

Lisa Lieberman.

LOCAL NEWS

VOLUME II

A Bundled Selection of
Articles by Lisa Lieberman
Local Articles

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I worry. I really worry. I really worry a lot.

I worry about my unpaid bills. I worry about the mold growing on the inside of my refrigerator door. I worry about which way to part my hair in the mornings and about plucking out excess strands of gray. And I simply can't sleep at night when I hear that drip drip drop from the leaky faucet inside my bathroom that just won't stop. No matter how sleepy I am, I always feel compelled to get up and turn it off.

I worry about my boyfriend when he doesn't come home until late because I think he's dead in a ditch somewhere. And then I worry some more when I think he's not dead in a ditch somewhere but has simply failed to call me like he said he would — the insensitive jerk! — and in fact then I think he would be better off dead.

I'm embarrassed to say, though, that even though I worry incessantly, I don't worry much about world politics. Sure, I glance through the newspapers and read stories about bombings, hunger, natural disasters and such, but hardly anything seems as important as when I'm in pain with a toothache or having a bad hair day.



Letters
from Home
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Worry cause for concern

I am a true believer in worrying because the simple fact is that worrying works.

Worrying no doubt, has saved me countless times by keeping the airplane afloat when I with clammy palms sat with my hands clutching my arm rests every time we hit one of those nasty air pockets which threatened to bring the plane down, but didn't. Worrying is what brought my grandmother's children home alive when she started calling the hospitals and highway patrol one minute after their curfew was up, and they magically returned home unscarred several hours later. And worrying, no doubt is the fuel that fed my car, when I worried my way all the way to the gas station and didn't run out until I got to the gas tank.

When people try to tell me that worrying causes me undue stress, and start trying to rile me up with all that senseless nonsense about "don't worry, be happy," I tell them that not only does worrying work but that worrying is a natural part of life passed down to us through our genes.

I mean, what would have happened to cave men back in primitive days had they just relaxed and sunned themselves on the rocks? Surely they would have been ravaged and eaten by animals had they not been constantly on the alert.

The only problem about worrying, I find, is when I run out of problems to worry about and I worry about what I've forgotten to worry about.

You know, like the feeling you get when you're driving to the airport on a nice vacation trip to Hawaii, and everything seems too good to be true, and suddenly out of nowhere you break into a cold sweat thinking, "Now what's wrong with this picture? Did I forget my bathing suit, my socks, tickets, etc..." Then finally after you've reassured yourself, you sit bolt upright in your chair in the middle of take-off when you realize in absolute panic that you let the windows unlocked, the kitchen stove on, and that drip drip drop has not stopped dripping.

But then once you've worried yourself into a tizzy, and go full circle with all of your fears, you'll feel a lot better once you realize that when the kitchen stove sets the house on fire, the flood that ensues from the dripping faucet will easily put the fire right out.

Then you can sit back and relax, knowing full well that your worrying wasn't all in vain.

Friend's advice: Don't take my advice

I was thinking of breaking up with my boyfriend, so I called a friend of mine and asked him what he thought I ought to do.

"I really love my boyfriend, and I think he's a great guy. It's just that he's driving me God-awful crazy. Do you think I ought to break up with him or not?" I asked my friend after telling him all of our problems in detail.

"Well, I really hesitate to give you any advice," my friend said. "If I tell you to break up with the guy, when you're an old maid 20 years down the road, you'll be calling me up and blaming me, saying 'Why'd you tell me to break up with him?' He wasn't so bad."

"But then if I tell you to stay together with him, you'll be angry at me years later when you're as unhappy with him as ever, saying it's all my fault because I was the one who told you to stay with him."

"Well, if you can't give me a straight answer, then maybe I should ask someone else," I said.

"But no matter who you ask, you're not really going to get a straight answer from anyone, since everyone has their own personal biases and each person you ask will probably tell you a different thing."

"If for instance, you ask a close



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girlfriend, who may be jealous of all the time you spend with your boyfriend, she may tell you to break up with him so that she'll have more time with you. If you ask a girlfriend who's married with kids and isn't too happy, she may tell you, 'All relationships are tough, so you might as well just stick it out and stay together.' But then if you ask another girlfriend who's sick and tired of you calling her up in the middle of the night bugging her with all your problems, she might just tell you to break up with him, so she

doesn't have to hear the same old stories over and over again.

