

[Policy]

MAKING THE BIG HOUSE A HOME

From a list of regulations distributed, in English, to foreign prisoners confined in Tokyo's Fuchu Prison.

While walking, avoid folding your arms or hands or putting your hands in your pockets. Avoid waving your shoulders intentionally or dragging your shoes while walking.

You should never strip without permission. Do not hang a towel around your neck.

Conversation in the toilet is prohibited.

Do not sniff or drink paint thinner.

You are not allowed to bother the guards when they are escorting you.

You must not say anything abusive, slanderous, or insulting to others.

You are not allowed to do any kind of sexual play with your inmates. You should not expose your sex organs.

You are not allowed to creep into your fellow inmate's bed.

You are not allowed to create obscene writing or drawings, or possess any such thing.

You are not allowed to talk loudly, make a big noise, or sing a song at the places where conversation is prohibited.

Tattooing or changing your hairstyle or eyebrows in peculiar forms is forbidden.

Without permission, you are not allowed to wash your clothes or body.

Running away from prison or any attempt of such is strictly forbidden.

[Comments]

THE ROAD TO MEAT

From Letters to Wendy's, by Joe Wenderoth, published by Verse Press. The novel consists of prose poems written over the course of a year on Wendy's comment cards.

JULY 6

I was so high on Sudafed and whiskey today that I couldn't eat. I got a Coke—actually five Cokes, as I could refill for free. It's times like this—dehydrated, exhausted, unable to imagine home—that your plastic seats, your quiet understandable room, set beside but not quite overlooking the source of real value, offer me a

tragedy small enough to want to endure.

JULY 12

I often think about overeating. It's strange that I never have. Each bite of my mustard-only double-cheeseburger is so good that I reel in the aftermath. The meaty goodness obliterates as much as it secures. I'm a fleshy bell, incapable of vibrating any more vigorously. If I rang out with any more force I don't know that I would remain a bell—and I don't know that the air could stand me.

AUGUST 22

There used to be a little Ma-and-Pa restaurant across the road, but it couldn't keep up. Everyone over there acted all familiar and cozy, like they knew exactly where they were. Like they were natives. Natives!! *Execute the natives*, insofar as they claim to be! Build Wendy's everywhere and all alike—and do not fear: you cannot, you CAN NOT ever step into the same Wendy's twice.

AUGUST 25

I see various very strange people in Wendy's—the strangest of all being, clearly, the *serious Christians*. Usually strangeness is a pleasure to behold, but in this case I confess that I feel only a kind of empty horror. People *eating* toward eternity! People *looking nice* toward eternity! It is terrible to be real, I know, but it is more terrible to be *long*.

SEPTEMBER 20

Today I had a Biggie. Usually I just have a small, and refill. Why pay more? But today I needed a Biggie inside me. Some days, I guess, are like that. Only a Biggie will do. You wake up and you know: today I will get a Biggie and I will put it inside me and I will feel better. One time I saw a guy with three Biggies at once. One wonders not about him but about what it is that holds us back.

NOVEMBER 14

Today the restaurant was filled with warmth,

a spirit of caring. The food was just right and the service was prompt. For the first time this season, snow began to fall. Parents laughed with their children. Handsome employees made witty—but not inconsiderate—remarks. Retired couples were given Extra Value coupons. I felt like getting fucked up and watching TV forever.

NOVEMBER 15

A beautiful woman with a Biggie. Nothing

[Pitch]

LOSE IT ALL

From a brochure promoting the Virginia-based Fitness Gaming Corporation's "Pedal 'N Play" and "The Money Mill," devices that combine a bicycle and a treadmill, respectively, with a slot machine; both stop working if the slot machine is idle for more than twenty seconds.

Introducing a twenty-first-century explosion! Fitness Gaming Corporation has merged two very exciting industries, fitness and gaming. This revolutionary concept is taking these industries by storm. You can experience gambling entertainment while receiving a heart-healthy workout. What could be more beneficial to your mind and body—not to mention the opportunity for endless financial rewards.

