

ePASQUINAIDIE

(formerly "Cirque De Fritolay")

PRESENTS

TALLES FROM  
CLOWNHENGE



*Fifteen Stories Based on Titles of Songs  
That Appear on Buddy Judge's Swell  
Album "Profiles In Clownhenge"*

*Issue 6  
March 2001*

## 1. Prelude

Five years drug-free and it was killing him. Hooked on depressants, he was much more tolerable. Although technically “cured,” since the intervention and the court-ordered detox program his friends, family, and especially himself, had grown weary of his incessant energy.

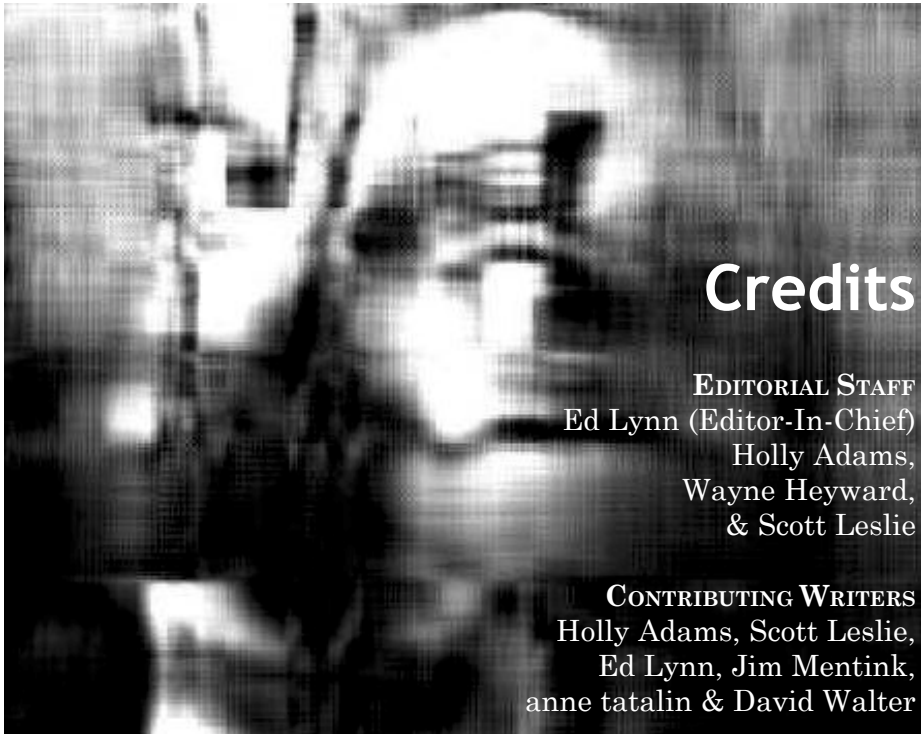
Tim’s sister, Marie, even went so far as to offer him some quaaludes but, being the model of rehabilitation, he refused. Now he had regrets. He dialed the telephone.

“Mare?”

“Tim! How are you?”

“Well, I’ve been voluntarily working seventy hour weeks at the office, have signed up for every arts and crafts class at the Learning Annex, and I’ve not been able to sleep in two weeks. I’m starting to see things, like the lavender penguin that keeps calling me *Gus* and says I promised to marry him. Penguins are flightless, right?”

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# MARFORIO

*Fictional Letters And Emails  
From Our Fictional Readers*

Sirs:

Who the fuck let the dogs out?

—Club American Kennel  
Armonk, NY

It has come to our attention that your account with us is grievously overdue. If you do not pay the total amount of \$12,097.67 by 03/01/01 (please see attached invoice #5285 for “Pornucopia III” and other miscellaneous video entertainment), we will be forced to take your account to our Collections Department. You will find our collections force to be efficient and unfriendly. In lieu of firstborn sons, spouses and essential body parts are accepted as payment.

—Triple X Entertainment  
Hollywood, CA

Hey, Ed. There may be a rather large bill coming your way for some prerecorded videocassettes. Just pay them no mind and massage the invoice through the accounting department. Whatever they tell you, and whatever the police officers claim, it was merely research for an article I’m doing for the Religion issue next month.

—Wayne Heyward  
Richmond, VA

My grandmother liked to boil parsnips until cooked, then eat with butter and salt. Much like a baked potato. But not as good. Still, give me a good parsnip any day.

—Randy Elephantiasis  
Murky Water, UT

Hello dah-lings! **Love** what you’ve done with the curtains—paisley is just too-too, don’t you think? And that sofa, is

# Tales From Clownhenge

## 1. Prelude

## 2. The Ballad of Bud & Dan by Wayne Heyward

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## Bonus Track: ePasquinade Remembers Dale Earnhardt, Sr.

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that new? Oh, you chose chintz. Isn't that quaint? Well, ha ha, some day maybe you will get a new carpet as well, when you get new things the carpet just looks so old, don't you think? Oh, it's a new carpet too? Well, I guess you were going for that Carrow's look, weren't you? Well, I have a meeting to go to. Ta ta!

—Euphegenia Clarisse Beaulieu  
President Junior League of Saint  
Charles County, Regional  
Chapter Chairwoman, Commit-  
tee for the Preservation and  
Beautification of the Graves of  
Our Glorious Dead Founder and  
Chairwoman, Lake Charles  
Women's Service Association

I was on a three-way phone conference with Andy Summers and Stewart Copeland for three hours before I realized they weren't in Genesis.

—Phil Collins  
Pigeon Forge, TN

Well I made it and I was right. God is Dead.

—Frederick Neitsche  
The Hereafter

No I'm not. I was just resting my eyes.

—God

What does it mean when you're sitting in the front row at an Enimem concert and he mouths the words "fish food" to you during a solo?

—Michael Fishfood  
London, England

I can't tell you how it ends, but I can say that pig wasn't the *only* meat that was eaten.

—Kimmi Kappenberg  
Long Island, NY

Submission to our minions is not optional. Should you prove to be uncooperative, they have orders to use force and mandatory removal of primary digits.

—Acme Collection Agency ★

*from page two*

“Last I checked.”

“You still have those ’ludes?”

“Sorry. You’re weren’t interested and Bob was getting a little horny. Have you tried Ny-Quil?”

“You’re kidding? You know my history. I may as well drink bottled water for my migranes. Thanks anyway.”

☆

After five hours of non-stop investigation, Tim uncovered the name of a dealer he believed would provide him with the depressants he sought so desperately. Ben Hollis lived in a grungy little apartment on 18th Street over an alleged brothel. Entering the building, it occurred to him just how easy it was to allege.

He knocked on the door and a small eyehole opened. The voice on the other side of the hole said, “You’re not Larry. Larry’s got brown hair. Larry’s got green eyes. Larry has a mole over his left eye that you can’t help but awkwardly stare at. Larry wears a dark coat. You have blonde hair, blue eyes, a bad skin graft, and a blue windbreaker.”

“I’m not Larry.”

“You’re not Larry.”

Awkward silence.

“So,” the voice eventually continued. “Who are you?”

“My name’s Tim. I’ve come to score some ’ludes.”

“Tim sounds like a narc’s name. Tim The Narc!”

“Look, do you have any ’ludes, any depressants at all?”

“I got some Ny-Quil.”

As he started to turn away, he considered saying “thanks anyway,” but figured it was a moot point.

“I got some Tylenol PM,” he shouted after Tim. “Or you could try Dave’s, down on 43rd. I hear it’s a front.”

☆

*What the hell*, he thought. Twenty minutes later, he was on 43rd looking for a bedding and coat store. Finally, he saw it:

**“DAVE’S DOWN  
Cheap Coats & Comforters  
PARKING IN REAR”**

☆

A salesman proudly announcing himself as Dave asked Tim if he could help him.