"But if you really need to ask someone's advice, the best thing to do is to ask someone who you seek to emulate and who really knows more than you do about the particular subject at hand. So, it's better to ask someone who's happily involved in a good relationship than someone who hates men and thinks all men should be brought to the pound.

"But then again, asking people who seem to know what they're talking about can be dangerous, too. For instance, if you ask a friend who is a skilled backpacker for advice on which trail to take while hiking, your friend may unwittingly give you faulty directions, sending you off up a dead-end path, which you blindly pursue. Then, despite your better instincts, you continue along the path, because you trust your friend more than yourself, and end up getting yourself hopelessly lost in the woods.

"On the other hand, if you ignore any and all advice from everybody, you may very well still end up getting lost, since you don't know what the heck you're doing anyway."

"Look, I don't want to hear all this stuff," I said. "I just want to

know what you think I ought to do."

"Well, giving advice is tricky business. But if you were to ask me for some constructive criticism or for my opinion on your situation, that would be a different matter. I could just say what I think, and then you can take it or leave it for what it's worth.

"But the truth is most of the time, people don't want to hear what you really think, they only want to hear what they want to hear.

"So when you tell me about a problem with your boyfriend, what you really want me to do is sympathize with you and say, 'What an insensitive jerk! Who needs him.' But if I were to somehow suggest that some of it may have been your fault, you'd get angry at me, and say, 'What kind of a friend are you?! I shouldn't have bothered telling you in the first place.'"

"So are you telling me that I should break up with my boyfriend or not?"

"I'm telling you that I don't believe in giving advice. So my advice, is don't take any advice."

"That's the stupidest piece of advice I've ever heard."

(Lisa Lieberman is a writer living in Three Rivers. Readers can write her in care of The Sentinel.)

Asleep or awake, the country sings

As the shroud of darkness enclosed the mountains, restless sleepers in my sleepy town listened to the silence of the night. Like an opera patron squirming restlessly in his chair waiting for the symphony to begin, I tossed and turned in my bed waiting for the music of dawn to come.

Outside, there was pitch blackness, not a single city street light. The blackness seemed to absorb all sound. In the day, sounds are easier to discern when you can see them as well as hear them, like watching the white foam of the river rising and following and listening to the sound each different current makes.

As I lay there listening, I thought about how different the sounds of the city are from those of the country. Nights in the city, I used to lie awake listening to the sounds of cars honking and beeping, pounding feet on the streets, car alarms going off, sirens wailing and jets flying by.

Quite often at night in the country, there are no sounds, except for the running river, whose sound is so constant and steady that it begins to sound like the air to me, which doesn't sound like anything at all.

The quiet of the night trains the ear to search for different sounds in the darkness. Instead of listening for glass shattering and for burglars breaking into the house, I lie listening for garbage cans crashing outside and the sound of the local black bear rummaging through my garbage like used

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goods at a yard sale. If I'm lucky, I'm able to run to the window in time to see the stealthy figure in the moonlight making off with his bag of goodies filled with orange peels and left-over vegetables.

Bears are quiet burglars. But if I listen carefully, I can sometimes hear them munching and slurping on apples underneath the apple tree outside. Apples are about as addicting to bears as popcorn and peanuts are to humans and once they get started, it's hard to get them to stop.

As summer draws nearer, the crickets come out at night. They rub their legs together like fiddlers sawing fiddles, singing love songs to their lovers and sending off warnings to their friends.

On rainy nights, I like to listen to frogs. Frogs are nice. They're such brave little creatures, calling out to each other in the night. When there is danger, and the "Undertoad", not the "Undertow," comes threatening to carry them away, they are suddenly silent. Lying in my bed, I hold my breath

with them waiting for the danger to pass. After a while, the leader of the crew, who is the bravest frog of all, will pick up the song where the chorus left off. "Ribbit!" he'll call out. "Ribbit," someone else will answer timidly. "Ribbit, ribbit, ribbit!" the rest of the frogs will say. And so the chorus begins again.

These are the typical sounds of the night. But sometimes if you are a blessed and special country dweller, like my boyfriend, who once saved a dying owl on the street, you will be gifted with extra-special sounds of the night.

The owl had been blinded by the headlights of passing cars on the road. When my boyfriend saw the owl looking stunned and panicked, he brought him home and set him on top of his refrigerator so the owl could rest and relax. The next day the owl flew free. That evening, the owl came back, along with his owl friends and stood in a circle underneath my boyfriend's bedroom window and serenaded him. "Hoo-hoo-hoo!" they sang that night, and "Hoo-hoo-hoo" they sang for the next three nights they came back to thank him for saving the owl's life.

