treks on through the mall toward the goal of that special purchase - a purchase so special any endurance must be endured.

## QUALITY FAMILY TIME

Children are such fun to watch, they are full of surprises and they certainly show forth their families value system.

A couple sat down with their two children to eat. Eating was not the video game that they were interested in. They both had handheld game machines and were gaming like there was no lunch to bother them.

When one was bored they would exchange machines by tossing them on the table with a double ca-wham, and they would catch the game as it was almost to slide off the table - well usually, one time something distracted one of the children and the machine was treated to an unexpected trip to the floor and beyond as it slide under the next table.

"Lunch." "What's that mom?" "I don't have time I'm almost to level fifteen mom!" "Put it down and eat!" The reader can fill in the next fifteen sentences, as you have most likely heard them before, finally "AHHHHH mom you made me miss level eighteen!" "You are such a \_\_\_\_\_ !"

Oh, there are also the adult gamers that are just as avid, just as isolated from their surroundings, just as obnoxious with their voices, and just as into themselves as the kids. At least the kids have been trained differently - well maybe - well maybe not - well, ya, you are right, definitely not.

## CHRISTMAS CHEER

When Santa is on his throne around Christmas time there are always lines of kids - well their parents are there as well, but I am correct when I use the collective "kids." The pushing and the shoving and the hollering, and the cutting in line, and the other signs of decency and love are exhibited in full color - well red anyway, you can see a lot of that in the faces.

When the real kid finally achieves that which his folks have instilled in him as his goal, he is confronted by this huge guy with way too much hair all over his face - the guy that has entered into way too many pie eating contests, and hasn't read a fashion magazine in a hundred years. Is this the ultimate in Christmas cheer? May we hope there is more.

What does it say about society when it is the goal of so many to gain a picture of our child sitting

on the knee of the biggest phony that our society has been able to invent, and especially when that phony is the key to great profit for those that pay him?

### MENTALLY CHALLENGED

Well, that is what society tends to call them, but they are the ones that know how to enjoy life, they are the ones that know the simplicities of life and they are the ones that know whatever they get in the court is going to give them great joy. Society labels it a disability but they feel it is their ability.

They are forward to a point and at times a little loud but they navigate life the same as the rest of us, just, most likely a little easier of mind.

### THE CUPIDLY CHALLENGED

Often the singles don't like the singles bars and all those traps, so go to the mall fishing. You can pick them out; everyone of the opposite sex is like a magnet of the opposite pole with their heads. As the other person walks by the head swivels in place to watch the gorgeous go by. The head soon returns to the forward position to discuss the person with the other heads that are just returning to position.

What good all this head pivoting does is questionable, but it seems to get them some meager exercise for their cardiac needs and a super jump start to their love life needs.

Offt, they perch in the court only to observe and discuss the prey like a couple of elk hunters watching a buck at a distance through binoculars. Now and then there is a shot from the hunter, but often there is further hiking and climbing to gain closeness to the elusive buck. The same with the man/woman hunter, they may leave their perch of safety and circle the quarry in the hope of getting closer without spooking them into a dead run for the exit.

If and when contact is made it is as if they both have reverted to school age. They banter about nothing and achieve little else. Possibly a date will ensue, but most likely they will part with pitter patter of the heart never to see one another again.

One must wonder, if there were to be a date, just how that would go. After all there was the hunt, the stalk and the shoot to kill. How can something that ends in the death of one of the parties, normally the buck, unless the hunter is totally inept, be a good pattern for finding a date for Saturday night. Maybe that is why first dates are often such a disaster.

Note must be taken, however, the hunt, the stalk and the first date, do work at times. Upon discharge from the service, it was time for marriage so this stalker returned to his happy growing up hunting grounds and bagged the first doe he dated.

## THE NON CONFORMIST THAT DRESSES TO BE DIFFERENT, BUT LOOKS JUST LIKE ALL THE OTHER NON CONFORMISTS

The non conformist comes in a number of shades, but always is very similar to others in his shade. There are those that call themselves Goth, while others call them other things. There are the Grunge, the hippie carry overs and then there are the others that haven't figured out their name yet, but know they reject all that everyone else holds dear - even if they hold dear the things that they reject.

Gothites love to appear black and white, and wear enough makeup and black clothes to achieve this "look." Not sure why they use silver studs in never ending pattern to detract from the black and white, maybe the silver passes for white due to their blood shot eyes.

Their demeanor is not that different from Slick on a Stick below, so that will be dispensed with as will any attempt to explain their philosophy of "I just want to look different" even though they look the same as their peers. Yes, slight variations, but all are black and white, well sometimes their hair warrants a few variations.

Non conformists are so non-conforming they move through society in groups of those that subscribe to the same non conforming stipulations of life. Maybe that means they are not conforming to society, but are conforming to their non conforming principles, which indeed, requires they be conforming. Thus they are conforming non conformists that aren't conforming to society but are conforming to non-conforming principles so that they don't conform to others lifestyles.

Society should be thankful for the non-conforming that conforming non conformists do, so we aren't a society of conformists, even though the non-conformists conform and the conformists actually do not conform to the non-conformists non-conforming conformed principles.

The non conformist actually is not conforming to society, but they are not conforming to the non conforming principles of other non conforming groups that are not conforming to society. If all non conforming groups could get together and unite under one grand non-conforming set of principles we could divide society into a dual class world. You know, ying and yang, light and dark, good and evil, but as it is they are all under their separate shades of non-conformity and ultimately society being non-conforming toward non conformity, are we not all just a bunch of non-conformists conforming to our own principles - you know - conformists at heart?

## SLICK ON A STICK

This one will be quite familiar to all. This is the "Mr. Cool" in all his decked out cooolness, ball cap on with the bill to the side, low dragging britches and 10 X tee shirt that covers the tow chain link to his billfold or whatever is in the pocket, and of course with a Tootsie pop hanging out of his mouth.

The proper word for the way he walks escapes me, strut doesn't fit, nor does runway walk. Maybe slippering would cover it, you know kind of sliding but kind of staggering along as if the top half were controlled by the strings of a puppeteer and the lower half is attempting to navigate ice covered with grease to keep up with the top half. It is almost as if the Tootsie Pop stick is anchored in space and his body is dangling from the end. Hope he doesn't fall off; it would be quite painful to see that body settle into a pile on the floor.

As Slick enters the court he looks to see if all are bowing at his sudden presence, but quickly comes to realize not all are noticing him adequately. This calls for an even grander entrance, slippering over to a prominent table, a quick swing of the chair, just high enough to land with a thunk to draw maximum attention, and then with a swing of the hips he lands in the chair with the proper energy to make it slide a foot or two, and he settles into his usual posture. Slumped, legs outstretched for total obnoxious blocking of the space between tables, one arm slung far over the back of the chair as if hanging on so he doesn't slip out onto the floor making him the fool.

What slick is about is hard to tell. He isn't slick unless about the hair, and he isn't cool, just rather comical to the observer.

## ABODELESS

They are everywhere. They are sloppy, their shirt is usually hanging out, their coat is often disheveled, and their head covered by a long stocking cap that covers their head and ears. The pants are baggy and the hair unkempt, as is the face.

Now, there should be a note taken here, there are many that answer this description but the homeless are marked by the piece of cardboard tucked carefully under their arm and often wrapped in plastic to protect it for the pan handling to come in the rain.

They hang in the warmth of the court as long as they can without being asked to move on. Usually when there are few customers they are allowed to sit and rest and absorb the warmth. At times they have enough to pick up a sandwich at one of the vendors and they enjoy it just as anyone else would, maybe even a little more.

A nap might be on their agenda if they can sneak it in without being noticed. If they tuck their scarf under their chin, they can appear to be awake and alert unless someone ventures by for a closer check.

Then there are the homeless by circumstance, not choice. They are often about the same without the panhandling cardboard. They probably start their day with the others at the rescue mission. The panhandlers can be distinguished from the homeless by the Starbucks coffee in their hand, and newspaper under their arm as they walk to the mission for their free breakfast.

One must wonder why the mission doesn't step down on the freeloaders that can afford coffee and newspaper, but then they are in the business of sharing Christ, not worrying about who might deserve and who might not.

It has been reported that the average panhandler makes more than most make at their full time job. There must be something wrong with a society that rewards mediocrity so generously, while not assisting those that could really use a little assist.

## THE HOME LESS

The home less are those that are at the mall more. Should you run into one of these you will know them because you saw them yesterday and the day before that and the day before that - come to think of it, that makes you a home less person as well.

The person that you see time and again as you observe those on the court is one which enjoys the confines of the court, or maybe they work nearby and have no choice in being present. Whatever the reason, they either feel they are always there under duress, or that they are there to enjoy their leisurely life.

Many older people grace the court, whether out of boredom or maybe loneliness, or maybe even because they enjoy watching people and their quirky habits.

## THE KEEP IN SHAPE CROWD

The exerciser comes in all shapes, conditions and amounts of commitment. You can see them show up on Monday morning, maybe again Tuesday, but if they are there on Wednesday and Thursday you will have to mark them with commitment.

Having biked the same route for several years over a three mile circuit, there have been walkers, joggers, dog walkers, runners, bikers and all sorts of groups out for their exercise. Few last more than a few days, others a week, but seldom anyone that lasts for an extended period of time.

Those dedicated few are the ones you see over and over sailing through the court. They are also, usually the thin folks that look like they are healthy and happy with what they are doing. Maybe it relates to that "sailing" through the court and not stopping for greasy unhealthy foods.

If you see someone walking up to the court at a good clip, but slows to savor the aroma and sights, you can be sure their commitment is not yet as big as their desire to sit down for a sandwich and shake.

The exerciser with spouse normally walks side by side, even hand in hand, but we won't discuss which one is doing the most of the talking.

May we comment and commend the commitment to the spouse which exercises with their partner even though their ear is exercised as much as their feet.

May the malls of America be praised along with all the negative evaluations of their value to society, in that they have always welcomed walkers to their establishment. Yes, we know that the walkers often shop, but the mall operators allow those few that are there for pure exercise to ply their trade to the freshly waxed floors without complaint.

The exerciser with purpose may be a rare breed but he is to be noted for his zealous commitment to routine. They are there rain or shine; they are there even if they have a cold, though bigger ailments do tend to side track them from their appointed rounds.

Their path is noted in their minds and they know what they must do to gain that thrill of satisfying their desire to stay healthy.

Often you can set your clock by their appearance/disappearance, and reappearance/re-disappearance, and often their additional - well the point is made, they do what they need to do, unlike those couch potatoes that claim to exercise by pumping the buttons on the remote and lifting those sodas high.

The exerciser with friend - you can spot them, one is always a tad ahead of the other, not for long however for the other is not to be out done by the other. They will jockey for position as if horses headed toward the finish line.

The fact that they have left strolling and passed walking and have entered into run mode escapes them since they are so devoted to the outcome - the win.

The exerciser with lack of logic - the one that sits down after the stiff walk and has a burger and fries - well maybe even a shake and pie.

Our society has recently placed a value on being somewhat fit. We all might not be fit as a fiddle, but many today want to be more fit than at present. The heavy are walking for loss, the older are walking for mobility, the younger are just walking between stores, but we are all finding that walking is good for us.

There are many that walk for medical reasons; they may need to exercise their heart, they may have to exercise a new joint replacement or a surgery, but many are walking for gain in the area of health.

Yes, many are slow, so be patient, and go around at first opportunity. If you cannot get around please don't be rude, but request to pass.

Walkers come in all sorts. There is the one with the cane that never quite sets the cane to floor,

there's the earphone folks that enjoy their tunes instead of the pure boredom of a walk.

There are those that swing their arms as if they are going to punch someone in the stomach, those that let their arms dangle as if they are the arms of a dead octopus, and those that have weights to increase their walking benefit.

There are those that aim directly at you and try to make you change your trajectory, there are those that cannot quite walk a straight line - give them a wider berth than most lest you become a barrier to their wonderings.

Our mall has the full cooperation of the local cardiac care unit one might think from the many older people that are walking. The mall opens at ten, but the place is abuzz by eight or earlier with the talking, the shuffling, and the laughter of those that really enjoy this torture called exercise.

There are the "tie the shirt around the waist," there are the waistless that tend toward suspenders, there are the get out of my wayers that seem to be on a mission from heaven at the direct orders of God - you best get out of their way, or you will hear the thunder from above, or so it would seem from their faces.

There are the brisk walkers that can pass you three times before you make the circuit around the mall once, there are those that are so slow they require a walker - cannot figure out why they call them walkers, they should be called slowers due to what they accomplish.

There is the, one hand on the hip trying to keep things in alignment so they won't return home with more pain than when they left, there are trios and duos that all swing their arms to extreme. We might call these the cement mixers of life. Get caught up in their slip stream and you will be chopped liver in a flick of the wrist.

There are the women that all dress alike, there are those that look like they forgot to dress, and there are those that dress as though they were out for a walk - imagine that.

They seem to come in pairs or trios of like shape and or age and condition. Guess misery does enjoy company.

If you get bored with watching people, you can sit in view of the pet store window - watch the cats and puppies - they have some personality and don't mind being themselves, rather than putting on airs for the observers.

Well, one more walker, that young person that ventures into the realm of the old, the one that came to the mall early, thinking that the stores would be open.

Imagine the horror of a young person being a hundred foot into a mall before the stores are open

and finding you are in the presence of a few hundred post sixtyites that are bent on running you over.

