

LJ Book

Your Most Personal Book.

TOMMASZ1

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Chapter 1

2001

1.1 February

1.1.1 My world and welcome to it! (2001-02-19 18:06)

I am trying LiveJournal as part of an attempt to separate the content in my site into separate pieces for the journal and the essays (or essay-like extended entries). While you will be able to access this journal via it's native URL, it is really intended to be accessed through my site, [1]Angry Middleaged Man.

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz>

1.1.2 Why I changed to LiveJournal (2001-02-19 19:14)

I changed to LiveJournal to manage the more frequently updated part of this site because I wanted to freedom to add entries from places other than home. LiveJournal gives you a choice of clients to do the updates (and you can use your browser in a pinch), including Linux, so it made it ideal. This site will still not be a weblog, I have my Blogger sites for that, but it will be more active than in the past.

1.1.3 (2001-02-20 17:23)

It is interesting for me, after having had my own serious motorcycle accident, to see how the public reacts to the death of NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt Sr. Motor vehicles in general are inherently unsafe, as is anything that propels the human body faster than it could go by running. Our bodies are full of safety systems for the kind of stresses one encounters on the savannah, but not for hitting a wall at 160 MPH. There were some additional safety items he could have been using, but no one really thinks they would have made any difference.

So while it's appropriate to feel sad at the loss of a human life, it's important to remember he died doing what he wanted, fully aware of the dangers. There are a lot of lives lost, everyday, most of them probably were not doing anything dangerous. Take some time and remember them as well.

1.1.4 (2001-02-22 13:03)

Lately, I find myself feeling discouraged. Not for any reason in particular, it's just a general thing. To be honest, it may stem from the accident. I believe that there are no coincidences, that everything happens

for a purpose, even (and perhaps especially) if we are unable to figure out what that purpose is. So my assumption was, as I recovered, that I had been spared so that I may do what it is I *have* to do. But I'm hoping what I am doing now in my life, is not my ultimate purpose. Call it ego, if you wish, but I can't get rid of the idea that I have a higher purpose.

At the same time, even saying such a thing makes me ashamed. I should be happy and grateful I'm here to even fret over such things, yet, as usual, I'm worried that it's not enough. I was given a chance to confront myself, think about changes, and actually make them. It's a gift, it's time I recognized it as such and accept it gratefully.

1.1.5 You can tell me off! (2001-02-22 17:58)

If something annoys you about a posting just click on the (comment on this) buttons and let me have it! And, in the off chance that someone reads any of this AND likes it, you can say something nice too.

1.1.6 When something works, you use it (2001-02-23 14:50)

One thing is for sure, my journal will never be the same, now that I have LiveJournal. Anyway, I'm constantly amazed at the power of politics, and faced with the consequences of my avoiding politics whenever possible. Not governmental politics, but organizational politics. There truly are those who can work the system to their benefit, even in the absence of technical skill. I must admit mixed feelings towards these people under normal circumstances. I wish I had what they have, but I'm unwilling to make the compromises they have made to get it.

But that's under normal circumstances. It's different when I have to interact with them. Then they annoy me to no end. I can't easily deal with those whom I consider a fraud, yet I have to because they are above me in the chain. It's because my family depends on me to provide for them that I do it. Perhaps, some day, I will have the maturity to overlook these things, not just act like I do.

1.1.7 All your base are belong to us! (2001-02-24 21:35)

Behold the power of [1]memes. This Flash movie/techno soundtrack is based on an old and poorly translated Japanese computer game. It's working it's way around the Web, courtesy of a number of weblogs (though not any of mine). I introduced it to a club in Yahoo, though, so I'm as guilty as the next person. I'm not techno fan, but the music and the images in combination are something I find fascinating.

It seems pretty clear to me that the Net has accelerated the pace at which such things get around. Twenty years ago, it would have to be on television to get this kind of exposure. Now, with more than half of Americans on the Net at least part of the time, it's possible expand the audience in a way TV cannot do. Where you either had to call someone up and tell them to watch what you're watching, or (if you had one) tape it and send the tape to a friend, it's now possible to tell dozens, even hundreds of people about something, and they can then experience it at their own convenience with no loss of quality.

Of course, this is exactly how urban legends propagate, but they're memes too. One new aspect is instead of "a friend of a friend of a friend" with changes at every step, it's more direct and less likely to mutate. Files are static, though links may "rot", but in general, everyone gets the same information. But speed of propagation seems to imply short time in the spotlight. It gets around quickly and then disappears equally as fast. Urban legends, at least the old ones, stayed around much longer, mutating like a flu virus (memes

are often called mind viruses). I wonder if speed of contagion is what influences mutation rates. If everyone caught the same cold at once and then recovered, would it survive long enough to mutate and re-infect others? Someone set us up the bomb!

1. <http://www.thefever.com/AYB2.swf>

1.1.8 Is Change Inevitable? (2001-02-28 12:44)

A good friend lent me a copy of *Career Anchors, Discovering Your Real Values*, by Edgar H. Schein (ISBN: 0-88390-030-0). I'm still working through the exercises, but it's a way to determine the things that make you happy in your career and how they affect your career choices. I don't know if I want to change jobs but recent events have me wondering if perhaps a different line of work might prove more fulfilling. Being the family's source of income is something that cannot be ignored, no matter what I come up with using the book. I wish I was 10 years younger right now.

What's good about this book is, at least for me, it seems to have some very spot-on descriptions, to the point where it's almost a direct quote. But finding your career anchor type is only part of the process, there is also an interview, done with someone you know, that helps to identify where your anchors have been active in your past career. Obviously, and I should have stated this earlier, this book is geared towards those in mid-career. You need to have enough history to draw conclusions from and be far enough from retirement to make changes.

1.2 March

1.2.1 Is Courtney Love a pioneer? (2001-03-01 13:08)

Courtney Love, who I've talked about before, [1]is suing her record company to break her contract. Recording contracts are typically very long term, with requirements to record so many albums over time. She is angry that her record company is suing her for not completing 5 albums in accordance to her contract.

There's no doubt that she signed the contract willingly, so her task is to prove that there is something inherently wrong with the contract itself. One thing in her favor is other industries, like movies for instance, are structured very differently. They also end up giving more to the actor than is typical in the recording industry. Whether that has any influence, depends on the court. Sympathy may not be enough to sway a judge or jury.

I wish her luck, but it seems obvious that no matter what the outcome, the recording industry has come to a major decision point in it's "life". Even if Napster is permanently shutdown, it's clear the public likes have access to music other than buying overpriced CD's. But what's telling is that they continue to buy them. Think about that. CD sales actually have gone up. The RIAA tried to claim otherwise, but their claim was based on *CD Singles*, which are less than 1 % of total CD sales. For the record, the drop was 36 %. All things considered, they could drop to 0 % and no one would care.

I think the drop is not surprising, and many folks are using Napster and equivalent to sample music before buying it. It's a great way for artists to let people learn about them, and many have taken advantage of their web sites to distribute MP3 samples. But the record companies don't see it this way, and I don't think they ever will. They would love end-to-end encryption (microphone to speaker) that absolutely prevent recording for any reason (that was covered in the Jaron Lanier piece I wrote about a while ago).

Courtney Love a pioneer? We'll see, but can you name any other musician as dedicated to changing the status quo? Think about that, and while you're thinking, buy your music direct from the artist that makes it. It's a good thing.

1. http://www.latimes.com/business/updates/lat_love010228.htm

1.2.2 We apologize for the inconvenience (2001-03-06 20:32)

I've noticed some rendering problems in both Mozilla 0.8 and in Netscape 4.74. Please be patient while I try to figure it out. I guess I should check with IE as well. I definitely need to clean up the HTML on this site.

1.2.3 It's worse than I feared (2001-03-07 12:39)

It's official, the site looks wrong in IE 4.0.1, so it's off the HTML shop. I doubt I will get to anything that strenuous until the weekend, so in the meantime, just resize the title area frame to see the additional text.

1.2.4 The downward spiral (2001-03-13 14:54)

This is not a discussion of Yahoo!, I'll get to that someday, perhaps. It's about The Big Company that I work for. It's not doing well, and the frenzy to try to get itself out of trouble is driving a great number of bad decisions made in the name of quick cash. In the meantime a number of good people have left (not me, though I think of it often). This removal of the top layer has exposed some rotten parts underneath, and it's not a pretty picture. It's very disheartening to see how many of the remaining people are simply incompetent. Yes, I'm bitter and jealous, there's no doubt of that. I've worked long and hard and the rewards have not been there. It's mostly my fault as well, but I've managed to keep hold of my principles.

One of those principles is loyalty. It's been put to the test in the past and I've even made some decisions that have made me feel like a traitor, but overall it's survived. That's probably the only reason I stay put, my mentor is still here and very much wants me to stay with him. But lately, even he is starting to cast his gaze outward. If he leaves, it will signal the end for I know of no one as upbeat and dedicated to making this company a better place. He won't surrender until it's all over, the fact that he is even looking says more about the state of things than the stock price. I just wish I was ten years younger.

1.2.5 An Experiment in Workplace Community (2001-03-14 16:02)

As noted in my weblog, [1]My Likes and Dislikes, I have installed Radio Userland on my office PC. It acts as a desktop web server and weblog tool, allowing you to create and publish content to your heart's content. I want to see if I can establish an internal weblog and news page for my workgroup. The real downside to this is resides on my PC (a laptop) and it only runs when I start the Radio software and I'm in the office (or near a net connection on campus).

If this works at all, the next step is to see if I can make it a collaborative effort, that is, allow others to post and edit along with me. I don't have great hope for this, given that I can barely operate the software right now; I don't know how I will teach others to use it. I had similar problems with Frontier, the scripting program, on my Mac. It seemed like it could do a lot of things, but there was so little documentation on "how to" that I eventually gave up. I didn't really *need* to script anything so there was no incentive to dig. I was looking to automate the launch of some apps to support the MIDI work I was doing, but it wasn't worth the effort for the small decrease in double-clicking. This was, of course, in the early days of the web,

and Userland has shifted their emphasis from scripting on the Mac to multi-platform web services.

What hasn't changed in the intervening years is the lack of documentation. I know how hard this is to create and maintain, and being a geek myself I can relate, but that doesn't excuse Userland. I assume they are marketing primarily to an installed base used to their approach and not to a more general audience, but over time that general audience has to be embraced and catered to.

Which brings me to my workgroup. I'm the only computer-savvy person in it, everyone else has a different background. If I am having problems, how can I expect them to handle it easily, or at all? Perhaps I will eventually "get it", but if I don't there's always Apache and a text editor.

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>

1.2.6 Had this been a real life... (2001-03-19 10:33)

You would have been notified and given the opportunity to actually make something of it.

I have a problem with success. Specifically, I have a problem with my perceived lack of success. I'm 43 years old, I've been bruised and battered and I'm stiff, sore, and tired. I haven't felt "normal" since the accident, and I'm beginning to think that how I feel now is pretty much permanent. I surrender.

I read something in a magazine recently (I forget which, sorry) that said basically we're hundreds of years away from extending the human life span much beyond what it is today. There will exceptions, of course, but overall it's probably stuck where it is. I suspect that some unplanned and unexpected advance might happen but I'm not holding out hope. To be honest, I'm not sure how long I really want to go myself. Middle age has been nothing but a continuing series of disappointments and abandoned dreams for me, I'm not sure I want to lower my expectations to the point where all this is acceptable.

This means I'm unlikely to incorporate much technology designed to prolong/enhance my life other than glasses and (sadly) a hearing aid (safety first, you know). No transplants, no augmentation, no adds/deletes/modifications for esthetic purposes, just basic maintenance items.

Remember, you heard it here first.

laurabel (2001-03-19 21:51:30) Cheer Up
I can understand your frustration though.

1.2.7 Been whining, will stop (2001-03-21 10:57)

The last whiny entry actually garnered a reader, though by no means will I continue in that vein. Instead I intend to get off my butt and get a job I enjoy, regardless of the pay. I can't imagine myself regretting being happy. Coming soon, my resume in HTML.

I've been watching the latest Napster goings-on with great interest. One of the conditions of the court case was that Napster servers begin filtering for copyright infringement. Almost immediately, an alternative client, called Aimster, was offering a pig latin encryptor. This allows you to store files with the names in pig latin (igpay atinlay) that would appear in their normal form in the Aimster client. Aimster has since recalled that add-on, at Napster's request. Aimster is itself an add-on to the AOL Instant Messenger client

and is not a product of Napster.

Of course, since the new rules only apply to Napster, you can just use one of the many non-Napster servers running OpenNap. There is a service, called Napigator, that allows you to find and use these alternative servers. The RIAA has sent a warning letter to owners of these OpenNap servers, but I don't think compliance is mandatory under the existing legal rules.

Speaking of the RIAA, they have a policy of not extending royalty payments to lyricists, only composers. In a world where >99 % of the pop music is vocal, that's not an insignificant amount of money. Remember, the RIAA is fighting for the artists. Yeah, right.

Given that all of this is still pretty murky ethically, what should you do? I've wrestled with this a lot, and to be honest I can't say I've made my mind up. I try not to download MP3's for music I don't own in some form already. By law, I can make copies of my purchased music if I don't sell it or play it for profit. I doubt they envisioned me being able to get that copy without making it myself, but who would have? But I still have a few files of music I never purchased. In every case, it's a song from an album I don't think I'd buy, so to get that song by itself would likely be impossible.

That's the real crux of the Napster phenomenon, people are sharing music file by file, not CD by CD. Why? Because there's a desire to sample what an artist produces that is stymied by having to pay \$15 for a CD. Radio stations play maybe 1 or 2 songs from a CD, on average, and it takes a lot of effort for new artists to get radio play. That's why I am in a book club, it offers at least some description of a book that you won't get in the aisles at Barnes and Noble. The record companies could do well to heed this desire and make more music downloadable, for both established artists and the unknowns. Will they? I don't know, I'm sure they think they've won the right to go back in time but there's no way that their customers will go along. As a result, another sharing service will pop up to replace Napster. Remember, CD sales (except for singles) actually went up, with Napster in place. That tells me that samples sell CD's, and they're cheaper than other forms of promotion.

Of course, the best thing you can do is buy your music direct from the artist. If they have a web site, encourage them to allow CD sales (with samples) online. Go to their shows and buy from them there. Put your money into their pockets without the middlemen, it's always the right thing to do.

Like jazz guitar? If you do, go to [1]Steve Greene's Web Site and buy his CD *Acoustic Living*. Listen to the MP3 samples and then find out when his new CD with Gene Bertoncini will be available (I was recording engineer for some of it). He's my guitar teacher, and I don't get anything for recommending you.

1. <http://www.stevegreene.com/>

1.2.8 Resume is up as promised (2001-03-23 14:13)

For once, I've actually done something I've said I would do in a reasonable amount of time. My resume is [1]here. Just think of all the postage I'm saving not sending it all over the place ;)

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/tcmresume.html>

1.2.9 This Time for Sure! (2001-03-24 22:03) - pleased

I think I've got the logo portion to render nicely, after some work in [1]The Gimp. At least now I know how to create new graphics using it, which I couldn't do before, so it's been worth it on a couple of levels.

1. <http://www.gimp.org>

1.2.10 It doesn't have to be this way (2001-03-28 12:07) - annoyed

If you read my [1]weblog you've probably noticed that I do not hold Microsoft in very high regard. There's a number of reasons for this, but in particular I'm bothered by the low quality of their products *despite* the huge number of seemingly competent people who work there. Perhaps it's my age, but I remember when computers were pretty sturdy, your own programs may bomb, but not the ones that you bought or that came with the computer.

But that was a long time ago, and not just in Internet time. And to be honest, most of my experiences sound like fairy tales to those who were born much later than I. You see, I was young during a time when computers were giant "thinking machines" built by companies like IBM and DEC and they didn't belong to a person (the very idea was unthinkable). But then along came little computers, like Apples and IBM PC's, that changed that, though not always for the best.

Please, don't think I'm advocating a return to the past. I think the personal computer, in all its forms, is the single most significant advance in computing since Turing. What I am advocating is a bit of outrage at how we've allowed mediocrity to rule. And yes, I'm singling out the Redmond behemoth.

Some recent experiences have just out and out ticked me off. I have to use Windows NT at work, it's not an option even though I have a Compaq laptop. Things battery power management don't really work, I have an Infrared port I can't use as well as a useless USB interface. NT was Microsoft's reliable, crash-proof OS, at least until Windows 2000 came along, which was the reliable, crash-proof OS, at least until Windows XP came along, etc. Note a trend here? One of the problems with NT, and I suspect all of Microsoft's Windows OS offerings, is that it's so easy to crash the OS because too many programs are allowed access into the "inner sanctum". Good OS design says the opposite, programs almost never get that access because of the inherent dangers. That's why I can run my Linux box for weeks without a reboot but my NT box gets rebooted an average of 2 times per day and I'm *not* developing programs with it.

Open Source programs are said to be better quality, I won't necessarily agree with this statement 100%, but there is some truth. I've had plenty of programs crash on Linux, and still more that lacked features or a polished appearance. But overall, there's a noticeable lack of crashing on Linux. Perhaps having experienced this lack has made me more sensitive.

One problem with Open Source software is the fact that only those applications that someone decides to get written, get written. If your needs are the same as one of those people, you're in luck. But you can always ask the community for help. Try doing that with Microsoft. Still, most Windows applications are so loaded with features, perhaps this is a moot point. I, for one, would gladly give up features for more robustness.

It's obvious that Microsoft has a large number of very talented people, I just don't think they focus on quality. There's no time and no compelling business reason for them to do so. The entire business is dependent on churn, there's no money to be made long term if everyone buys a computer with an OS and then never upgrades either of them. This puts MS in the position of having to repeatedly declare the latest thing as being the most (fill in the blank) ever, even after having said *exactly* the same thing about the previous latest thing (they have an ad campaign that gives you a "blue screen of death" to paste on your monitor if you miss their previous OS crashing). And the cycle has to repeat, infinitely. Since there's this constant replacement cycle going on, there's simply no need to offer fixes, since they're probably covered by the latest version. Maybe.

So stop chalking up all of those crashes as the cost of using computers and complain. Stop accepting mediocre when you know you can get better. Imagine what might happen if enough people simply said "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!"

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>

1.2.11 One Year Anniversary! (2001-03-28 17:21) - happy

Wow, I just realized this collection of wasted electrons has been "on the air" a year as of 12 March. And with 5 known readers (not including me)! So this is what fame and fortune feel like ;)

1.3 April

1.3.1 State of the Geek Message (2001-04-09 12:55)

Obviously, not a lot of entries of late. But I have been tweaking the site here and there and I'm working on adding a picture page (something I've wanted to do for almost a year. I should also add some more to my links page, but that's not a priority. It's probably time for me to think about adding some sort of access counter again. I had one, but it was wiped out when I was heavily working the HTML and I haven't bothered reinstating it. My ISP doesn't offer a lot of CGI programs so you take what you can get. Been a while since I've looked at the tools available, perhaps it's time again.

If you've been a reader in the past, thanks for sticking around. It's been harder than I would have expected to find the "voice" I want to have here, and I'm still searching. Knowing someone actually has read at least some of it, is encouraging. Feel free to swap links with me so I can read your stuff (if you have a site, obviously).

1.3.2 Watching Virtual Communities Unravel (2001-04-10 12:37)

As mentioned in my weblog, I've been watching two virtual communities go through some tough times. This has gotten me wondering whether they are more vulnerable simply because they lack the physical proximity factor. I think it does, based on watching my own life and seeing how I've drifted apart from people I used to work with or live with. But it's also true that some virtual communities can weather the storms and emerge (somewhat) intact. It remains to be seen whether this will happen in the two I'm familiar with, though the signs in one case seem to be positive.

Perhaps size has something to do with it. As groups grow larger, the number of interactions increase, you lose the ability to know everyone, a single voice is more easily overlooked. Cliques begin to form since they lessen the "fan out" necessary and let you restrict your interactions to your subgroup. Eventually the subgroups often splinter into sub-subgroups. The overall community has to be able to deal with these cliques in some way that allows them to feel comfortable otherwise they will often withdraw from the rest (possibly to start a separate community). I've seen this happen and have been a direct participant (one of the two virtual communities I'm referring to); once started the process seems to continue.

Online, success (and popularity) can invoke problems with the network infrastructure that supports the community. This is a destabilizing influence outside the group that is not a direct mirror of physical communities (though excessive popularity strains all sorts of support structures, no matter where). Luckily, this

is not a factor in the two cases I'm talking about here.

Having a clear purpose and mission seems to be key, at least in the case of the second community. When there is abandonment or drift, there will be dissatisfaction. So leadership is important, though this doesn't necessarily mean a single person. This is a particular problem for virtual communities. Members come and go, so do leaders. When a leader drifts away, with no clear successor, there may be power struggles or the community may just fade away itself. Not everyone is a leader and a community of followers falls apart on its own.

I'll probably have something more on this as things evolve. I'm especially interested in the methods they use to recover so that will be my main theme. Courage.

(2001-04-16 19:40:16) Route 66

Hi Tom, I was doing a bit of e-mail cleanup, maintenance, reading and came across your request for info on my computers. I decided to follow the link to your web site, and have been enjoying your monotribes. I think that you voice a lot of the concerns of many people who have reached this stage in life, figuring that their folks had it sussed by now and so should I - but... I think that it gets a bit better from here on out. I think that we learn to live with the broken or failing pieces of our bodies. I think that we come to realistically evaluate our dreams and decide that maybe, just maybe, we actually made the right choices. I think that in determining these things, we actually present that same image to our kids - the image that we have it all sussed out by now. And in that sense, maybe we do. Anyway, just thought I'd toss my two cents in here. Bob Martin By the way, I found this in a link on your site: ■This is the web site of my guitar teacher. I've been studying with him since the fall of 1994. Someday I hope to be able to play half as well. By the way, my late 30's Epiphone was purchased from Roy Berns, the guitarist on the right in the picture above. He played it on the Acoustic Living CD, so buy the CD and listen to my guitar (not me). Trivia: The guitars in the picture don't belong to Steve and Roy but were borrowed from the photographer.■ In fact, the Super 400 is mine. The L5 is Dave Frensel's. We were going to do a shoot with all these archtops all over the place, with the band sitting in hog heaven in the middle. I had my whole collection there. I think that I have some out-takes of this photo session with all the guitars everywhere. Another bit of trivia - this photo (indeed, the entire session) was shot in black and white. I hand colored it (in Photoshop) for the cover to give that more "homey" old-fashioned look.

tommasz1 (2001-04-17 15:29:34) Re: Route 66

Thanks for reading, Bob, and especially for the background info on the picture. I always thought it was odd that the photographer would have guitars just *lying around*. Perhaps I just misunderstood Steve's explanation. Nice work on the photos. I knew they'd been enhanced but I wouldn't have guessed them to be B & W originals. Tom.

1.3.3 Greetings (2001-04-13 14:14) - good

It's Good Friday, the important prelude to Easter Sunday if you're Christian, otherwise it's just Friday the 13th. If you're not Christian, Easter is the holiday *without* the merchandising opportunities. In any case, I hope you have a happy and peaceful Easter, a great weekend, or both!

1.3.4 Some additional reading (2001-04-16 09:32) - geeky

This sort of goes along with my earlier entry on virtual communities. Check out this paper by David P. Reed, called [1]*That Sneaky Exponential - Beyond Metcalfe's Law to the Power of Community Building*. It talks about how the size of a network is related to its value to its members. Central to the paper is the concept of *Group Forming Networks*, or GFNs. From the article:

In networks like the Internet, Group Forming Networks (GFNs) are an important additional kind of network capability. A GFN has functionality that directly enables and supports affiliations (such as interest groups, clubs, meetings, communities) among subsets of its customers.

David has also begun assembling a collection related to GFNs, sounds like I'll be doing so online reading.

1. <http://www.reed.com/Papers/GFN/reedslaw.html>

1.3.5 (2001-04-17 17:08)

Looks like I need to do some updating and cleanup. I picked up some additional background information on the CD cover picture on the *Cool Stuff* page I should add. Also, I think I'm going to add a page to act as a sort of guide to my online writing. This will also help me figure out the mission for each venue and channel my writing appropriately.

I've already blogged this but [1]Trellix has invested in Pyra Labs, the [2]Blogger folks. This is a very welcome event, Pyra was down to a single employee, one of the founders Evan Williams and in trouble even after cost-cutting and layoffs. Weblogging has taken off with individuals but has no presence in the minds of corporations. Subsequently, Blogger has a lot of users, but very little income (sound like Yahoo?). Trellix, on the other hand, is doing quite well with its website building tools. There's obviously a lot of synergy here, and it looks like a win-win. If you're curious about the details, here's Ev's [3]take on it. Dan Bricklin (of Visicalc and Demo It! fame) has his side of the story [4]here. It also looks like Blogger and the Blog*Spot hosting site will remain free for the time being, but enhanced with new services. Part of that will be because Ev has the time and money to do them and part because of what Trellix brings to the table. I look forward to it.

Crossing my fingers that the weather holds as we're taking the kids up to Toronto to visit the zoo and science center. The zoo is many times larger than the one we have at home and they've never seen it, so they should get a big kick out of it. That is, if it doesn't snow. Spring is such a nebulous concept in this part of the world.

1. <http://www.trellix.com/>

2. <http://www.blogger.com/>

3. http://www.evhead.com/longer/trellix_essays.asp

4. <http://www.bricklin.com/log/blogger.htm>

1.3.6 Community Updates (2001-04-26 18:29)

Here's what's happened with the two online communities I wrote about previously. Both have taken a *circle the wagons* approach to their problems. Actually, this metaphor is not quite right, since they are not only reacting to outside influences, but attempting to foster a greater sense of belonging among those who remain. It's hard to argue with the need to do both, especially given that size was likely one of the reasons (as I talked about previously). Unfortunately, I may be unable to report much more about either as I am now on the outside, with but a few contacts that remain inside and I hesitate to press them for information.

The *Cool Stuff* page has been updated with information I received from a reader (and fellow jazz guitarist) about the guitars in the picture used on my guitar teacher's CD cover. And *you can buy it!*. Go do it now.

1.4 May

1.4.1 Strange Things Happen (2001-05-01 12:25) - cynical

Music: radio.whump.com

I'm pretty open with regards to contacting me via the Internet, as I post my various IM names and my email address on this site. But it's becoming clear to me that such openness is unwise. I don't use any of the IM services a lot, partly because I'm basically shy and partly because I don't wish to be stereotyped as the "married guy on the make". My original hope was to make it easier for people who know me to locate and contact me, since most email providers don't provide a way to find someone in particular.

But while that was the plan, the reality has proven quite different. On ICQ, 90 % of the incoming messages I get are some type of porn spam, usually with a URL you can click to have God-knows-what installed on your Windows PC. Occasionally, there are messages in the form of: "Hello". That's it, one word. I have in my ICQ profile information that I am happily married, with two children and not looking, but not everyone reads it. I tend to ignore those. Then there was the woman who immediately was asking me for A/S/L (age, sex, and location, again all in my ICQ profile). She sort of backed off when I told her I wasn't interested but she then asked me if I knew anyone who was looking. I told her "no", as if I would hook up anyone I knew with someone like that. Yahoo is much better, since everyone has a profile that you can check, but still I get weird messages. The *Ignore* feature works fine, though, and it gets plenty of use. AIM is the one that I use to talk with my daughter Alanna. Very few spam messages (actually I can't remember a single one) but it's flaky through the firewall at work and AOL has a tendency to block the OpenSource clients I use at home on my Linux machine. But then I don't need to use any IM to talk to my daughter, so I can't complain.

And as far as an old friend finding me and contacting me, not yet.

1.4.2 Movin' On Up! (2001-05-03 14:13) - amused

Music: Smokin' Big Band Jazz & Swing!!

As part of some new assignments at work I get to move from my present office to another one in a different building. This probably means I'll be giving up my "office with a door" for a cubicle, since my labor grade doesn't entitle me to have an office. At The Big Company Where I Work, those of us in Research in my current building all have offices (lesser employees are "two-up") because of the building's original design (too expensive to renovate). I was just lucky in having my own office, looks like my luck my have run out. But with luck, I'll keep the same phone number, unlike the move to my current location.

1.4.3 A weight off my shoulders (2001-05-04 11:46) - jubilant

Music: radio.whump.com

Today I had my last scheduled visit to the Orthopedic surgeon who fixed my shoulder. My collar bone is all solid and I'm free to do as I please (within reason). The gap that you can feel along the top should fill in, though it may take a few years (!). I've been feeling pretty good, though with an occasional ache and pain, but this just makes everything all that much better. All in all, a great day :)

1.4.4 So long and thanks for all the fish (2001-05-14 20:39) - sad

So Douglas Adams has died at age 49. He was probably the most consistently funny writer I've ever had the pleasure of reading. Doug not only understood technology, he saw the impacts it had on the people that

used it. Perhaps he didn't invent the handheld computer, but who else would have envisioned one that had "Don't Panic" in large, friendly letters on the cover? He will be missed in my house, and many other houses across the planet.

1.4.5 The end of Eazel (2001-05-16 15:39) - geeky

Music: radio.whump.com

A while back I talked about [1]Eazel a company that was hoping to take the drudgery of keeping Linux software up to date. Actually, that was only part of their strategy, because their first product was *Nautilus*, a file manager shell for the GNOME desktop. Well, despite it being really cool software, Eazel is closing up shop, having lost VC support for a second round of funding. There is a possibility that Nautilus will continue since they are releasing it to the Open Source community, we'll see what happens.

While this is disappointing, it may be too much to conclude this is an Major Statement on whether Linux can make it as a desktop OS (it's credibility as a server OS is unquestioned). Given the present business climate, I doubt even McDonald's would have an easy go of it. The real question is whether the Open Source community at large is willing to pick up the code and continue Nautilus development. Considering most Open Source developers are using Linux (or other Unix) as a desktop, you could almost assume they're happy with the current state of things. It's too soon to call this, but I feel confident Nautilus will continue.

The software update feature eventually was emulated by other Linux distributions so Eazel would probably have had a hard time distinguishing themselves in the market, given their relative newcomer status. In the meantime, my current setup gets older and more out of date by the minute. Sadly, my distribution doesn't offer such update services. In any case, I'm waiting for the next release, which should have a better version of the 2.4 kernel and a more stable release of KDE2. Accelerated video drivers for my ATI video card should be there in the latest XFree86 too, yet another reason to update.

One more thing. My birthday is Friday (18 May). I share this date with Rick Wakeman (of the band Yes) and Pope John Paul II. It was also the date in 1980 that Mt. St. Helens blew up. You may draw your own conclusions from these tidbits. This year I will spend my birthday with my wife and friends in the US (last year at this time I was in England). And, if you keep track of these things, I will be 44.

1. <http://www.eazel.com/>

1.4.6 Holding back (2001-05-22 12:40)

Despite what you might think about someone with two weblogs and a journal site, I'm not the most forthcoming person you'll meet. But I realize that people consider me aloof, though I am far from that. Really.

I suspect that to be the root of my incapability to find my writing "voice". At night, before I fall asleep, I've been creating short stories that seem pretty good. But they never get written down. Somehow the transition from inside my head to the keyboard never happens. Perhaps it never will.

But there is a ray of hope. Dim, perhaps, but still visible. I have actually found myself playing guitar and not worrying about how good or bad my playing is. Not all the time (certainly not last night), though certainly not never. Who knows where this could lead?

1.4.7 Whither Blogger? (2001-05-23 17:05) - worried

Music: (KPIG - Live DJs 24/7 - 100% Pure CyberPork from Freedom, Calif.)

The service I use to host my two weblogs, BlogSpot, is currently down after Pyra Labs' T1 provider cut them off. This also affects a couple of other sites that were sharing the line. To be honest, given Pyra's financial condition, this sort of thing should not be surprising. The recent deal with Trellox notwithstanding, the free hosting services can never be considered "safe" in this economic climate. It's making me consider moving my Weblogs to a different host, but I would rather not lose the accumulated entries, if I don't have to. That's a concern for this journal as well, and I plan to archive that on my site soon.

By the way, I've had a number of people add me to their ICQ lately. No obvious link between any of them and certainly no one I know from somewhere, strange. ICQ has always been the most spam-filled of the IM services I have and I'm beginning to question whether I want to continue with it. I've had enough spam for a lifetime, I don't want or need more.

1.4.8 Memorial Day and Pearl Harbor (2001-05-27 22:59) - grateful

It's Memorial Day, and Pearl Harbor is the big story. It's been 60 years since the attack and many of those who fought in the Second World War are in or approaching their 80's, their generation is quickly disappearing. I probably won't see the movie, though you may want to make up your own mind. I'm not a big fan of fictionalized true stories, and this is one that needs no polishing. Instead, take the opportunity to thank a veteran, they did something for you that can never be underestimated.

1.4.9 Coming soon (2001-05-29 14:28) - moody

I've been working on an idea for a "Recently Read Books" section covering books I read with short opinions and recommendations (or lack thereof). I read a lot, this seems like a reasonable thing to do, though it will be no [1]epinions.com.

While I'm on the coming soon thing, I've been seriously considering writing on some topics that don't normally write (or even talk about). I'm not sure when, but I it's becoming something I have to do. If you like that sort of thing, stay tuned.

And finally, I think I want to do another site redesign. Anyone know about some good web site design tools that run on Linux? My site is hosted by my ISP and I can't run a lot of cgi stuff, so it has to be mostly HTML and JavaScript. Let me know.

Thanks to my family and all of my friends for sticking with me through all of the crap I've been going through. You've made all the difference to me.

1. <http://www.epinions.com/>

1.4.10 Some more on virtual communities (2001-05-31 14:08) - amused

Music: Pharamceutical Bandits - Saw Red (((((SKA*Anarchy))) The Third Wave of Ska!!!)

If you've followed my occasional entries on virtual communities, then you'll enjoy reading this [1]interesting rant on the [2]scobelizer weblog. It's a short piece, but it says a lot about communities online and the perils of open discussions.

1. <http://scobleizer.ManilaSites.Com/2001/05/31>
2. <http://scobleizer.ManilaSites.Com/>

1.5 June

1.5.1 Why yes, yes I am behind schedule (2001-06-05 09:18) - good

Music: (KPIG - Live DJs 24/7 - 100% Pure CyberPork from Freedom, Calif.)

If you're wondering where the site update and some of the other bits I've been promising are, don't. This is not my life, it's my hobby, things happen (as my Tai Chi Chuan instructor might say). Good things come with time, and in this case, so do mediocre things.

On other hobby fronts, I have dusted off my homebrewing equipment for the first time in years to brew this weekend. I had to buy some new supplies, including a new can of malt extract. It seems the can of Stout extract I had was last good in 1997. I thought that perhaps not using it was a good idea. I used to brew quite frequently, but haven't done much (obviously) other than the occasional batch of cider. I had forgotten how much prep work was required. In any case, a 5 gallon batch of Real Ale!

1.5.2 Instant Messaging update (2001-06-05 17:07) - thoughtful

Music: (KPIG - Live DJs 24/7 - 100% Pure CyberPork from Freedom, Calif.)

While I've looked at Instant Messaging a number of times in the past, lately it's been mostly to complain about the spam I get (ICQ is still the leader, and as they used to say in a motorcycle commercial, "Out front, and pulling away"). But there's still the IM technology and an industry to think about.

The Motley Fool sends out regular mailings to members, and the latest one has an article on IM [1]Instant Messaging's True Value, that brings up an interesting point. There was once an effort to get AOL to open it's IM service AIM to Microsoft's MSN users (and others). It's gone quiet because there is no need to get AOL to do that, given that most folks have multiple IM services and use them. Besides, the IM clients have become channels for distribution of advertising, so there is no incentive to share. That's the nice thing about clients on Linux, no ads, just compilation issues to deal with (gabber, as usual). Of course, that makes my use of the services a loss, given that I will never see the ads Windows and Mac users do. Oh well.

1. <http://www.fool.com/news/2001/aol1010605.htm>

1.5.3 All that, and he makes his own beer too (2001-06-08 13:08) - amused

Music: hold tight hold tight

Tonight, as a matter of fact :) It's been a while, but the bug bit me and it ended up being something I had to do. Last night I prepared the yeast starter so that it would be ready for tonight. If I get a good enough start on the process, I should be done my midnight. I might even leave work early, though a half hour or so head start probably won't make much difference. In case you're wondering, it will be an English Bitter, kegged and dry-hopped. Should be a perfect late Spring accompaniment.

My oldest daughter has been selected to go to Discovery Camp in California! She's thrilled, and so am I. It's nothing short of amazing the opportunities available to kids today and she certainly deserves it. Love you big girl :)

1.5.4 Crime and Punishment (2001-06-10 17:14)

Tomorrow, unless he changes his mind, Timothy McVeigh will be executed for the Oklahoma City bombing. There are a lot of people in the US who think this is a well-deserved punishment, given the number of deaths and the large percentage of children. But will the killing of this unremorseful man do anything to bring those who have died back? When and where will the killing stop?

McVeigh, to the end, has maintained his actions were of a military nature and the deaths so called "collateral damage". His unwillingness to apologize, even in the face of execution, has only further angered those who are calling for his death. He is not a sympathetic man, and this has only made it easier to hate him, and wish him dead. But that may not be the best answer to the problem that McVeigh represents.

Even if you overlook the moral arguments against capital punishment, there is an aspect to McVeigh's execution that may some day haunt this country. McVeigh's actions might have been extreme, but his anger at the federal government is shared by many in the US. For these people, McVeigh may likely become a martyr and symbol of revolt against a government they feel is out of control. It may be hard to believe that, but keep in mind the network of helpers McVeigh had in preparing for the bombing, and don't forget that they are still around and watching. When McVeigh dies tomorrow, expect them to react.

I've traveled in Europe and Japan and I've seen how much security exists in other countries. We think we are immune here, even after all that has happened, but it may well be that we are deluding ourselves.

1.5.5 Still late, getting later (2001-06-11 13:33)

Music: (KPIG - Live DJs 24/7 - 100% Pure CyberPork from Freedom, Calif.)

I know I was supposed to have started both the site redesign and the essays, but obviously I haven't. I will, I just don't know when. It's a little bit of laziness, a little bit of writer's block, and a little bit of fear. So now you know.

1.5.6 Minor updates (2001-06-12 10:46)

It's not the makeover I've been hinting at, but I added some new stuff to the *Cool Stuff* page and added a page of short reviews of books I've read. Share and enjoy!

1.5.7 Happy Father's Day and other stuff (2001-06-17 13:20)

It's Father's Day, and since I am one, it's sort of my day. But it's my father's day too, and so I called him. He's doing fine (no more ladders for him) but my aunt, who's husband passed away last year, was involved in a car accident as she drove from North Carolina to New Jersey. She's fine, but her car, with all of the clothes she needed, was towed to an impound lot. My dad doesn't have the phone number, and neither do I (she's at a cousin's house). At the risk of sounding whiney, think it's time bad things stopped happening to my family. Thank you.

1.5.8 More Digital Media Notes (2001-06-18 13:10) - creative

I already covered some of this in my [1]weblog, but along with the all of the MP3.com/Napster changes of late, there are efforts to replace the MP3 format with something else.

Microsoft, naturally, is pushing their Windows Media (WMA) format, and the Windows Media Player in Windows XP will not have MP3 capability like earlier versions. It is supposed to be still possible to add it in, but you can expect most consumers to not bother.

The MP3 format itself, owned by the Fraunhofer institute, has a potential replacement, MP3pro, that offers improved sound quality and smaller file sizes. Given all that's happening in the digital media realm, it doesn't seem likely that it will replace MP3 or compete effectively against WMA.

And finally, there's Ogg Vorbis, from [2]Xiph.org. Vorbis is still in development and as such, is still not a viable consumer choice. But it also offers smaller file sizes and improved sound quality over MP3, and is not encumbered with patent and licensing issues, so that there's an economic incentive for artists to use it.

Most folks don't know that Fraunhofer is supposed to get paid for each copy of the various MP3 encoders that are available. Whether or not that happens, is an issue for your conscience. In any case, Fraunhofer would certainly prefer you paid, and you can expect the MP3pro format to be no different. Microsoft, on the other hand, seems to be tired of paying for that capability in Windows Media Player (it's not their business model to pay others money). By controlling the format and the players they can control the features, adding or subtracting at will. Once they've got all your financial info under their control, there will be no question about royalty payments (plus a handling charge). I wish Vorbis the best, but given the scenario, has any alternative audio format got a chance?

And finally, on the payment topic, Scott McCloud, Web cartoonist *extraordinaire*, has put up [3]I Can't Stop Thinking! #6, wherein he talks more about the micropayment concept. Simply put, instead of charging, say, \$16 for a CD, you charge a 15 cents a song. The key difference between micropayments and the current method is that all of the 15 cents goes to the artist. With the lower price, more people buy and the artist makes more. Of course, middlemen don't exist in this scenario, as you might expect. A number of folks have pointed out the glaring flaw in this: there is no current infrastructure for collection of micropayments. The systems that do currently exist cost more per transaction than the micropayment itself. In any case, read Scott's comic and make up your own mind.

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>

2. <http://www.xiph.org/>

3. <http://www.thecomicroreader.com/html/icst/icst-6/icst-6.html>

1.5.9 Battle of the Internet Behemoths (2001-06-19 16:52) - thoughtful

If you're reading this, you're probably using a Microsoft browser and it's probably running on a Microsoft operating system. It's also possible that your ISP is also Microsoft, but it may well be one of their rivals, America Online (AOL). And therein lies an interesting tale.

Let's start with AOL. It is currently the largest ISP in North America. AOL started as a competitor to CompuServe, then a leader in online services. In the early 90's, online services competed with the exclusive content they provided to their subscribers. The Internet, which was primarily available to colleges and government contractors, wasn't an issue. But that changed, and it went from an extra feature to being the core of the online attraction. AOL was better and faster at giving their subscribers access to the Internet than their competitors. Add to that compelling exclusive content and easy for novices to use software, and AOL took over. It's still number one.

Microsoft got into the Internet late, but made up for lost time. They tried to do the exclusive content thing with the Microsoft Network, but it was the end of that era and it failed. They came back, as they often

do, with MSN, which is much like AOL in many ways, and they are now in a heated battle for supremacy with the leader. Every version of Microsoft's operating systems have an MSN icon on the desktop.

Oddly enough, they also have an AOL icon. Yes, that's right, AOL *and* MSN both on the desktop. That's because AOL managed to convince MS a while back to include AOL. It is clear which one MS wants you to use, but at least you have a choice. That is, you did. Microsoft has a new Windows version coming out, called XP. Among the many controversial things about it (there are many, more than I can list here) is the very real possibility that AOL won't be on the XP desktop. That's because recent talks between AOL and MS broke down. Why? Probably a lot of reasons, but one that many analysts point to is MS is no longer afraid of anti-monopoly rulings and feels free to do what they please. They don't have to be nice.

AOL will still be free to send out CD's by the millions, but it's likely the free ride is over. Expect them to continue to use the Internet Explorer browser, even though they own Netscape (once the market leader in browsers) and continue to fund the development of the Mozilla browser effort. Business makes for strange bedfellows.

The battle for control of the Internet may already be over, and you know who has one.

1.5.10 More Napster News (2001-06-20 17:16)

Just a quickie to point out a [1]LA Times article showing how CD sales have continued to drop even though there are significantly fewer Napster users. I have said that I thought most Napster users used it to sample prior to purchase, and that seems to be the case. And after you read that, pop over to my *Cool Stuff* page and buy some Steve Greene CD's, especially his latest.

1. <http://www.latimes.com/business/20010620/t000051058.html>

1.5.11 Real Ale (2001-06-23 21:46) - content

This old dog can still brew a great ale, despite the four year layoff. The key was my investment years ago in a bunch of quality pieces of equipment. This places me firmly in the class of advanced beginner. I have the capability of boiling the entire 5 gallon batch, a wort chiller to get the batch down to room temperature as fast as I can siphon it, and the ability to get quality ingredients. To make it to intermediate requires the ability to mash grain (slow cooking at lower than boiling). My equipment allows me to do that, for ales, but it's a lot of work and time. Perhaps someday, if I can convince myself the incremental time, money, and effort result in sufficiently improved beer. I'm sceptical.

Still no site update, but I'm thinking about it.

1.5.12 Tai Chi (2001-06-25 14:24) - artistic

Music: The D's 3 - Crush

I'm taking a beginner's level class in Tai Chi Chuan (it has many spellings in English) at the local YMCA, in hopes of regaining some of the flexibility and overall well-being I've lost since the accident. It's in a large room that adjoins the "Stairmaster" room and is separated only by glass. That means they can watch us while they huff and puff their way to fame and fortune. I'm sure to them, the slow deliberate movements look like child's play. But let me tell you, they are nothing like what they seem. This stuff is *hard*, and I have nothing but respect for the (mostly 60+ retired) women in my class who can move in ways I can only

dream of.

After a month or so, I have to admit, it's starting to help. I'm not sure I can describe it adequately, but I don't feel my body is "broken" as much as I did. The accident left me feeling as if something was out of alignment, for lack of a better term, but that feeling is diminishing. Now all I have to contend with is the fact that I'm a middle aged white guy totally lacking in physical grace ;)

(2001-06-25 17:32:16) Testing
Testing comments.

1.5.13 More songs about buildings and food (2001-06-27 14:22) - artistic

Music: Big Band Bash in The Kingdom Of Swing • 25 May • 720 tracks/60 new

I've found some nifty-looking bits to start the site rebuild with. Check out [1]Media Builder, they have a nice combination of free and pay graphic elements. I've decided that the main entry page will contain a menu element that opens the content as separate windows. That will include the LiveJournal part you are currently reading. It's going to take some JavaScript coding, and I guess I'll have to learn at least some elementary stuff, but that's not a major issue.

Another thing I will have to do is add Meta tags to turn off Microsoft's SmartTags feature. Check out my [2]weblog for links to some of the ongoing hoopla over this new feature. A real hotbed of activity is Dave Winer's [3]Scripting News. Dave's company produces a Content Management System called *Manila* (they also make a smaller-in-scope product called Radio Userland that I use to power a desktop website at work) and he ended up having kluge in SmartTag blocking so that you don't have to do what I'm doing per page. This makes SmartTag support an *opt-in* feature, rather than *opt-out*. I've mentioned Dave before, and I've always expected his acceptance of Microsoft would prove a mistake. But I won't say "I told you so". It's time to mobilize and keep the Web free for all, there's no time for in-fighting.

1. <http://www.mediabuilder.com/>
2. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>
3. <http://www.scriptingnews.com/>

1.5.14 The News (2001-06-29 16:24) - grateful

Music: (KPIG - Live DJs 24/7 - 100% Pure CyberPork from Freedom, Calif.)

There's not much I can say about the Microsoft ruling, so I won't say anything at all. It's probably the biggest tech/business story so far this year, so you'll have no problem finding plenty of coverage and opinions.

If you live in the US, I hope you have a safe holiday. I have to work a couple of days next week, but it's guaranteed to be light. We're going to a friend's house the Fourth, and that should be fun and relatively low-key. My oldest daughter flies to camp in California on Friday. She has a 6:30 AM flight out of Rochester and will be landing in Reno, NV and taking a bus. I'm so proud of her :)

Monday will mark the one year anniversary of my deer/motorcycle accident. To be honest, I've come a long way in a year, but I still can't say I'm over it. At least, in part thanks to the Tai Chi, I no longer feel *wrong* (sorry, but I can't describe it better than that), and that's made a big difference. So has the love and support of my family and friends. I love you all.

1.6 July

1.6.1 More of the same old thing (2001-07-02 16:17) - contemplative

Music: (KPIG - Live DJs 24/7 - 100% Pure CyberPork from Freedom, Calif.)

My oldest daughter needs braces, her lower teeth are not meeting the uppers correctly. I had braces at her age, so it's nothing new to me. I was lucky to have the big ugly stuff only on the top, with a "pusher" of some sort on the bottom. Sounds like my daughter will have something similar. I'm bringing home the box of company schwag that the camp requested each camper bring with them. Actually, they asked for things that represent their hometown, but since Rochester is such a company town, it's ends up being company-labeled items.

1.6.2 Houston, we have a redesign (2001-07-03 12:19) - pleased

Music: Radio Margaritaville

It's really gathering steam, for once. I went a paid for my [1]LiveJournal account, so I can customize the colors and use JavaScript to flow it into the site. I also looked at some site building software, Dreamweaver 4 on the Mac and WebSphere on NT, but neither was compelling and I decided to stick with StarOffice, though it may complicate working with CSS.

Otherwise, have a great holiday! I'm going to, now that I've passed the 1 year milestone, my mood has lifted nicely.

1. <http://www.livejournal.com/>

1.6.3 Progress Report (2001-07-09 13:12)

Things are moving much more slowly than I had hoped. The site has no content, but the logo is up and a link to this journal is on it, so at least I can get stuff like this published. Dreamweaver is starting to look more interesting, though it has a decided Flash bias (it's by Macromedia, so no surprises there). IBM's WebSphere may be okay, but I can't get the FTP to work through the corporate firewall and so I can't use it on my site.

My oldest daughter made it to California just fine. The 5:30 AM fun and games at the airport was worth it. She's managed to call multiple times each day (we gave her a calling card with no limit) but I suspect that will decrease once things get into full swing. Her sister is enjoying being an "only child" for a week. It's nice not having to deal with the sibling rivalry for a while, too. I miss her anyway.

Napster appears to be dead, with it's servers offline, but that may be temporary. The filtering and other changes seem to have taken their toll. OpenNap servers are still active, and you can use Napigator to find them. I've been looking at the Gnutella protocol, but it suffers from a lack of reliability. I can barely make any connections and have never had a download work. Gnutella is different than Napster in that there is no central server and searches depend on connections to other nodes. Just getting connected long enough to complete a search is a rarity and the results are very poor in that you can't tell when a node will disappear. To be fair, these problems are shared by other P2P applications, and is a "feature" of this type of network. More on the protocol and the client I am using as I get experience with it.

1.6.4 Limited Success (2001-07-11 18:49)

I've gotten both Dreamweaver and WebSphere to work, ftp and all, but since this is a personal site, I've decided to go with Dreamweaver (on my Mac at home). It has the layout features that StarOffice lacks and the results look good in multiple browsers. Now I have to figure out how to do some of the stuff that I have on jotted down on paper.

1.6.5 Wait! There's More! (2001-07-20 10:49)

Well, actually no, there isn't more.

1.6.6 Progress (lite) (2001-07-22 21:03)

Note the amazing, non-functional, navigation bar.

1.6.7 Things that have changed (2001-07-24 15:24)

Music: Share The Groove: Phish, MMW, Charlie Hunter, Galactic, Soulive, Flecktones + jam bands

A while back I pointed to some information regarding the apparent effect of Napster on overall music sales. But that was based on old information. In 2001, the numbers are quite different. Read this Salon.com article on the [1]downturn in the music industry for an idea. This wasn't supposed to happen, the idea was, kill Napster and people will go back to buying CD's from the majors. But that Napster is almost dead, there's sort of post-Napster [2]diaspora, as Salon.com refers to it, with users embracing all sorts of Napster alternatives.

What's common to most of them is that they are true peer-to-peer, with no central (and therefore easily sued) server. Some of these are admittedly not as easy to configure and use as Napster, some even support digital rights management, and none have the sheer number of users or files as Napster did. Then again, neither does Napster, and it's attempts at appeasement, which have included filtering and a new file format, have only hastened it's demise. Why? Because it has made the selection smaller and the files harder to use, which negate all the advantages it ever had. It's the same reason the record labels will never succeed in their ventures, since all their actions so far have been toward the same ends. The music consumers are not interested now, haven't been in the past, and aren't likely to be in the future. The winner, if there is one, will combine selection and ease of use, it's the only way to win. And the record companies are in the best position to do this, ironically, they are also the ones least likely to. So they will continue to lose out to the file-sharing services. It's as if someone came up with a way to easily create and trade gasoline, would the OPEC's of the world continue to exercise the same power in the market? Of course not, because at that stage, the tactic of *restricting supply* would no longer have any effect.

I'll post some of my experiences with the Gnutella protocol one of these days, but in the meantime, buy your music direct from the artists. As a matter of fact, buy *Gene with Greene* direct from [3]Steve Greene. You'll be glad you did.

1. http://www.salon.com/ent/music/feature/2001/07/19/industry_downturn/index.html

2. http://www.salon.com/tech/col/rose/2001/07/20/napster_diaspora/index.html

3. <http://www.stevegreene.com/>

1.6.8 Some IM News (2001-07-26 15:08)

AOL is finally getting around to opening their AIM service, according to [1]this article in ComputerWorld. AOL has been particularly vigilant in preventing other IM services from accessing their users. This has also included preventing non-AOL AIM clients (like those for Linux) from using the system as well. This has not been a big issue for me, since I only use AIM to talk to my oldest daughter when she's at home and I'm at work. ICQ, Yahoo, and Jabber all have Windows/Mac/Linux clients and don't have problems with third party access. I don't think MSN does either, but I don't (and never will) use that service.

I have to be honest, though, my use of IM is declining, because of the annoyance factor. I have switched ICQ to the mode where people have to request permission to add me to their lists, because it is the single most spam-filled of them all. In addition, I would get messages from 18 year-old girls in Thailand; that's not my idea of what IM is for. Oh, and then there's the women who chose to ignore the "I am married and don't want to play around" warning I had. I even got one message from someone who said they read it but decided to message me anyway. It's sad, but perhaps it's not surprising. so I'm still debating whether or not I will put my IM addresses on the new site. I'll let you know.

1. http://computerworld.com/nlt/1%2C3590%2CNAV47_ST062537_NLTES%2C00.html

1.6.9 A Progress Report with Real Progress (2001-07-30 10:52)

So it took the demo of Dreamweaver running out to motivate me, but I've gotten a big chunk of the redesign done. It's not quite right, yet, and some of the navigation buttons don't work, but the main sections I wanted are available. I still needed BBEdit to tweak some of the stuff, though, but I don't think any WYSIWYG authoring tool is perfect.

By the way, if you're new here, welcome. This is my web home, and it's constantly evolving. I'm ashamed to say the most recent evolution has been the most painful and lengthy, but it's coming along. You'll find more about me in the *About* section, it's kind of wordy, but it's the best explanation of how I got here I've ever written. This is the (obviously) *Journal*, and it mostly contains things about my life, work, and interests. Some of it tends to resemble little essays on tech topics (mostly Instant Messaging and MP3/Napster), rather than journal entries. I may move them to a separate section one of these days. You can read it in a standalone fashion at [1]this location, if you want. The *Weblog* section is my [2]Blogger weblog, [3]My Likes and Dislikes, which, in line with it's name, is mostly links to tech items that either bother me or intrigue me. It has taken a serious anti-Microsoft slant in recent weeks, but it's more than that. I don't put much personal stuff in there, mostly because I can use the journal for that. It's easy to read though, and that may be enough.

I'll post information about the other sections as I get them up and running. You can also expect more frequent entries here, and feel free to comment (using the button) on anything I write.

1. <http://tommasz1.livejournal.com/>

2. <http://www.blogger.com/>

3. <http://mylnd.blogger.com/>

1.6.10 SirCam Virus Strikes! (2001-07-31 11:37)

Music: rhapsody in blue arr r bar

Wow, even I got the SirCam virus, from someone I don't know in *Bulgaria*, of all places. Unlike [1]some[2] people, I didn't get any readable, just some Win32 executable localized for that person. But you never know, though to be honest, I don't have a wide circle of email contacts.

1. <http://www.lakefx.nu/>
2. <http://glennf.com/blog/>

1.7 August

1.7.1 Just Stuff (2001-08-03 11:10)

Music: @()@ Mr Po Boy's Jambalaya Jam * * New Orleans, Jazz Fest, Mardi Gras, Zydeco Cajun, R&B, Blues, Louisiana, Funk, Swamp, Heritage Festival www.pocreations.com, A Confederacy of Dancers

Don't really have anything major to report, other than the girls (yes, both of them) head for two weeks at Y camp. Other than the cruise week we took in 1999, we haven't had an opportunity like this to be alone together in almost 12 years :)

I also purchased Dreamweaver, it works for me and the demo has expired. I could continue development using a text editor, but there is so much else I want to do that is easier with Dreamweaver. Look forward for much more "stuff" in the coming weeks. Peace.

1.7.2 An Interesting Virtual Community Site (2001-08-08 11:20)

If you're interested in virtual communities on the Web, take a look at [1]CommunityZero, a site that offers free hosting. I am involved in one myself, although I didn't start it (thanks Erin). It runs on [2]Cold Fusion, a content management system (CMS), but with a browser-based interface that anyone can learn in minutes. They also offer [3]services for groups that wish to host it on their own servers or within their company intranet. As a matter of fact, I recommended it to someone in my workgroup for hosting a community of practice. My company has had a tendency to go with homegrown solutions, but current economics dictate buying a COTS (Commercial Off The Shelf) package. We'll see.

1. <http://www.communityzero.com/>
2. <http://www.allaire.com/>
3. <http://www.communityzero.com/information/solutions/>

1.7.3 Yet Another Status Report (2001-08-14 13:28)

So, after that initial burst of creativity, the site work has ground to a halt again. But I've been reading up on some aspects of Javascript, DHTML and CSS, so that's my excuse. Ultimately, I probably won't have any major areas of interactivity, just as much cross-browser/cross-platform compatibility as I can get.

1.7.4 On the Road (2001-08-15 13:54)

I just finished this book, by Beat writer Jack Kerouac, and I'm now working on his *Dharma Bums*. It's not easy reading, since Kerouac adopted a writing style that emulated the bebop jazz he knew and loved. The words and ideas just keep coming at you, making it difficult to find a natural stopping point. But little ever happens, so if you like plot, don't look here. They truly don't make them like this anymore.

1.7.5 Middleage (2001-08-20 13:38)

I'm what most people would consider middleaged. It's not a comfortable term, for me at least, but it's fitting. But, despite the name, it's not the mid-point of your life, rather, it's more like the 2/3 point. It's the point at which you realize that you will not live forever, and that you will eventually die. It's the point where your advancement in your career shows a definite slowing down. If you've reached what others consider "your potential", you are thought to be a success (more so if you've exceeded it). If, on the other hand, you've not made it that far, they feel sorry for you. In either case, you're on the plateau, and might even be on the declining other side. It's not fun, and it's not funny.

But mostly middleage is the point at which you can see both ways, back to the beginning and ahead to the future. That's something younger and older people lack, preoccupied with other things as they are. It's giving me a lot to consider. Peace.

1.7.6 Geeks and God (2001-08-22 13:09)

You might not expect techies to be concerned with religion. In fact, I'd be willing to bet that most people assume they don't think much beyond the occasional libertarian rant or Ayn Rand quote. But that's not the case at all. For starters, read [1]What religion for geeks? at kuro5hin.org. You'll see that beliefs are all over the spectrum, as you'd expect in any sufficiently large, multinational human population. k5, as it is known, is an open forum for "technology and culture, from the trenches" and tends to offer a more thoughtful environment for discussion than [2]slashdot. Back in June, it presented [3]An open challenge to Creationists, and has never shied away from such topics, despite the potential for flamewars.

The fact is, even those who proclaim themselves atheists, have some kind of belief system, even if it is expressed in negative terms. And these beliefs are every bit as closely held by techies as by the rest of the world. Traditionally, any favorite tool or system has been associated with *religion* in techie world. Larry Wall, the creator of [4]perl, the ubiquitous Internet scripting language, is a former missionary who freely intermixes religion into his programming language work. For him, the religion of the "favorite tool" and his Christian religion are closely linked. The k5 discussion makes it clear he's not the only one. Is it the same for all in science and technology? I think so, though one poster in k5 mentions that astronomers are predominately atheists (ponder that one).

But don't science and religion contradict each other? Yes on certain levels, they do. Certainly, the very concept of faith requires belief without evidence, while science says observation is required for anything to exist. But if you don't try to use one where the other is appropriate, the contradictions go away. Don't ask science to explain *why* we (humans) are here, and don't ask religion to explain the origin of the universe (but since observations can't penetrate that barrier, it can't explain what came before. In essence, there are things that we can contemplate that science will never be able to explain.).

My beliefs? At one time, I was fairly clear on what I believed. I had drifted in and out of the (Catholic) church over the years, but my basic belief set had stayed the same. That was until the accident last summer. Since then, I've begun to wonder about things that I once took for granted. I can't very easily describe myself with a single term, though agnostic might be the best fit. There are still things, as I mentioned above, that science is unable to deal with.

As time goes by, I will likely write more about this, and in particular what I experienced in the accident. I don't know where I will end up. Life, no matter what your beliefs, is a journey and I am just another traveler with a tale to tell.

1. <http://www.kuro5hin.org/story/2001/8/21/15457/2473>
2. <http://slashdot.org/>
3. <http://www.kuro5hin.org/story/2001/6/8/52432/25359>
4. <http://www.perl.org/>

1.7.7 More of the same (2001-08-27 20:17)

I've had some strange bug the last couple of days, nothing much symptom-wise, other than a slight fever and overall tiredness. Better now, though.

My wife and kids are off to camping for a few days, for my oldest's birthday (which is not actually until the 10th). I get to work until Friday, and then I'll be joining them for Friday night and Saturday (the teardown and cleanup). I have a meeting Friday morning that I have to attend (even though it's technically a vacation day) or I'd be there Thursday evening. Yes, there is something wrong with this entire concept, but that's life working for A Big Company.

1.7.8 Bad writing alert! (2001-08-28 10:33)

Music: @()@ Mr Po Boy's Jambalaya Jam * * New Orleans, Jazz Fest, Mardi Gras, Zydeco Cajun, R&B, Blues, Louisiana, Funk, Swamp, Heritage Festival www.pocreations.com, A Confederacy of Dancers

Life, no matter what your beliefs, is a journey and I am just another traveler with a tale to tell.

Looks like I was feeling a bit too self-important. Feel free to kick me in the butt whenever I do that.

(2003-02-06 17:34:56) @()@ Mr Po Boy's Jambalaya Jam
Great Music - Thanks - Gris Gris

1.7.9 Feedback (2001-08-28 20:09)

Did you know you can comment on what's written here by clicking on the *Comments* button on the lower right of each entry box?

1.7.10 Suggested Reading (2001-08-29 09:35)

Music: @()@ Mr Po Boy's Jambalaya Jam * * New Orleans, Jazz Fest, Mardi Gras, Zydeco Cajun, R&B, Blues, Louisiana, Funk, Swamp, Heritage Festival www.pocreations.com, A Confederacy of Dancers

From Eric Norlin's [1]Uncharted Shores weblog comes [2]Politics and Buddhism. An essay written in the spirit of mischief. This essay, by [3]Steven Fortney, is a fascinating, but difficult to read, exploration of politics in a religious context. It also covers some of the very things that have been troubling me these past months. Read it, perhaps bookmark it for a second read, and see what you think.

1. <http://www.unchartedshores.com/blogger/>
2. http://www.unchartedshores.com/blogger/archive/2001_08_26_archive3.html#5342460
3. http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1878569740/qid=999012503/sr=2-7/ref=aps_sr_b_3_3/102-3864446-2926507

1.7.11 More difficult reading (2001-08-29 14:07)

Difficult, because I had to stop several times to cry. Difficult, because it reminds me of what I put my wife through last year. Please read [1]Breathless.

If there is a God, then this is an example of how He works on this Earth of ours.

1. <http://www.startribune.com/breathless/>

1.7.12 Random thoughts (2001-08-30 12:07)

Cold and lonely night, didn't sleep well at all. Strange dreams.

Sometimes I feel like I'm on the threshold of something great, but it just never seems to happen.

The thought of contracting Alzheimer's is very frightening, I want to be fully aware when I die. Not that it makes any difference.

My guitar playing skills seem to be eroding lately, either something is wrong physically, or I need some new inspiration to break me out of this rut.

I'm jealous of successful people.

I'm a lousy friend sometimes.

1.8 September

1.8.1 More on growing up (2001-09-04 11:53)

Growing up means:

- Accepting the fact that you'll never do all the things you thought you would do
- Realizing that nothing and no one lasts forever
- Confronting your slow, but gradual loss of ignorance
- Having more things you regret than you thought possible
- Saying goodbye more often than hello
- Marvelling at how you could never have predicted you would end up like you did

1.8.2 Desktop Eating (2001-09-06 12:33)

You can always tell who eats lunch (or dinner, if they work late) at their desk. Just turn their keyboard over and look at all the "stuff" that falls out. Sad, isn't it? I work about 100 feet from the cafeteria, but since I buy my own lunch somewhere else, it just seems easier when I'm by myself (most of the time) to eat it at my desk. Today I managed to drop a Frito on the floor and then run it over with my chair wheels, thereby

crushing into the carpeting. So I did the only thing you can do in such a situation: brushed the crumbs in such a way to minimize the concentration of crumbs in any one area and making it look like it's some random dirt. It's not like someone is going to come in to my office and vacuum any time soon.

1.8.3 Hey! (2001-09-07 15:19)

Music: (KPIG - Live DJs 24/7 - 100% Pure CyberPork from Freedom, Calif.)

I'm not angry or miserable all the time, despite the site title and the general tone of things here lately. But this is one of the few places where you get to see the surface and what's underneath, hence the dichotomy.

1.8.4 Endings (2001-09-07 22:21)

Tonight we had to put Digger, our small lop rabbit, to sleep. She was 12 years old; this probably the equivalent of 110 years for a human. We were all prepared, but when the time comes, it's still hard, especially for the girls. It's been a tough week overall but we're glad that things were under our control. Few things in life are.

1.8.5 Bad news does come in threes (2001-09-10 09:03)

On Saturday, my boss, who is also a good friend and mentor, called me to say that he had to leave for home (UK) to be with his father in what is likely his final moments. He believes his dad is waiting for him to come home to say goodbye. Earlier this past week, I found out an old friend who I hadn't heard from in a while has died of pancreatic cancer. I never knew until it was too late. At least we able to make the last moments of our little bunny's life as comfortable as possible.

There's something to be said for cherishing the time we have to spend with our loved ones. Even decades can seem so short.

1.8.6 But on a positive note (2001-09-10 10:54)

My oldest daughter, Alanna, is 12 years-old today :) If you see her, don't forget to wish her a Happy Birthday. She's pretty cool for a kid her age, you know.

1.8.7 (2001-09-10 13:57)

My friend's father passed away this morning. My friend was able to spend about an hour and a half with him. Godspeed.

1.8.8 Some more on religion (2001-09-11 08:25)

In the aftermath of this year's [1]Burning Man festival, comes this interesting piece, [2]The redefinition of my personal concept of weird, by R. Bohlender.

A quote:

I do find it weird that the church strives to convenience people when people really thrive on challenge.

Getting to Burning Man is a challenge, but it s a challenge people rise to. The church in America has done everything they can to remove all challenge from attending, in hopes that if it s convenient, people will stumble into a walk with God.

I'm feeling challenged at the moment, but I'm not sure where responding to the challenge will take me.

1. <http://www.burningman.com/>
2. http://www.spiritlifeonline.com/rb_bm_article_01.htm

1.8.9 (2001-09-11 11:06)

The world is a terrible, frightening place. God have mercy on the souls of all those who have died today, especially the firefighters, medics, and police officers.

Please consider giving blood today if you can. It's the single most effective thing you can do to help.

1.8.10 (2001-09-11 16:42)

As I have had some time to reflect, it's clear that whoever orchestrated this attack has accomplished their goals. Besides the lives lost, and the psychological effects, there is the total disruption of the US financial community as well as profound effects on the federal government. There is no act of revenge that will have the same effect on the ones responsible, short of all-out war. And I know that there are many in the US who are in favor of war at the moment, though no one knows against whom we would wage that war. But such is normal in this age of terrorism. The danger for us is to direct the response, no matter what it is, to those responsible, and no one else.

Many people are concerned that part of the response will be a drastic reduction in the personal freedom and privacy of US citizens in the name of National Security. And perhaps this is yet another way the terrorists have triumphed. No matter what happens, life in the United States will never be the same again.

1.8.11 Posted also on my Weblog (2001-09-12 09:17)

My heart is breaking, but at least my sister-in-law, Marta, who lives in Manhattan is okay. We heard from her, indirectly, yesterday. (Marta, I doubt you read this, but if you do, we love you and we're glad you're all right).

If you want to do more than just give blood, try [1]this or [2]this link to donate money.

1. <http://s1.amazon.com/exec/varzea/paypage/PKAXFNQH7EKCX/107-4368286-3056556>
2. <http://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=p/gen/relief-outside>

1.8.12 Something from Julian of Norwich (2001-09-12 14:44)

Inevitably, in times such as these, there is always the question of the existence of evil in the world. For believers, this is an especially difficult problem, as God is the ultimate good yet evil exists. [1]Julian of Norwich, an English Christian mystic (1342-ca.1416), wrote in her [2]*Revelations of Divine Love*:

It is sooth that sin is cause of all this pain; but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner [of] thing shall be well.

1. <http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/julian.htm>
2. <http://www.ccel.org/j/julian/revelations/>

1.8.13 (2001-09-13 15:22)

There must be a million or so web sites with "my thoughts on the tragedy" on the web by now. I can't imagine mine are all that important but I must write them down. Conveniently, no one will ever read them but me.

What is the most difficult for me to understand is how anyone could hate the citizens of the United States so much that they would kill in such a horrific fashion. But the hate is real, as real as the deaths of all those firefighters, police officers, and ordinary people. My biggest fear is that we will strike back in anger, and in doing so become the very thing we despise. It's clear from the news that this sort of reaction is already occurring. And it will only get worse, unless we stop it. We're the only ones who can. Will we? Will we direct our anger at only those who are responsible or will we strike blindly, in any direction, just to satisfy our sudden lust for vengeance? These are, as Thomas Paine said during the Revolution, "times that try men's souls." How we react to this crisis will forever define what the United States truly stands for. I hope that our definition will be one to be proud of.

I was a volunteer firefighter for 21 years (still am in my heart). I knew while watching the towers collapse on Tuesday that firefighters were dying in front of my eyes. I knew what others in the room didn't. Because I had done exactly what those firefighters had done: walk into a dangerous situation and attempt to make it better. I've been lucky, but I'm sure those guys were lucky too, until that day. On my door at work are two printed images, both of them of firefighters raising the American Flag. The first is from Tuesday, the flag is tattered and silhouetted by the still-burning wreckage of the towers. The second is from Wednesday, the scene more monochromatic due to the gray ash covering everything in sight. I want to remind those that pass my office door that there is someone looking out for them, a bunch of hard-working folks who face danger every day, and that some of those brave souls have paid the ultimate price.

1.8.14 (2001-09-14 11:17)

I'm not going to post again for a while. I have nothing unique or important to say, so why confirm that? But today at noon, I will pray during the moment of silence, even though I'm not sure there's anyone listening.

I will also be updating my homepage, adding links to some graphics I want people to see.

Here's something everyone should do. Hug each and every person you hold dear, no matter what "issues" you may have. Do it. If they're not nearby and you can't travel to them, call them, e-mail them, whatever, but let them know how you feel. And encourage them to do the same.

Peace.

1.8.15 Is religion in general to blame? (2001-09-18 09:17)

Richard Dawkins, the man responsible for the "selfish gene" concept, has written an article on the [1]role of religion in the recent WTC attacks. Read it before continuing.

I don't agree that religion's emphasis on the afterlife means that people can act any which way they wish on Earth, it instead is quite the opposite. Your behavior in this life is a direct determinant of what, if anything, the afterlife is for you. Those terrorists that Dawkins speaks of were fed a distorted view of their God's wishes. No different in that respect to those Christians who marched off to the Holy Land in the Crusades. No different, because they're both wrong.

It's somewhat ironic, but religions suffer from the basic fact that they are made up of people. Most religions start from some basic principles (10 Commandments, "Love thy neighbor", etc.) but then complicate them with rules and ceremonies to the point where many of the adherents lose sight of the basics. And once the principles are lost, it is oh so easy to convince people to do what you want.

1. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4257777,00.html>

1.8.16 I gave blood today (2001-09-20 15:03)

Even though I know it's not going to any victims, but to replenish the Red Cross's depleted supplies. We had a blood drive here at work, over 400 people signed up and they had to turn people away. No walk-ins were accepted. It took me over 2 hours to donate, every station in the process was backed up with the exception of the drink and snack table.

1.8.17 Land of the free and the home of the brave (2001-09-23 20:20)

It was great watching the NY Giants game today. The coaches and players all wore FDNY, NYPD, and NYC EMS hats in place of their usual team ones. Curiously, they actually had to get permission from the NFL to do that. But perhaps that's not so odd, since even the color of their shoes (on the field) is determined by the NFL. Oh, and the Giants won.

1.8.18 Songs, songs, songs (2001-09-24 09:20)

Despite my pathetic attempts at being a musician, music has always been an important part of my life. Songs are always playing in my head, from the silly songs my mom sang to the latest pop drek. So I thought I'd share some pieces of songs that have been flowing through my consciousness of late:

From Justin Haywood and John Lodge's *Remember Me (My Friend)* (Blue Jays, 1975):

You don't need to ask me if I'll be your friend.
I am. I am.
You don't need to ask me if I'm sure my friend.
I am.

I am your friend,
You must remember me.
I'm the one who saw through the world's disguise,

Took away its cloak and made it hide
From me.
Remember me?

From Simon and Garfunkle's *America* (Bookends, 1968):

"Kathy, I'm lost," I said, though I knew she was sleeping
"I'm empty and aching and I don't know why"
Counting the cars on the New Jersey Turnpike
They've all come to look for America
All come to look for America
All come to look for America

And from Simon and Garfunkle's *Bridge Over Troubled Water* (1969):

When you're weary
Feeling small
When tears are in your eyes
I will dry them all
I'm on your side
When times get rough
And friends just can't be found

Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down

1.8.19 Welcome! (2001-09-26 12:56)

Welcome to *Angry Middleaged Man*, the online expression of someone who has nothing to say.

(2001-10-26 14:17:34) Angry?

In the months that I have gotten to know you the little bit that IRC allows. I have not seen any of the flaws you so adamantly insist you have. I have never seen you angry or bitter. Rather, I have noted your wit, humor, and compassion.. Ge-

1.8.20 Here's a question for you (2001-09-27 11:51)

I've read countless pieces in the papers and on the web on how "everything is different" now and how much the world has changed. Is this really true for you? Use the *Comments* button on the lower right to let me know. If anyone does this, I'll answer with how I feel.

(2001-10-26 14:19:52)

YES! It is...and I am trying to instill the value of people in general in my students. This is what I mailed on 9-13 to my heart friends... To All of You Who Matter SO Much to Me... On Tuesday night, as our nation was paralyzed by shock and grief, my husband Greg and I got home late and as we parked our car, I look at him and said, "Greg, had that been me in the World Trade Center—Had I died, would you have known how I feel about you? How much I love you and what a tremendous difference in my life you have made?" His reply was to say yes and to ask me the same question. After assuring him that I DO know how he feels, we both understood immediately how important it is to tell ALL those we love how we feel. So, today, as I take time to reflect on the many who have loved me and nurtured me...who have made a DIFFERENCE in my life, YOU were one of those people. And I wanted to be sure and let you know and to say I love you. Ge-Anne

tommasz1 (2001-10-26 16:46:58)

I was absolutely devastated as I watched the towers fall because I knew that firefighters were dying. Having been a volunteer for > 20 years I knew they were on their way in, along with police and EMT's. It's what we do, simple as that. Usually, it's not so tragic, but it's almost always dangerous. So I have officially requested to go back to active status; it's been over a year since my accident and it's time. I hope that one of the longest-lasting effects of 9/11 is our heightened awareness of the circle of loved ones that we all have. Take no one for granted, ever again. Peace.

1.8.21 In lieu of your responses (2001-09-30 20:16)

Not unsurprisingly, no one has bothered to comment on my request for how (or if) your lives have changed as a result of the 9/11 attack. Oh well.

In any case, I have talked a number of people in my life and I've seen the gamut, from no effect whatsoever, to a profound effect. In other words, exactly what you'd expect. Of course, I live in NY state, and ties with NYC run deep here. Lots of people who won't fly right now. I'm glad I won't have to travel this year for work. But none of this seems permanent, at least not yet. I suppose that if there is another attack this could be.

Andy Rooney on *60 Minutes* tonight wondered why the US doesn't invest in the railroads rather than the airlines. That's good for travel on the continent, but not overseas. But maybe that won't be necessary, given how video and phone conferences are picking up the slack. I don't know if tourist travel is a sufficient incentive on it's own to justify air travel, but it certainly gets a lot of attention. And a lot of fear and uncertainty.

1.9 October

1.9.1 Random thoughts (2001-10-01 10:05)

I wish I could write better, I hate the gap between what's in my head and what ends up on the screen.

My ability to concentrate is diminishing over time, I don't know why.

I haven't played or even touched my guitar in a month. Something has changed, and it has taken the music away. This was even before the 9/11 attack.

I want to just quit my job and do something I really like, but that's not an option.

Nobody reads what I write, yet I pretend to myself that I have an audience. Why?

(2001-10-26 14:04:31) Because someone IS reading

I feel the same way...about wrtiing...but the benefit...the therapy of it all, is in the process. I am amazed at how similar our views are...:) Ge-

tommasz1 (2001-10-26 16:23:03) Re: Because someone IS reading
Now the trick is not to become self-conscious ;)

(2001-11-11 15:40:18)
Tommaz, I read:)

1.9.2 Apology (2001-10-02 13:49)

Got to whining a bit in the last entry, I'll stop.

1.9.3 Think about this (2001-10-04 12:59)

If you've given any thought to what could happen in the future, based on recent events, you need to read the [1]September 30 Crypto-Gram from Bruce Schneier. Normally, Crypto-Gram is, as the name implies, about cryptography. But Bruce expanded his scope and covers a number of topics key to the terrorist attack. One key point is the difference between data and information. We're drowning in the former but dying from the lack of the latter. It's really going to take putting people in the midst of things to get anywhere. As Schneier says:

We need more intelligence agents squatting on the ground in the Middle East arguing the Koran, not sitting in Washington arguing about wiretapping laws.

1. <http://www.counterpane.com/crypto-gram-0109a.html>

1.9.4 The places of our dreams (2001-10-05 08:33)

Music: (KPIG - Live DJs 24/7 - 100% Pure CyberPork from Freedom, Calif.)