As I lay there listening into the deepness of the night, there were no owl sounds, and no other sounds to keep me company. Finally, I closed my eyes, and let myself drift down to the murmuring gurgles of the river outside.

At sunup, the cold, blue light of dawn crept in through my window. I heard the sound of a lone bird

outside chirping. There was no alarm clock in my room. There were no sounds of clinking dishes being taken out of the dishwasher, which my mother used to set on the kitchen counter, or the sounds of sizzling bacon frying in a pan, which used to tell me when it was time to get up when I was a kid.

Instead, I listened as the lone bird was joined by another bird, and then another bird and another bird. Eventually, all the fragmented contingents of the symphony joined into the melody: A mother calling out to her baby birds. "Chirp, chirp," she called out. They answered sweetly in little voices, "chirp, chirp, chirp."

Couplets of birds held discourse over their plans for the day: "Chirp, chirp," sang one. "Chirp, chirp, chirp," answered the other picking up the first bird's tune, and resonating back with a slightly different sound. Some pairs of birds sang out in panicked voices, urging each other to hurry up building their nests before it was time to lay the eggs. One baby bird, swinging back and forth on a branch, was oblivious to the rest of the birds' melody and sang just to amuse himself. And this amused me.

Gradually, the gentle singing of the birds rose into a crescendo, as the blue light of early morning burst into a red, hot crimson light. I rolled over in bed and got up to open my bedroom curtains to applaud the day.

(Lisa Lieberman is a writer living in Three Rivers.)

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From 8 to 5

The "welcome" sign at the Auschwitz concentration camp during the Holocaust read, "Work will save you." In some cases this was true. In many it was not.

Work is a good thing. But, I still think the concept of the 8 to 5 work week is pushing the concept too far.

As a reporter, I disdain the 8 to 5 work week. Not only because I can't reach people for interviews outside the hours of 8 to 5, but because no one ever seems to ever be in their office during working hours.

At 8 a.m. people are just arriving late to work and are getting their coffee. At 9 a.m. they're having meetings. At 10 a.m., they're busy filling out this month's progress report. At 11 a.m., they're reviewing last month's progress report to make sure it matches up with this month's progress report.

At 12 p.m. they are out to lunch. Around 1:30 they're busy recovering from lunch, and they tell their secretaries to hold all their calls. At 2 p.m. they do a little work. At 2:30 p.m. they return all the calls they missed when they told their secretaries to hold their calls. At 3 p.m., they're having another meeting. At 4 p.m., they're talking with their friends at work about the meaning of the meeting. At 5 p.m. they go home.

All of this work is actually a lot harder than it seems. It's not so easy expending great amounts of energy looking like you're busy doing something when you're actually doing nothing at all.

Personally, I've never been in favor of the 8 to 5 work week. Not only because it seems to be relatively ineffective, but because it is an institution that reminds me a lot of both school and jail.

School is a place that prepares you for the institution of work. At school, you're in a certain place at a certain time doing a certain thing. If you're tardy you get in trouble. If you're going to be absent for a long time, you need a doctor's note. And it's the same way with work.

School prepares people for work, and when either system fails, the prison system is always there to step in. At prison, like in work and at school, you have to follow certain orders from your superiors. One major difference between work and prison, though, is that at least in prison system you may get time off for good behavior, whereas with work you get more time added on for good behavior.

For me, it's a shame that the hours between 8-5 don't even encompass the best hours of the day, which are in the early mornings, right around dusk, and late at night.

Early mornings are good for me, because whenever I have a work problem, I literally sleep on it, and half the time, magic elves come to me in the middle of the night, and whisper the words in my ears that I need to write, which I scramble in the mornings to try and remember.

At dusk, I like to lie in my hammock, strung out under my oak tree and write. That's when the blue jays around my house come home from a hard day of work (of singing) and sing some more.

There seems to be a thin line, too, for fish who live in the lakes, between the world of work and play. Right around sunset, they like to leap out of the water through the air. I always thought they were dipping their gills into the air to catch glimpses of the sunset in the same way that people do, who dip their toes in the water and sit alongside the lakes. But someone once told me that fish jump out of the water at dusk because that's the best time of day to catch flies.

I didn't know what to believe; whether the fish were working or playing. I'd like to believe they were at work and at play. I think it works out better that way.