“I could sure use some Quaaludes,” Tim said.

“Well, I just have no idea what that is, sir. Like our sign says, we sell coats and comforters.”

“A dealer on 18th told me this was a front for drugs, that you, Dave, are a depressant dealer.”

“De-what? I don’t even know what that is. Ask me about coats and comforters and I can spout volumes.”

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## Jaded Press Clippings

A vacuum cleaner saved the life of a 70-year-old man when it was used to suck out a rice cake on which he was choking, local officials said on Saturday. “His daughter used the vacuum cleaner to suck out the mochi,” a local official in the northern island of Hokkaido said. The sticky mochi, made of glutinous rice, is traditionally served during New Year’s in Japan, but it can be lethal to elderly people. *Reuters*

When a 13-year-old local boy tried to duplicate a prank he saw performed on MTV’s enormously popular stunt comedy show “Jack-ass,” he wound up in the hospital with severe burns. Jason Lind underwent surgery Sunday, two days after being burned. Police are unsure whether Jason set the fire himself or whether another youth did, but they believe he was a willing participant. *The Hartford (MA) Courant*

A truck driver arrested for possession of child pornography told police he uses photos of children engaged in sexual acts to stay alert at the wheel during long hauls. He said he used the photos to get angry—because he can’t understand why adults would portray young children in such a manner—so he would not fall asleep on the road, according to the police report. *Associated Press*

Lassos flew as riders herded three elusive (and pregnant) cows, which had been on the loose more than twenty-four hours, through heavy snow and the woods of an Oakdale, MN, neighborhood in January. Elk River farmer Mark Thompson was driving his newly

“Look at this place. It’s beautiful...”

“Thank you.”

“Crystal chandeliers, marble pedestals, silk curtains. It all looks pretty suspicious when you’ve got a place like this in such a run down part of town.”

“I have some very tidy magic dirt elves that do my bidding.”

“You’re just selling hallucinogens now then?”

“Yup.”



And so it was. Tim sat on the front steps of his brownstone, his entire body vibrating from the stored energy. A dog barked in the distance. An air conditioner hummed from a second story window. He looked down to discover a small capsule. All would be improving soon, if only for a little while. ★

## 2. The Ballad of Bud and Dan

BY WAYNE HEYWARD

**You know how it is when you start singing a song to yourself** and then realize you not only can’t remember the words, but aren’t even sure you ever knew them, so you try to log onto the Internet to find the lyrics but can’t because you have voice mail waiting, which means your modem hears the stuttering dial tone and declares there’s “no dial tone,” so you check your mail and there’s one for your roommate from his parents (whom he never calls back anyway so you’re not sure why you leave the messages clogging up the mailbox) and two from the loan people threatening to remove certain vital limbs if you don’t pay up and finally one from that woman you met at the bar last week saying “call me, please” in that tone which implies wonderful things will happen if you call her back within twenty-four hours and I mean wild, erotic, glorious things you’ll be bragging to your buddies about the next time you all get drunk but *Damn!* she didn’t leave her number, so you try to remember where you left it and what clothes you were wearing that night and whether you washed them yet but, of course, you didn’t because it was only last week but still which which which aha those pants but no nothing there so what about the jacket nope not there either okay so the wallet maybe nope not there either, so you give up and decide to see if she’s in the phone book, but you realize she never told you her last name so you hope she’ll call again meanwhile you’ve cleared all the calls from the queueueueue so you log in and start reading your mail and tossing out the junk mail and answering a few from old friends and then start up the browser only to realize (“ah shit!”) you have completely forgotten why it was so important for you to get online in the first place, something about a song but damned if you can even remember the name of the song though you have a vague recollection of how the tune goes which is no help so, giving up, you disconnect and try to

purchased cattle home from the South St. Paul stockyards about 3pm the previous day when his truck hit a bump on I-694. He stopped to check his trailer gate—and was greeted by three hefty cows on the way out. *Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune*

Flesh from a protected species of sea turtle that died at the Miami Seaquarium was turned into stew and eaten by some of the facility’s workers. No charges were filed because the Seaquarium’s permit to handle endangered species didn’t specifically say how dead animals were to be disposed of, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Lt. John D. West said. *Associated Press*

Real College Course at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: HISTORY 298: OPRAH WINFREY, THE TYCOON *Chicago Sun-Times*

A hungry, knife-wielding robber settled for a chicken sandwich, a Mountain Dew and a trip to jail when a clerk, standing safely behind bulletproof glass, locked the door to a north side convenience store. The situation turned tense when the would-be robber grabbed a young customer and threatened her with the steak knife after Jaspal Singh told him he wouldn’t get a dime. But when Singh promised the 28-year-old suspect twenty dollars and something to eat if he let the girl go, the man promptly complied. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

A Broward County woman who claims a Pompano Beach pastor defamed her by calling her a “slut” from the altar can’t sue the House of God for damages because the church is protected by the First Amendment, an appeals court has ruled. Ashanti White can sue the

Max Patkin slipped here.



remember and then decide to call a friend to ask and get that stuttering dial tone again so you check the messages and sure enough she called again while you were online and said that if you don't call back in the next ten minutes then forget it she's not all that interested anyway.

That's when you remember the name of the song is THE BALLAD OF BUD AND DAN but you no longer even care. ★

### 3. The Ugly American

BY DAVID WALTER

**The blind date wasn't his idea. A friend of his mother's had mentioned that her daughter worked with a girl who was single and about his age, and maybe it would be nice if some evening in the near future, the two of them got together and saw a movie or went to dinner. Same old same old.**

Not that he wasn't interested to some degree. He wasn't going to lie to himself. I mean, here he was at thirty-eight; he wasn't getting any action anyway. Spending a little dough to take some gal to dinner and a movie was better than eating a can of Chunky Soup and watching reruns of THE GOLDEN GIRLS.

And the more he thought about it, the more he liked the idea. Even if this girl wasn't his soul mate, she might be fun. Who knows, she might be easy. Face it, he told himself, you know you need a date when Bea Arthur starts looking good.

So it was into the shower as soon as he got home. Spend a little extra time on the armpits and, as an afterthought, the crotch. Hey, you never know.

He checked himself in the mirror, stroking his chin, evaluating his five o'clock shadow. Not too bad. A little stubble drives 'em wild; it's that Marlboro Man image. He also got up close and personal to scope out any rogue blackheads. We can't have any inadvertent eruptions, now, can we? A quick trim of the nostril and ear hair, and he should be done.

Once he was satisfied his face was in order, he splashed on an extra helping of Hai Karate (the aroma of l'amour) and applied an extra generous helping of Old Spice antiperspirant/deodorant. He could ill afford pit stains and offensive body odor tonight.

On to the wardrobe. Boxers or briefs? Briefs made him bulge a little more in just the right place, but boxers were an easy-off accouterment. He chose briefs, telling himself it pays to advertise. "Shipping and handling" were extra, he chuckled to himself.

The shirt was an easy choice. Imitation ecru silk with a wide collar and his monogram on the cuff. Chicks dig monograms. He spurned a necktie, and left the top two buttons open. He always considered his chest hair one of his best attributes, especially with two gold chains setting it off. His tightest pair of dress jeans (with the

pastor of the House of God as an individual for defamation, though, because there is no constitutional issue preventing that. *Miami Herald*

A 37-year-old Dutch man was admitted to a psychiatric hospital after failing to commit suicide three times by jumping off a bridge in The Hague. He was found leaning over the bridge's railing, contemplating a fourth attempt. *Reuters*

A scrawny, blind cod had to undergo an emergency operation to remove gas which built up inside its body because of its repeated capture. The cod survived the critical medical operation and forty previous nettings by the Norwegian fisherman, who had repeatedly freed it because it was too thin to eat and he felt sorry for it. He'd sent it to retire in a private pool in a marine park in Aalesund. *Reuters*

A Minco, OK, woman suspected of fatally stabbing her son-in-law was convinced a Ouija board told her to do it. "This is basically the grandmother saying that Brian Roach needed to die," a police spokesman said. She is also suspected of trying to kill the man's daughter. "She thought the ten-year-old was evil and thought the father was evil," Burns said.

