the ONION PRESENTS

Chronicles Of The Area Man

For Kindle
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BELMONT, NH—Stating that she wasn't in the best place right now, and that things have been sort of you know, Belmont resident Megan Slota announced Thursday that sometimes she just feels….

Due to a general sense of…well, it's hard to explain, the 28-year-old dental hygienist reported that she just needed to work some stuff out, and that she would probably be a little I don't know for a couple weeks or so.

"It's not anybody's fault, honestly," said Slota, standing in her kitchen and holding a mug of tea with both hands. "Sometimes I just get like this where it's like I'm not, I guess, whatever. We don't have to get into it right now."

Added Slota, "I'm really, like, argh, I don't know."

After that thing with Dave on Thursday, people were concerned that Slota was in a weird place, which she initially denied. But Slota later admitted that she was just taking some time to figure things out and needed a little space, but it's not like she wanted people to leave her alone or anything like that.

"I had a really good talk with Debra," Slota said. "She's such a good friend. It's good to know I have someone like her. It's just a crazy time right now. And I've been really busy with work, too, so that hasn't helped."

While admitting that it must suck to have to deal with her lately, Slota said that she appreciates everyone's patience while she sorts all of this stuff out. Sources close to the sort of spacey, sort of—oh gosh, what would you even call it—distracted woman confirm that it's always the same this time of year, because of her dad.

"I worry about Megan," longtime friend Alex Polson said. "Times like this, she can get a little strange. Not strange strange, but still kind of strange where you're like, 'Huh?' But you know what? She's tough. She'll get through all this and be back to her old self in no time."

Though she's been kind of blah lately, especially at the family thing where she had to be on her best behavior, friends and coworkers have been understanding about what's going on with her, and want to let her know they're there if she needs help moving, or needs someone to go shopping with her, or just wants to hang out and not talk about the thing that happened with Samantha last week.

"You know, it's like when you're just," Slota said. "You feel one way but then you're also sort of, I don't know, maybe it's just one of those things. And you don't want to force it, right? I feel like you just have to accept it sometimes, I guess."

"It is what it is," she added.

Regardless of the thing that's, oh, whatever, it'll pass eventually, Slota maintained that she's forging ahead and taking things one day at a time.

Dr. Andrei Robinson, author of the book It's, Well, I'm Not Sure How To Describe It, Really, says that Slota's condition is not uncommon.

"As a therapist, I'm seeing more and more patients with problems and conditions related to Ms. Slota's," Dr. Robinson said. "But ultimately, there's not a lot I can do for them. It's just another facet of this, whatever it is. You can't understand the, you know, well, anything, really. It's all too much sometimes, but it's her deal. She's got to work through it. We've all been there, right?"

"I don't know," Dr. Robinson added. "Does that make sense?"
Gay Marriage Passes In 9 States After Area Homosexual Dunks On Regulation Rim

MONTGOMERY, AL—A two-handed slam dunk by an openly homosexual man set off a chain of events this week that culminated in the legalization of gay marriage in nine states, including Mississippi and Alabama. "When I saw that dunk, I was like, 'Whoa!'" said Alabama state Sen. Hinton Mitchem, adding that his office was flooded with calls and e-mails from constituents demanding legal recognition of same-sex marriages following the slam. "A guy with nasty moves like that should be entitled to the same fundamental rights as the rest of us." On Thursday, the New York State Senate passed a resolution declaring that it would take a pretty sweet roundhouse kick from a gay mixed martial arts champion before it would allow homosexuals to marry.
Area Mom Issues Stern Warning On Road Where She Once Got A Ticket

OSHKOSH, WI—Insisting she recently received a ticket on Jackson Street, Brenda McCormick, 57, issued a stern warning to her son Justin Monday, urging the 25-year-old to slow down the car, backseat sources reported. "Watch out, there's always a police car waiting at the corner where the speed limit switches from 55 to 35," said McCormick, adding that the area was definitely a speed trap. "They have quotas, you know." McCormick also cautioned her son to drive defensively near New York Avenue, as drivers were always pulling out right in front of people and there was that bad accident there when he was little.
Area Man Has Far Greater Knowledge Of Marvel Universe Than Own Family Tree

LA CROSSE, WI—Returning to his hometown to attend a cousin's wedding Saturday, Josh Sundling, 29, reportedly demonstrated on numerous occasions a vast, far more intricate understanding of the fictional Marvel Comics Universe than of his own family's genealogy.

Sundling, who cannot identify his ancestral homeland or the meaning of his surname, possesses extensive knowledge of the creation of superhero teams, the history of imaginary alien races, and the special powers of countless characters.

"We're from Sweden or Norway or somewhere around there," said Sundling, who when prompted can accurately detail the origins of each cartoon member of the X-Men, the Avengers, the Defenders, and the Squadron Supreme. "I don't know for sure. I never really asked about it.

Though Sundling reportedly reread several issues of Moon Knight recently and found himself enjoying the subplot of the hero's romantic involvement with Tigra, it is believed he did not realize his cousin was dating anyone until he received an invitation to the wedding.

"I guess Andy had been engaged for a while," Sundling said of his cousin Tom, whom he has met on 26 separate occasions and once spent two weeks with at summer camp but routinely confuses with other relatives. "One of my aunts was telling me about it. Whichever one used to have the long dark hair and kind of looked like former Alpha Flight member Diamond Lil."

"She cut it, though, and now it's white and curly," Sundling added. "Kind of looks like Daily Bugle editor in chief Joe Robertson's haircut. Especially if you look at those old issues from the '70s, back when Ross Andru was drawing him."

According to family sources, not only is Sundling not familiar with his family's heritage and history, but the 29-year-old also appears more emotionally attached to the fictional characters in his comic books than to many of his blood relatives.

"Josh has always loved those cartoons," said uncle Donald Grier, whom Sundling believes to be one of his father's friends from college. "I remember one time he cried after reading about Captain America, because the Captain's little helper guy had died."

"It was weird because I'd never seen him cry before," Grier said. "Not even at Papa's funeral. Though Sundling is unaware that his grandmother was the first female valedictorian at La Crosse Central High, or that ancestors on his mother's side narrowly escaped famine by fleeing across the Atlantic with nothing but the clothes on their backs, he has been known to confidently discuss the histories of the Skrull, Kree, and Shi'ar civilizations. Sundling also has a working knowledge of Jean Grey's complex family tree, which contains multiple clones and characters from other realities."

Sources confirmed that Sundling does not know his grandmother's maiden name.

"It's so fascinating that Jean Grey and Cyclops had a child from an alternate future who ends up marrying Franklin Richards, who is the son of Mr. Fantastic and Invisible Woman," said the man who did not recognize his own nephew at the wedding. "And then their kid, Hyperstorm, travels back in time and attacks the Fantastic Four."

"I've always been drawn to superhero pedigrees and how they pass traits down from one generation to the next," said Sundling, completely unaware that colon cancer runs in his family. "It'd just be cool to have something rare in common with your relatives."
IONIA, MI—A heated game night Pictionary match at the Anderson household ended memorably this past Friday, just moments after Aunt Denise somehow managed to guess Uncle Don's clumsily drawn sketch of a carburetor, in what family sources are calling "one for the record books."

"It was just so funny," Caroline Anderson said of the game-winning drawing, a crude, misshapen scribble that those present could not believe resulted in a correct response. "Here's this weird thing that looks like something a kid would draw, and all of a sudden Denise throws up her hands and yells, 'Carburetor!'"

Witnesses reported that at 9 p.m. Friday the score was tied among the Anderson's three Pictionary teams—Uncle Don and Aunt Denise, Cheryl and her husband, Russ, and Caroline and her fiancé, Gary Morley—with the game still up for grabs.

At the time, no one predicted the dramatic finish that many now expect will be permanently chronicled in the annals of Anderson family lore, perhaps surpassing in its tellings the legendary occasion upon which Grandma Florence did the chicken dance at Cousin Marcia's wedding.

"It's been quite the talk around here," said Cheryl Anderson, who hosted Friday's game night and as the family's unofficial archivist will be tasked with preserving accounts of the comical drawing for future generations. "Of course, the Andersons are kind of known for their stories. Like the time Lucille drove home from church and forgot that lasagna dish on the roof of her Honda. Or when Marcia made the pumpkin pie with a cup of salt instead of a cup of sugar."

"What can I say?" Cheryl continued. "We do have our share of fun."

Several different accounts of the Pictionary match will reportedly be put forth this Thanksgiving, when the tale formally takes its place in the oral tradition of the Anderson clan.

Speaking to reporters Monday, Russ Anderson explained that what makes Uncle Don and Aunt Denise's Pictionary triumph memorable for him is that Denise managed to guess the word "carburetor" despite her near-complete ignorance of automobile components.

"When we stalled coming home from that steakhouse last Fourth of July, I asked her when was the last time she had the spark plugs replaced, and she acted like I was speaking in Martian," Russ said. "But now, out of nowhere—carburetor? Come on!"

Family members agreed, however, that the most amazing aspect of the victory was the fact that Aunt Denise, who herself admits she is more of a cribbage girl than a Pictionary whiz, answered correctly despite Uncle Don's primitive, childlike drawing.

"You'd think the 'car' part of carburetor would be easy," said Morley, who acted as timekeeper during the turn. "But Don doodles this roller skate that has squiggles coming out of it for reasons I still don't get."

"So yesterday, I asked Don with a totally straight face if he could recommend a reliable roller-skate mechanic," Morley added. "From now on, it's going to be 'skate' instead of 'car' whenever I'm around."

According to family sources, with "car" decoded and 30 seconds to go in the round, Uncle Don frantically set about sketching a clue for the remainder of the word, his felt-tipped marker making wild and seemingly random strokes.

With moments to spare, Aunt Denise suddenly hit upon the answer, a success she credits to a split-second insight she could only describe as "miraculous."

When asked to comment on the potential legacy of the drawing, family members acknowledged that exhaustive descriptions of the picture are likely to become a standard ritual at family gatherings. At least three Andersons confirmed they would make mention of it in their toasts to Uncle Don and Aunt Denise when the couple celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary in 2010.

"Funny thing is, Don himself tells the story best," said Cheryl Anderson, explaining that her brother gets all the
little details right and does a "dead-on" Denise when recounting the Pictionary game. "Course, he's always been a real character."

Cheryl Anderson told reporters she might even consider having the legendary drawing framed, or at least place it in her family scrapbook.
WASHINGTON—Unless immediate measures are taken, the delicate balance of local claims adjuster Doug Mahoney, 39, could soon collapse, an international panel of leading conservationists warned Monday.

"Decades of irresponsible consumption, as well as the plundering of vital emotional resources have reduced this once-thriving human being to almost nothing," said Phillip Bowman, coauthor of the report and a professor of ecology at Stanford University. "It's frightening, but at the rate that he's going, Mr. Mahoney may be completely depleted by the year 2012."

Added Bowman, "There's barely anything left of him as it is."

According to the report, over the past 30 years a series of external pressures—including the monotony of work, dysfunctional personal relationships, and the frustrations of daily life—have wreaked havoc on the fragile Washington resident. A number of man-made disturbances, such as Mahoney's divorce and the death of his father, Jim, also contributed to the rapid physical and mental deterioration of the formerly pristine man, the report found.

"The very future of Doug Mahoney is in jeopardy," said preservationist Barbara Schean, adding that Mahoney has eroded at an alarming rate since the realization that he is almost 40 set in last May. "By our calculations, his most nutrient-rich layers will be washed away by the end of the decade, leaving little more than a desiccated, middle-aged wasteland."

Throughout his life, experts say, Mahoney has been repeatedly exploited and cut down by those in search of personal gain, most notably asshole bosses, manipulative friends, and several ex-girlfriends. Still, the rampant abuse of the 39-year-old continues, with recent findings indicating that it may not be long until Mahoney is wiped off the face of the earth.

"He's being sucked completely dry," said ecologist Charles Stephenson, who claimed that Mahoney's degradation was exacerbated by such factors as being passed over for a promotion twice, and only finding comfort in his three nightly glasses of Jack Daniels. "Large businesses alone have utterly ravaged Doug, burning through the nonrenewable employee as they please."

Most harmful of all, experts say, might have been the disruption caused by the introduction of a destructive species: a roommate Mahoney was forced to take on after losing his savings in the stock market earlier this year.