What does the poor person do? Do they turn and run with all of the embarrassment that goes with that? Do they continue on as if they don't realize what is happening to them? Do they just pick up the pace and hope that nobody notices that they are here - ya right - not a chance, those old folks are already onto the mistake and are buzzing under their breath about the young person's severe misfortune.

Maybe they could duck into the restroom and hide till the mall opens - that would work but is not too good an idea - maybe if they just keep walking something will come to them - like the pain of their situation, the embarrassment that they are suffering from, or the greatness of their opportunity to interact with the rest of society - uhhhh, well, uhhhh, maybe not. Who knows they may run into Houdini and he will make them disappear.

There is the exerciser carrying an oxygen tank on her back. There is the exerciser that probably is a little young for all this exercise stuff, but knows what is coming and wants to get a running start on things - well a walking start at least.

There are those that make one circuit of the mall with relative ease, those that don't make it with relative ease, those that go around twice, those that go around three times and those that are just plain showing off with all their exercise - nobody needs that much walking unless they have two hearts. Well maybe that guy was exercising for his wife as well.

There are the large tables full of people that seem to know each other so well, other tables where the questions indicate they have just met.

Could this be a social place, a place where people can meet, get to know, understand one another? The thought of that seems fairly hard to believe in our divided society.

There are the old timers that look like they couldn't set the clock on a VCR listening to their tunes on their Ipods - hope they know that there is supposed to be music coming out of those things in their ears. Many have cell phones swinging from their hips. One thing is sure; the older generation has embraced the technological revolution and is enjoying the computer age with their children.

One of the large drawbacks to this arena is that you overhear way too many conversations about things you don't want to hear about. That is about all one can stand for one morning. No one wants to hear about what the doctor took out of that lady, nor do they want to hear what came out of that guy when he punctured his stomach. Why oh why do these old people talk about such disgusting things over breakfast or coffee?

While we are speaking of the pet store windows there is a little lesson of life that might be

appropriate. The sign that looks like this "DO NOT TAP ON THE WINDOW" is translated from the English into English as " DO TAP ON THE WINDOW" - evidently the "NOT" is dropped in the translation due to the prohibition in English to anything in the negative - wouldn't want to stunt anyone's self image, would we.

There goes that gal with the sweater and cell phone she is using for a weight in one hand - that makes three times around the mall - showing off no doubt, nobody needs that much exercise.

One is left to wonder how powerful that left hand and arm are going to be with all that exercise on the one side and not the other. Sure wouldn't want to see her left jab, if I see her coming I think I will try to stand on her right side at all times.

The old folks come and go, they walk, they sit and talk, they go home to whatever they do - there goes the old Ipod guy for the second time around and that younger oriental guy is on his fourth time - wow, wonder what terrible job he is putting off going to.

There are heavy, there are light, there are white, Spanish, oriental and all sorts. There are seemingly rich, there are poor and all shades between. There are bald, there are haired, there are blonde, there are brown, there are gray, there are - well every shade of purple you could want if you wait long enough.

There are the two cup people that ask for two cups so they won't burn their fingers carrying their hot coffee to their assigned seat for the morning, and there are those that tuff it out with one cup - those that seek to build up their threshold of pain. What would this generation of seniors do without McDonald's to feed their coffee habit?

Mr. Coffee corporation must be near extinct by now with the food courts of America clogged with their previous customers.

OKAY OKAY

Okay, so the computer is put away, slung over the stooped shoulder and he has joined the maddening crowd trying to keep pace with the guy up front that was putting on a great show of prowess while feeling his failing heart tightening with each and ever more aggressive step. It might serve him right if he had a little jolt for making the rest of us gasp for every breath.

Is all this really worth a few extra months or years at the end of life? Must be, or the millions wouldn't be doing it.

So what if this exerciser joins the throng as they file past all the spectators? If I want to act like an army ant streaming along with the mass from one un-useful point to another less useful point what's it to you the spectator.

Feels kind of like being on one of the PBS nature shows where the army ants are streaming across the screen while all the couch potatoes are sitting in their comfortable chairs wishing they had an ounce of that energy being shown before them. The ants are marching with most specific purpose and those observing are doing so because they have nothing else to do. That is what you call retirement. It is sitting, drinking coffee, observing and making comment on others. No, it isn't gravity that is holding you to that chair it is a poor decision to sit rather than rise to the occasion.

It might be wondered just how you tell if someone in the long trail of folks has just joined the group. Rather easy if it is raining outside - their sneakers screech much louder. However if there is no rain, look for the ones that are quite upright, swinging their arms briskly with each step. Oh, and also they will still have their tongues in their mouth. They don't yet have to pant and/or wipe the sweat from their lips.

## THE SPOILERS

Ah, Grandma and/or grandpa out with the grand kid for a visit to the mall; that is dangerous to be sure. That seems to be spoiling on the move.

S and H green stamps were the talk of the middle class a number of years ago. They were collected and traded for all sorts of good products.

They now have an S and H points website for the same purpose for online shopping. Sending the address to three kids that probably did not know what the green stamps were, the message was included, if they did not know, to ask an older person.

The daughter that a certain grandpa had spoiled rotten replied, "Oh, I know what those are, they are little green stickers that your grand father lets you stick all over the end of the kitchen cabinets."

Yep, you know exactly how spoiled someone was by a certain other someone - not pointing fingers mind you, just making an observation.

The miracle of these grandparents slowly making their way through the mall is that the grandkids don't mind the slow pace, indeed, they seem to enjoy it - maybe parents should take note. It might even be that the slow pace is the more comfortable pace for the grandkids, rather than the parental swift step that most modern parents prefer.

## THE CHAIN GANG

The food court business would fold in a heap if it weren't for their employees. Most are low paid folks that for one reason or another can't find a better paying job.

Some are managers and they fair much better than the rest, however the focus here is not on income, but their plight.

They are required by law to get coffee and lunch breaks, but consider for a moment, what that means for the low paid employee.

If they are going to eat, they are going to eat where they work where hopefully they get a meager discount on their purchases. Or the wiser in diet probably brings something healthy from home so that they can be healthy in their low paid domain.

If they are taking a break, it probably isn't long enough to go do anything, it isn't long enough to get out of the area for a real break, so they sit down in the eating area with a book or some other mind number to pass their all too brief respite from boredom.

So, when you see that person sitting alone, with a slightly elongated face, realize they have their own set of disappointments at the moment.

Having worked long in retail there has been many a break taken in a cramped break room where the talk is about all that stuff that you are supposed to be able to take a break from.

It might be of note to observe the Chain Gang in action - in the court, not behind the counter, though behind the counter could be educational at times as well. In the court they are on the same turf as anyone else. They are as varied as the exercisers, different looks, different purposes and different personas.

There are the tired; they can be picked out by their natural slump into the chair and/or onto the table in front of them. Fatigue exhibits itself where it will and they allow it full control when they have a moment or two.

Some read, but most just negate. They discuss the negatives of men, they discuss the negatives of women, they discuss the negatives of the company that supports them, and they discuss the negatives of just about everyone and everything in their minds path.

If only they could legislate, they would clean up the mess of government. They could negate everything but themselves and the world would be a better place.

Negating is the favored pass time of many in our society, and the society to a point feeds the negate. After all what is there in corporate America that is positive. What in government is positive, well if you aren't on one of the dozens of federal, state, and local programs that allow the recipients to fleece America.

The real question is whether the negates get rid of the positates, or if the positates just counteract the negates. Doubt we will ever know.

## POLIFERATING MUTANTS

Easy to catch a glimpse of if you are an odd duck watcher. They are the ones with the plastic appendage evolving from their ear. It may be black, silver, purple, or most any color, the focus is the appendage itself.

Seldom can anything be done once produced by the person, they are not removable without certain withdrawal and frustration. As long as it is attached they are calm and focused on the growth itself, and little else - total comfort when giving attention to the evolving addition to their body.

It takes their mind off the petty things of life such as friends, family, girl/boyfriend, spouse or most anyone in sight.

They are even being reported in churches across the country where quiet has always been the desired condition of things.

No more, the quiet is not required as long as the person is capable of feeding the habit within. Cell phones ring constantly in churches and hospitals and libraries across the land.

Is the person surprised? Embarrassed? Never, why would they be, this is as natural as Darwin's theory itself.

Churches have begun placing signs and notices to please turn them off. It isn't just the ringing that is an irritant, it is the fact that people are answering and talking during the services.

This appendage must go; it is curtailing people's rights on every hand. Surgical removal and rehab time should be required by law if these patients can't control their evolutionary advances.

I think Webster had it wrong when he defined appendage as "Something added to a principal or greater thing, though not necessary to it, as a portico to a house."

This growth is not quite fit for that definition because it is necessary, it is totally necessary to the survival of the principal. To remove this appendage would cause the principal terrible withdrawal symptoms that could be quite serious.

## ATTACK TURTLES

Sitting in the corner, attempting to be invisible, collar pulled up, and cap pulled down, hands in pockets, neck scrunched low between the shoulders - the turtle is in his shell.

Defenses are up, the strategies set - look mean and others will leave you alone is the hoped for result of this stance.

What lurks in the mind of one so cut off from society? How do they spend their moments in the court - without nourishment, without liquid refreshment, how can they exist much longer.

Watch out, someone is approaching that one in the corner - uuuuh ouch that snap from the mouth caught the intruder off guard and they went skurrying away as if in great pain.

Ah, the shoulders are back in defensive mode, the eyes are back to guard sweeps awaiting the next attack from the world they fear. One must wonder if he is sitting on a nest of newly laid eggs for his bride. He defends that little space as if it were really his. If and when there is movement from the nest it is slow and easy to show that there is no panic of nature, but confidence in transference from nest to appointed target.

## GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

The new mothers of America knew not of discipline at home, so there was no discipline in their lives, thus they are young mothers chasing undisciplined kids.

Mom was at a meeting at Subway with daughter on the go; - the daughter wanted a toy from the machine out of the area and near the door. Thrice mom retrieved her daughter from the toy machine. Then she dug in her purse for some coins for the machine. Guess this was another variation on the ONE - TWO -- THREE --- line of discipline - we all know it, this is where the parent counts to three before going after the child that is not listening, or out of earshot of "THREE" - guess this kid has her mom trained well to react to "THREE" on command.

Heard a mother in a store - as the child disappeared around the corner ONE - TWO -- THREE --- FFFFOOOUUURRR ---- FFFFOOOUUURRR ---- she repeated, we are not sure what the counting is for, in the later case it may have been getting up enough energy and ambition to set out on a dead run trying to find the kid.

Anyway, back to the mom with kid on the go. The game being over and the kid getting the toy, and in about one minute being bored with the toy, the child started to push the "chair away from the table game," where mom pushes it back and kid pushes another out, and mom pushes the other one back and kid pushes another one out and mom pushes the second other one back and so the exercise program goes.

One of the grand gifts of Humanism to our nation is the lack of discipline in our citizens. They can do anything they want, they don't have a set standard, so there is nothing wrong with what they want to do - discipline - what is that? The cry of the older generation aimed at the younger, but the younger generation has ruined their ears with loud music, so they never hear the plea that is broadcast across our land.

Just the kind of interest one wants when meeting with someone else.

## MR. RIGHT

The long hair with a long beard desires to seat himself in the middle of three table and chair sets. Of course the tables that are on either side of his are not set correctly so he first sets the chair next to the spare at his table just ten inches away, then adjusts the table adequately, then the opposing chair so that all is right - well almost - a short push of the table allows him to position the far chair just right in relation to the wall, but the table movement has moved the first chair so he readjusts it, then moves on to the other outside table. The first chair, then the table, then the other chair just so by the wall, well again the table isn't just right, so a slight adjustment, and the other chair and now it is time to adjust the hair in the mirror of the photo booth.

Ah finally, food is acquired and the seating is perfect and he is able to eat - oh no, there is a food court worker in the area adjusting seats, and tables, and she is heading toward his newly arranged area. What will occur, will she mess up his master piece or think it adequate for the day?

NOOOOOOOOO, she adjusted one of the chairs! Oh my the horror. Yet, he continues to eat - no, she is out of the immediate area and he is on his feet - he is there to save the day, he marches right over to that chair and sets it aright! Now, he can eat in peace. We won't go into the way he unfolded his napkin and laid it just so and placed one piece of food in the center, ate it, placed another piece of food in the center, ate it - need we continue? Nope.

Oh, she is back, she is now in my area adjusting seats and tables - oh good she left mine alone, was afraid she was going to jam a chair into my knee and wake me from this bad dream.

Hummm, now my table and chairs are slightly off from the rest of the court. Only I sit at a crooked table. Only my perfectionism bothers me, but I am refraining. I have vowed that I will finish my coffee, fold up my computer and walk away having not straightened it - why bother, with two perfectionists within eyesight, the imperfect won't be allowed to continue very long before the universe is set back into sync.

Still wonder why all his hair grows out of the top and bottom of his head and mine just grows around the horizontal plane. Some things just aren't meant to be known - the great unknowable, that which escapes our scientific community or maybe just a case of misdirected or totally lost follicles. Maybe since mine are male follicles, they were just to proud to stop for directions or something.

## TWO CUP WAITER

This man is obviously waiting for someone, he has two cups of coffee, a tall for himself and a short for the yet to appear friend.

He calmly reads the newspaper while he waits. The assumption might be made by some that this is the wise and very smart husband of the woman in the dress store that is strolling around from

rack to rack piling on the items to take to the dressing room to try on and reject.