In 1986, the victim, Brian Roach, ran for mayor of Minco and won by eight votes. He was only nineteen-years-old at the time. He unsuccessfully crusaded for more police officers during his first year as mayor. He finished his public office career in 1991 as the town's Ward 2 councilman. *The Oklahoman*

More than a thousand images of child pornography were found on the office computer of a Univer-

elastic hidden in the waistband) and he checked himself out in the full-length mirror. He nodded, satisfied. The briefs had definitely been the right choice.

He slipped his sharkskin jacket on and fluffed the hankie in the breast pocket. Imitation silk, for show, not for blow. If the lighting wasn't too direct, you could hardly tell it wasn't quite a perfect match to the shirt.

Now for the crowning touch. He returned to the bathroom and lined his styling combs, brushes, spray, and blow dryer on the vanity. After eight years of working with a follicly impaired scalp, he could whip his depleted locks into shape in just fifteen minutes. Tonight, he'd given himself half an hour. Just to be sure.

He bemoaned the fact his hairline was receding, but he was pragmatic enough to admit it. And he was putting twenty-five dollars aside every paycheck for implants. In the meantime, he had perfected his dwindling 'do.

Spurning the comb-over as a pathetic, greasy-looking travesty, he sprayed, blew and brush-fluffed, beginning at the crown and working forward and up. He considered himself an artist, and even briefly considered a career change. But only briefly, since male hairdressers were considered too faggy. So he lavished his care and expertise on himself, a clientele of one.

After twenty minutes, he set his brush and blow dryer down. He had to be careful at this point, since the spray hadn't achieved its final firmness. Turning his head gingerly from side to side, he examined himself in the mirror for stray hairs, weak spots in the infrastructure, and overall shape and balance. What he saw resembled a bird's nest made of spun carpet fibers perched on his cranium.

Perfect. That was the look, baby. He was ready, willing, and was he ever able.

He flared his shirt collar over his jacket lapels and walked jauntily out the door never seeing the trail of toilet paper clinging to his heel. ★

## 4. Everybody Loves Bob

BY HOLLY ADAMS

**There he is, at it again, dagnabbit! Handing out candy to them pesky neighborhood kids, spreading favors like a starlet on a casting couch. All them varmints swarm around him, screaming and shouting and generally carrying on. Messing up my lawn, bringing their damn dogs to crap all over the place. I can't hear a blessed thing, with all that carrying on. And here's WHEEL OF FORTUNE on in five minutes. It's enough to make a person spit.**

And he tries to ingratiate himself with my person, bringing me casseroles and cassoulets and what have you. Like he don't got nothing better to do than to take care of poor old Ed, one foot in the grave

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city of Minnesota professor who has been suspended, said university general counsel Mark Rotenberg. Richard Pervo, 58, who teaches the New Testament and Greek, was suspended with pay Friday in connection with e-mail found on the computer. *Minneapolis Star Tribune*

Robert M. Tellez, 36, allegedly broke into the home of his ex-girlfriend early Valentine's Day morning and, armed with an ice pick, threatened and kidnapped her and her children. Later that same day, he forced the woman to marry him at an afternoon mass-wedding event that was held at the Wool Warehouse in Downtown Albuquerque. "She looked mad and I couldn't figure out why she looked so mad," said Metro Court Judge Denise Barela Shepherd, who performed the ceremony. *Albuquerque (NM) Journal*

A man charged with killing his friend with a rifle loaded with cigarette butts was released this week from the Cape May County jail in New Jersey after his bail was reduced. State Police said Anthony Saduk loaded an antique-replica Thompson Hawken muzzleloader rifle with black powder and cigarette butts during a party at his Freemont Avenue home early and fired the weapon at his roommate, who was standing about seven feet from him in Saduk's gameroom. *(New Jersey) Press Plus*

Esam Dohan, 29, is due in court next month on charges he stole more than 200 boxes of cereal from a Natick supermarket. *Boston Herald*

Regulars had found the image of Christ inside a cash register at the James Dean bar on Lovers Lane in Akron. The bar's owner told

and incontinent to boot. Bringing around his nancy-pants swishy friends for a “nice little visit” right when JUDGE JUDY’s about to start. Last night, I missed CHiPs because-a him. Wanted to show off his newest pretty little “friend.” Usta be, you could say “gay” and “queer” without peoples thinking you was talking about sodomy. And here he is, converting all the neighbor kids as well. Gonna be surrounded by them pansy ass inteer decco-rators any day now.

Oh, lookee here. Here comes Oda Mae, even she’s gone all fuzzy-wuzzy and touchy-feely. Look at her cooing at them sticky-faced, crappy-pants kids. Is she... yesirree, she’s kissing him! Don’t she know she can catch all sorts of horrible diseases from them people? See if I let her clean my kitchen, I’d likely catch that AIDS thing and die in my bed, and him bringing me chicken soup and some of that mary-wanna that he smokes all the time. Says it’s “medicinal.” Ain’t nothing more medicinal than a good couple shottsa whiskey, I says. Ain’t nobody losing brain cells and going insane drinking alky-hol, I tells you.

Ayup, everybody loves Bob. Ain’t a blessed sane person in the entire neighborhood anymore. Looky them all calling his name and latching onto him. Why, I’ve half a mind to put summa that rat poison I got t’other day, inta his candy. Then we’ll see how much they like him. Watching them rugrats (hawhaw, rat poison fer rug rats!) all over the ground, shaking and foaming like one-a them Pentycostal preachers. But then, they’d get foam all over my nice lawn. I pay that little colored boy good money to keep it nice, like a proper gentman’s lawn.

Dagnabbit! Git that flea-ridden dog offa my lawn! I’ll larn ya ta go around mutylaitin’ other people’s property! Git off I say! Git off before I... ERK!



Hey, what’s going on here! Tarnation, lookee there! All them kids down there swarming on my front porch, dagnabbit! Say... I feel sorta floaty... Musta had too much meddycation again... What’s going on now? Hey now! That’s me down there! Git up, you stupid fool! Don’t let them climb all over your porch like that! And tell ol’ pretty boy Bob to get his hands offa me! Well, now... what are they doing now? Why, they’re kicking me! And what’s Bob doing with that spangly pink dress thingie? ★

## 5. The Nemesis Waltz

BY SCOTT LESLIE

**When people ask what I’m doing back in Cedar Bend, I always tell them I missed the hash.**

Yeah, the minute I walked into ShirI’s diner, my old days of flipping burgers and slinging hash for all the locals came flooding back like a stuck up storm drain. And there was my best gal, ShirI Enough. She paced behind the counter with that same peroxide blonde beehive, those same dark baby blues, and that same twisted lip she got

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Akron bureau chief Eric Mansfield he’s getting a new change drawer because so many people have come in to see the image. The old drawer will now be put on display. *WKYC-TV, Cleveland, Ohio*

At least fifteen repeat sexual offenders in California have requested castration, convinced it’s the only way out of detention facilities in a time of tougher laws for sex criminals still deemed by judges to be a threat to society. “I should have done this a long time ago,” said Delmar Burrows, a 37-year-old, 300-pound, former short-order cook from Sacramento. “I feel at peace and as a whole person now.” *Los Angeles Times*

Milwaukee Brewers pitcher Curtis Lesknic came to see Brett Larson and his classmates at Clinton Middle School on a goodwill tour to promote the team. During that visit, Brett approached Lesknic, handed him a pen and asked him to sign the back of the Milwaukee Brewers shirt he’d worn to school that day. “I asked one of my friends to tell me what it said,” the young Larson said. Lesknic had written “KICK ME!” on the boy’s shirt and, under that, he signed his name. Before the school day was over, a half-dozen other kids followed the instructions on the shirt.