"Even in the most controlled conditions, the introduction of a predatory entity into an ecosystem is very destabilizing," Stephenson said. "In this case, a parasitic tenant was imported into the environment after nothing more than an awkward 10-minute interview in Mahoney's living room."

Despite the grim news, the report outlined a number of recommendations to preserve what little remains of Mahoney, including a gym membership, antidepressants, and maybe getting a fresh start in another city. But the experts warned that even if all these measures were implemented right away, the odds of completely halting the devastation were slim.

"Unfortunately, Doug Mahoney does not have the recuperative power of, say, certain lichens that bounce back from reindeer overgrazing," Robillard explained. "So if you've always thought about visiting him, I'd do it right away."

"And take pictures," Robillard added. "He'll be unrecognizable in a couple of years."
Area Mom Adds Ankle Weights To Already Bizarre Workout Routine

GRAND RAPIDS, MI—Area mother Janet Cosgrove, 59, has apparently added ankle weights to her already weird fitness regimen, 30-year-old son Reggie incredulously reported Monday. "She's got the plastic suit, the ski-pole things, and the last time I was over there she was on one of those rope-and-pulley ones you strap to the doorknob," Reggie said. "I'm guessing the ankle weights have something to do with that weird flailing march exercise she does? Or maybe they're for her 'cool down.'" Reggie added that at least Mom no longer uses the ThighMaster she ordered from television in 1991, but that part of her unintelligible diet still consists of a cup and a half of fresh ground walnuts every morning at 6 a.m.
HARRISBURG, PA—Mom, 54, is evidently going to marry Jerry, the guy she's been seeing for over a year now, family sources reported Monday.

"You remember Jerry," Mom said in a long-distance telephone call to her youngest son, Daniel Schickele, 29. "He bought you that variety tin of popcorn last Christmas."

"Well, we're getting married," she added.

Mom met Jerry three years ago on an over-50 singles cruise, but did not start dating him until September 2007. Since then, the two have apparently been spending more and more time together.

While not much is known about Jerry, 60, those who have met him have confirmed that he seems like a pretty good guy.

"I guess he makes Mom happy," said daughter Pam Schickele, 32, who lives in Idaho now and hasn't seen Mom in a few years. "He's the bald one, right? Because I know she was seeing that other guy for a while, too, but he wasn't bald."

Mom, who reverted to her maiden name of Pendersen after the divorce seven years ago, did not display any strong emotion during her announcement, but seemed, on the whole, to be pleased.

"It's not like she goes on and on about him or anything, but she's fairly excited," son Ted Schickele, 27, told reporters after learning of the upcoming Mom-Jerry nuptials. "I know she joined his bowling league a while back, and I even heard they went on a camping trip together, so it seems like they've gotten pretty close. It's hard to say. I haven't seen her since that time me and the kids stopped by on our way back from Florida.

"That guy Jerry was there," he added. "He drove an SUV that looked pretty new."

Jerry, who is reportedly in some sort of sales or something, has a few grown kids of his own who will become stepbrothers and stepsisters once the marriage is finalized.

"We'll probably meet Jerry's family at the wedding," Pam said. "I wonder if they still live in Harrisburg, or what. I heard one of his sons is a dentist. Or a chiropractor? I can't remember."

What Jerry's children are like is "anybody's guess," Pam said.

According to reports, the wedding plans include a modest ceremony, in which the bride and Jerry will exchange vows, followed by a three-day honeymoon in San Diego, where the couple will spend time with Jerry's mother, who lives in a retirement community there.

Overall, family members have reacted to the news positively.

"He's not George Clooney or anything, but at this point I don't see why Mom should have to sit around waiting for Mr. Perfect," Ted said. "And Jerry seems like a nice enough guy. We watched the game together one Thanksgiving."

"He's good for her," Ted added.

Jerry's first wife reportedly passed some years back.

"This seems pretty sudden, but I don't know," Pam said. "When Dad married Tina a couple years ago we all wondered how that would go over, but it wasn't such a big deal. I'm sure Mom and this Jerry guy's marriage will be okay, too."

As of press time, Dad could not be reached for comment.
PORTLAND, OR—After dating for nearly three years, area couple Peter Mazursky and Janet Hyams have finally achieved the perfect semblance of a mother-son relationship, sources close to the pair revealed Monday.

The couple share a moment of familial contentment.

"My little pumpkin would practically be helpless without me," said Hyams, 28, whose role in the adult relationship has slowly transformed from romantic lover to maternal caregiver over time. "I have to supervise almost everything he does, from making sure he gets up in the morning, to reminding him about his doctors' appointments. I even have to pick out his clothes for him when we go shopping together."

Added Hyams, "I don't know how Pete would survive if I weren't around."

The couple—who met in 2005 and have been living together since Mazursky was evicted from his apartment—have not always had it so easy. In the beginning, their interpersonal style still contained many troubling elements of a mature relationship, including periodic moments of independence, mutual equality, and even occasional sexual contact.

Luckily for the pair, this early period of instability quickly began to break down as arguments over Mazursky's irresponsibility and Hyams' controlling personality gave way to the codependent harmony they now share.

"She takes care of me," said Mazursky, 26, unconsciously looking to Hyams for approval. "With Janet, I never have to worry about stuff like picking up after myself, or remembering to brush my teeth before I go to bed. Plus, she always makes all of the big decisions for both of us, which is nice."

Since falling into preprogrammed roles from early childhood, the couple have seen their relationship undergo a number of significant changes. Sexual intercourse, once a favorite and frequent pastime, has steadily dropped off in regularity, ceasing altogether earlier this month.

"We don't have to be having sex all the time to be happy," said Mazursky, who by this point has entirely sublimated his libido under the weight of his projected need for a maternal protector. "Right now we are focusing on other things, like losing weight. We have a system worked out where I can only eat cookies with Janet's say-so, and if she catches me eating one without permission, she gets to 'ground' me from snacks for a week. It's so great to be able to share that level of intimacy with another person."

"My old girlfriend Jessica used to let me eat all the cookies I wanted," he added. "We just didn't have the same kind of bond that Janet and I now share."

Hyams' maternal duties include always paying the rent for Mazursky and then hounding him to get a job, performing basic household chores to make herself feel useful and needed, and monitoring Mazursky to make sure he doesn't exceed his allotted three hours of video games per day. In return, Mazursky's duties include playing touch football with his friends, giving Hyams someone to subconsciously feel superior to, making the bed after being yelled at to do so, and allowing Hyams to lick her finger and wipe smudges off his face before they go outside.

"When we first met, I knew there was something special about Pete—he was like a big teddy bear you just wanted to tuck into bed," Hyams explained. "That's not to say we don't still have our problems. Sometimes he throws a tantrum when he doesn't want to do the dishes, and I have to discipline him. But when he falls asleep with
his head in my lap, it's all worth it."

Mazursky agrees.

"I'm really happy with Janet," he said. "Not every guy's got a girlfriend who calls him from work to make sure he's had lunch. I guess I'm just one lucky kid."

"I really love Mom—I mean, Janet," Mazursky added.
Local Raccoons Once Again Take The Fall For Area Man

SOUTH NATICK, MA—For the third time in as many weeks, South Natick's local raccoon population took the blame Monday for the actions of 37-year-old sales manager Louis O'Halloran.

"Goddamn raccoons," said neighbor Jim Tunney, 50, as he cleaned up the debris scattered across his yard the morning after O'Halloran accidentally sideswiped his garbage bins while trying to change radio stations in the car. "I had to buy these plastic cans because they wrecked my good aluminum ones last month. This is really starting to get out of hand."

The upending of Tunney's trash receptacles is only the most recent example of raccoons being held responsible for property damage actually caused by O'Halloran. This month alone the nocturnal creatures have been faulted for a hole O'Halloran's wife discovered in the wall of their garage—the result of a clumsily handled cinder block—and next-door neighbor Thomas Fallon's felled downspout, which was in fact brought down by O'Halloran's basketball after a poorly aimed jumpshot.

These incidents do not include the toppling of 64-year-old Linda Dagan's birdfeeder, which varying reports have blamed on red squirrels and teenagers.

"Those raccoons are smart little buggers, I'll give them that," said Pete Ulster, 46, whose home O'Halloran house-sat last August while Ulster was on vacation. "I still can't figure out how they got into my shed and knocked over all those paint cans. It took me a whole weekend just to clean it up."

"And they sure did a number on my flower pots," added Ulster, referring to the mess O'Halloran made as he fled in panic from the shed. "If I ever get my hands on those critters, I'll choke the life out of them."

Since adolescence, the lumbering and ungainly O'Halloran has been an unacknowledged source of calamity wherever he has lived, his awkward gaffes resulting in an unknown number of false accusations made against pets, the weather, and God.

Although he continues to wreak havoc, the 37-year-old remains free from suspicion, and has done little to assuage the anger those on his block feel toward the local raccoon population. He has only come close to defending the innocent mammals once, when a neighbor mentioned last month that she believed raccoons had destroyed her flower garden, and O'Halloran nervously replied, "Or dogs. Could've been dogs."

Though raccoons often become a nuisance in places where their habitat intersects with that of humans, Kate Yewell of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife said the amount of destruction attributed to the species in O'Halloran's neighborhood was not realistic.

"The wild animal population in the area is relatively sparse, and if anything, the few raccoons there are beneficial to the local ecosystem," Yewell said. "Also, raccoons have rarely been known to knock down power lines with a poorly maneuvered backhoe, thereby causing a blackout that lasts for days."

Still, area residents continue to pin such catastrophes on the small mammals, with some even attempting to kill the suspected offenders.

"Good luck trying to catch those crafty bastards," said Orin Ditmus, whose prized cherry trees have been ravaged by O'Halloran for the past two summers. "I started putting traps out last June, but the only thing I ever caught was poor Louis [O'Halloran] from down the block."
Area Woman Will Eat Anything With 'Tuscan' In Name

JEFFERSON TOWNSHIP, NJ—Veterinary assistant Lauren Millardi, 27, will eat any dish prefaced with the word "Tuscan," sources reported Monday. "Tuscan shrimp, Tuscan garlic chicken, it doesn't matter," said Millardi's boyfriend, Tim Vernacini. "I'm not really sure if she even knows what makes food Tuscan, but there's something about that region-specific culinary modifier that she finds inordinately appetizing." Vernacini added that Millardi likely would have loved the 2003 movie *Under The Tuscan Sun* had it not failed to meet her strict film criterion of having taken place between the years of 1743 and 1919.
Area Woman Encouraged By Sight Of Other Woman Drinking Beer Alone At Airport Bar

DES MOINES, IA—While en route to visit her cousin in South Bend, local divorcée Janet Linden, 37, told reporters Monday that her initial self-consciousness at drinking a beer by herself at Dugan's Sports Bar in the Des Moines International Airport was somewhat mitigated after she saw a woman approximately her age doing the same. "I guess it's not that bad," Linden said as she straightened herself up in her bar stool and brushed some cat hair off her skirt. "What's wrong with a single, independent woman having a cold beer while she's waiting for her flight? It's perfectly normal. Just ask that lady over there." Linden considered approaching the other woman to chat before realizing she had been looking at a mirror at the other end of the darkened bar.
Area Teen Up To Something

GREENFIELD, OH—A local teenager, standing on the corner of Spring Street and Dunlap Lane, is clearly up to some kind of no good, neighborhood sources reported Thursday.

Neighbors are keeping close watch on the teen, who has an unsettling number of pockets. The teenager, spotted by Greenfield residents at approximately 4:36 p.m., has been described as tall, suspiciously quiet, and almost certainly looking for trouble. According to concerned sources, the teenager has absolutely no business being out there like that.

"Just look at him," said Bob Page, one of several men and women currently watching the 14-year-old from their living room window. "That boy's definitely up to something."

Signs that the teenager may be up to no good have so far included his hunched over posture, the way he keeps looking around with his eyes, and the fact that he probably owns a number of those violent video games. Residents told reporters that they are especially troubled by the teenager's hooded sweatshirt, which he is wearing with the hood drawn, despite it not even raining outside.

"I don't like how I can't see his face," said homemaker Ellen Campbell, who attributed the teen's erratic behavior to the lack of positive role models in today's music industry. "He'd show his face if he weren't thinking of doing something wrong. I bet he's thinking of doing something wrong right now."