Yes, wise this man is, and when she doesn't return, he gets her coffee before it gets cold - smart as his years indicate.

#### THOSE THAT THROW TRASH AWAY SHOULD BE PAID

Finishing his meal the man dutifully gathers his trash, marches to the trash bin and contributes to the greening of America - but he waits - there in front of the trash can he waits looking at the door as if he is awaiting the hand imprinted on the door throwing the cup away to tip him for his contribution.

He has something in his hand - it is more trash - maybe he retained it hoping for an encouragement from the bin to continue in his good works - into the trash with my trash, if you aren't going to bless me for my work, I will do my good works anyway - so there you have my all!

OH NO!

Is that - it looks like - oh no - yes it is - maybe not - oh, yes it is her! What can I do, I don't want to talk to her, she hates my guts, did she see me? Not yet. Ah, she sat down before she saw me and probably won't look this way - well she might - should I leave - should I move - I really don't want to talk to her. She probably wouldn't come over to talk anyway - well she probably would, she is that sort of person - force the issue even though she really dislikes me.

Only one thing to do - fold up my computer and walk calmly and coolly in the other direction and get out of the mall before she decides to take a walk and happens to run into me - keep it cool, don't hurry, don't look back, just calmly move toward the mall and find an exit.

Ah, in the mall - safe, I can just go through here to the exit, she will never come this way, and even if she does, she doesn't walk fast so will never catch up to me - close call, but safe.

US-POD

Walking to the mall entrance someone is following making weird noises, turning to see, a disshoveled teen with his hand to his ear was bouncing off the pavement like a basketball in the hands of a pro. Not a hearing aid, not an ear ache, not a cell phone - he'd be louder if it was a phone, no this is something different. Ah, it is a radio, he is singing along with Mitch - or Dogface, or Slime Pit, or Dented Car - whoever is on the radio.

Guess he can't afford ear buds, or maybe he is on a campaign to save hearing - well maybe they are in his hair and he just can't find them right now, at any rate, listening to his tunes the old fashioned way, with a speaker - the closer he came the louder it was - some of the radio program

could even be heard through the brief gasps for air caused by his singing and the stairs.

## CRIPPLED

Arising from the confines of the cramped family table area a slight young woman struggled to free herself from the group. The struggle was assumed to have been from the tight quarters, but as she moved into free space it was evident there was something quite wrong with the woman. She was struggling to walk as if she were the recipient of some major disease.

She struggled to keep her balance as her body lunged forward and then backward as she moved along her desired path. Head bobbing forward and back in opposition to the rest of her frame - what a site of discomfort and loss of control.

The deficiency of this woman's gait was of interest - what could cause such a gait? I haven't seen such distress in a gait since I saw a car run through a wrought iron gate on the news.

As she stumbled past our table the cause of her turkey trot was evident. She was walking on a pair of very high boots. The sole of the footwear made the old term platform shoe seem like a one story building along side these high risers. Discomfort, awkwardness, unsightliness, and the shoe shop probably made her pay for them on top of all the other problems they caused her.

What a business, having to sell a woman shoes that are going to make her look like a geek, while charging way to high a price and making her feel good about her appearance as well; all before they get out the door without buying the things. That is a high pressure job.

One must wonder what the woman tells herself to compensate for what she sees in the mirror or in the windows as she shops. How does she convince herself that walking like a stork with bad blisters on its feet is cool. This woman needs to go into car sales, she could sell anything to anyone without a doubt.

Amazing how some women think it is so cool to look like they are crippled with some deadly disease. Not much different than all those people with a cigarette hanging out of their mouth while they commit suicide, thinking they are waaay cool.

## AUTOMATIC SKIRT

A new way to skirt around exercising!

Inventiveness, or just the luck of the purchase of a skirt that was too small, which we do not know, but what we do know is this, the woman has hit upon the invention of the century. It will revolutionize walking as a sport, as an exercise method and as a part of life.

This woman has hit upon the most effective of tools for the average walker. There is no more

need for you to adjust your gate, there is no more need to measure your step, and there is no need to further your walking skills. This skirt will become the envy of every walker in America.

The woman exerciser wears an ankle length skirt that has a small circumference at the walking end - we wouldn't want to comment on the holding up end that would be social commentary. As she walks the skirt strains at the ankle with each step. It is as if she has designed this skirt to assist her in her exercise. With each step, as her front foot reaches its full length and begins to settle onto the floor the skirt jerks her other foot out from under her to begin its travel forward. At the time it reaches its fullest extent the other foot will have been yanked off the floor to allow the walking to continue.

She should seal the patent rights on this skirt. Think of the money she could make, she could be rich, she could then hire someone to exercise for her and she could stay at home counting her fortune, or go shopping and spend it.

She could make an add on band that would velcro to the skirt so you could go walking, rip off the strap and go from exercise to shopping in a moment. What a boon for the shopping malls of America. They could buy these straps by the thousands and hand them out at the door. Think of the added shoppers to a mall with this automated exercise program.

They could even rent them by the hour, and let people turn them in at any cash register. The extra revenue would be a real assist to the bottom line, while helping the waist line of America.

ALRIGHT!

Seven men enter the area, the six pack in front and Mr. Cool bringing up the rear. Swinging the hips, swinging the arms as if to draw the maximum attention, he bopped in behind the rest. The six stepped to the counter while he held himself reservedly at a distance, as if trying to disassociate himself from the rest. He, was not going to eat, even though the pack had gathered for that specific purpose.

Aside from Mr. Cool, it was observed, that there was one pre-teen boy with the group, while the rest appeared to be in their thirties. His smile was obvious to the most casual observer, and it did not diminish in the time spent eating breakfast.

What would cause such a smile. A little obvious maybe, but most likely because he, a kid, was with six men on a mission. They were having that "bonding" experience that sports types yearn for and he was in on the whole thing.

Outside there were three pickups with three trailers containing several All Terrain Vehicles parked in a line as if to soon be off to the races. No wonder the smile was from one side of the face to the other - with the guys and not only that, with the guys to go ATVing. Can't get better than that.

Would be of interest to see if Mr. Cool was the cleanest of the pack when they return to town.

Can't imagine him allowing any mud to cover up any of the glory shining forth from his being.

## DOUBLE DIPPING

Several standing in the line at Subway, some waiting to order, others in the process of telling the assistants what they want on their sandwiches. A little, slight old lady, marches right in to the front of the line and begins to order, ignoring all in the cue as if she hasn't a clue. As she is in the process of her order she moves in and around the others that are patiently putting up with her rudeness. She completes the transaction and walks to the drink bar to draw her favorite beverage.

"MAAM, MAAM, MAAM, I think you have two sandwiches," crys the young lady that was trying to get a sandwich for her break. She approaches the old lady and relieves her of the sandwich she did not order and did not pay for - theft? Nah, just one of the foibles of the elderly. Rudeness and senility rolled into one, and you can bet there are many of her family that love her in spite of herself.

## CHAW THANG

Sitting under the stairs on a bench, drenched in black, sat the chaw thang chawing the cud of a months ration of bubble gum. Her mouth was opening so wide that if her tongue had been made up with as much black makeup as her eyes she would surely have disappeared into blackness behind the hole.

The flashing of the silver studs on the leather jacket between closings of the mouth would be the only indication that anything was there. What a weapon this would be for the Army on a black, moonless night. The movement of someone at will between buildings - the bright flashes of light from the diamond studs would blind them to the fact that anyone was there. Infiltration of the enemy lines would be assured.

Her hair was standing straight up in front, as if a barrier to anything that might venture close. What it was a barrier against is debatable. Some might suggest it was a barrier from evil sources of society, or possibly a barrier to gather and strain germs as the filter swept through the mall. Those space dust gathering satellites may well be based on this design, they too gather in all sorts of varied and strange items of space.

Is it possible that this is actually something designed by mall maintenance to sweep the air of all bacteriological and viral agents? That sweeping, filtering hair on top to glean filth from the higher reaches while that opening and closing chasm filtering air across that sticky mass of gum - maybe this is what that new sticky Swifer is based on, I hope the Swifer company hasn't infringed on any patent rights.

Can you imagine the jaws on this lady, after chewing that mass for days on end. She could be the human replacement for the jaws of life. Imagine, no more mechanical problems to deal with, just feed it a Big Mac now and then and you would have a perpetual machine to save lives from the wrecked cars of America.

Who says evolution isn't going on today. I've never seen a mouth open so wide, this could only be the result of several generations of chaw thangs developing that chasm to devour more and more gum. The gum makers of America must be recording record profits, we just hope that the bubble gum industries bubble of financial success doesn't pop - what a mess that would be to clean up! Not even a new and improved model of the Swifer could handle that one!

Since there is so much energy expended in opening and closing this jaw, we might suspect that there is little energy left to walk and move about the habitat. The next generations of chaw thangs may well develop with smaller and smaller legs as nature prepares this creature for sedentary chawing rather than mobile chawing. It makes sense to cultivate this generational change. The mall owners would rather just sit these things in the corner and allow the air to move around them rather than having these big black objects moving in and out among the shoppers.

Can you think of the law suits the malls would face if a shopper happened to get caught up in one of these chaw thangs? It would most surely be instant dismemberment if not suffocation from landing in that blob of gum face first.

## SCRATCH IT

No, not the lottery in Oregon, nor the scratch and smell of yesteryear advertising, but the head scratching of centuries that has been developed into an art form. This man has been developing his scratching pattern for many years - it is quite evident. He is a man with a mission, he is a man with a head to scratch, and he has a mess to create on the table below.

He begins at the very left front of his hairline, fairly far down on his forehead. What a stock of hair this man is carrying; he could transplant a dozen like me and never miss a bit of his forest. This may be why he has developed the unique pattern, so that he doesn't miss any area of dandruff ridden scalp.

As he scratches his way along he moves very slowly and carefully to the rear. As he reaches the point where there is hair going down the side of his head he widens his field of movement to include the sides lest any point be missed.

Already the pattern is appearing on the table below, that smattering of white flack with the occasional shaft of hair - a DNA samplers heaven this table would be.

Slowly, methodically the scratching continues as he works toward the ear. Now the pattern is

altered to comply with the shape of the ear, not even a deviation to catch the hair in the ear, just the head for now. As the hand moves slowly, side to side, back and forth, the mission is well under way.

His head moves in rhythm with the fingernails as the two work together in this process, the process to make a pattern on the table. The work going on is as serious as that of a group of sand painters, laying out their intricate pattern upon the surface before them. The difference being that they, when finished blow their design away into the dust of the surrounding area, while the pattern from the dandruff painter will await the wet cloth of the maintenance woman that will certainly come later.

Ah, so good to finish a side and move directly across the base of the head to the other side to begin the relief of the itches waiting to be scratched. Methodically, back and forth moves this well oiled machine, slowly and surely up the back of the head relieving the anticipation of nerve endings as it goes.

The action continues, slowing only for the occasional pimple that takes an extra pass or to before it is popped and relieved of its contents to lubricate the continued scratching and scraping of the nails against the scalp.

Ah, the skill of this man, the ability to accomplish his male pattern massage, while moving his Whooper in and out among the falling hairs and flakes, to be able to do a deep scalp massage while devouring lunch at the same time and not having to stop to pick hair out of your mouth. This man has practiced his art before, you can be sure.

Of course this isn't a textbook for scalp massage for many have different patterns. For example this scratcher must move from the side and follow the hair line that has been set by the falling of the follicles contents into way too many Whoopers. Extra protein is always good as long as it doesn't collect in your throat, as many cats can clearly attest.

Yes, in case any comb-over folks are reading this, the same pattern of "around the edges" should work well for you also. Of course to be in keeping with your, "nobody knows I'm bald idea," in public you'd want to follow the original man's male pattern of scratching so you won't give away your secret.

WHO-BEENG COUGH

That Sally, I get so tired of her, coming into wo AAACHOO rk when she is AAACHOO sick. How AAACHOO inconsiderate is that? I just can't stand people that AAACHOOOOOOO oh my, do that!

They just AAACHOO t come in and AAACHOO spread their germs CCCCCAH

COUGGGGGHHHHH around so everyone el SSSNNNNIIIFFGH se has their germs and make them AAACHOO sick and they have to suff AAACHOO er through it too! It is so discusting! AAACHOO

If I ever get int AAACHOO o management, I'm going to be sure nobod AAACHOO y does that to my crew.

Well CCCCAH COUGGGGGHHHHH guess my break is over, better get back CCCCAH COUGGGGGHHHHH to work. Oh, I wish I could have stayed CCCCAH COUGGGGGHHHHH home this morning! SSSNNNNIIIFFGH SSSNNNNIIIFFGH CCCCAH COUGGGGGHHHHH AAACHOO.

### THE REAL JESTERS

The four servicemen in fatigues that thought they were the cats meow as they entered the area - swagger, loudness, swinging of the head to and fro to see who was looking at them. The area was void of female attention givers so the swagger seemed to subside a bit, but the loudness grew. It would seem from a self imposed freedom to do as they wished since no females would be put off by their noise.

Ah, such bravado, such suaveness, such - well to be correct such undisciplined action and character.

It would have been of interest to have introduced some females to the mix to see the reaction, though don't know why anyone would want to subject any females to such obnoxiousness. It certainly would not have been any benefit to them.

Seems there is always one in the crowd, the one that stands out, not due to their stellar character, but due to their being louder and suaver than any other in the group. He is the one that bounded to the counter to impress the girl behind - well that was the intent, not that it worked.