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Everything and nothing

When I first moved to the mountains from the city, many of my family and friends reckoned I'd be high-tailing it out of here before even two weeks went by. After all, I was born in Chicago, raised in New Orleans and Los Angeles, went to school up in Berkeley and was used to big cities.

"How will you live?" they asked me. "There's nothing to do there and no one to talk to. There's no movie theaters, no museums, no place to shop — nothing to entertain you."

Now, two years later, it's not too hard to explain. I feel totally at home. The mountains are more special to me than any other place I've ever known.

Unlike the city, things are so free and easy here. People wave to each other to say hello and stop in the streets to chat.

There are no city lights here, so the nights are pitch black. Sometimes in the summers, I sleep out on my roof top under a blanket of stars as a chorus of crickets sing me to sleep.

In the mornings as cool blue shafts of early light turn warm and bright, I wake to the sounds of birds singing sweet melodies happy simply to be alive, instead of cars going by, drivers angrily honking their horns as they hurry to work, anxious to finish their drive.

And when I look out from the windows of my little house perched on a hill, I am surrounded by mountains every which way — no shopping malls or rows of concrete walls to obstruct me.

In my backyard are my old oak trees which I've grown to know personally.

Way up high in one of them lives a red-tailed hawk who's built her nest and raised her babies and taught them to fly.

It's really the little things I love.

A new baby calf in the pasture across the street from my house, who while all the other cows are busily munching grass, perks up its ears whenever I walk by, so full of curiosity. The family of deer shyly creeping across my lawn to quench their thirst in the river below. The older gentleman down the road who brings me greens from his garden who's always glad to see me.

"But don't you get lonely?" my friends always say.

"Yes, but I have the mountains and the rivers and the trees to keep my loneliness at bay."

True, life in the country can be hard, rugged and rough. And sometimes you have to be tough. You have to contend with bears and learn to live with your fears and not get the jitters of critters in the night that give you god awful frights or slinky snake sliders and great big furry-legged spiders — though generally such hazards do little harm. And life in the country does seem to have its own special charm.

Sometimes around dusk, for instance, if you're quiet and you're still, and you listen carefully with your heart and your soul and not just your ears, there are certain things you start to hear: When you lean back and listen to the birds and the rustling leaves from the trees blowing in the cool evening breeze, when before long, the frogs starting singing their songs, and the smells of summer drift through the air, you soon find that you're no longer there, and float above and beyond to a place far away.

So when my friends from the city say, "So tell us again, what it is you do all day?"

"Everything and nothing," I always say.

(Lisa Leiberman lives in Three Rivers.)

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Playing 'God of the House'

Sometimes I wonder about ants.

I wonder what ants pray about when they go home to their nests after a long, hard day of work pillaging my kitchen cabinets and drawers. I wonder if they pray to God, thanking him for their many rewards. Or, when times are bad, and there are no bread crumbs to be had, I wonder if they pray to God asking him for help.

I often feel a huge sense of responsibility when it comes to ants, because in many ways, I am their god.

I have the power to save them or destroy them at will. With the flick of my foot I can shake up their nests and cause earthquakes which register 10 or more on the Richter Scale and send them running for cover. I can drown them with great floods with a twist of my hose.

Or, I have the power to have mercy on the ants, and answer their prayers for peace and harmony by simply stepping over their nests when I see them on the ground. If I give them the blessing of an extra drop of honey outside their nests, the ants will think it no less than a miracle, and will talk about the greatness of the powers that be for many days to come.

I often am awed by the fact that even though I affect so many thousands of lives every day with my large and vast presence, just like the real God, I am practically invisible to the ants.

It isn't always easy to know how to behave when you have so much power. I often blame myself when I accidentally test the ants by leaving a jar of honey open, which lures those ants, who are looking for the easy way out, into temptation.

I often feel sorry for the little creatures that slip through the many crevices and the cracks in my rural house.

I especially feel sorry for the lizards and grasshoppers, which are such harmless little creatures, when my devilish cats get a hold of them for play and torture. I grapple with what to do; whether to leave them to their own devices and let nature take its course, or to use Divine Intervention to save the tiny creatures. (Of course, Divine Intervention can depend on whether the phone is ringing or if I'm late for work).

But if I stay focused, and I see their anguished faces from afar, I can hear their silent prayers asking to be saved. And when I bend over to free the little creatures from my cats' clutches and set them on the window sills to run off, I know that to them, it's the mysterious hand of God that's come to their rescue.