The fitness craze of today will increase as future generations become more and more devoted to being healthy. Years ago smoke-filled casinos and alcoholic beverages were a big hit; they still are today. However, there is a new generation of health-conscious adults who enjoy gaming but do not want to be subjected to a smoke-filled casino. Promoting health and fitness on the casino floor will capture a new audience of gamblers.

Whether aboard a luxury cruise liner or in a hotel/casino, your health spa is another place to offer the "Pedal 'N Play" cycle and "The Money Mill." The spa exercise floor offers little or no source of revenue. Just think of all the possibilities this innovative concept will do to benefit your customers, your revenue, and your reputation.

Everyone wants to be a winner, and Fitness Gaming Corporation has made that possible. Even if you lose at gaming you win at having a "healthful workout." Imagine that!

else—just a Biggie. She sat alone; she seemed like she was waiting for someone. What lucky soul could make a beautiful woman with a Biggie wait? Who has that kind of power? What person would a beautiful woman with a Biggie find attractive? Only one answer made sense to me: *another beautiful woman with a Biggie.*

NOVEMBER 16

It's good, this not knowing anyone's name. The employees have nametags, but no one believes them. Their anonymity is far too obvious. How monstrous to introduce oneself to one's register person! How useless, how wearying, that information is! Only the shouted names of children make sense here, denoting not a person but a drifting off, a subversive fascination.

NOVEMBER 25

The idiotic notion that one should love the other customers. "Love" here really only means: *agree, for the time being, not to attack.* People pretend, though, that each customer is an irreplaceable piece of some priceless puzzle—like the death of each customer is significant for every other customer. It's just not true; one cannot love what one does not know, and—fortunately—one knows very little.

DECEMBER 3

Today I had \$15 worth of coffees. I got them one at a time, and dined in. The first five were leisurely, but then the leisure disintegrated. I went through the last five in about five minutes. After a while the register girl looked at her manager as if to say: "Is there something we should do?" The manager said nothing. I said nothing. We understood one another perfectly.

DECEMBER 8

To stroke another customer's head. Run my fingers through his hair and whisper to him: "You're going to be *all right* . . ." I would be called *responsible* for doing all of this if he were bleeding to death on the floor, but I would be called *inappropriate* if I did it when he was in good health. I would be, like all trustworthy prophets, called a nuisance and promptly arrested.

JANUARY 30

If I were royalty I would want a Biggie and a hundred plain burgers. I would throw away the buns and lay the burgers side by side on the sidewalk so as to form a bed. I would take off all my clothes and lie down in the bed with my Biggie. As people passed by, I would say, "Behold the meaty bed of royalty! Behold the final Biggie!" And I would relax there until I was arrested.

JANUARY 31

The urge to belong. I'm so jealous when the

employees speak to one another in that *knowing* way. I always look away as if I didn't care, as if their easy affection with one another was the last thing on my mind. But why do I yearn so persistently to be included—what would *being included* mean? An implicit motherland? A small drink of blood for my hungry shade?

FEBRUARY 10

One watches the others order. An aesthetic develops. It's not the worst thing that could happen. Yes, a weariness lurks, often, in the obvious next step—the dream of a school. The only thing worse than endeavoring to create a school is endeavoring to maintain a school. Which is why I like, above all, those customers who, in the middle of their order and quite without warning, change their minds.

MAY 20

I'd like to have my muscles removed. Resume the inanimate. Wendy's allows me to extract myself from the retarded narcissism of animal thrivings. I sit still in a warm booth and get thought. All movement wants, in the end, is stillness; the animate is just the failure of movement to get what it wants—one sleeping body. The road to heaven is paved with meat; the road to meat is not paved at all.

[Orders]

TAKEOUT, DELIVERED

From transcripts of two tape-recorded conversations between undercover investigators from the Office of Special Investigations at the U.S. General Accounting Office and two gun dealers in Nebraska and Oregon, respectively. The calls were part of an investigation by the House Committee on Government Reform into the availability of long-range .50-caliber sniper rifles and armor-piercing ammunition. With an effective range of four miles and the ability to pierce several inches of steel, .50-caliber rifles are among the most powerful and destructive firearms legally available in the United States. The rifles were widely used by U.S. infantrymen in the Gulf War to penetrate armored personnel carriers and concrete bunkers. Convicted felons and children under eighteen are not allowed to buy the ammunition or new rifles, though secondhand sales of the rifles are not regulated.