I haven't lived on Long Island, where I grew up, since 1975. Yet, for some reason, most of my dreams are set there. Last night, we were in the garage of my current house when a black woman came up and said her husband was in their car having a heart attack. When I followed her out to the car, I was on Hanover St. in Floral Park. I was on my cell phone to the 911 center, giving the intersections, Hanover and Fuller, Hanover and Terrace, as we went.

That was the house of my childhood. We moved out of it to my step mother's house when my dad re-married. I didn't want to go, but my dad felt he was drowning in the memories. The new house had more room, which we needed because one of my step brothers still lived at home. I was 14, and didn't quite understand. It hurt to leave because I didn't want to leave those memories behind. We ended up doing a lot

of work to prepare it for sale. It looked pretty good, in a 70's sort of way, when we left.

Many years later, I took my family to see the various places where I had grown up. We went to see that house. The owners had let the house deteriorate, not even painting the trim in 15 years. I couldn't look at it for long. I know it's silly to become attached to a place, but that was not just any place. It's the place of my dreams.

1.9.5 Unleash the dogs of war (2001-10-10 09:52)

Music: (KPIG - Live DJs 24/7 - 100% Pure CyberPork from Freedom, Calif.)

It's Wednesday, and the US-led coalition is in it's fourth day of bombing the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Taliban is trying to paint a picture of war between Islam and the West, while the West is portraying it as a war of freedom versus terrorism. They're both right, of course, since these things are what you believe them to be. The unrest in Pakistan and other Moslem countries backing the West is evidence that the Muslim faith is not united on the issue, though, and I still wonder exactly what Islam is as a religion.

There has been plenty of discussion both ways on whether Islam is a peaceful religion or a violent one. The Koran, like most religious writings, is open to interpretation. This is why you've heard less of the term "Islamic Fundamentalist" than in the past; it's not clear that the Taliban are indeed adhering to a strict literal interpretation. You do hear the term extremist, though, and that's a much better description anyway. The Taliban are certainly extremists.

One thing that the West has to confront, despite the extremism, is the fact that the Taliban were welcomed in many places in Afghanistan, simply because *they offered an improvement over existing conditions*. You must first come to grips with this before you can effectively deal with the situation. Removing the Taliban alone will do nothing, there's no clear advantage to having the so-called Northern Alliance in charge if we don't fix the problems that led to the current mess. Think about it, dropping bombs on Afghanistan is nothing they haven't been through. Starvation? That too. We've got to help these people, in a way that hasn't been attempted before, or else this will all come to naught. And then perhaps all of Islam will rise up against the West. It's our mistake to make.

1.9.6 Are you scared? (2001-10-12 14:44)

Music: (KPIG - Live DJs 24/7 - 100% Pure CyberPork from Freedom, Calif.)

There have been a number of anthrax cases reported lately, the latest ones in NYC (see my weblog). It's not the best way to kill people, but as a method for spreading terror, it's surprisingly effective. Your best defense? Simple, don't open packages and envelopes from folks you don't know.

As far as the question in the topic goes, no I'm not scared. Not scared, but getting angry. It's not good to get me angry.

1.9.7 Stuff from my head (2001-10-15 11:48)

Music: Big Band Bash in The Kingdom of Swing • 875 tracks • 95 new

I couldn't remember Somalia although I could remember the name of one of the cities in it, Mogadishu.

People will post the most interesting things about themselves online. Would they tell you the same things

about themselves in person? (take a look at some of the profiles on [1]Yahoo! some time for an idea of what I'm talking about)

What is it about baseball that makes it so much less fun than football?

I don't think the Founding Fathers had even a inkling of how the fight between security and freedom would manifest itself in the future. What would they have put in the Constitution if they knew?

I just realized I could easily spend another 25 years working, and I'm probably at the top, advancement-wise. That means either years at this plateau or years of slow decline.

1. <http://www.yahoo.com/>

1.9.8 Guitar (2001-10-17 10:17)

Music: Swing2jazz.Between You and Me.. Soft Lights and Great Music

This is always a difficult subject for me to discuss. Part of the reason is the fact that playing touches something in me that I don't really understand and exposes what I think is a fundamental flaw in my personality. I've been playing a long time, on and off, and I run into long stretches, plateaus really, where little change occurs. What I've noticed in these periods is the dichotomy between what's inside and what I play. Granted, some of this is technique-related, but not all of it. It's as if there's a filter, one that let's through a limited version of what could be.

I've really noticed it lately, probably because I hadn't played in a month or so. Given that, the technique thing is certainly a factor. Still, as I play more it diminishes in importance. Maybe it's a Zen-like thing in that I need a momentary shock to show me something I heretofore hadn't seen. But this implies that I have the potential. Now that is something I *really* think about. It's quite clear that musicians differ with regards to their abilities, can we then also say that it's because they've maxed out their potential? The short answer is, of course, "no", at least not in every case. Surely, commitment is key, as is time. I have only a little of each and it shows.

But maybe, some day, if I practice enough...

1.9.9 Futility (2001-10-23 09:07)

At some point I think everyone asks themselves "does what I do matter?". In my case, the answer is clearly "no". I put commenting capability and a counter on my [1]weblog in order to get an idea of how many people were visiting it. The result: no one but me. Of course, that's who reads this journal as well. Why do I bother? Right now, I don't know.

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>

1.9.10 Non Disclaimer Agreement (2001-10-24 12:32)

Music: (((((SKa*Anarchy)))) Ska and Punk with Augustus inna Rude Boy Stylee from early Ska toThird Wave and with the sounds of new punk....Skank to the Beat of Ska SKa SKa..

In other words, I'm going to stop apologizing whenever I go off the deep end complaining about something in my life. Deal with it.

1.9.11 The SSSCA and the future (2001-10-24 13:58)

I covered some issues around this in my weblog but I haven't really written much about it here in a while. First, read [1]this to the point article by Dan Gillmor for a good background. Then, ask yourself if this is the future you're willing to put up with. I'll wait.

Back? Good. If you're like me, you probably won't be buying Windows XP anytime soon. But chances are, you will, because you're not like me. Let's face it, it's not like you have a choice. There will always be Mac users, like me, and Linux/Unix users, also like me, but their numbers are insignificant. No one has gone broke underestimating the willingness of a population to being told what to do. We laugh at sheep and cows but they don't laugh back, because we're just like them.

So get ready for a future where everything you touch or interact with will be touched by Microsoft. Everything. Microsoft OS, Microsoft apps built with Microsoft developer tools, Microsoft Internet, Microsoft digital file formats, Microsoft protocols, perhaps even Microsoft artists "creating" the content. And those who don't wish to follow this? They'll be left out, at best, or hunted down as "terrorists". If you thought what happened to Napster was bad, you ain't seen nothin' yet! Because the copyright laws used to punish Napster were weak in comparison to the DMCA/SSSCA juggernaut that is soon to be unleashed. Enjoy those MP3 files you downloaded, if you can (and if you have XP, you can't without additional software), just hope the government doesn't find them on your hard drive. Or Microsoft, or the RIAA, or the MPAA. Or are they the "government"?

1. <http://www.siliconvalley.com/docs/opinion/dgillmor/dg102401.htm>

1.9.12 More disturbing dreams (2001-10-25 15:06)

I'm starting to worry, ever so slightly. Last night it was demons attacking me with construction equipment, broken glass and more. I woke up in tears. There's no way this can be considered normal. What's happening to me?

(2001-10-26 14:12:27) Demonic Dreams

I have had very realistic, disturbing dreams for years about demons. They are very troubling, but I am able to recover from the terror fairly quickly after I wake up. I have never met anyone who has talked about this before. Ge-

tommasz1 (2001-10-26 16:14:30) Re: Demonic Dreams

It's certainly not the sort of thing I'd say to just anyone. So far, they've not repeated, which is good. We use the term so loosely in conversation it's not surprising that it would appear in dreams, however discomfoting.

1.9.13 Images of the Past (2001-10-31 11:17)

Sometimes we enter a time machine of sorts through our children, seeing things from our past happen to them anew. This is a fancy way of saying my oldest daughter has begun getting braces on her teeth, much the same as I did at her age. Sigh.

I've resisted telling her the horror stories of my experience, because it's been 30 years and there's really nothing to be gained by scaring her. The orthodontist is a famous one in our town and he sponsored the baseball team both my girls played on in 2000 (the Brace Runners). We wanted our regular dentist but he didn't have hours that were a good fit for a girl in middle school. I went on Saturday for mine, but that

wasn't an option for her. She *loves* school, taking time off every 2 weeks was not something she wanted.

Like me, she'll only have to wear them for 2 years or so, and the immediate effect will be minor. It's the results in 10 years or so that matter. I have nice straight teeth as a result of my braces and I am sure she will too. It's tough at 12 to understand that something now will pay off in the future, but she's wiser and better equipped for handling such things than I was at her age.

1.10 November

1.10.1 Had to share this (2001-11-02 11:14)

I received this e-mail from my youngest daughter today.

Subject: I LOVE YOU SO MUCH.....

I LOVE YOU SO MUCH I WOULD PAY ALL THE MONEY I HAD TO GET YOU BACK IF YOU WERE KIDNAPPED OR STOLEN.:0

1.10.2 Something I've been thinking about (2001-11-06 11:07)

When I'm not in the self-pity mode, I actually think about other things (no, really). What I've been obsessed with lately at work is the concept of motivation - why people do what they do.

Not surprisingly, this sort of thing comes up often at work. Especially so in the context of organizational change (or lack thereof). Not so much when discussing why someone is doing something, but more in the light of how you would get them to *do something else*. The difficulty is that most folks do what gets them the most reward. At my company, each employee, from the CEO on down, has a set of objectives that, if met, turn into pay raises, bonuses or promotions. They are drafted at the end of the year for the following year and with the exception of a potential mid-year update, are static. Static even if your work is not, like my job. I'm lucky to have a small workgroup and a boss who is a close friend. He is the one that drives the dynamic nature of my job, taking advantage of my ability to turn on a dime to enhance *his* performance against *his* objectives.

And this is precisely what makes change difficult. Because as long as someone's objectives remain unchanged, they will resist efforts to make them do something for which they may receive nothing. In some cases, asking them to change is tantamount to *taking money away from them*. I'm involved with a task force attempting to change the way my company builds products. Unfortunately, some of the things we're doing will cause some products to be delayed and possibly cost more. Both are short term effects but in order to initiate the new way, some project has to bear the burden. And none of them want to, because the project members get rewarded for quick delivery and low cost. I'm beginning to think we need to change the objective setting process first before we change anything that effects it.

1.10.3 More on motivators (2001-11-07 15:34)

Music: Swing2jazz. ...Miles, Ella, and Friends

My company (A Big Company) is not a Dot Com. Not an Internet startup. But for two years they were giving out stock options as if they were. A stock option is essentially the right to buy a share of stock at a fixed price. They are only valuable when the stock price is higher than the option price, or strike price. During the Dot Com boom, that was a frequent happening, and many folks were virtual millionaires because they had options at low strike prices. Notice I said virtual, because the options are not shares and you have to be able to come up with money to buy the shares. But still, virtual or not, they were popular means of rewarding employees. In some cases, companies offered options in lieu of or in addition to salary. Great. When your company tanked, both the options and the shares of stock became worthless. Great.

In emulation of such practices, some established companies (like mine) began offering options as bonuses. It was more for the cachet than for actual value, since most established companies don't have volatile stock prices and it takes a long time for significant changes to occur. Besides, it's one of the cheaper ways to compete with Dot Coms, since they don't cost much to issue. So now I have stock options at \$60, \$22, and \$4.75. But only the last batch has potential value, since our stock price is about \$7 these days. In less than two years, the options went from being a motivator to almost being an insult. Thankfully, after a change in corporate management, they've gone back to cash as a bonus (but only for certain employees).

1.10.4 Another redesign is coming (2001-11-09 13:04)

Music: move over rover

Yes, yes, another one. My goal this time is to get better cross-browser support. We'll see how well my goal can be achieved but with Mozilla Win, Mozilla Linux, IE Win, and IE Mac at my disposal, that should cover most of it.

1.10.5 More trouble for NYC (2001-11-12 13:46)

Hard to believe, but New York City once again faces disaster as an American Airlines plane crashed into Rockaway, in Queens, after taking off from JFK. Early speculation was all over the place but it's clear now that one of the planes two engines separated while the plane was still in the air and crashed separately. What caused it to do so is not presently known and is key in determining if this was an accident or a deliberate act.

Heard of this is in the oddest way. My boss, who is in Japan, notified me via e-mail. He has a son attending college there, but on Roosevelt Island, nowhere near the crash site. My boss was in England to attend to his dying father when the WTC was attacked. He always seems to be out of town when this stuff happens.

My family is on Long Island, but East of where the crash was. I don't think anyone works near Rockaway. But I checked the map this morning, just to be sure.

1.10.6 I wrote something on the Fray (2001-11-12 18:06)

There's a site on the Web, called [1]The Fray, where people post first-person stories. At the end of one story about unconsummated love, they asked for reader contribution. Here's [2]my story.

1. <http://www.fray.com/>

2. <http://www.fray.com/hope/real/post/index.020.shtml>

1.10.7 Not the best of days (2001-11-13 17:05)

It was layoff day today. Wait a minute, not layoff, IRIF (Involuntary Reduction In Force). Terminology is important, you know, especially in the corporate world.

The research division had been left alone before but it was our turn this time, I guess. Not as ugly as some I've experienced, but still ugly.

This time it included the admins, they had been excluded from the voluntary RIF's, but not in the IRIF. Nice, eh? It's going to be tough for those people to prop up the economy this holiday season.

1.10.8 Online communities (2001-11-14 10:38)

I haven't written much about this subject in a while. That's because I've been mainly inwardly focused lately, and nothing looks like it will change that for a while. But my interest in online communities remains, and I find myself in communities without realizing. This sounds fallacious, but it really is possible to be part of something without actively doing so.

Case in point, I am both a weblogger and a journal keeper (I was going to use *journalist*, but that word has a slightly different connotation than what I'm going for). One of my favorite sites, *Kuro5hin.org*, has an [1]interview with Glenn Reynolds that made me realize this community connection.

1. <http://www.kuro5hin.org/hotlist/add/2001/11/11/155142/11/displaystory>

1.10.9 Home recording (2001-11-17 17:32)

As part of my expanding jazz guitar work, I was thinking about recording some of my playing with the idea of sending out MP3 files to friends. Once upon a time recording would mean getting a nice 4 track cassette recorder from Tascam and making tapes. But to make them into MP3 files, it requires a A/D step somehow. My guitar teacher and one of my fellow students recommended that I go direct to digital. I downloaded a free Mac program (name to follow if it works) that looks good, but it's intimidating as far as complexity goes. The "Quick Start" manual has over 50 pages! Keep in mind this is the free restricted functionality version, too. But if it works, I'm da man!

1.10.10 Odd coincidences (2001-11-19 15:06)

Both Blogger and LiveJournal suffered from outages (for me at least) over the weekend and continuing into today.

1.10.11 Those freakin' deer! (2001-11-26 09:51)

I was going to talk about my recent mini vacation. But instead, I direct you to read this [1]article from *Reason* on the plague of white-tailed deer in the US. We saw dozens dead by the side of the interstates this year, more than I've ever seen before. Long-time readers will remember my accident in 2000 when I hit one while riding my BMW motorcycle, so I'm particularly biased. NY State hunters have open season this year, but it won't help, I bet.

Anyway, it was a great vacation, with uncharacteristically good weather. We spent Thanksgiving with

my parents, this year it was just us. We also drove into New Jersey to visit my aunt, whom I haven't seen since before my uncle passed on. I really expected a difficult visit, especially given that it's coming up to the first anniversary, but it was great. We left her house Saturday afternoon and got home after midnight. I drove about 600 miles, but not all in one shot. Rain and fog, especially in the Catskills, made the drive much less fun than it could have been.

NJ is not a pretty state, especially in the eastern section, just like I remembered from my childhood. And the drivers are maniacs, luckily I'm paranoid at the wheel (courtesy of riding motorcycles) and I managed to anticipate even the stupidest moves.

1. <http://reason.com/rb/rb112101.shtml>

1.10.12 A site (and book) about Online Communities (2001-11-28 16:50)

If you want to read a lot more about online communities, you need to take a look at [1]Design For Community, which is also the title of the book. It's done by [2]Derek Powazek and the site has lots of interesting bits in addition to excerpts from the book. The site, of course, it also a community, as it offers ways for readers to interact. I don't know if I'll buy the book, mostly because I'm not looking to start a community, but the site is going to be a frequent stop.

1. <http://http://designforcommunity.com/>
2. <http://www.powazek.com/>

1.10.13 When meetings go bad (2001-11-29 15:05)

It's never a good sign when a meeting intending to present the goals and direction for the next year instead ends up just further lowering the morale of the attendees. With videos that only confused and made you wonder how the people that made them continue as employees. Sad times indeed.

1.11 December

1.11.1 More on communities (2001-12-03 08:59)

Perhaps it's the result of September 11, but I've seen more and more on online communities recently. Take a tour of this [1]Slashdot discussion on [2]popularizing community sites. Slashdot is, of course, one of the most successful Linux/Open Source community sites and one that is frequently copied (legally, since the source code that runs the site is free to use).

If you're new to it you'll see that each entry is assigned a *Score* depending on how relevant to the discussion it is. The scores are determined by voting by the site members (I'm one myself) in a process called *Moderation*. When you display articles and discussions, you can filter out scores below a certain level, and thus get only the level of discussion you want. Nothing is deleted, though, even low-rated postings, but many may never be seen by most of the site visitors. You can post as a member, or anonymously (called *Anonymous Coward*), though only members can accumulate *Karma*, which is essentially the score values of postings for that member. Post a lot of relevant comments, and your Karma goes up. Needless to say, within the Geek community, it's taken fairly seriously.

But Slashdot is far from perfect. It's overwhelming popularity tends to mean most discussions generate hundreds of postings, and even with the rating system, it takes a lot of work to separate the wheat from the

chaff. Lots of people no longer bother trying, but there are still plenty of interesting bits if you're patient. Check it out sometime.

1. <http://slashdot.org/>
2. <http://slashdot.org/article.pl?sid=01/11/30/078228&mode=thread>

1.11.2 Year-end review (2001-12-05 12:15)

At work, that is. I want to just scream "I hate my job" to my boss, but this is unlikely to be productive. If you ever wonder why I don't talk about my job, it's because I can't describe what I do in a sentence or two. That tells me I'm in trouble.

I'll probably do a personal "Year in Review" kind of thing in a few weeks. Like it matters, but it's my site, after all.

1.11.3 Minor changes (2001-12-06 21:07)

You'll notice the new winter motif. This, despite the total lack of snow here. Now at least something looks like it ought to.

Sadly, three people I know in online communities have passed away this year. It's been a tough year, but loss of friends makes everything harder.

1.11.4 More things I think about (2001-12-10 10:22)

I've been wondering about the speed of light and communication over vast distances. I constructed a "thought experiment" where a very long beam was suspended between Earth and a "local" star. If you pushed on the end of the beam here, when would the other end move?

Based on our observations of very short beams, it appears instantaneous. So I posed the question to my boss, who has a physics background. His answer was that, since the speed of light cannot be exceeded, the other end would not move in less time than it would take light to make the same journey. This is because pushing on the end of the beam causes a small decrease in the space between atoms at the end. They then return to normal spacing, but push on other atoms, and so on down the line. The resulting wave effect then is subject to the limitation. Actually, since the wave occurs in a solid, the speed will be closer to that of electrons in circuits, which is slower than light. This was never much of an issue until computers got so fast that the physical length of connections between circuit elements became roadblocks. This is one of the factors pushing computer chips to be smaller and more dense.

And I think about God and what happens after death, but I'm not ready to talk about that.

1.11.5 Infinity? (2001-12-12 11:27)

Music: CFB - The Long (Dicky's Rockin' Radio)

We like to think sometimes that our universe is infinite in size, but it really isn't. And then again, it is. Sort of. It depends on how you describe the "universe". If you consider it to be all the stars, planets, dust, etc. that we can see of measure, than you have to realize that it has boundaries. Assuming that, following the Big Bang, the explosion expanded outward in all directions equally, then the universe is a big ball that gets

larger and larger. But think about this: what is the ball expanding *into*? The short answer is *nothing*. But nothing in way that's hard to relate to human experience. Once you get far enough away from the expanding ball, the radiation from the expanding ball becomes infinitely (sorry) small. Since there is no matter there (it's all in the ball), it's the ultimate No Thing. Think about it.

1.11.6 (2001-12-12 14:56)

Music: (Radio Paradise - eclectic intelligent rock - playlist & other bitrates at radioparadise.com)

Here's a dilemma for you. I can't afford to quit my job. Can't stand to continue what I'm doing. Not a lot of opportunities for a 44 year-old geek who hasn't programmed production software in years. Is this mid-life crisis time?

1.11.7 The Ho Ho Ho Thing (2001-12-16 20:14)

Had the Fire Department Christmas party on Saturday, today we went out for our tree. It's odd slogging through the mud to cut down a tree, but the weather's been definitely un-Christmasy.

1.11.8 Horoscope O' Relevance (2001-12-17 13:00)

Not sure what to make of my Yahoo! horoscope:

Horoscope (by astrocenter.com)

Today you may receive sudden clarification of your life's purpose, dear Taurus. It may be that something you read in a book or heard in a lecture made things "click" for you, and all the seemingly unrelated events of your life suddenly took on a clear, cohesive form. This can be a bit of a heady feeling. There is no need to act on this new understanding just yet. You will need a few days to digest everything before setting out on your new life path.

I'm not a believer in horoscopes, I mean c'mon, except in the most general sense that some of it is apropos to anyone at anytime in their life. This one, however, seems to be more to the point personally. But then note the use of "may" in the first sentence...

1.11.9 Christmas Message (2001-12-24 17:13)

I thought I'd let all my faithful readers know how things are going, especially since I've not been posting much.

It's Christmas Eve here in Rochester, but there's no snow and almost no chance there will be any for Christmas. I can't remember the last time this has happened, it's disappointing but that's global warming for you.

Our rabbit, Big Bunny, has some sort of stomach problem, a serious condition for rabbits, and we're nursing him with medicines from the vet. After a day he's showing remarkable improvement but it's too soon to tell yet if he'll completely recover. We've had him since 1993 and he means a lot to all of us, the girls especially.

On Saturday we went to the local animal shelter, Lollypop Farm, and adopted another rabbit, Zipper, as a companion for Big Bunny. He was lonely and this should help. I can't help wondering if his illness is related to his emotional state; despite what you might think, a rabbit has a complex personality and definitely has emotions. Zipper is a neutered female and should be a good match, but only time will tell.

Tonight we have a party with my in-laws and tomorrow is dinner with my father-in-law. I have fresh real ale on draft, my health is good, my family is in good shape and we're together. It's not Thanksgiving, but I am thankful this year for all the good things that I have.

I hope you have a wonderful and safe holiday, no matter your faith. It's been a tough year for us all, but nothing on this earth of ours is permanent. "All shall be well, and all matter of things shall be well" - Julian of Norwich

1.11.10 End of Year Extravaganza! (2001-12-31 09:54)

Made you look!

My plans for a well-written, inciteful end of the year essay have been put aside in favor of more mundane activities. Have a safe New Year and we'll talk in 2002.

Chapter 2

2002

2.1 January

2.1.1 Bits and Pieces (2002-01-05 15:51)

Nothing big, now that we're in the new year (same millenium, so there's none of that geeky agrument), but there's lots of little things.

First, and foremost, this year will be the year I get myself back into reasonable physical shape. The Tai Chi has helped quite a bit, but now I need to improve strength and conditioning. My first choice is the Japanese martial art, Aikido. It's not a "kick and punch" kind of art, like Karate, but is more inwardly focused and extends the *Chi* concept (Ki is the Japanese pronunciation). Luckily there is a local dojo in Rochester.

Also, I've been finishing up my conversion of my Linux box to kernel 2.4 by installing [1]SuSE version 7.3 (the Professional version). It's been a chore, since I upgraded my 6.3, but it's finally gotten to the point where I can use it. the new [2]KDE 2.2 is nice also.

And finally, I have managed to record myself playing guitar. It's crude, both playing and mix-wise, but it worked. I hope to have a link up sometime soon. I've tried sending it to some friends but most of the transfers failed so having it on a server should help.

1. <http://www.suse.com/>

2. <http://www.kde.org/>

2.1.2 Back to work (2002-01-07 13:16)

Work as in my job. Having been off for over two weeks, it's strange to be here, and given the company's state, even more so. But I'm ready for something new, and if that means I lose my job, then so be it. This is the year of change.

2.1.3 Crossroads (2002-01-08 11:51)

Music: Radio Paradise - eclectic intelligent rock - playlist & other bitrates at radioparadise.com

I went to the crossroad
Fell down on my knees

I went to the crossroad
Fell down on my knees
Asked the Lord above "Have mercy now,
Save poor Bob, if you please"

Recognize this quote? It's from a Robert Johnson tune, that was later covered by Cream. The legend goes that Robert sold his soul to Satan there to play guitar better. Maybe he did, he died young under mysterious circumstances and "one never knows, does one?" Robert went to the crossroad because he felt them to be a place of great power. I, on the other hand, view the crossroads as a place of uncertainty, of differing directions, a place of decision.

All of this is just a long-winded way of saying that I feel I have come to a crossroad in my professional career. My group was reorganized to essentially reduce the number of direct reports that the boss had. This is not unusual, and is in fact a good idea, since there is a set of diminishing returns as the number of reports increase. Long-time readers will recall that my boss is a friend and has been my mentor here in The Big Company since 1996. But that relationship has been changing over time, and has further been altered now that I am no longer directly reporting to him. I was confused about my career direction and unhappy with my job before, now it's even more obvious that I am on my own and in need of a change. But to what? That I hope to answer soon, but given the economy, it's truly an awful time to even consider changing jobs or careers.

To a certain friend:

We are all in search of answers to questions we'd rather not have had to ask. You know where to look for the guidance you need. When you get it, your decision will be the right one.

(2002-01-14 15:15:34) wonder how many people see themselves here?
:) I sure did :) Ge-

2.1.4 Quick update (2002-01-15 10:27)

Been ill for a bit, I'm behind on some site updates (Writings section). I have an MP3 of me playing Gershwin's Summertime, but not yet linked here. The job is in the process of changing, but not clear as to what or when. Don't know if I mentioned this but we adopted another rabbit as a companion to Big Bunny. She's a English Spot mix named Zipper. Unfortunately, she hates Big Bunny and we have to keep them separated. Not at all what we intended.

2.1.5 Even more of my writing on the web (2002-01-17 13:11)

Music: (KPIG - Live DJs 24/7 - 100% Pure CyberPork from Freedom, Calif.)

I've written another little piece for [1] {fray }, this one is on my [2]September 2001.

1. <http://fray.com/>
2. <http://fray.com/hope/2001/post/index.009.shtml>

2.1.6 Update (2002-01-21 10:13)

I've finally activated the Writings page, but there's not much there yet. Be patient. I promise something provocative, if not well written.

2.1.7 Strange Days Indeed (2002-01-22 10:26)

Music: Less Than Jake - Help Save Kids Exploding (Dicky's Rockin' Radio)

In my weblog, I've blogged the [1]Wayback Machine, a Web archive. With it, I was able to look at my journal from back in 2000, especially the ones around my motorcycle accident. Damn, I wish that hadn't happened. It's strange to see my words from then, when I was thinking I would get another bike. I've since changed my mind, and decided I'd rather spend my money on something else that probably won't kill me (a new archtop guitar from a local luthier). But still, there are times when I think about riding again...

1. http://mylnd.blogspot.com/2002_01_01_mylnd_archive.html#8932077

2.1.8 With fingers crossed (2002-01-23 10:51)

There have been rumors for weeks that today would be a big layoff day. Sadly, the rumors were true. I'll find out at 12:30 what it means for me.

2.1.9 Still here (2002-01-23 12:58)

But a meeting was cancelled because the person we were to have it with is no longer with the company.

2.1.10 When the mail fails (2002-01-29 09:58)

Music: Swing2jazz.....Soft Lights...Sweet Music....and You

Here at The Big Company, e-mail (Outlook running with Exchange servers) has become pretty much the backbone of our daily work. So much so that when it doesn't work, work itself grinds to a halt. People call or stop by wondering why you have not responded back to their notes. Meetings come and go without you noticing since the invites are sent via Outlook. Those little interruptions that come with new mail disappear. Productivity rises for some, and falls for others. Why? Some people do much better when they don't have to keep switching context to deal with things. New mail, much like a ringing phone, distracts us and almost forces us to respond in some way. Even if you just look at the caller ID and let the voice mail get it, you still stop and divert your attention and that can take a while to recover from. On the other hand, if you were intending to work with a file someone sent you and it's in your unavailable Inbox, then your productivity drops. To zero. What a strange environment we create for ourselves when we over-rely on a single tool.

2.1.11 Another story on the {fray} (2002-01-31 13:25)

This time I talk about an [1]incident that happened in college.

1. <http://www.fray.com/criminal/tony/post/index.002.shtml>

2.2 February

2.2.1 Some updates (2002-02-04 13:26)

Music: (Radio Paradise - eclectic intelligent rock - playlist & other bitrates at radioparadise.com)

I've added lots of stuff to the [1]Writings page. Check out the original journal postings if you want to see how my writing style and life has evolved over time. There's also links to my pieces on the {fray }. I've also changed the opening graphic, just because. I want to redo the buttons in the bar too, but that may take some time. Some day, this will be a site worth reading. Maybe.

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/writings.html>

2.2.2 A compulsion (2002-02-05 10:21)

Music: Lil Darling - It ain't necessarily so

Upon spying a yellow No. 2 pencil on the shelf in the men's bathroom, I was struck by a sudden desire to label it with "This is a bad place to leave a pencil." Not sure why, but I wanted to. After all, it really *is* a bad place to leave a pencil. And this isn't the only thing I'd like to label. Cars parked poorly. You know what I mean, crooked or taking up two spaces. I would love to put a big sign on them, "This car has been parked by an idiot." It's a good thing I never give in to these desires, or I'd probably have gotten myself beaten up by now.

2.2.3 (2002-02-07 15:47)

I wonder if sometimes it's better to withhold things than to be honest. When you don't feel better after telling someone, it seems like having not said anything would be better.

2.2.4 (2002-02-07 15:52)

I wonder if sometimes it's better to withhold things than to be honest. When you don't feel better after telling someone, it seems like having not said anything would be better.

2.2.5 Reckless Orgy of Acquisition (2002-02-09 19:14)

Well, maybe not an orgy, *per se*, but still.

I have purchased the tube mic and guitar preamp kits from [1]PAiA, a tube guitar amp kit from [2]Torres Engineering, and a CD-RW, FireWire PCI board and memory from [3]Smalldog Electronics. I also picked up a 16 channel mixer from [4]Behringer. This completes my home studio, at least until I decide I want to do more of the mixing of the sound on the Mac (in digital) . But this may be a while as I don't have that many sources and most of my intended recording work is me solo.

I promise reports on the quality of the kits and the ease of assembly. It's been years since I built any electronic kits but I'm looking forward to it. I used to build Heathkits back in the day when they could compete price-wise with the manufacturers. This was before the 80's, after that the costs of materials plus customer support (I'm colorblind and had lots of trouble with the color-coded resistors, resulting in blown circuits nearly every time) made the kits non-competitive. I'm sure it's worse in this age of instant gratification, but I'm patient and love tube equipment. Perhaps I'll build some tube stereo equipment too.

1. <http://www.paia.com/>
2. <http://www.torresengineering.com/>
3. <http://www.smalldog.com/>
4. <http://www.behringer.com/index.cfm>

2.2.6 Just bits (2002-02-11 11:06)

Found in my desk drawer this morning that I didn't know I had:

- Liquid Paper
- A Bausch & Lomb eye loupe that I thought I lost
- Plastic bag containing small polished rocks

I think I need a retreat at the local Trappist monastery. It's ironic I should feel that way, in that I have almost completely lost the faith that I once had. But regardless, the [1]Abbey of the Genesee is a wonderful place. You can sense you are in a different kind of place just standing there. I can't explain it, but it's the same feeling I had in the cathedral in St. Albans in England. Maybe there is something "out there", after all. Certainly spending time in those two places makes one wonder.

1. <http://www.geneseeabbey.org/>

2.2.7 Changes (2002-02-13 11:14)

I've finally found a neat little Script-fu for the GIMP that will generate the buttons for the button bar, so look for some changes there this weekend. Like anyone reads this.

2.2.8 Partial update (2002-02-16 16:34)

I'm having FTP problems with my host. I suspect most, if not all, of the pages will be messed up. I have no idea when I will be able to get everything cleared up. Since there aren't a lot of folks who read this, I doubt this will be an inconvenience to anyone but me.

[Later that same afternoon]

No sooner did I post the above, but I figured out a work-around. The new look buttons are up and I'm now working on a browser-independent picture viewer implementation that should get around some of the ugliness with the picture windows being always wrong. Remember, if you will, that I create this on a Mac, but I work on Windows NT and use Linux at home. And, I use IE (Mac and Win), Mozilla (Win and Linux), as well as Opera (Win) and Konqueror (Linux). I hate it when things look odd when I move from system to system.

2.2.9 Sick and tired (2002-02-19 17:31)

There's some sort of virus going around that seems to settle into your sinuses and give you day after day of sinus headaches. I'm the last one in the family to get it. Yay. Winter is bad enough, but this just makes it worse. And that's enough whining for now.

2.2.10 Listening (2002-02-20 17:07)

Once again, I must help a child deal with the death of a pet. My youngest's friend had a yellow lab that she absolutely loved (because of my wife's allergies we can never have a dog in our house, so my daughter has to enjoy the dogs of others). He was struck by a car today and died soon afterwards. She found out from her friend a little while ago and she called me at work. Listening to her cry on the phone was the best I could do under the circumstances. Sometimes you have to cry, and sometimes there's nothing anyone else can do but let you.

2.2.11 Daniel Pearl (2002-02-22 13:47)

Music: (Radio Paradise - eclectic intelligent rock - playlist & other bitrates at radioparadise.com)

I realize that this is not my "news" area (see the [1]weblog for that) but this *is* where I cover things in detail. And I want to cover the death of Mr. Pearl in detail.

A lot of people will probably consider Daniel Pearl's death a tragedy, and they're right. He probably had no intention of dying when he accepted the invitation that led to his kidnapping. But if he had convinced himself that it was even remotely safe, he was terribly mistaken.

I really think that Americans are incapable of imagining that the rest of the world is not like us. I once flew to England next to two women who were amazed that the time was different there. The fact that the US has multiple time zones didn't seem to have been something they were aware of. In the same way, the freedoms we accept as part of our birthright are not necessarily what the rest of the world takes for granted. Especially so in the world of journalism. Muckraking, investigative journalism, call it what you will, Americans love it. The image of the good-hearted news reporter that gets the goods on the evil corporation/public servant are part of our culture. But in a lot of places, journalists are not looked upon so highly, not at all. Perhaps Mr. Pearl forgot that, assuming that no one would harm an American journalist in pursuit of a big story. But he was in an Islamic country full of sympathy for the Taliban and distrust of anyone who was an ally of their mortal enemy, India. One has to assume that he thought the results would outweigh the risks or he wouldn't have gone. There's no reason to believe he was suicidal.

And so he was kidnapped and murdered and even if the bungling fools who masquerade as police in Pakistan find the culprits, his death is likely to change little in that country. And that, in my opinion, is what makes this truly tragic

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>

2.2.12 More on the music industry (2002-02-25 09:14)

Music: Swing2jazz..... From Louis to Duke,Basie,Ella and Krall you

As time goes by (pun), more people seem to be coming to the same conclusion as me about "fixing" the music industry: Artists selling their music direct. Check out this article by Matt Haughey, [1]The future of music (Matt's a smart guy, check out his collaborative weblog, [2]Metafilter). He's mostly right, but I know there are artists who are strictly Internet/MP3 only, but their not famous enough to cause the market to shift (check out [3]IUMA, the Internet Underground Music Archive, for examples).

As always, try to buy direct from the artists whenever you can. Check out their web site and see if they offer CD ordering. If they don't, send them an e-mail encouraging them to do so. Luckily, my guitar teacher, Steve

Greene, does. Order CD's (including *Gene With Greene*, which I helped record) from [4]SteveGreene.com.

1. <http://a.wholelottanothing.org/more.blah/moreID/13.html>
2. <http://www.metafilter.com/>
3. <http://www.iuma.com/>
4. <http://www.stevegreene.com/>

2.2.13 Principles vs. Dollars (2002-02-28 15:41)

Those readers that know me outside of the Web are aware of who I work for. With them, I can joke and generally disparage my employer without worry. However, it's not the same when you write on the Web. Recently, a [1]woman was fired after writing some very critical things about her co-workers. None were identified by name, nor was the company named but she was "outed" by someone who emailed the company head. This is nothing new, ever since the technology to post your own content has been available, people have been losing jobs because of what they write.

The other day, I posted something in the [2]weblog that was mildly critical of my company, without identifying that I worked there. Then I read about the woman mentioned above. I can't afford to lose my job, as much as I don't always feel like I enjoy it. So I edited the post to remove my editorializing. I abandoned my principles to prevent the possibility of being fired.

Then again, taking care of my family is a principle that I believe in, too, so it's not really abandonment, more like prioritization. Or rationalization, I'm not sure which.

1. <http://www.dooce.com/>
2. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>

2.3 March

2.3.1 More reasons to buy CD's direct from the artist (2002-03-04 13:49)

Perhaps it's the recent Grammy awards, but more attention has been focused on the music industry of late. Between the RIAA, the SSSCA legislation (that would make manufacturers add hardware to computing systems to block copying), the decline in CD sales and the general assault on consumers, it's obvious that something is amiss. And it is. But not just the decline in Grammy TV ratings or CD sales.

Courtney Love, despite what you might think of her as a musician, has been consistent in identifying that the artists are getting shafted in all of this. Even if you think some of her statements were ghostwritten, no one is arguing with her contention that it's the artists (she hates the term "content producer") who are being treated badly. If you want an idea of how badly, read [1]The Problem With Music, an article by producer Steve Albini. As you read it, especially the spreadsheet part, keep in mind it's about a fairly successful band. (Note: this is not a new article, and I think I may have linked to it before, but it bears reading again). Then go and buy a CD direct and put your money where it belongs, *in the pockets of the artists*. Thanks.

For those who pay attention to these sorts of things, my guitar group's date at a local retirement home has been confirmed for Saturday 16 March at 2:30 PM (it's music-related, so I thought I'd put it here). We don't have a CD, and we're not getting paid, which given the above, may actually put us ahead. I wish I was kidding.

1. <http://www.negativland.com/albini.html>

2.3.2 Not all NDE's are the same (2002-03-08 10:43)

First of all, NDE means Near-Death Experience. It's kind of a catch-all term for what people experience during a period when they are physically close to death but (obviously) do not die. You've probably heard about someone who claims to have seen a bright light and heard voices calling to them when they were having surgery and then discovering that their heart had temporarily stopped and was revived. This is not an isolated phenomenon, and a lot of folks claim to have had such an experience. For example, [1]my life after Near Death Experiences is a weblog of a person who believes he's had *over 100* of NDE's. Read it for yourself and decide. The weblog includes the experiences of others, as well, along with links to a number of web rings for other similar sites.

Some researchers think these are very [2]real, while others are not so [3]sure. A Dr. Karl Jansen in the UK is using [4]ketamine to induce the NDE, so it's difficult to make a clear decision one way or the other.

Or is it? Perhaps you need to experience one yourself to really be sure. I had a Near-Death Experience and I can state without reservation that it consisted of absolutely nothing. No light, no voices, nothing. In fact, it has caused me to reevaluate my religious faith and to strongly fear that there is *nothing* after death, nothing at all. And that fear, dear readers, keeps me up nights and induces near-panic reactions that I can just barely control.

1. <http://freestone.blogspot.com/>
2. <http://www.nderf.org/>
3. http://www.mindspring.com/~scottr/nde/_skeptic.html
4. http://leda.lycaem.org/Documents/Using_Ketamine_to_Induce_the_Near-Death_Experience.9260.shtml

2.3.3 Stuff you (do not) gotta watch (2002-03-10 11:08)

Tonight, [1]CBS intends to show *9/11*, with footage taken inside the WTC during the attacks. It's nothing but cheap exploitation and a dishonor to those who lost their lives that day. If you wish to honor them, donate to one of the many charities that have been set up for their families. By not watching you send CBS a message that says "those men and women died helping others, not making your network richer."

1. <http://www.cbs.com/>

2.3.4 Followup (2002-03-11 20:07)

As you might have guessed, I didn't watch *9/11* last night, but I'm sure a lot of people did. It was the topic of the day on a local radio station and all of the callers seemed to have been quite moved. Some folks [1]weren't, and that link explains why quite well.

I'll bet CBS made a lot of money although it claims to be donating to the [2]Uniformed Firefighters Association Scholarship Fund. They don't say how much, though. If you didn't watch, why not bypass the middleman and donate directly, if you feel you want to help. And now I'll climb down off my soapbox.

My "debut" as a jazz guitarist is this Saturday afternoon. I know I'll be nervous, just like I was this past Saturday when my youngest daughter's [3]Odyssey of the Mind competition was held. My wife kidded me about it, but I had spent a lot of time with the kids working on this and I couldn't help feeling the tension (even if they didn't). Anyway, they did well, but didn't get a ribbon. This was the first year our school district has competed and the complicated rules were difficult to fully understand. Clearly a product of evolution, not design. Probably not unlike other organizations, but since the teams are graded on their

adherence to the rules, it would be nice if they were better organized. A web and email answer service is available but they tend to err on the side of not disclosing too much (ostensibly to encourage creativity). In other words, you ask questions and like as not you don't get a useful answer. Subsequent teams, building on our experiences, should do better. I will certainly have something to tell them but I don't think that we'll be doing this next year. I'm sure that as pioneers in our school district, we'll be called upon to offer assistance to the next set of teams.

1. <http://www.teevee.org/archive/2002/03/13/index.html>
2. <http://cbs.ufalocal94.org/>
3. <http://www.odysseyofthemind.com/>

2.3.5 Almost Famous (2002-03-15 15:03)

Music: Radio MaszMan

Tomorrow is the day when I play guitar in front of an audience for the first time in almost 30 years (unless you count immediate family). We had a practice on Wednesday and it went well, even though one of us broke a string. I'm hoping this isn't an omen. Wish me luck in overcoming my stage fright.

2.3.6 A qualified success (2002-03-17 16:52)

The nursing home concert went over very well. This particular home has a range of residents, from those who walked in on their own to others that seemed to be comatose. The vast majority were more than aware of what we were doing, and some members of the audience sang along, while others tapped their feet. We were all a little nervous and some of the songs suffered a bit from lack of rehearsal, but others went well indeed. The staff would love to have us come back again but no one was sure they wanted to make this a regular thing. It would require some serious work on building a repertoire since they'd probably get bored if we played the same things over and over. Still, it was a great experience for us and them and enabled me to take a big step in overcoming my fear of public performance.

(2002-03-25 17:50:01)

Im sure you did great!!! Good for you for conquering your fear! Oh, by the way... don't worry about adding to your repertoire, your audience is old, they won't remember what you played last time!! Take Care Tom!

tommasz1 (2002-03-26 10:33:46)

LOL, I suspect you're right, but it's good to grow as an musician. Thanks for reading :)

2.3.7 Weblog Update (2002-03-20 15:29)

Music: Radio MaszMan

[This being posted to both my weblog and my journal to catch as many readers as possible] I'm thinking of doing a new template for my weblog, and I was wondering what people who read it thought. Should I use a template that includes more personal trivia (favorite [x], frequent sites, etc.) or stick with the relatively terse format I have now (those who want to know more can visit my main site). Let me know via the comment feature. Thanks.

(2002-03-25 17:51:35)

Definitely more personal trivia! You have so much to offer the world, don't keep it inside. Share with the inquiring minds.

tommasz1 (2002-03-26 10:32:22)

Well, okay then. I've been much more active in the weblog lately, anyway, and it's becoming the focal point, with the rest being more backup. I should have the update done before the week is out. Tom.

(2002-03-27 21:36:04) Can't wait to see it

Can I hold you to having this done by the end of the week? It should be very interesting... Waiting and wondering

tommasz1 (2002-03-28 17:49:15) Re: Can't wait to see it

No, you can't. But it's certainly on my list.

tommasz1 (2002-03-29 14:34:29) Re: Can't wait to see it

But I did it anyway :) [1]My Likes and Dislikes has a new look!

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>

2.3.8 Some additional site updates (2002-03-26 21:09)

It's Spring, or at least it's supposed to be, so I thought I'd clear out the Winter motif and bring in a warm weather look. It's going to include a weblog makeover (a reader said to go for it) and probably a conversion to the use of frames, since the Dreamweaver nav bar is really intended to work with them.

This, along with a backup and reconfiguration of the Linux box here, should keep me fairly busy (not to mention loads of non-computer activities). Have a wonderful Easter if I don't get a chance to post here before then.

(2002-03-27 21:39:27) Have a great Easter

Have a wonderful Easter weekend. Enjoy the time with your family. Just don't forget where you hid all the colored eggs. Do you celebrate Easter? What is your fondest Easter memory?

tommasz1 (2002-03-29 15:41:50)

There are a few things that I remember fondly. First of all was the lamb-shaped cake that our neighbors to the rear used to make. It actually stood up and had jelly beans for eyes. My mom wasn't much of a baker, so we seldom had home-baked cakes in our house. Second was the Polish unleavened bread we sometimes had, I think it came from relatives. It was like Communion wafer, but not consecrated and embossed with (I think) the Last Supper. Last was the candy eyes on the hollow chocolate bunnies I always received from the Easter Bunny. I loved to eat them first :)

(2002-03-29 16:43:38)

You would eat the eyes first. You are really a sick man. What was it about the eyes that got you? The crunch as you bit down? After you ate the eyes, what would you eat next? Start top down or bottom up? Anything you want to know about me?

2.3.9 Oops (2002-03-27 15:13)

Music: Radio MaszMan

It would seem the FTP problems continue. The main site image is corrupt and visitors get a nice blank screen. I'll fix that as soon as I can when I return home. Sorry if this caused you any inconvenience.

[Later that same day] Fixed it. Welcome back loyal readers.

2.3.10 A Not So Happy Easter (2002-03-31 19:24)

This is becoming a familiar refrain, but today our new rabbit, Zipper, passed away. She had only been ill a few days, but rabbits tend (as prey animals often do) to cover up illness and she was clearly sicker than we, or the vet, could see. It hit us all hard, she had come a long way in the months she was with us, and she will be missed.

Then I found out my aunt has been having chest pains and is scheduled for an angiogram (a medical procedure to view the arteries of the heart). We'll know more Wednesday. She's in her late seventies and has been through a lot of stress in the last year and a half. Worse still, she has chosen to live far from my father and his brother, so we all worry what might happen should her health not stay good. Not a great Easter Sunday, all things considered.

2.4 April

2.4.1 (2002-04-02 14:41)

Music: Radio MaszMan

I am struck by my overwhelming inability to change things.

2.4.2 Dreams (2002-04-03 13:01)

Music: Radio MaszMan

I dream a lot. But perhaps a better way of saying it would be that I remember my dreams fairly often. Not everyone does, I guess, though it's possible to train yourself. But that's neither here nor there. I had a dream last night that I remember and that's really what I want to write about. For some reason I dreamed that I was researching DNA. I was reading recently that the overwhelming majority of our genome is made up of genes that no longer have any function, but are leftovers from an earlier evolutionary phase, perhaps that's why. Anyway, I dreamed that the unused portion was actually an encrypted message, supposedly it would have had to have been from a "designer" of some sort (though I don't believe in Intelligent Design). The message was short and to the point: "You are loved." I suppose that if a creator was to encode a message in our genetic material, that would be the one I would want them to leave us. It's certainly the message I intend to leave with all those that I love.

2.4.3 Drought (2002-04-09 11:16)

I know I haven't been writing as much (or as often) as I had. There's really no big reason for this, just a bunch of things conspiring to rob me of the desire to scribble here. It'll pass, I'm sure.

I've been mentioned (pseudonymously) in a friend's journal, just for being smart. Odd, that. It's been one of the things that I've had the most difficulty getting accustomed to. I can't recall ever considering myself all that smart as a kid or even as a young man. It's only been in the past few years that I've even considered it. At one time in my life, I was moving aimlessly and had it not been for a good friend and the girl who became my wife, I'd be nowhere. It's perhaps the luckiest thing that ever happened to me. Thanks Steve and Mary Ann.

2.4.4 So this is what's happening (2002-04-14 20:28)

The site update is slow, it looks like I'll have to do more changes that I had expected. I had hoped to make some incremental improvements, but that seems to be more difficult than I expected.

If you came in via the [1]main link, you may have noticed that it looks different. That's because I registered the *maszerowski.net* domain and have it set to redirect to my existing site. I added links to my daughters' sites to make it simple for folks to find us.

I finished the first of my tube kits, the Tube Head preamp. It works fine (no smoke), and now it's on to the tube mic preamp and the 5E3 guitar amp. I'm tired.

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz>

2.4.5 Update news (2002-04-17 09:52)

I've started work on the site update (of course I have, sure) and it's looking like it will be a bigger change than I originally envisioned. I'm going to a CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) implementation that will probably look like crap in 4.x browsers. There are ways to work around that but I don't think it's worth the bother for something so few people read (not whining, but it *isa* personal site and gets the traffic you'd expect). I'm using CSS on a site at work, and I love the nice way it handle window resizing, so I'm applying some of the same techniques at home. Yes, I know I'm not a web designer, but there are nice bits you can grab for free and CSS allows you to better separate content from design, which is a nice goal. It's not a complete separation, but since it's not a production site, it's adequate.

I've got some stuff on online communities I want to write about, but I'm not in the mood. It'll probably happen after the new design appears. I still think a lot about such things, even though I've written little about them of late.

We have to take Big Bunny in for surgery tomorrow to take care of some tooth problems that have been making him ill. He's over 11 years-old now and this is not minor by any means. It's not cheap, but he's been a great pet and family member and I feel I owe him, silly as that may seem. He's not like any rabbit we've ever had, which goes to show you the importance of human interaction in pets' lives. I just hope he handles the anesthesia well.

2.4.6 Good news (2002-04-19 14:24)

Big Bunny is coming home today, they had to keep him an extra day because he started coming out of the anesthesia and they couldn't finish. He's eating like a little fuzzy pig, which is great, but he's going to have to be on a elderly rabbit's diet because of the problems with his teeth. We all miss him terribly, it's surprisingly lonely in the house without him.

Isn't it funny how we get attached to our pets?

2.4.7 Even more good news (2002-04-20 18:20)

Big Bunny is indeed home, a little tired and probably not all that comfortable yet, but with a healthy appetite (which is the best part of all). He's enjoying a nice diet of special recovery food mixed with baby food, it's easy on his tender mouth.

Look for the new design to launch tomorrow, all of the design work is done, just doing some last minute testing and trying to figure out if I'll use the counter again.

2.4.8 Design issues (2002-04-24 17:00)

You might notice some problems with the logo and menu buttons if you are running Internet Explorer on Windows. It seems it does not handle transparency with PNGs, even though it's "supposed to." I'll probably have to retrograde to using JPG (GIF doesn't have enough colors to reproduce them as they look now). It also like to make this journal right-justified, for reasons I suspect are related to the CSS changes. For what it's worth, it looks fine in IE/Mac and Mozilla (Win/Linux), which are the minority so I need to figure out a work around. Have patience.

2.4.9 An Idea (2002-04-28 20:18)

This first occurred to me this past Friday night, and the details I worked out on Saturday. I realize it's got no hope of ever happening, but I'm not going to let that stop me talking about it.

Anyway, as we were eating in a local restaurant, and I noticed a young woman at a nearby table who had absolutely *gorgeous* hair. Really, it was that nice. And so I thought, "wouldn't it be nice if I told her so?" And that's when I stopped, because no one does that. At least not without some sort of hidden agenda (it sounds like A Classic Pickup Line). With my luck, I'd get thrown out (at best). But it got me thinking.

Here's my idea: Why not have a "Say Something Nice to Someone Day" once a year? Nothing complicated, just people taking a little effort to do as the name indicates. Imagine how much your day might improve when someone says something that isn't sarcastic, demeaning, or just plain not nice. Family members, friends and co-workers, and particularly strangers could make each others' day. Sound good?

I know it's one of those things that's just ripe for abuse (it's not a license to put the moves on someone). And there are "Days" and "Weeks" and "Months" galore for all sort of things, adding another one to get lost in the shuffle seems futile. I'm no optimist but it's really time for this sort of thing. So pass it on, let's see what can happen.

Remember, "Say Something Nice to Someone Day."

(2002-05-11 10:33:54)

Tom: does this give me free range on saying nice things about you and too you...you might get yourself in a fine mess with some of your idea's...and I would have went up to that young lady and told her she had beautiful hair..I have done things like that many times often it is with a pair of beautiful eyes and with they are blue I never miss

commenting...but I think in Canada we are more inclined to tell people how we feel. PJ (HH)

tommasz1 (2002-05-12 07:20:21)

A healthy discretion is always appreciated. It may indeed be an US cultural anomaly, and could even be regional in nature. Where I grew up, the NYC suburbs, it was drummed into us from an early age to keep to yourself and never make eye contact with strangers. I was in Hickory, NC, for business back a decade or so ago and was surprised to have people say hello on the streets.

2.4.10 Writer's block (2002-04-30 11:17)

Music: Radio MaszMan

I've been literally swamped with thoughts and ideas and clever bits but for some reason nothing gets written down. Except, of course, the "Say Something Nice to Someone Day" idea, but that's pretty much it. Luckily, there aren't a lot of calls for my ideas; I don't think I'd be happy having to write even when I'm not in the mood. Which is why I'm not a professional writer.

My best friend Steve's father-in-law, Dick Eiser, passed away Sunday. He and his wife Joan were always nice to us and we've spent many a Christmas evening singing carols at their house. The wake is today, the funeral is tomorrow. So long, Dick, and Godspeed.

2.5 May

2.5.1 More passages (2002-05-08 14:12)

Though totally coincidental, I attended another funeral service today, the second in a week. My wife's aunt's mother (great aunt?) passed away at 98. Sad, but not unexpected and the service reflected a joyful life and a woman who had a positive impact on her family and those around her. The sad truth is that dying at that age often means few of your contemporaries remain, yet there were numerous friends and neighbors (in addition to family) in attendance. Would that I live to that age and leave such a legacy. Goodbye Grandma Rose.

2.5.2 Not all gloom and doom (2002-05-10 15:20)

Music: Radio MaszMan

Lest you think I'm a miserable SOB, it's been a good day, despite finding out I'm probably not doing something I should be doing at work. I've fixed the printer/copier in my office, loaded a new driver and replaced the cable with a real IEEE-1284 cable. I was having some comms problems that were related to either the cable or the driver so I took care of both. Ha ha.

This was the printer/copier I was program manager on, years ago, it felt funny disassembling and reassembling something I had taken apart a million times in the past. Back when I was doing something of value. Oh well, I'm not going to think about that now and ruin my mood.

2.5.3 Circle of strife (2002-05-14 13:31)

So here I am, applying for a job that I'm not really qualified for, just to get out of the dead end I'm in now. This would be funny, but I was doing the exact same thing in 1999. And that act of desperation got me here. I'm getting slow in my old age.

2.5.4 Just some random junk (2002-05-20 14:33)

Music: Radio MaszMan

I never seem to be able to come up with more than a sentence or two of things to post here, though I often imagine myself writing *The Great American Essay* on some topic or another. So rather than try, I thought I'd just spew some random bits and leave it at that.

Turned 45 on Saturday. Had steaks on the grill watching *Mission Impossible* on my new DVD player. Covered the gray in my hair and got new contacts. Discovered I was still 45.

Snow on Sunday and Monday (19 and 20 May).

A woman sent me her picture because she saw my name on a web site somewhere. Said she knew I was married but hoped I'd pass it on to someone who was looking. Sent her a reply back saying I didn't know anyone and cautioned her about sending her picture to strangers on the net.

Someone sent me a note despairing that the term "BBW" in a search tends to bring up a lot of pr0n links on [1]Google. Sad, but true.

Boss is blindly signing applications for me to get another job with the company. Don't know if he thinks it's futile and is doing it to keep me happy or whether he really is letting me go. I'll know when I get an offer, I guess.

Getting ready to put the guitars away for a while, again. Frustration level is higher than the enjoyment level. It's hard to admit you'll never be good. Only one in my group that hasn't played professionally. Even the two high school kids that join us now and again are better than me.

I really am a miserable bastard most of the time. Don't know how I manage not to alienate everyone I know. Maybe I have and just haven't realized it yet.

1. <http://www.google.com/>

2.5.5 More of my writing on the {fray} (2002-05-22 10:26)

Music: Radio MaszMan

Can't get enough of my funky stuff? Read more nostalgia from me in the [1] {fray }.

1. <http://www.fray.com/drugs/homecoming/post/index.008.shtml>

2.5.6 On hiatus until... (2002-05-22 14:38)

Music: Radio MaszMan

...whenever I decide I'm not.

2.6 June

2.6.1 Back, sort of (2002-06-21 21:25)

I said that I would be back, and so it would appear that I am. I've been thinking about writing again, but there is a lot of inertia to overcome with such things.

Rather than go over a list of the events that have transpired since I wrote last (you don't care and I don't want to bother) I'll just say I'm alive, well, and full of the goofy ideas that so often grace these pages. Let's hope you weren't expecting anything else.

If you use Internet Explorer on Windows, you've been seeing a degraded form of this site because it doesn't support transparency on PNG (Portable Network Graphics) files. It should, but it just doesn't (as of version 6.0). I'd go back to GIF's, but I dislike the LZW issues and it's a 256-color format. Summation: I know it looks bad but I'm not going to fix it. Try [1]Mozilla or [2]Opera (or switch to the Mac where IE renders just fine).

Enough for now.

1. <http://www.mozilla.org/>
2. <http://www.opera.com/>

2.7 July

2.7.1 The Home Studio Debuts (2002-07-01 19:47)

Finally, mostly due to the girls being at summer camp, my studio rack system is complete. It required a bunch of cables (and subsequent trips to the store) to hook everything up, including a MIDI cable to replace one that had been chewed by one of our rabbits. Now I need to start practicing some of the tunes I plan to record. I'm hoping to create a CD for my Dad for Christmas, so he can listen to me playing in a non-solo format.

Otherwise, we're enjoying the time alone together, even if it means lots of work on the house. I sort of had a day off today in that I worked on the rack system, but tomorrow is Seal The Driveway Day, so it's the calm before the storm.

(2002-07-22 18:38:17)

while your at it make one for me too I know I would enjoy a cd every bet as much as good ole dad...and maybe if you just picture everyone in the audience naked you could get up on stage and play...I know I have read somewhere that works for something :)

(2002-07-22 18:40:02)

you know me any my typos so I am sure you know that was bit not bet PJ

2.7.2 Happy 4th! (2002-07-04 18:17)

Please enjoy yourselves and be safe, I want you all around to read my blatherings for many more years to come.

risenveil (2002-07-04 19:24:38)
Hope you had a Happy 4th too!

tommasz1 (2002-07-09 15:13:48)
Thanks, and thanks for reading too :)

2.7.3 Random thoughts (2002-07-08 15:33)

Some more bits 'n pieces from the brain:

The more movies and television shows are *less* like real life, the better. Or so it seems. What else explains the wisecracking kids, the anorexic women, the implausible plots? Is the real world so awful that we're afraid to look at it? And don't tell me that "reality" TV is real, it's mostly scripted in some way, too.

A tale of two fatal bus crashes. One is in the Rochester, NY area, one in the Dallas, TX area. Guess which one made the national news?

Incidentally, the driver in the Rochester crash spent most of his off time gambling in an Indian casino, and then fell asleep at the wheel. His family and friends deny he has a gambling problem.

Nothing is more important than how much money a movie makes on opening weekend. The quality of the movie doesn't seem to be much of an issue anymore.

Why are celebrities so important? I don't understand the fascination with the minute details of famous people's lives. More fear of reality?

Why does society seem to hate overweight people so much when they are effectively the majority? On a similar note, is it me, or are "plus sized" models prettier (and sexier) than "normal" models?

I actually enjoyed watching the World Cup. It helped that the US broadcasts featured at least one European announcer, they understand the game and helped me gain an understanding of the "game within the game."

When I don't like something, I do what I can to make it better or avoid it.

One thing people don't know about me: I seldom agree with people, but I seldom voice my disagreement.

(2002-07-22 18:31:34)

hahaha I am so glad I popped on to read some of your writings Tom it is almost as good as having that abstract mind of your working those fingers as you type bazaar hilarious things to me PJ

2.7.4 Net Strangeness (2002-07-09 16:43)

Music: Radio MaszMan

Have you ever noticed that people will publish things about themselves online that they would probably never reveal to even their closest friends? Take a gander at sites like [1]LiveJournal or [2]Yahoo! and you'll

see what I mean. It's as if the Net is a different world, with no connection to the "real" one. The way some folks act in forums and chat rooms is similar, where insults and disrespect are the norm. Somehow, that feeling of being disconnected from others frees people to act in ways they never would otherwise. This, like so many other Net-related things, is a double-edged sword. Each swing hurts us all.

1. <http://www.livejournal.com/>
2. <http://www.yahoo.com/>

(2002-07-22 18:53:50)

hmmmmmm did you have me in mind when you wrote this or am I being paranoid...just kidding but I didn't want to leave this without a comment PJ

2.7.5 Dogs and Fleas (2002-07-12 17:30)

Longtime readers will know that I work for A Big Company. It's been in serious financial trouble, and is one of the many companies that is being mentioned in the same breath as Enron and WorldCom. But they've gotten most of the problems behind them, unlike those others. So work goes on.

One thing that tries to go on as it was (even though it's not as it was) is their joint venture with a Japanese company. Before the bad times, it was a 50-50 arrangement but they had to sell half of their stake so now it's 75-25. Even in the old days it was tough enough for the US half to get their way; it's even worse now. They went from being the tail trying to wag the dog to being the flea trying to wag the dog. You really need a lot of leverage.

(2002-07-22 18:49:27)

I am a cat person myself...remind me to ask you who you work for when next I see you PJ

2.7.6 What makes life good (2002-07-14 20:23)

Sometimes, it's the smallest little things that really make all the difference. I'm sitting here in my home office, surrounded by guitars, computers and audio equipment. It's nice, of course, but what really makes it good is my rabbit, Big Bunny, who's happily sitting nearby.

I picked up some nifty electronic gear this weekend. I ended up with an old Tektronix oscilloscope, a tube tester, some bench power supplies, and assorted bits and pieces. There's a guy at work who's moving to North Carolina and he decided to dump the stuff rather than move it. I got all that for free, with the proviso that if anything didn't work, I would dispose of it on my own. I now have enough gear to build and service audio gear, which is something I might make a sideline of someday. It's not like I'm going to make money playing guitar.

Next project: my Fender Deluxe (5E3) clone tube guitar amp.

(2002-07-22 18:23:06)

geez you would love our basement if you felt an old tube tester was a treasure...hubby being a TV repair man for a few years and a electronic tech for years...we have boxes and boxes of treasures come visit I will show you. PJ

2.7.7 A Net-Free (tm) Vacation (2002-07-18 16:30)

Music: Radio MaszMan

I'll be away from the computer for a while, as we're going to my brother-in-law's in Colorado. We'll actually be staying in a lodge in a local park with it's own kitchen. It's cheaper than a motel and much more convenient and both families get to stay together. It was closed for a while when the wildfires came within 8 miles, but they reopened when the fire was stopped.

It may seem that 8 miles is pretty far and the park was being overly cautious. But the truth is, they weren't. Depending on the weather, such fires can travel 60 MPH or faster, you can't outrun them on foot. In fact, you often can't outrun them with a motor vehicle, especially if the ground is uneven. Think about it. For most folks, 8 minutes a mile would be a good pace. In that amount of time, a wildfire could have traveled 8 miles, 8 times as far! And you'd only have a little over another minute to live. A good rule of thumb is "if you can see the fire, you're probably too close." The firefighters at these fires rely on good communications and aerial reconnaissance to keep ahead of the fire, still they carry emergency shelters that they can deploy within seconds if the fire catches them. They're designed to deflect the heat and without an air supply, can only be effective for a short while. Still, it's better than the alternative.

The firefighters out there work incredibly hard under the worst possible conditions. I've been a volunteer for over 20 years, I've never been in a situation that lasted over a day, let alone weeks and weeks. Most structure fires go out within minutes of the fire department arriving (though not always) and usually involve only the room or building of origin (again, not always, but often enough). There is a true sense of accomplishment when a fire is extinguished, I can't imagine how it must feel to work for weeks on end without seeing the fire go out. My hat is off to these folks.

(2002-07-22 18:47:27)

thanks Smokey that really was interesting and good info to know...and no that was not tongue in cheek...its boring without your abstract humour being bantered about..so please bring yourself and your family home safe...and when you get here welcome home :)

(2002-07-29 05:48:16) you should be home

well ok you should be home..so where are you your journal needs updated and I need my dose of your warped humour

(2002-07-31 05:34:48) are you home yet ?

I can not tell you the number of times I have checked this website waiting for a new entry from you...telling us all about you exciting trip...are you exhausted and dragging your butt or are you swamped at work with no time...I hope to get all the answers very soon

2.7.8 I'm Back (2002-07-31 21:36)

Yes, I'm back. Had a great time, which I'll write about later, once I get past the backlog.

(2002-08-01 15:01:00)

Welcome Back great to know you all survived the trip and had a good time...hope to read more of your type soon

2.8 August

2.8.1 Delays (2002-08-04 17:41)

I wrote something on my vacation but it's currently stuck on my [1]Palm, I thought I could transfer it to my Linux box but I lack the proper translator. I should be able to post it Monday at work.

1. <http://www.palm.com/>

2.8.2 Our Colorado Vacation (2002-08-05 09:19)

Music: Radio MaszMan

First of all, I have to say that it's beautiful country and very much different from the East. Sadly, it's also very dry and dusty, the result of three years of drought.

You certainly get a feel for the need for water management and the problems of unrestrained growth when in the Denver area. The (infamous) new airport and miles of new highways are the most obvious examples of the changes. Less obvious are things like broken windshields (about 1/4 of the cars I saw) from all the gravel flying around. All things considered, Coloradoans put up with a lot to live there.

Luckily, there wasn't any fire near us, though we saw a few acres of burned area along the highway near the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. It had come almost right up to the pavement but didn't cross the road. There were signs all over the place thanking firefighters for the work they were doing. This wasn't something abstract; in many cases these people's home were intact because of the firefighter's work.

It did rain a little while we were there, but never hard and never for long. Colorado gets a lot of bad storms and tornadoes; the clouds tend to have to dump moisture to rise above the Rockies, but they tend to be isolated. The weather map usually showed vast differences in temperature in the various towns and cities, the mountains seem to foster little microclimates everywhere.

Of course, we did the usual things you do on vacation in Colorado: Pike's Peak Cog Railway ride and whitewater rafting on the Arkansas River. Along with that, we did a Renaissance Faire, a water park, saw *Stuart Little 2* and (my wife and I alone) went to Boulder to see the sights and have a nice dinner together at the *Walnut Brewery* (the *Devil's Thumb Stout* is recommended, it's smooth and almost porter-like in flavor). On our last night all of us went to a local steakhouse, *Trail Dust*, that features a big slide for the kids to go down along with a live country band (the slide is closed when the dance floor is open and vice versa). Noisy, of course, but fun for everyone. Our waitress happened to know my sister-in-law and gave her a big hug when she came to the table. The rest of us thought it was part of the ambience, until we learned better, but they are friendly in any case.

2.8.3 Things are tough all over (2002-08-06 16:08)

Yesterday, as I was entering my local Starbucks, one of the employees entered the store behind me. As I walked up to the counter, he went behind to punch in or whatever they have to do when starting. It was almost 7:30 AM and apparently he was late because the manager took one look at him and *fired him on the spot*. He never said a word. The last I saw of him he was standing next to his car, fishing his keys out of his pants. It had taken about the same time for him to get fired as it had taken me to get a venti regular coffee.

2.8.4 Journalling via my Palm (2002-08-07 17:58)

I don't know why I simply didn't look before but I'm posting this via [1]PocketLJ and my Palm. It uses [2]Avantgo, a site that allows non-connected devices to access the web. Nice. Now there's one less barrier to my creativity.

1. <http://www.pocketlj.com/>
2. <http://www.avantgo.com/>

2.8.5 The road to DSL (2002-08-12 10:59)

Dial-up Internet can be flaky sometimes, but I'm getting to the point where I've had enough. FrontierNet's dial-up service, which was never better than "good", has degraded markedly in the last couple of months. For each successful connection, there are 4 or 5 unsuccessful ones. And to make it worse, the symptoms vary from no answer, to answer but no logon prompt, to answer and connect but no visible DNS server. Oh, and occasional disconnects for no apparent reason. We've not had the option for DSL until recently, so it looks like we might finally go for it. Cable was always an option, but we don't have cable TV anymore and I don't want it and don't want my lawn torn up (despite it's current dead condition from lack of rain).

One reason I've hesitated is I've been concerned about the change of e-mail address and the change of web site address involved with changing ISP's. I took one step towards independence by registering maszewski.net for both web and mail, so we can change at will, but never went further. But it's probably time to move from dial-up, and despite the bad taste from the current service situation, we'll go with Frontier's DSL service if our line tests okay. It's only \$10 more a month and we keep our phone line as is. There'll be some additional costs, mostly in a DSL router/hub and cables, but all of our PC's and recent Mac's are Ethernet-ready, so we don't have to purchase cards. Look out world, we're joining the 1990's!

(2002-08-13 11:08:56) Well as long as you stay connected

Tom: what would I do with out your bazar banter and you abstract humour to keep me entertained and my brain racing to keep up...so you better keep dialing.

tommasz1 (2002-08-14 13:17:49)

Unfortunately, my Linux box has a modem card that tends to lock-up after a number of dials, whether they're successful or not. I've been able to sometimes restart it without a reboot, but most of the time a power down/up is required. Depending on how bad Frontiernet has been, I either reboot or walk away before I toss the thing.

(2002-08-15 14:36:29) ah well I am patient

Thanks for the explanation of your router troubles it does sound very frustrating...I am glad that I have this little outlet to say hi to you and maybe make you smile...I suppose there is always email too but this way you know I am keeping up with your mind wanderings...hope to see you on line soon

2.8.6 Corporate Stupidity (2002-08-14 08:47)

The Big Company has, once again, done something stupid and shortsighted. Not that this is anything new. One of my tasks is dealing daily with the effects of such acts, done in the name of turning the company around. I can deal with those. What I can't deal with is when good people get laid off for being in the wrong department at the wrong time. People who had been recently promoted, people the company had invested large amounts of money in to get Masters degrees, people with excellent reviews. Why does this strike me as the last desperate act of a dying animal?

2.8.7 Perhaps not so tough (2002-08-16 13:22)

Music: Radio MaszMan

One encouraging sign, if you can call it that: the guy I thought was canned at my local Starbucks must have been docked for a day instead. He was getting out of his car as I was leaving the lot. I hope for his sake they gave him a later start time.

(2002-08-16 17:50:24) a happy ending I wonder?

This might not be a good thing...he might have gotten himself out of a looser job had he been forced to look else where...on the other hand it might have gotten him into a serious bind being out of work...you just never know these things do you ?

tommasz1 (2002-08-17 22:40:23)

Well, to be honest, I place a lot of value on punctuality. Still, I don't believe that everyone is like me. Or you.

2.8.8 Knowing too much (2002-08-20 16:25)

Music: Radio MaszMan

There are times when knowledge is not power, it is instead a burden. I am facing one of those times right now. The only redeeming factor, if there is any, is that not all the facts are available and there is a possibility that the most obvious explanation is incorrect. The alternative, that someone I like and respect is guilty of a blatant ethics violation, is something I don't wish to believe and yet I *can* believe. We all expect so much from those we respect, even if they are no better than we are, and how disappointed we are when they prove it.

(2002-08-20 17:32:06) peaked my curiosity

well I must say that blurb is a brain teaser...not knowing if you are talking about some one at work or in your personal life or your irc world...I sure would like to know more so I can understand...the use of the word ethic's is usually one that is used in a professional sense but one never knows for sure with you...I would be very interested in hearing more

tommasz1 (2002-08-20 17:43:43)

It wasn't intended to be a blurb, and it's intentionally vague because it does indeed refer to work. The facts remain to be discovered.

(2002-08-20 19:25:45) sorry

only called it a blurb of lack of better word thanks for explaining it was a work issue :)

tommasz1 (2002-08-21 09:40:24) Re: sorry

I walk a thin line when it comes to work-related postings. I know of a number of people who have lost their jobs over derogatory comments about their company and/or coworkers (even when names were not mentioned). I'm not ready to join them.

(2002-08-21 14:28:43) Re: sorry

I fully understand that and I am surprised that you did mention it here...but you must have been comfortable enough to do so...I don't think you do much without thinking about it first...although I could be wrong about that

2.8.9 It's a WiFi world (2002-08-23 15:08)

Music: Radio MaszMan

[1]WiFi is the less techie-sounding name for the IEEE 802.11b wireless networking standard. It's been gaining rapidly in popularity for a number of reasons, not the least of which are performance and ease of use. Apple uses it in their AirPort system and builds it into their portable computers. I know a number of folks who have it in their homes, simply because it eliminates the need to run cables through walls and under carpets. A couple of companies build Cable/DSL routers with WiFi built-in so you don't have to buy a separate access point. WiFi speeds are more than 50 times the 56K modem speed and are a good match for most Cable or DSL systems.

But what makes WiFi really exciting for most people is the fact that it's becoming available in public places. A number of airports are offering it in lounges and preferred customer clubs. [2]Starbucks is now rolling it out across the US with their [3]T-Mobile HotSpot service. In fact, it's made it to Rochester, which is hardly known for being on the leading edge for such initiatives (advanced mobile phone services are not quite here yet and DSL is only sparingly offered). It makes sense, if you think about it. People like to sit and drink coffee while using their laptop, yet most coffee houses don't have banks of phone jacks to use modems with. Wiring a store for them, along with the costs of multiple lines, is more cost and bother than it's worth. A WiFi access point is relatively easy to set up and only requires a single dedicated broadband connection. Starbucks is charging for their service (although they give you a discount to start up) so they're likely to stay ahead of their costs for the service. If I had a WiFi card for my work laptop, I'd be out of the office a lot more ;)

Of course, not every access point charges for access. A number of people, either intentionally or otherwise, allow outsiders to freely connect via their link without a fee. It is possible to configure the access point to prevent this, but it's not required. Anyone you can reliably receive the signal could then use the network. It's an obvious security risk, and corporate networks probably shouldn't do it, but individuals can do as they please. In some metropolitan areas, a movement called [4]Warchalking has arisen among WiFi enthusiasts. Using a system of chalk marks similar to what hoboes used to use to mark homes that offered free food, Warchalkers mark areas where open WiFi links are available. If you know the code, you can link up wherever there's a signal. It's not perfect, as you can imagine, since most access points are in people's houses and standing in the street balancing a laptop looks rather odd. And the legality of sharing net connections is up in the air (so to speak) since service agreements often limit the number of connections (they assume hardwired connections). But given the difficulty of enforcement, I wouldn't worry.

In fact, some people actually set up WiFi to allow their neighbors to access it in a kind of bandwidth cooperative. Each neighbor then chips in to pay the cost of the broadband connection. While a handful of busy WiFi connections could theoretically overwhelm a Cable or DSL connection, the likelihood of a such a condition is low. Most people's net traffic comes in bursts and is usually only heavy on the downlink side (Web page viewing and downloads). Those who depend on uninterrupted bandwidth (gamers in particular) probably shouldn't be sharing a link anyway.

When I finally get DSL, I plan to include a WiFi access point as a supplement to the wired links. While I don't have a laptop at present, I'm also not looking to string cable if I don't have to. Someday...

1. <http://www.weca.net/>
2. <http://www.starbucks.com/>
3. <http://t-mobile.com/hotspot/>
4. <http://www.warchalking.org/>

2.8.10 Interesting dream (2002-08-25 15:02)

I don't know why, but sometimes my dreams take me to places I wasn't aware I was thinking of. Last night, I had an extended trip back to Moscom, a place I haven't worked at since 1992. It was as if I had never left, although I certainly have (it's not even the same company name anymore). I often dream of my home back in Long Island, but seldom to I travel backwards in terms of employment. Considering all the brouhaha at work, I'm wondering about the significance of this.

I knew going in that large companies have political issues that smaller companies don't have, but balance this somewhat by having more resources and generally take longer to fall apart (Enron and WorldCom excepted). I think that this is exactly what is happening, and I'm willing to hang on, given the superior salary, until it's the end. After all, things *could* turn out for the best.

2.8.11 Site updates (2002-08-25 15:03)

Busy day for me, I guess. I'm redoing the *Contact* page, mostly because I hate it and it never worked as I would like. This update is not as Mac-like as the rest of the site, so it may not last either. Bear with me as I figure out what I want and how to present it.

2.8.12 In Praise of Real Women (2002-08-30 10:49)

Music: Radio MaszMan

It's been an interesting week for those of us that find real women to be attractive. First, [1]Jamie Lee Curtis, the actress, did a very revealing photo shoot for *more* magazine. In it, she let herself be photographed before a three-hour makeup session and then after. She looks great with the makeup and clothes but to me, and I suspect a lot of others, she also looks great without them. She's a major babe, either way. I've always thought that sexiness is something that comes from within, and it can transcend external appearances. Jamie Lee does; would that others feel the same way about themselves.

Another bright spot is the movie, *Satin Rouge*. This [2]review in *Salon.com* by Stephanie Zacharek nails it. The movie is more than just about "average" women, set as it is in an Islamic country, but the themes are universal enough. As with Jamie Lee, the key is how someone feels about themselves as much as how others view them. Given how our culture (and others) worships youth and thinness despite being increasingly older and less thin, it's a minor miracle that Jamie Lee's photos or *Satin Rouge* even get produced. Bit by bit we seem to be growing out of our obsessions and into some sort of maturity. Still a long way to go, though.