Finally they settle to inhale their supper and then soon off they go into the world to set it aright. With such bravado they suppress the food shops of America with a single meal - they cause uneasiness in the populous, and they keep our nation safe. Nothing against the service men of America - the mature ones which these will one day be.

### QUICK ON A STICK -- NOT!

Here is the question of the day. What is worse than two seniors walking? Two seniors with canes. What is worse than two seniors on canes? Two seniors on crutches. What is worse than two seniors on crutches? Two seniors with walkers. What is worse than two seniors with walkers? Two dead seniors laying in the middle of the mall. Remember it could be you on a walker, coming soon to a doctor's office near you!

Years ago three of us were going out on a job. The youngin sitting in the middle was getting very frustrated with the slow old timer driving in front of us.

His frustration was fueled by his major desire to get back to the shop to his Saturday morning cartoons. After much muttering he blurted out "Why don't they shoot you and put you out of your misery?"

I nudged him gently with my elbow and quietly observed that when he was that man's age that eighteen year old voters would be the majority and they might even vote in the shooting of his age group to save them time on the roads.

I were a prophet, Oregon has an assisted suicide law on the books and it is officially reported than doctors regularly send coma patients to the grave daily in Europe.

He did consider his impatience and enjoyed our leisurely ride to our project.

## CHOW

The anticipation of this child was equal to that of the small white puppy he had been watching bounce off the glass in the pet store window in front of him.

His anticipation was satiated immediately upon the first taste of that biscuit. My anticipation was only heightened by his gleeful chewing and kicking of his feet as if in unison with his mouth.

The anticipation had but a brief respite for as the mouth emptied to the rear it automatically opened in front for further joy.

Why oh why did our creator set things up this way? When young he gave mothers to fulfill such anticipation and give such joy, but in the elder years he gave doctors to stifle such joy with diets of Styrofoam and water?

Oh, for a pretty young mother to hand feed me one of those delicious Subway breakfast sandwiches. I could even, at this old age, kick my feet in unison with my mouth! Why, I could even manage a squeal of delight when given a morsel of cholesterol! But, alas, my doctor and my wife would frown upon such partaking.

## INSANITY

Here is another question of the day. Why, when they know those maintenance service carts are going to be used in areas of quiet, do they put hard noisy wheels on them so they clatter like a train going through? Especially in the food areas that are covered in small tile with a seam every three to six inches.

Hospitals have them, food courts have them, stores have them, sidewalk maintenance people have them, everyone has them, so why are we polluting the calm of our society with the clickity clack of garbage carts, when soft rubber wheels would do just as well, but ever so more quietly?

Just another mark of our society, make a product a few bucks cheaper so you can make those big profits. Heaven forbid we make a great product that will satisfy all concerns and make a slightly smaller profit.

Profit is good, profit is uppermost, profit is the goal, profit is ..... not necessarily the best thing for our world or our daily life.

Ah, a wise man indeed, a considerate man, a man of compassion, the maintenance man just walked by carrying his noisy cart. It would seem that they don't like the commotion either.

## KEY PERSON

There is a maintenance gal with half a ring of keys with an earphone/mic in the opposing ear for counter balance. Not to worry, she has ample ballast below the belt loop the keys yank on, to lower the center of gravity sufficient for several more sets of keys.

How many locks can a mall have? How many doors need to be secure? About half a key ring full it would seem. This young lady has a key for every occasion. Be it access to the storage area, the back room, the outer doors - she has it all. One for every door that might need opening.

I recall a time when my own key ring was quite full as well. Not as impressive a collection as she, but a fairly nice selection if I do say so myself. I also had a key for every occasion - well maybe not, I found often that I was insufficiently funded with keys. I discovered one day that there was a key locker up in the bowels of the store, a locker full of keys, a key for every occasion, a key for every door. Well, maybe not, for I had keys that the locker had not. The locker had keys that I had not.

As time passed in this job, I found that I would find keys. Keys for another occasion, for another lock, another door. Keys for my ring, keys for the locker, and keys to leave laying around for the next man to wonder and ponder about.

What would we do without keys in this world? Keys for every occasion, keys for ever lock, keys for long past destroyed locks, keys for long forgotten locks, keys for the first house we lived in, keys for every car ever owned, and maybe even a rental car key or two.

What would we do without spare keys to clutter our drawers? What would we do without keys to wear holes in our pockets, what would we do without keys to carry on our belt loops to look

important? Well we could always use the drawer space for more profitable items, and we could always wear our pants a few months longer, now that the hole makers are gone.

But alas, we cannot do away with the spare keys of America, for they remind us that we need to get a spare key made for the car or house, just in case we loose one. What would the key makers of our nation do if Americans weren't key people? They would probably have to lay off thousands of workers, all those that make the keys, those that make the key making machines, and even those that deliver and install key making machines.

The economy would be broken, the nation would become keyless, and the criminals would be free to enter any door, any area where they were not welcome, so be sure to keep making those keys, they are important to the future of our country. We certainly cannot have criminals in our private rooms on every occasion they wish.

That reminds me, there is a need to deal with those keys in my jewelry armoire, we might get some jewelry to put in it. Oh, there is that ring of keys in my tool box in the garage as well. Maybe I can find a use for them. Maybe I can invent a use for spare keys - some use that would cause America to dig out their keys and pass them on to other and better uses. Maybe there is an island nation that uses keys for currency, some use rocks, some use other things, why not keys. We could be rich, rich, rich!

## CHICKEN HAWKS

The pretty chick at the Cinnabon stand is in danger. There are a number of hawks circling her beauty. They alight at the counter in their attempt to lure the girl into their clutches. They dominate the counter in an attempt to block all others from swooping in, or allowing her to escape.

Nothing is daunting them, not the swishing of her towel, not the onslaught of customers trying to get to the counter, not even the total rejection that they have been dealt. Must be the frustration of a puppy knowing there is a ball under the couch that he cannot reach.

Don't these hawks know that the chick is taken for the next few hours, are they so ignorant to think that she is there for their pleasure at her employers expense. Can these seeming intelligent men not understand the nasty looks, the cold demeanor, and the communication of "NO?" yet they remain. Finally they are asked to step aside to allow paying customers access to the counter. They scatter, but only to assume their circling pattern around the island of sweetness.

As the customers leave, the hawks swoop in toward the chick to gain her approval. One battling with the other for prominence, too bad they don't wear feathers in their hair to attract attention. Well, maybe that greased slicked hair standing in the air is meant for that purpose, it just doesn't seem so to the casual observer.

Too bad pit bulls aren't allowed in the mall maybe that would be an effectual hawk control for the mall to employ.

## BOPPIN

Walking past the Burger King a fifty something overweight woman was putting together the kids meal boxes for the day. What intellectual stimulating work that is - she was bouncing up and down and swinging her head side to side. She was really getting her groove on when I realized that they were playing sixties music over the sound system.

Now, I have to admit I wasn't impressed with the picture I was being given. A near senior citizen that was big enough for two, bouncing behind the counter where I purchase my food - well, my coffee, don't dare eat there any more due to doctor's orders. I watched for a moment and she was oblivious to life around her. She was really movin and grovin with no thought to what she looked like, nor what others might think of her.

She reminded me of some of the PBS programming while they are raising money. You know those neat oldies shows that they tell us they will show us between fund raisers, but never seem to show except during fund raisers to raise funds for shows we love, but that they won't use for anything but fund raisers. Anyway, the oldies programs are usually made up of the original artists surgically implanted into some of their smallest tuxes and formals. The audience is mostly made up of baby boomers that have too much money to spend and too much time on their hands, so they fix themselves up in their undersized clothing and gaudy jewelry to impress the masses - well the point is, they too bop around as if they are still in their teens.

It seems to be normal for old folks to act like they were never in the aging process. It relates to the discussion of the fact that most people look in the mirror seeing an eighteen year old trapped in a fifty year old body. Few of us feel more than eighteen in our minds eye, even though our bodies eye tells us we are totally inaccurate.

When you see someone bopping around and swinging it like it has always been swung - someone that should be acting like a grandma or grandpa, remember they aren't, they are eighteen and enjoying music just like every other eighteen year old - their outer person, just isn't cooperating as it has in the past.

## SAFFFFFEEEE

A middle-aged man walked briskly to a table, pulled out the chair, placed his jacket on the seat of the chair, placed his plastic lunch bag on the table and walked off. The smarts of this gentleman were immediately in question. Who, in their correct thinking would leave a jacket and lunch unattended in a food court full of people? This man isn't thinking well it would seem.

There he goes with another couple, they are here to walk for exercise. He is brave to leave his

things open to theft for so long. Closer inspection indicate that his jacket is a pale pink, much as a baby pink - guess the jacket is safe, who would steal a man's pink jacket? Well, it would go well with a certain outfit which will be described later, but in 2006, not sure anyone would bother, unless they needed something to mop up a spilled milkshake or something. It would go quite well with a strawberry shake, the stains wouldn't even show.

With this realization, attention was turned to the lunch sack. Why would he endanger it .... two bananas, two bottles of water, and some sick colored juice - yep, safe as a pink jacket to be left alone in a mall - safe as a mess on the floor!

## BEWARE

The next time you swing open one of those trash receptacles at the court with your hand, be sure to consider what might have gone on before your entrance upon the scene.

There may have been a slab of catsup smeared across the surfaces, or even more messy, mustard. These would be understandable, even though they would be very undesirable. However, other things might be smeared there-upon, so consideration should continue.

The walker that needs to spit detours from his appointed rounds to spew forth a gubber into the receptacle. It fits, it is garbage, but is it appropriate for the hundred or so hands to follow that day? Or the person that has perfected his aim of snot forced from his nose under great power.

These receptacles are labeled trash, not slim, nor mucus, nor disgusting receptacles - consider the danger and disgust that you are subjecting others to before you spit or blow or whatever you inconsiderates of the world do. There is good reason why spitting etc. are not Olympic events - they aren't considered sports, they are considered disgusting.

## READY FOR ANYTHING

Loaded for bear she slowly moves toward a table. Purse on her shoulder, tote in hand, and a sports bag filled with rocks in the other hand. As she swings the bag onto the chair, the weight is evident and the thud with which it hits the chair is further evidence that this lady is loaded with all she needs for whatever it is she is here for.

Rocks? No, only looks like it. Who would carry rocks to the food court? Just a little exaggeration to make the point that this little lady was portraying a beast of burden.

What is in the bags? Who would know, except their bearer. What could she possibly need to carry that much stuff for in a food court? The government should investigate I'm sure, because it looks very fishy to this observer. Maybe a gym teacher that takes her weights with her. Maybe a brick layer on her way to work - women are into all occupations today. Maybe something more sinister, a chopped up and frozen body on its way to be encased in the new construction just a

block or two away.

Doesn't seem to be a body, she is headed toward McDonald's for a burger. Not weights or bricks, she is of slight build for both. Must be a hair stylist on her way to work, one that wants to be ready for any problem of the hair or skin. Not only does she have the kitchen sink, but the hair rinse bowl as well.

Odd, how other people's business is so much ours. Well, maybe it shouldn't be, but we are people and we, by nature make other people's business our own. Maybe we should make a bigger effort to not worry about what the poor girl is carrying, she may just be a housewife out for a shopping spree and is carrying her credit cards with her - just in case she might find something she needs.

#### NEWTON WAS WRONG

Newton must have been wrong in some of his gravitational theories since the fabric manufacturers have made cloth that defies his laws. That young lady with the heavy looking skirt that is clinging to her way too low on her body. The material must be floating and held in place by a serious series of gyros. It moves with her as if it is stuck to her, but surely, not even duct tape would keep it in place with the swinging and swaying that she is putting it through.

There must be a constant tension in her mind. Is it slipping, is it not slipping, is it too low, is it lowering, is it creeping up, or down, what if it drops, what if it gets pulled down when I get up from the table, what if ... What a way to live, to not know from one moment to the next if you are going to be clothed or naked. I'd guess the point these days with the view of things by the younger set, there would be little difference whether it fell or not.

There goes a guy and his pants are lower, his belt so tight he must be near to losing his legs to gangrene due to lack of circulation. Even defying gravity would not help those britches. They must be glued on, no technology nor belt could do what is being done there.

Recently received a birthday card asking why old men wore their pants so high. Maybe that is just a generational reply to the younger set. The answer was "You will soon know," indicating the elderly age of this writer. My reply to my wise cracking offspring was that I was far from knowing why, since I eat way too much to get pants that high.

Seems every generation loves to make their statement in fashion. It was all pink and then all black in a day remembered, and since, the fads have been many and varied. Probably just as many negative comments made with each change as we have today relating to the low riders.

The wide variety and the constant change is indicative of mankind's unique creativity. Fashion continues to change, but duplication is rare. There is some taking of the old to make the new, but the new is never the old.

## SHUFFLING ALONG

Shuffling along must have dropped his notebook and the rings must have opened dumping the contents out into a widespread mess on the floor. He has been sorting, page by page for ever so long and sorting away he goes yet. Arranging, sorting, straightening, putting into numerical order, a stack here a stack there, all in some arrangement known only to him.

Ah, there is the spot for that stack and then there is this page, that page and another stack disappears into the three rings open and awaiting their reason for being.

The notebook finally reconfigured and it is cell phone time. Dial, talk, hang up, dial, talk ... as he worked through the paper mess, he works through his message mess, first one stack then another. Efficiency plus, a credit to the perfectionist in all of us. Organized he is and organized he shall be, and a good clean business he probably runs.