*A Jaded Press Clipping is one that reports something so utterly mindblowingly... er, Jaded, that you can’t help but send them to our special JADED PRESS CLIPPING EMAIL VAULT at [jpc@epasq.com](mailto:jpc@epasq.com) So please do. It’s makes the JPC editor happy and encourages him to turn them in on time. ★*



in a knife fight at a biker rally in Toledo.

The sign outside town might say Cedar Bend but I tell ya, right then, I was back in Heaven.

Shirl was busy waiting on customers and pouring some coffee for Norman, the local taxidermist, when she looked up at me, staring like she'd just spotted a toenail in her Frosted Flakes or something.

"Hey there, pudding," I smiled.

Let me tell you something about me and Shirl. We've been going steady for ten years now ever since we met at a Stuckey's in Pennsylvania that one time. I had a flat and Shirl had got out of prison for assaulting a kid selling girl scout cookies. I'm sure she didn't mean nothing by it, mind you. That's just her way of being friendly-like. Well, that and she didn't like vanilla creme.

Anyways, Shirl was looking to make a fresh start, and ever since she built "Just Enough" here a few blocks off the Interstate, you couldn't find a seat in the place. Every guy in town kept going on about how Shirl was good with a sandwich maker and how she could press their ham any old time. Sure every one in Cedar Bend had "had enough" at one time or another. But I was the only one she was *really* making sandwiches with. Yeah, since I met Shirl, it's been wall to wall tuna melts.

Until today, that is.

"Beat it, Mick," she said.

Okay. Let me tell you something else about me and Shirl...

I've been gone out west a spell. Eight months to be honest. You see, Shirl and I love the movies, so I guess it's no secret The Starlight Drive-In's been a mighty big part of our lives. Or it was at least til that time Jimmy Partlin burned it down in that

freak bong accident. But that's a whole other ball of wax.

Anyways, one night me and Shirl were making a blue plate special or two when I looked out between her legs and there was that silver screen calling my name. Well, actually it was Emilio shouting: "Mick! Wake up, man! It's showtime!" I don't know. Something about MIGHTY DUCKS 3 gets me every time. I just can't explain it. Shirl thought I must of had a bad Milk Dud or something. But I told her I'd send for her soon as I hit the big time. Next thing you know, I packed my things and there I was in La-La Land, making the scene with Jimmy Dean.

Three months later, I was a regular Sly and the Family Stone. I'd got myself two jam commercials and I'd even scooped a part in a made-for-cable flick called, MADE TO ORDER. Sure, it was only one line. But I figured with my experience, I was a real shoe-in for Waiter #4. All's I did was smile for the camera and said, "You're gonna love the lobster." Cut. Print. I'd like to thank the Academy.

Okay, it didn't work out. See everyone kept warning me about this casting couch thing. Personally, I didn't see what the big deal was. I love fly fishing for Chrissake! But when that director went fishing in my pants, I knew the guy had other things on his mind than landing the big one. I tell ya, I got out of there faster than a cat in a Korean kitchen.

It wasn't a total loss though. I actually ran into Emilio's brother, Joe Estevez. I caught him walking through Penney's, checking the payphones for spare change, so I went up and asked for his autograph. Sure, Joe was

no Emilio—hey, who is?—but he gave me his card anyways. Said he could use some help building his friend's patio and call him any time. Hell, he was such a nice guy I even gave him bus fare.

I might've taken Joe up on it, but it was no use. I missed that cuddly little ex-con of mine. I swear I must of called Shirl a hundred times out west. She kept slamming the phone down on me until I finally caught on. I figure those roaches at her place must be cropping up something awful.

"C'mon, pudding—how's about a little sugar for your great big Emilio?"

"Forget it, *Emilio*," she said, looking back in the kitchen. "I've found some one else to bake my potatoes..."

"Wha—? Who—? Wha—?"

"It's Ozzie, Mick."

"Ozzie?!?" I sputtered. "You mean... Ozzie Dean?"

A large rumpled head with a little paper hat dangling off the side, peeked out of the kitchen window. "Hey," it said.

I hadn't seen the kid in years, but this guy'd turned into one tall drink of water. Straight *up*, no chaser. Actually his real name was Billy Jim Bo Bob Bo Bob Bo Dean. His late mother had a stutter and when she'd had Ozzie, that's all they could get out of her, poor woman. Hell, I would've stuttered too if I saw that thing coming out of me.

But now everybody called him Ozzie. Guy that big—you call him what he wants.

"Hey," Ozzie said again, trying to emphasize his point.

"Shirl," said old Freddy from Organ Donor Village. "Get me one of those deep-fried burritos..."

"Coming up, Fred," she said, crying: "Ozzie—stuff the Pope and burn his ass!"

"Yep," said Ozzie, disappearing back into the kitchen.

“But Shirl, I came back for you, baby, I—”

“Mick, get out! I don’t need no candy-assed movie man scaring all my customers away.”

I blinked and gave my outfit the once over. Okay, the white Armani was a bit much. And maybe the hair extensions didn’t help. I pointed out my new shoes.

“But baby, these’re Guccis! They’re all the rage out there.”

“Yeah and I’ll show you some real rage if you don’t get your made-for-cable ass the hell out!”

I tried to plead my case but Shirl just went back to her rounds—pouring coffee and spit shining tables. All’s I had to see was the Ozman giving me the eye and pointing a spatula in my direction to know that it was end of story.

For now, anyways.

As I shuffled out of the place with my head lower than a snake’s sandals, I could hear Sid order his usual steak and hot chocolate combo.

“Fuck the goat and take no prisoners!” cried Shirl.

It takes a lot out of a man, getting kicked in the tamales by his best gal like that. Sure, some guys would’ve folded up like a cheap card table. Me? I wasn’t giving up so easy. No sirree bob.

Soon as I had the chance, I trashed the matinee idol outfit and headed over to Sammy’s Ammo & Pharmacy, down the street. It took forever to get out of the place, what with Sam asking how I was doing and if them gals out west all had the real McCoys or not. But I got myself all fixed up and hightailed it back to the diner.

For hours, I sat out in the bushes and waited for them to close her up. I knew it was going to be an early night, what with Shirl’s target practice Monday

nights. Sure enough, about eight o’clock, the lights went low and Shirl hit the highway. Oz’s red Bronco pulled out right after her. And I moved in for a little bit of B&E. I made for the back door and paused at Shirl’s old welcome mat.

“EAT ME,” it said. Yeah, just like old times.

I grabbed the extra key from underneath. Luckily it was still there or my big night was gonna be shorter than John Wayne Bobbitt’s prick.

Back inside that kitchen, I got to admit it felt a little funny wandering around. All the strainers, ladles, and whisks hung from the ceiling, staring back at me like they were waiting for their last meal before the execution. Don’t worry, guys—your buddy Mick’s here to save you. I took a good look around, got my bearings, and headed over to the frig.

It was a simple plan really. I figure if I mess with the food—and a few customers, natch—Shirl is gonna bite Ozzie’s head off something fierce. Next thing you know, Ozzie’ll get the boot and I’ll be back in the saddle. Okay, I know it wasn’t poetry but hell, it worked on *THE DUKES OF HAZZARD*.