And while I'm at it, have a happy and especially a safe Labor Day weekend. They say North Americans travel more on this weekend than any other all year, so watch out for the other guy and drive defensively. See you!

1. <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2002/08/27/ED242187.DTL>

2. http://www.salon.com/ent/movies/review/2002/08/30/satin_rouge/index.html

2.9 September

2.9.1 Personal Net Outage (2002-09-03 11:09)

Sometime Saturday afternoon our home phone line went dead. That meant no Net access in addition to not having phone service. We both have cell phones, and everyone we know knows the number, so there was

no danger of not being in voice contact, but the loss of access affected us all. I had planned an anniversary surprise using some things printed off the Web and had to change tactics at the last minute.

But I had time to spend for other things, and so I used it to my advantage. I finally built the DTD and XML file format for my book reviews. I now need to learn XSL to turn them into HTML files. More importantly, I started the documentary of the motorcycle accident I had in 2000. I want to make sure I record all of the details that I can while I still remember them. I'm not sure why I'm worried, but I'd rather be safe than sorry. It will eventually be posted to the site, though I can't imagine anyone reading all of it.

2.9.2 Worth reading no matter what your beliefs (2002-09-06 10:21)

Music: Radio MaszMan

Lest I ruin it with my words, read [1]this weblog entry from A. K. M. Adam.

1. http://www.seabury.edu/faculty/akma/2002_09_01_blogarch.html#e81205823

2.9.3 Outdoor fun (2002-09-06 18:01)

There was a picnic today for a program that went successfully from the research group to a business group for further development to launch. I went, even though I have little direct involvement with the program, other than running the slide shows and taking notes at team meetings. For some reason, they don't understand my reluctance to sign team mementos and my discomfort accepting accolades the active team members get.

When those who do not contribute receive the same honors as those who do, it lessens the meaning of the rewards and sets a dangerous precedent. I don't want to be a part of that, I want to be a contributor. Unfortunately, the economy is not conducive to supporting useless employees.

2.9.4 A Reminder (2002-09-08 14:25)

We went to Mass this morning in honor of Dick Eiser, our friends' father who passed away earlier this year. A beautiful morning it was too, and that just made it all even better. The homily was about anger and revenge in light of the coming anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. There's going to be a lot of media coverage in the next few days, including media coverage of the media coverage. I'll try to avoid most of it, I don't need to be reminded because I haven't forgotten. What I saw and felt that day will remain with me forever.

Some miscellaneous bits:

I have Jury Duty this coming week and I don't know if I'll even be in the office on Wednesday. But that's not really important because I will observe the anniversary the same way: quiet, respectful silence for all of those who lost their lives. Perhaps I'll even pray, who knows. In any case, this will be my only journal entry this week.

If you see her on Tuesday, wish my daughter Alanna a happy 13th birthday. I will be quaffing the last of the ales I brewed for her birth. They've aged remarkably well but they can't hold a candle to the young lady they were brewed for :)

2.9.5 An Interesting Week (2002-09-15 20:10)

I said I wasn't going to write any journal entries last week and I didn't. But now I'm going to.

First of all, the first anniversary of the September 11 attacks came and went with an embarrassing flood of coverage in every media channel. It was as if they thought everyone had completely forgotten about it and needed to be reminded, again and again. I haven't forgotten, so I didn't watch or listen to any of it. I even avoided most of the web sites, though I did glance at the [1]MetaFilter archive from last year. It's not because I don't care, it's because I do. The entire incident remains for me an open wound, one that may never heal. I still cry when I see things like the scenes of the towers collapsing, firefighter funerals or interviews with families of victims. Please don't show me any more, thank you.

Alanna's birthday is the 10th, so the alternator had to die on my car. As a result, Mary Ann could not get the supplies necessary for the party and I ended up scrambling at the last minute to get them. We ended up with everything but cups and a spatula for the grill. My brother-in-law Larry got us some cups and we improvised the spatula. Alanna floated 13 candles on little popsicle stick rafts down the canal at dusk, they traveled about 20 yards or so before going out.

To add to the fun, I had Jury Duty. In the US every citizen is a potential juror, but not everyone gets to serve. I was exempt for many years, courtesy of having been a volunteer firefighter for 5 years. They eventually changed the law, withdrawing all exemptions. So now even judges, lawyers and cops can serve (though most aren't selected for some reason, ha ha). I had to call each day, sometimes twice, but didn't have to show up until Thursday. We were given a questionnaire to assess our knowledge and opinions on medical malpractice suits. I thought I wouldn't get chosen, given my experiences with my motorcycle accident, but I was asked to report again on Friday.

Those of us chosen on Friday had to report to a NY State Supreme Court room for jury selection. Once inside, about half of the initial group were excused for various reasons (why they didn't get excused earlier is beyond me). They picked 16 names out of a box for 8 positions (this court only uses 6 jurors and 2 alternates, unlike civil court) and I wasn't picked. The two sides talked with the juror candidates, eliminated a couple and eventually chose the 8. Those of the 16 who were not chosen, and the rest of us, were sent back down the the central jury room. Since it was Friday and we had been released by the judge, we were allowed to leave. Now I won't have to serve again for another 4 years or so. So much for my civic duty. So much for the week.

1. <http://www.metafilter.com/>

2.9.6 Vocabulary Lesson (2002-09-18 16:56)

Music: Radio MaszMan

ennui : a feeling of weariness and dissatisfaction : BOREDOM

[Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition, 1993]

2.9.7 Some interesting reading on communities (2002-09-20 10:16)

Music: Radio MaszMan

It's been a while since I've scribbled about communities, mostly because I've been wrapped up in myself to notice. But not everyone is so narcissistic. Clay Shirky, someone way smarter than I, takes a look at

[1]communities and broadcast institutions in light of what MSNBC and others (Salon.com being one) are doing with weblogs.

I know that my weblog, [2]My Likes and Dislikes, is mostly a one-way communications medium, despite the availability of a commenting system (similar, but not identical to the one in this journal). I don't think of it as broadcast, but given little evidence of the readership being linked by anything other than the reading, it's difficult to come up with another fitting metaphor.

1. http://www.shirky.com/writings/broadcast_and_community.html
2. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>

2.9.8 Finally, It's All Clear (2002-09-23 09:52)

I've finally figured out my basic beef with the world: I want to be Somebody but I am Nobody.

2.9.9 My worst nightmare (2002-09-27 13:19)

I think everyone has a fear of some accident or disease befalling them that would make their lives unbearable. For me that would be anything that would leave my mind intact but my body impaired. Not Alzheimer's, for that slowly diminishes the mind without there being awareness of it. Sad, but more so for those who know you. What I am referring to is something like a stroke, that's what I fear the most.

Why I suddenly mention this: Someone at work, who was already being treated for cancer, suffered a stroke in his brain stem, most likely a result of the cancer treatments. He cannot move, speak, or breathe on his own and is only able to move his eyes. He will remain that way for the rest of his life. Still, his mind is fully intact. He was able to make a decision for himself to remain on life-support. I'm not sure what I would decide in a similar circumstance. All I can do is hope that I never have to. If there is a God, I hope He's listening.

2.10 October

2.10.1 (2002-10-05 15:49)

I realize I haven't written anything in a while. I've been rather busy at work learning [1]Zope and other technologies for some information systems we're building in my group. Having my own server that I control has really been a good experience and an even better idea with regards to rapid rollout of group tools.

Meanwhile, it looks as though I will be getting to dust off my software development skills on a new project that's starting up. Still too soon to tell, but my boss finally got convinced that I am best utilized in areas that I have experience in. Not to sell myself short, but using me as a general-purpose fill-in for any skill is not the best use of my abilities. Time will tell if I still have it.

1. <http://www.zope.org/>

2.10.2 A question with no answer (2002-10-11 15:30)

Why does our president obsess about a middle eastern dictator when here at home anthrax is sent via the mail and snipers take innocent lives?

2.10.3 Writing drought explained (2002-10-13 18:00)

I realize that there haven't been a lot of journal entries of late, but that doesn't imply that I'm not writing nor that I have nothing to write about. Let me explain. I've become more and more concerned about mentioning anything about work. The Big Company is on track for another big cut back (in the name of saving money) and past history shows that being a good worker or having a lot to do is not a guarantee that you won't be laid off.

Despite that, I'm busier than I've been in a long time, my boss figures that even if it's guaranteed to keep me from getting laid off, it's better than nothing. We'll see how well his theory works. He's been the most pessimistic that I can remember him ever being, which doesn't inspire a lot of confidence. So we'll see what happens, it could be a very bleak Thanksgiving this year. I'm still amazed that the sorry state of the economy gets so little coverage. Does attacking Iraq solve those problems? I think not.

I have been doing some writing that hasn't been posted here yet. The biggest and most important to me is a complete history of the motorcycle accident I had in July 2000. It's taking me a while because I need to stop now and again to compose myself. Given that, I realize now that I couldn't have done this any sooner. I had thought that there was more detail in my (then) online journal, but I was remarkably vague in those posts. I'm not much for sympathy so I deliberately kept a lot of the details hidden. Now that it's two years in the past, it's not the same so I see no need to keep things hidden.

I've also been doing some creative writing (fiction, that is) that I may or may not post. They're not "G-rated" and given that I have children who are active online, I don't want them reading it until they're old enough to understand. I think I might post their availability, and have the links pop up a email message to me so I can screen the readers. We'll see.

I repaired a cheap guitar my youngest daughter bought in a garage sale. It was strung with steel strings but shouldn't have been and it was slowly pulling the bridge off. I reglued the bridge and restrung it with the nylon strings it should have had and now I'm slowly getting the stretch out of them so they'll hold tune. And no, I haven't started on the Tweed Deluxe amp kit, even though I now own two (!) old Tektronix oscilloscopes. They both have defects, so I hope to build a single one from all the parts. Work on my Christmas (time not necessarily theme) CD is on hold, for no good reason other than I'm lazy.

That's enough for now, stop by again, you're always welcome here.

2.10.4 How to discourage spending (2002-10-17 16:40)

My work laptop is an ancient Compaq Armada 1750 that was out of date before I got it in 2000. It's got a whopping 96 Meg (not a lot even in 2000) and runs Windows NT 4.0 (now up to Service Pack 6a, with more Hot Fixes than you can shake a stick at). Realizing that I spend a lot of time waiting for it to page things in and out of virtual memory, I foolishly decided that I should upgrade the RAM. Laptops are notorious for model-specific RAM that are impossible to get, but I lucked out in that a 128 Meg upgrade would only cost \$31. And this from the corporate-mandated supplier, no less. Needless to say, things went downhill from there. I can no longer simply order things like RAM. I have to use the corporate tool, which you must register with and take the training for before you can use it. The training takes 2 hours! Hoping to sidestep this little bit of ugliness, I tried to get my department secretary to order it for me, especially since the boss has to okay it anyway. No such luck, because she hasn't taken the training yet either. And so, I'm still watching the (slow) show.

2.10.5 Irony is not dead (2002-10-18 11:06)

Here's irony for you. The Big Company has changed long distance calling card suppliers from good old [1]AT &T to [2]WorldCom. The cesspool is getting crowded.

1. <http://www.att.com/>
2. <http://www.worldcom.com/>

2.10.6 Changes (2002-10-26 21:17)

I've been taking Tai Chi at the local YMCA for over a year, but lately I've been getting a bit restless and I've been looking for something else. This isn't to say that Tai Chi isn't good, on the contrary it's done a lot for my balance and flexibility (no small thing in light of what I've been through). I had thought I would become involved with Aikido, a Japanese martial art somewhat like Judo in that it emphasizes using the opponents strength against them, but my youngest has been taking Karate at a local [1]center and I've decided to enroll there instead and keep the family together, so to speak. I have my first lesson this coming Monday. I look forward to increasing my upper body strength on top of everything else.

It's been a long week, I spent Monday through Thursday in all-day workshop sessions for a new program starting up in Research at The Big Company. This is a program I'd like to be a part of but there are complications, namely me being involved in another new program that is also starting up. For reasons I can't go into here, I'm really not looking forward to continuing with the other program, but it may be a decision I can't make, no matter how I wish otherwise. We'll see what happens. I've enjoyed being in research, and I've done a lot of discovery and learning, but I'm a delivery kind of guy.

1. <http://www.rochesterkarate.com/>

2.11 November

2.11.1 About Real Women (2002-11-03 16:53)

I don't often talk about movies for the very practical reason that I don't see a lot of movies. And I haven't seen [1]Real Women Have Curves, but I think a lot of people should. Why? Because it portrays women considered "fat and unattractive" as anything but.

There's a strange dichotomy between our popular entertainment and our real lives. We're all heavier than we used to be, but as we grow larger, those who pretend to portray us on television and in movies grow thinner. Nevermind that they may be achieving this via some unhealthy methods, it's only the results that matter. But what is worse, it's caused us to look at ourselves as unattractive.

Real Women confronts this particular issue head on. The characters may be Mexican-Americans, but it's theme is surely universal. How well it does, and how well people will understand it, remains to be seen (the trailer is a mix of comedy and drama, like real life, though that's not enough to judge the whole film). But it's a first step, and first steps are important. So go see it when it comes to your town (it will probably be at my local "art house" theatre). Your dollars are one great way to tell the purveyors of popular entertainment what you think (it's probably the only way).

1. <http://realwomenhavecurves.com/>

(2002-11-07 19:01:14) gosh it's been a long time

I sure had lots of catching up to do and I always enjoy reading your thoughts....helps me get to know you just a little bit better I chose this one to respond too because I did not know about this movie I will look for it when I am out west visiting the kids towards the end of the month...just incase you happen to notice my absence around that time...anyway it felt good to be reading your journal again..take care hope to see you on line soon

tommasz1 (2002-11-08 06:43:14) Re: sorry

I have indeed missed seeing your comments here. You're the only one who has ever given me much feedback. I would suspect this movie might be more readily found on the West Coast than in the Maritimes, so your chances of seeing should be good. Probably better than it appearing in Rochester, though you never know. Have a safe trip, though I expect to have a chance to talk online before then, and say "hi" to your daughter for me :)

2.11.2 More with less (2002-11-06 13:56)

The Big Company has had Yet Another Layoff, this time taking about 100 people locally (and about 750 world-wide). It's telling that the objectives for my organization has been amended to include a task dealing with how to get the work done with fewer people. Sadly, it's a task that many organizations are dealing with here. Good thing we're going to war with Iraq.

2.11.3 Politics and me (2002-11-09 22:05)

I actually started this on Friday but I ended up getting distracted and gave up. It's one of those things that can wait, for the most part. But anyway, here's my problem. In the United States there are two major political parties, the Democrats and the Republicans (yes, there are lot of other parties, but these two dominate things almost everywhere in the US). While they've had changes in major themes over the years, it used to be fairly clear what each stood for, even if they didn't state it as such. In essence, the Democrats are in favor of the government taking care of the people, and the Republicans are in favor of taking care of business.

At least, that's the theory. Some people argue that these differences have diminished in recent years. I suspect they're right about that but let's ignore that for now. My problem is that, because they feel a need to maintain doctrinal purity, they're unable to deal with the gray areas. Things are *Conservative* or *Liberal*, plain and simple. And once they are identified as such, they remain that forever, unless the definitions change.

I can understand the desire to crisply define things but so few things in life offer themselves for such easy classification. Which brings us to me. I think there needs to be a government, which does things for you that you can't or won't do for yourself (like fight wars). I think it's reasonable to pay taxes for that government to pay for thiose unpleasant things I don't want to do. Which makes me a Democrat, by current definition. However, paying taxes for services I don't want or can't use is annoying, which is leaning towards the Republican side. I don't think abortions are a good idea (which makes me Republican) and I don't favor capital punishment (Democrat).

I could go on, but I think you get the idea. Too bad there's no pick and choose menu. Luckily, voting is totally up to the individual, regardless of party (you can not be in any, if that's your thing), and so I vote for those who have ideas like mine. Sometimes, there isn't anyone who thinks like me to vote for, so then it's pretty much a random thing (though I tend to favor those who don't use the "attack ad" approach). It works for me.

For the record, I'm a registered Republican. It was something I did to get a summer job working for the local DPW. I haven't bothered to change it.

2.11.4 Bittersweet moments (2002-11-17 18:03)

Yesterday we went to a "retirement" party for two of the guys in my workgroup. They were in The Big Company 32 and 36 years, respectively. But instead of officially retiring, both of them were laid off. The party took the place of a more traditional retirement celebration, not that the company would pay for such things.

I was amazed at how much I had learned from the two of them, having spent my entire Big Company career working with them both. And it dawned on me that their generation was rapidly disappearing, along with their knowledge and experience. At least I hope the shareholders are happy, because what else is important?

(2002-11-19 06:34:38)

Thought I would take a few minutes to see what was going on in your life before I left tomorrow...I might get to chat some while I am away so might see you online before I get back...take care and keep sharing those thoughts

tommasz1 (2002-11-19 11:50:30)

Hope you have a safe journey. I'll keep adding things, lots of material, I'm afraid.

2.11.5 More, more, more (2002-11-19 12:30)

Another fun day of layoffs. People were being walked out all over The Big Company. One of the secretaries found out she had lost her job because they sent her boss an email. Trouble was, her boss is out on extended medical leave and the secretary is set up to receive her mail. Classy, eh?

2.11.6 First impressions (2002-11-24 18:05)

I like to think I can learn a lot from someone from the first meeting. Unfortunately (but not surprisingly) I'm hardly infallible. Then it's a question of whether what I learn afterwards is good or bad. Lately I've been embroiled in a rather harsh learning experience that I have to admit truly caught me by surprise. But you can't expect every relationship in your life to be a positive one, and so the disappointment is moderated by pragmatism. And it just makes me even gladder to have the good ones. You know who you are.

(2002-12-05 15:49:28) This Makes Me Curious

Howdy: I just got home around noon today and decided to check and see what you have been up too...now of course I am curious to learn more?????

tommasz1 (2002-12-06 03:49:25) Re: This Makes Me Curious

I'll explain, in private, I'm not one for naming names in a public forum.

(2002-12-06 09:36:27) OK

I am glad it was just a case of you being away a few days...and I look forward to chatting with you soon and working on the list

2.11.7 Bathroom Door Etiquette (2002-11-25 16:13)

When you work in a large building, like I do, it's very common to run into someone who's leaving as you are entering. This presents a dilemma: who should hold the door for whom? My proposal is based purely on practicality. The person leaving is probably not in much of a hurry, unless they've Done Something Bad, and the person entering probably is, maybe even in A Big Hurry. Therefore the person exiting holds the door. Simple, efficient, and polite.

Next up, cell phones.

2.11.8 What I'm Thankful For 2002 (2002-11-26 15:31)

Since today is the last day I'll be online for a while, I thought I'd take some time and list some of the things I am thankful for this year. There's no particular order, other than what came to my mind as I wrote this.

- My wife, you've been there for me, without fail
- My children, just because
- My dad, for all the things you did for me
- My godmother, a source of comfort in a terrible time
- My friends, all of you
- My rabbit, you've been more than a pet
- My guitar teacher, swinging lightly and politely
- For being alive, it's a gift I'll never be able to repay

What are you thankful for this year?

(2002-12-05 15:55:56) Reflection Time

Hi You: So what did I miss while I was away...why aren't you going to be on line for awhile? I know I will miss your interesting and somewhat warped mind and sense of humour...I will also reflect on what I am grateful for when my brain isn't mush...would you like to know my list...if so let me know and I will share it with you...be well and come through your inner fight healthy and stronger PLEASE!

tommasz1 (2002-12-06 03:46:10) Thanksgiving

Ahhh, I thought it was obvious that it was (US) Thanksgiving, but it wouldn't necessarily be so for a Canadian. I was simply out of town with my folks, nothing dramatic at all. I'd be thrilled to see your list, you can email it to me anytime. And welcome back!

2.12 December

2.12.1 Random bits (2002-12-07 12:03)

Time for more random stuff from the recesses of my brain:

- Karate is doing me a world of good, and I'm glad I took the Tai Chi, it would have been difficult to begin otherwise. I truly feel better than I have in years, and my shoulder is not holding me back in any way. Unfortunately, my innate clumsiness is, but it's curable ;)
- There has been a theme in the comic [1]For Better Or Worse about the death of the youngest child's rabbit. April was born around the same time as our youngest and our rabbit is 12 so it was particularly apropos for us. Luckily our bunny is still hale and hearty.
- I still haven't gotten broadband yet. The uncertainty around work makes me hesitate.
- My resume will be online soon, if you hire geeks take a look at it, thanks.
- I am way behind on my "Christmas CD", the getting started part is the hardest, I'm discovering.

1. http://www.fborfw.com/strip_fix/index.html

(2002-12-16 13:47:36) you just have to push harder

nice to see your writing again...noticed a you had taken a bit of a recess from it...I have missed crossing paths with you on line too...with that said get your butt in gear and make wonderful music to share with your family and friends...funny I actually listen to that piece you shared with me a couple of days ago and I still think it's great just like you

2.12.2 Reflection (2002-12-09 10:08)

We went to get our tree early this year, at [1]Stokoe Farms (pronounced "stoke-ee"). The day started out fairly nice but by the time we left the house it had clouded up and begun to snow. Luckily, it wasn't too cold so we only had to deal with mud instead of frostbite. We get a tree type called Concolor, a long-needled bluish fir with the aroma of citrus. It's lovely and the smell makes it even better. There were only a few this year at the size we like (about 6 feet or, as we measure it, about as tall as me), but we found a nice example. Once I cut it down, Liz and I carried it to be wrapped and paid for. I ended up with the bottom end which soaked my gloves with the wonderful smell of citrus from the sap.

On the ride home I was struck by how good my life is at the moment. Despite all the bad things at work, I still have a job. Physically, I feel pretty good. My family is healthy. My wife has found some part-time work she likes. The girls are becoming young adults. I live somewhere where there are seasons, and Christmas feels like Christmas. I have no idea what the future has in store for me, but I know I will always look back in fondness to the present time.

1. <http://www.stokoefarms.com/>

(2002-12-16 13:53:36) such a positive thinker

one of the nicest things about you my friend is your positive attitude and your caring ways...I have never heard of those tress before wish I could smell one...hope to share thoughts with you soon

2.12.3 It's a CD! (2002-12-18 21:41)

Well, I procrastinated too long and I had to hurry through recording in order to get it done, but it's going out tonight. With a decent label and cover graphics, it looks better than it sounds. Next year, I hope to get an earlier start and I should have a better handle on the recording process so I can have more control over the sound. More details in later entry, I'm going to bed.

2.12.4 Creative Commons License (2002-12-20 18:27)

I've migrated everything here to a new license, the [1]Creative Commons License, in place of the copyright I was using. I wanted something where people could use the material here without having to pay. The only restriction is that they need to credit me and they can't modify what they use. It's what I was really seeking with the copyright, but this is more explicit about what I allow.

The [2]Creative Commons concept is basically about that idea of making explicit what people can do with your content. The compelling feature is that variations are allowed, including totally public domain. The site has all the information and the latest news, take some time to read it if you're interested in these sorts of things.

1. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/1.0>
2. <http://creativecommons.org/>

2.12.5 Big Bunny Update (2002-12-20 18:36)

We found a lump on our rabbit's tummy that seemed to be bothering him so he went to vet today. It was just a cyst that the vet drained for him. His teeth are fine, which we were worried about, and his weight is holding (not surprising given his appetite). So far, so good but unfortunately, he's starting to lose his sight. He's not totally blind, but these things never improve. We'll have to watch him for signs of him bumping into things, but other than that, he's fine. Given his age, 12, this isn't surprising. Digger, his companion for many years, lost her sight too. First one eye, then the other, clouded up. She was lucky in that Big Bunny acted as her "seeing eye bunny" and took care of her until the end. Now that Big Bunny is a bachelor, we'll have to do that for him. He's earned it.

2.12.6 New essay posted (2002-12-22 17:10)

I have finally posted the story of my 2000 motorcycle accident to the [1]Writings page. Check it out when you have some time (it's kind of long).

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/writings.html>

(2002-12-28 17:44:37) thanks

I finely took the time to read about the accident and I thank you for sharing...I can see your point of view on certain things...I guess for me the fact someday I would die was brought home at a very early age...so from that day I have

made so I enjoy each day to the fullest and make the best of what has been given me...if at any time you want to talk about any of your views or feelings I have a good set of ears and they are ready to hear.

tommasz1 (2002-12-30 06:15:02) re: Thanks

To be honest, I'm pretty much done talking about it. But thanks for the offer. I just wanted to make sure I got it all down on "paper" before I forgot too much.

2.12.7 Holiday Greetings (2002-12-24 12:14)

I hope you have a merry (and safe) Christmas!

(2002-12-25 18:27:38) thanks I did

had a very relaxing quiet day here...cooked full turkey dinner but did little else other then relax and watch a movie or two

tommasz1 (2002-12-26 19:11:46) Re: thanks I did

And you said I never respond to these ;)

2.12.8 Happy New Year! (2002-12-31 09:46)

Have a safe and happy New Year!

Chapter 3

2003

3.1 January

3.1.1 And so it's 2003 (2003-01-07 11:46)

I realize I've been writing less and less lately, but I hope to remedy that in the future. I've been doing a lot of interesting things so it's been harder to find time to spend writing. I have managed to work on one of my short stories, though not complete it. I have the outline in my head, so it's more a matter of simply typing than creating. It's coming along nicely, too, but I've noticed some areas that could use some work. For one thing, I can see the characters and the setting so well in my head, I've neglected to adequately describe them (like what they're wearing, colors, things like that). The narrative is at a pause point now, so I think I'll go back and do the editing I need.

I spent a lot of time online over the two weeks I had off. It was interesting to watch some of the online communities I participate in behave. Besides there being more people online due to time off, there was the added dynamic of the Christmas season. I noticed less "Christmas Blues" than I have in past years, but there may be some reasons behind that.

In keeping with my policy of not naming names without permission (and I have no intention of obtaining it, either), I'll use pseudonyms for the following. There are a number of IRC networks (where network refers to a group of servers linked together offering the same channels [discussion rooms]), some of which offer a broad range of channels while others are more restricted in scope. [1]DalNet, the one I am referring to here, is one of the former. DalNet is also, unfortunately, a frequent hacker target due their size and policies. Their servers (all volunteers) have been the targets of DOS (Denial Of Service) attacks at intervals for over a year or so. Logging into one of the servers can often be a trying task, as the servers may be under attack or no longer a DalNet member. Complete outages are not as frequent, but have happened.

One group of channels, we'll call them B , which are all owned by a single person, have been on DalNet for years. But in light of the problems faced with the DNS attacks, they decided to move their channels to a new server (now 2 servers) not affiliated with DalNet. The move was interesting, since they were quiet about it in order not to alert the spammers and hackers of the new destination. The new server was reasonably fast (once they got it off of Win32) and uptime was excellent. It seemed like a win-win.

What they hadn't counted on was inertia. People on DalNet weren't moving to the new server despite the apparent advantages. They pursued a policy of minimal supervision in the hopes that the sudden increase in IRC spammers would drive people to the new server. It mostly made participants angry and

confused. Also, since the move was announced by "passing the word", rather than a public notice, it was hoped that only the "cool" people would move. Needless to say, not all of them did. They had also not counted on the influence of the "uncool" or quiet people had; their absence is felt, even if not acknowledged. The new server is much more narrowly focused, obviously, and doesn't offer the same variety of channels that DalNet does. So while the B channels exist on the new server, analogous channels have popped up on DalNet as well, essentially replicating the old (and now deleted) B channels. In an attempt to guide folks to the new server, B's owner recreated the main channel. This new/old channel is moderated and no one can talk in it, it exists simply to hold a topic telling people how to get to the new server. Despite this, it sometimes has more people in it than the same channel on the new server!

For people who participate in channels outside the scope of B, like me, the only solution is to be connected to two servers at the same time. Luckily for me, all the clients I use (mirc, ircle and kvirc) allow this, though it can get confusing at times. Of course, now that I'm not on vacation, my online time will return to it's normal amount. This will make it more difficult to track subtle changes but major trends should be still visible.

Next time, some of my "resolutions" for 2003 (note the clever use of quotes).

1. <http://www.dal.net/>

3.1.2 Some things I want to do in 2003 (2003-01-08 15:18)

I hate resolutions, so I don't make them. But I do try to set goals for myself. Here they are, in no particular order:

- Continue advancing in Karate
- Learn the guitar fingerboard better
- Get a more enjoyable assignment at work
- Play guitar in public at least once
- Learn ProTools to make better recordings
- Clean up my website, especially for IE/Win users
- Relax more
- Live, laugh, love

What are your goals for this year? Let me know in the comments.

3.1.3 About a book (2003-01-11 23:39)

[Background] I'm working on using an XML/XLST system for building a list of book reviews. The book I am going to talk about was, however, worth talking about here.

The book is called *Everything Is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer. It's difficult to describe the way this novel is structured, other than to say it manages to weave a story about a Ukrainian *shetl* (Jewish village) in the nineteenth century with a narrative written (in English) by a young Ukrainian hired by the

author (or someone like him) about the author's search for his family roots. It's not an easy read; the text reads exactly the way you'd expect a Ukrainian not particularly conversant in English would write.

The overall tone is fairly light-hearted, though you know that something bad will eventually happen. After all, this novel is centered around a Jewish village in Ukraine. And something bad does happen, as expected, but in a surprising way. I don't want to give any more away, so I'll leave it at that.

I have to admit I find that what happened to the Jewish population in Europe at the hands of the Nazis to be the most troubling event of the twentieth century. This novel is all about that, about a place where Jews had been subject to *pogroms* (state-sponsored attacks) that paled in comparison to what happened in 1941. It brings home to me how evil human beings can be. No matter what their politics.

I'm mostly of Polish descent, but I'm 1/8th German. It wouldn't have mattered, in the long run. They would have come for the Slavs (Poles and Russians) once they were done with the Jews. There was a lot of anti-Jewish feeling in Poland, for which I feel nothing but shame. Given what would have happened had the Allies not won, it was stupid beyond all imagination.

More importantly, and this is an important point in the novel, non-Jews had the chance to do something but didn't. Yes, rebelling against the Nazis was a sure death sentence, but so few had the courage to do so. Has anything changed?

So read this novel. Even if your history has nothing to do with the themes it covers. Because evil hasn't gone away. Because.

3.1.4 Big Bunny update (2003-01-18 16:07)

My poor, old rabbit. He's been having trouble with his hind legs, first one then the other. We took him to the vet on Wednesday and she found nothing obviously wrong with him, other than the arthritic changes you'd expect with the elderly (rabbits are subject to many of the same things as we are). He received an anti-inflammatory injection which seemed to help, but now he's showing signs of lameness in his other back leg. It could be from over-use when his other leg was hurting, we don't know. We continue to watch him carefully, but this could be the beginning of something we don't want to think about right now.

I'm not in favor of confining him at night and when we are away, he's lived most of the latter part of his life pretty much free to roam anywhere he wants, and I want to see that he continues until the end of his days. Mary Ann modified a cardboard box so he didn't have the high walls of his litter box to negotiate, and he likes that. He likes to rest his front paws on the side, though, so we'll need to modify another box soon.

I realize this is a lot of fuss for a pet, and a rabbit at that, but he's been with us so long he's gone way beyond being a mere pet and is a real family member. Some difficult decisions await us.

3.1.5 Why do I do this? (2003-01-20 10:27)

Many are the days I ask myself that very question. [1]Mark Pilgrim, a weblogger and web developer, casts a eye on people like me in his [2]Influences. I definitely resonate with the idea that people who write are looking for an audience, I know that I am. Of course, most of those people writing weblogs and journals and personal sites, like me, will never have much of an audience. I know from the counters that I'm the majority of hits on my weblog and I think the rest of the site is similar. I know of a few hardy souls who've managed to read this journal and comment, so it's not entirely self-indulgence.

Of course, I think I have something unique and important to say and I want people to hear me. I would like to think I can make a difference on this planet, even though I know that most people don't. I've said in the past that my main problem with the world is that I am nobody and I want to be somebody, this site is ample proof of that. But I'm not willing to do something outrageous or provocative simply to gain readership. That would work, for a while, but ultimately, you have to be what you are. This site, warts and all, is what I am and it will never ever be anything else. If anyone actually is reading this, thank you. But even if no one sees this other than myself, I'm not giving up.

Big Bunny note: He's still lame, but he's not giving up and neither are we. But we're slowly becoming prepared for what must come. Yesterday was a particularly rough day, for us, as the reality of what we must do sunk into all of us.

1. <http://diveintomark.org/>
2. <http://diveintomark.org/archives/2003/01/19.html#influences>

(2003-02-01 10:47:15) was time

hi it's been awhile since I visited I am glad to read that you write here hoping that others would read...I wasn't sure if that was your goal...happy it is...sorry to hear about big bunny I have yet to read your last entry about him I start where I left off and work up...I am sure today is not an easy day for you with the shuttle not making it safely back home...just one more thing in this big bad world to deal with

tommasz1 (2003-02-01 13:42:30) Re: was time

I'll likely write more about the shuttle, just not today. Thanks for reading.

3.1.6 HelloWorld (2003-01-25 10:16)

I blogged this the other day but didn't get around to reading the docs until today. *HelloWorld* comes from [1]Cooperating Systems, a company headed by Kai Gradert, of Photoshop plug-in fame. It's intent seems to be replacing your computer's UI, emphasizing sharing, content publishing and Instant Messaging. It's all built on standardized protocols with the exception of HOP/E (HelloWorld Open Protocol/Exchange) which handles discovery and presence (key to this) type of application. It also uses the Gnutella protocol for searching the distributed network of clients.

I look forward to trying it, having signed up for the demo. But I wonder how well it will play in corporate IT environments. Gnutella is fairly "chatty", hundreds or thousands of clients could well clog a network. The publishing service will extract a performance hit from each client. Small workgroups look like the prime targets. I'll let you know after I run the demo.

1. <http://www.cooperatingsystems.com/>

3.1.7 More Big Bunny news (2003-01-27 12:29)

We call Big Bunny the "Energizer Bunny" for the number of medical crisis he manages to get himself through. His rear legs are still not right, but he's moving much better despite that. His luck is bound to run out one of these days but we're not giving up on him anytime soon. He's been a continual source of amazement to us, not just for his recuperative abilities, but his intelligence and personality. He puts the "dumb bunny" label to rest, once and for all.

(2003-02-01 10:50:34) good news indeed
this news made me smile...I have gotten quite fond of big bunny...along with his owner

tommasz1 (2003-02-01 13:40:18) Re: good news indeed
He's not just a pet, he's a family member.

3.2 February

3.2.1 About heroes (2003-02-02 16:31)

What is a hero? We use the term a lot, especially post-September 11, but do we really ever stop and think about what it means?

Rather than supply a definition right off, consider the following groups of people:

- The 9/11 firefighters, police and EMTs
- The people in the WTC at the time of the collapse
- The passengers onboard United Flight 93 (the 9/11 flight that crashed in Pennsylvania)
- NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt
- The crew of the Space Shuttle *Columbia*

Do you think any, all, or some of them are heroes? Why?

Here's my take on the list. I believe wholeheartedly that the emergency responders at the WTC were all heroes. Even though emergency services is hazardous (and there is always a real possibility of death even in the most mundane-looking situation) those people went forward towards danger, despite the obvious. Certainly they were not fully aware of the damage to the buildings, but few people really believed that the towers could fail. I don't doubt for a minute they would have done what they did even knowing. I'm a volunteer firefighter, that desire to help, to make things even a little bit better is something that we all, volunteer and professional, share. Sometimes it overwhelms our sense of self-preservation but then we rely on our colleagues to watch over us, to keep us from making that big mistake. It's only on occasion that the extra oversight fails us.

I can only call the workers in the WTC at the time of the attack as victims. Their jobs, predominately white collar financial, had no real expectation of danger, other than what NYC offers to it's residents. Nevertheless, this is not *carte blanche* to forget them, their deaths (and lives) have meaning and importance to all of us survivors.

The passengers onboard Flight 93 are a different case. Most of them were victims, unlucky to be on the wrong plane at the wrong time. But some were heroes, in the sense of actively foiling the hijackers plans. People like Todd Beamer, Jeremy Glick, Mark Bingham and others did their best to keep their plane from it's (still unknown) destination. They knew what was happening in NYC and Washington but never let it stop them. It would have been easy to simply give up and let fate have it's way, but they tried. We'll never

know how many lives they saved.

Dale Earnhardt was an aggressive, hard charging NASCAR driver that would stop at nothing to try to win. He died racing, an activity he had spent most of his adult life doing, and doing fairly well. There was some question as to whether his safety gear was all working and he declined to wear the head and neck restraints that most drivers now use, but these measures probably wouldn't have helped. Was he a hero? In my mind, no. Despite the expectation of danger, racing is a strictly volunteer (in the sense that you enter into by your own free will) activity where the goal is to win. Real heroes don't worry about the paycheck or who comes in first.

I saved the most recent for last, on purpose. I've been thinking very hard lately about the US space program and those who take on the challenge of space. I was born in 1957, the year *Sputnik* went up. I can remember John Glenn's 1962 orbital flight (but not Alan Shepard or Yuri Gagarin's earlier flights). I witnessed the Mercury and Gemini flights. I saw, but didn't really understand, the tragic *Apollo 1* fire. We followed the *Apollo 8* and *Apollo 11* flights in detail as part of school. I breathed a sigh of relief when *Apollo 13* came back, secure in my government-supplied ignorance that things weren't too bad for them. Being an astronaut was a big thing, these men (and later women) were to be looked up to and admired. Sure it was dangerous, but we overlooked that most of the time. It took me years to recognize how audacious President Kennedy's announcement that we would reach the moon before 1970 was- "we will go to the Moon, and do the other thing, not because it is easy, but because it is hard".

The Space Shuttle was a different story. It was built in an era of reduced funding and has never been trouble-free. Given the same design problem in 1960, it's likely NASA would have built something different, something less susceptible to heat and o-ring failures. But times had changed. NASA had made getting to the Moon look too easy, perhaps. The *Challenger* exploded in 1986 because the o-rings on the solid fuel boosters couldn't handle the low temperatures at the launchpad. The original (and more expensive) design had one-piece boosters. *Columbia* likely (this may change) have been felled by the same problem that held up the beginning of the program - faulty insulating tiles. The oldest shuttle (though many times overhauled and modernized), it lost tiles while being carried to the launch facility for the first shuttle flight. It a lot of work to overcome that problem. And maybe it wasn't overcome, instead simply pushed down the probability stack.

Spaceflight is risky in a way that few people understand. The astronauts understand, believe it, but yet they do what they do gladly, with an enthusiasm that sets them apart from others. Do they have a death wish? Of course not. They know the risks but they consider the rewards to outweigh them. They strap themselves onto enormous quantities of explosive fuel and blast into space because the *want to*. Their knowledge, skill and training let them go places the rest of us can only dream of. What these astronauts do and learn is freely given back to us; space is a science lab we all get to share.

The crew of *Columbia*, seven people who gave their lives in the search for knowledge and understanding, are the personification of what I was talking about in the preceding paragraph. I just hope that everyone realizes it. More importantly, I hope that the sacrifice these heroes made is not the endcap to our explorations of space. If it is, then their deaths were in vain.

The crew of STS 107:

- Commander Rick D. Husband
- Pilot William C. McCool

- Mission Specialist Kalpana Chawla
- Mission Specialist David M. Brown
- Mission Specialist Laurel B. Clark
- Mission Specialist Michael P. Anderson
- Payload Specialist Ilan Ramon

Requiescat in Pace

3.2.2 The Energizer Bunny (2003-02-05 15:01)

I've mentioned before that we call our Big Bunny *The Energizer Bunny* because of his repeated ability to recover from medical setbacks. True to form, he's handled his latest (lameness in his left rear leg) with aplomb. His leg is still bad but he's managing to do almost all of his normal activities, albeit in a limited way. He can no longer handle vertical leaps so stairs and the couch seem to be out of his reach (so far). It's a relief, compared to what we first thought.

3.2.3 Karate update (2003-02-11 08:23)

On Thursday I will be testing for my Yellow belt, the second level. I will be studying more advanced techniques and be allowed to spar (practice fight) with other students. I also signed up for the Black Belt Club, a 3-year committment. I'm in this for the long term.

3.2.4 More on Big Bunny (2003-02-12 16:51)

I realize I've been writing a lot about him lately, but it's nice to step away from the "me, me, me" and "look, I'm a deep thinker" stuff now and again. Anyway, he continues to mend and gains more use of his back leg by the day. This morning, he managed to climb the stairs to the second floor, investigate and then come back down on his own. He also managed the vertical leap into one of the living room chairs the other evening, further proof of his recovery powers. He doesn't seem to realize how amazing it all is.

3.2.5 A short Valentine's Day message (2003-02-13 16:44)

I don't like to get all mushy and such, but I thought this little [1]post (scroll down for my entry) on the [2] {fray } was worth mentioning here. It's all about *the things we do for love*.

1. <http://www.fray.com/drugs/love/post/index.002.shtml>
2. <http://www.fray.com/>

3.2.6 Numbers and dreams (2003-02-18 13:46)

I had a very strange dream over the weekend that has left me rather puzzled. The only real details I can recall are the numbers 12, 23 and 7 (maybe 07, I seemed to recall being adamant that the 7 was really 07). It could be a date, 12/23/07 or maybe a time, 12:23:07. I think in the dream it had something to do with a car odometer. I was talking recently about my car and how it hit 77777.7 the other day and would likely hit 100000 this year or next, perhaps that's why I thought it should be the 07, but that doesn't make total sense. Then again, it was a dream. A friend suggested I play the numbers in the lottery. I just may do that. I'd rather think of this as a portent of good fortune than the opposite.

3.2.7 Big Honkin' Catchup Entry (2003-02-25 12:08)

I realize I haven't been writing much lately, so I thought I'd just glom a whole bunch of things all into one entry and assuage my guilt a bit.

I need a new note cube at work, my old one is almost out and the binding is falling off.

I've been able to wear my contacts more and more, though the left one still doesn't feel right. Then today, for some reason, my right one isn't working well. That's the close-up lens, so I'm having trouble reading and using the screen.

Not sure if I've mentioned this, but now I'm a karate yellow belt, meaning, among other things, that I can spar (practice fight) with other students. I'm still having trouble deciding if I like it. I certainly enjoy kata (organized routines of basic karate moves), despite the overwhelming frustration I feel at times due to my total lack of physical coordination. But sparring I'm not so sure of. Part of it has to do with my goals for karate, I suppose. I'm looking for poise and flexibility, both of which I am definitely gaining, but no so much the self-defense (though it can't hurt to know). We'll see over time what happens, I guess.

My daughter Alanna flew down to NYC for a couple of days to spend time with her aunt, Marta (I have an aunt Martha, sometimes we get confused at home over who we're speaking of). Her flight home Sunday night was delayed five hours due to bad weather on the east coast. She landed, finally, at 2:35 AM Monday morning. We all slept in Monday (except for my wife who had to work) and I didn't make it into work until about 2:30 PM. I was still a zombie, though, and I was in bed by 8:00 PM. Alanna had a great time, though, her aunt sleeps late and stays up late and Alanna fell right into the pattern. Unfortunately for her, school is still a daytime activity.

Our rabbit, Big Bunny is pretty much fully recovered from whatever it was that was affecting his rear legs. I know because he was in and out of our bedroom Saturday night/Sunday morning (meaning he could climb the stairs at will). I gave in at about 7:30 Sunday morning and got up to feed him his breakfast yogurt. We think he was concerned about Alanna not being home and kept checking on her room. He spent at least part of last night sleeping with her, so I think that pretty much confirms the hypothesis. He has a very strong sense of family, and of course, he's the head (at least in his mind).

The guitar group has morphed, again, into a once-a-month practice session for another nursing home gig like we did last year. The group was moving away from being a good teaching vehicle, and people were beginning to drift back into private lessons (like I did). Part of it was the group dynamic; as we grew larger in numbers it became harder to focus on any one thing. I suggested that we go to the single meeting per month and frame it as a rehearsal, rather than a lesson. It worked nicely last week. We had a new guy show up, not sure if he's going to be a regular, and he's way ahead of me (as are everyone else in the group). I realize this is whining, but just once I'd like there to be someone in the class that I'm better than. It's tough to be the low guy on the totem pole after almost 9 years of lessons, but such is my fate. I could practice more.

Enough of me for now.

3.2.8 The dreams keep coming (2003-02-26 10:12)

I seem to babble a lot about dreams here, but when they get weird, they really get weird. Anyway.

Last night, I dreamt that I came upon a sort of suspension bridge, but instead of being made of iron or

steel, it was made of stone and done in a Greek or Roman style. It was falling to pieces, and I yelled at some people who were on it and in the water (lake or river, can't remember) that it was going to collapse. Not long after that, the statues that were on it came to life and ran off the span. As pieces of stone began to fall, I helped pull some people from the water who had jumped.

Somehow, after the partial collapse, the water area turned into a swimming area, and I found myself the lifeguard and swimming with the rest even though the water seemed particularly dark and unclean looking. When I left the water, I simply grabbed a towel and walked across the street to a house that belonged to my wife's aunt Ruth. It was undergoing massive renovations, and Ruth mentioned that it was taking forever. Everyone was in the backyard and in my attempts to join them by the most direct route, I got caught in a rose bush and ended up taking a longer route. Various members of my wife's family were doing summer backyard barbecue things. My wife greeted me as I came around the bushes. My sister-in-law Marta was folding up blankets or towels. That was pretty much it.

I found this dream odd in that it took place in a setting I didn't recognize, it wasn't my old home or another of the typical settings my dreams often use. As far as bridges go, I recall seeing a mention of the Brooklyn Bridge somewhere recently. My oldest daughter just spent a few days in NYC with her aunt, but that doesn't explain the house or the rest of my wife's family (Ruth lives in Arizona and I've never been there). Why the bridge looked as it did, the statues, and the swimming area are mysteries to me.

Of course, I had chili just before going to bed last night.

3.2.9 One cure for the winter blues (2003-02-28 13:55)

It may be hard to believe, but I do think about things other than my dreams. For instance, today I finally purchased the stainless steel keg system for my homebrewed beer. I've been using a plastic keg for years that required those tiny CO2 cartridges only available in gourmet shops. It worked, but the cartridges were always a pain to obtain, and it seemed like I would manage to run out when the stores were closed. No more. The new system uses all commercial parts and a standard 5 lb. CO2 tank, fillable just about anywhere. I bought it from A.D.M. Amalgamation, Inc. in Rochester, NY. They also sell over the [1]web, so you don't have to drive here to buy. I have a batch of best bitter that will be keggable soon, so it won't be long before I try out my new toy :)

1. <http://www.admainc.com/indexsite.dbm>

3.2.10 History (2003-02-28 21:44)

The history of my father's family has always been somewhat mysterious to all of us. My uncle Ed was the only one that knew most of it and he passed on before I was truly interested. His papers have disappeared. Thus, we were forced to start almost from scratch. Luckily, it's a good time to be searching for Eastern Europeans now that the Ellis Island database is active. Even though we've only been doing this a short time, we've learned a lot.

My grandfather, Czeslaw Mascherowski, sailed from a port in Russia to Liverpool, England in 1912 aboard the Lusitania. That's right, the ship who's sinking would bring the United States into WW I. The spelling of the last name is interesting, it's likely a phonetic attempt at the original Polish sounds, or an attempt by the officials in Liverpool to render the Russian characters (Cyrillic) into English. Although we're not Russian, the area my grandfather lived in was Russian territory in 1912. He spent a least some time in the Russian military, though family legend says not willingly, and he would have had to have been literate in Russian.

He also spoke German, as his mother was German and Polish, of course. I know he could read and write in Polish and his naturalization papers from 1923 indicate that he could write in English by then as well. I doubt he had much formal schooling and his literacy and fluency in four languages is all that more amazing for it.

We still need to get more info about my grandmother, she and two of my aunts didn't travel with him. He worked in America for a few years before bringing them over to join him. Still it was great to see the names suddenly appear after a long period of searching. I called my dad and he was as thrilled as I was. He's the youngest in the family and was born in the U.S. He has no memories to fall back on and his remaining brother and sisters are all in their 80's themselves. It's an incredible feeling to see my family history appear, I can't wait to learn more.

3.3 March

3.3.1 Some aesthetic site improvements (2003-03-02 17:29)

I've cleaned up the graphics again, somewhat. At least some of the problem with the GIF graphics had to do with the HTML code having the wrong sizes, so most browsers were scaling the buttons making the text look even worse. I fixed that and went back to PNG format. It supports 24 bit color so everything looks better. I also implemented a fix for some of the image problems on IE/Win but I need to check to see if it works for the buttons also. At minimum, the logo and subtitle should display correctly (transparent backgrounds).

I've also attempted to fix the strange rendering this journal had in IE/Win (is there a theme here?) by using a custom style intended for embedding. This may also change as time goes by. Such is the world of cross-browser coding.

3.3.2 Major oops (2003-03-03 12:09)

It looks like the changes to support PNG in IE/Win actually cause more problems than they solve. I apologize to all. I will try to fix them this week (I usually do changes on weekends, but this is bad).

Being an idiot is more work than it would seem.

3.3.3 Some progress (2003-03-03 20:00)

I think I may have found one of the problems making things look bad in IE/Win. I also did a little more tweaking on the appearance of the Journal page in IE/Win.

I know that this is an evolutionary process, but I was really disappointed in how things turned out. It's funny in a way, how browsers take a supposedly standard language like HTML or CSS and then interpret them in different ways. A scripting language, like Python, is also interpreted but there's considerably fewer differences between Mac Python and Windows Python than between Mac IE and Windows IE.

Doing anything interesting with web pages requires multiple release phases. There's the first release, using standards, then there are multiple follow-on releases, optimized for the various browsers, including fixes to fixes for platforms that broke something on other platforms. Web design firms have the resources to test all the possible combinations so that the public never sees the iterations behind the scenes. I don't, so my dirty laundry is out there for everyone to see. Thanks for reading.

3.3.4 More tinkering needed (2003-03-05 13:30)

Alas, the more I work on making things look good for IE/Win users, the worse things get. The current configuration seems to cause all of the PNG graphics to disappear, so there is not title or button bar. To add insult to injury, there is no ALT text for any of the graphics. While this is optional, it goes a long way to improve site readability for those using non-graphical browsers and screen readers. I'll try to fix these problems this weekend.

Another vexing issue is how the journal looks in IE/Win. For some reason, it is right-justified instead of the normal left. I suspect it's a CSS conflict but I don't know where the style is being overridden. I'll try to debug that this weekend, also. I made need to use the Linux box for that, since it lets you use command line tools like wget. The View Source option in most browsers doesn't handle the use of the `document.write()` and won't show the HTML being emitted for the journal itself. Maybe I'll have time to write about me.

(2003-03-05 11:24:18)

sounds like a never ending battle you have there on your hands...I just did catch up it has been awhile since I visited...I have missed seeing you about...but I am rarely on anymore...do you usually remember your dreams it is something I rarely do I would say I wouldnt remember 3 a year in a good year...or would that be a bad one...hugs my friend

tommasz1 (2003-03-05 17:09:58) re: Thanks

I haven't been online (in the interactive sense) a lot in recent weeks, either. I prefer to let others enjoy the drama and then hear about it secondhand. I go through periods where my dreams are very detailed and memorable; I'm in one of those periods right now. It's also been a trying time in my waking life, I wonder if there isn't a connection. I don't know if dreams can tell us anything we didn't already know so I found the dream about the numbers to be perplexing. I have to assume that 12 23 07 means something in my life, but I haven't yet figured out what. I have it on my whiteboard at work in the hopes that it's meaning will suddenly strike me. Hugs right back at ya!

3.3.5 Maybe it's improved (2003-03-08 22:11)

So here we go again. I'm trying yet another potential fix for IE/Win users (5.5+) that may (or may not) make the backgrounds on the main logo and the navigation buttons. I've also tried to clean up the journal so that it looks right. For some reason, much of the style info was set to align right, and IE/Mac and Mozilla both ignored that and did the align left. It seems IE/Win may have been the only one that was actually working. I also boosted the font size so it looked more like the rest of the site. If you read this and you're an IE/Win user, let me know what you think. I will check it at work on Monday.

[Updated 3/9/2003]

I've added a bunch of pictures to the [1]Stuff page. Most of them were actually on the site already but some visitors had problems finding them on the *About* page.

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/stuff.html>

3.3.6 Sort of fixed (2003-03-12 17:01)

It seems at least some of the PNG appearance issues were due to a corrupted install of IE/Win on my work PC. It's at least good enough for me to stop tinkering and go back to adding content (such as it is). A good word for how I feel right now is chagrined.

3.3.7 Still tinkering (2003-03-15 20:55)

Yeah, yeah, I know my record on such things isn't all that good, but I can't help myself. Anyway, I've got a page that isn't linked from anything to use for experiments instead of foisting them upon the general readership (all none of them). What really drives this is the problem with IE's install that I had at work caused me to reject some other solutions that might also work as well or better than the one I'm using now to handle the PNG files. And I hate not knowing if they would have worked, so I have to try them.

I have a lot of things I want to get posted, including my book reviews (done in XML just because I can). I conveniently ignore the fact that no one reads this.

(2003-03-18 21:00:23) hey should I be offended
geez all none of us...I will have you know I visit and read on a regular base... so there !

tommasz1 (2003-03-19 08:26:02) Re: hey should I be offended
I stand (actually I'm sitting, but that's not important now) corrected. It should have read: all one of them. Feel free to punish me as you see fit ;)

3.3.8 I don't want to live forever (2003-03-18 14:41)

No, really. I don't. Despite my overwhelming fear of death, I can't imagine going on and on, *ad infinitum*. But that doesn't mean I'm looking to check out anytime soon (my bike crash notwithstanding), either. I do try to take of myself, even though it seems easier to simply do nothing.

A few weeks ago I was rejected from giving blood because my blood pressure was too high. Subsequent checks and a doctor visit proved that it wasn't as high as measured at the blood drive, but it was borderline. This is nothing really new, I've been aware of this issue for years. Unfortunately, it's a type of hypertension that doesn't respond to anything but drugs. I exercise and my weight is good, these don't seem to be a factor. I had a physical today and my doctor decided that to be safe, it would be a good idea to start me on a mild diuretic to see if we can get the pressure down to normal. We'll see in about a month how well it works. I've been warned about the possibility of a potassium deficiency and a tired sort of feeling early on, so it's not without some negative side effects. But those are nothing compared to a stroke (or worse). I'm also starting to take one of those baby aspirins every day, not for any reason other than I'm 45 and it's a good idea with almost no downside.

I was wondering the other day if it's really possible to get to be 90 or so without having any physical problems requiring some sort of active maintenance. I'm guessing it is, though it may entail some risk or diminished quality of life. I'm not eager for either of those, so I'll listen to my doctor.

(2003-03-18 21:22:31) my opinion
I believe a good mental attitude goes a long ways to keeping a healthy body...add some fresh air and exercise and it goes a very long way to having a long happy life...and hey smile spring is almost here

tommasz1 (2003-03-19 08:22:58) Re: my opinion
Attitude does count for something, I realize. Given my usual attitude, I'm doomed, but so are we all. There's no if, only when. Ahhh, Spring. Most of the snow is gone now, and the matted brown remnants of the lawn are now visible. At least the melt wasn't too fast, only ice-dammed creeks are in danger of overflow. I haven't seen any crocuses yet;

I hope the heavy snow cover hasn't hurt them.

3.3.9 On the war in Iraq (2003-03-20 13:37)

I have to be honest, I'm not fully comfortable with the US actions in Iraq. It's not like the first Gulf War, when it was clear what was happening and clear what needed to be done. Saddam, obviously, is a truly evil and dangerous man and removing him is the right thing to do. But I'm very uncomfortable with the notion that Saddam is somehow behind Al Qaida and terrorist attacks in the US. No one, in my estimation, has shown that anyone other than Osama bin Laden is running (and financing) their operations. Considering his nationality, it's much more likely that money comes from Saudi Arabia (our so-called ally) than from Iraq.

But I'm a realist, it was never possible to change this outcome. Whatever happens from now on, from further terrorist attacks to a general feeling of dislike towards America and Americans, will be the consequence of what's happened in the last few months. I want to believe that nothing bad will happen, that no revenge will be taken. I want to believe. But I can't. We've stepped on too many toes to get our way, and we'll be treated like every other bully: treated with respect to our faces but spit upon when our backs are turned.

It's funny how things have turned out. I was born during the height of the Cold War. I saw the beginnings of the Vietnam conflict and how things turned out there. We've managed to seem like the good guys even when we've made mistakes. Not any more. And that's a shame.

Be that as it may. There are thousands of young men and women who are now in harm's way. Let's hope that this war is over quickly, for their sakes and everyone else's.

3.3.10 No site updates for a while (2003-03-25 10:05)

My beloved Power Mac G3 has sick video and she's going to the shop to be checked out. Unfortunately, video is on-board, so it's not a simple card swap fix and we'll see what's up. I think if worse comes to worse, I can plug in a PCI video card, but I'm not really sure. That's usually the setup for multiple monitors, so I'm not sure what'll happen if the main video is dead. Over the weekend I got a good deal on a 20" Apple ColorSync monitor, under the mistaken assumption that it was the monitor and I can't wait to use it. A disappointing set of events, but that's nothing new.

3.3.11 A cold gray Sunday (2003-03-30 12:07)

After some fine warm weather, more appropriate temperatures have returned. There's even been some snow this morning, but nothing accumulating. It's funny how a day or two of warm weather can make you think winter is over.

3.4 April

3.4.1 On writers of murder stories (2003-04-01 16:31)

I just finished a short crime story about a woman who kills her lovers when she feels they have wronged her. The author is a woman who lives with her husband in the American Southwest. That causes me to wonder

what being married to a writer of murder stories, particularly one like that. You have to believe they look at every situation for their murderous potential.

They tell writers to "write what you know" but clearly there are genres where such a thing is (I hope) not necessary (SciFi being the first to come to mind). But even when the subject precludes actual involvement the author is thinking about it.

So therein lies the cause of my concern. I'm glad I'm not married to someone who might be planning my demise, no matter how hypothetical.

3.4.2 Birthday Girl (2003-04-04 10:38)

My youngest daughter, Liz, is going to be 12 years-old tomorrow! If you see her, don't forget to wish her a Happy Birthday!

3.4.3 Ice storms are more than ice (2003-04-09 11:31)

The Rochester NY area was hit by an ice storm last Thursday and Friday. It wreaked havoc throughout the region, and the after effects linger even today. It was 12 years and 1 month (to the day) after the "storm of the century" in 1991, back when we were involved in the first Gulf War. Luckily, this one was somewhat milder than the '91 storm, with less ice and less duration, so the damage was not as extensive in most areas. But if you were affected, it doesn't much matter where else the damage has occurred. Two friends of mine have had no power since last Thursday, both of them have had to abandon their homes for other accommodations. The majority of the county should have power by tomorrow, but some may have to wait until the weekend.

We had to cancel the party for my daughter Liz on Saturday because our karate dojo (school) where the party would be closed due to power problems. There were a bunch of kids sleeping over Friday night and I spent part of Saturday morning calling their parents and the parents of the other kids coming to the party to tell them that everything was postponed until a future date (to be determined). Liz was majorly disappointed, but there's little that can be done in the face of Mother Nature. I did take everyone who was left (there were two girls staying over because they had no power at home) out to dinner Saturday night, though.

I spent Friday and Saturday doing stand-by shifts at the firehouse, very much unlike '91 when I spent days there. I've got a lot more responsibilities now, not to mention I'm 12 years older, but the call volume was much lower, anyway. I'm still sore from lugging pumps and generators through yards.

Lots of interesting things as a result of the storm. A common farewell is "stay warm." Utility trucks from all over the Northeast. Localized areas of downed trees; travel a half-mile and everything is different. Busy intersections with no traffic lights. Some cars stop like it's a four-way stop, others barely stop at all. Surprisingly few accidents, though. Many of the damaged trees looked otherwise healthy, indicating they broke under the heavy weight of ice. We lost a limb on our tree in the front yard, it had handled the '91 storm just fine and this break was a classic "green stick", the wood was healthy and not rotted. Diner and motel parking lots full of utility trucks. The sound of generators running. People dying, overcome by carbon monoxide because they were running generators indoors despite being told not to (fear of them being stolen, I've heard). The local minor league baseball team canceling their home opener due to weather (they've only played one game so far) and pushing their first game here to next week. The longest list of school and business closing that I can ever recall hearing. Nice old lady giving the fire department \$20 every time we went to her house to

pump her basement (we've gone 4 times so far). Sending out our fund drive appeal letter just in time for the storm to make it clear in resident's minds what the fire department does for them.

3.4.4 Strange new spam technique? (2003-04-11 10:57)

I know I'm paranoid, but nevertheless I always take unsolicited IM's to be spam unless the senders let me know otherwise. Yesterday, out of the blue, I was hit by unsolicited messages from two separate folks on Yahoo!, with similar content. Both of them have no information in their profiles (the nicest feature of Yahoo! IMHO). This morning, they both hit me again, within seconds of each other. In case you get them the names are [1]black_hill_1987 and [2]nicole_maclachlan2002.

1. http://profiles.yahoo.com/black_hill_1987/
2. http://profiles.yahoo.com/nicole_maclachlan2002

3.4.5 Big Bunny's "Birthday" AKA Gotcha Day (2003-04-13 00:40)

On this day, 10 years ago, Big Bunny became part of our family. We don't know when he was born, so we use this day instead. Sometimes we use "Gotcha Day" because that we tell him "we gotcha."

Check out the [1]Stuff page for some pictures of the old man.

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/stuff.html>

(2003-04-16 04:31:08) All caught up

I love that picture of big bunny you should fine some contest to send it to I am sure it would be a winner...the pillow one that is...you got a lot worse weather then we did and our's has been bad enough surely spring is on it's way...take care until next time

tommasz1 (2003-04-16 15:06:45) re: Thanks

He's a cutie, isn't he? LOL I've heard rumors of Spring, but so far the evidence isn't available.

3.4.6 One man's trip to Cuba and more (2003-04-16 14:07)

Authors note: Yes, this is something that might normally appear in the [1]weblog, but I'm in a writing sort of mood, so here it is.

Paul English [2]visited Cuba recently and came away with a decidedly anti-Castro feeling that he did not have prior to going. Reading about his trip and how it influenced his thinking got me thinking about the way the United States views tyrants and dictators, particularly in light of the Iraq operation.

You don't need to be a rocket scientist to realize there's anything but a consistent approach. We ignored what was going on in Europe and Japan as long as we could, despite ample reason not to. After all, the Battle of Britain was being fought in 1940, essentially 2 years before we started fighting. Poland was overrun in 1939. Then again, perhaps ignore is a tad strong, after all, we were happy to be building ships and arms for England, but that's different (that's business). Obviously, when we did get involved, we did so in a big way, and the world benefited. And it changed the dynamics of how the world worked, a change that is still in progress 60 years later.

After the war, the big fear in the US was Communism; nothing else provoked as much concern in the 50's. This fear, which continued into the 60's and beyond, had an alarming tendency to cause us to restrict our vision, to put the blinders on, so to speak. If you were a dictator looking for support for your regime, the easiest way to do it was to state loudly and publicly you were against Communism. That was all it took to open the spigot of foreign aid and shut down any possible questions about exactly what happened to all those dissidents.

But something funny happened in the early 1970's that changed things around, at least a little. That funny thing was the Oil Crisis of 1973. It was abruptly brought to our collective attention that we were a nation dependent on oil imports. Very dependent. And, typical of the thinking of large groups, the root cause was ignored for the most part (we use too much oil) in place of the easier to swallow idea of maintaining the supply.

This led to long, twisted, and ever-changing set of relationships that we still are in the midst of. We supported the Shah of Iran as long as we could. Saddam Hussein was a frequent traveler to this country. Our relationship with Israel complicated things (and still does), but money talks, loudly and clearly. When wars broke out, you can be sure both sides had weapons made in the USA. Maintaining the status quo was expensive, but worth it.

Saddam had a good thing going until he got greedy and tried to take over Kuwait. That was A Bad Thing because it upset the careful balance we had been working on all these years. He might have raised prices or restricted the supply (which would also raise prices). And so we spanked him for it. Like all bullies, once he realized that there was someone on the playground who couldn't be cowed, he ran home.

There are a lot of reasons why we didn't follow him. The shifting winds of public opinion in the US seems to have played a major role, though. It was thought an invasion of Iraq would be a long affair resulting in more US casualties than the public would tolerate, so Bush halted the military's advance. This wasn't popular with the generals, but they obeyed. Saddam was beaten back, but not eliminated.

Fast-forward a decade or so. The United States has been directly attacked by an Islamic terrorist organization funded by a wealthy Saudi who is based in Afghanistan (guess how he might have become so rich). In retaliation, we invade Afghanistan and take down the Islamic fundamentalist government but are unable to find the rich Saudi or the terrorist organization he supported. In response, Bush's son, who is now also president, declares that his father's adversary Saddam has been giving aid to this terrorist organization and must be dealt with.

Notice the subtle turning away from retribution for the WTC attack. Not completely, of course, but it's certainly not the primary focus. This is precisely where I get angry. I do not think the US government is being straight with it's own people. I have no issue with the removal of Saddam, it's something we should have done the first time, and it's a shame and a sin we gave him all that time to wreak havoc upon the Kurds and Iraqi people. What's missing is the clear, unambiguous link between Saddam and al-Quaida. Lacking that, the justification (as stated) for the invasion is pretty shaky. What's even more annoying is that everyone knows it, and yet it changes nothing. There's nothing wrong with economic and business concerns driving policy. It may not be the greatest of reasons, but the issue I have has nothing to do with that and everything to do with honesty.

To be fair, the Russians, Germans and French all probably have economic reasons behind their reluctance to join the coalition. And they were no more forthcoming about them than we were. Lies and omissions seem to be standard diplomatic tools nowadays. Our world is a sadder place because of that.

Now, about Castro (sorry it took so long to get here). As far as I can tell, our approach to him over the decades has been all over the place. First of all, he's a Communist in the Lenin/Stalin absolute dictator mold (which is not really socialistic but that's not important for this discussion). For that reason alone, it's hard to imagine how we've not done anything more proactive in Cuba other than maintain a naval base there. In the early days, he was heavily supported by the USSR, which is what precipitated the Cuban Missile Crisis. But all we ever did was try to organize a bunch of deportees into some kind of rag tag invasion force that failed miserably in reclaiming the island (this was the so-called Bay of Pigs invasion). Perhaps it was our fear of angering the Soviets that kept us from doing anything. Though, if it was, then we should have taken the fall of Communism in Europe in the early 1990's as our cue to remove Castro and free Cuba. But, we didn't. Sometimes I wonder if we're just waiting for Castro to die. This method would have worked fine had he done so, but it's 2003 and he's still around.

So I can't tell for sure why Cuba still exists as it does. Paul English's experiences show a country in sad shape, a mere shadow of it's former self. It's not getting better nor will it. Our policy of careful neglect and embargo has made sure no improvement is in sight. When Castro finally does die, I won't blame the Cuban people from pointing their fingers at us for not helping them when they were in the most need. One wonders what our response to that will be.

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>
2. <http://paulenglish.com/cuba/>

3.4.7 That voice inside (2003-04-18 15:09)

I don't know about others, but I have this voice inside of me. I call it The Voice, as a matter of fact. It's been with me all my life, or at least that I can remember. And no, it's not some sort of psychotic thing, it's just how I talk to myself.

Perhaps it was because I was an only child and spent a lot of time by myself. But in any case, I've always been able to talk to myself without a problem. I do it a lot, as it turns out. Sometimes I don't even realize I'm doing it, which can be embarrassing at times when I suddenly realize I'm not alone. That often happens in the bathrooms at work and I'll be thinking out loud when it dawns on me on that I'm not alone. Then I try to make my exit before anyone can match the face to the voice. Having a reputation at work for being insane is not a good career booster.

But there are times when The Voice isn't really me talking to myself, it's something else entirely. More like a combination of my father, me, and other authority figures I've known over the years because the The Voice is always correcting me. I'm very tough on myself and The Voice is part of that. I feel it's part of my success, such as it is, and I can't imagine not being this way. It's been difficult for me as a father to not be that way with my daughters and I know I've stepped over the line more times than not. I've done it with my wife, as well. Not good, and I have to work to not do it, which is in itself a contradiction. But anyway.

This really came to mind last night in Karate class. I have to keep reminding myself to stand straight, hold the right foot positions, keep my guard up, watch my opponents move, etc. Or perhaps I should say The Voice does. Lately, it's been a full time job. I know it's that "awkward stage" but it's still exasperating to be such a newbie.

It's a little different, usually, when I'm playing guitar. I'm passed the clueless newbie stage, but playing Jazz guitar is one of those never ending journeys where you're always as far from the beginning as you are from the destination. Patience, patience is the virtue I lack.

3.4.8 Happy Easter! (2003-04-20 12:25)

I hope you have a great Easter and an enjoyable day.

3.4.9 Non-stereotypical (2003-04-22 16:48)

I realize that I'm not a stereotypical LiveJournal user in that I'm male, middleaged (as you well know), not depressed and definitely not mad at my parents. I use it because I'm too lazy and cheap to have my own server. So there.

My personal health is another non-stereotypical situation. I'm not overweight, I exercise regularly, I don't put salt on my food, yet my blood pressure is too high. The mild diuretic I'm on isn't doing much, if anything, and now I've also been put on an ACE Inhibitor to see if it will help. At least this time they were free as my doctor had them as samples in his office. Three more weeks to see if anything improves.

shannon27 (2003-04-24 08:35:10)

Well, I hope something improves then. :-) Hi! I was just passing through, and I felt a bit dirty reading your thoughts and not letting you know! I also feel like not the typical LiveJournaler, I am not angsty, or grudge-ridden. I love my parents and my current status. Life is good.. doesn't mean I can't talk about it :-) Thanks for representing us stable-minded people. :-) And have a GREAT day!!

tommasz1 (2003-04-25 07:03:23)

First of all, thanks for stopping by, I don't get a lot a traffic or comments and I enjoy them both. I was reacting to comments I've seen in other places about LiveJournalers and I felt some need to make sure I wasn't lumped in with the rest. Sheer vanity on my part, obviously I've never considered myself a Poster Boy for Stability, but hey! As long as I don't have to resign as Poster Boy for Dull ;)

shannon27 (2003-04-25 07:22:52)

Heh, well, you are obviously not like all LJ users. And forgive me for being curious! I checked out your very cool website., You are a very handsome man (gorgeous eyes!) and your family is beautiful!! Good for you ;-) Anyway, I am glad you appreciate the barge in, and I added you to my friends list, I hope you don't mind!

tommasz1 (2003-04-25 19:27:57) re: Thanks
Geez, now I'm obligated to add you ;)

3.4.10 Things I have on my whiteboard (1 of a series) (2003-04-22 17:06)

- A diagram of my view on how to get processes and tools accepted in an organization
- The Japanese numbers from 1 to 10

To be continued...

3.4.11 Why my day started poorly (2003-04-28 12:52)

Bad dream. Mary Ann and I, along with my (deceased) Uncle Joe and Aunt Martha, were in some department store/mall. We were shopping, everything was seemingly normal. Suddenly he made a strange sound and fell to the ground. When I looked down, there wasn't a person but a broken pen, leaking ink onto the floor. I awoke in tears.

3.5 May

3.5.1 Strange days indeed (2003-05-03 09:45)

At work (still The Big Company) we now have "Safe Zones" in case of nuclear or chemical attack. Basically, they're rooms without windows and no exterior walls. We also get potassium iodide pills, for our thyroid. This will save us in case of terrorist attack. Or not. The rooms are too small to hold a lot of people except when they stand up so I'll take my chances on my own, thanks.

During the recent ice storm, the ring of warning sirens for the nearby nuclear power plant failed to operate. Apparently the power company, of all people, failed to account for power outages. Never been safer, yep.

3.5.2 Here's something amazing (2003-05-04 20:34)

It's been one of those days (okay, so that's not amazing, sue me).

3.5.3 Success is relative (2003-05-09 16:17)

So is failure. The key is knowing which is which. And then measuring accordingly.

3.5.4 Happy Mother's Day! (2003-05-11 10:48)

It's a good day to thank your mom for all she's done for you, especially if you neglect to do so the rest of the year. I have the privilege to have a mom, a step-mom, and a god mother to remember this day. My mom has been gone since September of 1971, but I will always have her in my heart.

3.5.5 The search for something (2003-05-14 13:22)

I'd be lying if I said I've been feeling well lately. Not in the physical sense, though I was a bit under the weather last week, but in the spiritual/emotional sense. Let me explain.

Part of it is undoubtedly my upcoming birthday. I'm going to be 46 years old and I still haven't begun doing something I consider even remotely worthwhile. I know this sounds selfish and that I should be happy as a provider with a job that pays enough to keep my family solvent. But I can't help feeling this way, despite knowing I shouldn't. I want to be better than I am, plain and simple. I've been pushing myself hard since as long as I can remember, and it just seems that in the last 10 years the rewards from my efforts have continued to diminish. Oh, I make more money than I would have believed 10 years ago, but I enjoy it less. I used to be happy to tell people what I did for a living, now I usually dismiss it as "too difficult to describe in a single sentence." Was I kidding myself that job satisfaction would come with time? So far, the answer is "yes."

I'm not sure what the other part is. I need more time to reflect, I think. If I don't do so, it will continue to bother me, and that in itself will bother me. Stay tuned (assuming you've read this far) for more exciting revelations.

3.5.6 Disappointing (2003-05-17 13:33)

This is a funny thing to have to say, but nevertheless it has to be said. I usually go the karate class on Fridays, which means I come direct from work and change at the dojo. The past three weeks, I've noticed that my pocket change is missing when I get dressed to leave. The first two times, I assumed it had simply fallen out of my pants pocket, and nothing more. But since it had happened twice, I was beginning to wonder if perhaps something else was going on.

Yesterday, I made sure I had change when I took my pants off and then carefully folded them and placed them at the bottom of my gym bag and zipped it up all the way. When I went upstairs at the end to change, I noticed my bag was open and my pants pulled out. Needless to say, all my change was gone, but not my watch and ring. I immediately went down and reported it to the senseis (teachers). Turns out they had a pretty good idea who it was, and confronted him (I didn't join them, it seemed wrong). He denied it, of course, but he has a history of this (he's a teenager) and the head sensei will speak to him. I didn't get my money back, obviously (not that I need it, it's the principle).

Like I said, disappointing. I'll have to keep my stuff with me and assume my fellow students are crooks.

Tomorrow I turn 46. Yay me.

3.5.7 More things on my white board (2003-05-19 11:18)

[Part 2 of a continuing series]

- The question: "What are you doing and why are you doing it?"
- My office version, currently 2.2c "Clock"
- A list of tasks to perform on my server, only 1 of 6 has been completed

3.5.8 More things I think about (that you probably don't) (2003-05-20 16:20)

Sometimes my thoughts go all over the place. I was listening to [1]Black 47's [2]Mychal, which is about Fr. Mychal Judge, the FDNY chaplain who was killed in the September 11 attacks on the WTC. I can't really describe how I feel about that particular man's death. It strikes hard at my agnosticism, yet in a strange way supports it. If there really is a God, why take such a man, especially as he was administering the Last Rites to a fallen firefighter? But there are never answers to Why? questions, especially those concerning God's motives.

The lyrics to Mychal are located [3]here, on a site dedicated to the [4]canonization (making of a saint in the Catholic church) of Fr. Judge. But I would like to share a verse from it that set my mind off in another direction:

*I love the company of friends
The fire and music dancin' in their eyes
But I attained my heart's desire
When I rode beside the men who fight the fires*

We used to be called firemen. But some began to chafe at that, feeling (rightly) that it was no longer a male-only field and the term was sexist and limiting. Others felt it was a name for those who stoked the coal fires on steam locomotives and not for those who battled against fire. We became firefighters, a name that's both evocative of the struggle against the enemy and a reminder of the danger each of us willing faces. That was never so clear as it was the morning of the 11th of September, 2001.

1. <http://www.black47.com/>
2. <http://www.black47.com/music/Black%2047%20-%20Mychal.MP3>
3. <http://saintmychal.com/memory006.htm#GOLDTHING>
4. <http://saintmychal.com/>

3.5.9 Memorial Day Weekend (2003-05-25 09:59)

As usual, it's been a pretty busy weekend, but for once not spent driving to softball games. So far this weekend I've:

- Fixed the string trimmer
- Installed new Grover Rotomatic tuners on my old Les Paul copy guitar
- Bought the materials to make a wheat beer on Monday
- Saw *The Matrix Reloaded*
- Cleaned up my work laptop in preparation for getting a new one
- Installed new toilet seats in both bathrooms (don't ask)

And it's only Sunday.

3.5.10 Memorial Day (2003-05-26 10:11)

It's Memorial Day here in the US, the one day a year we're supposed to pause and remember those who have fought and died for our freedom.

Sadly, the need for such a day shall never end, as men and women continue to lose their lives in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

3.6 June

3.6.1 The Home Game (2003-06-01 18:30)

For those of you playing the home version of my life, here's what's been going on.

I just received my Orange belt in Karate Friday night. I was the only adult testing, all the others were kids, so I looked even more out of place than usual. But I managed, even though I was more nervous than I normally am. And really, there's no reason to be, because with the exception of the sensei's, there's no one else who has any idea whether you're doing the stuff right or not. But I am what I am. I will have to overcome that if I ever want to be a Black Belt.

My dojo has started a Kendo club (because we don't have a master to teach us at this point) and I've joined it. Kendo is probably best defined as Japanese fencing, given it's structure, but differs significantly from the sport that you are probably familiar with from watching on television. It's especially good for developing speed, which always comes in handy, particularly in sparring. You also must wear armor, called bogu, which is rather expensive. Most of us are sharing a spare set that one of the instructors own until we purchase our own (\$300 and up). The swords used are called shinai, and are made of strips of bamboo bound together. It has no edge and cannot cut but still hurts when you get hit, hence the armor. It is also possible to do Kendo with solid wooden swords as well as with edged weapons, but that's in the future. I might have some pictures to post some day, I'll let you know.

That's enough for now.

3.6.2 He keeps going and going... (2003-06-03 10:09)

Oh, poor Big Bunny. He's got another abscessed tooth and he's at the vet right now getting it worked on. He stopped eating suddenly Sunday night, and the vet saw him yesterday. Rabbits can't go very long without eating or drinking, so you can't procrastinate when you notice the symptoms. He'd lost some weight and was dehydrated, but he's in good hands. We get to pick him up this afternoon, if everything goes well.