AGENT: Yes, I'm looking to see if you carry .50-caliber BMG armor-piercing incendiary.

DEALER: A guy just bought the last thousand rounds about twenty minutes ago. I will have more back in here Monday or Tuesday.

AGENT: Okay. How much is it a round?

DEALER: Two hundred and forty dollars a hundred.

AGENT: This ammo will go through, say, metal, won't it?

DEALER: Uh, yeah, it'll go through metal.

AGENT: Okay. Do you think it would go through, like, an armored limousine?

DEALER: Well, I think it would. *[Laughing]*

AGENT: How 'bout bulletproof glass?

DEALER: Oh, yeah, it'll go through that.

AGENT: Even if it's ballistic glass, it'll still go through?

DEALER: Right.

AGENT: With the first round, probably?

DEALER: Right.

AGENT: Okay. Now, I live on the East Coast—can you send it to me?

DEALER: Uh, whereabouts do you live?

AGENT: Uh, I live in Virginia, but I'd like it shipped to D.C.

DEALER: Okay.

AGENT: How can I go about doing that?

DEALER: I'll put my assistant on, and she can give you all the information.

AGENT: Okay, but I've got a couple of technical questions first. This ammunition, does it clog up the barrel of the weapon?

DEALER: Oh, no—it's got the soft jacket on the outside. We also have a sniper round we do for the government. What kind of gun are you shooting?

AGENT: A Barrett Model 82.

DEALER: We've got a round we've developed for the Barrett, a solid-brass bullet with a poly coating on it—that's our sniper round.

AGENT: And that's what you've sold the government?

DEALER: Yes.

AGENT: Now, that sniper round, does that give you higher velocity, greater distance, or what?

DEALER: It gives you the best accuracy.

AGENT: So if I wanted to use this against a person, let's say, the sniper round would be better?

DEALER: Right, right, because it makes the rifle real accurate.

AGENT: If I got the sniper round instead of the armor-piercing incendiary, though, would it still go through ballistic glass?

DEALER: Oh, I don't know—I don't think we've tested on ballistic glass. It'll go through three-inch aircraft window.

AGENT: But, say, an armored limousine?

DEALER: Uh, we've never tested it on that.

AGENT: All right. What's the price for these sniper rounds?

DEALER: Four dollars a round by the hundred, or fifty a round by the ten-round.

AGENT: So they're more than the API?

DEALER: Oh yeah.

AGENT: Well, I think I'm better off with API. I'm going to be using this against, um, you know, something with an armored limousine and something with ballistic glass, and I just want to make sure I'm going to be able to penetrate. So put me on with your assistant there, and maybe I can figure out how I can get this shipped to me.

DEALER: Okay, hold on.

ASSISTANT: Okay. What we'll need is a copy of your driver's license to prove that we're shipping to someone over the age of twenty-one.

AGENT: Okay.

ASSISTANT: And a statement that you are over the age of twenty-one and there are no federal, state, or local laws that prohibit you from receiving the ammunition. Once we have that on file, you'd never have to do it again—that's just, you know, for the first time.

AGENT: Okay. So I just have to write a statement out and sign it, saying that I'm over twenty-one years of age and there's no federal, state, or local laws prohibiting me from—

ASSISTANT: Receiving the information.

AGENT: Ammunition, you mean.

ASSISTANT: And, uh, this can be faxed to us. Once we have it on file, we can send some stuff to you.

AGENT: Okay.

ASSISTANT: Can I get your name?

AGENT: My first name is Roger.

ASSISTANT: Okay.

AGENT: Well, actually, that's just what they call me. My real name is Julian.

ASSISTANT: Okay.

AGENT: You can see why I want to be called Roger!

ASSISTANT: There you go. [Laughter] Okay.

DEALER: Can I help you?

