

## Waterfallcutoff

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## THE REGULAR ROUTINE

I make my own arrangements now and I didn't up to this point. No one of us who was still a resident felt like sharing. We'd been bestowed upon friends. I have two roommate/friends, Tony and Jamal.

Tony asked, "Could you mop the kitchen floor for me?"

"No, not really," I replied. The dishwasher hummed and it was cold outdoors. "Tony," I addressed him, "could you please turn off the music so I can go to bed?"

Well, my new resolution for the New Year was a plan to move to the west. I am saying the real west, i.e. Montana, Colorado. Eileen and I had stayed in the co-op, and it was only for one weekend, a four-day weekend.

I had been doing well with photography, Plaster of Paris sculptures and some painting with acrylic. As my father once told me, hobbies can turn into gold digging.

"It is again a day for a snow removal job!" claimed my roommates to me. Then Jamal asked, "Why don't you take up a new hobby?"

I decided to walk downtown. I had dropped off some film at a drugstore in the snowy afternoon. "It looks like a blizzard. It's snowing!" I exclaimed jubilantly.

We were busy with snow shoveling here in Montpelier for the town and they were going to pay us. A place called Sunset Bluff is my dad's house where he lives near Greenport, New York, with his wife, Dorothy. I prepared a warm set of clothing for this awful weather.

Tony said, "I'll do these dishes after I smoke a cigarette."

I did my chores, then I said to Jamal, "Jamal we have to get out of chores and find a place where it is easy going!" Most of the residents hate getting their chores done. What is wrong with our living accommodation?

"We have to escape this shelter," Jamal retorted. "You just picked some things out of the garbage," he continued. "You didn't mean to throw them away, did you?"

I had thrown away some mail from the Black Outr Guide Service of Pray, Montana.

"Hey, Jamal and Tony, these outfitters are offering wilderness vacations in the town of Pray, Montana." I had worked there years ago. And I had taken their wilderness vacation once.

Dad had been really unpleasant as of late.

Should I answer the phone? My dad had called. There is a public pay telephone in the foyer of the house. We didn't discuss much.

Think about what you can do with what you hold, a woman said as honest advice.

The telephone card gave me very little time left and I had a key to the shelter, given to me by a woman who works there.

"You'll try not to go to bed too late, alright buddy?" Jamal said. "Good night," I replied. Tony, Jamal, and I awoke around nine. Today I will be riding to various locations on the county bus. I gave a thought about my best woman friend, Eileen.

It was a very frigid day and I was forced to see a doctor. We are driven to our appointments by taxi on Route. 100. A woman at the shelter questioned me when I returned, "Did you get your blood work?"

"Yes, I did." I answered. She is an ex-drill sergeant. Again in the room after dusk: "Good night men," I said to Jamal and Tony. The shelter where I stay seems to be fine.

I need to get a base where I can manage my telephone charges, have a car, and a

warm home.

I traveled west by bus to Waitsfield with a roommate and we stopped at a diner. "Jamal," I said, "could you order me a cereal and coffee?" "Why don't you order your own?" Jamal answered. While having breakfast, I was thinking of my sister, Pam. "It is my sister's birthday (December 27)." I said out loud.

"Oh yeah, how old is she?" Jamal asked. "Fifty," I said. I thought to myself, "I will call her on the telephone." At the diner, I ate my breakfast and we paid the check. I spent the rest of this day job hunting. I walked out to the businesses. Quick walks to the shops are a regular routine.

There had been sub-zero temperatures and an even colder wind chill factor. Everyone needs to shop for jobs. It is like a full-time job just looking for work. I did not like my minimal economic budget. I rode the bus to different local merchants and priced the things I'd like to buy. It was tough to stand around in the cold, waiting for buses and shops. I got an idea. I tried to reach my brother Rob at the co-op in Vermont, but heard no one home at the vacation home. Long ago, I listened to the 1967 hit by the Turtles called "Happy Together" and that condo in Waitsfield, Vermont, was a happy vacation home. I couldn't bed down there now because it is willed to Rob, after our father dies. And, in addition, the legal clause states that no one can live there year-round. Rob and I have talked of this song by the Turtles and we bought a lot of music from that era. One LP Rob turned me on to was by The Doors.

I now have been accepted into a place called Spring Lake Ranch in the Green Mountains of Vermont. I had to get away from home and soon.

I have a small room in a house with two floors and a huge lawn. The room is upstairs and there are three beds in it. Jamal and Tony moved in also. Jamal asked, "Is that your laundry in

the machines down in the basement?" "Yes," I replied. "The machine just buzzed," he said. The buzz signals that the wash is over. So with the cold winter outside, I was warm inside and I went to the basement and proudly gathered up my clothes and put them in the dryer. Then I said to Jamal and Tony, "It really feels like winter, I like the snow." I added to the two, "I only wish I had some tax refunds coming in April so I'd have some cash, but that won't happen. I haven't held a job in my life. Are you glad I moved from the shelter with you two?" It was our first evening and becoming friends so we stay together: Jamal, Tony and Steve. The next day the weather was cold and the sky was blue. There is nothing definite except death and taxes in this world. A common slogan that holds true, a therapist quoted me. "Tell me about some of your relationships," she said in session. I know my love life is pitiful. I hoped all along to possibly date Cathy. She never let me in. Maybe grandiose expectations failed in the new relationship. I have no girlfriend. "What have you been doing?" the counselor asked.

I carry my binoculars as I did when I was a teenager. I don't have paying work, but I am doing chores. I have wanted to be a professional all of my life. Every day I am cleaning and doing what I am told. The work around the CR in Spring Lake Ranch doesn't rest. There are many health problems that are coming upon me in these middle-age years. I experienced prostate cancer and GERD, which is acid reflex.

I said to Tony, "My dad and I have a long-distance relationship but it is a good father-son bond." I spend some hours each day on a computer.

Usually I never get any e-mails. On my way out of the house, Tony asks every time, "Where are you going?" I go to the library and it is a short trip so I walk.

Once, on the way home, the bus broke down and everyone exited so I walked back. Could you believe there was an oil leak and everyone lit up cigarettes anyway? I would not.

It was relaxing to watch a movie today. I saw the "Heartbreak Kid" and it paralleled "The Graduate." It has been a month now and all this time I have been going to program. I am not happy about attending groups. It is a social place but people are grumpy and smoke a lot so they also want to borrow, beg, or steal. I want to be rich and right now!

"Are there no concrete rules to adhere to?" Jamal asked out of the blue. "Jamal," I said, "do whatever you want., just be good." "I am always good," Jamal answered.

I do a lot of work voluntarily around the house I live in with others.

A man called Neil and I went for walks at the park mainly to get away from the CR in the evening and basically because he and I were the most athletic. He moved back with family, his brother. I can never go back to family, but I can still go homeward in my thoughts and head.

Our new digs are to be occupied by three and I am with Jamal and Tony. At first, I didn't get along, but after a while I adjusted. "Straighten up, Steve" I said to myself.

## **BENEFITS**

I consider myself like most, to be a heathen. Valentine's Day is approaching.

Today, I took the bus through Montpelier and went to Clubhouse (a workplace for people with psychiatric/financial illiteracy difficulties) and that day there I had lunch. As I walked into

the building, I was hoping to see Eileen but she was not there to meet me. Well, it is already the hump day for the week! Wednesday. At the Clubhouse, I did some computer fun. It is a thing that I do well so I should carry on with it. Programming is what I did well a long time ago. I think about carrying on with it. It required a lot of brain power. It's a combination of numbers and language. I studied the languages of Basic and Fortran for one semester.

Even though winter is not officially over, signs of spring are showing. It is very warm outside. The sun is shining and there is blue sky and the days are getting longer. There are birds chirping. A few blue jays are here. Also, I saw a red-winged blackbird flying in a flock of common grackles.

Dear Steve,

This is the check that belongs to you. Please deposit it into your bank and please think several times before you spend it. I will speak to you soon

Love,

Dorothy

I was up early on Saturday morning. I feel a lot better with people of my equal stature in brains, and the CR in Spring Lake Ranch is definitely a hand up from living in shelters. We all have to see doctors, go to programs, and carry a label but it is warm in a house and as I say, I have three hot's and a cot. That is, we have three hot meals and a bed to sleep on (it refers to people incarcerated). Living with others means some amount of care and doing what we are told. We all have to listen to someone at some time in our lives. So I start now and I don't give up. The counselors were pushing me to join a program, the Day Treatment Center.

As it was a holiday (President's Day), it was moved forward a day. I was denied lunch at the interview because I am not a member yet.

"It was an awful place to spend a day," Jamal told me.

"The clinic does not do anything productive," Tony interjected.

Again, I dislike the grumpy attitudes, the smoking all the time, and the borrowing. But this day was a good day as I got a chance to go over my resume with a certified social worker.

"I just like to write?" I imagined to myself. The days and weeks go by with very little done.

Well, today is Ash Wednesday and I was at Mather Hospital in Port Jefferson, New York, visiting my dad. He was walking with a cane. He had had a knee replacement. At the hospital, there was a church service. Just being with my Dad is the best of religion for me, for today he is alive and walking, and, I told this to him.

On a bus to the local library in pouring rain, I felt easy and comfortable. The weather stayed foggy and rainy. When I arrived at the library, I discovered I was a little early. Inside the building, I researched Certified Social Worker. I wanted to prepare for the civil service exam in this field. Later, after I went back, I lost confidence and interest in applying for the position. I cannot keep a position of employment. It is because of my lack of abilities, it's not because of the illness. I never had much of a will or work ethic and my skills are minimal.

On a dreaming occasion, I also hung out at the doors of the Montpelier Public Library and it turned out to be like taking an LSD trip. Waiting for them to open, I had no thoughts. My mind was blank. And nothing is not how I'd learn to feel. Ah, it seems as if I'm up to no good and people want to be cautious with me. In a counseling session I blurted out, "They think they have a special relationship with me and I would describe one as a crackpot. I no longer want to



be friends, I'd rather not be near them. I'd prefer to have a friendship with my co-op neighbor, Rob Sherwin." On the first day without a program, I walked to the stores with the idea to buy clothes. Or at least I dreamed of buying clothes for myself. I didn't have the money. Later on, it turns out, I am able to order many pairs of blue jeans through a catalog.