[Update] Poor bun, besides the abscess, he also had overgrown teeth that were cutting into the inside of his cheek. And, once again, he woke up during the operation. He's still the World's Toughest Bunny, I guess. We get to pick him up after 6:00 PM, and have to keep giving him antibiotics and soft foods (as usual) while he recovers at home.

I sometimes hesitate to tell people I know that I care so much about a pet, but I do. He's given us a lot of love and been much more than "just a rabbit" and he really doesn't ask for much. He's more than earned the right to a comfortable life.

3.6.3 Another {fray} story (2003-06-03 17:21)

Today I posted yet another story on the [1] {fray }, this one about [2]scars. It's a follow up to a [3]great story by [4]Derek Powazek. Mine is about an incident in my college days (scene of many a rousing adventure). Enjoy.

1. <http://www.fray.com/>
2. <http://www.fray.com/drugs/scar/post/index.004.shtml>
3. <http://fray.com/drugs/scar/>
4. <http://www.powazek.com/>

3.6.4 A memory (2003-06-04 11:01)

I was listening to my usual morning drivetime show today when they got onto an extended riff on summer camps. Things have changed since most adults have gone to camp, of course, but it got me to remembering my own experiences.

I went to Camp St. Benedict, which was located in Tom's River, NJ (it's a subdivision now, if I read the maps correctly). This was a Catholic camp and I went in the late 60's (think Jesus medallions and peace signs). But it had all the camp stuff: swimming, horseback riding, riflery, archery, arts & crafts, boating,

plus Mass.

I went twice, each time for two weeks. One year, one of my counselors was a guy named Tom Smith. Tom was cool, and it being the 60s, was into Tolkien. He used to read from *The Hobbit* in the dark with just a flashlight. It made a great story even more dramatic, he really made Bilbo come alive for us.

I was smiling as I pulled into the parking lot.

3.6.5 You don't wanna know (2003-06-09 10:57)

I am having one of those days when it would have been better to have been suffering from terminal dysentery than to have come to work.

3.6.6 Father's Day 2003 (2003-06-15 11:14)

I suppose I could wax even more eloquently about Father's Day than Mother's Day because not only do I have one, I am one. But I won't, my prerogative, you know. My day will be spent about the same as most Sundays: softball game, laundry, other chores, and pizza for dinner. And of course I'll be calling my dad. Or perhaps I should say the girls will be calling their grandfather. Which is all fine by me.

3.6.7 Going home (2003-06-16 09:14)

If you've been reading my journal for a while you'll remember that I've mentioned that many of my dreams are set in the village where I grew up. Last night was no exception. I actually dreamed that I was standing on Plainfield Ave. (between Tulip Ave. and Magnolia Ave.) explaining to someone that I was always dreaming about being here even though I hadn't lived there in over 25 years. When I woke up, I realized that it was time to do something, that my dreams were telling me something and it was time to listen.

Here's my plan. Mary Ann and the girls will be spending most of the Summer at Girl Scout camp, including some weekends, so they won't miss me if I'm away a couple of days. My intention is to leave here Thursday after my block of "can't miss" meetings and drive down to Long Island. I will spend Friday visiting my mother's grave site at the Long Island National Cemetery (sometimes mistakenly referred to as Pinelawn) in Farmingdale and then revisiting the places of my dreams. Perhaps there is something there I need to see, maybe the significance of "12 23 07" will be made apparent to me, I don't know. I do know I'll drive back on Saturday.

I don't intend to visit any of my family, in fact, I'm not going to tell anyone but Mary Ann where I'm going. It's not that I don't want to see them, it's that this trip I have to make alone. I won't be looking to contact any old friends, either. That's something for another time.

I will take my digital camera and photograph as much as I can of the places I wish to remember. I'm envisioning sort of a illustrated journal, but we'll see. No matter what the form, it will be posted here on my site. I'll post more details when I know them.

3.6.8 Long day's journey into night (2003-06-21 18:07)

I was going to write about something deep and meaningful, but that just isn't going to happen. Oh well.

Instead, I'll just babble about some trivial hoo ha. I changed the [1]maszerowski.net look (again, yada yada) and removed the page resize which I now realize is just plain rude. I've been thinking of doing a major site overhaul, going to a strict XHTML/CSS W3C-compliant layout, but maybe I won't. Given that I might have more free time this summer, I'm not sure how I want to spend it. I have a bunch of ideas, besides My Trip Home. First on the list is to get broadband and wire the house network. I already have the hub/router, which I got on sale, next is the wires and the software install/setup. I'm waiting for the girls to head out for Girl Scout camp before I do it because of the potential for disruption.

So, about the Martial Arts. I'm really enjoying it lately, not sure why. I've noticed a definite improvement in my overall musculature, even though I still can't do a regular pushup. That will come, in time. It's sort of my general fitness goal, if I can be said to have one. The Kendo club is going well, too. I splurged on some bogu (Kendo armor) from a company in Korea. It's not cheap, but I'm enjoying it so much I decided to go for it. It's certainly something I can sell if I decide that it's not for me. Kendo does a lot for your speed and reaction times, and I've noticed a definite improvement in my Karate sparring. I just need to work more on my footwork and my flexibility in the hips, an area I seem to be particularly stiff in.

I've also become very aware of how tight I am across the shoulders and into the neck. Some of that is no doubt due to the accident and recovery, but has become my "center of tension", for lack of a better term. When I get tense, it centers itself there. I've considered massage therapy, although it will be temporary at best. The real answer is a combination of that and relaxation. If you know me, you know how difficult a task that will be. But there's always hope.

I think that's enough about me. I get tired of talking about me, but that's the nature of journalling. I promise more tech talk in the future.

1. <http://www.maszerowski.net/>

3.6.9 The cost of bits (2003-06-21 19:56)

(I told you I was going to get back to the tech talk)

Have you ever thought about the price of a bit of information flowing through the network? You probably haven't, and you're not alone. Most people have a fixed-price monthly plan that has no specific limit on usage (at least until they exceed a certain limit, which I won't get into here), which at \$20-40 (US) for a modem or broadband link means a single bit doesn't cost very much at all. But you're not really paying per bit, anyway.

So what are you paying for? Some of what you pay goes for infrastructure: equipment replacement and maintenance, electricity, your ISP's connection to the Internet, etc. Essentially, it's anything you have to have to offer Internet service to begin with. Some of your money is for insurance. But not the kind you're used to. Within any given population of customers, there's always going to be some who have problems. Your ISP has to maintain a staff of folks dedicated to helping those problem customers. Every customer contributes to their cost, even if only a small number ever need them. Anything left over is profit. So, in a way, your ISP is motivated to give you good service because it costs them when things go poorly for you.

You may have noticed that in some areas you can get service for much less than the prices I mentioned above. How is this possible? A number of ways, actually. One obvious way is to cut down on services. You may not have a lot of modems to connect to, meaning you get more busy signals when calling. Sure it's annoying, but it's cheap. Or the wait on the help line is really long. So long, you often hang up before you get to talk to anyone. You'll either fix it yourself or call again. Either way, it costs your ISP (and subsequently

you) less.

One idea to cut costs doesn't seem to be as popular as before. It was cheap or free access in exchange for unsolicited ads, sent to you at your ISP's discretion. I think you haven't heard much about them for the obvious reason that the annoyance factor outweighed the price advantage. Unlike TV, ads on the net have been poorly received. You can ignore commercials on TV, but they seem harder to overlook when they're on your computer's screen.

It seems so old-fashioned now, but I remember when connections were billed a different way. I had a Compuserve account that was billed by the minute. It didn't include Internet access, it was all Compuserve content, which was the norm for the time. It really discouraged anyone from spending too much time online. I would connect, grab what I needed, and get off. It was a bad idea to walk away during a download, because you paid whether you were doing anything or not. Present day services like AOL and MSN have taken the Compuserve model a step further, but offering access to the Internet along with their own content. But they really, really, want you to stay within their boundaries. Both of them are chock-full of ads, too. Less intrusive, but still everywhere.

AOL and MSN have a lot of subscribers, which is part of their business model. Unlike more localized ISPs, they have access to a nation-wide pool of users, but on average, their users have different patterns of use. At any given time, far more of their users are inactive than for local ISPs. They pay anyway, so their cash just goes into the pot. AOL offers a lot of free access, in the beginning, specifically to get users hooked into a monthly payment schedule. I think MSN does too, but they can operate on different model because Microsoft is willing to lose money in exchange for marketshare. But their longterm plan has to be similar to AOL's.

And that's enough about that.

But don't you wonder why the phone company charges by the minute?

3.6.10 What I learned in a single weekend (2003-06-23 13:46)

Here's some things I learned this weekend (in no particular order):

- That people in marginalized groups will act amongst themselves the same way as those who discriminate against them
- That there is more to people than you can possibly determine from random comments in a online forum
- That it's obvious that I need a change in career direction sooner rather than later
- And that what goes on beneath the surface is what really matters

3.6.11 A chilling online community story (2003-06-25 10:59)

While this seems like a weblog kind of thing, it's worth a little more detail so here it is in the journal. [1]Wired magazine has an [2]article on a strange and disturbing incident that occurred in the online multi-player game [3]Shadowbane. I don't normally refer to games when I talk about online communities, but Shadowbane certainly qualifies. The game was hacked, but it wasn't simply defaced. The very nature and rules of the game were altered, allowing a small group of attackers to dominate the game, to become "gods", as it were.

Please take some time and read the article and pay close attention to the quotes. They will give a very good feel for how the players think and why it is truly a community.

1. <http://www.wired.com/>
2. <http://www.wired.com/news/games/0,2101,59034,00.html>
3. <http://www.shadowbane.com/>

3.6.12 Inexplicable (2003-06-27 10:47)

I'm supposed to be a man of science, yet I know that there are things that defy easy explanation. Case in point. Last night, at the end of Kendo, we were meditating (part of the routine at the start and the end of each class). As we were doing so, the dojo CD player started playing a CD, on it's own. I thought at first the music was from *Princess Mononoke*, but it turned out to be Charlotte Church. Nevertheless, it was rather apropos.

Some Japanese martial arts emphasize *ki*, their word for what the Chinese call *chi*, the universal life force. Ki can be accessed if you are the right frame of mind and body. So perhaps we were using ki, or perhaps it was a coincidence. You be the judge. I was there, yet I can't decide one way or the other.

budgie_ (2003-07-10 16:24:26)

What do you do for a living??

tommasz1 (2003-07-11 05:28:42)

Reading from my business card "Manager, Technology Platforms". But in reality (since business cards are another world, not necessarily related to our own), I'm really a computer geek, with a background in both hardware and software. But I have many human-like characteristics ;)

budgie_ (2003-07-11 05:54:40) Re:

Ah. I was just curious to know if it was biology/chemistry related. :D

3.7 July

3.7.1 More Thursday strangeness (2003-07-01 11:18)

I forgot to mention in the entry about the Kendo event that the drive home from work was rather eventful as well. As I passed the North Pond park in Webster, there was an incredible number of emergency vehicles parked around it. It was clear that something bad had happened, even though there was no radio traffic. It turned out to be a drowning, a man, who couldn't swim, had gone into the water to rescue his nephew, who also could not swim. The nephew was rescued, the uncle went under. Given how shallow the water is, it's been somewhat controversial. There were lifeguards on duty but they didn't see him or didn't notice he was in distress. Expect lawsuits.

Then, further down the road, there was a Saab on fire. No, really. Dark brown smoke, and flames coming from the engine compartment. Right under the Browncroft Blvd. exit sign. Luckily, everyone had gotten out. I called 911 to confirm someone was dispatched (they had already sent the City and Brighton) and to tell them it was a real fire, not a broken radiator hose. There's still some debris in the road there.

3.7.2 Final Anniversary (2003-07-02 08:26)

Today marks the third, and I've decided, final anniversary of my motorcycle accident. It's been getting less and less of an issue for me over the years and I've decided to stop paying any sort of attention to the date. So this is it.

In case you're wondering about this, you can find the story over on the [1]Writings page. I expect to be doing some minor rewrites to the story, but the overall facts and timeline won't change, obviously.

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/writings.html>

3.7.3 Why I do this (2003-07-05 11:19)

Why? Because every now and then, someone reads it.

3.7.4 Things are tough all over (2003-07-07 13:38)

I don't like to whine and complain, so I won't. But boy, do I want to.

3.7.5 Fun in the car (2003-07-08 11:04)

When I'm in the car, I like to look at other drivers, especially at traffic lights. I've been doing it for years. There's nothing more fun than to catch them talking or singing (and sometimes dancing) to themselves. Usually, if you can stare at them long enough, they eventually become aware that someone is watching them. When that happens, I just smile and wave, to let them know I enjoyed the show. That often brings an embarrassed smile with only an occasional glare.

But nowadays you can't always assume that the person is talking to themselves, they could just as easily be talking on a hands-free cell phone. Those folks never seem to realize you're looking at them, probably because they don't think what they're doing is in any embarrassing. But it is. Many people become extremely animated when engaged in phone conversation; which is why even a hands-free phone can be dangerously distracting. I only call on mine to 911, otherwise just use it for answering.

But even in this always connected era, it's almost guaranteed that someone singing in the car is not on the phone. But hell, if you can't sing in your car, there's something wrong with the world! So go ahead, just watch where you're going. And don't forget to bow when you're done, I'm watching you after all ;)

shannon27 (2003-07-08 08:54:30)

There is nothing I love more than singing in my car! :-) And I don't care who sees me! I usually catch them, catching me... so I turn, smile, and continue singing.. Because I know, then when they think I'm not watching, they are doing the same damn thing! :-)

tommasz1 (2003-07-11 07:47:55)

Boogie on, reggae woman! (this is an old Stevie Wonder tune, in case you don't get the reference)

3.7.6 Some more on online groups (2003-07-10 15:54)

(If you're here as a result of reading my [1]weblog, welcome to the stuff you've missed)

It's always been my policy not to get in the way of people smarter than me or more eloquent. In that tradition, I offer a link to [2]A Group Is Its Own Worst Enemy, by Clay Shirky. Clay (I use his first name although I've never met him) is both smarter and more eloquent.

I can honestly say that I've had first-hand experience with almost everything Clay mentions in his article, with the exception of MOOs. I've been part of Usenet groups that have gone bad, mailing lists that have degraded into name-calling, IRC channels that went under because of bickering, etc. And I have most definitely seen the formation of subgroups (some might call them cliques). That's something I'd like to talk about, since I'm most familiar with it (I was going to talk about the influence of spam on Usenet groups but that's boring).

A lot of people think of cliques in negative terms, so I'll use the term subgroup except where I need to stress the negative aspects. As Clay shows in his article, subgroups seem almost a natural occurrence within any sufficiently large group. Common interests, common annoyances, even common fears drive some people in the group to band together. If there's a threat, this subgroup may only last as long as the threat is present. But many subgroups form for more permanent reasons. And this opens them up to problems within the larger group.

What sort of things can cause problems? Power is one of them. If the subgroup holds, or is thought to hold, power over something it is bound to cause resentment among those who lack that power, even if that power is exercised in a benign or helpful way. Another one, which can be problematic even in the case where there is no assumed power, is a high barrier to entry. There's nothing more annoying than watching a group having fun that won't let you join. It's akin to being the "new kid on the block", but it can happen to anyone, anytime. In fact, it's probably more annoying to those that have been around a while. This is sure to be a situation someone labels as a clique.

It's also likely that those on the inside will be puzzled by the accusation. It's possible that the subgroup formed simply out of some common bond and it was never intended to exclude anyone, "it just happened."

[Digression, feel free to skip] Many years ago, I read a book called [3]Dinosaur Brains, by Albert J. Bernstein and Sydney Craft Rozen. It's basic thesis was that humans still have the primitive reptile brain of the dinosaur, and it's active, whether we have any awareness of it or not. One of the things that your dinosaur brain does is "like me, good - not like me, bad" with everyone you meet. It's the basic drive behind racism, sexism, sizism, etc. In person, looks are what invoke this response, hence someone with dramatically different skin color is suspect because they don't look like the person you see in the mirror. Likewise, those who resemble us (or resemble someone we'd like to be) are far more acceptable. This happens even when you're not racist (or sexist, sizist, etc.), you're driven to find the similarities and differences in everyone you meet. Even online, where the physical aspect is absent or greatly diminished (webcams are still a flat, two-dimensional view), people will look for things just like they would in person. Subgroups are inevitable, and those in them may not be aware of why they formed. [End of digression]

Is there an answer to the subgroup problem? Nothing that I've seen leads me to believe that there is. Threat response is not usually grounds for resentment (unless you're part of the perceived threat), so we can probably ignore that. But even in the absence of threats subgroups will form, and that seems unpreventable. You can try "legislating" them out of the picture, but that's not going to prevent the subgroups from existing, just how they act in the presence of others. About the only thing that seems to me like it would work would

be to make the barriers to entry difficult but not impossible (think Slashdot, where everyone can participate, but you have to earn the right to do certain things). Keep it so that you have to continue to perform the acts that earned you entry (no one gets to "retire" and stay in the subgroup), so that a steady influx of new people is balanced by an outflux of old people no longer interested in maintaining their membership.

So, there you have it. Now go out there and interact!

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>
2. http://www.shirky.com/writings/group_enemy.html
3. <http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-047161808X.html>

3.7.7 Weekend fun (2003-07-14 13:49)

It's funny, but with the girls at camp all week, the weekends end up being hectic as all get out. We usually end up running around to stores so the girls can buy things they want or need for camp. Given that they arrive late on Friday and then leave Sunday morning, it makes for a hectic day on Saturday. This past week was tough on me too, for a number of reasons. Oh well. It's not forever, after all.

But I did get some things done of my own. First of all, I wrote a ghost story. A true one. One that actually happened to me. You can read the story [1]here but it's also on my [2]Writings page, which is growing slowly. I have a friend, Jacqui, who hunts ghosts and who was collecting true ghost stories a while back. I couldn't write it down then, but my whole summer has been slowly moving me towards the trip home I hope to take in August and this was a part of that.

I also installed a CD writer in my Linux box. It's not really usable, though, as a CD writer. My kernel refuses to believe that IDE devices can include CD writers, so you have to install a SCSI emulator. And since I'm a KDE user, I wanted to use KonCD, which allows drag-and-drop from the KDE file manager. Unfortunately, KonCD doesn't seem able to recognize that the discs are in the drive and won't write. Oddly, XCDroast will, but it's a bear to use because I'm trying to off-load a bunch of files in separate directories. It's a bear to include them one by one.

On Sunday I biked over to the Corn Hill Arts Festival, one of the biggest local arts and crafts festivals in the area. Saturday has been cool, cloudy, windy and intermittently rainy, but Sunday was like a dream, sunny but not too hot. It was also the day of the local Gay Alliance's summer picnic, which was held in a county park and which I rode through to get back and forth from Corn Hill. To be honest, if it wasn't for the banners, I would never have known it was a picnic primarily for gay folks. Not sure if that says something about me or about the mainstreaming of gay culture.

I had gotten to bed late on Saturday, and was up before 6 AM on Sunday for a fire call. That, plus the bike ride, had me in bed by 8:30. I had tried to nap after getting home but we had another fire call. I was beat. But no aches or pains from the ride. Karate and Kendo are paying off, big time.

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/MyGhostStory.html>
2. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/writings.html>

3.7.8 A sad moment, memorialized (2003-07-17 17:54)

Recently, a woman from North Carolina [1]killed herself, and two others, after driving for miles the wrong way on the expressway. No ones knows [2]why, although theories abound.

Today, as I was driving home past the place where the collision occurred, I saw a woman and her son pulled over to the shoulder. They were building one of those memorials you often see at the sites of fatal crashes.

1. http://www.democratandchronicle.com/news/0714HQ16NVN_104fatalweb14_news.shtml
2. http://www.democratandchronicle.com/news/0715ER16UA0_fatal15_news.shtml

3.7.9 Even more writing (2003-07-20 19:09)

I've published, but not yet posted, stories about the births of my two daughters. They were originally written for Mother's Day in 1997, as a gift to my wife, and I've only changed the pronouns and formatted them for the web. But since they are about them (and not me) I will ask them for permission to post. They're as wacky as you'd expect, of course, could it be any way else?

3.7.10 It pays to upgrade (2003-07-21 14:21)

As part of the work I'm doing on my Karate and Kendo site, I've already started noticing some rendering issues with IE/Mac (it's probably worse with IE/Win). Microsoft is not going to be updating IE for the Mac and IE 6.0 for Windows is supposed to be the last standalone browser released. IE/Mac has been good to me but it's getting old and the limitations of its CSS support will become more acute.

But there is a solution that works for Windows, Mac and Linux users and that is to use one of the Gecko-based browsers. These include Netscape 7.x (okay for now, but not a good long term solution), Mozilla 1.4 or Firebird. Mac users could also consider Safari, which is not Gecko but still good and improving. Opera 7 might also work, but I haven't used it.

Firebird is a good choice if all you need is a browser, it eliminates all the non-browser parts of Mozilla. I run it on Windows and Linux and it's essentially identical on both platforms, particularly in terms of rendering. I use Netscape 7 on the Mac, because I'm still running OS 9. IE/Mac is still my default, but I always verify design issues with Netscape before I change anything.

IE/Win's market share essentially forces sites that have large audiences to conform to its way of doing things, bugs and all. I don't have that worry, I can choose to be standards-compliant and encourage my visitors to do the same. And I do.

3.7.11 More stuff on my white board (2003-07-22 13:43)

A bit of philosophical claptrap (that I created):

When one thing is broken,
anyone can fix it.
When two things are broken,
someone can fix them.
When everything is broken,
no one can fix it.

3.7.12 Update on that recent car crash (2003-07-22 13:57)

I realize that this isn't the real *why*, but the woman that drove the wrong way had a [1]blood alcohol level of .21, two and a-half times the legal limit. It's frankly amazing that she was able to go as far as she did. A sort of miracle in reverse, I guess.

Since she had left a restaurant just prior to entering the expressway, expect suits against the owners. NY State has what they used to call the "Dram Shop Law" that makes a restaurant or bar legally liable for damages caused by an intoxicated patron. It is in their best interests to not serve someone who seems drunk, though it maybe difficult to judge in some cases, particularly when that person may been somewhere else prior. In this incident, there's nothing to indicate that, meaning they should have known how much she had been drinking and stopped serving her. No one is talking, of course, that won't happen until the trial(s). But it doesn't look good for the owners, and it shouldn't. They are as responsible as if they had been at the wheel of that car.

1. http://www.rochesterdandc.com/news/07190F1897V_crash10419_news.shtml

3.7.13 Drought (2003-07-29 11:42)

Sometimes I don't feel like writing.

haystings (2003-08-01 17:16:56)

Hello! Thought I'd stop and say hi since I discoverd your journal. Yes...it is too hot to do anything really...and humid too!

tommasz1 (2003-08-03 08:51:24)

Thanks for taking a look. I do try to write frequently, but sometimes that's not so easy, especially lately. I'm sure this will change.

3.8 August

3.8.1 My weekend, a retrospective (2003-08-03 12:11)

This weekend, my brother-in-law and his family, who we went to see in Colorado last summer, are in town. My wife's mother's family (stay with me) had a big reunion on Saturday at which we spent all day. It was muggy and hot, at least until the rain started. Then it cooled nicely.

A sister-in-law organized it, not my wife (whew!) and she's Italian, so there was plenty of food all day. No one went home hungry and we get to eat the leftovers (of which there are plenty) this afternoon. I'm tired, I just want to nap but I'll have to be at least half-awake for most of the day. And eat more, of course. Luckily, my wife's family is great, so it's no problem for me.

As far as my trip home, goes, I'm beginning to wonder when I'll be able to take it. I've goofed up the scheduling a little so it may be later in the summer or early fall than I would have liked. But such are the things of the world to not fall into line as we would like. More on it in this space as I figure it out.

3.8.2 New picture of my dad (2003-08-10 19:30)

It took me a while, but I finally put up a picture of my dad, Charles Maszerowski, taken in Coronado, California in November of 1945 (it's on the bottom of my [1]Stuff page). The original photo is a bit nicer, but this version still shows what a handsome devil he was in those days. I have the pinky ring he's wearing in the picture, I had suspected it was from his Navy days, and now I know for sure. Oh, and in case you wonder, he's 82 and still doing fine.

Someday, I'm going to write about my dad's Navy days. He was in a number of close calls in WW II and, to be quite honest, is lucky to have survived. It's a trait we have in common.

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/stuff.html>

3.8.3 Living a nightmare (2003-08-12 08:01)

As i write this we are hunkered down in a meeting room at work. A bankrobber shot two people, one fatally, while robbing the credit union office fifty yards from my office. We've been here over three hours so far. Police and FBI are doing a building by building search of the campus with dogs and there is no outlook for when we'll be released. The suspect is still at large. More later.

3.8.4 Update (2003-08-13 09:13)

I would have written last night when I got home but I just ate dinner and went to bed. We ended up being under lock-down for over 10 hours, finally being let go around 7:30 PM. We then had to have our cars checked, trunks and all, before being allowed to exit. If you want the big picture, please check the local paper's [1]article. [2]This is another picture of the gunman. The story was also in the [3]national news.

It was a long day, needless to say. We had some food, mostly snacks, until about 6:00 PM. They had fed the law enforcement people but had mostly ignored the employees. My group was lucky in that we were in the same building as the cafeteria and we had someone who was willing to annoy people to get us food. Many folks snuck back to their offices to get snacks and drinks they had at their desks to share with everyone. There were about 100 people in our group but it remained cordial the entire time.

Since we were so close to the credit union building, the employees and customers that were involved were taken here to be questioned. When they had signed their sworn statements, they joined our group, having had even less food and drink than we did. I listened to one man who had taken 10 minutes away from his job to check into a loan and had the misfortune to be in there when it happened. I don't feel I can relay any details other than it was over in less than a minute. Less than 60 seconds to kill one man, wound another and steal money. Think about it.

I have to admit to a great reluctance to coming into the building this morning. The gunman is still at large and could be literally anywhere. I found myself checking all around me as I walked in from the parking lot. Then, as I got into my office, my server's disks were going nuts. Sometime yesterday afternoon, someone hacked my system. I guess they thought they would take advantage of the lockdown.

My faith in human nature has taken another serious blow.

1. http://www.rochesterdandc.com/news/0813GC1GC6C_xeroxupdate13_news.shtml
2. http://www.rochesterdandc.com/news/0813NC1GC72_xeroxbox13_news.shtml
3. http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2003-08-12-plant_x.htm

3.8.5 Guilty pleasure (2003-08-13 20:50)

It's a guilty pleasure to run into an old girlfriend and realize that she regrets having dumped you all those years ago.

Yes it is.

3.8.6 Explanation (2003-08-14 15:53)

Yesterday was the annual steak roast and equipment show put on by the county volunteer fire chief's association. I had already planned to go, though it proved to be a welcome diversion from recent events here at work. An old girlfriend works at the party house and I felt obligated to at least say hi. We ended up chatting for a bit, and she filled me in on happenings in her family (we used to be quite close, as you can tell). I even had the chance to talk with one of the guys I worked with in the dining hall kitchen at school. He's married to one of the girls that also worked there and has a kid in college. He was pretty wild in those days, funny how he's settled down.

So that's the root of the cryptic previous entry. It was nice to see her and that she was, for the most part, doing well. Although things had ended badly for us (don't they always do) we've managed to get over that in the 20 years since. I'm usually one to question every decision I make, but this is one that I'm glad I made. I think we've both done much better for ourselves than we would have had we stayed together.

3.8.7 One hell of a week (2003-08-15 10:45)

There are times when you just have to say enough! This is one of those times. After all the turmoil surrounding the robbery/murder and my system being hacked, we have a major blackout. I need a rest, thanks, and so do a lot of other people.

The power outage was fairly routine (as these things go) for me. Once I got home, through the most horrendous traffic I've ever seen here (the PGA Championship is being played in town, to add to the traffic) I changed clothes, made sure the computers were all off, and drove to the firehouse. Mary Ann and the most of the girls (we have two English girls, Daisy and Stacey with us for a while, that's another story) were already there, having given up hope of making it home in the rush hour traffic. We had a small volume of calls, mostly automatic alarms related to batteries going bad, but that was it. We all ate pizza at the firehouse, and got the last ones from the pizza place since they couldn't cook anymore due to not having any ventilation. After dark, a guy from a local ice cream place drove down and asked us if we'd like some ice cream they couldn't keep. Of course, we said yes and so we enjoyed some of that too. The girls went home about an hour before I did, and of course, as soon as I got home we had a call. It was right down the street but I had to drive back to the firehouse because we store our gear there. Our lights came back on sometime around 2 AM.

When I got to work this morning (late, and without regret) my server, which has also had a bad week, was locked, the power must have glitched and I don't have it on a UPS since it's not mission-critical. My plans for this evening involve a hard karate workout and then beer.

3.8.8 And so I dream (2003-08-18 08:24)

Last night I found myself back in high school (as a junior, not sure why) at my present age. It was explained that even though I possess a Masters degree, I had somehow missed some of my junior year and needed

to make it up (after 30 years?). But there I was. First class of the day was some sort of public speaking assignment, and I got stuck taking notes and providing other services, in particular computers. They had a couple of laptops and a desktop all running some versions of Windows. and of course, none of them ran correctly.

My dreams are becoming too much like my waking life.

3.8.9 I'm finally going to the places of my dreams (2003-08-19 11:14)

It's taken me a while, and no small amount of planning and preparation, but I am finally taking the trip to Long Island I've been talking about all summer. I'd be lying if I said I was doing this without hesitation. As a friend said to me, it may not solve the issues that have developed over the course of thirty years, but it's something I have to do. I've got the camera and voice recorder so that I'll be able to fully document the trip.

I've found writing to be very helpful for me, especially in recent years, and this trip will be appear, in an illustrated form on the [1]Writings page sometime in the fall. Although the actual trip is going to be a very private thing for me (I'm going alone and none of my relatives there have been told about it) the experience I hope will be a public one. My past is not a typical one, and I'm not offering it as such; it is what it is. I have chosen to open some of it to the world on this site and this is part of it. Thanks for reading.

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/writings.html>

celebratemeandu (2003-08-20 14:48:14)

The best of luck... for whatever it is you're searching for.

3.8.10 I'm back (2003-08-24 10:30)

My trip home is over, and I returned late Saturday night. It was a great experience overall, despite my getting lost at every turn. I'll write about the trip in detail later and it will be a while before my essay will be posted. I had some trouble with the digital camera and I'm hoping I didn't lose some of the shots. I can honestly say I feel as if a weight has been lifted from my shoulders. Peace.

3.8.11 Personal networking (2003-08-28 10:43)

My friend Alexis has introduced me to [1]Friendster, which is a sort of personal networking web site that allows you to build a web of relationships with other people. Although I believe that it's primarily geared towards dating (without being specifically for dating), it's not really limited to anything in particular. In Friendster, you have friends, who in turn have friends, who have friends, etc. This creates for you a network that you can then browse. Each person is then "related" to you through some chain of friendship. Besides the obvious use for dating, it's possible to use Friendster to do any kind of organizing you can think of.

Digression:

I've been sort of stagnating, guitar-wise, and I've begun to think that I need to play more with other musicians. I've done the guitar group with my teacher, [2]Steve Greene, but that was often intimidating as the other students were way better than me musically. There was an ad a while back in the local alternapaper for a group basically at my level, but I wasn't ready and the ad has never repeated. I could start my own, of course, but I'm not good at organizing. But (you it was coming), Friendster looks like it could help with

doing something like that. It has search capabilities that allow restriction by location (driving 4 hours to jam every week isn't fun) and interests, so finding like minded folks shouldn't be possible provided they're on Friendster. As I often say, you never know until you try.

End of Digression

Friendster is one of those things that the Web does well, if for no other reason that it's not hard to use and doesn't require anything other than a browser. There are lots of other similar mechanisms (web rings, blog rolls, etc.) but they assume that you have a web site or a weblog, where Friendster doesn't. It's worth exploring, even if you don't want to join, just to see the relationship building capabilities.

1. <http://www.friendster.com/>
2. <http://www.stevegreene.com/>

3.8.12 Some workflow changes (2003-08-30 21:18)

Because I really like my site to work well for all my visitors, I try to stick to standards and try to stay away from browser-specific coding whenever I can. At the same time, I realize that most folks are using Internet Explorer of some vintage on various editions of Windows. The problem for me is that I'm not using IE/Win, except at work. I do use IE but on Mac OS 9 and that's a doubly dead end platform. In an effort to stave off the coming obsolescence I have installed Mozilla 1.2.1 on my Mac (the last OS 9 version). It's stable, very standards-compliant (thanks to the Gecko rendering engine) and way ahead on CSS1 and CSS2 compared to IE/Mac. This will do until I break down and go OS X.

georgesstrwbrry (2003-08-31 07:08:11)

Just whatever you do, DON'T get an iBook. Go ahead and spend the little bit of extra money to get a PowerBook if you are going to eventually go the laptop route. On the iBook the Logicboard gives out after just over a year and Apple is refusing to recall them. Not fun...

tommasz1 (2003-08-31 08:44:30) Thanks, but...
...are you sure you're responding to the right journal?

georgesstrwbrry (2003-08-31 08:48:05) Re: Thanks, but...

Believe it or not, yes. Just thought I'd plug in my two cents worth - if it is even worth that much. I added you a while back because I thought you were a bit interesting. I can take you off again if you would prefer - I usually ask first, don't know why I didn't with you.

tommasz1 (2003-08-31 09:51:54) Re: Thanks, but...

Oh no, don't worry, I was just wondering, I don't mind at all. Thanks for the tip, my youngest wants a iBook but I'm trying to steer her to a desktop, so it was helpful.

georgesstrwbrry (2003-08-31 16:28:49) Re: Thanks, but...

It's a \$700 fix. My husband was most upset when he found out about it - after his went out of course. It's only been a little over a year and his iBook is useless. The PowerBooks are great, though.

3.9 September

3.9.1 The creative bug (2003-09-01 16:03)

I've finally finished one of the "adult" stories that I've been working on. It had languished a while before I caught the spark I needed to finish it. This and other stories like it won't get published here (it's a personal decision and doesn't reflect the policies of FrontierNet although I don't know off the top of my head what their policy is) but will be available to people who ask me via email.

Finishing that piece now allows me to start on the story of my trip home. If you've been reading this journal for a while you know when I took it but not a lot about the why. That was deliberate omission on my part, partly because I wanted to use the opportunity to do some extended writing and partly because I had so much trouble defining it for myself. I had hoped the trip would provide some of those answers, and it did. So please stay tuned, because once I've started, I'll have to finish.

3.9.2 Big day today (2003-09-03 07:59)

Today is a rather important day for us, it's our 20th wedding anniversary (September 3rd in 1983 was a Saturday) and my daughter Alanna's first day of high school. Isn't life funny that way?

3.9.3 Wine touring by bus (2003-09-07 13:28)

The Finger Lakes district in NY state is the traditional center of the wine industry here. It used to be centered around Keuka Lake, but in recent years Seneca Lake has become much more important. Keuka was mostly native *Labrusca* and then hybrid grapes. That began to change in the 70's, but Seneca supports mostly *Vinifera* (European) grapes and is way ahead of Keuka in that regard. Most wine experts consider the American and hybrid varieties to be superior, and you can easily tell the difference, even if you can't express it like they do.

Anyway, we took a nice tour yesterday on a bus that was hired by a friend's company. Even though she had just started there, she was allowed to invite anyone she wanted, friends as well as clients (it's a financial services firm). It's nice not having to drive or navigate on such a trip, considering you're sampling at every stop.

3.9.4 A heads up (2003-09-08 10:52)

In observance of September 11 I will neither post anything here or in my weblog. It's a day for quiet reflection, please take the time to do so.

3.9.5 Pathetic whining, feel free to skip (2003-09-09 15:58)

I'm supposed to be doing something else right at the moment, but instead I'm writing here. I had my mid-year review today, late obviously. We're never too punctual with them, anyway, and that's not the issue for me. What the issue is, of course, is me. It's no secret that my career has hit a definite plateau, and with things here at The Big Company being what they are, that's not A Good Thing. One big problem is that my self-confidence has hit an all-time low.

I came into my present position after a strange summer of being totally abandoned. I technically had

no supervisor and no real work. I had finished delivering a program to market and my reward was being left to rot on the vine. Only in a very large company could something like this ever happen, obviously. I had assumed that something would come along, but it was the beginning of the slow decline The Big Company finds itself in right now, and there weren't any opportunities for someone who had delivered an unpopular program (despite it being one of the biggest sellers, in units, that the company ever had) in relative obscurity. The obscurity was intentional, as our VP felt it was the best way to get a program out that needed to be fast and low cost. He was right, but he left to pursue other things once his point had been made. I was hired for that program, and didn't have mainstream contacts to fall back on.

I ended up where I am now because I was able to convince (actually, I begged) him to hire me into research after I was unable to find anything on my own. That was in the beginning of 2000, I'm still here and still wondering what I am going to do with myself. I do odd jobs here and there, but nothing like I was doing. I help here and there, but nothing important. And the longer this period extends, the less confident I feel I am at anything. I haven't managed software development actively since 1999. I haven't written any production code since before that.

Today we talked about what I could do, and for each possible task mentioned, I was hesitant to say I could do them. There was only one of them that I would even consider doing, and it has nothing to do with my background. My boss, of course, feels I could do any of them. We talked about it, though, and perhaps something will come of it. Once I overcome myself, of course.

And now, back to the technocrap I usually write about.

3.9.6 What would you pay for this? (2003-09-12 08:48)

You don't have to be an Internet expert to know that there is no end to the controversy around the concept of what's free and what isn't. To be succinct, it's been very difficult for anyone to figure out how to make money selling anything digital. Real goods (what I'll call anything you can't digitize and put on a disk) have fared well, but certainly music hasn't, at least from the profit standpoint.

But music files aren't the only thing you can get from the net. The net is an ideal place to publish your creative works, because it's fairly easy to do and reasonably cheap, at least compared to classic book publishing. All you need then is a way to get paid for it. And herein lies the problem.

Most artists are not interested in soaking their fans and when their publishing costs are low, they want the cost of their art to be similarly low. Credit card companies typically charge the seller a percentage of the transaction as a handling fee. When the cost is high enough and the profit margin sufficiently robust, this is negligible. But what happens when the artist wants to charge 25 cents? The short answer is that credit cards don't work. But what will?

One potential answer is micropayments. Micropayments are small payments that you incur as you access web content, you sign up with a service and the service takes care of the billing and transfer to the artist. Simple, right? Of course not. Rather than have me explain why, read [1]Fame vs. Fortune: Micropayments and Free Content, by Clay Shirky. Clay is a long-time critic of micropayment systems and his opinions are well regarded in the net world. I personally think he's right, but there is still a lot of disagreement and it's clear there's no end in sight to the arguments. Read the article and see what you think.

1. http://www.shirky.com/writings/fame_vs_fortune.html

3.9.7 FTP problems (2003-09-13 15:53)

I am having some problems uploading a recent picture I took of myself (ah, the magic of self timers) , so if you're looking for that, please be patient.

3.9.8 Beginnings (2003-09-15 09:03)

This weekend I finally buckled down and started writing about my trip home. This will take a while. Right now I'm doing the background material necessary to understand my reasons for taking the trip. This is all from memory (some of which I was surprised I even had), I'll be using my recorded notes later, when I get to the trip itself.

I guess it was no surprise then that I dreamed of home last night, the first time in a while, perhaps even since the trip. "And I dreamed a dream of home" - Lyle Lovett

3.9.9 Stormy Weather (2003-09-19 08:16)

It's funny, but I think the weathermen have taken the approach that it's better to emphasize the worst the weather could be, rather than take a more middle-of-the-road approach. I'm not sure I wouldn't do the same in their position, as people might complain about the forecast being more dire than the resulting weather but they might be angry being caught unawares.

That said, we're on our way today to [1]Niagara-on-the-Lake in Ontario to see a [2]play at the [3]Shaw Festival for our twentieth anniversary. The original (pessimistic) forecast for here was 5-15" of rain but it's clear that won't happen. What will happen is the bulk of the rain won't be here, it will be west of Buffalo. In other words, we're going to drive right into it. Despite that, we're going!

I'll post a review of the play next week, along with the rest of the trip. See you then.

1. <http://www.niagaraonthelake.com/>
2. <http://www.shawfest.com/plays/family.html>
3. <http://www.shawfest.com/>

3.9.10 Niagara-on-the-Lake (2003-09-22 14:21)

Niagara-on-the-Lake (or NOTL, as the locals seem to prefer) is one of the prettiest areas near us. As in the Fingerlakes area of New York, it's close to water and an ideal area for growing grapes and other fruits. There didn't seem to be many places that didn't have grapes growing on them. Like Seneca lake, many of the wineries are fairly new, including the one we had dinner at on Saturday, [1]Peller Estates. It's certainly a place to stop if you're even remotely interested in wine.

Our bed and breakfast was lovely. It's called [2]A Breakfast With Friends and it's run by a friendly English woman, Alison Hewitt, who's originally from Yorkshire. There are only two bedrooms, but both have king beds and are nicely decorated. Alison makes an amazing breakfast, so even if you're not a big breakfast eater (I'm not), you'll definitely enjoy her cooking. It's not in the main part of town, but it's just a short drive and fairly direct. Also, it's close to the lake shore as well as the Welland Canal, so you can view both of them within easy biking distance (Alison has two bikes you can borrow). We went to the canal locks on Saturday and Sunday and managed to actually see one of the big boats go through, though not actually see a lock in action (timing is everything).

Dinner was very nice, indeed, as we took advantage of the wonderful Saturday weather and ate outdoors. Dinner was included with our theatre package all we had to pay for was the wine. We both had the scallops with lobster, mine was fine but Mary Ann's was a bit salty (the scallops only, they were topped with something before being broiled). They graciously brought her a second entree that was fine at no charge. Their 2001 Reserve Chardonnay more than held it's own with dinner, as the seafood was accompanied by a vinaigrette salad that was rather robust. They also offer a tasting dinner, with different wines with each course, if you've got the time and would like a broader view of their wines.

The play was a fictionalized version of the life of the Barrymores, the great theatrical family. It was written by George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber in 1927, when New York City was still the focus of the entertainment world in the US and Hollywood was still an impertinent upstart. Although it has a number of period references, it's still funny today as it focuses on the relationships between the characters as much as anything else. Lots of snappy patter, as you'd expect, but nothing incomprehensible to today's audiences. We were looking for a fun comedy and this one did the job just fine.

NOTL is a nice place to walk around and sight-see in, or you can rent a bike and ride if you like. The latter seems popular with the winery crowd, it makes it easier to cover the many wineries without the hassle of parking (at a premium most everywhere). The main town is small and everything is close together, so seeing it all in a day is not an unreasonable goal. If you're into nightlife, there's [3]The Angel Inn, one of Canada's oldest and seemingly the "hot spot". We caught the live show on Friday night, it was a local band that was really, really good, but I can't for the life of me remember their name (the video on their web site shows the same bass player, though). We ate in the pub, but there's also a dining room. An added bonus for us was that smoking was no longer allowed, it made it much easier to enjoy the food and entertainment. Oh, and by the way, it's said to be haunted.

It was a wonderfully relaxing weekend, despite the dire weather predictions at the start. We hit some rain about half-way from Rochester to Buffalo, but that was about it. Saturday and Sunday were picture perfect, weather wise. The kids only called once, to ask a question, so that was wonderful, too. As they get older, we won't have to save such trips for major anniversaries and I look forward to doing this even more. It's less than five years now to our twenty-fifth, so I'd better get planning.

1. <http://www.peller.com/peller/index.html>
2. <http://www.bbcanada.com/3866.html>
3. <http://www.angel-inn.com/>

3.9.11 This just in (2003-09-23 08:09)

I'm now a Isshin Ryu karate green belt. I'm almost half-way to a black belt (which in itself is just the beginning). I broke a board last night using an elbow strike and felt like I could have done two. What a difference even a couple of months of training have made.

3.9.12 Beer weekend (2003-09-26 15:29)

As noted in my [1]weblog, Empire Brewing, a local brew pub that was also in Buffalo and Syracuse, has closed its final location. They had closed in Buffalo first, then here, and now in Syracuse.

But on a lighter note, the [2]Custom Brewcrafters [3]Autumn Festival of Ales is Saturday. They brew house beers for dozens of local restaurants and pubs as well as market under their own label. The festival

includes a chili cook-off, for the intestinally robust. We avoid the chili, most of the contestants believe the challenge is in how hot you can make it. But with good beer and music, as well as less challenging food, how can you say no?

Then I get to go to a bachelor party Saturday evening for one of the guys in the fire department. As usual, we'll all laugh at the groom-to-be when he gets all drunk and stupid. It's one of the classic "stupid guy things", some classics never go out of style ;)

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>
2. <http://www.custombrewcrafters.com/>
3. <http://www.custombrewcrafters.com/autumnFest03.html>

3.9.13 Bad news (2003-09-27 09:37)

Some days it doesn't pay to get out of bed, other days the bad news manages to get to you before you even get up.

This morning my aunt called to tell me that my stepmom has been diagnosed with breast cancer. They are going to do some surgery in October to remove the lump and some of the lymphnodes. My dad is very upset, especially given what happened with my mom.

And so am I.

[Later that day]

My mom called in the afternoon and I got a more detailed story than my aunt was able to give. She's not as upset as my dad or my aunt are, so that helped. They have a little getaway planned and they're going, no matter what. It's still serious, though, but not as serious as it seemed earlier.

3.9.14 One man's opinion (2003-09-28 09:10)

The bachelor party last night was typical, as those things go. But I was struck by the "entertainment". Specifically, they were both fairly tall, thin and had surgically enhanced breasts. I realize they're playing to the lowest common denominator but I wouldn't complain if they had been a little more like real women. Oh well.

3.10 October

3.10.1 Geeky interlude (2003-10-02 15:25)

It's been a while since I've done any great amount of programming. If I recall correctly, 1999 was probably the last year I wrote and production code. I've dabbled in some things in the mean time, particularly the Python language, but that was for fun and not for any specific work need.

It's funny, I used to be a master of the C programming language. I could have taught it in school; the programmers working with me would come to me to ask questions. But nothing lasts forever. Times changed, the work world moved to C++ and Java (as well as scripting languages like Python) and I got pulled into management and technology investigation.

Now to the present. My digital camera has a tendency to create corrupt image files for some reason. At first I thought the problem was in the memory card, but after using a couple of different recovery programs it became obvious the problem was in the files themselves. I suppose a normal person would have just given up, but I figured I could do something. The camera creates what are known as EXIF files, they contain the regular image plus a thumbnail image (for the camera's LCD to display) as well as information about the image that comes from the camera itself (date, settings, etc.). I looked around for some open source libraries to deal with the files, but that was disappointing. One was decent, to a point, but written in C++ and I don't know that language well enough (see above). Another was in C, but poorly documented. Neither handled a corrupted file, so that meant I was on my own. Luckily the EXIF spec is available and right, now I'm working my way through it, writing code as I go. It's a good way to get back into things, I guess. But boy, am I ever rusty.

3.10.2 How to have a crappy weekend (2003-10-06 09:03)

- 1) Buy 10 Gig iPod
- 2) Determine that iPod requires OS X
- 3) Purchase OS X
- 4) Attempt to install OS X
- 5) Determine that OS X really likes having OS 9.2 installed first
- 6) Install OS 9.2
- 7) Discover Mac won't reboot
- 8) Repeatedly power Mac up and down
- 9) Get Mac to reboot
- 10) Install OS X
- 11) Attempt to install iPod software
- 12) Discover iPod software actually needs OS X 10.1.5
- 13) Attempt to download OS X 10.1.5
- 14) Have monitor go into powersave and not recover
- 15) Repeatedly power Mac up and down
- 16) Give up for the night
- 17) Connect Mac to older monitor
- 18) Reboot into OS 9
- 19) Plug in regular monitor and turn off energy saving
- 20) Repeat download attempt to get OS X 10.1.5
- 21) Discover that OS X 10.1.5 requires updated Installer
- 22) Download updated Installer
- 23) Discover that updated Installer won't install
- 24) Search Apple site and discover that new Installer requires a security patch
- 25) Download security patch
- 26) Install security patch and new Installer
- 27) Install OS X 10.1.5
- 28) Install iTunes 4
- 29) Install iPod software
- 30) Have daughter copy all her music to Mac from Zip disks
- 31) Discover that iPod will not be recognized by iTunes
- 32) Repeatedly reset iPod, reinstall software and curse under breath
- 33) Give up for the night
- 34) Write daughter an apology note, go to work
- 35) Search net for help

- 36) Join a couple of iPod support forums
- 37) Prepare to send iPod back

And that's my weekend.

3.10.3 New Windows client check (2003-10-07 11:40)

Thought I'd try a newer LiveJournal client on WinXP. I guess I'll need to get a new one for OS X as well, if I don't delete it off my Mac drives in total frustration. Which is my way of saying that I still don't have the iPod working right. I don't want to tell my daughter we can't use it. I really don't.

3.10.4 What if... (2003-10-08 12:48)

What if you go on quest to discover yourself, but you don't find anything?

Not in that elusive, just around the corner way, but there's nothing there. Nothing, as in no thing. What would you do? Invent someone, just so you can claim to have found something, so that no one wonders why you went to the trouble in the first place? Or would you smile in some enigmatic way and say "you wouldn't understand" and then look away so they can't see the lie in your eyes?

Well, would you?

3.10.5 The price of persistence is eternal diligence (2003-10-10 15:09)

So, after five days of struggling and being in a particularly foul mood, I did the one, final, thing I was going to do before boxing up the iPod. I checked what Software Update had to offer. If you're a Windows users, it's similar to Windows Update but the control is more fine-grained - you can select which updates to accept. It had an iPodDriver 4.0 to download (along with 40 megs of other updates). I had seen references to this driver before, but it wasn't on the discs that came with the iPod nor could I find it on any of my hard drives. Downloading it made all the difference.

To be honest, this is not the sort of thing I expected from Apple, but it's an OS X world now, and perhaps this is the price you pay. If you weren't connected to the net, things would be most difficult for you, I guess. It just so happens that OS X is a great system, and it does a lot of things that OS 9 couldn't have even dreamed of, so there is a payoff for all the turmoil. It's UNIX roots are well hidden. most of the time, but it's things like missing drivers that make you realize it's not all totally tamed. There's really no comparison with my Linux box, though. Linux, even with KDE as the U/I, is still a geek's OS. That's not a bad thing, but it's not the ticket to ubiquity that gets you on the desktop of Joe Average User.

The reality is there's nothing I can do with my Linux machine that I can't do with my Mac now. Some of the more UNIXy things might be more convenient on Linux because there's less hidden from sight, but the basic abilities are still there in OS X. Given the commercial application support, I would have a hard time choosing Linux over OS X if hardware cost wasn't a factor (Mac hardware is still more expensive than commodity PCs).

I'm not an OS guy, but I know that the Mach kernel, which is the heart of OS X, was a new idea at one time that doesn't seem to have caught on as well as some thought it would. The idea was to create a "micro kernel", that is, an operating system that did the absolute minimum necessary. Everything else would

be an add-on. Linux is what is called a monolithic kernel (with some exceptions), it has everything built-in. But even though Mach isn't UNIX, it can be made to look like it except at the lowest levels, and that's what makes developing applications for OS X easier than for Windows or OS 9. OS X uses a different windowing system than Linux and that does require some work-arounds (though you can get X Windows for OS X). Getting Linux applications to run on OS X can take anything from a recompile (command line apps) to a major overhaul (windowed apps if you don't want to use X), but it's not outside of the capabilities of anyone who could write the software to begin with.

I haven't played much guitar or prepared the new bamboo for my Kendo shinai because of this issue. Now that it's settled, I can get back into a more normal groove.

3.10.6 It never ends (2003-10-12 16:34)

After spending all that time getting the iPod to work I discovered yesterday my oldest daughter (the one with the iPod) had deleted thousands of files on the Mac. She had assumed that since she had to login, that she was only removing the files from her login. I've been trying to recover them ever since.

I didn't have them backed up, of course, and did some installs not realizing they'd been deleted. I will be able to recover the files for my website, but some images and some files I had done for my guitar teacher may be gone forever. Not a good feeling.

3.10.7 News (2003-10-13 13:57)

My stepmom goes in for her surgery tomorrow. I talked with her and my dad this morning. My dad seemed a little low but my stepmom was upbeat. I'll be spending some days down there next week or the week after, depending on how things go. I'll be there to lend support, help around the house, cheer up my dad and generally keep him from doing things he shouldn't.

I know I shouldn't worry too much, yet, but I can't help myself. But I have to keep up a good facade so that my dad doesn't worry even more. We're worriers, the two of us.

3.10.8 On Pope John Paul II (2003-10-16 13:59)

I have to be honest, I'm not a very devout Catholic. There are days when I'm not even sure I believe there is a God. But one does not simply abandon decades of belief in a heartbeat, and so I remain "on the fence", for lack of a better term. In fact, certain things have happened to me recently that are slowly pushing me back towards belief. A topic for some other time, as I'm writing about someone else.

John Paul and I have a couple of things in common, it turns out. First, and most obvious, we're both Polish. That's not all that amazing, I admit, so that brings us to the other one, we're both born on May 18th. I was surprised when he was elected, and so were millions of others, that they had actually chosen a non-Italian after centuries. Surprised, but pleased, that he was Polish like I was. You have to understand the background to this feeling. Polish jokes were popular at the time, and despite centuries of achievement, Polish people were stereotyped as stupid, uncultured, construction worker types. But here was someone who was smart, who spoke and wrote multiple languages, who despite being a "compromise", was chosen out of an elite group to lead millions of Catholics world-wide. That he was born on the same day of the year made the connection to him all that much stronger for me.

He's done a lot of things as Pope and he's set an incredible example for those who will follow him. He's been more places, been seen in person by more people and in general done more things than any of his predecessors. He probably did more to bring about the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe than any US president, perhaps more than all of them (from Eisenhower to Bush the elder) combined. He's had the misfortune to have been shot, to have presided over the worst church scandal in modern times. I can't imagine Paul IV being able to deal with such setbacks, perhaps not even John XXIII could have.

Still, he's no stranger to controversy or criticism. Many people consider him too conservative in a time of change. It's created an environment where Catholics profess faith yet do what they want on certain issues. I am one of them; I have been for a long time. But it's the nature of faith to be conservative, to be distrustful of change. Even if you believe God is speaking directly to you, caution is still called for. I can't help but believe that some of the things that he had been unwilling to accept will come, given time. But only time, and careful consideration, will tell.

It's painful to see him now, bent and slowed by the Parkinson's. I cried watching him speak in St. Peter's Square on the nightly news last night. But the man is still inside, and that's what counts, really. The nightly news also carried the story of a woman whose husband fought for years (against her family) to have her taken off life support. It was a meaningful juxtaposition, perhaps even intentional on the part of the network. The church opposes euthanasia, because it feels it's wrong but also because it's a slippery slope. Once it's legal to end the life of someone in a "vegetative state", how long before it's legal to end the life of someone it's "too expensive" to care for?

Well, I seem to have gotten off the subject a bit, but that happens. Happy Anniversary, Karol Wojtyla!

3.10.9 Finally, some good news (2003-10-17 14:50)

My dad called today, the operation went fine and my stepmom went home on time. Today the doctor was able to remove the drain from the incision, which is a very good sign. He's confident that they got all the cancer but the radiation treatments are still going to be done. It's much better to be safe than sorry.

I could just tell by some of the things that my dad said on the phone he was worried. He's been through this before and the last time it had a very unpleasant ending and I know that he had visions of the same thing happening all over again. But I think thirty years of advancements in medical technology and early detection are likely to make sure it doesn't.

3.10.10 More OS X fun (2003-10-19 17:13)

Another long weekend of battling OS X to its knees. I did all the file undeleting I could stand this week and did a reinstall of OS X onto a disk with more room. Turns out, OS X doesn't like to be installed on partitions larger than 8 gig. I had to partition my 14 gig drive and boom! I'm still not happy with the way Software Update works, it keeps dying before I can get the files I need downloaded. I've been able to get some of them via the browser, but not all of them are available that way. It literally locks up the network interface, for some reason. I hope things are smoother with DSL, whenever that happens.

The phone company was happy to take my registration for DSL, but nothing has happened. I have to call them tomorrow and see what the hold up is. I'm sure it'll be my fault. It's the phone company, after all.

But overall, I really like OS X, and I'm somewhat glad I upgraded, modulo the issues I'm still working on. I really wish I hadn't lost some of those files, but I can only blame myself. As part of the reorg I used

the other 7 gig partition to be our file areas, formatted with UFS so there are owners and permissions. We can each see each other's files, but not delete them. Better late than never.

3.10.11 Goals (2003-10-20 14:46)

One thing I really like about the martial arts is that it gets you thinking. Well, maybe not everyone, but it does me. It also makes you humble when you realize that the martial arts are really a journey that has no end, that even the highest level black belts are still learning. Or when you learn something from someone half your age.

On the latter, one of the senseis (Japanese for teacher), who is all of 23, talked about goals last week. He's got a five-year plan, a ten-year plan, etc. In other words, he knows where he is (head instructor, second only to the master of the dojo) and where he's going. In contrast, I don't. Not even a clue. And I'm twice his age.

It's my fault, of course. I've always felt that if I ever get to a point where I say I'm satisfied with myself or my accomplishments, I'll become complacent and fall apart. It's good to push yourself, I guess, but it would be better to have a destination in mind. Until recently, I did fine, but I don't feel that way anymore. I'm not only unhappy with where I am in my career, I'm also clueless as to where I want to go from here. Given that for me, my career defines who I am, I'm also unhappy with myself.

I envy my wife. She manages to keep going, though I know she's not doing exactly what she wants. Part of my personal frustration is not being able to make enough money to allow her to do what she wants and knowing I'm not in a position now where that's likely to change. To her credit, she has never complained about the money, though I know in my heart of hearts that she wouldn't mind being in the position we were in when we were both working. She stopped because of the kids and we adapted financially. It's paid off, as the girls are turning into smart and decent young women (and many of their friends are not). I just wish I could have done better for all of us.

So, when sensei asked us what our goals were, I had no answer. I've been bothered ever since by that. I would love to teach college, but the pay is too low, so if that ever happens it won't be for another 10 years or so. It would help to get my doctorate, if I plan to make teaching a career, but that's not going to be easy while working. The deck is truly stacked against me.

I've actually been considering teaching karate, as this is something I could do with the training I'm going to be getting anyway. It's not a goal yet, as I'm not sure I can and it depends so heavily on my own advancement. But maybe. Stay tuned to this journal.

Now, some meta issues. I've been whining way, way, way too much in this lately. So I'm going to stop. Not stop writing, just the whining. That pretty much means no more personal entries for the time being, strictly the technobabble I do so well. Remember, you were warned.

3.10.12 iTunes: The Brouhaha (2003-10-21 13:50)

I was originally going to title this *iTunes: The Review*, but there's way more to this now. I won't rehash the links, if you want some, the [1]weblog is a good place to go. I will go into some details about my experiences with it on Windows and OS X, and a little about the issues surrounding it.

First of all, since Apple is the name most people associate with user interfaces, it's a good place to start.

For better or worse, iTunes uses that brushed metal look that Apple is lately fond of. This means, of course, it doesn't look like other Mac or Windows applications, other than Apple's own Quicktime. Since I switch between Mac, Windows and Linux (KDE) interfaces over the course of a day, this isn't much of a problem for me. If you always use the same thing, it might be a little odd to you, but there's certainly nothing in the interface that is hard to decipher or confusing.

If you've used WinAmp, however, it's certainly going to be a change. WinAmp is primarily a player application, while iTunes is a player, a music manager and now also a shopping interface. iTunes can play your MP3 collection with no problem, as well as a lot of other sound formats, including AAC. AAC is Apple's proprietary format for the iPod that is said to offer better fidelity (which may be debatable) and Digital Rights Management (DRM) capability. The rules for songs downloaded from the iTunes Music Store (iTMS) allow for a limited number of copies to be made. A lot of people (including Microsoft) don't like AAC, but iTunes (and the iPod) can play MP3, so you're only required to use it for downloads from iTMS.

iTunes can play CDs, as well as create them, so if you have the right hardware, you don't necessarily need additional software to rip your music collection or create mix CDs. These capabilities aren't unique to iTunes, so this is only something to note, not marvel over.

Where I think iTunes excels is in the area of music management. It'll happily suck in your existing music collection, in whatever format. Songs are first collected in your Library. After that, you can create Playlists, which are subsets of the Library that can contain any song in any order. Better yet, you can have Smart Playlists, which have conditions that match songs in some way. Matching songs are then included in the Playlist automatically. For example, I have a number of Smart Playlists based on genre (if the file has that filled in). So, if I want to play all my Jazz tunes, I just create a Smart Playlist with genre=Jazz and all my Jazz tunes instantly appear in it. Genre is only one of a number of conditions you can use, so if you want all your short songs in one place, you can do it. The drawback is that many MP3 files lack a full set of tags, so this might not work with all of your collection. Nothing you can't fix if you want to.

But it's the iTMS that really gets people excited, at least for now. For some, it's the AAC format, for others it's the cost (99 cents/song or \$10/album), others complain about the selection of artists and others are concerned about the DRM. Steve Jobs of Apple thinks it's going to put an end to illegal filesharing, but he's probably the only one who thinks that. I believe it's going to continue to be the leader in for-pay services, but it can't easily win over *everyone*, not when its major competitors are free. One reason it could be the leader is that it's clued in to one of the major drivers in the filesharing phenomenon: people want songs, not whole albums. It's a sad fact that many CDs are full of crap, with maybe a good song or two. Consumers want to hear the songs they hear on the radio or see the video for on VH1, and that's pretty much it. The era of the 45 single is long over, and the cost of producing CD Singles isn't much less than a full-length CD. In other words, there's no financial incentive to offer the format. But people still wanted the format, and filesharing makes it possible to get "singles".

Even early on, the numbers for iTMS are impressive, even if they pale in comparison to the filesharing networks. While the experts argue about it, regular folks respond to the opportunity to get quality downloads at a reasonable price. While a million dollars in revenue in a few days is nothing compared to Apple's overall revenues, it's a million dollars more than any of the filesharing networks generated in the same period. And that gets the record companies excited. That will eventually make more artists and music available, and that's a good thing. It even makes them stop suing 12 year-old kids and grandmas. And that's also a good thing.

Filesharing is not likely to go away, it's free after all. But if services like iTMS can generate enough revenue, filesharing might not be seen as the great danger it is right now. And if iTMS can get enough variety, it

may become the premier source for music. Selection and service go a long way to getting people to overlook cost, and that's all a service like iTunes needs to do to be successful.

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>

3.10.13 My server at work (2003-10-24 14:26)

I know there are people that distrust Open Source software for various reasons (see the [1]weblog for examples) but the truth is there are in incredible number of industrial-strength applications available if you're willing to do a little work. I won't sugarcoat anything, with many Open Source applications, the customer support severely lags what is available for commercial applications. But by investing some "sweat equity" you can have systems that rival anything in the business.

Case in point, the server I maintain in my office at work. It has the following services available on it:

- Web pages via [2]Apache
- Departmental weblog via [3]Moveable Type
- Web applications via [4]Zope
- Content management via [5]Plone
- Instant Messaging via [6]Jabber
- SQL Database access via [7]MySQL
- File storage for Windows clients via [8]Samba
- MP3 streaming via [9]GnuMP3d

Additional cost to implement all of these services above the hardware: \$0. If it seems like a lot of things for a single server, it's because it is. I have all of these things on the same server because they aren't currently heavily used. My database guy and I are specing out another server to act as the backend for the web server, that will take some of the load off the current one (400 MHz PII with 384 Meg RAM) and leave it to act primarily as an I/O server. Given our use of Open Source, the cost to introduce a second CPU is again \$0 + cost of the hardware.

But if you think it's "free as in beer", you'd be wrong. I've had to do a lot of reading or posting to mailinglists or fiddling with config files to get everything set up right. Since I'm salaried, the cost to my company can be considered zero but really isn't since the time I spent doing that work was time that I could have been using to do something else. But part of my charter (or at least how I view my charter) is to provide tools to my workgroup and department at the best price/performance ratio I can. The Big Company spends a lot of money on commercial tool subscriptions every year. They also spend a lot on the hardware and people to provide service to those applications. Obviously, I'm not trying to replace every application in use, but there are certainly opportunities here to provide capabilities at much lower costs. And we do.

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>

2. <http://www.apache.org/>

3. <http://www.moveabletype.org/>

4. <http://www.zope.org/>

5. <http://www.plone.org/>

6. <http://www.jabber.org/>
7. <http://www.mysql.com/>
8. <http://www.samba.org/>
9. <http://www.gnu.org/software/gnump3d/>

3.10.14 Progress report (2003-10-25 15:42)

In case anyone has been keeping track of these things, I am not actually working on the story of my trip this past summer. I just today restored the deleted Word file, so it wasn't actually possible to work on it anyway. I doubt I'm going to get the image files that were corrupted back, so the only excuse I have is my lack of initiative. Done by year's end, for sure.

3.10.15 Three Wishes (2003-10-26 15:30)

(This was inspired by a Sunday comic I read, go figure)

If you had the proverbial three wishes, what would you wish for? Think about it, I'm serious. No limitations, no repercussions, no moral/ethical dilemmas. Would they be all for you, money, celebrity, power? Would you help a friend or relative? How about world problems? End war, or hunger, or maybe disease? Give me a hint in the comments.

3.10.16 Taking a break (2003-10-27 16:17)

I'm going to take a short break in order to deal with a couple of personal issues, primarily to go spend some time with my dad and my stepmom. I'm not taking my laptop (and they don't have a computer) so I'll also be unable to answer any emails until I return. There's a significant delay in the start of the radiation treatments, but there's still frequent doctor visits for various things, and I told my dad to save up chores for me to do when I'm there.

3.11 November

3.11.1 Off the air (2003-11-02 19:04)

I'll see you next week. Hugs to everyone, I appreciate your thoughts.

3.11.2 Don't call me (2003-11-10 10:49)

Or rather, don't bother calling me, since I no longer have a cell phone. I managed to lose it at my parents' on Friday and I cancelled it immediately. On Sunday I went to Verizon Wireless to pick up a replacement. And then the fun began. With VW, every time you make a change it's requires a new contract. Every time. The years of billing irregularities are understandable, given this proviso, but still annoying. Anyway, the prices for the phones that are advertised are only if you sign up for a two-year contract. Which isn't a two-year contract if you change anything (see above). You pay considerably more for a single year's contract. It's like buying a new car, there isn't really a price that anyone can name up front. It's only after a series of conditional statements (if X, then if Y and Z, etc.) that you might get to a point where you can write a check. I didn't get to that point. We left without me getting a phone. Now that my wife doesn't have one, it's senseless for me to have one, as there's no one else I ever call. I'd rather take the money I've been

spending on a service I don't use much and put it towards the DSL broadband I really need. Oh, since we had kicked off a new contract in August (invalidated since I wanted a new phone) it's going to cost \$175 to close the account ahead of contract termination. But in the long run it will actually be cheaper than getting a new phone and continuing service, not to mention less of a headache dealing with the billing. Of course, that assumes we can actually terminate the contract. I guess we'll have to see.

3.11.3 What's goin' on (2003-11-13 18:44)

I'd happily buy another car, if I had the money. I seem to spend thousands a year on maintenance items, in addition to high gas cost due to the fairly low mileage. Now it's the water pump (and the brakes, but who's counting?) I dream of a life of luxury, where bad purchasing decisions don't haunt me and I can buy what I want. Meanwhile, back in reality, kiss \$600 goodbye.

My stepmom started the radiation treatments on Tuesday, the chemotherapy won't begin until January. Given the early stage it was detected, it's all really precautionary at this stage. We're keeping our annual trek for Thanksgiving (and their anniversary) conditional at this stage. I should know more on Saturday.

3.11.4 The Matrix: Revolutions (2003-11-15 20:35)

I took the girls to see *The Matrix: Revolutions* today. To make a long story short, I liked it. A lot, actually, though not as much as the first installment. Needless to say, the special effects are second-to-none. The action scenes definitely dominate this time, as opposed to *Reloaded*. It seems clear that the second film was merely a setup piece for the finale, and you could easily skip it if you want, missing it will do little to make *Revolutions* less understandable. This one is less bogged down in attempts to explain things and just gets down to the action. And there's plenty.

And it's good there was plenty of action, since there was a large and loud group of people sitting near us laughing and talking through most of the movie. I was really close to telling them to shut up, but they eventually quieted down sufficiently. Manners are dead.

3.11.5 Minor changes (2003-11-16 19:46)

I've redone the [1]maszerowski.net page, taken out some of the junk and other html and css cleanups. Not that anyone cares, but I do these things to make myself feel superior.

1. <http://www.maszerowski.net/>

3.11.6 Smile, you're on Candid (web) Camera! (2003-11-17 13:29)

Here's an interesting question for you. Let's say you're clicking around the web and come across pictures of someone you know on, um, an adult site. Would you contact them to let them know? Would it matter if they seemed to have been posed and posted deliberately by the subject (versus secretly taken by someone else and posted without the subject's knowledge)?

This actually happened to me a while back. It was clear the person posting them was not the person in the pictures. When I told the subject about it, they just laughed, explaining they had posted the originals themselves a while back and weren't at all bothered by them reappearing (they were risqué but not pornographic).

Ten years ago, a question like this would probably be way more provocative than now. Back then it was no small feat to get images into digital format, scanners were primitive and expensive, most people had modems, and it was difficult (though not impossible) to have such photos developed and printed. You could be fairly sure that if you didn't do it yourself, only someone with access to your photos could have. That would have meant only your photofinisher or someone they knew. Creepy, when you think about it (like that Robin Williams movie, *One Hour Photo*).

But now, with fast links and digital cameras you don't have that middleman, and once something is on the net, it's difficult (if not impossible) to prevent its easy copy and distribution. Distribution in particular, is a real issue. The days of "destroying the negatives" as a way of eliminating evidence are gone. Even taking down a picture from a website doesn't erase it from browser caches (and Google, among other search engines).

But even if you don't post them yourself, that doesn't mean they won't get posted in some way, even if they started life as an film image. Remember those Polaroids you and your ex took of each other during those intimate moments? Better hope they don't get a) a need for revenge and b) a scanner anytime soon. Oh, don't worry, your name probably won't be on them (too easy to find and sue in that case) but your face (and perhaps other body parts) will be there for all to see. This is what they mean by being in your "permanent record".

I'm glad I told my friend about the pictures, despite the casual reaction. I'd do it again, too, because you never know. I don't worry about my images, because I've never done any compromising ones and I've never photographed anyone in such a way. But I can't help wondering if the people who are actively taking and posting such pictures now might regret doing so in a decade or so. There is still a stigma associated with such activities, though how bad it can be for you depends on who you are and what you do. It's good if you're Paris Hilton, or so it seems right now, but might be less so if you chose teaching as a career.

What intrigues me about technology is how it always has a non-obvious dark side. And this means everything from a sharp stick (which can be used to kill food as well as your fellow hunters) to wireless access points (which trade greater flexibility for lessened security). And we somehow always hear the positive spin long before the negative news appears even when both sides have been in existence the same length of time. I suspect we like it that way.

3.11.7 Growing older (2003-11-19 14:06)

My stepmom is doing well, but she didn't start the radiation until yesterday due to a small infection at the incision site. And, for the first time in more years than I can recall, we're not going to spend Thanksgiving with them. She's still feeling well, but it's early in the treatment program. There's also the impact n her immune system (which I didn't mention to her), that will be made much worse by our bringing in "out of town" germs. Given that my stepbrother and his family are also going to be there, it just seems like too much. We're going to visit around New Year's, though, in conjunction with my youngest going to spend some time with her aunt in NYC. I hope things are stable then.

My parents are in their 80's, my wife's in their 70's. We're both in our late 40's. I just noticed that one part of my moustache has turned completely white. I personally feel I'm not even half-way done with my life (despite some close calls) but it's becoming obvious to the most casual observer than I'm no kid anymore.

3.11.8 Quitting time (2003-11-20 18:01)

There are days when it's obvious that no matter what you do it would have been better to not have done anything at all. Yesterday and today are those kind of days.

On my server at work I deleted the directory that my in-house weblog uses for its database because I didn't realize what it was. No backups, of course. And all the attempts to recover it just made things worse. Worse, as in corrupted the MySQL innodb database.

I really am beginning to suspect I've got Alzheimers. At least I have enough mind left to realize the irony.

3.11.9 Thanksgiving 2003 (2003-11-27 23:09)

This year was unusual in that we stayed here instead of traveling to the Poconos. We went to my inlaws, which was okay, but seemed to lack the specialness I associate with Thanksgiving. But in my heart, I know it's the right thing to do.

I'm thankful that my parents are still here, especially since I know they're both well on in years. It's like warm weather in November, better to be grateful than to wonder why.

If you're one of the few that ever reads these things, I encourage you to think about the things you're thankful for.

3.11.10 Tipping point (2003-11-29 13:54)

I seriously doubt this happens to most people but I often find myself at a point in my life where I have to change something significant in order to deal with something that's bothering me. One of those points is coming, I think. Not sure why and definitely not sure what I'm going to do about it. But that's not unusual. Things have been bothering me more lately than usual, and I can definitely feel my patience dwindling. If I don't deal with the problem, I'm likely to lash out at someone and regret it later. I've done enough of that over the years to know I don't want to do it any more.

I'm sure part of it has to do with the dawning realization that I am never going to be anybody. It's not a tragedy, it's just my destiny. But I had hoped at one time to be more. And that really hurts.

3.12 December

3.12.1 For this I got a flu shot? (2003-12-03 13:57)

Despite dutifully getting my flu shot, like a good boy, I seemed to have gotten the flu. It's going around work, as well. Since I've been away from work since the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, it looks as though it has a one week gestation period. Which is cold comfort if you've gotten it already.

It makes me glad now that we didn't go to my folks for Thanksgiving, I'm sure I would have made things worse. But a part of me still wishes I had gone.

And, in case you've wondered, there will be no Christmas CD from me this year. I just haven't gotten

the ambition to do the work necessary to prepare myself and my studio this year. I hope to perhaps do something in the new year, though, and this will be more jazz than holiday. We'll see.

3.12.2 I got yer DSL, right here! (2003-12-05 23:19)

The Mac and the Linux box came right up. On the other hand, I can't get the Win 95 box to connect at all. And now I can't get it to dialup, either. So it's completely off the net for now. Crud.

3.12.3 Ho Ho Ho (2003-12-07 19:21)

Today we took Big Bunny to the local animal shelter to have his picture taken with Santa (and the kids). This has become a tradition of sorts, but given that the girls insist, it's hard to say no. We've been using it for our Christmas card. We put a scarf around his neck to help him show up better in contrast to Santa's big white beard, but it's never easy as rabbits don't have much in the way of necks. But he does look rather jaunty with it. If I can, I'll scan it and post it on the site.

I do have to say I'm pleased with my DSL setup, even though the Win95 box is still not connected. Ironically, the Linux box, which is almost identical and has the exact same LAN card, was a breeze to get going. Still, in neither case was it a job some Joe Average User. Better than it was in 10 (or even 5) years ago, but still not a matter of just plugging a cable in.

I've got Samba set up on the Linux box, so it can act as a server for the Win95 box (and eventually the Macs since Jaguar supports SMB shares without adding anything). But once all of the Macs are Jaguar-equipped I'm going to try using Rendezvous so that they don't have to worry about the server being up. I've decided not to keep it running all the time for security reasons, though I thought at one point that's exactly what I'd do. Having such OS diversity (something I believe in strongly) in my home net is a good idea but there's still a possibility of having one of the machines hijacked as a DDOS slave. I don't know if I'll update it to the new SuSE 9.0 (that's available for free download) or not, given the age of the hardware. There's something good about being forced to go to new hardware now and then (I present the Win95 box as proof) and a 400 Mhz AMD K6-2 with 128 Meg is likely to struggle with the new OS. Next year, unless I decide to do a major home studio upgrade.

3.12.4 What are your objectives? (2003-12-08 17:01)

Right now I'm sitting in my organization's quarterly communications meeting. It's not really necessary but the VP has this on her objectives so we have to. That's one advantage (among many) of power in the corporation: you can force other people to accomplish things for you.

3.12.5 HUD (2003-12-12 10:15)

As I note on the blog, a Seattle company has come up with a [1]Heads-Up display for motorcyclists. I have to be honest, if it really did have the ability to detect impending hazards, I would buy one (and the motorcycle to go with it) in a New York Minute.

I still think about riding. The riding suit I bought and have never even taken out of the box is still under my desk at home. I keep telling myself that I'm going to sell it on eBay, but I never do. It's become a sort of shelf, as a matter of fact. But it's not because of the handy shelf feature that I keep it, it's because selling it would represent the real end of my motorcycling days, and I'm just not ready for that.

1. http://mylnd.blogspot.com/2003_12_01_mylnd_archive.html#107123372984088574

3.12.6 Why do we never get an answer, when we're knocking at the door, with a thousand-million questions... (2003-12-15 14:07)

I'm writing this when I should be transcribing meeting notes. I'll get to it, eventually.

I've been thinking about this journal, particularly what I write in it and why. Observations have led me to believe I fall far outside of the norm for this sort of thing. I also (as I was reminded once) don't talk much about my family or others in my life. In my defense I like to think that there are reasons for all of that.

My family are all computer-savvy and they all know of my journal. None of them have expressly given me permission to talk about them, though to be honest I've never asked. Hence, I mention them only in general terms for the most part, under the assumption that they don't wish to be embarrassed. Which is not to say that I've ever done so, it's just the general principle.

I do write about myself, but I don't often reveal anything very deep (there are the occasional dreams, which, while personal, are abstract enough that they don't directly represent the real world) other than how much I dislike my job. I have a personal, hand-written journal for that. I don't use it as much as I used to, since most of my thoughts end up here, but it still exists. I have seen many online journals that go into great detail about the author's personal life. Some of them are interesting while others are painful to read. Many people use journalling as a way to deal with stressful conditions in their personal lives and as their journals are publically readable, you get to experience it along with them. I can't do that level of self-expression. It is my nature to hold things inside, much to the consternation of my wife, who thinks that doing so has negative effects on my health. She's right, but I can't change the way I am, at least not at the drop of a hat. But I know I'll have to, I can no longer deal with some of the consequences the way I used to. It's no picnic getting older.