AGENT: Yes, I'm interested in ordering some .50-caliber BMG ammo. I was wondering if you have any in stock.

DEALER: No, it's all sold. I'm taking orders for a month from now.

AGENT: I may be interested in some API.

DEALER: Okay.

AGENT: Now, do you know a lot about these rounds?

DEALER: Well, um, some.

AGENT: Do you think they'll go through bullet-proof glass?

DEALER: Well, they're loaded with the bullet weight the military uses now—660 or something.

AGENT: Uh-huh.

DEALER: In the old days they used 700 grains or something. But nowadays they use 660, so

they're getting a little more velocity out of it. And I just can't see glass standing up to that.

AGENT: How about an armored limousine?

DEALER: You're using that to test it?

AGENT: Well, you say testing— Yeah, I'll be testing against armored limousines. But it's gotta work.

DEALER: Right.

AGENT: You know, I don't want to have the chance of it not working.

DEALER: Well, there's no way that I can guarantee it. I'm not familiar with the glass they're using nowadays.

AGENT: But you've never had any complaints from your customers about these being misfires or anything? These rounds are pretty good?

DEALER: They'll bore through a fair amount of steel.

AGENT: Okay.

DEALER: I don't know how strong the glass is, but the ammo will go through a fair amount of steel. [Laughing] It'll go through the whole car.

AGENT: Okay. Would it go through a lightly armored tank, do you think?

DEALER: It won't go through any modern tank, because we have too much armor on them now.

AGENT: Uh-huh.

DEALER: But it would probably go through two and a half or three inches of mild steel.

AGENT: Oh. An armored limousine definitely doesn't have that much on it.

DEALER: That's what I'm saying. I think a .50 would go all the way through it.

AGENT: Okay. And then, if I theoretically wanted to use these rounds to take down an aircraft—say, a helicopter, or something like that—I should be able to do that, shouldn't I?

DEALER: Yeah, they're not armored. It'll go through any light stuff like that.

AGENT: Good. You know, I'm very happy to see that we'll be able to do business. Here on the East Coast, when you go to buy ammunition, they ask a lot of questions.

DEALER: Oh.

AGENT: And I don't like people asking me questions about why I want this ammunition.

DEALER: Well, see, out here they use it for hunting.

AGENT: Uh-huh. Well, you could say I'm going to be using this for hunting also. But just hunting of a different kind.

DEALER: [Laughing] As long as it's nothing illegal.

AGENT: Well, I wouldn't consider it illegal.

DEALER: All right.

[Exegesis]

MONDAY NIGHT FOOTNOTES

From "Dennis Miller Demystified," a service offered by Shadowpack, a wireless-technology company that provides real-time translations of Dennis Miller's Monday Night Football commentary to its clients' pagers and other wireless devices.

Jaguars v. Titans, 4th quarter

DENNIS SAID: "The kid's committing seppuku."

DEMYSTIFIED: Seppuku is ritual suicide by disembowelment practiced by the Japanese samurai or formerly decreed by a court in lieu of the death penalty.

Jaguars v. Colts, 2nd quarter

DENNIS SAID: "I fell into some cosmic wormhole last night. I was watching Mary Lou Retton live."

DEMYSTIFIED: A cosmic wormhole is a theoretical space entity proposed by noted scientist Carl Sagan in his only work of fiction, *Contact*. Ostensibly, a wormhole could be used to travel back in time to see 1984 Olympic gold medalist Mary Lou Retton perform.

Jaguars v. Colts, 3rd quarter

DENNIS SAID: "He looked like George Chakiris in summer stock."

DEMYSTIFIED: George Chakiris was a bearded singer/actor famous for his Oscar-winning role in *West Side Story*.

Jaguars v. Titans, 3rd quarter

DENNIS SAID: "Cool graphic, guys. Who do we got there in the animation, Ralph Bakshi?"

DEMYSTIFIED: Ralph Bakshi was a cult-hero animator who in the 1970s was cheered and jeered as the "X-rated Disney" for his wildly subversive films *Fritz the Cat* and *Heavy Traffic*. Since burnout pushed him to close his

Hollywood studio more than a decade ago, the Brooklyn native has only occasionally returned to the medium, most recently to direct the coolly received 1992 feature film *Cool World*.