I sometimes get angry at my cats for acting so evilly. Yet, just like the way I think the real God loves everyone, I try to love my cats for their goodness, and in spite of the evil they inflict. My cats, I know, depend on me like a god. When I'm gone, they pray for me to return and give them warmth, food and shelter. And, they pray for the magic rain which happens whenever I turn on the cold water tap on the bathroom tub.

My job as "God of the house," as I see it, is not only to decide the life or death of the creatures inside, but to help guide those that get off track.

I know, though, that there are certain creatures that can't be helped. I can no more stop the moths from flying straight to their deaths into burning lamps and candles than the real God can do anything to stop foolish humans from smoking cigarettes and abusing drugs and alcohol.

But there are some little creatures I can help, like for instance, the lost little fly who occasionally flies in through an open window and then can't figure out how to get out again.

To me, it seems so easy. There's always an easy way in and an easy way out. But to the poor fly who has lost his way and wants desperately to get back to his fly family, it can seem an awful eternity of wandering through endless mazes banging his wings against walls and windows, before the fly finds the one little opening that will lead him to his salvation. And then, out of the blue, a flying angel, (usually in the form of a newspaper or a fly swatter) gently guides the lost fly in the right direction back outside.

It all seems so easy. Sometimes I wish some kind angel would do the same thing for me.

(Lisa Lieberman is a writer living in Three Rivers.)

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Thoughts born of small death

The first thing I did one morning two weeks ago when I awakened was to bury one of my cat's dead kittens. The kitten had died in the middle of the night while I was sleeping, and was the last of my cat's litter.

The kitten was the first living thing I had ever buried alone. I had always relied on my dad to bury my dead pets when I was growing up. Later on in life, there were boyfriends and other friends to help me.

But that day, there was no one around, so I had to face death alone.

Death is a peculiar thing. It was strange how loathe I was to touch the dead kitten's body, as if it carried some infectious disease that could harm me.

The father cat acted strangely, too. Upon touching the dead kitten with his paw, he jumped in fear, as if afraid that death could suddenly carry him away, too. He quickly leapt away as if he had singed his paws on a hot stove.

The mother cat, meanwhile, nosed the dead kitten, gave it a few licks, as if trying to nurse it back to health and, sensing it did no good, walked away.

I stood with the dead kitten wrapped in a towel in my arms and walked outside to the backyard in a funeral-style procession with my two cats.

I brought the kitten to my favorite oak tree where I had hung my hammock to sleep in during early mornings and around dusk when the birds came out to sing their summer evening songs.

I dug a shallow grave out of the dry dirt in the shade underneath the tree and lifted the tiny animal's dead body into it.

Only yesterday I was stroking its fur as it suckled happily against its mother's breast. And here I was about to throw dirt over its body and walk away and forget about it. This seemed strange.

Someday this will be me, I thought. And that seemed even stranger. I sat there thinking about death for a moment.

How can it be that this creature was alive yesterday, and dead today? Its body is still here, but yet "it" is somehow gone. Where did "it" go? I wondered. I didn't know. Death is such a mystery. It's no wonder people invent religion in order to explain death, I thought.

The kitten was only three weeks old, too tiny to have developed much of a soul. I didn't know where such a soul would go. I supposed it went back to the same place it had come from before it was born. Wherever that was.

With my cats looking on only a few feet away, I didn't know quite what to pray for as I laid the last few handfuls of dirt over the kitten's grave. I prayed to learn to better appreciate and care for the living things around me, since I always seem to be sorry, no matter who or what the living things were, that I wasn't nicer to them when they were alive.

My cats, I felt, were soon going to forget our little funeral. The mother cat walked halfway to the grave then, seeming to forget why she had come, turned back around.

I stood up and thought of a dog I had once loved who had died. I was sad at first when she died. Then I was relieved, because she was suffering a kind of agony to which only death could bring a release. Then, I began missing her and remembered all the cute little things she had done. I called to her silently in my mind, wishing she would come back. But, alas, there is no answer from the depths of death.

I wiped my hands clean of dirt and stood up and turned to go back to the house. I looked to see that my cats had moved from beyond the tree's shade and were playing in the sunshine again.

It's a good thing cats' memories are so short, I thought. Death is so long.