I especially avoid writing about things at work in any way that could identify my employer or any of my co-workers. This is a pure survival move. I have seen more than a few examples of people losing their jobs over something they've written online that was critical of something or someone at work. A Microsoft temporary employee was terminated because he posted a picture of some Mac G5's on the loading dock at MS headquarters. In these days of a weak economy, downsizing and offshoring it's easier than ever to terminate someone over an online comment. I can't afford to lose my job, as little as I may like it right now, so I use the pseudonym The Big Company. I laugh whenever I type it. It's almost ironic, in a way, as they continue to shed employees on their way to becoming The Medium-Sized Company.

So there you have it, answers to questions that no one has ever asked.

3.12.7 More pictures (2003-12-21 19:08)

I uploaded some pictures of the kids taken at the fire department's Christmas party. They are, of course, on the [1]Stuff page. It's hard to judge their height from the pictures, since Santa is sitting down, but I believe they were the two tallest women in the firehouse.

I'm beginning to think I need to reorganize the Stuff page, since I keep adding pictures at a fairly steady rate. As a matter of fact, I have some scanning to do on our Karate picture and the pictures of the kids and Big Bunny with Santa. Sadly, we still haven't gotten the Windows PC on the network, and it has the scanner attached to it, so it may take some work. But doesn't everything?

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/stuff.html>

3.12.8 Goals worksheet (2003-12-23 21:18)

I was talking about goals and in particular what my Karate dojo is doing to help us focus on ours. I received the worksheet tonight and I thought I'd share the contents of the sheet. It has the following sections with space below them to write in the goal and, in particular, the date:

- Knowledge goals (I want to learn how to...)
- School goals (grades to earn, accomplishments in school, etc.)
- Physical/Skills goals (sports, activities, fitness goals)
- Life Goals (Things I like to achieve in my life)

We're supposed to fill them out and put them in a place where we can look at them every day. I am really going to put some effort into this, I've been thinking so much about these things of late. It's about time, really.

(2004-01-01 17:36:21)

looking forward to hearing your life goals. I want to help u achieve them..chas

3.12.9 Christmas 2003 (2003-12-27 14:59)

It was a good Christmas for us, but unfortunately, one thing that I had hoped would not happen did: my wife has come down with whatever I had. All I can hope is that it's the respiratory infection and not the flu.

Also, on Christmas Eve, my wife's car refused to start while she was shopping. It's not the battery, unfortunately, and we had to leave it until after Christmas in the parking lot where she was parked. Yesterday, I waited over 2 hours for the dealer's designated tow service to show up, and then I gave up and called our usual garage. We had thought the problem might be something the dealer could fix easier, but they blew their chance. Of course, their tow truck finally did show 5 minutes after I called our garage. I hope to hear on Monday how much it's going to cost us.

As far as neat gifts, I received a laser level/stud finder combo that I can't wait to use. We're going to redo our master bedroom closet with it. I also got a nice book on Kendo that I'm already reading. It's written by an American sensei, so it's a little easier to get through than the other Kendo book I have (which was translated from the Japanese).

What did you get?

3.12.10 Ambivalence: in review (2003-12-30 22:41)

I'm thinking I might write up a "2003: The Year In Review", if I can get beyond "it sucked". But then maybe I won't.

Chapter 4

2004

4.1 January

4.1.1 Not so-Friendly Skies (2004-01-01 20:37)

We took our youngest to the airport tonight for her flight to NYC to spend some time with her aunt. The Rochester airport now seems more like the visitor's lobby at a maximum security prison than a passenger terminal. The first step is to stand in line to get your ticket. Then you have your luggage hand-inspected, even if you're checking it rather than carrying it on. Next step is to show your ID and boarding pass to a person who only seems to be guarding the next line you have to stand in. This is the carry-on inspection line. Here you have to remove your coat and shoes along with every metallic object on your person and place them in bins to be x-rayed. We noticed that many bags had to be x-rayed twice, I guess they couldn't always see them clearly. It looks as if it fails a second check, there is a hand inspection station. Once your shoes, coat and bags are on their way through, you get to again show your ID and boarding pass to the person who watches as you walk through the metal detector. If you pass that, you can then get re-dressed and you're on your way. I'm sure there's more security to go through at the gate, but we couldn't see.

I'm glad we're taking security seriously, but I can't escape the feeling that we're punishing the wrong people. It's clearly a case of the actions of a few ruining it for everyone. I wonder if these security measures would have caught those who hijacked the planes that hit the WTC and the Pentagon. And I especially wonder if they've actually caught any would-be hijackers. I know they've confiscated potential weapons in every airport, but I don't know if they then also arrested the owners. Given our recent turn away from open government, I don't know if we'll ever know.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: my father didn't almost lose his life twice in the Pacific during WWII so people could be treated like criminals by their own government.

4.1.2 Some bits n' pieces (2004-01-07 20:56)

I mention my dad now and then and in particular I usually mention that he served in the Navy in the Pacific during World War II. In case you wondered about what he did, there is a Navy Memorial Foundation site with [1]him on it. The USS Wasp CV-7 was the ship he was on that was [2]sunk by a Japanese torpedo during the battle of Guadalcanal. My dad still attends many of the Guadalcanal reunions. The fact that he survived that attack is one of the mysteries that surround my family.

More on the Wasp is available [3]here. This site includes a lot of pictures and stories from the survivors, in particular the report of the captain. It wasn't easy for me to read it and I've heard the story before.

Speaking of memorials, I'm glad they picked a simple, yet still touching design for the September 11 memorial. Sometimes a simple thing says more than a complex one because it confronts us and makes us think rather than do all the work for us. It's one reason we treasure books more than television.

1. http://www.lonesailor.org/log.php?search=yes&navy_log_id=356159&lname_search=MASZEROWSKI&fname_search=CHARLES&page=1
2. http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/CV/CV-7_Wasp.html
3. <http://members.tripod.com/davidmclellan0/index.htm>

4.1.3 Karate and Kendo (2004-01-17 14:03)

I'm testing for my Blue belt in Karate next Friday, and I feel fairly confident. This, of course, means that I'm nowhere near ready. But anyway. What's probably more important is that it puts me beyond the midpoint to getting my Black belt. In other words, it's time to get serious. I'm still surprised at how my body has changed in just a year. Martial arts don't tend to give you enormous muscles (unless you also lift weights) but they do help add definition. I never managed to build big muscles in the past, even when I was lifting regularly (in the genes, I guess) and at this point I'm more interested in flexibility and poise (both of which I'm gaining like mad). I'm in remarkable shape for a guy in his mid-forties, and I plan to be in even better shape.

Kendo is a different story, of course. Since we do it as a club, we only have one session per week. There's a possibility I could test for one of the *kyu* levels in April, but it would take a lot of kata work as well as a new hakama. They're sticklers for details, and my present hakama is not the preferred blue color. It's rumored they actually place observers in the locker rooms at the testing sites so they can see what you're wearing and how you put it on. I think I'll keep Kendo at the club level, with occasional visits to a real Kendo dojo, until I get my Certified Black Belt (one step beyond the basic Black belt). My dojo pretty much requires Black belts to study another martial art and I'll have a distinct advantage having been in Kendo for so long prior.

4.1.4 Update (2004-01-19 13:14)

I haven't been writing here as much lately, that's due to a work-related thing that I won't go into here. I don't like whining in print, so I guess it's just as well. Part of growing up means you realize there are certain things that will never happen for you and there's nothing you can do that will ever change that.

I'll likely keep things to a mostly technical level: computers, technology, etc. It's usually possible to discuss things like that without offending anyone or putting my job at risk. Though, given my propensity for failure, there's no such thing as a sure bet.

4.1.5 And you may ask yourself (2004-01-20 11:49)

My God, what have I done?

4.1.6 Hop, hop, hop (2004-01-20 16:19)

Big Bunny does quite well for someone his age (12 years-old) and his infirmities (arthritis, partial blindness, missing teeth). Case in point: he is still perfectly capable of climbing the stairs to the second floor. We know

this because he does it every now and then at night when we're all sleeping. Once he nudges the bedroom doors open he likes to run around the room, sometimes stopping and resting, other times just making a quick circle and then leaving. I have no idea why he does this. He does like to be around his people, so I suppose that when they're all upstairs, that's where he thinks he should be, too. He's remarkably noisy, so even I wake up sometimes as he makes his rounds. Rabbits do a remarkably good job of making their presence known when they want to, despite their limited vocal capabilities.

4.1.7 Geek striving (2004-01-22 16:58)

Sometimes, I just feel like giving up. It seems everytime I touch my G3 tower, something awful happens to it. Last weekend, I tried (foolishly) to do a PowerPC processor upgrade to a 500 Mhz G4. It hasn't run since. Something went awry and the damage to the filesystem on the system partition has taken me since then to fix, and I'm still working on it. Needless to say, I haven't even gotten close to doing the CPU upgrade. I hope to be up again this weekend, but it's been a while, and no one can use it in the meantime.

I'm really, really concerned that what skills I ever had are slowly disappearing. More to the point, I'm really looking to win at something, anything. Anything.

4.1.8 (2004-01-23 22:34)

I graduated to my Blue belt tonight. For once, I was on the normal testing cycle so the girls were able to watch. I thought my kata was as good as any I've done while nervous and in front of a large number of people. I guess I'm getting better with that, or learning how to deal with it, which in the end is probably the same.

The highlight of the evening for me had to have been when Sensei called me a Martial Artist. All I can say is that I wish I had started sooner. The journey remains the same.

Domo arigato, sensei.

4.1.9 Got the Mac back, Jack! (2004-01-28 10:33)

I finally have the Mac back, at least in terms of the disk contents. Not sure what happened, but there was a file that was listed as being over 7 gig, which is actually larger than the disk it was on. This caused no end of problems, as you might imagine. The worst side effect was to make it look like every file on the disk was crosslinked. This was because the enormous file looked like it occupied the same space as did every other file on the disk. After fixing some other problems, I tackled the checking of all the files for being crosslinked, which literally took days. Once that was done, I had to actually use the Norton disk editor to edit the enormous file's header block to make it look smaller and to change it's name, which was a bunch of arbitrary characters that were illegal and could not be matched in the shell. That done, I could finally delete it and fix the last of the errors, reinstall Jaguar and the updates. Next step is a real backup to CDRom and then to do the G4 upgrade which started all of this.

I realize that all of this makes it sound like the Mac, and Mac OS X, is flakey. Please keep in mind that my Mac is used and I have no idea what happened to it before I bought it. I did run a physical sector check, though I suspect the problem may have been due to being reset (by me) when it looked to be hung and probably wasn't. This incident, along with the hosing of my wife's Win95 box, makes me wonder if I'm not becoming senile.

4.1.10 Even more Kendo (2004-01-30 16:23)

Last night I went to the Sho Shin dojo to train with the Rochester Kendo Club. Sensei Rivera was nice enough to allow me to train with his class and wouldn't take any money, saying "next time." I plan I going about once a month, so I will definitely do so. They were very patient with me and I was able to keep up with the more experienced students, even when doing the repetitive exercises (800 cuts!). I can certainly feel it today, but not too badly. Of course, tonight in addition to regular kata class we have "Spar Wars", basically 45 minutes of straight sparring. It's going to be a struggle, but I'll make it, I'm sure, especially since we get to take breaks whenever we wish to.

4.2 February

4.2.1 Now faster than ever (2004-02-01 20:45)

Finally, I was able to do the G4 upgrade for the Mac. It's now a 500 MHz G4 instead of a 333 MHz G3. It's not "holy crap!" faster, but it is noticeably faster with some functions. I expect now that I'm all set to run Garage Band, except, of course, the lack of a DVD drive. That's my next purchase, which I'll probably do in March, just to spread out my expenditures.

4.2.2 Changing careers (2004-02-02 14:16)

(I also mention this on my [1]weblog)

I am seriously considering making a drastic change in my career and I'd be interested in hearing from anyone who has done so. It can either be positive or negative. In particular I'm wondering how you managed to decide what your new career would be. I've already read a couple of books but I'm always willing to read more, so if you have any suggestions, I'm open. There is no timetable or deadline, at least right now; that's something I need to develop over the course of this year. Thanks.

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>

4.2.3 New {fray} story (2004-02-03 16:13)

In an eerie coincidence, there's a new story up on the [1] {fray } about [2]lessons learned at work. Mine is [3]here. As are all my stories on the {fray }, it's true although I don't name names. It will be added to the [4]Writings page with my next update of the site.

1. <http://www.fray.com/>

2. <http://www.fray.com/work/skidmarks/>

3. <http://www.fray.com/work/skidmarks/post/index.002.shtml>

4. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/writings.html>

4.2.4 Karate seminar (2004-02-05 18:18)

Alain Saily, the French karate master (whose picture is on my [1]Stuff page) came back to our dojo for a seminar last night. As usual, it was an interesting evening, as he has a very distinctive teaching style and approach to the martial arts. The last time he was here, I was a white belt and totally overwhelmed. This time, having had over year of training, I was able to get a lot more out of the evening.

It's always a good idea to get exposed to other styles (and other arts), though the value increases the more you know about your own art. A lot of times, you are made aware of something that you either hadn't noticed or had simply taken for granted. This is also why the value increases the more you know: when you're first learning, you really need to immerse yourself in what you're doing (like me), but when you're fairly experienced you can afford the time to examine things. Hence, I know that the black belts got even more out the seminar than I did, even as I got more than I did the previous seminar.

The important thing is that you never stop learning.

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/stuff.html>

4.2.5 More words about nothing at all (2004-02-07 21:22)

I've been slowly revamping my weblog template to an XHTML/CSS one instead of the table-based one I'm using now. But it's taken a long time because I never really sit down and work at it more than a little bit at a time. Oh, well. It'll happen someday.

Work on my Karate and Kendo site is in an even worse state. I haven't even started it yet. But I have been collecting some things for it, so there's a non-zero probability I will get going eventually. Trust me.

Still no action from the readership on career changing. So I'll re-extend the request for anyone with experience in changing careers to let me know how you did it and how it went. Thanks.

4.2.6 Geriatric rabbit care (2004-02-08 14:37)

Big Bunny is an old rabbit, plain and simple. I don't know what the equivalence of "rabbit years" is to "human years" but given that rabbits can breed at six months, I'd bet it's greater than the oft-quoted seven years for dogs (that's been somewhat modified in recent years, but most people still use it). I'd peg him as the equivalent of someone in their nineties or so. He's got arthritis in his hind legs, he's losing his vision (though slowly), he's had most of his back (chewing) teeth removed and he might be losing his hearing (there's less evidence for that). Despite all that, he still gets around on his own power, and manages to navigate the stairs to the bedrooms at least once a night.

Which is not to say we haven't had to make some allowances. We had to modify his litter box to remove one of the sides so he doesn't have to jump in. He eats a modified diet of yogurt for breakfast and baby food mixed with pellet rabbit food for dinner. He can still eat the little graham cracker sticks he loves, so he gets those as a treat. Bananas, which most rabbits seem to love for some reason, are still on the menu. We've learned a lot about his eating habits because we're way more involved than we were when he ate most of his food out of a hopper.

He also can't clean himself as well as he used to, mostly because he's not as flexible as he once was (who is?). His backend gets a bath every now and then (it's unusual to bathe rabbits) and we have to wash under his chin since he gets it into his food.

But probably the most obvious sign of his age is that he sleeps more than he used to. Rabbits are generally active in the morning and the evening and sleep most of the rest of the time (it actually makes them good pets for people who work days), occasionally waking up for a snack or a quick romp. Big Bunny, because of his reduced mobility, does considerably less during his normal active times. Still, as I mentioned

before, he's perfectly capable of ascending the stairs to the second floor during the night and running around at great speed.

The world record for age in rabbits is around 16, it was a captured wild rabbit so there's some question as to the exact age. Big Bunny is at least 12, so he's certainly up there if not exactly a record. But there's no telling how much longer he has with us so perhaps that record is attainable. I hope so.

4.2.7 Little things (2004-02-13 13:01)

Sometimes it really is the little things. At work, I always try to be nice to the admins because they're the ones you end up saving your bacon when you need to deal with the bureaucracy. So every Valentine's Day, I go around and leave some chocolate candies on the desks of my department's admin and a few other admins who I deal with on occasion. All of them work for guys well above me in stature (and pay, obviously), yet for some of them, my little token is the only thing they'll get. I realize it's not *required*, but it doesn't hurt.

I just hope that if I ever become successful and powerful that I don't forget those who work for me.

4.2.8 The St. Valentines Day Dinner (2004-02-16 17:03)

That's right, dinner, not massacre. The only thing seriously injured was my wallet. We went to a new restaurant, primarily because my guitar teacher's new tri was playing there. I had to make reservations, and that should have been my first tip-off. The restaurant is in Mendon, a semi-rural suburb of Rochester famous for being the home of the "horsey set." The cuisine was Italian, slightly upscale, and not even remotely cheap. At least it was good. Unfortunately, the sound was inaudible in the dining room so we could only listen for a little while when we were enjoying a beer (of which there were few on tap) before dinner. Still, it was a nice evening and worth it, though we're not likely to revisit that establishment anytime soon.

4.2.9 What if they gave a weblog and nobody read it? (2004-02-18 16:03)

I took a look at the site statistics for it today, and it's obvious that I'm basically the only reader (with some occasional exceptions). But it's a double-edged sword, really. If I had more readers, there'd be an implied obligation on my part to say something, well and often. It would also be more difficult to always say what's on my mind, as the possibility of offending someone would be much higher. As things stand, I can post what I want, when and if I want, and never have to worry about how it will be received. Still, I try to act as if the whole world is reading it, even if that's not the case. If I ever get "discovered", I don't want to have what I wrote in the past come back to haunt me.

4.2.10 Star photos (2004-02-20 10:59)

My oldest daughter has to do a project for school involving using a 35mm camera to take pictures of the stars, using various (long) exposure times. Essentially, you point the camera at the sky and then open the shutter and hold it for a minute, five minutes, etc. This is not something you can do with most consumer-grade digital cameras, of course, and it turns out my wife's Canon SLR couldn't do it either (the auto features don't seem to allow it). Luckily, I still have my old camera equipment. I have a Nikkormat FTN and Nikon F2, both SLRs, and neither of them having any auto features, other than the coupling of the lens f-stop to the metering system. As I recall, the F2's meter didn't work at all, and both of them need to new batteries and to be extensively cleaned and lubricated. Still, for what she needs to do, the Nikkormat will do fine. I set her up with a long shutter release that has locking, so that you can more easily keep the shutter opened.

But seeing my old stuff really made me feel nostalgic (and old, naturally). I was heavily into photography as a teen, and worked hard to buy the cameras (or part of them). I went to RIT specifically for the Photographic Science major (though I should have gone for photojournalism), but only lasted two quarters before realizing that I liked optics (which I enjoyed in high school physics class) and not chemistry. My high school year book for 1975 is full of my photographs. I was in the Photo Club for four years, spending countless hours in the darkroom listening to "After The Gold Rush" and "Workingmans' Dead". But something happened to me in college.

To this day, I'm not really sure what it was. I had been a hard-working A student in high school. It was a Catholic, all-male school that heavily emphasized academic achievement (and still does, as far as I can tell). I went from a highly-structured environment to one that was free of almost all regulation and I simply couldn't handle the freedom. I was still hard-working, I just worked at my on-campus job instead of my class work. Realizing that the PhotoSci program wasn't what I thought it would be was also a factor. To put it mildly, I went wild. I'm not proud of those years. I was truly lost, and only the fear of facing my parents if I dropped out kept me going. Finishing the Food Service Administration program was probably not the proudest moment of my career, but at least I didn't drop out. And, though I couldn't have possibly have known then, it put me on a path to where I am now. Granted, there were more direct ways, but to borrow a metaphor from the martial arts, once you're on the path, you'll reach the destination.

4.2.11 Fire Department Banquet (2004-02-22 16:57)

Last night was the fire department's annual banquet, our big get-together of the year. This year it was held at the local Holidome (Holiday Inn) and was a very nice evening. Things are considerably less wild than they were in late 70's when I first joined, but that's to be expected. I don't know this for sure, but I'd bet the average age in the department is considerably higher than it was 25 years ago. But on the positive side, we do have a number of younger members (all in the last year or so) which bodes well for the future.

We use our banquets to hand out awards for those that make the most calls and are voted by their peers as leaders, to announce the new line officers and board of directors and to honor those who had served in an elected office the previous year. We don't get a lot of attention from the community, unless of course we're responsible for raising their taxes, so this is our way of patting ourselves on the back. The downside of emergency services work is seeing people when they are not at their best, and the "thank yous" are few and far between. None of us are in this for the fame and glory, and I think the recognition of the people you work with is more valuable than something from the public, at least in most cases.

4.2.12 Rewriting the story of my life (2004-02-24 20:47)

Catchy title, eh? And not quite true, sadly. What I am going to do is rewrite the About page contents in a more biographical format. The original, which has been up for years, was done sort of tongue-in-cheek and I just thought it was time for a change.

The truth is you can't change your life's history, unless you're willing to lie. The future is something you can only affect indirectly, by what you've done in the past. The present is truly the only thing we have direct control over. But yet we procrastinate, hoping that somehow the future will still come out all right. And when it doesn't, when it resembles almost exactly what today is like, we wonder why...

4.2.13 That Mel Gibson movie (2004-02-25 11:21)

Let me say right off the bat, that I have not and will not go to see Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. I have a number of reasons for this. First of all, I know the story, having read the Bible and other writings on the subject. I was raised Catholic, the Crucifixion is a part of being a Christian, but it's not necessarily the focus. Secondly, while the film may not necessarily blame the Jews for killing Jesus, it doesn't try not to. It was (in pre-Vatican II days) previously Catholic teaching that the Jews were indeed the ones responsible, but that has changed. Gibson is a member of a Catholic offshoot sect that ignores Vatican II, so his movie follows his beliefs fairly closely. But to assign culpability to one group really ignores the big picture. Jesus didn't die for any one group and his death, therefore, is not the result of any one group. The Catholic church has been guilty of an "us and them" approach for a long time. It claimed Heaven as only for Catholics, no others, since they denied the teachings of the church. Post-Vatican II that teaching was modified, although I'm sure Gibson, given his beliefs, thinks otherwise.

If you're looking to blame someone, you have to blame everyone. Yes, many of the Jewish leaders feared and hated Jesus because he represented a challenge to their authority and because he could potentially bring down the considerable wrath of the Roman conquerors. Other Jews, looking for a, dare I say it, a *Braveheart*-like avenging leader who would organize a uprising that would force the Romans out of the region, were disappointed in his message and uninterested in his teachings. The Romans, no nice guys, were more than happy to take care of a potential destabilizing force in one of their territories, especially when it could serve as a warning to other rebels. Even Jesus' followers, who had greeted him with such fan fare when he arrived in Jerusalem, abandoned him at the end. Keep in mind that when he was arrested, he was in the company of just twelve of his closest friends (and a few others, notably his mother, Mary, and Mary Magdelene). To make it worse, one of those would turn out to be key in his arrest (Judas) and only one of the twelve (Peter) would try to stop the arrest. That Jesus let this all happen, letting Judas act as he did and telling Peter to put away his sword, is an integral part of the mystery. It also makes it hard to pin blame on anyone in particular since Jesus knew his fate, and could have done a number of things to change it, yet he allowed things to progress to their ultimate end. Either everyone is to blame, or no one is.

But what bothers me the most about the film is the violence. There's no doubt in my mind that the death of Jesus was a bloody, painful, horrifying ordeal. It may or may not have been any worse than any other Roman crucifixion of the time. What's important, from a belief standpoint, was that he chose to be sacrificed in the same way as any common criminal. The film, on the other hand, is mostly about the violent aspect of his death. The violence begins after fifteen minutes into the film and continues for the remaining hour and forty-five minutes. What is central to Christianity is that Jesus suffered and died for the sins of mankind, all of mankind. The Crucifixion, while important, isn't. Gibson has chosen to emphasize a secondary aspect of Christianity, and that's the real reason I will never see this film. By ignoring so much of Jesus' life and ministry, it becomes just a violent film intended to shock audiences. No thanks. As conflicted as my beliefs are now, I have no expectation that seeing almost two hours of blood and violence will change a thing. I suspect that I'm not the only one.

4.2.14 And, on a positive note... (2004-02-27 16:04)

Oddly enough, my life isn't all gloom and doom. Oh sure, it seems that way if you read this journal (all 2 of you, ha ha), but there are moments of good fortune. For instance, Wednesday. I usually gas up the Bulgemobile on Wednesday mornings on the way to work. I stop at the Mobil Mart near me, fill the tank and get a large coffee, all paid with my nifty Mobil SpeedPass. This is really the only time I buy coffee there, so I was surprised when the lady at the counter told me my coffee was free. Since I wear the same coat pretty much all winter, she recognized me and essentially stamped all the blank spaces on a coffee club card.

Then today, I got my extra shot of espresso in my mocha for free, on a similar deal. Now I go to Starbucks 3-4 times a week, so they really know me there. Still, it's nice to have someone do something nice for you. I know Starbucks is equated with Satan by some people, but I like their coffee and I'll drink it black, which is something I can't say for every coffee place.

I also may have come up with a better job possibility here at The Big Company. It looks like an ideal fit for my background. Unfortunately, it's in southern California. They say they'll handle relocation, but it's a big move in any case. I have my review with my boss on Monday, so I'll be able to get him to sign the papers necessary to apply then. Since many jobs are posted even though they have someone in mind, my chances aren't good, but perhaps it'll get me introduced to people that might have something else later on. We shall see.

4.3 March

4.3.1 Water on Mars (2004-03-02 15:01)

As noted in my [1]weblog, NASA has announced that the *Opportunity* rover has found evidence that the area it's in was "drenched" with liquid water at some time in the past. This also means that there were hospitable conditions for life as well. Which is not the same as saying there was life, and NASA was careful in all of its statements.

A question was asked as to how likely the possibility was of finding fossils there and the answer was, basically, "as low as the chance of finding them on Earth." We find them here because we have a good idea where to look, and even then they aren't common. It also helps that on Earth, life evolved beyond the single-cell stage. It doesn't seem likely to me that Martian life got much beyond that, if it got to any stage at all. It is possible to detect the presence of microbes in fossil rock, but it's not going to tell you more than it was there. But still, that would be something, since this is Mars. In any case, this kind of investigation is beyond the abilities of the current rovers, though I'm sure there are plans to go beyond them in future missions. We are far from sending astronauts, and I wonder if we ever will (or should).

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>

4.3.2 If I were a lawyer (2004-03-03 12:59)

IANAL (I am not a lawyer), but if I was, I'd probably be trying to figure out how to make money from all the SCO anti-Linux brouhaha. I think a lot of techies are scratching their heads and wondering how this could have happened. Linux was supposed to be free of all that legal encumbrance, courtesy of the GPL (Gnu Public License). In theory it is, assuming that none of its contents are covered by another license. That's what SCO is claiming, but at the moment they haven't publicly revealed exactly what. It's not in their best interests to do so, since Linux hackers would simply remove the offending code and replace it with something else.

In the meantime, companies like AutoZone and Daimler-Chrysler are going to have to spend money to defend themselves, even if the suits are dismissed. And how could that happen? Easily, it turns out. SCO bought "UNIX" from Novell, who bought it from AT &T, the ones that originally developed it. Turns out, there is significant disagreement between SCO and Novell over exactly what it was that SCO bought. Until such time as the exact nature of the purchase is determined (in a court, of course), no court will allow these new suits to progress. Essentially, their continued progress is totally dependent on the ruling on SCO and

Novell. And it's no slam dunk. BSD, the U.C. Berkeley Unix derivative, was determined to be allowed by the AT &T license. This fact tends to lend credence to Novell's view of the purchase, but a new judge is certainly free to decide otherwise.

If SCO loses that, then it won't matter what code they claim is illegally in Linux. If they win, then it's still going to be replaced, but SCO can go after anyone who is using Linux now. But suing people, especially in a manner such as this, is not a sustainable business practice. SCO is already losing money, if they don't win, they'll be finished. Sales of their "genuine" Unix product are not going anywhere, and if their only value-add is the license, that won't be changing. Even Sun, with Solaris, is doing okay (though not as well as they once were) because customers can perceive a value. It's hard to compete with a product that costs nothing to acquire (support costs are a different issue and hardware, even cheap commodity hardware, isn't free and never will be), so Sun's performance has to be appreciated. SCO is facing a scenario where they have a large, short term influx of cash that ends as soon as Linux is free of SCO code. The ill-will generated will overcome anything they do after that. If I was an investor, I'd try to guess when the boom would be over and sell my SCO stock before the bottom drops out.

Trust me, not only is Linux going to be fixed once the problems are identified, but those who are using it are going to continue to use it. They're not going to switch to SCO, or Solaris, or Windows. They'll pay their fines, since they are one-time, non-recurring expense, and then get on with business. It's the lawyers who are going to really clean up here, since every company that gets touched in this will need one (or ten).

Just think, I thought about attending St. John's in NYC and becoming a lawyer like my uncle Ray. Hind-sight...

4.3.3 No, really (2004-03-06 16:29)

Sometimes the strangest things happen to me. Today, I was getting my hair cut at my usual walk-in place when a woman who was getting her hair colored (or highlighted, I'm not sure) said out of the blue that I was handsome. No, really. I'm still smiling to myself.

4.3.4 It worked (2004-03-06 20:16)

I actually managed to do a major hardware upgrade on the Mac without breaking anything. Re-read that sentence, it's not something you'll see very often from me. I swapped the old 4 gig OS 9 internal drive for a new 120 gig monster and then moved all the home directories to it, to leave more room on the boot partition. OS X seems to require the boot partition to be less than 7 gig in size, and the combination of having 4 people share one computer and a decent set of installed applications meant we were right on the edge. As a matter of fact, that's why I bought the big drive. At one point, there was so little free space that things basically stopped working, particularly preferences. It was weird.

Luckily, I was able to keep the OS 9 drive, using an enclosure from Macally to turn it into a FireWire external drive. When we finally break free from the old stuff, I'll buy another drive and replace it in the enclosure. The Mac used to be SCSI, which easily allows chaining, but Apple switched to IDE a long time ago. My G3 still has an external SCSI connector, but newer Macs don't. FireWire drives tend to have a second connector for expansion; it's not quite SCSI but it's more than adequate. And the best part was that it all worked.

4.3.5 Procrastination pays off now (2004-03-10 18:20)

No one is ever going to accuse us of not being procrastinators. Only 16 years after getting the family room addition to our house, we finally have a mantle over the fireplace/stove. It's very nice, too, solid oak. Now our family tradition of hanging our stockings (with care) on nails hammered into the 2x4 they used to space the bricks will have to change. And we're also getting the bookshelf unit (it's behind me as I write this) finished. It's not quite as old as the addition, but it's been here a while. Now all I have to do is not get laid off and we're golden.

4.3.6 On Hyndford Street (2004-03-14 12:04)

Sometimes it's better to let someone else speak:

Take me back, take me way, way, way back
On Hyndford Street
Where you could feel the silence at half past eleven
On long summer nights
As the wireless played Radio Luxembourg
And the voices whispered across Beechie River
And walks up Cherry Valley
On sunny summer afternoons
Picking apples from the side of the tracks
That spilled over from the gardens on Cyprus Avenue
Watching the moth catcher working the floodlights in the evenings
And meeting down by the pylons
Playing round Mrs. Kelly's lamp
Going out to Holywood on the bus
And walking from the end of the lines to the seaside
Stopping at Fusco's for ice cream
In the days before rock 'n roll
Hyndford Street, Abetta Parade
Orangefield, St. Donard's Church
Sunday six bells, and in between the silence there was conversation
And laughter, and music and singing, and shivers up the back of the neck
And tuning in to Luxembourg late at night
And jazz and blues records during the day
Also Debussy on the third programme
Early mornings when contemplation was best
Going up the Castlereagh hills
And the Cregagh glens in summer and coming back
To Hyndford Street, feeling wondrous and lit up inside
With a sense of everlasting life
And reading Mr. Jelly Roll and Big Bill Broonzy
And Really the Blues by Mezz Mezzrow
And Dharma Bums by Jack Kerouac
Over and over again
And voices echoing late at night over Beechie River
And it's always being now, and it's always being now

It's always now
On Hyndford Street where you could feel the silence
At half past eleven on long summer nights
As the wireless played Radio Luxembourg
And the voices whispered across Beechie River
And in the quietness we sank into restful slumber in silence
And carried on dreaming in God.

©Van Morrison/Caledonia Productions Inc.

4.3.7 My life considered as a line from a Cory Doctorow novelette (2004-03-16 16:30)

I struggle with pessimism all the time. The trouble is, I'm right more often than I'm wrong. But that does little to make me happy. It seems to me that people who are optimistic all the time are adept at ignoring reality, even if they are happier. On my whiteboard in my office is a line from Cory Doctorow's new "Eastern Standard Tribe" novelette, "Would you rather be smart or happy?" It's presented as an either/or situation, and I'm not sure I can disagree.

Another thing I've noticed is that the more I know, the less happy I am. Coincidence? I think not.

4.3.8 The Middleage Guy Looks At Technology (2004-03-18 13:51)

I wouldn't be surprised if this is a general symptom of middleage, but lately I can't help feeling I just don't understand the world anymore. Then again, 40 years worth of changes tend to render things unrecognizable, so it's probably not just me.

I can imagine my grandfather, who grew up in Poland, who lived in a horse-drawn world, having the same sort of feeling watching the Moon landings. He was in his early 80's at the time, and I can't help but wonder if I'll experience the same level of change when I'm that age. It was a big step from riding a horse to driving a car, but anyone who could drive a car in 1957 could drive one now (if their health allows). Clearly, not all aspects of what we call technology change at the same rate.

The primary change in the world as I know it is probably in communications. I can converse, either in voice or in text, with people anywhere on the planet as easily (or moreso, if you're a shy introvert like me) as you can talk to the person in the next office. I wear a wireless phone on my belt. I have multiple email accounts. I have accounts on multiple IM networks (though I don't use them much). My weblog and electronic journal have commenting facilities. My grandfather probably knew only the people who lived in his village, right up until he was "drafted" into the Russian army.

But most of those communications channels have only opened in the last 15 years or so. What's interesting is that my two children have never known a world without them. For them, email and especially IM are simply part of the world, as natural as speaking. I can only guess as to what they'll be using when they're my age. Will communications continue to expand? Or will the focus of technological evolution change to something else? We'll see, won't we?

4.3.9 Linux upgrade (2004-03-20 17:06)

I upgraded my Linux box, finally, to [1]Mandrake 10. I was running [2]SuSE 7.3 but it became unsupported at the end of 2003 because of age, and the mishmash of old and new I had on it had become rather unstable. One of the main reasons I wanted to switch to a 2.6 kernel is improved memory management, especially in cases of fairly small RAM sizes (128 Meg). I've always suspected 2.4 of not handling the swap area being larger than 50 % of its allocation, though I have no data to prove it.

It's really an old box, with only a 400 MHz K6-2, but it's decent enough for most non-gaming, non-multimedia applications. I do most of those with the Mac, anyway, so it's not a loss. Once you've done much of anything with iTunes, it's hard to go back to XMMS (or even WinAmp).

The only ugly thing right now is getting my old mail, which is in MH format, into KMail, which uses another format. I'm probably going to have to run a converter to get the MH mail into mbox format so I can then import it.

I bought a new 80 Gig Western Digital drive to replace the two smaller drives I had. I figure if it still isn't stable enough, I can use the drive in a newer PC, so it's not money wasted. And, if I ever decide I forgot to copy something to CD, I still have the drives.

1. <http://www.mandrakesoft.com/>
2. <http://www.suse.com/>

4.3.10 Spoke too soon (2004-03-21 11:10)

As can be expected, my announcement of Linux PC stability was premature. It locked up again on me, so it's time for new hardware. Which, considering how nice the Mac is for damn near everything, isn't a priority right now. Oh well.

4.3.11 Question (2004-03-22 09:59)

If you dread coming to work each day, to the point where getting out of bed brings tears to your eyes, is that a sign?

4.3.12 wxPython (2004-03-24 18:27)

I haven't been doing a lot of programming at work in recent years, but I try to keep up with it a little, here and there. Mostly I've been working with Python, doing small scripts on my Linux servers that manipulate log files and such. But lately I've been working with [1]wxPython which wraps the wxWindows libraries and I built a small Windows app that allows me to drag and drop files and then does some simple processing. It runs like a normal compiled Windows program, but I can make changes at any point and instantly get results. It's nice.

One of the advantages of higher processor speeds and more memory is that it makes interpreted languages, like Python, practical as more than just scripting tools. It's a whole new computing world out there.

1. <http://www.wxpython.org/>

4.3.13 Ah, the smell of solder (2004-03-27 15:46)

After more than a year, I've finally gotten started on my 5E3 tube amplifier kit. I realize that I should have splurged and gotten a complete kit instead of buying parts here and there, but that's water under the bridge.

I'll write up the whole experience later, but I knew I was in trouble when I discovered the main circuit board was missing a component hole. That, and I was missing all of the hookup wire and spent half an hour in the dank basement of the local electronics surplus store selecting 4 different colors of 22 AWG. Even better, I discovered that one of the wires I selected was really coax, but I think I'll use it to wire the filaments. Normally, you use discrete wires and twist them together to cut down on the 60 Hz AC hum, but using coax should be even better. I'm not trying to build a total replica of a 50's amp, so I don't care if my wire colors don't look retro, provided the sound is what I want.

It's definitely a different experience than doing printed circuit board work. You really have to get the soldering iron in contact and it sucks up a lot of solder for each joint. But it's fun, and really, that's the whole point, isn't it?

4.3.14 Updates (2004-03-27 20:01)

I did some minor updates to the About page, just for the heck of it. Mostly, I changed the third person wording back to the first person. It was funny when I wrote it, but it didn't age well and just seemed dumb.

I'm really thinking about doing a major redesign again, but there's such a gap between what I can do and what I'd like to do. I've always looked longingly upon the sites of famous web personalities and wanted to be like them in some way. I write my weblog as if people read it (and some actually do), rather than as a private journal (I have a journal). I doubt I'll be famous but that doesn't stop me from trying to do good work. Accordingly, it annoys me when I can't seem to get things the way I want, and sometimes that keeps me from doing anything at all. I'm funny that way.

4.3.15 Weekend report (2004-03-29 18:51)

It was an interesting weekend, I didn't get much done on my 5E3 kit, since other things seemed to keep coming up. For instance, I noticed that the dryer wasn't venting correctly when it started getting warm and damp in the basement as it was running. We had a repairman in this past week to repair the main bearing, which was worn and making noise. He needed to move the dryer and that caused the problem. I replaced the pipe and everything was fine, but of course I lost an hour or so.

I figured out the best way to mount the power transformer, but that required drilling holes into the stainless steel chassis. Stainless is tougher than chrome-plated brass, had I known I would need to drill as much as I've had to, I would have gotten the softer material. I bought a drill press attachment for my electric drill, it makes drill holes in precise places a lot easier. It's not as nice as real drill press, but it's fine for the kind of occasional use I have in mind.

Given the terse documentation that came with my kit, I can only assume it was written for someone that knew what a 5E3 looked like inside. Since I've never seen one in the "flesh", it's been good that people have posted a number of pictures on the web of various bits. There's a bit of danger involved with high voltage tube circuits, and I don't want to mess things up not knowing the correct assembly rules. That's what was behind some of my procrastination, sort of. Another aspect was that after I bought the kit I found a lot of negative opinions about the manufacturer. To be honest, a lot of it was specifically about the "service after

the sale”, rather than the kit quality itself. I’ve been using the web to supplant the build manual, and that’s been okay so far. But there are various parts in the kit that I’m not sure what to do with, and not having a good idea of what it’s supposed to look like (which includes where things go), I’m sure I’m going to get stuck somewhere along the way. I guess there’s no sense worrying until that happens.

It looks as if I might finally be getting a more fulfilling position at work, I have an interview tomorrow for a program manager position with a guy I used to work with a couple of years ago. It’s interesting how things turn out.

4.3.16 About that interview (2004-03-31 15:50)

So here’s the story. I interviewed for another job yesterday, still with The Big Company. It’s more along the lines of what I was doing prior to taking my current position. I might have ended up in something like that, had I not moved, but the odds weren’t in my favor. Considering what happened to the group that I was in, I’m not regretting making the move, I’m just a little disappointed that it’s taken me over four years but life is like that sometimes. Anyway, I felt the interview went well and it ran two and half hours, so that’s a sign as well. I hope to find out in the next week or so, since there are others to be interviewed.

It’s going to be interesting if it comes through. I haven’t traveled for business since early 2000, and the job requires multiple trips, so that will be a big change. That’s really the only part that I’m ambivalent about. Getting back into something that actually puts products out is what I can’t wait for. There is some satisfaction in helping other people build products, but it’s really secondhand. On top of that, much of the work has been done in reaction to problems. In some ways, it’s not unlike being a volunteer firefighter, but I’m getting paid. The amount of thanks is about the same, though. I really like solving problems, it’s something I do very well, and I’d rather solve my own.

4.4 April

4.4.1 Uh oh (2004-04-01 18:56)

I can’t help but feeling disengaged lately. Don’t know why, and it’s perplexing given that some good things are finally happening. Or, I’m going senile, and not in a kidding way. I hope it’s just a phase. And if it’s not, uh oh.

4.4.2 Splinters (2004-04-03 22:18)

As I write this, my hands are stinging all over. Why? Because they have a bunch of stainless steel splinters in them. And why do they have them? Because I discovered the stainless steel 5E3 chassis I have for my amp had 12AX7 socket holes that were too small for the sockets I had. They’re nice ceramic sockets, so I didn’t want to replace them. Odd that the 6V6 socket holes were fine. So I bought a small hand tool and ground the holes to fit, which was the source of the splinters. But now they fit, though the holes aren’t round anymore. This amp had better work when I’m done.

4.4.3 Some assembly required (2004-04-04 20:46)

I’m getting to the point in my 5E3 kit where having the assembly instructions would help. I’ve soldered a number of connections without realizing I would need to make additional connections there, which is a

pain. It's beginning to look like I'll have to take it apart and reassemble it a couple of times so that I can make some of the connections. It's a tight fit between the main board and the some of the connectors and I still have to put in the insulating board that goes behind the main board. Of course, there aren't any holes drilled in it for mounting, supposedly on purpose so that you can choose your own. That should be fun.

I didn't get much done today. I was tired from the DST change and my youngest's sleepover last night (they don't sleep, you know). I also seem to be missing a capacitor, but it could just be misplaced. I lacked the patience to look for it today.

4.4.4 Waiting (2004-04-06 14:47)

It's been a week and I haven't heard any news about the job I interviewed for. I'm starting to come to the belief that it's not going to turn out in my favor. Oh well, at least I tried. More importantly, having done so has changed the way I approach these things. I've started looking at job openings that previously I would have assumed to be beyond me in a whole new light. I wouldn't say I've had some great epiphany, but something's different.

4.4.5 Notebook (2004-04-07 11:08)

I don't know if I've mentioned this before (and I'm too lazy to go look) but I've started a little writer's notebook for jotting down little bits and pieces that come to me. I've got a couple of story ideas in my head that I'd like to get down on paper. I usually fall asleep each night working out some of these stories and I thought it was time to get serious and actually write the stories rather than just thinking about writing them. Your guess is as good as mine (maybe better) when I'll have anything actually complete. Given my high level of procrastination, it could be a while.

I know that fear of discovering that my ideas stink and my writing is poor is the main reason I've hesitated to do anything. I'd love to make a living writing but I doubt I could do that. I've seen plenty of evidence to indicate how difficult that would be. That, above and beyond any other reason, is the prime motivator for my staying at The Big Company. I would love to do something else but I simply don't want to deal with the financial ramifications. Note that this is not the same as saying "I can't afford to." If you work at it, you can easily deal with a lower income. I just don't want to. I've become enamored with my current level of income and I guess I'm willing to deal with not following my heart to stay there.

4.4.6 To everyone: (2004-04-11 09:50)

Happy Easter!

4.4.7 I am not a plumber (2004-04-17 20:35)

We were away for a couple of days this week, visiting my parents. Before we left, I was cleaning up the last dishes in the sink when I noticed that there was a spray coming from the faucet. I thought it was something to do with the spray attachment we have on it but it turned out to be a pinhole in the faucet barrel itself. My wife had noticed it the night before but didn't find the source. We ended up wrapping it with duct tape until I could replace it. It was a Moen single-handle that we've had since 1983, so it's done well. We bought the replacement yesterday.

Today was my turn to install the new faucet. The original had been in place for over 20 years, so it

was no surprise it wasn't in any mood to be removed. I spent an hour spitting pieces of old dried plumber's putty and ended up having to hacksaw one of the fittings to remove it. Then the real fun began.

The original faucet was intended to be a replacement for the older two valve types, so it had straight fittings in two places. The new one puts all of its pipes in the center, but can be adapted to fit three-hole sinks. That meant that my fittings wouldn't simply reconnect. Of course.

I managed to come up with a set of adapters that should have worked, but it was all downhill from the first time I turned the water on. Everything leaked. So I shut the water off and tightened everything up. Turned the water on again. Broke off the handle of the hot water shutoff and had to use a wrench. Things looked okay, so I put everything back in under the sink and let it sit a while.

When I checked on it again, it was clear both the hot and cold water were leaking, the cold moreso. I tried to tighten that one but it didn't really stop the leak. I thought I'd try the hot side. At this point, disaster decided to visit. And stay.

The hot side shutoff handle had broken off and I thought I had turned it off using a wrench. I was, of course, wrong. When I disconnected the leaking fitting to put on some teflon tape I discovered the hot water wasn't even close to being off. As hot water blasted all over I attempted to turn it off but the valve itself is bad and wouldn't shut all the way. I was able to slow it to a trickle and now it's flowing hot water into the drain. The cold water is off. A plumber will be here on Monday.

I am not a plumber.

4.4.8 Amp project update (2004-04-18 18:54)

I'm almost done with my tube amp project. Or perhaps I'm not, given my usual luck. I've made all the electrical connections and mounted the speaker in the cabinet. I still haven't figured out how the Fender-style tube retainers work so they remain to be installed. The tubes hang upside down in this amp so having some type of retainer seems necessary. Next weekend I'll do as complete a circuit checkout as I can and then install the tubes and connect the speaker. And maybe I'll live to right about it.

The only really unresolved kit issue is the front (or top to be pedantic) panel markings. I bought a chassis that was unmarked, because it was cheaper, and that's what I gave up. I posted on the 5E3 Forum page so that should get me what I need.

4.4.9 Summer trip idea (2004-04-20 16:40)

I've been thinking about what I want to do with myself this summer. My wife and kids (isn't that a TV show?) are going to be spending the summer at Girl Scout camp like they did last year. Last summer I took a short trip back home (pictures and text still not published) but this year I want to do something else.

I've been teasing the fast ferry a lot in my weblog but it could be a good thing if they can handle all the details. We rode a similar ferry in the Canadian Maritimes and it was great so there's plenty of precedent for optimism. The delay at the Toronto end is certainly not too surprising given the nature of most public works projects and I'm sure they'll be able to handle things in the meantime. It would make for a fairly relaxing day trip even if the total travel time isn't significantly different just because you don't have to drive. For us in Rochester, it's a drive west to Buffalo then over the border to pick up the QEW northeast. It's certainly closer than NYC or Boston, but seems like more of a drive than it ought to be. You could

certainly make it a day trip (and I have) but it's a long day trip, if you get my drift. After all, you can nap on the ferry. That's not a good idea when driving.

I was actually thinking of taking my bike, rather than my car. There was some issue over the fare for taking bikes but a glance at their site says it's a \$10 fee each way and that's certainly manageable. The nice thing about a bike is that you can't beat the freedom of travel, especially in a big city. Unless it rains, of course.

Right now I'm not considering any particular date and/or destination in town. Since I'm taking a bike, the ferry schedule leaves me about 6 hours or so to explore if I want to ride home in the light (and given the terminal location, I sure do) which is more than enough time to see the sights and do a little shopping. The nice part of biking is you have an automatic limit on how much you can carry so you end up doing more looking than buying.

4.4.10 London Rebooted (2004-04-21 18:27)

It's funny how coming across something on the web can send you off into interesting directions. In my weblog I linked to the Clash remix, [1]London Rebooted. I downloaded it and burned a CD which I'm currently listening to in the car. It's unusual, to say the least, but interesting listening. I wonder how many of the remixers were even alive when it first came out. The Clash have this way of continuing to appeal (my 14-year-old likes them) so perhaps I shouldn't be surprised.

My boss likes the remix, too. He's about my age and lived in the UK during the punk era and recalls seeing them play live in their early days. In the jazz world, old tunes get reinterpreted over and over. In the rock world, you get something like this. I don't claim either to be better, they're just different.

And while I'm on the Clash, I know what I want for my birthday: a t-shirt with the cover of London Calling on it.

1. <http://www.culturedeluxe.co.uk/londonbooted.htm>

4.4.11 Somedays (2004-04-22 17:57)

Somedays things just seem to conspire to make it impossible to be happy.

4.4.12 It's done! (2004-04-25 21:09)

I finally completed the 5E3 Tweed Deluxe kit tonight. I need to do some minor touchups on it, but it's done. There's plenty of clean volume and the hum is well within reason. The 5E3 has an interesting circuit design that results in the two channels interacting. There's a lot of learning to do with this amp, and I look forward to it.

Next up, tube hifi equipment.

4.4.13 Social Networking Software (2004-04-28 13:40)

If you prowl the net these days it's not hard to come across the latest "new new thing", social networking software. I'm referring to sites such as [1]Friendster (which started the unfortunate trend of ending names

with -ster), [2]Tribe.net, [3]LinkedIn and others. I list those because I have accounts on each of them, but believe me, there are plenty of others. The basic premise is that you set up some sort of profile that establishes you on the service. You then add links to others on the service (and vice-versa). The end result is a network consisting of you, your friends, your friends' friends, your friends' friends' friends, *ad infinitum*.

With me so far? Good, Anyway, if you have enough friends and in turn they have enough friends, your personal network can *look* rather massive. But is it really? Take a look at your own life. You probably have some friends you're really close to. Chances are, though, you don't have much more than half a dozen of those. If that sounds pessimistic, I can only say in my defense that being close to someone requires a lot of effort and communication. It's difficult to have that with a lot of people and still have it be meaningful. In Social Networking terms we'll say that you have 6 first degree friends. If they follow the averages, it means they all have 6 first degree friends too. For you, that means 36 second degree friends. Doing the math, you also have 216 third degree friends. You're at the center of a network of 259 people!

Or are you? Be honest, how many of your friends' friends do you have contact with on a regular basis? I would say few, if any. Going back to my previous paragraph, it takes some effort to maintain a close friendship. And it's not one-sided. Your friends are putting in effort, too (perhaps not the same as you, but still not zero). In other words, your circle of friends tends to be inwardly focused, not outwardly. Links to outside the circle are weak, at best.

But you don't get that impression from most Social Networking Software. I believe that's because links are *cheap*. Oh, maybe I have to pop you an email invite, but it's still pretty much effortless. I don't have to leave my office or home to meet people. I don't have to buy tickets to an event. But once you've lowered the cost of entry, the quality of the relationships go down. And this still doesn't make maintaining those relationships easier, so you're no more likely to talk to friends of friends than you would in the physical world.

Don't get the impression that I think Social Networking Software is useless. Far from it. Online has always been a great way for people with similar interests to connect regardless of the physical location. That was true when the net was first created and is still true today. There's been nothing in the history of mankind that has done this as well. But consider those "communities of interest" in Social Networking terms. If you do, you'll see that either they're all first degree or not connected to each other at all (assuming that a link to the subject of interest is not considered a link to a person). However, if you've ever been involved in such a community, you know that's not the case at all. There are friendships, cliques and rivalries all over. Sometimes there are wars and revolutions. The big difference is that it's all dynamic. You just can't take a snapshot and determine who's who forever and ever. Just like your life, things change.

Some of the sites I mentioned in the first paragraph do try to catch some of the community feel in addition to the network. Tribe.net has the concept of Tribes, which are communities of interest. LinkedIn, which is oriented towards job search and business, uses geographic terms to group people (on the assumption, I suppose, that you're more likely to look for work or business opportunities where you are now). Do those add-ons make any difference? I think they do. I can exchange information, ask questions, etc. without needing to be anyone's friend. And I'm not tied down to communications with my friends, I can talk to anyone with a similar interest. Why, it's almost like my offline life ;)

1. <http://www.friendster.com/>
2. <http://www.tribe.net/>
3. <https://www.linkedin.com/home>

4.4.14 Coincidence (2004-04-30 22:24)

Being basically paranoid, I tend to see conspiracies everywhere. But lately even normal people would have to start wondering. Here's the background. At The Big Company we have a web site that lists currently open jobs along with their location and labor grade ranges. We're a multi-site company and there are rules about what happens if you bid for a job at your labor grade (a simple transfer) or above (a promotion).

So far so good. But one of the jobs I applied for recently disappeared, only to reappear with the labor grade range changed to be below my grade. This means I can't apply. Another one disappeared permanently the same day my paperwork should have arrived at the hiring manager's desk. Coincidence?

4.5 May

4.5.1 New amp (2004-05-01 16:55)

I've been playing through my new amp and I have to say I love the sound. There's a decent variety of sound choices available through the inputs and with the channel volume control interactions. There's a nice amount of compression too, so I can get that classic jazz guitar sound I've been looking for. Now I have to figure out how to record it so I can include some clips with the build report.

The build report is a necessity for the 5E3 builder's forum I'm in. They also want pictures along with the sound clips (and the text). It will give me a chance to gripe about the quality of the kit, which as you know was less than ideal. But what I want to do is first make sure I won't be sued. We'll see how honest I can be.

4.5.2 Softball (2004-05-02 11:15)

Music: Last Chance Texaco-Ricky Lee Jones

And so softball season begins. Last year was uncharacteristically cool, and we froze for most of the games. The girls wear shorts and t-shirts so they usually ended up wearing either something over their uniform or something underneath. Today should be different, thank you very much.

4.5.3 Anniversary (2004-05-05 12:29)

Today marks my seventh anniversary at The Big Company. If I were to net it out it would be two years (or four if you include the two years I contracted here) of hard, enjoyable work followed by five years of regret.

4.5.4 Turning point (2004-05-08 16:59)

I guess today marks a significant turning point in my life. It's the "Day I Gave Up Motorcycling Forever" since I put my Aerostich Roadcrafter riding suit up for auction on eBay. I saved up for a while to buy it and then went back and forth for a while making sure it was the right size. That was in May of 2000. I crashed my BMW in July of that year. The suit arrived at my house two weeks later, when I was still home recuperating. Since at first I assumed I'd ride again, I kept it. Now, four years later, I realize I never will.

I'm going to use the money I get to buy a replacement for my old Linux box (which I tore down and recycled today). I may even buy a used Mac, if I can get what I want (has to run OS X).

4.5.5 DIY stereo (2004-05-09 20:21)

I really enjoyed building my 5E3 amp and that gave me the "build my own electronics" bug. I'm going to build myself a stereo system and do as much of the work as I can. Right now that means a tube preamp, tube headphone amp, tube poweramp, speakers and cables. I expect to buy a CD player and turntable, although you can build your own of those. Tube equipment is generally expensive so you can save serious amounts of money doing it yourself. It's all relative, of course. I've chosen mostly low-end equipment to compensate and it's still going to be expensive. My plan is to stage the purchases over the summer so the impact is less. The preamp is first up, followed by the headphone amp. That will give me enough for a listening station.

The speakers and power amp are going to be a little more work and effort. The amp I'm going to build is fairly low power and requires high efficiency speakers to achieve decent volume. The speakers I'm looking at require you to build your own cabinet using either their plans or your own. They recommend fairly heavy MDF (really dense particle board) for the material and I'm going to get in touch with a guy I used to work with to cut it to dimensions. He's into wordworking and has the power tools necessary to cut precisely. It's not something I want to invest in for myself. I'll do the assembly and finishing myself. You can get MDF with various veneers already applied so you don't have to fuss with thin sheets of wood.

One thing I've noticed is that audio people are really strange. I can't imagine being able to hear the difference between two pieces of wire but such discussions are commonplace on the hi-fi discussion forums.

4.5.6 Mixed messages (2004-05-11 19:29)

It's definitely been a good news/bad news kind of day.

4.5.7 A milestone of sorts (2004-05-15 16:13)

Friday morning around 4:30 we got a call for a motorcycle accident with injuries. When we got there the ambulance was already there, along with two county sheriffs cars. The motorcycle rider had sustained severe injuries to his leg and they were clamping down on it, probably because he had severed an artery and was bleeding badly.

As we got out of the rescue truck you could immediately tell the rider had struck a deer. There were pieces of intestines and other internal organs over a 100 yard stretch of the road. It's likely, based on how the cops were acting, that this was the end of a high-speed chase. When I hit the deer at about 30 or so I injured it and it had to be put down. My guess is that he was going at least twice what I was, perhaps more.

At first the sights and smells were too much for me and I almost went back to the truck. But I decided that I couldn't do that and somehow got over it. I hadn't been to a motorcycle call since before I had my own accident. But somehow it was to be. We had three motorcycle-related calls in less than 24 hours, that must mean something.

Now I know I can handle it.

And in related news, my riding suit sold for \$520 on eBay. I guess it'll be shipped out on Monday.

4.5.8 It's not my birthday, it's not today (2004-05-19 08:49)

Yesterday was my 47th birthday. Not to brag, but did you know who else shares this birthday?

- Pope John Paul II
- Rick Wakeman (keyboard player for *Yes*)
- Reggie Jackson (baseball's Mr. October)
- Brooks Robinson (Hall of Fame 3rd baseman)
- Perry Como (singer)
- Frank Capra (film director)
- Dame Margot Fonteyn (dancer)
- Bertrand Russell (mathematician and philosopher)
- George Strait (country singer)
- Tina Fey (SNL)
- Chow Yun-Fat (actor)

Lots of smart and talented people. And me.

Also, Mount St. Helens erupted on my birthday back in [1]1980.

1. http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/19/newsid_2511000/2511133.stm

4.5.9 An interesting week (2004-05-21 22:05)

It's been an interesting week. My riding suit is gone. I ordered the Mac G4 I wanted. And then this afternoon one of the people I've sent internal job applications to actually called me. To tell me what I already knew, unfortunately. But she gave me the names of some people I could talk to. Not get a job, sadly, but at least talk. We'll see.

I've decided to get at least one of my 35mm SLR's refurbished. It's bound to be cheaper than a digital SLR and allows me the use the lenses I have already (the newer Nikons use a modified version and won't work well with my old lenses). I'll deal with conversion to digital later.

Time for some clarification. My boss, who is also a good friend, is probably going to be leaving the country to take over one of our engineering facilities in the UK. This is a great thing for him but it will leave me in a vulnerable situation. It means I need to redouble my efforts in finding another job before his protection is gone. It's not a good time, of course (see the first paragraph), but then there's never really a good time.

4.5.10 Things To Do (2004-05-22 19:07)

Sometimes the size of my "things to do" list is mind-boggling, but I'm taking the approach that if I ever finish them all I'll die. For instance, my website. It's been like this for more years than I can remember, and while it looked sort of cool at first, it hasn't aged well. Time for a change.

I also want to be a little more IE/Win friendly than the current incarnation and I'm going to be using Firefox to check it, instead of IE/Mac. IE/Mac was the hot ticket when I first started with the CSS-based pages. But given Apple's introduction of Safari, Microsoft abandoned IE for the Mac and never got around to fixing some of its problems (come to think of it, they've taken a similar tack with IE/Win but for different reasons). Working around the quirks in the various browsers is practically an industry all its own. You can have a site that works in every browser if you're willing to work at it.

This time, I'm starting with a framework that has the workarounds already in it. I use it at work to develop my own personal pages so I know it's acceptable in IE/Win 6. It's also less graphic-intensive, surprisingly, using some clever CSS code instead. Still deciding the colors, though. I like the Apple "Aqua blue" scheme, but even Apple has left that behind. We'll see, I guess. No matter what, it'll look good to old colorblind me.

4.5.11 Hey look, it's a dinosaur! (2004-05-24 16:12)

It's really becoming clear that I am a dinosaur in the workplace. Too high-paid, too educated, too (fill in the blank) to be able to compete for the extremely limited number of jobs at The Big Company. The local job scene is pathetic, most of the companies that might have hired someone like me have downsized or disappeared. Laid off people are fighting each other for the few crummy jobs left. It would be funny if it wasn't happening to me (alas, such things are the key to comedy, but I digress). I'm ashamed of myself.

4.5.12 Me no barista (2004-05-26 10:46)

I tend not to ask for anything on my birthday and Christmas. Everyone knows this, so it's remarkable when I do. This birthday I actually asked for something: tickets to see Lyle Lovett and for a Clash "London Calling" t-shirt. I got both. I also received a new coffee/expresso/cappuccino maker. My old coffee maker was a Black & Decker "Space Saver" model that had begun to leak water onto the counter. It has to be close to 20 years old, if it's a day. One clue to its age is that Black & Decker hasn't been in the home appliance business since the 1980's or so (the basic line has been part of B & D, GE, and others over the years).

It makes great coffee, has its own water filter, auto-shutoff and a milk steamer with its own water reservoir. I'm still learning how to use the steamer, though. There's a certain mixture of steam to milk I'm guessing and because I don't know what that is I had three very different cups of cappuccino this weekend. I think that it's not a good idea to go beyond doubling the milk volume via steam. Anyone have any recommendations?

4.5.13 An important Memorial Day weekend (2004-05-28 07:52)

For most Americans, Memorial Day weekend is a three day weekend that signals the start of the summer season. But for some of us, it's something else entirely. For those who have risked their lives defending our freedom know a different Memorial Day.

For them, it's a day to remember not only their own service, but those who served with them. Especially those who served and never came home. Given their sacrifice, is one day a year too much to ask?

But this Memorial Day is special. It's the weekend of the dedication of the National World War II Memorial in Washington. It's been a long time in coming. It took longer than the Vietnam and Korean memorials. I'm not sure why, other than the WW II generation isn't big on calling attention to themselves. But somewhere along the line we recognized that they were getting on in years and wouldn't be around for much longer. It took a lot of effort, Bob Dole being one of the prime movers. Thanks to his work and others, the "Greatest Generation" gets the recognition they deserve. As he said on TV this morning, all you have to say is "thanks for what you've done for us" to make their day.

If you're a child (or grandchild) of a WW II veteran or simply know one, this is the perfect weekend to thank them for what they've done. Because next year may be too late.

4.5.14 Not a good day (2004-05-29 11:36)

Today is the day we've been expecting would come while hoping beyond hope would not come. Big Bunny can no longer walk, it looks as if his good back leg can no longer compensate for the bad leg. He hasn't been able to move or set himself upright. I thought he might be in trouble last night but I wanted to be sure. When we found him in the same place this morning as we had left him the night before and his food was untouched, it was clear what was going on.

He's still hungry and ate his breakfast when I hand fed him. We're taking him to the vet this afternoon, but we all know what the outcome will be.

[Later] It was around 1:30 PM when Big Bunny was finally released from his pain. There was some small chance that anti-inflammatory drugs might have been able to do something but I made the decision to let him go. He's buried in the backyard with the ashes of his long time companion, Digger, and next to another companion, Zipper. We made a little heart-shaped concrete stepping stone with their names on it and that will mark their place in our yard.

This morning was the first without him impatiently waiting for his breakfast. I'm sure I'll get used to it but right now the room seems particularly empty.

4.6 June

4.6.1 I had to say this (2004-06-04 14:07)

Despite the obvious fact that hardly anyone but me reads this thing (and my weblog, for that matter) I've still been reluctant to post anything this week because I'm concerned that my feelings about the loss of my rabbit might make me seem like a wimp. But I can't help being what I am and having to hide yourself is a sad and ultimately soul-killing thing. So I won't.

We in the developed countries tend to lavish a lot of care (and cash) on our pets. I say this without making a value judgement but you should wonder about the rightness of such things. I did, even as I crushed baby aspirin into plain yogurt for Big Bunny's breakfast. It's all a matter of perspective, I guess. But I'm not really here to talk about the moral and ethical issues around our infatuation with our pets. I don't really want to talk about any big issues at all. I do want to talk about Big Bunny, and I will.

I can honestly say that I was prepared for the void his absence would leave because a while ago I realized just how much a part of the family he was. Each new medical crisis was handled, no questions asked. When he begged, he was given something, a cracker, a piece of banana, a hour or so of snuggling, it didn't really matter. We greeted him when we came home and said our goodbyes when we left. Do something on the floor and he'd be in your way. We knew how odd it would seem to outsiders but for us it had become our life. One member of the family had fur and hopped but otherwise was just one of us.

In our hearts we knew it couldn't go on forever, Big Bunny's ability to shake off physical ailments notwithstanding, but we pretended otherwise. Time, however, is something we can't get around. It takes a toll that can never be paid back. When our clocks run down they run down, no matter who (or what) you are.

I can try to be philosophical about it all but that's cold comfort when I walk into the house and look into an empty room for someone who isn't there.

4.6.2 Please note (2004-06-07 15:44)

I believe that I am entering the darkest time of my life. I have no evidence of this other than a vague feeling, but it's enough.

4.6.3 Full circle (2004-06-08 18:19)

I finally have my G4 and it's pretty much up and running. Fittingly, it's sitting in the same spot as the unopened box my riding suit sat for almost four years.

4.6.4 The AC is gone (2004-06-11 22:43)

Music: w/ Ben Folds Five - A Long Dec-Counting Crows

I've had problems with the air conditioning in my Tahoe ever since I bought it in 1997 (it's a 1997 and a year-old when I got it). I had it charged last summer and it was dead before September. Had it looked at today and it would cost around \$800 to get it fixed this time. Major parts have failed, not just fittings or hoses. It's got close to 97K miles on it and it's just not worth it anymore so I decided to not fix the AC. I hope it's not too hot this summer, but since the girls will have it at camp, it should work out. I need to save the money for the emissions pieces that will need to be fixed for inspection in the fall.

4.6.5 Brother Ray (2004-06-13 10:14)

CBS had a nice little tribute to Ray Charles on this morning. I'm not sure there's anyone who typifies American Music the way he did (and does). After a week of unceasing Reagan coverage, it was like a breath of fresh air. I'm sure if most Americans were to think about it, Ray has had more impact on their lives than Reagan ever did. He just did it in a more subtle way.

I dreamed about Ray Charles last night.
And he could see just fine, you know.
I asked him for a lullaby. He said,
"Honey, I don't sing no more."
No more, no more, no more, Ray don't sing no more. - Joan Osborne

4.6.6 An interesting day in the web world (2004-06-15 14:10)

An interesting day in the web world. If you had a weblog hosted on weblogs.com you discovered today that your weblog was no longer reachable. Not because of hardware or software failure but because Dave Winer decided he didn't want to host them anymore. No, really. These sites also required the use of Manila, so it's no simple matter to relocate them to a different server (Manila is a program that Dave's former company, Userland, sells). Even then, they need access to the data and Dave won't release that until July or so he says. There also won't be any DNS redirects so the old addresses will simply be lost. If you were a reader of one of them, you'll have to either contact the author directly or wait until Google finds their new locations.

Doc Searls, one of the few people whose site is still available, has been defending Dave on the grounds that he had been giving it away for a long time and that no one should complain. There's no arguing that it was indeed free for a long time. Score one for Doc. But he also did it in the most callous way possible. No one believes web hosting is free. You pay, either a fee or through mandatory advertising. I'm sure those people would have gladly come up with money had they been asked. But they weren't. There was no "hey, this costs me more than I can afford, can someone help?" But that's Dave Winer.

I used to like and respect Dave. His weblog was one of the first I ever read, if not The First. I used his Frontier and Radio. He was on my weblog's blogroll and I read him everyday. But over time I realized that he was a jerk. A sad, bitter man who, despite earlier achievements, was reduced to doing stupid things in a vain attempt to get attention. Instead of something new, it was all "I did this X years ago." He frequently would insult and degrade people in his weblog and then delete the entries without comment (Mark Pilgrim caught him on this using a bot and all Dave could do in reply was claim copyright violation). He's not in my blogroll anymore. His weblog is buried somewhere in my bookmarks and I don't read it much now. I don't have to. I can read about him in other places in the reactions of others.

4.6.7 On RSS (2004-06-17 14:42)

I put a link to my [1]RSS syndication feed on my [2]weblog today. No big deal, really, except I've come across in the past as somewhat against the idea of syndication. Actually, I've really been critical of the all of the splintering that has occurred to RSS. There are a dizzying number of semi-compatible versions of RSS existent and they've all come about because various people have been unable to agree with each other. Smart people are not expected to agree with each other on everything, but you'd hope that they'd at least be willing to work together. Well, not this time. My feed is RSS version 1.0, which is the only version that Blogger supports. Blogger also supports [3]Atom, a syndication format designed as a replacement for RSS. Atom is truly XML and has some features that RSS lacks. There's only one version of Atom, at least for now. But Blogger syndication is an either/or deal and I felt that RSS's slight advantage with readers supporting it was the deciding factor. Of course, that's subject to change if Atom really takes the market lead. We'll see.

The whole idea behind syndication still doesn't sit quite well with me. I have RSS readers both at home and at work. It's a nice way to summarize the content of a large number of frequently-changing sites (like weblogs and new sites) and it allows you to basically skim over the "headlines" and only read the stories you're interested in. A lot of sites that report on releases of software have RSS feeds and the readers make it easy to locate programs you use that have been updated. But they also remove some of the context you'd get if you went to the sites in a browser. If the site offers commenting, it's likely the comments are not in the RSS feed. And needless to say the graphical design of the site doesn't get conferred. But there's also nothing stopping you from going there with your browser, if you wish. So it's a mixed blessing for me, all things considered. Ultimately, though, I felt that as someone who used RSS myself it was wrong not to offer

it. So I did. Enjoy.

By the way, LiveJournal also offers syndication, but I don't think I want to enable it for this journal. But I won't say never.

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/rss/mylnd.xml>
2. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>
3. <http://www.atomenabled.org/>

4.6.8 Logo update (2004-06-20 13:39)

Music: Like a Stone-AudioSlave

There I was, drunk with the power of making "iMac text" with the Gimp, when I decided to redo the Angry Middleaged Man logo. I like it, sort of. But I'm sure I'll tweak it again.

4.6.9 My Lonely Summer 2004 (2004-06-24 15:00)

Tomorrow the girls head down to scout camp and I get left alone for most of the summer. They'll be home fewer days than last year due to the camp being better managed (they fired the camp director right before it opened last year). Not even Big Bunny this summer, so alone really means alone. I need a bunch of things to do, I guess.

Being by yourself seems fun until you have to do it.

4.6.10 Bad news keeps coming (2004-06-29 15:24)

Sometimes it's hard for me to keep my spirits up. Yesterday I found out, quite by accident, that the wife of one of the guys in my guitar group class had died suddenly on Saturday. Near my age and everyone else in the group. It's hit us all pretty hard. I have a private lesson tonight and my teacher and I will undoubtedly take the opportunity to discuss this. I plan to visit the funeral home tomorrow but probably not attend the funeral itself.

My best friend was recently told his job was up at the end of the month and he had to find another job in his company before then. He's had two interviews so far. He wasn't qualified for the first and hadn't heard (as of last night) from the second. He's one of the two people (my wife being the other) responsible for setting me on the life and career path that have gotten me where I am today. I want to help him, if I can, even though I've not done all that well at finding myself a new position.

Speaking of which, it's one thing to say you need to change careers, it's another to figure out what you should do and make the change. So far, despite spending time each day, I have yet to even come up with a idea of what I should do. There are very few suitable positions for me at The Big Company, due in part to my current labor grade, so there is a fairly low expectation that I'll be able to find something internally. The technology world has changed, and I obviously need to change too.

4.6.11 Paying my respects (2004-06-30 15:24)

I just came back from the funeral home. It was a low-key affair, with no casket. I was amazed at the number of people there until I remembered that she taught in the French Road school where both my daughters

went. I remember seeing her name on one of the classroom doors when I was there for the various school functions.

Surprising also was the number of people I either knew or at least recognized, including someone from my department. Three of us from the guitar group went as a bunch, it's always easier to do these sorts of things when you're not alone. Words came hard but I managed, having others with me certainly helped.

There was a request for memorabilia to be brought to be added to what the family already had. A book of art from all of her class was one of the items, along with a signed letter that was to go out in August welcoming the new fourth graders. That last one really got to me, really brought the suddenness of it all into focus. I hope, if it's allowed me, to have time to say goodbye.

4.7 July

4.7.1 A day packed with entertainment (2004-07-02 17:21)

I took the girls to see Spiderman 2 today. We went to the 11:00 AM show to beat the crowds, it was a great idea. The movie is great, even better than the first one. More action, more story, more everything.

Tonight we're off to see Lyle Lovett play at an outdoor facility. He's currently touring with a small group rather than the Large Band but I'm sure it'll be a great show. Lyle could very well be the coolest guy alive.

4.7.2 Lyle Lovett (2004-07-03 16:01)

Lyle Lovett - if he appears anywhere near you, you must go see him. Even without the Large Band he still had 9 guys with him on stage and added a gospel choir at the end. Now I find this odd to even say but his cello (!) player was nothing short of incredible and did a solo that had to be seen to be believed. I didn't realize you could actually get those sounds out of a cello.

They played tunes from all of his vast array of work, including the the title cut from "My Baby Don't Tolerate", which is as bluesy a sound as you're likely to hear. But the band had no problem playing any style, Lyle knows how to pick his sidemen. You want country? Western Swing? Folk? Celtic? Gospel? No problem. Lyle played over two hours straight without a break, which is unusual. He's also an incredibly funny guy and his between song monologues are not to be missed. He managed to include some local bits, which had the crowd really going, alongside stories about life at home in Klein, Texas. I had always thought Klein was far away from everything but Lyle said they've actually gone and put up speed limit signs. He knows because he quietly mentioned he got a speeding ticket and couldn't talk his way out of it.

It was truly a great evening, the weather was great and the music was superb. All in all, a great birthday present for yours truly.

4.7.3 Something important to me (2004-07-03 18:09)

On the Stuff page I've added a picture of great importance to me personally. It's a photo taken in May of 1971 outside the Our Lady of Victory school. It was the day of 8th grade graduation and I'm standing next to my mom and dad. I have the original photo but it was extremely faded and discolored. For my birthday my wife had it professionally restored and part of that service was to give me an scan on CD. So, there it is.

If you look carefully, you can almost see the pain my mom was feeling from the cancer that would claim her life by September of that year.

4.7.4 New {fray} piece (2004-07-04 16:35)

Music: Elderly Woman Behind the Coute-Pearl Jam e

More stuff from me on {fray } on [1]this page. Read the [2]story first, though,

This will be linked on the Writings page, of course.

1. <http://www.fray.com/work/fireworks/post/index.002.shtml>
2. <http://www.fray.com/work/fireworks/>

4.7.5 Bachelor summer (2004-07-08 18:38)

I won't be seeing the girls until the 23rd so I'm deep into my "bachelor summer". Luckily, between karate and kendo, guitar and the fire department I've got most of my weekdays covered. I also get to cook for myself, which I manage to do with minimum fuss, which is the way I like everything to go.

For example, dinner tonight will be sushi and miso soup. Tomorrow will be dinner out, but only some place I can eat at the bar, since nothing says "Loser" quite like a table for one. Saturday I'm making chili in the slow cooker and Sunday is pulled pork BBQ. I live life on the edge.

4.7.6 Kendo seminar (2004-07-12 14:08)

Yesterday I attended a Kendo seminar taught by Noburo Kataoka Sensei, a 7th Dan (or 7th degree black belt). It was, in a word, excellent. Kataoka Sensei was amazingly patient with beginners such as my self (yes, a year and half and I'm still a beginner) but rather stern with the advanced students. We spent most of the five hours covering the basics. In Kendo, as in other martial arts, the basics must be totally mastered and reviewed constantly. He had us pair up and then went down the lines observing each of us and giving tips and corrections as he went. It was tough to the focus of the class's and Sensei's attention and I was extremely tense. Tense to the point of getting a cramp in my shoulders that only stretching and Advil could work out. I calmed down eventually, I think exhaustion had a lot to do with that. We had only a limited amount of time for shiai (or sparring) and I ended up against my own teacher, a 1st Dan, who I've worked with before. It turned out oddly, as Sensei took him to task on some of his technique (see above) and I seemed to do better (but that was because he was cutting me some slack). A surreal moment. Sensei did like my shinai (bamboo sword used in Kendo), which was nice.

But as a result of this I'm wondering if I want to test for my Ikyu (1st Kyu, equivalent to Brown Belt in Karate, the rank just below Black Belt) in December. I just plain tighten up when I'm being watched. Tension is used in the martial arts but only for fairly short times, the majority of time the practitioner must be loose and relaxed. I'd hate to travel hundreds of miles to fail. I still have time to train and prepare, so I have time to decide.

4.7.7 Driveway sealer (2004-07-18 09:47)

I spent a couple of hours yesterday sealing and filling the driveway. This past winter was extremely tough on it, lots of cracks and heaves. It's over 15 years old and definitely due to be either replaced or resurfaced.

I'm convinced that not sealing it every year (like my nutty neighbor does) is why it's lasted that long (twice as long as my neighbor's).

It was in the mid-60's all week, right up until Saturday, of course. Luckily it was cloudy and never got much above 80, but the humidity was brutal. It's a tradition that I pick the hottest day to seal the driveway and it continued. It's much cooler today, naturally, but it's supposed to rain hard later, so I picked the right day.

4.7.8 New pictures up (2004-07-20 19:39)

I posted some new pictures on the Stuff page, both of them scanned (see below) from photographs. One is a fairly recent one of me taken after the monthly meeting at the firehouse. The other is of me and Liz, in our karate uniforms. Unfortunately, Liz isn't studying right now but I hope she will again.