I guess it was a couple of years back, Shirl was looking to try a new dessert and she hit on making chocolate-coated gingerbread men in the shape of *AMERICA’S MOST WANTED*. Man, when we were baking up those chocolate O.J.s, the kids never could get enough of ’em. Shirl always was a little bitter that she got three years in the can and all O.J. got was a new set of golf clubs. But anyways...

I broke out the gingerbread men and fired up a big pot of chocolate sauce I’d dug up. After

it got nice and toasty, I took out my package and dumped my secret weapon into the mix: eight boxes of chocolaty-good EX-LAX. Mmm-mmm. I laughed a little to myself, knowing I was about to bring new meaning to the words “open for business.”

Yeah, I was just about to pour another coat on the Osama Bin Ladens when I heard this creaking noise. I turn around and cripes, all’s I saw was one big arm coming out of the back door like the Jolly Green Giant or something. It was Ozzie! And he was none too happy about the deal. Ozzie said something. It was really low. And it was more than two syllables. But I’m sure I heard him say, “Nobody plays with my boys.”

I think I must of been eating my own liver by the time Oz got through pummelling me and changing my name to Stretch. When I came to, my feet were hanging from a meat hook, and there was Ozzie in all his Godzillaness.

But funny, the big lug wasn’t even paying attention to me. He was staring at a little white card in his hand.

“Joe...Estevez...” he muttered.

Joe’s card!

I knew I was on Death Row. But right now, I needed a call from the Governor.

“Yeah, yeah, Oz—a guy out in Hollywood. Needs help building patios and—”

“Patios?”

That’s when it all started to click. I remember Ozzie’s dad was an ace carpenter from way back, back before he got hit by that mush melon truck in ‘74. I’d seen all the lumber back of Ozzie’s truck. I knew he had to be a real handyman in waiting. Christ, the guy could’ve eaten three Bob Vilas for breakfast and still have

room for a fourth.

“Yeah, patios! You can do that stuff can’t you, Oz?”

“Me?” said Ozzie. “Work? In Hollywood?”

“You kidding, Oz? Big kid like yourself? Joe, *hell*, *Costner*, could use a guy like you!”

Ozzie’s eyes went all fuzzy-like, his big hound dog face all lit up like a Wal-Mart greeter.

“Swimming pools...”

“Movie Stars!” I cried.

So Ozzie started going on, as much as the guy could go on, about how he would kill to get into the carpenter trade. And I thought that was a primo idea, just as long as I didn’t get killed in the bargain.

As Ozzie cut me loose and let me down gently to the linoleum, I guess you could say I had one of those epiphanies they call them. All my life, I never dreamed I’d have my ass saved by Joe Estevez! You know, I’ve always been head over heels for Shirl. Always will.

But I’m telling you, if Joe was in the room right then? Man, I would’ve done him right there.

I guess you could say everything’s back in the high life here in Cedar Bend. Yesirree. I gave up the glamorous life. Ozzie’s out in L.A. laying drywall. And me and Shirl are still going heavy on the salami.

Shirl says she was just trying to get back at me after all and I can’t say as I blame her. I was all wrong not taking her out to California in the first place. Hell, even Shirl claims she’d be another Meryl Streep out there if she could only sweet talk her parole officer.

After we closed up my first night back, Shirl gave me a big kiss and flashed those big baby blues. You get lost in a pair of eyes like those and, mister, I could’ve used a life-preserver

right then.

Shirl jumped up on the counter and smiled that sweet little crooked smile of hers.

“Mick,” she said. “If you pull another stunt like that, I’ll cut your head off.”

Me? I didn’t say too much. I just took the gum out of her mouth and spread her like French bread.

“Baby,” I said with a smile, “you’re gonna love the lobster.” ★

## 6. Earl’s Breakdown

BY ANNE TATALIN

**Earl didn’t mind being ugly. Really. He didn’t.**

Whole damn family was ugly. In the genes, they said.

What Earl sure didn’t cotton to was the cruel birthmark that fate inflicted him with.

Born with it. Yep, sure was.

Now, we’re not talking about something Earl could hide with a flannel shirt or even a glove.

Smack dab on his left cheek and I don’t mean ass cheek.

It wasn’t even one of those port wine colored things like the Russian fella has on his forehead.

Earl’s was blue.

And shaped like a pig.

Yes, it was.

Old Earl was born looking just like a USDA Grade A piece of pork.

Sure, they made jokes.

Earl barely made it through school for all the taunting.

His own family made sport of pig-faced Earl. In fact, that’s what everyone called him.

Pig-faced Earl.

His own mother, though she loved him as a mother should,

never stood up for Earl. Maybe it was her shame. For her younger brother Ned, who died as a baby of influenza, bore a similiar mark.

But he died mercifully, long before her own husband could know it was her lineage that stamped the pig on Earl’s face. What she did do for Earl, however, was to set his destiny in motion.

She called Big Benny Stamper.

On the eve of his high school graduation, which Earl dreaded with every breath, mostly because the graduation gowns were the exact same color as the blue pig on his left cheek and the fact that he was graduating dead last, Big Benny Stamper came to call.

Now, despite his low grades, Earl was not dumb. He had more sense than most. What he lacked was the confidence to support his smarts. He had no idea how he would make his way in this world, looking the way he did, so he didn’t see much sense in putting forth any effort in school. He merely withstood the taunting so he could get a diploma. On this evening, he sat in his room alone, wondering what he would do now. He contemplated calling on the devil, selling his soul in exchange for having the blue pig forever banished from his soft cheek. But on that night, Earl doubted he even felt up to hearing the jokes Lucifer would make about his blue pig. So he went downstairs to see Big Benny Stamper.

Big Benny Stamper was a pig farmer. In fact, Stamper had the largest spread around and a whole lot of pigs. Though none of them were blue.

Stamper could be loud and obnoxious, but he could also be gracious. In perhaps the most compassionate gesture of his life,

he held back his jokes and got to the point.

"Seems to me, son, the Lord set you apart for a purpose. I believe he clearly marked you for this purpose. You have the mark of a pig farmer, boy. I'm just saying what seems to be plain.

"If you want to work for me, I'll expect you day after tomorrow."

Earl didn't have much to choose from.

"Yes, sir," he mumbled, never looking up from the wooden floor.

"Well, that settles that!" Earl's mother said patting him on the knee.

Big Benny Stamper didn't necessarily have a need for an extra farm hand at this point. But even when Earl was just a young pig-marked boy, Benny always told himself he would hire Earl, just 'cause it would be good PR. A pig-faced boy helping to manage his pig-based business. Thought it was good business strategy. And though he never made any Pig-faced Earl jokes, he didn't discourage his farm hands from doing so. Benny thought it built character. Earl was used to it.

Earl was indifferent when it came to pigs. He recognized he was identified as one because he bore the mark, but he felt no special love for the species. He went about his work quietly and dutifully. Until the day his life changed.

Big Benny called Earl into the unkempt room he called his office one day and let him in on his plans for expansion and marketing. "Earl," he said evenly, "I got a chance to buy a processing plant of my own. I can cut my costs by doing so but, moreover, I have the opportunity to use the equipment available to me to market my own pork products. I'd

like to do it."

"Yes, sir," Earl replied. "You didn't call me in here for my approval, sir, did you?" I told you Earl wasn't no dummy.

Big Benny looked at Earl with new found respect. "You ain't dumb, are you now?"

Benny continued, "No, no... fair enough. But, if you are willing to cash in on your affliction, it might could benefit us both. How do you feel about PIG-FACED EARL PORK SAUSAGE, PORK RINDS, and SMOKED HAM SLICES?"