When I thought of Eileen telling me to get glasses (she needed them for herself), I shopped. I had my eyes examined. I never bought a pair of glasses but I received them through my Medicaid benefits. I came home on the bus because it is the cheapest way to travel, I told Tony. The bus fare is reduced with benefits. Years later, I bought glasses with better frames for \$100.

There seems to be some peace in the house. It is much better. I was getting settled at the residence and people seemed to like me. I talked with Jamal before dinner. He asked, "So, are you going to the Halloween party?"

"No," I replied. "I just telephoned Eileen to ask her out on a date to the Haunted House in Waterbury, Vermont, for Halloween."

"Yo," said Jamal.

It was nasty outside so I watched the movie, "Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban." The end of the film was great and I had read the story a long while ago.

I arrived to a sleepy house after a hard day. I had been riding to different locations all day. Really tough!

I called Eileen back (she had left me a message). "Eileen, I don't have the money for the Haunted House and to tell you the truth, I am a little frightened by it. So will you go to the Halloween party with me?"

"Sure," she said, and we said goodbye and hung up. I just love the simple, genuine, agreeable nature of her. Looks like I will go to the party after all, I said to Jamal.

"So, you, you, you are going with Eileen? That's good," he stuttered. It is a lazy Sunday and we began talking in the room.

"I have memories of the hospital about one year ago," Tony said. "I was in the V.A. hospital," Jamal kept quiet. We are all frightened by mental illness.

The group home had a Halloween party and it was a success.

I think that productive work is hard and I should have signed up for ROTC but I didn't. I was a landscaper in the agency that I live in. Jobs that require only a use of brains are rare indeed. I suppose I wanted to be a computer programmer. I only took one class in it. It was so difficult to learn. I didn't get enough education in computers. If you want to be in business, you have to produce, work with both hands and put your back into your work. My father was a lawyer and I just went through and through with my education, never knowing what career I should choose. The work that Tony does is fairly simple. It is business but he doesn't take home much money. Jamal simply socializes at the Clubhouse. I have a desire to really go at full potential in a job so I can have money!

Again in our room, Tony always loves to say, "Do you realize how much money the Beatles had?" And Jamal watches television. They are my best friends. I'll have a bachelor's degree. However, I want these jobs that are too high for my qualifications. New college graduates have to not aim so high, especially low GPAs like myself. I want to be rich. And right now, Tony says the same. Jamal, well we don't know what he wants. I know how I felt about a hospital years ago. And I know how I feel about the present.

We're in a coerced situation. And I get tired of productive work. I just want to kick back.

and relax after a work week to the weekend calendar, i.e., football. So, here I have presented a week in the group home that I am living in now. An altruistic laid back weekend!

There are five or six years of this nonsense that they called home for people with psychiatric afflictions. "When does it get any better?" asked Tony.

#### THE DIVERSE ACTIVITIES

"A lot of people are still taking advantage of freedom riding on the trains," I said.

"They are what riding?" Tony asked.

"They get on the Amtrak train, then walk off or hide in the lavatory before a conductor comes by to collect tickets. The Montpelier bus is only a half a dollar and gets me going places," I concluded. I went to Waitsfield to walk around and I visited the Memorial Library. Later in the day, I went to the high school track and ran four laps or one mile. I find it good to try to be fit. In

reality though, I am 239 pounds, overweight, and I am not athletic at all. Ah, how good it must be to be in super shape. I mentioned my day to my roommates.

Jamal had gum in his dresser. What a mess!

I rode the fifty-cent bus once in the morning. There were stratus clouds in the sky threatening to rain after a sunny morning. I saw a laundry shop ad for help wanted and I went in and got an application. Then I rode the bus back. At home, I tried to get my head together so I made a resume and filled out the application. I took the same bus to give the paperwork to the proprietor. It was fickle weather. The clouds were white and gray. I got the bus and it began to rain. As it began raining on the way home (from the second trip) I said, "This is ridiculous, I can't ride a bus this far everyday for a small job."

In conclusion, I got home and looked over some old college course listings and my GPA. I just have a disgust against spending the day watching TV or sleeping. I know I picked it up from the family. I get joy from the diverse activities I keep busy with. I like studying foreign languages, programming computers, keeping a diary, and outdoor work, especially raking leaves. Looking over my old college course listings and my GPA is often interesting.

\* \* \*

I caught a flu bug and upchucked about three times. I stayed in bed the whole day. I got up only to use the bathroom and to get a drink of water. After being sick, it felt healthy to flush out the germs of the disease by throwing up.

I fasted today and didn't eat. At one point, I had had viral diarrhea and spent eight hours in the ER with an IV attached to me. I was dehydrated.

As I am well again, Eileen and I went shopping and she got her new eyeglasses. I also bought some food at the food court. We stayed in the town for an hour and a half. We talked that

puppy love as we walked in the village. I don't care for that nonsense; I had a big love my first time, a real exploitable one. Some years later, I underwent prostate surgery from a diagnosis at Burlington Medical Center. I was incontinent for a spell. It was not so humorous as I would piss in my pants.

Tonight, finally Friday, I am feeling my old self. I just watched basketball but watching sports on TV is fading from my agenda and I almost never watch TV except to catch a weather report.

Everyone in the Spring Lake Ranch CR was getting geared up for the night party. I run to libraries, stay in therapy with counselors, and I am still single at 34 years old. The label that society puts on me are horrible stories. As Spring Lake Ranch CR has every individual social disease, we all have different issues and are not keenly aware of our ill emotions. I personally know I am a (schizophrenic) but ... A plaque in the home says 90% of us is our attitude. I do have a good attitude. I have conquered the Why, basically and beginning on the How. I also have sorted out my feelings to the optimum.

Seriously, for all of us, our meetings are very peaceful and if we are a harm to others or ourselves, they will hospitalize us immediately. Our neighborhood is separated though.

It is a nice stretch of blue-sky days. We have had too much rain lately. With the help of my stepmother, I am secure.

I took another trip to the west, i.e., the valley in Wainsfield. I took the bus there and as I got to the valley, I called my counselors and they recommended I turn back and not go.

I missed a visit with my sister, who was going to help me out with some money. The insanity is, everyday it is an ongoing worry of mine that I will travel and get stuck out in a place with no money and no way home. I don't carry a credit card with a big balance, and I spend,

spend, spend. Mostly on junk food. This leaves me with very little for an emergency.

I received a letter from my brother Rob:

Steve,

Everything is well here. No, we have not raked any leaves yet. We are still trying to finish off some house painting when we get warm, dry days. Unfortunately, there have not been too many of those recently. We'll probably rake over Thanksgiving here, although it's possible we may go to grandma's. We'll find out tonight.

I just finished reading "Plum Island." It is chock full of North Fork, Claudios, Old Town Tavern, vineyard, Orient, etc. If you haven't read it yet, I recommend it, although I suppose it is mandatory reading for anyone who lives in Greenport.

Talk to you soon.

Rob

What I read into his letter is that I can better his lists with a book I have on travel in which Cutchogue is mentioned as a good sight on the North Fork. The book is "Small Town Escapes," a National Geographic publication.

But on to my present theatrical servility, I am going to finalize the paradigm—not through psychology or education, but work as a goal. I did well in school. I finished secondary school and started college without a failing grade. I have been in group therapy, had hospitalizations, and am on medications. But I have one work experience that was really tremendous. I left my family home at 14 and went to boarding school for four years. Afterwards, my dad called it a country club. Then I worked in England for four months. That was super. I squeakily spent one year in a mental hospital and then I worked in Hartford, Conn., at various

sucky jobs after. That town was awful and so I was mentored closely by my step-mother who assertively straightened out my mess, or at least got me back on the right track.

\* \* \*

As I stare into the aquarium and listen to the bubbles or muse to a dishwasher humming, it is easy to write. It is very smoky in the kitchen so I open a window.

"Hello, Steven, I am just seeing your room. Could you pick up these please?" Our counselors are genuinely looking after our best interests.

I like to fish for blue fish a lot. The ones that I catch I usually keep. Sunset Bluff has a great private beach that I can use, if I ask Dorothy ahead of time.

My aquarium has five fish that I feed once a day. I snack a lot and I always go for milk and cookies. But in the group home, the staff watches carefully that no one abuses privileges.

The ten-gallon tank lights up nicely in the room. Also, I have a fiber optics lamp that illuminates a blue light. To my mind, fishing and photography are two hobbies that I do the best.

As an answer, "That is my laundry on the floor and my laundry day is Sunday."

"Could you please pick up these?"

I do a few things on my computer. I fill out surveys for a research firm. I also refer friends about signing up for Verizon Internet Services (DSL) and if I make a referral, I get \$25. I use the web for information and e-mail to my brother, Rob, and his children. I also sell items on eBay. The computer knowledge I had gained in one college course.

It is very stuffy in our room so we turned on the air conditioning. At the arrival of the mail, I received a nice letter from my niece in California:

Dear Steve,

I just thought I'd write a quick note to say hello and see how you are doing. I'm sure that you are working hard at the job, you have a good work ethic since you started there, keep it up. Just remember to stay warm while you're working. I think it's going to be a cold winter.

I'm starting a business with a friend. We are going to do catering with planning and decorating. When I set my new business cards, I will send one to you.

We'll take care, and keep busy, enjoy life and keep in touch!

Karen

It is so like our family to say they're going to do something and never actually do it. Karen spent all this money on business cards and web sites but the hard work doesn't appear. She is a successful secretary in a law firm. My dad got her a position. It is hard to be productive with your efforts rewarded. In fact, my father had told me you'd better appreciate your own labor efforts, because no one will appreciate them for you.

When I was forced, I wrote this memoir to refer to my life in work. My attitude shines at the job and I enjoy the work, learn things, and I am rewarded for producing. Well, the CR staff makes sure we live with a clean environment and pick up the dinner dishes and so on and so forth. What I mind about living with six other people in a house is I have no nook where I can be alone.