The fact that I was able to scan anything is itself miraculous. Mary Ann had to take her PC to camp and the scanner, a UMAX SCSI model, was attached to it. My older Mac has a SCSI bus on it but would not under any circumstance work with it. I thought perhaps I could use a SCSI-to-USB converter with it. Adaptec makes the USBXchange, which does exactly that and works with both PCs and Macs. But not OS X. To top it off, they probably won't ever support OS X. I downloaded and installed a SANE-TWAIN open source driver but the USBXchange wouldn't appear on the bus. Various other downloads also didn't work. Oh, did I mention that UMAX charges for the OS X driver?

I moved the setup to my newer Mac, since it would boot into OS 9 while the older one won't (could be because the OS 9 disk is on Firewire). When I did that and installed the Adaptec software I finally found out that the adapter needed to have external power. Today I bought the recommended power adapter and got it working in the sense it was on the USB. But I needed all the drivers and software I had on the older Mac.

On the older Mac I tried just invoking Classic which did work. But it still didn't work in OS X. That is, until I left Classic running, and when I did, it was finally recognized as OS X. I'm using VueScan with it, which works fine and does a lot of cool things (like auto sensing scan area). I'm happy, finally. With the scanner, that is.

4.7.9 One hour of interesting time (2004-07-26 15:33)

Wednesday should be an interesting day. I have a meeting with the new boss, although nothing has been officially announced as of yet. Since the new boss and I have had some less than great dealings in the past, there is plenty of opportunity for something less than great resulting from this.

Perhaps losing my current job will be the impetus I need to finally figure out what I want to do with my life and do it.

4.7.10 Mas y mas (2004-07-27 13:55)

I realize that I'm paranoid and pessimistic, but lately things seem to be getting worse and worse. I'd love to believe that it's my imagination, but it's not.

4.7.11 Me and My Guy Weekend (2004-07-30 10:16)

It's "Me and My Guy Weekend" at camp and I'll be there until Sunday, come hell or high water. Mostly high water as it's supposed to basically rain and thunderstorm all weekend. I've got plastic bags for my stuff and I won't be taking anything too important, so I should be fine.

4.8 August

4.8.1 I'm back (2004-08-02 09:59)

As in back home, that is. "Me and My Guy" was great. We did canoeing, the hamster wheel (a big inflated ball you walk in on the water), built a fire circle bench, did high ropes, boondoggle, firestarters, cooked outside, swam, sang songs (with me on guitar) around the fire and walked (a lot) up and down hills. It was well organized (thanks Mary), which helped a lot, there was plenty of food, and much fun was had despite the almost constant rain. The sun came out Sunday morning, just in time to go home, but the lack of it never dampened the fun (pun intended).

Mary (or Buggin' as she's known in camp) is the camp director and works full time for the Girl Scout council. We were talking in the dining hall on Sunday morning and she mentioned how much she really enjoys her job at camp and how much of a shock it is going back to her office in the council building. I have to admit I envy her, and I told her so. It's been so long since I've been able to say I enjoy my job. To be honest, it's becoming a major effort to get myself here every day. I'm so angry at myself for getting to this point.

4.8.2 Finis (2004-08-09 10:18)

I was going to write some self-pitying crap in here but I've decided instead to end this online journal. This will be the last entry. I need to figure out a way to transfer all of the data to my home computer, but that's neither here nor there as far as the journal is concerned.

(2004-08-10 19:32:43)

But why? I'm really going to miss it. Good luck.

(2004-08-15 09:37:07)

Hi Tom, I've been sitting here for at least a good hour or so reading through your older entries, and I have to say, though I'm a new fan of your journal, I'm an old fan of you, and I'll be sorry to see the journal go :(Reading this has re-inspired me to get going again on my own online weblog/journal, I started one a while back (as you know and kindly reminded me I could post in it more than once :)) I feel like I've gotten to know you so much better just by reading these entries. Should you ever find a way to make that living via writing, I predict you'll be a huge success. :) Whatever you write online, via weblog or journal, I'm there on a regular basis from here on out. I'm kicking myself for not checking this out more closely sooner. (I'm just hoping somehow you'll reconsider ending the journal part :)) Thoughtfully, albeit tardy :) Kelly aka XMyHeart :)

(2004-08-15 20:53:03)

What a coincidence, you inspired me to start writing too! You run a good site, I'm sorry to hear you're going to stop.

(2004-08-15 12:14:08)

PS: Should you find yourself immensely bored, I'm now journaling online at: <http://coloradokel.diaryland.com/> Bye!
Kelly

4.8.3 End postponed (2004-08-21 21:35)

I've thought a lot about my decision to discontinue this journal. The comments, which I thank you for, were unexpected but nevertheless thought-provoking. The past couple of weeks have been trying, and it seemed as though events were conspiring against me. But that's life, and hardly a convincing rationale for giving up. It's not all about me. It's really a partnership between me and you. I'll keep my end of the bargain. Thanks for reading.

(2004-08-22 13:14:03)

phew! it's good to know you're still writing. thanks!

(2004-08-28 19:04:02)

Yes, I'm very glad as well, though very late in responding to seeing you back :) Yay! :) WB! Kelly aka XMyHeart

4.8.4 Olympics (2004-08-22 15:56)

Music: Closing Time-SemiSonic

As you might have seen on my [1]weblog, the 2004 Olympics in Athens seem to be overrun by corporate interests, to their detriment. People in the US have complained about NBC's control over information coming from the games in the past, but that was nothing compared to preventing the competitors from blogging or posting personal pictures. God help you if you're wearing the wrong logo. Insane. I'm sure they can "justify" it by claiming it's all in the name of counter-terrorism.

Anyway, I've noticed some things that seem a little odd. The trampoline. The trampoline is an Olympic sport. The staple of "America's Funniest Home Videos" is an Olympic sport.

Beach volleyball players have numbers. One player is 1, the other is 2. On every team. Are they worried we'll confuse them? And do the women need to wear those tiny suits? Is an extra 2 oz. of fabric going to anchor them to the ground?

But it's not all evil or weird. I watched the Women's Marathon today and if you saw it, you know what an intense ending it had. An American, Deena Kastor, was in fourth place two miles out of the stadium. Somehow, she managed to begin accelerating and passed the third place runner. As she entered the stadium for the final laps, she began crying and didn't stop until she finished. And damned if I wasn't crying too. Looking at the faces of the top finishers (Japan, Nigeria and US) you see human beings who've pushed themselves to the limit (5:35 per mile over 26 miles) and slightly beyond. Ignore the corporate crap, those faces are what the Olympics mean.

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>

4.8.5 A story from my formative years (2004-08-24 15:24)

I, like so many boys of my era, was in Cub Scouts. In those days, dens met in our houses and our moms were the Den Mothers. Fathers might be involved in Pack activities, but the dirty work was the moms' job. Fittingly, when it was time for Webloes, things fell apart and I never made the transition to Boy Scout.

Instead, my parents got me involved in the [1]American Sea Rangers. My battalion (13) met in the Stewart Manor school, just over the line from Floral Park. It was sort of like Navy boot camp, but for kids (boys and girls). You wore Navy uniforms, both work and dress, and went through the same ranks. Mostly we marched, learned to use semaphore flags and practiced for drills (marching competitions). The adults were the officers but teens could become Chief Petty Officers. It was actually more fun than it sounds, and we took field trips to Navy ships, went to summer camp, marched in parades, and traveled to competitions.

I started off as a regular seaman, but somehow ended up in the color guard, the guys who carried the flag. It consisted of four people, one carried the American Flag, one the Sea Rangers flag and two on each end carrying rifles. I eventually became the rifle carrier on the right side who gave the orders. Previously, this person had no official designation, but I successfully lobbied to be classified as a company commander, like the leaders of the other three companies. This gave me a red shoulder braid to wear with my dress uniform. Within my peer group, I was cool.

This, of course, did not settle well with some people. In particular, a guy called Alfred Colangelo. He had been in the color guard and resented the honor given me so he got his mother to argue with the leaders that since he had more seniority (we were both Petty Officer First Class, if I recall correctly) he should be the color guard commander. The leadership, to my chagrin, decided it was easier to screw me over than to deal with Alfred Colangelo's mother so I was replaced. I elected to not stay in the color guard and moved back into a regular company. Not long after that I decided that now I was in high school the Sea Rangers were not for me, and I quit. It was an easy decision.

1. <http://www.americansearangers.org/pages/533968/index.htm>

4.8.6 String foolishness (2004-08-26 15:04)

I've been in sort of a rut musically for a while now and I read in one of my guitar magazines that one way to break out of the doldrums is to try a different instrument. I purchased a cheap A style mandolin from eBay the other day and I'm going to play with that for a while. I had thought about a ukelele instead, but so many of them seem to be cheap toys. Most of the cheaper mandolins look slightly better in quality, so I'm hoping it will hold up.

The mandolin is tuned differently than guitar, like a violin actually, so the fingerings are radically different. This in itself should provide much of the learning curve. I can read music, so I need to also learn the fingerboard as well as chords. There's a sizeable community of mandolin players who are interested in jazz, that should help. If I can get it down well enough, it should provide an intriguing counterpoint to my guitar playing.

(2004-08-28 19:09:12)

I had a mandolin as a young girl. I played guitar also, and the mandolin was actually owned by my grandmother. I remember it fondly, it was a beautiful cherry wood, in immaculate condition, and my grandmother wanted me to learn how to play it. I was SO excited, but at the time, I was in elementary school. My brother in law, who had just recently married my older sister, was a guitar player as well, and asked if he could play it and hang on to it until I

grew up and could take care of it responsibly. Come to think of it, that's the last time I saw that. *note to self-get mandolin back!* But I remember it being very beautiful music. I'd love to hear some of your music from it sometime! Kelly XMyHeart :)

4.8.7 Karate update and more (2004-08-28 11:01)

Music: Shelter From the Storm-Bob Dylan-Blood on the Tracks

I passed the test for my Purple belt last night. I couldn't get the message to the girls in time because the phone at camp was shut off, so they made it late and missed me. I did okay on the kata, I was a little nervous at first, but my power was there.

My mandolin came yesterday. It needs a little bit of setup but I can play some simple chords already. It should be fun accompanying my teacher on his banjo.

"Come in," she said, "I'll give ya shelter from the storm."

(2004-08-28 19:11:30)
Congrats! :)

(2004-08-28 19:12:33)
oops, forgot to sign that Congrats :) LOL Kelly XMyHeart :)

4.8.8 For Kel (2004-08-31 18:19)

(Is there a way to open commenting up to non-Diarylanders?)

I read your "retirement" note with some, but not a lot of, surprise. As you may have noticed over the years, hypocrisy runs rampant in that community. You need not look any other place but at the leadership to understand why.

The first thing to understand is what those IRC channels exist for. There's the stated reasons that appear on the website (more about the site below) and there's the real reasons: everything that the leadership does is in support of the annual party. Everything. Of course, no one will say that out loud. It's like a lot of other things about the channels, the people and the party: we all know, but we don't (or can't) say. Now that the party for 2004 is over, the channels will be neglected until the build-up for 2005 begins. Since there's no real leadership, the channel ops can do as they please. You've seen the results. It's nothing new, either.

The website is another example, and it mirrors what happens in the channels in a way. First of all, notice that it's a .com, not a .org. This is not a charity or a 501(c)3 tax-exempt, non-profit corporation. It's a business. I'm convinced the annual party is a profitable venture for the leadership, which helps explain why everything seems to be in support of it. The infrequent changes all seem to occur in the month or so before the party, I don't think that's coincidental. The rest of the year, the site gets the same level of neglect the channels do.

Don't expect anything to change until the leadership does. I put up with it because of my friends that are still there (though now there's one less). I keep my mouth shut because of them. If at some point in the future, none of them remain, I won't keep it shut. In the meantime, I'm glad I can keep up with you via your diary. I'll certainly let you know when I'm ready to "burn my bridges".

(2004-09-26 08:02:26) Hey there :)

Heya! :) So glad to hear (read :)) that you know where I've been hiding myself. I should have posted something on here too for you. I have to say, I haven't missed that place one iota. I have popped in via java twice since then, but only stayed for maybe 10 mins at a time, if that. Nothing ever changes in there, I'm just tired of all the stupidity, and decided a long, if not permanent break was in order. You are SO right about the focus of the channel's leadership. And very apparent visible lack of support or caring from its founder(s). I'd just become very discouraged with it all again, it just seems that the bash has become (always has been) a moneymaking venture, and that the condition of the channel is a concern that's way way down on the founder's list. It's on the expressway to you know where in a pretty handbasket w/a big bow on it. :(And that's sad, because it used to be a really fun place to go, with fun ops that cared and channel patrons that didn't seem to want to relive their jr. high school days online. It's actually worked out quite well, it's coincided with the start of Mr.'s new job, and since we only have one car, I've been playing chauffeur quite a bit, which takes quite a bit of time from my day when it's 45 mins each way! But more than that, it's just been incredibly awesome to have him at home. Been busy with the kiddo and taking care of my mom, family's been here, and I've just been concentrating on other things going on (me and my health/weight loss efforts, which I'm happy to say are going well! :) and haven't been on a whole lot lately. (As you can see, since this post you made to me is over three weeks old and I'm just NOW responding! I'm so sorry about that.:) Read about your trip to Toronto, sounds like you had a great time. I hear what you are saying re: Rochester: we live in a medium sized city that has a very limited mass transit system as well, and the way it's mapped out, it covers a very large area. If you don't have a car, you are basically in the proverbial boat traveling the proverbial creek w/out said paddle. So I hear exactly what you're saying re: the lack of available mass transit. I esp. gripe about it now that Zach's at an age where he's wanting to do more w/friends i.e. go to the mall or something, and can't because the bus schedules aren't there for it. Our car went down Wednesday night too, thankfully Chris has a buddy that he can ride to work with at times when their schedules mesh (his name is Kelly too, makes for mass confusion during visits to their house to play cards or to have dinner :)) Thankfully we got it back w/in a day (\$600 later! OUCH!) and we're working on getting a 2nd vehicle as soon as possible. I just went and checked out diaryland.com and realized somehow I managed to lock that off, sorry! I did start blogging over at xanga.com. Check it out at www.xanga.com/toastedmelba if you like :) With the crazy schedule I've not done much blogging lately, but I'm going to go and blog now and try and get it caught up a bit. PS: I was looking at a place online called petfinder.com. It's a website where a lot of the animal shelters list their available pets for adoption. Anyway, I found a bunny locally that's available for adoption called BigBunny. I smiled, shed a little tear, and thought of your BigBunny. After reading how much joy he brought you and your family, I'm strongly considering getting my own BigBunny one day soon. :) I'll keep you posted on what we decide to do. Take care of yourself, I'll try and pop in and see if you're around, cuz I miss having fun w/you in there :) I'll look for you on Yahoo!, you have me on your Yahoo!?! (coloradolyonsden) If not, pls add, thx :) Bye for now! Kel :) (XMyHeart's carbon-based twin :))

tommasz1 (2004-09-27 15:03:52) Re: Hey there :)

I tend to be an IRC "weekender", since that's about the only time I have, but I'll pop into Yahoo! now and then. I mostly just watch now, rather than participate, so it's even easier to avoid. I guess I'm post-addicted :) I'd love to replace my Tahoe, it just cost me \$1000 to fix various leaks and put on four new tires. And that's still not enough to pass NY state inspection. That will be a couple hundred more now that the state requires all sensors to work and the sensor data be sent to Albany. It's got 100K on it and the quality has been less than wonderful. I declined to fix the AC this year, which would have been \$600+. We're starting to really wonder how much more we want to go with it given the age and mileage. The trouble is we own it outright and don't want to start making payments. No

sooner than 2005, at any rate.

(2004-09-26 08:45:57)

PS: Happy Belated 21st anniversary to you and Mrs! And congrats on the Purple Belt! I knew there were a couple of other things I wanted to say before I closed that last posting! Sorry about that! :) Kel :)

4.9 September

4.9.1 Updates (2004-09-04 15:21)

Music: The Carpet Crawlers-Genesis-The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway

I've added a couple more pictures to the Stuff page. One of me and Mary Ann from 2003, one of me and a Xerox colleague, Bill Bender in the Lion brewpub in Tokyo back in 1999 and one of Big Bunny with his head stuck in a graham cracker box.

The picture with Mary Ann was partially corrupted by my HP digital camera and I had to do a severe crop to get rid of the bad sections. It does show our height difference, though :) Yesterday was our 21st anniversary, by the way, and that picture was taken almost exactly one year ago.

The shot of me and Bill Bender was taken in the Lion brewpub, which is owned by Sapporo and lies on the edge of the Ginza district in Tokyo. I can't recall now who took the picture. It was either our waitress or someone at another table. The Japanese are polite and love cameras, so it's never hard to get someone to take your picture. As you can see from the picture, we were drinking a dark beer, which is ordinarily hard to find in Tokyo. After that, we went to the Hard Rock cafe, where I bought t-shirts, and then to an Irish pub (possibly Paddy Foley's) in Roppongi. Roppongi is the district in Tokyo where all the foreigners (*gaijin*) hang out when they want to interact with people from home. I bought a nifty model guitar, similar to my Heritage H-575, from a street vendor from Belgium. The Hard Rock only had Guinness in cans, but the Irish pub had it on draft. Bill is a big Guinness fan, so we got out of Hard Rock after only one. The t-shirt store was a separate building out front. I guess there was no room inside.

Big Bunny loved graham crackers, and if we left the cabinet open, he would serve himself. As you can see, his head was bigger than the box. If we didn't help him, he would often run around with the box stuck on his head until he managed to dislodge it.

4.9.2 Always remember (2004-09-11 16:24)

I am surprised at my personal feelings about September 11 three years later. I tend to avoid saying much and I don't read the news articles or watch ceremonies on television. I don't need to be reminded.

For some reason, though, I read through [1]this thread on Metafilter again. It's as good a chronicle of the fear, anger and uncertainty that gripped the nation that day as you will find. I couldn't get through it without feeling some of the same things I felt that day.

My wife and daughters are down at camp this weekend so I'm alone in the house again. It's an unpleasant kind of solitude.

1. <http://www.metafilter.com/mefi/10034>

4.9.3 Strange things I've seen today (2004-09-15 10:08)

- A car traveling in the right-most lane at about 45 mph, the driver reading the newspaper
- A large spill of what appears to be uncooked oatmeal, in front of the door to the men's bathroom

4.9.4 Toronto (2004-09-22 15:24)

We had a pretty good weekend in Toronto. The kids had never seen a major league baseball game before (and, it turns out, neither had my wife) and the Skydome is a great park. The mild weather and lack of rain allowed them to keep the dome open so we could see the golden sunset reflected off the CN tower. Unfortunately, the BlueJays lost 11-4. We had field-level seats right behind home plate, just high enough to see over the netting. There were a number of fouls hit near us, but none close enough to catch.

They're still negotiating the return of the ferry, but we're going to try to get our money back, rather than get an exchange. As a taxpayer, I'm really hoping that it doesn't end up being paid for by tax money (like the local soccer stadium). Rochester has taken a lot of abuse, this ferry debacle is just the latest. It's a shame, really. Rochester is a decent place to live, for the most part. Attempts to make it better, like the Brown's Race district, never seem to really do all that well, though. Lack of parking and a fear (perhaps unwarranted) of crime do a lot to keep people from downtown.

Spending time in Toronto really make the differences apparent. There are people on the streets all day and night. True, there isn't a lot of parking, but it's balanced by an extensive mass transit system that makes getting around simple, even for out-of-towners. For instance, we walked a block from our hotel to the subway and rode it to Union Station, where we then walked the skyway to the Skydome. We took the subway and a bus to the Ontario Science Center. As a matter of fact, I never touched the car until we left on Sunday. Compare that to Rochester, if you will: no street cars, no subway, fewer bus routes and fewer bus routes. Many bus routes go to the central station, requiring you to change buses. It's okay to discourage driving, but please offer viable alternatives.

What's ironic is that we love the city and frequently go there. But when we do, we take my wife's car. It's smaller and easier to park than my big SUV. But scarce parking means we'll be driving around for a while once we get to our destination. We're willing, but not everyone is. As a result, the suburbs are booming, their acres of parking lots promising no parallel parking skills will be needed.

4.10 October

4.10.1 Personal observation (2004-10-06 14:00)

If you're wearing a baseball cap indoors at work in summer, it doesn't say "young, hip guy" it says "bald guy."

In case you were thinking otherwise.

4.10.2 Strange courtesies (2004-10-11 09:50)

In the bathroom at work, there's a guy in a stall chatting on his cell phone. He tells the person to "hold on" as I come in and resumes his conversation as I leave.

4.10.3 Overload (2004-10-11 10:28)

Friday night, as I was leaving my local beer store, there were two guys with "Event Staff" shirts on loading a Toyota with five half kegs of beer (two in the trunk, three in the back seat). At about 170 lbs per keg, that's around 850 lbs. Needless to say, it was sitting pretty low and the event guys weren't in it yet. In retrospect, I should have stayed just to watch them drive away.

4.10.4 It's Hoover! (2004-10-12 10:34)

I knew this would happen. On Friday afternoon my wife called me to tell me about a neighbor's relative who had a rabbit they couldn't keep. It seems they have a baby with numerous allergies and she was affected by the rabbit. Now of course I didn't have to say yes but I miss Big Bunny and, well, you know I said yes.

Last night we picked him up from his previous owners. He had spent his first couple of years in a school classroom but had spent the last two or so at home after the school had banned live animals. He is a real house rabbit, very used to people and other animals, neutered and litter box trained. His name is Hoover (like the vacuum) and is a Chinchilla, meaning gray, black and white but overall darker than Big Bunny was. He's also slightly larger overall. He's still settling into his new home, as you can imagine, and it will take a while for all of us to adjust. But it's a fun time learning about a new pet so it should be an enjoyable time. I should have a portrait posted fairly soon.

4.10.5 Hoover's weblog (2004-10-15 15:54)

I've started something interesting that I hope continues to be interesting over time: a [1]weblog by our new rabbit. Yes, I realize that he can't actually be the author, and I'm equally aware this isn't the first pet-authored weblog, so put your hands down. But sometimes it's okay to suspend your disbelief and just with it. This is one of those times.

What is Hoover going to write about? First of all, his new home/life/family. Rabbits are far more complex creatures than most people realize, and unlike a rat or a hamster, they are greatly aware of and affected by their environment. Right now, I believe he's unhappy to have been removed from his family and still somewhat overwhelmed by his new one. Eventually this will pass and he'll be writing about his adventures and whatever else rabbits might be interested in. I don't expect him to writing things every day, but check back now and then to see what's on his mind.

1. <http://hooversblog.blogspot.com/>

4.10.6 Well, that certainly smarts! (2004-10-16 18:15)

Music: My Girl Lollipop-Bad Manners

Or it sure sucks getting older.

I drove out to Buffalo this morning to practice with their Kendo club. It was a great practice, despite my being yelled at a lot. Or, I should say, it was great until my left calf cramped up during gi geiko with the best student in the club. Sensei told me to move faster through the strikes. And so I did. Once.

I should be okay tomorrow.

(2004-10-31 04:08:50)

I'm so sorry to hear about your injury :(I am just getting caught up on my blog and journal reading, sorry for not being clued in to it sooner than now. Hope you're getting better now. And I must say, Hoover's blog is quite informative and entertaining! Cute twitchy nose and an uncanny writing ability. Can't wait to read more :) Kelly aka XMH

4.10.7 Observations (2004-10-20 13:16)

It's taking longer for my left calf to heal than I thought it would. It's another sad reminder of getting older. Kendo tomorrow night is looking doubtful, but perhaps I can at least engage in the upper-body work, so it won't be a total loss.

Last night my guitar lesson was actually 3/4th's of the guitar group we used to have (and that actually played for an audience once). One of the members lost his wife suddenly this summer and I thought it would be a great idea to get everyone together and play guitar. I was glad to give up my lesson time for this, too. I even played my mandolin on Summertime. But if the session did one thing, it highlighted how poor my playing is. Of course, I don't practice anywhere near enough, so there's no great mystery at work here. But it's also abundantly clear that I don't have a lot of talent. I wish that wasn't the case, and more practice would undoubtedly close the gap, but in the end it's inescapable. It's never fun to realize your limitations.

4.10.8 A change of brand (2004-10-20 16:50)

In my weblog today I [1]linked to a Hugh Macleod piece on the [2]death of branding which also touched on corporate blogging. It's interesting to note that most corporations that are heavily branded (Apple, Gap, Nike) do not have (or maybe not even allow) corporate weblogs that are visible to outsiders. This isn't all that surprising since they have spent untold millions of dollars to create and protect their brand identities. Having that brand diluted even slightly is not part of the plan. I work for such a company. I have an in-house weblog at The Big Company, but you can't see it. It's the only one in the company, as far as I know.

In a comment on Hugh's site I mentioned that I don't even know who in the corporate bureaucracy I could even talk to about making a public weblog. But it's more than that, I know already what the answer would be. It just not the way things are done here. You will also note that I don't mention the actual name of my company. Not a coinkydink.

On a related note, The Big Company is attempting to change its brand strategy. Up until just a couple of months ago, we were The Widget Company (where Widget stands for another word I won't mention here). Instead, our logo is now accompanied by "Technology. Widget Management. Consulting Services." It's intended to signify a fundamental change in the company's approach to the market. We're getting out of manufacturing, since we can't compete cost-wise with Asian companies who build their widgets in places with minimal labor and other costs, like China. That's sad, especially if you're an engineer like me who enjoys making things but it's not like we're alone in this. The question is, of course, will the market accept a change in the brand? Imagine, if you will, GM getting out of the automobile manufacturing business (except perhaps for Cadillac, at the high end) and selling just services for automobiles (think OnStar). Would you automatically buy from them? Some people might, but since there are lots of other businesses selling services for cars, it's not a slam dunk, even if you were a GM buyer in the past. That's the same hurdle The Big Company might be facing. Maybe it's time they took a new approach to branding, too.

1. http://mylnd.blogspot.com/2004_10_01_mylnd_archive.html#109829072793627592

2. http://www.gapingvoid.com/Moveable_Type/archives/001068.html

4.10.9 Strange, but true (2004-10-21 13:18)

A lie detector only works if you know you're telling a lie.

4.10.10 Jay Leno in Rochester (2004-10-25 13:33)

Whiny personal note: The injury I was sure was just a muscle cramp is probably a muscle tear instead. My left calf is swollen and black and blue. I managed to reinjure it last Thursday and I was sent home from karate on Friday before I could even change out of my street clothes. I understand why, of course, but I was hoping to be able to do something. It's clear there will be no workouts for me this week, either.

We went to see Jay Leno last night at the Eastman Theatre. Jay does a lot of charity work, though he doesn't call attention to it, and the show started with him getting the Lifetime Assistance Foundation (proceeds from ticket sales went to benefit the Foundation which helps children and adults with developmental disabilities) Inspiration Award. It was presented by a young man who seemed at first to struggle getting the words out, but quickly became part of Jay's act. And a funny act it was. Freed from the constrictions of a network television show he was all over current events, celebrities, cars, and his own family. If you wonder why Leno got the nod from Johnny Carson, see him live and you'll see. On a side note, the program mentioned that Jay has mild dyslexia which was something I had never heard before.

Additional whiny personal note: We had decent seats in the Loge section (front of the balcony) but my leg tightened up from the sitting. It was slow going for a while but I was able to stretch it out eventually. It's going to be a while before I'm over this, I'm afraid.

4.10.11 What do you...? (2004-10-29 10:44)

What do you call a company that, year after year, calls for dramatic spending cuts in the fourth quarter because they've managed to underestimate sales and revenue? The Big Company.

4.11 November

4.11.1 My one, and only, rant on the 2004 Presidential election (2004-11-03 10:29)

To be honest, I'm saddened but not at all surprised by election results. It's clear the Democrats don't really understand a lot of things and haven't really learned much of anything in the four years since they nominated Gore. My local area, at 80 % or higher of eligible voters going to the polls, is an anomaly compared to country at large. So despite all the new voter registrations ("Rock the Vote", "Vote or Die", etc.) the fact is only around half of the eligible voters in the US actually vote. While you can spin that to mean Bush and the GOP don't have a mandate, they're going to think exactly that. The Democrats would like to believe that all those people who didn't vote in the last election will vote in this one. Guess what? Nothing changed. People who don't vote aren't going to. Perhaps they should just give up and start addressing the segment of the population that does vote.

The Republicans, on the other hand, spend much more effort in addressing their constituency. They do it well, I might add, to the point where they can have a President that almost no one thinks is doing a good job get reelected. The GOP knows how to push the buttons of the electorate in such a way that their concentration is not on the mistakes. Lincoln's statement about not being able to fool "all of the people all of the time" was correct but incomplete. You can fool most of the people most of the time. You can get

people to forget about losing jobs or Social Security if you can scare them about something else, like gay marriage or terrorism. Frightened people don't think, they react. The GOP understands that. They don't want thinkers, as a matter of fact, they encourage anti-intellectualism. They've managed to make the word liberal become a perjorative. After all, liberals are from the *East*, they're *egghead college professors*, they live in *cities*, they like *gays* and *blacks*, they *are* gays and blacks. Standing up for the less fortunate is now considered a weakness, not a strength, the work of girlie men. The Democrats did nothing to counteract that line of thinking. They persisted in their belief that all you had to do was line up the facts and people would change their minds. Sorry, but it doesn't work that way. Somehow the Democratic party has to learn to get people *angry*. Spitting, stuttering, fist-shaking angry. Their appeal to America has to be emotional, not intellectual. You don't win by informing voters, you win by getting them mad, by making them afraid.

Sen. Kerry is a nice man. But there's a reason you never heard of him before the campaign. He was a lackluster senator and a lackluster candidate. His one and only asset was that he was not Bush. That's not sufficient to get people to vote for you. It was certainly not enough for people to look beyond their fears. It won't be in 2008, either. What will the Democrats do then? Running as the "anti-Bush" won't work. There are bound to be additional job losses and more Iraq war costs. But unless the Democrats can take advantage of that, it won't matter. I'm not a political analyst. I don't know *how* the Democrats can change, I only know the *what*. Business as usual for them didn't work in 2000, doesn't seem to have worked in 2004 and sure as hell won't work in 2008.

The USA will survive. It may be a less desirable place for some of us to live, but in the end, the country as a whole will go on. I might even still be able to express my opinions in 2008. Only time will tell.

watermelonpunch (2004-11-08 13:35:39)

I believe in Australia, voting is a mandate... er... mandatory.

tommasz1 (2004-11-08 13:44:56)

Ha! One can only imagine what the US would be like if all the citizens eligible actually voted. There are tens of millions of people who don't vote and don't participate in polls, who knows what they want? Sure, there's a distinct possibility that they simply don't care one way or another, but there's also a chance they feel their voice isn't heard. Politicians like simple yes/no, us/them kind of choices, having to deal with more choices could easily overwhelm them.

watermelonpunch (2004-11-08 15:25:11)

I thought this was interesting: <http://www.collegeiseasy.net/voting.html> ;) Anyway, I think I can speak for at least some non-voters... I'll make a startling confession and admit that I was once one of them. I did not vote as soon as I was eligible, I wasn't even registered. Though I grew up in a household where politics were discussed regularly, and both my parents voted (against each other), by age 19 I was living on my own and fending for myself. I remember those early years of adulthood and independence as rather difficult & overwhelming, as I was trying to support myself in a time the economy was very bad (in my area at least), develop some kind of a life, and (from my perspective) have the fun I felt others my age were having that I hadn't had. It comes down to this - it didn't seem particularly easy to register to vote and find out about these things. Indeed, it seemed a downright difficult pain in the ass to register. And I thought the other bureaucracy I was legally obligated to handle was enough of a pain in the ass, particularly at that time. It wasn't that I didn't care, or I didn't have an opinion. And I now don't think my vote counts anymore or any less than I thought it did back then (haha), so that wasn't the issue. I turned 18 the year of a new presidential term, so I was 21 years old before I was eligible to vote in a presidential election. The first presidential election I was eligible to vote in (I refuse to say publicly, because it would reveal my age -haha)... I WANTED to vote, but I didn't realize until it was too late that you had to find out about that registering stuff well in advance of the election... So by the time I had realized and looked into it, even if I went through with registering

at that point, it would've been too late, and I couldn't have voted anyway. I remember being fairly interested in the election... My significant other and I (he was visiting me from another state at the time for the Halloween holiday), were actually very concerned about it - we strongly disliked the one running, and were anxious to turn on the television & see the results. I remember that clearly - I remember he joked that he & his friend (who was there at the time) were going to start a riot if the one guy won. (My significant other didn't vote, not because he was out of his state, but because he was a resident alien (from England) and I believe he wasn't allowed to vote. He came to the U.S. as a teenager with his father, and did consider the U.S home.) I was relieved that the one I didn't like was not actually elected, despite my not having voted. The next presidential election season, I jumped through the hoops I had to, to register in time. And I did vote. And since then I've voted nearly every year. I missed last year because I literally forgot it was election day. (I'm registered as a political party not democrat or republican, so I don't vote in primaries.)

tommasz1 (2004-11-09 09:39:56)

I was eligible to vote in the 1976 election, but I didn't. I was living away from home and hadn't registered, knew nothing about the candidates for local positions and was so isolated at school that it didn't matter to me anyway. I did vote in 1980 and have every year since (I missed last year due to a family emergency). But I was registered here, not at home, since I began thinking that Rochester was where I was going to stay (I was right). And it was because I wanted a summer job with the local DPW, not for some lofty idealistic reason. The town then was Republican-controlled and it was a "good idea" to be one also if you wanted a job. But once I did, I've been diligent at voting every year. So that makes me a Republican even though I don't usually vote that way. I've considered changing to Independent, since that probably best describes me, but there's really no advantage/disadvantage unless you're interested in the primary elections. I was lucky in that my then-girlfriend's mother and stepfather both worked for the town and were familiar with the process for registration. It was a long time ago, and I couldn't tell you the process now, other than seeing the forms in places like the Post Office. NY State is being sued by the Feds for failing to implement the "Motor Voter" act, so it's undoubtedly more complex here than it could be. Still, you seldom hear complaints about voter registration. Most of the local races, with some exceptions, are low-key affairs. Even when there's two people running, the one for the non-dominant party (the Dems rule the city, the GOP gets many of the surrounding towns and the county) usually ends up being almost invisible. Now that my town is Democratic, the poor GOP candidates seem to get short-shrift from their own party. For instance, the last time the town supervisor position was up for vote, the GOP candidate, who's name I didn't know then and can't recall now, stopped at my house on the Sunday prior to election day. He was by himself. I felt sorry for him, but that's not grounds for electing someone. He lost by a incredible margin. I'm sure Democrats have the same problems running for county legislature. I would love to have a viable third party in this country. I can handle decisions that involve more than two choices. But I realize that even if that happens, there's little or no chance I'd see it on a local level. We can barely manage two parties.

watermelonpunch (2004-11-09 09:58:51)

I think 3rd party candidates have better chances at the more local levels though... At least it seems that way since they actually get elected - I mean they don't for president. I would say in my area, local political elections are not all that low-key. Though it depends on the town. In my area, some towns are dominated by democrats who are heavily accused of nepotism (this is at a very local level). I often vote for 3rd party candidates at the local level because I don't like either candidate. I have a friend who voted for George W. and then voted for a green and an independent for 2 other of their local elections. There's often an independent running, sometimes a libertarian or green. I suspect most of the votes they get are from democrats who are angry at the corruption or nepotism of the incumbants & don't like the message of the competition, or just don't like republicans. Arlen Specter comes to mind as someone who most of the people I know don't like, no matter what party they generally vote with.

tommasz1 (2004-11-09 15:08:15)

Around here, the alternaparties most often endorse candidates from the two main parties, although there can be

exceptions. Each year there are some new ones and some old ones that disappear. They tend to be organized around one particular issue, which has been the model in the US. While the model for coalition parties isn't a strong one, I can't imagine a 3rd party making it on a national level based on a single issue.

watermelonpunch (2004-11-08 16:18:08)

Oh yeah, and as a side note, you might find this discussion interesting: <http://www.mikezellers.com/archives/0005-37.html>

4.11.2 Random thoughts (2004-11-08 10:01)

We've had the buildup to the attack on Falluja on the news for days. Do we not think the insurgents don't read, watch TV, listen to the radio or use the Net? If I were them, I'd just leave, and infiltrate another city.

My building at The Big Company has a front door that is in a sort of sheltered alcove, consequently the wind tends to swirl around the front door. Right now, there is an immense pile of leaves about 3 feet high in front of the door that I have to shuffle through each morning.

There was something odd on the floor in front of the men's bathroom the other day. It was a hairnet, the kind worn by foodservice workers.

After deciding my leg wasn't getting any better, I went to the Orthopedic specialist. It's a muscle tear, as I suspected. I've been in one of those Velcro-on "boots" and I've been going to Physical Therapy. I have another appointment on the 15th and I hope to lose the boot then. I'll be lucky to get back to Karate and Kendo this month.

I have an interview for another position here at The Big Company on Wednesday. I'm actually surprised to get it, since there's the spending cutback issue and one of the other positions I applied for was withdrawn. I've been advised that it's not going to be a good fit for me, that I'll be bored. Perhaps. But I'm already bored, and I'd rather take a chance that maybe I won't be. My strong point isn't my creativity, of which I don't have a lot, it's my dogged determination and sense of right and wrong that make me valuable. I'm hoping that continues to be my value proposition in the post-engineering world.

[Update] I just set up an interview this afternoon for a second position. That makes two interviews out of three applications (the remainder being that one that was withdrawn).

4.11.3 Out of the darkness, into the light (2004-11-12 09:31)

As I write this I'm sitting in the cafeteria in my building at The Big Company. The lights in my office are off again for the second time this week. The glamour of having an office with an actual door is diminished somewhat by the lack of windows. I had a desk lamp, but it fell the first time the lights went off and broke into two pieces. The cafe has wireless and outlets, so I can sit here all day, if I want. But it's not the same as having your own space.

I'm struck by the dichotomy of the outward appearance of the company compared to the slowly failing infrastructure within.

4.11.4 Occam's Razor (2004-11-13 15:52)

I find it hard to believe that there was any speculation that anyone other than Scott Peterson had killed his wife and unborn child. The reason why I find it hard to believe is Occam's Razor. You can Google it if you want but the short definition is whenever there are multiple possible causes for an event, pick the simplest one.

It may seem prejudicial, but whenever someone is murdered, the attention always goes to immediate family members or spouses. Granted, people get killed by strangers all the time, but even then there is often some relationship, some reason why they were in the same place at the same time.

In the Peterson case, his defense attempted to portray this crime as being a frame up by a homeless person or a burglar. The jury didn't buy it. Why? Think about it. Would a burglar a) break in to the house b) kill Laci c) remove the body d) hide the body and e) leave no evidence? You have to note that Peterson never complained about his house being broken in to or that anything was missing. Yes, it could have happened that way, but the question is "how likely was that compared to Peterson having done it?" Occam's Razor says pick the simplest cause, all things being otherwise equal (more on that below).

Obviously, the trial also revealed that Scott Peterson is a detestable human being. The defense was correct in telling the jury to ignore their hate for him when deciding. But you cannot completely overlook it, as it goes a long way to providing a motive. Had he not been the scumbag that he is, the defense might have been able to cast some doubt. But the simplest explanation would still have the simplest explanation.

In that case, it's likely he could have been acquitted. Our justice system requires proof "beyond the shadow of a doubt" and it would have not been sufficient to convict him only because he "could have done it". Think of our friend, O.J. Simpson. One of the reasons his defense was able to create sufficient doubt was that there was a lot of discussion about physical evidence (like gloves) and less about his character. You know the Peterson prosecution learned a lot from that case. The defense couldn't come up with a compelling alternative explanation for who could have done it. Peterson's personality did the rest.

4.11.5 Getting better (2004-11-15 16:32)

Went to the orthopedic office today, I'm doing well but probably won't be allowed back into karate and kendo for another four weeks. This would make of a total of eight weeks from the date of the original injury. As the PA explained, this isn't an uncommon injury for a guy my age, and the idea is to get it to heal and to prevent reoccurrence. I start strength training in PT this week, and part of that includes prevention. I'd just go back next week, if it was up to me, but that would unnecessarily put the dojo at risk if I did reinjure it, and I would never do that to them. So that means I've got to get serious about doing some modified workouts to keep from going completely unfit. Pushups and situps sound like a good start.

4.11.6 New picture (2004-11-22 08:58)

I've posted a new picture, this one is [1]Liz and Alanna with our new rabbit, Hoover. They're with Santa at our local pet shelter, [2]Lollypop Farm. They've been offering pet pictures with Santa for years. We have a number of them with the girls and our other rabbits, Big Bunny and Digger. This year, instead of using film that you had to pick up later, they did everything digital and we were able to take home prints plus a CD and since I didn't have to scan a print, it was easy to post it. Have a Happy Thanksgiving!

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/GirlsAndHoover2004.jpg>

2. <http://www.lollypop.org/>

4.11.7 Thanksgiving Day 2004 (2004-11-25 13:24)

Hope you're having a great Thanksgiving (if you're in the US) and not overdoing it. We're home today but we'll be on the road tomorrow to visit my parents in the Poconos. Liz and I are in charge of making the turkey. I couldn't find a small-enough turkey so I bought a turkey breast instead. It's still over 7 pounds but there's more meat and less bone and other waste (but also no dark meat) which will still result in plenty of leftovers.

You can be sure I'll be watching the football games, despite the fact that the teams aren't my favorites. It's always fun to watch the Colts, of course, which is exactly what I'm doing now.

It wouldn't be a Thanksgiving without mentioning what I'm thankful for. I'll keep it simple. I'm thankful for my wife and family. I'm also grateful for my friends, my martial arts teachers and my doctors and therapists, who've been there for me, taught me a lot (and a lot about myself) and put me back together.

4.11.8 I live in a world... (2004-11-29 12:02)

I did not create

I was born in middle-class splendor in the mid-1950s. The second World War was over, and Vietnam was ramping up. It was the height of the Cold War. But everything that would eventually shape the world we live in today was in place. It may have taken a visionary to see that at the time, but it was there.

I do not influence

I'm not in politics. I don't own a company. I am not an artist. I've done nothing but labor as a unremarkable worker for large companies. I'm definitely not the only one. I also vote, but I can't point to anything I've voted for or against and say it was because of me. Perhaps if I supported the things that the majority does, I might feel like I made a difference, but I tend to think about things and support those issues I feel deserve to be supported. Consequently, I feel powerless.

I don't understand

This is the logical outcome of the former points. If you're in the middle of something you didn't create and can't change, you're going to have some trouble getting your head around it. I ask "why?" a lot, perhaps too often. The opportunities for getting that question answered are few and far between. This is why people turn to religion, it provides answers to that question (regardless of whether those answers can be scientifically proven). That's certainly something the conservatives in the US understand, that the desire to know "why?" is an important one. I don't wish to get into the whole creationism vs. evolution discussion here, but I think it's important that creationism (and its sibling, intelligent design) address the issue of "why?" in addition to the "how?" (and emphasize the former).

What brought this on

I was thinking about that near-riot that broke out during an NBA game (despite my somewhat flippant link to it on my weblog) and the fight at the Vibe awards, in particular the number of fans who threw things at the players. We're angry. Our anger blinds us to what we are doing so that we lash out at anything, anyone, any time. We cheer on those who resort to violence. Rappers like 50 Cent who glorify their "gangsta" roots dominate the charts. But it's totally understandable. If I, as a white, middle-class male, feel disenfranchised how do you think blacks and other minorities feel?

I really think things are going to get worse, unless something significant changes. By significant I don't mean the political party of the guy who's President. I do mean a change to the basic fabric of our society. I realize that such changes usually come about as a result of something distinctly unpleasant, like a world war or major economic downturn. But if we continue on a track that makes more of us feel the way I do, we're on our way to our own demise. If that happens, we won't need to ask "why?"

4.12 December

4.12.1 Working from home (2004-12-03 12:01)

Music: My Window Faces the South-Hot Club of Cowtown-Continental Stomp

I'm working from home today since I needed to do some work that I couldn't do with the borrowed laptop I have (see the weblog for the details). It's been way more fun and productive than going into the job. I do scribe duty for a couple of programs and I generally write directly in an outliner (Bonsai) that saves to OPML format (an XML dialect for outlines) and then use XLST to turn them into HTML. Since I couldn't load any software on the laptop, I did the typing on my Mac using OmniOutliner and saved them as both HTML and OPML. Then all I had to do was start Samba and I could use the files on the laptop.

Of course, being able to play my music at a volume where I can actually hear it and having my rabbit, Hoover, near by are also nice benefits :)

I'm brewing a nice English Special Bitter tomorrow. I've done some minor equipment upgrades, too. The recipe is one I devised on my own, but I'm sure it's nothing revolutionary. Kegged and force carbonated, of course. That keg, while not cheap, has to be the single best brewing-related purchase next to the full batch boiler.

4.12.2 Chinese curse (2004-12-10 09:56)

I live in interesting times.

I've actually received two phone calls from headhunters recently, unfortunately both positions were far away from Rochester. I've thought about moving, but I've really got roots here and the thought of uprooting my family simply for work is not something I wish to entertain. Yet.

Yesterday got off to a bad start when I managed to knock the top off my takeout coffee getting into the car and spilled it all over myself and my wife's car. Nothing like starting the day with scalded hands and smelling like hazelnut.

Still no laptop at work. I'm off today, so perhaps they're rushing it to my office as we speak. Meanwhile, back in reality...

It truly boggles the mind that The Big Company would pay me what they do and then not care whether or not I had the tools to do my job. This is precisely why I worry about getting laid off, the economics of the situation don't make any sense. But, on the bright side, I have only four more working days for 2004. So they'll have to hurry.

Luckily, that also means I get to miss my department's "holiday get together". The new boss decided to hold it in a bowling alley, I guess to affirm his "working class roots" or something. No thanks.

4.12.3 Holiday Glee (2004-12-17 10:34)

Music: Chris Isaak - I Want Your Love

Well, I'm done with work for 2004 and let me tell you, it's great not to be in the office. I'm sitting in a Starbucks right now, WiFi'd to the net, listening to Chris Isaak and generally having way more fun than I could otherwise. I have a bunch of errands to run, then it's karate followed by dinner out.

I started back to karate on Wednesday, and I'm only a little sore even after doing 50 pushups, running and sparring. My leg is surprisingly good and it gave me no trouble at all during class. I was sorely neglectful in keeping up with my kata practice. I was scared to stress the leg and bo katas need a lot of room, which is something that's in short supply at home. But it's okay, I'm on a path, the destination will be reached.

Tomorrow the girls have to go to MCC to receive a grant for their youth group. They've carved themselves out a niche in grant writing it seems. Usually they just send them in the mail but some politicians have seized upon the opportunity to be photographed. After that it's parties at the dojo and the firehouse. I might even haul my guitar to the dojo and play with some of the senseis. But maybe not.

This morning I had my teeth cleaned. Not a big deal normally but I needed x-rays. I can barely tolerate them due to my gag reflex. It's literally all I can do to keep myself from throwing up. A topical anesthetic helped, but I still need more, since she couldn't complete the set. Weird, isn't it? I have noticed that it's been getting progressively worse over the years. Sometimes in karate my mouthguard will do it if I also have my helmet's chinstrap fastened. I have to either remove the guard or loosen the strap to stop the feeling. Weird.

4.12.4 Have yourself a merry little Christmas (2004-12-23 22:44)

Today was my last day of Christmas shopping since I wanted to get my wife one last gift. Unfortunately it meant going to the mall. On December 23rd. But it wasn't too bad especially since I had a nice pub lunch at The Old Toad with a wonderful IPA from Wagner.

Our tree is decorated, after the usual fun with burned out lights. We weren't able to get a Concolor like previous years but the Norway Spruce we have is pretty and smells great. It was extremely cold the day we cut it, as usual, the beginning of the cold wave that struck here earlier this week.

Our usual holiday luck has struck again, this time with the garage door. It's stuck closed now and won't open no matter what. This means we'll have to call someone on Christmas Eve and see if they'll come out. Oh joy.

But anyway, if you're reading this, have a safe and happy Christmas however you celebrate (and even if you don't).

4.12.5 Post-Christmas Status Report (2004-12-27 08:58)

Note: I originally wrote this yesterday but I managed to lose it and couldn't grep it out of the temp files and nor could Norton it. So I'm writing it again.

It was a very good Christmas here for everyone. The girls loaded up on iPod gear, my wife got some clothes and cooking stuff and I got a remote starter for the Bulgemobile. My sister-in-law came in from NYC

and we picked her up from the airport on Christmas Eve in what we thought would be a Christmas snow, but it turned out to be a brief flurry and we had a gray and brown Christmas.

It actually started snowing yesterday afternoon and as of this morning we have about six inches or so of light, lake-effect snow. We're going for a short trip today, of course, but the snow shouldn't be much of an issue. You know I'll be using my remote starter.

My Christmas beer came out rather well, but lacks the fruitiness I had hoped for given the yeast I used. This could be due to being in the fridge, or the fermentation temperature (it was cool and the yeast took a while to get to kraeusen). Still, it's a very good beer and I'm more than happy with the results. Having the keg has really made a positive impact.

I'm starting to get used to my new Palm Zire 72. I was happy with my old Palm V and wouldn't have upgraded were it not for the damage, so I wasn't sure what to expect with the color, speed and additional storage. I'm sure I will find additional things to do with it over time, things I couldn't have done with the V.

I know I'm starting to sound rather smug, especially since I know that some of my friends are not having the best of times right now, so I'll stop. See you later this week.

4.12.6 2004 Year In Review (2004-12-31 20:20)

I was going to write about what happened this year, but I've decided to be pithy instead of wordy. Maybe next year.

So, here it is: **It Could Have Been Worse.**

Chapter 5

2005

5.1 January

5.1.1 Last day of freedom (2005-01-02 19:49)

I have never felt so much dread about returning to work as I do today. Part of it has to be the amount of time I've been off, but the other part is the realization that I need to make a big career change. Yeah, I know I've been whining about that for a while now, but it *has* to be this year, I can't put it off any longer. I'm not a kid anymore and the number of opportunities in my current career are extremely limited and actually decreasing in number over time. Since there doesn't seem to be a "next big thing" coming along right now, it's going to be a case of finding something within an established field that can make good use of my talents. Stay tuned, it'll be a fun year one way or another.

5.1.2 What greeted me upon returning to the office (2005-01-03 10:00)

Music: WOXY

- The Yellow/White Pages on CD-ROM
- A rejection notice from one of the jobs I applied for
- Two voice mail messages with nothing in them

5.1.3 Some cleanups (2005-01-08 17:05)

I reorganized the Stuff page to better group the pictures I have in it. Truth is I should have some sort of web photo album for it but I'm putting that off until I redo the whole site. It really needs it, and I have some design ideas that I can use.

I'm really looking to be more organized overall in 2005 than I've been and redoing the site is just one part of that. The biggest thing I've done so far is to separate my longer term todos and goals from my short term ones. It's not the ultimate organization scheme, but it will allow me to get a better understanding of what I have to do now, which in a lot of cases is what really matters. I'll keep this journal up to date with how I'm doing as I go. Expect a writeup on what tools I'm using in the next journal entry.

5.1.4 A question (2005-01-09 13:16)

If you pause live TV, at what point does it "catch up"?

5.1.5 My take on the Six Apart acquisition (2005-01-10 10:13)

Music: Coverville - Coverville-2004-12-23

If you're a weblogger or online journaler, you're probably aware that Six Apart, the company behind the Movable Type weblog software (and the TypePad blog service) has [1]purchased Danga Interactive, Inc., the operators of LiveJournal, the service behind this journal.

There's been a lot of speculation about why they wanted LiveJournal. There has also been a lot of [2]talk about what could go wrong. Six Apart annoyed a lot of people when they released Movable Type 3.0 and announced a pricing structure that imposed an unreasonable burden on people who had more than one MT weblog. It cost them a lot of customers and, perhaps more damaging, a lot of friends. It wasn't the pricing itself. Movable Type was never "free software", it was "free to use for now" software, and their license agreements never said otherwise. Still, they created the *impression* that it was free. Given that they just bungled the change to a paying model. The story should end up in business school textbooks when they get around to covering the weblog "industry".

I was a Movable Type user for my work weblog (that no one reads), right up until the 3.0 debacle. It was working fine for me, for the most part. I had a serious problem when the Berkely DB database that is the default data store got partially deleted and I was never able to really recover it. I switched over to MySQL, which I should have been running anyway, and that was that. Running behind the corporate firewall meant I never had to deal with the comment spam issue that plagues many MT installations, so that wasn't an issue for me. But the cost would have to be covered out of my own pocket, and the *value to me* was not sufficient to warrant paying for it. I'm not a Perl hacker so I gain no advantage to having the MT source code available. Most of the add-ons and such didn't solve any problems I had. So I looked for an alternative and settled on [3]Wordpress.

Wordpress is free to use. It's also open source. It's implemented in PHP, which I also am not fluent in, but that doesn't matter much anyway. It also uses MySQL as the backend store, so it wasn't much work to move to it from MT. It was also fairly easy to import the MT entries I had (post the DB meltdown), including their categories. That was it for MT.

My work weblog occasionally contains proprietary information, so I knew I needed to host it on my own server. At the time, MT was the only reasonable choice for someone like me, since it was fairly easy to get a basic configuration up and running. You still had to be fairly skilled as a sysadmin, though, and the upgrades were difficult to manage. Wordpress seemed easier to install and configure, but that may be because I'm more comfortable doing those types of tasks now.

Six Apart started as two people, Ben and Mena Trott, who created a Content Management System (CMS) that was ideal for weblogging. They gave people the impression that they really cared about making MT the best. Perhaps at one time they really did but that was then, this is now. It's not Ben and Mena anymore, it's Six Apart, a company with venture capital and all that goes along with it. Danga, on the other hand, is a company that existed only to keep LiveJournal going. Not particularly ambitious, but it worked. One thing that this enabled was free users. I pay for this account, because I grab the content via Javascript and format it for my site. You can't do that with a free account. On the other hand, all of Six Apart's TypePad accounts are paid. There's no room for free in the Six Apart business model.

Let me make one thing clear, lest you assume otherwise: there's nothing wrong with not having free accounts. There are a lot of so-called "free services" which extract a high price in some other ways. Yahoo! is a good example. An account is free, but the mail service is chock-full of spam, all of the pages are covered in ads and the communities insert ads into the middle of message threads. So paying for TypePad, which doesn't have all that (except for the spam in the comments) makes sense. But it's not the only way.

LiveJournal allows free accounts and generates its revenue from people like me. Part of that revenue goes to paying for the free accounts. It's that simple. As I indicated above, I take my journal content via Javascript and write it into my Journal page on my site. That's hardly an expensive service, and it basically costs LJ nothing to provide it to me. I pay for the convenience to me, not for the cost of the services I use. If LJ had to have additional servers or employees to provide that for me, it would be a different story. LJ has enough paying customers to balance their free ones, pay their employees and handle their equipment and bandwidth costs. But that's about it. No one is getting rich off LJ, but that's the intention.

Six Apart, on the other hand, is looking to make people rich. That's what happens when you ask venture capitalists for money, they expect it back, with interest. It's not the dot com boom days anymore, VCs want a real return on their investment. Six Apart can't just acquire a business like Danga with no expectations of future profit. The VCs aren't interested in a company that just barely pays its own costs. In other words, the days of free at LiveJournal are numbered.

It probably won't mean a thing to me. I may end up paying more, but since I'm already doing so, I don't foresee a big change. All of those free accounts, on the other hand, are in for some culture shock. Expect a major downturn in LJ users when this happens. Don't expect any great changes in the service levels or feature sets.

That last sentence is important. One of the knocks against MT 3.0 and its costs were the lack of major new functionality. MT 3.0 was rolled out primarily to introduce the pricing structure and features were pushed off to later releases. This may have been Six Apart's biggest mistake. They could have done a lot to smooth over objections to the cost if they had offered some compelling feature adds or fixes for some of the big problems that users had been experiencing. At minimum, it would have given people something else to comment/complain about. I fully expect that when Six Apart moves LJ to a fully paid model, they will do nothing else but that. Why? Because it makes business sense, that's why. They're not going to spend money before they make it. Assuming a predictable percentage of LJ users will abandon ship, it's better to wait and see how much money they can really make before spending anything on new features or infrastructure improvements. Oh, they might sugarcoat it a little better, having learned from the MT debacle, but they'll do what they have to do.

As with the Wordpress change, I'll be evaluating my LiveJournal use over time and possibly evaluating going with something else. It's what I have to do.

1. http://sanfrancisco.dbusinessnews.com/shownews.php?newsid=6836&type_news=latest
2. <http://www.metafilter.com/mefi/38359>
3. <http://www.wordpress.org/>

5.1.6 In which I whine about my job while others have it worse than me and don't get a chance to complain (2005-01-21 12:56)

I probably shouldn't write here when I'm in a foul mood, but for some reason I can't stop myself today. I had hoped to stop whining here and instead relegate that to my handwritten journal, so much for that goal.

I would like to have the last eight years back, at least as far as my job goes. I'm looking at having to take training to become, wait for it, a Java programmer. Back in 1997, that would have indeed been an attractive offer. I hadn't yet been fooled into thinking I could do more than grind out code so it would have been a natural extension of what I was doing then. But it's 2005, and that's where the problem lies.

I was stupid and naive enough to listen to those who told me I could manage. I was even more stupid and naive to think that just because I was successful doing that, that The Big Company would want me to continue to do that. Instead, I got shuffled around and basically tossed out like so much trash. I ended up in a totally inappropriate job out of the kindness of a former boss. In it I have no value.

So instead I've been shopped around to various and sundry groups in the company, hoping they might have something I could do. Hence, the Java thing. I haven't actively programmed anything other than some short Python scripts since 1998. But I'm a bargain since the group that's looking at me to program doesn't have to pay for my time, it's already covered. I'm free, so the fact that I'm earning twice what they would normally pay someone to do the same thing can be conveniently overlooked. Even the training would be free, to them at least.

There's no expectation that I'll be able to get another job in the company even with the training, because no one is hiring people at my grade level to do programming. It'll be the same thing all over again, just shifted in time. But perhaps worth it to relieve myself of having to worry about a job for another year.

Hindsight: 20-20, foresight: legally blind.

5.1.7 In regards to my "no whining" policy (2005-01-25 18:31)

My previous post was clearly in violation. Management sincerely regrets the oversight.

5.1.8 Annoying Events (2005-01-30 14:23)

Music: Blinded By The Light-Bruce Springsteen-Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.

Thursday night I attended a karate seminar with Master Alain Saily (an older picture of the two of us is on the Stuff page). It was great, as usual. This is the third time he's been here and he's never done the same routines twice. But after the class, I discovered that I had been parked in. Since the parking lot is full of snow, the lines and in particular the traffic lanes were obscured. So people just park anywhere. This meant I had to go down the row of open businesses looking for the owner of the truck immediately behind mine in order to get them to move. They weren't at the dojo, the health club, or the dance school. That left the comedy club, which had its shows on. I had the make, model, color and license number so they announced them to each room.

A guy came out, walked out to the sub-zero lot only to discover it wasn't his. He had no idea what his plate number was. I felt bad, since he came out for no reason, but I was still a little miffed over the whole thing. As I was headed back to the dojo to call 911, a woman came out. She also had no idea what her plate was but she was the one. She then commenced to travel in and out a dozen times before getting out to explain that it was her husband's truck and could I get it out of there for her. I really, really wanted to be insulting and smart-mouthed, but I held my tongue (am I getting old?) and freed her vehicle. It wasn't difficult, but then I wasn't full of alcohol like she was. She parked somewhere else. As I backed the Bulgemobile out, which is twice the size of hers, I noticed that I had wasted close to an hour. It definitely

took the fun out of the evening for me.

Yesterday started off well, but both my wife and I must have caught a bug and slept most of the day away. Luckily I had managed to get a lot of things done before it hit me. Today, I went down to the laundry room to discover that the large jug of Tide we usually keep on top of the washer had fallen off and broken open, dumping an untold amount of liquid laundry detergent all over the floor. Luckily, the drain is nearby and the flow was mostly towards it. Took an hour to clean that up.

I'm almost looking forward to going back to work. Almost.

5.2 February

5.2.1 What are we overlooking? (2005-02-01 12:55)

The movie *Hotel Rwanda* is about genocide that occurred in full view of the world. The world did basically nothing. United Nations troops simply escorted foreign nationals to safety, leaving the Tutsis refugees to be slaughtered by Hutu militia. Over *one million people* perished in just three months. This was in 1994. The movie came out in 2004, a full decade later.

A lot of people, particularly Americans, are asking themselves not only "how could this happen?" but also "why am only hearing about it now?" For Americans the simple answer is "O.J. Simpson trial". That's right, while Rwandans died by the thousands, Americans were glued to their televisions watching a Ford Bronco slowly traverse a California highway.

It's truly an American moment, but not one I'm particularly proud of. The UN's reluctance to call what was going on in Rwanda *genocide* didn't help, but there's no reason to believe that we would have paid any more attention even if they had. I'm as guilty as the next person. While I wasn't "cemented to the TV set", I certainly paid a lot of attention to the O.J. case. So much so that I can't recall hearing much if anything about Rwanda until recently.

Today, ten years later, America seems to be equally fixated on another celebrity trial, this time Michael Jackson's molestation case. While not as serious a crime as a double murder, it's still a felony and still capturing our undivided attention. Frankly, as with O.J., I think Michael is guilty. But, unlike O.J., I don't think Michael understands that what he did was wrong. I'm sure he believes that child molestation is wrong, he just can't equate what he did with molestation. And I also believe that the parents of the children involved should be jailed, as well. Even before the first faint whispers of something not quite right in Neverland surfaced, the idea of letting your child sleepover with a grown man is so absurd that no one who wasn't as deluded as Michael would even consider it. Yet, more than one parent did.

Now that America has something to fixate on, what are we going to miss? I'd bet that you could ask a bunch of Americans about what's happening in Iraq right now and a lot of them wouldn't know much beyond the word "elections", if they knew that. If we could overlook the death of a million people in 1994, what will happen in 2005 that we'll ignore with equal thoroughness?

5.2.2 Superbowl review (2005-02-07 08:17)

It was a decent game and not the blowout that some people thought it might be. While the NFL's playoff system allows for some pretty mediocre teams to get into the post-season, the two teams represented the best

of the conferences. The Patriots and Eagles are both fairly balanced teams, with perhaps a slight edge to their defenses. The Eagles need to develop a "hurry up" offense since they looked positively lethargic in the closing minutes when they should have been trying to run as many plays as possible. It's hard for this NFC partisan to admit, but right now the AFC is clearly the dominant conference, despite the leveling factors like salary caps and free agency.

I was disappointed by the commercials. Too many talking animals (funny the first time, amusing the second and boring the third) and not enough creativity. Many of them I had already seen, so there were few surprises. The one for the Ford Mustang Convertible was cute, but they ran it too many times and it lost its element of surprise. The chimps at work one was okay, but there were three versions and that was two versions too many. Budweiser was all over the place, as usual, which says something sad about America's taste in beer. The Napster commercial was a joke, and not in a good way. It was also misleading.

Paul McCartney still has a good voice, slightly aged but still going strong. Nothing outrageous during his show, naturally. He was a nice, safe choice. No boobs. Of course, MTV was not producing this show, unlike last year. I've said it before and I'll say it again, "what did you expect when you hired MTV to produce your halftime show?" I wasn't scandalized by Janet's nipple, to be honest, I was doing something during last year's show and had to see it in reruns. I know that a lot of people were, but see above.

I missed most of the pregame show, not tuning in until 5:00 PM. I have to be honest, seeing Clinton and Bush together is something of a shock, but a pleasant one. Our sitting president could learn something from his predecessors, but I don't think he will. I was deeply affected when they brought out the WW II veterans for the national anthem. Seeing how few there were and how old makes you realize that in only a few years all of those who fought to make the world we live in today will be gone.

Now it's the odd football drought on Sunday television until the preseason begins.

5.2.3 Yet Another Interview (2005-02-07 18:14)

Tomorrow I have an interview for another job at The Big Company. It's a job I'm not necessarily qualified for, but I've been qualified for all of the other ones I've interviewed for and I didn't get any of them, so who's to say?

5.2.4 Saturday, (not) in the park with(out) George (2005-02-12 17:39)

Music: Do You Feel Like I Do?-Peter Frampton-Frampton Comes Alive

I had that interview on Tuesday, with a second interview on Wednesday. I'm clearly qualified and they liked me, but I'm up against an unknown number of others, so the question is "am I the most qualified?" I hope to find out this coming week.

Trading on my recent brewing success, I made a batch of porter today. Some issues with cracking the adjunct grains has me worried their might be some tannins in the brew, so we'll see. The yeast was very robust this time, so I skipped making a starter in the hopes that it would be active enough on its own. This also skips a possible step for contamination, which I hope pays off.

5.2.5 Kendo (2005-02-13 20:51)

I didn't mention it in the previous entry, but I went to Kendo for the first time since injuring my leg back in October. My leg tightened up a little at the beginning but that was easily stretched out.

I'll admit I was scared, and I actually put off starting back up by a week. I had set myself a goal of starting February but I managed to convince myself that since the first week wasn't a "full week", I should wait. Procrastination can be a powerful force.

5.2.6 Free coffee! (2005-02-16 07:56)

For me, not from me. Sorry.

This morning, as I was standing in line at my local Starbucks, the lady behind the counter dropped the guy in front of me's credit card between the counter and the deli case. She was flustered and didn't quite know what to do. I spoke up and asked her if we could move the deli case and how it moved. She said it should just move straight away from the counter. So the guy who owned the card, the guy behind me and I pushed the deli case enough so the card was retrievable. It wasn't the only thing that had been dropped but it was the most valuable.

For our efforts we all got free coffee (a \$1.73 value in my case) and the card owner also offered to buy mine if we ran into each other again.

5.2.7 Startling new development! (2005-02-17 13:14)

Well, perhaps not startling but certainly new. I have gotten that job I recently applied and interviewed for. My start date is still being negotiated, but should be rather quick. I have to finish up a couple of things and pack, that's about it. I'm still getting used to the idea.

5.2.8 Dirtbags everywhere (2005-02-17 13:23)

(NB: I didn't think this one fit well with the new job announcement, so I decided to post it separately)

My youngest's 15 GB iPod went bad (battery-related) and since we had AppleCare, we made arrangements to have it repaired with Apple. They sent us a box (and tape) to ship the iPod to their depot. They tell you right off that they may replace it with a refurbished equivalent and they did. It was shipped back to us on Monday. No one was home on Tuesday to receive it and so my wife went over to pick it up yesterday. Only one problem, someone had slit the tape of the box and removed the iPod. So now instead of having a working iPod in five days, we get to make a claim and wait for an undisclosed amount of time until a replacement to the replacement arrives.

AppleCare is certainly fast, but they print the contents on the shipping label. All someone has to do is look at the box to see what's in it. Time for some barcoding, Apple.

5.2.9 Whirlwind weekend (2005-02-23 14:06)

We went down to NYC for the weekend. My niece got married on Saturday, with the wedding on Long Island but the reception was in Nyack, in Rockland county. We spend Friday night in Manhattan, but stayed in Nyack Saturday night. On Sunday it was back to Manhattan for Cristo's *Gates* and the Museum of Natural History. On Monday, we drove down to the Jersey shore to visit my aunt and came back home yesterday. The weather was fine almost the entire time, though it was cold for the wedding and there was some slush to deal with in NYC on Monday.

The Gates were certainly interesting, but I was more awed by the scale than anything else. Cristo is known for doing things big, and this was no exception. There's nothing special about each gate, just a rectangular frame with two orange curtains hanging from them, it's the sheer number of them that impresses. They're coming down this weekend, so if you want to see them you'd better hurry.

It wasn't much fun piloting the Bulgemobile through NYC rush hour traffic, and the rudeness and craziness of the drivers takes some getting used to. We were handicapped by old maps that didn't show the one-way streets as they are today so we made an unexpected visit to Brooklyn (which my wife and kids had never been to) on the way in on Friday. By Monday we were old hands at it, even doing a U-turn right in front of a traffic cop (who didn't blink an eye). It seems to me their job is really to keep traffic flowing, rather than to enforce laws.

The whole idea of traffic flow is obvious in the EZ-Pass lanes. Not only are they strictly separated from the cash/token lanes, but the speeds are higher, as high as 25 mph in some places. In contrast, it's only 5 mph for the Thruway here in Rochester. EZ-Pass also took some of the immediate sting out of the Brooklyn detour, though I'll pay for it later.

Our hotel in Manhattan was small place that looked like it was a converted apartment building: our room had a full kitchen with stove, microwave, cabinets and a fridge. The rates were decent (especially considering the Cristo exhibition) but there was no off-street parking. I managed to find a spot both Friday and Sunday night even though I had to parallel park on the wrong side of the street.

We got to the church early, so we stopped at the bride's parents' house to drop off our gifts and to get directions to a car wash. Having come down from Rochester the Bulgemobile was white with road salt to the point people were staring and pointing. The car wash was on such a small lot that you had to let them drive it, the turn required was so tight.

The hotel in Nyack was certainly larger, but was partially under renovation. Some of us met in the bar after the reception. As one of my brothers remarked, the bar resembled something you'd see in a bowling alley. I'm convinced it usually only served off-duty employees, especially since they were in the corner giving us dirty looks the entire time.

All in all, a reminder of why I left there, and never went back.

5.2.10 Dojo strangeness (2005-02-25 20:46)

I love my dojo, but there are still some strange things about it. The bathrooms are in the back (it's in a shopping plaza) and they're in an unheated area with tile floors. The floors are so cold that if you didn't have to go when you step in, you will soon enough.

We have a water fountain, but it's frequently out of service because the drain clogs up. Right now, the carpet around it is soaked and there's an odor of sewers in the air. A good incentive to bring your own water bottle.

5.3 March

5.3.1 Moving at The Big Company (2005-03-02 15:54)

I've long held the opinion that many procedures here at The Big Company are specifically designed to be so complex and unpleasant that only the most dedicated employees can stand to follow them through to the end.

For instance, let's say you want a No. 2 pencil. Ten years ago, you would have strolled over to the supplies cabinet your department admin had and taken one out. But as we all know, inventory is expensive. So we don't have inventory anymore, especially not office supply inventory. So what do you do? Well, you could ask your admin to order a pencil from Staples. And they'll get out the old Staples catalog and discover you can't order a single pencil, you have to buy an entire box. All you need is purchase approval. But your boss won't approve a purchase for a single box of pencils, since they have to be delivered and the delivery charge for a box of pencils is probably more than the box cost to begin with. Perhaps, if you're lucky, there will be other people in your department who need office supplies and you can gang up the orders into one that will exceed the cost to ship. Or maybe other admins from other groups will have partial orders they've been holding onto and will include yours. That will require multiple managers' approvals, so that's definitely a court of last resort. Or, you can do what I do, and go to Staples and buy your own damn pencils.

Slightly different, but equally frustrating is the travel policy. In essence, you have to have plane tickets in order to get approval to get plane tickets. It used to be you got permission to take a trip and then had corporate travel buy your tickets under that approval. Now that we've reengineered corporate travel out of existence, you have to have booked your flight on your own and then submit that for approval, since the approval process requires the flight information and ticket cost up front. The money must come out of your pocket up front, obviously, since you don't have permission at the time you buy the tickets to buy the tickets.

Now that I'm getting a new job, I've discovered even more fun processes. My group was once part of the research organization, and our computers are still maintained by them. The rest of the company has their computers maintained by an outside firm. I'm moving to a group that uses that outside firm, so I had to obtain permission to move my PC from being maintained by research to maintenance by the outside firm. But first I needed permission to take my PC with me, since moves between business divisions are generally frowned upon. My old boss granted me that permission. Now I needed a job ticket for the reconfiguration of my PC. Got that, without much effort. Then came my phone. I needed a separate job ticket to move the phone, even though all they're really doing is moving the number, since the actual phone stays in the office. But I couldn't get a phone move job ticket without obtaining a job ticket for moving my boxes from my present location to the new. Which is done by corporate real estate, not the external firm. That required me to fill out a form online that needed my boss's name and email. Unfortunately, we've been in the midst of an Exchange upgrade and everyone has multiple email addresses. My boss has four different ones for the same account. None of them would work. Luckily my new boss has had the same address for a while and we used that one. Then I could have my boxes moved. And get my phone moved. But not my monitor and docking station. Corporate real estate doesn't move computers. Now I had to get a second computer move job ticket from the external firm. This, of course, caused some confusion, since they don't handle a lot of moved from outside. Luckily, someone figured out that they didn't need to have two separate tickets to move and configure my PC. I have both numbers written down, just in case.

This doesn't include some items that I'm moving myself, because I know the riggers won't be gentle with my stuff. I have to be careful, though, moving things, since the union is currently in contract negotiations and members are on the lookout for non-union people doing things like moving equipment. My department can get fined for such things, so I have to move things in pieces.

I swear none of the above is made up.

5.3.2 A great week for wife murderers (2005-03-18 20:34)

Has anyone noticed what a great week it's been for guys who've killed their wives? Robert Blake was acquitted. Not because he was innocent but because there wasn't enough evidence against him (expect him to lose big in the civil suit). Michael Schiavo got his wish to finally get rid of the wife he's been stuck with for 15 years. And Scott Peterson was sentenced to death but he's unlikely to die of anything but old age. I'm not in favor of capital punishment, but I certainly would like to wipe that smug expression off of his face, with extreme prejudice.

5.3.3 What I (do and do not) believe (2005-03-22 18:35)

I don't believe that Michael Schiavo is concerned about anyone other than himself. I also don't believe that Congress should pass laws that specifically target (either positively or negatively) a single person, regardless of the circumstances. I don't know what Terry Schiavo is capable of perceiving in the state that she's in. No one does, despite their claims to the contrary. It's possible that she did indeed not wish to be on life-support (I understand and feel the same way) though we'll never know for sure (it's the best argument for a Living Will that there's ever been). I do believe that the precedent that's being set is going to affect the future in ways that no one can conceive.

5.3.4 Happy Easter! (2005-03-27 09:10)

I hope you have a happy Easter!

5.3.5 Not going away (2005-03-28 18:24)

It was difficult to watch the Pope attempting to speak at the Vatican's Easter services yesterday. He's old and infirm and unwilling to let his age and infirmities stop him. Our society likes to pretend that the sick and the old don't exist. We create special places to hide them away because it's too painful to look at them. But John Paul takes these painful realities and dares us to look.

A lot of people think he should step down. But he won't. Despite his physical condition, his mental condition appears to be healthy. His obvious frustration at his inability to speak attests to that. So he stays. Even if we'd rather he didn't.

5.4 April

5.4.1 On Pope John Paul II (2005-04-02 16:57)

The thoughts of a Catholic who seldom attends Mass are probably not all that valuable, but here they are anyway.

The first thing you need to understand about John Paul II was how improbable his becoming Pope was. First of all, he wasn't Italian. There is nothing in the Church law that says the Pope has to be, but it was a tradition fairly closely followed for a long time. Second, he was Polish. That doesn't seem like much now, but

in 1978 it was very significant. Poland was a Communist country, and technically atheist. But Poland is also a strongly Catholic country and even if the government didn't like it, the Church could not be suppressed. It had to be an embarrassment for them when he was elected. But it wasn't something they could easily have prevented. It says a lot for the wisdom and bravery of those who championed this veritable unknown from Krakow as leader of the Church. I'm sure there were better known and safer choices that could have been made.

In many ways his becoming Pope brought about the end of the Soviet Bloc, although it wasn't the only factor. But you can't underestimate the power of the hope and pride that it gave to the Poles struggling for democracy. When he publicly supported the Solidarity movement, it was far more significant to the Polish people than any other world leader. Solidarity the labor movement became an unignorable, and ultimately unstoppable, political movement. Its contribution to the fall of the Communists in Poland helped encourage others to do the same. Eventually, even the Soviet Union itself would fall apart. A bunch of ordinary people, inspired and supported by a Polish Pope had managed to do what the United States and its allies could not. I still don't think our leaders have understood that lesson.

John Paul also understood how to get his message across. He was in the media far more than any Pope before him. He traveled more than any Pope ever did and went to places other Popes would never have dreamed of. He went to synagogues and mosques. He was a writer, a playwright, a poet. He was in many ways an intellectual, which I'm sure bothered some people, especially those who would seek to separate religion and thought. He held what many would consider divergent opinions, yet he had no problem doing so. He had as many supporters as he had detractors, perhaps because his message was always "out there" to be heard.

His reign was far from perfect. The number of priests and religious vocations in general have declined. He presided over the scandalous actions of the American bishops on the child abuse cases. But he took responsibility for the latter and his stand on celibacy and women priests did not change despite pressure to do so. He understood the Catholic Church and his role in it perhaps better than many realized. He knew the Church to be fundamentally conservative (note the small "c"). As such, change is gradual, and very slow. When change does come, it's because it's the right thing to do, not a response to a passing fad. But it's also frustrating, and as the leader of the Church, the anger of those who wish the change would happen faster was directed at him.

When I looked at him, I saw the faces of my Polish family. To me, it was as if I had known him all my life. We shared the same birthday, May 18th. I have always felt we were connected in some way and his death has affected me in a way totally different than any of the others before him. He weathered a number of serious health issues, including being almost fatally shot, and yet kept going. His message in his final weeks and months, particularly in light of what was happening to Terry Schiavo, was that all life had value, no matter how encumbered by illness.

It's become a cliché, but his successor truly has a tough act to follow. Rest in peace, Karol Wojtyla.

5.4.2 Not what I was expecting to find there (2005-04-05 18:27)

(this may be somewhat cryptic, sorry about that)

I had a bit of a health scare over the weekend. I went to the doctor today and it's quite likely it's just an infection. I'll know in a couple of weeks, depending on how well the antibiotics work. I didn't really need this, coming as it does after being sick for four weeks with a cold, but that's the nature of things.

5.4.3 The BitKeeper Brouhaha (2005-04-16 17:19)

Music: Remember Me, My Friend-Justin Hayward & John Lodge-Blue Jays

I've resisted the urge to comment about this, but I can't help myself anymore. Linus Torvalds, the guy behind Linux, is the ultimate decision maker as to what gets into the Linux kernel. It's a little more decentralized than it used to be, with a few trusted people filtering things before they get to Linus, but he's still the gatekeeper. A while back Linus decided to change the source code control system he used for the kernel source to a proprietary program called BitKeeper. He claimed it was superior to anything open source and there has been a measurable increase in his productivity since. There was a special free version made available for use by kernel developers.