## SLICKERY-DO

Man if you touched that guys hair you'd be slippin and slidden for the entire day. What a greased down mat. You'd never have to wash that mess, just change the oil, wonder if Jiffy Lube does heads? The Valdez must have taken lessons from guys like this.

The grease must give them confidence (might we say it goes to their head :-)) if not arrogance. Parked in front of the condiments waiting for his order, anyone wanting sweetener or a stir stick must penetrate his space and reach across in front of him and hope he doesn't bow and grease your palm. He couldn't have been more in the way unless he had parked himself atop the condiment racks - probably would have had it not appeared too painful to do.

## AT THE READY

Walking through the food court as casually as he can, stocking cap pulled down over his ears, umbrella on the shoulder at the ready just in case it rains. Stopping at the sandwich place he uses the umbrella as a pointer, almost reaching far enough to touch the item he is interested in on the plastic menu mounted above.

What fashion statement is made when you walk around in a heated food court with a stocking cap on and pulled down past your ears. Are they saying they have no ears or maybe that they aren't open to hearing anyone. Are they saying their ears are cold, they are too big and want them covered up, or are they saying "I AM COOL!"

It probably matters little what they are saying, for they are happy with the way they look, they are comfortable with how they present themselves to the public around themselves.

Sandwich obtained, the eating begins. Stocking cap does not seem to hinder the eating, for the

sandwich seems to go down one bite at a time, just like it does for the capless.

One might wonder if there is a different message between the stocking cap, ears installed, or a ball cap screwed on and down over the ears. The former must be more comfortable, but the later must install headaches if worn in that manner too long.

There are all manner of wearing of ball caps. Screwed down tight, bill in front, screwed down tight bill cocked to the right or left a few degrees, screwed down tight cocked at ninety degrees either way, to the rear centered, on the front at an angle covering one eye, much as the girls wear their hair over one eye - guess it makes their vision a little less, but increases the cool level a bunch.

Not only are there the screwed down tight, there are the sit it on the very tippy tops so it does not mess up my hair types. They sit there with their head frozen in time and space – moved and lose it would be the mantra. Any slight movement of the head would cause the hat to tumble.

Head frozen, he must contort his face so that his eyes can see what his hands are doing with the food. The eyes follow that food up to the mouth so that nothing is lost, especially the hat.

Well, not sure, maybe that stocking cap makes the food go down faster, that guy inhaled that sandwich and drink. He must have a direct chute from mouth to stomach that makes chewing a thing of the past. Imagine the time that would save the busy business person, if only he could wear a stocking cap that low over his hair that stands on its end as if at attention and waiting to salute some general in the area.

## INTERVIEW

Many interviews occur in this comfortable, casual spot. The pretty manager selecting her prospective clerks, the guys interviewing a dozen possible phone salesmen. Many and varied are the facial features of both the interviewed and the interviewer. The nervousness of the one and the boredom of the other; the anticipation of the one and the hope of the other.

What an exercise in futility. The prospect knows that they have to build themselves to be something they are not to get a chance at the job, the future boss, knows that the prospect knows that they have to build themselves to be something they are not they just have to judge to what level the prospect is going over reality. Is that girl really as friendly as she seems, or does she turn into a raving witch when the salary begins? Is that fellow as technically savvy as he seems or did he just read a technology magazine glossary.

The prospect isn't in any better position to judge reality. The facts may be correct but that "This is a great place to work, you will love it." may well be as false as the smile on the face that is there to draw you in as is the kind comment.

Having done some interviewing in the past it is evident that there is some stretching on the other side even though honesty and straight forwardness was on mine. The most unseemly candidates seemed to turn out to be the best workers and the stunning bright stars often were flashes in the pans.

It is amazing how someone that "Wants to work and do a good job." often is the one that never makes it on time and often calls in "sick" or any other excuse that comes to mind. The problems of being a boss today are vast indeed, especially with the I want to do it my way generation, that wants to do what they want, when and where they want. Finding a common ground between the two is not easy.

A close to sixty guy in suit and tie sits as he is faced with two twenty barelys in sport shirts and slacks. "We'll call you." seems a tad shallow and misleading to the man that needs a job, but is woefully over qualified, over experienced and over the hill.

Ahh, the excitement of looking for a job in our new day and age.

#### BUBBLE HEAD

Slouched in the booth, crotch of levies at the same level as the knees, ball cap on a tad crooked, tongue stuck in his lower teeth while curled outward as far as possible creating a perfect bubble, talking on the cell phone, how cool does it get?

Totally amazing how many ways we have found to communicate with one another. Not sure how much communication was being done through that curled ballooned tongue, other than maybe some grunts and groans - guess progress is defined as going back to the cave man days.

The table he is sitting across from seems to be someone he knows. They are hollering at one another - we are removed as far as we can be from them and we are hearing every word. Maybe they are the result of loud music from earbuds and can't hear one another, even though we hear them clearly. Ah, we hear from the little boy that has been trained in this new form of communication for the hard of hearing "I HAVE TO GO POTTY!" Way more information than we needed over lunch. What an atmosphere, what ambiance, what crudeness, do we have to hear about your personal lives folks?

I sure hope that nobody cans and sells this sort of atmosphere. The only place it should be at home is at the sanitary landfill.

Our "Nothing is Barred" society is at its best in the food courts of America.

#### RUN IN CIRCLES SCREAM AND SHOUT

When in the service the comment of the day when things were going radically wrong was to say,

"Run in circles scream and shout!"

A woman and her daughter walked up to the counter to order. The daughter, whom we will call Absent, because she walked away to sit down at the table about twenty foot away. The woman, whom we will call Present because she was still at the counter, hollered to Absent to ask what she wanted. The reply was, "I really don't know, what do they have." Present was not pleased but started making some suggestions. Absent finally walked to the counter after a number of exchanges with Present. They discussed the menu at great length. Absent absented herself from Present with a face on that looked like a "I'd like to absent myself from the present as well as Present."

Present, still looking over the menu at length, and width and height and breadth. The employee, whom we will call Patient was close to losing it. Present asked what the first sandwich was like. Then the other, then asked if they toast the first one, or if the second one was hot. She pretty much knew the menu and all the options before she was finished quizzing Patient. Patient might have been toasted, but he acted as if he were straight out of the veggie cooler.

Absent, still at the table awaited the nourishment that she needed, while wondering if Present ever would be. Present did not seem to know what she wanted, in fact we might surmise that her middle name was Confused. Present Confused even had more questions for Patient and he just continued to answer her, hoping that there would be a decision made this year so the bottom line could reflect the good business of recent day.

Absent, now famished, joins Present once again to discuss what they might have.

One must wonder if this is some new diet called, "TALK YOURSELF THIN WHILE DRIVING THE SUBWAY GUY TO AN EARLY DEMISE."

Patient excused himself to go into the back for a moment. He said he needed to do something for the rolls, but it was obvious he needed to get a drink so he could continue to talk with this woman. Then again, he may have been trying to talk the other employee into hollering fire or something similar.

Present Confused finally concurred with Absent as Absent sought the quiet of the table and the safety of being away from Present once more. When Patient returned he was pleasantly surprised that Present only had two more questions before she placed her order.

It was not that Patient was out of the woods yet, because the decision made was only as to what sandwich Present and Absent wanted and nothing about whether toasted or not - that took a moment or two more. Then came the decision as to whether to have American or Cheddar. Lettuce? "Well let me see now, well I guess - well maybe not - ya, but not too much." "What else would you like?" "Well, what do you have?"

Sandwiches in hand, Present presented herself to Absent and they enjoyed their meal, though I am sure there was some slight discussion about just which end to start on, or whether to eat from the side moving inward or whether to pull the top off and eat it first - not like this is an Oreo ladies!

With customers like this, a good day at Subway would be four customers per day - if you could get all four to make a decision.

### CONFUSION ON A STICK

Sitting there minding everyone else's business, I noticed three pretty old guys shuffling into the area. That is "Pretty" as in very, not as in pretty. One on a cane had on dark glasses as if blind or near to. As they selected their tables, they shoved a couple together and two of them sat down while the third collected the coffee. The one with the cane, prior to being seated walked to an artificial tree, hung his cane on it and returned to the table. Now, one could assume he thought it was a hall tree but the green leaves should have been a dead give away to the treeness of the object. He wasn't totally blind, it was obvious from the way he drank his coffee and other items of activity.

His use of the tree: Humor? Lack of acuity? Maybe just the old timers little rebellion against a phony society that tries to make people feel good with fake plastic and wood trees.

As the third man with the coffee arrived, he started to hand out change to the other two. This prompted a lengthy discussion about who gave him how much and who deserved change and who did not. The three didn't have enough collective memory to determine with any real clarity what was due whom. Finally all three gave up the battle and decided whatever was the present placement of money was good enough and they all pocketed what was in front of them and began their time of talk and coffee.

### THE SWARM

Two ladies entered with clipboards, two folks from the burger place joined them, also sporting clipboards. The huddle was on, the buzz was constant, suddenly the four went four different directions. One exited the area briefly but soon returned with a gaggle of quacking middle school girls. The dread swarm of ravenous mouths were abuzz about their past morning, and present excitement of eating.

The buzz was not deafening, but certainly constant and no matter how loud an Ipod would go, it wouldn't have covered up the sounds. Only one of those special NOISE CANCELLING headphone units could have handled what those teachers unleashed on the public.

Fortunate for many, their break was up and/or their time to leave was due. They did not need to watch the feeding frenzy that was about to ensue anyway. That had to be a little ugly, and the

clean up must have been overtime for anyone that was on duty.

Their demeanor was that of a herd of trumpeting elephants and their eating must have been a serious treat similar to the frenzy of perona fish when some unsuspecting prey drew their attention.

## LIGHT AND DARK

A young mother rolled a stroller into the court with twin boys. As time moved along the personalities of the two were as if night and day. One was calm, observant and totally satisfied except for the occasional poke in the eye or the cheek from his sibling.

Sib was about as calm as a tornado, and about as satisfied as a shopoholic with an empty billfold. He would squirm, he would fuss, he would whimper, he would cry, he would do anything to gain mom's attention, but she was never long lived enough for him. The attention was needed constantly and she just wasn't about to give it to him.

Two older brothers were present as well and mom was as controlling as tight suspenders on a fat person - not about to have anything out of place. The olders were enjoying a game while mom attended the twins and especially Sib's need. A poke in bro's ear should bring him into the fray, a jab to the lip, a pull of the hair, a backhand in the mouth, a kick in the knee - nothing is going to stir his calm, nothing is going to bring him to lower himself to revenge.

Mom ignoring the minor abuse one to the other and just keeps on controlling the older ones that really need no control, especially not that much. If they put that much control in panty hose women would be dropping like flies due to the loss of blood flow to the legs.

The micromanager reminded me of Microsoft designing their software to do what they think you want done with your documents and graphics rather than what a customer might actually desire. The boys, all quite oblivious to the management techniques just kept on doing what they were doing in spite of the numerous interruptions from the ignored hierarchy.

## I AM THE WORLD

Two registers open, a person at both, he assumes if he stands between the two he can dart to the one that is open first. The only difficulty in this plan is that he is totally blocking the walk way between the registers where people desire to walk.

What makes a person the most critical person in the world - in their own mind at least? What thought pattern allows someone to block the only passageway for others? Not just this man, there are multitudes of examples of this in our society. The four people that meet in a store in a narrow walk way that decide to catch up on the last forty years history while standing in the walk way. The shopping cart parker that parks in the middle of the aisle where no one can pass. The

car driver that pulls to the stop sign and stops with their car completely blocking the pedestrian lane. More than one of these inconsiderates has heard my favorite cry as I bike around the rear of their car, "It ain't a parking lot lady!"

Their mental systems are totally oblivious to the fact that others are in their area. Are they so inept of their surroundings to not know others are there? Are they so dazed by their own personality that they cannot comprehend the possibility of other people? Are they so totally obnoxious as to not care that others are near? Yes would be the simple answer, though I doubt all three are true all the time.

What might be the answer to this sort of person? Ramming your cart into theirs and knocking it out of the way? Hollering at the driver in the pedestrian lane "Hey that it isn't a parking lot?" No, that doesn't work, they just glare back at you. Bump into the people yakking in the aisle? Might work if they are smaller than you.

The public schools teach that whatever is right for you is right. Wrong! It is a good policy to live by if you don't run into someone bigger than you. In that case you may find it a painful policy to adhere to.

## ZIP IT

Similar height, male and female, grayed fringe around the bald head, 50's hairstyle for the wife, dressed in casual walking to maintain their health finally alighting at the table where their snackies are contained in ziplock bags. A cup of McDonalds coffee to wash the snack down they watch the work-a-day world folks scurrying past on the street below toward their days work.

Toast and coffee for breakfast - adds to the health as well. The world ought to take note of such as they. Driving to the mall I passed numerous Junior High students walking to school. Not a one would pass the normal weight test, not a one could pass a fitness test unless it included exercises such as lifting the pop to the lip, or the cupcake to the mouth.

Our society is -- oh, this isn't a social commentary - sorry - back to the topic at hand. Good to see someone else that is trying to say no to their desire for the sausage and bisquits of the world.

Oh, forgot to eat my granola bar with my coffee, decaf of course.