INSIDE OUT

by Lisa Lieberman



In Between The Lines

~With a little help from Irene and Arlene

The main problem with the world, as far as I'm concerned, is that there is too much emphasis on lines and not enough on circles. Don't get me wrong. I'm not knocking lines. They're great for stepping over cracks in sidewalks to avoid breaking your mother's back and for drawing great designs like bridges that hold up under earthquakes and other natural disasters. But then again, at times, there are certain problems that go along with lines.

For instance, while the shortest path between two points may be a straight line, the most direct approach isn't always the best way to get from point B to point A. Sometimes it's far better to go circle around a mountain than it is to tunnel right through it. And for those who happen to be unlucky enough to live on planets that intercept the preset plans of intergalactic highway planners, the worshipping of lines can be most unfortunate.

Without a doubt, straight lines are terribly rigid, boringly predictable, and have the bad sense to break before they'll acquiesce to bend. Circles, squiggles and swirls are far superior. All anyone in doubt need do is look at spaghetti, which is a good indicator of

universal truth and tends towards twirls and curls at its tastiest and stands rigid and tall right before its about to fall.

Lines can be downright frightening. Look at all the fear lines aroused in those who once believed the earth was flat rather than round and thought they would eventually fall off over the edge of the horizon if ever they walked too far.

Those, who've flown over the Midwestern cornfields where most land is divided into squares made up of straight sides, knows the advantages of circles over lines.

Circles have no sides, and when they connect are able to meet at one common point and respect each other's space. But when squares come too closely together, border disputes may arise between neighbors when one man wants to build a wall made of glass and the other man wants to build one made of stone.

King Arthur, who was a wise man, knew the problem with lines, squares and uncooked spaghetti when he ordered all spaghetti be boiled until it was soft before it was served and declared that his table should be round rather than square. That way everyone sat at the head of the table and everyone sat at the behind.

Circles are really rather friendly. That's why we have circles of friends, not lines of friends. And at parties, how would it be if everyone stood around in lines instead of circles?

With circles, there's never any beginning and there's never

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any ending. They're always very forgiving. On a one way street that runs linear, for instance, if you miss something, there are no second chances, unless you turn around. But with a road that runs round, you not only get a first chance, a second chance, a third chance--you get as many chances as you need to find what you're looking for.

So in this historic debate between circles and lines, no one knows for sure what the future may hold. But one thing's for sure; many tales may be told, of ancient kings and knights and modern soldiers and of anyone else who fights, drawing battle lines and making circles of blood, leaving millions and millions for dead. Need any more be said?

It's a sad, sad story. If only

all the ruptured, gory hearts could the circles just a little mend and the lines just a little toward the circles bend, then maybe we could all come together and all the world's problems just a little mend.



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Love and the Art Of Fire Building

A patient once complained to his psychiatrist, "My brother is driving me crazy. He thinks he's a chicken." "Then why do you put up with him," asked the psychiatrist. "Because I need the eggs," the man said.

From Woody Allen's "Annie Hall"

--And I guess that about sums up how I feel about relationships.

I met my neighbors for the first time a year ago when I knocked on their door in the middle of the night to tell them that I thought my house was burning down.

"I'm really sorry to disturb you," I said, "but my chimney is on fire, and I was wondering if you wouldn't mind coming over and taking a look at it?"

They were very nice and obliged me by coming over to investigate the problem. "Oh, it's just a normal chimney fire. Just wait for it to go out and don't add any more wood," they said.

So, reassured after watching it for a little while longer, I fell off to sleep.

Being from the city, I never had to worry about fires (at least none that I, myself, had set). I just turned on a switch and presto, there was heat. But living in the country and having a wood burning stove as my only heat source, I soon realized I had a lot to learn about fires. So, instead of asking people the usual philosophical questions I used to like to ask, like "What's the answer to life?" or "Do you think there's a God?", I started asking, "How do you start a fire?"

Of course, no single person had the answer. Everyone has their own way of building a fire, and I had to discover for myself what my way would be.

Building a fire is just like any art. No two fires are ever the same, and the rules for making them are never quite set in stone. I learned, though, that it's important to have a good, solid foundation first, and then begin with what's easiest to burn. Dry, crumpled paper works better for this than a heavy wet log in much the same way that when you first meet someone, it's probably best to start out talking about something relatively simple, like the weather, rather than launching off into a discussion about the time you committed armed robbery when you were 17.

After the initial spark, you gradually feed the fire with materials that take longer and longer to burn than talks about the weather or dry crumpled paper. Dry twigs, sticks, bigger sticks, and then, eventually, heavy logs are generally the natural sequence of events.