Based on his outward appearance, many are worried that the teenager is one of those youths who were recently caught drinking in the woods behind the recycling center.

According to residents, what the teenager will do next remains their chief concern. Though he is not currently in possession of a shopping cart, residents believe that he may in fact steal one from the nearby Stop & Shop, simply for the sake of inconveniencing others. Some have even speculated that the teenager may be planning to burn dead leaves later this afternoon, possibly with the cigarette lighter to which he no doubt has access.

Whatever unlawful acts he may be planning, locals are convinced it will include some sort of profanity, whether spoken, written, or a combination of both.

"He's probably waiting for one of his friends to arrive," said Howard Silverman, who pretended to check on his mailbox four separate times in order to get a better look at the teen. "Once that happens, they'll come up with something really terrible to do together."

Added Silverman, "The songs they listen to make them angry."

Fears among residents increased minutes later when several onlookers noticed that the teenager's hands had entered his pockets. Among the items believed to be inside his pockets were spray cans, spoiled eggs, and probably one of those miniature stereos that all the young people own.

The teenager then removed a cell phone from his pocket, viewed its screen—which sources believe contained a nude picture of another teenager—and placed it back in his pocket.

"What's he hiding?" homeowner Ron Kirkland asked. "One thing I know for sure: He's going to regret whatever it is he's about to do when he's older."

In a recent poll, 56 percent of residents claimed that the teenager is selling drugs, while 34 percent said he is buying drugs. The remaining 10 percent believe that he is currently on drugs. Ninety-eight percent of those polled wished the teen would just go away.

"Maybe someone should call the police," said neighbor Patricia Meyer, who instead opted to stare out her window with an even more disapproving look. "I just hope something doesn't get robbed."

At press time, the teen adjusted his hood to reveal a giant piercing in his left earlobe.
God Help Him, But Area Man Loves That Crazy Bitch

RENO, NV—Despite her continued efforts to drive him out of his goddamn mind and turn his every waking hour into some kind of living nightmare, Craig Shearer, 32, admitted Monday that he still loves that crazy bitch.

"Aw, who am I kidding? That nut-job's really got my number," Shearer told reporters after being locked out of the apartment he shares with the total psycho. "She may not give me a moment's peace and I can't mention another woman's name without hearing about it for a week, but what can I do? She's the one. That fucking lunatic is the one."

Shearer then concluded his address, sighed, and began gathering his shirts and pants from his front lawn.

Shearer's proclamation of love for that big sack of crazy comes in direct contradiction to a statement he made at the Loading Dock nightclub last week. After getting into an argument with his girlfriend over not taking her computer classes seriously enough, Shearer was reportedly thrown out of the bar at the request of the fucking basket case, who just five minutes later assaulted the bouncer for "getting in her business" and was thrown out herself.

During the intervening minutes, Shearer made a number of public statements regarding his girlfriend's unstable mental health, fluctuating emotions, and irritating pine-nut allergy before reconciling with the bat-shit insane woman in the backseat of their car.

Although Shearer has tried multiple times to leave that crazy bitch once and for all, he has thus far been unsuccessful. His most recent attempt came shortly after she arrived at his office sobbing over the death of her seventh straight pet parakeet, but was ultimately delayed when Shearer couldn't imagine his life without the raving sociopath.

"Maybe it's the way she dumped her nail polish on my pool table when I insulted her sister, or the way she cries every time I eat veal, but damned if I don't adore her crazy ass," Shearer said. "I'll kill her someday, I swear, but that wack-job is going to end up being the mother of my children."

Friends said they have seen the couple go through many difficult times in years past, including that night when the crazy bitch had a little bit too much to drink and accused Shearer of hiding money from her, and that incident, a few weeks back, when she locked herself inside the bathroom and refused to come out until Shearer had thrown away the casserole she cooked, like she knew he wanted to. Still, sources confirmed that Shearer and his old lady always seem to work things out in the end, a trend that may suggest those crazy fucks are perfect for each other.

"If my girlfriend wrote 'limp dick' in permanent marker on all my work shirts because I said Kate Winslet was hot, I'd probably leave her," Shearer's longtime friend James Pennette said. "But Craig? Man, does he have it bad for that crazy bitch."

Pennette could not be reached for further comment, as he is currently recovering in West Hills Hospital for talking shit about the love of Shearer's life.
Area Boy Enters Jumping-And-Touching-Tops-Of-Doorways Phase

BROOKINGS, SD—Local 11-year-old Dylan Adams entered the stage in childhood development Wednesday in which a boy feels the uncontrollable desire to run, jump, and touch the top of every doorway he encounters. "It is perfectly natural for young males to start exhibiting a tendency to touch things that are slightly higher than they can reach from a normal standing position," child psychologist Gerald Bakerfield said. "In many cases, the child is experimenting with his newfound ability to make his own choices, whether that means jumping to touch ceilings, street signs, or low-hanging tree branches." Bakerfield added that Adams would soon progress from the jumping-and-touching-doorways phase to the crossing-your-arms-over-your-chest-turning-around-and-pawing-at-the-back-of-your-own-shoulders-to-make-it-seem-like-you're-making-out-with-someone phase.
Area Man Makes It Through Day

SCHAUMBURG, IL—Despite an overwhelming, seemingly endless barrage of frustrations, area systems analyst Adam Blume made it through the entire day Tuesday, overcoming the odds against him in a Herculean display of courage, perseverance, and the indomitable human spirit.

According to witnesses, though it seemed on more than one occasion throughout the day that his life would come to an end, Blume valiantly found the wherewithal to carry on. Not only did the 37-year-old successfully get out of bed and leave his apartment, but he somehow found the strength to navigate through the day's many challenges and, once victorious, made his way back home again. Hit from every side with such formidable opponents as suburban conformity, mind-numbing coworkers, and the celebrity "infotainment" magazine he paged through on his lunch break, Blume nonetheless trudged along—permitting nothing, no matter how soul-deadening, to break his will.

"Man, what a day," Blume said regarding his 16-hour battle with everything from public transportation to profound spiritual alienation.

Experts estimate that, by 10 p.m. Tuesday night, Blume had survived exposure to approximately 1,700 advertising images of epic banality, at least 35 emotionless interactions with complete strangers without making any real human contact, and more than 25,000 moments of soul-crushing inner emptiness throughout the almost day-long struggle. In addition, he also surmounted the onslaught of more than 150 separate anxiety-producing forces, including credit card debt, weight gain, hair loss, sexual inferiority, loneliness, a dead-end job, geographical isolation from extended family, virus-laden spam, the need to keep his cell phone charged, in-store Muzak, mortality, mounting laundry and dishes, his cable bill, indefinable longing, fear of terrorism, online gossip, the unavoidable certainty of his own unimportance, nostalgia for a past that never was, severe lower-back pain, and general ennui.

"I only wish I had gotten a chance to pick up those replacement filters for the vacuum cleaner," Blume said only moments after valiantly suppressing the urge to set fire to his carefully cataloged file cabinet of insurance information and old appliance manuals. "The last ones I got were for the wrong model, but I can't take them back because I didn't save the receipt and now I need new ones."

How Blume made it out of his kitchen—let alone his apartment and suffocating cubicle—may never be known.

"And for some reason, I had the song 'Hobo Humpin' Slobo Babe' stuck in my head all day," he added.

Blume's epic odyssey of survival reportedly began at 6:15 a.m., the moment he awoke. After enduring the sudden, unrelenting attack of his bedside alarm clock, Blume resisted the near-overpowering compulsion to press the snooze button a second time. Courageously hurling himself from bed and dragging his almost unconscious body the 15 feet to his bathroom, Blume was almost defeated before even making it to work when, as he was putting toothpaste on his toothbrush, it fell on the floor.

"I thought I was going to lose it right there," Blume later told reporters. "It was lying in that space between the sink and the bathtub, covered in dust, so I had to bend over, grab it, rinse it off under some hot water, and put some more toothpaste on it. I hate when that happens."

According to roommate Joe Tesch, with whom Blume shares an apartment despite already having reached middle age, the physically, financially, and spiritually exhausted man then stared at his hollow face in the mirror for approximately three minutes before showering, shaving, and moving his bowels in time to catch the 7:04 bus.

After arriving at work, Blume's trials and tribulations only continued. Over the next 10 hours, Blume weathered an onslaught against his very humanity, from automated menus on telephones and cash machines, to shrill homeless men yelling in the street, to a coffee stain on his workplace-mandated tie.

This was not Blume's first exposure to adversity. When pressed, he was able to recall several such incidents, including the time in May 1993 when he walked on crutches all the way from the bus stop at the bottom of a large hill in Madison, WI to the unemployment office located at the top, the 72 hours he spent stranded in Chicago's O'Hare Airport during the 2004 Christmas season, and the thousands of other battles before, between, and since.
“Another day, another dollar,” said Blume, modestly downplaying the impressive scope of his accomplishments. "I suppose I just did what anybody would have done."

Blume's inspiring battle against the dehumanizing forces of modernity continues tomorrow.
TIPTON, IN—Wes Mendic, a grown man who works at a pool-supply store and lives all by himself, finds solace in a series of sad, piddling little activities when he is feeling down, he reported from his tiny one-bedroom apartment Tuesday.

Mendic added that, if his cheer-up routine fails to cheer him up by 8 p.m., he vigorously masturbates to Internet pornography and falls asleep.

"Whenever I'm down in the dumps, rather than wallow in my troubles, I try to do things that will get my mind off them," Mendic, 28, said. "Like, the first thing I always do is turn on all the lights in my apartment, even during the day. It just makes everything brighter."

"It's amazing what something as small as lifting up your kitchen window, leaning your head out, and looking outside for a few minutes can do for your spirits," Mendic added.

Mendic also indulges in a succession of "fun" tasks, including putting fresh, clean sheets and pillowcases on his bed; using his Dustbuster to thoroughly vacuum his two-by-three-foot welcome mat, the only section of carpeting he owns; and dumping out the contents of his coin bank, stacking the coins into small piles by denomination, and then placing them one by one back into the coin bank.

"Something that always gives me a chuckle is going to my computer and loading up Bobby McFerrin's 'Don't Worry, Be Happy,'" said Mendic, who often watches the four-minute music-video clip several times in a row, staring intently at the screen and silently mouthing the lyrics in one of the saddest displays you will ever see. "It's funny, it's catchy, and it really helps remind you not to take this crazy business called life too seriously. I remember it used to cheer me up back when I was in college too. Good times."

Mendic seriously claims chores like sock-folding make him feel better because he's "accomplishing something."

If his spirits are still low by lunchtime, Mendic said that he can always count on the simple task of preparing himself a tasty meal to help shake off the blues. His self-proclaimed "house specialty" is nachos.

"I only make them a couple times a month as a treat, so they'll still seem special," said Mendic, arranging a layer of tortilla chips on a paper plate, then taking a Kraft single, carefully tearing it into sad little strips, and sprinkling it onto the chips as if it were shredded cheddar and not an individually wrapped slice of American cheese. "They taste real good, and only use up like one or two singles, so there's always enough for the next nacho time."

When Mendic feels low, "comfort food" takes on new, asinine meaning, as virtually any kind of two-dimensional food, including toast, pancakes, or hamburgers, will inevitably find itself embossed with a jam, syrup, or mustard smiley face.

Mendic also started a tradition called "mini-Thanksgiving," which he holds approximately once a month, and which consists of microwaved turkey medallions, canned cranberry sauce, and a paper plate.

"It's great because it reminds me of spending time with friends and family," Mendic said.

The pathetic rituals don't end there. During his afternoon shower—a second daily shower he takes to "relax and not have to focus on getting clean, like the morning shower"—Mendic reads the labels of his shampoo and conditioner out loud in a Don Pardo-esque voice, and even plays a pitiful little game in which he scans the bottle's instructions and ingredient write-ups for all 26 letters of the alphabet. And as he towels off and dresses, he dances around to the Paul Simon song "You Can Call Me Al," flailing his arms and shaking his legs with a mixture of
genuine enthusiasm and lack of coordination that would make you want to cry.

Despite his passion for bizarre little rituals that apparently keep him from tumbling into complete despair, over time Mendic has been forced to retire some of his habits, such as, for the love of Christ, playing Minesweeper.