It would be great to get out on my own. But I can't live on imaginary means and I don't have enough to rent a place.



## INCENDIARY

A strange woman came into the Spring Lake Ranch House and laid down on a women's bed. As she was not a resident, she shouldn't have been there. She was nobody's friend and unfamiliar looking. When we spotted her (the staff spotted her), she freaked and yelled, "Get me out of here!" The whole scene was almost a crime. The police came and she locked herself in a car. I assume it was hers. Funny, we are in a social interaction setting and we couldn't resolve the difficulties without outside help. The firemen came also. She eventually surrendered to the police, and in conclusion, we never found out the cause of her snooping.

One workday, after dinner, late, I was about to fall asleep. Suddenly there was a lot of yelling and commotion heard from the adjacent house. We all went downstairs and ran outside. I

went down and I heard someone yell, "Fire!" I had no chance of being hurt, but there was a blaze, a fire in the adjacent house. I said, "This looks bad," and that was rightly evident. However, it was such an incredible sight and a blaze that overtook the whole facade of the house next door. It was so close up, so high, and very colorful. Firemen came and the police came. It was a good rescue.

"Do you know how it started or why it happened?" I asked. Everyone shook their heads in denial and faces of disbelief appeared. No one knew how it began and no one was going to offer a response. One man was still unaccounted for as the firemen fought the fire. They put the fire ladder up to the second floor and went through the window of a room to rescue the man still in there.

During the evening of the crisis, one of the patients or clients (acquaintances) had requested to go to the hospital. The rescue of the man on the second floor turned out okay. He was safe. One girl's mother came and took her daughter. The people were definitely out of danger.

"The cause of the fire was a cigarette left on a couch," Glen said. I didn't think so because there is no smoking inside, I think it was a grease fire. I am just lucky to be a non-smoker. "I chew tobacco inside mostly every night," I said to Glen. "Oh my God," a woman said, "we will not have a place to live now." "I've lost all of my things," another said. We all watched the water put out the blaze and smoke smoldered after the fire was out. I went to bed without a guilty conscience. Some went to bed in shelters and one person was an arsonist, but who? But maybe, only an incendiary act.

The following morning brought nice weather. The people were all transported back from the shelter and we were all doubled up in our house. Over the next few days the insurance

adjusters looked at the house, reviewed the damage, and there, only the empty shell of a house remained.

The people were given clothing, telephones, and food. They lost a lot that couldn't be replaced.

We related stories about who possibly started the fire, what should we do, and what went wrong, but I never heard how it started. In conclusion, there won't be a neighboring house for a while until they rebuild. It will be different around here. Some years later, I heard that the cause was a burning cigarette left on a living room couch.

\* \* \*

It was the first weekend of the year and I made plans for many events. I received a phone call from Eileen. "Hello, Steve, I really miss you," Eileen said.

"Do you want to see a movie?" I asked. She said she really wanted to see the movie "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." It is a funny film that some people in our residence loved to watch, including myself.

We would plan a lot of events, Eileen and I, to keep our relationship with good mind, body and soul together. We are very much in love.

The hype settled down concerning the recent bad luck, the burned-out property, and the intruder. Mobile homes were set up to camp the people. It was like the world Formula 1 of circuit racing, there were mobile homes and lots of cars. We all ate in one house and the three mobile homes were occupied by eight residents. As the New Year wore on, the weather turned to snow.

One day I buddied up with one of the new clients (there are always new people coming and people leaving). We went out of the room of the house to catch a bus. A major road runs parallel to the front of the property. He was going east and I could probably have gone there, too.

but I took off, distracted and unfocused about my destination. I stood in the cold and waited for a bus in the opposite direction. The main road runs east-west at the base of the hill. I stopped in my tracks and never took the bus anywhere. It was too cold to go anywhere. He went on a bus for an errand. I hesitated because I didn't care to travel with him, after he stole \$40 from me. I was very upset about that because I only got back \$20 of it.

After many mornings that I had been sleeping late, this Sunday I was up at the very early part of the morning. The ground is covered with snow. Both two-story houses were in the center of a winter wonderland ground of white. One was completely burned down to the ground.

For fun, I am planning to collect photos of football games, and possibly sell them in a flea market at the church auctions. I also started another hobby—Plaster of Paris in molds. Both hobbies will take time and patience for selling at a flea market. It is so easy to sit with your work in front of you and wait for sales, but it doesn't sell fast.

Some very cold air came in on this holiday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I don't mind the cold and they claimed it was eighteen degrees Fahrenheit. I like to walk in the snow and I did a lot of skiing as a young boy, so I'm used to the cold. I walked a long distance to different localities on various errands. We only had one day when it was as cold and that was February of last year.

I might have already mentioned my few hobbies. I take care of an aquarium, mold sculptures, and take photographs. I remember when I was a young boy, I did these as part of a curriculum. Regarding the projects of today, I have the skills to do them well. I will take credit for a first prize of a photograph when I lived in Walsfield. I knew how to develop prints in our darkroom in high school. I can still take wonderful pictures. I'd like to be a second Ansel Adams. The Valley Environmental Council accepted my picture for their First Place.

There was another incident at the group home. There was some missing medication. It was late at night. They had to wake us all because of the stupid paranoia of the staff. They searched all around the house. These incidents left me cold around the holiday.

To my left, a woman was trying to see what she must do. The thief had taken (stolen) her medication. Maybe she misplaced it or took the wrong dosage, anything could possibly go wrong. To my back, a girl was complaining, "Why can't we all get along?" She was socially worried. We sat and watched a movie that night, "The Bourne Legacy." The trouble of the evening had blown over. No overdose. We all stick together and the smiles returned to the faces.

Maybe there had been a reason for the screw-ups in the group home that I have called my home. Yes, medication, we all take medication. There are doctors who write prescriptions for our health. I do react to mood enhancers. Prozac is one such kind of medication. I take Prozac. Clozaril is an anti-depressant that I take orally also. Both of these medications seem to me to be satisfactory. Anyway, I assume most doctors are sexually overt. They like Freudian therapy. I came out of the hospital and went right into finishing school.

Well, I have mankind who listens to my grievances. The road in mental illness recovery is a tough one. I give my best performance to therapy. After so many years, one realizes that a doctor is just a friend. Many come out of hospitals morbidly.

Dear Dr. Shatterhand,

Steven stopped by ELIH today to pay me a visit. I had been his psychiatrist from 1993 to 1998, before he moved to the CR in Spring Lake Ranch. He seemed to be doing well on the Clozaril—thinking clearly and keeping organized, but does seem markedly downcast/depressed compared to his usual state as I remember it. Subjectively, too, he experiences low energy and

depressive thoughts. Would you discuss with him the question of antidepressant medicine?

Possibly change one drug or a change of dosage. Please call me.

Dr. Pot

This is a letter to switch doctors. I do much better working with healthy people as opposed to programs that house consumers. One of my housemates, Glen, has a scar showing due to a car accident. I think he has ruined some self-esteem because of his scar. He is on the cusp of danger. I watch him pretentiously. I have a scar showing on my forehead, also. I have ruined, low self-esteem. But reading about Harry Potter I can relate—he is known in the series to have a scar on his head. I'd had a fall skiing on Mount Washington in New Hampshire. We process what we read sometimes. I did not take a hydrochloride pill that Glen offered me.

I tried to begin my journal, but the music downstairs was getting loud. Downstairs there are some consumers just either doing chores or watching television or smoking outside. These are the only activities and the same every night.

"It is too loud," I told Tony. Tony is listening to various Beatles music and I am comfortable.

The house is peaceful. It is a Sunday, a week after King's holiday and the afternoon has been splendid. I had the chore of cleaning a van. It is the car used by staff for shopping. Clients can own cars if they want, actually if they can afford one. I want to get a nice car and have the money to pay for the insurance.

Frankly, I'd ignore my chores if I lived alone. The house does get dirty very fast. On the following Saturday, I was called for jury duty—that was actually a letter. It was exciting to get a letter. I filled out the return questionnaire, I had heard that a son of a lawyer/psychology person

could not do jury duty. In recent years, I heard they eased the rules of the law. In conclusion, I recapitulated the things I heard and contacted the people regarding this, saying I should be excused from jury duty with a psychiatrist's note.

## BREAKING AWAY

I don't know what tomorrow holds for me. I spent a Sunday morning at Mass and I have a lot to pray about. I have a great need of better health. Why can't I be independent? What employer would put up with inexperience? When I do the math, it just doesn't add up, rent is too high.

One roommate and I walked a mile for the Sunday service. The preacher gave us wine and bread. I'm not supposed to drink alcohol, but one sip of wine would be fine. I am incorrigible enough without the booze. The sermon was regarding humbleness. We learned to love ourselves first, then try to become a proud American. I will offer my best prayers for the weeks ahead and insist on more self-esteem and empowerment. Next Monday, I'll go to the library to read. Tuesday, it is therapy and the doctor.

I am not happy about going to a doctor for a checkup. They'll take more blood to monitor

my medicine. I feel dizzy when I stand up too quickly.

I had a hoard dog attitude today. I don't know where the day went the way it did. I shopped for food. I really relaxed most of the day.

Since we were at church on Sunday with other Christians, it really lifted up my mood and spirit, but I am still down on Wednesday. I awoke late and applied for a photo job. Then on Thursday I really enjoyed "The Last Picture Show."

"Tony, could you get the telephone, please?" I asked. "I'm too tired," he responded. The telephone rang and rang until Tony finally answered it. I think he doesn't like to answer the phone because he never gets any calls.

My situation here sucks. I only have limited freedom. I don't have a car or privacy.

My certified social worker drove me to a day treatment center, to a place where we went to a program for consumers of mental illness. I told my roommates, "Hello," Jamal said, "Hello, Mom." He was talking on the telephone to his mother.