Fire is risky business and timing is of the utmost importance. If you add too much wood too soon, the fire will suffocate. If you feed it too slowly, it may burn out before it has the chance to burst into flames.

Getting it started is usually the hardest part of building a fire. Some people find that using certain starting fluids speed up this otherwise time consuming process. These can be helpful in some instances, but if used carelessly, things can get out of control and may "blow up in your face," creating quite a mess.

Any fire, however it gets started, needs plenty of air and space in order to grow. Once a fire gets going, it's often necessary to close the fire door, and confine the boundaries of the fire to a closer space. It will then intensify, and radiate enough energy to heat the whole house.

When it's time to put your fire out, either stop feeding it and cut off its air supply until it withers and dies, or throw cold water on it. Throwing cold water on it may cause quite a "shock to the system" and spew nasty smoke all over the place. Your stove may even crack from such an abrupt ending, and lighting future fires will be a difficult task. It's best to treat

your stove as gently as possible, so that it will stay in good shape and serve you well for future fires.

To maintain the good health of your stove, a regular regimen of maintenance is a good idea. While it's true that the more you use your stove, the easier it will be to light each new fire, it's important to clean out the remnants from any old fires. Cold, dead ashes can clog up important passage ways, essential for the intaking of fresh air.

Bear in mind, too, that if you haven't lit a fire in a long time, your apparatus may be a bit cold. It will take longer to heat up, before it starts to work again, so be patient.

All of this is really a lot of work. Some people would rather not be bothered with it -- all the time, effort, and mess it creates all over your nice living room rug. But what are the alternatives? You can either go through life cold, which could lead to illness and early death, or you can switch to manufactured heat...but those electric devices are ever so impersonal.



INSIDE OUT

by Lisa Lieberman

An Ounce of Prevention Is Worth A Pound of Cure

For a long time, I thought I was doing the mouse in my house a favor by letting it live. But it turned out, I was wrong.

The mouse in my house brought his friend, and then there was no end. The two mice produced three mice, then four, then five.

Even still, I hated the idea of killing them so I decided to let them live.

"Look here," I said with a sigh, "We're both creatures of the earth, so you have as much right to be here as I. But you stay hidden during the day and don't come out to play until night when the lights are all out, and then you run around."

For a long time, they abided my wishes, and stayed out of the kitchen while I cooked and cleaned and did my dirty dishes, until one day they decided to come out in hoards from the kitchen floor boards where they were hiding in hopes of finding life on the outside a bit more exciting.

And then, oh, the rest of the story is such a mess!

Out in open sight, even in broad daylight, I found them in bathroom cabinets, kitchen drawers. They even had the nerve to sneak in through my refrigerator door.

"Eeeeeeeek," I screamed when I saw them there.

But they didn't care. Upon seeing me, they slipped through the crevices and cracks, and then the next night fearlessly came right back.

"Look," I pleaded with them, nervously biting my nails, "I don't want to harm you, I just want you to go away far, far, from my home and leave me alone."

But my silly little entreaties didn't charm them. They didn't even alarm them. Not even a bit.

My friends, meanwhile, called me an achy hearted liberal. "Look what you've done. You've given them an inch, and they've taken a mile."

"Oh well yes, it's true," I agreed, still not knowing what else to do, hoping and praying for some magic pied piper to come to my rescue.

I dreaded the thought of lying awake in my bed waiting for the sound of those god awful mouse traps snapping off the mice's tiny little heads. And then the next morning, having to pick them up by their tails and toss them into garbage pails.

So I waited and I watched and I waited and I watched and I waited, politely leaving bread crumbs on my kitchen floor, which I implored the mice to take. Though, it was my mistake, as they continued to plunder and pillage all my stores in my kitchen drawers instead.

Finally when I discovered a mouse in my bed, a new thought popped into my head: the original mouse would have been better off dead. For the problem I had originally decided to ignore had utterly turned into a war.

So I set about setting a dozen traps or so and heard

them go snap, snap, snap all through the house. And then in a somber mood, I apologized to the great grandfather mouse for letting him live and killing his brood, which I hoped he could forgive.

"Dear Great-Grandfather Mouse," I said to my now vacant house. "Everyone knows how the old sayings goes: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure and sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind. I only wish I had known a little sooner that it's best not to pretend that little problems are OK when they're not and let them sit around and rot. That way I could have brought this whole mess to a hasty rest."