"While I played it, I'd pretend I was on a secret mission from the CIA," said Mendic, who would bob his head while clicking away on his mouse in a ridiculously intense manner. "It would always pump me up. Until one day, I beat Expert [level] in 108 seconds, and I knew I would never top that record, so it stopped being fun."

Other heartbreakingly tragic routines Mendic cheers himself up with include fake-laughing, done in the hopes that it will trigger real, spontaneous laughter; throwing himself a "solo party"; poring over his high school yearbooks and rereading old e-mail exchanges from several years ago; calling his mother; sitting on his bed in front of the mirror and pretending he's interviewing himself about his life story; and checking his iPod's "date last played" column on iTunes and trying to remember where he would have been when he last heard each song.
Amazon.com Recommendations Understand Area Woman Better Than Husband

SANDUSKY, OH—Area resident Pamela Meyers was delighted to receive yet another thoughtful CD recommendation from Amazon.com Friday, confirming that the online retail giant has a more thorough, individualized, and nuanced understanding of Meyers' taste than the man who occasionally claims to love her, husband Dean Meyers.

Meyers said she was pleasantly surprised to receive three e-mails from Amazon today alone.

"To come home from a long day at work and see the message about the new Norah Jones album waiting for me, it just made my week," said Meyers, 36, who claimed she was touched that the company paid such attention to her. "It feels nice to be noticed once in a while, you know?"

Amazon, which has been tracking Meyers' purchases since she first used the site to order Football For Dummies in preparation for attending the 2004 Citrus Bowl as part of her husband's 10th wedding anniversary plans, has shown impressive accuracy at recommending books, movies, music, and even clothing that perfectly match Meyers' tastes. While the powerful algorithms that power Amazon's recommendations generator do not have the advantage of being able to observe Meyers' body language, verbal intonation, or current personal possessions, they have nonetheless proven more effective than Dean, who bases his gift-giving choices primarily on what is needed around the house, what he would like to own, and, most notably, what objects are nearby.

"I don't know how Amazon picked up on my growing interest in world music so quickly, but I absolutely love this traditional Celtic CD," Meyers said. "I like it so much more than that Keith Urban thing Dean got me. I'm really not sure what made him think I like country music."

Meyers said she was especially moved that the online merchant remembered that she had once purchased an Ian McEwan book, and immediately reminded when the author released a new novel. Moreover, despite only having had 37 hours of direct interaction with Meyers, Amazon was still able to detect her strong interest in actor Paul Giamatti, unlike husband Dean who often teases Meyers about her nonexistent crush on Tom Cruise.

Meyers said that her husband, whose gift choices have never reflected any outward recognition of her desire to learn Spanish, nor of the fact that she looks terrible in orange, rarely, if ever, communicates with Meyers while away on any of his frequent business trips.

"I was having some tea from that Nebraska Cornhuskers mug Dean got me for Valentine's Day, when a little e-mail from Amazon popped up out of the blue," Meyers said. "Just completely out of the blue."

"It was nice to know that on my birthday, someone or something was out there thinking about me, and what boxed sets I wanted," she added.

Though "it could only be a coincidence," Meyers admitted that she became emotional during a recent "bad day" when the site recommended the DVD The Umbrellas Of Cherbourg. "Dean and I saw it on one of our first dates, and I remember it being such a great night not just for the movie, but how everything felt so natural, how we seemed to be on the same wavelength," Meyers said. "It was the first time I thought, 'Yes. This is the one.'"

While Amazon is almost always accurate, the company does occasionally make a gift recommendation that does not suit her tastes, such as a recent suggestion of camping gear and an all-weather backpack. Still, Meyers lauded Amazon's attempts at spontaneity.

"At least it's trying," said Meyers, whose husband will once again surprise her with their fourth romantic getaway to his hometown of Kenton, DE sometime in March. "And maybe I would like camping if I ever tried it. Amazon's usually right about these things."

Meyers, who has spent the past 15 years with a man who still believes she enjoys attending car shows, said she has kept her Amazon recommendation e-mails a secret from her husband so as not to corrupt the "deep and unstated understanding" between her and the popular website.
“Sure, I could send him the link to my Wish List, but that really defeats the purpose of gifts, as far as I'm concerned,” Meyers said.

For his part, Dean has promised to make a concerted effort to pay closer attention to his wife's habits in order to choose more appropriate and tasteful gifts. He said that she will be "pleasantly surprised" with his new strategy, enrolling her for the next three years in the Oprah Book Club.

"I know she's really into *The View*, so I just figured this would be perfect," Meyers said. "And I know she'll love taking moonlight drives on our new riding mower together, too."
Area Senior Suspects Grandchild's Visit Just Some Sort Of Class Assignment

UNIONVILLE, MO—Eugenia Stollis' delight over an unannounced visit from grandson Toby Rourke soon soured Monday when the 76-year-old grandmother began to suspect that he was only there to complete a class assignment.

Stollis' grandson, Toby, almost certainly milks her for information about Pearl Harbor.

"At first we talked about baseball and his new cousin Cody, but when he started asking me about my childhood and what my parents were like, I knew something was going on," Stollis said. "He wasn't coming over for gingersnaps and quality time with his grandma. The boy's got some homework thing. I just know it."

According to Stollis, before she could even set a can of orange soda on the kitchen table, the 10-year-old began asking her detailed questions about life on the farm where she grew up, whether she spoke any Norwegian, how her family fared without indoor plumbing, and her favorite childhood radio programs.

"I'm as sure as gum that he's got some kind of history or social studies paper to write," Stollis said.

Stollis then recalled that her daughter, Carolyn Rourke, had told her in June that her son was taking summer classes to make up for a poor second-semester academic performance.

"Does he think I was born yesterday?" Stollis said.

Stollis said that Rourke rarely visits her except during family gatherings, and that the only thing he'd previously shown interest in was "that skateboard of his," and certainly not her life story.

"I've been through this with the other grandchildren," said Stollis. "They all wanted to know about my older brother Ken, who died in World War II. Some of them were more interested in my mother who had polio. I guess it depends on what class they were taking at the time. But if Toby thinks he can sneak all the information out of me, he's got another thing coming."

Added Stollis, "And if Toby expects I'll tell him which beach Ken died storming, he's got a lot to learn about his old grandma. I don't mind telling stories, but I'm not going to do the research for him, too."

Stollis also cited Rourke's "smiling and eager" attitude and backpack full of library books as further evidence of his true motives.

"Why does he need to know what my husband did for a living before he died in 1983?" Stollis said. "What kind of classes are these?"

Over the course of the nearly two-hour visit, Stollis grew increasingly upset at the prospect of being used by her fourth grandchild.

"I finally made up a story about how I was tired and needed to lie down," Stollis said. "I didn't even give him a jar of my homemade raspberry preserves that he likes so much. Even so, he seemed very pleased with himself, and I'll tell you, I didn't care for that that one bit."

Stollis also turned down Rourke's repeated attempts to pose with him for a photo, assuming it would only be used as a visual aid or poster as part of the report.

After Rourke left, Stollis said that she began to worry that sensitive and personal details of her life would be revealed in a public forum.

"I don't want my old letters to FDR to appear in the school newspaper or the whole life story of my late husband, God rest his soul, to be paraded all over town for any old body to see," Stollis said. "Some things should stay in the family."

Stollis said she would be more careful not to get "hoodwinked" on future visits from her grandson.

"I cherish my grandchildren," Stollis said. "But I didn't spend three years riveting bomber planes to have them weasel information out of me just so they can pad their report cards."
Area Mom: 'I Finally Learned Computers'
Childbirth To Be Area Woman's Least Painful Interaction With Daughter

SCHENECTADY, NY—The near-indescribable pain of a 30-hour labor and the passing of an eight-pound infant through her birth canal will, over time, prove to be the least agonizing part of Virginia Quigley's relationship with her daughter, the 23-year-old first-time mother failed to realize Monday.

Quigley with an eerily quiet Caitlyn Rose in the calm before the storm that their life together will become.

"Labor was horrible," says a weakened Quigley, who doesn't know the half of it, as she lies in her bed at Divine Savior Hospital cradling her tiny future nemesis, Caitlyn Rose. "This is the happiest day of my life," she adds, unaware of how true that observation will prove to be. Over the next two decades, the young mother will endure a worsening avalanche of agonies. Unceasingly shrill fits for the first 18 months, followed by a sustained campaign of migraine-inducing petulant disobedience and gratuitous defiance, will typify Quigley's relationship with her daughter.

While the shrieking arguments over persistent truancy from school, harrowing episodes of self-mutilation, and pointless stints in rehab are still safely in the future, Quigley lovingly rocks her newborn, enjoying their last small window of peaceful interaction before it forever slams shut.

"Look at her little face—isn't she the most precious thing?" says father Douglas Quigley, 31, who, in addition to being spared the physical pain of labor, will also largely be spared the psychological pain of raising Caitlyn after abandoning his family in May 2009.

Other horrors that await mother and daughter include: a March 2010 ordeal demonstrating how insignificant postpartum hemorrhaging really is when compared to the deep pain of a hysterical 3-year-old Caitlyn repeatedly screaming, "I hate you! I wish you would die!" before a dozen onlookers in the cereal aisle of a local supermarket; the September 2014 scalding death of a pet gerbil, in which Caitlyn's amoral tendencies will first surface, dwarfing the discomfort of torn vaginal tissue; and, in an incident that will easily trump the intense nausea that tortured Quigley throughout labor, the night in July 2017 when the unsupervised 11-year-old, embittered by her single working mother's inability to provide adequate attention, will steal a bottle of Wild Turkey from a neighbor's liquor cabinet and vomit its contents on the living-room couch.

Also slated to occur is a June 2021 incident in which the father-figure-deprived teenager will have underage sex with a 45-year-old ex-convict named Wheeler, then call crying from a motel room at 4 a.m. A sleepless Quigley will drive 70 miles to pick up her daughter, only to fight bitterly with her all the way home and be two hours late for work, causing her to lose her low-paying job.

Quigley geared up for motherhood by reading child-care guides and sincerely hopes to be closely involved in Caitlyn's upbringing. However, Caitlyn's hyperactivity and intense flashes of temper will cause her frightened and intimidated mother to retreat into apathetic numbness, which will only accelerate Caitlyn's feelings of neglect and lay the groundwork for a life of destructive behavior.

As the Quigleys prepare to check out of the hospital and take Caitlyn back to their small two-bedroom home, they remain oblivious to their tragic future, including the unexpected arrival of police and child protective authorities alerted by concerned neighbors who will overhear a fight in which Quigley's then-boyfriend, Glenn, will beat and rape 13-year-old Caitlyn while Quigley lies passed out in the kitchen from a punch to the face.

In perhaps the most morbidly poetic chapter of the troubled relationship, a cancer-ridden Quigley will die alone, burdened on her deathbed with the worst pain of her life, after her repeated pleas for aid and comfort go unanswered by Caitlyn, who, though longing for reconciliation with her mother, will refuse to return the calls, saying she is "done" with her.
Family Cell-Phone Plan Area Family's Closest Bond
God's Plan For Area Man Involves Kidnapping Ford CEO

MINOT, ND—Unemployed factory worker James Harold Gurshner told reporters Monday that God's plan for him, revealed during a moment of divine inspiration, requires kidnapping Ford Motor Company CEO William Ford Jr.

Gurshner, who vows to do God's bidding by kidnapping Ford (below).

"The Lord works in mysterious ways," said Gurshner, talking to reporters through a metal grate screwed over the window of his dilapidated, hubcap-covered house. "And right now, the Lord is working through me. I didn't choose this path, but if you're called upon, you must look into your heart and make a decision. I have chosen to heed the Lord's command."

Gurshner said he does not know why God "came to [him] in a dream" and asked him to kidnap Ford, but he said he believes that "it is best not to question His motives."

"I didn't question the Lord when He struck down my beloved wife Emily with cervical cancer," Gurshner said. "I didn't question Him when I was dismissed from my job and put on Social Security. I didn't question Him when He commanded me to dig a three-foot ditch around my house and fill it with charcoal briquettes, and I don't question him now. I, James Harold Gurshner, will kidnap the Ford CEO, as that is the will of the Lord."

"Amen," Gurshner added.