## BAGGIES

Apologies to the company that makes Baggies for relating their brand to the type under consideration. A shirt that would pass for a tent pitched over a little frame of a man with pants that resemble those baggy upside down umbrella britches worn by clowns - you know the one, they are twice as big at the waist as the person, looking as if you could fill them to the brim with water and he would have his walk along wading pool.

What possesses a man to wear such clothing; surely he must have a skin disease which requires him not to allow fabric to touch his skin. Or perhaps the clothes are symbolic of his arrogance as he steps over brushing your arm to reach across in front of you at the condiment stand to get his desired packet.

He is off to work or whatever is important in his life, off to display his badges of whatever it is they represent. At least as he moves his coworkers will be cooled by the movement of air caused by the sails of cloth, and the speeding cars will slow to avoid that huge object in the road.

## HEAD CREW

The United States Navy in years past called the restrooms aboard ships and on land bases "heads." We will not surmise the reason or reasoning behind such a name change, other than it is one of those military things that happens and never gets changed due to long traditions that cannot change.

The Mall cleaning staff is on break, sitting with their coffee and snacks discussing the worst of worst and the filthy of filthiest that they have encountered this day. The messes are detailed and disgusting as you might think - many of us have been in the bathrooms they clean long before they arrive. What a life, what a way to make a living. Cleaning up after those that don't care how piggish they might be, those that know others will clean it up, and those that just like to make the life of others more miserable.

We will not mention that these are those that take the jobs Americans will not do, since this is a myth that the government has foisted upon us. Indeed, many of these janitorial slots are filled with other nationalities, because they were hired at such low wages that they replaced the Americans that were already filling those jobs.

No matter the why of their occupying their jobs, their jobs are miserable enough without sloppy slimy people making their work more intense and more disgusting by making messes that are worse and worse.

Having occupied one of these jobs for many years, until being replaced by one of these non-English speaking folks, in a retail store where homeless people frequented the rest rooms I can attest to the filthy nature of the human being. Yes, they can be clean and proper, but they can also be disgustingly polluting.

The cleaner uppers of the world should be thanked for their uplifting of human kind! Maybe that is why the title of this portion - Head Crew!

## STAYIN ALIVE

This old gent in sloppy sweater under a coat limps his way into line at the counter. A breakfast, a

lunch, a dinner, never mind the occasion, he is present and accounted for. Barely able to move from one spot to the other, stooped to keep his balance and slow to save the pain, he limps from the counter to the table.

Oh the joy on his face as he bites into that burger, the grin raised from the fries. Never mind he has to get up to go for more catsup, the pain is worth the wonderful taste of those fries so richly coated with sauce.

It is hard to know whether the joy of his burger and fries, the delight of his muffin and potatoes, is more important to him than the need to consume to stay alive. The ecstasy of the moment must overwhelm any need or hindrance he might have.

Not a gulper, but a carefully choreographed dance of the fingers and the lips. Dipping that fry has its just right twist of the wrist as the fry twirls to pile up catsup before the leading edge - the precise move of the wrist to bring the fry out of the cup with the fullest volume for the flavor buds to enjoy. Never in a hurry, never worried about how busy the place is, he just sits there carefully savoring each bite and he just keeps on smiling.

Never interrupts others, never a problem to the staff, just a joy to watch as he totally and unequivocally enjoys his meals. He would never dream that he brings joy to others by his simple enjoyment of his daily ritual at the burger joint.

All has been consumed, all the waste trayed, and the enjoyment over, but not the remembrance. The remembrance of a meal well executed, a meal well enjoyed - another important task done for the day. Now, the planning begins for that next trip to the counter to recount the many trips before. Is he in a hurry, no, he just sits there with a smile of satisfaction on his face with hands folded on his stomach as if to say, what's in there is so very satisfying.

Oh the joy of just enjoying a meal as this man is able to do. We are way too busy in our society; we miss so many little joys so we can get going on to the next task.

## FAST SHUFFLE

She is in the aisle leading to the counter, not knowing there is a world around her. Standing, gazing at the menu blocking all other customers - this after she has ordered. Maybe studying for an upcoming game show where she will show her amazing knowledge of fast food.

Walking to the table of choice she consumed her meal without further event - until ---- Having finished the cuisine, she empties her tray dutifully into the trash receptacle but is faced with a decision. There is another tray laying on the top of the trash can. What to do? Does she just simply stack her empty tray on top, or does she do something different, something daring, something dashing like pick up the other tray, slide hers under it and place the other tray on top of hers.

Okay, this author is stymied. What possible importance to this action could exist. Is she practicing for a unique Texas Holdem shuffle, is she showing her submission to some other tray user or is she simply expressing her own unique method of detraying herself?

Whatever the reason this person will forever wonder about how he will deal with the detraying procedure - did she have it more correct than I? Did she have some knowledge of etiquette that I have not heard of? Did she simply have a brain hiccup that caused this special procedure?

Sorry, she was long gone before the full implications of what had been observed struck home. Oh, to have hurried over to her and asked for that world shaping news, oh to have that information for you the reader. How will life for you continue when you find yourself holding a tray? What will be your decision? How will you chose of the options available?

It is feared that the tray holding stations of the world may now be clogged with people hesitating, wanting to do right, and not really knowing what right might be - all because some stupid author didn't see the earth shattering implications of his simple observation. That simple act of running after the woman could have saved the world from so much.

ACRO (DING) BAT

Sitting across from her boyfriend she does here contortions and gyrations as if watching some hidden or invisible big screen with the latest exercise video playing. The neck limber upper is first, the one side the next side the back the forth and all around, then the shoulder stretch or is she scratching her back?

Could be that the exercise bug has become a habit with her. Why else would she contort her body into such grotesque posses unless she might like pain. To the left she twists her body, to the right, to the back to the front. At least the symmetry is in good shape even if she isn't.

To the chin with her knee clutching her leg close to her body. The other knee to the chin, no not a prize kickboxing fight, just a couple with half of it doing weird things before the others very eyes. And all this while balancing on a chair. Maybe she is sitting on a flashlight and working on her balance beam routine.

Ahh, the leg stretch into the aisle making the passersby go out and around to keep from tripping on the extended extremity. The other one into the other aisle, more folks scatter. Not only is she exercising, but she is causing those around her to get a little extra as well.

And finally the ankle twist. It doesn't take as much room so less people are involved. Let's hope that she doesn't have some unique toe twisting workout to do. Removing shoes in the food court is illegal isn't it?

Maybe she is trying to become as the alien I once saw in a television ad. The hips were where

our shoulders are and the shoulders where where our hips are, making for a much easier combination of extremities for touching your toes in exercise. Imagine that frame work for doing deep knee bends, your hands could steady you as you go down. Imagine though, trying to do jumping jacks - legs and arms flailing for air space, might be that there would be massive bruising and even cuts from finger nails jabbing into thighs. These aliens may be smarter than we are to be able to travel in space, but their putter togetherer isn't quite as good as ours. At least we can do jumping jacks even if we can't travel planet to planet to scare other species.

She must be done, they are on their feet, they are walking, or at least he is, she is doing more of a hopping routine. Maybe all the contortions were aimed at turning her into a rabbit. Her boyfriend has to be having a hare raising morning spending time with an exerholic. Bouncing and walking they go out into life.

One must wonder what the offspring might be like if the bouncer and walker should marry. Would the child be a bouncer, a walker, or maybe a slitherer. No wonder man is so varied. When the extremes combine to cause other combinations of extremes.

### THE THREE MUSTATEERS

The couple with their early teen son are out for their walking rounds of the mall. Round one, the son is tapping his mother from behind on one shoulder and then the next. Rather like the mother fox that has finally gotten a break and is laying in the sun for a moments peace when her pup pounces on her back seeking attention. As the mother ignores her pup, so the mother ignores her son as they walk briskly along.

Round two finds the son cutting across the food court an aisle before his folks to grab a chair on the other side where he waits for the parents, only to jump up and declare them as being very slow - umm wonder if the parents predicted his comment as well as any competent observer?

Round three and they haven't slowed a bit. The parents don't look like they need this exercise, but son's waddle clears up the puzzle - he does. A mom and pop that think enough of their son's condition to encourage his exercise by doing it with him. There just has to be some love in their somewhere.

Round four and the pop has been lost. Weak lungs? Weak knees? Who would know. Maybe he is taking a break to get away from the son's poking him on the shoulder. Since mom ignored him maybe dad will give him some attention.

Another round and son is trailing. A little tired, a little neglected, or just giving the folks some space. Maybe they will talk all this walking over and find that it isn't as good an idea as first thought. Maybe a walking machine in the garage so he can't poke them on the shoulder, or a walking coach so he won't take shortcuts - something must be done.

Walk is over, slowed down to a casual stroll, oh no, they are walking up to the Cinnabon. Can it be they would go to all that effort only to succumb to the aroma that is filling the court. Rather like the girl we took shopping one day. We asked if she found all that she wanted. She replied, "I think so, I got my exercise video, a diet coke and a Snicker." Yes, we did, snicker a little - well a lot - well actually more like laughing - like loudly.

No, not a Cinnabon in their hands, water for son and coffee for mom, they abstained from the delight of everyone's heart and made this person happier because there isn't a Cinnabon on this table either. I'm sure my doctor would be proud of me, sitting here with that smell drifting in and out as if beckoning me toward the Sin-abon stand.

## AN EARFUL

A blue tooth in the ear - hummm, who'd a thunk it a few years ago, a person spends thousands of dollars with an orthodontist to straighten their teeth, then a few months later they stick a blue tooth in their ear to make themselves look weird. Wonder how the dentist feels about these turns of events.

How does a doctor deal with these things anyway? Do you whiten them, do you try to straighten them, or do you just try to remove them? Not that you can. They seem stuck in there as if they are permanent implants.

Are these things going to replace ear rings? Do ear rings act as antennas for them, will they make earrings that become antennas for them? What is the future for these things? The entrepreneurs of the world must be atwitter with what to do next.

Then again, what about the medical implications. Are they causing misalignment of the spine due to the difference in weight between sides of the head? Are they cutting down on air flow somehow and causing dizzy spells? Will they be useable for dispensing ear drops in the future? Maybe dispense a drop every time a call comes in to sooth the weary ear canal?

There ought to be some investigation into the phone companies to be sure they aren't giving secret messages while people sleep. They could take over the world by telling the wearers to target all non-wearers for super salespeople to contact.

Maybe they could be used to teach the wearer a foreign language. Not the one the people seem to talk when they are using these units, but another language, or maybe even some phonics to teach them to talk without mush in their mouth.

Maybe they could implant antennas at the food counters and when the sale is finalized the register could send a signal to the tooth to remind the person to say thank you.

Could we non-wearers design some super loud sounding call that would inform the toothers that

they are a little rude and that their nose is a little too high into the air as if they are putting on one - air that is.

You might find that they become a good anchor for an errant hair piece, it could be a phony blue tooth that is just an fm radio so you have your tunes. It might even just be a phony like the fake security cameras that we have around the country. A phony, could actually be useful in the mall for cutting the noise level down a little - how about two phonies to cut down lots of noise?

Saw a talk show the other day where the gals were trying to make fat people look thin and hippy people look natural by adding color and layers and strips in their clothes. Wonder if you have a stripe on your blue tooth if it makes your fat head look slimmer, or if you do a layered look will it draw attention away from that fat lip your wife gave you? Maybe a light blue that matches your eyes will draw attention away from your crooked nose.

Really, haven't seen anyone getting into this line of work, maybe a new shop on the mall would be a great idea - style for your blue tooth. You could do blue tooth make overs, you could do blue tooth whitening seminars, you could do how to wear your blue tooth in the pool parties and you could do workshops on how to put on sunscreen without shorting out your blue tooth. Thousands could be made on these simple new dentures for the ear!

To make the toothies want to come into your store you could make it unpopular to be without some adornments for your tooth. What would we call a store like this? How about calling these little shops "TOOTH OR CONSEQUENCES?"

Advantages of a Bluetooth in the ear:

1. Anyone with a real or self-perceived ear deformity will feel less self-conscious due to all eyes being on the deformity with color in the Bluetooth wearers ear.
2. If you wear it on the correct side it's weight may help with that curvature of the spine you have, stretching things in the proper direction.
3. It is assumed if no one calls you, that you can just press some buttons and get in touch with yourself.
4. If you are deaf in the other ear you have a great excuse for not hearing your wife telling you to take out the trash.
5. When people see your lips moving and no one is around they will assume you are a little short wired in the head and not bother you. Well except for the panhandler that thinks you are talking to him.

Disadvantages of a Bluetooth in the ear:

1. People always staring at you wondering what disease causes such a deformity.
2. Having to remove the thing to scratch and remove wax from your ear. Ah, another possible spin-off market. Someone needs to develop an automatic wax removal system for wearers. Maybe they could heat the wax and spread it on those troublesome sideburns for removal.
3. If you are deaf in the other ear you may miss some invitations to dinner.
4. You don't have a reason for not answering your phone. What are you going to say, I left my phone in the car? Or, Sorry, didn't hear the ring due to the ringing in my ear.
5. You will miss that date with the great looking girl that cannot stand Bluetooths in the ear.

Well this books contribution to the future economic stability of the country is accomplished. Better stop this section as it is getting a little long in the tooth.

#### IF ONE IS GOOD A HANDFUL IS GOODER

Walking to the condiment area the middle aged woman with no coffee cup in hand picked up a creamer, opened it, downed it, threw the empty container in the trash, picked up a whole handful of creamer containers and walked to her table.