Earl felt his face, even the blue part, redden. "I don't know, sir."

"Maybe 15% of the profit in exchange for the use of your likeness will help you in making your decision. I don't see as you'll ever have a better offer in your life, circumstances being as they are, Earl."

"You might be right, sir," Earl swallowed hard. "Okay."

I don't guess anyone was really prepared for the success of the products. There really wasn't anything out of the ordinary about them. They were reasonably good. They met all government requirements, but so did many other regional brands. Anyone in marketing will tell you, if you have a good hook and good packaging, that's all you need. Trendy yuppies as far away as Silicon Valley and Boston Harbor were driving in their Beemers, cell phones charging, snacking on PIG-FACED EARL PORK RINDS.

Despite his success and fifteen percent of the cream, Earl still lived at home with his folks, though their standard of living greatly improved. It was at his parent's urging that he allowed Benny to push him one step further when Benny begged him to appear in a television commercial

for the pork products. Earl lay awake every night staring at the wall dreading the evil day when he would appear in front of the bright lights and cameras, baring his pig face to the world.

☆

Big Benny Stamper accompanied Earl to the local television studios. It was more than Earl could bear. From the titters of the receptionist to the stagehands who could barely disguise their amazement and laughter saying, "I'll be damned...he really does look like that. God Bless," Earl was screaming inside. He ran to the nearest doorway he could find and slammed the door after him, crumpling like a piglet inside. Sobbing, he slumped to the floor. Earl finally had his breakdown. He heard Benny outside assuring the account executives that everything was fine. After the voices quieted down, Earl allowed himself to cry for twenty minutes more.

When his cries died down to piglet whimpers, he took his hands from his face. In the corner of the room he had chosen to barricade himself in, a young woman stood very still. She wore a smock over her clothes and clutched a small case in her hand. Truth was, Ruth (that was her name) was scared to death at the sobbing pig-faced man. But she figured that was the worst thing she could admit to herself or this poor soul.

Smoothing out her smock, she assessed the situation. Gathering her courage, she said, "I guess you're here for make-up, right?" She extended her tiny hand to Earl, helped him up to his feet and over to the make-up chair, which sat in front of a large mirror with many lights. He suddenly calmed himself in the



simple kindness of her presence.

“You can cover up the pig?” he asked hopefully.

“Lord, honey,” she laughed. “Why would I do that?”

“Because, they laugh.”

“Because they don’t know any better,” she admonished. “Let me show you something.”

She lifted up her leg onto the make-up table to reveal a small pig tattoo on her tiny ankle. It was blue. “And I paid for that!” she giggled.

“Why?” Earl asked.

She placed one hand square on his left cheek, tenderly stroking the tear streaked blue pig on Earl’s face. “Because, I like pigs.”

Earl left the make-up room, his faced dried and powdered with stage make-up, his blue pig still visible. Big Benny Stamper stood waiting outside and looked at him quizzically.

“You okay, boy? You aren’t gonna let me down, are you?”

Earl looked Benny square in the eye for the first time. “Me? Never have before, have I? Oh, and before we do this, about that fifteen percent? Let’s shake on twenty-five before we do this, okay?”

“What?” Benny looked at the door of the make-up room as if to say, “Lord, what happened to you in there?” but instead he wiped his sweaty palm on his pants and said, “Why not. Let’s shake.”

Earl quickly withdrew his hand and stuck it in his pants pocket just to make sure Ruth’s phone number was still there.

Oh yeah, yeah. Ruth married Earl, then Big Benny Stamper died and left everything to Earl. Ruth and Earl had piglets and none of them bore the mark of the blue pig. The world became Earl’s pig sty.

The moral of this story? Well, I suppose you could draw a lot from this tale of Pig-faced

Earl. But perhaps none so poignant as this: if you’re marked as a pig, learn to love the mud. ★

## 7. Smaller than Life

**Being 4’ 6” sucked.** Tochi Yakamuchi wasn’t even a giant among Asians, but was one of the ten most intelligent people on the planet. And after today, he’d be the tallest man on Earth. When he flipped the switch on his latest invention, the world would bow to Tochi’s genius.

Just a few adjustments and the containment booth would be ready. He’d step inside the chamber—press a few buttons, turn a few knobs, flip a few switches—and the magic would happen.

☆

Twenty minutes later, the big red button sat impatiently in his line of vision, anticipating his small, shaking finger. Would it work or would he become a 4’ 6” steak, well done? He hoped the calculations were correct.

The button was pressed. Kaleidoscopic lights swirled and danced around him, teased him, calling him “twerp” and “short stuff.” He held steady, enduring the cruel voices by closing his eyes as tight as he could. They soon faded until the only thing Tochi heard was the whirring of the machine.

Finally, silence. Tochi  
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opened the door to the chamber. Everything looked the same as it did when he’d entered. He measured himself. Still 4’ 6”. Damn.

Frustrated with his failure, he decided to call it a night.

☆

Before long, Tochi began noticing things weren’t exactly the way they used to be. His machine *had* done something. Objects hadn’t changed, but the people around him had. The waitress at the diner, the postman, the other scientists at the firm, had apparently shrunk.

It was obvious once he saw it. Everyone was now 4’ 6” or less. Suddenly, Tochi was one of the tallest men on Earth.

☆

Dave had no idea why he could no longer reach the top shelf. Worst of all, no one could.

However, being one of the ten most intelligent people on the planet, he had an idea. ★

## 8. The King of Reseda

**The thin patches on either side of his head were all that remained of Barry’s hairline.** He was about fifty pounds too heavy but, despite a variety of physical setbacks, he was well-liked. So it was no surprise when he unveiled his campaign to be elected King.

Reseda, California, has all the expected branches of govern-

ment one would expect of any town in America. They have a mayor, a treasurer, a building inspector. They have no king. So, Barry thought, there's an opening.

His first obstacle was getting the proper permits. The clerk had all the proper applications for inclusion of the ballot for every public office. There was no application to campaign for King.

"I'll tell you what," he told the clerk. "Just give me the forms for MAYOR and I'll cross out the word MAYOR and write KING." Being time to leave for the evening and not wanting to miss her carpool, she agreed.

Once May rolled around, it was discovered that Barry was running unopposed. There was a big brouhaha made in the local press but, somehow, the applications had all been blindly approved.

☆

There was a campaign in the days before the election to get people to write-in Elvis for King. Although the former singer garnered an impressive seven percent, Barry won by a landslide.

He appeared at his acceptance speech wearing a crown of his own making—with beer nuts for jewels—and a t-shirt that read "The King of Receda."

Barry was never that good a speller. ★

## 9. Horrible Guy

Nunzio explained the situation. "Doctor, I smell bad," he said. "But I can't seem to determine the source of the smell."

Doctor Seaton pulled a surgical mask over his nose and mouth, less for reasons of sterility than to cover a small clothespin pinching his nostrils closed. "Let's take us a look-see."

He lifted the gown that barely covered Nunzio's nether regions. "Hmmm... interesting..."

"What?" asked Nunzio.

"I believe I've discovered the source of your problem. It would appear you've passed your expiration date. You went bad three years ago." ★

## 10. Parade of the Damned

BY HOLLY ADAMS

"The Damned what?" Earl said irritably, wiping the back of his neck with his handkerchief. "Seems to me they should tell us what we're watching if they're going to drag us all out in this heat!"

"Now, Earl..." Daisy murmured, fanning herself with the mail she had just picked up at the Post Office. It was too hot to do anything more strenuous. The little daisy she had tucked, all fresh and crisp, into her hat not more than an hour ago was drooping in the humidity.