Gurshner said he would prefer to kidnap the man who runs the auto-supply store, or simply volunteer at the local soup kitchen, but nonetheless, he is determined to complete the Lord's task.

"The Lord would not have picked me to carry out His will if He didn't think I could do it," Gurshner said. "He'll probably help me along, though. Just like the time I found a perfectly good chair on the side of the road two days after I burned all of my furniture for Jesus. God will provide for those who do His will."

Although he does not have a specific kidnapping plan, Gurshner said he is confident that he will succeed.

"I've been thinking on ways to get that Ford guy the whole time I've been cleaning out the aluminum shed out back," Gurshner said. "That's where I'll store him. I won't keep the CEO tied up and gagged in a dirty place. The Lord wants me to make him feel comfortable."

Although Gurshner refuses to question God's will, he has a few theories about the Heavenly Father's motives.

"The Lord may want to enact retribution for all the people who died in cars, like my daddy did when I was 7," Gurshner said. "But unless the Lord directly tells me to torture Ford, or beat him, I won't. One thing I will not do is make love to the Ford CEO's asshole, no matter what the Lord says. That activity is a sin against nature. An order to do it would be God's way of testing me."

Raised a Seventh-day Adventist, Gurshner said he "got the true calling" in 1998, when God commanded him to kill a stray dog that wouldn't stop barking during the night.

"I saw a bright light and knew in a flash what He wanted," said Gurshner, who explained that God's messages are often paired with staggering migraine headaches. "It wasn't until I put a shovel through that dog's head that God was satisfied and the messages finally stopped."

Gurshner said God usually sends him messages through Bible passages, particularly those found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Sometimes, however, the messages appear on Hardee's billboards or in Kenny Chesney song lyrics.
"I never know what God's next message will be or when I will get it—all I can do is obey," Gurshner said. "It's like when God told me to start collecting plastic laundry-soap bottles a few years back. I still don't know what they're for, but until God reveals His reasons, I'll keep storing them in my living room."

Residents of Minot are well-acquainted with Gurshner's relationship with God.

"Everybody has heard all about Jim's direct line to the Lord," said Officer Nathan Randell of the Minot Police Department. "We try to leave him alone whenever we can. Most people in town feel sorry for him. All that tragedy shouldn't happen to one man. But when Jim gets really riled up, we have to go talk him down, or sometimes even lock him up for a night. He'll tell us that blaring religious hymns from his car stereo on Main Street at 3 a.m. is part of God's plan, but I guess we have to go against His wishes every once and a while."

Ford declined to comment on the Lord's plan.
Area Dog Will Never Live Up To Dog On Purina Bag

KANSAS CITY, MO—Although those close to Buster characterize him as a good boy, the area collie-rottweiler mix reported Monday that he will never live up to the standard set by the show-quality golden retriever on the Purina Dog Chow bag.

Buster eyes the competition.

"I try as hard as I can," said Buster, lying on his blanket in the entryway of the Hopkins-family home. "I welcome [Buster's owner] Gerald [Hopkins] home every night with lots and lots of barks and leaps. And when he sits down in his chair to read, I lie quietly at his feet. Still, when I see that dog on the Dog Chow bag, I feel like I'm nothing."

Without lifting his head from his paws, Buster turned his eyes to the shelf above the dryer, where the trim and muscular golden retriever on the 40-pound bag of Purina Dog Chow bounded across a green lawn.

According to Buster, the dog is almost certainly American Kennel Club-certified.

"Look at that coat," Buster said. "Thick and soft... And his color! Varying shades of rich and lustrous gold. As for me, I'm sort of a rough, dull black, and I know it. I've known it since I figured out that the strange, scentless dog in the mirror is me. Ever since then...well, I try my best not to whine, but it's hard to live with the fact that I will never measure up."

"It didn't take two vets to piece together what breed that dog was," Buster added.

Buster admitted that not one member of the Hopkins family has ever compared him unfavorably to the dog on the food bag.

"But I know what they must be thinking," Buster said, baring his teeth to reveal two misaligned incisors. "Just look at this messed-up bite. The kids hug me when they feed me, but over their shoulders, I can see Golden Boy over there, staring down at me from the Purina bag."

Buster said his worst days are those when a family member forgets to return the Purina bag back to the shelf after feeding him.

"Oh, I go positively crazy," Buster said, pausing to gnaw a spot on his left hindquarter. "He's right there, staring me down, eye to eye, all day long. The only way I can get away from his strong nose and bright eyes is to put my own head in the bag. And, you know how it is, once you smell the kibble, you can't help but eat all of it... And then there's no question about it: I'm the worse dog."

Added Buster: "No, the dog on that bag would never eat himself sick and then make a mess on the floor."

Buster noted the gracefulness of the golden retriever's movements.

"Aw Jeez, look at him go," Buster said. "I can't even shamble up the stairs without tripping. That dog looks so confident and intelligent. Meanwhile, I still fall for the old fake stick toss half the time."

A fit, attractive woman in her 30s accompanies the golden retriever on the Dog Chow bag. According to Buster, the tall, upright-walking woman looks uncannily like his owner's wife.

"I look at the bag, and I think, 'That looks like Susan, all right, but that dog sure doesn't look like me,'" said Buster, a hint of a growl in his throat. "I have to wonder if Susan sees the bag and thinks the same thing. When we're out on walks, is she embarrassed to be seen with me?"

"I love my human family with all my heart," Buster added. "They deserve the dog from that bag.

Elaine Thannum, a noted animal behaviorist and author of The Breeding Myth, said that idealized media images contribute to self-esteem problems among pets.

"Unfortunately, the inadequacy Buster is feeling is common among normal, everyday dogs," Thannum said. "No matter how much their families love them, regular dogs can't help but be affected by the unrealistic images shoved down their throats by dog-food companies like Purina, Cycle, and Iams. Dogs like Buster need to understand that if they were to meet the supposedly perfect animals they see on the food bag, they'd see and smell dogs with a lot of the same problems they have."

Los Angeles-based purebred Troubadour's Golden Dawn appears on millions of Purina Dog Chow bags, as
well as a Clarinex print ad and packages of Nylabone chew toys.

"Let me tell you, it is not easy being me," Troubadour's Golden Dawn said. "Do you know what it's like to have judges and photographers poking and prodding you all day long? What I wouldn't give to have a fun, playful family. I'd roll over and play dead to be able to eat Purina-brand Dog Chow, instead of that all-natural, vitamin-flavored concoction I have to choke down."

"And believe me," the 3-year-old golden retriever added, "you don't want to get me started about what it feels like to have to compete for jobs with that nippy little blond bitch on the Puppy Chow bag."
Dress-Up Doll Born To Area Couple

NEW YORK—Two years ago, Manhattan married couple Ron Garver and Becky Meyers weren't sure they were cut out for parenting. They worked long hours, had a thriving social life, and their East Village apartment was small and cramped. But 24 months and 73 outfits later, Garver and Meyers are the proud parents of a 10-month-old dress-up doll.

Garver and Meyers display their child.

"I didn't think I was ready for a baby," Meyers said Monday. "In my mind, Ron and I were too irresponsible. But next thing you know, I'm pregnant and we're buying sundresses, headbands, little Converse sneakers—you know, I was doing all the important things you need to do in preparation for a baby."

Meyers said she began to read everything she could get her hands on, from catalogs to articles on nursery decorating.

"I was so relieved when our little girl arrived in perfect health," Meyers said. "It's almost impossible to find cute outfits for preemies."

Since their baby's birth, Garver, a staff writer for New York magazine, and Meyers, who works in acquisitions at a small film company, have spent nearly 30 percent of their income on baby clothes.

"We don't just buy anything, though," Garver said. "It has to be something that's missing from her wardrobe. Last week, I got Daddy's little girl a little Knicks jersey to wear to the games. Everyone thinks it's adorable. She's already been on the Jumbotron!"

Garver said his daughter is not always in an athletic mood.

"Did you know they sell Clash shirts for babies?" Garver said. "Everyone at work gets such a kick out of my little punk!"

After Meyers gave birth to the baby, she said she had to adjust to the "full-time job" of primping their child for display.

"For a while, we never got any sleep!" Meyers said. "She'd wake up in the middle of the night, and we'd have to get up, take her out of her sleeper, put her in her breakfast PJs, and feed her. Sometimes, I barely had the energy to plan her outfits for the next day."

"Having a child is a lot of work," Meyers added. "Coming up with the idea to dress your baby like a farmer, a police officer, or even a little sunflower is difficult enough on its own. But if she's sleepy or fussy, it can take a half an hour to dress her. Still, when you hear the coos of the neighbors who see her in the Baby Jogger, it's all worth it."

Meyers and Garver's child photographed throughout the day Monday.

Garver and Meyers have discovered many unexpected responsibilities, such as making sure that their daughter is bundled up in an adorable snowsuit when it's cold.

"Every trip outside requires a hundred decisions," Meyers said. "Should she wear her bear coat or her cute red-velvet Santa jacket? Is today a bunny-ears kind of a day, or does it feel like more of a plaid-wool-cap morning? Sometimes, if our social calendar requires it, we have to pull together three or four outfits in a single day."

The baby does not always wear special outfits, however.

"If we're spending the night in, she might just lounge around in a Nike sweatsuit, some grubby old T-shirt from two months ago, and one of those sweaters Grandma sent," Garver said.

Garver and Meyers said they had to make some sacrifices after they became parents.
"We've had to make some changes in order to save money," Meyers said. "But we've learned to rely on accessories to freshen up a look. And we keep an eye out for sales. It takes a bit more time than just heading to Macy's, but we've scored some really great little sunglasses and backpacks. Nothing is too much for our little doll."

Even though she spends a great deal of time shopping for her baby, Meyers said she believes that the best gift she can give her daughter is her time and attention.

"Just last week, I thought, 'Wouldn't it be cute if I took a picture of her on the phone?''" Meyers said. "I spent an hour figuring out how to strap her hand to the telephone. Then, I had to make it look like she was talking by giving her a little baby food to chew on. If you snapped the photo at the right moment, it totally looked like she was talking on the phone. My sister told me I was crazy, but I said 'You just wait until you see the photo!'"

Garver and Meyers said that, in spite of the financial and social sacrifices they have had to make, they have "never once regretted the decision to keep the baby."

"This isn't about Becky and me," Garver said. "This is about building our child's self-esteem, because we love her. Which reminds me, we're really looking forward to Valentine's Day. We found an adorable pink dress with little wings on the back for our little Cupid. How can she not be happy with all the attention everyone will give her? Plus, her hair's finally growing in, so we can stop using the hats. She never seemed to like those."
Area Man Somehow Even Less Popular Than He Was In High School

JEFFERSON, MO—Contrary to what he had been assured about adult life, local resident Mike Glick, 24, reported Monday that he is even less popular than he was in high school.

Glick, who has even fewer friends than he did six years ago.

"One of the biggest incentives to endure high school is the idea that the misery will end once you graduate," Glick said. "What I wasn't told is that people are basically the same dicks, except with more money and fewer opportunities to say 'Smell my finger.'"

Glick, a part-time clerk for a Jefferson law firm, added that he has not advanced in status or self-fulfillment in the six years since graduating from James Monroe High School. In fact, he said he believes he has regressed considerably.

"At least in high school, teachers cared if you didn't show up for class or weren't paying attention," Glick said. "And in retrospect, being slammed against the lockers helped shape my identity. At least I had something to react to. Now, I just feel adrift."

Glick paused to check his e-mail inbox, where he found a company-wide e-mail from a law partner whose billable hours he had itemized that morning.

Glick was one of the least distinguished members of Monroe High's Class of 1998. Too timid to rebel and not confident enough to be well-liked, Glick was at least noticed long enough to occasionally be mocked. Once known by such names as "Glicklicker" and "Suck My Glick," he said he is now more likely to be referred to as "the guy in payroll. No, the shorter one."

"When high-school graduates enter the world, they meet people with whom they share common interests," said Dr. Sharon Kesselbein, a Kansas City-based psychologist and former public-school guidance counselor. "While being cast into a wider world can be disorienting, it can also be liberating and enriching. The young person discovers that he isn't so strange or misbegotten, as he's opened up to friendships with people who are making similar discoveries and experiencing a similar openness. So none of this happened to [Glick], huh? Really?"

Glick said he thinks his lack of social status can be traced to decisions he made right after graduation.