Wow, with that mind set all of us could stop buying sugar, sweetener, salt, pepper, creamer, napkins, and why not - bring our empty catsup and mustard containers in for a refill.

It is no wonder prices have been climbing. That whooper just increased a nickel due to the theft.

Ours is a wonderful society. Our public schools have trained all their students to believe there is no wrong, that what they want is paramount, that what your concept of truth is, is true, and that there is no one that should hold you responsible. Why not a handful of condiments? Why not a t-shirt? Why not a purse? There is no end to the implications of a life where nothing is wrong unless you declare it to be such.

Indeed, the man sitting in jail for murder declared himself innocent and the system guilty of persecuting him. He didn't mean to shoot that man in his robbery, the man stepped in front of his gun when he decided to fire it. The shooter has no responsibility. The victim is the one that was at fault. He got what he deserved, stepping in front of that firing gun! What a stupid man was the prisoner's mindset.

#### MUST BE CLEAN, I MUST BE CLEAN I JUST MUST

Ball cap screwed down tight and shades pushed close against the face there is no forehead to be seen. The meanness is exuding from this man as he walks to the table and seats himself.

Removing the lid to his coffee he opens the sugar and dumps it in. He rises and walks to the trash can to throw away the sugar packet empties. Stirring the sugar into the coffee, he rises and walks to the trash can to throw away the stir stick. Returning to the table he pours the coffee into his thermal cup that he brought with him, rises and walks to the trash can to throw away the cup and lid.

Sandwich finished he walks to the trash can to throw away the sandwich wrapper. Returning he finishes his fries and walks to the trash can to throw away the fry cup. Seating himself he wipes his fingers with the napkins and walks to the trash can to throw away the soiled napkins.

Removing his shades and cap he surveys the court and relaxes for a moment. Great breakfast - now to work - he walks to the trash can to throw away the sack, returns to the table for shades and cap and off into the world he returns for the rest of his day - probably a little more tired than before breakfast, but nourished for the morning's activities.

#### THE CHASM, THE CROSSING, THE DELIVERY

Scooting as close to the table as his Santa sized tummy will allow he opens his pancake breakfast with glee. On goes the butter, and on goes the syrup. All is prepared, but as the fork goes in and begins its lift off one is left to wonder, will the cakes have sufficient uplift and forward torque to make it that foot and a half across that nice clean t-shirt to the mouth?

Leaning forward so the mouth is over the tray would be the safer method, but this man is so sure of his fork dexterity that he seats himself in a comfortable upright position and allows his expertise to overcome the surety of gravity and chances that syrup might drip on his front. Anyway there is such a pattern on the shirt that a syrup drop would only look like an impressionist painters splotch of color in the grand scheme of the work presented.

I, the more prone to try to cover up such indiscretions, would find a useful purpose to such drippings - purpose as, Yes, I know I dropped something, but I wanted that for a snack later. Or I might even suggest that I am starting my follow the dots pattern for the cat to play with later. It could be said, if she isn't around to hear, that my wife did it while dishing up the meal.

Then again he may know these cakes are so tuff that the only way that they will be removed will be the strong teeth of a thirty year old and the neck muscles of a weight lifter. What ever the background the napkin has not yet been implemented to wipe away any problem areas and he is rising to dispose of his tray. We must assume the techniques employed were successful, or he is totally unknowing of any gravitational overcomings.

#### JUST RESTING

Having been known as overweight, someone very close to me has been known to frequent Subway sandwich shops for their low fat sandwiches. We have noted that just below the counter

on the customer side there is a nicely finished rail installed. It is about an inch thick and around four to five inches wide. Often the wonderings of my mechanical mind have considered the designers use for the rail. It isn't for drinks, because you haven't gotten to the drink section yet, though if you happen to have a drink from one of those other nameless shops, it works well for that. It also works quite well for a ladies purse to rest on as she orders those delicacies for the sandwich.

Kids have been observed hanging onto the rail so they can go tippy toe to see whats goin on hind the counter. Others just like to hang on it - hangin round the sandwich shop has different meanings for kids and teens.

Other than those items no real use for the rail has been noted; not until just recently. A young woman was at the counter as we stepped up. It was noted that she had finished ordering her sandwich, and she had asked for an order of biscuits and gravy. Not the usual side order for a healthy sandwich, but that was not overly attention gathering - well until she also requested a turnover to go with everything else.

Turning to look at this young woman her more than hugely ample foundation for a navel was resting on this rail that had such an interest. Now, the question of the ages was finally answered. It is a tummy rail for those weary of back. Humm, either a very strong wood, or poorly engineered at an inch in thickness.

Rather gives that old wild west phrase "Belly up to the bar" new meaning.

MR ALL IN ALL

The family arrives, grandparents and kids and grandkids. Noise levels increase, why not it is their dinning area, not anyone else's. Rather like the cell phone syndrome. Everyone wants to hear our conversations - right? Well at least they want you to hear it. Never mind their swearing; their crude comments etc., they are meant for EVERYONE'S enjoyment.

As they stand at the counter baby and brother are placed on the food counter for the exposure of all to all that might have transferred to the britches. Health inspectors ought to require Teflon coated slanted counters so that any child installed on a food counter would be quickly deposited back into obnoxious mother and grandfather's arms.

One of my favorite songs is "MUSIC FROM ACROSS THE WAY" and these folks thought it was conversation from across the way. They must take voice lessons to learn to project their voices that far. On a football field they would need no PA system to call the penalties.

It is so obvious to most any observer that our society has lost so many of the prior generation's social graces. Maybe the loud and boisterous comes with the finger food generation. The line of thought that all I want to do and be excludes anyone else from thought and action. The

individual has been so thoroughly pumped up that all think they are all in all - no wonder there is so much anger in our society - when Mr. Big enters Mr. All in All's space what is Mr. All in All to do besides blow a gasket.

Well, gasket blown and Mr. Big and clan are about to leave so peace and tranquility will soon reign once again in Mr. All in All's space.

IT'S CATCHING - IT'S SPREADING - EVERYONE'S GUNNA GET IT

What is this new malady of life, what new disease, what new plague are we facing? The cell phone volume, that loud voice that automatically kicks in when someone answers the cell. Have you noticed? The loud voice isn't always just on the cell phone anymore. Cell phone users are on the phone so much that their normal tone of voice is on loud. Oh for a volume switch like the new wireless phones have - you know walk by the rude person and flip his volume to low.

Two salesman types sat down a number of tables away and I heard every word of their conversation because both had their volume switch on holler. What in their minds makes them think themselves so very important? What makes them think that everyone within forty feet of them is interested in their conversation? They are kind of like the person out walking their dog that allows the dog to make a deposit on someone else's lawn. What makes the literer think because they do not want that stuff on their lawn that we do? What arrogance and what rudeness we are building in our country.

Anyway, back to the disease. The loud cell phone voice has now spread to the phone user's everyday voice. Not only that, if you observe where there are people present, that if one table is talking loudly, then the one's next to that table will be raising their voices so that they can be heard over the loudness of the phone users. Then those around those that are around the cell phone users will have to increase their volume to be heard over those trying to be heard over the cell phone users. Pretty soon those around the cell phone users cannot hear because of not only the noise of the cell phone users but also the noise of those that are around them. Soon the whole place is full of shouting people and no one is really being heard, nor are they really enjoying the noise levels in their ears.

When will people get disgusted with this behavior and begin to call for no talking in public places. We got rid of smoking this way, maybe we can quiet the cell phone users of America as well as those around them and those around those that are around the users.

Ah, the quiet. Ah, the calmness. Ah, the impossibility of getting rid of loud voices. If they were detrimental to our health, maybe we could, but just because it is rude, obnoxious, and bothersome - well that is just being around other humans.

HAVE IT MY WAY OR YOU WON'T HAVE IT

Stepping to the order counter the woman ordered a ham biscuit with egg. The girl at the counter pointed to the sign above her head and informed Mrs. Stupid that the biscuit sandwich only came with sausage or bacon.

Mrs. Stupid feeling fully as stupid as her name implies then said, "Then I will have a bacon biscuit. The counter girl then replied, "Well I could substitute ham for the bacon if you'd like." Mrs. Stupid now feels she should change names with someone in close proximity. "Yes, I could substitute ham for the Sausage as well if you'd rather. HUUUUUUUH?

Let it be clear this was not a Burger King where they love to give it to you "Your way" but this was the joint that loves to give it to you THEIR way no matter what your way might be. It's our way or the highway so to speak.

No, you can't have a ham biscuit because we only serve sausage or bacon biscuits, but we can substitute ham for the bacon or for the sausage. Guess it is a terminology thing. They can't call it a ham biscuit sandwich, they have to call it a sausage or bacon biscuit with a substitute of ham. Runs in some people's minds that with the sausage biscuit with a substitute of ham, or the bacon biscuit with a substitute of ham, is also served with a liberal coating of STUPID, IGNORANCE, ILLOGIC or SMART ALICINESS. Please substitute the comment of your choice for the thought that there is intelligent life in fast food joints.

## THE BIG EMPTY

This morning the place is totally empty. Chairs aligned, floors shined, trash bins bagged, and awaiting the crowd. The court itself has personality. It can be cluttered, it can be well arranged, it can be dirty, and it can be clean. It can be quiet as this morning, or it can make a deaf person hear. It can be hilarious, it can be scary, it can be boring, and it can be just about anything the people can make it.

It can be a friend to the lonely, a respite for the weary, and an extensive pool for the writer.

The reality is that it will probably outlive most of its inhabitants. As they pass into eternity, it will remain serving well the new generation which it might also bury if it keeps paying its way through life.

Not a pleasant concept to consider, but truth often is.

The reality of the court is that it not only serves many, it also controls many. The security folks must adhere to their rounds, the shop keepers must continue to hire and fire, and worry of the bottom line. The employees must consider the daily grind, the possibility of unemployment, and the specter of a bad day of business, yet the court just continues on without a thought, without a care, without a reason to change. It is and thus it has value, it is, thus it will continue to be - as long as it is profitable, but even then if there is no more court, the space continues to serve some

purpose, and continues to exist even when its customers are long ago buried in the ground and their dollars forgotten.

Not only the court, but the house we build, the grass we plant, the television we purchase - all may very well outlive us. Makes one wonder why we value those things so highly.

#### THE TALL AND THE SHORT OF IT

Six feet three, bald on top and graying around the edges walking into the area with his five foot one inch wife. Mutt and Jeff, tall and short, high and low or whatever contrasting terms you might want to apply; they will fit quite nicely.

As they sit down there is quiet between them, as he observes the goings on and she gazes intently into his wondering eyes. Little is the conversation, they have undoubtedly said it all before numerous times. It is the company, not the conversation; it is the companionship not the building up of intelligence; it is the couple, not the individual.

Smiles cross the table, touches shared reveal the inner feelings no matter the shallow observation of distance.

It is possible that these two have all that we want to observe in our coming thoughts. They have led a long life together, they have struggled through the hard times, they have enjoyed through the good times, and they are pushing at the end of their time.

Not much different than any of the others that have been observed eating their way through life. These two however are at the far end of life and have found many of the things we want to look at in our coming considerations.

Just a note or two of conclusion would be appropriate to this work. First of all there are some things that I have come to understand over the last few years.

Even though I have my bigoted side as most of us do if we are honest, we must, if we take time to observe people, more than the passing, quick and judgmental observation, find some common threads no matter who we run into, or what they are acting like.

Some personal illustrations might open our mind's eye to these people we encounter from time to time in our daily life that we quickly write off as crazy, weird, or just plain crazy.

ALL WANT TO LOVE. When leaving high school there was no money for college, no ambition to start a business, and no real goal in life so into the Navy for a four year enlistment.

Four years of wondering from here to there with no real goal in mind. Nothing really struck my fancy, so nothing much was accomplished.

Upon being discharged from the service, there was a growing awareness that a companion for life would be of great value. A desire for marriage became very strong.

A move to the Midwest brought me to my home town and soon to the sister of an acquaintance. It wasn't but days before we knew that we had something special and that marriage would be the ultimate ending to our dating.

When you meet that kid dressed in black with silver studs decorating his entire being, he has that same desire to love someone in a most complete way. That desire might not be fully developed, but it will if given time.

It is natural to share yourself, your love, and your life with another. God created Adam, but soon it was clear that there was need of a woman to complete him. Likewise, the woman was made to be a completer, to love, to assist, and to spend her life with another.

Now, this is not an edict that all must marry, for that is not necessarily the way of things. Some choose to walk this life alone, but their capacity to love is not diminished, nor need it be. There are many ways to love others, other than in the marriage bond even though most of humanity throughout history has chosen that path.

ALL WANT TO BE LOVED. Part of the desire to marry is a desire to have one that will love them through life.

The merry go round marriage of our day is not what I have in mind. What I have in mind is pictured in that grey haired couple walking into the food court hand in hand, looking at one another as if they had just met and fallen in love that day.

Man has the capacity to love monogamously; all they have to do is to commit to it. There is no switch that shuts love off as the current society suggests, it is love that continues as one continues to commit to that person that they first loved.

To go into marriage on a trial basis, is nothing more than deciding to shack up till the good physical relations start to diminish. Once the fun is gone, why wait around, why try to fix it, why bother with the other - drop that person and find another that will light your imagination.

This is not what love is about, nor is it what God suggests in His Word. He tells us that love is for life, and life is for love. To throw that away every time you have a fight is to loose what God has intended for you - His best, after, of course, salvation.