The big banner was hung across Main Street, right between the old bank building (nobody knew which bank, exactly, but it had been a bank once, sure as shooting; now it was a Walker Scott's, but the walls were still about three feet thick where the vault used to be) and the Post Office across the way. "Parade of the Damned" it said, in big red

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letters. The last word was sort of crowded towards the right end, like the banner-maker had run out of space, or perhaps it had once said something else after it. The Damned Yankees? The Damned Kids These Days? Who knew.

Everybody in town was lined up on the curb, waiting to see what was going to happen. Down the block by the beauty parlor, a fire hydrant had been opened up and children were running through the water. They were all screaming loudly and Earl thought to himself that he wouldn't mind taking a turn through the spray. But Daisy was sitting next to him like a complacent slug and he knew she would never allow such frivolity.

Earl sighed.

There was a line nearly out the door to the ice cream parlor, and there was an extra crowd of people around the door, waiting for a draft of air-conditioned air to flow out and bath them in its cooling caress. Every time the door opened, people would push and shove to be in the front but, by the time anyone got to the front, the door would be closed.

Another hour crept by in this way and people were restless. But still they stood by the curb, waiting for the parade of Damned Somethings (Fools? Poor Excuses?) to start.

Right around two o'clock, when everybody was thinking a tall, cool glass of lemonade might be nice and the ladies were thinking longingly of the Noxzema they had stored in the refrigerator, a long black car pulled up under the sign. A tall, ruddy-faced gentleman in a crisp white suit leapt from the car and rapped the ground with a peculiarly shaped walking stick. It was long and black, with a silver knob at the top shaped like a sort

of trident. It actually put Earl in mind of a cattle prod in a way.

The tall gentleman leaned against the car and surveyed the crowd like a hungry man surveys a heaping table of casseroles at a church potluck. He licked his lips, flicking his pink tongue across them moistly. The crowd grew still and quiet, except for the shrieking of the children down the block. The man looked cool and crisp as cucumber salad, his suit unwrinkled and his brow dry. Another gentleman, this one short and fat in a black suit, handed the tall man a megaphone and stepped to the side with an enormous clipboard.

Earl patted the back of his neck again and thought what an interesting break this was from the daily toil of plowing his field. No matter how many times he plowed, the gophers always seemed to come back and the weeds sprang up again like they had never been down in the first place. He'd never seen such a suit before in his life. He watched a bead of sweat run down his wife's cheek and licked his gummy lips. Sure could go for a tall, cool glass of fresh lemonade.

The tall man got on the bullhorn and, after the usual "testing" hemming and hawing, spoke to the crowd. The bullhorn made his voice sound sort of buzzy, like a million flies. "All right now, I want everybody to line up here, starting with you folks, the ones who hide Playboy in the bathroom." A group of men started guiltily and trudged meekly to the front of the line. The short, fat man made a few ticks on his clipboard.

"Alright, next let's have the porkers." Here the man scanned the crowd and pointed out several plump ladies and the grossly overweight Scranton Twins, Ed and Fred. "You, step right in be-

hind these lusty gents." Another row was filled in. The fat man made some more ticks.

The crowd was starting to buzz now. "I have a pretty big group of misers here, especially you Mr. Brand." Mr. Brand, who was notoriously parsimonious and rarely, if ever, opened his vast purse, patted his pocket and started to shake his head. "Over here, please, right behind the fatties. Thank you." Earl felt a deep satisfaction in this. Never had liked that old skinflint.

"Will Misterns Hodges, Barnes, Caplan, and Nixon please step up? Also, Mrs. Bridges, since I heard about that little blowup you had with your daughter last week. That's right, over here," the tall man nodded approvingly. "Bet the wives will be glad you aren't there to scream at them, eh ladies?" Mrs. Hodges, Barnes, and Caplan did not look amused, although Mrs. Nixon did look a trifle relieved. Five ticks went on the clipboard.

"I don't think we have any heretics here, do we Beelzy old boy?" the tall man turned to his assistant, who ran a finger over his list and cleared his throat. "Well, my Lord, there *is* the matter of Mr. Jones." Beelzy had a voice like a million flies as well, even though he wasn't using the megaphone. The tall man raised a quizzical eyebrow. "Football on Sunday? You were thinking of letting that slide?"

"Oh yes, quite right." The tall man turned to Mr. Jones with a grin. "I can forgive a man for wanting to watch football on Sunday, I'm a big Saints fan myself. Love it when they get trounced. Okay. Violence, no. Got mostly small time stuff here. What?" The tall man leaned in towards his assistant, who murmured in his

ear. "Oh yes, dear Daisy." Daisy looked up with a start and gasped. Earl looked at his wife sidewise and edged away from her slightly. "Little matter of that hound dog you kicked. And I happen to like hounds. So get in line." Daisy whimpered and tried to catch Earl's eye but he looked away. Tick.

"Okey dokey," said the tall man. "Let's bring in the next group. I see this is a small one. You, Mabel, you get on up there, and Frank, too. You guys cheated the Smiths on that land deal last year, you fraudulent little bastards." Tick, tick. Mr. Smith, in the front row, looked a bit disgruntled and Mrs. Smith glared at Mabel accusingly.

"Well, that's about it. Let's get moving. The rest of you may sit and watch, I'll catch you next time. Meanwhile, you should feel it start to cool down now that these folks are out of your hair." The tall man looked at the pitifully small group left huddled together on the sidewalk and glared meaningfully at each one of them in turn. Earl resolved to stop taking that shot of whiskey every night, just in case.

The parade moved slowly down the street, the black car running in front. The townspeople watched until they disappeared over the next rise, the individual figures blurring slowly into one teeming mass.

"Seems to be getting cooler," Earl remarked to no one in particular. "I think I'll go home and make some soup." ★

# 11. Send In The Clowns

**“We got your partner, McCarroll. He’s pointin’ his greasy finger at you as the brains of the operation.”**

The interrogation room smelled of cigarette smoke and sweat. McCarroll was cool, smooth, immune to both. “You got nothin’ on me. You’re probably more crooked than me, you pigs.”

The inquisitors had tried every tactic in the Academy handbook to eke a confession from the suspect. Except one. “Bring in the specialists,” said Detective Murphy.

“Specialists?” mumbled McCarroll.

☆

Fifteen minutes later, a group of fifteen men filed into the interrogation room, their attire and hairstyles screaming military. They formed a semicircle in front of the table at which McCarroll was seated and the leader, front and center, suddenly leaned in close to him. Slamming his fists hard on the cheap particle board surface, he screamed “You’d better talk, man!”

“I have a dog-eared copy of *THE BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY* in my back pocket and I’m not afraid to read it to you!”

McCarroll looked confused. “What? Uh, yeah. Whatever.”

Suddenly, the other fourteen specialists snapped to attention and began circling the table. As each passed behind McCarroll’s chair, he would bend down and slide a formidable and dexterous tongue into McCarroll’s ear.

By the ninth tongue, McCarroll, in tears, could stand

it no more. “Okay! I did it! I was the brains behind the heist! Just get these freaks away from me!”

Detective Murphy’s voice came in over the intercom. “Thanks, guys. Great job. Record time, too. A minute, twenty.”

With that, the fifteen specialists simultaneously licked their eyebrows, snapped their heels, turned, and filed out of the room. ★

# 12. A Perfect Day

BY JIM MENTINK

**At exactly 8:45am on a certain Friday, Sid Higgins awoke to the sound of a barking dog. The dog belonged to his neighbor, Sandy Beach—a former small-time game show hostess. The pekingese, named Jumpy Joe, was chained outside Sid’s window. Sid, who had no screens and even less sense, threw his sneaker out the open window.**

This caused Jumpy Joe to, well, jump which, in turn, irritated Ms. Beach who was watering her rose garden. Jumpy Joe’s tether struck her heel causing her to stumble backwards which, in turn, resulted in the water from her hose arcing into the air and falling on a passing bicyclist, a twelve-year-old named Mike. Mike, despite the cloudless sky, feared it was raining and began to pedal faster in order to get to

**sixteen**

his home, which was dry.