Jaguars v. Colts, 1st quarter

DENNIS SAID: "The triplets were all working together. You don't get to be that great without putting in a lot of BTUs."

DEMYSTIFIED: Miller refers to the Colts' triumvirate of fine young skill players (Edgerrin James, Peyton Manning, and Marvin Harrison) and British thermal units, a way to measure heat.

Bucaneers v. Vikings, 3rd quarter

DENNIS SAID: "And somewhere on Long Island 'Le Grand Ahi' churgles in his Barcalounger."

DEMYSTIFIED: Referring to retired coach Bill Parcells, a.k.a. "The Big Tuna," Miller mixes Japanese and French.

Seahawks v. Chiefs, 1st quarter

DENNIS SAID: "... air-dropped in like Red Adair."

DEMYSTIFIED: Miller refers to legendary fireman Paul N. "Red" Adair, who gained international celebrity for putting out the oil fires of Kuwait after the Gulf War. Referred to as "the best in the business" in oil-wildfire control.

Bucaneers v. Vikings, 4th quarter

DENNIS SAID: "I think Warren is telling him that Sapp is farther up the tree than Moss."

DEMYSTIFIED: After seeing Warren Sapp jaw at Randy Moss, Miller refers to the fact that "sap" is found farther up a tree than "moss." Sap rises from the root of the plant and must be extracted from plant tissues. Mosses grow on soil, rocks, and the bark of trees.

and some Baptist Bible college. It was a pretty wild time! I then drove down to Chi town, where I am at today. It's been a party since! Day after day, night after night. It seems that way anytime you go back to your hometown, and not to mention running for president of the USA. I did some great campaigning at about 8 bars in Will County. Peace! Spread the word and God bless you all! David E. Wyatt, Presidential Candidate for the USA in the Year 2000!

[Lexicon]

QUIT AVRAMIZING, YOU SQUIRTUS

From suggestions submitted to the Oxford English Dictionary's Web site in response to a July 1999 appeal for new words.

Avramize—*v.* to present a formidable argument or to confidently display a thorough knowledge of a particular subject matter, despite having only a scant understanding of the topic in question. "Before you answer the question, let me warn you not to *avramize*."

Birskies—*adj.* cold. "Turn up the heat when you get home. Last night was *birskies*." Origin unknown, possibly Russian.

Cheesehead—*n.* 1) a hat that looks like cheese. 2) a person who wears the hat. 3) a person residing in the state of Wisconsin.

Cuntify—*v.* to make something all cunt-like.

Diffability—*n.* the word "disability" separates the "abled" from the "disabled." We all have different abilities, we are all children of "God." Thus people are just *diffabled*.

D'oh!, doh!—*interj.* this Homer Simpson ejaculation was used at least as early as 1936, by Spanky in *The Little Rascals*. Spanky uses the term repeatedly to express frustration and exasperation.

Jabroni—*n.* nonthreatening word meaning fool, appears to have been coined by the World Wrestling Federation. "Imagine the Rock coming along, having his animal of a wife hold his jacket, and then slapping the stupidity out of the *jabroni*."

Ntnn—*n.* this word is uttered with the mouth fully closed. It is used to "save breath." Semantically it means "no."

Philarenist—*n.* one who collects and studies sand.

Puppies—*n.* slang for women's breasts, used by wrestling fans across America.

Shrimping—*n.* the practice of putting your partner's toes in your mouth is known to some people as *shrimping*, and in one sense this seems like rather a good term.

Snirkle—*v.* to laugh politely at something said by another that is not funny.

Squirtus—*n.* a name given to someone who annoys the living shit out of you.

Truddle—*v.* when two people walk a converging course down a hallway and to avoid a collision both step aside in the same direction and then try stepping aside in the opposite direction, thus continuing on a collision course.

Winet—*n.* a pubic hair with a small piece of pooh attached, generally found on males.