Back up in the room. I finished saying to only Tony, "We had gone into the painted building and waited in the reception area. I took a tour of the center and the grounds and Tony, guess what? I refused to sign in to be forced to spend days there." I would like to dis-enroll from my present program before too long. See, these house counselors just shove programs in our face. At the programs, there are groups, a cafe, doctor's appointments, and socialization.

During the middle of the week, I decided to rethink my itinerary. I talked to my Dad and he suggested I work. Something really original, I ironically imagined to myself. All very good intentions, but jobs are hard to find. I decided not to give blood at the school on Friday because of the meds.

I spent the free days riding the buses to get to appointments. My spending has to be



curtailed. Thank God I don't have a horrible smoking habit that would really eat up my money (burn it up).

"How's it going, Steve?" Jamal asked. "Fine," I said. "I'm having leftover ravioli," Jamal said. "My mother is in Florida," he told Tony and me.

The two of us were going on a shopping spree. As I finished in the store (I had bought chewing tobacco) and we walked back up the hill from the store to CR, we talked.

I had been walking and using numbers in my head and chewing gum. I had picked up lottery tickets. That Monday night, my roommate and I watched Monday night football on television.

Over the last week, I retook an employment test. At this time of my free days, I have been applying for a job with the Census Bureau. I took the exam three times and scored in the seventies each time. Not good enough to be considered for hire. I was watching a program on television, a soap show. One thing that stood out to me was when the actor said to his mother, "I'll wait until you come to your senses." Ok, you can hear a lot of Peter Pan advice from soaps on TV, but they don't sink into your brain.

I rarely watch soaps, but today I did. It was a lesson to me, in an institution all we had was television and medication inside a hospital. Come to my senses, now! I still feel the need to be dependent (on my father) and be a stronger person emotionally. See my father was a Taurus, the bull, and I am the youngest of the family, so I struggle. The most sensible thing to do is work.

The Spring Lake Ranch house sometimes is unable to stay together. We are pulled in different directions. I just don't like being home at the house, I'd prefer to be in an office and think, express my thoughts on paper. I am able to focus on one type of employment, it's just that no one will give us a chance to work. At least I think no one will.

Television and sleep are two big events here in the Spring Lake Ranch. Also, the best TV is a Saturday basketball game with college or pros. But I do sculptures and paintings to not stay glued to sports television. My paintings have been included in the VSA art organization. I am working on one sculpture. I'd rather go out and shoot baskets than watch TV.

On Sunday television, I like to watch the intellectual politics discussions like the Chris Mathews Show.

This Sunday, I dropped in the counselors' office. Something unique (we are in the office two or three times a day). I went over my three-month expenses and I had a discussion with one counselor. As we talked, I noticed my own program writes about me.

"Steve, you are doing very well. You are meeting your goals. By next winter you will be able to move," the writing said. Looking at the journal, I noticed it read, "Steve seems to isolate from people."

Back to the room, Tony said, "You know, you left the tub full of water." I had completely forgotten. It's all right, the tub was half empty, like Tony himself.

Jamal watches a lot of television. Tony sleeps a lot, loves the Beatles' music, and works every week, as I do. Jamal goes out to a program for the mentally ill. We three share a room together. We have a hard time listening to each other.

They never had a great upbringing like I had in order to be able to listen. I had a wonderful childhood. I grew into being a thinker. But that's not fair. They too probably had wonderful childhoods. What is our common problem?

It was the next Sunday. I awoke around seven a.m. Jamal slept late, but after I shopped for coffee, I reunited with him in the room. "Jamal, good morning," I said, "I am going to get some sleep," Jamal said. He hasn't changed his bed sheets. I don't believe it, he'd just gotten up

and he wanted to sleep. This is how, as mental patients, we conduct our emotions and how we feel. He got up after a minute or so and said, "I'm going to take a shower."

I had plans for the weekend, and Sunday morning was bright and sunny. Tony and I had gone to the coffee shop. He'd called his girl to come to us to pick him up. I am surprised that Tony was actually up and doing some activity on Sunday when he was not forced to work. I did a little gardening like weeding and watering.

I have never seen Jamal with a girlfriend, I mean a lover. I told him in confidence, "Jamal, you are a nice guy." "Steve, you're a nice guy also." We were having a chef salad as a dinner. Someone from downstairs called up to me, "Dinner is ready." I said, "I am not having any dinner, thank you." Jamal came up to the room and said, "No, no, no, no dinner?"

"Jamal, you should buy some toilet paper for us. I have been supplying a lot," I said. "I have my own," Jamal replied

The three of us were driven up to the polling place to vote in the general election. We went in and talked to the polling people. It was embarrassing. We look like fools. A man asked for our names and we voted.

Tony said (about me), "He'll be a college graduate. He works in a gas station." To this I felt refreshed. It wasn't meant by Tony to make me feel good, he brought the lows up but people love to be complimented. Going anywhere with Tony can really lift my spirits because he dresses like a relic from a different age (a long past age). I mean come on now, Tony that '60s era is basically over. I try to dress for success.

I worked for the election board for several years until I got a full-time job, I said, "I am glad now that we will never poll there again." I personally have to move every few years to new polling places; we just can't put up with these labels the public puts on us.

We left the polling place after the three of us had voted. We went back to our CR. Tony went for a smoke. "We voted, Jamal," I said. "We voted." "Yes, we did," he concluded.

Sometimes to do your best is not enough. You have to do what is required.

Winston Churchill.

## A NEW JOB

When the new job started now, I was really able to cook with gas.

I generally come home at 6:30 p.m. and they save dinner for me. Tony asked, as always, "How was work?" "Fine," I replied.

"He's a handsome lad," Jamal proclaimed. He was referring to a photograph of me at the station. "He's a handsome lad."

They both had made that picture into a running joke in our room.

Jamal watches a lot of television, as I have mentioned. However, he doesn't watch for very long at a time. He has no real attention span. He likes to flip through the channels and he lies on his bed with his hand cupped over his mouth, for what, I don't understand.

The room is quiet. I can hear the bubbling of the fish aquarium. If Jamal walks in the room and turns on his television once more, I am going to curse. Oh, it is something I love to do, also, so I shouldn't be such a son-of-a-...

\* \* \*

A year has passed since I wrote these notes. On a sunny day, sitting on the verandah, I received a telephone call late one weekday morning. It was from a fellow in a gasoline service station. The man asked me if I would like to work at his service station. That got the ball rolling. I rode my bicycle eight miles and they hired me. I began working. I said to myself, "I am really happy to be making some real money." Now I have been at the job for one full year and never missed a day. I showed up every day on time and most importantly to me, I produced. I pumped gasoline.

I have problems at work. A lot of bullshit goes through my mind and as I talk about changing job to job, I use a little sarcasm to help the relationship but I have met with cheerless and thankless feelings. You see, I have highs and lows and it is a reality check at the job from too many years of therapy.

My boss, Jason, gave me a nostalgia popcorn maker and since this man's dad was a colonel in the U.S. Army I said, "I got my popcorn from the Kernel."

I think a lot that I am going to quit, which is stupid of me. One of these times, I'll get so sick of work that I'll get out. My cash outs everyday are getting good. I just need to renew my attitude and stick it out every day.

On the work I do, however, I do okay. I keep persevering and I get the job done. I was waiting on the gas pump island. I missed the step down and I fell down on my hands and knees. I brushed myself off and got up quickly.

One year into the job, and now the job seems to get easier. I think I get along.

One night they had me ponder a question "What looks different around here?" Billy asked. "I don't know," I replied. I thought about it and then said, "I had my picture taken here." I

don't know, I hardly understand my confusion sometimes. I looked up and the neon sign was shining brightly. It is called USA. That's what he meant.

As my fellow co-workers were cursing down Jason about his temper, I was able to vent my own true feelings. "I am very spoiled but don't work too bad," I said before we left on a routine day. Real emotions and relationships can hurt a lot worse than a fist. Ed said, "You, Jim, are forced to work. Jason does not have to. He is not forced to work." However there were no fights at the station.

I was the last out at five to six. I saw a man walking to the garage. I turned around to contact him.

I said, "Are you here for your car?"

"Yes, I called up to say I'd be here shortly before six."

I answered, "I'll wait for you. Your keys are in the car. You can pay us tomorrow." I waited, and he came back with the car. Then I was off for home. I did a good deed.

We joke around a bit (but I'm so serious). Jason and Jay touched a button on my shirt with a finger, then pretended to poke my nose. Actually, Jay took his finger and snubbed my nose. I have a nick name here: Spanky.

A credit card computer is on the wall and sometimes I swipe credit cards and sometimes I collect money. A computer tie-up happens sometimes. The computer reads: Waiting for line. It is this way on long-distance calls.

The ladies sit in their cars and do paperwork. I return their cards as soon as possible. I often joke. A car came in from Quebec (it had Canadian plates) and I gassed it up. I said to the Canadian in French, "Au revoir." He said, "You speak French?" I told him, "I'd like to learn from a tutor. My name is Jim and I can be reached at this telephone number ..."

In conclusion, it really is a nice job. After work, and always at home, I am hopeful of a positive attitude. Finally, it was the end of a work week. Friday of course is payday and the best day of the week.

Normal? My boss, Jason, had left the shop at eleven a.m. and had taken his motorcycle to New York to buy five hundred dollars worth of lottery tickets. He came back around 3:30. Most of my customers were in good spirits and me, too. Was I doing a good service for Jason and Bill? Sometimes the weather is really awful, but the pay is all right.

After the work week, I went to a pub's Happy Hour and talked to local laborers and secretaries. We discussed the day, told jokes and drank beer. And the free buffet of food was superb.

Sometimes, I go to Hartford, Conn., and stay locally in town. It was my retreat from Spring Lake Ranch and all the rhetoric talk and familiar surroundings.

In Hartford, there is a clubhouse to spend time at: Chrysalis Center.

\* \* \*

The telephone in the foyer rang and it was a short message for me. I said, "Eileen, we are still a couple! I'll see you tomorrow. Want to come to Hartford, Connecticut?"

"Call me."

The three of us, Tony, Jamal and me", had a few disagreements over the week. Tony asked, "Do you feed the dog for pay?"