But recently, Andrew Tridgell, the guy who reverse-engineered the SMB protocols and created Samba, has been doing the same with the BitKeeper protocols. Larry McVoy, the creator of BitKeeper, claimed this violated the agreement for the free version, and is ending support for it. Linus [1]is mad at Tridgell, and has made some serious accusations against him (Tridgell has not replied to any of them, it's assumed this is the result of legal advice). Linus is also looking for a BitKeeper replacement, though he hasn't announced one yet.

Now Bruce Perens, the open source advocate, is saying [2]'Cool it, Linus' and basically calling him a jerk. It may seem like a tempest in a teapot, but the issue strikes at the very core of the free software movement. Perens questions how Linus can be accepting of Samba but condemn Tridgell's similar handling of BitKeeper.

I'm all for productivity, and I'd fight hard to give the developers working for me the best tools I could. It's clear that BitKeeper allowed Linus to be far more productive than he was. Given the kernel development methodology, anything that helps Linus benefits everyone. But a lot of developers were uncomfortable with the choice of BitKeeper and remain so. It's naive to assume no one would attempt a BitKeeper-compatible replacement and I'm leaning towards Perens' take on the matter. I hope Linus reconsiders his criticisms.

Working for a big company, like I do, is fundamentally different that what Linus is doing. Big companies are not interested in philosophy, they want products. The productivity increase would be sufficient to merit the expense of a BitKeeper. And we could never get away with a development process so dependent on a single person (it's part of the corporate view of people as interchangeable 'resources', but I digress). At the same time, if one of us did something to violate a license, we'd be fired. It's not like the world of the Linux kernel folks.

1. http://www.theregister.co.uk/2005/04/14/torvalds_attacks_tridgell/

2. http://www.theregister.co.uk/2005/04/15/perens_on_torvalds/

5.5 May

5.5.1 Bits and pieces (2005-05-02 18:04)

I'm doing a complete site overhaul right now, so expect to see some radical changes soon. I've got most of it done with the exception of a photo album, so it could very well be online this weekend. It's much cooler, cleaner and standards-compliant than this setup. Less graphic-intensive as well.

Strange day today. Felt funny for no apparent reason. My inbound email at work was down for some reason, too.

Started reading David Allen's *Getting Things Done*. I guess I'll see if that helps my work and personal life.

5.5.2 Out of here (2005-05-10 18:27)

I'm off to California tomorrow for some training for my new job. I'll be back on Saturday morning, taking the Red Eye out of LAX late Friday night. I expect to be wiped for the rest of the weekend, but unfortunately life will not slow down to accomodate.

5.5.3 Back from California (2005-05-15 19:59)

The trip to California was a success, business-wise. But it was a nightmare on a personal basis. Our outgoing flight, on United, was cancelled and we ended up on Delta. That morning there was news that United had gotten permission to default on its pension plans, having lost over \$1 billion in the first quarter, and was possibly looking to dissolve the unions if they didn't agree to wage cuts. Clearly, employees weren't happy. It was echoes of the problem I had in 2000 trying to fly United out of Frankfurt, Germany when the crew called in "sick".

LA-area traffic is totally insane. Despite large numbers of freeways and lanes, traffic is awful at all times, with random slowdowns or stops for no reason. Driving from LAX to Irvine to get to our hotel was a great introduction: we stopped at one point for five minutes, and then started up again with no indication of anything being wrong. It was to be repeated again and again. It's obvious that you can't plan any drive too closely, since the same trip that takes 30 minutes one day can take 2 hours the next. We did manage to see the beach a couple of times, so that was nice.

We ate dinner at a nice place called [1]The Cannery in Newport Beach. Lots of seafood, naturally. Much fancier than I would normally go to, but it's okay to have fun now and then. It wasn't on the beach itself, but on a channel used for boats (which were all yachts, nothing small anywhere).

The return trip wasn't bad, but the plane we had from Newark to Rochester smelled like burning insulation and I had a headache by the time I got off. We had left LAX at almost 10 PM on Friday and got into Newark about 6 AM Saturday. We got into Rochester about 10 AM. I slept from when I got home to about 6 PM and then from 11 PM to 9 AM Sunday morning. Right now I'm tired but still going.

We had to buy a new TV today. The Sony 27" we bought in 1985 finally died and the repairs weren't worth it. A new Sony 27" cost us less than 1/2 of what it did in 1985 and had a better picture (no HDTV though).

1. <http://www.cannerynewport.com/>

5.5.4 In which I reveal something shocking about myself (2005-05-18 18:05)

I have a confession of sorts to make: I love *Joan of Arcadia*. There, I said it. I'm an adult male who enjoys a television show about a nerdy teen girl who talks to God. And, because I actually like it, it's been cancelled. The show had won an Emmy in its first season, but the second season was considerably darker in tone and the creator refused suggestions from CBS network execs to lighten it up. It was one of the few shows (along with *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*) that my whole family would sit down together and watch. Accent on the *was*, I guess.

Joan was unusual in that it was upfront about God's essential mystery. We live in an age when we expect explanations for just about everything. We're no longer comfortable with not knowing things as we perhaps once were. This is not necessarily a bad thing. We're much better off knowing that bacteria cause diseases because that means we're more careful about sanitation. But God cannot be examined and explained the way *e. coli* can. This was very evident in every episode. Joan was given tasks to perform without really understanding why she was being told to do them. The explanations were never fully satisfying. Bad things happened to beloved characters and there was no "why". And it did all of it without being particularly denominational, even if the family was technically Catholic. To be honest, Joan's family wasn't very religious, although her mother was re-examining her faith (for a long time without anyone in the family knowing). It wasn't like other shows, it was better.

But quality is seldom enough to keep a network television show alive. Perhaps we'll see *Joan* on cable (by we I mean you, since I don't have cable).

imaclanni (2005-05-19 02:43:06)

Totally with you on this. How could they cancel my second favorite show? [[nothing can top CSI]] They could have at least shown the last few episodes!

5.5.5 ...I saw a Dead Head sticker on a Cadillac... (2005-05-23 18:09)

As I was driving home down S. Clinton this evening, I passed a group of leather-clad punk rocker-types, complete with chains and all the usual accessories. They were pointing across the street at a man wearing a slightly too-small bowler hat and using a walking stick. He was otherwise dressed like a homeless person so perhaps they were struck by the contrast of his natty accessories to the rest of his outfit. Or perhaps there is a pecking order to the oddly dressed I am unaware of.

5.5.6 Memorial Day (2005-05-30 10:16)

Music: Buddy Guy - Buddy Guy - Leave My Girl Alone

On Memorial Day you should take some time out of your day and thank a veteran for the sacrifices they made in order to ensure your freedom. It's one of those things that's so easy to take for granted.

5.6 June

5.6.1 And I become a photoblogger (2005-06-03 21:45)

As you may have noticed, I've been posting a lot of photos of Rochester to my [1]weblog and my [2]Flickr photo-sharing account. Now that I'm working downtown and the weather isn't horrible I've been wandering and grabbing snapshots with the Palm's camera. I'll probably switch to my other camera, but not until I decide there's something I want to photograph in detail. Stay tuned, Rochester is a much more interesting place than you'd think.

1. <http://mylnd.blogspot.com/>

2. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tommasz/sets/399178/>

5.6.2 Watching and listening (2005-06-06 18:24)

This past week, when I went for my guitar lesson, there was (so I thought) a student in ahead of me who was singing. This isn't all that unusual since [1]Steve sometimes has us do that to learn the sound of scales, not just the pattern on the fingerboard. But I realized pretty quickly that the singer wasn't playing guitar. It turned out to be Tina Albright, a jazz vocalist that Steve has worked with in the past. Tina actually injured her vocal cords about eight months ago and couldn't sing at all. But she's made a complete recovery and they were working out some details for a gig on Saturday night.

I was impressed with her abilities (turns out she's an Eastman School of Music grad) and Mary Ann and I went out Saturday night for the first two sets and then dinner. Steve has a new trio (not the same one as when I first started taking lessons), this time with a drummer and bass player instead of a second guitarist and a bass player. While Steve's previous bass player was excellent, his new one, Dave Arenius, is simply stellar. Having two masters of their instruments on the stage made for some magic. Steve managed to channel Django Reinhardt, Wes Montgomery, Oscar Moore and, of course, his own unique style. There's no one like him. I'm still amazed that I'm one of his students.

Tina's voice was great, though she seemed a little nervous at first, which wasn't surprising. But she has a great voice for jazz and standards, with an wider range than you'd expect. All in a all, a night of great music.

1. <http://www.stevegreene.com/>

5.6.3 Mac on Intel (2005-06-07 18:37)

Being a long time Mac user (continuously since 1985) I thought I'd share some of my thoughts on the news that Apple is dropping the IBM/Motorola PowerPC and going with Intel's Pentium.

I got my start programming using Motorola processors, on the 6800 family. It was quite possibly the most advanced 8-bit processor of its time, moreso than the 8080 of Intel. But while the 8080 and derivatives (most notably the Z80) ended up in thousands and thousands of computers, the 6800 didn't fare as well. It had a lot to do with Motorola's arrogance and unwillingness to work with the market. It got to the point where some Motorola engineers left and started their own company, Mostek, to create a similar processor, the 6502. You might have heard of it, it powered the Apple II, the Commodore 64 and others. Keep that in mind.

Later on, Motorola would come out with the 68000, a 16/32 bit processor that was a significant improvement over the 6800 family and also better than what Intel had at the time, the 8086. The 68K (as it was called) had a great set of registers, a nice instruction set, and an un-segmented memory architecture. IBM almost used it for a skunkworks project they had going down in Florida, but (again) Motorola's unwillingness to deal pushed them to the Intel camp. The 8088, which was a cheaper, slower "little brother" of the 8086 was chosen for the IBM PC. Need I tell you what happened with that product?

Still, Motorola sold a lot of the various models in the 68K family. As a matter of fact, it was chosen by Apple for a revolutionary product they were working on called Lisa. Lisa, unfortunately, was very expensive (\$10K in the early 1980's) and a group at Apple was working on a skunkworks project of their own that used the same Motorola chip and some of the software, but was intended for home use at a more realistic price point. That, as you know, became the Macintosh.

As the Mac grew in speed and capability, it needed newer and faster 68K chips to power it. But

the 68020, 68030 and 68040 were not keeping up with their Intel rivals, the 80286, '386 and '486. Macs were always slower, at a higher price, than contemporary PCs. Intel introduced its Pentium ('586) chip but there was no real equivalent from Motorola (there actually was a 68050 and 68060, but never in Macs).

Needing to keep pace, Apple brought Motorola together with IBM to create a new chip, based on an IBM design, that would compete with Pentium. It was to be called the PowerPC, in keeping with the belief that it could be the processor of choice for the desktop. The PowerPC was a RISC (Reduced Instruction Set Computer) architecture, instead of the Pentium's (and 68k's) CISC (Complex Instruction Set Architecture). The idea is to make the low-level instructions the CPU executed small and fast, trading off the total number of instructions (greater) for instruction execution time (lower). There are plenty of arguments either way, but in general RISC doesn't seem to have as significant an advantage as once thought. Ignore the benchmarks and you'll discover that for yourself.

Motorola took the bulk of the business with Apple at the beginning. For a couple of years the PowerMacs did okay against the Pentiums. But Motorola could not deliver the speed improvements necessary for Apple to keep pace with the PC manufacturers. They turned to IBM, who had been making PowerPC chips for its own use all along. At first IBM was able to do what Motorola could not, but eventually they too fell behind. When Apple could not deliver a 3 GHz PowerMac or a G5 PowerBook, it was obvious something was wrong. What made it worse was that Steve Jobs, Apple CEO, was embarrassed, not a good thing.

In IBM's defense, the PowerPC has been selling like mad, thanks to the X Box and other consoles. Apple's sales number dwarf in comparison. IBM has seen more profit in that market, so of course their attention followed.

But what Jobs knew (along with some Apple employees) was that OS X, Apple's Unix-based OS, had been compiling successfully on Pentiums for the last five years. OS X had much in common with NeXTStep, the OS that Jobs brought with him to Apple when he returned as CEO. NeXTStep ran on Pentium. It turns out, so does OS X. So as amazing as the change seems at first glance, it's now obvious Apple has been hedging their bets since the beginning.

Sure, there's some risk (not RISC, get it?). You need to be using Apple's development tools to re-compile for Pentium. Current PowerPC software will be run under emulation, similar to the way Apple handled the PowerPC transition. That means older software will likely run slower than it would have natively. Apple's announcement will also pretty much kill PowerMac sales, so they better have some products almost ready to go. Time will tell.

But somehow, the magic is gone, or at least it's fading. There was a reason the original Mac development team flew a pirate flag on their building. There was a reason that Apple created the "Think Different" ad campaign: Mac's *were* different. They looked different, used different software and a different processor than their PC rivals. Many companies forbid employees to use them. Having a Mac, and especially a PowerBook, was a sign that you weren't following the crowd. It was like thumbing your nose at "the man".

And it was alright until the Mac couldn't keep up, speed-wise. What Apple did was a smart move for their business. People, especially gamers, put a lot of importance on speed numbers, regardless of whether they can actually tell the difference. They'll put up with a lot of annoyance (Windows) simply to have the fastest box around. Apple really had no choice. You can't sustain a company on marketing slogans, no matter how much your customers love your products. Still, it's sad to see an era end like this.

Now the question becomes whether Apple can keep the Mac distinguishable from Windows PCs,

given their running on essentially the same hardware. Apple made good margins on Macs, the PC business model, courtesy of Dell and others, is predicated on volume, not margin. Apple is likely to continue selling their own hardware, at a price premium, so it will be interesting to see how that hardware will be different. Apple has always controlled both the hardware and the software (something Microsoft would like to do) and integration was a breeze compared to the work to make sure Windows is compatible with one of the millions of possible combinations. OS X is lightyears ahead of Windows XP, but may not be so compared to "Longhorn". Yes, Longhorn is delayed but it will come out eventually, no doubt sporting features similar to OS X. Given a choice to run Longhorn or OS X on the same hardware, what will people do? It's not a question anyone's been able to even ask until now, so I have no idea what the answer will be.

I don't even know what my own answer will be.

5.6.4 Airshow Ale (2005-06-12 12:34)

Music: Tears in the Morning -The Beach Boys-The Platinum Collection

Another brewing weekend. I usually don't brew this late in the season, but I wanted a beer for summer so I'm taking a chance it won't get too warm downstairs. This one is just a light ale, nothing special, but not a wheat beer like I've done in the past. The O.G. was only 1.033, so it shouldn't be too heavy or filling. It's the right way to make "lite beer".

The air show is this weekend and the Air Force Thunderbirds have been flying around since Thursday. I tried to grab a shot of them flying over downtown Rochester from my window at work but they moved too fast for my camera (and skills). They have to be moving fast, and not all that far off the ground. The Right Stuff, indeed.

5.6.5 Lawrence Lessig (2005-06-14 14:20)

Sometimes, shock and rage are the only things you can feel when confronted with something as awful as this:

Lawrence Lessig, the foremost legal voice in the fight for freedom on the Internet is challenging the state of New Jersey's law that protects not-for-profits from [1]lawsuits over negligence, no matter how horrific. He's arguing for a former student of the Princeton Boychoir School who was repeatedly abused by teachers and staff.

It's more than just a legal case for him. Lessig was a student at the school and was himself abused by the same teacher. He had settled his own claim against the school years ago and because the records were sealed, could not mention it. That is, until the school's lawyer recklessly revealed it in arguments in front of the New Jersey State Supreme Court. The judges have yet to issue their ruling.

Now that this information is out, Lessig has talked about it in his own [2]weblog. Be sure to read the comments, too. This isn't "repressed memories", this is something real that happened over a long period of time, to multiple people, in an institution that had full knowledge of it and did nothing.

But what really gets me angry is the response of the Catholic Church in New Jersey, which has been actively supporting the school's attempt to use the law to get out of any responsibility. If you're a Catholic in NJ, please contact the New Jersey Catholic Conference and express your disapproval of their support for this cowardly, immoral stance.

1. <http://www.newyorkmetro.com/nymetro/news/features/12061/index.html>

2. <http://www.lessig.org/blog/archives/002912.shtml>

5.6.6 Writing (2005-06-17 22:26)

I switched my large writer's journal for a much smaller one and it's actually gotten me to write more and more frequently. You might even see some of it online one of these days.

5.6.7 Downtown, where all the lights are bright (2005-06-21 19:17)

Now that the weather is actually summer-like I've been walking around downtown almost every lunchtime. I've been grabbing [1]snapshots almost every time, as well. I say snapshots because my Palm Zire's camera isn't much of a camera. I hope to one day take my regular camera to some of these locations and take some serious photographs.

There are a lot of buildings, parks and monuments in the downtown area I that I never knew about. Rochester has had a bad history of destroying its architectural heritage in the name of "progress", so these little islands of the past are nothing to be taken for granted. I find myself fascinated, and in many cases puzzled by the things I've been finding. Rochester's had an inferiority complex for most of its history, but yet there's a significant amount of things here to be proud of if we'd just pay attention.

That's one reason the plan to fill the old subway bed with dirt torques me off so much. Every kid in NY State has to learn about state history, and no NY history is complete without mentioning the Erie Canal. After the Genesee, it's the most important body of water in Rochester history (Lake Ontario is pretty much a distant third). But it was neglected for decades once it became too narrow and shallow to support modern shipping. But it wasn't until the 1980's that much of the towpath was paved to allow its use as a path. Despite a couple of marinas in a few villages, there's been very little recreational boat traffic. But things are improving. The NY State Thruway Authority took over canal operations and began a slow process of renovation. But they're not responsible for all of the old Erie Canal.

The canal used to pass over the river, carried by an aqueduct because the engineers weren't sure what would happen if the river and canal crossed. When the canal was rerouted to its present location, the old aqueduct was covered over and became Broad St. Later on, this covered canal would be the home of the Rochester subway. The tunnel therefore has dual historical significance, yet the city wants to fill it in because it's easier than maintaining it. Perhaps they don't realize that even a filled tunnel will need maintenance.

This is exactly the kind of thinking that I'm trying to counteract. The irony is that I'm not a Rochester native, but perhaps it takes an outsiders point of view to realize the importance of something so close.

1. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tommasz/sets/399178/>

5.6.8 Blogging Rochester (2005-06-26 21:11)

I didn't start off as a Rochester blogger. Originally I was thinking more along the lines of tech issues, Mac and Linux stuff, Microsoft-bashing, and so on. In other words, just like thousands of others. But somewhere along the line I changed my approach. Let's face it, the world doesn't need Yet Another Slashdot. One is enough. I credit Garret Vreeland's [1]dangerousmeta! weblog for showing me a different approach, one that was more involved with local issues. Not just local issues, though. Rochester isn't a large city, and only a few of the local stories have interest beyond our borders. But some of them are worthy of wider attention.

The fast ferry debacle is probably the most pressing issue on my mind these days. It's been bungled in a most amazing way. There's a message in it for other communities that are looking to use tourism to try

to replace industry. The message isn't "don't try", though. It's more along the lines of "respond to a need in an intelligent way." Rochestarians love to go to Toronto. We'd don't live that far away, as the crow flies, but that crow has to fly over Lake Ontario. For us land-based creatures, it means a drive to Buffalo and then North on the QEW to Toronto. But then along comes the "fast" ferry. Your drive will now be to and from the terminal, with a relaxing ride in between. Unfortunately, it will also be about as long as the trip via car. And it wasn't cheap. Tickets cost about \$30, with a number of fees and taxes added on top of that. A family of four would end up spending around \$200 to get to Toronto, versus perhaps a tenth of that in gas to drive. Simply put, there was no value proposition. Especially for Toronto residents. They never embraced the idea from the beginning, which is not surprising since they've never been streaming here to visit.

Our approach to our cultural heritage is also something to report. As you know, we're trying to fill in the old canal/subway tunnel. We've bulldozed plenty of things in the past, so it's nothing new. But perhaps this time it won't end in the usual way as it's generated a lot of controversy. Sometimes I wonder if that wasn't the intention, but I guess we'll see.

I've been walking downtown on my lunch breaks, grabbing snapshots here and there. I plan to go into detail with some of the locations, backed by research at the Rochester Public Library and the Landmark Society. Look for them in the weblog.

1. <http://www.dangerousmeta.com/>

5.6.9 You see the darnedest people in a Starbucks (2005-06-30 15:57)

I'm working (no, really) in a local Starbucks this afternoon, connected to the T-Mobile wireless. So far the #2 executive from The Big Company and one of the DJs from my favorite morning station have come in.

And one young lady who felt obligated to stop at my table to bend over and give me a view of her rather generous cleavage. I'm sitting near the door and she stopped here, ostensibly, to straighten out a piece of clothing. Of course she did.

5.7 July

5.7.1 Independence Day (2005-07-05 18:58)

The Fourth was pretty good here. The Brighton fireworks were in Meridian Center, an office park that also has some of the town ball fields. Unfortunately, parking was at a premium, since no one walks there. It's easier to park at the high school, since many people walk there, but it's also surrounded by homes and a fire nightmare. We ended up back home, watching from the Clinton Ave. bridge over the canal. We could also easily see Pittsford's, Penfield's, Henrietta's and the city's from our vantage point.

I've been taking a lot of pictures lately, now that I have my HP 320 back. Check out my [1]flickr account for some of the pictures (in particular my [2]Rochester Set and my [3]Erie Canal Lock 62 set). It's hard to believe how much of Rochester's history is hidden away. There are signs here and there, but much of what was once a part of life here is simply ignored. I spent a couple of hours at the downtown library looking at maps to get an idea of things to look for in modern Rochester. Now some of the places I've either overlooked or simply never seen are becoming meaningful. Perhaps my photos can help preserve things when nothing else will.

1. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tommasz/>
2. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tommasz/sets/399178/>
3. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tommasz/sets/536813/>

5.7.2 Random thoughts (2005-07-09 18:06)

How can the God of Islam be the same God that Christians and Jews believe in? Either it's not okay to kill or it is. No Supreme Being would ever tell some of his followers one thing and others something else.

How long will it be before we become a totalitarian society, so frightened by terrorist threats that we willingly surrender our basic rights for the illusion of safety? The Brits have been dealing with terrorist acts for decades, and they're probably the most watched society in the free world. And yet it wasn't enough. Now what will happen, cameras on every train and bus?

It's no simple task, even for a modern military, to fight an enemy that *wants* to die. Our tactics and training are predicated on the idea that the enemy wants to live as much as we do. Perhaps it's time to change.

5.8 August

5.8.1 An explanation (2005-08-01 10:47)

I haven't linked the new materials from the WTC attacks. I'm not going to. You can access them easily enough without my help. I don't need to hear them, quite frankly. Let's be honest, the FDNY was in over its head and there were a lot of mistakes made. Most fire departments use the Incident Command System, it was developed by the people fighting wild fires out West. It's very good at dealing with incidents spread out over a large area involving multiple fire departments. It's not as good, it turns out, with large incidents in concentrated areas. There's also an assumption that disaster will strike only in a limited area and that most of the system will remain intact. That's one of the advantages of decentralized control, it can handle limited outages without falling apart. But the WTC attacks resulted in multiple, simultaneous outages in the system and it could not cope. People died. Nothing in the released material will ever change that.

5.8.2 Me and My Guy 2005 (2005-08-01 10:47)

This past weekend was "Me and My Guy" weekend at Girl Scout Camp Pinewood and unlike last year the weather was wonderful. I've got pictures up [1]here, if you're interested.

This year the craft project was staining the outside of the Arts & Crafts cabin and I think we were the only family who participated. The benches we built last year have proven to be very popular and it was good to see them in the various units.

I took the obligatory nap when I got home, of course. There was plenty to do on Saturday and Sunday so it's no surprise you're pretty much worn out come checkout time. The food was plentiful and better than last year thanks to a chef with real experience. Even our cookout Saturday night was great and we went through more food than any of us dads thought we would.

Liz is heading to Costa Rica Wednesday morning for the school Spanish trip and I brought her home from camp to get ready. Mary Ann will be home tomorrow from camp to help get Liz on the plane successfully.

Nothing much else to report other than I'm covered in mosquito bites. It was too cool Friday night for them but the weather was ideal on Saturday. Maybe it's me, but I don't think these new-fangled cortisone creams work as well as good old-fashioned calamine lotion.

1. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tommasz/sets/674270/>

5.8.3 Brown belt (2005-08-29 09:38)

Friday night I received my Karate brown belt. It's been an entire year since the last one, mostly because of the leg injury last fall and getting sick in the spring. The dojo was packed and it was hot but it's important to have your family and friends see you advance, especially for the kids. Providing I don't get hurt again, I can probably expect to earn my black belt in the fall of 2006 or so, depending on how many others there are. Black belt graduations are done in groups, rather than individually, so you sometimes have to wait a little. Your sensei knows when you're ready and what your abilities are; that's the most important part.

(2005-09-04 02:19:11)

Congratulations!!! You're almost there!

5.8.4 Katrina (2005-08-31 20:36)

I have to be honest, the Katrina disaster has really gotten to me. I've pretty much stopped blogging, even though today was supposed to be [1]Blog Day. I'm in awe of the power of a single storm and how little we can do to prevent damage of this magnitude. Just the amount of energy in this storm is enough to make you humble. I wasn't sure that a mass evacuation was necessary, but then I'm not an expert on the gulf coast and it sure looks like it was a good idea. It still does. I've spent the last three days watching this storm, at first out of the usual geek curiosity, but that curiosity eventually turned to horror. I've been to New Orleans, you really need to have been there to get a feel for what damage has been done but particularly how vulnerable they were. Keep in mind that New Orleans is mostly below sea level, but more importantly, it is mostly below the level of Lake Pontchartrain. Pontchartrain is where the water that would normally have been in New Orleans is pumped to keep the city (somewhat) dry. That lake, the pumps and the levees are what made New Orleans the city possible. The failure of all three is what has made it uninhabitable.

Perhaps it was because I'd been there, but I had tears in my eyes as I read about what has happened. Between the tsunami, the bombings in London and this, it just seems to me that more bad things happen than good. I'm not so dumb as to think that nothing good happens. We all know that the good stuff seldom makes the news. Nevertheless, I'm ready for some good news. More importantly, so are the people in Louisiana and Mississipi.

1. <http://blogday.org/>

5.9 September

5.9.1 More on Katrina (2005-09-01 16:07)

The news coming out of Mississippi and Louisiana sounds like something out of a third-world country, not the United States. Government, from the local level on up to the federal, has just plain fucked up. The Bush "administration" has done a lot to make things the way they are, ie. sending 40 % of Louisiana's National Guard to Irag, slashing the FEMA budget, forbidding the Army Corps of Engineers to improve the levees,

but it certainly can't be held 100 % responsible. The legacy of neglect and hoping-we'll-be-lucky goes a long way back to many presidents, governors, and mayors. But what Bush can do, and do now, is to step up efforts to curb lawlessness, help people and (temporarily) repair the levees. Let's not forget it's still hurricane season, the longer the delay, the more likely something will happen. And enough has already happened.

5.9.2 Lessons learned? (2005-09-04 14:46)

The question that should be on a lot of people's minds is "how can we fix the poor response to an *expected* disaster?" Unlike terrorist attacks, hurricanes are tracked from their beginnings off the coast of Africa until they dissipate into clouds. We knew Katrina was going to strike the Gulf coast. We knew the levees weren't constructed to withstand greater than a Cat 3 storm. We knew that not everyone is willing or able to evacuate. Yet the New Orleans evacuation was delayed. Yet the Federal response was delayed. Yet the plan to handle those who were still there was woefully inadequate.

You know I blame Bush for draining resources from the Army Corps of Engineers, the National Guard and FEMA to fight for oil in Iraq and fund the useless Department of Homeland Security. But there's the state of Louisiana and the city of New Orleans who share the blame, and more importantly, have the greatest opportunity for improvement. Residents of New Orleans are the only ones who vote for their city government. Residents of Louisiana are the only ones who vote for their governor and state legislators (and Congress members). It's time to stop tolerating incompetence and corruption, at any level, and start electing people who understand their job is to serve their constituents and not themselves.

In the meantime, they still need help, and those of us unaffected are the ones who need to provide it. Give.

5.9.3 Meet Mack (2005-09-10 15:21)

On my [1]Writings page I've added [2]Meet Mack, the story of a Katrina survivor who I met last week in my driveway.

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/writings.html>
2. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz/Meet%20Mack.pdf>

5.9.4 Never forget (2005-09-11 14:59)

It's the eleventh of September, 2005. Four years since Islamic terrorists flew jetliners into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. In those four years we've invaded Iraq, round up thousands of suspects, made air travel a dehumanizing experience, created a Department of Homeland Security and run roughshod over the Constitution. There's been so much done in the name of "security" yet no one is willing to say we're actually safer than we were in 2001. All it takes is a hurricane to expose the flaws in policy that favors rhetoric and favoritism over substance.

This year we must not only remember those who lost their lives in 2001 but also those who have lost their's in 2005. When you go to vote this November, think about what your vote can do to change our chances for the future.

5.9.5 Bells are ringing (2005-09-24 16:26)

Karate is an enjoyable way to get in shape and generally improve yourself but it's not without its hazards. Today at the dojo we were doing tournament-style sparring, according to AAU rules. In my second match I

was up against one of the teenagers, a blue belt. If I recall correctly, the ref had just called for us to break (but I could be wrong). I dropped my guard (a mistake, no matter how you look at it) and he hit me square in the nose. It didn't hurt my nose but it did knock me back and I heard the proverbial bells ringing. I had to sit for a bit before my head cleared. Even now, over four hours later, my head still feels funny. Never drop your guard.

5.9.6 Mountains of trash (2005-09-29 18:19)

I drive through the city every day to get to and from work. You don't get to see much when you're driving but I do notice some things. One of those things is how much trash some houses put out front on garbage day. I mean *huge* amounts, way more than you'd expect to come from a house. We're a family of four, and we typically generate a "tote" or so a week. More if we're making the kids clean up, which we're doing more of lately, but usually it's just one. Some of these houses, on the other hand, look like they've got a dozen people in them. I can understand why some people like to patrol city streets looking for "treasures".

5.10 October

5.10.1 Chicken or egg? (2005-10-05 20:46)

The net is buzzing today about Mark Andreessen's new Ning social software platform. But an interesting question has come up as to whether the software platform or the people make the social network. Sites like Flickr and Craigslist are really about the people who use them, rather than the implementation underneath. Flickr, for instance, started off as a "photo sharing" site. That doesn't sound all that exciting, but by making it easy (compared to setting up your own site on a server someplace) to upload and share digital photos it brought together people who would otherwise have either not bothered or would have had their own isolated photo site. What happened then was not necessarily predictable from just looking at the software. Sure, it made things easy, but it was the people who made the community. Craigslist has a similar history.

But that's not to say the software has no value. There's a lot of different ways to make something easy but only a few ways to make something easy *and* useful. I think a lot of software designers equate easy with limited. In some cases, that's fine, but most of the time the people that use it run quickly up the learning curve and then get bored. Yahoo! Groups feels like that to me. It was originally eGroups, which was really about maintaining email lists without having to mess with listservs. At the time, this was a big thing, since really only Unix gurus had the knowledge to deal with mail and list servers (that's pretty much still the case, but I digress). Yahoo! added some additional features to eGroups, but the truth is it's still a easy way to maintain an email list. Anything else and you're either out of luck or you're in for some work.

Flickr is easy to use, too. But it's not just easy. Not only can you upload and share a digital image, you can tag that image. Tags are nothing more than simple phrases, like "nature" or "Rochester" that are stored along with your image. Nothing difficult. You can type in anything you want (or nothing at all, it's your choice). As can everyone else. And that's the difference. Because everyone's photos are tagged, you can search for images using those tags. It makes the software simple, at least compared to trying to analyze the image for its content, and puts the burden of tagging on the community members. But you search by tag, so if you want to see photos tagged with "Rochester", you can simply specify that tag. It's not perfect, because tagging is voluntary and unconstrained, you can tag anything in any manner you please. But you pay a price doing so. If your tagging is inappropriate, you're likely to hear about it from the community. In other words, the community polices itself. That function, by the way, is not part of the software.

Ning, since it's not a community itself but a software platform, runs the risk of becoming the focus. Sites created with it could be known first as "Ning sites", taking the emphasis off the people and putting it on the software. For some that might be an attraction but for people who don't care so much about software but just want to belong, it's either a turn-off or of no value whatsoever. But it's possible this could change over time as the novelty wears off and the focus changes, only time will tell. Communities are tough to predict, maybe there's a community just waiting for the right platform and Ning is it.

5.10.2 Subject to change without notice (2005-10-17 16:53)

I had called my dad last Friday to see how they and the rest of the family back on Long Island were doing given all the rain and flooding in the East but didn't catch them at home. On Saturday he called me back to tell me that they were okay (being on top of a mountain helps) and that everyone else was fine. Then he dropped a bomb: they're selling the house in the Poconos and moving back to Long Island, East Patchogue to be exact. This is further out on the island than where we used to live but close to my stepbrothers. It's not unexpected given my dad is 83 and my stepmom is even older. The fall he suffered in 2000 has taken its toll and combined with the distance to services and the Pocono winters he's come to grips with the fact he can't do the work he used to. My stepbrothers come up to help on a regular basis but they can't be there all the time. I'm just glad they made this decision because they wanted to, rather than had to.

Still, it's an uncomfortable realization that my parents have gotten so old. They've been lucky, health-wise, with only a few serious issues over the recent years. There are a lot of people their age in much worse shape. It was easy to convince myself they weren't old, they were living independently after all. Meanwhile, reality continued, I can't pretend any longer.

Long Island will always evoke mixed feelings in me. I'm glad they'll be close to family since moving closer to my parents is not an option for me. But if my stepmom should die before my dad, I'm not sure what will happen. Being an only child means I have no brothers or sisters to help me so I alone will have to figure out what would be best for dad. It may mean moving him here. I don't know what he would say to that. Since both of my parents have stated that they wish to be buried next to their first spouse, I believe they would both rather be on Long Island than anywhere else, even if my stepbrothers weren't there.

On an unrelated note, I'll be traveling to Brazil this weekend for business next week. Or perhaps not. I just found out one of the major players in the work I'm doing died of a heart attack with no planned successor. Wonderful.

5.10.3 Not, not, not! (2005-10-19 12:58)

I have to be honest, I'm not looking forward to going to Brazil. Not even a little. The key person responsible for actually interfacing between my company and the Brazilian government recently died suddenly of a heart attack and there's no immediate replacement, let alone one with experience in government relations. So there's a good chance nothing will come of what I do. Next, of course, is issues of safety. That I can almost handle, assuming I stay to main tourist areas or my company's offices. But there's also some possible health issues (solveable if I stick to bottled water) that have me wary. I'm also keeping my eye on Hurricane Wilma. Not sure if that will affect me directly but I have to make connections in Houston, so we'll see.

On the other hand, the company will benefit money-wise if I do well. And I desperately need some career help. I'm probably never going to be promoted ever again (I was "promoted" when switching divisions, but that was more of a salary range difference than anything else) so I have to rely on things like this to

get those coveted 2 % raises. I am so ashamed that I can't do any better. If I fail this time, I'm as good as unemployed.

5.10.4 Back from Brazil (2005-10-31 15:04)

So I'm home. It was an interesting trip, all told. The travel to Rio wasn't bad, but there was a massive rain storm Monday morning and it was all I could do to get out of the hotel and to work. The week went by quickly, though, and I believe my presence there made a difference in the outcome (which I can't talk about here, of course). The Brazilians are nice people, for the most part.

The first thing that hits you (besides the humidity) is how big the difference is between the upper and lower classes. There's a middle class, of course, but it's small and doesn't seem to be growing. Crime is a real issue, driven no doubt by the class differences. There were people living under some of the expressway overpasses, not far from luxury hotels. I think I was the only one who found it surprising.

Brazilian food scores big in two areas: fresh fish and beef. Living in Rochester means fish is frozen. Having sushi that was fresh from the sea was something I can't do here at home. Beef is raised in the southern part of the country, in roughly the same conditions as in Argentina (a fierce rival). They like the churrasco style of serving, where there is a central buffet with salads and such and then waiters come to your table offering different cuts of meat for you to sample. You can literally eat yourself sick, so it's a good idea to limit yourself to only what you really like.

Since I was in Rio, I was on the Atlantic Ocean. It's heavily populated and the climate is moderated my proximity to the ocean. The temperature hovered around 30 C (86 F) most of the time I was there, but the humidity seemed like it was close to 100 %. I got used to things never completely drying out. My hotel, which fronted Copacabana beach, was nicely air conditioned but still damp. It's an odd feeling.

I was warned about the water, so I used bottled water even to brush my teeth. The local beers are almost all in the light Pilsener style (the Germanic tradition) but there was at least one black (dark) beer. They love their coffee espresso style, usually with two sugars (a big Brazilian crop). It was actually free in my company's offices. I only sampled one Brazilian wine, a white. It was very dry without much complexity, a reasonable choice for certain lighter foods.

The local mixed drink is the caipirinha, made with cachaca. Cachaca is distilled from sugar cane, but is distinct from rum in both taste and aroma. Caipirinhas are made with cachaca, limes, sugar (are you seeing a trend yet?) and ice. The limes are crushed in the glass to release the juice. It's a powerful drink but everyone should try it at least once.

I think I'll leave the travel details for another day.

5.11 November

5.11.1 Impressions of Brazil (2005-11-09 10:17)

Impressions of Brazil

- Dirty

- Smelly
- Colorful
- Friendly people
- Pretty girls
- Extreme poverty
- Crazy drivers
- Lane-splitting motorcyclists
- Espresso free in the machines at work
- Great sushi
- Old and new right next to each other
- White sand beaches
- Living on the side of mountains
- Restaurants that feed you until you burst
- Caipirinhas
- Beach volleyball
- Sugar in everything

5.11.2 The Brazil trip in detail (2005-11-09 10:42)

I know I said previously I was going to talk about the trip to Brazil itself, so here goes.

Because of the days I was traveling and the limitations of our corporate travel, I was forced to take three flights to get to Rio. First was to Detroit, then to Houston and then to Sao Paulo and Rio. The last counts as one because we didn't have to leave the plane. I slept a little on the Houston to Sao Paulo flight but I was exhausted when I got there. My company driver was there waiting for me and we left immediately for the hotel. I slept most of Sunday afternoon and woke up long enough to eat dinner in the hotel and go back to bed.

Monday morning started off badly, with a massive rainstorm that flooded Rio and tied up traffic for the entire day. My company driver couldn't get into the city and I had to hire a tour driver to get me to work. Our office is near the port and it's not a nice neighborhood. We have armed guards at the entrances and the parking lot. It's nothing like home.

Wednesday I was able to finish early and did a little sight-seeing. The regular tours leave in the morning and late evening but I was free in the afternoon. I decided to walk on my own and took my own tour of Copacabana and Ipanema. There's a fort on the point that divides the two areas but you couldn't tour it on your own. The nice young ladies they had as guides did not speak English very well and I decided I didn't want to spend money on a tour I wouldn't understand. I took lots of pictures of the beaches and rock formations. I also ended up with some large blisters on my feet, probably from not washing the sand off my feet, but it was worth it.

The Brazilians are a friendly lot and the only problem I had was when I took a picture of a sand sculpture. The "artist" then demanded money from me. I didn't come up with any which then made him quite angry. I never actually stopped walking so he couldn't detain me. He cursed me in Portuguese and English, but it didn't get him any cash.

Later that evening I went to a mall to do some shopping. The hotel provided a driver and a strict pickup time. I would have walked, but the concierge said it was a "bad neighborhood" and wouldn't even think of me walking. It was a typical mall, for the most part, but with some local differences. It was actually on five floors and some of the stores were on more than one floor, which I found disorienting. I bought some postcards, t-shirts and some jewelry for Mary Ann. The ladies in the jewelry store kept bringing out more things for me to buy, but I managed to stop them at two sets of earrings.

The trip back on Thursday was quite an adventure. I was pulled out of line in the Rio airport and had all my luggage and belongings searched. Once on the plane, I discovered we would have to change planes in Sao Paulo. Getting on in Rio were a group of 100 or so retired Asian folks (Chinese, if I'm not mistaken, judging from their conversations) who were traveling together. Most of them were late getting on and many of them wanted to change seats to sit next to spouses or friends. We were late leaving Rio. Since we had to get off and on to a new plane, the same thing happened in Sao Paulo. We were late leaving Sao Paulo and late getting into Houston. I was again searched in Houston. That, plus my Asian friends, added 20 minutes to my time through US Customs. I missed my connecting flight to Newark although my luggage might not have (I can't be sure where it went). I immediately went to the first person from my airline I could find and managed to get standby on the *next* flight to Newark. Since I was so quick I made that flight, which got me to Newark in time to make my flight to Rochester with minutes to spare. My luggage arrived on Saturday morning.

Oh, since this was work-related, I should mention it went very well and I believe the mission was accomplished.

5.11.3 Thanksgiving (2005-11-28 13:15)

Now that my parents have their home in the Poconos up for sale in preparation for a move to an apartment back on Long Island, we spent what is likely to be the last Thanksgiving with them. The idea that they are getting too old to live there is a tough one to internalize, but the reality is they're in their 80's and it's not a great place for the elderly in the Winter. It's hard to even think of them as *elderly*, but you can't ignore it. I'm glad they made this decision while they were still healthy, no matter how I feel.

My dad let me go through his old tools to see which ones I would like to take, since he won't need much of anything in the apartment. I took a number of tools I used to use when I lived at home. It's a way to remind myself of things that used to be.

We also went to Liberty Island and Ellis Island in New York City. I had been to the statue in the 60's, but not since. You can no longer go into the statue, a result of 9/11 and enhanced fire safety regulations. I would like to have taken the girls up there to see what I had seen but had to be content with looking up into the interior.

Ellis Island has been partially restored from the years of neglect that befell it after closing in 1954. But there's much to see, and I was able to walk the same stairs and corridors that my grandparents did as they entered this country in the years prior to WWI. The very walls seem infused with the hope and tragedy of

those who gave up everything to come here. My family was one of the lucky ones, for which I am eternally grateful. I sometimes wish that they had brought more "heirlooms" with them. Growing up, there were few stories of Poland and my father's father actually refused to return even to visit, fearing the Russian army was waiting to grab him again as they had did when he was a teenager.

The amount of data that was gathered and managed at Ellis Island is impressive for a system that was all done by hand. They caution you when researching that mistakes were common, particularly in the spelling of names and places. And it's true, my family name has been spelled a number of different ways. It wasn't until my wife chanced upon a variation that we could find the records for my paternal grandfather, Czeslaw Macherowski. He came over before my grandmother and two oldest aunts, traveling with cousins on board the *Lusitania*. When they came over the name was spelled yet another way, but finding them was easier once we had my grandfather's record. I'm sure many other families could tell similar tales. Getting all of this handwritten information online was no small feat, and I'm grateful to all of those who contributed to the restoration.

One striking thing in the facility is the so-called "Stairs of Separation". It was where people were sent to either local transport to NYC, trains to the rest of the US or to medical detention. It was the last step for those who were cleared to come into the US. Those who were detained for medical reasons were kept in a hospital facility on the other side of the island until they were well enough to enter. Today those steps are worn thin in the spots were millions of feet trod upon them and you can sense the joy and sadness of their owners. It may not have had streets paved with gold but the United States was still better than anything those people had ever seen in their home countries. Perhaps it still is.

5.12 December

5.12.1 Freedom vs. Security (2005-12-01 13:10)

It looks like the FAA is relaxing some of its regulations on what items you can carry onto planes, allowing scissors and other previously forbidden objects. It's taken them four years to realize that little old ladies with a bag of yarn and some knitting needles don't represent a terrorist threat, but I guess it's a start.

If you've flown in recent years you know that flying has become a exercise in humiliation, frustration and invasion of privacy. Add to that the decrease in service the airlines have given us in order to deal with increased competition and taking the bus starts seeming like a luxury cruise. It's not the way it used to be, when it was mostly for the wealthy, but unlike cruise ships both the price *and* the service have declined to the point where no one on a plane thinks of themselves as lucky anymore.

But we're safer, right? Beats me. Do you know how many potential terrorists have been captured as a result of this increased level of screening? I don't. Outside of the "shoe bomber" and the occasional drunken tourist, I can't recall anyone getting caught. Yet the FAA sells off cargotainers of confiscated scissors on a regular basis. All I can surmise about safety from that is perhaps some people who might have run with those scissors are now forced to run without them.

Both freedom and safety are important, but neither should be sacrificed in favor of the other. The 9/11 hijackers should have been detected long before they got on those planes, but they weren't. I don't feel confident they would today, either. Oh sure, the box cutters would probably be detected, but would that truly stop a determined hijacker?

The only real solution would to have prevented them from getting on the planes in the first place. No x-ray is going to tell you that the person has been training in Florida to crash a jetliner.

5.12.2 An unrelated thing (2005-12-02 19:07)

When I dream I often dream of my childhood home on Long Island. I haven't lived there since 1973, but for some reason it's the setting more often than my present home. Last night I dreamt that there was a big reunion at my old house, but it wasn't just the people who were in my life in those days. It was pretty much everyone in my family, my stepmom's family and my wife and children. I knew somehow it was a dream and that some of the people there were dead. I was both happy to see them and sad at the same time. Sad because I knew that they were gone. I woke crying.

5.12.3 Off with their heads! (2005-12-14 12:21)

Perhaps it's my Catholic upbringing, but I can't support capital punishment. I just can't. I think the primary reason for this is that it doesn't bring back the victim (murder is the primary reason people are put to death in the US these days). It's not like having robbers pay back the people they've stolen from. That which has been taken away can never be returned.

Catholics believe that sins may be forgiven, but that does not necessarily imply permanent change. Thus someone may obtain forgiveness for killing, yet they are still capable of killing again. It sounds like a flawed system, and it is, but the flaws are the result of the human beings involved. And lest you assume that forgiveness means no punishment, that's not the case at all. The only thing really at issue is the nature of the punishment itself.

Our criminal justice system is good for one thing, and one thing only: punishment. That's not a bad thing, since that's what we want it to be good at. The problem is we assume it's good at other things when the fact is that it's not. I don't think that the majority of those incarcerated will ever become "rehabilitated". The system has its hands full of issues around keeping the inmates secure and from doing significant harm to each other (and you may argue that the high incidence of prison rapes says they aren't doing that particularly well). There are those you try, and there are those who succeed, but to say that happens due to any concerted effort on the part of the system is wrong.

Stanley "Tookie" Williams seemed like someone who had managed to change himself in prison. He wrote children's books and warned against gang life. The latter was important as he was the founder of the infamous LA gang, The Crips. But he was also a convicted murderer of four people. Although there were claims of racial bias, the evidence stood up to inquiry. Mr. Williams was sentenced to death by lethal injection. Numerous famous people called for clemency, but the Governor declined to grant it citing Williams' lack of remorse or admittance of guilt.

I don't know if Williams was truly a changed man. People said he had changed, that he wasn't like his gang self. I don't know that, since I never met him. Perhaps he did change. In either case, he was still a convicted murderer. The only question is whether he should have been killed as a result of that.

I have to say "no", but by no means should he have ever been let out of jail. Society has a right to protect itself, we create governments to do that for us on a much wider scale than we can manage for ourselves. Does capital punishment do a better or worse job of protecting us than life-without-possibility-of-parole? I say it's slightly worse, in that it brings all of us down to the level of those we seek to punish. And it doesn't bring

anyone back to life. We may have eliminated a murderer but the cost to society as a whole just isn't worth it.

5.12.4 The lie (2005-12-18 19:25)

I think I've said this before, but just being smart isn't really all that valuable. Even if you ignore the anti-intellectual bias that's rampant in the US, it's still not much. Yet we tell our children to work hard in school and to get good grades so they can go to the college of their choice. But we don't tell them that being smart won't make you happy or content.

5.12.5 Unsurprising (2005-12-19 14:51)

As you might guess, I'm not feeling chipper right now. Another year is almost gone and I've nothing to show for it.

Also, I put my weblog on hiatus with the strong possibility I'll not start it up again. After five years of posting things no one reads, it was about time to move on. This site and my Flickr site will continue, however.

5.12.6 Merry Christmas! (2005-12-25 09:57)

To everyone who bothers to read this odd journal, I hope you have a very happy and safe holiday.

5.12.7 Wish me luck (2005-12-27 16:08)

Music: Be My Yoko Ono-Barenaked Ladies-Everywhere for Everyone (Glasgow, UK 50104)

In a little while I'm heading out to Buffalo to the Kendo dojo for a training session. This is the same place where I tore my left calf muscle last year, so I'm feeling a little trepidation. Nevertheless, I've made a complete recovery and training with Kimura Sensei is always valuable. I'm driving a bunch of us from the club, the downside of having a huge gas-guzzlin' SUV. Oh well. I hope we have the chance to eat dinner with Sensei afterwards, since that's always educational and entertaining.

(2005-12-27 21:15:13)

LOL. I read this too quickly and I thought you wrote "huge ass-guzzlin' SUV," but I luckily did a double take and read what it really says. Hope your adventure is beneficial and that you have fun!

tommasz1 (2005-12-28 23:05:45)

I'll admit "ass-guzzlin' SUV" sounds kind of interesting, but it just guzzles gas.

5.12.8 I survived (2005-12-28 22:43)

Yes, that's right, no major injuries other than some foot blisters (not surprising given the hardwood floor). I also outlasted the teenagers in the club, so I've got that going for me. Kimura Sensei was very helpful, perhaps I can succeed at this after all.

5.12.9 2005: The Year In Review (2005-12-31 18:20)

Is the title pretentious enough for you?

Anyway, I think I can sum up the year in a simple statement: I found a new job at The Big Company.

Have a Happy New Year!

Chapter 6

2006

6.1 January

6.1.1 RAW expenditures (2006-01-02 17:37)

If you work with high tech devices you notice that they have a tendency to force you to make additional purchases in order for them to work. Take my Canon D60. Since it's an SLR, you need to buy lenses. Which require filters, caps, etc. in order to be useful. You also need to purchase memory cards (Compact Flash in this case) and batteries (they wear out). It also offers RAW mode, the files are not compressed with JPEG or other algorithm so they let you work with all the pixels the camera offers. In the case of the D60, this means 6 megapixels. The files are huge, naturally. This means you need more CF cards, since they hold less than 1/3 than JPEG-compressed images if you use RAW. You also need additional software, but Canon gives you that with the camera (and you can also use Photoshop). My D60 is an older model and required a firmware update to fix a RAW file handling issue. You need to be able to copy a firmware update file to the CF card, which requires a card reader/writer. The one I bought has a USB 2.0 interface. My Mac G4 had only USB 1.1. So I had to buy a USB 2.0 card to work with it. The reader has a 1" cord, so it hangs in back near the floor. I have to lay flat on the floor and use a flashlight to find the right slot.

Oh, did I mention how slow my G4 is with big files? I'm looking at a CPU upgrade, too. It never ends.

6.1.2 In which I describe my experience buying Visio (2006-01-05 15:10)

If you've ever read this journal you know that I work a big company that I refer to as The Big Company. That's because I like getting paid and don't wish to blow that choice gig. And, to be honest, the name doesn't really add (or subtract) much from the story. It's frequently frustrating to work for a large company, particularly when encountering the embedded bureaucracy that such companies inevitably develop. Recently I had to purchase Visio, the Windows diagramming software package. Herein lies a tale...

It all started one day when I had a problem with Microsoft Outlook. It's *the* email, calendaring, etc. program here and not having it work correctly is a major impediment. Some background is in order here: my laptop PC was brought over from my previous job in research. The rest of the company has A Support Company running its network and administering its PC fleet but research had its own people. My laptop, naturally, was considered Non-Standard. In their infinite wisdom A Support Company decided they had to completely wipe all data/programs/etc. off of it and reconfigure it. They managed to save most of my data and important programs, so it wasn't too bad. That is, until Outlook stopped working.

As I said, I had a Non-Standard laptop. They attempted to diagnose and repair it multiple times using a remote connection. It failed to repair. They then sent me CDs to try, which also failed. The only recourse was to get a new laptop. Although they made it sound wonderful, the reality was it was essentially the same as I had. But, of course, this one was Standard. It had to be better. So I got a new laptop PC.

The old one had a nice docking station and monitor. The new one did not. As a matter of fact it's not even possible to order one. So now I'm staring at a much smaller screen and I have to plug in a variety of cords each day. But it's Standard, you know.

One more thing, the new laptop lacked Visio. I had it on my Non-Standard research laptop, but the license was in research, so no Visio. I would have to purchase it.

Purchase, it sounds so simple, so easy. But we're not allowed to go and buy anything from a store. We have to follow a Purchase Procedure that requires us to first get an account on the in-house purchasing program, iBuyStuff (not its real name, The Big Company has a penchant for slapping an "i" or "e" in front of product names). That requires some training, of course, since it's not very easy to use. Once you have that login, you can buy things. No wait, I take that back. You can look at things to buy. Actually purchasing is a bit more complicated than that.

Software isn't sold directly but through a third-party company that we access via iBuyStuff. I was able to find Visio fairly easy. Then I attempted to buy it. First I had to fill out my budget center and account code. I knew the budget center, we use that a lot. The account number was a total unknown. It seems that we have accounts within the budget center and you have to allocate the account prior to buying anything. I had to sit down with my boss and determine the applicable account (we sort of guessed since there was no particular "software" account).

Once you order something, your boss has to approve it, you have to approve their approval and it gets ordered. This can take a while, but my boss is nice and actually wanted me to have Visio, so she approved it quickly. I then had to wait.

Eventually I received an email with a "Proof of License" for Visio. I assumed that the software would arrive shortly after. I was, of course, wrong. What I had purchased for \$107 was a license. Period. No software. It was like that Steven Wright joke "I bought batteries but they weren't included so I had to buy them again." The third-party company was polite but had nothing to offer short of "see if someone there has the disks." Silly me, I called A Support Company, but they don't have the disks. I had to order "the media" separately for about \$23. It arrived when I was on Christmas vacation.

Then I foolishly attempted to install Visio. Stop laughing back there! The Visio installer requires an activation code. But *I didn't have an activation code*, I had a "Proof of License". They're not the same. So once again I called the third-party supplier. They were once again polite (even though I wasn't at that point) and told me that I had to send the "Proof of License" to someone in The Big Company and that person would then send me an activation code. I asked them where this was documented, they said it was The Big Company policy and not their's.

Rather than just email someone, I called The Big Company person to inquire about this mystery process. She was new to the job, the prior person having recently retired but admitted that it wasn't documented and not mentioned anywhere. It was something specific to Microsoft software. Be that as it may, I still had to send her the "Proof of License", which I did. She immediately sent me back the activation code.

I installed Viso. Total elapsed time: 6 weeks.

[Update]

I just received this email from the iBuyStuff robot:

Oracle Workflow Notification (FYI)From: Workflow on PNPP
Sent: Thursday, January 05, 2006 5:38 PM
To: Maszerowski, Thomas
Subject: FYI: REMINDER: Invoice 8239058 requires your immediate action

Attachments: Notification Detail.html

To MASZEROWSKI, THOMAS C
Sent 05-JAN-2006 17:36:34
ID 2149068

Reminder Notification:

You cannot take action on this REMINDER.

You must go back and locate the original notification in MS Outlook or
log into iBuyStuff and locate it in your Worklist.

The Big Company has received invoice 8239058 which is being held for payment.

Immediate action is required by MASZEROWSKI, THOMAS C to pay this invoice.

To see a copy of the original invoice, click on the following link for F \$TV: F \$TV

For help to see "How to respond to this notification", click on the following link: Notification Help

Please note that the message says I must take action *and* that I can't take action. When I log into iBuyStuff there is no action I can take. I'm waiting for a human from Finance to call me.

[Update 2]

Poking around the iBuyStuff site I finally found the right button to approve the invoice. So I guess no one will come to hunt me down. I was kind of hoping they would, just so I could complain.

6.1.3 Weekend: The Epic Story Of Defective Car Door Handles and Leaking Hot Water Heaters (2006-01-23 15:49)

I've been experiencing problems opening the driver's door on the Bulgemobile of late. On Sunday, it came to its fruition. I had to stop at the fire house for our annual inspection and when I got there I couldn't open the door. At all. The usual pushing against the frame had no effect. Finally, giving it one last try before I climbed over the console to get out the passenger door, I pulled on the handle and began to push. But this time the handle just kept moving. It was not longer connected to anything inside the door. The problem we had been assuming was related to the door latching mechanism was really the inside door handle. Now I have to open the window to reach out to open the door via the outside handle. But since I have power windows, that means the key needs to be in the ignition and turned to accessory (or the engine has to be running). I might wait for some warmer weather and take the door apart to see if I can figure out how to fix it.

Annoying, yes, but that would not be the end of my device-related excitement.

Sometime between 11:00 PM and midnight Mary Ann woke me up out of a deep sleep to ask if I knew how to turn off the hot water heater. Liz had gone downstairs for some reason and saw water on the floor in the laundry area. I ran downstairs and made sure the water and the gas were shut off. The water was, of course, mostly on the carpeted side of the basement. We couldn't remember how long ago we had bought it, so there was some worry it was out of warranty. Monday morning wasn't looking like it was going to be much fun.

I took a cold water sponge bath and washed my hair in the tub with the hand nozzle. I was sure my hair was going to disappear retreating from the shock, but it didn't. It took 10 minutes for it to warm up to normal. I was awake, though. Very awake.

But we lucked out, in a sense. Mary Ann found the paperwork and it was 9 years old, with a 10 year warranty. We're getting \$220 towards the purchase of a new one. She was also able to get our plumber to do the work, so I don't have to. I can look forward to a hot shower on Tuesday. And I'm only out about \$200, so it could have been worse.

6.2 February

6.2.1 In which I ask a question or two (2006-02-09 09:26)

Why is it people entering elevators act *so surprised* when someone on the elevator has the temerity to actually exit? Do they think that every elevator, having dropped what it was doing to come to their call, is empty and waiting for them?

6.2.2 Proof I'm Getting Old (2006-02-09 16:55)

The Grammy Awards were last night. U2 won a whole bunch of them for their latest recording. I was surprised since *I didn't even know* they had a new record out. This is surprising in a number of ways, not the least being I used to be much more aware of what was going on in the music world. Any moment now I'm going to be hiking my pants up to my chest and shaking my fist at those whippersnappers and their too-loud music.

imaclanni (2006-02-09 23:25:12)
oh but you love the too-loud music : P

6.2.3 More excitement brewing (2006-02-11 19:08)

Music: Soak Up the Sun-Sheryl Crow-C'mon, C'mon

Or should it be "more brewing excitement"? Either way, I've got 5 gallons of Oatmeal Stout fermenting in the basement. Now I'm tired and can't wait the two weeks necessary, but that's not something you can change. Cheers!

6.2.4 Life:252, Me:0 (2006-02-13 10:17)

The weekend started with a bang (literally) when the front wheel of Mary Ann's car broke off as she was getting off the expressway. The ball joint failed completely. Luckily, she was slowing down at the time or she could easily have been seriously injured, or worse. In my rush to get to where she was, I managed to forget where my car was in the parking garage. It took me 10 minutes to finally locate it. I had to be at the town hall to sign the fire department's contract and the girls had to be various places but somehow we managed. I did end up late to my karate class, though. The garage called, it looks like about \$600 should do the trick. It could have been worse.

Saturday I managed to brew a batch of beer but didn't get my Valentine's shopping done because Mary Ann needed the car. On Sunday I discovered that my secretary's keys for the firehouse are missing. Not sure when I lost them. I checked with corporate security today in the hope I lost them here in my scramble to leave on Friday, no luck. On Sunday evening, after Liz and I used the telescope to look at the full moon, I was doing some fix up on it when it collapsed on my hands. My hands are swollen and bruised and my right hand is cut on the knuckle. I cancelled my guitar lesson for tomorrow since both my hands hurt.

I'm ready to give up. Nothing goes right and I can't make anything better, ever, no matter what I do.

6.2.5 Career progress (2006-02-23 13:03)

It's been a difficult week at work, for reasons having nothing to do with the work itself. Luckily, things have improved somewhat *and* I have tomorrow off.

I'm facing a difficult decision. Or at least I hope I am. I haven't worked as an active software developer since 1998. I've done lots of computer-related things since but no production coding. Here at The Big Company I'm in a labor grade that pretty much means that no programmer jobs are available to me. Of course, back in my previous position they were going to try and make a Java programmer out of me but that was simply because of accounting (I was on loan at no cost, therefore there was no penalty for having a high-level employee doing the work). But at least I was in an engineering area. I'm in corporate now. I believe I may be the only engineer in corporate (outside of IT). I've managed to slot myself into a position that really is only open to people *outside* of corporate (like I was). There is no one else here who is qualified to do my job and likewise I am not qualified to do anyone else's job. I'm stuck.

I can't decide if I was shortsighted when I took this job or not. I was very likely on my way to being laid off. I've thought about it and I believe that Java thing was being used to setup rationale to get rid of me. The company hasn't really had much use for me since I launched the printer-copier back in 1999. My

former boss did me a great favor when he gave me the job in research (after I begged him) but he could only do so much. So in the sense that this beats unemployment, it was a good idea. But in the sense of a "career", it certainly doesn't. That's assuming I had a career, which is debateable.

The big boss is retiring this year. There's likely to be changes in the department. If a position other than the one I have ends up being available, do I try for it? If this happens and I actually get it, it will likely mean I'm in corporate for the rest of my time here. If not, I'm not sure there's anyplace I can go in engineering here. My only direction might be towards another company, but NY state isn't doing well and the opportunities aren't anywhere near where I live now. I just hope I get the chance to choose.

6.2.6 Public Service Announcement (2006-02-27 18:42)

To the woman who pulled up behind me this morning on Broad Street as I was pulled over to the curve *with my four-way flashers on*, and who honked her horn and turned on her high beams in order to somehow convince me to move despite the fact that I couldn't: fuck you.

Thank you, this has been a Public Service Announcement.

6.3 March

6.3.1 Mardi Gras plus one (2006-03-01 16:51)

It was good to see that there was a Mardi Gras in New Orleans, despite the damage from Katrina. But to think that the area is somehow "back to normal" is nowhere near the facts. I keep the donation link on my weblog up because there's still work to be done. I keep reminding myself that "this is America" when I look at the pictures because otherwise it's too easy to convince yourself it's some third world backwater.

Watching "Brownie" blame everyone but himself was simultaneously disappointing and totally expected. We're conditioned to blame others, it's just the way things are done these days. And in some ways, it is sort of not his fault. Not his fault he's an idiot. Not his fault he was totally unqualified for the position he was in. Not his fault a Congress afraid to stand up to the president voted him in without questioning his ability to actually do the job. Not his fault a hurricane came along while he was in office. And he's not alone. Mayor Nagin, who I guess is running again for office, had an emergency plan that consisted of nothing more than hoping nothing bad happened. Too bad something *really* bad happened. Governor Blanco didn't do much better. But they should have.

There's probably no US state *totally* prepared for destruction on the order of what happened with Katrina, but you have to balance that with the probability of that destruction occurring. New Orleans, on the Gulf and mostly below sea level, was clearly at much higher risk than say, Des Moines. And what really bugs me is that the hurricane wasn't a surprise. NOAA had been tracking it since it formed in the Atlantic. *Something* could have been done to get people out in the days before the storm hit. But instead of that they got a half-hearted recommendation to move to higher ground. It was pretty much ignored, too. Because they'd been lucky before. Their luck just picked a bad time to run out.

I wonder what New Orleans will look like in 2010. It's only going to faintly resemble the place I visited in the late 90s. Will I be happy knowing I saw it "the way it used to be"?

6.3.2 Miracle Man (2006-03-05 13:17)

I take South Clinton Avenue to and from work. It runs from Brighton all the way into the city. The section between Goodman Street to about Highland Avenue has been called Swillburg, because of the hog industry that previously called the area home. Now, it's mostly lower income homes and cheap storefronts, with a number of restaurants and bars. One of the bars is home to a gentleman I refer to as the Miracle Man.

Miracle Man looks to be in his forties or fifties, with long hair and a beard. During most of the warm parts of the year he can be found outside of the bar, drinking and smoking (which isn't allowed indoors). In the cold months, his motorized wheelchair sits outside, empty. That's what I consider the *miracle* part. Although he ostensibly can't walk, he manages to get out of it in order to drink. On occasion, you can see him outside, smoking in his wheelchair. I have no idea if he can get in and out of it on his own. Once I actually saw a woman sitting in it smoking. I guess it beats standing. And it was there, I suppose I might use it too, if I was a smoker.

He's there at least Monday through Friday, since those are the days I go to work. I assume that he's there on weekends, too. I mean, why wouldn't he be? Although this post is somewhat lighthearted, it's really sad that people live like this. He may be a special case and noticeable because of the wheelchair, there are plenty of others who join him every day. I may complain sometimes about my own life but at least I'm not slowly drinking myself into oblivion, one day at a time.

6.3.3 Weekend Report (2006-03-06 15:05)

It was an exhausting weekend, but it was also a lot of fun. On Saturday, I did a row-a-thon (on rowing machines) in addition to my usual karate class. It's intended to raise money for my youngest daughter's rowing club. I competed in the Seniors (40-49) category and managed to finish in the middle of the pack. Considering I only had about two weeks of practice (and really no specific training for it), that wasn't too bad. Mary Ann and the girls ran the food concession. The club massively over-bought, unfortunately (they have a history of this), so much of the perishable food had to be given away. Some of it was donated, though, so the losses weren't as bad as they could have been.

Sunday was a brown and black belt seminar put on by Sensei John Devine, an 8th degree black belt (highest ranked in the US) from Pennsylvania. Sensei Devine is a vice president of our [1]organization and has spent a lot of time with Angi Uezu, our grandmaster in Okinawa. You expect someone with close to 40 years experience to have a lot to offer and he certainly did. His ability to add nuance and detail to things you've been doing for years is why it's so important to have the opportunity to work with the masters. I make a point of trying to attend every Thursday night class, since this is when Sensei Dorsey usually teaches. Senseis Devine and Dorsey have both been to Okinawa (including a recent trip in November) to train with the grandmaster and it will be up to them to carry on his teachings.

1. <http://www.oikka.com/>

6.3.4 Can't trust that day (2006-03-13 16:13)

This Monday was actually worse than most Mondays. It started with a promotion announcement in my inbox concerning an old work enemy. But that isn't so unusual. I've seen a lot of the people I've crossed swords with in the past get rewarded (and only a couple of them get punished). Of course I'm bitter, but I busted my ass to deliver two products and I got treated like a used kleenex. Maintaining your personal integrity and vision may be psychologically rewarding, but they're not worth squat when it comes to your

paycheck.

Then, the big boss popped in (it wasn't even 8:00 AM) to grab me about a very serious problem that had erupted Sunday evening. He was already fit to be tied. I ended up in several phone conferences on the topic. By lunch time I was already tired, as if I had worked a full day already. At least the afternoon was quieter and things were almost normal by 3:00 PM.

6.3.5 Me fall down, go boom (2006-03-18 20:18)

After work on Thursday I left a little early to head over to World-Wide News to buy some maps for the trip down to my parents' house on Long Island. None of the maps we had were less than 20 years old so it was time to get new ones. On the way back, as I was crossing Division Street on St. Paul, I tripped on some heaved pavement and fell in the middle of the street. I did only a partial roll and hit my hands and left shoulder fairly hard. I was up in a second or two and no one waiting at the bus stop across the street seemed to notice. No major injuries, but I was sore for a couple of days. I ended up missing karate and kendo on Thursday, but I was fine today.

6.3.6 Interesting (2006-03-28 12:44)

You know what I find interesting? Microsoft ads. Why? Because they usually tell you about some new feature that will save you from some old feature in their own software. In other words, they're competing with themselves. And they've been doing it for years. Part of it is their inability to conceive of anyone actually competing with them and part of it is their never-ending need to keep people buying their software, even when they don't really need to. All of their software is bloated, some, like Office, incredibly so. They called the open source Office alternative, [1]Open Office, primitive. But is it? It does have fewer features, but it's got all of the ones you actually need and use every day. Unlike the suite from the WordPerfect folks, it's not trying to compete feature-by-feature with Office. And that means Microsoft doesn't know how to compete with it. But they have acknowledged its existence, which as in the case of Linux, is a very good indication they're worried.

1. <http://www.openoffice.org/>

6.4 April

6.4.1 Brain dump (2006-04-01 18:19)

Music: When the Music's Over-The Doors-The Best of the Doors (disc 1)

Last night I received my Advanced Brown Belt, I'm now one step away from Black Belt. It's taken me longer than it should but I'm glad to have gotten this far. I really need to also consider testing for my Ikkyu in Kendo. That I might do in the Fall in Toronto. I can't keep putting that off, I'm afraid.

It's amazing how far I've come physically in the years following the 2000 accident. Of course there's an expectation that coming close to being killed is going to have some sort of effect, but there's no guarantee that the changes will all be positive. I've been lucky in a number of ways, I guess.

Work is getting "interesting". We're trying to start up a process improvement project and the big boss wants me to take the lead. He's also mentioned, but not guaranteed, a promotion (my first in 8 years) if I can pull this off. Of course, he's retiring and possibly won't be here when we wrap things up, so it may

not quite work out. It requires that I do some Six Sigma training, which I had hoped to avoid, but The Big Company is obsessed with it, regardless of the applicability. I guess I'm stuck.

Looks like my home music studio needs some repairs, my old Stromberg-Carlson amp is not doing well. I guess I can practice my tube amp repair skills on it. It will give me the opportunity to overhaul my rack as well, so perhaps it will all work out. It's a lot of work for someone who doesn't play as much as he should, but that could easily change. I've been thinking about hauling myself to the local jazz jam, one of the guys I take group lesson with says they could use a rhythm guitarist, and that would be me. We'll see.

6.4.2 Happy Easter! (2006-04-16 10:27)

It's Easter Sunday and that means candy, phone calls home and bunnies. In our house, Hoover stands in for the Easter Bunny, but he doesn't bring us any eggs. He *does* snuggle with you, though, and that's even better.

6.4.3 Vacation report (2006-04-24 12:32)

We went down to Long Island to visit my parents last week. It was the first time since they'd moved from the Poconos. It's a nice apartment with almost as much room as they had in the house, but all on one level and no maintenance. My dad still looks good, and not just for his age, but the accident he had back in 2000 has had lasting effects on his strength and balance. Not having so much to take care of will go a long way to making them happier.

They live far out on the island, much farther than we lived before. It was a long drive on the Long Island Expressway but made somewhat easier by the use of the HOV lanes. I can honestly say I'd never been that far out before, unless there was a trip in my dimly-remembered childhood I've since forgotten. But it was still Long Island. Bad traffic, bad drivers, unhelpful sales people, it's everything I remember. I don't regret leaving and I never will.

We also spent some time in Manhattan visiting my sister-in-law. We went to the Tenement Museum on Friday. It's not far from her place in the Lower East Side. My family comes from Brooklyn but lived in similar places in the early days. The small size of the rooms and the overwhelming sense of darkness are so different from the places we live in today. You can see why some of the public health laws were enacted in the 1890's and early 1900's. I can only imagine how bad they must have been in the summer heat.

Friday evening after dinner we stopped into the [1]Strand bookstore and stocked up on used books. I wish Rochester had such a place but I can understand why it doesn't. They claim to have "18 miles of books" and you can rest assured it's not hyperbole. Recommend for bibliophiles.

Saturday we visited the [2]Flux Box in Long Island City (Queens) and the FDNY's museum on the West Side. The Flux Box is a sort of interactive music-making machine that you can climb in and around. It's part of the Flux Factory artist coop. The FDNY museum is what you'd expect, of course. Most of the exhibits are from the early years, but there is a touching 9/11 memorial that you shouldn't miss. Nothing brings home the reality like seeing the very equipment they were using on the day they died. Not a dry eye to be seen, mine included.

I took a copious number of photos but I haven't uploaded them yet. Expect that to happen this coming weekend.

1. <http://www.strandbooks.com/home/>
2. <http://www.fluxfactory.org/projects/fluxbox/>

6.5 May

6.5.1 New Look! (2006-05-01 08:53)

One of the advantages of using a CSS-based site design is that changing the look is fairly simple. The Nautica template I'm using has been modified to be a "liquid" layout, meaning that the columns and other elements scale nicely to the view port size. This is something that table-based layouts are incapable of doing but something you can do with CSS fairly easily. The logo banner is from a photograph I took of a building at the Iola campus, run through a Photoshop filter. Things are still a bit in flux, I haven't decided if I want to keep the copyright or go with an alternative license like I had before. This site is hardly something people visit frequently, but I like to share and share alike when I can. We'll have to see.

I've got some more things I want to do with the site, building on the framework I've already got, but I'm not sure how to do it as of yet. The problem is doing what I want without access to a templated content management system, since frontiernet.net doesn't support such things. A long time ago I had an XML thing I was developing for book reviews (like anyone cares what I think about books, but I digress) that would have used XSL to render to HTML files for upload to the server. I might revive that, I don't know. A SQL database seems like overkill for this sort of fairly static content and the idea of using XML files appeals to me for the simplicity. If anyone has a suggestion for something (must run on OS X) along these lines, I'm open.

6.5.2 Other priorities (2006-05-05 13:31)

Yesterday, as I was photographing the South Avenue garage being I was accosted by a guy that had come from someplace on Stone Street. I thought that he was going to tell me about a better vantage point to shoot the construction equipment but he really wanted me to come over and take pictures of a hawk eating a pigeon. I told him thanks, but I wasn't interested and continued with what I was doing. He mumbled something and disappeared into the library. I guess he was disappointed that I didn't share his enthusiasm.

6.5.3 Speed Graphic (2006-05-10 20:34)

I was given a cash bonus at work for the trip I made to Brazil last year. Flush with excitement and cash I bought myself a Miniature Speed Graphic film camera. It's one of the old-fashioned press cameras that you used to see everywhere. They were built by the Graflex company, in Rochester, up until the 1970s (I actually worked in their last building, back in the early 90s). Photographers had long since abandoned large cameras for 35mm SLRs from Nikon and others, so the end of Graflex wasn't particularly noticed. But the cameras were built like tanks and extremely versatile and many of them are still available. I chose a Miniature, since it's a 21/4x31/4 (6x9) and can easily use 120 roll film rather than sheet film. The 6x9 format gives 8 exposures on a 120 roll (6x6 gives 12). I'll have to scan the negatives or slides, naturally, but that's fine. This isn't something that lends itself to spontaneity, after all. Although Speed Graphics were the "point and shoot" camera for pros, they also do fine on a tripod. Once I figure out how it all works, I'll be trying it out. Look on my Flickr account in a couple of weeks.

6.5.4 Memorial Day, 2006 (2006-05-29 17:14)

While our government wages war on our freedoms in the name of "fighting terrorism", it's good to remember those who fought and died for those freedoms. May their sacrifices not be in vain.

6.6 June

6.6.1 My possessions are causing me suspicion... (2006-06-23 19:50)

This hasn't been the best week of my life, but certainly not the worst. Anyway, my Palm Zire 72 has been acting flakey lately. In particular, it's been slow to start up when you hit the power button and the USB port kept getting messed up to the point where a reset was necessary. Then yesterday it locked up on startup with a flashing screen. I was able to get it going again by doing a hard reset with data delete. It's the court of last resort method but it worked. In fact, it started working faster and even hotsync was better. Then, this morning, it died completely. It won't start up at all now and won't even blink. I guess it's time to consider a smart phone since I also need to replace my cell phone. But I don't want to spend the money, so it won't be anytime soon.

I was able to transfer a bunch of phone numbers using an open source program, BitPIM. It's a little rough around the edges, but it gets the job done. I was also able to transfer calendar items, so I have more than just printed sheets to rely on. I'm clearly dependent on the Palm, and the phone isn't quite the same. I like the Palm Treo 700p but it's not cheap. The new Motorola Q is attractive, but it's not really compatible with iSync on the Mac (there is beta software but no guarantees). So I'll hang on with paper and phone. It's good enough, if not ideal.

6.6.2 Thanks (2006-06-25 16:08)

I would like to thank those people who smashed the mirror on my car for no reason other than it was there. You've confirmed my belief that people are assholes.

6.6.3 A week of training (2006-06-30 18:12)

I've just spent the week in a Six Sigma training class. If you didn't already know, Six Sigma is the newest corporate buzzword. It's going to be on everyone's resume sooner than later. But in the meantime, it's a must-have for those, like me, who need to survive the corporate minefield of layoffs and outsourcing. Six Sigma is a process improvement technique intended to make businesses more efficient and their products higher in quality. It's really a lot of old quality and process improvement tools in new clothes, but that doesn't matter. What matters is that I'm now 2/3rds of the way to "Green Belt", all I need is to be certified on my current project by my "Black Belt".

Now it's time for a four-day weekend.

6.7 July

6.7.1 More words about buildings and food (2006-07-20 14:21)

I recently paid for another year of LiveJournal though I hardly use it anymore. I gave it a lot of thought, though. There are some things I would *like* to do with it, but I manage to never find the time to do so. Part

of the reason is I'm actively using my private, hand-written journal. Not everything worth writing about should be shared with the world (or potentially shared, given that no one reads this, but nonetheless the possibility is there). I don't have to use pseudonyms for my company or my co-workers. I used to think that this was a good place to pontificate on certain issues of the day but I've always avoided truly controversial topics and I've always held back my truest feelings, both because I dislike controversy and direct conflict. Given all that, there's not much I can write about.

But anyway. I've been sort of promised a promotion (my first) here at The Big Company if I complete some training and complete a special project for my workgroup. This promise came from my boss' boss, who is retiring at the end of August. There's no way the project and training will be complete by then. Thus, I don't know if the promise has any validity or whether the new big boss will honor it. There is certainly no incentive for them to do so. The Big Company is big on diversity and white, middle-aged males of European descent are not the kind of people they're looking to promote. Each manager with people under them gets a score based on how diverse their workers are. Promoting me (in addition to just having me) will decrease their score significantly. Yes, I'm bitter, but only a little. There's nothing I can do to change things and it's not like I'm the only person looking to get promoted here. The Big Company is dying, albeit slowly, the only question is how quickly. We're all fighting, like the company itself, for a piece of shrinking market. The competition gets tougher and the rewards smaller. It's a game you can win and still lose at the same time. Nothing else to do but keep up appearances.