Zool—*v.* to mewl piteously and constantly, with the mouth wide open, without apparent need. "Did you just hear a *zool*? No, where is the *zooler*?"

[Journal]

CATS, NOW AND FOREVER

From Last Words: The Final Journals of William S. Burroughs, published this month by Grove/Atlantic. Burroughs died on August 2, 1997.

NOVEMBER 14, 1996: Calico was killed at 19th and Learnard. I heard about it from José. Tom had seen the cat by side of the road. In the empty spaces where the cat was, that hurt physically. Cat is part of me. Mornings since, I break into uncontrollable sobbing and crying when I remember where she used to be—sit—move, etc. No question of histrionics. It just happens.

NOVEMBER 20, 1996: You just live long enough, and you will become the grand old man of letters, a bit tired with his very tired old jokes. Some bordering on the *risqué*. (The grand old man of letters will accrete around you with cashmere shawls.)

The man in a cheap hotel makes it with lady in next room. Next day as they meet on a landing, she says: "Bonjour, Monsieur," wiggling her little finger suggestively. He responds by taking off his hat and placing the top side over his crotch: "Bonjour, Madame!"

At a party there was someone who could—and unfortunately did—imitate Roosevelt: "My

friends, I hate war. Eleanor hates war. And I hate Eleanor." Heh, heh. It was a long time ago, and it wasn't funny even then.

Yes, where are the snows of yesteryear? And the speedballs I used to know? Well, I guess it's time for my Ovaltine and a long good night.

NOVEMBER 20, 1996: Every time I put out three cat pans instead of four, the death of Calico hits again—or I see the place where she used to eat, beside the sink. All the empty places. *The memory of what has been and never more will be.* Killed by a car, she left with me all the places she used to be and never more would be.

If I thought the driver did it deliberately—if then I could find him—I have a catalogue here advertising a vial of Road Kill. A touch in his ear, on the porch, sent in envelopes under his door.

On plane—sleeping passengers—dream flashes: "My creeping opponents say that I am trading on my reputation as a writer to gain notice as a painter. Of course I am. In this life one is well advised to play the cards one has for all they are worth. If one is lucky enough to be born with a beautiful face and the corresponding physical attributes, instead of moaning, 'Oh people only want me for my face,' play your face card. In youth, play your youth cards. In old age, claim the privileges of age, and get your snout in the public trough before it dries up."

DECEMBER 15, 1996: To miss a cat is to miss *your* cat, part of *you*. It hurts physically, like an amputation. There on top of the sofa, on the side of the sink where she always ate. It hurts.

As Wordsworth, that old child molester, said:

She died and left to me
this heath this calm this quiet scene
The memory of what has been
and never more will be.

DECEMBER 22, 1996: A boy wished his brother dead, and his father in the package. When this wish emerged in his "life review," he said: "I would rather sacrifice my own life." And of course he meant it, but he didn't feel it. So he doesn't even get a whiff of grace.

In despair he threw himself somewhere and was saved by his love for cats. No priest or psychiatrist could do it. It was "meow meow meow."

Is there any final honesty of character?

JANUARY 13, 1997: Out to feed the fish. All the places where Spooner used to be hit me with a physical impact. The cat was part of myself. He died Friday, October 4, 1996. "Sorry he didn't make it," the vet says.

I *knew* when I held him in my lap he was dying—then he jumped down and pissed under the table.

JANUARY 25, 1997: I must tell my agent: Please never conceal from me any nasty letters or reviews. I want the names of these creeps. The addresses, so I can put one of my curses on them. It will give me something to do. And jog a few higher-up elbows hiding behind the nameless assholes. I will make a list and cross names off one after another.

Like the new rich in St. Louis. At his daughter's coming-out party. *Nobody showed.* She went mad. He made a list of all the invitees who didn't show. And ruined them one after another. It gave meaning to his life. He crossed off the last name on his deathbed, gave a contented belch, and died. He was a fully fulfilled evil old man.

I've a weakness for evil old men.

JANUARY 29, 1997: Got this anthology of cat horror, *Twists of the Tale*, edited by Ellen Datlow, and *The Cat From Hell*, by Stephen King, is a hoot.