I tried to sound important, I said, "Well, the boss pays me for a service and I do errands. I feed the dog as goodwill."

Tony got irate and said, "Stop the mambo jumbo." I didn't tell him correctly so I have to give a straight answer: I get paid for work and I feed the dog as a favor to Bill.

The conversations between us, the clients, and real outside spheres, i.e., the staff, make me go through turbulence (ups and downs) with the medication, but it was good to know that the medication works and the staff is genuinely looking after our best interest.

## CHRISTMAS 2001

I hope I will find an agency that might help me find an affordable apartment. The apartments are close to shopping and work. I await their response.

It is December, close to Christmas. I am getting geared for Eileen, who is having a party.

I went to the garage. There I filled up the tank and I fed Casey, a dog who belongs to the owners.

I took a swim at the Y.M.C.A. gymnasium pool in Montpelier. I swam about a quarter of a mile. There is no one around as this is a Saturday. A quarter of a mile is eight laps. The cost to swim is six dollars.

I stopped at the stores to buy a woman's scarf for my woman. I looked in the Dress Barn. Eileen told me to shop there but I just looked. I went into Burlington and shopped there. I like to shop there because they are struggling with competition from the big stores and basically, they had the local stores in business. Eileen wants a \$100-gift certificate for Christmas. However, with the economic downturn, she won't get it.

I got to Eileen's house early for the party. She had cooked a turkey and had the table set



up for a buffet. Slowly, people came in. Rosemary and Mark arrived, then Dave. Dave's roommate, Mr. Mines, was invited at the last minute. I called him to come over. Then he arrived, too. Liz called and said she was too beat to show up. I surprised Eileen with the gift. She said it was wonderful. We wasted no time and ate the turkey dinner.

It is a two-story house. I had put everyone's coats upstairs in the bedroom. The stairs are in the middle of the house. A living room, dining room, and kitchen form a perimeter around the staircase.

We watched a Charles Dickens' "The Scrooge" movie after the meal. It was hard to make conversation. I know these people from Clubhouse, but who says they are really friends? It was Eileen's idea so I played along with it. Mr. Mines, Mark, and Rosemary left in the middle of the video. Mr. Mines asked, "Could I have my coat?" "Yeah, sure," I replied. We talked of the Clubhouse.

The weather turned to rain and cold. We talked about jobs, careers, and how we wanted to employ ourselves. These people are just happy to take from Social Security and they had no interests to talk about.

\* \* \*

On my cell phone now, "Hello," I said.

"Hi, hi how are you doing?" Eileen asked. I just walked in when the phone rang last night. I'd left a message that I was in her neck of the woods getting my teeth looked at by a dentist. I could not reach her. She was referring to the answering machine message.

"I am doing fine," I replied.

"Did you get me diamonds yet?" she inquired. I made a chuckle, which really upset her. "How was your day?" she asked. I didn't say anything because I was fully exhausted from

working. And making a joke was in poor taste. I told her I got an early Christmas present from Rob, my brother, and I can tell the temperature.

I stand on my feet all day. I run from the garage to the pumps and I have to make some sort of conversation. This gadget just made the perfect gift. Well, I always could tell the temperature so the gift was redundant.

"I'm tired," I said. "What day are we going to the Astoria restaurant?" We plan to dine with her folks, which I hate because her mother is such a mom.

"Christmas Eve," she replied.

"I am looking forward to that", I said.

"It is next Monday," she went on to say. I need to go shopping. Next weekend is practically Christmas.

"You could stay Christmas Eve if you like," she told me. "Give me a call."

"Okay, babe."

Eileen and I received permission to lodge at the co-op in Vermont. Christmas came and everyone stayed long. Christmas Eve, we had gone to the Astoria restaurant with her parents and I slept overnight. Then I visited David, a woman, and them at Sunset bluff. With Dorothy and Dad giving us lots of presents, we received clothes, books, and toys (well, little jokes). The weather was grand. We had a fire in the fireplace.

I only wish Eileen could have had as nice an affair, but maybe she didn't. Why we always have to be uninspired during the holiday, we never will understand.

Dad and Dorothy said I am much more focused. I am a pleasant person to be with.

On Christmas Day, Dorothy was just saying, "Your father gets in these awful moods."

When Dad asked, "Do you remember when you'd get so moody with your mother?" I did not know the answer to that.

"I don't know," I said. "Isn't it really me in the most awful moods?" As a New Year's resolution, I will try to be more cheerful.

I gave dad a painting I did, the actual finished piece.

Dorothy said, "You know now he is really exuberant." The scene of art, an eighteenth hole on a golf course on canvas I did from a paint-by-numbers, was his Christmas present.

Christmas had been truly a wonderful day. I was so elated to be a part of super Christmas affair with family.

## THE CO-OP

At the start of a new year, 2002, frankly, I said to myself, "I have a place to live, I have a job, and a girlfriend. Also, I have a place to vacation and a car." I can honestly say I have most of the normal amenities that everyone who has a modicum of life has, but I want to be rich and right now.

Maybe I have missed the boat, speaking of marrying and raising a family. However, my brother and sister can cover for me. I am 34 and single.

I have made my New Year's resolutions. On New Year's Eve, Eileen and I went to First Night in Hartford, Conn. The town had a few bands performing. We went to a Sea Chantey performance where I knew the musician. I walked in the place with Eileen just as he finished a song. Yes, David Berson. We clapped our hands. We enjoyed his sea songs. Next on the town common, we took a ride on a Ferris wheel. I know Hartford very well, but I got a little dizzy after riding the Ferris wheel. I thought I was exiting out onto the street side and, much to my surprise; I exited onto the riverside. It was new to me since I had been there years ago.

We stopped for coffee. I spilled my cup and Eileen and I didn't clean up. We just left. We stayed until the clock struck midnight, then we took in 2002 with a glance at the fireworks. We parked near the Civic Center. The fireworks were right in front of us. We were very exuberant.

about 2002. I entered 2002 in a very special state of mind.

\* \* \*

It was Sunday and everyone was watching Batman. I hadn't seen the program since the 1960s. I realized just how nutty the show was. I sat on my bed relaxing. My comforter was folded neatly on the edge of my bed. Looking at this quilt, I saw written in thread, "God loves you."

In conclusion, these two discoveries really marveled my spirit for the moment. I have to experiment with thinking of anything positive to keep me going. I only wish for the best for me in the coming year. It promises to be prosperous and healthy.

\* \* \*

Oh, also at the garage, the phone rang and it was for me. Elaine called again concerning my prescription from Dr. Shatterhand. She didn't have it. I said I honestly remembered giving the prescription to Mrs. Keyes. The phone rang again, and again it was for me. It was Rosemary. She asked the same question, where was my prescription? I told her for sure they had it. I get edgy when it concerns medication misses. I still live with ups and downs. You'll see the ups and downs I go through. I am not worried about going psychotic on the job, I also do take my medication diligently, except I forget. The job is there and I can gain independence. I am hopeful, at best.

On the weekend, also, I was asked by Tony, "What are we going to do?" I knew he meant we would use my automobile.

I got mad and said, "What am I going to do?" I paid the insurance for the car. The age of buddy-buddy is over for me.

Jamal doesn't like to hear arguments or get involved in fights; he just likes his television. I can understand. At my onset of these group homes and prior hospital stays, I too would try to hide myself in television. Tony and I can fight because I feel Tony is good-natured and I am a friend to him. Basically, we forgive each other after verbally fighting.

We sat around our room in the group home and waited for our soda and coffee. A man from the next room had gone shopping for me.

My side of the room always has the bed made. I have a fish tank and on the wall a painting I did. I have a few books, some Plaster of Paris sculptures, and a fiber optics lamp. Jamal has a bed with toiletries and a laundry basket. Tony has a stereo, Beatles posters on the wall, and a few *Pfayboy* magazines.

Jamal said, "He's taking a long time with that coffee."

"What?" Tony asked.

Jamal repeated himself, then added, "You'd think he'd be back by now."

"You fellows can't agree on whether to have television or records," I said. "You have them both on."

There is language at work which I don't like to hear very well. With an open mind, I follow what is said with the boys at work. I won't tolerate shit, fuck, damn or hell, but a blessed man is okay. I talked to one of my counselors and he swavered me to say anything nasty in return.

I have reasons for wanting to live in my own place.

It is a dilemma. Should I stay in my grouphome or move to my own apartment? Jamal, Tony, and I are a great team. I have lived alone before and it didn't work out. And the living here is becoming comfortable. My meals are prepared for me and my general well-being is

satisfactory. In conclusion, the vacation in March to the co-op seems exciting. Soon we'll be up for it, to kick back in the Green Mountains here.

\* \* \*

It is the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. On Saturday we were covered with a blanket of snow. The weekend ended with a lot of chores for me. I was the chef for Sunday. I cooked steak, French fries, and corn. My job was to wash the kitchen floor and, since I cooked, I did the dishes also. It was also the birthday of one lady in our group home. We had a cake for her. The routine is the same around here. Jamal watched television most of the day. I went to the shops for coffee. Tony was asleep most of the day. I fed the dog at the station as usual. My roommates and I were quiet for the most part.

"Hi, Steve, I'm going to watch TV," Jamal said.

\* \* \*

I did develop a new hobby. It is February 2002 and my car insurance check for the new year went in the mail. I was accepted at a correspondence school, Breaking into Print. I acknowledged the acceptance but mailed them a refusal note. I painted three works of art using a paint-by numbers kit. I am enrolled in a course entitled Literary Film at the University of Vermont.

I gave one of my paintings to Dad (the Christmas present), sold another, and the third I gave to my home church for use in a Chinese auction.

It will hardly snow now; there have been record temperatures of 68 to 78 degrees. It is warm and the days are getting longer.

\* \* \*

I shopped at a department store after dinner. I went with George, a house resident, to take

a look at items. Immediately, I asked for the arts and crafts section, I looked for paint-by-numbers kits. I then asked a customer service lady about latch hook. She mistakenly showed me the wrong counter. She said, "Oops, right church, wrong pew." Laughing, I kept looking at different things until finally buying a bicycle and a picture frame. George and I arrived back at the group home.