This weekend I'm attending [1]Super Summer Seminars, a martial arts camp held each year at Colgate University. I'm scared witless. I've not been able to attend this before, so this is my first time. I'm painfully aware of how poor I am at Karate and Kendo, how hard I have to work just to barely keep up. It's the same for anything involving physical skill. Not a barrier but it does make the learning curve that much steeper. I envy those I see who seem to pick this stuff up instantly. I have to try over and over to achieve the same thing. What I have instead, I guess, is a willingness to persevere. I'd trade it in a New York Minute for the ability to learn faster, but that's not going to happen. I'm planning on sticking with the basics courses they offer so I can reinforce the skills I need and not feel overwhelmed.

Theoretically, I could earn my Black Belt this year. I am 2/3rds the way to being a candidate (as of Tuesday). But it all depends on how many others are ready (they average about 2 graduating classes a year) and when. I'll have a better chance if there's only a few since that will push the graduation out to the end of the year. That will give me more time to learn and perfect the skills I need. Otherwise, 2007 is a sure bet. I would love to have it before I'm 50 but it may not work out that way.

In other news that matters only to me, my Palm Zire 72 PDA died, leaving me without my calendar, reminders, e-book reader and (most importantly) camera. I'm really lost at the moment and it's getting to me. I've got a Day Runner paper journal, so at least I have something. I'm using Google Calendar's SMS feature to send notifications to my cell phone in place of the Palm's alarms. It's kludgy, but it works. I would love to get a Treo 700p, as it would leverage my investment in Palm software, but it's not cheap and there are things I would rather buy (like a flash unit - Sunpak 555 from eBay). My wife insists that I have the money, and perhaps I do, but I think I've engaged in enough self-indulgence with the flash. Time to take it like a man and do without. I need the money to replace the Bulgemobile. It's got > 120K miles on it and is 10 years old. I want something smaller and fuel-efficient but I don't want to spend a hunk of dough to do it. That means nothing above \$20K, and preferably well below. We'll see. The real decision point will be in December when inspection is due. If I can get by with minimal cost, I'll hold out another year. Time will tell.

That's it. Nothing left to say.

6.7.2 Wherein I Select A Whine (2006-07-24 13:25)

I'm tired. Not just in the physical sense, but in a more spiritual one. The camp was excellent, but the Colgate campus is literally on a hillside. We were constantly up and down multiple flights all weekend. Consequently my calf muscles are fairly beat. My left calf started hurting on Saturday. This isn't all that surprising given the injury. All the classes I took were good, with some better than others, of course. There was also a nice demonstration Saturday evening. I've got pictures I need to upload of some of the demos. It rained all day Saturday with some real downpours. We ended up wearing garbage bag ponchos to go from building to building.

I was surprised and somewhat dismayed by the number of people in the classes who, despite wearing black belts, were very overweight and out of shape. You get out only what you put into the Martial Arts, so I wonder about people like that. My limitations are rooted in my lack of physical agility but I can still overcome them with determination. I would hate to have anything else acting as a barrier to my achievement, but that's me.

But otherwise, I'm exhausted. It's nothing in particular, it's everything. Work isn't bad but I'm doing things I don't like or believe in order to get promoted and that doesn't help. The longer I spend doing things I don't love the less time is left for doing the things that I do. Obviously, knowing what I want to really do would go a long way to allowing me to make the changes I need. But I don't know. I'm 49 years old and I don't know. So this is my life until I do.

6.8 August

6.8.1 Free layoffs! (2006-08-07 16:15)

Tidbit: The Big Company received a bunch of money from the federal government after they discovered they'd overpaid some taxes along the way (yes, sometimes the IRD loses). As part of their filing with the SEC it was revealed that they intend to use the cash to fund massive layoffs worldwide.

There's no denying that we have too many employees for the level of business we're doing so this shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone. But my workgroup, which does exports, is part of the corporate tax department. I feel responsible, somehow.

But it brings up an interesting question. The Big Company is hardly unique in its exit of the manufacturing sector. They intend to live off software sales and service, leaving the actual building to someone else. Except our software has never sold well and we're new and unproven in the services arena. And we're outsourcing the software development as much as we can. Although I believe that market pressures force the price of software down to zero in the long run, it can still be immensely profitable short term (ask Microsoft). That's if you can sell it. So we'll see what happens to those who remain (which may or may not include me).

It's sad to watch The Big Company slowly die. Only some of it is its own fault, however. The market it's in is shrinking and the competition is fighting for a bigger piece of a smaller pie. I imagine it's like a water hole in the dry season. The predators fight for food and fight each other as the water recedes. Eventually there's a winner, but the winner ends up with nothing. Granted, in this case it's going to be

years before the market is too small to support anyone, but there's no denying that day will come. I doubt The Big Company will be that last remaining predator, having long since died of starvation.

I'd love a new job somewhere else, but it's unlikely I'll find one here in Rochester, or NY state for that matter.

6.8.2 More 9/11 tapes (2006-08-16 16:13)

Today the city of New York released over 1600 emergency phone calls today from the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center. This included a number of calls from cell phones belonging to fire officers. *The New York Times* and some of the families of firefighters lost in the attacks had sued the city to release them in the hopes of better understanding what happened inside the towers and what people on the scene were being told.

The word for what was happening in the towers: chaos. There's no better way to describe it. The incident was on a scale so far removed from what emergency responders usually deal with that all the normal mechanisms were useless. Most fire departments and other emergency responders use what is called the Incident Command System. It was developed out West to deal with large wildland fires that incorporated large numbers of personnel. It's based on the idea of a limited span of control and works remarkably well in most cases. But the WTC scene was not "most cases" and was inadequate for the task. But I'm not sure what would have been.

One important issue was made apparent by what emergency dispatchers were telling people who called 911. They told them basically to hang on and wait for rescue. Neither they, nor anyone else at the time, knew exactly what had happened and the extent of the building damage. I doubt that anything they could have said would have made much difference, it seems they did their best to prevent panic.

If nothing else, we know that emergency management in massive disaster scenes such as this requires tools and techniques that normal building fires do not. The Incident Command System is being built upon to handle disasters that involve entire cities or even states. But no system will work if the commanders don't have the information they need to make the right decisions. That information includes things like the building/street layouts, construction details, extent of involvement, and locations of civilians and responders. While some of this is available now, most of it is not. We do our best to keep track of who is in a fire building, but too much of what we depend on is generated manually and can be overlooked in a crisis. We can do better, but it's going to take time and money. I'm not sure we have either.

6.8.3 My Girls (2006-08-28 13:06)

I don't do this often but I'd like to say how proud I am of my daughters. Today's Rochester Democrat and Chronicle has [1]this article on its front page on teen drinking and they're featured prominently in it. There was supposed to be a picture included but they didn't print it.



Instead, here is is: [2]

1. <http://www.rochesterdandc.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060828/NEWS01/608280335>
2. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tommasz/226526423/>

6.9 September

6.9.1 Almost famous (2006-09-03 18:25)

I received a surprising email (via Flickr) the other day. An employee of the Rochester city parking division was looking to use my [1]photos of the collapse of the South Avenue parking garage. Now that the garage has been reopened, they're in the process of documenting the collapse story. The plan is to link my photo set to their site, so it's not like I've sold anything, but it will have my name on it.

On an unrelated note, Mary Ann and I are celebrating our 23rd anniversary today. September 3rd in 1983 was sunny and one of the hottest days of the summer. In contrast, today is cloudy and 64 degrees.

1. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tommasz/sets/72057594126587933/>

6.9.2 Five Years On (2006-09-10 11:23)

Monday, September 11, 2006 will mark five years since the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. It's unlikely you haven't been reminded of this numerous times on television, radio, newspapers and the net. Of course, not all of us need to be reminded. Certainly not those who survived the attacks. Not those who lost a family member or loved one. Not me.

There will be only one post to my weblog tomorrow, pointing here. I'll let others more eloquent than I do the talking.

But there is one thing I'd like to say. On CBS's *Sunday Morning* today, which focused solely on 9/11, there was a segment on some American Muslims. Their reaction to sentiments following the attacks was one of "what have we done?" The answer, which was not offered in the segment, wasn't what they had done, but what they *had not done*: protest loudly and strongly against the actions of the terrorists. Non-Muslim Americans look at their silence as consent, as support for the actions. As pointed out in the segment, there

have been Christian terrorists like Timothy McVeigh. But there was instant and universal condemnation from all sides. It is clear that a Timothy McVeigh held non-mainstream views, where is that apparent within the Islamic world?

6.9.3 Drive-by spelling (2006-09-18 13:56)

This afternoon as I was walking along East Avenue, I was stopped by a woman who needed some spelling help. No, really. She was applying for a job and said she didn't spell well. I'm guessing it was in health-care, since she asked about words like *disinfected* and *prepared*. She had a list of words and quickly wrote down the ones she asked me about. I can only wonder if she'll get the job.

6.9.4 Flotsam and jetsam (2006-09-26 14:28)

I'm tired. Not just "not enough sleep" tired, but major league tired. I need to make some changes and soon.

I've discovered that simply filling your life with activities doesn't do much for you in the long run. Let's break it down. I have three weblogs, one daily, one weekly (a comic) and one occasional. Add to that this site and the journal. I have thousands of photos on Flickr. I shoot photos at my daughter's rowing regattas. I study jazz guitar. I study karate. I study kendo. I write (though I don't publish much). I'm a volunteer firefighter. I'm on the board of directors for the fire department. It's too much and it's not worth it anymore.

Once I've decided what I need to jettison, I'll post here.

6.10 October

6.10.1 Fraud (2006-10-03 12:44)

It's hard for me to not feel like a fraud sometimes, particularly as a parent. This past Saturday, Mary Ann and I went down to Honeoye Falls for the Custom Brewcrafters Autumn Festival of Ales. We've been going for the past couple of years and it's usually a good time. This year was a little chilly, unfortunately. Anyway, this gave us the opportunity to talk without worrying about the kids listening. Conversation eventually got around to intelligence, particularly my own. I've come to the unfortunate conclusion that intelligence has little or no real value. It doesn't make you happy, it doesn't make you successful, and it seems more like a barrier to both of those rather than a help. But yet I, as a parent, have to tell my children that it does all these things and more. That studying hard and getting good grades is important. My only hope is that when they realize the truth, they won't hate me. Perhaps they'll find themselves in the same predicament and they'll understand. Perhaps.

6.10.2 Simplification (2006-10-04 13:07)

I said I'd keep you updated on what I've done to deal with the complexity, so here we go. First, I'm not going to be the fire department secretary next year. While that wasn't the biggest piece, it's been getting less enjoyable and looks to continue in that direction. Time to quit while I'm still sane. Second, I've taken a sabbatical from the guitar. I realized the other day that after my lesson two weeks prior I hadn't actually touched the guitar. It was still in the exact same place it was, undisturbed. I've done this in the past, and I obviously came back to it. This time, I'm saying I will go back but I'm not as sure that I will. I always feel guilty about this, I've known my teacher a long time (12 years) and this is his livelihood, but he understood.

The truth is I am at the limit of my limited talent. I really haven't improved at all in years. There's nothing wrong with accepting your limitations and that's what I'm doing. There's no question I'm a better player than I was 12 years ago, but I'm never going to be the player I would like to be.

Not sure what else I should drop at this point.

6.10.3 Red vs. Blue (2006-10-06 15:53)

The US likes to think it has a two-party system, but the reality is somewhat more like a 1.5-party system (I'm conveniently ignoring parties like the Conservative since they seldom do anything but endorse someone else's candidate). There are fewer differences between the Republicans and the Democrats than they'd like you to believe. Both have the whole hypocrisy thing down fairly well. They're both in thrall to special interest groups who provide most of their funding. They raise taxes but claim to do the opposite (see hypocrisy). The GOP does this by transferring the tax burden from the rich to the middleclass, but in the end it's still the same. The one area where there seems to be some real difference is how they interact amongst themselves.

This is very apparent watching the Mark Foley affair play itself out. First of all, you have to realize how unlikely Mark Foley is as a Republican. As a gay man, he represents the enemy as far as many social conservatives are concerned, even if he wasn't playing online games with teen boys. But he was a Republican, and the GOP swallowed its collective bile and proclaimed solidarity. Both Speaker Hastert and Dubya are still supporting him, even if there are some in the party who seem to be dissenting. It's a tough row to hoe, but they're all sticking together. Eventually, though, the entire party will unite in opposition.

Contrast this with the Democrats. As a party of acceptance, of willingness to embrace disparate viewpoints, they're almost always at odds with themselves. Democratic primary races are frequently ugly little affairs. Just look at Joe Lieberman. They couldn't agree it was the end of the world if God himself was standing in front of them. If you ever wonder why the Democrats never seem to be able to take advantage of GOP mistakes, this is why. When you believe in everything, you really believe in nothing. More importantly, it makes it impossible to explain your position in a simple, straightforward way. Until they change this, the Republicans will continue to dominate the Congress and the Presidency. And we'll all be the worse for it.

6.10.4 OS X Tiger (2006-10-09 20:01)

I sort of mentioned this over on the weblog, but I upgraded my G4 to 10.4.8 (Tiger). I did it primarily to take advantage of a number of applications that won't run on 10.3, especially Adobe's Lightroom beta. I was going to wait until I upgraded to a faster processor, but I decided to go for it.

My impressions: meh. It's not bad, of course. But none of the 10.4 features seems to be worth it to me. Spotlight is just annoying, getting in the way of my use of Quicksilver. Dashboard seems okay, at least until you realize you have to hit a key to see the widgets. I went back to Konfabulator since I like to see the temperature without having to do anything. I haven't really noticed anything else other than heightened security around downloads. I guess Automator is supposed to be good, but I haven't run into a need for it. But Lightroom is good, and I guess I'm going to have to figure out how to pay for it when it goes to a real release.

6.10.5 Question of the day (so far) (2006-10-10 11:06)

I was writing in my private journal and I ended up asking myself this question:

So I know what I *don't* want to be when I grow up, what about what I *do* want to be?

I'm in a odd place right now, work-wise. I'm doing well but I'm at the midpoint for my labor grade. I made more in a single bonus last year than I did in salary increase (and bonuses don't repeat). I could get promoted, but I'm not the type of person they want to hire, let alone promote. I'm a techie, but I'm in a business organization. I'd be better off with an MBA, not the MS I have. The company doesn't care much about people like me on the assumption that we'll do okay without help. And we do. Mostly. Just not by staying here.

Which brings up another dilemma. I'm not hireable. No, really. I've been here almost 10 years now. My MS was back in 1994. I haven't programmed professionally since 1998. I haven't managed a programmer team since 1999. I've mostly bounced around here like "a ping pong ball in a clothes dryer", neither failing or succeeding in a noticeable way. I'm in a business group since no one in research or engineering wants anything to do with me. Why yes, my self confidence is nonexistent. Thanks for asking.

I'd quit and go do something (really anything) else, but my family depends on me and I'm not in a position anymore to optimize for myself alone. Yeah, yeah, sucks to be me and all. But it's the life I chose, and I'm not abandoning my responsibilities just because I hate my job. And it's not like I know what I'd do, anyway. I've been trying to decide that for *years*, and I haven't managed to do it. I don't hold out hope for some sudden realization.

I think the real root of this is in my basic makeup. I've always looked for something better. The grass has always been greener, you know. But perhaps I've come to point in my life when things no longer can be better. I'm approaching 50, it's likely I'm on the downward slope, the part of the curve that describes diminishing returns. It's time to expect less, and get it. It's time to give up.

6.10.6 Woe is mouth (2006-10-11 12:36)

I was flossing my teeth this morning when one of my crowns popped off and landed on the floor. Not good, but this has happened before. After all, they're just glued on. But when I went to the dentist today it turns out that the tooth had cracked! When the crown came off it took part of the tooth with it. It's down to the gumline, unfortunately. I have to go back tomorrow for 1) a root canal, 2) a post and 3) the crown. My dentist is coming in on his day off to deal with this. Great guy and a great dentist.

6.10.7 A secret revealed (2006-10-16 11:19)

I'm going to let you in on a little secret of mine. Not that it matters, mind you, but now you can feel smug knowing something about me. Anyway, here it is: I've always wanted to be better than anyone else at *something*. The problem is, of course, I'm not. Not all that surprising, really, since there are few of those kind of people by definition. But it would be nice.

I'm involved with so many things, you'd think that at least one of them would prove to be my specialty. But no, that's not the case. And, thanks to the Net, it's now possible to come into contact with *thousands* of people who are better than you are at something. At least in the past you could convince yourself that you were the greatest among all the people you knew. Now you can't live in that little bubble of ignorance anymore. Not that I was the best among my acquaintances, but there was at least potential. Now, there's nothing but reality. Which stinks, thank you very little.

6.10.8 The end (2006-10-17 09:52)

This is the end
Beautiful friend
This is the end
My only friend, the end

I've decided to end posting to my weblog. I've taken breaks over the years but I made the mistake of announcing them and that made people artificially comment and it all made it seem like some whiny attention-getting stunt. So this time I decided to announce it here, where no one ever reads anything. In a month or so, I'll probably post a "where you can find me now" which will point people to the places I can be found actively updating.

Six years is forever in Internet time. I went from a "hey, isn't this cool?" approach to simply spewing out links to newspaper articles about things that pissed me off. No one really cares what I think but the fun is definitely gone for me. I think my readers can read the news sites on their own, they don't need me to point things out to them.

imaclanni (2006-10-17 23:00:54)

aw man! i love reading your weblog. alright, if you're not going to post anymore, how 'bout you email your favoritest links or leave a comment on my weblog? and at least start up a photoblog of your best photos, plus your comics! that would be sweet.

tommasz1 (2006-10-18 13:04:02)

I plan on posting something in November or so. I *think* I'm going to continue the Insider Box comics, but I'm not sure. My Flickr stuff will *probably* continue as well. All of this was turning into work, something I had to do, versus something fun that I wanted to do. PS No one reads this, so I'm surprised to see your comment.

6.10.9 File under miscellaneous (2006-10-20 12:10)

I'm old enough to remember when you didn't have to prove you're not a drug dealer to purchase decongestants in the pharmacy.

Rochester is one of the gloomiest cities, weather-wise, I've ever experienced. Even England has sunny days.

None of those I'd call my contemporaries (people I grew up with, went to school with, etc.) seem to have any online presence. Am I that unusual?

Having a sinus headache (see above) for five days straight doesn't do much for your morale.

Seeing an post card addressed to my daughter selling high school rings reminded me that I lost mine swimming in Mendon Ponds in 1976. Now Mendon Ponds is too contaminated to allow swimming and I wonder if anyone ever found my ring.

Two (of many) things parents tell children that aren't true: being tall is cool, being smart is key to success.

When I look at headlines from the entertainment media I seldom have any idea who they're talking about.

I'm staring geezerhood right in the face.

(2006-10-21 02:56:10) sinus headache

I ran across your post doing cold research - I recognize how lame that sounds. Your post implies that you are familiar with the new and dubious restrictions for purchasing compounds containing the decongestant Pseudoephedrine HCL. I don't know if you've tried any of the new over the counter cold/sinus relief formulations containing Phenyl Ephrine; if you did, you probably noticed they don't work. I found this out last week when I had a bad head cold and kept taking Dayquil to no effect. I created a blog to let everyone know about it. I'm also thinking of starting a letter writing campaign. I really need my Dayquil! Anyway, if you want more info or if you know anyone else with a cold, visit <http://my-aching-head.blogspot.com/>.

6.10.10 Obsession: Trivial (2006-10-24 16:16)

Have you noticed how obsessed with the trivial the Mainstream Media (MSM) has become? Where once upon a time you had to pick up one of the supermarket tabloids to find out which celebrity was getting divorced, now you can just check out CNN or the CBS Evening News. Karl Marx called religion the "opiate of the masses" but he died long before television so he should be excused for being slightly off. All you have to do is watch Jay Leno some evening when he goes out on the streets of LA to ask people questions about current events to see how this has resulted in a nation of idiots. The average person probably hears more about Anna Nicole's "baby daddy" than how many lives have been lost in Iraq today. Is there any wonder as to why people have so little awareness of the world around them?

Back in the pre-Internet era, news was fairly limited in amount. Most people read a newspaper, which was fairly deep but covered events that occurred the previous day. Radio (and eventually television) was more up to date but significantly shallower. This artificial drought may have skewed things a little. For all I know audiences in the 1950s might have devoured hours of coverage of Tom Cruise's baby instead of Edward R. Murrow. But somehow, I doubt it.

Just look at the Mark Foley incident. Here was a congress member engaging in sex chat with teenaged boys. It was big news, for a couple of days. Now it's fallen below the horizon. Although Foley resigned, I wouldn't be surprised if he could have won re-election given enough time. There's some Congressional "Investigation" going on now, but Congress doesn't like to get too enthusiastic investigating itself lest they expose anything embarrassing. The media is helping by diverting attention to other important topics, like whether or not Hillary Clinton's Senatorial opponent said she was ugly.

The irony of it all is that there's so much more news than there used to be. There are very few places in the world that are so isolated that they can't be reported from. But maybe that's the problem. Given the flood of news (much of it disturbing) that people face, is it surprising they turn to the trivial? How many global warming stories can you read before a giggling Katie Couric seems preferable?

I'm not advocating a return to the 1950s, news-wise. Ignorance is ignorance, whether it's willful or not. But we owe it to ourselves and our children to make sure we know the things we really need to know and to give the trivial the few seconds of attention it so richly deserves.

6.10.11 I'm under control again (2006-10-25 16:07)

The final piece in my personal time management system has been restored. One of the things I lost when my Zire died was Shadow Plan from [1]Code Jedi. It's reasonably priced and has a Palm client as well as Windows *and* Mac desktop clients. Having to use Windows at work means I need cross-platform solutions and there aren't many out there in this category. When I switched over to the Treo, I also changed my Hotsync ID and the old registration was now invalid. I emailed them a couple of times but got no answers. I managed to figure out what do, finally, on my own. Their site offers a password update tool that you can use when you need a new one. Once I did that and did a hotsync, I was back in business (still wish they had contacted me back, though).

I looked at a program called Life Balance from [2]Llamagraphics. It was cross-platform like Shadow and uses a similar outline format as its basic data format. But Life Balance requires a significant change to my workflow and I was just not getting it. I think that if you were coming in fresh, the Life Balance approach is probably better than Shadow's but if you're used to one, the other represents a significant learning curve. I ultimately decided I wasn't going to use Life Balance even if I couldn't get Shadow working. If you haven't started using a program like this, it's definitely worth looking at and there's a 30-day trial if you're interested.

Shadow's basic paradigm is the outline (as mentioned above). I love outliners and have been using them for years so this is a big plus for me. You can make lists, checklists, task lists, etc. Each list item can then be linked into the Palm's Tasks or Calendar, if you choose. Since I sync these with desktop applications separate from Shadow, I use this a lot. Shadow can replace them, obviously, and if you're not tied into Outlook or iCal, it might be better if you do. Linked items update back and forth, so you don't have to worry about them getting out of sync. Shadow has a number of additional features, including alarms and tags, that I'm still learning about. But even without them, it's a great personal management tool.

I use Shadow as my main "to-do" collector and task outliner. The outline format makes it easy to show task precedence and hierarchy. It's sort of like using MS Project without the Gantt chart, if you're familiar with that. Each item can be pretty much anything you want. You can set Start, Due and Finish dates, priority, and % complete if it's a task. Each item can have a color (other than black) and its own custom icon. The list view allows filtering if you want to hide certain items (not yet due, complete, etc.). Lists of tasks reflect the completion status of their constituent tasks with a little bar that allows you to quickly see how close to completion it is.

But Shadow's lists can be just text and it functions as a standard outliner that you can use for just about anything. Shadow uses XML for its file format so you can use other tools to access the information, should you need or want to. I've been considering writing a Yahoo! Widget to parse the files and display unfinished tasks, for instance. That was one thing that I was glad of, I knew that I could access all my info even if I couldn't get a registration out of Code Jedi. Having open formats is critical to making sure your data remains available and *yours*.

Now that I'm back to quasi-normal, I can start doing some of the other things I've been putting off. The Insider Box comics are back as of today. I was going to make a "How I Make This Comic" page but that turned out to be more work that I cared to deal with right now, so I just gave up. I still hope to do that, but with no timetable. As for the weblog, that will remain as it is. I've been thinking about getting hosting services so I can run a WordPress installation, so I'm going to sign up with the service [3]Lanni uses. I'm still trying to figure out what's going where so the DNS gets sorted out correctly. I have the [4]maszerowski.net domain, and I'm not sure what that will eventually point to. All I know for sure is that I would like the WordPress blog to be something like blog.maszerowski.net. The new blog will primarily be a photoblog and probably less "linky" and more "journaly" than My Likes and Dislikes was. But I'm still thinking about that.

You can probably expect fewer links but longer entries. I may or may not import the old blog entries. If I do, the old blog will disappear, otherwise there will be a re-direct to the new one. No express timetable for this, so check back to see how things are going.

1. <http://www.codejedi.com/>
2. <http://www.llamagraphics.com/>
3. <http://imaclanni.com/>
4. <http://maszerowski.net/>

imaclanni (2006-10-25 21:28:16)
that last part sounds like an EGGCELLENT idea :)

6.10.12 There's a reason it has "Fish" in the name (2006-10-30 17:27)

We knew it would rain at Saratoga for the Head of the Fish regatta. It did. Even more than back in May. There was standing water in most of the park area 6 to 8 inches deep. Only people with knee-high rubber boots escaped with dry feet. Yet there were kids walking around barefoot or in sandals. Most everyone was cold, of course, since the temperature only briefly climbed out of the 40's.

I did the best I could, photo-wise. I started sitting in a chair but the rain collected in the seat and eventually soaked me to the skin. I was using a plastic bag to cover my camera but that only worked partially once the downpours commenced. I changed socks twice, in the hopes of keeping more comfortable but eventually lost the feeling in my feet anyway. My D60 began to malfunction, most likely in the link to the lens, and I gave up, too cold and tired to continue. I missed two of our races as a result. There was no way I could have done anything about the camera at that point and we were packing up so that was that. It seems to have recovered but I'm a little concerned anyway.

As we began packing the winds that caused havoc up the Eastern seaboard were blowing tents all over. It was clearly time to get out of there. We had gotten up at about 5:30 AM and I was expecting to be still on the road at 10:00 PM so I made sure Mary Ann didn't nap in the car. We made it fine but I was glad I didn't have to go it alone.

I bought a rain cover for the camera today. I didn't think anyone made them but I was searching for the wrong thing and when I replaced "waterproof" with "rain", bingo! I need some rain pants and boots, but I can get them later as there's only one more race, Plug The Plug, this coming Sunday and the conditions won't be anywhere near as bad as Saratoga. My usual spot is dry and near the car, so I should be okay during the long periods between races.

Crew is not a great spectator sport, particularly at Saratoga, but it's important to support the kids as they compete.

6.11 November

6.11.1 Make it stop! (2006-11-01 19:32)

While I don't recommend violence as an answer, go ahead and shoot your television and make it stop spouting political attack ads. According to the ones playing here, *everyone* is going to a) raise taxes b) cut Social Security benefits c) raise the retirement age and d) make your life miserable by making all the things you

buy more expensive. Since everyone is going to do this, why not vote for someone new and get rid of the incumbents? According to the attack ads, it won't matter who wins, we'll all end up paying more. But maybe we'll get something different.

Also, this will make it stop showing F* (I won't name him) Hyundai ads. The man is mentally ill and needs serious help but that's no reason to inflict him on us.

Please aim carefully, you don't want to miss.

6.11.2 My face hurts (2006-11-06 13:36)

I'm almost at my wit's end dealing with whatever is attacking my sinuses. I have to determine if I need to have my GP refer me or if I can just find an ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat) specialist on my own. My health coverage changes every year so there's no good way to predict what's going to be necessary. My left ear is plugged again and the left side of my face hurts.

6.11.3 Wait, there's less, much less! (2006-11-06 16:10)

I enjoy using Flickr for posting my photos, though it does tend to emphasize how narrow my interests are along with my dearth of talent as a photographer. I'm no artist, for sure, and my work tends towards photojournalism moreso than anything else. I don't get a lot of comments, and while it might be construed as their being so incredible that words fail, it's far more likely that no one thinks much of them at all.

I'm active in a couple of Flickr pools (interest groups), among them the pool for Rochester, NY. I was actually the top contributor in that pool for a long time. But recently I decided to quit that pool (along with some others) and deleted all my contributions. I ended up rethinking that decision and rejoined all those I had quit. But this time I probably won't post anything there, just check out the photos and the discussions in a read-only sort of mode. Like my weblog, abandoning the groups has gone by totally unnoticed. I'm not sure if the pool owners get notified of these events or not.

I'm probably going to get the full court press tonight to remain the fire department's recording secretary for another year. But that's not a decision I'm going to reconsider. I can't wait to be free of the responsibility and aggravation (the workload isn't the issue). The trouble is the position is difficult to fill and I might get asked to fill in if no one runs or is willing to be appointed.

So far my policy of doing less (and discovering no one notices) is only moderately successful. I mean that in the sense of how I'm feeling. At this point it's difficult to separate my feelings from the sinus problems so it's probably too soon to say for sure. But one thing is clear, my life doesn't feel empty. That's a pretty clear sign I had overextended myself. Doing less can work for you under the right circumstances.

So fat it's been over a month and I haven't even opened my guitar case. I've been playing my cheapo mandolin mostly, instead. Not that I'll ever be a mandolin player, of course.

6.11.4 Vote! (2006-11-07 15:11)

If you live in the US, vote! Nothing will change and nothing will get better if you do nothing.

6.11.5 Thanks, Western NY! (2006-11-08 07:31)

Thanks for re-electing Tom Reynolds and Randy Kuhl. There was a danger we could have shown some integrity this year but instead we voted for the guy who could have exposed the Mark Foley scandal a year earlier but didn't. And we voted for a drunk-driving wife-beater for *the second time*. No wonder Randy Kuhl has a permanent smirk on his face.

Remember when the jobs are gone that you *could have done something* better but didn't.

6.11.6 Please Stand By (2006-11-08 12:19)

Hey, there's some interesting stuff happening on the Interweb front. Since the retirement of my weblog (I should add *unnoticed* to that) I've been (slowly) working on a new weblog on my own hosting service. No details yet as I've only just gotten the hosting and selected the blogging software but stay tuned here for the URL.

My present plan is to stay with the mix of topics I've been covering in recent years (Mac, open source, Rochester, privacy rights) along with relevant photos but to get away from the "linkblog" approach and get a little more in depth. This will probably mean fewer links per day but more actual content. I might leave the Blog*Spot weblog as is or I may import it. Given that my URL has been posted in comments and other places I might decide to keep it there even if I import it. More details as I get them.

6.11.7 It's live! Also cider! (2006-11-12 19:08)

The new site and weblog are live! Pop over to [1]Maszman Speaks! and check it out! The template I'm using is bound to change but all of the features I want except my blogroll are basically done.

Also, there was a recent newspaper article on a new NY State law that will [2]prohibit the sale of untreated apple cider starting in 2007. Currently, most fresh cider is either pasteurized or treated with chemicals to cut down on the bacteria and natural yeasts that can cause unintended fermentation or even illness. But not all. Of course, this harvest is the last time you'll be able to buy untreated cider so I figured it was a good opportunity to make hard cider again. I've had mixed results with regular cider in past years but this time I did some research and came up with what I hope is a better recipe and went out yesterday for three gallons of fresh, untreated cider. Now it's a waiting game to see if it makes a difference. Of course, the corollary is "what will I do if it does?" since the untreated cider won't be available again.

If you're in the Rochester area, check out [3]The Victor Apple Farm on Rt. 444. Given the rate of sales of farm land for housing, enjoying fresh Western NY apples and cider is going to be something we'll *betelling* our grandchildren about, not something we'll be *sharing* with them.

1. <http://www.tommasz.net/>

2. <http://www.democratandchronicle.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061106/NEWS01/611060323/1002/NEWS>

3. <http://www.theapplefarminvictor.com/>

6.11.8 Unescalator (2006-11-13 15:58)

You know what's really weird? Walking down an escalator that's not moving. Sure, it sounds like a piece of cake but when you are near the ends, the spacing between steps varies. Your brain doesn't deal with uneven steps very well. Once you get into the middle, you're fine but those first and last steps are just so *wrong*.

6.11.9 It only looks easy (2006-11-16 12:42)

There are a lot of things in life where it's not readily apparent what separates the "great ones" from the rest of us. Golf, which I don't play, is one of them. Granted, there are some duffers who swing so poorly you know the ball is headed for the woods, but beyond them it's a lot more difficult to tell the best from the middle of the pack. If you watch pro golf tournaments, you see a lot of folks who golf very, very well. But there are still vast gaps in the scores between the top and the bottom. There may be one or two of them with an unorthodox swing, but for the most part they're all about the same in their techniques.

I was thinking about this the other day when I was trying to decide if I want to keep playing guitar. It's been over a month and a half since I even took my guitars out of the case. Jazz guitar is another one of those things that seem to have subtle differences between the best and the rest. Although my teacher disagreed, there's no overlooking natural talent. Even when I was practicing daily, there was still a point at which I stopped progressing and that point was nowhere near "good". Which isn't good enough.

Jazz in general, and jazz guitar in particular are not pop music. Even in Rochester, home of the Eastman School of Music and it's wonderful jazz program, the number of jazz gigs are limited (but probably better than in some cities of similar size). The one and only jazz guitar gig I ever played was for a local nursing home. It was unpaid. If I was to possibly get a paying gig I'd have to be good. Very good, perhaps incredibly good. There are only a couple of places where I could play and those gigs are taken by the top guitarists in town (my teacher being one of them).

I had set a goal and I failed to reach it. I knew jazz would be difficult but I assumed I could handle it. I was wrong, but at least I tried. It's not like I spent a week and gave up because I wasn't Wes Montgomery by that point. Back in 1994 when I started this, I was also considering learning to fly my own plane. That might have been an easier goal, but would likely have been more expensive in the long run. I did play a lot of music, and some of it was okay, so in a lot of ways I accomplished more this way. My wife is a big advocate of doing something as long as it gives you enjoyment. Playing guitar, unfortunately, no longer does that. Mostly because I realize that it's possible to play better and I just can't.

For what it's worth, I've been playing my mandolin a lot. No goals, no expectations. It seems better that way.

6.11.10 Wife-murdering scumbag "writes" a book (2006-11-20 12:56)

I'm sure you've at least heard a mention that wife-murdering scumbag O.J. Simpson has "written" a book wherein he describes how he "hypothetically" murdered his wife Nicole, which he didn't, of course. To say it's controversial is like saying the Grand Canyon is a hole in the ground. There's even a Fox TV special on it*. You know I won't be reading the book or watching the special. If I was rich, I would buy as many copies of the book as I could and burn them for fuel. And then I would shed a tear for the trees that gave their life so that piece of shit could profit from murdering his wife.

It's all perfectly legal, of course. He's been acquitted of the murders in a court of law. And, quite frankly, he should have been. Not because he was innocent, but because the prosecution was totally inept. Our legal system says everyone is entitled to a trial and to have representation at that trial. Unfortunately, it doesn't mandate competency on either side. That means poor people end up with cheap, unskilled lawyers and the rich get the expensive highly-qualified ones. It also means that sometimes the prosecution, the lawyers who are supposed to represent the interests of "we the people", sometimes aren't the best lawyers in the room. We also have laws that make "double jeopardy", being tried twice for the same crime, illegal, too. Although

he was acquitted in the legal case, he lost big time in the civil case (he was sued by his wife's family). By virtue of it being a civil suit, it avoided the double jeopardy issue.

If you feel as I do, there are really only a few things you can do other than not buy or watch that are legal. You could write a letter to your local Fox affiliate. That won't stop them, but you'll feel like you've done something. You could tell everyone you know how you feel and ask them to do as you're doing. It might convince a couple of people, and that's a good thing. And if you vote, you should carefully examine the people who run for judgeships and district attorney positions (assuming they're elected where you are). We may not be entitled to the best DAs, but that doesn't mean we can't try.

[Update] I see that the both the book and TV show have been cancelled. Good riddance to bad rubbish.

For a network with such a conservative news division, you'd think they would be at the forefront of "clean, wholesome" programming. Yet Fox has some of the most vulgar crap available on broadcast television. I don't think there'll ever be a point at which you can say they can't/won't stoop any lower.

6.11.11 Scumbag won't profit after all (2006-11-21 12:14)

I'll be honest, I was surprised by Fox's cancellation of both the television show and the book. Perhaps I'm cynical, but it seems to me that there's really nothing left that isn't fair game anymore. All you have to do is look at most "serious media" and you know how much attention celebrity "news" gets these days. But I guess there are a few things we still find disgusting. Is there hope for us?

6.11.12 Trip Report (2006-11-27 13:07)

I hope you had a great Thanksgiving, ours was pretty good if not a bit hectic. We had an early dinner at home on Thursday and then drove down to Long Island. The weather was pretty bad and got worse as we got closer to NYC. We checked into the hotel at about 10:30 PM, grabbed some snacks at a 7-11 and watched a little cable TV.

On sunny Friday, as we went to the car to drive to my parents' place, I discovered that the dome light had been left on (probably by me, again) and it wouldn't start. I called my dad and he came over with his jumper cables. One of the clips had come off and we had to hold the bare wire on the battery terminal, but at least it worked. Unfortunately, when the battery is low like that and comes back up to charge, it relocks the doors. This happened when my dad had left the keys in the ignition. So now I had a dead battery *and* my keys were locked in the car. It cost \$55 to get it opened but we got it started and everything went well from there. My folks are in good shape and content where they are, so that's good. They're still slowly divesting themselves of their possessions and we got some photo albums and a few other pieces. We don't need them, but take them anyway.

On Saturday, we went into Long Island City in Queens to spend the day with my wife's sister. She had to move from her place in the Lower East Side of Manhattan when the owner got in trouble over zoning and permits. Her new place is much larger and much nicer. Her commute is a little longer but not that bad since she's right on the East River. The neighborhood is mostly industrial but there's more and more residential every day (as businesses move out, unfortunately). We had dinner at Malagueta, a mostly-Brazilian restaurant a few blocks away from her apartment. It was great and turns out to be [1]very well reviewed

Sunday would turn out to be a very bad day to be on the highway. We had stop and go traffic pretty much from Queens to home, with occasional periods of almost-speed limit driving. It took over seven hours to get back rather than the usual five to six. At least the weather held, I guess.

1. <http://nymag.com/listings/restaurant/malagueta/>

6.11.13 A sense of detachment (2006-11-29 15:06)

When you've spent four weeks with sinus problems, you start viewing the world with a sense of detachment.

Not the emotional kind, but the physical feeling that you're no longer actually part of the world but living somewhere else and watching what's happening in front of you like it's on a video screen. You start noticing the commercials for cold and sinus remedies that tell you they actually work, unlike their competitors that don't. And you realize it's not advertising hyperbole, it's because the competitors have switched to a non-pseudoephedrine formula. As difficult as it is to believe, some over the counter products now contain ingredients that they, and everyone else, know don't work. In effect, they're saying "we know this won't actually make you feel better but it's important that you give us money, so fork it over suckers." They won't admit that, of course. It can't be a winning long term strategy, can it?

As I've mentioned before, you now have to go through a series of checks prior to purchasing the products that *do* work. It's sort of like buying bootleg hooch during Prohibition, but not as much fun. While Prohibition was generally considered a failure, I'm sure that placing pseudoephedrine behind the pharmacy counter will immediately and permanently put an end to the scourge of crystal meth.

6.11.14 At war with technology (2006-11-30 08:48)

For someone with my (supposed) geek cred, I spend a lot of time fighting technology to get things done. For instance, as the secretary of my fire department one of my monthly tasks is to send out the newsletter. I use pre-printed address labels that our part-time office person prints for me. But he's been out on vacation recently. And I don't have the file, or access to it. As a matter of fact, I couldn't access my account at the firehouse, either because my password was changed or I forgot it. I *do* have the admin password, in a memo on my Treo. Except when I went to access the Memos application, it caused the Treo to reboot. So no labels. I had to hand address the envelopes. Luckily, there's only 30-something members who receive the snail mail version (we're trying to get more members receive theirs via email). Oh, and I can't access my voicemail there, either. Another password forgotten? I don't know.

Anyway, the newsletter went out. I fixed the Memos issue this morning. I know can access the admin password so I can go in and fix my regular password. Not sure what to do about the voicemail, though.

6.12 December

6.12.1 And now, time for our sinus update (2006-12-04 10:09)

I have my appointment with the specialist today. It's been a long time without significant relief and I fervently hope this visit is the beginning of my finally getting better. I'll report later today with any findings.

[Update] I have a CT scan scheduled for tomorrow. The PA took a look inside my nose but couldn't find anything obvious so it's necessary to see further inside. They spray a cherry-flavored anesthetic up your

nose prior to examining you. It makes you feel like your nose is running even if it isn't. After the CT scan I have another appointment next Monday to review it and see where we're going from here. I also have a large packet of information on various surgical and non-surgical treatments to review. What happens will depend on the CT scan so there's no obvious next step at this point. Such fun.

6.12.2 This looks like a job for ... (2006-12-09 23:33)

... homebrewed beer! The Christmas beer is in the carboy! It almost made up for the sinus headache.

6.12.3 And now, your sinus update (2006-12-11 14:55)

Since I know you're all at the edge of your virtual seats wondering what happened as a result of the CT Scan, here's what happened. Nothing. That is, nothing unusual was seen in the images, indicating nothing that surgery or antibiotics could deal with. I *did* get prescriptions for some antihistamines and steroids to deal with the constantly running nose. As far as the pain goes, it's likely the culprit is my jaw. I was hit in the face at karate a while back and since then I've had a popping noise coming from my right jaw joint. It likely means TMJ, or [1]temporomandibular joint disorder, and I now have an appointment with my dentist to be treated for that. There are numerous treatments, including physical therapy and appliances you wear at night. The downside is that relief (except for the runny nose) isn't going to be immediate. At least I know nothing serious is wrong.

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temporomandibular_joint_disorder

6.12.4 Only at The Big Company (2006-12-12 08:46)

Here at The Big Company, we do things (not quite) right. This year they gave us MP3 players, with The Big Company name on them, so we could "listen to company podcasts" and other important things. But this was no iPod, or iPod Nano, or even a Shuffle. It's got a whopping 128 Meg (that's a million, folks) bytes of non-upgradeable storage. Hot technology, in 1999. But wait, there's more! Yesterday they sent out a notice that the battery that came with it has an unfortunate tendency to explode and should be immediately replaced.

I'm not replacing mine, however. My MP3 player is still in the mailing package it came in. I don't want to erode its value by opening it. I just hope it doesn't explode while I'm away on vacation.

6.12.5 MTEPFTMOM? (2006-12-12 13:30)

This morning there was yet another IRIF (Involuntary Reduction In Force) here at The Big Company. IRIF is a funny word, since the Involuntary part is on behalf of the workers who lose their jobs. The company doing the firing is doing it entirely of its own volition. But voluntary or not, it's still probably misleading to call it a reduction in force. It's more like "making the employees pay for the mistakes of management" but that doesn't make for a simple acronym (MTEPFTMOM).

One of those "involuntarily" reduced was someone I convinced to become a Big Company employee back in the late 90s when he was a contractor. I even wrote a letter of recommendation for him. Although I shouldn't, I feel like shit for having done so now. He's taking it well, although it may be too soon to tell.

That, plus a couple of other things, has resulted in one craptastic day for me.

6.12.6 Please stay away (2006-12-16 12:14)

The "atypical face pain" continues, albeit at a more tolerable level. I have an appointment with my dentist Monday morning to see what can be done.

In the meantime, my tolerance level has dropped alarmingly. I get angry at the drop of a hat now. I'm unable to put up with things that used to be minor annoyances. I advise you to avoid me whenever possible.

6.12.7 Oh, what a relief it is (2006-12-20 13:54)

Music: Happy Ukulele-Jake Shimabukuro

My dentist pretty much confirmed the TMJ diagnosis and I was fitted for a "device", essentially a sports mouthguard, to wear when I sleep. It prevents me from grinding my teeth. Right now, my mouth feels funny but the pain in my face is pretty much gone. I'll have to be fitted for a more permanent device in a little while but the temporary one is doing fine for now. My jaw still pops but that will go away with time, too, I hope. I'm feeling better all the way around, I've been feeling pretty hopeless these last couple of weeks.

6.12.8 Merry Christmas (2006-12-25 16:31)

I would like to wish a very Merry Christmas to all my family and friends.

6.12.9 A mystery within a mystery (2006-12-26 18:30)

Back in April I purchased a bunch of books at the Strand in NYC. One of them contained a bit of a mystery. The book is *Get Shorty* by Elmore Leonard. I enjoyed the movie (the phrase "the Cadillac of minivans" stays with me to this day) so I figured I'd enjoy the book, too. But this book had more than Elmore's prose in it. The inside leaf contains the name "Julie Green" and the title page is enscribed "With love, Xmas 1990. Dick." So far, pretty normal. But between pages 66 and 67 is a piece of *A Current Affair* notepaper, dated "January 1st, 1991" bearing the following:

You were right and I was wrong. Happy now?
R.J. McWilliams

Is R.J. also Dick? What happened that Christmas that made New Year's seem so unhappy? Did Julie even read it?

6.12.10 Goals review coming (2006-12-29 10:40)

This year I really started looking at my goals and set up goals for the year along with some ideas for 5 years or so out. This weekend will be time to check my progress against what I wanted to achieve for 2006 and set up the goals for 2007. While setting up goals for yourself doesn't guarantee you will be successful in everything you do, it's clearly better than having no goals at all.

Chapter 7

2007

7.1 January

7.1.1 2006 - The Year In Review (2007-01-01 10:55)

Looking over my goals for 2006, it's not a pretty sight. Let's break it down:

- Career - missed all of them. Not even close.
- Music - ditto. I even stopped guitar lessons. Really have to rethink this one.
- Martial Arts
- Karate - didn't make Black Belt but I can do my goal for pushups and situps.
- Kendo - didn't test, still not ranked.

Personal life - wrote more in my journal, but that's about it. Did I set myself goals I couldn't reach? No, I don't think so. It has more to do with my approach to them. I'm going to have to redesign my goal setting and review process. More on that as I come up with it. Happy New Year in the meantime. May 2007 be something special for you.

7.1.2 Apple, Jobs and Woz (2007-01-09 14:35)

A lot of people wonder why Apple seems to get the rabid fans that Windows and PCs don't. As one of those fanboys (I've had Macs since 1985) I'm not sure if I can put it into words. It's not that Apple or the Mac are perfect. Not even close. The Mac has been too expensive for most of its life (until recently). Performance was almost always behind Intel PCs (again, until recently). But there's something about Macs (and iPods and iTunes and...) that is unmistakably Apple. No matter whether you like a particular part of an Apple product, it's always obvious that someone actually thought about that part. Granted, those are also what make Apple products more expensive, but it was a conscious decision by an Apple designer, not some random third party commodity supplier. The new iPhone, which was announced today, follows in that tradition. It's a bit more expensive than my Treo 700p, but it works with OS X (which it also runs) right out of the box, no additional software required. It's also an iPod, with both audio and video. It also sports Wifi. It runs a regular (Safari) web browser. This could replace a laptop for many people. It's, in a word, cool.

During the keynote Steve Jobs talked briefly about him and Steve Wozniak, back in the Apple I days. I'm currently reading *iWoz*, Woz's autobiography so I'm familiar with the anecdote. Woz designed hardware to use the minimum, whether it was chip count or board space. His design of the Apple I and Apple II were wonders of the time. He put a lot of effort into making sure they were. He cared. While it may have wandered off that path from time to time, Apple still puts effort into the things they do and they still care. I know Microsoft expends a lot of effort on products, too. But I can't help get the impression that much of the effort goes into simply fighting the bureaucracy that such a massive company naturally is saddled with. Their de-features of Vista in order to get it out the door is a good example of that. Vista has become the best they could manage to deliver, in spite of themselves. They may care, but the difference is what (and whom) they care about that makes all the difference.

I expect to be an iPhone owner once my present contract for my Treo expires. I'm sure I'm not the only one. We may not be able to explain why, either. But that's nothing new.

7.1.3 Tangential (2007-01-16 09:02)

Ever have one of those days when you think that your career has gone off on a tangent and there's nothing you can do about it? As part of the work I do for the other half of my department (the import people), I've had to contact my computer science Master's advisor at RIT to have him consult on something we're doing. As a result, I'm reminded of what my career used to be: full of promise. Now that I'm out of engineering and product development and into a corporate support function my odds of getting my career back on a technical path are not very good. Add to that The Big Company's move away from developing its own products and you can call my chances nil.

I'm so proud.

7.1.4 How to not fix a problem (2007-01-19 10:46)

My present workgroup is for the most part a nice bunch of folks but there is someone in the group who is just the opposite. They've been a problem for years, but previous management never really did anything about the problem. Sometime last year they got into a loud, screaming argument with the person in the cubicle next to them. Management's answer: *move them* to a different cubicle (close to me, of course). This person tends to be loud when on the phone as it is but frequently uses the speakerphone as well. This breaks what is probably Rule #1 of cubicle life - don't use the speakerphone. Even when they don't they have a tendency to stand up while on the phone thereby broadcasting their voice over the top of the cubicle walls. The other day I was sitting in my cubicle and I could hear them talking on the speakerphone. I put on my headphone (over the ears model) and could still hear him. At that point, I locked my computer and left for a while to cool off. I'm not a confrontational person and this person has a record of record of attack, so the usual gentle reminder would have led to something I wasn't prepared to deal with. When I felt better, I went to my boss and asked her to move me. She wouldn't, because "then everyone will want to move." She promised to talk to this person's supervisor.

Yesterday, management's answer to the problem was revealed: **telephone headsets and cubicle etiquette reminder via email**. It doesn't seem that anyone actually spoke to the person or identified them as the cause. Now, every time you use the phone (I already had one), you'll be reminded why you're wearing the headset. The problem person remains, oblivious to the distress they cause others.

My boss was surprised a while back that I had not interest in succeeding her. But let me tell you, if I

was and got that job, the first thing I'd do is fire the problem guy. First hour. First minute. Because it looks like no one else ever will.

7.1.5 The great cider experiment (2007-01-27 12:09)

My Christmas beer ran out early, due to a mishap, and I decided to keg the batch of untreated cider instead of bottling. To be honest, I've been putting off bottling for a couple of weeks due to the large amount of fuss required (washing, drying, filling, capping). This way I could also give it a little fizz without guessing how much corn sugar to use. I'll be giving it a try tonight.

[Update] The cider is incredibly good, on a par with some commercial ciders I've tasted. Not too dry and not too sweet with noticeable alcohol. Since the method I used made it difficult to get the OG, I didn't bother with measuring FG but I'm estimating around 8-9 % alcohol by volume. It's a little cloudy, I probably could use more of the pectin enzyme next time.

7.2 February

7.2.1 Colt 29, Bears 17 (2007-02-05 13:08)

Another February, another Superbowl. I was rooting for the Colts, despite being an NFC partisan, for a number of reasons. I like watching the Colts play and while I never thought that Payton Manning couldn't win the big one, I did think it was overdue. He's not perfect, but he's raising the bar for what will constitute quarterbacking in the future. His intense game preparation and study are going to become standard fare, not something exceptional. His team deserves a lot of credit, too. They've taken on his intensity and willingness to keep coming back and doing the job, no matter what. They don't panic. Ever. The beginning of the game had to have been a nightmare for them (opening kickoff run in for a touchdown, interception on their opening drive) yet you never would have known by looking at them. Tony Dungy is the one responsible for their work ethic. If you looked at him during the game you'd be hard-pressed to tell if they were winning or losing. A lot of teams might have gone for the long ball after a start like that but Dungy never strayed from the game plan and it paid off. It was a sloppy game at times but better than you'd expect given the weather. Although a Superbowl ticket is probably a dream of many, I'm not sure sitting in the pouring rain for four hours is all that much fun. At least it was warmer than here.

I'm sure the Colts will get hit by free agency (it happens to the Superbowl winner every year) but they've shown an amazing talent for getting the right people into their organization. I'm sure Edgerrin James wishes he hadn't left but the Colts did fine with their two replacements. It's harder to assemble a "dynasty" than it used to be, and teams that seem to be in the running year after year are always the ones with the best coaches and front offices as well as the good (or great) players. It's still a crapshoot. Things happen. Players get hurt or lose their edge. Coaches burn out. Teams get sold to new owners. Sometimes star players just don't fit in. Indy has come close for a number of years, but until now the magic combination eluded them. It may elude them again next year. It's what makes football great.

7.2.2 Road trip (2007-02-10 16:56)

Back in the 1950's, before the NYS Thruway was completed, trucks used to travel along Rt. 5 (which begins in Albany) to get to Rochester. It's a meandering route, intended to serve the various towns along the way, rather than an efficient way to travel. My uncle Joe was an over-the-road trucker in those days and he used to come here to deliver to Bond clothes from the NYC area. Since roads that have been bypassed, like Rt.

5, tend to have a abandoned buildings alongside them as a result of the loss of traffic, I figured it would be ripe territory for abandoned building photography.

I was wrong. Perhaps ten years ago, but creeping development from the Rochester and Syracuse areas have made Rt. 5 almost a solid strip of commercial buildings. I rode from Avon to Auburn, and there were basically no abandoned buildings. Some looked like they *were* possibly abandoned at some point in the past, they clearly weren't now. Every small motel, the kind of place that seem to die the quickest, was active. I came home with no pictures at all. But I did find a few interesting places that I might try some time.

7.2.3 Snow (2007-02-12 12:26)

Just now I was watching the powdery lake-effect snowflakes hit the glass windows and melt. They look like feathers.

7.2.4 A mystery (2007-02-13 10:16)

A while back I mentioned some of the activity around a certain disruptive person in my workgroup. Some very odd things have happened since then, and I thought I'd let you know about them. Last Thursday, the MERT (Medical Emergency Response Team) was called to this person's cubicle. They had been having chest pains and their doctor told them they should go directly to the hospital, not home. They were taken away on a gurney by a commercial ambulance. On Friday, this person's boss sent out a note saying the hospital visit was inconclusive and they wouldn't be in for a while, pending further tests. Yesterday, we had a group meeting scheduled for the afternoon. As I was preparing for the meeting I noticed this person in their boss's boss's office but they weren't at the group meeting. That seemed strange, but stranger still was the announcement, at the end of the meeting, that this person was "no longer with the company" and no further explanation would be available.

I suspect this was voluntary since they had been cleaning out their cubicle over the last week or so. But it seems that Corporate Security escorted them out of the building and they left some personal effects, so I can't be 100 % sure. I don't know if the heart issue was real or faked now, either. I did feel bad about not noticing this person not feeling well on Thursday and to be honest, had it been someone I liked, I probably would have said something. It's all so confusing now. And I feel bad for liking the fact that this disruptive person won't be here to bother me anymore.

7.2.5 Yo mama... (2007-02-27 13:46)

I think one measure of how widely known you are is how many people you can offend in a single shot. If you have a very popular weblog or some other presence on the web (or elsewhere), you've got the basics for offending people. I say the basics, because your loyal readers (or listeners) are those least likely to be offended. If you're Rush Limbaugh, saying something about black quarterbacks in the NFL isn't going to make the "Dittoheads" angry, it's going to make someone else, a non-listener, livid instead. And your audience does the work for you, by forwarding your offensive words on to those who will find them the most offensive. Without them, you'll end up like me, all opinionated up and nowhere to go.

Of course, the hard part is building that audience. Particularly on the web, where unlike radio, there are literally millions of people with something to say and who are saying it. Looking at all the aggregators and tag sites and what have you, I can't help but wonder if the people who created them were looking to tick people off with greater efficiency.

7.3 March

7.3.1 Surely you jest (2007-03-12 11:08)

I was mistaken today for someone important. It happened as I was getting off the elevator to go to the cafeteria. I have a Treo 700p smartphone which I keep on my belt. I have it for the calendar and todos and stuff like that, but you can use it like a Blackberry to send and receive email. I don't since I'm not important enough to have the company pay for it (they recently cut back on the number of people getting this service) and too cheap to pay for it myself just for so I can say I do. Anyway, one of the guys on the elevator said to me that he had the same phone and was having trouble getting it to sync with the (Microsoft Exchange) mail server here. I laughed and told him I couldn't help him because I didn't use it for email. I noticed that he headed for the executive parking garage so he must be important and somehow thought I was too. At least for a little while.

7.3.2 Aero thoughts (2007-03-19 12:41)

The computer press is well occupied on reporting about Microsoft's Vista OS, whether pro or con. A lot of the noise is around the look of the user interface, called Aero. Aero is a lot like Mac OS X's look, of course, but with some differences. One big difference is that Aero requires significant video card capabilities to run successfully. If you don't have that, it defaults to a simpler UI that lacks many of the Aero features. Cards that are fully compatible are available, however, but may be in short supply at first. People with machines that have video on the motherboard will be scrambling to buy one since I don't believe any existing onboard video chipsets will work. But other than that, Vista doesn't get you a lot. It does enforce the concept of privileged accounts (like OS X and Linux have had for years), which is a good idea but one that's likely to annoy more people than it pleases. Most people are used to running at Admin level so they can easily install programs and drivers. Unfortunately, this is how a lot of trojans and spyware get installed, so Vista doesn't allow it. Vista will require the Admin credentials for installs and system changes, so you're less likely to get infected via this route (there are rumors this mechanism can be subverted, but I haven't seen conclusive proof yet). It's a great idea, but runs counter to how Windows has worked since the beginning and you know how people resist change, even if it's good for them.

But as big an issue as Aero seems to be now, I believe that it will fade into the background before too long. Why? Because user interfaces are not why people use computers. People use them to get something done, whether it's their taxes or another level in an online game. What matters is *in* the window, not around it. Those who invest in new video cards will soon forget all about it as the novelty wears off. This happened with OS X, too. Everyone talked about the "lickable" interface at first, but now you hardly hear much about it. Occasionally someone will notice that Apple has converted something to a metallic look and complain about the lack of consistency, but most of the talk is around applications and not about user interface. Expect this to happen with Aero as well once people actually start using Vista for something other than evaluation.

7.4 April

7.4.1 Lacrosse and justice (2007-04-11 14:43)

Now that all of the Duke lacrosse players have been exonerated, I can admit that I thought they were guilty, at least at the beginning. It has nothing to do with the racial component of the case, I just believed that a bunch of jocks accustomed to getting their way were more than capable of what they were being accused of.

It was prejudice in its purest form.

I don't think that I'm going out on a limb when I say that our college athletes, in particular male athletes, can get away with a lot before someone says anything. Some of them assume the same rules apply once they enter professional sports, like Adam "Pacman" Jones and Chris Henry. Until recently, they weren't really wrong in that assumption. But as the transgressions get worse and more frequent, even the NFL has to do something.

Thus, the fact that the Duke lacrosse team had themselves a party involving hookers was not surprising to me. Nor were the charges of rape. It all seemed to fit. But that's not enough to convict someone and send them to jail. Or at least it shouldn't be. The DA, Mike Nifong, seems to have come to same conclusion I did, but he could actually do something about it. And so he did. But with the power of his office comes the responsibility of making sure that the evidence supports the allegations and that the right people are identified as the suspects. He failed on all of those counts and is justifiably under investigation.

Nevertheless, his zeal to convict those Duke players despite the lack of evidence, required that the state spend a lot of time and taxpayer money making sure that there was indeed no case against them. It prolonged a tragic experience and will permanently affect all of those accused as well as their teammates. But it did one important thing: it ended the case.

Was justice served? In a way, perhaps. But I wonder about the woman at the center of the case. It shouldn't be the case that a woman should have to sell her body to pay for college. I realize that's a very idealistic view, but there's truly something wrong with a society where that's so. She may well have psychological problems that have go unaddressed. I don't see a bright future for her, I'm afraid. And as the lacrosse players go on with their lives and their futures, she's left behind. And that's not just at all.

7.4.2 Imus and the mourning (2007-04-11 19:52)

I'm so old that I remember when Don Imus had a morning radio show in NYC back in the 70s. Back then, a DJ had to have a personality but didn't have to be offensive. Of course, over time, the so-called "AM drive time" shows became more and more talk and less music until they became talk radio. Talk radio seems to have a different audience than the music and news formats it replaced. Talk radio listeners seem to overwhelmingly be conservative, white and male and they tend to listen carefully to their favorite personalities. They're very engaged. More so than you need to be to listen to background music.

Talk radio also appears to be a very competitive arena. Many radio personalities are either in a network or syndicated and are available in multiple markets simultaneously. A name like Howard Stern can command listeners anywhere, making it difficult for local stations to compete. Unless they're willing to do something that will gather them attention, that is. Spewing outrageous opinions and sponsoring offensive, possibly illegal stunts (think St. Patrick's or the Wii contest) is now pretty much the norm. You've got to get listeners attention somehow.

So here comes Imus. What he said about the Rutgers women wasn't more offensive than things he's said in the past. It is, actually, pretty much in line with his past comments about Blacks and women. And yet people are *shocked* and they're demanding his firing. My question is "why now?" He's a "*shock* jock", people. He's *paid* to say things that are outrageous, he's *paid* to offend people (not his listeners, of course, which is why his targets are often not white, not male and certainly not conservative). Assuming he gets fired from this job, he'll be back somewhere else. Somewhere they need the publicity to boost their ratings.

If this incident offends you, the real response isn't necessarily firing Imus, it's doing something about the entire "shock jock" market. It exists because it attracts listeners. Until it doesn't, don't expect this will be the last incident like this.

And while you're at it, it's time to stop the double standard over who can call whom what. I'm a big supporter of the rights of a group to call itself whatever it wants. But at the same time, once that name is out, it's out. Crying "foul" whenever and "outsider" uses the term is silly. Particularly when the name was considered offensive to begin with. If you don't want outsiders using it, don't use it yourselves. It won't stop an Imus from being offensive, but at least no one can say "well, you use it among yourselves, why can't we?"

7.4.3 (Not) Writing (2007-04-16 12:25)

I've been trying to kick-start my writing, but it hasn't been really going anywhere. Although I like genre fiction, it's not for everyone and it requires research to sound authentic to those who really know the genre. It goes along with the idea that you should "write what you know." The corollary is that you should avoid trying to write about things you don't know. My problem is that what I know isn't particularly interesting, even to me. Writing about it and then expecting people to read it seems out of the question.

7.4.4 Preparations (2007-04-17 13:09)

As a parent of a child (but not a kid) starting college in the Fall, the massacre at Virginia Tech hit me particularly hard. My wife and I have done as much as we can to prepare her for the world, but yet there will always be something unexpected that no one planned for. That's when you hope that all the lessons, all the hard work, all those conversations gave her the tools to handle it. But does anything you encounter growing up truly prepare you for a gunman on a rampage?

I'm sure many of the parents of the victims are asking themselves a lot of these kind of questions. It's likely that they, as I do, believed that they had prepared their child as best they could for what the world might throw at them. It's your job as a parent. Four years in college will add to their knowledge and enable them to enter the world of work, but it's built on top of foundation we parents have helped build. A foundation that we know is incomplete. It will take the rest of their lives to complete it, we're just lucky to be permitted to assist in the beginning. We let them go off on their own knowing that there's something else we could have told them, one more thing that would leave them fully prepared. But we have to, really. They have their own lives, and they have to live them. The best we can do is skim a little off of ours. And cross our fingers.

So now perhaps many of us will have to add surviving an on-campus shooting attack to the lessons we impart on our offspring. It might end up taking the place of something more positive, but that's the price we pay. We can't give them everything. We can only try.

7.5 May

7.5.1 All I do is whine (2007-05-07 13:45)

I was glancing through my private, hand-written journal and it's pretty obvious that all I do is whine about things. I started journaling with the specific goal of becoming the next Thomas Merton and instead I've become just another asshole. It's humbling, let me tell you.

There's a fundamental tension in my life between what people tell me I am and what I believe I am. There are many times I'd prefer to believe them but I can't in good conscience do so. Quite frankly, I distrust anyone who says good things about me. That probably sounds pretty bad, but it's the truth. Those who love us tend to say nice things. That should come as no surprise. They have a vested interest in our happiness (and we in theirs). People at work and in other facets of our lives generally have more complex motives. In both cases, it's still a matter of what you know about yourself that really matters. You can be many things, but you have to believe that you can.

7.5.2 Here's an example (2007-05-07 14:14)

I whine a lot. Last week I purchased a new Maxtor 40 GB drive and an USB 2.0 enclosure to use to hold my iTunes library at work (to get it off my company PC and give it growing room). The drive was dead on arrival, and I had to pay seven bucks to send it back for replacement. On Saturday I discovered that my lawn mower had seized up over the Winter. Now I don't have a mower or a string trimmer (which died last Fall). The 1.4x tele-extender I bought to use for crew racing photos works but makes the autofocus unusable. I had hoped to not have to buy a long telephoto but it looks like I'm stuck. I'll know tomorrow if the \$110 I spent on getting my Speed Graphic's lens and shutter CLA'd (Clean, Lube, Adjust) was worth it (that's almost as much as I paid for the camera itself). My Treo's battery is already failing, I had to replace it (but with a higher capacity version).

Other than that, things are looking up.

7.5.3 Getting it over with (2007-05-16 13:02)

Since I'll probably forget to on Friday I decided to post this today. I'm going to be 50.

I've managed to live for fifty years without becoming remotely successful. I guess it takes a special talent to manage that, so I've got that going for me.

7.5.4 First post-50 post! (2007-05-20 15:27)

I was right, I did remember to post something on Friday. But that's okay, since my birthday was super wonderful and full of win and awesome.

Really?

No, not really. I went to work. But I left early and got my hair cut (with free eyebrow trim!). We left for the regatta in Syracuse well after 8 PM so it was close to 10 before we got to the hotel. Luckily it wasn't raining and regatta day was cool but sunny.

Other than that, it was a perfectly normal day.

7.5.5 Happiness (2007-05-21 15:59)

I often joke that the key to happiness is lowered expectations. Getting older automatically diminishes the realm of possibility. So as you get older, unless you lower your expectations, you're on a track to become dramatically less happy. I seem to be on that track.

7.5.6 Thanks are in order (2007-05-30 12:53)

Now that I'm 50, it seems like a good time to thank those who've helped me along the way.

- My parents, of course. They made Chaminade High School and RIT my goals. They fostered my love of reading and discovery and put up with my odd hobbies.
- My aunt and uncle. They were my second set of parents. They were there for us when my mom died and I don't know what I would have done without them. I learned to drive in their car. I still miss my uncle - I see him in my dreams every now and then.
- My teachers, particularly in grade school and high school. They were tough and uncompromising, and that's what I needed.
- My wife. Not only does she accept me for who I am, she puts up with me on a daily basis. She taught me how to program computers, that simple act set the course of my adult life. She has done the lion's share of raising the girls, abandoning a career to do so. I realize that no matter what I do, I will never be able to make that up to her. I am in her debt.
- My friend Steve. He got me a job as an electronics technician even though I didn't have a degree. That enabled me to go back to school and become the engineer I am today. His wife was part of the "conspiracy" that brought my wife and me together and they'll always be part of our lives. When I was in the 2000 motorcycle accident, when our children were born, they were the ones we called.
- My former boss Charlie. Not only did he take a chance on hiring me but he put me in charge of a project and enabled me to be successful. No one I have worked for before or since has done that for me.

I know there are a lot of names I have omitted, which by no means implies that they haven't helped. I hope I haven't disappointed you.

7.6 June

7.6.1 Free stress with every flight! (2007-06-15 13:57)

I'm sitting in Rochester's airport, waiting for flight to Dulles and then on to Heathrow. It's part of a business trip that will ultimately take me to Ireland. But there's more than that on my mind.

Wednesday morning my dad (he's 85) called me to tell me he was going in the hospital on Thursday for a cardiac catheterization with a possible angioplasty and a stent. I knew that he had some minor heart problems but this came as a shock. I had to be ready to fly home instead of this trip but he got through it fairly well and he should be home today. I'm going to call him when I get to Dulles.

It's funny, I'm 50, yet I still feel like a kid inside. The idea that my parents are old and in the twilight of their years is still foreign to me. But you can't deny reality and I will have to face the inevitable one day. I hope that's not any time soon, but someday it will happen.

Check my [1]Twitter for updates.

1. <http://twitter.com/tommasz>

7.6.2 UK/Ireland - Flight Report (2007-06-21 15:18)

I figured I would describe my recent trip to the UK and Ireland day by day, starting with Friday the 15th.

6/15/2007

The flight to Dulles was quick and uneventful. Once at Dulles, my attempts to set up my rented world phone failed, and I had to call Verizon Wireless and do it manually with one of their operators.

The flight from Dulles to Heathrow started out normally. But when they closed the plane doors at the gate, we didn't move. As a matter of fact, we stayed there for *over two hours*. It seems there was a security problem (I don't think the pilot was supposed to tell us that) that resulted in a shutdown of the baggage system. We eventually left but the pilot made no effort to make up the lost time.

In Heathrow, the poor souls with connecting flights blocked the hallway and it took forever to get by them to the baggage pickup. My friends had used the web and knew I was going to be late so they weren't waiting too long. After a quick shower, we popped into their little village for some quick shopping. On the way back the skies opened up, soaking us to the skin. The cars scattering puddles in the road helped, too.

After drying out, we headed into London for the Wallace museum and the British Museum. Lots of great stuff, especially the Rosetta Stone and the Elgin Marbles.

The trip to Dublin was quick, but the Dublin airport has the dirtiest bathrooms I've ever seen. I mean that. I wouldn't have used it at all but I had no choice.

Met up with my co-worker and we toured Ireland from Dublin to Nenagh. She had borrowed a TomTom GPS unit and it made all the difference. We saw Kilkenny Castle, Waterford and Cork, with stops at the coast and the Blarney Stone. The Blarney Castle was closed, of course. It closes early on Sunday.

Monday was all work, all day. The entire team went out for dinner at a local pub with the only good Irish food I had the whole time I was there. Fresh fish makes all the difference.

Tuesday was the big meeting morning. I got a ride from a company exec from Nenagh back to Dublin. I wasn't going to go to Dublin until the following morning but everyone else had to move on to Amsterdam so I decided to try seeing Dublin quickly.

I saw Trinity College and tried to see the Book of Kells. It was closed. Of course it was closed. I did some shopping and had dinner (in a nice Mediterranean place) in the Temple Bar area. By then it was raining, hard. Got soaked again, naturally. That was enough to end my evening. I wisely brought an umbrella but that's only good for keeping your head dry.

Wednesday started poorly. The plane had blown a tire coming into Dublin, requiring a replacement. We took off for a stop in Shannon with little delay, though. As we waited, they called my name on the PA. It seems that I was marked as needing a wheelchair. I told them that obviously I didn't and they actually looked on the passenger list for another Maszerowski! I assured them it wasn't a common name and I'm likely the only Thomas Maszerowski in the world. Eventually they believed me, I guess.

In Shannon we had to get off the plane, go through US Customs and then get back on. They kept announcing the wrong gate, even though it was obvious we were at 11 and not 9. It didn't seem to matter.

The flight into Boston was fine, actually shorter than coming over. Once getting off the plane I had to get to the right terminal. This required the 11 bus, the only one that stops at Terminal B (I was in Terminal E). But there seems to be only one 11 bus for every three of the others. By the time one arrived, the platform was packed. I was literally run over by some teenager trying to get up with her mother. I kicked her rolling bag a couple of times to remind her she was being an asshole. Didn't seem to sink in, of course.

Once in the right terminal, I got sent to the wrong line. Luckily the lady behind the counter took pity on me and got me set up. I ran to the gate only to find out my 4:55 flight was now outlooked to *arrive* at 6:40!

Something about excessive traffic on the East Coast. We didn't get to board until closer to 7:00. But this time, the pilot made up the deficit and I was in Rochester before 8:30.

Mary Ann and Lanni picked me up and we ate at Red Robin. I barely stayed awake for the food and I was asleep within minutes of getting home.

Next entry will cover Ireland in detail.

7.6.3 Ireland, in detail (2007-06-26 15:52)

This is the second part of the two-part report on my trip to Ireland.

First things first. Ireland is indeed the "Emerald Isle" in the sense that everything is green, green, green. One reason for that is the frequent rain, with which I became intimately familiar. Much of the green is due to grass, there are not a lot of trees remaining. Where there are trees, they seem clumped together, perhaps for protection. Ireland has traditionally burned peat (instantly recognizable by its smell) instead of wood or coal, no doubt due to the lack of useable trees.

Although I had imagined it fairly flat, Ireland's topography is mostly rolling hills, with very few truly flat areas. The Southern coast, accordingly, is rocky with numerous coves surrounded by sheer rock cliffs. We did see some sand beaches but there were few swimmers. Most people seemed content to sit and watch the ocean.

The central parts of Ireland are quite empty, at least outside of the cities. Farm land definitely predominates the landscape, but I can't be sure how much of it was active and how much was simply abandoned. Near the Southern coast we saw a number of seemingly working farms but with brand new houses in among the ramshackle barns and out buildings. We guessed that they belonged to wealthy folks looking to escape the hustle and bustle of Dublin, but I was perplexed that the farms looked like they were still in business. Perhaps they hire folks to run the farm for them.

As you may have undoubtedly heard, Irish food outside of major cities is nothing to write home about. Most of it is plain, almost flavorless and halfheartedly presented. You have to go to Dublin to see decent food and then most of that is foreign cuisine. The fish, freshly caught, is good and probably the only thing I'd recommend. Vegetables are of the usual boiled-until-lifeless variety, and while you'll get them with every meal, no one will feel bad if you don't eat them. In general, I'd say the Irish are about a decade behind the British as far as food goes. If their immigrant population expands beyond Dublin it might jumpstart their chefs into improving their wares.

Despite an economy that heavily (but not exclusively) depends on tourism, the Irish just don't get "service industry" very well. Most table service is barely adequate. Twice, when having lunch in two different places, the waitress dropped our silverware before placing it on the table. I was surprised each time that they didn't just pick it up and put it on the table anyway. Semi-self-service "carvery" is the norm for most lunch places. You grab most everything for yourself with the exception of anything that must be sliced or served with a spoon or ladle. It's like high school, except much more expensive. Considering the service, it's no loss not having someone come to your table.

The people behind the desk at the hotels were no different. Many of them gave the impression they were doing you a favor even looking at you and more than once I had to wait while the desk person took a call while dealing with me. One of our group said she was actually challenged to prove that they had called down for a taxi (she had and it wasn't called). I would have requested a manager at that point, had we been somewhere else, but Ireland quickly conditions you to lower your expectations.

When we checked into our hotel in Nenagh (the only hotel in Nenagh), they were handing out flashlights! It seems they needed to do some electrical work so they were going to shut the power off between midnight and four AM! Good thing the room lacked a clock of any kind since it would have messed up the alarm. I used my Treo to make sure I was up for work in time. I would have asked for a wakeup call, but felt that might stress the desk help. Oh, and my room had two beds, one double and one twin. I've never been in a hotel with non-matching beds before. There were three channels of television in English and one in Irish. Most of the programming was from the UK or the US, even on the Irish channel (they used subtitles). I guess even the government, which is technically bilingual, uses mostly English and then translates into Irish. You see Irish all around but only a few places where it is the primary language.

Forgive me for even mentioning this but Irish bathrooms are horrible, just horrible. The bathroom in the Dublin airport almost made me retch. Had I not desperately needed to go, I would have run screaming from it. I still feel unclean. The rest of them were not much better, sadly. It all fits with their lackluster approach to service.

I declined to sample the whiskey, but I can report on the Irish beer industry. One word: Guinness. It's everywhere, of course. As are Smithwick's and Harp (both brewed by Guinness, naturally). Guinness had a limited availability stout called North Star Brew, the third of their "Brewhouse Series". It's very smooth and lighter in mouthfeel than regular Guinness, I found I liked it as well or better than the regular. I never saw any hand pumps and I don't know if any real ale or microbrews exist there. You can get some European lagers and Bud, if that's your poison. Bulmer's cider is widely available and quite good, if you tire of the black stuff.

Ireland's economy, the so-called Celtic Tiger, is booming. But you'd be hard pressed to see much evidence of that outside big cities like Dublin. Dublin is clearly a growing metropolis, with all the traffic and overcrowding you'd expect. Dublin's skyline is dominated by construction cranes and building skeletons. There's still a central core of older structures but you can see they're been overshadowed (literally and figuratively). The traffic starts backing up long before you can even see Dublin. But just go a few more miles out and you'd never know there was a boom. The contrasts are quite striking.

One reason we were in Nenagh, which is about the middle of Ireland, rather than Dublin is the government's decision to decentralize itself and move offices out of the Dublin area. It's a good idea in principle, but it put the Import office far from any port city. They were grateful not to have to travel to Dublin, however.

All things considered, my one trip was enough. I would like to have seen Galway Bay but that was about it. Lacking any Irish heritage, there's no compelling reason for me to go back, no family to look up, no history to discover. Still, if you have the time and the right level of expectations, Ireland does have a lot to offer. I was on a business trip and heavily time-constrained. We tried to see as much as possible in a single day and that's no way to approach a country like Ireland. But that's business travel for you.

7.7 July

7.7.1 Immediately (2007-07-11 13:42)

If you're anything like me (and I hope for your sake you're not) you eat most of your lunches at work at your desk. Of course, I probably shouldn't, but given my lack of social skills it's certainly understandable. One downside to this practice is that you tend to spill things on your chair. My chair is covered with some

kind of odd fabric, so anything that gets spilled on it tends to sink in. It doesn't look nice, to say the least. Today I broke down and purchased some Resolve(tm) and sprayed my chair. It recommends you treat stains immediately, so I hoping "within two years" is the same as immediately.

Now I'm free to drop new food on it, safe in the knowledge I can clean it immediately. Or within two years.

7.8 August

7.8.1 `$> shutdown -h now` (2007-08-07 09:40)

It's time to move this journal to my own server. My confidence in the long-term viability of LiveJournal is non-existent. Check back at [1]my site for more news.

1. <http://www.frontiernet.net/~tommasz>

gads

Gad's LJBook v0.5,
L^AT_EX 2_ε & GNU/Linux.
<http://www.ljbook.com>

Edited: August 7, 2007