How evil can an evil old bastard get? Well, "this evil old recluse"—now, it isn't easy to be evil in a vacuum. Oh sure, his Will, hate of his sisters and everybody. But what does an evil old recluse *do*? Just sit and be evil? Very difficult, unless one is an adept at evil and a *made man*, got all the medals.

Here I sit with my three old cats, getting

[Product Description]

DRUNK ON WORDS

From the label of Allozo Crianza, a red wine from Tomelloso, Spain, published in the March issue of the Wine Spectator.

Aging: In American oak barrels for one year, twelve months in barrels and six months in bottles.

Sensorial Tasting: Allozo Crianza has a deep, obscure, red and cherry color, with a good cloak, clean and brilliant with reflexes of medium evolution that show tiles. It has aromas of breeding, prevailing new wood over an elegant and perfumed bottom of spices, and matured black fruits well united and with balsamic memories. It is vivid on the tongue, with a great acidity very well integrated, a solid, full, silky, and greasy way, and a tasty and well-structured final. It is large in retronasal.

closer to eternity all the time, and it gets very depressing.

What can I do? I had high hopes. We all did.

MARCH 17, 1997: Mutie is ill. The lady vet came to get her yesterday. When she wouldn't eat, I knew she was sick.

Call today. Yes, high white blood cell count, couldn't eat all day Sunday. Ate and threw up Monday morning.

Most startling discovery: a pellet in her body. Not recent, since there is no apparent entry wound. .22? Air gun? I don't know if surgery is indicated.

MARCH 18, 1997: They say only love can create, so who the fuck could love up a centipede? He's got more love in him than I got. Now killing a centipede makes me feel safer—like, one less.

MAY 5, 1997: If a plague should or will kill a third of the population, I can only pray that it affects not only humans but domestic animals, with special reference to dogs and cats. The

picture of trillions of dispossessed cats is too horrible to be confronted.

JUNE 2, 1997: As for humanity, most of them is only good to feed cats.

[Vignettes]

THREE MEASURES OF LONELINESS

From "Seven Fictions," by J. Robert Lennon, in the Summer issue of Epoch. Lennon's story "The Fool's Proxy" appeared in the October 1999 issue of Harper's Magazine.

BUREAU

Two couples went together to an estate auction, hoping to find some inexpensive antique

[Scene]

OPEN FACE

"The Mystery at the Middle of Ordinary Life," a one-act play by Don DeLillo. The play, which was written for the American Repertory Theatre, appeared in the Winter 2000 issue of Zoetrope: All-Story. DeLillo's twelfth novel, The Body Artist, will be published next month.

A MAN and a WOMAN in a room.

WOMAN: I was thinking how strange it is.

MAN: What?

WOMAN: That people are able to live together. Days and nights and years. Five years go by. How do they do it? Ten, eleven, twelve years. Two people making one life. Sharing ten thousand meals. Talking to each other face to face, open face, like hot sandwiches. All the words that fill the house. What do people say over a lifetime? Trapped in each other's syntax. The same voice. The droning tonal repetition. I'll tell you something.

MAN: You'll tell me something.

WOMAN: There's a mystery here. The people behind the walls of the brown house next door. What do they say and how do they survive it? All that idle dialogue. The nasality. The banality. I was thinking how strange it is. How do they do it, night after night, all those nights, those words, those few who do it and survive?

MAN: They make love. They make salads.

WOMAN: But sooner or later they have to speak. This is what shatters the world. I mean isn't it gradually shattering to sit and listen to the same person all the time, without reason or rhyme. Words that trail away. The pauses. The clauses. How many thousands of times can you look at the same drained face and watch the mouth begin to open? Everything's been fine up to now. It is when they open their mouths. It is when they speak.

[Pause.]

MAN: I'm still not over this cold of mine.

WOMAN: Take those things you take.

MAN: The tablets.

WOMAN: The caplets.

[Pause.]

MAN: Long day.

WOMAN: Long day.

MAN: A good night's sleep.

WOMAN: Long slow day.

[Lights slowly down.]

CURTAIN