At work today, I was elated when I heard the owners bring in about a quarter-million dollars a year. "Hooray," I said to myself. "If they bring in that much money, they can certainly pay me a thousand dollars a month."

Today was payday and I was happy. It is Valentine's Day. What a real joy this job has been for me. I glee at all the money I am socking away in the bank. The scale is much bigger as I have to maintain a car. That means gasoline and maintenance. And I have premium payments once a year for my insurance. That about covers the bases for me. I still get an allowance check once a week, another monthly check, and the pay I make at work.

\* \* \*

It is President's Day Weekend. The temperature earlier today was sixty degrees. There is bright sunshine and nothing but blue sky.

My small circle of friends includes my two roommates, Jamal and Terry, and my girlfriend, Eileen. They were all busy with their routine on a Saturday. I went to my literary film class in the morning. The film we saw made us laugh.

The professor pointed out that we enjoyed it and laughed.

I had spent the night before sleeping with Eileen. With a three-day weekend, it is time to catch up on a lot of painting, Plaster of Paris, and writing and reading. Also, it is time to do a



laundry. Too many small projects, I want to reach the tops of mountains.

\* \* \*

Finally, it was time for our holiday weekend. Eileen and I left on a Friday after work. We went by car. The trip is about an hour and a half. When we reached White River junction in Vermont, we got on Route 89 and went to the Warren/Stowe exit. The ride had beautiful scenery. There were big mountains covered with snow. It is very country in that part of Vermont. We took Route 100 into the valley, where we arrived around 11 p.m.

Arriving, you go up a hill about a half a mile and the driveway slopes down and to the left. The co-op is a flat-roofed multiple dwelling and ours is in the middle. You park your car under an overhang. The entrances are under the cover of the overhang. As you open the door, you walk into the living room. There is a tiny kitchen and a stairway to bunk beds on the lower level. The actual size of the whole apartment is small, both upstairs and downstairs.

I said to Eileen, "Wait until you see the view in daylight." She seemed to like the place. It was her first visit and the first time I ever brought a girlfriend there. "We'll have to go grocery shopping tomorrow," Eileen commented.

"Eileen, you can put your bags in the bedroom downstairs," I said. "But the stairs are very steep," she said. We were ready for bed and stayed in the double bed. In the morning, I was up at seven a.m. and went upstairs to feel the nostalgia I always feel at the co-op, with all the memories. I thought, "What should I do now?" Finally, I said to myself, "Stop playing. Do the chores you have to do to keep the place clean." It isn't all fun here. There is the heating to monitor, the kitchen chores, the linen, and the vacuuming. Eileen got up and was going to do these things. I was here to enjoy my holiday from the gas station.

"Wow, what a marvelous view," Eileen told me.

"Eileen, you'll take good care of keeping the place clean?" I inquired of her.

My sister lives over the mountain and owns a coffee shop in the valley. Her husband, Franz, is a damn good plumber and has a monopoly in the valley. He is Austrian. They have two grown children, a boy and a girl. I went to visit them, and Eileen came too. After we stopped in at the coffee shop to see her, Eileen wanted to go grocery shopping. I didn't want to go. I just wanted to buzz around the valley, see Franz driving around, or other co-op families, or just people I knew.

I couldn't get real about chores and I never was able to. Eileen was going to be my co-pilot to get down to vacationing.

"What do you want to do?" I asked Eileen.

"I don't know," she answered. It is up to me to have fun and she would keep control of the minor stuff.

It was a Saturday and I suggested we see the swimming hole. We went to the river. Of course, Eileen wouldn't swim, but I didn't either because it was still only March.

"This is where we jumped off these rocks," I said to Eileen. She said nothing and we drove back to the co-op.

"Let's do some shopping," she said.

"Okay, let's go!" I said. We got plenty of food for the weekend and she wanted to start cooking but I said, "Let's go for a hike!"

"Not a long hike," she warned,

"No, just up the road a little bit," I said. The hike was nice in the crisp fresh Vermont air. After the hike, I left Eileen at the co-op and took a ride to my sister's coffee shop. I said to Pam, "How are the conditions at the ski area?"

"I don't know. I haven't been there at all this winter," Pam said.

"I am going to go to the mountain," I said.

I picked up Eileen and then realized what a mistake it was to have left her at the co-op. I took Eileen up to the basebox and we looked around for a while. I haven't skied at Mad River Glen for ten years. That is, since I was a young man in my early twenties. At the basebox, as a kid and then in my twenties', the skiing was always a very big social event. I had lots of friends and a lot of fun going on the mountain. To Eileen, it was just another ski area. To me, it was that special place I grew up, which I overly loved.

We had dinner that Saturday night and a fire in the fireplace. I was pondering whether to take Eileen to the bar scene, but thought better of it. I love her enough to just be alone with her.

Sunday morning was cloudy and cold. There was about a foot of snow on the ground. We went to a Catholic mass at Our Lady of the Snows. I think Eileen enjoyed it. After church, we sat around and got comfortable. It was a comfortable setting for Eileen and for me it was like the reward of a lot of hard work. We two old people kept the time of day just sitting on a massive, wooded mountainous landscape.

I knew we were close by our CR home, so at mid-afternoon I told Eileen we'd be leaving. All we had to do now was clean up. Eileen was a real big help.

We glanced at the cartoon from the *New Yorker* magazine on the wall which reads, "Go home and face your responsibilities."

The co-op has been in the same condition since it was constructed:

**METICULOUS**

Sitting in the bedroom, Jamal, Tony and I get ready to sleep. "Tony always has that radio on," I told Jamal.

"Tony, you have to turn off that radio," Jamal retorted. "We can't sleep." In addition, Jamal told Tony, "This man telephoned three times for you." It was the dentist who had to confirm that Tony has an appointment. My dentist had given up calling me.

Next day, Tony asked, "What should we do now?"

I knew he wanted to use my automobile so I interrupted. "It is my car, I bought it," I said. I looked at my temperature gauge. The sound of the fish aquarium bubbled and a replica of a black spider focuses my attention. The aquarium had just been cleaned.

Jamal is starting to put his clothes away. He just stuffed socks and underwear loosely in his dresser, then he is tired and goes to sleep. I am organized and very simple about how I keep my belongings.

\* \* \*

Jamal has been discharged from the psychiatric ward recently and I came home to find him smiling in front of the television. The windows (there are three) in our room are open and it is a warm, April spring day. I paid Tony's forty-two dollars for a ticket to a show. We saw a concert at the Montpelier Theater.

"You get paid today?" Tony asked. I assumed he wanted to borrow money from me. I didn't answer him.

Jamal said, "I am starting a job with a sheltered workshop. My counselor at the day treatment center suggested it."

"That's good Jamal," I said.

Tony walks in with a cup in his hand. From downstairs Elaine yells, "Tony, did you bring that up there? Bring it down."

He replies, "It's empty, and it's mine."

I had a meal at Domino's, the pizza place, and settled on my bed in front of the television, a fish aquarium, and a fiber optics lamp.

I traveled over to Eileen's on a Saturday night. Eileen had prepared a supper. In her dining room, we had steak, potatoes, and green beans.

Eileen told me, "Steve, I'm so proud of you, working so hard. You've got it all together now." I was happy to hear this. I really love her open heart and sweet kindness. With a magnificent sunset, I left Eileen to come back to Spring Lake Ranch, the group home.

There were lots of chores to do at the group home. I had to take out the garbage, take my medication, and I needed to do laundry.

Suddenly, Eileen called. Jamal told me, "She called and you were not home."

"When did she call?" I asked.

"When you were not home," he said.

I realized that she was looking for me. For some strange reason she didn't call me on the cell; she called on the pay phone in the commons.

\* \* \*

On Friday afternoon, as I work at the station, I am pumping gas for Tom Kelly and he says, "Hey, how is the fishing?" He continues and says, "You are a real baby."

I said, "What the hell, you're a baby." I had a karma and I came to a lesson: There is really a lot of uncooth behavior around. I get a cross section of peoples' personalities, from the

very super to the very weary.

I was asking my boss, "Bill, what are you going to do this weekend?" Then I showed him a paper, *The Valley Reporter*, and told him to look at the events calendar.

"Yeah, like I'm really going to try the Farmer's Market in the valley on Saturday," he said with sarcasm. I laughed, but then I reflected on it that it is not my own best, honest laugh.

\* \* \*

It is Saturday and the weather is really fine. I had a lot to accomplish. The only problem was I didn't tell my father of my whereabouts.

First, I started at school. I got my first two papers back and we watched a French film called "Diva." Second, I checked on the dog at the garage and fed him and I filled up the tank. I drove to Montpellier, where I got my haircut. Then I drove back to the Y.M.C.A. and went swimming in the indoor pool. I did a quarter mile. I drove back to the high school nearby and the adjacent public library. I photocopied my photograph, and I checked out a book.

As I settled at the Ranch home, I was told Dorothy had called me. It seems they were expecting me when school finishes to help them in their garden. They were sympathetic and I promised to be there on the next weekend.

Just about every Saturday, I watch a film at the library.

When I am told, I do cleaning chores in our Ranch home. We are required to do a single, individual job each day. We chop wood at the Ranch to build up our physical strength. And to supply our heat for winters. I had to clean my fish aquarium. I cleaned the tank in the bathtub, then afterwards, cleaned the bath, which was dirty and filled with hair.

I keep my side of the room very picked up, bed made, and clothes put in their place.

Last Saturday night, I did not need to be told to wash the kitchen floor. I just got to work

and mopped the floor. I not only do the chores I'm told to do, but I do extra chores as well. It is the errands that cost so much money, so I keep to only chores because they are generally free.

I still would like to lose about forty pounds to get to a normal weight. I am starting to snack a lot more and more and that has to be cut out. I am liking beer, and I still have that tobacco snuff habit. It is hard to get in really good shape for me. I was in good form at one time and I want to get fit again.

One job that people say I can do well is be pleasant with people. I am the person to get along with.