At that moment, Mr. Gibson, who had no rear view mirror in his car, backed from his driveway without looking, striking Mike. Mike fell from his bike and rolled into the lane of oncoming traffic, where a bus was approaching. The bus skidded to a stop mere inches from Mike, who was mangled. Mr. Gibson, sensing he had hit something and seeing the stopped bus, exited his car in a panic and ran into the house, where he planned to call his insurance company.

As he reached his phone, he realized he had forgotten the number and bent to the floor to pick up the yellow pages. This action caused his back to pull and he fell to the floor in pain, muttering curses in Tagalog.

He reached from the floor to the phone, dialing without seeing the numbers. The number he reached belonged to Cathy Birchtree. Cathy, who was expecting a call from her runaway son, ran quickly to the phone, forgetting she had broke her toe at 7pm the previous night. Like Mr. Gibson, she fell in pain, grabbing the kitchen tablecloth as she did. Upon this reaction, a twenty-five pound brass centerpiece fell on her head, drawing blood. Cathy also cursed, although not in Tagalog, for, while she had been under the impression that a massive strike to the head resulted in unconsciousness, she found it only hurt really, really, bad.

This caused her husband to come running toward the kitchen and, as he did, he saw his runaway son on the TV news being led away by police for cocaine trafficking. This made him kick the TV which, upon breaking, zapped the circuitry in their two-flat, which put the power out in the upstairs unit. Living in that unit was a twenty-five-year-old



man who was too lazy to shut off his beeping alarm. When the power was cut, this young man smiled, rolled over and thanked God for a perfect day. ★

## 13. Just Another Girl

Dear Jane,

I'm writing this letter to tell you what I'm unable to tell you in person, to you face, your beautiful, cherubic face. Whatever happens to me, know that I will love you always. War is hell and these past years have been hell on me.

I suppose I should get right to the point.

I've met another woman. I know we said we were going to stay exclusive and I fully intended to be faithful. But, as I said, war is hell. Her name is Elisabeth and she works closely with me in my unit. We'd known each other for over a year and managed to stay friends, but after her significant other back home decided their relationship was over, she ran to my arms for comfort and, in my weakened state, I gave in to her charm, her beauty, her soft, supple...

I'm sorry. When I start thinking about her I melt like butter. Please understand this isn't easy on me either.

I'll never forget the great times we had together and hope that we can still be friends.

Love, Jennifer ★

## 14. Vision

"You see that investment banker over there?"

"Yeah. So?"

"You see that banana peel?"

As if the banker was magnetized to banana peels, his left foot came down full force upon the yellow skin sending him four feet into the air and finally settling upon his ass. Jason had a gift.

I bit into a Twinkie I'd packed into my lunch bag before work. Not ready to admit his ability was genuine, I voiced my skepticism. "Coincidence. Someone would've stepped on it eventually."

"But I knew he'd be the one."

"I dunno. Seems like a pretty flimsy claim."

"Follow me."

We walked to a nearby park where a group of workers were building a small playground. Two of the men were retrieving long wood planks for a see-saw.

"Remember that old Three Stooges routine with the ladders?"

"Yeah, I love that gag. Shemp's always getting whacked with the—"

"Watch," he interrupted.

Within a minute, a third guy was calling to the guys with the planks who consequently swung around clubbing the supervisor squarely in the back of the head. While blood shot from the back of the man's head, Jason turned to me and asked if I was satisfied.

"It could still be coincidental."

"Bullshit! Admit it! I can see funny things happen to serious people!"

Whatever doubts I'd had would vanish, however, as he pointed at a group of librarians and a coconut cream pie vendor about to cross paths. ★

## 15. X-Mas In Clownhenge

"License and registration, please."

"I'm sorry, officer. I can't seem to reach my glove compartment. Or my wallet."

"Right. I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to step out of the vehicle, sir."

Forty-five minutes later, the driver handed the officer both documents. "How fast were you going, sir?"

*"Who knew?" says the late Joey Bishop. "This Pope guy goes a little wacky and suddenly I'm Joey Archbishop!"*

Coming in April, ePASQUINADE, the magazine that tried to sell Nikes to the Jehovah's, releases its wacky, unrepentent Religion issue. Amen.

Coming In April



“Thirty-five? Maybe forty?”

“One hundred eighty-two on my radar, sir.”

“I suppose my speedometer might have been somewhat obscured.”

“You know, I should arrest all of you.”

“But, sir, it’s Christmas.”

“I’ll let you off with a warning this time on account that I can’t fit all thirty-eight of you clowns in the cruiser.” ★

## Bonus Track: ePasquinade Remembers Dale Earnhardt, Sr

*In February, the world lost a great man in Dale Earnhardt, Sr., brutally murdered by a wall while driving his GM-sponsored car in the Daytona 500. The wall was not charged in Earnhardt’s death.*

*Despite being in the midst of*

*a special issue, the writers of ePasquinade recall their memories of the slain race car driver.*

**Holly Adams, writer, editor, and paranoid schitzophrenic:**

“One of my friends was watching the race when it happened. He’s not such a big Dale Earnhardt fan. And so when the crash occurred, he said ‘Good, take him out of the race for awhile.’ Now, I have to go tell him he killed Dale Earnhardt. I might even call the police.”

**Kelsey Grammar, actor, director, did I say actor?:**

“One day my significant other and I were picking out a new bed for our apartment. The salesman asked if we’d considered a bed in the shape of a race car. I asked if one of these race-car-shaped beds came in a king size. That salesman was Dale Earnhardt, Sr.”

**Scott Leslie, writer, editor, garden gnome enthusiast:**

“I’m still blown away by the whole thing. I mean, first Amelia, now Dale. Geez, that family’s had more bad luck than all the

Kennedys put together. Why can’t God deep six someone who really deserves it for a change—like the Osmonds?”

**Ed Lynn, publisher, editor,**

**wombat breeder:** “I remember once when Dale and I were sitting on the sofa in the BIG BROTHER house. Dale told me how the Daytona 500 was going to be his last. ‘Wouldn’t it be ironic,’ he said, ‘if I flashed out in the final lap while tryin’ to take third?’ I said he shouldn’t say things like that, then we embraced. It was a very ‘Oprah’ moment.”

**Midnight Tree Bandit, occasional JPC compiler and late night fridge-raider:**

“I remember meeting Dale in PEP BOYS one time. I was getting a new alternator for my car, the Antichrist, and there he was, checking out the license plate holders, trying to decide which colored lights he’d like. I suggested the chartreuse. He said no, he preferred red and white on a black rim, but they didn’t seem to have it, so chartreuse on a silver rim is as good as any.” ★

# Contributions

**Jim Mentink** will now cost you 34 cents.

**anne tatalin** is a mother of three, collector of gargoyles, former radio personality, licensed manicurist and known sociopath. From her home in West Virginia she writes a special brand of hu-

mor not yet appreciated by the masses. She publishes a weekly Internet e-zine at <http://home.earthlink.net/~wvgargoyle/garglair.htm>.

**David Walter** lives with his wife and their two children in suburban New York. When not writ-

ing humorous pieces and doing Dad stuff, Dave works for a major pest control company as a field technician. But he prefers to think of himself as a “hired killer.” His website, “Ravings From Dave”, can be found at <http://www.hometown.aol.com/davew0071/myhomepage/writing.html>. ★