"Maybe it's because I stayed in town rather than going away to school," said Glick, whose stint at Jefferson Business College resulted in a two-year accounting degree and no real acquaintances, save for a brief friendship with his evangelical Laotian-American seating partner at freshman orientation. "Maybe if I had gone to South Dakota State like my friend Ted Carpenter, or to North Carolina like Sean Rudy, things would have been different."

Carpenter and Rudy were friends—or perhaps more accurately, lunchtime buddies—of Glick's. Carpenter, Rudy, and Glick shared an interest in science fiction and a tendency toward unpopularity, but when Carpenter and Rudy left Jefferson, Glick lost contact with them.

"In the lunchroom at work, I usually sit alone," Glick said. "But a few months ago, I tried sitting down with a couple of paralegals, just to see what would happen. They didn't groan and scatter like my classmates would have in high school. In fact, my coworkers didn't appear to notice me at all. Their conversation continued uninterrupted, and no one seemed ill at ease. I didn't even get a single wayward glance. After about five minutes, I got up and walked off. Now, I just eat at my desk."

The working life has given Glick certain material advantages denied him as a jobless teenager, such as his own apartment and new clothes. In high school, Glick was teased about his sparse and shabby wardrobe, and this led him to believe that an opportunity to purchase a larger wardrobe would lead to increased popularity.

"I quickly realized that no one cares what I wear," Glick said. "This pair of khakis I have on and one or two dress shirts are basically enough to get me through the week. I have a tie in my desk in case a senior partner calls me to his office, but that never happens."

At that point, Glick's phone began to ring, offering a ray of hope to the lonely man. On the other end was a misdirected client seeking a tax lawyer whose name Glick wasn't familiar with.
Kesselbein, however, offered hope for Glick.

"Popularity may be the most sought-after and wished-for thing among young people, but high school doesn't last forever, and adults have to fall back on other things, like knowledge and common sense," Kesselbein said. "The content of your character is more important than whether you can throw a football or how much you weigh. Really, it's true. I'm an expert, and I spend all day and night studying these things."
Rise In Teen Sexual Activity Comes As Surprise To Area Teen

SALEM, OR—The Alan Guttmacher Institute released a report Friday that showed a dramatic increase in teen sexual activity, a finding that surprised policy-makers, public-health professionals, and 17-year-old Tom Ellis. (below).

"So, more teens are having sex, are they?" Ellis asked Monday. "Well, I'm not sure where those guys got all their data, but it sure wasn't from me."

Ellis, a senior this fall at Sprague High School in Salem, learned of the trend while watching television at home Saturday, as he does most weekend nights. A 20/20 story titled "The Teen Sex Epidemic" informed him that 82.6 percent of his peers aged 15 to 19 have engaged in some form of sexual contact with another person.

"Really?" Ellis asked. "Eight out of 10 teens? There's an epidemic?"

While excited by the findings on teen sexuality, Ellis has yet to observe the increase in his own life.

"I mean, it's summer, and I can't help but notice all the girls wearing sexy dresses and tank tops and stuff," he said. "But, does that mean I'm one millimeter closer to getting some tail? No, sir."

"Doesn't matter that I've grown six inches this year, that I've been working out in my basement, or that I dress in Gap clothes, like everyone else," Ellis continued. "Girls like Kelly [Mehan] and Michelle [Lehrer] still totally ignore me. At this rate, I'll be lucky to French [kiss] a girl before college."

Sexual Activity Among Teens

Although teen sexual activity is on the rise, the Guttmacher report indicated that the teen pregnancy rate has dropped to a 13-year low.

"More teens are engaging in sex, but a larger percentage of them are doing so responsibly," said Dr. Jerry Kendall, a senior researcher for the Guttmacher Institute. "There's an increased access to and acceptance of proper contraceptives, mainly the condom, even among the disenfranchised teen population. An additional factor is the marked casualization of oral sex, which is often substituted for full intercourse."

"Really?!" Ellis asked. "Blow jobs? Well, that national trend hasn't spread to Salem yet, because I'm about one blow job shy of joining that statistic. It would take a miracle to get a girl to go down on me."

Ellis did confirm that he would use a condom if he were to have sex.

"You have sex, you wear a condom," said Ellis, who has practiced proper condom use alone in his bedroom. "At least that's what everybody says. I certainly wouldn't know from experience because, clearly, I'm a freak. I'm one of the pathetic 18 percent who still haven't even seen, much less touched, a naked breast. Well, rest assured: When and if I ever get the chance to have sex, I will definitely know how to put on a condom."
Teens who, unlike Ellis, are engaging in sexual activity.

Although Ellis has carefully documented his intense desire for a sexual encounter in his journal, that desire hasn't translated into sexual activity. Ellis insisted that this is not by choice.

"Hey, I'm not one of those weird abstinence kids," Ellis said. "There's nothing I would like better than to waste myself on the wrong girl. I just want to know: Where in the hell are all these millions of loose teenage girls? Because they certainly don't go to my school."

According to friend Doug Binder, Ellis' chances of joining the growing ranks of the sexually experienced are slim.

"Tom?" Binder asked. "He's doomed to virginity, just like me. But, hey, that doesn't stop us from talking and thinking about sex all the freaking time. For all our yapping about what we'd do if we were ever alone with a girl, neither of us is anywhere near getting some action."

Although he admitted he was startled by the report, Ellis said he remains hopeful for the future.

"I've still got two years to get laid and join the majority," Ellis said. "I mean, I've heard guys talking about all the girls they've slept with, but I thought they were just making it up. Turns out, everyone really was having sex all that time. Well, thanks, 20/20. Now I know what a complete loser I am."
Area Mom Could Have Made Same Meal At Home For Much Cheaper

NAPERVILLE, IL—During an outing to Chisholm's Family Restaurant Monday, Sandy Wiersma, 43, repeatedly told her family that she could have made the same food at home for significantly less money.

"When I saw the menu, I just couldn't believe we were paying for things I easily could have made at home for a fraction of the price," Wiersma said. "It just seemed like a real waste of money to me."

After mentally calculating what it would have cost to prepare the meals ordered by herself, her husband, and their two children, Wiersma said she was "flabbergasted."

"For what we're shelling out on [son] Eric's cheeseburger and fries alone, I could have made dinner for the entire family," Wiersma said. "We all could have had nice cheeseburgers and fries, with plenty left over for baked beans and cole slaw. Plus, I would have toasted the bun just the way Eric likes it."

The restaurant outing was the idea of family patriarch Bob Wiersma, who said it served the dual purpose of "giving Mom a break" and providing a much-needed change of scenery.

"I told her, 'Don't worry about the price, Sandy,'" Bob recalled. "'Let's live it up a little.' Boy, did that backfire."

Sandy said she was upset that none of the dishes ordered were out of her culinary grasp, yet all were priced at least four times the cost of her homemade versions.

"It just seems so wasteful," Sandy said. "My chicken parmesan was $12.95, and I could have easily made it for the entire family for under $10. I could have picked up two nice chicken breasts at the Jewel for $5 and cut each one in half, making four servings. A good jar of tomato sauce would be $3, tops, and a 16-ounce box of pasta you can get for next to nothing. And I think I have everything I'd need for breading the chicken just sitting in the cupboard."

Added Sandy: "And you can bet my pasta wouldn't have been watery and overcooked."

Sandy tried to keep her worries over the cost of the dinner to herself for most of the evening. She felt compelled, however, to speak out against 12-year-old daughter Jenny's choice of a grilled-cheese sandwich as an entree.

"Mom was like, 'Why did you order that?'" Jenny said. "I told her that's what I felt like, so that's what I got. She was freaking out, going off about how I could make a grilled cheese at home for two weeks straight for what they're charging. I was like, 'Mom, I just want a grilled cheese. Don't be such a spaz.'"

According to Jenny, Monday's incident was not the first time her mother has fretted over spending money on items she could have made herself.

"If we ask to buy a Halloween costume from a store, she has a total conniption," Jenny said. "Every year, she tells us that with a little imagination and elbow grease, we can have better costumes than the store-bought stuff. I don't know how many times I've had to be a California Raisin for Halloween because she won't let us go out and buy something cool."

Bob, the family's primary breadwinner, expressed consternation over his wife's thrifty ways.

"I keep telling her we're doing fine, moneywise," Bob said. "It's okay to spend a little to enjoy a nice night out at a restaurant. She'll agree to eat out, but then eventually, at some point in the evening, she'll say, 'You think it's worth paying $8.95 for a $2 plate of chicken fingers just to enjoy this décor? This place is nice, but it's not that nice.'"

Anxious to avoid such situations in the future, Bob said he will make an effort only to bring the family to restaurants that serve foods his wife does not know how to prepare.

"Next time, we'll go to a foreign place and try to pass it off as a 'family-enrichment night,'" Bob said. "There's a Chi-Chi's over in Downers Grove I've always wanted to go to, and I'm pretty sure Sandy doesn't know how to make
Mexican, so it should be a more relaxed evening for us all."
20 Percent Of Area Man's Income Spent Ironically

LOUISVILLE, KY—Alex Vartan, 24, a Louisville-area convenience-store cashier and part-time DJ, spends 20 percent of his income ironically, sources reported Monday.

Vartan in his irony-filled apartment.

"I know I should really try to sock away some cash, but there's just so much funny shit out there," Vartan said. "Like, just yesterday, I passed by this Christian bookstore, and in the window they had those statues of Jesus playing basketball and a bunch of other sports with little kids. Now, how are you supposed to pass something like that up?"

Though his job as a cashier doesn't provide much in the way of disposable income, Vartan spends roughly one-fifth of his $21,000-a-year salary on such ironic items as Future Farmers of America jackets, Successories posters, and *Knight Rider* lunchboxes.

Vartan's love affair with irony-based shopping began in high school, when he bought a used sitting bath at a hospital surplus sale.

"I just thought it would be funny to use it for a chair," Vartan said. "Plus, it was only $3. At a garage sale a few days later, I found a bunch of copies of 'The Super Bowl Shuffle' for a dime apiece, and I gave them all out to my friends for Christmas. From that point on, I was hooked."

The habit grew worse in the spring of 1996, when Vartan discovered eBay.

"Man, that blew my mind," said Vartan, who combs the popular auction site for ironic items almost daily. "I couldn't believe the amazing stuff you could find on there. Like, about a month ago, I found this bootleg Wendy's employee-training video from the mid-'80s where this black kid does this how-to-cook-the-burgers rap. I shit you not."

A typical trip to the supermarket for Vartan involves the purchase of at least one ironic foodstuff, such as Frank's Kraut Juice or Uncle Sam's cereal. When he returns home, he often pops open a can of Schlitz beer and unwinds with his prized laser-disc copy of *Leonard Part 6* or a book of *Lockhorns* comic strips.

Even when his financial situation is dire, Vartan has a hard time resisting ironic purchases.

"Last June, I found a $20 bill on the street," Vartan said. "I was totally psyched, because I was seriously hurting for cash at the time—I think I had, like, $5.85 in my checking account. I was going to put it in the bank, but on the way home I saw this shirt in the window of Ragstock that said, 'It's Not A Beer Belly, It's A Gas Tank For A Sex Machine.' Of course, I got the shirt and lost seven pounds that month because I ate nothing but rice and beans, so it was even more ironic."

Though he tends to gravitate toward pop-culture artifacts from the '70s and '80s, Vartan has recently taken to investing in contemporary items that he speculates will have future kitsch appeal.

"I spent $200 on a rare movie poster for the Italian version of *The Adventures Of Pluto Nash*," Vartan said. "I emptied out my bank account to get the money, and then I had to call the electric company and make up some excuse why I couldn't pay them this month. That kinda sucked, but it's gonna be worth it in a few years when *Pluto Nash* is recognized as a classic on par with *Battlefield Earth* and *Showgirls*."
Despite his misgivings, Vartan said he does not have any immediate plans to change his spending habits. "I know I really should save for my future, but it's almost impossible with all the great crap you come across," Vartan said. "If I ever do manage to save enough money, though, I'd love to get a house in Celebration, FL, that freako Disney-planned community near Orlando. That place sounds so unbelievably weird and depressing, it'd be hilarious."
Area Man Proudly Accepts Exit-Row Responsibilities

CHICAGO—Air traveler Lynn Paschal feels physically and mentally ready to fulfill the duties of an exit-row passenger should tragedy strike United Airlines Flight 234 en route to Atlanta's Hartsfield International Airport, sources close to the 34-year-old confirmed Monday.