It is Monday, there was some rain in the morning and the sun came out from behind a cloud. Most of the day was cloudy and overcast. I did my job and went back to my corner and drank a beer.

Tony said, "Steve, you're taking chance drinking that beer. They could kick you out of the program."

It is Wednesday and after dinner Jamal had his turn at washing clothes. He was stuffing his clothes away when I walked into the room.

"I hear," he said, "I guess you have athlete's foot."

"Yes, that's it," I answered. I could see the anguish and boredom he was going through to change his linen.

"I am going to put "Batman" on," Tony said. He sang the Batman theme!

"Now I've got my clothes done," Jamal said.

We discuss books and he mentions what to do on the next Halloween. "I don't want to be the devil because that is what our counselor is going to be," Jamal joked. At Halloween, we know it'll soon be Thanksgiving and then Christmas.

We were talking about baseball for most of the night. We were ambiguous of whether to watch "Batman" or "The World According to Jim" or "The Jamie Foxx Show." I'd prefer to watch baseball.

\* \* \*

I received another nice letter from Dorothy:

Dear Steven,

I hope you are enjoying your Saturday morning film/literature course. Do not just pick book titles that you have already read. After all, college is supposed to expand your knowledge. So do not take the easy way through.

We thought that you might have called in once this summer, so we missed you.

Enclosed is a couple of pay-in slips. Keep them in a safe place.

Well, my dear, take care of yourself and we will see or speak to you soon.

Love,

Dorothy

This was the empathetic letter I received after I missed the weekend of Sunset Bluff.

The Ranch home houses psychiatric people, but there are healthy people there as well, in addition to handicapped. I can't say to myself that I have an illness because I am an excellent problem solver.

I have an empowerment test every day. With a few good experiences in my youth, I am still not very good in social graces and the ethic "stick with it." I have kept my work active on the job, like putting education first and therapy in psychology helps, too.



Now, at Spring Lake Ranch, I am becoming very comfortable! My room is always picked up, my chores are easy, my meals are prepared for me, and my general well-being is satisfied. A move to the apartment phase would be really great now. I shift from the great minds to the very feeble ones, so I hope I've found a medium. Anyway, yes, I think okay. Basically, all I did for my single nightly chore was to dust the woodwork and the mouthpiece on the telephone. I was shelved with doing my chores.

\* \* \*

It was Saturday, with blue sky in May and nice weather. I studied for class at school in the library. I then drove from the Ranch to first feed the dog at the station and fill up the tank. I then drove to Greenport N.Y. They were cutting the grass and I started weeding at Sunset Bluff. We had lunch and prepared to go to the old digs (house) with Dorothy here to garden and make the lawn look smart.

I swept the sidewalk and Dad and I put fertilizer down. I edged the garden and cut some branches off an evergreen that were brown. When I saw Dad, he had had a big black eye. I said, "Oh, what happened?" He had fallen into a manhole in Manhattan and hit his head.

After a nice ride back home (the group home), I made dinner and I ate steak and soup. Then I cleaned the corner of my room and went to the basement with my laundry. While doing my clothes, I took off my black trousers that I had been wearing all day. I put them in with colored clothes and I ran up in my skivvies to the bedroom. One lady of the house saw me, but not even a flinch came from her.

\* \* \*

I spoke up to Tony, "Tony, you don't really give a damn, do you?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

The phone rang. I said to him, "I mean the telephone. You don't answer it."

"Yo," he replied and began to move things.

Yo is an easy introductory statement or a response; it really expresses no opinion and is a redundant way to answer somebody.

"The dishes just sit there, dirty in the sink," I continued, but Tony interrupted, "It's not my chore."

Even though we have cell phones now, there is a public pay phone in a foyer of the community residence at the Spring Lake Ranch commissary.

I am waiting for Jamal to come back. When he returns I'll say, "Did you visit your psychiatrist?" He did, I know, but I just want to rub it in his nose.

I know this is only temporary housing but I get on really well with my roommates. I could live by myself, but I'm undecided. The room is peaceful, no radio or television. I just lie on my bed and focus on a cap of Tony's that has "NY" printed on it.

After every job (weekday) and always in my corner (on my bed), I think about how the day went. I also tell myself that I am laid back and easy to make a friend. I never cheated in all of schooling that I attended.

What enters my mind is letting go of my past. I also could change my evil ways. I say to myself, "I have to keep my short-term memory sharp and put the past out of my head." I think when an adult, most people feel this way.

I picked up a book entitled, "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven" by Sherman Alexie. It is the last story for our class. We have read, so far, the books, "To Kill a Mockingbird; and "Iron and Silk." The corresponding movie of Alexie's book is entitled "Smoke Signals."

Spring Lake Ranch will be discharging me soon.

#### A FLEETING IMAGINATION

On Wednesday, Jamal asked me, "Steve, would you like to go to a movie at my mother's country club?"

"When Jamal?" I asked.

"Thursday night," he replied. "Would you like to go?"

"I'll see when I get home from work tomorrow," I said.

Tony told me, "I am going to have to get cigarettes."

I said, "So you want me to drive you to the store Saturday?"

"Yeah," he replied.

Tony and I walked to the 7-11 and he talked about his wish for a car and about loving women. I didn't say much, but I meely go to that store.

\* \* \*

"So, tell me, your feelings", a counselor of the Ranch staff asked me in a therapy session.

"I have to get an easier job soon. I did gain a lot of experience at pumping gas, but I stand around too much (and I only handled the money and gave it to the owner). I stand around with my hands in my pockets," I told her.

Every day at work, I try to think in my mind the same routine so I can stabilize and eventually use my back more. In reality, I am pumping gas and doing productive work and I tire out. Because business is all about producing, I have feelings of inadequacy around mechanics working on cars because I can't fix a car. All I have to do is watch for cars to come in and go fill them up. And I think, "Keep firm, keep simple, and keep positive." My work is really going well. Social work would be a good job and I'll have a bachelor's degree, but I wouldn't consider that in my sphere of influence world.

\* \* \*

Well, it is a Saturday afternoon and I am feeling very well. I sat down with Tony and had a talk. Tony has to not spend all his money on cigarettes. He has a job, but he is very unhappy.

The room looks picked up and we all made our beds.

"Jamal, well," I think to myself, "get off your sorry ass and get a life." He has been watching television all day.

I like these guys, my roommates, mind you. We can all trust one another. I mean, I can have money out in the open and there is no worry about it becoming missing. Individually, I've socked away some money in the bank.

I changed the water in the fish aquarium. I did my laundry today. I cooked a shrimp scampi for the residents and everyone was full. The day was very easy and I got a good chance to rest. It was also a good time to pick up a few things for myself, like toiletries, pictures, books, and so on and so on.

On another weekend, I went by bus out to Long Island to Sunset Bluff in Greenport. I ate a breakfast and then walked up to the Greenport United Methodist Church. I had planned to play a round of golf with my father. The church service was splendid. I really enjoyed the music, prayers, and the people. I went around shopping for a few more little things. At Sunset Bluff, Dorothy was in her garden. She said she was on a strict time schedule, so Dad and I wasted no time, and drove out of the driveway to a nearby golf course.

Dad paid \$105 for the two of us. We walked with our clubs. We were joined by another father and son, Jim and Chris Biggs. It is Dad's birthday. The weather turned nice. My score was 105, which just matched the cost. One dollar per stroke. I told this to Dad. He went home and drank a beer. I went back home on a bus during a thunderstorm.

\* \* \*

At the station, we had to do a necessary, but unpleasant thing. We had to put Casey to sleep. Now I no longer have the responsibility of feeding the dog on the weekends. I am kind of glad for this. I had volunteered to feed the dog.

\* \* \*

On Friday, I got my pay from doing work. I have plans to get a crew cut on the weekend. Also, in August I'll be moving out of this Ranch housing. I will move to a place in a luxury garden apartment complex. I am moving into an apartment. I will decorate the place --- maybe only my bedroom. I am planning to keep it very simple.

\* \* \*

Another year has passed and I have lived in my own place for a full year. I always keep my room clean and I have gotten used to cleaning the bathroom and the kitchen and vacuuming the rug daily.

One morning I met Mary Ann outside in the drive we share. "Think about what you can do with what you hold," the honest woman said. I had dreamt these counselor's words last night in my sleep. Mary Ann was going off to an interview that day and I spoke randomly with her before she left. I said to her, "Just be yourself in the interview! Tell your employer that you just have to pay your mortgage."

A few days passed and I met with her again. She said, "I got hired. The advice that you gave me to go on that interview had been right. It was a positive aura for me!"

"What kind of job did you get?" I asked. "You must be thrilled."

"I am a counselor at a group home for rehabilitation," she told me. *Déjà vu.*

It just made me feel good to speak up about something for somebody and it was easy. I don't have to get cocky or proud of this little advice, it's just a use of common sense. I am glad for her, but as I sit in my living room, I look out the window and worry.

Recently I received some mail from an insurance agent and from the police. The letters said they were investigating something. However, I can't recall an accident that I had. I was very

concerned about what these accusations in the letter said: "To date, we have been unsuccessful in our attempts to contact you regarding your working off the books. We ask that you contact this office upon receipt of this letter. If we do not hear from you within fifteen days of this letter, we will assume that you are not presenting a claim and we will close our file. This letter is to advise you that your name has been mentioned in connection with an active investigation being conducted by the below named officer. You are being afforded this opportunity to contact Officer Michaels in order to clear up this matter. It is incumbent upon you to use this opportunity to clear up this matter."

I didn't know how to explain a response to the letters so I mailed them to Dorothy. She read them. Well, we had a three-way conference call with Dorothy, Officer Michaels and myself, and concluded it was all a big error.

I was so relieved.

Over the telephone with Tony still at the Ranch I said, "Hi, Tony, how are you?"

"Steve, what are you doing?" Tony asked.

I found out that Jamal had been transferred to an adult home in St. Albans. He has no real escape anymore and I tried to call him, but he couldn't be reached.

Tony said, "I am going to work three days a week." And, he told me, "Jamal is doing all right."

\* \* \*

In a dreaming occasion while I was asleep, I looked back to my first time at the CR in Spring Lake Ranch.