ALL WANT TO LOVE THEIR KIDS.

This is not an exclusion to those that do not have kids, but if there are children present in a family, there is usually a desire to love and care for those kids.

In our society we note that the drug addicts fail in this area, but as I have seen addicted mothers interviewed, most have a deep concern for their offspring, even though they aren't capable of acting on that concern due to their addiction. Clean the drugs out of their system and they normally react as anyone else with children.

That person at the register that was short with you, might well have a sick child on her mind, or may be wondering how they are going to feed the child in coming months. A child in trouble is usually coupled with a parent or two that are totally concerned.

Normal for us is often also normal for others that we meet or observe. Even that aggravating greeter at the store that says the same hello to you weekly, but fails to answer or respond to your questions or comments; they have the same desires and aspirations as you. They have their dreams, their desires as well as their own set of disappointments.

Place yourself in the greeter's position and wonder a moment as to how long you would be all that sincere with your rhetoric for the masses passing before you. When you are discouraged about home life, how greeterific would you be? When facing financial troubles how much of a smile could you muster for that person that is most likely ignoring your greeting?

ALL WANT TO ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING IN LIFE.

When young, few have their real direction set in their minds. As they see life, most find things that interest them and they begin to wish that they could accomplish some of those things.

In the end of life, most look back and wonder where their life went, and what was accomplished. Few when older feel that they have accomplished anything of value. More than one famous person has looked back and wondered if there was anything that they did in this life that was worth much of anything to anyone.

Normally, and to be expected, for when one accomplishes one thing they usually set their sights on another and so forth through life, until life is gone and they have their sights on something that they cannot accomplish. The natural conclusion is that you were a failure due to your inability to finish what you wanted to do. This may not be a logical line of thought, but the line that many follow to the wrong conclusion.

One of the major actors in Hollywood that had been in literally dozens of movies felt that he had not accomplished much in life. He had never become the main star in any of his movies, but had always played supporting roles. Yet, most of those movies would have been much less interesting if he hadn't added his great abilities to the films. Many probably could not have named his name, but his face would bring instant recognition of one that they had enjoyed many

times over the years.

As you look at those that are around you filling their faces, realize they fill their face in a similar fashion to you - one mouthful at a time - some bigger mouthfuls than you, but when all is said and done, they want to accomplish something in life just as you - over and above feeding the face.

ALL WANT TO BE ACCEPTED.

Even the avowed non-conformist seeks approval from someone. They want to be acceptable on some level, whether in their non-conformity, or whether in a love relationship, or in general by their fellow workers.

Acceptance is key to belonging, to knowing, to all facets of life. If you are not accepted you will not feel that you are a part of anything, thus become alienated from everything.

ALL HAVE WANTS AND DESIRES.

No matter how rich or poor a human being is, they have wants and desires.

Recently I saw a documentary on the Amistad mutiny, where a number of slaves took over a ship that they were being transported on.

They all had a desire and hope of being free, and the opportunity appeared so they took it and took the ship and sailed off to freedom. Freedom was not as quick to come as they had anticipated, there were long legal struggles for the Africans, but ultimately they were declared freemen and later transported back to their homeland.

On the other hand the rich have their hopes and desires. Again, recently Bill Gates and his wife have been in the news. Yes, it is easy to call him the Geek of the century, but then consider, he is the richest man around - Geek must now be a good thing.

The man and woman with billions of dollars built themselves a neat house - very understandable, desire done - they have undoubtedly fulfilled other desires, but the reason they have been brought up is that they still have hopes and desires. They had billions of dollars that can buy them anything they want, yet they still have unfulfilled desires.

Lately in the news they have been shown to have a tremendous desire to help the poor in the world on a medical plain and have given a billion dollars to that goal through a foundation that they have set up. They can do most anything in the world, but they chose to help the poor.

The point made - all mankind has some sort of desire and goal for their life's chase. Whether they succeed is questionable, but they will always have those desires of life.

We might mention one further desire that probably needs separate consideration. There seems to run in man the desire to continue to live. This is not a totally universal desire, but for the most part all continue on in this quest.

There are a few that choose suicide rather than go through the trials set before them, and there are a few older folks that fail to see the point in continuing to exist in a state where they are, but few of these act on their desire to move on into the next life, most just exist as best they can.

For the most part you will find that the older folks work and strain at the work of aging gracefully and do so with the thought of a longer life than they have thus far succeeded in.

Secondly, in the common threads, we must note that all are human, and if we look at this from the Christian perspective - that is, that the Bible teaches we are all lost and on our way to an eternity without God, with great punishment, there are two more common elements.

We are all depraved and unable to respond to God's grace. Finally, we are all offered God's divine grace and it is our only thread of hope for true happiness, joy, and peace with Him.

Two applications and we will be finished. All are depraved - so why would you be shocked that they are rude, demeaning, and nasty to you as you deal with them? Since they are rude etc., and they seem lost and in a muddle, then the gospel is the only key to changing them for the better.

The simple gospel, or a gospel tract is all that is required, and they are on their way to the decision that will take them into the family of God, or allow them to continue on in their decent into hell.

You may be the only person that is between a lost person and an eternity in torment. When we put that nasty cashier on that basis, maybe we can be a little nicer to them, and a little more loving in our thought life toward them.

It could well be wondered why this work ever developed beyond a minor brain cramp of an old man. It first occurred to me to write a comical tome relating to humorous people I observed in the food courts. It quickly evolved into a humorous/serious look at people in general, and ended up with a bit of all of the above.

It changed, in part, due to the observation that I can see myself in many of these characters that I have set forth. Not now and all at once, but I see these people in me at different stages of my life.

For example I see "MR. ARROGANCE IS BLISS" in my early college days. Young, in college, and we all know that Freshmen and Sophomores know everything there is to know, except that one item that missed their attention - they find in their Junior year that they know little. Me, arrogant? No, not very, but a little I will admit.

As for "LATE FOR AN VERY IMPORTANT DATE" that is me in a nutshell. Most of my life has been lived in turbo gear, everything in a hurry and everything had to be done in a moment or two. It took me four years after retirement to realize that there was no need to hurry, that there was plenty of time to do everything and even a lot of time to be bored.

We are all in too big a hurry for our own good, scurrying around in a huff trying to jam four more things into or allotted twenty-four hours.

You may have guessed that "THE QUINTESENCIALLY CHALLENGED" is yours truly. In my old age I have learned that there is little use for a worn out old man. Some still hire such as janitors, some as greeters, but little value other than this is to be seen.

These worn out souls that few notice in our society fill their time with crafts, hobbies, and other things to waste their excess time so they can make it through to what ever television show that floats their boat comes on in the evening. Staying awake for said show is the real challenge of life, many will notice.

Ahhhhh, "DOUBLE CHEESEBURGER, FRIES, AND SHAKE PLEASE - OH AND AN APPLE PIE AND MAKE THAT TWO DOUBLE CHEESEBURGERS AND A LARGE DIET COKE" is oh, so much about me.

I must confess that over the years it wasn't even diet coke, it was regular. Not until the doctor told me to get off of all sugar, did I even question the need of the body for Coke. Most thought that Coke was what the body was lubricated with, who knew?

After the heart attach that struck as I was prone on the emergency room table with minor chest pains, Double cheese burger took on a whole new meaning to wanting less pain. With all the cheese burgers, fries, pies, donuts etc. how could a heart attack avoid such an invitation as this foodaholic?

Though never having been as "PURPOSELY CHALLENGED" as some, a retiree can slip into this world quite easily. It is adequate to get out of bed and dress yourself, what more could anyone want?

"QUALITY FAMILY TIME" has a familiar ring to it as well. Though the Derickson clan preceded the pocket electronic game era by a little, there was the Atari 2600 that held our attention for some time, then the Timex Sinclair and the Commodore 64, were instrumental in drawing our family together.

The C-64 magazines were filled with program code that you could type into our C-64, save and then run. It was a great family time sitting around, one person reading the code slowly while the other one fingered the code into the machine. Mom was even involved now and then, gleefully we accepted her help - she was the only touch typist in the family and she could really make the

pages of code disappear into the silicon chips.

"THE CUPIDLY CHALLENGED" era of life was in high school. Being a borderline hood and James Dean type few of the fairer sex wanted anything to do with me. Guess getting the girls was more than being cool - looks must have related.

The town to the west was a little different; there were some young ladies that actually smiled now and then. Hanging at the Creamery slurping Cherry Cokes we often rubber necked as the gals drove by. There were actually a few encounters with the locals that turned out to be quite enjoyable.

"THE NON CONFORMIST THAT DRESSES TO BE DIFFERENT, BUT LOOKS JUST LIKE ALL THE OTHER NON CONFORMISTS" stage of development occurred during a four year enlistment in the U. S. Navy.

A friend requested I drive an old thirty-two Chevy home for him. Being in the throws of beatnickville, the shower shoes, cut off shorts and Hawaiian shirt made for a real thrill for the small town folks where the tow truck man dropped me off when the Chevy threw a rod. The first man out of the gas station scanned up and down, then down to up and finally mustered his profound comment for the year. "Uhhh, are you in a play or sumpthin?" Well, acting was a close guess, since hippyville had not really settled into a lifestyle, just something to try while on leave.

"SLICK ON A STICK" attacked me in high school as well. One morning, standing in front of the mirror observing that cool guy in a pink shirt, pink cords, pink buck shoes, with pink socks, and pink suspenders to hold things together, and off course topped off with a great duck tail - how slick does it get?

Never been "HOMELESS" but definitely "Home less" would fit the current climate. Mostly because I am one of the "Keep in shape crowd" that mobs the malls these days. A long walk around Wal-Mart before getting groceries, then off to the mall for a longer walk around the mall. What better for the heart and shoe manufacturers? This, after a long, brisk ride on the bike before sun up.

Why not some exercise in the afternoon you might ask. When do you think I lift weights?

Haven't worn out so many shoes in any era of life! Haven't worn out too many muscles, they went years ago.

"MR. RIGHT" the man that rearranged all chairs and tables in his area till they were just right - observing this was as if it were a script written in my mind and the man was playing out my very thoughts. After seeing what the man was doing, my mind knew what was going to happen next - it just had to be - in the world of the perfectionist there is always a nonperfectionist to frustrate and aggravate the perfectionist.

These two were brought together by fate to give enjoyment to any that would observe - it was choreography at its best, it was the mating dance of the species, all was set for the requirements to play themselves out, and they did.

The "QUICK ON THE STICK" crowd found a new member when I arrived in the senior citizen camp. May be slow, may not walk a perfectly straight line, and may slow down and speed up according to the breath available, but still functioning without a stick.

Observing the "CHOW" child, I was able to recall the world of biscuits, eggs, and bacon, the double cheeseburgers, the fries, the glazed donuts and all that fat, but I really must thank the creative cooks of America that have given us great recipes to turn Styrofoam and vegetables into something enjoyable to eat.

All this looking back, is so that we can look forward a bit. If all these folks can be seen in my own mirror of life, it seems that others might see themselves in these characters.

We are all different, but in a lot of ways we are all the same, we have the same failings, we have the same agings, we have all the cravings of life, so, what makes us so terribly different?

The key to understanding people my dear Archie Bunker, is to understand that we all are quite similar, except for our packaging and programming.

A Jew is programmed differently than you, but they are just as human as you. The black is packaged differently, but then so are pot bellied folks. I forgot to mention that my favorite set of reruns had to be Archie Bunker. He was right on, he was I in so many ways, but the lessons learned were and are quite similar.

It didn't take a Meathead to convince me, it just took a little more time of talking to myself - get the picture? Meathead talking to Archie Bunker - that going on in my mind - now that is a real split personality.

To sum it all up - we aren't all that different. Some of us slick our hair, some spike it, and some don't do anything because they have none, but we all are so similar in the underneath, in the area where we know our selves when nobody else is around. That, real person, the one we know deep down inside isn't much different than anyone else's inner being - just a lot different in how we present ourselves to the world.

Generically speaking, the Christian's that come and go with nary a witness, with nary a consideration of those around them and their spiritual destinations - what are they about? What is their accomplishment? What is their excuse?

The lost hear Christian talk, see Christian books being read, see Bible's, but where is the outworking, where is the concern? No one considers telling those lost folks of their invitation to

heaven, nor their destination of hell.

What about me? Why don't I witness? I'm writing a Christian book and need to concentrate! Aren't we all full of excuses? A farmer ask his neighbor to borrow some rope. The neighbor asked what he wanted the rope for. The farmer said that he wanted to tie up his milk. The neighbor was shocked, knowing you cannot tie up milk. The farmer explained, "One excuse is as good as another."

There is an Album by Irish women called "CELTIC WOMAN" and upon that album is a song with the name of "ONE WORLD" which has relates the words "Deep down inside I'm just like you." I fear the churches rejection of all things liberal has often caused us to throw out some ideas that are so very true, but since the liberals spout them to further their cause we often set the thoughts aside. We are all the same, deep down inside where we really live - not much difference be we black, white, short, fat, educated, uneducated, weird or any other difference - we are the same.

This work may be viewed as a little liberal for this ending, but so be it. Down inside all people are the same and we as believers need to understand and apply the idea to our witness and ministry to people in our little corner of the world. No matter where God has placed you, be sure that people all around you are the same as you. If they are lost they are in need of your Lord, if they are believers, then they are in need of your ministry.

"Deep down inside I'm just like you." Thanks ladies, for the reminder.