"The last thing anyone wants is an emergency landing," said Paschal, limbering up his forearms and checking his reach to the door handle. "But in case we do, I'll do everything in my power to make sure everyone gets out quickly and safely."

In the unlikely event of an emergency landing, Paschal may be called upon to open the escape door with the help of the O'Hare-based United flight crew.

"I certainly hope there will be at least one crew member left alive to help me, but there's no guarantee of that," Paschal said. "I have to prepare for the possibility that I'm the surviving passengers' only hope." Paschal noted that if need be, he could probably throw the door open himself, either by applying all his strength to the handle or by wrapping a seatbelt strap around it for leverage.

In addition to opening the exit-row door, Paschal's emergency duties would include helping his fellow passengers exit the plane and slide down the inflatable chute.

"That's the price you pay for having a little extra leg room here in the exit row," said Paschal, who stowed his carry-on bag in the overhead compartment so it wouldn't tangle the legs of escaping passengers. "Right now, it's leg room, but when the plane is engulfed in flames or sinking like a stone 30,000 feet above central Tennessee, it could be the path to life. And that's a path I want clear."

"Don't worry," said Paschal, turning to the woman seated next to him. "You're going to see your family again."

Paschal first learned of his exit-row responsibilities during the standard pre-flight safety video shown to passengers as Flight 234 prepared for takeoff. Paschal paid strict attention to the presentation, well aware that he could be unexpectedly called into service.

"When [chief flight attendant] Melinda [Garnock] directed my attention to the exit sign above my head, I was glad I made damn sure I had the procedure down," said Paschal, scanning the plane for any elderly passengers who might need special assistance. "Now, I'm basically a member of the crew. Until this plane lands, I'm no longer a civilian."

In addition to familiarizing himself with the large, clearly marked lever, Paschal made other preparations. After introducing himself to everyone in the immediate vicinity of seat 15E, he tucked the aircraft's crash card into the underside of his tray table for easy access. He also fixed his seat in its most upright position.

"Can't afford to relax on this flight," Paschal said. "No coffee, no soda. Got to stay ready. I might have to make my way around this bird in total darkness or even underwater."

Paschal's zeal has not gone unnoticed by United personnel.

"I asked him about six times to stop removing his seat cushion," Garnock said. "He said he was practicing using it as a flotation device. He only stopped when I assured him we wouldn't be crossing any oceans from Chicago to Atlanta. He kept looking over at me and giving me the thumbs-up."

"He took me aside earlier and said he was pretty sure he could get everyone out himself, that if it came to it, I should save myself," flight attendant Yvette Sanchez said. "It took me a while to realize he was talking about helping people out of the plane in an emergency."

Added Sanchez: "Apparently, the guy doesn't realize that in the unlikely event of a crash, we're all fucking dead."
Area Sales Rep Played A Little Football Back In College

LIVONIA, MI–Following a discussion of the Detroit Lions with a potential customer Monday, Kwik-Kool Heating & Air Conditioning sales representative Kevin Resnick mentioned that he played a little football back in college.

Sales rep Kevin Resnick, 36, admits to having "tossed the pigskin around a bit."

"Speaking of football, I used to toss the pigskin around a bit myself," the 36-year-old told Little Red Barn Plush Toys CEO Grant Nussbaum, who was looking into a Kwik-Kool heat and air system for his new factory. "Yup, played two full seasons at Central Michigan. I was a walk-on as a freshman, but by sophomore year, I practically had a full ride."

During the one-hour meeting at Little Red Barn's Livonia headquarters, Nussbaum learned that Resnick played defensive back at CMU for two years, but blew out his right knee in May 1983.

"It was the annual spring intrasquad game, between my sophomore and junior year, and on the very first play from scrimmage I tore my ACL," Resnick told the toy manufacturer. "And that pretty much ended that."

"I still remember those practices," said Resnick, unfolding a glossy Kwik-Kool brochure. "Coach Meijer would put us through hell, pardon my French. The first week of training camp, we'd run 10 miles in full pads every morning and then cool down with something easy, like, oh, 25 windsprints. And even us guys who weren't starters had to do the full thing. It was insane."

"But it was a good experience," Resnick added. "Meijer was a tough bastard, but he taught me a lot about life."

Mark Meijer, retired but still living in Mt. Pleasant near the CMU campus, said he could not recall Resnick specifically, but noted that "all of [his] players were good, solid boys."

"I've put on a few pounds since then, of course," said Resnick, patting his growing paunch. "But I do try to get out and shoot some hoops now and then, and I play in the company's volleyball league every summer."

According to Resnick, "keeping physically active is the key to staying mentally active." Throughout his 11 years at Kwik-Kool, he has had the opportunity to share such bits of wisdom with coworkers, heating-and-cooling-industry suppliers, and Kwik-Kool clients, whom he frequently treats to expenses-paid lunches at local taverns.

"Those were some of the best years of my life," Resnick said during one such three-hour meeting at J.T. McBleacher's Sports Pub with Denkinger Lanes owner Russ Denkinger, who was considering a new air-conditioning system for his bowling alley. "Being out there under the lights during a big game, everyone cheering–what a high. Of course, I only saw a few minutes of game time–it was a very seasoned team. But you should have seen that locker room after a win. Man, that was brotherhood."

Denkinger ultimately decided not to purchase a system from Resnick.

Despite his reminiscing, Resnick is anything but living in the past, and is "extremely excited" about his future with Kwik-Kool, a fast-growing company that has doubled its revenues over the last decade and has plans to branch out with offices as far away as Fort Wayne, IN, in the next 18 months.

"I've got a great life–a beautiful wife, two great kids, and a new 21-foot Sea Ray," said Resnick, pulling a picture of the motorboat from his wallet. "I'm pretty much right on track in terms of the goals I've set and where I wanted to see myself at 35."

Though he has not yet been tapped for any management positions at the company, Resnick did sell the most units in the third quarter of 1995, an achievement that earned him Kwik-Kool "Sales Star Of The Month" honors for September of that year.
“Kevin may not be our star player, but he’s a very important member of the Kwik-Kool team,” said Dale Rindfleisch, Kwik-Kool regional manager and starting third baseman for George Mason University from 1983 to 1985. “To succeed in business, as in sports, you need more than great starters—you also need a solid bench.”
Area Man Hasn't Told Co-Workers About His Billy Joel Fanpage Yet

DAYTON, OH–Ross Hudek, a 36-year-old claims processor at Northcentral Insurance in Dayton, still hasn't told co-workers about "Zanzibar," his three-month-old Billy Joel fanpage.

"I really haven't brought it up to the gang at work," Hudek said of the site, which features Billy Joel FAQs, photos and song lyrics, as well as links to other webpages devoted to the popular, Long Island-born singer. "I'm not hiding it or anything--it's right out there for the world to see–but I'd just feel kind of weird if I knew people at Northcentral were looking at it."

Hudek, who lists "Captain Jack," "Scenes From An Italian Restaurant" and "Summer, Highland Falls," as his all-time favorite Joel songs, said he is "pretty sure" that none of his co-workers have ever visited the fanpage.

"[Claims adjustor] Glenn [Dietz] and I talk about Billy Joel every once in awhile, because he's also a fan," Hudek said. "He saw him on the Storm Front tour when he came through Cleveland in '89, and I was at the same show. But I don't think he knows about the site. At least, he's never mentioned it to me."

Hudek said he spends approximately 10 hours a week on maintenance and upkeep of the website, typing in trivia questions, scanning photographs he took at various Joel concerts, and posting the results of weekly fan polls.

"This week's question is: What is your favorite song on Turnstiles?" Hudek said. "Surprisingly, 'Miami 2017' is in the lead, with seven votes. I was sure it would be 'James' or, at the very least, 'I've Loved These Days.' Not that '2017' isn't a great song--it is. But the best on all of Turnstiles? My suspicion is that there's one person out there who really likes it and is casting multiple votes. Right now, there's nothing to prevent that."

"I'm pretty proud of what I've done," Hudek continued. "There's a lot of good stuff there: updates on what Billy's been up to lately, midi files, desktop images, and a whole bunch of other downloadable goodies. Still, I'd kind of rather keep it to myself for now."

Despite his reluctance to tell co-workers, Hudek said he has a good relationship with them. Furthermore, he insists he is not "hiding" the website and would tell his fellow Northcentral employees about it if it ever were to come up in conversation.

"They're good people," Hudek said. "Dave [Boniol] and Bill [Kerkseich] and Samantha [Deele], in particular, I would consider more than just co-workers, and actually friends. But still, there's a limit to what we talk about. Some things are more personal, you know?"

Hudek's co-workers may not have visited Zanzibar, but the fansite is not going unseen. Since its launch, it has received more than 200 visitors, and Hudek has received a great deal of positive e-mail from other Joel fans. He has even developed an ongoing "Billy Joel trivia exchange" with some of them.

"We e-mail back and forth and try to stump each other," Hudek said. "It's a lot of fun. I'm pretty tough to stump, though. You can't just ask me something easy like, 'What was the inspiration for "Big Shot"?' or, 'Who is the "Famous Violinist Incognito" who plays on "The Downeaster Alexa"?' Or even, 'Who is the Rosalinda in "Rosalinda's Eyes"?'

Added Hudek: "A very bad date with Bianca Jagger; Itzhak Perlman; and Billy's mom."
Hudek said he decided to set up the fanpage after visiting a number of other Joel sites and finding them to be "big on graphics but sorely lacking in accurate, detailed information."

"If you're going to have a site devoted to the life and music of Billy Joel, you don't start your discography with *Cold Spring Harbor,*" Hudek said. "You go all the way back to his pre-solo years with The Hassles."

"Not that I'm, like, a fanatic about him, or anything," Hudek added. "I love his music, but it's not the only thing I do. And I certainly wouldn't want to give my co-workers that impression."
Area Woman To Get By On Looks For Six More Years

SAN DIEGO–Michelle Haltigan, a highly successful advertising executive known throughout the San Diego area for her striking physical attributes, will continue to get by on looks for six more years, it was reported Monday.

San Diego-area advertising executive Michelle Haltigan, who has until the year 2004 to coast on her appearance.

Sources report that the 23-year-old Huntington Beach native will be able to coast effortlessly until late 2004, when her appearance will no longer be sufficient to guarantee preferential treatment in her professional and personal life.

Haltigan, recently chosen for promotion at H. William Gordon Advertising over a number of more qualified, less luminous co-workers, enjoys a wide range of unspoken societal prettiness privileges. She receives free flowers from street-cart vendors, is allowed to skip ahead in line for the Stairmaster at her apartment complex’s mini-gym, and gets priority scheduling from tanning-salon personnel throughout the San Diego area. At booked restaurants, she is always quickly seated and attended to, and when pulled over for speeding, her chances of being let off with just a warning are 17 times greater than the average person’s.

As a result of her attractiveness, Haltigan also enjoys greatly enhanced discretionary powers in interpersonal relationships. Able to choose from a nearly endless list of suitors, she always operates from a position of strength in dating scenarios, rarely finding her desires challenged or denied by would-be sexual partners. When faced with resistance, Haltigan is able to persuade partners to relent by pouting her lower lip slightly and saying, ”Pretty please?” in a childlike, flirtatiously wheedling tone.

Haltigan, whose looks have made it unnecessary for her to cultivate attractive personality traits, is reportedly unconcerned about the finite nature of her powers. When asked for comment on the rapidly closing six-year beauty-privilege window, she simply flashed what witnesses described as a ”dazzling” smile, displaying her perfect, professionally whitened teeth.

"I think I’ll go skiing in Taos this weekend with Andre or Michael, or maybe Ethan if he's back from Europe," Haltigan told reporters. "By the way, how do you like this new sweater I bought?"

Experts say the state of denial in which Haltigan lives is easy for her to preserve, primarily due to the nonverbal affirmations she receives daily, a form of tacit approval that fosters her illusory faith in the permanence of her esteemed status in the eyes of others.

"I'm sure in the back of her mind, on some subconscious level, she must know that time is ticking away," said noted psychotherapist Dr. Eli Wasserbaum. "But, for the most part, the many perks that come with being beautiful block out any real awareness she might have. One can understand how this process works when one considers how unbelievably good-looking she is at the present time."