One Sunday this summer, I devoted a day to my painting.

One of the residents and I walked to the grocery store. We were downtown and at the

shopping center in Bennington. There were police cars in the parking lot. I glanced up from my stroll and saw a liquor store with a smashed glass door. Someone had stolen lottery tickets.

Tony is in the psych hospital now and I'm thinking about going to see him. I'm sure he needs cigarettes. I would bring him a carton, but they are outrageous in cost. That was good common sense for me not only in this one situation, but overall to never have taken up cigarette smoking.

The sun shines brightly over the open landscape of the enclosure by the trees and the woods. I looked up at my temperature gauge and it was eighty-one degrees at eleven o'clock in the morning.

There is no longer a need to go to the station on the weekends to take care of the dog. Casey is dead now.

There isn't much noise on the phone as Tony is in the psych unit and Jamal has gone on his Florida vacation with his mom. I changed my mind and did not visit Tony.

Outside my window are huge oak and maple trees. I was on the second floor and I sure did climb those stairs quite often. It was quite a dream.

All I need is to look up and improve my attitude. It's a Tuesday evening and the leaves are wagging from the breeze outside my window. Rabbits and squirrels race around our landscape. There are easy chairs on the verandah that host the residents who sit and chat. When the evening approaches, fireflies light up from the woods like residents lighting up their cigarettes. I am pleased with the work I've done for the day. Usually I am saved a dinner. The sun casts its long beams down on our residence and sinks itself into the western sky over the landscape.

"Clean up for fifteen minutes each day," I say out loud. The best time to clean up is in the



mornings. But, in reality, I get the bathroom spotless about once a month when my fish aquarium needs cleaning. Chores like laundry and dishes are little problems. When it comes to scrubbing dirt, it is a major job.

Over the weekend, I did get a buzz haircut. It was again great for me. As it is going to be a humid, hot summer, I will be cooler in the hot weather. Not coincidentally, but a maintenance-free buzz haircut would mean no need for shampoo and I shave with soap to save myself some money.

I am looking forward to new work and maybe I'll make new friends. I said to Bill, "You've taught me everything I know: to keep the money organized and to not let the people rush me." I've said some healthy words at the service station, I should try to be very proud of not only the productive work I do, but that head of mine is doing something right.

Bill lets me go fifteen minutes early sometimes. I went off to fish.

Next afternoon, I looked up at my thermometer and it read ninety-nine degrees. Inside with the air conditioner, it is very comfortable. As I lie on my bed, I think about the day's events. I am very proud of myself on how the day's work went.

I look up at my picture on the window sill. I am still happy about that picture in the bulletin. I spent the whole damn day in ninety-nine degree weather pumping gas, and let me say, it wasn't pleasant. I am glad I have four days off.

Eileen telephoned to say she was feeling much better. She was recently in the psych ward, too. I had car trouble at that time so I could not visit her. She was in Waterbury State Hospital for a short time. She really has no good avenue to follow in her life. I mean she was struck down with depression and I thought she would do well in the Clubhouse. She doesn't want to go there ever again, so I don't know what she is going to do. She will stay at home and

clean occasionally, albeit she will sort of mope in that big house.

Today, Dad and Dorothy are two who encourage me. I find real peace of mind here. Eileen sounded a little better, so I'm satisfied.

I have a car now and that can make a big difference. Eileen would like me to take her to one of the Long Island beaches. I know, because she asked me. I would like to plan a car trip, too.

I might be working at the carnival this Fourth of July. The country fair is only a short ride and it could be a lot of fun to work there but no!

We residents did seem to know each other so well we'd pick up greater conversations. On one night, at a Ranch house meeting, we all laughed and joked over what to plan for a meal. Duck, duck, goose!

I had turned on the radio just before Tony walked in. "Did you turn on my radio?" He asked.

"Yes, I did," I said.

"You know you are liable for it. Oh, it's a good radio, my nephew bought it for me," Tony interjected. Tony loves that radio, as I do also.

"Why did you ask? What's wrong?" I asked Tony.

"Well, you just look like you're overworked," he said.

"Yes, I am," I replied.

Between the three of us, Tony smoked, I take snuff tobacco and Jamal watched a lot of television. Tony listens to music and I write as much as I can. We were an extremely good trio, a unique trio. Never before, and I haven't lived with many roommates, had I experienced such easy going relationships. But all good things must someday come to an end.

The economic aspect of me surfaces from time to time: I have a downward spiral and I leave myself with only a bus token. So it gets lonely living by myself without Eileen.

\* \* \*

I see a lot of people that I sort of know, and they are mostly ones that I fill up with gas. It is eighty-six degrees outside so I plan to stay indoors in the cool air. It was up to ninety-nine degrees outside in the hot sun. There was a pig roast and when my woman saw me at the house, she said two or three times, "You look good!" We sat outside and I looked around her place. It needed some painting and spackling. Also, it needed light bulbs replaced. Inside, I didn't care.

The maintenance of the property was in shambles. The garden needed work. So, this is where the problem began, more work on a house and upkeep. I would learn a lot if only Eileen had let me move along. All I wanted to do was clean. We discussed things, Eileen and myself.

"We haven't been ourselves," Eileen told me. "I heard about your phone conversation with Dorothy," she said.

Frankly, I do a lot of sitting around and do some painting on my canvases. I don't neglect my laundry on weekends. On Saturday, I bought myself new trousers, shirts, and some boxer underwear. I also bought some music for Eileen as I am beginning to feel enumerated.

I said, "I have brought you to concerts and to the store many times. What have you done for me? Think about it."

"The, all-star baseball game is tonight," I said.

"Oh yeah, what time?" she asked.

"Eight o'clock," I replied. "I'll put the game on now?" We couldn't get the channel that the game was on.

In reiterating, "Do whatever you want," "Just be good." I say I only care about how my room looks, that my car is clean and runs, that I wash my clothes and keep my body clean. And that I eat and I get my mail.

"What's for dinner?"

"I think fish fillets and fries."

I said that I have been watching television all night and I'd stop it for a while. The room was in a better condition than any other previous living arrangement. Too bad we didn't last long together, Eileen and me.

#### A FORTNIGHT AWAY IS WATERFALLCUTOFF

Gee, Father, I loved you very much. The best lesson you ever taught me was to recreate myself in mind, body, and soul. The word comes from recreation: to enjoy doing. We based this philosophy on a book entitled "The Art of Self-Renewal" by John Gardner. He was Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare in the 1960s. I can't renew my spirit by an alternative drive Outward Bound. I was nurtured in a faith and I found recovery in it. Church

services are how I spend my Sunday mornings. It helps to reinsure me emotionally and spiritually. God, the creator of the Universe, made a magnanimous beautiful world. So I ask, "Why did He bring man here, a builder, destroyer, and polluter?" "To keep God's word going!" That is our answer. With God all things are possible. I have never been witness to another faith other than Christianity. The Holy Spirit tells me to stay away from them. I can recreate myself. I take some preventive medicine before going to bed. I say to myself, "Just go straight home, no night trips to clubs, discos, and/or bars. Just continue with the medicine.

The government takes out 7.65% minimum of all wages. That tax is used for our roads, Medicare, social security revenues, etc. Now I am gainfully employed and I do not collect Social Security Disability anymore. I walk to the library everyday still. I stopped seeing Ellen and I do my apartment maintenance outside of the day job.

The sun shines opaquely through a window of my bedroom. Outside is a big bare tree and pine needles mat the car park. I am making equal money per week to the gas pumping job but I am paying taxes. I am very grateful to Bill and Jason. I had worked for them for almost ten years. And now I am working at a landscaping job at a Vermont college three days a week that pays great.

It is difficult for me to adjust to the different ethics at Pond View Living. In luxury apartment living, Dorothy tells me, "It doesn't matter where you live, you could live anywhere." Yet my housing isn't exactly what I wanted. With 13 -14 buildings and 20 units to each building, the Pond View complex is a luxury but it is still subsistence standard living.

I now live in a ranch-style house with two others, with HUD and Concern for Independent Living subsidies. I pay my rent completely through the outside work I am doing. It has been like a weaning process. And in my own individual case, I feel the perseverance worked. Because I

always want to take the bull by the horns. My mother used to say, "Your father is a driven person." And I think that it was key that I acquired his act!! Business and the economy look bleak, but I remain optimistic, honest, and still patriotic. In this day and age, renewal is key to remaining compliant and solvent. I don't have a job that requires a use of brains, but these are rare indeed.

I renewed my body enough, I am physically fit enough. I quit the football photos hobby and did one Plaster of Paris in a mold. Now I am learning about html and web designing. Freelance web-designing will not make me rich. (I want to be rich and right now), but at least it offers a good hobby for me.

In a fortnight, is our final exam before the end of the semester. I needed one class in small business management to graduate. I teamed up with a Japanese student in a project and he quit so I finished with my own makeshift business, S.C.A.R.F. (Suffolk County Auto Refurbished Fords) and ended up flunking.

When I got that F grade, I went into the dean's office three times and pleaded for a D-. He at last granted me the passing grade and I got the degree, but he said, "Don't ask me for a job when you graduate."

I suppose I should have continued with accounting principles and tried more but I didn't. Or carried on with computer programming but it was so difficult to learn. And my health failed during the time I was taking computer science and the dean didn't believe me.

In economics one doesn't get a clear ground opportunity, but what one gets is a broader monetary picture, or at least a glimpse into it.

Years later, a professor pointed out to me in a letter that just reading books won't get one a sustenance in life. What books will do, though, is give one structure.

"Writing books is better than planting vines for a vine serves his belly, but he who writes a book serves his soul." "Books are a banquet for the mind." So in retrospect and conclusion, I get a small job from my future B.S. at a service station. I had learned a lot about cars and repairing and maintaining them. I'll piece together S.C.A.R.F. from that college final and work it out if fixing cars will raise some funds somehow.

Father had always encouraged me. He'd said, "Give it that ole college try" and Dorothy would say, "You can't just take a day off on a whim, you have to show up because you have work."