"I even asked her out myself once," Wasserbaum said, "but she said that, unfortunately, she was too busy that weekend to attend the symposium."

As a busy advertising executive, Haltigan’s duties include taking clients to lunch, attending departmental presentations, networking with other executives, and taking clients to dinner. Other professional obligations include twice-weekly hair appointments, mud-bath skin treatments and sessions with her personal trainer.

"In my job, I have to look good," Haltigan said. "Projecting the right professional image is crucial to winning the client's confidence and trust."

Haltigan's commitment to success has earned her the admiration of her coworkers. "We all love Michelle here at Gordon Advertising," said company president Donald Gehry, 59. "There's a certain quality about Michelle that
enables her to just light up a meeting. She's got that certain 'presence' necessary to be a big success in the advertising
game."

According to experts, shortly after turning 29, Haltigan will begin her descent into shrewish bitterness,
suffering a string of humiliating failed relationships, unemployment and, ultimately, a free-fall into neurotic self-
loathing and cocaine addiction sometime around 2007.

But despite the looming threat of her inevitable loss of beauty and influence, Haltigan remains nonchalant
about the future.

"I don't really have time to worry about what might happen down the road, because I've got real-world goals
I'm committed to making happen today," Haltigan said. "The fast-paced world of advertising is all about living in the
now."

"I'm always on the go, making sure I get the most out of life, pushing myself to be everything I can be,"
Haltigan continued before pausing briefly to toss her hair over her shoulder, adding, "but if you call me next week, I
might be free."
Area Boyfriend Much Nicer Before Sex

SHREVEPORT, LA—Jordan Farmer, 22, boyfriend of Mindy Hodges, 20, is significantly nicer before sex, Hodges reported Monday. "Before we have sex, he's always really sweet to me, and he, like, tells me my hair looks nice and stuff. And if I'm upset about something, he listens and tells me that he loves me and that everything's going to be all right," Hodges said. "But then, afterwards, he stops listening to me, and he screams at me and says he's going to break up with me if I don't stop being so clingy and annoying." Hodges has vowed to make an effort to be less clingy and annoying.
Area Stylist Would Love To Do Julia Roberts' Hair

BURWELL, NE–Local hair stylist Pam Nowicki would love to do Julia Roberts' hair, Nowicki announced Monday at the Mane Attraction Beauty Salon in downtown Burwell.

Hair stylist Pam Nowicki, who says she could "work wonders" with Julia Roberts' hair.

"Julia Roberts is so gorgeous," the 41-year-old certified cosmetologist said. "I would just die to get my hands on that luscious hair of hers."

Nowicki, who has the second-longest tenure at Mane Attraction behind owner and head stylist Janet Hunter, said she would likely take three or four inches off Roberts' hair and layer the back.

"Whoever's doing Julia's hair now just isn't making the most of her facial features," Nowicki said. "She's got those incredible almond-shaped eyes and high cheekbones, but her hairstyle isn't accentuating them nearly as much as it could."

Added Nowicki: "Pretty Woman is my all-time favorite movie. I've seen it, like, 200 times."

A lifelong resident of Burwell, Nowicki has been a stylist for 17 years, spending three years at Shear Magic on Holcomb Avenue and four at Hair & Now in the Burwell Plaza strip mall before arriving at her current position in 1989.

"Personally, I think she looked best in My Best Friend's Wedding," said Nowicki, whose seniority enables her to get first crack at the perm and tinting appointments, leaving most of the low-tip-yielding $7.99 cut-and-style jobs for the newer stylists. "For that movie, they did her hair with a chestnut tint, which is perfect for an autumn like Julia. In all honesty, though, I probably would have dyed her hair even a few shades redder."

"I think I could really do wonders with Julia's hair," said Nowicki, sifting through a plastic, teal-and-pink caddy of combs, scissors and butterfly clips. "Somehow, I've just got this knack for making people look their best."

While Roberts is Nowicki's favorite Hollywood star, she is not the only actress whose hair Nowicki would love to do. During her 10 years at Mane Attraction, Nowicki has expressed a desire to style the hair of such leading ladies as Meg Ryan, Melanie Griffith and Sandra Bullock.

"I saw Sandra on Access Hollywood last night, and it looked like she was definitely due for a shape-up," Nowicki said. "Or, at the very least, a little off the ends."

"It would be so much fun to work with a big star," said Nowicki, who makes $6.50 an hour, plus tips. "Not that I don't appreciate my customers here at The Mane."

One such regular customer, Burwell resident Mary Klapisch, is well aware of Nowicki's talents. "Pam is really up on the latest styles–she gets tons of magazines, including People, Glamour and Cosmopolitan, and she never misses Entertainment Tonight," Klapisch said. "She said that with my facial shape, she could make me look just like Celine Dion."

Among Nowicki's higher-profile clientele are such Burwell luminaries as city-council member Teresa Bonner, PTA president Maggie Kittridge, and Burwell Post-Dispatch bookkeeper Annette Pedersen.

Though she has yet to achieve her dream of cutting the hair of a Hollywood star, Nowicki recently had the
chance to work with an actual television personality.

"Two weeks ago, Katie Oberman, the news anchor for [NBC affiliate] KTNE over in Lincoln, was passing through town and got a haircut from me," Nowicki said. "It was such an amazing experience, getting the opportunity to actually do a hairstyle for the camera. I watched her the next night on the news, and she looked fantastic."

"I always thought it would've been fun to go to Hollywood and get a job as a stylist for the movies, but Dan never would have gone for that. And now, with the three kids and all, forget it," said Nowicki, bending over to sweep clumps of hair into a dust pan. "Oh, well. I'll bet it's really muggy there in the summer, anyway."
Area Stoner Convinced Everyone On TV Also Stoned

ATHENS, GA—In a highly stoned statement made while sitting around watching late-night cable TV with his roommates Tuesday, Athens-area stoner Dirk Udell announced his conviction that everyone on TV is also stoned.

"You ever see that HBO series *Mr. Show*? Those guys are *out there, man,*" said Udell, a part-time record-store clerk and occasional drummer for an as-yet-unnamed local band. "Those guys must get fucked up all the time, you can totally tell just by looking at 'em. I mean it. I don't know what those people are smokin', but, like, the other night, David, the bald guy, comes out and starts dancing around all crazy and shit? And Bob just looked at him like, 'Whoa, man, you are so baked.'"

"I was like, *man,*" Udell said.

According to Udell, among the other TV personalities who are "obviously baked out of their minds" are David Letterman, the guy who does the voice of Homer Simpson, Sipowicz on *NYPD Blue*, the cast of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, Beavis, Butthead, that one "Let's Get Ready To Rumble" dude, Howard Stern, that guy on the Menards commercials, MTV's Matt Pinfield, and the people who came up with the aliens for the original *Star Trek* series.

"I mean, come on," said Udell, pausing to take what witnesses described as a "monster" bong hit. "A freakin' white furry gorilla with, like, one horn stickin' out the middle of his head? You just know somebody was chokin' down some serious primo cheeba-cheeba when they dreamed that up."

"That shit's *fucked up,*" he added.

The 26-year-old Udell is no stranger to controversy. He has made numerous inflammatory statements in the past, including a June 3 allegation that the Masons are into some really freaky shit and a January 1996 announcement that somebody was eating all his Fruit Roll-Ups without asking permission. The longtime stoner's latest remarks, however, delivered in a semi-coherent monotone through a drug-induced haze, are widely considered his most explosive yet.

"I'll tell you something else, man," Udell said. "The other night, they had a rerun of that one episode of *Space Ghost* where the guest was Beck, and he was so stoned. He had, like, a lampshade on his head, and he was all like, 'This is my space helmet' or some shit like that. I mean, he was stoned off his gourd. It was awesome. Those *Space Ghost* guys must be so high, man. Especially Brak. Brak *rules.* He is, like, *so wasted.*"

Udell's numerous allegations of celebrity drug use could not be confirmed as of press time. The fact that Udell was really high was confirmed, however.
Area Grandparents Still Have No Idea What Grandson Does For A Living

BOSTON—Sources confirmed Monday that Walter and Nancy Brandt, grandparents of Boston-area systems consultant Charles Brandt, 31, still do not have the slightest idea what their grandson does for a living. "We are very proud of our Charles," said Nancy, 82. "Whatever he does in that job of his, I'm sure it's very impressive." Said Walter: "I think what Charles does is make sure companies have enough computers and employees so that they can —oh, I haven't a clue." The couple also has no idea what their granddaughter, Erica Haselrig, a Lodi, NJ, human-resources supervisor, does for a living.
Area 15-Year-Old Only Homosexual In Whole World

WAUGANAUKEE, MN—On the surface, Daryl Hegge seems to be a typical 15-year-old boy. An avid trivia buff and amateur model-rocket hobbyist, he enjoys pizza parties, after-school activities like yearbook and drama club, participating in the junior-varsity cross-country team, and listening to the music of his favorite pop stars.

Hegge appears as normal and well-adjusted as any of his peers at J. Edgar Hoover High School in the tiny rural town of Wauganaukee. But despite his seemingly healthy exterior, Hegge is different from all his peers—very different. For, unlike his fellow students, Daryl Hegge is the only homosexual in the whole world.

"I am so alone," said Hegge, speaking to reporters from his family's unfurnished basement. Here, the silently suffering youth spends much of his time struggling to cope with his hidden, shameful burden—praying to Jesus for help, furtively masturbating, and writing love poetry in what he calls his "way-super-secret diary that no one, no one ever, can see."

Hegge suffers from the only known case of a condition doctors term "homosexuality"—a completely unknown syndrome that creates in Hegge a recurring, involuntary, overpowering compulsion to hug and kiss other boys. The teen's bizarre sexual affliction is such a freakish aberration that he has felt compelled to keep it a secret from loved ones, family members, and authority figures.

"No one must know," Hegge said. "If they ever found out what a horrible freak I am, they'd probably put me in a traveling circus show. A legacy of undying shame would follow me forever, plaguing the Hegge family name long after my death, passed down from generation to generation as 'The Legend Of Daryl The Homosexual Monster-Boy.'"

Hegge said he first became aware of his condition at age 12, during a week-long Bible study and nature retreat sponsored by his church youth group.

"It was a campfire sing-along and weenie-roast, and we were singing that part of 'And They'll Know We Are Christians By Our Love' that goes, 'We will walk with our brothers, we will walk hand in hand,'" Hegge recalled. "And I realized I was gazing into Billy Rostengruper's eyes as we sang, thinking about how much I wanted to hold his hand. Later, I had a dream that he was touching my you-know-what."

Hegge then broke down in tears, screaming, "The agony! Oh, God, the shame!"

In the years that followed the campfire episode, Hegge's erotic fixation with males grew, leading to such humiliating incidents as a gym-class locker-room erection and a botched kiss-attempt from fellow student Mildred Gunderson. Hegge tried to learn more about his condition from teachers, library books, and even learned members of the clergy. But all his attempts to learn inevitably ended in failure. No one had any information to share with him, as there are no other homosexuals anywhere in the world.

The burden of disability and disease is hard for anyone to bear, but for Hegge, it is especially difficult. While those afflicted with illnesses like diabetes, cancer, and muscular dystrophy can expect the full support of loved ones, such support is notpossible in Hegge's case: Because of the singularly perverse and twisted nature of his homosexual desires, any attempt on his part to seek out the comfort and aid of others could only result in shock, revulsion, and, ultimately, rejection.

"My family and friends are all I've got in the world. I wouldn't be able to take it if they abandoned me. I've
pictured it countless times, so vividly in my nightmares: their faces contorting into the immutable masks of horrified
disgust and raw, unbridled hatred that would be any sane person's natural reaction to my twisted desires," Hegge
said, his lower lip trembling as he fought back tears. "How could I live through that experience? Sometimes, I think
the only way out is to commit suicide and carry my horrible secret with me to the grave where it can't hurt anyone."

Added Hegge: "I know I would go to hell if I killed myself, but aren't I already damned to eternal punishment
for my sick, perverted fantasies?" Sadly, for Daryl Hegge, this poor, suffering, small-town teenage homosexual, the
only such person in the whole world, there can never be an answer. All he and the rest of us can do is wait—and
hope.
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